

THE PROGRESSIVE ALLIANCE AND THE RISE OF LABOUR, 1903-1922 POLITICAL CHANGE IN INDUSTRIAL BRITAIN



Samantha Wolstencroft



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1903–1922

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Political Change in Industrial Britain

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*To my husband Julian and in memory of my mother Kathy Frost
(1949–1981)*

PREFACE

There exists an enormous literature on the causes of political change in Britain in the period immediately prior to and after the First World War. The realignment that saw the demise of the Liberals as a party of government and the subsequent rise of the Labour Party shaped British politics for the remainder of the twentieth century. It is unsurprising that the subject has fascinated political historians for many years, and there have been a variety of ways in which they have attempted to explain the process by which Labour emerged as the principal opposition to the Conservatives while the Liberals collapsed to third-party status. Some have emphasised social and economic change, others have prioritised political circumstances and what might be described as ‘accidental factors’. It is unlikely there will ever be complete consensus in relation to the precise causes of such a reversal in political fortunes. *The Progressive Alliance and the Rise of Labour, 1903–1922: Political Change in Industrial Britain* evaluates electoral politics in two of Britain’s leading industrial centres, Manchester and Stoke-on-Trent. The book is the first to focus specific attention upon the politics of the Progressive Alliance, the informal, though critically important, electoral arrangement between the Liberal and Labour parties. It explores the character, development and long-term viability of such an electoral alliance and considers the difficulties faced by the early Labour Party in its attempt to gain a foothold within the political landscape.

No single study has examined in detail both Liberal and Labour politics in Manchester, Britain’s leading industrial city, during this critical period; the political history of Stoke-on-Trent has been similarly neglected.

Examination of both these localities, however, provides a valuable insight into political alignment and electoral politics in Britain before and after the upheaval of war. Detailed comparative analysis of two urban areas is particularly useful for a number of reasons. It allows for a thorough and contextualised understanding of political change during the early twentieth century. Drawing upon extensive empirical evidence, the detailed local study helps to prevent an overly determinist account of political change which has a tendency to present party performance as simply the product of changing social and economic circumstances and national developments. It also helps to prevent a reading of politics where political change is perceived as a consequence of virtually autonomous processes, such as the impact of national leadership. The health of local organisations has to be seen as a critical factor in contextualising the debate concerning the national strength, or otherwise, of political parties. Local networks, such as the party associations and trade unions, were significant mechanisms of political communication and were of critical importance for both the efficiency of national organisation and in terms of mobilising popular support. Local political culture was also of considerable significance.

The book examines the evolving character of the political parties in the decade before the First World War, in particular that of the Liberal Party and the new Labour Party, the significance of candidates and the interrelationship between national issues and local political culture. Political historians have traditionally tended to concern themselves with 'high politics' and political leadership at the centre. A principal objective of this book is to show how individual candidates were of critical importance in shaping the political agenda, influencing political change on the ground and in mobilising party support. The book examines campaign speeches across both parliamentary and municipal elections. Very few studies have provided a detailed evaluation of municipal elections and council politics in the early twentieth century; given that much of Labour's early activity focused upon local government, this appears to be a significant omission within the literature. This book examines electoral strategy and party performance at the municipal level and explores the developing character of council politics before and after 1914.

The impact of the experience of war upon the political parties was enormous and the relationship between the two left-of-centre parties changed forever. By 1922, the economic context and disillusionment with the political status quo encouraged many voters in Britain's industrial heartlands to desert the Liberal Party. This enabled Labour to build upon and

consolidate its electoral position. In this book I recognise the power of politics within the electoral process: the significance of issues and the candidates' abilities to advocate party policy.

Samantha Wolstencroft

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A book of this kind relies heavily on the work of many other writers and I am indebted to all those cited within the first chapter. Two historians, however, stand out as having monumental importance in the historiography of the early Labour Party, and the work of both was critical in igniting my interest in the subject. I would like to express my considerable gratitude to the late Professor Duncan Tanner who was always exceptionally generous with his time and provided tremendous encouragement in my early research. I would like to thank sincerely Dr Ross McKibbin who very kindly read the manuscript and contributed generously with comments and advice. Many other people, in one way or another, have also contributed to this book. I would like to thank Professor Peter Barberis and Dr James Moore for their academic guidance, but more particularly for their long-term friendship. My colleagues within the Department of History, Politics and Philosophy at Manchester Metropolitan University have always been enormously supportive over the years and I am immensely grateful to Dr Nigel Hems, Dr Steve Hurst, Dr John Gibbons, Stewart Cowley and Dr Tony Adams. Equally, I would like to thank all of my politics students (past and present) at the Manchester Metropolitan University who every year are a joy to teach and a pleasure to know. I would like to express my gratitude to Dr Chris Godden, Professor David Dutton, Dr Mark Garnett, Professor John Garrard, the late Professor Sam Davies and the late Professor Howard Elcock who all read the manuscript in various stages of development and offered many helpful suggestions. Of course, any errors that remain are sadly my own. I would like to record a debt of thanks to the staff of the various research libraries and record offices in

Manchester, Stoke-on-Trent, Birmingham, Bristol and London, which are acknowledged in the reference lists. I would like to thank Emily Russell and Carmel Kennedy at Palgrave Macmillan for their considerable help in guiding me through the production process of the book. Thank you to Cynthia Berry for permission to use the front cover image. It has taken a number of years to produce this book and it would not have been possible without the exceptional support and practical contributions of my husband Julian. I would also like to put on record my immense admiration for many of the political activists (both Labour and Liberal) discussed within this book. Their drive and dedication to create a more humane and democratic political system which exists to serve the many and not the few was remarkable; some stood by their convictions when circumstances were by no means favourable to them. In 1922 one Labour candidate in Manchester told his audience that ‘something radically different must occur if life is to be worth living’. The energy and determination with which political activists fought for a ‘life worth living’ for the greater proportion of the population during the earlier twentieth century should continue to inspire us all. I hope what follows goes some way to providing an insight into the efforts of those activists.

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ABBREVIATIONS

BLU	Bradford Labour Union
FTL	Free Trade League
ILP	Independent Labour Party
LRC	Labour Representation Committee
MFGB	Miners' Federation of Great Britain
MLF	Manchester Liberal Federation
MPA	Manchester Progressive Association
MPU	Manchester Progressive Union
NDP	National Democratic Party
NPH	New political history
NSMF	North Staffordshire Miners' Federation
RPA	Ratepayers' Association
SDF	Social Democratic Federation

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction: Historians and the Decline of the Liberal Party

The collapse of the Liberal Party after 1918 and the subsequent rise of Labour remains one of the most important events in modern British political history. Few subjects have attracted more attention or debate. Such fascination is understandable, not least because the scale and speed of collapse was so dramatic. The turn of the twentieth century had seen the Liberal Party reinvent itself: the party's organisation had been overhauled and ideologically the period witnessed the emergence of pronounced Liberal radicalism, subsequently known as the New Liberalism. Throughout the process of reorganisation, the Liberal Party sought to focus upon the democratisation of its selection policy and new candidates tended to be younger and more radical than their predecessors. One might suggest that the early twentieth century saw the modernisation of British Liberalism.

At the same time, Britain saw the appearance of a new political movement. The impact of the formation of the Labour Representation Committee (from 1906, the Labour Party) on British politics was immense. Few could have predicted that just over two decades later this organisation would be in a position to form its first, albeit minority, government. During the 1900s both parties of the left, despite maintaining their own strict independence, sought to advance their electoral positions by way of a policy of cooperation, later known as the Progressive Alliance. Although the extent of its acceptance within both parties on the eve of war may be questioned, it seemed unlikely there would be an imminent and overwhelming restructuring of the political system: the significant 'rise' of

Labour at the expense of the Liberal Party. On the contrary, the Liberals appeared to be sustaining their position as a major electoral force. The party was returned to office with one of the most significant victories of modern times: four hundred seats and a majority of one hundred and thirty in the 1906 general election. The Labour Representation Committee could also afford to be satisfied after securing forty members in the new parliament. By 1924 these figures had all but reversed, with only forty Liberal MPs to nearly two hundred Labour. After 1918, the collapse of the Liberals to the status of a third party was swift and unrelenting; one contemporary observer went so far as to describe the political situation of the Liberal Party as a ‘holocaust’.¹ Nearly a century later, entirely satisfactory explanations for the decline of the Liberal Party and rise of Labour remain elusive.

The first major work examining the post-First World War fortunes of the Liberal Party appeared close to the time of the transformation itself: George Dangerfield’s *The Strange Death of Liberal England* set the tone of interpretation for the next three decades.² Dangerfield’s main contention was that the decline of the Liberal Party was a reflection of the wider collapse of Liberal political culture and the specific difficulties that arose during the pre-war period. After 1906 the Liberal Government had been confronted with an array of disaffected groups and political problems: trade unionists, the House of Lords, suffragettes, the Tariff Reform League and the Irish Question to name but a few. In embarking upon the radical course that it did, the Liberal Government, and party, managed to alienate itself from substantial sections of public opinion. These factors undermined the party’s energy and strength. Furthermore, there was the question of the emergence of the Labour Party with its demand for increased independent labour representation. For Dangerfield, British Liberalism was defunct by 1914 simply because it could not cope. Implicit in his assessment was a degree of inevitability about the ‘death’ of Liberal England and his overall conclusion was effectively that it was not strange at all but easily explained. Still in print today, *The Strange Death of Liberal England* was a pioneering work of its age. Dangerfield successfully identified four great crises omnipresent within Edwardian politics and society: workers, women, the aristocracy and the Irish Question. In his view, these ‘problems’ overwhelmed not just Edwardian Liberalism but the assumptions of ‘Liberal England’. He recognised, however, that the Labour Party was part of this culture and was as much at sea as the Liberals themselves. Dangerfield’s interpretation of Edwardian politics generated significant

debate and, in a sense, the importance of *The Strange Death of Liberal England* lies not necessarily in the strength of its argument, but in relation to the historical debate it helped to foster. Whilst historians today are generally sceptical about Dangerfield's array of events and the effects these had upon political change, particularly the extent to which the Liberals were unable to cope with the problems they encountered, it remains an important part of the historiography on Edwardian England.³

Interest in the decline of the Liberal Party was heightened from the 1960s, a period that coincided with the growth of social history alongside a predominance of left-leaning historians. Many of the new generation of historians became interested in debates surrounding the development of class consciousness during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that overlapped with the period of Liberal resurgence and decline. It was not surprising perhaps that some historians began to focus attention upon the transformation of the political parties during this period. The 'rise of Labour' approach was appealing for some historians because that party's 'onward march' could be presented as a victory of the working classes over elite intransigence with respect to their political rights.⁴ Labour historians and their perceptions of class consciousness, politicisation and political mobilisation became hugely influential in the debate surrounding the decline of the Liberal Party.⁵ For them it was important to highlight examples of independent working-class action that would serve to destroy the existing order. The collapse of the Liberal Party could be cited as a case in point. Some historians also suggested that Nonconformists and also business interests were beginning to move away from the Liberals and this became an even more pronounced feature after the party had begun to court the working-class vote more directly.⁶

The publication of Ross McKibbin's *The Evolution of the Labour Party* in 1974 represented a significant turning point in the historiography of the Labour Party and ignited considerable debate.⁷ McKibbin's work suggested that the seeds of Labour growth were already in place before 1914. Labour's rise was assured for a number of reasons including the growth of an acute sense of working-class class consciousness, trade union expansion and the eventual extension of the franchise. Other factors such as better party organisation, continuity of personnel and appeal of policy also served to underpin Labour's advance; as McKibbin concluded, 'everything pointed to Labour's enduring Ante-bellum character'.⁸ For McKibbin, the franchise factor (the limited nature of the parliamentary franchise) blocked an immediate advance because the party's natural constituency was itself

disenfranchised. His core argument, therefore, was that war acted as an accelerant on an already established process. The implication of his research was that the Labour Party existed as a 'sleeping monster' on the political landscape in the decade after its formation. In collaboration with Matthew and Kay, McKibbin later argued even more explicitly that, had there been a wider franchise, the decline of the Liberal Party would have been even more rapid.⁹ Other historians perceived the failure of New Liberalism to stem the tide of an ascendant Labour Party. In his study of the West Riding, Laybourn portrayed the local Liberal organisation as 'aggressive' and 'unwilling to compromise'.¹⁰ Similarly, Lancaster suggested that Ramsay MacDonald's 1906 victory in Leicester heralded 'the beginning of the end for the Liberal Party' in that area.¹¹ McKibbin has since modified his position, stating that he no longer considers 'the Edwardian system as already disintegrating'.¹² His view now is that the Edwardian political system was based upon an 'equipoise in balance', critically one 'delicate enough ... to be severely unbalanced by events which began with the outbreak of the First World War'.¹³

During the late 1960s and early 1970s, a number of historians began to argue that structural and class-based interpretations of the collapse of the Liberal Party exaggerated Liberal disintegration before the outbreak of the First World War. They suggested that the Liberals in fact remained remarkably robust in most respects: ideology, organisation and electoral appeal. Having passed through troubled times, primarily because of the Home Rule Crisis, the party's electoral victories from 1906 confirmed that it had fully recovered. In *Downfall of the Liberal Party* (1968), Trevor Wilson argued that it was only the war itself that 'initiated a process of disintegration' within the Liberal Party which, by 1918, had 'reduced it to ruins'.¹⁴ He accepted that the Liberal administrations prior to 1914 had encountered significant difficulties (Ireland, the constitutional crisis and industrial unrest in particular) but, even if these factors represented 'problems' and the Liberal Party might soon be out of office, it did not mean the party *itself* was doomed.¹⁵ In a famous analogy, Wilson likened the Liberals to 'a sick man run over by a rampant omnibus';¹⁶ the sickness, however, was not life-threatening and suggestions to the contrary were wildly exaggerated. In 1971, Roy Douglas's *The History of the Liberal Party* supported Wilson's proposition that the Liberal Party had remained strong before the outbreak of war.¹⁷ Douglas claimed that what shattered the Liberal Party most of all was a series of 'accidental' factors that arose both during and after the war and even went so far as to suggest that, if

any party was in a state of decline before 1914, it was in fact the Labour Party. Thus, in two studies that transformed historical analysis of the decline of the Liberal Party, both Wilson and Douglas contended that the Liberals were essentially in good shape before 1914 and in no sense in a state of decline.¹⁸

In *Lancashire and the New Liberalism*, Clarke appeared to be an even stronger advocate of pre-war Liberal strength.¹⁹ His detailed examination of Lancashire contended that the Liberal Party had become the most powerful medium for political change and argued that it possessed substantial electoral appeal based upon traditional principles such as free trade and individualism whilst incorporating a new, more reformist and collectivist ideology most clearly expressed within the New Liberalism. In short, Liberalism entered the twentieth century re-energised and attentive to the needs of a mass electorate; also it was unwise to suggest that the fledgling Labour Party unduly challenged the Liberals or that the arrival of Labour would inevitably be detrimental to the party's long-term prospects. On the contrary, Clarke argued that the Labour Party was fading before the appeal of the New Liberalism. In essence, Clarke's argument appeared to suggest that before 1914 the Liberals had successfully out-trumped Labour. This evaluation of Edwardian politics represented a radically different interpretation to that of the Labour historians.

Paul Thompson's study of London suggested that the position of the Liberal Party in the capital was less secure.²⁰ He demonstrated that there had been a sharp decline in the fortunes of the Liberals in London after 1892 with factors such as the lack of a viable working-class electoral base and organisational and financial problems all contributing to the Liberal malaise. He also made the significant claim that the early twentieth-century Liberal revival was to a large extent issue-based and that once these issues began to lose their political effect the position of the Liberals would become increasingly uncertain. Rather than reinventing itself as a classless party of reform, Thompson suggested that it was specific issues, such as free trade, education, trade union grievances and Home Rule, that helped the party pick up the Nonconformist, trade union and Irish vote in 1906 and that it was thereafter 'held together by success'. Thompson therefore concluded that the post-1906 Liberal revival was a 'deceptive illusion'; despite the apparent electoral success, the party itself was 'rotting at its roots'.²¹

Since 1990, a number of studies have contributed enormously to our understanding of British political development during the early twentieth

century, most notably Duncan Tanner's *Political Change and the Labour Party*, which provided an exhaustively researched examination of Liberal and Labour politics during this critical period. Tanner concluded that, like social and economic change, political change was fragmented and complex. He illustrated how early twentieth-century Liberalism was a broad reforming coalition and there were few signs before the outbreak of war that the party was in a state of decline. Tanner concluded, however, that there were problems connected with the composite nature of the Liberal Party because it meant that it could not easily adopt radical measures.²² It would not always be so easy to maintain unity within a party that in many ways possessed contradictory views. A key point of Tanner's analysis was that the split during the First World War proved fatal because existing problems had become more serious. Moreover, the rise of Labour could not be explained by reference to an increasing working-class consciousness (and similar propositions) because the Labour Party itself was a practical party with a practical programme. Like the Liberal Party, it was progressive and reformist and, after 1918, inherited the vacuum left by the collapse of the Liberals because it was not so dissimilar.

Tanner's study represented a major turning point in the historiography of early twentieth-century British politics because it demonstrated the complexities of political culture and electoral realignment. Based upon a number of detailed regional studies, Tanner's work also demonstrated how fragmented political developments were during the early twentieth century. Political change was highly regionalised; there was no uniform experience across the country. Earlier studies of the decline of the Liberal Party had been problematic because their scope had been too wide; their focus had been based too much upon national politics and thus they had not appreciated the extent of regional variation.

Evaluation of the development of local politics is central to a more contextualised understanding of the respective positions of the parties during the early twentieth century. The 1990s saw an increase in the number of detailed local studies that appeared to confirm Tanner's view that there was no uniform experience. Savage has raised a number of critical points in relation to the local study, particularly that it must be approached cautiously.²³ The central argument might be weakened if the locality has been used simply to prove a point. Furthermore, prior conceptions of a conclusion tend to produce selectivity in approach. If approached carefully, however, the detailed local study can prevent an overly determinist account of political change which presents party performance as essentially the product of

changing social and economic circumstances and national developments. The local study is also useful in preventing a reading of politics where political change is perceived as a consequence of autonomous processes, such as the impact of national political leadership. The health of local organisations has to be seen as a critical factor in contextualising the debate concerning the national strength, or otherwise, of political parties. Furthermore, it is essential to appreciate from the outset the sheer extent to which local politics touched people's everyday lives during the early twentieth century. To use Savage's apt expression, 'the local was the bed-rock of political life'.²⁴ Indeed, Savage's own detailed study of the 'dynamics' of working-class politics in Preston successfully stresses the importance of the local dimension and suggests that political development there remained almost exclusively influenced by local factors right up to 1939.²⁵ At the turn of the twentieth century, politics remained largely shaped by local issues and personalities. Political clubs, trade unions and other local networks were essential means of political participation at the local level. For the Labour Party in particular, these were important mechanisms of political communication and were crucial for the efficiency of national organisation. Local political culture was of considerable significance and remained so.

The local study gives us a more thorough understanding of the period under consideration. It allows us to examine popular responses to policy in microscopic detail and to assess the changing character of the political parties themselves by evaluating aspects such as the character of candidates, changes in ideological approach and developments at the municipal level. Given that much of the activity of the early Labour movement focused attention upon local government, it seems appropriate to evaluate Labour's role and influence in municipal politics in some detail. Although there has been a proliferation in local studies of political change during the early twentieth century, there have been relatively few studies providing comparative examination of a number of localities.²⁶ Like the local study, comparative historical analysis needs to be approached carefully; simplistic comparisons between areas might not, in fact, prove very much at all.

A number of regional studies have suggested that previous interpretations of political change in the early twentieth century overestimated the extent to which the Labour Party had progressed by 1914. Pugh and Purdue, for example, concluded that prior to 1914 the Labour Party's progress was extremely limited in the localities they evaluated.²⁷ Others, however, including Thompson, Hill, Laybourn and Lancaster have claimed

that Labour had made identifiable progress in the areas they examined.²⁸ Yet one of the key features of Edwardian politics was its local variety; voters remained responsive to local issues as much as they did to national questions. Nonetheless, examination of politics at the constituency level provides an invaluable insight into how the political parties responded to the challenges they faced and, equally, how voters reacted to the issues with which they were presented.

A number of historians have made valuable contributions to our understanding of political change prior to 1914 by detailed examination of Liberal and Labour politics in various localities across Britain. Some have supported Clarke's analysis that the Liberal Party was gaining ground in working-class communities before 1914. In his study of the North East of England, Purdue concluded that the area remained dominated by the Liberal Party after 1906 and the limited presence Labour did possess was only in consequence of Liberal acquiescence.²⁹ Pugh's study of Yorkshire also claimed that the Liberals remained remarkably successful within the context of a predominantly working-class electorate; Labour's share of the popular vote never reached more than 20% and the party performed badly in the one by-election it chose to contest.³⁰ More significantly, Pugh found that across the West Riding mining communities as a whole, Labour never polled more than half of the miners' vote. Morgan concluded that among the Welsh mining communities, Lib-Labism remained the 'dominant and unifying creed' and it seemed unlikely there would be a significant Labour advance in the immediate future.³¹ Stead's examination of Wales supported Morgan in contending that Liberalism remained strong, although he did suggest that Labour's improving organisation and growing presence in municipal government there might have laid the foundations for future development.³² Significantly, Pugh, Purdue, Morgan and Stead agreed that relations between the two progressive parties in these particular areas were deteriorating by 1914. In Scotland, too, evidence suggests that an imminent Labour breakthrough seemed unlikely. Fraser concluded that Labour's progress north of the border, especially within the mining districts, was sluggish; the party's organisation remained weak and popular support was limited.³³ Fraser cited poor performance in a number of by-elections before 1914 as evidence to support the assertion that Labour's progress was tentative to say the least and, ultimately, that Liberalism demonstrated a remarkable ability to retain its traditional support among the Scottish industrial working classes.

Lawrence's study of popular politics in Wolverhampton before 1914 highlights the complexities of political change before the outbreak of war. He contends that there 'is little reason to believe that structural changes within the economy and society had created a new base for class politics' and even questions the extent to which Labour saw itself as representing a 'new type of party', the basis of which was working-class solidarity.³⁴ In Wolverhampton, Labour had to compete with 'highly-developed Liberal and Conservative appeals to the putative interests of the English working man'; furthermore, its activists were in fact only 'marginally more representative' than the party's opponents.³⁵ For Lawrence, factors retarding a wider Labour advance in the area included the party's inability to exploit the 'politics of place' successfully because it was too constrained by cooperation with official Liberalism.³⁶ His work also suggested that the Labour Party in Wolverhampton suffered a further disadvantage in being perceived as too reliant on 'outsiders', a natural consequence of local organisational weakness. Other studies have presented a similar picture of the problems Labour faced in constructing a distinct and viable political appeal before 1914. Davies's evaluation of the development of the Labour Party in Liverpool, for example, demonstrates the considerable difficulties the fledgling party faced when confronted with weak unionisation, a predominantly poor population and religious division.³⁷

Regional and national studies of Liberal and Labour politics have also illustrated the complexity of progressive cooperation. A number of historians have contended that the Progressive Alliance appeared to be on the verge of breaking down by 1914. Petter's study, for instance, pointed to a number of by-elections before 1914 as evidence that the Progressive Alliance had started to break down by that point.³⁸ Suggesting that conflict at by-elections served to undermine an already fragile alliance in the constituencies, he concluded that there ultimately existed a significant contrast between relations in Parliament and those in many areas across the country.³⁹ Bernstein's examination of Norwich, Leicester and Leeds supported Petter's findings in highlighting the considerable difficulties the Liberals faced in 'containing' Labour within the framework of a 'progressive alliance' because in many areas there simply no longer existed the conviction to maintain the policy.⁴⁰ Bernstein suggested that Labour candidates, particularly at the municipal level, appeared more willing to stand as out-and-out socialists and therefore asserted their distinctiveness from the Liberals more obviously. This served to undermine prospects for the survival of the Progressive Alliance and, as Bernstein contends, the Liberals

were in any case 'unable to come to terms with a movement which insisted upon espousing an ideology [often] hostile to their own'.⁴¹

Tanner's study of political change prior to 1918 adopted a very different approach to the politics of the Progressive Alliance. He concluded that the Alliance remained intact in 1914 and that prospects for continued cooperation between the left-of-centre parties appeared more positive than some previous interpretations might have implied.⁴² He suggested that an 'immediate and fundamental realignment of forces' appeared unlikely.⁴³ For Tanner, the Liberals' inability to break the hold of the Conservatives in shaping working-class opinion in many parts of the country, alongside the existence of a genuinely social-democratic outlook, served to encourage and consolidate the party's willingness to cooperate with Labour. Whilst Labour's 'half-formed appeal' to specific groups remained 'insufficient to make it a major anti-Tory party in the country as a whole',⁴⁴ the fledgling party's strengths ultimately 'complemented those of its progressive ally'.⁴⁵ For Tanner, these factors ensured that, for the time being at least, neither party was likely to opt out of a general framework of an electoral alliance. What changed the political situation completely was the experience of war.⁴⁶

In his more recent *Parties and People: England 1914–1951*, McKibbin provides a new interpretation of the character and long-term viability of the Progressive Alliance in 1914. Whilst he recognises that the Progressive Alliance existed as a central plank of the stability of the Edwardian political system and that cooperation with Labour 'upheld the Liberal Party' throughout its various crises after 1906, he concludes that such an alliance had a pronounced sense of 'impermanence' about it.⁴⁷ Essentially, McKibbin's argument is that it is imperative to recognise that an alliance between the Liberal and Labour parties was not in reality 'based upon a long-term programmatic affinity ... but fundamentally on what proved to be the unfinished business of nineteenth century politics'.⁴⁸ The Progressive Alliance was not ideological, that is based on a progressive and radical type of politics, but about the 're-emergence of issues which most people thought had been settled',⁴⁹ aspects including the defence of free trade, the Nonconformist conscience and industrial rights.⁵⁰ When, after 1918, these unifying issues disappeared or were superseded by others, the Progressive Alliance fell apart. It is hard not to see the logic in this argument.

The 1918 general election recorded one of the most sweeping victories in modern British political history. Given its importance, it is perhaps surprising that it has been relatively neglected within the historiography.

Wilson, Turner and Morgan's studies of national politics and, in particular, the Liberal split have provided invaluable insight into the subject from this perspective,⁵¹ as have those examining the transformation of Labour during this critical period in the party's development.⁵² Only a limited number of studies have examined in detail the general election and its immediate aftermath at the local constituency level.⁵³ Many studies of Liberal and Labour politics at the constituency level have also tended to neglect the immediate post-war period (1918–1922), although it is arguably during this period that Liberal decline is most appropriately located.⁵⁴

Most historians agree that war critically damaged the Liberal Party. Its unity and organisation had been devastated and the conflict had a detrimental impact on Liberalism ideologically and culturally.⁵⁵ Wilson, however, suggests we should be careful how we view 'the decline of the Liberal Party', reminding us that the parties of the left (i.e. the Liberals and Labour combined) did not do as badly during the early interwar years as subsequent Conservative domination might suggest.⁵⁶ The critical difference was that electoral arrangements prior to 1914 had ensured maximum advantage from votes cast against the Conservative Party, whereas from 1918 Labour made a determined bid for power as a completely independent force. This served to undermine the viability of the Liberals as a potential governing force but, as Wilson rightly suggests, it also limited Labour's own chances of office in the immediate sense. Tanner argues that this was the origins of a three-party system but, given the effects of the British electoral system, the Liberals found themselves on the periphery. Parliamentary results, of course, never reflected total popular support.⁵⁷ Clarke suggested that organised Liberalism in Lancashire had been seriously undermined by the impact of war because the 'premises underpinning the progressive vote had been destroyed'.⁵⁸ The Liberal Party was simply no longer the 'best available instrument of progress'; by 1924, therefore, Lancashire Liberalism was only able to return MPs 'on the basis of a sort of nonconformist bastard Toryism'.⁵⁹

In his study of the Liberals, war and the franchise, Hart made the significant claim that pre-war Liberal voters formed the majority of the post-war Labour vote and that the principal reason for this was simply because the Liberals were no longer 'progressive' after 1918.⁶⁰ Both propositions are complex and not necessarily easy to determine. Turner offers a detailed and interesting examination of how new electors may have voted in post-war general elections. He suggests that, contrary to expectations, the higher the number of new voters, the lower the swing towards Labour. So,

rather than propelling Labour forward, Turner concluded that franchise reform in fact hindered the party considerably.⁶¹ This implies that trade union votes continued to form the bedrock of Labour's support and that the party did well primarily in areas where there was already an established presence. Equally, one would assume that issues and policy during and after 1918 formed an essential component of any transfer of allegiance from Liberal to Labour. Whether such factors as the presence of sizeable groups of trade unionists or local political culture and party activity were more or less significant will be central to the discussion of post-war political change in subsequent chapters. One key example concerns the voting behaviour of miners: Turner suggests that, more than anywhere, voters in the mining constituencies turned to Labour more strongly after 1918. The critical question is to what extent such transference of allegiance was connected to the experience of the war itself or to what extent it may be attributed to long-term trends. In his study of the miners and British politics, Gregory concluded that in many mining areas Labour's prospects before 1914 appeared 'reasonably fair' and it was clear that a new generation of leaders was becoming increasingly committed to Labour 'almost to a man'. Consequently, the position of the Liberals in these constituencies might have become less secure than it had been.⁶²

In a revision of his earlier analysis, McKibbin has reconsidered how the First World War affected British politics and evaluates how and why the experience of war changed the political landscape forever. War inevitably benefited the Conservatives and disadvantaged the Liberal Party. Yet as he demonstrates, the *experience* of war fundamentally served the Labour Party's 'ideological and tactical interests' not least because it settled the 'vexed question' of the party's relationship with the Liberals. Additionally, wartime policies and issues surrounding reconstruction were clearly more associated with Labour than any other party. War strengthened the position of the trade unions and, more crucially, turned the Conservatives and Labour into class parties. This was concurrent with increasing class homogenisation within both the working and middle classes.⁶³ McKibbin suggests that the fundamental impact of this process was to provide Labour and the Conservatives with an 'irreducible core of social support'. The Liberal Party, on the other hand, was not a class party and was consequently ill-positioned to attract widespread electoral appeal in the way it had in the past.

Historians have placed considerable emphasis upon the importance of sociological change and its role in electoral politics in the aftermath of the

First World War. They have contended that, above all else, class was fundamental to influencing political realignment after 1918.⁶⁴ The sociological approach to political history suggests a neatness of electoral development: essentially a more homogeneous working-class identity explains electoral change.⁶⁵ A notable advocate of this view was Henry Pelling, who saw the rise of the Labour Party as an inevitable ‘result of long-term social and economic changes which were simultaneously uniting Britain geographically and dividing her in terms of class’.⁶⁶ The social and economic consequences of the First World War have been the subject of intense historical debate. For many years, labour and social historians perceived the War as the instigator of considerable social and political change, since war, they claimed, created a more homogenised working class and served to encourage antagonistic class sentiments. These social changes, they contended, had a significant impact upon party politics and upon the voting behaviour of manual workers in particular. First published in 1965, Arthur Marwick’s *The Deluge* emphasised economic gains made by some of the working classes in the form of wage increases and new employment opportunities. War ‘tested old laissez-faire ideas [which] gave appeal and credibility to Labour’s aims’.⁶⁷ Other historians who supported Marwick’s interpretation include Waites (in a number of studies examining war, class and the working class), Winter (particularly with regards to living standards and health) and Cronin (in his important work *Labour and Society in Modern Britain*).⁶⁸ Explicit in the research of social and labour historians was the belief that socio-economic change during the war created a climate of dissatisfaction, raised expectations of entitlement and increased confidence about what government might achieve. All these factors served to propel Labour forward as the principal party of the industrial working classes.⁶⁹ Other historians though have highlighted the complex nature of socio-economic change and its relationship to the political transformation that occurred in the aftermath of the First World War.⁷⁰ In particular, a number of historians have provided a valuable insight into a range of occupational groups and specific industrial sectors. Their findings have questioned earlier assumptions about the precise impact of war upon the British working classes and suggest that the impact of war was less pronounced and uniform than traditional interpretations implied.⁷¹ Whilst war may have improved the position of some workers, it did not, they suggest, transform conditions for all, or in the process encourage feelings of repression and class antagonism across the entire working class. It has been suggested that, in the first instance, changes in national wage rates and living

standards (critical and commonly used measures of the impact of war) have always represented an unsatisfactory means of determining the real impact of war since they do not take into account the regional and sectoral nature of change.⁷² As Tanner points out it is imperative to recognise that the ‘*experience* of war was mixed and that the *interpretation* of that experience was equally variable’.⁷³ This meant that attitudes of workers towards the government and politics varied enormously and was entirely dependent upon the sector: the experience of workers in non-essential sectors such as consumer goods was far less favourable than for state-controlled industries. Here, as a number of historians have identified, workers experienced longer hours, poor conditions and insecure employment prospects.⁷⁴ In contrast, state-controlled industries delivered regular employment, higher wage increases and collective bargaining.⁷⁵ The contention that there was a common experience of work underpinning a uniform and oppositional class consciousness has gained little support among historians in recent years. It seems there existed a multitude of influences in relation to how class groups perceived themselves and the world around them.⁷⁶

The most significant assault upon a class-based approach to the political history of the first half of the twentieth century has been from Lawrence and Taylor.⁷⁷ They have argued that political historians should ‘pause and think’ before adopting an ‘electoral sociology’ approach, develop ‘a more contextualised and less concept-driven understanding of electoral behaviour in the past’ and adopt an approach which recognises the wide array of influences on voting behaviour.⁷⁸ Tanner has also made a significant contribution to the reassessment of the role of sociological change in political realignment in Britain.⁷⁹ He advocates the need to adopt a ‘fuller and [more] interdisciplinary analysis’ of the changes facilitating Labour’s electoral growth, and his own work suggests that Labour’s expansion was, in fact, ‘a long, drawn-out and incremental process which was incomplete [even] by 1931’.⁸⁰ Tanner suggests that, whilst social change created a ‘potentially encouraging new climate for Labour’, post-war expansion was not simply a result of the ‘inevitable outcome of class’; rather ‘Labour created its own expansion ... by learning to represent people’s needs’.⁸¹ As he writes, this may have created ‘a deep sense of political loyalty [in terms of class] but it was a gradual, partial and uneven process which was not determined by social and cultural forces alone’.⁸² Tanner stressed the importance of a more integrated assessment of political development, one that recognises the ‘power of politics’. Political events contributed significantly to

determining the fortunes of the parties, but that was only half the story; as Tanner states, Labour's breakthrough in 1918 had to be 'built into a firm political platform ... it had to prove itself as a practical party [and] meet the needs of a new electorate and a new set of social circumstances'.⁸³

For a number of historians, the Labour Party's expanding municipal representation before 1914 underpins their arguments for an inevitable, or likely, advance.⁸⁴ They have noted that Labour made an 'unbroken series of gains' between 1908 and 1914.⁸⁵ Moreover, had it not been for structural impediments such as the limited franchise and the complexity of registration laws, this expansion might have been even more rapid.⁸⁶ Others have questioned the extent to which the Labour Party had 'broken the mould' of municipal politics in Britain before 1914.⁸⁷ The extent to which the municipal franchise did in fact disadvantage Labour has also been questioned.⁸⁸ Tanner, for example, has dismissed the idea that the unenfranchised before 1914 might be perceived as a natural Labour bloc as neither 'sociologically plausible nor empirically sustainable'.⁸⁹ Davis's research has shown how registration laws and requirements relating to ratings no longer discriminated heavily against the working class; in fact, he suggests that the electorate in areas such as factory towns and poor inner-city slums became dominated by the working class.⁹⁰ Arguments concerning the municipal franchise existing as an obstacle to Labour's early progress are now approached with some caution.

The extent to which a Labour advance in municipal politics provides evidence for potential national realignment remains an area of debate. Irrespective of discussions surrounding the municipal franchise, a number of local studies have concluded that by 1914 Labour experienced difficulties in making progress in municipal representation; in some areas it appears the fledgling organisation had failed to obtain a foothold in municipal government. Others have concluded that, despite being incomplete, Labour's potential was clearly apparent; after all, obstacles such as the franchise, weakness of local organisation and finances could all change in time. In his study of municipal politics, Cook suggests that the Liberal Party had failed to achieve an effective electoral strategy at the municipal level and, in particular, had been unable to determine what ought to be done with respect to Labour. Significantly, Cook claims that in some places the Liberals had even begun to form alliances with the Conservatives in order to 'pre-empt' a Labour challenge, though he admits that apart from in a few industrial areas the Labour Party's progress remained tentative or non-existent.⁹¹

Consideration of municipal politics and the debate surrounding the decline of the Liberal Party and the rise of Labour has tended to focus primarily on the question of numerical expansion, that is the respective representation of the parties on the local authorities. In order to obtain a more thorough understanding of political change before and after 1914, it is equally important to examine council politics itself. Aspects such as the influence of the new Labour representatives on the councils, the degree of 'progressive' cooperation and the ideological position of the established parties (especially the Liberals) are all important when evaluating political change during the early twentieth century. Although overall control might have remained a distant prospect for the Labour Party before 1914, this should not necessarily be taken to imply that the new Labour groups remained peripheral.⁹² Evaluation of municipal politics is important in order to assess how Liberalism at the local level responded to the wider challenges it faced after the First World War. Historians such as Doyle have provided a valuable insight into the ways in which the Liberal Party in some areas continued to be a successful electoral force in local politics long after 1918.⁹³ Municipal performance presents a number of methodological problems as, for example, one is often not comparing like for like and localities' peculiarities can be more pronounced at this level. Nonetheless, local politics, in particular municipal elections, can provide a valuable insight into the parties' general progress in a given locality.⁹⁴ Given the frequency of the municipal contests, they also provide more opportunities to assess change in popular electoral preferences.

Recent years have seen the emergence of what has been termed the 'new political history' (NPH). This approach to the subject matter and methodology of the study of twentieth-century British politics has prompted re-evaluation of what constitutes political history and how the historian (as opposed to the political scientist) ought to go about examining it. The approach of the NPH is essentially a more holistic one in that 'new' political historians have sought to provide a more integrated analysis of 'high politics' (institutions and leadership) alongside aspects such as political culture, ideology and, in Fielding's words, 'how this related to the people at large'.⁹⁵ There is an obvious appeal to the approach of the NPH. Among other things, political history tended traditionally to be somewhat London-centric, was prone to neglecting the political importance of aspects such as local government and the regions and, as Readman suggests, was perhaps guilty of a 'narrow-minded cult of the archive'.⁹⁶ The NPH has aimed to avoid some of these pitfalls and has sought to understand more fully the

nature and development of the political parties across the country at the widest level. A critical aspect to emerge from the NPH has been to recognise that the ‘politics of place’, to use Tanner’s apt phrase, remained enormously significant well into the twentieth century. The detailed study of electoral politics and political change in specific localities such as those evaluated here provides an opportunity to explore the evolving character of English progressivism during a period of significant political change.

The extent to which the NPH offers an entirely innovative or radical approach to the study of twentieth-century British politics may be questioned. After all, the ground breaking work of writers such as Russell, Blewett, Cook and Thorpe between 1970 and 1990 set new parameters for historians considering electoral politics and political change during the earlier part of the twentieth century.⁹⁷ Influenced by the methodologies of ‘modern’ political science such as those pioneered by the Nuffield series, their analysis remained very much from a historian’s perspective. Even so, one might suggest that the NPH has encouraged a more contextualised understanding of political change as it developed.

Historians have tended to move away from structural and sociological explanations for the decline of the Liberal Party and the subsequent rise of Labour and have instead stressed a multitude of factors that influenced political change before and after the First World War. Aspects underpinning political change during this period continue to attract considerable academic attention and will no doubt generate debate for some time to come. Politics in Britain before 1914 presents a complex picture and firm predictions as to what might have been are necessarily fraught with danger. One thing is clear however: much depended upon the relationship between the two left-of-centre parties. McKibbin has astutely concluded that there were two pivotal determinants vital to that relationship and thus critical to the political system as it stood: first, the extent to which there existed issues on which the progressive parties could agree; and second, the extent to which Labour was prepared to remain subordinate within the party system.⁹⁸

MANCHESTER AND STOKE-ON-TRENT: HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

In 1844, Benjamin Disraeli declared that ‘rightly understood Manchester is as great a human exploit as Athens’.⁹⁹ Contemporary observers agreed that Manchester represented a significant transformation in urban development for good and for bad.¹⁰⁰ Symbolic of a new era, it was perhaps

inevitable that it would also be hugely significant in the context of political development in Britain during both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Manchester developed a strong and distinctive Liberal political tradition personifying the free trade movement of the nineteenth century and, in the process, produced Britain's first modern pressure group, the Anti-Corn Law League, established in 1838. It also appeared to herald a new era in relation to class as the industrial and commercial middle classes were catapulted to a new position of influence. At the same time, Manchester played a central role in the development of a national campaign for democratic reform: Chartism.¹⁰¹ The development of the national Labour movement also owed it a considerable debt. Historians have recognised Manchester-based radical journalist Robert Blatchford as being enormously important in giving the movement for independent labour representation a significant push at a critical time in its development.¹⁰² Besides his *Clarion* newspaper, Blatchford's *Merry England* (published in 1893 with total sales of over two million) was influential for many radicals, and the establishment of a Manchester Independent Labour Party in 1892 represented a new type of political organisation, its very name implying a new purpose. Alongside the Bradford Labour Union, the Manchester Independent Labour Party precipitated the emergence of the national Independent Labour Party. Equally significant, the first meeting of the Trades Union Congress had been convened in Manchester in 1868. Manchester's contribution to the development of both Liberal and Labour politics was immense; from this perspective alone, examination of Manchester during a period of significant political change is of special interest. For contemporaries, the city was regarded as having a significance beyond all others. The symbolic value of success or failure in Manchester remained well into the twentieth century.

The last twenty years or so have seen a number of studies examining constituency politics in various localities and several have considered Liberal and Labour politics in Manchester.¹⁰³ Moore's assessment of the transformation of urban Liberalism provides an excellent study of the Liberal Party in Manchester towards the end of the nineteenth century whilst McHugh's examination explores Labour Party politics in the city throughout the 1920s.¹⁰⁴ No single study has examined in detail both Liberal and Labour politics in Manchester during the critical period between 1906 and 1922. A number of national surveys of constituency politics have paid some attention to Manchester: Tanner's study of political change between 1900 and 1918 provides interesting analysis of the

North-West region and Clarke's seminal study of Lancashire provides invaluable consideration of the county's largest and most important urban area. These do not, however, provide an exhaustive consideration of electoral development in Manchester throughout the pre- and post-war periods.

The merger of six North Staffordshire towns into the federated borough of Stoke-on-Trent in 1910 was a product of prolonged industrial development.¹⁰⁵ Popularly known as the Potteries, the area was at the forefront of Britain's Industrial Revolution and remains the country's only polycentric city. Founded in 1769, Josiah Wedgwood's Etruria works represented one of the country's very earliest factories; others soon followed (Spode, Minton and Doulton). The region became recognised as the world's leading centre of ceramic manufacture. Stoke-on-Trent was one of Britain's great industrial centres but it is probably true to say that it has never received the credit it has deserved as an important centre of British industry. Impressions of the area have been largely negative. Two of the twentieth century's most successful novelists, Arnold Bennett and J. B. Priestley, have been influential in shaping perceptions of the Potteries. Published from 1902, Bennett's popular series of stories set against the backdrop of the Potteries evoked a seemingly unchanged world, an area 'as remote from the rest of England as any part of the country could be'.¹⁰⁶ Over thirty years later Priestley, in his *English Journey*, found the Potteries still 'like no other industrial region ... unique in their remote, self-contained provincialism' and he concluded that this part of Britain represented Victorian industrialism in its 'dirtiest and most cynical aspect'.¹⁰⁷ Though clearly appreciative of the aesthetic impact of the local industry, Bennett and Priestley depicted an area remarkable in its sense of place and community. Priestley went so far as to suggest that the Staffordshire potters were the most contented of workers in any industrial area he had come across.¹⁰⁸ Yet as Priestley acknowledged, the realities of the social conditions in the Potteries were far from idyllic. In his remarkable 1903 memoir of growing up in the area and of his life as a working potter, Charles Shaw recalled how if there was one thing typical of employers in the district it was an 'absolute indifference to the condition of the people'.¹⁰⁹ 'From four and five in the morning until nine and ten at night', in Shaw's words, 'the race for wages was run'. The pottery operatives endured wretched housing, extreme poverty, sickness (not least in consequence of egregious environmental pollution) and astonishingly poor working conditions. The Factory Acts had only been extended to pottery workers very late and even then improvements were of marginal significance.

Historians have perceived Stoke-on-Trent as an area in which both socio-economic and political development were notoriously slow, the general view being that the Potteries changed little after the initial phase of industrial development. Common perceptions have been that the pottery industry remained backward, industrial relations were distinctly harmonious and trade unionism remained painfully slow to develop. Indeed, trade unionism in the Potteries presented a marked contrast to areas such as Lancashire, but this had little to do with harmonious relations with employers. Charles Shaw was correct in suggesting that trade unionism was ‘haphazard, feebly and timidly followed, surrounded by suspicion [and] spoken of with bated breath’.¹¹⁰ A variety of elements hindered the development of labour organisations in the pottery towns. First, as Shaw noted, there existed a ‘deep and wide division between one class of workmen and another’. The industry was highly fragmented and hierarchical, so it was all but impossible to unite the many branches of the workforce. Second, fear of the ‘master and an overweening deference’ undermined any spirit of independence. Many potters were hired annually and so lived in fear for their future employment. The prospects for successful unionisation under these circumstances were poor. Third, Methodism, an exceptionally powerful force in the area, adopted a strong anti-union position. This sentiment permeated institutions such as the Sunday schools. In his overall judgement, Shaw described the pottery industry as ‘abusive’, concluding that ‘no other industrial population in the country would have tolerated [such conditions] for so many years’.¹¹¹ A significant consequence of this was that political development in the area lagged behind other industrial regions and demands for independent labour representation were slow in emerging. This was an area where loyalty to the Liberal Party was exceptionally strong and popular working-class Liberalism was underpinned by the predominance of religious Nonconformity. The North Staffordshire Potteries represented an industrial community where traditional political loyalties and allegiances were pronounced and initiatives for independent political action viewed with suspicion.

Compared to many of Britain’s other major industrial regions, the literature on the Staffordshire Potteries is limited. A number of studies have assessed the history of trade unionism in the area, notably Gregory’s *The Miners and British Politics*, which provides extremely detailed analysis of the region’s development with respect to the politics of miners.¹¹² Despite renewed interest in early twentieth-century constituency politics, few studies have paid attention to the North Staffordshire area and no single

study has exclusively examined the political history of the Potteries. One historian who has shed light on aspects of social and political change there is Richard Whipp in his excellent *Patterns of Labour: Work and Social Change in the Pottery Industry*, though the area's political development does not constitute the principal focus.¹¹³

Stoke-on-Trent is worthy of detailed study for a number of reasons. The Staffordshire Potteries are an extremely good example of what can be described as 'an isolatable case study which offers scope for intensive investigation'.¹¹⁴ The area's boundaries were clearly defined and the six towns remained more or less isolated from the surrounding industrial regions of Manchester, Birmingham and Liverpool. Communities within the Potteries were exceptionally close-knit, more so perhaps than in other parts of the country. In terms of class composition, the industrial working classes dominated the pottery towns. This is not to suggest there was not a middle-class presence, but compared to other towns and cities the Potteries lacked the distinctively middle-class enclaves that had become a key feature of social development towards the end of the nineteenth century. Religious Nonconformity, particularly Primitive Methodism which had been conceived in the area, also bound the communities together, more significantly perhaps than in many of Britain's other industrial regions.¹¹⁵ Stoke-on-Trent was remarkably homogeneous in socio-economic and religious composition and this gave the area a special character. This book evaluates how the working classes of such a tight-knit community responded to a period of rapidly changing political context.

Few historians have paid attention to the political history of Stoke-on-Trent or Manchester during the immediate post-First World War period. Studies that have included some assessment of Stoke-on-Trent have tended to focus on the years prior to 1914, largely due to the national significance of the 1912 by-election.¹¹⁶ Though no study has examined constituency politics in the area from 1918, analysis of Stoke-on-Trent provides a valuable insight into political realignment after the upheaval of war. Before the outbreak of war, industrial North Staffordshire was an area where popular working-class Liberalism remained strong and the prospect of an imminent Labour breakthrough seemed unlikely. The 1918 general election saw a major advance for the Labour Party in the area, one of the most impressive across the country. This was consolidated in 1922, by which time Labour held all of the borough's three parliamentary seats. The Liberal Party, meanwhile, had been fatally destabilised by the experience of war and, whilst it successfully recaptured one of the borough's

parliamentary seats very briefly in 1923, electoral politics in this former heartland had changed dramatically. In municipal politics, Labour's advance in Stoke-on-Trent after 1918 was equally dramatic: the 1919 municipal elections resulted in Labour possessing thirty-four of the one hundred seats on the town council and the party comfortably maintained its position thereafter. The following year saw Stoke-on-Trent being one of Labour's most successful areas with eleven candidates from nineteen elected; thereafter the party's representation steadily increased.¹¹⁷ Given the political history of the city, such a transformation was remarkable and evaluation of the locality from 1918 thus provides an excellent opportunity to explore factors underpinning political change during this critical period.

The city of Manchester has also been neglected within the historiography of post-war political change in Britain. Despite some evaluation of the city's post-war politics in recent years, existing studies have tended to focus exclusively on the development of Labour and have virtually ignored the position of the Liberal Party. Furthermore, assessment of the process of political development itself, electoral campaigns in particular, has lacked depth of critical analysis.¹¹⁸ Examination of Manchester suggests that the Liberal Party was not entirely decimated by the experience of wartime events; neither was an immediate Labour advance inevitable, the party finding it difficult to maintain electoral stability in the years immediately after 1918. This presents a marked contrast to Stoke-on-Trent where the Labour Party had established a strong and seemingly secure hold on the parliamentary politics of the borough from very early on in the post-war period. The 1923 general election demonstrated that the Liberals could still capture parliamentary seats in Manchester despite persistent difficulties and determined opposition. The city's Liberals had reunited the previous year and the party's organisation appeared to be in relatively good shape. The Labour Party's post-war ascendancy in Manchester, on the other hand, was neither immediate nor complete by 1922.

In addition to the five general election campaigns, Manchester and Stoke-on-Trent saw six by-elections between 1906 and 1922. By-elections at the time were perceived as providing an important insight into the way the political tide was flowing and the parties took them extremely seriously. Whilst analysis of by-elections may be somewhat problematic in relation to the extent to which they demonstrate long-term political realignment, they remain useful in showing how the parties presented policy and how the electorate responded. By-elections also provide additional insights into

the strength of party organisation, relations between parties, the degree of internal party unity and the role of individuals. This book evaluates the role played by candidates in shaping the political agenda and influencing political change on the ground. Some historians have cited poor by-election performance as evidence of a wider realignment in British politics in the years immediately before the outbreak of the First World War.¹¹⁹ Surprisingly, there have been only a limited number of detailed assessments of by-election campaigns across a number of constituencies prior to 1922, though recent research by Readman and Blaxill has gone some way to addressing this omission.¹²⁰ In their evaluation of the Edwardian period, they suggest that by-elections ‘mirrored public opinion with accuracy’ and thus by-election performance provided an ‘excellent guide to future general elections’.¹²¹ They also illustrate how by-election results were of critical importance in influencing political decisions and policymaking at Westminster. They concluded that by-elections from 1911 ‘demonstrated a growth in Labour’s electoral aspirations and reaffirmed their propensity to split the Liberal vote’.¹²² Detailed analysis of the six by-elections between 1908 and 1922 in Manchester and Stoke-on-Trent provides a valuable opportunity to examine aspects of political change in these localities.

NOTES

1. *The Times*, 30th December 1918.
2. G. Dangerfield, *The Strange Death of Liberal England* (London, 1936).
3. See for example, D. Tanner, *Political Change and the Labour Party, 1900–1918* (Cambridge, 1990).
4. For a summary of the debate on class politics and the Liberal Party see G. Searle, *The Liberal Party, Triumph and Disintegration 1886–1929* (London, 1992), pp. 55–9. Most recent studies have recognised the complexity of class and have rejected the supposed homogeneity of the British working class.
5. Some of the most prominent exponents of the inevitable rise of Labour school include K. Laybourn and J. Reynolds, *Liberalism and the Rise of Labour, 1890–1918* (London, 1984); P. Thompson, *Socialists, Liberals and Labour* (London, 1967); A. Howkins, ‘Edwardian Liberalism and Industrial Unrest’, *History Workshop Journal* (1977).
6. See H. Perkin, *The Origins of Modern English Society 1780–1880* (London, 1969).
7. R. McKibbin, *The Evolution of the Labour Party 1910–1924* (Oxford, 1974).

8. R. McKibbin, *Evolution*, p. 240.
9. H. Matthew, R. McKibbin and J. A. Kay, 'The Franchise Factor in the Rise of the Labour Party', *English Historical Review*, 91 (1976).
10. See K. Laybourn, *The Rise of Labour: The British Labour Party 1890–1979* (London, 1988), p. 27.
11. See B. Lancaster, *Radicalism, Co-operation and Socialism: Leicester Working Class Politics 1860–1906* (Leicester, 1987), p. 22.
12. R. McKibbin, *Parties and People: England 1914–1951* (Oxford, 2010).
13. *Ibid.*, p. 2. For McKibbin's full exploration of his position today, see *ibid.*, pp. 1–32.
14. T. Wilson, *Downfall of the Liberal Party, 1914–1935* (London, 1966) p. 23.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 16.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 18.
17. R. Douglas, *History of the Liberal Party* (London, 1971).
18. See also R. Douglas, 'Labour in Decline, 1910–1914', in K. D. Brown, (ed.) *Essays in Anti-Labour History* (London, 1974).
19. P. Clarke, *Lancashire and the New Liberalism* (Cambridge, 1971).
20. P. Thompson, *Socialists, Liberals and Labour: The Struggle for London, 1885–1914* (London, 1967).
21. *Ibid.*, pp. 10 and 167–189.
22. D. Tanner, *Political Change and the Labour Party 1900–1918* (Cambridge, 1990) p. 431.
23. See M. Savage, 'The Rise of Labour in Local Perspective', *Journal of Local and Regional Studies*, 10 (1990), p. 12 and 'Political Alignments in Modern Britain: Do Localities Matter?' *Political Geography Quarterly*, 6, (1987), pp. 53–76.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 7.
25. See M. Savage, *The Dynamics of Working-Class Politics: The Labour Movement in Preston, 1880–1940* (Cambridge, 1987).
26. Exceptions include G. Bernstein, 'Liberalism and the Progressive Alliance in the Constituencies 1900–1914: Three Case Studies', *Historical Journal*, 26, (1983), pp. 617–640 and S. Davies and B. Morley, 'The Politics of Place: A Comparative Analysis of Electoral Politics in Blackburn, Bolton, Burnley and Bury', *Manchester Region History Review*, 14, 2000.
27. M. Pugh, 'Yorkshire and the New Liberalism', *Journal of Modern History*, Supplement, 50 (1978) and A. W. Purdue, 'The Liberal and Labour Parties in North-East Politics 1900–14: the Struggle for Supremacy', *International Review of Social History*, 26 (1981).
28. See J. Hill, 'Manchester and Salford Politics and the Early Development of the Independent Labour Party', *International Review of Social History*, 24 (1981).

29. A. W. Purdue, 'The Liberal and Labour Parties'.
30. M. Pugh, 'Yorkshire and the New Liberalism?' *Modern History Journal*, 50, supplement (1978).
31. K. Morgan, 'New Liberalism and the Challenge of Labour; the Welsh Experience' in K. D. Brown, *The First Labour Party 1906–1914* (London, 1985), p. 172.
32. P. Stead, 'Establishing a Labour Heartland' in *ibid.*, pp. 69–72.
33. W. Hamish Fraser, 'The Labour Party in Scotland' in *ibid.*, pp. 52–59.
34. See J. Lawrence, *Speaking for the People: Party, Language and Popular Politics in England, 1860–1914* (Cambridge, 1998), p. 266.
35. *Ibid.*
36. *Ibid.*, p. 267.
37. See S. Davies, *Liverpool Labour: Social and Political Influences on the Development of the Labour Party, 1900–1939* (Keele, 1996) and 'The Liverpool Labour Party and the Liverpool Working Class, 1900–1939', *Bulletin of the North West Labour History Society*, 6 (1980).
38. See M. Petter, 'The Progressive Alliance', *History*, 58 (1973).
39. M. Petter, *ibid.*, p. 48.
40. G. Bernstein, 'Liberalism and the Progressive Alliance in the Constituencies 1900–1914: Three Case Studies', *Historical Journal*, 26 (1983) pp. 617–40.
41. *Ibid.*, p. 637.
42. See D. Tanner, *Political Change*, pp. 317–348.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 347.
44. *Ibid.*
45. See D. Tanner, *Political Change*, pp. 347–48.
46. For Tanner's analysis of the impact of the First World War and the Progressive Alliance, see *Political Change*, pp. 395–408.
47. For McKibbin's evaluation of the Progressive Alliance see R. McKibbin, *Parties and People: England 1914–1951* (Oxford, 2010) pp. 2–20.
48. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
49. *Ibid.*
50. McKibbin even suggests that had the Conservative Party not adopted the outright opposition it did on various issues (the 1909 budget, the constitution, Ireland and education to name but a few) the Progressive Alliance might have collapsed much sooner. Moreover, he suggests that, had the Balfour administration overturned (for example) the Taff Vale decision, the Progressive Alliance might never have happened in the first place; see R. McKibbin, *Parties and People*, pp. 4–5.
51. See T. Wilson, *Downfall*; T. Wilson, 'The British General Election of 1918', *Journal of Modern History* (1964); J. Turner, *British Politics and the Great War: Coalition and Conflict 1915–1918* (New Haven 1992) and

- K. O. Morgan, *Consensus and Disunity, the Lloyd George Coalition Government 1918–1922* (Oxford 1979).
52. See R. McKibbin, *Evolution*.
 53. These include M. Savage, *Dynamics*; B. Doyle, 'Urban Liberalism and the Lost Generation, Middle Class Culture in Norwich 1900–1935', *Historical Journal*, 38 (1995); J. Smyth, 'Resisting Labour: Unionists, Liberals and Moderates in Glasgow between the Wars', *Historical Journal* 46, 2 (2003).
 54. Lawrence, for example, ends his study of Wolverhampton in 1914, Tanner in 1918 and Cook's examination does not begin until 1922.
 55. For the best analysis of how the war affected the Liberal Party ideologically and in terms of organisation see T. Wilson, *Downfall*, pp. 23–48.
 56. Tanner has also suggested that it is wise not to understate the Liberal Party's potential from 1918; despite the party's poor national standing, the Liberals could still outpoll Labour in a number of working-class seats, particularly in areas where the candidates articulated a radical programme. The Liberals' performance in 1918 and up to 1922 was influenced by other factors, most notably the impact of the Coalition. This 'blurred their public image and damaged their performance'. See D. Tanner, 'Class Voting and Radical Politics: the Liberal and Labour Parties, 1910–1931' in J. Lawrence and M. Taylor (eds) *Electoral behaviour in Britain since 1820* (Aldershot, 2002), p. 117.
 57. See D. Tanner, *Political Change*, pp. 419–422.
 58. See P. Clarke, *Lancashire*, pp. 395–397.
 59. *Ibid.*
 60. See M. Hart, 'Liberals, War and the Franchise', *English Historical Review*, 97, (1982), pp. 820–32.
 61. See J. Turner, 'The Labour Vote and the Franchise after 1918: An Investigation of the English Evidence', *History and Computing* (1987), pp. 136–142.
 62. See R. Gregory, *The Miners and British Politics* (Oxford, 1978), p. 191.
 63. R. McKibbin, *Parties and People*, pp. 29–32.
 64. See H. Pelling, *Origins of the Labour Party*; R. McKibbin, *Evolution*; K. Laybourn and J. Reynolds, *Liberalism and the Rise of Labour*.
 65. For a good evaluation of the debate on the emergence of class politics see G. Searle, *The Liberal Party, Triumph and Disintegration 1886–1929* (London, 1992), pp. 55–59.
 66. See H. Pelling, 'Labour and the Downfall of Liberalism' in *Popular Politics and Society* (London, 1979), p. 120. Pelling did, however, recognise that such change would inevitably be slow because sectional interests such as religion remained powerful forces and so were likely to inhibit Labour's expansion; see H. Pelling, *Modern Britain, 1885–1955* (Edinburgh, 1960), p. 6.

67. See A. Marwick, *The Deluge* (London, 1991), pp. 344–348.
68. See B. Waites, ‘The Effects of the First World War on Class and Status 1910–1920’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 11 (1976); B. Waites, *A Class Society at War 1914–1918* (Leamington Spa, 1987); J. Winter, *The Great War and the British People* (Basingstoke, 2003); J. Cronin, *Labour and Society in Modern Britain* (London, 1984) and J. Cronin, ‘The Crisis of State and Society in Britain 1917–1922 in L. Haimson and C. Tilly (eds) *Strikes, Wars and Revolution in an International Perspective* (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 462–468.
69. See, for example, K. Laybourn and J. Reynolds, *Liberalism and the Rise of Labour* (London, 1984).
70. See, for example, D. Tanner, ‘Class Voting and Radical Politics: the Electoral Expansion of the Labour Party 1910–1931’ in J. Lawrence and M. Taylor (eds.) *Party, State and Society: Electoral Behaviour in Modern Britain* (Aldershot, 2002). For the opposing approach to Marwick et al. see also T. Wilson, *The Myriad Faces of war: Britain and the Great War 1914–1918* (Cambridge, 1986); R. Rubin, *War Law and Labour: the Munitions’ Acts, State Regulation and the Unions 1915–1921* (Oxford, 1987) and H. Perkin, *The Rise of Professional Society: England Since 1880* (London, 1989). It ought to be noted that a small number of historians have supported Marwick’s approach, see N. Whiteside, ‘The British Population at War’ in J. Turner (ed.), *Britain and the First World War* (London, 1988) and J. M. Bourne, *Britain and the Great War 1914–1918* (London, 1989).
71. For a good analysis of this body of work see D. Tanner, *Political Change*, pp. 353–355.
72. *Ibid.*, p. 357.
73. *Ibid.* The emphasis is mine.
74. See P. E. Dewey, ‘Military Recruiting and the British Labour Force during the First World War’, *Historical Journal* (1994) and R. Whipp, *Patterns of Labour: Work and Social Change in the Pottery Industry* (London, 1990), pp. 110–116.
75. For analysis of the state controlled industries see B. E. Supple, *The History of the Coalmining Industry* (London, 1987); P. S. Bagwell, *The Railwaymen* (London, 1963) and E. Taplin, *The Dockers Union* (Leicester, 1985).
76. See P. Joyce, *Visions of the People, Industrial England and the Question of Class, 1848–1914* (Cambridge, 1991) and *Democratic Subjects: The Self and the Social in Nineteenth Century England* (Cambridge, 1994).
77. See the introduction in J. Lawrence and M. Taylor, *Party, State and Society*, pp. 1–26 and the chapter in the same book by J. Lawrence, ‘The Dynamics of Urban Politics 1867–1914’, pp. 79–105.

78. See *ibid.*, p. 15.
79. See in particular D. Tanner, 'Class voting and Radical Politics: the Liberal and Labour Parties, 1910–1931' in J. Lawrence and M. Taylor, *Party, State and Society*, pp. 106–130.
80. *Ibid.*, p. 106.
81. *Ibid.*
82. *Ibid.*
83. *Ibid.*, p. 124.
84. See R. McKibbin, *Evolution*; K. Laybourn and J. Reynolds, *Liberalism and the Rise of Labour*; M. G. Sheppard and J. L. Halstead, 'Labour's Municipal Election Performance in Provincial England and Wales 1901–1913', *Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History* (1979); B. Lancaster, *Radicalism, Co-operation and Socialism, Politics in Leicester 1860–1906* (Leicester, 1987).
85. McKibbin points out how Labour's net gains across the country were 23, 78 and 85 in 1909, 1911 and 1913 respectively, see R. McKibbin, *Evolution*, p. 85.
86. See M. G. Sheppard, 'The Effects of the Franchise Provisions on the Social and Sex Composition of the Municipal Electorate 1882–1914', *Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History*, 45 (1982).
87. See C. Cook, 'Labour and the Downfall of the Liberal Party 1906–1914' in A. Sked and C. Cook (eds) *Crisis and Controversy: Essays in Honour of A. J. P. Taylor* (London, 1976) and M. Pugh, 'Yorkshire and the New Liberalism', *Journal of Modern History*, Supplement, 50 (1978).
88. The franchise for local elections was different from that of parliamentary elections; women were enfranchised earlier. See P. Hollis, *Ladies Elect: Women in English Local Government 1865–1914* (Oxford, 1989).
89. See D. Tanner, 'The Parliamentary Electoral System, the Fourth Reform Act and the Rise of Labour in England and Wales', *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, 56 (1983), pp. 205–219.
90. See J. Davis, 'Slums and the Vote, 1867–1890', *Historical Research*, 64 (1991), pp. 375–388 and more recently; 'The Enfranchisement of the Urban Poor in Late-Victorian Britain' in P. Ghosh and L. Goldman (eds) *Politics and Culture in Victorian Britain* (Oxford, 2006).
91. C. Cook, 'Labour and the Downfall of the Liberal Party, 1906–1914' in A. Sked and C. Cook (eds), *Crisis and Controversy: Essays in Honour of A. J. P. Taylor* (London, 1976), pp. 55–58 and 62.
92. For a full consideration of Labour councillors' ability to have proposals adopted, see M. Cahill, 'Labour in the Municipalities' in K. D. Brown (ed.) *The First Labour Party, 1906–1914* (London, 1985).
93. See Doyle's work on the Liberal Party in Norwich, which concludes that the Liberals managed to sustain considerable middle-class Nonconformist

- allegiance well into the 1930s, B. Doyle, 'Urban Liberalism and the Lost Generation: Politics and Middle Class Culture in Norwich 1900–1935', *Historical Journal*, 38 (1995), pp. 617–34.
94. For a consideration of the methodological difficulties of examining municipal election performance see D. Tanner, 'Election Statistics and the Rise of Labour 1906–1931', *Historical Journal*, 34 (1991).
 95. For an assessment of the impact of the 'new political history' see S. Fielding, 'Looking for the 'New Political History'', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 42 (2007), pp. 515–524.
 96. P. Readman, 'The State of Twentieth-Century British Political History', *Journal of Policy History*, 21, 3 (2009), p. 219.
 97. See A. K. Russell, *Liberal Landslide: The General Election of 1906* (Newton Abbot, 1973); N. Blewett, *The Peers, the Parties, and the People: The General Elections of 1910* (London, 1972); C. Cook, *The Age of Alignment: Electoral Politics in Britain, 1922–1929* (London, 1975) and A. Thorpe, *The British General Election of 1931* (Oxford, 1991).
 98. See R. McKibbin, *Parties and People*, p. 32.
 99. Disraeli quote cited in A. Kidd, *Manchester: A History* (Keele, 1993), p. 38.
 100. A notable observer of nineteenth-century Manchester was Friedrich Engels in his *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (Leipzig, 1845).
 101. J. Walton, *Lancashire: A Social History 1558–1939* (Manchester, 1994), p. 129.
 102. See, for example, H. Pelling, *The Origins of the Labour Party* and *A Short History of the Labour Party*.
 103. Studies which examine aspects of Manchester's political history include J. Hill, 'Manchester and Salford Politics and the Early Development of the Independent Labour Party', *International Review of Social History*, 24 (1981); D. McHugh, 'The Labour Party in Manchester and Salford before the First World War: A Case of Unequal Development', *Manchester Regional History Review*, 14 (2000) and N. Reid, 'Manchester and Salford ILP: A More Controversial Aspect of the Pre-1914 Era', *Bulletin of the North West Labour History Society*, 5 (1978).
 104. See J. Moore, *The Transformation of Urban Liberalism* (Aldershot, 2006) and D. McHugh, *Labour in the City: The Development of the Labour Party in Manchester 1918–1931* (Manchester, 2006).
 105. For consistency, I have used the title Stoke-on-Trent throughout although it did not actually come into being until 1910 with the federation of the borough. Any reference to 'Stoke' refers specifically to that town (Stoke-upon-Trent) which is one of the constituent components of the federated borough (after 1925, city) of Stoke-on-Trent.

106. Frank Swinnerton in his introduction to the 1953 edition of Bennett's *Anna of the Five Towns* reprinted in A. Bennett, *Anna of the Five Towns* (London, 2001).
107. J. B. Priestley, *English Journey* (Ilkley, 2009), pp. 207 and 193.
108. *Ibid.*, pp. 201 and 207.
109. C. Shaw, *When I Was a Child: Growing up in the Potteries in the 1840s* (Derby, 2013), p. 36.
110. See *ibid.*, pp. 173–176.
111. *Ibid.*, p. 176.
112. R. Gregory, *The Miners and British Politics, 1906–1914* (Oxford, 1968).
113. R. Whipp, *Patterns of Labour: Work and Social Change in the Pottery Industry* (London, 1990).
114. Thistlewaite quoted in R. Whipp, *Patterns of Labour*, p. 2.
115. Pelling suggests that by the turn of the century the influence of Nonconformity could *only* be maintained in smaller, somewhat isolated, towns; see H. Pelling, *Social Geography*, pp. 430–33.
116. See R. McKibbin, *Evolution*, R. Gregory, *Miners, British Politics*, and D. Tanner, *Political Change*.
117. See table in S. Davies, *Liverpool Labour* (Keele, 1996), pp. 84–85 showing Labour representation in county boroughs in descending order of Labour strength. By 1929, Stoke-on-Trent was ranked in eighth place (from forty) and the party's position (although dipping slightly in 1929) remained solid.
118. McHugh's study of Manchester Labour politics after 1918, for example, provides little examination of the party's electoral strategy, policy or appeal during the 1918 or 1922 general elections or the two by-elections in 1919 and 1922; see D. McHugh, *Labour in the City* (Manchester, 2006).
119. See R. McKibbin, *Evolution*, pp. 82–7.
120. T. G. Otte and P. Readman (eds) *By-Elections in British Politics, 1832–1914* (Woodbridge, 2013).
121. P. Readman and L. Blaxill in *ibid.*, p. 228.
122. *Ibid.*, p. 247.

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The Politics of the Progressive Alliance: Manchester Liberalism and the Emergence of Labour, 1906–1908

Before the mid-1880s across large parts of the country, the working-class vote had remained solidly behind the Liberals and the party perceived itself to be the principal vehicle for working-class representation in Parliament. By the early 1890s, the Liberals faced an emerging challenge from the rise of working-class Conservatism and also by an apparent drive towards independent labour representation. The pioneers of the concept of independent labour representation appeared first with the creation of the Bradford Labour Union (BLU) in 1890 and then, two years later, the Manchester Independent Labour Party. The BLU had declared its aim to be to ‘carry out its business irrespective of the convenience of any political party’. This sentiment was of monumental importance in that, whilst such organisations were, as their socialist society predecessors had been, deeply committed to socialism, they were fervently independent. Ultimately, they sought to establish themselves as distinct entities within British politics.¹ The creation of a national Independent Labour Party (ILP) in 1893 represented an even more significant development. Formed primarily upon the initiative of Keir Hardie, the ILP was from its inception determined to get working men elected to Parliament and was ambitious. More significantly, the ILP was less rigid in its ideological approach and adopted a more practical programme, focusing upon issues such as the campaign for an eight-hour working day, the payment of MPs, tackling child labour, the abolition of piecework and a more progressive system of taxation. Hardie appreciated that the key to the future of independent labour representation lay in obtaining the support of organised labour and spent the next few years

courting the trade unions, though his appeals to union officials were initially met with an unenthusiastic response. By 1900 however, faced with an increasingly precarious economic climate and mounting attacks on the unions, some union leaders chose to embrace the concept of independent labour representation: the view that there needed to exist a distinct and entirely independent political group within Parliament to represent the working man. Established in February 1900, the principal aims of the Labour Representation Committee (LRC) were to contest parliamentary elections and, ultimately, obtain power. Initially only half of the Trades Union Congress were affiliated to the LRC but, following the Taff Vale Judgement in 1901, membership grew rapidly.² By 1906, when the LRC became the Labour Party, some 900,000 workers were affiliated.

The 1890s was also a significant decade for the Liberal Party, witnessing the emergence of a more advanced and progressive Liberalism, subsequently known as ‘New Liberalism’. From this period, some Liberal thinkers and activists began to adopt a more positive view of the state, believing that government should enable democratic participation and extend health, welfare and educational rights in order to encourage the development of the individual citizen. This marked a dramatic change in the history of Liberal thought. By the end of the 1890s, a new generation of Liberal radicals embraced a more collectivist outlook in relation to the role of government. They also appeared willing to promote policy in the interests of organised labour.

Although it never amounted to a formal coalition, the ‘progressive alliance’ (hereafter Progressive Alliance) became a fundamental dimension of electoral politics from 1903. The Progressive Alliance amounted to an informal electoral arrangement between the Liberal Party and the recently established LRC and was the culmination of negotiations between the Liberal Chief Whip, Herbert Gladstone, and the secretary to the LRC, James Ramsay MacDonald (Figs. 2.1 and 2.2).³ The immediate historical background was an essential context of the pact. By the mid-1890s, the Liberals were challenged by popular Toryism. Conservative success at this time may be attributed to an array of factors, fragile Liberal unity in the aftermath of the Home Rule crisis, Tory appeals to working-class sectional interests (*vis-à-vis* articulation of the need for a strong empire) and, amongst some, an increasing focus on social reform underpinned in certain areas by strong Protestantism. Particularly worrying for the Liberals, however, was that the Conservatives were encroaching upon traditional Liberal strongholds. Equally, the fledgling political Labour movement



Fig. 2.1 Herbert Gladstone (Alamy)

appeared to be struggling to make progress. The ILP had been ambitious, had quickly expanded and had been successful in securing representation on town councils and other local bodies, but parliamentary success had proven to be much more difficult. By the late 1890s, the organisation was in a state of decline. The formation of the LRC was, of course, encouraging. As an umbrella organisation incorporating the ILP, various socialist societies including the SDF and the Fabians, and those trade unions who chose to affiliate, the new organisation offered maximum scope for manoeuvre. Adopting a progressive though moderate programme, the LRC put forward fifteen candidates in the 1900 general election. Two were successful, Keir Hardie in Merthyr Tydfil and Richard Bell in Derby.

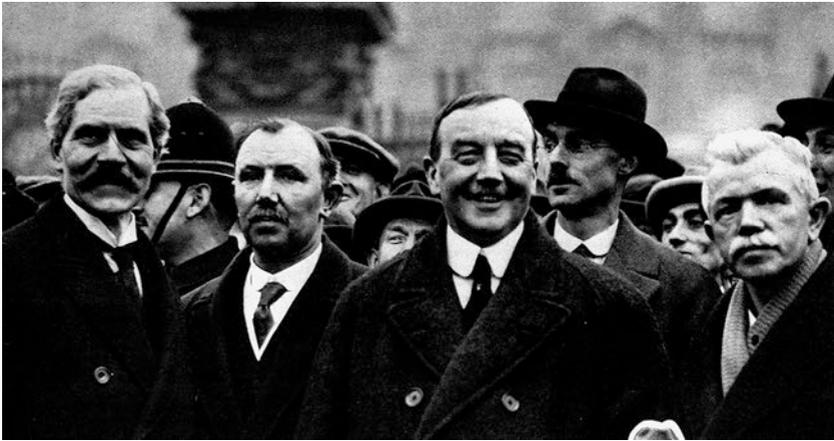


Fig. 2.2 James Ramsay MacDonald (far left) and J. R. Clynes (far right) (Alamy)

Subsequent by-election victories added another three MPs, taking the total to five, but this did not amount to a significant leap forward.

The period represented a difficult time for both the Liberals and the fledgling Labour movement. The appeal of some form of electoral pact, which would entail the fielding of only one ‘progressive’ candidate against the Conservatives in certain seats, was obvious. Practically, cooperation was imperative for both parties’ electoral prospects. For the Liberals, an agreement with Labour was appealing for a variety of reasons. The party’s position in its strongholds could be protected by limiting Labour intervention. At the same time, Labour candidates might be better positioned in seats that would always prove difficult, if not impossible, for the Liberals to win themselves, often owing to local religious profiles. If the Liberals abstained from fighting these seats, the party could concentrate on more targeted and effective campaigning. Furthermore, by cooperating with the LRC and helping the fledgling organisation attain a foothold in parliamentary politics, the Liberals would, it was presumed, gain a progressive ally. The ultimate objective, of course, was to forge a significant anti-Conservative alliance as a serious force within British politics but at the same time to maintain the Liberals’ own position as a popular party with a strong working-class support base. For Labour, it was hoped that an electoral pact with the Liberals would facilitate the great leap forward in parliamentary politics and, since this amounted to an electoral agreement

and nothing more, the integrity and independence of the party would not be compromised. This was extremely important in that if it was to attract Tory working-class support as well as satisfy its own activists, the Labour Party had to be seen as truly independent.

The principal feature of the Gladstone–MacDonald pact was that the parties would not stand against each other, that is one would stand down in favour of the other where deemed tactically necessary. The seats that came under the terms of the agreement tended to be double member constituencies, Oldham, Bolton, Blackburn, Merthyr Tydfil and Preston for example. In total, the Liberals agreed not to contest fifty seats in favour of the LRC. The 1903 pact was enormously significant in that it without doubt facilitated Labour's breakthrough in Parliament. From its inception, however, the Progressive Alliance was beset with potential problems. The longevity of such an agreement was perhaps inevitably going to be problematic, not least since local compliance could not always be guaranteed. In the constituencies, many leading Liberal officials strongly opposed the idea of a pact and questioned the logic of 'gifting' seats to Labour. This was especially the case in seats which the Liberals believed they could themselves win. From Labour's perspective, many local activists believed such a pact would be counter-productive to the organisation's development. We should not overlook the question of Labour's ambition. Given that the very purpose of the LRC was independent representation, it seems ironic that the new organisation was so heavily reliant upon relations with the Liberal Party. For how long activists would remain content in existing as a junior partner within a progressive coalition only time would tell.

Throughout the decade before 1905, Liberalism had remained organisationally and electorally weak in Manchester.⁴ The Liberal Party had fared badly in the parliamentary elections of 1895 and 1900 and had been divided over the Boer War. A number of wealthier supporters had left the city, leaving an inevitable dent in the party's financial position and the Conservatives remained the dominant force in municipal politics. The cumulative effect of these factors was that the Liberal Party in Manchester appeared to be in an extremely precarious position. Some form of reorganisation of the party was essential. This happened in 1903 with the formation of the Manchester Liberal Federation (MLF), the main objective of which was to coordinate the work of the six divisional Liberal Associations of the city. The early twentieth century saw a major overhaul of the Liberal Party nationally and this was to prove critical to the Liberals' revival from 1905. On becoming Chief Whip in 1899, Herbert Gladstone recognised

that the local Liberal organisations had become largely ineffective. Registration and canvassing work was poor and, worryingly, candidates who did not possess their own independent wealth were effectively discouraged from putting themselves forward.⁵ Gladstone set about addressing the question of organisation with vigour. Between 1900 and 1905, he and his staff reinvigorated the Liberal organisation: the party possessed a substantial election fund, good quality candidates had been in constituencies for some time, the central office was well equipped with propaganda material and, crucially, there had been a successfully negotiated agreement with the newly created LRC.⁶ Consequently, Liberal organisation in Manchester had improved enormously.⁷

From the beginning of the campaign, the 1906 general election was conducted amidst an air of considerable optimism within the Liberal ranks across the country. The record of the late Conservative Government in relation to education policy, South Africa (atrocities during the Boer War and more recently the introduction of indentured Chinese labour), trade unionism and licensing had alienated many voters. To complicate further the Unionists' electoral prospects there was the question of trading policy. Joseph Chamberlain had ignited a political debate on tariff reform in 1903, although Conservative leader Balfour remained cautious on the issue, neither openly supporting it nor condemning it.⁸ The fact that there had been no formal change on fiscal policy by the Conservatives as a party was irrelevant: the suggestion of *any* change was in itself enough to alarm many people. The Liberal Party's ability to exploit prevailing grievances appeared to give the party the edge throughout the duration of the election campaign. This, combined with a wider range of issues addressed by the Liberal candidates, was in marked contrast to the Unionists (as the Conservatives were now referring to themselves) who tended to focus on a narrow range of issues. Additionally, the Liberals presented a more united front, with all candidates appearing supportive of national party policy. The Unionist candidates did not display such unity, and well publicised disagreements on issues such as fiscal policy proved detrimental to the party's prospects.

Of Manchester's six parliamentary divisions, four were contested by Liberals, two by the LRC; all were contested by Unionist candidates. The Progressive Alliance was clearly in operation across all Manchester constituencies, the two left-of-centre parties selectively targeting seats they believed each would be most capable of winning. The Liberal and Labour candidates were (what might be termed) traditional in their occupations

and background: the Liberals included two businessmen (Charles Schwann and Arthur Haworth), a King's Counsel (Thomas Horridge) and a gentleman-cum-journalist (Winston Churchill); the LRC candidates (J. R. Clynes and George Kelley) were prominent local trade union organisers.

From the beginning of the contest, both the local Liberal organisation and press appeared anxious to affirm their support for both Clynes and Kelley. The *Manchester Evening News* concluded that official Liberalism had 'realised that organised Labour had become a political force and must be recognised',⁹ yet a feature of both the Liberal and Labour campaigns was a relative neglect of labour questions and social reform.¹⁰ The most prominent issues for all candidates were free trade, education (opposition to the 1902 Education Act) and the question of Chinese slavery in South Africa. These issues allowed both Liberal and Labour candidates to present themselves as concerned with moral, humanitarian as well as economic considerations, whilst at the same time recognising the freedom of the individual.

Of all of the city's constituencies, it was understood that Manchester North West was the most important. Perceived to be the 'citadel' of free trade, commerce and capital, it represented the heart of the cotton industry, Britain's largest export trade and one of its greatest wealth providers. The sitting Unionist member, Sir W. H. Houldsworth, had held the seat comfortably since 1885 and had even been unopposed in 1900. It was widely believed that the rejection of a Unionist here would have an immense effect upon results in other constituencies.¹¹ The constituency was a large one with nearly 12,000 voters and, although it had the image of a business constituency, it was in fact mixed in its social and economic composition. It included some of the richest men in the country, mainly non-resident voters who qualified through their businesses in the division, but it also included a sizeable number of urban poor and significant Irish and Jewish communities. The Liberal candidate in Manchester North West in 1906 was the thirty-one-year-old Winston Churchill who had joined the Liberals two years earlier in protest over the Tariff Reform issue. Churchill had represented the nearby Lancashire constituency of Oldham from 1900 and was perceived to be a rising star in British politics. Throughout the 1906 contest, local commentators reported that Churchill's campaign was conducted with considerably more energy and enthusiasm than was usual. Churchill was publicly supported by many of the division's most prominent businessmen of all party persuasions, primarily on the basis of their objection to an alteration in fiscal policy.

Churchill's Unionist opponent in 1906 was the London barrister and future Home Secretary, William Joynson-Hicks. In contrast to Churchill's exuberant platform performances, Joynson-Hicks, at least according to the Liberal press, appeared dull. He presented himself as a defender of the status quo and paid most attention to the issue of the union. For the *Manchester Guardian*, however, this was a flawed tactic since it was assumed that the constituency's voters cared little about the 'Home Rule bogey'.¹² In a division so heavily influenced by commercial interests, the most crucial issue remained the fiscal question and the possible impact the introduction of protection would have upon the cotton trade. Churchill's capable advocacy of the virtues of free trade proved to be a godsend to the Liberal campaign in this important division. He avoided becoming submerged in the technicalities of the issue and simply asked 'if Free Trade is not a good thing, why did you build the Manchester ship canal? ... what is the good of constructing it to make the delivery of goods as cheap as possible if you are going to put customs officers on duty to place a tax on them before they reach you? You might as well throw your money *into* the canal'.¹³ Such sentiments were likely to go down well in the city where the cult of Cobden and Bright had reached almost quasi-religious proportions. It is essential to recognise, however, that free trade was not a subject exclusively of interest to the commercial classes and business elite. For the working classes the matter was a 'bread and butter' question and any suggestion that their material well-being may have been affected by a reversal in policy could prove decisive for many of these voters. In areas such as Manchester North West, large parts of the industrial working classes might have supported the Liberals not because of any particular political or cultural identification with the party but because at particular times it was perceived to be more economically advisable to do so.

The Tariff Reform issue must at times have appeared an incredibly complicated and confusing debate for the average elector. Confronted with an array of complex economic arguments and propositions that suggested both free trade and some form of protection offered the best chance to secure economic stability, protect jobs and guarantee low food prices, how could they determine which to believe? Joynson-Hicks told Manchester electors that the maintenance of the existing free trade system would lead to increased unemployment.¹⁴ His explanation for this was that the erection of tariff barriers would widen the total area of free trade within the empire, that is protection would mean more free trade. However, it was reported that this was poorly received by audiences and

he was advised by his campaign managers to avoid the subject. Like other Liberal candidates, Churchill argued that Chamberlain's proposals would lead to retaliation and economic disaster and his ability to explain the basic aspects of Tariff Reform in simple terms was an electoral asset for the Liberal Party in Manchester throughout the campaign. Nevertheless, whilst his platform performances lifted the spirits of the Liberals, they clearly provoked consternation from his former Conservative associates who believed he was simply courting 'cheap notoriety'. As one Unionist supporter writing to the *Manchester Courier* expressed it, 'whilst we admire talent from whatever source, we would prefer it blended with modesty rather than precocity and calm language rather than vituperation'.¹⁵

The Unionist advocacy of Tariff Reform represented a direct appeal to working-class self-interest since it was argued that imperial preference would secure jobs by protecting British trade against foreign competition. Yet there was an apparent flaw with the strategy: as the leading historian of the Tariff Reform issue suggests, it was simply not perceived to be an attractive policy outside the region of its birth (the Midlands) and it ultimately proved to be an 'even more disastrous policy' in the regions where trade was principally export-led.¹⁶ Neither did the movement for Tariff Reform enjoy the widespread grass-roots support that free trade experienced. In areas such as Manchester, the movement to maintain free trade amounted to a coherent and well-organised campaign. Across the city, the President of the Master Cotton Spinners Association, Charles Macara, was unusually active throughout the campaign in his condemnation of any form of protection, and the association issued a wide array of pamphlets and circulars advising voters that any alteration of existing arrangements would be 'bad for the cotton industry and the consumer alike'.¹⁷ The election also saw the formation of the Manchester Free Trade League.¹⁸ Although ostensibly a non-party organisation, the Free Trade League (FTL) was active in the Liberals' anti-Tariff Reform campaign throughout the contests. The Manchester FTL included a large number of the city's most prominent Conservatives, a point not lost upon either Liberal organisers or the Liberal press nationally and locally. The majority of trade unionists also remained staunch supporters of free trade. One historian has gone so far as to conclude that 'in one fell swoop the Unionists lost their credibility as the party of the economic interests of the workers'.¹⁹ This is an important point when considering Manchester, which possessed both commercial interests and working-class communities whose prosperity

relied heavily on the fortunes of the cotton trade. It is probably for this reason (the local economy and perceptions of what contributed to maintaining its prosperity) that the majority of the Unionist candidates appeared rather lukewarm on Tariff Reform. With the exception of Joynton-Hicks, they were clearly not all in the Chamberlain camp.

For symbolic value, Manchester East was another seat that the Liberal Party was desperate to capture in 1906. Former Prime Minister Arthur Balfour had represented the constituency for more than twenty years. In 1900 he had been returned with a majority of nearly 2500. That majority had been unusually high because of support for the Boer War.²⁰ Manchester East was by no means a safe Unionist seat, however, and whilst Balfour no doubt attracted a certain degree of personal support in his constituency, he also carried a huge burden of the unpopularity associated with the late Unionist administration. This was evident throughout the 1906 general election campaign. Balfour was routinely heckled, on one occasion having a herring thrown at him, and the customary vote of confidence in his candidature at meetings was lost more often than it was supported.²¹ Clearly, the mood had swung against Balfour and this was exacerbated by his seemingly confused message on Tariff Reform. The former Prime Minister appeared to have no definite policy on the fiscal question. He even went so far as to inform his constituents that he would be 'ill performing my duties if I were to profess a settled conviction where none exists'.²² In the opinion of one Liberal agent, Balfour's election speeches were 'mystifying' and left electors 'extremely indignant'.²³

Balfour's Liberal opponent, Thomas Horridge, worked exhaustively throughout the campaign. Together with his wife, it was estimated that he had canvassed over 300 homes per day, on top of the huge number of meetings he addressed. Horridge's three central planks were free trade, Chinese slavery and the Trades Disputes Bill (concerning the legal position of trade unions during a strike, in particular the right not to be sued for damages for costs incurred). Large numbers of men in East Manchester were employed in the railway industry and Balfour's views and recent voting record on trade union legislation was unlikely to endear him to a large section of his constituents. The constituency also possessed areas of extreme poverty such as Ancoats, which bordered the city centre. Liberal suggestions that Tariff Reform would lead to higher taxes on essential foodstuffs, tea and sugar especially, and contribute to rising unemployment probably proved significant in Balfour's declining popularity. The subject of Chinese slavery, the introduction of labour from China into the

Transvaal gold mines in an attempt to alleviate the post-Boer War labour shortage, was also a subject that had a direct relevance within a highly unionised district. Many trade unionists became increasingly concerned as to whether the same sort of arrangement (the importation of cheap labour) could happen within Britain itself. The question of Chinese slavery was one that the Liberals had pushed very hard in this division, not least because it was an issue that could be connected to the rights of labour more generally.²⁴ The election saw strong cooperation between the local LRC and Liberal Association. After the contest, Horridge's agent remarked that he believed the fact that 'the Liberals as a party had put themselves into full and sympathetic line' with the LRC had served to strengthen the developing relationship; he also believed that, ultimately, 'support for labour representation was the foundation of modern Liberalism'.²⁵

Manchester South was the largest constituency in the city with nearly 15,000 electors; up to 1895 it had always returned a Liberal. This predominantly suburban division of the city included the (then) middle-class enclave of Moss Side and it was generally felt that this district determined the results of the whole constituency. A large number of Moss Side's residents worked in the textile warehouses on the Whitworth Street corridor. The *Manchester Guardian* believed these workers to be 'typically progressive'.²⁶ A member of a well-known Liberal family and a central figure in the MLF, Arthur Haworth was one of Manchester's most radical Liberals. Interestingly, he was the only out-and-out evangelical Nonconformist among the Liberal candidates. During the 1906 campaign, he focused on aspects of policy perceived to affect the Nonconformist interest, particularly education. He was also one of the city's strongest advocates of sympathetic trade union legislation and argued for state subsidies for the unemployed that did not result in the 'taint of pauperism and electoral disqualification'.²⁷ He made land reform another central plank of his campaign, arguing that the 'unearned increment in urban sites ought to bear its fair share of the burden of the rates'.²⁸ Additionally, whereas most of the city's other Liberal candidates tended to avoid the question of Irish Home Rule, Haworth chose to discuss this in detail.²⁹

The only seat that was currently held by the Liberals in Manchester was Manchester North. A largely working-class constituency, it had been represented by Charles Schwann since 1886 and the sitting member enjoyed considerable local support. During the 1906 campaign, Schwann received the support of both the railway and post office workers. The Unionist candidate, Harry Sowler, devoted considerable attention to the question

of trade unionism. He declared that he was in favour of the Trades Dispute Bill, although he qualified his position by adding that, whilst he believed unions 'should have liberty', they 'should not mistake that for licence'.³⁰ This might not have given the impression of wholehearted support. The Unionist candidate also focused heavily on education, claiming that if the Liberals were elected they would 'endeavour to take away the discretion of parents [in respect to] the religious beliefs they would have taught their children'.³¹ Interestingly, he chose to avoid the subject of Tariff Reform altogether.

The LRC contested two seats in Manchester in 1906. Both of these were in areas where historically popular Conservatism had a significant influence for large parts of these predominantly working-class communities.³² One of these was Manchester North East. The Unionist Sir James Fergusson had held the constituency for nearly twenty years and was so sure of retaining his seat that he did not feel it necessary to campaign at all during the 1906 election. He attended just four meetings, although he may have been disinclined since it was reported that two of these were of a particularly hostile character. On one occasion, he had refused to continue.³³ From the few addresses that he did deliver, it seems Fergusson's basic position was that he was 'entirely against a resort to Protection [but believed] it was the duty of the Government to do that which Mr Balfour recommended'. Citing factory and mining laws alongside workmen's compensation, he identified areas in which workers' rights had been strengthened by the late government, but argued that state aid for the unemployed would result in a 'great loss to the state'.³⁴ It was widely understood that Unionist organisation was weak in the constituency and that there were few party workers. Manchester North East was one of the city's poorest districts; one observer went so far as to describe it as a 'corner of hell' and concluded 'what an appalling price Manchester pays for its prosperity'.³⁵ The price was very high indeed. Areas such as Ancoats and Miles Platting contained depths of poverty that had changed little since Engels had so vividly described the area during the 1840s. It was upon the extent of deplorable poverty that the Labour Party candidate J. R. Clynes chose to focus some of his campaign. Clynes would become one of the Labour Party's most important early politicians, beginning his ministerial career during the First World War and briefly becoming the party's leader in 1922. In 1906 he was thirty-five years old. A former mill worker, Clynes had become a prominent local trade unionist in the Gas Workers and Boilermakers Union. He did not hide his socialist beliefs but remained

careful not to elaborate them too much. Throughout the 1906 campaign, he received the official support of a number of locally important groups including the Free Trade League, the United Irish League and the General Railway Workers' Union. As an official LRC candidate, Clynes was not expected to ask the local Liberals for assistance, although the East Manchester Liberal Association, which published a number of pamphlets and advertisement hoardings, passed various resolutions in his support. Besides a direct appeal to the industrial working classes, Clynes also targeted middle-class electors in the division, particularly shopkeepers and other small traders. In one speech, he suggested that Labour did not expect their support for altruistic reasons but 'for the sake of their own pockets'.³⁶ Like the Liberal candidates, Clynes's basic proposition was that all had suffered in consequence of the late government, primarily owing to its wayward fiscal policy, and if they were to be returned, the people would continue to endure hardship.

In Manchester, as elsewhere, the 1906 election was fought on the record of the late government, as of course parliamentary elections generally are. However, it is important to recognise that irrespective of the legislation that followed 1906, the election itself, as Manchester illustrates, lacked the articulation of distinctly new ideas apart from exceptions such as Arthur Haworth in Manchester South. There was little to distinguish Labour's programme from that of official Liberalism, principally because they appeared to be at such pains to present themselves as free trade candidates. Consequently, this helps to explain why the Liberals appeared not to be alarmed by the Labour Party. Some writers have suggested that the Labour Party was more committed and united in relation to its social welfare policy compared to the Liberals, who remained divided on this issue and made few specific reform proposals.³⁷ The evidence in Manchester suggests that this depiction is largely, but not entirely, accurate. The city's Liberal candidates, with the exception of Haworth, did not make social reform a major issue throughout their campaigns at all. Equally, the Labour candidates placed surprisingly little emphasis on social reform. Whilst their election addresses stressed aspects such as the Unemployed Workmen Act, old age pensions, housing and taxation, neither LRC candidate paid special attention to these issues throughout the campaign itself and no detail as to Labour's approach was forthcoming.³⁸ Perhaps this was simply a question of the candidates playing it safe, wishing not to appear too radical at this early stage.

A significant challenge for the early Labour Party in Manchester, as in other areas, was that of organisation. Whilst the party may not have been disadvantaged during the general election itself, the LRC's candidates receiving assistance from local Liberal Associations, the greater problem was that the party lacked permanent ward organisation in the constituencies and had undertaken hardly any preparatory work. This was most noticeable in relation to registration work, especially tracking down removals. Whilst the established parties usually undertook three or more surveys, the LRC had conducted none in 1906. Neither did the organisation possess funds for the adequate provision of agents. In 1906, Clynes and Kelley shared the same election agent, Harry Nuttall, whose task was consequently enormous, as it was for his workers.

Geographically the smallest constituency in England, and with just 8500 voters, Manchester South West was a compact working-class division incorporating the very poor area of Hulme and a high concentration of Catholics. The fact that it was so small served to intensify the fierceness of electoral contests in the constituency. The seat had been held by the Liberal Party until 1895 when it was captured by the sitting Unionist MP, W. J. Galloway. Labour's candidate George Kelley was a well-known trade unionist and local councillor, an emblematic figure for the period in that he maintained a strong political attachment to Liberalism.³⁹ Within his own party, some did not hide the fact that they viewed him as a 'Lib-Lab wobbler'. Robert Blatchford, in his *Clarion* newspaper, adopted a particularly harsh view of these sorts of candidates, arguing they had only managed to secure their position on a 'flowing Liberal tide' but would soon find themselves 'washed up by the ebb'.⁴⁰ The more moderate *Labour Leader* bemoaned the fact that, for candidates such as Kelley, 'the claims of labour were always subordinate to the interests of Liberalism', adding that he had only secured the support of the United Irish League because 'he was punishing some staunch anti-Home Ruler'.⁴¹ As an official LRC candidate, George Kelley was not encouraged to seek Liberal assistance. Nonetheless, the South-West Manchester Liberal Association provided significant support via appeals in the press and the distribution of circulars and pamphlets, along with advertisements on hoardings across the constituency.

As the first day of polling arrived, few people doubted that the Liberal Party would win the election, although predictions varied as to the likely scale of a Liberal victory. The period after 1902 had seen the Unionist Government stumbling from one crisis to another. The fact that much of

the press was already discussing a Liberal victory might in itself have served to influence the result. There had been a slight worry for some Liberals about the appearance of the Home Rule question. Liberal and Labour candidates in Manchester appeared cautious not to promote this issue too much even though the Irish vote was likely to remain securely behind them whether they promoted it or not; there was no tactical advantage in giving it greater prominence than was necessary. Aspects such as lingering consternation over the Boer War and trade union grievances figured prominently in the rising anti-Unionist tide and these factors contributed significantly to the Liberals' confidence and optimism. The dominant issue across all of the city's constituencies, however, was that of Tariff Reform.

The North West division saw the Liberal Party returned with a majority of 1241 on the highest turnout in over two decades. In the neighbouring division of Manchester East, Balfour was decisively rejected with the Liberals winning with a majority of nearly 2000. Manchester North and South saw equally impressive Liberal victories: in the former, Charles Schwann saw his majority increase from just twenty-six to nearly 2500 and Arthur Haworth's victory in the latter constituted the Liberals' most impressive result, a majority of 4232 and a 68% share of the vote.⁴² In Manchester North East and South West, both LRC candidates were elected. While Clynes's majority of 2432 represented a winning margin of 29.2%, Kelley attained 64.6% of the vote, a majority of 1226. With a turnout of 81.6% this was a significant Labour victory considering the Unionists had won the seat with 62.6% of the vote in 1900. Kelley enthused that his victory represented a 'blow struck at that shade of political thought which was not favourable to the workers'.⁴³ The *Manchester Guardian* believed that Labour's success had been facilitated in large measure by high levels of support from four distinct groups: new voters, Labour supporters, Liberals and dissatisfied Conservatives defecting principally over trading policy.⁴⁴ Interestingly, the *Manchester Guardian* suggested that Conservative voters had also switched allegiance because they felt 'direct representation of labour was a cause more important to them than ordinary party considerations'.⁴⁵ Across Britain, Labour achieved an average swing of 16.8% from the Unionists, nearly twice the average of 9.4% from Unionist to Liberal, which suggests that Labour was winning over Conservative working-class voters.⁴⁶ After the contest, Clynes told the *Manchester Guardian* that he had been keen to promote the idea of a 'big Labour party that could decide legislation and be a determining influence on national policy' and he believed his party had won on a 'distinct

agenda'.⁴⁷ In another interview with *The Clarion*, he stressed his belief that a crucial factor had been 'the spread of Labour opinions', although he conceded that other 'temporary issues like Chinese slavery and Free Trade had also helped'.⁴⁸ The extent to which Clynes had in fact articulated a distinctive Labour agenda can be questioned. Newspapers such as the *Manchester Guardian* might have been expected to emphasise the more Liberal aspects of a Labour candidate's platform, yet careful reading of his election addresses across a range of sources suggests that his campaign lacked a particularly distinctive appeal. This does not mean that there was a complete absence of labour-related issues, but had the free trade issue been less prominent it is doubtful the fledgling Labour Party would have won the seat quite so easily.

Analysis of the 1906 general election in Manchester suggests that issues such as free trade, education and Chinese slavery were of critical importance in pushing the Liberals and LRC together in an anti-Conservative alliance. The election resulted in a left-of-centre landslide which, given the city's history, represented a significant shift in its electoral politics. These were all national issues, and campaigns around the country had focused on the same themes. Nonetheless, the impact of place was significant in that the introduction of Tariff Reform into the political debate in Manchester, more than anything else, enabled the Liberal and Labour candidates to make a direct appeal to the city's electors on an issue that by that time had become almost an article of faith for both rich and poor.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, by-elections had become an increasingly important and visible feature of British politics; a growing popular press ensured such contests attracted considerable attention, generating both local and national interest. A number of historians have concluded that by-election performance before 1914 suggests a shift away from the Liberal Party, yet arguably the Liberals were performing impressively when set against the backdrop of the scale of forces ranged against them because of recent legislation.⁴⁹ Although the Liberals did lose seats to the Conservatives, in some areas they retained seats with an increased share of the vote. Many of these were triangular contests that saw Labour intervention. Even in seats that were lost, the Liberals often still managed to increase their share of the vote. On no occasion did the Labour Party do better than the Liberals in a three-cornered contest before 1914: in every instance the Labour candidate came bottom of the poll. Before the outbreak of war in 1914, there were a number of by-elections in the North West of England, and these provide a valuable

insight into the problems faced by the Liberals and the Labour Party during this period.

With elevation to the cabinet, Winston Churchill was required to resign his seat in 1908 and stand in a by-election.⁵⁰ The sitting member would usually be returned unopposed but Unionist determination to recapture this important division made it unlikely such an opportunity would be allowed to pass. The 1908 contest in Manchester North West represents an interesting by-election in the region before 1914. The main parties viewed the constituency as being critically important to capture as it had acquired a reputation as one that influenced voters not only across the wider region but also the nation; the parties believed the seat possessed significance unlike any other in the country. It was perhaps inevitable that the by-election captivated the national press for the duration of the campaign.

In terms of class, ethnicity and political opinion, Manchester North West was a mixed constituency: it possessed some of Britain's richest men but also some of its poorest. It had a strong Jewish community, a sizeable Irish population and a large number of Unionist Free-Traders who, it was widely understood, put the issue of free trade before party identifications.⁵¹ The division included nearly 12,000 voters split into eight wards, the largest of which was Cheetham. Within the very heart of the city, Exchange and St. Ann's were rich wards in rateable value and represented the centre of the Lancashire cotton trade. Prior to 1906, the constituency had never returned a Liberal and despite the Liberal Party's success in 1906 there was some uncertainty as to the exact political character of the division. The *Liberal Magazine*, for example, believed that 'in no other constituency had so many Unionists voted Liberal without becoming Liberal'.⁵² Many perceived that the Liberal Party had won in 1906 only because of the free trade question, the commercial electorate strongly believing that the future of the cotton industry depended upon it and voting exclusively on that issue. As at the general election, Churchill's opponent in 1908 was William Joynson-Hicks. In his opening address, Churchill sought to emphasise the importance of the contest for the country as a whole, not least because, as he perceived it, a Unionist victory would 'encourage the House of Lords to greater excesses of partisanship'.⁵³ He hoped the working man would not 'support six hundred peers over and above the wishes of six million electors',⁵⁴ although the principal focus of his campaign was, again, Tariff Reform. Joynson-Hicks chose to avoid the subject altogether and focussed instead on issues such as education.

The 1908 by-election also saw a Socialist candidate, but the decision of the SDF to send Dan Irving to fight Manchester North West initiated intense debate across the Labour movement. Keir Hardie was resolute in his opposition, arguing that whilst he certainly favoured an increase in the number of socialist candidates, circumstances in Manchester on this occasion were not favourable; it was simply not the right sort of constituency. He believed that such a campaign would be a ‘fiasco’ and give a ‘false impression as to the real strength of the socialist movement’. Consequently, it would ‘injure the prospects of reasonable candidates elsewhere [and] damage the realisation of socialism nationally’.⁵⁵ Clynes and Kelley shared Hardie’s view and refused to uphold the candidature of someone who represented an organisation that, as they saw it, did not accept the ‘unity and common cause of a united Labour Party’.⁵⁶ In terms of organisation, the SDF was greatly disadvantaged, Irving himself admitting there was no effective organisation in the division apart from a very small Jewish branch and that no preparations had been made beforehand. It was also significant that the Manchester and Salford Trades Council felt unable to support Irving because ‘for the purpose of the election he was not a trade unionist’.⁵⁷ Whilst it cannot be denied that the press, in particular the *Manchester Guardian*, gave Irving ample coverage, it was generally recognised that his chances were poor. In a constituency such as Manchester North West, with considerable commercial and business interests, it was widely accepted that a socialist candidate would struggle to gain widespread support. Irving, however, believed the election offered an ‘opportunity to make known the cause of socialism’ and hoped he would be ‘in the fight’.⁵⁸ The issues Irving focused upon were unemployment, the nationalisation of industry, universal suffrage, secular education, maintenance for children, old age pensions and Irish Home Rule. All of his meetings had to be held outdoors as the SDF had been refused permission to use any of the city’s halls. His speeches were emotionally charged, evangelical in tone and called upon voters to vote for their ‘own emancipation and on behalf of the struggling masses trampled under a soulless capitalism’.⁵⁹

Churchill’s campaign ignored social issues almost altogether, which may seem surprising given the Liberal Government’s recent legislative programme. He instead focused exclusive attention upon free trade and left it to others in his party to advocate the case for social reform. Making his first public appearance since his appointment as Chancellor of the Exchequer, David Lloyd George came to Manchester in support of

Churchill and made a series of speeches. He launched a scathing attack upon 'monopoly and privilege', demanded a 'radical programme of social reform' and called for a 'redistribution of wealth ... fair play to the worker and a war on poverty and destitution'.⁶⁰ For the new Chancellor, social injustice represented a 'stain upon the flag and it was the duty of every man to put an end to it'.⁶¹ Lloyd George declared the by-election timely as it gave the people of the city of his birth the opportunity to demonstrate a 'sense of community', to show the government they were behind it in the quest for social progress.⁶² At the time, it was considered bad form for cabinet ministers to participate in by-election campaigns and the Unionists argued that the appearance of Lloyd George was entirely inappropriate, although they believed it was a sign of desperation as much as anything else.

As with all by-elections during the early twentieth century, the Manchester contest saw the participation of a remarkable array of pressure groups, each attempting to impress upon the candidates, press and public their respective causes. As a recent evaluation has stressed, Edwardian by-elections became the 'quintessential site' of pressure group activity.⁶³ They allowed for an incredible concentration of resources, and given the scale of national press interest, ensured maximum publicity. One of the first to gain attention in Manchester was the women's franchise campaign. Compared to later years, women's tactics were restrained. The question of female suffrage was a topical issue, however, since the Women's Enfranchisement Bill had recently passed through its second reading in the House of Commons. The women's campaign was anxious to use this ministerial by-election as an opportunity to promote its cause. Rather than embark upon disruptive action, the various women's groups decided to leave Liberal meetings alone and instead provided 'counter attractions'. Essentially this entailed holding their own meetings, distributing leaflets and requesting the candidates to outline their position. From the beginning of the contest, all three candidates expressed their general support for a women's vote, although Joynson-Hicks appeared to be the most enthusiastic, even going so far as declaring that he believed women should possess the vote on completely equal terms with men.⁶⁴ He also addressed a wide range of issues that affected women, one of which related to the hours worked by barmaids since there were currently proposals to restrict their hours. Joynson-Hicks claimed he was opposed to any restrictions placed upon female labour.⁶⁵ Somewhat less tactfully, Churchill told voters that he 'didn't like to see women in bars anyway'.⁶⁶ These issues would

have had limited impact in themselves and, although the drink question might have helped mobilise key groups of voters for both parties, Churchill's attitude was emblematic; Joynson-Hicks appeared more sincere and, in fact, more liberal. No candidates, however, 'came up to the standard of requirement' for the women and none were endorsed by either the Women's Social and Political Union or the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies.

Other issues that achieved prominence during the campaign included the eight-hour day and workmen's compensation. For Churchill, the question of social advancement and Tariff Reform were inextricably connected, and electors had a choice between 'progress and reaction'. He suggested that a proposal of Tariff Reform was essentially an attempt to 'reverse the social balance ... to set back the clock and re-conquer the country for forces of capital and privilege',⁶⁷ everything came back to the question of the maintenance of free trade. His opponent argued that the Eight Hours Bill was itself an infringement of free trade as a principle and this, he told voters, was something identified by the Chairman of the Manchester Chamber of Commerce.⁶⁸ He also claimed that the Bill would increase coal prices and thus burden the cotton industry even more so. Joynson-Hicks concluded that it was unfortunate his opponent had supported the Bill 'in the imaginary interest of a million miners to the detriment of about forty-three million people'.⁶⁹ In his closing speech, he launched a ferocious assault on the Liberal government on a number of issues, proclaiming it had 'alienated the colonies, weakened the navy, increased taxation, flouted religious convictions and let loose chaos and bloodshed in Ireland'.⁷⁰ Overall, Joynson-Hicks had conducted a much broader campaign and, much to the annoyance of the Liberals, had chosen not to fight the election on the fiscal question, although in his election address he had openly identified himself as a Tariff Reformer.

The result of the by-election saw the Unionists recapturing Manchester North West with a small majority of 429. Given the constituency's electoral history, this did not represent a substantial reversal for the Liberal Party. The Unionists' majority had been nearly 1500 (a 17% margin of the total vote) in 1895 and the Liberals had not considered the seat worth contesting in either the 1892 or 1900 general elections. The Liberals may have come to consider this constituency as the most famous free trade seat in England, and might claim it as naturally Liberal, but the reality was less straightforward. The press had difficulty interpreting the result: for some sections of the Liberal press it represented a 'heavy setback for the cause of progress [and] an absolutely disastrous blow for Free Trade'.⁷¹ For others,

the wonder was not Churchill's 1908 defeat but his victory in 1906 (Fig. 2.3).⁷² That the Unionist candidate had decided to avoid the fiscal issue caused anger across the Liberal press; the *Daily News* bemoaned the fact that Joynson-Hicks had won 'a victory under obscure colours'.⁷³ Other newspapers simply perceived that, with Catholics and the liquor trade ranged against him, Churchill's defeat was inevitable.⁷⁴ The Unionist press appeared equally divided. Some sections suggested that in making free trade the key issue of the by-election, Churchill had 'staked all and lost'; the Manchester constituency synonymous with free trade had given



Fig. 2.3 Winston Churchill addressing a crowd in Manchester during the 1908 by-election (Alamy)

a firm endorsement for Tariff Reform.⁷⁵ The *Daily Telegraph* took delight in declaring ‘Winston Churchill is Out! Out, Out’ on its front page the following day. Other sections of the Unionist press, including the *Manchester Courier*, took a more pragmatic view, reporting that the result was not primarily a victory for Tariff Reform because the winning candidate had not made it the immediate issue.⁷⁶ In his post-election address, Joynson-Hicks himself refused to cite Tariff Reform as a major reason for his victory, which he attributed instead to the ‘absolute detestation on the part of the commercial and working classes of the current legislation of the present government’.⁷⁷ Yet whilst he and his party may have held back on the subject, others campaigned tirelessly on the issue throughout the contest. The Tariff Reform League, for example, had produced an enormous amount of propaganda material as well as holding regular meetings throughout the constituency. As a non-partisan pressure group, this type of organisation did not come under restrictions on expenditure imposed under electoral law. The press was equally important. Throughout the by-election the *Daily Mail*, a strong advocate of Tariff Reform, had been distributed free across the division. The *Liberal Magazine* later bemoaned that ‘its contents page became almost each day a mere anti-Churchill poster’.⁷⁸ Despite Joynson-Hicks’s inattention to the issue, Tariff Reform did play some part in discourse throughout the by-election.

The 1908 by-election in Manchester suggests a number of factors relating to party strategy and performance. The Unionist candidate had determined to avoid the issue of Tariff Reform altogether and his position on the majority of issues appeared moderate, balanced and he clearly articulated his points effectively, though the key to his success was most likely to have been his focused attacks on current Liberal legislation. Churchill’s campaign seemed weak by comparison. There are a number of wider implications of the by-election. By 1908, the Conservatives as a party had come to recognise Tariff Reform as a serious electoral liability and had calculated that it was probably wise to avoid the issue as best they could during election campaigns. It was clear that the Conservatives as a party were by no means entirely united on Tariff Reform and, in any case, it was not guaranteed that an incoming Unionist administration would put the policy into effect. Having said that, by 1908 the Unionists had become more committed to Tariff Reform because of the worsening economic situation and, as already mentioned, it cannot be suggested that the subject did not have a presence during the election. The Liberals continued somewhat dogmatically to focus on the fiscal issue at the expense of other

issues. As an electoral strategy this may have been something of a flawed tactic. Whilst it was understandable that in areas heavily reliant upon export trade, such as Manchester, the Liberals might continue to stress the benefits of free trade, it appears to have become unnecessary to focus too exclusively on the subject. Also, whilst a few visiting speakers, David Lloyd George most notably, sought to emphasise the government's social reform programme, Churchill did not do so himself. Given the symbolic nature of the constituency, the 1908 Manchester North West by-election could have been viewed as a disaster for the Liberals, yet they had polled respectably, obtaining 48% of the vote.⁷⁹ Lloyd George displayed a remarkable ability to emphasise only the positive when suggesting that 'the polling of only 150 more votes [for the Conservatives] than the aggregate forces of progress confirmed the necessity for the government to proceed with measures of social reform'.⁸⁰ Ultimately, Manchester North West was a marginal constituency and whilst it represented a blow for the Liberals it did not indicate a wider crisis for the party.⁸¹

NOTES

1. Founded in 1884, the Fabians adopted a policy known as 'permeation'. This meant that they were prepared to work with the established parties in order to reform the existing political framework from within as opposed to the more revolutionary approach of the Social Democratic Federation (SDF).
2. The financial immunity of trade unions was called into question following the Taff Vale Judgement. The Taff Vale Railway Company successfully sued the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants, setting the precedent that unions could be held liable for damages incurred by its actions.
3. Although Herbert Gladstone (ultimately) signed the agreement, the principal player in the negotiations had been his political secretary, Jessie Herbert.
4. For examination of Liberal politics in Manchester during the late nineteenth century, see J. Moore, *The Transformation of Urban Liberalism: Party Politics and Urban Governance in Late Nineteenth Century England* (Aldershot, 2006).
5. See the Liberal treasurer's warning to the National Liberal Federation in 1903; *National Liberal Federation Proceedings of the Annual Meetings, 1903*.
6. See the speeches by Augustine Birrell and John Massey, *National Liberal Federation Proceedings of the Annual Meetings, 1905*.

7. See *Manchester Liberal Caucus Minutes*, 24 September 1906.
8. Joseph Chamberlain remained a Liberal Unionist and never joined the Conservative Party although he held office in Unionist governments between 1895 and 1903, serving as Secretary of State for the Colonies under Salisbury and then Balfour.
9. *Manchester Evening News*, 5 January 1906.
10. Nationally, two-thirds of candidates included social reform proposals in their election addresses, see Russell, *Liberal Landslide*, p. 66. Russell notes that candidates who did give some priority to social reform tended to be younger.
11. *Manchester Guardian*, 12 January 1906.
12. *Manchester Guardian*, 5 January 1906.
13. See Churchill speech, *Manchester Guardian*, 10 January 1906.
14. See *Manchester Guardian*, 6 January 1906.
15. *Manchester Courier*, 4 January 1906.
16. A. Sykes, *Tariff Reform in British Politics 1903–1913* (Oxford, 1979), p. 26. On Tariff Reform see also P. Fraser, 'Unionism and Tariff Reform: The Crisis of 1906', *Historical Journal*, 5 (1962).
17. *Manchester Guardian*, 10 January 1906.
18. The Free Trade Union (later League) was formed nationally in July 1903 in response to Chamberlain's campaign for imperial preference. See P. Barberis, M. Tyldesley and J. McHugh (eds) *Dictionary of Political Organisations* (London, 2000), p. 306.
19. See M. Savage, *Dynamics*, p. 148.
20. Previous contests had seen Balfour obtain small majorities, on one occasion as low as 398.
21. *Manchester Guardian*, 10 January 1906. The 1906 general election was perceived to be a particularly ill-natured contest. The press across the country reported a discernible increase in instances of disorder at meetings and Unionist candidates in particular were at the receiving end of much abuse; see A. K. Russell, *Liberal Landslide*, pp. 130–131.
22. See Balfour's speech, *Election Speaker (East Manchester edition)*, January 1906.
23. See Zimmerman's post-election assessment, *Manchester Guardian*, 15 January 1906.
24. See *Election Speaker (East Manchester edition)*, January 1906.
25. *Manchester Evening News*, 10 January 1906.
26. *Manchester Guardian*, 13 January 1906.
27. *Manchester Guardian*, 1 January 1906.
28. *Ibid.*
29. *Manchester Evening News*, 12 January 1912.
30. *Manchester Courier*, 13 January 1906.

31. *Manchester Courier*, 10 January 1906.
32. This did not manifest to any great extent in terms of organised popular Conservatism, for instance membership of the Primrose League remained small even in these parts of Manchester; see, M. Pugh, *The Tories and the People* (Oxford, 1985), p. 123.
33. *Manchester Evening News*, 12 January 1906.
34. *Manchester Courier*, 10 January 1906.
35. See *Labour Leader*, 21 January 1910 that contains a detailed report on the response of a party worker who had just visited the constituency for the first time and was clearly overwhelmed by what he encountered.
36. *Manchester Evening News*, 8 January 1906.
37. See Thane, P. 'The Labour Party and State Welfare' in K. D. Brown, *The First Labour Party* (London, 1985), p. 183 and J. Harris, *Unemployment and Politics: A Study in English Social Policy 1886–1914* (London, 1985), p. 186.
38. The LRC issued a collective policy statement alongside the candidates' individual statements.
39. *Liberal Yearbook*, 1907.
40. *The Clarion*, 19 January 1906.
41. *Labour Leader*, 5 January 1906.
42. The Liberal share of the vote was 63.7% in Manchester North.
43. *Manchester Guardian*, 15 January 1906.
44. *Manchester Guardian*, 12 January 1906.
45. *Ibid.*
46. A. K. Russell, *Liberal Landslide*, p. 200.
47. See Clynes interview with the *Manchester Guardian*, 15 January 1906.
48. See *The Clarion*, 26 January 1906.
49. R. McKibbin, *Evolution*, pp. 82–7.
50. The Re-election of Ministers Act ended this requirement in 1926.
51. See *Liberal Magazine*, May 1908.
52. *Ibid.*
53. *Manchester Guardian*, 16 April 1908.
54. *Ibid.*
55. See *Labour Leader*, 24 April 1908.
56. *Manchester Guardian*, 16 March 1908.
57. Irving was a member of the Gas Workers and General Union which was affiliated to the Manchester and Salford Trades Council. The council said he was not a trade unionist due to a technicality, but what this was remains entirely unclear. *Manchester Guardian*, 19 April 1908.
58. *Manchester Guardian*, 13 April 1908.
59. *Ibid.*
60. *Manchester Guardian*, 22 April 1908.

61. Ibid.
62. Ibid.
63. P. Readman and L. Blaxill, 'Edwardian By-Elections', p. 230.
64. *Manchester Guardian*, 14 April 1908.
65. *Manchester Guardian*, 16 April 1908.
66. Ibid.
67. Ibid.
68. *Manchester Guardian*, 20 April 1908.
69. Ibid.
70. See *Manchester Courier*, 24 April 1908.
71. *Morning Leader*, 25 April 1908.
72. *Daily Chronicle*, 25 April 1908.
73. *Daily News*, 25 April 1908.
74. *Bristol Mercury*, quoted in *Manchester Guardian*, 25 April 1908.
75. *Bristol Times* and *Bristol Mercury* quoted in *Manchester Guardian*, 25 April 1908.
76. *Manchester Courier*, 25 April 1908.
77. Ibid.
78. *Liberal Magazine*, May 1908.
79. Another factor in relation to the Liberal poll was the Jewish vote. Given the government's liberal administration of the religious persecution clause of the Aliens Act, it may have been the case that the Jewish vote was cast solidly for Churchill, so this could have served to limit the swing at the by-election. For consideration of this aspect, see J. Garrard, *The English and Immigration 1880–1910* (Oxford, 1970).
80. *Manchester Guardian*, 27 April 1908.
81. To put the Manchester North West result in national perspective, the party managed to retain nine of the fifteen Liberal-held seats that saw by-elections during 1908.

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The Viability of the Progressive Alliance: Electoral Politics in Manchester, 1910–1912

Whilst the Progressive Alliance was a fundamental dimension of electoral politics from 1903, it is essential to remember that it never existed in a formal sense, insofar as there was never, nor was there ever likely to be, a formal alliance or coalition between the parties. The Progressive Alliance amounted to an informal, although a very significant, agreement between the Liberals and the fledgling Labour Party. It was never imposed from above and the local parties remained autonomous in relation to the selection of their parliamentary candidates. Certainly, seats included under the terms of the agreement could attract a degree of intervention from national party headquarters. These tended to be double member constituencies, and in these areas it was easier to obtain local compliance given the fact that there were two members to be elected, ideally one Liberal and one Labour representative. However, even in these areas the local associations could not be forced to accept national recommendations. The 1903 agreement had facilitated Labour's parliamentary breakthrough at the 1906 general election and, with a high level of constituency support, Labour were given a clear run in twenty-four seats. The parties shared similar programmes, and issues such as the restoration of trade union rights helped to ensure the mutual alliance. The long-term durability of such an agreement, however, was likely to be more complicated. First, it could not be guaranteed that local Liberal associations would be so willing to 'hand over' seats that they believed they could win themselves and, second, there was the possibility that local Labour organisations might become more

ambitious, essentially becoming increasingly committed to the idea of complete independent Labour representation.

The most significant aspect of the January 1910 general election in Manchester was that the Liberal and Labour parties opposed each other for the first time in a three-cornered contest.¹ Analysis of Manchester sheds light on the Progressive Alliance before 1914 and illustrates how, at the constituency level, relations could be far from harmonious. By 1909 the sitting members for two Manchester constituencies (East, held by a Liberal, and South West, by Labour) had stated their intention to retire at the dissolution of Parliament. In accordance with the spirit of the Progressive Alliance, the Liberals ought to have been given a free run in Manchester East and Labour should have remained unopposed in Manchester South West.² The Labour Party, however, had concluded that Manchester East was a seat that their own organisation ought to contest, largely on the basis that they had a strong organisation in the district and were doing well in municipal contests there. It proceeded to adopt its own candidate, city councillor and miners' agent John Sutton.³ The Liberal Association was willing to accept this on the condition that the Labour Party withdrew its candidate, J. M. McLachlan, in Manchester South West.

The Manchester Liberal Federation strove hard to find a compromise, but the East Manchester Liberal Association had already decided to make a serious challenge for the seat. This was reflected by the Association's choice of candidate, L. W. Zimmerman, who *The Times* reported was the 'strongest candidate the party could put forward'.⁴ As a last resort the MLF urged a deputation from the East Manchester Liberal Association that 'in the interests of Liberalism as a whole [they] ought to withdraw their candidate'.⁵ The deputation replied that there was 'no necessity to consider the matter further [since] they had unanimously decided to continue'.⁶ The MLF could do nothing else but declare that the Association had 'placed upon themselves the responsibility of the contest'.⁷ Eventually Zimmerman decided he no longer wished to continue and formally retired on 29 December, thus resolving the issue. Relieved, the MLF declared its 'high appreciation of [his] self-denial and self-sacrifice for the peoples' cause'.⁸ The episode is important for a number of reasons. Certainly, Labour acted as the aggressor by adopting McLachlan to contest Manchester South West, a move that seemed ungracious to the local Liberals since they held the seat. The Federation's proposed solution seemed logical however; Manchester East was an overwhelmingly

working-class constituency and had never returned a Liberal before 1906. Sutton was perceived to be a safe candidate, unlikely to alienate Liberal voters, and was certainly more acceptable to the MLF than McLachlan, an out-and-out socialist. Manchester South West was a socially mixed division and had previously returned Liberal members, so it made sense that this seat should be contested in the Liberal interest. The consequences of this apparent breakdown in Liberal–Labour relations appeared clear to many contemporary observers, with the *Manchester Courier* predicting that as ‘negotiations had failed both of the progressive forces are faced with new dangers’.⁹

The smooth operation of the Liberal–Labour electoral agreement in 1906 had been a crucial factor in the overall results for both parties. It is important to recognise, however, that there had been some significant developments after 1906 at the national level and some historians have suggested that, by 1910, Lib-Labism effectively ceased to be the alternative it had been. In large part this was because its most powerful supporter, the miners, had gone over to Labour.¹⁰ Blewett suggests that by 1910 the lines between the Liberal and Labour Parties were more clearly drawn, yet Lib-Lab sentiments remained strong amongst both political activists and sections of the electorate.¹¹ More significantly, attempts by the Labour Party to expand were perceived by the Liberals as acts of aggression. The Liberals, however, appear to have seen the value of maintaining the Progressive Alliance given that they, ultimately, decided to stand down in East Manchester.

The January 1910 general election in Manchester South West demonstrates how Liberal–Labour relations were clearly fraught. McLachlan fought a vigorous campaign and pulled no punches in his hostility towards the Liberals who, he declared, were ‘the real enemies of the workers’.¹² In particular, he expressed his objection to the way the *Manchester Guardian* described Clynes as a Labour candidate yet himself as an independent socialist. Indeed, the Liberal press did all it could to present McLachlan as a man undermining the unity of Manchester’s progressives forces.¹³ The Liberal candidate, C. T. Needham, avoided blatant criticism of McLachlan although he did tell electors that a vote for Labour would be ‘as good as a vote for the Unionists’.¹⁴ The Unionist candidate, Henry Colefax, was an absolutist Tariff Reformer who directed most of his attention to attacking the Liberals on this question, claiming that the House of Lords was a ‘dead issue’. His position was that the Unionists had not ‘rejected the Budget but had simply referred it to the people’.¹⁵ The central planks of

his campaign were Tariff Reform and the budget although he also addressed a wide range of social questions such as unemployment, pensions and education.¹⁶ By 1910, the Unionist position (nationally) on Tariff Reform had become much clearer and this was reflected by the more forthright position adopted by the party's candidates in Manchester. Colefax launched a fierce condemnation of the budget and went to great lengths to present figures in support of his assertion that the burden of taxation would fall heaviest not upon the rich but the ordinary working man.¹⁷ As he told one meeting, the budget hit hardest 'the luxuries of the poor ... whisky, tobacco and beer'.¹⁸ Colefax was anxious to stress that he was 'fully in sympathy with the social reforms advocated by the Liberal Party', but the critical question was how best to fund these. The answer, he said, lay with the fiscal question; he told one meeting that 'the Radicals cried "never tax the foreigner" but he taxes you all the time ... I say put some of your taxes on the foreigner'¹⁹ and devoted considerable attention to demonstrating how British labour was 'exposed to unfair competition from abroad'.²⁰ Interestingly, he never attacked the Labour Party, declaring that, whilst he disagreed with McLachlan's approval of 'the socialisation of the means of production', he was in agreement with many aspects of McLachlan's platform, in particular the need to address the distress and poverty caused by unemployment. The Conservatives conducted a vigorous campaign and Colefax was a confident speaker on a wide range of issues. It is vital to remember that the strength of individual candidates could be of critical importance during election campaigns; Colefax was emblematic of this.

In terms of policy and approach, McLachlan spoke about his 'unflinching socialist principles' and focused attention principally upon issues such as unemployment, poverty, trade unionism, the land question and, in particular, abolition of the House of Lords.²¹ Apart from the Lords issue, the Labour programme did not differ enormously from that of the Liberals, although McLachlan presented his policies in more socialistic language. The January 1910 election placed Labour in a difficult position. Given the prominence of the constitutional question, it was even harder for the Labour Party to offer a particularly distinct appeal. Blewett suggests that, during this general election, Labour candidates were essentially 'little more than surrogates for radicals' and in his evaluation of the election nationally identified how little Labour speeches differed from those of the Liberals.²² Though evaluation of Manchester's other Labour candidates affirms this, McLachlan was an exception. His socialist inclinations help to

explain why both the local Liberal Association and McLachlan himself remained so determined to contest the seat. His predecessor George Kelley had been a prominent Lib-Labour and Liberal activists and supporters had believed him to be one of them. With a change of personnel, not to mention political stance, the situation changed dramatically.

In Manchester North East, J. R. Clynes, like all Labour candidates in January 1910, made social and economic reform the key focus of his campaign. This was, of course, a response to economic conditions, particularly rising unemployment. Declaring himself 'a worker for the workers', Clynes spoke of a need for a 'war on poverty and social injustice' and argued that the only way to enable truly effective social legislation was to 'abolish the House of Lords completely'.²³ The extent to which this appeal proved to be effective was questionable. Clynes later remarked that 'the very poorest people, who least understand the causes from which they suffer, were the least responsive to our appeals and were deceived by the quack remedies of the Tariff Reformers'.²⁴ This was an astute observation: the Conservatives remained exceptionally strong among the poorest in the slum areas of the city. Concentrated largely around the city centre, these areas were populated by casual workers who remained outside the influence of trade unions. Nonetheless, throughout the campaign Clynes remained focused on the issue of social reform and the 'great Liberal work' that had been done. He told one audience that there had been 'more genuine endeavour to effect social advancement by legislation during the previous four years than [by] any political party in the history of this country'.²⁵ In essence, Clynes campaigned on an identical platform to that of the city's Liberal candidates, focusing on social reform and the obstructionist tactics of the House of Lords. His Unionist opponent, Manchester City Councillor and solicitor Sir William Vaudrey, adopted the same approach as Colefax in Manchester South West, arguing that the Budget did nothing for the working man and that Tariff Reform offered the best prospect of improving the condition of the people, particularly in alleviating unemployment.²⁶ In his election address he elaborated on his proposals for a second chamber consisting only of appointed and elected peers, strong support for old age pensions, proper maintenance of the navy, the right of parents to 'have their children taught in their own religion' and how he was absolutely against the separation of Britain and Ireland.²⁷

In Manchester East, the retirement of the sitting Liberal member and withdrawal of the prospective candidate just after Christmas 1909 left a straight fight between the Labour and Unionist parties. The number of

electors had decreased since the previous contest and Sutton assumed this was a consequence of rising poverty in the district; many decent people, he claimed, were disqualified because they had been forced to accept poor relief.²⁸ At the same time, the number of estimated removals in the division was high, approximately 15% of registered voters. A key question, of course, was how Liberal supporters in the division would vote. Initially it was presumed that many of the constituency's Liberals remained hostile towards Labour but, as the contest progressed, the *Manchester Guardian* reported that most had 'swallowed their disappointment' and were 'rallying around Sutton in increasing numbers'.²⁹ Showing good grace, Zimmerman also issued a personal appeal to the division's Liberals, urging them to unite in their support for the Labour candidate. Sutton received valuable campaign help from the Liberal Party as well as from a number of other sources including students from the university, the local Baptist College and the local Co-operative Societies.³⁰ The cooperative movement usually adopted a non-political role but the threat of increased or new taxation on food most likely contributed to their decision to intervene in this instance. Throughout the campaign the Conservative candidate, Elvy Robb, was met by particularly hostile audiences. This was probably not helped by the fact that he was reported to have commented that if he had to live in East Manchester he would become a socialist.³¹ Throughout the contest, Sutton focused attention principally upon the budget and the constitutional rights of the House of Commons (as compared to the unconstitutional exercise of the veto by the House of Lords). He told electors that the Labour Party 'were not robbers but policemen protecting the interests of the working-classes' and that the Unionists' rejection of the budget had nothing to do with the interests of the people but was 'because they would have to pay something'.³²

The January 1910 general election in Manchester highlights the differences of approach individual candidates adopted during this period, within their parties as much as between them. Whilst some Conservative candidates appeared to elaborate on policy fully and effectively, others adopted a more confrontational approach, bereft of detailed discussion, and endured difficult campaigns in areas with predominantly working-class electorates. It is noticeable, however, that they all adopted very strong pro-Tariff Reform agendas. Doing so in Manchester, the spiritual home of free trade ideology, was of enormous significance.

The remaining constituencies of Manchester North West, North and South saw straight fights between Liberal and Unionist candidates. The

latter two were considered to be safe Liberal seats. Arthur Haworth's majority in Manchester South in 1906 had been over 4000, one of the highest in the country. Similarly, Manchester North had seen Charles Schwann retain the seat he had held since 1886 with a majority of nearly 2500. Churchill had lost Manchester North West at the 1908 by-election, although the Liberals believed that the seat would be recaptured at a general election. The Unionists made a determined effort to hold Manchester North West and challenge Liberal dominance in Manchester North although they appear to have made a weak effort in Manchester South. The local Liberal press believed that the Conservative Association had made an unwise choice in their candidate for this division, especially within the context of a 'peers versus the people' debate. The Unionist candidate, Captain Ward Jackson, was a Yorkshire squire who had no background in politics and no connection with Manchester. This point was not lost on the Liberals, although, given the seat's electoral history, it might have been difficult for the Unionist Association to secure a better candidate. In contrast, Haworth was a well-known Manchester cotton merchant and noted Congregationalist with an impressive political record.³³

Unsurprisingly for the Liberal candidates, the central campaign issues were the budget, constitutional reform and, inevitably, free trade.³⁴ Haworth in Manchester South was emblematic of the Liberal approach in asking whether the working man should vote for 'handing over the power of his own vote to a non-representative, utterly irresponsible and uncontrollable House of Lords'.³⁵ In Manchester North West, the Liberal George Kemp was repeatedly questioned about his views on Irish Home Rule. He attempted to avoid the subject, leading the local Conservative press to conclude that he had 'failed to define his position'.³⁶ Whilst the Conservative candidates Hiram Howell (Manchester North) and Ward-Jackson (Manchester South) attempted to avoid the question of the Lords, Joynson-Hicks in Manchester North West focused his campaign largely on the legitimacy of the second chamber, claiming that the House of Lords was 'the only means by which new legislation could be referred to the people of the country'.³⁷ In relation to the budget, he contended that it amounted to an 'unequal taxation of wealth [and] if land was to be taxed, so should commerce and other sources of unearned increment'.³⁸ In a division where commercial interests dominated, such sentiments may not have represented the best strategy.

The January 1910 general election produced a number of significant results for the Liberal Party in Manchester. By far the most satisfactory was

the recapturing of the Manchester North West constituency. The loss of the seat two years earlier had represented a blow to the Liberals which was symbolic as much as anything else. Winning the seat back had been a priority for the Liberals, so victory here (on a 5.5% swing) served to increase the party's morale across the whole city as indeed the country. The result of the election in Manchester East saw the Labour Party winning the seat with a majority of 1019 on 54% of the vote. The percentage decline of the 'progressive vote' since 1906 amounted to only 4.6%. Despite the events leading up to the election, it does not appear that Liberal voters in the constituency had deserted Sutton. The swing to the Unionists in this division was the lowest of all Manchester constituencies, suggesting that the Labour Party was strong here. Given the constituency's electoral background, this was a significant result. Of course, had the Liberal candidate proceeded the result could have been very different. Tellingly, Sutton believed he had won because '6,110 electors were in favour of the campaign against the House of Lords, [desired to maintain] Free Trade, [supported] the Budget and [wanted] the abolition of poverty'.³⁹ Clynes held Manchester North East with a majority of 1478 on 58.4% of the popular vote, a 6.2% fall in Labour's share since 1906.

The result in Manchester South West was disastrous for both progressive parties, the Unionists winning the seat with a majority of just 107. The Unionists obtained 42.4% of the popular vote, the Liberals 41.0% and Labour 16.6%. For the Labour Party, especially, the result was disappointing. Faced with Liberal opposition the party had failed to defend a seat that it had held, coming bottom of the poll. It also suggests that the Liberals were intrinsically stronger in this area than was Labour and that the Liberal candidate had taken a substantial share of what in 1906 had been the LRC's vote. The experience of Manchester South West demonstrated the difficulties Labour faced where the party lost sitting members owing to retirement or death. Retirements could encourage the Liberals to make their own claim. Another message from the result was very clear: as recognised by the Liberal press, the combined 'progressive' poll amounted to 4222 votes (57.6% of the total), a decisive majority against the Lords. The splitting of the 'progressive vote' had negated this and the seat had been lost because of what one senior Liberal described as 'unnecessary conditions'. There were many lessons for the future. McLachlan attributed his defeat to the 'undeniable advantage of the Lords and the budget agitation to the Liberals', although he remained upbeat in declaring that the seat had been lost only temporarily to the Labour cause. The

principal lesson of the South West result was that the seat undoubtedly contained a 'progressive' majority but this was not large enough for either the Liberals or Labour to win within the context of a three-cornered contest; the ultimate lesson was that the Progressive Alliance worked and that competition led to defeat.

In Manchester South, the Liberal Party managed to hold the seat but with a significantly reduced majority of 2452 on 58.9% of the popular vote compared to 68.0% in 1906. This constituted a hostile swing of 9.1% and was in the context of a weak Conservative candidate. In Manchester North, the Liberal Party held the seat with a majority of 1259 on 56.9% of the vote. This represented a decrease of 6.8% in the Liberal vote when compared to 1906, although elections before then had seen that vote fluctuate between 50.2% (the lowest) in 1900 and 52.8% (the highest) in 1895. Therefore, the January 1910 result, in this light, suggests that the Liberals were retaining much of their support. Schwann, an elder statesman of Manchester Liberalism, remained a highly popular MP and his personal prestige was possibly a factor in sustaining the Liberal vote.

The January 1910 general election campaign had been lengthy and intense. In contrast, the December contest was shorter and less heated and some observers sensed a degree of election fatigue. The December 1910 general election proved to be anything but dull, however. Some historians have suggested that it was only during the December campaign that the constitutional question achieved the primacy it had been denied during the earlier contest.⁴⁰ Since the December election took place on an eleven-month-old register, the efficiency of the party organisations was of critical importance and, in particular, the timing of the election required some considerable effort in terms of locating removals. As soon as the election had been announced, officials from the MLF placed advertisements in the city's newspapers requesting that notification of removals be forwarded to their offices. The immediate response to this alone resulted in over 500 replies providing details of changes.⁴¹ Analysis of Manchester suggests that before 1914 there were clear differences as regards the efficiency of the respective party organisations. At both national and constituency levels the Liberal Party organisation in 1910 was at the peak of its efficiency. In Manchester, Liberal organisation lacked neither workers nor funds. This was in sharp contrast to both the Labour and Conservative parties who struggled to match the effectiveness of the Liberal organisation.⁴² Yet organisational shortcomings did not prevent the Conservatives from mounting a full-scale assault on one of Manchester's key seats in December

1910. By selecting one of the country's best-known advocates of Tariff Reform, Andrew Bonar Law, for Manchester North West, the Unionists had determined to attack free trade in a seat with which it was fundamentally synonymous.⁴³ Bonar Law had given up the prospect of a safe seat in South Dulwich to contest the Manchester constituency although he had allegedly been promised another safe one were he to lose. A Glasgow-based iron merchant with a background in business, he was not what one might call a traditional Tory. Bonar Law's candidature in Manchester represented an attempt to attract publicity, an indicator of his political ambition, a bid for future leadership of the party. In his opening address, he announced that the critical question was whether 'the nation was going to be master of its own house, or is our government and country to be subject to a cabinet whose policy is dictated by a faction [of radical Liberals]'.⁴⁴ A major plank of Bonar Law's campaign was opposition to the Parliament Bill principally on the grounds that 'so long as the government can command a majority in the commons for two years it can do anything it likes, not even excepting the power to abolish the crown'.⁴⁵ A few days later he told an audience how the Commons 'could do what it liked; they could make Keir Hardie President of a British Republic'.⁴⁶ Clearly he was taking some artistic licence here. In support of his Tariff Reform proposal, Bonar Law told voters that any increase in the price of food would be alleviated by reducing taxation on other goods and would not disrupt trade in the cotton industry since trade between Britain and the empire would be increased. Ultimately, as the *Manchester Guardian* sarcastically suggested, Bonar Law's central message was 'free trade between Britain and India against the rest of the world'.⁴⁷ His opponent, George Kemp, who had regained the seat for the Liberals in the January contest, focused his attention upon the question of the Lords veto, arguing that, had it not been for the veto, even more extensive reform legislation could have been introduced.

In Manchester North East, the seat's sitting Labour member J. R. Clynes contended that the contest was 'not one between the Commons and the Lords but a battle between the peers and the people'.⁴⁸ The division's Liberals placed advertisements on hoardings, circulated over 6000 election addresses in support of his candidature and assisted in the supply of motor cars.⁴⁹ Without this assistance, Clynes would undoubtedly have been disadvantaged. The Conservative candidate was a well-known local philanthropist and strong advocate of Tariff Reform: Arthur Taylor. Like Bonar Law, he sought to emphasise that the cotton industry would not be

disadvantaged by a measure of reform in trading policy. In a significant turn of events just four days before polling, the Unionist leader Balfour, in an address at the Royal Albert Hall, made the monumental announcement that an incoming Unionist government would not introduce any measure of Tariff Reform without first holding a referendum on the issue. Significantly, he also urged the Liberal Party to make the same pledge in connection to Home Rule. The electoral impact of this for candidates on the ground was yet to be determined. On the one hand it may have served to alienate ardent Tariff Reformers; on the other hand it would have allowed others to vote for the Unionists safe in the knowledge that it would not amount to abandoning their free trade principles since it was not guaranteed that a Unionist administration would introduce Tariff Reform. In the neighbouring Manchester North division the Conservative candidate, city councillor and journalist H. E. Howell, also enthusiastically advocated fiscal reform and placed this at the forefront of his campaign alongside Irish Home Rule (which he was passionately against), ahead of the constitutional debate. In other constituencies the Unionist candidates sought to evade the Tariff Reform question altogether. In Manchester South, for instance, Philip Glazebrook ignored the issue and somehow managed to avoid the constitutional question as well, although he did tell voters 'if the will of the country is that the hereditary principle should go then it must go'.⁵⁰ The Unionist campaign in Manchester South came to an abrupt end, however, when after failing to submit his nomination papers in time, the candidate was disqualified from the contest and the sitting member was returned unopposed.⁵¹ Not surprisingly, this enraged many local Unionists, and the following weeks saw a tirade of protests in the pages of the *Manchester Courier*. For some this was indicative of disorder within the local organisation; one respondent went so far as to declare that 'Manchester Unionism is hopeless'.⁵² The Unionist position was much better in the neighbouring constituency of Manchester South West which the party had captured in January. In the December contest, the sitting Unionist member H. A. Colefax had a straight fight with Liberal C. T. Needham, Labour having abandoned the contest to concentrate on securing the returns of Clynes and Sutton. Both candidates attempted to capture the large working-class vote by focusing on questions such as unemployment, social reform and poverty. The question of the veto was largely ignored by both candidates. Throughout the campaign, it was believed that those who had supported the Labour candidate in the January contest would now transfer their vote to the Liberals. The local

Unionist press took strong objection to this assumption, arguing that such predictions were as ‘unwarrantable as they were gratuitous’.⁵³

The December 1910 general election proved to be a major setback for the Conservative Party in Manchester. The election saw the return of four Liberals and two Labour members. The contested seats resulted in two Liberal holds, one Liberal gain and Labour holding the seats which it already possessed. In Manchester North West the Liberal Party held the seat but with a smaller majority of 445. Importantly, this amounted to an adverse swing of only 1.4% within the context of a very high profile Conservative candidate; this equated to 52.1% of the popular vote compared to 53.5% and a 783 majority in January of that year. The Liberals appeared to be holding their own in this critical Manchester constituency although the party had not won with a massive majority; the seat was by no means secure. In Manchester North the Liberals again held the seat but with a much smaller majority, 665 compared to 1259 in January. The share of the popular vote had declined from 56.9% to 53.9% and the turnout had decreased from 89.1% in January to 83.0% in December, although removals may have contributed to this figure. The result in Manchester North appeared to suggest that the Unionists were making some headway, although it should be remembered that margins had always been narrow in this division. Before 1906, Schwann’s majority had been 1455 at its highest and twenty-six at its lowest (in 1895 and 1900 respectively). The majority of 2454 in 1906 had been exceptional. In reality, this was a more marginal seat than the 1906 result might imply. The sitting member’s personal appeal undoubtedly helped sustain the Liberal vote and perhaps helps to explain a swing to the Unionists of only 3%; were he to retire, however, the Liberal position might be less secure.

The most interesting contest in January 1910 had been that of Manchester South West, a triangular fight resulting in the Unionists capturing the seat from Labour. In December, the Liberals won the seat with a small majority of 259. No doubt assisted by Labour’s decision to transfer efforts to the eastern divisions, their vote had risen by 10.9% despite a reduced turnout. Labour held both its seats though majorities suffered. In Manchester North East, Clynes’s majority fell from 1478 in January to just 205 in December, his support falling from 58.4% to 51.2% of the vote. In the East division, John Sutton retained the seat he had won earlier in the year with a majority of 871, the highest of all the city’s constituencies. In January it had been 1019 but in percentage terms the Labour share of the popular vote had fallen by only 0.2%; the turnout had dropped

markedly here from 88.6% to 80.5%. Results such as these served to reinforce the necessity of a progressive alliance. Despite winning both the seats it contested in December 1910, the local Labour organisation was quick to acknowledge that significant improvements were essential if the party was to maintain its parliamentary position in the city. Clynes told the *Labour Leader* that it was 'necessary for the Labour Party to make greater preparation in the future than we have done up to now ... the lack of permanent organisation must be removed'.⁵⁴ The *Labour Leader* complained that 'one man cannot be expected to improvise an efficient organisation where none previously exists' and suggested that local shortcomings were largely because of the central party's 'inattention to the work of organisation', concluding that 'in consequence, it had jeopardised the seat of so valuable an MP as Clynes'.⁵⁵

Evaluation of the 1910 general election illustrates a number of important points in relation to political development in Manchester. In terms of organisation, the Liberal Party appeared to be in good shape in all parts of the city. Historians such as Thompson have identified weaknesses in other parts of the country, but the evidence in Manchester suggests that the party had successfully overhauled its organisation by 1910. This did not mean that they were complacent about their electoral position; throughout the year, the local organisation had made strenuous efforts to ensure that it was ready for a contest. The effectiveness of the party machine would be critical in order to ward off determined Unionist attempts to regain a foothold in the city's parliamentary representation. The Unionists were determined to recapture some of the ground lost in 1906 and this was particularly the case in constituencies such as Manchester North West, recaptured at the intervening by-election but lost again at the general election in January 1910. Here the choice of candidate reflected the Conservative Party's extent of ambition, Bonar Law himself relinquishing the prospect of a safe seat to stand in Manchester. Even with such a strong candidate, however, the swing against the Liberals proved to be very small at only 1.4%. This suggests that, whilst this was certainly not a safe Liberal seat, the party was performing very well here.

For the Labour Party, prospects for the future appeared somewhat insecure despite having two MPs in the city. The majorities in 1906 had been high because of the huge backlash against the Unionists, but by the end of 1910 these had been dramatically reduced. The North East constituency in particular presented potential problems. Clynes was undoubtedly becoming a popular political figure locally but his majority had fallen

alarmingly from 2432 to 1478 to 205 (29.2% to only 2.4%) over the course of three elections. In Manchester North East, a predominantly working-class constituency, Labour should have been strengthening its position but this was not the case; an obvious weakness was organisation. The Labour Party still had no permanent local organisation to match that of the established parties; its presence was limited to the work of local councillors, activists and the candidates themselves. No matter how remarkable their efforts, they were not enough to sustain the party's electoral position in the area and considerable improvements were needed; given the limited numbers of canvassers it is probable that many potential Labour voters were overlooked. The support of the local Liberal Association was invaluable yet this did not highlight the Labour Party's distinctive features. Significantly, Clynes stated that his party had met its weakest response from the poorest electors, those least likely to attend political meetings or to take the initiative to register themselves. Labour's inability to take active measures to reach these voters may have been critical, though whether they would have voted in their favour remains uncertain. While clearly appreciative of the difficulties facing Clynes, the national party appeared slow to address these issues. Had there been a general election in 1915, Clynes may have lost his seat. In terms of issues, both general elections of 1910 were dominated by the constitutional question though the extent to which this issue actually dominated the campaigns in the constituencies differed dramatically.

During 1912, there were two by-elections in Manchester and in both the issue of national insurance proved decisive in determining the results. As Readman and Blaxill have suggested, by-elections tended to be fought on the issues 'dominating national discourse'.⁵⁶ Few government measures have ever attracted as much controversy upon their introduction as the 1911 Insurance Act. It represented a significant landmark in the development of social welfare provision in Britain, laying the foundations of the modern welfare state. Based upon the principle of contribution, the scheme insured against loss of health and temporary unemployment. All workers earning less than £160 per year were now obliged to make a weekly contribution of four pence into the scheme; their employer added three pence and the state topped this up with two pence. In return, workers incapacitated through ill health would be entitled to draw a payment of ten shillings a week for thirteen weeks and then five for another thirteen weeks. Alongside sickness payments, the scheme provided additional critical benefits including payment for women on maternity 'leave' and

sanatorium treatment for those suffering from tuberculosis. The Insurance Act insured workers in a select number of trades, mainly manual occupations, against short-term unemployment. Workers and their employer would each make contributions of two and a half pence per week with the state adding another three pence. Insured workers would receive seven shillings for up to fifteen weeks in one year during periods of unemployment. All payments were received at the recently established labour exchanges. A significant aspect of the national insurance scheme was the element of compulsion, that contributions were to be made at source. Many skilled workers who were already paying into schemes run by friendly societies or trade unions assumed, wrongly, that with the arrival of a national scheme they would have to pay twice or receive lesser benefits under the state scheme. Conservative campaigning perpetuated these misconceptions while the general principle of the scheme, that of providing for others as well as insuring oneself, remained anathema within a value system in which a clear distinction was made between the deserving and undeserving poor. Despite a considerable degree of suspicion, however, the measure became more generally accepted and opposition subsided over the following few years. By 1913, nearly two and a half million workers were eligible for unemployment benefits under the scheme and fifteen million were covered under its health provisions.

The first by-election followed the appointment of Sir Arthur Haworth to the position of Junior Lord of the Treasury. Convention usually ensured that such elections were uncontested though the Unionists were as eager to capture this critical seat as they had been at the 1908 North West by-election. Haworth's opponent was Philip Glazebrook, the would-be candidate disqualified in December 1910 for returning his nomination papers too late. When the 1912 election was announced, Glazebrook was unfortunately out of the country and had to correspond with his party and electors via cablegram, returning for only the last few days of the campaign.

Haworth chose to focus almost exclusively on the Insurance Act. The compulsory aspect of the scheme perhaps did most to undermine its appeal. A sizable proportion of electors within the division already paid into insurance schemes and enjoyed relative security of employment. It was customary for warehouses to provide sick pay for a limited period and it was widely believed that an employee would be compelled to pay four pence a week for something he was already sure of and instead of receiving full wages he would have to 'depend on a beggarly pittance from the state'.⁵⁷ Trying to convince the constituency's warehousemen and clerks

of the wider benefits of the Insurance Act proved problematic for the Liberal Party and the Unionist's portrayal of the measure as a 'serious menace to the prosperity of the country', which would have an 'especially adverse effect', further heightened their concerns.⁵⁸ Howarth did his best to reassure voters that even if they were already in a scheme they would receive substantially increased benefits; appealing to employers he stressed that the scheme would reduce expenditure in connection to poor relief.⁵⁹ The campaign promoted the idea of the scheme as a 'state aided, employer aided thrift club',⁶⁰ which to all intents and purposes it was.

As Glazebrook remained abroad, the Unionists relied upon a series of guest speakers and they all adopted one simple strategy: to condemn the Insurance Act and other aspects of the Liberal Government's social welfare reform programme. One spoke of the 'expensive amusement of old age pensions'.⁶¹ The Liberal Party, on the other hand, argued that since the Unionists had voted for the measure in the House of Commons it was 'dishonest now to make [it] a plank at by-elections' and that the election had deteriorated into a campaign of 'falsehoods'.⁶² The Unionists' assault upon the measure was indeed ferocious. Liberal speakers meanwhile sought to appeal to the goodwill of the public spirit, declaring it 'the greatest step forward in the cause of national health and individual happiness there had ever been produced'; it was the first attempt to 'guard English people against the worst horrors of being poor'.⁶³ The Liberals went anxiously into polling day although they believed they were 'holding their own'. The party believed that the electorate now had 'an increased awareness of the details of the Act and had come to recognise its soundness'.⁶⁴ The electors' response, they hoped, would 'show their confidence in government policy'.⁶⁵

The result of the Manchester South by-election came as a surprise to both parties: the Unionists captured the seat with a majority of 579 on a turnout of 84%. Although the swing against the Liberals was large, Haworth's majority being almost 2500 in January 1910, it would be wrong to interpret the loss as indicative of a wider crisis for the Liberal Party. The Conservative majority was only 4.2% and it is worth remembering that the constituency had an erratic electoral history prior to 1906. On this occasion the result was determined by clerks and warehousemen who perceived their interests to be threatened by current legislation, namely the Insurance Act. Although, in an immediate sense, this represented a problem for the Liberal Party, it did not mean it would be a long-term or insurmountable one.

The resignation of the Liberal MP Sir George Kemp in July 1912 saw the voters of Manchester North West participating in their fifth parliamentary election in the space of just six years. Few constituencies witnessed such regular change in their parliamentary representation. Of all by-elections in the North West of England before 1914, this was one of the most hotly contested. For the Liberals the loss of Manchester North West so soon after Haworth's defeat in Manchester South would represent a considerable blow, whilst for the Unionists its recapture would be seen as emblematic of a wider turnaround in fortunes for the party and the beginning of the end of the present government. Given the evident unpopularity of much recent legislation, the Insurance Act in particular, the prospect of an election in this constituency in the summer of 1912 was, for the Liberals, undesirable to say the least. The party did everything it could to avoid an election; as Clarke suggests, the situation amounted to 'one of the most extraordinary and sustained campaigns to keep a man in parliament against his will'.⁶⁶ The precise reasons for Kemp's decision caused speculation in both the national and local press; the Unionists believed it to be primarily connected to his objection to the Home Rule Bill although he had also been at odds with his party over Lloyd George's financial policies and Welsh disestablishment. One of only two Liberals elected at the last general election who had declared themselves against Home Rule, he had spoken against it in the House of Commons; on the Bill's second reading he had abstained from voting altogether. Both party officials and Kemp himself were at pains to stress that his resignation would allow him to concentrate on his business interests but the real reason was almost certainly his objection to recent policy and it is likely that he wanted to be out of Parliament by the third reading of the Home Rule Bill. Correspondence with the Manchester Liberal Federation suggests Kemp had first intimated his intentions to resign as early as March 1912.⁶⁷ The party, however, clearly desired that he stay longer, preferably until the next general election. In the meantime he was persuaded to postpone his resignation until at least June. He assured constituents that he would 'put in the occasional appearance in the House' and when he was unable to be there, he would utilise the pairing system.⁶⁸ The manner in which the Liberals handled the situation undoubtedly damaged their prospects; by delaying the inevitable, it almost certainly allowed the Unionists to begin preparations for a contest. Having secured as their candidate Sir John Randles, a well-known businessman and former MP for Cockermouth, a good amount of campaigning in the constituency had already been

undertaken. Conversely, the Liberal Party was in disarray. Rumours circulated that the local association favoured Sir Arthur Haworth to the (assumed) nominee, barrister Gordon Hewart. As Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Royal Exchange and a popular local Liberal, Haworth would have been considered preferable for many but given the character of the electorate, in large measure anti-Irish, pro-empire and Anglican, it might have been politically advantageous for the Liberals to adopt a unionist free trader. Furthermore, given that Haworth had only recently lost his seat in Manchester South, it is unlikely that he would have wished to stand again so soon, especially in such a vulnerable seat.

It seemed possible that Labour intervention might further damage Liberal prospects. A meeting of the North West branch of the ILP had been called on 17 July to discuss the selection of a candidate and a meeting of the full membership of the Manchester Labour Party had been scheduled. The Manchester and Salford ILP issued a recommendation that the seat be contested.⁶⁹ A possible candidate was J. M. McLachlan who had contested Manchester South West in January 1910. A week later the *Manchester Courier* was appalled at how the ‘Labour Party had been left behind’, suggesting that the Liberals had deliberately sped up the process in order to prevent Labour from selecting a candidate. They had ‘show[ed] their late allies little consideration’.⁷⁰ Nothing came of Labour’s candidature, but the episode showed their willingness to consider the possibility of contesting a seat that the Liberals perceived to be naturally theirs. The by-election took place soon after another in nearby Crewe which had seen the Unionists win with a sizable majority. With this recent victory the Unionists entered the Manchester contest with a sense of confidence; Crewe’s close proximity also meant that a large number of party workers could quickly be redeployed to the Manchester campaign.

From the beginning of the contest, it was clear that the Insurance Act would again be the most prominent issue of the campaign. In his opening address, Conservative candidate Randles argued that in a by-election with no prospect of a change of government, it was pointless even discussing the question of Tariff Reform.⁷¹ Instead he sought to discuss the ‘sufferings resulting from current legislation’; in a ‘one nation’ tone, he spoke of social, political and economic justice and national unity. The commercial credentials of Randles were emphasised with headlines such as ‘a business man for business people’, a contrast to the Liberal candidate’s legal background. As had been the case during recent by-elections in Oldham and Manchester South, the position of the business sector was that the Act

would severely handicap the British employer in the world market and could lead to a rise in unemployment. National Insurance was neither liked nor understood and despite the Liberals' efforts to alleviate these misgivings, it seems that electors of all classes remained unconvinced of its merits. For the Liberals the Insurance Act represented one aspect of the government's drive to promote the 'social advancement of the people';⁷² for the Unionists, it took away from trade unions, friendly societies and other working-class organisations the management of their own funds. Additionally, they argued, the worker would receive fewer benefits while having to contribute more. They claimed legislation had been pushed through too quickly, drawing attention to the fact that it had taken seven years to develop such a scheme in Germany.⁷³ They also foresaw considerable charges to employers. Unionist objections here seem more carefully considered: Randles regarded the Act as 'a good thing but it had been carried out in the worst possible way, creating maximum irritation with the minimum of benefits'.⁷⁴ The Liberals caused confusion amongst some voters by presenting them with an excessive amount of complex information on the measure; neither did the candidate help matters when, at one meeting, he told voters that he realised the scheme 'pressed hard on individuals but it was capable of amendment'.⁷⁵ A witty journalist from the *Manchester Courier* concluded that he should 'join the Amend the Act League'.⁷⁶

Another issue that intensely divided the parties during the by-election was Home Rule. The position of the Unionists was clear: any measure of Home Rule would lead to the disintegration of the nation, weaken the Empire and affect trade, particularly between Manchester and Ireland. Given the importance of empire to the interests of the North West constituency, it is interesting that the Liberal candidate stated he was looking 'not only for Home Rule for Ireland but for each component part of the empire'.⁷⁷ Hewart sought to emphasise not only the moral rationale for Home Rule but the wider practical considerations; he argued that delegating to Ireland management of its own affairs would relieve Parliament and facilitate 'friendlier relations' with the USA. A significant misjudgement by the Liberal candidate, however, was his admission that Home Rule could 'only be carried at the price of civil war'.⁷⁸ Hewart claimed that he had been misquoted but the Liberals could have done without such controversy on this issue given the retiring member's record on the subject.

The 1912 Manchester North West by-election saw the Unionists capturing the seat with a sizable majority of 1202 on a relatively low turnout

of just under 82%.⁷⁹ For the Unionists the result represented a substantial improvement on Bonar Law's poll in 1910, with an increase of 8%. The Liberal vote had decreased by 21%. With this victory the Unionists won their eighth seat at a by-election since December 1910, reducing the Liberal majority in the House of Commons to just fourteen.⁸⁰ This represented a fragile position for the Liberal Government, although the votes of Labour and the Irish representatives upon whom they relied were assured. Manchester's Liberal press determined that 'there can be no excuse in disguising the fact that the Insurance Act in its present condition is causing endless irritation and unpopularity',⁸¹ but it went on to affirm that this was only likely to be 'temporary trouble'.⁸² They believed that since Randles had refused to prioritise Tariff Reform 'the result should not be taken to imply that the Free Traders in the community had lost their faith'. Indeed, the result served to underline for the Unionists the usefulness of remaining cautious in their promotion of Tariff Reform and Clarke suggests that experiences such as these 'stiffened the antipathy' of Unionists in the region towards a full-blown policy.⁸³ This could have had significant consequences for the Liberals and Labour in places such as Manchester since their victories after 1906 had been largely dependent upon hostility towards Unionist candidates on the issue. For the Unionist press, the result demonstrated that Manchester's businessmen were 'weary and distrustful' of the government and alarmed by 'mad Lloyd George's finance' and his 'incitements to class hatred upon the industrial world'.⁸⁴

The flagship Liberal policy of social insurance was crucial to the outcomes of both by-elections in Manchester during 1912, albeit for reasons specific to the particular constituencies. In Manchester South it was suburban working-class hostility to the measure which determined Liberal fortunes; in Manchester North West it was, for the greater part, the city's businessmen who deemed their interests to be under threat from the impact of the scheme. At its inception, the Unionists were able to exploit to their electoral advantage the widespread unpopularity of national insurance. The evidence in Manchester suggests that poor electoral performance during 1912 was associated with public dissatisfaction with specific pieces of legislation.

The prospect of the Liberals holding Manchester North West during the summer of 1912 had seemed bleak from the outset; they had done everything they could to persuade the sitting member to stay but to no avail. Perhaps the Liberals expected to lose the seat, after all it had a turbulent electoral history. Nonetheless, Manchester North West had great

symbolic value; its loss represented an embarrassment for the Liberal Party locally and nationally. It was possible that once the benefits of the insurance scheme began to be recognised, levels of hostility and suspicion would subside and Liberal electoral performance might improve accordingly. It is also important to remember that the Insurance Act was not fully operational that summer: contributions were being made but no benefits were paid out. Significantly, the Conservatives had not prioritised Tariff Reform during the by-elections; some commentators interpreted this to mean that the issue had not therefore played a part in the results. Whilst it would be unwise to reach this conclusion, it was almost certain that at future elections Tariff Reform, for the Unionists, would remain at best low key. This required the Liberal Party to reassess its approach in areas where it had previously been such a dominant issue, perceiving it to their advantage. Whilst the Liberals lost a number of by-elections in the region between 1911 and 1913, it would be unwise to suggest that the party was facing a wider long-term crisis. The party appreciated there was much work to do and redoubled its efforts in Manchester: a new selection committee was created under Sir Arthur Haworth in 1914 and plans for a forthcoming general election were already in hand as early as January of that year. The MLF recognised the need to acquire good candidates and, in this respect, they appeared to have been particularly successful when securing the candidature of future Cabinet Minister Sir John Simon for the North West division.⁸⁵

NOTES

1. The 1908 by-election had seen a three-cornered contest but the Labour Party had not officially sanctioned the third candidate on that occasion, rather, his candidature had not met with Labour approval.
2. Manchester South West had a history of problems. In 1900, for example, though the Liberals did not run a candidate, the local association refused to endorse the LRC candidate.
3. That the party was performing well in the municipal politics of this district (Bradford, Beswick and Ardwick wards in particular) may have confirmed for Labour their claim to contest the parliamentary constituency.
4. *The Times*, 17 December 1909. It was believed that Zimmerman had been instrumental in the 1906 election victories in Manchester and this made him a popular choice with ordinary members.
5. *Manchester Liberal Federation Executive Committee Minutes*, 20 December 1909.

6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. *Manchester Liberal Federation Executive Committee Minutes*, 29 December 1909.
9. *Manchester Courier*, 5 January 1910.
10. N. Blewett, *The Peers, The Parties and the People: The General Elections of 1910* (Toronto, 1972), pp. 234–235.
11. Ibid., p. 234.
12. See *Manchester Guardian*, 3 and 6 January 1910.
13. See *Manchester Guardian*, 4 January 1910 and *Labour Leader*, 21 January 1910.
14. *Manchester Evening News*, 11 January 1910.
15. *Manchester Courier*, 3 January 1910.
16. Colefax's policies were remarkably progressive. He argued strongly for the removal of the pauper disqualification (incorporated within the pensions scheme), advocated the establishment of a national scheme for unemployment and invalidity insurance, extension of the education system and state-aided purchase of land; see *Manchester Courier*, 8 and 10 January 1910.
17. See speeches in *Manchester Courier*, 3 and 6 January 1910.
18. *Manchester Courier*, 6 January 1910.
19. *Manchester Courier*, 5 January 1910.
20. See *Manchester Courier*, 8 January 1910.
21. *Manchester Evening News*, 5 January 1910.
22. Blewett, *Peers, Parties and the People*, p. 109.
23. Generally, the attitude of Labour candidates was to provide support to the government on the constitutional question. There was very little difference between the lines adopted by Liberals or Labour candidates. For a useful account of Labour and the constitutional question, see Douglas, R. 'Labour and the Constitutional Crisis' in K. D. Brown, *The First Labour Party* (London, 1985). Douglas highlights how Labour candidates were especially interested in land taxation, and this period marked the high point of Lib-Lab cooperation.
24. *Manchester Guardian*, 17 January 1910.
25. See *Manchester Evening News*, 7 January 1910.
26. See *Manchester Courier*, 5, 7 and 8 January 1910.
27. *Manchester Courier*, 7 January 1910.
28. *Manchester Guardian*, 11 January 1910.
29. Ibid.
30. *Manchester Evening News*, 12 January 1910.
31. Ibid.
32. See *Manchester Evening News*, 4 January 1910.
33. *Liberal Yearbook*, 1910 and *Manchester Evening News*, 5 January 1910.

34. Schwann, in particular, focused on free trade and requested that the MLF provide election hoardings that dealt solely with the subject.
35. *Manchester Guardian*, 12 January 1910.
36. *Manchester Courier*, 14 January 1910.
37. See *Manchester Guardian*, 11 January 1910.
38. Ibid.
39. *Labour Leader*, 21 January 1910.
40. See N. Blewett, *Peers, Parties and the People*, p. 379.
41. *Manchester Liberal Federation Executive Committee Minutes* report on the general election, 13 December 1910.
42. Labour faced particular problems in tracking down removals especially in the poorest parts of the city. In East Manchester, for example, it was estimated that half had moved since the register had been compiled; see *Manchester Guardian*, 9 December 1910. See also *Manchester and Salford Labour Representation Committee Annual Report 1910* which noted that 'whilst Manchester [was] the only town in the country returning two Labour members it is one of the weakest in organisation'.
43. Blewett suggests that there were two objectives to Bonar Law's candidature in Manchester North West. First, it was hoped that it would provide a much needed boost for the Conservatives in Lancashire, and second it could encourage the wider unity of the party behind protectionism; see N. Blewett, *Peers, Parties and People*, p. 23. Contesting such a free-trade seat (at least in terms of how the Liberals perceived it) no doubt also boosted Bonar Law's personal reputation as a leader of the Tariff Reform movement.
44. *Manchester Guardian*, 22 November 1910.
45. Ibid.
46. *Manchester Guardian*, 25 November 1919.
47. *Manchester Guardian*, 26 November 1910.
48. Ibid.
49. See *Manchester Liberal Federation Minutes*, 13 December 1910.
50. See *Manchester Guardian*, 25 November 1910.
51. Glazebrook arrived at Manchester Town Hall only six minutes after nominations closed; Arthur Howarth did offer to resign the seat in order to allow Glazebrook to fight the election, but the offer was declined.
52. See *Manchester Courier*, 5 December 1910 and the preceding day's coverage.
53. See *Manchester Courier*, 25 November 1910.
54. *Labour Leader*, 5 December 1910.
55. *Labour Leader*, 9 December 1910.
56. P. Readman and L. Blaxill, 'Edwardian By-Elections' in T. G. Otte and P. Readman (eds), *By-Elections in British Politics, 1832-1914* (Woodbridge, 2013), p. 228.

57. *Manchester Guardian*, 27 February 1912.
58. Glazebrook via cablegram, *Manchester Guardian*, 24 February 1912.
59. See *Manchester Evening News*, 24 February 1912.
60. *Manchester Guardian*, 26 February 1912.
61. *Manchester Courier*, 3 March 1912.
62. See Sir John Simon speech, *Manchester Guardian*, 4 March 1912.
63. *Ibid.*
64. *Manchester Evening News*, 5 March 1912.
65. See Asquith's message to the constituency, *Manchester Guardian*, 5 March 1912.
66. P. Clarke, *Lancashire*, p. 304.
67. *Manchester Liberal Federation Minutes*, 15 March 1912.
68. *Manchester Courier*, 17 July 1912.
69. *Manchester Courier*, 18 July 1912.
70. *Manchester Courier*, 26 July 1912.
71. *Manchester Courier* 27 July 1912.
72. This quotation is from an election address by the Liberal candidate during the previous year's by-election campaign in Oldham; *Manchester Guardian*, 3 November 1911.
73. *Manchester Courier*, 7 August 1912.
74. *Manchester Courier*, 2 August 1912.
75. See *Manchester Courier*, 30 July 1912.
76. *Ibid.*
77. *Manchester Guardian*, 29 July 1912.
78. *Manchester Courier*, 27 July 1912.
79. This was 10% lower than that of the January 1910 general election.
80. The 'progressive' and nationalist majority over Unionists stood at 109 (389–280). After December 1910, it had been 126.
81. *Manchester Evening News*, 9 August 1912.
82. This was based on a comment by a Unionist official intimating that the party had polled fewer than fifty votes in Cheetham; see *Manchester Courier*, 9 August 1912.
83. See P. Clarke, *Lancashire*, p. 305.
84. *The Times*, 9 August 1912.
85. See *Manchester Liberal Federation Executive Committee Minutes*, 1 April 1913 and 28 January, 18 February and 11 March 1914.

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The Times



Municipal Politics and the Progressive Alliance in Manchester, 1906–1914

The progressive landslide across Manchester at the general election of 1906 appeared to offer the prospect of an equally significant advance in municipal politics, yet the immediate contests after the general election saw municipal electors voting in favour of retrenchment and against the programme of municipalisation adopted by both Labour and Liberal candidates.¹ The Conservatives fought on a strong anti-municipal trading platform and the candidates who made this issue the key plank of their campaigns overturned sitting Liberal majorities or, if they already held the ward, substantially increased their majorities. The net result of the 1906 contests was a Conservative gain of three seats.² Despite Labour's endeavour to increase its municipal representation, the party saw its numbers decline. From the seven wards Labour contested they were successful in just one, Ardwick. The local organisation was especially disappointed with the loss of Harpurhey, where W. T. Jackson was considered one of the party's most capable advocates on the council.³ Labour had failed to capture working-class wards such as Longsight, St. Luke's, Harpurhey and Miles Platting, though some of the losses were close and the party's vote was generally respectable, demonstrating an ability to pose a challenge to both the Liberals and Conservatives. The 1906 municipal contests were equally disappointing for the Liberals who were defeated in Cheetham and New Cross. A number of factors contributed to this poor performance. The electoral value of the free trade issue was limited at the municipal elections and, more particularly, the Liberals in government had begun to alienate some sections of society. The Education Bill, in particular, served

to alienate voters in parts of Manchester where Tory Anglican sentiment was strong. In 1906 there was just one three-cornered contest, in St George's, where the Conservatives won with a narrow majority of just 3%; Labour came third obtaining 17% of the vote. Without Labour intervention, the Liberals could have captured the seat. The following year saw just three contests involving Liberal and Labour candidates; in Harpurhey Labour now beat the Conservatives into second place.⁴ In the other two wards, however, Labour came bottom, although the party's vote was again respectable, at 23% and 21%. In its annual review the local party was highly critical of the 'lack of enthusiasm' shown by its affiliated societies during the municipal elections.⁵

As was the case during its parliamentary campaigns, a significant problem for the fledgling Labour Party was weakness of organisation and the limited numbers of party workers. The year 1908 saw an especially large number of contested seats in Manchester: twenty-five in total. The prominent issue of the campaigns was the question of unemployment and the role of the city council in attempts to alleviate the problem. Throughout the year, the Liberal Lord Mayor had been vocal on this increasingly serious problem and had arranged a series of public meetings and established a registry for employers. At the municipal contests, Liberal candidates focused virtually exclusive attention upon unemployment which may have made it difficult for Labour candidates to present the issue in a distinctive manner. Again, the party made very little progress: from seven candidates fielded, the party returned just two, in the mining district of Bradford and in New Cross. These successes were negated, however, by the loss of Miles Platting and Openshaw, both of which saw the Conservatives winning with large majorities. The overall result of the 1908 contests was a net Conservative gain of six seats. The Labour Party now had eight elected councillors, three fewer than in 1906; the Liberals had ten fewer. This period was one of frustration for both Liberals and the Labour Party. Evaluation of the 1908 contests suggests a number of important factors in relation to electoral politics at the local level. First, it is interesting that there were no three-cornered contests. Second, it appears that the Labour Party was focusing its efforts in its strongest areas, Openshaw, Harpurhey and Miles Platting, in the main unsuccessfully. More worryingly, Labour was struggling to consolidate its position in parts of the city where we might expect it to have performed better, for instance in Ardwick and Newton Heath. Additionally, a number of members for key wards such as

Openshaw and Miles Platting were not re-elected. The Liberals appeared to concentrate on the central and suburban wards while the Conservatives stood in virtually every ward and remained dominant in Manchester's municipal politics.⁶

With the inclusion of Gorton and Levenshulme, the 1909 municipal elections saw numerous contested seats but, as the *Manchester City News* lamented, there was no 'burning question other than the vague declaration that the rates must be reduced'.⁷ The elections saw contests in twenty-four wards for thirty-three vacant seats and the parties stood a record number of candidates, sixty-four in total. Given the increased number of available seats, the 1909 contests provided Labour with an opportunity to make inroads in its municipal representation on the City Council. The party stood in twelve wards with seventeen candidates.⁸ The new additions provided mixed results: Gorton North and South returned three Labour members, one Liberal, one Conservative and an Independent, whilst Levenshulme, similarly divided, returned three Liberals, two Conservatives and an Independent.⁹ In Levenshulme North Labour came bottom, polling just 14% of the vote.¹⁰ Labour again appeared to target wards selectively, focusing efforts in three key wards, Ardwick, Harpurhey and St Luke's. The party lost the first two only narrowly but won the last by a significant majority. While Labour was doing well in Gorton, the party had performed poorly in Levenshulme, a reflection of the respective social and religious composition of these districts. Labour was doing best in the respectable working-class districts, wards where the electorate consisted primarily of better-paid workers and, more significantly, highly unionised sectors such as miners, engineers and railway workers in places such as Bradford, Gorton, Openshaw and Newton Heath.¹¹ By contrast, districts such as Ardwick, Harpurhey and St Mark's contained sizable pockets of slum areas where the inhabitants were predominantly Anglican. These wards were strongholds of popular working-class Conservatism and clearly difficult territory for the Labour Party to permeate.¹² The year 1909 saw Liberal and Labour conflicts in just two wards,¹³ a three-way contest in Longsight and a two-way contest in Openshaw. The former saw Labour push the Liberals into third place, the latter saw the retiring Labour member returned with a majority of 12%. It seems that the Liberals were standing down in favour of Labour in many of the working-class areas of the city and likewise Labour was not challenging the Liberals in the central and suburban districts, Didsbury, All Saints, Cheetham, Rusholme and St John's, for example.

A number of emerging issues divided local politics along more clearly defined party lines in the city from 1910. One of the most controversial was the future of the Royal Infirmary site and candidates at municipal elections sought to attach political meaning to how the site ought to be utilised.¹⁴ Labour candidates attempted, but largely failed, to divert attention from this issue and onto the question of housing, particularly the purchasing powers of the corporation and the acquisition of land for building programmes.¹⁵ The 1910 municipal elections saw Labour continue to focus on areas of the city where it already had a strong presence, the party's ten candidates concentrated in what was now familiar Labour territory, Ardwick, Bradford, Gorton, New Cross and Openshaw. The strategy proved successful, with the party returning seven councillors. It is worth recognising, however, that most of Labour's majorities were small, 5% of the total vote in Blackley and Moston and Harpurhey, 7% in Gorton North, and just one actual vote in Openshaw. Furthermore, the party found it more difficult when faced with both Liberal and Conservative opponents.¹⁶ In a three-cornered contest in the socially mixed Longsight ward, Labour came bottom of the poll, obtaining just 20% of the vote to the Liberal's 36%. In New Cross, where there were two seats available, a Labour candidate was elected but his poll was 19% behind that of the Conservatives. In Ardwick, Labour intervention pushed the Liberals into third place allowing the Conservative to sneak in.¹⁷ This illustrated the futility of progressive confrontation given that the total anti-Conservative poll amounted to 63% of the vote.¹⁸

After 1906, the Manchester Liberal Federation had become determined to improve the performance of the progressive forces in municipal politics, and this culminated in the establishment of the Municipal Progressive Association (MPA) in 1911. The role of the MPA was two-fold: to assist the associations in finding candidates and to aid essential preparatory work for the municipal contests. In March 1911, for example, the MPA contacted all ward associations, requesting reports on election prospects and urging that 'arrangements ... be made'. Senior officials were dispatched to Ardwick and St Luke's, where the party had experienced difficulties in previous contests and was anxious to improve its position.¹⁹ Both wards received new financial assistance to enable candidates to arrange meetings and the MPA rendered valuable assistance to the ward associations in organising meetings in the month immediately preceding the municipal elections.²⁰ The party also hoped to draw attention to their councillors' achievements.²¹ The 1911 elections saw the Conservatives

losing three seats, two to Labour and one to the Liberals, Labour having fielded twelve candidates and secured the return of six. Altogether, the Liberals fielded fifteen candidates, nine of whom were elected, and there had been just one contest in which the progressives faced each other. This suggests that, during this period at least, the MPA may have been influential in averting conflict. The overall composition of the city council now stood at seventy Conservatives, forty-three Liberals and seventeen Labour representatives. The following year there were contests in just seventeen of the thirty-four wards and a relatively high number of uncontested returns. Two wards stand out in particular: in Harpurhey, a three-cornered fight saw Labour push the Liberals into third place, and in Ardwick the Liberals again finished bottom, obtaining just 14% of the vote.²² Diplomacy had broken down in this part of the city and the consequence of a split in the progressive vote was to allow the Conservatives to capture the seat. There appeared to be increasing Labour strength in some parts of the city at the expense of the Liberals. In some working-class wards, Labour had become the major anti-Conservative force, but the party still found it difficult to beat them. Labour was strongest in Bradford, Gorton North and Openshaw owing to the socio-economic and occupational profile of these districts. A critical feature of the municipal elections before 1914 was the decreasing number of contests each year. The last year of peace saw just nineteen seats contested.²³ The year 1913 appears to have been one of some Liberal recovery, notably at the three-cornered contest in Blackley and Moston.²⁴ The *Manchester Guardian* claimed that the progressive forces were making gains against the Conservatives across the city as a whole, a not inconsiderable achievement after seven years in government. Labour stood in just seven wards with eight candidates, four of whom were returned; two of these were new members. The progressive forces in 1913 achieved a good strike rate, considering the small number of candidates and the overall results.

Scrutiny of municipal representation may suggest that Labour remained peripheral to the city's politics, yet this was certainly not the case. On the contrary, analysis of the Manchester City Council's monthly meetings illustrates that the new Labour group, albeit small in number, had a significant impact on the character of municipal debate. As in other parts of the country, a key issue the Labour group campaigned upon throughout the period was that of wages, especially those of municipal employees. The corporation was, after all, one of the city's major employers. The Labour group and its leader Tom Fox, in particular, proved to be capable advocates

of issues including wage capping, standardisation and the right to work. The year 1909 marked a turning point in the role of the Labour members on the city council. From this point onwards, Labour interventions within council debates not only brought the issue of wages to the agenda but also helped to win a number of key votes on the question.²⁵ In February 1909, a proposal to instruct all the council's committees to refrain from any wage increases for a year was defeated after Labour intervention.²⁶ The following month, a proposed increase in salaries for officials was also defeated and on this occasion it was reported that the majority against was so large 'no-one asked for a count'.²⁷ Labour's interjections on other labour issues also received surprisingly positive responses. Later in 1909, a Labour proposal that a committee be established to consider an eight-hour day and forty-hour week for all corporation workers was agreed by fifty-three to eighteen votes.²⁸ The Labour group benefited on these occasions from the support of Liberal members as well as a number of Conservatives, especially those representing working-class wards. Nevertheless, the Labour group had taken the lead on the issue. Throughout 1910, the Labour group became increasingly critical of the city council's inaction concerning the problem of unemployment. Because of its refusal to appeal for public funds, the Distress Committee in particular was accused of failing to deal with the problem. Labour's councillors took up the issue strongly and in consequence of this intervention, the authority embarked upon a series of initiatives to relieve unemployment. The Labour group was making its presence felt in the council chamber but the extent to which this resonated with municipal voters more widely may be questioned. By focusing attention upon aspects such as municipal wages, the perception that Labour existed as a sectional interest that did not extend beyond trade unionism may inadvertently have been reinforced. This may not have sat comfortably with electors in some parts of Manchester, many of whom were not members of a trade union.

Council politics in the years before 1914 illustrate the extent to which progressive cooperation existed at the municipal level. Despite no formal alliance, the voting patterns of the Liberal and Labour groups at the monthly meetings suggests that a progressive bloc had indeed developed after 1906, with the parties regularly voting together. They shared similar aims and objectives on social reform and, if they united, the progressive forces could pose a considerable threat to Conservative domination of the council chamber. This may have disadvantaged Labour insofar as it could make it difficult for the party to present a distinctive appeal and separate

identity; whilst it was becoming more assertive and intent on widening its municipal role, both the electorate and the established parties may have continued to regard it as little more than a pressure group and adjunct of the Liberal Party.

For a number of historians, electoral developments in municipal politics before 1914 provide evidence of an identifiable Labour advance.²⁹ McHugh contends that Labour made 'smooth progress' in Manchester before 1914 and the party's 'popularity and rise', admittedly concentrated in the working-class districts of the city, was already 'cemented' by that point; post-war success was founded upon an advance made *before* the outbreak of war.³⁰ Analysis of voting patterns in Manchester's municipal contests between 1906 and 1913 does not, however, suggest an imminent Labour breakthrough. Where Labour faced both Conservative and Liberal opponents its performance was poor, and in areas of the city where popular Conservatism remained strong, it experienced significant difficulties in establishing itself. In the sixteen contests which saw both Liberal and Labour candidates at municipal elections before 1914, Labour managed to outpoll the Liberals on seven occasions, though the party was able to win only twice.³¹ Of the thirteen wards that saw multiparty contests involving Conservatives, Liberals and Labour, the Conservatives were returned in ten. This was a reminder of the necessity of progressive cooperation at the municipal level. The number of candidates put forward may itself be perceived as an indicator of party strength, or at least ambition. While the number of Labour candidates increased to nine after 1909, this had fallen back to just five in 1913. Fewer candidates perhaps reflected a more selective targeting of wards, although this tactic was not always successful. The Liberals' position within Manchester's municipal politics appears to have been equally precarious. Whilst their share of the municipal vote remained relatively stable, the party suffered increasing numbers of defeats in areas where it had previously been successful, in Withington, Exchange and Rusholme, though analysis of Liberal versus Conservative contests shows that the vote could often be extremely close. Given the geographical character of party support, it is unsurprising that the local Liberal Federation was anxious to establish some form of municipal entente along similar lines as the Progressive Alliance at the parliamentary level. The Labour Party appears to have been advancing in the 'better off' working-class districts to the east of the city whereas the Liberals continued to prosper in the affluent middle-class suburbs and the socially mixed wards. Longsight represented a particular success for the MPA. The Conservatives

had won the seat easily between 1907 and 1910, four successive three-cornered contests all of which had seen the Liberals outperforming Labour. Yet in 1911, the Liberals withdrew in favour of Labour and thereafter the gap became progressively narrower with Labour eventually capturing the seat in 1913. The Conservatives were particularly strong in working-class wards in the centre and north of the city, Medlock Street, New Cross, Miles Platting, St. John's and Ardwick, and showed signs of becoming stronger in other districts.

The parties had developed in such a way that their appeal was spatial, yet in relation to the overall composition of the City Council there is no evidence to suggest that any significant transformation was imminent. Even in districts where the Labour Party appeared to be making headway, development remained tentative; the LRC, for example, had won Ardwick in 1904 and again in 1906, but thereafter won only once, in 1911. Control of the city council in Manchester remained a distant prospect but despite an extremely tentative electoral advance, the group's impact within the council itself was not altogether limited. Despite possessing just sixteen elected councillors, less than an eighth of the council's total membership, the Labour group was not of peripheral significance. The group asserted itself in a confident and positive manner, believing that the value of its municipal representatives remained to be fully appreciated, largely because the results were 'not immediately visible to the public eye'.³² Nonetheless, the group persisted and 'more than held their own in the debates'.³³ The period after 1911 witnessed a growing number of labour disputes across the city and the subjects of wages and conditions of work were of great significance. The Labour members took the lead on these questions. From this time a frequent criticism of Labour began to emerge, that the party represented too narrow a sectional interest. Some even claimed that the Labour members were 'paid agitators' seeking municipal representation only in order to 'advocate an increase in wages'.³⁴ Whilst pronounced hostility towards Labour was rare before 1914 it nonetheless illustrates some of the difficulties faced by the new organisation. Another obstacle in the way of Labour's progress in municipal politics during the earlier stages of its development was in connection with the party's limited representation on council committees. Where much of the critical work took place, Labour's poor representation on these limited the party's ability to exert an influence on policy.³⁵ Even so, the Labour representatives on the city council had played a critical role in improving the conditions of many workers. Despite occasional opposition within the council chamber,

Labour amendments were often decisive in securing improvements. The Labour Party itself believed that ‘no section of workers had benefited more by Labour representation’ than municipal workers but, equally, it was recognised that they ‘gave less support to the party than those who [were] employed outside of the corporation’.³⁶

The politics of the Progressive Alliance at the municipal level were complicated. The Labour Party appeared most independent in the council chamber and, to a slightly lesser extent, at the municipal elections. It was in municipal politics that a drive for truly independent labour representation was most pronounced although it is wise not to exaggerate the point. At the municipal elections, with such a huge number of seats to police, it was perhaps inevitable that some of the local parties would ignore party advice and stand candidates in their wards rather than make way for Liberals, even if they were better positioned. There were some seats, noticeably Harpurhey, which all parties appeared determined to fight almost every year. Ultimately, however, whilst the number of three-cornered contests increased slightly in the years just before the outbreak of war, they remained the exception to the rule.

SUMMARY: MANCHESTER, 1906–1914

Despite being fragmented and largely dependent upon Liberal acquiescence, the Labour Party had made significant electoral progress in Manchester before 1914. Initial growth was concentrated in areas with significant trade union membership, the north-east and east of the city, but even in these areas there was not always an identifiable swing to Labour at this stage. Elsewhere, politics in poorer districts of Manchester remained dominated by either deeply embedded popular Conservatism or by Liberalism and there appeared little evidence in either municipal or parliamentary politics that these traditional loyalties were about to change. Labour’s wider progress appeared painfully slow and little evidence exists to suggest the emergence of a powerful and distinct Labour appeal based on policy.

Analysis of Manchester suggests that Labour’s advance was by no means assured before 1914 and at best the party’s prospects appeared tenuous. The contention that the seeds of future Labour growth were well in place before 1914 appears to rest on slim foundations when one considers electoral politics in Manchester. When Labour did challenge the Liberal Party, it tended to fare badly. Its position in the more unionised parts of the city

seems to have been only slightly more secure. As J. R. Clynes's position illustrates, Labour continued to face deeply entrenched popular working-class Conservatism in this type of district.

In Manchester, there were occasions before 1914 when relations broke down, yet such instances should not be perceived as indicative of a wider and more serious collapse of the Progressive Alliance; it is important, however, to recognise that the longer-term durability of progressive cooperation remains more of an open question. Equally, it is unwise to exaggerate the permeation of New Liberalism in Manchester. Apart from a few exceptions, Manchester's Liberal parliamentary candidates before 1914 campaigned on a traditional, some might suggest mundane, political platform. Most continued, dogmatically, to focus principally on the question of free trade at the expense of other issues. The majority of the party's candidates appeared to lack the dynamism we would associate with New Liberalism and a city with such a glorious Liberal past. This is not to suggest that the party was losing ideological momentum to Labour, far from it; the Labour Party appeared to be as moderate as the Liberals. Ultimately, the Liberal Party in Manchester seems to have become preoccupied solely with the task of defeating Tariff Reform. On the eve of war, Liberalism in Manchester remained electorally significant but did not appear ideologically vibrant. Analysis of election campaigns illustrates that the traditional Liberal issue of free trade remained central to the party's electoral platform and that the impact of the New Liberalism was limited to a relatively small number of candidates. This provides little support to the contention that the period prior to 1914 heralded an altogether new era for Liberalism based on the permeation of a new Liberal radicalism.

NOTES

1. It is important to note that the franchise for municipal elections differed from that of parliamentary elections. For example, following the 1888 Local Government Act, women were permitted to vote in county and borough elections.
2. The LRC lost one seat (Harpurhey) and sitting Liberals were defeated in Cheetham and New Cross wards. It was believed that the Liberal Alexander Porter was defeated in Cheetham on the question of the new Education Bill; see *Manchester City News*, 3 November 1906.
3. Jackson lost by an extremely narrow margin of 23 votes, 1% of those cast. Harpurhey possessed a large Catholic community who had previously been

- loyal to the Liberals because of the Home Rule issue. The Education Bill, however, ignited Catholic opinion and probably underpinned the Conservatives candidate's poll (at the same time going against Labour); *Manchester Guardian*, 2 November 1906.
4. In percentage terms, the breakdown was as follows: Labour 44%, Conservative 36%, Liberal 18% and Independent 0.8%.
 5. *Manchester and Salford Labour Representation Committee Annual Report*, 1908.
 6. Of the twenty-five contested seats in 1908 only three, All Saints, Bradford and Openshaw, did not see a Conservative candidate. The Liberals contested seventeen.
 7. *Manchester City News*, 29 October 1909.
 8. This includes wards with more than one member to be elected. The Conservatives stood twenty-six candidates in twenty-one wards while the Liberals stood fourteen in twelve.
 9. Labour performed much better in Gorton North.
 10. Labour did not field a candidate in Levenshulme South.
 11. A reflection of this is how the Labour wards tended to be ones with higher rents.
 12. For a good analysis of the development of working-class neighbourhoods during this period see, M. Savage and A. Miles, *The Remaking of the British Working-Class 1840-1949* (London, 1994), pp. 64-68 and also J. Lawrence, 'The British Sense of Class', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 35, 2 (2000).
 13. This excludes wards with three seats.
 14. The essence of the debate related to whether or not a new city art gallery should be built on the site. Labour candidates argued the case for the site to be used for housing and others simply wished it be left as an open public space. This debate persisted for some time.
 15. See speech by W.T. Jackson in *Manchester City News*, 22 October 1910.
 16. In 1910, for example, three of the five gains were taken from independents and only two from the established parties.
 17. The Conservative majority over Labour was just 2%. Certainly, without Liberal intervention Labour would have won this seat.
 18. The Conservative majority over Labour was just 45 votes. The respective poll was 33% and 30% for Labour and the Liberals respectively.
 19. *Municipal Progressive Association Executive Committee Minutes*, 10 March 1911.
 20. *Municipal Progressive Association Executive Committee Minutes*, 31 July 1911.
 21. *Ibid.*

22. In Harpurhey the Conservatives won with 44% of the vote, Labour came second with 31% and the Liberals last with 24%; in Ardwick the Conservatives secured a significant majority, 29% of the vote cast, over the second-placed Labour candidate who obtained 28% of the vote.
23. A record number of fifteen wards were uncontested. The overall result saw the Liberals gaining two seats (Blackley and Moston and St Michaels) and Labour losing one. Note, however, that the Liberals lost Didsbury and Moss Side East.
24. The Liberals won with a 5% majority over the second-placed Conservative, whilst Labour came third obtaining 27% of the vote.
25. *Manchester Guardian*, 8 August 1909.
26. On this occasion, the Labour group's Joseph Billam won the argument in support of wage increases and the council voted 54 to 28 against limiting wages. *Manchester Guardian*, 4 February 1909.
27. *Manchester Guardian*, 4 March 1909.
28. *Manchester Guardian*, 5 September 1909.
29. See M.G. Sheppard and J. L. Halstead, 'Labour's Municipal Election Performance in Provincial England and Wales, 1900–1913', *Bulletin of the Society of the Study for Labour History* (1979) and K. Laybourn and J. Reynolds, *Liberalism and the Rise of Labour* (London, 1984).
30. See D. McHugh, 'The Labour Party in Manchester and Salford before the First World War: A Case of Unequal Development', *Manchester Region History Review*, 14 (2000), pp. 15–23.
31. These were Harpurhey in 1907 and New Cross in 1910. Note that this figure excludes Gorton South in 1909 where three seats were available and both a Labour and Liberal candidate were returned.
32. See, *Manchester and Salford Labour Representation Committee Annual Report*, 1911.
33. This was the view of the Manchester LRC (cited in *ibid.*) and appears to be an accurate assessment.
34. See a particularly heated debate in December 1912 that centred on whether skilled employees such as engineers (amongst others) ought to be paid more than the standard rate. Labour's response to accusations of them representing only sectional interests was to accuse the established parties of being 'the paid advocates of the property owners'. *Manchester Guardian*, 5 December 1912. Tellingly, this meeting saw Labour's largest defeat to date; Labour's amendment was lost by 73 to 23 votes; see report in *Manchester Guardian*, 9 January 1913.
35. *Manchester Central Labour Party, Annual Report*, 1911.
36. See *Manchester Central Labour Party Annual Report*, 1914.

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The Complexities of Progressive Cooperation: Lib-Labism and Electoral Politics in Stoke-on-Trent, 1903–1910

Until the 1880s the borough of Stoke-upon-Trent was a double-member constituency; sometimes two Liberals were returned, on other occasions a Liberal and a Conservative, although the area appeared more Liberal than Conservative. With redistribution in 1885, a separate seat was created for the town of Stoke-upon-Trent (hereafter referred to as Stoke) while Hanley and Burslem were brought together as one constituency under the title of Hanley Parliamentary Borough. Stoke was subsequently captured by the Liberals for three successive general elections in 1885, 1886 and 1892 and at a by-election in 1890; on all occasions, the Liberal vote was high.¹ In 1895, a Liberal Unionist won the seat with a narrow majority of 2.4%. Hanley was represented by a Liberal MP until 1900 when, largely as a consequence of the Boer War, both seats fell narrowly to the Unionists. This defeat prompted the Liberals to reassess their position in the area and they now considered the feasibility of some form of coalition with organised labour in the belief that the potential electoral appeal could be significant. At the same time, the principal trade unions in the area were also beginning to examine their political position. This primarily entailed the miners' union considering the viability of seeking independent representation. From this period, a distinct Lib-Labism in North Staffordshire started to develop, and from it emerged a particularly distinctive type of Lib-Lab representative.

Nationally, the first working-class MPs were elected from the mid-1870s. These members accepted the Liberal whip but were permitted a degree of freedom on labour issues. They formed a distinct group in

Parliament and by 1886 numbered twelve; one of them, Henry Broadhurst (secretary of the TUC's Parliamentary Committee), was appointed a junior minister. Approximately half of these MPs were former miners who had gained experience in their trade union before embarking on political careers; the remainder were leading officials from other unions. The Liberal leadership appeared enthusiastic in encouraging a greater number of Lib-Lab MPs yet in many areas local Liberal Associations refused to endorse working-class candidates. Famously, Keir Hardie, Ramsay MacDonald and Arthur Henderson were rejected as prospective Liberal-Labour candidates. An apparent reluctance of some Liberal Associations to adopt working men was an essential context in the growing call for independent action and organisation. With the formation of the LRC in 1900, the position of Lib-Lab MPs became rather uncertain although it should be remembered that a number of Britain's largest unions including the Miners' Union did not initially affiliate to the LRC.

Initially, the Liberal Party in the Potteries had to deal with a number of dissenters, those for whom accommodation with the labour interest implied a belief that the party might be taken over by socialists. Despite some misgivings, however, in April 1902 a meeting of local Liberal and labour representatives was convened in order to determine the 'advisability of fighting the seat on labour and progressive lines ... providing a suitable candidate [were one to be] forthcoming'.² One month later, the decision was taken to adopt John Ward as the prospective parliamentary candidate for Stoke. Ward served with the British Army in Sudan and had been a member of the SDF in Battersea during the 1880s. He later became chairman of the Battersea branch of the Gas Workers' Union and was involved in the creation of the Navvies', Bricklayers', Labourers' and General Labourers' Unions. From this point he had adopted a more Liberal stance and became active in the cross-party National Democratic League, becoming the organisation's chairman in 1902.³ Ward arrived in Stoke with the hope of obtaining the LRC nomination but, critically, he made explicit efforts to obtain an electoral agreement with the local Liberal Association. This situation antagonised some elements within the local labour movement, although the weakness of the LRC in Stoke meant they were unable to mount effective opposition to his candidature.⁴

For the radical wing of the Stoke Liberals, Ward represented an ideal candidate, a progressive who, it was believed, could strengthen the Liberal position in the area. Some local Liberals, however, clearly believed the position to be untenable and that the Liberal Party alone, without Labour

support, could in any case hold the seat. In July 1902, a meeting of the North Staffordshire Liberal Association resolved to adopt a Liberal candidate in opposition to Ward.⁵ It was hoped that the prospective candidate would be Alfred Billson, a well-known Liberal who had previously been MP for Barnstaple and Halifax. He needed more time to consider his position and the following January decided to decline the invitation on the grounds that local unity was more important.⁶ It seems possible that the national party applied pressure to the Staffordshire Liberals to allow Ward a free run. By the beginning of 1903, therefore, some form of 'progressive alliance' had been established in Stoke, although the degree to which it was ideologically motivated or entirely supported by the Liberals remained uncertain. Nevertheless, an accommodation of the labour interest was attractive since it could enhance the Liberals' image as a party committed to representing working-class interests and would certainly improve local organisation.

Whilst Hanley was not an exclusively mining constituency, the miners formed the most powerful group within the town's politics and shaped its development more than any other occupational sector. The North Staffordshire miners were widely perceived to be politically moderate, 'laggards' of the wider movement away from Liberal patronage.⁷ Conflict between the Liberal Party and organised labour in Hanley therefore seemed unlikely. The pottery workers, numerically the predominant occupational group in the town, remained equally loyal to Liberalism.⁸

As part of Herbert Gladstone's overhaul of the party organisation in the summer of 1903, the local Liberal organisations were restructured, culminating in the inauguration of the North Staffordshire Liberal Federation. This marked the end of a long period of inadequate organisation in the area and improvements served to encourage a more united front for the Liberals and Labour. Furthermore, it appears that a sizeable proportion of local Labour supporters welcomed a more formal relationship with the Liberals, some even believing that the pursuit of independent labour representation was an inappropriate route to take.⁹ Certainly, a section of the local Labour movement did not favour cooperation with the Liberals and the local ILP branches contained elements hostile to any involvement with Liberalism. The greater proportion of the movement, however, continued to support the concept of a 'progressive alliance'.

Nonconformity was fundamental to the development and character of Labour politics in North Staffordshire. Courting this interest was imperative if Labour was to advance in the area, although it is important to

recognise that the relationship between Nonconformity and Labour politics was an organic one. The chapels had become the springboard for a generation of trade union activists and became the connecting point between Liberalism and trade unionism and then, conversely, between Liberalism and Labour as a political party. Labour's early representatives in North Staffordshire were active Nonconformists, usually staunch Methodists, and their religion informed their politics as much as their class or occupation.¹⁰ Experience as lay preachers gave some trade union activists invaluable experience on the public platform. It also encouraged a strong relationship with the local Liberal elite.

In spite of earlier wrangling over his candidature, John Ward secured the Liberal-Labour nomination in Stoke while Enoch Edwards was selected in Hanley. Edwards had been a working miner until he had been injured in an accident in the early 1870s. Having embarked upon a career as a trade union organiser, he became treasurer and then general secretary of the North Staffordshire Miners' Federation. At the formation of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain (MFGB) in 1889, Edwards was appointed treasurer. His career in local politics had begun in 1886 when he was elected to the Burslem Town Council, later becoming Alderman and finally Mayor between 1899 and 1890.¹¹ Throughout his political life, Edwards remained a moderate Lib-Laber and this was no doubt connected to his staunch Primitive Methodism. Edwards had first been put forward as a prospective miners' candidate for Newcastle-Under-Lyme in 1892 but the local Liberal Association refused to endorse him and he subsequently withdrew.¹² In 1900, he had been adopted as an MFGB-Liberal candidate in Hanley but had encountered considerable hostility owing to his opposition to the Boer War.¹³ In 1904, he became president of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain. Two years later, the Liberals agreed to support Ward and Edwards in the general election on condition that the Labour organisations would assist Liberal campaigns in Newcastle-under-Lyme, North West Staffordshire and Leek.¹⁴ Both received substantial assistance from the North Staffordshire Trades' and Labour Council, chairman Herbert Emery acting as vice president of the election committee. That both Edwards's and Ward's campaigns represented the combined forces of Liberalism and Labour was reflected by the formation of a joint Liberal-Labour election committee for the duration of the 1906 general election.¹⁵

While the Potteries had been largely under Liberal control after 1895, it would be unwise to perceive Conservatism as having only peripheral

influence. There existed significant pockets of Conservative support in the area, one reflection being membership of the Primrose League, the grass roots political-cum-social organisation established in 1883 to promote Conservative ideals. Both Potteries seats had some degree of Primrose League strength with Hanley, Stoke and Fenton possessing active habitations. As in many other parts of the country, popular Conservatism was more or less exclusively working class.¹⁶ Given the limited amount of information available, it is difficult to make an accurate assessment about its wider influence, although it appears that popular working-class Conservatism was well organised as reports on the Unionist Workingmen's Association testify.

The Liberal-Labour campaigns focused principally upon Free Trade, Chinese Slavery, Trade Union legislation, in particular the Miners' Bill, and demands for amendment of the Workers' Compensation Act. Alongside these matters, the two Liberal-Labour candidates focused attention upon a number of social issues such as old age pensions, unemployment and education.¹⁷ John Ward conducted an impressive campaign and addressed a wider array of issues than any other candidate in either Stoke-on-Trent or Manchester. For no obvious reason, the *Staffordshire Sentinel* chose to refer to him simply as the Labour candidate although the newspaper stressed that he was endorsed by and received the active support of the local Liberals.¹⁸ He did indeed adopt a more discernibly 'Labour' stance and articulated his arguments in more decisively anti-capitalist language; he also attacked his opponent much more directly. Considering the increasingly precarious economic position of the working man, he told one meeting how 'the friends of the Tories, the capitalists, the clergy and the brewers [had] taken the cream of the extra taxation raised by [their] hard labour'.¹⁹ Edwards never used this sort of language. Throughout the campaign, Ward reiterated how the constituency's Unionist member Douglas Coghill had 'always voted against the interests of the workers'²⁰ in Parliament, how 'instead of representing [this] purely working-class constituency [he] had never had any sympathy with the working man'.²¹ He went so far as to suggest that the sitting member appeared 'peculiarly hostile to all labour proposals' in Parliament and so, he argued, it was 'very illogical for Tory working men to support such a candidate; in fact it was absolutely inconsistent'.²² Another subject that provided Ward with ammunition was the issue of Ireland. When the sitting member allegedly accused the Irish of 'disloyal, treacherous and treasonable behaviour',²³ he had obviously overlooked the fact that his

constituency contained a sizeable Irish population. Ward went so far as to contend that his opponent's hostility towards Ireland amounted to 'almost a mania'.²⁴ He focused considerable attention upon education, asserting that the late government had had 'no mandate to interfere with the national education system ... [they had] foisted voluntary schools upon the public funds without giving the people proportionate control over the management of [the] schools [and] the Education Act was not a solution to the problems [because it simply] gave privileges to certain sects [whilst placing] the cost of sectarian teaching upon the public funds'.²⁵ Ward appeared passionate about this issue and throughout the campaign reiterated his belief that all state-aided institutions should be under absolute public control. He objected strongly to religious tests for teachers, an issue likely to strike a chord with Nonconformist Liberal supporters in the constituency and reinforce their endorsement of him, although it could have alienated him from the Catholic Irish and Anglicans. Ward also gave considerable attention to the subject of Chinese slavery in South Africa, going so far as to suggest that 'war had only been waged to secure cheap labour' and that the 'real object of importing Chinese labour was to keep out trade unions'.²⁶ He told voters that if such cruelty had been introduced in 'one part of the Empire there was no reason why it shouldn't be introduced here' and he fervently insisted that 'the principle must be fought and the stain in South Africa wiped from the British flag'.²⁷

Edwards, meanwhile, conducted a moderate and more Liberal campaign than Ward. Perhaps surprisingly, he avoided discussion of his own trade and devoted little attention to wider labour questions. He argued that pauperism had increased substantially during the period of the late government and told voters that, whilst the Conservative administration had been able to find £250 million for a war in South Africa, 'men who had been good citizens were facing the prospect of the workhouse'.²⁸ 'If the highest in the land did not believe it below their dignity to accept a pension,' he argued, 'why shouldn't the working man?'²⁹

Both candidates adopted a strong defence of free trade, although it played less of a central theme for Ward than it did for Edwards. Ward made the simple but effective point that whilst employers might achieve higher prices for their goods under Chamberlain's Tariff Reform proposals, it did not necessarily follow that they would pay higher wages.³⁰ Interestingly, the fiscal question never dominated election campaigns for the Liberals and Labour in North Staffordshire as it did elsewhere. Conversely, and in contrast to Manchester, the Unionist candidates declared themselves to be

enthusiastic supporters of Tariff Reform, arguing that a degree of protection would benefit the pottery industry. It was widely perceived that the British pottery industry was under threat from Germany and Austria and manufacturers were vocal in their support for fiscal reform. The unions, however, remained unflinching in their support of free trade.³¹

From the outset of the 1906 contest, the Unionist candidate and sitting member for Hanley, A. H. Heath, was at pains to stress how he objected to what he called ‘the cursed bugbear of class’ being introduced into the election. He told his audiences ‘labour would be of little use without capital’ and it was unfair for people to be ‘scornful towards the capitalist’. He defended government policy in South Africa, declaring that ‘the Chinese in the Transvaal were living as happily as the volunteers ... it was a lie to call it slavery’.³² He deemed the Education Act to be ‘a useful and wise measure’ and said he regretted the actions of the Nonconformist churches because, as he saw it, their grievances were less severe than they claimed. He largely avoided the question of Tariff Reform though, when questioned on the issue, declared himself ‘distinctly a supporter of Balfour’ and stated that he thought government ought to be given the ‘fullest opportunity to negotiate with foreign countries for a better system’.³³ He argued that he could not see ‘why the doors of this country were open to others to make their markets but [they] closed their doors to us ... binding the colonies together in commercial union was worthy of consideration [because] industries were crippled by the unfair competition to which they were exposed’.³⁴ The only thing he would say in relation to temperance and the Irish question was that he believed the late administration had passed ‘good and useful measures’ and, when questioned, declared himself in favour of a ‘modified’ franchise reform for women ‘who did not have a man to represent them’.³⁵

The 1906 general election in Stoke-on-Trent overturned the Unionist majorities of 1900 in both Stoke and Hanley. John Ward was returned with a majority of 3372, a margin of 28.2%, while Edwards was returned with an impressive majority of 4896 or 36.4%. These set new records for the constituencies and, more importantly, demonstrated that a Liberal–Labour alliance could produce astonishing results. For the near future, at least, the election helped to ensure Liberal and Labour cooperation. The immediate post-1906 period in Stoke-on-Trent was one of renewed energy and optimism amongst both local Liberal and Labour forces. For the Liberals, the election had demonstrated that electoral accommodation with Labour could work extremely effectively. This was reinforced the following year with the election of another Liberal–Labour candidate, Albert Stanley, at a by-election in North West Staffordshire.

Edwards and Ward stood again as Liberal–Labour candidates in the general election of January 1910. With the affiliation of the Miners’ Federation of Great Britain to the Labour Party, Edwards was now expected to contest Hanley as an official Labour candidate and it seems that some of the Hanley Liberals were becoming increasingly concerned as to their own position. In October 1909, a section of the local Liberal Association expressed unease over Edwards’s candidature in light of the new circumstances³⁶ but this did not amount to anything; given Edwards’s considerable popularity and local support, opposition to him was unlikely to succeed (Fig. 5.1).³⁷ Tellingly, it was only after Edwards had secured local Liberal support that the local Trades and Labour Council consented



Fig. 5.1 Enoch Edwards, MP for Hanley and leader of the Miners’ Federation of Great Britain. (Courtesy of William P. Edwards)

to giving him their backing.³⁸ In Stoke, John Ward encountered greater opposition to his nomination, not from the Liberals but from the local Labour Party. This derived primarily from the fact that Ward had refused to endorse the Labour Party constitution.³⁹ Like Edwards, however, Ward had by that time established a degree of popularity in the constituency that ensured any formal opposition to him was likely to encounter difficulties. At the beginning of 1910 there was, as before, an impression of 'progressive' harmony in both Stoke and Hanley.

The Unionists adopted candidates who were both new to the area, George Rittner in Hanley and David Kyd in Stoke. Both were London barristers and from the beginning of the campaign were determined that Tariff Reform, with particular reference to its benefits for the pottery industry, would constitute the major thrust of their platforms.⁴⁰ Joseph Chamberlain's policy had not been universally endorsed by candidates across the country in 1906 but the 1910 election now saw the Unionists as a party more committed to Tariff Reform. The recent budget provided another critical line of attack. In contrast to previous contests, the January 1910 general election saw the Unionists fighting noticeably more aggressive campaigns; their justification for this approach rested on the assumption that they were defending the state from what was deemed to be the road towards socialism.

Liberal-Labour candidates across the country focussed more or less exclusively on the constitutional question. Ward objected to the Lords' actions on the basic premise that Parliament had to provide for social responsibilities, particularly pensions. The present government had determined that 'the veterans of industry who had assisted to procure the wealth of the community should no longer have only the paupers' dole and the workhouse to look forward to in their declining years'.⁴¹ For Ward, the people had to decide whether the finances of the country should be 'levied, controlled and expended by their representatives or by those who stood for their own interests, power, privilege and nothing else'.⁴² He went further in arguing that in a 'democratically elected country ... the industrial community [had] no place for idle Lordlings in it anyway'.⁴³ Edwards too focused primarily on the Lords. He told voters that the second chamber was 'out of harmony with the general tenor and tone of things, as they now existed'.⁴⁴ The 'great principle driving the budget of Lloyd George was that taxes should be put on those who had money and plenty of it and given to people who had very little'.⁴⁵ He also dedicated considerable attention to the land

question, declaring that ‘at last they had found a man brave enough to tackle this question’.⁴⁶ Throughout the campaign, Edwards received considerable support from a number of Hanley’s prominent Liberals. Elaborating upon their endorsement, Sydney Malkin and Dr Rowley Moody cited Edwards’s background as the prime reason voters ought to support him. As Rowley Moody told one audience, ‘there was a great deal of social legislation to be passed and the country needed men like Edwards with his knowledge of the workers in parliament’.⁴⁷ Tellingly, no significant Labour Party speakers joined him during the campaign. Adopting a Liberal platform, Edwards focused considerable attention upon the fiscal question arguing that Tariff Reform would inevitably mean taxing the food of the people. He also spoke at length about unemployment, labour exchanges and the necessity for a scheme of national insurance.

Like many Unionist candidates throughout the period, George Rittner endured a difficult campaign.⁴⁸ He declared himself a strong supporter of Tariff Reform, more so than the party’s candidate had done in 1906 now that it was official party policy. Attempting to counter the suggestion that Tariff Reform would lead to increased food prices, he claimed it would ‘do away with every single tax on food supplies which come from the colonies ... which are large enough to supply everything we need’.⁴⁹ He further suggested that it was ‘better to be dependent upon these than upon the whim and caprice of either one or a combination of foreign powers’.⁵⁰ Throughout the contest he referred to the Labour Party as ‘absolutely socialistic’ and took an equally aggressive attitude towards contemporary Liberalism, declaring, for example, that ‘by being a Liberal today a man has to be a Home Ruler, Free Trader, a socialist and opposed to religious education in schools’.⁵¹ He asked one audience whether ‘any thinking man could be in favour of a Godless education and revolutionary socialism’.⁵² It is interesting that as early as this, some Unionist candidates in the area were beginning to articulate ferocious anti-Labour and Liberal sentiments since they classed them as being, in essence, the same thing. In the context of January 1910, Enoch Edwards probably did not appear to be much of a ‘revolutionary socialist’ and it was highly unlikely the ‘socialist bogey’ would have much of an impact in an area where the miners’ leader had achieved near cult-like status.

The Unionist candidate in Stoke, David Kyd, was another strong advocate of Tariff Reform. He argued that such a change would ‘protect the home market, secure the colonial market and so benefit the working

classes'.⁵³ He also focused significant attention upon the question of the navy, claiming only a Unionist government would ensure Britain's naval supremacy.⁵⁴ Both Unionist candidates argued that the pottery trade would benefit from a system of tariff protection, the basic contention being that markets were becoming smaller, trade in the district was declining and, inevitably, unemployment would increase.⁵⁵ They pointed to Joseph Chamberlain's assertion, issued in a statement on Tariff Reform, that all the 'different branches of the pottery trade would succeed by the adoption of a new policy'.⁵⁶ The Unionists were dismayed at the position taken by the pottery union officials. Rittner, for example, declared himself completely perplexed since he assumed 'every trade unionist, if he is consistent, ought to be a Tariff Reformer because the very object of trade unionism is to protect your labour and it is perfectly useless to protect your labour if you do not protect the outcome of your labour'.⁵⁷ Given that workers in the pottery industry appeared to mistrust the idea of Tariff Reform, the issue may not have helped the Conservatives in the way either candidates or party managers had hoped. The determination of the Unionists to recapture seats in the district was apparent when Balfour opened his 1910 election campaign at Hanley's Victoria Hall before a capacity audience of over 4000. It was claimed by the Conservatives that over 18,000 people had applied for tickets; the local press noted that the audience was 'predominantly working-class'.⁵⁸ In the first speech ever delivered by a leader of the Conservative Party in the area, Balfour declared that 'never before [had] the ideals of the two great parties been so fundamentally diverged ... [and that] the major issue of the present was Tariff Reform or Socialism'.⁵⁹

Both the Liberals and Labour viewed the January 1910 general election results in Stoke and Hanley as a vindication of the legitimacy of recent government legislation. Enoch Edwards was returned in Hanley with a majority of 27.8%, 8.6% less than at the last election.⁶⁰ In Stoke, John Ward won with a majority of 14.8%, a decrease of 13.4%.⁶¹ The results represented a disappointment for the advocates of protectionism, confirming that the Tariff Reform movement had not gained significant ground in this part of the Midlands. In Hanley, the miners' support for their leader would undoubtedly have contributed to sustaining the Labour votes; as the *Staffordshire Advertiser* recognised, Enoch Edwards wielded an 'influence which [was] hardly surpassed in any other mining constituency'.⁶² However, the miners constituted only 20% of the voting strength of the constituency at most and do not alone suffice to explain political loyalty in

the area. It is essential to recognise the critical role of individuals in the politics of this period, a factor often overlooked by historians. Whilst individual politicians undoubtedly could have a significant impact on the electoral history of a constituency, the context remained significant. Both Edwards and Ward had polled well in 1906 because, like Liberal and Labour candidates across the whole country, issues had given them a considerable electoral advantage. Their defeat had been almost unimaginable and, essentially, they had been elected on a Liberal platform. By 1910, the political context and the impact of the issues that had played a critical role in 1906 had begun to change and their positions might have accordingly. As it was, the results of the January 1910 general election in Stoke-on-Trent saw another victory for the combined forces of Liberalism and Labour. The local relevance of the issues upon which the candidates campaigned was, however, of critical importance.

For Labour as an independent organisation, the January 1910 general election did little to improve its position in the Staffordshire Potteries. Whilst Labour members technically represented Stoke and Hanley, in reality both Ward and Edwards remained loyal to their Liberal roots; in practical terms they had been elected on a Liberal platform with Liberal support. So long as Labour representation continued to be dominated by trade union-sponsored members who were essentially Liberals, areas such as Stoke-on-Trent were likely to remain unfruitful ground for an independent Labour advance. Within these localities, the Labour candidates relied heavily upon Liberal organisation, finance and popular support. This was underpinned by a cult of local personality and the influence of Nonconformity in the area. Furthermore, as Labour organisation remained weak in the area, it seemed unlikely that effective alternatives to Lib-Labism would emerge in the immediate future.

Throughout 1910, John Ward continued to encounter opposition to his candidature among the local Labour membership. In response to this, he took the unusual step in May 1910 of establishing his own constituency organisation. Supported by local labour organisations and the Liberal Party he aimed to counter opposition whilst thwarting the 'menace of Socialism'.⁶³ During the December 1910 general election he once again focused his campaign upon the 'irresponsible' behaviour of the House of Lords who, he declared, 'represented only their land, their class and the monopolies of the few ... the only question [was] who should rule; the peers or the people?'.⁶⁴ Again offering a more comprehensive programme than Edwards, Ward discussed pensions, insurance, housing, land taxation,

nationalisation, popular control of education and the right to work.⁶⁵ Edwards, on the other hand, concentrated on the Lords, free trade, Home Rule and electoral reform.⁶⁶ Edwards perceived himself to be first and foremost a trade union representative and always sought to emphasise how *all* of the 'progressive forces' in the borough had selected him unanimously, namely the trade unions, the Labour Party and the Liberals. Before an act of Parliament introduced payment of MPs in 1911, Labour members were sponsored by a trade union, often their own. By prohibiting the unions from using a political levy, the Osborne Judgement of 1909 had the potential to impede seriously direct labour representation. Historians have suggested that while the Osborne judgement did not have such a significant impact in terms of the 1910 general election, it did have a major effect on Labour politics in the sense that, like Taff Vale, it served to encourage trade unions to look more concertedly towards the Labour Party.⁶⁷ As leader of the country's largest trade union, Edwards argued strongly that the unions should be allowed to use their funds as they thought best. He argued that the Osborne decision would seriously impair labour representation in Parliament and thus make it harder for the wishes of working men to be carried out, concluding that, as trade unionists, this represented 'the most important question ever placed before them'.⁶⁸

George Rittner again stood as Unionist candidate in Hanley while Samuel Joyce-Thomas replaced Kyd who had retired due to business commitments. Like his predecessor, Joyce-Thomas was a strong Tariff Reformer. Both Unionists drew attention to this issue despite the Liberals' efforts to keep it focused upon constitutional reform. When the Unionists did discuss the constitutional question their campaign rested upon the basic assertion that politics at present effectively amounted to party dictatorship and that a strong upper house was imperative to 'safeguard the will of the people'.⁶⁹ A joint election address issued on behalf of all the party's candidates in North Staffordshire urged 'the moderate man to believe in the voice of the people more than a particular party'.⁷⁰ The address outlined how the Unionists were determined to reform the House of Lords and increase democratic participation by submitting important matters to public referendum. The central plank of their programme remained the commitment to Tariff Reform, which they claimed would give the people better food, housing, clothing and see 'tax transferred to goods manufactured abroad and dumped into England to the detriment of the British worker'.⁷¹

The results of the December 1910 general election saw Enoch Edwards returned with a majority of 28.4%, an increase of 0.6% on the January election. This suggests that Edwards's electoral support was solid. In Stoke, John Ward was returned with a majority of 16.4%, an increase of 1.6% on the last election which again suggests that his core vote was strong. The Unionists' failure to divert attention away from the constitutional question and on to Tariff Reform had no doubt played a critical role in their defeat in both elections. In December, the Unionist candidates appeared more aggressive but were still unable to influence electors' allegiances. For Labour, the period from 1906 until 1911 did little to change the basic position of the movement in the area. Whilst Labour Party members represented both seats, their public speeches across all three general elections suggested that neither Ward nor Edwards perceived themselves to be primarily representatives of that organisation. They saw themselves as labour members but not Labour Party members; in their mind, the two things were very different. Ultimately, Labour politics in the area remained dominated by trade unionists with pronounced Liberal sympathies. Only a dramatic upheaval of some kind was likely to change this.

NOTES

1. 63, 61, 62 and 59% respectively.
2. *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 3 May 1902.
3. See J. M. Bellamy and J. Saville, *Dictionary of Labour Biography*, Vol. 4 (London, 1977), p. 193. The National Democratic Federation was formed in 1900 in an attempt to promote unity between radicals and trade unionists. In 1903, it attempted to affiliate to the LRC but this was refused because of alleged Liberal ties.
4. See *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 3 May 1902.
5. *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 14 July 1902.
6. *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 13 October 1906.
7. See R. Gregory, *Miners and British Politics*, pp. 168–173.
8. See H. Pelling, *Social Geography of British Elections, 1885–1910* (London, 1967), pp. 270–274 and R. Whipp, *Patterns of Labour: Work and Social Change in the Pottery Industry* (London, 1990), p. 181.
9. For example, in 1904, the President of the North Staffordshire Trades and Labour Council (John Welsh) suggested his organisation should disaffiliate from the LRC. The proposal was defeated by twenty-four votes to sixteen; see *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 4 December 1904.

10. Smith argues that the contention that there was ‘more Methodism than Marxism’ in early Labour politics is misguided; Methodism, in fact, had much less of a role than is commonly assumed; see Smith, *Religion and the Rise of Labour* (Keele, 1993), pp. 166–167. In this region, however, Methodism was fundamental to early Labour politics. High profile Labour representatives such as Albert Stanley, for example, continued to preach at the Bethesda Chapel; see *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 7 March 1908.
11. Biographical details from J. M. Bellamy and J. Saville, *Dictionary of Labour Biography*, Volume 3 (London, 1976), pp. 109–111.
12. See R. Gregory, *Miners and British Politics*, p. 168.
13. The Liberals had initially believed it would be more appropriate for Edwards to stand in North West Staffordshire since there were more miners in that area, but he had refused; *ibid.*, p. 168.
14. See *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 1 and 16 January 1906.
15. *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 21 December 1905.
16. See M. Pugh, *The Tories and the People* (Oxford, 1985) p. 118.
17. *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 2, 4 and 16 January 1906.
18. Throughout the campaign, prominent local Liberals regularly supported Ward on his election platforms. The Liberal candidate for Leek, R. Pearce, for example, gave Ward significant support, as did the local Liberal agent H. Leese.
19. *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 2 January 1906.
20. See *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 4th January 1906.
21. On labour questions in general, it appears that the sitting member’s record was out of step with the character of the constituency. He had voted against the Shop Hours Bill, had contributed to the defeat of the Railway Accidents Prevention Bill and had declared that he supported the Taff Vale decision; see *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 6 January 1906.
22. By which he meant that it was inconsistent for a man to pay into a trade union then vote for someone who believed it acceptable that the ‘great capitalist monopolies’ could take the money the union had accumulated for benevolent purposes away.
23. *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 2 January 1906.
24. Coghill had also voted against his party in opposing the Irish Land Bill.
25. See *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 2 January 1906.
26. *Ibid.*
27. *Ibid.*
28. *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 2 January 1906.
29. *Ibid.*
30. *Ibid.*
31. See *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 20 January 1906.
32. See *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 2 January 1906.

33. Ibid.
34. Ibid.
35. Ibid.
36. See *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 30 October 1909.
37. Ibid.
38. *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 20 November 1909.
39. Edwards had also initially declined to sign the Labour constitution though his refusal generated less debate; for local Labour opposition to Ward, see *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 8 January 1910.
40. *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 8 January 1910.
41. See *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 3 January 1910.
42. Ibid.
43. *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 8 January 1910.
44. For Edwards on the constitutional question see *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 17 January 1910.
45. See *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 6 January 1910.
46. Edwards was a great admirer of Lloyd George and spoke about him regularly in his speeches, suggesting that he very much remained a Liberal at heart. Ward, by contrast, mentioned neither him nor any other Liberals.
47. Ibid.
48. Many of his meetings were noticeable for an identifiable element of dissent, i.e. booing and disruptions.
49. See *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 8 January 1910.
50. Ibid.
51. See *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 1 January 1910.
52. Ibid.
53. See *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 6 January 1910.
54. He outlined a long list of facts showing how the navy had been neglected under the Liberal administration; see *ibid.*
55. See Rittner's figures on the declining exports of pottery; *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 8 January 1910.
56. *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 15 January 1910.
57. Ibid.
58. *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 8 January 1910.
59. See *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 6 January 1910 and *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 8 January 1910.
60. The turnout rate was 87.1% compared to 83.4% in 1906.
61. The turnout rate was 88.8%. In 1906, it had been 84.8%.
62. *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 22 January 1910.
63. See *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 14 May 1910.
64. See *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 2 December 1910.
65. See Ward election advertisement in *ibid.*

66. See Edwards's election address, *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 2 December 1910; the address was published jointly with those of Ward, Wedgwood, Stanley and Pearce presumably in an effort to cut costs.
67. See C. Wrigley, 'Labour and the Trade Unions' in K. D. Brown, *The First Labour Party*, p. 147.
68. See *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 29 November 1910.
69. *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 2 December 1910.
70. Ibid.
71. See joint Unionist election address, *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 2 December 1910.

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A Fragile Alliance: The 1912 Hanley By-Election

The 1910 general elections had exhibited a degree of stability in the ‘progressive’ vote and the potential durability of the Progressive Alliance in Stoke-on-Trent. While relations between the Liberal and Labour organisations were lukewarm on occasions, the outward image at least was one of progressive unity. The area remained one where traditions of cooperation between Liberalism and organised labour appeared to be strong. This changed dramatically after 1910. Some sections of the local Labour movement began to express concern that Edwards was not effectively promoting the Labour position. Furthermore, party headquarters had identified significant shortcomings in the political organisation of North Staffordshire: dramatic improvements and significant reorganisation were necessary.¹ The Executive Committee of the Party encouraged local activists to establish a more sophisticated organisation and emphasised the necessity of effective canvassing work. Whilst it recognised the difficulties its local organisations faced in places such as Hanley which were represented by miners’ MPs, it appreciated that little enthusiasm could be raised for the development of independent Labour representation in such constituencies, from either the MPs themselves, the local Trades Council or the wider membership.² Although the Labour Party clearly recognised that such seats were in urgent need of attention, the extent to which the national party could change these circumstances remained limited.

After 1910, the Liberal–Labour relationship in Stoke-on-Trent began to fragment. This came to a head in July 1912 with the sudden death of Enoch Edwards. The ensuing debate as to which party had greater claim

to the seat made the Hanley by-election one of the most famous and controversial of the early twentieth century. It represented a critical test of the Progressive Alliance in an area where Liberal–Labour cooperation had appeared to offer so much potential as an electoral strategy and approach to politics. The repercussions were not only felt locally: a number of historians have suggested that the by-election threatened to damage the workings of the national Lib–Lab pact in a way no other election had ever done.³ At the time, it certainly generated significant national interest by alluding to the increasingly fraught relationship between the two left-of-centre parties.

Edwards's precise political identity remained ambiguous up to his death, although he probably remained more of a Liberal than a 'Labour' man despite his position as leader of the country's most powerful trade union.⁴ By the time of his death, Edwards had become a very prominent and popular political figure in the Potteries. In some ways, his party affiliation was irrelevant; by 1912, many of Hanley's electors may have concluded that party was not in fact a prime consideration, or rather they continued to perceive him as simply a Liberal trade unionist whatever official tag he was given. In light of Edwards's personal politics and the fact that he had been elected with substantial Liberal assistance, the Liberals considered Hanley to be theirs. It was perhaps inevitable that the ensuing debate over the adoption of a candidate was protracted to say the least. Historians have often considered events surrounding the Hanley by-election as a critical turning point in the politics of British Labour.⁵ The experience revealed the party's unhealthy reliance upon the Liberals in some localities. Equally worrying, in such areas it appeared almost impossible to find suitable candidates from the local movement, ones inclined to promote a distinctive and sufficiently independent *Labour* appeal. The political culture of these areas was such that voters simply did not possess a clear concept of the difference between the Liberal and Labour parties; to all intents and purposes, they were the same thing. 'Progressivism' meant anything that was not the Unionists. The parties' attitudes to contemporary issues perhaps heightened perceptions that Labour and the Liberals represented essentially the same interest. Despite the Labour Party's difficulties in such an environment, recognition of the realities of the Progressive Alliance could prove a defining moment in the party's development if it exposed the problematic nature of electoral entanglements with the Liberals. This could encourage a more assertive policy of independence and, whilst this might not have immediate effect, it could

serve the organisation well in the future. In an immediate sense, however, a Liberal–Labour split could have dramatic effects on the political situation in other parts of the country, especially in areas where Liberal–Labour agreements existed. Whilst Labour’s own prospects remained poor when challenging both Liberals and Unionists, Labour intervention could cause significant problems for the Liberals.⁶

The situation was clear for the Hanley Liberals: Edwards had been elected with Liberal organisation and, they assumed, Liberal support, although the Miners’ Federation had provided financial assistance.⁷ It was inevitable that the Liberals took the first steps towards adopting a candidate and, on 28 June, the Hanley Liberal Six Hundred met to consider the nomination. Their first choice was president of the local Liberal Council, Dr Rowley Moody, who accepted, albeit reluctantly, that his name be put forward as a prospective candidate.⁸ Before the local Liberal and Labour Association⁹ could convene to adopt him formally, however, Rowley Moody ruled himself out, claiming he was too upset about the death of his close friend to continue.¹⁰ This left the Liberals with no obvious candidate to contest the seat. Whilst a number of local people had intimated their willingness to stand, the Hanley Liberal Association made it clear that they only wanted ‘an out and out radical ... someone who would unite the two sections of the progressive forces’.¹¹ This suggests the Hanley Liberals had concluded that only a radical could appeal to both Labour and Liberal supporters. Conveniently for the Hanley Liberals, the national headquarters had already taken the matter in hand and had arranged for Robert Outhwaite, a radical young land reformer, to address a joint Liberal–Labour meeting on 1 July. The assembled group believed they were there to adopt Dr Rowley Moody, so it must have come as something of a shock to be met with a new candidate. Outhwaite was widely reported to have delivered an impressive speech and appeared to be on the verge of adoption when one of the Labour representatives, Joseph Lovatt, secretary of the Potters’ Union, asked that in the light of the changed circumstances the meeting be adjourned for two days to allow the Labour representatives to consider the situation.¹² The local Labour organisation was meeting the following evening and it was suggested that Outhwaite address them so they would ‘have the opportunity of considering whether he would be a suitable candidate from their point of view’. Rowley Moody responded that ‘one day would be cheap’ if it meant they could achieve unity. It would appear that both the Hanley Liberals and Labour remained anxious that the by-election be contested as a united progressive force; such

optimism proved to be short-lived. The following morning, an announcement from Labour headquarters made it clear that Outhwaite would not be welcome to address that evening's meeting and they would not be supporting his candidature. Their position was clear: the party would oppose any candidate who was unwilling to accept the Labour whip in Parliament and headquarters would instruct the North Staffordshire Miners' Federation (NSMF) to find a candidate of their own if the Liberals refused to withdraw Outhwaite.¹³ Thus developed an acute crisis between the Liberal and Labour parties and the prospect of a three-cornered contest in Hanley. The situation was exacerbated a few days later when Labour's national executive issued a statement declaring that it 'regarded Hanley as a Labour seat and in the event of a three-cornered fight would withdraw its members from the House of Commons during the election [so] that the full force of the party may be behind the candidate'.¹⁴ Ramsay MacDonald articulated his party's position unequivocally when he declared 'the Liberals are the aggressors and if they will not allow us to retain our present number in Parliament we must act accordingly'.¹⁵ It was agreed that the NSMF would assume responsibility for selecting the Labour candidate and two days later the miners adopted their President, Samuel Finney.¹⁶ Like Edwards, Finney's political outlook was Liberal, underpinned by the fact that he was also an active Methodist lay preacher. It was believed that Finney would gain the support of a wide section of the local community but he was possibly not the sort of candidate Labour headquarters had in mind.

Finney had been a close associate and friend of Edwards and it was assumed he would benefit from this association. Nevertheless, the Liberal Party remained adamant that Hanley was by rights a Liberal seat and refused to withdraw Outhwaite, arguing that Edwards had sat as a Liberal until 1909 and had been sustained by Liberal organisation; as the Liberal Chief Whip commented, 'Hanley had always been regarded as a Liberal seat and so would be fought against all comers'.¹⁷ There clearly existed a strong determination amongst Liberals locally and nationally that Hanley should be fought at all costs, especially since present causes were just 'too great to allow a mere caucus to dominate the choice of a great constituency'.¹⁸ The Liberals may also have felt encouraged by the fact that a number of prominent local Labour activists appeared to support the assertion that the seat be fought by a Liberal candidate with Labour acquiescence on the grounds that 'the great cause of progress had always been dear to Edwards's heart [and that] must go forward'.¹⁹ Much has been written about the Hanley by-election although most accounts have provided inadequate analysis of

how the crisis actually unfolded. The key fact is that the national Labour Party did not wish to support Outhwaite as a Liberal–Labour candidate and so decided to pursue an independent challenge.

The Hanley Liberals were pleased that they had secured a man with ‘a great policy that he had made his own’.²⁰ As one prominent local Liberal expressed it, the Hanley Liberals had not wanted ‘some Whig in the division but a man with tried service and brilliant abilities’ and it was generally believed that Outhwaite was at that time ‘the ablest politician outside parliament’.²¹ He also had an admirable record fighting for trade unionism, having played a critical role in its development among South African miners. Outhwaite came to Hanley with the support of the highest echelons of the Liberal Party; Lloyd George himself had determined that land reformers should challenge a number of by-elections during the summer of 1912 in an attempt to demonstrate the electoral popularity of land reform and attempt to recover some of the ground lost over the Insurance Act.²²

Outhwaite had intimated to the Hanley Liberals that he wished to conduct his campaign exclusively on the issue of land reform, and this he did.²³ Informing the Hanley electors that he intended to ‘strike a blow for the emancipation of the people from the land monopoly’, Outhwaite contended that land reform would ‘shake the whole system of privilege to the foundation’. He added that ‘[what] rightfully belonged to the people, the Liberals were going to take back for the people’.²⁴ It is important to remember that the Liberal Party at this time had not yet formulated a definitive policy on the land issue and it remained a question of continuing investigation. Outhwaite had conducted two previous campaigns on the issue and was well versed in presenting the case for land reform. In Hanley, he argued that the enormous revenue received in ground rents at present contributed nothing to the local rates. If the law changed to ensure a contribution through the taxation of land values, a district such as the Potteries would see significant changes. There would be an increase in trade because land would be used more productively. Ultimately, his assertion was that land reform would help alleviate unemployment.²⁵

In contrast to Outhwaite’s single-issue campaign, persistent Unionist candidate George Rittner addressed a wide variety of issues: Tariff Reform, Irish Home Rule, the House of Lords, the Insurance Act, the franchise and the navy. Only to a very limited extent did he focus attention upon proposed land reforms. He also had another powerful line of attack on the subject of the current Liberal–Labour debacle: at his opening meeting, he

contended that the immediate priority of the Unionists was to ‘check a government that was rapidly ruining the country [and] carry out their own constructive policy of Tariff Reform’.²⁶ Without the adoption of imperial preference, there would never be any significant increase in the rates of wages for the working man. Furthermore, labour needed to protest strongly against aliens. He suggested that Liberal land policy was simply an attempt to ‘catch votes’ and avoided becoming embroiled in the subject itself, other than contending that the Unionists’ policy would see the government purchase land from landlords to be cultivated by the unemployed. The basic principle was to make land more productive in order to make food cheaper rather than importing so much. This seemed to amount to land nationalisation.²⁷

It seems that the Labour candidate Samuel Finney found it difficult to offer anything distinctive and his moderate campaign contrasted greatly with the militancy of visiting party speakers and even the impassioned radical campaign of his Liberal opponent.²⁸ Finney appeared to be out of his depth and paid excessive attention to accusing the Liberals of aggression and theft of a Labour seat at the expense of discussing actual issues. Once the by-election campaign had begun, that was simply beside the point. He did attempt to consider the land issue, which he believed was ‘the most practicable policy at present’ but was unable to elaborate on the subject in the same way as Outhwaite. It ought to be remembered that Labour’s appeal in areas such as Hanley was based principally upon practical issues and it was from such a perspective that men like Finney approached politics. They were not comfortable with detailed examination of questions such as land reform. Finney was widely perceived to be a weak candidate though this was a little unkind. He simply did not approach politics in the same way as a politician like Outhwaite; his approach amounted to a more straight talking and honest politics.

Liberal organisation was slow to mobilise. Arthur Nicholson, Secretary of the Midland Liberal Federation, reported that when he first visited the division at Outhwaite’s request he found ‘things in great confusion’ and had to take ‘drastic steps’ including the deployment of a team of eleven experienced agents in the division, each of whom was allocated a specific function, such as meetings, literature and removals.²⁹ As Nicholson reported, ‘for nine days a tremendous pressure was kept up ... although the task was great since we had to make an organisation as we went along’. He concluded, however, that the Liberal campaign ‘completely beat the Labour Party’.³⁰

The 1912 by-election saw the first ever three-way contest in the history of the parliamentary borough of Hanley. The result was widely perceived as likely to have a much wider impact on politics across the country. In the event, Outhwaite was victorious but with a much narrower majority than Edwards had previously enjoyed, 4.6% compared with Edwards's 28.4% in December 1910. The 85% turnout rate reflected the interest the by-election had generated.³¹ For the Conservatives the result seemed to suggest that, as at other recent by-elections, the Liberals 'weren't as strong as they thought they were'.³² The fact nevertheless remained that the Liberal Party had won the seat despite determined opposition. Moreover, Outhwaite had staked all on the land question. Not all Liberals were entirely convinced that this offered the best strategy; even at this time, single-issue campaigns were very rare. Outhwaite and the Liberal leadership, Lloyd George especially, no doubt believed the Liberal Government had been given a mandate on land reform. It reaffirmed for the party locally that Hanley was a Liberal seat. Outhwaite asked that no animosity be shown towards the Labour Party in spite of what had happened, yet given the evident bitterness felt by Labour, the chances of relations ever being the same again seemed remote. Liberal organisers were well aware of this fact, Arthur Nicholson declaring that whilst it was a 'great thing to win Hanley and so strengthen the position of the Chief Whip in dealing with Labour it must be confessed that such struggles would be fraught with the utmost danger to progressive politics'.³³ Across the Liberal press there was also unease about the party's action. Some blamed their own leadership whilst others simply called for restraint on both sides.³⁴

Some historians have suggested that the experience of Hanley did not necessarily mean the Liberal Party had abandoned the Progressive Alliance though, as Tanner notes, the leadership recognised they had to 'stay ahead of the field in order to keep the Labour Party in check'. He suggests that this was simply how the Progressive Alliance worked, by 'informal displays of strength rather than discussion and agreement'.³⁵ That this was the case is indisputable, yet it created potential problems. As the Hanley by-election demonstrated, even if the Liberals managed to hold a seat under such circumstances, their majority could become precarious.

The result of the 1912 by-election was hugely disappointing for the Labour Party, not just because the party had lost but, as the *Labour Leader* bemoaned, because it had lost 'so decisively'.³⁶ Labour had come third and obtained just 1694 votes in contrast to the Liberals' 6647. This did not bode well for the prospects of independent Labour representation in

the area and, given the national attention the election had received, neither was it likely to be helpful for Labour propaganda. The Labour Party's bitterness over the by-election was clearly reflected by Ramsay MacDonald when he declared that 'Hanley [would be] the most expensive victory Liberalism has had within this generation', going on to stress that 'Labour is not going to accept its present strength as its final strength ... the convenience of no party is going to deter us'.³⁷ During the campaign, he had been ferociously critical of the actions of the Liberal Party. When threatening to withdraw his members from Parliament, for instance, MacDonald declared that any Liberal efforts to prevent Labour's expansion was 'little short of a declaration of war'.³⁸ The *Labour Leader* suggested the result could have been interpreted as a blessing in disguise since it revealed that 'Liberalism was the enemy of organised Labour'. The publication believed that for the miners particularly the experience would 'mean the death-blow of Liberal-Labourism as a national force'.³⁹ *The Times* also viewed the contest as signalling a significant departure in politics, though from a slightly different perspective, reflecting that 'maybe in the growing intractability of the Labour Party we are witnessing the beginning of the end of the coalition'.⁴⁰ In his study of the miners and British politics, Gregory concludes that Lib-Lab politics in the Midlands 'came to an end in a welter of bitter recrimination'.⁴¹ For Labour, as much as it highlighted the dangers of too close an association with the Liberals, the by-election also served to demonstrate the party's poor organisation in the area. No attempts had been made by the respective labour organisations to organise a genuine Labour Party in the district, despite the insistence of the central organisation that such work ought to be undertaken as a matter of urgency.⁴² The party had urged the NSMF to withdraw the financial assistance it gave to the local Liberal Associations, yet the Federation repeatedly refused to change its position.⁴³ The national party viewed this as a deliberate attempt to suppress independent Labour activity in the political arena in the region. Consequently, the Labour candidate found no effective organisation behind him and limited public support. Assessing the political situation after the by-election, the Labour press concluded that, where independent politics was not valued by the public and labour organisations, a week's campaign was unlikely to win a majority of votes.⁴⁴ Many believed the choice of Labour candidate in itself was partially to blame for the poor vote. Finney was widely perceived to have failed to present a class appeal distinct enough to differentiate himself from the Liberals. As the *Labour Leader* reported, 'the sad truth has to be admitted [that] Outhwaite

voiced the protest of the working classes against exploitation more insistently than the Labour candidate and [his speeches] breathed more of the spirit of revolt than the utterances of Finney'.⁴⁵ It was claimed that responsibility for such a poor candidate lay with the local rank and file, who should have chosen someone who reflected the 'militant spirit which moves the factory, workshop and mine'⁴⁶ more effectively. Of course, the *Labour Leader* would naturally have taken this position, but, even so, at this particular election Finney appeared to be a weak candidate in contrast to the intellect and vigour of Outhwaite, one of the country's most capable exponents of land reform. The *Staffordshire Sentinel* agreed that the choice of candidate had probably had a major effect on the result, believing that had someone else been adopted, he could have conducted a more vigorous campaign.⁴⁷ This remains speculative though, and even if the Labour Party had adopted a more energetic and dynamic candidate, it remains an open question whether the result would have been dramatically different.

The established political culture in Hanley was such that demands for independent labour representation were met with limited enthusiasm, a significant obstacle to the immediate development of the Labour Party in similar seats.⁴⁸ To some extent, the experience of the 1912 by-election encouraged the miners to reassess their relationship with the Liberal Party. Just a few weeks after the by-election, the Miners' Federation decided to cease financing a local Liberal-Labour alliance and take immediate steps to set up machinery for the formation of a Labour Association for political purposes. Rather than simply feeling defeated by the experience, Gregory suggests the miners 'in their anger ... were determined to fight again and do better on the next occasion'.⁴⁹ The by-election prompted a significant change of attitude among the miners' leaders and this would have national significance despite, perhaps, coming a little late in the day.⁵⁰ Labour would continue to face difficulties in attempting to compete with a re-energised and radicalised Liberal Party that had proven it could attract significant support among the working classes. In areas such as Hanley, this was underpinned by deeply embedded attitudes towards trade unionism and its relationship with Liberalism. Encouraged by events such as Hanley, it may be the case that the union's leadership had become detached from official Liberalism, but it is unwise to presume that the wider membership itself switched allegiance from the Liberals at the same time and at the same rate.

An essential factor that underpinned the strength of the Liberal vote in Hanley was the sheer number of pottery workers, a factor that has received little attention from historians. Of a total electorate of 17,000, only 2500 at most were miners.⁵¹ Hanley was not primarily a mining seat despite the fact that the borough's former member led the mighty Miners' Federation of Great Britain. The greater proportion of electors in the constituency was employed in the pottery industry and the potters' role in determining the result of the by-election was arguably as great, if not greater, than the miners'. A number of points about the potters should be noted. First, trade unionism remained relatively weak: in 1912 just 16% of the total workforce of 50,000 belonged to trade unions.⁵² Second, allegiance to Liberalism remained extremely strong.⁵³ Industrial relations in the trade remained relatively harmonious and class conflict appeared minimal. This inhibited the growth of class consciousness and, in turn, influenced political allegiances in a way that continued to favour the Liberals but proved detrimental to concepts of independent Labour representation. It is wise not to exaggerate these points, however, and assume that the potters were entirely reluctant to express industrial dissatisfaction. Questions such as unemployment, low pay and industry-specific conditions saw the potters engaged in various forms of protest during the period.⁵⁴ Unemployment in particular saw union leaders such as Joseph Lovatt adopting a strong anti-government position although, as Whipp suggests, the potters perhaps 'did not feel oppressed' in the same way as other workers.⁵⁵ Like the miners, many of the pottery union leaders continued to have close connections with the Liberal Party as did many of the pottery manufacturers, although these chose not to stand as parliamentary candidates before 1918.⁵⁶ The potters' loyalty to the Liberal Party remained strong before 1914 and this served to sustain the Liberal vote during this period.

The 1912 by-election in Hanley demonstrated that a distinctive political culture had been created in areas with a strong Liberal-Labour alliance. This was augmented by a close relationship between the local Liberal Association and local trade unionism with strong support from other workers. This was underpinned by the predominance of religious Nonconformity across the area. A consequence of the Progressive Alliance was that in some areas Labour had been painfully slow to develop its own organisations and was unable to form a distinct identity and appeal. In localities such as Hanley, where popular working-class Liberalism remained extremely strong, the ability of the fledgling Labour *Party* to permeate the dominance of Liberalism was likely to remain limited for some time. The

potential durability of a Progressive Alliance based upon a shared ideological approach, policies and a mutual electoral agreement possibly had a limited shelf life. From very early on in the history of the Progressive Alliance, the degree of commitment was always open to question. The parties' own interests always came first. The Liberals may have been happy to allow Labour to make some headway but only on their terms, not at their own expense. The Hanley by-election was complicated and, in a way, both sides were correct; Edwards may have been a Labour MP but in his heart he had always remained a Liberal. He was emblematic of the political culture of the area at that particular time.

Hanley illustrates how the nature of the Progressive Alliance was inherently complex. Additionally, there always remained the basic fact that for Labour the demand for greater representation persisted as the single most important issue. Any perceived attempt by the Liberals to limit Labour's expansion was always going to be viewed as an act of aggression and would threaten the whole concept of the Progressive Alliance. Experiences such as the Hanley by-election could simply serve to reinforce Labour's belief that the Liberals were enemies in the same way as the Unionists, souring relations considerably. These experiences could contribute towards the development of a more distinctly Labour approach and reaffirm that only true independence offered a viable alternative to cooperation with other parties. Alternatively, episodes such as the Hanley by-election might reinforce the belief that cooperation *was* the best path because, divided, both parties could be severely disadvantaged. This was not the case in Hanley: the Liberals had managed to win but only just; their majority had declined considerably and the seat could be vulnerable in the future if circumstances were less favourable than at the by-election. The Liberal candidate's ability gave them an advantage over Labour but this may not necessarily always be the case.

Between December 1910 and August 1914, Labour fought in twelve by-elections across the country. The party's performance in three-cornered contests was exceedingly poor, 'abysmal' as Wilson puts it.⁵⁷ The Labour Party failed to capture a single seat from either the Liberals or Conservatives. Labour's intervention at by-elections, however weak, could cause serious problems for the Liberals. Losses in South Lanarkshire, Leith, South West Bethnal Green, Crewe and Oldham all demonstrate this. A breakdown of the Progressive Alliance could be potentially disastrous for the Liberals, although the last thing the Labour leadership wanted was a 'political free-for-all' that would 'ruin the chances of the Labour Party and return the

Conservatives'.⁵⁸ There were many other by-elections where the situation was not dissimilar to Hanley, where cooperation had disintegrated resulting in direct confrontation. The results, as in Hanley, always saw Labour coming bottom of the poll.⁵⁹

The Liberals had no intention of abdicating local autonomy to the Labour Party despite the existence of electoral agreements. This was illustrated by the events of the Hanley by-election in 1912. Liberalism in the Potteries was able to unite on 'Liberal' issues such as land reform, and the electoral appeal of popular Liberalism, with its fundamental basis of Nonconformity, remained strong. If these issues began to diminish in prominence, the Liberal Party might see this unity decline. Stoke-on-Trent illustrates the apparent limitations of the policy of an electoral alliance between the Liberal and Labour parties. For Liberals in the area, cooperation essentially meant a coalition with organised labour, principally the miners' union; it did not mean an acceptance of a national programmatic Labour Party. The Liberal Party in Stoke-on-Trent viewed such an arrangement as the successor to a strong Liberal–trade union relationship; it was not an admission of support for the idea of independent labour representation in itself. In Stoke-on-Trent, the relationship between the Liberal Party, the miners and pottery workers was critical to political developments and, prior to the outbreak of war in 1914, that alliance appeared to be strong. The Labour Party faced an uphill task in supplanting the Liberals as the 'natural' ally of industrial workers; under existing conditions an imminent advance by the Labour Party appeared unlikely. This is not to suggest that the Labour Party was likely to remain content with its current position or that future growth was impossible. An immediate consequence of the 1912 by-election was that it brought the trade union–Liberal coalition crashing down and from that point the miners' union in particular adopted a markedly different attitude towards its former allies. The Labour Party, meanwhile, no longer seemed to consider the advantages of a Progressive Alliance worth the price demanded. Given the historical strength of Liberal–Labour relations in industrial North Staffordshire, this represented a significant shift in the politics of the area.

Stoke-on-Trent was an overwhelmingly working-class area, yet the evidence suggests that class had not become the overriding determinant of political allegiance. Traditional loyalties remained extremely strong. Local political culture, the personal appeal of particular candidates and the actual election campaigns all had a critical impact on determining political fortunes. In this part of industrial Britain, popular working-class Liberalism,

underpinned by a predominance of religious Nonconformity, retained considerable influence. The political culture of the area had evolved in such a way that Liberalism developed an extremely close relationship with organised labour, particularly the miners, creating what became widely known as ‘Lib-Labism’. This, consequently, impeded the expansion of support for truly independent Labour representation. This was strikingly demonstrated in 1912 during the Hanley by-election when Samuel Finney fought the contest almost entirely on his infinitely greater claim to the seat as a miner and local man, and yet failed to convince the majority of Hanley’s electors. Labour’s claim that only members of the working class could represent working people appears to have been largely ineffective in such areas. This presented Labour with a dilemma: while the party clearly wished to assert its independence and distinctiveness, there were risks associated with going too far down such a path. It is difficult to predict the future prospects of the parties had the outbreak of war not intervened. However, as McKibbin so astutely suggests, the Edwardian political system ‘was in many ways provisional and all three English parties found themselves in territory over which they had only loose control’.⁶⁰

NOTES

1. See *Labour Party Executive Committee Minutes*, 2 July 1912.
2. Ramsay MacDonald also expressed this view very strongly; see *Labour Leader*, 18 July 1912.
3. M. Petter, ‘Progressive Alliance’, p. 52.
4. Gregory suggests that Edwards and Stanley were ‘bitterly hostile’ towards the Labour Party even in the years following affiliation; see R Gregory, *The Miners in British Politics*, p. 170. McKibbin, however, contends that Edwards was, in fact, not as committed to the Liberals as is often imagined especially when compared to some of his colleagues. McKibbin suggests that as president of the Miners Federation he had handled relations with the Labour Party with exceptional goodwill; see R. McKibbin *Evolution*, p. 54.
5. See M. Petter, ‘Progressive Alliance’; R. McKibbin, *Evolution* and H. Pelling, *Social Geography*.
6. This is reflected by the fact that after 1911 by-elections involving the Labour Party were responsible for the greater proportion of losses for the Liberals than they had been previously. The period 1906–1910 had seen 17% of all seats lost having involved Labour candidates, whereas after 1911 this increased to 36%; see M. Petter, ‘Progressive Alliance’, p. 51.

7. The Midlands Miners Federation continued to contribute £200 per year to the Liberals for the upkeep of the Hanley constituency right up to the time of the by-election; see R. Gregory, *The Miners and British Politics*, p. 171.
8. This account is derived from a detailed report by the secretary of the Midland Liberal Federation; see *Midland Liberal Federation Minutes*, 31 July 1912.
9. This organisation consisted of about 400 Liberals and 200 Labour representatives.
10. *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 5 July 1912.
11. *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 6 July 1912.
12. Joseph Lovatt had been a member of the Hanley LRC since its formation in July 1906. His union, however, had only recently affiliated to the Labour Party. It is important to note that the Labour movement in North Staffordshire remained fragmented right up to 1914. It was only during that year, for instance, that all the local Labour organisations changed their name to the North Staffordshire Labour Party. It is critical to remember, however, that it had been a potters' official who requested time for Labour to consider the situation.
13. Outhwaite was officially adopted by the Hanley Liberal Association at ten o'clock on the evening of the 2nd.
14. *The Times*, 3 July 1912. The following day, Arthur Henderson announced that the Labour Party would contest Crewe. This was a seat where Labour had an extremely poor record so this action can only be perceived as an act of retaliation over Hanley. The Crewe election proved to be disastrous for the Liberals with the party losing the seat by a very slim margin. Labour intervention undoubtedly cost the Liberals the seat, which the party had won in eight out of the nine general elections since 1885.
15. *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 6 July 1912.
16. This was because the miners' union paid for the candidate.
17. *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 3 July 1912.
18. See Hemmerde on Outhwaite's adoption meeting, *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 4 July 1912.
19. *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 4 July 1912.
20. See Grimwade on Outhwaite's adoption meeting, *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 4 July 1912.
21. See Hemmerde on Outhwaite, *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 4 July 1912.
22. See Tanner, *Political Change*, p. 66; Tanner notes that the Chief Whip was opposed to this.
23. For evaluation of the land issue in British politics during this period see I. Packer, *Lloyd George, Liberalism and the Land: The Land Issue and Party Politics, 1906–1914* (Royal Historical Society, Woodbridge, 2001).
24. See *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 6 July 1912.

25. This is a very brief summary of Outhwaite's major arguments in relation to land reform and the impact this would have on the local area. The subject was complex and some of Outhwaite's speeches were enormously detailed. The essence of his argument throughout the campaign, however, remained that land reform provided a simple means to emancipate the people; it would attack the privileges of landlords (which was a class issue as much as anything else) and it would have significant social and economic benefits. For Outhwaite's election speeches see subsequent press coverage in *Staffordshire Sentinel* and *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 6–14 July 1912.
26. See *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 3 July 1912.
27. Outhwaite responded by saying this was simply impossible.
28. Throughout the contest, an array of Labour leaders came to the constituency in support of Finney including Keir Hardie, George Lansbury, Ramsay MacDonald, John Hodge, John Sutton, Will Crooks, Stephen Walsh, Albert Stanley and J. R. Clynes. In reality, only these discussed policy; Finney simply focused on his party's greater claim to the seat and his own (equally great) claim as a Staffordshire man and a miner.
29. *Midland Liberal Federation Minutes*, 31 July 1912.
30. *Ibid.*
31. The turnout rate in December 1910 had been 78.6%. The by-election had therefore seen an increase of 6.5%.
32. See *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 15 July 1912.
33. *Midland Liberal Federation Minutes*, 31 July 1912.
34. See *Liberal Magazine*, August 1912, for example, which appeared to blame the Liberal Party for creating the situation.
35. D. Tanner, *Political Change*, pp. 66–67.
36. *Labour Leader*, 18 July 1912.
37. Ramsay MacDonald quoted in McKibbin, *Evolution*, p. 62.
38. See *The Times*, 9 July 1912.
39. *Labour Leader*, 18 July 1912.
40. *The Times*, 17 July 1912.
41. R. Gregory, *The Miners and British Politics*, p. 172.
42. Another reflection of the weakness of independent Labour politics in the area was that there was not a local branch of the ILP until 1912.
43. The Staffordshire Miners Federation remained loyal to the Liberal Party and lukewarm on the question of independent labour representation; this had been reflected in 1909 when the district voted against affiliation to the Labour Party although it was forced to fall into line with the rest of the country; see *Labour Leader*, 18 July 1912.
44. *Ibid.*
45. *Ibid.*
46. *Ibid.*

47. The choice of Labour candidate had been left to the miners since it was that union which had paid most of Edwards's expenses.
48. After the miners had transferred allegiance to the Labour Party in 1909, the national executive had been attempting to set up separate Labour organisations in all the mining constituencies. Hanley was not uncommon in respect to poor organisation.
49. Gregory, *Miners and British Politics*, p. 173. In October 1912 the executive of the (national) Miners Federation instructed its affiliated unions to establish 'political Labour Parties in all constituencies they controlled' and the locality rule was abolished as it was believed this 'prevented effective candidates being chosen'; cited in McKibbin, *Evolution*, p. 27.
50. That the miners began to identify more strongly with the Labour Party after 1912 was something that was likely to have significant national implications. Before 1914, the picture appeared mixed. Whilst in some instances Liberals continued to support Miners' Federation candidates and the Progressive Alliance remained electorally successful (Chesterfield), the coalition broke down in others (e.g. North East Derbyshire).
51. Figures cited in *Labour Leader*, 18 July 1912.
52. See F. Burchill and R. Ross, *History of the Potters' Union* (Hanley 1977), p. 163. It was not until 1917 that all the different branches of the pottery industry organised into one union, the National Society of Pottery Workers. From that point, membership started to increase, especially among female workers. Additionally, before 1914 many pottery owners remained hostile to union activity preferring to maintain direct contact with their workforce. As late as 1920 only 30% of firms recognised the Potters' Union; see R. Whipp, 'The Art of Good Management, Managerial Control of Work in the British Pottery Industry, 1900–1925', *International Review of Social History*, 14, 3 (1984), pp. 381–82.
53. This has been acknowledged by a number of historians, see for example, Pelling, *Social Geography*, pp. 270–274, but is rarely considered in connection to the result of the 1912 by-election.
54. See *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 11 April 1908 and 16 January 1909–6 February 1909. In 1912, for example, when the Potters International Conference was held in Hanley a resolution condemning capitalism and militarism was passed; see *The Times*, 27 July 1912.
55. See R. Whipp, *Patterns of Labour*, pp. 176–177. Whipp suggests one aspect of this was that the potters came into regular contact with people from the wealthier classes, some of whom helped the unions in combatting industrial-related illnesses. Compared to other groups such as the miners, the potters were less conscious of class. This may also have been compounded by the fact that the industry was highly stratified.

56. The leader of the Ovenmen's Union, Thomas Edwards, for example, had a strong connection to the Liberal Party up to his death in 1911; see R. Whipp, *Patterns of Labour*, p. 181.
57. T. Wilson, *Downfall*, p. 17. McKibbin offers a different interpretation of Labour's by-election performance. He suggests that the seats Labour lost were unrepresentative. These were areas where Lib-Labism remained 'uniquely strong' and Labour's organisation remained virtually non-existent.
58. R. McKibbin, *Evolution*, p. 56.
59. M. Petter, 'Progressive Alliance'. For other by-elections during the immediate pre-war period see R. Douglas, 'Labour in Decline' in K. D. Brown, *Essays in Anti-Labour History*, pp. 105–125.
60. R. McKibbin, *Parties and People*, p. 7.

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The Impact of War and the Collapse of the Progressive Alliance: Political Change in Manchester, 1918–1922

Although the Liberals had lost seats at by-elections in Manchester between 1910 and 1914, it seems unwise to suggest that the party was in a state of near collapse or inevitable ‘decline’. Labour had made only tentative progress and a natural advance by the party was by no means guaranteed. The post-war realignment of electoral politics in Britain was dramatic. In both localities examined here, the position of the two left-of-centre parties was reversed. Some historians have identified sociological change as critical in political realignment in the aftermath of the First World War. However, whilst sociological change ought not to be discounted, this alone cannot explain political change after 1918. Issues, policy and personalities were important in determining party fortunes. The appeal, forcefulness and immediate relevance of a party’s programme, alongside candidates’ abilities in the presentation of policy, were of great significance in changing voter allegiance.¹ The 1918 general election resulted in the Liberal Party losing all of its parliamentary representation in Manchester, although this was not because the party’s unity had completely disintegrated or its organisation had been entirely smashed. In Manchester, the Liberals were not entirely decimated by wartime events; neither was a Labour advance inevitable. Indeed, the party found it difficult to maintain its electoral position in the years immediately after 1918.

After by-election losses for the Liberals during 1912, the position of the parties in Manchester was evenly split: the Conservatives, Labour and Liberals each held two parliamentary seats in the city. The Liberals held Manchester North and South West, the Conservatives North West and

South, and the Labour Party North East and East. After the boundary changes of 1918, Manchester comprised ten parliamentary constituencies. Labour's strategy in 1918 was to concentrate on seats already held, but the extent of the party's ambitions were clear and reflected by an increase in the total number of candidates put forward. The Labour Party decided to contest five seats in 1918, a modest increase in ambition within the city, although this was in the context of four additional seats. The Conservatives were also determined to improve upon their pre-war position in Manchester and contested nine seats, while the Liberal Party contested only six.²

An essential aspect of the general election was that it would take place within the context of an expanded electorate, all men over the age of twenty-one and women over the age of thirty (subject to property qualifications) having been granted the vote under the terms of the 1918 Representation of the people Act. Another essential context of the 1918 general election, of course, was the political situation as it persisted for the Liberal Party. The Liberals had been unsuited to the demands of total war: abandonment of fundamental principles including free trade and freedom of speech had contributed to an increasing number of disaffected Liberals. These had not initially been critical problems; the major turning point came with Asquith's decision to create a coalition government in May 1915. This was to be a major miscalculation and would prove to be critical for the future of the Liberals as a governing party. Conscription, introduced in early 1916, was enormously damaging, not only because it was a matter of principle but because, for many Liberals, it implied too much Conservative influence. By 1916, many Liberals had begun forming into separate groups, such as the Union of Democratic Control. The war, as they perceived it, was not being conducted in accordance with Liberal principles. The most critical development, however, had been the replacement of Asquith by Lloyd George as prime minister in December 1916. From this point, the Liberals were divided between two leaders, in Parliament and across the country.

From the beginning of the 1918 general election campaign, the Liberals argued strongly against the timing of the contest. William Royle, Chairman of the MLF's General Committee, regarded an election as 'disastrous in the present divided opinion as to the leadership of the party'.³ Officers of the MLF had even sent deputations to both Lloyd George and Asquith, declaring a strong objection to an immediate appeal being 'forced upon the country' because it would be 'against the national and allied interest and the armed forces would be unable to exercise their vote under

conditions of full information and mature judgement'.⁴ Liberal hostility to the calling of an election continued throughout the campaign and centred on issues of manipulation (timing the election in order to guarantee a Coalition victory) and the morality of excluding a significant proportion of servicemen. It has been suggested that Liberal objections to an immediate election were partly based upon the fact that the party's organisation was unprepared; the Liberals had been hoping for reunion and an immediate election came as a major shock.⁵ On top of the party's own troubles, the boundary changes required the reorganisation of constituency associations which put them under considerable pressure.⁶ In Manchester and the Midlands, however, a general election had been anticipated for some time before the armistice; the MLF had begun to formulate plans for a forthcoming election in February 1918.⁷ There is nothing to suggest that the party's organisation in the city had broken down; the federation's financial resources had dipped slightly, but this appears to have been in hand.⁸ We should also remember that difficulties such as these confronted all of the parties, not just the Liberals.

The operation of the 'coupon' provides an essential context of the 1918 general election. This was a letter to candidates signed by the coalition government's respective party leaders, Lloyd George and Bonar Law, which informed them, and more crucially electors, of their official endorsement. Whether or not a candidate claimed to be in receipt of the coupon determined many political fortunes. Officially, as the *Manchester Guardian* reported, the policy of the government was that it would only support a candidate if he declared himself 'an out-and-out supporter of the Coalition ... [thus a Liberal candidate would] not be supported by the government unless he [was] an avowed supporter of Lloyd George'.⁹ Wherever a Liberal candidate had refused to give complete support to the Coalition Government, endorsement was given to another, usually a Conservative. This meant Liberal candidates were expected to give absolute and unconditional support to the Lloyd George administration; implicit or half-hearted support was insufficient. In Manchester, as elsewhere, the coupon was awarded to opponents of sitting Liberal members. Many Liberals were placed in an impossible position: whilst most did not wish to be perceived as anti-government, they could not bring themselves to pledge unconditional support to Lloyd George if it meant betraying their fundamental Liberal principles. In a way, the Liberals in Manchester contributed to their own electoral downfall because they believed their Liberalism too sacred to risk.

The position of the Labour Party was more clearly defined. The decision to withdraw from the Coalition Government marked the beginning of the complete independence of Labour, although the party was not entirely united on the issue. In Manchester, J. R. Clynes risked expulsion from his party because he initially refused to resign his Cabinet position. He believed that an immediate withdrawal could handicap Labour candidates because it might 'stamp them out as men who had severed themselves from the national service'.¹⁰ In the end, however, he conceded to pressure and resigned his ministerial position.

Although not directly hostile to the Prime Minister himself, the Liberals in Manchester remained lukewarm. The *Manchester Guardian* argued that the Coalition took 'the heart out of politics and ought not to continue beyond the occasion of national emergency such as a war'.¹¹ The same newspaper also pointed out that, in any case, coalitions never possessed any 'real bond of unity' and were simply 'artificial' combinations of parties. The MLF, however, adopted a pragmatic approach, resolving to support impartially candidates selected by the general councils of the respective parliamentary divisions of the city whether the candidates were Coalitionists or not.¹² The Liberal parliamentary candidates in Manchester in 1918 were all prominent local party officials: C.T. Needham, Tom Stott, Philip Oliver, Arthur Haworth, Walter Butterworth and G. F. Burditt. It was assumed that Coalition endorsement would be given to three of these (Needham, Stott and Oliver) and that Needham would be given an unopposed return by the withdrawal of the Unionist candidate in Hulme. All of the Liberal candidates professed some degree of support for the government, but the exact extent of this varied. Butterworth, Burditt and Haworth, for example, made it clear they could only support the Coalition as long it did not impinge upon their fundamental Liberal principles. In a letter to the MLF, Burditt declared that he 'found it impossible to give an unqualified pledge of support because doing so would mean sacrificing freedom, one of the dearest principles of Liberalism'.¹³ He also indicated how deeply unhappy he was that there had been no mention of free trade in any of the statements to emerge from the Coalition. Throughout the campaign, he described himself as a Liberal free trader. At one meetings he told his audience he was 'a Liberal without prefix or suffix'.¹⁴ Of all Liberal candidates in 1918, Butterworth was by far the most hostile towards the Coalition. He told one meeting that he felt the Coalition was a 'cunning device of party politicians who wanted to grasp power for another five years'.¹⁵ However, it would have been difficult for electors to identify

accurately the official government candidates from the candidates' admissions alone.

An aspect of the 1918 general election that caused widespread dissatisfaction was the position of absentee voters who remained on war service. In Manchester, the estimated total number of absentee voters was in the region of 65,000 to 70,000, with the average number per constituency more than 6000;¹⁶ in some, Hulme and Plating for example, the figures were as high as 9000 and 10,000.¹⁷ Whilst registration officers expressed optimism that ballot papers would reach overseas voters in time, doubts quickly arose as to the basis for such optimism. The mechanism by which the army authorities had to operate the voting procedure was hugely complex. Three days after the calling of the election, the army was required to supply registration officers with the latest addresses of soldiers formally resident in the area. As in other parts of the country, this simply could not be done in time, and the town clerk was forced to postpone giving lists to the party agents until much later than was usual. It was assumed that as much as half the city's electorate would be disenfranchised because the precise addresses of men in the field were unavailable. Only 400 of the 5000 to 6000 proxy votes were returned.¹⁸ Of 9180 absent voters in Hulme, a current general location was known for 7357 although nearly 2000 of these remained untraceable; this meant that a fifth of the electorate was disenfranchised. It was estimated that about 1500 more would not receive papers because the addresses that had been provided were inadequate.¹⁹ The situation was similar across the city and indeed across the country.

The 1918 general election saw contests in nine of the ten Manchester constituencies. There were three-cornered contests in Blackley and Rusholme where Labour candidates fought both Liberals and Conservatives. Two constituencies, Hulme and Gorton, saw unofficial Labour candidates while Moss Side, Exchange and Withington saw straight fights between the Liberals and Conservatives. Labour and the Conservatives contested Clayton and there was additionally a representative of the National Party in Ardwick.

In Blackley the Liberal candidate was a young barrister, Philip Oliver, who had been secretary of the county Red Cross during the war and had devoted most of his time to that cause.²⁰ His Unionist opponent, W. J. H. Briggs, was a local manufacturer with a presence in the constituency, whilst Labour's A. E. Townend was an employee of the postal service. Oliver began his campaign by declaring himself a supporter of the

Coalition, albeit a qualified one in that he was unable to 'give a definite pledge for an indefinite period'.²¹ In an unusual approach to the situation, he told voters that 'the more Liberals supported [the Prime Minister] the more Liberal and democratic his programme would be', so he would support the Coalition 'until it cut across some vital principles of Liberalism'.²² Later on in the campaign, Oliver appeared more cautious, declaring that he was standing first as a Liberal and then as a supporter of the Coalition. He spoke at length on foreign policy suggesting that Britain ought to adopt a firmer stance with regards to Turkey, which he said had been a 'terrible oppressor'; it was Britain's duty to see that justice was done for the Armenians, 'many of whom had been massacred'.²³ He spoke extensively on the land question claiming that, if necessary, land ought to be purchased compulsorily in order to develop proper housing schemes.²⁴

In Rusholme the Conservative R. B. Stoker had been elected unopposed for Manchester South the previous March after the division's sitting member Philip Glazebrook was killed on active service. Stoker was a Conservative heavyweight, a director of Manchester Liners Ltd., President of the Manchester Chamber of Commerce, Director of the Ship Canal Company and a staunch protectionist. The Liberal candidate, Walter Butterworth, was a respected local Liberal official, well known for his social and educational work and as chairman of the city council's Art Committee. Interned in Germany since the outbreak of hostilities, he had been released early in 1918. Labour's candidate, Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence, was a long-time women's activist and former treasurer of the Women's Social and Political Union. From the beginning of the campaign, Stoker sought to distinguish himself from those he called his 'pacifist friends' and adopted a hard-line towards the peace settlement.²⁵ He attempted to capitalise on his Liberal opponent's personal position during the war, suggesting that his internment amounted to nothing more than an extended holiday; Butterworth may have unwittingly reinforced this by stating he had been treated well and had spent his time improving his German. Of all Manchester's Liberal candidates, Butterworth made it clear that he would not stand as a supporter of the Coalition. He adopted a fierce line against the timing of the election telling one audience that 'the present election in which three million men could not take part could not be seen as a proper expression of national opinion'.²⁶ He argued that significant social reform would be unlikely to materialise given the reactionaries with whom the Prime Minister was associated. The greatest concern for the Liberal Party in Rusholme was a potential split in the anti-Conservative vote; Butterworth

himself intimated that, had he not already been nominated, he would not have contested the seat.²⁷ Mrs Pethick Lawrence was the first woman to stand in a parliamentary contest in Manchester and was one of the few candidates to address broad topics such as health, insurance and education²⁸ plus a wide range of war-related issues and questions associated with reconstruction such as separation allowances and pensions for dependents.²⁹

Hulme saw another multiparty contest. Manchester industrialist and Unionist candidate, Major Joseph Nall, was the only candidate who chose to wear his military uniform on the election platform. Liberal candidate C. T. Needham had been member for Manchester South West from December 1910 until its reorganisation. Another prominent Liberal activist, he was an iron and steel merchant who played a prominent role in Manchester's civic life. Unofficial Labour candidate Alfred Hilton was general secretary of the United Carters' and Motormen's Association and there was also an independent, George Milner, representative of the National Federation of Discharged Soldiers and Sailors. Needham had been offered the Coalition ticket and Bonar Law had allegedly appealed to Nall to stand down. Both rejected these approaches although Needham was still widely reported as the 'officially accepted' Coalition candidate. Needham was ill during the contest and unable to take an active part in the campaign, which instead was effectively run by way of letters to the press and with the help of party workers in his constituency. Little can be ascertained of his policy agenda, though a number of well-known local businessmen spoke on his behalf, largely on the basis of free trade: Conservative heavyweight Sir Edward Tootal Broadhurst proclaimed Needham 'the best commercial representative' Manchester had ever had.³⁰ Nall attempted to make capital of the Liberal candidate's stance on the Maurice Debate. The infamous debate in the House of Commons during May 1918 followed allegations made by army officer Major Frederick Maurice that British soldiers had been held back from the Western Front and, more seriously, that the government had lied to Parliament about this. The Maurice Debate was politically significant because Lloyd George perceived it to be a vote of confidence in his premiership. The government won the debate by 295 votes to 108 but it had a wider legacy in several critical respects: it contributed to disunity in the Liberal Party, strengthening Lloyd George and weakening the Asquithian Liberals; in the longer term, Liberals who voted against the government were identified as being

disloyal to the Prime Minister. Historians have suggested that the birth of the coupon can, in effect, be traced back to the Maurice Debate.

In Gorton, a three-way contest saw Labour's former Minister of Pensions, John Hodge, challenged by a Conservative, Henry White, and a Socialist Labour Party candidate, J. T. Murphy. There had been some confusion over Hodge's candidature. Earlier in the year the Gorton Trades Council had decided to replace him with J. Binns of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers. The national executive refused to sanction this and Hodge was nominated, helped no doubt by his withdrawal from the Coalition.³¹ Throughout the campaign, Hodge focused attention principally upon the position of workers and post-war reconstruction, calling in particular for workers to have a greater share in the management of industry. It was widely assumed that his work as Minister of Pensions would give him a tremendous advantage, especially amongst female voters, the wives and mothers of men who had fought.³²

Two of Manchester's three straight fights between Liberals and Conservatives took place in the predominantly middle-class suburbs of Moss Side and Withington while the third was fought in the commercial heartland of the city, formerly Manchester North West, now renamed Exchange. Here the Liberals put up one of their most senior figures, Arthur Haworth, who had represented Manchester South West for eleven years, was Chairman of the Royal Exchange and President of the Manchester Liberal Federation. His Unionist opponent, John Randles, had represented Manchester North West since the by-election in 1912. Like Haworth, he was a well-known local businessman. Both candidates, therefore, had been sitting members at the dissolution. Free trade remained the only issue of importance in Exchange, and Haworth told electors that whilst it was 'not an eternal commandment written on tablets of stone [it did amount to] a wise commercial arrangement that has stood the test of peace and the strain of war, leading us into prosperity in peace and saving us from disaster in war'.³³ Many notable businessmen involved in the cotton trade came to support Haworth. Randles appealed to electors solely in the 'national interest', advising his former constituents to 'support the Coalition and drop the clap-trap of Free Trade'.³⁴ He told one meeting that voters had a choice between 'Lloyd George and himself or Haworth and Asquith'.³⁵ In Moss Side, the Liberal manufacturer Tom Stott faced the Conservative Gerald Hurst, a barrister and law lecturer at Manchester University. Stott declared himself a supporter of the Coalition and claimed it would be impossible to carry on the affairs of the nation at present by

means of party government. He addressed a wide range of issues—housing, pensions, employment, health and land—and gave considerable attention to the likely unemployment that would result from demobilisation. His opponent, however, focused exclusively on the war and enlisted the platform support of men who had served under him. Having initially taken a strong pro-conscription stance, he later changed his position after it became apparent that this was deeply unpopular with his audiences, though he continued to adopt an extremely hard line in respect to conscientious objectors.³⁶ Under pressure, Stott had to deny that he supported their immediate release.³⁷ Withington was the third constituency which Labour had chosen not to contest. The Liberals adopted a local businessman, G. F. Burditt, and the Conservatives a bank manager, R. A. D. Carter. Like Butterworth in Rusholme, Burditt adopted a strongly independent stance throughout the campaign, arguing that it was impossible for him to give ‘any coalition an unqualified pledge’. Although he claimed he had been offered Coalition endorsement, he had chosen to decline it. Burditt focused significant attention upon the case for the establishment of a league of nations and spoke at length of his absolute objection to conscription. He emphasised the need for a ‘just peace ... not a policy of vengeance and hatred’.³⁸ His Conservative opponent adopted a somewhat odd position as a self-declared anti-democrat, expressing throughout the campaign his dislike for democracy because it ‘encouraged the lazy and ignorant to organise riots and revolutions’.³⁹

Labour and Conservative candidates contested the remaining two constituencies in Manchester. Clayton included the greater part of the former Manchester East constituency and was largely a working-class district including many railway employees and miners. Labour’s John Sutton had represented Manchester East since January 1910 and was expected to retain the reconstituted seat.⁴⁰ As the *Manchester City News* reported, Sutton was widely recognised as a ‘Labour leader of undoubted ability and independence’.⁴¹ His Conservative opponent Edward Hopkinson, a director of an engineering firm in the district and son of a former Lord Mayor of the city, was known for his social work in the area. Perceived to be a strong candidate for the Conservatives, there was some suggestion that his candidature had not been supported by party headquarters. He was especially critical of the government and the timing of the election, saying he was not going to be ‘muzzled by or committed to the Prime Minister’.⁴² In terms of issues, Sutton focused attention upon aspects of post-war reconstruction, though he spent most of the campaign condemning the

election and the Coalition. Throughout the campaign, the local Liberal Association issued statements in support of his candidature.⁴³ Labour's candidate in Ardwick, Thomas Lowth, was a member of the city council and General Secretary of the General Workers' Union. Lowth focused exclusively upon aspects of post-war reconstruction affecting workers, particularly wages, conditions and the proposal of a maximum eight-hour day. He argued that a 'state unemployment scheme was not wanted by the working classes [but] state employment', though he contended that 'there was no trusting a Coalition Government to do anything for the worker'.⁴⁴ He argued for combined industrial and political effort, citing a recent victory by the railwaymen in securing an eight-hour day as evidence of what could be achieved, and arguing that similar improvements could be obtained for the whole of the working class if there was a significant increase in the number of Labour representatives.⁴⁵ Inevitably, all candidates were forced to discuss their personal roles during the war. Haworth and Stott were both anxious to stress their wartime roles in an attempt to counter suggestions they had not played their parts. None of the Labour candidates had seen active service since most were above recruitment age, but they too were anxious to reiterate their roles in recruitment, relief committees and such like. This no doubt increased perceptions of the party's respectability at the local level even though the party leadership included a number of high profile pacifists.

The 1918 general election campaign saw policy proposals and issues focused upon questions of the peace, post-war reconstruction and the timing of the election itself. In some constituencies, the Liberal candidates appeared more progressive than in others and Conservatives differed in their moderation. Labour stood out as the party with an 'entirely independent standpoint' and concentrated on future aims.⁴⁶ As one Liberal organiser candidly stated after the election, the 'fact [was] that the Labour manifesto commanded the assent of Liberal [supporters]' whilst the Liberals' appeal 'fell absolutely flat because it never had any opportunity of getting home to the minds of the people'.⁴⁷ Timing had also been critical; the same official believed 'the programme was solid when it came, but it had come too late'.⁴⁸

Nationally, an important context of the 1918 general election was that it took place after the Labour Party had adopted a new constitution, which for the first time included an explicit commitment to public ownership (Clause IV) together with the provision of individually enrolled members alongside the constituent bodies. The party had concluded that an

expanded electorate necessitated a more 'direct appeal' and, in Sidney Webb's words, that this would be 'indispensable for electoral success'.⁴⁹ Webb believed such a drive would not only enlist 'hundreds of thousands of new working class electors' to the service of the party but also 'attract men and women of the shop keeping, manufacturing and professional classes who are dissatisfied with the old political parties'.⁵⁰ The Labour Party had made strenuous efforts to develop its organisation during 1918, establishing new local parties, 300 to 400 of which were envisaged, and adopting over 300 candidates across the entire country. Such ambition was significant although the extent to which these efforts would pay dividends during such an exceedingly brief campaign appeared doubtful; half of all electors were first-time voters and high numbers would be unable to exercise their vote. In Manchester, the principal topic of debate between Unionists and Liberals tended to be the continuation of the Coalition and, as the campaign progressed, the Conservatives began to adopt a harsher approach to the Paris Peace Settlement. The Labour candidates, however, remained focused upon the defence of working-class interests and avoided becoming embroiled in debates concerning either the Peace Settlement or the continuation of the Coalition.

Compared to previous contests, the election saw considerable apathy amongst electors; as the *Manchester Guardian* reported, audiences were 'small and spiritless' and it was estimated that no more than about an eighth of the total electorate had even heard a speech.⁵¹ Given the circumstances, this was inevitable. Another feature was the predominance of local candidates: of the twenty-two candidates who stood in Manchester, only one, Sir J. Randles in Exchange, did not come from the area. The results represented an overwhelming victory for the Coalition and a bitter disappointment for the city's Liberals. Across Manchester, the Unionist candidates received more than half the total votes polled, obtaining an overall vote of 91,968 from 161,703. The total Labour and Liberal votes, with seven and six candidates respectively, amounted to 35,452 and 28,854. In Manchester, as across the country, Lloyd George had swept the board principally because of his status as war leader. Of Manchester's ten seats, eight returned Unionists; the remaining two returned Labour members including Clynes who was unopposed. Three Conservatives received official Coalition endorsement and were returned with 65, 70 and 48% of the vote, representing winning margins of 46, 40 and 17%. The coupon had clearly contributed to the scale of these victories, although in Withington, Blackley, Clayton and Moss Side 'un-couponed' Conservatives also won

with significant majorities of 39, 30, 23 and 30%. In Hulme, where Needham had repudiated the coupon, the Conservatives won with a majority of 25%.⁵² The Conservative triumph in Manchester cannot be entirely attributed to the operation of the coupon. Districts of traditional Liberal strength, the former Manchester North, South and South West constituencies, experienced significant swings to the Conservatives, as did constituencies across the country, irrespective of the operation of the coupon.⁵³ No doubt the coupon forced voters to make a decision about which candidates they determined to be 'patriotic' and 'official' or 'unpatriotic' and 'anti-government'. The coupon damaged the Liberals' prospects because it forced them to declare publicly their opposition to Lloyd George's Coalition. Liberal candidates varied in their willingness to 'support' the Coalition: Needham, Stott and Oliver seemed prepared to give greater support than Butterworth, Burditt and Haworth who made it clear they were 'free Liberals opposed to caucus dictation'.⁵⁴

A low turnout of 55% across the city reflected the prevalent mood of apathy and disinterest. Less than a fifth of the armed service electorate had voted and it was reported that a proportion of these had in fact spoilt their ballot papers, some even writing 'demobilise us first' on them. To some, this was an indication of how those in the armed services felt about a 'snatch' election. Analysis of the Liberal and Labour votes in the constituencies where they faced each other helps shed light on the comparative levels of support of the respective parties. Of the three-cornered contests, Rusholme and Hulme saw the Liberals outpoll Labour opponents but, given the suburban character of these divisions, this is unsurprising. Labour's result in Rusholme was impressive, however, with a female candidate with no permanent organisation standing against a prominent local Liberal faring relatively well. Perhaps this serves to demonstrate just how badly the Liberals had done. This was part of the city considered a Liberal heartland, yet the party only just managed to outpoll Labour; the Conservatives won with a margin of nearly 46%. The Liberals did better in Hulme where Needham obtained nearly 30% of the total vote, but he was still almost 25% behind the winning non-couponed Conservative; the independent Labour candidate, with no preparation or formal organisation, obtained nearly 3000 votes, 13% of the total. Although it contained identifiable slum areas, Hulme was a socially mixed constituency and, owing to the boundary changes, it is difficult to compare the 1918 result with previous elections. Ultimately, whilst the 1918 general election saw the Liberals outpoll Labour by nearly 2.5 to 1, future prospects for a

Labour challenge in this seat were far from dismal, especially if an official candidate with greater preparation and improved organisation contested the seat. In Blackley, the Liberal and Labour vote was more or less equally divided, 20 and 25% respectively. One of the most significant features of the 1918 general election in Manchester was that Liberal versus Labour contests took place in areas previously considered natural Liberal territory. Though Labour had no real prospect of capturing these seats imminently, the party's intervention would seriously undermine Liberal chances of overtaking the Conservatives in these constituencies.

The 1918 general election recorded one of the most sweeping victories in British politics. Liberal organisers undoubtedly expected to fare badly but the scale of the Coalition's victory was unforeseen. With marked understatement, the *Liberal Magazine* concluded that 'the situation created for the party [was] one of delicacy and difficulty'.⁵⁵ The *Manchester Guardian* believed the outcome was the result of 'a widespread desire on the part of the electorate to give the Coalition Government an opportunity of concluding peace and of carrying out the work of demobilisation [and of] a wave of Conservatism prompted by the political events'.⁵⁶ The newspaper objected bitterly to the way in which the results had been achieved by 'seizing upon a moment of confusion and excitement' that had served to turn 'representative institutions into something of a mockery'.⁵⁷ Observers immediately attempted to explain the Liberal candidates' poor performance. One newspaper reported that 'rightly or wrongly, it had come to be assumed that the Liberals did not desire such drastic measures [in respect of the peace settlement] and that they might display a tender sentiment towards a still ruthless and arrogant enemy'.⁵⁸ For many electors it seems that all Liberal candidates were perceived to be 'soft' on Germany. Another factor that in all probability served to underpin the scale of the Coalition victory was the female vote. It was initially reported that new female electors appeared apathetic and 'difficult to move' although, as one Liberal official observed afterwards, once they engaged with the election 'whatever class they belonged to they gave in bulk an anti-German vote' (Fig. 7.1).⁵⁹ Nor should the personal appeal of the Prime Minister be underestimated. As the *Manchester City News* concluded, the election was 'a personal triumph for Lloyd George who has a magnetism that few possess and who inspires faith and commands support'.⁶⁰ Another local newspaper was less generous in its bitter and sarcastic assessment that electors had voted simply for 'the legend of the man who had saved England, Europe and civilisation'.⁶¹

Although the 1918 general election was undoubtedly a disaster for the Liberal Party in that the party lost all of its parliamentary seats in



Fig. 7.1 David Lloyd George meeting female munitions workers in Manchester, September 1918 (Alamy)

Manchester, there was not a complete collapse of its electoral base. No candidates lost their deposits and the percentage of the vote obtained by Liberal candidates ranged from 20 to 35% which, although extremely low compared to previous contests, was easily explained by the political situation. The local organisation had remained intact and, despite a slight deterioration in party unity, the party split was hardly severe compared to elsewhere. The political situation before and during the 1918 general election did not in itself destroy the Liberals in Manchester even though the electoral defeat was deeper than anything the party had encountered previously. Organised Liberalism would face monumental difficulties over the coming years and party managers locally and nationally recognised this fact. They did not, however, believe that Liberalism had been fatally wounded because, as one local newspaper declared, ‘it would be rash in the last degree to take the 1918 general election as providing any trustworthy criteria as to the relationships of parties to the electorate’.⁶²

Some historians have suggested that the main premises underpinning the Liberal vote in 1910 had by 1918 been destroyed and, quite simply, that new voters acquired new habits of voting.⁶³ Nevertheless, the 1918 general election itself represented a triumph for the forces of reaction; anti-Coalition candidates fared badly across the board and the Liberals were uniquely disadvantaged in consequence of both issues and the political situation. Labour performed only marginally better than before the outbreak of war although in some areas the party made a significant leap forward. Furthermore, it could be suggested that the performance of the Asquithian Liberals under-estimated the level of total Liberal support. Certainly, the Progressive Alliance had collapsed during the war and the Liberal Party remained disunited, yet there remained many people across the country who still considered themselves Liberals and who had 'not even begun to think of transferring their allegiance elsewhere'.⁶⁴ The Labour Party's parliamentary position had only marginally improved. In Manchester, the local party bemoaned the fact that the working classes had 'failed to be radicalised by the experience of war'.⁶⁵ The 1918 general election did not produce an immediate transfer of allegiance from Liberal to Labour in Manchester or across the country as a whole. It might have appeared like any other khaki election, albeit one in which one of the participants had been especially divided and its results particularly bad.

In September 1919, voters in Manchester were given an opportunity to express their opinion of the Coalition Government when the Rusholme seat became vacant following the death of its sitting Conservative member R. B. Stoker. The by-election was perceived to represent a key test of public opinion towards the Lloyd George administration and its record over the past nine months. It would also provide an indicator of the respective positions of the two progressive parties. The Rusholme Liberal Association indicated that it intended to contest the seat, claiming that the former constituency of Manchester South had always been Liberal and its right to stand was infinitely greater than that of the Labour Party. Before the campaign had formally begun, the Liberal press adopted a firm stance against Labour intervention. The *Manchester Guardian's* position was that Labour candidates had been 'ungrudgingly' assisted by the Liberal Party at a number of recent by-elections and that Labour ought to demonstrate the same 'cordial co-operation and not force a triangular contest' on this occasion.⁶⁶ In any case, the *Manchester Guardian* contended, forcing a three-cornered contest would only serve to strengthen the Coalition since it would simply 'gift' the seat to the Conservatives and thus strengthen the

Government's present 'misguided policies'.⁶⁷ The newspaper suggested that there ought to be an 'agreement on a reasonable allocation of seats based on the character of each constituency'⁶⁸ and that, in such an allocation, Rusholme would be viewed as a Liberal seat. The actions of Labour on this occasion would be taken as an 'index of its sincerity', insofar as it would indicate whether the Labour Party placed the present dangers to the country before or after party considerations.⁶⁹ It became clear, however, that the Labour Party was resolute in its determination to contest Rusholme.

Robert Dunstan was emblematic of a new breed of Labour candidates who emerged after 1918. A doctor and qualified barrister, he represented the intellectual side of his party; he had not risen through the unions⁷⁰ and had only recently converted to the ILP, having previously been a Liberal parliamentary candidate. During the war, he had been a lieutenant in the Royal Army Medical Corps and it was at this time that he converted to the Labour Party, unsuccessfully contesting a seat in Birmingham in 1918. Dunstan had no connections with Manchester and it was reported that some within the local movement were reluctant to support him since they favoured a local candidate.⁷¹ The *Manchester Guardian* reported that endorsement from the central party was unusually slow, suggesting that opposition to his candidature was not purely local. The central executive of the Labour Party did give their full support, however, and the leadership threw their weight behind him throughout the campaign. After his adoption, Dunstan declared that he had been aware that the Liberals already had a candidate in place but contended that his intervention was justified because there would be issues upon which he and his Liberal opponent would disagree. Additionally, it was essential that the Labour Party 'establish a strong parliamentary position ... if it was going to realise its aim of seeing a Labour government come into existence' at this critical juncture.⁷² The Liberal candidate also came from the radical wing of his party. Like many radical Liberals during this period, W. M. Pringle had studied at Glasgow University. A barrister, he had been MP for North West Lanark between 1910 and 1918.⁷³ Pringle had a reputation for his fierce independence and made a strong impression on the Manchester Liberals during the National Liberal Federation meeting the previous year when he had delivered a speech condemning the Coalition Government. At forty-five he was still young, yet he came with a wealth of political experience.⁷⁴

The Rusholme by-election campaign began on 11 September 1919, yet it did so without a Conservative or Coalition candidate in the field. Indeed, it did not appear that the Conservatives were in any hurry to adopt one. As the *Manchester Guardian* bemoaned, they might have been content simply to watch the 'opening blows of the battle delivered between the two candidates already declared'.⁷⁵ It was more likely that they had trouble securing a candidate. A number of Manchester's most prominent Conservatives had allegedly been approached but had declined. Eventually the Conservatives secured Captain John Thorpe who, unlike the Liberal and Labour candidates, had no political credentials, prompting the Liberal press to suggest that his candidature illustrated the fact that the Conservatives had failed utterly in the 'quest for an influential Manchester man'. From the beginning of the campaign, the Liberal candidate did not attempt to hide his radicalism. Pringle's principal policy was that of a capital levy that he claimed was the only workable means by which to tackle the current economic crisis. Alongside this, he ferociously condemned Britain's campaign in Russia, the deteriorating situation in Ireland and advocated the immediate nationalisation of all key industries and the abolition of conscription. Pringle's basic argument with regards to a capital levy was that rather than relying on Germany to pay reparations 'the people of Britain would have to meet their own financial liabilities'.⁷⁶ He highlighted how expenditure exceeded revenue by more than two million pounds every day and, although savings might be obtained from greater economy in Whitehall, more had to be done. Pringle argued that the solution did not lie in the shape of Chancellor Austen Chamberlain's proposals (which were just a continuation of a policy of borrowing) but in something completely different: a levy on capital. He admitted such a policy might cause 'inconvenience in an immediate sense', but it was the best means of dealing with the financial crisis in the long term. At this time, some Liberals were anxious to present themselves as pioneers of the capital levy, but the extent of support across the whole of the party was unclear. In Manchester, there were clearly differences of opinion in relation to the policy. During the by-election the Chairman of the MLF, Arthur Haworth, was at odds with the candidate over the issue, arguing that such a proposal was 'unsound even if practical'.⁷⁷ In response, Pringle suggested that the policy was an essential part of the MLF programme which had been agreed at a representative meeting of all the city's associations by an overwhelming majority; the policy had been adopted in other parts of the country and,

whether Haworth liked it or not, he refused to remove it from his campaign.

Pringle adopted an equally radical line in relation to the Irish question, claiming that people there were 'held down by military rule [and] their allegiance maintained and order preserved by seventy thousand troops'.⁷⁸ Dominion status as incorporated in the Government of Ireland Act was probably the best workable solution, but in relation to Ulster, allegiance should be determined on a county-by-county basis. He vigorously supported the nationalisation of all key industries, claiming that it was a significant safeguard for the community, as was the taxation of land values.⁷⁹ In one powerful speech, he drew voters' attention to the government's failure to fulfil the promises of the previous year. In nine months, he declared, 'peace had not been made (there were still twenty-three on-going wars), the Kaiser remained untried, the promised indemnity had not materialised, conscription had been prolonged, the daily expenditure exceeded the daily revenue by a catastrophic amount, trade remained hampered by restrictions, the country was sinking into bankruptcy, industry was unsettled and Ireland was sinking into deeper anarchy'.⁸⁰ In his last election address, Pringle delivered another powerful speech focusing upon the government's policy in Russia. Apart from the obvious sacrifice of British soldiers, he argued that intervention in Russia represented a complete waste of money: it had cost over 100 million pounds to date.⁸¹ He also accused the government of lying about casualties, stating that more British troops had been killed in Russia than had been officially admitted and that the Secretary of State for War had lied to the House of Commons in claiming that men who went to Russia had gone overwhelmingly as volunteers. Pringle argued that a more accurate figure was around 10%, the rest had gone against their will. Ultimately, he argued, 'the government had no right to put the life of a single British soldier in peril except where the interests of the country were at stake' and that was simply not the case in Russia. Throughout the contest, some Liberals appeared uncomfortable with their candidate's platform and it was even reported that some of his audiences had begun to ask him if he really was a Liberal; he maintained that he was very much a Liberal advocating a Liberal programme. The traditional Manchester issue of free trade versus protection hardly appeared at all as a significant issue for the main party candidates; interestingly, Pringle did not mention it in any of his election speeches.

Robert Dunstan was as radical a candidate for the Labour Party as Pringle was for the Liberals. From the beginning of the campaign, he

declared that he was not fighting Rusholme for ‘purposes of propaganda’ and like his opponent focused principally upon the Coalition Government’s foreign policy, particularly in Russia. He appealed for an immediate end to hostilities and resumption of trade with Russia, telling voters that if the issue was resolved others would follow: conscription would come to an end, the country would no longer need to maintain armaments and the economic crisis would begin to ease. He was a strong supporter of free trade and an even greater advocate of land taxation. Like his Liberal opponent, Dunstan also spoke strongly of the necessity of a capital levy. He also paid considerable attention to the issue of profiteering, claiming that this was just one aspect of an ‘embedded corruption in political life’; only the Labour Party, he suggested, ‘had no profiteers, no secret funds and no rich men’.⁸² In relation to the housing situation, he argued there should be a national system and public funds ought not to be placed in the hands of private landlords. Throughout the campaign Dunstan made explicit attacks upon the Liberal Party and argued that his opponent was ‘dressing himself up in Labour garments’ and it was only in response to public pressure and expediency that he had adopted such a programme. Dunstan insisted that both established parties had been discredited during and after the war but the Liberal Party in particular had had its day; he told voters how he, like many others, had left the Liberal Party because he had been ‘disgusted at the conduct of Liberal Ministers in relation to secret foreign policy’.⁸³ He acknowledged that it appeared men such as Pringle were indeed creating ‘a new programme and a new party’ but that in itself was ‘recognition that the Liberalism of the past had failed [and that] the Liberal Party in its despair [was] trying to cover up its past by adopting Labour’s programme’.⁸⁴ Why then, he asked, did men such as his opponent not join the Labour Party? Given that Pringle and Dunstan had adopted virtually identical positions on foreign policy, conscription, land taxation, nationalisation and (crucially) a proposed capital levy, progressively minded voters would only be able to make a decision based upon which party was best placed to bring about such change.

The Conservative candidate advocated few concrete policies, simply focusing his campaign upon the contention that the Coalition comprised the ‘best men in politics’ and ought to be given time to make good the promises of 1918, alongside a more general argument that if nationalisation were to be implemented it would lead to certain revolution. Thorpe asked voters to give Lloyd George the opportunity ‘to show what he could do as a peace prime minister’⁸⁵ whilst making it clear that he ‘reserved the

right to criticise the government as a Conservative and Unionist'.⁸⁶ The *Manchester Guardian* was infuriated by what it perceived to be the 'vagueness and complacency' of the Conservative campaign. Thorpe's campaign indeed appeared to lack focus until the intervention of the railway strike.⁸⁷

The 1919 railway workers' strike was called suddenly during the last week of the by-election and took all the candidates by surprise. Their attitude towards the strike varied and almost certainly made some impact on the performance of the parties at the by-election, although perhaps not as great as some subsequently claimed. The occurrence of a national strike in the later stages undoubtedly aided Thorpe's ailing campaign, allowing him to make an appeal for public support for the government at a time of 'national emergency'. He portrayed the strike as an organised attack on the constitution, declaring that 'forces of unrest must be dealt with severely'.⁸⁸ Pringle stated he was in favour of standardisation of wages across the whole industry and against a return to the low wages of the pre-war years. Nonetheless, he was accused of appearing impartial and slightly noncommittal in his attitude. This seems a little unfair, since examination of Pringle's statements on the subject suggests a considerable degree of sympathy with the cause of the railway workers. In one speech, he described it as 'intolerable' that railway workers should have to supplement their 'miserable pittance by tips from the general public'. Nevertheless, in suggesting that the strikers be prepared to end their action and negotiate while the government listened to their arguments, he perhaps gave too great an impression of impartiality.

During 1919, by-election results across the country were showing, in the words of the *Manchester Guardian*, 'every sign of instability of public opinion', though ultimately the newspaper concluded that 'a public willing to wound might be unwilling to slay'.⁸⁹ Nonetheless, by-election losses for the Coalition represented clear condemnation of the government's policies and, by the autumn of 1919, results were becoming ever more sensational. Newspapers such as the *Manchester Guardian* believed these provided evidence that the electorate was 'throwing off the momentary madness' of the previous year's general election.⁹⁰ The Rusholme by-election in September saw the Conservatives managing to hold the seat, though with a substantially reduced majority: the party won with 45.7% of the vote, a majority of 14.5% over the second-placed Labour candidate. The turnout was low for the post-war period and it is possible that some Liberal voters abstained.⁹¹ The striking feature of the result was the advance made by the Labour Party, which had doubled its vote compared

to the 1918 general election and managed to outpoll the Liberals by 12%. Rusholme was traditionally Liberal territory, suburban and largely middle class; this represented an astonishing result for Labour. For the Liberals the result was disastrous: the Rusholme by-election proved a striking reminder that the Labour Party had repudiated the Progressive Alliance in Manchester and the result was unlikely to change their minds. Ironically, it also illustrated the necessity of progressive cooperation: the combined progressive vote amounted to just over 50%, 4.6% more than the Conservatives.

The widely publicised debate within the Liberal Party over Pringle's support for a capital levy was probably unhelpful. As the *Manchester Guardian* concluded, 'the spectacle of not only members of the party ... but of the president of the local organisation criticising the programme on which the party had invited the candidate to fight' created a disastrous impression. The Labour Party on the other hand appeared united.⁹² Pringle believed that the election had taken place at a time of 'abnormal conditions' and he did not believe it demonstrated anything about the real balance of the parties in the constituency or in the wider country. He also suggested that the railway strike 'nullified the election as a test of public opinion on *political issues*' because many voters who would have voted against the government believed they should instead rally behind it during what they perceived to be a time of crisis.⁹³ At the same time, Pringle also suggested that a very large number of Liberal trade unionists believed the 'whole principle of trade unionism was at stake so felt obliged to support the Labour candidate'. Like Pringle, Dunstan believed that, but for the railway strike, Thorpe would not have won, although he still believed the result represented a significant blow for the government because Labour had doubled its vote in what was a socially mixed constituency. That meant that a sizable proportion of electors had supported the party's position on issues such as the capital levy, the taxation of land values, nationalisation, self-determination in Ireland and the Russian question.⁹⁴

For the local Liberal press, the implications of the result were very clear: given that the Liberal and Labour candidates had virtually identical programmes, there had 'probably never been an election in which the vote [of the two parties] could be more justly lumped together as the sum of progressive strength'.⁹⁵ For the Liberals the by-election served to illustrate the futility and consequences of three-cornered contests, and demonstrated the effects of an obsolete electoral system. The Liberals began to calculate that without electoral reform the position of their party was likely to

remain difficult if not ultimately impossible in some places. For Labour, by contrast, the result justified the decision to stand. The Rusholme by-election demonstrated the Labour Party's ambition and showed how far the party had come in terms of policy, but also highlighted the continuing difficulties facing the Liberals. In a reversal of the pre-war political situation, it now appeared that the Liberals were dependent upon the acquiescence of Labour.

The death of Edward Hopkinson prompted a by-election in Clayton early in 1922. The election was a straight fight between Labour and the Conservatives. Having been defeated at the 1918 General Election, Labour's John Sutton fought a determined campaign focusing attention primarily upon the failure of the Coalition Government to carry through the promises that it had made in 1918. His programme was likely to attract Liberal supporters in particular. More than any other issue, Sutton appealed to voters on education, condemning the recent Fisher Education Act as a 'betrayal of the national interests'. He promised to oppose 'any attempt to rob a child to pay for the war'.⁹⁶ In an interview with the *Manchester Guardian*, he launched a particularly ferocious attack on the proposals of the Geddes Committee, published that day and calling for significant spending cuts, declaring that it was an outrage that the Government was 'robbing the children of the war dead'.⁹⁷ Published by the government's Committee on National Expenditure and chaired by Sir Eric Geddes, the Geddes Report came at an opportune time for the Labour Party and probably gave them a considerable advantage.⁹⁸ Labour had strongly supported the need to protect education and pensions and the report was perceived as an attack on both. By citing the 'children of the war dead', Sutton no doubt struck a chord with many of the division's residents and his defence of education would have appealed to women; given there were 15,000 female voters in the constituency it is unsurprising that he made strenuous efforts to appeal to them on these issues. In addition, Sutton stressed his fundamental opposition to any cuts to pensions.⁹⁹ Housing was also a concern as it had been suggested that houses built by the local authorities ought now to be sold off. Sutton argued that it was morally wrong to sell off public housing; many of the tenants were ex-servicemen and they might face the prospect of eviction before replacements were built.¹⁰⁰

Inevitably, the question of the current economic crisis and unemployment in particular received significant attention during the by-election. A manifesto in support of Sutton outlined how Britain was 'sinking beneath

its burden of debt' while ministers were 'squandering money in support of frantic military adventures in support of reactionary policies abroad'.¹⁰¹ Sutton used his final election speeches to argue that unemployment and a flawed foreign policy were intrinsically related. He told voters that unemployment would continue to be a problem that would overshadow all others and it was all 'down to the discreditable incompetence of the Coalition Government'.¹⁰² There needed to be an immediate restoration of European trade, including Russia and Germany, and a restoration of free trade, which was essential given that the condition of industry in the region was 'determined by international relationships more than anywhere in the country'.¹⁰³ In contrast to the Coalition's flawed foreign policy, the Labour Party, Sutton argued, advocated a policy of peace. Interference in Russia and other countries had already cost £200 million which could have built 200,000 new houses. He told voters that the government 'had never been in earnest with their cry of building "homes fit for heroes to live in"' and argued that those who spoke of military pacts were 'traitors to the uncounted dead'.¹⁰⁴ Sutton defined his programme clearly and directly and successfully forced the campaign onto the record of the Coalition since the Armistice. He told voters that he simply wanted to 'do his best for those who had suffered by the war'. Interestingly, he chose to avoid the issue of nationalisation, saying that it was 'not an immediate issue'.¹⁰⁵ A need to deal with critical issues such as unemployment, education, pensions, housing and the inadequacy of the peace treaties gave Labour momentum from the very beginning of the by-election and the publication of the Geddes Report perhaps reinforced Sutton's contention that the Coalition was unfit to govern.

Economic, political and social context, a small number of issues, good organisation and the performance of the candidate himself ensured that the Labour Party would perform well at the Clayton by-election. Sutton was very likely to secure the support of many Liberal voters. He was a free trader and a strong advocate of the taxation of land values and the League of Nations. The only policy area where there might have been a difference of opinion with some Liberals was nationalisation, although he largely avoided that issue. The *Manchester Guardian* concluded that Labour's alternative amounted to 'not only a keen criticism of the Government but a forward policy' and that Sutton had effectively articulated a 'Liberal programme that was easy to support'.¹⁰⁶ The Liberal press played a critical role in reassuring Liberal voters: throughout the contest the *Manchester Guardian* strongly urged its readers to vote for Sutton, pointing out that

the by-election presented a 'decisive opportunity to condemn the government'.¹⁰⁷

Throughout the by-election, the Conservative candidate W. H. Flanagan never concealed the fact that he would only be willing to support the Coalition 'so long as his party continued to do so'.¹⁰⁸ As the campaign proceeded, however, his allegiance to his party began to appear tenuous and by the end of it he had started to sound more like an anti-government candidate. Tellingly, he received no support from the Conservative Party leadership, having to rely on a few of the city's MPs for support. Throughout the contest, he played up his credentials as a local employer. In terms of economic policy, Flanagan stressed a need for economy and an improvement in industrial relations. Cooperation between capital and labour formed the basis of his campaign, yet he caused controversy when he appeared to suggest favouring the use of the military in industrial disputes. Somewhat astonished, the *Manchester Guardian* claimed that this amounted to 'firing a shot over open sights into his working-class audience'.¹⁰⁹ The Liberal press reported that he had been a strong protectionist up to 1920 but was now claiming to be a free trader. In terms of foreign policy, he initially took a very different position from his Labour opponent, declaring that he would 'wholeheartedly' support an alliance with France, although he later modified this by saying that he wanted little more than an entente. He suggested that Germany was attempting to evade her responsibilities, but his position on this also changed as the campaign progressed. By polling day, he advocated a total revision of indemnities and spoke enthusiastically about the League of Nations. Flanagan did not always cope well on the election platform and his speeches appeared abstract and vague. He failed to develop his points and regularly had difficulty answering questions effectively. At one meeting, for example, he admitted to agreeing with an audience member's argument that the Coalition had failed to honour the promises made to servicemen in 1918.¹¹⁰ The *Manchester Guardian* appeared to be completely perplexed by the Conservative candidate and went so far as to write that 'his mind is almost too remote for the common traffic of politics'.¹¹¹ He appeared to offer the very antithesis of Sutton's polished, accessible and intelligent platform style. Some saw this as an endearing, if eccentric, aspect of his character, but given the prevailing hardship in the division, it began to be perceived as inappropriate.

The Clayton by-election resulted in a significant victory for the Labour Party. Sutton won the seat with a majority of just over 3600, 14.2% of the

total vote. At 74%, the turnout was significantly higher than in 1918. Sutton claimed the result represented ‘a blow against the Lloyd George Government and any candidate who had any lingering attachment to it’, but it also suggested public approval of the policy of the Labour Party, particularly on education. He believed his advocacy of ‘reconstructing Europe as the only way of reconstructing England’ had been especially well received and he said electors now ‘understood more fully how international affairs impacted upon them’ than in 1918; there had also been a pronounced anti-militarism amongst electors.¹¹² It seems probable that Sutton had received a large proportion of the Liberal vote. The Liberals had urged supporters to get solidly behind him and it had been easy on this occasion, as Sutton had advocated a very ‘Liberal’ programme. He had avoided the issue of nationalisation, focusing instead on education and foreign policy and his platform talents shone in contrast to his inept opponent. For the Liberal press, the Clayton by-election demonstrated why unity was essential for the progressive parties; had there been a Liberal candidate the seat might have been lost. The *Manchester Guardian* reiterated its belief that the ‘future of Labour and Liberalism’, as the by-election illustrated, was dependent upon some sort of ‘accord’,¹¹³ yet the same newspaper recognised that difficulties lay with the local associations and while there was ‘plenty of goodwill on the Liberal side [there was] a good deal less on the part of Labour’.¹¹⁴

The Clayton by-election illustrates a number of important aspects of political change in Britain in the aftermath of the First World War. It shows how the Labour Party moved in to claim its ‘Liberal’ inheritance. John Sutton had articulated an exceptionally ‘Liberal’ programme, focused principally upon the failures of the Coalition government; on issues such as education, housing, unemployment, pensions and foreign policy and, as an individual, he was a remarkably capable advocate of (in his words) the Labour Party’s ‘forward looking’ programme. The impact of candidates like Sutton and the sheer forcefulness of their campaigns was of critical importance in changing political allegiance in the aftermath of the First World War. Whilst post-war socio-economic and political issues were increasingly national, as illustrated by the emphasis on foreign policy, the way the respective candidates articulated their condemnation of the record of the Coalition and the way they advocated their own party’s programme was extremely significant. This suggests that in many ways the Labour Party created its own expansion. The national political situation gave birth to a more favourable environment for Labour, but the mobilisation of

voter disillusionment into actual support for the party and, ultimately, firm political allegiance was achieved through the ability of candidates such as John Sutton within the local context.

NOTES

1. Many historians pay inadequate attention to the role of individual candidates in political development. One exception is Howell who identifies the role of candidates as of crucial importance in Labour's growing electoral support after 1918. See D. Howell, *Macdonald's People: Labour Identities and Crisis, 1922–1931* (Oxford, 2002).
2. In Gorton, the Conservative candidate was not officially sanctioned and ran as an independent Conservative.
3. See *Manchester Liberal Federation Miscellaneous Letters*, July 11 1918.
4. *Manchester Guardian*, 15 November 1918.
5. D. Tanner, *Political Change*, p. 404.
6. In Manchester, the MLF does appear to have responded quickly to a fast moving political situation. Registration work, for instance, began as soon as the new register was published; see *Manchester Liberal Federation Minutes*, 3 June 1918.
7. See *Manchester Liberal Federation Minutes*, 20 February 1918, 4 March 1918 and 14 October 1918, and *Midland Liberal Federation Minutes*, 21 March 1919.
8. See *Manchester Liberal Federation Finance Committee Minutes*, 4 September 1914, 31 January 1915 and 21 July 1918.
9. *Manchester Guardian*, 15 November 1918.
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Manchester Guardian*, 16 November 1918.
12. See *Manchester Liberal Federation Minutes*, November 1918. This policy was supported by Asquith; local federations could decide themselves whether they chose free Liberals or Coalition Liberals.
13. Burditt, reported in the *Manchester Guardian*, 22 November 1918.
14. See *Manchester Guardian* and *Manchester Evening News*, 23 November 1918.
15. *Ibid.*
16. Figure cited in *Manchester Guardian*, 22 November 1918, see also article 'Reaching the soldiers: Manchester's experience', *Manchester Guardian*, 27 November 1918.
17. *Manchester Guardian*, 27 November 1918.
18. Proxy voters included men serving in Egypt, Macedonia and other distant fronts and those in the navy.

19. *Manchester Guardian*, November 27 1918.
20. Details from *Manchester City News*, 16 November 1918.
21. See *Manchester Guardian*, 27 November 1918.
22. Ibid.
23. *Manchester Guardian*, 3 December 1918.
24. See *Manchester Guardian*, 6 December 1918.
25. See *Manchester Guardian*, 16 November 1918.
26. *Manchester Guardian*, 22 November 1918.
27. *Manchester Guardian*, 5 December 1918.
28. *Manchester Evening News*, 26 November 1918.
29. *Manchester Evening News*, 2 December 1918.
30. See *Manchester Guardian*, 10 December 1918.
31. R. McKibbin, *Evolution*, p. 107.
32. *Manchester Guardian*, 11 December 1918.
33. See *Manchester Guardian*, 30 November 1918.
34. See *Manchester City News*, 4 December 1918.
35. Ibid.
36. *Manchester Guardian*, 13 December 1918.
37. See *ibid.*
38. See *Manchester Guardian*, 22 November 1918.
39. See *Manchester Guardian*, 11 December 1918.
40. The new parliamentary division of Clayton comprised a combination of the 'better' working-class districts such as Bradford and the more socially mixed Newton Heath.
41. *Manchester City News*, 10 December 1918.
42. See, for example, *Manchester Guardian*, 28 and 29 November 1918.
43. See *Manchester Guardian*, 14 December 1918.
44. See *Manchester Guardian*, 7 December 1918.
45. Ibid.
46. See *Manchester City News*, 14 December 1918.
47. See the secretary's report on the 1918 general election, *Midland Liberal Federation Minutes*, 21 March 1919.
48. Ibid.
49. See article outlining the basic premise of the new party constitution written by Sidney Webb in Labour Party leaflet number one, 1918 (new series), LSE Collection.
50. Ibid.
51. *Manchester Guardian*, 12 December 1918.
52. Election details from F.W.S. Craig, *British Parliamentary Election Results*, pp. 184–194.
53. Swing cannot be calculated for the 1918 general election due to boundary changes.

54. See *Manchester Guardian*, 30 December 1918.
55. *Liberal Magazine*, December 1918.
56. *Manchester Guardian*, 30 December 1918.
57. Ibid.
58. *Manchester City News*, 14 January 1919.
59. See Midland Liberal Federation report evaluating the 1918 general election, *Midland Liberal Federation Minutes*, 21 March 1919.
60. *Manchester City News*, 4 January 1919.
61. *Oldham Chronicle*, 4 January 1919.
62. Ibid.
63. P. Clarke, *Lancashire*, p. 395.
64. R. Douglas, *History of the Liberal Party*, p. 131.
65. See *Manchester Labour Party Annual Report*, 1918.
66. *Manchester Guardian*, 6 September 1919.
67. Ibid.
68. Ibid.
69. See *ibid.*
70. Dunstan was, however, a member of the National Union of General Workers.
71. See *Manchester Guardian*, 10 September 1919.
72. See *ibid.*
73. M. Stenton and S. Lees, *Who's Who of British Members of Parliament*, vol. 2, p. 288.
74. He had fought four previous general election campaigns and had played a key role in the establishment of the Federation of Discharged Soldiers and Sailors.
75. *Manchester Guardian*, 12 September 1919.
76. For Pringle's position on the capital levy, see *Manchester Guardian*, 12 and 25 September 1919.
77. *Manchester Guardian*, 26 September 1919.
78. Ibid.
79. See *Manchester Guardian*, 17 and 20 September 1919.
80. See *Manchester Guardian*, 22 September 1919.
81. See *Manchester Guardian*, 7 October 1919.
82. *Manchester Guardian*, 25 September 1919.
83. *Manchester Guardian*, 12 September 1919.
84. See *Manchester Guardian*, 20 September 1919.
85. See *Manchester Guardian*, 19 September 1919.
86. Ibid.
87. *Manchester Guardian*, 22 September 1919.
88. See *Manchester Evening News*, 30 September 1919.
89. *Manchester Guardian*, 12 September 1919.
90. See *Manchester Guardian*, 13 September 1919.

91. The turnout at the by-election was 67.5% compared to 62.9% in 1918, when the constituency had the highest turnout of any Manchester seat. The 1919 by-election represented a low turnout when compared to most post-war contests; in the 1922 general election it increased by 10%.
92. See *Manchester Guardian*, 13 September 1919.
93. See *Manchester Guardian*, 8 October 1919.
94. See *Manchester Guardian*, 21 October 1919.
95. *Ibid.*
96. See *Manchester Guardian*, 3 February 1922.
97. *Manchester Guardian*, 4 February 1922.
98. The Geddes Report advocated government savings of £87 million. A large proportion of the savings were to be made from cuts in social services and education. One recommendation was to increase the school starting age to six.
99. The Geddes Committee proposed a five shilling (a week) reduction in pensions.
100. *Manchester Guardian*, 14 February 1922.
101. *Manchester Guardian*, 13 February 1922.
102. *Manchester Guardian*, 16 February 1922.
103. See *Manchester Guardian*, 3 February 1922.
104. See *Manchester Guardian*, 16 February 1922.
105. *Ibid.*
106. *Manchester Guardian*, 18 February 1922.
107. *Ibid.*
108. See *Manchester Guardian*, 8 February 1922.
109. *Manchester Guardian*, 7 February 1922.
110. *Manchester Guardian*, 15 February 1922.
111. *Manchester Guardian* report, 10 February 1922.
112. See *Manchester Guardian*, 20 February 1922.
113. *Ibid.*
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Manchester's Municipal Politics in the Aftermath of War and the 1922 General Election

The Labour Party's electoral progress in Manchester's municipal politics had been patchy before 1914 but after 1918 the situation changed dramatically. As in many other areas of the country, war had taken its toll on the Liberal organisation. Before the 1919 municipal elections, the Manchester Progressive Union (MPU) made an appeal to its members for financial assistance. The response was tremendous and allowed a degree of financial stability. The circumstances in 1919 still represented a challenge however, not least because the ward boundaries had been redrawn; for thirty-seven available seats the Labour Party fielded nineteen candidates, a reflection of their ambition. This compared to just eight candidates in nineteen wards in 1913. The Liberals put up eight candidates, the Conservatives thirty-one.¹

The dominant issues of the 1919 municipal campaigns in Manchester were housing and profiteering, two issues that the city's councillors 'had chosen to avoid for so long but could avoid no longer'.² It was believed that the Labour candidates would gain most from their prominence; since Labour's presence on the council before the outbreak of war had been limited, it was believed that the party could not be held accountable for previous failures. In addition, issues such as housing had been central to the Labour group's interventions within the council before 1914; having previously attempted to raise these issues, the Labour group could not now be seen as campaigning upon them for opportunistic reasons.

The 1919 municipal contests saw a significant advance for Labour: the party's candidates won eleven seats, taking its total representation on the

council to thirty-one. Conservatives were returned in nine, their overall representation dropping from fifty-five to thirty-eight, and the Liberals were successful in just two seats from five candidates.³ In a spirit of progressive cooperation, or perhaps merely a reflection of the Liberals' inability to contest a greater number of seats, there were just three three-cornered contests: Blackley and Moston saw Labour outpoll the Liberals while in Levenshulme the Liberals outpolling Labour although the margins were small. For the *Manchester City News*, Labour's large poll suggested that the public 'was in sympathy with the party's aims' and 'dissatisfied with existing conditions' in relation to housing and social questions.⁴ The same newspaper also reflected that it was perhaps 'inevitable under the circumstances that Labour should pitch its strength against the parties which had been principally associated with local government'.⁵ All the parties had campaigned on social reconstruction and it must be concluded that, in the working-class wards especially, electors voted for the party they trusted most and blamed the least in relation to perceived past failures on such issues.

The critical question the following year was the extent to which the Labour Party would hold onto the gains made in 1919. Maintaining its momentum, Labour fielded twenty-one candidates while the Liberals ran thirteen, standing on a 'Liberal and MPU' label. The Conservatives put up twenty-one for the twenty-nine available seats. The 1920 municipal elections saw a record nine contests in which the Liberal and Labour parties faced each other, suggesting that at this level the Progressive Alliance had clearly come to an abrupt end. The results saw the Liberals and Conservatives return seven and thirteen candidates respectively. Relative to the number of seats contested, the Liberals performed well. Admittedly, they had been successful in their traditional heartlands, All Saints, Cheetham, Moss Side West, Rusholme and Withington, but the elections nonetheless proved that the Liberal Party could not be discounted as a municipal force. Labour, on the other hand, suffered a significant setback with the party managing to win in only five wards, Beswick, Gorton South, Miles Platting, Openshaw and St. Michael's. These were all straight fights with Conservatives in areas where the party already had a solid electoral base. Labour performed poorly against Conservatives in areas such as Newton Heath, Longsight and Medlock Street and where it was challenged by both Liberals and Conservatives: of nine triangular contests only three, Harpurhey, Moss Side East and St. George's, saw Labour polling above the Liberals.⁶

The year 1921 saw thirty-three seats contested. Just three candidates ran as Liberals while nine, including a number of well-known Liberal activists and existing council members, stood simply as 'progressives'; effectively the total number of Liberals was the same as the previous year. Labour and the Conservatives ran sixteen and twenty-nine candidates respectively. The contests resulted in the return of twenty-two Conservatives, five Labour, four progressives and two independents. Labour again performed well in areas where there was an established presence, Beswick, Bradford and Gorton South, but did badly elsewhere. The results were mixed for the Liberals: the party performed well in its suburban heartlands of Didsbury and Rusholme but poorly in the more mixed areas of Crumpsall, Collyhurst and Longsight. Exchange represented a particular disappointment for the Liberals, the party's candidate polling 34% less than the winning Conservative. In contrast to the previous year, just two contests saw the Liberals and Labour face each other. In a straight fight in Newton Heath, the Progressive/Liberal candidate polled 59% to Labour's 41% and in a triangular contest in St. Mark's, Labour won the seat with 47% of the vote to the Conservative's 36% and the Liberal's 17%.

Whilst the 1922 municipal elections were perceived to have greater significance because of the concurrent parliamentary contests, the occurrence of the general election meant that only a relatively small number of wards were contested, twenty-three in all. Despite increased pressure on the organisation, Labour was still able to run a large number of candidates in the municipal contests, nineteen in total, just one less than the Conservatives. The Liberals, no longer using the 'progressive' label, ran only six candidates and managed to return two in Chorlton-cum-Hardy and Rusholme. Of the three wards where the Liberals and Labour faced each other, Collegiate Church saw the Liberals push Labour into third place; a split vote in Miles Platting allowed the Conservative to win and, in Moston, Labour won a straight fight with a substantial majority. Altogether, ten of Labour's nineteen candidates were returned, a great success, although the results left the party with a net loss of four on the council. The overall position of the council consequently stood at seventy-five Conservative, twenty-seven Liberal/Progressive, twenty-five Labour and thirteen independents; the Conservative majority was roughly what it had been in 1920.

The 1919 municipal elections represented a turning point in Labour's position in local government. The party was better positioned to influence municipal politics than it had ever been, yet as Labour's position changed

so too did the attitudes of the established parties. Before 1914, Labour's councillors had largely been moderate Lib-Lab types. This had begun to change, but few of the Labour Party's municipal representatives were out-and-out socialists. The established parties generally received them positively and there was never an overtly anti-Labour agenda. This changed dramatically after 1918. A key feature of the immediate post-war period was the way in which Labour's municipal representatives became increasingly assertive and political, with the result that the established parties, the Conservatives in particular, showed hostility towards them. Municipal politics after 1918 became increasingly politicised.

A problem for the Labour Party before 1914 had been low representation on the council committees, an issue that the Labour group in Manchester was now anxious to address. They argued that the council ought to take 'cognisance of their new position and accept the Labour victories at the polls'.⁷ The request was ignored. The *Manchester Guardian* became supportive of Labour's claim for increased committee representation, bemoaning in March 1920 the fact that, whilst Labour had done very well at the polls, this 'could not guarantee the party an effective voice in the city's affairs which its numbers might warrant'.⁸ The *Manchester Guardian* claimed that it was widely known that the council's Conservatives considered Labour members 'inferior' in status. They quite possibly did, but there were specific reasons which underpinned objections to a strong Labour presence on the committees, notably the question of impartiality. As one Conservative Alderman argued, because 'of their politics [Labour members were] debarred from performing certain governmental functions [because] as trade unionists they could not be expected to hold the balance evenly between the city and its workpeople where dealings with corporation employees were concerned'.⁹ Hostility to Labour within the council became pronounced, *The Manchester Guardian* reporting that 'almost every amendment emanating from the Labour benches was negated by a solid Conservative vote'.¹⁰ Labour received the support of some Liberals although this was rarely enough to ensure the adoption of Labour amendments or proposals.¹¹ Obtaining a significant foothold in the municipal representation of the city was one thing, being able to exercise influence in the decision-making process thereafter was a different matter. Nonetheless, the Labour group made its presence felt in the best way it could: within the context of the council's monthly meetings, the group inevitably focused its attention upon issues such as unemployment, housing and social improvement.

Analysis of policy on unemployment helps to shed light on party ideology and influence at the municipal level during the immediate post-war period. An early indication of the mounting economic crisis in Manchester was seen in March 1919, when an estimated 40,000 unemployed men gathered outside the city's town hall in an attempt to alert the council to their plight and urge it to consider assistance, especially in the interests of ex-servicemen and former munitions workers.¹² A deputation secured a meeting with the Lord Mayor at which one activist, Annie Lee, described conditions in parts of the city as a disaster. Thousands were on the verge of pneumonia because they could not afford to buy coal and she highlighted how over 60,000 of the city's women were unemployed. Another member of the deputation told the Lord Mayor that, in his opinion, the city was 'on the verge of catastrophe'.¹³ The issue received immediate attention within the council chamber, but it was only after Labour intervention that resolute action was taken. On the initiative of the group's leader, Tom Fox, the council voted in favour of establishing a special committee to report on schemes of public utility to be put in place by the council's departments.¹⁴ After protests from another Labour councillor, a resolution urging the government to take steps to accelerate normal working conditions (by the decontrolling of industry) was adopted. As the same councillor insisted, there could be no delay: 'these men were victims of the Great War and [were] entitled to be maintained'.¹⁵ Unlike areas such as Salford, Manchester had been exceptionally slow in creating schemes of relief work. On the recommendations of the special committee on unemployment, the council from 1921 initiated a range of schemes employing over 2000 men and the Lord Mayor's Fund raised over £11,000, of which £500 a week was estimated to provide for over 500 families.¹⁶

The question of 'municipal economy' had long been a feature of the politics of local government, but with increasing economic uncertainty the issue attained an even greater significance after 1919. This presented difficulties for the municipal authorities. Much work in connection with housing, education, child welfare, health and unemployment relief needed to be undertaken, but the question of 'economy' meant any schemes in these areas became increasingly controversial. The subject of 'economy' became a critical aspect of council politics after 1919 and was hugely divisive. The Labour group was as anxious as its opponents to cite 'economy' but from a very different perspective. Consequently, the anti-Labour-anti-waste strategy of some of the party's opponents may not have reaped the

electoral rewards expected. On occasions when Labour members argued against the economy ‘lobby’, they did so by questioning established notions of what ‘economy’ actually meant. In defending welfare provisions, they argued that ‘true economy’ could only be effective with improved health, education and the general well-being of the people, children in particular. Although it was not necessarily articulated as such, this amounted to a national efficiency argument as much as a humanitarian one. In Manchester, proposals to increase expenditure on various essential social provisions met regularly with determined opposition from members of the council who deemed it an inopportune time to embark upon ‘idealistic schemes’.¹⁷ Those who objected to cuts in social provision argued, however, that irrespective of humanitarian considerations, poor health and education was more expensive in the long term than expenditure invested in the short term.

Economy speeches became the dominant feature of council meetings during 1921. The Labour group recognised a need for economy but from a different perspective, arguing that it would be morally wrong for the council to cut essential social services and that there were areas where *appropriate* savings could be made. At the September meeting, for example, the Labour group claimed that some surveyors employed by the Housing Department were surplus to requirements and a drain on expenditure; the reservoir begun fourteen years earlier in Heaton Park was increasingly expensive and so too was the £60,000 the corporation spent every year on stationery.¹⁸ At the following month’s meeting, a Conservative attempt to reduce expenditure on the provision of massage sessions for children with rickets was overcome by combined Labour and Liberal opposition which argued that ‘expense should not stand in the way of a chance of a cure’.¹⁹ The economy versus child welfare debate was one that those demanding ‘economy’ were unable to win. Indeed, it was usually only after Labour-led opposition that proposed cuts were abandoned.

Another matter that generated debate was the question of officials’ pay, and on many occasions the Labour group successfully led opposition to large increases in municipal salaries. In December 1921, for example, when the question of the newly appointed Town Clerk’s salary came up for discussion, it proved to be hugely divisive. Labour Councillor Cundiff moved that the proposed salary be reduced by £250, claiming that at the municipal elections voters had ‘expressed their feelings on the subject of economy’. The three parties remained split: some asked what difference £250 would make, others believed that even to contemplate paying a

lower salary than other municipalities would be embarrassing for the city. Cundiff stood his ground, arguing that it was 'a question of setting an example ... at a time when there existed so much hardship, it was inappropriate to be handing out enormous salaries to officials'.²⁰ A compromise was reached when the new Town Clerk himself offered to accept a reduction. Whether this would have been the case without the Labour group's objections remains an open question, but the episode illustrates how Labour was anxious to demonstrate concern for what they perceived to be unnecessary municipal expenditure. A year later, the city's chief water engineer was denied a salary increase after a resolution moved by another Labour councillor. Despite the fact that he had saved the corporation £200,000 by overcoming technical difficulties and that other councils paid their engineers much more, the council supported Labour's position by fifty-four votes to fifty-one that 'whilst there are hundreds of school-children to feed and thousands of men starving [it was] not playing the game to advance already large salaries'.²¹ Despite continuing difficulties such as low committee representation and sizable opposition to its position, the Labour group grew in confidence after 1919 and became a more dynamic force within the council chamber. In many ways, the Labour Party appeared to be the standard bearer for 'economy' within Manchester's municipal government. The critical aspect was the nature of economies. The electoral significance of this can only be speculated upon, although it is possible that, for some voters at least, Labour's practical contribution to safeguarding social provision and, in particular, its active role in promoting unemployment relief schemes will have served to consolidate their support for the party. Furthermore, in wards where Liberal supporters no longer had the choice of a Liberal candidate, the fact that the Labour group on the council was reformist and progressive may also have underpinned their allegiance.

On 19 October 1922, Conservative MPs took the momentous step of withdrawing their support for the Coalition Government led by David Lloyd George. Whilst the party's leadership favoured remaining in a coalition, the majority of the parliamentary party had concluded that the position had become untenable. Those present at the famous 'Carlton Club meeting' were of the opinion that the Conservatives ought to fight the next general election as an independent party. Following the Carlton Club vote, during which the anti-Coalitionists won by 100 votes, Lloyd George offered his resignation; Bonar Law succeeded him as prime minister, simultaneously replacing Austen Chamberlain as Conservative leader, and

a general election was called for mid-November (Fig. 8.1). Clearly, there were many questions concerning the position of the Liberal Party, not least would there be a Liberal reunion?

In Manchester, the Liberals very quickly announced a ‘complete reunion’ and the party launched its general election campaign with a large demonstration in the Free Trade Hall. This was more symbolic than anything else. The Coalition Liberals had never been strong in Manchester compared with other parts of the country but this was partly because the local Conservatives had never been enthusiastic supporters of the Coalition. During the 1918 general election, some Conservative candidates had refuted it altogether, even if they had received endorsement via the coupon. One Conservative candidate had run against and defeated a couponed Liberal in Hulme. Quite simply, the Manchester Conservatives did not feel they needed cooperation with coalition-minded Liberals. There is no evidence to suggest that any of the city’s leading Liberals chose to declare themselves as Coalition Liberals. Furthermore, there was an article of faith that united all of Manchester’s Liberals: free trade. The

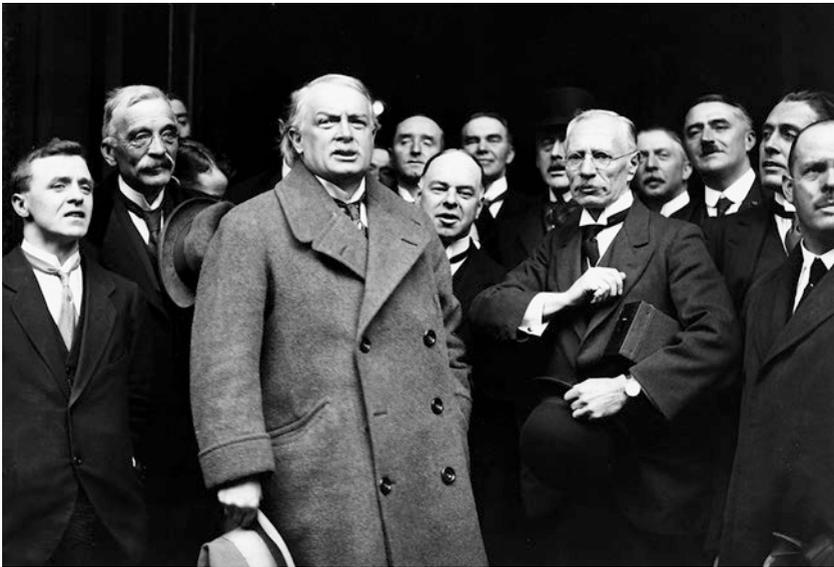


Fig. 8.1 David Lloyd George outside the Manchester Reform Club, 16 October 1922 (Alamy)

return of a potentially protectionist-inclined Conservative administration was a reason in itself to prompt the two sections of the party to overcome any differences. Moreover, as already mentioned, the Coalition/National Liberals were never of any real significance in Manchester. Practically, Liberal reunion simply meant that activists who had been identified, officially or unofficially, with Lloyd George returned to the local Liberal Associations. In terms of voters, the *Manchester Guardian* estimated that around 75% of those Liberals who had given their allegiance to the Coalition would now be fully behind Liberal candidates in their constituencies, although no estimate was made in connection with total numbers since this was presumably unknown.²² Coalition Liberals who wished to remain a distinct entity faced considerable difficulties, not least in terms of organisation.

From the beginning of the 1922 general election campaign the reunited Liberal Party in Manchester appeared optimistic that some of the ground lost four years earlier could be recaptured. Party workers suggested voters were supporting the Liberals because they 'did not know how far back the Conservatives would go and how far forward Labour may go',²³ and organisers were reported to have been taken aback by the size of audiences that 'flocked to obscure schoolrooms' to hear Liberal candidates speak. The Liberal press evidently felt that reunion had given the party a new lease of life in the city and predicted a Liberal resurgence.²⁴

Whilst there was some variation between the Conservative candidates on fiscal policy, none of them openly supported Tariff Reform and three even declared themselves as out-and-out free traders.²⁵ Unsurprisingly, the Liberal press viewed this as an election 'charade' and advised voters not to trust them.²⁶ The Conservative Party in Manchester was determined to sustain its current electoral position, as it was across the country, and this was reflected in the candidates the party had secured. In Exchange, Sir Edwin Stockton was a typical local heavyweight. A well-known cotton manufacturer, he had recently been President of the Manchester Chamber of Commerce, was a Director of the Manchester Ship Canal, Governor of Manchester University and member of the Cotton Control Board. In Rusholme, Platting, Blackley and Moss Side the Conservatives were possibly hoping for a split vote. In all of the constituencies they attempted to secure former Coalition Liberal support. In Blackley, for instance, Harold Briggs defined himself as 'a Conservative of progressive thought' and appealed directly to National Liberals, as they had now come to be known, who believed in 'stability, economy and unity'.²⁷ The only Conservative

not to court the National Liberal vote was Dr T. Watts in Withington, who reportedly went as far as putting up ‘crude and critical cartoons of the former prime minister’.²⁸ In the poorer parts of divisions such as Exchange and Hulme, the Conservatives tended to focus upon the familiar question of cheap beer. The local Liberal press inevitably condemned such tactics as crass and simply a ploy to ‘catch votes’, whilst admitting that such appeals were likely to be effective.

After 1918, the Labour Party was not prepared to countenance any form of cooperation with their former Liberal allies although the Liberal press in Manchester believed this owed more to the party’s national leadership than the attitude of the local constituency organisation.²⁹ Whether this was true or not, it certainly appeared too late for local agreements to be reached other than where the local Labour Party remained ill-equipped to put up candidates. Admittedly, some Labour activists may have believed cooperation with the Liberal Party was useful for short-term development, yet most determined it would severely disadvantage the movement in the longer term. This is a critical point. After 1906, the Labour Party’s priority had been short-term objectives; it was, after all, a young organisation embarking upon its first tentative steps. After 1918, the situation was very different. Within this context, short-term expedients such as entangling alliances with the Liberals did not equate with the party’s aims and objectives.

The 1922 general election in Manchester saw four three-cornered contests, three straight fights between Labour and the Conservatives and three contests between Liberals and Conservatives. Labour officially stood in opposition to Liberals in three seats. The situation in Manchester might suggest that cooperation between the two left-of-centre parties had completely broken down and, indeed, it did not point to a spirit of progressive harmony. However, there is another way to interpret the political situation in Manchester. Effectively, the Liberal Party was given a free run in three constituencies, Withington, Hulme and Exchange, all parts of the city where they might expect to perform well. It seems curious that Labour chose not to contest these seats in 1922. Likewise, the seats where Labour was given a free run against Conservatives, Clayton, Ardwick and Gorton, were districts where the party had established a strong presence and were now seen as part of its ‘natural’ territory. It seems that even though the Progressive Alliance had broken down at the national level, there remained in Manchester a recognition that party interests were best served if the left-of-centre parties were given a free run in their attempts to capture the anti-Conservative vote in districts identified as their natural territory. The

Liberals no longer spun political fantasies around the concept of a Progressive Alliance and the Labour Party sought to reiterate its independence. The result was the same however: six of the city's ten seats saw no intra-left fight. In Manchester, the politics of the Progressive Alliance continued even if it was subconscious and unspoken; the parties continued to target seats selectively and thus avoided direct confrontation as far as was possible. The situation in the three constituencies where the Liberal and Labour parties did face each other was more complicated. Rusholme ought to have been considered a Liberal seat and the Liberals evidently viewed it this way; Platting was more of a Labour seat and both parties could logically lay claim to Blackley.³⁰ Examination of three-cornered contests in 1922 illustrates a great deal in relation to the positions adopted by the respective parties in terms of selectivity in contesting parliamentary constituencies.

The Conservatives had won Rusholme at the by-election three years earlier and that contest had involved a noticeably radical Liberal candidate. In 1922, the Liberals opted for a more moderate candidate, E. F. M. Sutton, although Labour's Albert Wood remained in the same radical vein as his predecessor. Like Dunstan at the earlier by-election, Wood was a successful barrister, tremendously adept at articulating his points. From the outset, he conducted a vigorous and intelligent campaign focusing on the late government's inability to tackle effectively the economic crisis. His campaign slogan was 'peace, security and humanity' and he declared his wish was to eradicate the 'ghost of insecurity' by creating a 'revolution in the minds of the people so they might see the justice of what the Labour Party advocated'.³¹ Wood was critical of the former prime minister who, he claimed, was responsible for the 'present chaos'. He warned voters that the forces of privilege and monopoly would again unite; throughout the campaign he stressed the inequality of sacrifice made by the working classes during the war and how that sacrifice now appeared to have been in vain.³² Wood did not solely blame the government, however, so much as the wider community; in one powerful speech he told his audience that 'people's emotions were generous when they thought Belgium was being wiped out ... but they are slow to act now when eight million people are starving at home'.³³ In relation to the Capital Levy, he claimed there was nothing confiscatory about it, asking voters to consider whether it would have been used if the war had necessitated it. He suggested that the present economic emergency and its attendant suffering required it. In another

emotive speech he declared that ‘something radically different must occur if life is to be worth living’.³⁴

Rusholme’s sitting member, John Thorpe, had been a strong supporter of the Coalition and, in stark contrast to his opponents throughout the 1922 campaign, continued to reiterate his admiration for Lloyd George. Compared to his by-election campaign three years earlier, Thorpe adopted an aggressive anti-Labour stance. He told one audience they should support ‘anyone in order to defeat the Labour Party’ which was ‘the real enemy of the nation’.³⁵ He was ferociously hostile to the Capital Levy, claiming the policy would destroy the national wealth and the empire and represented the ‘most fatal, unfair and unworkable proposition ever put forward in English political life’.³⁶ For good measure, he added that were Labour to obtain power it would also mean the end of Christianity.³⁷ He declared free trade to be simply a ‘business proposition’ and refused to outline his position any further.³⁸ The Conservative campaign in Rusholme was highly negative and this antagonised the Liberal press. The *Manchester Guardian*, for example, described Thorpe as ‘the most naïve of the candidates’ and concluded that ‘politics to him [was] just a jolly game ... a thing of high spirits and laughing assurances’.³⁹ E. F. M. Sutton was regarded as a particularly strong candidate for the Liberals; he was a well-known local businessman and had been a member of the city council for some time. Sutton dealt with a wider range of issues than most of the other Liberal candidates in 1922, although he was forced to focus attention upon fiscal policy, accusing the sitting member of ‘not daring to stand on a Manchester platform and advocate Protection’.⁴⁰ Unusually for a Liberal candidate in 1922, Sutton went to considerable lengths to condemn the Capital Levy, referring to it as ‘a mad idea’ which would inflict ‘more harm on the working man than on the man it taxed because the economy would be affected so adversely’.⁴¹ He claimed that a restoration of free trade and addressing reparations would alleviate problems such as the housing crisis and unemployment.

The contest in Platting attracted a significant amount of attention since it was widely believed that J. R. Clynes, now leader of the Labour Party, faced his most challenging contest to date and many thought he was at risk of losing his seat. Interest was heightened by the fact that the Liberal Party was contesting the seat for the first time since 1900. Clynes inevitably focused most attention upon the government’s record in respect of social reconstruction and the economic crisis. He told one meeting that ‘those who had sacrificed and suffered for the war’ had seen their position

worsen.⁴² He staunchly defended Labour's policy of the Capital Levy, issuing an array of literature examining the proposal. Clynes told his constituents that 'those who had not £5,000 could breathe freedom ... [it] was only intended to target excess',⁴³ fortunes made largely on the back of the war. He fiercely condemned the Coalition, telling voters that the country 'did not have government but a callous desertion of it' and that the people were 'entitled to more than just general talk about tranquillity'.⁴⁴ Since Labour had grown in strength, Clynes believed that opponents were resorting to 'desperate attempts' to 'scare electors' by suggesting the party sought to spread 'discontent'. This was erroneous because the Labour Party simply desired 'justice for those who did most to help the country during the war [but who were presently] treated the worst'.⁴⁵

The Liberal candidate in Platting, W. Ramage, had been adopted the previous year and had already undertaken a significant amount of constituency work. It was reported that he had canvassed in excess of 25,000 of the 35,000 electors in the division and that approximately 50,000 election addresses had been circulated.⁴⁶ This suggests that the Liberal Association had determined to make a very serious bid for the seat. Ramage chose to focus attention principally upon the hardship endured by ex-servicemen; he told voters that 'those crushed by the war should be the first charge upon the revenue'.⁴⁷ Conservative candidate Frank Henry Holmes promoted himself as a free trader and represented the moderate wing of his party. He argued that the army should be kept at as low a strength as was conducive to national safety, opposed reductions in war pensions and spoke at length about the need to protect trade union powers.⁴⁸ Holmes repeatedly stated that he wished to see an end to class war and emphatically avoided pursuing an aggressively anti-Labour position. Neither Holmes nor Ramage addressed the Capital Levy in detail.

The contest in Blackley featured the same three candidates as in 1918, when the Conservatives won the seat with a majority of nearly 2000. It was generally believed that the sitting member, W. J. H. Briggs, had been a conscientious representative. Like Holmes in Platting, Briggs was a moderate Conservative who referred to himself as a progressive Conservative and focused attention primarily upon former soldiers, pensions and unemployment. He avoided becoming embroiled in a debate over the Capital Levy, despite the fact that his Labour opponent, A. E. Townend, had made it a central plank of his campaign. Townend asserted there was no better alternative but to accept the proposed Capital Levy if the necessary social reforms were to be financed. In response to what he

called 'adverse press coverage', he argued that if the country was ever going 'to get out of the morass of financial stagnation' it had to impose taxation on those who could still pay. Like most other Labour candidates in 1922, he linked the issue specifically to an inequality of sacrifice during the war and a disproportionate burden at present.⁴⁹ He also argued that the housing crisis amounted to a 'betrayal of the people', telling voters this alone should 'leave them with no alternative than to vote for the Labour Party'.⁵⁰ More so than in other constituencies, both Conservative and Labour candidates in Blackley focused the greater part of their campaigns upon social policy; effectively there was very little to distinguish between them. Neither Townend nor Briggs paid any attention to the fiscal question. The Liberal candidate, P. Oliver, argued that, in view of Liberal representation in Lancashire remaining so low, the region had been practically forgotten and thus free trade, so vital to the trade of the district, had been severely undermined.⁵¹ He asserted that it was on the principle of free trade alone that voters should return Liberal candidates.⁵² He did, however, address other issues such as education, housing, medical services and pensions for ex-soldiers.

Three of Manchester's constituencies saw straight fights between the Labour and Conservative Parties. In Clayton, John Sutton told voters Bonar Law's policy of 'tranquillity' meant 'sitting down in a comfortable chair, folding one's arms and doing nothing at all' whilst in the country 'the people were practically at starvation point'; he concluded that 'the country must not trust these people again'.⁵³ He argued that 'a working man who voted for an employer against a candidate selected by his own class was a traitor to his own cause'.⁵⁴ The opponent he had faced at the earlier by-election, W. H. Flanagan, proceeded in the same manner he had on that occasion. He had virtually no programme, although this time he adopted a more pronounced anti-Labour platform. In Gorton, John Hodge faced determined opposition, although he made a vigorous effort to fight for his seat. Unlike some of Manchester's other Labour candidates, Hodge concentrated almost exclusively upon the Capital Levy and the injustices of the war. He asked electors why 'when manhood had been conscripted was capital allowed to escape?'⁵⁵ Hodge urged voters not to be misled by 'wild statements that Labour sought to destroy the country' because its intention was, in fact, to 'save it'.⁵⁶ Unsurprisingly, he devoted considerable attention to pensions and the treatment of former soldiers, their dependents and the families of those who had not come back. He stated that he would oppose any attempt to abolish the Pensions Ministry

or cut down the pensions of ex-servicemen. Given that Hodge placed so much emphasis on the Capital Levy, it was inevitable that his Conservative opponent, W. Heap, based his campaign primarily around a strong condemnation of it; he told one meeting that, with the Capital Levy, the Labour Party had been brought to 'the level of the Communist Party'.⁵⁷

The remaining three constituencies, Exchange, Hulme and Withington, saw straight Conservative versus Liberal contests. Manchester's most famous parliamentary constituency, Exchange (formerly North West), had a fluctuating electoral history and it was thought the contest here would be one of the closest across the city. The Conservatives had selected Sir Edwin Stockton, an extremely well-known local businessman and, crucially, a leading advocate of free trade. The Liberals inevitably argued that their candidate, Sir A. W. Barton, would be a more effective free trader because the Conservatives would never be converted as a party to the principle of free trade.⁵⁸ They also attempted to make capital out of the fact that Stockton had been a member of the Protectionist Board of the Manchester Chamber of Commerce after the free traders had been ousted; to Stockton, this merely demonstrated that the Liberals were clutching at straws.

The suburban constituency of Withington represented one of the Liberal Party's strongest hopes of regaining a foothold in the city's parliamentary representation. The electoral history of the area was strongly Liberal and the party's candidate in 1922, Ernest Simon, was a significant asset; one of the party's leading lights in Manchester and as outgoing Lord Mayor he had a strong public profile. Simon focused upon two key issues, unemployment and housing. He argued that the whole community 'must accept responsibility for ensuring every willing worker was given either work or proper maintenance' and stated that 'a larger policy was needed in respect of housing';⁵⁹ all the Conservatives had to say on the subject was that 'they would see what they could do'.⁶⁰ The new Conservative candidate, Watts, had been selected following the retirement of sitting member R. A. D. Carter. Much to the indignation of the Liberal press, Watts appears to have adopted a very simple appeal: cheap beer. Adding insult to injury, he also declared himself a strong supporter of free trade.

According to the *Manchester Guardian*, Hulme was unfertile territory for the Liberals: 'the man who goes there to preach an enlightened Liberalism needs a good deal of courage because it was not easy to turn the eyes of people of such a neighbourhood from the immediate prospect of cakes and ale'.⁶¹ Beyond this, even the *Manchester Guardian* was forced

to concede that the sitting Conservative member, Major Joseph Nall, was one of the Conservatives' most capable representatives in the city. Like Holmes and Briggs, Nall was on the left of his party and his campaign focused on an exceptionally wide array of issues. He spoke at length about the need to maintain ex-servicemen, the extension of the Rent Restrictions Act, appropriate maintenance for the unemployed, education and housing.⁶² Nall declared himself in favour of Imperial Preference although he did not dwell on the matter. A notable feature of his campaign was an evident distaste for what he termed the 'mud-slinging' style of politics that was 'submerging the real issues'. He completely avoided anti-Labour sentiments throughout the campaign; as there was no Labour candidate in Hulme, the Conservatives might have been expected to make capital out of the general anti-left feeling, but the sitting member simply chose not to. He directed his anger instead towards the Liberal candidate Walter Davies, having taken offence at his opponent's public statement that he had been elected in 1918 only because he was 'in Khaki with his arm in a sling'.⁶³ Davies was a well-known local Liberal and treasurer of the MLF. His principal focus throughout the campaign was the failure of the Coalition Government in relation to a variety of economic questions including Germany's reparation payments, the decline in trade with Russia and the reduction in trade across the Lancashire district. Davies told voters his opponent's policy of protection was itself largely responsible for the present scale of unemployment in the region. As the Conservatives avoided the subject, however, Davies was never able to divert attention to the issue. An obvious problem for the Liberal Party in Hulme was that it was impossible to portray the sitting Conservative member as reactionary and uncaring because he clearly was not.

The 1922 general election saw the Liberal Party in Manchester seemingly re-energised and expectations of a recovery were high, yet the majority of Liberal candidates adopted noticeably conservative platforms. This contrasted sharply with the intensity of the Labour candidates' campaigns. On top of this, the Liberals remained handicapped by weak national leadership and the continuing national party split. The election resulted in no resurgence in terms of seats for the Liberals in Manchester, though the party was far from decimated. In straight fights against the Conservatives, the Liberals polled very well: the party managed to obtain 49, 43 and 42% of the vote in Withington, Hulme and Exchange respectively. Given the continuing difficulties the party faced at the national level, the Liberals' performance in these constituencies was impressive, although Exchange

probably represented a significant disappointment. In the three-cornered contests the picture was mixed. Whilst the Liberals managed to outpoll Labour in three of these constituencies, the margins were extremely narrow. Even in Moss Side, where the unofficial Labour candidate had no organisation of any kind, the Liberals polled only 9% more votes. In Platting, the Liberal poll was disastrous, at only 6%. The 1922 general election suggested that party support continued to be geographic but, more significantly, where progressive cooperation broke down the results were catastrophic. Had the Liberals been allowed a free run in Rusholme and Blackley, it is possible they would have seen two MPs returned for Manchester; in Moss Side they would have come a close second. The collapse of the Progressive Alliance meant that the political outlook for the Liberals in Manchester was uncertain, yet it did not look altogether secure for the Labour Party either.

Nationally, the most significant feature of the 1922 general election was the advance made by the Labour Party. In Manchester, however, there was no Labour breakthrough and the results were somewhat disappointing: from seven candidates only three were returned, J. R. Clynes and John Hodge only just managing to hold on to their seats. Despite Thomas Lowth's victory in Ardwick, the loss of Clayton, where John Sutton had won a landslide victory in February's by-election, resulted in no improvement in the party's overall position. This was a particularly galling defeat, the Conservatives slipping in by just eleven votes. Platting was the only three-cornered contest in which Labour defeated the Liberals but given the margins (only 0.1% in Rusholme) and social complexion of these constituencies, it could be said that they had polled well. Even so, the 1922 general election saw the Labour Party in Manchester at a standstill. If anything, this election served to demonstrate the necessity of a progressive entente in Manchester although this appeared an unlikely prospect given the Labour Party's new ambition and their determination to fight elections as an independent force.

DEVELOPMENTS IN POLITICS IN MANCHESTER 1918–1922:

SUMMARY

During the First World War, the Liberal left became both politically and ideologically weaker than ever before. Liberalism was thrown back to its traditional support base. As Labour now appeared a more practical alternative, the 'New Liberal' ideas that had made the party so successful before

the war were effectively redundant.⁶⁴ As evaluation of the city of Manchester illustrates, despite some Liberal candidates articulating radical and progressive policy programmes, the majority were on the centre-right of British politics. With few exceptions, Liberal candidates appeared neither as dynamic nor as progressive as their Labour counterparts. Liberal candidates overwhelmingly fell back on the traditional, though by now rather dated, policy of free trade at the expense of virtually all other issues. On occasions where progressive Liberal candidates did adopt a more dynamic and advanced programme they encountered resistance from the local organisation and this was very public. Manchester Liberalism was simply not as progressive as the *Manchester Guardian* liked to believe it was, or at least it was not progressive when it most needed to be, within the context of the parliamentary elections.

The war had a significant impact on the Liberal Party in Manchester. The party lost all of its parliamentary representation in the 1918 general election and saw its share of the vote plummet. Despite this, the Liberals in Manchester had not been destroyed by the experience of war and there was certainly no immediate transfer of allegiance from the Liberals to Labour; in two of the three triangular contests in 1918, the Liberals were able to outpoll their Labour opponents. Labour's performance across the country was disappointing and their position had barely improved. Since the 1918 general election had taken place against the backdrop of chaotic and highly unusual circumstances, the extent to which the results reflected actual party support was questionable; subsequent elections would prove to be more illuminating.

Some historians have suggested that during the early 1920s the Labour Party did best where it was more concerned with practical working-class interests as opposed to industrial struggles.⁶⁵ By-elections in two Manchester constituencies during 1919 and 1922 and the 1922 general election illustrate how Labour candidates at this time focused their attention upon questions such as greater justice in relation to the burden of war, education and housing alongside policy on unemployment and industrial organisation. In many respects, Labour's policy programme after 1918 reflected traditional Liberal concerns. The Labour candidates' impassioned advocacy of concrete proposals on issues such as a Capital Levy, education, housing and unemployment may have encouraged a growing proportion of electors to perceive Labour, rather than the Liberals, as representing the best vehicle for progress. The role of the candidates, their individual campaigns and party organisation were of critical

importance. Candidates such as John Sutton fought determined campaigns and were highly capable speakers. Their overriding sentiment was that the war ought not to have been fought in vain and, as the Clayton by-election demonstrated, this helped to propel Labour forward. As Sutton himself soon discovered, however, the party's electoral position was by no means assured.

NOTES

1. Seven candidates stood as 'progressives' although these have not been calculated into the Liberal total since it remains uncertain who most of these were. Examination of the records shows that only two (Walter Davies in Chorlton and E.F.M. Sutton in Rusholme), both of whom won, had in any way been connected to the Liberal Party in a significant capacity.
2. See *Manchester City News*, 1 November 1919. No investment had been directed to new building for years and four years of standstill during the war had made the situation critical.
3. The remaining seats were won by independents, progressives and one cooperative.
4. *Manchester City News*, 8 November 1919.
5. *Ibid.*
6. Newton Heath and Longsight were mixed wards while Medlock Street contained slum areas.
7. *Manchester Guardian*, 4 December 1919.
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.*
10. *Ibid.*
11. The Aldermanic bench was also influential in swinging the council against Labour resolutions on occasions.
12. Estimates suggested that about 10,000 of these were ex-servicemen; see *Manchester Guardian*, 6 March 1919.
13. *Manchester Guardian*, 6 March 1919.
14. *Ibid.*
15. *Ibid.*
16. See *Manchester Guardian*, 22 October 1921.
17. See *Manchester Guardian*, 2 July 1921.
18. See *Manchester Guardian*, 6 September 1921.
19. See *Manchester Guardian*, 6 October 1921.
20. See *Manchester Guardian*, 3 December 1921.
21. *Ibid.*
22. *Manchester Guardian*, 3 November 1922.

23. *Manchester Guardian*, 2 November 1922.
24. *Manchester Guardian*, 4 November 1922.
25. In Exchange, Blackley and Platting.
26. *Manchester Guardian*, 2 November 1922.
27. *Manchester City News*, 8 November 1922.
28. *Manchester Evening News*, 9 November 1922.
29. *Manchester Guardian*, 3 November 1922.
30. Platting had never become a safe Labour seat and the strength of Conservatism remained high.
31. See *Manchester Guardian*, 5 November 1922.
32. Ibid.
33. Ibid.
34. *Manchester Guardian*, 7 November 1922.
35. *Manchester City News*, 5 November 1922.
36. *Manchester Guardian*, 8 November 1922.
37. *Manchester Guardian*, 13 November 1922.
38. The *Manchester Guardian* went so far as to write that Thorpe saw free trade as a 'dull affair for the theorists of the Chamber of Commerce'. Locally, the Liberals were unimpressed with his stance on the subject.
39. *Manchester Guardian*, 13 November 1922.
40. *Manchester Guardian*, 8 November 1922.
41. *Manchester Evening News*, 8 November 1922.
42. *Manchester Evening*, 7 November 1922.
43. *Manchester Guardian*, 14 November 1922.
44. See *Manchester Guardian*, 7 November 1922.
45. Ibid.
46. *Manchester Guardian*, 10 November 1922 and *The Times*, 2 November 1922.
47. See *Manchester Guardian*, 9 November 1922.
48. See *Manchester City News*, 7 November 1922 and *Manchester Guardian*, 5 November 1922.
49. See *Manchester Guardian*, 10 November 1922.
50. See *Manchester Guardian*, 5 November 1922.
51. *Manchester Guardian*, 8 November 1922.
52. Ibid.
53. See *Manchester Evening News*, 7 November 1922.
54. *Manchester Guardian*, 9 November 1922.
55. See *Manchester Evening News*, 9 November 1922.
56. Ibid.
57. See *Manchester City News*, 9 November 1922.
58. *Manchester Guardian*, 5 November 1922.
59. See *Manchester Guardian*, 10 November 1922.

60. Ibid.
61. *Manchester Guardian*, 15 November 1922.
62. See *Manchester Guardian*, 5 November 1922.
63. *Manchester Guardian*, 9 November 1922.
64. See D. Tanner, *Political Change*, pp. 383 and 377–380.
65. See, for example, M. Savage, *Dynamics*, pp. 194–199.

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The Politics of Change: The End of Lib-Labism in Stoke-on-Trent, 1918–1921

As a consequence of boundary changes in 1918, Stoke-on-Trent now had three seats in Parliament: Hanley, Burslem and Stoke. Stoke was uncontested in 1918 since all parties agreed unanimously to nominate the sitting Liberal–Labour member John Ward, who remained on active service in Siberia. As evaluation of Manchester has already shown, the operation of the coupon saw the Asquithian Liberals and their political loyalties regarded with suspicion. Neither of the Liberal candidates in Stoke-on-Trent received government endorsement. Four candidates contested the election in Hanley, but with no Unionist candidate it amounted to an intra-left contest. The radical Liberal Robert Outhwaite had been returned at the by-election six years earlier but his vocal criticism of various aspects of war policy had endeared him to neither the local Liberal Association nor the local press and he was, in effect, deselected. The Liberal Association requested that he stand down but he refused to do so. After some persuasion, one of the area’s prominent pottery manufacturers, Leonard Grimwade, was adopted as the officially sanctioned Liberal candidate. The Hanley Liberals had struggled to find a suitable candidate and it appears that the local Liberal Association was unprepared for an election at this time. Grimwade was adopted just days before the beginning of the campaign. He later claimed that he had been urged to stand by an ‘array of local interests’ including the free churches, temperance organisations and manufacturers, as well as the Liberal Association. From the beginning of the contest, Grimwade asserted that he was an ‘enthusiastic supporter of Lloyd George’ and would support the Coalition, although he was anxious

to stress that he did not believe the next government would be a very long one.¹ With the appearance of the coupon, however, he adopted a more combative approach and strongly criticised the Coalition, although he seemed anxious not to place the blame directly upon the Prime Minister.²

The most controversial candidate was the National Democratic Party (NDP)/Coalitionist James Seddon. With predominantly Conservative support, Seddon had an interesting background for a Coalitionist. Having been a trade union organiser, he sat as Labour member for the Newton constituency in Lancashire between 1906 and 1910. He had been President of the Trades Union Congress in 1915 and was a founding member of the Socialist National Defence Committee, later the British Workers League. It has been suggested that a number of NDP candidates were put forward with the primary aim of unseating Liberal or Labour MPs whose attitude towards the war had been viewed as unacceptable by the government.³ Given Outhwaite's high profile role in condemning many aspects of the war, this may have constituted a key reason for Seddon's candidacy in Hanley. The Labour Party candidate, Myles Harper Parker, was a well-known local trade union and Labour activist. He had been a miner, was Secretary to the National Organisation of Enginemmen and Firemen and was a member of the local council.

The new constituency of Burslem saw a more conventional contest with three candidates, independent Liberal Sir Richard Walter Essex, Coalition Conservative Sampson Walker and Labour's Samuel Finney. Essex described himself as a 'Coalitionist with a Liberal bias' and pledged 'whole-hearted support' for the government. He advocated a policy of 'fusion' between the Liberal and Conservative parties and took an exceptionally strong line in respect to dealing with Germany, going as far as arguing for an immediate expulsion of all Germans living in Britain. Until January 1910, Essex had been MP for Cirencester and had then represented Stafford until its reorganisation in 1918. Couponed Coalition Conservative Walker had hoped to stand in Hanley, but with the appearance of James Seddon had been adopted for Burslem. A partner in a successful oil refining business, Walker had been a councillor on Stoke-on-Trent Borough Council since 1910. Throughout the 1918 campaign, he assumed a distinctly anti-Labour stance. Samuel Finney was perceived to be a strong Labour candidate, the local press reporting that he came before electors with 'tremendous personal esteem'.⁴ Finney had unsuccessfully contested Hanley at the 1912 by-election but later become MP for North West Staffordshire following the death of Albert Stanley. Finney was emblematic

of industrial North Staffordshire's Lib-Lab tradition; tellingly, the *Staffordshire Sentinel* reported that he had been 'brought up a Liberal and has been a life-long Liberal but is now a member of the Labour Party'.⁵

The 1912 Hanley by-election had exposed the Labour Party's weakness in the area, prompting the national leadership to focus more vigorously upon these types of constituencies; the party had to improve its position in Britain's industrial heartlands. The 1918 general election marked a significant turning point for the Labour Party both nationally and locally in relation to organisation. It was reported at the time that Labour 'threw more vigour'⁶ into the election than any other party; it was also recognised that the now substantially larger trade union movement strengthened Labour's position considerably, especially in connection with organisation.⁷ The extent of the Labour Party's ambitions in 1918 was clear: nationally the party put up 388 candidates compared to just fifty-six in December 1910. It also put forward a manifesto that demanded attention. For all these reasons, the junior partner in the pre-war Progressive Alliance now appeared a more serious political force. In Stoke-on-Trent, Labour entered the 1918 general election in a very different position from that of the by-election in 1912 and this was reflected in the outcome.

Like their counterparts in Manchester, all the independent Liberal and Labour candidates were united in their fervent opposition to the timing of the election, viewing it as something forced upon the country, not to mention undemocratic because of the inability of soldiers and sailors to participate.⁸ The general view, as one of the candidates put it, was that the government ought to have 'waited for the lads to come back'.⁹ A striking feature of the 1918 general election in both the contested constituencies in Stoke-on-Trent was the restrained manner in which it was conducted; there appeared to be a marked absence of the intense patriotic fervour generally associated with this contest. The idea that voters were interested only in revenge and were overwhelmed with a sense of nationalism is not borne out by detailed analysis of the press coverage of the election campaign in this area. The debate on the terms of the Peace Settlement appeared more restrained and rational than might have been expected. Excepting the Coalitionists, all other candidates were at pains to stress the need for a fair and just peace.¹⁰ As one Labour candidate proclaimed, 'obtaining a just peace does not mean imposing on the defeated enemy the payment of a large indemnity'.¹¹ What was needed, he outlined, was a 'clean peace which would leave no germ of hatred, revenge or vindictiveness out of which could grow a future war'.¹² The independent Liberals

were also anxious to express their desire for a rational settlement, suggesting that only the establishment of a League of Nations could secure future peace. There was little to separate the Liberal and Labour parties on these issues. More importantly, it seems many electors supported them on this matter. There was certainly a percentage of voters in Hanley who supported a harsh settlement and, ultimately, went with the candidate who promised the most in this respect, but the fact remains that the majority were more supportive of the views of Outhwaite than the *Staffordshire Sentinel* cared to admit. The effects of the British electoral system distorted electoral realities.

Few constituencies in 1918 had a sitting member as vocal in his opposition to the conduct of the war as did Hanley. Robert Outhwaite was not in a strict sense an out-and-out pacifist but had taken an increasingly critical stance on various issues associated with the conduct of war, notably conscription, soldiers' pay, army punishments and the timing and nature of the Peace Settlement.¹³ Voting against the introduction of conscription in 1916, he had led a parliamentary agitation for an increase in service pay and had been extremely vocal on the barbarity of British army punishments such as 'crucifixion'. He had been particularly forceful in his questioning of the Secretary of State on the issue of a negotiated peace from early in the spring of 1918.¹⁴ Given the general climate in November 1918, it was inevitable there would be some disquiet over his stance on the war. This came primarily from the local press which mounted a hostile counter-attack, arguing that he had brought shame and dishonour to the town and had made Hanley notorious across the country. The *Staffordshire Sentinel* refused to report his meetings, claiming that it was precluded from printing a large part of his speeches under the terms of the Defence of the Realm Act and stating that it had already 'explained, discussed and refuted' his views.¹⁵ The *Sentinel* claimed that Outhwaite was attempting to 'camouflage his weird misreading of history', that he was a 'casual political wanderer with no party behind him' and concluded that his views were 'hostile to the national interest'.¹⁶ Outhwaite responded by saying that he had been 'misrepresented and slandered for four and a half years'. He claimed his supporters were being intimidated and, at one point, even threatened to sue the newspaper.¹⁷

Although the *Staffordshire Sentinel* reported only one of Outhwaite's election meetings, this provides enough detail to allow us to appreciate the considerable forcefulness of his arguments. In an astonishingly powerful and brave speech to an audience of over 4000 at Hanley's Victoria Hall,

Outhwaite mounted a robust attack on the government's foreign policy. If the country 'surrendered to everything that was basest', he forecast, it would only lead to the 'enslavement of the German people and a war of revenge in twenty years'.¹⁸ For him the choice was clear: 'a peace of revenge' or 'a peace that would last'. He told his constituents that he believed the coming government would be the 'most militaristic ever'. One point he made in particular was that British forces had never enlisted to be sent to Russia 'to protect the property of the capitalists'. Referring to his own constituency, Outhwaite declared it 'a mass of seething misery' exacerbated by the 'inhumanity of the state towards those who had served that state'. He concluded by warning that 'whilst our men went to make the sacrifice of their lives for the extension of freedom and, as they thought, to support human rights ... behind their backs you are creating conditions which mean they will not come back to greater liberty ... [rather] you are permitting to be forged the chains of their enslavement and servitude'.¹⁹ The Victoria Hall audience was reported to have 'applauded very loudly' and there was not a 'single sign of dissent'; this was much to the disappointment of the *Staffordshire Sentinel* who would without doubt have happily reported it in order to underpin its attitude to Hanley's sitting member. It is worth noting that, in his 1917 book *The Land or Revolution*, Outhwaite had written at length about the future he envisaged for returning soldiers. Their fate, he argued, would be 'to take off the khaki to march in the ranks of the unemployed' (Fig. 9.1).²⁰

The Coalition candidate James Seddon was anxious to stress that, in contrast to his opponents, he was a recipient of 'the letter' from Lloyd George. This provoked Grimwade in particular, who contended that Seddon was posing under 'false colours' and should stand down. Seddon's receipt of the coupon had been made public on 28 November. Grimwade claimed that prior to this he had received a letter from Lloyd George wishing him success; clearly he assumed this amounted to official endorsement. Seddon, in response, claimed that rather than splitting the vote and allowing Outhwaite in, Grimwade should retire from the contest altogether. The local Liberal Association viewed this as an outrageous proposition considering the fact that Seddon had appeared uninvited from nowhere.

Seddon was enormously critical of the Labour Party, arguing that social reform was 'not the prerogative of Labour' and that the organisation's claim to represent the workers was wholly inaccurate. He argued that out of four and a half million trade unionists, just two million were nominally affiliated to the Labour Party and so, even based upon its own figures, the

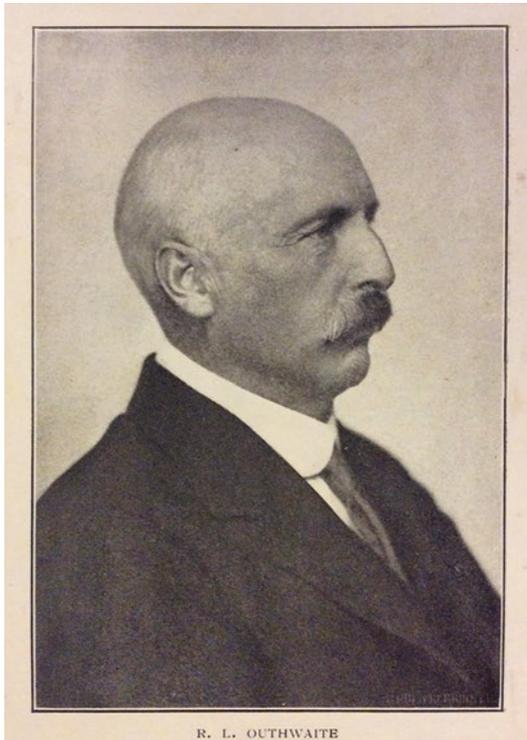


Fig. 9.1 Robert Leonard Outhwaite, MP for Hanley and vocal critic of the Coalition Government

party could not claim to be speaking for more than 50% of organised workers. He told voters that there would be revolution as in Russia if the Labour Party ever obtained power and further attacked his Labour opponent as a man backed by ‘conscientious objectors and pacifists’; if it were up to the Labour Party, he claimed, Germany would ‘get off scot-free’.²¹ He spent much of the rest of the campaign eulogising Lloyd George, the ‘greatest man in European politics’ and talking about hanging the Kaiser. In response to his critics’ accusations of opportunism, Seddon declared that ‘during the Armageddon old political distinctions had been submerged in this great sea of blood’.²² He spent no time discussing actual policy but was forced to defend his own position and play the patriotic card. Besides the question of the coupon, Seddon faced regular taunts

from the other candidates in relation to the party he represented; no one, they pointed out, had ever heard of the NDP. He was viewed as a 'joke' candidate throughout the campaign but both Liberals and Labour no doubt recognised that he was very likely to do considerable harm to their own chances since he possessed government endorsement.

The official Liberal candidate, Leonard Grimwade, conducted a focused campaign on the basis that he was 'a potter for the potteries', declaring that he would be a representative of local interests as opposed to party interests and that change was needed in order to 'make Stoke-on-Trent a great commercial centre'. Grimwade adopted a traditional Liberal platform advocating Irish Home Rule, land reform, education and issues affecting trade, particularly transport. Concerning the urgency of social reform, he said that as a recruiting officer he had 'been struck by the number of low category men'.²³ Ultimately, however, Grimwade aimed to capitalise from his position as a leading pottery manufacturer. In response, the Labour Party's speakers stated that they too wanted a 'potter for the potteries ... but not from that class'.²⁴

In Burslem too there was anger amongst Liberals that the coupon had been given to the Unionist candidate. Coalitionist Sampson Walker claimed that party politics had 'had their day' and what was needed now was 'fusion of the best brains in the country' and 'mutual co-operation' to enable 'great social improvements' to be made. He told voters that coalition offered a 'new conception of Government'²⁵ although he made little attempt to outline in detail what these great improvements would entail. Most of the campaign was spent attempting to discredit the Liberal Association, claiming it had selected Outhwaite in 1912 and was therefore responsible for him now. It is clear this tactic was not always well received by his audiences, some of whom shouted back to him: 'talk about politics'.²⁶ Like Seddon, Walker spent some time outlining his fears about the Labour Party; he argued that whilst he felt the local Labour candidates were 'sincere and honest men', he believed that pacifists within the Labour Party had tried to 'weaken resolve during the war, discredit the forces ... and were making excuses for the enemy'.²⁷ He also declared that he believed Labour's policy programme to be one that 'promoted war between the classes'.²⁸

In contrast to the Coalition candidates' vagueness in respect to policy, the Labour candidates in Hanley and Burslem articulated a practical programme of reform and reconstruction, focusing attention upon issues of immediate concern such as demobilisation and adequate allowances for returned soldiers and their dependents (Fig. 9.2). Samuel Finney's



Fig. 9.2 In a 1918 General Election poster, Labour shows its support for those involved in the war effort (Alamy)

programme also included housing improvements, the lowering of the pension age to sixty, complete equality for the sexes, total nationalisation of all key industries and abolition of the Defence of the Realm Act and conscription.²⁹ These things, he told voters, were ‘more important than hanging the Kaiser’.³⁰ He also proposed Home Rule ‘all round’ and the establishment of a league of nations.³¹ Finney asserted that he did not believe the government had ‘put forward anything of a definite character’.³² He fiercely condemned the government for the timing of the election, more so than any other candidate. At one meeting he told his audience that the government ‘wanted to blindfold folk and lead them to forget by holding a general election’.³³ Finney was exceedingly critical of the coupon, telling

one meeting that whilst the ‘government could trust the people to fight and pay taxes, they could not be trusted to select their own candidates’.³⁴ He condemned continuing press censorship, arguing this represented another attempt to ‘exclude the masses’. The working classes, as he put it, ‘were very important when something had to be done [i.e. the war] but they were not quite so important when they were no longer needed’.³⁵ Like most Labour candidates in 1918, Finney made a direct appeal to discharged soldiers, not that there would have been that many in the constituency.³⁶ During and after the 1912 by-election he had been widely and publicly criticised, ridiculed even, as a weak and ineffective candidate who had been out of his depth in relation to policy; yet in 1918, with the exception of Outhwaite, he was Stoke-on-Trent’s leading critic of the Coalition and a powerful advocate of post-war reconstruction.

As in Hanley, the Liberal candidate Sir Richard Walter Essex defined himself as ‘a sturdy supporter of the Coalition’, although he added that he was ‘mortified to see more of it pass under Conservative domination’.³⁷ Whilst he believed there should be cross party cooperation until the peace was signed, he remained a fierce critic of the way the election was being conducted, saying that it ‘had been sprung in such a way that the soldier was disenfranchised’.³⁸ He went so far as to say that the election was ‘an attempted invasion of the right of the people to free choice’.³⁹ Interestingly, Essex was the only candidate to make a direct appeal to the newly enfranchised female electors.⁴⁰ His meetings regularly included female platform speakers who urged women to ‘take an active part in the political life of the country’. As ‘shareholders in the governing of their native land’, women were told that ‘the home life of the nation and the health of the people’ depended upon them.⁴¹ The wife of the local Liberal Council’s chairman, Mrs A. Rowley Moody, addressed many of his meetings and was exceptionally vocal on the need for fair treatment of soldiers and allowances for wives and mothers. She was an extremely outspoken critic of Lloyd George and the Coalition, on one occasion asking her audience ‘what was the use in sending such dummies to parliament?’.⁴² The Liberal Association, however, recognised that organising the female vote was not going to be an easy task. As Mrs Rowley Moody noted, only about sixty of the party’s workers in the constituency were women; given the number of female voters and the limited time available, it was not easy to ‘enthuse’ the female electors.⁴³ At the beginning of the contest the party managers did not expect women to vote in large numbers, perhaps explaining why few candidates made direct appeals to the new female electorate.⁴⁴

The results of the 1918 general election in Stoke-on-Trent are interesting for many reasons. Inevitably, Hanley's sitting member, Robert Outhwaite, was defeated although probably not as decisively as the local press might have wished.⁴⁵ In securing nearly 3000 votes, Outhwaite demonstrated that there existed a significant degree of dissatisfaction over various aspects of the conduct of the war. The NDP/Coalitionist James Seddon, reflecting results across the rest of the country, captured Hanley on a minority vote.⁴⁶ What surprised many was the substantial advance made by the Labour Party: polling nearly 38% of the popular vote, the Labour candidate was defeated by just 335 votes. Whilst Outhwaite came third, worse still was the disastrous performance of the official Liberal who managed to poll only 7.3% of the vote; the Liberal vote in the constituency had completely collapsed. It is likely that Outhwaite took votes away from Grimwade so a more accurate assessment of the total Liberal poll might be 20.9%, comparable to results in other localities including Manchester. Nonetheless, the 1918 general election represented the near annihilation of the Liberals in a part of the country generally considered to be one of the party's heartlands. Significantly, the total anti-Coalition poll amounted to nearly 60% of the vote. Ultimately, despite the election of James Seddon, the Potteries electorate remained predominantly left of centre and progressive in outlook.

The constituency of Burslem saw an even greater advance for Labour, the party capturing the seat with nearly 45% of the vote. This amounted to a majority of 7% over the second-placed couped Coalition Conservative and made Labour's victory in Burslem one of the party's most spectacular results anywhere in the country. Nationally, the 1918 general election did not represent a tremendous step forward for Labour representation in parliament: just fifty-seven MPs were returned within the context of a greatly increased number of candidates. Labour's success in Burslem might have been the exception to the rule, but the result changed the political landscape of the Potteries forever.

The Asquithian Liberals fared as badly in Burslem as in Hanley, finishing bottom of the poll with 18% of the vote. The total anti-Coalition vote was again extremely high at 62%. Comparisons with previous elections are difficult given the reconstitution of constituencies and the low turnout in 1918, but taking the two constituencies together it is clear that the Labour Party had experienced a remarkable reversal in fortune. In 1912, the party had been unable to make any significant inroads in Hanley at all, had no permanent organisation and had suffered a humiliating defeat at the by-election.

The town appeared staunchly Liberal in both politics and culture. In 1918, however, the Labour Party had very nearly won the seat. Combined with a sensational victory in neighbouring Burslem, Labour's advance in Stoke-on-Trent compared to other industrial regions was striking. The political situation was extremely confused in 1918: political events and the national position of the parties influenced voters' perceptions of the parties in the constituencies. It is arguable that there was a considerably higher degree of dissatisfaction with the government's war policies in 1918 than has generally been recognised, especially in relation to the slowness of demobilisation, conscription itself and the timing of the general election. This was almost certainly the case in Hanley and Burslem when one considers that more electors voted against the Coalition than for it. The anti-Coalition vote amounted to 59.6 and 62.7% respectively.⁴⁷

In assessing the 1918 general election, Arthur Nicholson (secretary of the Midland Liberal Federation) concluded that there were some very clear reasons why usually loyal Liberals switched to Labour and he identified two factors in particular: first, large numbers of Liberals were 'so fiercely anti-Coalition and anti-conscription that they voted Labour as the most marked way of expressing that sentiment', and second, Labour's manifesto in relation to policy 'commanded the general assent of Liberals'.⁴⁸ This implies a significant shift to the left among Liberal supporters as confirmed by the experiences of Hanley and Burslem. Other factors that may have contributed include the national situation which, as one historian has suggested, destroyed the Liberal Party's ability to fight the 1918 general election effectively.⁴⁹ Asquith's failure to provide direction greatly affected the party in the constituencies. Interestingly, neither Liberal candidate made any mention of their leader by name during the campaign in Stoke-on-Trent which suggests that they may have been attempting to disassociate themselves from the national political situation. In an age of mass communication when electors would have been well aware of what was happening nationally, this was virtually impossible. The party split and the routine local organisation of the party was disrupted by the war.⁵⁰ This was, in part, connected to the party truce. As Nicholson was anxious to stress in his post-election report, he had throughout the war repeatedly urged the associations to observe the truce and not do any party work or carry on with party propaganda. The loss of party agents and activists, of course, also placed considerable pressure on the local associations. Alongside the party split, the Liberals were ill-placed to fight an effective campaign in December 1918. This was the same for all parties,

however, and the extent to which it disproportionately disadvantaged the Liberals should perhaps not be over-stated. The Liberals, after all, had perfected a highly sophisticated organisation after 1900. While it does not seem that Liberal organisation was weak to the point of being a disaster, there were clearly problems. Moreover, it is clear that Labour's organisation had improved considerably and the party was prepared for the contest in a way that the Liberal Party was not.⁵¹ The extent of trade union organisation in a particular constituency contributed to Labour's organisational capabilities and candidates received considerable financial assistance in the mining districts.⁵² This needs to be borne in mind when assessing Labour's advance in 1918 in North Staffordshire. Continuity of local leadership and the forcefulness of Labour's evangelicalism, principally connected to policy on post-war reconstruction, were also crucial to the party's challenge in 1918. In areas such as Stoke-on-Trent Labour remained, as it always had been, evangelical and propagandist but it possessed a new focus on advanced and relevant policy. This amounted to a powerful appeal.

Besides the national political situation, other factors contributed to the poor Liberal poll in 1918. Liberal party managers believed a great many of those who had abstained were Liberals who did not wish to vote for the Coalition but would not vote against their party. Both the contested constituencies in Stoke-on-Trent saw exceptionally low turnouts in 1918, 56.5% in Burslem and 58.9% in Hanley. In addition, it was understood that the women's vote went heavily against the Liberals. As Arthur Nicholson observed, 'it is perhaps not too much to say that whatever class they belonged they gave in bulk an anti-German vote' and that 'Lloyd George's declarations against Germany appealed to a by no means unnatural sentiment in the breasts of mothers, wives and daughters smarting under a sense of bereavement, loss and suffering'.⁵³ Locally, other factors need to be borne in mind when considering political change after 1918. The period of the First World War was critical in relation to the politics of the pottery workers, the largest sector in the area. The early stages of the war had witnessed a number of strikes after which various unions took the momentous step in voting to establish a political fund. An equally significant development occurred in 1917 when, for the first time, the pottery unions combined to form a single organisation, the Ceramic and Allied Trade Union. By the end of the war, the potters' union claimed a total membership of 40,000, a fivefold increase compared to 1914; it is likely that this benefited the Labour Party.⁵⁴ Whilst the 1918 general election

had been a disaster for the Liberals across the country, the party believed it would live to fight another day.

After 1918, Labour advanced most markedly in wards dominated by the pottery industry, in Burslem, Tunstall and Hanley. A major factor underpinning the party's immediate post-war municipal expansion was that the trade unions had become more firmly committed to the concept of independent labour representation. In Stoke-on-Trent, the attitude of the pottery unions was of critical importance and, in contrast to the period before 1914, the National Society of Pottery Workers threw its full weight behind Labour's candidates; a number of the union's leaders also stood as candidates. Arthur Hollins, financial secretary of the union, stood in Hanley in 1919 on a platform of municipalisation and won with a substantial majority.⁵⁵ Hollins's opponent was a well-known councillor who had been so sure of victory that he did not even hold any public meetings, claiming that the electors' 'knowledge of his public work' would be enough to ensure his return. As it transpired, Hollins was returned with 60.5% of the vote and a 21% majority.

The 1919 municipal elections, the first contested after the war, marked a watershed in the position of the Labour Party in local government. As in Manchester and many other parts of the country, the principal feature of the results in Stoke-on-Trent was the significant number of seats captured by the party.⁵⁶ From twenty-one candidates Labour was successful in thirteen wards, winning nine new seats. The main issues of the 1919 contests in Stoke-on-Trent were housing, health, revision of the Poor Law and, in particular, the proposed municipal purchase of the local tramways. The Labour candidates claimed that they were 'not merely pledged as individuals' to pursue improvements but 'as a party ... to work for their accomplishment'.⁵⁷ After the contest, the *Staffordshire Sentinel* claimed that Labour had 'gained access to the council chamber ... upon the flowing tide that has swept the country generally', which 'had nothing to do' with local issues; given that these had been central to the campaigns, this appears unlikely.⁵⁸ The 1919 contests saw Labour's representation on the council increase to 38 out of 104, a net gain of twelve.⁵⁹ The party itself believed it 'would now have a powerful influence' on the council.⁶⁰

The extent of Labour's ambitions was apparent the following year when the party put up sixteen candidates for seventeen contested seats. The central planks of Labour's campaigns were again social and economic issues, the atrocious state of housing, health and conditions across pottery towns. The party launched a ferocious assault upon the failure to address

the appalling living conditions in the district. Referring to conditions in his own ward of Longton, one Labour councillor told voters that ‘children in such places [were] not born into the world but damned into it’. Another told voters that ‘if the authority did not attempt to prevent the death of a child it was guilty of manslaughter’ and promised that the Labour group would be prepared to ‘challenge anyone who advocated the cutting-down of essential services in the borough’.⁶¹

As in other areas, a feature of the 1920 contests in Stoke-on-Trent was the active role played by the recently formed Ratepayers’ Association (RPA), which had emerged as a determined attempt to oppose Labour’s proposals to increase the role of the municipal authority.⁶² The RPA warned municipal voters against candidates who advocated ‘grandiose and experimental schemes’.⁶³ Across the country, accusations of ‘municipal extravagance’ and demands for ‘municipal economy’ became a pronounced feature of local politics from the early 1920s. Labour’s opponents warned that if it were to gain overall control, it would ‘put such mad schemes into practice’.⁶⁴ The issue of ‘economy’ more than anything else polarised municipal politics in the immediate post-war period. The results of the 1920 municipal elections saw Labour successful in five of the sixteen seats contested, a net loss of just one seat. This represented a check on the party’s progress but it was by no means a serious setback.

Labour’s opponents adopted an even more vigorous assault upon the party’s municipal policies in 1921. One told electors that ‘the anti-Labour party is the only party which has the interests of the whole electorate at heart’, while another claimed that Labour councillors lacked independence because they were ‘paid for their services by a clique and have an axe to grind’.⁶⁵ Labour’s opponents placed the need for municipal economy at the forefront of their campaigns. The Labour candidates, by contrast, focused their entire campaigns upon the rating and taxation of land values as a means of raising capital to meet municipal expenditure.⁶⁶ They claimed that changes in the rating and taxation of land values would meet the cost of essential services and have the added advantage of forcing vacant land into use, thus helping to alleviate the housing crisis.⁶⁷ The results of the 1921 elections saw the Labour Party capture six seats out of thirteen which, including unopposed returns, represented a net gain of four seats.⁶⁸ The pottery union now had three representatives on the town council, Financial Secretary Arthur Hollins, its President, William Aucock, and General Secretary Samuel Clowes. Aucock obtained the largest majority in the elections winning 75% of the vote. Clowes was particularly significant:

as General Secretary of the Society of Pottery Workers, he had been instrumental in the amalgamation of all of the various unions associated with the industry. Under his leadership, membership had increased substantially, the union had won increases in wages and employers had been encouraged to introduce a number of critical reforms in relation to conditions across the trade. Of enormous importance was the union's success in the abolition of the policy known as 'good from the oven', the practice whereby pottery workers would receive pay only if a product emerged after the whole process in perfect condition. Clowes would go on to become the first potter ever to sit in Parliament when he won the Hanley constituency in 1924; upon his death four years later he was succeeded by Hollins.

In relation to 'municipal economy', the Labour candidates stood their ground. As one of the party's candidates made clear, 'whilst conscious of the need for economy we are not prepared to sacrifice the health of the people and the lives of the children in the name of economy'. Another suggested that 'there is plenty of money [but it] is just not directed to the right things'.⁶⁹ The Labour view was that 'true economy consisted of the wise spending of money not in the cutting down of expenditure',⁷⁰ a sentiment consistently reiterated. The economic context was of considerable importance to the Labour Party's immediate post-war municipal performance in areas such as Stoke-on-Trent. By 1922 over 16,000 of the local population were unemployed and another 1000 on short-time work.⁷¹ As in Manchester, the question of the municipal authority's role in attempts to alleviate unemployment became a central feature of debates during the early 1920s. Crucially, the Labour group appeared to be the most attentive to the problem. In Stoke-on-Trent, the council became noticeably proactive in its policy on unemployment relief and proceeded to establish a wide range of relief schemes.⁷² Overwhelmingly, this was the result of Labour interventions. Given the current economic climate, the council's Finance Committee urged restraint in expenditure on such schemes, but Labour-led opposition to abandoning them regularly won the argument.⁷³

Historians have shown that councils across the country with a significant Labour group developed the most extensive schemes of public works, which contrasted greatly with the 'growing parsimony imposed by the government'.⁷⁴ This was the case in Stoke-on-Trent, where strategies to address the problem of unemployment were largely a consequence of Labour intervention. Labour's record on the promotion of unemployment relief schemes almost certainly worked to the party's advantage, especially in wards where unemployment was high and rising.

NOTES

1. *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 19 November 1918.
2. Ibid.
3. R. Douglas, *History of the Liberal Party*, p. 119.
4. *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 5 December 1918.
5. *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 4 December 1918.
6. *The Times*, 9 December 1918.
7. During the war, trade union membership had doubled to eight million.
8. As elsewhere, the numbers of absent voters in Stoke-on-Trent was very high. It was estimated that 1200 of a total 6200 voters were missing in Burslem, and in Hanley the figure was 3000 of 7000. Whilst the receiving officer made every effort to reach these voters, this was likely to be extremely difficult. Figures from *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 4 December 1918.
9. See the speech by Myles Harper Parker, *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 7 December 1918.
10. The Coalition candidate repeatedly declared that Germany should pay ‘to the utmost farthing for their crimes against humanity’, *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 29 November 1918.
11. See Myles Harper Parker speech, *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 11 December 1918.
12. Ibid.
13. Outhwaite claimed conscription had been introduced to ‘fetter the masses’. For a full account of his views on the subject, see R.L. Outhwaite, *The Land or Revolution* (London, 1917), pp. 105–114 and also, R.L. Outhwaite, *The Ghosts of The Slain* (London, 1916).
14. See Outhwaite’s interjections in the House of Commons, 4, 5 and 12 January, 29 February and 7, 14, 15 and 31 March 1916, [Hansard. Millbanksystems.com/people/mr.robert.outhwaite/1916](http://Hansard.Millbanksystems.com/people/mr.robert.outhwaite/1916)
15. See *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 12 December 1918.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid.
18. All quotes are taken from Outhwaite’s sole reported speech, *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 12 December 1918.
19. *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 12 December 1918.
20. R. L. Outhwaite, *The Land or Revolution* (London, 1917), p. 17.
21. *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 29 November 1918.
22. *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 11 December 1918.
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid.
25. See *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 7 December 1918.

26. See *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 7 December 1918.
27. Ibid.
28. Ibid.
29. Nationalisation included mines, railways, minerals, oils, munitions, waterways as well as the nationalisation of the land.
30. *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 13 December 1918. G.D.H. Cole remembered how audiences at meetings he had spoken at responded very well to his 'demonstrations of the absurdity of slogans such as Hang the Kaiser'; see G.D.H. Cole, *History of the Labour Party From 1914* (New York, 1969), p. 85.
31. See *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 29 November 1918.
32. *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 3 December 1918.
33. Ibid.
34. *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 13 December 1918.
35. *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 3 December 1918.
36. See Labour advertisements, *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 7 December 1918.
37. He became increasingly hostile towards the Coalition, especially in connection to the coupon; see *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 11 December 1918.
38. See *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 5 December 1918.
39. Ibid.
40. In Burslem 11,000 of the 33,789 voters were women; *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 12 December 1918.
41. See *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 13 December 1918.
42. Ibid.
43. *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 13 December 1918.
44. *Midland Liberal Federation Minutes*, 19 March 1919.
45. Outhwaite was not alone in having being deselected by his constituency organisation and subsequently defeated; other perceived Liberal 'pacifists' including C.P. Trevelyan and D. Mason suffered the same fate.
46. Nationally, ten NDP candidates were returned to the House of Commons in 1918. One later defected to the Labour Party. All were defeated in 1922.
47. The total anti-Liberal vote in Burslem amounted to 81.6%. In Hanley (counting Outhwaite as a Liberal) this was 79.1%; the total anti-Labour vote in Hanley was 61.3%.
48. *Midland Liberal Federation Minutes*, 21 March 1919.
49. J. Turner, *British Politics and the Great War* (London and New Haven, 1992), p. 135.
50. See *Midland Liberal Federation Minutes*, 21 March 1919.
51. The Labour Party had been restructuring its organisation for fifteen months prior to the election; in August 1917, Henderson left the government to devote himself to this work with the specific objective of securing funds from the unions; see R. McKibbin, *Evolution*, pp. 112–123.

52. See R. McKibbin, *Evolution*, pp. 156–162.
53. *Midland Liberal Federation Minutes*, 21 March 1919.
54. See F. Burchill and R. Ross, *A History of the Potters' Union* (Hanley, 1977), pp. 165–169.
55. See *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 3 October 1919.
56. The turnout was very low, below 50% on aggregate; in one ward it was 20%.
57. *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 3 October 1919.
58. See *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 3 November 1919.
59. The overall composition was 66 independent and 38 Labour. No party tag was specified other than for the Labour candidates.
60. See *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 13 November 1919.
61. See speech by E. Hobson, *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 29 October 1920.
62. See *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 6 October 1920.
63. See *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 6 November 1920.
64. See *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 7 November 1920.
65. See speeches by F.W. Dale and W.T. Leason, *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 27 October 1921.
66. See *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 20 October–1 November 1921.
67. See speech by W.H. Beecher, *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 27 October 1921.
68. There were contests in fifteen of the twenty-six wards.
69. See speech by W. Aucock, *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 27 October 1921.
70. See speech by R.G. Wass in *ibid.*
71. Figure cited in *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 25 July 1922. See also F. Burchill and R. Ross, *A History of the Potters' Union*, pp. 171–172. By industry, the unemployment figures broke down as follows: 7864 pottery, 1780 iron and steel, 1304 mining and 4801 other.
72. For evaluation of national and local policy towards unemployment see N. Whiteside, *Bad Times: Unemployment in Britain: Unemployment in British Social and Political History* (London, 1991).
73. See reports of council proceedings, *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 6 January, 24 April and 26 May 1921. Throughout the remainder of 1921 and the whole of 1922 many schemes were put into effect which provided relief for thousands of men at a cost of £162,625. See *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 27 September 1922 which includes a table outlining the breakdown of these schemes.
74. See N. Whiteside, *Bad Times*, p. 71.

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The Rise of Labour: The 1922 General Election in Stoke-on-Trent

The political parties in Stoke-on-Trent appear to have been taken by surprise at the prospect of an election in 1922 and consequently the constituency organisations were slow in their preparation for the contest.¹ After the last general election, the political situation was complex: Hanley was represented by an independent Coalitionist, Burslem by Labour and Stoke by a member who had been unopposed in 1918 and described himself as Independent Labour. Samuel Finney, who had won Burslem for Labour in 1918, was retiring, having apparently fallen out with the party.

The 1922 general election saw a triangular contest in Hanley between Labour candidate Myles Harper Parker, an Asquithian Liberal, John Whitehouse, and the sitting member, James Seddon, who now stood as an independent.² In Stoke, the sitting member John Ward, now promoting himself as independent Labour, was challenged by prominent local trade unionist and official Labour candidate John Watts. Burslem also saw a straight fight between Labour's Andrew Maclaren and a National Liberal, Sydney Malkin. None of the Stoke-on-Trent constituencies saw a Conservative candidate, suggesting that the local party was either unable to mount a serious challenge or that they did not perceive defeating Labour to be their key priority. It is significant that a week after the election had been declared, the Burslem Conservative and Unionist Association confirmed that they would continue to assist the adopted Coalition Liberal candidate.³ Malkin was one of the district's most prominent pottery

manufacturers, was president of the local Chamber of Commerce during the war and had a distinguished background in the municipal politics of the town having served as alderman and mayor.⁴ Like the majority of North Staffordshire Liberals, he was also a well-known and active Methodist. Given Malkin's local prestige, it is perhaps unsurprising that the local Conservative organisation had decided not to oppose him. The Chairman of the Conservatives told the local press that, whilst Malkin 'had always been progressive and a firm believer in trade unionism', he was reassuringly 'opposed to anything that would destroy the best interests of the country by revolutionary, Communist or Socialist methods'.⁵ For his part, Malkin stated that he 'wholeheartedly supported' Bonar Law because the country presently 'faced a great danger in the Labour Party'; they, the Liberals and Conservatives, were 'forced to put their shoulders together'.⁶ Conservative assistance did not go so far as contributing to Malkin's funds however, and he had to pay his own election expenses although he let it be known that he was doing so in order to 'preserve [his] independence from any wire-pullers'.⁷ Throughout the campaign, Malkin received valuable support from many prominent local Conservatives and the press even began to label him the 'Liberal and Unionist' candidate although he never used this term himself.

Malkin's Labour opponent in Burslem was Andrew Maclaren. At thirty-nine years of age, Maclaren was far younger than any previous Labour candidate in the district and represented a very different type of Labour man. He was fiercely radical compared to his predecessors. Born in Glasgow, Maclaren had been educated at the Glasgow School of Art and had become an engineer. He had initially been a Liberal⁸ but had then joined the ILP and the Union of Democratic Control during the early stages of the war.⁹ An associate of Hanley's former member Robert Outhwaite, the two had much in common; they were both highly critical of the war and keen land reformers. From the outset of the campaign, Labour's opponents attempted to play the 'red menace' card in an attempt to drum up right-wing misconceptions of Labour's nationalisation programme. The only candidate in Stoke-on-Trent not to employ this strategy was the Asquithian Liberal, John Whitehouse, in Hanley.

For the first time in the history of the constituency, the 1922 general election saw Labour contesting Stoke as an independent force. This caused considerable apprehension amongst Stoke's Liberals and Conservatives who had already agreed to cooperate in their support of the sitting member's candidature. It is difficult to establish whether their joint endorse-

ment of John Ward resulted from anticipation of Labour intervention. Ward had been elected in 1906 as a Liberal–Labour member and the Liberals had always claimed him as one of their own, which was unsurprising given that he had accepted the Liberal whip in Parliament. By 1922, however, he had become increasingly right wing and during the campaign went to considerable lengths to attack his Labour opponents who, he claimed, were extremists and revolutionaries. Ward sought desperately to disassociate himself from the Labour Party, arguing that it was too narrow and not representative of the whole working class and declaring that he did not intend to ‘sign away his liberty’.¹⁰ For him, Ward argued, the war had ‘killed party [politics]’ and he was ‘prepared to help any reasonable combination which may evolve to carry out the internal government of the country’.¹¹ He believed that opposition to him had been ‘engineered by an extremist section of the Labour Party’.¹² It was more likely, however, that the local Labour Party had grown weary of Ward’s Lib-Labism, believing that since they had the complete support of trade unions across the area they had as much right as anyone to contest the seat. In the context of economic depression and with the effects of the miners’ strikes of 1920 and 1921, as disruptive for the pottery workers as for the miners, there now emerged a more definable sense of union solidarity in the area and recognition of the need for combined political activity. It is also arguable that, because of industrial hardship, the disparity between employer and worker became even clearer. This undoubtedly facilitated a political identity very distinct from former Liberal–Labour sentiments.

The Labour Party officially launched its campaign on 24 October with a large demonstration at Hanley’s Victoria Hall, during which their key objectives for the forthcoming contest were outlined. The national manifesto, *Labour’s Call to the People*, was issued two days later and received considerable attention from both the national and local press. From the beginning of the campaign, Labour remained anxious to present itself as a constitutional and moderate organisation. The party’s opening meeting saw platform speakers reiterate that they had always ‘fought the battle of constitutionalism and had fought extremism in their own ranks ... They were neither communists nor revolutionaries and [were] committed to upholding the authority of the House of Commons’.¹³ Harper Parker claimed that ‘to achieve social and economic emancipation workers must look to a party of their own creation’.¹⁴ The Labour Party represented a ‘new idea in politics’ he declared, because it was ‘determined to secure a more humanised economic and industrial system’. He added that Labour

was often accused of living ‘in a world of idle dreams’ but ‘many policies the party had stood for over the past twenty-five years were now accepted planks of the other parties’ platforms today [so] what was in the land of dreams today could clearly come into the realm of practical politics tomorrow’.¹⁵

The national Labour Party manifesto generated a considerable degree of discussion. In it, Labour advocated an extensive programme of social, industrial and economic reform and a progressive foreign policy.¹⁶ The manifesto’s economic proposals were likely to be the most controversial. Briefly, the programme made the argument that the national debt was a ‘dead weight burden’ and proposed the creation of a war debt redemption fund by way of a special graduated levy on fortunes exceeding £5600. The manifesto stated that the party desired a ‘degree of restitution from the fortunes made during the war’. Labour’s economic policy involved a system of taxation in which the burden would fall according to a person’s ability to pay. In the context of 1922, this represented radical economic thinking and selling it to certain sections of society would prove difficult. Other aspects of economic policy included a proposed super tax on incomes above £850 and the imposition of death duties on large estates. In relation to unemployment, Labour promised ‘work or maintenance’, the provision of employment or adequate support. This would entail the establishment of a ‘large number of programmes of necessary and useful public works’. The manifesto advocated significant industrial reorganisation including the complete nationalisation of the nation’s key industries: coal, railways, transport, iron and steel. In terms of social policy, Labour emphasised the urgent needs of the nation in relation to health and housing. Greater provision of old age pensions was proposed, alongside the complete abolition of the poor law and an extensive programme of house building. Another important element was the party’s declared resistance to any attempt to ‘cut off or cut down’ ex-servicemen’s pensions.

Reflecting the temper of the national manifesto, the central issue for Labour’s candidates in Stoke-on-Trent in 1922 concerned the record of the Coalition Government. Although it had categorically ‘failed the people’, Bonar Law’s new administration did not appear to possess any concrete solutions to contemporary problems. In Stoke-on-Trent, Labour’s candidates focused upon a variety of issues outlined in the national manifesto but made a point of applying them directly to local conditions. An issue of increasing concern for pottery workers was industrial disease and the extent of poor health in the city. As Andrew Maclaren observed, death

rates in Stoke-on-Trent were appalling. Tunstall possessed the second worst death rate in the country and had the highest infant mortality rate in the United Kingdom. In one powerful speech, Maclaren argued that, despite the potter 'being an eminent craftsman, [he] lived under conditions that the royal family wouldn't keep dogs under'.¹⁷ Another repeated theme during the contest was the inequality of the burdens of war. Myles Harper Parker in Hanley reminded one audience that 'Britain had lost 746,000 men, one million had been wounded and yet 340,000 men had made £2,846,000'; the poorer classes were now facing grinding poverty as well as being asked to carry a disproportionate burden.¹⁸ Throughout the campaign, the Labour candidates stressed the 'just and equitable' character of their party's economic proposals, insisting that there was nothing confiscatory about the Capital Levy.¹⁹ They repeatedly asked their audiences how many of those present had more than £5000, and inevitably the response was always in the negative. John Watts in Stoke compared his Labour politics to his religion, emphasising that the principles of economic justice were contained within the New Testament.²⁰ He told one audience that 'a man's politics should be his religion and his religion his politics' and claimed that the attainment of a just distribution of wealth would lead to the 'realisation of the kingdom of God on Earth'.²¹ In an area so heavily religious in outlook, this approach was potentially persuasive. A significant amount of the Labour candidates' time was taken up with refuting their opponents' accusations of Communist tendencies. The candidates were quick to assert their feelings on such accusations: Watts was typical in declaring them 'not just unfair, but below the belt'. He told voters that he had never 'confiscated anyone's property or inflicted pain on anyone', but he asked his audience to consider British policy towards Russia, which had been a disaster.²²

Andrew Maclaren made explicit efforts to appeal directly to Liberal supporters in the constituency of Burslem. A former Liberal, he argued that *now* only Labour existed as a viable party of progressive politics; it was taking the place of the old Liberal Party.²³ Maclaren asked voters whether they were going to vote for Bonar Law and his colleagues or for a party that actually had a programme. As the campaign progressed, it was reported that interest in Maclaren's meetings had become so great that 'people were paying large sums of money to hear him speak'. Interestingly, it was also reported that a significant proportion of his audiences were very young.²⁴

The two Liberal candidates who stood in Stoke-on-Trent in 1922 came from opposing wings of their ‘party’ and there were, unsurprisingly, marked political and ideological differences between them. John Whitehouse in Hanley represented the radical wing of the Liberal Party and was a noted social reformer with a strong political background.²⁵ From the outset of the 1922 general election campaign, Whitehouse attacked the government’s record in respect of social reform and ‘had no hesitation in regarding himself as a labour candidate [because] all [his] public life [he had] represented the labouring classes’.²⁶ His stance on the majority of issues was not dissimilar to the Labour position: whilst he opposed Labour’s Capital Levy, he believed in a graduated income tax and in the taxation of land values. The land question, Whitehouse argued, was the root of the social problem and he advocated nationalisation of all key industries, particularly the mines and railways.²⁷ Unemployment, he stated, was a scandal and, while he had ‘no scientific solution to it’, he objected to an ‘inadequate dole’ as the answer, especially since there was tremendous work to be done in housing, agriculture and public works. In particular, Whitehouse sought to emphasise the government’s broken promises and betrayal in relation to ex-servicemen who were ‘tramping the streets trying to get employment’.²⁸ He stated that he would like to see the total abolition of the House of Lords and free secondary and higher education for all.²⁹ In Hanley, therefore, the Liberal and Labour candidates both offered radical programmes.

Before 1914, the Labour Party had been unable to distinguish itself from the Liberals in relation to issues and policy. By 1922, the situation was reversed and the radical wing of the Liberal Party now found it increasingly difficult to articulate anything that Labour was not already advocating. Wilson has suggested that many Liberals sought to handle ‘the Labour problem’ by ‘making criticisms [that] did not amount to outright denunciation’,³⁰ yet this simply served to reinforce the fact that Labour had ‘stolen their thunder’.³¹ Despite the efforts of radical Liberals such as John Whitehouse, the Liberal Party nationally did not present the appearance of an active force for social reform; there were simply too few candidates like Whitehouse. In addition, the Capital Levy and nationalisation gave Labour’s radicalism a specific and practical economic focus which was different from anything on offer from the left of the Liberal Party. In this respect, the Liberal and Labour platforms were clearly distinguishable although some candidates such as W. M. Pringle in Manchester in 1919 had made Capital Levy a key plank of their campaigns. Ultimately, however,

the Labour Party's economic programme struck a greater chord with working-class voters than did continued Liberal emphasis on free trade and land reform.

In Burslem, Sydney Malkin focused more or less exclusively on his objections to Labour's programme, which aimed to 'abolish capitalism' and 'surrender liberty to bureaucratic control'.³² Labour's programme amounted to 'total confiscation' which, if enacted, would eradicate private enterprise and thrift. He constantly reiterated his belief that employers and workers 'should be friends' and voiced his strong objection to 'disastrous class struggles'. He believed 'wholeheartedly' in Bonar Law's programme although he was never able to elaborate on what that actually involved. The few issues Malkin did address included war pensions, which he thought ought to be simplified, and the problem of unemployment, which he believed could be alleviated by means of schemes of productive work and an extension of unemployment insurance. The National Liberal campaign in Burslem was negative and offered little discussion of policy. This contrasted greatly with the Asquithian Liberal campaign in neighbouring Hanley, where Whitehouse advocated a radical programme whilst avoiding any form of 'red scare' tactics. These differences epitomised Liberal divisions at the time. Whilst independent Liberals more often than not remained at least in some way progressively minded, the National Liberals appeared virtually indistinguishable from the Conservatives. In Burslem, Malkin could easily have been a Conservative candidate and this is, no doubt, why he was assured of local Conservative support. However, this swing to the right amongst the National Liberals represented a major obstacle to the reunification of the Liberal Party in an immediate sense, and may subsequently have precipitated and then underpinned the anti-Labour cleavage during the 1920s within the reunited Liberal Party.

Hanley's sitting member, James Seddon, who had captured the seat as a Coalitionist in 1918 and now contested it as an independent, adopted a similar approach to Malkin, focusing on the 'Labour menace'. He told voters that the 1922 general election was 'about systems [and] Labour's system [was] the road to destruction [and] if they started with nationalisation they would end with Communism and anarchy'.³³ Seddon claimed they were 'threatened with revolution and faced the threat of confiscation'.³⁴ Few in Hanley possessed much to 'confiscate' and red scare tactics were unlikely to persuade voters that the road to ruin was nigh. Seddon endured the frequent sabotage of his election posters³⁵ and considerable

heckling at his meetings, which he believed was an organised attempt to break them up.³⁶

In Stoke, the sitting member John Ward also fought the contest largely on the question of a perceived socialist threat, claiming he was ‘astonished’ that he was being opposed by ‘a combination of extremists’ and explaining that in the ‘present abnormal conditions’ he would support ‘any group capable of carrying on government’.³⁷ He was keen to stress that he could have had the official ‘Labour tag’ if he had wished but this would have necessitated joining the party and obeying the party whip which he was not prepared to do. Throughout the contest, Ward cited his experiences in Russia and argued that, if Labour’s programme was enacted in Britain, the country would face the same ‘anarchy and ruin’ as that country.³⁸ His organisation appears to have been weak in comparison to his official Labour Party opponent.³⁹ Admitting he had no money for huge posters such as those of Watts, he did not seem unduly worried because he did not think ‘anyone took any notice of them anyway’.⁴⁰ This was a significant miscalculation. The 1922 contest was one of the first truly modern general election campaigns in British history; never before had so much advertising been used during an election. Nineteen million leaflets were distributed across the country, the Conservative Party alone had put up over 300,000 posters and it was estimated that the other parties combined had equalled this.⁴¹ Liberal headquarters had spent nearly £127,000 on the campaign and most of this was allocated to assisting candidates, even those standing in less hopeful regions in order ‘to keep the party fighting along a national front’.⁴² As one historian has suggested, although the Liberals were not expecting to win office, they made a determined effort to re-establish themselves as a major political party.⁴³

The central issue throughout the 1922 general election in all three Stoke-on-Trent constituencies was the debate surrounding the programme and policies advocated by the Labour Party. For Labour this meant arguing for the urgency to enact its programme; for the party’s opponents, it meant mounting the strongest possible objection to it. From the outset, the Labour Party dissociated itself from extreme socialism, presenting itself as a constitutional and reformist political organisation. It did this by emphasising the continuity of its ideology. Consequently, the ‘red scare’ failed to make a significant impact in the minds of electors in the area. Furthermore, Labour’s candidates hardly appeared to be ‘frightening’. A man such as Myles Harper Parker had been known for many years

and was perceived to be a respectable pillar of the community, recognised for his political, trade union and religious work.

The outcome of the 1922 general election was one that contemporary observers found extremely difficult to predict. The *Manchester Guardian* went so far as to depict it as ‘the most baffling of modern times’ and as ‘the don’t-know-where-we-are election’.⁴⁴ Polling day saw intense press speculation in respect of this most ‘baffling’ of elections. It was generally considered that the sitting member for Stoke, John Ward, would win comfortably, although even here the impact of a Labour candidate remained an uncertain factor. Capturing Hanley would represent a major advance for the Labour Party in the area. The party had been humiliated at the 1912 by-election, having obtained less than 12% of the vote, but confidence was no doubt strengthened by the fact that the miners’ and potters’ trade unions had decided to support independent Labour. In his report on the election, the Secretary of the Midland Liberal Federation pinpointed this factor as being of critical importance in determining the results in many areas in the region. He concluded that the election had ‘strikingly illustrated the power of the trade unions’.⁴⁵ The Miners’ Federation was identified as having been enormously influential. It was widely believed that a last-moment circular urging members to vote for the Labour Party changed the course of the campaign in some constituencies. The Midland Liberal Federation believed that Labour ‘secured victory at the last minute’ in areas where they appeared to have no chance at all; even where Labour did not win, it propelled them into second place at the expense of Liberal candidates. This was, of course, entirely speculative though the fact that the union had urged members to vote for Labour candidates was no doubt a significant factor.

In 1918 the Labour Party had failed to capture Hanley despite polling well, obtaining 38.7% of the vote, just 1.7% less than the winning Coalitionist. This had been within the context of a four-way contest in a highly unusual election on a low turnout. Labour had made substantial inroads in municipal politics since 1918 and entered the general election in 1922 with an unprecedented confidence, ambition and optimism. The scale of the victory, however, was remarkable, suggesting a major realignment had taken place in the politics of the town. Labour’s major ‘push’ had paid off.⁴⁶ Harper Parker was returned on 48.8% of the vote with a margin of 20.1% over sitting member James Seddon. For Hanley’s new Member of Parliament, the result demonstrated voters’ ‘confidence in the honesty and intentions of the Labour Party’.⁴⁷ There seems little reason to doubt this interpretation but it needs to be set against the backdrop of severe disappointment over the

Coalition Government's failure to deliver on their promised 'land fit for heroes to live in'. The Labour Party was also advantaged in Hanley in that its candidate was a well-known local figure with an impressive background in local trade unionism, municipal politics and the religious life of the community. Another factor reported to have reinforced the swing to Labour was the voting of ex-servicemen, whom the local press believed voted on bloc for the party.⁴⁸

The Labour Party's success in Burslem was equally impressive. Despite an extremely narrow victory, just 0.8% of the vote, the result was significant because it suggests that Labour had consolidated its position in the division and was now less reliant upon the local personality factor. Andrew MacLaren represented a new kind of Labour candidate in this area. Throughout the campaign, he had never been afraid to express his radicalism, had denounced war and militarism and ferociously attacked the outgoing government's record, particularly its failure to honour its promise of a 'land fit for heroes to live in'. The *Staffordshire Sentinel* believed it was 'a general desire on the part of the working classes for a better economic position'⁴⁹ rather than MacLaren's stance on the war that led to his victory. The local press was clearly unimpressed with Burslem's new member, bemoaning the loss of Finney, 'a Labour man with a fine old Liberal flavour' unfortunately 'jockeyed out by extremists'.⁵⁰ As in Hanley, attention was given to Labour's well-organised campaign when compared to the apparent weakness of the National Liberals. It should be remembered that Malkin received significant electoral assistance from the local Conservative organisation and, although he never defined himself as such, he was perceived to be a National Liberal/Conservative candidate. Although a combined National Liberal/Conservative effort clearly posed a considerable challenge to Labour's claim on Burslem, such an alliance failed when it came to capturing the seat. Given Malkin's position, it was probable, if not certain, that MacLaren would have captured the radical, or at least non-National, Liberal vote; his approach would have appeared very attractive to that section of the party. Considering the previous member's 'Liberal' politics and local status, Andrew MacLaren's victory in 1922 represented a significant break from the town's Lib-Lab past. Before 1914, popular working-class Liberalism had remained strong and this had retarded Labour's development as an independent entity. By 1922, the experience of war, continued unemployment, fragmenting relations with employers and a perceived weakness of present day Liberalism all contributed to a very different approach to politics. That said, given

the small margin between Labour and the National Liberal in Burslem, the Labour Party could not afford to be complacent.

In Stoke, John Ward's personal appeal was expected to ensure his return, yet at nearly 40% of the vote the size of his Labour opponent's poll surprised many. Ward argued that his return represented a 'victory for sane democracy and constitutional government'⁵¹ but the figures suggested that many of Stoke's electors had become dissatisfied with his style of labour representation and appeared willing to support a party with a more definite programme of economic, industrial and social reform. Given the relatively limited organisation, the Labour Party in Stoke had performed impressively.⁵² After the poll, Watts claimed that it had 'had to fight several forces, Tory, Liberal and the *Staffordshire Sentinel*'. He argued that Ward had been 'misleadingly reported as a Labour candidate' throughout the election and the newspaper's coverage of his own campaign had been extremely prejudiced.⁵³ Indeed, careful reading of the *Sentinel's* reporting lends support to this assertion. Nonetheless, Watts believed the election had been extremely useful because it at least 'laid the foundations of a working Labour Party in the constituency'.⁵⁴ With more time and better organisation in the future, the party could and would do better. Indeed, analysis of the 1922 general election in Stoke-on-Trent illustrates effectively that when the Labour Party was properly established in an area such as Burslem, the old-style Lib-Labism of the pre-war period was severely challenged, facilitating a significant realignment in party loyalties.

Economic conditions were an important dimension of political change in the aftermath of the First World War. Immediately after the end of hostilities, trade in the pottery industry was buoyant but this was followed by a sharp decline. As Burchill and Ross's work illustrates, the pottery workers suffered severely during the early 1920s, primarily because of substantial wage reductions,⁵⁵ and from 1922 unemployment within the industry was running at around 13.5%.⁵⁶ From this point onwards, unemployment within the pottery industry increased well above the national average and by 1926 it reached nearly 40%.⁵⁷ It is possible that North Staffordshire felt the impact of depression more deeply because the area had been relatively stable beforehand, though pre-war economic prosperity should not be exaggerated.⁵⁸

The years immediately after 1918 had seen unemployment leap to two million and the Coalition was increasingly perceived as conspiring with employers against the working classes; the Sankey Report could have been interpreted in this way.⁵⁹ By 1922, the political impact of this was a

defensiveness across the labour movement unsurpassed in recent history. It is not hard to understand why the working classes in areas such as Stoke-on-Trent would have felt a sense of betrayal in the immediate aftermath of the First World War. The 1922 general election has to be set against the backdrop of working-class disappointment and anger at the perceived failure of social reform, housing, education, the treatment of ex-servicemen, stagnation of industry and the increasingly precarious position of the trade unions, particularly after the experience of 'black Friday' and the miners' lock-out of the previous year. By the end of 1922, Labour appeared to be the only party with a sincere commitment to addressing these critical issues. The party had dramatically improved its organisation, was aided by significant union assistance and its candidates proved to be extremely capable advocates of policy on the platform. By contrast, the Liberal organisation in Stoke-on-Trent was virtually non-existent and the party remained split.⁶⁰ Even where the Liberals possessed a gifted radical candidate such as Whitehouse in Hanley, it probably seemed to electors that the party had 'stolen' the Labour Party's ideas since that party was articulating the same policy on a united and national front.⁶¹ These factors contributed to the declining strength of the Liberal Party in Britain's industrial heartlands such as Stoke-on-Trent. The real point of breakthrough for Labour in parliamentary politics was 1922, not 1918 or during the war itself, and was inextricably linked to mounting economic crisis and the question of trust as to the current political situation.

The impact of war upon the political attitudes of both combatants and civilian voters is an issue of critical importance, although it is not something that can be easily defined.⁶² A number of historians have shown that provision for ex-servicemen, their wives and dependents was far from generous and this in itself may have served to generate considerable dissatisfaction with government and the established parties.⁶³ The evidence from Stoke-on-Trent supports the contention that such discontent remained high after the war. Throughout the 1922 general election, all parties paid attention to the concerns of ex-servicemen, yet it was Labour candidates who campaigned most vigorously on the issue. The key question was who the ex-service voters would trust most; the available evidence suggests that it was the Labour Party.

It has been suggested that age became a key determinant in voter allegiance after the First World War. This appears to be supported by evidence from Stoke-on-Trent, where reports suggest that a significant proportion

of Labour supporters were younger men and women. Studies have concluded that men who had not yet come of political age prior to the war were likely to display low levels of identification with the established parties.⁶⁴ This generational factor has been overshadowed by discussions of the emergence of class as the principal determinant of voter allegiance. In 1922 the newly enfranchised, other older voters and a large proportion of younger voters formed 60% of the total electorate and were perceived by party managers and journalists to be volatile because they were 'unattached to any of the great parties'.⁶⁵ The established parties, particularly the Conservatives and in 1922 the National Liberals, were mindful of Labour's potential to make gains and it was therefore not only an ideological factor which prompted them to resort to 'red scare' tactics. Analysis of Stoke-on-Trent shows that this strategy backfired spectacularly. Much of Labour's new strength was derived from the newly enfranchised; those voting for the first time in 1922 had had a traumatic early political education. The experience of war, the failure of the Coalition to fulfil the promises of 1918 and mounting economic insecurity had a significant impact. Whilst some older Liberal voters may have remained loyal in their traditional allegiance, younger voters perceived the Labour Party as the only serious opposition to an established politics that had failed them; continuing divisions within the Liberal Party aided this process.

Given the predominance of religious Nonconformity in North Staffordshire, it is also relevant to consider possible changes of allegiance within this group. Nonconformity was exceptionally important in cementing popular working-class Liberalism and historians have illustrated how the Liberal Party's resurgence after 1900 was underpinned by the revival of political nonconformity. This, however, was a short-lived phenomenon that did not survive the war and some have gone so far as to suggest that Nonconformity ceased to count at all in politics after 1918.⁶⁶ Koss and Catterall, for example, have suggested that the Free Church leadership became less exclusively Liberal after 1918 and this had the effect of lessening the political profile of Nonconformity.⁶⁷ The influence of Nonconformity in the evolution of the Labour Party has been well documented. From its inception, the parliamentary party had drawn the greater majority of its membership from the Free Churches and ideologically drew a great deal of its inspiration from radical Nonconformity.⁶⁸ Many Nonconformists were keen social reformers and their religious outlook underpinned their politics. As Smith suggests, the socialism of many early Labour activists was a peculiarly 'ethical kind

and owed little to Marxist theory'.⁶⁹ Before 1914, religious identity was central to both Liberal and Labour activists in Stoke-on-Trent. Whilst there was no immediate collapse of Nonconformity during the First World War, there was an identifiable political realignment of Nonconformists, many of whom were keen social reformers and had been opposed to the war; this worked to Labour's advantage. Crucially, the most significant shift from Liberal to Labour amongst Nonconformists was within the working classes.⁷⁰ Thus in an area such as Stoke-on-Trent, both largely working class and predominantly Nonconformist, this shift is likely to have been substantial. It is interesting to note that all four Labour candidates who contested seats in 1918 and 1922 were Nonconformists and one of them, John Watts in 1922, went so far as to express his politics almost exclusively within the context of his religious conscience. One might suggest that the Labour candidates came to embody the political spirit of the Nonconformist conscience most explicitly. It was in producing radical candidates that Nonconformity was most significant in the rise of Labour. Additionally, as one historian has suggested, 'socialism found greatest *acceptance* in areas where its ethic was reinforced by prevailing religious tradition'.⁷¹ Stoke-on-Trent supports this assertion; the overwhelming majority of Labour activists continued to come from Methodist backgrounds and interspersed their politics with their religion, applying both to the present state of the nation. Historians recognise that religion was significant in party political affiliations in Britain before 1914. In areas such as industrial North Staffordshire, religious affiliation continued to play a critical role in party choice amongst voters.

Electoral politics in post-war Stoke-on-Trent reveal that the Labour Party continued to espouse past traditions, progressive Liberalism within the context of the Nonconformist conscience, while at the same time promising a new social and economic order, based to some extent upon socialist doctrine. This, and the forcefulness of its delivery, gave it a powerful appeal. The candidates' advocacy of national policy at the constituency level and the application of policy to local circumstances were of critical importance in ensuring that Labour no longer existed as an adjunct of Liberalism, but was now a truly independent entity, a national party with a positive forward-looking programme and one aim: government itself.

DEVELOPMENTS IN POLITICS IN STOKE-ON-TRENT 1918–1922: SUMMARY

Before the outbreak of war, industrial North Staffordshire was an area deeply impregnated with popular working-class Liberalism and there appeared little prospect of an imminent Labour breakthrough. After 1918, both the political situation and the salient issues changed. Questions such as unemployment, the organisation of industry, housing, health and pensions became central to the political debate. In the process, they replaced the more traditional issues on which the Edwardian Liberal revival had largely been based. These issues became increasingly relevant to the now expanded electorate, but the Liberal Party no longer existed in a form voters perceived capable of carrying through such reforms. In predominantly working-class areas such as Stoke-on-Trent, there existed significant potential for a major Labour advance based on issues and policy alone. Even within the unusual circumstances of the 1918 general election, Labour made a significant advance in Stoke-on-Trent by winning one of the parliamentary seats. The real breakthrough, however, came in 1922 when it won Hanley, the seat so controversially denied it a decade earlier. This represented a major departure in the politics of the Staffordshire Potteries; few areas saw such absolute destruction of the Liberals between 1918 and 1922. Not everything changed. In Stoke, John Ward could still attract enough support to retain his seat until 1929, but even he was in danger when faced with official Labour opposition. The effect of war on the Liberal Party in Stoke-on-Trent was crushing. Strikingly, one of the party's greatest triumphs there, the Hanley by-election which returned the rising radical Robert Outhwaite, proved also to be its last.⁷²

Wilson suggests that the Liberals in 1922 were 'in no position to capture attention by the forcefulness or novelty of their programme'.⁷³ The evidence of Stoke-on-Trent supports this to an extent. In Burslem, the National Liberal appeared old-fashioned and out of touch, although in Hanley the Asquithian Liberal was radical and dynamic. Yet both failed to compete with the Labour candidates' economic and social reform programme. 'Red scare' tactics dominated the political debate during the 1922 general election but Labour's candidates remained focused on their own programme and rose above accusations of Bolshevism. In 1919 the *Manchester Guardian* had suggested that the 'socialist menace [was a] political bogey by which we decline to be terrified'.⁷⁴ It appears that the greater proportion of Stoke-on-Trent's electors were of the same mind in

1922. Ultimately, the Coalition Government was perceived to have failed the British people in its promise to provide ‘a land fit for heroes to live in’. The Labour Party’s focus upon this point was decisive in securing its breakthrough at both the parliamentary and municipal level after 1918. Analysis of electoral campaigns in Stoke-on-Trent from 1918 shows the importance of issues to Labour’s post-war advance and how candidates’ abilities in advocating policy were so significant. Political events helped the Labour Party expand but political allegiances had to be harnessed and built upon. Emotive issues such as a perceived inequality of sacrifice both during and after the First World War could be used to mobilise political support and, as this analysis of Stoke-on-Trent testifies, the Labour Party did this particularly effectively after 1918.

NOTES

1. The Labour Party stands out, however, as having undertaken a significant amount of work in both Hanley and Burslem, having held regular indoor and outdoor demonstrations for some time. Little had been done in Stoke since the party had not decided to contest the seat. See *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 23 October 1922.
2. At the relatively young age of forty-nine, John Whitehouse represented a significant coup for the Hanley Liberals. He had been elected for mid-Lanarkshire in January 1910 and had been a member of many departmental committees relating to education or children’s legislation. He went on to become Parliamentary Private Secretary to Lloyd George from 1913 to 1915.
3. At the time of his adoption in December 1921, the local Conservatives pledged their support and agreed not to oppose him. Once the national position changed, it was unclear whether this assurance would remain. The Burslem Conservatives waited a week before making their intentions known.
4. In economic policy, Malkin was a committed free trader and was unlikely to waver on this. Given that this was no longer the issue for the Conservatives that it had been historically, it did not pose a problem for cooperation.
5. *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 30 October 1922.
6. See *ibid.*
7. *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 7 November 1922.
8. Maclaren continued to espouse Liberal doctrines, notably the single tax. He saw little incompatibility of Labour’s programme with more Liberal-based ideology such as land reform.

9. Details from M. Stenton and S. Lees, *Who's Who of British Members of Parliament, Volume 3* (Sussex and New Jersey, 1979) p. 227.
10. See *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 6 November 1922.
11. *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 30 October 1922.
12. *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 7 November 1922.
13. *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 25 October 1922.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid.
16. The Labour Party manifesto was printed in full in the *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 26 October 1922.
17. *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 8 November 1922.
18. *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 7 November 1922.
19. See Harper-Parker on Capital Levy, *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 7 November 1922.
20. See *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 4 November 1922.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid.
23. See *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 5 November 1922.
24. *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 7 November 1922.
25. Whitehouse had been a member of the Home Office Departmental Committee during the implementation of the Employment of Children Act in 1909 and had led a successful parliamentary agitation for the improvement of housing in mining districts, leading to a Royal Commission on the issue.
26. *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 1 November 1922.
27. *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 31 October 1922.
28. Ibid.
29. *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 1 November 1922.
30. T. Wilson, *Downfall*, p. 232.
31. *Liberal Magazine*, November 1922.
32. *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 30 October 1922.
33. *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 2 November 1922.
34. *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 6 November 1922.
35. Seddon's election slogan was 'Peace, Economy and Progress' which appeared on most of his election posters. This was replaced with graffiti reading 'Party Exchanged Periodically', alluding to the fact that Seddon had changed party affiliation on a number of occasions.
36. Many Coalition Liberals across the country suffered the same fate; Wilson cites one candidate in Sheffield forced to take out a newspaper advert declaring he would 'attempt to address electors'. It is curious that Coalition Conservatives did not appear to suffer in the same way.
37. *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 31 October 1922.

38. *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 4 November 1922.
39. Ward remained unhappy at the amount of money the Labour Party was spending and even made this an issue on his election platforms, highlighting that each candidate had almost £1000 at their disposal. See *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 4 November 1922.
40. *Ibid.*
41. See T. Wilson, *Downfall*, p. 237.
42. Wilson notes that of the 325 independent Liberal candidates, nearly 200 received financial assistance from party headquarters. See T. Wilson, *Downfall*, p. 237.
43. *Ibid.*
44. See *Manchester Guardian*, 15 November 1922.
45. *Midland Liberal Federation Minutes*, 8 December 1922.
46. Nationally, Coalition losses were heaviest to Labour possibly because a large proportion of Coalition Liberal seats had been in industrial districts.
47. *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 15 November 1922.
48. *Ibid.*
49. *Ibid.*
50. *Ibid.*
51. During his post-declaration speech, Ward was booed and was reported to have received a lukewarm reception. Whether some of the protestors were Labour Party activists remains an open question.
52. Labour organisation was weaker in Stoke mainly because the party had never contested the seat before and had undertaken less work in the constituency prior to the election.
53. Watts quoted in the *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 15 November 1922.
54. *Ibid.*
55. See F. Burchill and R. Ross, *History of the Potters' Union*, p. 171. Another factor relevant to the attitude of male pottery workers is that female employment had expanded dramatically during the war. See Whipp, *Patterns of Labour*, pp. 110–16. This may have prompted male pottery workers to view their position as less secure.
56. See R. Whipp, *Patterns of Labour*, p. 171.
57. F. Burchill and R. Ross, *History of the Potters' Union*, p. 171.
58. See F. Burchill and R. Ross, *History of the Potters' Union*, pp. 43 and 46. Whipp also makes the point that it was only because so many women and children worked that families in the Potteries were able to overcome poverty; Stoke-on-Trent had the second largest child employment rate in the country after Lancashire. See R. Whipp, *Patterns of Labour*, pp. 76–77.
59. 18% of the insured workforce were unemployed.
60. Whitehouse admitted that he had 'lacked proper organisation' and he noted that this contrasted with his Labour opponent.

61. Wilson suggests that dissension within the Liberal Party hindered it from putting forward a consistent social, economic and industrial programme. See T. Wilson, *Downfall*, p. 217.
62. Given difficulties in reaching voters on active service and the subsequent low turnout in 1918, it is likely that the significance of changed political allegiance amongst this group only became clear in 1922.
63. See for example J. Winter, *The War and the People* (New Haven and London, 1992), pp. 285–304 and D. Englander and J. Osborne, 'Jack, Tommy and Henry Dubb: The Armed Forces and the Working Class', *Historical Journal*, 21, 2 (1978), pp. 594–601.
64. See D. Butler and D. Stokes *Political Change in Britain* (London, 1981), p. 77.
65. See *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 15 November 1922.
66. See S. E. Koss, *Nonconformity in Modern British Politics* (Connecticut, 1975).
67. See *ibid.*, p. 324 and P. Catterall, 'Nonconformity and the Labour Party', *Historical Journal*, 36, 3 (1993), pp. 668–676. For a good assessment of how the social networks of Nonconformity increasingly 'withdrew from active political Liberalism' after the war see R. McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures, England 1918–1951* (Oxford, 1998), pp. 90–92.
68. See D.W. Bebbington, *The Nonconformist Conscience: Chapel and Politics 1870–1914* (London, 1982); S.E. Koss, *Nonconformity in Modern British Politics* (Connecticut, 1975); L. Smith, *Religion and the Rise of Labour* (Keele, 1993) and P. Catterall, 'Nonconformity and the Labour Party', *Historical Journal*, 36, 3 (1993).
69. L. Smith, *Religion and the Rise of Labour*, p. 164.
70. See S.E. Koss, *Nonconformity in Modern British Politics*, p. 234.
71. See S.E. Koss, *Nonconformity in Modern British Politics*, p. 148.
72. The Liberals won Burslem on an exceedingly narrow majority of 0.2% at the 1923 general election but subsequently lost the seat in 1924. The Liberals were never again to win a seat in Stoke-on-Trent.
73. T. Wilson, *Downfall*, p. 226.
74. *Manchester Guardian*, 8 December, 1919.

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Conclusion: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Alliance

A number of historians have suggested that the seeds of future Labour growth were in place before 1914, making the rise of the party inevitable at the expense of the Liberals. Heightened class consciousness amongst the industrial working class, trade union expansion and extension of the parliamentary franchise ensured Labour's 'onward march'. Factors such as an expanding organisation, continuity of leadership and personnel together with an attractive policy programme underpinned their advance. Others have contended that prior to 1914 the Liberal Party remained strong in terms of ideology, organisation and electoral appeal. One of the most forceful advocates of the strength of the Edwardian Liberal revival argued that the party had become the most important vehicle for political change.¹ The period saw the emergence of a progressive policy agenda, the party's organisation was successfully modernised and, perhaps most significantly, Labour was contained. There is something to be said for both these propositions, but the evidence of Manchester and Stoke-on-Trent appears to support the view that a Labour advance was not assured before 1914; the new party's prospects appeared uncertain at best. In Manchester, Labour held two of the city's six parliamentary constituencies but assessments of its progress must be qualified. First, Labour's electoral progress at the parliamentary level in Manchester was a consequence of considerable Liberal assistance. Not only had Labour been given a free run in these seats, but the fledgling party was elected with Liberal *votes*. The character

of Labour's representatives was also relevant in this respect; neither they nor their policies on the platform were likely to alienate Liberal supporters. The Labour Party had achieved its parliamentary breakthrough in Manchester within the framework of the Progressive Alliance. As the three-cornered contest in the South West constituency and a number of confrontations in municipal elections demonstrated, it is indisputable that the Progressive Alliance in Manchester came under pressure after 1906. When the Labour Party did challenge the Liberals it tended to fare badly and its position was precarious, even in the seats that it held. This was largely the result of a deeply embedded popular Conservatism in parts of the city and the fact that some of the issues that had aided Labour in 1906, as they had the Liberals, began to decline in significance. Weak organisation was also a hindrance. At the municipal level, the Labour group on the council did assert its distinctiveness and Labour members articulated a more distinctly 'labour' agenda. In terms of electoral politics, however, despite there being a very slight increase in the number of three-cornered contests in the years just before 1914, they remained the exception to the rule. At this level, Labour's ability to contest seats appeared to be limited.

The Labour Party's early progress was concentrated in areas with high trade union membership, but even within these areas there was no uniform swing to Labour before 1914. Electoral developments in Manchester before 1914 demonstrate how Labour's support within a given city could be highly localised. In the solidly working-class districts, where trade union membership was high, the party made good progress but elsewhere, as consideration of municipal elections vividly shows, the fledgling party made little identifiable progress. Electoral development in Manchester reveals that all three parties had developed spatially: Labour's support was strongest in the 'better' working-class districts while the socially mixed, middle-class and business areas remained predominantly Liberal; the poorest 'slum' areas of the city continued to be dominated by popular Conservatism. There was little sign of an imminent reconfiguration of this distribution of party support. The key point, however, is that before 1914 Labour only did well in agreement with the Liberals.

The experience of Stoke-on-Trent before the First World War also shows that the rise of Labour was by no means inevitable in the near future, in fact, the Labour Party was very weak in the area before 1914. Stoke-on-Trent was an area where Lib-Labism endured. Even after the miners' union had affiliated to the national Labour Party, traditional

loyalties remained strong. There was relatively little enthusiasm for the idea of independent Labour representation in the Potteries. During the Hanley by-election campaign of 1912, the Labour candidate's sole plank had been that he was better placed to represent the area because he was a miner and a local man, but he failed to convince electors on these points and Hanley voters rejected one of their 'own kind'. This no doubt came as a shock to the fledgling Labour Party as well as to the miners' leadership and it left them in a quandary as to where to go from there. It is possible that over-concentration on the concept of class representation was not effective in an area that perceived Liberalism as the principal vehicle of working-class interests. Ultimately, Lib-Labism, usually dismissed by historians as a kind of transitional politics, still had vigour. Clearly, this would be a powerful impediment to independent Labour representation, especially if the Liberals in some areas encouraged it more actively.

In Stoke-on-Trent, the relationship between trade unionism and the expansion of Labour was complicated. Certainly, trade union growth could aid the development of the Labour Party, but the extent and speed of political realignment across a particular union's membership was unpredictable. While union leaders increasingly adopted a more explicit stance on independence, there was no guarantee that the wider membership would follow and in the process abandon long-held party loyalties. In Stoke-on-Trent, evaluation of policy over the longer term shows how the candidates adopted a more pronounced 'Labour' appeal, but the majority of the workforce remained unconvinced. Before 1914, Lib-Labism remained deeply embedded within the political culture of the area and existed as an impediment to the viability of a truly independent Labour Party.

Outwardly, it might seem that the Liberals were well positioned in both Manchester and Stoke-on-Trent. In Manchester, they had rarely been in such a good electoral position, but whether this implied a successful future based upon the tenets of the New Liberalism is more problematic. Parliamentary election campaigns show that the impact of the New Liberalism in Manchester ought not to be exaggerated. With very few exceptions, Liberal candidates stood on distinctly conservative platforms, focusing almost exclusively on the issue of free trade at the expense of virtually all other policies. Stoke-on-Trent saw a more pronounced radicalism on the election platform, on the part of both left-of-centre parties. Much of this came down to individual candidates. The situation might

have changed but, as it was, Liberalism in Manchester remained electorally strong, if not ideologically vibrant, in the years leading up to 1914.

Specific issues had facilitated the 1906 electoral landslide but, once these began to lose their political appeal, the Liberals' overall position could become less secure if the local party failed to maintain ideological momentum. On the surface, this was the case in Manchester. The Liberals' policy position may have been tactical. It may have been thought that a more radical stance would be electorally damaging and could alienate the party's traditional supporters, the financial implications of which could have been detrimental to the local organisation. Given that some candidates did adopt a more radical approach, however, it seems unlikely that a uniform party line on policy existed. It seems that candidates were left to determine for themselves the key issues upon which they would base their campaigns. Overall, the fact remains that Liberalism in Manchester remained noticeably traditional. This presents some difficulty for the idea that the post-1906 Liberal revival, and long-term viability of the Liberal Party, was intrinsically linked to the successful permeation and appeal of New Liberalism.

The four by-elections that took place in Manchester and Stoke-on-Trent between 1908 and 1912 suggest the need for caution in making judgements on statistics alone. Poor Liberal performances were determined by adverse public reaction to policy and legislation. The two by-elections in Manchester during 1912 illustrate this point, National Insurance critical to the outcome of both. The loss of two parliamentary seats in the city was unfortunate for the Liberal Party but not necessarily evidence of long-term decline. The Conservatives gained a significant electoral advantage from the widespread unpopularity of the Act and built on this by conducting an aggressive propaganda campaign against the measure. The Home Rule question also played some part. In Manchester North West especially, the Unionist candidate argued that Home Rule for Ireland would lead to the disintegration of the nation, weaken the empire and have a devastating impact upon trade. In neither by-election did the Unionist candidate make Tariff Reform a key plank of the campaign; both, in fact, largely avoided it. For the Unionists, the experience of by-elections like these must have served to reinforce the wisdom of a low-key approach to the issue. This may also have been significant for the Liberals as it was primarily on the issue of Tariff Reform that the party had managed to secure seats such as Manchester North West in 1906.

In spite of adverse public reaction to the Insurance Act and the inevitable impact of the Home Rule question, the Liberal vote held together fairly well. In Manchester South, the Liberals polled just 4% less than the winning Conservative while in the North West division this figure was 8%, suggesting that the commercial sector was more hostile to recent legislation than other groups. Both these constituencies had an erratic electoral history and party loyalty could never be taken for granted. The Liberal Party understood this and did not appear unduly concerned by the by-election losses, believing the outcomes to be the result of widespread public misunderstanding of recent legislation. The by-elections in Manchester demonstrate the fine line the Liberal Party was treading in its introduction of advanced policy, but poor performance during the period was not necessarily indicative of a serious deterioration in Liberal fortunes. By-election losses represented ‘temporary trouble’² as opposed to anything more serious and the Liberals redoubled their efforts to recapture these seats. Understanding the specific reasons for the by-election losses, the Liberals were in no sense complacent about future prospects and recognised that the party had to work hard to improve its position in marginal constituencies.

It has been suggested that the Progressive Alliance was bound to fail if the Labour Party insisted on encroaching further than the Liberals were willing to concede. Both Manchester and Stoke-on-Trent illustrate this point very effectively. The electoral agreement did not always run smoothly and appears to have been fragile in both areas. One can suggest, however, that there was always an inherent problem with the Progressive Alliance in that Labour’s long-term acceptance of remaining a junior partner was always open to question. Equally, for the Liberals, alliance with Labour was meant to reinforce *their* position; if it failed to do so, the whole idea of an electoral entente might appear much less appealing. The evidence in Manchester appears to be especially problematic insofar as, whilst the Progressive Alliance appeared to be just about holding together, the Liberal Party itself remained noticeably conservative in connection to ideology and policy. The campaigns show how the Liberals were dependent on traditional policies. One can only conclude that Liberal acceptance of an alliance was primarily strategic, that is in an attempt to secure the Liberal Party’s position in the city.

In Hanley, the Liberal–Labour alliance had broken down in a particularly explosive manner and with immediate recrimination on both sides, yet the results could have served to strengthen the Progressive Alliance in

the longer term as they emphasised to Labour that independent politics offered little, if any, prospect of success in the foreseeable future. Although the Labour Party was inevitably disappointed by their 'treatment' at the hands of the Liberals, the result provided the party with little option other than to cooperate with them in the future if they wished to secure the election of parliamentary representatives. Furthermore, given that electors appeared to favour progressive candidates, the Labour ranks perhaps needed to accept the electoral reality that an appeal based exclusively upon the notion of independent Labour politics, that is class representation, had very limited popular support. In industrial North Staffordshire, it appears that Labour needed Liberal support more than the reverse.

The politics of Manchester and Stoke-on-Trent before the First World War reflects a pattern illustrated by other regional studies; where Liberalism was electorally strong and deeply embedded within the political culture, the party appeared reluctant to 'hand over' seats to Labour. This posed obvious problems for the viability of the Progressive Alliance. Had there been a general election in either 1914 or 1915 it is likely that the Labour Party would have contested a greater number of seats, some of which were bound to have been in constituencies held by the Liberals. This would potentially have led to a major reconfiguration of British politics. On the other hand, as it was in neither party's interest to see a split progressive vote, the respective organisers might have resolved matters by amicable agreement, that is by re-establishing an alliance.

As across the country as a whole, the First World War had a significant impact on the Liberal Party in Manchester and Stoke-on-Trent. In both localities, it lost all of its parliamentary representation in the 1918 general election, its share of the vote falling dramatically. In Manchester, the general election saw a significant swing to the Conservative Party. The results cannot be attributed solely to the operation of the 'coupon' since Liberal candidates performed badly whether their opponents possessed this or not. The campaign in Manchester illustrates the general attitude of the Liberal candidates in relation to the Coalition and the terms of the forthcoming Peace Settlement and it is not hard to see why they would have been severely disadvantaged in the climate of anger, bitterness and considerable confusion just four weeks after the cessation of hostilities. This was the essential context of the 1918 general election. Although some Liberals did discuss issues of domestic and foreign policy and appeared generally progressive, they continued to be embroiled in debate surrounding the election itself. The fact that they adopted distinctly anti-conscription

platforms may have run counter to the current climate of public opinion. In Stoke-on-Trent, the Labour candidates, and one Liberal, adopted ferociously anti-government, anti-war platforms and polled very well. Evidently, such a stance did not necessarily alienate voters. The Labour Party's campaign in Manchester in 1918, whilst still focused on the ethics of the election itself, paid greater attention to practical issues surrounding post-war reconstruction. As the *Manchester Guardian* saw it, Labour stood out as the party with an 'entirely independent standpoint ... focused in its future aims'.³ Moreover, as one Liberal organiser put it, 'the Labour manifesto commanded the attention of Liberal supporters'.⁴ In a way, the Liberals satisfied no one because they were perceived as either too 'left-of-centre' for some, that is soft on Germany and questionable in their views on issues such as conscription, or not radical enough for others. The Liberal campaign fell between two stools and there was the added burden of a lack of party uniformity in relation to the Coalition and its policy.

Before 1914, the Progressive Alliance had been a critical component of the political system; its collapse heralded a new era in British politics. In Manchester, there were three three-cornered contests in 1918 and this did not bode well for its re-establishment, yet Labour's position had improved only marginally in terms of the total vote polled. The local party appreciated this, bemoaning that 'the working classes had failed to be radicalised by the experience of war'.⁵ This was a little premature given the political and electoral context of the 1918 general election; it was simply too early to make predictions about future prospects. Despite the fact that the Liberals lost all their parliamentary representation in Manchester in 1918, the party's electoral base had not collapsed completely and the poll was entirely explicable within the context of the current political situation. The Liberals in Manchester knew the party would face monumental difficulties in the coming years but they did not believe the damage inflicted at the general election would be permanent.

In contrast to Manchester where the Labour Party did not do so well on its own, the striking feature of the 1918 general election in Stoke-on-Trent was the rapid advance made by Labour. Stoke-on-Trent saw a significant swing to the Labour Party. Given the electoral history of the area, the results amounted to a near annihilation of the Liberal Party. In the two contested seats in Stoke-on-Trent, Labour was returned in Burslem and came extremely close to capturing Hanley where it was just 1.7% behind the winning couponed Coalitionist. The Liberal vote plummeted, the party coming bottom of the poll in both constituencies. Many factors disadvantaged the

Liberals in 1918 and these need little reiteration, but the key question is: Which of these factors in particular facilitated such a reversal in fortune for Labour in Stoke-on-Trent? Policy and issues were of critical importance, as was the forcefulness of the candidates' campaigns. The Labour candidates were fiercely anti-Coalition and they were vehemently opposed to a vindictive Peace Settlement, but they also campaigned on a forward-looking, constructive, emotive and relevant policy platform. Both candidates were well-established Labour trade union officials, but that alone is insufficient to explain their success; policy had to be important.

Before the 1922 general election, voters in Manchester had two opportunities to express a verdict on the performance of the Coalition Government, one just nine months after the 1918 general election, the other during the later stages of the Coalition's life in February 1922. The 1919 by-election in Rusholme provided a striking reminder that the Labour Party had repudiated the Progressive Alliance. A noticeable feature of the by-election was the remarkable similarity of the Liberal and Labour campaigns, both candidates coming from the radical wings of their parties and articulating advanced policy. Both focused attention upon a wide array of issues including the need for a capital levy, nationalisation, the government's flawed foreign policy, profiteering, conscription, land reform and housing. The combined progressive vote at the Rusholme by-election amounted to 50.3% of the total. The Liberals believed that Labour intervention had 'gifted' the seat to the Conservatives, whilst for Labour the result vindicated the party's decision to stand. The by-election confirmed Labour's ambition and demonstrated how far the party had come in terms of policy.⁶ More significantly, it highlighted the continuing difficulties facing the Liberal Party in Manchester and indeed nationally.

The 1922 by-election in Clayton saw a straight fight between Labour and the Conservatives and represented a key test for the Labour Party. The Labour candidate conducted a determined campaign on a very Liberal programme. His speeches reminded voters how the Coalition Government had betrayed the 'uncounted war dead'. Having captured the seat with a majority of nearly 4000 on 57.1% of the total vote, the by-election represented a significant victory for the Labour Party; it had virtually doubled its vote since the general election. After 1918, political events helped Labour expand but political allegiances were not simply constructed from above. Electoral change was more complex than that. Labour's breakthrough had to be built upon and turned into a solid political platform; political activists in the constituencies contributed greatly to building that

platform. The role of policy and political activists' advocacy of the party programmes was of central importance to electoral politics and political change.

The 1922 general election saw the Liberals in Manchester re-energised and expectations of a recovery were high. With few exceptions, Liberal candidates continued to adopt conservative platforms and the majority still placed free trade at the forefront of their campaigns. Despite being lumbered with weak national leadership and division, the party performed well across the seven constituencies contested in Manchester. The Liberal vote had increased significantly since 1918. Of the four three-cornered contests, the Liberals managed to outpoll Labour in three, although a split progressive vote allowed the Conservatives to win. The results in 1922 were disappointing and the party's overall representation in the city did not change. While candidates had campaigned on the same issues as their counterparts in Stoke-on-Trent, the electoral results were markedly poorer. The immediate post-war period proved equally frustrating for the Labour Party in Manchester's municipal politics. While the party here rapidly expanded in 1919, it found great difficulty in making progress thereafter. This contrasted greatly with Stoke-on-Trent, where Labour was able to consolidate its expansion at both the municipal and parliamentary level.

In Stoke-on-Trent the 1922 general election further cemented the rise of Labour. The party held Burslem, captured Hanley and performed exceptionally well in Stoke. Throughout the campaign, Labour's opponents, with the exception of one Liberal, launched a most vitriolic assault upon the party's 'dangerous socialism'. The candidates held their nerve, however, and staunchly defended the party's position. The Liberal Party in Stoke-on-Trent emerged from the 1922 general election no better than it had been four years earlier.

The experience of Manchester and Stoke-on-Trent suggests that the Liberal Party remained relatively strong before the outbreak of war in 1914 although it would be wise not to overstate the case. It seems unlikely there would be an imminent Labour breakthrough. Much depended on the future of the Progressive Alliance, or rather, how the two left-of-centre parties conducted their electoral arrangements. There were clearly uncertainties as to whether such an agreement could remain a permanent feature on the political landscape. Even so, in Stoke-on-Trent it certainly appears that Lib-Labism still had vigour in terms of local political culture. The intervention of total war destroyed Lib-Labism and the Progressive Alliance. War so altered conditions that Lib-Labism could no longer be a

viable alternative to the post-1918 Labour Party and, consequently, British politics was changed forever. Arguably, political change in Britain after 1900 was defined by the rise and fall of the Progressive Alliance.

NOTES

1. See P. Clarke, *Lancashire and the New Liberalism* (Cambridge, 1971).
2. This was a term used by the *Manchester Evening News* in its post-results assessment of the 1912 Manchester North-West by-election. See *Manchester Evening News*, 9 August 1912.
3. *Manchester Guardian*, 14 December 1918.
4. See the secretary's report evaluating the 1918 general election, *Midland Liberal Federation Minutes*, 21 March 1919.
5. See *Manchester Labour Party Annual Report*, 1918.
6. Nationally, between 1919 and 1922 there were eighty-one by-elections and forty-seven of these saw Labour candidates. Many of those that were uncontested were in rural constituencies; see R. McKibbin, *Evolution*, p. 113.

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