

Liberals in wartime

Tom Trafford examines how the debates within the Liberal Party over the South African war of 1899–1902 played out in one major city.

The Manchester Liberal Union's response to the South African War

Anti-war majority versus pro-war minority

THE SOUTH AFRICAN War (11 October 1899 – 31 May 1902) took place during a period of political upheaval in Britain. The Redistribution of Seats Act 1885 had aimed to give each town, city and county representation in the House of Commons based on their population. The Act divided Manchester into six constituencies: East Manchester, North Manchester, North-East Manchester, North-West Manchester, South Manchester and South-West Manchester.¹ The government's implementation of the Act resulted in constituency Liberal associations becoming more important in local election campaigning.² In early 1885, the Manchester Liberal Party resolved to form associations in each of the six new constituencies. Each was under the direction of a general council and an executive committee. Within a constituency, the rule of its Liberal association was absolute; no other Liberal association or central organisation could exercise their influence in the constituency.³

Following the formation of the six Manchester Liberal Associations in 1885, the leadership of each association agreed to form the Manchester Liberal Union to encourage cooperation and ensure that the Liberal Party maintained a city-wide presence.⁴ The Liberal Union's constitution outlined its three objectives as: 'to advance the general interests of

the Liberal Party; to support or oppose the policy of the Government for the time being on occasions of national and local emergency; to consider any question directly or indirectly affecting the Liberal cause'.⁵ The Union's executive committee had six functions: to call meetings of the Liberal Union; to consider the city-wide interests of the Liberal Party; to advocate for the policies of the Liberal Party; to coordinate the Liberal Party's response to local and national emergencies; to consider any questions that effected the Liberal Party; and to provide oversight of the registration work of the whole city.⁶ The Union's executive committee, which consisted of twelve cooperative members and forty-eight members elected each year by the six associations, elected the Union's leadership: president, vice-president, treasurer and honorary secretary.⁷ These offices were elected each year at the Union's annual meeting, with those elected serving a one-year term. There were no term limits, and if an officer was re-elected, they could serve for as long as they wanted.

This article considers the Liberal Union's response to the South African War, by scrutinising its leadership's position on the government's South Africa policy, and argues that the tradition of radical politics among Mancunian Liberals led the majority of the committee to oppose the war. This did not reflect

the national position, where the war had divided the national Liberal Party into three factions, all with contrasting views on the conflict. It is important to note that a minority on the committee supported the war; however, they lacked the numbers and influence of their anti-war counterparts. The most influential members of the Union led the anti-war faction, which enabled them to use their influence to ensure that it took an anti-war position.

The anti-war members of the Liberal Union opposed several aspects of the conflict: the government's refusal to agree on a diplomatic resolution to the conflict; the cost of the conflict; the benefit the war brought to capitalists; and the army's tactics. Their control of the Liberal Union enabled them to use the Union's resources to amplify their opposition to the war and prevent disunity amongst the six Manchester Liberal associations. This was reinforced by their use of the Liberal Union to authorise the formation of the Manchester Transvaal Committee as a political vehicle to amplify opposition to the war.

Background to the South African War

Throughout the nineteenth century, successive British governments aimed to form an empire in southern Africa. This culminated in Britain's annexation of the South African Republic (usually known as the Transvaal) in 1877.⁸ Following the Transvaal Rebellion (16 December 1880 – 23 March 1881), Britain and the reestablished South African Republic signed the Pretoria Convention on 3 August 1881. The convention granted the Republic self-governance in internal affairs, while maintaining British suzerainty over its foreign policy.⁹ Both governments renegotiated the convention in 1884, leading to a new London Convention; however, the Republic's representatives signed only under duress, after politicians in Cape Colony and the Orange Free State exerted political pressure on the Republic's president, Paul Kruger.¹⁰

The Jameson Raid (29 December 1895 – 2 January 1896) exacerbated the tensions between the two countries. The raid was organised by Cecil Rhodes, the prime minister of Cape Colony's Chartered Company,



and led by the Chartered Company's administrator, Dr Leander Star Jameson. Jameson invaded the Republic with 600 Rhodesian mounted police employed by the Chartered Company, aiming to rendezvous with the Uitlanders, British citizens living and working in the Transvaal, whom Rhodes had convinced to rise in rebellion against Kruger's government. Despite their promises to Rhodes, the Uitlanders decided against rebelling, enabling the Boer commandos to track down and capture Jameson's force. Amongst the captured baggage, the Boers found coded telegrams from Rhodes and the code book required to decipher them.¹¹ Although the British government denied having any prior knowledge of the raid, it increased tensions between Britain and the Republic.¹²

The tensions between the two governments came to a head four years later. On 31 March 1899, Percy Fitzpatrick, an Uitlander living in the South African Republic, arrived in Cape Town to present a petition to Sir Alfred Milner, the British high commissioner in South Africa. The petition, signed by 21,000 British subjects living in the Republic, asked the British government to intervene to protect their democratic rights.¹³ Fitzpatrick's petition led to Bloemfontein Conference (31 May 1899 – 5 June 1899) between the two governments. Milner demanded a five-year franchise and an increase of seats in the Volksraad, the Republic's parliament, for the Rand. Although Kruger offered concessions, the conference ended without agreement.

However, in August, Kruger offered a five-year retrospective franchise and an increase in the Rand's seats in the Volksraad from two to ten. There were three conditions attached to offer: that the British government would agree to a bilateral arbitration procedure between the two governments to resolve other points of difference; that this offer would not set a precedent for further British interventions in the Republic's internal affairs; and that the

British would not insist further on its claim of suzerainty over the Republic. Although Kruger's offer was more than the British had initially demanded, the government rejected it due to the conditions.¹⁴ The Republic and the Orange Free State then issued an ultimatum at 5 p.m. on 9 October 1899, demanding Britain accepted the following terms within forty-eight hours: arbitration on 'all points of difference'; all British troops deployed on the Republic's border to be instantly withdrawn; British reinforcements that had landed in South Africa after 1 June 1899 to be withdrawn; reinforcements currently in transit not to land in South Africa. The British government responded to the ultimatum the next day, stating that the demands were 'impossible to discuss.'¹⁵ At 5 p.m. on 11 October, the first Boer commandos crossed into British Natal, thus starting the South African War.¹⁶

The Liberal Party was ill-prepared for the outbreak of the war. W. E. Gladstone's retirement in 1894 had caused a succession crisis with both Lord Rosebery and then William Harcourt unsuccessfully trying to fill the void he had left. At the same time, Liberals were still reeling from the home rule crisis of 1886 and the breakaway of those Liberals who opposed home rule to form the Liberal Unionist Party.¹⁷ The main objective of Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, the new leader of the Liberal Party from January 1899, was therefore to keep the party united.¹⁸

Despite Campbell-Bannerman's best efforts, the war split the party into three factions. Campbell-Bannerman led the moderate faction; he took the view that the Unionist government could have prevented the war through better diplomacy; however, he argued that Britain must defeat the Boers through military force.¹⁹ Following the Boers' invasion of Natal on 11 October 1899, 84 out of 177 Liberal MPs remained loyal to Campbell-Bannerman, with this number increasing to 98 out of 183 MPs after the 1900 general election.²⁰

However, his authority over both the imperialist and radical wings was more tenuous. Lord Rosebery led the Liberal Imperialists in supporting the government's South African policy. Rosebery described a Liberal Imperialist as a 'Liberal in domestic politics and an imperialist in foreign and colonial questions'.²¹ Before the 1900 election, the Liberal Imperialist faction consisted of fifty-one Liberal MPs, with this number increasing to fifty-five following the election.²² In contrast, the radical wing criticised the government's South African policy and maintained the Liberal Party's opposition to the worst aspects of imperialism.²³ This resulted in them being derogatively known as pro-Boers.²⁴ Unlike the other two factions, there was no designated leader of the anti-war faction. There were forty-two sitting radical anti-war MPs when the war commenced, with this number falling to thirty following the 1900 election (twenty-eight Liberals and two Independent Labour Party).²⁵

The turning point of relations between the radical wing and the moderates was Campbell-Bannerman's speech at the National Reform Union, which took place on 14 June 1901. He had become convinced that the Liberal Imperialists were plotting to replace him as leader.²⁶ In response, he used his speech to condemn the army's use of concentration camps as 'methods of barbarism'.²⁷ This was a decisive moment which moved the Liberal Party's position on the South African War. In one stroke, Campbell-Bannerman had normalised opposition to the conflict, while supporters of the war were now the extremists. This was an olive branch to the anti-war faction and marked Campbell-Bannerman's change from a moderate opponent of the war to one of the anti-war faction's greatest advocates. Over the next five months, Campbell-Bannerman attacked the government for imposing martial law in Cape Colony, called for both Joseph Chamberlain, secretary of state for the colonies, and Milner to resign and

continued to describe the army's tactics as 'methods of barbarism'.²⁸

The Manchester Liberal Union's opposition to the South African Crisis

Like the national Liberal Party, the Manchester Liberal Union was unprepared for the diplomatic crisis in South Africa. After more than a decade of being a key voice on the Union, C. P. Scott resigned as its president on 12 August 1899.²⁹ Scott was arguably the most influential Liberal in Manchester. He was the editor of the only morning daily Liberal newspaper in the city, the *Manchester Guardian*, and the MP for Leigh.³⁰ Scott's influence on the Liberal Union was so great that the Union's secretary described him as 'practically the official head of the party'.³¹ During his presidency, the Liberal Union prioritised the incorporation of working-class interests into the traditional middle-class party.³² Scott's presidency had continued the Liberal Union's close alignment with the radical wing of the national party.³³ Most of the Union's members continued to adhere to the principles of John Bright's and Richard Cobden's Manchester School of economic and social theory.³⁴ The school's three key tenets were free trade, non-intervention in the affairs of other nations and limited interference in employer-employee relations.³⁵ Most members of the Liberal Union continued their support for the national party's radical wing throughout the South African War.

Throughout the conflict, the Union prioritised opposing the government's South African policy, with the Education Bill (1902) the only other policy the Union criticised during this period.³⁶ At the Union's annual meeting on 12 August 1899, the executive committee elected C. E. Schwann, the MP for North Manchester, to replace Scott as president, Edwin Guthrie was re-elected vice-president, Edwyn Holt was elected treasurer and Theodore Gregory was re-elected honorary secretary.

Schwann was often in London due to his position as an MP, leaving Guthrie to lead the Liberal Union in his absence.³⁷ All four went on to vocally oppose the South African War.

On 29 August 1899, the executive committee met to discuss the 'Transvaal Question'. Guthrie chaired the meeting, Scott spoke on the South African crisis, while representatives from each of the six Manchester Liberal associations were in attendance.³⁸ The committee agreed that a public meeting would be organised in the next ten days to oppose military intervention in South Africa; those present tasked Scott with organising it. This coincided with the members of the committee authorising the formation of the Manchester Transvaal committee.³⁹ Scott urged those present to ensure that the Manchester Transvaal committee would be organisationally separate from the Liberal Union.⁴⁰ By keeping both organisations publicly separate, Scott attempted to protect the Liberal Union from any potential adverse ramifications from the public. However, it is difficult to argue that both organisations were separate entities when it was Liberal Union's executive committee which had authorised the formation of the Transvaal committee, and both organisations shared membership and cooperated closely with each other before the commencement of the war.

On 1 September, Hugh Fullerton, who represented the North-West Manchester Liberal association on the executive committee of the Liberal Union, circulated the announcement of the formation of the Manchester Transvaal committee.⁴¹ Manchester was the only regional city that was able to sustain a localised peace committee independent of the national peace organisations based in London.⁴² In comparison, anti-war activity in the similarly sized regional hubs of Glasgow and Liverpool was minimal, due to the Conservative tendencies of both cities, while Birmingham was a stronghold of the Liberal Unionists.⁴³ Out of the eighteen people

present at the executive committee's emergency meeting, eight became founding members of the Manchester Transvaal committee. Five of the eight formed the newly formed committee's leadership: chairman Guthrie; vice-chairman Scott; treasurer Arthur A. Howarth; honorary secretaries Fullerton and Alexander Porter.⁴⁴ They were not the only senior Mancunian Liberals to join the Transvaal committee; both the Union's president Schwann and Treasurer Holt joined it, despite both being absent from the executive committee's meeting on 29 August.⁴⁵

The Manchester Transvaal Committee's most notable achievement was the holding of a large peace meeting at St James Hall on 15 September 1899. Scott's biographer J. L. Hammond described the meeting as 'the greatest attempt to deter the British public against a potential conflict in South Africa.'⁴⁶ John Morley, a Gladstonian loyalist, was the meeting's chief speaker.⁴⁷ Morley had initially been reluctant to address the meeting, as he viewed Scott and the Manchester Liberals, who organised the meeting, as 'unpractical and fanatical'.⁴⁸ He agreed to speak, however, after being persuaded to do so by L. T. Hobhouse, Scott's subordinate at the *Manchester Guardian*.⁴⁹ He was joined on the platform by Leonard Courtney, a Liberal Unionist⁵⁰ – though as his wife Catherine [Kate] Courtney noted in a letter to Scott, her husband was not the embodiment of many Unionists.⁵¹

The Transvaal Committee's leadership selected John Albert Bright to preside over the peace meeting, instead of Schwann, in an attempt to give the meeting an apolitical image.⁵² Despite initially being a Liberal Unionist, Bright had defected to the Liberal Party after standing down as MP for Birmingham Central in 1895, standing as the Liberal Party's candidate in Montgomery Boroughs in 1900.⁵³ Bright's appointment as president of the peace meeting gave the Liberal Union plausible deniability, while if Schwann had

presided, it would have been a clear connection to the Union. Both the Transvaal committee and the Liberal Union wanted the public to view the peace meeting as apolitical. Courtney's and Bright's connections to the Liberal Unionist party were extremely useful in this regard, as Chamberlain, the leader of the Liberal Unionists, was one of the main instigators of the South African crisis. Despite the Transvaal committee being nominally independent of the Liberal Union, the substantial number of Liberal members ensured that the impact of the committee's policies on the Liberal Party remained at the forefront of the committee's minds.

Morley addressed the meeting first, arguing that those who desired a peaceful conclusion to the South African crisis were on the side of national honour.⁵⁴ F. W. Hirst, an attendee, described Morley's speech as the 'finest oratorical performance and the most moving of all those I have heard.'⁵⁵ Courtney addressed the meeting second, arguing 'that due to the jingoes' argument for war rested on the Boers breaking both the Pretoria Convention (1881) and the London Convention (1884), the simple solution was to refer the case to the highest legal court in the land and for them to determine what the truth was.'⁵⁶ Following the unanimous passing of an anti-war resolution which condemned the government's South African policy, Bright concluded the meeting by declaring, 'It was delightful to know the meeting had such a good result, and it had shown conclusively that Manchester is not full of jingoes.'⁵⁷ Hirst described the meeting's attendance as 'a great sea of ten thousand men and women, with a few hundred jingoes at the back of the crowd'.⁵⁸ The meeting was a huge success: the largest anti-war meeting held outside London.

On 12 October, the executive committee of the Liberal Union met in response to the Boers' invasion of Natal the previous day. Guthrie presided over the meeting and

provided an overview of the Transvaal committee's performance, in which he outlined the successful peace meetings held in Manchester and around the country.⁵⁹ By reporting to his fellow members of the executive committee on the Transvaal committee's peace campaign, Guthrie was admitting that the Union had a vested interest in the committee. The Transvaal committee was effectively a pressure group formed by anti-war members of the executive committee of the Liberal Union with the sole remit of opposing military intervention in South Africa.

The Manchester Liberal Union's opposition to the South African War

Opponents of the war used their control over the Liberal Union to provide a platform for politicians to condemn the government's military intervention in South Africa. Campbell-Bannerman gave a speech under the auspices of the Liberal Union on 15 November 1899. The Union's president, Schwann, chaired the meeting and used his opening speech to set its tone. He did this by linking the war with the Jameson Raid:

One thing puzzled him. They were told that the Transvaal Government had for years been plotting to turn the British out of South Africa. It might be so. But how was it then that Colonel the Hon. R. White, who visited the Transvaal in 1895, before the [Jameson] raid, had the evidence that he did? Colonel White gave a lamentable account of the armoury and the cannons in possession of the Transvaal at the time.⁶⁰

Schwann's decision to attack the government's tacit support for the raid and to justify the Republic's rearmament was a strong stance to take, as the Boers had invaded British territory just over a month before, the army was suffering defeats on the battlefield, and feelings amongst the public remained high.

Campbell-Bannerman followed Schwann, echoing the same sentiments. He first turned his attention to the government's failure to resolve the Uitlanders' grievances with the Republic diplomatically:

Their [Unionist government's] first duty to us, to the people of this country and this empire, was to keep us out of war in South Africa – And we are plunged into war in South Africa. They declare they did not intend it, and we are bound to accept their disclaimer. But blind indeed must he be who does not see that beside them and behind them, among their advisers and instigators, and backers and instruments, there were men who did intend war and whose influence was certainly not on the side of peace.⁶¹

Campbell-Bannerman next turned his attention to Cecil Rhodes' role in the deteriorating relations between Britain and the Republic:

Always remember that the key to this South African problem is not to be found at Pretoria but at Cape Town. The military power, which has been nurtured and developed in Pretoria, gives the Transvaal a temporary prominence. These military preparations, this armed strength, as the chairman has said, can hardly be spoken of as unnatural by anyone who remembers the intrigues and designs openly expressed against their independence and remembers also the abortive revolt in Johannesburg and the Jameson Raid.⁶²

Both Schwann and Campbell-Bannerman criticised the government's South African policy in the lead-up to the outbreak of the war. They both argued that the government's expansionist foreign policy had caused the Republic's rearmament. However, they both refrained from criticising the government's policy in response to the Boers' invasion of Natal. British soldiers were losing their lives on the battlefield, and trying to score points

politically would not go down well with the public.

In the aftermath of his speech, Campbell-Bannerman wrote in a letter to his chief whip, Herbert Gladstone, that the war had divided the members of the Manchester Liberal Union between a large anti-war faction led by Guthrie and a smaller pro-war faction led by Alderman James Southern.⁶³ Despite these divisions, the anti-war faction controlled the Liberal Union's policy throughout the conflict. Schwann, Guthrie, Gregory and Holt were all re-elected to their leadership positions at the Union's annual meeting on 10 May 1900.⁶⁴ Guthrie presided over the meeting and used his presidential address to outline his belief that only the Manchester School's principles could bring prosperity to Britain: 'Lord Salisbury sneered at the doctrines of the Manchester School. It was not by aggression, but by the operation of the doctrines of the Manchester School that prosperity, peace, and happiness were made permanent'.⁶⁵ Guthrie believed that if all countries were prepared to trade their resources equally, there would be no need for them to use military force.⁶⁶

Following Guthrie's speech, the executive committee passed a resolution strongly condemning the government for being involved in a war so soon after the Hague Peace Conference of 1899, which had brought hopes of universal peace:

That this meeting of the General Council of the Liberal Union deplores the war in South Africa following so closely upon the hope of permanent peace engendered by the conference at the Hague, and earnestly hopes that the war may be brought to an early termination, and that peace may be established on such terms as will ensure the future from the danger of any reoccurrence of military conflict and may be reasonably calculated to allay all animosities which have been occasioned.⁶⁷

It was the government's dashing of the symbolism of the hope of worldwide peace that the Hague Convention had developed, rather than its failure to adhere to the Convention's legal mechanisms, which brought the Union's ire. The organisers of the Hague conference had not invited representatives from the Republic or the Orange Free State due to their deteriorating relations with Britain. They were concerned that if they invited representatives from the two Boer republics, the British would withdraw from negotiations. As the Hague Convention only regulated warfare between signatories, the Boers did not have the protection of the Convention. However, it is essential to note that the Convention was a compilation of the signatories' collective beliefs about how countries should conduct war, rather than a legal mechanism that could punish a nation that broke their shared norms.⁶⁸ At most, the Convention set the benchmark for when signatories could expect condemnation from the international community for their actions in war.

The second aspect of the resolution condemned the government for prioritising an expansionist foreign policy over rectifying social issues in Britain:

This meeting further hopes in the interests of the United Kingdom that a Liberal Government may soon be returned to power, which shall be free to devote its attention to those domestic questions which are so urgently pressing for settlement, and which are now neglected under the stress of enlargements abroad.⁶⁹

The resolution's strong condemnation of the war and support for a new Liberal government hides the divisions within the Liberal Union. It had taken three meetings of the executive committee over two months to agree on the contents of the resolution, with the debate only resolved when Guthrie personally intervened and amended the resolution to strongly condemn the government's policy.⁷⁰

The executive committee's divisions were on show nine months later. On 8 February 1901, the committee met to discuss the request of the North-West Manchester Liberal Association to call a meeting of the wider members of the Liberal Union, known as the 'Liberal 1200', to discuss the government's South African policy. The committee narrowly passed the motion; seven supported the motion and five opposed.⁷¹ Eighteen days later, the 'Liberal 1200' congregated and passed an anti-war resolution:

That this meeting of the Liberal Union, believing the war in South Africa to be as immoral as it is unjust, is of the opinion that, in view of its prolongation, the widespread devastation it has caused, and of the necessity felt by all classes, on every material as well as moral ground for the speedy termination of the war, the Government should be urged forthwith to appoint special commissioners to inquire and report as to the possibility of restoring peace on terms which shall secure the equality of all classes of the white population and guarantee the protection of the native races from every form of forced labour.⁷²

The 'Liberal 1200's' decision to pass a resolution condemning the war is evidence that the anti-war feeling present amongst most of the members of the Union's executive committee extended to most of its wider membership. However, without knowing how many members voted for or against the resolution, it is impossible to know how much support there was for the pro-war faction amongst the members of the 'Liberal 1200'.

The Union reaffirmed its members' opposition to the government at its annual meeting on 14 August 1901.⁷³ Schwann, Guthrie, Holt and Gregory were all re-elected to their leadership positions.⁷⁴ Guthrie presided over the meeting and used his presidential speech to voice his opposition to the South African War:

It appeared to him [Guthrie] that the feeling of the country was steadily tending in the direction of the views of those who had opposed the war from the very beginning, and very soon the tax collector, he supposed, would affect the conversion of a good many who were not converted on the ground of argument and principle.⁷⁵

By August 1901, it was becoming increasingly difficult for the government to hide the impact of the war from the public, whose support was beginning to wane after the publication of the atrocities committed by the army.

Later in the year, the pro-war faction managed to prevent the anti-war faction from organising a large peace meeting in Manchester. On 17 October, the executive committee of the Union met at the request of the North-West and South Manchester Liberal associations to discuss holding a peace meeting at the Free Trade Hall to provide a platform for John Burns MP and David Lloyd George MP, two of the most outspoken and well-known opponents of the war.⁷⁶ The committee passed the resolution by eleven votes to five.⁷⁷ At the following meeting, on 27 November, Gregory resigned as honorary secretary because 'he could not associate himself with or take any part in carrying out the resolution of 17 October in reference to the proposed meeting in the Free Trade Hall with Mr John Burns MP and Mr David Lloyd George MP as speakers'. Gregory's resignation prevented the peace meeting from taking place.⁷⁸ Up until November 1901, Gregory was a member of the anti-war faction, so his refusal to support the meeting would have been a damaging blow to his previous allies. There is no record of why Gregory opposed the proposed peace meeting; however, he probably felt that inviting two prominent opponents of the conflict would cause more divisions amongst the members of the Liberal Union.

The Union's opponents of the war, however, were able to secure enough support to

invite Morley to speak under the auspices of the Liberal Union on 12 March 1902.⁷⁹ Morley attacked the government's South African policy: 'if the government could have foreseen the bloody spectre of horror and misery now abroad in South Africa, the wreck of free Parliamentary government in Cape Colony, the mountain of mischief and irreparable wrong, they would have checked their diplomacy.'⁸⁰ He condemned the side effects of the war, both the humanitarian crisis it had caused in the Republic and the Orange Free State, as well as the implementation of martial law in British-controlled Cape Colony. If the government had understood the side effects of war in South Africa before the conflict, Morley believed they would have adhered to the advice of peace activists in September and October 1899 and resolved the Uitlanders' grievances diplomatically.

Morley did not just blame the government for the war; he accused Lord Rosebery and his fellow Liberal Imperialists of being willing collaborators:

If Lord Rosebery had only come with us – if he had come with us at St James Hall in 1899 and warned the Government of the train of mischief which he now depicts with such force and eloquence, I say again there would have been no war.⁸¹

Rosebery had hoped to use the war to purge the radical wing of the Liberal Party.⁸² He saw the war as a chance to further his political ambitions and undermine Campbell-Bannerman's leadership. Following Campbell-Bannerman's 'methods of barbarism' speech on 14 July 1901, however, radicals and moderates had allied against Rosebery and the Liberal Imperialists.

The anti-war faction reestablished its control of the Liberal Union's offices at its annual meeting in 1902. The Union's standing orders had required Gregory to remain in post until the executive committee could arrange

an election to appoint a successor.⁸³ The committee elected Hugh Fullerton, a prominent opponent of the government's South African policy; he had served as the honorary secretary of the Manchester Transvaal committee.⁸⁴ His election ensured the anti-war faction remained in control of the Liberal Union, with Schwann, Guthrie and Holt all being re-elected to their positions.⁸⁵ As was tradition during the war, Guthrie referred to the conflict in his presidential speech. He expressed the hope that the peace negotiations then going on would be successful and went on to connect the war to the high level of taxation that the public was facing.⁸⁶ Guthrie expressed his belief that the government was willing to contemplate peace because it no longer had the guaranteed support of the average citizen. He hoped that the government was now willing to negotiate with the Boers in good faith.

Conclusion

Overall, the anti-war faction dominated the Liberal Union's response to the South African war.⁸⁷ The anti-war faction's dominance of the executive committee was due to the support of key members of the Liberal Union. All five incumbents of the Liberal Union's offices during the war were members of the anti-war faction.⁸⁸ The majority of Mancunian Liberals were from the radical wing of the Liberal Party, which doubled as the centre of opposition to the war amongst Liberals.⁸⁹ Guthrie was by far the most influential voice on the Liberal Union during the war; he used his position as vice-president to dictate the Union's response to the government's South African policy. He used his authority as vice-president to amend the resolution passed at the annual meeting in 1900 to increase the criticism of the government.⁹⁰ He used all three annual meetings as an opportunity to give anti-war speeches.⁹¹ His influence went beyond the executive committee, as he was also the chairman of the

Manchester Transvaal committee.⁹² Guthrie was the face of the Liberal Union's opposition to the war.

Initially, the influence of senior Mancunian Liberals who opposed the war led to a much stronger opposition to the war by the Liberal Union than by the national Liberal Party. This was due to the anti-war faction amongst Liberal MPs lacking the numbers and influence to be able to affect the national party's leadership's position. However, as the conflict progressed, Campbell-Bannerman moved more towards the pro-Boer position due to political necessity; he came to espouse many of the same sentiments as the Liberal Union.

Ultimately, the most influential members of the Liberal Union vocally opposed the South African war, and their leadership led the Union to follow suit. While a minority of the committee supported the government's South African policy, they lacked the numbers and influence to consistently affect the Liberal Union's policy on the conflict. ■

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