

# THE COALITION PRELUDE TO LIB

The coalition of 1915–1916 has not had a very good press. Liberals have traditionally disliked it because it signalled the end of the last Liberal government to hold power in the United Kingdom. Conservatives have not been much happier with it, seeing it as still dominated by the Liberal ‘old gang’ headed by Asquith, and insufficiently willing to take drastic action to support the army and organise the economy during the First World War. **Ian Packer** analyses the record of the 1915–16 coalition.

Does it represent a health warning against Liberal coalitions with Conservatives?



**A**BOVE ALL, the coalition did not deliver military victory and it collapsed in acrimony in December 1916, leaving the field free for Lloyd George

to form a new coalition, which did emerge triumphant in 1918. In these circumstances, not many historians have had a kind word to say for the first wartime coalition of 1915–1916.<sup>1</sup> However, it was not

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necessarily a particularly incompetent administration, nor one that demonstrated that Liberals were unable to adapt their ideology to winning a modern war – it was just in power during some of the most desperate times of the First World War. The coalition did, though, prove disastrous for Liberalism by paving the way for the power struggle between Asquith and Lloyd George which destroyed the Edwardian Liberal Party. If the Liberal Party needs a warning that coalitions can be dangerous for your health than the experience of 1915–1916 provides a salutary example.

That the First World War would lead to a coalition government was a possibility that hung over British politics from the very beginning of the war. The political era before 1914 is often seen as the classic time when the ‘swing of the pendulum’ ensured alternating Liberal and Conservative governments, with secure parliamentary majorities. But the existence of other parties ensured that the picture was actually far more complicated. The Conservative government of 1886–1892 relied on the Liberal Unionists for its majority and the government of 1895–1905 was a formal coalition of Conservatives and Liberal Unionists. The Liberals relied on the Irish Nationalists to support them in power in 1892–1895 and again in 1910–1914, with the infant Labour Party also providing help on the latter occasion. In the whole period 1886–1914, only the Liberal government of 1906–1910 was not either a coalition or reliant on another party for its majority. Late Victorian and

Edwardian politicians were, therefore, scarcely averse to cross-party cooperation.

In August 1914, a Liberal–Conservative coalition was, for a moment, a distinct possibility. The leading figures in the Liberal government, particularly the prime minister, Asquith, and the Foreign Secretary, Sir Edward Grey, were determined that Britain must intervene in a continental war on the side of Russia and France.<sup>2</sup> But a few other Cabinet members were implacably opposed to this continental ‘entanglement’, while the majority wavered in between. Until two tense Cabinet meetings on 2 August decided to support a declaration of war if German troops invaded Belgium or German ships entered the Channel, it was possible that the Liberal government would collapse. In fact, only two Cabinet ministers, Lord Morley and John Burns, resigned in protest at this decision, while a maximum of about twenty MPs harboured serious doubts about entering the war.<sup>3</sup> This outcome allowed the Liberal government to survive virtually intact and direct Britain into the war. But if there had been an avalanche of resignations from the Liberal government it was possible that Asquith and the pro-intervention ministers would have tried to survive in power by forming a coalition with the Conservatives. Bonar Law and Lord Lansdowne, the Conservative leaders in the House of Commons and House of Lords respectively, had written to Asquith on 2 August pledging their full support for intervention and

this could be read as implicit support for a coalition, if necessary.<sup>4</sup>

However, Asquith’s skillful handling of his Cabinet banished the spectre that the Conservative leaders’ letter had summoned up. While the Conservatives had twenty-five more MPs than the Liberals in August 1914, the Liberals retained a secure parliamentary majority through the support of the thirty-seven Labour MPs and eighty-five Irish Nationalists. Both Labour and the Irish, under the leadership of John Redmond, supported the decision to declare war, though both parties, like the Liberals, contained opponents of this decision.<sup>5</sup> But once they had decided to support the Liberals they became bound even more tightly to the government. If the Liberals were replaced by the Conservatives or a coalition government that contained Conservatives, then Labour and the Irish Nationalists feared that objectives they held dear would be threatened. Labour was worried that trade union privileges would be eroded and particularly disliked the possibility of industrial conscription; the Irish hoped above all to protect the Home Rule Act that was put on the statute book in September 1914, though suspended until no later than the end of the war.

The Liberal government seemed safe for the time being. In wartime the Conservative opposition could not even criticise the government, for fear of seeming unpatriotic, especially when Asquith pulled off the political masterstroke of appointing the leading general, Lord Kitchener, as Secretary of

Left:  
H. H. Asquith,  
Liberal Prime  
Minister 1908–16

State for War.<sup>6</sup> Divisions of course arose about how to conduct the war, but they were not fatal to the Cabinet's unity, which had been built up over nine years of successful peacetime administration. The crucial dispute was about how much of the country's economic and manpower resources should be committed to the war.<sup>7</sup> A group of Liberal ministers, centred around McKenna, Runciman and Harcourt took a cautious approach, fearing that massively disrupting the economy would lead to Britain's financial collapse. Lloyd George, on the other hand, rapidly associated himself with a policy of 'total war', calling for a massive expansion of munitions production and increasing government intervention in the economy. This was partly a temperamental difference, but it also reflected, to a certain extent, pre-war attitudes. Lloyd George had been an advocate of expanding the state's role in social reform, while McKenna and his allies had been much more dubious. In wartime, Lloyd George merely expanded his enthusiasm for state intervention to include organising the country for victory. This was certainly not a dispute between one approach that was Liberal and one that was not: Liberalism before 1914 had accommodated itself to a great deal of state intervention, especially in the field of social welfare.<sup>8</sup> But it did lay the basis for some of the most acrimonious quarrels that rocked the 1915–1916 coalition and a lasting enmity between McKenna and Lloyd George (though they had been rivals long before 1914).<sup>9</sup> However, McKenna's approach, whatever its merits, was gradually being superseded in 1914–1915 because of Kitchener's decision to train a volunteer army of millions. This started to seriously warp the economy as munitions and engineering expanded, while other sectors of the economy shrank, starved of manpower and resources. Prices rose by 40 per cent by May 1915 as shortages appeared, and the Cabinet was increasingly drawn into managing the economy in an attempt to supply both the army and the home front.

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lead to coalition was amply demonstrated in the early days of the war in France. When German troops threatened Paris the outcome was a national coalition under René Viviani on 28 August 1914. Many British politicians of course hoped the war would be 'over by Christmas' – and Liberal politicians believed no doubt that a grateful electorate would reward them for leading the nation to victory. But this prediction proved an illusion. The decisive battle on the western front never came and was replaced by the stalemate of a line of trenches from Switzerland to the North Sea. In early 1915 the Liberal government still remained hopeful of an early victory, but these predictions, too, came to nothing. Instead, a series of military and diplomatic setbacks rattled the Cabinet's optimism. The spring Anglo-French offensive on the Western Front failed to break the German lines. Instead it backfired on the government, when reports, inspired by military figures, appeared in *The Times* on 14 May 1915, suggesting that British troops were being held back by a shortage of ammunition. At the same time, Churchill's brainchild of a landing at the Dardanelles merely provided another military stalemate and neither forced the Ottoman Empire out of the war nor brought the neutral Balkan states into the war on Britain's side. On 15 May Lord Fisher, the head of the Admiralty, resigned in opposition to the whole Dardanelles policy.<sup>10</sup>

Under these circumstances, Asquith had to accept that it was very unlikely the war could be won in the near future. His government had to bear the responsibility for this situation. Its reputation was also constantly battered by the Conservative press, which hounded the government as insufficiently patriotic in its attitude towards enemy aliens and even hinted that ministers like Haldane, who was known for his links to Germany before 1914, were secret traitors.<sup>11</sup> The combination of the 'shells scandal' and Fisher's resignation threatened to seriously damage the government's already waning credibility. It was certainly unlikely that Bonar Law would be able to restrain his backbenchers from openly criticising the government.

In this worrying situation Asquith took advantage of one

of the 'sudden curves' in politics he liked to think he had a special aptitude for spotting.<sup>12</sup> On 17 May, Bonar Law called on Lloyd George to confirm that Fisher had resigned. In the course of their conversation the idea of an all-party coalition government seems to have arisen (though who initiated the idea and in what context has remained a matter of dispute).<sup>13</sup> When Lloyd George reported his conversation to Asquith, the latter summoned Bonar Law to 10 Downing Street and, in a conversation that allegedly lasted only fifteen minutes, the termination of the last Liberal government was agreed. Asquith probably felt the need to strike a deal as quickly as possible, before his Cabinet's authority and the Liberal Party's popularity waned any further. A coalition would force the Conservatives to share responsibility (and blame) for wartime decisions. It was, for this very reason, distinctly unpopular with many Conservative leaders, but they felt they could not refuse for fear of seeming to run away at a moment of supreme national crisis.<sup>14</sup> Labour, too, accepted a Cabinet post to protect trade union interests, while the Irish Nationalists declined as they did not wish to be too closely associated with a British government, or face taunts at home that they had accepted paid posts from the British Crown.<sup>15</sup>

The government that was formed, though, reflected the reality of the parliamentary situation and the continued majority in parliament of Liberals, Labour and Irish Nationalists. Asquith remained prime minister; in a Cabinet of twenty-two members there were twelve Liberals, plus Arthur Henderson as the representative of Labour, while the Conservatives held only eight posts (the remaining minister was the non-party Kitchener).<sup>16</sup> Bonar Law was relegated to the lowly post of Colonial Secretary and several Conservatives received non-executive jobs, including Curzon as Lord Privy Seal and Lansdowne as Minister without Portfolio. No Conservative had a central role in the direction of the war, other than Balfour, who was given the Admiralty. Asquith could feel he had achieved his aim. The Conservatives were compelled to share responsibility for the conduct of the war and any future

disasters would not just damage the Liberals. But it was still very much Asquith's government. Many other Liberals outside the leadership were dismayed though. The last purely Liberal government had been dismantled without any consultation, and of course most Liberals continued to see the Conservatives as their main political enemies and had no wish to cooperate with them. Asquith had to be at his very best to convince a meeting of Liberal MPs on 19 May to back the new coalition: 'Some of the members were moved even to tears, as was the P.M. himself', as Christopher Addison wrote.<sup>17</sup> But in the end Liberal MPs had no choice but to go along with their leaders, especially as Asquith pleaded that the very survival of the country was at stake.

The real difficulty that Asquith created for himself in May 1915 was one that he may not have foreseen. He was the unchallenged leader of the Liberal Party. No competitor had emerged since his unopposed coronation in 1908. It was certainly very unlikely that Lloyd George could replace him. While the Welshman was very popular with the Liberal rank and file, he had no supporters or friends in the Liberal Cabinet other than Churchill, whose reputation had been temporarily eclipsed by the Dardanelles fiasco anyway.<sup>18</sup> Many of the leading Liberals, like McKenna, openly despised Lloyd George and he had been unable to build up a core of supporters at the highest level – all his acolytes like Rufus Isaacs or Charles Masterman who had reached Cabinet rank had been failures.<sup>19</sup> But once a coalition was formed, it was no longer necessary to be Liberal leader to be prime minister. If Lloyd George could attract at least a modicum of Liberal support he could add this to the Conservative MPs (and possibly Labour as well) and form a new majority government. Cooperation between Lloyd George and the Conservatives would have seemed unthinkable before 1914. But in wartime it might be feasible, as Lloyd George's plans for organising the economy and increasing munitions production were shared by most Conservatives. In May 1915 this must have seemed a very far-fetched possibility. But the creation of the coalition meant it *was* possible. In fact it was about the only way

that Asquith could be displaced as prime minister, as no Conservative could take the job, given the party's minority status in the Commons. In May 1915 this kind of speculation must have seemed very tenuous. But, by December 1916, it had become a reality and the coalition had fallen, and with it the Edwardian Liberal Party.

A number of factors pushed events in this direction. The first was that, as part of the coalition arrangements, Asquith had intended to remove Kitchener from the War Office, where he was widely perceived to be obstructive and unimaginative, and replace him with Lloyd George. When clear evidence of the general's popularity made this impossible, he appointed Lloyd George head of a new Ministry of Munitions, charged with increasing production and avoiding any future 'shells scandals', like that of May 1915.<sup>20</sup> Lloyd George would have been happy to remain as Chancellor of the Exchequer, but his new role gave him the opportunity to immensely enhance his reputation as a successful wartime leader. It allowed him to tackle one of the greatest crises confronting Britain's participation in the war and, in the judgment of his contemporaries and most historians, he did so successfully.<sup>21</sup> Lloyd George's role at Munitions suited his temperament ideally. Rather than being faced by a huge bureaucracy he created his own organisation, exercising his considerable talents for picking the right man for the job. The famous 'men of push and go' undertook the detailed administration (never Lloyd George's strong point), while he inspired his subordinates, fought their battles in Whitehall and planned out grand strategy. The only yardstick by which the ministry's success would be judged was its ability to increase munitions production, and, as Lloyd George boasted in his *War Memoirs*, this meant it was a resounding success. Britain produced 70,000 shells a week in May 1915, but by January 1916 the total was 238,000 a week.<sup>22</sup> This huge increase in production kept the British war effort going. But it also made Lloyd George a potential alternative to Asquith as war leader.

Lloyd George's success at Munitions also raised crucial questions that put the coalition and the

Liberal Party under strain. The most significant of these was how the nation's manpower should be directed. The army was demanding more and more recruits and it was increasingly clear that the system of volunteering could not provide these recruits. Moreover, the army was competing for men who were desperately needed in the munitions factories and on the land, as Lloyd George well knew from his experience at the Ministry of Munitions.<sup>23</sup> He had come to the conclusion that only conscription could solve these difficulties and he made his views public in September 1915.<sup>24</sup> For the first time in a great public controversy, Lloyd George aligned himself with the Conservatives, who strongly supported conscription, while the views of his own party were much less enthusiastic. The forty or so Liberal MPs organised in the Liberal War Committee enthusiastically supported Lloyd George's views as the only way to secure victory.<sup>25</sup> But some Liberal Cabinet ministers, headed by Reginald McKenna, who had been installed as Chancellor of the Exchequer in May 1915, were bitterly opposed. McKenna argued that conscription would be a disaster. The country could not afford an even bigger army and, by taking more men from industry, conscription would ruin the economy and prevent the army, and Britain's allies, from being properly supplied. Outside the Cabinet, most Liberal MPs were reluctant to accept conscription – some on pragmatic grounds, others because they felt it breached fundamental Liberal principles of freedom of conscience. However, perhaps only about thirty Liberal MPs were implacably opposed to conscription in all circumstances.<sup>26</sup> If pressed hard, the rest were prepared to accept the policy as the necessary price to win the war. But the conscription issue caused tremendous soul-searching and disquiet in Liberal circles at the same time as it started to seal Lloyd George's growing reputation among Conservatives.

The policy of conscription was eased through in stages in 1916, with united backing from the Conservatives and increasingly soft opposition from within Liberalism. Legislation to conscript single men aged 19–41 was passed in January 1916, and extended to married men

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## THE COALITION OF 1915–1916: PRELUDE TO LIBERAL DISASTER

in May 1916.<sup>27</sup> With a huge offensive planned for the summer of 1916, conscription had become crucial to replace British losses in the field. In a sense, passing conscription was one of Asquith's last great parliamentary triumphs. He sensed the inevitability of the measure and used his cautious approach to bring most Liberals with him. Only Sir John Simon resigned from the Cabinet over the issue, with McKenna and his allies refusing to go with him. But, ironically, Asquith's triumph also weakened him. Lloyd George was willing to admit Asquith was 'the only man who can get Compulsion through the *House of Commons* at present', but once he had piloted conscription through parliament he was no longer so useful to the Conservatives as war leader.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, his cautious, conciliatory approach alienated both many Tories and Lloyd George, who complained '[I]f he were in the pay of the Germans he could not be of more complete use to them'.<sup>29</sup> The idea that he might need to be replaced started to circulate more freely.

Events later in 1916 pushed this idea further forward. The crucial context, as at the creation of the coalition in May 1915, was military and diplomatic.<sup>30</sup> The great Somme offensive of July 1916 came to nothing; Britain suffered a major reverse when its invasion of central Iraq was defeated by the Ottoman Empire; and Rumania collapsed on the eastern front. Food production remained perilously close to the minimum needed to feed the population while conscription had not solved the basic shortage of manpower needed for the army, industry, agriculture and transport. Meanwhile, the whole economy was increasingly dependent on loans from the United States and thus the goodwill of the American government and financial sector. Some senior politicians came to believe victory was impossible and Lord Lansdowne circulated a memorandum, calling for a compromise peace, which the Cabinet discussed on 22 November 1916.<sup>31</sup> The Cabinet rejected the idea as impractical and an admission of defeat. But it made Asquith increasingly vulnerable to the accusation that he was not providing the leadership needed to inspire the nation and

crush the need for such discussions. The Conservative backbenches and press were awash with this sort of criticism by the autumn of 1916, and plans began to circulate about the need for a small War Cabinet to take over the direction of the war. But the Conservative leaders could not act on this kind of criticism. If they threatened resignation it would look like desertion in wartime, and, as the minority party, they could not hope to replace Asquith with a Conservative. If he was to be toppled it had to be by a member of his own party, and the only person who was both prominent enough to attempt this and acceptable to the Conservatives was Lloyd George.

In late 1916 Lloyd George was increasingly amenable to some sort of reconstruction of the government, in particular one that might exclude his enemies like McKenna from the centre of power. He may also have been worried that his move from the Ministry of Munitions to Secretary of State for War in July 1916 had not been a success. Lloyd George had to take some responsibility for the failure of the Somme offensive, and he had been unable to politically outmanoeuvre the generals, such as Sir William Robertson and Sir Douglas Haig.<sup>32</sup> Lloyd George may have felt the need to reassert his role in the conduct of the war and his standing in the Cabinet. In November 1916 he started to turn increasingly to the idea of a War Cabinet that would direct strategy. In Lloyd George's version, Asquith would be excluded from this body (as would McKenna), but would remain as prime minister and leader of the Liberal Party. Lloyd George's key ally was Bonar Law, who was equally keen to reconstruct the government, if only to show his backbenchers and the Conservative press that something was being done to try and turn around the dire strategic situation.<sup>33</sup>

The fatal step in ending the coalition of 1915–1916 was taken on 1 December 1916, when Lloyd George met Asquith, put the War Cabinet plan to him, and suggested he would resign if the proposal was not accepted.<sup>34</sup> Initially, Asquith was cautious and seemed to be willing to negotiate around the proposal. But then he backtracked.<sup>35</sup> Possibly he came to believe that Lloyd George did not have the support of the

Conservative leaders and that he could ride out Lloyd George's resignation, as he had withstood so many political storms. This was a fatal mistake, as Lloyd George's resignation was swiftly followed by indications that he, not Asquith, had the support of the Conservative leaders. As a last throw of the dice, Asquith dissolved his own government by resigning himself on 5 December, challenging his critics to see if they could put together an administration. This too was a miscalculation. George V asked Bonar Law to see if he could form a government as leader of the next biggest party in the Commons. He swiftly concluded this was impossible and the baton passed to Lloyd George. In a few days he put together a new coalition of the Conservatives, Labour and some Liberal supporters (though none from the previous Cabinet). The coalition of 1915–1916 was dead.

This outcome was not inevitable even after the December crisis began – after all Lloyd George had not planned to replace Asquith as prime minister. But it was a reformulation of politics that was determined by the peculiar political circumstances of 1915–1916, which had brought the Liberals and Conservatives together in coalition. Its impact on the Liberal Party was catastrophic. The party was cut in two from top to bottom and one section of it was in alliance with the Conservatives – a disaster it had sedulously avoided since the split with the Liberal Unionists in 1886. In 1918 the Liberals would suffer an electoral catastrophe even greater than that of 1886, when Asquith's followers were annihilated, while Lloyd George's emerged as prisoners of the Conservatives. The end of the 1915–1916 coalition also put a full stop to the 'progressive alliance' with the infant Labour Party. Henderson had functioned more or less as part of the Liberal group in the 1915–1916 Cabinet, but in December 1916 he refused to act with Asquith and his ministers and Labour took on an enhanced role in Lloyd George's new coalition government.<sup>36</sup> This development helped ensure that there would be an independent successor waiting in the wings once the Liberal Party suffered electoral disaster in 1918, rather than a friendly ally.

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But if the 1915–1916 coalition paved the way for a set of disasters for the Liberal Party, it also slaughtered a number of Liberal sacred cows. In addition to enacting conscription the famous ‘McKenna duties’ were included in the September 1915 budget, imposing exceptionally high duties on various luxury imports, including motor cars.<sup>37</sup> Their intention was obviously protectionist and no pretence could be maintained that free trade had survived in wartime. The coalition also failed to enact some crucial Liberal policies, especially Irish home rule. After the Easter Rising of April 1916 the Liberals within the government insisted there should be a concerted attempt to keep Irish Nationalist opinion behind the war effort by trying to reach an agreed settlement on home rule. Lloyd George took on a central role in the negotiations and suggested that the Home Rule Bill, enacted but suspended in September 1914, might be implemented immediately, but not in the six counties of Northern Ireland. Necessarily, there was some ambiguity about whether this exclusion would be temporary or permanent. But this eminently Liberal policy was undermined by the Conservatives in the Cabinet who disliked any notion of home rule. By insisting on clarification of the future status of Northern Ireland they killed the scheme and the last chance of implementing Gladstone’s home rule policy.<sup>38</sup>

So – one verdict on the coalition might be that not only did it lead to disaster for the Liberals, it was not even very successful in protecting Liberalism. But from a wider perspective, does it deserve its reputation of lack of competence in pursuing the war effort? Here, the coalition’s reputation has started to rise, if only because it has become increasingly clear that the distinction between the coalition and its successor of 1916–1918 has been overdrawn. The new War Cabinet of five that Lloyd George set up to conduct the war gradually grew larger as more and more ministers and soldiers attended and it soon found itself just as clogged with details as Asquith’s old Cabinet.<sup>39</sup> On crucial issues like food distribution Lloyd George’s new Cabinet stumbled gradually towards price

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controls and rationing in 1918, desperately engaging in crisis management, only gradually accepting radical new forms of state intervention and constrained all the time by party bickering and sectional interests.<sup>40</sup> In other words, it behaved much as Asquith’s government had done. Behind the rhetoric there was a great deal of continuity and, if Lloyd George’s regime took a more active role in organising the economy, it was in the winter of 1917–1918, under the impact of a series of crises, rather than as a result of any new vision.

With a great deal of hindsight it is possible to take a more balanced view of the 1915–1916 coalition. Its birth had been inauspicious. Neither Conservative nor Liberal MPs or activists had wanted it and its real author, Asquith, hoped to use the Conservatives as a sort of human shield for the Liberals, or at least make them share the blame for the government’s inability to win the war. This was a scheme of some ingenuity, probably conceived on the spur of the moment. But, ingenious as it was, it could only produce political stability if the government could actually start to produce military success. Without this crucial factor, the call for new men and new measures would not go away, and in December 1916 it destroyed the coalition and ultimately the Edwardian Liberal Party.

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- 1 This approach goes all the way back to Lord Beaverbrook, *Politicians and the War, 1914–1916* (Thornton Butterworth, 1928). For a later example, from a Lloyd Georgian perspective, R. J. Q. Adams, *Arms and the Wizard: Lloyd George and the Ministry of Munitions, 1915–16* (Cassell, 1978).
- 2 These matters are dealt with succinctly in K. M. Wilson, ‘Great Britain’ in K. M. Wilson (ed.), *Decisions for War, 1914* (Routledge, 2003), pp. 175–208.
- 3 For these MPs see Bodleian Library, Oxford, Denman Papers, 4 (3), Minute Book 1914–1915.
- 4 Birmingham University Library, Austen Chamberlain papers 14/2/2,

- Chamberlain memorandum, 1–5 August 1914.
- 5 D. Marquand, *Ramsay MacDonald*, (2<sup>nd</sup> edn., Richard Cohen Books, 1997), pp. 164–85; A. Jackson, *Home Rule: an Irish History, 1800–2000* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2003), pp. 142–48.
- 6 J. Pollock, *Kitchener* (Robinson, 2002), pp. 371–74.
- 7 The terms of this debate are set out in D. French, *British Economic and Strategic Planning 1905–1915* (George Allen & Unwin, 1982), esp. pp. 98–123.
- 8 I. Packer, *Liberal Government and Politics, 1905–15* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. 142–56.
- 9 For McKenna see M. Farr, *Reginald McKenna: Financier among Statesmen, 1863–1916* (Routledge, 2007).
- 10 The military and strategic background to these events is dealt with in D. French, *British Strategy and War Aims, 1914–1916* (Allen & Unwin, 1986), pp. 78–99. The classic account of the political struggle in May 1915 remains M. Pugh, ‘Asquith, Bonar Law and the First Coalition’, *Historical Journal*, 17 (1974), pp. 813–36.
- 11 D. Sommer, *Haldane of Cloan: His Life and Times* (George Allen & Unwin, 1960), pp. 317–22, 384.
- 12 Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Eng. c.6990, Margot Asquith papers, H. H. to Margot Asquith, 25 Feb. 1909.
- 13 R. J. Q. Adams, *Bonar Law* (John Murray, 1999), pp. 184–86 summarises virtually all that is known of these events.
- 14 Austen Chamberlain to Bonar Law, 17 May 1915, in Sir Charles Petrie, *The Life and Times of the Rt Hon Sir Austen Chamberlain*, 2 vols. (Cassell, 1939–40), vol. ii, pp. 50–1.
- 15 C. Wrigley, *Arthur Henderson* (GPC Books, 1990), pp. 89–90; Jackson, *Home Rule*, pp. 148–50.
- 16 From a Liberal point of view Haldane, Samuel, Montagu, Pease, Emmott, Lucas, Hobhouse and Beauchamp all lost their places in the Cabinet to make room for the new arrivals, though the Conservatives had only specifically insisted that Haldane be sacked.
- 17 Addison’s Diary, 19 May 1915 in C. Addison, *Four and a Half Years*, 2 vols. (Hutchinson, 1934), vol. i, p. 80.
- 18 Churchill was demoted to Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster in the coalition government and resigned altogether in November 1915.
- 19 Rufus Isaacs had resigned from the Cabinet in 1913 and Masterman in February 1915.
- 20 S. Koss, *The Rise and Fall of the Political Press in Britain* (Fontana, 1990), pp. 716–17.
- 21 Adams, *Arms and the Wizard*.
- 22 Lloyd George, *War Memoirs*, 2 vols. (Odhams, 1938), vol. i, p. 388.
- 23 The conscription debate is dealt with in R. J. Q. Adams and P. Poirier, *The Conscription Controversy in Great Britain, 1900–1918* (Macmillan, 1987), pp. 89–110.

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- 17 See HM Treasury, *Budget 2010* (London: The Stationery Office, June 2010), p. 89.
- 18 Middleton, 'British monetary and fiscal policy', p. 431; Robert Skidelsky, *Politicians and the Slump: The Labour Government of 1929–1931* (London: Macmillan, 1967), p. 379.
- 19 Andrew Thorpe, *The British General Election of 1931* (Oxford: OUP, 1991), pp. 220–1.
- 20 Hansard, H.C. Deb., fifth series, 257, 28 Sept. 1931, cols. 83–7, at col. 84.
- 21 *News Chronicle*, 1 and 22 Aug. 1931; Trinity College Library, Cambridge, Layton papers 101/4, Sir Walter Layton to Philip Snowden (copy), 11 Aug. 1931.
- 22 A group of Liberal activists and economists led by Norman Crump and E. A. Lessing attempted to revive the national treaty idea in September 1931, as a means of staving off an election fought on the tariff issue: see National Archives of Scotland, Edinburgh, Lothian papers, GD40/17/144/57–67, 'Liberalism and the Crisis of the £', undated but probably 16 Sept. 1931.
- 23 *News Chronicle*, 3 Sept. 1931; Williamson, *National Crisis*, p. 424.
- 24 British Library, Reading private papers (Eur. F118), 112–7, Lord Lothian to Sir Herbert Samuel, 25 Aug. 1931.
- 25 Williamson, *National Crisis*, p. 364–5.
- 26 Samuel papers, A/77/12, David Lloyd George to Sir Herbert Samuel, 25 Aug. 1931.
- 27 Lothian papers, GD40/17/143/12, Samuel to Lothian, 21 Aug. 1931, and GD40/17/143/26–28, Lothian to Samuel (copy), 31 Aug. 1931; Churchill Archives Centre, Cambridge, Thurso papers, III 3/5, Philip Oliver to Sir Archibald Sinclair, 27 Aug. 1931.
- 28 Manchester City Archives, Ernest Simon papers, M11/11/5, Diary, 1929–35, entry for 21 Sept. 1931.
- 29 David Marquand, '1924–1932', in David Butler (ed.), *Coalitions in British Politics* (London: Macmillan, 1978), p. 61.
- 30 Williamson, *National Crisis*, pp. 249–50.
- 31 Bodleian Library, Oxford, MSS. Simon, 249 fos. 45–6, Note by Sir John Simon, 1 Dec. 1930. For the continued attachment to free trade of most of Lloyd George's critics, see Thurso papers, THRS I, Sir Archibald Sinclair to C. E. Taylor (copy), 26 May 1931, and *Huddersfield Daily Examiner*, 29 June 1931.
- 32 MSS. Simon, 249 fos. 5–8, memorandum by Sir John Simon at meeting of leading Liberals, 20 Nov. 1930.
- 33 Thurso papers, THRS III 3/5, Sir Herbert Samuel to Sir Archibald Sinclair, 18 Aug. 1931. Maclean had led the independent Liberal opposition to the Lloyd George Coalition in 1919–20, following Asquith's defeat at East Fife; a solicitor by profession, he had become a company director when out of parliament in the 1920s. See Philip Williamson, 'Maclean, Sir Donald (1864–1932)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: OUP, 2004; online edition, Jan. 2008).
- 34 *The Times*, 13 Aug. 1931.
- 35 Thurso papers, THRS III 3/5, Sir Archibald Sinclair to Sir Herbert Samuel (copy), 14 Aug. 1931.
- 36 Bodleian Library, Maclean papers (dep. c. 468), 121–2, Sir Donald Maclean to Lady Maclean, 24 Aug. 1931, and 127, Sir Donald Maclean to his family, 24 Aug. 1931.
- 37 For MacDonald's attempt to persuade the Liberals to accept a smaller cuts package than the Conservatives demanded, see Williamson, *National Crisis*, p. 325.
- 38 Bernard Wasserstein, *Herbert Samuel: A Political Life* (Oxford: OUP, 1992), p. 312. For Samuel's support for public works programmes after 1932, see Hansard, H.C. Deb., fifth series, 274, 16 Feb. 1933, cols. 1242–56.
- 39 Maclean papers (dep. c. 468), 143–6, Walter Runciman to Sir Donald Maclean, 25 Aug. 1931; *Manchester Guardian*, 29 Aug. 1931.
- 40 Williamson, *National Crisis*, p. 354.
- 41 Reading private papers (Eur. F118), 131–3, memorandum by Lord Reading on meeting with David Lloyd George, 11 Sept. 1931; Wasserstein, *Herbert Samuel*, pp. 320–1.
- 42 Williamson, *National Crisis*, pp. 394–7, 413, 433–6.
- 43 MSS. Simon, 68 fo. 163, Sir John Simon to Ramsay MacDonald (copy), 5 Oct. 1931.
- 44 Peter Clarke, *The Keynesian Revolution in the Making, 1924–1936* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 95, 99.
- 45 Wasserstein, *Herbert Samuel*, p. 312; Duncan Tanner, 'The strange death of Liberal England', *Historical Journal*, 37 (1994), p. 975. A similar argument appears in Ross McKibbin, *Parties and People: England 1914–1951* (Oxford: OUP, 2010), pp. 66–7.
- 46 *The Times*, 28 March and 11 April 1929. The distinction between the pledge and the policy was coined by Maclean.
- 47 Lothian papers, GD40/17/140/456–8, 'The Views of Mr. J. M. Keynes', memorandum by G. C. Allen, undated but summer 1930.
- 48 Lothian papers, GD40/17/134/88–116, memorandum by Lothian on the unemployment problem, 10 June 1930.
- 49 Skidelsky, *Politicians and the Slump*, pp. 220–7; G. C. Allen, 'Economic Advice for Lloyd George', in G. C. Allen, *British Industry and Economic Policy* (London: Macmillan, 1979), pp. 196–207. Skidelsky understates the centrality of the proposed reduction in current government spending to the Liberals' new policy.
- 50 Compare Sir Herbert Samuel's speech in the debate on the National Economy Bill, Hansard, H.C. Deb., fifth series, 256, 14 Sept. 1931, cols. 537–54, with Vince Cable, 'Keynes would be on our side', *New Statesman*, 12 Jan. 2011, available online at <http://www.newstatesman.com/economy/2011/01/investment-keynes-essay>.
- 51 Samuel papers, A/77/7, 'Course of Events', Maclean papers (dep. c. 468), 116, Sir Donald Maclean to Lady Maclean, 18 Aug. 1931.
- 52 Samuel papers, A/77/7, 'Course of Events'. Lothian urged Samuel to emphasise this argument in public: Lothian papers, GD40/17/143/37–8, Lord Lothian to Sir Herbert Samuel (copy), 7 Sept. 1931.
- 53 Samuel papers, A/77/1, 'The Budgetary Situation', memorandum by Sir Herbert Samuel, 3 Aug. 1931, and A/77/7, 'Course of Events'.
- 54 These issues are explored in David Dutton's article.
- 55 Ernest Simon papers, M11/16/32, Ernest Simon to Ramsay Muir (copy), 2 Feb. 1934.
- 56 For an example of teachers' disaffection with the Liberals, see Parliamentary Archives, David Lloyd George papers, G/33/3/74, Haydn Jones to David Lloyd George, 12 Oct. 1932. Jones sat on the executive committee of the National Association of Schoolmasters.
- 57 On London, see Sir Percy Harris, *Forty Years In and Out of Parliament* (London: Andrew Melrose, 1947), p. 90, and *Manchester Guardian*, 6 March 1934; on Darwen, see Wasserstein, *Herbert Samuel*, pp. 370–1. A useful overview of local election trends in the 1930s appears in Chris Cook, 'Liberals, Labour and Local Elections', in Gillian Peele and Chris Cook (eds.), *The Politics of Reappraisal, 1918–1939* (London: Macmillan, 1975).
- 58 Middleton, 'British monetary and fiscal policy', pp. 436–8.

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- 24 Lloyd George's 'Preface' to his collected wartime speeches, *Through Terror to Triumph* (Hodder and Stoughton, 1915), published on 13 Sept. 1915.
- 25 M. Johnson, 'The Liberal War Committee and the Liberal Advocacy of Conscription in Britain, 1914–1916', *Historical Journal*, 51 (2008), pp. 399–420.
- 26 Thirty-four Liberal MPs voted against the first reading of the National Service Bill in January 1916.
- 27 J. Turner, *British Politics and the Great War: Coalition and Conflict, 1915–1918* (Yale University Press, 1992), pp. 64–90.
- 28 F. Stevenson Diary, 18 April 1916, in A. J. P. Taylor (ed.), *Lloyd George: a Diary by Frances Stevenson* (Hutchinson, 1971), p. 107.
- 29 *Ibid.*, 12 Oct. 1915, *Lloyd George: a Diary*, p. 68.
- 30 French, *British Strategy and War Aims*, pp. 220–43.
- 31 National Archives, Cabinet papers 37/159/32, Lord Lansdowne, 'Terms on which a Peace might be considered', 13 Nov. 1916.
- 32 Lloyd George's fraught relations with the army are explored in D. R. Woodward, *Lloyd George and the Generals* (Associated University Press, 1983).
- 33 Adams, *Bonar Law*, pp. 220–9.
- 34 House of Lords Record Office, Bonar Law papers 53/4/27, Asquith to Lloyd George, 1 Dec. 1916 (copy).
- 35 The literature on the December 1916 crisis is enormous. See in particular, M. Fry, 'Political Change in Britain, August 1914 to December 1916: Lloyd George replaces Asquith: the Issues Underlying the Drama', *Historical Journal*, 31 (1980), pp. 609–27; J. M. McEwen, 'The Struggle for Mastery in Britain: Lloyd George versus Asquith, December 1916', *Journal of British Studies*, 18 (1978), pp. 131–56.
- 36 Wrigley, *Henderson*, pp. 107–11.
- 37 French, *British Strategy and War Aims*, pp. 124–6.
- 38 Jackson, *Home Rule*, pp. 152–74.
- 39 J. Turner, 'Cabinets, Committees and Secretariats' in K. Burk (ed.), *War and the State: the Transformation of British Government, 1914–19* (Allen & Unwin, 1982), pp. 57–83.
- 40 J. Harris, 'Bureaucrats and Businessmen in British Food Control, 1916–19' in Burk (ed.), *War and the State*, pp. 135–56.