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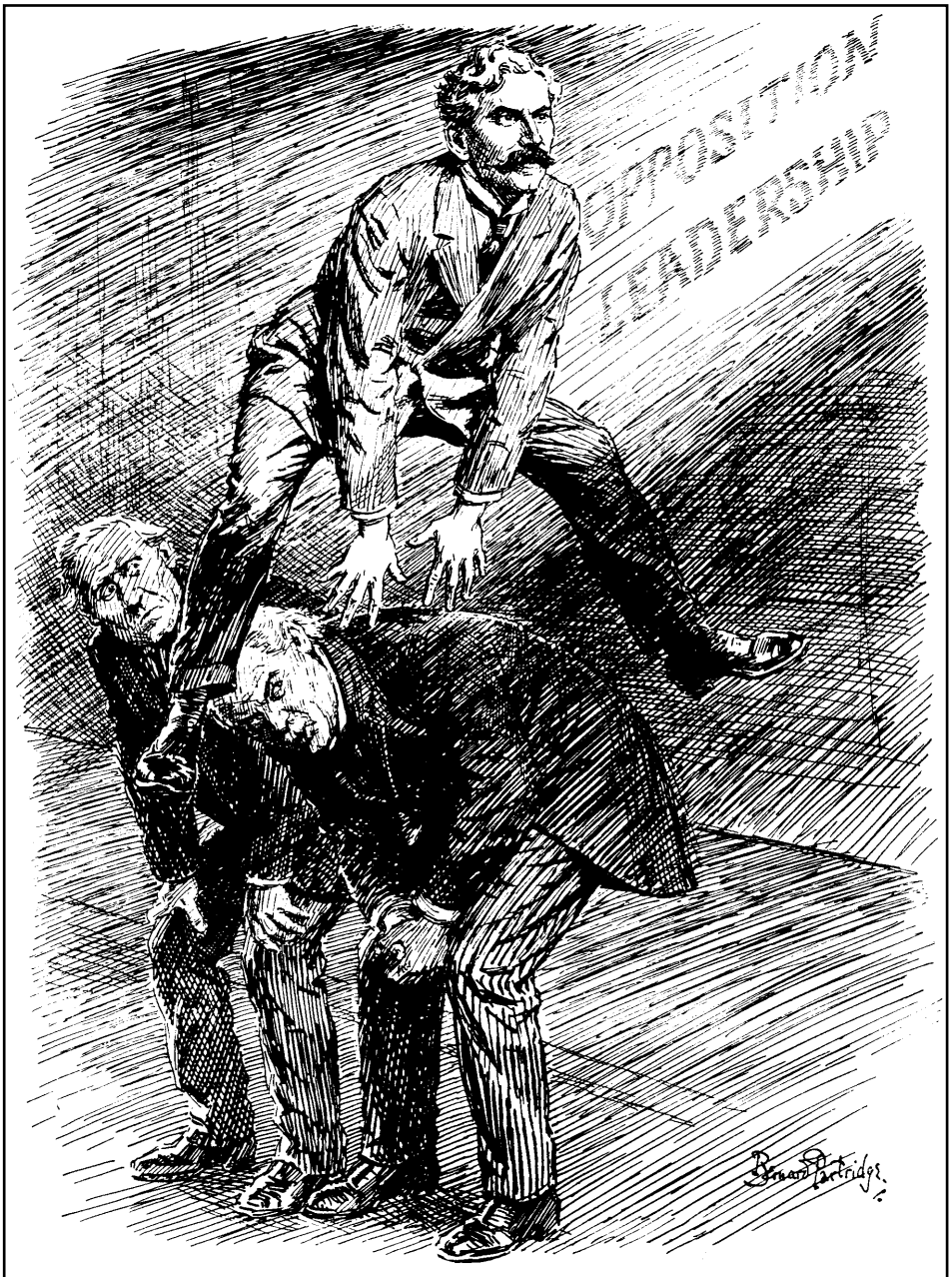
LIBERALS WHO JOINE

From 1914 to 1931, many of those previously active in Liberal politics defected to Labour. Why did so many Liberals switch their political allegiance ('almost like changing one's religion', as one Liberal MP observed) and abandon their party, which had been in office, or coalition government, from 1906 to 1922, to enlist with the fledgling Labour Party? And how far, if at all, did their presence influence Labour's development during a key period of political realignment in British politics? **Professor John Shepherd** examines the history.



INTO THE LIMELIGHT.

THE LIBERAL PARTY D LABOUR, 1914–1931

On 13 December 1923 the former Liberal imperialist, Secretary of State for War and Lord Chancellor, Lord Haldane, wrote his daily letter as usual from London to his ninety-nine-year-old mother, Mary, in Scotland about his negotiations with Ramsay MacDonald. The Labour leader was about to form Britain's first Labour government. 'In the evening he offered me anything I chose if I would help him; the leadership of the House of Lords, the Chancellorship, Defence, Education and the carrying out of my plans … the press is in full cry and Williams [Haldane's butler] is keeping them off'.[1] In January 1924, Haldane became Lord Chancellor rather than the former Conservative and King's Bench judge John Sankey, MacDonald's original choice. Haldane told his mother and sister that MacDonald 'has consulted me about every appointment'.[2]

Haldane's triumphant tone revealed he firmly believed that meetings he had held with MacDonald in London and Scotland had greatly influenced the Labour leader. From India a reassured Viceroy, Lord Lytton, wrote to Haldane: 'I think I can trace your hand in most of the appointments'.[3] MacDonald had seemingly not sought advice from senior Labour figures such as Arthur Henderson, J. R. Clynes (both – unlike MacDonald – with ministerial experience in the wartime government) or Philip Snowden. Nor did he heed the advice of the Fabian Sidney Webb, who had inundated MacDonald with written guidance about taking office.[4]

The announcement of the new administration, which included ex-Liberals and Conservatives alongside figures from the trade union and labour movement, attracted considerable attention abroad as well as in domestic politics. [5] However, it was MacDonald who was primarily responsible for bringing in 'specialised outsiders' to appeal to the middle-class as well as traditional working-class voters of Britain.[6] As well as Haldane, among those now rewarded with Cabinet office were former Liberals Charles Trevelyan (Education), Josiah Wedgwood (Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster), Noel Buxton (Agriculture and Fisheries), and also ex-Conservative recruits, Lord Parmoor (Lord President), Lord Thomson (Air) and, most surprisingly, the former Viceroy of India, Lord Chelmsford (Admiralty). Other non-Cabinet posts were also filled by ex-Liberals, such as Sir Patrick Hastings (Attorney General), and Arthur Ponsonby (who returned to the Foreign Office as MacDonald's deputy).

From 1914 to 1931, many previously active in Liberal politics (or with strong Liberal associations) defected to Labour in broadly three clusters: the first during 1914–1918, followed by another contingent from 1919 to 1925, and then the last who joined from the mid-1920s to the early 1930s.[7] According to Andrew MacCullum Scott, Liberal MP for Glasgow Bridgeton (1910–22), who joined Labour in 1924, 'changing one's political party is almost like changing one's religion'. As he also shrewdly observed, the process of conversion *en masse* was a rare event.[8] Nonetheless, he was now witnessing a mass movement of this kind in the world of twentieth-century politics. Why did so many Liberals switch political allegiance and abandon their party, which had been in office, or coalition government, from 1906 to 1922, to enlist with the new fledgling Labour Party? And how far, if at all, did their presence influence Labour's development during an important period of political realignment in British politics?

Probably around three hundred MPs of all parties changed their political affiliation during the last century.[9] Individual politicians switching political connections between the Liberal and Labour parties have been part of the warp and weft of twentieth-century British politics. In early twentieth-century Britain, the years between 1914 and 1931 were arguably the most significant in terms of movements between parties.[10] Over forty years ago, before many collections of politicians' private papers became open, Professor Catherine Cline published a pioneering study based on seventy prominent recruits who had joined Labour in the early twentieth century, the vast majority of whom were former Liberals, mainly from the progressive wing of the party. Included were politicians such as Lord Haldane,

'Into the Limelight', *Punch*, 29 November 1922: in the 1922 election, Labour under Ramsay Macdonald beat the Liberal factions led by Asquith and Lloyd George to become the leading party of the left.

Charles Trevelyan, Arthur Ponsonby, Christopher Addison, Noel Buxton and Charles Roden Buxton, as well as the financier Sir Leo Chiozza Money and John A. Hobson, the influential economist.[11] Only three women featured among her recruits to Labour: Mary (Molly) Hamilton, Dorothy Buxton and Helena Swanwick.[12] More recently, two historians have thrown valuable light on this intriguing subject. Martin Pugh's account of recruits from upper-class Conservative backgrounds, such as Sir Oswald Mosley, Oliver Baldwin (son of Stanley Baldwin), Lady Warwick and Muriel, Countess De Warr, reveals the extent of their influence within Labour politics. [13] David Howell's study of the development of the British Labour Party during MacDonald's leadership demonstrates how progressive politicians from other parties formed a significant part of Labour's multi-identities in the interwar years.[14] According to Robert Dowse, in all probability more than two thousand Liberals active in national and municipal politics shifted to Labour at this time, although he gives no evidence as to how this figure was arrived at.[15] Interestingly, undertaken some fifty years ago, Dowse's research into the paths former Liberals followed into the Labour Party between 1910 and 1920 had a secondary purpose of shedding light on the possibility of a major Liberal–Labour realignment during the first main post-war Liberal revival under Jo Grimond's leadership in the late 1950s and early 1960s.[16]

Why politicians change parties can be a fascinating and intricate question involving political convictions, motivation and ideology – not without their difficulties in analysis for historians, political scientists and psephologists. Forty years ago, in plotting changes of allegiance by MPs, David Butler and Jennie Freeman noted the labyrinthine complexities of 'compiling an exact and comprehensive list of all floor-crossings, whip withdrawals, whip resignations and whip restorations'. For example, the parliaments of 1919–1922 and 1924–1929, during which there were some significant Liberal defections, presented them with a near-impossible task in deciphering politicians' manoeuvrings between different coalition and non-coalition factions.[17]

Since the 1960s, a considerable amount of ink has been expended by historians debating the 'decline of Liberalism and the rise of Labour'.[18] The impact of the First World War on British politics and society was crucially significant in the growth of the Labour Party and the decline and even eventual destruction of the Liberal Party. Over forty years on, Trevor Wilson's powerful and enduring metaphor about the Liberal Party, which likened its downfall to the fate of a healthy pedestrian mowed down by a runaway omnibus, still seems apposite.[19]

The Liberal government's participation in the First World War, its lack of clear war aims and, in particular, the failure of Sir Edward Grey as Foreign Secretary to declare the nature and extent of the British military undertakings with France were certainly decisive factors in the growing disenchantment among radical Liberals. At the outbreak of hostilities, not just Charles Trevelyan, parliamentary under-secretary at the Board of Education, but also Cabinet ministers John Burns and John Morley all resigned from Asquith's government. Unprecedented total war compelled the Asquith and Lloyd George wartime premierships to implement illiberal policies undreamt of by British Liberals. The Defence of the Realm Act (DORA) hastily enacted in August 1914 and later renewed, was followed by restrictions on personal liberties including press censorship, identity cards, food rationing and other state controls. In particular, the principles and values of British Liberalism were challenged fundamentally by the heated debates in 1915 and 1916 over the introduction of conscription for males aged 18–41. In particular, conscription created a crisis in wartime coalition government that divided the Asquith Cabinet and brought continued acrimony and deep rifts within the Liberal ranks. In the end, John Simon, the Home Secretary, resigned and around fifty Liberal MPs voted against the Military Service Act. Remarkably, H. B. Lees-Smith, Liberal MP for Northampton 1910–18 and later Labour President of the Board of Education in 1931, returned to parliament from serving as a private on the Western Front to oppose the measure.[20]

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Even more crucial to declining Liberal fortunes were the deep divisions created by Lloyd George's ousting of Asquith to take over the wartime premiership in 1916, which brought about a fatal rupture in British Liberalism and demoralised Liberals in the constituencies. As the party haemorrhaged parliamentary and municipal membership to Labour or the Conservatives, for many disaffected Liberals Lloyd George bore the overwhelming responsibility for the permanent split in their party.[21] It was a charge that stuck to him, as many Liberals remained increasingly distrustful of the 'Welsh Wizard', even during his long exclusion from power after 1922. In 1918 the parliamentary confrontation between Asquith and Lloyd George during the Maurice Debate about British troop levels on the Western Front had demonstrated clear Liberal divisions at Westminster. The 'Coupon Election', in which 130 coalition Liberals supporting Lloyd George were returned to Westminster compared to only twenty-eight independent Liberals under Asquith, emphasised this critical rupture within the party, now divided into two bellicose factions.

Despite brief periods of Liberal unity in 1923 and 1929, Liberalism remained fatally wounded during the post-war years in contrast to the remarkable growth of the Labour Party at parliamentary and municipal levels. During the early post-war years, the Liberal leadership's post-war foreign and imperial policy and its attitude to the punitive Treaty of Versailles was instrumental in driving Liberals into the Labour ranks.[22] The reputation of the Lloyd George coalition government suffered irreparable damage as a result of the intervention in Bolshevik Russia, the Chanak Crisis that almost brought war with Turkey and, particularly, the 1919 Amritsar Massacre in India and the ruthless policy of using the 'Black and Tans' in Ireland.[23] In contrast, Labour increasingly took over the Liberal mantle of radicalism

in domestic, foreign and imperial affairs. By 1922, as Labour outstripped the Liberals to become the official parliamentary opposition with 142 members in the Commons, the Liberals totalled only 116 MPs divided between fifty-four Asquithian 'Wee Frees' and the sixty-two Liberals led by Lloyd George.[24]

During the First World War, various networks in the British 'peace movement' provided the bridges, usually via the pacifist Independent Labour Party, for disenchanted Liberals to join, or move closer to, the Labour Party. Among the different anti-war groups which sprang up during these years, the Union of Democratic Control (UDC) was the most prominent, alongside the No-Conscription Fellowship (NCF), the Bryce Group and the League of Nations Society. Each had their specific orientation in opposing the war, but shared overlapping memberships and sympathisers among dissident Liberals, pacifist ILP members and anti-war radicals. The NCF, founded in November 1914 by Fenner Brockway, opposed the introduction of compulsory military service in 1916 (the occasion of Sir John Simon's resignation as Liberal Home Secretary) and was the main organisation to aid conscientious objectors and their families. The influential Cambridge don, Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson, was prominent in the Bryce Group and was highly active in the Society for the League of Nations in planning schemes for a post-war international peace organisation. Many of the Liberals from these peace groups met socially with members of the ILP and others Labourites (including those who had previously supported the war) at the 1917 Club. Founded by J. A. Hobson, and taking its name from the date of the Russian Revolution, the club provided an important forum for those opposed to the war.[25]

The day after the outbreak of war, the Union of Democratic Control was founded by Norman Angell, E. D. Morel, Ramsay MacDonald and Charles Trevelyan, with its London headquarters in Trevelyan's house at 14 Great College Street. They were soon joined by Arthur Ponsonby, another critic of Britain's participation in a European conflict.[26] The UDC was not another 'stop the war' group, but a highly significant pressure group for peace. There was no unique UDC stance on the war, but the organisation became a significant sounding board for different viewpoints among dissenting radicals, Liberals and Labourites. It campaigned for a just and peaceful post-war settlement under which no territory should be transferred without a plebiscite, and for foreign policy to be under parliamentary control. However, members of the UDC experienced a hostile public reception during wartime, which brought Liberal members closer to the ILP and the Labour Party. *The Labour Memorandum on War Aims*, published in December 1917, demonstrated how close the Labour Party's proposals were to the work of the different groups in the British peace movement.[27] In addition, in the post-war years, as Labour's pro-war and anti-war factions reconciled, UDC condemnation of the punitive Versailles peace treaty and of the French occupation to enforce reparations occupied common ground with Labour's foreign policy. In 1924 the UDC could claim that fifteen of its members – including former Liberals – were in Ramsay MacDonald's first Labour government.[28]

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However, the cause of this significant political realignment, as mainly middle-class and upper-class politicians broke away from their party to join Labour, with its strong trade union sectional interest, remains a complex question. An examination of the individual biographies of a number of the former Liberals who held office in Ramsay MacDonald's minority governments in the inter-war years shows differing and sometimes convoluted reasons for switching to Labour. Whether they were Asquith or Lloyd George supporters – or neither – their motivations were wide ranging and not always simply due to distaste for the Liberal leadership's conduct of the war or to 'pacifist principles'.[29] Percy Alden, Bertrand Russell and Sydney Arnold were undoubtedly prominent pacifists. The Welsh nationalist, E. T. John, voted against conscription and was President of the Peace Society from 1924 to 1928. However, a number of those soon to abandon their party – including Ernest N. Bennett, Albert Dunn, James Chuter Ede, John Hay and H. B. Lees Smith – fought with distinction in the First World War. Ede was from a staunch Liberal nonconformist background and a career in teaching and Edwardian municipal politics. While on army service he switched to Labour as the party to secure social reform for working people.

A stalwart of the UDC, Richard Denman, Liberal MP 1910–18 for Carlisle, opposed British intervention in 1914, which cost him the support of his local Liberal party. Yet, he served as a second lieutenant on the Western Front and sent home graphic accounts of wartime gas attacks. [30] In 1918 Denman supported the Lloyd George coalition, but denounced the Versailles Treaty in 1919 and eventually joined Labour in 1924.[31]Three well-known Liberal recruits to Labour from different political backgrounds – Josiah Wedgwood, Cecil L'Estrange Malone and J. K. Kenworthy – became famous for their combined parliamentary opposition to British military intervention in Russia. What they shared in common was notable war service.[32] Charles Roden Buxton's activities in the UDC and his advocacy of a negotiated peace settlement and a future League of Nations led to a breach with the Liberals in his new constituency of Central Hackney. In 1917 he joined the ILP and built up strong friendships with socialists such Clifford Allen and Fenner Brockway.[33] However, both the well-travelled Charles Buxton and his brother, Noel, were experts on the Balkans. Remarkably, as unofficial envoys they had attempted to enlist Bulgaria on the side of the Allies in 1914.[34]

Another leading pacifist member of the UDC, Arthur Ponsonby, former principal private secretary to the Liberal prime minister, Campbell Bannerman, and his successor as the Liberal MP for Stirling Burghs from 1908, was a prominent critic of Sir Edward Grey's foreign policy. In the parliamentary debate of 3 August

1914, he was among the five members who spoke out against the war. However, early signs of his move away from Liberalism and towards socialism were apparent in his critical writings on the ethics of wealth and social class, such as *The Camel and the Needle's Eye* (1910) and *The Decline of the Aristocracy* (1912). A former royal page to Queen Victoria, he was soon dropped from King George V's guest list for the monarch's garden party. However, Ponsonby did not join the ILP, the main route into the Labour Party, until after the 1918 election. His constituency association had disowned him on account of his opposition to the war. In the 'Coupon Election' he was heavily defeated at Dunfermline as an Independent Democrat.[35]

A career politician, Charles Trevelyan was Liberal MP for the Elland Division of Yorkshire from 1899 to 1918. In 1914, he had resigned as Parliamentary Secretary in the Board of Education from Asquith's Liberal government at the same time as Cabinet colleagues, John Morley and John Burns in protest against British participation in the war. However Trevelyan, who loathed war, was no pacifist and had voted for the Liberal government's naval programme of dreadnought battleships. He was one of a small group of Liberals who distrusted Grey's reasons for British intervention in the war.[36] In parliament he became the UDC's leading figure. His carefully considered resignation, as war was declared, caused a deep rift with most of his family and brought down the wrath of a jingoist press on his head. Disowned by his Elland constituency, in the 1918 election as an Independent he suffered a devastating defeat to finish bottom of the poll.[37]

In 1921 Trevelyan published *From Liberalism to Labour* to explain to a wider public the daunting changes in British politics that underpinned his decision to sever links with the Liberals and throw in his lot with Labour. As he put it, 'the wholesale transference of the working-class vote from Liberalism to Labour' spelt the end of his Liberal Party. Only Labour offered the real possibility of social reform, the nationalisation of land, railways and mines, a wealth tax, and the free provision of secondary and university education in which he believed. He concluded: 'the only hope for our generation lies in a powerful and intelligently led Labour Party'.[38] In 1919, similar sentiments that the days of the Liberals were over as a political force in Britain were uttered by H. B. Lees-Smith when publicly rejecting Asquith's call for radicals to remain in the Liberal fold. In near-visionary terms the Liberal MP for Northampton from 1910 to 1918, who joined Labour in 1919, proclaimed 'we are standing on the threshold of a new world order' and envisaged the 'establishment of a co-operative commonwealth' to eradicate 'gross inequalities of wealth'. Moreover, in his view, the harsh Versailles Treaty inflicted upon Germany threatened another cataclysmic international conflict that only the election of labour and socialist governments throughout Europe could prevent. 'All the men who share these views', he declared, 'are in the ranks of Labour'.[39]

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Occupying the centre of the British politics, a Liberal Party in difficulties was vulnerable to losing members to the other parties on the left and the right. An instructive example of Liberals jumping ship to both Labour and the Conservatives was the arrival of three prominent Liberals – Josiah Wedgwood, Alexander MacCallum Scott and Winston Churchill – in the same taxi for their party's meeting at the Reform Club in 1916, three days after Asquith's resignation as prime minister. Of the three, Churchill gradually found his home in 1924 in the Conservative Party. In the same year, MacCallum Scott – the Radical Liberal MP for Glasgow until 1922, and Churchill's biographer and sometime private secretary – joined Wedgwood in the Labour Party. [40]

A scion of the famous Staffordshire pottery firm, Josiah Wedgwood was a staunch ally of pacifists and conscientious objectors. Yet, as already noted, he was among those Liberal MPs with a distinguished military career. Wedgwood had fought in the South Africa War and won the DSO at Gallipoli in the First World War. In the pre-war years, various extra-parliamentary agitations, such as the Free Speech Defence Committee with the socialist MP, George Lansbury, brought him into contact with the organised trade union and labour movements. The Asquith government's controversial infringement of civil liberties, witnessed in the use of troops in industrial disputes, the 'Don't Shoot' prosecutions and the horrific forcible feeding of suffragette prisoners, helped push Wedgwood firmly in the direction of the Labour Party.[41] In 1918, he was returned unopposed as an independent Radical. By 1919, the maverick Wedgwood was a member of the ILP and had taken the Labour whip.

Among the Labour Party recruits, the land values tax, free trade and the capital levy were also significant causes of friction with the Liberal leadership and contributory factors in inducing dissatisfied Liberals to consider joining Labour. Wedgwood was a life-long 'single taxer' and disciple of the American reformer, Henry George. With other Liberal MPs, including Edward Hemmerde, Robert Outhwaite and J. Dundas White, he was prominent in crusading for a far stronger land tax to rejuvenate society than the tame measure in Lloyd George's 1909 budget. However, with the Liberal leadership's failure to act by 1918, the land taxers took their campaign into the Labour Party. Similarly, protectionist measures, such as the McKenna duties in 1915 and the adoption of the report of the Paris Economic Conference in 1916, provoked fury among Liberal free traders. Hobson recalled this violation of the sacrosanct article of faith at the heart of British Liberalism as the reason he left the Liberal Party and eventually joined Labour in 1916. In the early post-war years, Labour's sole advocacy of the capital levy also probably helped attract Frederick Pethick Lawrence, J. A. Hobson and Sydney Arnold, all Liberal authorities who championed this tax.[42]

Christopher Addison, former medical doctor and eminent professor of anatomy, who enlisted with Labour in 1923, was the only former Lloyd George supporter to switch parties and probably the most significant of the ex-Liberal

recruits. His longevity in British Liberal and Labour politics was remarkable. Addison was at the heart of most of the landmark events of twentieth-century party politics. He was involved in Lloyd George's premiership bid in December 1916 and the political crisis that brought the downfall of Ramsay MacDonald's second Labour government in 1931. In 1945 Clement Attlee appointed him Leader of the House of Lords in Labour's first majority government.[43] Although critical of Grey's foreign policy, Addison had given full support to British participation in the First World War. As Lloyd George's important ally for eleven years, Addison held important wartime posts, including the Ministry of Munitions and the new Ministry of Reconstruction tasked with post-war social and economic planning. In 1919, as the first Minister of Health in the newly created ministry, he oversaw the first substantial housing programme. However, the construction of 200,000 'homes for heroes' had proved sluggish and increasingly costly and led to his humiliating demotion to minister without portfolio. His resignation followed an acrimonious rift with Lloyd George over broken pledges on social reform. In 1923, negotiations with Arthur Henderson led to his change of political affiliation to Labour. With the break-up of the coalition, other coalition Liberals, such as the Liberal chief whip, Freddie Guest, gradually defected to the Conservatives. However, Addison, who had been conspicuously on the left on domestic, foreign and imperial policy, was the only one to join Labour.

By the late 1920s the small radical group of seven MPs within the Liberal Party provided two further recruits for Labour. Joseph Kenworthy and William Wedgwood Benn resigned as Liberal MPs in 1926 and 1927 after Lloyd George had taken on the leadership of a reunited Liberal Party in 1926. In the post-war years, both had been members of the Asquithian opposition to Lloyd George's coalition government. A former naval officer, Kenworthy had won a spectacular by-election at Central Hull in March 1919 after being roundly defeated as a Liberal candidate in 1918. In the 1920s his radical credentials included support for the Soviet Union, Zionism and Indian home rule. In 1924, Kenworthy consistently backed the minority Labour administration. He was one of twelve Liberals to vote against his own party's amendment to the no-confidence motion (over the prosecution of the communist J. R. Campbell) that brought down Ramsay MacDonald's government. He later claimed he had 'an unofficial bargain made with [Arthur Henderson] which could have led to a Liberal–Labour alliance in the constituencies as well as at Westminster'.[44]

William Wedgwood Benn was a member of the famous Benn dynasty of several generations. In1906, he succeeded to his father's East End seat of St George's Tower Hamlets and then held a succession of Liberal government posts, including serving as a Liberal whip from 1910 to 1915. During the First World War he had a distinguished military service record, acknowledged by many honours bestowed in Britain and abroad. A staunch Asquithian, Benn – like Kenworthy – became increasingly opposed to Lloyd George's politics and moved towards the Labour Party until he eventually applied for membership in 1927. He recalled, in 1929, that he had left a party deeply divided at Westminster and losing membership in the constituencies. 'Everyone knows that thousands of those who were in the past prominent Radicals are now stalwarts in the Socialist Party', he declared. After over twenty years in the Liberal Party, he had switched to Labour owing to total disenchantment with Lloyd George. 'Deep down in the hearts of all there is a feeling of distrust of his character and repugnance to his methods which far outweighs the power of his energy, imagination, and money.'[45] Benn was an important recruit for the Labour Party, recognised by his appointment as the Secretary of State for India in MacDonald's second Labour Cabinet, with responsibilities for negotiations with Mahatma Gandhi and the Congress Party during difficult years in Anglo-Indian relations.

The movement of former Liberals, as well as Conservatives, into Labour's ranks during 1914–1931 undoubtedly changed the make-up of their new party and contributed to its development as a major party in the interwar years and even beyond.

In 1961, Cline concluded that, during 1914–1931, at a time of major realignment of the British party system, the presence of former Liberal newcomers had helped change Labour radically from a parliamentary splinter group into a major political force.[46] However, this was an evaluation made after a long period in which the Liberal Party had been in decline or even heading for disintegration. So, to what extent was this a realistic assessment of the impact of those ex-Liberals who joined Labour on the party's development as a major political force in British politics?

The movement of former Liberals, as well as Conservatives, into Labour's ranks during 1914–1931 undoubtedly changed the make-up of their new party and contributed to its development as a major party in the interwar years and even beyond. Characteristically, these new recruits were largely from a social milieu poles apart from the world of industrial labour, trade unionism and working-class politics. In 1906, the first Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP) consisted mainly of former trade unionists and workmen: coalminers, engineers, mechanics, steel smelters and labourers with direct practical experience of manual labour. Only a few – such as MacDonald and Snowden, both former pupil-teachers – had experienced social mobility to a different class.[47]

In contrast, those such as the Trevelyans, Ponsonbys and Buxtons were, by and large, representatives of the wealthy upper and upper-middle classes – the products of public schools (mainly Eton) and of Oxford or Cambridge – who had traditionally governed Britain and the British Empire. And in terms of wealth and property, there were marked differences from their Labour counterparts from working-class backgrounds. While at Westminster, Labour MPs normally resided in cheap hotels or lodgings, whereas Labour's new recruits from other parties owned London homes in socially exclusive areas of the capital, such as Westminster (Trevelyan), Belgravia (Chelmsford), St James's (Haldane), Chelsea (Benn, Ponsonby),

Knightsbridge (Buxton, Parmoor) and Mayfair (Jowitt).[48]

As a party new to government in the 1920s, Labour also benefited from having a number of lawyers among the Liberal recruits – such as Lord Haldane and Sir Patrick Hastings – in filling legal posts. In 1929 MacDonald appointed the former Conservative, Lord Sankey as Lord Chancellor. The successful barrister and Liberal MP for Preston, William Jowitt, became Attorney General, and was then unusually re-elected for the same constituency, but as a Labour MP. After the controversial downfall of the Labour administration in 1931, Jowitt was among those who accompanied MacDonald into the National government, but quietly returned to Labour in 1936. In July 1945 he became Lord Chancellor, one of eight former recruits to Labour in Clement Attlee's Labour Cabinet.[49]

Establishing a Labour presence in the House of Lords was another difficulty, but was resolved by creating new peers without heirs to succeed – including the Conservative recruit Brigadier-General Thomson and the ex Liberal MP, Sydney Arnold. In 1925 the crossbencher and former Under Secretary of State for Air, Lord Gorell, became a useful addition to depleted ranks of Labour in the upper house. A writer of fiction and poetry, he apparently declined the opportunity to enter a future MacDonald Cabinet. 'Poetry not politics is my real life', he noted.[50]

In 1920 MacDonald declared that the rich vein of Labour's expertise in local government and trade union work could be mined when forming a national government.[51] However, Churchill's famous charge, in the same year, that Labour identified with class rather national interests and was 'quite unfitted for the responsibility of government', unlike its Liberal and Conservative predecessors, echoed with Labour politicians throughout the early post-war years.

From the outset, MacDonald put his imprint, impossible to remove, on his administration. Interestingly, after the 1923 election, he had consulted three former Liberals, Arnold, Lees-Smith and Hobson, as to whether he should risk forming a minority government. He was determined to demonstrate Labour's respectability and competency. At a dinner at the Webb's house, MacDonald went through his memorandum for government – on foreign policy, unemployment and the budget- with future ministers. 'Unanimous that moderation & honesty were our safety. Agreed to stand together,' he noted.[52]

The new recruits to MacDonald's party brought expertise, particularly in areas such as foreign affairs, finance and agriculture, where Labour notably lacked experience. With their backgrounds in politics, administration and, in some cases, ministerial office, they provided an aura of respectability and competence that MacDonald eagerly sought as leader of a national party. At the same time, the newcomers who joined Labour were largely at ease in their new political home with little need to abandon their Liberal principles, or change their individual life styles. On policy, there was much common ground between Labour and Liberals on free trade and economic policy, social reform, and personal liberty.[53] This did not go unnoticed elsewhere. 'A socialist govt. actually in power. But don't get uneasy about your investments and your antiques. Nothing will be removed or abstracted … They are all engaged in looking as respectable as lather and blather will make them,' David Lloyd George reassured his daughter, Megan.[54] Probably Hobson was an exception in admitting he 'never felt quite at home in a body governed by trade union members and their finance, and intellectually led by full-blooded Socialists'.[55]

In 1918, Arthur Henderson's important reconstruction of the post-war Labour Party included a new constitution and party programme, *Labour and the New Social Order*, that would appeal to disenchanted Liberals. Particular attention was given to establishing constituency parties and recruiting a wider party membership. In the 1920s, the new converts provided a ready source of candidates and money for local Labour associations, rather than influencing developments in the well-established central party organisation. They were not a distinct group in the PLP, or on the National Executive Committee. The two minority Labour governments were dominated by 'the big five' of MacDonald, Snowden, Henderson, Thomas and Clynes.

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After the First World War, the establishment of the Co-operative Party by the Co-operative movement was a significant development in Labour's social and cultural evolution as a political party. In 1922 A.V Alexander was one of four MPs returned to Westminster for the Co-operative Party which allied to Labour in 1927. A former Liberal, Alexander, who had served in the First World War, became the Co-operative Party's most important figure and an adept junior Labour minister in MacDonald's 1924 administration. He brought Labour special expertise with his views on defence and foreign affairs as First Lord of the Admiralty in MacDonald's Second Cabinet in 1929-31 and at the wartime Admiralty from 1940-1946.[56] From 1945 Alexander was one of a number of former distinguished Liberals in Attlee's government - Addison, Benn, Ede, Jowitt and Pethick Lawrence- who reached the higher ranks of the Labour Party to be rewarded with peerages.

After the First World War, which radically altered Labour's attitudes towards the wider world, foreign affairs took on greater significance as the Labour Party gradually evolved an internationalist policy in the 1920s. By withdrawing from the Lloyd George coalition government, Labour was not directly associated with the punitive Versailles peace settlement. Ramsay MacDonald's resignation in 1914 as chairman of the PLP brought him public odium for his seemingly pacifist and unpatriotic stand, but enhanced his moral reputation and standing among radicals in the UDC and encouraged many to move over to Labour.[57]

In 1917, the party conference called for the establishment of an advisory committee on foreign policy. Ultimately, as part of the modernisation of Labour orchestrated by Arthur Henderson and

Sidney Webb, nine advisory committees of policy experts were established to advise on different areas of policy. As new recruits joined from other parties, they provided much needed expertise on international questions. Moreover, the Advisory Committee on International Questions (ACIQ) was more than just a committee of experts advising the Labour Party Executive by compiling memoranda and publishing pamphlets. During its thirteen-year lifespan, the ACIQ proved a vital forum comprising a wide range of academics, intellectuals and politicians with diverse outlooks on international relations. At its hub were new recruits such as Norman Angell, Philip Noel Baker, Charles Roden Buxton, Noel Buxton, Hugh Dalton and G. Lowes Dickinson.[58] In particular, during the 1920s, Arthur Henderson, Labour's Foreign Secretary in 1929, increasingly drew on the ACIQ's expertise in shifting Labour's foreign policy towards a firm belief in the role of the League of Nations as a world peace-keeping body backed by an effective and enforceable system of collective security. However, the ACIQ had more influence on Labour policy in opposition than in government. In 1924 MacDonald was both premier and very much his own Foreign Secretary.[59]

There were other examples, too, of ex-Liberals in Ramsay MacDonald's two inter-war Labour administrations who brought valuable expertise in shaping and administering Labour policy. As Lord Chancellor, Haldane, whose sister, Elisabeth, was a member of the Lord Chancellor's Advisory Committee, made significant changes to the criminal justice system in England and Wales, revitalising the antiquated system of local advisory committees that nominated lay justices of the peace (JPs) and appointing more working men and women to the magistrate's bench in different areas. And Wedgwood, in particular, as Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, was uncompromising in appointing women as JPs, following the Sex Disqualification Removal Act (1919).[60] In broadening the magistracy's social and political composition, Haldane and Wedgwood were actively responding to mounting pressure by the labour movement and women's groups, such as the campaign led by Florence Keynes, mother of the economist John Maynard Keynes.[61] In 1920, Wedgwood's predecessor, Lord Crawford, had complained privately: 'I confess I do not at all like of having to appoint women to the [JP] Advisory committees … it is difficult enough to get a woman competent to serve as a magistrate, and … to find someone … to give opinions on the appointment of men'.[62] Traditionally, JPs had been overwhelmingly recruited from among the landed gentry and middle-class professionals, such as industrialists and businessmen. Among Wedgwood's successful appointments was Selina Cooper, radical feminist, trade unionist and ILP member.[63] As former Liberals, Haldane and Wedgwood followed in the footsteps of predecessors in earlier Liberal governments who first responded to calls for greater labour representation in the late-nineteenth century and early-twentieth century.[64] Lay justices of the peace – voluntary unpaid Crown appointments drawn from their local communities – remain to this day responsible for dealing with over 90 per cent of criminal justice in England and Wales.

Trevelyan's two periods of office as President of the Board of Education in 1924 and 1929–31 illustrate how switching parties from the Liberals to Labour usually meant little change in political outlook or beliefs.

Trevelyan's two periods of office as President of the Board of Education in 1924 and 1929–31 illustrate how switching parties from the Liberals to Labour usually meant little change in political outlook or beliefs. Trevelyan, Labour's spokesman on education in the 1922–1923 parliament, brought to Cabinet office in 1924 previous experience as parliamentary under-secretary at the Board of Education from 1908 to 1914. However, there had been little difference in policy between his former and new parties since the 1918 Fisher Act raised the school leaving age to fourteen and required local authorities to draw up educational plans. Labour's *Secondary Education for All* (1922), written by Richard Tawney, the influential Christian socialist on Labour's advisory committee on education, set the pattern of education in the inter-war years on which progressive Liberal and Labour politicians could agree.

However, Trevelyan's performance in two periods of Cabinet office also reveals the limits to his influence on domestic policy in government, particularly with the cost-conscious Philip Snowden at the Treasury. In a typical tussle over educational expenditure, Snowden admonished Trevelyan: '… all of your proposals but one admit of great expansion. In such circumstances I rely on the watchfulness of my Department to safeguard me and my successors from future difficulties'.[65] Beatrice Webb considered that Trevelyan was 'wonderfully well self-advertised'. 'He is quite fond of his job – far more determined and industrious than any of his predecessors', she added.[66] He was not in fear of his civil servants and realised he had to steer between the Scylla of the local authorities who ran the state schools and the Charybdis of the Treasury determined to reduce government expenditure.

With a list of practical policies, his record in 1924 was not unimpressive: the reduction of elementary school class sizes; improving run-down school buildings; raising the percentage of free school places from 25 per cent to 40 per cent; and the restoration of state scholarships from state-aide schools to universities. 'The collective effect gave an impression of immense expenditure', he confided to his wife, Molly.[67] He was the first minister to address the National Union of Teachers' conference, attended by 2,000 delegates, in 1924.[68] Trevelyan was also responsible for establishing the Hadow Committee, although its landmark report on secondary education did not appear until 1926, after Labour had left office. Overall, in 1924 Trevelyan undoubtedly proved an adept minister with a sound grasp of administrative detail, though the extent of his influence over Labour policy must take into account the presence of R. H. Tawney and Labour's advisory committee on education.[69]

However, Trevelyan's second spell at the Board of Education from 1929 was less successful, Trevelyan ran into grave difficulties over his main policy to raise the statutory school leaving age to fifteen. His third Education

Bill (the first two were lost for lack of parliamentary time) ran into Roman Catholic opposition in parliament and was eventually defeated in the Lords in February 1931. In March, frustrated by the general direction of Labour policy, Trevelyan resigned. He publicly mentioned the lack of constructive socialist plans, such as the ILP's 'Socialism in Our Time' which was based on J. A. Hobson's theory of underconsumption.[70] Addressing the Parliamentary Labour Party, his resignation speech, with a biting personal attack on Ramsay MacDonald, was heard in silence. However, a swift riposte, from the prime minister of an ailing government, revealed MacDonald's view in 1931 of the ex-Liberal recruits:

> Some of us gave you and others who were not acceptable to our friends at the time a very generous welcome, and we expected greater assistance … At the moment when everyone who cares for the future of Socialist political ideas should be striving by a united front to overcome immediate difficulties created by individualistic divisions … it is very curious that the greatest troubles are coming from those who are our latest recruits.[71]

Outside of international affairs, the development of agriculture was the area where the influx of the new recruits had the greatest impact on the policy. Former Liberals such as Addison, the Buxtons, Wedgwood and the National Union of Agricultural Workers leader, George Edwards, Labour MP for South Norfolk in 1920–22 and 1923–24, brought expertise where Labour lacked personnel with appropriate knowledge and experience of rural affairs. As a political party with its origins in industry and the urban environment, Labour in the 1920s needed to develop agricultural programmes as a national party. Moreover, there was a persistent belief that the failure to win rural seats would prevent Labour from becoming a party of government, as in many rural constituencies there was still a strong Liberal presence. However, although he switched parties in 1918, Noel Buxton retained his North Norfolk seat until 1930 (when he entered the Lords) and virtually wiped out the local Liberals.[72] In the second Labour government, Buxton returned as a cautious Minister of Agriculture. '… there is a great deal to do without legislation in drainage, marketing, education, research & other things', he advised his enthusiastic deputy, Addison.[73]

In June 1930, Buxton was succeeded by Addison. It was the latter's second political career after his earlier commitment to social reform as an Edwardian 'New Liberal' and the state collectivism of wartime government. As the 1929–31 Labour government struggled in a world economic downturn following the Wall Street Crash, the development of agriculture became a crucial area of policy which could improve Britain's balance of payments by reducing agricultural imports. Addison's policies to combat the long rural depression and support home agriculture with quotas for production had been worked out as a junior minister. His most successful proposal, for which he won all-party support, produced the Agricultural Marketing Board in 1931, which radically improved various sectors of agriculture. It led to a revolution in policy that was extended by the National government and the wartime coalition to cover a range of other agricultural foodstuffs.

Addison was also a significant intermediary between his old Liberal ally, Lloyd George, and the minority MacDonald administration in cross-party discussions on agriculture reform and unemployment. In 1931, he was a leading member of the minority in the Cabinet who opposed the 10 per cent cut in unemployment benefits which ended MacDonald's government. Addison continued to make a considerable and influential contribution to Labour politics in the 1930s, with the publication of *A Policy for British Agriculture* in 1939. As Lord Addison, at the age of seventy-six, he became an important and respected member of the Attlee Cabinet, and his membership of the Cabinet from 1945 to 1951 was notable for his skilful leadership of the Tory-dominated House of Lords. As Kenneth Morgan has adeptly shown, Addison was one of the most important of the Liberal converts to Labour in the 1920s and the only minister to serve in both post-war governments. In particular, his remarkable and far-reaching career demonstrated 'the continuities of the progressive tradition in British politics'.[74]

Scott wanted Liberal–Labour cooperation to continue and regretted that 'while Liberalism and Labour are snapping and snarling at each other, the Conservative dog may run away with the bone', but MacDonald had a different project in mind – the destruction of the Liberal Party and the independence of Labour.

In 1923, the *Manchester Guardian* editor, C. P. Scott, declared that 'Between Liberalism and Labour there are deep natural affinities, but for many a long day each is likely to pursue its separate path'.[75] In 1903, Ramsay MacDonald's secret pact with the Liberal chief whip, Herbert Gladstone, gave a clear run to nearly thirty Labour candidates in the 1906 election – including MacDonald himself and Philip Snowden – and formed the basis of the Edwardian 'Progressive Alliance' between Liberals and Labour. However, the impact of the First World War, which triggered the exodus of so many Liberals from their party into the Labour ranks, transformed the relationship between the two parties on the progressive left.

As he considered possible former Liberals to fill posts in his new administration, MacDonald rejected Harold Spender's suggestion for 'a broader Liberal–Labour concordat to reap a possible harvest of fruitful legislation'.[76] Scott wanted Liberal–Labour cooperation to continue and regretted that 'while Liberalism and Labour are snapping and snarling at each other, the Conservative dog may run away with the bone', but MacDonald had a different project in mind – the destruction of the Liberal Party and the independence of Labour. For MacDonald and Baldwin, the legacy of the 1923 election was that within a British system there was only room for two parties – moderate Labour and respectable Conservatism.[77]

However, forty years ago, the Liberal leader, Jeremy Thorpe, contended that the arrival of the Labour Party in the inter-war years to replace the Liberals was more than simply a disaster in electoral terms in the history of British radicalism. He observed that, while the Liberals remained

out of power, it was key Liberal figures, such as John Maynard Keynes and William Beveridge, who provided the influential blueprints for major social and economic reorganisation in the twentieth-century.[78] While the Liberal Party was certainly in decline, Liberalism remained alive and well, both inside and outside the British Labour Party.[79] In today's unpredictable political and electoral climate, with the advent of a Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government, calls for a revival of progressive politics, including Labour and Liberalism that dominated the early twentieth-century, may well be heard again.

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Principal Liberals who joined the Labour Party between 1914 and 1930

Between 1914–1918*:* Ernest Nathaniel Bennett, Charles Roden Buxton, J. Chuter Ede, Mary Agnes Hamilton, Albert Edward Dunn, E. T. John, B. N. Langdon-Davies, Richard Lambert, Joseph Martin, Edward Rosslyn Mitchell, Leo Chiozza Money, E. D. Morel, Helena Swanwick, Alfred Trestrail, Cecil Wilson.

Between 1918 and 1919*:* Noel Buxton, J. A. Hobson, Joseph King, H. B. Lees-Smith, R. L. Outhwaite, Arthur Ponsonby, Charles Trevelyan, James White.

Between 1919–1925: Morgan Phillips Price, James Dundas White (both in 1919), Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson, E. G. Hemmerde (1920), Sydney Arnold, Richard Haldane, Patrick Hastings, Frederick Pethick Lawrence, Edwardian Rosslyn Mitchell, Bertrand Russell (1922), Christopher Addison, Percy Alden, Frederick Seymour Cocks, William Massingham (1923), Richard Denman (1924),Alexander MacCullam Scott (1924) Ronald Gorell Barnes (1925), Athelstan Rendall (1925),

Between 1925-1930: Cecil L'Estrange Malone (c. 1928), Reginald Fletcher (1929), William Jowitt (1929), William H. Dickinson (1930).

1 Haldane to Mary Haldane, 13 December 1923, Haldane Papers MS 6006.
2 Haldane to Mary Haldane, 12 January 1924, Haldane Papers MS 6006.
3 Lytton to Haldane, 6 February 1924, Haldane Papers, MS 5916.
4 Beatrice Webb, *Diary*, Vol. 3, 15 January 1924.
5 For MacDonald's appointments, see John Shepherd and Keith Laybourn, *Britain's First Labour Government* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), Chapter 3.
6 Ramsay MacDonald, *Diary*, 9 December 1923, Ramsay MacDonald Papers, TNA/PRO 30/6/1753.
7 See the appendix of former Liberals, who joined Labour, broadly based on the (mainly) parliamentary group in C. A. Cline's sample: Catherine Ann Cline, *Recruits to Labour: The British Labour Party 1914–1931* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1963), p. 134 n. 26 and appendix, pp. 149–78). Other recruits to Labour not mentioned in her study have been added. Not all those listed became Labour MPs or Peers.
8 A. MacCullum Scott, 'The Flight from the Liberal Party', *The Labour Magazine*, III, No. II, March 1925.
9 Robert Leach, *Turncoats*: *changing party allegiance by British politicians* (Aldershot: Dartmouth, 1995).
10 This history of this period has also been usefully examined in Roy Douglas, 'A failure of leadership: an explanation of Liberal defections 1918–1929', *Journal of Liberal History*, 25, Winter 1999–2000, pp. 18–23 and 51.
11 Catherine Ann Cline, *Recruits to Labour: The British Labour Party 1914–1931* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1963)
12 Mary Hamilton was a stalwart of the Union of Democratic Control, Labour MP and Ramsay MacDonald's biographer. Dorothy Buxton (née Jebb), humanitarian and co-founder of the Save The Children Fund, was a member of Labour's Advisory Committee on International Questions (ACIQ). Helena Swanwick, a founder of the 1917 Club, joined Labour in 1918 and also served on the ACIQ.
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20 Cline, op cit., pp. 164–65.
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29 David Howell, *MacDonald's Party*: *Labour Identities and Crisis 1922–1931* (Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 315.

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