The Lost Party: Liberal Unionism, 1886-1895

Thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
at the University of Leicester

by
Ian James Cawood

October 2009
Abstract:

This thesis seeks to analyse the political philosophy, organisation and historical significance of the Liberal Unionist Party, which was created following the first Home Rule debate of 1886 and the subsequent general election in which Unionists stood against ‘Separatists.’ The Liberal Unionist Party has rarely been taken seriously as an electoral force by political historians, who see the party as a collection of peers, intellectuals and lawyers, who objected to Home Rule from a desire to maintain the supremacy of Parliament and the rule of the law in the face of the burgeoning forces of nationalism, democracy and class-based politics. Given its elitist nature, the party is perceived as having failed to build a strong electoral base among the newly enfranchised workers and to have willingly succumbed to ‘fusion’ with the Conservative Party due to the parties’ fellow-feeling on issues of imperial expansion and the fear of socialism. This thesis offers an alternative interpretation of the Liberal Unionists as a diverse group of liberals, who formed an electoral alliance with the Conservative Party largely from political necessity rather than ideological affinity. Committed to the maintenance of a political culture of strong regional identity, independence of political conscience and concepts of individual liberty, the Party only reluctantly engaged with the centralised machine politics that had begun to emerge after the electoral reforms of the 1870s and 1880s. Due to this, the Party barely escaped an electoral debacle in 1892, but reformed itself and its electioneering tactics and was perhaps the crucial force in the Unionist landslide of August 1895. The thesis also suggests why the Party swiftly declined as an independent force after this triumph and thereby came to be seen by most twentieth-century historians as a mere ‘revolt of the Whigs.’
Acknowledgements

I am indebted to my supervisor, Dr Stuart Ball, for his patient encouragement, guidance and painstaking proof-reading. I would also like to thank Professor Yahya Nakeeb, director of research at Newman University College, for his unfailing support for this project, which included a vital research sabbatical in 2008. I am also grateful to Dr Matthew Cragoe, Dr James Owen, Dr Victoria Barbery, Dr Nick Crowson, Professor Eric Evans and Dr Noelle Plack for their advice and assistance. I would also like to extend my thanks to the staff of the Modern Political Records Room at the Bodleian Library in Oxford, the Heslop Archive at the University of Birmingham, the Mitchell Library in Glasgow, the National Library of Scotland, the Women’s Library in London, the Local History and Archives service at Birmingham Central Library and the archives of the London School of Economics, all of whom have made a significant contribution to this study with their professionalism and scholarly assistance. Finally, I would like to thank my wife and my children for their patience and forbearance.

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my mother who died during the final stages of its completion.
The Lost Party: Liberal Unionism, 1886-1895

List of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter One: Whiggery or Socialism? The Ideology of Liberal</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unionism</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Two: 'A Distinction without a Difference'? The Unionist Alliance</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Three: Party Organisation – Cave or Caucus?</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Four: Liberal Unionism and the electorate – 'A Farce and a Fraud'?</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion: Who were the Liberal Unionists?</td>
<td>270</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendices</td>
<td>287</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Lost Party: Liberal Unionism, 1886-1895

Introduction

LADY BRACKNELL: What are your politics?

JACK: Well, I am afraid I really have none. I am a Liberal Unionist.

LADY BRACKNELL: Oh, they count as Tories. They dine with us. Or come in the evening, at any rate.

(Oscar Wilde, The Importance of Being Earnest, 1895)

Lady Bracknell’s witticism, though politely laughed at by audiences for over a hundred years, has, of course, lost any political meaning for most theatre-goers. As she suggests, after 1895 the Liberal Unionists quickly became socially and politically allied with the Tories, and ever since there has been a tendency to forget that they were a separate party. This thesis intends to examine whether the absorption of the Liberal Unionists into the Conservative and Unionist party was inevitable, by examining the ideology, organisation and electoral performance of the Liberal Unionists, as well as the troubled relationship between the two branches of the Unionist alliance from 1886 until 1895.

The division of the Liberal Party in 1886, which became permanent after the failure of the Round Table conference of 1887, is perhaps unique in British political history for a number of reasons. It was the biggest defection from any political party (at its height, the Party boasted seventy-eight MPs who refused to obey the Gladstonian whip.) It was the longest lived breakaway political force in modern British political history, lasting for twenty-six years as an independent
party, with its own associations, leadership, whips, agents, funds and publications (including a newspaper from 1887 until 1892 and a party newsletter for the next 20 years.) It was, arguably, the bitterest division in nineteenth century political life, matched only in modern history by the split of the Labour Party in 1931. In 1886, fathers and sons, friends and club members parted company over the issue. Some, like William Harcourt and Joseph Chamberlain, managed to remain on good terms (in private at least), but others, such as Lady Stanley, wife of the Liberal Unionist leader Lord Derby and president of the Women's Liberal Unionist Association, and her daughter Lady Carlisle, opened a breach that lasted beyond the death of one or other party.¹ As John St. Loe Strachey, leader writer for the Spectator wrote in his autobiography, this applied to middle class families as well; ‘My father and my elder brother remained Liberals and followed Mr Gladstone, I followed Lord Hartington, Mr Chamberlain and Mr Goschen.’² Lady St. Helier later commented,

The Home Rule question absolutely divided London society into two factions, and the cleavage was distinct. The Home Rule Party were virtually ostracised by their own friends and relations...the cleavage between the two parties and the intensity of feeling surpassed anything in the memory even of those people who remembered the bitterness which existed at the time of the Reform Bill [of 1832].³

The division between the Gladstonians and Unionists was in most cases social

¹ See W. Harcourt's letters to J. Chamberlain, Chamberlain MSS, University of Birmingham Special Collection. For the Stanley split, see R. Strachey, Millicent Garrett Fawcett (London, 1931), pp. 128-9.
as well as political. Alfred Pease recorded in May 1887: ‘they [the Liberal Unionists] are more viciously bitter than our Conservative opponents. Give me every time a Tory, who can speak with civility at least when he has time to meet such social outcasts as ourselves.’ Henry James considered that party feeling in social circles was at its strongest from 1886 until 1890, that he had never experienced anything like it, and that no political event since the Great Reform Act of 1832 had so divided the nation. The British Weekly’s correspondent at the Liberal Unionist conference of December 1886 confirmed the anger felt by some towards those who, it was felt, had betrayed their principles for their party. When William Harcourt’s name was mentioned, it ‘provoked the strongest manifestations of contempt and disgust – two gentlemen beside me relieving their feelings by spitting.’ Lord Spencer’s behaviour provoked similar reactions and Henry James recorded that if any Unionist wished to invite Spencer or Harcourt to dine, he had to ask all his other guests to agree to meet him. As R. B. Brett commented, ‘all the argument, all the authority, all the social influence’ was in favour of the Unionists’ cause, and the result was, according to the Inverness Courier, ‘on a small scale, the outbreak of civil war.

The study of the Home Rule crisis has largely been dominated by those who look at the crisis as a missed opportunity for peaceful Irish self-government and those whose primary interest has been to investigate the decline of the Liberal Party. In both cases, the interpretation of 1886 is clouded by the attempt to find

---

6 British Weekly, 10 December 1886.
7 Askwith, Lord James of Hereford, p.189.
9 Inverness Courier, 20 July 1886.
antecedents for an event that occurred after the First World War. Beginning with Morley's official Life of Gladstone in 1903 and developed by J. L. Hammond in 1938, there has been a tendency among the former to regard Gladstone as a far-sighted, humane politician, defeated by the careerism, timidity, self-interest and bigotry of his opponents, with devastating consequences for Ireland in the twentieth century. Among the latter, the split among Liberals in 1886 is often regarded as a harbinger of the devastating division between Asquith and Lloyd George during the First World War, as well as the moment that large aristocratic sources of political funding moved away from the Liberals, never to be replaced. In short, Liberal Unionism is studied as a negative force, and often caricatured as a 'revolt of the Whigs' or at best 'a progressive wing of the Conservative Party.'

Those interested in Unionism have tended to view the issue from an Irish perspective, or more particularly an Ulster one. The largest number of studies published recently on British attitudes towards Ireland in the period and on British support for the Union, have tended to focus on the personalities, ideologies and events of the island of Ireland. D. George Boyce and Alan O'Day have largely regarded Liberal Unionism as mere 'dissident Liberals', ciphers for Conservative opposition to devolution, not worthy of the attention that they give the Ulster Unionist movement. J. Loughlin has been the most savage in his

---

12 D.G. Boyce, The Irish Question and British Politics 1868-1986 (Basingstoke, 2nd ed, 1996); A. O'Day, Irish Home Rule 1867-1921 (Manchester, 1998); D.G. Boyce & A. O'Day (eds.), The Ulster Crisis 1885-1921 (Basingstoke, 2006); P. Bull, 'Irish Protestants feel this betrayal deeply…: home rule, Rome rule and nonconformity' in D.G. Boyce & R. Swift (eds) Problems and Perspectives in Irish History since 1800: Essays in honour of Patrick
condemnation of the ‘racism’ (as he perceives it) of the English Unionists, though he is frequently weak on the complexities of the British political narrative at this time.\(^{13}\) Frank Thompson and Graham Walker have also written studies that briefly address the Liberal Unionists’ role in 1886, but they are all more interested in the rise of Carson’s Ulster Unionist Party, which dominated Northern Irish politics in the twentieth century, despite the fact that there was no connection between T. W. Russell’s Ulster Liberal Unionists and Colonel Edward Saunderson’s Irish Unionist Alliance, from which the UUP evolved.\(^{14}\)

The most recent study of the Ulster question confirmed that historians continue to overlook the Liberal Unionists, stating that the Home Rule debate polarised the British polity ‘into two blocs, for and against Irish autonomy.’\(^{15}\) With this assumption dominant, the study of late 19th century Unionist politics outside Ireland has been dominated by work on the Conservative Party in the period, such as that of Professors Peter Marsh,\(^{16}\) Richard Shannon,\(^{17}\) Michael Bentley,\(^{18}\) and in particular by E. H. H. Green’s study of late Victorian and

---


Edwardian Conservatism.\textsuperscript{19} As the titles of these studies suggest, the role of the Conservatives, and especially that of Salisbury, have been the main focus of analysis, and their theme has been the fashion in which Salisbury adapted his party very successfully to the political circumstances of the period, using imperialism, patriotism, moderate reform and, most effectively, defence of the Union with Ireland to out-maneuver the increasingly divided Liberal Party.\textsuperscript{20} Salisbury’s sure-footed avoidance of the issues of social reform and the costs of aggressive imperialism are also well documented by David Steele,\textsuperscript{21} and in Robert Blake and Hugh Cecil’s often over-looked collection of essays.\textsuperscript{22}

Salisbury’s success was in winning the support of the large numbers of Liberal peers and members of parliament who left the Liberal Party in 1886. Reluctantly at first, this disparate group of landed aristocrats, wealthy businessmen and radical professional politicians gradually coalesced into a political party of sorts and attempted to maintain an independent policy whilst remaining part of the Unionist alliance. The role and influence of the Liberal Unionist Party on a period of remarkable transformation in British politics has largely been ignored in recent years.\textsuperscript{23} A series of articles written in the late 1950s and early 1960s attributed the 1886 schism in Liberalism to the growing fear of socialism among

\textsuperscript{20} The most effective recent study of Salisbury’s re-alignment of the Conservatives is F. Cammarano, “To Save England from Decline” \textit{The National Party of Common Sense: British Conservatism and the Challenge of Democracy (1885-1892)} (Lanham, 2001).
\textsuperscript{23} Even the most recent studies of grass-roots Unionism fail to see the Liberal Unionists as anything more than an adjunct of the Conservatives with no distinct, separate identity of their own. Matthew Roberts even described Chamberlain’s Birmingham as “as bastion of Conservatism.” M. Roberts, “Villa Toryism” and Popular Conservatism in Leeds, 1885-1902, \textit{Historical Journal}, 49 (2006), p.221.
the upper-class Whigs, one even going so far as to describe the Liberal Unionist Party as ‘a half-way house’ between the Liberals of Gladstone and Salisbury’s Conservatives.\textsuperscript{24} By the 1970s this view had become so orthodox that historians could describe Liberal Unionism as ‘the means whereby many Whigs and moderate Liberals could gradually move into the Conservative Party without feeling they had betrayed their commitment to Liberalism.’\textsuperscript{25} As late as 1998, Angus Hawkins was still asserting that ‘wealth and status in all forms, became overwhelmingly Unionist in opinion during the 1890s.’\textsuperscript{26} Even W.C. Lubenow partly sustained the orthodox view in stating that ‘class conflict was… the consequence,’ of the 1886 Liberal split.\textsuperscript{27} This was perhaps an unsurprising conclusion, given the class focus of most political studies of the period, and the behaviour of the Liberal Lords. Of the 183 Liberal members of the House of Lords in 1886, 120 became Liberal Unionists according to \textit{Dod’s Parliamentary Companion}, thus virtually ending the Liberals’ aristocratic representation.\textsuperscript{28}

Unfortunately this interpretation largely ignored the role of the radical Unionists, chiefly concentrated in the West Midlands and around Glasgow, who left the Gladstonians at the same time and over the same issue, as well as the behaviour of moderate Liberals from more humble backgrounds than the


\textsuperscript{28} See also D. Southgate, \textit{The Passing of the Whigs, 1832-1886} (Basingstoke, 1962).
Cavendishes, Fitzwilliams and Foljambes. Recently, in a much neglected study, Robert F. Haggard has demonstrated that there was no sudden shift to radicalism among the Gladstonian Liberals, and that Chamberlain’s defection was, in many ways born of frustration of the failure of the Party in general, and the NLF in particular, to adopt the ‘unauthorised programme’. Haggard concludes that ‘classical liberalism’, in other words concepts of individualism, ‘character’ and self-help, remained the dominant philosophy of the Liberal Party until after the Boer War.29 Unfortunately, as Jonathan Parry has commented, ‘most historians have not been sufficiently sensitive to the Liberal Unionists’ distinctive and powerful tradition.’ 30 Study of the work of the three chief ideologues of the Party: the Professor of Law, A. V. Dicey; the historian and Liberal Unionist MP, W.E.H. Lecky; and the historian Goldwin Smith, a disciple of John Bright, soon confirms that the principles which Haggard detected among Gladstonian Liberals after 1886 were still championed by the Liberal Unionist Party, long into the twentieth century.31 What motivated Liberal Unionists was more than a mere ‘fear of socialism’ and arose from a contrasting interpretation of Liberalism and Nationalism to that of Gladstone.32

In the large number of biographies of Joseph Chamberlain, few are successful in pinpointing the radical Unionist leader’s difficulties after 1886 in maintaining

---

an alliance with Whig land-owners on one side and the Conservatives on the other. T. A. Jenkins' article in 1990 revealed the existence of a secret electoral fund controlled by Hartington and Wolmer, the Party whip, which, Jenkins asserts, was deliberately kept secret from Chamberlain, even after he became the Party leader in the Commons in 1892. This indicated that Liberal Unionism was itself not a particularly cohesive force, yet this particular issue has not been significantly addressed in any of the subsequent monographs or biographies.

There has been no major study of the role of Lord Hartington, the moderates' leader, since 1911, and the biographies of important Liberal Unionists such as Henry James, George Goschen, W. S. Caine, Jesse Collings are equally dated. Perhaps the only major study of Liberal Unionism ever published is M. C. Hurst's extremely detailed narrative of the Round Table conference of 1887, which nearly brought the radical Unionists back into the Gladstonian Party.

Whilst an impressive piece of historical reconstruction, the study failed to relate the events to the wider position of the Liberal Unionists in relation to the other political parties or of the MPs concerned to their constituents and local party officials. Many recent studies of late Victorian Unionism have forgotten that the Liberal Unionist Party even existed. Alex Windscheffel's monograph *Popular...*
Conservatism in Imperial London spends a chapter analysing the success of H. M. Stanley in North Lambeth in 1895, barely acknowledging that he was in fact, a Liberal Unionist. Like the elephant in the room, the true nature of the Liberal secession of 1886 has been overlooked and the motives of the electorate in ending the period of Liberal dominance have been neglected.

The only study to have considered the Liberal Unionists as a genuine political grouping, was, if not dismissive, certainly disdainful. Cooke and Vincent saw the Liberal Unionist Party as largely dismissed by its own leaders and composed of ‘unimportant members of the leisured class,’ who ‘needed the crisis [of 1886] more than the crisis needed them’ and who displayed all the features of the ‘pathology of political virginity.’ They may have seemed influential, largely due to their influence over the press in general and The Times in particular, but in reality they had little influence over both high politics and the general public, occupying instead ‘a closed system of self co-opting articulateness.’

W.C. Lubenow’s study of the Home Rule crisis, published in 1988, suggested that class was not the chief motivation behind political behaviour in 1886. By closely analysing the social background of the Unionist lobby on 8 June 1886, he proved that class was not ‘the cause or the explanation of political

---

He was the first to suggest that the initial split was chiefly on principle and focused on the particular issue of the Union, even though he said little of the varied motivations of the individual MPs. This work led to a re-evaluation of Liberalism as a party of conflicting and disputing ideologies which had already suffered less serious splits in 1866, 1873, 1881 and 1882.

There have been a number of influential journal articles on the Liberal Unionists, none of which have ever been developed into full historical monographs. The ideology of the Liberal Unionist leaders was investigated further by T. A. Jenkins, who perceived a growing closeness developing between Chamberlain and Hartington in 1886. Peter Davis’s article investigated Liberal Unionist influence on the second Salisbury administration over the particular issue of Ireland, and, perhaps unsurprisingly, found that the Party’s Liberalism in this area soon proved difficult to sustain. In contrast to the bulk of studies of Conservatism, John D. Fair’s statistical analysis of the ‘cohesiveness’ of parliamentary voting between the Liberal and Conservative Unionists revealed that there continued to be distinctive differences of political behaviour on issues other than Irish Home Rule between those who agreed the 1886 electoral ‘compact’. Gregory Phillips also questioned Goodman’s ‘half-way house’ thesis in his study of the Liberal Unionist peers. Rather than rushing into ‘fusion’ with the Conservatives, his study of the voting patterns of the Unionist peers led him to conclude that ‘they formed a separate political unit in the House of Lords,

43 Lubenow, Parliamentary Politics, p. 208.
not merely a nominal grouping of Tories-in-all-but-name.\footnote{47} G.R. Searle was the first to suggest that Liberal Unionism was more than a ‘transit camp’ for those en-route to the Conservative Party. He argued that ‘Liberal Unionism retained a quite strong identity of its own…especially…in Scotland.’\footnote{48} Despite the admirable focus on the Liberal Unionists as a party, almost all these studies concentrate either on the Party’s leadership (based on their surviving correspondence) or the events at Westminster (based on parliamentary speeches and voting behaviour). Although a study of Conservatism, Jon Lawrence’s examination of Wolverhampton politics offered an alternative approach to the traditional analysis, by suggesting that in the late 19\textsuperscript{th} century the influence of local circumstances, publications and personalities could be just as effective in explaining the outcomes of regional political upheavals as the national influences of Westminster, Fleet Street and the clubs of Mayfair.\footnote{49} Lawrence’s further study of political campaigns and local party activity in this period suggests that two aspects of the traditional approach to Victorian politics need to be challenged. Firstly, the primacy of class as a motivation for political needs to be fully tested as religion, gender and national and local identity all played a crucial role in explaining political behaviour. Secondly, the assumption that political parties were monolithic, capable of centrally organising their activists and party members to obey the diktat of the caucus, is particularly untenable and based on ahistoric readings of nineteenth century politics from

\footnote{47}{G. D. Phillips, ‘The Whig Lords and Liberalism, 1886-1893’, \textit{Historical Journal}, 24 (1981), pp.167-173. Philips noted that although 4/5 of the Liberal Unionist peers were owners of vast amounts of land, there was no relationship between the social composition of the Unionist peers and their political behaviour.}


late twentieth century perspectives.\textsuperscript{50}

Recently, in the wake of Lawrence’s study, a few important new approaches to research into this aspect of the period have been added. In a penetrating case study of Paisley between 1886 and 1910, Catriona MacDonald has argued for the crucial importance of traditions within political communities. She concluded that the Liberal Unionist principles of constitutionalism and abhorrence of class-based politics were based in earlier radical commitments.\textsuperscript{51} John Moore’s study of the failure of Liberal Unionism in Leicester suggested that the pattern of Unionism seen in Birmingham may be very untypical of provincial England.\textsuperscript{52} He points out that the Liberal Unionists were frequently ‘generals without an army’, a conclusion borne out by my own research in Leamington and Warwick.\textsuperscript{53} Although rather limited in its scope, Catriona Burness’s recent study of Unionism in Scotland, clearly indicated that local factors must be examined to investigate why some pockets of Liberal Unionism continued to flourish into the twentieth century, while others had a more fleeting popularity, losing their grip on whole regions as early as 1892.\textsuperscript{54}

In her detailed study of the Scottish press, Burness continued the excellent work begun by the much-missed Stephen Koss, whose unmatched account of

\begin{itemize}
\item I. Cawood ‘The Unionist ‘Compact’ in West Midland Politics 1891-1895’ \textit{Midland History}, 30 (2005), pp. 92-111.
\end{itemize}
the role of the political press in Britain did much to reveal the relationship between the public appearance of a harmonious Unionist alliance and the private in-fighting and mutual mistrust.\(^{55}\) Victoria Barbery, in a highly detailed and reflective thesis, attempted to place the Liberal Unionists of Lancashire into their local context, in particular relying heavily on the press coverage of the experiences of Henry James in Bury.\(^{56}\) A student of Jon Lawrence, she also considers that the impact of national politics took a long time to affect the behaviour of associations and candidates in individual seats. Perhaps uniquely, she regards Liberal Unionism as ‘a vibrant and independent movement’, at least in Bury.\(^{57}\)

My own articles, based on my MPhil thesis, sought to explore the strains in the relationship between the Liberal and Conservative Unionists following the accession of Chamberlain as leader of the Liberal Unionists in the Commons in 1892.\(^{58}\) In particular, I investigated Chamberlain’s motives for joining Salisbury’s cabinet in the subordinate position of Colonial Secretary, having been offered the posts of Chancellor of the Exchequer or Home Secretary. The answer for this decision lay, I felt, in the deep suspicion that some senior Conservatives and many grass-roots activists still felt for Chamberlain and his radical Unionists, which was manifested during the 1895 candidature dispute in the united borough of Warwick and Leamington Spa.\(^{59}\) It was clear that the original ‘compact’ agreed between Liberal Unionists and the Conservative leadership in

---


\(^{57}\) Ibid., p. ii.

\(^{58}\) I. Cawood, ‘The Unionist “Compact”’, pp. 93-95.

1886 had not been an entirely equal arrangement, and that it did not reflect the arrangement of forces within Liberal Unionism. It is therefore possible to explore the nature of Liberal Unionism in terms of local, as well as national political discourse, psephological behaviour and the political material culture that was evolving in this period, rather than simply in terms of monolithic ideologies, as Marsh, Bentley, Green and most others have suggested.\(^{60}\) As Miles Taylor recently commented, the advent of the ‘New Political History’ has meant that ‘the life has gone out of traditional historical debates’ such as that surrounding the Liberal schism of 1886.\(^{61}\) However, I feel that an investigation of the identity, organisation and electoral performance of the Liberal Unionist Party and of the relations between the two branches of Unionism, may well help to refute the sociological view of the Party as one born entirely out of class fear which was swiftly and effortlessly absorbed into the Conservatives after 1895.

As well as the papers and memoirs of the chief personae of the Unionist parties, I have used the records of local Liberal Unionist and Conservative associations and the official publications and Party journals of all branches of Unionism, in which there is frequent reference to the struggles for influence and independence of both individuals and parties. In those constitutions where tensions did become public, the local press, diligent and detailed in their investigation of local political activity, are a valuable source of evidence, especially as the editorial influence on such reports is frequently breathtakingly candid. *The Times*, perhaps at its most partisan during the Home Rule crisis, is

\(^{60}\) See also M. Fforde, *Conservatism and Collectivism, 1886-1914* (Edinburgh, 1990).

a valuable source of information on the progress of the new Party. 62 *Punch,* also at the height of its influence, was frequently indiscreet in its revelations of dissension among Unionists. A number of other journals, both national and provincial, were consistently used by Liberals and Conservatives to voice their positions on the emergence and decline of this third force in British politics, 63 most significantly in 1905 when the death of the Party was announced. 64 For examples of local Party organisation, the bulk of those papers that survive (outside Scotland at least) date from the years 1895 to 1912, so the study of the party’s organisation will extend beyond the formation of the Unionist government of 1895 in order to make use of these.

This thesis will attempt to understand those politicians who opposed the political mission of William Gladstone and frustrated his ambitions for a lasting constitutional settlement for Great Britain until long after his death. Gladstone was deeply offended by the Liberal Unionists, referring to them as ‘that unhappy, unfortunate, ill-starred abortion of a party.’ 65 In less vindictive mode, he accused them of a fatal weakness for any new party: ‘I do not admit that they are a political party in the country. I will tell you what they are. They are officers without an army, they are clergymen without a church.’ 66 There must have been some truth in this allegation as, during the crisis caused by the resignation of Randolph Churchill in December 1886, Alfred Milner wrote to his

---

62 Most famously in its publication of the articles ‘Parnellism and Crime’ in 1887, despite serious doubts as to the authenticity of all the correspondence as expressed by many Unionists.

63 Most consistently: *Nineteenth Century; Pall Mall Gazette; Edinburgh Review; Contemporary Review; Annual Register.*


65 Gladstone at Hastings, quoted in *Liberal Unionist,* 63, April 1891.

chief, George Goschen, advising him to take Churchill's place as Chancellor, 'I remain impenitently of the opinion, of deep conviction rather, that your place is with the army that wants a leader, rather than with the leaders who want an army.' Having attended the first conference of the Liberal Unionists earlier that month, one of the many intellectual adherents of the new Party, Henry Sidgwick, noted that although the conference was 'a decided success,...we were like a regiment of officers without common soldiers, and with little prospect of finding any “rank and file.”' Clearly one of the Party's priorities if it was to survive beyond a single parliament would be to find an electorate willing to support it.

Secondly, the question arises as to whether the Liberal Unionists were genuinely Liberal. Punch's parliamentary satirist, Toby (Henry Lucy) reckoned there was only one true Liberal Unionist, L. H. Courtney, MP for Cornwall Bodmin, 'ever in a party of one', who was eventually forced by his constituents to retire in 1900 due to his opposition to the Boer War. Alfred Hopkinson was a little more generous, believing there to have been three true apostles:

There were three of us who used to tell each other that we really represented the pure Liberal Unionist faith: the late Lewis Fry of Bristol, J. W. Wilson and myself. It is worthwhile noting that the first two came of Quaker families and had some of the characteristics of political outlook which were probably due to that origin, and that the third, in his early days had had a Quaker governess and been to a Quaker school.

---

67 A. Milner to G. Goschen, 29 December 1886, Milner Papers, Bodleian Library, Milner MS 183.
The other figure often thought to have remained true to Liberal principles was that of the Party's unquestioned leader, Lord Hartington. E. T. Raymond commented that 'of all the Liberal Unionists he alone did not suffer some 'sea change' as a result of immersion in the Tory flood...The Duke shed no particle of his old-fashioned Whiggism, with its distrust of the Crown, the church, and the people, and its intense faith in itself. In 1902 he was still conscious of a dividing line between himself and his Conservative colleagues – a line imperceptible to the practised eye of Lord Rosebery.'

Liberal Unionism was for many a position of political compromise, forced on them by the competing demands of support for reforming policies and free trade economics and an opposition to Gladstone’s policy and method of introducing Home Rule for Ireland. Not surprisingly, as Liberals many found it hard when forced to support Conservative policies and so retired from politics as soon as they were able or returned to the Liberal Party. For the others, some willingly renounced their Liberal values, as in the case of George Goschen, who eventually joined the Carlton Club in 1893, and who swiftly ‘had become so “moderate” that a political microscope was necessary to distinguish themselves from Conservatives born and bred.’ However, Goschen was the only leading Liberal Unionist to join the Tories in the first seventeen years of the Party's history. Even if they voted for the Conservative government against their former colleagues, Hartington’s Party stood as Liberals, which provoked the following memorable description from Arthur Pease, himself tempted to secede in 1886:

I have often thought of a story I was told as a child of a Russian family

---

72 Elliot, Life of Goschen Vol 2, p. 120; Spinner, George Joachim Goschen, p. 177.
flying before a pack of wolves, in their sledge with four horses. To save
themselves they tried sacrificing one horse, then another, each victim
reprieving then for a short time from a terrible fate, and in their
desperation finally sacrificing their children, and all in vain...principles,
their promises.. all had to be thrown away to defeat the policy of
conciliation and justice.\textsuperscript{73}

Some, however, attempted to use their position as liberal allies of the
Conservatives, to persuade the senior partner in the ‘compact’ (as the electoral
alliance was known) to carry out Liberal reforms in areas such as education,
land purchase, local government and protection for working people. Of course,
indirect influence was no guarantee of ultimate success and, as Alfred
Hopkinson noted, one of the Party’s own leaders privately commented that ‘I
would not advise any young man with political ambitions to belong to the Liberal
Unionist Party.’\textsuperscript{74} Unsurprisingly, therefore, such attempts to influence legislation
are frequently over-looked or dismissed by the historians of Conservatism and
Liberalism, and their influence needs to be re-assessed in order to understand
the relative success and failure of the two main parties in the early decades of
the twentieth century.

The challenge of establishing a new political party is, of course, extremely
revealing for those who wish to understand the political culture of late Victorian
Britain. As an article in the Party newspaper exhorted its members in May 1887,
passive support was no longer enough, and ‘it is the plain duty of every man

\textsuperscript{73} Pease, \textit{Elections and Recollections}, p. 274.
\textsuperscript{74} Hopkinson, \textit{Penultima}, p. 161.
possessing [Liberal Unionist] opinions to assist in defeating the wrong, and in
speeding the triumph of the right. Every one can do something. A silent vote is
of great service, but it is not enough.’ The article went on to encourage
membership of associations, canvassing of friends and acquaintances,
distribution of literature and (rather self-servingly), ‘spreading the circulation of
the *Liberal Unionist*, a paper which gives expression to the best thoughts of the
best men of the Party.’\textsuperscript{75} Such an approach, motivated by a concept of duty that
implied membership of an elite patrician group and which presumed
membership of a certain professional or kinship group, appears wildly
misjudged for the new politics of the period, and a failure to adapt to the
changing needs of an emergent democracy was almost a badge of honour
among some Liberal Unionists. No other political Party can have said to have
contained a man who turned down the premiership three times (Lord
Hartington), a man who refused the Home Secretaryship (Sir Henry James) and
a man who preferred to be Colonial Secretary rather than Chancellor of the
Exchequer (Joseph Chamberlain). But in this constant self-sacrifice lies the
origins and the ideology of Liberal Unionism, as well as the causes of its
political failure.

This thesis therefore attempts to identify the varying ideological strands of
Liberal Unionism and to explain how these were gradually recast into a national
political language and forms of behaviour which, before the 1895 Unionist
coalition, owed precious little to the Conservative ideology of Salisbury and
Balfour. Secondly, the thesis addresses the period of Unionist alliance between

\textsuperscript{75} *Liberal Unionist*, 7, 11 May 1887.
1886 and the Party’s acceptance of office in 1895 in Salisbury’s Unionist coalition administration. It intends to explore the Liberal Unionists’ peculiar difficulties as an opposition party between 1886 and 1892 who largely supported the Tory government, and then as an opposition who sat alongside the Tories from 1892 to 1895. As a minority group, the Party sought to influence the policy of others (chiefly the Conservatives), whilst simultaneously seeking to portray themselves as a party committed to a distinct set of principles. This created unique challenges which the Party had managed successfully to overcome by 1895, but which provoked a hostile reaction from their own allies that would prove the Party’s downfall.

It is often assumed that the Party declined as an independent force after 1895, and this thesis offers evidence that the inactivity of the party organisation and its electoral machine was a deliberate act by the party’s national leaders and resisted by its grass roots. It therefore extends the study of the party’s organisation and its appeal to the electorate beyond 1895 to establish the ways in which Liberal Unionism remained (in some regions at least) a vibrant political culture, with considerable activism and cross-class electoral support. By contrast, after the 1903-6 tariff reform campaign, it was so fundamentally divided that it only avoided electoral oblivion by a whisker in 1906 and became a branch of the Conservatives in all but name after Chamberlain’s debilitating stroke of that year. That it took until 1912 for the Party to merge with the Conservatives speaks more of the lack of leadership among the Conservatives in this period and the confusion caused by the challenges of Lloyd George’s aggressive ‘peers vs the people’ campaign of 1909 to 1912, than it does of any
desire for independence on the part of the few remaining Liberal Unionists. That is not to say that individual MPs, and, in the case of Birmingham, individual areas, did not continue to identify themselves as Liberal Unionist, at least until the Second World War, when the Chamberlain family’s dominance of the second city was finally broken.\footnote{J. Broughton, ‘Working Class Conservatism and the Rise of Labour’, \textit{The Historian}, 59 (1998), pp. 16-20.}
Chapter 1: Whiggery or Socialism? The Ideology of Liberal Unionism

Increasingly, the acceptance of an *a priori* meaning of a term such as 'Unionist', has been questioned by those who seek to examine the ability of language to shape, as well as reflect, the behaviour of the actors in the wider political environment.¹ This chapter seeks to examine the conflicting, over-lapping and complementary definitions of the phrase 'Liberal Unionist.' For, as Biagini has noted, the campaign against Home Rule ‘was part of the broader debate on imperialism, liberty and democracy...’.²

Although Unionism is a term that is now associated with the Conservative Party in the twentieth century, to a reader in 1886 the associations were far more positive. One of greatest affirmations of Liberal Unionism was the support of so many Scottish MPs, including such solidly non-English figures as the Crofter MP, Charles Fraser Mackintosh, and the editor of the *Scotsman*, Charles Cooper. The positive view of the benefits of the Union was shared by many lowland Scots and some highland Scots, who even referred to themselves on occasions as ‘North Britons.’³ Not only did ‘Unionism’ imply a support for the integrity of Great Britain and a belief in the benefits this brought, it also deliberately had historical connotations, with a cause popular among working class radicals. It was not lost on many that Goldwin Smith, the great Liberal supporter of Lincoln's cause in the American Civil War, was a strong supporter

---

¹ Joyce, *Visions of the People*, Lawrence, *Speaking for the People*.
³ There were, of course, many journals and newspapers who promoted this view, most notably the *Northern British Daily Mail*. 
of Hartington's Party.⁴

The job of the Liberal Unionists for some was simply the defeat of Home Rule and not any real radical change. As Milner himself wrote to Goschen, following his six week visit to Ireland prior to the 1886 General Election, 'the people of Ireland...are praying for a “little wholesome neglect.” If only the House of Commons could be shut up for ten years – the other organs of government going on as usual – what a transformation scene we should witness in poor politician-ridden Ireland."⁵ The Party's chief propagandist, John St. Loe Strachey, revealed that for some, the Party had but one purpose, to defeat Home Rule so comprehensively that it would no longer be raised a proposal by any party. In January 1892, he admitted that 'after that has been done...the Liberal Unionist Party will have performed its allotted task."⁶

The intellectual defence of the Union

The place of ideology in later Victorian politics has been strongly asserted by those such as E. H. H. Green and Matthew Fforde who see the emergence of a new coalition of the ‘propertied’ who could resist the imprecations of ‘New Liberalism’ and Socialism. However, they have tended to ignore the significance of the defence of the Union in providing what Jeremy Smith describes as a ‘totem’⁷, preferring to read the Liberal Unionists’ existence in orthodox class

---

⁴ As was John Bright, who saw parallels between Parnell's Nationalists and the Confederate Rebels. Bright to Gladstone, 13 May 1886, Gladstone Papers, Add. MSS 44113. See J.M. Herron 'The Use of the American Civil War in the Debate over Irish Home Rule' American Historical Review, 69 (1964), pp. 1022-1026.
⁵ Milner to Goschen, 17 October 1886, Milner MS 183.
⁶ Liberal Unionist, 72, January 1892.
terms. In fact, a genuine ideology was present among Liberal Unionists largely due to the intellectual support for the Unionist position. As Christopher Harvie has noted, ‘academic opinion on the whole tended towards unionism.’ On 4 May 1886, *The Times* had listed ‘eminent men outside the political arena, who are...thorough-going Liberals and who have declared themselves hostile to the disruption of the United Kingdom’ to include Sir Frederick Leighton, Herbert Spencer, Goldwin Smith, Matthew Arnold, Henry Sidgwick, J. A. Froude, John Tyndall, W. E. H. Lecky, J. R. Seeley, T. H. Huxley and Lord Tennyson. Sir John Lubbock, MP for London University, was treasurer of the Liberal Committee for the Maintenance of the Legislative Union between Great Britain and Ireland. Sir William Thomson (later Lord Kelvin) had joined the Liberal Unionist Committee by 24 May; scientists may have been inclined to unionism, suggests Greta Jones, due to the Catholic Church’s implacable opposition to the theory of evolution.

As well as Henry Sidgwick, at Cambridge, Millicent Fawcett was a leading member of the Women’s Liberal Unionist Association, together with Emily Davies, the founder of Girton College, Cambridge. More generally, the university seats proved very supportive of Liberal Unionism with London, Oxford, Dublin and Edinburgh and St Andrews all returning Liberal Unionists in of reactionaries, ignoring the Radicals and progressive Liberals within the alliance.

---

8 Fforde, *Conservatism and Collectivism*, p.48.
10 *The Times*, 4 May 1886. Huxley wrote a letter to *The Times* on 13 April strongly criticising Gladstone’s policy.
11 *The Times*, 24 May 1886. In much the same way that Liberal Unionism embraced different political, social and regional philosophies, Huxley and Kelvin were on opposite sides of the evolution debate. G. Jones, ‘Scientists Against Home Rule’, in Boyce & O’Day (eds.), *Defenders of the Union*, pp 188-202.
12 H. Emy believes that this academic revolt was against the growing power of the state and the threat of its misuse by unscrupulous politicians willing to promise unattainable treasures to an unsophisticated electorate. H. V. Emy, *Liberals, Radicals and Social Politics 1892-1914* (Cambridge, 1974), p. 5. Harvie agrees, noting that ‘distrust of Gladstone had always been endemic in the academic liberal community.’ C. Harvie, ‘Ideology and Home Rule’, p.310.
the period. As Burness has noted, six professors of Glasgow University were vice presidents of the WSLUA, as well as the Chancellor, the Earl of Stair.\footnote{13} In July 1887, the combined Universities of England presented an address to Hartington, signed by 'a number of resident graduates of the two universities...eminent in either literary or scientific or classical studies.'\footnote{14} Shortly after the 1892 election, W. Miller, the new secretary of the Liberal Unionist Club, wrote to Phillip Lyttelton Gell looking for new speakers 'among undergraduates at Oxford who would be of service to us as soon as they have taken their degree.'\footnote{15} The Oxford Liberal Unionist Association had two professors as vice-presidents: Rev. Professor Thomas Fowler, professor of logic and President of Corpus Christi College, and the legal professor, T.E. Holland, and there were ten further professors on the committee.\footnote{16}

The Liberal Unionists arguably benefited more, in the first age of mass politics, from the influence of writers, capable of spreading the message through popular history. T.B. Macaulay, although dead for twenty-six years at the time of the first Home Rule Bill, had been a prophet of imperial British identity, in his *History of England from the Accession of James II*, published between 1848 and 1855. J. A. Froude, whose 1870 *History of England*, had made him, to his biographer at least, 'the most famous of living English historians,' attacked the prospect of Catholic persecution of both peasants and protestants under a Home Rule parliament, based on his reading of Irish history and became the chief inspiration for the patriotic Radicals, for whom Chamberlain eventually became

\footnote{13} C. Burness, ‘Strange Associations’, p.49.\footnote{14} Liberal Unionist, 16, 13 July 1887.\footnote{15} W. Miller to P. Lyttelton Gell, 28 October 1892, Gell Papers, Derbyshire County Record Office, D3287/116/2/6.\footnote{16} One of these ten was the celebrated Rev. W. A. Spooner. Gell Papers, D3287/116/4/12.
the unquestioned leader. Froude’s later novel, *The Two Chiefs of Dunboy* (1889), popularised his liberal criticisms of Gladstone’s schemes still further, as did *Hurrish* (1886) by Emily Lawless. Froude’s belief in a global movement towards large states in which nationalist self-interest had to be sacrificed for the benefits of economic strength, civil freedoms and political liberty, was one of great appeal to the British electorate between 1886 and 1903. As the jurist Alfred Venn Dicey put it at the centenary of Trafalgar:

The yearly crowning of Nelson’s column, the influence exerted by the writings of Froude, of Seeley, and above all of [Alfred] Mahan, the tales and the verses of Rudyard Kipling, with their glorification of British imperial sway, and the echo which the teaching of all these writers finds in the hearts of the English people throughout the United Kingdom and our self-governing colonies, all tell their own tale.

Dicey, Vinerian Professor of Law at Oxford University and author of *Law of the Constitution*, ‘the most influential constitutional textbook of the last century’, emerged as the Party’s leading ideologue. In addition to his academic excellence, he also had political credibility as he had argued in favour of better treatment of Irish Catholics during Gladstone’s second administration, while refusing to accept that either Home Rule or coercion provided the solution. In

---

17 H. Paul, *The Life of Froude* (New York, 1905), p. 110. In much the same way that Salisbury would appoint Alfred Austin of the *Standard* to the post of Poet Laureate as a reward for his support in 1895, Froude became Regius Professor of History at Oxford shortly before the 1892 election, despite his serious shortcomings as an academic historian.


21 A. V. Dicey, ‘Edmund Burke on Affairs with Ireland,’ *The Nation*, 18 August 1881.
this, he followed the lead of the great Victorian constitutionalist, Walter Bagehot, who had feared that Home Rule would challenge respect for the law and authority. Dicey continued with this nuanced position after the Hawarden Kite, arguing that Ireland, rather than being separated from English rule, needed to enjoy the full benefits of English law, which it had been so far denied. In Scotland, the Union had preserved the best of the indigenous institutions, but in Ireland, only the worst elements remained. Dicey rejected the paradigm of the parliamentary discussions of spring 1886 that posited a choice between coercion and Home Rule and believed that the Union with Ireland was both possible and desirable. For him the only two possible solutions to Ireland's problems were: a more sympathetic and non-sectarian implementation of the Union; or complete independence for Ireland. Any other suggestion was a mere chimera, including any suggestion of a devolved assembly in Ulster. As he put it:

the fullest legislative assembly meeting in Dublin would rightly claim to speak for the Irish people. A town council, whether of Birmingham or Belfast, springs from, and is kept alive by the will of Parliament and cannot pretend that its powers, however extensive, compete with the authority of its creator.

Having established a reputation among academics and politicians as a dispassionate commentator, the enthusiasm with which Dicey took up the

---

defence of the Union had a significant effect. Trowbridge Ford gives him credit for recruiting W.E.H. Lecky to the Liberal Unionist cause as well as changing the editorial policy of *The Spectator.* Dicey had always believed in the historic potency of nationalism, seeing in the recent developments in Italy, Germany and the United States the desire for integration leading to a moral and political regeneration. For him, as for most Liberal Unionists, Irish nationalism, with its negative approach, disruptive parliamentary methods and disdain for the rule of law, was the greatest threat to the integration of Great Britain and implied a collapse of the imperial mission, economic decline and a fracturing of the most effective political and legal structure in the world. He wrote to Bryce in April 1886, 'I feel it more strongly than I can tell you & more strongly than people would believe of me.' Although, as a staunch Liberal, he found it hard to join an alliance with the Tories, such was his belief in the cause, he was prepared to tolerate 'strange and very uncongenial political company.' In order to support the Liberal Unionist cause, Dicey wrote *England's Case Against Home Rule* during the election campaign in June 1886. In it, he laid out the moderate Liberal cause most explicitly. He admitted that he had no particular knowledge of Ireland or Irish history and that, as the book's title suggested, he was only concerned with 'the advantages and disadvantages from an English point of view, of either maintaining the Union or of separation from Ireland.'

As a Liberal, he accepted that the Nationalists were honest in their view that

---

27 For popular support for this view, see *Weekly Times & Echo,* 2 February 1890.
29 A. V. Dicey to Bryce, 10 April 1886, quoted in Cosgrove, *The Rule of Law,* p.124.
30 A. V. Dicey to Bryce, 18 May 1886, quoted in ibid., p.125.
Home Rule was a first step on the road towards complete separation, but regarded the English Home Rulers as duplicitous in stating the Home Rule was a final solution as it could only inflame demands for complete independence.

His opposition to Home Rule was thus summarised in three points:

1) Home Rule would arrest and reverse the historic expansion of the British Empire which had begun in the 16th century and would threaten the political institutions of the country.

2) As a constitutional revolution, Home Rule would threaten the integrity of the United Kingdom as had evolved since the union of England and Wales.

3) Home Rule would never satisfy the Nationalists, as they called for the repeal of the Act of Union and not a 'Union of Hearts' envisaged by Gladstone once Home Rule had been passed.

For Dicey, Home Rule meant 'the endowment of Ireland with representative institutions and responsible government' and as such he believed this would cause a number of constitutional difficulties between Dublin and Westminster.\(^{32}\)

He criticised Home Rulers in the Liberal Party for presenting Home Rule as merely an extension of local self government, while Irish Nationalists claimed it to mean virtual independence for Ireland. This, Dicey believed would lead to significantly poorer relations between the two countries. Ireland was a vulnerable point in Britain's island defences and an unsympathetic Irish government might encourage other powers to use the island as a base to attack the British mainland. This may seem far fetched today, but the fear of French attack had resulted in the creation of a line of sea forts in Sussex and Kent.

\(^{32}\) Ibid, p.20.
between 1859 and 1860 and the memory of the Directory’s landings in Ireland and Wales in 1797 still influenced attitudes.\textsuperscript{33} In Scotland, in particular, this was a genuine concern and in 1886 the Glasgow Chamber of Commerce passed a resolution expressing the fear that Ireland would ‘become the choice refuge of all the dynamitards of Europe.’\textsuperscript{34}

Dicey’s argument then extended, revealingly, to the political structures that had created the Home Rule crisis. The growing democracy of the British political system was, he felt, no guarantee of sensible or effective government, a view which was shared by Salisbury and most Conservatives.\textsuperscript{35} He accused the Liberal Party of abdicating its responsibility by hiding behind the electoral results in Ireland of 1885, when, in reality they were giving in to the threat of violence and parliamentary opposition. ‘Cowardice masks itself under the show of compromise, and men of eminent respectability yield to the terror of being bored, concessions which their forefathers would have refused to the threat of armed rebellion.’\textsuperscript{36} As he apparently commented parenthetically, suicide was not an acceptable solution to tooth ache.

Dicey’s book was fundamentally a creed of negative Unionism. It opposed the idea of Home Rule as Ireland was too close to the rest of Britain and thus too much of a security risk to allow control over its own affairs. It posited the growth of larger multi-ethnic states as inevitable and thus saw Home Rule as ahistoric.

\textsuperscript{34} North British Daily Mail, 20 April 1886, quoted in J. McCaffrey, ‘The Origins of Liberal Unionism in the West of Scotland’, Scottish Historical Review, 50 (1971) p.567.
\textsuperscript{35} See Cammarano, “To Save England From Decline.”
\textsuperscript{36} Dicey, England’s Case Against Home Rule, p.45.
It rejected the right of three million Irishmen to overrule the rest of the British electorate, and regarded English civilisation as more advanced than the Irish. It did accept that Irish grievances needed to be addressed, but denied that these could be best resolved through a Dublin parliament. Oddly for an academic, Dicey discounted the significance of Irish history in the Home Rule crisis. In his rebuttal, Justin McCarthy attacked this weakness:

All that history teaches is to be ignored, to be wiped away, and a quarrel as old as the hills to be investigated as if were a mushroom that only came into existence the week before last.37

Dicey analysed Ireland’s fundamental difficulty as economic and concluded that only the resources of the United Kingdom could resolve this. This ran, of course, entirely counter to Gladstone’s reading of the 1885 Irish vote.38 For Dicey, as for so many other Unionists, the Union was ultimately of greater significance than the principle of democracy. Parry sees the Liberal Unionists as losing confidence in Gladstone’s ability ‘to distinguish between the material wishes of seasoning opinion and unconditional section clamour’ and consequently having become ‘a soft touch for any well-organised minority who could persuade him of their morality.’39 Consequently, the Liberal Unionists claimed that the 1891 Newcastle Programme marked Gladstone’s surrender to ‘faddists’ such as temperance reformers, trade unionists and disestablishers. Ultimately, this attitude led many one-time champions of franchise reform, including Dicey, to defend the House of Lords’ right to veto the decisions of the

Finally Dicey acknowledged, as so few Home Rulers did, the problematic religious, cultural and ethnic divisions in Ireland, and argued that only the Union, if it was reformed on an non-sectarian basis, could resolve these issues. There had to be a single paramount legislative body, in which was represented the various cultural, ethnic and social groupings of the United Kingdom, which would ‘equalise conditions as far as practicable throughout the three kingdoms.’ That said, Dicey was quite prepared to use the apparent threat to Ulster prosperity and civil rights that Home Rule seemed to offer, to bolster his argument. In his mind, Home Rule would betray those 'loyal' Irishmen who wished to retain their British citizenship.

\[
\text{[Home Rule] whilst not freeing England from moral responsibility for protecting the rights of every British subject, does virtually give up the attempt to ensure that those rights have more than a nominal existence and thus gives up the endeavour to enforce legal and equal justice between man and man.}\]

Such a disgrace, he felt, would haunt the politics of the mainland and would provoke a wave of demands for similar treatment throughout the Empire, which would hasten the collapse of Britain's world power status and its decline into a minor European state, nearly as impoverished as its Irish neighbour. This was

---

41 Linda Colley has argued that the Union should be regarded as the basis for consensus among the conflicting identities of the British Isles and was well established in this position in the eighteenth century. L. Colley, Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837 (London, 1992).
43 Quoted in Boyce and O’Day (eds.), The Ulster Crisis, p.286.
an effective attack, as the Home Rule scheme’s greatest weakness was its refusal to confront the distinctive religious, economic and cultural character of Ulster.44

However, despite encouragement by figures in the Party such as T. W. Russell and Isabella Tod and those outside such as Colonel Saunderson and Lord Randolph Churchill, the ‘Ulster Question’ was not especially emphasised in the Party’s literature, at least before 1892, when the issue grew desperate as the Party seemed to be heading for electoral disaster.45 It was only in September 1890 that the Party officially sanctioned mention of the risk of ‘civil war’ in Ulster if Home Rule was forced upon the country.46 To many, such as Dicey, such talk was provocative and the very purpose of Liberal Unionism was to ensure the supremacy of the law over party political concerns. To threaten to break the law when it did not suit a political group’s interests would be to lower oneself to the moral standards of Parnell and the Nationalists.47 Instead, the Party preferred to emphasise the positive benefits from an inclusive and united British identity which appealed to lowland Scots, Ulster tenant farmers, Cornish Wesleyans and Birmingham Radicals.

44 Loughlin, Gladstone, Home Rule; F. Thompson, The End of Liberal Ulster: Land Agitation and Land Reform, (London, 2001); Loughlin, ‘Creating a “Regional and Geographical Fact.”’
45 While Chamberlain’s determination not to place Ulster under a Nationalist Irish Parliament contributed to the collapse of the ‘Round Table’ conference in January 1887, he had been willing to contemplate ‘a separate Legislature’ for the region. L. Harcourt’s journal, 14 January 1887, P. Jackson (ed.) Loulou: Selected Extracts from the Journals of Lewis Harcourt (1880-1895) (Madison, 2006), p.147. T. W. Russell’s oft-quoted speech at Grangemouth in which he referred to the Ulster Protestants, as ‘bone of your bone, flesh of your flesh’ was not widely reprinted until the Third Home Rule Crisis. See, for example, A. W. Samuels, Home Rule: What is it? (London: 1911).
46 E. Dawson, ‘Shadow of the Sword’, Liberal Unionist, 56, September 1890.
47 As Phillip Gell wrote to Milner, the Liberal Unionists saw themselves as ‘the party of law and order...’ Gell to Milner, 4 August 1887, Milner MS 4.
The Liberal Unionists only found themselves tempted to appeal to Protestant distrust of clericalism when their electoral oblivion appeared to beckon in the early 1890s. With the Irish episcopacy's direct intervention in Nationalist politics in the condemnation of Parnell, Henry James warned the Liberal Unionist Club in April 1891, that 'if the government of Ireland is given to the Irish people, it will, in fact be given into the hands of the Roman Catholic priesthood.' The following month, the Party newspaper included a number of anti-clerical statements and began a series of articles entitled 'The Clerical Conspiracy in Ireland.' Such policies were risky; ideologically, as Liberalism had traditionally attempted to appeal across sectarian lines, and electorally, as many Unionists in southern Ireland were Catholic. Although Glasgow is traditionally associated with sectarian politics, Edinburgh seems to have also been susceptible to the anti-clerical argument. Lewis McIver, although a confirmed radical, was faced with a tough challenge in South Edinburgh in 1892, and turned to religion in his speeches, accusing the Liberals of tolerating 'the priest in politics'. He was clearly determined to have his cake and eat it, for he demurred any accusation that he was 'endeavouring to stir up religious animosity', preferring to brandish 'the true Liberal’s feeling for religious freedom, religious intolerance, of respect for every man’s religious opinions sincerely held' and to use the names of Bright and Spurgeon freely. As a more prominent radical, restrained by the Unionist alliance, facing electoral oblivion in a much larger scale, the new Party leader endorsed McIver's approach in an address to the Nonconformist Unionist

---

48 Liberal Unionist, 64, May 1891.
49 Liberal Unionist, 65, June 1891.
50 On the selection of William Kenny to fight St Stephen's Green, Dublin, it was noted that 'Mr Kenny belongs, as very many of the most zealous Unionists in the city of Dublin do, to the Roman Catholic Church.' Liberal Unionist, 70, November 1891.
51 Liberal Unionist, 75, April 1892.
Association at the end of March 1892. Chamberlain was far less subtle than McIver in his appeal to sectarian instincts:

Irish Protestants will be left entirely at the mercy of a Parliament in Dublin, which will be, as far as its majority are concerned, filled with delegates and creatures of the Irish Roman Catholic priesthood. I do not believe that Irish Protestants will accept this proposal.\textsuperscript{52}

The \textit{Liberal Unionist} continued to complain of clerical interference in the general election in Ireland, claiming that ‘the priestly functions have been forgotten for the last three weeks, and the religious minister has become a political haranguer and an electioneering agent…’\textsuperscript{53} although this was exactly the role of the Irish non-conformist clergy in the Unionist association. T. W. Russell, despite his radical principles, was quite prepared to threaten ‘the distinct menace of civil war’ in May 1892.\textsuperscript{54}

With the announcement of a Home Rule Bill in the Queen’s Speech in January 1893, Arnold-Foster, now representing an Ulster seat, introduced an amendment attacking the ‘vast amount of clerical influence.’\textsuperscript{55} This was soon followed by detailed (if selective) summary of Non-Conformist reaction to the Second Home Bill in June 1893 in \textit{Liberal Unionist Association Memoranda}. The Presbyterian Church leadership was quoted as believing that ‘the measure seriously impairs our civil and religious liberties.’ The Methodist Conference had declared that ‘far from being a message of peace to Ireland, [it] would be a fruitful occasion of more distressing discord and strife.’ The Quakers apparently

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{52} \textit{Liberal Unionist}, 76, May 1892.
\item \textsuperscript{53} \textit{Liberal Unionist}, 79, August 1892.
\item \textsuperscript{54} ‘Mr T.W. Russell on the Ulster question’ \textit{Liberal Unionist}, 76, May 1892.
\item \textsuperscript{55} \textit{Liberal Unionist Association Memoranda} (hereafter \textit{LUAM}), 1:3, March 1893.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
declared that ‘the Bill...will, of necessity, be extremely injurious to the moral and material prosperity of this country.’\(^{56}\) Even a Roman Catholic manifesto against the bill was being circulated, signed by the Party’s single Catholic MP, William Kenny, together with Daniel O’Connell’s son, the Earl of Fingall, the Earl of Kenmare, Lord Louth and Lord Westmeath.\(^{57}\)

The Party was, however, keen to distance itself from accusations that it was playing the Orange Card, as Churchill had done with such violent consequences in 1886. The only recent study of the Orange-Unionist alliance in Scotland, states that ‘a discreet public distance was [usually] maintained.’\(^{58}\) Asked to take the position of president of the Irish Unionist Alliance, Hartington wrote to Wolmer that he was reluctant as ‘I thought the thing had an Orange appearance which would not be acceptable to some of my friends in Ireland.’\(^{59}\) When the Ulster Convention of 1892 was organised, it was emphasised that it comprised ‘descendants of Scotch Covenanters... descendants of leaders of Volunteers ...descendants of United Irishmen...sons of old fighters for Catholic Emancipation ...advocates of... the rights of the tillers of the soil’ and that ‘Orangemen are only one element in this movement’. Even those Orangemen present, due to ‘their recent association with moderate Conservatives and Liberal Unionists,’ demonstrated ‘a calmness and moderation of spirit which is new in their history.’\(^{60}\) The Convention itself passed off without any riot or violent

\(^{56}\) \textit{LUAM.}, 1:6, June 1893. \\
\(^{57}\) \textit{LUAM}, 1:3, March 1893. \\
\(^{58}\) E. W. McFarland, ‘The Orangeman’s Unionist Vision’ in MacDonald (ed.), \textit{Unionist Scotland}, p.43. As R. Colls has argued, the Orangeman’s identity was distinct from that the tolerant Englishman, to whom Liberal Unionism appealed. Colls, ‘Englishness and the Political Culture’ in Colls and Dodd (eds.), \textit{Englishness}, p. 40. \\
\(^{59}\) Hartington to Wolmer, 30 January 1892, Selborne Papers, Bodleian Library, Selborne MS II (4) 170. \\
\(^{60}\) I. Tod, \textit{Liberal Unionist}, 76, May 1892.
incident, as a deliberate contrast with the ethnic cleansing of areas of Belfast in June 1886. There were, it was said, all creeds present at the event which attracted around 100,000 people, ‘Episcopalian, Presbyterians, Roman Catholics, Methodists, Unitarians, Independents, Baptists, Jews and Friends.’\textsuperscript{61} There was also a convention held in Dublin, but this received far less attention.

With the Liberals’ electoral victory in 1892 and the introduction of the second Home Rule Bill, the argument that Parliament was supreme needed some adjustment, and here the position of the Ulster Protestants did become crucial. As the \textit{Liberal Unionist Association Memoranda} put it in a supplement, ‘Parliament has no moral right to cast off and repudiate the allegiance of the loyalists of Ulster.’\textsuperscript{62} There was also a perfect opportunity to attack the Liberals for failing to adhere to the principles in which they claimed to believe, with the increased use of the ‘guillotine’ (now nicknamed ‘Gladstone’s gag’) limiting the freedom of speech at Westminster itself.

This injustice was perpetuated by a government calling itself Liberal! By a party which professes to be the champion of free speech, and by the majority of a House of Commons which has no mandate from the people of Great Britain either for this revolution of the British constitution, or for the revolutionary method by which it has been sought to establish this great wrong.\textsuperscript{63}

Discontent with the attitude of both Liberals and Nationalists towards Parliament and due procedure clearly animated the Lords in their decisive vote against the

\textsuperscript{61} \textit{Liberal Unionist}, 78, July 1892. Another 100,000 Unionists processed peacefully past Balfour in Belfast during the debate on the Second Bill on 4 April.

\textsuperscript{62} \textit{LUAM Supplement}, March 1893.

\textsuperscript{63} \textit{LUAM}, 1: 8, August 1893.
second Home Rule Bill in 1893, following the ‘Judas’ outburst aimed at
Chamberlain in the House of Commons. It also led to a defection, when George
Doughty, who had won Heneage’s seat at Grimsby for the Liberals in 1895,
crossed the floor in July 1898 expressing anger at the behaviour of Redmond’s
MPs. He fought a by-election on the issue and demonstrated the continuing
anti-Catholic attitude of the town by securing his return with a comfortable
majority of 1,751 votes.

Much of Dicey’s 1886 book had been taken up with dystopian visions of the
consequences of an independent Ireland and damning critiques of the
constitutional short-comings of any scheme of Home Rule, chiefly because they
would all challenge the crucial element of the British polity, the sovereignty of
the Westminster parliament. His ultimately negative interpretation of Unionism
was only partly shared in Birmingham and the other, more radical areas.
Radical Unionists regarded themselves as ‘advanced Liberals’ much as they
had done before 1886, and viewed Hartington’s moderates as necessary but
unfortunate allies. The radical Unionist ideology was expressed most succinctly
in *Home Rule from a Liberal Unionist’s Point of View* by Richard Parkes. In this,
although there was a strict insistence that ‘there must be persistent enforcement
of the law of the land’, there was a traditionally radical attitude in the pamphlet’s
conclusion. ‘…landlordism must go and…Land Acts of the future must tend in
the direction of peasant proprietorship.’ The article hinted that Liberal reunion
was possible, by calling on the Gladstonians ‘to shelve indefinitely both Home

---

64 *British Weekly*, 28 July 1898.
65 *The Times*, 4 August 1898
Rule and Local Government [for Ireland]’ as the prelude to reconstruction.66 Other radical Unionists emphasised that the ‘unauthorised programme’ had been abandoned by Gladstone’s fixation with the Parnell and that now ‘Ireland blocks the way.’ This view had been expressed by Chamberlain early in 1887, when he first expressed his disgust that ‘thirty two millions of people must go without much needed legislation because three million are disloyal.’67 In this way, Unionism could act as a source of constructive economic and social reform and a means of improving the humanitarian achievements of the imperial mission. Of course, this attitude was shared by other independently-minded Liberals, who were not associated with Chamberlain, such as Lubbock, Courtney and Lewis Fry of Bristol.

In some ways, the pamphlet demonstrated that radical Unionism appeared to be more akin to Salisbury’s Conservatism with its description of ‘the character of the average Irish peasant’ matching the Conservative leader’s famous ‘Hottentot’ remarks at St James Hall on 15 May 1886. In contrast to the principled, legalistic opposition of the moderate Liberal Unionists, Parkes resorts to an English prejudice, believing that ‘he [the Irishman] has the ignorance, superstition, cunning and a large admixture of that happy-go-lucky element which in England is called idleness...[with] an utter want of self-reliance. He will neither think for himself, or do anything for himself...thus he clings to the Roman Catholic religion as the one which gives him the least mental effort...he joins a secret society, in order that he may frighten something

---

67 The Baptist, 25 February 1887.
out of somebody." In one of '30 Reasons against Home Rule', the Liberal Unionist Association Memoranda Supplement claimed that 'the Irishman, sufficiently inclined to drink already, will drink as a patriotic duty, and this, thanks to the votes of a large number of persons in the country who are enthusiastic votaries of temperance.' Such an attitude could sometimes translate into apparent callousness, as is evident in the Liberal Unionist's leader on the failure of the potato harvest of summer 1890:

the death rate is very low and fewer young children and more very old people die than elsewhere in the three kingdoms...Compared with the dwellers in the slums of our large cities, the Western Irish cottier's life is a very tolerable one.

Biagini suggests that this was not, as Loughlin might have it, race propaganda, but merely an attempt to use the language and imagery of Darwin to condemn those who, respectable society felt, had put themselves in a class of their own, through acts of terror or poverty, beyond the reach of civilisation, in which terms such as 'bestial' and sub-human' had to be used. Any grievances that the Irish had were exaggerated by opportunistic Nationalists, and were probably the result of the indolence and fecklessness of the Irish themselves.

In July 1886, John Bright significantly contributed to the radical rebellion against Gladstone by claiming that the Irish lacked the political maturity which the

---

68 R. Parkes, Home Rule from a Liberal Unionist's Point of View, p. 2. See also Liberal Unionist, 76, May 1892; Liberal Unionist, 80, September 1892. For the popular English depiction of the Irish see L.P. Curtis, Apes and Angels: The Irishman in Victorian Caricature (Newton Abbot, 1971).
69 LUAM Supplement, March 1893.
70 Liberal Unionist, 57, October 1890.
71 J. Loughlin, 'Joseph Chamberlain.'
72 For the Conservative view of Ireland, see Smith, 'Conservative Ideology', p.23.
northern English working class had demonstrated during the ‘cotton famine’ of the 1860s.\textsuperscript{73} However, unlike the Conservatives, the radical (and the moderate) Unionists believed that a nuanced combination of coercion and reform could improve the Irish character so that some degree of self-government would be possible in the distant future.\textsuperscript{74} Of course, many Liberal Unionists differentiated between the humble Irish cottager and the Fenian terrorist. Since 1882 and the murder of Cavendish and Burke and the Maamtrasna massacre, many Liberals had accepted that there must be no concessions to violence and threats of disorder, otherwise the rule of law itself might be in jeopardy. As Trevelyan had put it in 1883, when Chief Secretary for Ireland, if British rule was abandoned in Ireland, ‘we should have a mutual massacre.’\textsuperscript{75} There was also the belief that there was no strong popular support for the ‘land war’ despite Gladstone and the Nationalists’ claims, as only 2-4\% of the tenant farmers joined the Plan of Campaign, and that intimidation and corruption explained the massive Nationalist majorities in rural Ireland.\textsuperscript{76} Such genuinely Liberal concerns as to the motives and behaviour of the Nationalists explain the majority of the Liberal Unionist Party’s willingness to accept coercion in 1887, and the \textit{Liberal Unionist} continuously fed this attitude with its ‘Latest Outrages in Ireland’ feature, which ran for every one of the paper’s eighty issues.

As Stephen Koss has written, there was no natural alliance between the Free churches and the Liberal Party, merely the acceptance that ‘Liberalism was...the

\textsuperscript{73} Bright speaking at Birmingham, quoted in \textit{The Times}, 2 July 1886.
\textsuperscript{74} Parry, \textit{The Politics of Patriotism}, pp. 382-384.
\textsuperscript{76} Quoted in Biagini, \textit{British Democracy}, p. 242.
less unsatisfactory of the rival parties. As a consequence, although the 1886 division within Liberalism was shared by non-conformist Protestantism, it was not on the same lines. The non-conformist alliance at first refused to take part in politics. The Methodist Conference in London in August 1886 passed a resolution condemning the introduction of party politics into Methodist buildings or meetings. The historian of Congregationalism records that prior to Home Rule when the denomination was almost entirely Liberal it had been easy to introduce political resolutions at the Annual Congregational Union, but that afterwards the situation was quite different. No Free Church denomination (outside Ireland) attempted a resolution on Home Rule at any of the annual denominational conferences and any resolution of support for Gladstone and his attempts to resolve Irish grievances never referred to the specifics of the 1886 Bill. Even in the resolutions condemning coercion as a policy, which were passed at such conferences during the next few years, Home Rule was never referred to directly. One resolution at the Congregational Union of 1888 caused R.W. Dale of Birmingham to withdraw from the Congregational Union.

The leadership of Dale and Chamberlain led the Birmingham Unitarians to join the Unionist cause. Dale’s opposition was based on opposition to the Home Rule Bill’s clause which excluded the Irish from Westminster, but would continue to extract taxation from Ireland. The other influential Free Churchman who became Unionist was Charles Spurgeon, a Baptist who was the best known

---

79 Methodist Times, 12 August 1886.
British preacher of the day.\textsuperscript{83} Spurgeon’s opposition was, however, based on the fears for future treatment of Irish Protestants under a largely Catholic parliament. As will be seen in Chapter Three, the Liberal Unionists attempted to make the long-established nonconformist distrust of Catholicism into a political movement through the Nonconformist Unionist Association, which reached the peak of its activity in 1892. This was not simply historical prejudice against a rival faith: Nonconformity stood for the principles of humanitarianism, self-help, sobriety and, above all, resistance to the confessional state. The announcement of papal infallibility in 1870 that helped to trigger the Kulturkampf in Germany and Gambetta’s ‘Voila l’ennemi!’ campaign in France, alienated many Liberals in Britain as well. As the \textit{Christian World} put it, ‘Centuries of Popish rule have taught us that we can never trust them when once they have power in their hands.’\textsuperscript{84}

The fear of ‘Rome Rule’ was shared by almost all the Protestants of Ireland, both those who feared specific measures of injustice, such as the endowment of Catholic schools, and those who spoke wildly of pogroms of Protestants. Other Nonconformist Unionists identified by Bebbington include Congregationalists such as Newman Hall, Henry Allon, Robert Bruce, J. B. Paton, John Stoughton and J Radford Thompson; Presbyterians like Oswald Sykes and Monro Gibson.\textsuperscript{85} Koss also suggests that Wesleyan Methodists, predominant in Cornwall nonconformity, were far more ‘middle-class and traditionalist' than both other

\textsuperscript{83} Guinness Rogers claimed that the motivation for Spurgeon’s opposition was his gout. G Rogers to Gladstone, 19 June 1886, quoted in Bebbington, \textit{Nonconformist Conscience}, p. 90.


\textsuperscript{85} Bebbington, \textit{Non-Conformist Conscience}, p.88.
Methodists or the other Dissenters.\(^{86}\) On the other hand, such was the appeal of Gladstone’s reputation among that, in the words of the Baptist, ‘men…were overawed by the stature of the Liberal leader and so lost their power of independent judgement.’\(^{87}\)

As early as December 1885, Edward Watkin had claimed that Home Rule was a perversion of ‘true Liberalism.’\(^{88}\) Craig Sellar, when writing to advise Hartington to sit on the opposition benches in July 1886, had referred to the Liberal Unionists as ‘the true church of Liberalism.’\(^{89}\) Edward Heneage had expressed the sentiment most fully, writing to his (separatist) agent in January 1887:

> I deny that we are Dissentient Liberals; we are consistent Liberals and Unionists; the others are Radicals and Home Rulers who dissent on every part of the Bills among themselves and include Unionists like Herschell and Rosebery and Separatists like Parnell and Labouchere in their ranks.\(^{90}\)

Colonel Hozier, the first secretary of the Liberal Unionist Association, took this attitude still further, when he addressed the West of Scotland Liberal Unionist Association (hereafter WSLUA) in October 1886.

> They were not dissenters, they were the True Church. He claimed that they held those noble Liberal principles that had been handed down from generation to generation of Liberals to all Liberal statesmen since the


\(^{87}\) *The Baptist*, 21 May 1886.

\(^{88}\) E. Watkin to Hartington, 25 December 1885, Devonshire Papers, Chatsworth House, DP 340.1871.

\(^{89}\) Craig Sellar to Hartington, 28 July 1886, DP 340.2029.

\(^{90}\) E. Heneage to J. Wintringham, 2 January 1887, Heneage Papers, Lincolnshire County Records Office, 2 HEN 5/14/1.
great Reform Act.\textsuperscript{91}

Writing in the Party organ in October 1888, the poet Ernest Myers claimed that the break over Home Rule was ‘a calamity which contains the promise of a purer and more vigorous revival…’ Like Dicey and Argyll, he saw the Liberal Unionists as the standard bearers for the true values of Liberalism, as it had been defined by the Party during the 1860s (largely through the work of John Stuart Mill), and he saw the attempt by Gladstone to deviate from these principles as something akin to apostasy. It was not by accident that he used biblical language to express his hopes for the future of the Party:

When the stock of true Liberalism has again borne fruit upward, when the party has purged itself of the false crew who have conspired to trail our flag in the mire…although the Liberals may be for a time a less numerous host, they will not be… a weaker one. Power will come later into their hands, but it will come also more amply and more honourably by the delay.\textsuperscript{92}

As W. C. Lubenow has demonstrated, the voting behaviour of the Liberal Unionist in the 1886-1892 parliament ‘shows considerable affinity between them and their former Liberal colleagues on questions other than Home Rule.’\textsuperscript{93} Like a radical religious sect breaking away from the body of an established church, many Liberal Unionists saw themselves as a righteous minority persecuted by the sinful and ignorant, but assured of an ultimate victory in the political paradise to come.

\textsuperscript{91} Quoted in \textit{Glasgow Herald}, 21 October 1886.
\textsuperscript{92} E. Myers, ‘The Unionist Alliance’, \textit{Liberal Unionist}, 33, October 1888.
\textsuperscript{93} Lubenow, ‘The Liberals and the National Question’, p.140.
What, then, were the ‘principles of 1885’ around which the Party had once united, which the Gladstonians had abandoned and to which the Liberal Unionists claimed to be the true heirs? First, as Dicey himself frequently reminded audiences, was the demand that the law had to be obeyed and that, by breaching the law and encouraging others to do so, the Nationalists had lost the right to demand political reform from Parliament. As *Liberal Unionist Association Memoranda*, in a specially produced supplement to coincide with the introduction of the second Home Rule Bill, expressed it, there were benefits to be had.

The history of the past seven years has shown that Ireland can be tranquil and prosperous under the rule of the Imperial Parliament in which she is adequately, if not excessively represented, that the rights of individuals and of minorities are represented and enforced; and that her mutual resources can be developed.\(^95\)

Liberal Unionists fundamentally believed that the liberal constitutional that had evolved by 1867, as celebrated by Bagehot, acted as a bulwark against despotism and sectarianism. All the references to ‘upholding the rule of law’ may appear to many modern scholars, particularly Irish ones, to be mere English cant which overlooked the suffering of the Irish people, but they were in fact based on the principle that true freedom of action was only possible when the law, rather than a class, race or denomination, ruled the country. As Liberals, Hartington’s Party believed that ‘justice for Ireland’ could be delivered,

\(^94\) The first record of this potent phrase is in the history of the Liberal Unionist Association published in the *Liberal Unionist*, 33, October 1888, though Heneage had pledged to ‘stand as a Liberal on Mr Gladstone’s platform of 1885’ in 1886. Heneage to Wintringham, 7 June 1886, 2 HEN 5/13/49.

\(^95\) *LUAM Supplement*, March 1893.
but only within the constitutional framework that had taken such historic struggle to erect.

There were of course some disputed principles in the legacy of mid-Victorian liberalism which the Liberal Unionists laid claim to, and which disrupted the new Party to some degree as they had the Liberal Party as a whole since 1865. The issue of temperance was a major feature of late Victorian Liberalism, and support for the 'local option' was an article of faith among some Radicals. Isabella Tod, certainly the most tireless of all the Party's female speakers, complained in 1889 that "It has been a constant distress to us that at many of the by-elections the Unionist candidate has been ... sometimes infriendly, when asked for his opinion on temperance questions.\textsuperscript{96} A 'Scottish Radical Unionist' went so far as to suggest that 'no inconsiderable number of Radical Unionists... deem the drink evil a much greater danger to the country than the separatism of Messrs Parnell and Gladstone.'\textsuperscript{97} Another 'Scottish Radical Unionist' offered an alternative explanation for the by-election defeats at Ayr and Govan, suggesting that, 'a candidate who temporises in regard to the drink question simply courts defeat.'\textsuperscript{98} In a move clearly designed to influence the outcome of the Partick by-election in 1890, the \textit{Glasgow Herald} asserted that 'the Unionist candidate [Parker Smith] is sounder on the liquor question.'\textsuperscript{99} In the end, though, the Conservatives' decision not only to ignore the demands for reform from their Liberal allies, but even to introduce a compensation clause into the 1890

\textsuperscript{96} \textit{Liberal Unionist}, 38, March 1889.
\textsuperscript{97} \textit{Liberal Unionist}, 37, February 1889. Burness sees the Glasgow Liberal Unionists' position on licence control as contributing to the party's relative success in the West of Scotland in 1892. Burness, \textit{Strange Associations}, p. 94.
\textsuperscript{98} \textit{Liberal Unionist}, 37, February 1889.
\textsuperscript{99} \textit{Glasgow Herald}, 30 January 1890.
Licensing Bill, drove the most active of all Party's organisers, W.S. Caine, to resign in protest and force a by-election in 1890.\textsuperscript{100} Caine's mutiny was a source of some embarrassment to a Party nominally Liberal as a whole and radical in part, but was mitigated by the refusal of other such committed temperance campaigners as T. W. Russell to join Caine's protest.\textsuperscript{101} On the other hand, the secretary of the radical WSLUA confessed at the Associations' AGM in 1890 that 'the question of the licensing clauses caused a temporary but very deep disturbance throughout our Association...the severe shock shook the loyalty of not a few.'\textsuperscript{102} Caine's dramatic decision must have been motivated by personal discomfort as much as by principle, though. Henry James recorded that 'towards the end of 1889...he [Caine] could not much longer stand being hissed at and hated at every temperance meeting he attended and should probably go back to Gladstonian Liberalism.'\textsuperscript{103} It was, however a dramatic, sudden and very public rejection of the Party by a figure often seen as one of Chamberlain's chief lieutenants. Yet his resignation did not simply criticise the government on the Licensing Clauses of Goschen's Local Taxation (Customs and Excise Duties) Bill, but went much further, declaring 'that he would do all he could to put the government out of power, and explicitly asserted that if re-elected he would not support the Liberal Unionist Party.'\textsuperscript{104} Within months, he had subscribed £20 to the British Fund in Aid of the Irish National Struggle.\textsuperscript{105} Such a dramatic \textit{volte face} demonstrates the great passion that the temperance

\begin{flushright}
\footnotesize
\textsuperscript{100} Caine wrote in his defence to Chamberlain, 'the bondage of the Tory alliance had become unbearable and their attack on the whole temperance movement ...gave me emancipation.' Caine to Chamberlain, 27 March 1892, JC 5/10/10b.
\textsuperscript{101} H. Hobhouse, 'Temperance and Party Spirit', \textit{Liberal Unionist}, 53, June 1890.
\textsuperscript{102} West of Scotland Liberal Unionist Association (hereafter WSLUA) minute book I, 18 November 1890, National Library of Scotland 10424/19.
\textsuperscript{103} Henry James' memoir, James Papers, Herefordshire Record Office, M45/1864, p.37.
\textsuperscript{104} \textit{Liberal Unionist}, 54, July 1890.
\textsuperscript{105} \textit{Liberal Unionist}, 60, January 1891.
\end{flushright}
movement inspired in later Victorian political culture and the bewilderment among those less concerned. As the Manchester Guardian commented, 'if merely talking about beer can make a man forget his strongest principles, what must drinking it do?'

If temperance was the issue on which the Party was most divided, the issue of free trade appeared to be a shibboleth for all Liberals. Accusations that a Home Rule government, dominated by the Nationalists would introduce tariffs to protect Irish agriculture, added to the concern about Gladstone’s alliance with Parnell among Liberal voters. The advent of Labour candidates in the late 1880s, with their demands for greater collectivism and defence of British employment in the face of cheap foreign imports, had been gleefully derided by the Liberal Unionists, who could accuse the Gladstonians of having abandoned the great financial policy of Cobden and Bright. It was therefore with some dismay that the Liberal Unionist reported Salisbury’s speech at Hastings in May 1892, in which he hinted that the agricultural sector, suffering the worst depression of the century, might be stimulated by some measure of Protection. St. Loe Strachey complained that the speech was ‘most unwise.’ The Liberal Unionist Party ‘is a Free trade party’ he claimed and he threatened the stability of the Compact if this was not respected, ‘any attempt to tamper with Free Trade must break up the alliance with the Conservatives.’ The terms of the Alliance had to be evenly observed, especially in light of the recent Welsh Bill, ‘while Radical Unionists refrain from attacking the Church, the Protectionist

106 Manchester Guardian quoted in the Liberal Unionist, 55, August 1890.
107 For the best example, see ‘Some facts about Home Rule’ Weekly Times & Echo, 30 December 1888.
Tories should surely keep their hands off Free Trade.\textsuperscript{108} Not all Liberal Unionists agreed, such as W. V. Jacklin, a former organiser of the WSLUA, who criticised free trade as ‘delusive and treasonable’ and claimed that the policy was the cause of the disruptions in Ireland.\textsuperscript{109} The divisions over the issue remained hidden within the Party until 1903, though, when Chamberlain's sudden conversion to tariff reform convulsed both his Party and Balfour's Conservatives.

Perhaps the most difficult issue for the Liberal Unionists was the question of the established church. Of course, in raising the issue of disestablishment, as he did in 1891-2, Chamberlain had trodden on some very important toes. It is clear that the threat of disestablishment had nearly caused a secession of moderate Liberals in Scotland as early as 1885 and had contributed to the scale of the Unionist revolt in the west of the country. For Salisbury and the bulk of his Party, maintenance of the established church was part of the Conservatives’ apostolic creed. As David Steele has convincingly described, Lord Salisbury devoted a huge amount of his precious time between 1886 and 1892 struggling to pass a tithe bill (which failed) and a Clergy Discipline bill (which succeeded in 1892), neither of which did much to aid the alliance with the nonconformist Liberal Unionists. His intention in these cases, as in the introduction of free elementary education in 1891, was to reform the Church in order to protect it from attack.\textsuperscript{110} When he no longer relied on Liberal Unionist votes, his attitude towards the church became clearer both in the education bill of 1896 and the tithes rent charge act of 1899, which provoked a backbench Liberal Unionist revolt led by

\textsuperscript{108} Liberal Unionist, 77, June 1892.  
\textsuperscript{109} Liberal Unionist, 78, July 1892.  
\textsuperscript{110} Steele, Lord Salisbury, pp 224-225.
Leonard Courtney.\textsuperscript{111}

A crucial element of the Liberal Unionist ethos was the freedom of personal conscience and political action, which had been increasingly challenged by the growth of party structures and the increased power of party organisers in general and party leaders in particular. The broadening of the electorate in 1867 was clearly the crucial event in determining the future of the British political system, what H. J. Hanham has described as ‘the first decisive event in…the “transition to democracy.”’\textsuperscript{112} The evolution of party apparatus from 1867 to 1885 was largely a response to the substantially enlarged electorate, which, in turn required the work of substantial professional organisations to canvas, cajole and co-opt. Nationally, both Liberals and Conservatives created a central organisation which brought the local party bodies under varying degrees of control. On a constituency level, paid party agents organised sophisticated political associations and recruited activists who checked the electoral register, door-to-door, raised funds and held formal and social meetings. The 1883 Corrupt Practices Act placed strict limits on the expenditure that associations could deploy and thus required the use of volunteer workers, which brought middle class women (those with the time and means to play this role) into national political life.\textsuperscript{113} Successive political leaders also appealed over the head of parliament to the electorate (most recently by Gladstone in the Midlothian campaign) through public speeches and electoral campaigns.

\textsuperscript{111} Although the Act passed, Salisbury’s majority fell from nearly 150 to 65 due to Liberal Unionist abstentions and opposition. Steele, \textit{Lord Salisbury}, pp.308-310.
Popular support, not parliamentary support, became the crucial measure of political success, and this led to Chamberlain’s attempt to seize the political initiative by issuing the ‘unauthorised programme’ in 1885. Most historians agree with Angus Hawkins that by 1886, ‘parliamentary government had gone…parties and their leadership…incontestably exercised that sovereignty formerly belonging to parliament itself.’\textsuperscript{114} This was recognised by other commentators, who bemoaned the passing of ‘an assembly where gentlemen gathered to exercise their independent prerogative and reason.’\textsuperscript{115}

As Hawkins has also illustrated, the achievement of reform in 1867 had been the result of a parliamentary battle with MPs dictating their terms successively to Gladstone and Disraeli, whereas, the 1884 Reform Act had merely been rubber-stamped by Parliament after it had been agreed privately between the Conservative and Liberal leaders.\textsuperscript{116} Criticism of the emerging rigid party structure was most effectively expressed by Sir Henry Maine, a year before the Home Rule crisis, who bemoaned the reduction of independent MPs to the role of mere delegates.\textsuperscript{117} It was dissatisfaction with this trend, opposition to an illiberal development, and the loss of influence of traditional aristocratic and local gentry families that explains the composition of much of the Liberal Unionist Party, not a natural affinity with the Conservatives. Goschen was the exception, not the rule (and Goschen, of course, had failed to support the ‘party of 1885’). Hence, as the \textit{Liberal Unionist} put it, ‘no small proportion of those

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item\textsuperscript{115} J.D. Fair, \textit{British Interparty Conferences} (Oxford, 1980), p. 263.
\item\textsuperscript{116} Hawkins, \textit{British Party Politics}, pp 266-267.
\item\textsuperscript{117} H. Maine, \textit{Popular Government} (London, 1885), p.94.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
Liberals whose sympathies were entirely Unionist were men who had never been in the habit of taking an active share in party politics. In 1891, the WSLUA declared that ‘the Unionists were not party politicians.’ This is why Wilde had his hero, Jack Worthing, declare that he had no politics, and was thus a Liberal Unionist. Liberal Unionists were those who regarded themselves as supporters of enlightened principles and remained aloof from the squalid business of party dispute.

Liberal Unionism was therefore as much a reaction against the growing power of the party machinery in general and Gladstone's arbitrary attempt to impose a new Liberal orthodoxy in particular, as a dismissal of the principle of Irish autonomy. Hartington complained of Gladstone in 1886 ‘Did any leader ever treat a party in the way that he has done?’ One former Liberal MP, Duncan McLaren resigned his presidency of the Edinburgh South Liberal Association on the grounds that Gladstone had attempted to ‘a virtual assumption of political autocracy or dictatorship.’ Lord Selborne condemned Gladstone as ‘a revolutionary demagogue.’ Victoria Barbery has shown how Sir Henry James was able to undermine Gladstone’s position as the ‘people’s tribune’ by highlighting his own consistency on the Home Rule issue, and thus to offer himself as ‘a strong, alternative lead[er].’ Gladstone’s political ability was unquestioned, as was the respect for his achievements in the past, but now he had abandoned his statesman-like concern for the whole community in favour of...

---

118 Liberal Unionist, 33, October 1888.
119 WSLUA minute book I, 4 November 1891, NLS 10424/19.
122 Barbery, 'From Platform to Polling Booth', p. 176.
the pursuit of power, whatever the cost to his principles.

Many individual MPs had felt, since the creation of a mass electorate in 1867, that they had lost their independence as the need for party structure had resulted in an increase in the power of the party leaders or ‘wire-pullers’ who were now able to ‘boss’ their votes and personal manifestoes. In 1885 Anthony Trollope had compared the caucus to the Sicilian ‘Camorra’:

Wherever a comparatively small number of active, energetic, unscrupulous, audacious and self-asserting individuals are found in the midst of a much larger number of apathetic, indolent, timid, stupid and meek-tempered persons, there ‘Camorra’ will be found…the English for ‘Camorra’ is caucus.

In Grimsby, Heneage denounced the ‘caucus wire-pulling’ as the Liberal Association sought to disown him in July 1886, even though they had endorsed during the election. For Heneage, the difference with his Party leadership was over a particular issue, and he retained his identity as ‘a thorough Liberal’, hoping, vainly for an eventual settlement that would allow him to escape the enforced alliance with the Conservatives. Similarly, in Oxford, when the Liberal caucus attempted to enforce the Gladstonian line, Gell reported the reaction to Milner:

The Liberal organisation here is, I find, absolutely smashed after last

---

125 Heneage to Wintringham, 15 March 1892, 2 HEN 5/19/17.
night. Everybody is leaving the caucus in one huff or another. Gladstone has...shivered us into our primitive molecules.'\(^{126}\)

Gladstone’s lack of consideration for the stated principles of his own Party was probably crucial in provoking John Bright to join the Unionists. As he wrote to Caine, ‘what will be the value of a party when its whole power is laid at the disposal of a leader from whose authority no appeal is allowed?’\(^{127}\) It was this dislike of the Party leadership’s dictatorial tendencies which could unite the leader of the moderate Unionists, Lord Hartington, with the leader of the radical Unionists, Joseph Chamberlain. As T. A. Jenkins has observed, the authoritarian approach which Gladstone appeared to be taking to the Irish question was regarded by many such as Bright and Arthur Elliot as ‘fundamentally alien to a party which gained so much of its identity from the belief in individual opinion.’\(^{128}\) Of course, the only aspect of Parliament that still expressed views not dictated by the party whips and not based on the appeal to popular sentiment, the House of Lords, was almost fully united against the concept of Home Rule, as can be seen by the revolt of the Liberal Lords in 1886 and the devastating scale of the defeat of the second Home Rule Bill in 1893. This in turn led to Rosebery’s tentative criticisms of the position of the Lords, which would eventually flourish into the constitutional crisis of 1910.

The dislike of the limitations on the autonomy of MPs in Parliament, which many

\(^{126}\) P. Gell to Milner, 29 June 1886, Milner MS 4. Finally, the Liberals of Oxford decided to have no candidate in Oxford, ‘amidst the desperate sulks of the Rads.’ Gell to Milner, n.d. (July 1886), Milner MS 4.


moderate Liberals already felt was compounded by the obstructive tactics of the Irish Nationalists between 1877 and 1885, which provided many Liberals with a connection between the dislike of ‘wire-pulling’ and the distaste for Irish politicians. A desire to preserve the independence of MPs was perhaps the single most common motivating factor in the decision of most of the 1886 rebels to join the breakaway Liberal Unionist Association on 5 August. The attitude of moderate Unionists towards their caucuses is perhaps best epitomised by F W Maude, honorary secretary of the Liberal Unionist Committee. When the South Oxfordshire Liberal Association deselected him, he wrote to the Oxford Chronicle angrily asserting the right of candidates not to behave like ‘clockwork voting machines, of which the party whip shall be entrusted with the keys.’

The behaviour of some caucuses towards long-established MPs may have played a role in temporarily driving some Liberals away from the Party, unused as they were to being addressed in the fashion that Sir Henry Hussey Vivian’s constituency association adopted when they met at Neath.

He [S.T. Evans] did not know whether they were to call Sir Hussey a representative or a delegate (A Voice – “Delegate!”). He would not parley with words, but if he did not vote with Mr Gladstone, he would be misrepresenting them, and his course should be to place his seat in the hands of his constituents (Applause).

Perhaps far more typical of the initial relationship between the Liberal Unionist MPs and their caucuses was the experience of Edward Heneage and the Grimsby Liberal Association. Here ‘the 300’ clearly disagreed with Heneage’s strongly expressed opposition to Home Rule, but refused to de-select him

129 Oxford Chronicle, 8 May 1886.
130 Western Mail, 12 May 1886, quoted in M. Cragoe, Culture, Politics and National Identity in Wales, 1832-1886 (Oxford, 2004), pp 262-263.
because, as Heneage put it, 'I imagine that they still believe in my honesty and Liberalism.' Local Liberal Associations, aware of the affection that long-standing MPs enjoyed among their constituents, were reluctant at this early stage to risk damaging what had been hitherto a working relationship profitable for both sides over an issue that would, most likely only last as long as Gladstone's surely short, remaining career. Heneage's own agent and his chief confidant and correspondent, James Wintringham was a supporter of Home Rule, who successfully demanded that the Association continue to select Heneage as the Liberal candidate in 1886, as he 'truly represents us in nine points out of ten.'

This reluctance to accept the party system cannot merely be regarded as a resistance among moderates to give up their cherished freedom of action, however. Three prominent members of the Party, Gell, Courtney and Sir John Lubbock regarded the party system as the unfortunate result of the nature of British democracy as it had evolved over the century and continued to campaign for proportional representation, though there is little evidence for popular support for this cause in the movement, despite Gell's belief that 'proportional representation would have saved us from the present misfortune.' As Dicey put it in a letter to St. Loe Strachey in 1894, 'sham parliamentary government means a very vicious form of government by

131 Heneage to Wintringham, 7 May 1886, 2 HEN 5/13/39.
132 Wintringham to Heneage, 6 May 1886, 2 HEN 5/13/41.
Millicent Fawcett, herself invoking her late husband's support for a 'national' party, wrote of her dislike of party influence on public behaviour, 'witness the hissing of Mr Caine by his former friends in the temperance movement, and the rancour with which the Liberal Unionists in Dorsetshire and in the Eighty Club have been drummed out of the Party.' Part of the Liberal Unionists' discontent with party politics was the reduction of MPs from the role of local representatives, to mere lobby fodder, ordered into action by cracking of the party whip. Many Liberal Unionists prided themselves on their strong connections with, and consequent representation of, the distinct regional identity and local needs of their constituencies. This helps to explain the survival of isolated MPs such as Henry Hobhouse in Somerset, Cuthbert Quilter in Suffolk, Harry Anstruther in St. Andrews and even Edward Watkin in Hythe, as well as the regional powerbases of the parties, in areas with a strong sense of local distinctiveness, such as Cornwall, Glasgow and Birmingham.

However, campaigns such as Home Rule helped to turn politics in late Victorian England from a patchwork of local variety into a black and white division on national issues. Voters, studies have suggested, began to vote for national parties in these circumstances (or abstain as did many Liberals in 1886), rather than local candidates. As a result, parties rather than individual MPs became increasingly powerful, and the battle for party leadership and control of the political agenda became the chief struggle for political success. In this way, the local Liberal Unionist MP was constantly required to accept issues advocated

---

135 Liberal Unionist, 19, 3 August 1887; Newton, *W.S. Caine*, pp.178-183.
by his Party (or his Party’s allies) that his conscience rebelled against. The
decision to support coercion in 1887 produced the first revolt against the party’s
leadership, followed by the growing exasperation with the lack of constructive
reform (especially in Ireland) as the Conservative government struggled on. The
exclusion from office (and the frustration of Chamberlain’s social programme)
prevented any further walk-outs between 1892 and 1895, but once a Unionist
coalition was formed, a series of MPs with a strong sense of regional identity
and political autonomy (most notably T. W. Russell and Leonard Courtney) left
the Party.

Of course, this anti-caucus ideology was not shared by Chamberlain's
Birmingham Radicals and herein lay the fundamental problem of the Liberal
Unionist Party. The very principles that motivated a revolt against the perceived
tyrranny of Gladstone’s forced policy change (anti-Irish sentiment
notwithstanding) were not shared by an important element of those who formed
the Liberal Unionist Party. As the Divisional Council of the West Birmingham
Liberal Unionist Association put it in December 1888, ‘we are not only Unionist,
but we are radical Unionist and though we welcome the Conservatives when
they come up to our standard, we do not go to Toryism.’¹³⁷ Unlike LUAs
elsewhere, the West Birmingham branch sent copies of its resolutions in favour
of ‘improvements in local government and land tenure’ to the Party leadership
and to Balfour and Salisbury.¹³⁸ Although the moderates in the Party may have
looked nostalgically back to 1885 and before, as an age when MPs were freer

¹³⁷ Divisional Council Meeting, 14 December 1888, Birmingham West Liberal Unionist
Association, Smethwick Local History Archives, NRA 4755.
¹³⁸ Divisional Council Meeting, 20 March 1889, Birmingham West LUA; AGM, 16 May 1890,
Birmingham West LUA, ibid.
to act as they saw fit and Parliament, not the executive or the party, held true
power, any attempts to reverse the process were a Canute-like attempt to defy
the tide of political change that had begun with the 1867 Reform Act and
become a tidal wave with the 1884 Act, when 58% of the adult male population
gained the right to vote. In truth, these attitudes revealed a deliberate refusal to
accept that politics in an age of democracy required the work of professional
organisers. In an extraordinary attack, Thomas Raleigh, candidate for
Edinburgh West in 1888 epitomised this view in an article on ‘Democracy’ in
1889, in which he dismissed the urging of his own Party’s leaders such as Lord
Wolmer and W S Caine:

> Party managers are always imploring us to organise, and it is true that
nothing can be done without organisation. But it is not for the interest of
the people that they should be strictly drilled and definitely brigaded to
suit the convenience of party managers. If popular government is to have
any meaning, there must be large bodies of men prepared to vote on the
merits of a great question, without regard to party interests.\(^\text{139}\)

This view was shared by many Liberal Unionists, according to Argyll as ‘all the
most independent members of the Liberal Party repudiated and opposed [Home
Rule].\(^\text{140}\) This was a protracted form of political suicide, for, as the chapter on
organisation reveals, to rely on banquets and political speeches in an age of
mass literacy and popular politics very nearly drove the Party to oblivion in its
first six years, before it was rescued by the one man in the Party who had most
embraced and embodied the new politics of the 1880s: Joseph Chamberlain. It
is an indication of how desperate the Party’s position had become that most of

---

\(^{139}\) T. Raleigh, ‘Democracy’ _Liberal Unionist_ 43, August 1889.
the moderates were prepared to abandon their fastidious dislike of the machinery of modern politics and hand their future to a man who neither respected their politics nor sympathised with their romantic yearning for a political world of individual MPs acting according to their consciences and mediated through bonds of kinship instead of caucuses, mass meetings and door to door canvassing.

As a believer in Liberalism as the gospel of individualism, the growing interest in social legislation profoundly alarmed Dicey, as it did others in the Party, but the fear of socialism, emphasised by many historians of the Liberal Unionist Party as the motive behind the split of 1886, does not appear to have figured very strongly in the writings of the Party's leaders before 1890. In January 1890, in response to the announcement of the 'Newcastle Programme', the Liberal Unionist declared 'we shall not consent to the erection of fresh inequalities in the name of Socialism' and gave its front page to an attack by Montague Crackenthorpe on 'the deadening methods of state socialism.' The article read almost like a line by line repudiation of the 'unauthorised programme' of 1885, in the name of orthodox Liberalism. 'The state,' Crackenthorpe wrote, 'cannot undertake to provide sanitary dwellings at the expense of the taxpayers. That would be to do injustice to the class that would not share the benefit, and to demoralise the class that would.' In this way, he still exhorted the rugged individual to seize opportunity and to overcome adversity in a fashion that J.S. Mill and the recently deceased Matthew Arnold would have found wholly acceptable. He also recorded his objection to the Eight Hours Bill, which
Hartington opposed, and, in a choice of issue possibly designed to provoke the reaction of those such as George Dixon, compulsory education. ‘State assisted education may be inevitable; it is none the less an evil.’ Instead the typically mid-Victorian solution of ‘philanthropy’ was favoured. In this way, Biagini’s claim that ‘there was a link between the Union and social reform’, is, at least until 1891, untenable. Less contentiously, the article recorded the Party’s objection to the 'New Unionism' on the grounds that self-interest was the Union's main motivation, not a concern for the success of their industry. As the issue of Home Rule receded and working men were increasingly exposed to propaganda from the Labour movement, through Robert Blatchford’s Clarion and Joseph Burgess' Workman’s Times, the Liberal Unionists were forced to offer their model of gradualist reform in opposition to more expansive and utopian appeals. The Party newspaper warned that ‘socialism...based as it must be on compulsion would diminish the wealth of the world’, which would perhaps have been somewhat ineffective as a disincentive to the 30% of the population which Booth estimated lived in a state of 'chronic want'.

Chamberlain was careful to appeal to consistent Liberal principles when he advocated old age pensions at the Aston by-election in 1891, assuring middle class voters that he favoured a policy of insurance and rejecting compulsion. He was, however, coming under pressure from his own constituency Association in West Birmingham, who intended to hold him to his promise that ‘more attention [would be] given to the great social questions which directly

141 Hartington to Wolmer, 9 November 1890, Selborne MS II (4) 112.
142 Biagini, British Democracy, p. 238.
143 M. Crackenthorpe, 'Unionism and State Socialism' Liberal Unionist 48, January 1890.
144 'Plain Words on Socialistic Problems' Liberal Unionist, 66, July 1891.
145 Liberal Unionist 66, July 1891; 'Old Age Pensions' National Review, 18 February 1892.
affect the interests of the working classes.'  

He recognised that a refusal to countenance any state intervention in the hours of labour would lead to disaster in the East Midlands and South Yorkshire: ‘I doubt if any candidate has a chance in mining districts other than the northern coalfields unless he is willing to accept at all events the second reading of the [8 hours] Bill.’

W. H. Smith and Hartington attempted to defuse the eight hours issue by appointing a Royal Commission on Labour in March 1891. Derby accepted Smith’s invitation to serve on the commission, and Hartington told him frankly that ‘the one main object...is to gain time, and avoid the necessity of acting on the dangerous eight hours question until after the general election.’

Chamberlain revealed a similar desire to be seen to be doing something on the question after the election, when he wrote to James, announcing his intention to create a programme of social legislation: ‘the only doubtful item is the 8 hour bill for miners which I support. I am convinced it will come and if we are wise we can so deal with it in committee that it cannot possibly do harm, and may do good.’

With the announcement of the Newcastle programme in 1891 and the constant repetition of Gladstone’s assertion that he stood for ‘the masses’ against the classes’, it was incumbent upon the Liberal Unionists to demonstrate their commitment to constructive reform, whilst stressing their desire to legislate in favour of the whole community rather than the sectarian interests of any...

---

146 Divisional Council Meeting, 2 March 1891, West Birmingham, Liberal Unionist Association, Smethwick Archives, NRA 4755.
147 Chamberlain to Wolmer, 18 March 1892, Selborne MS I (8) 27-30.
149 Chamberlain to James, 2 October 1892, M45/1718. The Royal Commission, when it finally reported in June 1894 rejected any suggestion of a statutory maximum working day for all groups, including miners.
particular class. The Party’s gradual acceptance of a more collectivist approach is normally associated with the take-over of Chamberlain as leader in January 1892, as he had openly advocated policies such as Old Age pensions during the Aston by-election in 1891. There is some evidence that the Party was influenced by the work of the social investigators who would later influence Hobson and Hobhouse in the change of Liberal Party policy after 1895 and which is usually referred to as 'New Liberalism.' In 1889, the Liberal Unionist printed a lengthy and detailed summary of Booth’s *Life and Labour in East London*. Hartington himself acknowledged the need for a more reforming approach when he complemented the work that Chamberlain had achieved in free education and allotments. He acknowledged that more could be done, but used the convenient scapegoat of 'Irish obstruction' to justify the lack of substantial progress on social issues.

The influence of D.G. Ritchie’s 1891 work *Principles of State Intervention*, which advocated broadening the role of the state in removing obstacles to an individual’s life chances, was particularly felt among the radical Unionists. Of course, radical Unionism had been a very muted philosophy until then, confined to the constituencies of individual MPs and the ‘fiefdom’ of Birmingham and the West of Scotland. Constructive Unionism was genuinely accepted by ‘Englishmen of ordinary common sense [who]...have no objection...to secure by Tory aid, solid legislative benefits.’ At first, however, the benefits (and the ‘Tory aid’) seemed limited. Proposals such as the 1887 Land Transfer Bill and the Tithes Bill had been lost in the ‘Massacre of the Innocents’ caused by the

---

150 *Liberal Unionist*, 41, June 1889.
151 *Liberal Unionist*, 66, July 1891.
152 ‘The fruits of Liberal Unionism’ *Weekly Times & Echo*, 23 October 1887.
debate on the Crimes Bill, while ideas such as ‘Home Rule All Round’ were
diluted in the face of Conservative and Scottish and Ulster Liberal Unionist
opposition, to form the basis of the granting of regional local government
through the County Councils Act of 1888 (for Scotland in 1889).

As had been demonstrated in their pressure on Salisbury to pass an Irish Land
Bill in 1887, land purchase was the preferred Liberal Unionist solution to land
issues on both sides of the Irish Sea. Chamberlain had chaired the 1888 Select
Committee on Small Holdings, and eventually, after much pressure from both
Chamberlain and Collings’ Rural Labourers’ League, the Small Agricultural
Holdings Act was passed, just before the dissolution of parliament. After the
failure to convince Gladstone to accept the ‘unauthorised programme’, much
was made of this measure (despite Collings’ concern that it lacked any
compulsive element), in demonstrating how the needs of British workers were
more effectively resolved under a Unionist, rather than a Home Rule,
administration.153

It was only with the disastrous defeats at South Molton and Rossendale that
senior moderate Party figures began to accept the need for a more positive
manifesto. In February 1892, Henry Hobhouse proposed a scheme for Irish
local government ‘acceptable to all Liberal Unionists’154 and followed this with a
demand for a parish and district council reform.155 On the other hand,
aristocrats like Argyll warned Salisbury that ‘Chamberlainism is an unstable

---

153 P. Readman, Land and Nation in England: Patriotism, National Identity and the Politics of
154 Liberal Unionist, 73, February 1892.
155 H. Hobhouse, ‘Parish and District Councils’, Liberal Unionist 75, April 1892.
element – and an image which may require “bloody sacrifices”. Argyll’s view was not shared in the West of Scotland where the regional Liberal Unionist Association pressed their demands for land reform in order to reduce the flood of emigration from the Highlands. Admittedly the defection of Caldwell in 1890 and the defeat of Fraser-Mackintosh in 1892 blunted the WSLUA’s influence, but their constant pressure for procedural as well as administrative reform, both before and after the 1892 election, allowed Chamberlain to claim that there was a demand for a less timorous policy across Great Britain. The campaign for free Elementary Education, granted before the election, had been assisted by the advocacy of Cameron Corbett, MP for Glasgow College, who had introduced a private members bill to this effect in 1881.

As the 1892 election drew close, Chamberlain wrote to James illustrating the weakness of the moderates in winnable seats, with Lichfield as an example. ‘I told Wolmer that the candidate must go for the 8 hours miners’ bill. Yet [Major] Darwin who knows nothing and cares little about the question is sent without instructions and goes awry. Consequently what would have been a safe seat for us is very doubtful.’ Exasperated, Chamberlain washed his hands of the moderate Liberal Unionist MPs in rural seats (despite the fact that he was their leader), writing to Wolmer that ‘I cannot answer for the Dodos in the country.’ Chamberlain, leader of a Party which had very nearly been obliterated in the general election, with his personal electoral triumph in Birmingham as evidence,

156 Argyll to Salisbury, 16 July 1892, Salisbury Papers, Hatfield House.
158 Chamberlain to James, 17 June 1892, M45/557. Chamberlain’s active support in Lichfield may have made the difference for Darwin as the seat was won by 4 votes.
159 Chamberlain to Wolmer, 19 June 1892, Selborne MS I (8) 34.
now sought to convert the Liberal Unionists to a policy of constructive reform in almost every aspect of government and administration. Although Matthew Fforde is quite right to describe Chamberlain’s motivation as chiefly political, ‘a response to a threat, not the product of inner conviction’, the enthusiasm with which the social programme was taken up in Glasgow, Birmingham and Cornwall and also by the WLUA, demonstrates that it built of Liberal tradition of humanitarian reform, designed to prevent the vagaries of fate from limiting a worker’s access to opportunity and self-advancement.¹⁶⁰ What resulted was a constructive, reformist unionism, designed to out-flank Socialist claims of class bias. Radicals might demand a more collectivist approach, and Tories and Whigs might jib at the sacrifices that had to be made by their aristocratic allies, but most Conservatives and Liberal Unionists could accept this new approach. Now the Unionist alliance could truly claim to be acting in the interest of the whole community and not merely as an alliance of negation. As this domestic policy was allied to a defence of British interests abroad, and, after 1895, a policy of aggressive imperial expansion, the way was paved for the twentieth-century electoral success of the Conservative and Unionist Party.

G. R. Searle believes that by 1894 Chamberlain’s new direction had led to a new division in the Unionist alliance. Less significant, by now, he claims, was the distinction between Liberal Unionists and Conservatives. Instead one could delineate between the ‘moderate’ and the ‘advanced’ Unionists.¹⁶¹ In 1894 Chamberlain had devised a clever strategy to try to win Devonshire’s support for his programme of social reform. When Rosebery, desperate for a political

¹⁶⁰ Fforde, Conservatism and Collectivism, p.71.
¹⁶¹ Ibid., pp. 44-47.
lifeline for his foundering government launched his attack on the House of Lords at Bradford, Chamberlain wrote to his leader, claiming that the best way to prevent Rosebery’s crusade catching fire among working class voters was to offer them constructive alternatives. ‘Information obtained from a great number of constituencies by Powell Williams…show that the electors are much more interested at the present time in social questions and the problems connected with the agitation of the Labour Party….’ He now made a highly ambitious claim. ‘I have reason to know that…Lord S. is favourable in principle to all the proposals which I submitted in my Birmingham speech [12 October 1894]

- Amendment to Artisans’ Dwellings Act
- House Purchase
- Courts of Arbitration
- General Provision for Accidents.’

Chamberlain was careful not to trouble Devonshire ‘with the matters in detail’, but raised the spectre of ‘the wild schemes of confiscation and revolutionary change’ to try to frighten the increasingly timorous Devonshire into publicly advocating his own ‘practical’ policies or at least offering ‘the expression of willingness’ to seek such reforms.  

Chamberlain had, in fact, merely asked Wolmer to ask his father-in-law ‘whether it might not be possible for the House of Lords to spoil the game of the Gladstonians by itself dealing with some of the important social questions by means of bills?’ Chamberlain had assumed that ‘Lord Salisbury is not opposed to any of them’ and had suggested ‘as especially worthy of attention the House Purchase Bill, the extension of the Artizans’

---

162 Chamberlain to Devonshire, 13 November 1894, DP 340.2587.
Dwellings Act, the establishment of Courts of Arbitration, Compensation for Injuries and Aliens Immigration.' In reply Salisbury had informed Wolmer that ‘...he sees his way pretty clearly to the introduction of an Aliens Immigration Bill and of an Arbitration Bill...he is afraid that any attempt to deal with the question of the purchase of working men’s dwellings...would be held to be an infringement of the privileges of the Commons.’ In the area of Employers’ Liability, Salisbury felt constrained by two problems: ‘the domestic servants one’ and ‘the susceptibility of the employers generally.’ He even claimed that the Bills could not be introduced into the Lords as he lacked colleagues competent to do so. While he did tell Wolmer, as Chamberlain told Devonshire, ‘that these criticisms are not to be taken as indicating any want of sympathy on his part with your general views on these subjects’, one cannot escape the conclusion that Salisbury was attempting to string Chamberlain along and that Chamberlain was attempting to do the same to Devonshire.

Chamberlain again tried to use the grass-roots Conservative organisations to promote his more progressive policies, as he had once attempted to enlist them through their architect Randolph Churchill. He wrote to James, no doubt hoping to influence him to work on the Duke: ‘I hope you read the resolution of the National Scottish Conservative Association supporting every one of my proposals and urging the peers to initiate the legislation.’

At the same time, it was clear that he was prepared to compromise his long-held position on the upper chamber and to defend it against Rosebery’s attack.

163 Chamberlain to Wolmer, 12 October 1894, Selborne MS I (8) 40.
164 Wolmer to Chamberlain, 15 October 1894, Selborne MS I (8) 42. Salisbury duly introduced a bill for ‘the regulation of the immigration of destitute aliens into Great Britain’ in the House of Lords on 6 July 1894.
165 Chamberlain to James, 7 November 1894, M45/1742.
He may have stated at a meeting at the Coliseum that ‘I am ready to view with favour any reasonable proposal which would add an elective element to the House of Lords’, but he made it clear at the Liberal Unionist conference at Durham on 16 October, in the presence of Lord Londonderry and Lord Durham, that ‘until you can find me a better, I am going to stick to the House of Lords.’ As for Rosebery’s attack on the peers, ‘it is merely a device to give a fillip to the jaded spirits of a pumped out party.’

Once Chamberlain’s programme was out-manoeuvred by Salisbury, Akers-Douglas and Middleton in 1895, the possibility returned of the divisions within Liberal Unionism reasserting themselves and crippling the Party as they had in 1892. In these circumstances, Chamberlain’s choice of the Colonial Office was natural. Not only was the defence of the empire shared among most Liberal Unionists but Alfred Dicey had always stressed in the historic mission of the British Empire and in the centrality of the United Kingdom within the Empire. Any threat to the Union threatened the Empire, and Dicey believed that the Home Rule would ruin England and Ireland. He was supported in this view by J. R. Seeley, who had first developed a historical narrative of the positive benefits of the expansion of British identity in *The Expansion of England* (1883), and whose work is acknowledged to have influenced Chamberlain’s imperial views. The interest and concern for Empire, which had so troubled Gladstone in his third administration, could now be defended as the export of British liberties and freedoms, and as such, could appeal to a working class audience, encouraged to support the cause of the imperial mission through popular newspapers and

---

_166 LUAM 2:10, October 1894; LUAM 2: 11, November 1894._
music hall.\textsuperscript{167}

The threat that Home Rule presented to the British Empire had first been expressed by Lord Wolseley, speaking in London on 10 April 1886, when he urged the nation ‘to say with one voice “hands off” to that man, no matter who he may be, who would dare break up and dismember this Empire and in doing so ruthlessly destroy it.’\textsuperscript{168} It was also clear that in some working class constituencies the issue of Empire could be equally important. During the election, a speaker addressing a large radical meeting asked ‘why should anyone object to home rule?’ and was answered by a number of voices ‘because it will lead to the break up of the Empire.’ The speaker, rather unwisely, responded ‘who cares whether it will or not?’ From that point, noted the Gladstonian \textit{Inquirer}, the speaker lost his hold on the meeting, and the paper concluded that British people clearly did care about the integrity of the Empire.\textsuperscript{169} The cause of Empire could accommodate Liberals with very different views of its structure and operation, from the supporter of devolution, Lord Lansdowne, to federalists such as Lord Selborne and Earl Grey. It was also, of course, valuable common ground to share with the Conservatives, especially the illiberal figure of Salisbury, who claimed in June 1886 that he was fighting the election on ‘one great issue…the…empire.’\textsuperscript{170} The issue of Empire, although by no means a crucial matter in 1886, increased in importance during the history of the Party, achieving its apogee between the Diamond Jubilee and the Boer War, a war fought, in theory at least, over the constitutional rights of

\textsuperscript{168} \textit{The Times}, 12 April 1886.
\textsuperscript{169} \textit{Inquirer}, 24 July 1886.
\textsuperscript{170} \textit{The Times}, 19 June, 1886.
Englishmen abroad. In some ways this was inevitable, as, when Chamberlain spoke to Balfour in March 1886, he used this aspect of radicalism as the bridge in any future alliance with the Conservatives. As he put it, ‘my Radicalism at all events desires to see established strong Government and an Imperial Government.’\footnote{Balfour to Salisbury 24 March 1886, quoted in R. H. Williams (ed.), Salisbury-Balfour Correspondence, 1869-1892 (Hertford, 1988), pp.133-138.} In 1887, speaking at Ayr, he made his attitude public, Home Rule, he believed, would ‘pave the way for the dissolution of the Great Empire which has been the envy and admiration of the world.’\footnote{The Times, 17 April 1887.} Of course, the Liberal Unionists, radicals and moderates alike, supported the concept of a ‘Liberal Empire’, the chief exports of which were the rule of law, the promotion of religious tolerance and benefits of free trade. This belief in the moral purpose of Empire was, as Parry has convincingly demonstrated, a key feature of 19\textsuperscript{th} century Liberal ideology.\footnote{Parry, The Politics of Patriotism, pp. 341-368.} It was, of course, in marked contrast to Salisbury’s view of Empire as an economic resource and strategic weapon, to be exploited by ‘white people [who] possessed a special pedigree and played a privileged part in the world order.’\footnote{Bentley, Lord Salisbury’s World, p. 221.} Nevertheless, as an advocate of a ‘National Party’ and an ardent imperialist, Chamberlain’s growing support for closer ties between the metropolis, the dominions and the colonies could be read as an attempt to find common areas of agreement between the British political classes. It must not be forgotten that ‘Joe’s war’ was fought ostensibly over the issue of the civil rights of the Uitlanders, the British who were denied citizenship in the Transvaal, a republic notorious for its bigotry, race politics and lack of religious tolerance.\footnote{See resolutions passed at Liberal Unionist Conference at Leicester, 29 November 1899.}
As imperialism could appear very distant, one of the great achievements of the two Unionist parties was to present the cause of Empire in a fashion which could excite and activate working class voters. It is barely ever noted by historians that both Victoria’s Golden and Diamond Jubilees took place during periods of Unionist dominance. In 1887, with the alliance tottering after Churchill had resigned and as Chamberlain and Trevelyan discussed reunion with Harcourt and Herschell, the Golden Jubilee was designed as an assertion of a united nation, moving forward in the expansion of Empire, in marked contrast to the alternate vision of devolution and morally-based international relations that Gladstone had proposed the previous year. Loughlin describes the event as ‘a crucial landmark in the developing imperial identity of the British “race.”’

Lady Monkswell recorded being ‘sick with nervousness…whether the Irishmen would take the opportunity of blowing us all up together – Queen, Lords and Commons in [Westminster] Abbey’ noting the exclusion of Nationalist Ireland from the celebrations, and a popular association between Catholicism and insurrection that had a clear parallel with the Gunpowder Plot of 1605. In 1897, with the Unionist alliance secured, Home Rule defeated and the Empire at its zenith, it was a celebration of the new politics of patriotism, organised by Chamberlain to test the consciences of those Liberals worried by the rise of anarchic republicanism, internationalist socialism and little-Englander Liberalism. On both occasions, national bank holidays were supplemented

---

176 LUAM, 7: 12, December 1899.
177 Loughlin, The British Monarchy and Ireland, p. 220. He goes on to emphasise the ‘Protestant’ nature of the celebrations that took place in 1887.
179 D. Cannadine, ‘The Context, Performance and Meaning of Ritual: The British Monarchy and
with special acts of thanksgiving, reviving a mid-century custom of thanking God for his protection of Britain and its monarchy. The Queen’s barely hidden support for the Unionists provided a means whereby Salisbury and Chamberlain could create a profitable association between the defence of the united nation and royal (and divine) celebration.¹⁷⁹

Liberal Unionism was therefore, a deliberate political position, not a mere halfway stop on a journey from Liberal to Conservative. As Victoria Barbery has concluded, ‘[Liberal Unionism] had a distinctive ideology; neither Whiggism, nor Conservatism…’¹⁸⁰ It was designed to appeal to those moderates, radicals and Free Churchmen who wished to oppose Party policy without having to join with their historic opponents, the Tories. As with the Liberals before 1885, the Liberal Unionists were ‘a party of ideas and ideals, much given to discussion and argument’ on issues such as female suffrage, proportional representation, temperance, and, above all, the role of the state.¹⁸¹ The dominant socio-economic interest in Liberal Unionism, and the exact nature of the Party’s ideology varied from region to region, and in some cases from MP to MP.¹⁸²

Looking back in 1912, Viscount Wolmer (by now Earl of Selborne) restated his belief that the Liberal Unionists were ‘the natural heirs of mid-Victorian

---

Liberalism.' He convincingly asserted that the Liberal Unionists had maintained the principles of constitutionalism, the defence of minorities and the benefit of the nation as a whole rather than self-interest, as well as the tenets of protestant Christianity through educational reform, electoral reform and social protection for the least wealthy.\footnote{Boyce (ed.), \textit{The crisis of British Unionism}, p.83.}

That the Party faced the challenge of organised Labour with a new programme after its bare electoral survival in 1892, demonstrated that it, like the Liberal Party before 1885, was capable of adapting to changed circumstances. As Jeremy Smith has demonstrated for the Conservative Party in the same period, to do so was not to compromise ideological principles, merely to alter the ‘selection, emphasis and prioritizing of its assorted aims and beliefs.’\footnote{Ibid., pp 84-89.} However, the failure of that new programme to be fully articulated and accepted and the ultimate demise of the Liberal Unionists as a party with a distinct ideology, rather than a party of individuals with distinct principles, was a result of the divisions within Unionism, which were expertly manipulated by the Conservative leadership, who feared the consequences of such political experimentation.

\footnote{Smith, ‘Conservative Ideology’ pp.20-21.}
Chapter 2: 'A Distinction without a Difference'? The Unionist Alliance

The Birth of the Alliance

In light of the distinctively ‘Liberal’ attitudes of Hartington’s Party, Jonathan Parry has shown, ‘few [of the Liberal Unionists] were enamoured of the Conservatives’ apparently irrational, prejudiced, unintelligent governing style.’¹ When considering their future in August 1886, some Liberal Unionists, while admitting that the Conservatives were no longer the reactionary party of the past, still baulked at the prospect of joining them, as ‘we hold it still to be to too great an extent a party of landlords.’² It is, therefore, ahistoric to regard, as most historians do, the Liberal Unionists and Conservatives as suitable candidates for an alliance or the eventual fusion between the parties as inevitable.³ What emerges is an electoral arrangement, created to serve the short-term needs of both parties that gradually developed into a pact of mutual assistance, which both parties attempted to exploit for their own profit. As Parry concludes, ‘the Liberal Unionists reassured themselves that at least…Salisbury might make a better fist of defending endangered values than the unprincipled, irresponsible, unEnglish Gladstone.’⁴ The alliance was, at least until 1895, a marriage of convenience, not one born of mutual admiration.

The negotiations between the Tories and the Liberals opposing Gladstone’s Home Rule Bill began with tentative proposals to Goschen in February 1886. At

¹ Parry, The Rise and Fall of Liberal Government, p.302.
³ For example, Searle, Country before Party, p.27.
⁴ Ibid., p.306.
first, although Salisbury was keen, seeing an opportunity of ending a period of nearly forty years in which there had only been one Conservative majority government, W. H. Smith was less so. As he wrote to his leader,

When parties are very nearly balanced it will be almost impossible to get your friends to support a man who is not of their precise colour; but a good deal may be done in those cases where the moderate Liberals turn the scale, by admission of our own people; and it is worthwhile at some risk to make a great effort to bring these two hitherto divergent elements together.\(^5\)

Salisbury did however, manage to persuade the bulk of his Party from interfering in the Home Rule debate at Westminster, so that the opposition to Gladstone’s Bill would come from within his own Party: ‘I doubt the wisdom in the next few weeks of pushing Hartington & co., unnecessarily into the Ministerial lobby.’\(^6\) He was unable to restrain Lord Randolph Churchill, of course, whose speech to the Manchester Conservative Association on 3 March had proposed Tory support for a Hartington ministry, before the Home Rule Bill had even been unveiled.\(^7\) When Hartington rejected this proposal at the Eighty Club on 5 March, some Conservatives revealed their frustrations. In the first of many attacks on the Liberal Unionist leadership, the *Standard* attacked Hartington’s character, commenting that ‘only a very halting temperament, drenched through and through with the compromising spirit of party, could have enabled a man to deliver himself of observations so vague and inconclusive.’\(^8\)

---

5. W. H. Smith to Salisbury, 11 February 1886, Salisbury papers.
The Conservative Party came out publicly in favour of an electoral pact with the Liberal Unionists at the National Union of Conservative Associations on 16 May 1886. Salisbury and Hicks Beach both told the conference that Conservatives must support Liberal Unionist candidates in constituencies where the Conservatives would have had no chance of defeating a Liberal in normal circumstances. Neither committed the Party to refraining from attacks on Liberal Unionists, as *The Times* had encouraged when it urged that the 'truce' should be applied to all Liberal Unionists, no matter what their behaviour had been in the past, which was clearly a reference to Chamberlain. This may have been a deliberate ploy on the part of the Conservative leaders, for, as the negotiations between Goschen and Akers-Douglas and the meeting of the Liberal Unionist peers at Derby House on 16 May reveal, a much more comprehensive pledge had been made. The Conservatives were therefore carefully responding to the concerns of the Liberals who did not wish to be publicly associated with 'their hateful allies', and were keeping their profile as low as possible, as Lord Iddesleigh had recommended a fortnight earlier. After the defeat of the Bill on 8 June, Salisbury reverted to his firmest ally among the Liberal Unionists to make arrangements for the forthcoming election, writing to Goschen on 20 June. In this letter, he revealed that he had prevented a Conservative from opposing Goldsmid in South St. Pancras, claiming that 'we have made many such acts of abrogation in several parts of the country.' He now demanded 'some reciprocity.' In particular, 'a unionist Liberal' was asked to appear

---

9 *The Times*, 17 May 1886.
11 *The Times*, 30 April 1886.
alongside Charles Whitmore in his battle against Dilke at Chelsea.\textsuperscript{12} On the following day, Salisbury wrote directly to Hartington asking for his intervention in seats where Conservatives were fighting Gladstonians. ‘Could you say something in one of your speeches reminding Liberal Unionists to vote for us where we are fighting a Gladstonian?’\textsuperscript{13} Although Hartington was reluctant to endorse Conservatives with whom he disagreed on a myriad of historic issues, against Liberals with whom he disagreed on one, surely temporary issue, he did respond to Salisbury's pleas and eventually agreed to advise Liberal Unionist voters to support Conservatives in seats where no Liberal Unionist was standing.\textsuperscript{14} For his part, Goschen wrote to Salisbury explaining that, although he wanted them, it was proving ‘very difficult’ to arrange joint meetings between Liberal Unionists and Conservatives at a local level. He concluded that it might be best for the Conservatives to ‘practise the virtue of silence...lest their voices should frighten the wary and timid Radical.’\textsuperscript{15}

Prominent Liberal Unionists such as Edward Heneage in Grimsby had, by June 1886, begun to receive offers of help in the coming election from the local Conservative Club. It is clear that Heneage felt no restrictions on his expression of Liberalism, and ‘it will in no way bind anyone in the future...I am in all matters free to act...[with] my opinions openly expressed at public meetings as I believe.’\textsuperscript{16} Chamberlain, meeting at Waddesdon with Balfour, Hartington and Churchill, insisted that he had no ambitions to be Party leader, or to join a

\textsuperscript{12} Salisbury to Goschen, 20 June 1886, DP 340.2009.
\textsuperscript{13} Salisbury to Hartington, 21 June 1886, DP 340.2011.
\textsuperscript{14} Hartington in Glasgow, 25 June 1886; The Times, 26 June 1886.
\textsuperscript{15} Goschen to Salisbury, 21 June 1886, Salisbury Papers.
\textsuperscript{16} Heneage to A. Peel, 18 June 1886, 2 HEN 5/13/54.
putative coalition government, as it would restrict his freedom of action.\textsuperscript{17} That Liberal Unionists continued to support Liberal policies did cause some discontent, as 'Paratus' complained to the \textit{Scottish News} in May 1886. 'Let no member of the Tory Party assist in returning to Parliament any Liberal whatever his professions, who, when the crisis is over, will be ready to use the position acquired by our votes, to put into effect, say for instance, Chamberlain's views of ransom.'\textsuperscript{18} On the whole, the election was so dominated with the issue of Home Rule, that it amounted to a plebiscite on Gladstone's scheme. It appeared that in most constituencies, the Liberal Unionists enjoyed considerable Conservative support for their principled stand against Home Rule and that the Conservatives benefited from Liberal abstentions, occasioned either by indifference towards the Irish issue or reluctance to endorse Tory candidates despite their Unionism.

Under the terms of the informal agreement (only referred to much later as the 'Unionist compact'), a few leading Liberal Unionists were forced to stand aside for Conservatives. Salisbury wrote to Hartington, explaining that he had managed to get his supporters to drop their opposition to the Radicals, MacLean and Goldsmid.\textsuperscript{19} Henry Brand at Stroud and Bickersteth in North Shropshire were the most prominent of Hartington's supporters to be forced to seek election away from their own constituencies.\textsuperscript{20} Brand contested a Welsh seat and, although he performed creditably in Cardiff, like all Liberals facing a Gladstonian in the Principality, he was rejected by the electorate. Bickersteth

\textsuperscript{17} Balfour to Salisbury, 15 June 1886, quoted in Williams (ed.), \textit{Salisbury-Balfour Correspondence}, pp.143-5.
\textsuperscript{18} \textit{Scottish News}, 13 May 1886.
\textsuperscript{19} Salisbury to Hartington, 20 and 21 June 1886, DP 340. 2009; 340. 2011. Maclean was returned unopposed for Woodstock and Goldsmid won with 68% of the vote in South St. Pancras.
\textsuperscript{20} In the end, the Stroud Liberals did run a Unionist candidate, J. Stanton, against the Tories and he managed to win 46% of the vote.
was humiliated, being defeated by nearly 4,000 votes in Leicester. John
Westlake faced a Conservative as well as a Gladstonian opponent in South
Essex (Romford), and received only 20% of the vote, but this was a strong
performance compared with that of W.P. Duff in Camberwell North and W.H. Hall
in Newmarket, who achieved only 5% and 4% respectively in similar
circumstances. When A.G. Kitching was opposed by the Conservatives in
Maldon, he withdrew his candidature in favour of a Gladstonian.21 Lord Wolmer
(Salisbury’s own son-in-law) faced Conservative opposition in Petersfield from a
Conservative, William Nicolson, and it was reported to Salisbury that Nicolson
would be supported on the platform by Sir Richard Webster, a member of
Salisbury’s own front bench. Salisbury wrote a very instructive letter to Akers-
Douglas revealing the truth about the Conservative leadership. ‘It is quite one
thing to say we cannot impose our will on the local politicians – quite another to
take part in the proceedings we profess to lament.’22 In the end, Salisbury
appears to have been unwilling to force the local Conservatives to drop
Nicolson, or to prevent a neighbouring Conservative MP, Sclater-Booth, from
campaigning for him.23 Wolmer was fortunate that his nascent political career
was not cut short, as he was returned with a 1% majority of 111 votes.

On one occasion, however, the central Conservative office did more than keep
silent. At Torquay they supported the local Conservatives in opposing a Liberal
Unionist, Lewis McIver. McIver’s views on Home Rule, were, at best, ambiguous
and as late as 1 June many local Liberals believed that McIver would vote with

\[21\] *The Times*, 23 June 1886.
\[22\] Salisbury to Akers-Douglas, 18 June 1886, Akers-Douglas Papers, Centre for Kentish
Studies, C18/13.
\[23\] *The Times*, 9 July, 1886.
the government; one local Liberal Unionist, Lord Ebrington, had actually
campaigned against him.\textsuperscript{24} When Salisbury's opinion was sought on the case of
Torquay, the Conservative candidate, Richard Mallock, was recommended to
contest the election.\textsuperscript{25} McIver was duly defeated by a majority of eighty, with his
vote decreasing by 454 from that of 1885 and the Conservative vote only
decreasing by twenty-six. To avoid future disputes such as Torquay, a joint
committee was set up, comprising Brand, Craig-Sellar, Akers-Douglas and
Middleton.

The Conservatives did manage a more co-operative approach in four double
constituencies, running Conservatives in harness with Liberal Unionists in
Newcastle-upon-Tyne, York, Northampton and Portsmouth. In many
constituencies, especially in Scotland, due to their huge funds, the Liberal
Unionists were able to run candidates in unpromising seats, purely in order to
encourage the development of a party structure for future elections.\textsuperscript{26} Clearly
the constituency agreement was being organised to suit Salisbury. As Salisbury
often said 'hopeless seats should never be fought' – particularly if they could be
fought by Liberal Unionists.\textsuperscript{27} The Liberal Unionists fought 165 seats and won
only 78 of these (see Appendix 3)

The first question that the Party faced after the 1886 election was the position of
the Liberal Unionists in relation to the Conservative government. When
Hartington contacted Chamberlain to ask his advice on whether or not to join a

\textsuperscript{24} \textit{Daily News}, 14 July 1886.
\textsuperscript{25} Salisbury to Gochen, 19 June 1886, Salisbury Papers.
\textsuperscript{26} The best example is Dundee, See W.G. Irving, 'Dundee and District Liberal Unionist
Association' \textit{Liberal Unionist}, 1 April 1889.
\textsuperscript{27} Hanham, \textit{Elections and Party Management}, p.378.
coalition, Chamberlain was quite adamant in his refusal and was supported by Derby, who saw the fragility of the nascent party grouping and who, perhaps unsurprisingly, completely mistrusted Salisbury.

    Salisbury might find or make any pretext to break up the concern, and remain in with his own people only. And he is just the sort of man who would do it.\textsuperscript{28}

As Hartington noted, 'the opinion is not confined to the Radical section of the Unionists.' The respected independent Liberal Unionist, Leonard Courtney also urged Hartington not to join, as did Henry James, who had given Hartington such wise counsel in the months before the defeat of the Home Rule bill.\textsuperscript{29}

Despite the urging of \textit{The Times}, \textit{The Spectator}, the \textit{Standard}, the \textit{Daily Telegraph}, the \textit{Scotsman}, the \textit{Glasgow Herald}, the \textit{Irish Times}, the \textit{Northern Whig}, Goschen, Brand, Argyll and the Duke of Westminster and Queen Victoria,\textsuperscript{30} Lord Salisbury found, when he met Hartington on 24 July, that the Liberal Unionist leader was determined not to enter a government as it would jeopardise his standing as a Liberal.

    They have represented themselves to their constituents as Liberals, and nothing will induce many of them to act with Conservatives in general opposition to Liberals...

    If Home Rule is to be resisted it must be, not by the Conservatives alone, but by the assistance of a party which, not only is, but is acknowledged to

\textsuperscript{29} Hartington's notes of the question of a coalition government. n.d. (24 July 1886?) DP 340.2025.
Hartington had also to consider the effect that twenty years of Conservative-Liberal antagonism had had on his own supporters, as he expressed in a letter to the Queen: ‘….there remains on the part of the large majority of the constituencies so strong an attachment to party organisations and associations that no real fusion of parties could at present take place…’

In addition, the weight of family tradition and reputation weighed on Hartington and those around him. As Chamberlain put it to James, ‘it would be a sort of historical catastrophe that the head of the Devonshires should become a Tory official.’

Finally, there was a less high-minded reason for such a reluctance to enter office. Hartington had undergone a very close battle in Rossendale and Goschen and Trevelyan had lost their seats. There was a very real possibility that if the Liberal Unionists took office, they would be humiliatingly defeated in the consequent re-election contests. Secondly, he knew that the Party was made up of a loose electoral alliance of entirely separate factions, and would split if collaboration with Salisbury was proposed.

The Liberal Unionists themselves were determined that they should be an independent Liberal group, and that they should be publicly recognized as such. They resolved at an Executive Committee meeting on 24 July to maintain a separate headquarters, with subscriptions to local Liberal Associations to be broken off. An attempt was also made to unite the Unionist Liberals by inviting

31 Hartington to Salisbury, 24 July 1886, DP 340.2024.
32 Hartington to the Queen, 6 August 1886, DP 340.2039.
33 Chamberlain to James, 16 July 1886, M45/209.
35 Though, as will be seen in the cases of Edward Watkin and Arthur Peel, this instruction was not always obeyed.
Chamberlain to join, now that he had safely retained his radical support and organisation in Birmingham. However, the distinctions between the two branches would be recognised, as it was proposed that there would be two Liberal Unionist whips, one for the moderates and one for the radicals. The matter of where they should sit in the Commons thus arose. Chamberlain, Wolmer, James, Lord Derby, Heneage, Arthur Elliot, Biddulph and Craig Sellar all advised Hartington that the Party should continue to sit with the Gladstonians, now on the opposition benches.\(^{36}\) Gladstone refused to place any objection in the path of this policy, assuring Hartington that ‘I earnestly desire…to promote in very way the reunion of the Liberal Party.’\(^{37}\) This decision was confirmed at a meeting of Liberal Unionist members on 5 August. At this meeting Chamberlain finally, publicly acknowledged Hartington's political leadership, once Hartington had formally recognised the Party's intention to seek Liberal reunion under a Unionist programme and pledged to combine the Radical Unionist Association with the Liberal Unionist Association. Chamberlain, on this basis, finally joined the Liberal Unionist Committee.\(^{38}\) The nature of the relationship between the two branches remained as difficult as that between the Liberal Unionists and the Conservatives, and provoked Arthur Hamilton to warn Lord Selborne in 1890 that the Party ‘had no real chemical union’ and that once Home Rule was averted ‘the compressed atoms will fly

\(^{36}\) Chamberlain to Henry James, 23 July 1886, DP 340.2022; Chamberlain to Hartington, 28 July 1886, DP 340.2030; Goschen to Wolmer, 1 August 1886, Selborne MS, II (13) 11-12; Derby to Hartington, 4 August 1886, DP 340.2036; A. Craig Sellar to Hartington, 28 July 1886, DP 340.2029. Only Goschen and Selborne appear to have objected to this policy. Goschen to Wolmer, 24 July 1886, Selborne MS II (13) 9-10; Derby’s diary, 9 August 1886, Vincent (ed.) Later Derby Diaries, p. 73.

\(^{37}\) Gladstone to Hartington, 3 August 1886, quoted in Holland, Life of Spencer Compton Vol. 2, p. 176.

\(^{38}\) Heneage to Wintringham, 6 August 1886, 2 HEN 5/13/65.
violently apart.\textsuperscript{39} This had been stressed by the pro-Chamberlain \textit{Birmingham Post} as early as May 1886, which described Chamberlain’s faction as ‘for Mr Gladstone, if he will but modify his plan’ and Hartington’s as those who ‘would refuse, at any time or under any circumstances, to concede autonomy to Ireland.’ The article concluded, pessimistically, ‘the two sections, though they may vote for once in the same lobby, can have no continuous ground of common action, either in Parliament or in the constituencies.’\textsuperscript{40}

The initial negotiations throw an interesting light on the relationships between the Party leaders in 1886. Although he was very conscious of the feelings of the Radicals towards co-operation with the Tories, Hartington admitted that ‘I have had but little conversation with him [Chamberlain] since the elections.’\textsuperscript{41} Instead, he used a number of intermediaries, most particularly Henry James. In turn, Chamberlain was not keen to be seen conspiring with Hartington and spent much of July at Highbury, only returning to Westminster the day before the opening of Parliament on 4 August. He also famously demonstrated his willingness to mislead his own supporters for the sake of political survival, caught, as he was between his radical electoral base in Birmingham and the Whiggism of Hartington and the reactionary Conservatism of Salisbury:

\begin{quote}
Our real policy is never to vote with the Tories unless they are in danger, and to vote against them whenever we can safely do so. This policy would be the best for them as well as for us, for if we lose our hold on
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{40} \textit{Birmingham Daily Post}, 25 May 1886.

\textsuperscript{41} Hartington to Goschen, 29 July 1886, quoted in Elliott, \textit{Life of Lord Goschen Vol. 2}, pp. 96-7. Hartington met Chamberlain for a mere hour on 26 July before leaving London for race week at Goodwood.
Liberal opinion, we can bring them no strength on critical occasions. The results of any other course will be that what I may call your section will gravitate to the Tories and be absorbed by them; while mine will make their peace with the Gladstonians…

This dissembling failed to convince the Nationalists, and on 23 May 1892, with the debate on the Irish Local Government Bill, Tim Healey attacked what he regarded as Chamberlain’s hypocrisy.

…The Government bring in a Bill. Its proposals are attacked and the Government gets into distress, and then of course ‘a friend in need is a friend indeed.’ The Rt. Hon. Gentleman for West Birmingham gets up and makes a speech. I have heard him make a speech on the Coercion Bill of 1887 in almost identical terms and also on the Parnell Commission Bill of 1888…It invariably happens that he has sufficient Radicalism left in him to condemn some obnoxious points in the measure, and he says that he will vote for their removal; but they are not removed and the Bill ultimately passes into law with the benediction of the Rt. Hon. Gentleman.

Although regarded as possessing ‘great, bad qualities’ by many Tories, Chamberlain was determined to stand for radical policies, telling Hartington that ‘I am very strongly in favour of an immediate announcement of a small Royal Commission into the land question.’ Hartington recommended to Salisbury that there must be progress in Ireland, asking the Conservative leader ‘to institute enquiry into the Land question and land improvements and several

---

42 Chamberlain to Hartington, 9 September 1886, DP 340.2043.
43 Hansard, 4th Series, 23 May 1892.
44 Lady Monkswell, A Victorian Diary, p.271.
45 Chamberlain to Hartington, 28 July 1886, DP 340.2030.
other small reforms. Chamberlain was as cautious as Hartington, though, and began negotiations with Churchill, meeting with him alone on 26 July and later urging him to avoid 'vital questions' so as not to put the inter-party support in jeopardy.\textsuperscript{47}

Once appointed as Chancellor and Leader of the Commons, Churchill attempted to appease the Liberal Unionists' conscience over Ireland, promising 'the development of a genuinely popular system of local government in the four countries which form the United Kingdom,' which, Hartington's biographer admits, was further than the Party's own leader would have been inclined to move.\textsuperscript{48} The difficult relationships between members of Salisbury's cabinet and Chamberlain's deliberate distance from the government made many Unionists nervous. So fragile was the government at this stage that only Hartington could guarantee its continuance.\textsuperscript{49} Hartington himself felt that the Liberal Unionist Party lacked cohesion, urging James not to accept Salisbury's offer of the Lord Chancellorship in December 1886 as Hartington could 'never... be sure how far Chamberlain and I will be able to go on together'.\textsuperscript{50}

\textbf{The Alliance Tested 1887-1889}

When Churchill's offer of resignation over naval estimates was unexpectedly accepted by Salisbury, the pressure for a Hartington-Salisbury led coalition government (and possibly a Chamberlain-Churchill led opposition) grew. Henry

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{46} Salisbury to Queen Victoria, 6 August 1886, Buckle (ed.), \textit{Letters of Queen Victoria}, 3\textsuperscript{rd} Series Vol. 1, p.172.  
\textsuperscript{48} Holland, \textit{Life of Spencer Compton} Vol. 2, pp. 164-5.  
\textsuperscript{49} Hicks Beach to Hartington, 19 October 1886 DP 340.2053.  
\textsuperscript{50} Hartington to James, 15 December 1886, M45/242.}
Sidgwick noted that ‘all the newspapers I see (Times, Scotsman, Glasgow Herald) are urging the Liberal Unionists towards coalition.’\textsuperscript{51} However, the Tory Chief Whip, Aretas Akers-Douglas, played his first hand in his on-going attempt to keep Liberal Unionist influence to a minimum, warning that ‘he could not whip up the [Conservative] men for Hartington’, which Leonard Courtney noted was ‘enough to prevent a coalition.’\textsuperscript{52} The perception that the government was tottering was quelled by the appointment to the government of a single Liberal Unionist as Chancellor of the Exchequer, who Churchill famously ‘forgot.’\textsuperscript{53} Goschen’s appointment to Salisbury’s Cabinet in January 1887, encouraged by Queen Victoria, Hartington and Heneage, might be seen as the first step in an inexorable progress towards inevitable ‘fusion’ between the Tories and the Liberal Unionists. As Goschen had refused to serve under Gladstone between 1880 and 1885 due to his objections to widening the franchise, he cannot be regarded as a prominently Liberal figure however, and this action at least secured an already tottering government without the need to involve Hartington himself. The Liberal Unionist Party itself, as its Liberal credentials became increasingly questioned in 1886, chose to represent Goschen’s position as Liberal ‘yeast to leaven the Tory lump…’\textsuperscript{54} Some were even more optimistic about the future. Edward Heneage saw the Liberal Unionist Party as ‘master of the situation’, foreseeing either a total surrender by Gladstone or the eventual disintegration of the Conservatives ‘and Hartington will come into power,’ as Henry James had also predicted in March 1886.\textsuperscript{55}

\textsuperscript{52} L. Courtney to A.R.D. Elliot, 31 December 1886, Courtney Papers, London School of Economics, V/43.  
\textsuperscript{53} St. Helier, \textit{Memories of Fifty Years}, p. 275.  
\textsuperscript{54} \textit{Liberal Unionist}, 44, September 1889.  
\textsuperscript{55} Heneage to Wintringham, 2 January 1887, 2 HEN 5/14/1.
Of course, this was another coup for Salisbury, and another blow for Chamberlain. Now the Birmingham leader had lost his most useful ally in the Conservative Cabinet, one who had expressed sympathy with the idea of a new party comprising the 'advanced' sections of both Unionist parties and thus out-maneouvring Hartington and Salisbury. He was also now a member of party which was in an alliance with the previously derided Conservatives, and one that would most likely last for the remainder of the parliament. As he put it: 'we may be face to face with a Tory government whose proposals no consistent Liberal will be able to support.'\(^{56}\) The fall of Churchill meant that the advocates of coercion had triumphed and that a Crimes Bill, which Chamberlain had openly denounced, would now be introduced.\(^{57}\) Chamberlain was reported as commenting 'we are anxious, we are eager for reunion.'\(^{58}\) William Harcourt spotted that Chamberlain's position was uncomfortable, if not untenable, and responded positively to Chamberlain's suggestion of a meeting at the end of 1886 which eventually led to the 'Round Table' conference which has been described in such minute detail by Michael Hurst.\(^{59}\) It is worth considering that Chamberlain may have begun negotiations for the purpose of short term survival, as Lewis Harcourt’s journal and Derby’s diaries reveal that both they, Hartington, James and even Gladstone, expected Salisbury's government to collapse in early 1887 (partly due to Salisbury's nervous exhaustion)\(^{60}\), and

---

57 Heneage to Wintringham, 21 January 1886, 2 HEN 5/13/4.
60 See Steele, *Lord Salisbury*, p. 204.
Chamberlain did not wish to go to the country with only coercion as a policy.⁶¹ As Lewis Harcourt’s journal reveals, Chamberlain was so eager to reunite the radical Unionists with the Gladstonians that he willingly consented to the idea of an Irish Legislature based on the model of Canadian provincial councils while ‘George Trevelyan sat horrified, and occasionally feebly protesting.’⁶² Ironically, it was Trevelyan who was persuaded by the meetings to re-join Gladstone while Chamberlain felt he had proved that Gladstone was the obstacle to reconciliation, provoking Trevelyan to exclaim ‘he has betrayed us.’⁶³ Clearly the radical Unionists were as fissiparous as the moderates.

In March 1887, W H Smith, the new Leader of the House, wrote to Hartington describing the introduction of the Crimes Bill as the advent of ‘a most serious struggle in which the ordinary parliamentary understandings and courtesies as between parties may be suspended,’ and fervently hoping that ‘we may rely upon the organisation of the Liberal Unionists' to keep the government from an ambush by the Liberals and Irish Nationalists.⁶⁴ Hartington began to write some of the longest letters in the archive at Chatsworth to Salisbury, discussing at great length, the distribution of honours among Liberal Unionists and attempting to secure as many as possible for the Party’s wealthiest supporters.⁶⁵ Ironically, having raised the MP for St Ives to the Lords, Hartington now found himself having to face the first attempt by the Conservative managers to obtain for themselves the Unionist candidature for a constituency previously held by a

⁶² L. Harcourt’s journal, 14 January 1887, Jackson (ed.), Loulou, p.147.
⁶³ L. Harcourt’s journal, 7 June 1887, P. Jackson (ed.), Loulou, p.154.
⁶⁴ W. H Smith to Hartington, 30 March 1887, DP 340.2116.
⁶⁵ In May 1887 he successfully persuaded Salisbury to give Sir John St Aubyn, MP for St Ives, a peerage. Hartington to Salisbury, 18 May 1887, DP 340.2128.
Liberal Unionist. Hartington wrote to Salisbury complaining about Middleton's behaviour, revealingly not because he was opposed to the idea of a Conservative candidate, but because it would be 'a transaction with which it would be known I was connected' and which 'would do harm in the constituencies.' Demonstrating just how limited the discussions which led to the initial 'compact' of 1886 were, Hartington now had to request that 'Mr Middleton should be authorised to go over with Hozier the list of constituencies and candidates in the UK and arrange as far as may be possible which are to be contested by Conservatives and which by Liberal Unionists.' It was the first of many such disputes which was to hamper the Unionist alliance until the 'fusion' of 1912. In St. Ives, as in so many of the later cases, the issue of disagreement was the most fundamental difference between the parties, which had created so much antagonism between Tories and Liberals in the past, attitudes towards the Church of England and non-conformity. As Salisbury correctly commented in his reply to Hartington, 'I generally find that it is that question that makes the difficulty.' Hartington was adamant, and no doubt, quite correctly in electoral terms. A non-conformist candidate such as Thomas Bolitho, former High Sheriff for Cornwall, now Deputy Lieutenant for the county and a JP, who was eventually chosen, would appeal to a Methodist community, fearful of an Irish influx and still quite deferential to their local social superiors, more than a Tory landowner. So strong was Bolitho's position that the Liberals finally refrained from contesting the seat. Bolitho went on to represent the seat until his retirement in 1900 and the seat remained Unionist until the deluge of 1906.

---

66 Hartington to Salisbury, 23 May 1887. DP 340.2130.
67 Salisbury to Hartington, 23 May 1887, DP 340.2131.
The Crimes Bill was a particular challenge for the Alliance, but the work of WH Smith in persuading not only Hartington but also Lord Wolmer to support the introduction of such a measure, meant that the Party leadership were soon committed to a short-term use of coercion at least. Chamberlain and his followers were the crucial problem, but here Hartington and Salisbury had a rare moment of good fortune. John Bright, although an electoral asset in 1886, had been a reluctant fellow-traveller since the defeat of the Home Rule Bill in June, even refusing to join the Radical Unionist Association, but he now roused himself to offer his support to the Crimes Bill to Wolmer on the grounds that ‘Mr Gladstone ought to have suppressed the Land League five years ago.’ Dr Dale of Birmingham also spoke out in favour of the Bill, stating that ‘one of the elementary duties of Government [was] to provide for the detection and punishment of crime.’ This left Chamberlain dangerously isolated among the nonconformist Unionists of Birmingham and forced him into a position where he had to assure himself that the Bill would pass before he could allow himself the luxury of abstaining when he discovered the strength of feeling in Birmingham. Others such as Heneage vainly demanded that they would only support the Bill if the Tories would accept Liberal Unionist amendments, such as those proposed by himself, Henry James, Finlay and Thomas Lea. As the Liberal Unionists had the choice of whether to support the Bill or bring the government down, the Conservatives could safely call their bluff and the Bill was passed with sixty-four Liberal Unionists voting in favour of it. For many Liberals in the Associations, this was the issue which finally made the breach in the Party

---

68 Bright to Chamberlain, 15 June 1886, JC 5/7/54.
69 Bright to Wolmer, 24 April 1887, Selborne MS II (13) 28.
70 ‘Dr Dale on the Crimes Bill’, Liberal Unionist, 5, 27 April 1887.
71 Heneage to Wintringham, 18 May 1887, 2 HEN 5/14/21.
irreversible. Henry James in Bury had managed to weather the storm of criticism that followed his vote against the Home Rule Bill in 1886 and had been re-adopted at the Liberal candidate in Bury, largely due to his appeal to non-conformists not to abandon fellow Protestants in Ireland. However, a meeting to condemn the Crimes Bill in April 1887 produced 'sulphur in the air' and the sight of Liberal Unionists 'hissing at old friends.' The President of the Bury Liberal Association resigned and a Bury Liberal Unionist Association was formed with 150 members.

For some Liberal Unionists who had made pledges against coercion, the alliance had served its purpose in defeating the Home Rule Bill, but it was now being distorted by the Salisbury–Hartington alliance. A. B. Winterbotham spoke out for this group during the debate in March 1887, much to Chamberlain’s embarrassment. ‘We denounced coercion again and again. We went in for equal laws and equal liberties, and I for one decline to be divorced from the declarations which I made upon many platforms in the course of the Unionist campaign.’ Winterbotham led Talbot, Vivian and Grove back to the Liberals, and it looked as if Chamberlain would be left completely isolated, until W. S. Caine came to his rescue and stood firm, responding to his constituency chairman’s concerns, ‘coercion has no terrors for me…I am glad the bottom is being knocked out of all this eviction sentimentality.’ Caine’s firmness stiffened vacillators such as F W Maclean, MP for Woodstock, who voted in favour of the

---

73 Bury Guardian, 18 April 1887; Bury Times, 30 April 1887.
75 Hansard, 3rd series, 29 March 1887.
76 Caine to J. Fell, 20 January 1887, Barrow Election Papers, Lancashire Record Office, C19, DD Fe/1.
Crimes Bill, purely because it was ‘only paving the way for the introduction of remedial measures [including] at least a very wide measure of self-government.’ When the Crimes Act was secured, the government importuned upon the Liberal Unionists' goodwill still further, by proscribing the National League, forcing Chamberlain to vote for Gladstone’s hostile motion, purely to satisfy his supporters in Birmingham. Five other Radicals joined him in the opposition lobby, and seventeen more Liberal Unionists abstained. Salisbury realised that he had tested the patience of his allies too far and was forced, as he admitted candidly to Lord Cadogan eight years later, as a token of his constructive intentions, to introduce a hastily devised Land Bill, ‘containing some very bad provisions – but they were the price of obtaining the votes of the Lib. Uns. & of the left wing of our Party, for the Crimes Act.’ The detail of the negotiations over this Bill are well described by Peter Davis, which led to T. W. Russell resigning the Liberal Unionist whip for the first time. Salisbury’s son, Lord Cranborne, had warned him that ‘the Liberal Unionists must not drag us too far, or we may swamp principles as precious as the union.’ The Bill was only allowed to pass the Lords having been emasculated (hence Russell’s resignation), and it is therefore unsustainable for David Steele to claim that ‘the Liberal Unionists called the tune in Irish policy.’

On a local level, even the inclusion of Goschen in the government made very little difference to local party leaders, accustomed to a simple divide between

---

77 Hansard, 3rd series, 29 March 1887.
78 Salisbury to Cadogan, 22 November 1895, quoted in Bentley, Lord Salisbury's World, p. 122.
81 Steele, Lord Salisbury, p. 205.
Liberal and Conservative, especially those far removed from the soothing influence of the Westminster leadership. The *Liberal Unionist* reported in June 1887 that in Ulster ‘the local Conservative Party did not recognise the advantage to the Unionist cause of giving way more largely to Liberal Unionist candidates, but persisted in the candidature of Tories for every constituency except South Derry and South Tyrone…’ The paper naturally criticised such an approach and asserted that the return of Lea and Russell in these two seats and the St Austell by-election result showed that a non-partisan approach could produce favourable electoral outcomes, and even ‘Scotland and Wales might no longer be pointed to as supporting the Separatist programme.’ In the same issue, a letter from an aggrieved Liberal Unionist questioned whether ‘a Conservative candidate should be ostentatiously paraded around and meetings held in opposition to the sitting Liberal Unionist member, there being no Gladstonian candidate in the field?…Is this alliance to continue?’ Clearly this problem was becoming more serious, particularly as the position of the Liberal Unionists became more fragile as 1887 progressed and their membership haemorrhaged back to Gladstone in the aftermath of the Crimes Bill. Some, who found their liberalism under question, chose to remind their electorate of their principles by criticising their Tory allies, such as did Henry James by attending a dinner at the Manchester Reform Club and attacking the Primrose League. The attitude of Middleton, hardly helped relations either. As he observed to Akers-Douglas in mid 1887, ‘without the Conservative Party being properly organised for the contest, no Liberal Unionist can secure his seat in

---

82 *Liberal Unionist*, 11, 8 June 1887.
83 Ibid.
any future election.¹⁸⁵

It was in these circumstances that Chamberlain began to explore, with Churchill, the idea of a fusion, of at least the ‘advanced’ sections of the parties, and he refused to spare the blushes of his leaders and his erstwhile allies in promoting his views when he spoke at the Liberal Unionist Club in June:

We do not want to be absorbed in the old Toryism, that is a dead creed. We do not intend to surrender to the new Radicalism, which is the English imitation of Nihilism.…when we have secured our position, then we shall be ready to ally ourselves with all whether they call themselves Conservatives – whether they have hitherto called themselves Conservatives, or Liberals, or Radicals – with all who accept our objects.¹⁸⁶

He even appeared to have convinced Hartington that the issue should at least be discussed, as Hartington referred cautiously to it in a speech in Manchester, later that month. This was picked up by F Maclean, whose article ‘The Parties of the Future’ confidently asserted that ‘It must be apparent that the old party lines – those upon which the electoral contest of 1885 was fought – are rapidly disappearing.’¹⁸⁷

By July, Chamberlain chose to moderate his criticisms and held up the 'spirit of mutual concession' displayed by the Conservative leaders as behaviour that 'ought, I think, to be imitated in the different constituencies by the several sections of the Unionist Party.' His support was still clearly conditional, for he still felt 'justified in demanding in return assurances of opposition to all

¹⁸⁵ Middleton to Akers Douglas, 9 July 1887, quoted in Chilston, Chief Whip, p.135.
¹⁸⁶ The Times, 15 June 1887.
¹⁸⁷ Liberal Unionist, 15, 6 July 1887.
reactionary proposals, and a general support of progressive legislation.\textsuperscript{88} The warning to those considering simply maintaining coercion in Ireland was clear. Sadly for Chamberlain, he was threatening with an empty hand. He had the support of the Birmingham caucus still, but, with the failure of the Round Table, he would suffer humiliation that would probably finish his career if he was to return to Gladstone now. In August, Balfour and Salisbury called his bluff, and the Liberal Unionist Party suffered its most high profile loss, when George Trevelyan ‘quitted the Unionist rails.’\textsuperscript{89} As Trevelyan told Henry Sidgwick in summer 1887: ‘I do not see why the fact I disagreed with him [Gladstone] on a Bill that is dead, is a sufficient reason for my practically joining the Tories.’\textsuperscript{90}

When the National League was finally proscribed in 1887, the need to offer a constructive alternative to Home Rule became paramount. Shortly before the Crimes Bill was introduced, Chamberlain attempted to pre-empt the damage this would cause with a speech at the Liberal Union in which he insisted that ‘they were still part of the party of progress’, and asserted that ‘the measures that were being pressed forward by a Conservative ministry were the very measures that Liberals and Radicals had always desired to see passed.’ In his search for a more constructive policy with which to appeal to his supporters, Chamberlain began to propose a scheme of two Provincial Legislatures for Ireland, based on the model of the Quebec and Ontario scheme then in operation in Canada. This again clearly illustrated the differences between the factions, as Hartington wrote cuttingly to Goschen in August that adopting such

\textsuperscript{88} Liberal Unionist, 16, 13 July 1887.
\textsuperscript{89} Liberal Unionist, 17, 20 July 1887.
a policy, no doubt unacceptable to Salisbury, would mean that the Liberal Unionists ‘would be almost compelled to help to bring Mr Gladstone back,’ which would amount to a virtual surrender of the Liberal Unionists’ position as ‘the influence which we could exercise over any future policy would be very small.’

To obscure further the lack of reform in Ireland, Chamberlain returned to his idea of the spring and suggested that ‘there was nothing to prevent the formation of a great National progressive party.’ Of course, for Salisbury and Balfour, there was nothing to gain from such a re-organisation, and even the same issue of the Party newspaper revealed that Chamberlain had little support for this policy within the Party:

we believe that any present attempt to force a close alliance between Liberal and Conservative Unionists is not calculated in the long run to benefit either party...What the Unionists need now is not a common or joint organisation, but a common programme of action.

This division was finally resolved by Hartington’s *ex cathedra* pronouncement at Greenwich on 5 August, when he announced ‘that the time is not yet ripe for such closer union.’

Such was the pressure that the Party felt in supporting the Crimes Bill, that the Party newspaper was forced to restate ‘our policy and principles’ and advise its readers that ‘no Liberal Unionist need feel regret that he has been obliged to

---

92 *Liberal Unionist*, 19, 3 August 1887.
93 Ibid.
94 Quoted in *Liberal Unionist*, 20, September 1887.
support a government that has introduced measures so liberal in the best sense as the Mines Regulation Bill and the Labourers’ Allotment Bill. Chamberlain, under pressure due to his vote against the Crimes Bill, confronted those who believed he was to resign from the Party:

It is true that I differ from the government upon this one point, as I have differed from them occasionally in the course of the session upon other matters; but I am prepared to support their general policy so far as in my judgement it tends to the maintenance of the union.

In reality, Chamberlain was clearly less satisfied as, in a letter from Churchill which described the proclamation as ‘insensate impropriety’ and the policy of Salisbury’s government on the land issue as ‘imbecile enough, no what matter what might be the consequences’, the writer agreed that in these opinions, he ‘was entirely at one with you [Chamberlain].’

In Autumn 1887, therefore, Chamberlain began to put pressure on Hartington, on the ground that ‘every day brings me letters from Liberal Unionists in all parts of the country asking me what the issue is and where we still differ from our old colleagues…I am at my wit’s end to know how to treat the situation in public and what to say to prevent the disappearance of our followers in the country.’ He also threatened, in very careful terms, that ‘a disengagement between us on Irish policy’ might ‘ultimately be declared’ if no constructive policies were announced. In response, Hartington commissioned Craig Sellar to consult individuals such as Sir John Lubbock ‘for suggestions to a constructive policy

---

95 Ibid.
96 Quoted in ibid.
98 Chamberlain to Hartington, 16 August 1887, quoted in ibid., p. 315.
for Liberal Unionists to lay before the country."\textsuperscript{99} Lubbock's reply was unhelpful, for although he admitted that 'I am sorry the government have proclaimed the League', he himself did not favour an active policy the current circumstances.\textsuperscript{100} The policy that was adopted was not pleasant to Chamberlain's ears: 'I should privately record my dissent from the policy which you have finally adopted. It is a negative policy and while it may do well for the Conservatives, it will not retain any considerable number of Liberal or Radical Unionists in the country.'\textsuperscript{101} He dismissed those that Craig Sellar had consulted as unrepresentative of popular opinion. 'I cannot say that I think much of the authority of the various writers consulted by Craig-Sellar. With the exception of Lea and Russell, they are all bad advisers for a popular party – and even the two Ulstermen regard the question from an Irish standpoint and without reference to the English electorate...unless something unexpected turns up we are certain to be extinguished at the next election.'\textsuperscript{102} Although it is impossible to ascertain who Craig Sellar had consulted, Derby had himself sent a memo to Hartington in which he insisted that 'there is no middle course possible – no alternative except complete union or virtual separation.'\textsuperscript{103} It was at this juncture, with his allies deserting him and his constituents questioning his stance on coercion, that Salisbury handed Chamberlain a life-line, or at least a breathing space. The opportunity to represent Britain in the Fisheries dispute between Canada and United States would give Chamberlain the chance to prove his skill as a statesman and avoid association with the implementation of the Crimes Bill. As he wrote to James, 'I should have stayed here if there was any chance of

\textsuperscript{99} Hutchinson, Life of Sir John Lubbock Vol. 1, p.265.
\textsuperscript{100} Lubbock to Craig Sellar, 13 October 1887, quoted in ibid.
\textsuperscript{101} Chamberlain to Hartington, 22 September 1887, JC5/22/137.
\textsuperscript{102} Chamberlain to Hartington, 22 September 1887, JC5/22/137.
\textsuperscript{103} Derby's diary, 10 October 1887, Vincent (ed.) Later Derby Diaries, p 84.
solving the Irish difficulty, but the Marquis seems inclined to move backwards rather than forwards and under these circumstances I can be of no use.'

With the prospect of Liberal reunion rapidly fading, the Liberal publication department began their vicious campaign against those they dubbed 'dissentients.' Early in 1888, the Liberal pamphleteer Edwin Goadby wrote *Dissentient Liberalism: Tested by its professions and its votes* in which he condemned the Unionists for their 'Political Nihilism' in supporting the Crimes Act. The attack demonstrated some subtlety, exposing the unease among the Liberal Unionists with the current strategy of their leaders, by highlighting the unusually large number of Liberal Unionist absences from important divisions on the Crimes Bill. It culminated with this rhetorical question: 'Is not the later growth of personal feeling and attack the surest evidence that the Dissentient Liberals acutely feel that they have been forced by events – we will not say betrayed – into a false and humiliating position from which there is really no easy and effective escape?'

Hartington therefore took the trouble to define the Liberal Unionists' position in a speech at Ipswich on 7 March 1888, designed to appeal to all elements of a party in danger of splintering under the pressure of the coercion issue. He stated that he could not 'see the basis of a foundation on which the Liberal Party can be reconstituted', and therefore (nearly two years after the formation of the first party organisation), conceded that 'we have no alternative before us except to do all that is in our power to constitute a 3rd party.'

He made clear that Goschen’s increasing affinity with the Tories was not to be

---

104 Chamberlain to James, 6 September 1887, M45/287.
the direction of the whole of the Party, ‘because while we adhere to the opinions we have always held on the Irish question we have not renounced one single Liberal opinion or Liberal principle which we have ever held.’ Finally, clearly to appease Chamberlain’s beleaguered group, he stated that ‘there is room within the Liberal Unionist Party…for the extremest Radical as well as for the most moderate Whig…’ and that the Unionist policy was not ‘simply one of obstruction and resistance to reform.’\textsuperscript{106} The tactic appeared to have worked, for Chamberlain at least, as he wrote to Wolmer in March on his return to England that ‘I shall be glad to be able once more to take my place amongst you…’\textsuperscript{107}

Chamberlain took this opportunity of the tolerant noises from Chatsworth to float further proposals for increased local government in Ireland and Land Purchase, but with little success, as Northbrook reported when he visited Galway in September. ‘No one that I can find agrees with Chamberlain’s …schemes, and I am very glad that he has not nailed his colours to the mast in respect to either, for I believe them to be impracticable in their present shape.’\textsuperscript{108} Hartington, aware that Chamberlain was raising issues that might divide the Liberal Unionists, chose to inform Ritchie of what he knew of Chamberlain’s plans.\textsuperscript{109} The Party did manage to point to one concrete achievement with the passage of the Local Government bill which introduced elections to county councils on a rate-payer franchise, as Chamberlain had demanded in the ‘unauthorised programme’ three years earlier. Even here, there was a dispute on the licensing clauses, which temperance campaigners such as W S Caine thought too lenient

\textsuperscript{106} \textit{Liberal Unionist}, 27, April 1888.
\textsuperscript{107} Chamberlain to Wolmer, 13 March 1888, Selborne MS I (8) 1.
\textsuperscript{108} Northbrook to Wolmer, 29 September 1888. Selborne MS II (13) 33-36.
\textsuperscript{109} Hartington to Wolmer, 11 June 1888, Selborne MS II (4) 5-6.
towards landlords. Luckily for the unity of the Liberal Unionists, the government withdrew these clauses.

In October 1888, Ernest Myers wrote another article for the *Liberal Unionist*, in which he firstly defended the Liberal Unionists' political position 'holding the balance of power' but defended their maintenance of a separate structure largely on the grounds that the Conservatives' 'reactionary tendencies [may]... appear' in the future.¹¹⁰ Hartington's decision to avoid fusion seemed to be justified as Myers' prediction appeared to be coming true in early 1889. As strong Liberal Unionist seats were lost in by-elections, even in the stronghold of western Scotland, the Party began to demand what they perceived as their side of the electoral bargain from the Conservatives.

The secretary of the West of Scotland Association, Robert Bird, was one of the most vociferous in his request for a more constructive policy, perhaps unsurprisingly, as his was an area where the accusation of becoming a Conservative was a potent Gladstonian weapon.

It is little less than political starvation to ask Liberals and Radicals to stand by and say 'ditto' or 'dissent' to the proposals of their Conservative friends, and leads directly to lethargy and disintegration… why should Liberal Unionists not have a programme which they can call their own? The programme of the Liberal Party before the split will do to begin with – that they may lay their views before the people and the Government, and if one of their reforms is passed into law, claim it as thing for which they

---

deserve some credit.\textsuperscript{111} This was in direct contradiction of Hartington's view which he gave at the inaugural meeting of the Organising Council on 22 March, when he revealed just how out of touch he was with the feelings of his own Party workers. In his view the alliance had presented ‘no hindrance to the Liberal wishes for the progress of the Liberal Unionist section of the Party.’\textsuperscript{112} As John Fair has attempted to show for the Commons, and Gregory Phillips has more convincingly proved for the Lords, there was limited co-operation between Liberal Unionists and Conservatives during the second Salisbury administration.\textsuperscript{113} As Phillips puts it, ‘the Whig noblemen sided with their Liberal colleagues on almost every category’ and, ‘even more strikingly, the Whigs tended to vote with Liberal peers on Irish land legislation during these years.’\textsuperscript{114}

The growing division between Conservatives and Liberal Unionists finally found public expression in the dispute over the candidate for John Bright’s seat in 1889. Chamberlain, understandably protective of his power-base, regarded Birmingham Central as his to allocate, but the local Conservatives, bitter opponents of Chamberlain before 1886, when the Conservative \textit{Birmingham Gazette} had referred to him as 'Jack Cade', saw an opportunity to make trouble. This reflected a distrust of radicalism that was certainly still felt by many local Conservatives, as well as by an unknown number of senior Party figures, long after 1886. In the North Buckinghamshire by-election in October 1889, despite the whole-hearted support given to the Conservative candidate by Liberal

\textsuperscript{112} \textit{Liberal Unionist}, 39, April 1889.
\textsuperscript{113} Fair, ‘From Liberal to Conservative’; Phillips, ‘The Whig Lords and Liberalism.’
\textsuperscript{114} Ibid., p.169.
Unionists, some of Evelyn Hubbard’s Conservative supporters were limited in their reciprocation. As the *Liberal Unionist* reported, ‘one of these gentlemen began his speech in the following style: “Chapter xv.. verse 7 of the book of common sense - ‘never trust a Radical.’”’

The Party, particularly the rapidly shrinking radical Unionist section, felt that this was a vital test of the Party’s credibility as an independent force. As Powell Williams reminded Chamberlain, ...if the number of Liberal Unionists in Parliament is decreased and that of the Conservative Unionists increased, there will be a gradual but certain defection of Liberal Unionist votes towards the Gladstonian camp.’ In these circumstances, the Party leadership sprang to Chamberlain’s defence. A hastily organised Party conference was held in Birmingham at the end of April with Hartington, Camperdown and the Duke of St Albans all attending. The *Liberal Unionist* printed a timely profile of their electoral asset. It was one that revealed much of the Party’s discomfort with Chamberlain’s political views. While he was praised for showing ‘nothing but support with the utmost loyalty for the Unionist government now in power...in strong contrast with that of Lord Randolph Churchill...’ the article managed to avoid mentioning the word radical or referring to his views on disestablishment.

As Party leader during this awkward period, Hartington had frequently to defend the Unionist alliance, especially when he spoke in Liberal heartlands, such as in September 1889 when he spoke near Ilkley. He attempted to emphasise the

---

115 *Liberal Unionist*, 46, November 1889.
areas of agreement, which presciently, were focussed abroad. 'We have found that we can support the Unionist government in its foreign and colonial policy', but on the area of a constructive policy of reform he could only offer the evidence 'that we can work as cordially together in the extension of those local powers of self-government.' Hartington again rejected the idea of immediate fusion, preferring instead to offer a longer term prospect to those such as Edward Dicey and Chamberlain who advocated such a policy, by claiming that the alliance was 'laying the foundation at some not very distant time of the formation of a still greater national party.'\footnote{Hartington to Wolmer, 7 July 1889, Selborne MS II (4) 33.} Luckily for Hartington, by 1889 Chamberlain had finally decided that the Liberal Unionist Party would remain his political home, and was unwilling to threaten retirement for the sake of a 'national party' which seemed far less attractive after the breach with Randolph Churchill and the dispute in Birmingham following John Bright's death.\footnote{For a full account of the dispute, see Garvin, \textit{Life of Joseph Chamberlain Vol. 2}, pp.438-443.} Hartington still did not trust Chamberlain not to reassert his radical credentials and cause trouble for the government, as he wrote to Wolmer in July 1889 after the Birmingham leader had expressed a wish to join the Royal Grants Committee, '…there is no knowing which way Chamberlain will go and if he should go against the government they will be nearly, if not quite, in a minority.'\footnote{Hartington to Wolmer, 10 August 1889, Selborne MS II (4) 35-36.} Hartington was far happier communicating with Salisbury, using his influence over Middleton to prevent the competition for candidatures from destabilising the alliance.\footnote{Quoted in \textit{Liberal Unionist}, 45, October 1889.}

The depth of Liberal Unionist support in Birmingham was revealed when
Chamberlain arranged for Powell Williams, Austen and other radical Unionists to canvass the constituency. So thorough was the survey of opinion that they even employed subterfuge, using a loyal farm worker to pose as a Gladstonian Liberal, to assess how reliable the promises of support they received were. Powell Williams was jubilant at the results:

One thing comes out most clearly...that there are an immense number of Liberal Unionists in the division, and that the Tory estimate of their relative strength of the sections of the Unionist forces is all fudge.¹²³

When Middleton was finally forced to disown Churchill's attempt to contest the seat and order the Birmingham Conservatives to back down, the relief among Liberal Unionists was palpable, and the dispute was presented as the work of the ill-informed and malicious.

Mr J A Bright's great victory showed most clearly that, in constituencies where the electors have been properly educated on the all-important issues now before the country, Conservatives and Liberal Unionists alike are ready to vote for the Unionist candidate without paying the slightest regard to the quarrels of party managers...¹²⁴

Hartington, in his response to a deputation from the South Kensington Association, made clear what he hoped would now emerge as the modus vivendi between the parties. He emphasised the role the Associations could play through their increased efforts to convince the Conservatives of the need to compromise in matters of candidature choice and strategic direction of policy,

¹²² Powell Williams to Chamberlain, 10 April 1889, JC6/2/1/18; A. Chamberlain to J. Chamberlain, 10 April 1889, JC6/2/1/17.
¹²³ Powell Williams to Chamberlain, 11 April 1889, JC6/2/1/19.
¹²⁴ Liberal Unionist, 41, June 1889.
for ‘the hands of their leaders would be strengthened by any measures ...to complete... the organisation of the Party, and thus prove to the Conservatives the value of the assistance which the Liberal Unionists might be able to render to the common cause...’ However, Chamberlain was clearly not satisfied, and wrote to Hartington demanding action from Salisbury. Hartington refused to believe that Salisbury’s confidant could have anything to do with the problem and he merely wrote to Wolmer, asking whether ‘anything can be done about the Birmingham Gazette? I don’t suppose that Middleton has anything to do with the attacks of which Chamberlain complains.’ Wolmer was unable to provide the solution, for in November Albert Bright wrote to Chamberlain threatening to resign if the Birmingham Conservatives, led by Satchell Hopkins, did not desist from attacking him. Chamberlain wrote to Hartington ‘asking Salisbury and me to arbitrate, or rather to advise on the difficulty which has arisen there... strongly recommending that we should insist as a condition that the committee of each party, in each division should pass resolutions pledging themselves to abide by our decision.’

**The Alliance Formalised 1890-1892**

Clearly, there was now a need to define exactly what the relationship between the two Unionist Parties should be and to turn the verbal 'compact' of 1886 into a more formal document. Hartington was unclear what had been written down, and he asked Wolmer ‘is there anything which you know of in writing about the

---

125 Ibid.
127 Hartington to Wolmer, 15 October 1889, Selborne MS II (4) 45-46.
128 J. A. Bright to Chamberlain, 5 November 1889, JC6/2/1/26; J. A. Bright to Chamberlain, 8 November 1889, JC6/2/1/27.
129 Hartington to Womer, 2 November 1889, Selborne MS II (4) 53-54.
electoral compact between us and the Conservatives and if not what form do you consider that it exists?’ The attempt to reach an agreement with Salisbury over Birmingham had clearly stumbled as Salisbury was prepared to accept ‘that the Compact only went to the extent of prohibiting either Party from attacking a tract belonging to the other, and did not extend to the case of vacancies.’\textsuperscript{130} Even though Salisbury was clearly reluctant to allow any formal acceptance of Liberal Unionist claims to certain seats, forcing Hartington to have to make an usual degree of effort to pin him down, the Liberal Unionist leader finally succeeded.\textsuperscript{131} Although undated, a document entitled ‘resolutions’ can be found at the end of Hartington's Devonshire Papers for 1889 at Chatsworth; it is transcribed in its entirely in Appendix 1. This was agreed between Wolmer and the Conservative whip, Akers-Douglas. Points five, six and seven were written so as to avoid any repetition of the central Birmingham dispute. It is notable that in the event of dispute, the Party leaders, W H Smith and Hartington were to be consulted, and that the Party managers, usually responsible for the selection of candidates were not to be consulted. Although not explicit, it is possible to imagine that the Liberal Unionists now distrusted Middleton to act in a disinterested fashion, especially where West Midland seats were concerned. It is also striking that Salisbury himself was not to be consulted in the event of a dispute. Finally, the document confirmed the defection of Vivien, Winterbotham, Wodehouse and Buchanan. In reality the choice of candidate was largely determined by Salisbury, no doubt advised by Akers-Douglas and Middleton to give as little away as possible. In Cambridge, where there was a strong intellectual Liberal Unionist presence, Hartington tried to

\textsuperscript{130} Hartington to Wolmer, 8 December 1889, Selborne MS II (4) 57-60.
\textsuperscript{131} ‘I must try to see Salisbury...soon. He ought to try to get this Birmingham business settled’ Hartington to Wolmer, 29 December 1889, Selborne MS II (4) 61-62.
have Albert Grey adopted for the University and Montagu Crackenthorpe adopted for the city constituency. Despite the aristocratic lineage of the former and the strongly anti-socialist beliefs of the latter, Salisbury refused to give way.

Hartington was simply not prepared to force the Conservatives into formal undertakings beyond the written ‘compact’. He also wished to ensure that Chamberlain moderated his behaviour towards the government. As he wrote to Wolmer before going on his usual winter cruise round the Mediterranean in February 1890, ‘...I do not think you should give any important whip without consulting Chamberlain; but I shall leave definite instructions to you to consult Chamberlain and James, so that in the event of the former asking to do anything embarrassing to the government, you might bring to bear the influence [?] of James and all the moderate Liberal Unionists upon him and if necessary get a meeting called.’ Hartington knew that he could control Chamberlain, as ‘he knows too well that the Gladstonians hate him too much ever to take him back again and I believe that the worst to be feared about Chamberlain at present is that he should retire for a time from politics altogether.’

To ease relations on a local level, after pressure from moderates such as Crackenthorpe and the Conservative leadership, Wolmer urged LUAs to regulate their relations with their Conservative allies by the creation of joint committees. In West Derbyshire, for example, a Joint Unionist Committee

---

132 Hartington to Wolmer, 6 September 1891, Selborne MS II (4) 128.
133 Hartington to Wolmer, 22 October 1891, Selborne MS II (4) 146.
134 Hartington to Wolmer, 1 February 1890, Selborne MS II (4) 65-69.
135 M. Crackenthorpe, ‘The Future of the Unionists’, Nineteenth Century, 14 (November 1888);
was organised, comprising two members of the Liberal Unionist Association and three members of the Conservative Association. The objects of the Committee were defined as:

1. ‘To appoint chief registration agent’
2. ‘To select a candidate’
3. ‘To keep the two wings of the Unionist Party in friendly touch’

This committee became the chief organising body in the constituency, meeting in 1892 before the election and in 1893 and 1895. Joint Unionist meetings regularly took place within the constituency and at every election until 1900 a joint Unionist manifesto was issued by the Committee. The only price that the Conservatives extorted for this support, was that Victor Cavendish, Liberal Unionist MP since 1891, ‘should be requested to adopt [the] Unionist colours as his election colours.’

The Party was also enthusiastic in its endorsement of a newly popular figure in the alliance, who might serve as a rallying point for Liberal and Conservative Unionism, after Churchill's ill-considered confrontation with Chamberlain in Central Birmingham. Balfour, who had succeeded in quietening, if not pacifying Ireland, was the subject of an enthusiastic profile in the *Liberal Unionist* which included the observation that ‘it would seem that this administrative genius is marked out as the heir-apparent of the Unionists.’ Dicey wrote in 1891 to Wolmer that Balfour’s appointment and the scenes daily taking place in Ireland

---

136 West Derbyshire Liberal Unionist Association Rules, Derbyshire County Records Office, D504/3/1/1.
137 West Derbyshire Joint Unionist Committee minute book, DCRO, D504/38/2/1.
are slowly but surely strengthening the Unionist cause.'\textsuperscript{139}

Balfour responded with a speech in Liverpool in November 1890 in which he stated that 'without the Liberal Unionists, the Unionist Party could not have accomplished the great work which I think it has accomplished…their actual support at the polls has been invaluable.'\textsuperscript{140}

The growing closeness between the parties during 1890, as the prospect an election drew nearer, was further cemented by the O’Shea divorce trial and the poor display put on by Parnell in the witness box. As the Liberal Unionist concluded, 'Mr Parnell’s character and aims and methods of warfare and those of his associates as lately displayed to the world prove the view entertained of him by the Unionist Party, and endorsed by the findings of the Commission, to be amply justified.'\textsuperscript{141} That month, Chamberlain made one last attempt to create a ‘National Party’ in which he could develop the political influence that, as the leader of a minority faction in a small and seemingly declining party, was beyond his reach. Yet again, the \textit{Liberal Unionist} actively opposed this idea, printing a letter by W. L. Blench, Party agent for Leicester, which commented that ‘many of the most active and useful members of our Party in the constituencies, whose Unionism is as steadfast as their Liberalism is robust, do not regard [fusion] with favour…they continue to cherish the hope of the ultimate reunion of the Liberal Party. To fuse with the Conservatives at the present time would be to alienate these men and to deprive the Unionist Party of their active and powerful support.'\textsuperscript{142} A serious blow to the scheme was the

\textsuperscript{139} A. V. Dicey to Wolmer, 5 November 1891, Selborne MS II (13) 95-98.
\textsuperscript{140} \textit{Liberal Unionist}, 59, December 1890.
\textsuperscript{141} \textit{Liberal Unionist}, 60, January 1891.
\textsuperscript{142} W.L. Blench, ‘A National Party’, \textit{Liberal Unionist} 61, February 1891.
unexpected loss of Hartlepool in January, when a majority of nearly 1,000 was swept away in a 10% swing to the Liberals. The *Liberal Unionist* noted grimly 'that constituency has always been strongly Radical, and doubtless many of the Radical electors find it difficult to reconcile themselves to the conditions of the alliance with the Conservatives.' Finally, the influential Robert Bird wrote a strongly phrased article in which he declared of fusion, 'it were better under the earth.'

I should like to hear our leaders say, as they said in 1886, ‘there shall be no fusion, Liberals we are and Liberals we intend to remain.’

What should we lose by fusion? The confidence of the Liberal and Radical workmen of the country at the next general election. Though they are deaf to us now, the working classes will listen to us at a general election when the facts are clearer. They did so before.

Like Hartington, Bird was prepared to encourage joint committees but the relationship should ‘touch... hands on the union only.’ The only assenting voice raised in support of the proposal did so largely from a feeling of bitterness towards the main Party's leadership. James Couper, chairman of the St. Rollox LUA, complained of the ‘supineness in high places’ which had failed to uphold the Party's position in relationship with their Conservative allies, claiming that the Party had ‘encouraged the ‘nobbling’ of seats in the College Division of Glasgow, the Ayr Burghs and other quarters, where, according to the original compact, only Liberal Unionists should be allowed to stand...’ As a result, the only prospect for Liberal Unionist survival beyond the next election would be

---

143 *Liberal Unionist*, 61, February 1891.
144 *Liberal Unionist*, 62, March 1891.
145 Ibid.
fusion.\textsuperscript{146} Bird again stood firm as the voice of independent Liberal Unionism, replying that fusion ‘would...unnecessarily stifle or lame our Liberalism and Radicalism.’\textsuperscript{147} His opinion was supported by Heneage, who warned Hartington that in the forthcoming election ‘it will do much harm.’\textsuperscript{148}

In many ways, 1891 was the high-point of the informal alliance between the Liberal Unionists and the Conservatives that had been created to keep the Gladstonians from office, despite the failure to enforce the decision to amalgamate the two parties’ constituency organisations in 1890.\textsuperscript{149} Not only did Parnell’s leadership of the Irish Nationalist cause come to an ignominious end that year, but the passing of the education act of 1891 seemed to demonstrate a genuine attempt by all the factions of the Unionist alliance to find a common ground in constructive policy. As John Fair found, 1891 marked a return to 1886 levels of co-operation between Liberal Unionists and Conservatives with a yearly likeness percentage (on the Rice Index of measurement) of 90.6%, compared to a Liberal – Liberal Unionist figure of 76.5% for the same year.\textsuperscript{150} Goschen continued as Chancellor, largely because his policies were increasingly indistinguishable from those of his Tory colleagues, and the electoral compact continued to operate with few disturbances.

A reminder of the limits of the alliance came with the debate on Welsh disestablishment in 1891, designed to provide the Unionists with vital electoral ammunition to make progress in the principality. In reality, such an issue, ill-

\textsuperscript{146} Liberal Unionist, 63, April 1891.
\textsuperscript{147} Liberal Unionist, 64, May 1891.
\textsuperscript{148} Hartington to Wolmer, 30 November 1891, Selborne MS II (4) 148.
\textsuperscript{149} Shannon, Age of Salisbury, p. 212.
\textsuperscript{150} Fair ‘From Liberal to Conservative’, p. 298.
chosen and badly composed, merely illustrated the fault lines in the Unionist alliance on the issue. Several Liberal Unionists had been nervous of Gladstone’s vague promises of Scottish and Welsh disestablishment and it had contributed to their defection from their leader in 1886. To find members of their own Party, such as Lord Derby supporting this policy, was, therefore especially galling. The chief defender of the state church in the Party, Lord Selborne, in one of the few occasions on which he took an active role as a party leader, spoke out in the *Liberal Unionist* in September 1891, accusing those who supported Welsh disestablishment as wishing to attack the Church of England, as ‘the agitation for disestablishment in Wales means, of course, the general disestablishment of the Church of England and nothing else.’

The issue of Chamberlain’s radicalism within the alliance finally came to a head when Hartington succeeded to the Dukedom of Devonshire and moved to the Lords. With a general election looming and the largest of Liberal Unionist majorities being overwhelmed in the by-elections of South Molton and Rossendale, the Party wanted to avoid a bitter public contest. Henry James, as Hartington’s lieutenant, commanded the largest faction of Liberal Unionists. He, however, could not foresee any alternative to Chamberlain’s leadership, despite some support from contributors to Party funds and some favourable noises in the press. Although Chamberlain’s views on disestablishment and his earlier flirtation with Churchill’s brand of ‘Tory Democracy’ made him a not altogether congenial partner for the Tories, his excellent working relationship with Balfour, now Leader of the House after W.H. Smith’s death, his undoubted talents as a

---

151 See Derby’s Diary, 10 October 1887, Vincent (ed.) *Later Derby Diaries*, p. 84.
152 *Liberal Unionist*, 69, October 1891.
parliamentary debater and a vote-winner and his assiduously cultivated national profile, made any other choice largely unthinkable. He had, after all, prepared the ground for himself, when he repudiated the idea of rapprochement with the Gladstonians in November, when Salisbury himself had symbolically been invited to Birmingham Town Hall to demonstrate the continued strength of the alliance. Salisbury had recognised the centrality of Birmingham (and thereby Chamberlain himself) to Liberal Unionism when he had spoken of the city as ‘the centre, the consecration of this alliance.’

Henry James was therefore prevailed upon to stand aside, and wrote immediately to Chamberlain ‘saying I would with pleasure serve under him as loyally as he had served under Hartington.’ The meeting of the Party was to be swiftly organised so that no hint of dissension over Chamberlain’s succession should be voiced.

Chamberlain still wished to retain some freedom of action, of course. While he was happy to accept the leadership of the Party in the Commons, he insisted that Devonshire should ‘continue to lead the party as much as ever’, and asked him to call a full meeting of the parliamentary party where he could ensure that the Party appointed him with his radical position clearly restated. Hartington, wanting to secure Chamberlain the electoral asset, not ‘Jack Cade’ the obstacle to the Unionist alliance, was not keen, but was unable to resist Chamberlain’s demand. His fears proved well founded when at the meeting

---

153 Lord Salisbury, Birmingham Town Hall, 24 November 1891, quoted in *The Times*, 25 November 1891.
154 *Askwith, Lord James of Hereford*, p.224.
155 ‘There must be no disruption in the press or by anyone about the House of Commons leadership.’ James to Wolmer, 22 December 1891, Selborne MS II (13) 109-110. Derby immediately stood aside as Liberal Unionist leader in the House of Lords. Derby to Hartington, 2 January 1892, DP 340.2439.
156 Chamberlain to James, 23 Dec 1891, M45/521.
157 Hartington to Wolmer, 30 December 1891, Selborne MS II (4) 164.
in Devonshire House on 8 February, rather than avoiding the difficult issue of disestablishment, Chamberlain tackled it head-on. As Hartington had advised, he said, 'he had been and still was willing to subordinate his opinions on the subject of disestablishment to the interests of the Union', but subject to this reservation he retained his freedom to put forward his views when he thought it right to do so...' He wished to make his attitude clear that 'the support of Liberals for the Unionist policy had been secured, and could only be retained, by proving to them that Liberal Unionists were not recreant from Liberal principles.'\textsuperscript{158} Of course, as had been demonstrated in 1885, the position of the Liberals on disestablishment was by no means clear and Wodehouse spoke up, insisting on his right to disagree with Chamberlain as he was 'a more moderate Liberal.' The leader writer of the resolutely moderate \textit{Liberal Unionist} also noted that he differed from his colleagues in some areas, but dismissed these as 'questions of minor importance.'\textsuperscript{159} \textit{The Times} described Chamberlain as the only serious candidate for the position as well as ‘the fittest person to occupy the arduous position reluctantly relinquished by his chief.’ However, the fissure in Liberal Unionism was acknowledged: ‘Mr Chamberlain's opinions upon some subjects it is true, are probably in advance of those held by a considerable number of those who will be asked to serve under him.’\textsuperscript{160}

There was one significant absentee from Chamberlain's coronation. The Chancellor of Exchequer, Goschen, had played almost no role in the Party since his appointment in January 1887, but he now wrote to Devonshire in disgust, announcing his resignation from the Party and his intention to join the

\textsuperscript{158} \textit{Liberal Unionist}, 74, March 1892.
\textsuperscript{159} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{160} \textit{The Times}, 15 January 1892.
Conservatives. As he said, he would rather sit with Balfour ‘than with Chamberlain and his other friends.’ Chamberlain also found difficulties with his own Party officials, in particular the new chief whip, Harry Anstruther. Although Chamberlain praised his abilities, he complained to Devonshire that Anstruther was interfering with his attempts to give the Party a much needed new direction, ‘he does not quite understand that it is the duty of leaders to lead.’ In these circumstances, Chamberlain continued to operate his own whip, Powell Williams, to direct the radical Unionists.

If the Party’s new leader disagreed with a substantial portion of his own colleagues, then the relations with the even more ‘moderate’ Conservatives looked increasingly problematic. The first hint that Chamberlain’s leadership would cause difficulties came in London, where the Lewisham Conservative Association was opposing a radical Unionist candidate in the London County Council elections. Chamberlain’s own brother, Richard, proposed fighting the election on party lines, rather than as ‘Moderates’, the label which the official Unionist candidates adopted. On 1 January 1892 a correspondent of The Times noted that although ‘there is at the present time complete harmony so far as the leaders are concerned’ this was not the case in the rank and file of both parties, amongst whom ‘there is a certain amount of jealousy and suspicion, which, if not eradicated before the general election, must operate prejudicially to the Unionist candidates.’ Within days this jealousy was expressed on a matter close to Chamberlain himself. At East Worcestershire, the unexpected

---

161 Goschen to Devonshire, 8 January 1892. DP 340.2506.
162 Chamberlain to Hartington, 14 January 1892. DP 340.2508.
163 Liberal Unionist 74, March 1892.
164 The Times, 1 January, 1892.
resignation of Hastings, on a charge of fraud, had led the Chamberlain to persuade his eldest son, Austen, to give up his candidature in Hawick and stand as a Liberal Unionist for the constituency that included the Chamberlain home at Highbury. Unfortunately, as Balfour told Wolmer, the chairman of the local Conservative Association, Victor Milward, insisted that Austen Chamberlain must give a pledge not to vote for disestablishment in order to receive the support of local Conservatives. As he wrote, ‘it appears that Hastings had pledged himself to vote against Disestablishment and he appears to entertain some hope that Austen Chamberlain will be induced in the interests of harmony to give a pledge of the same kind…’ Balfour vainly hoped that the Church question should be left in the background … and that no allusion should be made to it one way or the other’ but he reckoned without Millward or Joseph Chamberlain.$^{165}$

The Conservative-controlled *Birmingham Gazette* (in which Richard Middleton had a large interest) went public on the issue on 6 January 1892,$^{166}$ and Chamberlain told Wolmer that ‘I am not at all satisfied with the state of things in E Worcestershire…’$^{167}$ Chamberlain had openly supported disestablishment of the Welsh church during an ill-fated tour of South Wales as recently as autumn 1891$^{168}$, and had made his commitment on the issue entirely public when the Party elected him leader on 8 February:

> I stated my intention of continuing to support by vote, and in any other

---

$^{165}$ Balfour to Wolmer, 4 January 1892 Selborne MS I (1) 4.
$^{166}$ *Birmingham Gazette*, 6 January 1892.
$^{167}$ Chamberlain to Wolmer, 25 January 1892, Selborne MS I (8) 17.
$^{168}$ *South Wales Daily News*, 14 October 1891.
way that seemed fitting, the disestablishment of the State church.\footnote{169}{Memoir dated 1892, JC/8/1/1.}

His objection, however, does not appear to be on the principle of disestablishment, but merely its impact on the Unionist voters in the coming general election, ‘the disestablishment cry has been raised and…the question may come up during the election and may interfere with hearty and unanimous Conservative support.’ Neither did he seem particularly concerned with the fact that the candidate facing Conservative pressure was his own son, and was quite prepared to sacrifice Austen. ‘If Austen does not stand we should want a thorough Liberal who, however, is not pledged to disestablishment…I think a lawyer would do very well.’\footnote{170}{Chamberlain to Wolmer, 25 January 1892, Selborne MS I (8) 17.}

When Austen refused to back down, it appeared possible that the Conservatives would find and run their own rebel candidate. As Chamberlain noted in his occasional diary, Austen refused to give the pledges required and pointed out that by doing so he would probably lose the support of many of his own friends as well as placing himself in the unsatisfactory position of abandoning his opinions in order to secure votes. It was also strongly urged that if pledges against disestablishment were to be asked from Liberal Unionists, pledges in favour of disestablishment might be asked from Conservatives by Liberal Unionists.\footnote{171}{Occasional Diary, dated 1892, JC/8/1/1.} Following the crisis, Lord Salisbury held the first joint meeting of the Unionist leadership that year, but the issue of disestablishment continued to hinder the relations between the radical Unionists and the moderates and Conservatives.

Chamberlain therefore sought another means of re-emphasising his radical
credentials to the electorate, which would not upset the Conservative leadership, and returned to the issue of social reform that had proved so successful at the Aston by-election the previous year. As Marsh notes, Salisbury had worried about Balfour’s appointment as leader of the House as ‘Balfour was susceptible to Chamberlain’s enthusiasm for programme construction.’

Fulfilling his promise of 8 February to offer a more radical interpretation of Liberal Unionism, Chamberlain immediately began to pressure both Balfour and Salisbury to agree to a programme of reform, very similar to that contained in the ‘Unauthorised Programme’ of 1885. He had already written to Balfour in 1891, warning that ‘you cannot … keep Radicals in the sound faith of Unionism by tickling them with whiggery’, implying that his electoral usefulness to the Tories had to be matched by a willingness to undertake substantial social reform. Following the loss of Rossendale, Chamberlain warned Balfour that there must be a more dynamic social policy to counter the Liberals as he ‘would undertake to lose Birmingham in twelve months by modelling myself on the articles of *The Times* or the speeches of Lord Hartington.’

The consequences of political inaction were clear to see, with the failure of Liberal Unionism to develop a strong base of support in towns like Leicester, where the council election of November 1891 saw the Liberal Unionists only take one seat.

The by-election defeats at South Molton and Rossendale seemed to suggest that the Gladstonian Liberals, who had regained control of London County Council in March 1892 on a platform of social reform, had rediscovered those issues that would lead working class voters to return their votes to the Liberals.

---

by focussing on land reform, housing and local taxation. This resurgent Liberal radicalism, endorsed by Gladstone and Morley, had led to the creation of the ‘Newcastle Programme’, adopted by the National Liberal Federation in 1891. This, it was hoped, would persuade Liberal voters to spurn the Unionists and return their support to the Gladstonian leadership. As many features of the ‘Newcastle Programme’, such as Welsh and Scottish disestablishment, land reform, smallholdings, factory and dwellings acts were issues that Chamberlain was committed to, it left the Radical leader in a difficult position. He handled it in two ways, firstly by accusing the Liberals of merely attempting to ‘gild and sweeten Home Rule’ by promising social reform measures that ‘will be indefinitely postponed while they are engaged in that hopeless and futile task of producing another Home Rule Bill,’\(^{175}\) and secondly by publicly stating that ‘…as Liberals we have every reason to be satisfied with what we have done.’\(^{176}\) He claimed that ‘in social questions the Tories have almost always been more progressive than the Liberals’\(^{177}\), and dismissed the Newcastle Programme as ‘nothing more or less than a gigantic political waste paper basket for the Gladstonian Party.’\(^{178}\) When he did so, however, he clearly aroused the suspicions of some Conservatives, for he chose to repeat the most famous of the phrases from his notorious speech of January 1885 that so alarmed Tory and Whig landowners alike:

You see gentlemen, I have not altogether forgotten the doctrine of ransom, though I am very willing to confess the word was not very well chosen… The soldiers and the sailors are pensioned. Yes, peace hath

\(^{175}\) Joseph Chamberlain, speaking in Birmingham, quoted in *The Times*, 19 November 1891.

\(^{176}\) Joseph Chamberlain at the Liberal Unionist Club, quoted in *The Times*, 9 March 1892


\(^{178}\) *Birmingham Gazette*, 25 June 1892.
her victories as well as war; and the soldiers of industry, when they fall out of the ranks in the great conflict and competition in which they are continually engaged – they also have some claim to the consideration and gratitude of their country. 

Salisbury himself responded to Chamberlain, warning him from over-praising the Tory reform record since 1885:

I can quite understand that you should describe our legislation as liberal, progressive and so forth: and that you should be more indulgent to us in that respect than we deserve… But if you say that the Tories have given in on all the points on which you differed from them in 1885, you give them an uncomfortable feeling that they have deserted their colours and changed their coats. 

Some historians see Salisbury’s willingness to accept Liberal Unionist demands for domestic reform during his second term as ‘mildly ‘Liberal’ and owing nothing to any authentically Conservative strategy of ‘resistance’. In truth, many of Salisbury’s social reforms had had ulterior motives, entirely consistent with his traditional Conservatism. The introduction of free education was passed largely to save church schools from financial collapse and the local government reforms were designed to shore up the influence of local rural elites against the growing power of the party and the working class voter. Chamberlain himself acknowledged the fact that he tended to get his ideas accepted on the ‘fourth

180 Quoted in Jay, Joseph Chamberlain, pp. 174-5.
time’, one in four occasions. Salisbury stepped up the pressure by asking his son-in-law, Lord Wolmer, the Liberal Unionist chief whip, to request that Chamberlain should stop claiming that the Tories had actually passed the ‘unauthorised programme’ into law as a result of his pressure over the past six years.184

This rebuff left Chamberlain in a near impossible position. If he praised the Tory leaders for their social reforms, he upset their supporters for giving the seal of ‘Radical’ approval to what were meant to be Conservative policies. On the other hand, if he said nothing, his enemies would argue that he had abandoned his principles for the sake of his political survival. In his ‘memorandum’ of 1888-1892, Chamberlain reflected very astutely on his difficult position as leader of a radical section of a predominantly moderate splinter group.

The Conservative Party had the old traditions and methods and were inclined to move slowly or not at all. Lord Hartington, who in 1885 had been the most moderate of Whigs, found little difficulty in accepting a negative policy…On the other hand, the Liberal Unionists in the country were restive at the idea of working with, and especially under new allies.185

The impact of the general election results, Birmingham notwithstanding, distinctly altered the relationship between the two parties. While the Conservatives had lost 19% of their parliamentary strength overall (forty-seven seats), the Liberal Unionists had lost 37% of theirs. Chamberlain tried to

---

185 ‘Memoir’ dated 1892, JC/8/1/1.
salvage victory from defeat in August, in his first speech in the new parliament, when he claimed that never before had a third party come back to the House forty-eight or forty-nine strong.\textsuperscript{186} Asquith, for one, was having none of it, and taunted Chamberlain’s ‘dwindling numbers.’\textsuperscript{187} From Salisbury’s perspective the result was perhaps as good as he might have expected.\textsuperscript{188} His Party was in need of a rest after the unusual experience of minority administration for seven years. As Richard Shannon puts it, ‘Salisbury could well see that the Conservative Party’s greatest immediate necessity was time and space simply to be the Conservative Party.’\textsuperscript{189} The Conservative dominance of the House of Lords and the small size of the Gladstonian majority (especially as it was dependent on Irish votes) told Salisbury that a second Home Rule bill could be successfully resisted and that any Liberal administration was likely to be short-lived. The dramatic decline of the Liberal Unionists now raised the prospect of a Conservative majority in a future election, rather than a Unionist one. But Chamberlain thought the Liberal Unionists were not entirely to blame for their own misfortunes. He complained to Balfour of the cost of a rash attack on the liberal financial orthodoxy of free trade by Salisbury in his address to the National Union at Hastings on 18 May. ‘Lord Salisbury’s unfortunate allusion to Fair Trade has been taken up and misinterpreted – this cost us a dozen seats in the Counties.’\textsuperscript{190} But, more seriously, in his letter to Heneage, he blamed many of the defeats on the way in which the compact had been interpreted by the Conservatives, or rather by the Party functionaries.

\textsuperscript{186} There were, in fact, 47 Liberal Unionist MPs returned in 1892.
\textsuperscript{187} Annual Register 1892, p.134.
\textsuperscript{188} Marsh describes it as ‘from Salisbury’s view, an…almost perfect result.’ Marsh, Discipline of Popular Government, p.222.
\textsuperscript{189} Shannon, The Age of Salisbury, p.380.
\textsuperscript{190} Chamberlain to Balfour, 19 July 1892, Balfour Papers, British Library, MSS 49773, 53.
I am afraid we get put off with all the hopeless seats and in this way we are slowly edged out of existence as a separate party.¹⁹¹

Even a cursory inspection of the results reveals some truth in this, as an analysis of the 93 Liberal Unionist defeats reveals a national average majority against the candidates of around 1,000. In a period when the average constituency electorate was less than 10,000, this indicates just how serious the defeat was. While the Party was clearly responsible for the loss of its own seats, the scale of the defeats elsewhere leads one to suspect that Middleton was ensuring that, outside the West Midlands, the Liberal Unionists were being offered the chance to stand where it was felt that the Conservatives had no chance anyway. In all, Liberal Unionist candidates stood in seventeen seats which had previously been contested by Conservatives. In all but one (Belfast West) of these, the Liberal Unionist candidate was defeated. In East Aberdeenshire, despite achieving a swing of 7% to the Unionists, the Liberal Unionists candidate, Colonel Russell, still lost by over 1,500 votes.

Writing in the Party newspaper, Ebenezer Le Riche blamed the Party’s defeats on the overly close relationship with the Conservatives. According to Le Riche, ‘again and again at meetings the relative merits of the Conservative and Liberal parties were pointed out, the Conservative big drum was beaten, the party colours and sentiments flaunted wholly regardless of the 10 to 40% of Radicals who were thereby alienated and whose votes lost us the seat.’ The refusal to chase the radical vote in many seats and to put up Unionist candidates

¹⁹¹ Chamberlain to Heneage, 6 July 1892, JC5/41/30.
acceptable to moderate voters was terminal for the Unionist cause he felt. 'It is almost impossible to convert a Radical into a Conservative, comparatively easy to make him a strong Unionist, easy to get him to vote for a Liberal Unionist, difficult to get him to vote for a Conservative.' The remedy was clear, 'when the majority of the electors in any constituency are Conservative, a Conservative should stand; when the majority are Liberal, a Liberal.' The need to have a significantly larger number of Liberal Unionist candidates standing in more winnable seats, was the only way to break through.\textsuperscript{192}

**Salisbury Triumphant 1892-1895**

The election left Chamberlain in an unusual position. Although the Party which he led in the Commons was considerably reduced and would no longer have the influence it had had in the previous session, his own influence over that Party was greater than ever. As he had managed to increase the majorities of the six Liberal Unionist seats in Birmingham, and the four in neighbouring areas, the proportion of Radicals within the Liberal Unionist Party had consequently increased. Balfour was clearly impressed, writing to him 'You do know how to manage things in Birmingham. I never saw such smashing results.'\textsuperscript{193} He now felt that he could justify a call for a more creative brand of Unionism, as the influence of the moderates fell away. As Punch's 'Toby MP', Henry Lucy, commented in his 'Diary of the Salisbury Government',

> Mr Chamberlain's personality is so strong, his ability so conspicuous and his generalship so brilliant, that his influence accumulates though his

\textsuperscript{192} E. Le Riche, 'The Lessons of the Elections', *Liberal Unionist* 80, September 1892.

\textsuperscript{193} Quoted in Judd, *Radical Joe*, p.171.
party decays.\textsuperscript{194}

Chamberlain briefly resurrected the possibility of fusion between the two parties with Balfour,\textsuperscript{195} but when Salisbury rebuffed that approach, in November 1892 Chamberlain published an article in the \textit{Nineteenth Century}. In ‘The Labour Question’ he explained that the achievement of political representation by the Labour Left in the General Election required some response from Unionism to prevent the development of class based politics.\textsuperscript{196} As he put it in a letter to Balfour shortly afterwards, ‘The movement for ‘social' legislation is in the air and it is our business to guide it.’\textsuperscript{197}

Chamberlain stepped up his attempts to persuade his Party and the Tories to accept a programme of social reform, writing to James, ‘our Unionist programme of the last 5 years is nearly exhausted and we must have a new one for our fellows to talk about. If we attempt to win on a policy of negation, the fate of the moderates on the LCC will be ours.’\textsuperscript{198} He appeared to have the support of John Boraston, secretary of the LUA, in this, for the initial edition of \textit{Liberal Unionist Association Memoranda}, in January 1893, printed a detailed list of Chamberlain’s suggestions, and claimed that ‘the Gladstonian Party has foregone its opportunity of dealing with this and kindred problems by staking its future on the issue of Home Rule.’\textsuperscript{199} He also had Powell Williams make a suggestion for meeting some of the costs of this programme in February's

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{194} Quoted in Garvin, \textit{The Life of Joseph Chamberlain Vol. 2}, p.529.
\textsuperscript{195} Balfour to Salisbury, 24 July 1892, copy, BP, Add. MSS. 49690.
\textsuperscript{197} Chamberlain to Balfour, 3 December 1892, quoted in Steele, \textit{Lord Salisbury}, p.279.
\textsuperscript{198} Chamberlain to James, 2 October 1892, M45/1718.
\textsuperscript{199} ‘Mr Chamberlain on the Labour Question.’ \textit{LUAM}, 1:1, 1, January 1893.
\end{flushright}
At first the reaction from the Conservatives was luke-warm. Although Balfour expressed his sympathy in a speech at Sheffield in December 1892, he noted that ‘...in this matter of social legislation, the beginning of wisdom is to recognise the enormous difficulty and complexity of the problems with which you have to deal.’\textsuperscript{201} The first attempt to convert the Unionist alliance to a programme of social reform was, however, obscured by the introduction of the second Home Rule Bill. Although it brought the two wings of the Alliance closer, it also sowed the seeds for the most dangerous dissension of all. Chamberlain, whose combative nature and electoral credibility made him the ideal figure on the opposition benches to lead the fight against the Bill, bore the abuse of former colleagues and on one occasion, the physical threats of the Irish Nationalist Party. He was, therefore, championed as a national leader, for the first time in his career.

When the history of this momentous controversy comes to be written and it falls to the historian to record the names of those English statesmen who stood in the breach and beat off the attack, to no one will he assign a larger share in the victory than to Mr Chamberlain. Nor we venture to affirm will he rank any of this great orator’s services higher than those which he has rendered to the national Imperial cause since the present session began.\textsuperscript{202}

Chamberlain’s position on the issue of social reform became difficult, however, once the Lords had thrown out the second Home Rule Bill and Rosebery had

\textsuperscript{200} ‘Taxation of Ground Rents’, \textit{LUAM}, 1:2, February 1893.
\textsuperscript{201} Balfour’s speech at Sheffield, 13 December 1892, quoted in \textit{LUAM}, 1:1 January 1893.
\textsuperscript{202} \textit{Daily Telegraph}, 2 September 1893.
signalled a new direction for the Party with the introduction of an Employers’ Liability Bill in 1893, swiftly followed by the Mines Eight Hours Bill. Chamberlain firstly strove to distance his programme from that of the Liberals, accusing them of issuing ‘appeals to class prejudice.’ The Party newsletter publicly criticised the Liberals for blatantly chasing the votes of organised labour. ‘The truth is that the government is controlled by the leaders of the Trade Unions in this matter.’

He soon found that the Conservatives in the Lords were much more difficult to persuade than Balfour. In early 1894 Rosebery’s Employers’ Liability Act was thrown out by the upper house and Powell Williams warned Wolmer of the consequence ‘the effect of the loss of the Bill on the North is very bad indeed, and this is as well known to Sir Henry James as it is to me. This is not an opinion. I can give you proof’ and he warned of the ‘out rush of the latent feeling against the House of Lords which all who know great cities are aware exists…’ This warning was clearly taken seriously as new Party leaflets appeared in June 1894 with titles such as ‘Mr Chamberlain on the Employers Liability Bill’, ‘What the Lords did to the Parish Councils Bill’ and ‘What the Lords did to the Employers’ Liability Bill.’

The content of the programme was subtly altered, to encourage a more positive response from ‘Hotel Cecil.’ This was duly forthcoming for, when Balfour spoke to the Nonconformist Unionist Association later in June, he commented that,

---

203 Chamberlain at first meeting of the Midlands Liberal Unionist Association, 8 February 1894, quoted in LUAM, 2:3, March 1894.
204 LUAM, 1:11, November 1893.
205 Powell Williams to Wolmer, 4 March 1894, Selborne MS II (13) 140-143.
‘what we have to look to undoubtedly are experiments made by the state for the amelioration of those members of the community who may need assistance.’

Encouraged, Chamberlain continued to champion his programme, but by autumn it had been further watered down, perhaps due to the on-going silence from Hatfield. In September, he spoke to the Liverpool Working Men’s Association and only emphasised pensions from his Bradford speech, choosing to add proposals for ‘…shorter hours for shopkeepers and the restriction of alien immigration.’ He did stress that the Conservatives needed to be seen to favour reform, as an election seemed increasingly imminent. ‘After all, social reform is not necessarily the monopoly of either party.’ He also stressed the response he had had from Balfour. ‘…I have found the leaders of the Conservative Party as ready to work with me…as I have found the Liberal leaders.’ He then went on to highlight a case where he believed the Conservatives had exceeded Gladstone’s willingness to reform, that of free education. Meanwhile, when he spoke to the Liverpool LUA, he made sure that the bulk of his speech praised the Conservatives. ‘I do not believe that there is one man among us at the present time who feels he did not do well in joining the Conservatives…’

By the time he spoke to his constituents in West Birmingham, the content of the programme had altered again. As well as an extension to the Artisans’ Dwellings Act, a House Purchase Act, Employers’ Liability and Alien Immigration, there was now added a desire to enact temperance reform and a tribunal of industrial arbitration. In his on-going attempt to win Salisbury’s approval, the restriction of labour hours was explicitly limited to miners and

---

206 Balfour at NUA, 21 June 1894, quoted in LUAM, 2:7, July 1894.
207 LUAM, 2:10, October 1894.
208 Chamberlain at Liverpool, 6 September, quoted in ibid.
shopkeepers (therefore excluding domestic servants and agricultural labourers as Salisbury and his Party wanted). As for old age pensions, Chamberlain now stated that ‘I do not propose to give everyone a pension as a matter of right; I propose to help the working classes to help themselves.’

The first response from Hatfield was eventually made public in a speech at Edinburgh at the end of October. Salisbury admitted that he had ‘the greatest sympathy’ for Chamberlain’s ‘general objectives’ but appeared to have been turning a deaf ear for the past five months, as he claimed that ‘I do not know precisely the nature of the proposals which he [Chamberlain] recommends. In these matters everything depends upon details.’ Despite his lack of knowledge, Salisbury did manage to state that ‘I am satisfied that there is no taint of confiscation in anything he has proposed.’ Clearly, Chamberlain’s chameleon-like attempts to find a programme acceptable to all Unionists had been noted and Salisbury was making it plain to Chamberlain where the line had to be drawn.

Chamberlain was clearly frustrated by this response, and began to attempt to use James as a conduit to influence the Duke (and thereby, Chamberlain no doubt hoped, Salisbury himself):

> In my opinion a Unionist government should, from the outset, declare its settled intention to...devote itself entirely to the study and prosecution of social legislation. Unfortunately the Conservative Party is weak in constructive statesmanship, but the Govt., must contain men capable of

---

209 Chamberlain speaking to the W. Birmingham Liberal Unionist Association, 11 October 1894, quoted in *LUAM* 2:11, November 1894.
210 *LUAM* 2:11, November 1894.
211 This did not prevent a Liberal Unionist leaflet appearing shortly before the election entitled ‘Social Reform – Mr Chamberlain’s Programme. Lord Salisbury approves.’
giving practical application to the principles on which such legislation is to be based.\textsuperscript{212}

It seems fairly clear where the weakness lay, in Chamberlain’s view. By contrast, Balfour appeared ever more eager to endorse Chamberlain’s proposals whole-heartedly, even stating in November that ‘I think we are likely to have a monopoly of [social] legislation.’\textsuperscript{213}

Perhaps buoyed by this, Chamberlain suddenly ceased his caution, perhaps realising that he would never win over Salisbury and began to make a number of wild promises to the electorate. Speaking at Heywood in Lancashire later that month, he made the choice for working class voters clear.

You may as I have said, try to disestablish the Welsh church, or you may, on the other hand, try to become the owners of your own houses. You may attempt to pass an Irish Land Bill, or you may attempt to get old age pensions for yourselves.\textsuperscript{214}

Of course, this may be seen as a commitment to pensions in principle, not to state provided pensions funded by taxation. He chose, however to make his view explicit, speaking at Birmingham in December on the issue of friendly societies. While he encouraged individuals to take up the pensions provided by the societies, he added that ‘it is the duty of the state to encourage by all reasonable means, \textit{including assistance from the public funds}, a better provision for old age.’\textsuperscript{215} Powell Williams began to organise a campaign of

\textsuperscript{212} Chamberlain to James, 11 December 1894, M45/1744.
\textsuperscript{213} Balfour at Newcastle, 13 November 1894, quoted in \textit{LUAM}, 2:12, December 1894.
\textsuperscript{214} Chamberlain at Heywood, 22 November 1894, quoted in ibid.
\textsuperscript{215} Chamberlain in Birmingham, 6 December 1894, quoted in \textit{LUAM}, 3:1, January 1895 (my italics). This was accompanied by an article in the January 1895 edition of the \textit{National Review}. 
support among the more radical Associations, writing to the WSLUA chief
organising agent, W. L. Blench, in December asking him to organise
'undenominational' lectures 'to exhort Mr Chamberlain's social programme to
the people.'\textsuperscript{216} Balfour continued to encourage Chamberlain's campaign,
speaking in January 1895 at Manchester. After the support for the Union, the
second ideal of the Unionist Alliance was, he said, 'a desire to use the collective
forces of the community to ameliorate any legitimate grievance and to put
society upon a fairer and more solid basis' and to the end he was prepared to
support 'social legislation.'\textsuperscript{217} Emboldened by this, Chamberlain became even
more open in his programme, even referring to social issues as 'the primary
policy' in his response to the Queen's speech in the Commons in February.\textsuperscript{218}

Although the problems within the Compact have been described by myself in
the cases of the 1892 East Worcestershire and the 1895 Leamington Spa
candidature crises, the case of Hythe is less well-known. The dispute did have
longer antecedents, but these appear to have been ignored by the leadership.
Sir Edward Watkin, MP for Hythe, was seriously ill in 1894 and looked unlikely
to stand again, yet the relationship between the two wings of the Unionist Party
appeared to have broken down and the national parties appeared to be more
openly at loggerheads as well. As in Leamington, the problem centred on
Watkin's exact party status. Watkin had been struck off the Liberal Unionist lists
by Hartington in 1890 when he had launched a stinging criticism of his business
rival, but fellow Liberal Unionist, Edward Heneage. Despite this, Hartington had
advised Wolmer 'it is no use opposing Watkin at Hythe as the people think he

\textsuperscript{216} WSLUA minute book II, 21 December 1894, NLS 10424/20.
\textsuperscript{217} Balfour in Manchester, 16 January 1895, quoted in \textit{LUAM}, 3: 2, February 1895.
\textsuperscript{218} Chamberlain in the Commons, 15 February 1895, quoted in \textit{LUAM}, 3:3, March 1895.
can ruin them by stopping the trams there.'\textsuperscript{219} Watkin was duly placed on the Liberal Unionist lists in 1892, but following his actions in supporting the Liberal against Heneage in the Grimsby by-election in 1893, his name was again removed. Boraston explained to Devonshire that Watkin's election address of 1886 'especially identifies himself with the policy of yourself, of Mr John Bright and of Mr Chamberlain. This indicates with sufficient clearness that he regarded himself as a Liberal Unionist.'\textsuperscript{220}

Devonshire immediately wrote to Chamberlain 'I think you ought if possible to see somebody about Hythe, where A. Douglas seems to have been acting in a very extraordinary manner...I have seen Salisbury who appears to have had a very inaccurate report from A. Douglas, and naturally does not like to interfere without consulting Balfour.'\textsuperscript{221} Chamberlain was approached by Lord Radnor who suggested that the issue should be settled by a meeting between Ridley for the Conservatives and Lubbock for the Liberal Unionists,\textsuperscript{222} but he was informed by the proposed Liberal Unionist candidate, Le Roy Lewis, that Akers-Douglas had advised the proposed Tory candidate, Edwards, to have nothing to do with such arbitration, and that the candidature should be regarded as his.\textsuperscript{223} The Times contributed a leader, in which it commented that 'it is not often that Mr Akers-Douglas makes a mistake, but it would certainly appear that he has done so.'\textsuperscript{224} Chamberlain was clearly concerned about the behaviour of the Conservative whip, as he now began to keep detailed notes of Akers-Douglas'...
role in the crisis.\textsuperscript{225}

With the concatenation of the Hythe and Leamington disputes, it seemed a genuine Unionist crisis was underway, and Boraston was keen to encourage Chamberlain's sense of grievance. He sent Chamberlain a letter from J H Cooke, Honorary Secretary of the Cheshire LUA:

I think it is right to tell you from all the information I have received in Cheshire, there is an intensely strong feeling as to the questions which have arisen at Hythe and Leamington. If the matter is not settled soon and in our favour you may rest assured that a good many Liberal Unionists will not stir one peg at the next General Election. Both seats have hitherto been held by Members who certainly have been recognised as Liberal Unionists.\textsuperscript{226}

Boraston continued to worry Chamberlain by telling him of the experience of T Ainge, Liberal Unionist agent in Barnstaple and Tavistock where the local Liberal Unionists were 'soured at the mutinous spirit that the Conservatives are showing.' Boraston concluded that 'I am quite sure that the feeling of irritation amongst the Liberal Unionists, evidenced in the letters of Messrs. Cooke and Ainge would, on enquiry, prove to be very wide-spread.'\textsuperscript{227} The dispute at Hythe dragged on, and \textit{The Times} noted that Lewis and Edwards were still both listed as candidates as late as 25 June\textsuperscript{228}, with Lewis once again requesting that a committee of arbitration should meet, in early July.\textsuperscript{229} The political spotlight

\textsuperscript{225}JC6/6/1E/13. Akers-Douglas’ behaviour at Hythe does not appear to have been censured, and in July 1895, Salisbury appointed him to the Cabinet as Commissioner of Works.

\textsuperscript{226}J .H. Cooke to Boraston, 25 March 1895, JC6/6/1F/17. See also letter to \textit{The Times}, 25 March 1895.

\textsuperscript{227}Boraston to Chamberlain, 26 March 1895, JC6/6/1F/18.

\textsuperscript{228}\textit{The Times}, 25 June 1895.

\textsuperscript{229}Letter to \textit{The Times}, dated 4 July 1895; \textit{The Times}, 5 July 1895. Lewis was ordered to withdraw his candidature once a Unionist cabinet had been formed. Bevan Edwards won the seat at the general election.
shifted, however, as the much more serious crisis emerged in April in
Leamington, but *Punch* was quick to spot the common problems that both
crises illustrated.\(^{230}\)

Officially, the Hythe and Leamington disputes were dismissed by the Party as
‘certain local difficulties’ exploited by ‘certain ill-advised persons calling
themselves Unionists’\(^{231}\), but, as was the case in Leamington, the attempt to
absorb the constituency into the Conservative penumbra appears to have
involved the active encouragement of the Party leaders, Middleton and Akers-
Douglas. Although Salisbury was similarly passive in Hythe as he was at
Leamington, his only involvement showed scant regard for the feelings of his
political allies.

Although it has not been fully recognised, the Tories of Central Birmingham also
took the opportunity to make trouble again, as they had done in 1889. Lord
Charles Beresford offered himself as a Conservative candidate, once Albert
Grey’s intention to stand down became public.\(^{232}\) Powell Williams’ letter to
Chamberlain on the issue makes a number of suggestive comments, which give
the impression that Albert Bright’s behaviour may have contributed to the
problem:

> On the Birmingham candidature issue – I wish all Birmingham Tories
> were in Sheol!

> How came John Bright to have such a son?

> Middleton - like the rest – ignores the extreme difficulty we should have

\(^{230}\) ‘Quousque Tandem? Or one at a time’, *Punch*, 6 April 1895.
\(^{231}\) *LUAM*, 3:5, May 1895.
\(^{232}\) *The Times*, 4 July 1895; 12 July 1895.
with our men if they were asked to yield to a Tory claim. He only looks at his own side.\textsuperscript{233}

Powell Williams was in no doubt that the crisis was of Middleton’s doing, but given the weakness of Bright, all Powell Williams could suggest was that Bright should fight the general election and then resign. Vince, secretary of the Midland Liberal Unionist Association, reported to Chamberlain that Middleton took a keen interest in the affairs of Birmingham. According to Moore Bayley, described by \textit{The Times} as 'the mouthpiece of the malcontent Conservatives', 'Mr Middleton had the best of sources [about Birmingham matters] and thoroughly understood the situation.'\textsuperscript{234} As I have previously suggested was the case in Leamington, the action of the local Conservative Association of Central Birmingham in voting to adopt Beresford as their candidate on 10 July was such an act of defiance that it is difficult not to see Middleton as the figure offering encouragement to the rebels.\textsuperscript{235} In the end, a compromise Liberal Unionist candidate, Ebenezer Parkes, was selected, to demonstrate Chamberlain's willingness to meet the Conservatives' concerns about the proposed candidate, Grosvenor Lee.\textsuperscript{236} Beresford was forced to withdraw his candidature after he came under pressure from Salisbury, who was once again forced to intervene to undo his chief agent's mischief, or as \textit{The Times} leader put it diplomatically, 'local misrepresentation'.\textsuperscript{237}

Having realised that he was in no position to make political demands after the Leamington debacle, Chamberlain was finally faced with an opportunity to

\textsuperscript{233} Powell Williams to Chamberlain, 2 June 1895, JC6/2/7/10.
\textsuperscript{234} \textit{The Times}, 4 July 1895; Vince to Chamberlain, 8 June 1895, JC6/2/7/12.
\textsuperscript{235} \textit{The Times}, 12 July 1895.
\textsuperscript{236} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{237} \textit{The Times}, 13 July 1895.
distance himself from his own social reform programme when it received the support of Mrs Fawcett, who spoke at a meeting of the Metropolitan Liberal Unionist Federation in May and who proposed a motion urging the Party leadership 'to press forward measures of social reform.'\textsuperscript{238} By this time, however, Chamberlain had been chastened by his treatment by the Conservative press and in his speech clearly demonstrated the ideological switch that he had been forced to undertake in order to satisfy Conservative concerns. He failed to respond to Mrs Fawcett's invitation and instead spoke of his priorities as 'the expansion of the Empire', and 'the burden of a great governing race.'\textsuperscript{239} On the same day, Salisbury spoke at Bradford, making it clear that 'nothing would induce me to adopt the socialistic [sic] remedies', but he acknowledged, 'there is an evil.'\textsuperscript{240}

His confidence perhaps renewed by this support, and with the pointed demand from his West Birmingham Association that he should persevere with ‘the battle for progress and reform’ in mind, Chamberlain did emphasise the attention that would be paid to his reform programme.\textsuperscript{241} When he issued his personal manifesto, he claimed that 'Unionist leaders are absolutely agreed in their determination...to devote their principal attention to a policy of constructive social reform,' although he no longer enunciated specific policies.\textsuperscript{242} Chamberlain may also have felt the need to offer some detail in the face of attacks, such as the Liberal pamphlet, 'A Farce and a fraud' which cited the

\textsuperscript{238} \textit{LUAM}, 3:6, June 1895.  
\textsuperscript{239} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{240} Salisbury at Bradford, 22 May 1895, quoted in ibid.  
\textsuperscript{241} Divisional Council Meeting, 5 July 1895, West Birmingham LUA, Smethwick Archives, NRA 4755.  
\textsuperscript{242} Chamberlain's manifesto, quoted in \textit{LUAM}, 3:8, August 1895.
example of George Pitt Lewis, former Liberal Unionist MP for Barnstaple, one of the earliest members of the Liberal Unionist Committee in 1886. Pitt Lewis had rejoined the Liberals 'because he declines any longer to be “a hewer of wood and a drawer of water for the Tory Party.”' It went on to quote Sir Thomas Bazley, former president of the Cirencester Liberal Unionist Association, who had resigned on the grounds that ‘“the original intention of Liberal Unionism appears to be lost sight of by its leaders...My contributions...will not be continued in support of a Liberal Unionism which is fact becoming a synonym for Toryism”'\(^\text{243}\)

I have previously described how the Leamington dispute arose on the announcement of the retirement of the Speaker, Arthur Peel, in March 1895. The choice of the new Speaker, however, also illustrated the limits of the alliance, as the prospect of office drew near. Leonard Courtney was encouraged to stand for the Speakership by William Harcourt, but was forced to turn it down. As he told his wife ‘there was every prospect, indeed a certainty of unified Conservative opposition.’\(^\text{244}\) To her he admitted that ‘my putative friends (the Duke, Chamberlain, Balfour) are more or less against.’\(^\text{245}\) The Times criticised Courtney’s independence and it became clear that many Liberal Unionists were acting, as Kate Courtney put it, ‘as Tory jackals.’\(^\text{246}\) Courtney had every reason to feel aggrieved. Having put aside his radical agenda for the sake of defeating Home Rule, as demonstrated by his speeches such as that at Glasgow on 24 September 1894, he may have felt he had earned some more favourable

\(^{244}\) L. Courtney to K. Courtney, 16 March 1895, VI/11. Lewis Harcourt noted that ‘the Tories are very hostile to Courtney.’ Harcourt’s journal, 11 March 1895, Jackson (ed.), Loulou, p.254.
\(^{245}\) L. Courtney to M Courtney, 14 March 1895, VI/8.
\(^{246}\) Kate Courtney’s diary, 15 March 1895, Courtney Papers XXVII.
treatment.

Beatrice Webb had little doubt as to who was responsible:

A mean and discreditable intrigue of Chamberlain's who has had an animus against him ever since I can remember – first because Leonard was too much of a Whig, then because he retained too much of the Radical. Most likely, however, it has been all through a personal animus dating from Leonard's refusal fifteen years ago to enrol himself as Chamberlain's follower.247

Unusually, this action roused Boraston to write a private letter to Kate Courtney, in which he declared himself 'very much disappointed and not a little disgusted' by the treatment of her husband. He described the opposition to Courtney's bid as 'stupid…and petty…' and described himself as 'very angry.'248 T.B. Bolitho, Courtney's fellow Cornish Liberal Unionist, wrote to Anstruther demanding an explanation and threatening to denounce the Liberal Unionist leadership if it was shown that they had undermined his attempt.249 In most cases, however, Courtney received support from Liberal Unionist MP's wives, rather than from the members themselves.250 Both Courtney and Bolitho considered resigning their seats, though in the end, both contested and won them as 'independent Liberal Unionists.'251

It is important to understand that the creation of the coalition government of 1895 was, ironically, encouraged by the 'friction' that had arisen. Devonshire,

---

248 J. Boraston to K Courtney, marked 'private', 18 March 1895, VI/13.
249 T. B. Bolitho to L. Courtney, 20 March 1895, VI/16.
250 L. Courtney to M. Coutney, 23 March 1895, VI/20.
251 T. B. Bolitho to K. Courtney, 14 April 1895. VI/34.
speaking at the annual banquet of the National Union of Conservative and Constitutional Associations in June 1895, rather than ignoring the recent problems, advised his Conservative audience that ‘I do not know...whether it would be wise that we should forget them.’ Warming to his theme, he continued, ‘where there is smoke, there is generally fire and even if that small smoke had not made itself manifest, a very small amount of reflection and consideration would convince any sensible men that an alliance such as that has existed for nine years between the Conservative and Unionist parties, there are elements of difficulty which might have become elements of weakness or even of danger.’ He concluded that, the only way to finally resolve disputes was to make the common cause of the Unionists explicit through a government composed of Liberal and Conservatives. Chamberlain, speaking after the Duke, was remarkably (if understandably) restrained and, instead of enunciating a programme of reform, blandly spoke of his hopes for ‘constructive legislation.’

Of course, he was in no position to go as far as to suggest that there ought to be a fusion of the two parties as a result of the formation of the Unionist government. The Party immediately began to debate the issue, though, with two articles under the title, ‘Alliance or Fusion’ appearing in June’s Nineteenth Century, with St. Loe Strachey supporting a separate identity for the Party and Edward Dicey arguing in favour of merger. Strachey’s argument that the continued existence of the Party ensured that, even with the defeat of Home Rule legislation, the continued commitment of the government to the union was recognised, and simply to coalesce would be to risk the votes of Liberals, who

---

252 Devonshire, 14 June 1895, quoted in LUAM, 3:7, July 1895
253 Ibid.
could not, through long tradition, bring themselves to vote for a Conservative
candidate. By contrast Dicey’s criticism was that the division between the
parties had 'become a distinction without a difference.'

The allocation of offices in the Unionist coalition made Salisbury’s power clear.
While Chamberlain was free to choose the Colonial Secretaryship and
Devonshire was satisfied with the Lord Presidency as it would not interfere with
his time at Newmarket, Sir Henry James was treated in a fairly dismissive
fashion. Having already been overlooked in December 1890 for the post of Lord
of Appeal, Salisbury attempted to fob James off with a judicial post, until he was
eventually granted the Chancellorship of the Duchy of Lancaster at the behest
of Chamberlain and Salisbury.

With the election over, Salisbury made it clear that not only would the 'evil' he
had spoke of not be eagerly confronted under his premiership, but also that the
priorities of government, stated by Chamberlain, were shared by himself. The
Queen’s Speech of August 1895 contained no mention of domestic reform at all,
and he did nothing to prevent an amendment to the speech asking for measure
to address unemployment to be defeated by 211 to seventy-nine. Speaking at
Brighton in November, he suggested that ‘our legislation should be careful and
tentative...however much you may desire to benefit your neighbour, do not
benefit him by taking money out of the pockets of another man.’ Five months
after Chamberlain’s manifesto, he stated that ‘the sufferings under which

254. 'Alliance or Fusion', Nineteenth Century, 37 (June 1895).
255. Jackson, The Last of the Whigs, pp. 95-6; Marsh, Joseph Chamberlain, p.359. L. Harcourt’s
journal, 30 June 1895, quoted in Jackson (ed.) Loulou, p.264.
agriculture is groaning are the first evils to which we must apply ourselves.\textsuperscript{256} It is difficult to dissent from David Steele’s conclusion that unlike Gladstone, Salisbury had now ‘tamed’ Chamberlain.\textsuperscript{257} Chamberlain at the Colonial Office, was no longer the Liberal Unionist spokesman on this issue and it was left to an equally quiescent Devonshire, as Lord President, to attend a conference on the Poor Law at Derby in September, where he stated that ‘anything which may be proposed in [the direction of state-aided insurance]...must be of an extremely tentative character...We must make up our minds to the fact that for a long time to come a great proportion of even the industrious aged poor must be dependent for their support ...from the Poor Law.’\textsuperscript{258} When attacked by Rosebery for explaining away promises made by the Unionists at the election, Devonshire responded in Leeds in October that the government was receptive to the principle of reform but was committed to a policy of ‘prudence, caution and moderation’ as laid down by the Conservative leadership.\textsuperscript{259}

From a Conservative perspective, John Bridges encapsulated the cultural differences that prevented the Unionist alliance from being any more than a parliamentary electoral arrangement:

I think that the explanation was that the manners and customs of the two ‘wings’ were too different for any amalgamation to be possible, however desirable. Our ways were not often their ways. Smoking concerts, for instance, which we found so serviceable, were, I feel sure, an abomination to the Liberal Unionists. I have seen a few of them there, but

\textsuperscript{256} Salisbury at Brighton, 19 November 1895, quoted in LUAM, 3:12, December 1895.
\textsuperscript{257} Steele, Lord Salisbury, p. 374.
\textsuperscript{258} Devonshire at Derby, 18 September 1895, quoted in LUAM, 3:10, October 1895.
\textsuperscript{259} Devonshire at Leeds Liberal Unionist Federation, 30 October 1895, quoted in LUAM, 3:12, December 1895.
if not always like skeletons at the feast, they never seemed comfortable. They gave the idea of condescending to what they considered a regrettable waste of their valuable time. We, on the other hand, thought their political tea parties, attended by those we did not know, and perhaps had never heard of, and their wives and daughters (who would have laughed to scorn the idea of developing into political personages like our Primrose dames) jejeune affairs. It appears there is something in the professing of Liberal politics that makes a man averse to joviality; or rather perhaps, people of a saturnine or melancholy complexion are irresistibly drawn towards Liberalism; and certainly all work and no play makes Jack an exceedingly dull boy.²⁶⁰

As Rohan McWilliam has described, ‘bloody-minded, tub-thumping, beer barrel jingoism…characterised Toryism in later Victorian years.’²⁶¹ The principled Liberal Unionists, with their disdain for the politics of the public house and the street corner, were naturally uncomfortable with this culture of aggressive nationalism, as they were with the honest vulgarity of the Primrose League’s concert parties. Gregory Phillips noted in his study of the Liberal Unionist peers that ‘contrary to received opinion, the Whigs did not sink gratefully and immediately into the Tory embrace.’²⁶² Some more radical policies, such as temperance, non-denominational education, increased collectivisation, further franchise reform (including the enfranchisement of women) and disestablishment continued to divide the Liberal Unionists as they had done ‘the party of 1885.’ Of course, these policies posed a particular threat to the party of the Church, the farmer and the businessman - the Conservatives - and were, as

²⁶¹ McWilliam, Popular Politics, p. 90.
a result, a significant stumbling block in the Unionist Alliance. What emerged instead, was a commitment to the rule of law and the defence of the historic mission of the British Empire. These issues were used to disguise the divisions within the alliance, but in 1895 Chamberlain learnt just how flimsy this disguise was. It was, therefore, a political decision on his part, to use the imperial mission between 1895 and 1903 to bring a genuine affinity to the two wings of unionism. Some Radicals and committed Liberals refused to go along with this and grumbled, resigned or returned to the Liberal Party, but Chamberlain no longer needed the Liberal Unionists as much as he needed to prove his acceptability to the Tories.
Chapter 3: Party Organisation – Cave or Caucus?

Initial Reluctance 1886-1889

On 5 May 1886, the general committee of the NLF met at Westminster Palace Hotel in London and voted its confidence in Gladstone by an overwhelming majority. All the dissentient Liberal promptly resigned.\(^1\) The *Annual Register* recorded that most local Liberal Associations were more strongly in favour of Gladstone’s policy than the members who had been returned a few months earlier. As Cooke and Vincent noted, caustically, Chamberlain ‘wanted not less than everything and ended up with Birmingham.’\(^2\) Kate Courtney noted that ‘Chamberlain is completely worsted in his struggle with Mr Gladstone – hoist with his own petard with a vengeance.’\(^3\) The loss of the caucus (outside Birmingham) was a severe blow for the Unionists’ prospects, but for many of the dissentient MPs it was almost a relief to free of its pressure and demands, as was made clear by the attitudes expressed at Chamberlain’s meeting on 12 May.\(^4\)

As a result of this ambivalent attitude, extra-parliamentary organisation was limited among the Liberal Unionists in 1886. The public meeting at the Westminster Palace Hotel on 22 May 1886 formerly created the Liberal Union, the prime purposes of which were, according to Hartington, to counter the

---

\(^1\) *Daily News*, 6 May 1886.
\(^3\) Kate Courtney’s diary, 10 May 1886, CP XXII.
\(^4\) *The Times*, 13 May 1886.
pressure of the caucuses to support the Government of Ireland Bill's second reading and to prepare to contest the general election that would probably follow the bill's defeat. Goschen explained that local committees of the Liberal Union had already been formed in Glasgow, Nottingham, Liverpool, Derby and elsewhere and that others should now be established, for the purpose of publishing and circulating literature and raising funds. A general committee of fifty-eight was then appointed, including nineteen MPs and thirteen peers.\(^5\) A Metropolitan Committee was formed to organise the Party's London campaign, led by Lubbock, and a finance committee of six of the wealthiest Liberal Unionists was created.\(^6\)

Milner and Goschen decided that, in the circumstances, a strict division of activity would be the best action, revealing just how divided the Liberal Unionists were. Scotland and Ireland were left to deal with their own affairs (and Wales was left to individual candidates).\(^7\) England's constituencies were parcelled up between the two branches of the Liberal Unionists. 'I think the Radicals ought to do the Midlands, but in the East and South West, you would be more effective', Milner informed Goschen.\(^8\) In this way, the candidates in each region were forced to rely on one or other organisation, becoming beholden to one of two very different leaders.

Despite having been forced into a closer embrace with Hartington than was

---


\(^7\) F. W. Maude to J. Parker Smith, 6 May 1886, TD1/346.

\(^8\) Milner to Goschen, 3 July 1886, Milner MS 6.
politically advisable for a Radical leader, Chamberlain now chose to organise an alternative force to that of the Liberal Unionist Association. He wrote to his brother the day after the defeat of the Home Rule Bill suggesting a ‘National Radical Union. W S Caine – W. Kenrick will be vice-presidents. We should ask every one of the 46 Radical MPs who were in the Division last night to be a V.P.\(^9\) Within ten days, the first meeting of the National Radical Union was held, unsurprisingly, in Birmingham. Such was Chamberlain’s haste to put distance between himself and Hartington that he had not waited to secure the consent of the forty-six Radicals he had asked Arthur to contact. Even the *Birmingham Daily Post* had to admit that ‘the room was but partially filled’ and when the vice-presidential posts to support Chamberlain’s presidency were announced, only twelve MPs were named (and eight of these sent apologies!).\(^10\)

In fact, twelve of Arthur Chamberlain’s list of forty-six Radicals had already joined the Liberal Unionist Committee. Eventually seventeen MPs put their names to the organisation.\(^11\) Unlike the other Liberal Unionist organisations, the NRU refused all assistance from their Conservative Unionist allies, largely because they were not needed, as the Liberals had chosen not to contest any of the Liberal Unionist seats in the city apart from that of Bordesley, for which Collings was standing.\(^12\) Chamberlain, by carefully presenting his opposition as being based on a few, illiberal elements of the bill and continuing to stress his

---

\(^10\) *Birmingham Daily Post*, 18 June 1886.
commitment to greater autonomy for Ireland, had even managed to recruit
Gladstonians to the Union, and all his supporters were convinced that the split
among the Radicals was only temporary and would be healed once the election
was over.

The *Birmingham Daily Post*, closely connected to Chamberlain, not only
supported Collings in Bordesley, but also the Gladstonian, W.T.G. Cook, in
Birmingham East, against the Conservative, Henry Matthews.\(^\text{13}\) In July 1887,
when *The Liberal Unionist* reviewed the Party’s organisation, it had to admit that
the National Radical Union had ‘hitherto acted as a separate, though friendly,
organisation.’\(^\text{14}\) Some MPs, caught between loyalty to Hartington and
admiration for Chamberlain, were faced with a dilemma as to which body to
affiliate to. Heneage in Grimsby felt as early as July 1886 that, in the light of the
slanders that the Liberal Association were spreading about him and the fact that
he was increasingly being made unwelcome in the Liberal Club, ‘it would be a
very good thing to form a branch [of the National Radical Union] in Grimsby’, but
he also considered that he ‘must write to Lord Hartington before I could become
a vice-president.’\(^\text{15}\)

Although considerable effort had been made in creating the Committee, many
believed that the organisation had served its purpose in defeating Home Rule.
As Chamberlain wrote to Heneage in July, ‘I expect...that after a year or so, the
Gladstonians will come to their senses.’\(^\text{16}\) The future Party whip, Lord Wolmer,
wrote a letter of commiseration to J. T. Brunner, who had lost his Northwich seat to a Liberal Unionist, in which he expressed that he was ‘awfully sorry to see you were beaten,’ and sighed ‘Oh! When and how will this split be healed!!’\(^\text{17}\)

Even Milner was uncommitted beyond the immediate future, and concurred with Goschen as to ‘the wisdom, nay the absolute necessity of keeping up the Liberal Unionist Party, for the time at least, as a separate organisation.’\(^\text{18}\)

However even as the Committee organised the defeat of the Home Rule Bill, Milner was unsure about its future.

   Somehow or other I am not easy about it [the Committee] and to say an arrogant thing, don't believe it has progressed so much in proportion of late days as it did during the first week. But of course, it is always easier to begin a thing than to keep a steady head of steam up afterwards\(^\text{19}\)

In the words of J. P. Grant, later honorary secretary of the East and North Scotland Association, 'it was not easy to overcome at once the apathy that succeeds a period of political turmoil.'\(^\text{20}\) This was, in part, caused by the retirement of a large number of those who voted against the second reading, either out of fear of rejection by their caucuses, or a reluctance to take any further part in the rebellion against their still much-admired leader.\(^\text{21}\) The immediate circumstances of the defeat of Home Rule at the polls still left the Party's future in doubt, as there was still the possibility of Gladstone's retirement and the subsequent re-union of the Liberals under a Unionist leader such as Chamberlain or Hartington.

\(^{18}\) Milner to Goschen 17 October 1886, Milner MS 18.
\(^{19}\) Milner to Goschen, 8 June 1886, Milner MS 183.
\(^{20}\) \textit{Liberal Unionist}, 36, 1 January 1889.
\(^{21}\) For an example see J. Ramsay to J. Parker Smith, 4 May 1886, TD1/346.
Examination of the Association record book reveals that Maude, Milner, Grey and Brand had no intention of allowing the new party to collapse and on 24 July the Committee was re-constituted as the Liberal Unionist Association (LUA). A circular was sent on 28 July to all the original members of the Association appealing for the names of prominent supporters and sympathetic newspapers in as many constituencies as could be identified.\(^{22}\) Gladstone’s refusal either to consider retirement or dropping his commitment to Home Rule meant that the party apparatus would now be needed indefinitely.

On 1 August 1886, the Liberal Unionist MPs met at Devonshire House and formally constituted the premises at 35 Spring Gardens as the offices of the Liberal Unionist Association, appointing Colonel H. M. Hozier as the first secretary. Hozier had already fulfilled this role during the election, as Bickersteth acknowledged in February 1888.\(^{23}\) Craig Sellar was appointed as Liberal Unionist whip.\(^{24}\) On 8 August, Chamberlain finally agreed to form some official connection with the rest of the Party and joined the Liberal Unionist Committee together with Caine, Collings and other Radicals.\(^{25}\) Only on 9 August was the die cast, when the NLF formally announced its commitment to Home Rule and the expulsion of members who refused to support this. The Association record book notes that ‘this proved the urgent necessity of organising the Liberal Unionist Party throughout the country.’\(^{26}\)

\(^{22}\) *Liberal Unionist Association: Origins and Progress*, AC 2/1/1.

\(^{23}\) ‘That at such short notice it [the LUA] was able to grapple with [the 1886 election] was mainly due to the invaluable work of Colonel Hozier.’ *Liberal Unionist*, 33, 1 October 1888.

\(^{24}\) Northbrook to Wolmer, 1 August 1886, Selborne MS II (13) 13-16.

\(^{25}\) *The Times*, 9 August 1886.

\(^{26}\) *Liberal Unionist Association: Origins and Progress*, AC 2/1/1.
The LUA swiftly began to establish regional branches of the association
(carefully avoiding the West Midlands), concentrating on Scotland, Lancashire and the North of England. Outside these areas of Liberal Unionist representation, the task of organising was largely left to MPs, as Northbrook revealed in his letter to Wolmer, isolated in Hampshire. Northbrook admitted that 'I hardly think we are strong enough to establish local organisations in each country division, but we should show a very respectable front for the whole county including the l[sle] of Wight.' He went on to suggest that a 'County Liberal Unionist Association' and to encourage membership by setting a 'a very low subscription, indeed a nominal one, say 5/0.' 27 There was no initial organisation of the main area of Liberal Unionism, Devon and Cornwall, and it was admitted that the organisation in Ireland was 'independent of England.' 28 There appeared to be limited enthusiasm for centralised organisation among the Party's leaders, as well, for, although invitations to a proposed Liberal Unionist national conference were sent to members in September, the Executive Committee did not actually meet until 3 November to fix the date for 7 December. The Executive Committee also fixed the subscription rate for membership of the central Association at the relatively high level of two guineas, although the Committee also suggested the creation of a lower level of supporter, the 'associate' who would be allowed to join 'without payment of any subscription.' 29 Although the Liberal Unionist claimed in July 1887 that over 200 constituencies now had Associations, it had to admit two years later that the Association had faced severe difficulties at this time, as 'the very success with which the danger had been averted tended to make the LUs over-confident; and

27 Northbrook to Wolmer, 1 August 1886, Selborne MS II (13) 13-16.
28 Liberal Unionist Association: Origins and Progress, AC 2/1/1.
29 Ibid.
when once the presence of the actual crisis was removed, the old indifference to party organisation and party machinery began to reassert itself. In this way, the traditional, moderate Liberal dislike of ‘wire-pulling’ was a major hindrance to the establishment of a third party in its earliest, most crucial years.

Perhaps as a consequence of this distaste for committee work and canvassing, Hozier, was given full responsibility for organising the first Liberal Unionist Conference. This public gathering of the Party’s leaders, was symptomatic of the out-dated approach that the Party took. Although the Liberal Unionist later claimed that ‘the names of the delegates present, made it evident that the Association was not only firmly established, but that it had a right to take its place amongst the chief political organisations in the country,’ in truth the series of speeches reported in newspapers and the subsequent banquet did little more than reassure the Party’s wealthy donors that it was a going concern and an alternative focus for social activity. Chamberlain failed to attend, and there is little or no evidence of the Conference making any impression in the provinces, outside the Unionist press.

Once Milner had departed to be Goschen’s private secretary at the Treasury and the parliamentary negotiations of 1887 were complete, the more committed Liberal Unionists, such as W.S. Caine, urged greater activity from Liberal Unionist leaders in the provinces. Speaking of the defeat of the Conservative candidate in Ilkeston in 1887, he wrote of the lack of effective organisation in the first issue of the Liberal Unionist, under the title ‘Organise – Educate!’

30 Liberal Unionist, 15, 6 July 1887; 'Liberal Unionist Work 2: The Liberal Unionist Association', Liberal Unionist, 33, October 1888.
31 Ibid.
We must, therefore, be prepared to offer a home to these Unionist refugees, if we do not wish to see them absorbed by Conservative associations or sink into indifference. To accomplish this, the Liberal Unionist Association must take a fresh departure. Hitherto, it has accomplished useful work in conserving Unionist force in Parliament and in a few constituencies, where Unionist principles are strong. Now, it must become an aggressive power, organising its adherents from John O’Groats House to Land’s End; and, having organised them, it must find them the materials and speakers to carry a steady and persistent propaganda…

If only five or six Liberal Unionists can be found in a constituency, that half-dozen should be organised into an association and encouraged to call a public meeting. They would quickly become 500 or 600.  

Those MPs who prided themselves on their commitment to liberal principles, such as Leonard Courtney, also urged greater action on Arthur Elliot, who was now emerging as one of the leading activists at 35 Spring Gardens.

The new development makes it all the more necessary for the L.U. to maintain their character, and the office in Spring Gardens ought to be strengthened. I have been pressing for a responsible man to be there all day and I am glad to find R. Grosvenor is strongly of this opinion. As you have been active there you may influence the division on this point. I have recommended a man [John Boraston], known to Hobhouse as well as to myself, who would be exceptionally good.  

---

32 Liberal Unionist, 1, 30 March 1887.
33 L. Courtney to A.R.D. Elliot, 5 January 1887, V/44.
It had already been noted that F.W. Maude, the Party's first secretary, was considered to be too obscure a figure for the initial recruitment drive to the Liberal Unionist committee. In Milner's eyes, he was simply too passive.

I hope you [Goschen] will do everything to impress the need of a bold policy on Maude and fearlessness about expenditure. He deserves praise and encouragement for he is most hard-working and whole-hearted, with very pleasant manners, a perfect temper and plenty of sense. But he does not quite feel how necessary it is that we should be restlessly aggressive if we want to win.34

Maude's lack of aggression and passion for the cause was clearly evident on the hustings, for he had failed to win at Sheffield Attercliffe at the General Election. Despite this, he maintained the position of party secretary, but proceeded to demonstrate an approach to party organisation that was congenial to the Liberal Unionist hierarchy but less effective in a new age of mass democracy. He was praised for his work in setting up the Liberal Union Club, to accommodate those expelled from the Eighty Club, but he showed little enthusiasm for the Party's work.35 The Association's failings were candidly reported by the *Liberal Unionist* in the aftermath of the failure at the St Austell by-election in May 1887, when it was noted that 'the Liberal Unionists were absolutely unorganised.' Caine, always keen to attack his moderate colleagues, commented that 'a good LU organisation would have given the Gladstonians a crushing defeat.'36

After several months of such criticism, Maude fell ill in summer 1887 and his

34 Milner to Goschen, 28 April 1886, Milner MS 183.
35 *Liberal Unionist*, 2, 6 April 1887.
36 *Liberal Unionist*, 9, 25 May 1887.
deputy, Colonel Oliver Duke took over his responsibilities in running the Liberal Unionist Club.\(^{37}\) The Party's lack of progress was clearly shown by the crushing defeat of Evelyn Ashley at Glasgow Bridgeton in August. Gell wrote to Milner complaining that 'Spring Gardens exists to let things slide.'\(^{38}\) Milner replied, agreeing that 'we want a chief of staff badly.'\(^{39}\) Maude then unexpectedly rejoined the Gladstonian Party in 1887 when coercion was introduced.\(^{40}\) Much to the Unionists’ embarrassment, he immediately appeared at a demonstration organised by the Liberal League, asserting that ‘the hour had arrived when every Radical Unionist and every Liberal Unionist who did not look forward with complacency to finding his final resting place in the slough of Toryism, should seek salvation by joining the Liberal Party.'\(^{41}\) Duke was appointed secretary in Maude’s place but did little more than oversee the Liberal Union Club’s gradual eclipse by the LUA. He eventually resigned in December 1890 to further his political ambitions by standing as a Liberal Unionist candidate.\(^{42}\) Duke was succeeded by the chairman of the Wigtonshire LUA, Sir Andrew Agnew, who was chiefly responsible for the launching of the Union Jack vans prior to the 1892 General Election. It was a mark of the diminishing status of the Club that when Agnew resigned in April 1892, ‘a young barrister’, Mr W. Miller, was thought sufficiently qualified to fill the role for the general election.\(^{43}\)

Despite Hozier’s achievements in 1886 and his continued work as he toured the

\(^{37}\) *Liberal Unionist*, 19, 3 August 1887.
\(^{38}\) Gell to Milner, 1 August 1887, Milner MS 4.
\(^{39}\) Milner to Gell, 3 August 1887, Milner MS 4.
\(^{40}\) *Liberal Unionist*, 20, September 1887.
\(^{41}\) *The Times*, 6 September 1887.
\(^{42}\) He stood for election as a Liberal Unionist in the three subsequent general elections (twice in Luton and once in Stirling Burghs) and once at a by-election (Luton in September 1892). He was defeated each time.
\(^{43}\) *Liberal Unionist*, 75, April 1892.
newly founded branch Associations in Liverpool, Manchester, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Dundee, Aberdeen, Darlington and Nottingham, Caine for one, soon came to believe he was not sufficiently committed to the post. In February 1887 he wrote to John Fell,

I am very anxious about our organisation. 35 Spring Gardens is not doing its work. Hozier is only there for ½ an hour a day, and although a very exceptional man, we want more than that. We have appointed at last an assistant secretary [Boraston], a smart gentlemanly fellow who was Courtney's agent; he will get to work next week I hope.\(^\text{44}\)

Although Courtney had an interest in the Party's organisation, as newly appointed Chairman of Committees at Westminster he did not have the time to commit to the task that Caine did. Behind Hozier's back, he set to work building a new team to replace Milner's

I have got a small organising committee formed at 35 S. G. consisting of Arthur Elliot, Hy Hobhouse, and myself, and as soon as our Asst. Sec. arrives, we will get to work as vigorously as possible.\(^\text{45}\)

Boraston duly met Caine's high expectations,\(^\text{46}\) and was referred to as 'zealous' in the review of the Association's first year,\(^\text{47}\) and he began plotting Hozier's removal. Caine made sure that news of Hozier's shortcomings reached Hartington's ears.\(^\text{48}\) In the meantime, as the work of co-ordinating the growing Association developed, Biddulph's office at Spring Gardens became unsuitable and the Party transferred its business to 31 Great George Street in Westminster

\(^{44}\) W. S. Caine to J. Fell, 4 February 1887, DD Fe/1.
\(^{45}\) Ibid.
\(^{46}\) Caine to Fell, 21 March, DDFe/1.
\(^{47}\) *Liberal Unionist* 15, 6 July 1887.
\(^{48}\) Hartington to James, 7 October 1887, M45/289.
on 29 September 1887.\textsuperscript{49} The Executive Committee also began to appoint paid
agents in constituencies where no voluntary body had yet been formed.\textsuperscript{50} The
introduction of the Crimes Bill and the crisis this provoked meant that many,
hitherto distant from practical organising, now urged a re-evaluation of the
Association's activity. J Boyd Kinnear, defeated candidate for East Fifeshire in
1886, criticised current activity as 'merely joining associations and celebrating
banquets' which was surely a criticism of Hozier’s tactics to date. He called
instead for canvassing, especially of the working classes, 'no hamlet should be
left unvisited, no workmen’s club without a lecture.' The duty of the Party’s
sponsors was made clear, 'those who have pecuniary means must pay the
necessary expenses.'\textsuperscript{51} Kinnear's criticism was echoed by Heneage, who
reported to Chamberlain the lack of strategic direction in the establishment of
the party organisation, 'I get spasmodic communications suggesting LUAs in
Tory or Separatist strongholds.'\textsuperscript{52} Richard Chamberlain, as the only Liberal
Unionist MP with a largely working class constituency in London, also dismissed
public meetings as valueless, preferring direct leafleting by canvassers. He
supported his brother on the subject matter of such leaflets, suggesting that the
Party officially advocate free libraries, technical education, labourers’ allotments,
and municipal, local and school board elections.\textsuperscript{53} Meanwhile, shaken by the
defection of those such as Trevelyan, Maude, Buchanan and Winterbotham, the
Party leaders responded and Hartington, Chamberlain, Selborne, James,
Courtney, Finlay and Elliot all addressed 'not far short of one hundred meetings'

\textsuperscript{49} Liberal Unionist 20, September 1887.
\textsuperscript{50} 'Liberal Unionist Work 2: The Liberal Unionist Association', Liberal Unionist, 33, October 1888.
\textsuperscript{51} J. Boyd-Kinnear, 'The Crisis of Liberal Unionism', Liberal Unionist, 21, October 1887.
\textsuperscript{52} Heneage to Chamberlain, 29 September 1887, JC5/41/3.
\textsuperscript{53} Liberal Unionist, 25, February 1888.
in the next month to challenge the view that the Party was ‘declining’, ‘dispirited’ and ‘practically extinct’.\(^\text{54}\)

**Increasing Professionalism 1889-1892**

Pressure was put on those reluctant to spend time away from their estates to participate in the Party's activities. Henry Hobhouse, the head of the literature department, had stepped up his efforts and the Party had 102 different leaflets available by the end of November.\(^\text{55}\) By the following year ‘the number of separate leaflets, apart from pamphlets, issued by the Association amount[ed] to 143, and that the number of copies distributed since the work commenced may literally be reckoned by millions.’\(^\text{56}\)

The literature department was assisted by the defection of a large proportion of the Liberal press. *The Times*’s conversion to the cause of Liberal Unionism was part of a wider revolt against Gladstone’s policy by the print media, which also played a role in maintaining the Party over such a long period. Although attempts to sustain new newspapers such as the *Liberal Unionist* and *Yr Undebwr Cymreig* and to re-launch the *Manchester Examiner*, the *York Herald* and the *Leeds Mercury* as Liberal Unionist titles all failed after initial optimism, much of the Liberal press followed Hartington and Chamberlain, including the *Daily Telegraph*, the *Daily Chronicle*, the *Graphic* and of course, the *Birmingham Daily Post*. St. Loe Strachey wrote leaders for the *Spectator*, while Arthur Elliot, MP twice for the Party, became editor of the *Edinburgh Review*

\(^{54}\) Ibid.
\(^{55}\) *Liberal Unionist*, 22, November 1887.
after 1895. In Scotland in particular, Charles Cooper, editor of the Scotsman and Charles Russell of the Glasgow Herald were vice-presidents of the WSLUA.

The limitations of Hozier’s ability as a political organiser were laid bare, when, despite Kinnear’s criticisms and the by-election defeats and defections of the past months, all he could suggest was that another conference ought to be organised, for, as Hartington put it, ‘considering how few we are and how impossible it is to stump all over the country, it may be as well to have one.’

The conference was held in December 1887, at which the Party organ was keen to present a positive picture, asserting that ‘a great many more than half the electoral divisions of Great Britain are provided with a [Liberal Unionist] organisation’ and going on to contrast the amateurism of the Party’s earlier years with the ‘disciplined and organised political party’ present at this event.

However, it took another six month to finally depose Hozier, while the LUA had expanded gradually, reaching 115 branches covering 257 constituencies by 1888. The Liberal Unionist acknowledged that it was an impossible task for anyone such as Hozier, ‘who was unable to devote his whole time to it.’

In February 1888 Courtney informed his wife:

Caine has just told me that Hozier has resigned, having capitulated before Caine’s attack. Caine hopes to follow up the blow by re-installing our friend [Boraston], perhaps not in exactly the same position but heading to the same or better in the end. Don’t say anything about this to anyone.

57 Hartington to James, 7 October 1887, M45/289.
58 Liberal Unionist, 24, January 1888.
59 Liberal Unionist, 33, 1 October 1888.
60 L. Courtney to Mrs Courtney n.d. (‘Monday night’ February 1888), V/56.
As it was, Caine was outmanoeuvred by the more moderate Executive Committee and Bickersteth, MP for Newport (North Shropshire), between 1885 and 1886 was appointed as the new secretary, with Boraston retained as his assistant. The plotters were given lesser rewards to secure their support. Caine became chairman of the Metropolitan Committee, comprising himself, Lubbock and Richard Chamberlain, which was made responsible for the Party’s organisation and activity in the capital with Boraston appointed as honorary secretary to this committee as well. When the new committee visited their offices at 74 Palace Chambers, Bridge Street, on 26 March 1888, they found the existing organisations ‘if not beyond benefit of clergy...at least in a condition of suspended animation.’ Formal weekly meetings were introduced and Caine quickly set to work establishing branch Associations in North East Bethnal Green, East Finsbury, Fulham, North Hackney, Haggerston and Enfield, Holborn, South Kensington, North and South Paddington, North East and West St Pancras and Tottenham in the space of six months. The attempt to reach working class voters was clearly Caine’s intention, as he held meetings in November at the Hammersmith Radical Club, the Woolwich Radical Club and the Walthamstow Working Men’s Institute. He recruited H. T. Anstruther and Leedham White to his Committee, and a substantial registration drive was also carried out; and ‘in the case of one division alone, claims have been put in on behalf of 115 Liberal Unionists.’

By autumn 1888, the Metropolitan Committee felt that ‘there is now in each

---

61 *Liberal Unionist*, 27, April 1888.
62 *Liberal Unionist*, 34, November 1888.
63 *Liberal Unionist*, 27, November 1888.
64 *Liberal Unionist*, 27, April 1888.
ward a compact body of Unionists whose influence must be reckoned with.\(^{65}\) It is clear from Boraston's history of the Committee, published in November 1888, that Caine modelled his tactics on those of the National Radical Union not the Association to which his Committee was subordinate.

At a time when the so-called ‘caucus’ system, originally established in Birmingham under the auspices of Mr Joseph Chamberlain, had spread through most of the principal boroughs in the provinces, and had even obtained a strong hold on the counties, London was practically without political organisation... Canvassing is the one essential which is at the very foundation of successful political organisation, and the whole of the operations of the London Committee are based upon a recognition of this principle. Two things are necessary to carry it into effect – a good canvasser and a copy of the register.\(^{66}\)

By April 1890, there were forty-four Associations in London, and Caine organised a meeting at the Westminster Palace Hotel on 25 April to form a Federation. Surprisingly, Hartington's deputy, Henry James was elected President.\(^{67}\)

With Caine now enjoying a position of even greater authority within the Party and Hartington promising that the Party could accommodate ‘the extremest [sic] Radical’, Chamberlain felt his interests were best served by drawing closer to Hartington. The National Radical Union was re-named the National Liberal Union in October 1888, demonstrating greater if not complete accord among the

\(^{65}\) *Liberal Unionist*, 32, September 1888.


\(^{67}\) *Liberal Unionist*, 52, May 1890.
Party leaders. As Powell Williams later explained,

'It soon became apparent that the term “radical” had its disadvantages when the object in view was to make an appeal to the Liberal Party generally. It has only a sectional not a general signification. All Radicals are Liberals, but not all Liberals are Radicals...for these reasons the name of the Union has recently been altered to that which it now bears, namely the ‘National Liberal Union.'

On the other hand, the Party at Great George Street was becoming concerned with the independence of the NLU. The National Liberal Union, recognised as a separate section of the Party’s organisation, was often in competition with the rest of the Party. It was, in contrast to the LUA, committed to more than just preserving the Union. As Powell Williams noted, ‘the attention of the new body was confined to one object only:...promoting a system of local government in England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales, and under the supreme authority of one parliament for the United Kingdom.’ In June 1889, it organised its own conferences of radical Unionists in Huddersfield, Newcastle and Plymouth. In April 1891, an even larger conference was held in Portsmouth attended by representatives from Hampshire, Berkshire, Dorset, Surrey, Sussex and Wiltshire, with Powell Williams presiding and Chamberlain the chief speaker. In those seats where there had been sympathy towards Chamberlain's brand of Liberalism before 1886, the Union sought to expand its interests, using the more professional methods as used in Birmingham. In Bradford, for example, a

---

68 J. Powell Williams, 'The Rise and Progress of the National Liberal Union' Liberal Unionist, 45, October 1889.
69 Liberal Unionist, 39, April 1889.
70 It was officially stated by Wolmer at the October 1889 meeting of the Liberal Unionist Council that 'the West Midland district...as under the special charge of the National Liberal Union of Birmingham.' Liberal Unionist, 46, November 1889.
71 Powell Williams, 'The Rise and Progress of the National Liberal Union', Liberal Unionist, 45, October 1889.
radical was appointed as agent very soon after the defeat of C. M. Norwood in Central Bradford in 1886. Registration work was undertaken independent of the Conservatives and a series of public lectures was held at times convenient to working men, and a debate organised with a prominent Gladstonian. Finally, the National Radical Union organised a conference in the city and appointed a general secretary to the Bradford Liberal Unionist Association, E. C. Baily, to take charge of initiating other Yorkshire Associations under the Radical, not Liberal, Unionist banner.  

In 1889, Hartington was forced to visit Birmingham to attempt to settle the areas of responsibility of the LUA and the NLU, after Chamberlain had refused to obey the summons to Chatsworth in October when there arose a dispute over who should represent the Liberal Unionist interest in Huddersfield. Hartington was clearly deeply offended by the quasi-independent actions of the NLU, writing a letter of unusual length (for him) in May 1890:

> We don't want to have anything to do with Mr Baily or the Birmingham crew. They raise no money and I do not believe that except in Birmingham and perhaps in the West of Scotland, they have any influence. But what can be done to satisfy Chamberlain? He attaches extraordinary importance to this National Liberal Union. I know that in one or two places where he went last year he suggested to the local Liberal Unionist Association that they should affiliate themselves to the NLU and when after some correspondent points out the difficulties I saw him and talked it over with him at Birmingham I altogether failed to make

72 'Liberal Unionist Work 12: Bradford', Liberal Unionist, 46, November 1889.
73 Hartington to Wolmer, 31 October 1889, Selborne MS II (4) 47-48; Hartington to Wolmer, 2 November 1889, Selborne MS II (4) 50-51
an impression on him. Now, as you see he has been at Wolmer again about it.\textsuperscript{74}

The rift in party organisation was not even healed when Chamberlain became Party leader in the Commons in February 1892. While Chamberlain was appointed as vice-chair of the Organising Council, the National Liberal Union remained an entirely separate body and Chamberlain made no attempt to amalgamate it to the LUA.\textsuperscript{75} Only in 1894, when Chamberlain tried for a second time to convert the Party to the cause of social reform, did he re-organise the NLU in the Midlands. Now, the NLU was refounded as the Midland Liberal Unionist Association. It was claimed at this meeting that the total membership of the association outside Birmingham was 21,707, approximately 10\% of the electorate. In Birmingham the proportion was even higher with 13.75\% of the electorate belonging to the group. The Association proudly claimed that ‘no friction between the Conservative and Liberal Unionist organisations had resulted’ in the previous eight years, a claim that was neither historically accurate, in light of the Birmingham Central and East Worcestershire disputes, nor far-sighted, considering the storm cloud that lay in wait over Leamington.\textsuperscript{76}

The Midland LUA remained, however entirely free from Boraston’s control. The Yorkshire Liberal Unionist Federation, meanwhile became even more of a mouthpiece for Chamberlain’s policy statements. In September 1894, a motion was passed calling on the Party ‘to devote attention to measures calculated to improve the relationship between employers and employed, to protect the thrifty labourer from destitute old age and to give effective agricultural education in rural schools, and generally to better the condition of the working classes in

\textsuperscript{74} Hartington to James, 28 May 1890, M45/407.
\textsuperscript{75} \textit{Liberal Unionist}, 74, March 1892.
\textsuperscript{76} \textit{LUAM} 2:3, March 1894.
Meetings and conferences continued to be held under the title of National Liberal Unionist until at least 1898, when a conference was held in Manchester, and Chamberlain re-animated, the debate on Old Age pensions, promising that 'we may be able to do something...before this Government goes out of office.'

The attempts which Caine had made to reach out to a wider audience were now copied elsewhere. In London, Edward Bruce Low organised conversaziones to appeal to 'friends of members and ladies.' Although political speeches took place, these were limited and, 'lest the succession of speeches should become tiresome, the ladies were invited between each speech to contribute their share by supplying music and singing' and as a consequence, numbers attending rose from 180 to over 400. Boraston agreed with this approach, noting that any initial meetings of provisional committees 'prove more successful in every way when something of a social character is given to them and the experiment of introducing coffee and cigarettes has on many occasions operated very happily to remove that feeling of restraint or diffidence which so often robs meetings of much of their practical value.' The Metropolitan Committee, of which he was honorary secretary, took this less formal approach further still in St. Pancras South, where 'arrangements have been made for first class Smoking Concerts every Monday at 8.30, and dances once a fortnight. The Club is well fitted with billiard tables, reading room, smoking and card

77 LUAM 2:10, October 1894.
78 Chamberlain at Manchester, 15 November 1898, quoted in The Times, 16 November 1898.
79 Liberal Unionist, 32, September 1888.
By 1889, the organising committee of the LUA was no longer sufficiently professional to cope with the growing Party. In October, Hobhouse and Storey-Maskelyne (MP for Cricklade) called for the creation of a council of Associations for the counties of the west of England, in an attempt to create a more democratic system in emulation of the NLF and NUCCA. T. G. P. Hallett, secretary of the Somerset Association, had argued in the pages of the *Liberal Unionist* that a ‘central representative Organising Council …[would] give each county, or each county of a certain size, direct representation…’ Two months later, one of the most active regional organisers, Robert Bird, secretary of the West of Scotland LUA, which already had a strongly representative structure, wrote in the Party newspaper:

> A cry has gone up…for a Federation of the whole Party, to be centred in London, and presided over by Lord Hartington; so that, by a chain of elective representation, the leaders may be ever within hearing of the voices of the constituencies, and the most belated and forlorn committees.  

In response, the committee was re-established as the Liberal Unionist Organising Council of the Liberal Unionist Associations of the United Kingdom on 22 March 1889. There were to be fifty members, with forty elected by the branch Associations and ten nominated by the Executive Committee. The organising agent of the Association, Mr Prange, promptly resigned in protest,

---

81 *Liberal Unionist*, 36, January 1889.
83 *Liberal Unionist*, 38, March 1889.
but he was quickly replaced by Major Walter Yeldham.\textsuperscript{84} It would seem that this was largely the work of Lord Wolmer, newly appointed whip to the moderate Unionists.\textsuperscript{85} Chamberlain in his dismissal of the new Organising Committee, revealed Wolmer’s central role in Liberal Unionist organisation. When he wrote to Austen shortly before it was constituted, he commented that 'I do not believe in it – it is all organisation and nothing else...let Wolmer have his little scheme and see what he can make of it.'\textsuperscript{86}

There were now 124 district associations, thirty-eight of which had been founded in the past year. There remained 150 constituencies outside London which had no LUA, but in all but twenty-two there were activists in correspondence. Hartington summarised the work of the LUA as being 'to raise and expend very considerable sums of money in the dissemination of political information, and by means of its organising agents to cover the whole country with branch associations.' Hartington and Lord Stalbridge were elected as chairman and vice-chairman respectively of the Council. Bickersteth and Boraston were automatically appointed as secretary and deputy, with the Party whips, and the secretaries of the Metropolitan Committee and the NLU given ex-officio membership. A committee was set up for standing orders and rules, and another for the revision of schedules.\textsuperscript{87} By the time the Council met three months later, there were 157 branches of the LUA. One of these was in Portsmouth, where Arthur Conan Doyle took his first steps in what was to prove a frustrating political career. He wrote to Amy Hoare in 1889: 'I am the Hon. Sec

\textsuperscript{84} \textit{Liberal Unionist}, 37, February 1889.
\textsuperscript{86} J. Chamberlain to A. Chamberlain, 15 December 1888, JC 5/12/4. For the full composition of the Liberal Unionist Organising Council, see below, Appendix 2.
\textsuperscript{87} \textit{Liberal Unionist} 39, April 1889.
to the Liberal Unionists.\textsuperscript{88} It appears that he was identified as a useful supporter by the local MP, Sir William Crossman, as a result of his correspondence with the \textit{Portsmouth News} in 1888, and Doyle hoped that by helping Crossman he would get in contact with, as he put it in a letter to Mary Doyle, 'the inner circle of Liberal Unionists.'\textsuperscript{89}

At this point, the organisation of the Liberal Unionist Association appears to have become more professional and more centralised under Bickersteth's control. The weaknesses that Balfour had candidly noted to Salisbury, began to be eliminated.\textsuperscript{90} Caine's Metropolitan Organising Committee was moved to the main Party headquarters in Great George Street in March and the publications department was moved to the Party's premises on 1 April.\textsuperscript{91} In May the \textit{Liberal Unionist} called upon the branch Associations to perform their own registration work, as 'hitherto, we have had to mainly depend upon the Conservatives to do this work for us, but surely we are now able to stand upon our own bottom…our leaders are active, it is time the rank and file asserted themselves.'\textsuperscript{92} Bickersteth appears to have toured Britain, lecturing all on how to improve their appeal to the electorate. The best record of his advice appears in the record of the talk he gave in Glasgow to the West of Scotland LUA in July 1888. Despite the high level of activity in the area and the support for many radical policies, the defeat of Ashley at Glasgow Bridgeton in 1887 meant that Bickersteth had a willing


\textsuperscript{91} \textit{Liberal Unionist}, 39, April 1889.

\textsuperscript{92} \textit{Liberal Unionist}, 40, May 1889.
audience. He told the WSLUA that they needed to make the executive committee more representative of the electorate as a whole, and that more consultation was needed on the choice of candidates. More generally, he encouraged the WSLUA to learn from their opponents and to apply 'something of the Gladstonian methods and energy to the conduct of elections.' Unlike many of those he spoke to, the WSLUA listened to the advice and acted almost immediately, with Craig-Sellar appointed to the Liberal Unionist 'candidates committee' and affiliating a branch of the Women's Liberal Unionist Association. The reorganisation was not entirely successful, as Sir John Pender was shortly afterwards adopted by the WSLUA as their candidate for Govan on the advice of the 'candidates committee' and proceeded to lose the by-election in January 1889 by over a thousand votes, prompting criticism from the Radicals in the Association.

Despite the lists of meetings and newly-founded Associations in every issue of the Liberal Unionist, just occasionally there were hints that all was not as well as it seemed. A letter in the May 1890 issue claimed that:

> In some of the counties there is nothing more than a Liberal Unionist Association on paper, which distinguishes itself by doing nothing, and the members of which never come into contact with one another, and probably hardly know of each other’s existence. The most that is done is perhaps once in two or three years to get up a joint Unionist meeting, at which the lion’s share both of the platform and the audience is Conservative.

The moderate leadership also appeared to regard the LUA as a nuisance.

---

93 WSLUA minute book I, 3 July 1889, 10424/19.
94 Ibid., 14 August 1889.
95 'A Reformer', 'Liberal Union Dinners', Liberal Unionist, 52, May 1890.
Hartington wrote in 1889, 'I have no objection to be President of the Sussex LUA, though I suppose it means a speech some day.' Argyll similarly showed a lack of awareness of the needs of politicians in an age of emerging democracy when he candidly admitted that he had no idea of the extent of Liberal Unionist support in Scotland.

After the defenestration of the Unionists from the Eighty Club, the Liberal Union Club was formed on 18 February 1887 but was still modelled on the structure of the Eighty Club. The intention was that the Club would ‘provide speakers and lecturers for all parts of the country, to provide canvassers for elections, and generally to promote the sympathy and active co-operation of the younger members of our Party who wish to do work in the cause of the Union.’ By September 1888, there were 450 members of the Club. The usefulness of the Club as a social gathering for the Party’s elite was limited; ‘during the summer of 1887, fortnightly meetings and discussions at the Westminster Palace Hotel were attempted, but these did not prove sufficiently attractive.’ All the prominent Whigs retained their membership of their old clubs such as Brooks’s and the Reform. As a means of promoting the Liberal Unionist cause, it also suffered from the disdain most of the leadership felt for electioneering.

At the LUA headquarters, Bickersteth was, like his predecessor, criticised by his own Party, and daily faced with the ambition of his deputy. In early 1891, he

---

96 Hartington to Wolmer, 11 November 1889, Selborne MS I (6) 52.
97 Argyll to Wolmer, 15 September 1891, Selborne MS II (13) 77-80.
99 Ibid.
chose to resign. According to the minute book of the WSLUA, he did so because Boraston had requested and received permission from the Party leadership to circulate the Irish Presbyterian manifesto of 29 December 1891, without consulting his superior. Although W. S. Caine had dramatically departed the Party in the previous year, his protégé finally achieved his ambition and became the Association secretary. After the 1892 defeat, Boraston continued as secretary, but he found his position as secretary of the LUA increasingly challenged by the organiser of the National Liberal Union and the radical Unionist whip, Powell Williams, especially after Chamberlain’s accession to Party leadership in the Commons. Henry James acknowledged that ‘from 1892 to the G. Election of 1895, Mr Powell Williams occupied the position of manager.’ In October, Chamberlain informed James that he intended to re-found the Association, 'I hope to get every constituency in the 3 countries fairly started with a permanent organisation.' The decision to continue the work of Boraston’s Liberal Unionist Association after the 1895 election was made by Selborne and Powell Williams without any consultation and it was agreed that ‘all points of importance’ should be reserved ‘for Williams’ decision’ and that Boraston should consult Williams ‘who will give him an hour 2 or 3 times a week’ on all other matters. Anstruther’s role as Party whip during this period appears to have been entirely limited to Westminster matters.

The publications department was one aspect of the Liberal Unionist operation

---

100 R. Bickersteth to Hartington, 12 January 1891, DP 340.2266.
101 WSLUA minute book I, 9 January 1891, 10424/19.
102 *Liberal Unionist*, 60, January 1891.
103 Henry James’ Memoir, M45/1864, p.75.
104 Chamberlain to James, 2 October 1892, M45/1718.
105 Selborne to Chamberlain, copy to Devonshire, 6 December 1895, DP 340.2667.
that seemed to lack neither funds nor efficacy. Taken over from Hobhouse by Boraston in 1888, by January 1891 it had produced 1,396,000 copies of 80 leaflets, 825,000 copies of 18 pamphlets, 710,000 copies of the Liberal Unionist manifesto and 84,000 copies of the Liberal Unionist. In total, 2,305,000 copies of Liberal Unionist literature had been produced in less than five years.\textsuperscript{106} The focus of these publication shifted as the Party's position altered. Between 1886 and 1889 the focus appears to have been on Parnell's inadequacies and the fearful consequences of separation. However, with the catastrophic performance of the party in successive by-elections, after 1889 a less reflective tone and a more negative approach was discernable until the General Election of 1892. After that, the influence of Chamberlain's social programme was paramount until the creation of the Unionist cabinet when the focus again shifted, as the threat of Home Rule receded and the Party's leadership drew closer to the Tories.

**Affiliated Organisations**

The Liberal Unionist Party contained other, more focused political organisations, structured on a national level, which also demonstrated a variety of influence and activity and in many ways were the fore-runners of the 'league of leagues' which E.H.H. Green drew attention to a decade ago.\textsuperscript{107}

\textit{a) The Women's Liberal Unionist Association}

As Jon Lawrence has noted, following the Corrupt Practices Act of 1883, 'women gradually began to assume a more prominent role in all aspects of

\textsuperscript{106} Liberal Unionist, 61, February 1891.

\textsuperscript{107} Green, Crisis of Conservatism, pp.194-241.
public politics and the Liberal Unionist Party responded to the creation of the Women's Liberal Federation in 1886 by founding the Women's LUA was founded in North Kensington in May 1888. Kate Courtney claimed the idea was Mrs Tod's, but the chief movers were unsurprisingly the wives of the senior Liberal Unionists, in particular, Lady Stanley, Mrs Kate Courtney (nee Potter; sister of Beatrice Potter, later Webb), Mrs Biddulph and Mrs Caine. However, women from the whole Liberal spectrum belonged to the organisation. Looking back from the controversy which was to terminate the WLUA's existence some fifteen years later, Millicent Fawcett noted that 'we were formed in 1888 mainly to resist Home Rule but we had from the first other and subsidiary objects which we have always described on our Programme as the promotion of Liberal principles and the development of local liberties.' The first meeting of 'L.U. ladies' took place at the home of Kate Courtney in May 1888, even though some women had been forbidden to attend by their husbands. Millicent Fawcett's dislike of party politics and mistrust of Gladstone had been acquired from her late husband Henry, and she quoted his opposition to Home Rule in a letter to The Times at the height of the Home Rule debate. She had spoken at the first Liberal Unionist conference in December 1886, and she now became one of the most active of the Association's speakers, giving a rousing denunciation of the prospects of a self-governing Ireland at the first meeting held in Lady Stanley's drawing room in the West End in July 1888.

108 Lawrence, Electing Our Masters, p.83.
110 Kate Courtney's diary, 11 May 1888. CP XXIII. According to Courtney, this was because some of the women involved had 'worked in other causes' – clearly a reference to the involvement of Mrs Fawcett and the other suffragists.
111 The Times, 4 June 1886.
112 Speeches on the formation of the Women's Liberal Unionist Association, (London, 1887), pp. 8-14; Strachey, Millicent Garrett Fawcett, p.128.
Perhaps the chief activist among the Association was the formidable Isabella Tod, secretary of the Ulster WLUA and founder member of the Ulster LUA, who, within two months of the WLUA’s formation had written the lead article for the *Liberal Unionist*. Tod was a tireless campaigner, speaking at meetings across Britain, often facing hostile crowds, writing letters and articles for newspapers and organising and assisting branches of the LUA and WLUA.

Female political activists could offer services in a fashion than most men found difficult; as one of the organisers of the North London branch of the WLUA, Mr. Richardson, noted, ‘Women could work all the year round at times when there were no elections going on, as well as when there was all the excitement of a contest. Men could only arrange their business to give up time when elections were taking place. Women might influence voters by house-to-house visiting, or by quiet discussion….’ The WLUA had twenty-one branches within a year and began to demand official recognition from the Liberal Unionist Council. They set up offices at 92 Palace Chambers, Bridge Street in Westminster and advertised in the *Liberal Unionist*. As the rising star among the Party managers, with Caine’s enthusiasm dimming, Wolmer was keen to encourage the Association in its efforts and attended the WLUA Council meetings.

The role that Wolmer, probably in common with the rest of the Party’s leadership, envisaged the WLUA playing was summarised by one of their

---

113 *Liberal Unionist*, 31, August 1888.
115 *Liberal Unionist*, 41, June 1889.
116 *Liberal Unionist*, 43, August 1889.
officials:

Women are for the most part rooted to the soil; they will never be a large guerrilla force, but they may be an excellent territorial militia. It is for this reason that we have been urging on the LUA the desirability of employing them to work among the voters in their own neighbourhoods, to influence the people whom they know, or whom they easily could know; so that when an election comes on, instead of fetching in strangers from a distance, who have to begin by learning their way about, we may have a corps of women workers on the spot, knowing the electors personally and living in permanently friendly relations with them.  

In particular, the Party's reliance on Conservative records and efforts in the crucial field of registration might be mitigated through the use of the WLUA volunteers. The WLUA became to be seen as a valuable electoral tool and became quite sophisticated in its approach to the electors. A lengthy article, 'Some Hints to Women on Canvassing', whilst epitomising the patronising tone often used when addressing female activists, gives an astonishing level of detail. Women canvassers are given advice on how to approach 'the stiff Conservative who will not vote for a Liberal Unionist' (and vice versa), the 'temperance man', the 'eccentric religionist', the 'indifferent man' and even the 'invalid' in order to win their vote. Although the canvassers may be middle class themselves, the guidance is clear where votes need to be won, 'if you have the choice, you had better go among the working classes, you will be much more useful.'

117 Liberal Unionist, 44, September 1889.
118 'Some Hints to Women on Canvassing', Liberal Unionist, 70, November 1891.
Despite the limited view of the Association's role of some of its own leaders, Kate Courtney, the WLUA secretary, was clearly intent on creating a radical organisation, in keeping with her and Fawcett's views on female suffrage and other social and political questions. The organisation's leaders were keen to stress that 'they were not only Unionists but Liberals, and should not allow themselves to be confused with Conservatives.'  

Tellingly, 'the leading place' for the WLUAs was Birmingham, which had its first meeting on 9 October 1888 at 8 Corporation Street, with Mrs Herbert Chamberlain as president and Mrs Arthur Dixon as one of the vice-presidents. The Birmingham WLUA had established a membership of 1,000 within nine months and by November 1891 it was nearly 2,000. The Association was credited with 'a conspicuous part' in the success of the Party's candidates in the 1892 election, largely due to their work in tracing and canvassing voters who had removed. In London, Caine's radical Metropolitan Committee took control of the North London branch of the Association through Richard Chamberlain. A Cornish branch was started in July 1888. An attempt was made to spread the reach of the WLUA into the other heartland of Liberal Unionism, the West of Scotland, with Fawcett attending the inaugural meeting of the regional WLUA in Glasgow on 8 November 1888. However, with their strictly conservative social attitudes, the Scots failed to develop a similar body of supporters, as 'the feelings against women joining in politics appears to be very strong.' The Association, with branches in Glasgow, Ayr and Paisley was clearly of some help. J. Parker Smith's wife

119 Lady Elizabeth Biddulph, quoted in *Liberal Unionist*, 43, August 1889.
120 *Liberal Unionist*, 70, November 1891.
121 *Liberal Unionist*, 79, August 1892.
122 Kate Courtney's diary, 5 July 1888, CP XXIV.
123 *Liberal Unionist*, 36, January 1889.
124 *Liberal Unionist*, 44, September 1889.
became its president following his election victory in Partick in 1890, and in early 1892 it was promoting the candidature of Alexander Cross for Camlachie.\textsuperscript{125} Parker-Smith's own increased majority in 1892 was a result of 'this very well-organised branch.'\textsuperscript{126}

In Ireland, where Isabella Tod oversaw an active Association with branches in Leinster, Connaught, Munster, Waterford and Tipperary, membership although 'very numerous' was not always 'earnest' or even motivated by purely political impulses. A Tipperary Nationalist, in his account of a WLUA Clonmel public meeting on 7 September 1889, asserted that the meeting, in an area where 'no other Loyalist Association of any kind exists', was largely attended by those who were seeking to make more personal alliances; 'it was a great day for mothers with marriageable daughters.'\textsuperscript{127} Elsewhere, the Association struggled to assert its identity. Although William Gell managed to create an Association in Oxford, the lack of a Liberal Unionist candidate made the group less attractive to the socially-ambitious Oxford Unionist women (and their daughters) and by 1891 it was holding joint meetings with the previously derided Primrose League.\textsuperscript{128} As other issues began to emerge in the early 1890s, Fawcett and Courtney were keen to use the WLUA's influence to push for the Party to advocate female suffrage.\textsuperscript{129} The less radical members of the executive committee and those concerned of the impact of such a policy on relations between Conservatives and Liberal Unionists were unenthusiastic and at the conference of WLUA

\textsuperscript{125} \textit{Liberal Unionist}, 73, February 1892. \\
\textsuperscript{126} \textit{Liberal Unionist}, 79, August 1892. \\
\textsuperscript{127} Quoted in \textit{Liberal Unionist}, 44, September 1889. \\
\textsuperscript{128} \textit{Liberal Unionist}, 64, May 1891. \\
secretaries on 4 June 1891 the organisation declared itself neutral on the issue of female suffrage.\footnote{130} This did not solve the problem, as Isabella Tod immediately wrote a lead article criticising the Party leadership for putting pressure on the WLUA. As most women were Unionists, she argued, surely there was much to be gained by a bolder approach to politics?\footnote{131} The issue flared up again as the election drew closer. When Mrs Fawcett refused to agree to Margaret Farrow’s request not to mention women’s suffrage at a meeting of the Birmingham WLUA scheduled for 20 January 1892, Mrs Farrow cancelled the meeting.\footnote{132} Mrs Fawcett therefore wrote a lead article ‘Women and Politics’ in the January edition of the \textit{Liberal Unionist} in which she lambasted the paper for having criticised a Conservative conference resolution in favour of women’s suffrage. In a bitter tone, she commented that ‘I am always sorry when I see Liberal Unionists justifying the taunt so often uttered against them in the Gladstonian press that they are \textit{plus Royalistes que le Roi} i.e. that they are more Tory than the Tories’, and she went on to make a chilling prediction: ‘…if the paragraph I have criticised represents fairly the mind of the \textit{Liberal Unionist}, it is a symptom of death.’\footnote{133} St. Loe Strachey responded with the official Party line that was not designed to promote enthusiasm among the WLUA’s more radical members

\begin{quote}
The \textit{Liberal Unionist Party}, as far as we are aware, is not committed to Female Suffrage…Mrs Fawcett appears to think we should be drummed out of the Party because we do not express a direct opinion in favour of
\end{quote}

\footnote{130} \textit{Liberal Unionist}, 66, July 1891.\footnote{131} I. Tod, ‘Lord Salisbury and Women’s Suffrage’ \textit{Liberal Unionist}, 68, September 1891.\footnote{132} M. Farrow to Fawcett, 11 Jan 1892, Fawcett Papers, Manchester Archives, M50/2/1/152; Fawcett to M. Farrow, 12 January 1892, M50/2/1/153; L. Chamberlain to Fawcett, 17 January 1892, M50/2/1/155.\footnote{133} M. G. Fawcett, ‘Women and Politics’, \textit{Liberal Unionist}, 72, January 1892.
female suffrage...we cannot help thinking that we shall be most truly Liberal if we allow expression of opinion from all sides and do not assume that no one can be a Liberal Unionist who does not agree with us on Female Suffrage.\textsuperscript{134}

Although Wolmer himself let Mrs Fawcett know that he would support a ballot for a suffrage bill at Westminster, there was clearly little unanimity in the WLUA on this issue.\textsuperscript{135} Kate Courtney recorded that the issue ‘made some of the ladies very hot and excited.’\textsuperscript{136} At the AGM of the WLUA on 11 May, Fawcett was not invited to speak, and the question of support for women’s suffrage if discussed at the event, was not reported. Mrs Fawcett explained her inaction in 1903, ‘I and other suffragists always abstained from pressing it [women’s suffrage] because although we might have carried it by the requisite $\frac{3}{4}$ yet we felt it would lead to the break up of the Assn. and we had suffrage societies on which to work for suffrage.’\textsuperscript{137} There is clear evidence here of Liberal Unionists being able to continue to act according to their principles outside the formal party structures, with no external limitations being placed upon their freedom of action.

The Party was far more comfortable with the WLUA playing a supporting role, and a largely decorous one at that. The report of the AGM emphasised a very traditional view of the priorities of such events: ‘the platform was fringed with daisies, lilies and other flowers tastefully arranged.’\textsuperscript{138} Despite these difficulties and the limited social reach of the body, by the Council meeting on 10 May

\textsuperscript{134} \textit{Liberal Unionist}, 72, January 1892.
\textsuperscript{135} Wolmer to Fawcett, 5 February 1892, M50/2/1/160.
\textsuperscript{136} Kate Courtney’s diary, 10 May 1892, CP XXVI.
\textsuperscript{137} Fawcett, (n.d.), 7MGF/A/1/230.
\textsuperscript{138} \textit{Liberal Unionist}, 77, June 1892.
1892, Kate Courtney could report that the Association’s membership stood at 7,000.\textsuperscript{139} The body was clearly the work of a few committed activists, however, as the report on election activity for 1892 revealed. In it the Association reported that ‘a band of Irish ladies distributed themselves in different parts of the country…to press upon English voters the claims of the Irish loyalists.’ This band was found to number four, including the indefatigable Isabella Tod.\textsuperscript{140} Most of the canvassing work was also done by a few volunteers. So rare was an effective activist that Agatha Richardson wrote to Mrs Fawcett in February 1894, recommending the services of a Miss Charlotte Jones as ‘strong, energetic, methodical, bright, and thoroughly trustworthy.’\textsuperscript{141} As Devonshire had commented at the AGM in May, ‘a great deal had been done by it [the WLUA] on an extremely meagre income…’\textsuperscript{142}

The refusal to support suffrage disheartened the Courtneys and was compounded by the Party’s failure to respond to the WLUA meeting on Proportional Representation that was held at River House, Chelsea Embankment on 10 July 1894, at which Courtney and Lubbock argued passionately for electoral reform in Balfour’s presence.\textsuperscript{143} Finally, when the Conservative and Liberal Unionist leadership blocked Leonard’s bid for the Speakership in March 1895, Kate and Lady Stanley considered resigning from the Association. Mrs Arnold-Forster wrote an urgent letter describing this prospect as ‘like a nightmare’ and managed to prevent any hasty action. But as

\textsuperscript{139} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{140} *Liberal Unionist*, 78, July 1892.
\textsuperscript{141} A. Richardson to Fawcett, 23 February 1894, 7MGF/A/2/006.
\textsuperscript{142} *Liberal Unionist*, 77, June 1892.
\textsuperscript{143} Report of Meeting on Proportional Representation, or Effective Voting, held [by the Women’s Liberal Unionist Association] at River House, Chelsea, on Tuesday, July 10\textsuperscript{th}, 1894 (London, 1894).
can be seen from the two volumes of Kate Courtney’s diaries from 1895 to 1900, she now felt ‘that the L.U. Party in Parliament are not as independent as we thought.’ She felt particularly aggrieved at Chamberlain’s influence as she felt he was ‘too clever a wire-puller for a small party to be at all free under his leadership.’ Unsurprisingly her activity with the WLUA dwindled, choosing to visit Germany from 31 May to 10 June at the height of preparation for the expected election, and, as far as can be gleaned from her diary, holding no WLUA meetings and never speaking outside her husband’s constituency during the election campaign.\textsuperscript{144} The only other truly significant contribution of the WLUA was its support for Faithfull Begg’s women’s suffrage bill in 1897, even though it was known that the Duke of Devonshire was personally opposed to such a measure. Although the bill was defeated, it provides evidence of the ongoing ideological divisions within the Party, as even after the formation of the coalition government, twenty-five Liberal Unionists MPs voted for the bill and twenty against.\textsuperscript{145}

\textit{b) The Nonconformist Unionist Association}

The Party was also directly responsible for the creation of a supposedly independent pressure group, the Nonconformist Unionist Association. This body, established by a group of nonconformist lawyers, was inaugurated at the Cannon Street Hotel on 17 April 1888, in order to repudiate the claim that most nonconformists were Gladstonian.\textsuperscript{146} As Parry has shown, nonconformist involvement in Liberal politics had not only been motivated by a dislike of state

\textsuperscript{144} Mrs Arnold-Forster to K. Courtney, 21 March 1895, V/18; K. Courtney’s diaries, 8 April 1895-20 November 1900, CP XXVIII; CP XXIX.


\textsuperscript{146} \textit{Daily News}, 18 April 1888.
interference in religion and education, but also by a suspicion of Ultramontanism in Ireland. Fear of a over-mighty Catholic priesthood had been one of chief motivations for the politicisation of Nonconformist communities in the 1850s and their support for an English political culture that permitted liberty of conscience as well as encouraging individual responsibility.\textsuperscript{147} It was therefore inevitable that, while entering into an alliance with the Tories, the Liberal Unionists needed an organisation to reassure chapel-goers that the Liberal Unionists had not sacrificed their commitment to the ethical values of dissenting Liberalism.

Although the group was always presented as the non-partisan voice of the non-conformist movement, it was in fact originally organised by the Ulster Liberal Unionist Association.\textsuperscript{148} As the Liberal Unionist Party struggled that year with the burden of coercion, which drove many of its supporters back to the Liberals and the lack of any constructive policy that would appeal to working class voters, the temptation to return to sectarian politics was clearly too great to resist. The body originally sent speakers such as Isabella Tod and T W Russell to speak at election campaigns in England to persuade voters that ‘the whole body of Protestant opinion in Ireland [was] against Home Rule’\textsuperscript{149}, but it soon became more ambitious. It organised a highly publicised meeting between the non-Episcopalian minister and both Salisbury and Hartington, and then held a banquet at the Hotel Metropole with the Moderator of General Assembly of the Irish Presbyterian Church (R. J. Lynd) present. The two Ulster Liberal Unionist

\textsuperscript{147} Parry, \textit{The Politics of Patriotism}, pp. 112-126.
\textsuperscript{149} \textit{Liberal Unionist}, 35, December 1888.
MPs were of course in attendance, together with Havelock-Allan, Goldsmid, the
Scottish MPs Corbett and Sinclair, and, perhaps most notably, Chamberlain's
lieutenant, Powell Williams. Senior Methodists, Baptists and Congregationalists
attended and the names of Spurgeon and Dale were frequently referred to as
prominent supporters. The purpose of the meeting was, as the chairman, G.
Hayter Chubb (described by Bebbington as 'leading spirit in the NUA'\textsuperscript{150}), put it,
'a reply to the repeated insinuations of the Separatist Party to the effect that
Nonconformists were necessarily Gladstonians.'\textsuperscript{151} Shortly afterwards, the
Liberal Unionist's new column, 'Friends and Foes of the Union' began with a
profile of the leading figure in the one nonconformist sect not represented at the
Hotel Metropole banquet, the Quakers. The article on John Bright emphasised
'his desire to benefit the people' in all he did, arguing that there was
consistency in his opposition to 'the policy of handing Ireland over to
anarchy.'\textsuperscript{152} Bright, although reluctant to work with the Party in any fashion, was
unable to prevent his name being splashed across the Party's literature (a
poster was even made up with his face and Charles Spurgeon's). When he
died, the \textit{Liberal Unionist} was printed with a black border on its front page.\textsuperscript{153}

The Nonconformist Unionist Association increasingly revealed its links to the
Party as the general election grew nearer. In September 1889, the \textit{Liberal
Unionist} published 'Some Reasons why Nonconformists should be Unionists',
written by the Association's President, T. E. Winslow QC. This revealed the
largely anti-Catholic nature of the organisation as two of the five heads were

\textsuperscript{150} Bebbington, \textit{Nonconformist Conscience}, p.94.
\textsuperscript{151} \textit{Liberal Unionist}, 35, December 1888.
\textsuperscript{152} 'Friends and Foes of the Union 1: Mr Bright', \textit{Liberal Unionist}, 36, January 1889.
\textsuperscript{153} \textit{Liberal Unionist}, 39, April 1889.
that Home Rule 'will lead to the endowment of Roman Catholic Religious Education in Ireland' and that it would give the 'Irish Roman Catholic parliament' the power to use taxes ‘for the purposes of the establishment or endowment of any form of religion in Ireland.'¹⁵⁴ In March 1892, a meeting of the NUA was held with Joseph Chamberlain as guest speaker, at which he described himself as 'one of yourselves and a Nonconformist.'¹⁵⁵

Once the election had passed, despite the promise of the new president, Chubb, to open branches of the NUA outside London, little activity took place. When interviewed by the *Pall Mall Gazette* in 1893, Chubb had to admit that there was little point in going to such expense as 'half the members of [LUAs] are Nonconformists.'¹⁵⁶ Bebbington concludes that 'the NUA was a one-man band', which 'did little effective work apart from holding banquets.'¹⁵⁷ With the threat of the second Home Rule Bill, the NUA was superseded by the Irish Presbyterian General Assembly's decision to hold a Unionist Convention in Belfast. Here, the support of prominent Liberal Unionists such as Thomas Sinclair was significant in avoiding a sectarian or threatening appearance, as even Catholic priests were welcomed onto the stage. Following this success, the Liberal Unionists appeared to have gradually allow Chubb's Association to decline, as they felt they could make much better Unionist capital out of the official non-conformist bodies of Ireland, rather than through an intermediary body. The only significant role the NUA appeared to play after 1892, in addition to organising a meeting in support of H. M. Stanley's candidature in North

¹⁵⁴ *Liberal Unionist*, 44, September 1889.
¹⁵⁵ *The Times*, 31 March 1892.
¹⁵⁶ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 26 May 1893.
Lambeth,\textsuperscript{158} was to help H.M. Bompas organise his survey of 1,243 nonconformist laymen on their support for the second Home Rule Bill in 1894.\textsuperscript{159}

c) The Rural Labourers' League

The other body organised to appeal to a particular group among the electorate which was far more independent of the central Party's control was Jesse Collings' Rural Labourers' League. Chamberlain was clearly the driving force behind it, having written to Wolmer in 1888 advising that 'I think we ought to start at once a new Labourer's League and put Collings at the head of it.'\textsuperscript{160} Their motivation was to force upon the Conservatives something less of a token gesture than the extremely limited 1887 Allotments Act, which, David Steele admits, 'Tories hoped...might stave off a demand for something more...'\textsuperscript{161} The League went on to launch a weekly newspaper, the \textit{Rural World}, the first issue of which featured articles by Collings, Sir John Lubbock and 'the warm and old friend of the labourer, Mr Howard Evans.' The independence of this avowedly Radical publication was clearly the cause of some nervousness among moderates: as St. Loe Strachey welcomed it by blandly asserting that 'the paper should prove of great use,' and promptly never mentioned it again.\textsuperscript{162} Collings felt that the Party was making little use of his efforts, as he wrote to Wolmer in 1891 that 'it would be well if possible to waken up all the Unionist Party to see the necessity of increased work in this direction.'\textsuperscript{163} William Morris was acidic in

\textsuperscript{158} \textit{The Times}, 2 July 1895.
\textsuperscript{159} H. M. Bompas, 'Nonconformists and Home Rule' \textit{The Times}, 2 February 1894.
\textsuperscript{160} Chamberlain to Wolmer, 13 March 1888, Selborne MS I (8) 1.
\textsuperscript{161} Steele, \textit{Lord Salisbury}, p.233.
\textsuperscript{162} \textit{Liberal Unionist}, 36, January 1889.
\textsuperscript{163} J. Collings to Wolmer, 15 June 1891, Selborne MS II (13) 67-68.
the scorn he poured on Collings and his 'poor foolish little scheme', mocking it ('how many rural labourers are in it, I wonder?') and describing those at the banquet to launch the League as 'the friends of the ejectors of the Irish, and the Scotch crofters.'

Derby unwittingly confirmed Morris's view in his diary when he described Collings as 'not an enemy to the rich as such.' The organisation was obviously felt to be of value in the county seats, as, shortly before the 1892 election, it was granted £5,000 from Wolmer's secret electoral fund. However, once the election was over, he found the Conservatives far less willing to engage in debates for further land distribution. Even attempts by Collings to influence the Royal Commission on Labour proved fruitless and he was reduced to issuing a number of independent recommendations.

Readman has identified the Tory opposition to compulsory purchase for the provision of allotments as both aristocratic and popular. With Chamberlain more concerned about the behaviour of the urban worker in his campaign for social reform after 1892, it is difficult not to find some validity in Morris' dismissal of the RLL.

**Funding**

Of course, such a large organisation, with a number of subsidiary bodies to support, which had been created largely from nothing in 1886, needed to be financed, and perhaps the chief source of the Liberal Unionist Party's unexpected and unprecedented longevity was its huge financial reserves. As James confidently put it, 'we had within our small party many very rich men who

---

164 W. Morris, 'The Skeleton at the Feast', *Commonweal*, 127, June 1888, p.188.
contributed to our funds very generously." On 11 May 1886, *The Times* stated that the Duke of Bedford had sent the Liberal Unionist committee a blank cheque.\(^{169}\) Once the Liberal Union had been created on 22 May, it was reported that contributions were flowing freely, many of them of £1,000.\(^{171}\) Albert Pease reported that a target figure of £100,000 had been set,\(^{172}\) while Nathaniel Rothschild boasted that the committee had 'unlimited funds.'\(^{173}\) Despite the fact that no appeal for funding had yet been made, by 9 June it was reported that subscriptions had reached £30,000.\(^{174}\) As a result, in those areas where the situation was monitored, such as Manchester, the amount of literature for the Unionist cause vastly exceeded that of the Home Rulers.\(^{175}\) The *Birmingham Daily Post*, meanwhile, spoke of the Liberal Unionist Committee 'daily shaking its money bags in the face of the public' on 10 June.\(^{176}\)

The clearest indication of the state of the Party finances comes from a report from Wolmer to Hartington in December 1888. He estimated income at between eight and nine thousand pounds per annum and anticipated that it 'might predictably be increased to 10.'\(^{177}\) The monies were soon spent. The Liberal Unionist Association had six organising agents, paid between £250 and £500 a year, but Wolmer wanted four more. There were the 'large staff of lecturers' organised by the Liberal Union Club paid between a guinea a lecture and £50 a

\(^{169}\) James’ Memoir, M45/1864, p.75. James listed the principal contributors of funds as Bedford, Devonshire, Fife, Westminster, Rothschild, Revelstoke, Walter Morrison, Pennington and Sir Horace Farquhar.

\(^{170}\) *The Times*, 11 May 1886.

\(^{171}\) *Daily Telegraph*, 24 May 1886.

\(^{172}\) Pease, *Elections and Recollections*, p. 133.


\(^{174}\) *Birmingham Daily Post*, 9 June 1886.

\(^{175}\) *Manchester Guardian*, 3 July 1886.

\(^{176}\) *Birmingham Daily Post*, 10 June 1886.

\(^{177}\) Wolmer to Hartington, 10 December 1888, DP 340 2201.
month, with travelling expenses and organising agents 'a very heavy item', and two offices in London – the Association's and the Metropolitan Committee's. With publishing costs (including the *Liberal Unionist*) additional expenses included subsidies to 'weak-kneed' branch associations, registration expenses and an average of two contested by-elections a year, the weight of this expense was clearly felt by a party lacking in a large base of popular support. In November 1890, T. E. Jacob, a self-confessed 'member of the rank and file' saw one of the main obstacles to efficient organisation as 'penury', and in the same month, the secretary of the newly found Yorkshire Federation of the Party complained of 'want...of money'.\(^{178}\) The Party was clearly well funded at its centre, due to the monies of the peers and landlords, but, of the Liberal Unionist General Committee, 'the majority of the members contribute nothing to the funds.'\(^{179}\) Lord Rothschild was asked by Hartington to approach some of the wealthy peers for £60,000 to support the regional associations as the prospect of an election drew near. Rothschild gave £5,000 himself, but could only persuade Derby to pledge £2,000.\(^{180}\)

At the annual meeting of the WLUA at Prince’s Hall in Piccadilly on 11 May the following year, having dwelt on the question of Ulster for the bulk of his speech, the Duke of Devonshire made an appeal for funds, commenting that the Association operated on an ‘extremely meagre income’.\(^{181}\) In order to raise funds for the forthcoming election, to supplement the remaining limited resources of the various Liberal Unionist Associations, Devonshire himself was

---

\(^{178}\) *Liberal Unionist*, 58, November 1890.

\(^{179}\) *Liberal Unionist*, 64, May 1891.


\(^{181}\) *The Times*, 12 May 1892.
reduced to sending personal letters of appeal to wealthy supporters of the Party. The bulk of those who responded were businessmen, such as bankers, tradesmen and brewers, and it is clear that they expected some rewards from this trade. Four anonymous contributors, Henry Wiggin, John Jaffray, Horace Farquhar and E.H. Carbutt all received baronetcies in Salisbury’s dissolution honours following the election.

In total, Wolmer raised £131,785 'through [Devonshire's] letters in connection with and in preparation for, the general election.'\(^\text{182}\) £66,800 was spent in the months leading up to the election. £27,000 was spent on the Liberal Unionist Association, and £5,000 on Jesse Collings’ Rural Labourers’ League, in attempt to minimise the damage in the counties.\(^\text{183}\) Even by 1895, £65,000 remained. Wolmer reminded Devonshire, that 'I have still, as you may remember, some money left over from the fund we raised for the General Election of 1892.'\(^\text{184}\) By then however, he had acceded to his father's title and was more concerned with maintaining the Defence Association. As James had commented a few months earlier. 'Wolmer appears to have dropped out almost entirely...you should ask Wolmer to take an active part in the collection of funds. He knows our wealthy men and has great tact.'\(^\text{185}\) But James was more than happy with his replacement as Party manager, the radical Unionists' whip, Powell Williams. 'You know how highly I think of Powell Williams...the accounts are all professionally audited...the main responsibility of expenditure may well be left in Powell Williams' hands ', even though he clearly felt less confident about

\(^\text{182}\) Wolmer to Devonshire, 5 September 1892, DP 340 2503. 
\(^\text{184}\) Selborne to Devonshire, 25 March 1895, DP 340 2687. 
\(^\text{185}\) James to Devonshire, 8 January 1895, DP uncatalogued.
Wolmer's replacement as Chief Whip:

The more the management of our affairs is left in [Williams'] hands and the less in Anstruther's the better...Anstruther has not in any way whatever interfered in business matters – nor has he been near the office...If [the collection of funds] be left to Anstruther we shall soon find our funds very low...I do not wish to be unduly hard on Anstruther. He is very civil and zealous – but I do not think he is quite fitted to carry out the very delicate matters arising out of the collection or expenditure of a considerable political fund.\(^\text{186}\)

Wolmer, either honestly or to avoid being pressed back into service at a time which no longer suited him, wrote to Devonshire to reassure him of Anstruther's abilities. 'I think you may be very much at your ease about [the finances],’ as Anstruther had already collected £6,000 in excess of what was required to fight the election, and more funds were still arriving.\(^\text{187}\) Chamberlain confirmed this positive picture in June, assuring James that 'there seem to be funds in hand enough to carry us on.'\(^\text{188}\) The Liberals' financial difficulties were effectively exploited in the election as the Liberal Unionists' organisation and funding resulted in a series of uncontested elections. Anstruther reported to Wolmer on the eve of the election that funds were 'prospering in my hands'\(^\text{189}\), which he substantiated to Devonshire after the election in September:

The state of the general election account stands at the 6 September:-

Credit £41,846

Debt £22,083

\(^{186}\) Ibid.

\(^{187}\) Wolmer to Devonshire, 12 January 1895, DP 340.2604.

\(^{188}\) Chamberlain to James, 24 June 1895 M45/1755.

\(^{189}\) Anstruther to Wolmer, 27 June 1895, Selborne MS II (13) 144.
= Ba. £19,763

To the first I expect to add another thousand promised and not paid, and from the other possibly to deduct two deposits of one thousand each while I advanced for the petitions in Durham and Lichfield respectively.

There are a few payments yet to be made; the result will shown roughly a balance of £20,000.\textsuperscript{190}

The need for such large amounts of money is demonstrated by the only figures for contesting an election that survive for a Liberal Unionist Association. The account book for the West Derbyshire LUA for 1906 survives and reveals that this single Association, in a seat that could be considered safely Unionist, spent £1603/4/2d on the election, the costs being incurred from the employment of an agent and the expenses of canvassers, but mainly from the publication of materials. 20,435 placards were produced, 99,695 handbills, 43,050 cards and portraits of Victor Cavendish, 60,300 leaflets and pamphlets (most of which must have been purchased from the literature department in Great George Street) and 54,000 cartoons and picture leaflets.\textsuperscript{191}

Of course, the production of such material, of other propaganda, and indeed party organisation were not, in themselves, guarantees of electoral success, therefore the relationship of the Party with their electors needs to explored as a discrete issue. It must be credited that the Liberal Unionist Associations, their affiliated bodies and London headquarters were a significant demonstration of a

\textsuperscript{190} Anstruther to Devonshire, 30 September 1895, DP 340.2652.
\textsuperscript{191} W. Derbyshire LUA account book for 1906 election, DCRO, D504/38/3/13.
Unionist culture that amounted to more than merely parliamentary whiggism and the demagoguery of Birmingham that most historians have been content to recognise. With substantial funding from both business and aristocratic sources, and the influential support of so much of the national and provincial press, many Liberals clearly felt comfortable expressing their commitment to patriotic and constitutional principles through the Liberal Unionist Party, and there is evidence to suggest that they continued to do so until at least 1903.\(^ {192}\) There is, however, little evidence of the employment of local professional agents (outside certain regional and central organisations) which Kathryn Rix has identified as such a crucial feature in political success between 1883 and 1906.\(^ {193}\) In this way, although the Liberal Unionists had managed to use their funding to guarantee short-term survival as the Liberals faltered, they had failed to establish the structures necessary for their growth in an age of mass democracy. Only in Glasgow and Birmingham was the Party sufficiently organised with professional agents that it could cope with the challenge of nationally divisive issues such as the reorganisation of state education in 1902 and Tariff Reform in 1903.


Chapter 4: Liberal Unionism and the electorate – ‘A Farce and a Fraud’?

The ability of the Liberal Unionist Party to fight and win so many seats as it did over the twenty-six years of its existence, in an age of mass politics, has been put down, by left-leaning historians, either to Chamberlain's unprincipled opportunism or to the 'jingo' factor – the ability of upper class leaders to dupe working class voters into supporting expensive and futile imperial ventures, most notoriously in 1900. The high-water mark in the failure to acknowledge any positive causes in the return of so many Liberal Unionists was at the height of enthusiasm for 'cliometrics' in 1977. Hugh Stephens of the University of Houston offered a structural explanation for the Liberal Unionist vote as being 'occasioned by the …drastically altered constituency structure resulting from the reform acts' rather than by any actions on the part of the individual activists. With the aid of the inevitable collection of tabulated statistics, he asserted that 'the Liberal Unionists….were the beneficiaries of a lag in electoral mobilization which often happens after a large expansion of the franchise.'

Unfortunately, this electoral sociology reduced the significance of the local MP and the specific issues of individual constituencies within the historical analysis, in much the same way that the 1884 reform act reduced their significance in the political structures of the country. If one wishes to engage with the creation and reception of the political discourse in the late nineteenth century, the historian must account for political behaviour at the grass-roots level. Unlike twentieth-century historians, those who study the late nineteenth century have no opinion.

polls or surveys. As so few detailed results from canvasses survive, due to the low number of Liberal Unionist Association records that have been preserved, the relationship between voters and organisers can only be tentatively analysed and some inference has to be made from the methods of electioneering undertaken (including the use of the provincial press) and the results in both by-elections and general elections. Some of the relevant material on the effectiveness and scale of party organisation at the association levels has been dealt with in the previous chapter, so this section of the thesis focuses on the outcomes of this work and the particular problems the Party faced in enlisting the support of the new, working class electorate.

As the 1886 revolt was based primarily on the principles and consciences of individual MPs as to which lobby to enter on 8 June 1886, there was little cohesion to the location of most of the rebels' seats. In five areas in 1886, the Liberal Unionists achieved more than ten seats. In some of these cases, however, this was misleading as there was little coherence to the areas represented. However in two of these areas, the West Midlands and the West of Scotland, strong initial party organisation was responsible for pressure being brought to bear on the local Liberals to join the rebellion. In the third, Cornwall, a largely accidental concentration of Liberal Unionists was built upon in subsequent years and local circumstances were exploited to create a third base of anti-Gladstonian Liberalism. Outside these three areas, I believe, Liberal Unionism often became a leaf on the breeze of the political temper, suffering from the national swing away from Salisbury's Conservatives in 1892 and then befitting from the failures of the Rosebery administration in 1895 and the mood
of patriotic fervour in the ‘khaki election’ of 1900. Or it was dependent on the influence of particular MPs in particular seats, with those who spent precious hours cultivating their constituencies (such as Henry Hobhouse in East Somerset or Cuthbert Quilter in South Suffolk), exploiting the familial influence (such as the Fitzwilliams in South Yorkshire, the Rothschilds at Aylesbury or the Cavendishes in West Derbyshire), or relying on their particular appeal to their constituents (such as the anthropologist and naturalist, Sir John Lubbock, at London University\footnote{Hutchinson, \textit{Life of Sir John Lubbock Vol. 1}, p.226.} surviving, while others found themselves isolated and unloved, and either swiftly re-joined the Liberal Party (as seven MPs did between 1886 and 1892) or were removed in the 1892 cull as the Liberal vote recovered.

The 1886 Election

The general election of 1886 demonstrated the extent to which various regional associations had gained a foothold. In sixty-seven constituencies where the standing Liberal MP had voted for Home Rule, they were opposed by a Liberal Unionist.\footnote{There were 39 challenges from Liberal Unionists in England, 23 in Scotland and 5 in Wales.} In thirteen others, the sitting Liberal Unionist retired before the election, either because the local Conservatives would not support them and so they stood no chance of winning, or because they had been rejected by their caucuses.\footnote{Those who retired were: H. O. Allen (Pembroke); W. S. Allen (Newcastle-under-Lyme); R. Ferguson (Carlisle); W.T. Harker (Ripon); H. C. Howard (Penrith); W. Jacks (Leith Burghs); E. A. Leatham (Huddersfield); J. Ramsay (Falkirk Burghs); H. Robertson (Merioneth); J. Ruston (Lincoln); G. Salis-Schwabe (Middleton); the Marquis of Stafford (Sutherlandshire); H. Meysey-Thompson (Brigg). Sir R. Anstruther died in July and his seat (St. Andrews burghs) was contested by his son, Harry Anstruther. F. W. Grafton (Accrington), J. H. Blades (West Bromwich), F.T. Cobbold (Stowmarket), R. Davies (Anglesey) who had all abstained on 8 June also retired.} E. A. Leatham MP for Huddersfield withdrew and advised his constituents to vote for the Conservative candidate, while Jacks, faced with the
potential nomination of Gladstone in Leith Burghs withdrew his candidature.

'What a fool Leatham has been,' wrote Chamberlain to Caine, 'to give his seat to Summers - he could have kept it easily. Jacks is the worst, however the idea of bolting like a rabbit from a mere nomination of the G.O.M.' One great advantage to the Liberal Unionists was the reluctance of the Eighty Club, which included so many Unionists, to take an active role against Liberal Unionists during the election. Gell had spotted that the membership list should be scrutinised and those thought to be Unionist in their sympathies contacted and asked to help at Spring Gardens.

Of the 102 Liberals who voted against the second Reading of the Government of Ireland Bill or abstained, eighty stood for re-election in their original seats as Liberal Unionists, and sixty-five of them were returned (twenty-eight unopposed). Where the Tories' chief agent, Richard Middleton, felt that Liberal Unionists stood a better chance of defeating the incumbent 'separatist' (as The Times dubbed the Gladstonians) only thirteen out of eighty-eight were successful in defeating a Home Ruler. Seventy-seven MPs who then affiliated themselves with the newly formed Liberal Unionist Association were returned in 1886. Forty-seven Liberal Unionists sat for country constituencies, twenty-nine for borough seats (including two in London) and one for the University of London. Of the county returns, there were thirty-four in England, nine in Scotland, two in Wales and two in Ireland. The higher proportion of representatives of county constituencies had been noticed among Liberals who supported the Union before the election, but was more marked than before. The

---

198 Chamberlain to Caine, n.d. ('Sunday'), JC5/10/7.
199 Heneage to Wintringham, 15 June 1886, 2 HEN 5/13/50.
200 P. Gell to Milner, 27 June 1886, Milner MS 4.
percentages of county representative were: Liberal Unionists: 61%; Liberals: 53%; Conservatives: 40%. It has been suggested that in such areas, the persistence of deference allowed Liberal dissidents to take their working class support into the Unionist camp with them as the prestige of the incumbent MP and the strength of his claim to consistency was often highly convincing.\textsuperscript{201} Of the borough seats, twenty-one were in England, eight in Scotland, one in Wales and none in Ireland.

If one takes Chamberlain's claim that forty-six of the ninety-three rebels of 8 June were Radicals, it can be seen that the Radical element were punished more harshly for their vote against Gladstone than the rest of the Liberal Unionists. Sixteen Radicals either retired (usually in the face of impossible odds) or were defeated. Of the thirty who were returned, eight, according to Brand's conversation with Akers-Douglas, 'mean to rejoin Gladstone at once.'\textsuperscript{202} Eighteen members of the NRU were returned including D. H. Coghill and Walter Morrison, neither of whom had sat in the previous parliament. A week after polling began, Gladstone's chief whip, Alfred Morley, admitted to him that Chamberlain's influence in this area was stronger than anticipated. According to Morley, one Gladstonian had changed to a Liberal Unionist at the last moment in order to avoid a contest.\textsuperscript{203} Lewis Morris believed that Chamberlain's influence even extended into Wales, to his seat, Pembroke and Haverford West, where he had been defeated by Conservative.\textsuperscript{204}

\textsuperscript{202} Alexander, \textit{Chief Whip}, p.83.
\textsuperscript{203} A. Morley to Gladstone, 7 July 1886, W. E. Gladstone Papers, British Library, Add. Mss 44253.
\textsuperscript{204} L. Morris to Lord Spencer, 20 July 1886, Misc. Althorp.
The South and the Midlands were where the 1886 election was won. The Gladstonians lost thirty-five county and twenty-eight borough seats in England, half of the latter in London. Middlesex, Surrey, Kent, Hertfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Berkshire, Hampshire, Huntingdonshire, Rutland, Worcestershire, Shropshire, Hereford and the city of Birmingham returned no Gladstonians at all. The Liberal Unionists also benefited from a large number of uncontested seats (more than a third of their parliamentary strength), which have usually been ascribed to lack of time for finding a Gladstonian candidate, or lack of funds as the rich Liberal donors flooded to Hartington’s Committee. However, William Harcourt did suggest that the policy may have been a deliberate one on the part of the Liberals, possibly with an eye to achieve reunion as soon as Gladstone could be persuaded to retire, ‘we have hitherto been all of us able to avoid placing ourselves in individual conflict with our former colleagues of a recent date...’ In the 1885 Election over four million had voted, but in 1886 only two and a half million had exercised the franchise (a fall in turnout from 84.4% to 74.1%). These 1,639,010 fewer votes were partly due to the uncontested seats, but also due to much apathy or uncertainty towards the Home Rule issue. In such circumstances, with the future direction and leadership of the Party unclear, the voters appear to have given the incumbent the benefit of the doubt in many cases. Making allowance for the unopposed returns, it is possible to calculate that at least 800,000 voters must have abstained. Contemporary testimony suggests that the bulk of these were

206 W. Harcourt to Hartington, 28 June 1886, quoted in Holland, Life of Spencer Compton Vol. 2, p.163.
207 Lawrence, Electing Our Masters, p.73.
Liberals and Gladstone interpreted this to mean that many Liberals had not made up their minds about Home Rule.  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Liberal Unionist</th>
<th>Candidates</th>
<th>Elected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>South-East England</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South-West England</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midlands</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern England</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wales</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East and North Scotland</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Scotland</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>165</strong></td>
<td><strong>78</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total Vote</th>
<th>1885</th>
<th>1886</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Liberals</td>
<td>2,157,612</td>
<td>1,244,683</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irish</td>
<td>299,784</td>
<td>97,905</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cons</td>
<td>1,934,450</td>
<td>1,036,649</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LU</td>
<td></td>
<td>431,513</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Uncontested seats</th>
<th>1885</th>
<th>1886</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Liberals</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irish</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cons</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

208 W. E. Gladstone, *The Irish Question: A history of an idea; lessons of the election (London, 1886)*, p.27.
Some Liberal Unionists may have also suffered from Conservative abstentions, as they could not bring themselves to support those who had only recently been their adversaries. One Worcestershire Conservative farmer recorded that he could not vote for 'the black-coated, cotton-gloved gentry who, but yesterday, had been trying on the village greens, to prejudice the farm workers against their employers.' 210 Many other Conservatives found it difficult to support those who favoured church disestablishment, 'free schools' or restrictions to the liquor trade. On the other hand, in some areas, the assistance of the Conservatives was crucial. In Grimsby, Heneage calculated 'that 2/5 of the Liberal Party voted for me (1,400) as against 3/5 (2,100), while 2/3 of Conservatives (1,582) voted for me.' 211

The *Daily Telegraph* advised the Conservatives that if one of their candidates had stood in the borough seats as well as a Liberal Unionist, twenty or thirty more Conservatives might have been elected, and that only twelve Liberal Unionist seats had been won entirely with Liberal votes. 212 Clearly the most destructive force on the Gladstonians was the sense of betrayal by the agricultural voters, especially farm workers, of whom, it was estimated, 400,000 had not voted. Their votes, won by the promise of 'three acres and a cow' in December, now deserted Gladstone, who, they felt, had become distracted by Home Rule and who had alienated their champions, Jesse Collings and Joseph

---

209 All statistics from *The Times*, 31 July 1886.
211 Heneage to Wintringham, 5 July 1886, 2 HEN 5/13/56.
212 *Daily Telegraph*, 13 July 1886.
Chamberlain. Chamberlain's undoubted ability to appeal to the newly
enfranchised agricultural labourers was sorely missed by his old Party in 1886.
The self-proclaimed 'radical parson', W. Tuckwell, considered that his absence
from the hustings was 'an immeasurable disaster; his influence with the
democracy had some for time past excelled Gladstone's; I found of late that if
audiences cheered Gladstone's name for two minutes, they cheered
Chamberlain's for five.'\textsuperscript{213} Caine, facing his own caucus in Barrow, gave
Chamberlain the credit for his victory, 'your visit added 500 to my score.'\textsuperscript{214} The
\textit{Standard} wrote on 14 July that the Government's losses were not due to
Unionist sentiment but to a reaction after the extravagant hopes of 1885 and the
influence of Jesse Collings. Henry Sidgwick also considered that Chamberlain's
departure damaged the Liberals' electoral chances in the rural seats. 'There are
various explanations of the swing-rounds of the agricultural labourer. Here
[Essex], my Tory friends think he is partly disgusted at not having got his three
acres and a cow, partly afraid of Irish competition in the labour market.'\textsuperscript{215} Few
sections of the community suffered more from cheap Irish labour than the farm
workers. As well as making them unsympathetic to the Irish cause, this also
made them susceptible to the claim that Home Rule would ruin Ireland and fill
the UK with a swarm of starving Irish willing to work at almost any rate. C.R.
Spencer, who stood in Mid Northamptonshire, complained that that the
Unionists had flooded the division with pamphlets stating that the Gladstonian
policy would swamp the labour market with Irishmen. He was also concerned
that the timing of the election during the hay harvest had caused many to be

\textsuperscript{214} Caine to Chamberlain, n.d. (July 1886?), JC5/10/5.
away from home and thus unable to vote.\footnote{C. R. Spencer to Lord Spencer, 10 July 1886, Misc. Althorp.}

The Gladstonians fared worse where the farm worker had most influence – in predominantly agricultural constituencies of large farms worked by paid labour. In Yorkshire, Durham and Northumberland, with large numbers of industrial workers and miners, the counties stayed loyal as the political interests of these workers were similar to those of the urban workers.\footnote{In Yorkshire, Milner identified the lack of support for the position of Liberal Unionists: ‘I said I was going to spend a week in the West Riding looking up Union Liberals and here I am as large as life. Where the Liberal Unionists are, is a more difficult question.’ Milner to Gell, 20 November 1886, D3287/MIL/1/176.} In Wales, where Gladstone held all his county seats, and in large areas of Scotland, a proportion of the constituencies were likewise ones in which miners and industrial workers predominated, but in the majority, the bulk of the voters were dependent on agriculture. In these constituencies, however, the largest number of voters were not farm workers, but tenant farmers with grievances similar to those of the Irish tenant farmers eager for the remedial legislation which they associated with the Liberal Party. This was especially true in the highlands and islands of Scotland.

The loss of so many Liberal landed families to the Unionists told heavily against the Gladstonians in the country, for as yet the ballot act had not seriously affected the influence of local landed families in politics. One contemporary observer noted that in those districts where the members of the great Whig families were still regarded as the natural leaders of the Party, the Gladstonians had suffered their worst defeats.\footnote{‘Is Liberal Reunion possible?’ Congregational Review, October 1886.} The promise of easier electoral victories may have played a role in explaining the decision of some county MPs to resist
the temptation (and pressure from their activists) to return to the Gladstonian Party once the election was over and Home Rule had receded as an imminent threat. C. S. Roundell, in a letter to Spencer after the election, mentioned that in Skipton, West Yorkshire, the Devonshire, Ribblesdale, Tempest and Morrison influence had all been on the Unionist side and he had been the only person of any standing on the Liberal side.219

Urban workers and miners chose to support Gladstone, because only his Party seemed to offer a prospect of disestablishment, temperance, education, taxation and labour reforms. On the other hand the issue of Home Rule made many abstain as they felt Gladstone was neglecting their interests. As Hammond wrote, 'no voter who wanted anything else [than Home Rule] had much reason for voting for him.'220 Rev. Tuckwell noted that many workers felt that their devotion had been thrown away and their confidence abused.221 The historian of the miners' unions of Northumberland and Durham recorded that when radical miners' agents began to advocate Home Rule with all the vigour which they previously expanded on social reform there were protests, as not every miner could be convinced that Home Rule was a labour question.222 Chamberlain's Radicals were more fully committed to these objects than the Gladstonian Party as a whole, but in most areas they had no candidates and no prospect of enforcing these policies on their erstwhile allies, the moderate Unionists and the Conservatives. Only in certain areas did urban voters support Unionists because they felt that do so would put pressure on Gladstone to

220 Hammond, Gladstone and the Irish Nation, p.557.
221 Tuckwell, Reminiscences of a Radical Parson, p.60.
abandon his new crusade and return to the true mission of Liberalism.

The Liberal Unionist Committee, now reconstituted as the Liberal Unionist Association, noted the particular problem that their Party had faced, and which caused the defeat of nearly 50% of its candidates:

those seats were probably the most difficult to win from the Gladstonians as they were considered as safe Liberal seats when the Liberal Party was united under Mr Gladstone and consequently it was more difficult at short notice to induce the great bulk of the electorate to transfer their political allegiance from Mr Gladstone.

...There can be no doubt that most of the defeats of the Unionist Liberal Candidates where they were defeated were due to want of organisation and want of time. As the elections went on the organisation improved and the result was that the Unionists appear to have supported Conservatives better and Unionist Liberals obtained greater success.\textsuperscript{223}

One of the most significant defeats for the Liberal Unionists was Goschen’s in Edinburgh East, which the \textit{Scotsman} acknowledged as being the result of Gladstone’s visit to the city during the campaign.\textsuperscript{224} Other notable casualties included Trevelyan and Albert Grey.

The Liberal Unionist campaign was aided by the Irish speakers provided by the Irish Loyal and Patriotic Union, the Ulster Anti-Repeal Union and the Ulster Liberal Unionist Committee. This was not surprising, given the improvised nature of the Liberal Unionist Party machinery. In some areas a large number of

\textsuperscript{223} Liberal Unionist Association 1886: Origin and Progress, AC2/1/1.
\textsuperscript{224} Scotsman, 7 July 1886.
unionists resigned from the local Liberal association, but in others, election committees and supporting workers had to be found almost entirely among those with no experience of electioneering. Also the Liberal Unionists were particular targets for trouble-makers and many meetings were broken up and candidates physically attacked. As many of the Liberal Unionist candidates were quite unknown, ‘ticket-only’ meetings were impractical, so in some cases no meetings were held and canvassing and election addresses were relied on instead.\(^\text{225}\)

In Glasgow, after a public appeal on 6 May, a Committee had been formed with 500 Liberals from the west of Scotland within a fortnight. As J. McCaffrey has ably explained, the Liberal Unionists carefully exploited ‘long-standing social and economic prejudices against the Irish’ and highlighted the impact of Irish separation on Scottish trade. Dr McGrigor, speaking to the Glasgow Chamber of Commerce noted the dependence of the Greenock sugar refining trade on exports to Ireland. ‘…this would cease and at least three other sugar refineries would be added to the four now silent and smokeless.’\(^\text{226}\) With the crucial support of the *Glasgow Herald* and the *Scotsman*, the Party was able to spread its message that the Home Rulers had surrendered to the Irish demands and that it was the duty of Scotsmen of character and determination to resist Parnell’s dictation.\(^\text{227}\) This message and the Liberal Unionists’ organisation were clearly decisive. In the election, the Liberals lost seventeen seats to the Liberal Unionists, but only two to the Conservatives. This meant that Liberal Unionists


\(^{226}\) Quoted in McCaffrey, ‘The Origins of Liberal Unionism in the West of Scotland’, p.67.

\(^{227}\) For examples see *Glasgow Herald*, 27 April 1886; *The Scotsman*, 1 July 1886.
held nearly a quarter of Scottish seats and these accounted for 20% of the Liberal Unionists’ total parliamentary strength. Twelve of the Liberal Unionists seats were won in the West where the speed of the Liberal Unionist organisation was unmatched in any other region of the United Kingdom.\textsuperscript{228} In Wigtownshire in 1886, the Liberal Unionists afforded the local Conservative, Sir Herbert Maxwell, ‘the easiest [election] I had yet experienced.’ Lord Stair, a Liberal Unionist peer, assisted by ‘throwing his great local influence in support of the Conservative Party’. The vote across the counties of West Scotland dropped by an average of 5.5%, but that in Wigtownshire fell by 15.7%. Maxwell, however, saw his vote increase by 200 votes from 1885. ‘Thus loyally did the newly formed Liberal Unionist Party fulfil their pledge and rally in support of their former foes.’\textsuperscript{229}

The east of Scotland presented a very different picture. Here, the local MPs appeared to be dependent on the work of a single electioneer, Rev. James Taylor D.D., and their source of literature was the Irish Loyal and Patriotic Union. Of the forty-three constituencies within the committee’s area of responsibility, thirty-five were contested (only three seats were fought by Conservatives).\textsuperscript{230} The first LUA to be founded was the Dundee and District LUA, formed on 9 June, which found two candidates for the Dundee election – Brinsley Nixon, a London banker, and General Sir H. D. Daly. Both lost, and Daly lost again in a by-election in Feb 1888. In recognition, they formed good

\textsuperscript{228} Eight of these seats remained Unionist until 1910: Ayr, N. Ayrshire, Glasgow Central, Glasgow Tradeston, Greenock, S. Lanark, Partick and E. Renfrewshire.


\textsuperscript{230} East and North of Scotland Liberal Unionist Association minute book I, NLS, 10424/17.
relations with the local Conservatives.\textsuperscript{231} The E&NSLUA failed to match the level of achievement of their colleagues in Glasgow and as early as January 1889, the honorary secretary, J.P. Grant (unsuccessful candidate for Ross and Cromarty in 1886) was warning that Scotland is the battle field where the most disastrous blow to the Union can be struck,' as in three of the seventeen Liberal Unionist seats in the country, the Liberal Unionist candidate held the constituency on a majority of less than one hundred. Grant warned that Scotland was being targeted by the Liberals and that the Unionists were vulnerable 'for want of a constructive policy.'\textsuperscript{232}

In Devon and Cornwall, the puzzle of the huge majorities for Liberal Unionists in 1886 and the relative success of the Party of the whole period, has not been effectively explained by Lubenow, Henry Pelling or even Patricia Lynch in her recent study of rural support for Liberalism in the period. In the Party newspaper it was noted in February 1890 that ‘…our Nonconformist supporters, who are especially numerous, are as devoted and hearty as can be desired…’\textsuperscript{233} There is a valid case for believing there was a genuine cultural basis to the support for Liberal Unionism here. As E. Jaggard has shown in his study of Cornish politics before 1885, ‘localism was too powerful a force to be ignored’, as the independent minded population tended to prefer locally born and raised candidates.\textsuperscript{234} Although it was admitted that ‘the Liberal Unionist Party in West

\textsuperscript{231} Liberal Unionist, 39, April 1889.
\textsuperscript{232} J. P. Grant, ‘Liberal Unionist Work 5: the East and North of Scotland Liberal Unionist Association’ Liberal Unionist, 36, January 1889.
\textsuperscript{233} E.J. Temple Willis, ‘The Devon and Cornwall Liberal Federation – its History, Constitution and Work’ Liberal Unionist, 49, February 1890.
\textsuperscript{234} E. Jaggard, Cornwall Politics in the Age of Reform (Woodbridge, 1999), p.218.
Somerset is scattered,\(^{235}\) of the eleven rural seats west of Exeter, the Liberal Unionists represented seven of these after 1886. What is more they held all seven seats of these with majorities of over 1,000 each. F B Mildmay in Totnes won 80% of the vote and went on to hold his seat until 1922. The Liberal Unionists did particularly well in Devon and Cornwall where the Free Church movement was strongest and where the middle class voters were freest of landlord influence.\(^{236}\) It was acknowledged as ‘the next strongest redoubt’ of the Party after Birmingham.\(^{237}\) Nonconformity in Devon and Cornwall was dominated by Wesleyan Methodism which seemed particularly susceptible to fears for Irish Protestantism.\(^{238}\) As early as the 1887 St Austell by-election, George Chubb, later president of the Nonconformist Unionist Association, could confidently assure Lord Salisbury of growing support for the Union among Wesleyans in Cornwall.\(^{239}\)

On the issue of Home Rule here, the Liberals were deeply divided, and the local Conservatives were reluctant to hand this opportunity to the Liberal Unionists. Hozier and Middleton were unable to settle the issue and Salisbury had to intervene. Believing that in such a stronghold of non-conformity the Tories only stood a marginal chance of victory, he endorsed seven of the Liberal Unionists and called on the local Conservatives to support them. Salisbury had his limits, though, and the Radical MP, Lewis McIver, was not endorsed, following strong

\(^{235}\) Liberal Unionist, 64, May 1891.


\(^{237}\) Liberal Unionist, 42, July 1889.


\(^{239}\) G. H. Chubb to Salisbury, 19 May 1887, Salisbury Papers.
protests from the Conservatives of Torquay, and a Conservative stood against him as well as a Gladstonian. In Totnes in Devon, the young F. B. Mildmay refused to allow Conservatives to appear on his platforms, fearing the alienation of his Liberal supporters and the Conservatives sought, in vain to run a candidate in protest. At Barnstaple, although the local Conservatives were instructed to support G. Pitt Lewis, a meeting at Ilfracombe preferred to abstain rather than endorse his candidature, leaving him with no party workers. Pitt Lewis was forced to attend Liberal meetings, where his voting record was criticised and he was reduced to invoking the name of General Gordon and to mitigate his vote on 8 June by condemning the meeting at Her Majesty's Opera House. Conservative Central Office now had to come to his aid and send a letter from Lord Iddesleigh. 'As far as I can make out, Mr Pitt Lewis is a fair example of the Liberal Unionists. He has gone very straight against Gladstone, and he is (I know) ready to pledge himself against the disestablishment of the Church in the next parliament.'

Courtney, however, faced a serious rebellion in Bodmin from Liberals. As a supporter informed him, 'the general objection one meets with is “If Mr Courtney could not vote with Jesse Collins [sic], he might have been neutral; why need he go into the lobby with the Tories and against his own Party?”' At a meeting of the Central Committee of the South East Cornwall Liberal Association, a vote to readopt him as the candidate for the division was defeated by fifty-nine to nine. He and his supporters had to swiftly form a new committee in order to nominate

---

240 Western Daily Mercury, 1 May 1886.
241 Western Daily Mercury, 12 June 1886.
242 J. Dingle to L. Courtney, 2 February 1886, V/9.
his candidature.\textsuperscript{243} In Truro, William Bickford-Smith only just managed a majority of votes in his favour at a similar meeting.\textsuperscript{244} The Liberal Unionists also put up candidates in the Ashburton division of Devon and in Camborne in Cornwall that were, frankly, poor choices. R. B. Martin in Ashburton was a London banker and of little appeal to the fiercely independent voters and he suffered a torrid time on the stump.\textsuperscript{245} A. Strauss in Camborne was, in the words of the local newspaper 'a German Jew', with such a considerable control of the local tin trade that he was detested by Conservatives and Liberals alike and had to withdrawn in favour of a local nonentity, J. D.Gay.\textsuperscript{246} Despite his fears that ‘the working men are so thoroughly Gladstonian that the adverse poll will be fairly large’, Courtney held Bodmin with a majority of 1,162.\textsuperscript{247}

The strength of Liberal Unionism in Cornwall appears to have been focused around Courtney at Liskeard, T.B. Bolitho at St Ives and successive Liberal Unionist MPs at Truro. The Party seemed much less secure in Devon, where it had won four seats in 1886. Although F.B. Mildmay was unassailable at Totnes (which he held until 1922), the second safest seat, South Molton, was lost in a by-election in 1891, when the Gladstonians achieved a swing of 21.6% in their favour. This was followed by the capture of two of the remaining three Liberal Unionist seats in Devon at the General Election in 1892 and the reduction of majorities elsewhere. It appeared that some (if not all) of the Liberal abstainers in 1886 had chosen to vote for the G.O.M. one last time. In 1888 after a narrow defeat at a by-election in St Austell, local LUAs were joined into a central

\textsuperscript{243} Western Daily Mercury, 16 June 1886.  
\textsuperscript{244} Western Daily News, 19 June 1886.  
\textsuperscript{245} Western Daily News, 2 July 1886.  
\textsuperscript{246} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{247} L. Courtney to Mrs Fawcett, 4 July 1886, V/35.
organisation, when a federation of the two counties under the Presidency of Lord Revelstoke was established. This had offices at Plymouth with a paid secretary, and it raised an income of over £1,000 p.a.²⁴⁸ By 1889 Wolmer was referring to the Devon and Cornwall Liberal Unionist Federation as an example to the rest of the Party for its organisation and efficacy.²⁴⁹

The most marked feature of the voting in this strongly Liberal part of England was the decline in the overall poll, as many electors, unsure of how to respond to a sudden change in Gladstone's direction on Ireland and advised by many of Gladstone's former supporters, both in Parliament and the press, to abandon him, simply deferred their decision and stayed away. In her recent study of three rural constituencies in the period, Patricia Lynch found little enthusiasm for Home Rule among the Liberal electors. In North Essex, despite inviting comments on the government's policy, Herbert Gardner only received a single negative response.²⁵⁰ The worst fall was in St Ives, where a fall of 21% of the total vote was recorded, and even in the best turn-out in the region in Torquay, it still fell by 6%. In St Ives, St Aubyn managed to secure the Liberal Party's endorsement, and so the low turn out can be accounted for by confusion over the position of the two Liberal candidates and the unofficial Gladstonian won less than 1,000 votes. With the Conservatives backing them (albeit reluctantly) and such disarray among the Gladstonians, only McIver lost his seat (to a Conservative) and even Martin in Ashburton got over 3,000 votes.

²⁴⁸ Liberal Unionist, 47, December 1889.
It is a matter of speculation whether the appeals of the Irish non-conformists, who almost unanimously opposed Home Rule and who organised the Nonconformist Unionist Association to send speakers from Ulster to persuade the nonconformists of England to vote likewise, found an audience willing to listen in a region where the majority were chapel-goers. Certainly the efforts of popular speakers, like H.M. Bompas and Isabella Tod and the illustrated lectures of the Liberal Unionist Club’s Union Jack van were focused on the villages of Devon and Cornwall before the elections of the 1890s. Even Chamberlain was not afraid of appealing to the sectarian interests of the largest nonconformist church, asking at Bodmin in October 1889 ‘What answer the Methodists of Cornwall were going to make to the appeal of their brethren, the Methodists of Ireland?’

Perhaps the best insight was given by The Times’ special correspondent, who carried out a detailed survey of every electoral district, between October 1891 and March 1892. Of ‘the Western counties’ he wrote

At one time a tendency was displayed by certain LU members to rely too much upon personal influence and too little upon active co-operation with the Conservatives. The lesson of South Molton, however has not been thrown away and things are upon a much more satisfactory basis but he then went on to stress the importance of ‘Mr Courtney’s personality’ in Bodmin, ‘the personal influence of Mr Mildmay’ in Totnes and the fact that the candidate in Truro, ‘Mr J. C. Williams, comes from one of the most respected families in the West of England.’

251 Liberal Unionist, 46, November 1889.  
252 ‘The Approaching General Election: XVI: The Western Counties’, The Times, 2 February
funded from deep pockets was enough to win lasting affection, as was the case in North Bristol, where Lewis Fry won the seat twice between 1886 and 1895, partly as the result of actions such as the ‘generous aid which you so willingly extended to the sufferers of the disastrous floods with which our city was visited some months ago…’  

Most revealing of the persistence of personal influence and political patronage in the region, was the comment on Tavistock.

Much interest attaches as to the attitude which the Duke of Bedford may adopt; for in the town and vicinity of Tavistock, the Russell influence is still powerful…If, before the election, the Duke of Bedford, openly espouses the cause of the Unionists, the result will be a foregone conclusion…

Judging from the result, a personally popular candidate, a strong religious identity, effective, centralised organisation and cross-party co-operation made a difference in some seats, but could not compensate when a powerful landowner chose not to favour the Party. Tavistock was lost in a 10% swing against the Liberal Unionist candidate. In other cases elsewhere in the country, the importance of aristocratic support was declining in comparison with modern political organising. When Robert Purvis, an able and capable candidate contested Peterborough at the 1889 by-election, he had on his side, ‘the

---

253 Liberal Unionist, 63, April 1891.
support of the Fitzwilliam influence’ yet was still defeated by over 250 votes.\textsuperscript{256}

The defeat may have been due to the fact that a Liberal Unionist Association was not founded until May 1890.\textsuperscript{257} The belief in the influence of the ‘leading and influential men’ persisted however, among important Party men such as Harry Anstruther, who claimed that ‘a Fitzwilliam for Peterborough, a Doulton for Kennington, a Pearce for Lanark, a Verdin for Northwich, etc and possibly all these seats might have been saved.’\textsuperscript{258} Of course, the adherence of many of the old Liberal families to the Unionist cause was understandable, as this Party was the only one not to have fully replaced the old kinship bonds with a dominant central association.

The anti-Catholic attitudes of a non-conformist community, especially one on the western side of Britain, fearful of cheap Irish immigrant labour may seem to offer something of a solution to the regional variety of Liberal Unionist support, taking in Cornwall, Lancashire and the West of Scotland. However, one must not press this too far. The area of greatest Liberal Unionist defeat was also the strongest area of non-conformity in the British Isles, Wales, where the Primitive Methodist church, with its largely working class congregation remained loyal to the Gladstonian cause. The three Welsh seats won by Liberal Unionists in 1886 were not contested by the Liberals. Sir H. H. Vivian and C. R. M. Talbot both left the Liberal Unionists within a year and Colonel Cornwallis West, managed less than half the votes of his rival when he stood for re-election in 1892. The Welsh cause was clearly badly handled as Lloyd George’s victory in the 1890

\textsuperscript{256} Liberal Unionist, 46, November 1889. Purvis was standing as the previous MP, J. Fitzwilliam, son of the fifth Earl Fitzwilliam, had died.
\textsuperscript{257} Liberal Unionist, 53, June 1890.
\textsuperscript{258} Liberal Unionist, 55, August 1890.
Carnarvon by-election result demonstrated. When Irish non-conformist and working class speakers were brought in to bolster the Unionist cause, the meetings were held in Conservative clubs, not public halls, and no Welsh Liberal would enter such premises. The Liverpool Post believed that the 'Unionists had thus thrown away their trump card. 'Lloyd George's campaign in which he played entirely on the theme of Welsh disestablishment, was well chosen to embarrass the Unionists, who were divided nationally on the issue. In the whole period of the Liberal Unionist Party's existence, only one Liberal Unionist ever won a seat in Wales. Sir J. Jenkins won Carmarthen District with a majority of fifty-two in 1895 (and failed to retain it in 1900). Kenneth Morgan, writing of the Liberal Unionists in Wales claims that 'Unionist efforts to whip up Nonconformist prejudice against the sinister menace of Irish popery...failed completely.'

The Pursuit of the Working Class Vote

The Reform Act of 1884 had created a large number of working class voters, as the electorate had increased from 3.04 million to 5.7 million in Great Britain, particularly among the rural communities. While the impact of this electorate on the rise of independent labour parties has been endlessly examined since the 1960s, the appeal of Unionism to this new political class has been explored only recently. There has been no published study examining the appeal of Liberal Unionism to this group. Only now, with Patrick Joyce and James Vernon's analysis of how the contemporary language of politics must be understood in order to explain the way the political elite engaged in a discourse with the

259 Liberal Unionist, 52, May 1890.
burgeoning electorate, has a methodology developed which allows historians to explain how the Unionist parties spoke to the new voters.\textsuperscript{261} In particular, Jon Lawrence has encouraged historians to examine how political activists attempted to create political identities among the new electors by building on existing models of masculinity and freedom.\textsuperscript{262} In contrast to the perception of the Liberal Unionist Party as ‘generals without an army’, analysis of local campaigns proves that they were just as adept at doing so, and in some areas ahead of the other two parties.

The first to identify the problem of persuading working class men to support Liberal Unionist candidates was A. V. Dicey, whose suggestion was typically academic, claiming that ‘National Schoolmasters ...are a class almost certain to have influence and more accessible than many electors to argument.’\textsuperscript{263} Courtney spotted the major stumbling block, when he quoted a working man at a village meeting in Liskeard, ‘It would never do to have a separate parliament in Ireland; but Mr Gladstone has been the friend of the working man and we must stand by him.’\textsuperscript{264} As early as June 1887, the energetic Robert Bird, secretary of the WSLUA, noted that any attempt to appeal to working class voters was bound to be difficult, given the Unionist alliance and the traditional working class distrust of the Tories. He asserted that

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\item A.V. Dicey to Wolmer, 27 September 1887, Selborne MS II (13) 29-32.
\item L. Courtney to Fawcett, 4 July 1886, quoted in Gooch, \textit{Life of Lord Courtney}, p.261.
\end{thebibliography}
the [Liberal Unionist] cause is growing in popularity and strength, and it has got a strong hold upon the middle and the mercantile classes...

Working men generally follow the lead of their employers; but in order to secure that following it is necessary that the working man should be got to see…that the working man who also becomes a Liberal Unionist will not be called upon to renounce or in any way modify his Radical opinions…

As a result, the WSLUA opened the first Liberal Unionist reading room in the working class constituency of St Rollox, where James Caldwell only had a majority of 119. The Party clearly had some way to go however, as the defeats at Ayr and Govan demonstrated.

When he visited the WSLUA in April 1890, Lord Wolmer emphasised future priorities:

> There are infinitely more Liberal Unionists among the working classes in any given constituency than any gentleman here has any idea of…They won’t come to you… You must go to them…you must conduct a canvass, either by paid agents or by volunteers.

The Party began to consider other ways in which working class voters could be made aware of the Liberal Unionist message. In September 1888, it was suggested in the Party newspaper that literature might be distributed on workmen’s trains in East End. It was also suggested that, in order to reach the working man who was more likely to spend his evening in the pub or music hall, that there should be ‘a distribution of literature during the dinner hour, at the

---

265 Liberal Unionist, 12, 15 June 1887.
266 WSLUA minute book I, 1 December 1887, 10424/19.
267 Ibid., 16 April 1890.
gates of some of the large factories in West Ham and the Tower Hamlets.\(^{268}\)

In the Midlands, 'a Staffordshire Miner’ agreed that ‘what is wanted is to get among these men [miners] at the right time and in the right way.' He advised that traditional approaches to politics would yield paltry results, as 'the exchange of shots between the leaders of the opposing parties will not teach the lower orders of men the ins and outs of the Irish Question.' Instead he recommended political activity such as the Liberal Unionist van undertook as 'men will read a little work on the question, or listen on the road-side, who cannot be got to attend meetings a long distance from their homes.'\(^{269}\) The choice of canvasser was crucial as well, as, within the complex hierarchies and identities of the world of skilled and complex manual labour, the Party recognised the need to promote the cause through those of similar trades and professions.\(^{270}\)

In Lancastria, already inclined towards Unionism due, as Peter Clarke believes, to its traditional fear of cheap Irish labour and working class Anglicanism, there was a further pocket of Liberal Unionism with six MPs. In reality, seats such as Northwich in Cheshire or Hartington himself in rural Rossendale had little in common with urban seats such as that of Henry James in Bury, Peter Rylands in Burnley or W. S. Caine in Barrow in Furness. There was little co-ordination and little active organisation in the north, outside county Durham, which the Liberal Unionist Chief Whip and main party organiser after 1887, Lord Wolmer believed to be the best organised district in the country. As a result, support for

\(^{268}\) *Liberal Unionist*, 32, September 1888.
\(^{269}\) *Liberal Unionist*, 37, February 1889.
\(^{270}\) ‘A New Method of Canvassing’, *Liberal Unionist*, 43, August 1889.
Liberal Unionism was not sustained in Lancastria; the first warning coming when George Goschen failed to win the securest Unionist seat in Liverpool, Exchange, by seven votes in February 1887.

The experience of Heneage in Grimsby could give an indication of why the Liberal Unionists failed in the north. Although he could count on the sympathy of the many Wesleyan Methodists of Lincolnshire, Heneage's attitude towards the organisation of his local party remained largely aloof. He remained close to his agent, James Wintringham, but failed to perceive that Wintringham's commitment to Home Rule might have been made him less active for Heneage's re-election than he might have been. Although he informed Wintringham that he was being told that 'my interests are being neglected' and complained 'I do not know what you are and Reed are doing' in February 1892, he only continued to use Wintringham as his agent.  

A local supporter, Ben Coulbeck, wrote to Heneage in despair, 'I am amazed at the apathy shewed by...our leading people in the Unionist cause.' He warned that 'we have a formidable rival...unless something is done quickly we shall... “be caught napping.”'  

Wolmer himself became concerned and in March demanded of Heneage that 'he investigates in detective fashion.' Heneage was dismissive, however, 'I do not see that he can do any good myself and might do harm' and expressed continued confidence in Wintringham, informing Boraston of the situation.  

Instead Heneage chose to use personal attacks on Watkin's chosen candidate, Josse, denouncing him as a former lunatic, Frenchman, Republican

---

271 Heneage to Wintringham, 12 February 1892, 2 HEN 5/19/3; Heneage to Wintringham 27 May 1892, 2 HEN 5/19/29.
272 B. Coulbeck to Heneage, 7 March 1892, 2 HEN 5/19/12.
273 Heneage to Wintringham, 13 March 1892, 2 HEN 5/19/15; Heneage to Wintringham, 15 March 1892, 2 HEN 5/19/17.
and Roman Catholic.\textsuperscript{274}

Additional problems were the on-going poor relations with the Conservatives ('I do not trust the Tories at all.'\textsuperscript{275}) caused by their refusal to endorse Heneage as chairman for Lindsey County council, preferring Lord Oxenbridge, who defeated Heneage in January 1889.\textsuperscript{276} Heneage was also in poor health, retreating to Eastbourne for ten days in April 1892.\textsuperscript{277} He faced the opposition of the local paper, the \textit{Grimsby News}, who accused him of being a ‘deserter’ and throwing himself into Tory arms.\textsuperscript{278} Eventually, Heneage realised that his position was serious and dismissed Wintringham and began to seek the support of the Lord Cross and the M.S. & L. Railway Company.\textsuperscript{279} By then it was too late, though, and Heneage lost the election by the substantial majority of 636 votes.

Even after the 1895 electoral victories, the Liberal Unionists never recovered in the north, with the veteran radical Unionist, Sir Saville Crossley, losing heavily in the Halifax by-election in March 1897. Those seats that they did win in the area, were largely safe affluent seats, such as Central Bradford, Skipton and South Manchester, the gift of local Conservatives, encouraged by Balfour and Salisbury to keep the Liberal Unionist leaders happy and as a consequence to urge their supporters in marginal seats elsewhere to vote Conservative, despite their scruples (as solidly Liberal figures such as Henry Sidgwick did in

\textsuperscript{274} Heneage to Wintringham, 13 March 1892, 2 HEN 5/19/15. 
\textsuperscript{275} Heneage to Wintringham, 15 March 1892, 2 HEN 5/19/17. 
\textsuperscript{276} Heneage to Wintringham, 21 January 1889, 2 HEN 5/16/13. 
\textsuperscript{277} Heneage to Wintringham, 24 April 1892, 2 HEN 5/19/24. 
\textsuperscript{278} Heneage to Wintringham, 21 May 1892, 2 HEN 5/19/28. 
\textsuperscript{279} Heneage to Wintringham, 27 May 1892, 2 HEN 5/19/29.
Manchester and Lancashire, despite the aristocratic enclaves of support for Derby, Westminster and Hartington, remained largely loyal to Gladstone in 1886. Only in fifty-three seats across the country did the Gladstonian vote increase in 1886, and ten of these were in Lancashire. There were far fewer Liberal abstainers here than elsewhere. The Liberal Unionists failed to find a candidate in 1886 for the one seat that the Conservatives were willing to allow them to contest, South Manchester. Despite an opportunist letter to Leonard Courtney inviting him to stand from T. C. Rayner, secretary of the Manchester Branch of the Liberal Unionist Committee, who had heard of Courtney’s problems in Bodmin ‘they were unfortunately not attended with success.’ In 1892 Hopkinson was invited by Conservative Association to contest Manchester SW. Seats were also contested in Lancaster, Clitheroe and Heywood, Rossendale, Liverpool Exchange and Bury. All were lost except Bury. Moore suggests that ‘support for Home Rule united [Manchester’s] large Irish population behind the Liberal Party – a move which compensated for the loss of the Liberal Unionists.’

Rebels against an admired leader knew they faced difficulties in getting re-elected, especially in Gladstone’s heartland in the North of England. Henry James informed his electors in Bury that ‘I am going to take up my abode in no
cave. The climate of a cave would not suit me.\footnote{P. W. Clayden, \textit{England under the Coalition (2nd ed.)} (London, 1893), p. 28.} He was right to do so, for once he became a leading figure in the Liberal Unionist Party, his local caucus disowned him and attacked him. James had some sympathy with their position, though. After all, ‘they had won the seat in 1885 for me, and now a year afterwards they saw me holding it for those we had defeated.’\footnote{Henry James’ notebook, M45/1865.} As Hartington wrote to his father on 9 July:

\begin{quote}
A great many of my old supporters seem to be very angry and are working as hard as they can against me. Both the Manchester Liberal papers [the \textit{Guardian} and the \textit{Evening News}] are strong against me and we are certainly on the unpopular side with the mob this time.\footnote{Hartington to Duke of Devonshire, 9 July 1886, quoted in Holland, \textit{Life of Spencer Compton Vol. 2}, p.163.}
\end{quote}

By contrast, in Bury, the relatively small numbers of Irish-born residents, and the undeniably Liberal profile of the MP, Henry James, helped to secure this constituency for the next nine years. Despite Jeremy Smith’s assertion that dislike of local Irish communities motivated working men to vote Unionist, the only seat in Lancashire which the Liberal Unionists held for longer than the first parliament after 1886 was that with the smallest Irish population.\footnote{Smith ‘Conservative Ideology’, p.24.}

As has been noted above, there was an attempt to create leisure facilities for working men in Lancashire, with reading rooms and clubs set up in 1889. The Devon and Cornwall Association had already established one in Plymouth and Caine’s Metropolitan Committee had done so in South St. Pancras. This was applauded by W. Thorburn, MP for Peebles and Selkirk, who called for more such clubs. Backhouse, who represented an area which was struggling to
recruit, was also keen but he was aware that the initial expense was considerable and suggested that in many places these clubs would have to be subsidised by the local leaders of the Party. Heneage, on the other hand, stated that under proper management they paid very well and the Organising Council refused to commit themselves to subsidies, choosing instead merely to recommend ‘that clubs available for working men be established wherever practicable in towns and populous places.’

However, in October, at the Liberal Unionist Council meeting, Wolmer had to defend the very notion of working men's clubs, from Radical pro-temperance Unionists such as E.C. Baily, secretary of the Bradford Association, who claimed that his experience of political clubs in Birmingham had taught him ‘that there was a strong tendency for the political element to become subordinate to the social element...frequently the clubs became more drinking shops and card-playing places.’ In Wolmer’s view, the fact remained that ‘clubs had a great attraction for young men particularly.’ When the Party paper printed an encouragement to establish such clubs in working class areas, it did so in a fashion that would have made most local activists blanch, as the need to be affordable and need for efficient management made it clear that no help from headquarters would be forthcoming. Thus, only in areas of wide-spread Liberal Unionist support such as Birmingham, or areas where rich Unionist leaders were prepared to subsidise the establishment of such facilities, such as Bristol and Durham, were such vital sources of influence and social centres

---

288 Liberal Unionist 43, August 1889.
289 Liberal Unionist, 46, November 1889.
290 Wolmer at Leeds Conference of Liberal Unionists, November 1889, quoted in Liberal Unionist, 47, December 1889.
291 Liberal Unionist, 47, December 1889.
established.

The WLUA were a major source of canvassing, although the efforts of the upper middle class women of the Association sometimes demonstrated a complete lack of understanding of the demands of working class life. In 1894 the Oxford WLUA organised a meeting in a rural constituency, but ‘the time was unfortunately chosen and all the people were busy haymaking.’\textsuperscript{292} Getting suitable workers was hard as well, as Mrs Sinclair complained in May and again in June, when she noted that ‘the privates and recruits are conspicuously absent in the organisation.’\textsuperscript{293} Those that could be persuaded to go house to house were reluctant to enter working class areas; as another organiser reported to Mrs Gell in June, ‘others said they would not go into the courts and alleys [of Witney]. So it ended in my employing a lame man to distribute some [leaflets].’\textsuperscript{294}

The Oxford WLUA records also reveal the problems of persuading Liberal Unionists to vote for Conservative candidates. As Mrs Sinclair, one of Mrs Lyttelton Gell’s most active workers, found when she visited the local villages, there were ‘Gladstonians who might become Liberal Unionists’, but only ‘if they had a Liberal leader. I do not think they would vote Tory unless associated to strengthen each other and well led.’ She quoted verbatim the attitudes of several Liberals. One, John Adams, an ‘old labourer’, voted Liberal even though ‘he could never see that Home Rule was right.’ Another had ‘doubts about Home

\textsuperscript{292} A. Richardson (Organising Sec. Oxford LUA) to Mrs Lyttelton Gell, 27 July 1894, D3287/66/4/1/55.
\textsuperscript{293} Mrs Sinclair to Mrs Lyttelton Gell, 17 May 1894, DCRO, D3287/66/4/1/83, Mrs Sinclair to Mrs Lyttelton Gell, n.d., (June 1894) D3287/66/4/1/101.
\textsuperscript{294} M. Westall to Mrs Gell, n.d., (June 1894), D3287/66/4/1/96.
Rule but G.O.M. is always right so “lumps it.” This sentimental attachment to Gladstone’s reputation as the friend of the working man was a challenge that the Liberal Unionists had to struggle with, even after the Liberal leader’s retirement. As early as April 1886, Boraston noted that ‘the very name of Gladstone is a most potent instrument to conquer with. The creed of the majority seems to be “if you cannot see eye to eye with Mr Gladstone in this Irish matter, you are no Liberal.”’

Another common attitude among rural workers, which was a major stumbling block, was that the labourer ‘hates the farmers’ and ‘fears the Tories are against free trade.’ Mrs Sinclair was convinced that many wives were Unionists but their husbands remained Liberals by default. In many cases, in rural England, the constitutional implications of Home Rule seemed far removed from the lives of most labourers, as Mrs Sinclair complained, ‘it is very difficult to get the country people I meet, even our own lads, to take any interest in the Irish Question.’

Even before the 1892 election, an official of the WLUA asked pointedly in 1889: ‘Have we made the way that we should with the working classes?’ She contrasted the experience between the regions of the country: ‘Why should there be large number of Liberal Unionist working men in Birmingham and a good many in Cornwall, and not in other constituencies?’ The writer, in common with other activists, questioned the value of ‘large meetings and set speeches... however good these may be, it is probable that the country is growing a little tired of them.’ The solution had been had found in areas were volunteers were plentiful and the WLUA was keen to offer the same services. ‘What is wanted is

295 J. Boraston to J. Collings, 16 April 1886, JC8/5/3/12.
296 Mrs Sinclair to Mrs Lyttelton Gell, 21 March 1894, D3287/66/4/1/72.
297 Mrs Sinclair to Mrs Lyttelton Gell, 17 May 1894, D3287/66/4/1/83.
more work among individuals in each constituency, more careful finding out and bringing together of those, who, whether rich or poor, whether men or women, would have some influence over their neighbours when the time for action comes.\textsuperscript{298}

By November 1889, Wolmer was almost in despair as shown by his candid comments at the Liberal Unionist conference in Leeds. In his view, the focus on traditional political methods meant that 'they had quietly allowed the Gladstonians and the Conservatives to monopolise the working men.' Wolmer concluded that 'if no attempt was made to get at the working men, all the organisation would be of very little avail. That was a fault which he was afraid the Party was in many cases suffering from.'\textsuperscript{299}

In London, the WLUA kept up its efforts to reach working class men at times which suited them, rather than the Party. Bompas, Leedham White, Robert Purvis and Thomas Richardson all addressed meetings in the mess rooms of the locomotive sheds at St Pancras organised by the N. St Pancras WLUA.\textsuperscript{300} It is possible to presume that even the title 'Unionist' had become tainted with 'Toryism' among working class voters by the early 1890s, as a 'Constitutional Open Air League' had begun holding meetings every Sunday at St Pancras Arches, Mile End Waste, Regent's Park, Victoria Park and Wormwood Scrubs, in opposition to similar Socialist meetings. As it was proposing opening reading rooms in working class districts in winter, it was clear that it was being funded from a deeper pocket than that of its organiser, John Byland, who lived in Hammersmith. The source was mostly

\textsuperscript{298} 'The Work of the Womens' Liberal Unionist Association by one of its officials', \textit{Liberal Unionist}, 44, September 1889.
\textsuperscript{299} \textit{Liberal Unionist}, 47, December 1889.
\textsuperscript{300} \textit{Liberal Unionist}, 60, January 1891.
likely the Constitutional Club itself, which had already learnt the art of keeping its name free of Conservative associations since 1883.\footnote{Liberal Unionist, 69, October 1891.}

Finally, in mid-1891 the central Party responded with a leaflet, \textit{What the Unionist Government has done for the Working Man}, which included twenty-one measures passed by the Conservatives which would be of benefit to lower class voters. As a piece of sophisticated political persuasion it was not highly convincing. Important measures such as free education and local government were hidden beneath such trivial issues as the 'Margarine Act', whilst the attempt to claim that 'the reduction of National Debt' was worthy of inclusion smacked of a desperate attempt to produce as long a list as possible, especially when it was accompanied by the limp hope that ‘much of that...will go to the working man.’ Finally, the exhortation that ‘is it not his duty and his interest to support the men who have done these things and who are ready to do more in the same direction?’ implied an ability to command and expect deference from the lower orders that surely belonged to the paternalistic politics of pre-1867 Britain, not the age of militant Trade Unionism and the year of the founding of the Social Democratic Federation.\footnote{Argyll to Wolmer, 15 March 1892, Selborne MS II (13) 123.} Argyll suggested that Bright should be politically disinterred and his writings on the Irish Question widely distributed as ‘nothing so useful has been written because of the writer’s influence and authority with the working classes’, thus demonstrating an attitude towards the working classes that was, at best, twenty years out of date.\footnote{What the Unionist Government has done for the Working Man, Liberal Unionist Leaflet no. 306, (London, 1891).}
As the by-election defeats continued and the Liberal Unionists' rather ham-fisted propaganda and organisation failed to halt the tide, despite the money thrown at Union Jack vans, leaflets, association meetings and agents’ fees, the attitude towards the electorate became quite bitter. The Birmingham WLUA held a meeting in April 1892 with the revealing title: ‘How best to deal with the ignorance and apathy of the voters.’\textsuperscript{304} The Party did try to overcome its limited appeal to the mass electorate in 1892 by targeting key working class groups. As well as the work of the Rural Labourer’s League, Chamberlain had been cultivating the assistance of the sailors’ champion, Samuel Plimsoll. In July 1892, he wrote to the \textit{Liberal Unionist}, contrasting the lack of pertinent reform proposals from the Liberals with ‘warm and decided part’ taken by Chamberlain, and urging those ‘who think sailors’ lives are of more importance than party politics …to support those candidates who will aid to keep the present Government in power.’\textsuperscript{305}

\textbf{By-election performance}

The returns from the initial by-elections in 1887 clearly worried the Liberal Unionist organisers, in particular, W. S. Caine, the radical Unionists’ whip. He wrote in the initial issue of the \textit{Liberal Unionist}:

\begin{quote}
The by-elections...one and all teach a lesson to LUs. In every instance we should have done better had our party been organised and educated...it is very clear that those Liberals in Ilkeston who refused to bow the knee to Baal could not bring themselves to vote for a Conservative candidate and abstained altogether, to the number of
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{304} \textit{Liberal Unionist}, 76, May 1892.
\textsuperscript{305} \textit{Liberal Unionist}, 78, July 1892.
nearly 1,200.

... The increased Parnellite majority in Ilkeston was made up of LUs, who are Unionists still, but who, for want of mutual support and encouragement, have been persuaded by an unusually clever candidate to support him on other grounds than the Irish question, such as Local Option, Disestablishment and what not.  

Due to an unfortunate piece of editing, the same issue of the paper revealed the current, clearly inadequate Liberal Unionist electoral tactic: ‘Mr O. T. Duke and Mr J. Parker Smith have been canvassing the Liberal Unionists in Ilkestone [sic].’ As both these figures were (at this stage) minor figures in the LUA, perhaps it is not surprising that the Liberal electorate was less than impressed.

A letter from ‘Unionist’ in Lewisham in the 13 April edition of the Party journal made it clear what the fundamental problem was for the average Liberal Unionist:

Let a man be put up for them [the Liberal Unionists], and not until then, shall both we and Mr Gladstone know our exact strength…

“Vote for a Tory Unionist!” Hundreds, ay and thousands of them will not, talk as you will. Burnley and Liverpool were lost in this way. At Ilkeston the majority of the Gladstonians might and would, I feel confident, have been still further reduced…

In my own borough we Liberal Unionists added nearly 1,000 votes to the Tory majority, and at least 500 more voted for the Gladstonian candidate,

---

306 W. S. Caine ‘Organise – Educate!’, Liberal Unionist, 1, 30 March 1887.
307 Liberal Unionist, 1, 30 March 1887.
rather than do so for (they think) the hated Tory.\footnote{308}

However, in the heartland of Liberal Unionism in the South West of England, the Party did appear to be making some progress. As the Party newspaper reported after the St Austell by-election, despite the majority of the Gladstonian candidate exceeding 2,000 in 1886, the Liberal Unionists, given their success elsewhere in Cornwall, ‘resolved to bring forward a LU candidate to contest the division.’ The reduction of the Gladstonian majority from 2,281 to 211 was reported to have ‘far exceeded the expectations of the local Unionists.’ Revealing the reason for this relative success, the paper gave credit to McArthur, the Liberal Unionist candidate, attributing this in part to his religion, as being a Methodist he could appeal to the sectarian interests of the ‘¾ of the constituency [that] are followers of Wesley.’ No doubt determined to counter the pessimism that appeared to be infecting the Party, St. Loe Strachey opined that ‘the St Austell election must be reckoned as by far the most significant political event since the general election.’\footnote{309} In doing so he showed that there was much truth in both ‘Unionist’s’ and Chamberlain’s assertion that many Liberal Unionists would only vote for a Liberal candidate, and that the choice of candidate to suit the profile of constituency was crucial.

An Irish correspondent commented similarly following the Spalding by-election in July, noting that, with the Home Rule Bill now safely consigned to history, ‘the average Liberal or Radical Unionist will...rather vote for the candidate with whom he disagrees on one question only, than for the candidate with whom he agrees on one question only,’ with the consequence that Gladstonians will

\footnote{308}{\textit{Liberal Unionist}, 3, 13 April 1887.}
\footnote{309}{\textit{Liberal Unionist}, 9, 25 May 1887.}
probably win 'every bye-election.' The anonymous commentator suggested that a Liberal Unionist candidate should be found for every seat, and should fight, even if the Conservatives put up a candidate.\textsuperscript{310} The Party, mindful of their limited room for manoeuvre, could not pursue such a policy with Middleton's eye upon every constituency and so chose to put their efforts into campaigning for each Unionist candidate, regardless of his party orientation, with limited results. In the campaign to retain West Edinburgh for the Liberal Unionists in the face of Buchanan's defection, Henry James visited, after being told by Hartington that the election was 'very important.'\textsuperscript{311} Caine reported after the defeats of February 1888, that the Gladstonian candidates had succeeded as 'many Liberal Unionists were induced by the large concessions now made by every Gladstonian candidate to Liberal Unionist sentiment to vote for men whose professed views are not the views of their great leader.'\textsuperscript{312} The Liberals had also turned Salisbury's typically unguarded words, 'it is only to the judgement of Conservatives that I attach any importance,' spoken at a Conservative meeting in Liverpool on 13 January, to their advantage. As they pointedly asked of Salisbury's supposed allies: 'Liberal Unionists - will you be insulted in this fashion? If not, do all you can to inflict a crushing defeat on these Tory insultors [sic].'\textsuperscript{313} The quality of the candidate was not necessarily a cause of defeat either. The prominent Liberal journalist, H. O. Arnold-Forster, adopted son of W.E. Forster, stood for the Party in Dewsbury in November 1888 and lost by over 2,000 votes in a Yorkshire that seemed to have become an impregnable Gladstonian fortress. The Party was left clutching at increasingly insignificant

\textsuperscript{310} Liberal Unionist, 16, 13 July 1887
\textsuperscript{311} Hartington to James, 18 December 1887, M45/300.
\textsuperscript{312} Liberal Unionist, 26, March 1888.
\textsuperscript{313} NLF Leaflet, Liberals! Liberals! Liberals! quoted verbatim in Liberal Unionist, 25, February 1888.
straws, claiming that 'Arnold-Forster succeeded in materially diminishing the
Gladstonian majority' (when he had only reduced it by 250 votes) and that his
achievement of 40% of the vote was considerable as, according to Arnold-
Forster's agent, 'no one could have named a score of Liberal Unionists in the
parliamentary borough' which says little for the local Association's activity in the
preceding two and half years.314

Even in Scotland, the tide of defeat could not be stemmed. The first warning
came in Glasgow Bridgeton in August 1887 when Evelyn Ashley was defeated
by nearly 10% of the vote in an area though to be the heartland of Scottish
Liberal Unionism. Milner, writing to Gell was cutting in his assessment of the
Liberal Unionist electoral efforts:

We are a lot of miserable, well meaning amateurs and we share the fate
of patriotic volunteers fighting against mercenaries; of amateur actors
figuring in a London company; of laymen pleading against professional
lawyers...don't let your people massacre any more innocents.315

In Ayr Burghs the following June, Ashley stood and lost again (albeit by the tiny
majority of fifty-three votes), eliciting the criticism of 'a Scotchman' who blamed
the defeat on 'Unionists not exerting … in getting a sufficient number of
volunteer canvassers' and who revealed the parochial nature of Scottish
politics, exhorting the leadership to 'secure, wherever it is possible, candidates
with local influence.'316 This opinion was echoed by John Borland's comment at
the AGM of the WSLUA in December 1888, when he opined that the 'election in
Ayr was lost through over-confidence on the part of the Unionist Party – and

314 Liberal Unionist, 35, December 1888.
315 Milner to P. Gell, 3 August 1887, Milner MS 4.
316 Liberal Unionist, 30, July 1888.
through their organisation not being in proper order.\footnote{WSLUA minute book I, 6 December 1888, 10424/19.} The concern about poor organisation was also expressed following Sir John Pender’s heavier defeat at Govan in January 1889. John McCulloch, Radical MP for St. Rollox between 1885 and 1886 (who had voted for the Home Rule Bill in June 1886 but had retired in favour of Caldwell in 1886), believed that neither Ashley nor Pender had been chosen by the electors, going so far as to say that ‘he did not see why it should be that a certain coterie or number of gentlemen should choose a candidate for a district without taking the constituency into its confidence.’\footnote{WSLUA minute book I, 5 February 1889, 10424/19.} ‘Another Scottish Radical’ even went so far as to suggest that no Liberal Unionist would be better than one whose Liberalism was not evident. ‘..if our candidates do not come up to the mark, we must stand aside and the Unionist cause will lose votes and work which it can ill spare.’\footnote{Liberal Unionist, 38, March 1889.} There were also the tactics employed by the local party associations. The North British Daily Mail asserted that Pender had attempted to improve his reputation as a friend of the workers by bringing in Orangemen from Belfast to bolster the attendance at his meetings in the poorer areas.\footnote{Northern British Daily Mail, 5 January 1889.} When this was reported, it must surely have disheartened some Liberal voters who, like T. W. Russell, who saw co-operation with the Orange order as a betrayal of Liberal principles.

For the secretary of the Party Association responsible for both these defeats, however, the problem was larger than organisation or temperance. Bird commented in March that ‘what is dealing disaster among the Scotch constituencies is our identification with Conservatism brought about by our
negative attitude.' The majority of Scots had rejected the principles of Conservatism for so long that, as the organiser of an Association of genuine Liberals, he felt that 'the cure for this lies in a forward Liberal programme, not urged to excess, but advocated with earnest freedom...' and he called upon the Conservatives to show a greater flexibility in their attitude to reform.\textsuperscript{321} John McCulloch had similarly commented on Pender's defeat that 'if Sir John had been able to adopt certain planks of the Liberal policy, which he did not do, he would have carried with him a third more of the constituency.'\textsuperscript{322}

The returns from the by-elections did not improve and Chamberlain concurred with Bird's conclusions in dispirited fashion in October 1889, following the loss of Peterborough: 'the bye-elections are most discouraging. I am afraid the Liberal cry is too strong for us, and that it is true, as Harcourt says, that the Liberal Unionists of 1886 have largely become Gladstonian since then.'\textsuperscript{323} The \textit{Liberal Unionist} did its best to find crumbs of comfort in the defeat of Robert Purvis, by asserting that 'the Peterborough electors fell a prey to separatist misrepresentations.'\textsuperscript{324} The truth was that Purvis had been a second choice candidate, largely as the dominant gentry family in the area, the Wentworth-Fitzwilliams refused to put up a candidate despite Hartington's entreaties.\textsuperscript{325} The defeat of C.B. Logan in Elgin and Nairn in the same month was attributed to an ungentlemanly and unwise campaign; 'the Unionists...probably lost some votes – they certainly deserved to lose some votes - by an indiscreet and abortive attempt to rake up an old charge against Mr Seymour Keay which he

\textsuperscript{322} WSLUA minute book I, 5 February 1889, 10424/19.
\textsuperscript{323} Quoted in Holland, \textit{Life of Spencer Compton Vol. 2}, p.218n.
\textsuperscript{324} \textit{Liberal Unionist}, 46, November 1889.
\textsuperscript{325} Hartington to Wolmer, 13 September 1889, Selborne MS II (4) 41-42.
had no difficulty in rebutting."\textsuperscript{326} Hartington's only comment confirmed his lack of understanding of the electoral mood, as all he could write to Wolmer was that 'Peterborough and Elgin are very depressing.'\textsuperscript{327} Only the Ulster LUA seemed capable of some decisive effort. Conscious of the damage that Nationalist accusations of government oppression and landlord exploitation were doing to the Unionist cause, a group of seventeen 'good men – Methodists if possible, and working men' were selected 'to assist at the by-elections...to help to stem the torrent of Nationalist misstatements.'\textsuperscript{328}

The trend of defeats was finally reversed with the election of J. Parker Smith, one of the original members of the Liberal Unionist Committee, to the seat vacated by Craig Sellar in Lanarkshire Partick. The quality of his campaign and the highly organised Association is evident in the Parker Smith papers at the Mitchell Library in Glasgow, which includes a highly detailed canvas of the constituency, with pledges of support outnumbering those for the Gladstonian liberal in every ward.\textsuperscript{329} Parker Smith made considerable efforts to maximise his support, appealing to the Conservative electorate by agreeing to abstain on the issue of Scottish disestablishment and emphasising his principles as a prohibitionist for the Liberal voters. As a result the seat was retained despite a 5% swing away from the Liberal Unionists. Although the Liberal vote had increased since 1886 by 644, enough Liberals had abstained (the \textit{Glasgow Herald} estimated that '1,350 voters...refrained from polling') or voted for Parker Smith, that, together with the Conservative vote he had secured, he had

\textsuperscript{326} \textit{Liberal Unionist}, 46. November 1889. 
\textsuperscript{327} Hartington to Wolmer, 9 October 1889, Selborne MS II (4) 43-44. 
\textsuperscript{328} R. MacGeah to H. de F. Montgomery, 14 February 1890, quoted in Biagini, \textit{British Democracy}, pp. 267-268. 
\textsuperscript{329} TD1/129.
improved on Craig Sellar’s poll of 1886 by 422, giving him a majority of 219. The relief was palpable. ‘I hope it marks a turn in popular feeling,’ wrote one Liberal Unionist, ‘your success has been a pleasure to all Liberal Unionists’ wrote St. Loe Strachey.\footnote{H. W. Elphiston to Parker Smith, 14 February 1890; St. Loe Strachey to Parker Smith, 13 February 1890, TD1/129.}

Sadly, Craig Sellar’s success in Partick proved the exception rather than the rule and one of the few seats in the North of England was lost in January 1891 when the railway director, Sir William Gray, was defeated in Hartlepool, in what the Party newspaper admitted was ‘unquestionably a serious blow.’\footnote{Liberal Unionist, 61, February 1891.} In these circumstances, perhaps it was inevitable that Chamberlain would be tempted to announce a policy innovation without consulting the Party’s leaders. Although his declaration of support for old age pensions was given in support of a Conservative candidate, Chamberlain’s priority was to avoid any perception of Unionist weakness in Birmingham. This he achieved spectacularly, with a four-fold increase in the Conservatives’ majority in the 1891 Aston by-election that was a striking contrast to the Liberal Unionist experience in their other strongholds of Devon and Cornwall and Lancashire.

South Molton was in the Liberal Unionist heartland of West Devon and Cornwall, and there appears to have been a sense of local confidence but a fatal lack of organisation. As late as October 1891, Hartington was having to ask Wolmer ‘what is doing about South Molton?’ Clearly no local candidate had been brought forward, as Hartington went on, wearily, ‘I suppose we ought to contest it…’ A. V. Dicey, visiting the constituency, warned Wolmer that the
situation looked bleak. ‘From what I hear, I fear that we shall be defeated in Devonshire.’

In a seat with a Liberal Unionist majority of 1,689 in 1886, the Liberal candidate managed a spectacular swing of 21%, and took the seat with a majority of over 1,000 in what Chamberlain described as a ‘smash.’

Although the hostile *Bristol Mercury* asserted that the seat was lost because of the unpopularity of 'Whiggism' with the working man, the leader writer of the Liberal Unionist *Exeter Flying Post* put the blame on more prosaic failures by the local Party:

> The Unionist registration has been scarcely worthy of that name, and to sum up the whole matter we say that until the recent election was forced upon the constituency the Unionist Party went to sleep.

Emerson Dawson, writing in the *Liberal Unionist* commented that the South Molton election came as a surprise upon everyone...’ Like many Unionists, he had relied on the attitude of the Methodists of Devon, as 'dissent is a great power in the constituency', but noted that the electoral effect of this had been mitigated by the work of the ‘protestant Home Rule Association’, who had 'quite imposed their views on the Nonconformist ministers – a very influential body in the constituency.' Clearly they had made a sophisticated appeal to the charity of such influential local figures and 'succeed[ed] in persuading the South Molton ministers that the protests made against the really monstrous interference of the priests with Irish electors was merely ‘the old ‘No Popery’ cry slightly disguised.’

Although the Party paper concluded that ‘unionism seems to have

---

332 A. V. Dicey to Wolmer, 11 November 1891, Selborne MS II (13) 99-102.
334 *Bristol Mercury*, 16 November 1891; *Exeter Flying Post*, 14 November 1891.
335 E. Dawson, “Popery” and “Clericalism” *Liberal Unionist*, 71, December 1891.
for the time being lost its charm to the average voter’, the truth was that the Party had failed to counter the effective Gladstonian canvassing in the constituency. As ‘a Local Liberal Unionist Secretary’ candidly commented:

What is the use of appointing Liberal Unionist Agents or Conservative Agents to work divisions up, when, as I know, a few weeks after their appointment, country parsons and squires (in whose hamlets a Radical lecturer has been speaking more than once) come down to the office to tell the agent not to disturb their little corner with lectures, or even canvassing or formation of committees; but to leave it all to them. They know all and will see to it themselves when the election comes. Come it does with results like South Molton and Market Harborough and then the agent is blamed by the very country squires and parsons who would not allow him to work on modern lines with modern methods and weapons…They must work themselves with the committee and help heartily instead of hindering the working agent or secretary, coming more often into more direct and personal contact with him, instead of trusting to honorary and ornamental secretaries of their own class, who know nothing of the working classes and their wants.336

Then, in January 1892, Hartington’s own seat at Rossendale was lost after his accession to his father’s Dukedom. Wolmer hoped that a low-turn out might save the seat, writing to Salisbury ‘on a poll of 85 per cent we should pull it off by about 150.’337 Unfortunately, the local Liberal Association brought out the urban working class voters, by carefully stressing those elements of the

337 Wolmer to Salisbury, 9 Jan 1892, Salisbury Papers.
Newcastle programme that would appeal to the constituency (in particular the proposal for a eight hour working day) and the seat was lost on a 92% turn-out, despite the appalling weather on polling day.\textsuperscript{338} Although the loss was merely described as ‘unfortunate’ by the Party organ, there was an admission of how little progress the Party had made in establishing itself in Lancashire. ‘It was felt in 1886 by all well-informed persons that Lord Hartington owed his election to his great popularity with all classes in the constituency. It was not a seat then which any other Unionist could have carried.’\textsuperscript{339} Hartington was less sanguine in private, describing the prospect of defeat to Wolmer as ‘simply disastrous’ and one which would ‘affect the thinking of all possible and impossible candidates.’\textsuperscript{340} Even Chamberlain was taken aback, writing to Wolmer on 25 January, ‘Rossendale is a great blow. I am afraid it will seriously affect the business of the Session. How the voters must have lied. I confess the result altogether surprises me.’\textsuperscript{341}

The culprit responsible for the disaster, when it did come, was not difficult to find. Despite the death of the Duke having been long anticipated, Hartington appears to have done almost nothing to prepare for a by-election until December 1891, when he wrote in desperation to Wolmer whether a candidate could be found ‘Is there anybody in Manchester or could the Birmingham people find us anybody?’ Hartington hoped to persuade Sir Thomas Lea to move seats from South Londonderry but the Irishman had too much sense to abandon a

\textsuperscript{338} Birmingham Gazette, 15 January 1892.
\textsuperscript{339} Liberal Unionist, 73, February 1892.
\textsuperscript{340} Hartington to Wolmer, 9 December 1891, Selborne MS II (4) 156.
\textsuperscript{341} Chamberlain to Wolmer, 25 Jan 1892, JC5/74/11.
safe seat for the unhealthy climes (for Liberal Unionists) of Lancashire.342

**Electioneering and 1892**

Jon Lawrence has recently explored how the coming of a mass electorate led to a ‘late Victorian explosion of outdoor speaking’,343 and Katherine Rix has explored the importance of a new class of professional political operative in reaching out to the newly enfranchised rural labourer.344 In 1888, the Liberal Unionist Club took the decisive step to improve their canvassing and electioneering in the crucial rural seats by imitating one of the Liberals' most effective forms of propaganda, the anti-coercion van. They unveiled the Liberal Unionist van, part of 'a flying column consisting of a van and one or two tricycles, to traverse some of the more remote parts of the country.' The van contained posters of Irish brutalities, and sometimes had a limelight projector with slides.345 There was clearly no problem in meeting the 'necessarily heavy' expense since 'it will carry with it the dissolving view apparatus belonging to the club,...and it will be attended by one or more assistants on tricycles, who will visit all villages adjacent to the line of march, distribute literature, and call attention to the van and its movements.'346 This first van cost the considerable sum of £400 a year to run, but such was the sense of crisis engendered by the continued by-election defeats that in May 1889 it was announced that a second van would be started by the Club.347 The leadership clearly took some persuading, as in August Duke was still pressing for a second or even a third

---

342 Hartington to Wolmer, 9 December 1891, Selborne MS II (4) 154.
343 Lawrence, Electing Our Masters, p.74.
345 *Liberal Unionist*, 53, June 1890.
347 *Liberal Unionist*, 40, May 1889.
van, ‘as they are convinced that it is absolutely necessary for the success of our policy to adopt this method of reaching the rural populations.’\(^{348}\) The second van, specifically designed to cover the North of England, was run by James Dingle from March 1890,\(^{349}\) although local activists still felt more were needed.\(^{350}\) By November 1890, a third van was operating\(^{351}\), and, after an appeal by the Liberal Union Club, two more were launched in Spring 1892, in two of the most vulnerable areas of Liberal Unionism, the East of Scotland and East Anglia.\(^{352}\) On occasions, the vans clearly did much good, as the following report of the visit of a van to Wellow parish in Somerset reveals.

The Union Jack Van, belonging to the Liberal Union Club, visited Wellow and created a sensation…The van was illuminated, in a novel way, by some ten or twelve youngsters sitting on the tailboard holding candles, the effect was decidedly good and the inhabitants turned out en masse to witness the procession…At Mr Willis’s wagon-house the lecturer, Mr Foster Boggis, spoke at some length on the Irish question, giving some very cogent reasons why Home Rule should not be granted to Ireland…After the address some magnificent lantern views were exhibited with the brilliant lime light. The views were unusually fine and were much appreciated by the audience…The meeting altogether was a good one…and ended with the singing of the National Anthem, it will long be remembered by the people.\(^{353}\)

\(^{348}\) *Liberal Unionist*, 43, August 1889.

\(^{349}\) *Liberal Unionist*, 51, April 1890.

\(^{350}\) *Liberal Unionist*, 52, May 1890.

\(^{351}\) *Liberal Unionist*, 59, December 1890.

\(^{352}\) *Liberal Unionist*, 76, May 1892.

However, five vans covering the country could only do so much in rural Britain and in East Perthshire the secretary of the combined Unionist Associations organised a ‘Unionist Cycling Corps’ to spread the message, ‘firstly to the smithies and secondly to the bothies of the constituency.’

Despite this innovation, the Liberal Unionists, as the by-election results suggested, were in a particularly vulnerable position, which the Newcastle Programme sought to worsen. Somehow, despite their personal commitment to many of the issues contained in the Programme, the Liberal Unionists had to oppose it as a whole and yet offer alternative constructive policies in order to retain their claims to be ‘Liberal.’ Robert Bird, organiser of the west of Scotland, warned that a purely Conservative domestic programme would not satisfy the voters and called for a return to the ‘unauthorised’ programme of 1885. Even the normally moderate WLUA recognised the centrality of social questions in the forthcoming election.

Chamberlain did his best in the time he had, considering the constraints that both Conservative and moderate Liberal allies placed upon him. He re-stated his personal commitment to old age pensions and industrial accident insurance, industrial arbitration courts, shorter working hours and aid for home improvements and house purchase, but he was forced to tone down his proposals. At the Liberal Unionist Club on 8 March, he talked of ‘a simple moderate programme’, and at the Annual Meeting of the Grand Council of the...
Birmingham Liberal Unionist Association on 29 April, he used that classic phrase of inaction, ‘we are not going to build Rome in a day’ when referring to old age pensions.\textsuperscript{358} He did support the second reading of the doomed Miners’ Eight Hours Bill at Westminster, on a matter of principle chiefly, but also to counter the appeal of the ‘new’ unionism that had been behind much of the industrial unrest since the successful London dock strike of 1889. As he noted in his political memoir, ‘legislation was a more convenient way of securing the result than strikes.’\textsuperscript{359} Yet he risked provoking the ire of Conservative industrialists like George Wyndham and moderate financiers such as the Chancellor of the Exchequer, George Goschen, who feared the increase in costs that such a bill would bring in a period of intense foreign competition.\textsuperscript{360}

Chamberlain’s influence, along with Salisbury’s concerns over the voting intentions of agricultural labourers, also lay behind the Small Holdings Bill finally introduced in 1892, but this was not enthusiastically supported by the Conservatives. Chamberlain approached the 1892 election without a clearly defined political role, and tied to an exhausted Conservative ministry on the one hand and passive and unambitious moderate allies on the other.

Unsurprisingly, in these circumstances, the Party played the Orange Card instead and both Chamberlain and Hartington warned of a rebellion in Ulster and encouraged the holding of anti-Home Rule demonstrations in and around Belfast. This culminated in the Ulster Convention of 17 June, held in a specially erected building. This was reported by the \textit{Tory} as having included 12,330 Ulstermen from all classes, amongst whom there were 730 clergymen, 443

\textsuperscript{358} \textit{The Times}, 30 April, 1892.
\textsuperscript{359} ‘Memoir’ dated 1892, JC/8/1/1.
\textsuperscript{360} See Green, \textit{Crisis of Conservatism}, pp.131-2.
magistrates and 915 professionals.\textsuperscript{361} As J. Bardon comments, this was a carefully choreographed demonstration of respectable resistance, ‘Unionist leaders were determined to erase the memory of the vicious rioting that had so besmirched the opposition to Home Rule in 1886.’\textsuperscript{362} Chamberlain was quite prepared to clutch at this straw, noting in his diary that the general election should be postponed as long as possible as ‘the Ulster Convention would have great influence and its effect would increase during the next few months.’\textsuperscript{363} Chamberlain also attempted, once again, to use his personal identification with non-conformist politics to influence traditional Liberal voters. On 30 March, the inaugural meeting of the Nonconformist Unionist Association took place, at which Chamberlain resorted to some fairly unpleasant sectarian language, referring to ‘the extraordinary and baneful influence on political movements by the Catholic priests of Ireland’\textsuperscript{364} which he again employed at the Birmingham Liberal Unionist Association meeting of 29 April:

Our fellow subjects in Ulster, the strongest race in Ireland, the most determined, the men who have made whatever prosperity that exists in Ireland, would never submit to the dominion of a parliament, a great majority of whose members were to be elected at the dictation of the Roman Catholic priests.\textsuperscript{365}

Having made his name as the founder of the political caucus in Birmingham, Chamberlain was also alarmed by the lack of effective structures among the

\textsuperscript{361} The Tory, 3, 20 September 1892, Conservative Party Archive, Bodleian Library, CPA Pub 1/1.
\textsuperscript{362} J. Bardon, A History of Ulster (2\textsuperscript{nd} ed.) (Belfast, 2005), pp. 409-410.
\textsuperscript{363} ‘Memoir’ dated 1892, JC/8/1/1.
\textsuperscript{364} The Times, 31 March, 1892.
\textsuperscript{365} The Times, 26 April, 1892.
Liberal Unionist Party at a provincial level outside the West Midlands. In Leicester, the most influential Liberal Unionist, the mayor, Thomas Wright, not only refused to stand as a Liberal Unionist candidate, but shortly afterwards rejoined the Gladstonian Party. The incumbent Liberal MP was returned and the Liberal Unionist Association was wound up in the city. In Bury, as senior a Liberal Unionist as Henry James had to appoint his own amateur agent, a local solicitor named Butcher, as there was no system of professional agents, in contrast to the other two parties. Even in Stratford-upon-Avon, only just outside Chamberlain’s sphere of influence, it was only in April 1892 that the local Conservatives were able to report that ‘considerable progress has been made in the formation of a Liberal Unionist Association.’ As Chamberlain baldly warned the Party, ‘What is necessary in order that our side might win at the election? Of course, organisation.’ He went on to draw the lesson from the failure of the ‘moderates’ (Unionists) in the London county council elections of the previous week, who were beaten ‘in the first place because their organisation was less effective than that of their opponents, and above all, because they had no policy, except a policy of negation.’

Given these problems, it is not surprising that Chamberlain wanted to wait as long as possible before fighting an election, to give time for his new programme to be fully publicised and for the revitalised Liberal Unionist Association to start making progress. In a symbolic reminder of the continued divisions between the

---

367 Henry James’s notebook, M45/1865.
369 Chamberlain speaking at the Liberal Unionist Club, quoted in The Times, 9 March 1892.
370 The Times, 9 March 1892.
radical and moderate Liberal Unionists on even procedural matters, he found himself in a minority of one when the date for the dissolution was decided at Devonshire house on 25 May 1892. Chamberlain tried to argue for an election in the autumn, believing, as he had written to the Metropolitan Liberal Unionist Federation only two days previously, ‘it appears to me that the “flowing tide” is with us.’\(^{371}\) But both Captain Middleton, the Conservative Chief Agent, and Lord Wolmer, the Liberal Unionist Chief Whip, believed that the Unionists might benefit from the bitter splits among the Liberals and Irish Nationalists over the post-Parnell strategy for Ireland and suggested an immediate election. Balfour and Devonshire agreed and Salisbury called the election next day.\(^{372}\)

In 1892, Chamberlain faced Liberal opposition in every one of his Party’s Birmingham seats except Edgbaston. In the circumstances, he made his priority the defence of these seats and those of the three county ‘duchy’ he had been allocated in 1889,\(^{373}\) perhaps with the cynical reasoning that they were held by loyal ‘radical’ Unionists, unlike most of the rest of the Party’s seats which were held by moderates, who had distrusted his intentions since 1880. He opened his campaign a month before the polls in Smethwick and spoke in every constituency in the city, and in most in the surrounding counties of Warwickshire, Staffordshire and Worcestershire, only venturing out of his electoral ‘Duchy’ to Manchester after Birmingham had voted. He was again reduced to using his associations with Nonconformity to bolster his cause, as in this speech at an election meeting in June in Coventry, described as ‘one of the rowdiest ever held’ in the city:

\(^{371}\) *The Times*, 24 May, 1892.


\(^{373}\) Hurst, *Joseph Chamberlain and West Midland Politics*, p.7.
I appeal to the Dissenter among you not to desert your fellow
Nonconformists in Ireland and to place then under the ascendancy of the
Irish priests.  

In his immediate objective, he succeeded spectacularly. The six Birmingham
seats and four surrounding seats (Aston Manor, Handsworth, Lichfield and East
Worcestershire) returned Liberal Unionists with increased majorities.
Chamberlain’s support for the Miners’ Eight Hours bill not only helped Homer
Bass to be re-elected with a considerable majority in West Staffordshire, but it
also allowed him to take credit for extending the Liberal Unionist Party’s
influence further into the Nottinghamshire coalfields, where Charles Seely, a
Liberal Unionist coal-owner, defeated Henry Broadhurst, the secretary of the
Parliamentary Committee of the T.U.C. and an opponent of the bill, in
Nottingham West, when the miners’ local agent called on his branch members
to vote against their MP. Chamberlain’s comments to Wolmer at the time
reveal him to be entirely concerned with the results in the Midlands:

The result in the Midlands has certainly been magnificent and I hope that
we are not at the end of our victories. I am quite confident about
Handsworth and think that we have a fair chance in North
Worcestershire.

It is clear from the details of the ‘special fund’ raised by Wolmer to fight the
election, that one factor in the outstanding results in the West Midlands was the

---

374 *Birmingham Gazette*, 25 June 1892.
376 Ibid., p.208.
support of the press in the area. John Jaffray, the owner of the *Birmingham Daily Post* and the *Birmingham Mail* was felt to deserve a reward from the honours systems, as Powell Williams revealed in a letter to Chamberlain,

> Here then are the brilliant results in the Midlands and the claims of a man who, through the press which he owns – and especially through the *Mail* – has contributed not a little towards them. I think that even the reward which he seeks wd. be universally deemed appropriate, for in the range of no other Unionist paper can similar results be found.\(^\text{378}\)

Wolmer himself had reason to feel satisfied, re-gaining Edinburgh West for his Party. But these successes went against the national swing of the electorate. For the Liberal Unionists as a separate political force, the election was a major setback. Chamberlain had anticipated problems when he wrote to Provost Watson on 24 February,

> It is probable that we shall lose some seats in the agricultural districts of England, but we hope to make amends in Ireland and Scotland where the constituencies are more fully impressed with the importance of the Home Rule cause.\(^\text{379}\)

Wolmer’s prediction for the 1892 election, still preserved in its original notebook in the Bodleian Library, was pessimistic but ultimately accurate in its overall figures. He predicted the loss of ten Liberal Unionist seats, which he noted was ‘the worst which can befall us on our present available data – we shall probably do appreciably better.’\(^\text{380}\). This contrasted with the hopelessly optimistic attitude

---

\(^{378}\) Powell Williams to Chamberlain, 19 July 1892, JC5/72/14.
\(^{379}\) Chamberlain to Provost Wilson, 24 February 1892, JC6/6/1A/18.
\(^{380}\) Selborne Papers, SP13°.
of James and Devonshire.\(^{381}\) In fact, apart from the West Midlands, the Liberal Unionists lost seats from all areas. In Scotland, Roxburghshire, South Ayrshire, Falkirk Burghs, Inverness District, Invernesshire and even St Rollox in the Unionist stronghold of Glasgow were all lost. The one remaining Liberal Unionist seat in Glasgow, Tradeston, and the one captured by Alexander Cross, Camlachie, were only secured with majorities of less than 200 each. In complete contrast to Chamberlain’s hopes, the Party was very lucky to lose only six seats, as no single Liberal Unionist managed to win with a majority of over 1,000 votes. As the North and East of Scotland Liberal Unionist Association had received £4,000 in election funds thanks to Devonshire’s fund-raising, one can only wonder at the possible scale of the Liberal Unionist losses in Scotland had this money not been provided for the publication and distribution of electoral material.\(^{382}\) As Charles Cooper revealed, there had been much complacency among the Scottish Liberal Unionists, and despite his position as editor of the *Scotsman*, ‘I did not expect we should be beaten by so many.’\(^{383}\) The Conservatives had not provided a major source of support as, before the election Salisbury had written to Balfour, ‘we have so little to lose (or gain) in Scotland at present, that if the effects were limited to that country, I should not…regard the matter as important.’\(^{384}\)

In Wales, Chamberlain had taken his new wife to Camarthenshire during an ill-fated expedition marked by low turn-outs, gales and local derision. The Liberal *South Wales Daily News* had cut through his rhetoric and exposed

\(^{381}\) See Devonshire to James, 2 July 1892, M45/1716.

\(^{382}\) Jenkins, ‘The funding of the Liberal Unionist Party’, p.938.

\(^{383}\) C. G. Cooper to Wolmer, 27 July 1892, Selborne MS II (13) 124-125.

\(^{384}\) Harcourt-Williams (ed.), *Salisbury-Balfour Correspondence*, p.284.
Chamberlain’s weakest point when it contrasted the content of his speech with the denominational make-up of his political allies:

Mr Chamberlain, as strongly convinced as ever of the need for disestablishment and of the justice of Welshmen’s demand to be set free from the insulting dominance of an alien sect, is at Llanbyther hobnobbing with pillars of the Church and using the desire for Disestablishment as an instrument for breaking in pieces the Radical Party.  

In 1892, five out of seven Welsh Liberal Unionist candidates were heavily defeated with the added humiliation of seeing the Liberal Unionist candidate in East Carmarthenshire, Captain Davies, rejected by over 3,000 votes. The problem, so Chamberlain thought, was Salisbury’s refusal to countenance any prospect of disendowment for the churches in Scotland or Wales: ‘We will do nothing in Wales without disestablishment,’ he wrote to Balfour after the election, adding that ‘friends of the Kirk in Scotland…except in Midlothian and Berwick…have made no show at all.’ Matthew Cragoe concludes that Liberal Unionism, like Conservatism before it, failed in Wales where ‘the primary commitment of Liberals remained the support of William Gladstone.’

In the South and West, North Bristol, Portsmouth, Tavistock, Biggleswade, Cricklade and Barnstaple were lost. In East Anglia, Mid Norfolk fell. The attempt to win seats in the North of England completely failed, as working class loyalty to Gladstone held fast, although the Party only missed taking Liverpool

---

385 South Wales Daily News, 14 October 1891.
386 See Morgan ‘The Liberal Unionists In Wales.’
388 Cragoe, Culture, Politics and National Identity, p. 78.
Exchange and Darlington and failed to hold Skipton and Hartlepool by less than a hundred votes in each case. However, South East Durham, Doncaster, Great Grimsby, Chesterfield and Colne Valley were lost more emphatically. Perhaps most disappointing for Chamberlain personally was the heavy defeat of Richard Chamberlain in Islington, which was accompanied by a major Liberal revival in London. Of course, there were now four Liberal Unionists in Ireland, but these, such as H. O. Arnold-Foster in West Belfast, owed their survival to appeals to the sectarian politics of Ireland, rather than to the operation of party politics on the mainland. Devonshire was reduced to pleading to Salisbury for a baronetcy for South Londonderry’s MP, Thomas Lea, in an attempt to maintain the influence of the Party in the country.  

Effectively the Party was reduced to two main pockets: in central Scotland (mainly in and around Glasgow), and Chamberlain’s fiefdom in the West Midlands. The other seats were mostly isolated in Liberal areas, and often held due to the personal influence and patronage of prominent Whig landlords. The attempts to increase the Party’s spheres of influence had failed, having fought to win seventy-four new seats across the country and having lost in seventy of these. The Party also had bear the financial costs of fighting 139 elections on its own, yet having lost nearly a third of its MPs. Edward Heneage was one of the principal casualties as his Grimby seat, exposed amid the sea of Liberal Lincolnshire, was lost. In his consoling letter, Chamberlain revealed his concern over the collapse of the Party which he had just taken control of:

> I was extremely disappointed to see the return from Grimsby. After your

---

389 Devonshire to Salisbury, 3 May 1892, Salisbury Papers.
last letter I had been very hopeful of your success. Besides my personal feeling in the matter, it is undoubtedly serious that the Liberal Unionist Party should suffer such heavy reverses. Up to the present time we have not gained in a single contest except that in Nottingham where there was a division owing to the Eight Hours bill.  

Among the Liberal Unionist Party managers, there was an attempt to write off the 1892 slump as inevitable, given the peculiar, cross-party battles of 1886. In his report to the Liberal Unionist Association at the end of the year, Boraston, the recently-appointed Association secretary, claimed that defeats were due to ‘numbers of [Liberal] electors...[who] ultimately returned to their allegiance to Mr Gladstone as a matter of blind faith rather than of reason’ and the ‘wholesale falsehoods and misrepresentations which were disseminated’, rather than any failings on the part of the Party organisation. This view was not shared by many other leading Liberal Unionist MPs. In his post-mortem, James lamented the weakness of the Party’s organisation,

Outside the House, there is a very wide field for improvement. We have been sadly out-generalled in the last five years and it must not occur again.

In his ‘political memoir’, completed in 1892, Chamberlain agreed with James’ analysis, writing that ‘they were without efficient organisation.' Others close to the Party agreed. A member of the Liberal Union Club, Ebenezer Le Riche, wrote a letter which was printed in the final edition of the Liberal Unionist, in

---

390 Chamberlain to Heneage, 6 July 1892, JC5/41/30.
which he asserted that ‘our defeat has been rather due to our own mistakes than to the conduct of our opponents.’ In particular, given the string of by-election defeats and the confident predictions that the Liberal Unionists would be ‘wiped out’ as William Harcourt claimed, Le Riche believed that many Liberal Unionists had lost heart and so ‘they did not work as they should have done.’

Tellingly, despite the apparent success of the LUA claimed by Boraston, Le Riche asserted that ‘deficiency in organisation’ had proved as costly. There was a hint of the Party’s new leadership wishing to sweep away the kinship and friendship influences that had dominated the Party’s local organisation in Le Riche’s final comments that ‘it will be desirable to change some candidates and agents who have failed. These are not times to be guided by personal likings or private interests; failure is frequently a sign of unsuitability.’ 394

It is clear that the Liberal Unionists lacked an effective electoral organisation at grass-roots level (at least outside the west midlands, the west of Scotland and Cornwall) prior to Chamberlain’s accession to the Party leadership. The Party had been, for the previous six years, largely an aristocratic club, which had taken a compact agreed at the level of the Party leadership to apply to the rank and file of the Conservative Party. By 1892, however, the relationship was beginning to be strained by such assumptions, and Primrose League dames, local party agents and association members failed to bestir themselves quite so actively on behalf of their Liberal and Radical allies as they had done in 1886. With little effective organisation of their own to fall back on and facing a Liberal Party re-invigorated by the Newcastle Programme, the Liberal Unionists were

forced to appeal to nationalist zeal, with reminders of the threat posed by Home Rule to the Empire, to traditional Protestant fears of ‘popery’, with the campaign to mobilise the non-conformist vote, and to racial prejudice against the Irish, with the revival of the cause of Ulster.\(^{395}\)

That this campaign was of only limited effectiveness may be due to the reluctance of many Liberals to lower themselves to engage in such populist rabble-rousing, but is more likely due to the failure of any such negative policy as this to succeed, when it lacked an effective political structure to hammer it home. Chamberlain himself had realised this when he had confronted the Liberal Unionist club with his harsh diagnosis of the Party’s position in March:

…In municipal as well as in national politics, a policy of negation is no good in a democratic representative system…I believe they [the voters] would rather vote for half a loaf from those who are in a position to give it to them than for a whole loaf from those who are not in a position to give it to them.\(^{396}\)

Once the dust had settled, the Party’s leaders went into conclave, with a meeting on ‘the prospects of the Party’ closed to all press, even their own Party paper. The membership of the meeting was a fair indication of the growing influence of the more Radical wing, as of the twelve MPs, four were from West Midlands seats\(^{397}\), and three others could be described as Radicals.\(^{398}\) Despite Asquith’s claim that the reduction in Liberal Unionist seats sealed the fate of ‘a

\(^{396}\) Quoted in The Times, 9 March, 1892.  
\(^{397}\) Chamberlain, J. A. Bright, Meysey-Thompson and Jasper More.  
\(^{398}\) W. Thorburn, T. W. Russell and J. Goldsmid.
small and dwindling band of deserters from the Liberal camp…which was born
the day before yesterday’ and that they would as a consequence ‘be forgotten
the day after tomorrow’, the Party was determined to move forward.399

**Reinvigoration 1892-1895**

With a new leader, who was far more comfortable with the new methods of
electioneering at the helm, the Liberal Unionists became much more adept at
using modern media after 1892. This included the lure of celebrity, with H. M.
Stanley agreeing to stand as a Liberal Unionist candidate.400 At first they
appeared becalmed – only managing to win one of the by-elections held
between the general election and the elections consequent on the appointment
of Rosebery’s cabinet in March 1894,401 but as the 1895 election approached, if
one ignores the crisis of the alliance which was emerging in Warwick and
Leamington and at Hythe, the electoral prospects looked highly positive. The
failure of the Liberal government to achieve any significant reforms and its
consequent attacks on the Lords, the on-going bitter divisions within the
Nationalist Party and its unseemly behaviour in 1893, and, most importantly
perhaps, the retirement of the ‘people’s tribune’, Gladstone himself, had left the
Liberals looking weak and rudderless. In April 1895 the Liberal Unionist Party
managed its first gain in East Anglia since 1886. Despite his own difficulties,
Chamberlain saw the victory of R.T. Gurdon in mid-Norfolk as a herald of a
major electoral victory. ‘Mid Norfolk was very satisfactory. If we could only get
the Tories in the constituencies to a take a long view of this situation, there must

399 Asquith in Commons, 8 August 1892, quoted in *The Times*, 9 August 1892.
and Ernest Shackleton later stood as a Liberal Unionist candidates.
401 The only victory was Heneage’s return to Grimsby in March 1893.
be a sweeping victory at the next election.\textsuperscript{402} Even with the enmity of the local Conservative leadership, Alfred Lyttelton managed a comfortable victory in Warwick and Leamington and Lewis McIver finally managed to win a seat as a Unionist, when he won West Edinburgh with the healthy majority of 508 in May 1895. In Scotland, the \textit{Glasgow Herald} reported the local Association as ready for the coming campaign as early as autumn 1893:

> The war chest replenished, active canvassing is being carried out, and due attention has been paid to registration, with excellent results. We look forward with confidence to the results of these labours, which will appear at the coming general election.\textsuperscript{403}

It is therefore incorrect of David Steele to claim that ‘the 71 Liberal Unionists in the Commons were there, most of them, thanks to Tory organization and Tory votes.’\textsuperscript{404}

In his notes for the 1895 election, Chamberlain clearly saw that the working class electorate must be appealed to:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy</th>
<th>Constitutional</th>
<th>Nil</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Army &amp; Navy</td>
<td>Army Reform</td>
<td>Navy Extension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colonies</td>
<td>Develop</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign</td>
<td>Por – Russia, Egypt – Siam</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>Old Age Pension</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>H. Purchase</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Art. Dwellings</td>
<td>Courts, Arbitration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>E. Liability</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{402} Chamberlain to Devonshire, 18 April 1895, DP 340.2608.  
\textsuperscript{403} \textit{Glasgow Herald}, 30 November 1893.  
\textsuperscript{404} Steele, \textit{Lord Salisbury}, pp. 300-301.
Certainly, there was evidence of Liberal Unionists, and some Conservatives, using this platform to appeal to the working class electorate. As well as in the West Midlands, the Scottish Unionists endorsed many of the proposals publicly, despite the lack of a clear party policy, most notably in Falkirk, where the Conservative candidate for the county and the Liberal Unionist candidate for the burgh supported the social reform programme on a joint platform. There is also evidence of similar cross-party support for 'constructive unionism' in the north of England, most notably in Bradford and Liverpool.

When the Liberal Party was finally defeated over a minor item in the army estimates in 1895, this was a perfect opportunity to contrast the 'little Englander' attitudes of the Liberals with the imperialist sentiments of the Unionists. Although the tensions of the Unionist alliance had forced Chamberlain to muzzle his support for social reform, the public were presented with the image of a strong united Unionist leadership, which contrasted effectively with the Liberal dissensions. Chamberlain carefully altered his rhetoric to avoid all accusation of 'ransom', preferring instead to pour scorn on Rosebery's Liberals.

\[405\] 1895 Election Notes, JC 6/6/1D/4.
\[408\] WSLUA minute book II, 27 November 1895, 10424/20.
for attempting ‘to show that the interests of landlords, farmers and agricultural labourers were divided. That was an absurdity…’

Although left-leaning historians have tended to swallow J. Cornford’s analysis of the Unionist victory as based on Conservative organisational strength, Paul Readman has shown that there was a vitality of local issues which Unionist candidates were especially adept at exploiting. That they could contrast their concern for the ‘bread and butter’ economic issues of working class daily life (on both a constituency and national level) with the ‘faddist’ Liberal concerns with temperance, Welsh disestablishment and Irish Home Rule, was due to their growing expertise in political presentation. In particular, of course, they could highlight their own support for the freedom of the working man to enjoy his leisure time in a public house or at a race-course, in contrast to the puritan interference of the Liberals, who had attempted to pass a Local Veto bill in the previous parliament. As John Davis has shown, the newly enfranchised were still receptive to ‘apparently undemotic causes’ such as the nuanced voluntaryism of the Liberal Unionist social reform programme and the defence of the Union. In 1895, as in 1886, it was the Liberal Unionist agenda that convinced the mass electorate, not propertied defensiveness nor an Anglican revival (as in 1874). The shadow of the ‘khaki’ election of 1900 has too often been allowed to extend to 1895, yet this was an election fought largely on a choice of Liberal programmes, between the official Liberal Party and those who claimed to be the true heirs of mid-Victorian Liberalism. As Readman has

---

409 Chamberlain at Stratford, reported in The Times, 17 July 1895.
410 Cornford, ‘The Transformation of Conservatism.’
shown, despite Chamberlain’s “muzzling”, in the 1895 campaign 52% of all
election addresses by Liberal Unionists and Conservatives mentioned old age
pensions, with a further third mentioning workers’ compensation and working
class house purchase.\textsuperscript{413} For this reason, the Party made an effort to run former
MPs who had been defeated in 1892 in their old seats, with the implication that
the electorate had made a mistake in unseating their Unionist representative
three years earlier and was now offered an opportunity to correct their error.\textsuperscript{414}

The shortage of funds also told against the Liberals who struggled to run
candidates in many seats only three years after the previous election, and
seventeen Liberal Unionists were returned unopposed. Unlike in 1892,
canvassing had sufficiently improved for the Liberal Unionists not to waste as
much time, money and effort on hopeless seats, and only thirty contests were
lost. That said, the Party still suffered some unexpected defeats, demonstrating
their dependence on both Conservative and Liberal support outside their
stronghold areas. Heneage was defeated yet again at Grimsby, Dumfriesshire
was lost by a whisker in Scotland and Gurdon’s April triumph in Mid-Norfolk was
short lived. Despite these setbacks, the Party had managed to win seventy-one
seats, exceeding the number of MPs that had sat at the end of the 1892
parliament, and could justifiably boast that it enjoyed genuine cross-class and
cross-party support.

For those, such as James Vernon who see a rapid decline in the traditional,

\textsuperscript{413} P. Readman, ‘The Conservative Party, Patriotism and British Politics: The Case of the
\textsuperscript{414} Lewis Fry in North Bristol, Walter Morrison in Skipton, Havelock-Allen in S-E Durham, R.B.
Finlay in Inverness and William Arrol in South Ayrshire all regained their seats in 1895.
locally-based political culture based on the ‘character’ of the candidate after 1883, the existence of the Liberal Unionists and their survival as a separate political force for twenty-seven years has proved a difficult issue to reconcile with their argument, and has consequently been largely ignored. With the recent work of James Thompson, Katherine Rix and Jon Lawrence, it is possible to see the thirty years before the First World War as a period of transition, in which localism, ‘deference’ and ‘character’ all retained their electoral resonance at the public meetings which still remained the crucible of political reputation, as I have shown was the case in Leamington in 1895 for Arthur Peel.⁴¹⁵ There was, as Thompson has shown, a dramatic increase in the use of visual, musical and print propaganda, but the Liberal Unionists proved themselves successful pioneers of the use of women canvassers, quasi-independent organisations and travelling political propagandists.⁴¹⁶

For the Liberal Unionists, local political identity was far more significant than either class or ideology, and this allowed the Party to prosper as an independent faction at least until 1895. From the advent of Lord Wolmer as chief organiser in 1888 the Party had begun to accept (as the NLU and WSLUA had already accepted) that, as Vernon suggests, the instinctive popular support for a Liberal and Unionist position had to be ‘disciplined’ by the strictures of a modern political party.⁴¹⁷ In contrast to the views espoused by Cornford and Stephens, one must explain the Liberal Unionist successes between 1886 and 1895 as the result of effective campaigning on a local level, which highlighted the discrete identity of the Party’s MPs, married to good organisation. The

⁴¹⁵ Cawood, ‘The Unionist “Compact”’, pp.103-104.
⁴¹⁶ Thompson, ““Pictorial Lies”?“
⁴¹⁷ Vernon, Politics and the People, p.337.
Party’s survival was thus assured into the twentieth century, but eventual fusion with the Conservatives could only be avoided with the active cultivation of the local Party’s separate identity by the leadership, even as they entered a Unionist coalition cabinet. That this support was not forthcoming is clear from the Party records after 1895, which show little opposition to Middleton’s appropriation of former Liberal Unionist constituencies, at least outside the area controlled by the WSLUA. According to a contemporary article in the *Nineteenth Century and After*, the Party ‘was strangled by its own parent’, after having been badly neglected for eight years.\(^{418}\) The Party may have been ‘officers without an army’ at first, but I would argue that by the mid 1890s, in certain areas, and for differing reasons, a genuine Liberal Unionist identity had emerged, which had a long term impact on the politics of certain regions, as well as on the Conservative Party nationally.

**Conclusion - Who were the Liberal Unionists?**

For a hundred years, historians described the Liberal Unionists as composed of two distinct groups, the Whigs and Chamberlain’s Radical Unionists.¹ Perhaps this was an unsurprising conclusion, given Henry James’ description in his memoir:

> There were, in fact, two sections of the Party. The majority were Whigs or moderate Liberals, who always regarded Lord Hartington as their leader; the minority were Radicals, who, for instance, were in favour of the disestablishment of the Church, and they followed Mr Chamberlain. Of the whole Party, however, Lord Hartington both in the House of Commons and generally was the leader, and to him Mr Chamberlain gave a most loyal support. No differences of opinion were ever made apparent.²

Twenty years ago, in *Parliamentary Politics and the Home Rule Crisis*, W.C. Lubenow exploded the myth that there was a clear social, religious, political or even occupational pattern to the division of the Liberal Party in 1886. This analysis suggested for the first time that the motivation for belonging to the Liberal Unionists was more complex than had previously suggested. If one relies on a contemporary view of the Party from an outsider (the Liberal MP, Alfred Pease) a more complex pattern of Liberal Unionist identity emerges:

> Some were merely Liberal in name, others were Whigs, some were Liberals apart from the Irish question, others were Radicals, others tee-

---
² Henry James’ Memoir, M45/1864, p.74.
total fanatics, and a small body was whatever Chamberlain was.

As John Vincent wrote in his introduction to The Later Derby Diaries, 'there were many types of Liberal Unionist. There were those who wanted a split and those who feared one; those who were mainly interested in Ireland and those who were not.'\(^3\) In fact the only true definition of a Liberal Unionist was one who rejected Gladstone's policy on Ireland and looked back to 'the party of 1885' as the true embodiment of orthodox Liberal principles, before these were abandoned by their own leader.

Steven Fielding has recently commented that 'historians of representative democracy need to address issues that transcend conventional notions of party politics.'\(^4\) In any attempt to make sense of the Liberal Unionists between 1886 and 1895, it quickly becomes apparent that to examine the Party as a separate institution is completely futile. In an age when the modern party organisation was being re-forged in the furnace of mass political involvement, the Liberal Unionists attempted to restore much of the moral imperative of mid-Victorian politics, while building a more democratic structure in order to convey their principles to the electorate. With such a challenge, it is not surprising that many fissures existed as to the Party’s philosophy, priorities and methodology.

In September 1887, the Pall Mall Gazette published an article entitled ‘the Black Book’ in which it attempted to delineate between the different factions that composed Liberal Unionism. As an apostate Unionist, Stead listed ‘the converted’, then ‘the Chamberlainites’ on the grounds that they were ‘nearest to

---

\(^3\) Vincent (ed.), Later Derby Diaries, p.25.  
salvation.’ The ‘T. W. Russellites’ were listed next (‘soon told for they are a party of two’), and then, before the ‘out-and-out Coercionist, Landlordist, anti-Gladstonian, no-surrender “Liberals”’, which on previous occasions the *Pall Mall Gazette* had described as ‘Hartingtonians’, there was an intriguing list of ‘Independent Dissentient Liberals.’ Although Stead is not specific on the grounds that separate the ‘Independents’ from the ‘Coercionist - Landlordists’, the names on the list suggest that this group comprised not only those who objected to the dictatorial tendencies of the whips and the caucuses (such as Heneage, Quilter and the venerable C.P. Villiers of Wolverhampton), but also of those with particularly strong Liberal principles (such as George Dixon and Leonard Courtney, including some, like James Caldwell, whose principles would lead him to stand as a Gladstonian in 1892).⁵ Although one cannot read too much into Stead’s precise classifications of the individual MPs (W. S. Caine is listed, rather unconvincingly, in the ‘Coercionist - Landlordist’ group and Wolmer’s name is misspelled), based as it is on an analysis of only eight Commons divisions between February and August 1887, it indicates the fragmented nature of the Liberal Unionists, beyond mere Whig-Radical categories. It illustrates the problem for any modern political party, in organising its forces and presenting its case with such a spectrum of opinion and attitude. In their description of the humbler Liberal Unionists, Cooke and Vincent are far from flattering in their analysis, describing the Liberal Unionists’ behaviour as ‘harder to account for’ than the Home Rulers and dismissing them as ‘underemployed journalists, academics and members of the upper classes whom for one reason or another life had excluded from a political role.’⁶ They

⁵ ‘The Black Book’, *Pall Mall Gazette*, 14 September 1887.
regard the Liberal Unionists as relying on a ‘moribund tactical tradition’ of ‘disorientated activism among the unoccupied’ (such as Cowper and Westminster); what Mrs Fawcett described as ‘grand formal receptions and garden parties, long business gatherings, stirring propaganda meetings, demonstrations, publications, protests, election campaigns and all the rest.’\footnote{7}

Despite his criticism of Cooke and Vincent’s approach, Harvie largely agrees, describing the Liberal Unionists as ‘a political party run by intellectuals for intellectuals: all officers and no awkward rank and file.’\footnote{8} Such descriptions appear to match the Gladstonian belief in 1887 that the Liberal Unionists would ‘act with the Tories and then drift into the ranks as pronounced Tories.’\footnote{9} They offer no explanation as to why the Liberal Unionists managed such unexpected longevity and maintained a distinct position nationally until 1895, and in certain regions until well after that.

The only detailed analysis of the occupational basis of Liberal Unionism on a constituency level has been carried out by Victoria Barbery, based on the unique directory of Liberal Unionist activists held by the Bury Archive Service. By cross referencing this data with the 1891 census returns, she has produced an insight into the composition of the Party on a local level that is highly illuminating. In contrast to the interpretation that the Liberal Unionist Party was a middle class revolt against the growing radicalism of the Liberals, the data reveals that only 42.6% of the Party activists were middle class, with consequently, 57% of the canvassers, fund-raisers and organisers of the Liberal

\footnote{7}{Ibid.}
\footnote{8}{Harvie, ‘Ideology and Home Rule.’ p.314.}
\footnote{9}{\textit{Bury Times}, 9 July 1887.}
Unionist Party belonging to the working class.\textsuperscript{10}

In the age of the secret ballot and the crack-down on corrupt practices that so concerned the WLUA, the worker was not obliged to vote as his employer wished. In fact, while nearly 40% of the Bury Liberal Unionist factory owners controlled dyeing, bleaching or printing works, only 5.6% of the working class Liberal Unionists worked in these trades, suggesting that the owners' politics had a negative impact in larger trades. Given the fear of cheap Irish labour undermining their privileged position among the working classes, perhaps it was not surprising that the skilled artisans, Alistair Reid's 'Labour Aristocracy', made up a third of the working class Unionist activists in Bury. Barbery concludes that 'the LUA activists...tended to be drawn from the most independent groups.'\textsuperscript{11}

The largest group among the Liberal Unionist cotton workers, for example, were the spinners. This seems to confirm the impression of Liberal Unionist support in all the areas of consistent Liberal Unionist strength (Cornwall, West Midlands, Glasgow and its environs), that there was in fact no clear difference in the social structure between the Gladstonian Liberals and the Liberal Unionists, they both represented all the classes in late Victorian society.\textsuperscript{12} The Liberal Unionist victories in the Glasgow working class seats of Camlachie and Tradeston in 1892, 1895 and 1900 provoked an ironic comment from John Wilson, MP for Falkirk, at the 10\textsuperscript{th} AGM of the WSLUA.

\textit{…did the classes reside in Camlachie? (laughter) They did not usually look for Belgravia and Mayfair in the district Mr Cross represented…he

\textsuperscript{10} Barbery, 'From Platform to Polling Booth', p.177; List of Liberal Unionist officers and party workers, 1892, Bury Archives, GCP/C/4/1.

\textsuperscript{11} Barbery, 'From Platform to Polling Booth', p.179.

thought the Falkirk burghs and Kilmarnock burghs did not exactly represent the homes of the aristocracy.\textsuperscript{13}

Fundamentally, in an age when most people divided their friends, their guests and their business dealings into Liberal and Conservative, and had done so since the defeat of Peel's government in 1846, it was hard for many to change their habits, especially as the threat to the Union was swiftly disposed of on the two occasions before 1900 when it appeared to threaten. This is what Wilde meant in his aphorism – Conservatives like Lady Bracknell might tolerate Liberal Unionists, but they remained Liberals, so would not be invited to dinner. In these circumstances, as Henry Sidgwick observed in December 1886, ‘I think party organisation is too rigid a thing to be broken up and that Liberal Unionism will be broken against it at the next election.’\textsuperscript{14} Chamberlain felt the same, telling Austen in 1895 that ‘no one who has not worked among the electors can be aware how strong are the old prejudices in connection with party names and colours and badges.’\textsuperscript{15} That Liberal Unionism survived for as long as it did, in spite of the growing tendencies of political dichotomy, speaks volumes for the commitment and hard-work of the party organisers, the actions of certain key leaders and the success of the Party in fashioning an appeal to a broad range of voters with different religious, regional, political and class identities. It is also a very important revelation of the survival of a traditional political culture of localism, deference and patronage that supports Jon Lawrence’s argument that a ‘national politics’ (in which individuals defined themselves by party labels) only

\textsuperscript{13} WSLUA minute book II, 27 November 1895, 10424/20.
\textsuperscript{15} J. Chamberlain to A. Chamberlain, 27 January 1895, JC 5/12/13.
truly emerged during the First World War.16 Graham Goodlad suggested that as
the Liberal Unionist Party was formed in the lobbies at Westminster, the
creation of local Associations depended upon ‘local men prepared to take the
initiative.’17 If one takes the examples of Ireland, the West of Scotland, Cornwall
and Birmingham, as well as isolated seats such as Bury, East Somerset, Ross-
on-Wye and Sudbury, it seems much more likely to suggest that more than just
a small body of Liberals supported Hartington and Chamberlain and that many,
entirely new to politics, were inspired to take up their first political activity for the
Liberal Unionist Party. These cases also suggest a close and effective
relationship between MPs and their associations, and one which, in the case of
Ireland at least, acted a successful lobby group on the Unionist government.

In 1886 the majority of Liberal Unionists looked to Hartington as their leader,
rather than Chamberlain, despite Biagini’s claims.18 ‘Chamberlain is sometimes
referred to as the leader of the Liberal Unionist Party’, wrote Alfred Hopkinson;
‘this was not so. The real leader from the beginning was Lord Hartington, the
most consistent, wise and far-seeing statesman within living memory, but one
whose talents and wise leadership were not always sufficiently recognised in
the country and still less by himself.’19 Dicey confirmed this judgement when he
wrote in December 1886 when he wrote to Hartington, urging him to take the
 premiership in the wake of Randolph Churchill’s resignation. ‘You are the only
leader in whose honesty, common-sense & patriotism, men of the most different

16 Lawrence, ‘Transformation of British Public Politics’, pp. 185-187; Lawrence, Electing Our
Masters, pp. 120-129.
and the Rank and File with Special Reference to Certain Localities’, PhD Thesis,
18 Biagini, British Democracy, p.241.
19 Hopkinson, Penultima, p153.
parties absolutely confide.' As these quotes suggest, many Liberal Unionists and their supporters saw the issue as one of character, rather than ideology and this reveals much of Victorian attitudes towards public behaviour. In a speech to the Lords on 12 July 1886, Argyll praised the 'masculine honesty' of both John Bright and Lord Hartington. This was in marked contrast to the behaviour of Gladstone, who, as Argyll put it in a letter to Granville, was guilty of 'a violence of language...a contemptuous treatment of all who could not follow him...perversions of historical fact...the free use of all the Irish revolutionary cant – which constitute together an unparalleled series of provocations.' As Argyll claimed in Edinburgh, shortly before the election in 1892, the Liberal Unionists stood for the authority of the crown, the power of parliament and the integrity of empire, 'but we fight for something better.' Far more important for Argyll and those moderate Liberal Unionists around him was 'honour and truthfulness and openness and candour among public men.' As Jonathan Parry has demonstrated, such language was a deliberate attempt to re-animate the discourse of 'character' which had dominated much of mid-Victorian political culture until 1867. To most Victorians, 'character' implied the virtues of public-spritedness, restraint, independence of conscience, strict personal morality and 'manliness' and this had a distinguished pedigree among the Liberals. John Stuart Mill had considered that 'the problem of character is the determining issue in the question of government' and Herbert Spencer, who publicly endorsed the Liberal Unionists in 1886, wrote in The Principles of Ethics that

---

20 A. V. Dicey to Hartington, 23 December 1886, DP 340, 2071.
22 Argyll to Granville, 22 June 1887, quoted in ibid., p. 458.
23 Quoted in ibid., p. 466.
‘the end which the statesman should keep in view as higher than all others is the formation of character.’

Milner shared this distrust of the new politics that had emerged and he exulted when the Liberal Unionists left the Eighty Club en masse in protest against the confrontational politics of ideological conflict that were creeping into all aspects of the cultural fabric of political life.

It is a triumph of character agreeable to witness and how wholesome in an age apparently given over wholly to political dodgery...what a few men can do even in our vast democratic whirlpool if they have the courage to stick to the opinions of their own.

Henry James held his seat in Bury until 1895, while Liberal Unionists elsewhere in Lancastria went down to defeat, largely due to the high local regard for his character and integrity. As Victoria Barbery notes, James' success was based on 'his reputation for those attributes valued most by Bury Liberals – political integrity and independence.' He was seen to have opposed Redmond's attempts to persuade Lancashire Irish voters to support the Conservatives in 1885, as he felt such interference in a voter's freedom to choose went against the Liberal principles which he had attempted to uphold by his work on the Corrupt Practices Act of 1883. When he refused to join Gladstone's cabinet in February 1886 and then voted against the Home Rule Bill, his supporters could argue that, in contrast to Gladstone, who had denounced boycotting in 1882 as 'combined intimidation…for the purpose of destroying private liberty', James

27 Milner to Gell, 20 May 1887, D3287/MIL/1/195.
28 Barbery, ‘From Platform to Polling Booth’, p. 175.
had ‘been true as steel to the ticket he ran upon at the last election.’\textsuperscript{29} The victory of Liberal Unionists in Bury, as in Birmingham, Cornwall and Scotland owed everything to their commitment to unbending Liberal principles and absolutely nothing to the alliance with the Conservatives.

Respect for an individual MP’s determination to stick to his stated principles in the face of the pressure from party ‘wire-pullers’ was, in this period, often characterised by reference to what Lawrence describes as the ‘near-ubiquitous rhetoric celebrating candidates’ supposed “manly independence.”’\textsuperscript{30} John Tosh has recently identified manliness as ‘the most clearly articulated indicator of men’s gender in the nineteenth century.’\textsuperscript{31} Manliness was a positive judgement of a politician’s character and actions and, in the first age of mass electorates and increasingly sophisticated political organisation, the refusal of Liberal Unionists to bow either to the local party caucus or to the diktat of the party leadership was ‘manly’ in that it demonstrated the courage, steadfastness and independence so admired by mid-Victorian commentators such as Samuel Smiles, Thomas Carlyle and Charles Kingsley. In local political discourse, the refusal to follow the dictates of the central party could pay electoral dividends, especially in the North and West of England where such behaviour was particularly admired.\textsuperscript{32} It was not merely in public that ‘manliness’ could affect political loyalty however. When Powell Williams agreed to follow Chamberlain in opposing the first Bill in 1886, he did so due to his admiration of Chamberlain’s

\textsuperscript{29} Quoted in ‘The Liberal party and coercion’, \textit{Liberal Unionist}, 30, July 1888; \textit{Bury Guardian}, 8 October 1887.
\textsuperscript{30} Lawrence, \textit{E lecting Our Masters}, p.19.
‘manly course.’\(^{33}\) James Dingle, the sole martyr to the Liberal Unionist cause, similarly praised Leonard Courtney’s decision to vote against Jesse Collings’ amendment of January 1886 as the product of ‘a manly sentiment.’\(^{34}\) Such behaviour was to be contrasted with Gladstone’s ‘sentimental’, and therefore essentially feminine, attitude towards the sufferings of Ireland, which he seemed to confirm, with his use of the distinctly effete term, ‘a union of hearts’, to describe his proposed alternative to the dominance of Westminster.\(^{35}\) It also served to highlight the shortcomings of Parnell’s character who was perceived by Unionists as a liar and dissembler, who either advocated political murder or did nothing to prevent it and who was finally revealed as an adulterer, much to the discomfort of the Nationalists’ allies.

From a reading of Unionist literature, it can be demonstrated that the character of the Irish Catholic was felt to be more childish (in the sense that they failed to mediate their selfish and often brutal instincts) compared to that of the English Protestant, Scottish Presbyterian, Ulster Nonconformist or Cornish Wesleyan.\(^{36}\) The Irish needed to be restrained in order to avoid recourse to violence while being encouraged towards the responsible exercise of self-government. There is an argument to be made that those who attempt to read ‘racist’ attitudes into the behaviour of the Liberal Unionists are using ahistoric paradigms, while concepts of ‘national character’ were much more subtle and nuanced in their

\(^{33}\) Powell Williams to Chamberlain, 3 June 1886, JC5/72/6.
\(^{34}\) J. Dingle to L. Courtney, 2 February 1886, V/9.
\(^{36}\) See, for example, ‘The Clan-na-Gael’, Weekly Times & Echo, 7 July 1889 and Parkes, Home Rule from a Liberal Unionist’s Point of View, (Birmingham, 1887).
application in this period.\textsuperscript{37} That said, attempts to define the British character, which would later become a fetish under Baldwin’s leadership, began as a response to the challenge of Irish nationalism.\textsuperscript{38} It was a character that had widespread appeal to the new electorate, but one that was based on traditional identities of religion, public behaviour, gender and locality rather than class or a consistent ideology. Where these identities were strongly associated with Gladstonian Liberalism, as in Wales, Liberal Unionism failed to establish itself. In the north of England, where class politics were beginning to take root in the 1890s, Liberal Unionism found it difficult to find an electorate. Despite this, in a number of northern constituencies, the apolitical, selfless commitment to the perceived benefits of the Union, allied to a stronger nonconformist tradition, won the Liberal Unionists support that would not have been forthcoming for a Conservative candidate. When the Liberal Unionists took eleven seats in northern England from the Liberals in 1895, they did not do so on a manifesto of Empire, or anti-Irish bigotry, rather they demonstrated what Patricia Lynch has described as ‘the enduring popularity of supposedly outdated political traditions’, and won as consistent Liberals who put the needs of the whole community above those of any one ethnic, religious or class faction.\textsuperscript{39}

Lubenow argued that in 1886 ‘political conflict became social only when parties and the parliamentary system failed to accommodate the diverse forces at work

\textsuperscript{39} Lynch, \textit{The Liberal Party in Rural England}, p.220.
in the House of Commons.\textsuperscript{40} Between 1886 and 1895, the political structures of Britain were tested, not only by the constitutional challenge of the Irish Nationalists, but also by the rejection of the new political methodology by a group of politicians whose Liberalism compelled them to resist the dictatorial demands of their leader, their party whips and their activists. That the issue on which they divided was one of patriotism was largely immaterial at first, and they proceeded to exercise an influence on government that has been unmatched by any small party in British political history. Had Gladstone not felt obliged by his overwhelming belief in his divine mission in Ireland to remain leader, it is likely that Hartington could have become leader of a re-united Liberal Party which would have passed some measure of land purchase and local government in Ireland after the initial imposition of mild coercion. The moderate Liberals would not have been able to resist the influence of Chamberlain, the Glaswegian Radicals and T.W. Russell’s faction. In reality, the pressing demands of an increasingly democratic and demanding electorate drove the Liberal Unionist Party to embrace a less high-minded nationalism in 1892 which provided common ground with their Conservative allies, while the advent of Chamberlain’s leadership led to a renewed drive for constructive reform. That Salisbury and his lieutenants successfully resisted these demands and managed to exploit the fundamental divisions among the Liberal Unionists in 1895, was a crucial turning point for the Party. All that survived of the Liberal Unionists’ principles, beyond the maintenance of the Union, was a commitment to the concept of a Liberal empire which, in an age of aggressive imperialism, was insufficient to prevent the gradual defection of the independent

\textsuperscript{40} Lubenow, \textit{Parliamentary Politics and the Home Rule Crisis}, p.208.
nonconformist Unionists in a series of crisis after 1895.\textsuperscript{41}

Once the Party leadership accepted the junior governmental positions offered by the Tories and, perhaps most decisively, once the Tories won a majority in 1895, the existence of the Party became an increased irrelevance. Spurned by their own leaders, rejected by their Liberal friends as traitors and distinctly uncomfortable among the flummery of the Primrose League, the Liberal Unionists had to choose between principle and expedience. With no real threat of a third Home Rule Bill after 1895, and with Chamberlain’s siren call of imperial expansion, the Party largely fell into disuse. The crucial role that it played in bringing working men and nonconformists to support a Conservative dominated alliance was ignored firstly by Salisbury and then, most seriously by Balfour in 1902. The nonconformist rebellion over the Education Act culminated in a major protest meeting at Queen’s Hall, London on 10 June, where nonconformist Unionists were described as those ‘who gave their votes to the betrayal of their co-religionists.’\textsuperscript{42} The Liberal Unionist Party was thus in no position to mount an effective resistance to Chamberlain’s attempt to overturn one of the central tenets of Liberalism, Free Trade, in 1903, at least not outside Glasgow.\textsuperscript{43}

The influence of Liberal Unionism, partly through the Chamberlain dynasty, partly through the attitudes engendered by the years of constructive unionism of 1887-1892 (especially on A. J. Balfour and the emerging leadership of the

\textsuperscript{41} These were: the Tithes Bill of 1899; the second Boer War; the 1902 Education Act.
\textsuperscript{42} Quoted in Koss, \textit{Nonconformity in Modern British Politics}, p.46.
\textsuperscript{43} Burness, ‘\textit{Strange Associations}’, chap. 6, ‘Glasgow decides not to eat imperially’, pp. 162-191.
Conservative Party), has been sadly ignored. Stuart Ball and Eugenio Biagini have recently suggested that there is a direct link between the Liberal Unionists’ ideology and presentation (if not their organisation) and that of the Conservatives in the Baldwin years. Biagini believes that ‘the Conservative Party took on board the rhetoric and some of the policies of old liberalism,’\(^{44}\) while Ball quotes Lord Hugh Cecil’s metaphor for the Conservative Party in 1912, ‘the waters of which have come from many converging streams.’\(^{45}\) In his view, as in Jeremy Smith’s, the twentieth century Conservative Party’s success partly lies in its outspoken dislike of ideology and its cross-class appeal on issues such as moderate reform, patriotism and defence of British liberties, typified by Stanley Baldwin.\(^{46}\) While these ideals have antecedents in the Conservative Party, particularly in the rhetoric of Disraeli, the ‘culture of conservatism [which] transcended class in favour of the nation’ only became convincingly espoused by Conservatives with the alliance with Liberal Unionism, as this culture owed more to the principles of Chamberlain and Hartington than to the sectarian, reactionary beliefs of Lord Salisbury.\(^{47}\)

It is striking how few historians of the Conservative and Unionist Party have given the Liberal Unionists any credit for the changing outlook of the Tories in the early twentieth century. It was the future Poet Laureate, Alfred Austin, who in June 1886, asked ‘…is it impossible to constitute a Party of Common Sense?’ which he foresaw as the result of the Unionist alliance facing its first test at the

\(^{44}\) Biagini, *British Democracy*, p.3.
\(^{45}\) H. Cecil, *Conservatism*, (London, 1912), quoted by S. Ball ‘Conservatism between the Wars.’
\(^{46}\) Smith, ‘Conservative Ideology’, p.18.
\(^{47}\) McWilliam, *Popular Politics*, p.94.
polls. The Liberal Unionists were the means by which the mid-Victorian tradition that the Liberals governed on behalf of the entire national community, rather than on behalf of sectional or class interests, became transmitted to the Conservatives, although it took the experience of a flirtation with protectionist dogma between 1903 and 1914 and the challenge of a global war to convince them. It is certainly true that the Conservatives needed to find a new position when faced with the challenge of Lloyd George’s social reforms and the rise of the Labour Party.

Jonathan Parry agrees with Gregory Phillips’ conclusion that the Liberal Unionists taught the Conservatives to be ‘more flexible.’ Parry has suggested that the Liberal Unionists influenced ‘an attitude towards administrative probity, respect for property, individualism and economic carefulness…that served it well in the 1920s and 1930s.’ There is much work yet to be done on the legacy of Liberal Unionism, both on a cultural and a political level, but it cannot be denied that the imprint of the Party was still felt into the twentieth century, both in Birmingham and beyond. Exploring the connection between nineteenth century Liberalism and twentieth century Conservatism requires advocates of the ‘New Political History’ to widen their perspectives and to take the Liberal Unionist Party as seriously as Parry, who has written that ‘a Conservative Party guided by three Chamberlains, Churchill, Baldwin, Butler

50 Parry, Rise and Fall of Liberal Government, p.311.
51 In Birmingham, the Midland Liberal Unionist Association survived into the 1920s. See D. Dilks, Neville Chamberlain Vol. 1, 1869-1929 (Cambridge, 2002), p.280. While the name ‘Unionist’ was gradually phased out by the united party before the war, in Scotland the title ‘Conservative’ was not employed by the Party until the 1960s. C. Burness, ‘The Making of Scottish Unionism’, pp.31-32.
and Macmillan owed an enormous amount to Liberal Unionism.\footnote{Parry, The Politics of Patriotism, p.399.}
Appendix 1 – The Unionist “Compact”: ‘Resolutions’ (n.d. – 1889)

Devonshire Papers 340.2205A

1) That no seat held by a Conservative shall be attacked by a Liberal Unionist
2) That no seat held by a Liberal Unionist shall be attacked by a Conservative
3) That seats contested at the election of 1886 by Conservatives shall not be attacked by Liberal Unionists without the consent of the whips of both sections of the Unionist Party
4) That seats contested at the election of 1886 by Liberal Unionists shall not be attacked by Conservatives without the consent of the whips of both sections of the Unionist Party
5) That Gladstonian seats uncontested at the election of 1886 shall be attacked by Conservatives or Liberal Unionists as may seem most advisable having regard to local circumstances
6) That in the event of any difference the question of candidature shall, at the request of the local organisation, be referred to Mr Smith and Lord Hartington
7) That in all cases where the candidature has been decided upon, every effort shall be made to induce the electors of both sections of the Unionist Party to support the candidate

NB

It is not considered that
1) The Swansea District

2) The Mid Division of Glamorganshire

3) The Cirencester Division of Gloucestershire

4) The West Division of Edinburgh

are held by Liberal Unionists.
Appendix 2: Liberal Unionist Organising Council (*The Times*, 21st March 1889):

**Elected Members:**

**London, Middlesex and South-East Counties**
- Leedham White
- W. A. Bell
- W. J. Gandy
- C. H. Bond

**South-West Counties**
- Lewis Fry MP
- Col. WhiteThomson

**Eastern Counties**
- R.T. Gurdon MP
- W. C. Quilter MP

**South Midlands**
- Col. Hollis
- G. T. Llewellyn

**West Midlands**
- J. Powell Williams MP
- J. S. Baily

**North Midlands**
- J. Ruston

**Liverpool and Manchester**
- W. Oulton
H. T. Crook
Lancaster, etc
Thomas Brooks
Yorkshire
T. H. Morris
Thomas Marshall
C. W. Woodall
E. Laverack
Counties north of York and Lancaster
H. C. Howard
J. C. Backhouse
North Wales
Sir R. Cunliffe
South Wales
G. C. Thompson
Stephen Evans
Edinburgh and the North and East of Scotland
Hon. A Elliot MP
T. D. Brodie
Captain Fletcher Campbell
Sir Donald Currie MP
Glasgow and West of Scotland
Sir William Thomson
Col. Buchanan
Alexander Cross
Robert Bird

Aberdeen and District

John Crombie jnr.

Liberal Union of Ireland

Sir R. Blennerhassett

J. T. Pim

Ulster

Thomas Sinclair

Thomas Harrison

Nominated by the Liberal Unionist Executive Committee:

Lord Stalbridge

A. Craig Sellar MP

W. S. Caine MP

H. Hobhouse MP

W. Thorburn MP

James Grahame

Edwin Lawrence

H. O. Arnold-Forster

Robert Purvis

G. McCullagh
Appendix 3: Liberal Unionist Electoral Statistics, 1886-1900

General Elections, 1886-1900:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total LU candidates</th>
<th>Unopposed LU candidates</th>
<th>Total LU MPs elected</th>
<th>Total LU vote</th>
<th>% of national vote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1886</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>431,513</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1892</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>474,941</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1895</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>314,702</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>313,200</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 4: Regional Distribution of Liberal Unionist Constituencies, 1886-1906:

South East

London
- W. Islington 1886-1892
- N. Lambeth 1895-1900
- London University 1886-1906
- W. Marylebone 1895-1900
- St. George's, Hanover Sq. February 1887-1895
- S. St. Pancras 1886-1906
- Tower Hamlets (Mile End) January 1905-1906

South East – Excluding London
- Hythe 1886-1895

East Anglia
- Mid Norfolk 1886-1892, April 1895-1895
- S. Norfolk 1886-1896
- Peterborough 1886-1889, 1895-1906
- N. Suffolk (Lowestoft) 1886-1892
- S. Suffolk (Sudbury) 1886-1906

Central
- N. Beds. (Biggleswade) 1886-1892, 1895-1906
- Mid. Bucks. (Aylesbury) 1886-1910
E. Gloucs. (Cirencester) 1886-1892

Oxford University 1900-1914

Mid. Oxon. (Woodstock) 1886-1891

N. Wilts. (Cricklade) 1886-1892, 1895-1900

South-West

Wessex

E. Hants. (Petersfield) 1886-1892

Portsmouth 1886-1892

Southampton 1895-1906

S. Wilts. (Wilton) 1886-1888

Bristol Region

Bath 1886-1906

N. Bristol 1886-1892, 1895-1900

Gloucester 1895-1900

E. Somerset 1886-1906

Devon and Cornwall

Cornwall, Truro 1886-1906

N. W. Cornwall (Camborne) 1895-1900

S. E. Cornwall (Bodmin) 1886-1906

W. Cornwall (St. Ives) 1886-1906

N. Devon (S. Molton) 1886-November 1891

N. W. Devon (Barnstaple) 1886-1892, 1895-1900
S. Devon (Totnes) 1886-1922
W. Devon (Tavistock) 1886-1892

**Midlands**

**West Midlands**

Birmingham, Bordesley 1886-1918
Birmingham Edgbaston 1886-1898
C. Birmingham 1886-1918
N. Birmingham 1886-1918
S. Birmingham 1886-1918
W. Birmingham 1886-1914
S. Herefords. (Ross-on-Wye) 1886-1906

**Mid Shropshire (Wellington)** 1886-1906

S. Shropshire (Ludlow) 1886-1917
Staffordshire, Burton 1900-1910
Staffordshire, Handsworth 1886-1905
Staffordshire, Lichfield 1892-1895
W. Staffordshire 1886-1906
Warwick and Leamington 1886-1913
S. Wolverhampton 1886-1900
E. Worcs. 1886-1914
M. Worcs. (Droitwich) 1886-1906
N. Worcs. 1886-1887, 1895-1918
East Midlands

W. Derbyshire 1886-1918
Gt. Grimsby 1886-1892, March 1893-1895, August 1898-1910
Lincoln 1895-1910
Lincs., Holland (Spalding) 1895-1900
W. Nottingham 1892-1895

Northern England

Peak-Don

Derbyshire, Chesterfield 1886-1892
Doncaster February 1888-1892

Lancastria

Barrow-in-Furness 1886-July 1890
Burnley 1886-1887
Bury 1886-1895
Cheshire, Northwich 1886-August 1887
Lancashire, Heywood 1895-1904
Lancashire, N. Lonsdale 1895-1906
Lancashire, Rossendale 1886-January 1892
Liverpool Exchange 1895-1906
S. Manchester 1895-1906
Newcastle-under-Lyme 1886-1892, 1900-1906
Stoke-on-Trent 1895-1900
Yorkshire

C. Bradford 1895-1906
Halifax 1900-1906
Wakefield 1895-1902
Yorks., Colne Valley 1886-1892
Yorks., Shipley 1895-1906
Yorks., Skipton 1886-1892, 1895-1900

North England

Appleby 1900-1906
Darlington 1895-1910
Durham June 1898-1906
S.E. Durham 1886-1892, 1895-1898, 1900-1910
Hartlepool 1886-1891
Northumb., Tyneside 1900-1906

Wales

Carmarthen District 1895-1900
W. Denbighshire 1886-1892
Mid-Glamorgan 1886-1890
Swansea District 1886-1887
Ireland

W. Belfast 1892-1906
W. Down July 1905-1907
Dublin, St Stephens 1892-1900
Dublin University December 1895-1903
S. Londonderry 1886-1916
S. Tyrone 1886-1910

Scotland

Scotland, Highlands and Islands
Inverness District 1886-1892, 1895-1906
Invernesshire 1886-1892
Orkney and Shetland 1900-1902
Sutherlandshire 1900-1906
Wick District 1892-1896, 1900-1906

Scotland, East
E. Aberdeenshire 1900-1906
Edinburgh & St. Andrews Universities 1900-1916
S. Edinburgh 1895-1899, 1900-1906
W. Edinburgh 1886-1887, 1892-1918
Falkirk District 1886-1892, 1895-1906
Forfarshire 1886-1892
Peebles & Selkirk 1886-1906
W. Perthshire 1886-1900
Roxburghshire 1886-1892
St. Andrews District 1886-1903

Scotland, West

Ayr Burghs 1886-1888
N. Ayrshire 1886-1910
S. Ayrshire 1886-1892, 1895-1906
Dumfriesshire 1886-1895, 1900-1906
Glasgow Camlachie 1892-1908
Glasgow St. Rollox 1886-1892, 1900-1906
Glasgow Tradeston 1886-1910
Greenock 1886-1892, 1895-1900
Lanarkshire, Partick 1886-1906
Lanarkshire, NE September 1901-1904

Word count: 79,813
BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Manuscript Collections:
   a) Liberal Unionist Party Papers:

   W. Birmingham Liberal Unionist Association Records, Smethwick Local History Centre.

   Birmingham Liberal Unionist Association, All Saints Ward Records, Birmingham Central Library.

   East and North of Scotland Liberal Unionist Association Records, National Library of Scotland.

   West Derbyshire Liberal Unionist Association Records, Derbyshire Record Office, Matlock.

   Manchester and District Liberal Unionist Association Records, Manchester Central Reference Library.

   Maryhill Liberal Unionist Association Minute Book, National Library of Scotland.


   West of Scotland Liberal Unionist Association Records, National Library of Scotland.

   E. Worcestershire Liberal Unionist Association Records, Birmingham Central Library.

   b) Politicians’ Private Papers:

   Balfour Papers, British Library.

   Joseph and Austen Chamberlain Papers, University of Birmingham.

   Courtney Papers, London School of Economics.
Dicey Papers, Glasgow University.

Devonshire Papers, Chatsworth House.

Fawcett Papers, Manchester City Archives.

Fawcett Archives, Women’s Library, London Metropolitan University.

Gell Papers, Derbyshire Record Office.

Grey Papers, Durham Record Office.

Harcourt Papers, Bodleian Library.

Herbert Gladstone Papers, British Library.

William Gladstone Papers, British Library.

Heneage Papers, Lincoln Record Office.

Henry James Papers, Hereford Record Office.

Milner Papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

Parker Smith Papers, Mitchell Library, Glasgow.

Salisbury Papers, Hatfield House.

Selborne Papers, Bodleian Library.

Spencer Papers, Althorp House.

c) Other Collections:

Ballad Collection, British Library.

Barrow Election Papers, Lancashire County Record Office, Preston.

British Liberal Party Archive Vol. 1, 1884-1908, Birmingham Central Library.

Conservative Party Archive, Bodleian Library.

Warwick and Leamington Conservative Party Association Records,

Warwickshire County Record Office, Warwick.
2. Newspapers/Periodicals

Annual Register.

The Baptist.

Birmingham Daily Gazette.

Birmingham Daily Post.

Bristol Mercury.

The British Weekly.

Bury Guardian.

Bury Times.

Christian World.

Congregational Review.

Contemporary Review.

Daily News.

Daily Telegraph.

Edinburgh Review.

Exeter Flying Post.

Fortnightly Review.

Glasgow Herald.

Inquirer.

Inverness Courier.
The Judge.

Leamington Spa Courier.

The Liberal Unionist.

Liberal Unionist Association Memoranda.

The Manchester Guardian.

Methodist Times.

The Midland Telegraph.

The Nation.

National Review.

Nineteenth Century (and After).

North British Daily Mail.

The Northern Whig.

Oxford Chronicle.

Pall Mall Gazette.

Punch.

St Stephen’s Review.

The Scotsman.

The Scottish Highlander.

Scottish News.

The Spectator.

South Wales Daily News.

The Standard.

The Times.

The Tory.

Weekly Times and Echo.
3. Published Primary Sources

a) Memoirs


A.E. Gathorne-Hardy, *Gathorne-Hardy, First Earl of Cranbrook: a Memoir Vol. 2*,


T. Macknight, *Ulster as it is: Or, Twenty-Eight Years' Experience as an Irish Editor (2 vols.)*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1896.


**b) Other**

*The Case for the Union* (*five series*), British Library.


*Hansard’s Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd and 4th series.


*Report by the Executive of the West of Scotland Branch of the Liberal Unionist Committee for the Maintenance of the Legislative Union between Great Britain and Ireland, 1st August, 1886*, Glasgow: Alex. Malcolm, 1886.


W. Morris, 'The Skeleton at the Feast', *Commonweal*, 4:127, June 1888.


A. Ramm (ed.), *Political Correspondence of Mr Gladstone and Lord Granville*
L. G. Rylands (ed.), *Correspondence and Speeches of Mr. Peter Rylands, M.P*, Manchester: Heywood, 1890.


G. Stronach, *Twenty-Five Years of Politics; or, the Political Record of Mr. T.R. Buchanan*, Edinburgh, 1906.


4. Secondary Sources

a) Biographies:


**b) Edited Collections**


D.G. Boyce and A. O'Day (eds.), *The Ulster Crisis: 1885-1922*, Basingstoke:


P. Kennedy and A. Nicholls (eds.), *Nationalist and racialist movements in Britain and Germany before 1914*, London: Macmillan in association with St


c) Authored texts:


D. Cannadine, *Class in Britain*, London: Yale, 1998


M. Fry, *Patronage and Principle: A Political History of Modern Scotland,*


M. C. Hurst, *Joseph Chamberlain and West Midlands Politics, 1886-1895 (Dugdale Society occasional papers; no. 15)*, Oxford: Printed for the
Dugdale Society by V. Ridler, 1962.


S E. Koss, *The Rise and Fall of the Political Press in Britain, Vol. 1: The*

S.E. Koss, The Rise and Fall of the Political Press in Britain Vol. 2: The

J.M. Lawrence, Speaking for the People: Party, Language and Popular Politics

J. M. Lawrence, Electing Our Masters: The Hustings in British Politics from

J. Loughlin, Gladstone, Home Rule and the Ulster Question, 1882-1893, Dublin:
Gill and Macmillan, 1986

J. Loughlin, The British Monarchy and Ireland, 1800 to the present, Cambridge:
Cambridge University Press, 2007

W.C. Lubenow, Parliamentary Politics and the Home Rule Crisis: The British

W.C. Lubenow, The Cambridge Apostles, 1820-1914: Liberalism, Imagination,
and Friendship in British Intellectual and Professional Life, Cambridge:

P. Lynch, The Liberal Party in Rural England, 1885-1910: Radicalism and

P. Marsh, The Discipline of Popular Government: Lord Salisbury’s Domestic
Statecraft 1881-1902, Hassocks: Harvester, 1978

J. McCaffrey, Scotland in the Nineteenth Century, Basingstoke: Macmillan,
1997.

J. Mackenzie, Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Public

R. McKenzie and A. Silver, Angels in Marble: Working Class Conservatives in


R. Price, An Imperial War and the British Working Class: Working Class


G. Walker, *A History of the Ulster Unionist Party: Protest, Pragmatism and*


d) Articles:


J. Broughton, ‘Working Class Conservatism and the Rise of Labour’, The


P. Fraser, ‘The Liberal Unionist Alliance: Chamberlain, Hartington and the Conservatives, 1886-1904’, *English Historical Review*, 77 (1962), pp. 53-78.


e) Chapters in edited collections


F. Aubel, ‘The Conservatives in Wales’ in M. Francis & I. Zweiniger-


G. Jones, ‘Scientists against Home Rule’ in D.G. Boyce & A.O’Day (eds.),
Defenders of the Union: a survey of British and Irish Unionism since 1801,

J. M. Lawrence, ‘The dynamic of urban politics, 1867-1914’ in J.M .Lawrence &
M. Taylor (eds.), Party, State and Society: Electoral Behaviour in Britain

J.M. Lawrence, ‘Popular Politics and the Limitations of Party: Wolverhampton,
1867-1900’ in E. F. Biagini and A. J. Reid (eds.), Currents of Radicalism,

W.C. Lubenow, ‘The Liberal and the National Question: Irish Home Rule,
Nationalism, and their Relationship to Nineteenth Century Liberalism’ in J.

M. Luddy, ‘Isabella M.S. Tod, 1836-1896’ in M. Cullen and M. Luddy (eds.),
Women, Power and Consciousness in nineteenth century Ireland, Dublin:

C.M.M. MacDonald, ‘Locality, Tradition and Language in the Evolution of
Scottish Unionism: A Case Study, Paisley, 1886-1910’ in C.M.M.
MacDonald (ed.), Unionist Scotland 1800-1997, Edinburgh: John Donald

E. W. McFarland, ‘The Orangeman’s Unionist Vision’ in C.M.M. MacDonald
(ed.), Unionist Scotland 1800-1997, Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers,
1998.


f) Reference Texts


5. Unpublished Theses:


6. Conference Papers

S. Ball, ‘Conservatism between the Wars: Principles, Pride and Prejudice’,
paper delivered at the British History 1815-1945 Seminar, Institute of

I. Cawood, ‘The Liberal Unionist Vote: The Persistence of Patronage and
Localism in later Victorian Britain’, paper delivered at British History 1815-

R. Gill, 'Calculating Compassion' in the South African War, 1899-1902: A Case
Study in the History of the Origins of Humanitarian Relief’, paper delivered
at University of Sheffield Imperial History Discussion Group, 10 May 2007.

delivered at Languages of Politics Conference, University of Durham, 3
April 2009.