Liberalism and imperial policy

Stéphanie Prévost examines the response of Gladstonian ethical Liberals to Britain's relationship to empire, 1895–1906

Liberal Internationalism and Imperialism: Odd bedfellows for ethical liberals?

'The movement for the development of great empires has gone on very rapidly in-recent times, but we have no assurement that the true stability of national life will be maintained in these great, gigantic federations of states. Moreover, most of the territory which has been acquired by the civilized nations within the last thirty years is held very slightly and upon a most precarious tenure. The dream of a single empire in the future, or of a stable equilibrium of a few empires, dividing among them the power of the world, and existing in amicable relations with one another, proceeding upon the line of national self-development purely, is to my mind less warranted than even the dream of Cobden [international peace through free trade worldwide].'[1]

Such was Liberal theorist (1858–1940) J. A. Hobson's assessment of the late nineteenth-century European course of imperial expansion (best known as 'New Imperialism') and world order, expounded in 1906. Written after the 1899–1902 Second Anglo-Boer War, which he denounced, this article, entitled 'The Ethics of Internationalism', clearly saw 'New Imperialism' and the liberal internationalist quest for world peace as incompatible. In so doing, Hobson asked Liberals to (re)think the articulation of Liberalism, imperialism – here simply taken to mean 'the principle or policy of empire' – and internationalism as the party regained power following a landslide victory, but after ten years in opposition (1895–1906).

It is on those years in opposition that this article focuses. It explores the meaning of that triad – Liberalism, imperialism and internationalism – over that decade for a group of Gladstonian progressive Liberals who were later associated with the 1899–1902 anti-Boer-war movement, thereby extending the traditional scope of analysis for that group.[2] It considers the triad as foundational for their conception of a revamped Liberalism – one that would articulate liberal morality and politics with social principles and individual improvement – at a time of party setbacks and divisions over imperialism.[3]

These ethical progressive Liberals' positions were deeply impacted by the divisions over imperialism that predated the period 1895–1906. In his 1878 article 'England's Mission', Liberal opposition leader William Gladstone criticised the Conservative 'tandem' (Premier Benjamin Disraeli and Foreign Secretary the 3rd Marquess of Salisbury) for entering

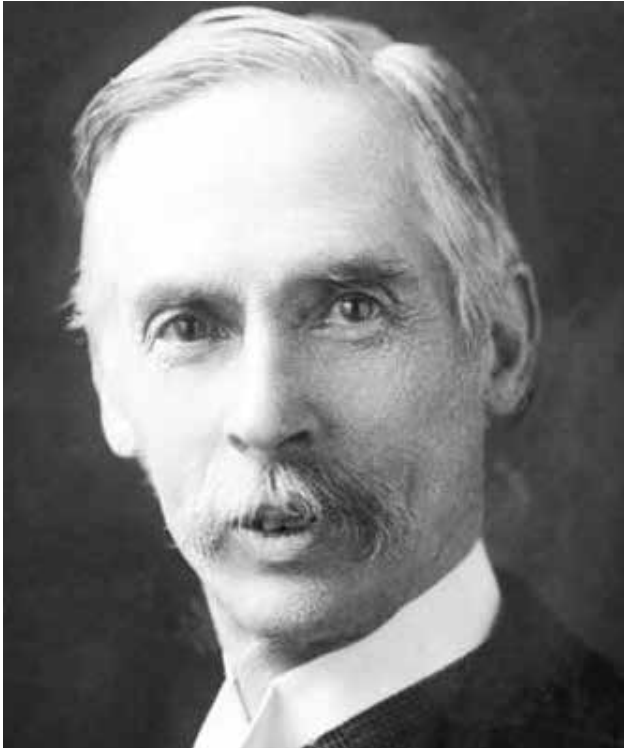
a defence deal with the Ottoman Empire that entrusted Britain with the administration of Cyprus, since, from a Liberal perspective, 'the prospective multiplication of possessions overseas [was], to say the least, far from desirable'.[4] When the Gladstone government reluctantly bombarded Alexandria and then authorised the British occupation of Egypt from 1882, the move – officially to restore order in the context of burgeoning Egyptian nationalism – alienated many Radical and Independent Liberals, who saw this as an unacceptable U-turn.[5] With Gladstone's home rule bills (1886, 1893), the most imperially minded Liberal Unionists agreed with the Conservative accusation that what Gladstone saw as 'England's mission' meant imperial disintegration (and especially the risk of an eventually independent Ireland). As such, they welcomed the Conservative–Liberal Unionist alliance in the 1895 general election, which resulted in Joseph Chamberlain becoming Salisbury's colonial secretary.[6] Internal rifts reached a new high as the Liberal imperialist faction (Limps), loosely organised from 1888 under the Earl of Rosebery to defend national efficiency, the maintenance of empire and party consensus over empire, became stronger in the post-Gladstonian era to the point of nearly killing the party.[7] Indeed, in 1899, Limps supported the Salisbury government's decision to wage war on the Boers in the name of Liberal patriotism.[8] Factionalism had been an issue for some time. Already, a few days ahead of the 1895 general election, Prime Minister Rosebery publicly warned 'the children of Gladstonianism to [not] cross over the sea that protects a hitherto united Empire from dismemberment', on the grounds that this contravened the 'voice of the country'.[9] To Rosebery, as always, the country was after 'greater pride in the Empire', i.e. 'a larger patriotism' – a belief that had led him, as Gladstone's foreign secretary in 1892, to push for the annexation of Uganda against the premier's will.[10]

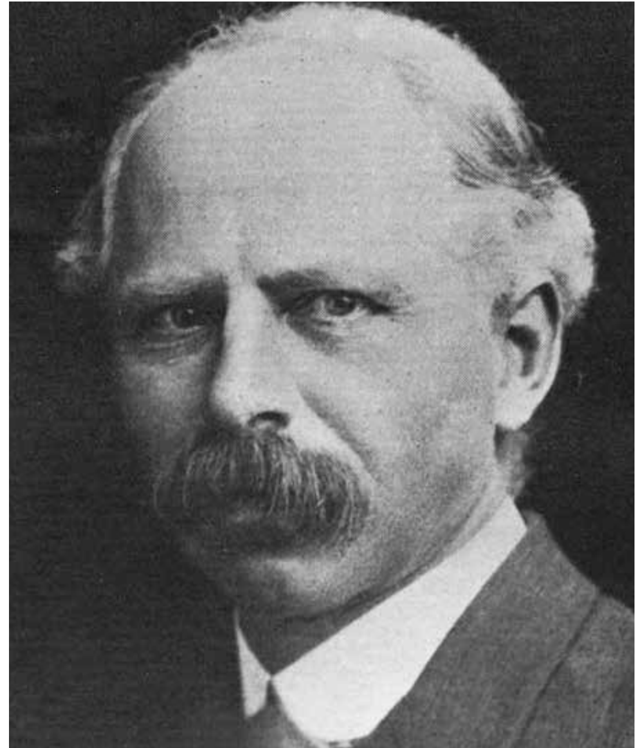
Contrary to Rosebery's portrayal, many Gladstonian ethical Liberals did not call for the dismemberment of the empire, although they did criticise new imperialism. As this article argues, they instead sought to see how British imperial policy could be articulated alongside their increasingly ethical and internationalist Liberalism and seized on humanitarian crises to rethink Britain's relationship to the empire. While many excellent biographical essays on New Liberal intellectuals and internationalism exist, close attention to the applied ethics in international relations (versus theoretical ethics) of ethical Liberals is rather wanting.[11] Yet, practical actions here deserve attention, as this group saw 'ethics [as] inextricably tied to spatial practices' and worked in practical terms towards what they hoped would be a harmonious triad of Liberalism–imperialism–internationalism.[12] This article is an attempt to remedy this.[13]

This article thus foregrounds their pragmatic, experimental responses to events that would shape their understanding of a revived Liberalism and centres on some of these key contexts. The first case revolves around the Armenian massacres of the 1890s, in which 80,000–250,000 people died: it examines their suggestion that individual responsibility in humanitarianism and constructive imperialism were reconcilable.[14] The second part takes the Second Boer War (1899–1902) as its main context to discuss the acceptability and limits of imperial intervention. Finally, internationalist endeavours are discussed under the banner of a nascent 'imperial internationalism'.

Individual responsibility, humanitarianism and 'constructive imperialism'

As shown by the 4,923 petitions sent to the Foreign Office between November 1894 and December 1896 to denounce Ottoman Sultan





New Liberal thinkers: J. A. Hobson (1858–1940) and L. T. Hobhouse (1864–1929)

Abdul Hamid II's cruelty and call Britain to act, mass violence against Ottoman Armenians was received as a great and sustained shock in Britain.[15] Although long overlooked (due to the destruction of these petitions), the Armenian agitation was carefully crafted by Liberal publicists, clergy, and politicians close to Gladstone as an issue that was central to the party's identity.[16] At a time when the party was becoming increasingly divided over imperial policy, this issue was construed by self-identified Gladstonian Liberals as an opportunity for party reunification, just as the defence of Bulgarian Christians had had a similar potential for a disunited Liberal Party in 1876–80 and had henceforth been perceived as the kernel of Liberal identity.[17] In the first issue of *The Commonwealth*, a periodical launched in January 1896, High Church Canon Scott Holland, a staunch Gladstonian Liberal, exclaimed: 'Deeper than the dividings of party, supreme over all accidents of class is the Common-wealth – the Common Life, in the name of the community, for the common good. (…) We shall claim for the cause of our common humanity, everything that is fairly and decently human'.[18]

The context was, however, very different from 1876, when a Conservative government (that of Disraeli) was in power, and the Liberals could build on the agitation as an opposition party.[19] When news of the Sasun massacre reached Britain in late summer 1894, Gladstone had retired a few months before, officially due to age and health, but also because the cabinet had failed to endorse his opposition to increased naval estimates. At least in the name of party unity, it was hoped by the organ behind the agitation – the Anglo-Armenian Committee (AAC), an extra-parliamentary organ established by Liberal jurist James Bryce in 1879 under the aegis of Gladstone – that Rosebery would bury the hatchet and respond positively to the AAC's demand for British pressure on the Ottoman polity to stop the massacres. Rosebery's refusal to take action (other than commanding a European commission of investigation into the

massacres) spurred a devastating AAC campaign by its secretary, Gladstone's friend and High Anglican Canon MacColl that added to the difficulties faced by Rosebery's government before its downfall in the 'cordite vote' in June 1895 and the subsequent Liberal electoral defeat in July 1895.[20] But it also had the effect of asking Liberals what else beyond petitioning could be done outside of government action, by individual citizens within a political community, to relieve Armenians.[21]

Thanks to the steadfast support of charismatic religious leaders across denominations – all progressive Liberals favourable to Christian social work (including Gladstone's son Stephen, Anglican rector of Hawarden) – and the support of many Gladstonian MPs, the AAC successfully organised fundraising from May 1895 throughout Britain. The flame of 1876 was revived.[22] Meanwhile, MacColl managed to convince fellow Liberal Armenophiles not to make the agitation a party matter. What he wanted was for Liberals to trust the new premier, the Conservative Salisbury, as MacColl thought that Salisbury represented Ottoman Armenians' best chance, because he agreed to distributing Armenian relief via Foreign Office diplomatic posts in the Ottoman Empire the minute he returned to office in July 1895.[23] MacColl did his utmost to ensure that Liberal demands were consistent with international treaties. Indeed, in the absence of a humanitarian military intervention collectively sanctioned by signatories of the 1878 Berlin Treaty (article 63), France, Britain, Russia, Prussia, Austria and Italy were collectively responsible for overseeing the implementation of reforms for Armenians' welfare (article 61). A unilateral move on the part of Britain to save Armenians could thus mean war, unless it was authorised by the other treaty signatories. In the context of a very divided Europe, relief collection and distribution seemed to MacColl to be the best option for aid to the Armenians without risking a European diplomatic crisis.

For many ethical Liberals, ad hoc relief was soon not enough, since it failed to bring durable protection for Ottoman Armenians. Humanitarianism 'concerned [itself] not merely with the direct alleviation of suffering and prevention of cruelty, but with the removal of fetters, the opening of opportunity to individual and national self-development, the utilisation of vastly increased material resources for the common benefit, the bringing in of the humblest to the banquet of civilisation'.[24] Shortly after their arrival at Constantinople in March 1896 to distribute Quaker relief, Biblical scholar and Liberal Quaker James Rendel Harris – a cousin of Gladstone's friend and confidant, Lord Rendel of Hatchlands – and his wife Helen decided to redirect part of the relief money to organise an emigration scheme for Armenians and offer them a new start somewhere safe. 'Imperial refuge', i.e. a safe spot in the British empire, was what they had in mind. This was to be an undercover operation, as it lay outside the prerogatives of the European powers under the 1878 Berlin Treaty and constituted a breach of Ottoman sovereignty. Any such scheme required the go-ahead of the foreign secretary, then Premier Salisbury, and of the British ambassador at Constantinople, Sir Philip Currie, Salisbury's former private secretary – all the more so as the first envisaged destination was Ottoman-British Cyprus. Despite Salisbury's public declarations that Britain could do nothing outside a European joint action, he came to regard emigration as a fait accompli that might as well be supported – just as, in 1898, he would consider the Ottoman and Chinese empires to be 'dying nations' whose territories would necessarily be encroached upon by 'civilised states', at the risk of war.

In June 1896, Rendel Harris was thus invited to liaise between the Foreign Office and the Colonial Office, to which Liberal social reformer Sarah Sheldon Amos had already submitted three emigration schemes for

settling adult, able-bodied Armenians wishing to emigrate to the north-west of Canada, Nyasaland and Cyprus, in a way that would help develop uncultivated lands and enhance the prosperity of these British imperial territories.[25] Following intercessions from her friend Canon Scott Holland and her brother Percy Bunting, the Liberal editor of the *Contemporary Review*, Salisbury rallied to the schemes, on condition that local colonial authorities approved. This line was readily endorsed by Chamberlain. The Canadian and Nyasaland schemes fell through, because of Canadian authorities' opposition and because of increasing tensions with the Boer Republics after the 1895 Jameson Raid.[26] The Cyprus scheme bloomed from mid-October 1896, after the Colonial Office and the British governor in Cyprus concluded that 'the establishment of a definite industrial home and refuge in a safe spot, where suitable and cheap premises [would be] offered, and where it [was] intended to receive and train to independence especially widows and orphans whose husbands and fathers [had] been massacred' would not disrupt the precarious harmony between local communities (Greek and Muslim).[27]

As the third wave of massacres rolled through Anatolia from September 1896, positivist, biologist and urbanist Patrick Geddes contacted Percy Bunting to see how he could practically contribute to the prosperity of the Armenian industrial home in Cyprus.[28] After months of consultation, Geddes approached the Foreign Office and Colonial Office with a development scheme by which an agricultural colony would help revive Cyprus agriculture, thanks to the expertise of Armenian farmers and the implementation of appropriate infrastructure and land management strategies – which coincided with Chamberlain's plans for Cyprus (especially irrigation systems) from spring 1897.[29] The scheme was eventually to yield government revenue profits indirectly through taxation, thereby making Cyprus profitable and offsetting the heavy tribute Britain owed the Ottoman empire under the 1878 Cyprus Anglo-Turkish Convention. But this first required investment money to start. As Geddes repeated over and over to interlocutors, 'it is time to rid [sic] of the common superstition that philanthropy is necessarily anti-business, and business anti-philanthropy' and, with the Foreign Office/Colonial Office's go-ahead, this was his chance to prove so.[30] He thus tried to get investors to support the Armenian labour colony on a grand scale. However, they rapidly considered the risks to be too high as Cyprus remained Ottoman territory (though it was administered by Britain), so that within a few years, the silk farm only survived thanks to a few friends in ethical Liberal and Social Christian circles.

Simultaneously, the agitation intensified and escaped MacColl's control, as many Liberals felt that Salisbury was not doing enough. Out of this final phase of the agitation sprang the Liberal Forwards, a faction meant to revive Gladstonian moralism. In the words of its initiator, Liberal MP as well as Gladstone's biographer (and former minister) George William Erskine Russell: 'if [the Liberal] cause [is] worth serving, then it [is] a case of humanity and freedom the whole world over and was the cause of their fellow creatures and fellow Christians wherever they might be found.'[31] Gladstone never publicly supported the 'Liberal Forwards' endeavour, but covertly activated networks to shield it from the ferocious Roseberyite opposition.[32]

'When is a war not a war?': the limits of imperial interventionism

In his *Democracy and Reaction* (1904), New Liberal thinker Leonard T. Hobhouse distinguished 'two deeply-contrasted pictures of Imperialism – the Imperialism of promise and the Imperialism of performance – the one

based on the constitution of the Empire as built up by Liberal statesmen, the other based on the policy of Empire as shaped by a generation of Imperialist statesmen'.[33] He made the Armenian massacres the very 'test case' that revealed how perverted New Imperialism ('the Imperialism of performance') was. Hobhouse argued that Conservatives and Limps brandished it as a civilising force and, yet, had been deaf to the Armenians' plea, although the 1878 Cyprus Convention hinged on the Sultan's commitment to introducing reforms for the protection of Christians in Eastern Ottoman provinces.

Hobhouse was by no means alone in his analysis. Interventions had been proposed by Gladstonian Liberals throughout 1896, such as sending the British fleet to protect the Armenians under the Cyprus Convention, or placing Ottoman Armenia under a British international mandate that the other European signatories of the Berlin Treaty could concede to Britain, in the name of her special responsibilities to Cyprus. As massacres intensified in September 1896, Gladstone came out of his retirement to offer Salisbury his public support, but soon recommended that Britain act alone in defence of Armenians, due to the European powers' failure to uphold their collective commitments and because of Britain's special duty under the convention.[34] Despite his full, but secret, commitment to Armenian emigrants, Salisbury brushed away those suggestions, famously declaring in November 1896 at Guildhall that 'no fleet in the world [could] get over the mountains of Taurus to protect the Armenians'.[35]

To dissipate accusations (by France and Russia) that such proposals were pretexts for British expansionism, Manchester Congregationalist philanthropist Francis William Crossley suggested a radical move to Gladstone in the Liberal *Manchester Guardian*: giving up on Cyprus and turning it into a 'sanctuary' for Armenians, just as British abolitionists had created the Freetown settlement for freed slaves out of colonial Sierra Leone in 1787.[36] While this didn't happen, 'the blunders of the past' remained very much present in the minds of ethical Liberals and socialist 'imperial sceptics'.[37] This was especially true after Rosebery resigned the Liberal leadership in December 1896 over Gladstone's position on the Armenian agitation and as imperial rivalries spiralled with France, Russia and Germany (in the Upper Nile Valley, on the north-eastern Indian border, in China and South Africa) over 1897–98.[38] Put simply, Britain's recent imperial acquisitions seemed to hamper her relations with other European powers and lead to war, rather than peace.

Britain's decision to wage war on the Dutch Boer Republics to secure the political representation of British settlers there (Uitlanders) in October 1899 and Lord Kitchener's war tactics in the third phase (March 1900–May 1902) – especially the scorched earth policy, the concentration camp policy and treatment of prisoners of war – placed British new imperialism on trial, more than ever before. With Rosebery asserting early on that Liberal patriotism commanded Liberals to support the British government's war policy, the party was further split. Many Liberal Armenophiles spoke out loud and clear in denunciation of that very policy (especially G. W. E. Russell, C. P. Scott of the *Manchester Guardian*, Rev. Clifford, Leonard T. Hobhouse, Radical Liberal Unionist MP Leonard Courtney, former editor of the *Daily Chronicle* Henry W. Massingham, etc.), although there were charismatic defectors (especially the progressive Liberal Methodist editor of the *Methodist Times*, Hugh Price Hughes, and Rev. James Guinness Rogers). While a 'humanitarian intervention' by imperial Britain to save Ottoman Armenians had been a dilemma for ethical Liberals who dreaded the use of force, even for humanitarian purposes (Quakers notably), the Boer War was simply intolerable and

un-Liberal. For Liberal Armenophiles, the Boer War proved another test case to refine their idea of Liberalism and imperialism (or rather empire), by making a third element – internationalism – indispensable to that revamped relationship.

As the extensive literature on the anti-war movement (best known as 'the pro-Boer movement') shows, the British Liberal, Radical Liberal and socialist 'pro-Boers' were 'individuals with a strong individualistic bias' and the movement's homogeneity should not be overstated.[39] Nonetheless, beyond their divergences on domestic politics and the pace of reform, it may be fair to say that all agreed on denouncing the conflict as inhumane and barbaric, illegitimate and illegal, useless and costly, and detrimental to the image of Britain internationally, as well as within the empire. They advocated a change in methods and sought to put humanity and international justice first, including within international and trans-imperial relations. Though vocal, they remained a small faction within the party as most Liberals felt rather uneasy opposing the war originally.[40]

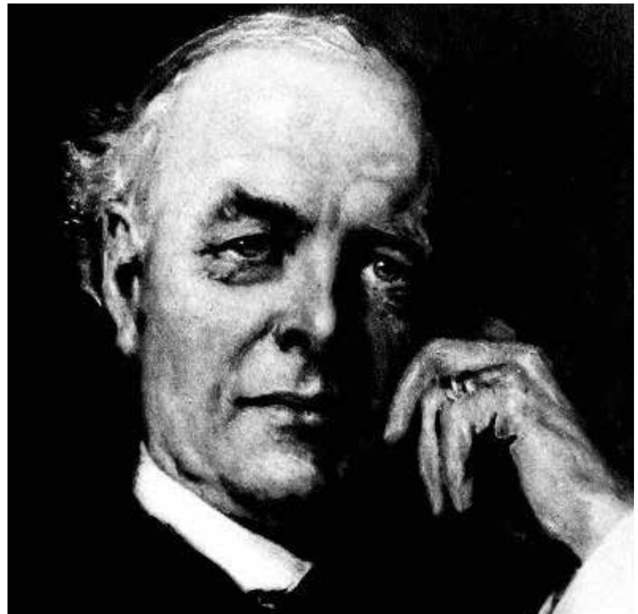
Russell's Transvaal Committee – the first 'pro-Boer' structure – was established by the Liberal Forwards in June 1899 before the conflict started. It pleaded for arbitration – an option that Russell inherited from Gladstone and that prospered amongst fellow Liberals who had urged Britain to accept arbitration (by the USA) in the ongoing boundary dispute with Venezuela and thus avert a war with the USA (which considered Britain's claim a breach of the Monroe doctrine).[41] This also coincided with the preoccupations of the peace conference that had just opened at the Hague in May 1899 on the invitation of Czar Nicholas II and which editor, former Gladstonian and Armenophile W. T. Stead, had promoted throughout Europe in 1898–99. One of the peace conference's objectives was, indeed, to establish the first intergovernmental Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) at the Hague to facilitate the resolution of disputes. With Britain a participant at the conference and with her recently consenting to an arbitration treaty with the US, arbitration advocates hoped that the British government would accept the Boer Republics' demand to submit the dispute to the PCA. But Britain refused, considering the peace conference to be first and foremost a great European powers' meeting, to which the Boer Republics had not been invited, and that arbitration was ad hoc (not systematic).[42] Above all, Chamberlain insisted that the Boer Republic of Transvaal had been technically under British suzerainty since 1881 and that international arbitration therefore did not apply (as the dispute was imperial and negotiations ongoing).[43]

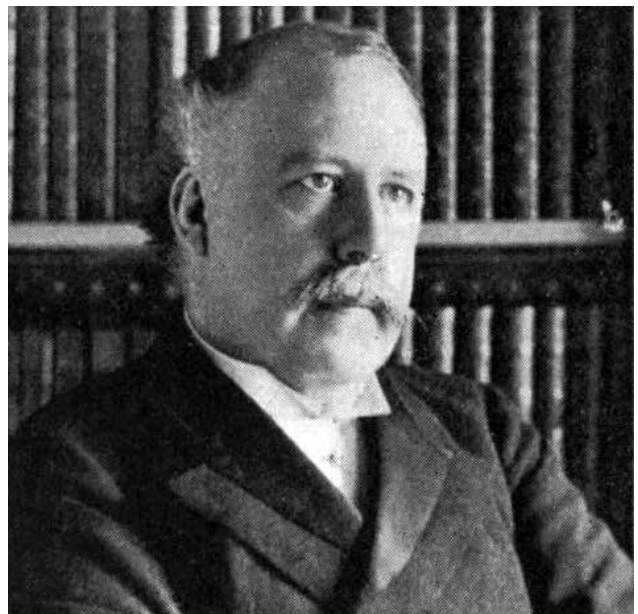
The Hague conference thus closed in July 1899 with the prospect of the Second Anglo-Boer war. Meanwhile, the Transvaal Committee failed to rally massive support at home. The decision by Transvaal President Paul Kruger to issue an ultimatum on 9 October asking for the withdrawal of British troops at the Republic's border outpaced the British government – which was about to issue its own. War immediately ensued, as the ultimatum was deemed an 'intolerable' attack on Britain's honour and prestige.[44] Chamberlain managed to rally public opinion, Conservatives and Limps behind him. The war declaration deprived the Transvaal Committee, very much a pre-war structure, of its raison d'être, especially as all those 'advocating the cause of the Boers in South Africa, now at war with Her Majesty' were suspected of sedition.[45]

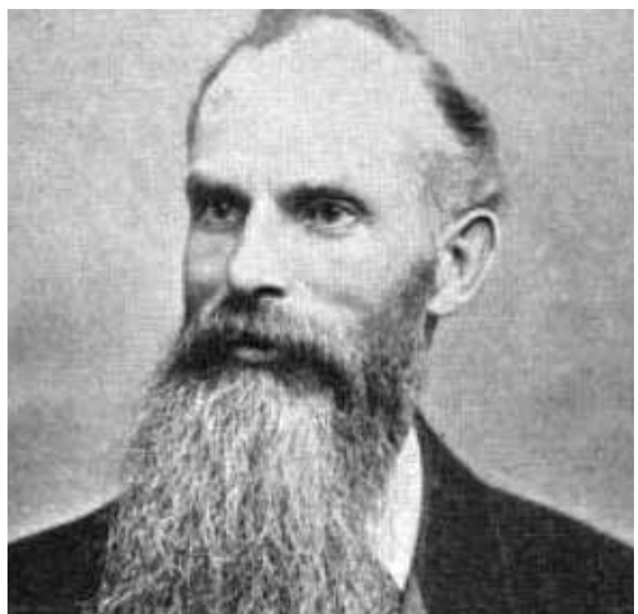
Over the next few months, the anti-war movement reorganised itself, but was going against the tide of public opinion. By Christmas Eve of 1899, the 'Stop the War Committee and Stop it Now' (STWC) was born under the aegis of Liberal Methodist preacher and novelist Silas K. Hocking to the cry that Britain (not the Boers) initiated the war and that it

should immediately be stopped.[46] Alongside Hocking, were Rev. Clifford (president), Mrs Amos, and Independent Labour Party Leader Keir Hardie; however, the most visible guiding light was public moralist Stead, just as he had been in the 1876 Bulgarian agitation movement. Just as then, Stead was incapable of half-measures – a fieriness that backfired.[47] The denunciation of the war as being 'wrong' and 'ruinous', as being a lie 'to cover conspiracy', as being 'wholesale murder' (including because 'the youth of the Empire [was] wantonly slain') unleashed scenes of violence against STWC meetings, during which their members were chased as 'traitors'.[48] In the context of the 1900 general election, the virulence of the STWC rhetoric – and the very fact that the STWC included Boers as members – played into the hands of the Conservative–Unionist coalition, which was returned to power with a landslide majority in the 1900 general election.[49]

More moderate groups – such as the parliamentary League of Liberals against Aggression and Militarism (LLAM) or the related extraparliamentary South Africa Conciliation Committee (SACC, presided over by Leonard Courtney) – were formed in early 1900 to try and 'retrieve the anti-war movement from the hand of extremists and doctrinaires'.[50] They failed to rally public support, despite extensive coverage in the *Manchester Guardian* (by Hobson and Hobhouse), as the London press was behind the government and the more moderate groups lacked a charismatic leader who might have turned the sorrow of British soldiers' widows into a stop-the-war







From top:
Canon Malcolm MacColl (1831–1907) – Scottish cleric and campaigner
G. W. E Russell (1853–1919) – Liberal MP and minister
Silas Hocking (1850–1935) – Methodist preacher and Liberal candidate

argument. On 25 July 1900, Radical Liberal MP Sir Wilfrid Lawson – a member of the Transvaal Independence Committee in 1881, of the STWC, the LLAM and the SACC – proposed a vote of censure by 'every friend of humanity, peace, and justice' against Chamberlain, whom he blamed for the 'degradation, demoralization, and probably disaster, on this country'.[51] Though supported by all Liberals who were opposed to the war – including James Bryce, who recurrently argued that Britain violated international law in pursuing war on behalf of Uitlanders – it was not backed by the Liberal Party leader, Henry Campbell-Bannerman, who abstained to try and maintain some equilibrium between Limps and Pro-Boers and 'sought refuge in equivocation'.[52] The SACC continued trying to 're-establish goodwill between the British and Dutch races in South Africa, by a full recognition of the just claims of both, and to urge a pacific settlement upon these principles' – for instance by having John Molteno (the first premier of the Cape Colony) and John Merriman, opponents of Rhodes and advocates of responsible government, delineate their understanding of the war and denounce annexation.[53]

This was to no avail until Emily Hobhouse, Leonard's sister, herself arrested, imprisoned and deported on her way to distribute relief to South African women and children, exposed how the British army violated international *jus in bello* principles by starving Boer civilians (notably women and children) in concentration camps. Campbell-Bannerman then exclaimed during a dinner to Liberal leaders on 14 June 1901: 'When is a war not a war? When it is carried out by methods of barbarism in South Africa'.[54] From then on, Campbell-Bannerman joined pro-Boers in contending that the continuance of war went against British interests and 'a solid and stable settlement in South Africa'. Such a change of attitudes made Campbell-Bannerman's followers uneasy, as the speech could appear an attack on soldiers, rather than on the government and the military command and as this symbolically meant giving the pro-Boers the upper hand in the party, at the risk of fracturing the party once and for all. For a few months, Rosebery did play up the division, possibly in the hope of reclaiming the Liberal leadership for himself and the Limps, or even of in the hope of joining a coalition government should a new one be formed, following Salisbury's impending retirement.[55] In the midst of chaos, it took the astute party sense of Herbert Gladstone, William's fourth son, a firm supporter of Campbell-Bannerman and the Liberal chief whip since 1899, to try and keep the party united by preventing a Limp breakaway. Seeing a very timid overture in Rosebery's 'National Policy' speech at Chesterfield in December 1901, Herbert Gladstone formulated the following in an attempt to find an acceptable rallying cry for most Liberals: 'surely [they] are all bound by every consideration of patriotism and duty to work for the one end of the present, urgent and overwhelming importance – a right settlement while continuing every vigorous military action till the war ends'.[56]

The 'imperialism of promise' ideal: towards harmony through conciliation and international cooperation?

What mattered then for ethical Liberals, in Britain and elsewhere, beyond party business was that Campbell-Bannerman was now endorsing LLAM and SACC principles, including promoting self-government for the colonies (an option that they preferred to having the annexed Boer Republics becoming British Crown Colonies).[57] Many read the Boer War from an evolutionist perspective: they firmly believed that 'New Imperialism' was becoming moribund and that it was high time to construct 'new internationalism' to build

peace. It required perseverance and time to achieve lasting effects: despite the promise of self-government for South Africa in the 1902 Treaty of Vereeniging, it was not until the Liberals returned to power in 1906 that implementation was seriously considered.

To Radical Liberal publicist and pacifist George H. Perris, the Permanent Court of Arbitration was the 'first decisive step toward a human confederation which will be the formal expression of that common interest'; but institutional internationalism was still a long way ahead, with the PCA still waiting on its first case and failing to check Russian expansionism in China, for instance.[58] Ethical Liberals were deeply convinced that the Concert of Europe, which had failed to halt the Armenian massacres and ensuing conflicts, was moribund and that it needed to be replaced with a structure that involved civil society more – or more precisely, international civil society – as a check on governments. What structure exactly that might be was not yet determined; then only loose expressions like a 'European Union' or 'the United States of Europe' gave contours to this future structuralist project. For the time being, these Liberals sought to invent new ways to mobilise citizens and parliamentary representatives, for they would be essential in popularising international arbitration and more constructive internationalism with national governments.

Ethical Liberals were deeply convinced that the Concert of Europe, which had failed to halt the Armenian massacres and ensuing conflicts, was moribund and that it needed to be replaced with a structure that involved civil society more – or more precisely, international civil society – as a check on governments.

A first endeavour had taken place from late 1896, when Liberal Armenophiles decided to target public opinions in Europe with a series of translated pamphlets that they distributed in Britain, France, Germany, Switzerland (and probably beyond) in the hope that the public would in turn appeal to their governments and that if the Concert of Europe did not move, new structures might be born.[59] International conferences for the relief of Ottoman Armenians also took place in Britain from 1897 with similar long-term hopes, and standardised petitions for peace, as Greece was waging war on the Ottoman empire to reclaim Ottoman Crete.[60] Though the Boer War seemed to call a halt to such transnational endeavours, individual contacts were maintained and associations pursued. For instance, Patrick Geddes's intensive international consulting prior to his Cyprus experience allowed him to found the International Assembly on the margins of the 1900 Paris *Exposition universelle*, with James Bryce as vice-president and Léon Bourgeois, the French Radical Liberal father of *solidarisme* and one of France's representatives at the Hague peace conference, as president. It aimed at bringing together social scientists in the hope of international cooperation – in 1900, there existed three branches (British, French and American) – and of diffusing international cooperation through education.[61] Just like Leonard Courtney, Geddes thought that a 'change in paradigms' was needed and that education could do that, so that 'honour' was not only 'a value to be held in war', but also to be held in peace.[62]

The Armenian agitation, the Hague Peace Conference and the Paris *Exposition universelle* were contexts that saw increasing transnational connections between liberal radicals in Britain, France, Germany (and to a lesser extent the United States), beyond the traditional forums offered by international journals. Another solid mooring in France was

Baron D'Estournelles de Constant, a former French ambassador to London (1890–1895), an Armenophile, and an advocate of international arbitration who represented France at the Hague peace conference. To him, French–English confrontation at Fachoda (1898) was proof enough that only international justice would end the increasing costs of armed peace and the international arbitration of war. Following the Boer War, he mobilised contacts in France to create the French parliamentary arbitration committee (1903) and turned towards international contacts (especially Bryce and Campbell-Bannerman) in Britain to establish a British branch, just as there was talk of a French–English arbitration treaty. Although the endeavour was mocked by Conservatives – who still believed that nothing could prevent war when national honour was at stake – French members were received in Britain and vice versa in late 1903–early 1904, just before the *Entente cordiale franco-anglaise* was signed (April 1904). D'Estournelles de Constant thought that all occasions to mobilise transnationally – such as for Macedonia and Armenia in 1903 and 1904 – should strengthen a European public opinion for world peace and that international arbitration should also apply to empire.[63]

Though British Liberal contact with D'Estournelles de Constant was less active in 1905, when the latter deployed his international *Conciliation internationale* committee (under the aegis of American philanthropist and peace advocate Andrew Carnegie), as they were trying hard to restore the Liberal Party's unity for an upcoming general election, they shared his understanding. They thus participated as much as time allowed them – for example, Campbell-Bannerman gave a speech at the 1906 Interparliamentary Union in London, a few months after he had become premier. But the peace-all-round 'imperialism of promise' was still very much a chimera, in which the place of the United States and of so-called 'racial unity' (vis-à-vis Europe) was a heated topic – for instance for Stead.[64]

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The years in opposition were formative for ethical Gladstonian Liberals who sought to reinvent the Liberal mantra after the death of an iconic leader. The triad of Liberalism–imperialism (or rather empire)–internationalism was central to that process, with practical, experimental schemes that revealed how much humanitarianism – and the cause of humanity – was key to their 'new Liberalism' and their understanding of cosmopolitan nationalism. Retrospectively, however, their internationalist/ethical 'new Liberalism' differed little from the Liberalism of social reform that came to characterise Liberal politics after 1906 and could be regarded as the story of a relative failure, in that it only remained strong on the backbench and in transnational venues after that date. This would only change with the advent of the First World War, when most of these ethical Liberals joined internationalist organisations – such as the Bryce Group – that would devise a new international organisation to maintain a lasting peace and were thus at the origins of the League of Nations (established in 1919). But for the time being, this seemed far off.

Indeed, ahead of the 1906 general election and of the 1903 Lib–Lab pact, the party reunification process, under the aegis of Campbell-Bannerman and of Chief Whip Herbert Gladstone, had to prune out centrifugal options and single out relatively consensual issues. Internationalism and all-round conciliation in the empire was not a high priority on that agenda and seemed very impractical to Limps for instance. By contrast, the 1906 Liberal electoral strategy centred on a consensual indicting of the Conservative–Unionist imperialism as being antagonistic to Britons' prosperity and sense of humanity, and on a denunciation of their favouring Chinese

indentured servants to work in South African gold mines rather than Uitlanders. While the 1906 Liberal campaign made the empire a prominent issue, it was primarily articulated through a domestic patriotism and the then rather vague promises of social reform, with a hope to capture the Labour vote.

As such – and in spite of the Radicals' citing the contribution of Indian soldiers to Britain's imperium as an argument for self-government – the 1906 consensus meant that any radical change in the hierarchy between the metropolis and colonies seemed far in the future, apart from the decision to favour free trade (rather than Chamberlain's imperial preference scheme) and the insistence on humane treatment of the colonised. After all, many (ethical) Liberals, including New Liberal thinkers such as Hobson and Hobhouse, still believed in the moral mission of Britain in the empire, including her 'civilising mission' alongside the process of national self-government. Thus, they did not really dispute Bryce's idea of sovereignty as a long-won process that would first benefit the Dominions, and then the Crown Colonies when they 'came of age'.[65] Put differently, and congruent with the dominant stance amongst American and European liberal internationalists at that time, institutional/federal internationalism was still envisaged by British ethical liberals as the turf of the 'Great Powers', whereby colonies were not yet legitimately able to sit as equals or negotiate their relationship to 'the mother country' (mainland Britain). At least for the time being, their internationalist/ethical Liberalism thus remained largely subsumable under post-1906 New Liberalism. ■

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