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The Public Career Of Lewis Harcourt (first Viscount) 1905-1916

Desvaux de Marigny, Guy

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The 'poison' continued to fester. After fifteen months of almost uninterrupted disputes, Rosebery was determined to have nothing more to do with Sir William. During the parliamentary recess several attempts were made to reconcile the two leaders, but to no avail. The Harcourts were unperturbed by the ex-premier's bellicosity: as far as they were concerned, he had put himself in the wrong. Instead of inspiring unity in the face of adversity, the electoral catastrophe had only intensified differences.

By the time the new parliamentary session commenced in February 1896 all that had been achieved was the renewal of the 1894-5 arrangement, whereby Asquith resumed his *rôle* of go-between for Sir William and Rosebery. The deadlock persisted into summer. Even while shooting grouse with his old acquaintance George Curzon at Inverlochy,[167] Harcourt was still probably wondering how he could promote his father's claim to the leadership of the Liberal Party. A possible answer suggested itself in August, via the start of new massacres of Armenians in Turkey. The activities of Armenian revolutionaries provoked reprisals which surpassed even those of December 1894. Anti-Turkish British public opinion placed the Unionist Government under heavy pressure to take action: what would the Liberal leaders say?

Ironically, since Rosebery was to resign largely over this issue, both he and Sir William shared virtually identical views. Both were critical of Government inaction, as well as that of the other signatories of the Berlin Congress of 1878, but were also equally reluctant to see Britain act independently and possibly end up going to war against Turkey on her own. The non-interventionist line taken by Rosebery in his speeches led Henry Massingham,[168] formerly one of his most vocal adherents, to denounce him as the 'veiled prophet'. 'I suppose', Sir William wrote to his son, 'you [have seen] the Daily Chronicle ... [t]heir rage with Rosebery is amusing'.[169] It became less amusing when Massingham addressed a telegram to Sir William, urging him to make a statement on Armenia.

In response to his father's request for advice, Harcourt suggested a pre-emptive blow before 9 October, when Rosebery was due to announce his stand at Edinburgh. However, before adopting an openly pro-Armenian stance, Sir William decided to try to gauge the extent of

support for Rosebery within the party. He despatched his son to Studley Royal, the old haunt of 'Lulu'. Harcourt reported that there was no consultation among Liberal peers, and that Rosebery and Ripon had fallen out. This was because the latter did not want to 'chuck' Home Rule. This continued adherence of the Gladstonians to Home Rule actually helped Sir William.

The 'disease' of faddism had not been eradicated, but since 1894 Sir William had declared his full acceptance of the NLF programme, avowing himself a 'New Radical'.[170] The 1895 NLF conference was to place reform of the House of Lords - Rosebery's pet reform - second in importance to Home Rule. Even so, Home Rule remained the top Liberal legislative priority, and by ignoring it Rosebery would seem to run against the mainstream of Liberal policy. Dissatisfaction with Rosebery over Home Rule might be used to the advantage of Sir William. Liberal peers and front-benchers might turn to him for guidance on the Armenian question, and from that to other issues.

Soon, another factor entered into Harcourt's calculations. On 24 September 1896 William Gladstone made his last great public speech at Liverpool to voice outraged British - and world - opinion, and called on the Government to take action, which he did not specify. Although he had relinquished his seat in the Commons on the dissolution of Parliament on 8 July 1895, the GOM reserved to himself the right to make statements on public issues. His pronouncements had 'enormous weight because of the prestige of his name and career, and because of the evident lack of leadership from anybody else'.[171] Harcourt pointed to the public enthusiasm aroused by Gladstone's speech and urged his father to adopt a similar anti-Turkish stance. Sir William, however, was not always putty in the hands of his son.

When he addressed his new constituents at Ebbw Vale, West Monmouth on 5 October, he remained true to his 'Little Englander' principles and clearly implied his agreement with the non-interventionism of Rosebery.[172] This did not prevent Massingham from hailing the speech as anti-Turkish, and thus opposed to Rosebery's policy. The reaction was swift and startling: on 8 October newspaper headlines blared Rosebery's resignation. Rosebery felt that the speech of the GOM had undermined his authority over the party, and seems to have carefully scrutinized Sir William's speeches for signs of 'disloyalty'. The distortion

of the Ebbw Vale speech in the Daily Chronicle, deliberate or not, provided a means of ridding himself of Gladstonian 'chains'.[173]

In a letter to Harcourt Allard commented that Gladstone had 'forced' the leadership of Rosebery on the Liberal Party and alluded to the confident expectation of 'some' that Sir William would now take over. 'We will make things "hum" under Sir William', he concluded happily.[174] What Allard did not realize was that Sir William's former Cabinet colleagues were still not keen on having 'Jumbo' trample on them as their leader. During his oratorical *tour-de-force* at Edinburgh on 9 October, Rosebery skilfully drove the wedge deeper. He referred to the support he did not get as Liberal leader, to 'unjustly aspersed' colleagues like Asquith, Fowler,[175] Bryce and Morley (who were present) and deliberately avoided direct mention of his arch-rival.[176]

With his father's permission Harcourt destroyed any possibility of reconciliation between Rosebery and his former Chancellor of the Exchequer. He wrote to Sir William on 5 November, explaining that Labouchère was to be provided with a copy of the ultimatum presented by Rosebery in August 1895 stating his determination not to associate with Sir William. 'Labby' was not to publish the letter, and Harcourt accepted responsibility for this disclosure. For father and son this was probably a measure of revenge for the veiled accusations made at Edinburgh, since they must surely have suspected that a political gossip like 'Labby' would not keep a secret for long.

This interpretation is supported by an earlier letter from Sir William to John Morley:

> This will have to be known one day, and I am waiting for the proper moment to let it be known. When the public see his letter ... of last August they will be a little surprised.[177]

Of course such motivation is not apparent in the covering letter by Harcourt dated 20 November 1896, in which the quarrel was blamed entirely on Rosebery. 'My father declined to have any part in it', he wrote, and added in italics that this was for 'private information' only. Rosebery found out the very same day, but decided to ignore Harcourt's action

until his 'illustrious Sire' became directly involved.[178]

Not very much later the letter had become public property, as part of a lengthy article in the Pall Mall Gazette which appeared on 7 November. Ripon complained to Spencer that whoever leaked the letter to the public was 'guilty of a most gross breach of confidence'.[179] In the end, the real 'culprit' was Harcourt, using Labouchère, and subsequently Rosebery made it clear that he neither forgot nor forgave. Others did not forgive Rosebery his departure. Ripon, who was evidently on better terms with 'Lulu' than Sir William, wrote reproachfully to the ex-Prime Minister: 'You have handed us over to Harcourt [senior] without escape'.[180]

As it turned out the start of Sir William's 'reign', as the Star, a Radical London daily put it, was an inauspicious one. Sir William's handling of the *cause célèbre* of 1896 justified the contention of the Liberal Speaker (a weekly which became The Nation in 1907) that his chances of leading a unified Liberal Party were 'absolutely nil'.[181] The case concerned Dr. Jameson's raid into the Transvaal, ending in the surrender of his force on 2 January. Sir William presided over the South Africa Committee belatedly set up to ascertain who was responsible for the ill-starred expedition.[182] Months of sittings began, during which Sir William failed to impress both because of his procedure[183] and the result.

The Committee found Rhodes, Jameson's employer, guilty of 'grave breaches of duty' but Colonial Secretary Joseph Chamberlain was absolved of any complicity in the Raid. It is now clear that while Chamberlain did not know the exact plans for the Raid, he knew of them - hence the transference of a strip of Bechuanaland territory for the use of the British South Africa Company. Nor was he charged with any intention to overthrow the Transvaal government, although this intention was part of his policy.[184] Afterwards, Sir William did in fact come to suspect that Chamberlain knew more than he had admitted, although his son 'Lulu' subsequently denied any conscious intention to protect an old friend.[185] In short, as the Liberal journalist Spender remarked, the Committee was a disaster for the Liberals from start to finish.

Apart from the negative reaction in England to the apparent 'white wash', there was also international indignation. Germany and

Russia were particularly disgusted by the findings of the Committee as their domestic press opinion showed.[186] During the fierce debate in the Commons on 26 July 1897 Chamberlain proceeded to overturn the Committee's verdict by defending Rhodes. Not surprisingly, the ensuing vote on the report expressed the dissatisfaction of the Opposition back-benchers, whose spokesman was Philip Stanhope. The vote represented a serious loss of confidence in the leadership of Sir William, and was a slap in the face for a report to which he had devoted so much time.[187]

While his father's political stock plummeted, Harcourt's own was rising quietly but steadily. He was becoming the confidant of journalists, politicians and civil servants who valued his advice and keen judgement. As one of his supplicants put it:

> your opinion would help me much, not only because of your well known 'intelligence' but because you know the ropes, spun or aspinning, both of official yarn and political twist.

In late February 1897 Herbert Samuel[188] asked Harcourt to attend the forthcoming Home Counties Liberal Federation conference at Stratford,

> not only because your presence amongst the speakers would add to the attractions of the conference but also because the delegates would listen to and remember the pieces of good advice that come from you.[189]

Even Government officials brought their woes and fears to Harcourt. Treasury stalwart Sir George Murray wrote to complain about the tug-of-war for staff between Sir Michael Hicks-Beach and Chamberlain. The Chancellor of the Exchequer

> seems to think that we are like so many pawns to move backwards or forwards as he pleases ... (Just at present, if I am on the board at all, I am one of Joe's pieces.)[190]

Sir Laurence Guillemard, with whom Harcourt later had official dealings in the former's capacity as Chairman of the Board of Customs and Excise, wrote to ask if he should accept a better paid Government post, which might however be boring work.[191]

Despite the blow dealt to his authority and prestige by the reception of his Committee's conclusions, Sir William remained in control of the Opposition in the Commons during the 1898 session, though many felt that this was *faute de mieux*. As Asquith put it:

> Harcourt's leadership excites no enthusiasm ... but for the moment there is no one else whose name is even generally acceptable, let alone a rallying cry for a broken army ... in the meantime the effectiveness of the party as a political instrument is crippled.[192]

Harcourt was well aware of the growing feeling against Sir William: disaffection was not just confined to a hostile front-bench.

An indication of Radical backbench opinion at this time is provided by a letter from Reginald McKenna[193] to Harcourt. The future First Lord of the Admiralty thanked 'Lulu' for his offer to propose him to Sir William as his private secretary, but regretfully he had to decline. He moved on to the question of policy differences:

> I am a member of the Advanced Radical section; and although [they] remained completely loyal to Sir William, still occasions arose when [they] could not accept Front Bench decisions made for Front Bench reasons.[194]

The Radicals, it seems, were not about to revolt as yet, but they were clearly chafing at the bit and desirous of a greater share in decision-making. Sir William's 'reign' was hardly democratic.

The reason why Harcourt sought someone to replace him as Sir William's secretary was simple. For years his father had urged him to devote more attention to his own interests, and to build up a life and

career of his own. Now Harcourt was preparing to do just that. When he received the letter from McKenna, he had already celebrated his first anniversary at his new Mayfair residence.[195] Harcourt's new abode at 14 Berkeley Square was only a few blocks away from Sir William's Brook Street dwelling. But when he went back to that street now he tended to end up in the Burns household, to visit the only daughter of the American banker Walter Burns.

The new object of Harcourt's affection was Mary Ethel Burns, the granddaughter of multi-millionaire John Pierpont Morgan. Apart from their Brook Street residence, the Burns family also owned a country retreat in Yorkshire, at North Mymms Park in the village of Hatfield. Harcourt also became a regular visitor there, so much so that by November 1898 Mary was writing to Lady Harcourt that:

> Lulu says he already thinks of this as his home. He is going to let me go to Malwood on the 25th so that I shall soon be able to say the same of his home.[196]

With the loss of his devoted assistant imminent Sir William began to consider resigning the leadership, and the political revival of Rosebery helped to strengthen his resolve. John Morley, who was also weary of the parliamentary grind, and Sir William began to toy with suitable dates on which to announce his resignation.[197] Harcourt became engaged in November, with the official announcement made in December. But, dutiful as ever, he travelled down to Malwood to assist Sir William and Morley. Sir William's letter of resignation was published in The Times on 14 December, with an adjoined letter by Morley expressing his complete agreement with the decision.[198] Harcourt had helped draught this 'torpedo', as Sir William put it, aimed directly by implication at Rosebery.

This was obvious to Asquith and Campbell-Bannerman who were the only ones given advance warning under strict confidence. Lord Kimberley, the leader of the Liberal peers in the House of Lords, and Chief Whip Tom Ellis had had no inkling of Sir William's intentions. 'What a pity it is', Asquith commented scathingly to CB, 'when big causes and interests get into the hands of grown up children who will not play in the same

nursery!' Fowler, the future Lord Wolverhampton, was equally unimpressed opining that Sir William had 'run away from a bogey of his own creation. I think *we* have been treated very badly ...'[200]

The 'we' summed up the general dismay among former Liberal ministers, and back-benchers alike. By contrast, Harcourt wanted Rosebery to become the leader of the Liberals once more 'as a piece of personal malice', so that he would 'bear the burden of the next two or three years and reap the harvest of failure he so well deserves.'[201] Rosebery was no more well disposed towards 'Lulu': after the official announcement of Harcourt's engagement, Rosebery sent his congratulations to Sir William but not the prospective bridegroom. 'I doubt', Edward Hamilton noted in his diary, 'If R. will ever forgive Lulu'. Nor was this the first snub.[202]

Reginald Brett congratulated Sir William on his son's imminent marriage and for ridding himself of his 'faithless mistress' (politics) in the same month. Sir Henry James, a Whig family friend, suggested to Sir William that he should now go to the House of Lords. However, according to Harcourt's father, 'Lulu' would not allow this because he anticipated 'like a young Hannibal to replace Hamilcar in the Commons.'[203] Another well-wisher was 'Joe' Chamberlain, to whom Sir William wrote:

> You know what Lulu has been to me and I have often felt that I engrossed too much of his life. When I say that I am happy you may be quite sure that I feel convinced that his future happiness - which has ever been my first and last object - is assured.[204]

The wedding was set for July 1899 at St Margaret's, the Parish church of Westminster. Harcourt's future colleague Winston Churchill married Clementine Hosier there in 1908, and MPs favoured the venue although 'Lulu' was still to obtain a seat in the Commons. Sir William's second bride was also American, and so Harcourt was maintaining the Trans-Atlantic connection. Such marriages conformed to a trend which was commented on even in contemporary fiction,[205] and there was no question that Harcourt was marrying into great wealth. As Reginald Brett testified from his visit to the Burns household, it was a typical high society

wedding of the time.

On 1 July, the wedding-day, Brett wrote that

> This morning I signed Lulu's settlement at the splendid Burns home in Brook Street. He was not there when I arrived and Walter was in bed, so I was received by the girl. She is young and fresh with nice hair ... I saw all the presents, which are gorgeous. Such jewels and things. Almost too gorgeous ...[206]

The newly-married Harcourt was, despite his father's hopes, no nearer beginning a political career than before. Another three years passed before 'Lulu' seriously considered contesting a parliamentary seat. By then, British politics had been thrown into turmoil by the impact of war.

VI

When Harcourt had read the letter from Sir George Murray about the friction between 'Joe' and Sir Michael Hicks-Beach, he could hardly have guessed the fateful consequences of the dispute. Although Murray stayed on at the Treasury, Chamberlain appointed Milner to a new post. Milner had been knighted in 1895, and Sir William was so grateful for his past services that he did not join the Radical attack on 'Joe's decision to make Milner the new High Commissioner in South Africa.[207] Early in 1897, Milner set out to take up his new duties. Much has been written about the evolution of his policy aims after his arrival,[208] and even Chamberlain did not know all his independently-minded subordinate's schemes, still less the Opposition.

By September 1899, when relations between Britain and the South African Republic (SAR) were becoming increasingly strained, Sir William was arguing that there was 'no valid answer' to the SAR's argument based on the suzerainty limitations set by the London Convention of 1884. In terms of the Convention, Britain had no right to urge a change of franchise, yet Milner was assiduously cultivating this very

issue as a *casus belli*. The SAR was driven into a corner by Milner's tactics. In accordance with his wish that 'we must seem to be forced into war',[209] the SAR presented its ultimatum first, on 11 October. There was no reply, and Britain was at war.

The situation was very difficult for CB, who had been elected unanimously as leader of the Liberal Party at a meeting in the Reform Club on 6 February. After barely eight months as leader, he now had the herculean task of keeping both 'Little Englanders' and Liberal Imperialists or 'Lib-Imps' in the same camp. The effect of the war was to make the Party virtually 'unmanageable', as Bernstein has put it. The Liberal Imperialists supported the war - and the Unionist Government. Their opponents, the so-called pro-Boers, were not in a majority.[210] Many Liberals did not commit themselves one way or the other, and CB and his supporters represented this centre alignment which while not hindering the war effort, continued to criticise Government policy.

CB worked for Liberal unity in terms of his 'Broad Church' concept: that diversity of opinion was to be tolerated. Criticism of British policy in South Africa was by no means equivalent to condemnation of imperialism *per se*. Many opponents of the war, in and out of parliament, had their own axes to grind or attacked the 'greedy' imperialism represented by the war. It was, in fact, British and foreign socialists who formulated a war criticism which was also anti-imperialist, instead of referring to a nobler, more 'ethical' imperialism.[211] The distinction is a crucial one, because this latter type of imperialism is what CB and his centre supporters had in mind. They did not question that Britain *should* have an empire and would have considered it unpatriotic to do so.[212]

Insofar as the war brought to the surface long-standing policy differences within the Liberal Party, the debate over Liberal Imperialism was more than just the 'rhetoric of party infighting' as has been argued.[213] It was because the war helped to crystallize various ideological stances that it represented such a threat to Liberal unity. Sir William expressed the Radicals' objection that imperialist aggression led to neglect of social reform,[214] but more serious still was the 'Lib-Imp' challenge to CB's leadership via the support of the Government. This, one Liberal MP complained to CB, negated the principles the Party stood for. Rosebery, Grey, *et al* were 'destroying the party as a fighting power and ensuring its complete ruin in the next election'.[215]

For the Liberal pacifists, the war was madness. '[H]ere', William Stead wrote in the Review of Reviews on the outbreak of war, 'we have persons presumably sane proclaiming that we are face to face with a deadly plot on the part of the Dutch in South Africa to destroy our authority, and to establish a great Dutch Republic on the ruins of the British Empire in South Africa'. Harcourt fully agreed with this assessment - as he put it in one of his speeches at the time, megalomania 'the worst form of lunacy ... has eaten into the brains of our rulers'.[216] Nonetheless, in his attitude to the 'Lib-Imps', Harcourt did not really share the violent 'Little Englandism' of his father.

Like Sir William, Harcourt was opposed to the 'Lib-Imps', but from the outset of the war he associated himself with the peace-making efforts of the Liberal leader. Harcourt and CB were on good terms long before the outbreak of hostilities. CB sent Harcourt some fine volumes of Plato, and in his letter of thanks Harcourt stated that in the near future he hoped 'to add my voice and vote to those who sit behind you'.[217] Well before he became an MP, Harcourt showed his willingness to place party unity before personal preferences. Although, as CB acknowledged, he could count on the support of Sir William,[218] 'Jumbo' would have much preferred a direct confrontation with the Roseberians or 'Lib-Imps'.

Despite the dissension within the Liberal ranks the general election of 1900 was not a complete disaster. Formerly, it was customary to see the results as a consequence of the patriotic fervour which produced a 'Khaki' vote, returning the Unionists to power. However, Richard Price has shown that although 402 Unionists were returned to the Commons against 186 Liberals, there was a good deal of public apathy.[219] As Herbert Gladstone, now Chief Whip, wrote to Harcourt it had been a hard-fought election, not only in Gladstone's own constituency of West Leeds but generally. '[W]e have', he summed up 'got through pretty well and most certainly came out stronger than we went in'.[220] This was partly because during the summer of 1900 public opinion had begun to change, when it became clear that British victory was certain.

Now there was growing pro-Boer feeling, and admiration for the exploits of Boer leaders like Christiaan de Wet. From the 'Little Englander' point of view, it now seemed a good time to deal with the

'Perksians'.[221] Francis Hirst wrote to Sir William at Malwood to ask his opinion, and the latter replied that

> I quite concur with you that the political barometer indicates change now, and that the time for home truths has arrived; but I think I am equal to knocking the wheels off the chariot of Perks and his Leader...[222]

Sir William was being unduly optimistic. 'Imperial Perks' and his cohorts were intending some wheel removals of their own - off the 'Little Englander' chariot.

The task of the supporters of CB was to see that neither side gained the advantage. A tremendous battle for supremacy of the Liberal Party was waged throughout the duration of the war. Harcourt played an active role in this struggle. As Gardiner remarked in his character sketch:

> those who know most of the story of those troubled years when Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman was holding aloft the old flag, surrounded by open enemies and cold friends, know how much of the ultimate triumph was due to the astuteness and passionless loyalty of Mr Harcourt.[223]

The 'Perksians' tried to infiltrate, rather than force hostile or non-aligned Liberals to their views. The vanguard of the 'Lib-Imps' or 'Perksians' was the Imperial Liberal Council formed in April 1900. The ILC tried to recruit support in the Commons and get a foothold in national organizations - the point of the latter procedure was to get official candidates selected by the organizations, so as to avoid any clashes with 'Little Englanders' in the same constituency.[224] Harcourt joined Lloyd George[225] in combatting the activities of the 'Perksians', and this included the fight for control of press outlets. The ILC claimed, as one of its founders said, to have the 'flower of young Liberalism', but it faced talented young opposition.

Breaking free of his father's influence, Harcourt was now cooperating with Lloyd George and McKenna. They had no intention of allowing the 'Perksians' a free hand. Lloyd George arranged for pro-Boers to take over the Daily News. Sir Edward Cook, its 'Lib-Imp' editor was ejected, and Rosebery wrote to Perks that 'the cause has received a great blow...'[226] Herbert Paul, the editor of the Unionist-inclined Nineteenth Century also regretted the loss, but acknowledged that Cook's successor - the anti-war R.C.Lehmann - would do a good job.[227] Finding his efforts in the Commons thwarted, Perks tried next to capture the NLF.

Since 1898 the NLF had officially recognized that its role was to be advisory, thereby relinquishing its claims to impose 'omnibus' resolutions on the Liberal leadership. But the NLF was still an influential caucus, and in February 1901 Perks made a takeover bid. The 'Lib-Imps' failed again, although Perks noted with satisfaction that the 'Lloyd George people', including Harcourt, were not elected either.[228] Although, as the NLF Report for 1901 stated, the attendance for the election was the largest on record, the essentially non-aligned nature of the federation meant that it did not fall under the control of a particular faction.

As Bernstein has pointed out, it was because CB maintained a a moderate course that he obtained the support of local Liberal associations and their organizers, who in turn encapsulated the 'national' views of Liberalism represented by the NLF.[229] As Haldane reported to Milner after the general election:

> You must not judge the opposition by the speeches of Harcourt and Bryce. They do not represent the bulk, or anything like the bulk of opposition opinion.[230]

Neither, Haldane failed to add, were the 'Lib-Imps'. By contrast, the rank-and-file of the Party were able to identify with the type of liberalism espoused by CB.

Back from holiday,[231] Harcourt observed with admiration how CB steadily consolidated his position as leader, and isolated the 'Lib-Imps' by his constant and consistent development of the 'Broad Church' concept by which he believed the party fell or stood.[232] Nonetheless, informed

by Emily Hobhouse of the 'methods of barbarism' (he coined this famous phrase in one of his speeches on 15 June 1901) used during the guerrilla phase of the South African War, CB began to move closer to the pro-Boer camp. During November 1901 he made a number of trenchant anti-war speeches, showing how mistaken the Scotsman who wrote to Labouchère in January 1899 was about his leadership ability.[233]

When he subsequently invited CB and his wife Charlotte to an 'at home' at 14 Berkeley Square, Harcourt took care to note that 'a few other leading Libs (*not* Imps)' would be present as well. As Sir Henry Lucy, the parlimentary lobby writer put it, these dinners formed part of the 'war to the fork and knife' waged within Party circles at this time. Harcourt also congratulated CB on his tours and speeches:

> they have been quite first rate and have really rallied the Party. I think we have been doing very well lately with Derby, London and even the Home Counties![234]

Harcourt wrote this on 14 December. The very next day, Rosebery made his famous speech at Chesterfield, Derbyshire, calling for a 'clean slate' on policy. He rejected NLF policies and Home Rule. CB did not associate closely with Sir William so as not to alienate the 'Lib-Imps' and drive them from the Party,[235] but he did value the opinion of the Malwood 'Nymph' as he nicknamed Sir William. In reply to CB's letter Harcourt senior went along with the need to end the war, and to set up a lasting and just peace-settlement. But he could not agree to the 'clean slate'. The party of progress, he wrote, 'has ever had for its aim to lead the way rather then to follow public opinion in the paths of reform'.[236]

CB agreed with Sir William that the 'clean slate' was, as the former put it to Herbert Gladstone, 'an affront' to Liberalism. Now what he had to do was show that by rejecting existing Party policies Rosebery had placed himself outside the Liberal camp, and that he had not offered a new basis for reconciliation. CB could now force Rosebery to declare himself, knowing that the bulk of the Party, including the NLF, would support their official leader.[237] The Liberal League which replaced the ILC in February 1902 was intended as a means of continuing to exert

pressure for the 'clean slate' policy from *within* the Party. Yet, Asquith, Grey *et al* could not get Rosebery to play an active role.

As long as Rosebery remained aloof, the 'Lib-Imps' lacked a forum to counteract pressure from anti-war groups[238] as well as to promote the Chesterfield declaration. Although the League's founders did not see it as an *alternative* to the Party, CB had already come to the conclusion some time earlier that Rosebery and his 'busy myrmidons' were too destructive to unity to remain unchallenged.[239] Confident by early 1902 of adequate support, CB could now go on the offensive. His vigorous attack on the League on 5 March 190? permanently endeared him to Harcourt:

> You have not only excited the enthusiasm and gratitude of the Party but you have acquired a personal affection from them which even Mr Gladstone did not have.

Harcourt added that he had done 'his bit' too, such as it was:

> I am doing what I can daily in a humble and obscure way in the Home Counties Federation, the Eighty Club and the National Reform Union to organize and stimulate that support which I am sure you must feel you are receiving from every part of the country.[240]

Asquith, for one, did not regard Harcourt's efforts as 'humble' or negligible. In a letter to Spencer he mentioned that 'Lib-Imp' organizations were under heavy attack from Harcourt and his allies.[241]

In their fight to retain control of the Party, and the loyalty of local Liberal organizations in particular, CB and the Gladstonians were helped by the Unionists themselves. During the last phase of Salisbury's premiership, his nephew introduced an Education Act to the Commons in March 1902 which made a substantial contribution to the Unionists' slow but inexorable decline. Of course this was not what Arthur Balfour intended. His biographers generally agree that the Act was a major piece of social legislation, and was an important mile-

stone in the history of British education.[242] The Act ended the board school system set up in 1870, and replaced it by state schools, which fell under the control of local authorities.

The largely Anglican schools were to be maintained by the rate payers, and Nonconformists objected to paying for the maintenance of these schools, from which Nonconformist teachers were often barred by tests. Roman Catholic schools were also to receive generous financial assistance from the rates and this preferential treatment for those who were not Nonconformists helped to transform the Nonconformist commitment to Liberalism 'from a vague sentiment into an active electoral alliance'.[243] Joseph Chamberlain realized that the Education Act was bitterly resented, and doing the Government untold harm.[244] It was not just a question of changing the issue however. He was also concerned about the future of the British Empire.

As Julian Amery, his biographer, put it, imperial unity had long been the 'transcendent purpose' of Chamberlain's life, and provided the *raison d'être* of his policies. Yet both Salisbury and Balfour, who succeeded his uncle as Prime Minister in July 1902, were not prepared to allow 'Joe' to challenge their authority over the Unionist Party. The fact was that, as Gollin has pointed out in a recent study of the Conservative leadership, when Chamberlain joined the Unionist administration in 1895 he became its prisoner, not its master. As in 1886 Chamberlain felt stifled by the restraint imposed by his party's leadership. Once again he decided to go his own way, and this time the conflict was over fiscal policy.

Preference to goods manufactured in the Empire would mean dropping free trade, and the possibility of introducing imperial preference was referred to by the Canadian premier Laurier and other delegates at the Colonial Conference of 1902. From his attendance at the Conference, Chamberlain knew that the idea of imperial preference had support. In a speech at Birmingham in May 1902 he in effect implied his rejection of free trade by arguing that Britain should seek to bind the Colonies closer, without sticking to old shibboleths.[245] Yet free trade was taken for granted in Edwardian Britain, and for many Cobden's economic theories had virtually become articles of faith.

So when Chamberlain made his famous plea for preference to colonial imports a year later, on 15 May 1903, he opened a great debate over future British fiscal policy. To conduct his campaign against free trade, Chamberlain resigned from the Cabinet in September, and the Unionist Party split into three major factions.[246] From the Opposition point of view, the importance of Chamberlain's action was that it provided a means of sinking differences over domestic and imperial policy. For the first time since 1886 Liberals had a clear dividing-line other than Home Rule to point to as a political 'indicator': they could now present themselves as defenders of free trade.

VII

A couple of weeks after Chamberlain had issued his challenge to free trade at Birmingham, Harcourt set out his own views on the future in a letter to his father:

> I can't help thinking that Chamberlain, besides destroying the Tory party, may break up the Liberal League. Many of their recruits must be Fair Traders and protectionists.[247]

As it turned out, it was via their attack on tariff reform that prominent 'Lib-Imps' like Asquith reinstated themselves in the eyes of the Gladstonians. During Chamberlain's 'stump' of the country in late 1903, Asquith shadowed the ex-Colonial Secretary, making counter speeches in favour of free trade, going 'bald-headed' as he put it, 'for JC and his swindle of a Zollverein', or customs union.

CB was understandably delighted by the return of the prodigal Liberal Leaguers. 'How can these fellows ever have gone wrong?' he wondered, noting also that all the 'old war horses' like Ripon and Sir William were 'snorting with excitement. We are in for a great time'.[248] Not all free traders could be counted on though: few Unionists left their party, as Winston Churchill did in May 1904.[249] As CB explained to Harcourt, he did not expect large-scale defections from the Government benches, doubting if even half a dozen of 'these gentry' would

stick to their free trade guns in the Commons:

> one by one people are shewing their real colours - from members of Chambers of Commerce up to 'free trade Unionists'.[250]

Another addition to the Opposition's ranks was that of Harcourt himself, when in October 1903 he finally agreed to stand for Parliament. Since the offer of a seat in Leicester in 1894, he had turned down two other possibilities. The previous July he had turned down the Lancashire seat of Clitheroe, because he did not want to try to compete against Labour there.[251] Harcourt had been monitoring the growing strength of organized labour for some time,[252] and this decision probably represented the growing willingness to cooperate with Labour where possible as a matter of *official* Liberal policy. There was resistance within the Party to such cooperation, and Harcourt was well aware of this.[253]

As early as January 1903, CB had expressed his interest in having more Labour members in the Commons, but as Harcourt's correspondence shows he was *au fait* with earlier Liberal efforts to promote Labour candidates as well. Politically, there was an element of self-interest in doing this: the 'Lib-Labs' or working class members in the Commons supported the Liberals, except when this might be detrimental to worker interests. The decay of certain Liberal local organizations, particularly in London,[254] made the installation of a sympathetic 'Lib-Lab' preferable to allowing a constituency to be lost to the Unionists by default. Even the 'Lib Imps' did not object to this, provided the working men who became Liberal MPs did not try to act independently, or form a separate party.[255]

The electoral pact made between Liberal Chief Whip Herbert Gladstone and Labour leader Ramsay MacDonald in March 1903 would provide for straight contests between the Labour Representation Committee (LRC) founded in February 1900 and the Unionists. Labour would stand aside in seats held by the Liberals, and this arrangement promised to save the senior member of the progressive alliance the sum of £15 000. The LRC also stood a chance of taking at least ten Unionist seats.[256] Harcourt's refusal to take on Labour there was well before this pact, but Unionist

weakness in the constituency[257] made this more prudent - this became one of Labour's strongholds in 1902.

In the other instance Harcourt's misgivings were also understandable - Zimmerman, the chairman of the East Manchester Liberal Association, asked him if he wanted to contest this seat against the Prime Minister.[258] A Churchill or Lloyd George might have taken up the challenge, but for any would-be newcomer to Parliament this would have been a daunting prospect. A much safer proposition was Rossendale, the Lancashire seat of Sir William Mather, the well-known industrialist. Mather, an old friend of Sir William, was due to retire in 1904, and it was duly agreed that Harcourt would replace him. Herbert Gladstone was only told about this arrangement afterwards.[259]

Rossendale was a small county division with a large number of female workers, and strong pro-temperance sentiment. This latter factor was a definite advantage for a candidate with tne name of Harcourt, associated with Local Option, but in any case it was solidly pro-Liberal, as previous elections had shown. Sir William gave his son a 'start' in his future constituency, via a speech on tariff reform at the town of Rawtenstall on 31 October. In January 1904 Harcourt was to begin his tour, and Sir William joked that he would crib his son's good points for his own speeches. But during January Harcourt was hampered by coughing - he had caught a cold.[260]

Despite this handicap, Harcourt was ready to begin his campaign when Mather retired on Wednesday, 9 March. Harcourt delivered his election address that Friday, and naturally focussed on the fiscal controversy. Harcourt pointed out, justifiably, that although official Government policy was limited to retaliatory tariffs, many Unionists openly or secretly favoured Chamberlain's preferential scheme. While not denying that public finances were in a 'deplorable' state, and that new taxation would be necessary, this should not be done by indirectly taxing the poorer classes. The taxes Harcourt proposed instead were ground-rents, land values and mining royalties. In office, he continued to advocate those reforms.

The Times noted that the Rossendale Unionists had not expected the seat to be vacated until the next general election, and thus did not

have a candidate ready.[262] The Unionists had difficulty finding a candidate, and tried to get a Mr.Hoyle, an influential local cotton mill owner. Mary Harcourt noted that:

> The people will certainly be disappointed if there is no fight as they say that we are never likely to get a larger majority then we should now.[263]

Harcourt was duly returned as member for Rossendale (North-East) unopposed, thus finally obtaining a seat in the Commons at the time Sir William announced his intention to resign his own seat at the next election.

The Wednesday following M[illegible]s retirement, the Times announced that Sir William and Herbert Gladsto[illegible] were to 'sponsor' a new member next day. Harcourt was cheered a[illegible] he took his seat among the Opposition.[264] The Liberal press paid trib[illegible] to Sir William, with the Westminster Gazette printing a cartoon illustrating the departure of the 'old crusader', and the Daily News depicting a 'stalwart knight' hanging his weapons on the wall having reached the end of his fighting career. In the Review of Reviews Stead regretted 'the severance of another of the few remaining links which bound the opposition to the great days of Liberalism'. But he was pleased to note that this departure 'concluded very happily with the entry of the son, Mr Lewis Harcourt, into Parliament. The succession is maintained'.[265]

On the political front, the Liberals made significant progress during 1904-05. Whereas the Annual Register had described 1903 as 'an almost uninterrupted twelve months of depression',[266] economic recovery thereafter began to take the sting out of the Chamberlainites' arguments that the solution was to drop free trade. In any case, as CB pointed out at Glasgow in January 1904, the Liberals did not only rely on criticism of Unionist policies, or would-be policies: they also offered constructive reform.[267] The Liberals did not have a reform 'programme' as such, but their commitment to a broad spectrum of reforms in various spheres offered something to many would-be supporters. Apart from the specific interests catered for, as cited below, electoral reform was also intended.[268]

CB endorsed the rating of site values, which would enable house owners to make improvements and generally reduce the cost of housing, as well as reduce often 'artifically high' rents which were causing widespread impoverishment. Liberals like Buxton, whose fiscal views have been mentioned earlier, agreed that land values should bear their share of taxation.[269] Liberal speakers generally described the Unionist Agricultural Holdings Act introduced at the start of the previous decade as inadequate, and promised the extension of small holdings. Even Rosebery, who was growing increasingly isolated, endorsed this step, though - like the Unionists - stressing ownership of plots,[270] which was not the approach Harcourt was to adopt. Liberals also promised to look into the problem of unemployment, to try to deal with it.

Radicals like Sir Robert Reid blamed the Government for its 'extravagant expenditure', particularly on armaments; and certainly the figures could be made to show - as Asquith did - that over 1895-1905 'normal' expenditure had risen by £43 500 000, which represented an increase of about 52% while the population had increased by 10%.[271] The Opposition could also effectively claim that the Unionists were not putting enough money into social reform schemes. For Gladstonian advocates of 'economy' like Harcourt, it was clear that the Government was living beyond its means, and did not provide - according to his analysis of the 1903 Budget - for the £159 000 000 burden of debt created by the South African War.[272] This debt definitely helped to justify Liberal criticisms, even allowing for the inevitable increase of expenditure over any ten-year period.

For those who claimed to speak for the 'advanced Radicals', the 'constructive' legislation envisaged included covering the election expenses of candidates and possibly payment of members, although on the latter issue Sir William was not 'advanced'.[273] Proposed payments were designed to assist less well-to-do candidates. For working men 'advanced' Radicals also wanted better legislation to protect factory and mine labour. Trade union leaders tended in any case to be staunchly Liberal, and were impressed by the Liberal promise to reverse the Taff Vale ruling of 1901.[274] The Government did not make itself more popular with Labour by allowing the import of Chinese labourers into the Transvaal mines from May 1904 onwards.[275] The Nonconformists were further alienated by the Government's Licensing legislation of 1904.[276]

Apart from the continued identification with Home Rule and Nonconformist grievances, Radicals like Dilke assured audiences that the Liberals would renew the 'inevitable struggle' with the House of Lords at once when returned to office.[277] The Liberals' trump card, however, remained the issue of tariffs versus free trade. The point was that, as Chamberlain had conceded during the debate over fiscal policy in the Commons on 28 May 1903, a preferential tariff on colonial goods must involve a tax on food. This was, and remained, the most unpopular aspect of Chamberlain's policy.[278] It became clear that hardly one Unionist seat could be regarded as 'safe'. The Government lost five seats in 1903, seven in 1904 and a further seven in 1905. The final collapse of the administration was only a matter of time, despite Balfour's parliamentary virtuousity.[279]

Harcourt played an active role in the Liberal electoral revival. On the local level there were organizations which aimed to attract young supporters, like the Young British Liberals Federation, and the League of Young Liberals. The latter organization, which Harcourt presided over, canvassed support among youth not already attached to the Liberal Party. By late 1905 there were twenty branches of the League throughout the country. Like-minded Radicals also worked together. In January 1904 Harcourt presided as master of ceremonies at a fête for Lloyd George at the New Reform Club. The Times unsympathetically described the newly-formed club's aims as 'not yet very coherent and intelligible', which was compensated for by 'perfervid discontent with existing arrangements'.

The Club, the article added, was 'understood to be the home of earnest and "advanced" Liberals and Radicals'.[280] Although he was now in the Commons, Harcourt still found time to assist the Home Counties division of the NLF. He also added to his gallery of press contacts. When Harcourt complained about the political 'blindness' of the Daily News, now edited by Alfred Gardiner, NLF offical William Crooks suggested that they should meet. Gardiner, he wrote,was 'a charming young fellow ... [who] knows nobody and nothing. Wouldn't it be worthwhile cultivating him?'[281] The meeting marked the start of a long association which was to see Harcourt entrust the official biography of his father to Gardiner. While Harcourt adjusted to his new role as an official member of the Liberal Party, his father was busy at Nuneham.

Early in 1904, Aubrey Harcourt's sudden death at Monte Carlo left Sir William as heir to Nuneham estate. The condition of inheritance was that the original surname of Vernon should be dropped from the family name. Although he preferred Malwood, Sir William set about the massive task of restoring the dilapidated estate with funds left by Aubrey's sale of Harcourt House, the old family mansion in Cavendish Square in central London. When parliament adjourned for the summer recess of 1904, Sir William hosted Mary and her daughters at Nuneham while Harcourt whiled away the August days at grouse-shooting on the estate of Lord Tweedmouth. In his invitation, the elderly Liberal statesman explained that he found it increasingly difficult to move away from home.[282] Yet he would soon be working with Harcourt in a Liberal administration.

Although Sir William and his wife moved into Nuneham in August 1904, his intention was to winter at Malwood. He never returned there, passing away quietly in his sleep during the night of 30 September/1 October. A telegram was hastily despatched to North Mymms, where Harcourt was visiting his mother-in-law with Mary, and they sped back to London. They were joined there by Harcourt's brother Robert and caught the noon train from Paddington to Oxford. Telegrams and letter of condolence arrived from all over. Herbert Gladstone postponed his meetings at West Leeds. At Manchester, Winston Churchill referred to the 'good, hard and consistent fighter who had the respect and friendship of those who worked with him and of his political opponents too'.[283]

Interviewed at his Welsh home that same evening, 1 October, Lloyd George expressed his regret at the passing of his former leader and - glossing over old disagreements - for one who had championed Welsh interests. Some commentators recalled Sir William's character and actions. 'He might', the Review of Reviews noted, 'have been Prime Minister in 1894 but for his temper'. Prime Minister Balfour paid tribute to 'one of the greatest parliamentary figures that we have known in our experience ... a vigorous controversialist ... who ... never allowed party differences to mar the perfection of personal friendship'. In the Unionist Monthly Review tariff reformer Sir Herbert Maxwell wrote that Sir William would be remembered in the Commons as being accompanied at the last 'by another figure, as tall but more slender - the son, with whom the father was seen taking counsel more and more frequently as the shadows deepened'.[284]

The funeral was held at Nuneham Park the following Thursday. The quiet ceremony held at the Church built by Simon Harcourt in 1710 was attended only by tenants, close relatives and some municipal representatives of Oxford and nearby Abingdon. The official ceremony, held on Thursday afternoon, was at St Margaret's Church in Westminster. Harcourt was inconsolable. 'To me', he wrote to CB, 'it is an irreparable loss - you know what our love for one another was - and I have lost the best of friends as well as the dearest of fathers'.[285] Thus 1904 ended on a gloomy note for a very ill, worried and overworked Harcourt.[236] During the ensuing months Harcourt forgot his sorrows in work, and because of his increased responsibilities.

These commitments included the estates of Nuneham and Stanton Harcourt, which he inherited on 17 January 1905, when the legal formalities were over. Harcourt was now a landowner of some standing in Oxfordshire, possessing lands which had belonged to the family for over 750 years.[287] It was ironical that within a short period the Harcourts had had to pay once again the estate duties owed to the State in terms of Sir William's Budget of 1894. Shortly before the summer recess of parliament, the Harcourts moved into Nuneham, although the mansion was still in a state of 'pandemonium' and there was much to be done before settling in.[288] CB went on holiday to the Czech spa of Marienbad as usual, where Harcourt continued to write to him.

There is not a great deal of CB-Harcourt correspondence in the private papers, and most of it dates from this period. As Harcourt explained to John Sinclair (CB's principal secretary) years later, most of his business with the Liberal leader was conducted on a spoken basis.[289] These letters show that CB was prepared to consider Harcourt's views on tactics and the selection of the next Liberal Cabinet, but he was not necessarily swayed by them. 'Your lists and suggestions are duly noted', he wrote to Harcourt, but pointed out that '...there will be a great block on the staircase!'[290] There was a considerable reserve of talent to draw upon, and only so many senior posts to go around. Finally, the period of waiting ended. Relying, over optimistically as it turned out, on the disruptive effect of the disagreement between CB and Rosebery over Home Rule,[291] Balfour surrendered the seals of office on 4 December 1905. The Liberals were back in power after ten years in the political wilderness.

CHAPTER TWO

AN INTERESTING EXPERIMENT

> There was 'much interest' in the appointment of the son of Sir William Harcourt as First Commissioner of Works - The Times, December 1905.
>
> 'An excellent First Commissioner of Works' - James Lowther, Speaker in the House of Commons.

At the time of Balfour's resignation, contemporary observers considered Harcourt to be one of the future 'stars' of the Liberal Party. Still relatively young, he had yet to make any impact as an orator or in the Commons, but he favourably impressed those who met him, and observed him at work.[1] On the basis of Harcourt's established reputation as an able organizer, it was possible the incoming Liberal administration would offer him the post of Chief Whip.[2] However Harcourt was not interested in what he regarded as 'a most difficult place to fill', and it was given to Liberal MP George Whiteley when Herbert Gladstone obtained the Home Office.[3] CB decided to give Harcourt the post of First Commissioner of Works which was a relatively junior position.

Works was not regarded as a useful prelude to Cabinet rank, unlike for example, the Financial Secretaryship to the Treasury awarded to the young McKenna,[4] but Harcourt was not disappointed. He still did not harbour any political ambition and because of his parliamentary inexperience did not expect a Cabinet post. The advantage of Works for Harcourt was that, as he later put it to CB in 1907:

> [It] gives me time to take charge of measures like Plural voting *et hoc genus omne* which belong to none in particular, and the frequency of my interviews with the King necessitated by my office and

> and my extremely good relations with him and the freedom he allows me in discussion and suggestion might be useful perhaps in more serious matters of Cabinet import ...[5]

In other words, Works enabled Harcourt to continue utilizing these indirect methods of persuasion that he had been mastering since the 1890s. The fact that he did not have a senior post did not mean he had no influence. During his term at Works, and subsequently, he used this influence in what he considered to be the Party interest, but his actions were informed by his rigidly Gladstonian conception of Liberalism. His response to the major issues examined in this chapter shows that if he was one of the Liberal Government's 'Radicals', then it was only in the nineteenth-century sense of the term.[6] From December 1905 to November 1910, when he was promoted to the Colonial Office, Harcourt showed that he was essentially a critic of the New Liberalism.

Like his opposition to Sir Edward Grey's foreign policy, his ambivalent attitude to New Liberal social reform schemes reflected his concern to keep down State expenditure. Harcourt's own reform initiatives in the Commons - on plural voting and small holdings - were staid old objectives of the Party, and endorsed by CB. After the death of the latter in April 1908, Harcourt combined his ongoing struggle with the Cabinet's 'Lib-Imps' with growing conflict with the advocates of more 'progressive' reform. The latter conflict came to a head over Lloyd George's 'People's Budget' of 1909-10, and although Harcourt was too loyal a Party man to attack the Budget outside Parliament, he was its most vocal critic in Cabinet. The ensuing struggle with the House of Lords after it rejected the Budget saw Harcourt at his most 'radical', but even this stance derived from that taken by William Gladstone in 1894.

II

Via his attack on Home Rule, the 'veiled prophet', as Massingham had denounced Rosebery in 1896, had completed his political isolation. This came as a relief for CB, who was having to contend with the attempt of Rosebery's senior followers to take over the Liberal Government even

before its formation. In terms of an agreement at Relugas (Grey's fishing lodge in Scotland) in September 1905, Asquith, Haldane and Grey had agreed to refuse to accept anygovernment posts unless CB went to the House of Lords. Asquith was to take over the leadership of the Liberals in the Commons. The Relugas conspiracy represented the final 'Lib-Imp' attempt to take control of the Liberal Party prior to its accession to office, but CB's firmness won the day.

Without knowing about the details of the compact, Harcourt urged CB not to give way to the 'Lib-Imp' trio. They asked for clarification of Liberal policy on Home Rule. As he saw it, the commitment to Home Rule was one of the distinguishing marks of the 'real' Liberals, and if the latter would-be ministers did not endorse the policy they were dispensable:

> It looks as if it [is] coming to a fight between the *real* and the *sham* Liberals, and after the election the overwhelming majority of the party will belong to the first category.[7]

As it turned out, the Relugas plotters did not demand guarantees about Home Rule before taking office.

By talking Asquith into accepting the Exchequer unconditionally, CB effectively destroyed the compact before it could come into operation. Haldane and Grey suspected that Asquith had been coopted, and a few hours after Balfour had resigned, Grey called at 29 Bergrave Square to present his blunt ultimatum to CB. The latter was unimpressed, and was prepared to do without Grey and Haldane now that he had won over Asquith. Next morning, 5 December, when he set out for Buckingham Palace to accept the premiership, he was considering other candidates for the Foreign Office.[8] Harcourt did not know about the 'Lib-Imp' attempt to get CB into the House of Lords. When he read about this possibility in the press, he was horrified.

He at once despatched an urgent letter to CB's secretary:

My Dear Sinclair

London is full of rumours, probably lies - I hope so ... It is thought that the situation has changed to the extent of CB being forced (by A & G) to go at once to the Peers: that Morley has joined this view in order to get the Ch. of Exch. and that Asquith is to lead the H. of Commons.

Our Radicals are in open revolt: I try to keep them quiet by saying that I don't believe it is true but that I know nothing. I think it would be *absolutely* fatal for CB to go to the H. of L now: it would be regarded as the triumph of the Rosebery section.

I don't ask you to tell me anything but for God's sake stop this if it is not too late. It is said that Haldane is inspiring the Peers with these ideas vide Times etc. today.

Yours ever

Loulou.[9]

The Times article Harcourt referred to incorrectly speculated that CB would give way to ensure he obtained the services of certain invaluable men for the new government. Some of CB's friends also thought that Haldane was behind the Times article of 6 December, which opined that CB would be unlikely to stand up to Balfour and Joseph Chamberlain in the Commons. Nor was the agitation confined to pro-Unionist newspapers. The Westminster Gazette, one of the Liberal London dailies, also chose this time to publish the first of a series of articles by its editor J.A.Spender, intended to pave the way for CB's acceptance of a peerage. Like the 'Lib-Imps', Spender, who later described 'Lulu' in his memoirs as one of the 'oldest and kindest' of his political friends, also thought that CB would find the sedate Second Chamber more congenial.

A couple of familiar themes emerge from Harcourt's letter. Firstly, the expression of his perennial dislike of the peers, possibly dating from their legislative wrecking tactics of 1894-95. His last

sentence reads as if Haldane and they were in collusion to deprive the Commons of CB. In fact, Haldane was not behind the letter in the Times on 7 December. And, as in 1894, Harcourt thought Morley's actions were motivated solely by self-interest. Morley was a staunch Gladstonian, and had played no rôle in the 'Lib-Imp' agreement at Relugas. Harcourt need not have worried: by the time his letter reached Sinclair, CB had already made up his mind. His wife had urged him not to give way, and he informed Sinclair accordingly at breakfast next morning (7 December).

After a couple of days of agonizing, Grey and Haldane decided to join Asquith in office, with no strings attached. 'Schopenhauer', as CB disdainfully nicknamed Haldane, was an unpopular recruit. Apparently there was strong rank-and-file feeling against his inclusion in the Cabinet. Harcourt pointed this out in one of his unsigned notes to CB, but did not explain the reason for this antipathy. 'I don't share it', he wrote, 'though I have no reason to love him. I expect the K. will want him somewhere in the inner circle'.[10] Despite the misgivings of his doctor, the sixty-nine year-old CB had committed himself to the political strife of the Commons, rejecting what was all too often merely an ermine-lined dustbin for the disposal of superannuated dignitaries.

With the threat to his authority firmly scotched, CB proceeded to form a Cabinet fully representative of all the major forces in the Liberal Party. He presented his list to Edward VII on Sunday, 10 December, and the King thoroughly approved the new Prime Minister's selection.[11] Although Harcourt later described Balfour's resignation as 'gratuitous and unnecessary', it had actually been an attempt to embarrass the Liberals, still in a minority in the Commons. Called upon to form an interim government until a general election, it would have been disastrous for them had they been unable to do so. Yet CB was well prepared. The composition of the administration testified to the success of the conciliatory strategy he had pursued since the South African War.

Of the Cabinet of 19, two more than Balfour's, about a quarter were 'Lib-Imps'. Asquith was at the Exchequer; Sir Edward Grey, as expected, took over at the Foreign Office; Haldane got the War Office, and Sir Henry Fowler accepted the largely honorific post of the Duchy of Lancaster. Despite Harcourt's fears about the 'Rosebery section', by accepting office the former Prime Minister's cohorts in the Liberal

League had effectively severed their last links with their leader. After the abortive Relugas compact, there were no further attempts at co-ordinated action. Nonetheless, inconspicuously, they did significantly affect the direction of foreign and military policy. With the exception of Lord Carrington (Agriculture and Fisheries), the 'Whiggish' members lived up to their neutral, amorphous reputation in the political sense. The three other Whigs were Lord Tweedmouth, Lord Crewe and Lord Elgin.

Lord Tweedmouth was perhaps dangerously close to senility, although it was rather harsh of the Unionist polemicist Leo Maxse to comment in the National Review that Tweedmouth would be more suitable as Astronomer Royal than as First Lord of the Admiralty![12] Lord Crewe (Lord President of the Council) and the Earl of Elgin (Colonial Office) were the dependable and underrated 'workhorses' without which an administration could not function, but by the same token could not be regarded as its inspiration or as innovators. Lord Carrington, however, showed a more dynamic reforming bent than his 'Whig' classification as a landowner suggested. He was to work closely with Harcourt on an aspect of land reform to which CB attached great importance - namely, small holdings.

CB led the Cabinet's 'elder statesmen', the older traditional Radicals, or Gladstonians, who subscribed to the familiar catchwords of 'Peace, Retrenchment and Reform'. The patriarchal Lord Ripon (Lord Privy Seal) was at the twilight of his career, although CB still valued his advice. John Morley (India Office) was a respected and influential member of the Cabinet, and James Bryce, a committed Home Ruler, got the Irish Secretaryship. William Gladstone's son Herbert obtained the Home Office. The influence of the Gladstonians did not depend on their numbers, but on the fact that the other Radicals all subscribed to some extent to Gladstonian tenets, especially the commitment to reform, whatever their personal emphasis.

Among the ministers in this category were Augustine Birrell (Education), whome one historian has described as 'a benign old bookworm'. Birrell was a Nonconformist, and primarily interested in obtaining legislative redress for their grievances. Labour stalwart John Burns (Local Government Board) and John Sinclair (Secretary for Scotland) had unenterprising and limited conceptions of social reform, and both were loyal to the Prime Minister who had appointed them. The latter post was regarded

by Stead as a reward for faithful service.[13] The Lord Chancellor Sir Robert Reid was an outspoken 'economist', particularly on the question of armaments, but did not otherwise indicate that he was a very advanced thinker on the 'condition of the people' issue.

By contrast, the young,dynamic Lloyd George (Board of Trade) was to prove to be a major champion of 'progressive' Liberalism, but he had yet to make his mark.[14] As noted earlier, Sydney Buxton (Postmaster General) did have advanced ideas, particularly on the reform of taxation, but he did not turn out to be a major force in the Cabinet. This diverse assemblage of Radicals posed no serious threat to CB's authority. If the Cabinet represented a microcosm of the Liberal Party itself, the question was to what extent Cabinet policy would reflect Party demands. R ing the new ministry in his pamphlet of character sketches published in January 1906, Stead rightly pointed out that the well balanced, very representative Cabinet was centred on CB.

This meant that the direction and pace of Government policy would depend to a large extent on the lead given by the Prime Minister. As it turned out, CB was not a sufficiently vigorous leader. In office he pursued the same moderate course which had enabled him to build up his all-embracing anti-Unionist alliance. Yet, after the great Liberal electoral triumph of January 1906, the appropriateness of this continuity, given the huge Liberal majority in the Commons, became increasingly questionable. As a result, by the time Harcourt was promoted to the Cabinet in March 1907, the Government was losing popular support because it was not fulfilling its various reform promises. The obstructive tactics of the House of Lords did not make the Government's task any easier either.

The next section will examine Harcourt's activities during the general election of 1906 and thereafter, to the eve of his promotion to the Cabinet. His quiet record in the Commons should not be allowed to obscure the fact that he had actually attempted a radicalization of the Government for whenever the next Cabinet reshuffle took place. He

did this by successfully pushing for the appointment of promising young Radicals like Winston Churchill and Reginald McKenna. As he suggested, Churchill got the Under-Secretaryship at the Colonial Office, and McKenna the Financial Secretaryship at the Treasury.[15] There was thus a talented clique of young Radicals waiting to take over from their elders when the time came.

III

CB does not seem to have attached any great importance to Harcourt's appointment as First Commissioner of Works. He forgot to tell his temporary extra private secretary about his new job. It was only when Spender came to spend the weekend of 9-10 December at the home of Mary Harcourt's parents at North Mymms Park and congratulated her on her husband's appointment, that Harcourt first heard of it![16] He immediately informed his stepmother Elizabeth Cabot, the widowed Lady Harcourt. Mary sent her a note the next day, coinciding with the official Times announcement confirming that 'It is the office of all others he would have preferred and is very happy at being given it'.[17] As the Times laconically noted on 11 December, this was Harcourt's baptism of fire in official life, in which Sir William had figured so prominently.

Actually, since Harcourt had already acquired considerable administrative and political know-how in the course of his unofficial duties for his father, his 'inexperience' was more apparent than real. Stead acknowledged this in his character-sketch of 'the very likeable, capable well-to-do young member'. He pointed out that Harcourt 'had long been an *habitué* of the inside track and his new post will keep him in intimate touch with his colleagues'.[18] Stead added that Harcourt would almost certainly be one of the first to be promoted to the Cabinet during the next reshuffle. His prediction was probably based not only on his knowledge of Harcourt's activities, but also on the nature of the department the newcomer had been placed in charge of.

The post of Surveyor-General or Comptroller of Royal Works dated back to the reign of Edward I in the fourteenth century. The

Office was reorganized in 1662 and apart from a brief interlude - Queen Anne created a Board of Works which was abolished by George III - there were no further major changes until 1832. As an economy measure the office was then merged with the Board of Woods and Forests. In 1852 they were split once again, and 'Woods and Forests', the post turned down by Harcourt in 1893, became a non-ministerial department, the ancestor of the present Crown Estates Office. 'Works' became the department of the First Commissioner of Works, a politician who was sometimes given a seat in the Cabinet.

The First Commissioner enjoyed a certain prestige due to his close cooperation with the monarchy: he was in charge of royal palaces as well as all government buildings, and was responsible for coronations, state funerals, etc. as well as the upkeep of royal parks. But Works also had a negative image; it had long been the butt of wits inside (and outside) the civil service when Harcourt took over. The department was, to put it mildly, unpopular. Its architects tended to ignore local authorities in their planning, alienating the London County Council and Westminster City Council in particular by their high-handedness. Nor was office routine sacrosanct. Civil servants found the periodic invasions of cleaners and redecorators from Works a disruptive nuisance.

Traditionally, Works was the Cinderella of the departments, with a low place in the Treasury's list of funding priorities. Harcourt was made painfully aware of this during the execution of his duties, particularly in his tireless efforts to preserve the cultural and artistic heritage of the Nation. All the same, he zestfully plunged into his new task, mastering its details, so that by the time of his promotion to the Colonial Office at the end of 1910 he had earned respect from both sides of the House. Although, according to his cousin Lionel Earle,[19] the department itself remained unpopular. Striving to raise the department to higher levels of efficiency, Harcourt was always sensitive to any aspersions cast on its inadequacies, even in jest.[20]

With the formation of the 'Ministry of All the Talents' completed, CB's next major concern was the forthcoming general election. The Liberal Party was united as never before in defence of free trade, and awaited the contest with confidence. By contrast, the Unionist Party

was weakened and divided by the tariff reform controversy, and its organizational efficiency was at an almost all-time low.[21] The Liberal campaign was launched on 21 December 1905, when the Prime Minister addressed a packed Albert Hall. The capacity audience of 8 000 included most of the new government's ministers. The accoustics or the rather disappointing content[22] did not matter - CB received a standing ovation. The enthusiasm expressed the new purposefulness and vigour of a Party which had spent such a long time in opposition.

As he stood with his wife among the cheering throng, the normally reserved Harcourt was probably as deeply touched as the tearful CB by this tribute to their leader, whom he admired so greatly. The parliamentary candidates dispersed to their constituencies in preparation for the election, with the better-known figures of the political world ranging up and down the country to support the local contests of their colleagues, prior to their own. Harcourt set out for Lancashire, accompanied by Mary, to address a number of meetings in and around his own constituency. In her series of letters to Lady Harcourt, Mary provides a vivid picture of their itinerary and reception.

As P. F. Clarke has pointed out, the Liberals knew that they needed to capture many seats in 'Tory Lancashire' to turn the election in their favour.[23] The Liberals spared no effort during the campaign, and their efforts were richly rewarded. The recipe for the Liberal success in Lancashire in 1906 was the promise to defend free trade. Both in Lancashire and other regions the threat of 'dear food' represented by tariffs made working class voters defect to the Liberal Party in droves. Liberal speeches invoked tradition, history and even patriotism in defence of free trade. The nature of Harcourt's own commitment to free trade needs further explanation. As he saw it, the essential key to the continued progress and prosperity of the community was the preservation of free trade.

In turn, this depended on the preservation of a free trade majority in the House of Commons.[24] The consistency with which Harcourt adhered to this stance would have delighted the GOM, William Gladstone, and Cobden himself. In a sense, Liberal speakers during the 1906 campaign in Lancashire were preaching to the converted. Whereas in 1895 there had been a heavy swing to the Unionists in constituencies affected by the cotton duties, in order to ensure their removal,[25] in 1906 the political

'pendulum' swung in the opposite direction for the same kind of economic motivation. The threat perceived to the Lancashire cotton and coal industries in the shape of tariff reform seems to have united working class and upper-middle class voters in defence of free trade.[26]

This decisive outcome in favour of the Liberals was by no means predictable *prior* to the start of polling. In both cotton spinning towns like Bury and Radcliffe-cum-Farnworth and weaving towns like Darwen and Bacup there was considerable working class support for the Unionists. As Martin Pugh has pointed out, prior to the primacy of the cheap food issue, Conservatism seemed to be more in tune with popular aspirations.[27] Despite the strength of the temperance movement in the north-west, Nonconformist Liberals did not have a monopoly on agitation for reform of licensing laws. As a counterweight to the United Kingdom Alliance, the Unionists had their own Temperance Association. Joynson-Hicks, the solicitor who opposed Churchill in North-West Manchester, was an active member of the Church of England Temperance Society.[28]

Despite his outward show of confidence, and the manifesto he issued in defence of free trade on New Year's Day, Churchill was by no means certain of defeating 'Jix', as he was nick-named. Paying a flying visit to Manchester on the eve of his tour of Rossendale Harcourt found Winston 'very overwrought'. Returning to his constituency, 'Lulu' prepared to embark on a strenuous schedule which included thirteen meetings in three days, and he was accompanied everywhere by his popular wife.[29] She reported that nothing had been left to chance although, as noted earlier, Rossendale was thought to be a 'safe' Liberal seat. Harcourt began his campaign on Thursday, 11 January, but the preceding two evenings:

> have been taken up with going around Liberal Clubs and Workers' meetings where L speaks about twenty minutes and then answers any questions and receives suggestions from the workers as to subjects it would be well to touch on in certain localities, etc.[30]

This preparation was a wise precaution, because Liberal

candidates could not afford to underestimate extra-economic factors despite the primacy of the free trade issue. Despite the almost fanatical zeal with which Nonconformist preachers inveighed against the Unionists, the creators of the 1902 Education Act, the religious factor was not invariably favourable to the Liberals. There were 200 000 Irish men of voting age in England, and despite the instructions issued by Irish Nationalist leaders John Redmond and T.P. O'Connor to vote for the 'Home Rule' party, there may sometimes have been a conflict of interest. Catholic priests were disturbed by the Liberals' commitment to undenominational teaching in elementary schools.

Catholic strength in market towns like Bacup and Haslingden could turn against either major party. In the latter town, an Irishman had made a speech assuring Harcourt of the Irish vote, but as his wife noted on 13 January:

> I hear that since their [local Irish] meeting they are rather at sea to know what to do as the Priest is going strong against us on Education - so I expect the vote will be divided.[31]

That same Saturday, the votes were counted at North West Manchester, and Churchill was found to have defeated 'Jix' by 5 639 votes to 4 398.

This early success marked the start of the Liberal 'landslide' in Lancashire and most of the nation. The following Friday, 19 January, the Harcourts' tour came to an end. The result, announced next day, was that Harcourt had won by 6 881 votes to 4 662 against the Liverpudlian J. Kebty-Fletcher. So, in Rossendale, as in so many other constituencies, the Liberal tide was irresistible - the winning margin was almost double that obtained by Mather in 1900.[32] The 1906 general election represented the greatest triumph of twentieth century British liberalism. By the time the polling ended on 6 February it was clear that the electorate had rejected tariffs with unique decisiveness.

Jack Sandars, Balfour's private secretary, attributed the Unionist débâcle to:

1. The pendulum with its doubly-strong swing - i.e. arrested in 1900 only to come back the harder.

2. Chinese labour - as potent in the country as in town.

3. The organisation of labour and the vote.

4. Nonconformist activity over Education.[33]

Certainly the drastic anti-Unionist swing in Lancashire owed much to the efficient liaison between Liberal and Labour candidates in terms of the 1903 pact,[34] but former Solicitor-General Sir Edward Clarke summed up the reason for the pendulum's swing more accurately, in a letter to Balfour:

> but for [Chamberlain] we might have been defeated, but we [w]ould not have been destroyed.

The returns certainly indicated a major shift of allegiances. A mere 157 Unionist MPs now faced 401 Liberals in the Commons. This latter total included 24 Lib-Labs. The pact between Macdonald and Gladstone had helped to ensure the election of 29 LRC representatives, and the remaining seats in the Commons were taken by 83 Irish Nationalists. In England, Scotland and Wales the swing against the Unionists averaged 10.5% and in Lancashire it was 13.1%. In total numbers of votes, the Unionists had actually improved by almost a third on their 1900 total, yet the Liberals had captured 71% of the 670 available seats in the Commons. The real 'landslide' was therefore in numbers of seats.

Part of the 1906 results can be attributed to the presence of local factors favourable to the Liberals, for example in Wales.[35] But when the Unionists subsequently argued for redistribution of seats, they were not really addressing themselves to the root cause of their discomforture, which was the growing importance of 'class' politics. By contrast, the Government's cooperation with Labour during the elections

indicated that the Liberals were more aware of this trend. Yet the huge Liberal majority over all possible combinations of the Opposition was not, Unionist polemicists to the contrary, an unruly mob of Radical 'wild men'. The bulk of the Liberal back-benchers were professionals, businessmen or 'gentlemen' of independent means, who tended to be politically conservative.

This conservatism was duplicated in a Cabinet which contained few 'advanced' Radicals. As a Gladstonian reported to CB with some relief even before the end of the election, the 'dangerous element' among the back-benchers hardly amounted to a dozen.[36] This element did not include the 'Lib-Labs', who were mainly 'tame' trade union officials whose loyalty could be relied on. The element referred to had little in common with their more staid back-bench colleagues, and retained their exclusivity as a group by fairly stringent 'screening' procedures prior to admitting new comers.[37] On the Unionist side, Austen Chamberlain recognized that the 'dangerous element' in the long-term was the Labour Party which,as he told Balfour, had 'come to stay':

> It is much stronger than first appears from the electoral returns, for on this occasion it has chiefly served as a cat's paw to pull Liberal chestnuts out of the fire.[38]

'Joe's' eldest son in fact underestimated the extent of working class support for Liberalism prior to the Great War, but the Liberal Government did try to cater for its 'Lib-Lab' following during the new session of parliament, as well as for its Nonconformist supporters. When Parliament opened on 13 February 1906, among the thirteen measures announced as part of the legislative programme were the Workmen's Compensation and Unemployed Women's Acts and a Trade Disputes Bill directed against the Taff Vale ruling. Concerned by the obvious loss of popular support during the election, the Unionist leadership did not oppose such legislation, but a 'sectional' interest, like that represented by the Government's Education Bill, was another matter.

Introduced to the Commons by Birrell on 9 April, this was by far the most controversial Liberal bill of the session. To placate

Nonconformists enraged by the 1902 Act, every rate-supported school was to be placed under the control of its respective local authority. Teachers would not be obliged to provide religious instruction, and religious tests for teachers would be waived. Local authorities would be given discretion in allowing undenominational teaching. As from 1 January 1908, only public elementary schools funded by local education authorities would be recognized. Voluntary schools would be taken over, with or without agreement of their trustees. Although it quietly passed First Reading, the Bill was soon denounced nation-wide by Anglicans and Roman Catholics, who felt that their children had the right to religious instruction from teachers who shared their religious beliefs.

Like CB, Harcourt was not really interested in the Education controversy. But he was reminded that a number of his constituents did attach great importance to the issue. Shortly before Third Reading on 30 July, Harcourt was asked to vote against the Government's legislation. J.G.Taylor, the secretary of the Catholic Federation of Bacup, reminded the First Commissioner of a speech he had made at the municipal borough of Rawtenstall (5km north of Bury) two years earlier. Refetting to the Catholic interest, Harcourt had stated that 'Catholic schools should have the fullest possible liberty to teach their own creed in their own schools, in their own time, and to their own children'. In his reply. Harcourt pointed out that in its report of the speech the Rossendale Express of 15 March 1904 had left out the qualifying phrase 'at their own expense', and added that as a member of the Government he could not vote against it.[39]

That it took the Education Bill no less than three months to get through the Commons was a portent of things to come. Harcourt soon experienced further Unionist obstructionism, directed this time against his own bill intended to end plural voting in parliamentary elections. Doing away with the plural vote had been one of Harcourt's cherished objectives for years, long before he became an MP. The plural vote was only one of the anomalies in an electoral system he regarded as an accumulated patchwork 'comprised partly of a little conviction, partly of a little concession and partly of a little cowardice'.[40] The Government wanted to deal with the anomaly of plural voting in particular.

The reason was that the plural vote was believed to favour the

Unionists. Existing property qualifications for the vote enabled the wealthy to vote in more than one constituency. During an election constituencies polled on different days, so those who owned property in more than one parliamentary borough could vote more than once. There were close to 500 000 plural voters in 1906, and if Unionists believed many voted Conservative, the Liberals were no less firmly convinced that they were at a disadvantage.[41] During the 1906 election campaign, dozens of Liberal candidates referred to the issue of plural voting. However the bill directed against it was only a minor part of the Government's legislative programme for 1906, and generally the public did not care about the allegiances of plural voters.

It was because of this Unionist confidence that there was no public demand for the abolition of plural voting that the House of Lords was to reject Harcourt's Plural Voting Bill - the only Liberal bill of the 1906 session to suffer this fate. Harcourt later claimed to be surprised by the ferocity with which the Opposition fought his 'modest attempt' to redress a 'great grievance', but from the Unionist point of view this was because the Government refused to consider this reform in conjunction with a broader scheme for redistribution of seats. The 1885 Redistribution Act had only provided for an *approximate* equality of electoral districts, reflecting Gladstone and the Whig leaders' dislike of a numerical equality running counter to tradition.

If one considers the Unionists' seat/vote ratio from the 1906 election, then they had good cause for complaint. Out of a total 5 626 091 votes cast they had received 2 422 071 (43%), marginally less than the 2 751 057 votes for the Liberals (48.9%). But they had only 157 seats to show for it from 556 candidates put up for election (28.3%), whereas the Liberals had had 400 out of their 536 candidates elected (74.6%). Gerald Balfour, President of the Local Government Board, had tried to get a redistribution scheme approved during the 1905 session. He failed and the Unionist administration had collapsed, but all the same it was thought by reform-minded Conservatives like Sir Henry Kimber that redistribution would be the main subject of the new session.[42]

'Gerry' Balfour, as he was nick-named by the Liberals,[43] attributed Liberal reluctance to support redistribution to fear of losing Irish votes. His prediction that the question would be 'indefinitely shelved' proved to be correct.[44] Certainly Ireland *was* over-

represented in the Commons,considering the effects of depopulation, and the large bloc of Irish MPs had not been affected by the reforms of 1884-85. In 1906 the Government did have an independent majority, but when the election of January 1910 realigned the balance of parliamentary forces more evenly, the Irish vote became vitally important to the Liberals. The Unionists were simply paying the price of defeat in the 'winner takes all' parliamentary system.

Balfour had not intended numerical considerations to be the only factor in this scheme. As its name implied, the Conservative Party wished to recognize and defer to the specific local conditions of certain constituencies and their historical and traditional features. In its concern for minority interests this line of thought found an echo in the long Liberal tradition which regarded proportional representation as one of the necessary pre-requisites for a fully democratic franchise. The philosopher economist John Stuart Mill had written a treatise on Representative Government during the nineteenth century, and the interest in this issue in fact cut across party lines. In 1905 Leonard Courtney, ennobled as Lord Courtney of Penwith the following year, had revived the Proportional Representation Society.

Founded in 1884, the Society had fallen into a state of decline. To try to correct this, its pamphlets proclaimed that membership was 'open to all ... in sympathy with its aims'. Radicals like Aneurin Williams and Hilaire Belloc joined, as well as well-known Conservatives.[45] There were also some prominent Liberals, like Lord Loreburn and Sir John Simon, who became Attorney-General in 1913. Harcourt took the Gladstonian line on proportional representation, whether or not - as H.G.Wells opined - it was 'sane voting'. Loyal 'party' men like Harcourt and Jack Pease, a junior Lord of the Treasury until 1908, saw the Society as just another manifestation of 'faddism', the bane of the Liberal Party during the 1890s.[46] Minorities, Harcourt subsequently remarked in 1909, were 'born to suffer'.

When asked in the Commons if the Government would introduce a redistribution bill, Harcourt invariably replied that such a measure should only be considered towards the end of a Parliament, not before. This was the stock Liberal excuse for deferring the matter. Just as redistribution was politically inconvenient for the Government, so did

a plural voting bill offer electoral benefits. Harcourt's interest in plural voting was political, and as a minister without extensive commitments, he had the time to draft a bill. On 2 May 1906 Harcourt presented his bill in the Commons. Attendance increased noticeably while he spoke, whether this was because of the topic itself, or because MPs were interested in hearing what Harcourt had to say in his maiden speech. Interestingly, this was the first time the re-elected[47] Arthur Balfour and 'Joe' Chamberlain had appeared in the House since the Easter recess.

Usually one's parliamentary baptism of fire is in Opposition and James Lowther, who had replaced William Gully as Speaker of the Commons in 1905, noted in his memoirs that this debut was a unique exception. The 'drily humorous' speech was 'greatly appreciated by the House' according to the Annual Register's report.[48] During the subsequent debate the former Unionist Prime Minister remarked that the liveliness of presentation had in fact rather masked, perhaps even from the author, the seriousness of his proposals.[49] Essentially, what Harcourt's bill proposed to do was to extend the prohibition of plural voting in municipal and county elections to national elections, so as to check the 'scandal[ous] multiplication of electoral power', as he put it.

During the ensuing debate, Unionist critics like Sir William Anson objected that the bill attacked property as the basis of parliamentary representation - that a man who had a 'stake in the country' should be free to vote wherever his property entitled him to. Harcourt personally believed the franchise should be based on manhood rather than property; but in any case the Government speakers could show that the 'stake' in the country argument was simply a rationalization for the perpetuation of plural voting, since it did not necessarily favour property holders.[50] Most of Harcourt's colleagues accepted the idea of 'one man, one vote', 'one vote, one value' at home or abroad,[51] and the Bill passed First Reading with a comfortable majority.

When the debate resumed a fortnight later, Unionists again referred to the need to couple a plural voting measure with a wider measure of redistribution. The need to redress 'glaring inequities' was combined in the Unionist press with support of continued university representation - in 1906, all nine university seats had voted Conservative.[52] Harcourt launched a scathing attack on his critics, including

'Joe' Chamberlain, saying that he hoped that it was only a 'momentary aberration to which even the youngest of us is liable' that had led Chamberlain to vote against his bill during the division preceding First Reading. Chamberlain was about to celebrate his seventieth birthday. Harcourt then went on to quote one of the veteran's own speeches against him.

During his Radical heyday, Chamberlain had declared in Birmingham in January 1885 that:

> I am in favour of one man one vote. I object altogether to the plural representation of property. I will take my own case, I am a terrible example. I have three votes in as many constituencies ... I know many of my friends who have ten or twelve, and I have heard of one reverend pluralist who has twenty-three. I consider that an anomaly altogether inconsistent with the principle that every householder ... has an equal stake in the good government of the country.

Harcourt's wife related the amusing aftermath:

> It is rather funny! Since his speech Chamberlain has studiously cut him and avoided him ... he is pretty sore but yesterday they met face to face and Lo.lou obliged him to speak to him by referring to Austen's marriage.[53]

Arthur Balfour, the last Unionist speaker during the Second Reading debate, took a rather more effective line than the disgruntled Chamberlain. There had been few references to wider manhood (and womanhood) suffrage during the debate,[54] and Balfour exploited to the full Harcourt's known anti-suffragist stance, asking why women were not to be enfranchised. While the debate was in progress, the Unionist press continued to condemn 'a measure of singular pettiness and unreason' which had 'taxed all Mr Harcourt's abundant humour to disguise'.[55] CB

had the last word, pointing out with his usual frankness that if the Bill *was* inspired by partisan motives, then so was opposition to it.

Again the Bill received a vote of assent, and Third Reading was set for early December. During the autumn recess of Parliament Harcourt was preoccupied by other issues, and did not really think that his measure was in any danger. During a speech at the annual meeting of the Rossendale Liberal Council on 17 October, he referred to suggestions he had read, although he disbelieved them, that the House of Lords would be asked to reject his bill, because it was not accompanied by a redistribution bill as well. 'They might as well refuse to eat a mutton chop because it was not garnished with a barbecued ox', he commented to laughter and cheers, repeating that redistribution could not be effected until the end of a parliament.[56]

A number of administrative details had to be dealt with during the committee stage, but when the nit-picking was over the Liberal Magazine congratulated Harcourt on the 'rare tact and skill' with which he had steered his complicated measure through the most tiresome stage of the legislative treadmill. The Third Reading debate was poorly attended, and something of a formality. The Bill passed with a majority of 333 to 104, but now had to face a far more serious obstacle: the Unionist dominated House of Lords. After a token first reading on 4 December, the Bill was presented for a second time six days later, by the Liberal peer Lord Beauchamp. Despite his efforts, it became clear that the Bill was doomed.

After only three hours of debate the Bill was rejected by a decisive 143-43 margin. For the Unionist-inclined press it was a case of good riddance. Initially, St. Loe Strachey, the Unionist free trader editor of The Spectator, had not expected rejection, but the addition of a clause stopping the enactment of 'one man one vote' unless it was accompanied by 'one vote, one value' - that is, redistribution. By December he was urging the peers to offer 'the most strenuous opposition' to this act of 'political tyranny'. The Times commented that the rejection was a 'sham grievance'; it had been 'generally expected'. Even if there was a 'good deal of clamour' over the Lords' decision, it would not really matter.[57]

In fact, the rejection of Harcourt's Bill was important for two reasons. Not only was it the first Liberal measure to be treated this way, but during the debate Lord Lansdowne provided a revealing glimpse of his attitude to the issue of relations between the two Houses. The leader of the Unionist peers issued his 'protest' against:

> the doctrine that because the Bill touches the House of Commons franchise, we are for that reason in any way precluded from dealing with it as we think proper.[58]

This was a barely veiled hint, in effect, that the Lords' veto could be used against other Liberal legislation - and would be.

On 20 December the peers insisted on retaining significant 'amendments' to the Education Bill, which had passed Third Reading in the Commons a fortnight earlier. The Government decided to abandon the Bill, since the alterations would perpetuate the existence of the denominational schools against which the legislation was intended. CB warned, however, that the resources of the Commons were not exhausted. The pro-Unionist Oxford Times accurately opined that:

> One cannot but see that there will be many occasions of conflict still to come between the two Houses before this Parliament has run its course. We are in for socialistic legislation, and when the country is asked to decide between the two Houses there will be no lack of material on which to form a judgement.[59]

On the rejection of Plural Voting Bill, the Liberal view was that the Unionists' argument for accompanying measures dealing with other anomalies was simply an excuse; and that the Unionist Chief Whip, Sir Alexander Acland-Hood, and Balfour had probably told the Unionist peers the Bill would harm the electoral prospects of their party.[60] In an open letter to the Times Harcourt addressed himself to the secretary of the Liberal Association at Harborough:[61]

> I am much obliged by your letter endorsing

> a resolution passed by the Harborough Division Liberal Executive on the subject of the Plural Voting Bill. You may rest assured that the Government have no intention of accepting without effective protest the interference of the Peers with an electoral matter with which they have no concern.[62]

CB was no less upset than Harcourt by this preservation of what he described some time later as 'a monstrous and intolerable electoral anomaly and privilege'.[63] Nonetheless, despite the indignation of the Harborough Liberals, the general lack of response to the rejection of Harcourt's Bill confirmed Unionist beliefs that the issue was not a popular one. As during 1894-95 the peers were to continue to use their veto selectively, as was to become even more apparent over future Liberal legislation. During the 1906 session Harcourt also waged other, less publicised, battles with the peers over matters related to his departmental work. The matters of more space being made available for MPs from the Commons and the provision of a lift for the House of Lords did little to improve the First Commissioner's opinion of their lordships.[64]

Harcourt's improvements to the Commons were much appreciated by members. The outer lobby was decorated, and lighting and ventilation - particularly of committee rooms[65] - were improved. More lockers were installed for MPs, as well as writing tables. Ministers were allowed more rooms. A new dining room was built in the terrace floor, and during debates refreshments were available so that members did not need to leave the lobby and perhaps miss divisions. In May Harcourt was in fact also given the difficult task of making divisions less time consuming. Harcourt went into the matter thoroughly, interviewing MPs, including Arthur Balfour, to find out their views on how it could be done,[66] and his eventual scheme was very successful.[67] His stock in the House rose appreciably as a result.

Efficiency wins respect, but affection is another matter. What endeared Harcourt to his staff was his concern for their welfare. Like other departments Works was obliged to adhere to the statutory Fair Wages clauses passed by the Commons in 1891, but Harcourt was not

content simply to observe the letter of the law. What he said in parliament on the subject, and his official papers, show that he consistently strove to assure that labourers working for Works were fairly treated. This applied not only to 'official' staff, but *indirectly*, to the conditions of employment of workers in firms which had government contracts. However, unless provided with an official complaint, it was difficult for him to take action as in the case of Messrs Waygood & Co, who were giving their wood cutting machinists less than half the correct pay in terms of the current rates.[68]

To avoid any repetition of abuses as at Waygood & Co, Harcourt got the Government to extend the Fair Wages Clauses to its contracts. In the 1907 session, Harcourt had a new protective clause inserted in the Works contracts. Workmen employed by contractors, especially in building and engineering, were now to receive acceptable wages in terms of the 1891 resolutions.[69] Harcourt also tried to keep the Works staff who worked in London's parks in work during winter, when the parks were snow-covered. The parks' staff had to be laid off then, but he did his best to place them elsewhere over the Christmas period. Early next session Harcourt attributed part of the increase of the Works Estimates to his provision for an increase in labourers' wages. This attentiveness to the needs of his staff made Harcourt a most popular First Commissioner.

Another source of increase in the annual Works Estimates was expenses incurred in restoration and preservation work.[70] Included in Harcourt's varied brief was the maintenance of national monuments, and as an enthusiastic antiquarian Harcourt showed a keen interest in this aspect of his duties. Castles like Carnarvon, Stirling and Walmer were no longer needed for military purposes, and had become the responsibility of Works. The negotiations, particularly over Stirling, took quite some time. 'I hope your letter to Haldane will clinch the matter of the transfer,' Schomberg McDonnell, Harcourt's principal assistant, minuted anxiously in October.[71] Eventually the War Office did relinquish its grip on this fine castle, which overlooked the main town of the constituency CB had represented since 1868.

During Harcourt's tenure at Works the outlay on castles was not in fact very considerable.[72] Extensive restoration work was done only on Carnarvon Castle to prepare that impressive thirteenth century Welsh fortress for the investiture of Prince Edward (the short-reigned

Edward VIII) as Prince of Wales in July 1911. Harcourt must have been annoyed that the recent monuments acts of 1882 and 1900 gave the Government little or no control over prehistoric sites, with a few exceptions like Stonehenge.[73] Harcourt was at the Colonial Office by the time Lord Curzon passed his Ancient Monuments Act of 1913. The Act gave Works greater powers, but still gave no jurisdiction over the church, with all its old cathedrals and parish churches of historical and archaeological interest.

Despite this variety of tasks at Works, the 1906 session was a hard and busy one for Harcourt, leaving him with little time outside his official tasks and the drafting of legislation. As early as March he had resigned the presidency of the League of Young Liberals. Harcourt was not prepared to play the role of 'figurehead', and wanted to accept posts on a fully functional basis or not at all. This was why when, during a visit to his parents-in-law at Hatfield, he was informed of a vacancy for the Oxfordshire County Bench he declined it. As he explained in his reply:

> I shall only be at Nuneham for parts of the recess and that time I shall want for complete rest.

He did not, he added, want to be regarded as a do-nothing who regarded a magistracy as a decoration.[74]

Towards the end of the 1906 session Harcourt's department worked non-stop to meet the deadlines for completion of the new public offices just off Whitehall, opposite the Foreign Office and the Home Office. Harcourt had his own office in the Commons, but while construction proceeded on the Parliament Street site, Works was in hired premises in the adjacent block. The offices at Storey's Gate could not accommodate the entire department, and various sections, including the architects and surveyors, had to be housed elsewhere. Press interest was considerable, and as early as October McDonnell informed Harcourt that the King did not object to reporters being admitted to the new War Office to describe it prior to the royal inspection in December.[75]

After the official opening in 1907 the War Office, as well as

the neighbouring Boards of Trade, Education and Local Government were all comfortably provided for. Ironically, Works itself was not. Only in 1915 was construction of the last section of the new offices completed, and the whole department finally housed under one roof. Preoccupied with these building projects, Harcourt was not delighted when the First Sea Lord Sir John Fisher began to badger him about the removal of a staircase at the Admiralty. Harcourt reassured the cantankerous old man that this would be done when the new block of offices was ready. Perhaps the expense might be met, he added with a dig at Fisher's pet project, 'by the omission of the new "Dreadnoughts" from next year's Estimates'.[76]

This referred to the Dreadnought -class battleship, which with its superior design and armaments made the previous Duncan and Lord Nelson types obsolete.[77] Launched on 10 February 1906, HMS Dreadnought cost £1 800 000, but in fact the overall Naval Estimates for 1905-06 were £1 500 000 lower than those for 1904-05. During the election campaign of 1906 Harcourt had acknowledged this, pointing out that 'hysterical jingoes' could not claim that this was a cheese-paring policy of weak Radicals': the Estimates had been printed at the time of Balfour's resignation.[78] The real significance of the Dreadnought was that by making previous classes obsolete, it precipitated a new naval 'race' with foreign powers, but for the present Liberal 'economists' like Harcourt were satisfied.

Overall, too, despite the innumerable 'amendments' to the Education Bill and the rejection of Harcourt's Bill, the Government was also satisfied with the outcome of the 1906 session. The varied domestic legislation which had passed represented a considerable achievement, and the Liberals had replaced Unionist Colonial Secretary Alfred Lyttelton's proposed constitution for the Transvaal Colony with one of their own.[79] Despite the good impression he had made during the 1906 session, Harcourt evidently did not feel that he was ready for promotion. In mid-December he informed Arthur Ponsonby, CB's principal secretary, that during the next reshuffle Churchill should have first claim to Cabinet rule. Ponsonby disagreed, noting that if the Prime Minister consulted him, he would back Harcourt.[80]

Parliament was prorogued a week later, on 21 December, and retiring to his country home at Belmont CB thought about who should

replace Bryce in Ireland. Sir Edward Grey had decided to install a new British ambassador in Washington. Initially, CB considered Harcourt, but thought that he had been too useful in parliament to be spared. Instead, Bryce replaced Sir Mortimer Durand, but who was to replace Bryce? Early in January 1907 the Irish Times speculated that Harcourt would become the new Secretary for Ireland. The Times was less certain, but reported that it had received 'trustworthy information' that the choice had been made a fortnight earlier.[81] After the Irish Times article of 9 January Harcourt informed CB that he had been 'inundated' with reply paid telegrams from newspapers and press agencies asking if it were true.

'I never answer these things on principle', he wrote, 'because if one is known to contradict lies the press usually assume that the absence of a contradiction may be taken for confirmation'.[82] The Times report was correct - the choice had already been made. It was to be Birrell. Harcourt had a carefree Christmas, knowing that he would not have to leave the country. 'Loulou', his wife wrote, 'is flourishing like a boy [released] from school and delighted at the prospect of a good month's holiday undisturbed by packing up either for Washington or Dublin! So whatever comes of the changes impending in the Government we return to London in the same place we left it'.[83] However others found it less easy to relax during the festive season.

Walter Runciman, a conventional 'business' Liberal, wrote from West Denton Hall, Scotswood-on-Tyne to ask if he should accept the under-secretaryship for India if it was offered, despite Morley's 'intimation' that he would 'not go on' if this happened.[84] Not for the first, nor the last, time Morley was simply indulging in a hollow threat, since he stayed on. In any case he had advised Runciman himself to take whatever chances for advancement came his way.[85] As it turned out, Runciman replaced McKenna as Financial Secretary to the Treasury. Morley also had his own views on who should step into which posts. CB received a letter on New Year's Day suggesting that Harcourt might be suitable for Education.

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of the Cabinet despite the 'good many flaws' in his character. Among these flaws Morley seemed to include laziness. Apparently Morley wanted Harcourt to earn his keep in the Cabinet because Education - unlike Works - was a demanding portfolio. Sinclair reported to CB that Morley was insisting that Harcourt take Education: he strongly opposed 'any man loafing into the Cabinet - Lulu ought to put on the collar and do some H of C and administrative grind like every other man, and earn his position in a reputable place'.[86]

It was true that although Harcourt did work hard, he could delegate authority to industrious assistants like McDonnell. Yet, insofar as neither CB nor his successor Asquith took ministers to task for their neglect of the 'parliamentary grind', Morley's criticism seemed rather selective. From the evidence of his capacity for hard work when he became Colonial Secretary, there seems no reason to reject Harcourt's own explanation of his disinclination to accept Education. Whereas Morley had placed McKenna *behind* Harcourt in the succession for promotion, Harcourt argued that CB would find McKenna 'a very sufficient Radical and I am sure always on your side ... and he is an admirable and indefatigable administrator'.

Since Harcourt also tired easily, he might have been reluctant to let himself in for the long parliamentary squabbles that Education entailed. In his reply to CB he stated that he did not want to embarrass the Prime Minister by his failure in an office for which he was unsuited, and which he would find 'most distasteful':

> I have never studied nor understood the Education question at all: I never comprehended the Bill of last year or even listened to the debates and I do not understand at all the local school questions ... and I detest all the distinctions of creeds ...

Harcourt added that he did not object to any of his contemporaries getting Cabinet preferment first - he was not 'a young man in a hurry'.[87]

Harcourt also pointed out that:

> There are of course other offices which might become vacant in the future which I should much like in which I think I could do good work after I [get] more experience of and practice in the House of Commons ... I imagine few men of my standing in any House of Commons have had so many chances in so short a time ... and I value this mark of your confidence and appreciation of my work far more than I could do any individual office.[88]

Thus, when Parliament reopened on 12 February, Harcourt was still at Works, while McKenna had, according to his recommendation, been given Education. From the outset of the session it was clear that the 'unfortunate differences' between the Houses, as the King's Speech referred to it, would continue. After the Government dropped its Education Bill CB had set up a Cabinet committee to investigate ways of dealing with the peers' veto.[89] The basic choices were either to 'mend' or reform the Upper House or 'end' it altogether in the adoption of single chamber government. As Harcourt explained at a reunion organized by the Home Counties Liberal Federation early in 1907, he did not object to the latter option, but was a 'mender'.

The important thing, as he saw it, was to find a way to curb the peers' power to reject or delay beyond 'a reasonable time' the measures sent to them by the Commons. If the peers persisted in resisting the people's rights there would be a constitutional crisis of overwhelming importance and gravity'.[90] Early in the session, however, Harcourt was too busy to speculate about what their lordships might get up to in future. He had to defend the Works Estimates, which provided for an increase in labourers' wages as well as improvements to the House. His tenacious defence prompted an anxious Austen Chamberlain to advise him to go home to nurse his throat, secure in the knowledge that he had won his case.[91]

In late February, Haldane outlined the first of his major army reforms - the creation of an expeditionary force of 150 000 men. On the eve of the War Secretary's speech former Colonial Secretary

Alfred Lyttelton passed a note to Harcourt inquiring if the House were really so hot, or was it just 'inflammation of the blood at the prospect of three hours from Schopenhauer!'[92] In fact Harcourt was most impressed by Haldane's proposals. They increased efficiency and promised to enhance national security - and decreased army expenditure. At a meeting of the Rossendale Liberal Council at Bacup, Harcourt had nothing but praise for 'a workable scheme based on the latest knowledge and experience [which] gave the nation a striking force in any eventuality'.[93]

It was precisely this latter aspect which should have perturbed Harcourt, had he been more knowledgeable about military matters. It was from the second line forces built up from his Bill that Haldane was to form a Territorial Army. While Harcourt and other Liberal pacifists saw the Territorial and Reserve Forces Bill as a means of strengthening domestic defence, Haldane's scheme was really intended to strengthen a British expeditionary force to the Continent in the event of war.[94] Apart from Radical opposition to the overseas entanglements such a strategy represented, the point was - as CB had pointed out to Haldane - that the success or failure of his scheme would depend on the number of voluntary recruits.

Another reason Harcourt and the other anti-war Radicals endorsed Haldane's Bill was that it seemed to represent an alternative to conscription. Conscription, or compulsion, was political dynamite for both parties. To make Lord Roberts stop his pro-conscription campaign (dating back to 1901) Balfour had forced him to resign from the CID in December 1905,[95] but Roberts continued his agitation thereafter in the National Service League. In early 1907 the Unionist press campaign in favour of conscription had not yet got underway,[96] and in any case influential journalists like Repington, the military correspondent of The Times, and Strachey did not want to go against evident popular feeling in favour of voluntary service, despite their belief that conscription was ultimately necessary.

On the Liberal side, CB was well aware that any attempt to utilize compulsion if Haldane's scheme failed would arouse the fury of the Radicals.[97] Yet he was less aware of the similar effect the news of the Anglo-French staff conversations would have if they

were discovered - the talks were known only to five ministers[98] - and it was Asquith who was to reap the whirlwind on this issue in 1911 although Sir Edward Grey bore the brunt of the Radicals' wrath. It does not seem to have occurred to CB that the continuation of such talks would, in turn, relate to the issue of *how* an expeditionary force might be used - and reinforced-in time of war. He did not know the full details of the talks, and only belatedly grasped their implications.[99] Radical confidence in CB as a bulwark against the Party's militarists was not fully justified, and the meaning of Haldane's Bill was not fully understood.[100]

Also keeping Harcourt busy early in 1907, and throughout the session, was his involvement with art galleries and works of art. Harcourt was interested in art for its own sake, not just because he had to deal with it in the course of his duties. In fact he took this part of his job very seriously: for instance he announced his intention in December 1906 to start a campaign in the Scotsman for the removal of the 'ridiculous so-called portraits', as he put it, of Kings of Scotland in the gallery of the Holyrood Palace at Edinburgh. He intended to replace them because of their historical inaccuracy by ten tapestries acquired by the Duke of Hamilton. At the end of January he set up a committee to consider the removal of the 'bogus' portraits from the gallery to some less conspicuous part of the Palace. Harcourt informed CB of this, because he thought the Prime Minister and some of his Cabinet colleagues would be interested, insofar as they represented Scottish seats.[101] The portraits were duly removed.

Thanks to Harcourt, the nation's galleries acquired some priceless paintings. Sir Ludwig Mond, father of the Liberal MP who succeeded Harcourt at Works in 1916, wished to leave his fine collection of Italian paintings to the National Gallery. The condition was that they be kept together in a room built for them by money he would provide. Sir Charles Holroyd informed Harcourt that the Board of Trustees would not meet until November, but he called to discuss the offer. Alfred Mond then wrote on behalf of his father to inquire if the condition was accepted. Harcourt explained that the Works architect would draft the plan for the additional room, and an estimate of the cost would be made. (This was expected to be at least £45 000.) Sir Ludwig could then leave this sum in his will. This was agreed, and Harcourt was able to

report to Sir Charles Holroyd that the collection would be left to the National Gallery: 'I am extremely glad to have been in any way instrumental in securing what I cannot doubt will be a most valuable addition to our National Collection'.[102]

The King was anxious that vacant land at the back of the Tate Gallery be used for an extension, and as early as August 1906 Schomberg McDonnell had informed Knollys that Harcourt had virtually finalized arrangements for this with the Chancellor of the Exchequer. At that time the question of where the Turner bequest should be housed was being asked in the Times. In mid February 1907 Sir Lionel Cust, the Director of the National Portrait Gallery, and other interested parties reminded Harcourt of the Times correspondence. The First Commissioner pointed out that land had been set aside behind the Tate Gallery, but there was a shortage of funds:

> If you could find a millionaire friend who wd give me £30 000 I wd start [building] at once![103]

In 1908 Harcourt was congratulated for finally getting the necessary funds:

> Your announcement [to the press] was simply astounding. What a splendid triumph, after all these years of waiting and working; ... I am sure everyone interested in art, especially in the treasures bequested by Turner, will duly appreciate your foresight and courage.[104]

Much as Harcourt appreciated this and other tokens of recognition - like the portrait of his daughters to commemorate his nineteen years of service with the Home Counties Liberal Federation,[105] he was still essentially a politician, and as such aspired to the Cabinet. On Wednesday 27 March 1907, he achieved his ambition.

III

Harcourt's appointment to the Cabinet bolstered the Gladstonian element in it, and also provided another supporter for CB, who was at loggerheads with the Cabinet committee which had approved Ripon's plan for joint conferences of the two Houses.[106] Perhaps, though, as Harcourt wrote to CB on 23 March to express his gratitude, his promotion was simply a 'fresh mark of your confidence and friendship' without any ulterior motives on the part of the Prime Minister. Taking into account Harcourt's creditable showing during the 1906 session, and Morley's rather back-handed compliments, CB had decided to enlarge the Cabinet by this addition of the First Commissioner. As noted earlier, it was not unprecedented for the minister in charge of Works to be allowed a seat in the Cabinet.

Although Harcourt regarded particular 'offices' as comparatively unimportant, the Cabinet was the 'natural goal' of every politician, as he noted in his letter to CB. Now that he had a post he liked, Cabinet rank, and legislative work which enabled him to participate in the life of the Commons there was '... nothing left for me to desire. I wish my dear father could have *seen* it, as I have not the least doubt that he *knows* it'.[107] After the official announcement of the promotion on 27 March Harcourt was congratulated by members from both sides of the House, and attended his first Cabinet meeting at 10 Downing Street.

Commenting on Harcourt's promotion next day, the Times remarked:

> Since his appointment as First Commissioner of Works, he has won high encomiums for his unfailing courtesy to those who have approached him with practical suggestions; and the schemes which he has set on foot for adding to the health, comfort and convenience of members and others in nightly attendance at St Stephen's show that he fully realizes the responsibilities attending to his office. Apart from this, his speeches in the House have compelled attention by reason of their marked

> ability and also because they have never been made unless absolutely pertinent to the subject under discussion.[108]

During the session of 1907, there were a number of various subjects to be discussed in the Commons. Now that he was in the Cabinet, Harcourt expected to be able to assist the Radicals within it. This is what he had informed CB he intended to do, even before his promotion. As he had explained in January, whilst declining the Board of Education:

> What I value most of all is your desire to have me in the Cabinet and naturally that is what I should most of all desire, especially the opportunity of supporting the Radical view of the great questions ahead of us...[109]

Yet, in practice, it became clear that Harcourt's views on these issues were by no means as 'radical' as those of some of his other Cabinet colleagues.

In the same way that Haldane believed that permeating the Government with the 'spirit' of Liberal Imperialism was a key to the defence of free trade,[110] so too did Harcourt see the function of the Gladstonians as an essential counterweight to the 'Lib-Imps' for the same purpose. Combatting 'jingoism' and militarism within the Party constituted the essence of Harcourt's 'radicalism', whereas his response to the New Liberals' social reform legislation was to be more cautious and qualified in its approach. As discussed below, the 'great question' which really concerned Harcourt in the sphere of social reform was the rural land question. His attitude to the ongoing struggle with the peers was genuinely Radical, but also Gladstonian, as was also his constant support of Home Rule. Nor did his attitude to electoral reform undergo any major change in Cabinet: he remained opposed to votes for women, which was the 'radical' course of action for would-be reformers of the franchise system.

Again, as at the start of the 1906 session, Harcourt found himself fully occupied by the affairs of his department. In early

April the Commons Supply Committee met to decide the estimates for the civil service and revenue departments for 1907-08. From the outset, Harcourt suggested to Alfred Emmott who chaired the Committee, that all votes should be taken that same evening - 8 April - because if any votes were left over to August, Works would lose valuable pre-winter construction time. As usual, Harcourt fended off criticism from Unionist MPs about his expenditure, and the vote was agreed to. Between his duties at Works and his preparation of a small holdings bill for England, the First Commissioner scarcely had time even to write to his wife.

As she commented to Lady Harcourt during a trip to the Continent:

> I don't know much of what's going on in London as L. who at best of times is a poor letter writer in the way of giving any gossip or news is now still worse as he has but little time to spend letter writing. I get a scrappy letter every day but absolutely nothing in them!![111]

The small holdings legislation Harcourt was preparing formed part of a general Government attempt to tackle rural land reform during the 1907 session. CB supported Harcourt's bill just as he supported Sinclair's hastily-prepared scheme for small holdings in Scotland.[112] CB had promised land reform at the Albert Hall in December 1905.

Perhaps one of the reasons CB decided to include Harcourt in the Cabinet was his knowledge that the First Commissioner could make a substantial contribution to the movement for the creation of small holdings. Although Unionist polemic attributed the anxiety of Radicals to pass land reform legislation as a means of hitting at landlords,[113] there was a considerable inter-party feeling that small holdings were a means of benefitting the nation and the real differences were over methods, not the objectives.[114] In practice, there was little separating Unionist advocates of small holdings like Henry Chaplin and Jesse Collings and Liberals like CB, Harcourt and Lord Carrington.

The latter was at the Board of Agriculture and Fisheries, and even before taking up this appointment in 1905 he had been trying to encourage small holdings on his own extensive properties, as well as creating a Co-operative Small Holdings Society.[115] Small holdings were given the priority in the Government's schedule of land reform for the 1907 session. In early March, when Harcourt, Herbert Samuel and Lord Carrington were fêted as the 'heroes' of the Home Counties at a dinner of the Home Counties Liberal Federation, Carrington spoke at length about the 'strong drive' among all sections of the Liberal Party for a 'comprehensive' small holdings bill. Although he conceded the acquisition of land would take time, he pointed out that the Treasury had issued a warrant arranging 62 000 acres of agricultural land to his department, and some of this former Crown land was available for small holdings.[116]

Actually the Liberal Party was not as single-minded on land policy as Carrington suggested. Other Liberal MPs advised land nationalization. Nor did the agricultural reformers have much in common with the sizeable group of land taxers who, influenced by the writings of Henry George, sought to siphon off 'unearned increment'. The 'single-taxers' sought to shift the burden of taxation from buildings to the land itself, and at the same time relieve the burden of local rate payers. The 'single taxers' like Alexander Ure (Solicitor-General for Scotland), Josiah Wedgwood and C.P. Trevelyan formed part of a movement which constituted a response to the crisis of *urban* municipal finance.

By contrast, Carrington, Harcourt *et al* formed a group which sought to alleviate rural problems, after more than a quarter of a century of agricultural depression. Halting rural depopulation and dealing with urban overcrowding by rural resettlement were not mutually exclusive objectives. Yet Lloyd George did not approve of the small holdings 'craze', as he put it. The Welshman believed small holdings reform was economically dubious, and politically divisive:

> Both parties seem to imagine, for the moment, that the real solution lies in the direction of ... establishing a system of small holdings. I think they have been rather too readily rushed by small, but well organized groups of their own supporters into the acceptance of this doctrine. These groups are inspired by men of no marked intelligence

> and with little knowledge of land cultivation ... If a mistake is made it will be irreparable for generations. Once a system of small holdings is rooted ... it will be almost impossible for a very long time to substitute for it a system of farming on a large scale with adequate capital, where the state might very well assist, and under intelligent management.[117]

Lloyd George was referring to Liberals - and Unionists - who had had years of experience with agricultural questions. Perhaps Harcourt did not experiment with small holdings to the same extent as Lord Carrington did on his Lincolnshire estates, but whatever his other defects he could hardly be accused of lack of intelligence. That the urban and rural movements coexisted without any significant degree of cooperation can perhaps be attributed to a degree of mutual ignorance of and lack of interest in the other's affairs. Lloyd George thought one of the Unionist supporters of small holdings was a Liberal, and by the same token Harcourt's approval of the taxation of land values did not make him an expert on the matter.

Harcourt's spadework was done by late May, and on Monday, 27 May he introduced his Small Holdings and Allotments Bill in the Commons. Once again he presented his proposals well, despite difficult circumstances, as described by his wife afterwards:

> Loulou's Bill seems to have given general satisfaction on the side. It was bad luck and management on the part of the Whip that he should have had to wait till nearly 6.30 [pm] to come on. He was *very* quiet - I thought impressive and resisted all the *advice* given to him by men like Masterman & Co to be more pugnacious. His answer to them was - you want a strong Bill not a strong speech. Even the labour men told Captain Norton [a junior Lord of the Treasury] they considered L's speech as a model of what a speech should be. The second reading is next week and then it goes to Grand Committee ... This will mean very hard work but I am glad to say so far he is very well.[118]

Harcourt began by expressing his confidence that unlike his small but 'highly contentious' measure of 1906, this bill would not

arouse 'serious dissent'. It was designed to facilitate the acquisition of small holdings and allotments in England and Wales, and was only an amendment of existing law (the 1892 Act). Then Harcourt pointed to the grave depopulation of country districts, an undeniable fact, and the urban overcrowding and poverty 'sadly evident' from examination of Blue-books. Later, during the debate,he reiterated his conviction that there was a 'hunger' for land, and a desire for advancement outside the cities - that it was the pathos of national rural life that existing laws and lethargy had condemned men 'who are the flower of our soil ... to the trials of the town or the pain of the workhouse'.

Existing local authorities - the borough and county councils - were the most convenient bodies to provide and to manage small holdings where they were willing or could be induced to do so. If they defaulted, two or more Commissioners appointed by the Board of Agriculture would take action. The Commissioners would be responsible to the Minister of Agriculture and subject to parliamentary control. They would have wide powers of enquiry into demand for land and the practicability of schemes in any and every county in England and Wales. If local authorities did not make any proposals, they could make their own. In either case a local enquiry would enable those involved to have their say. After the approval of the Board of Agriculture the county council would proceed to acquire the necessary land. As recommended by the Onslow Committee in 1905, the Board could set up small holdings in any district to demonstrate their feasibility.[119]

Small holdings were defined as not less than five acres in extent, nor more than fifty acres or with a greater annual value of £50. Allotments, one to five acres in extent, were to be the separate responsibility of smaller local authorities.[120] The price of purchase and rents would be fixed by an arbitration board appointed by the Board of Agriculture. Leases would not be for less than fourteen years or more than thirty-five. In arranging the purchase the country council would see to it that all expenses - equipment, management, etc would be taken into account in assessing the rent it would charge. To raise money for purchases councils would be allowed to make loans, with a maximum repayment period of eighty years. The Board would open a small holdings account in theBank of England, which would be monitored by Parliament. For the first year of operation of the bill the Treasury would contribute £100 000 to that account.

The arbitrator appointed to fix the price of purchased land or the rent of hired land would be instructed not to increase prices. On expiry of leases rent might not remain the same, but would not be increased on account of improvements made by the county council or its tenants. Harcourt explained that under the leasing provisions the landlord would be enabled to resume possession of all or any part of land he might need for non-agricultural purposes - for industry or building. This was of crucial relevance to plots of land adjacent to towns.[121] As further protection for occupiers and landlords a special instruction specified that when compulsion was used, the county council would avoid, as far as possible, taking any 'undue' or 'inconvenient' amounts of land. Parks, gardens and dwelling houses were immune from acquisition by county councils.

In conclusion, Harcourt made the welcome announcement that the board and county councils would be allowed to promote the creation of co-operative societies and credit banks to further the development of small holdings. He acknowledged his debt to the Onslow Committee, many of whose suggestions had been adopted or adapted. The major differences, as he pointed out, were compulsory powers given to local authorities, the emphasis on temporary rather than absolute ownership, and that no loans were to be made to landlords for the creation of smallholdings. He also praised Jesse Collings: he told the House that he had been one of Collings' 'very humble' assistants during the early days of the agitation for small holdings, when the former Radical had been the 'bogey' of the Conservative bench, and he rendered the 'grateful homage' of a 'humble disciple'.

Harcourt expressed the hope that his provisions would ensure that security of tenure which he thought a small holder should possess, and that the old cry of 'confiscation' would not be raised because of the compulsory powers given to county councils. He did not think that compulsion would be necessary: he saw it as a stimulus to voluntary action by landlords who, because of the 'inertia of human nature' would otherwise be reluctant to take any risks. While there might be landowners opposed to the idea of small holdings he, for one, welcomed it. Taking his own case, he was a tenant for life under a very strict settlement of entail, and had no son.[122] Therefore he was obliged to look after his estate in the interests of the next successor, and exercise tighter control of the administration than if he had a son or were absolute owner.

This was why he welcomed compulsion: it would enable him and his trustees to promote the creation of small holdings, which would not otherwise have been possible.[123] There could be nothing economically sounder and more financially satisfactory than to attach to the land a prosperous and contented peasantry - a peasantry which would be able to offer the farmer much-needed labour in time of emergency and who would otherwise be able to support themselves in comparative comfort on holdings secured for them by Parliament. With this remark on the creation of a 'contented peasantry' Harcourt revealed the typical concern of Liberal proponents of small holdings reform for the welfare of the agricultural labourer.

It was not only the gentry of Oxfordshire and other counties that faced difficulties - like the need to find labour for large estates which were becoming increasingly difficult to maintain.[124] The problem of the agricultural labourer was that he needed land, whether it was rented or his own, and would still need to supplement his low income. The smaller the plot, the more time a labourer had to devote to working for the farmer. As one contemporary estate owner pointed out this was true of allotments of four to six acres. Larger holdings of fifteen to twenty acres provided more income, and at the same time still left tenants time to work elsewhere, to provide assistance 'to any one of his neighbours who are in need of extra help. Such experienced men are useful on every estate'.[125]

Usually financial constraints would keep land applications down to smaller-sized plots. Harcourt's Bill was intended to provide the greater freedom of action which larger-sized holdings would permit. Tenants or owners would be able to supplement their income with occasional labour for estate owners. Thus by allocating State assistance to would-be small holders, Harcourt was also providing estate owners with much-needed assistance at times of 'emergency'. Harcourt's Bill was to provide security for the small holder, who would be a tenant of the local authority. Whereas the Unionist emphasis was on ownership, it was better in terms of Harcourt's objectives that the smallholder be a tenant. As Roy Douglas notes, peasant ownership offered nothing to the urban population, or to landless rural labourers,[126] whereas the 1907 Bill addressed itself to these inter-linked problems.

Then, in 1907, and later, Harcourt pointed out that in terms of

both the 1892 and 1907 smallholdings and allotments legislation, county councils *could* sell on easy terms any land obtained from their proprietors. In a reply to critical comments in the 'political notes' of The Times, he pointed out to its editor subsequently that since the passing of the 1907 Bill 20 605 acres had been bought by country councils, but only *one* smallholder had made use of the easy financial terms available to buy 26 acres. Evidently applicants preferred to be tenants. Harcourt also added that although landbanks were 'undoubtedly desirable', their best use would be to provide loans for the stocking and equipping of small holdings held on lease, rather than used to purchase the land outright. This would introduce the danger of mortgages, and give scope for the activities of the 'gombeen man'.[127]

The difference in emphasis on tenancy and outright ownership was therefore the main divergence between Liberal and Unionist landholding policy. As Harcourt rightly noted in his letter to Robinson, he doubted that the Unionists were very interested in utilizing the compulsory powers given to county councils in terms of the 1907 Bill. Certainly the Unionists could not object to the hiring of smallholdings, as distinct from purchase, from local authorities because the right to purchase under the 1892 Act was still in operation.[128] The final remark of Harcourt's 1907 speech was, significantly, that his Bill was drafted on the assumption that land valuation proposals would accompany or succeed it - this demand was repeated by the Radical 'single taxer' Wedgwood during the ensuing debate.[129]

Harcourt's final comment made it clear that his legislation formed an integral part of the Government's land policy, which of necessity had to include measures to value land prior to taxing it. CB and Churchill had spelt out the Liberals' determination to combat rural depopulation during a land reform luncheon held on 20 April. The Liberal commitment to reversal of rural depopulation was spelt out then, so that the mildness of Harcourt's bill came as something of a surprise:

> The friendly reception of this Bill in the House was largely due to the personal popularity and Parliamentary tact of Mr Harcourt. His speech was admirable alike in its lucidity of exposition and its conciliatory tone. It cannot ... be said that the measure is likely to satisfy the expectations of those Liberals

> who have so confidently pointed to the land question as the great issue for trying conclusions with the Lords.[130]

Harcourt's Bill was in fact the only one of the four major government land bills of the session to pass the gauntlet of the Lords: the Evicted Tenants (Ireland) Bill was significantly 'modified' while the Land Values (Scotland) and Small Landholders (Scotland) Bills did not pass at all. Given the hostility of the Conservatives to land valuation proposals, the rejection of the Land Values Bill, just before the recess was not startling: it was castigated by the Spectator as

> ... the first step in a thoroughly unsound system of local taxation. Making guesses at what would be the value of a site under conditions which do not exist will [not] help any one to an equitable system of local taxation ... What is wanted is that all persons should contribute to local taxation in proportion to their means.[131]

What CB and Sinclair, who devised the Scottisn Small Holders Bill, did not expect was the furious *Liberal* opposition to the extension of the provisions of the English Bill to Scotland. The idea was to, effectively, provide the security of tenure to Scottish small holders already possessed by Irish crofters in terms of the 1886 Crofter's Act. But both Liberal and Unionist landowners strongly objected to the extension of existing Irish 'fair rent' legislation to Scotland. Also, extension of the new English small holdings legislation threatened to erode landowners' control over their labourers and their land. The Parish councils which were to determine the allocation of land in terms of the 1907 Bill were largely controlled by farm labourers.[132]

In disputes these councils might appeal to the proposed Land Court so as to enforce, or compel, the reallocation of land by estate owners. This might endanger the preservation of Scottish estates, the male heirs of which had to observe stricter conditions of settlement and entail than under English law.[133] Liberals with an interest in Scottish affairs like Haldane and Munro-Ferguson opposed Sinclair's Bill.[134]

Rosebery was another of the 'Lib-Imps' who 'reared their heads once more' as CB put it. Rosebery shared the general Unionist preference, like that of the Unionist peer Balfour of Burleigh, for ownership of small holdings, rather than tenancy. Sinclair's critics doubted that his bill would halt rural depopulation in Scotland, although that was to be one of the measure's key functions.

During the Commons debates over Harcourt's bill, Unionists placed a similar stress on ownership. Jesse Collings was one of the most outspoken proponents of ownership. As he saw it, ownership would double the productivity of the land - the 'only alternatives' were purchase or the 'socialistic principle' of land nationalization.[135] Arthur Balfour summed up the main objections of the Unionist Opposition at the end of the Second Reading Debate of June 12-13. These were the compulsory hiring of land, the absence of financial assistance for county councils and the emphasis on tenancy as distinct from ownership. Yet, as noted earlier, purchase in terms of the 1892 Act was still possible.

In his own speech during the Second Reading debate, Harcourt emphasized that he did not want to see the creation of a class of small-owners indebted to the State and reliant on State credit:

> ... absolute ownership is the 'open sesame' to the money lender [or] ... Gombeen man. Under this system facilities are provided for the creation of mortgages and charges and the astute money lender or small capitalist may gradually become the landlord of a large number of small holdings and then proceed to let them out at rents screwed up to the uttermost farthing.[136]

After slight revision, the Bill passed Third Reading in mid-August, to the enthusiastic acclaim of CB. At the end of the Third Reading debate he declared:

> We are about to pass the most ambitious and the greatest reform ... in the agricultural system of the country for many years.[137]

The Bill received 61 amendments in the House of Lords, and was returned on 26 August. When returned to the Upper House these amendments were reduced to six and later two, which the peers finally accepted. Harcourt's Bill had thus gone through virtually unscathed.

Yet it had not been easy, and Harcourt thanked all his helpers, particularly John Burns, the phlegmatic incumbent at the Local Government Board:

> Your cheerful optimism was fully justified at the last but I do not think that even you knew how near a shave it was at the last.[138]

The relieved Harcourt could now spend the parliamentary recess resting at Nuneham, but the Lords' overall treatment of the Government's land legislation was no cause for rejoicing. Later in the year, Harcourt's indignation at the Lords' attitude to the Liberals' bills was the *leitmotiv* of his speeches. Apart from the continuing struggle with the peers, Harcourt had a confrontation of a different kind that illustrated his continued fidelity to the Erastian principles of his father. The dispute arose over one of the lesser measures passed during the 1907 session.

By 98 votes to 54 the peers approved a bill which legalized marriage to one's deceased wife's sister. Because of the high mortality rate among mothers at childbirth, it was reasonable to allow aunts to legally take charge of their late sisters' children.[139] Yet during the committee stage of the bill Randall Thomas Davidson, the Archbishop of Canterbury, had a clause inserted which 'relieved' a Church of England clergyman of any censure to which he would have been liable before the new legislation. Another amendment, the first proviso of Clause I, allowed any Anglican clergyman who refused to officiate at such a marriage to delegate his function to a colleague in the same diocese. The supporters of the bill felt that the amendments would have the effect of placing the clergy beyond the law of the land.

Harcourt regarded the latter amendment as 'unfortunate', and soon made his views public, which led to a clash with Davidson. The latter had promised to try to minimize his, or other bishops' criticism, but when the Deceased Wife's Sister Bill received the Royal assent,

he advised his clergy in a letter not to perform or allow in their Churches the solemnization of such marriages. In an address to his constituents, Harcourt described this action as a mistake which threatened the Church. It was not above the law, and if necessary the Episcopal Bench would have to be reminded that they were the servants of the Sovereign and Parliament, who were jointly the true and only supreme head of the Church.[140] This declaration drew support from clergymen like the Reverend Lines: 'All true Churchmen and Protestants will support the Government if this is their opinion as well as yours'.[141]

When he read the report in the Times, Davidson wrote to Harcourt to express his confidence that it was by 'pure inadvertence' that the First Commissioner had attributed to him a course of action he had deliberately declined to take.[142] Harcourt denied any 'misrepresentation': he had used the word 'admonish' in its lay or colloquial sense - in which Milton used it - and not in its technical ecclesiastical sense. He had obtained a clipping of the Archbishop's letter in the Canterbury Diocesan Gazette, written at Lambeth Palace on 28 August, and proceeded to quote him word for word, insisting that the 'guidance' suggested to clergy amounted to more than 'advice':

> ... I really do not think that you can complain of my words as misrepresenting your action, though I fully realize that we look at those matters from very different standpoints. I was born an Erastian - and what is bred in the bones will come out - in the speech.[143]

If there was little chance of agreement between the Archbishop and the hard-line Erastian by late 1907 there were even slimmer prospects of Harcourt reconciling himself to the movement for votes for women. At this point it is necessary to outline the Government's attitude to the women's suffrage issue since it had taken office. During his term of office CB did little to help the women, despite his sympathy with their cause. This was because the Cabinet was split over the issue, with suffragists like CB, Grey, Haldane and Herbert Gladstone opposed by Asquith and Harcourt in particular. As ever, CB's main concern was to preserve unity in the ranks. 'Go on pestering', was his advice to a deputation of women he met in May 1906. They took him, more literally than he intended, at his word.

Except for a long lull from early 1909 to late 1911, there was an almost endless succession of incidents inspired by the militant suffragettes. They were organized as the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) founded by Mrs Emmeline Pankhurst in 1903. The National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) led by Mrs Millicent Fawcett, the wife of a former Liberal minister, continued the struggle for the vote by peaceful - and less controversial - means. As early as December 1905 the great Liberal rally at the Albert Hall had been briefly interrupted by the 'suffragettes', as they were to be known.[144] Starting with heckling of Liberal speakers at political meetings, the militant suffragettes were, by 1913, breaking shop windows, pouring acid on golf courses,[145] and attacking Cabinet ministers known to be unsympathetic to their demands.

As one of the Cabinet's leading opponents of women's suffrage, Harcourt was a marked man. Assisted by his wife, he was to devote considerable time and energy combatting the women's suffrage movement, both in and out of Parliament. He did not object to extension of the male franchise, but the electoral consequences of enfranchising millions of propertied women who might well vote for the Unionists were less clear.[146] Whatever the political risks of extending the vote to women, and despite the fact that his reactionary attitude was not unique in a male-dominated Edwardian 'Clubland',[147] the historian Brian Harrison has pertinently pointed to the personal animus in Harcourt's activities. Perhaps Harcourt's vendetta against the suffragettes reflected a less well-known aspect of his personality.[148]

Whatever his personal motivations were, Harcourt's feud with the WSPU can be traced back to October 1907, at a time when the Pankhursts were trying to canvass prominent politicians and, possibly, win them over. Christabel Pankhurst wrote to Unionist leader Arthur Balfour to ask his intentions when next he was in office. In his reply on 23 October Balfour stated in typically non-committal fashion that he would need more proof that women 'as a class' really wanted the vote.[149] Continuing their approaches to politicians, a deputation of WSPU women led by Mrs Pankhurst met the First Commissioner at Rawtenstall, in his constituency a week later. Harcourt categorically declared he had not changed his anti-suffragist views.

The Liberal minister's attitude might have been influenced by a lengthy letter he received from the Liberal anti-suffragist John Manson

the day before the interview. Manson advised Harcourt that he was likely to be approached by, and possibly troubled at his meetings - an understatement as it turned out - by members of the national WSPU. He went on to describe the recent power struggle within the WSPU,[150] and advised that

> ... Mrs Pankhurst and her paid agents should be asked whom they represent, and on what grounds they venture to ask 'votes for women' from the Government when the 'founder' is afraid of granting 'votes for women' to the subscribing members of the national W.S.P.U.[151]

Precisely what Harcourt said when he met the WSPU deputation the following afternoon, 28 October, cannot be established with any certainty because journalists were excluded from the meeting Mrs Pankhurst asked Harcourt if he had changed his mind on the suffrage issue, and if he would press in Cabinet for the introduction of a measure of 'full suffrage' for women during the next parliamentary session. According to the official report Harcourt said he could not comply, and opined that the Government would not be 'in a position' to take such action. This does not sound like quite so blunt a refusal as Sylvia Pankhurst relates in her memoirs, namely that Harcourt said he was opposed to the deputation's cause 'because he was'. Mrs Pankhurst was infuriated by his 'most uncompromising refusal'.

She warned that she and her colleagues would expose the Liberal Party's double-standards in seeking House of Lords reform when the Commons itself was not a representative chamber. In her opinion Harcourt should not be representing a constituency where the majority of wage-earners were women.[152] From then on, it was open war between Harcourt and the suffragettes. He found that out that same evening, when he mounted the platform to address his constituents at the public hall in Haslingden. He had hardly begun when suffragettes interrupted, and there were cries of 'Chuck them out'. Harcourt asked that the women be allowed to remain and went on, but sometime later the uproar grew worse.

In response to a call for a vote of confidence in Harcourt, Mrs Pankhurst got up on a chair and, pointing to the Liberal Minister, shouted: 'I protest, we have no confidence in him'. Half a dozen WSPU

members joined in the protest. However they were drowned out by the singing of the crowd, and Mrs Pankhurst was made to leave the hall.[153] In a subsequent letter to The Times Mrs Pankhurst maintained that Harcourt had not been asked to support a women's franchise bill, only to drop his opposition to it in Cabinet. The deputation had *not* dictated what the measure should be, only that it should enfranchise 'duly qualified' women.[154] Presumably Mary Harcourt was one of the latter because of the property she owned, but she fully backed her husband's views on the matter, as her correspondence shows.

Harcourt now always had to consider the possibility of WSPU interruptions, and this was underlined by the events during his subsequent speeches in mid-December. At Radcliffe-cum-Farnworth on 12 December one of the hecklers was a Miss Keble, but she was not alone. Two men interjected questions about 'sweated' labour and taxation without representation. Chaos reigned for a while as police removed the hecklers, with the piano playing on, and part of the audience singing 'Let the hills resound' to drown the noise! Harcourt devoted most of the speech to a criticism of tariff reform, and his wife described the conclusion of the 'very pleasant' meeting, which did not meet with the approval of her husband's opponents.

She wrote that:

> [Miss] Keble got in but she interrupted and after a time was ejected & there were one or two socialists who suffered the same fate. The suffragettes are evidently working in league with them. There was a great deal of noise outside. They tried to rush the Hall but did not succeed. They held meetings outside [We heard] yells and cheering continuously ... at the end I believe many had a very rough handling from the crowd as they [suffragettes] returned to the station.
>
> We didn't get away for 3/4 of an hour after as the motor [car] (kindly lent to us) had been taken to a side door which Loulou absolutely refused to leave by & it took them a lot of time to get it round the front through the crowd. When we did get out it was through a cheering crowd. The police were evidently nervous

> ... no wonder for they [suffragettes] were throwing ink about ... but it was all right by the time we got out.[155]

The Friday 13th meeting, held in the evening at the co-operative hall at Rawtenstall, was also eventful. Men were allowed in without tickets, but women had to show 'passports' to prove they were not suffragettes. These passes were not a deterrent. As Harcourt's wife recalled:

> [They] tried all they could to get in but did not succeed. They all tried to get men to heckle for them ... Miss [?which] Pankhurst and another - disguised as lads but after passing some policemen were recognized by another who tilted her cap back to show her hair. They quite failed to get any constituent to disturb the meeting for them. They tried every known device to get in but failed. The organization of the meeting deserves the highest praise. It was absolutely pouring cats & dogs. They must have got soaking. We had tea at the Liberal Club after [and] return to Mymms today. Loulou is none the worse for this expedition.[156]

Liberal organizers had devised means for restricting suffragette disruption of meetings, but this did not mean that the question of votes for women could be ignored, as Harcourt evidently wished to do. Moreover, the suffragettes' cooperation with the 'socialists' as described by his wife, was symptomatic of a wider dissatisfaction of the Left with the achievement of the Government during the 1907 session. Cracks were beginning to show in the broad anti-Unionist alliance. During 1907 the Government contested sixteen by-elections. Six of these were abortive attempts to capture seats from the Unionists. The Liberals retained seven. The Unionists won only one Liberal seat, but mere statistics were misleading.

Labour also won only one seat - Colne Valley in Yorkshire was a surprising victory for the independent Socialist Victor Grayson[157] - but significant in trade unionist Peter Curran's win at Jarrow in July was the fact that the Liberals had polled only half their 1906 total.[158] The 'Ministry of All the Talents' had still not produced *major* reforms. As a new convert to Labour who had backed Curran put it to LRC Secretary Ramsay MacDonald:

> Old Age Pensions are postponed for the present. Nothing more is to be done for the starving child or the unemployed. We are to hear nothing more of the Miners' Eight Hour Bill or of Education until next year. What is to be done for Temperance nobody knows. The House of Lords is stronger than ever ... It is no use trusting to either Liberals or Conservatives for measures which will go to the root of the social evils of the day.[159]

IV

By 1908 the Liberal Government had clearly not done enough to satisfy its various groups of supporters. After two years in power, the administration had yet to show that land reform was the key to solving social ills, despite Radical convictions. The persistent use made by the House of Lords of its veto had not helped either. On Welsh Disestablishment Lloyd George had to inform the Welsh National Liberal Council that a Bill would obviously be rejected by the Unionists. They had also wrecked the 1906 Education Bill. Reform of the licensing laws had yet to be tackled. The Irish Nationalists had not expected an immediate Home Rule Bill in 1906,[160] but they had not received any compensation to reconcile them to their long wait.

Gladstonian Liberals like Harcourt perhaps underestimated the growing loss of support on the Left. As he told a meeting of his constituents, Harcourt endorsed a Lib-Lab alliance beneficial to working-class interests, but pointed to the different programmes of the Labour and Liberal parties. Although they covered much of the same ground, the time might come when they would arrive at the parting of the ways.[161] The electoral trend during 1907-08 indicated that this moment might be arriving sooner than he expected. The Liberals could not afford to ignore the growing importance of class consciousness in national politics, although during the pre-war years Harcourt was concerned more about the drift of middle class voters to Unionism than the possibility of large-scale working-class defection to Labour.

Insofar as the Labour Party had made little progress in the formulation of an ideology which would justify renunciation of all other

parties in the existing political system, the Labour 'threat' did not as yet loom large. But the possibility of an ideological rift was the long-term danger to working-class support for Liberalism. Also at issue was the degree of the Liberal Party's commitment to social reform. In this sphere, during 1906-08 CB and his supporters hoped to combine retrenchment and reform by cutting back on expenditure and unnecessary 'adventures'. Gladstonian finance would prevail as long as CB was in office, but his tenure of the premiership was almost over. Since November 1907 he had already survived two heart attacks, and although he continued to perform his duties as long as possible, his health was deteriorating rapidly.

The growing tension between the Cabinet's 'big navy' men and Gladstonian 'economists' threatened to come to a head well before CB's resignation on 3 April 1908. As early as 16 December 1907 Home Secretary Herbert Gladstone noted that:

> [O]ur people are in excellent heart, and excepting Ireland and one or two F.O. questions things seem pretty smooth - always excepting naval expenditure.[162]

CB was to support the 'economists' during the ensuing crisis, as described below. This was not to be the first, nor the last, time that a struggle over expenditure on armaments would threaten to tear apart a Liberal administration. The significance of these disputes was that they related to the debate over future Liberal domestic policy. Reduced expenditure on armaments also meant more money for social reform.

The other side of the coin was that existing revenue from taxation was insufficient to finance social reform, even allowing for a relatively low level of expenditure on defence. In 1905, even before he was officially installed at 11 Downing Street as Chancellor of the Exchequer, Asquith had denounced the Unionist Government's practice of drawing on national capital to cover annual expenditure instead of relying on revenue And to provide sufficient revenue this naturally meant an increase of taxation.[163] During the period 1908-10 taxation became the means of financing the New Liberalism, and it was in his attitude to this trend that Harcourt revealed the limited nature of his 'radicalism'. However, for the 'economists', the immediate struggle during 1907-08 was over the annual Naval Estimates.

Author Desvaux de Marigny G
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