

J.M. Hogge: Backbench Maverick

Every general election ends the parliamentary career of many backbenchers. Unless they are identified in the public mind with a cause such as the Repeal of the Corn Laws (in the case of Richard Cobden) or safety at sea (successfully promoted by Samuel Plimsoll), they can rarely expect to be remembered beyond their own generation. Such has been the fate of James Myles Hogge who, during his brief period in the Commons, became one of the finest backbenchers ever to represent a Scottish constituency.

Born in Edinburgh in 1873, he was educated in the city of his birth at the Normal School and the University where his dynamic energy was displayed as President of the Liberal Club, Senior President of the Students' Representative Council, Editor of *The Student* and Joint Editor of the 'Scottish Students' Song Book'. Initially intent on teaching as a career, he trained at Moray House, but then resolved to enter the ministry. To that end, he attended the United Presbyterian Theological and New College, then became assistant minister at College Street United Free Church in Edinburgh. During his period there, he undertook settlement work in deprived areas.

Hogge's religious commitment was an important consideration in his career. It may be difficult nowadays for many to appreciate how this affected politics in the second half of the 19th century and the first three decades of the 20th century. As a modern historian expressed it, 'Presbyterianism remained the wellspring of national life and many Scots held their politics to be merely a secular version of it'.¹ The creation of the Free Church as a result of the Disruption of 1843 was followed by the emergence in 1847 of the United Presbyterians, formed when the two largest of the churches which had seceded, largely over the issue of patronage, from the Church of Scotland in the 18th century united. The Free Church and the United

Presbyterians came together in 1900 to form the United Free Church with a small but influential number of the former, still known as the 'Wee Frees' standing aloof from this merger. Politically, the established Church of Scotland contained a large number of Conservatives or Unionists whereas the United Free Church and its predecessors constituted sources of strength for Scottish Liberalism comparable to those supplied in England and Wales by Nonconformity.

Throughout his life, Hogge cherished the memory of having attended a meeting addressed by Gladstone in the Edinburgh Music Hall as a boy of twelve. Such was the drawing power of the GOM that the boy, in an age of Saturday pennies, was sorely tempted to part with his coveted ticket when offered a pound for it but resisted.

He was a founder member of the Young Scots Society in 1900, a remarkable and now almost forgotten movement which had a membership of thousands throughout Scotland before the first world war. Its prospectus stated its aim was 'to educate young men in the fundamental principles of Liberalism and stimulating them in the study of social sciences and economics'.² While never fully integrated into the party organisation it claimed a membership by 1914 of 10,000 in fifty branches. Hogge gave yeoman service to these radical shock-troops who campaigned passionately for Scottish Home Rule. From 1903, the Young Scots began a Free Trade campaign against Chamberlain's proposals for Tariff Reform, making special efforts in Tory counties. Their youthful dynamism sharpened Liberal electoral tactics while their radical emphasis on the need for social reform together with their success in securing the selection of many of their own members as candidates came to fruition in the general elections of 1906, and particularly in 1910 when, in contrast to England, Scottish Liberals consolidated their position.

Finding that social work attracted him more than the pulpit, Hogge left the ministry and went to York where for several years he undertook social investigations under the auspices of the Rowntrees and was the author of publications on themes such as betting and temperance. A vehement opponent of gambling, he later became Hon. Secretary of the National Anti-Gambling League. During his period in York he travelled to Germany, Holland and Belgium in pursuit of information about labour questions and to Russia, Norway and Sweden for inquiries about licensing systems there,³ as well as serving on the Town Council. In 1905, he married Florence R. Metcalfe of Malton and acquired a step-son who, as Second Lieutenant W. E. H. Metcalfe, was to gain the MC in 1916.

His strong views on social problems were matched by progressive ones on political issues. At a time when jingoism was rampant, he was among those Liberals who had opposed the Boer War. Never averse to proclaiming his radicalism, he urged that solution of many social evils depended on the cure of economic ones. He believed that society must address the question of intemperance which he deemed a waste of health and life and pressed for a wide measure of local option. He was a fervent advocate of parliaments in Dublin and Edinburgh, sought an enlarged electorate of both sexes and spoke publicly of the need for friendly co-operation with the German people to avert the danger of war. Holding such opinions, it was no surprise that he was tempted to enter the national political arena.

Returning to Scotland, he failed narrowly to win Glasgow Camlachie in the general election of December 1910⁴ due to the intervention of a Labour candidate. Hogge was chosen as Liberal candidate for a by-election in East Edinburgh in 1912, during which he was proud to have the assistance of W.G.C. Gladstone, grandson of the GOM and MP for Kilmarnock. He was encouraged by a message from David Lloyd George: 'We want more men in the House possessing your deep sympathy for social reform and your knowledge



of social questions'.⁵ In a hard fought campaign at a time of bitter political tension, he held the seat in a constituency with a large working class population whose tone was then Radical rather than Socialist, supported by a strong Irish element.

For the next twelve years Hogge became a widely admired backbencher who described his recreation as 'work'. Never a conventional party man, he thought out questions for himself, expressed his opinions fearlessly and had no qualms over voting periodically against the Asquith Government. Deeply committed to Irish Home Rule, he said at a meeting on 2 October 1912: 'The Scottish Covenanters signed a covenant that was to procure for them freedom of conscience in matters of religion. The fight Sir Edward Carson and the Ulstermen are taking up is to secure the arrogant ascendancy of bigotry in Ulster'.⁶ In 1914, he did not hesitate to oppose the appointment of the na-

tional idol, Lord Kitchener, as War Secretary, arguing that the part should be filled by a civilian while Kitchener's military talents were used as Commander-in-Chief. In view of some of Kitchener's insensitive actions during the next two years, Hogge showed foresight in his criticism.

Always concerned with welfare, Hogge intensified his work on issues of allowances and pensions which were aggravated by the war, devoting an enormous amount of time to seeing that widows and dependants of the killed and crippled received adequate pensions. By 1916, he was receiving 500 letters a week and as, in contrast to many MPs, he lacked private means and received only £400 as a yearly salary, he had to ask for stamped addressed envelopes.

Aware that thousands of claimants were refused on spurious grounds and anxious to alleviate their lot, Hogge, with help from Walter McPhail, the distinguished Editor of *Edinburgh Evening*

News, set up a Pensions Bureau which investigated individual cases of hardship and made recommendations for review. This led to the formation of the Naval and Military War Pensions' League. After 1918, his work in this sphere continued and he became president of the National Federation of Discharged and Demobilised Sailors and Soldiers. His efforts earned public appreciation as shown in a testimonial he won 'for his unselfish and devoted endeavours on behalf of men broken in their country's wars and of the widows and orphans of the fallen'.

As an uninhibited critic of some of the actions of the Lloyd George Coalition, he did not receive 'the coupon' in the 1918 general election but held his seat, in the absence of a Labour challenger, against a Coalition New Democrat Party candidate. He opposed a stern peace with Germany as he held it calculated to lead to future disputes. In his role as Joint Chief Whip of the Asquithian or 'Wee Free' Liberals Hogge was prominent in pressurising Asquith to stand in Paisley, thus effecting his return to the Commons in the 1920 by-election.

Hogge was onscious of the dismay felt by those loyal to the Liberal Cause throughout the country over disunity and became actively involved in efforts to reunite the two sections. While he had no reason to feel friendly to Lloyd George, whose National Liberals had sought to unseat him in the 1922 gen-

eral election, he was a man of good sense who realised that disunity was ruining any chance of a Liberal revival. Hence he was involved in preliminary talks to that end, despite little encouragement from many Asquithians. A lack of personal rapport between Asquith and Hogge was an inhibiting factor. The Asquithians not only found his personal character unacceptable but had doubts about his political reliability. Nevertheless, in March 1923, Hogge was the leading author of a memorandum for speedy reunion signed by a group of seventy-three rank-and-file MPs from both sections. The numbers are even more impressive when it is noted that about twenty "leaders" from the two sections were not invited to sign.⁷

Liberal reunion was achieved in November 1923 when Baldwin opted for a policy based on tariffs in opposition to traditional Liberal adherence to Free Trade. Despite this, there were strong pressures among Scottish Unionists for an anti-Socialist pact; Hogge was involved in conversations with Sir George Younger but the issue of tariff reform prevented any agreement.⁸

The 1923 general election led to a hung parliament with a resurgence of Liberal support and representation increased to 158. In Edinburgh, for example, Liberals outpolled the other parties and were returned in four of the six seats, Hogge securing 68% of the votes in East Edinburgh.

Subsequent conditional Liberal support for the short-lived Labour Government of 1924 was disastrous for the party. Hogge was loud in his condemnation of Labour's defects in tackling unemployment, notably over its tardy recognition of the claims of ex-Servicemen. Despite this, he was one of twelve Liberal MPs who did not vote for the Asquith motion which led to the Government's resignation.⁹ His action proved fatal as he faced a three-cornered fight in the 1924 general election. Although Hogge received splendid support from branches of the British Legion, and, at a time when the public meeting was a principal feature of elections, held enthusiastic meetings – 1,000 at Portobello Town Hall followed by an open air one for 400 who could not gain entry – he was overwhelmingly defeated by Labour, finishing third with a vote reduced from 68% to 27%. A contemporary wrote, 'In street after street where Liberal support had been solid for decades, there was nothing but a display of Labour posters. The working classes had transferred their allegiance to the Labour Party'.¹⁰ His fate mirrored that of Asquith in Paisley and of a majority of his colleagues whose number was reduced to forty-two with only eight from Scotland.

The massive rejection of Liberal candidates in Scotland in favour of a now well entrenched Labour Party, despite its loss of the election, and of a revitalised Unionist one indicated the future trend. 'With the advent of class politics the bourgeoisie had good reason to think it was safer to support the Unionists than the ostensibly classless Liberals.'¹¹

The bitter blow of defeat virtually ended Hogge's career, leaving him without an income, as the modest supplementary payment he received as a feature writer for the *Edinburgh Evening News* ceased when he lost his seat.¹² The tragedy was that he was so soon forgotten and died in 1928.

In many respects, Hogge was a figure more typical of the early rather than the later decades of last century. His work as an ardent social reformer

concluded on page 32

Election results

1910 (December)	Glasgow Camlachie	1922	Edinburgh East		
H.J. Mackinder	Lib. Unionist	3,479	J.M. Hogge	Liberal	10,551
J.M. Hogge	Liberal	3,453	S. McDonald	Nat. Liberal	7,088
J. O'Kessack	Labour	1,539	<i>Majority</i>		3,463
W.J. Mirrlees	Independent	35			
<i>Majority</i>		26	1923	Edinburgh East	
1912 (by-election)	Edinburgh East		J.M. Hogge	Liberal	10,876
J.M. Hogge	Liberal	5,064	C.J.M. Moncur	Conservative	5,045
J.G. Jamieson	Conservative	4,129	<i>Majority</i>		5,831
<i>Majority</i>		925			
1918	Edinburgh East		1924	Edinburgh East	
J.M. Hogge	Liberal	8,460	T.D. Shiels	Labour	9,330
A.E. Balfour	Co. NDP	5,136	C. Milne	Conservative	6,105
<i>Majority</i>		3,324	J.M. Hogge	Liberal	5,625
			<i>Majority</i>		3,325

From Midlothian to Direct Mail

Parliamentary and Political Campaigning in the 19th and 20th Centuries

On the eve of the first general election campaign of the twenty-first century, this meeting will examine the development of campaigning techniques since the Great Reform Act of 1832.

From the introduction of electoral registers, the gradual elimination of corruption, and the appearance of new forms of communications – railways, the telegraph and newspapers – to the computerised and direct-mail based innovations of the SDP, have campaigns changed out of all recognition, or do they remain the same at heart?

Speakers: **Professor Michael Rush** (Exeter University) and **Bill (Lord) Rodgers**. Chair: **Graham (Lord) Tope**.

8.00pm, Friday 16 March 2001

Arlington Suite, Toorak Hotel, Torquay

J. M. Hogge

continued from p.22

and pertinacious radical who tried to lead rather than follow public opinion was animated by his Christian conscience. The loss of the United Free Church's support after its Union with the Church of Scotland in 1929 was one often overlooked reason for Liberal decline in many parts of Scotland. Since Hogge's time, links between political parties and religious denominations have loosened. Hogge was a victim of the calamitous fate of his party in 1924 which showed the danger of a smaller third party holding the balance of power under the first-past-the-post electoral system. His defeat was a reflection of the upsurge of the Labour party in urban areas, a development which Liberals have been unable to reverse in Scotland at parliamentary level. It illustrates likewise that a backbencher, however industrious and respected, has little chance of survival against a strong tide of opinion against his party.

In any roll of distinguished Scottish backbenchers of last century, James Hogge has a strong claim to rank high. It would be pleasing to hope that we may see more of his ilk in the next Westminster parliament.

R. Ian Elder graduated in history from Edinburgh University, and is a former Rector of Webster's High School, Kirriemuir.

1. Michael Fry, *Patronage and Principle, A Political History of Modern Scotland*. p.94
2. Richard J. Finlay, *A Partnership for Good? Scottish Politics and the Union since 1880*
3. J. M. Hogge, Papers, National Library of Scotland
4. See Box for outcome of election contests.
5. J. M. Hogge, Papers
6. J. M. Hogge, Papers
7. Roy Douglas, *History of the Liberal Party, 1895-1970*, p.169
8. Michael Dyer, *Capable Citizens and Improvident Democrats, The Scottish Electoral System 1884-1929*, p.127
9. Roy Douglas, p.180
10. Information from the late John G. Gray, former Liberal Councillor in Edinburgh whose father was a Liberal agent in East Edinburgh in the early 1920s
11. Michael Fry
12. East Edinburgh returned a Liberal MP between 1931 and 1935. In the 1935 general election it reverted to Labour.

History Group website

The History Group's website, at www.liberalhistory.org.uk is gradually being developed. When finished, it will contain up-to-date news of the Group's activities, a complete list of *Journal* contents, together with downloadable copies of earlier issues, a short history of the Liberal Party, SDP and

History Group News

Our apologies to anyone who tried to send emails to the new email addresses we announced in the last issue of the *Journal*. Unfortunately, thanks to the incompetence of our website hosting company, none of them were available. We have now solved the problem (by changing company), and are happy to announce that the following email addresses do now work:

- Any correspondence about subscriptions to the *Journal* and membership of the Group:
subs@liberalhistory.org.uk
- Any correspondence about any other aspect of the *Journal*, including letters to the editor, articles and reviews:
journal@liberalhistory.org.uk
- Any general queries about any aspect of Liberal, SDP and Liberal Democrat history:
enquiry@liberalhistory.org.uk

Liberal Democrats, and a resources section for researchers.

Offers of technical assistance with the establishment of the site would be very welcome – please contact Duncan Brack on webmaster@liberalhistory.org.uk.