THE PREDICAMENT OF THE BRITISH UNIONIST PARTY, 1906-1914

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By

Gerald C. Heberle, B.A., M.A.

* * * * * *

The Ohio State University 1967

Approved by

Philip L. Poirier
Adviser
Department of History
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to express my deepest gratitude to Professor Philip P. Poirier of the Department of History, The Ohio State University. Dr. Poirier's invaluable advice, his unfailing patience, and his timely encouragement were of immense assistance to me in the production of this dissertation.

I must acknowledge the splendid service of the staff of the British Museum Manuscripts Room. The Librarian and staff of the University of Birmingham Library made the Chamberlain Papers available to me and were most friendly and helpful. His Lordship, Viscount Chilston, and Dr. Felix Hull, Kent County Archivist, very kindly permitted me to see the Chilston Papers. I received permission to see the Asquith Papers from Mr. Mark Bonham Carter, and the Papers were made available to me by the staff of the Bodleian Library, Oxford University. To all of these people I am indebted.

I am especially grateful to Mr. Geoffrey D.M. Block and to Miss Anne Allason of the Conservative Research Department Library. Their cooperation made possible my work in the Conservative Party's publications, and their extreme kindness made it most enjoyable.
VITA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4 November 1932</td>
<td>Born - Dayton, Ohio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1954</td>
<td>B.A., University of Dayton, Dayton, Ohio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1955</td>
<td>M.A., University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati, Ohio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1958-1961</td>
<td>Graduate Assistant, Department of History, The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961-1962</td>
<td>University Fellow, Department of History, The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964-1965</td>
<td>Instructor, Department of History, The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965-1967</td>
<td>Instructor, Department of History, Oakland University, Rochester, Michigan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: History

Renaissance and Reformation. Professor Harold J. Grimm

Tudor and Stuart Britain. Professor Clayton R. Roberts

Modern Britain. Professor Philip P. Poirier

Colonial America. Professor Eugene H. Roseboom

Emergence of Modern America. Professor Francis P. Weisenburger
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VITA</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. THE ELECTION OF 1906</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. 1906: THE LORDS IN CONTROL</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. 1907: MARKING TIME</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. THE CONFEDERATES VERSUS THE CECILS</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. THE BUDGET VETO</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI. THE JANUARY ELECTION AND THE CONFERENCE</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII. THE VETO ELECTION AND THE PARLIAMENT ACT</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIII. HOME RULE OR CIVIL WAR</td>
<td>221</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IX. THE TRIUMPH OF THE DIE-HARDS</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>268</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I

THE ELECTION OF 1906

The Unionist Party dominated British politics for twenty years after its victory in 1886. The Liberal Unionist partnership with the Conservative Party in opposition to Irish Home Rule gradually transformed itself into a relatively complete political union. Although each section of the Unionist Party retained its name and a degree of organizational integrity, the authority of the Party Leader and his Whips knit the Unionist Party into an effective political unit. Even when in opposition from 1892 to 1895 the Unionist majority in the House of Lords gave the Party the power to decide all crucial issues as it wanted. The Unionists tended to regard their years of control as the normal state of British politics. They equated the party relations of this period with the basic premises of the British constitution.

The condition of the Liberal Party, which seemed to be in a state of near-disintegration for at least fifteen years after the catastrophe of 1886, puffed up the pride of the Unionists in their Party's excellence. They contrasted their unity with the fragmentation of the Liberals. They compared the apparent feebleness of the Liberal leaders, Lord Rosebery and Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman with the apparent strength of their own Lord Salisbury and Arthur Balfour. They contemptuously dismissed the Liberal dependence on
Irish, Welsh, and Scottish votes as evidence of factional weakness. The Unionists rather paradoxically took pride in their Englishness while claiming to be the only party representative of the broad national interests of Great Britain.

The real condition of the Unionist Party on the eve of the 1906 election, however, bore little resemblance to its ideal image of itself. The Party was rent in divisions over issues of policy and leadership. These divisions did not necessarily follow identical lines.

Joseph Chamberlain's crusade to unite the Empire by a selective reform of the tariff system had created a massive upheaval within the Party since 1903. The Unionist free traders, though the weakest section of the Party, posed a very serious threat to the unity of the Party. Their fiscal policy was identical with that of the Liberals. If they transferred their allegiance to the Liberal Party a political revolution comparable to that of 1886 might develop. On the other extreme the Chamberlainite tariff reformers, though not so numerous as they claimed, had the advantage of having seized the initiative, thus maneuvering the controversy onto ground of their own choosing. They partially dissipated this advantage by wavering among a variety of objectives such as Imperial Union, the protection of British industry, the creation of employment opportunities, the broadening of the basis of taxation, and the financing of social reform programs. They claimed that all these objects could be combined in a single program, but the multiplicity of emphases confused the issue and gave a perfect opportunity to the middle Unionist group, the Balfourian moderates.
Arthur J. Balfour, the Leader of the Party, was the nephew of Lord Salisbury and succeeded him as Prime Minister. Balfour was a tough, wily, opportunistic politician who concealed his hard work behind an appearance of philosophic detachment and social languor. A master of parliamentary maneuvering, he dominated the House of Commons by the intellectual dexterity of his debating speeches. As Leader of the Unionist Party he largely controlled the official policy of the Party, and the Chamberlainites found him a doubtful asset in the fight for tariff reform. With a seemingly limitless variety of fiscal policies Balfour skipped through tariff reform plans with bewildering agility, touching everything lightly and holding firm only to his tenure as Unionist Leader. Like most (if not all) Unionist Leaders he gave his primary loyalty to party unity, to which he was ready to sacrifice any single item or principle in the party program. He held the Party together during the critical years from 1903 to 1906 by his cryptic pronouncements on fiscal policy, by cabinet readjustments, and by skillful, if somewhat humiliating, parliamentary maneuvers. Flawed as it was, the relative unity of the Party in the 1906 election was a remarkable achievement, but Balfour had paid a heavy price for it.

Balfour's mystifying fiscal pronouncements and intricate parliamentary maneuvering greatly increased his already substantial reputation for clever dialectical trickery. By eliminating factional leaders from his cabinet he had left himself with a remarkably thin, unimpressive government. In a Party which prided itself on strength, decisiveness, and common sense Balfour's supple dialectics seemed
dangerously insubstantial, and only his vast parliamentary prestige, his Brahmin social heritage, and the habitual subservience of the Unionist Party to its Leader preserved his position. His famous philosophical speculations both lifted him above the brawls of his colleagues and gave him camouflage for his more tiresome political toil. In the most discouraging days of his government he remarked to a friend who asked why he went on, "I am like a man with a chronic cold who knows that the slightest fresh cold will kill him. But I go on because I find Joe [Chamberlain] such an interesting psychological study."\(^1\)

The tariff reform movement, at first sight a remarkably radical movement for a conservative party, was by no means united. On the one hand it expressed the frustration of certain men with the sense of aimless drift in a Britain steadily declining in industry and prestige relative to the newer industrial powers. It was a veiled protest against the survival in British society and politics of outdated values of aristocratic grace and gentility, hopelessly irrelevant to the later industrial revolution. In the eyes of men like Joseph Chamberlain and Alfred Milner the tariff reform movement was an attempt to revitalize both Britain and the Empire by placing the primary emphasis in politics on the value of national unity, efficiency, organization, and modernity. This modernist wing of the tariff reform group saw in Germany and the United States a vast energy concentrated by technology in an expanding industrial system of awesome power. Only an equally

\(^1\)Herbert J. Gladstone (1st Viscount Gladstone) Papers, British Museum, Additional Manuscripts 45988, Campbell-Bannerman to Herbert Gladstone, 17 June 1905, marked "Private."
effective mobilization of Britain and her Empire could arrest the relative decline of their country. Thus in one respect the tariff reform movement was a radical attack on the traditional establishment and its values—considerably more radical than any social reforms proposed by the Liberals.

But far stronger and more expressive of the Unionist mentality was another, typically conservative, approach to the tariff reform problem. For most Unionists tariff reform was not really a point of departure for British society but a resting place; not the beginning of a great change but a tactical readjustment to inhibit change. They expressed the objectives of tariff reform in a series of negations—to prevent the disintegration of the Empire, to prevent the loss of industrial eminence, to prevent class conflict and keep labor in its place through social reforms, to prevent punishing taxation of the rich by shifting the burden to the foreigner. For moderate tariff reformers free trade was the radical movement, for its continuance would compel Britain to face terrible new problems in a changing world. Typical conservatives, believing the nation to be fundamentally sound, visualized tariff reform as a convenient defense of the existing system. For them it was certainly not the opening step in a drive for national reorganization which might change the dominant social values and even change the dominant social class. As Alfred Lyttleton remarked during the fullest development of the debate, "It would not make a new heaven and a new earth, but he claimed in all seriousness that it would tend to prevent sudden and violent changes and keep comparatively level and smooth the trade
currents involving the employment of our citizens."\(^2\)

The diversity in the ideals of the tariff reformers created a fatal flaw in the movement. For those who found tariff reform the engine of a great national revival, it was clear that this must be the dominant issue of the day, and the battle must be won at any cost. But for the majority of the Unionists, who saw tariff reform as a strictly conservative adjustment, it was merely another promising proposal, subject to the same limitations as other proposals. The greatest single limitation was voter response. If tariff reform could win votes it was a viable prospect, but if it lost votes and, worse yet, lost elections it must be discarded or minimized. Despite the propaganda of the extreme Chamberlainite wing, the Unionist Party as a whole never saw the tariff reform campaign as the one policy which could save the nation from decadence. Balfour's policy was to hold the Party together until election returns gave a clearcut indication of the electoral appeal of tariff reform. After the results of an election were studied he could expect most of the men from all wings of the party to rally to whatever program might win the next election. A few fanatics in the extreme wings might put doctrine above party, but they would simply cancel each other out.

If tariff reform was a grievous Unionist difficulty, the dissatisfaction with the Party's leadership was an almost equally serious internal problem. Balfour's cleverness, subtlety, aristocratic disdain, and philosophical remoteness alternately enchanted and infuriated his

\(^2\)Speech in Glasgow, 21 October 1908, National Union Gleanings, XXXI (December, 1908), 478.
less gifted and flexible followers. His well-publicized affectation of amused contempt for the more popular aspects of democratic civilization, such as newspapers, might give him special leverage with the social classes which dismissed catering to the groundlings as tawdry, small-minded partisanship. To Unionists who were alarmed by their Party's increasing alienation from popular feeling the Olympian Balfour seemed a dangerous luxury. His opponents bitterly criticized Balfour's detachment from his own Party.

Perhaps the greatest tactical strongpoint of Balfour's leadership (as well as the mark of its failure) was the remarkable scarcity of first-rate men in the Unionist Party. With the exception of Joseph Chamberlain there was not one Unionist who could plausibly be suggested as an alternative leader. There were few enough who seemed adequate ministerial material. Many critics accused the Balfourian Old Gang of failing to attract more able men and of refusing to advance those already in the Party. The Morning Post, a Unionist journal committed to tariff reform and savagely critical of Balfour's leadership, expressed a very common feeling when it said, "You cannot lead a great party by a series of conundrums of which you are not ready to publish the answers."[^2] As usual when there was widespread dissatisfaction with a leader who seemed irreplaceable and impregnable, criticism focussed on the Party organizers as more vulnerable targets.

Despite these deplorable conflicts within the Party Unionists still blithely accepted the inherent superiority of conservatism within the British constitution. Politics provided for periods of apparent

[^2]: 23 October 1905.
decline by guaranteeing a breathing space of opposition during which the Party could recover its vigor by accepting the lessons of the election while enjoying the pitiful floundering of a feeble and miserable Liberal government. By giving the Liberals a chance to discredit and humiliate themselves in office the Unionists could gain time to get a clear directive from the electorate on tariff reform and to settle the leadership question. Opposition might produce new men of ability, and an electoral decision on the issues might give a clear lead to Balfour and end his shiftiness. At the very least an interlude of Liberal bungling would restore popular appreciation of Unionist administrative skill and dignity. As the Morning Post put it, "The fleeting triumph of its opponents will give the Unionist Party time to reorganize itself, to recall the principles for which it exists, and above all to throw over the weak and faint-hearted who have not the courage of their convictions."^4

A few Unionists in moments of despondency condemned their opponents in the fiscal debate as destroyers of the Party. Thus Lord Hugh Cecil, spokesman for the extreme free trade wing:

If things are kept quiet and we go on as we were before the Birmingham speech we shall doubtless be beaten at the election—but not very badly I think. And after a couple of years or so we should be back again strong in the proved incompetence and disunion of the Radical Party. But if the Government embark on Protection—under whatever specious name—our party must be split; and for aught I can see Protection will do for us what Home Rule has done for the others.^5

Alexander Acland-Hood, Balfour's Chief Whip (and target for much

^4 November 1905.

anti-Balfour criticism) echoed Cecil in writing to Balfour's secretary:

From what I can gather from various sources I am still convinced that 'Food Taxation' is so unpopular with the electorate that its inclusion in the Party programme means our exclusion from office for many years, as well as a breach in the Party, both in the House and the Country, as serious as that caused in the Radical Party by Home Rule.

But even these pre-election cries of distress were not as depressing as they might have seemed, for a clear lead from the electorate would settle the issue by changing the party policy. No one seriously expected the Unionist Party to be excluded from office for long. Indeed, some of the Unionist leaders undoubtedly longed for the release from responsibility and the freedom of a (short) period of opposition. Joseph Chamberlain assured the House of Commons,

I look forward with unmingled satisfaction to the time, whenever it comes, when we shall be in a similar position to hon. Members opposite. . . . A close examination of that Liberal policy opens to me a vista which I confess makes everything now stale and unprofitable. I greatly desire, whenever the proper time comes to exchange the responsibility of action for the joy of criticism.

Balfour was amused, not alarmed, by the prospect of a Liberal government and condescendingly confided to the Liberals that he thought much better of them than most others did. He was not pessimistic about a Liberal ministry. "I have no doubt they will rub along somehow. If they add neither to the glory or the stability of the country, at all events they will I dare say, get out of a position into which they have


7 Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons, Fourth Series, CXLI (16 February 1905), 336
rashly got without any fatal degree of discredit. I think well of them." For tactical reasons he occasionally expressed less cheerful viewpoints when trying desperately to attract the support of the Duke of Devonshire, leader of the Unionist free traders. He tried to make the Duke's flesh creep:

Nevertheless, it seems plain that with the Irish in undiminished strength, with the Welsh acting as a more or less independent party, with 40 Labour Members constituting a separate and powerful organisation, a Radical Administration will be forced to conciliate one section of its supporters after another by legislative projects of the most dangerous description.

Thus the certainty of defeat in the next election by no means shook the confidence of the Unionist Party. The parties were still apparently conforming to their customary roles. Even a convinced tariff reformer like George Wyndham could write:

Fiscal Reform, if we eliminate the confusions of tariff reformers is somewhat remote and speculative. But we, the Conservative Party, stand for much that is always urgent and permanently important:--sound Foreign Policy, adequate Defence, Imperial Unity, the Union, Religious Education, opposition to socialistic nostrums and the accentuation of class divisions. On these questions 90% of our historic Party are agreed. Our opponents are distraught on most of these and several other questions.

The Unionists prepared for the election, resigned to defeat, sure of the therapeutic effects of the election in healing the internal wounds of their Party, and secure in the conviction that the Liberals would provide a harmless and amusing spectacle in office. Joseph Chamberlain as early as 12 May 1904 observed that the solution

8 Debates, Commons, 4s, CLI (1 August 1905), 661.

9 Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49770, Balfour to Devonshire, 27 October 1905.

10 Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49805, Wyndham to Balfour, 8 November 1905.
of the great problems might well be hastened by "a change of scenes, a change of actors--by putting on a new piece which will not last long, and which will soon be hissed off the stage."

There was time for one last display of Balfourian tactics. He resigned office instead of dissolving Parliament. This, he thought, would bring into the open the pathetic weakness of the Liberal leadership. He apparently believed the Liberals to be seriously divided. He expected conflicts between Liberal Imperialists and Little Englanders, social reformers and Whiggish moderates to make Campbell-Bannerman's cabinet negotiations almost impossible. Unionists saw Lord Rosebery's influence as a divisive force as the key to a situation which was obviously beyond the very, very limited abilities of Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman. "These difficulties are real and great," Balfour wrote, "and they are increased by personal differences and jealousies, which will make the next Cabinet an eminently unfriendly collection of friends." Deciding that his own government could never carry its one big controversial measure, a Redistribution Bill, Balfour cast on the Liberals the onus of forming a government, confident that Campbell-Bannerman would present a sorry sight in such a complex task. The Liberal Leader accepted the challenge. The Morning Post derisively observed, "If a just man struggling with

11 Westminster Gazette, 11 January 1906.

12 Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49774, Balfour to Joseph Chamberlain, 2 November 1905.

13 Aretas Akers-Douglas (1st Viscount Chilston) Papers, C23/3, Confidential Cabinet Memorandum on Resignation, 27 November 1905.
adversity be a sight which is pleasing to the gods, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman in office and forced to define a policy may appeal to many people's sense of humour." A less generous but perhaps more typical Unionist opinion was that of the Chief Whip, Acland-Hood. "I am surprised at C.B.'s determination to take office. What a fool he must be."  

In the event Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman succeeded in forming a most powerful government with surprising ease. Drawing on a remarkable supply of able men, the Liberal Prime Minister assembled a ministry which in ability and driving force was to be perhaps the most outstanding of this century. Even so, the Unionists remained convinced that Campbell-Bannerman was inept and his party paralyzed by dissension. The Unionist election campaign was punctuated with such contemptuous sneers as Joseph Chamberlain's, that "he could not conceive of anything which would afford him more pleasure and amusement than to sit opposite to Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman in the House of Commons."  

In the election campaign of January, 1906, the Liberals hit hard on such issues as free trade vs. protection, Chinese slavery in the Transvaal, and nonconformist grievances over the Education Act of 1902. The Unionists in countering became more and more elusive. The fiscal question divided the Party to such an extent that the Duke of Devonshire and Lord James of Hereford, Unionist free trade leaders,  

---

14 December 1905.  
15 Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49771, Acland-Hood to Sandars, 29 November 1905.  
16 Westminster Gazette, 11 January 1906.
openly advised their followers to vote against any tariff reform candidate, regardless of his views on other matters. The Spectator, foremost of the Unionist free trade organs, echoed this advice while criticizing the "tone of complacent and supercilious superiority" in Mr. Balfour's election address. Acrimonious controversies in constituencies where Unionist tariff reform candidates opposed Unionist free traders distracted energies from the fight against the Liberals. The tariff reformers struck close to the Balfourian household by proposing a candidate to oppose his cousin, Lord Hugh Cecil, in Greenwich. Lord Hugh complained bitterly that he was being victimized for fighting for his conscientious convictions. Balfour was drawn into the controversy by pleas from his relatives to protect his cousin. He tried to induce the tariff reformers to withdraw the offensive candidacy rather than destroy the Unionist chance to hold the seat, but he also took the opportunity to condemn the free traders as hasty, ill-tempered, rebellious, impracticable in Parliament, and responsible for their own predicament. "And if they have been less mischievous in the country," he added, "it is, so far as I can see, because they lack the organization, and not because they lack the will." Balfour may have been aware that the Unionist free traders had previously attempted to redress their organizational weakness by

---

17 Saturday Review, 6 January 1906, 1.
18 6 January 1906, 2.
19 The Times, 5 January 1906.
20 Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49737, Balfour to Lord Robert Cecil, 8 January 1906, marked "Private."
concluding an electoral pact with the Liberals, but the cautious
Campbell-Bannerman was not to be drawn. He had written to his Chief
Whip, "I hardly see that we can enter into any definite arrangement,
to get, after all, half a dozen doubtful and difficult recruits. But
we should of course make things decently easy for them." The Liberal
strategy before and during the election was to wait and see, counting
on the impossibility of a Unionist reconciliation. C-B concluded,
"In short, we are under no necessity to go to them, and indeed cannot
go to them; it is they who must come to us. This need not be pro-
claimed, but it is the essence of the situation and cannot be ignored." 22

The campaign produced no issue on which the Unionists could
unite. A desultory attempt by Chamberlain and Balfour to revive the
old Home Rule scare caused no excitement. 23 Punch belittled this tac-
tic with a cartoon depicting Campbell-Bannerman offering his duelling
opponent, Balfour, foils representing the fiscal controversy, while
Balfour musingly contemplated an archaic pistol marked Anti-Home Rule,
commenting, "Quite so, quite so; but I've rather a fancy for this
quaint old thing which I found up my sleeve." 24 Unfortunately for
Balfour the Liberals had minimized Home Rule in their program for the
next Parliament. They knew that the House of Lords would certainly
throw out any Home Rule bill. The Liberals were less keen for Home

21Gladstone Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 45988, Campbell-Bannerman
to Gladstone, 3 December 1903, marked "Private."

22Ibid., Campbell-Bannerman to Gladstone, 26 December 1903,
marked "Private."

23Economist, 6 January 1906, 3.

243 January 1906, 11.
Rule than previously, having been irritated by the Irish attitude on education and licensing. Most serious of all, the Liberal Party counted the next Parliament as its decisive trial as an engine for securing social reform, especially since it was now in competition with a Labour Party. A concentration on Home Rule would only divert the whole energy of the Party.25

The Unionist campaign was a disappointment. No one was surprised by the Liberal victory in the election, but the magnitude of the victory was a stunning shock. The Liberals returned with the greatest majority since 1832. The Unionists suffered the greatest rout in modern British electoral history. The election, moreover, only exacerbated their Party's internal problems.

Balfour was decisively beaten in East Manchester by a majority of 1,980 (reversing the 1900 Unionist majority of 2,453). He jauntily assured his supporters that the Unionists would presently return to office to correct the blunders of the Liberals. "We shall return inevitably, as inevitably as the seasons return. It is written in the very law of our institutions; it is to be found in the unwritten law, perhaps I ought to say, which governs our institutions."26 In reply to Lady Salisbury's famous note on his defeat ("D---n. D---n. D---n!!") he cheerfully diagnosed the inner significance of the election.

I am horribly ashamed at feeling a kind of illegitimate exhilaration at the catastrophe which has occurred. It has made me more violently and pleasurably interested in politics than I remember having been since the Home Rule Bill. If I read the signs aright, what

---

25Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 41213, Crewe to Campbell-Bannerman, 19 November 1905, marked "Private."

26The Times, 15 January 1906.
has occurred is nothing whatever to do with any of the things over which we have been squabbling the last few years. C.B. is a mere cork, dancing on a torrent which he cannot control, and what is going on here is the faint echo of the same movement which has produced massacres in St. Petersburg, riots in Vienna, and Socialist processions in Berlin.

Balfour enjoyed this analysis so much that with some variations he sent the same message to a number of other people on the same day. The refrain was constant—the issues in the election were irrelevant; the Liberals were in no way responsible for the result. In fact the breakup of the Liberal Party was imminent due to the profound causes of the upheaval. He saw a great social movement under way, radical on the continent but hopefully moderate in Britain. The solace to a beaten leader in such an analysis was obvious. To be beaten by Campbell-Bannerman's Liberals was rather ignoble, even when expected, but to be swept away by an irresistible international tide was tolerable even for the proudest politician. If the Liberal victory owed nothing to the issues, the government could hardly claim a mandate for any part of its program. To the unflappable Balfour the spectacle of Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman ignorantly enjoying a victory which he had not influenced, which he could not understand, which he could not control, and which would soon destroy his party, must have been delightful.

Other Unionists found similar consolation in pondering the

27 Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49758, Balfour to Lady Salisbury, 17 January 1906, marked "Private."

deeper meaning of the election. The Times noted, "It is only to a limited extent a verdict upon the issues which politicians have imagined themselves to be prescribing for the electors." All Unionist analyses of the causes of the electoral debacle agreed that the defeat had almost nothing to do with the constructive program of the Liberals. The Daily Mail listed as the first three causes the swing of the pendulum, Chinese Labour, and Tory over-continuance in office. Only in fourth place did it mention the Education Act. Jack Sandars, Balfour's right-hand man, enumerated the swing of the pendulum, Chinese Labour, the organization of the labor and socialist vote, and the Education Act, in that order. Iwan-Muller, editor of the Balfour house paper, the Daily Telegraph, listed the swing of the pendulum, the growing unpopularity of all governments, nonconformist antipathy to the Church, and the advantage of attack over defence. Balfour himself announced that the Unionists had been in office so long that the electorate had forgotten what Radical government meant. "Besides, nobody would ever convince the elector of the demerits of a Radical Government except a Radical Government itself." He pointed to the Radicals' use of a "mass of mendacity which had made the election peculiarly discreditable."29 30 31 32 33

29 16 January 1906.
30 15 January 1906.
31 Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49764, Sandars to Balfour, 21 January 1906.
32 Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49796, Memorandum by Iwan-Muller on the 1906 Election, 5 February 1906.
33 Speech at Westminster, 21 June 1906, National Union Gleanings, XXVII (November, 1906), 392.
The Party settled on an official explanation listing the swing of the pendulum, reaction from the excitement and enthusiasm of the South African War, the Education Act, Chinese Labour, the Taff Vale decision, the division of the Party on the fiscal question, over-continuance in office, long prosperity, and over-confidence in the Unionist organization. It remained for Blackwood's Magazine to deliver the final word on behalf of the crustiest Unionists. "The General Election, which has just been brought to an ill-omened conclusion, is the heaviest indictment ever made against the Democracy."

The election of 1906, precisely because of its extraordinary result, settled none of the problems of the Unionist Party. Certainly no one could truthfully claim that the voters had given a clear mandate to either wing of the Unionist Party on the tariff reform issue. The Unionist free traders could and did claim that tariff reform had lost the election for the Party, but the Unionist free traders had themselves been all but wiped out. The campaign had driven these opponents still further apart.

The Cecils found tariff reform not only repugnant in principle but dangerous to the Party socially. Lord Hugh wrote to his cousin, Arthur Balfour, "The methods of these insane people keep wrecking the party and are besides quite intolerable. The combination of intrigue and bullying—of subterranean mining and dragooning—inspires me with


35 CLXXIX (February, 1906), 278.
absolute fury. . . . English people are quite of my mind and hate being bullied." 36 Lord Robert Cecil put his finger on one of the most important aspects of the tariff reform drive in his complaint:

I scarcely ever go on to a Unionist platform now without feeling completely out of sympathy with the majority of those there, especially if they belong to the Chamberlainite school. It is not by any means only the Fiscal Question upon which I differ from them. It is their whole way of looking at politics. It appears to me to be entirely sordid and materialistic, not yet corrupt, but on the high road to corruption. 37

Balfour himself occasionally indulged in sneers at "Joe's methods of bribing each class of the country in turn." 38 The aristocrats' distaste for the manners and values of the aggressive, middle class Chamberlainites was by no means the least important problem the Unionist Party would have to face. The Liberal press probed this social division. The Westminster Gazette gleefully seized on a remark in The Times that the election was a protest against dilletantism in politics to suggest that the Unionist Party had for years been a decadent party and had involved Parliament itself in its decadence.

"We may even go further and interpret Mr. Chamberlain's plunge into Protection as the effort of a very energetic man to find a desperate remedy for a disease which he perceived and knew to be mortal." 39

With a mere 157 Unionist seats salvaged from the crash, even

36 Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49759, Lord Hugh Cecil to Balfour, 21 January 1906.


38 Balfour to Gerald Balfour, 10 November 1905, in Kenneth Young, Arthur James Balfour (London, 1963), 251.

39 24 January 1906.
the tariff reformers were embarrassed in claiming a victory for their cause within the Party. The seven Commissioners of the Tariff Reform League who stood for election (all in Unionist constituencies) were decisively defeated. The *Daily Mail* sorted out the 151 returned Unionists as of 29 January as 82 Balfourites, 61 Chamberlainites, and 8 Free Traders. The election had given propaganda ammunition to every section of the Party, but heavy artillery to none. Thus the election of 1906 produced an interminable political controversy over doctrine among Unionists. Was victory to be gained by dropping the whole tariff reform policy, or was it to be gained by complete, categorical commitment to Chamberlain's crusade? The confused situation was perfect for an agitation against the Party's Leader, Balfour, who seemed determined to split the difference on the issue. Extremists on either side could agree that this approach was disastrous.

After the election the Chamberlainites carried on a brief agitation against Balfour's leadership but were fatally handicapped by the curious structure of the Unionist Party, which centered vast power in the hands of the Leader and his appointees. There was no regular review of the leadership, and in the absence of a ruthless and well-organized attack on the Leader, his continuance would depend on his own tolerance of insult and his determination to continue in office. Balfour certainly had no intention of abandoning the leadership to Chamberlain, who would probably split the Party. Nor would he sacrifice his right to define the Party's official policy, since only the vagueness of his policy could prevent a Party split.

---

Joseph Chamberlain played a curious role in the leadership crisis. He seemed willing to damage Balfour and his cohorts badly enough to force them to submit to his policy dictation, but he denied any desire to replace Balfour as Leader. Chamberlain apparently planned to impose his full fiscal program on the Party by inducing Balfour to call a meeting of the Unionist Party. Presumably the meeting could be manipulated to adopt tariff reform as a test of orthodoxy, and a complete reorganization of the Central Office would replace the Balfourian temporizers with Chamberlainite zealots. While the Morning Post tried to whip up sentiment in favor of a "definite constructive policy" and a more "democratic" organization, Chamberlain began his campaign by securing the firm support of his own Liberal Unionist organization. Lord Lansdowne, alarmed by the electoral defeat, informed Balfour that Chamberlain was planning to seize a monopoly of the policy-making power in the Unionist Party and nail the colors of tariff reform to the mast. Dismissing this as "an egregious blunder," Lansdowne took the safe position that during the Unionist period in opposition the Party should steer clear of producing any constructive policy of its own.

During this critical period the Chamberlains received encouragement from important sections of the Party. Edward Saunderson of the Irish Unionists wrote to Austen Chamberlain that though he had great admiration for Balfour, "I know I can speak for all my party when I say

---

41 31 January 1906.
42 Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49729, Lansdowne to Balfour, 26 January 1906; see also Lord Newton, Lord Lansdowne (London, 1929), 348-349.
that the man we wish to see in the position of leader of the Unionist party is your father." His postscript was the most important part of the letter. "I know Walter Long is absolutely at one with me in the view I here express." Long, Chief Secretary for Ireland in Balfour's cabinet, was the recognized leader of the powerful Tory squirearchy. His open opposition could be dangerous to Balfour, especially since Long was thought anxious to replace him as Leader. Whether or not Long supported Chamberlain at that time, his influence was to be an important and unpredictable factor in the changing fortunes of Balfour as Leader of the opposition.

Still another element in the Chamberlain-Balfour relationship was back-bench opinion. Arthur Lee, a tariff reform Unionist Member, may have expressed the opinions of many lesser party members. Lee rather hedged his approval of Chamberlain's grasp at control, suggesting that if Balfour could be induced to give a strong fighting lead and throw over the Unionist free traders he would be quite ready to follow him. He added, however, "I am not prepared, under any terms, to be led by Sandars and Acland-Hood." He voiced the opinion of the more ambitious tariff reformers in the pessimistic sentence, "In my mind's eye I already see a sinister clique growing at the Carlton and plotting how to rehabilitate the old regime, but this simply cannot be tolerated." Lee's comments were quite acute. Balfour's dependence on personal friends like his secretary, Jack Sandars, and the Chief Whip, Acland-Hood, had created the impression that he stood aloof from

---

^3 Sir Austen Chamberlain Papers, AC7(2), E. Saunderson to Chamberlain, 31 January 1906.

^4 Ibid., Arthur Lee to Chamberlain, 2 February 1906.
the more dynamic, popular elements in the Unionist Party. The Carlton Club, traditional center of Conservative Party activity, was identified by many with the too-familiar old faces in the Party who had lost the election. Lee was not alone in feeling that the Party needed new blood at the top.

It was difficult for Chamberlain to see any way to prevent the rehabilitation of the old regime. Balfour was fully prepared to fight a determined battle to retain the leadership. He was fully at home in such tactical conflicts. By refusing to contest for the top post Chamberlain had given away the most significant advantage of his faction—that it had an alternative Leader. At a meeting between Balfour and Chamberlain the differences were clearer than ever before. Chamberlain found Balfour set against holding a party meeting which would only publicize their differences, raising all sorts of procedural objections. Balfour dismissed the fiscal question as "not a practical question for the moment" and was unenthusiastic about organizational changes (especially "democratic" changes). He did not wish to exclude anyone from the Party on doctrinal grounds, preferring to retain the allegiance of the Unionist free traders by vagueness in the official policy. In short, Balfour regarded the defeat as an excellent opportunity to heal old wounds by concentrating on opposition to the Liberals. Chamberlain recorded, "He says that with a very small party, absolutely united on our opposition to the common enemy, our policy is clearly a policy of criticism and attack." The tariff reform leader
wryly noted, "Why should he in any way weaken his control if he is

determined to go forward on the present lines?"45

Chamberlain, disgusted by such evasiveness, concluded that his

followers should try to force a Party meeting. For a time he studied

a plan to organize his Parliamentary followers into a special Tariff

reform Party with its own whips and meetings (but not, as previously

proposed, declining the official Unionist whip).46 He nearly

announced this plan publicly, but at the last moment thought better

of it.47 Perhaps his most revealing observation on the meeting was,

"We must strengthen the organisation in the country and try to increase

the Party as quickly as we can."48 In a letter to Walter Long, Cham­

berlain reviewed Balfour's various objections to his ideas and finally

confessed, "In fact he is non possumus everywhere and I confess I do

d not see my way out of the difficulty in which we are placed."49

While continuing his calls for a Party conference, Chamberlain

continued to repudiate the imputation that he was eager to take over

the leadership. He suggested that he, a Liberal Unionist, would in no

circumstances become Leader of a Party seven-tenths of which were Con­

servative. He denied that he intended to make acceptance of tariff


45Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49774, Mimeographed copy of

Joseph Chamberlain's Memorandum of dinner meeting with Balfour, dated

13 February 1906 and marked "Private and Confidential."

46Ibid.

47Sir William Bull to Walter Long, 8 February 1906, in Sir

Charles Petrie, Walter Long and His Times (London, 1936), 111.

48Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49774, Joseph Chamberlain's

Memorandum of dinner meeting with Balfour.

49Joseph Chamberlain to Long, 5 February 1906, in Petrie,

Walter Long and His Times, 111.
reform (as defined by him) a shibboleth to determine Party loyalty. He blandly remarked that he wanted only to discover the Party's official policy on the fiscal question.\textsuperscript{50} The Unionist free traders regarded such statements as a subtle trick. The \textit{Spectator} mourned over Chamberlain's supposed success in hanging the dead albatross of tariff reform around the neck of Mr. Balfour.\textsuperscript{51} The Liberal \textit{Manchester Guardian} ridiculed Balfour's alleged passivity. "No wonder Mr. Chamberlain treats him as a gramophone and tells him he had better come to a party meeting and have some definite tune put into him, for better or worse."\textsuperscript{52} But regardless of appearances, the situation was really drifting more and more into Balfour's control.

A compromise was inevitable, since Chamberlain's disclaimer had assured Balfour's continued leadership. A Party meeting under that leadership called to repudiate the Leader was highly unlikely. Austen Chamberlain, who had remained in Balfour's cabinet after 1903 to serve as a sort of middle term in the Balfour-Chamberlain negotiations, drafted a pair of letters to make the continued cooperation of the two men possible. Jack Sandars made a few additions to the letters, and Aretas Akers-Douglas, ex-Chief Whip, and Alexander Acland-Hood, Chief Whip, approved them. Exchanged on Valentine's Day, 14 February 1906, the letters terminated the leadership contest by leaving the situation practically unchanged. Balfour's letter to Chamberlain announced that fiscal reform was the "first constructive

\textsuperscript{50} \textit{Saturday Review}, 10 February 1906, 157.
\textsuperscript{51} 10 February 1906, 205.
\textsuperscript{52} 9 February 1906.
work of the Unionist Party" and that it must secure more equal terms
of competition for British trade and closer commercial union with the
colonies. He would not oppose a moderate general tariff on manufactured
goods or a small duty on foreign corn, provided they were shown
to be necessary for the attainment of the ends in view or for gaining
revenue. Chamberlain, in his return letter, entirely agreed with
these objects, accepted the policy, and promised to support Balfour
in defending all Unionist principles. 53

The Unionist Party meeting, so assiduously promoted by Chamber-
lain, was held at Lansdowne House on 15 February in the pacific atmos-
phere created by the Valentine Letters. Not surprisingly it "passed
off in the happiest possible manner." 54 A unanimous vote of confi-
dence in the leadership of Mr. Balfour, the appointment of a small
committee to inquire into matters of organization, a remark by the
Duke of Devonshire that the compromise of the Valentine Letters was
not very satisfactory, a denial by Mr. Chamberlain that the agreement
was a compromise at all, and the thing was done. Balfour emerged from
the meeting with power intact, more secure than ever.

Joseph Chamberlain must have realized that his campaign to
seize power in the Unionist Party was doomed from the moment that Bal-
four indicated willingness to fight for his position. Victory was out
of the question as long as Chamberlain shrank from a determined assault
on Balfour with the object of replacing him as Leader. The next step
would have to be a gradual infiltration of the constituency parties by

53National Union Gleanings, XXVI (March, 1906), 141.
54Daily Mail, 16 February 1906.
dedicated tariff reformers. A direct strike at the Party's head was unpromising; perhaps the body would prove more vulnerable.

At least one historian has suggested that the 1906 election completely altered the situation inside the Unionist Party, arguing that after the defeat Joseph Chamberlain proceeded to enforce his will upon Balfour. "By February of 1906 Balfour agreed to recognise fiscal reform as the 'first constructive work of the party.'" He alleges that the disappearance of Joseph Chamberlain from the political scene after his stroke destroyed "the party triumph of the Tariff Reformers" since no other man could "dominate Balfour." This was not the case. When Balfour insisted that the Valentine Letter committed him to nothing he had not already endorsed many times, he was speaking the truth. His election address, for example, had announced early in January, "Should you return the Unionist party to power, it is to the reform of our fiscal system that its attention ought first to be directed—a task worthy of the efforts of a great party." The Valentine Letter was not much more definite than that.

Chamberlain did not dominate Balfour. He was, instead, completely defeated in his attempt to define the policy of the Unionist Party. So long as Balfour was Leader of the Party he could continue to define its fiscal reform policy so ambiguously

---


56 Ibid.

57 Speech in London, 20 February 1906, National Union Gleanings, XXVI (March, 1906), 141-142.

58 National Union Gleanings, XXVI (February, 1906), 111.
that even free traders could accept it. Far from accomplishing his
objective of expelling the free traders from the Unionist Party,
Chamberlain found himself nearly driven to organizing his own group
as a party within the Party. Balfour would continue to confuse the
whole question of Imperial preference and protection by stressing his
own pet subject, retaliation. When Chamberlain's stroke removed him
from active politics he had already lost the decisive battle.

Balfour could well afford to let the Chamberlainite faction
campaign on the grass roots level in the constituency groups. There
they were a nuisance with their attacks on free traders, but not a
threat to his leadership or to the unity of the Party. It might take
generations for the full gospel of tariff reform to evangelize the
nation. The majority might never respond to the dynamic call to a
rebirth. If Balfour could rely on the Unionist Party's habit of
clinging to security, tradition, and continuance which had initially
driven Chamberlain to tariff reform, he could continue on his own
way. In the event Chamberlain himself was worn out and destroyed
by the immobility of Balfour and the nation. Calls to heroism and
drastic reorganization were doomed to failure in pre-war Britain,
as Bonar Law was to discover in the Home Rule controversy. The
atmosphere of apathy which succeeded the election of 1906 was ideal
for those who happened to be in positions of power. The Liberals
had governmental power, and Balfour had Unionist power. It would
be no easy task to rouse a popular crusade against either.

Despite this bitter internal wrangling the Unionist Party
remained serenely confident that it was a naturally superior
governing instrument and that it was destined to govern in normal
times and to control the government at all times. That a deterioration of the Unionist Party, an improvement in the fortunes of the Liberal Party, or a change in public opinion could ever switch the roles of the parties, consigning Unionism to a more or less sustained and sterile opposition, was unthinkable. This would be altogether contrary to experience and to the traditional wisdom of the British system. The Party felt no pressing need to examine its relationship with the electorate or take seriously the new developments in the Liberal Party. These customary methods of adaptation in a modern democracy were less necessary in Britain, for the Unionist majority in the House of Lords automatically ensured the Unionist Party of that controlling position to which it considered itself entitled. A fairly intelligent use of the Lords' veto coupled with the confidently expected swing of the electoral pendulum would enable the Unionists to frustrate Liberal reforms until the natural alignment of forces in British politics restored the Party to its normal majority. In a democratic age the Unionist Party staked its whole future on the veto power of the aristocracy.

Even as the ballots were being counted in January, 1906, the defeated Party turned confidently to the House of Lords. Jack Sandars offered his mentor, Balfour, the reassurance, "It will all come right--some day--I know. Meanwhile the future is full of interest; and especially so with regard to the part the H. of Lords can prudently play in any violent constitutional changes."59 The Daily Telegraph

noted as the result of the election, "The forces of the new Government occupy the ground in overwhelming strength, and the only effectual check that can be given to reckless action in the immediate future will be that provided by the firm and deliberate action of the House of Lords." The Telegraph, generally accepted as the voice of the Balfourian circle, added that the sharpest conflicts between Radicals and Unionists would be "fought out, if not decided" in the Upper House. No very keen perception was needed to forecast the decision in any contest in the Upper House.

The Statist, an independent financial journal, attempted to caution the Unionist leaders by noting that even if the Lords could do as they pleased with Liberal legislation, "It is sincerely to be hoped that the rise of the new democracy will warn them that what could be done with comparative safety in the past will be attended by more serious risks in the future." The warning was most appropriate, for Balfour, despite his airy speculations about the more profound causes of the defeat, was still thinking in terms of 1894. He told Lansdowne that though caution and tact might be necessary when the Lords carved up Liberal legislation, he thought that "as the rejection of the Home Rule Bill undoubtedly strengthened their position, I think it quite possible that your House may come out of the ordeal strengthened rather than weakened by the inevitable

\(^{60}\text{22 January 1906.}\)

\(^{61}\text{27 January 1906, 144.}\)
difficulties of the next few years.\textsuperscript{62} By what mental gymnastic he decided that the movement that produced massacres in St. Petersburg, riots in Vienna, and Socialist processions in Berlin would produce a stronger House of Lords in London he did not record.

The very magnitude of the Liberal victory in a popular election excited a Unionist determination to expand the Lords' claims to control. Such a huge Liberal majority could not represent the settled will of the nation. Indeed, Unionists argued, it could not even represent the will of the Liberal voters, since it included so many Radicals of the type selected to contest hopeless seats. "Ignorant of Parliamentary procedure, they easily fell under the domination of the Caucus," remarked the Unionist historians a few years later.\textsuperscript{63} Even the Liberals admitted that the new House of Commons might, unless carefully handled, be in some danger of breaking with its traditions.\textsuperscript{64} The Unionists fully expected it to break with tradition and assumed that the House of Lords would have to handle the situation.

The House of Lords at this time attracted the attendance of members who were even less experienced than the new M.P.s. Lord Willoughby de Broke has left a curious picture of Lansdowne's coaching of the less noted Tory peers who hastened to Westminster, prepared to resist the Radical revolution. "He encouraged his more humble followers to speak, and contrived to make them feel at home in their

\textsuperscript{62}Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49729, Balfour to Lansdowne, 13 April 1906, marked "Private."


\textsuperscript{64}Westminster Gazette, 14 February 1906.
own House. No matter how trivial was the subject of our questions, he would always look at us when we were trying to speak, and at least appear to be interested." Lansdowne warmly greeted Willoughby de Broke on his first appearance in the House and encouraged him to be a regular attendant. He asked if the young peer was interested in bringing up a question which might be debated. Perhaps a trifle sheepishly Willoughby de Broke confessed that the only question he had any claim to know about concerned a War Office regulation seeking to limit the hours during which alcoholic drinks might be supplied to the Yeomanry in camp. Lansdowne urged him to put a question on the paper about the matter, promising not only to support him but to speak in his behalf. In due course Willoughby de Broke's question was discussed in the House of Lords, and Lansdowne spoke for him.

Under Lansdowne's assiduous tutelage and encouragement, the less experienced peers like Willoughby de Broke soon learned that they knew much more about the British constitution and the most technical questions of politics than they had imagined. Within five years Lansdowne would be fighting desperately to maintain his leadership against the revolution of his proteges. They would become in time the center of the most violent Toryism, beyond the control of Lansdowne and far beyond the comprehension of Balfour. The new House of Lords would prove far less traditional, moderate, and reasonable than the new House of Commons.

Significantly, this new House of Lords materialized precisely at a time when the Unionist Party's dependence on the Lords' veto

---

forced it to an extreme defense of that House. Faced by a Liberal-controlled Commons, Unionists would maintain that the Lords were more distinguished, able, popular, and democratic than the House of Commons. They would claim that the success of the Lords' veto of the Home Rule Bill in 1894 demonstrated that it was in closer contact with public opinion than was the Commons. They would recall the history of the Long Parliament, proving that an unrestrained House of Commons would indefinitely prolong its existence and establish a tyranny. They would boast that, free from electoral campaigning, the Upper House was more impartial, broadminded, and fair. The Unionist Leaders had themselves to blame if peers like Willoughby de Broke believed all this and acted accordingly.

The new Parliament was formally opened on 13 February 1906. While Balfour found a safe seat in the City of London, Joseph Chamberlain acted as temporary Unionist Leader in the House of Commons. The opening days passed fairly quietly. Chamberlain remarked that the "fissiparous and composite" character of the government majority suggested that the government would not last long. He admitted that free imports appeared to carry all before them at the last election, but he insisted that the tariff reform movement would triumph when the inevitable change of government occurred. Balfour resumed his leadership in the Commons after winning his by-election in the City on 27 February. Lord Robert Cecil's dolorous prediction that Chamberlain's temporary leadership "would be almost universally regarded as an admission that his was to be the official policy in the future" was unfulfilled. Balfour retained his control over official Unionist policy.

The return of Balfour increased the interest of the new House, for his personal ascendancy over Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman in the

---

1Debates, Commons, 4s, CLII (19 February 1906), 150.

last Parliament cast some doubt on the new Prime Minister's effectiveness even after his victorious election. Balfour had once been noted for his unfailing courtesy toward his opponents, but under the pressure of Unionist disunity in 1904 and 1905 his manner had changed. He had treated the Liberal Leader with contempt. Henry W. Lucy, an acutely observant politician, remarked in his Observer column, "Mr. Balfour alluded to him in tones of lofty irony that convulsed with laughter the faithful on the back benches." Lucy described Balfour as "habitually contemptuous of the capacity and resources of his adversary." So complete had been Balfour's hold on the Commons that even Campbell-Bannerman's followers seemed captivated by the Unionist Leader's artistry in sarcasm. Lucy, at least, could detect no serious Liberal resentment over Balfour's sneers at the Liberal Leader. If Balfour retained this Parliamentary ascendancy in the new House of Commons, the Liberal government would suffer acute embarrassment.

The first serious clash in the new House appeared during a debate on a motion by Sir James Kitson recognizing the decision of the electorate to preserve free trade and pledging the House to reject any proposal to create a system of protection. The new members eagerly awaited their first encounter with A.J. Balfour. The Liberals hoped that his speech on the fiscal issue would so clarify his policy as to create further problems for him within his own Party. The Unionist Leader responded with one of his most ingenious dialectical

35 August 1906.

41 July 1906.

5 Ibid.
demonstrations. He manipulated dilemmas, unanswerable questions, and subtle distinctions with such dexterity that differences between free trade and protection melted away. He showed both systems to be of such bewildering intellectual complexity as to be unfit for discussion by less subtle men. He reduced the resolution and all possible interpretations of it to a state of hopeless obscurity while reserving his own views on fiscal policy to a later date. It was a classic performance.

The Liberals, however, were not impressed. Balfour, shorn of office, seemed simply a debater relying on linguistic trickery for scoring points. Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman abruptly abandoned the style of genial toleration which had served him so well in holding his party together in opposition. Perhaps remembering the numerous humiliations he had suffered in past years from Balfour's arrogant condescension, he brusquely dismissed Balfour's airy graces and subtle nuances. He appealed, perhaps a bit demagogically, to the new men behind him with the famous challenge, "I say enough of this foolery! It may have answered very well in the last Parliament, but it is altogether out of place in this Parliament. The tone and temper of this Parliament will not permit it. Move your Amendments, and let us get to business."^6

Balfour was temporarily crushed as a parliamentary force. He had lost the ear and the sympathy of the new House, and he knew it. Campbell-Bannerman's shaft had even penetrated Balfour's personal armor. His pain and resentment were evident in his description

^6Debates, Commons, 48, CLIII (12 March 1906), 992.
of the scene in a letter to a friend, Walter Rothschild:

What happened is, I believe, unexampled in parliamentary history. To the questions put by the Leader of the Opposition, no answer was given—indeed, no answer was attempted. I have since been informed that they did not deserve an answer because they were 'mere dialectics.' 'Dialectics' in the modern jargon of political controversy is a pompous and inaccurate description of arguments to which a reply cannot easily be found. . . . With a majority of three hundred and fifty no high standard of logic is required. But decencies should be preserved.7

In the House of Commons Mr. Burdett-Coutts protested against the "brutal tyranny" of the Prime Minister's style and added the ominous prophecy that "two could play at that game."8 Balfour could not, but in time Bonar Law would far surpass the Liberals in the contest.

Many other Unionists found the tone of the new Parliament repellant. The Standard mused, "The airs of patronising dictatorship assumed by Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman are, it must be confessed, somewhat exasperating when we reflect how humble a position he occupied only a few years ago."9 Blackwood's Magazine perceived symptoms of general decline in the nation. "The social currency also is debased, and wherever we look we see the baleful influence of the democracy. . . . It has ever brought with it vulgarity and ruin."10 Balfour continued to find the new House too crude and coarse-minded to appreciate the delicacy of his rhetorical skill. The new members wondered at the quality of previous Parliaments

7Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49858, Balfour to Walter Rothschild, ca. 18 March 1906.
8Debates, Commons, 4s, CLIII (12 March 1906), 996.
9Quoted in Westminster Gazette, 15 June 1906.
10CLXXIX (April, 1906), 538.
which had surrendered to such flimsy enchantments, and they subdued the Balfourian sallies with chilling silence, puzzled indifference, occasional bursts of ironical cheering, or peals of mocking laughter.  

The fall of the Unionist Leader from Parliamentary preeminence was often described as marking a decisive change in the style of British politics. The democratization of the House of Commons allegedly dated from the election of 1906. It seemed that the day of the common man had arrived in the House, bringing with it a different social atmosphere. Later events, however, suggested that this judgment was oversimplified.

The apparent change in the tone of Parliament was not permanent. As the new members absorbed the traditions of Westminster they resembled more and more the veterans of previous years. Balfour dedicated himself to reestablishing his prestige by assiduous attendance and plainer speaking. He gradually regained his hold on the House and within a few years had educated the new members to appreciate his old debating style. The men who jeered at Balfour's "foolery" in 1906 stayed to enjoy the same foolery with the taste of the connoisseur.

Having lost the opening skirmish the Unionist leaders prepared for the major legislative battles of the year, fully expecting the Liberal government to introduce measures which would violate Unionist principles, which they identified with the public interest. They further expected that they would control the situation in the public interest, depending largely on the House of Lords. Rather early in 

—Leslie Stephen, Jr.
the session Lord Lansdowne, Unionist Leader in the Lords, raised the problem of ensuring constant cooperation between the Party's Leaders in the two Houses. He proposed setting up some Party machinery to ensure that neither group would "take up a line of its own without carefully considering the effects which the adoption of such a line might have upon the other House." Balfour agreed that the Unionists must plan carefully the campaign in the Lords and the Commons but had nothing specific to suggest as machinery to effect the coordination. He did, however, describe his general strategy to Lansdowne. "I incline to advise that we should fight all points of importance very stiffly in the Commons, and should make the House of Lords the theatre of compromise." No permanent machinery was created, but occasional conferences of the Party Leaders and the usual personal contacts partly satisfied the requirement.

Curiously, Balfour believed that the Liberals were counting on the Lords to rectify errors deliberately included in their legislation. He predicted,

They will bring in Bills in a much more extreme form than the moderate members of their Cabinet probably approve. The moderate members will trust to the House of Lords cutting out or modifying the most outrageous provisions; the Left Wing of the Cabinet, on the other hand, while looking forward to the same result, will be consoled for the anticipated mutilation of their measures by the reflection that they will be gradually accumulating a case against the Upper House, and that they will be able to appeal at the next election for a mandate to modify its constitution.

12Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49729, Lansdowne Memorandum and letter to Jack Sandars, 5 April 1906.
13Ibid., Balfour to Lansdowne, 13 April 1906, marked "Private."
14Ibid.
Balfour's conviction that the Liberals were quite insincere in their legislative proposals and that the House of Lords represented the moderates in the Liberal Party as well as the Unionist opposition colored his view of events through the conflicts of the next six years. Neither he nor many other Unionists was quite able to accept the sincerity of the Liberal charge that the Unionist majority in the Lords was a partisan body.

The conflict between the Commons and Lords was not long delayed. After a brief skirmish over a Commons resolution censuring Lord Milner on the Chinese slavery issue, which the House of Lords answered by its own resolution commending the late High Commissioner of South Africa, the government moved on to the main business of the session. The Liberal Education Bill of 1906 was intended to remove the grievances of the non-conformists arising out of Balfour's Education Act of 1902. This vexatious problem involved so many technical points that it was extraordinarily difficult to embody general principles in concrete proposals without some inconsistencies. It was precisely the sort of controversy in which the House of Lords could use its revising power with maximum effect. The education problem seemed to involve a jungle of detail of such appalling complexity as to baffle and ultimately to bore the public as well as Parliament itself.

The pattern of Unionist propaganda was set forth fairly clearly by the right-wing Blackwood's Magazine. In April, 1906, in an article entitled, "The Call to Arms," Blackwood's hinted that the Party must campaign for popular support for the House of Lords in its consideration of Liberal measures passed by a majority of the House of Commons,
a majority produced by an election "decided on a false issue." An approach to the "combination of moderate men" must accompany the Lords' decisions. Only a month later Blackwood's was confident that the government would have to modify its Education Bill as the Church and the Lords might require lest its majority "melt away before a blaze of popular indignation." The moderate men would certainly condemn the "corrupt and unprincipled bargain between the Government and the Non-conformists" to which the Education Bill was due. Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman must adjust his demands to the fact that on this issue the Unionist Party was united, and all Churchmen would "stand shoulder to shoulder in defence of their sacred inheritance." Thus the outlines of Unionist policy took shape. The Liberal majority was the product of a campaign of lies. Its championship of the nonconformist grievances was a cynical and corrupt bargain. The Unionist Party enjoyed complete unity on the issue, and it had the support of the Church and the "moderate men" in upholding the national interest against the factional attack. The details could safely be left to the discretion of the Unionist leaders, who, despite their scanty following in the Commons, clearly represented the permanent majority of the nation on all matters of education.

Just as the education controversy was getting under way, British politics produced a curious incident which clearly illuminated Unionist views of the role of the Lords. A Private Member's Bill

15 CLXXIX (April, 1906), 575.
16 CLXXIX (May, 1906), 742.
amending the Aliens Act passed the House of Commons without government sponsorship and without opposition. The Bill excluded from the country aliens brought in under contract to replace striking workmen. The House of Lords rejected the Bill on second reading on 17 May by a party vote of 96 to 24. The Unionist majority justified the action on the peculiar ground that the government had not accepted responsibility for the Bill but had left it to the independent judgment of the members of the House of Commons. Lord Lansdowne remarked that such treatment was "neither convenient nor altogether dignified." He hinted that the House of Lords need take seriously only the government's officially sanctioned proposals. He told the peers, "I feel very strongly that, particularly in this House, we ought to think twice before we reject proposals made by the responsible Government of the day, particularly when they deal with questions affecting the welfare of a great body of our fellow subjects." He promised to withdraw his opposition if the government adopted the Aliens Bill and gave the Lords its guidance. Lord Salisbury gave this trick away with the taunt, "What will be thought by their Labour friends in another place when they read that His Majesty's Government were unable, as a Government, to support this Bill, that they were unable to give any guidance to your Lordship's House in this matter?" The Lords vetoed the Bill in the hope that the Labour Party would blame the Government for the loss.

17Debates, Lords, 4s. CLVII (17 May 1906), 606.
18Ibid., 608.
19Ibid., 610.
To justify this obvious piece of partisan tactics the Unionist peers had to pretend that government sponsorship was all-important to them. They were compelled to dismiss a free vote in the House of Commons as unworthy of serious consideration. The Times described such votes uncontrolled by the Whips as "the crude decisions of a knot of people in the Commons who cannot even convince their own leaders of the excellence of their proposals." These were dangerous arguments for the Unionist Party, since only contradictory arguments could justify the Lords' handling of the government's bills. Although the Aliens Bill was supposedly not a considered opinion of the House of Commons because it passed without government sponsorship, soon bills passed with government sponsorship were not to be taken seriously because of the coercion of the Whips. A Private Member's Bill was merely the opinion of a "knot of people," but soon government measures were to be condemned because of the destruction of the independence, responsibility, and voice of the private member. The Prime Minister allegedly could have secured different treatment for the Aliens Bill by adopting it, but soon the Prime Minister's own bills were to be carved up or rejected because government bills could not carry the moral authority of bills on which there had been free discussion and voting.

The Aliens Bill incident demonstrated quite clearly that the Unionist Lords could and would reject any measure they disliked, provided they thought they could do so without risking an electoral defeat for the Party. The lengthy discussions in later years of

20 18 May 1906.
constitutional principles governing the Lords' veto were therefore often quite pointless. One result of the contradictory constitutional justifications of the Lords' actions was the debasement of political vocabulary. By 1910 when a serious attempt was made to reach a general constitutional agreement between parties, the terminology of political and constitutional usage had ceased to be of much use for realistic discussion. So long as the Unionist Party defined the terms arbitrarily to justify contradictory positions dictated by the Tory tactics of the moment there could hardly be much likelihood of agreements on principle.

At the extreme, some Unionists even discounted the effect of a general election in controlling the Lords' veto. Joseph Chamberlain, for example, thought that if the Liberal government insisted on carrying its Education Bill without changes, the Lords should insist on drastic amendments. Chamberlain anticipated an election on that issue and expected the Liberals to be returned with a big majority, though not quite so large as before. In such case he believed that the Lords should throw out or amend the Education Bill a second time despite the election, using the diminished Liberal majority as an excuse. Chamberlain even regarded as expendable the commonly accepted principle that the Lords merely referred controversial bills to the electorate by their veto and automatically accepted the verdict of an election.21

As the education controversy progressed the internal harmony of

21 Chamberlain Papers, Joseph Chamberlain to Austen Chamberlain, 4 May 1906.
the Unionist Party on the question began to crumble. Joseph Chamberlain became disgusted with Balfour's leadership. He thought Balfour was using the Lords solely to perpetuate his own Education Act of 1902. He wrote to his son, "I think I can see that Balfour is all for the purely party tactics of opposing the Bill without attempting to put anything in its place." Chamberlain's attempts to produce a constructive Unionist policy as an alternative to the Liberal bill were smothered by Balfour's reluctance to extend his activities beyond pure opposition. Early in June, 1906, Chamberlain summoned his Birmingham election workers to a garden party at his home at Highbury. He regaled his supporters with assertions that the Education Bill could not pass, that another election would probably come in the spring, and that the Unionist Party must be ready then to turn out the Radicals. His guests, perhaps flattered by their host's assurance that "whatever Birmingham has declared to be the right thing has been carried," came away with the conclusion that the House of Lords would ensure that the Education Bill would not pass.

Chamberlain's announcement was somewhat premature, since the Bill was still in the committee stage in the House of Commons. It seemed that Chamberlain was not averse from embarrassing the Leaders of his Party by making unauthorized disclosures of a policy which was still under debate. Perhaps he did so because he felt their resolve to fight the battle was weakening. Chamberlain was convinced that even

\(^{22}\) Ibid.

\(^{23}\) Observer, 10 June 1906; also Westminster Gazette, 7 June 1906.
if his Party did not produce a constructive policy it must fight against the Liberal policy to the death. In a top-level Unionist conference on tactics Chamberlain insisted on a policy of obstruction in the Commons. Lord Salisbury took the opposite side, arguing that obstruction was "the resort of a weak case." Salisbury thought obstruction in the Commons to be "the wrong preparation for strong action in the Lords." He advised, "We must be the profoundly reasonable party as against a Government who flounder from one dilemma to another." 24

The Salisbury plan of compromise in the Commons and strong action in the Lords was unusually interesting because it directly contradicted the plans agreed upon in April by Balfour and Lansdowne. Balfour had pointed out to Lansdowne that the stiff fight must occur in the Commons, while the Lords should be the theater of compromise. Lansdowne had agreed. Apparently the Leaders' tactics had not been impressed on the followers or perhaps even communicated to them. The Chamberlain-Salisbury argument suggested that Balfour and Lansdowne had not the firm grip on the situation that might have been expected of a self-confident leadership. In the event, neither the Salisbury tactic nor the Balfour-Lansdowne approach was employed. For the next nine years the Unionists appeared equally bellicose and intransigent in both chambers. The temptation to exploit the Lords' powers was too great. Theaters of compromise, profound reasonableness, and graceful concessions somehow never materialized.

The crucial second reading debate on the Education Act began in the House of Lords on 1 August 1906. The Lords met, assured by The Times that public opinion was certainly with them in their intention to examine the Act fully and fairly, even if "partisan comment on the other side" might assert the contrary. Under the circumstances Unionist usage of terms like "full and fair" discussion indicated hard times for the Education Act.

In the debate the Marquis of Salisbury immediately made one point clear with the announcement that the Liberal Party's apparent agreement on general principles was due only to their imperfect understanding of them. He snapped, "The truth is that when the Liberal Party have left general principles they have really shown themselves to be profoundly divided." This emphasis on Unionist union versus Liberal disunion led quickly to an image of solid majority versus factionalism, which would enable the Lords to appear as protectors of the whole nation against rabid minorities and even as protectors of the Liberals from the consequences of their own folly. Still more interesting was Lord Londonderry's conviction that the electorate may have said something about education in the election of 1906, but it certainly had not anticipated such a measure as the Education Act. The Duke of Devonshire drove this point home with the flat denial that the election had given the Liberals a mandate.

25 July 1906.
26 Debates, Lords, 4s, CLXII (1 August 1906), 1000.
27 Ibid., 1000–1001.
28 Ibid., 911.
for the Act's provisions. He noted that the large majority for the Act in the House of Commons had been produced only by party allegiance and that the debates had revealed differences of opinion among the sections of that majority which would "deprive its verdict of the weight which it might otherwise have possessed." The Aliens Bill doctrine that party allegiance enforced by government whips was a sine qua non of real legislative validity was conveniently forgotten. The House of Lords now made its claim to be the sole judge of electoral mandates and the sole interpreter of House of Commons votes.

The final touch was added by the aged Earl of Halsbury, who thought the Education Act nothing but an attack on the House of Lords. Dismissing with contempt the vague threats of the government, Halsbury grimly insisted that the Lords would act on their own judgment of what was good for the nation and would throw out the Act if necessary to preserve British children from godless education. Anyone who thought otherwise "must have a very small idea of the House of Lords and of his countrymen." Thus Halsbury expressed the doctrine that the Lords need consult no authority but their own consciences. He seemed confident that his countrymen could be depended upon to support the Lords whatever their decision. Halsbury's idea that the Education Act was not designed as a serious legislative measure but as a deliberately provocative and defective measure challenging the Lords' courage soon became a staple of Unionist thought. Balfour gave this notion his official sanction in a speech at Manchester. He told his audience

29Ibid., 1186. 30Ibid., 1181.
31Ibid., CIXII (3 August 1906), 1482.
that the government hoped, "by bringing in one measure after another in the House of Commons, each more impossible than the last, to accumulate what they are pleased to call a case against the House of Lords."32

Balfour's contribution to the discussion of the alleged Liberal mandate for the Education Act was to pour scorn on the whole concept of a mandate. He jeered,

A mandate is a phrase which does duty for argument, which does duty for sense, which saves the necessity of eloquence, which is incapable of being translated into practice except at the loss of administrative justice, of administrative ability—which is, above all, an instrument which cuts short and saves thorough discussion.33

Balfour could afford to dismiss the mandate from political consideration. He thought the Unionists did not need one and the Liberals never had one (at least for such measures as the Education Bill). Other Unionists found it useful for various arguments against the Liberals. Balfour himself resurrected the idea that the Liberals needed a mandate for major legislation in succeeding years.

As the Lords' campaign against the Education Act gathered momentum, Unionist enthusiasm for the peers became still less restrained. The Morning Post thought the Lords great because they stood above the interests of parties. Their prestige was anchored in "the conviction of the country that its members have no axe to grind, no rash pledges to redeem, no terminological inexactitudes

32 Speech at Manchester, 22 October 1906, National Union Gleanings, XXVII (November, 1906), 381.

to explain away." The Post added the curious remark that the Lords' duty was "to protect the parliamentary rights of the minority in the House of Commons." Liberals found it suspicious that the Lords discovered this constitutional duty only after January, 1906. Balfour told the Unionist 1900 Club that the House of Lords would "be universally applauded because it will be regarded by every man of sober thought, irrespective of party, as the one barrier that exists between the folly of our present governors and the great interests which in an unhappy moment have been entrusted to their charge." The Lords' amendments changed the Education Act from a Liberal to a Balfourian measure. This was a direct challenge to the Liberals. The government Whip, Arthur Acland, noted, "There is really nothing to give away to the Lords worth speaking of without the Government violating its pledges to the constituencies." Compromise with the Lords would be nearly impossible. But Acland perceived that the Liberals were not in a strong strategic position, despite their strength in the Commons. He commented sadly, "Of course every ordinary layman is bored to death with the subject—both education and religious squabbling." This boded ill for an electoral challenge if the Lords insisted on their amendments. At the same time, oddly enough, the Unionist leadership was by no means certain that it could goad the Lords into persisting.

Balfour cautiously wrote that he was "not wholly satisfied" with the Lords' proceedings. He, like the Chamberlains, thought the Lords were giving way too much! Balfour called a meeting of Unionist leaders to consider the problem of stiffening the Lords' resistance to compromise. Lord St. Aldwyn, Austen Chamberlain recorded, had said "he would regard the failure of the Bill to pass as a disaster and would yield anything or everything as soon as he knows the Government consider it essential." The Duke of Devonshire agreed with St. Aldwyn, but said he was willing to "tamper moderately" with one or two provisions. Even the Archbishop of Canterbury was intransigent only on a few points but was, Chamberlain wrote, "ready to give up everything else as he regards a continuation of the controversy as disastrous." Balfour, Austen Chamberlain, Walter Long, and four other influential Unionist M.P.'s sent the wobblers a strong remonstrance insisting that they fight to the death, but Austen Chamberlain wrote with disgust, "What a crew!" It was maddening to find compromisers in the Party when it held the power to enforce its will. Chamberlain's anger was probably increased by the fact that St. Aldwyn and the Duke of Devonshire, the chief compromisers, were also leaders of the Unionist free traders. Balfour, at least, had no doubt of the rightness of the cause or the perfection of the tactics. He touched the heights in a speech to the Junior

37 Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49723, Balfour to H.O. Arnold-Forster, 3 November 1906.
38 Chamberlain Papers, Austen Chamberlain to Mary E. Chamberlain, 27 November 1906.
39 Ibid.
Constitutional Club in London. "There is no subject on which I am more clear that the sense of justice, the love of fair play, the regard for religion are more surely ranged on one side, and nothing but sectarian animosity and prejudice ranged upon the other." An inept reporter may have garbled the Leader's grammar, but his meaning was unmistakeably clear. There was no need for dialectical obscurity in that situation.

Lloyd George might rail at the Lords and demand their abolition but the Unionists were serenely confident of their permanent control. The Prime Minister took time out from the campaign with the Lords to fight an irritating minor action against the King, who found Lloyd George's attacks on the Lords a deplorable breach of good taste and propriety. The Monarch was infuriated by the Welshman's reference to the King's name in his speech against the Lords. Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman complained in reply that the Lords were turning his Bill upside down and promised that "forcible language" would be employed generally if the Lords persisted. Unfortunately for him, forcible language was the only remedy the constitution had to offer short of a dissolution.

The House of Commons rejected the Lords' amendments en bloc, an empty piece of defiance since Balfour succeeded in holding the

---

40 Speech on 28 November 1906, National Union Gleanings, XXVII (December, 1906), 432.
41 Speech at Gloucester, 24 November 1906, National Union Gleanings, XXVIII (January, 1907), 63-64.
42 Campbell-Bannerman Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 41207, Lord Knollys to Campbell-Bannerman, 3 December 1906.
43 Ibid., Campbell-Bannerman to Knollys, 4 December 1906.
Lords firm. The Unionist Whip, Acland-Hood, told his Leader that the Party was dead set against accepting "anything but the most satisfactory concessions practically giving us all for which there has been a genuine demand." He thought the government so anxious to pass the bill that they would "swallow almost the full dose." Balfour met the government leaders in conference on 18 December to receive their proposals of concessions. His question was, "How far can they be squeezed?" Having reached the utmost limit of squeezing he decided that their offers were unsatisfactory and thus decided to destroy the bill. At the decisive meeting of Unionist leaders at Lansdowne House on 19 December only the Duke of Devonshire dissented from the decision to insist on the Lords' amendments.

Since Balfour had succeeded in using the Lords to block the revision of his education settlement, he could afford to endure a certain amount of Liberal chaff in the Commons. The Prime Minister referred to him as a "sort of unrecognised mouthpiece of the House of Lords." It might have been more accurate to call the House of Lords the recognized mouthpiece of Mr. Balfour. Campbell-Bannerman announced that the resources of the British constitution and of the House of Commons were not exhausted. He frightened nobody.

---

44 Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49764, Sandars to Balfour, 16 December 1906, marked "Confidential."


46 Chamberlain Papers, AC7(3), Chamberlain's Notes of the Conference, 20 December 1906.

47 Debates, Commons, 4s, CLXVII (11 December 1906), 157.

48 Ibid., CLXVII (20 December 1906), 1740.
only resource available was a dissolution, and his own rhetorical question settled that point. "Who can doubt that a sense of weariness, and nausea, and a dislike of clerical and sectarian squabbles have spread from one end of the country to the other?" An electoral appeal to weariness and nausea was unpromising.

Mr. H.W. Paul, a Liberal back-bencher, tried an ingenious maneuver to rescue the Education Act. He requested the Speaker to find the Lords' amendments a breach of Parliamentary privilege on the ground that the Education Act was a finance bill. The Speaker brushed aside the request with little ceremony. The incident was almost unnoticed at the time, but it was an early hint that the Commons' supposed control over money bills might appeal to Liberals as a way out of deadlocks with the Lords.

Unionists claimed to be shocked by the government's refusal to accept the Lords' superior statesmanship by agreeing to their amendments. Lord Lansdowne decided that insofar as there was a popular mandate for an education bill the Lords' amendments fulfilled it. Indeed, he thought the Lords had carried out the mandate more faithfully than the Commons. He was shocked by the rudeness and incivility of the government's rejection of the amendments en bloc. Such Liberal bad manners raised the constitutional question of the future usefulness of the House of Lords if it surrendered to such bullying. The Halsbury interpretation of Liberal bills as so many

49 Ibid., 1736.
50 Ibid., CLXVI (10 December 1906), 1576-1577, 1579.
51 Ibid., CLXVI (6 December 1906), 1113-1114.
challenges to the Lords was becoming common ground for all Unionist speakers. Already the Lords were maneuvering themselves into a self-created position in which compromise on an issue of Liberal legislation would be equated with total destruction of the Lords' powers.

Lord Avebury reached back to the election of January, 1906, to find his justification of the Lords' intransigence. He played an interesting statistical game and announced that if the government really had the seats to which it was entitled by popular vote the Education Bill, passed by 206 votes on second reading, would have been thrown out by 34 votes.\(^2\) The Times blamed the bill's failure on the Prime Minister's "incapacity for taking broad views of what the nation wants" and censoriously noted that "a Prime Minister needs to know a good deal more about the enduring temper of the nation than can be learnt from the result of a general election." Fortunately, The Times remarked, Mr. Balfour was there to express the real views of the nation. The House of Lords also helped "to bring out the real mind of the country as opposed to its passing impulses."\(^3\) Of course if the government was so obstinate as to ignore the real voice of the nation speaking through Balfour and the Lords, it could have an election, a decision which The Times thought improbable. The Times congratulated the Lords on their success in acting as trustees for the great number of people who had voted Liberal in the general election without giving a mandate for the Education Bill.\(^4\)


\(^3\) 21 December 1906.

\(^4\) 4 December 1906.
The ultimate statement of Unionist admiration for the Lords' splendid qualities came from Mr. George Wyndham, who pronounced the Lords "umpire" in all national questions. Liberal grumbling at the Lords' decisions was "barracking the umpire." In politics as in cricket the umpire's decision was absolute. The Daily Mail warned, "The real danger to the nation arises not from the House of Lords, but from the House of Commons, which acts upon impulse and disregards every consideration but party feeling." Only the Spectator, chief Unionist free trade journal, had serious doubts about the blocking of the Education Act, which it attributed entirely to Balfour's influence. It deplored Balfour's "unwillingness to recognise any faults in the measure of 1902" and his desire "to snatch a party advantage."

In June, 1906, during the education controversy, the Lords took under consideration another important piece of legislation, the Trades Disputes Bill, designed to clean up the wreckage in trade union affairs left by the Taff Vale decision. The government had abandoned its own Trades Disputes Bill and had adopted the Labour Party's alternative, which went much further in immunizing trade unions from legal penalties. The Daily Telegraph immediately advised the Lords to restore the measure to the original government form, but by the time the Lords began their debates second thoughts were in order. The Unionist leaders in the Commons were intimidated by the prospect of alienating the labor vote by moving against the Bill. Unionist

55 Westminster Gazette, 7 December 1906. 56 11 December 1906.
57 22 December 1906, 1028. 58 7 June 1906.
tactics in the Lords resolved themselves into a search for vigorous expletives in condemning the Bill together with the invention of ingenious excuses for voting for it.

Lansdowne summed up the Lords' problem as, "the question to what extent this House is justified in barring the way to measures recommended by the majority of the House of Commons, but in our opinion detrimental to the public interest."\textsuperscript{59} Lansdowne's judgment was, "I believe it to be the duty of Your Lordship's House to arrest the progress of such measures whenever we believe that they have been insufficiently considered and that they are not in accord with the deliberate judgment of the country."\textsuperscript{60} Thus he made the Lords the sole judges of the popular will. It was the Lords' duty to decide what the people had voted for in the general election. If the government disputed the Lords' decision, only another general election could settle the controversy (assuming the Lords accepted the election as a decision on that particular problem). Even this extreme statement of the Lords' power fell short of the Halsbury doctrine that the Lords must do what they thought best for the nation regardless of anyone else's opinion.

There was no question in Lansdowne's mind about the Trades Disputes Bill. The voice of the people had been heard in the election. The government had a mandate for this Bill. What the Lords might think of the merits of the Bill, which Lansdowne believed a national disaster of the first magnitude, was irrelevant. In a moment of

\textsuperscript{59} Debates, Lords, 4s, CLXVI (4 December 1906), 702.
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid.
amazing candor, Lansdowne remarked, "We are passing through a period when it is necessary for this House to move with very great caution. ... Let us, at any rate so far as we are able, be sure that if we join issue we do so upon ground which is as favourable as possible to ourselves." The Liberals received this as an admission that the Lords were checked only by a sense of self-preservation in pursuing the special interests of the Unionist Party. Lansdowne, who believed that the Unionist Lords always represented the national interest, saw nothing reprehensible in his statement. The House of Lords, dutifully following the directives of the Unionist Leader, passed the Trades Disputes Bill.

The arguments used in the controversies over the Aliens Bill, the Education Bill, and the Trades Disputes Bill effectively expressed the Party's principles. The Lords' veto of a Plural Voting Bill and their drastic amending of several other Liberal bills, though important to the government's program, shed little more light on Unionist political opinions.

The Unionist Leaders had controlled political affairs successfully during their first year of opposition by using the House of Lords as their agent. In the internal affairs of the Party, however, there was no such short cut to success. The leadership question continued to plague the Unionist Party during 1906. The Valentine Letters temporarily patched up the Chamberlain-Balfour alliance, but nothing could silence the more extreme tariff reformers to whom Balfour seemed a greater national danger than Campbell-Bannerman. In the

---

61 Ibid., 703.
campaign to discredit Balfour, Fabian Ware, editor of the Morning Post, and Leo Maxse, editor of the National Review, took the lead. Maxse did his best to add a note of personal bitterness to the attacks on the Leader, presumably in the hope that sooner or later Balfour would lose heart and give way to a more ardent tariff reformer. Most of the Chamberlainites, however, abandoned outright attacks on Balfour after the Party meeting at Lansdowne House officially expressed the Party's confidence in him.

The main emphasis of the tariff reform campaign then shifted to seizing control of the Party organization, which was vulnerable to attack, having lost the election so catastrophically. The chief aim of the tariff reformers was the "democratization" of the Unionist Central Office, a body controlled by the Whips, who in turn were firmly controlled by Balfour. The addition of enough popularly elected members to the Central Office would shift control of the Party machinery from the Leader to the activists in the constituencies, where the Chamberlainites were increasingly potent. This would be a most revolutionary step for the Unionist Party, and only a profound distrust of Balfour together with a sense of great urgency in pushing on tariff reform could have produced such a drive. Inevitably Balfour found support in resisting this Party revolution from those who were less than fanatically dedicated to tariff reform.

The National Review set the tone for this campaign with a condemnation of "the charmed circle of Tapers and Tadpoles which congregates at the Carlton Club." The Quarterly Review established

62XLVII (March, 1906), 16.
a respectable objective for the campaign in a criticism of Balfour, who "seemed to be so remote from public sentiment, so incapable of adjusting his words and plans to what was passing in the minds of others, that he could hardly be said to lead at all." This was a fairly plausible argument. If Balfour could be given a clear and continuing lead from the constituencies he would provide the leadership that was expected of him. The campaign to reform the Central Office could, therefore, be described as a move to assist the Leader to rally the Party. The reorganization of the Party would give Balfour the lead that the election had failed to give him.

The tariff reformers' effort to seize the Party organization was a potentially serious threat to Balfour's position, but it had little real chance of success. Joseph Chamberlain, having so recently pledged himself to follow Balfour's leadership loyally, could not join in the rebellion. Balfour had secured his commanding position in the Party meeting. He was a shrewd and experienced politician, and he had an infallible instinct for maintaining his own power within the Party. The scapegoat in the campaign against the Chief was Sir Alexander Acland-Hood, the Chief Whip. He was fully aware of the danger and faced the crisis in curiously Balfourian style. His statements combined vague references to the need to bring the Central Office into touch with the needs and wishes of the Party's rank and file with disquisitions stressing the practical difficulties of such an effort. At Taunton Acland-Hood made a major speech on the organizational changes. Freely admitting the need for closer

63CCIV (April, 1906), 577.
union between the Central Office and the local Party groups, he pointed out the insurmountable obstacles to the addition of popular representatives to the Party conference—distance, expense, the difficulty of including working men in the delegation. He concluded that if the rank and file could not be brought to the Party center, the Party center must be brought to the people. He proposed no steps for accomplishing this objective, leaving the impression that he planned to continue as before.

Joseph Chamberlain, practically debarred from publicly joining in the reform campaign, complained privately to Balfour about Hood's opposition to the addition of "the representative element" to the Central Office. He tried to tempt Balfour with hints that the long-discussed fusion of the Liberal Unionists with the Conservative Party might be forthcoming after the democratization of the Central Office. He threatened that it could never be done in the absence of such reform. Balfour, who had no desire to unite the sections of the Unionist Party at the expense of his effective power, listened patiently to Chamberlain's complaints and did nothing. Perhaps disgruntled at this failure, Chamberlain then shifted the focus of his attention from reforming the Party's Central Office to purging the Unionist free traders. He told the Liberal Unionist Club that there was no longer room for free traders in the Party. He was quite

---

64 Morning Post, 5 May 1906.
65 Chamberlain Papers, AC8(9), Joseph Chamberlain to Austen Chamberlain, 4 May 1906.
ready to put fiscal reform as a "shibboleth" to every candidate. Although he was in no position to carry out the threat, his speech fluttered the free traders. Lord Robert Cecil complained bitterly that Chamberlain's policy could end only in the destruction of the Party. He was, however, reluctantly compelled to admit that, "By dint of unscrupulous electioneering and blatant self-advertisement they [the tariff reformers] have acquired a certain prestige—particularly among the wirepullers of the party." He was horrified by the presumption of that "impulsive and unscrupulous demagogue" whose theory of politics "would soon drive all self-respecting persons to other pursuits." The fastidious aristocrat placed Chamberlain's cause in the lowest possible category. "It is American Bossism in its worst form."

Cecil's practical response to Chamberlain's threat was to accuse the Central Office of surrendering to the tariff reform pressure. Acland-Hood, carrying out Balfour's policy of holding the Party together by balancing all sections, found himself fighting a two-front war. Like Balfour he was holding off the Chamberlainite campaign to seize control of the Central Office while resisting attacks from the free traders on his alleged favoritism toward the Tariff Reform League in Party management. He wearily absorbed Lord Robert Cecil's protests and concluded, "I think a careful analysis would show that the F.T. [Free Trade]...

66 Spectator, 19 May 1906, 776.

67 Cecil Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 51158, Cecil to Sir Edward Clarke, 29 May 1906, marked "Private."
Kettle was considerably blacker than the T.R.L. [Tariff Reform League] Pot."

Despite the irritating pressures from Chamberlain and Cecil, the Party leadership held a commanding position. In the absence of open support from prominent Unionists, the public campaign for reform of the Central Office was primarily a newspaper agitation. The National Review's savage attacks on the "small and selfish clique of egotistical politicians who would sacrifice the whole future of Unionism to their own personal vested interests" convinced few Unionists that the Party was in serious danger. While the Morning Post hammered at the Central Office, which it described as "arbitrarily constituted, unbridled in the exercise of its power, and throughout profoundly suspicious of popular sentiment and popular control," the anti-Balfour forces prepared for a crucial meeting of the National Union. The crippling stroke which Joseph Chamberlain suffered in June removed him permanently from active politics, and Arthur Balfour's tactical strength within the Party made the attempt to force a tariff reform element into the Central Office a forlorn hope.

The National Union meeting on 27 July was a ludicrous anti-climax. The resolution attacking the Central Office was moved by Leo Maxse. It aroused some hostility, but most of the conference members were indifferent to it. It was a dismal failure. The Morning Post, searching for an explanation of the failure, commented,

68 Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49771, Acland-Hood's Notes on a Memorandum by Lord Robert Cecil, ca. 15 June 1906.

69 Conscientious Objector [probably Leo Maxse], "Mr. George Wyndham," National Review, XLVII (June, 1906), 635.

70 19 July 1906.
"Mighty indeed must have been the opiate which was yesterday at work in the Conference at the Hotel Cecil." The Party's antipathy to aggressive, noisy types like Maxse proved to be Balfour's greatest asset. The seconder of Maxse's resolution, Mr. Bridgeman, even thought it prudent to write to Balfour, assuring him of his complete loyalty and asserting that the sole purpose of the resolution was to secure the improvement of the Central Office. He could not resist ruffling Balfour's sensibilities by referring to the feeling that existed "rightly or wrongly" that Balfour was surrounded by men who were not in touch with the Party and who prevented him from hearing the views of Party workers. Jack Sandars, who was obviously one of the advisers Bridgeman referred to, dismissed his profession of loyalty peremptorily, apparently believing it to be a face-saving switch in the hour of defeat. The Daily Telegraph, steadfastly loyal to Balfour, brushed aside any doubt about the real object of the attack on the Central Office. The Telegraph announced triumphantly the collapse of the "incipient and rather clumsily-organised revolt" against Balfour's leadership. It quoted with relish Acland-Hood's declaration, "The Conservative Party would stand many things, but it would never stand a caucus."

The failure of the campaigns against Balfour's leadership and his organization left him in possession of the field. Only when

---

71 28 July 1906.

72 Balfour Papers, BM Add. MSS. 49764, Bridgeman to Balfour, 2 August 1906, marked "Private"; Sandars' Memorandum on Bridgeman's letter, 20 August 1906.

73 28 July 1906.
repeated defeats had demoralized the Party would Leo Maxse find effective leverage for his anti-Balfour diatribes. The early skirmishes had been one-sided, largely because of Joseph Chamberlain's decision to avoid an open competition for the leadership. With Chamberlain's retirement in June, 1906, the chief danger to Balfour vanished, but much dissatisfaction with his leadership remained.

The attack of the tariff reformers on Balfour's closest associates had hardly subsided before another challenge from a different section of Balfour's followers emerged. This controversy more directly involved the Leader, and it somehow combined bitterness, potential Party tragedy, and low comedy. It began quite unexpectedly on 29 August 1906, when Walter Long, late Chief Secretary for Ireland in Balfour's cabinet, speaking at the Irish Unionist Alliance meeting in Dublin, vigorously denied accusations that Balfour had vetoed Long's orders changing personnel in the Irish administration. He asserted that he had had good reasons not to make the changes, but he would not give them at that time. He insisted with some heat that the reasons were not what his accusers said they were and that there were no letters to prove differently. He challenged anyone who had letters that might seem to indicate that the accusations were true to produce the letters instead of making charges and threats. He did not mention what accusations he was denying.74 To the English public this curious passage may have been incomprehensibly obscure, but Long's meaning was not lost on his Irish Unionist listeners.

The controversy concerned Sir Antony MacDonnell, a Home Ruler

74The Times, 30 August 1906.
who had been persuaded by Mr. George Wyndham, Chief Secretary for Ireland in 1902, to exchange his position in the Indian Administration for the post of Under-Secretary for Ireland. He was supposed to take part in Wyndham's policy of conciliation, which was intended to obliterate the Home Rule movement by satisfying the economic and social grievances of Ireland. Land purchase, a university for the Irish Catholics, centralization and coordination of Irish government under the Chief Secretary, improvement in Irish transportation, and rate relief were to be part of the Unionist program. Wyndham hoped to persuade the Irish that the Unionists were their true friends and not their implacable persecutors. The Chief Secretary and MacDonnell had exchanged letters discussing these policies and outlining MacDonnell's position as Under-Secretary in rather general terms quite open to misinterpretation. The Irish Unionists, suspicious of this appeasement of the Catholic Irish, had savagely attacked Wyndham, destroying his career and his policy. Walter Long had then replaced Wyndham. Persistent rumors among the Irish Unionists that Wyndham's plans had called for an approach to Home Rule and that Balfour's cabinet had dabbled in this heresy gave rise to Long's peculiar speech in Dublin.

Long's call for the publication of correspondence concerning MacDonnell's appointment was in itself a dangerous prospect, for it could cause nothing but embarrassment to the Party. Far more dangerous, however, was Long's astonishing assertion that there was "abundant reason" for the Irish Unionists' suspicions and plenty of justification for their question, "Why, when the Unionist flag was
flying, were principles adopted which were not consonant with Unionist principles?" This broad hint that George Wyndham was a disloyal Unionist could be taken to mean that Balfour, who as Prime Minister was responsible for Irish policy, was also disloyal!

Sir Antony MacDonnell, interpreting Long's challenge to produce correspondence as being directed to himself, replied with a letter to The Times refusing to publish his papers and denying that he had made any accusations. He added that when Long became Chief Secretary he had proposed that MacDonnell's agreement with Wyndham be cancelled. MacDonnell claimed to have replied that the agreement was with the government, not with Wyndham, and that the agreement was left untouched. The Times commented that the public would want to have the correspondence published. Long replied immediately that his speech had not referred to MacDonnell, who was, he thought, concerned in the controversy only "to a very minor degree, if at all." But, Long added, since MacDonnell had gratuitously started an argument with him, it could not be left at the exchange of letters. He called on MacDonnell to publish his letters, and he now denied that there had ever been a MacDonnell-Wyndham agreement. This exchange brought the pot to a full boil, with the Unionist press insisting on a "full revelation of the hidden facts of the case" and hinting that Balfour's cabinet had compromised itself on the Home Rule issue.

All this was most satisfying to the Irish Unionists, who

---

75 Ibid.
76 Ibid., 31 August 1906.
77 Ibid., 1 September 1906.
78 Ibid.
believed or pretended to believe that Balfour had abandoned the time-honored policy of coercing the disloyal Irish and had gone soft on Home Rule. George Wyndham kept the controversy going with the announcement that neither he nor Balfour had ever departed from Unionist principles, though he admitted there had been "a certain vagueness" in his relationship with MacDonnell. He interpreted the whole affair as an indirect attack on Balfour's leadership. Walter Long, determined to press the quarrel to its most embarrassing degree, demanded that "the mystery of the letters" be cleared up. He stoutly denied that Balfour had ever pledged himself to a policy of devolution. Such protestations of loyalty were rather inconsistent with the character of his charges. Wyndham wrote to Balfour that Long was being used as a dupe by a cabal of Irish Unionists and English sympathizers, who wanted to discredit both the policy of conciliation and Balfour's leadership. He excused Long on the ground that the Tory squire had no idea what he was doing.

Balfour, hoping that sanity might reappear in his Party, attempted to ignore the whole outcry and refused to publish any letters. Walter Long's reaction to this announcement was decidedly hostile. He complained with some rancor to Austen Chamberlain that Balfour's silence was exposing him to unfair and offensive attacks.

79 Speech in Selly Oak, 8 September 1906, National Union Gleanings, XXVII (October, 1906), 245-249.
80 The Times. 13 September 1906.
81 Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49805, Wyndham to Balfour, 15 September 1906; Wyndham to Balfour, 16 September 1906.
82 Chamberlain Papers, AC7(4), Long to Austen Chamberlain, 28 September 1906.
Chamberlain responded to Long's plea for help by putting pressure on Balfour. He told his Leader that the situation was serious, far more grave than Balfour realised. He informed Balfour, "There is widespread misgiving and uncertainty producing not merely indignation on the part of Irish Unionists but disastrous hesitation in the ranks of the Unionist Party generally." Balfour could hardly have been pleased by Chamberlain's fervent pledge of his entire loyalty and devotion when the importunate lieutenant added to his memo, "And I think it must be admitted that this misgiving is not altogether without cause."\(^{83}\)

Balfour was enraged by the mere suggestion that he could have approved of anything resembling Home Rule. He found himself embroiled in a bitter controversy over a past incident and being forced into an embarrassing attempt to justify himself against an accusation whose very existence he regarded as a mortal insult. Jack Sandars further aroused his Chief's temper by reporting that no explanation would quiet the malicious tongues and that the whole thing was engineered by a malignant cabal. Sandars, like Wyndham, thought Long too much a fool to know what he was doing. "Walter is honest and simple as the day, but he is a tool in the hands of these people who flatter him assiduously, and who have found it not difficult to enlist his alliance in a matter where his vanity and his hopes are concerned."\(^{84}\)

\(^{83}\)Chamberlain Papers, AC7(4), Austen Chamberlain to Balfour, 7 October 1906; also Chamberlain's Memorandum on the MacDonnell Affair, 7 October 1906.

\(^{84}\)Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49764, Sandars to Balfour, 7 October 1906, marked "Confidential."
Lord Lansdowne, who had joined Wyndham at Balfour's request to make an investigation of MacDonnell before his appointment, finally made a major speech explaining his position on 12 October 1906. Lansdowne denied that any form of devolution had been approved by Balfour's government. MacDonnell's Home Rule conversations with Irish leaders had been due to a misunderstanding of his position. Correspondence relative to MacDonnell's appointment could not be published. Lansdowne believed that to avoid accusations of suppressing information the Unionists would have to publish every memorandum, private letter, and scrap of paper concerning the incident. He appealed to the Party to consider the precedent to be set if such private letters were published. Private correspondence was vital to government business, but it must cease if there was to be a danger of eventual publication. He announced that the Unionist Leaders would publish nothing, but if anybody else had anything he thought could substantiate the Irish Unionist charges they had no objection if he published it. In an obvious appeal to Party loyalty he said, "It involves the good faith of the Unionist Government; it involves our worthiness to act as your leaders." Lansdowne's speech could hardly have been less effective. He merely whetted the appetite of the malcontents for publication of the papers. He called for loyalty to the Leaders from those who had begun the agitation precisely as an expression of distrust in their Leaders.

The Times replied immediately that the Irish Unionists would

---

85 Speech at Nottingham, 12 October 1906, National Union Gleanings, XXVII (November, 1906), 326-329.
need more convincing proof of innocence than was contained in Lansdowne's speech. The Morning Post, always ready to join in any anti-Balfour campaign, complimented Lord Lansdowne on his "courageous and loyal effort to shield his leader" but dismissed his arguments as inadequate. "The Unionist Party suspect that their principles may have been surrendered by their leaders," snapped the Morning Post, "and so long as their suspicions are not dissipated they will remain in an attitude of angry discontent." 86

After some weeks of this sniping, Balfour was thoroughly fed up with the troublemakers. When the Ulster Unionist Council demanded further enlightenment on the affair he curtly referred to Lansdowne's speech as having dealt fully with the subject. On 22 October at Manchester Balfour poured scorn on the "preposterous legend" that the Unionist government had approved a measure of devolution. "You might as well accuse us of horse stealing." He denied again the existence of compromising letters and condemned the "whisperings and rumours in dark places." 87 Even this firm stand could not dispel the cloud of suspicion. The Times was implacable. It called Balfour's defense mere "rhetorical generalities" and insisted that Unionist minds had not been relieved. 88 The controversy dragged on to the end of the year, further embittering personal relations in the Unionist Party and only gradually dwindling away.

The political problems of the Unionist Party in 1906 were

86 15 October 1906.
87 National Union Gleanings, XXVII (November, 1906), 329.
88 23 October 1906.
concealed behind the successful use of the Lords' veto. It was the internal division that caused the Party the most concern. The leadership issue, for all Balfour's dexterity in parrying challenges, was sapping the strength of the Party. If Balfour could be accused openly of Home Rule sympathies, then nothing was sacred. At the same time, it was generally recognized that Balfour was the indispensable man. Austen Chamberlain, who inherited the leadership of the tariff reformers, had no alternative but to support Balfour as Leader. He wrote sadly, "My father won't; no one else can hold a candle to A.J.B. To destroy his influence therefore is to destroy ourselves." Under the circumstances there could be no solution of the leadership problem, and failing that, there could be no general agreement on fiscal policy. Despite this depressing situation, there was no despair in the Unionist Party. The Lords' veto gave the Party its customary control of governmental power. There was still the happy prospect that the Liberal Party would split up, and then the British constitution would restore the Unionists to their natural place as the governing Party.

89 Chamberlain Papers, Austen Chamberlain to Mary E. Chamberlain, 22 October 1906.
CHAPTER III

1907: MARKING TIME

The Unionist Party's second year of opposition continued the pattern set in 1906. Balfour carefully avoided unambiguous statements of constructive policy both because he feared exacerbating the split within his Party and because he expected the Liberals' mistakes to restore the popularity of the Unionists. So long as the Lords' veto gave the Unionists extensive control over the government, there seemed to be no conclusive argument against leaving the consideration of serious problems in abeyance.

Balfour's plans were predicated on a very low estimate of Liberal resources and ability. He and his Party saw in the Liberals only the factionalism and indecisiveness that had marred the last Liberal government in the 1890's. Replying to a letter from Jack Sandars, Balfour remarked,

As regards the more general points which you touch on, it is impossible not to be interested in the general scheme of the Government, if, indeed, they have a general scheme, and are not merely trifling. Their fundamental difficulty is that they came in on the vague expectation that they were going to carry great legislative schemes of social reform. Now great legislative schemes of social reform are not very easy under any circumstances, and are quite impossible unless a great deal more time and brains are given to their elaboration than this Government either possess or are likely to acquire. They are reduced, therefore, either to bringing in crude...
measures which will not stand examination, or to rush constitutional experiments such as that which they mean to practice upon the House of Lords.  

So long as he dismissed the Liberal reforms as crude, clumsy trifles, it was difficult for Balfour to see potential danger in the partisan use of the Lords' veto. He foresaw that the Liberals would raise the constitutional issue by challenging the Lords, but he was unimpressed by such a threat since he thought the government's case neither morally just nor politically formidable. His estimate of the swing of the pendulum placed the Unionists in the majority within a few years. He cautioned the more optimistic Sandars, "My reading of the situation is that the Government are spendthrifts, dissipating their electoral fortune as often as they can, but that fortune itself is so large that it seems doubtful whether they will be bankrupt if the stocktaking occurs as soon as you suppose, that is at a general election this year or next." As the government made itself less and less popular, Balfour's task was simply to avoid antagonizing blocs of voters.

Balfour's capacity to avoid definite commitments was tested to the limit by the squabbles within his Party in 1907. The failure of the brief Chamberlainite drive at the leadership in 1906 had switched the tariff reform campaign from the top of the Party to the bottom. The grass roots were now the center of aggressive work, and the more extreme wing of the reformist section had gained virtual control of the National Union of Conservative and Constitutional Associations.

---

1 Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49765, Balfour to Sandars, 5 April 1907.

2 Ibid.
This was a poor consolation prize for the failure of the campaign against the Central Office and the Whips, where the real Conservative power lay, but it was a useful publicity tool. More important was the drive to gain control of the constituency parties which had hitherto advanced Unionist free trade candidates. If the Party's Leader would not eliminate the Cecil group by enforcing tariff reform as a test of loyalty, the Unionist free traders might be driven out by pressure from their constituencies. This move, if successful, would advance the Chamberlainite aim of posing tariff reform as the test of true Unionism. Balfour's control of the Party organization and his refusal to endorse a policy of proscription ensured that this tariff reform campaign would have to be promoted by intrigue. Thus the campaign to oust the Unionist free traders from their constituencies was prosecuted by a band of extreme tariff reformers organized into a secret society known as the Confederates. Their concealed identity and subterranean activities complicated still further the tangled relations between Balfour, the Chamberlains, and the movement for tariff reform.

Balfour, caught in the center of the fight, was in the curious position of moderating attacks of one wing of the Party on the other while constantly accepting vows of loyalty from men who were ignoring his oft-repeated advice to live in peace. To make his position still more delicate, some of the men who were most deeply immersed in the combat actually did consider themselves his loyal supporters. It demanded the highest skill to maintain the facade of Party unity. Through all the trials of 1907 Balfour never made a serious slip. His speeches, while occasionally giving special encouragement to one
faction or another, were always so constructed as to justify several different interpretations. Thus he gave no faction cause to leave the Party.

No Unionist group could be very happy in this situation. The free traders believed themselves to be martyrs for political morality, defending the cause of true conservatism in a Party surrendering its leadership to madmen. Austen Chamberlain, on the other hand, was discouraged by the apparent waning of the Party’s enthusiasm for tariff reform. He thought the Party’s leaders completely unreliable on this key issue and only a few of the lesser figures on the front bench loyal to his father’s campaign. While the free traders bemoaned the increasing Chamberlainite strength, Austen Chamberlain was listing the pitifully few Unionist leaders he could count on. He confided in his close associate, Lord Ridley,

I have not said this to anyone except yourself because I do not want to discourage our men and because I feel that if we can keep the pot boiling in these difficult times, sooner or later the tide will set our way and we shall carry the weaker brethren along on the crest of the wave, but you can see the difficulty of going into battle with such allies.  

Ridley agreed, attributing the temporary setback to A.J. Balfour.

"You know well enough that though I share fully Maxse’s hatred of A.J.B. and his policy, I also realize that we can only work for the possible, and I don’t believe till things further develop (as they will) that it is possible to do more than push him."  

Ridley, head of the Tariff Reform Commission, recognized that Balfour was the

3 Chamberlain Papers, AC7(6), Austen Chamberlain to Ridley, 16 January 1907, marked "Private."

4 Ibid., Ridley to Austen Chamberlain, 19 January 1907.
real obstacle and that the Confederates' campaigns in the constituencies as well as his own propaganda must be indirect and peripheral.

The Balfourians shared in the general discouragement about the Party's condition. Balfour was perfectly aware of the danger to his leadership. Jack Sandars told him that his authority in the Party had been drastically weakened, that the tariff reformers were gaining control of Conservative agents in the constituencies, and that the Daily Telegraph was the only London newspaper on which he could count. Sandars listed Austen Chamberlain, Arthur Lee, Bonar Law, Leo Maxse, Leo Amery, and George Curzon as the chief influences undermining Balfour's leadership. He said that Henry Chaplin and Lord Ridley were engaged in capturing the Council of the National Union for the tariff reformers and that everyone was sick of Balfour's silence on tariff reform.5

This was one of Balfour's vulnerable points. Since endorsing tariff reform as the first constructive work of the Unionist Party in the Valentine Letter early in 1906 he had carefully avoided public speeches about it for a year. As Sandars tactfully suggested to Balfour, the Party suspected "that the policy of Fiscal Reform does not fill your heart and mind."6 Alarmed by the Party's disaffection, Sandars and Acland-Hood urged Balfour to give a strong lead to pull the Unionists together. Lest Balfour disappoint the Party by speaking in his customary style, Acland-Hood specified that the speech must be

---

5Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49765, Sandars to Balfour, 22 January 1907, marked "Personal."

6Ibid.
"without the refinement of argument but declaratory of your own personal belief."\textsuperscript{7}

Balfour was obviously bored by such suggestions. He expected the Unionist Party to regain office by a natural process of British politics, not by a positive program. By this time he was referring to the tariff reformers as "the enemy" and predicting the necessity of carrying the war into their camp to prevent a Party split.\textsuperscript{8} He had anticipated the advice of Sandars and Acland-Hood and had scheduled a major speech at Hull. He conceded wearily, "I shall, of course, have to touch on Tariff Reform, and say what I have so often said before, but what, apparently, our Tariff Reform friends are never tired of hearing."\textsuperscript{9}

At Hull on 1 February 1907 Balfour delivered one of his most successful speeches, reaffirming his commitment to the tariff reform crusade and eliciting from Austen Chamberlain a letter of congratulation. To this he replied that the Party must stick together at all costs to prevent a national calamity.\textsuperscript{10} From the free trade Spectator came a note of commendation for his claim to be "in the true sense of the word a Free Trader" and for his refusal to make tariff reform a test question for membership in the Unionist Party.\textsuperscript{11} From the Party's central region came the Saturday Review's emphatic assertion that the

\textsuperscript{7}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{8}Ibid., Balfour to Sandars, 24 January 1907, marked "Private."
\textsuperscript{9}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{10}Chamberlain Papers, AC7(6), Balfour to Austen Chamberlain, 4 February 1907, marked "Private."
\textsuperscript{11}9 February 1907, 198.
speech had given "almost universal satisfaction" to the Party.\textsuperscript{12} There were enough qualifications in the speech to allow each wing to project its own feelings into the text. No one but Balfour would have endorsed the unification and consolidation of the Empire by Imperial preference but immediately added, "We may think the problem very difficult. I admit it is not easy. We may think that no specific solution as yet proposed is satisfactory. I grant that there are objections (perhaps substantial objections) probably to all, or almost all, the solutions which have been, or perhaps can be, suggested."\textsuperscript{13}

Exploiting his temporary popularity, Balfour made a still stronger appeal to Austen Chamberlain for Party unity. This, tacitly, was an order to stop the tariff reform attacks on Unionist free traders. He said the Party must make its ideals quite clear, and then make it as easy as possible for all Unionists to fall into line. Everything which induced men to divide into different camps, to move into different lobbies, everything which encouraged the formation of different factions must be eliminated. Fiscal reform would lose as much from Party disunity as would the great national interests the Party was inspired to protect from "the disintegrating forces of modern Radicalism."\textsuperscript{14}

The appeal came at an awkward moment for Chamberlain, who was under pressure from his father to move an amendment to the Address,\textsuperscript{12,13,14}

\textsuperscript{12}9 February 1907, 160.

\textsuperscript{13}National Union Gleanings, XXVIII (March, 1907), 164.

\textsuperscript{14}Chamberlain Papers, AC7(6), Balfour to Chamberlain, 9 February 1907.
committing the Unionist Party to a tariff reform debate. The senior Chamberlain was almost convinced that the ties with Balfour would have to be sacrificed. His wife relayed the opinions of the invalid to his son.

If you are able to get an official amendment well and good, but if you cannot obtain one which gives you what you regard as essential don't hesitate to act. He has an instinctive feeling that the time has come to go on with or without Mr. Balfour. Of course you want to carry him with you, but if this is not possible and it does not look as if it were he believes that you will gain by independent action, and it is your surest hope of victory in the end. 15

Austen Chamberlain, unable to get Balfour's consent to an official amendment, called a meeting of his followers (52 in number) in the House of Commons. After declaring his absolute loyalty to Balfour, he sponsored a back-bench amendment raising the Imperial preference issue in connection with the imminent Colonial Conference. Balfour dexterously parried this act of near-defiance by agreeing that the amendment, though unofficial, might be supported by the official Party whips. 16 This compromise judgment, so typical of Balfour, merely encouraged the extreme tariff reformers to redouble their efforts in the constituencies.

To redress the balance within the Party, Balfour's only reliable London newspaper, the Daily Telegraph, launched a furious attack on the Confederates. The Telegraph charged the tariff reform conspirators with "simply reproducing the petty malevolence of small sections of partisans which have earned a passing notoriety on the

15 Chamberlain Papers, Mary E. Chamberlain to Austen Chamberlain, 13 February 1907.
16 Westminster Gazette, 15 February 1907.
morrow of all great political reverses." Reminding the Party of its 1906 defeat may not have been very good public relations technique, but the Telegraph had one trump card to play. It taunted the Confederates for their failure to name an alternate Leader. As the Telegraph triumphantly pointed out, none existed. That was the insuperable obstacle to every tariff reform challenge.

The official debate on Austen Chamberlain's amendment was of no advantage to the tariff reformers. Balfour's speech mildly commended the resolution and was thickly studded with qualifications and reservations. He mused, "All that this resolution asks for is that the Government should not rule out of the business of the Conference some attempt at discussion of the possibility of giving, on the present basis, some preferential advantage to the Colonies by one means or another." Lloyd George ironically congratulated the Unionist Leader on "eluding the trap set for him by his followers."

One, at least, of Balfour's followers was by no means content to let the occasion pass without protest. Mr. Rowland Hunt, a Conservative Member of minimal Parliamentary prominence, began a series of remarks about his Leader's faults at a moment when Balfour chanced to be out of the chamber. The unlucky Mr. Hunt was telling the House that Balfour was "the heaviest drag on the wheel" of tariff reform when that gentleman casually sauntered into the House. Hunt, not the most intellectually agile of men, continued gamely with

---

17 February 1907.

18 Debates, Commons, 4s, CLXIX (20 February 1907), 875.

19 Ibid., 896.
his prepared speech amid hilarious cheers. He implored his Leader
"to come down from the Olympian heights of philosophy and golf," then
lugubriously guessed aloud that "he had got himself into frightful
hot water" and "begged to thank the House for being so kind as to
listen to what a poor countryman had to say, although he could not
expect that the right hon. 'first whipper-in' would be satisfied." 20

Predictably, the right hon. first whipper-in, Acland-Hood,
was not amused, and the Balfourian group enforced its authority by
withdrawing the Party whip from Mr. Hunt. The ostensible reason for
Hunt's punishment was the personal character of his remarks, but it
was apparent that the Balfourian leadership was reminding its critics
of its great power within the Party. 21 After a few weeks to let the
lesson sink in, the Whips' Office restored the whip to Rowland Hunt. 22

Balfour's successful mystification in the February debate,
added to the punishment of Rowland Hunt, gave him a little time and
space for the more congenial task of trying to switch the Party's
attention to the defense of the Lords. Addressing a deputation of
Irish Unionists in March, Balfour rallied support for the Lords by
linking the constitutional question with Home Rule. In case his Irish
listeners thought themselves so secure they could afford to repeat
the attacks of 1906 on his leadership, he offered the guarded but
menacing observation that the English electorate was sick of hearing
about Ireland and was "impatient even at the smallest reference to

20 Ibid., CLXIX (19 February 1907), 793-794.
21 Westminster Gazette, 22 February 1907.
22 Ibid., 9 March 1907.
the Home Rule question." His purpose, apparently, was to work up a Home Rule scare which would turn the Irish Unionists and their associates against the divisive influence of the tariff reformers. By the end of the year Balfour had rallied the anti-Home Rule group and had secured their support against the tariff reform extremists. In December Sir Edward Carson, the effective leader of the Ulstermen, told T.G. Bowles, a free trader who was under attack from the Confederates, that he was alarmed by the Irish situation and was bitterly opposed to the extremists who were ruining the Party with their proscription of free traders.

Balfour nearly slipped off his tightrope in July when he became involved in one of the constituency fights between the Confederates and the free traders. T.G. Bowles, in trouble in Norwood, appealed to Lord Robert Cecil for help against the Confederates. Lord Robert went to Balfour, requesting a letter to Bowles' constituents repudiating the campaign of proscription. Balfour was agreeable and even promised to consult Lord Robert on the terms of the letter. On Lord Robert's advice, Bowles' chairman wrote to Balfour, expecting to receive the promised letter of support. To his surprise he was informed that instead of the letter from Balfour he would have an interview with Sir Alexander Acland-Hood with Balfour present, if possible. Bowles and his chairman went optimistically to their interview, only to find Balfour absent and Acland-Hood in a fit of bad temper. The Chief Whip read them

---

23 National Union Gleanings, XXVIII (April, 1907), 236.

24 Cecil Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 51072, Bowles to Lord Robert Cecil, 21 December 1907, marked "Private."
off a stern lecture on Party unity, urged Bowles to modify his position on fiscal reform, and hinted that only candidates pledged to a duty on corn could expect help from the Party. He curtly dismissed the agent's request for an interview with Balfour. Deeply disturbed by this surprising turn of events, Lord Robert Cecil wrote sorrowfully to Balfour, "In my efforts to help Bowles I have lured him to his destruction."25 After more importunity Balfour sent to Bowles' chairman a letter expressing in general terms the Party policy of non-proscription. The Confederates ignored it and eventually won Norwood from the free traders.

The secrecy which shrouded the Confederates' movement aroused great bitterness among the Unionist free traders and made Balfour's associates increasingly apprehensive. Everyone connected with tariff reform professed ignorance of the Confederates' identity. Austen Chamberlain, whose policy presumably formed the doctrinal basis of the Confederate campaign, wrote to Balfour, "I have heard that Leo Maxse is one of them, but I have never been able to learn their names, nor can I find that they have any organisation or headquarters." He was, however, sure that they were not attached to the Tariff Reform League. As usual, he took the opportunity to urge Balfour to take up an unambiguous stand on tariff reform. He informed Balfour that his whole theory of the swing of the pendulum was erroneous. Pure opposition would never bring the Party to power. Only an attractive, constructive program and vigorous leadership could win elections. Chamberlain asked, perhaps a trifle tartly, "Can we not have a

25Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49737, Cecil to Balfour, 9 July 1907.
definite lead and clear guidance not merely as to what we will not do
but in broad outline at least, as to what we will do on certain great
questions?" Balfour could expect little help against the Confederates
from Chamberlain.

Jack Sandars thought that the Confederates had originally
counted on the leadership of Joseph Chamberlain and had informed him
of their plans. After his illness they had counted on Austen Chamber-
lain's support but had been disappointed. Sandars knew that Leo Maxse
was one of them, and he thought Lord Ridley was originally a Con-
federate but might have left the group. Ridley flatly denied this
report and disclaimed any knowledge of the Confederates' identity.
In general, the Confederates successfully guarded their anonymity.
Everybody agreed that Leo Maxse was one of them, but this revealed
nothing to Balfour since Maxse was his avowed political opponent
anyway.

Balfour's genius for canny maneuvering between varying factions
met its severest test in November, when the mass meeting of the
Annual Conference of the National Union of Conservative and Constitu-
tional Associations occurred at, of all places, Birmingham. The
tariff reformers controlled the National Union. The meeting at
Birmingham under the influence of that city's historic associations

26 Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49736, Chamberlain to Balfour,
24 October 1907, marked "Private."

27 Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49765, Sandars to W.M. Short,
Balfour's personal secretary, 28 October 1907.

28 Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49859, Ridley to Balfour,
1 November 1907, marked "Private."
with Joseph Chamberlain's great career and tragic invalidity would strain Balfour's policy of vague moderation.

Balfour went to the meeting fortified by the success of his earlier speeches and by the failure of the tariff reformers to extend their influence throughout the Party. The Irish Unionists, thoroughly convinced by Balfour of the danger to Ireland of Unionist division, had rallied to his standard. They could not afford to weaken the Party's leadership. The tariff reformers had further damaged their own cause by arousing the wrath of Walter Long, influential leader of the Tory squirearchy and dedicated opponent of Home Rule. As early as February, 1907, when Long's embarrassing crusade for full publication of the MacDonnell papers had scarcely died away and when he had appeared ready to challenge Balfour's leadership, Bonar Law had crossed swords with Long on the tariff reform issue. As in most of Long's affairs, the political quarrel assumed a personal character, with Long bitterly accusing Law of making misleading statements about him, implying improper conduct and personal fault. In an angry letter to Law Long hinted that he knew Law was spreading slander about him in the Party. He took the extraordinary step of sending copies of this letter to Balfour and Austen Chamberlain, thus ensuring full publicity to his quarrel within the Party. It was unfortunate for the tariff reformers that Law was as well known for his tactlessness as Long for his irascibility.

By October Long had become so committed to the Balfourian policy of non-proscription that he spoke on behalf of a Unionist

---

29 Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49776, Long to Bonar Law, 20 February 1907.
free trader, Abel Smith, who was under attack from tariff reformers in Ware. Austen Chamberlain advised politely but frankly against Long's support of a man whom he regarded as something of a traitor to the Party. This infuriated Long, whose personal pique grew into general hostility to the tariff reform movement. Now intensely suspicious of the Chamberlains, he was afraid the pressure on Balfour during the National Union meeting at Birmingham might prove too much for the "good natured and easy-going" leader. He wanted Balfour to take up a very tough line against the tariff reformers. Suspecting that Balfour would not force the tariff reformers to change their tactics, Long threatened to assume an independent position in Parliament while remaining personally loyal to Balfour. Long took care to see that Balfour knew his views. He told Sandars that Balfour must assert himself against the Chamberlainites. He complained of Balfour's inability to enforce discipline and to command the full confidence of the Party. He wrote to Sandars, "As you say there are many knaves about and I wish to Heaven the Chief knew how to deal with them. He does not. It is magnificent but it is not war." When Balfour went to Birmingham he knew that the powerful influence of Walter Long could be thrown into the scale against the Chamberlains.

On the eve of the meeting Balfour got some timely help from the press. The Times announced that the public institutions of the country


31 Long to Akers-Douglas, 10 November 1907, in ibid.

32 Long to Sandars, 7 November 1907, in ibid., 340.
were in danger from Radical attacks and called on all Unionists to subordinate their particular interests to the need for Party unity. The Times specifically demanded that the tariff reformers recognize that their crusade was not nearly so urgent as the defense of the House of Lords. The Daily Telegraph charged that the tariff reformers were hindering the Party's chances of victory in the next election and condemned the "querulous attacks on the generalship shown at headquarters." 

Balfour was not without formidable support when he moved into the enemy camp at Birmingham. In his main speech to the meeting he obliquely condemned the Confederates with the observation that the Party must never use processes of court martial or excommunication, and he appealed to all groups "not to exercise any tyrannical jurisdiction" over those with whom they disagreed. The rewards he promised for self-restraint were Party unity and political power. The Party, he said, was bound to regain control of the government "within a relatively short space" and "at no distant date" if only it held together. After this preface he pleased his Birmingham audience by applauding the "great genius," "great authority" and "magnificent advocacy" of Joseph Chamberlain. Balfour discussed at length the objectives of fiscal reform, and his enthusiasm greatly

---

33 The Times, 13 November 1907.
34 15 November 1907.
35 National Union Gleanings, XXIX (December, 1907), 395.
excited the Chamberlainites. The speech was a complete success, and still Balfour had made no policy commitments. 36

The Spectator examined the speech from the free trade viewpoint and was not displeased. 37 The Saturday Review thought Balfour had reunited the Party splendidly. 38 The independent Economist attributed Balfour's success to the fact that "the Education controversy, the House of Lords controversy, and above all, the noise about Socialism have served to rouse more into active life the dormant conservatism of the Conservative party." 39 Balfour was counting on that.

Balfour's Birmingham success obscured the fundamental point that he had done nothing to settle the real problem. The Party remained divided. A continuation of the Confederates' intrigues was inevitable. Balfour had achieved his basic object of holding the Party together in name, at least, through 1907. There was, however, a great difference between the tightrope walking of 1903-1905 and that of 1906-1907. In the first case the Leader was holding a government together until a general election would give an unmistakeable lead to the Party in deciding its attitude toward fiscal reform, and a period of opposition would give time in which to make the adjustment. In the latter case Balfour was tenuously holding together a divided opposition Party in the hope that by

36 Ibid., 396-400.
37 16 November 1907, 758.
38 16 November 1907, 593.
some miracle it would be reunited by regaining office and assuming responsibility. If nothing turned up to vindicate this Micawberish policy, Balfour would be in trouble.

T.G. Bowles described the Party's condition accurately enough to Lord Robert Cecil:

The first constructive policy of the Party, unexplained and inexplicable, steadily and at all risks resisted at the Polls. The Leader, pledged to this policy but unable to define it, privately informing local Associations that it may be discarded if necessary. The Central Organisation, publicly and privately, demanding of all Candidates and Members its unconditional support. The Party, meanwhile, broken utterly in two; and both its remnants desperately struggling to put some power again into their Leader's hand by making arrangements behind his back to dethrone the unknown policy to which he is committed in public by the very means which he himself has months ago suggested in private. 40

The final word on Party unity in 1907 came from Lord Lansdowne, who announced that the Party was not in power and therefore had no need of a constructive policy. After it regained power there would be consultations with the colonies and the formulation of tariff reform proposals. Only then need the Party worry about facing the people with a positive program. "Do not, " he pleaded, "let us, in anticipation of that date, waste our energies and disintegrate our party in the discussion of these matters. Meanwhile, let us pull together and keep an open mind." 41

Despite its internal problems the Unionist Party was quite satisfied with its general political position in the first two years of opposition. The House of Lords gave the Party a decisive check on

40 Cecil Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 51072, Bowles to Cecil, 28 December 1907.

41 Westminster Gazette, 23 December 1907.
the government's actions. The Liberals' inability to overcome the Lords' obstructionism merely increased the Unionists' satisfaction. The Times voiced the Party's views on the Liberal Party's unfitness for office:

Its whole attitude and temper is one that fits it better for opposition than for either administration or legislation. It loves the excitement of political battle more than the humdrum work of constructive legislation, and is almost invariably drawn into the former to the inevitable neglect of the latter. 42

The government's failure to speak with one voice on the constitutional question buttressed the Unionist conviction that the Lords were in no danger. The Earl of Crewe remarked that in the treatment of private bills and neutral matters the House of Lords "acted extremely well as a Second Chamber." 43 Herbert Gladstone, the Home Secretary, seemed to cut across the Lloyd George anti-Lords campaign by saying, "It is not only part of the British Constitution, it is in a certain sense an institution itself. And perhaps, as with all old institutions, it is stronger than some of us like to think." 44 Gladstone favored the government's policy of "filling up the cup" or sending to the Lords measure after measure, taking careful note of their butchery in each case, and gradually accumulating a case against the peers. He preferred to go through the full term of Parliament, mounting a campaign against the Lords.

42 19 February 1907.

43 Speech at Tiverton, 31 January 1907, National Union Gleanings, XXVIII (February, 1907), 136.

44 Speech at Leicester, 30 January 1907, National Union Gleanings, XXVIII (February, 1907), 137.
only after the full score had been totted up. This policy, though the obvious recourse of a government which was ambitious to do as much with its huge majority as possible, was not particularly heroic. It convinced the Unionists that the government was merely trifling with its power.

A strange little incident might have given the Unionists reason to reconsider their position had they been a bit more alert. The loss of the Education Bill of 1906 led the Liberals to a most unusual stratagem. They included in the Appropriations Bill of 1907 a grant of £100,000 for the construction of state schools in those districts served only by denominational schools where the parents of dissenting persuasion showed a desire for state education. The £100,000 was to be spent by the local education authorities. The unusual part of the transaction was that such appropriations were expressly forbidden by section 96 of the Elementary Education Act of 1870. The normal procedure would have been to introduce an Education Bill to authorize the issue, but the inclusion of this legislative measure in a money bill (which was supposed to be free of the Lords' interference) bypassed the major obstacle. It was a clear-cut case of "tacking" but was such a minor issue that relatively little attention was paid to it.

Reginald McKenna, President of the Board of Education, was uncertain of the legality of the tack, but he shifted the responsibility for decision to the legal advisers of the Crown. He was immediately challenged by Lord Robert Cecil, the only Unionist leader who readily

\[45\] Debates, Commons, 4s, CLXXI (20 March 1907), 976.
perceived the menacing character of the precedent being created. Sir John Walton, the Attorney-General, delivered the judgment that legally there was no difference in binding power between a vote of the House on an ordinary bill and on a money bill. Thus the government could legislate as well by an Appropriations Bill as by any other. Even he, however, was somewhat diffident about this, recognizing that other lawyers might disagree. The government was cautiously feeling its way through a tricky constitutional tangle.

Lord Robert Cecil tried to excite Unionist interest in the problem by drawing up a lengthy memorandum discussing every aspect of the case. He, too, was uncertain about the legal aspect, but he definitely regarded the technique as "improper." On the constitutional question he was more confident, but in his analysis could be discerned the fatal ambiguity which poisoned British politics and brought the country to the brink of total constitutional breakdown just before the war. For Lord Robert the whole case against the government stemmed from one broad principle. "This principle is that the high executive affairs of state shall not knowingly and upon party grounds be made the field of an irregular and unusual course; that administrative traditions shall not be wantonly broken; that 'the forms of the Constitution' shall not be 'used to override the views of one Party by the other!'" He regarded this principle as "a matter of assumption throughout the Constitution."

---

46 Ibid., 976-977.  
47 Ibid., 979-980.  
48 Cecil Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 51074, Memorandum on the Appropriation Act 1907, School Grant; inside quotation from Lord Fitzmaurice.
Lord Robert Cecil had raised the most crucial problem of
British politics. Tradition, avoidance of unusual courses, respect
for forms, no irregularity—these were supposed to be matters of
assumption. The trouble was that there was nothing regulative about
such assumptions; they were purely descriptive. There was no real
remedy within the constitution for a violation of these customs. If
the parties decided not to assume these "matters of assumption"
nothing could legally prevent them from acting irregularly. Even
general elections could not really be checks on the constitutionality
of political acts. The government controlled the timing of elections;
there was little control over the issues; the results could be
interpreted in many different ways. Everyone could agree after an
election that the people had spoken, but nobody could be sure of what
they had said. If the Lords, for example, refused to accept the
Commons' interpretation of a mandate, the government had no way to
enforce its will short of appealing to the Crown for the creation of
an army of new peers. This was not ordinarily a practical method,
and being irregular it was itself a violation of constitutional custom.

The Liberals had a plausible case for arguing that the use of
the Lords as an irresponsible, obstructionist, partisan opposition to
the government was just such an abuse of the forms of the constitution
to override the views of one party (and that the vast majority) by the
other as Lord Robert regarded as condemned by the constitution. The
Lords had, so far as the Liberals were concerned, grossly violated the
hypothetical tradition that the second chamber should take a detached
viewpoint. The Lords had made the highest affairs of the state a
purely party matter. Thus the Liberals could and did regard the
situation as constitutionally defective and in need of adjustment. If the Unionists, who had lost the 1906 election, could so strain the constitution to give effect to their minority opinions, why should not the Liberals strain the constitution to give effect to the will of the majority? The Liberals' use of the Appropriations Bill to enact a piece of legislation already blocked by the Lords and forbidden by a statute was, beyond question, irregular. But it could be prevented only by an equally irregular extension of the Lords' power—the amendment or veto of a money bill. The only limitation on the exercise of such power was political strategy, not constitutional regulation.

The constitutional issue perplexed almost everybody during the debate on the Appropriations Bill. Balfour touched briefly on the fact that the departure was a precedent for all time. He appealed for a legal opinion from the Law Officers on the position when the two Acts should be in force contradicting each other. That was a blind alley. When the Speaker of the House was asked to rule on the question he became bogged down immediately in the constitutional morass. He remarked that the Committee of Public Accounts might settle the issue. He remarked that the Courts might settle it. As for himself, he could have nothing to do with it. The constitutional issue was one for the House itself to decide without intervention from him. He put the question neatly: "Can the House of Commons disobey an Act of Parliament; and ought the House of Commons disobey an Act of Parliament?" To the first part his answer was, yes.

49 Debates, Commons, 4s, CLXXVIII (11 July 1907), 68.
50 Ibid., CLXXVIII (22 July 1907), 1191.
To the second part, which was the one that mattered, the Speaker could answer only that he must leave it to the conscience of the House.

In the Lords the Marquess of Londonderry was much more forceful. The appropriation, he said, was "without precedent and unconstitutional," and the provision would be found illegal. He offered no explanation of these insights. 51 Lord Crewe was equally forceful for the government. The tactic was unusual, but then the circumstances were unusual. The case was urgent. He said flatly that if an Education Bill authorizing the expenditure would have passed the House of Lords the government would have taken the normal course, but without such assurance the government would hold to the rightness of its tactic. 52 Crewe implied that the constitution permitted one irregularity to offset another.

The Lord Chancellor, Loreburn, introduced an interesting distinction with the curious statement that he did not think the procedure was even irregular, let alone unconstitutional, but he thought it might be "improper." That was a matter of opinion. 53 Lord Robert Cecil's memorandum had argued that the constitution was nothing but regularity and propriety. If Crewe and Loreburn could separate these concepts, what did they think the constitution was? Neither gave an answer. The whole vocabulary of political discussion about the most profoundly important problem of the nation was ambiguous. Each man and each party found it an infinitely pliable material.

51 Debates, Lords, 4s, CLXXIX (25 July 1907), 20.
52 Ibid., 46. 53 Ibid., 58-59.
Loreburn summed up the government's case with brutal frankness:

There is no doubt that in taking this action the House of Commons is using the power of the purse, which it has always regarded as its chief weapon and of which it has supreme control, for the purpose of protecting itself against the intolerable position in which it was placed by the rejection of the Education Bill last December. 54

The decisive reply was that of the Leader of the Unionists in the Lords, Lord Lansdowne. He called attention to the danger of the precedent and of the vast reforms which could be tacked to money bills by the same expedient. He announced, however, that the opposition would do nothing to interfere with the Appropriations Act. At any other moment he would have suggested that a Committee of Inquiry should investigate the problem. "But," he said, "at this period of the session I do not think that much good would result from such a suggestion." He warned the government that the matter had not escaped the opposition's attention. Most important for the future was the threat implied in Lansdowne's general theory: "We fully admit that it is not in the power of this House to alter Money Bills, and that the only thing we can do is throw them out."55 This controversy, then, was concluded, but the outlines of a far more serious conflict were clearly drawn. It was already apparent that an attempt to use money bills for substantive legislation might arouse the Lords to an extreme assertion of their powers and that any attempt to settle such a problem by a discussion of the meaning of the British constitution would be futile and dangerous.

54 Ibid., 722.

55 Ibid., CLXXXI (21 August 1907), 720-721.
The episode of the tack was completely overshadowed by the famous resolutions on the limitation of the Lords' veto introduced by Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman. The resolutions, which reduced the Lords' veto to a suspensory device extending over a two-year period, eliminated money bills entirely from the Lords' control, and cut the duration of a Parliament to five years, revealed the intentions of the government but failed completely to impress the seriousness of their purpose on the Unionists. They were sure the game was going their way.

The Times' reaction to the resolutions was typical. It had some difficulty in treating the whole thing seriously, for it thought the resolutions merely spotlighted the "ludicrous side of the business" what had "already tickled popular fancy."

Disclaiming any partisanship in its joking mood, The Times cited Lord Rosebery as the living embodiment of true Liberalism. Rosebery, according to The Times, had correctly described the situation by comparing the government to Mr. Snodgrass, who "announced in a very loud voice that he was going to begin, and proceeded to take off his coat with the utmost deliberation." As for the Prime Minister's threats, The Times scoffed, "If the Prime Minister's resolution is regarded with amused tolerance, it is only because it is charitably looked upon as a bit of the small change of internal party tactics." The King agreed. He felt it incumbent upon him to tell the Prime Minister that the resolution's words, "to give effect to the will of the People," had a republican ring that accorded ill with the monarchical

56 15 June 1907. 57 Ibid. 58 24 June 1907.
constitution. But he generously attributed the offensive language to the Prime Minister's obligation to consider the feelings of the left wing of his party. 59

The debate on the resolutions traversed familiar ground. Campbell-Bannerman endorsed the general election as the only method of ascertaining the will of the people, denying the Unionists' argument that they (and the Lords) had a special insight into the settled will of the permanent majority. Balfour replied that the Lords existed to limit legislation to what he called, "the consistent and persistent will of the people, not the will of the people as exhibited at a particular moment and in a particular place." 60 To Balfour it was obvious that the House of Commons at any given time represented the people "only in a technical sense" considering the people's settled views over a period of (say) thirty years. 61 Balfour loftily brushed aside the notion that the government had a serious purpose in mind. The Liberals could not have been angered by the Lords' rejection of their bills because, Balfour remarked, "the right hon. gentleman's Bills, as I have said, were never brought in to pass, but to be rejected." 62 Unfortunately for future Unionist debates, Balfour went too far in deriding the accusation that the Lords were seeking control of the government. He gratuitously observed, "We all know that the power of the House of Lords, thus limited, and rightly limited as I think, in the sphere of legislation and administration,

59 Campbell-Bannerman Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 41208, Lord Knollys to Campbell-Bannerman, 16 June 1907.
60 Debates, Commons, 4s, CLXXVI (24 June 1907), 930.
61 Ibid., 934. 62 Ibid., 939.
is still further limited by the fact that it cannot touch those money
Bills which if it could deal with no doubt it could bring the whole
executive machinery of the country to a standstill." For once Bal-
four had expressed himself without qualification, and he had given
away a valuable point.

Lloyd George's contribution to the debate was the famous
comparison of the Lords with an obedient poodle, fetching and carrying
for Balfour. F.E. Smith, who was rapidly gaining the reputation for
clever and violent speech which carried him rapidly to the top of the
Unionist Party, forecast accurately the die-hard movement, still four
years in the future. He dismissed the notion that the Lords always
obeyed the verdict of the people by announcing that even if the
government approached the Lords with those resolutions after a
successful general election, any self-respecting Lord would spurn
them with contempt and would continue to do so until his personal
safety was in danger. The government passed its resolutions, and
things went on as before.

Many observers in 1907 noted a change in public opinion that
had a profound impact on the development of British politics. The
electorate seemed to have receded from the peak of its political
interest in the election of January, 1906. Some commentators felt
that public opinion was relaxing into a permissive, apathetic dis-
interest in the whole governmental process. The Statist, an

---

[^1]: Ibid., 929-930.
[^2]: Ibid., CLXXVI (26 June 1907), 1429.
[^3]: Ibid., 1442-1443.
independent financial journal, decided in March, 1907, that the electorate had little respect for any party. It attributed the government's apparent loss of support not to a popular swing to Unionism but to a widespread distaste for both political parties. In October the Daily Telegraph expressed alarm at the constant reports that the voters (including Unionist middle class voters) were "sunk in apathy and sloth." These warnings were to be part of the staple fare of political commentary in the succeeding years. Only those pleading for some special cause would claim that the public was inflamed, aroused, or even interested by any political issue.

The Unionists in Parliament were thus on safe ground when they taunted the government for failing to work up public enthusiasm for a crusade against the Lords. In the House of Commons Earl Percy painted a graphic picture in his speech on the House of Lords resolutions when he said, "There is nothing more remarkable than the complete indifference with which the public tolerates what in this House is regarded as a public scandal. Few Governments lose anything by applying the closure; no Opposition loses anything by resorting to obstruction." Only the Unionist conviction that public apathy was conducive to Unionist victory could have led Percy to contemplate this divorce between politics and public opinion with such equanimity.

Perhaps even more encouraging for the Party was the remarkable Parliamentary recovery of Arthur J. Balfour after the crushing}

66. 9 May 1907, 478. 67. 2 October 1907.
68. Debates, Commons, 49, CLXXVI (26 June 1907), 1505.
"foolery" speech. Henry W. Lucy, among the more perceptive journalists, called Balfour's revival of Parliamentary favor the most striking development of the Parliamentary session. Lucy sketched the chilling reception which had rendered the Unionist Leader ill at ease during the first half of 1906. He shrewdly noted that the Liberal and Labourite preference for the personality of Joseph Chamberlain had had a depressing effect on Balfour, and that the retirement of Chamberlain had stimulated Balfour to make an effort to reassert his mastery. Eschewing his lighter manner, he had adopted a more serious tone as befitted the new Parliament, and he had been assiduous in his attendance. Lucy thought Balfour had regained most of his control before the close of the 1906 session and had fully re-established it by the middle of 1907. With the passage of time he had resumed his old debating style, which Lucy cleverly depicted. "So light and subtle is his play with the rapier that right hon. gentlemen opposite do not know they have been pinked till they find the blood trickling down." In a most important insight Lucy observed, "New members have been unconsciously educated up to his methods and manner, and now enjoy it equally with predecessors in former Parliaments."

Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman had appealed to the new tone and temper of the men behind him to crush Balfour, but Balfour had lived to change that tone and temper even among Campbell-Bannerman's followers back to the old tradition. Oddly, it was Balfour's own followers in 1907 who sometimes complained that he was not sufficiently serious and determined to prosecute a vigorous campaign. It was not

69 Observer, 18 August 1907.
surprising that Balfour led the Unionist Party as if the 1906 election had marked no real change in the political pattern. If his old manner could so easily win over such a House of Commons, why should not habit, tradition, and experience repeat the Unionist triumphs of former days in the countryside? The traditional pattern was unbroken; the Party had only to wait.
CHAPTER IV

THE CONFEDERATES VERSUS THE CECILS

The illusion of Unionist Party harmony created by Balfour's successful performance before the tariff reformers at Birmingham lasted only a few weeks. Vigorous and successful attacks by the Confederates within the free traders' constituencies forced the Cecils back on the defensive. The conflicts within the Party assumed a peculiar character because of the maneuvering of Walter Long and an apparent shift in the policy of Sir Alexander Acland-Hood.

In January, 1908, Lord Robert Cecil's associates warned the free trade leader that the Confederates, well supplied with money by wealthy patrons, were preparing a fight in twenty constituencies, and that their primary target was Lord Robert's own East Marylebone. Cecil turned to the redoubtable Walter Long for assistance. His plan consisted of appealing for Party support for every Unionist candidate who might win, regardless of his fiscal reform views. He told Long, "It would be easy to agree that we would do our best to secure the adoption of the Unionist candidates most likely to win, whatever shade of Fiscal Opinion they might hold." This was rashly optimistic.

---

1 Cecil Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 51072, T.G. Bowles to Cecil, 10 January 1908, marked "Private"; E.G. Brunker to Cecil, 9 January 1908.

It would not be easy to get such an agreement, especially when the tariff reformers could remember 1906, when the Unionist free traders had advised the voters to elect Liberals rather than vote for tariff reform.

Long was ready to help Lord Robert Cecil, perhaps because his bitter quarrel with Bonar Law and Austen Chamberlain still rankled. In their quest for security, however, the Unionist free traders grasped at another opportunity that nearly broke up their alliance with Long. The Liberal Whips' Office extended a tentative but official offer to refrain from running a candidate against the Unionist free trader at Bewdley. Probably the Liberals had no candidate ready. The offer included promises to assist the Unionist free traders in every way. Rumors of such cooperative electoral arrangements had circulated for years, but now Lord Robert had an official offer at a critical moment. Possibly such an arrangement could be extended to other constituencies, freeing the Unionist free traders to concentrate wholly on defending themselves against the Confederates.

Lord Robert, perhaps imagining that he could increase his leverage within his Party by toying with the offer, incautiously mentioned it to Long. He wrote,

If Winterton & Co. are to be allowed to throw stones at us as much as they like without reproof or open repudiation any little coterie of Tariff Reformers may run candidates against us at the Election. What wonder that some think that unless we are to be assured of effective protection from within the

---

3 Ibid., E.G. Brunker to Cecil, 14 February 1908.
Long was appalled. He replied, "Your information is very startling. Surely the other side cannot offer any inducement which would prevail with men like yourself?" Long, who was already pressing Balfour to do something for the free traders, was obviously shocked that a good Unionist would even consider an alliance with the Liberal enemy.

Lord Robert hastily assured the touchy squire,

I should be very sorry for you to think that I, or any other like minded Unionist, contemplates joining the Radical party or that any proposal to that effect has been made to any of us. The advances to which I referred were of quite a different nature.

Long's suspicions, only partly calmed, were further aroused a few weeks later by the Spectator's revival of its scheme for the merger of the Unionist free traders and the Liberals in a new Centre Party.

Lord Hugh Cecil unwisely moved into the controversy with a letter to The Times complaining of efforts in twenty-three constituencies to supplant free food candidates with tariff reformers. If he expected to get support from The Times for the Balfourian non-proscription policy, he failed miserably. The Times had apparently changed its mind since the Birmingham National Union meeting. Its reply to Lord Hugh was brusque:

The voters in every case have the right to vote for whom

---

4 Ibid., Cecil to Long, 24 February 1908, marked "Private."
5 Ibid., Long to Cecil, 25 February 1908.
6 Ibid., Cecil's reply is written on the back of Long's letter.
7 7 March 1908, 360.
they please. Lord Hugh Cecil also speaks of the "confederates," whom we take to be zealous persons who do what they can to stir up voters in various constituencies to choose tariff reform candidates. Such proselytizers are entirely within their rights. 8

There were signs that the complaints of the Cecil brothers was beginning to bore some Unionists and anger others.

The next Cecilian tactic was nearly as dangerous as the revelation of the Liberal electoral offer. In a letter to Acland-Hood, Lord Hugh appealed for official help from the Central Office for his brother and himself, basing his claim primarily on the fact that they were Cecils. Hood called in Aretas Akers-Douglas, ex-Chief Whip and prestigious elder statesman of the Party, and the two considered the Cecil problem. They told Lord Hugh in no uncertain terms that Lord Robert must accept fully the chief points of Balfour's Birmingham speech on tariff reform before he could get help or recognition from the Central Office. Akers-Douglas described the incident to Austen Chamberlain, adding that he had told Balfour that the Party was strongly opposed to the "Hotel Cecil." The Leader was paying the penalty for his relatives' unpopularity. Balfour's reply to such complaints about Lord Robert Cecil was, "Well, I am sorry, for I admire his great ability and his usefulness in other matters—and well, if you will, blood is thicker than water!" 9

The Cecil problem took another twist on 31 March when Lord Midleton reported to Acland-Hood's room at Westminster and found the Chief Whip closeted with Austen Chamberlain, Aretas Akers-Douglas,

820 March 1908.

9Paragraph based on Chamberlain Papers, Austen Chamberlain to Mary E. Chamberlain, 27 March 1908.
and Jack Sandars. Midleton had been negotiating with Lord Robert
Cecil in the hope of finding a formula which would bring Cecil close
eough to the Balfourian fiscal position to avoid an outright clash
in his constituency. He said that he had secured from Cecil an
admission that he would favor retaliation and colonial preference,
that for revenue purposes a general tariff was necessary, that corn
need not be excluded from it, and that he would resign his seat if
he found himself unable to support a Unionist government's tariff
reform budget. To Austen Chamberlain's surprise the most vehement
opposition to acceptance of these assurances came from Jack Sandars
and Acland-Hood. They insisted that the promised resignation was
unsatisfactory, since it left Cecil free to campaign for reelection
still opposing the Party's policy. They demanded that all Unionist
candidates openly support Balfour's tariff reform line, which they
interpreted more definitely than Balfour did. Acland-Hood complained
that if as Chief Whip he allowed Balfour's cousins to take an
independent line he could hardly explain his taking a stiffer attitude
toward other free trade candidates. 10

It would seem that Jack Sandars and Acland-Hood, who had
previously been associated with the soft Balfour policy of non-
proscription had shifted their position. The Chief Whip had
occasionally given way to irritation in dealing with the free traders
in the past; now he seemed to join Sandars in a deliberate plan to
put pressure on the dissident group. Possibly this was due to a
growing fear that the Cecils were sinking and might drag Balfour

10 Ibid., Austen Chamberlain to Mary E. Chamberlain,
31 March 1908.
down with them. The Leader's position was shaky enough; widespread
resentment of the Cecils was too great an additional liability to
carry. Acland-Hood's stand against the free traders in 1908 and his
apparent willingness to accept their withdrawal from the Party sug-
gested that Balfour's subordinates were edging closer to the purge
that Balfour himself would not undertake. Courting the tariff
reformers, the Chief Whip began secretly diverting money from the
Party funds to the Tariff Reform Commission. But as if to hold
the balance against the favoritism of his Chief Whip, Balfour
occasionally discouraged the tariff reformers by such exchanges in
the House of Commons as:

Mr. Runciman: I gather that the right hon. Gentleman has
committed himself to a general tariff.

Mr. Balfour: I certainly have committed myself to a very wide
increase in the basis of taxation, but that is all.

The Cecil-Long alliance underwent still another severe test
when the Unionist free traders in Manchester decided to support
Winston Churchill against his Unionist opponent, William Joynson-
Hicks, in a by-election. Lord Robert Cecil was pressed by the Party
to make a gesture toward orthodoxy by speaking for Joynson-Hicks,
but he refused to do so because of Confederate attacks on his friends,
Bowles in Norwood and Abel Smith in Ware. He frankly told Long that
the only salvation for the Unionist free traders in the event of a
breakup was the special favor of the Liberals. He could not campaign

\[11\] Ibid., Austen Chamberlain to Mary E. Chamberlain,
24 June 1908.

\[12\] Debates, Commons, 4s, CLXXXVII (31 March 1908), 438.
against Churchill for fear of solidifying the Liberal resolve to
destroy the Unionist free traders at the next election.\textsuperscript{13} To this
Long replied testily that free trade was in no danger so long as the
Liberals were in office. If the Unionist free traders persisted in
backing Liberals, he said, "I am sure the great mass of our Party will
never forgive them and for my part I do not hesitate to say that a
split becomes inevitable."\textsuperscript{14} That Long was finding it difficult to
play the part of conciliator was not surprising. Even Balfour, a
much more able and patient man, had been driven to his wits' end by
the problem.

Lord Robert immediately replied to Long's outburst that he had
arranged for the Manchester free traders to support Joynson-Hicks but
that Acland-Hood had rejected the agreement "with contumely." He
could not repudiate his comrades even though he regretted their
action. Lord Robert appealed for sympathy.

For months every kind of invective has been hurled at us by
the Tariff Reform organs without a word of rebuke from our
Leader or anyone else. Campaigns have been set on foot in
our constituencies, organisations have been created there,
our agents paid by our own money and our chairmen have been
got at and when we ask for protection from the Central Office
or from our Leader we are told we can only have it by
abandoning our convictions.

He compared the support he had received from Long to Balfour's cold
detachment:

From Arthur we have had nothing and yet he pretends and perhaps
believes that he wishes to keep the Unionist Free Traders in
the Party. It may be that platonically he does not desire our

\textsuperscript{13}Cecil Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 51072, Cecil to Long, April,
1908, marked "Private."

\textsuperscript{14}Ibid., Long to Cecil, 17 April 1908.
political annihilation. But he has adopted a line of conduct which must produce that result and "persists in it with knowledge of his effect."

Characteristically, Lord Robert concluded his apologia with a moral justification. "Remember we profoundly believe that Tariff Reform will lead to Protection and that Protection will destroy political purity and will be economically disadvantageous."^15

Austen Chamberlain, for one, found Lord Robert's moral earnestness unconvincing. He was thoroughly convinced that Lord Robert was a slippery controversialist. He wrote to his father,

St. John [Brodrick, Earl Midleton] told me, as I expected, that Bob Cecil had gone as near swallowing our programme as possible without accepting our language. He was in favour of preference but not of a corn duty imposed for the purpose of preference; but he was not opposed to a revenue duty on corn nor to the use of such a revenue duty for preferential purposes! D—d Jesuitical!^16

He was doubly bitter since he had not been able to prevent East Marylebone from accepting Cecil's pledge to resign his seat in the event of his opposition to a Unionist budget. He was alarmed by the prospect of a general acceptance of the same pledge from the other free traders, considering this a license for disloyalty. He was also disgusted by Walter Long's alliance with Lord Robert and the free traders. Chamberlain remarked grimly,

He knows Hood's views and Douglas's and he really has no business to go to the help of a man who is simply making trouble for us. Long has been an awful disappointment to me in all this business. He has given us nothing but backhanders of this kind, and the very fact that he

^15 Ibid., Cecil to Long, 18 April 1908, marked "Private."

^16 Chamberlain Papers, Austen Chamberlain to Mary E. Chamberlain, 3 April 1908.
professes to be and indeed is a tariff reformer only gives him the more power for mischief. 17

Probably Long's zeal for Party unity in 1907 and 1908 was partly due to his increasing concern over the Irish problem. An old-fashioned Conservative, he was deeply devoted to the fight against Home Rule. He thought the Union endangered by the Radicals' control over the government. He was shocked when his Union Defence League's offers to send anti-Home Rule speakers and missionaries to constituencies were declined by Unionist groups "on the ground that they might prejudice the prospects of the candidate, while if Home Rule were not mentioned their votes might be secured on the Education question." 18 Long could hardly believe that the Unionist Party's greatest cause had slipped so far that candidates dared not mention it. He wrote to Balfour, "This seems to my Committee to be a very dangerous state of things, and to call for any action on the part of the Leader of our Party that may in his opinion be calculated to remove it." 19 Doubtless, Balfour would have been happy to comply if only he had known how.

Lord Robert's agreement with his constituency party introduced a temporary lull in the Confederate campaigns. For some months there was relative peace within the Unionist Party on the tariff issue. So pervasive was the spirit of conciliation that Walter Long gradually

17 Ibid., Austen Chamberlain to Mary E. Chamberlain, 23 May 1908.

18 Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49777, Long to Balfour, 17 July 1908.

19 Ibid.
drifted back to the tariff reformers' side. Chamberlain faithfully reported the development.

Signs of the times:—a few days ago Bonar Law, who had a regular row with Walter Long earlier in the year or last year, told me that he noticed a great change in Long's attitude. Long had sought conversation with him on Tariff Reform more than once lately. After consulting me, Bonar Law asked Long if he would join us in our Tariff Enquiry. Long at once accepted.

If Long thought the free trade issue had been finally settled he was grossly mistaken. Although the Confederates had temporarily quitted the big battle, they were still capable of skirmishing. Given the character of the Cecils it was inevitable that small encounters would produce major difficulties. One such incident arose out of a ridiculously slight cause. The Cecil Club tried to schedule a meeting at the Constitutional Club, and Edward Goulding, an ardent tariff reformer and probably a Confederate, intervened to oppose such use of the club's facilities. Lord Robert, affronted, immediately drafted a letter to Acland-Hood, demanding that the Chief Whip and the Party Leader denounce the Confederates by name. With ponderous solemnity Acland-Hood informed his correspondent that he was only an honorary member of the Committee of the Constitutional Club and could not dictate to them what gathering they should or should not permit on their premises. As for Lord Robert's demand for action, the Chief Whip replied with a little lecture on Party unity.

The situation is this. The Leader of the Party states his adherence to a certain policy in which he is keenly supported by the great majority of the Party. You and your friends do not agree with that policy. What you ask is that the Leader

20Chamberlain Papers, Austen Chamberlain to Mary E. Chamberlain, 3 November 1908.
of the Party is to denounce by name in public those who accept his policy and are doing their utmost to support him in order to shield those who refuse to accept his policy. Surely this is a "Reductio ad Absurdum." 21

The hint that he was guilty of a reductio ad absurdum deeply wounded Lord Robert. He replied that he would not continue the correspondence, but he still irritated the Whip with a lesson whose impact unfortunately had been dulled by repetition:

You consider that the only thing of importance is to secure the unquestioning obedience of all members of the party to the policy of the Leader whatever it may be. To me, important as party discipline may be it is a secondary matter. The great thing to secure is that the party should contain men who will carry not less weight in the country than the present leaders of the party. But if confederate methods are to be a regular part of the machinery to secure party discipline, if that is what your letter means, or even to secure the success of a particular policy it seems to me quite clear that no man of intelligence or independence will care to remain long in public life. 22

The Unionist free traders ended their third year of opposition on a dismal note. The Confederates had ousted many of their candidates before easing up on their campaign; the Chief Whip seemed bent on driving them out of the Party; the Leader seemed unwilling to trouble himself with interfering on their behalf. One of the most influential free traders, Lord Cromer, wondered how long they could keep going. He saw no other course than to "persevere for the present in a policy of 'masterly inactivity.'" The only ray of light he saw was the possibility that the government's next budget might drive the Unionists back together in opposition. Until then he could commit himself

21 Cecil Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 51158, Acland-Hood to Cecil, 17 November 1908.

22 Ibid., Cecil to Acland-Hood, 19 November 1908, marked "Confidential."
only to avoiding any definite expression of opinion on political matters.\textsuperscript{23}

If the Unionist Party's internal affairs in 1908 seemed a bit discouraging, the Parliamentary session of that year more than redressed the balance. There were good reasons for believing that shrewd employment of the House of Lords coupled with decreasing Liberal popularity must greatly augment Unionist strength before the next election. The failure of another government Education Bill early in the year, for example, revealed that the Liberals' greatest electoral asset had now become a serious liability. Whatever the Liberals gained from the non-conformist grievances could not now balance out the baneful effects of a continued failure to get an education settlement. Austen Chamberlain thought the government very anxious to get a compromise, and so he advised that it was not the business of the Unionists to relieve them of their difficulty. He wrote to his father, "It looks to me as if the Gov't thought that, if once the Education question were settled, their position at elections would be very much strengthened. They would once again get the full Irish vote, and I think they believe that they would have a large accession of strength on the Licensing question."\textsuperscript{24} Even so noted a Liberal as James Bryce agreed that the electoral situation had changed. He observed,

To dissolve with either the Licensing Bill or the Education Bill not passed, and still in the stage of an 'election issue'

\textsuperscript{23}Cecil Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 51072, Cromer to Cecil, 25 December 1908, marked "Private."

\textsuperscript{24}Chamberlain Papers, Austen Chamberlain to Mary E. Chamberlain, 19 May 1908.
would be fatal. The Education Bill was worth a great deal as an issue in Jan. 1906. The cards have been so played that it is worth little now—perhaps indeed it would tell against, not for. The Ministry seemed to some of us, at beginning of 1907, to have made two sad mistakes. One was producing a complicated Education bill which turned out to be a bad fighting measure because people couldn't follow it. The other was not dealing with the Licensing question in the first session of the new parliament. The horse ought to have been put at the high fence while he was still fresh. 25

If Bryce was right, the Liberals had lost the advantage in both the education and the licensing questions.

The reconstruction of the government upon the retirement of the ailing Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman seemed to some Unionists the beginning of the end for the Liberals. Herbert Henry Asquith, the new Prime Minister, was unquestionably able, but the factionalism of the Liberals was expected to be too much for him. Jack Sandars quoted with approval the opinion of the King's Secretary, Lord Knollys:

Knollys said he thought that the Gov't would be much weakened by the change of Premiership. He said that Ministers had more than once told him that but for C.B. there would have been a rupture 'ere now, and that he did not imagine that Asquith would keep his team in hand for any length of time: that he was far from popular and that he wanted those very qualities which had maintained the authority of C.B. with the party. 26

The Observer concurred with this unfavorable judgment of Asquith as compared with Campbell-Bannerman, observing that the latter's "tact and popularity were the moral cement holding together for a time the incompatible elements of the Ministerial coalition." 27

Austen Chamberlain, like most of his Party, pounced eagerly


26 Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49765, Sandars to Balfour, 24 February 1908, marked "Confidential."

27 15 March 1908.
on rumors of Liberal dissension. He related one such story in a letter to his father.

I don't know what the Times Lobbyist means by this morning's note, but the gossip I hear is that Winston was so rude to Crewe in Cabinet that at last Asquith sent for him and told him that he was the youngest member of the Cabinet and must behave with decency to his elders and that he must apologise to Crewe. Winston simply said he was d--d if he would! Loreburn took Winston's side and said he would resign if anything was done to Winston, and there the matter stands. But Crewe and Winston do not speak to each other! What a delightful colleague Winston must be! 28

He reported a little later that Balfour and Aretas Akers-Douglas confirmed the story from other sources. 29

Even the Prime Minister's behavior occasionally encouraged the Unionists to underestimate his skill. Austen Chamberlain recorded,

The House has been a little more lively the last two days over the Licensing Bill. I had a fierce brush with Asquith in an angry and excited House on Monday evening. Asquith was rude and offensive in his interruptions of a speech to which he would not reply and to which he did not take the trouble to attend. In fact he had drunk too much and was excited and thick in his talk. He could not pronounce Edgbaston. 30

Among the Unionist leaders only Balfour seemed to believe that Asquith might prove to be an effective leader. He wrote to the Poet Laureate during Campbell-Bannerman's illness,

The present situation certainly cannot last; and the best judges appear to think that, when Asquith becomes the official

29 Ibid., Austen Chamberlain to Mary E. Chamberlain, 30 June 1908.
30 Ibid., Austen Chamberlain to Mary E. Chamberlain, 21 July 1908.
leader of his Party, its unity—such as it is—will be greatly weakened. I am not quite confident that the best judges are right. As you well know, they very often are not. For Asquith, though he certainly lacks the higher qualities of the orator, and I should imagine also of the statesman, is an incomparably better speaker and abler man than C.B.; and this must tell. In Bolingbroke's famous phrase "he will shew his hounds much better sport" than his predecessor, and should probably, therefore, be better followed. But all this is speculation.

The main business of the Parliamentary session was the consideration of the Old Age Pensions Bill and the Licensing Bill. The situation was reminiscent of the 1906 session, when the coupling of the Trades Disputes Bill and the Education Bill involved the Unionist Lords in contradictory arguments to justify their passage of the one and rejection of the other.

The government's Old Age Pensions Bill put the Unionists in an awkward position. The Party had talked desultorily of such a plan for ten or fifteen years. Confronted by the Liberal Bill, Balfour could not risk voting against it. His abstention from the vote on the second reading was widely interpreted as a sign that the Lords would accept the Bill. The Unionist press, taking their cue from Balfour, called the Old Age Pensions Bill a national misfortune but recommended acceptance by the Lords for tactical reasons. Only the Spectator advised the Lords to carve up the Bill and bemoaned their failure to do so. Even crusty old Blackwood's Magazine praised the Lords' wisdom in choosing the lesser evil.

---

31 Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49859, Balfour to Alfred Austin, 2 March 1908, marked "Private."
32 Observer, 12 July 1908; for a survey of press comment see Manchester Guardian, 17 July 1908.
33 25 July 1908, 118. 34 CLXXXIV (August, 1908), 283.
Perhaps the only surprising element in the Lords' acceptance of old age pensions was the carelessness with which Lord Lansdowne expressed himself. He described the arguments against rejection as conclusive, and he gave a series of remarkable reasons for this conviction.

We have to take into consideration the fact that this Bill, though not strictly speaking a money Bill, is essentially a Bill of a financial complexion. It indeed forms part of the financial arrangements for this year proposed by His Majesty's Government. Then we have also to bear in mind the fact that it has been supported by colossal majorities in the House of Commons, and that when the sense of the House was taken on the Second and Third Readings only a small, forlorn hope amongst those who usually act with us were found ready to go into the lobby against it. . . . I have no doubt that noble Lords opposite and their friends would seize with avidity the opportunity of representing your Lordships as having attempted to rob the aged and deserving people of this country of the kind of assistance which most of us would be glad that, in some form or other, they should receive; and the difficulty would be increased for us by the fact that we should be represented, not without some prima facie justice, as having endeavoured to encroach upon the well-established privilege of the House of Commons which gives to that House almost undisputed control over the finances of the country. In these circumstances, were we to reject or postpone the operation of this Bill I am afraid we should not greatly advance the views which we hold, and we should, on the other hand, very considerably impair the opportunities which this House possesses of making its influence felt in controlling the legislation presented to us. . . . The wiser course is to throw upon His Majesty's Government the sole and entire responsibility for a measure which we regard with great apprehension, and which, we fear, may have far-reaching and disastrous effects upon the future of this country. 35

Almost every line contradicted some essential part of the Lords' constitutional case. When everyone was looking forward to a very controversial budget in 1909, it was bad politics to allege the privileged control of the Commons over finance as a pressing reason why the Lords must not touch a bill. What was to be made of the

35 Debates, Lords, 4s, CXCII (20 July 1908), 1421-1422.
supposedly non-partisan character of the Lords if they patterned their vote after the actions of the Unionist Party in the Commons—in Lansdowne's delicate phrase, "those who usually act with us"? The colossal majorities for the Bill in the Commons might have been a convincing argument for passage except that the Lords' whole defense was based on a rejection of such colossal majorities as decisive influences on them. Lansdowne argued that the Lords must pass the Bill to preserve their influence, but this directly contradicted the arguments used on the Education Bills and presently to be advanced on the Licensing Bill and the Budget of 1909. In those cases it was pointed out that the Lords must not give way, for that would destroy their influence. Lansdowne's last sentence was the most striking of all. It was incredible that the Leader of the Unionist Lords could speak of throwing the sole and entire responsibility for a disastrous bill on the government. The only reason ever advanced by the Unionists for the existence of the House of Lords was that the government must at all costs be prevented from achieving such sole and entire responsibility for legislation. It almost seemed that Lansdowne was so confident of the Lords' security that he did not have to worry about the consistency or consequences of his arguments.

The Licensing Bill was a different matter. Months before the Bill emerged from the House of Commons Balfour's closest associates took it for granted that the Lords would veto it. As early as May, 1908, Jack Sandars was so convinced that this would be the case that he was amazed to discover that Lansdowne was considering not vetoing
the Bill, Lansdowne wanted drastic amendments which the government would probably reject—a repetition of the Education Bill strategy. He was reluctant to chain the Lords to the liquor trade by an outright veto and fearful of what the Bishops might say. Sandars was shocked by such lack of spirit. Lansdowne presently came round to the veto position, perhaps pushed in that direction by Lloyd George's blustering threats to tax licenses to the torture point if the Bill were rejected.

The Lords' veto of the Licensing Bill was expected, but even parts of the Unionist press were shocked by the peers' procedure. Even before their debate began, 220 Unionist peers met at Lansdowne House and resolved to vote against the Bill. This was the most blatant display of partisanship Lansdowne had yet organized. The Spectator regretted the meeting, observing, "We think an injury has been done to what we may term the non-party position of the House of Lords." The Saturday Review protested,

In party polemics the Session is marked by an astounding betise on the part of Lord Lansdowne and unintelligent obstinacy on the part of Mr. Asquith. Unionists have not done with the giving away of the Lords' case at the Lansdowne House meeting, and will not have done with it for a long time to come. Never was a good case so gratuitously made a bad one.

The Unionist Leadership seemed to think that the time had passed when the Lords had to pay lip service to such political fictions. Lord St. Aldwyn, for example, casually justified the Lansdowne House

36 Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49765, Sandars to Balfour, 8 May 1908.
37 Observer, 10 May 1908. 38 28 November 1908, 863.
39 26 December 1908, 777.
meeting on the ground that the Unionist peers were simply doing what the Liberal caucus did all the time. The sole difference he could perceive between the two cases was that the Unionist peers were more tolerant of dissent.\footnote{Speech at Gloucester, 14 December 1908, \textit{National Union Gleanings, }XXXII (January, 1909), 152.}

No Unionist was disturbed by Lloyd George's famous jibe, "Decrees were issued from Lansdowne House which Buckingham Palace would not dream of sending forth." His threat, "We are not going to stand any longer the usurpation of Lord Lansdowne and his Royal consort in the Commons," turned not a hair on the heads of those gentlemen.\footnote{\textit{Spectator, }19 December 1908, 1039.} Even the Prime Minister's call to the Liberal Party to make the Lords' veto the dominant issue in politics failed to alarm them. Asquith described the forthcoming budget as the standard by which the Liberals would stand or fall. He told his followers, Finance is an instrument of great potency and also of great flexibility, and it may be found to be in some directions, at any rate, a partial solvent to what, under our existing constitutional conditions, would otherwise be insoluble problems.\footnote{Speech at London, 11 December 1908, \textit{National Union Gleanings, }XXXII (January, 1909), 86-87.}

The hint of crises to come left the supremely confident Unionists unruffled.
CHAPTER V

THE BUDGET VETO

The problems of internal division which had so disturbed the Unionist Party in its first three years of opposition subsided in 1909. If the difficulties between tariff reformers and free traders did not disappear, they at least shrank to manageable proportions. The general shape of the settlement had been foreshadowed by Lord Robert Cecil's arrangement with his East Marylebone constituency in 1908. The Cecil brothers were to receive special treatment, and the rest of the free trade candidates were to shift for themselves. No effort of Lord Robert Cecil could save his colleagues from the attacks of the Confederates. His appeals to Balfour and Asland-Hood for help failed to enlist their open support.\(^1\) Even his threat to publish correspondence revealing Balfour's incapacity to enforce his own policy of non-proscription could not compel Balfour to join in an open attack on the Confederates.\(^2\) By the end of the year Lord Robert was securely fixed in East Marylebone, protected by his alliance with

\(^1\)Cecil Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 51071, Cecil to Balfour, 19 January 1909; Cecil to Balfour, 21 August 1909, marked "Confidential."

\(^2\)Ibid., Sandars to Cecil, 23 September 1909, marked "Private."
Walter Long and supported by Lord Northcliffe. Lord Hugh, driven from Greenwich, found refuge as the Unionist candidate for Oxford University; desultory Confederate action against him there came to nothing.

The Observer, which usually supported Confederate campaigns, specifically excepted the Cecils with the remark, "In their case, and in theirs alone, we are unmistakably in the presence of the altogether exceptional services and abilities which would justify Tariff Reformers in extending to them a reasonable measure of most favoured treatment." Probably the Saturday Review came closer to the real explanation: "Conservatives in general must feel that it would be something of a scandal—it would shock the party's moral sense—if Lord Salisbury's sons were deliberately kept out of public life by Unionist action."

Thus despite the absence of firm leadership, the Party had groped its way toward partial unity. No one had much idea of the reactions of Unionist free trade voters to these changes, but the tariff reformers were satisfied by the elimination of dissident candidates. Balfour was freer than before to concentrate on carrying on the opposition in Parliament, the Party problems having been reduced to isolated outbursts of no great menace. One such was a personal quarrel between the irrepressible Walter Long and Sir Alexander Acland-Hood. Long was irked by Acland-Hood's presumptuous

---

3Cecil Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 51159, Northcliffe to Cecil, 26 March 1909; Cecil to Northcliffe, 3 August 1909.

4Saturday Review, 21 August 1909, 220-221.

524 January 1909.

612 June 1909, 744.
appointment of Unionist speakers in an Irish Land Bill debate. Taking
this as an official affront to his position as spokesman on Irish
affairs, Long delivered to Balfour one of his frequent threats to take
up an independent position. As usual Long's ruffled feelings were
soothed, and he resumed his role as the Party's self-appointed
troubleshooter.

The 1909 political situation seemed wonderfully promising for
the Unionists. For three years the Lords had carved up or thrown out
Liberal legislation almost at will, leaving the Liberals, who dared
not dissolve without some election issue stronger than the education
or licensing questions, in a quandry. Everyone agreed that the nation
was politically apathetic, bored by the party conflicts of the pre­
ceding years. The English Review offered a non-partisan view of the
public attitude with this depressing prognosis:

The rejection of the Licensing Bill by the House of Lords,
the collapse of the Education compromise, and, above all, the
utter indifference with which the fate of both these Bills
was received by the country, are fine symptoms of the decay
into which our Parliamentary system seems to be falling.

Both major parties agreed that their rank and file had no stomach for
a fight, but the Unionists rather optimistically interpreted public
indifference as a swing away from the Liberals. They were delighted
by the decision of the first cabinet council of the year to seek no
dissolution but to go the full Parliamentary term. The Observer, for

7Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49777, Long to Balfour,
17 September 1909, with the enclosure Long to Acland-Hood,
17 September 1909.

8I (January, 1909), 334.
example, took this to be "the unconditional capitulation of the Liberal Party to the House of Lords." 9

As Asquith had predicted, the Budget of 1909 lay at the center of the Liberal program. David Lloyd George, Chancellor of the Exchequer, had to meet the unexpectedly heavy cost of the social reform programs and increased expenditures in naval building. He had to find an increase of £16,712,000 and find it within the limits of free trade finance. There was no party contest on the extent of government spending. The Unionists had accepted the social reforms and had greatly enjoyed working up a dreadnought scare which had forced the government to build beyond their projected plans. The conflict centered on the methods of meeting the deficit. It was Lloyd George's task to wrap up in one fiscal package the backlog of Liberal programs from the preceding sessions, to prove free trade methods adequate to finance social reform and dreadnoughts, to find an expedient to whip up Liberal enthusiasm, and to embarrass the Unionists. The complacent opposition awaited the Welshman's budget with almost total unconcern. Years later Lord Willoughby de Broke captured the atmosphere of those peaceful days. He recalled in his memoirs,

It was not until Mr. Lloyd George, now Chancellor of the Exchequer, brought in his Budget in the spring of 1909, that a great many rural Conservatives began to realize that the landslide of 1906 might after all mean something very awkward. ... In fact, Conservatives generally did not take the Liberal majority seriously. This majority, like other majorities, would be dissipated somehow or other, and the Conservative Party would come into its own again, and the hideous abnormality of a Liberal Government

931 January 1909.
independent of the Irish would go the way of all flesh. So the Lloyd George Budget came as a rude awakening.\(^\text{10}\)

Even before the announcement of the Budget there were some accurate predictions of its more interesting features. The influential Economist remarked early in March that the Budget might well contain some scheme for land taxation. It expected such a scheme to include a new land valuation but did not expect it to bring in much revenue. Shrewdly the analyst added, "Probably any plan for amending the old valuation would be desperately resisted by the House of Lords, but it may be that the Chancellor of the Exchequer will find some less vulnerable access to a source of revenue which is evidently very popular with a large section of his followers."\(^\text{11}\)

Such predictions of the Lords' reactions moved the Saturday Review to cast a contemptuous glance at the "fevered idea" that the Lords might fling out the Budget. "We should say it is the last thing in the world the House of Lords is meditating or likely to meditate."\(^\text{12}\) The Unionist press was not apprehensive. On the very day of the Chancellor's Budget speech The Times loftily dismissed rumors that the Budget would open up sensational prospects with drastic taxes on land, licenses, and large incomes. "From little incidents we learn that the Session is not, after all, going to be so much of a Budget Session as was predicted. The conclusion is that in looking for his fifteen millions Mr. Lloyd George will keep very much to the old ways."\(^\text{13}\)

\(^{10}\) Lord Willoughby de Broke, The Passing Years, 249-250.

\(^{11}\) 6 March 1909, 499.  

\(^{12}\) 10 April 1909, 450.

\(^{13}\) 29 April 1909.
The Chancellor brought in an ingenious Budget that easily made up the deficit. The actual effect of the taxes was more modest than the provocative side issues of the Budget made them appear. The Economist divided the Budget into direct and indirect taxes and summarized their yield.

**Direct Taxation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tax Type</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Income tax</td>
<td>£3,500,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estate duties</td>
<td>2,850,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stamp duties</td>
<td>650,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land taxes</td>
<td>500,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>7,500,000</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Indirect Taxation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tax Type</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Liquor licenses</td>
<td>£2,600,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motor-car licenses</td>
<td>260,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tobacco duties</td>
<td>1,900,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spirit duties</td>
<td>1,600,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Petrol</td>
<td>340,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>6,700,000</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This revenue plus a £3,000,000 raid on the Sinking Fund met the year's deficit. Embedded in the Budget, together with fancy taxes on unused minerals, was a land valuation bill to provide the data for Lloyd George's favorite program of land taxes.

Even the Chancellor's Budget speech failed to arouse immediate alarm in most of the press. The Times noted that he had met his deficit almost exclusively at the cost of the wealthy and the fairly well-to-do, and it noted, "The doctrine of social ransom has never been carried quite so far." Apart from this complaint, The Times was not unduly disturbed. The Budget was "commonplace" in that it showed little original conception; it would probably provoke long discussion.

---

14 May 1909, 908.  15 The Times, 30 April 1909.
The Daily Telegraph was equally nonchalant. The Budget was, to be sure, a clever and astute maneuver by the Chancellor, who had displayed some electioneering dexterity. "The only criticism we would make upon the cleverness shown by the Chancellor of the Exchequer is that he has been far too clever." The wary Economist was pleased that Lloyd George had "promptly and decisively interpreted national expenditure in terms of national taxation." It thought the income tax less than had been expected and the super-tax simple and reasonable. The taxes on licenses and tobacco would be unpopular with some people, but the land taxes, said the Economist, would "excite more interest than alarm."^17

A few days later the Observer was the first to discover that the Budget was a national menace. The editor, J.L. Garvin, trumpeted, "The full gravity of the issue raised by the Budget may be stated in a sentence. Mr. Lloyd George, as his supporters and opponents will agree, proposes a financial revolution, which can only be prevented by a constitutional crisis."^18 But to the Observer whatever fiscal, social, or political defects the Budget contained were apparently less significant than the government's limited naval building program. Peculiarly, Garvin's primary objective in urging the Lords to veto the Budget was to compel the government to lay down eight dreadnoughts. Describing the House of Lords as the British substitute for a written constitution and a Supreme Court, Garvin argued that the peers would be well within their rights in demanding the maximum quota of

---

16 30 April 1909. 17 1 May 1909, 907-908. 18 2 May 1909.
dreadnoughts under the threat of destroying the year's finance. He questioned neither the wisdom nor the propriety of the Lords' dictating to the government its naval and fiscal policy. Lord Ridley, chief of the Tariff Reform League, concurring with Garvin's rather startling suggestion, remarked, "We have hitherto acquiesced in the financial decisions of the House of Commons because the Government has been conducted by sane men, but you have now a House of Commons controlled by a pack of madmen, and you have to take different measures." 19

The Economist praised the Budget because it carried out the principle that direct and indirect taxation should be balanced, 20 while the Daily Mail condemned it as un-English and unjust precisely because it violated that principle. 21 On that basis, the Daily Mail advised the Lords to amend, not reject, the Budget. "The necessity of a revising Chamber was never more clearly shown. 22 The Times, repenting its former moderation, condemned the Budget as reckless and socialistic, 23 but significantly failed to mention the Lords' control over finance. Not all Unionists were convinced that the Upper House was the answer to all problems.

For a few weeks after the Budget speech the Unionist campaign continued to be uncoordinated and, in part, self-contradictory. Bonar Law, a hard hitter in debate, virtually demolished his own Party's case in a London speech. The government, he announced with satisfaction, was proceeding on a course which gave the Unionists

19 Observer, 2 May 1909. 20 1 May 1909, 907.
21 3 May 1909. 22 Ibid.
23 3 May 1909.
the greatest advantage. "At the last General Election the party of progress—Liberals, Radicals, Socialists—they all won support on the same ground, they all appealed to the cupidity of one class based upon the spoliation of all other classes." Law had unwittingly conceded that the government had an electoral mandate for its "spoliation" budget, and thus he cut the ground from beneath his Party's feet. Law then described the government's predatory action as sapping the foundations on which society rested—respect for law, security of property, and hatred of disorder. But then he added, "The danger is not Socialism in the sense that I have described. The danger is revolution, and we have a revolutionary Government." Yet his Party was preparing to contest the Budget on the charge that it was socialistic.

Bonar Law was not the only Unionist who was giving away his own case. Balfour himself told the House of Commons that the taxes on real property and unused minerals were "not only grossly unjust, but quite unworkable." But obviously unworkable taxes could not ruin the landed classes; uncollectable taxes could hardly be dangerously revolutionary. Balfour was giving a strange lead. The only consistent theme in the Unionist anti-Budget campaign appeared to be a confident assumption that the Lords would take care of everything.

Of all the Unionist journals the Observer was most aggressive. Of the notion that the Lords could not touch money bills, Garvin

---

24 Speech on 3 May 1909, National Union Gleanings, XXXII (June, 1909), 521-522.
25 Debates, Commons, 5s, I (3 May 1909), 767.
indignantly wrote, "It implies on the one hand that Socialistic taxation may be carried to any lengths by any wild-cat coalition which may secure a temporary majority in the House of Commons without anything in the shape of a specific mandate for its financial purposes." He held that the power of the Lords to reject a budget was beyond dispute. But could they also amend financial legislation? "Why not?" asked Garvin. The only consequence would be a general election to ascertain the will of the people. Garvin, like other Unionists, conveniently assumed that his Party need not consider itself restricted by custom and settled practice if it could innovate without penalty. But the Liberal Party, on the other hand, had no such freedom. Its majorities were always temporary wildcat coalitions, its campaigns a mass of lies; it was incapable of eliciting a genuine electoral mandate. Garvin ignored the fact that Balfour and Lansdowne had earlier denied that the Lords could veto or amend money bills.

For the moment, at least, the Observer was far in advance of the bankers and merchants in the City. A group of the most prominent City men headed by the Rothschilds addressed a public letter to the Prime Minister. It was a comparatively temperate protest against some of the Budget proposals. Lloyd George's raid on the Sinking Fund they thought a "dangerous innovation," and they viewed with alarm the increasing disproportion of the tax burden borne by the rich (or in their terminology "a numerically small class of the community"). The increased death duties, income tax, and super-tax

26 16 May 1909. 27 Ibid.
they thought "seriously injurious to the commerce and industries of the country." These taxes on capital, they thought, might discourage private enterprise and thrift, "thus in the long run diminishing employment and reducing wages." In all this there was nothing suggesting that a revolution or an immediate national catastrophe was in the offing. Asquith thought the protest couched in "very moderate language." Despite the Daily Mail's cry, "It would be difficult to exaggerate the impression produced upon the country," the country gave no sign of having been roused by the outcry of the bankers.

The Observer's enthusiasm for the veto was contagious. The Daily Mail now followed Garvin's lead, linking the government's naval building policy with the Lords' consideration of the Budget. Speaking more plainly, or perhaps more clumsily, than any other Unionist journal, it proclaimed in an editorial that obviously the only course was "to remove the Government as speedily as may be from office." Not even Balfour or the more extreme Unionist partisans had previously claimed the Lords' right to remove a government from office. The Daily Mail was forging beyond the conventional talk of submitting issues to the electorate and protecting the nation from ill-considered legislation. This editorial went to the heart of the matter.

Plain speaking without much regard to consequences characterized Unionist journalism in May. The normally moderate Saturday Review

---

28 Economist, 15 May 1909, 1037.

29 Debates, Commons, 5s, V (17 May 1909), 62.

30 17 May 1909.

31 26 May 1909, 27 May 1909.
glanced at the constitutional issue and dismissed it as completely irrelevant to the decision on the Budget. The Lords need consider no arguments about precedents or privileges. The voters would gladly condone a breach of the constitution if they thought they had something to gain. The real question, the Saturday Review boldly asserted, was, "Would it then be expedient from a party point of view—which we need hardly say we consider to be the national point of view—for the Lords to reject the Finance Bill on second reading?" 32

The Unionist anti-Budget campaign began to take on a clearer shape in June. Lord Rosebery charged into the battle with a surprisingly combative letter to the newspapers. "This is not a Budget," he wrote, "but a revolution; a social and political revolution of the first magnitude." 33 He was appalled that no one had noticed that the House of Commons could legally carry such a revolution without ascertaining the views of the people. This pronouncement apparently had considerable impact. The Unionist press began taking a very different line, considerably more direct than the Observer’s dreadnought fixation. Surprisingly, the Daily Telegraph was the originator of the new style. The Telegraph was supposed to speak for Balfour and previously had advanced a very cautious policy, scarcely mentioning the Lords and giving them no advice. This moderation vanished abruptly after Rosebery’s call to arms.

The Telegraph announced on 23 June that the Budget must be considered a direct attack on the Lords' power. If it passed, the government would have succeeded in gaining absolute control. "The

---

32 29 May 1909, 677.  
33 Morning Post, 22 June 1909.
House of Lords, as a constitutional safeguard, would have ceased to exist." The Lords could either amend the Budget or veto it as they chose, but to pass it would be to commit suicide. Week after week the Telegraph repeated the same dire warning. The Observer's dreadnought crusade had at least left the Unionists a little flexibility; the Telegraph's conclusion permitted the Lords almost no room for maneuver—they must destroy the Budget or be destroyed. This was an especially provocative line, because it echoed arguments employed by Lansdowne and others in past debates, such as that on the Licensing Bill.

Balfour's agent in the Daily Telegraph was the editor, his personal friend, E.B. Iwan-Muller. In the midst of the Telegraph's campaign, Balfour wrote to Iwan-Muller,

I think your policy of familiarising public opinion with the idea that the Lords have a perfect right (as they most undoubtedly have) to reject the financial proposals of the Commons is by far the best; it will then be left open to the Lords to come unhampered to a decision when the moment for a decision really arrives. It has not arrived yet. 34

Balfour enjoyed posing as a man who never read newspapers. It was said that he kept abreast of press comment by having his associates clip interesting tidbits and pass them along for his perusal. The method was not working very well in July, 1909. The effect of the Daily Telegraph's editorials was the exact opposite of Balfour's desire to leave many alternatives open to the Lords.

In the same letter Balfour considered the possibility of amending the Budget in the Lords and rejected it on tactical grounds. He noted that the Lords had no expert advisers and so could not gauge

34 Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49796, Balfour to Iwan-Muller, 7 July 1909, marked "Private."
the financial effect of their amendments. He put his finger on the nub of the amendment difficulty with another objection. The first thing the Lords would amend would be the land clauses, which would attract public attention to the Lords' vested interest in land and would lay them open to the accusation that they were looking after themselves rather than the country. He saw no constitutional difficulty in tampering with the land valuation clauses, since he regarded them as a case of "tacking," but the tactical arguments against such amendment were decisive. He was looking ahead to the election, and he realized that complex positions were impossible to explain and defend in a campaign. Thus Balfour saw the Lords as having no alternative but to accept or reject the Budget. This made an impression on Iwan-Muller. The Daily Telegraph quietly dropped its talk of amending the Budget. Two days after Balfour's directive arrived, the Telegraph printed a call to battle.

Irresistible forces are ready to leap to action. But the signal must be given before public opinion can be mobilised; and there will be no sufficient demonstration of what is, we are certain, the real and profound feeling of the majority of the nation, until it is made clear that this controversy is to be faced without any thought of flinching, and to be fought clean out to the bitter end, be the cost what it may. The contrary course would mean surrender; and surrender is among the sins which democracy never forgives. 35

Lord Milner's famous cry, "Damn the consequences!" was more extreme only in its brevity.

Garvin's Observer now took its lead from the Telegraph and switched the campaign from the dreadnought scheme to the preservation of the Upper Chamber. The policy was Iwan-Muller's, but the language

359 July 1909.
was unmistakably Garvin's. "The Peers have hitherto successfully interpreted national sentiment against the misrepresentative proceedings of a temporary majority elected in a brief moment of aberration as the result of a campaign of organised mendacity. If the Budget passes substantially as it stands the Peers will be utterly and ignominiously beaten."\(^{36}\) Joseph Chamberlain added that if the Budget passed "the House of Lords would be knocked out of the Constitution."\(^{37}\)

Only The Times offered the Lords no advice. Lord Lansdowne's rather cautious references to the Budget and his refusal to predict the Lords' action on it\(^{38}\) moved The Times to decry the rash advice and ill-considered speculation in the Unionist press. The Times wanted the Party to concentrate on ridding the Budget with criticism and arousing popular opinion against the government. For its caution The Times was reviled by the rest of the Unionist press. There was no room in the controversy for sweet reasonableness or conventional tactics.

The independent Economist unconsciously revealed how irrelevant were the traditional political attitudes. Alarmed by the talk of a Budget veto by the Lords, the Economist noted that such a veto was unthinkable because "the Government of the country could not be carried on if the unwritten laws of our financial administration were violated."\(^{39}\) This was the customary pattern, but the Economist failed to realize that the Unionists had no intention of permitting the

\(^{36}\)11 July 1909. \(^{37}\)Observer, 11 July 1909.


\(^{39}\)24 July 1909, 163.
Liberal government to carry on. Constitutional principles had little to do with it. Hypothetically, if the Lords had the right to veto a budget they could destroy any government, but, practically, only the Liberals were subject to the veto. Traditionalists might object in the name of impartial justice to a constitution which placed Liberal governments at the mercy of the Lords, but the Unionists had never believed the Liberals deserved constitutional parity with them. Thus the Unionists never considered the Economist's constitutional protests as a considerable factor in their deliberations.

By mid-summer Balfour was already working out a logical justification for the Lords' budget veto. He tried out one of his formulas on the editor of the Spectator.

Quite apart from the considerations which appeal to the strict constitutional lawyer, it seems to me quite evident that a Resolution intended to prevent a non-representative body imposing taxes cannot by any just process of exegesis, be made to mean that the Second Chamber is to sit by with folded hands while the social organisation of the country is being revolutionised by financial legislation which has a political as well as a fiscal side.

Balfour, like Lansdowne, was determined not to rely on constitutional texts or precedents; he would consult only his common sense. His contempt for legal technicalities was notorious.

Lloyd George's famous Limehouse speech in which the Chancellor excoriated the landlords' greed seemed to have little effect on the Unionist leaders and journalists. The Daily Telegraph, already

---

40 Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49797, Balfour to J. St. Loe Strachey, 26 July 1909, marked "Private."

committed to a fight to the bitter end, thought the speech would damage the Liberals by arousing the "moderate men" to defend the country from revolution.\textsuperscript{42} The \textit{Morning Post} interpreted the speech as a confession that the government was afraid to fight the election on the ground of fiscal policy.\textsuperscript{43} The \textit{Times} printed a fiery letter from Sir Edward Carson, the greatest legal advocate of his day, announcing that the Chancellor's speech had absolved the Unionists of any responsibility for considering constitutional precedents or privileges.\textsuperscript{44} But The \textit{Times} editorially continued to recommend a policy of moderation and refused to join in the veto campaign.

The Liberal strategy was to pin the landlord label on the Unionists, identifying the Lords with the landed interest. Lloyd George explained his objectives in a letter to J.A. Spender. He told the Liberal editor that the land clauses in the Budget had saved his party from the despondency produced by its meek acceptance of the Lords' aggressions. He wrote, "The Party had lost heart. On all hands I was told that enthusiasm had almost disappeared at meetings, and we wanted something to rouse the fighting spirit of our own forces. This the Land proposals have undoubtedly succeeded in doing." In the Chancellor's opinion the land taxes were a deterrent to the Lords' veto. "There is only one consideration that makes them hesitate now, and that is the fear that our land proposals are so popular with the

\textsuperscript{42}2 August 1909. \textsuperscript{43}2 August 1909. \textsuperscript{44}Letter to the editor dated 31 July 1909, \textit{The Times}, 2 August 1909.
masses of the people as to make it very doubtful what the issue would be. "

45 A few Unionists did believe that the inflammatory speeches of Lloyd George and Winston Churchill had roused an anti-landlord spirit in parts of the country, 46 but the Unionists who made the important decisions did not seem particularly moved by the agitation.

It was primarily the tariff reformers who resented the identification of the Unionist Budget fight with the landed interest. They wanted nothing to distract attention from the tariff reform versus free trade issue. J.L. Garvin now demanded the veto because once Lloyd George's Budget had been enacted it would be so popular that not even a tariff reform government would dare change the fiscal system. 47 Why Garvin thought an election fought on the veto of such an amazingly attractive Budget would bring a Unionist victory he did not choose to reveal. Logic was never Garvin's strong point.

Neither the Liberal speeches nor the Unionist newspaper campaign was very influential in the highest circles. The Unionist leaders were reaching their decisions by their own best judgment. Lord Lansdowne was reluctant to veto the Budget, but it was not the fear of making an unpopular landlord's fight that was bothering him. Jack Sandars found Lansdowne inclining toward the amendment of the Budget, partly because he feared being blamed for the financial chaos which presumably would follow the rejection and partly because of the

45 Spender Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 46388, Lloyd George to Spender, 16 July 1909.

46 Cecil Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 51085, Salisbury to Lord Robert Cecil, 7 August 1909; see also Daily Mail, 16 August 1909.

47 Observer, 22 August 1909.
pressure Lord St. Aldwyn and other Unionist free trade peers were exerting. Sandars argued against Lansdowne's fears. The tone of his letter to Balfour describing the conversation hinted that the latter had already decided in favor of the veto.

St. Aldwyn and the free traders were in a curious position. They could support neither the Liberal Budget nor a veto, which would certainly result in an election campaign committing the Party firmly to the tariff reform alternative. E.G. Brunker of the Unionist Free Trade Club wrote glumly to Lord Robert Cecil, "We are paralysed by the Budget." St. Aldwyn's escape from the dilemma was amendment of the Budget. As a last resort he advised Lansdowne to excise the licensing and land tax clauses, thus throwing the onus of saving or losing the Budget on the government. He really preferred to accept the Budget, since his "House of Commons feeling on finance" affirmed the Commons' privileged control over money bills. Lansdowne received similar pleas for caution from Lord James of Hereford, Cromer, Onslow, and Balfour of Burleigh.

Lansdowne's fears were gradually overcome in the next few weeks.

48 Viscount St. Aldwyn as Sir Michael Hicks-Beach had been Chancellor of the Exchequer and was widely respected for his economic judgment.

49 Balfour Papers, B.M. Add, MSS. 49765, Sandars to Balfour, 26 August 1909, marked "Private."

50 Cecil Papers, B.M. Add, MSS. 51072, Brunker to Cecil, 6 September 1909.

51 St. Aldwyn to Lansdowne, 8 September 1909, in Lord Newton, Lord Lansdowne (London, 1929), 376.

52 Ibid.
His lingering concern over a financial breakdown was finally calmed early in November. Lord Milner, onetime Chairman of the Board of Inland Revenue, calculated the revenue losses after a Budget veto and was able to assure Lansdowne that the problems could be solved by a disagreeable but not especially formidable borrowing operation. Jack Sandars then reported that Lloyd George had told Lord Esher that the government was already drafting a stopgap Budget to carry the nation's finance through the critical period.

Probably Lansdowne was swayed even more by glowing reports of progress from Union election experts. The London agent assured Jack Sandars that Lloyd George's Limehouse speech had had no lasting effect. The Unionists in the capital were looking forward to a fight. Sandars wrote, "To sum up. The effect of the Govt's bluff is found of no consequence to our own forces: it is not now maintaining the spirit of their own men." Acland-Hood convinced his leaders that the Party was spoiling for a fight, its enthusiasm at the boiling point. He could not answer for the consequences if there was no election on the Budget.

Two important speeches in September seemed to mark the final

---

53 Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49730, Milner to Lansdowne, 2 November 1909.

54 Ibid., Sandars to Lansdowne, 6 November 1909, marked "Private."

55 Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49765, Sandars to Balfour, 26 August 1909, marked "Private."

56 Austen Chamberlain to Mary E. Chamberlain, 4 September 1909, in Sir Austen Chamberlain, Politics from Inside (London, 1936), 181; also Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49765, Sandars to Balfour, 26 August 1909, marked "Private."
turning point in the Budget contest. Lord Rosebery, in a much-publicized appearance at Glasgow, announced, "I believe that it is not in the best interests of the nation that this financial measure should become law." The Budget was a movement toward socialism, and socialism was the end of faith, family, property, monarchy, and Empire. Although Rosebery explicitly avoided predicting the Lords' decision, his speech was heralded as a death-blow to the Budget and "a political event of the highest importance."

Of greater significance was Balfour's major speech at Birmingham on 22 September. The tariff reformers overlooked no detail in trying to force the Leader's hand. Before he rose to speak the audience was excited by the reading of a letter from Joseph Chamberlain, in which the old warrior said, "I hope the House of Lords will see their way to force a General Election, and I do not doubt in this case what the answer will be." As Balfour stood on the platform he faced a huge sign, which proclaimed in gold letters on a crimson background, "Now is the time." His speech was a commonplace attack on the Budget coupled with enthusiastic praise of a very vague tariff reform alternative. He announced that the fate of the Budget would be decided not in the House of Commons or in the

58 Observer, 12 September 1909.
59 The Times, 11 September 1909.
60 Spectator, 25 September 1909, 441.
61 Westminster Gazette, 23 September 1909.
House of Lords but in the constituencies. Although no one could say exactly what Balfour and Rosebery had meant, there was general agreement that after their speeches the balance of expectation in both parties swung toward a veto of the Budget. The Times rather sadly noted this clear-cut change, though it could see no particular reason for it. There was little further talk of alternatives while the long, laborious passage of the Budget through the House of Commons continued.

By early October Lansdowne was almost certain that the Lords must reject the Budget. Contrary advice from Lord Balfour of Burleigh elicited from the Leader a full explanation of his policy. He recalled his initial inclination to amend the Budget, but now he accepted Balfour's arguments against it. Amendment would commit the Lords to specific issues and possibly arouse popular suspicion that they were dodging the land taxes. Amendment would further complicate the issue by raising detailed constitutional issues about tacking and Parliamentary privilege. Balfour had obviously convinced Lansdowne that the electoral appeal must be simplified. The ground on which Lansdowne would fight the Budget was carefully chosen. He argued that it was a new and dangerous departure to which the Lords had no right to assent until they were sure the government had popular support. He had considered the possibility that the Unionists might lose the election, since the Budget was not unpopular with the working classes. He was certain, however, that the Radical majority would be greatly

63 27 September 1909.
reduced. The Unionists would be far stronger in the Commons, and that would go far to justify the Lords' action. Even if the Lords did not veto the Budget, there would be an election soon, and the government might win handsomely after such an "ignominious capitulation" by the opposition. In that case the Lords would be seriously damaged, having surrendered the right to veto Radical Budgets. Lansdowne was not afraid of an election after a veto of the Budget because he was sure that even a Unionist defeat would not affect the House of Lords. He was assured that the country would distinguish sharply between the Budget issue and the constitutional issue. Even if the Liberals wanted to attack the Lords they would still have to have a second general election, in which case the people could be trusted to vote against single-chamber government.

Lansdowne obviously did not rush into his decision, nor was he coerced, taunted, or browbeaten into it. He had plenty of warning of the dangers inherent in the veto. Lord Lytton, for example, accurately forecast the government's victory and the consequent loss of the Lords' power, calling Lansdowne's attention to the Liberals' electoral advantage on the Budget veto issue. Lord Esher told Jack Sandars the real issue in the Budget election would be the House of Lords, and he thought the gamble was not worth it. Such cautions were wasted, since Balfour and Lansdowne had already

---

64 Lansdowne to Balfour of Burleigh, 2 October 1909, in Newton, Lord Lansdowne, 378-379.

65 Lytton to Lansdowne, 8 October 1909, in Ibid., 377.

66 Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49719, Esher to Sandars, 11 October 1909, marked "Private."
computed all the risks. Their analysis, however, was faulty in two respects.

The first mistake was their estimate that a decreased government majority must work to their advantage. Lansdowne even preferred the Unionists to have a large minority rather than a small majority. He was not afraid of the consequences, even though in such a situation the Irish Nationalists might hold the balance of power. One of the major curiosities of the Budget contest was the Unionist insistence that the Nationalists must be counted on their side against the government. The Irish, to be sure, disliked some sections of the Budget, but this was nothing compared to their hatred of the House of Lords. Throughout the crisis the Unionists made their plans as if the Irish Nationalist Party were some innocuous phantom which could easily be brushed aside. Nothing very distressing had happened when the Nationalists had held the balance from 1892 to 1895; therefore, a close election on the Budget of 1909 must be equivalent to a Unionist victory.

The second error in the Lansdowne prediction was his over-estimate of the Lords' popularity. He gambled that the second election must result in a sizable Unionist victory when the people voted for the peers' defense against a government attack. Quite arbitrarily he sealed off the two elections in separate compartments. The first was to be exclusively on the Budget, the second on the Lords. The possibility that the two issues were identical in the popular mind never disturbed his calculations. The probability that a second

67 Lansdowne to Balfour of Burleigh, 2 October 1909, in Newton, Lord Lansdowne, 378-379.
election, following rapidly on the first, would reach the same conclusion was not within his imaginative reach. The whole political experience of Balfour and Lansdowne led them to the assumption that there was a permanent Unionist majority in Great Britain. Even though the Liberals might temporarily acquire a majority of the ballots in unusual circumstances, a basic Unionist issue like the defense of the Lords must force the people to vote their conservative convictions.

Even the personal intervention of the King could not budge the Unionist Leaders. With Asquith's approval the King conferred with Lansdowne and Balfour on 12 October, trying to find some settlement of the Budget controversy to avert a clash between Lords and Commons. The two Unionists told the Monarch that they had not yet decided what action they should recommend to the Lords. If they were something less than frank with the King, it at least saved him from useless argument.

The wording of Lansdowne's resolution rejecting the Budget was worked out in a few conferences early in November. Jack Sandars reported that Unionist journalists urgently required a simple statement, devoid of excess verbiage about constitutional rights, Parliamentary privilege, or the invasion of precedents. Initial suggestions, such as a resolution complaining about the Budget's

---


69 Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49730, Sandars to Lansdowne, 6 November 1909, marked "Private."
"provisions of an unprecedented and dangerous character," were
whittled down to a starkly simple formula. Ultimately, Lansdowne
rose in the Lords and moved, "That this House is not justified in
giving its consent to the Bill until it has been submitted to the
judgment of the country."

The formal debate in the Upper House was hardly a dramatic
event, since everyone had known of Lansdowne's resolution for at
least a week. The Unionist Leader spent little time defending the
Lords' constitutional right to veto a budget. He merely cited a
Commons resolution acknowledging that right in 1689, touched on the
common sense argument against tacking, and then passed to the well-
worn attacks on Lloyd George's ingenious taxes. He called the Budget
a confession that free trade was exhausted as a financial system and
cited tariff reform as the alternative present in the minds "of a
large portion of the people, and the most thoughtful portion of the
people." He expected the people to think better of the Lords if
they had the courage of their convictions and referred the Budget
to the electorate.

Loreburn delivered the usual government denial of the Lords' power to tamper with money bills. Willoughby de Broke enlivened the
debate by exclaiming, "I do not believe the average elector cares the
least bit about the Constitution, provided he gets what he wants."

---

70 Ibid., Lansdowne to Balfour, 10 November 1909.
71 Debates, Lords, 5s, IV (22 November 1909), 731.
72 Ibid., 747.
73 Ibid., 749.
The impetuous Baron continued, lapsing into sporting metaphor.

All these arrangements with regard to conventions and precedents were perfectly good and right and ought to have been respected, so long as both great parties in the State played the game according to the recognised rules. But when those rules are deliberately broken by noble Lords opposite, then the time comes when the rules of the game may have to be slightly altered. 74

The Unionist free trade peers refused to vote against the Budget. Cromer and Balfour of Burleigh doubted the wisdom of raising a great constitutional conflict and risking the House of Lords on such a doubtful issue. 75

Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of the debate was Lord Rosebery's equivocal position. He had surpassed the Unionists in condemning the Budget, proclaiming that it must not pass. But in the final debate he told the Lords they were making a ghastly mistake in vetoing the Budget. They should pass it and let its excessive unpopularity sweep the Radicals from office. Many people were amazed by Rosebery's defection from the veto group at the last minute; not so, Austen Chamberlain. He had heard weeks before that Rosebery actually wanted to move the resolution rejecting the Budget. He wrote then, "I am sorry for it. I don't like going tiger-shooting with him." 76 Chamberlain was not surprised when Rosebery ran away as soon as the tiger came within range.

Lansdowne's resolution passed by a straight party vote of 350 to 75. The Budget was vetoed, and both parties were committed

74 Ibid., 777.
75 Ibid., IV (23 November 1909), 825-826; IV (25 November 1909), 1039-1042.
76 Austen Chamberlain to Mary E. Chamberlain, 4 September 1909, in Chamberlain, Politics from Inside, 181.
to a long and bitter battle. Whichever party won would have to invent a new code of constitutional practice to protect its interests, and whichever lost would accuse the victor of a conspiracy to revolutionize Great Britain. As Willoughby de Broke had so acutely observed, the rules of the game were changing.

The search for an explanation of the Lords' veto of a Budget, an apparently revolutionary violation of well-established precedent, turned up many reasons, none of which was commensurate with the magnitude of the action.

The pressure of the tariff reformers was often cited as the decisive element. Fearful that a successful free trade budget might permanently destroy their alternative, the tariff reformers were supposed to have stampeded the Party into the veto decision. Certainly, the tariff reformers were solidly in favor of the action, but they did not make the final decisions. Balfour and Lansdowne were the authors of the veto, and neither showed any sign of being driven unwillingly to the final step. Neither cared enough about tariff reform to risk the Party's fortunes for it. Tariff reform propaganda popularized the Budget veto but did not cause it.

Another supposedly decisive element was the desire to protect the landed interest from Liberal attacks. According to this thesis the Lords, panic-stricken by this outbreak of agrarian jacobinism, struck out blindly against the Budget. Both Balfour and Lansdowne loathed the land taxes, but neither seemed to regard them as particularly effective or immediately dangerous. The land was undoubtedly more important to them than tariff reform, but they were hardly so alarmed by Lloyd George's rather complicated taxes that they saw the struggle as a
life-or-death issue. There was no significant pressure from the back-bench peers. On the contrary, it was Lansdowne's lead that reassured the backwoodsmen. Willoughby de Broke described the interaction very clearly.

When Lord Lansdowne rose to move the rejection of the Budget his influence in the House of Lords was at its very zenith. But this same caution—always the dominant characteristic of Lord Lansdowne—that prompted him to fight shy of National Service surely made it safe to follow him when he now advised the House to submit the Budget to the judgment of the electors. Of course it was a big thing, an unprecedented thing. But the noble Marquis was no gambler. His sagacious and well-reasoned speeches always seemed to give forth an atmosphere that was essentially temperate. Above all others, he practiced to perfection the art of never overstating his case, and that of never appearing to be led away by passion or prejudice. A prudent counsellor such as he was sure to have counted the cost of so portentous a decision.77

Willoughby de Broke, who was as deeply devoted to the landed aristocracy as anyone could be, did not think land was the cause of the veto. He attributed greater influence to tariff reform. Fear of the Budget as an opening wedge for socialist taxation was an important factor, but it did not really rise to panic dimensions. The Statist, the Economist, and the Unionist free traders, all anti-socialist, accepted the Budget more or less willingly. The bankers and businessmen obviously disliked the income tax, super-tax, and death duties, but they were prepared to live with them. As Balfour and Lansdowne well knew, every tax was an opening wedge of some kind. Lloyd George's taxes were disliked and resented, but so were all taxes. There was obviously nothing immediately ruinous about the Budget, since the taxes included in it were being collected during

77Willoughby de Broke, *The Passing Years*, 258.
the entire controversy and the country's prosperity was neither improved nor damaged. Despite the newspapers' cries, the Unionist leaders did not see the Budget of 1909 as such a dangerous attack on property as to dictate the most drastic action.

Possibly of some importance was the argument of the Daily Telegraph that if the Lords failed to meet this defiant challenge by direct opposition they would lose their power to control legislation. Both Balfour and Lansdowne seemed to take this point rather seriously. Still, the Lords had passed distasteful measures before, and they had always found plenty of reasons for doing so. When they had so chosen, as in the Old Age Pensions Act passage, they had always dismissed the notion that their powers would shrink. The suggestion that the Lords' powers depended on their veto of a bill was always created by the Unionists themselves for tactical purposes. Even in the Budget controversy it was the Unionists who raised this cry first. Lloyd George's campaign of hurling defiance at the Lords was strictly secondary. Had Balfour and Lansdowne seen the tactics of the Budget crisis in a different light they could easily have justified an acceptance of the Budget. In that case, they could probably have changed the press campaign. Even if Balfour did not read the papers, Lansdowne, Sandars, and Acland-Hood did, and no one connected with the leadership tried to control the editorial comment. For the leaders the decision to veto the Budget created the issue of confidence in the Lords rather than the other way round.

The search for a cause sufficiently extreme to justify a near-revolutionary decision was futile simply because those who decided on the Budget veto did not believe it to be a particularly drastic step.
Neither Balfour nor Lansdowne gave more than a moment’s thought to the unprecedented character of the veto because neither considered constitutional precedents relevant. Common sense was the guide. No government needed a crisis as an excuse to have a dissolution, and neither did Balfour and Lansdowne. The custom that oppositions did not choose the time for elections was of no consequence to the Unionists, who never regarded themselves as a conventional opposition. They operated as a government that happened to be formally out of office for a time. It was a good time for the Unionists to fight an election (at least according to the Chief Whip), and so Balfour and Lansdowne forced an election. In their view the Budget veto was a normal continuation of the policy they had followed since January, 1906.

The Unionists gambled everything in the Budget veto. In their four years of opposition they had never faced up to their internal problems, nor had they accepted the reality of the Liberal government. They clung to their sense of superiority by their employment of the anachronistic House of Lords. They drew little distinction between the popularly elected Commons and the hereditary Lords. For Balfour and Lansdowne the Unionist peers were so many more Members of Parliament, and so they regarded a government defeat in the Lords as equivalent to a government defeat in the Commons. To them the Budget veto was exactly the same in its character and results as a successful vote of no-confidence in the Commons.

The Unionist leaders could hardly imagine a situation in which the British electorate would deliberately vote their Party out of power. The aberration of 1906 having passed, the Unionists calmly
assumed that they once more represented the majority, and the ready availability of the Lords' veto prevented them from considering other possibilities. But in using the House of Lords as the lever to force their way back into office they over-taxed its strength, and it failed them. It was a distinct possibility that the Party, suddenly bereft of its dominant role, might refuse to accept such an unexpected reverse and turn to extremism to regain its accustomed position.
CHAPTER VI

THE JANUARY ELECTION AND THE CONFERENCE

Although the Lords claimed to have made the Budget's merits and demerits the subject of the election of January, 1910, the veto made the House of Lords itself a key issue. The Unionists found it impossible either to separate the fiscal and constitutional problems or to integrate them into a simple, hard-hitting electoral appeal. Only the Party Leader could set a clear, consistent theme for the campaign, and there were those who questioned Balfour's suitability for the post of election strategist. J.L. Garvin attempted to prompt Balfour in a memorandum drawn up sometime late in 1909. Garvin's election tactic was simple and peculiarly appropriate to the conservative tradition.

We have got to show them that the Budget does represent the spirit of the Socialistic Revolution; and that the Limehouse Speech is a firebrand's signal for a class war. The argument the nation is prepared for is that the Radical-Socialist method means revolution, chaos and peril, while the Unionist party stands for power, union and security.¹

Congenial as the Garvin plan probably was to Balfour, there were serious obstacles in the way of its implementation. Since 1903 the Unionist Party had presented a spectacle of incurable disunity. The

¹Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49795, Memorandum on Campaign Literature by J.L. Garvin.
only alternative to Lloyd George's Budget was tariff reform, but if Balfour clarified his fiscal policy to establish the decisive, powerful image Garvin wanted, he would split the Party and destroy the fruits of his labor of the past six years.

Garvin's theme of protecting the nation from class warfare seemed a promising one for a time. Lloyd George campaigned on a class basis with a reckless disregard for traditions of social propriety. In Wales he was especially vindictive, announcing at Llanelly, for example,

We have caught the large rats at last. They will not destroy our measures much more, and there will be rejoicing in our land when we see the House of Lords set aside, when we see a clear path to the throne of King Edward VII, when we see a clear path for education, land, and religious equality.2

But the Unionists could hardly stand above class divisions when they were condemned by their own method of forcing the dissolution to identify themselves with the defense of the Lords. The socialism scare could be parried easily by the Liberals, who charged the Unionists with defending only the narrow special interests of the landed aristocracy. The Party uselessly protested, "From the Conservative party landlords are entitled to no more and to no less than should be accorded to every other class of citizens—justice."3

In the campaign the obligation to defend the Lords' political privileges in order to justify their actions associated the Party too closely with their social and economic position. It was impossible to

---

2Speech on 22 December 1909, National Union Gleanings, XXXVII (July, 1911), 85.

reconcile the cry of class warfare with such paeans of praise for the Lords as the Daily Mail's.

The People must judge. They must judge between a House that has grown with England's greatness, that represents her most splendid traditions, that forms part alike of her present and her past—they must judge between it and another Assembly which sits, in Burke's words, "not for the security but for the destruction of property, and not of property only but of every rule and maxim that can give it stability."^4

The Unionists compromised their stand for political security by defending the constitutionally questionable veto of the Budget. The Saturday Review exhibited the paradoxical nature of the campaign with the strangely un-conservative remark, "The country—rightly or wrongly—does not care a fig for constitutionalism, and will only ridicule the appeal of Radicals—the Socialists' allies—to the sacredness of constitutional precedent."^5 There were interesting issues available, but the Unionist Party could not take advantage of them.

Balfour's election manifesto to the voters of the City of London was anything but the expression of power, union, and security Garvin had suggested. His chief theme was the danger of single-chamber government. He wrote, "The truth of the matter is that the present attack on the House of Lords is but the culmination of a long-drawn-out conspiracy. The Government came into office not to work the Constitution of the country, but to destroy it."^6 But this point was weakened by Balfour's inability to present a strong defense of the existing House of Lords. After a comparatively mild discussion

^41 December 1909. \(^5\)11 December 1909, 719.

^6Manifesto dated 10 December 1909, National Union Gleanings, XXXIV (February, 1910), 140.
of the Lords' virtues, Balfour added, "But this does not mean that, even for its comparatively subordinate, though all important constitutional functions it cannot be improved." This broad hint at the need for a reform of the Lords detracted from the force of his case.

The Leader's presentation of his tariff reform program was vague and perfunctory. After a few platitudinous remarks about Imperial preference and retaliation, Balfour abruptly closed the issue with, "On other aspects of Tariff Reform I will here say nothing." He did not stress the fiscal issue in the campaign, and the Party's emphasis on its first constructive work varied wildly from constituency to constituency. The Unionist campaign of 1910 was less fratricidal than that of 1906 only because the Confederates had eliminated most of the Party's free trade candidates. The Unionist Free Trade Club was reduced to delivering the contradictory advice that its members should use their own discretion in voting but should do nothing which might imperil either the Union or free trade.

The attack on the Liberals' alleged conspiracy to impose single-chamber government on the country knit the Unionist campaign into a partially coherent plan, insofar as it had any unity at all. But the substantive issues raised by the Budget's financial provisions were rather confusedly mixed in with the constitutional problem. Only Leo Maxse's hysterical National Review successfully integrated all the complaints against the government into a unified description of Liberal perfidy: "After reconstituting the Government the United

---

7 Ibid., 141. 8 Ibid., 142-143. 9 Saturday Review, 18 December 1909, 743.
Kingdom would be disrupted and the Empire dismembered, the Navy reduced, the Army practically disbanded, and, generally, the way paved for a German invasion.\textsuperscript{10}

The Liberal campaign centered on the limitation of the Lords' veto power. Asquith was able to work his entire program around this theme by endorsing all the plans the Lords had blocked. In his major speech he recommitted his party to the education, licensing, and franchise reforms already attempted in the previous Parliament. He added firm commitments to the disestablishment of the Welsh Church and to Irish Home Rule, thereby discontinuing the 1906 pledge not to bring forward the Irish issue. Expanding on the revenue possibilities of the 1909 Budget, he held out the government's plan for sickness, invalidity, and unemployment insurance for "the industrious workman." The House of Lords, of course, stood in the way of all these projects.

The Prime Minister, without pledging himself specifically to the Campbell-Bannerman Resolutions, committed his party to a limitation on the Lords' power as the immediate goal, postponing consideration of the reform of the House of Lords to the indefinite future. Perhaps too boldly, Asquith promised, "We shall not assume office, and we shall not hold office, unless we can secure the safeguards which experience shows us to be necessary for the legislative utility and honour of the party of progress."\textsuperscript{11} This was commonly assumed to mean that the Liberals would extort from the King a promise to create enough new peers to give the Liberals control of the Lords before they would carry on the

\textsuperscript{10}LIV (January, 1910), 737.

\textsuperscript{11}Speech in the Albert Hall, London, 10 December 1909, National Union Gleanings, XXXIV (February, 1910), 145-147.
government. This was not actually Asquith's intention. Lord Knollys, in fact, told Asquith's secretary a few days later that the King had decided a second general election would be necessary before he would feel justified in creating the peers.\textsuperscript{12}

The election was not an excited or violent one. The Spectator accurately reported, "There never was a time when a question of vital and superlative importance excited less fuss and panic.\"\textsuperscript{13} Well into the campaign J.L. Garvin was writing to Jack Sandars, "Well, I must scheme out some way of heartening up our party. Their spirit is good apart from those who are plunged into despondency by the stream of pessimism from Lancashire.\"\textsuperscript{14} The Party's aggressiveness fell far short of the sanguine predictions of Acland-Hood during the Budget debate; nevertheless, there was considerable confidence of victory in the Unionist camp. Garvin examined the evidence and predicted a result falling somewhere between a Coalition majority of sixteen and a Unionist majority of forty-four. He was highly pleased by the prospect.\textsuperscript{15} Lord Willoughby de Broke later sketched the reasons why the Unionists contemplated a close election with satisfaction.

Even if an actual majority were not forthcoming, the Liberals were practically certain to return to office dependent on the Irish Nationalists, to whom the Budget was distasteful, as they were really sound Protectionists at heart. They would be sure to embarrass their allies in such a manner as to land them in

\textsuperscript{12}Asquith Papers, XXIII, Vaughan Nash's notes of a conversation with Lord Knollys, dated 15 December 1909.

\textsuperscript{13}11 December 1909, 984.

\textsuperscript{14}Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49795, Garvin to Sandars, 31 December 1909, marked "Private."

\textsuperscript{15}\textsuperscript{Ibid.}
a maze of difficulties, and Tariff Reform would emerge trium-
phantly from the wreckage of Free Trade. ¹⁶

The results of the election were not such as to constitute
a strong mandate for any party. The Unionists, who had counted 168
seats at the dissolution of Parliament, returned with 273, but this
increase in strength still left the government with a clear majority
of 124. The Liberals suffered a decrease from 363 to 275, and the
government was now dependent on the 40 Labourite and 82 Irish
Nationalist votes. John Redmond, who could control 71 of the Irish
votes, seemed to be in a commanding position, but as events proved,
he was as dependent on the Liberals as they on him. The greatest
disappointments to the Unionists were London, Lancashire, and York-
shire, where the popularity of the Lloyd George Budget campaign and
the hostility to the food taxes associated with tariff reform
inhibited the Unionist appeal.

The Unionist papers hailed the election as a victory for the
Party. Publicly, at least, they boasted that the reduction of the
Coalition majority had broken the power of the government and given
their Party as good a result as it had expected.¹⁷ Privately, however,
the Party was not quite so jubilant. Lansdowne derived only limited
pleasure from the belief that the government had not won such a
victory as to be able to demand guarantees from the King.¹⁸ Lord
Esher reported from Windsor Castle that the Royal circle was greatly

¹⁶Willoughby de Broke, The Passing Years, 255.

¹⁷Observer, 16 January 1910; Spectator, 22 January 1910, 113;
Saturday Review, 29 January 1910, 129.

¹⁸Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49730, Lansdowne to Sandars,
23 January 1910.
relieved. He remarked, "There can be no question, with this lowered majority, dependent upon the Irish, of Asquith trying to 'bully the King.'" 19

Austen Chamberlain dejectedly wrote to Balfour, "Frankly I am disappointed; but you were less sanguine than I was, so your disappointment should be less." 20 Chamberlain attributed the loss to the failure of the Party to press tariff reform boldly and to the unpopularity of the Lords. He was distressed by the growth of class consciousness, believing that the advent of the Labour Party had interrupted the workers' normal swing from Liberal to Conservative. His opinion was corroborated by Lord Wolmer, who wrote to him that Lancashire was lost, not by the food tax issue but by the Unionist failure to hold the workingmen's confidence. 21

Balfour was not elated by the election either. He wrote to Lansdowne, "I do not think the Government have a very pleasant prospect in front of them; but perhaps ours is not much more alluring." 22 Only the Chief Whip, Acland-Hood, made the ultimate deduction from the government's majority of 124. He offered his resignation to Balfour with the comment, "No general can want to keep a Chief of the Staff who has held that position without success during two successive

---

19 Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49719, Esher to Balfour, 24 January 1910, marked "Private."

20 Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49736, Chamberlain to Balfour, 29 January 1910, marked "Private."

21 Chamberlain Papers, AC9(19), Wolmer to Austen Chamberlain, 1 February 1910.

22 Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49766, Balfour to Lansdowne, 29 January 1910, marked "Private."
Canvases. A failure of that kind must be bad both for the general and the Rank & File. He admitted that his predictions of success had been mistaken. He was probably aware that many tariff reformers blamed the loss of the election on his Central Office. Even the Balfourian group, in fact, was becoming alarmed by the inefficiency of the Party organization. Jack Sandars, investigating the causes for the defeat, was amazed when the Central Office coolly informed him that the London organization was "defective" and the Manchester and Yorkshire areas "hopeless." Such evidence of the Central Office's failure to remedy the deficiencies of the Party in crucial areas pointed to the Chief Whip's ineffectual performance outside Parliament, but Balfour failed to seize this opportunity to reinvigorate the Party by purging the Whip's Office.

The Liberals, on the other hand, were as disappointed as the Unionists with the election returns. Lewis Harcourt, First Commissioner of Works, had hoped to lose not more than 80 seats; the government had lost 105. Sir Edward Grey, Foreign Secretary, concluded, "The moral of the election is that neither party has succeeded in gaining the confidence of the country." Even with such attractive 

24 Chamberlain Papers, AC8(10), Fabian Ware to Austen Chamberlain, 25 January 1910, marked "Confidential."
26 Herbert Henry Asquith (1st Earl of Oxford and Asquith) Papers, XII, Harcourt to Asquith, 26 January 1910.
causes as the People's Budget and the fight against the Lords, the
Liberals had done rather badly.

Consistent with their recently-discovered tradition that a
brute majority of votes meant little, the Unionists searched for the
elusive element of quality in the electoral returns. Not very
surprisingly, they found it in the Unionist majority of English
seats. Resurrecting the "predominant partner" thesis originally
suggested by Lord Rosebery, the Unionists insisted that English votes
morally counted more than others. J.L. Garvin proclaimed in the
Observer, "There will be a majority of English votes against the
coalition which seeks to destroy by the aid of the Irish and Socialist
vote, the political institutions and principles which embody the very
genius of English history and character." Sir Alexander Acland-
Hood announced to his constituents that he "would go back to Westmin-
ster and find in the House of Commons a solid, stalwart body of
Unionists, and they would be able to do what they liked with the
motley Radical Government"—motley because dependent on the Celtic
fringe. The Saturday Review erected these suggestions into consti-
tutional doctrine: "The truth is nothing on a great scale must be
done with England—or even a very powerful minority in England—dead
against it. The theory of representative government may allow it to be
done, but the practice forbids." This predominant partner thesis was
the basis on which the Unionists in later years accused the Liberals

28 23 January 1910.
29 Westminster Gazette, 26 January 1910.
30 29 January 1910, 126.
of unscrupulously subverting the British constitution by enacting their bills against the will of the English majority.

Apart from the racial issue, the Unionists discounted the moral force of the Irish Nationalist votes on the ground that they were cast, not on the issues, but solely as a result of bargains looking toward Home Rule. This made them corrupt and dishonorable. The Nationalists had voted against the second reading of the Lloyd George Budget and had abstained from voting on the third reading. The Unionist election analysts therefore appropriated the Irish votes to their cause and claimed a majority of fifty against the Budget, thus vindicating the Lords' veto.\(^\text{31}\) Despite the ingenuity of these searches for substitutes for victory, the fact was that the Unionists were in a minority in Parliament. Unless the Coalition fell apart as the Unionists hoped, the future looked rather bleak.

For a time the Parliamentary situation seemed about to fulfill the Unionist predictions of disaster for the government. John Redmond was cold and critical, if not avowedly hostile, when approached by the ministry for his support.\(^\text{32}\) Alleging that the Budget was intensely unpopular in Ireland, Redmond demanded immediately either special budgetary provision for Ireland or solid assurances that the Lords Veto Bill would become law within a year. The Liberal cabinet formally refused both demands, deciding to pursue its own course and endure defeat if the Irish went into opposition.\(^\text{33}\) Although the Prime Minister on at least one occasion subsequently had to warn the King that a

\(^{31}\) **Spectator**, 2 April 1910, 528.

\(^{32}\) **Asquith Papers**, V, Cabinet letter to the King, 23 February 1910.

\(^{33}\) Ibid., Cabinet letter to the King, 25 February 1910.
government defeat on the Budget by Irish votes was not improbable, the government might well have believed that Redmond was bluffing. Lord Aberdeen, Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, wrote only a few months later that the Budget was not really unpopular in Ireland, but that Redmond had to use something as a lever against the cabinet. Such information may have influenced the government in taking up its intransigent position. In any event, Redmond had nothing to gain from putting a Unionist government in office; the opposition's Irish policy consisted of a Redistribution Bill, drastically cutting down the number of Irish seats in Parliament.

After a period of uncertainty, the government announced its legislative program. The sequence was simple; the government's policy on the limitation of the Lords' veto would be introduced in the Commons in the form of resolutions. Parliament would then enact the Lloyd George Budget of last year (if the Irish were agreeable), and as soon as supply was secure the cabinet would introduce its Parliament Bill in the Lords. When the Lords rejected it or amended it drastically, the government would have another election on the Lords' veto issue. The Unionists charged that the Liberals went ahead with their veto policy only because of their dependence on Irish votes.

Prime Minister Asquith introduced the Veto Resolutions on 29 March, amid rumors that the cabinet was on the verge of a crisis. The Resolutions reproduced the old Campbell-Bannerman plan, stripping the Lords of control of money bills and giving them only a suspensory

---

34 Asquith Papers, I, Asquith to Ponsonby, 13 April 1910.
veto over ordinary legislation. Jack Sandars reported gleefully that the Resolutions were proving too harsh for ministers who favored a strong second chamber. Grey, Crewe, R.B. Haldane, and Walter Runciman were supposed to be on the verge of resignation. The Resolutions failed to split the government, however, since Asquith left the door open for reform of the Lords and consequent revision of the veto policy. It was a relatively calm debate.

Much more controversial was a formal statement by the Prime Minister two weeks later. Asquith then pledged that if the Lords blocked the Parliament Bill, "In no case shall we recommend a dissolution except under such conditions as shall secure that in the new Parliament the judgment of the people as expressed at the elections will be carried into law." The Prime Minister's statement, which the Unionists interpreted as a brutal ultimatum to the King, was all the more infuriating to them because at the beginning of Parliament Asquith had explained away his campaign speeches by denouncing categorically the idea of asking "in advance for a blank authority for an indefinite exercise of the Royal prerogative in regard to a measure which has never been submitted to, or approved by, the House of Commons . . . ." Jack Sandars told Balfour that this change in policy in demanding guarantees was announced to compensate the Irish

36 Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49766, Sandars to Balfour, 29 March 1910, marked "Confidential."

37 Debates, Commons, 5s, XVI (14 April 1910), 1548.

38 Ibid., XIV (21 February 1910), 56.
for the government's refusal to make Budget concessions for them. 39

Naturally, the Unionists charged that the Prime Minister had perverted his high office and betrayed the constitution as part of a squalid bargain with John Redmond. Asquith's denials of the existence of such a bargain did nothing to lessen the bitterness of the opposition as the Prime Minister embraced the policy he had denounced as improper. 40 The easy passage of the Budget through the Commons with Irish support after the "guarantees" speech poured salt on the wound. The Lords thereupon discarded some more of their past policies by accepting the Budget on 28 April without inquiring into the composition and motives of the Commons majority behind it. To reconcile this with the claim that the electorate had repudiated the Budget taxed the wits of Unionist journalists.

As an accidental side effect, the government's difficulties early in 1910 inflicted severe damage on the prestige of Balfour as Unionist Leader. While the Irish dithered on the Budget, for the first time since 1905 it seemed possible to defeat the Liberal government, but this opportunity merely alarmed Balfour. He shrank from the prospect of assuming office without a majority and expressed fear of being accused of "grasping at office." 41 To defeat the Liberals before the Budget passed would mean carrying on the government without supply for the year. This appalling prospect led to several embarrassing incidents in Parliament. Early in March about forty sportive

---

39 Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49766, Sandars to Balfour, 16 April 1910, marked "Confidential."

40 Debates, Commons, 5s, XVI (18 April 1910), 1776.

41 Chamberlain Papers, Mary E. Chamberlain to Austen Chamberlain, 18 March 1910.
Irishmen made a feint at marching into the opposition lobby, where­
upon the Unionist Whips withdrew their men in a panic lest they defeat
the government. \(^{42}\) Timothy Healy, the sharp-tongued Irish independent,
sneered at Balfour for putting down only such motions as he knew could
never command a majority. \(^{43}\) Fabian Ware, an inveterate enemy of
Balfour, made his *Morning Post* into a gadfly on the Unionist leader­
ship. He poured scorn and contempt on his Leader, too timid to defeat
the Liberals, whose revolutionary schemes he had so roundly condemned.

Mrs. Joseph Chamberlain found Balfour, on a visit to her husband,
determined against taking office, and she reported,

> Evidently the prospect of that is most distasteful to him,
and he is I fear creating the impression here that he is not
strong enough to do it. I hear rumours of the same old
criticism, 'Oh for a man!' 'Dear Arthur etc. etc.' and
then the *Morning Post* is quoted. \(^{44}\)

For some weeks Jack Sandars, Acland-Hood, Austen Chamberlain,
and Joseph Chamberlain put as much pressure on the Unionist Leader as
they could to induce him to try to defeat the government. \(^{45}\) They had
almost succeeded when the government resolved its problems and
solidified its alliance with the Irish. Balfour's stature within his
Party was seriously diminished, however, by his irresolution during
the critical days. Some Party members thought the Leader should be a

\(^{42}\) *Economist*, 5 March 1910, 483.

\(^{43}\) *Debates*, Commons, 5s, XIV (28 February 1910), 625.

\(^{44}\) Chamberlain Papers, Mary E. Chamberlain to Austen Chamber­
lain, 12 March 1910.

\(^{45}\) Ibid., Austen Chamberlain to Mary E. Chamberlain, 14 March
1910; Mary E. Chamberlain to Austen Chamberlain, 18 March 1910;
Mary E. Chamberlain to Austen Chamberlain, 25 March 1910.
man who wanted to grasp at office instead of worrying about his reputation for philosophic detachment.

The election left the Unionist policy-makers in a peculiar position. Committed to the contention that the Lords had accurately interpreted public opinion in vetoing the Budget, they were faced by the prospect of defending the Lords in the next election against the Liberals' Parliament Bill. They had no confidence in a campaign against the government's veto policy. Another successful defense of the Lords like the last one, and the Party could make up its mind to permanent opposition status. They began a desperate search for constitutional alternatives to conserve the Lords' power and yet free themselves from having to defend the existing House of Lords.

One possibility which attracted considerable favor was the use of the Referendum to solve Parliamentary deadlocks. The independent Statist promoted and popularized the new constitutional departure. Many Unionists disliked the Referendum, believing it to be more radically democratic and revolutionary than the government's Parliament Bill. They wondered what a conservative party was doing coquetting with such experiments. Lansdowne put the leaders' case for the Referendum succinctly. "I have myself never been favourable to the Referendum on its own merits, but the idea would, I should think, be popular in the country. A reformed House of Lords and the Referendum would not be a bad cry with which to meet the demand for single-Chamber government." As the government's veto policy

46 26 March 1910, 641; 4 June 1910, 1224.

47 Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49730, Lansdowne to Sandars, 23 March 1910.
became clearer, Unionist interest in the Referendum increased. Balfour was rather listlessly inclined to entertain it as a possible policy. Lord Robert Cecil found it extremely attractive. By incorporating the Referendum into the Party program and extending its scope to include tariff reform, he thought the fiscal issue might be evaded as an electoral obstacle. By the end of 1910 the Unionists were more or less identified with the advocacy of the Referendum.

Another escape from the Parliament Bill was reform of the House of Lords. The Unionists had been discussing plans for such reform at least since early 1908, but they had found the problem a knotty one. Retention of the hereditary principle prevented adequate reform, while repudiation of it seemed to involve both a condemnation of the existing House of Lords (if not of the Monarchy itself) and a limitation on the Royal prerogative. In principle such a reform would be at least as radical as the Parliament Bill. The Unionist leaders resisted considerable pressure to endorse reform of the Lords before the January election, but the result of the election forced a reappraisal of the issue. Jack Sandars noted,

As matters stand now, nothing could be worse. The House of Lords as we now know it, is an institution which the Unionist

---

48 Spectator, 2 April 1910, 525.

49 Cecil Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 51075, Lord Robert Cecil's Memorandum on the Parliament Act, ca. mid-1910, marked "Confidential."

50 Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49729, Balfour to Lansdowne, 22 February 1908.

51 Asquith Papers, I, Lord Knollys to Vaughan Nash, 3 December 1908; Knollys to Lord Loreburn, 20 December 1908.

52 Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49730, Balfour to Lansdowne, 29 December 1909, marked "Private"; Lansdowne to Balfour, 3 January 1910.
candidates cannot hope to defend with any measure of success, and if the issue before the country should be the House of Lords as it is or no House of Lords, there is no doubt but that the verdict will be against the Second Chamber. 53

Despite the foreboding of Joseph Chamberlain, who thought advocacy of reform of the Lords would merely discredit the peers without solving the electoral or constitutional problems, 54 the Unionist leaders committed themselves to support Lord Rosebery's resolutions for the reconstitution of the Upper House. Inevitably, this decision meant that the Unionists had to repudiate many of their own positions. The Daily Telegraph, for example, described the Lords as "sounder in judgment, abler in debate, higher in the personal distinction of its members, by comparison with the Commons" and then paradoxically demanded extensive reform of the Upper House. 55 Lansdowne contradicted five years of propaganda with the remark, "However sincere and impartial we may be, the country is profoundly convinced that we are not impartial." 56

On the Rosebery resolution declaring that a peerage should no longer of itself entitle the possessor to sit and vote in the Lords there was some back-bench discontent with Lansdowne's lead. Some peers resented the Unionists' repudiation of the principle of heredity. Willoughby de Broke enlivened the debate with the announcement, "I have been brought up in the midst of stock-breeding of all

54 Chamberlain Papers, Mary E. Chamberlain to Austen Chamberlain, 11 March 1910.
55 11 March 1910.
56 Debates, Lords, 5s V (17 March 1910), 393.
kinds all my life, and I am prepared to defend the hereditary principle in that or any other animal—whether the principle is applied to Peers or whether it is applied to foxhounds." Lansdowne had helped lead the Party to an electoral defeat on the Budget veto, and now he inflicted on the Lords what many regarded as a humiliating commitment to reform of themselves. Their confidence in his judgment was beginning to crumble. The Rosebery resolution passed in a thin House by 175 to 17, and the Party was pledged to reform though it had no plan for it. 58

Perhaps the most attractive feature of the reform policy to the Unionists was the fact that it might split the government. Some Liberal cabinet ministers like Lewis Harcourt thought that the Parliament Bill based on the Campbell-Bannerman Resolutions ought to be the final solution of the constitutional problem, and they opposed reform of the Lords as a fanciful, impractical scheme to postpone limitation of the Lords' power. 59 Other ministers like Grey and Haldane preferred reform of the Lords as an alternative to the Parliament Bill. Grey announced in a speech the Unionists often quoted, "Now I say that to confine ourselves to a single Chamber issue, and to leave the policy of reform of the Second Chamber—to leave all that ground unoccupied for the other side—would result for us,

57 Ibid., V (16 March 1910), 323.
58 Ibid., V (22 March 1910), 492.
59 Asquith Papers, XII, Harcourt to Asquith, 7 February 1910; XXIII, Harcourt to Asquith, 14 April 1910.
politically speaking, in my opinion in disaster, death and damnation."^60

The government's Parliament Bill neatly reconciled these Liberal positions by tacking onto the Campbell-Bannerman plan a preamble hinting that after the future reconstruction of the House of Lords on a popular basis a new Parliament Bill might revise the relations between the Houses of Parliament. The preamble was a declaration of pious intention and had no legal significance. With the publication of the Parliament Bill early in May the long-awaited war between the Coalition and the Lords was about to break out. The nation seemed poised at the edge of a political crisis. A few Unionists were eager for it to begin. George Wyndham described for his Leader the ideal sequence of events in the forthcoming combat. After the Lords vetoed the Bill an election might return a Unionist majority. If, however, the Coalition won, the cabinet should be forced to create the army of peers necessary to pass their Bill through the Upper House. This would necessarily lead to the reform of the Lords, a problem which would split the government. The Unionists would then take office, create more new peers to regain control of the Lords, and carry their full program including tariff reform. Part of the program would be the reconstitution of the Lords along Unionist lines.

When the unexpected death of Edward VII interrupted the

---

^60 Speech in London, 14 March 1910, National Union Gleanings, XXXIV (April, 1910), 340.

^61 Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49806, Wyndham to Balfour, 20 April 1910, marked "Private."
political process, there was a movement by those who could not contemplate the imminent crisis with Wyndham's confidence to prevail upon the party leaders to negotiate a settlement. Within two days of the King's death, Garvin's Observer called for a conference of the leaders. Other journals readily took up the cry, but it was probably the longing of George V, the new King, to seek some peaceful way out of the constitutional warfare which prevailed upon Asquith and Balfour to arrange the series of meetings. In response to the King's request the cabinet authorized the conferences, although there were rumors that Lloyd George and Winston Churchill opposed them, the latter arguing that Balfour "would out-general them all." The government delegation was Asquith, Lloyd George, Lord Crewe, and Augustine Birrell, Chief Secretary for Ireland. The Unionist members were Balfour, Lansdowne, Austen Chamberlain, and after a lengthy process of discussion and elimination, Lord Cawdor. Each delegate felt that he was taking his political life in his hands.

The Unionist Party's reaction to the secret meetings was surprisingly conciliatory. F.E. Smith in a letter to The Times praised the government's boldness and generosity, and urged the leaders of both parties to make such important concessions as were necessary to success. As an example he urged a revolutionary change in the Unionist view of the Upper House. "What is required," he wrote, "is such a House of Lords as will give to the Liberal Party

628 May 1910.
63Chamberlain Papers, Austen Chamberlain to Mary E. Chamberlain, 15 June 1910, marked "Secret."
64Ibid. 65Ibid.
when in power as good a chance—or as bad a chance—of carrying their legislation as it will give to the Conservative Party when in power. 66

The feeling that the next election, if fought on a straight party basis over the Parliament Bill, would produce the same result as the last inclined many Unionists to advocate extreme measures to avoid a failure of the Conference. In the autumn, when rumors of a Conference breakdown on the Home Rule issue circulated, Garvin publicly and privately urged the exploration of the federal devolution or "Home Rule All Round" policy, previously considered heretical within the Party. 67

F.S. Oliver as "Pacificus" wrote a series of letters to The Times urging a compromise on the Home Rule question and advocating the assembly of a formal Constitutional Convention. 68 Among others who were reported to Balfour as favoring a serious consideration of federalism as a solution to the Irish problem were Leopold Amery, 69 Jack Sandars, 70 Alfred Lyttelton, and Lord Milner and his associates in the "Kindergarten." 71

Balfour, when pressed for an opinion on the

66 15 June 1910.
67 Observer, 16 October 1910, 23 October 1910, 30 October 1910; see also Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49775, Garvin to Balfour, 17 October 1910.
68 The Times, 26 October 1910, 28 October 1910, 2 November 1910; see also Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49861, F.S. Oliver’s Memorandum on the Conference, dated 28 September 1910 and sent to Balfour on 11 October 1910.
69 Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49767, Sandars to Short, 24 October 1910.
70 Ibid., Sandars to Balfour, 18 October 1910, marked "Private."
71 Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49775, Lyttelton to Balfour, 16 October 1910.
subject, conceded that "many of the best of our young men are leaning to federalism," but characteristically he dismissed the subject, not with an outright negative, but with a series of rhetorical questions indicating that he could see such subtle and profound difficulties in the way as to make the plan all but impossible.\(^72\)

The Conference met some twenty-two times between 17 June and 10 November, with a lengthy break during the summer recess of Parliament from late July to early October. At the first meeting Asquith narrowed the focus to three issues—the treatment of finance bills, the solution of disputes between the two Houses on non-finance bills, and the constitution of the House of Lords.\(^73\) The discussions were relatively free and discursive; no attempt was made to reach final agreement on one point before progressing to the next. Since all the problems were closely interrelated it was hoped that exploration of all the points would set a general picture, thus facilitating detailed agreements as a final step. Most of the discussions were amicable, and there were occasional disagreements between members of the same party. Asquith, Lloyd George, Balfour, Chamberlain, and Lansdowne seemed the most active in discussion.

The problem of finance was thoroughly investigated in at least seven meetings. There was universal agreement that ordinary bills

\(^72\)Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49795, Balfour to Garvin, 22 October 1910, marked "Private."

\(^73\)All material on the Conference, unless otherwise indicated, is based on Austen Chamberlain's Notes of Conference on the Constitutional Question, summary minutes of each meeting written after each session, and Lansdowne's Comments on Chamberlain's Notes, dated 19 March 1913; both in Chamberlain Papers.
exclusively of a financial character must be free of the Lords' control. There agreement ended. After exhaustive examination of many different definitions of "ordinary finance" the government and the opposition could not reach an agreed formula. The Unionists differentiated money bills not exclusively financial "by reason of their social and political effects," while the Liberals limited the scope of the definition with the formula, "will effect important social or political changes through expropriating or differentiating against any class of owners of property." After much discussion there was no agreement on the agency which would designate finance bills as ordinary or extraordinary.

The problem of non-financial legislation took up most of the Conference's time. The Unionists distinguished between ordinary bills and constitutional bills. The Conference agreed that deadlocked ordinary bills should be sent to a joint session of the Commons and part of the Lords, after rejecting the Unionist suggestion of the Referendum. The critical factor in the joint session was the size of the Lords' contingent. This was designated "x" and there was never much chance of agreement on it. The government provisionally advanced a plan drawn up previously by Lord Ripon; which included in the joint sitting 100 peers, 20 of whom were to be government members, and the remainder of whom were divided up according to the party proportions in the House of Lords. This would produce a Unionist majority of about forty-four, which Balfour and Lansdowne regarded as totally inadequate.

The Unionists' creation of a special class of constitutional
laws forced an attempt to define it. This problem perplexed the Conference. In the unwritten constitution there had never been a distinct category of "organic laws." The Unionists tried out various formulas to justify the distinction but eventually settled for enumerating Home Rule and Parliamentary reform in all its branches as the reserved areas, having very reluctantly dropped the Church Establishment. The government restricted its constitutional list to the very limited realm of the Monarchy, the Protestant Succession, and Parliamentary redistribution. The Liberals thought the whole distinction between ordinary and constitutional bills artificial and impractical. There was no agreement on the special safeguards for the reserved subjects, assuming they could be defined. The Unionists insisted on a Referendum on a constitutional bill after two sessions of Parliamentary deadlock. The Liberals disagreed completely and would not budge from the joint session solution.

The reform of the Lords was never seriously discussed. Lloyd George opposed the whole idea, arguing in effect that the House would be adequately reformed when the backwoodsmen went home after the Conference settlement. Asquith vaguely endorsed reform, but neither party pressed the issue with determination. Balfour privately pointed out to his Unionist colleagues that if pushed too far, the government might ask to see the Unionist plan. This would be awkward, since the Unionists had many plans, on which they disagreed violently. The Liberals were, doubtless, in the same position.

The Liberals tended to assume that the Unionists had invented the constitutional category solely because they were afraid to submit
Home Rule to the joint session as ordinary legislation. They offered special provision to get it out of the way. The proposal, invented by Lloyd George, was that the government would pass a Home Rule Bill through the House of Commons before the next election. After that election Home Rule would be treated as ordinary legislation. The Unionists insisted that an election be held on every Home Rule Bill, thus making the proposal a permanent concession. The Liberals declined this, and feeling that the special Home Rule offer met the Unionists' major demand, denounced the distinction between constitutional and ordinary legislation.\(^7\) This impasse broke up the Conference.

Although it was generally believed that the Conference broke down over Home Rule, there was actually no agreement on any of the major issues. The terms of discussion meant different things to different men. The controversies over the definition of "finance bill" and "constitutional legislation" were insoluble. Just as serious was the misunderstanding of the term "conservative" when applied to the House of Lords. When government spokesmen referred to the necessary conservatism of the Upper House they meant an attitude of moderation, caution, and antipathy toward extremism. To the Unionists the conservatism of the Upper House meant the presence of a very large majority of peers responsive to the tactical dictates of the Unionist Party.

The size of the Lords' delegation to the joint session was at least as important as Home Rule, and there was never a possibility of

\(^7\)Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49692, Asquith to Balfour, 3 November 1910, marked "Secret."
agreement on it. The "x" problem, had it been negotiated in detail, would have revealed the chasm which separated the parties. The government expected to have a fair chance to pass Liberal legislation through the joint session; thus they estimated a majority of forty-four Unionist votes from the Lords as about right. The Unionists never considered accepting such a situation. In discussing "x" Lansdowne rejected the Ripon Plan without hesitation. "It would stand no chance against a majority such as that which supported the Liberal government in the last Parliament. In other words, it would be impotent just at the moment when a check upon ill-considered legislation was most needed." This was a consistent theme in his analyses. His doctrine was that preached by the Unionists for five years—the greater the Liberal majority, the greater must be the obstructive power of the Lords. The Unionists and Liberals never even approached each other on the basic object of the constitutional change.

Under the unwritten constitution it was the spirit in which the parties approached problems, not the letter of the law, that determined the success or failure of the democratic process. Unfortunately, the Unionist spirit was that which W. E. S. Hewins had once expressed and which Balfour was fond of quoting: "It is impossible to take an unwritten constitution and to define that portion of it which concerns the House of Lords without strengthening the House of Lords because


76 Ibid., Lansdowne's Memorandum on the Conference, dated 10 September 1910.
an astute Leader of the House of Lords could use any definition to
cover the exercise of almost any powers by the Lords." 

As an attempt to promote an agreed solution to constitutional
problems the Conference of 1910 was misconceived in structure. The
fact that party leaders attended as party leaders meant that the
narrow-mindedness, if not the bitterness, of party politics was
brought into the negotiations. Both the Liberals and the Unionists
carried the burden of the past—the necessity both to justify past
actions and to avenge past defeats. There was little hope of agree­
ment on the machinery of government, for on both sides the mechanical
structure was equated with the opportunity for partisan control.

A more promising scheme, which switched the focus from
machinery to policy, was the Coalition government project of Lloyd
George. Party leaders were incapable of constitution-making, but
they were thoroughly familiar with the bargaining and compromise of
cabinet discussion. The Lords problem would not arise if the plans
for a Coalition were consummated, for the peers could hardly pursue
an independent line against the leaders of both major parties. The
Welshman's plan was embodied in a Memorandum dated 17 August 1910,
and it had previously attracted the enthusiastic support of Winston
Churchill and F.E. Smith and the generally favorable regard of Prime
Minister Asquith.78 The Memorandum was extremely frank, arguing that

77 Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49779, Hewins' Notes on
Asquith's Birmingham Speech, dated 17 September 1909; see also Balfour
Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49770, Balfour to Lansdowne, 29 December 1909,
marked "Private."

78 Lord Birkenhead, F.E.: The Life of F.E. Smith (London, 1959),
155-156; David Lloyd George, War Memoirs (London, 1933), 1, 34.
such great issues as national defense, social reform, and national reorganization to fit the country to meet the economic competition of Germany and the United States, were being mishandled because of the particularism of the parties and their equal strength. Parts of every major reform were bound to be unpopular with some section of the population. So long as whichever party was in opposition opposed such reforms by appealing to the prejudices of extremist groups it would be difficult to accomplish anything. The deadlock on the education and licensing issues was the product of such agitation. Both parties, moreover, were shackled by traditional methods of dealing with problems, but these methods quite often ruled out experimentation with new alternatives possibly more appropriate to new problems. The Liberals, for example, were committed to free trade, but the Chancellor conceded that an open-minded investigation of tariff reform by a Coalition might be extremely valuable. Lloyd George wrote with almost brutal directness, "No Party commands the services of more than half-a-dozen first-rate men, and it has to depend for the filling up of all the other posts in the Government upon the services of men of second- and even third-rate capacity."

The central point of Lloyd George's position was simply that the major parties, in their concentration on old issues, were ignoring the primary concern of adapting the nation to the modern world. Only a Coalition of parties could escape from this paralysis. The Chancellor called for "bringing the resources of the two Parties into joint stock in order to liquidate arrears which, if much longer
neglected, may end in national impoverishment if not insolvency." 79

The plan was divulged to a carefully selected group, while others like Loreburn, the Lord Chancellor, were kept in the dark. 80 Lord Crewe and Sir Edward Grey responded favorably to the project. 81 Lord Haldane, Birrell, and the Master of Elibank, the Liberal Chief Whip, were ready to join the Coalition. The latter felt that only about forty Radicals might dissent. 82 Austen Chamberlain, Lansdowne, Curzon, Cawdor, Walter Long, and Bonar Law were reported as ready to try out the plan, although some of them knew only a little about it. 83

The two men who had absolute control of the project were the party leaders, Asquith and Balfour. The Prime Minister was ready to enter the Coalition, but Balfour temporized. Lloyd George thought him initially favorable but deterred from it by fear of a Party split, after being advised by Aretas Akers-Douglas that the Unionists would disapprove. 84 In reality, Balfour's conduct indicated quite clearly that he never took the project seriously. It went against the grain of Party tradition and Party unity. So little did Balfour think of Lloyd George's ingenious plan, he did not even show the Memorandum

---

79 Chamberlain Papers, AC10(25), Lloyd George Memorandum, 17 August 1910.

80 C.P. Scott Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 50901, Diary entry, 14 September 1911.

81 Asquith Papers, XII Crewe to Asquith, 22 October 1910, marked "Private"; Grey to Asquith, 26 October 1910, marked "Private."

82 Chamberlain Papers, ACS, F.E. Smith to Austen Chamberlain, 21 October 1910.

83 Lloyd George, War Memoirs, I, 35.

84 Ibid., 36.
to Chamberlain, Lansdowne, and Cawdor, his colleagues at the Con-
ference. Questioned by Chamberlain about Lloyd George's policies,
Balfour listed a few topics of conversation and offhandedly remarked,
"But in truth we touched on so many questions, and the initial dif-
ficulty of forming a coalition seemed to be so fundamental, that I
did not think it worth while coming to close quarters as to the exact
nature and limitations of the programme which a Coalition could carry
out." He casually added, "I think it quite possible, though perhaps
improbable, that a 'modus vivendi' might be arrived at on the sub-
stance of a common policy if the enormous initial difficulties of a
Coalition could be overcome." Clearly, Balfour was not the man to
overcome such enormous difficulties. Akers-Douglas' report merely
gave him a convenient excuse to evade the risks involved in the
unconventional experiment.

85 Chamberlain Papers, AC10(25), Austen Chamberlain's Memorandum,
dated 29 January 1915.

86 Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49136, Balfour to Chamberlain,
22 October 1910, marked "Private."
CHAPTER VII

THE VETO ELECTION AND THE PARLIAMENT ACT

With the simultaneous failure of the Conference and the Coalition proposal, politics resumed the course interrupted by the death of Edward VII. The government introduced its Parliament Bill in the House of Lords, thus forcing the Unionists, by their amendments, to commit themselves to the reform of the Lords, the joint session to resolve deadlocks on ordinary bills, and the Referendum to decide disputed constitutional issues.¹

The election was scheduled for December, and the Unionists were anything but ready for it. The deficiencies in Party organization exposed by the January election had never been rectified. Jack Sandars found that Acland-Hood had delayed his inspection of the crucial Manchester situation for two months and then had decided that the time before the next election was too short for reorganization. Sandars consulted the chief organizational expert in the Party and reported, "Bob Douglas despairs as much as I do." He could not imagine where election victories were to come from.²

Incessant journalistic attacks on Acland-Hood and his Central

¹Debates, Lords, 5s, VI (23 November 1910), 840.
²Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS, 49766, Sandars to Balfour, 18 March 1910, marked "Confidential."

186
Office did his position no good. On a personal basis Aoland-Hood managed to alienate Akers-Douglas and to goad Walter Long, who disliked him, to write savage attacks on the incompetence of his Party work. The Whip's tactlessness made him both an irritating bore and a figure of fun to the younger Unionist Members in the Commons.

Jack Sandars was alarmed by the inclusion of Balfour in the criticism aroused by Aoland-Hood and the Central Office, which, he said, had "stood still for more than a generation." Probably the Whip's problem was partly due to the extreme dullness of the Parliamentary session, when the Conference truce left the new Unionist Members without an opportunity to attack the Liberals. They chafed under the enforced inactivity. The Party organization gave little hope of a miraculous recovery from the last defeat.

Neither party seemed especially eager to face the December election. Jack Sandars and F.E. Smith gave up all hope of victory long before the campaign even began. Lewis Harcourt thought Balfour considered the Unionist position hopeless, but he also expected no

---

3 Morning Post, 16 February 1910; Saturday Review, 10 September 1910, 317; National Review, LVI (September, 1910), 22, LVI (October, 1910), 224.


5 Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49767, Sandars to Balfour, 18 October 1910, marked "Private."

6 Ibid., Sandars to Short, 3 October 1910.

7 Ibid., Sandars to Balfour, 9 November 1910; Birkenhead, F.E., 156.
great increase in the strength of his own government's majority. 8

The greatest difficulty the parties found was to interest the electorate in the election. It was universally regarded as a quiet election; the word most commonly used to describe the public mood was "apathy." 9 Even a staunch political campaigner like the Daily Telegraph had to note, "We are told that even Unionists, who hate the forced dissolution and a second General Election in ten months, are full of political apathy and weariness." 10 When John Redmond returned from an American trip with a $200,000 campaign fund, J.L. Garvin thought he had at last found an inflammatory issue. In editorials of almost hysterical passion he condemned the "Dollar Dictator" and his Liberal henchmen. Disregarding his own recent conciliatory pleas for a fresh study of Home Rule alternatives, Garvin blared, "The dollar-given conspiracy receives the whole of its driving-power from the league between the nominees of the priests and the Socialist enemies of religion and order." 11 But the crusade against the Dollar Dictator fell flat.

The Liberal campaign was not distinguished by originality. Asquith simply referred electors back to his Albert Hall speech of the last election. 12 The limitation of the Lords' power again was

8 Gladstone Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 45997, Harcourt to Gladstone, 21 November 1910, marked "Private and Personal."
9 Saturday Review, 28 January 1911, 100.
102 December 1910.
12Speech at Hull, 25 November 1910, National Union Gleanings, XXXVI (February, 1911), 160.
central to the campaign, and Home Rule was studiously understressed. All the Liberal arguments were time-tested, having remained virtually unchanged for years.

Balfour's campaign, keynoted by his speech to the National Union on 17 November 1910, labored under all the old handicaps and some new ones. His presentation of the tariff reform issue was, to say the least, uninspiring. "On the principles of Tariff Reform I have nothing new to say. . . . I am told by some political observers that Tariff Reform has lost its popularity, or at all events some of its popularity since trade became good." He sketched a complex plan for the reform of the Lords and proved by elaborate logical deductions that such reform must precede or accompany any plan for the adjustment of the relations between the two Houses of Parliament. He then confessed in a peculiar aside, "Now, I do not know whether I have made a rather difficult argument clear to my audience. Probably it will require a little thought by those who attempt to follow the various steps of the arguments I have brought before them . . . ."

His campaign appeal was not enhanced by the adoption of the Referendum as a major issue. The public seemed confused by it and was persuaded by the government that it was merely a more complicated way of discriminating against Liberal legislation.

As the campaign progressed Balfour became convinced that the Unionist chances of victory were nil because of the food tax bogey and the sagging appeal of the Referendum. J.L. Garvin's appeal to him to drop food taxes was peremptorily crushed by an ill-tempered

13National Union Gleanings, XXXV (December, 1910), 541.
letter from Austen Chamberlain, who snapped, "Let us win or lose with credit. Don’t let us kill ourselves with ridicule!" Late in November, however, came a sudden shower of advice to Balfour to rescue the campaign by promising a Referendum on tariff reform.

This would, presumably, attract the free food vote and refute the charge that the Referendum was only an anti-Liberal plot. Bonar Law passed on this advice to Balfour on 26 November, with the significant opinion that as a tariff reformer he could see no objection to the plan. Garvin added his private recommendation the next day, and simultaneously demanded it in the Observer. Lansdowne pressed it on Balfour, enclosing a letter from Lord Cromer, who said Lord Derby, the great Lancashire magnate, attached very great importance to it. Walter Long expected the immediate announcement of the Referendum on tariff reform to have "magical" effects.

The leader least consulted about the policy was Austen Chamberlain, whose tariff reform cause would be most seriously affected. Balfour’s message telling him that the Party had better accept the challenge and promise a Referendum on tariff reform reached

---

14 Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49736, Chamberlain to Balfour, 15 November 1910, marked "Private."
15 Chamberlain Papers, AC8(14), Law to Balfour, 26 November 1910.
16 Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49795, Garvin to Sandars, 27 November 1910, marked "Private."
17 27 November 1910.
18 Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49730, Lansdowne to Balfour, 28 November 1910; Cromer to Lansdowne, 28 November 1910, marked "Private."
Chamberlain on the 28th. It said that Balfour would make the announce-
ment on the evening of the 29th in his speech at the Albert Hall. 20
Chamberlain happened to be in Edinburgh, too far away to exert much
pressure. He immediately despatched a telegram protesting strongly
against the announcement, but it was too late. 21

In the midst of his long speech at the Albert Hall, Balfour
mused reflectively,

Nevertheless, I frankly say that without question Tariff Reform
is a great change. I admit that this election, or any election,
perhaps—certainly this election—cannot be described as taken
upon Tariff Reform simply; but I have not the least objection
to submit the principles of Tariff Reform to Referendum. 22

There was an immediate outburst of wild jubilation, with the audience
jumping to its feet, waving programs in the air, and screaming loud
and prolonged cheers. 23 The Unionist press hailed this election-
winning stroke as Balfour's greatest act of leadership.24 Garvin
was ecstatic, assuring Jack Sandars, "As for A.J.B. I will fight for
him all ways while there is breath in my body." 25 Only Fabian Ware's
Morning Post condemned the Referendum pledge as a stab in the back of
tariff reform. 26

---

20 Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49736, Balfour to Chamberlain,
28 November 1910, marked "Private."

21 Ibid., Telegram from Chamberlain to Balfour stamped 8.20 a.m.,
29 November 1910.

22 National Union Gleanings, XXXV (December, 1910), 553.

23 Daily Mail, 30 November 1910.

24 Ibid.; Daily Telegraph, 30 November 1910; Saturday Review,
3 December 1910, 701.

25 Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49795, Garvin to Sandars,
29 November 1910.

26 1 December 1910.
Austen Chamberlain was embittered by Balfour's hasty declaration. He very reluctantly and conditionally accepted the policy, and then he wrote acidly to his Leader, "I put myself in line with you last night and accepted your policy. You will tell me in due course how it is to be carried out." He was not entirely mollified by Balfour's insistence on the need for instant decision, and he was aggrieved by the fact that his tariff reform friends, Bonar Law and Lansdowne, were among those who had urged Balfour to accept the policy. The plea of "tactical advantage" was not convincing, especially after the election returns were in.

Balfour's Referendum pledge was a gambler's throw. Only a victory could justify the Unionist Party's espousal of revolutionary constitutional experiments and their application to the postponement of the Party's first constructive work. It was easy to foresee that even those who praised the Albert Hall speech to the skies might turn against the author if he failed to work the expected electoral miracle. Both Chamberlain and Walter Long were angered by the lack of formal consultation before the major policy change. Long later rather querulously noted that had he not happened to dine


28 Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49736, Chamberlain to Balfour, 2 December 1910, marked "Private."

29 Ibid., Balfour to Chamberlain, 30 November 1910, marked "Private."


31 Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49730, Lansdowne to Chamberlain, 14 December 1910; also B.M. Add. MSS. 49736, Balfour to Chamberlain, 13 December 1910, marked "Private."
with Balfour just before the speech he would have known nothing of the
policy. He hinted that Balfour might consider the use of the telephone
in future crises. The squire wrote to his beaten Leader,

To confess that we know nothing of your views is not desirable
I think? You often say to me that you hate the whole business
and would like to be out of it. If this is your view who get
all the cream what must be ours for whom there is nothing but
the much-skimmed milk! 32

Clearly only a victory in the election could offset the irritation
caused by Balfour's plunge.

The results of the December elections were, in a sense,
gruesomely comic, considering the gravity of the issues. The Liberals,
who asked the electorate for authority to coerce the Lords and change
the constitution, lost 2 seats and were reduced from 274 to 272. The
Unionists, who sought a mandate to revolutionize the constitution by
reforming the Lords and establishing the joint session and the
Referendum, lost 2 seats and were reduced from 274 to 272. The
government could command a majority increased from 122 at the
dissolution to 126. The total popular vote dropped by over 1,288,000
from the January mark of 6,523,000. This reflected a spectacular
rise in uncontested seats outside Ireland from 10 to 98 out of a
total of 567. Of the 670 seats in the United Kingdom, 162 were
uncontested. 33

Most observers agreed that the public cared nothing for the

32 Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49777, Long to Balfour,
20 January 1911.

33 All statistics from tables in National Union Gleanings,
XXXIV (March, 1910), 224-225, and XXXVI (January, 1911), 70-71, 160.
Garvin was shocked to discover that even the middle class public had paid no attention to the debates on the Lords and had no idea what the Unionists intended to do to reform the Upper House. Selborne summed up the situation in 1910-1911 with the depressing remark, "The electors have been very apathetic all through this constitutional crisis." Politically, this apathy was all-important. The Coalition, being in office, could exploit the public indifference—by passing its bills without having to cope with demonstrations of popular disapproval. The Unionists, however, could hardly believe that this situation could possibly exist. It was a cardinal tenet of the conservative creed that periods of public apathy should be periods of legislative inaction, and thus, of Unionist administration. To find a Liberal government determined to take advantage of the public's inattention to revolutionize the structure of Parliament seemed to the Unionists to be a discovery of treasonous subversion.

The customary Unionist journalists' claim to have won the election by winning the predominant partner, by emerging as a united opposition against a disintegrating collection of factions, and by preventing the government from securing a mandate rang more

---

34 The Times, 10 December 1910; Newton, Lord Lansdowne, 405-406.
35 Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49795, Garvin to Sandars, 12 December 1910, marked "Private."
36 Chamberlain Papers, AC9(18), Selborne Memorandum, 1911, marked "Confidential."
37 Daily Mail, 12 December 1910; Daily Telegraph, 10 December 1910.
38 Observer, 11 December 1910.
than usually hollow. There was now no way to evade the verdict of the political process. The Unionists were in a minority, and the government could unquestionably pass its Parliament Bill, depriving the Party of its only legal means of defying the electoral results.

The election was a personal catastrophe for Balfour. The Lords had plunged to their destruction following his lead. He had officially adopted compromising constitutional doctrines that had destroyed the Party's old commitments without winning any votes. Discontent with Balfour's leadership was especially pronounced among the tariff reformers, who felt their election campaigns damaged by the Referendum pledge. The complaints poured in to Austen Chamberlain. Chamberlain's desire to dismiss the Referendum pledge as null and void for future elections compelled Lansdowne and Sandars to warn Balfour of a possible split in the Party.

No Unionist Leader could survive three successive defeats without paying a heavy penalty. The penalty Balfour paid was the sacrifice of his Chief Whip, Acland-Hood. Jack Sandars noted the savage criticism of Acland-Hood and J.P. Hughes, Principal Agent of the Central Office, but Akers-Douglas told him, "If one lends one's ears to gossip mongers many heads must fall, not only Alick's

39 Daily Mail, 6 December 1910; Observer, 18 December 1910.

40 Chamberlain Papers, AC8(14), Sir J. Lawrence to Chamberlain, 14 December 1910; Hewins to Chamberlain, 15 December 1910; Ridley to Chamberlain, 16 December 1910; Hugh Elliot to Chamberlain, 7 January 1911.

41 Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49767, Sandars to Balfour, 24 December 1910, marked "Confidential."
and Hughes', but the Chief's also and yours above all." Akers-Douglas may have had in mind Walter Long's bitter complaints that Balfour had turned over the management of House of Commons business, including selection of topics for debate and Party speakers, to Sandars and Acland-Hood. Sandars urged Balfour to give the Party a fighting lead in the new Parliament, since "owing to Alick's neglect of our young men and the enforced truce following the King's death" the back-benchers were beginning to listen to Leo Maxse and Fabian Ware. He also passed on Lansdowne's conviction that Acland-Hood must go. Sandars seemed willing that Acland-Hood should pay for the loss of the election.

In January, in response to the increasing current of hostility, Balfour appointed a committee to investigate Unionist organization, but at the same time he refused Acland-Hood's offer to resign. The Chief Whip publicly accepted the committee's creation with the wry comment, "It would, in fact, have shown a very poor spirit in the party if after they had been beaten twice they had not said: 'There must be something wrong with our organisation.'" When, after a few months, the committee recommended separating the Party management

---

42 Chilston Papers, Aretas Akers-Douglas to Sandars, 17 December 1910, marked "Confidential."


44 Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49767, Sandars to Balfour, 5 January 1911, marked "Private."


46 Westminster Gazette, 27 January 1911.
from the Whip's Office, it curtly added that the reforms should not be
carried out by the present staff. Thus the luckless Acland-Hood,
having twice been persuaded to stay on after offering his resignation,
was abruptly discharged. Deeply hurt, he complained, "I have sacri-
ficed time, health, money, estate, sport and family life for the sake
of the Party . . . . When I have been anxious to go I have been asked
to stay on, and now I am to be summarily dismissed."\(^{47}\)

Acland-Hood's departure weakened his Chief's position. It was
difficult to regard the failures of the Whip as anything but the
failures of the Party Leader. His successors, Lord Balcarres as Chief
Whip and Sir Arthur Steel-Maitland as head of the Central Office, did
not stand in the same intimate relationship with Balfour as the
retiring Whip. Steel-Maitland's appointment caused some comment
because he sat for a Conservative seat in Birmingham and therefore
was associated with the Chamberlains. Walter Long, having helped
oust Acland-Hood, opposed Steel-Maitland, too, but Balfour overrode
his objections.\(^{48}\)

Acland-Hood's mortification was at least partially concealed
because it coincided with the controversy over the Parliament Bill.
The Bill, by now a familiar sight, received its first reading on
22 February but did not arrive in the Lords until 23 May. During much
of this time it was being carried by the closure against Unionist
obstruction. There was a certain atmosphere of unreality in the

\(^{47}\) Chilston Papers, Acland-Hood to Akers-Douglas, 17 April 1911,
marked "Private."

\(^{48}\) Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49777, Balfour to Long,
2 June 1911, marked "Private."
Commons debate, since it was obvious that the coercion of the Lords was the government's primary problem. Interest in the Commons seemed actually to collapse toward the end. One of the few interesting features of the contest was the re-emergence of the Cecil brothers as Party leaders. Lord Hugh, especially, was effective in the guerilla warfare, and he was criticized for the uninhibited rancor he brought to the battle. His defense was a portent of crises to come. "The truth is that when a human being hates anything very much (whether a Deceased Wife's Sister Bill or a Parliament Bill) he is always ready to do foolish, unseemly, and even wicked things in order to defeat it." Lord Hugh had made the interesting discovery that only foolish, unseemly, and wicked actions now had the possibility of attracting the attention of the public, by this time bored by the repetitious political squabbles into a state described by Asquith as "provoking and disappointing lethargy."

The Parliament Bill problem was, apparently, quite simple. If the government had the King's guarantee to create enough peers to pass the Bill, would the Lords force the creation or not? But this simple problem concealed a further difficulty. What did the creation of enough peers to pass the Bill mean? How many peerages were involved; 50, 150, or 500? It was the grotesque mishandling of this second question by leaders of both parties that erected the Parliamentary problem to crisis proportions.

---

49 Saturday Review, 6 May 1911, 537.
51 Debates, Commons, 5s, XXV (15 May 1911), 1694.
The planned sequence of events was clear and inevitable. The Lords would amend the Parliament Bill drastically. The government would reveal that it had the needed guarantees from the King and reject the Lords' amendments. The Lords would then vote on their own amendments, thus deciding whether or not to force the creation of the new peers. All this had been foreseen by acute observers from the moment when the December election returns had indicated the size of the government's majority. Balfour, at least, fully understood the power of the ministry to enforce this pattern, though he regarded such coercion of the King and Lords as unscrupulous, despicable, and unconstitutional. The Unionists, ignoring their own contemptuous dismissals of constitutional restrictions during the Budget crisis, temporarily became defenders of precedent and propriety.

The government had solved its basic problem about six months before the Lords received the Parliament Bill. After the breakdown of the leaders' Conference, the cabinet had advised the King on 15 November 1910 that it could not remain in office unless it was assured that if it secured an adequate majority in the coming election the Parliament Bill's passage would be guaranteed by the creation of peers. The King assented under pressure, Asquith having threatened to campaign on the cry, "The King and the Peers against the people" if

52 Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49767, Balfour to Lansdowne, 27 December 1910, marked "Private."
he refused. The King's pledge had been kept secret throughout the
election and the succeeding months, presumably to protect the Crown
from political involvement. The King's questions about the size of
the "adequate majority" were answered by the election. He could
not question the adequacy of a majority of 126.

Although Asquith had announced in April, 1910, that the
government would secure such guarantees before recommending a dis­
solution, the Unionist leaders had never believed it would do so.
They irrationally preferred to consider Asquith's January condem­
nation of "hypothetical guarantees" as binding on the government.
Thus it came as a shocking surprise early in July, 1911, when Lord
Esher leaked to Balfour the news of the November guarantees. Esher
had been informed of it by some minister in a breach of cabinet
secrecy. Balfour called a meeting of his shadow cabinet to discuss
the revelation. Sandars recorded, "There was a distinct division of
opinion among those present, but the majority decided that it would
be imprudent to resist the menace of the creation of Peers."

This tentative shadow cabinet decision cut across a body of

53 Lord Derby's memorandum of a conversation with King George V,
ca. 20 August 1910, in Randolph Churchill, Lord Derby (London, 1959),
127.

54 Asquith Papers, II, Knollys to Vaughan Nash, 28 November
1910, marked "Private."

55 Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49767, Sandars' Diary of the
Events and Transactions in Connection with the Passage of the Parlia­
ment Bill of 1911 through the House of Lords, dated 12 August 1911
but completed in September; hereafter referred to as Sandars' Diary.

56 Asquith Papers, II, Knollys to Asquith, 3 July 1911, marked
"Private."

57 Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49767, Sandars' Diary.
Unionist opinion which favored fighting to the point of forcing the creation of peers. George Wyndham and J.L. Garvin were long since committed to such a policy. Garvin's Observer endorsed the rejection of the Parliament Bill, but significantly suggested that the government would create only enough peers to carry the Bill. The rumors of 500 new peerages were part of a Liberal bluff. The group favoring the policy of resistance were called die-hards or ditchers, after an unfortunate exhortation from Lord Curzon to die in the last ditch rather than surrender. The nominal leader of the ditchers was the aged Lord Halsbury. Most of the group believed that the government would create only about 130 new peers. Even if the rumors that 500 peers would be created were true, Halsbury's followers believed the process of creation would be spread over many months of humiliation for the government. The ditcher movement, then, was largely based on a special estimate of the size and timing of the new creations. Lord Selborne, one of the ditcher chiefs, talked of forcing the creation of a small number of peers, even two or three, as a protest. The ditchers assumed that they could control the size of the creation by manipulating the size of the majority for

58 Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49806, A Note on the Political Situation by George Wyndham, dated 4 January 1911; B.M. Add. MSS. 49795, Garvin to Sandars, 21 December 1910, marked "Private"; Garvin to Sandars, 4 January 1911.

59 14 May 1911; see also Blackwood's Magazine, CXC (July, 1911), 143.

60 Willoughby de Broke, The Passing Years, 285-286; from a chapter added by Sir Thomas Comyn-Platt.

61 Asquith Papers, II, Knollys to Vaughan Nash, 11 June 1911, marked "Confidential."
rejection. The shadow cabinet's provisional decision of 7 July did not completely rule out a fight on these special conditions. Some extremists like Lord Hugh Cecil had long accepted 500 new peers as the price of resistance, but the vagueness of the cabinet's plans gathered into the die-hard movement many men who thought only in terms of a limited creation.

Even when the government officially informed the opposition of the King's guarantee, privately on 14 July and publicly on 18 July, there was no real clarification. Asquith's open letter to Balfour merely promised that the King would "exercise his Prerogative to secure the passing into law of the Bill." Balfour's shadow cabinet met the next morning and voted twelve to eight "to abstain from further action in Parliament and to allow the Bill to pass." Sir Robert Finlay and Bonar Law, who were absent, later followed Balfour and Lansdowne, but Akers-Douglas, who voted with the majority out of loyalty to Balfour, actually favored the minority view. The meaning of this important decision was not entirely clear, as it turned out.

At 3.45 on the same day a meeting of 200 Unionist peers gathered at Lansdowne House to receive their Leader's instructions. According to Lord Newton, Lansdowne suggested that since the Parliament Bill would become law with or without the creation of peers, he thought

---

62 Ibid., Knollys to Asquith, 25 December 1910.
63 Letter dated 20 July 1911, National Union Gleanings, XXXVII (August, 1911), 204.
64 Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49767, Sandars' Diary.
the prudent course might be to allow the Bill to pass. He did not, however, ask the peers to arrive at any decision. This rather feeble presentation encouraged others to express their opinions. Selborne, Halsbury, Salisbury, Willoughby de Broke, and other die-hards insisted that there must be no surrender, that the opposition must be outvoted. Newton thought there were about fifty die-hard peers at the meeting.  

At this point, due to the vagueness of the government's intentions, the Unionist leadership almost completely broke down. Neither Balfour nor Lansdowne had made these decisions issues of confidence in his leadership; indeed, neither fully understood the situation. Balfour's confusion was exposed first. Lord Balcarres, the Chief Whip, told Sandars that the minority Lords had favored a creation of peers, preferably a limited creation. To this report Balfour replied that he, too, had no objection to a limited creation. If his shadow cabinet colleagues had thought he was opposed to any creations at all they had misconstrued his advice. When Sandars carried this information to Balcarres, he was informing him that, in effect, the crucial shadow cabinet vote had been taken on a very ambiguous basis. Since many of the ditchers wanted only a limited creation, Balfour was virtually enrolling himself as a ditcher.  

Balfour then drafted a memorandum to his colleagues correcting their misconstruction of his position. In a strange, semi-satirical document, Balfour described the fighting position as "essentially theatrical." But he had no objection to such theatrics, provided they

---

65 Newton, Lord Lansdowne, 421-423.
66 Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49767, Sandars' Diary.
were not too expensive. "If," he wrote, "the creation of X Peers pleases the multitude, and conveys the impression that the Lords are 'game to the end,' I raise no objection to it, provided it does not swamp the House of Lords." Since no one knew how many peers the government might create, Balfour's position was open to several interpretations, especially since he added, "From this point of view the creation of 50 or 100 new Peers is a matter of indifference."

Unless the government expressed a clear intention about the magnitude of the creation Balfour had no personal policy.

Lansdowne and Curzon (who had completely changed his position) did have a policy. They wanted no creations at all, and they were thunderstruck by Balfour's memorandum. Fortunately for them, they saw it in time to persuade the very reluctant Balfour not to circulate it. From that point onward, Balfour publicly supported the Lansdowne policy of no creations solely because he would not split the leadership. His own beliefs, however, were unchanged and were widely known, since Balcarres had been informed of them. Balfour merely confused his own Party and thereby exaggerated what should have been a manageable problem.

The result of this failure of the leadership to lead was the seizure of the initiative by extremists in the Party. Lord Hugh Cecil and F.E. Smith organized the die-hard backbenchers in the Commons, and when the Prime Minister arose on 24 July to announce the government's guarantee policy they shouted him down. Amid shrieks of "Traitor!" Asquith tried vainly to speak, but he eventually had to

---

67 Ibid. 68 Ibid.
give up. "Scenes" in the House were not exactly unprecedented, but this was a novel episode because no one pretended that it was a spontaneous outburst of uncontrollable passion. Lord Hugh Cecil wrote to The Times, "Something more was plainly needed if the listless inattention which pervades the public mind was to be broken, if the people were to be convinced that the Opposition is sincere in proclaiming that a revolution is in progress. An unprecedented outrage on the Constitution required an unusual protest." The incident revealed very clearly the danger to British institutions involved in the combination of public apathy, Unionist Party frustration, and a breakdown of moderate leadership. Already the Party's control was gravitating into the hands of those who believed that only revolutionary and anarchic behavior could force the uninterested electorate to react against the alleged Liberal subversion of the constitution. Such extremism was also designed to coerce the Unionist moderates. Lord Hugh wrote, "Our cry should be that we do well to be angry; and we should blame nothing in our own ranks so much as lukewarmness in the day of battle." Many believed that the scene in the House was aimed at Balfour as much as Asquith. Balfour insisted that he had done what he could within the Parliamentary rules to stop the screaming. He rejected the suggestion that he should have risen from his seat and quelled the mutineers, and he confessed, "I have no ground for supposing that, had

69. 26 July 1911.
70. Letter to the editor, The Times, 1 August 1911.
I committed this breach of the rules, I should have succeeded where Mr. Speaker failed."  

By now thoroughly disenchanted with his Party, Balfour refused to call an official meeting to explain his policy. Perhaps he feared that the contradiction between his and Lord Lansdowne's views might be forced into the open. He was finally prevailed upon to give a lead by a public letter. A supposedly perplexed peer, rather arbitrarily designated to be Lord Newton, was the addressee of Balfour's advice to follow Lord Lansdowne. Surprisingly, the Leader announced, "I agree with the advice Lord Lansdowne has given to his friends; with Lord Lansdowne I stand; with Lord Lansdowne I am ready, if need be, to fall." This transformed the Party situation.

Although Balfour admitted to Balcarres again that he had no objection to a small creation of peers, he had now made Lansdowne's policy of no creations a matter of confidence in their leadership. Balfour cryptically informed Balcarres that he thought no deliberately limited majority against the Bill should be organized, but he had no objection to such a result "being naturally evolved."

The Newton letter of 25 July was virtually Balfour's last effort to lead, and it was a disaster. Austen Chamberlain, a ditcher whose conviction that the government would create only a limited number of peers closely resembled Balfour's preference, was pained and mortified. He told Balfour that the ditchers were well within his

---

71 Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49861, Balfour to F.E. Bennett, 29 July 1911, marked "Private."

72 Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49767, Sandars' Diary.

73 Ibid.
own policy but that by making Lansdowne's plan a matter of confidence the Leader had practically labeled them traitorous.  

Balfour by this time felt that Chamberlain and his colleagues were betraying the shadow cabinet decision of 21 July, having forgotten his own gloss on that decision. He replied only that he had meant no denunciation of Chamberlain's conduct. The famous Halsbury dinner at which Chamberlain and other die-hards quite sincerely vowed their loyalty to Balfour while repudiating Lansdowne's no-resistance policy was the perfect expression of the confusion Balfour's shifts of viewpoint had created.

The problem was quite clear. Lansdowne wanted no peers created at all, believing that a very large creation that would swamp the Lords was the only alternative. Balfour did not mind the creation of a hundred or so peers, but he did not want the creation of five hundred. It did not make much difference to him whether a hundred peers or none were created. Austen Chamberlain and a great many ditchers thought the rumor of five hundred a bluff; they actively desired the Lords to force a limited creation as a matter of honor. There was nothing insane or hysterical about this position, since throughout the crisis the Unionists had no clear idea of how the government intended to use the prerogative to pass the Parliament Bill.

On 22 July Lord Salisbury tried to resolve the issue by questioning the King. His wording was most unfortunate. He asked if His

74 Chamberlain to Balfour, 26 July 1911, marked "Private," in ibid.

75 Balfour to Chamberlain, 27 July 1911, marked "Private," in ibid.

76 Notes on a meeting of leaders, 7 August 1911, in ibid.
Majesty had consented to make an "unlimited number of peers so as to swamp the Lords." The King answered, "Certainly not. I have agreed with the Prime Minister to make only what is necessary to give the Government a majority to pass the Bill."  Strictly speaking, the King's reply could have covered any number between 1 and 500, but Salisbury came away having somehow acquired 120 as a magic number. It was on this basic assumption that most ditchers operated.

When, on 1 August, Balfour tried to extract a clarification from the King's Secretary, Lord Stamfordham, the two could not seem to understand each other. Stamfordham denied using the number 120; he said, "His Majesty agreed to make only sufficient Peers to enable the Government to carry the Bill through the House, no more no less." Balfour replied that his point seemed clear, though nothing on record indicated what he thought was clear. Stamfordham replied, "These seem to me times for plain speaking." He then condemned the "gerrymandering" of the King's words. If, he said, the ditchers could make the government unsure of passing the Bill, the King would "have to make Peers sufficient to leave no chance of defeat to the Government." There was nothing very clear about this clarification. It could as well indicate a "limited" creation as a list of 500. The curious unwillingness of the King and the government to make clear their intentions as to the number and timing of the creations greatly

---

77 Stamfordham to Balfour, 1 August 1911, marked "Private and Confidential," in ibid.
78 Ibid.
79 Balfour to Stamfordham, 1 August 1911; Stamfordham to Balfour, 1 August 1911, marked "Private and Confidential," in ibid.
strengthened the ditchers by leaving open the "limited" creation possibility. The number of ditchers who thought an immediate creation of 450 or 500 peers endurable was manageably small. Salisbury, a very active resister, usually talked in terms of a few score creations. Lansdowne acidly described Halsbury, the arch-ditcher, in the final debate as desiring 50 or 60 creations but strongly objecting to 500 or 600. Even the violent Willoughby de Broke chafed timid peers for believing "that an unlimited creation of Peers will take place if we are successful in our opposition." He announced, "Our answer is that we do not think anything of the kind will take place, and we shall not believe it until they actually take their seats in this House." Even Lord Morley's promise that the government was ready to make a "large and prompt creation" left the question open. Asquith's caution endangered his own Bill; the creation of peers was a deterrent to die-hardism only if fully and specifically explained. Perhaps the most dangerous tendency uncovered by the conflict was Asquith's fixation on political tactics and his complete inability to comprehend the minds of his opponents.

Under Lansdowne's management the Lords decided not to insist on their amendments to the Parliament Bill on 10 August 1911 by a majority of only seventeen. The defeat was bad enough for the ditchers, but they were still further embittered by the fact that about thirty Unionist lay peers and all but two of the Bishops voted for the
government. Balfour had tried desperately to induce Lansdowne to condemn those who were planning this defection, but the Leader of the Unionist peers was too deeply committed to the avoidance of creations to denounce those who would make it possible.  

The Unionist Party was deeply and unnecessarily split by the passage of the Parliament Act. Feeling against the Unionists who had voted for the Bill was most intense. They were condemned as traitors and "Rat Peers." Balfour and Lansdowne, even beyond their feeble leadership, were held responsible for the defection of lay and clerical Unionists. J.L. Garvin, forgetful of his pledge of eternal fidelity to Balfour in November, 1910, wrote in the Observer, "We say that the Unionist Party will never go into battle again under its present leaders until it knows how the struggle is going to be conducted and whither it is going to be led." The indignation of the ditchers was intensified by rumors that Lloyd George had admitted to F.E. Smith that only fifty to seventy-five peers would have been created to overcome the Halsburyites. Although the government might well have planned to create 450 or 500 peers, regardless of the margin of defeat, the die-hards believed that their leaders had been bluffed.

84 Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49767, Sandars' Diary.
85 Saturday Review, 12 August 1911, 189.
86 13 August 1911.
87 Austen Chamberlain to Mary E. Chamberlain, 19 August 1911, in Chamberlain, Politics from Inside, 347; also Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49767, Sandars' Note, dated 21 October 1911.
88 Gladstone Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 45997, Lewis Harcourt to Gladstone, 12 September 1911, marked "Private and Personal"; also Derby's Memorandum of conversation with George V in Churchill, Derby, 126.
Even as the politicians at Westminster watched tensely the Lords' division on the Parliament Bill, the Leader of the Unionist Party was engaged in the more pleasant occupation of travelling to Bad Gastein in Austria for a holiday. He had left London the day before the Lords received the Bill, and within him was maturing the decision to resign the post he had held for a long and difficult ten years. Thoughts of resignation were nothing new to Balfour; he had seriously contemplated the same step early in 1908 when the quarrels between the Confederates and the Cecils had driven him to distraction. He had endured this painful family problem and continued as Leader only because there was no successor ready to assume the office.  

The disastrous events of the Parliament Bill passage thoroughly destroyed whatever satisfaction his success in holding the Party together through the tariff reform crises had given him. He was deeply hurt by the ditchers' refusal to accept his lead and especially aggrieved by what he regarded as the refusal of the minority to accept the shadow cabinet's decision of 21 July. The division of the Party, not on a doctrinal issue but on what he felt was a mere matter of Parliamentary tactics, indicated to Balfour that his leadership was being deliberately repudiated. In a long outburst to Jack Sandars just before he left on his holiday, he said,

I confess to feeling that I have been badly treated. I have no wish to lead a Party under these humiliating conditions. It is

---

89 Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49708, Balfour to Selborne, 6 March 1908.

90 Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49767, A Note on the Events Leading to Mr. Balfour's Resignation by Jack Sandars, 8 November 1911, marked "Secret"; hereafter referred to as Sandars' Note on Balfour's Resignation.
no gratification to me to be their Leader. If they think that some one else is better able to discharge the duties of Leadership, I am quite willing to adopt that view. It is useless for me to attempt the duties of Leadership if my Leadership is not accepted.91

The Party spirit which had brought Balfour to this point was expressed by his long-time enemy, Leo Maxse, in the dangerously catchy slogan, B.M.G.---Balfour Must Go, which appeared in the September issue of the National Review.92 The Leader's distress over Party disunity was increased by signs that the die-hard movement was organizing on a semi-permanent basis. Lord Selborne summoned the group to a meeting in October, partly to channel its influence to more concerted ends but also because he feared that, left alone, some of the wilder men might create an intrigue aiming toward a split in the Party.93 The ostensible purpose of the Halsbury Club was to prepare for the reconstitution of the government after the Liberals had been defeated.94 The leading men of the Club, Austen Chamberlain, Selborne, Salisbury, Sir Edward Carson, F.E. Smith, George Wyndham, and Willoughby de Broké were all prominent die-hards. Although the Club stated repeatedly that it was in no way antagonistic to the Party's leadership,95 the very fact that such a club was thought necessary to keep up the fighting spirit was a reflection on Balfour and Lansdowne.

91 Ibid. 92 LIX (September, 1911), 16.
93 Chamberlain Papers, AC918), Selborne to Austen Chamberlain, 4 September 1911, marked "Private."
94 Ibid., Selborne to Austen Chamberlain, 7 October 1911.
95 Observer, 15 October 1911; Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49861, Steel-Haitland to Balfour, 17 October 1911.
The Party organization was badly shaken by the eclipse of Balfour. Steel-Maitland approached Austen Chamberlain in late August and asked him to sign with Balfour an appeal to the Party workers for action. He assured Chamberlain that Balfour's signature alone would do no good as the Party's die-hards would not listen to his appeals. By late September the head of the Central Office was actually calculating the chances of Balfour's hanging on till the Home Rule Bill reunited the Party. He was concerned about dangerous occasions for Party friction, such as the National Union meeting at Leeds on 16 November.

As the evidence of Party discontent mounted, Balfour's desire to continue his thankless job dwindled. On 30 September he concluded a conversation on general policy with Balcarres and Steel-Maitland with a fifteen-minute disquisition on the pros and cons of his resignation. Balcarres asked if the decision were final, thinking that the Leader was ready to quit, but Balfour answered that it was not. His morale in a highly critical condition, Balfour suffered a devastating blow the next day when he received a lengthy letter from Walter Long. The squire traversed all the difficulties and divisions within the Party and concluded that Balfour's leadership was a continuing disaster; as usual, he threatened to take up an independent

96 Chamberlain Papers, Austen Chamberlain to Mary E. Chamberlain, 23 August 1911.


98 Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49767, Sandars' Note on Balfour's Resignation.
position. Balfour took the letter to be a demand for his retirement. By the next day he had decided to resign, and after two more weeks of consideration he was quite sure that this decision was right.

One problem arose, however, in the management of his exit. Balfour wanted Lansdowne to remain as Leader in the Lords for six months or a year longer. This, he felt, would demolish the notion that the Halsbury die-hards had forced his resignation. They distrusted Lansdowne just as much as Balfour. To his chagrin he found that Lansdowne was as sick of the Party as he was and insisted on accompanying him into retirement. Jack Sandars enlisted the help of Lansdowne's friend, Lord Revelstoke, who in turn allied with Lady Lansdowne. By strenuous efforts they prevailed upon the unhappy Marquess to stay on.

By 3 November Balfour had begun the process of informally telling his Party associates of his imminent retirement. Even then the Party could not let him depart gracefully. At a meeting of the Halsbury Club on 6 November a resolution of confidence in Balfour's leadership was carried against strong opposition only after Austen Chamberlain and Lord Halsbury threatened to resign if it were defeated. Walter Long received the news of Balfour's resignation with deep concern for his own future and, to Sandars' disgust, dwelt long on the succession. Sandars was convinced that Long had on many occasions

---

99 Ibid.
100 Ibid., Sandars to Balfour, 2 November 1911, marked "Confidential."
101 Ibid.
102 Ibid., Sandars' Note on Balfour's Resignation.
disloyally caballed against Balfour. Only Long's ineptitude as an intriguer and his inability to get along with his colleagues for any length of time had prevented him from becoming a real menace.

On 7 November Long called on Balfour as the Leader planned his farewell speech. He tormented the bored and exasperated Leader by a lengthy and insensitive discussion of the arrangements for the Party meeting which would elect his successor. Sandars recorded, "Long argued in his usual heated manner and seemed little disposed to make things easy for his late Chief." Henry Chaplin, an elderly, self-important Party hack, was the luckless Balfour's next visitor. Chaplin had come to tell the Leader that instead of announcing his retirement in a speech as planned, it would be better for him if he wrote a public letter. Having harrowed Balfour's feelings, Long and Chaplin then went off to browbeat Lord Balcarres, whose job it was to arrange the consultations to decide on the new Leader.

On 8 November Balfour addressed the Conservative Association of his constituency, the City of London. He assured his electors that he would remain in Parliament, though reasons of health compelled his retirement as Leader. He did not have the strength to carry on a government even if the Party had the opportunity to form one. Referring to the rumor that there was unrest in the Party, he observed, "I do not believe at this moment that there is anything exceptional in the state of the party." This remark might have been taken in

---

103 *Ibid.*, Sandars to Balfour, 12 November 1911, marked "Private."

more than one way, especially when, responding to a resolution
regretting his retirement, Balfour urged the Party to make things
easy for the new Leader and very drily noted, "The Unionist Party
have always been faithful to their leaders, and I am quite sure that
that ancient tradition will not be violated on the present
occasion." 105

Balfour himself represented an ancient tradition, which was not
very appropriate to the politics of the post-1900 era. His political
ideas had been shaped in the period when the Home Rule scare and an
enfeebled Liberal Party had given the Unionists almost unchallenged
control. Accustomed to power, he had never adjusted well as Leader
of an opposition Party. He had been caught between the ruthless
tariff reform zeal of Joseph Chamberlain and the equally ruthless
opportunism of Lloyd George and the Liberal government, a position
in which his intellectual subtlety and aristocratic disdain were
inadequate to the challenge. His retirement marked, temporarily at
least, the end of gentlemanly politics.

Since the Unionists were in opposition there was no occasion
to select a Leader for the whole Party. The struggle for the succession
to Balfour as Leader in the House of Commons was marked by bitterness
and recrimination. Lord Balcarres as Chief Whip called a formal
meeting of Unionist M.P.'s at the Carlton Club for Monday, 13 November.
This early date left the Party only four days to agree on a candidate
in order to avoid what Walter Long later called the ignominy of a

105 National Union Gleanings, XXXVII (December, 1911), 572-576.
secret ballot to decide between rival contestants. The two obvious candidates, Austen Chamberlain and Walter Long, suffered under the severe disadvantage that neither liked or trusted the other. Chamberlain was convinced that even if he won, Long would intrigue against him and, with substantial Party support, might cripple his leadership. Long was equally suspicious of Chamberlain.

On the afternoon of Balfour's resignation in a meeting at which Chamberlain considered Long's manner particularly nasty, it was agreed that Balcarres should informally test the opinion of the Party. If a substantial majority appeared for one candidate all others would withdraw; if there was no consensus, then they would have to fight it out in an election. As Balcarres carried out his consultations he discovered a peculiar pattern. Chamberlain commanded the support of the Whips and most of the prominent men, but Long showed surprising strength among the backbenchers. Jack Sandars and others were convinced that Long would win the leadership if it came to a counting of votes. The Tory squires distrusted Chamberlain's reputation as a Liberal Unionist, a die-hard, and an extreme tariff reformer. His strength was still further decreased by Bonar Law's unexpected insistence on putting his name forward, not in the expectation of

---

106 Chamberlain Papers, AC9(21), Minutes of the Carlton Club Meeting.
107 Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49767, Sandars to Balfour, 12 November 1911, marked "Private"; this letter reports a long conversation between Sandars and Austen Chamberlain on 11 November.
108 Ibid.; also Chamberlain, Politics from Inside, 384–386.
109 Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49767, Sandars to Balfour, 10 November 1911, marked "Very Confidential."
victory but merely to make himself known as a candidate in any future leadership election.\footnote{Robert Blake, \textit{The Unknown Prime Minister: The Life and Times of Andrew Bonar Law} (London, 1955), 80.}

By the morning of Friday, 10 November, Balcarres felt he could make a reliable prediction of the election. He told Chamberlain that he and Long would each receive something over 100 votes and Law the rest. In the second election between the two top men he thought Law's votes would split up in an unpredictable pattern, but the Whip did not expect the victor to win by more than ten or twenty votes.\footnote{Chamberlain, \textit{Politics from Inside}, 388.} At this point Chamberlain knew that he could not become Leader with Long in such a strong position, nor could he permit Long to become Leader, believing him to be hopelessly incompetent for the role. Even a brief interlude of leadership by Long would be a tragedy for the Party and the causes it represented. Chamberlain therefore despatched Balcarres to Long with the proposition that both withdraw in favor of Bonar Law. Long agreed, apparently satisfied by having eliminated Chamberlain by his show of substantial strength.\footnote{Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49767, Sandars to Balfour, 12 November 1911, marked "Private."} Thus by the accident of personal antipathy between the two important candidates, Bonar Law became the unanimous choice as Unionist Party Leader in the Commons. His first reaction to this unexpected honor was reluctance to accept it. He called on Austen Chamberlain and amazed him by suggesting they make Long Leader, expecting him to fail.
and reopen the competition in a few months. Chamberlain rejected this Machiavellian proposal with some acerbity, and Law finally decided that he would accept the post. The Party meeting of 13 November was a formal ritual at which Long and Chamberlain proposed and seconded Law’s nomination with handsome speeches filled with praise for each other and the Party. Despite a little grumbling, the Members accepted the fait accompli, and the mantle passed from the aristocratic Balfour to the middle-class Bonar Law.

The change placed at the head of the Unionist Party in the Commons a remarkably insecure Leader. Unlike Chamberlain, who led the tariff reformers, and Long, who commanded the landed gentry, Bonar Law had no significant personal following in the Party or in the country. He had been neither a die-hard in the Parliament Bill crisis nor a loyal tariff reformer in the December election, having urged Balfour to shelve food taxes by the Referendum pledge. He had never held an office higher than an Under-Secretaryship and was reputed to be deeply under the influence of Sir Max Aitken, who owned the Daily Express and was described by Jack Sandars as "the little Canadian adventurer who sits for Ashton-under-Lyne." Law’s insistence on running for the leadership and then his reluctance to accept it made a profoundly unfavorable impression on Austen Chamberlain and many others. A Scottish-Canadian businessman from the Glasgow Iron Ring, he lacked the ancestry, personal appearance, education, social grace, range of interests, political experience, magnetic personality,

113 Ibid.; Chamberlain, Politics from Inside, 390-391.

114 Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49767, Sandars to Balfour, 10 November 1911, marked "Very Confidential."
and Parliamentary dexterity which were usually considered appropriate to British party leadership. Thus he could take few risks of contradicting Party feeling; even a tithe of the opposition which Balfour had withstood for years might tumble him from his place. As his biographer remarked, the Party "wanted someone who would show no sign of compromise with the enemy, who would state in blunt, and preferably rude, terms what the average Conservative thought about the Liberal Government." Law could certainly fulfill this need, but unlike the powerful Balfour or Chamberlain he dared not rise much above this level, assuming he had the capacity to do so.

115 Blake, *The Unknown Prime Minister*, 93.
CHAPTER VIII

HOME RULE OR CIVIL WAR

Proud of his reputation as a fighter, Bonar Law immediately launched virulent attacks on the Liberals, and he was not particular about his choice of weapons. He tore into the Chancellor's finance at the Albert Hall on 26 January 1912, only to be totally crushed when Lloyd George proved that his statistics had been wildly inaccurate.\(^1\) Law had, for example, sneered at the land taxes as yielding only £20,000; the true figure was £327,000.\(^2\) In the same speech he charged that the government had corrupted politics by creating offices as rewards for its followers. "They have succeeded in six years," he cried, "in creating a political spoils system which already rivals that of the United States."\(^3\) But when Asquith dared him to validate his accusations by moving an amendment to the Address in Parliament he had nothing to say.\(^4\)

Law's first important Parliamentary performance as Leader was not a happy one. After delivering the usual congratulations to the mover and seconder of the Address, he announced portentously, "Now,

\(^1\)National Union Gleanings, XXXVIII (February, 1912), 155-156.
\(^2\)Economist, 10 February 1912, 275.
\(^3\)National Union Gleanings, XXXVIII (February, 1912), 155.
\(^4\)Debates, Commons, 5s, XXXIV (14 February 1912), 36-37.
Mr. Speaker, I have done with compliments, and I am sorry to say that I do not think they will be very frequent during the Session upon which we have now entered." A few moments later he hinted broadly that the Liberals had diverted government funds to their party propaganda for Lloyd George's National Insurance Bill. He received a contemptuous denial from the Prime Minister and advanced no shred of evidence to back up the charge. Worse was yet to come. Asquith replied to his strictures on the National Insurance Bill by asking, "Is the right hon. Gentleman, if and when he comes into power, going to repeal it?" Law surprised the Prime Minister and completely dumbfounded his followers by replying, "Certainly." The opposition Members were staggered by this pledge, given so casually without thought or consultation. Their new Leader belatedly attempted to explain away his interjection in a letter to The Times, announcing that if the scheme were actually in operation the Unionists would only amend it drastically. This debate had revealed that Law could be rather easily baited and that he was not excessively scrupulous about facts in his attacks on the government. He explained that he had no qualms about the inaccuracies in his Albert Hall speech, observing, "The standard of success which I set up is the amount of irritation which my speech has caused to my opponents." Despite these blunders, Law's unrestrained abuse of the

5 Ibid., 16. 6 Ibid., 25.
7 Ibid., 36. 8 Ibid., 35.
9 15 February 1912.
10 Debates, Commons, 5s, XXXIV (20 February 1912), 563.
Liberals certainly struck a responsive chord among the Unionist back-
benchers and journalists. He more than made up for his fiascos in
finance and insurance by the applause he won for his attacks on the
immorality and unconstitutionality of the government's plan to carry
Home Rule under the Parliament Act. In his first address as Leader
to the Annual Conference of the National Union he set the general
themes of his Party's policy for the rest of the pre-war period.

He denounced the government's failure to reform the House of
Lords as promised in the preamble of the Parliament Act and argued
that until such reform was carried the nation was living under "a
provisional Constitution." Presently it became a Unionist article
of faith that the constitution was in a state of suspension. The
Party's insistence that the Lords must be reformed seemed a bit
peculiar, since the Lords could hardly become more conservative than
they already were. This policy actually went far beyond the recon-
stitution of the Upper House; it included the whole Unionist
alternative to the Parliament Act—the Referendum for constitutional
deadlocks and the joint session for ordinary legislation. Lansdowne
had introduced bills embodying these changes in 1911, but in the fight
over the Parliament Act they had been almost completely ignored.
From 1911 to 1914 whenever the Unionists spoke of the suspension of
the constitution what they meant was the unimpeded operation of the
Liberals' Parliament Act. They defined the real constitution as the
Unionist plan put forward by Lansdowne.

The second theme set by Law in his National Union speech was

11Speech at Leeds, 16 November 1911, National Union Gleanings,
XXXVII (December, 1911), 583.
the invalidity of votes not cast in accordance with certain standards of public interest. He announced, "If Irish members judged British questions and voted on British questions on their merits they would have as much right as anyone else to let their influence be felt on British questions." This disqualification of votes cast for the wrong reasons was extended to the rest of the strongly Liberal Celtic fringe and was basic to the claim that the Unionist majority of English seats gave the Party a moral and quasi-constitutional ascendancy. The Liberal attempt to pass Home Rule in defiance of the predominant partner's majority was, therefore, an assault on the constitution.

Finally, Law claimed that the Liberals had no mandate for their Home Rule plan, having failed to stress it in the December, 1910, election. He laid down the constitutional axiom that such a great change could be carried only if a majority of the people actively desired it. By implication, he suggested that it was not enough for them to accept it passively. For the Liberals to wait for a period when the people were in a state of lassitude and apathy and then exploit the condition by passing a Home Rule Bill behind their backs was obviously a damnable plot. Thus an election on Home Rule was essential, even if there was no sign of popular opposition to the Bill. It was such constitutional doctrines as these, accumulated during preceding controversies and wearisomely reiterated in hundreds of speeches from 1912 to 1914 which underlay the Unionist conviction that extra-legal or even illegal means could justifiably

\[12\text{Ibid.}\] \[13\text{Ibid.}\]
be used to destroy the Liberal plot to subvert the law. Only by a Unionist victory could the nation recover its true constitution.

The outlines of the Home Rule crisis began to form as early as 21 February 1910, when Sir Edward Carson was chosen leader of the Ulster Unionists. He was a much more formidable fighter than his predecessor, Walter Long, who relinquished the position after being elected for a London seat in January. The Ulstermen understandably interpreted the Liberal victories of 1910 as so many steps toward Irish Home Rule, and even before the December election they began to plan a civil war. On 24 November a Unionist M.P. announced the organization of a movement to refuse taxes to a Home Rule Parliament and to provide the Protestants with arms. The Ulster Unionist Council immediately confirmed this revelation and began collecting funds to purchase the necessary munitions. The British Unionist press was not immediately sympathetic to Ulster's intention to defy an act of Parliament. The Daily Mail, for example, warned, "Rebellion is not a weapon in the constitutional armoury. Even the threat to use it would rouse the antagonism of those who may sympathise with legitimate opposition to the proposals of the Government."

Perhaps the reason for the Party's failure to respond actively to Ulster's lead was discerned by Balfour, who told the Junior Imperial and Constitutional League, "I have begun to realize that controversies which were familiar to me and my contemporaries--as familiar as the

---

14 Speech by W. Moore at Portadown, National Union Gleanings, XXXVI (January, 1911), 5.

15 Ibid., 6.

16 19 January 1911.
alphabet 15 or 18 years ago—are quite unknown to the younger generation, to those whom you so admirably represent." He added thoughtfully, "The last great Home Rule controversy was in 1893." Captain James Craig, among the most prominent of the Ulster magnates, was reported as saying disgustedly,

A new generation was springing up in the sister countries who would have to be re-educated on the subject, and that would be a very expensive thing. It struck him that a great deal of the energy and money would be much better expended by just letting Ulster take her own firm stand. Let them spend amongst themselves in the direction of buying arms and ammunition...18

Only after the Parliament Act defeat had driven the Party to desperation did it espouse the Ulster cause with reckless abandon.

Six weeks after the Lords had accepted the Parliament Act, Sir Edward Carson announced in Belfast that the Ulster Unionist Council was planning a provisional government to administer the district if Home Rule were carried.19 The Party began to warm to the cause, almost in relief after the ceaseless bickering of the previous months. J.L. Garvin trumpeted,

Upon the issue of a Home Rule Bill framed under Redmondite domination, there will be unanimity, promptitude and determination... There will not be one atom of effective dissension. There will not be a particle of doubt as to the right line of action. This alone will be a moral asset such as the Unionist Party has not possessed for years. 20

Bonar Law lost no time after his elevation to the leadership in

17 Speech in London, 6 April 1911, National Union Gleanings, XXXVI (May, 1911), 394.
18 Speech at Lisburn, 24 December 1910, National Union Gleanings, XXXVI (February, 1911), 94.
19 Westminster Gazette, 25 September 1911.
20 Observer, 8 October 1911.
announcing his absolute dedication to Ulster's fight. He told his constituents,

I can assure you, and I speak, as I believe I am entitled to speak, not only for myself but for the Unionist party in the House of Commons—that when the time comes there will be no shrinking from any action which we think necessary to defeat one of the most ignoble conspiracies which has ever been formed against the liberties of free-born men.

Law gave the reason why strong action would be necessary.

There are in Great Britain a good many people who are in favour, or who think they are in favour, of Home Rule, but I believe that a great bulk of these people imagine that they are in favour of it because they are tired to death of the Irish problem, and because they are ready to welcome anything which promises them relief from the problem. 21

The threat of civil war should prove to them that relief was not in sight.

The first overt act to dramatize Ulster's seriousness of purpose was the Council's refusal to permit Winston Churchill to speak in the Ulster Hall in Belfast. This stroke against free speech shocked a few Unionists, 22 but most of the Party's newspapers blamed the scandal on Churchill. Typically, the Daily Telegraph placed the entire responsibility if violence occurred, not on the rioters or those who led them, but on the government. 23 Already the Unionists' description of Ulster was branching in two directions. On the one hand they said the Ulstermen had such strong and almost uncontrollable passions and were such tough fighters that the government must not provoke them. If the Liberals insisted on contradicting them after

21Speech in Bootle, 7 December 1911, National Union Gleanings, XXXVIII (January, 1912), 1.

22The Times, 18 January 1912.

238 February 1912.
having been warned of the danger, the government was wholly responsible for the consequences. But they also said the Ulstermen had a right to stage-manage deliberate assaults on the government in order to arouse the British public from its somnolence. Whether Ulster's outrages on accepted standards of behavior were uncontrollable responses to Liberal provocation or controlled publicity stunts to arouse British opinion, the Ulstermen were invariably acquitted of responsibility. The Observer, for example, after condemning Churchill for his "stroke of incendiary action" in plotting to pollute the Ulster Hall with Home Rule rhetoric, added, "Since Ulster is not bluffing it is consistent on her side to warn British public opinion--really responsible for the issue, though ignorant of Irish circumstances--that we are approaching a suspension of the ordinary rules of party controversy." When Churchill was finally permitted to speak at a Belfast football ground, the Unionist press heaped lavish praise on the Orangemen for not having broken out in bloody rioting. The Unionist press bore a certain responsibility for the Liberals' suspicion that Ulster's bellicosity was a bluff.

The cabinet drew up a moderate Home Rule Bill reserving to the Imperial Parliament all control over foreign affairs and new customs duties and placing innumerable restrictions on the powers of the Irish Parliament. These safeguards were supposed to reassure the Irish Unionists, but the obvious step of excluding the Protestant counties was reserved for future consideration. Lloyd George and Winston Churchill urged that the Ulster counties should be enabled to opt out

24 21 January 1912.
of Home Rule under the provisions of the Bill, but the cabinet followed the lead of Asquith and Lord Crewe in deciding that if public opinion moved in the direction of special treatment for Ulster the government should hold itself free to amend the Bill.  

This was a dangerous compromise. The cabinet obviously considered exclusion of some counties a viable plan but was waiting to see if it could be advanced as the price of an agreed settlement of the Irish problem. Asquith did not foresee that, in effect, he was urging Ulster to extremism, which might well reach such an intensity as to make a compromise impossible. The cabinet was using conventional political tactics at a time when the opposition was repudiating the rules of the game.

Two days before the government presented its Bill to Parliament Bonar Law once again promised to a great meeting in Belfast to exert the full strength of the Unionist Party in defeating what he called "a conspiracy as treacherous as has ever been formed against the life of a great nation." He could as yet hold out no hope of assistance from the British public, which was, he said, "weary of the burden of Irish government" and ready to accept anything that promised on any terms to settle the Irish question. Nor was there the slightest prospect of Parliamentary victory; he remarked, "I entertain no hope that the majority in the House of Commons will be broken down."

The cause of this unfortunate condition, according to Law, was the Liberals' insatiable hunger for office, which had led them to sell the constitution and themselves. "In such circumstances," he announced,

25 Asquith Papers, VI, Cabinet letter to the King, 6 February 1912.
"to attempt to pass Home Rule is not government; it is tyranny, naked and unashamed, and tyranny not less real because the usurpers have obtained their power by fraud instead of by force." It was not clear to the government whether Law meant any of this literally or if it was merely his own particular brand of Party rhetoric. The government failed to notice that Law and his associates were arousing in their Party such an appetite for victory by violence that they might have to act as if they believed these charges whether they did or not.

The debates on the presentation and first and second reading of the Home Rule Bill occupied the House of Commons from 11 April to 9 May 1912. They were remarkable chiefly for the staleness of the thirty-year-old arguments; the tedium was relieved only by occasional outbursts of crude abuse from the opposition. When, for example, Asquith challenged Law to repeat on the floor of the Commons his charge that the Liberals were selling their convictions, Law snapped, "You have not got any." Asquith dubbed this "the new style." Carson repeated the doctrine that the constitution was in a state of suspension, and Law added, "We can imagine nothing which the Unionists in Ireland can do, which will not be justified against a trick of this kind." The Unionists insisted that the Bill could not be carried without being submitted to the electorate, and Law

---

26 National Union Gleanings, XXXVIII (May, 1912), 354-359.
27 Debates, Commons, 5s, XXXVI (11 April 1912), 1425.
28 Ibid., 1428.
29 Ibid., XXXVII (16 April 1912), 300-301.
supported this demand with threats of "breaking our Parliamentary machine."\textsuperscript{30}

Both sides tiptoed warily around the question of excluding Ulster. Each was attempting to maneuver the other into committing itself to a definite proposal, which would presumably give the unpledged party a tactical advantage, so the debate on Ulster was completely unreal. Carson asked the rhetorical question, "What argument is there that you can raise for giving Home Rule to Ireland that you do not equally raise for giving Home Rule to that Protestant minority in the north-east province?"\textsuperscript{31} Law repeated the remark a few days later, but both dodged inquiries as to whether they meant that exclusion would satisfy the Ulster grievance.\textsuperscript{32} Asquith charged that the opposition was using Ulster as a mere wrecking tactic and thus excused his government from further consideration of it.\textsuperscript{33}

The Bill passed its second reading by a vote of 372 to 271,\textsuperscript{34} and even the Unionists admitted that the British people had been bored into a still deeper state of lethargic indifference by the first month of the Home Rule controversy.\textsuperscript{35} There were still two years to go.

\textsuperscript{30}Ibid., 301.
\textsuperscript{31}Ibid., XXXVI (11 April 1912), 1440.
\textsuperscript{32}Ibid., 1443; XXXVII (30 April 1912), 1720.
\textsuperscript{33}Ibid., XXXVIII (9 May 1912), 693–694.
\textsuperscript{34}Ibid., 708.
\textsuperscript{35}Morning Post, 9 April 1912; Observer, 12 May 1912, 9 June 1912; speech by Leo Amery in Debates, Commons, 5s, XXXVII (30 April 1912), 1788.
On 11 June during the committee stage, Mr. Agar-Robartes, a Liberal back-bencher, moved an amendment excluding Antrim, Armagh, Down, and Londonderry from the Home Rule area. This step nearly compelled both sides to consider seriously the exclusion policy, a most unwelcome confrontation with reality. Augustine Birrell, Chief Secretary for Ireland, delayed his speech, hoping the Ulstermen might commit themselves to something if they spoke first. They outwaited him. Finally, he said the government would not accept the amendment, but he added, "Indeed, it would require a very great deal of evidence from Ulster itself to lead to the belief that she desires to cut herself off from the rest of Ireland." This and similar government statements goaded Bonar Law into charging,

What the right hon. Gentlemen are doing, and doing deliberately, is this. They are saying, and they have said in so many words to the people of Ulster: "Convince us that you are earnest, show us that you mean to fight, and we will yield to you as we have yielded to everybody else." They talk about incendiary language. What they are doing is to invite the people of Ulster to show, not by language, but by acts, that they are determined.

For once Law had hit upon an accusation that came uncomfortably close to the truth.

The Unionists' response to the Agar-Robartes amendment was deliberately ambiguous. Law proved once again to his own satisfaction that the government's own principles required that it accept exclusion; he announced he would vote for it as part of Parliamentary committee

---

36 Debates, Commons, 5s, XXXIX (11 June 1912), 771.
37 Ibid., 774.
38 Ibid., XXXIX (18 June 1912), 1560.
work but did not believe in it.\textsuperscript{39} Carson did not speak on the amend-
ment for some time, and when he did he promised to vote for it more
or less because the government said exclusion would render Home Rule
for the rest of Ireland almost impossible. His own position was very
nebulous, but he did rule out exclusion as part of a compromise on
Home Rule.\textsuperscript{40}

The Agar-Robartes amendment was a close call, but both sides
managed to finesse their way out of a straightforward statement of
policy. There was a general sigh of relief when the amendment was
negatived by sixty-nine votes.\textsuperscript{41} The Liberals and Nationalists
concluded that the Unionist vote for the amendment was purely a
wrecking attempt, and the Unionists concluded that they need take
seriously only a detailed, official government exclusion plan.
Thus slipped away the best opportunity to thrash out the Ulster
problem before the hardening of attitudes on both sides made com-
promise impossible.

A few days later Sir Edward Carson thrilled the Women's
Amalgamated Unionist and Tariff Reform Association by telling the
ladies he intended to go over to Ulster and "break every law that
was possible."\textsuperscript{42} It was in reply to such hyperbolic statements that
Asquith assured a Dublin audience, "I tell you quite frankly I do not
believe in the prospect of civil war."\textsuperscript{43} He said he could not believe

\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., 780. \textsuperscript{40} Ibid., 1074.
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., 1570.
\textsuperscript{42} Westminster Gazette, 25 June 1912.
\textsuperscript{43} Speech on 19 July 1912, Gleanings and Memoranda, XXXIX
(August, 1912), 99.
that the conscience or the judgment of the British people would accept the justice of civil war by a minority in fear of future oppression and before any actual injury had been done. In this statement the Prime Minister revealed how completely he failed to comprehend the minds of his opponents. That the Ulster firebrands cared nothing for the conscience or the judgment of the British people he only dimly suspected. He had no idea at all that Unionists like Bonar Law believed civil war a legitimate method of arousing the conscience and compelling the judgment of the British people, and were even inclining to the notion that it might be the only way to do it.

Within a week whatever excuse Asquith had for his ignorance was completely removed by the famous Unionist meeting at Blenheim. There Bonar Law told the Party faithful that the government was only a despotic, revolutionary committee, and he cried, "In our opposition to them we shall not be guided by the considerations, we shall not be restrained by the bonds which would influence us in an ordinary political struggle. We shall use any means, whatever means seem to us likely to be most effective." He handed over to Ulster absolute control of Party policy. If the government tried to carry Home Rule without an election, he pledged, "I can imagine no length of resistance to which Ulster will go in which I shall not be ready to support them and in which they will not be supported by the overwhelming majority of the British people." Within a month Austen Chamberlain and Lord Lansdowne unconditionally endorsed Law's Blenheim speech.

44 Speech on 27 July 1912, Gleanings and Memoranda, XXXIX (September, 1912), 186-187.
45 Ibid., XXXIX (October, 1912), 291.
Lest the government think his pledge too lunatic to have been seriously meant, Law told the House of Commons that he had long realized the seriousness of his words and had actually written the formula down so that there could be no mistake. 46 Ironically, he reiterated his pledge to assist the Ulster rebels no matter what they did during a debate which concerned religious riots in Belfast in which the Orange mobs had savagely attacked the Catholic minority and driven 2,000 Catholic workmen from their jobs. He was enthusiastically supported by his Party's press. 47 Even Balfour a little later wrote that the government had done its best by mishandling Home Rule "to justify any action which the Ulster loyalists may take to maintain their rights." 48

The two-month summer recess of Parliament was full of activity for the opposition. The Ulster Unionists brought forth a Solemn Covenant, announced with great pomp and ceremony by Sir Edward Carson at Captain James Craig's estate, Craigavon, on 19 September. There was a separate Covenant for the women of Ulster. The two were signed by about half a million Loyalists within a few weeks. The Solemn Covenant pledged its signatories to defend their position of equal citizenship in the United Kingdom and to use "all means which may be found necessary to defeat the present conspiracy to set up a Home Rule Parliament in Ireland." 49

46 Debates, Commons, 5s, XLI (31 July 1912), 2134.
47 Daily Telegraph, 29 July 1912; Spectator, 3 August 1912, 154-155.
48 Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS, 49862, Balfour to J.A. Moore, 17 September 1912, marked "Private."
49 Gleanings and Memoranda, XXXIX (October, 1912), 305.
Bonar Law spent part of his holiday as the King's guest at Balmoral, and he took the opportunity to put considerable pressure on the Sovereign to seize the initiative in putting the Liberals out of office. Already in May, Law had told the astonished King that if the government did not resign within two years, that is, before Home Rule became law under the Parliament Act, the Monarch would have to accept the Home Rule Bill or dismiss his ministers. Either way half his subjects would conclude he had acted as their enemy. Law assured the King that without the House of Lords as a buffer he must accept personal responsibility for the bills he approved. In September he repeated this theme in a formal memorandum given to the King. He argued that since the constitution was suspended, the King had the obligation to ascertain the will of the people by refusing to sign the Home Rule Bill until either the Liberals had an election or he tried to find other ministers who would. Law assured the King that if it ever came to that point he must certainly be bitterly attacked by the Unionists if he signed the Bill or the Radicals if he dismissed his ministers. The only chance the King had of avoiding such trouble was to persuade the Prime Minister to extricate him from the dilemma, presumably by resigning or voluntarily holding an election before passing Home Rule. Law rather loftily recommended that in any crisis the King should consult him, Balfour, or Lansdowne, since they would give him advice uninfluenced by Party considerations. Having offered this interesting lesson,

50 Blake, *The Unknown Prime Minister*, 133.

Law left the perplexed Monarch to ponder his situation.

When the House of Commons resumed its consideration of the Home Rule Bill in committee a peculiar situation developed. Most of the time debate was desultory and attendance sparse; the Bill made steady progress under guillotine closure. Despite this pacific appearance, tempers were short, especially among the Ulstermen. Captain James Craig revealed the new spirit in a bitter exchange with the Chairman of the Committee of the Whole House. When Craig attacked the guillotine resolution on the pretext of raising a point of order, the Chairman repeatedly ruled him out of order. The enraged Ulsterman finally growled, "You can judge afterwards, because I am rather getting past the time, to tell the truth, when I care whether it is in order or not." 52 When the government was defeated on a snap division changing the financial provisions of the Bill, the opposition as a whole resorted to the new style. Asquith attempted to carry a resolution simply rescinding the vote on the financial amendment, but the Unionists brought the business of the House to a standstill by shouting down all other government speakers. The Speaker, unable to bring the opposition to order, adjourned the House amid a wild scene during which Winston Churchill and Ronald McNeill, an Ulsterman, came within an ace of having a fistfight. The "scene" (but not the fight) was planned in advance by the Unionist leaders, who were seriously considering the decision to make all business in the House impossible. 53 To the Unionists the deliberate destruction

52 Debates, Commons, 5s, XLII (22 October 1912), 2035.
53 Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49775, Alfred Lyttelton to Balfour, 13 November 1912.
of the prestige and stability of the Commons was an acceptable policy, limited only by tactical considerations.

On 1 January 1913 Sir Edward Carson moved an amendment excluding from Home Rule the entire province of Ulster, which included three heavily Catholic and two marginally Catholic counties. The debate was a sterile display of mental gymnastics. Carson denied indignantly that his amendment was a step toward compromise. The government chose to regard the amendment as another attempt to wreck the Bill, and Asquith pointed to the inclusion of the Catholic counties as proof of its absurdity. Law hinted that the object of Carson's amendment was to induce the government to bring forth its own exclusion plan and vaguely suggested that he might consider accepting such a solution to the Ulster problem. His demand for an election on the Home Rule Bill was challenged on the ground that Ulster had often refused to accept an unfavorable result. The most that Law could promise was, "So far as I am concerned, if it is submitted to the people of this country as a clear issue, so long as I speak for the Unionist party, I shall do nothing to encourage them in resisting the law." This modest commitment was unconvincing, since Lord Hugh Cecil had just told the House that if force were used to overcome Ulster resistance the Unionists would assist the Ulstermen even after an election.

The Saturday Review added that only the Party machine was involved in

---

54 Debates, Commons, 5s, XLVI (1 January 1913), 379.
55 Ibid., 395-396.
56 Ibid., 461-462.
57 Ibid., 469.
58 Ibid., 409.
Law's pledge; individual Unionists need have no inhibitions about ignoring the results of a general election.\textsuperscript{59}

The debate should have cleared up any lingering doubts about the Ulster character. When the Ulstermen spoke for themselves there could be no mistaking their sincerity. Churchill ridiculed the idea that the Irish Unionists outside Ulster would be mistreated under Home Rule, to which Captain James Craig snapped, "We have hostages in Ulster."\textsuperscript{60} Only the willfully blind could doubt the seriousness of this threat to persecute the Catholic minority, especially after Craig repeated it six months later.\textsuperscript{61}

The House of Commons approved the third reading of the Bill on 16 January 1913. The government had displayed remarkable Parliamentary efficiency throughout the contest, with the exception of the snap division. In the 234 divisions on the Home Rule Bill, the majority had averaged 116.\textsuperscript{62} The Lords' debate before they vetoed the Bill was undistinguished and perfunctory. Curzon adduced the total lack of interest in the countryside as a reason why the Bill should not pass.\textsuperscript{63} Lansdowne slightly amused the government by observing that most of the people who voted for Irish Nationalists were peasants;

\textsuperscript{59}Ibid. January 1913, 6.
\textsuperscript{60}Debates. Commons, 5s, XLVI (1 January 1913), 477.
\textsuperscript{61}Ibid., LV (7 July 1913), 90.
\textsuperscript{62}Ibid., L (12 March 1913), 271.
\textsuperscript{63}Debates. Lords, 5s, XIII (30 January 1913), 743–744.
he doubted that Irish peasants' opinions on political and constitutional matters were worthy of much attention.

By this point early in 1913 the Unionist Party's policy had assumed the pattern from which it never seriously deviated until the outbreak of the World War. The decisions made in 1912 shaped the whole development of the Home Rule crisis. When Law decided to concentrate almost all his fire on the Ulster issue, he was automatically compelled to endorse and promote the Ulster plan to resist inclusion of the Protestant counties by civil war, if necessary. This concentration also inhibited his attack on Home Rule as a general plan for the rest of Ireland. His objectives in the campaign were twofold. His first preference was a general election (or later, a Referendum) on the Home Rule Bill before its passage. An alternative was to concede Home Rule and press for the exclusion of the Ulster Unionist area as a last resort. Law tried to pursue both these objectives simultaneously, either not realizing or not caring that they cancelled each other out.

His basic objective, a general election, was not exactly reasonable, for everybody agreed that the electorate had no desire to think about the Irish problem. Even when the Unionists won by-elections they had to admit that the National Insurance scheme, tariff reform, and a host of other issues had been more influential than Home Rule. Throughout the crisis the electorate outside Ireland

---

64 Ibid., 782-783.
obstinately refused to tolerate a Home Rule campaign by either party.\footnote{Westminster Gazette, 22 October 1913, 20 February 1914; also Asquith Papers, XXXVIII, Asquith Memorandum to the King, September, 1913, marked "Most Secret."}

More seriously, the Ulster campaign itself ruled out a general election. Only the most inflammatory speeches were considered suitable to the cause. Carson once told an Ulster audience, "I find a very curious thing, that the more uncompromising I am myself the more popular I become amongst you."\footnote{Speech in Lisburn, 22 July 1913, Gleanings and Memoranda, XLI (September, 1913), 191.} To make their threats realistic the Covenanters had to argue that their cause was so righteous that even a general election could not change their position. In fact, Carson said even twenty elections could not justify Ulster's expulsion from the Union.\footnote{Westminster Gazette, 19 July 1913.}

Law's reaction to this defiance of the democratic process was, "If Ulster chooses to resist after the will of the people of this country has been declared, I admit that that will be rebellion. But rebellion is often justified, and that might be." Asquith asked, "Would it be?" Law replied, "That is not my business."\footnote{Debates, Commons, 5s, LIII (10 June 1913), 1571.} Asquith noted that if Law could commit neither Ulster nor the British Unionist extremists to accept the verdict of the electorate, then an election could not prevent civil war, and there was no reason to have one.\footnote{Ibid., LIII (9 June 1913), 1292-1293.}

When Ulster's militancy aroused a similar movement in southern Ireland the argument for an election was still further weakened. After the formation of both the Ulster Volunteers and the Irish Volunteers
a civil war seemed inevitable no matter which party won an election.

Law's secondary objective of exclusion emmeshed him in equal difficulties. He repeatedly promised his Party that Ulster's extremism would block Home Rule, and there were many who believed that to be the only valid reason for concentration on the Ulster cause. Lansdowne, Austen Chamberlain, Long, and the Cecils, all senior to Law in Party experience, regarded the exclusion of Ulster as intolerable if it meant the granting of Home Rule to the rest of Ireland. Unfortunately, the arguments for the exclusion of Ulster from Home Rule Ireland were identical with the arguments for separating Ireland from the United Kingdom. If the government accepted Law's reasoning and made a convincing exclusion offer, he could not logically deny Home Rule for the remainder of Ireland, but this might split his Party.

Law's encouragement of the Ulster extremists, his praise of their heroism, and his promises of success were taken seriously by the Irish and many of the British Unionists. Months of rhetorical fireworks excited in them a lust for heroics that blocked any negotiated settlement; they came to regard any compromise as a surrender. Law's campaign thus built up a die-hard faction vastly stronger than that of 1911. Only civil war or complete, abject capitulation by

Oddly, the Ulstermen paid absolutely no attention to the fact that their Solemn Covenant apparently ruled out exclusion, since its signatories pledged themselves to use any means to prevent the establishment of a Home Rule Parliament anywhere in Ireland. Only the Earl of Arran obstinately opposed exclusion on the ground that it conflicted with his oath. See Arran's letters to the editor of the Spectator, 25 October 1913, 650, and 1 November 1913, 708.
the Liberals could satisfy them. Law entered every negotiating
session with the government fearful of successful agreement, which
might force him to face a Party rebellion.

Only one thing had a chance to damp down Unionist extremism
and free Law from the maze of difficulties he had constructed. The
Party had damaged the House of Lords by using it to cripple the
Liberal government. It tried to use the King and the Army for the
same purpose and was quite willing to risk the same fate for them.
Only its loyalty to its own self-preservation was strong enough to
unite the Party in accepting a Home Rule compromise. If it became
convinced that extremism would lose elections it might rally behind
a moderate policy and sacrifice the Union. An internal crisis in
1912-1913 suggested that this was the case.

The Party had fought three elections while committed to tariff
reform and had lost them all. Balfour's pledge to have a Referendum
on tariff reform had failed to win in December, 1910, but the free
traders were convinced that the Party had to move still farther away
from the Chamberlains' policy to have a fighting chance. The Cecils
urged the dismissal of tariff reform so that the Unionists could unite
in the fight against Home Rule, and by 1912 this idea was gaining
ground with all but the most dedicated tariff reformers. Bonar Law
acknowledged to Austen Chamberlain that although he could not accept
the Cecils' view for fear of splitting the Party, if a poll were taken
he thought a majority would incline to the side of shelving at least
the food taxes.71

71 Chamberlain Papers, Austen Chamberlain to Mary E. Chamberlain,
16 March 1912.
In April, 1912, the shadow cabinet decided to retain the food taxes and to withdraw from Balfour's Referendum pledge. Balfour was a bit distressed by this, and there were strong protests from the Cecil faction. There was, however, no general outcry because for about seven months the leaders made no public declaration of the policy. Then in a National Union meeting in the Albert Hall on 14 November Lansdowne announced that although the Referendum would be retained for constitutional reform, the next Unionist government would feel free to enact tariff reform with food taxes if the Dominions asked for the preference arrangement. This speech aroused vigorous protests, especially in the north. Ten days later, as if in reply to Lansdowne's speech, a Unionist tariff reformer suffered a decisive defeat in a Bolton by-election. Undeterred, Bonar Law repeated Lansdowne's pronouncement in Ashton-under-Lyne, and he rashly made acceptance of his policy a test of confidence in the Party's leadership. "For nine years we have kept the flag flying, and if there is any sincerity in political life at all, this is not the time and, at all events, I am not the man to haul down that flag."

After Law's speech the Lancashire Unionists broke into open

72 Blake, The Unknown Prime Minister, 108.
73 Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49862, Balfour to Sir Robert Finlay, 8 January 1913, marked "Private."
74 Blake, The Unknown Prime Minister, 108-109, 111.
75 National Union Gleanings, XXXIX (December, 1912), 505.
76 Blake, The Unknown Prime Minister, 112.
revolt. They were ready to resolve formally to repudiate the Party's official policy if it were not changed.\textsuperscript{78} This compelled Law and Lansdowne to make a more careful sounding of opinion within the Party, and they found to their chagrin that the tariff reform strength had been quietly but drastically eroded by the suspicion that food taxes were electoral poison.\textsuperscript{79} As soon as the issue was raised, a strong section of the Unionist press condemned the food taxes.\textsuperscript{80} After nearly ten years of campaigning, the Chamberlains had truly converted only a small fraction of their Party.

Realising belatedly that their policy was hopelessly unpopular, Law and Lansdowne decided to resign, but as in Balfour's day the unavailability of an alternative Leader in the Commons compelled second thoughts, Chamberlain, the tariff reform champion, was obviously impossible, and there was no one else. Finally on 8 January 1913 a memorial signed by almost all Unionist back-bench Members of Parliament begged Law and Lansdowne to remain as Leaders while pledging the Party to submit food taxes to a general election before including them in a tariff reform budget.\textsuperscript{81} The two reluctantly swallowed their pride and accepted the advice.\textsuperscript{82}

The shelving of food taxes did considerable damage to Law's

\textsuperscript{78} Blake, The Unknown Prime Minister, 113.

\textsuperscript{79} Ibid., 114-115; Chamberlain Papers, AC9(22), Ridley to Austen Chamberlain, 3 January 1913.

\textsuperscript{80} Daily Telegraph, 30 December 1912; Daily Mail, 30 December 1912; Saturday Review, 21 December 1912, 756-757.

\textsuperscript{81} Chamberlain Papers, AC9(22), Copy #4 of the Memorial.

\textsuperscript{82} Open letter from Bonar Law to Balcarres, 13 January 1913, Gleanings and Memoranda, XL (February, 1913), 163.
reputation in the Party. The Chamberlains were embittered by what they considered his weakness and bad judgment, and even some of the free traders thought his surrender a mark of weakness. To underscore the breakdown of leadership, the Unionists in the Kendal constituency prepared for a by-election in March by discarding a tariff reform candidate in favor of a free trader who rejected even the watered-down food tax policy. Law's Central Office withdrew its support, whereupon Irish Unionist speakers moved in to fill the gaps. The rebellious Kendal Unionists rubbed salt in the wound by winning the election by a record majority despite Law's grumbling that they had virtually passed a vote of no confidence in the Leaders of the Party.

This great food tax crisis suggested that the Unionist Party put its electoral survival above points of doctrine. Without the personal prestige to impose a moderate Home Rule policy on the Party, Law's only real hope of avoiding civil war was a general election. A Liberal victory would give the government a mandate for Home Rule, but it would also, presumably, give Law a Party mandate for stopping short of outright violence. Law actually had little hope of an election victory. He told Asquith the best he hoped for was a stalemate, which he believed would open the way for compromise.

It was extremely difficult for the government to realise the

---

82 Chamberlain Papers, Mary E. Chamberlain to Austen Chamberlain, 8 January 1913; Austen Chamberlain to Mary E. Chamberlain, 16 March 1913.

83 Law's speech in Manchester, 18 March 1913, Gleanings and Memoranda, XL (April, 1913), 290.

84 Asquith Papers, XXXIX, Asquith's memorandum of conversation with Law, 6 November 1913; Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49693, Law's memorandum of the same conversation, dated 7 November 1913.
menace of Law's position. He might decide to avoid the danger of a Party split by refusing to accept any of the government's offers on one pretext or another, even though this would inevitably lead to civil war. This seemed impossible, if for no other reason than Law's promise to accept the result of an election. A great issue of conscience might justify civil war, but what rational man would go to war over a commitment so trivial as to be cancelled by an election loss? This was dangerous reasoning. If negotiations failed the government had its automatic passage of Home Rule under the Parliament Act to fall back on; it failed to realize that Bonar Law accepted the inevitable civil war in exactly the same spirit.

Law regarded civil war as a natural and legitimate termination of the controversy partly because he took no personal responsibility for it. In innumerable speeches he insisted that the absolute responsibility for peace or war rested on Asquith's shoulders. If bloodshed, destruction, and anarchy resulted from the Liberals' refusal to surrender to Ulster, Law's own hands were clean, so long as he had done his best to warn the government. He once told the Commons, "I say deliberately that so far from our having any responsibility for anything which may come of the action of the Government, we have done everything in our power to prevent the evils which we foresee."86

A more important reason for Law's attitude was that civil war, if it came, would necessarily bring his Party back into power, and it might not be such a terrible affair after all. His estimates of the horrors to come varied, but his most detailed predictions came in the

86 Debates, Commons, 5s, LV (7 July 1913), 81.
January, 1913, debates, and they had a peculiar tone of calculation. He told the House that the Ulstermen's resistance would undoubtedly be successful, and he sketched the complete course of events.

They do not need to shoot a British soldier. If they are willing to risk their lives in this struggle, and they are, all that has to happen is that twenty or thirty of them are shot, and I am certain there is not a man opposite who does not know that if that happened there would be an outcry in this country which would drive this Government or any other Government out. 87

Two weeks later he repeated the scheme with a shift in the numbers.

There is no question of their succeeding. They are bound to succeed. It does not mean that they must be in a position to defeat British soldiers. Nothing of the kind. It means this, and this only; that they should be ready in this case to give up their lives at the hands of British soldiers, and they are ready. If you shot down a hundred of them in Belfast to-morrow, a thousand would be ready the next day to share the same fate. And you know it. And what would be the effect of that on opinion in England and Scotland? 88

Sir Edward Carson similarly predicted,

No one will blame the Army for shooting upon Ulster men, but the country will hold the Government that puts forward the Army responsible. The first time the Government goes, by means of the Army, to enforce such a detestable Act as the Home Rule Bill, the manhood of England and Scotland will rise up and declare: "You shall not do this thing." 89

Garvin's Observer was almost indecently frank: "What end to the fighting and the chaos could there be but the return of Unionists to power by an overwhelming majority, which nothing else could secure for them?" 90 Most Unionists expected no vast casualties or

---

87 Ibid., XLVI (1 January 1913), 470.
88 Ibid., XLVI (16 January 1913), 2399.
89 Speech in Manchester, 3 December 1913, Gleanings and Memoranda, XLII (January, 1914), 33.
90 8 June 1913.
truly tragic consequences from the civil war, and so there were severe limits to what they would do to avoid it. Everything in the Party's policy and tactics pointed to civil war. An election might prevent it, but only some mechanism entirely outside the normal political process could force the government to a dissolution.
CHAPTER IX

THE TRIUMPH OF THE DIE-HARDS

The second passage of the Home Rule Bill made the session lasting from 10 March to 15 August 1913 the dullest Parliamentary period within memory. The debate on the Address set the tone for the session. Henry W. Lucy reported, "Save when the Prime Minister was speaking, with the Leader of the Opposition preceding or to follow, the Benches have been almost empty." Even an angry and disorderly scene when government Members obstructed a snap division until their majority assembled failed to rouse much interest in the debates. The discussions were undisturbed by any spark of originality, save that Lansdowne offered the government still another reason not to hold an election. When Crewe bluntly said that he did not believe that the Unionist Lords would accept the Home Rule Bill even after an election, Curzon replied with a formal pledge authorized by Lansdowne. He promised that if the result of an election indicated "substantial approval" of the Home Rule Bill, Lansdowne would be prepared to advise the Lords "to go into Committee on the Bill and endeavour to remove some of the blemishes and undesirable features by which it is characterised, and to ask all

1Observer, 16 March 1913.
2Debates, Lords, 5s, XIV (14 July 1913), 877.
parties in the House to join in the endeavour to shape it into a more passable and palatable measure."\(^3\) Even had the government been willing to let him decide what constituted "substantial approval" it knew full well what drastic amendments would be required to make the Bill "palatable" to the die-hard Lansdowne.

The debates were of no particular consequence to the Unionist leaders because they were relying on extra-Parliamentary means to attain their objectives. In May, 1913, Sir Edward Carson made public the arguments Law had privately adduced to persuade the King to turn the Liberals out. During a conventional attack on the character of any minister who would advise the King to sign the Home Rule Bill before an election, he hinted broadly that it was in the power of the Crown to compel such an election. There was a menacing tone to his remarks. "Every monarch rests upon certain ground so long as he makes this his maxim: 'The will of the people shall prevail.' But no monarch rests upon certain ground who says that the will of a coalition Government must prevail."\(^4\) The National Review tried to popularize the idea of a revival of the Royal veto or a dismissal of the government by the King during the summer.\(^5\) The lines were familiar; they had been used often to justify the Lords' attacks on the Liberals before the defeats of 1910.

The Unionists took care to see that the King was primed with

---

\(^3\)Ibid., XIV (15 July 1913), 1014.

\(^4\)Speech in Belfast, 16 May 1913, Gleanings and Memoranda, XL (June, 1913), 447.

\(^5\)LXI (August, 1913), 1044-1045; LXII (September, 1913), 8.
information about the readiness of Ulster for civil war. The troubled Monarch asked for the counsel of the Unionist Leaders and received in reply another memorandum from Law and Lansdowne. They told him the constitution was in suspense and that it was his duty to compel a dissolution rather than permit his ministers to run headlong into civil war. Asquith responded to this novel constitutional doctrine by pointing out to the King the danger of his acceptance of personal responsibility for controversial legislation. He told the King he could not confine such an experiment to Home Rule; he would be expected to act the same way in every crisis, and thus the Crown would become "the football of contending factions." In a second memorandum Asquith traversed the standard arguments against an election held before the passage of Home Rule. He did, however, try to calm the King's fears by observing that there would be an election between the enactment and the implementation of Home Rule. So far as civil war was concerned, he thought that if it were known beforehand that the election was due, "any outburst of disorder in Ulster would everywhere be regarded as premature and inexcusable."

Law returned to the attack in a conversation with the King at Balmoral. He repeated his stock arguments for the dismissal of the government and once again informed the King that no matter what he

---

6 Asquith Papers, XXXVIII, Memorandum by Augustine Birrell, written at Buckingham Palace, 24 July 1913, marked "Very Private and Confidential."

7 Blake, The Unknown Prime Minister, 152.


9 Ibid., 33.
did he would be "condemned by half his subjects." He invited His Majesty to choose "whether greater permanent harm would be done to the Monarchy by an attack from the extreme supporters of the Government or by the bitter and lasting resentment of the people of Ulster and of those who sympathised with them." Law used a most remarkable argument to frighten the King. He recorded, "I reminded him that the leaders of the Unionist Party had pledged themselves to give every possible support to the people of Ulster, that I had no reason to think that in this respect the policy of the Party would be modified and that in those circumstances I thought it very doubtful whether the army would obey the orders of the Government." 10 This very broad hint that the Army had become a branch of the Unionist Party and was no longer loyal to His Majesty's government failed to convert the King to Law's constitutional doctrine, but it did encourage him to seek a peaceful settlement by promoting conferences of party leaders.

During this campaign to draw the King into the party arena by inducing him to dismiss the government, there was even less discussion among the Unionists of the advisability of risking the Crown than there had been of risking the Lords in 1909. Of the Unionist leaders only Balfour noted the King's fear of compromising his position at home and in the Dominions, but the farthest the ex-leader would go in pressing this argument was, "I do not deny that this is an aspect

10 Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49693, Bonar Law's memorandum of his conversation with the King, dated 16 September 1913.
of the question which deserves serious consideration." His solution to the problem was simple. The King, after dismissing Asquith, would appoint either Rosebery or himself Prime Minister to carry on the government before the election. Balfour noted, "If he sends for Lansdowne or Bonar Law, he will, however unjustly, be accused of favouring one particular party in the state." The King did not take quite so optimistic a view of his position. By the end of 1913 he had decided not to force an election. Derby reported very indignantly that Asquith had threatened to attack the King in the election campaign if he dismissed the ministry. Apparently the King decided that if he were to be condemned by one party or the other no matter what he did, he had best follow the safest, most traditional constitutional doctrine.

On 11 September 1913 The Times published a letter from Lord Loreburn, former Liberal Lord Chancellor, calling for a conference of party leaders. Although the conference precedent of 1910 was not encouraging, Loreburn's suggestion was taken up by many, including George V, who were afraid the nation might blunder into a preventable civil war for want of an opportunity for discussion. When Bonar Law, amid his constitutional lectures, hinted to the King and Winston Churchill that he might be sympathetic either to a general scheme of federation for the United Kingdom or exclusion for Ulster with

11 Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49693, Balfour to Law, 23 September 1913.

12 Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49768, Balfour to Sandars, 10 September 1913, marked "Confidential."

13 Derby to Law, 26 January 1914, in Blake, The Unknown Prime Minister, 170-171.
some kind of Home Rule for the rest of Ireland, Asquith decided the
time had come for serious negotiation. He proposed personal and
informal meetings with the Unionist Leader.

As rumors of a conference circulated, Law began to receive
advice from all sides. In his talk with Churchill, Law had described
how completely the Unionist Party would support an Ulster rebellion
by creating such disorder in the Commons as to be driven out en masse;
he said he had reason to believe the army would refuse to obey the
government. When Churchill passed on this information to Balfour,
the ex-leader seemed shocked by these threats. This experience
moved Balfour to give Law some heavily disguised advice against
extremism. After recounting the opinion of Lansdowne and Curzon that
any exclusion compromise would be condemned as a surrender of principle
by the Party, Balfour went on to deplore the disintegration of social
bonds involved in the prospect of an Ulster rebellion. He foresaw
bloodshed, destruction, armed expeditions in support of Ulster from
Scotland, Lancashire, and Canada, resignations by Army and Navy
officers, rebellion in Nationalist Ireland, and the total degradation
of Parliament. He did not argue that the Ulstermen were wrong, but
he wanted to point out to Law that their example would be followed

---

14 Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49693, Bonar Law's memorandum
of his conversation with the King, dated 16 September 1913; Asquith
Papers, XXXVIII, Churchill to Asquith, 17 September 1913, marked
"Secret and Personal."

15 Asquith Papers, XXXVIII, Churchill to Asquith, 17 September
1913, marked "Secret and Personal."

16 Ibid., Churchill to Asquith, 21 September 1913.
by many other groups of less righteous character.\textsuperscript{17} This lengthy forecast of doom seemed a Balfourian hint that although Ulster might be right it behooved those outside Ulster to take a broader view of the national interest. Law told Balfour he agreed with his pessimistic outlook, but he gave no sign he thought his own position in any way modified by it.\textsuperscript{18}

Most other Unionist leaders were giving Law exactly the opposite advice. Lansdowne thought compromise impossible since the Party would not stand it. He was acutely afraid that the government might make a genuine, reasonable offer to exclude Ulster, since the necessary rejection would damage the Party's tactical position.\textsuperscript{19} There was considerable evidence that the lower orders of the Party not only hated compromise but opposed the whole idea of negotiation. Law had educated them to believe that they had the government beaten, and they had no desire to help the government out of its difficulties.\textsuperscript{20}

This chorus of the die-hards was momentarily interrupted by Sir Edward Carson, who communicated to Law the important discovery that the Irish Unionists outside Ulster would not fight Home Rule and therefore need not be included among those worth protecting by civil war. Law remarked with some surprise that some southern Irish

\textsuperscript{17}Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49693, Balfour to Law, 23 September 1913.

\textsuperscript{18}Ibid., Law to Balfour, 24 September 1913.

\textsuperscript{19}Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49730, Lansdowne to Balfour, 25 September 1913, marked "Secret."

\textsuperscript{20}Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49768, Sandars to W. Short, 4 October 1913, marked "Private."
Unionists had no great fear of persecution or even harrassment by an Irish Parliament. But despite Carson's advice, Law was not free to discount the Irish Unionists of the south; the spokesman of that group was not Carson but Lansdowne, and Law dared not antagonize the powerful Leader of the Party in the Lords.

Early in October Law summarized his Home Rule policy in a memorandum, perhaps in preparation for a conversation with Asquith. He sketched the course of events if there were no settlement. When the Ulster provisional government was established, the government would send the Army, which would be so divided by politics that its discipline would be destroyed. If, as was likely, the government managed to scrape together some obedient units, the Ulster Volunteers would resist and there would be "great bloodshed." But, Law went on, "the moment this bloodshed had taken place there would be an outbreak of excitement in the U.K. which would in my opinion ruin the Gov't and would certainly compel an election under the worst possible conditions for the Gov't." His idea of a limited civil war had not changed. Only one thing really bothered him. The Ulster Covenanters would settle for nothing less than the exclusion of the whole nine-county province. He dreaded the prospect of a government offer of exclusion depriving Ulster of the three heavily Catholic counties. "Nothing," he reflected, "could be worse for us than that we should be put in the position of having to refuse an offer which the people of

21 Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49693, Law to Lansdowne, 8 October 1913.
this country would regard as fair and reasonable.\textsuperscript{22} It would never occur to Law to accept such a fair and reasonable offer rather than move into civil war.

Asquith and Law met secretly on 14 October and 6 November to explore the possibility of peaceful agreement, both being reluctant to enter a formal conference which might not succeed. At the first meeting Law spent much, if not most, of his time telling Asquith why an agreement on any terms would be almost impossible for him. He feared the sense of betrayal among the Irish Unionists outside Ulster if exclusion were carried. His British followers would resent a Home Rule settlement, since that would permit the Welsh Church Disestablishment Bill to pass under the Parliament Act. The die-hards might split the Unionist Party if they were cheated of total victory. If the Home Rule issue were settled the Unionist Party would lose a valuable electoral issue, and its chances of winning would diminish, especially considering its divisions over tariff reform. Asquith did not record what he thought of this catalogue of party troubles offered instead of proposals intended to avert civil war.

Law insisted on a dissolution, attempting to answer Asquith's arguments by assuring him that Carson made extremist speeches because that was his best hope of winning an election and that Ulster alone would offer no significant resistance if the Unionists were beaten. If, on the other hand, as a result of the government's orders Ulster Protestants were killed in Belfast, Law believed the anti-Catholic spirit ("one of the strongest feelings in England and Scotland")

\textsuperscript{22}Ibid., Bonar Law's Memorandum on Home Rule Settlement, ca. 6-8 October 1913.
would be excited and "the effect in Great Britain would be not only that the Government would be beaten but that they would be snowed under." After dropping some threats of disorder in the House of Commons and mutiny in the Army, Law told Asquith that even if the government made a satisfactory exclusion proposal every prominent Unionist leader would have to accept it before he could pledge his Party to carry it out. Considering that Lansdowne, Chamberlain, Long, and the Cecils were all die-hards of various hues, Law's reservation was substantial.

The two Leaders met again on 6 November and exchanged complaints about the hardening of opinion in their parties against compromise. After some rather vague discussion of the area to be excluded, Asquith virtually proposed as a condition to any agreement that the Home Rule Bill, as amended, should be treated as agreed legislation. Law demurred, wanting freedom to vote against the Bill if he saw a chance to defeat it. In this exchange the two had finally reached the critical point of the whole controversy. Assuming neither side was bluffing, the alternatives were compromise or civil war, but both men acknowledged that no viable compromise could satisfy all the factions. By hinting at an agreed Bill, Asquith was proposing that the center sections of both parties unite against the extremists. Asquith could impose a solution on the Irish Nationalists and die-hard

23Tbid., Bonar Law's Memorandum Notes of his conversation with the Prime Minister, 15 October 1913; for Asquith's record see Asquith Papers, XXXVIII, Memorandum of conversation with Bonar Law, 15 October 1913.

24Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49693, Bonar Law's Memorandum of conversation with the Prime Minister, 7 November 1913.
Liberals if Law could induce his men to abstain from voting with them against the government. Law, in turn, would have to risk a split with the Unionist die-hards and fanatical Covenanters by concluding the compromise. It was the only hope of peace, but Law, it would seem, never entertained such an idea for a moment. He was committed both to Ulster and to Party unity, and civil war was preferable to sacrificing either commitment.

In lieu of agreement with Law the cabinet formulated its own proposals within the limits placed on them by their Irish allies. By December, 1913, the government had decided to advance an ingenious plan invented by Lloyd George. Ulster was to be excluded for five or six years and then automatically included under Home Rule unless Parliament had decided otherwise. Obviously there would be at least two general elections before the expiration of exclusion, and so the electorate would decide the issue. The cabinet thought no one could support an Ulster rebellion against inclusion six years in the future. The cabinet was dead wrong. Every Unionist leader, and especially Bonar Law, was pledged to support Ulster if she were not satisfied, no matter what the conditions. Another cabinet plan, "Home Rule within Home Rule" gave Ulster autonomy within Ireland, but nobody took it very seriously. Asquith transmitted the terms of both plans to Law in their last private meeting on 9 December, and the negotiations were concluded as a hopeless job. Law could submit to his Party nothing but absolute exclusion, and there was no assurance that it would accept that.

These negotiations late in 1913 were the last opportunity for reasoned compromise. When the next Parliamentary session opened, the
Home Rule Bill was locked in its third and final passage. The govern-
ment could not have an election after that moment without losing its
previous progress under the Parliament Act. It was inevitable that
temperatures would rise and incidents multiply as the conclusion of
the legislative process approached. Most Liberals thought the sur-
vival of their party to be bound up with the successful use of the
Parliament Act, while on the Unionist side there was little incentive
to talk peace when the long-promised victory through violence or the
threat of violence was so near. Once the third Parliamentary session
began, civil war was all but inevitable.

Law had failed to persuade Asquith to have an election and had
not compelled the King to dismiss his ministers. Only one extra-
ordinarily dangerous way remained to force the dissolution. It was
legally possible for the House of Lords to block the Army Annual Bill,
virtually disbanding the British Army by removing the sole legal
basis for military discipline. The opposition leaders turned to this
as a last resort early in 1914, but at the same time they intensified
a campaign to undermine the willingness of the Army to obey the
government's orders in Ireland. Either way they could destroy the
government's authority by rendering it incapable of enforcing the law.

The government, even in the fall of 1913, had no concern about
the Army. Asquith believed the military swagger of Carson and his
Ulster Volunteers would arouse the hostility of the moderate people
of Great Britain, and apparently he could not imagine such an outrage
as a successful undermining of military discipline.\textsuperscript{25} If he knew of

\textsuperscript{25}Asquith Papers, XXXVIII, Asquith's Memorandum for the King,
1 October 1913, marked "Most Secret."
the intrigues of his Director of Military Operations, Major-General Sir Henry Wilson, with the Unionists, he did not let the knowledge affect his policy. When Law openly compared the Liberal tyranny with that of James II and hinted that once again the Army might save the nation by refusing to obey orders, the government seemed unconcerned. Though Walter Long and Austen Chamberlain implicitly encouraged an Army crisis by predicting that orders to enforce a Home Rule Act would "destroy the British Army for a generation" and "demoralize the Army for years to come," there was no alarm. Law explicitly predicted in Parliament that civil war would divide the Army, since in such case, he said, soldiers were merely "citizens like the rest of us." Milner more directly tampered with the military by assuring Sir Henry Wilson that officers who resigned because of Ulster would be reinstated by the Unionists when they took office.

While such maneuvers proceeded, the opposition engaged in internal debate over the amendment of the Army Annual Bill. The Cecils had been agitating for this step since June, 1913. Lord Hugh thought the Lords' action to prevent the Army being used in

26 Law's speech in Dublin, 28 November 1913, Gleanings and Memoranda, XLII (January, 1914), 21.

27 Long's speech in Belfast, 19 January 1914, Chamberlain's speech in Yardley, 15 January 1914, Gleanings and Memoranda, XLII (February, 1914), 102-103.

28 Debates, Commons, 5s, LIX (19 March 1914), 2264.

29 Gollin, Proconsul in Politics, 200.

30 Cecil Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 51075, Lord Robert Cecil's Memorandum on Home Rule, 5 June 1913, marked "Private and Confidential."
civil war would be very popular with the voters. He was eager for the amendment because he feared his leaders might compromise on Home Rule when faced by the threat of force, just as they had accepted the Parliament Act in 1911. Bonar Law began a consideration of the plan as soon as his negotiations with Asquith broke down, and by late January he had concluded that forcing an election by an amendment forbidding the government to use the Army in Ulster was necessary and right. Remarkably, he no longer alleged that the alternative to an election was civil war; he did not believe Asquith would go so far. He was really afraid that the government might publish its proposals to conciliate Ulster and then call an election at its own time, and Law thought many people would agree that the government's offers had met the real grievance. He intended to destroy the British Army temporarily to ensure that he could choose the time of the election and focus the campaign on his issue, "Shall the Army be used to coerce Ulster without the consent of the electors."

Nothing was more striking in this Unionist discussion than the absence of debate of the plan's intrinsic quality. No Unionist leader, whatever his private reservations, opposed the plan on the ground that it was dangerous to make the very existence of the Army a tool of political maneuvering during a period of international tension. Lansdowne worried about the tactics of forcing an election without being

---

31 Chamberlain Papers, AC11(27a), Lord Hugh Cecil to Austen Chamberlain, 19 December 1913.

32 Ibid., Lord Hugh Cecil to Austen Chamberlain, 31 December 1913.

33 Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49693, Law to Lansdowne, 30 January 1914; reproduced in Blake, The Unknown Prime Minister, 175-176.
able to pledge Ulster to accept the result. Balfour was unconcerned about Lansdowne's problem, but he casually pointed out that the amendment gave the Liberals a debating point because it forbade the government to use the Army to protect the Ulster Catholic minority from disorderly Orange mobs. He also thought a few Unionists might object to setting a dangerous precedent against using the Army to control future labor disputes, but he had no hesitation in promising to support Law no matter what he decided. Balfour was delivering the Gifford Lectures and seemed almost bored by his Party's designs, but even so this complacent attitude was surprising in the man who had made the Committee of Imperial Defense an effective organism and was currently a member of a subcommittee of the C.I.D. studying the defense of Britain from invasion.

The shadow cabinet approved the amendment to the Army Annual Bill early in March, 1914, but opposition within the Party seemed to be increasing. Selborne presented to Austen Chamberlain what he considered his most persuasive arguments against the plan. He argued, (1) that it was unnecessary since the government could not coerce Ulster, having admitted that special provision was necessary, (2) that Asquith could make an impressive speech alleging the risk to the nation, (3) that Royal pressure might force the Lords to give way, and (4) that there was surprising hostility within the Party, even among the die-hards. Even Lord Robert Cecil was shaken by the

34 Ibid.
35 Ibid., Balfour to Law, 3 February 1914, marked "Private."
36 Young, Arthur James Balfour, 342.
last point. Informed of back-bench fear of election reverses, Law decided, probably by 20 March, that the Army Annual Bill amendment plan was impossible. The sole reason he adduced for this decision was his belief that the Unionist Party might split on the issue. From start to finish, the Party's leaders discussed the project primarily from the standpoint of electoral tactics.

The Curragh Incident of 20 March made all planning on both sides virtually irrelevant. When General Gough and his cavalry officers chose dismissal from the Army rather than obey General Paget's very garbled orders to move into Ulster, the whole military operation was blocked. It seemed apparent to the Unionists that the government could never enforce Home Rule in the north of Ireland. From that moment the Unionist leaders' freedom to negotiate shrank to nothing. With victory within their grasp neither the Covenanters nor the die-hards would tolerate any compromise. The savage controversies aroused by the rumors that the government's plan for a military seizure of Ulster had been frustrated by Gough's heroism, the hopeless confusion in the government's explanations, and then the government's indignation over a massive gun-running coup in Ulster on 24 April petrified opinion on both sides. The Unionists committed themselves to impossible conditions for the pacification of Ulster—permanent exclusion of the whole province and extensive amendment of the Home Rule Bill.

In a discussion of the exclusion problem Bonar Law finally

---

37 Chamberlain Papers, Austen Chamberlain to Mary E. Chamberlain, 15 March 1914.

38 Blake, The Unknown Prime Minister, 181-182.
brought home to Asquith the basic factor in his position which made any peaceful settlement short of absolute surrender by the government impossible. Asquith urged Law to reach an agreement with him and then force it on the Ulstermen as the Liberals would force it on the Nationalists. Law replied that the Unionists could never take up such a position. The Ulstermen were members of the Party, and Carson was among the most influential Unionist leaders. Law summarized the situation as regards the area to be excluded.

I said to him also that the fact is, although he might say it was our action which had created such a position, that the people of Ulster knew that they had a force which would enable them to hold the Province, and with opinion so divided in this country it was quite impossible that any force could be sent against them which could dislodge them, and that therefore they knew that they could get their own terms, and that it was certain that they would rather fight than give way on such a point as this.

He might have added that the other Unionist leaders—Lansdowne, Chamberlain, Long, Milner, and the Cecils—were far less amenable to compromise than Carson and himself. On the far right of the Party Willoughby de Broke and Lord Winterton led British commando units eager to rush over to Ireland and join the Ulstermen in case of civil war.

The fact was that the Unionist Party had found violence a substitute for the old House of Lords. Its leaders could once again

39 Balfour Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 49793, Memorandum by Bonar Law, 17 July 1914.

40 Winterton's activities are described in Gollin, Proconsul in Politics, 175-177, and Lord Winterton, Orders of the Day (London, 1953), 38. Leo Amery may have overestimated the commando organization when he wrote, "Willoughby de Broke has got his 10,000 men or so who are prepared to seize rifles and fight in Ulster." Cecil Papers, B.M. Add. MSS. 51072, Amery to Lord Robert Cecil, 16 January 1914.
veto Liberal legislation, and for the first time since January, 1906, they felt that office was within their grasp. That they had reached this position by illegal means bothered them not at all. They had never worried about constitutional precedents during their period in opposition. They had been inhibited in their tactics only by the fear of losing elections, and no such fear was present during the promotion of the Ulster civil war. Indeed, only a compromise which would split the Party and eliminate Ireland as an issue threatened their electoral position, and so it was ruled out. The Party had suffered severely from its tariff reform split; its Leaders, and especially such a Leader as Bonar Law, would never voluntarily create a similar split over Home Rule. If this intransigence led to civil war, the responsibility would be Asquith's and the victory Law's. This was the Party's position up to 31 July 1914, when the World War providentially prevented the crisis from running its full course. The Party never again resorted to such methods, for the breakup of the Liberals gave to the Unionists the dominant role in British politics for the next two generations.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Manuscripts


Aretas Akers-Douglas (1st Viscount Chilston) Papers. Kent County Archives.


Charles P. Scott Papers. British Museum.


Party Publications


National Union Gleanings, renamed Gleanings and Memoranda in August, 1912.
Government Publications

**Parliamentary Debates.** House of Commons, House of Lords.

**Newspapers**

*Daily Mail.*
*Daily Telegraph.*
*Manchester Guardian.*
*Morning Post.*
*Observer.*
*The Times.*
*Westminster Gazette.*

**Periodicals**

*Blackwood's Magazine.*
*Contemporary Review.*
*Economist.*
*English Review.*
*Fortnightly Review.*
*National Review.*
*Nineteenth Century and After.*
*Punch.*
*Quarterly Review.*
*Saturday Review.*
*Spectator.*
*Statist.*
Books


Annual Register. London, 1900-1914.


