Unionism and Unionist Politics: 1906- 1914

Derek C. Shouba
Department of History
McGill University, Montreal
August, 1995

A thesis submitted to the
Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

ISBN 0-612-12083-X

Canada

Abstract

This thesis will trace the development of Conservative ideology in Great Britain between 1906 and 1914. During these years the Conservative party was defeated by the Liberal party on three separate occasions. Many historians believe that this string of electoral contretemps offers convincing evidence that Conservatism, as an evolving pattern of beliefs, was fundamentally unsuited to the political climate of Great Britain at the turn of the century. According to this interpretation of Edwardian Conservatism, it was only the timely onset of war which saved the party from having to come to terms with the democratic impulse of an unfamiliar era. This is a gross exaggeration of the plight of Conservatism before the war, for the party's unwavering commitment to the economic status quo was not in itself a recipe for electoral catastrophe. What may well have turned out to be fatal to the party's well-being was Joseph Chamberlain's Tariff Reform campaign. In 1903 Chamberlain offered the party an all-encompassing creed, a total solution to Britain's problems, both domestic and foreign, and a positive platform to sustain the party in office. Balfour sensed the dangers of a comprehensive ideology that was inherently of its own time. He, and Bonar Law after him, helped to rehabilitate Conservative ideology by limiting its scope and suggesting that Tariff Reform was merely one weapon among many in a large Conservative arsenal.

Résumé

Cétte thèse tente le retracer de développement de l'idéologie conservatrice en Grande-Bretagne entre 1906 et 1914. Pendant cette période, le parti Conservateur a subi la défaite aux mains du parti Libéral à trois reprises. D'après plusieurs historiens, cette série d'échecs offre une preuve convaincante que l'idéologie conservatrice, en tant que système évoluant de croyances, était fondamentalement maladaptée au climat politique en Grande-Bretagne au tournant du siècle. Voilà une interprétation qui exagère le pétrin qu'a connu le Conservatisme avant la guerre. Le fait que le parti soit fortement engagé au statu quo économique n'a pas, à lui seul, assuré son catastrophe aux élections. En fin de compte, il est fort possible que la campagne de réforme des tarifs proposée par Joseph Chamberlain assura sa défaite. En 1903, Chamberlain a offert au parti un crédo universel qui devait servir de solution totale aux problèmes de la Grande-Bretagne au niveau domestique et étranger. Cette formule devait aussi agir de programme positif qui pouvait assurer le pouvoir au parti. Balfour a reconnu le danger que présentait n'importe quelle idéologie compréhensive, puisqu'elle ne pouvait être qu'une réflexion de l'époque. Celui-ci, ainsi que Bonar Law après lui, aida au rétablissement de l'idéologie conservatrice en limitant l'éntendue de la réforme fiscale et en suggérant que les propos de Chamberlain étaient simplement une arme parmi d'autres dans l'arsenal des Conservateurs.

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Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Professor Aaron Krishtalka for all the support and guidance he has given to me this past year. He, like Professor Robert Vogel before him, has been both an inspiration and a wonderful source of information on almost every aspect of British Conservatism.

Introduction

This thesis will trace the development of Conservative ideology in Great Britain between 1906 and 1914. Whether Conservative ideology evolved at all during this period, or any other for that matter, is open to interpretation.[1] With few exceptions, historians of the Conservative party have tried to divorce ideology from the practical politics of party strife by cataloguing contemporary expressions of Conservative "original principles."[2] The problems stemming from this particular method of historical analysis are manifold. For one thing, the original principles of the Conservative party are not easily identified. As Keith Feiling has written: "If we were to call them the most unprincipled of all parties, in the sense that rigidity or exclusive principle has been alien to their manner of thinking, there would be a measure of truth to it."[3] The Conservative party is indeed a pragmatic party. Yet even if this were not the case, even if it were still possible to discern the party's original principles at work in the twentieth century, the historian is, generally speaking, not well qualified to undertake the task. In fact, whenever historians attempt to cull representative apothegms from the past they run the risk of creating their own

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[1]The terms Unionist and Conservative are used almost interchangeably throughout this thesis. However, out of deference to contemporaries the term "Conservative" will only be used whenever it is necessary to draw attention to the Conservative political heritage.

[2]See, for instance, R.J. Bennet's "The Conservative Tradition of Thought: A Right Wing Phenomenon," The British Right: Conservative and Right Wing Politics in Britain (Westmead, England: Saxon House, 1972), Ian Gilbert's Inside Right: A Study of Conservatism (London: Hutchinson, 1977), and Robert Eccleshall's "English Conservatism as Ideology," Political Studies, 25(1977), pp. 62- 83.

[3]Keith Feiling, "Principles of Conservatism," Political Quarterly, 24(1953), pp. 129.

personal, post-hoc, versions of the original Conservative creed; the bias almost invariably shows through in their work. Who are the proper spokesmen and interpretors of Conservative ideology and original principles in the modern era? Is the intellectual who conforms most closely to the writings of Burke and Bolingbrooke a "representative" Conservative, or is the Conservative who has most influence over his colleagues a truly "representative" Conservative? Either way, the controversy over principles and pragmatism is a political issue rather than an historiographical one. In 1948 the Conservative Committee on Party Organization issued a report which stated that "Party principles are stable; the Disraelian principles are as valid today as when they were first propounded."[9] This may or may not be true, but history is a record of change over time, and if Conservative principles have not changed over time than historians would do well to leave the study of ideology to the politicians themselves.

The Conservative party has often been called the "stupid party."[10] It received that name in part because its leaders have seldom felt inclined to present the nation with a coherent statement of their beliefs. The appellation "stupid" is unjust and misleading, for the party has never been short of bright and educated men, but there is, nevertheless, a definite and persistent strain of anti-intellectualism among British Conservatives. The story of Stanley Baldwin's theoretical naivete is well known.

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[9]Ivor Bulmer-Thomas, "How Conservative Policy is Formed," Political Quarterly, Vol. 24, 195, pp. 190-191.
[10]The phrase was first coined by J.S. Mill.

When a journalist asked Baldwin what great man had influenced him most:

> "He reflected for a moment and then spoke quietly and emphatically to this effect: 'There was one political thinker who has had more influence on me than all others--Sir Henry Maine. When I was at Cambridge, his authority was complete and I never ceased to be grateful for what I learned from him."[11]

Armed with this information, the journalist pressed him to explain what Maine's greatest contribution to political thought had been:

> "Mr. Baldwin paused perhaps a shade longer and then said with conviction: 'Rousseau argued that all human progress was from contract to status, but Maine made it clear once and for all that all real movement was from status to contract.' He paused again and this time for quite a while, and suddenly a look of dawning horror, but at the same time a of immense humanity and confederacy stole across his face. 'Or was it,' he said leaning just a little towards me, 'or was it the other way around?"

Baldwin need not have been so alarmed. He, like most Conservative politicians of his era, learned more about politics from politicians and party platforms than he did from books and university lectures. It can hardly have been otherwise, for there were in fact very few Conservative theorists to begin with. In the years between 1906 and 1914 the dearth of philosophical

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[11]Frank Pakenham, Born to Believe (London: Jonathan Cape, 1953), pp. 71-72. Cited By John Ramsden, The Age of Balfour and Baldwin: 1902- 1940 (New York: Macmillan, 1978), pp. viiii- x.

writings by influential Conservatives was particularly acute. Hugh Cecil's *Conservatism*, published in 1912, and Geoffrey Butler's *The Tory Tradition*, published in 1914, were among the very few exceptions to this rule.[12] There were other serious books about Conservatism written during these years, notably those by W.H. Mallock, and no doubt these helped a few intellectuals to abandon one of the progressive parties in favor of the "stupid party," but none of these books had a very big impact on either the Conservative leadership or the Conservative rank and file.[13] Of course, the fact that party stalwarts made few attempts to read, write down or otherwise explain their evolving political cosmology does not mean that they did not have one. Professor Scruton has written that the essence of Conservatism is "inarticulate."[14] If this statement is true for the period which will be dealt with in this study, it is true only insofar as the Conservative program, as such, was largely a negative one. Between the years 1906 and 1914 Conservatives maintained an abiding hostility to almost anything that would upset the status quo. During these years British Conservatives defended the

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[12]Keith Feiling's Toryism: A Political Dialogue (Oxford: Oxford University, 1914) could be added to this short list, but Feiling's dialogue on Conservatism is an unsystematic, not to say immature, attempt to define contemporary Conservatism. Feiling's What is Conservatism? (London: Faber and Faber, 1931) would have a greater impact on interwar Conservatism, but in 1914 Feiling was still a young Oxford don whose views were still of little or no account to leading Conservatives.

[13]See Mallock's A Critical Examination of Socialism (London: J. Murray, 1907) as well as his Social Reform as Related to the Realities and Delusions of the Increase and Distribution of Wealth from 1801 to 1910 (London: J. Murray, 1914).

[14]Roger Scruton, The Meaning of Conservatism (Harmondsworth: Penguin 1980), p. 11.

constitution, the privileges of the Anglican church, the power and glory of the Empire, the Union with Ireland, the existing franchise, property rights, and the preponderance of British military and naval power. And, as George Wyndham wrote to Balfour on 8 November 1905, on all of these questions "...90 percent of our historic Conservative party are agreed."[15] The Conservative program is therefore a very specific one, but perhaps for that very reason it did not need to be written down. The rewards of the past are, after all, almost invariably self-evident to those who are satisfied with their present circumstances.

Conservative ideology can be described three different ways: as an oxymoron, as a reasoned defense of the status quo[16], or as a specific understanding of how the party is relating to the other parties at a specific point in time. The very fundamental assumption that this essay makes is that the first two conceptions of Conservative ideology (while perhaps true) are not useful guides to the party's evolving pattern of beliefs. As we have said, Conservatives did have a program in the years immediately preceding the First World War: apart from Tariff Reform, the significance of which shall be dealt with at some length in this thesis, the Conservative party believed in the world as they knew it. But even so, a certain amount of political and economic change is unavoidable, and in the end the

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[15] J.W. Mackail and Guy Wyndham, The Life and Letters of George Wyndham, Vol. 2 (London: Hutchinson, 1929).

[16] See, for instance, Robert Eccleshall's English Conservatism Since the Restoration: An Anthology and an Introduction (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990).

Conservative party has always been forced to prioritize its convictions. The years that will be dealt with in this thesis were extremely difficult ones in the long life of the Conservative party. Between 1906 and 1914 the party suffered three electoral defeats and a political exile made even more bitter by the party's self-professed status as the "natural" party of government. Joseph Chamberlain's radical proposal for Tariff Reform was a solution to the party's dilemma, and one that was not directly at odds with any of the special interests that Conservatives were pledged to defend. But even so, a large portion of the Conservative party was against Joseph Chamberlain's Tariff Reform campaign from the start. Opposition to fiscal reform was primarily, though not exclusively, based on expediency.[17] Joseph Chamberlain argued that Tariff Reform would consolidate the British Empire, raise money for social reform, and increase Britain's influence in the international community. Few Conservatives ever spent much time contesting these points. What Conservatives were more likely to contest was the electoral viability of protectionism. If Tariff Reform damaged the party's short-term electoral prospects, what other Conservative interests might be jeopardized in the meantime? Should reform of the House of Lords outweigh imperial consolidation? Should Ireland? These are the kinds of questions that were being asked by Conservative

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[17]See W.H. Greenleaf's The British Political Tradition, Vol. 2, for the traditional, collectivist versus individualist, approach to the Tariff Reform controversy. Greenleaf maintains that the struggle over Tariff Reform reveals an ideological cleavage always latent in British Conservatism. In fact, Greenleaf has argued that every major struggle within British Conservatism stems from these unresolved (if not unresolvable) tensions.

politicians in opposition, and these are the kinds of questions that this thesis shall endeavor to answer.

One final note about the limitations of the present study is in order. In the first place, this essay does not attempt to give a detailed and connected account of the history of the Conservative party. Such accounts already exist--though not as many as one might expect from the most successful political party in modern British history--so an exhaustive account of the events and personalities of the era would be unproductive if not altogether superfluous. With this in mind, a great many important political events have been left out of this study altogether. Some have been left out because the Conservative party, as a party, was not involved in them. Others have been left out because they played no role in the central policy disputes of the party elite. For this reason, foreign and defense policy debates have received scarcely any attention at all.[18] This thesis is, in any event, more of a commentary on Conservatism than it is a description of the whole range of Conservative activity in the Edwardian era.

The sources for this commentary on Conservatism are relatively diverse. Books and newspapers published at the time have been invaluable to the present study. So have a few party histories, such as Ramsden's *Age of Baldwin and Balfour* and Blake's *History of the Conservative Party from Peel to Churchill.* Letters and speeches have been gleaned from a wide range of

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[18]In any event, there were few sharp divisions over foreign policy in these years. Asquith, Grey, and Haldane, were especially sympathetic to Unionist foreign policy objectives. The real foreign policy debates, therefore, took place within the Liberal parliamentary party. See John Turner, British Politics and the Great War, (New Haven: 1992), pp. 41- 42.

secondary sources; Blake's *The Unknown Prime Minister* and Charles Petrie's The *Life and Letters of the Rt. Hon. Sir Austen Chamberlain* have been among the most helpful in this respect. The author is also indebted to Pugh's *The Making of British Politics* and Anthony Seldon and Stewart Ball's *The Conservative Century*. Both of these books have been indispensable bibliographic guides to the history and historiography of Edwardian Conservatism. Finally, it must be said that the conclusion of this thesis follows the party into the First World War and leaves it at the Carlton Club meeting of 1922. This is an appropriate place to leave off, since it was only after the party struck out on its own that the full impact of the war became apparent. Before 1922 many Conservatives believed that it was only Lloyd George and the Coalition which prevented them from occupying the same positions they had abandoned during the war. After 1922 this conceit was permanently laid to rest.

Chapter One

Joseph Chamberlain and the Search for a Positive Platform, 1904 - 1906

In the summer of 1904 Austen Chamberlain sent a letter to Arthur Balfour warning him that the Unionist party was on the very brink of disaster. "At the present time," Chamberlain lamented, "the party viewed as a whole is timid, undecided, vacillating. It has no constructive policy. It does not know what is to be its future. It is exposed to a most active and dangerous attack, and stands timidly on the defensive."[1] In short, the Unionist party, wanting both unity and a sense of purpose, was in danger of being annihilated by its opponents at the next general election. Yet the party would not be sent into political oblivion at the upcoming election unless it had failed in the meantime to rally around an imaginative and positive platform for the future. Indeed, if the Prime Minister would but commit himself to Joseph Chamberlain's radical proposals for Tariff Reform, proposals which had the benefit of being both long overdue and wildly popular in many of the constituent organizations, the party would be well on its way to a full recovery.

The difference between an active program for the future and a passive defense of the last twenty years of Unionist administration could not easily be overestimated. Even a cursory examination of the political landscape ought to have been enough to convince Balfour that the party had very little to lose and everything to gain by supporting Joseph Chamberlain's call for a fiscal revolution. At any rate, Austen Chamberlain argued that sooner or later the Prime Minister would be forced to endorse

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[1]Austen Chamberlain, Politics From the Inside: 1906- 1914 (London: Cassell, 1936), pp. 22- 27.

Tariff Reform, because its supporters would not rest until they had won the entire party over to their point of view. As Chamberlain pointed out to Balfour in a second letter--this one sent three weeks after the first--if Balfour refused to support a comprehensive program of Tariff Reform, there would be a struggle within the party, and "...each section will try, and will be bound to try, to make itself as strong as possible, by enforcing pledges and capturing associations and seats."[2] The ultimate result of the contest was not in doubt, not to Chamberlain anyhow, but in the meantime the contest would involve the party "...in serious divisions, in perpetual controversy and Parliamentary impotence."

In fact, the struggle between Tariff Reform and Free Trade Unionists had already begun. The opening shot in this bitter and increasingly debilitating conflict was fired one year earlier when Joseph Chamberlain first publicly proposed Tariff Reform in Birmingham on May 15. Chamberlain's audacity astonished the political world and turned the Unionist party upside down in the process. L.S. Amery described the address as "...a challenge to Free Trade as direct and provocative as the theses which Luther nailed at the church door at Wittenberg."[3] He was not far wrong. According to the Annual Register, no other political event in recent years had "...produced so startling an effect as the pronouncement on fiscal policy made by Mr. Chamberlain in Birmingham."[4] Balfour was himself caught completely unawares

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[2]Austen Chamberlain, Politics From the Inside, pp. 32- 34.
[3]L.S. Amery, My Political Life, Vol. 1 (London: Hutchinson, 1953), p.236.
[4]The Annual Register, 1903, pp. 130- 131.

by Chamberlain's unauthorized manifesto. He had only expected Chamberlain to say in Birmingham what he himself had said that very afternoon in London: that the Government would consider a "trifling" duty on food imports only after the "great body and mass" of the British people had been thoroughly reconciled to the idea of a comprehensive fiscal arrangement with the colonies. Instead, Chamberlain had said that Free Trade was moribund and that the Unionist party should attempt to overturn the whole structure of Free Trade without further delay. Chamberlain had even gone so far as to suggest, on no other authority but his own, that Free Trade might be put to the ultimate test at the next general election.

Chamberlain's Birmingham address galvanized Unionist opinion and helped to define and delimit the entire discourse of Conservatism for the next thirty years. By 1906, 98 percent of all Unionist candidates were espousing some form of Tariff Reform in their election addresses.[5] By 1910, Unionist Free Traders had ceased to function as an organized group, and Conservatism, as a shared and coherent system of beliefs, had become almost inextricably interwoven with protectionism. The proposal itself was remarkably uncomplicated. Following the introduction of preferential tariffs between the various components of the British Empire, an imperial trade council would raise external tariffs, reduce internal tariffs, institute an imperial investment program, and arbitrate whatever trade disputes might have arisen in the

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[5]A.K. Russell, Liberal Landslide: 1906 General Election (Newton Abbot: David and Charles, 1973).

meantime between and among the "Great Colonies."[6] This simple scheme represented Chamberlain's grand political vision for the future. Chamberlain knew that the new tariffs would shield British farmers and manufacturers from unfair and potentially destructive foreign trade, but he also hoped that the new tariffs would help to integrate Britain's empire; finance innovative social welfare programs for Britain's poorer classes; guarantee full employment; and promote national security by ensuring that the Empire would be entirely self-sufficient in time of war.[7]

Though Chamberlain could count on the support of a few noted economists--Booth, Ashley, Cunningham and Hewins among them--Tariff Reform was widely condemned by members of Britain's academic establishment.[8] Chamberlain was, however, unperturbed by the criticism that was heaped upon his calls for a food tax and a ten percent duty on all manufactured and semi-manufactured imports. This indifference to academic criticism infuriated many of Chamberlain's opponents, as well as a few of his friends, but Chamberlain always maintained that the chief merits of Tariff Reform lay altogether outside the traditional domain of political economy. While economists harped on problems of exchange, capital, and profits, Chamberlain was content to perceive the dim outline of what Balfour would later refer to as "the dynamics not the statistics of trade and

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[6]See Richard Jebb, The Britannic Question: A Survey of the Alternative (London: Longmans, Green, 1913), pp. 84- 126, for alternatives to Chamberlain's proposal for an imperial trade council.

[7]J.R. Jones, "England," in The European Right, ed. Hans Rogger and Eugene Weber (Berkley: University of California, 1965), pp. 41.

[8]R.B. McDowell, British Conservatism: 1832- 1914 (London: Faber and Faber, 1959), pp. 161.

manufactures."[9] These "dynamics" were the sweeping trends and tendencies of the international economic system, trends and tendencies which could only be understood intuitively.[10] If Britain were wealthier in absolute terms than she had been previously, her industrial lead over the rest of the world had vanished overnight, her free trade markets had shrunk, foreign tariff unions had expanded, and powerful vested interests had begun to crystalize even in newly developed nations. The limits of classical economic analysis were manifest in this as in most other economic computations of the day. There were, after all, few economic models or statistical patterns which could help to determine whether or not the self-governing colonies would drift slowly away from the motherland until Great Britain had ceased to be a first-rate power.[11]

In many ways Tariff Reform was an extremely awkward and unnatural policy for Conservatives to embrace. As Lord Hugh

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[9]Arthur James Balfour, Economic Notes on Insular Free Trade (London: Longmans, Green, 1903), pp. 29.

[10]It might be remembered, however, that these "dynamics" had only recently come to the attention of Mr. Chamberlain. As late as 1902 he had occasion to say: "I see no signs of any imminent or pressing danger to the prosperity of the country. During the last five years we have been building up an unparalleled condition of trade...The prospects are extremely good, and I am not at all disposed to take a pessimistic view of the situation." J.M. Robertson, The Collapse of Tariff Reform: Mr. Chamberlain's Case Exposed (Westminster: Cobden Club, 1911), pp. 13. Balfour agreed with Chamberlain, telling his constituents on 23 January 1902 that he "...did not see any sign of the decline and ruin of British industry which was the prominent topic of newspapers..." Cited by John Morley, Hansard, Fourth Series, Vol. CXXIX, col. 628.

[11]The reason orthodox economic analysis was of little use in public policy debates, according to L.S. Amery, was because it "...is almost wholly an analysis of industrial or commercial operations from the point of view of the individual. Nowhere is there any consistent attempt to analyze these operations viewed collectively or in the mass." The Fundamental Fallacies of Free Trade (London: Office of The National Review, 1906), pp. 6-7.

Cecil wrote in 1911, "Natural conservatism is a tendency of the human mind. It is a disposition adverse from change; and it springs partly from a distrust of the unknown and a corresponding reliance on experience rather than on theoretic reasoning."[12] Most Conservatives did embrace Tariff Reform, and many did not hesitate before doing so, but since Conservatives were "...largely recruited from and dependent on the natural conservatism that is found in every human mind," their enthusiasm for the Colonial Secretary's proposal was somewhat paradoxical. Notwithstanding Chamberlain's rhetoric, Tariff Reform represented a gigantic leap in the dark, especially for a party accustomed to gradual change or, as Lord Salisbury put it, "...seeing that things went to the devil only slowly."[13] Was there, after all, any way for Conservatives to determine in advance whether or not Imperial Preference would lead to increased trade between Britain and the Empire? Was there any way to know, without the benefit of evidence or experience, whether the higher cost of living would be offset by a drop in unemployment? And finally, was there any way of knowing whether the Empire would really draw together politically even if its trade links could eventually be strengthened as a result of Tariff Reform? These would have been difficult questions for any politician to answer but they were especially difficult for Conservative politicans. What might Burke--Burke, who had admonished his countrymen

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[12]Lord Hugh Cecil, Conservatism (London: Williams and Norgate, 1913), pp. 9.

[13]Cited by John P. Mackintosh, British Prime Ministers of the Twentieth Century (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1978), pp. 25.

to demolish any "weak, erroneous, fallacious, unfounded, or imperfect theory" by comparing it with practice--have thought of Tariff Reform?[14]

Since Joseph Chamberlain was not himself a Conservative, he himself had few scruples about the philosophical purity of his proposals. "To him," Lord Hugh Cecil would write in an open letter to *The Times*, "change was not an object of distrust, to him there was nothing repulsive in a period of acute political controversy."[15] Lord Hugh Cecil was right, of course, Chamberlain had spent the greater part of his political life, whether in the company of Liberal or Unionist colleagues, in the service of radical social reform. But if Chamberlain had been a Conservative, he might have taken a great deal of comfort in the fact that he was merely proposing a variation of what had been the single most important tenet of the Conservative party until 1852. Indeed, even in 1852, when Disraeli had cynically jettisoned protectionism after having split with Peel on the same issue in 1846, there were at least thirty Conservative M.P.s who did not accept the new fiscal regime and repeatedly voted against it. The sentiment that lay behind that futile revolt, whatever its origin, was never entirely extinguished, and various protectionist revivals throughout the second half of the Nineteenth Century had garnered enough strength to pass mild resolutions against

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[14]Edmund Burke, Reflections on the Revolution in France: and on the Proceedings in Certain Societies in London in Relation to that Event (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969). Quoted by R.J. White, The Conservative Tradition (London: Nicholas Kaye, 1950), pp. 35.

[15]The Times, 12 July 1904. Quoted by R.B. McDowell in British Conservatism: 1832- 1914 (London: Faber and Faber, 1959), pp. 167- 168.

unrestricted Free Trade at meetings of the National Union of Conservative Associations.[16] Moreover, both Disraeli and Salisbury flirted briefly with the idea of reinventing protectionism themselves, and though both men concluded that it would have been politically unprofitable to tamper with the fiscal system, they had not thought that there was anything particularly un-Conservative about making sweeping changes in the country's fiscal code.[17] This was no doubt because they both knew that Conservatism had never completely lost its special affinity to British agriculture, but the volte-face was more easily accommodated, philosophically, by Conservatism's "pragmatic" approach to politics.[18] As Disraeli would have said--"above all, no program!"

Chamberlain knew better than anybody that there was more than one way to interpret Conservatism. In an age of tariffs, trading blocs, and industrial competition, might it not be said that Conservatism could no longer be bound by the discredited strictures of the past? Chamberlain would make this point over and over again in speeches across the country. Times had

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[16]One reason the revolt took so long to bear fruit was that unrepentant protectionists failed to produce any systematic defense of protectionism. R.B. McDowell, British Conservatism, pp. 28.

[17]According to Disraeli, "...reciprocity appears to rest on scientific grounds, and it is probable that experience may teach us that it has been recklessly disregarded by our legislators." Quoted by Derek Walker-Smith, The Protectionist Case in the 1840's (New York: A.M. Kelly, 1970), pp. 90.

[18]Of course, most ardent tariff reformers never admitted that the country's fiscal arrangements had anything to do with ideology or party loyalty. See for instance Balfour's Economic Notes on Insular Free Trade, pp. 3- 4, or Milner's The Nation and the Empire (London: Constable, 1913), pp. xx, where Milner emphatically states: "Neither is there anything in the principle of fiscal reform which would make it acceptable to a Conservative and unacceptable to a Liberal."

changed and "...the musty dogma of old-fashioned schools," whether Liberal or Conservative, would have to change with them.[19] Whether this attitude was really consistent with Conservative doctrine was difficult to say; but this point did not really concern Chamberlain.[20] He only knew that he believed in Tariff Reform at least as much as he believed in the Unionist party itself. So too, as we shall see, did a increasingly vocal and powerfully organized minority of Conservatives.

Chamberlain believed in Tariff Reform, both as a policy and as an electioneering tool, because he believed that Tariff Reform would benefit, almost without exception, everyone and every interest in Great Britain and the Empire. While Tariff Reform was plainly intended to aid Britain's manufacturing classes, Joseph Chamberlain went to great lengths to prove that Tariff Reform would help the Labouring classes too. Speaking at Limehouse on 15 December 1904, Chamberlain told his audience that attempts to ameliorate the plight of the working classes through factory legislation and social interventionism alone were doomed to fail:

> "This attempt of ours to raise the standard of living, to regulate the conditions of trade in the interests of working men--it is very good; but--take this to heart--remember that it is inconsistent with Free Trade. You cannot have Free Trade in goods in the sense our opponents use the word, and at the same time have

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[19]R.J. White, The Conservative Tradition, pp. 250-251.

[20]Keith Feiling, What is Conservatism? (London: Faber and Faber, 1930), pp. 8. If Tariff Reform was truly un-Conservative, it would not have been the first time British Conservatism became the enemy of tradition. Yet, as Feiling reminds us, in the longrun the Conservative Party can only survive by narrowing the gulf between it and "...the immense reserves of conservatism in the country at large."

> protection of Labour. Take the United States of America: take our own Colonies. It is universally admitted that in those countries the general standard of living, the position of comfort and prosperity in which the working classes exist, is superior to their condition in this country. They have a tariff....You will not find a single man of influence or importance, whether among the manufacturing classes or amongst the working men of America and the colonies, who will not tell you that the tariff is part of a system for the elevation of the working classes, and that if they adopted our policy of Free Imports it would absolutely be impossible for them to maintain the high level of general prosperity to which they have attained..."[21]

To Unionists worried about the class implications of the rest of their legislative agenda, not to mention the more sensational and predatory implications of the Liberal program, Tariff Reform came as a godsend.[22] If the nation had grown weary of the other Unionist trump cards--imperialism, militarism, and diplomatic competence--it had not yet been properly introduced to Tariff Reform. The Unionist party, always on the lookout for new ideological imperatives to bridge the widening chasm of class, was enthralled by the seemingly limitless possibilities of Joseph Chamberlain's latest crusade. This then was yet another reason why many old-fashioned Unionists were

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[21]5 December 1904. Cited by R.J. White, The Conservative Tradition, pp. 248-249.

[22]Of course, there were a few Conservatives who believed that Tariff Reform was almost indistinguishable from socialism. As Lord Balfour of Burleigh would complain, Chamberlain's followers were "...going very far in attempting to beat the Radical party in outbidding them in a Socialist direction. They <were> pursuing things which by no stretch of the imagination <could> be described as Conservative." Balfour of Burleigh to Walter Long, 5 December 1907. Cited by D.J. Dutton, "Unionist Party and Social Policy: 1906- 1910," Historical Journal, 24(1981), pp. 875.

drawn to Tariff Reform; it certainly was the most self-serving one.[23] For a variety of reasons, and obviously the country's recent experience in the Boer War must not be overlooked, few Unionists still believed that patriotic rhetoric alone would be enough to win elections in the twentieth century.[24] The party had, for the time being at least, given its last Crystal Palace speech.

In these circumstances it is no small wonder that Tariff Reform gained ground so quickly in the Unionist party. Unionists, and especially Unionists worried about the rise of socialism on the Continent, knew that their party had to be able to respond to a brand new generation of Liberal propaganda. In the 1870's and 1880's, when the Liberal party had called itself the People's party, Disraeli had said that it was impossible for a party to represent the People so long as that party was soft on defense, on the Empire, and on British prestige in general.[25] That answer

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[23]Amery identified the importance of these ideological imperatives to the Unionist party. "The one thing I dreaded," he would later write, "has been a cleavage based on class, on the desire for the material gain of one class of the community at the expense of anothers...If my long political life has any meaning it has lain in my constant struggle to keep the Tory party true to a program of Imperial greatness and social progress, linked with a definite economic creed of its own, and to prevent it drifting into becoming the party of a mere negative laissez-faire anti-Socialism." L.S. Amery, My Political Life, Vol. 1 (London: Hutchinson, 1953), pp. 254- 255. Cited by John Barnes, "Ideology and Factions," in Conservative Century, ed. Anthony Seldon and Stuart Ball (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 336.

[24]Both A.P. Thornton's The Imperial Idea and its Enemies (London: Macmillan, 1963) and Richard Shannon's The Crisis of Imperialism: 1865-1914 (London: St. Alban's, 1976) analyze the general decline in public enthusiasm for imperialism at the turn of the century. See Martin Pugh's Tories and the People (New York: Blackwell, 1985), pp. 158- 161, for a dissenting view of Edwardian jingoism. Pugh maintains that Tory jingoism only wained after the war.

[25]J.H. Grainger, "Between Balfour and Bonar Law," in The Conservatives, ed. Donald Southgate (London: Macmillan, 1974), pp. 180- 181.

had been a good one in its day, but over time it had become increasingly obsolescent. This obsolescence might well have been revealed earlier were it not for Ireland. When it came to Ireland, Unionists believed that they were representing the interests of the nation over and against the fractious and self-serving interests of the Liberal party. When Unionists defended the nation and the Empire against Home Rule, and when the issue at stake was fully understood by the voting public, they could lose no election. Or so they believed right up until Ireland gained its independence in 1922. Unfortunately for the Unionists, in 1906 the value of Ireland, while still considerable, was not quite what it had been in 1886. In the 1906 election, Liberals hardly mentioned the subject and the electorate did not seem to be bothered by the omission.[26] The eclipse of the Home Rule controversy left Unionists, who could no longer place their confidence either in abstract jingoism or the defense of the Union, groping for an alternate "national" policy, and Tariff Reform fitted the bill quite nicely.[27]

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[26]Campbell-Bannerman did promise to bring about a Dublin Parliament, but only "step by step," and certainly not in the 1906 Parliament. Lord Oxford and Asquith, Fifty Years of Parliament, Vol. 2 (London: Little, Brown, 1928), pp. 30- 31.

[27]It is of course difficult to measure the degree to which the discourse of Tariff Reform overlapped with the discourse of Imperialism, but mild nationalist rhetoric was seldom excluded from any sustained argument in favor of protectionism, either before or after the First World War. Take, for instance, William Ashley's scholarly treatise on the subject, The Tariff Problem (London: P.S. King and Son, 1903), pp. 200, where Ashley concludes: "...I, for my part, am loathe to see the English people surrender their guiding share in the destiny of the world. With all our faults, I fain believe, something in our traditions, our institutions, our conceptions of duty, which should be valuable elements in the world politics of the future."

Of course, the party had not taken to Tariff Reform all at once. The campaign had actually split the party, on every level, into three unequal parts. One faction of the party supported Joseph Chamberlain and his son, Austen, in their calls to establish preferential tariffs for the colonies in the United Kingdom market; another faction, typified by C.T. Ritchie, the Duke of Devonshire and the Cecils, refused to accept any revolution in the fiscal status quo, and was strongly opposed to any imposition of food taxes; and a third faction, led by the Prime Minister himself, tried hard to find a coherent position somewhere between Joseph Chamberlain and the unrepentant free traders. At first, Balfour had tried to skirt the fiscal controversy altogether by treating Tariff Reform as an "open question" within the Cabinet. It is unclear how much the Prime Minister hoped to gain by this delay, but he wrote optimistically in his report to the King on June 9: "Mr. Balfour has used and is using, every effort to avert any rupture among his colleagues; and is very loyally supported by all the other members of the Cabinet. He hopes that it may be found possible to avert, or if not to avert, at least to defer, any crisis which may threaten the existence of the Government."[28] For the duration of the Cabinet "truce" individual ministers were allowed to think what they liked about Tariff Reform so long as they did not discuss the matter in Parliament. In the meantime the Government would conduct a detailed and impartial study of the whole fiscal question. As Balfour told the House of Commons in his speech on the Finance Bill, the issue at stake was not one of

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[28]Kenneth Young, Arthur James Balfour (London: Macmillan, 1963), pp. 213.

principle but rather of fiscal efficacy. Whatever difference of opinion there was about tariffs, the difference would not be wide enough to "...strike at the root of party unity or party loyalty."[29] Whether this was wishful thinking on Balfour's part remained to be seen. Clearly, the unfortunate results of the 1845 party split over tariffs were weighing heavily on his mind.

In July 1903 the Cabinet truce broke down prematurely and Hicks-Beachs' Free Food League began to engage in open warfare with Joseph Chamberlain's Tariff Reform League. In the interlude provided by the truce, however, Balfour had written the document that would later be published as *Economic Notes on Insular Free Trade.* Up until this point Balfour had refused to "...to express a settled conviction where no settled conviction exists,"[30] and his *Economic Notes* did not stray too far from this ambiguous position. *Economic Notes* merely called for retaliatory tariffs to be imposed upon those nations who protected their own markets against British goods.[31] The paper did not go very far beyond that. Balfour hoped that the pragmatic approach to fiscal reform outlined in his paper would reconcile the two rival wings of the party. Of course, even retaliatory tariffs represented a very substantial threat to Free

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[29]Kenneth Young, Arthur James Balfour, pp. 214

[30]J.A. Spencer and Cyril Asquith, Life of Lord Oxford and Asquith (London: J. Murray, 1931), pp. 152.

[31]There was something for everyone in Economic Notes. Balfour was clever enough, or perhaps disingenuous enough, to write both that "...I approach the subject of fiscal policy from the free trade point of view..." and that "...the first and most essential object of our national efforts should be to get rid of the bonds in which we have gratuitously entangled ourselves [by adhering blindly to unilateral Free Trade]."

Trade, but the new tariffs would only have been put into effect in order to lower the trade barriers of Britain's trading partners.

If *Economic Notes* represented Balfour's honest efforts to find a middle way between Joseph Chamberlain and C.T. Ritchie, his "Blue Paper" was much more biased in favor of the tariff reformers. Both *Economic Notes* and the "Blue Paper" were presented to the Cabinet on 13 August 1903, and the "Blue Paper" drew criticism from at least four ministers who, if they were not at all pleased about retaliatory tariffs, were even less disposed to favor food taxes and preferential tariffs for the colonies. The meeting was broken up by Balfour before any irrevocable split occurred but it was clear to Balfour that the "Blue Paper" would have to be scrapped, or at least substantially amended, in order to prevent debilitating resignations from the Government.

In the event, the more extreme proposals contained in the "Blue Paper" were thrown over in order to keep the Duke of Devonshire from making common cause with the other Free Traders in the Cabinet--C.T. Ritchie, Lord Balfour of Burleigh and Lord George Hamilton. But the real drama was yet to come. First came Joseph Chamberlain's unexpected request to resign from the Cabinet in order to take his extreme views on the subject of fiscal reform directly to the people.[32] Balfour, not slow to realize that Joseph Chamberlain's resignation would strengthen the hand of the fiscal moderates in the Cabinet, agreed at once to let him go to the country. If the Colonial Secretary made any headway

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[32]Alan Sykes offers the most detailed and insightful account of Balfour's machinations in Tariff Reform in British Politics: 1903- 1913 (Oxford: Claredon, 1979), pp. 31- 54.

with the public, Balfour repeatedly assured him that those gains would be consolidated through new legislation.

Balfour was now thoroughly convinced that only a moderate Cabinet would be able to hold the parliamentary party together, and so, with the Colonial Secretary's offer of resignation already in his pocket, Balfour decided to dismiss C.T. Ritchie and Lord Balfour of Burleigh for criticizing food taxes and preferential tariffs at the 14 September Cabinet meeting. He did so, he said, because the two men had spoken out against the new direction in fiscal affairs that had "already been decided upon." The two men prepared their resignations, as did Lord George Hamilton two days later, in the mistaken belief that Chamberlain's fiscal program had been officially adopted by the rest of the Cabinet. But Chamberlain's program had not been adopted. So far Balfour had committed himself to nothing more than retaliatory tariffs and some form of unspecified "fiscal change." Neither Chamberlain's resignation, nor Balfour's private decision to throw over the extreme proposals contained in the "Blue Paper," had been explained to them.[33] Devonshire, however, was told everything, and he remained in the Government long enough to prevent it from collapsing under the impact of its other defections.

In his October 1 speech at the annual meeting of the National Union of Conservative Associations at Sheffield Balfour publicly explained his Government's moderate fiscal platform.

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[33]A.M. Gollin, Balfour's Burden (London: Anthony Bond, 1965), pp. 149-153.

Devonshire, who had never been convinced that he had a right to stay in the Government without his Free Trade colleagues, now took the opportunity to resign from the Government himself. Balfour was outraged by Devonshire's abrupt departure. It weakened the Government materially and dramatized the fact that the Unionist party had more than one fiscal policy. And for all his pragmatism, duplicity, and political dexterity, Balfour was now forced to admit that the Unionist party remained hopelessly divided about the merits of a proposal which, whether right or wrong, was clearly not designed to win elections until such time as the general public had had time to rethink one of the central tenets of British economic orthodoxy, and perhaps not even then.

Nowhere were the divisions within the Government and the parliamentary party more visible than in the 1904 debate on the Address. The debate was held in February. For six days the House listened incredulously to speakers from the Treasury Bench as they made various and conflicting explanations of Balfour's latest fiscal policy, the Sheffield Program. Needless to say, it did not take six days for members on both sides of the aisle to realize that the Sheffield Program, though essentially a compromise between the protectionist and Free Trade wings of the party, had satisfied no one.[34] Still worse, it was clear from the onset of the debate that the compromise was not fully understood by the very people who claimed responsibility for it.

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[34]The Sheffield Program, devised by Balfour but not propounded by him this particular debate since he was sick at the time, did not implement a general tariff and specifically rejected food taxes, though it did allow the Government to put "retaliatory" tariffs in place to force down foreign tariffs.

The Government's uncertainty led to embarrassing questions from gleeful Opposition leaders. "We want to know," asked Campbell-Bannerman, "in the first place, something more as to the character of the declared policy, and the time and the manner of its coming into operation; and with regard to the larger policy we want to know whether, severally and collectively, the Government associate themselves with it, or disassociate themselves from it."[35] Lord Hugh Cecil, speaking on behalf of the Unionist free traders, wanted to know too. "...I think the House is entitled , and especially the members of the Ministerial party, to have a declaration from the Government on their fiscal policy more definite than anything which has yet been given."[36] When the debate was over twenty-five Government supporters voted for the Opposition amendment; seven others abstained. The split in the party exposed by this vote never fully healed. As Sanders put matters in a letter written to Balfour the day after the vote, the Government could only carry on after that embarrassing episode if it avoided "...either frightening or irritating these twenty-five Unionists."[37] Sanders might have put things another way: the Government could carry on only so long as Balfour managed to avoid any irreparable breach with Joseph Chamberlain, who, in 1904, was well on his way to converting a large majority of the Unionist party to his radical proposals for a fiscal revolution.

The stamina of Balfour's Government in 1904 and 1905 is now legendary. Though it staggered from one political crisis to

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[35]Hansard, 2 February 1904, Fourth Series, Vol. CXXIX, Col. 136- 137.
[36]Hansard, 2 February 1904, Fourth Series, Vol. CXXIX, Col. 179- 181
[37]Cited in Kenneth Young, Arthur James Balfour, pp. 153-154.

another, it never collapsed. Winston Churchill would later write that he had never in his entire political career known of any greater parliamentary achievement than Balfour's successful though precarious reconciliation of the tariff reformers and free fooders during these years. But if Balfour's efforts to hold his divided Cabinet together were extraordinarily effective, they were also self-defeating. For the Unionists had nothing to gain from merely remaining in office and, as the results of the 1906 election soon made clear, everything to lose.

Austen Chamberlain had written in the summer of 1904 that he did not believe the Unionist party could win the next general election under any circumstances. "As things stand now," he lamented, "we are already disastrously beaten, and every month's delay only makes our case worse."[38] It was of course not only Austen Chamberlain who was aware that the Government, and along with it the Unionist party, had lost the confidence of the British electorate. The opinion of the country was in those days more difficult to gage than it is today, but the mood of the country was not always obscure. By 1905 there was a rare consensus of opinion among both Liberal and Conservative politicians that the Government would not be able to win a general election. As Sir Edward Grey remarked, some Governments lost public favor without realizing it, others realized it without admitting it, but Balfour's Government was the first which publicly acknowledged that it was determined to govern in spite of the fact that it no longer enjoyed the

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[38]Austen Chamberlain, Politics from the Inside, pp. 22- 27.

confidence of the British people.[39] All the by-election results testified to Grey's assertion. Their significance was inescapable: from 1903, when Balfour first assumed office from his uncle, Lord Salisbury, until the end of 1905, when Balfour at last relinquished office, the Unionists suffered a net loss of twenty seats. Particularly disconcerting were the losses in traditionally Conservative constituencies like North Leeds, St. Albans, Oswestry, Rye, and Brighton.[40] Not even the results of the last general election, the "Khaki" election as it came to be called, spoke well of the support the Unionists enjoyed in the country, since the election had been held before the Government's handling of the Boer War had been called into question by a series of military defeats.

In a very real sense, Balfour agreed with his critics. He himself admitted, at least privately, what his critics had said he had admitted, that the Unionists were living on borrowed time. But Balfour was determined to go on, despite or perhaps because the country was so obviously against him. In a later day Balfour's biographers would pay generous tribute to his statesmanship by reminding us that Balfour believed that it was necessary for him to stay on in order to oversee the reorganization of the country's military, naval, and diplomatic arrangements. But whether Balfour's tenacity was a measure of his statesmanship or merely the first hint of that extreme arrogance that would shortly

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[39]Charles Petrie, Life and Letters of the Rt. Hon. Sir Austen Chamberlain, Vol. 1 (London: Cassell, 1959), pp. 156.

[40]Charles Petrie, Life and Letters of the Rt. Hon. Sir Austen Chamberlain, Vol. 1, pp. 157.

characterize the Unionist party in opposition, it was a very bad political strategy. For if Balfour could place his confidence, as his opponents had said he had, in the strength of the Unionist position in the House of Commons, he could not do so forever. Nor could he prevent the country from noticing that Conservatives had already been in office for the greater part of the last twenty years.

On 14 November 1905 delegates of the National Union of Conservative Associations accepted Joseph Chamberlain's arguments by voting by a large majority in favour of preference and a general tariff. This action explicitly rejected Balfour's calls for party unity based upon the lowest possible fiscal common denominator, and implicitly challenged the right of Balfour to lead the Unionist party, which was now plainly out of step with him on the most important element of Unionist propaganda. And so, at long last, it appeared as if Balfour's delaying tactics--"tricks in a long game of skill," according to Campbell-Bannerman--had ended in disaster not only for Balfour personally, but for the future of the whole Unionist organization.[41] But Balfour, ever the detached and imperturbable patrician, was undeterred by Joseph Chamberlain and the activities of the NUCA, and when, on 25 November, the renegade Liberal-Imperialist leader, Rosebery, delivered an angry speech criticizing Campbell-Bannerman for hoisting "...once more in its most pronounced form the red flag of Home Rule," Balfour sensed an opportunity to shift attention away from the fiscal controversy which had plagued his

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[41]Roy Jenkins, Mr. Balfour's Poodle (London: Chilmark, 1954), pp. 11.

administration for the past three years.[42] Accordingly, Balfour surrendered the seals of office on 4 December and hoped that by forcing the Liberals to form their own Government on such short notice he would exacerbate the old Liberal divisions that had, apparently, already begun to resurface.

Since not even Joseph Chamberlain was disposed to challenge Balfour with a general election impending, Balfour's tactics may have salvaged his position as leader of the Unionist party. But Balfour's tactics did not improve the electoral posture of Unionist candidates or destroy the fragile unity of the Liberal party. In fact, Balfour's abrupt resignation may have had the opposite effect, since Rosebery's divisive speech discouraged the other Liberal-Imperialists--specifically, Asquith, Grey, and Haldane--from seriously jeopardizing their party's prospects in the upcoming election by continuing to press their demands. Moreover, Balfour's abrupt resignation robbed the Unionists of one of the few arguments still left to them: national defense. If the Unionists really believed that the Liberal party was unable to look after the country's defenses, why had they put the Liberals into power in the first place? And finally, surrendering office when he did Balfour allowed Campbell-Bannerman to attack Balfour's Machiavellian tactics directly, both in the Commons and on the hustings. Balfour's trickery came under immediate and scorching fire in Campbell-Bannerman's "enough of this foolery speech," but that speech was followed up at the Albert Hall with

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[42]A.K. Russell, Liberal Landslide, pp. 34, who quotes Lord Crewe's Lord Rosebery, Vol. 2 (London: J. Murray, 1931), pp. 593- 595.

an even more stinging rebuke of the party's lack of sincerity. "Tactics! Tactics!" Campbell-Bannerman cried out, "Ladies and gentlemen, the country is tired of tactics. They have lived on nothing but tactics and now they have died of tactics."[43]

Campbell-Bannerman accepted the King's Commission on 7 December and announced the dissolution of Parliament on 16 December. As the election drew near there was no doubt in anyone's mind that the Unionists would lose. The majority of Unionist candidates found it difficult to speak in the hostile atmosphere that characterized the campaign. Cries of "Black Bread" and "Dear Food" were heard almost everywhere a Unionist speaker tried to gain a hearing. On the day of Balfour's resignation *The Morning Post* reviewed "all signs and portents" and predicted a combined Liberal-Labour victory of not less than 140 seats.[44] Balfour also confessed in a letter to the Duke of Devonshire, that "...every school among the political prophets seems to agree that the Unionists are to be defeated."[45] Yet no prophet anticipated the magnitude of the catastrophe which was shortly to overcome the Unionists.

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[43]Speech delivered at Albert Hall on 21 December 1905. Cited in John Wilson's A Life of Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman (London: Constable, 1973), pp. 470- 471.

[44]John Ramsden, Age of Balfour and Baldwin, pp. 18.

[45]A.K. Russell, Liberal Landslide, pp. 145.

Chapter Two

An Uneven Recovery, 1906 - 1911

The proportions of the Liberal landslide were truly astounding. On 13 January 1906, the first day of the poll, the Unionists were massacred. In Manchester and Salford the Unionists lost every seat; in Ashton, Burnley, Oldham, Bury, Preston, and Lancashire, the Unionists were virtually swept off the map.[1] By January 28 the extent of the rout had become clear. The whole of Wales had not returned a single Conservative candidate to Parliament; neither did the traditionally Conservative county of Cheshire. Four-fifths of Scotland had returned Liberal or Labour candidates, and more frightening still, for the first time since 1880 the Liberals had managed to win a small majority of English seats. Almost every region in the country had shared in the rout. There were thirty-one losses in London, twenty-seven in the South-East, twenty-two in Lancashire, and twenty-five in the South-West.[2]

Birmingham alone managed to increase its Unionist representation, though not without the loss of the surrounding areas, and even in Birmingham the vote was generally attributed more to Joseph Chamberlain's personal charisma than to any regional enthusiasm for the Unionist program.

And what was the Unionist program in the 1906 general election? That was precisely the problem: depending on how one looked at it, the Unionists either had too little to say or too

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[1]A.K. Russell, Liberal Landslide, pp. 148.

[2]Robert Blake, Conservative Party from Peel to Churchill (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1973). Blake's calculations are based upon Henry Pelling's Social Geography of English Elections: 1885- 1910 (London: Macmillan, 1967).

much. On the one hand, Balfour's negative approach to politics had encouraged many Unionist candidates to refrain from proposing many new and constructive policies. There was, of course, a certain logic in defending the status quo against the various proposals for radical change presented by the Liberal and Labour parties. Conservatives, as has been often pointed out, have often--perhaps always--had a difficult time outbidding other parties when the public was in the mood for change. So why bother proposing anything more than what was strictly required by the imperative of an election platform? As the Liberals and their Labour allies outlined their proposals for social reconstruction the Government would become increasingly vulnerable to attacks from the Unionist Opposition. All this would make sense in the long run, because after the Liberals had been in office long enough they would certainly upset powerful interests by their progressive legislation. Conversely, if the Liberal Government chose not to implement any progressive legislation, it could expect criticism from both the Labour party and its own radical supporters. Yet the problem for the Unionists in 1906 was that the Liberals had scrupulously managed to refrain from proposing anything new in their election campaign. On Home Rule they were mute. Of course they could afford to be mute about Ireland, since a leading light of the Unionist party, George Wyndham, had resigned one year previously amid allegations that he had attempted to orchestrate his own personal version of Irish Home Rule.[3] On unemployment insurance, poor law reform,

[3]Wyndham's limited goals for Ireland were grossly misinterpreted by his

pensions, licensing reform, and housing, the Liberals had little more to say. The fact was that the Unionists had left themselves exposed for too long for the election to have been anything other than a referendum on the conduct of the Unionists in office.

But if the Unionists had very little to criticize in the Liberal election platform, their one great constructive proposal, Tariff Reform, was not expressed with any great degree of clarity or enthusiasm. This was at least in part a result of an anachronistic organization, but perhaps it was all but inevitable that Tariff Reform would lead the party to disaster, at least in the short run. It was, after all, far easier for Unionists to split hairs over the definition of Tariff Reform than it was for Liberals to split hairs over the definition of Free Trade. Free Trade was Free Trade, pure and simple, and there were few Liberals (and even fewer Labourites) who were willing to tamper with any manifestation of protectionism, however innocuous. In contrast to Free Trade, which already existed, there was no standard or orthodox form of Tariff Reform (outside of Joseph Chamberlain's fertile imagination) to unite the forces of protectionism. It has often been argued, both then and since, that Tariff Reform probably could not have helped the Unionists win a general election even in the best of circumstances.[4] Certainly the results of subsequent

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contemporaries. See J.R. Fanny's description of the episode in "The Unionist Party and Ireland: 1906- 1910," Irish Historical Studies, xv(1966-1967), pp. 152- 160.

[4]Liberal commentators hailed the election as primarily a verdict in favor of the fiscal status quo. A.K. Russell points out that there were a number of other factors which contributed to the electoral rout, but admits that "...there is little doubt that--in the length and breadth of the country--the majority of the voters opted for the fiscal status quo." Russell goes on to say that "...there is equally little doubt that in two of the areas of of major Liberal gains --Lancashire and

elections (and in particular the 1923 election) have done nothing to undermine this conclusion. In 1905 even Joseph Chamberlain agreed--at least in his private correspondence--that the country would not accept Tariff Reform before a Liberal administration had been given the opportunity to embarrass itself. Chamberlain, of course, was willing to make large sacrifices for the cause he valued above all else. He could afford to wait for the slow but steady increase of the protectionist sentiment that had already made such large inroads in the Unionist party.[5] In any event, Chamberlain knew that the Unionists would lose the next election regardless of what policies they advocated. Balfour, on the other hand, was a party leader and by nature an extremely skeptical man, and it would have been surprising indeed if he had decided to deliberately weaken his party before a general election by embracing food taxes and full-fledged Tariff Reform.

So perhaps the party's principle constructive policy was inherently unsound on two levels. Firstly, Tariff Reform was by its very nature an imprecise and confusing policy to espouse during a general election. And secondly, the time when the majority of the British public would be willing to see a dramatic change in its fiscal system had not yet come.[6] Arguments against

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the south-east--it was--mutatis mutandis--an issue of central importance." Liberal Landslide, pp. 172.

[5]A.K. Russell, Liberal Landslide, pp. 84. And the campaign, now two and a half years old, was working. In April 1903 ten percent of Unionist candidates were out-and-out free traders; in the 1906 general election that proportion had shrunk to three percent.

[6]As L.S. Amery bitterly lamented: "We have got to remember that the mind of the ordinary Englishman is dominated by certain theoretical assumptions and arguments [in favor of Free Trade] which have been ingrained in it as a result of generations of repetition." The Fundamental Fallacies of Free Trade, pp. 2.

the electoral fitness of Tariff Reform are fortified by the results of the next two elections as well as the election called for by Baldwin in 1924. Yet in 1906 it was difficult to decide one way or the other whether Tariff Reform had helped or hurt Unionist candidates, because although the great majority of Unionist campaign literature and election addresses were concerned with protectionism, there had never been a single fiscal policy advocated by the various organizations and individuals that made up the Conservative and Liberal-Unionist parties.[7] And while it is true that the proportion of dogmatic free traders within the party had been greatly reduced well before the election was held, it is not fair to say that there had ever been any consensus about the purpose of Tariff Reform. Whether Tariff Reform was intended for trade retaliation, protection of vulnerable industries, reducing unemployment, or encouraging imperial unity, entirely depended on which Unionist candidate was being consulted.[8]

After the election the issues were greatly simplified for the Unionist leadership, though at a terrific cost to the party's strength and vitality in the House of Commons. Entering the general election with a majority of more than 100, the Unionists soon found themselves with 157 seats all told. Among the losers were many of the party's best and brightest men. Lyttelton,

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[7]Rempel, Richard A. Unionists Divided: Arthur Balfour, Joseph Chamberlain and the Unionist Free Traders (London: David and Charles, 1972), pp. 122-123.

[8]See A.K. Russell's Liberal Landslide, pp. 86- 87, for a complete breakdown of the various explanations of tariff reform that were given by Unionist speakers during the campaign. Russell also claims that even though 98 percent of Unionist candidates mentioned some form of fiscal reform during the election campaign, less than half of the Party was willing to go the whole hog.

Chaplin, Brodrick, Hugh Cecil, Gerald Balfour, and the Conservative leader himself, Arthur Balfour, all were convincingly beaten in what had previously been considered safe seats. Ranged against this rump Opposition were 401 Liberals, 83 Irish Nationalists, and 29 Labourites. Together they gave Campbell-Bannerman's Government a solid working majority of 356. That working majority was "solid" because all three parties were implacably opposed to very vital aspects of the Unionist program. The three parties were united, for instance, in support of Free Trade, Irish Home Rule, and a speedy reversal of the contentious Taff Vale decision which had handicapped trade unions in their wage disputes since 1903. But even if the Liberals had been abandoned by the Irish Nationalists as well as the Labourites--and almost half of the Labour members accepted the Liberal Whip at first rather than that of the Labour Representation Committee--they would have been able to carry on their Government alone. For the Liberals had managed to obtain a majority of 84 over all other parties combined.

The election of 1906 was not an unmitigated disaster for the Unionist party. The scale of the defeat did, for instance, clear out a whole generation of backbenchers from what had previously been considered safe seats. In 1910 a whole new generation of men were ushered back into many of these seats and these men provided the party with a great deal of talent and versatility during the inter-war years.[9] It also gave untried men like F.E. Smith and Bonar Law a chance to make their names in a

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[9]John Ramsden, The Age of Balfour and Baldwin, pp. 20.

way which would not have been possible if the front bench had not been forced to look for debating talent wherever it could be found. And finally, the defeat stimulated a much needed reform of party organizations, institutions, and attitudes. After nearly twenty years in power, complacency, in particular, was one attitude which would have to be abandoned. In 1908 this spirit of innovation and introspection was captured by some of the younger men of the party in the book, *The New Order*, which for the first time made a coherent attempt to explain how Tariff Reform, coupled with moderate social reform, could help the party compete in the next election.[10]

On the other hand, defeat did not bring unity to the party leadership because there were two irreconcilable explanations for the recent electoral catastrophe. The debate that resulted from the election was essentially the same debate that had preceded it. Chamberlain, of course, remained convinced that if Balfour had taken his advice he could have salvaged a great many seats and prepared the party for a quick and complete recovery once the Liberals had been given an opportunity to demonstrate their incompetence in office. "The division in our party and the uncertainty as to Balfour's views," he said, "has handicapped us seriously and has prevented our new policy from being put forward with conviction and earnestness which alone could have made it a strong and steadying influence."[11] Balfour, for his part,

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[10]Lord Malesbury, The New Order: Studies in Unionist Policy (London: Francis Griffiths, 1908).
[11]Chamberlain to Parker Smith, 27 January 1906. Cited in L.S. Amery, Life of Joseph Chamberlain, vi, pp. 793.

stoutly maintained that Tariff Reform could not have improved the situation even if it had been expressed with a greater degree of clarity or conviction. He saw in the election a great argument for "extreme caution."[12] The problem, he insisted, was much bigger than Tariff Reform or any of the other issues that had divided the Unionist party in the last few years. According to Balfour, the influence of Labour had been decisive in the recent struggle:

> "If I read the signs aright, what has occurred has nothing whatsoever to do with any things we have been squabbling over the last few years. C.-B. is a mere cork, dancing on a torrent which he cannot control, and what is going on here is a faint echo of the same movement which has produced massacres in St. Petersburg, riots in Vienna, and Socialist processions in Berlin."[13]

Balfour was intensely interested in the rise of the Labour party. He believed that the 1906 election had ushered in a brand new political era, and he predicted that before long the Labour party would "break-up" the Liberal party and force the Unionist party to reinvent itself in order to compete with Labour for working class support. Balfour also refused to admit that a comprehensive program of Tariff Reform would do anything to improve the party's electoral posture. Balfour did not go so far as to blame the loss of the election on Tariff Reform alone, but he did point out that food taxes were particularly unpopular with

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[12]Austen Chamberlain, Politics from the Inside, pp. 27.

[13]Quoted by Sidney Zebel, Arthur James Balfour, (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1973), pp. 143.

with working classes. In the words of Lord Salisbury, food taxes were just another example of "...the indifference of capital to the struggles of the poor."[14]

The election results did nothing to convince Balfour that he had been wrong about Tariff Reform, but the new balance of power in the parliamentary party made Balfour's fiscal moderation much more egregious. As a counterbalance to the Tariff Reform wing of the party Balfour could now rely on the support of only a handful of men. Every branch of the party had suffered badly in the election, but free traders and those who supported retaliatory tariffs had fared worst of all. This meant that Balfour would have to rely more heavily on Joseph Chamberlain's advice and consent than he had in the past. And Chamberlain, who had preserved all seven of his Birmingham seats intact and who could count on the solid support of at least two thirds of the parliamentary party, was more determined than ever to press his advantage.[15] At first Balfour fought hard to retain his independence, but with the mediation of Chaplin, Austen Chamberlain, and Long, he eventually consented to meet with Chamberlain in order to discuss the future of the party. The two met for the first time since the election on February 2, but Balfour refused to commit himself at this time to any policy

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[14]Salisbury to Selborne, 19 January 1906. Cited by John Ramsden, The Age of Balfour and Baldwin, pp. 23.

[15]Peter Fraser provides a numerical breakdown of the party factions in his "Unionism and Tariff Reform," Historical Journal, 18(1975), pp. 155. Fraser believes that before the election there were a roughly equal number of tariff reformers and Balfourites in the parliamentary party. After the election, however, there were 102 tariff reformers and 36 Balfourites, with free traders making up the difference.

which would drive the free traders out of the party.[16] Chamberlain, who may well have been reminded of what he himself had written one year earlier, that "...Balfour believes in the Balfourian policy of delay and mystification, and perhaps at the bottom of his heart hopes to tire out his opponents and get rid of the subject altogether," still did not despair of agreement.[17] He knew that time, and the great bulk of the party, were on his side. Four days later Chamberlain's hopes were partially fulfilled when Balfour agreed to hold a meeting to resolve the Tariff Reform controversy as well as some of Chamberlain's other organizational concerns. In the event, the organizational innovations could not be agreed upon, but after two days of intense negotiation Balfour capitulated to Chamberlain's other demands in an exchange of published letters and agreed that fiscal reform "...is, and must remain, the first constructive work of the Unionist party."[18] He further agreed to support a general tariff on manufactured goods as well as a small duty on food imports. Chamberlain, for his part, accepted Balfour's definition of party policy and reaffirmed his loyalty to Balfour.

The agreement between Balfour and Chamberlain made Tariff Reform the official policy of the Unionist party and many of Chamberlain's supporters regarded this concession as "...the

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[16] Balfour was particularly wary of isolating his relatives, the Cecils. Robert Blake, The Conservative Party From Peel to Churchill, pp. 182.

[17] Chamberlain to Garvin, 6 February 1906. Quoted by John Ramsden, The Age of Balfour and Baldwin, pp. 25.

[18] L.S. Amery, The Life of Joseph Chamberlain, Vol. 4 (London: Macmillan, 1965), pp. 815.

greatest political triumph since the days when Disraeli captured the Conservative party."[19] But it was hardly that, for the free traders refused to accept Balfour's pronouncement and it was left to the tariff reformers to battle for control of the party in much the same way as they had in the past. This they proceeded to do.[20] The only difference was that tariff reformers were no longer constrained by the Central Office from attacking free traders in their own constituencies.[21] What the so-called Valentine Letters did do, however, was to further undermine Balfour's leadership, which was already severely strained by the election results. The fiction of Balfour's independence had now been laid bare, and it was obvious to everyone that the leader of the Unionist party had been pushed into a position he had not wished to occupy by forces outside his control.[22]

The situation was dramatically altered when Chamberlain was struck down by a crippling stroke in July. In the months to follow, while Chamberlain hovered precariously between life and death, Balfour slowly began to reestablish his influence over the

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[19]Henry Chaplin is quoted by Alfred Gollin, "Balfour," in The Conservative Leadership, ed. Donald Southgate, pp. 165.

[20]See Alan Sykes, "The Confederacy and the Purge of Unionist Free Traders: 1906- 1910," Historical Journal, xviii(1975), pp. 349- 366.

[21]According to the Morning Post, by 1909 the NUCA had decided to "...withhold official recognition from all candidates who refuse to endorse Balfour's Birmingham proposal without reserve." February 1909. Cited in National Review.

[22]Lord Newton, Lord Lansdowne (London: Macmillan, 1929), pp. 352. Newton describes his own impression of the party meeting which Chamberlain had demanded. According to Newton, Balfour "...appeared somewhat in the character of a captive, it being the general belief that he had yielded at the last moment in consequence of the pressure put upon him by numerous members of the party. Certainly the impression was that Mr. Chamberlain had generally got his way.

party. With Joseph Chamberlain removed from active politics, it was not unnatural for his supporters to worry that the initiative they had worked so hard to achieve was once again in danger of passing out of their hands. In the future committed tariff reformers would find themselves in the vanguard of a movement to replace Balfour with a man who, like Chamberlain, could be trusted to make fiscal reform a priority again. More than anything, tariff reformers were convinced that what they wanted was a leader who saw their policy as something more than a political expedient.[23] At present, however, Balfour remained irreplaceable. His experience and parliamentary expertise were especially important now that the Liberal legislative program had begun to unfold.

Balfour's opposition strategy in the new Parliament was to rely on the overwhelming Unionist majority in the House of Lords to overturn as much of the Liberal program as possible without unduly upsetting the electorate. In an unguarded moment after the election Balfour had said that it would be his duty to see that "...the great Unionist party should still control, whether in power

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[23]It has often been argued that Balfour was constitutionally incapable of taking heart-felt convictions seriously, since he allegedly had none of his own. See for instance Harold Nicolson, George the Fifth: His Life and Reign (London: Constable, 1952), pp. 68. "His philosophic aloofness had induced in him the habit of mind, so dangerous in any politician, of being interested in both sides of a case. It was not that he lacked the courage of his convictions: few statesman have manifested such physical and moral audacity: it was rather that he classed convictions with deliberate forms of belief and much disliked all deliberate forms of belief." Or, more waggishly, George Wyndham's comment: "Arthur...takes too scientific view of politics. He knows there once was an ice age, and that there will someday be an ice age again. This makes him indifferent." Cited by Rhodri Williams, Defending the Empire: The Conservative Party and Defense Policy, 1899-1915. (London: J. Murray, 1981), pp. 200.

or whether in opposition, the destinies of this great Empire."[24] This he proceeded to do by carefully coordinating the efforts of the Unionist majority in the Upper House with the Unionist minority in the Lower House. Over the next three years the Unionists in the Lords would do whatever Unionists in the House could not do on their own. In 1906 the Lords killed an Education and Plural Voting Bill; in 1907 it mutilated or rejected out of hand four different Land Bills; in 1908 it threw out a Liberal Licensing Bill. The risks inherent in this opposition strategy were self-evident, but Balfour recalled the success of similar tactics in the 1893-1895 Parliament and hoped that the House of Lords could once again be "strengthened rather than weakened" by defying the House of Commons.[25] Unfortunately, the historical parallel which Balfour drew upon was largely irrelevant. The situation in 1906-1909 was nothing like what it had been eleven years previously. In 1893-1895 the Liberal Government's majority had depended on Irish votes and could hardly be compared with the unprecedented majority which the Liberals had secured in the 1906 election.

The use Balfour made of the Lords in these difficult years has been almost universally condemned by historians. Ensor, in his classic appraisal of Balfour's strategy in opposition, declared that it was an abuse of the Constitution which was "...bound eventually to cause a fatal collision with the fair-play instincts of

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[24]Quoted by Sidney Zebel, Arthur James Balfour, (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1973), pp. 151.

[25]R.C.K. Ensor, England: 1970- 1914 (Oxford: Oxford University, 1933), pp. 387.

common Englishmen."[26] This was true up to a point, since the Unionist majority in the Lords was more or less permanent and had never rejected a single Unionist Bill during the last nineteen years of Unionist administration. But Ensor also insists that Balfour's policy was so shortsighted that it is very difficult to understand how it could possibly have come about in the first place. Ensor's only explanation, and it is an explanation which has gained a considerable amount of currency among historians, is that Balfour and the rest of the Unionist leadership were motivated by aristocratic arrogance alone. Of course, there was an element of presumption in Balfour's personality and he probably would never have thought to employ his majority in the Lords if he had not felt that there was something particularly menacing about the new Parliament and about the Liberal party in general. However, it seems unlikely that any political leader in a similar predicament would have been able to do anything less than Balfour did. After all, if Balfour wanted to block any Liberal legislation at all he had very little alternative to employing his majority in the Upper House. Certainly he understood the fact that his actions might diminish the power of the Lords but he was not unwilling to take the gamble. His decision may or may not have been a bad one, but he never underrated the dangers inherent in the situation. He summed up the threat for Lansdowne in April of 1906, before the Lords had rejected a single Liberal Bill:

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[26]Ensor, England, pp. 387.

> "There has certainly never been a period in out history in which the House of Lords will be called upon to play a part at once so important, so delicate, and so difficult....I conjecture that the Government methods of carrying on their legislative work will be this: They bring in Bills in a much more extreme form than the moderate members of their Cabinet will probably approve: the moderate members will trust to the House of Lords cutting out or modifying some of the most outrageous provisions: the Left Wing of the Cabinet, on the other hand, while looking forward to the same result, will be consoled for the anticipated mutilation of their measures by the reflection that they will be gradually accumulating a case against the Upper House, and that they will be able to appeal at the next election for a mandate to modify its constitution. This scheme is an ingenious one, and it will be our business to defeat it, as far as we can."[27]

Balfour's decision to obstruct the work of the Liberal Government was not an unwise or unnatural one, but after 1908 Balfour's strategy was not carried out with the caution and finesse which alone might have made a success of it. Unionist peers were farsighted enough to let by the Trade Disputes Bill, a bill which relaxed the law of conspiracy and exempted trade union funds from liability in Court actions, but outside of this painful concession to the feelings of organized Labour, there was no indication that the Opposition was prepared to exercise any restraint whatsoever.[28] By 1908, as a direct consequence of the intransigence of the Unionist majority in the Lords, the Liberal

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[27]13 April 1906. Lord Newton, Lord Lansdowne, pp. 354- 355.

[28]Martin Pugh, The Making of British Politics: 1867- 1939 (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982), pp. 124- 125.

Government had reached an impasse. After three sessions of the 1906 Parliament, no measure, other than a money bill, had passed onto the statue book intact unless it had first been approved by the leader of the smallest opposition within living memory. Such a state of affairs was intolerable to the Liberals, yet the Government had reason to hesitate before appealing to the electorate to break the deadlock in Parliament. During 1908 the Government had suffered disastrously in the by-elections. Churchill, standing for re-election after having been appointed to the Board of Trade, was defeated at North-West Manchester; as were Liberals standing at Ashburton, Peckham, Ross-on-Way, Shoreditch, Newcastle-on-Tyne, and Pudsey.[29] In fact, Liberals had lost so much standing in the country that the Conservative Central Office was predicting that a general election would give the Unionist party a majority of at least twenty after the Christmas recess.[30]

A good case can be made for Balfour's opposition tactics right up until this point. For the Lords had successfully thwarted the Government's program and the Liberals had not yet been able to retaliate in kind. What is more, as a result of the trade depression most of by-elections were being won by committed tariff reformers who were promising to reduce or eliminate the unemployment that had not been eradicated by the Liberal Government. But under the circumstances, the Liberal

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[29]Roy Jenkins, Mr. Balfour's Poodle, pp. 64.

[30]Neal Blewett, The Peers, the Parties, and the People: the General Elections of 1910 (London: Macmillan, 1972), pp. 62. According to Ensor, however, poll results showed that the Unionists would have won a majority of 100 in January. England, pp. 418.

Government had no choice but to mount a bold counterattack against both Tariff Reform and the House of Lords in order to save itself from the twin dangers of electoral defeat and parliamentary impotence. The 1909 Liberal Budget was the perfect solution on both counts since it provided Britain with a precise, and as it seemed to Asquith at the time, unassailable alternative to Tariff Reform. The Budget, which called for new inheritance and land taxes rather than a general tariff to pay for social reform and increased defense expenditure, could not be thrown out without subjecting the Lords to serious criticism for rejecting a money bill. Also, if the Lords did exceed their constitutional prerogatives, the Budget itself would make a very attractive Liberal campaign platform, since the wealthy would be forced to contribute the lion's share of Lloyd George's new revenue.

The 1909 "People's Budget" was, as Philip Cambray would call it years after the fact, "a masterpiece of political strategy, a classic example for the student of that art."[31] But the Unionist party, which fought the new budget line by line in the House of Commons, might not have fallen into the Liberal trap had it not been for the extravagant fears of tariff reformers and the vulnerability of the Unionist leadership.[32] The tariff reformers, understandably enough, were concerned that the new budget

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[31]Phillip G. Cambray, The Games of Politics (London: J. Murray, 1932). Cited by R.C.K. Ensor, England, pp. 413.

[32]The struggle in the House of Commons turned out to be the "most prolonged struggle in the history of the House of Commons." Altogether the passage of the budget required 70 days of debate and 554 divisions. Collin Cross, Liberals in Power: 1905-1918 (London: Barrie and Rockcliff, 1963), pp. 104.

would set a precedent in taxation which, while repugnant and confiscatory in and of itself, would make Tariff Reform superfluous as a taxation scheme.[33] Their fears might in ordinary times have been disposed of by firm and uncompromising leadership, leadership which understood that the Unionists would do well to wait for a better issue to take to the electorate, but in 1909 both Balfour and Lansdowne had been weakened by the fiscal controversy and were in no position to defy the tariff reformers openly. Accordingly, they gave way to pressure and used the Unionist majority in the Lords to reject the budget and force an election. They did so with many reservations but they were at least consoled by the knowledge that their action would carry a united Unionist party into the next general election.[34] Indeed, by the end of the year Balfour himself had been invigorated by the enthusiasm of the party and had even said that he would resign his position as leader of the party if the peers did *not* reject the bill.[35]

On November 30 the budget was rejected in the House of Lords by 350 votes to 75; two days later Parliament was dissolved and the budget was referred to the people. In many respects the Unionists were in a much better position to fight a general election in 1910 than they had been in 1906. For one thing, the public had been given a chance to forget the embarrassing fiscal

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[33]Viscount Milner, The Nation and the Empire, pp. 401-403.

[34]According to Bruce Murray, by the autumn of 1909 "an overwhelming majority" of the Unionist Party was in favor of rejection of the budget. The Liberal Budget 1909/10 (Oxford: Claredon, 1989), pp. 210.

[35]Blanche Dugdale, Arthur James Balfour, Vol. 2 (London: Hutchinson, 1936), pp. 57-58.

disagreements which had plagued the party in the past.[36] For another, party enthusiasm had been inflamed by the lengthy budget debates, and the great success of the Budget Protest League seemed to indicate that this enthusiasm extended to every level of the party hierarchy.[37] On the issue of "Lords versus People" the Unionists were in a less advantageous position, but they could at least point out that the budget was a "grave" and "unprecedented" measure which had merely been presented to the public for a second opinion.[38] In any case, the Unionist campaign was directed against the Government's defense fiscal policies and not against the budget itself. As Acland-Hood wrote to Sanders on 8 August: "The universal experience of all speakers is that the budget excites little attention one way or the other, but Tariff Reform wakes up the audience at once."[39] Acland-Hood consequently urged all Unionist speakers to make it clear that Tariff Reform offered a clear alternative to the budget, and one that would raise revenue and reduce unemployment without setting any socialistic precedents. The election returns were encouraging, since the Unionists were relatively successful in

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[36]What fiscal divisions remained were partially smoothed over by the budget's attack on property and inherited wealth. As Sanders assured Lansdowne: "When the issue is socialism...the division of our forces will be without meaning." Cited by Bruce Murray, The Liberal Budget 1909/ 10, pp. 216. It should be noted, however, that a few Unionist Free Traders did not think that the budget was worse than Tariff Reform. James of Hereford, Balfour of Burleigh, Arthur Elliot, and Professor Pollock were among those who felt that "...going to the country in favor of protection...is too big a bolus...to swallow." Blewett's The Peers, the Parties, the People, pp. 120.

[37]Rowland, The Last Liberal Governments, Vol. 1 (London: J. Murray, 1968), pp. 230). Cited by John Ramsden, The Age of Balfour and Baldwin, pp. 34

[38]Lord Lansdowne, Lords Debates, 22 November 1909, Fourth Series, Vol. CXXIV, Col. 732.

[39]Bruce Murray, The Liberal Budget 1909/ 10, pp. 214.

pushing Tariff Reform to the foreground, and the Unionists recovered a great deal of what they had lost in 1906, but the Liberal Government retained a tenuous grip on power and the 1909 Budget was duly passed (with the support of 40 Labour Members and 82 Irish Nationalists). And this time around the Lords had no choice but to pass the budget in its original form.

After the budget had finally been enacted into law the Government introduced a bill to curb the powers of the Lords. This bill too was destined to be rejected by the Lords, and not merely because the Liberals were attempting to create "single-chamber tyranny," but also, and more importantly, because the bill would prevent the Unionists from blocking the passage of Home Rule. In this way the stage for yet another constitutional struggle was set, and were it not for the death of King Edward VII and the constitutional conference that was called out of respect for the new king, George V, another election might have followed almost immediately upon the first.

The constitutional conference was doomed to failure. The Unionist delegation was prepared to surrender the Lords' power over money bills but insisted that there should be a special category of constitutional legislation that would remain subject to the Lords' veto. To this the Liberal delegation could not agree, since whatever else might be meant by the word "constitutional," it was clear from the start that an Irish Home Rule bill would inevitably fall into that broad category. At one point during the conference Lloyd George proposed a National Government made up of the leading men of both parties to break this deadlock but

this proposal was also bound to fail because neither party was yet prepared to compromise on the fundamental issue of Irish Home Rule. Be this as it may, it is interesting to note how seriously the proposal was studied by the leading figures of the Unionist party. Large segments of the Unionist press began to agitate for the coalition without knowing any of the details of the offer. F.E. Smith, Lansdowne, Long, and Cawdor, were all distinctly inclined to accept Lloyd George's offer.[40] Since Tariff Reform had been thrown in to sweeten the pot, Bonar Law and Austen Chamberlain showed signs of interest as well. The scheme failed because, as Akers-Douglas informed Balfour, the rank and file of the party would never have gone along with it.[41] That is to say, a coalition government was at this stage impracticable but not necessarily undesirable.

Lloyd George's offer saw the confluence of virtually every issue which was to exercise Conservative politics right up until the beginning of the 1930's. The issues raised by the Lloyd George memorandum included Tariff Reform, the constitutional status of the House of Lords, the role of the state in social policy, Ireland (and by implication, questions that related to Empire and defense policy), and the independence of the Conservative party. Ultimately, Balfour realized that he could not afford to alienate the party more than he already had, but the fact that he and the others seriously considered Lloyd George's adventuresome

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[40]R.C.K. Ensor, England, pp. 424. See also David Lloyd George's War Memoirs, Vol. I of 6 (Boston: Little, Brown, 1933), pp. 35-41, and Balfour's memorial in The Times, 20 March 1930.

[41]Bernard Semmel, Imperialism and Social Reform: English Social Imperial Thought, 1899-1914 (London: Anchor, 1968), pp. 243.

proposals may perhaps indicate that Unionist leaders feared their own backbenchers almost as much as they feared the Liberals. In refusing to accept Lloyd George's offer, Balfour declared that he would not become "another Peel."[42] He meant only that he would not betray or split his party by giving way on one of the very principles that had helped him to become leader in the first place. And yet, as his conversations with Lloyd George reveal, he was not, at least temperamentally, so very far removed from Peel. That is to say, neither Balfour nor Peel doubted their own political judgement insofar as the country's best interests were concerned. The difference was that Balfour at least understood how dangerous this attitude could be for his party and attempted, unsuccessfully in the end, to avoid any irreparable breach with his supporters.

The constitutional conference broke up on November 10, and with the original Liberal proposals for constitutional reform about to be rejected by the Lords, Parliament was dissolved and yet another general election was declared by the Prime Minister. This time around the Unionists were determined to win at any cost. This meant that the party would have to play down its own proposals for Lords reform and focus on Ireland as much as possible during the course of the campaign. It also meant that party stalwarts would be more willing to streamline its platform by jettisoning food taxes. If the Liberals were elected, and if they were allowed to pass the Parliament Bill with the assistance of the

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[42]Alfred Gollin, "Balfour," in The Conservative Leadership, ed. Donald Southgate, pp. 165

King, Ireland would be lost to the United Kingdom, if not the Empire itself, forever. This threat, and the threat of a third consecutive defeat at the polls, convinced many candidates that food taxes were no longer justifiable. On 14 November a meeting of Unionists decided that food taxes were not expendable, but the triumph of the tariff reformers was short-lived, for once the campaign was underway the pressure to get rid of food taxes became irresistible. Letters flooded into the Central Office from candidates in close contests who believed that food taxes might spell defeat for them. Lancashire candidates in particular made it clear that they could not hope to win many seats while their Liberal opponents were harping on the fact that food costs were certain to go up under a Unionist administration.[43] Even such staunch tariff reformers as F.E. Smith and Bonar Law agreed that, for the moment at least, it appeared as if food taxes would have to be sacrificed to the higher ends of the party.

Not everyone agreed that the party had any higher ends than Tariff Reform, or that food taxes, if the case for them was argued well, would prove to be unpopular with the electorate. So when Balfour spoke at Albert Hall on November 29, 1910, and announced that he was prepared to submit Tariff Reform to a referendum if he was returned to power, *The Morning Post* called Balfour's ingenious scheme a "dodge" and said that it meant the "...indefinite postponement of Tariff Reform."[44] Austen Chamberlain was also upset, and told Lansdowne that the pledge

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[43] John Ramsden, The Age of Balfour and Baldwin, pp. 36.

[44] 26 November 1910. Cited by George Peel, The Tariff Reformers (London: Methuen, 1913), pp. 76.

"...was a great blow to me--the worst disappointment that I have suffered for a long time in politics."[45] The pledge became still more disappointing once the election was over and it had become clear that the balance of power in the Commons had not shifted at all. Tariff reformers became even more irate at the leadership after Balfour and Lansdowne let it be known that they intended to allow the Parliament Bill to pass the House of Lords unamended.

The fortunes of the Unionist party reached their lowest ebb in the summer of 1911. In June a "no surrender" movement was launched in the House of Lords, and despite the lasting myth of the "backwoodsmen," many of the men who identified themselves with this movement were already prominent figures within the Unionist party.[46] Yet the rift in the party extended well beyond the House of Lords. This unpleasant fact became fully apparent only after the Shadow Cabinet had met on July 21 without coming to an understanding about the future of the Parliament Bill. The controversy divided the Shadow Cabinet into two roughly equal parts, and though a small majority of the Shadow Cabinet agreed to "hedge" rather than "ditch" in the Lords, Milner, Selborne, Carson, Smith, Wyndham, Halsbury and Chamberlain all

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[45]Charles Petrie, The Life and Letters of the Rt. Hon. Sir Austen Chamberlain, pp. 267. Or see a memorandum on page 160 in which Austen analyzes the relationship between Home Rule and Tariff Reform.

[46]Both Unionist whips the House of Lords, the Earl of Waldregrave and Viscount Churchill, the Earl of Portsmouth, Lord Raglan, the Duke of Marlborough, Lord Colchester, and Viscount Halifax, all voted against the Bill. All had held important offices before. See Gregory Phillips' The Diehards: Aristocratic Society and Politics in Edwardian England (London: J. Murray, 1985), pp. 1-24, for a detailed analysis and comparison of the background and attitudes of the Diehard peers.

steadfastly refused to adhere to the decision.[47] In late July the initiative passed out of Balfour's hands altogether and from that point on resistance to the Parliament Bill was carried out without Balfour's knowledge or consent. In fact, Balfour had become strangely complacent about the deepening crisis. He viewed the conflict with skepticism, sorrow, and a certain degree of fatalism. As he told a friend:

> "On a question which is not one of principle, but of mere party tactics, I am confronted with a deep schism among my leading colleagues. In a Cabinet, if there is a division of opinion, the rule is that the majority must prevail; and if the view of the majority is not accepted those who will not accept it must leave the Government. But here, after a full discussion, a minority decline to accept advice, which commanded the votes at the Shadow Cabinet, and the dissentient members have gone out into the world and have embarked on a policy of active resistance. I confess to feeling badly treated."[48]

Balfour's despondency is easy to comprehend but difficult to excuse because Balfour made very little effort on his own behalf to convince the Diehards that their actions were counterproductive. He refused, for instance, to hold a party meeting or to meet with Diehard peers individually in order to discuss their grievances. Instead, he elected to outline his position in an open letter in *The Times*, which read in part:

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[47]Roy Jenkins, Mr. Balfour's Poodle, pp. 220- 221. On the other side were Balfour, Lansdowne, Curzon, Middleton, Londonderry, Derby, Law, Long, Lyttelton, Chaplin , Finlay and Steel-Maitland, and only with extreme reluctance, Akers-Douglas.

[48]Cited in Blanche Dugdale, Arthur James Balfour, Vol. 2, pp. 85.

> "Let us then, if we can, agree. Let the Unionists in the Upper House follow their trusted leader. But if this is impossible, if differ we must, if there be Peers who (on this occasion) are resolved to abandon Lord Lansdowne, if there be politicians outside who feel constrained to applaud them, let us at least remember that...unless the forces conducting (this campaign for constitutional liberty) possess unity and victory, ultimate victory is impossible."[49]

Chamberlain complained to Balfour after having read the letter that it was less an argument than a denunciation of the conduct and loyalty of the Diehards. Balfour excused himself on the grounds that he could no longer "remain a spectator" in the controversy that threatened to do permanent damage to the party. Even so, Balfour had already abdicated a large measure of his authority by writing the letter in the first place.[50] Lord Lansdowne was scarcely more inclined to intervene actively to restore the authority of his leadership. After the meeting of the Shadow Cabinet Lansdowne called for a meeting of Unionist peers and some 200 attended. But at this meeting he allowed himself to appear detached and almost indifferent to the opinions that were being aired in front of him. Lansdowne's own

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[49]The Times, 26 July 1911. Cited by R.T. McKenzie, British Political Parties (London: William Heinemann, 1955), pp. 78. See David Gilmour, Curzon (London: J. Murray, 1994), pp. 390, for a description of the original memorandum Balfour had composed to make his views known to the peers. Among other things, Balfour suggested that the comparisons between the Diehards and Leonidas at Thermopylae were made for "musical hall consumption." Luckily, Curzon convinced Balfour to drop the supercilious tone in the letter to The Times.

[50]Of course, Balfour's abdication is also illustrated by the fact that he left for a vacation in Germany on the same day the Parliament Bill was re-introduced in the House of Lords.

opening speech, moreover, stressed the impropriety of the Government's actions and came very near to striking a balance between the arguments for resistance and those against it.[51] He then went on to praise many of the Diehard speeches that had been made throughout the day, calling special attention to speeches by Selborne, Halsbury and Willoughby de Broke. The meeting of peers broke up--and there was never another meeting like it--without being asked to arrive at any decision. Such a gross oversight on the part of Lansdowne is hard to imagine, but Lansdowne's own natural sympathies on the subject of Lords reform, as well as the ones he held on Ireland, go far to explaining his complacency.

Without a clear lead from the two leaders of the party, Balfour and Lansdowne, the Diehard revolt could not be contained. On July 24 Diehard sympathizers in the House of Commons, led by Lord Hugh Cecil, howled down Asquith in a scene utterly without parliamentary precedent. On July 26, the day after Balfour had announced that he would advise the Lords to bow to the inevitable and accept the Bill, a dinner was given for the founding member of the "no surrender movement," Lord Halsbury, and several hundred peers and MPs expressed their determination to carry on the struggle to the bitter end. Not everyone who attended the dinner was opposed to Balfour, but the formation of the Halsbury Club guaranteed that the divisions opened up by the Parliament Bill would survive the final vote.[52]

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[51]Roy Jenkins, Mr. Balfour's Poodle, pp.221- 221.

[52]A prospectus distributed at one of the Club's meetings read: "Some of those who took an active part in supporting Lord Halsbury in his action over the

The Club was formed in order to strengthen the resolve of Unionist opposition and prepare the party for "...the reconstruction of the constitution after the government have done destroying it."[53] The first meeting took place on November 6, and at that time Club members unanimously agreed to cooperate with the Unionist party in order to defend "...Unionist principles and tender to Mr. Balfour and Lord Lansdowne of their loyal support in the coming struggle."[54] But the Club gave the Unionist leadership rather more help than was needed, and it soon became obvious that Club members intended to undermine Balfour's personal influence over the party.

The final debate in the Lords took place on 9 and 10 August, and with the assistance of 11 out of 13 Bishops, and 29 Unionist peers pressed into emergency service at the behest of Lansdowne, the Bill was passed by 131 votes to 114.[55] Thus the party was split into three parts. Historians have been at a loss to understand the attitude of the Diehards during this crisis. Their tactics once again seem at first glance to defy rational explanation. By defeating the Parliament Bill in the Lords the Diehard peers would have merely compelled the King to create enough new Liberal peers to force its passage. And, as Balfour pointed out, if this occurred the Unionists would merely have lost

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Parliament Act...have met together and agreed that the spirit of the "Halsbury Movement" should become a permanent force in the Party." A.W. Wilson-Fox, The Earl of Halsbury: Lord High Chancellor (London: Chapman and Hall, 1929), pp. 286. Cited in McKenzie, British Political Parties, pp. 80.

[53]Selborne to Austen Chamberlain, 7 October 1911. Cited in Gregory Phillips, The Diehards, pp. 145.

[54]Wilson-Fox, A.W. Earl of Halsbury, pp. 286.

[55]The vast majority of Unionist peers abstained from the vote.

what little political advantage was left to them. As things were, the Unionist party would at least have the chance to delay Home Rule--not to mention Welsh Disestablishment, Plural Voting, licensing reform and any other Liberal measure that might threaten the status quo--for another two years at the very least.

Of course the Diehard peers themselves saw matters in a different light. A few, like Halsbury and Willoughby de Broke, believed that the Bill was immoral and might have refused to compromise their beliefs whatever the consequences. But many cautious politicians also refused to give in voluntarily, and their motives are more complicated.[56] In the first place, many Conservatives believed that a compromise over the Parliament Bill would weaken the morale and fighting spirit of the Unionist rank and file. Tariff reformers in particular were loathe to make another concession for tactical advantage so soon after they had been asked (quite unnecessarily as they believed) to sacrifice food taxes in the December election. Apart from this, most Diehards hoped that the powers of the Lords could be restored at some future date even if the King did create enough new peers to overcome their opposition; but if the peers did not go down fighting it would be difficult to argue later that their powers had been taken away illegitimately. And if, in the meantime, an army of Liberal peers were created, the party need not despair. An extravagant creation of peers would guarantee nothing for the Liberal Government. It was, after all, impossible to know in

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[56] J.R. Jones, "England," in The European Right, ed. Weber and Roger, pp. 46-47. Much of this explanation is taken from Jones' article.

advance what each new peer would do after he had come face to face with Home Rule. Was it not possible that some of these new peers, if not most of them, would want to attach amendments to the Bill which Redmond and the Irish Nationalists would be unwilling to accept? Such an eventuality was not difficult to imagine, and the Unionists had said all along that Asquith and his allies were only supporting Home Rule in the first place so that the Irish Nationalists would remain loyal to the Government.

The Diehards had rational explanations for their actions and these explanations have not always been fully appreciated by historians of the era. Some of these explanations, such as the ones that have been given above, were the product of tactical considerations alone. Yet behind these various tactical motivations there lay a kind of strategy, or rather, a kind of strategic impulse. In the opinion of many Unionists, especially those who sympathized with the Diehards, the two parties had entered an era of classical antagonism and the difficulties of the Liberal Government cried out for aggressive, and sometimes extra-parliamentary, exploitation. Militant Conservatives, and the Diehards in particular, believed that their tactics were justified by the great stakes involved.[57] When Ireland and the constitution were threatened, the ends more than justified the means. In any case, the Diehards argued, and not necessarily without reason, that the Liberals had more to lose than the Unionists if the struggle between the two parties was allowed to escalate. This

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[57]See G.D. Phillips, "Lord Willoughby de Broke and the Policy of Radical Toryism: 1909- 1914," Journal of British Studies, xx(1980) , pp. 205- 224.

was so because the Liberals would be left with no alternative but to call another election, and in that election the Unionists would be able to take advantage of the fact that Home Rule was bound to figure more prominently that it had in the last election.

This then was the strategic impulse behind the Diehard revolt. It was a project fraught with danger, both for the party itself and for the country at large, but it was not altogether illogical or, as it has characterized been characterized by Blake, "insane."[58] It is also important to note that the revolt was directed at the leadership of the Unionist party as much as it was directed against the Liberal majority in the House of Commons. In one very important respect, therefore, the revolt made perfect sense, and what is more, was ultimately successful, since the Parliament Bill crisis led directly to Balfour's growing "sense of isolation," his resignation on November 9, and his replacement by Bonar Law, a man much less inclined to compromise his political principles for the sake of parliamentary propriety or some spurious conception of party unity.[59] In his resignation speech Balfour alluded to the dissatisfaction of certain unspecified elements within the party but said it was ill health which prevented him from serving any longer as leader of the Unionist party. Balfour once remarked to a colleague, "I cannot be evicted from the leadership."[60] This may well have been true, but it had become obvious that Balfour could only have retained his position at considerable cost both to his own prestige and the

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[58]Robert Blake, The Conservative Party From Peel to Churchill, pp. 190.
[59]Blanche Dugdale, Arthur James Balfour, Vol. 2, pp. 69-71.
[60]Blanche Dugdale, Arthur James Balfour, Vol. 2, pp. 88.

prestige of the Unionist party. By the autumn of 1911 the slogan that had been coined by Leo Maxse, "BMG: Balfour Must Go," was already in widespread use. Less publicly, but no less significantly, the Diehards had begun to mount a campaign to unseat Balfour at the National Union Conference in November. If this had failed, there was even some talk of the formation of a separate Diehard party.

It is possible that Balfour could have kept his critics at bay and remained indefinitely as leader of the party, but as Balfour admitted in to a friend, politics had already become "unusually odious" to him.[61] This was the crux of the problem with Balfour's whole style of leadership in the opinion of the Diehards and tariff reformers. Where Balfour was tired of aggressive political confrontation, his critics relished it; indeed, they wanted to see a great deal more of it in the future. The losing battle over the House of Lords was the best illustration of this point. As Leo Maxse baldly stated in the September issue of *The National Review*, "...pitiful tactics and cursed opportunism had been the ruin of Unionism."[62] Or, in the words of Walter Long, "...what the party wanted was to be able to declare that the long nightmare is over, and their leader is to the fore as he was in the old days, and that the party is united with a fighting policy behind a fighting leader."[63] In other words, Balfour's critics believed

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[61]Kenneth Young, Arthur James Balfour, pp. 313.
[62]Cited by Peter Fraser, " The Unionist Debacle of 1911 and Balfour's Retirement," The Journal of Modern History, xxxv(1963), pp. 360.
[63]Walter Long to Arthur Balfour, 29 September 1911. Cited by Peter Fraser, " The Unionist Debacle of 1911 and Balfour's Retirement," The Journal of Modern History, xxxv(1963), pp. 361.

that fiercer combat, and not further compromise and moderation, would eventually lead the party to victory at the polls.

Chapter Three

Bonar Law and the "New Style," 1911 - 1914

Balfour's resignation as leader ushered in a new era of violent partisanship and extra-constitutional brinksmanship in the Unionist party. The rivals for the succession were Austen Chamberlain and Walter Long, but since the supporters of neither candidate could be relied upon to support the other, the leadership fell to a third candidate, Andrew Bonar Law.[1] Bonar Law's selection was at first glance a startling event, since the Canadian-born Glasgow businessman was a relatively unknown and remarkably inexperienced politician. According to his biographer, Robert Blake, he had not even put forward his name with the intention of winning the election but had merely hoped to draw attention to himself in case he decided to run for the leadership in the future. This is hardly surprising, since Bonar Law had only been an M.P. for eleven years, had never held Cabinet rank before (or any position which even approached Cabinet rank), and had never made a mark in any Unionist organization or institution. However, all this aside, there were certain incontrovertible advantages to Bonar Law's candidacy. Law was, after all, a Conservative rather than a Liberal-Unionist; a tariff reformer rather than a free trader or fiscal moderate; and a Diehard at heart (who had managed to remain scrupulously loyal to Balfour's official policy) rather than a Hedger.[2]

The new leader in the House of Commons was also an excellent debater. Though less polished than Balfour, Law was

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[1]Lloyd George commented at the time: "The fools have stumbled upon their best man by accident." Cited by C.T. Jones in The National Dictionary of Biography: 1922- 1930, pp. 485.

[2]John Ramsden, The Age of Balfour and Baldwin , pp. 90.

never at a loss for words on any of the subjects so dear to the hearts of Conservatives. His selection came about as a result of a political compromise between tariff reformers and Tory traditionalists, but Bonar Law was not a moderate politician by any stretch of the imagination. Where Balfour's style of leadership had been detached, cynical and equivocal, Bonar Law's style of leadership was committed, sincere, and supremely intelligible.[3] This, no doubt, was what Diehards and tariff reformers had wanted all along. The Unionist program was not itself at fault, but if the party wanted to win with that program it must begin to clarify its themes. Above all, the party needed a fighter rather than a philosopher to carry its message to the people. Fed up with Balfour's "ingenious formulae," "dialectical subtleties," and "elaborately qualified arguments," the rank and file of the Unionist party were eager to have a leader who would tell the electorate in plain, preferably rude, language exactly what he thought of the the Liberal Government and its "multitudinous appetites."[4] This Bonar Law was eminently qualified to do.

The new tone and tenor of the Opposition was displayed in Bonar Law's conduct in the House of Commons as well as in his speeches in the country. Before the debate on the Address could begin, Law privately apologized to Asquith for putting an end to polite forms of debate: "I am afraid I shall have to show myself very vicious Mr. Asquith this session. I hope you will

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[3]Roy Jenkins, Mr. Balfour's Poodle, pp. 271

[4]Robert Blake, The Unknown Prime Minister: The Life and Times of Andrew Bonar Law (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1955), pp. 93.

understand."[5] Law's "New Style" was also evident in a speech he gave at Albert Hall in which he said that the record of the Liberal Government was "...an example of destructive violence for which there is no parallel since the Long Parliament." Law went on to say that

> "...some people have the idea that the members of the Government, apart from their policy are extremely competent. That is a delusion. It depends of course on the point of view. In one department of their activity--the only department that interests them--in electioneering, in small trickery of politics, they are indeed competent. They have never had equals; but fortunately for this country in the past they have had no competition."[6]

Law had always been a vehement exponent of Conservatism, but his vehemence was partly a reflection of the way he conceived his role as leader of the party. His strategy was to foster unity by placing himself at the head of Balfour's old critics. As he was said to have observed on more than one occasion, "I am their leader, I must follow them."[7] But where, exactly, did his followers want to be led? For one thing, it was clear that Balfour's referendum pledge would have to be repudiated in order to placate the tariff reformers. Austen Chamberlain had unilaterally renounced the pledge at the Tariff Reform Dinner on November 8, but it remained for Lansdowne to repudiate the

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[5]Lord Oxford and Asquith, Memoirs and Reflections, Vol. 1, pp. 202.
[6]Robert Blake, The Unknown Prime Minister, pp.94.
[7]David Dilks, "From Balfour to Bonar Law," in The Conservative Leadership, ed. David Southgate, pp. 167.

pledge officially at Albert Hall on November 14, and for Law to do the same at Ashton-under-Lyne on December 16. The only concession Law would make to the fiscal moderates and free fooders within his party was to agree that food taxes would only be imposed after they had been requested by the Dominions. However, there was never any doubt that the Dominions, and especially Canada, had decided long ago to secure agricultural preference in Britain as soon as it was feasible to do so.[8]

Law did not anticipate the furore that would erupt in response to his repudiation of the referendum pledge. It seemed natural to assume that with Balfour out of the picture the fiscal controversy could finally be put to rest once and for all, but this was not to be. With Irish Home Rule on the political horizon, fiscal moderation gained new adherents among the Unionists. Lord Salisbury's objections to the Shadow Cabinet's decision to revoke the referendum pledge were not atypical:

> "...I incline indeed to think the food tax to be bad policy, but in a world of compromise I should be content if it were likely to be a successful policy. Hitherto it has been very unsuccessful. If it may be said to have finally made possible the destruction of the constitution, the prostitution of the Prerogative, the Repeal of the Union and the Disendowment of the Welsh Church, it will probably rank as the most costly policy in history. But there seems a chance that some of these disasters may be spared to us if public opinion were to pronounce an emphatic desire to change the Government...If we are to be saved it must be manifest that the country prefers the Unionists to the Radicals...and as long as the food tax is our

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[8]John Ramsden, The Age of Balfour and Baldwin, pp. 75.

> programme any such manifest public opinion is in the highest degree unlikely."[9]

Lord Hugh Cecil agreed, and on November 7, one week before the Albert Hall declaration, he too insisted that Tariff Reform could not be allowed to outweigh more essential goals--both national and international--of the Unionist Program.

> "We are like the French legitimates who in 1873 sacrificed the throne of France rather than accept the tricolor in place of the Bourbon white flag. Taxes on food are exalted into a kind of religion--even to postpone them is a kind of apostasy. If there were no Church or no Union or Ulster at stake this would deserve to be called insanity. But when the highest national interests are involved, when those whom we are bound to succor and save by every consideration of honor and chivalry may have to pay for the price of our folly, what word fitly describes our action?"[10]

By Christmas the free food agitation had come to a head. The Irish Unionists were up in arms, Conservative leaders in important centers like Manchester and Liverpool were irate, and most of the Opposition Press were actively hostile. Even Austen Chamberlain admitted that the revolt had consumed the party: "In a few weeks, almost in a few days, the revolt had become general; the panic had spread to all but a few stalwarts. When we examined our lists we found that we could only count on the constancy of thirty to forty men."[11]

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[9]Robert Blake, The Unknown Prime Minister, pp. 108-109.
[10]Robert Blake, The Unknown Prime Minister, pp. 111.
[11]Charles Petrie, The Life and Letters of the Rt. Hon. Sir Austen Chamberlain, pp. 329.

Law had originally meant to defend his decision against all comers, but a hostile meeting of the Lancashire Unionists convinced him that the position he had taken up on fiscal reform would have to be abandoned, otherwise the party would be split from top to bottom.[12] The problem, of course, was that Law did not wish to reverse his own policy on food taxes, which would have involved a "sudden wholesale abandonment, not on any question of principle, but to all appearances in a panic, of what we have all been preaching for years about our first constructive policy."[13] As Austen Chamberlain pointed out to him, such an abrupt change of heart was patently absurd. "I do not understand," he wrote with some asperity," how after your recent speeches anyone can think it compatible with your honor to withdraw from the position you have taken up."[14] Law tended to agree with this assessment himself. The only logical solution, he told Henry Chaplin on December 31, was to resign and allow his replacement to repeal the pledge.[15]

Both Lansdowne and Law decided to announce their resignations at a party meeting in January 1913, but before they could do so they were presented with a memorandum signed by nearly every Opposition M.P which pleaded with Law to remain at

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[12]It should be noted that many ardent tariff reformers thought that the rank and file of the Unionist Party still supported food taxes. See W.A.S. Hewins, The Apologia of An Imperialist, Vol. 1 (London: Constable, 1929), pp. 284-285. Hewins felt that the strength of the Lancashire branches of the Tariff Reform League indicated that the Lancashire leadership was out of step with the views of its membership.

[13] The Times,.10 February 1913.

[14]Charles Petrie, The Life and Letters of Sir Austen Chamberlain, Vol. 1, pp. 88.

[15]Robert Blake, The Unknown Prime Minister, pp. 114-115.

his post for the good of the party. The memorandum went on state that

> "...we adhere to the principle of Imperial Preference. We consider that the Unionist party if returned to power ought to put that principle into effect, in every respect in which the new duties on food are not required. We look forward to the carrying out of many useful measures of preference and of encouragement to Imperial trade in the interval which must precede the final completion of the full policy of Imperial Preference."

Only six Unionist MPs refused to sign the petition.[16] For the time being at least, the Unionist party had decided to resist the temptation to adopt a monolithic political policy. Law's critics thought that he had been willing to put food taxes on hold because he had never fully understood Tariff Reform in the first place.[17] While it could hardly be denied that Law had always been a lucid and energetic champion of government intervention in trade, there were those who believed that he had never really got beyond old-fashioned protectionism. Professor Hewins would later write that Law's views were as narrow as those of an eighteenth-century screw manufacturer.[18] Law was, according to Hewins, little more than a mercantilist at heart. The facets of

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[16]David Dilks, "From Disraeli to Law," in The Conservatives, ed. Lord Butler, pp. 244. Max Aitken, Austen Chamberlain and Leo Amery were among those six.

[17]See W.A.S. Hewins, The Apologia of an Imperialist, vol. 1, pp. 11. See page 281 for a description of Balfour's imperial vision. According to Hewins, even Balfour was better equipped to understand "the intricacies of Empire policy."

[18] W.A.S. Hewins, An Apologia of an Imperialist, vol. 1, pp. 11. Cited by J.H. Grainger, "From Balfour to Bonar Law," in The Conservative Leadership, ed. Donald Southgate (London: Allen and Unwin, 1974), pp. 174.

Tariff Reform that involved imperial integration and social reform were of little use to him. This attitude, so the argument ran, allowed Law to turn away from the full program of Tariff Reform at the first sign of a rupture within the party.

Hewins' criticism of Law's conception of Tariff Reform, criticism which was accepted and echoed, not surprisingly, by Austen Chamberlain, may have contained a kernel of truth.[19] Law's imperial vision and social-reforming idealism were indeed cut from a different cloth than that of men like Leo Amery and George Wyndham who thought that Tariff Reform would change the whole course of British history at a single stroke. But Law's protectionism did have an imperial theme, and Law was always concerned with national defense, imperial integration (especially with regard to Great Britain's relationship withCanada), and the improvement of what Milner would have called the British "race." Admittedly, Law tended to emphasize the negative aspects of Tariff Reform, but this was to be expected, especially after he had become leader in the Commons, because it was only the negative aspects of Tariff Reform which brought the party together. Whereas almost everyone could agree that Tariff Reform would act as a bulwark against syndicalism and confiscatory socialism, not everyone could agree that Tariff Reform was an organizing ideal for the whole social and economic life of the British Empire.

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[19]Chamberlain's criticism went rather farther than that of Hewins when he wrote to a friend: "How Bonar Law can help us, without any knowledge of Foreign Affairs, Navy, Church questions, or Home Rule, Lord only knows." Charles Petrie, The Life and Letters of the Rt. Hon. Sir Austen Chamberlain, Vol. 1, pp. 308.

Whatever Law thought about Tariff Reform, it must be said that by the time he withdrew his resignation at the behest of his colleagues he had already made up his mind that the defense of the Irish Union would have to take precedence over all other Unionist objectives; "Everything else," he warned, "was just a game." This being the case, the party was no longer free to work out a detailed imperial and domestic program for the future. Ireland alone would have to suffice. It must be said, however, that the Unionist Social Reform Committee, set up in August 1911 under the chairmanship of F.E. Smith, did manage to resurrect a very modest Disraelian social policy between 1911 and 1914.[20] During this period the USRC published reports on several areas of social policy which, taken together, might have formed the basis of a detailed and comprehensive platform for the anticipated election of 1914- 1915. All this is pure speculation, however, since the USRC's recommendations were strictly unofficial. In any event, the USRC's reports were not particularly progressive when judged by the standards of their opponents. As F.E. Smith reminded his readers in his introduction to the Majority Report on poor law reform, the USRC "...has ranged itself with...facts as

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[20]See Matthew Fforde's excellent analysis of the USRC in Conservatism and Collectivism: 1886- 1914 (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University, 1990), pp. 88-102. Fforde reminds us that "not one significant policy was adopted by the Right between 1911 and 1914." Of course, Stanley Baldwin, Edward Wood, and Neville Chamberlain had all been active members, so the USRC may have acted as a school for those who led the party and implemented reform in the interwar years. See Jane Ridley's article, "The Unionist Social Reform Committee 1911- 1914: Wets Before the Deluge," Historical Journal, 30(1987), pp. 391- 413, for a less cynical appraisal of the Committee's work.

they are."[21] Of course, Tariff Reform, unlike the work of the USRC, easily survived Law's decision to back down from the referendum pledge, but it too was overshadowed by Home Rule, and it was only revived by the Unionist Business Committee in the midst of World War.

The Opposition decks were now cleared for the fight against Home Rule. According to the provisions of the Parliament Bill the veto of the Lords would not prevent the Home Rule Bill, which was introduced by Asquith on 11 April 1912, from becoming law, provided that the Bill had been passed by the Commons on three separate instances, and provided that a period of not less than two years had gone by between the second reading of the Bill in the first session and the third reading of the Bill in the last session.[22] It therefore followed that the Unionists still had until approximately the middle of 1914 to prevent the Bill from becoming law. Unfortunately, even under the generous timetable provided by the Parliament Act, the Liberals were under no obligation to hold a general election before Home Rule had been passed by the Commons in three consecutive sessions. This meant that the party needed to force an election by any means at its disposal, and barring that, Ulstermen would have to be encouraged to make it impossible for the Bill to be implemented. The strategy was a bold one, and under normal circumstances an improper one too, but the Unionist party was clearly not inclined

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[21] Jane Ridley, "The Unionist Social Reform Committee, 1911- 1914: Wets Before the Deluge," Historical Journal, 30(1987), pp. 391- 413

[22] For details of the original Home Rule Bill see The Annual Register, 1913, pp. 7- 10.

to view the loss of Ireland as one of the Liberal party's legitimate legislative goals.

It has often been said that the ferocity of Unionist opposition to Irish Home Rule was predicated on the peculiar class structure of Ireland. This is partially true. Since the leaders of the Irish "Ascendancy" class were closely linked with the leaders of the Unionist party, Home Rule--and the threat of estate confiscation by a Dublin parliament--were not likely to be taken very lightly by the Unionist party as a whole. But the status of English property rights in Ireland was not what drove the Unionist party to such desperate opposition to Home Rule. The real issues at stake were the "historical" integrity of Great Britain and, still more importantly, the rights of Ulster Protestants who wished to remain within the Union.[23] The loyalty of Ulster Protestants was an old Conservative theme, one first advanced by Lord Randolph Churchill in 1886 in response to Gladstone's Home Rule Bill in 1886. The Orangemen were, as Lord Churchill had once surmised, the ultimate trump card to play against the "multitudinous appetites" of the Liberal Government.[24] In the first place it was difficult to see how a democratic government could legally deprive loyal British citizens of their ancient birthright by placing them under the rule of their hereditary enemies in the South. After all, a parliamentary democracy

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[23]At this time only the extreme fringe of Irish Nationalist politics was in favor of leaving the Empire altogether. Even so, many Unionists also argued that Irish Home Rule would jeopardize Britain's entire imperial legacy by suggesting to the world that Britain lacked imperial resolve.

[24]John Campbell, F.E. Smith: First Earl of Birkenhead (London: Jonathan Cape, 1983), pp. 325.

depends on a tacit recognition by the majority of the rights and privileges of the minority, and in this case the Government was plotting to rob the Orangemen of the rights and privileges they had enjoyed since the Union Act of 1800.[25] In the second place, the Government was not being consistent about self-determination, since it applied one standard for Ulster and another one for Ireland as a whole. As Law explained in the Commons on 1 January 1913:

> "If you say that the Nationalists of Ireland have a right to claim to go out of the United Kingdom as a community, if you say that five or six percent of the whole United Kingdom have the right because they wish to have a separate rule for themselves, how can you say that a body in Ireland, not five or six percent, but twenty-five percent of the whole population, has not an equal right to separate treatment? That argument has been put by many of us, and by myself many times, and it has never fully been answered.[26]

Law did not rely on Ulster alone to make his case against Irish Home Rule. But it seemed as if the awkward position of the Ulstermen was going to be the real sticking point in the progress and implementation of the Bill. Indeed, Law saw at a glance that if the Ulstermen were prepared to defend their liberties by force of arms if necessary, the Liberal Government would be confronted by an almost insurmountable obstacle to its ambitions for Ireland. The loyalty of the Ulstermen gave the

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[25]A.T.Q. Stewart, The Ulster Crisis, pp. 57.

[26]Hansard, 1 January 1913, Fifth Series, xlvi, Col. 467. Cited by John Ramsden, The Age of Balfour and Baldwin, pp. 78.

Unionist party an excellent tactical advantage in the struggle to save the Union, but the ties that bound the party so tightly to the cause of the Ulstermen were not derived from tactical considerations alone. Many Unionists regarded the Orange movement as a symbol, not only of patriotic fervor, but also of what the Unionist party hoped someday to achieve for Great Britain as a whole.[27] The Unionist party had always claimed to have purely "national" goals, but in truth the party system often prevented the British people from recognizing their corporate interests and acting accordingly.[28] In Northern Ireland, however, a truly national movement already flourished. In Northern Ireland there was a noble national ideal that transcended class by wedding people in every walk of life to a single corporate purpose. That purpose was dramatically embodied in Ulster's Solemn League and Covenant, which read in part:

> "...we, whose names are underwritten, men of Ulster, loyal subjects of His Gracious Majesty King George V, humbly relying on God whom our fathers in days of stress and trial confidently trusted, do hereby pledge ourselves in solemn Covenant throughout this our time of threatened calamity to stand by one another in defending for ourselves and our children our cherished possession of equal citizenship in the Uni 1 Kingdom, and in using all means by which may

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[27]J.R. Jones, "England," in The European Right, ed. Hans Rogger and Eugene Weber, pp. 53.

[28]This criticism extended, theoretically, to both parties, but the Liberal and Labour parties were almost always singled out for their special brand of "divisive" politics. The 1909 Budget was of course the best example of Liberalism's parochialism, since Unionists believed that the Liberal Government had deliberately attacked the land owning classes in order to win votes from the landless classes, but most major Liberal initiatives fell into this same category.

> be found necessary to defeat the present conspiracy to set up a Home Rule Parliament in Ireland."[29]

The fact that almost everyone in Ulster seemed to be actively preparing to fight and die for their cause also deeply impressed itself on Unionist politicians. The formation of the Ulster Volunteer Force in itself gave ample proof that Ulstermen intended to be every bit as good as their word if and when the crisis came. The Force was disciplined, energetic, effective, and extremely popular. In short, it was the practical incarnation of the will and capacity of a whole people.[30] This lionization, both of the UVF in particular and the Orange movement in general, was perhaps a romanticized and myopic view of the larger question of Irish Home Rule, but it was one that appealed to almost every important Unionist leader of the day, and more importantly, it was one that went some distance to saving Ulster from the Government's Home Rule Bill.

Law had, in fact, already made the cause of Ulstermen his own. As soon as he had become leader he had attended an enormous demonstration at Balmoral, a suburb of Belfast, and watched one hundred thousand Irish Unionists march past in military formation. What he had said on that occasion left little doubt about how much the party was willing to identify with the fate of the Irish Unionists, which had somehow become the linchpin which held the entire British Empire together:

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[29]Quoted by A.T.Q. Stewart, The Ulster Crisis, pp. 29.
[30]J.R. Jones, "England," in The European Right, ed. Hans Rogger and Eugene Weber, pp. 55.

> "I say to you with all solemnity; you must trust to yourselves. Once again you hold the pass for the Empire. You are a besieged city...The Government by their Parliament Act have lowered a boom to cut you off from the help of the British people. You will burst that boom. The help will come and when the crisis is over men will say of you in words not unlike that of Pitt, "You have saved yourselves by your exertions, and you will save the Empire by your example."[31]

And speaking at a rally held at Blenheim on 29 July 1912, the leader of the Opposition was very explicit about how far and in what directions the Unionist party would be prepared to go in order to support the Ulster Protestants and wreck the carefully laid plans of the Liberal Government:

> "In our opposition to them we shall not be guided by the considerations or bound by the restraints which would influence us in a normal Constitutional struggle. We shall take the means, whatever means seem to us most effective, to deprive them of the despotic power which they have usurped and compel them to appeal to the people whom they have deceived. They may, perhaps they will, carry their Home Rule Bill through the House of Commons. What then? I said the other day in the House of Commons and I repeat here that there are stronger things than Parliamentary majorities."

Law went on to utter a sterner warning to the Government:

> "Before I occupied the position I now fill in the party I said that, in my belief, if an attempt were made to deprive these men of their birthright--as part of a

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[31]Robert Blake, The Unknown Prime Minister, pp. 129.

> corrupt Parliamentary bargain--they would be justified in resisting such an attempt by all means in their power, including force. I said it then, and I repeat now with a full sense of responsibility which attaches to my position, that, in my opinion, if such an attempt is made, I can imagine no length of resistance to which Ulster can go in which I should not be prepared to support them, and in which, in my belief, they would not be supported by the overwhelming majority of the British people."[32]

Here was the Unionist position laid bare. The Home Rule Bill was a "corrupt Parliamentary bargain" perpetrated by the Liberal Government in order to remain in office, and if the Ulstermen resisted this bargain by force of arms Bonar Law was prepared to throw the full weight of the Unionist party behind them. Craig and Carson had asked the party for unlimited support and, though it was unclear what direct assistance the party would actually be able to render, their request had been granted readily enough. Asquith called Law's commitment to Ulster a "grammar of anarchy," and indeed, such a revolutionary stand had not been taken by any opposition leader since the days of the Long Parliament.[33] In private a few Unionist leaders expressed their doubts about the wisdom of making an unconditional pledge of assistance to Ulster, knowing full well that it could easily lead to a convulsion "...of the whole fabric of the Commonwealth."[34] Chamberlain voiced some of these concerns in a letter to Willoughby de Broke in November, 1913:

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[32]Cited in Robert Blake, The Unknown Prime Minister, pp. 130.
[33]A.T. Q. Stewart, The Ulster Crisis, pp. 18.
[34]Belfast, 12 July 1912. John Campbell, F.E. Smith, pp. 329.

> "Civil War is a terrible thing, not to be lightly encountered, but it is not the greatest evil which confronts us if the coercion of Ulster is tried. For if that is done, the House of Commons and the Army will break in the process....If officers throw up their commissions and troops refuse to fire, Home Rule is dead, but a great deal else is dead too. I won't dwell on the dangers of foreign complications, real though they may be, but how will you meet another general strike on the railways or in the mines? It is not civil war that is the greatest peril but anarchy."[35]

Law had his doubts too, though he never allowed these doubts to surface in any of his public speaking engagements. The potential for civil war and anarchy weighed heavily on his mind. Second thoughts, no doubt, were all but inevitable for the leader of a party which had an abiding tradition of respect for governmental authority. Law's private reservations increased as the Bill made steady progress in Parliament. On 16 January 1913, the Bill's third reading was carried in the House of Commons by 367 votes to 257; on January 30 it was rejected on the second reading in the House of Lords by 326 votes to 69. In July the same scenario repeated itself. The Bill needed only to be carried once more (and under the Government's existing time table this was due to occur in the middle of 1914) in order to become law under the provisions of the Parliament Act. Soon Ulster and the Unionist party would be forced to back up their angry words with angry deeds. As Law announced on January 15, "...the country

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[35]Austen Chamberlain to Willoughby de Broke, 23 November 1913. Cited by John Ramsden, The Age of Balfour and Baldwin, pp. 83.

was rapidly drifting to civil war."[36] The prospect of a test of political wills was one that appealed to men like Willoughby de Broke, Milner, Croft, Amery, Gretton, who believed that things must get worse in Great Britain before they could become better.[37] But Law, in addition to Carson and Craig, were considerably less enthusiastic about the recent course of events in Ireland.

It was not until the autumn of 1913 that anyone in either party began to contemplate, much less propose, a compromise solution to the Home Rule crisis based on the temporary or permanent exclusion of Ulster from Home Rule. The attitude of the Unionists up until then had been merely to advance the claims of Ulster in order to sabotage Home Rule for the rest of Ireland. The Liberals, for their part, were also disinclined to view Ireland as anything other than a single entity. This posture was adopted largely in response to pressure from Redmond and the Irish Nationalists, but it was also true that the Liberals were not at all certain that Ireland without the industrial North would be economically viable. These attitudes began to crumble, as it has already been said, as the implementation of the Bill became more imminent. Negotiations were the natural upshot of this new

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[36]Cited by R.H. Gretton, A Modern History of the English People: 1910- 1922 (London: Richards, 1929), pp. 119.

[37]J.R. Jones, "England," in The European Right, ed. Rogger and Weber, pp. 53- 54. Jones has provided a reasonable analysis of Diehard attitudes before the war but his account of the crisis over Irish Home Rule is flawed in that it assumes that the Diehards (and Jones' actually uses the historically anachronistic term "Right") were hoping for civil war. What Diehards hoped for was a test of political wills and not civil war itself. In fact, this same attitude existed in certain sections of the Liberal Party and was demonstrated by the Government, and in particular by Winston Churchill, during the Curragh Incident.

willingness to avoid a destructive confrontation. On March 9 Asquith produced a scheme of "provisional exclusion" which went some distance to bridging the gap between the two parties. The proposal stipulated that any county in Ulster would have the opportunity to vote itself out of the Home Rule Bill for a period of six years. At the end of this period, which was to be punctuated by not less than two general elections, the excluded counties would come under the jurisdiction in the Dublin parliament unless the British Parliament had in the meantime confirmed their exclusion. In other words, the Unionists would be given the chance to prove their case in two separate general elections.[38]

Unionists had mixed reactions to Asquith's proposal, but with Carson calling the proposal "a sentence of death with a six year stay of execution," and with Diehards organizing against it, Law felt obligated to turn it down.[39] The Liberals, on their side, were at first reluctant to make any further concessions to secure an agreement with the Opposition. In 1914, however, it appeared as if Asquith was at last prepared to exclude Ulster from the Home Rule Bill altogether. But by this time resistance to the Bill had acquired a life of its own and Law was no longer in a position to sell any compromise to his followers. With this final refusal to agree to terms, the controversy was removed from the arena of purely party politics. The mechanism of coercion, the army, was now transformed into a battlefield for the competing ambitions

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[38]For a description of this plan see R.H. Gretton, A Modern History of the English People, pp. 121- 122.
[39]A.T.Q. Stewart, The Ulster Crisis, pp. 137.

of the two parties. In the early months of 1914 the Opposition began to consider the possibility of amending the annual Mutiny Act in the House of Lords. Since the Bill was only operative for a single year, the refusal to pass it would effectively restore the power of the Lords by depriving the Government of legal authority over the army.[40]

To amend the annual Mutiny Act in the Lords was to commit an act of obstruction without constitutional precedent or historical parallel. Yet the plan was only abandoned by the party after the Curragh "mutiny" suggested that Government would not be able to rely on the loyalty of the army anyhow.[41] The mutiny--or "misunderstanding" as the Government rather euphemistically referred to it--also persuaded Ulstermen that the Government was actively plotting to arrest the Ulster leaders, Carson and Craig, and to provoke revolt in Ulster in order to crush it. Soon the Ulstermen were making practical preparations for a unilateral declaration of independence, the formation of a provisional government, and guerilla war. Asquith, now forced by events to seek a solution for Ulster at almost any price, offered to introduce an amending bill which would exclude the Ulster counties en bloc from the Home Rule Bill. When Law hesitated, Asquith offered to waive the time limit in the exclusion clause altogether if Law would in turn agree to compromise on the demarcation of Ulster's boundaries.[42] Asquith's offer, if it had

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[40]John Ramsden, The Age of Balfour and Baldwin, pp. 84.
[41]Robert Blake, The Unknown Prime Minister, pp. 162. Blake believes that Law would have halted the plan anyhow, since he could not count on the support of the whole party, but his evidence is far from conclusive.
[42]Robert Blake, The Unknown Prime Minister, pp. 214.

been made earlier, might well have been accepted; now, however, Law was determined to hold out for Ulster's complete and permanent exclusion from the Bill.[43]

In the end, Law's determination could not be put to the test. The outbreak of the First World War, which prompted Asquith to suspend the Amending Bill in the interests of national unity, imposed an unnatural, or at least unanticipated, resolution to the crisis at hand. Whether the issue would have been resolved by civil strife, or at the last minute by peaceful negotiation, is impossible to surmise. Certainly many Unionists felt that by 1914 there was little hope left for a pacific compromise between the two parties. As Carson grimly told a parade of Ulster Volunteers on July 12, "I see no hope of peace. I see nothing but darkness and shadows...we must be ready. In my opinion the great climax and great crisis of our fate, and the fate of our country, cannot be delayed for many weeks."[44] He was not alone in his pessimism. Lord Winterton and Lord Willoughby de Broke had already begun to recruit Diehard commandos for the conflict they felt certain would soon engulf England as well as Ireland.[45] What must history make of the fatalism that permeated the public and private utterances of so many prominent Unionists on the subject of Ireland? Was this fatalism, as George Dangerfield has argued, merely a ploy to bring the Liberal Government face to

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[43]Or perhaps the reverse was true, and Law rejected this offer not because he was confident of success, as he said he was, but because his followers would never have agreed to it. Robert Blake, The Unknown Prime Minister, pp. 216.
[44]Ian Colvin, Life of Carson, Vol. 2 (London: J. Murray, 1934), pp. 203.
[45]Willoughby de Broke to General Richardson, 21 January 1914. Cited by John Ramsden, The Age of Balfour and Baldwin, pp. 84.

face with an elemental force it was in no way equipped to handle?[46] If it was such a ploy, it was one that Unionists only perpetrated because they believed so strongly in the cause itself. As Lord Milner told Selborne on 18 February 1914:

> "There are a great many people who still fail to realize what the strength of our feeling is on the subject. They think it is only a party game. And so it may be to a great many Unionists, but there is certainly a very large body who feel that the crisis altogether transcends anything in their previous experience, and calls for action which is different, not only in degree but in kind from what is appropriate to ordinary political controversies."[47]

Milner's comment is instructive because conviction rather than strategy was at the heart of almost all Unionist resistance to Home Rule. Joseph Chamberlain's reaction to the third Home Rule Bill is an even more compelling illustration of Unionism's natural affinity to Ulster Protestants. Chamberlain, who had fought against the Ascendancy all his life, remained solidly behind the Ulster loyalists until his death in 1914. On 8 January 1914 an article written by Chamberlain appeared in *The Northern Whig* ; why was it, Chamberlain asked, that Ulster Protestants were being criticized by the Liberals?

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[46]See George Dangerfield, The Strange Death of Liberal England: 1910- 1914 (London: Smith and Hass, 1935), pp. 79-80, where he writes, among other things, that "The word `Unionist' fitted snugly around the Conservative mood, like an iron glove around a fist. It had very little to do with Ireland: it had a great deal to do with beating the Liberal Party into a irremediable mess of political blood and brains."

[47]Milner to Selborne. Cited by John Ramsden, The Age of Balfour and Baldwin, pp. 85.

> "Why, because they are proud to belong to a greater country; because they take their share in the autonomy of the UK in which they take a party; because they cling to the traditions and history of the United Kingdom, which is just as much their possession and heritage as it is ours; because they refuse to be cast adrift and cut away from the hopes and resources which they have hitherto cherished."[48]

The vast majority of Unionists were sincere about Ulster. What has helped to obscure this simple truth is that, as far as we know, opposition to Irish Home Rule was a policy which might have helped the party to win an election in 1913 or thereafter. The political savvy of the Unionist leadership does not, however, take anything away from its decision to lend its full support to Empire "loyalists." The sympathy of the British electorate may well have made certain forms of unconstitutional behavior feasible, but by the early stages of the crisis that sympathy had already been won and there is no evidence to suggest that risking civil war would have done anything more to improve the electoral posture of the Unionist party. The fact of the matter is that the Unionist party in 1914, in spite of its reputation for cynical pragmatism, was a party which believed very strongly in its own program, which was, despite the false inferences that have so often been drawn about the real significance of Tariff Reform, essentially a defense of the status quo.[49] The sincerity of the party had been evident in the Tariff Reform campaign, in efforts

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[48]Quoted by Paul Bew, Ideology and the Irish Question: Ulster Unionism and Irish Nationalism: 1912- 1916. (Oxford: Claredon, 1994), pp. 52.
[49]Mathew Fjord, Conservatism and Collectivism, pp. 24.

to overturn the 1909 budget, and in the Diehard revolt of 1910, but it was nowhere more evident than it was in the campaign to exclude Ulster from the Irish Home Rule Bill. This is hardly surprising, since no other single act of Parliament threatened to do so much, so quickly, and with so little prospect of redress. If Ireland were lost, Unionists were convinced she would be lost forever.[50]

Whatever else may be said about the Unionist party between 1903 and 1914, it must be admitted that it suffered from no dearth of confidence or party feeling between these years. Historians have argued that the Unionist party almost destroyed itself and the supremacy of Parliament in its reckless pursuit of power. The latter part of this premise is partly true, but the basis of agreement on which parliamentary government rested was damaged in part by the Government's own lack of sensitivity to Northern Ireland. As Law said of the Liberals at the beginning of 1914: "They have become revolutionaries, and becoming revolutionaries they have lost the right to implicit obedience that can be claimed by a Constitutional

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[50]Ironically, a case could easily be made about the sincerity of the Liberal Party throughout this crisis. The argument has seldom been made before, but Paul Bew has at least called into question, albeit indirectly, the sincerity of the Liberal leadership by pointing out that there were very few leading Liberals who were willing to directly refute the Unionists' chief objections to Home Rule. Bew also calls attention to Jonathan Perry's recent work, The Rise and Fall of the Liberal Government in Victorian Britain (New Haven: Yale University, 1993), which advances the argument that Irish Home Rule was not in line with previous Liberal Imperial thought since Liberal Governments had always encouraged greater inclusiveness *within* the constitution. Ideology and the Irish Question, 1912- 1926: Ulster Unionism and Irish Nationalism (Oxford: Claredon, 1994), pp. 53.

Government."[51] In retrospect it is easy to see that Unionist leaders did not accurately perceive the difference between Liberal policy and Liberal rhetoric. Ireland was not the only issue of importance in British politics, men like Asquith and Grey were not revolutionaries, and Irish Home Rule did not in itself signal the end of the British Empire. But whether or not Unionists were right about any of these things is beside the point. The simple fact is that they believed they were right, and their beliefs, disproportionate though they surely were, would not have damaged the electoral prospects of the Unionist party in 1914. It is true that at the outbreak of war the "natural party of government" had been in exile for more than eight years running, had forfeited the last three consecutive elections, and had secured neither the exclusion of Ulster nor the implementation of Tariff Reform. Even so, when the war arrived the Unionists were more sure of themselves and the strength of their negative program than they had been at any time during the last eleven years. What is more, by the summer of 1914 the Unionist party was confidently awaiting the election that could not be long delayed. And ironically, Balfour's negative platform had been enough to work this radical change in the party's flagging fortunes.[52] In the words of Lord Selborne, which were written in

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[51]Cited by John Ramsden, The Age of Balfour and Baldwin, pp. 85. The Unionists also justified their behavior with a technical argument: since the preface of the Parliament Bill had called for a compositional reform of the Lords it could be argued that the constitution was "in suspense" until the change had taken place.

[52]Already by-elections had given the Unionists a lead of thirty MPs over the Liberals, though not over the combined votes of Liberal-Labour-Nationalist MPs. John Ramsden, The Age of Balfour and Baldwin, pp. 85. For a more

1910 but applied just as well to 1914: "...we have a splendid program: the essential thing is not to vary it."[53]

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optimistic appraisal of the plight of Liberalism, see Peter Rowland's The Last Liberal Governments, Vol. 2, pp. 347- 353 or Martin Pugh's The Making of British Politics, pp. 153- 155, which does not accept the verdict of an easy victory for the Unionists but admits that Liberals were having real trouble with trade unionism, the franchise, and Grey's foreign policy.

[53]24 December 1910. Cited by Gregory D. Phillips, "Lord Willoughby de Broke and the Politics of Radical Toryism: 1909- 1914," Journal of British Studies, Vol. 20(1980), pp. 207.

Conclusion

The Road to the Carlton Club, 1914 - 1922

The Unionist party supported Britain's involvement in the First World War as soon as it had appeared likely that war would be declared. The atmosphere of wartime politics suited the Conservative political tradition on many levels. In the first place, the war with Germany had been anticipated by Unionist propaganda throughout the Edwardian era. Now at last, in the midst of global conflagration, the old Unionist arguments for a program of national service and a larger navy had to be taken seriously by the Government and the nation as a whole. In the second place, the Conservative political tradition was uniquely well suited to the unpleasant realities of modern warfare: where the Unionists had always emphasized their respect for authority, corporate action, patriotic self-sacrifice, and state activity in times of national crisis, the Liberals were much more accustomed to emphasizing their respect for legalism, constitutionalism, laissez-faire economics, and pacifism.[1] On a more practical level, the war also gave the party a chance to demonstrate the self-restraint and sense of proportion that had not always been evident in its unrelenting opposition to the Parliament and Irish Home Rule Bills.[2]

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[1]Robert Blake, The Conservative Party from Peel to Churchill, pp 196- 197. Not everyone has accepted Blake's view of Unionist wartime attitudes toward state regulation of industry. See John Stubbs' "The Impact of the Great War on the Conservative Party," in The Politics of Reappraisal: 1918- 1939, ed. Gillian Peele and Chris Cooke (London: Macmillan, 1975), pp. 14- 19, and Martin Pugh's The Making of British Politics, pp. 201- 210, for insightful, if also rudimentary, reassessments of Blake's position on this question. Both authors suggest that a majority of Unionists believed that business should remain free of state interference despite the war. Trade, of course, was one obvious exception to the rule.

[2]John Ramsden, The Age of Balfour and Baldwin, pp. 111- 112.

Several days after the outbreak of war the party demonstrated its patriotic forbearance by participating in a joint recruitment drive while simultaneously agreeing to adhere to an electoral truce. On Irish Home Rule and Welsh Disestablishment Unionists were less willing to compromise their beliefs for the sake of national unity, but Law and Lansdowne persuaded the party to refrain from provoking a constitutional crisis in wartime.[3] In this way opposition to Home Rule was temporarily outweighed by the war effort, even as Tariff Reform had once been temporarily outweighed by opposition to Home Rule.[4] But the honeymoon between the two parties could not last forever. In Parliament Unionist M.P.s found it increasingly difficult to refrain from criticizing the Government's prosecution of the war. This difficulty was increased by the fact that Unionist M.P.s had neither faith in the Government's administrative competence nor a voice in any of its deliberations. To some extent the Unionist Business Committee, formed in January 1915 as an official opposition group, provided Law and the Shadow Cabinet with a means of articulating party opinion and influencing the Government without formally breaking the party truce. Through the mechanism of the UBC the party slowly began to formulate its

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[3]After the September 17 debate on Home Rule (where the Unionists walked out of the House in protest) Asquith and Law prevented any further open debate on the Government's conduct of the war, that is, until after the formation of the first Coalition. A.J.P. Taylor, English History: 1914- 1945 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), pp. 16- 17.

[4]It might also be noted that the UVF organization formed an Ulster Division in the early stages of the war and was almost completely wiped out in the trenches, thus further reducing both the significance and influence of Ulster on the Home Rule debate in London. See A.T.Q. Stewart, The Ulster Crisis, pp. 22- 24, for details of the episode.

own views about how the war could and ought to be won.[5] The Unionist critique centered around Asquith's lack of drive and initiative. If Britain intended to win the war, the Committee was convinced that the government would have to begin implementing vigorous controls over trade, industry, and manpower. What is more, to Hewins and his Tariff Commission staff, the war was a once in a lifetime opportunity to become imperially self-sufficient.[6]

In the long run the UBC and other devices designed to placate opposition and channel Unionist backbench criticism were doomed to failure. In May 1915, with the Dardanelles expedition in ruins and the shell controversy in full bloom, the party at last agreed to join in a coalition government. The formation of the coalition was a welcome relief to Asquith and his liberal colleagues. For while the Unionist party now shared responsibility for the vicissitudes of war, Unionist leaders still had very little say in its conduct. Out of the six most important Cabinet positions, Unionists only received one, and Law himself was relegated to the Colonial Office. The fact that six out of eleven members of the War Cabinet were Unionists did not carry much weight either, for the War Cabinet was extremely inefficient and its decisions had to be approved by the full Cabinet. In the

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[5]During the war years the Unionist War Committee grew both in size and importance and also helped the party to develop a distinct approach to the management of the war. G.C. Weber, The Ideology of the British Right: 1918-1939 (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986), pp. 25. See also Turner, British Politics in the Great War, pp. 83- 86.

[6]J.H. Grainger, "Between Balfour and Bonar Law," in The Conservative Leadership, ed. Donald Southgate, pp. 179.

long run the new arrangement in Parliament did not, indeed could not, silence those Unionist backbenchers who believed that Asquith and his philosophy of government were fundamentally unsuited for the prosecution of a World War.[7]

The Unionist component of the Coalition Government did help to bring about a few important changes in the way the war was being run. Most importantly, the party helped to move the country toward compulsion and national conscription, and away from Free Trade.[8] These innovations did not, however, mollify Unionist backbench opinion, and throughout 1916 Law steadily lost influence over his own parliamentary party. By June a significant number of Unionist M.P.s had already become accustomed to voting against the Government on a wide range of issues. The Unionist War Committee, organized by Carson for a more vigorous conduct of the war, became the natural focus of backbencher frustration, and unlike the Unionist Business Committee which had preceded it, the UWC was entirely outside the control of the party leadership. The debate over the disposal of enemy assets in Nigeria allowed Carson and the UWC to test their strength on distinctly favorable grounds. When it came to a vote, Law managed to persuade a narrow majority of Unionist

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[7]Even in the short run there were criticisms from the Unionist backbenchers who thought, according to Lord Beaverbrook, that the Government "...should not have been saved, even in part." Men and Power: 1917-1918 (London: Hutchinson, 1956), pp. 133-134.

[8]Moving the country away from Free Trade was itself an accomplishment. In the early phases of the war Runciman, then acting as the President of the Board of Trade, had told the Commons that "...no government action could overcome economic laws and any interference in those laws must end in disaster." A majority of the Liberal Cabinet agreed with him. Cited by A.J.P. Taylor, English History, pp. 15.

M.P.s to reject Carson's motion, but he was only able to do so by appealing for national unity.[9]

The frontal assault of the Unionist War Committee had for the moment failed to topple either Law or the Coalition Government, but the issues that had been raised during that assault remained unresolved. Realizing this, Law now joined forces with Lloyd George and Carson and helped to bring down the Government and turn Asquith out of office. The Lloyd George Coalition Government which emerged from the wreckage of the Asquith Coalition contained 33 members; less than half these, 15 in all, were Unionists. Yet this number does not accurately measure the change which had taken place. In fact, the new Government was now very closely aligned with the Unionist party, both in its distribution of important offices and in its commitment to a powerful war cabinet.

Unionists continued to support the Lloyd George Coalition until the end of the war. The secession of Henry Page Croft and the few Diehards that were willing to join his National party [10]hardly put a dent into the community of interests that had grown up overnight between the Coalition and the Unionist party. The only serious threat to the Coalition came as a result of Lloyd George's disputes with Haig and Wilson in 1917- 1918. But here

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[9]The UWC was also ranged against the Government over the Government's July 1916 Irish settlement, and although Carson supported the Coalition in this instance, Bridgeman, a Junior Whip, estimated that if the settlement came to a vote only 60 percent of the parliamentary party could have been reluctantly persuaded to accept it. John Turner, British Politics and the Great War, pp. 116.

[10]See William Rubinstein's "Henry Page Croft and the National Party: 1917-1922," Journal of Contemporary History, 9(1974), pp. 129- 148.

again, Unionists never allowed their sympathy for the military to undermine their faith in the Government's ability to wage war. At the Maurice debate the Unionists voted to sustain the Government in overwhelming numbers. Even the UWC decided to back Lloyd George in his hour of need.[11] UWC members did so, not because they believed Lloyd George was innocent of Maurice's allegations, but because they trusted his ability to wage aggressive war against Germany.

As the war drew to a close Unionists began to prepare for their first general election in just under eight years. party leaders had reason to be confident about the election's outcome. After all, the party, which had survived the war intact, was now in the process of guiding the nation to a victorious peace. The decision to continue the Coalition into peacetime was a natural one, and one that did not create a great deal of controversy.[12] Unionists accepted Lloyd George's leadership in peacetime in part because they were eager to exploit Lloyd George's immense prestige during the election campaign. The continuation of the Coalition might not have been accomplished, however, if Lloyd George had not informed Law that he was prepared to stick fairly closely to the Unionist platform. For one thing, Lloyd George explicitly accepted the principle of Imperial Preference, though he would

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[11]Carson, however, did make an attempt to turn the UWC against the Government. See Lord Beaverbrook, Men and Power, pp. 259.

[12]Davidson, Law's personal secretary, has argued that Lloyd George might have led the Unionist party itself if he had set out to do so in 1917. He could have done so, Davidson contends, because the Unionist party could never have resisted a "national" leader during wartime. Robert Rhodes James, Memoirs of a Conservative: J.C.C. Davidson's Memoirs and Papers, 1910- 1937 (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969), pp. 58- 59.

not go so far as to endorse food taxes. For another, the Prime Minister promised never to coerce Ulster into accepting the rule of a Dublin Parliament. On Welsh Disestablishment he was more circumspect, but he did agree to look into a number of the Bill's financial clauses at a later date. As a Welsh non-conformist who had been one of the Bill's principal supporters before the war, he could not reasonably be expected to do much more than this. His general policy statement, though appropriately vague, was also in accord with the Unionist political tradition. "If an election were to take place," he wrote,

> "...My fundamental object will be to promote the unity and development of the British Empire and the nations of which it is composed, to preserve for them the position of influence and authority in the conduct of the world's affairs which they have gained by their sacrifices and efforts in the cause of human liberty and progress, and to bring into being such conditions of living for the inhabitants of the British Isles as will secure plenty and opportunity to all."[13]

Obviously, the priorities of the Lloyd George Coalition would not be the same priorities that the Unionist party had carried with it into the war. But this did not worry Law or any of the other important figures in the Unionist hierarchy. Indeed, most Unionists believed that in the wake of the Bolshevik Revolution the Unionist party would have to operate on a wider political front than it had at any time before the war.[14] The old

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[13]Quoted by Robert Blake, The Unknown Prime Minister, pp. 385- 386.
[14]G.C. Weber, The Ideology of the British Right, pp. 16.

Edwardian electoral base of Unionist voters was apparently too narrow to fend off the challenges of the new era. The threat from organized Labour and Communist Russia, while not yet fully developed, posed a serious and abiding threat to the political and economic welfare of the British Empire, and one that could best be confronted by a union of the two parties which were, generally speaking, in favor of upholding the national status quo. In the words of Oliver Stanley:

> "The future seems to me as if it would have no room for any parties except Constitutionalists and Socialists. It would be very stupid, I think, to split the forces of Constitutionalism, and to spend time, that ought to be devoted to strengthening our discipline and discharging our duties, arguing about the origins of Toryism and Whiggery....our first task is to enlighten the electorate on the great differences that separate Constitutionalism from Revolutionism."[15]

Also, many Unionists believed that the great sacrifices that had been made by ordinary citizens during the war required a brand new approach to politics. In other words, if Lloyd George wanted to develop a positive program to reinforce Tariff Reform, the war itself would justify many of those reforms.[16] The

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[15]Quoted by Harold Begbie, The Conservative Mind (London: Mills and Boon, 1924), pp. 142- 143.

[16]Not everyone agreed that the war had made the Unionist party more progressive. Stanley Baldwin said the 1918 Parliament was filled with "hard-faced men who looked like they had done well out of the war," and Northcliffe thought there were only 20 real progressives in the whole parliamentary party. Northcliffe to Dawson, 1 December 1918. The History of the Times, Vol. 3 (London: Office of The Times, 1952), pp. 455- 457. See K.O. Morgan's Consensus and Disunity: the Lloyd George Coalition, 1918- 1922 (Oxford: Claredon, 1979) for a defense of the Coalition's progressive credentials.

difficult business of national reconstruction, of creating a "fit country for heroes to live in," could not be conducted without certain modifications in the Unionist program. In the words of Austen Chamberlain, the challenge of the postwar era demanded a "...a wider outlook and a broader union than can be found within the limits of a single party."[17]

With the assistance of Lloyd George and the Coalition Liberals the Unionists went on to win a stunning electoral victory over the Asquithian Liberals and the Labour party. The results of the election went a long way toward establishing the Unionist party as a governing party in its own right. In the new Parliament Unionists occupied over 338 seats out of a total of 707 seats; without representation from Sinn Fein those numbers represented a workable majority.[18] The moment of triumph was short-lived, however, because the Government was almost immediately confronted with industrial unrest, international tension, and a deteriorating situation in Ireland. Confronted with so many difficulties the Government stumbled from one crisis to another. In 1919 tensions within the Coalition inevitably began to surface. In April of that year 233 Unionist M.P.s sent a telegram to the Prime Minister while he was negotiating the peace settlement in Paris. The telegram criticized a few of Lloyd George's political appointments and urged him to stop running the government as if wartime conditions were still in effect. Thus far the only real

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[17] Donald Southgate, "Disraeli to Bonar Law," in The Conservatives, ed. Lord Butler, pp. 252.

[18] Charles Mowat, Britain Between the Wars (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1955), pp. 6.

bones of contention that had anything to do with policy were Lloyd George's stand on German reparations and Addison's housing schemes. These matters could be smoothed over easily enough, but in order to prevent the situation from repeating itself Lloyd George attempted to fuse permanently the Coalition Liberals and the Unionists into one party. Law consented to this proposal, as did a majority of the Unionist leaders, but only in order strengthen the Government's hand as it negotiated with the trade unions.[19] When the Coalition Liberals themselves rejected Lloyd George's proposal, Lloyd George's window of opportunity had closed. Probably it had never really been open in the first place. It is possible that the Unionist parliamentary party could have been persuaded to fuse with the Coalition Liberals, but it seems very unlikely that the Unionist party outside of Parliament would have gone along with the merger. At the party Conference of 1920 it was estimated that three-eighths of those in attendance were against the existence of the Coalition on principle; but even those who were in favor of the Coalition said that they were opposed to the Coalition's policies.[20]

Not surprisingly, the first Conservative attempt to take the Unionists out of the Coalition resulted from the Government's decision to negotiate an Irish treaty with Sinn Fein. In October 1921, Diehard backbenchers in the Commons tabled a motion of censure against the Government. The motion was soundly

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[19]Sir George Younger made the condition that Lloyd George's private campaign fund would have to be turned over to the Unionist Party as "gate money." Lord Beaverbrook, The Decline and Fall of Lloyd George (London: Collins, 1963), pp. 9.

[20]John Ramsden, The Age of Balfour and Baldwin, pp. 143- 144.

defeated, but in November the Diehards took their case to the Annual party Conference in Liverpool. According to one eye-witness, "Not since the great Liberal split over Home Rule in 1886 had feeling within a party reached the intensity evident among the Conservative politicians who poured into Liverpool on the eve of the National Unionist Conference of 1921."[21] Chamberlain, who had succeeded Law as leader of the party in March, won that battle too, but only after he had turned the Irish policy into an issue of confidence in his leadership. Next came a challenge from Colonel Gretton who, having already led the Diehard revolt in the Commons, sent a letter to the press on 22 February in which he expressed his deep misgivings about the party's participation in the Coalition:

> "It is evident that an effort is being made to merge the Conservative party and their organizations permanently in the Coalition, either by continuing the existing Coalition or under some new name...We are therefore of the opinion that the time has come when we should have a clear declaration from the leaders of the Conservative party as to their views of the future of the party that they have chosen to represent, and how far they are prepared to cooperate in the maintenance of a consistent Conservative policy, which, in our belief, can alone secure that stability and confidence in the Government of the country which has been its greatest asset in promoting the progress and welfare of the people. We would therefore appeal to all Conservatives in the country, who still believe in their principles, not to pledge to themselves to support any Coalition candidates until

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[21]Stanley Salvidge, Salvidge of Liverpool (Liverpool: Hodder and Stoughton, 1934), pp. 205. Cited in R.T. McKenzie, British Political Parties, pp. 86.

> the position of the party and its future policy are made clear."[22]

But what did Gretton or any of the Diehards mean when they implied that Coalitionism was not compatible with Conservatism? Aside from Ireland, how had Lloyd George's conduct in office betrayed the guiding principles of the Unionist party?[23] Insofar as policy was concerned, Lloyd George had failed to reform the House of Lords; failed to decrease public spending; failed to lower the income tax; failed to consult Unionist M.P.s over the constitutional status of India; and failed to enact Tariff Reform. Beyond that, Lloyd George had lowered the standards of public life by his personal and political amorality. The ultimate expression of the amorality that characterized Lloyd George's public life was to be found in his sale of honors to men of dubious distinction. One man on the Birthday Honors List, Sir Archibald Williamson, had been guilty of trading with the enemy during the war; another, Sir Samuel Waring, had made a fortune as a war profiteer. The scandals turned the rank and file of the party against Lloyd George and helped to generate animosity and indignation within the

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[22]Gleanings and Memoranda, March 1922, pp. 282. Cited by R.K. McKenzie, British Political Parties, pp. 91.

[23]It should be noted that Unionist sympathy for Ulster was not what it had been in 1914. As Younger told Law during the negotiations: "...there is a strong feeling that she ought in the interests of the Empire and of Great Britain, to make every reasonable concession to reach a settlement...there would, I believe, be an absolute revolt against Ulster if she showed any indisposition to move towards an arrangement." Younger to Law, 19 November 1921. Cited by Maurice Cowling, The Impact of Labour, 1920-1924: The Beginning of Modern British Politics (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1971), pp. 127.

parliamentary party. The Honors Scandal, which was vigorously debated in both Houses of Parliament, was the beginning of the end for the Coalition Government. A long string of by-election defeats helped to seal the Government's fate by taking away the Coalition's raison d'etre. If the Coalition could not even win elections anymore, what purpose did it serve?

As the Diehard revolt continued to spread in the constituencies, the coalitionists tried to forestall further criticism by calling for an immediate general election. Since the coalitionists assumed that no single party would be able to win a majority in its own right, they also assumed that the Coalition would be the only thing that could prevent Labour from taking power. But as things stood, the Unionists had their own majority and naturally the rank and file resented making any further sacrifices to their coalition partners. The decision to hold an election in conjunction with the Lloyd George Liberals was, therefore, an unfortunate one, and every senior party officials opposed it vehemently.[24] Younger, Sanders, Wilson, and Fraser, all struggled in vain to convince Austen Chamberlain that the decision to hold an election would destroy the unity of the party. The National Union responded to news of the impending election by calling for a special meeting of the Executive to consider whether the Unionist party would not be better off to leave the Coalition before the election rather than after it. Faced with an

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[24]It should be said that the decision to hold an election was taken in the midst of the Chanak crisis, which angered both the Diehards and many influential moderates (Bonar Law for instance). Before the war, Tories had usually sided against Greece in favor of Turkey. John Campbell, F.E. Smith, pp. 605.

embarrassing debate and a potentially fatal vote by the Executive of the National Union, Chamberlain decided to take his case to the parliamentary party. He did so at the famous Carlton Club meeting of 19 October 1922.

The results of the Carlton Club meeting are well known. When Chamberlain arrived at the meeting he was greeted by shouts of "Judas" and "Traitor." He was not discouraged, however, and when the meeting began the majority of the coalitionist ministers fully expected to be able to defeat a motion against the continuation of the coalition. The rebel M.P.s, for their part, were not at all confident of the meeting's outcome.[25] The Diehard contingent, which represented about one sixth of the 286 M.P.s in attendance, sat alone in order to protest the results of a vote they fully expected to lose. Chamberlain opened the meeting by telling his audience that the two coalition partners should cooperate with one another as they had in the past, though each candidate should "stand under his own party name, and should retain his own party loyalty unimpaired." He also stressed the socialistic threat from Labour and referred to a recent speech by Henderson which called for a capital levy, nationalization of the great industries, and the right to work or maintenance for every citizen. These were the policies of "quite the second largest party in the state" and they could only be defeated at the next election by the Coalition.[26] Interestingly, neither this speech nor Balfour's speech, which concentrated on

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[25]Keith Middlemas and John Barnes, Stanley Baldwin (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969), pp. 122.
[26]Lord Beaverbrook, The Decline and Fall of Lloyd George, pp. 200- 201.

loyalty to Chamberlain's leadership, made any mention of any of the specific party grievances that had made the Carlton Club meeting necessary in the first place. If fact, when Chamberlain reiterated his view that there were no significant differences of policy to divide the Coalition Liberals from the Unionists the statement was greeted with audible dissent.[27] All in all, the Coalition Unionists had not made a convincing case for the Coalition.

The most effective speeches against the Coalition were delivered by Baldwin and Bonar Law. Baldwin's speech was short--only eight minutes long--and to the point: Lloyd George was a "dynamic force" and a "dynamic force is a very terrible thing; it may crush you but it is not necessarily right."[28] Bonar Law's arguments were conducted in a similar vein. He feared for the unity of the party above all else. "I confess frankly," he said, "that in the immediate crisis in front of us I do attach more importance to keeping our party a united body than to winning the next election."[29] Law's speech was an emphatic argument against the continuation of the Coalition, but like Baldwin, he did not think that there were any outstanding points of principle or policy which separated the Coalition Government from the Conservative political tradition. In Law's own words:

> "Let me say at once of what I am afraid. I am an opportunist. I am not influenced as much as Sir

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[27]David Dutton, Austen Chamberlain: A Gentleman in Politics (Egerton: Ross Anderson, 1985), pp. 197.
[28]Keith Middlemas and John Barnes, Stanley Baldwin, pp. 123.
[29]Cited by Robert Blake, The Unknown Prime Minister, pp. 457.

> Henry Craig is by the difference of principle. There are things that are vital. On that there can be no comment. But life is a compromise, and if I had been in Mr. Chamberlain's position I think it is almost certain that I would have differed with a large section of our own party, apart altogether from other sections working with him."[30]

Still, if the Coalition Government survived much longer a new Conservative party would take the place of the old one. The tragedy of such a split would be that the new party would be much more reactionary than the old one. According to Law, it would "...be a repetition of what happened after Peel passed the Corn Law. The body that is cast off will slowly become the Conservative party, but it will take a generation before it gets back to the influence which the party ought to have."[31]

Bonar Law's speech helped to carry the rebel motion by a margin of 107 votes. Five days later Bonar Law had been confirmed both as Prime Minister and as leader of the Unionist party. Shortly thereafter the Unionists emerged from a general election with their own majority in the House of Commons. The party managers had had been right all along: the Unionist party could fight and win elections without the support of the Coalition Liberals. But how did the Unionist program differ from that

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[30]Cited by Robert Blake, The Unknown Prime Minister, pp. 457- 458. Law's personal secretary, Davidson, would later make this appraisal of Law's decision to break with the Coalition: "...Behind his simple and modest exterior he had a very deep subconscious strain of ambition: the Premiership had escaped him twice, and I think this did effect his ultimate decision..." Robert Rhodes James, Memoirs of a Conservative, pp. 126- 127. Whether or not this was his prime motivation, there were few concrete differences--outside of Chanak--which influenced his decision.

[31] Cited by Robert Rhodes James, Memoirs of a Conservative, pp. 138.

which had been propounded by the Coalition? The election campaign provided few clues. Baldwin, as the second most important man in the Government, set the tone of the whole campaign. According to Beaverbrook, Baldwin "...spoke with success. He said nothing sensational. He made no spectacular promises. He went before the electorate as a plain business man representing a plain business Government out to do a solid job of work."[32] Bonar Law's own election manifesto promised to do no more than provide the country with "tranquility and stability both at home and abroad so that free scope can be given to the initiative and enterprise of our citizens."[33] Apparently, Law believed that this in itself represented a break with the past. After the election Law would be even more explicit about the nature of the new Government when he told his ministers that even if the new Government was no better than its predecessor, at least it would give the nation a "change and a fresh start."[34] Naturally, there was some speculation, both during and after the election campaign, that the new Government would move further to the right once the Diehards had been given the chance to exert their influence in the Government. This prediction was not born out by events. Neither during the election nor afterwards did Diehards have a significant influence over Government policy.[35]

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[32]Lord Beaverbrook, Decline and Fall of Lloyd George, pp. 218.

[33]David Kinnear, The Fall of Lloyd George, pp. 221.

[34]The Times, 24 October 1922. Cited by David Kinnear in The Fall of Lloyd George, pp. 158.

[35]In any case, the Diehards no longer had a coherent pattern of beliefs. That is to say, with the exception of the Carlton Club resolution the Diehards no longer voted en bloc. They were deeply divided on every major policy that

On Ireland, Welsh Disestablishment, Lords Reform, and Tariff Reform, the Government carried out exactly the same policies that had been pursued by Lloyd George.[36]

As it turned out, the Carlton Club meeting had a profound impact on Conservative ideology in the postwar world, but only insofar as it led to the rapid advancement of men like Stanley Baldwin and Neville Chamberlain. The fact that Bonar Law replaced Austen Chamberlain and Lloyd George was of little account in and of itself. Bonar Law had proven to be a sober administrator and a good party leader, but his negative political vision, while never doctrinaire, did little to help adapt Conservatism to a rapidly changing world. In any case, Law was neither an active legislator (like Neville Chamberlain) nor a visionary (like Baldwin). Law died before he had been given the chance to change the course of British Conservatism, but even if he had lived it is doubtful whether he could have helped the party to come to terms with either the rhetoric of socialism or the reality of practical social reform.

What Law did do was put the party in a strong position to overcome every immediate threat to its growth and development. He did so by implicitly repudiating many of the Diehard attitudes he had been associated with before the war. Law's natural instinct to preserve as much of Britain as could be preserved was not impaired by the war, but in 1922 Law self-consciously

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was under consideration by the Government. G.K. Weber, The Ideology of the British Right, pp. 23.

[36]And in fact, Bonar Law went to a great deal of trouble to pass the Irish Treaty before its December 6 time limit had elapsed. Lord Randolph Churchill, Lord Derby: "King of Lancashire" (London: Heinemann, 1959), pp. 489.

avoided anything which might endanger civil peace or parliamentary government. This was of course a noteworthy achievement, but the Unionist leader did little more than accept the changes that had been brought on by the First World War. It was the war, after all, and not the personal influence of Law or anyone else in the Unionist hierarchy, which rendered many of the antediluvian Diehard concerns unattractive and irrelevant to the rank and file of the Unionist party. Only the terrible bloodletting of the war could have made the possibility of an unending conflict in Ireland unacceptable to a majority of Unionists. Only the rise of revolutionary Bolshevism occasioned by the war could have convinced a majority of Unionists that the controversy over the House of Lords was less important than the controversy over capitalism and parliamentary government. In the final analysis, the Diehards lost influence over the Unionist leadership because their policies and attitudes were unrealistic in the contest of reconstruction politics. In Ireland, India, and Britain's own coal mines Diehards were in favor of simple, not to say blind, coercion. In foreign affairs, Diehards were in favor of an unending war against the Russian Communists, a huge indemnity against Germany, and scrapping the naval agreement with America. Moreover, in the words of Morgan, all their proposals were laced with the flavor of "class war."[37] By and large the whole Diehard agenda, an agenda which might well have led the party to electoral victory in 1915, flew in the face of Britain's experience with world war.

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[37]K.O. Morgan, Consensus and Disunity, pp. 251.

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