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

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of the period, but the Colonial Office did not intervene. A typical case was a trial at Umtali, Southern Rhodesia, where a young African from Moçambique was sentenced to death for rape. Due to irregularities during the trial, and what he thought were extenuating circumstances, Gladstone exercised his prerogative as High Commissioner to commute Alukuleta's sentence to imprisonment.[181]

Soon afterwards, in mid-January 1911, Gladstone felt the first rumblings: a meeting was held at Umtali to protest his intervention.[182] The storm burst in earnest in February, with headlines blaring 'Black Peril' in both Southern Rhodesia and the Union. Harcourt, who was also criticised for standing by Gladstone, was sent a representative sample of clippings. In the Cape Times it was suggested that this 'precedent' meant that a Governor-General was now a final source of appeal to overturn capi ntences, the prelude to chaos. As letters to the Pretoria News and Cape Argus testified, Harcourt and Gladstone did have defenders. In the latter paper a 'South African' wrote that 'punishment for the guilty is one thing, blind and indiscriminate vengeance ... another; and the stories we hear from the Rand of natives being kicked and thrashed by roving bands of vigilants and, if suspected of molesting a white woman, mutilated without even a pretence of a trial, are not edifying'.[183] But the general tone was one of alarm .

Although he stuck to his guns, Gladstone was taken aback by the growing hysteria: 'It was too ridiculous for words. Women who had never touched firearms and would probably be too frightened to pull the trigger, carried revolvers about with them'. Male chauvinism aside, there was no doubt that, as Henry Burton, the Union's Minister of Native Affairs, informed Herbert Stanley (Gladstone's private secretary) there had been a 'regrettable' increase in the number and gravity of 'Black Peril' cases, and an unprecedented tendency on the part of the white population to try to take the law into their own hands.[184] New reports of attacks on white women were interpreted by the public as a reaction to the apparent *carte blanche* provided by Gladstone. Commenting on the attack on a white girl at Lyndhurst on Thursday 2 February, the Rand Daily Mail asked for severer sentences, since 'mistaken leniency' might convey the impression that such crimes were not serious. If the 'outrages' continued 'there will assuredly be an outburst of anger which all will afterwards regret'.[185] In fact, as noted, white vigilantes soon swung into action.

To provide Harcourt with replies to criticism in the Commons of his ruling in Rex versus Alukuleta, Gladstone despatched numerous statistics showing that the incidence of death sentences for rape was low in previous cases. 'I may be obsessed', he wrote anxiously, 'but these figures appear to me to smash up the allegations against me'.[186] In view of the racism and ethnocentrism permeating all levels of white society - in the colonies and the mother country - Gladstone had cause for concern.[187] An unpleasant spin-off of the anti-black feeling aroused in Southern Rhodesia was the trial of Sam Lewis in Bulawayo.[188] The evidence suggests that it was precisely because of the emotive nature of these 'Black Peril' cases that the Office did not intervene: it could have made the metropolitan government very unpopular.

Harcourt certainly did not approve of white jurors acquitting killers like Sam Lewis, but there may have been wider strategical considerations which precluded an official attempt by the Imperial Government to urge reform of the jury system. One of these strategical factors seems to have been the long-term future of Southern Rhodesia *vis-à-vis* the Union of South Africa. Perhaps it was not merely youthful speculation which led Colonial Under-Secretary Winston Churchill to write in 1906 that Southern Rhodesia might 'ultimately be the weight which swings the balance in South Africa decisively on the side of the British Crown'.[189] Southern Rhodesia could only fulfill such a function by being joined to the Union.

Southern Rhodesia was the 'joker' in the pack: if it became *too* powerful it might not join the Union - incorporation would, to some extent, be a function of its inability to 'go it alone' economically. Churchill was referring to *political* infiltration. According to Colonel Burns-Begg, the Administrator of Southern Rhodesia, 'responsible people' there believed that the Imperial Government was quite capable of making a deal with the BSAC and the Union over the incorporation of Southern Rhodesia.[190] Burns-Begg also noted that although the Southern Rhodesians were then opposed to the idea of incorporation by the Union because of the loss of political say, this might not remain the case. If, as argued above, the Office was thinking in the long-term about the political future of the sub-continent, then this information placed Harcourt in a dilemma.

Intervention would almost definitely make the Imperial Government even more unpopular. This would jeopardize the establishment of

direct British authority over Southern Rhodesia if and when that option was presented by the expiry of th e BSAC charter in October 1914.[191] Worse still, as Burns-Begg indicated, intervention might drive Southern Rhodesia into the arms of the Union. In terms of a long-range policy of 'wait and see', such an outcome would be no more desirable than BSAC acquisition of Bechuanaland, or other more sensitive strategical points like Beira.[192]

Southern Rhodesia had not as yet attracted any sizeable numbers of British immigrants. Premature incorporation by the Union would mean the end of any hopes of British domination via a *stronger* Southern Rhodesia. Timing was all-important. Harcourt chose not to utilize the 'corrective' role of the Imperial Government. It was 'much better', he wrote to Burns-Begg, 'that the suggestion [of reform] should originate in Rhodesia rather than Downing Street'.[193] This was certainly a carefully calculated decision which reflected the Office's consistent concern not to endanger Imperial prestige - and influence.

The Colonial Office also took care to let the Dominions go their own way in the spheres of fiscal policy and trade. During the Imperial Conference of 1911 the Imperial Government formally resigned the power to conclude commercial treaties binding on the Dominions. In constitutional theory this marked an advance, allowing them to deal with foreign powers on an equal footing. But even this, as The Nation commented, was merely recognition of a *fait accompli* since the Dominions already acted independently.[194] Even before the Conference, Harcourt had sought to avoid any dissension between the Dominions over the issue of Imperial preference.[195] All the same, as a fervent free trader, Harcourt found the Imperial fiscal set-up irksome.

Protection was fashionable internationally, and Britain was still the only major country clinging obstinately to its Cobdenite tradition. In one letter to Australian Governor-General Lord Denman in 1912, Harcourt remarked on the 'monstrous' rent Denman was paying for a house in Brisbane, wryly concluding that 'everything, I suppose is much dearer in Australia than at home. This is one of the blessings of

Protection'.[196] Yet if the Dominions were allowed to formulate their own fiscal and commercial policies, they also had to be allowed to make their own mistakes. The complications arose when the agreements the Dominions sought to conclude with foreign powers might affect British interests. From the Colonial Office's point of view it was as awkward - if not more so - if they tried to create agreements with Crown Colonies for which it had some degree of responsibility.

The Canadian/United States reciprocity talks of 1911 fell into the first category, and the subsequent Canada/West Indies reciprocity agreement belonged to the latter. Harcourt was very interested in the former talks. Firstly Laurier's Liberal administration was dealingg *directly* with the US Government, with the assistance of Bryce, the British ambassador in Washington since 1907. Harcourt was anxious to see this experiment in independent Dominion negotiation succeed. Also, these negotiations over proposed mutual reduction of tariffs had important implications for *British* politics. The talks seemed to represent a further nail in the coffin of tar iff reform, following Balfour's pledge of a referendum on his party's fiscal policy. The Canadian farmers were desperately anxious to export their produce to the United States. A greater degree of free trade was needed, via the lowering of tariff rates.

Although he was Vice-President of the Free Trade Union, which promoted anti-Protectionist activities, Harcourt could only support it to a limited extent publicly because of his official position. Hence, when Wallace Carter, the Union's General Secretary, asked him to be one of the signatories to a Union address to the Manitoba Grain Growers' Association, Harcourt had to decline. He explained that as a Cabinet member he felt it wrong to append his signature to a document which might be criticized in Canada, and embarrass its Government. English ministers should not appear as 'moving spirits' in the addressdespite his approval of the anti-Protectionist text, which called for 'disavowal of any desire for a Preference on the British market'. The address pointed to the solidarity of interest between opponents of free trade in Canada and Britain.[197]

The preliminary talks over reciprocity began in Ottawa in November 1910, the same month that Arthur Balfour made his controversial pledge on a tariff reform referendum. Lord Grey, the Canadian Governor-

General and a cousin of the British Foreign Secretary, kept Harcourt fully informed about the proceedings. Grey also sent Bryce a copy of his report to Harcourt on the exploratory talks. The agreement eventually drawn up between President Taft and Canada's Minister of Finance William Fielding (a former Prinme Minister) crystallized Canadian party-political differences in the same way that Chamberlain's attack on free trade in 1903 had done in Britain.[198] The Reciprocity Bill was also the subject of heated debate in England, and took up much of the two-day debate in the Commons over the Address opening the 1911 session of Parliament.

Harcourt asked Lord Grey to explain to Canadian Ministers that his non-intervention was deliberate, and supported by Asquith. No 'responsible' Opposition speakers had attacked Canada's fiscal policy.[199] After attending the Imperial Conference, Laurier returned to Canada. In September, the Canadian general election saw the Conservatives triumph over Laurier's Liberal Party, and Sir Robert Borden became the new premier. Harcourt, to use his own words, found the 'overwhelming' defeat of Laurier 'totally unexpected'. His wife expressed the general dismay of English and Canadian Liberals: 'The Canadian elections are an absolute surprise. No one seems to have expected such a landslide and Lord Grey wrote to Loulou a week or two ago anticipating a small majority for Laurier'.[200] The previous Canadian elections had, actually, been quite close.

This time, Laurier wrote to Harcourt, the Reciprocity Agreement 'hastened the inevitable'. It had 'arrayed together all the financial interests in the land and all these interests are entrenched behind a high tariff'.[201] As Harcourt rightly surmised in his letter of commiseration to Laurier, the change of government meant also a change of naval policy, as well as the repudiation of the Reciprocity agreement. Harcourt also feared that it might lead to a revival of the agitation for protection nearer home.[202] Perhaps it *did* hasten Balfour's resignation of the Conservative leadership, leaving the field clear for the tariff reformers. The election results were also a blow for President Taft,[203] and less than a year later the Democrats had taken office. Ironically, one of the planks in Woodrow Wilson's 'new freedom' platform was tariff revision.

While the outcome of the Canadian/US negotiations had been a

setback for free trade, Harcourt was less concerned by the plight of the West Indies sugar industry. As Ronald Hyam has commented, there is little to choose between the Unionist and Liberal handling of this issue: it was uniformly inept. The West Indian industry had been hit by the loss of the US Market, and the Brussels Sugar Convention of 1902 by which signatories, including Great Britain, abolished subsidies to sugar producers. Canada replaced the US as the main outlet for West Indian sugar, and the islands were anxious to set up a reciprocity agreement. After some prevarication the Colonial Office agreed to set up a Royal Commission to investigate the issue, and when it recommended an agreement, West Indian delegates eagerly set out for Ottawa. The agreement signed by 1913 seemed to be the best available option.[204]

In reply to questions in the Commons about why Crown Colonies were allowed to be drawn into tariff systems such as those of Canada, Harcourt was advised by his staff to explain that the elected legislative bodies of the islands exercised complete control over fiscal legislation, and could not be overruled without provoking a major constitutional crisis. As for free traders' objections about taxation associated with tariffs, the Commission had made it clear that this would be amended, or that at least part of the revenue losses from reduction of duties would be made good without taxing articles of 'general utility'.[205] Despite Harcourt's public endorsements of the agreement, it came as a shock for the West Indies some months later, in 1914, when Canada announced it would extend its preferential tariff to Mauritian cane sugar.

Although the Canadian/West Indian reciprocity agreement did not specifically provide for extension of tariffs to the United Kingdom or other parts of the Empire, there was a loophole.[206] Harcourt's advisers therefore argued that since Canada was acting within its rights, the West Indies had no reason to feel let down - the delegation at Ottawa had had ample opportunity to study the agreement. All that the Office could do, and it was small consolation, was to point out that the West Indies were equally free to extend preference elsewhere within the Empire, and that at least the agreement with Canada was binding for 10 years, whereas the new privileges of the small Indian Ocean island could be withdrawn at any time. It was deemed wiser not to publicise the fact that Borden, the Canadian premier, had advised Harcourt privately about his country's intentions beforehand.[207] For the Office, the sugar issue had become a tedious burden. As in other colonies, its policy was one of retrenchment

and there had been a gradual diminuation of grants over five years since 1908. However, apart from sugar, the islands had little other sources of revenue - only in Trinidad was cocoa more important. Cowell, the Office's resident expert on West Indian trade, argued that it was not being 'loyal' or 'imperialistic' to consume West Indian canesugar instead of beet sugar. Nor, in cane sugar imports, did the West Indies dominate the British market.[208] Cowell's arguments summed up the Office's essentially pragmatic approach to the West Ind ies, another victim of the limited resources allocated to colonial development.

Now that he had to control a large Government department himself, Harcourt was made fully aware of the constraints on the spending of the British taxpayers' money. During the Edwardian period there was still not a great deal of money being spent on colonial development, but even so there were still large sums involved. Harcourt's Whitehall offices were located next to those of the Chancellor of the Exchequer. But the Colonial Secretary did not deal directly with the guardian of the national purse over financial allocations: this was done in lengthy Commons committee sessions devoted to annual Colonial Estimates.

The normal procedure was that money was made available in what was called grants-in-aid, to those colonies and protectorates which had the best prospects of becoming financially self-sufficient. The Treasury had no intention of pouring good money after bad, and priority was given to 'promising' areas like Nigeria, the East African Protectorate and Uganda. The objective was to enable them to stand on their own feet after which they would receive no further aid. Within this scheme a wide range of financial permutations was possible. Terms of repayment were a major problem. Technically, the protectorates were not British colonies, and since they did not form part of the Empire were therefore 'foreign' countries.

In parliament, critics asked Harcourt what guarantee there was that money invested in the protectorates would be repaid. In a memorandum prepared for Harcourt to provide him with a reply to this line of attack, it was pointed out that the protectorates' sole link with foreign powers was the British Government. There was no question of their seeking foreign

support or protection should they want to renege on their debts. As for their seeking to default of their own accord, this was precluded by the variable nature of the British Government's control over their internal affairs. Harcourt and the Treasury did not always see eye-to-eye on projected rates of repayment, but in these and other disagreements an agreement was usually reached - and which usually went in favour of the Office.[209]

But in inter-departmental disputes over money the Treasury did not go out of its way to support the Colonial Office. In the case of Malta, for example, the Office's funds were continually tapped with nothing to show for it. This was because of the unusual situation on the island: there was no direct taxation, and the Roman Catholic Church held much of the land, which made it difficult to levy a land tax. So costs of municipal works had to be defrayed from customs duties, which created a lengthy squabble between the Colonial and War offices and the Admiralty. The Colonial Office complained that the expensive municipal works, including drainage systems, were used by the troops stationed on the island, but the War Office and the Admiralty did not contribute towards maintenance.

The Treasury agreed that the Colonial Office should not bear the burden by itself, but remained neutral, urging the three departments to agree on a definite breakdown of the combined contribution. This correspondence began in October 1905, and was still dragging on when Harcourt was appointed. In November 1 913, Harcourt decided to inform the Treasury that the customs immunity given to the army and navy in Malta would be lifted, so as to provide the revenue necessary to redress the balance of contributions.[210] The protracted dispute illustrated the Colonial Office's lack of pull *vis-à-vis* the other departments, and the situation in Somaliland by 1913 further emphasized that Harcourt was far from being a 'despot under democracy' when there was a departmental clash of interests.

Since the creation of a protectorate in Somaliland in 1884, the trend of British policy had been towards disengagement. As Harcourt's father had put it to Foreign Secretary Rosebery, *apropos* the annexation of Uganda in 1892, 'We have as much Empire as the nation can carry'.[211] When the Liberals took office in 1905 they implemented the option their Unionist predecessors had considered - a retreat to the coastline . Following the decision in October 1909 to withdraw from the interior,

the move was completed by the end of March 1910, with the British holding the line Burao-Berbera. The 'friendly tribes' of the interior were provided with arms by the British, with which they were supposed to defend themselves against the attacks of the dervishes led by their Mullah, Mohammed Bin Abdulla.

As Ronald Hyam notes in his examination of Liberal policy in Somaliland, the Imperial Government regarded the Mullah as a 'mad' bandit, underestimating his prestige as a national figure of resistance to the 'infidels'. Harcourt did not take a more sympathetic view of the Mullah than Office officials or, for that matter, of other nationalist leaders.[212] Early in 1912 it was feared that the Mullah might launch an attack on the coastal towns. Harcourt urgently called on the Admiralty to despatch a ship to the Somali coast. The Admiralty grudgingly consented, although it did not intend to keep a ship off the coast for any considerable length of time. The Colonial Secretary regarded a continuous naval presence of the 'highest importance' because it would also help to curb the arms trade between the Arabian and Somali coasts.[213]

The Admiralty did not agree,[214] and the dispute over naval patrols was still continuing a year later. Although the armed dhows patrolling the coast had made few captures during the preceding decade the Admiralty thought their presence had a deterrent effect on the arms trade. It therefore rejected the Somali administration's offer of £1 000 towards the cost of keeping a cruiser off the coast: the annual cost of such surveillance would be not less than £35 000.[215] It was, once again, a case of inter-departmental passing of the buck: the Colonial Office thought that the question should be settled between the India Office[216] and the Admiralty, but the latter department had to meet many conflicting claims for ships, and there were only so many to go around. Thus the Admiralty wanted the departments concerned to reach agreement. Harcourt's difficulties in getting naval assistance was a function of the Colonial Office's lack of influence, the Admiralty's limited resources, and the flaws in the policy of coastal concentration, or what its critics called the policy of 'scuttle'.

However Harcourt put the sole blame for the traffic in arms, which he sought to get the Admiralty to control, on the French. It was 'common knowledge', he complained to the Foreign Office, that the arms

trade was kept going by the French Government - that the arming of the 'friendly tribes' had been forced on the British Government as the only way of relieving an 'intolerable' situation created by the French themselves.[217] Harcourt did not acknowledge that the British decision to reduce the Somali garrison to reduce expenses had helped to create the 'intolerable' situation. As the Admiralty had pointed out in 1912, the crisis then was due to the insufficient numbers of troops, mainly Indian - five officers and 520 soldiers - stationed on the coast. It was true that the arms traffic was being perpetuated via French-controlled Jibuti. But Harcourt's usual anti-French bias blinded him to the fact that British policy was not beyond reproach.

Despite his prominence in Colonial Office despatches, the Mullah was not responsible for all the unrest in the interior of Somaliland. The arms the British provided to the 'friendly tribes' for defence against the dervishes were misused. They were utilized for internecine struggles, or exchanged for camels! In the vacuum left by the British withdrawal to the coast, there was a general collapse of law and order. Caravans were attacked, and travellers were robbed and murdered. Starving refugees, mostly women and children, filled the streets of Berbera and Bulhar.[218] To try to supplement the undersized coastal garrison Harcourt authorized the creation of a camel constabulary in June 1912. This was to be a peace keeping force. The original contingent of 150 soldiers and three officers was doubled by 1913, by which time Mr. Richard Corfield had been placed in command.

Under Corfield's leadership the Camel Corps adopted an offensive policy against the dervishes, and by mid-1913 both Commissioner Byatt and Harcourt were uneasily reminding Corfield that he should keep his small force close to the coast. But Corfield sought a decisive encounter, and on 10 August Harcourt was notified that he had been killed in a skirmish in which the outnumbered corps had suffered severe casualties. The event created a stir in the British press, which was always on the alert for news of a military setback. Harcourt's explanation during the ensuing parliamentary questioning was that Corfield had exceeded his brief, and had completely disregarded instructions to avoid a pitched battle.[219] The victory over the Camel Corps bolstered the Mullah's prestige, and he continued to range across the interior almost at will, until his defeat by a British expeditionary force in 1920.[220]

In its dealings with the senior departments the Colonial Office had to play a supplicatory role, and to some extent this was also true of relations with the Treasury, despite the *modus vivendi* referred to earlier. Even if it generally managed to justify its expenditure, the Office certainly did not always have its own way. As the assistant Under Secretary George Fiddes co mmented in exasperation soon after Harcourt's appointment:

> I put a severe restraint on myself when minuting; but I feel pretty sick with the Treasury. They combine the rapacity of a Harpagon with the business instincts of an Oxford don.[221]

Fiddes' chief also found the Treasury's attitude to expenditure galling, particularly because some of his pet projects never saw the light of day.[222]

Harcourt's private secretary J.C.C.Davidson referred once to his superior's 'well-known bent' for railway construction, and this was certainly one sphere in which Harcourt was not such an ardent 'economist'. Like Joseph Chamberlain, Harcourt knew that considerable extension of railway lines was needed to m ake the natural resources of the colonies accessible, as in British Guiana.[223] Writing to Sir Hugh Clifford, the Governor of the Gold Coast, in 1913, Harcourt commended his 'forward' railway development policy and '(tho unofficially!) blow "the expense"'.[224] On the face of it, the immediate development of colonial resources and conservation seemed to be warring objectives. However, as noted earlier, the pace of development was not uniform in all colonies - colonial development was not a priority[225] and often natural resources were held in trust.

The common factor determining the Office's attitude to both conservation and development was that it should have control in either case. Whereas the development allowed served immediate needs, preservation of resources was a long-term investment, providing for the *future* needs of the Empire. It was on this basis that the Office placed restrictions on developers before and after Harcourt's tenure, but its 'possessiveness' while he was in office also reflected his concern to preserve the natural habitats of the colonies for their intrinsic value. Harcourt was more conservation-conscious than many of his predecessors, and his efforts ranged from preservation of flora - such as the lowland forests of Ceylon[226]

- to fauna. To cite an example of Harcourt's handling of one case in the latter category, he resisted considerable pressure from East African colonists in 1913 for unrestricted killing of wild life.

The white settlers believed that big game was a carrier of the trypanosome, the sleeping sickness, killing their livestock. In a public speech, Harcourt remarked drily that if the advocates of this policy had their way, the fauna of tropical Africa would be wiped off the map, and out of the natural history books. To investigate the cause of the sleeping sickness, Harcourt assembled a distinguished team of scientists and natural historians, and placed Alfred Lyttelton, the former Unionist Colonial Secretary, in charge of the research committee.[227] Harcourt was adamant that any steps 'however drastic' would be taken *after* their necessity was proved. Had he been less conservation-conscious, the large-scale slaughter proposed would have seriously, if not irrevocably, damaged the ecological balance in East Africa.

Harcourt's stance on this issue ranks as one of his most positive achievements as Colonial Secretary, but in the long-term the fauna and flora of East Africa and oth er parts of the Empire could not indefinitely be held 'in trust' on behalf of the 'unsophisticated' indigenous peoples. The Office's resistance to encroachments by developers and concessionaires, whom Harcourt jocularly referred to in 1914 as the 'soap-boilers' of the world,[228] was less pronounced in the post-Great War period. As the Governor of the Gold Coast noted, the war itself 'put a lid' on colonial development for the time being.[229] But in another sense war stimulated the search for certain natural resources when, in 1914, the Imperial Government became aware of how dependent the British economy was on raw materials the acquisition of which had been taken for granted.

The unsystematic development of colonial resources by the Colonial Office during the Edwardian period also included its utilization of human resources. Eurocentric prejudices ensured selective use of the services of indigenous peoples, who could have made a greater contribution to the development of their respective lands. A typical example was the sphere of medical care and research. Great importance was attached to the specialized research conducted at the Liverpool and London schools

of Tropical Medicine, to find ways of curbing the ravages of malaria and sleeping sickness. Liverpool businessmen like John Holt, who contributed to the founding of the former School in 1899, were prepared to spend vast sums to be ri d of malaria, 'the bugbear of our trade, and the vital enemy to European existence in West Africa'.[230]

Joseph Chamberlain, who had founded the London School as Colonial Secretary a few years later than its Liverpool counterpart, followed Harcourt's efforts in support of his creation with great interest. The success of the development of the tropical colonies, he informed Harcourt,[231] largely depended upon the work of the School. Harcourt quite agreed: key sections of the School, like the Sleeping Sickness Bureau and the Entomological Research Bureau, were heavily reliant on private donations and subsidies. Together with Austen Chamberlain, 'Joe's' eldest son, Harcourt managed to raise thousands of pounds in contributions to fund the School's researches. In just one of his fund-raising speeches, at the MansionHouse, he collected £2 393. However all this effort was not duplicated in attempts to provide the personnel to distribute the new medicines and vaccines under development.

Colonial officials appointed to West and East Africa were given a short training course 'in subjects likely to be of service to them in their work'. These included lectures on tropical hygiene and sanitation, criminal law - evidence and procedure, elementary accounting, tropical economic products, elementary surveying, and, 'in some cases', anthropology. In agricultural matters, the administrations of colonies like the Gold Coast preferred qualified curators from agricultural colleges, rather than 'assistants' sent from Kew Gardens, the clearing-house for the various experimental seeds and plants sent to the colonies.[232] Where did the 'natives' fit in to these various schemes? The memorandum referred to earlier[233] listed the number of career opportunities open to the indigeni in Government service, commenting on the need to increase the variety of categories.

The main outlets were as soldiers and policemen, artisans, labourers, railway workers, clerks, customs officers, minor political posts and magistrates. However the training and education of the indigeni was left to the missionaries. In a letter prepared by Senior Clerk Frederick Butler to Reverend John Harris, Harcourt wrote that:

> I should be glad to see the missions embark on a more extensive programme of industrial and technical education of the natives ... I should welcome any extensi on of educational effort which would divert the stream [of trained locals] into the channel of production [to] ensure an adequate supply of the agriculturalists, merchants and artisans on whose presence the prosperity of a developing territory must ultimately depend.[234]

As Harris, the Secretary of the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society pointed out to Harcourt, to do this the missionaries would need considerable support - not only subsidies, but assistance from local officials.[235] Thus the onus of providing trained cadres fell on the missionaries instead of the metropolitan government. As late as 1916, after leaving the Colonial Office, Harcourt still found time to criticise the results of the education programme in West Africa as 'very unsatisfactory',[236] but British officialdom had taken no direct action to improve the situation. Moreover, in at least one category, training was actually discouraged. Despite the comment on the need to provide more job categories in the memorandum cited above, a question mark was appended to the final entry on the list of jobs, namely doctors.

The shortage of medical staff was acute. Since 1904, African doctors had been excluded from the West African Medical Service.[237] The Liberal Government did not reverse this policy. The Colonial Secretary knew, of course, about the lack of medical personnel, nurses as well as doctors. In a speech in 1912 praising the work of the Colonial Nursing Association, he pointed out that in some instances a single nurse was responsible for an area of 250 miles.[238] When the Office sent around a questionnaire asking various colonial governors about their views on the increased use of African doctors, the vast majority declared against the idea. The locals, one of the governors replied, preferred to entrust themselves to white doctors.[239] Thus whites continued to provide medical services in both rural and urban areas.

Perusal of Colonial Office records makes it clear that in the constant concern about public health in East and West Africa, it was the *white* public, and particularly colonial officials, whose interests were

being considered. Whatever their original status in Europe, any white official in any European overseas territory was part of, as A.P. Thornton has aptly put it, a *noblesse de peau*. The 'white aristocracy' needed careful protection, and colonial segregation policies kept them free of 'contamination' by Africans or Indians. In Nairobi, for example, the proposed segregation of residential and commercial areas was a sore point for the Indian community.[240] Harcourt was not content to defer solely to the opinion of the men 'on the spot'. During an interview at his private room in the Commons in April 1913, he asked Seymour Price Williams, a consulting engineer, to provide his unofficial, confidential impressions during his forthcoming visit to Nairobi.

Williams reported that the Indian bazaar in the centre of Nairobi was:

> a constant source of danger to the health of the white population. If some person would set fire to the bazaar that it might either be rebuilt on sanitary lines or cause its removal to another part of the town it would be a Godsend to Nairobi.

Yet, despite his condemnation of the bazaar, Williams also acknowledged that his conversations with many of Nairobi's leading citizens revealed that lack of funds was the real reason for the unsanitary conditions.[241] Nonetheless, the 'necessity' for segregation was not an issue from officialdom's point of view - only the methods.[242]

One of the more bizarre ideas mooted was to have all white-occupied dwellings placed on concrete blocks set well above ground. However any proposals, in West or East Africa invariably hinged on the maintenance of a sanitary 'zone' of varying size. An illustration of this type of 'solution' was the proposed demolition of the African village at Esselkado, near Sekondi, on the Gold Coast. This was intended to maintain a 'safe' distance of 233 yards - usually it was more. To his credit, the colony's Governor Sir Hugh Clifford questioned the fairness of obliging the 'native' taxpayer to bear the burden for a scheme which would cost at least £37 000 including demolition, removal and relocation of the villagers. Clifford especially objected to the recommendations - which subsequently proved impracticable - of the colony's senior sanitation officer that a zone of 440 yards in depth be maintained around all

buildings housing government officials.

The Governor asked for reconsideration of existing instructions that governors could not disregard the advice of these sanitation advisers without consulting the Secretary of State.[243] Harcourt reiterated the Office's long-standing policy. Whether it was 440 yards or not, there *had* to be some 'cordon'.

Harcourt's reply read:

> [Y]ou represent that the existing site of Essekado was selected by Government and allotted for the use of the Chief and his people when they were evicted from their former home in 1898; and that it would be an act of injustice to remove them compulsorily a second time ... [Yet] Dr Rice, in his report of the 9th of May, 1910, said that the only possible line of European extension at Sekondi was to the north, and that at present Essekado did not permit of this ... Irrespective of any standard set up by the sanitary authorities, it is impossible to contemplate with equanimity a state of things which must result in bring[ing] the European quarter of Sekondi within a distance of very much less than 233 yards from a native village; and the expenditure of a large sum of money might be held amply justified if it could permanently avert the development of so undesirable and dangerous a situation ... Sekondi, thanks to the attention which it has been receiving since the outbreak of yellow fever in 1910, is at present a fairly healthy town for Europeans, and it is necessary to [avoid] ... conditions which might [lead] ... to the increased frequency of those ailments which, as experience tends to show, are likely to be induced in the European by living too near to the native.[244]

Vast amounts were allocated to public works,[245] but white attitudes precluded diversion of even a small percentage of those funds to public health programmes which would have removed any 'need' for racial segregation.

No survey of Harcourt's handling of colonial affairs would be complete without some remarks on his selection of the Governor-Generals. These officials were the representatives of the Crown, and the main intermediaries between the Imperial Government and the Dominions. The importance of the post meant that selection procedures should have been rigorous, and based on objective criteria like appropriate experience and merit.[246] The reality was somewhat different. For the less governorships there were alway numerous applicants, and vacancies were filled by former Colonial Office officials. This was, effectively, a 'closed shop' - as Harcourt explained to one of the applicants, the only governorships available outside of the Colonial service were those in South Australia.[247] It was also significant that the costs of Governors exceeded their official income.

This applied even more to the Governor-Generals, and even men of independent means found it hard to make ends meet. For example, because of his large entourage, Arthur, the Duke of Connaught, asked for a £10 000 increase of salary and allowances which threatened to cause dissension in the Canadian parliament.[248] In October 1910 Lord Dudley, the Governor-General of Australia, protested that he could not provide for the various official functions to celebrate George V's coronation out of his own pocket, and asked for a special allowance of £2 000.[249] Dudley eventually resigned, and his successor had to be someone who could spend at least £10 000 a year over and above his salary. During a talk with Harcourt at Windsor in early 1911, George V suggested that all the governors of the dominions should receive annual salaries of £24 000.

Harcourt pointed out that this would involve an annual parliamentary vote, and draw 'unnecessary' attention to the cost of the Dominions to the British taxpayer.[250] The King wanted Dominions representatives 'worthy of their position', his private secretary reported to Harcourt, and regretted that Asquith supported the Colonial Secretary's rejection of his proposal. Bigge's letter noted that:

> there is no disguising the fact that the Dominions become more particular and critical every day as to the representative of the Crown chosen for them by the Home Government and it would seem almost inevitable that the time must come when they will have to choose between moneyed mediocrity and salaried superiority.[251]

The search for a successor to Dudley continued, and Harcourt proposed Lord Denman, 'an able and ambitious young man' with a 'capable and suitable wife', and explained the full list of necessary attributes to Bigge.[252] One of the qualities for which Harcourt had recommended Denman was his ability to cooperate with a Labour government, but the new Governor-General's tenure was a complete failure in this respect. In view of what happened to Denman, Harcourt must have been relieved that he did not have to deal with a federal system of government in South Africa as well. In late 1912 Denman was evicted from his official residence at Sydney. The house was provided by the Labour Government of New South Wales.[253] It was on loan, but the State government did not agree to let Denman use it rent free, requesting a 3½% rental based on the capital value, which meant a rent of about £3 500 a year. The State and Federal governments could not reach agreement.

The crestfallen Denman wrote that his eviction was 'a rude shock to the cause of Imperialism in this country' and cited the 'hostile forces' arrayed against him and poor health as reasons for ending his tenure before its expiry.[254] Harcourt was dismayed, noting that the action had been aimed at the Federal Government, and that in any case Fisher's Labour ministry might soon be voted out.[255] His plea gained a temporary reprieve, but Denman finally did resign barely a year later, amid Australian press speculation that the eviction had contributed to his decision. Harcourt had hoped for better of Denman[256] but the federal system made Governor-Generals in Australia vulnerable, and liable to become 'the shuttlecock of alternate parties', as the Colonial Secretary put it. In the Union of South Africa Harcourt's closer personal ties with its ministry and Herbert Gladstone ruled out such embarrassing episodes. Not that Harcourt had selected Gladstone, but they were old friends.

The Corpus Christi affair of 1908[257] had indicated that Gladstone was not the best possible candidate for the governor-generalship of South Africa, but as described above, Harcourt stood fast by him in all major crises. He did put his foot down over minor matters - like allowing Gladstone's attendance at parliamentary debates[258] - but did not consider recalling him. When Gladstone left South Africa in 1914 there was again local press speculation that, as in this case, the departure was linked to Gladstone's mishandling of the 1914 strike. But Gladstone had wished to leave, for personal reasons, well before the strike.[259] The fact that a Governor-General might be a friend introduced a subjective element into a Colonial Secretary's assessment of his performance. It might also affect the choice of a Governor-General.

This random human factor should not be overemphasized, but in at least one instance Harcourt's personal views did have a very important bearing on his selection - for the governorship of Nigeria. Sir Frederick Lugard was not one of Harcourt's closest friends, but the Colonial Secretary greatly respected him as an administrator. As High Commissioner of Northern Nigeria during 1900-06, Lugard had initiated the supposedly dynamic system of indirect rule perpetuated by his successors, Sir Percy Girouard & Sir Hesketh Bell. As John Flint has remarked, in Northern Nigeria 'British pragmatism was carried to ... negative extremes, despite the impression of positive energy created by the writings and theorizings of northern officials'.[260] Lugard was the most vocal and forceful advocate of indirect rule, but the policy also had influential supporters like Edmund Morel, a prolific writer on West African affairs.

On the face of it, indirect rule, or administration via an administration of local chiefs, seemed to limit British intervention in Nigerian internal affairs to a minimum. Yet the merits of indirect rule were then - and still are - hotly debated. In practice, the system was no so equitable because of the chosen instruments of British rule. British residents dealt with the essentially feudal Muslim emirates, and after amalgamation of north and south, the lack of say in government of the predominantly Christian and Protestant 'educated elite' centered in the south was accentuated. Lugard's return to Nigeria in 1912 intensified the clamour for abolition of a system with which he became inextricably linked.[261]

Indirect rule imposed less strain on the Colonial Office's limited resources of administrative personnel, but as a system it could not pay its own way.[262] There was no customs revenue to draw on, as in the southern protectorates, and revenue from the locals in the north was insufficient to cover administrative expenditure, long before Harcourt's appointment. The enormous deficits incurred by the northern protectorate had to be made good by equally massive grants-in-aid. In January 1912, the Treasury was considering allocating a sum of £190 000, at a time when the Governor of the south could boast that revenue and trade had trebled during his tenure, placing Southern Nigeria in 'the very first rank of Crown Colonies'.[263]

Given this disparate economic development between north and south, amalgamation suggested itself as a means of relieving the strain on the Colonial Office and Treasury. The proposal had been made to Joseph Chamberlain as early as 1898, and by late 1911 Harcourt had decided to take positive action. He sought the right man for the task, and decided on Lugard, then the governor of Hong Kong:

> I know your heart has always been in the work there and that I could not anywhere obtain so admirable an administrator for this great reorganization - in fact, if I cannot have your help, I think I shall let the project drop for the present, as its success must depend on the quality of the man whom I could obtain to carry it out.[264]

Speaking in the Commons a few months later, Harcourt expressed his sincere conviction that Lugard - and none other - was the man to unite Nigeria. During his marathon speech on colonial development on 27 June 1912 he stated that Northern Nigeria was 'in the truest sense the product of his [Lugard's] foresight and genius'. There is an ironical ring to this in view of current opinion among historians about indirect rule, but clearly Harcourt had as high a regard for Lugard as his father Sir William had disliked him for dragging the British into Uganda.[265] Apart from the agitation in the press, like Morel's in favour of 'Lugardism' - so to speak - Sir Frederick's most persistent propagandist was possibly his wife, Flora.

Her indefatigable lobbying might well have tilted the balance in favour of amalgamation *per se* since, as indicated in the letter quoted above, Harcourt was reluctant to proceed without Lugard. Margery Perhum has described Mrs Lugard's influence over Harcourt - the tall (6'4") figure in wing-collars was a regular visitor to the Lugards' English residence.[266] To the outside observer, the frequency of those visits might have suggested an illicit liaison, but Lugard was not amused by the suggestion.[267] Lu gard did not, in fact, propose complete administrative amalgamation: only that of the railways, marine department and customs service.

Lugard would be Governor-General, but sub-governors in north and south would prepare separate budget estimates. The *real* novelty was extension of the 'efficient' rule of the north to the southern protectorate. There was little divergence from the ideas he had conceived years earlier. It was indicative that he submitted a memorandum on Nigerian land tenure even before his return to Nigeria. As Sir John Anderson pertinently noted:

> It would have come with more force if it had been written after Sir Frederick Lugard had renewed his acquaintance with N. Nigeria. It is rather an academic exercise ...[268]

The new ruler of Nigeria was obviously determined to impose indirect rule willy-nilly, lacking empathy for the feelings and views of the Nigerians themselves. The port of Lagos, which by this time had a population of about 60 000, had an 8km-long front of potential harbour. Lugard's attitude to Lagos was revealing. The nearest deep-water harbour to the west was as far away as Freetown in Sierra Leone. Yet, when he looked at Lagos, Lugard did not see the gateway for what could be the development of an economic giant. All he saw was a low-lying island packed with far too many 'natives', who made segregation impracticable, which meant - as far as he was concerned, that Lagos would *not* be the capital of a new, united Nigeria.[269]

Lugard seems to have been equally insensitive to the need for internal reforms - in particular judicial. This time it was less a case of lack of professionally-trained personnel, but the ethics of that

personnel. The Chief Justice of Northern Nigeria continually reminded the Office that legal abuses were rife. He was especially critical of the quality of the legal practitioners in the Nigerian provincial courts. The barristers, he wrote, were not really interested in trying criminal cases, but sought the more profitable civil cases. They apparently *fomented* litigation (over land, etc) charging inflated fees for their services.

In a covering note to Harcourt *apropos* the latter memorandum, all Lugard could write was: 'I am sorry that Speed's memo was of such an unhelpful kind'.[270] It was true that the judicial problem was nothing new. As Egerton had written to Lord Crewe, Harcourt's predecessor

> ... within the last few years ... native barristers from Sierra Leone and the Gold Coast ... have adopted the habit of sending their agents through the country [the Southern Protectorate] touting for cases and inducing towns ... to pay extortionate fees to bring suits in the Supreme Court ... Naked savages are now, through the agency of lawyers, bringing cases before the Supreme Court.[271]

Speed did not have the answers, but was simply doing his duty to the 'naked savages' by pointing to judicial abuses. Despite such defects, the Colonial Office paid little heed to complaints in the Nigerian press about the administrative system, and the inflexible nature of Lugard's rule.[272] Nigeria was duly amalgamated on New Year's Day 1914. It was not any matter relating to Nigerian affairs which finally broke the spell Lugard - or his wife - seems to have cast over Harcourt. Whilst in England, Lugard stepped out of his depth when visiting Belfast. The 'Curragh mutiny' in March 1914 had jolted the Imperial Government, and thousands of armed Ulster Volunteers threatened mayhem at any moment.

This was hardly the time for a senior colonial official to muddy the waters by praising the Ulstermen for a display of 'grit and determination' that would 'never be forgotten' and to congratulate them in the name of the overseas dominions. Not surprisingly, the Irish Times of Saturday 11 July 1914 reported the speech in full. In reply to Harcourt's inquiry on the 15th, Lugard sheepishly admitted that he spoke 'without previous thought', and that the report was 'substantially

correct'. Had, he maintained, Harcourt seen:

> the extraordinary self sacrifice, the devotion, and the intense loyalty of these men you would yourself have been carried away by admiration whether you agreed with their idea of liberty or not.[273]

Harcourt was not 'carried away', and despatched a note which read:

> After anxious consideration - and consultation with the Prime Minister - I have decided to accept your apology for your very grave breach of the best traditions of the Colonial Services ... I am sorry to be obliged to add that this incident must in the future gravely affect my estimate of the value of your judgement and discretion.[274]

Harcourt had allowed Lugard to escape lightly, in terms very similar to his censure of Girouard in 1912. Lugard remained in office until his retirement in 1919. Exemplifying the general relief in Nigeria was the comment of the Lagos Weekly Record, which bade farewell to a:

> victim of exaggerated personality induced by the autocratic power conferred upon him through the indiscretion of a Lewis Harcourt.[275]

## II

On the domestic front major industrial strikes and sporadic violence by the militant suffragettes made the period 1911-14 an especially trying one for the Liberal Government.[276] Nor did the Liberal victory in the December elections of 1910 slow the tempo of the struggle

between the Government and the Unionist Opposition. Despite the passage of the Parliament Bill curbing the veto of the peers in 1911, the old fights over Education, Welsh Disestablishment and Home Rule for the Irish continued with a new, embittered ferocity. In and out of Parliament itself the Government's measures of social reform met with serious resistance. During this succession of crises Harcourt showed his continued commitment to the traditional goals of Gladstonian liberalism.

The pressure on the Government, particularly that of the suffragettes, only served to accentuate his reactionary tendencies. As during 1905-10 he continued to interpret the interests of the Liberal Party in terms of his personal political and ideological criteria. Loreburn, the most vociferous of the Cabinet's 'economists', retired due to failing health in mid-1912, and Harcourt inherited his mantle, though he made as little impact on armaments policy. Harcourt continued to judge the New Liberalism on the basis of financial soundness. So he thoroughly disapproved of the Chancellor of the Exchequer's increased utilization of the Sinking Fund due to the inability of revenue to meet Budget needs - by 1914 the annual financial provisions envisaged a national outlay of over £200 000 000 for the first time.[277]

Harcourt also continued to demonstrate his selective interest in electoral reform by his opposition to female enfranchisement, which also was to delay universal adult suffrage, and his support of the Liberal efforts to abolish plural voting. Although his ideas on domestic policy underwent no major changes, Harcourt involved himself more in foreign policy prior to the Great War. Whereas informal army staff talks and a naval agreement in 1912 bound Britain more closely to France,[278] Harcourt sought to create better relations with Germany via revision of the secret Anglo-German treaty of 1898 about the future disposition of Portuguese colonies in Africa. Sir Edward Grey did not object to Harcourt's initiatives,[279] but ultimately they were made irrelevant by the escalating naval rivalry which constituted the real measure of the state of Anglo-German relations.

Due to his awareness of the needs of Imperial defence, as discussed earlier, Harcourt did not contest the inflated naval estimates of 1914/15 with his usual vigour. This was at least partly due to his conviction that the navy was Britain's first line of defence, and in his

continuing opposition to conscription he stressed the importance of the navy - after its defeat invasion would be futile, because Britain could be starved into submission.[280] In what has aptly been called the Radi-cal demise of 1912-14, Harcourt's failure to achieve a genuine *détente* with Germany exemplified the ineffectiveness of the Cabinet pacifists. They possessed *en masse*, considerable clout, but could not bring it to bear because they had no alternative to Grey's *entente* policy and the involvement with continental power-politics this policy implied.[281]

Despite the large turnover of individual seats the general election of December 1910 left the electoral landscape largely unaltered. Had it not been for the Irish and Labour votes the Government could count on in the Commons, there would have been a parliamentary deadlock. The Irish Nationalists won 84 seats and Labour 42, and the Government and the Unionists had 272 each. In January 1910 the major issues had been the rejection of the 'People's Budget' and fiscal policy, but in December it was the constitutional issue - the question of limitation of the powers of the House of Lords in its future dealings with the Commons.[282] Balfour ensured the primacy of the constitutional issue by his declaration at a Unionist rally at the Albert Hall on 29 November.

The leader of the Opposition stated that fiscal, ie tariff reform would be made the subject of a referendum *after* a Unionist victory. Austen Chamberlain was 'broken-hearted' by this blow to his father's policy,[283] but many Unionists were relieved to be rid of the albatross of 'stomach tax' which had cost them dearly in two previous elections. Liberals interpreted Balfour's move as a cynical ploy. For Asquith it was 'the largest recorded experiment in vote catching'. Harcourt predicted that it would lead to Balfour's deposition as Opposition leader and fail in its objective:

> [It is] in my opinion, the most immoral political proceeding which I can remember in my lifetime. I am happy to say it has not achieved its purpose, which was to win seats in Lancashire. It has, on the contrary, greatly disgusted and depressed the Tariff Reformers ...[284]

Harcourt wryly added that the absence of his 'fiery eloquence' did not seem to have changed his party's prospects. At the time he wrote to the Canadian Governor-General he was confined to his London residence by a combination of bronchial trouble and what his wife described as the 'overstrain of the last five years'.[285] Mary stood in for him during the election at Rossendale, although she was not a practised speaker.[286] Yet Harcourt saw nothing anomalous in letting her do a task that he denied other women could do. When he later declared at a public meeting that he would gladly support votes for women if they were all like his wife, at least one member of his audience took his remark literally, and smashed one of the windows at 14 Berkeley Square in retaliation.[287]

Harcourt had expected a tough contest at Rossendale, for which Liberal canvassers mobilized all available support, and on 13 December he was returned with a reduced majority - 6 619 to 5 206. This time his Unionist opponent received the votes given to the third, suffragist, candidate in January 1910.[288] By 21 December Harcourt was sufficiently recovered to leave London for Nuneham, where he continued to recuperate until the reopening of Parliament on 6 February. The 1911 session promised to be a lively one. Now that the Government had won three elections in a row, it could brandish the threat of a mass creation of Liberal peers to deal with the Second Chamber's veto. Balfour, depressed by yet another defeat, thought it bad tactics to continue to resist, and considered it better for the Opposition to accept that they were 'victims of a revolution'.[289]

The militant tariff reformers disagreed, although internecine squabbling within the Unionist Party during the ensuing months did not mean an end to its obstructionism in parliament. The Government regarded the passage of the Parliament Bill as the first priority of the new session, and Harcourt confidently expected it to soon be 'comfortably reposing' on the Statute book. But the House of Lords was trying to devise its own reform schemes, and Harcourt regarded Rosebery's criticism of Lansdowne's proposal as typical of the former Prime Minister.[290] The reluctance of the Unionists to accept the Parliament Bill, which essentially embodied CB's veto plan of 1907, was shown by how long it took the Bill to get through committee stage after Second Reading on 2 March: two weeks.

The struggle over the Parliament Bill was continuing while Lloyd George introduced the most important other measure of the session on 4 May. The National Insurance Bill was a scheme against unemployment and illness to which workers from selected trades were to contribute. To the surprise of the Government the real opposition to the 'malinger's millenium', as the Unionist press denounced it, came from the Left. Ramsay MacDonald did not attack the Bill but other Labour and Socialist MPs contended that it did nothing to remedy the root causes of poverty. They also maintained that the Bill should include maternity and sickness benefits, and that the costs s hould be borne by the State, not the working man. The latter factor was certainly an important explanation of popular resentment: even the contribution of a few pence seemed considerable given workers' slender pay packets.

Hordes of Liberal lecturers were despatched to popularize the Insurance Bill, and the Government's Publications Department worked as hard issuing explanatory literature. Opponents of the Bill argued that what the Chancellor described as his 'ambulance wagon' was just another vehicle for Liberal tyranny. As contemporary analysts pointed out, a fixed rate of contribution not adjusted to means (like the income tax) was in effect a regressive direct tax. It amounted to a head tax, not enforced in England since 1381! Small wonder, therefore, that Harcourt did not find the scheme revolutionary. There is no mention in his papers that he was one of the ministers who urged Lloyd George to drop his Bill when the extent of popular resistance to it became apparent.

From his talks with Richard von Kühlmann the First Secretary of the German embassy, Harcourt gathered that such opposition had been experienced in Germany as well initially, although insurance later came to be regarded as an essential part of daily life.[292] Yet, as one correspondent informed Harcourt, there might be political repercussions:

> I find amongst workmen rather considerable dislike to the compulsory contribution ... and that it is pretty freely stated by some that at the next election, while they will not vote against the Liberal candidate they will not vote for him. Probably this will simmer down before they have the opportunity.[293]

In view of his complacent attitude to the uproar, Harcourt possibly agreed with the writer's concluding remark.

The summer witnessed the climax of the constitutional struggle, during a week of soaring temperatures. Should the Second Chamber reject the Parliament Bill, the Government had obtained grudging Royal consent to the mass creation of Liberal peers. The final, critical vote was taken on Thursday, 10 August. The House was packed, with the galleries thronged by members of the Commons, Privy Councillors and others come to witness a scene even more dramatic than the rejection of the 'People's Budget'.[294] Harcourt was also present:

> I stood on the steps o f the Throne when the Division was called and up to the last moment we did not know whether we should have a majority - in fact when we heard that the Halsburyites were to be 109 we felt sure we were beaten, as we had had no intimation of support from the 37 Unionist peers who ultimately voted with us. We were prepared to create 500 peers the next day if necessary, but I am glad on the whole that we were saved from the necessity though it would have put us in clover as regards legislation for some years to come.[295]

The final vote, in favour of the Parliament Bill, was 131-114. It had been a 'near-run thing' due to the numbers of elderly peers Halsbury had summoned from the 'backwoods' to oppose the Bill. Yet the Liberal victory was not complete. The Nation praised the Bill as 'a great liberating agent', but there were some grounds for Harcourt's rather regretful comment about the Unionist peers not being swamped by a mass creation after all. As John Grigg points out in his latest volume on Lloyd George's career, the Government's bills could still be delayed for over two years, and reduction of the life of Parliaments from seven to five years *encouraged* more obstruction.[296]

As it was, Liberal ministers did not have an easy time of it during the 1911 session. As early as March, Crewe had fainted during a reception given by Morley, sustaining concussion in his fall. The Times complained about 'The strain upon politicians', and Harcourt himself ..

opined that the overworked Secretary for India should have a long rest before resuming work. What with the Imperial Conference and the vociferous parliamentary struggles, Harcourt shared the Government's general relief when the session ended on 16 December. Simon, the Solicitor - General, he wrote to Gladstone, had had a breakdown and many other ministers were 'on the verge of similar events'.[297]

The 1912 session proved to be another stamina - sapping test of endurance. Harcourt gloomily predicted to one of his correspondents a continuous sitting of eleven months, and even this turned out to be an underestimate. There were major strikes, the struggle over Home Rule, and the stepping up of suffragette militancy to come. Even the Insurance Act, the showpiece of the Go vernment's 1911 legislation, came under heavy fire once again, and before his scheme finally came into operation early in 1913, Lloyd George had many anxious moments. Apart from colonial affairs, the one issue which preoccupied Harcourt early in the New Year was electoral reform.

The Cabinet continued to regard the issue very much from the party-political point of view. During the previous session Simon and Pease (who replaced Runciman at t he Board of Education in October) had considered another plural voting bill, and later the plan was broadened to consider a wider measure of enfranchisement. Harcourt, who assisted Simon and Pease in their planning, had come to the conclusion that 'one man, one vote' should be high on the list of Liberal legislative priorities. By December 1911, as the Pease/Harcourt correspondence shows, Asquith had decided to stick to another plural voting bill instead, but if Harcourt had had his way, 'one man, one vote' would have been the first Liberal measure proposed after the passage of the Parliament Bill.

The reason that a plural voting bill was preferable to a broader reform bill was lack of parliamentary time. As Simon noted, a franchise and registration reform Bill would have to have its Second Reading by March 1912 and Royal assent by mid-March 1914 in time for a general election in January 1915.[298] Failure to meet this time-table would mean that there would not be time for preparation of a new parlia-

mentary register for that election. Apart from the time factor, the extension of the franchise was perilous. Harcourt and other Cabinet Ministers like McKenna, Samuel and Loreburn opposed votes for women, and were supported by the Prime Minister. In general Grey, Lloyd George, Birrell, Runciman, Burns, Haldane and Herbert Gladstone took the opposite stance, while Churchill vacillated.[299] In contrast to this Cabinet split over the possible benefits of female suffrage, abolition of plural voting offered definite advantages.[300]

So too did the Alternative Vote, support for which was growing within the Liberal Party and Cabinet by 1912. After he became premier, Asquith had agreed to Lord Courtney's request to set up a Royal Commission to investigate means of electoral reform. In 1910 the Commission's full report had conceded the possibility of proportional representation, which Harcourt opposed,[301] and advocated the use of an alternative vote in single-member constituencies. The Government did not fear the results of voters expressing their party preference in numerical order: losses to Labour could be regained with interest, from the Unionists in rural seats.[302] Harcourt had

> for some time come to the conclusion .. that preferential voting is the only practical system for this country, though I tremble at the effort to teach the agricultural labour how he has to place his 1-2-3 &[303]

To save debating time, the new Plural Voting Bill presented to the Commons in June 1912 omitted any alternative vote proposals. The planning of this measure began well before the passage of the Parliament Bill which would ensure its passage, unlike Harcourt's attempt in 1906. Pease and Simon were the main architects of the new legislation, but Harcourt, because of his knowledge of the subject, was invited to attend planning sessions at 21 Abingdon Street.[304] Harcourt also aided Pease to draft a new Franchise and Registration Bill, which provided 'one man, one vote' for an estimated one and a half million male electors possessing a six month residence qualification, and listed on a 'continuous' register.[305] Asquith had agreed to this additional measure due to his promise prior to the December 1910 election to set aside parliamentary time for a 'conciliation' Bill on women's suffrage.

The Conciliation Bill, as it was called, had safely passed Second Reading in the Commons on 5 May 1911, but no time could be spared for it thereafter. To cushion the blow to the suffragists, an 'elastic' week had been proposed by Sir Edward Grey for the 1912 session, allowing for an additional two or three days for consideration of the Report and Third Reading stages of the Bill if necessary. However, well before the 1912 session began, Lloyd George began to have second thoughts - despite his earlier support of Grey - about the wisdom of allowing a property-based Conciliation Bill easy passage. Such a measure would, he reasoned, appreciably strengthen Conservative voting strength, unless the franchise were extended to include wor kers' wives.

Lloyd George asked the Chief Whip to canvass the opinions of the secretaries of the twelve provincial Liberal federations in September 1911. The Master of Elibank reported that eleven of the secretaries believed that the Bill would be detrimental to the party's interests.[306] Harcourt had always believed this, and in response to Sir Edward Grey's publicly-expressed suffragist views, the Colonial Secretary was reluctantly 'brought out into the open'. He informed Grey that 'I am now actively organizing against you and your pernicious opinions'. However, the fundamental policy divergences between Harcourt and the Liberal Imperialist, suffragist Grey did not prevent him from inviting the Foreign Secretary over fo r some partridge shooting![307] Due to his anti-suffragist stance, Harcourt could not oblige an old acquaintance like Crook to address delegates of the Home Counties Liberal Federation.[308]

If many MPs had fixed views on women's suffrage, outside the Commons itself, there was considerable support within Liberal press circles for submitting the issue to a national referendum. The Westminster Gazette, the mouthpiece of Liberalism, approved this step, as did the Daily Cnronicle. At the same time Harcourt sent off his reply to Crook, he received a clipping from the latter London daily, submitted by its managing editor Robert Donald. The article in the Chronicle pointed out that there was disagreement w ithin the Cabinet and the Party itself, duplicated in the ranks of t he Opposition. The article argued for a referendum, which would consult both men and women - not only those enfranchised on the municipal voting rolls - to settle this apolitical issue.

Lloyd George, Donald complained to Harcourt, had made a 'great mistake' in supporting votes for women. He could not accept the Chancellor's argument that, since the Commons would pass *some* form of suffrage bill, the wider the franchise could be made, the better for Liberalism. Donald added that he intended to canvass the Chairmen of Liberal associations for their views on the referendum, and asked Harcourt for his 'frank opinion'. Harcourt agreed with Donald that the apolitical stance taken by politicians and citizens did seem to make a referendum necessary, but he wanted it confined to Parliament and, perhaps, local government [i.e. existing voters]. It seemed to Harcourt 'most inadvisable' to create a new register with all the women on it - 'You will never get them off again!'[309]

By linking the fate of the Conciliation Bill with that of the Franchise Bill in his announcement on 7 November 1911, Asquith ensured that the women's suffrage movement would be back to square one if the larger measure was voted out by the Commons. This realization by the leaders of the WSPU led to the resumption of militancy. Towards the end of January 1912, Harcourt soon discovered that the brief truce with the WSPU during 1911 was over. Addressing a deputation of the Union's representatives, Harcourt opined that the basis of the franchise should be manhood suffrage - if there were universal adult suffrage women would be in the majority, which would not be good for the State. These arguments did not impress his listeners.[310]

Members of the WSPU did their best to carry out their threat to make Harcourt's life a misery, and eventually Harcourt was not even prepared to consider a referendum on the suffrage issue, contrary to his earlier views. Early in 1912, the opponents of the suffragists marshalled their forces - it was announced that there would be a major meeting at the Albert Hall on Wednesday, 28 February. The meeting was organized by by the National League for Opposing Woman Suffrage. Speakers would include Lord Cromer (the League's president), his fiery Unionist colleague F.E.Smith, Loreburn, the Lord Chancellor, the prominent anti-suffragist Miss Violet Markham, the sister of a Liberal MP, and Harcourt. The League in fact represented only a fraction of all anti-suffragist elements,[311] but did its best to gain more supporters.

A national campaign was planned prior to the debate of the

Conciliation Bill in the Commons in March, with most of the forty meetings to be held in the midlands and the north. Charles Hobhouse, promoted to the Cabinet in October 1911[312] was to speak at Hull. Non-speaking ministers present at the Albert Hall meeting would include McKenna, Pease and Postmaster-General Herbert Samuel. By February 1912 Churchill had clearly aligned himself with the 'antis' because of the dangers 'petticoat politics' presented to the Government. Loreburn noted that:

> I am very glad to he ar the PM agrees with us. I am quite certain we can win our way and equally certain it is right. This time is very critical and I am shocked at the folly of some members of the Cabinet but am sure they can and will be overruled...[313]

Harcourt took quite as serious a view of the suffrage issue as Loreburn and Churchill. Using a rather strange choice of words, he wrote to Sir John Fuller that if Parliament passed a female suffrage bill he would be 'sorely tempted' to 'slink out of the House of Commons for good'. The Governor of Victoria's somewhat tongue-in-cheek reply was that in Australia no harm had res ulted from giving women the vote, and he strongly suspected that, if the worst came to the worst, 'you would be more likely to receive the votes of the females than the other fellow!'[314] In Australia itself, the Women's Political Association of Melbourne did not take kindly to Harcourt's official commitment to the anti-suffragists, and sent a telegram of protest.[315]

The Albert Hall was filled to its 8 000 capacity on 28 February - 20 000 tickets had been applied for. Sympathetic letters and telegrams were read out, the latter including those from the Prime Minister, Lord Lansdowne and Joseph Chamberlain, then holidaying at Cannes. Harcourt, the penultimate speaker, reiterated his conviction that it was unthinkable to allow women to have the controlling say in affairs of state, including the great questions of diplomacy. The true basis of franchise was manhood - the claim to sexual equality was refuted by inescapable physiological facts. The Conciliation Bill, always a farce, was in danger of becoming a fraud. As for better wages, women workers

would obtain these by organization, not via the vote.

Harcourt's suggestio n that the majority of women did not *want* the vote, that it would be unfair to force it on them, formed the central theme of the preceding speaker, V iolet Markham. She cited statistics which showed women's apathy in municipal politics, and used these to develop her argument. As Harcourt's wife reported to Lady Harcourt, the meeting was a great success, and

> people have been very kind about Loulou's speech which is nice as he was in a terrible state of nervousness for days beforehand. Miss Markham's speech was remarkable ... a wonderful personal triumph well deserved.[316]

She added that there had not been many interruptions though, as usual, her husband received the lion's share from those suffragettes who had managed to smuggle themse lves into the Hall. In fact, Harcourt had to run the gauntlet *twice* the same day when several suffragettes were removed from the Mansion House a few hours earlier, during one of Harcourt's fund-raising speeches for the London School of Tropical Medicine.[317] The Lord Mayor ordered policemen to remove the hecklers. Harcourt quipped that this was not the kind of disease on which he wished to speak, but the incident could hardly have improved his state of mind for the evening meeting.

On Friday, 1 March, the West End echoed to the sound of breaking glass as the WSPU staged a less organized but very expensive demonstration of its own: women smashed shop windows, causing thousands of pounds of damage, while Mrs Pankhurst and two companions went to Downing Street to throw stones at the Prime Minister's windows. Then, and later, they could have saved themselves the trouble - Asquith had opposed women's suffrage since 1892, and took the Gladstonian line (in this instance) that popular agitation should not be confused with public opinion. One of the stones flung by the women in fact missed number 10 altogether, and struck the Colonial Office (number 12), but perhaps this was deliberate![318]

Commenting on these developments The Nation expressed the consensus view that the militants had done immense damage to the suffrage movement - it was doubtful if there was still a Cabinet majority for

women's suffrage, and the women's cause had been weakened on both sides of the Commons, as indeed it had.[319] However, Massingham warned. failure to solve the Conciliation Bill would simply lead to another year of 'violence and heat'. Whereas the Pankhursts intended, by the stepping up of militancy, to publicize their cause, it was in fact precisely the *negative* publicity generated as a result of their activities that Harcourt and the anti-suffragists counted on to defeat the Bill.

Harcourt expressed his confidence thus to Herbert Gladstone:

> The suffragettes are more noisy and troublesome than ever and have now taken to a campaign of window breaking in the West End shops, which will not endear them to a nation of shopkeepers. They broke mine last year and I am hourly expecting them to do it again as they made a raid on Bob Reid [Loreburn] and Jack Pease this morning. We held a remarkable anti-suffrage meeting at the Albert Hall last week and I am quite hopeful of defeating their Conciliation Bill in the House of Commons, largely owing to the folly of their proceedings.[320]

Harcourt lobbied vigorously prior to the next reading of the Conciliation Bill, and it was narrowly defeated, by 222-208, on 28 March. In a letter informing Sir John Fuller of the outcome, Harcourt emphasized his determination that the larger franchise Bill would meet a similar fate.[321]

Although he did not refer to himself specifically in this letter - by 'we' he meant the anti-suffragists - Harcourt definitely made an important contribution to the defeat of the Conciliation Bill. In his memoirs, Austen Chamberlain recorded that during the weeks preceding the vote Harcourt was busy drumming up support for the defeat of the Bill, especially among the Irish members. Possibly, as Chamberlain surmised, what he told them was that if the Bill *did* pass its reading, the Government would have to devote more parliamentary time to it later on in the session. This, in turn, would leave less time for consideration of the Home Rule Bill.[322] A breakdown of the vote on the Bill shows that many of the Nationalists who backed the measure in 1911 had now voted against it.

Labour support fell away, although the Labour Party was the only party *officially* committed to women's suffrage, because the coal strike monopolized the attention of the Labour MPs. By March, when the strike began, the Cabinet's attention was focussed on how to get the owners and the Unions to reach agreement. The railway strikes of 1911, Harcourt had written to the Australian Governor General, had threatened to become 'very serious',[323] but they were minor by comparison with the 1912 coal strike. In its scope and impact, the stayaway was not surpassed until the general strike of 1926. The confrontation between Capital and Labour threatened to bring the entire economy to a standstill, and created a revolutionary atmosphere.

Volatile pamphlets like The Miner's Next Step, suppressed before it could be circulated, urged workers to exclude parliamentary representatives as intermediaries, and depose their own so-called leaders, so as to set up a democratic executive truly representative of the workers. The workers wanted an acceptable minimum wage, and reduced working hours. The premise inform ing such publications was that collective bargaining, assuming co mmon ground with the mine owners, was impossible.[324] The uncertainty in the country at large was duplicated in the Cabinet, which would not agree on a way of resolving the *impasse*. The argument hinged on whether the Government was to assist the owners, via subsidies, to enable them to pay the minimum wage asked for - five shillings a shift for men, two shillings for boys - or pass legislation enforcing a set minimum, w hateve r that might be. The latter step would entail a measure of State intervention hitherto avoided by Liberal Governments.

Harcourt's notes on the series of Cabinet meetings held in March reveal the growing panic of ministers at what Sir Edward Grey described as 'a condition of civil war'.[325] Harcourt favoured negotiation with the miners, noting that Churchill was 'violently for the masters against the men'.[326] On 16 March the Cabinet agreed to a modified version of Asquith's proposals for district by district minimum wage negotiations.[327] Asquith, Lloyd George and Crewe formed a powerful triumvirate in favour of the Bill, and most of the others, excluding Churchill, at once deferred to their view, including Harcourt and Hobhouse. The latter commented that the workers would, in terms of the Bill, have surrendered nearly all they asked for. Comparing this reaction to that of Churchill, it would be easy to forget that the First Lord was

supposed to be a Radical.

Cautious as ever, Harcourt advised his colleagues - *apropos* Hobhouse's remark - not to say that the workers had virtually conceded everything. There would be many others to say it.[328] Churchill gloomily predicted that the Unionists would strongly oppose the Bill, but Harcourt's scepticism on this point was justified - it was on the Statute book by 29 March. In the opinion of the MFGB executive, there were not enough adverse notes by the miners canvassed to justify rejection of the Bill - in fact some miners were returning to work on 18 March, even before the Bill was revealed - and by April the dispute was over. During this crisis Harcourt had shown, once again, that he was not a major voice of Radical opinion within the Cabinet.

Evidently Harcourt saw the Bill as an adequate solution to the *immediate* problem, which was all that mattered to him. Far from seeing the Bill as a step on the road to socialism he in fact believed that it did not meet workers' wage demands fully, but was not prepared to argue the matter. At the same tim e, he di d not openly take issue with Churchill over the First Lord's contention that the Bill went *too* far in knuckling under to workers' demands. By contrast, Lloyd George, one of the trio who had persuaded the Cabinet to accept the Bill, showed his keener awareness of the long-term significance of a Liberal commitment to a minimum wage: nothing less than the 'death-knell of the Liberal Party in its old form', as his biographer Griggsiteshim as saying.

If, as Keith Middlemas argues, Lloyd George had 'no system' in industrial relations policy,[329] then still less did the Government as a whole, and in particular ministers like Harcourt, who did not move beyond an unimaginative paternalism in their attitude to the working-class. Yet however well - or little - they understood the workers, would-be reformers like Pease and Harcourt were striving to get more of them the vote in an electoral system which effectively only allowed 59% of all adult males to vote. There were at least seven types of franchise in a complicated system 'without parallel in the history of the civilized world', Pease complained.[330] Nonetheless, the Franchise and Registration Bill took shape during early 1912, reflecting the demands of Liberal agents from Wales and elsewhere for elim ination of various categories of qualification and the abolition of technicalities affecting the vote - like rent, rating etc.[331]

Yet, doing away with the laborious technicalities enshrined in previous legislation did not necessarily reduce expenses. As in other issues, this was an aspect which was bound to concern Harcourt. His own proposals had been criticized in 1906 as cumbersome and expensive, but the new Bill would not be cheap if an accurate register was to be maintained. Register compilation would cost local authorities at least £280 000 annually, an average of about 10d a name. Pease suggested as one possibility a grant-in-aid, proportionate to the expenditure incurred from the rates.[332] Another cause for concern was the objections of Liberal agents and the executive of the NLF to parts of the Bill like continuous registration. Continuous registration means more work for party agents, and because it was more expensive, it favoured the party with more funds to trace electors. The latter could even be induced to qualify for a pre-arranged vacancy, a form of 'gerry mandering' which was quite feasible.[333]

As it turned out the Liberals' internal negotiations over the Franchise Bill were made redundant by the ruling of Speaker James Lowther in January 1913. The Third Reading debate was to resume on 24 January with the Cabinet 'very disturbed', as Hobhouse put it, over the suffrage issue. It was rumoured that Harcourt and even the Prime Minister would resign if the Bill's pro-suffrage amendments were carried.[334] Hobhouse's account of the heated Cabinet discussions makes it clear that suffragists like Sir Edward Grey and McKenna were thinking of resigning if the amendments were *not* carried. At the time, the Liberal press did not realize the seriousness of the Cabinet split over the suffrage issue.[335] Suffragette militancy during the previous summer had contributed to this dissension.

As Harcourt had predicted in his letter to Gladstone, suffragette militancy had only hardened ministerial attitudes, and he had also been correct about the possibility of another attack on him. The attack came barely 4 months later, just after the Second Reading of the Franchise Bill. This time the attack was not on 14 Berkeley Square. Shortly after midnight, on 13 July 1912, a local police constable found two women standing near some creepers on the north wing of Nuneham. They were unable to explain their presence and, during the ensuing scuffle, one woman got away. In the bag of the other one, Helen Craggs, a note was found addressed to 'Sir' stating that she was responding to the 'challenge' issued by Charles Hobhouse at Bristol (concerning the women's suffrage issue).

Since he lived near to Miss Craggs, Harcourt was simply a more accessible target! There is no evidence that the Pankhursts ordered the attempt to burn down the house, but it was certainly a case of attempted arson by members of the WSPU, though not actually the first directed against an anti-suffrage minister. Inflammable materials, matches, a glass cutter and nine 'picklocks' were found in a basket next to the accused. The women had gained access to the grounds by a canoe found beached on the riverbank. The 23-year-old suffragette was sentenced to nine months with hard labour. She pleaded guilty as a political offender, but the presiding judge's ruling, which was extended to other such cases, was that the law did not permit a plea of political motivation as a justification for criminal offences.[336]

For Dr Ethel Smyth, the fairly well-known suffragette composer, the attempt on Nuneham had an unexpected repercussion. Long after the incident on 13 July, to which The Times attached 'considerable importance', she was arrested at her Woking home and charged with complicity at Oxford, then released on a bail of £1 000. In fact, the police had mistaken her for the 'Miss Smith' who accompanied Helen Craggs. Also, a vocal card of the suffragette song 'The March of the Women', composed by Dr Smyth had been found in the canoe, and she was known to have smashed one of the windows of Harcourt's London residence the previous year. She was arrested on the strength of this circumstantial evidence, and tried at the police station, instead of in court, to avoid publicity.

When the error was discovered the case had, of course, to be dropped. Dr Smyth told the press that a 'prominent' French journalist would write an article in Figaro about her treatment, which she regarded as typical of a 'woman-hounding government suffering from nerves'.[337] The incident cropped up for discussion again a few months later. During a Commons debate on suffragette tactics Keir Hardie, the Labour member for the Welsh seat of Merthyr Tydfil said that Nuneham was empty in the north wing, and that the intention had been to destroy property. Harcourt's brother Robert indignantly replied that the eight servants living in the house *had* been endangered - or did they not matter?[338] Right up to the Great War, the suffragettes' activities fell into the category of 'criminal', rather than 'political', offences as far as the law was concerned. Legalities aside, the incident almost certainly strengthened Harcourt's determination to deny women the vote, despite his denial of this during

Third Reading.

On Friday, 24 January 1913, the Liberal and Opposition suffragists duly presented their amendments to the Franchise Bill. After they had done so, Harcourt rose to deliver what was perhaps the most impassioned of all his speeches in the Commons. The vendetta-like aspect of Harcourt's opposition to women's suffrage has already been referred to,[339] and listeners on both sides of the House could not but notice that Harcourt's speech revealed what seemed to be a personal grudge against women *per se*. Harcourt began by his customary declaration of opposition to 'any form of female suffrage for Parliamentary elections'. Next, he objected to the introduction into the Franchise Bill of a policy which 'few' believed to have any wide popular backing. He argued that the Bill as it stood - providing for a single and simplified franchise, a shortened period of qualification [reduced from 12 to 6 months] together with the abolition of the plural vote - had been the public policy of the Liberal Party ever since the Newcastle Programme.

Harcourt added that he was not very fond of the idea of a referendum but conceded [as he had written to Donald] that this might be the only way of getting the opinion of the electorate on the votes for women issue. Harcourt now began to cite 'evidence' to back his views. To support his contention that *any* form of Parliamentary suffrage for women would be detrimental to their own interests and those of the State, he invoked the authority of the English philosopher Herbert Spencer. Harcourt quoted from a letter written by Spencer to John Stuart Mill, in which Spencer harped on the 'relative deficiency' of the female mind in precisely 'those most complex faculties, intellectual and moral, which have political action for their sphere'. In fact, all that the letter 'showed' was that women occupi ed a lowly place in Spencer's evolutionary scheme, and he might hav e got along well with Sir Almwroth Wright[340]

Harcourt also cited a more contemporary reference by the Unionist anti-suffragist Sir Edward Clarke, to the effect that female suffrage would lower the 'intellectual quality' of the entire electorate and undermine its stability. Presumably borrowing from one of the points made by Violet Markham at her Albert Hall speech, Harcourt expressed his regret that women had not made greater use of their local (municipal) voting rights. The amendments proposed would add about eleven million women to the electorate, placing the male electorate at about ten million in a

minority. Harcourt now launched an attack on Sir Edward Grey: if the Foreign Secretary thought women were fit to pronounce on, and participate in, foreign affairs, why had he not appointed any as his ambassadors, consuls, or even as Foreign Office clerks? Ironically, considering his own ambivalent attitude to reform, Harcourt accused Grey of 'sticking to the business end of the wedge, which is so dear to the heart of every timid reformer'.

Then Harcourt turned on Lloyd George, whom he accused of wanting adult male suffrage, but a limited female franchise. Harcourt told the Commons that he had recently spoken to a deputation of female domestic servants about National Insurance, and had found their views 'relevant, emphatic and sound'. Why did the Chancellor accept their three pence contributions, but not their votes? Referring to the attempt to burn down the children's wing of his house, Harcourt denied that it had influenced his attitude, but thought it might be indicative of 'the type of mental balance we may expect' if women became electors. He concluded his diatribe against the 'tremendous and, as I think, revolutionary' alteration of the electorate thus:

> Women are physically incapable of contributing to the naval, military or police defence of law and order. They are ill-suited, in my opinion, by temperament, by training, or life, to the conduct of diplomacy or the solution of Imperial problems. I believe, therefore, that in a sovereign state like this they would be a weakness rather than a strength as a governing factor in its administration.

The anti-suffragists could not have hoped for a more vehement attack on the amendments, and Lord Hugh Cecil remarked after Harcourt's speech that the Colonial Secretary's zeal reminded him of Peter the Hermit [the organizer of the People's Crusade in 1096] . As the Unionist peer pointed out to the House, the 'most amazing part of [Harcourt's] speech was the extraordinary quarrel he seems to have with the female sex in general. He might have been recently spanked, and he feels so deeply and bitterly as never to have got over the indignity of having been born of woman'.[341] Yet the frantic, Canute-like efforts of Harcourt

and the anti-suffragists to dam the democratic groundswell of the new century seemed unlikely to succeed. The suffragists in both major parties looked forward to the passage of the suffrage amendments.

The next day, Harcourt's speech was the subject of discussion at an impromptu gathering attended by Masterman, Chief Whip Percy Illingworth, Lloyd George,and his friend, the newspaper magnate Sir George Riddell. As Illingworth noted, the speech had been written, but delivered well, and Masterman confirmed that Harcourt was pleased with himself. He told Masterman afterwards that he had had a favourable reaction to his speech. Riddell asked the Chancellor if the speech might not have given the public the impression that there was dissension in the Cabinet. The Chancellor cautiously denied this, but added that he did consider the speech to be a mistake:

> It was unnecessary, and has created a wrong impression as you say. There, again, it is like two children playing roughly with each other. The rough play often leads to real blows. If I were to reply and carry on the discussion, I know who would look foolish in the long run. Lulu is all right if he has six months to prepare, but he is no good in a rough and tumble.[342]

However, in terms of Speaker Lowther's ruling, neither suffragists nor anti-suffragists had to make any further efforts. Following Arthur Balfour's resignation as Unionist leader in November 1911, his place had been taken by Andrew Bonar Law, an iron merchant from Glasgow. This 'shrewd, glib commercial man' as Ilbert, the clerk of the Commons described him,[343] pointed out to Lowther the irregularities of the suffrage ammendments, which enabled the Speaker to reject them. Lowther decided that, unlike the amendments of 1867 and 1884, the proposed additions to the Bill did not enfranchise new *classes* of people. Hence they would alter the nature of the Bill to an unacceptable extent, and he told Asquith that would have to recommend its withdrawal if it incorporated them. As Lowther laconically noted in his memoirs, the effect of his ruling was

> to put an extinguisher upon any chance which the women might have had of having their claims recognized in the current legislation, and the Prime Minister withdrew

the Bill.[344]

The following Monday, 27 January, Lowther explained his ruling to the Commons. The Cabinet had by then decided to drop the Bill rather than risk its destruction, and Asquith announced its withdrawal.[345]

Not surprisingly, the Government was accused of bad faith by the suffragettes, and some newspapers had speculated before the ruling that the Franchise Bill would be dropped, in favour of a plural voting bill on its own. This is what happened, and for anti-suffragists like Harcourt and Asquith the outcome could only have come as a relief. However the evidence confirms that the Government did not plan the fiasco. Had it done so, there would have been little point to the extensive work on the amendments.[346] The withdrawal of the Franchise Bill dismayed the more moderate women's suffrage societies like Mrs Fawcett's NUWSS, and was the signal for furtherescalation of WSPU militancy during the rest of 1913 and 1914. In the Commons, Lloyd George categorically denied that there had been threats of ministerial resignations, but the whole episode did little to enhance harmony within the Cabinet.

It seems unlikely that the resignation from the Reform Club by Winston Churchill and Lloyd George soon afterwards was coincidental. Liberal back-benchers were also sick and tired of the internal squabbling. In a letter to The Times, Harcourt's suffragist brother suggested granting women a wider franchise on a narrower range of subjects - anything was better than the 'singularly unedifying' parliamentary proceedings of the past week.[347] Harcourt himself took the loss of the Franchise Bill very well - he had no intention o f resigning from the Reform Club, as rumoured in the Times, and remai ned on good terms with Lowther. On one of the occasions he manage d to escape his official duties, the Colonial Secretary accompanied the latter to a play with the rather inappropriate name, under the circumstances, of Trust the People ! Nor did Harcourt's anti-suffragist activities cease.[348]

Lowther's ruling mar ked the end of the last major Government attempt to secure votes for women prior to the Great War. The Liberal back-bencher Willoughby Dickinson introduced his own Representation of the People Bill, but its defeat in the Commons ended any further private

efforts. Despite the demise of the Franchise Bill, the Government pushed on with its plural voting bill, affecting about 525 000 voters.[350] The Unionists resurrected the old arguments,[351] and it did not pass Third Reading until mid-July 1913. The Second Chamber obstructed the measure, so in 1914 the whole process had to begin over again. Defending the Bill during Second Reading Harcourt now described redistribution as a 'very desirable' reform because the imminent passage of the Home Rule Bill now made it possible to reduce Irish representation to below 100, which he would have objected to in the past.

Shortly after the Plural Voting Bill had passed through the Commons once more, war broke out. Liberal electoral reformers were most dismayed to find the measure 'marooned' in the 'shallows' of the party-political truce of August 1914, and tended to blame the Prime Minister.[352]

The Harcourt Papers do not indicate if the Colonial Secretary was amongst those who blamed Asquith, although evidently the war could not have been foreseen. Pease was at least as anxious - if not *more* so than Harcourt - that the Bill should not be forgotten. Even on active service, he wrote anxiously to Harcourt in England that:

> I wrote to the P.M. that I expected the Govt to safeguard the Plural Voting Bill, I know that you will do your utmost to see this done. I felt I ought to place something on paper to show I had done what I regard as all that is possible for m e to do, being out here.[353]

As it turned out, in the post-1918 electoral system voters were allowed to retain a second vote by virtue of university or business qualification. But the old Liberal grievance about the plural vote given to the borough freeholder in counties was finally met.

Although not as hot as the summer of 1911, politically the 'temperature' soared during July 1912. On Saturday 27 July the Unionists staged their most impressive pre-war show of strength

at Blenheim Palace. The Duke of Marlborough invited 3 000 delegates representing virtually every Unionist organization in the country, and the grounds about the Palace were host to 10-15 000 people from the surrounding districts. The leader of the Opposition launched a violent attack on the third Home Rule Bill which Asquith had introduced to the Commons in April, and he described the Government as a 'revolutionary committee' which had swindled its way into seizure of despotic power.[354] The Unionist rally at Blenheim made it clear that the Opposition intended to centre its resistance to the Government on the Irish question, which was increasingly to dominate domestic politics.

Asquith was appalled by the 'reckless rodomontade at Blenheim' which 'furnishes for the future a complete grammar of anarchy'.[355] Harcourt must also have been taken by surprise by the bellicosity of the Blenheim rally. Not so long before it was held, he wrote *apropros* the Second Reading of the Home Rule Bill that:

> We have got through [it] well and it is striking to see how much less opposition there is to the principle than there was some years ago. The fight is more directed to details and is, therefore, less savage ...[356]

Despite the majorities in the Commons in favour of the Bill it became apparent that the House of Lords had every intention of using its considerable powers of delay to the limit. The question was what would happen *after* the Bill could no longer be denied constitutionally, in terms of the Parliament Act of the previous year.

The Liberals were no less committed to Home Rule, especially because of their need of Irish Nationalist support in the Commons, than their opponents were to allowing the rule of the predominantly Catholic south over Protestant Ulster. Whereas it turned out that Bonar Law was willing to accept a compromise exclusion of Ulster acceptable to Carson and the Unionists in those northern counties, his less moderate supporters wanted to use the Ulster issue to stop Home Rule altogether - a course of action Law ultimately rejected. Since the Liberal Party's fight over Home Rule in 1886, the issue had been one of abiding interest for Harcourt. He always supported the movement for Irish self-government, the key policy of Gladstonian Liberalism. As Patricia Jalland, the historian

of the Liberals and the Ulster question has pointed out, Harcourt's duties at the Colonial Office kept him too busy to play any major role in formulation of Irish policy.

This sphere was, in any case, the preserve of the Irish Secretary, but although Harcourt had not joined the Cabinet Committee set up in January 1911 to thrash out the details of a Home Rule Bill, he did see to it that Birrell kept him fully briefed on developments.[357] On good terms with Redmond, the Irish Nationalist leader in the Commons, Harcourt got him to address his constituents in late 1911, at a Home Rule demonstration at Rawtenstall Grand Theatre, and in his own introductory speech Harcourt outlined his stance on the Irish question. He firmly stated his conviction that the time had come for Ireland to be granted self-government. The granting of autonomy would, he argued, help to cement national unity, and cited the precedents of a troubled Canada and, more recently, strife-torn South Africa.

Harcourt reassured his audience that Carson and his 'stage army' - the Ulster Volunteers - would be met by a determined English nation, with an 'inevitable outcome'.[358] In subsequent speeches to his constituents during 1912 Harcourt continued to make scathing attacks on Carson - a lawyer who preached illegality' and toyed with 'semi-treason', although if there were a revolution over Home Rule, Carson would not be found hanging from a lamp with an orange in his mouth.[359] Harcourt was one of the ministers who did not take the threats of the Ulstermen seriously, or regard what he dismissed as the 'parliamentary mouthings' of their spokesmen as representative of majority opinion. He clearly had his own dealings with the Dominions in mind when he told the assembled members of the Rossendale Liberal Council in May 1912 that to see the tendency in national affairs as towards concentration and centralization, instead of devolution, was 'a mistaken and distorted view'.

This time, Harcourt cited the United States and Australia as examples. When territories within the USA developed their resources and increased their population, they were given state rights by the central government, and had their own legislatures, joining the Union as fully-fledged autonomous states. Harcourt also pointed out that when Australia became a Commonwealth, constituent states retained freedom of action - they were not deprived of their parliaments or their autonomy.[360] This was fine in theory, but in practi ce Harcourt discovered that when

autonomous states asserted themselves , as happened in Australia, the consequences for the Imperial government could be embarrassing, even if - adhering to the principle of non-intervention - Harcourt did not interfere.[361] These speeches, and others like them, clearly indicate that Harcourt was committed to Home Rule not only because it was *party* policy, but because it seemed to be the next logical step in the evolution of Irish government. Like other Liberal politicians in 1912, including the Prime Minister, Harcourt seems to have underestimated the seriousness of the Ulster commitment to resisting Home Rule from Dublin.

A man who, by his own admission to CB in 1907, detested 'all the distinctions of creeds' could not be expected to understand the depth of nationalistic feeling aroused by the Government, embittered by religious cleavage, that then - as now- was to make Northern Ireland a hotbed of unrest. Little suspecting that the nation would come to the brink of civil war over Home Rule, Harcourt thought that there would be more resistance to the Government's Disestablishment Bill:

> I fancy that much more feeling will be developed in the country against our Welsh Bill for, though the people do not mind Disestablishment, they are not enamoured of disendowment.[362]

He was only partly right, the Government did not have to contend with public opposition, despite lack of support from non-Welsh rank and file.

The main focus of attack by the Bill's opponents was as Harcourt predicted, disendowment. When McKenna defended the Bill in the Commons in May 1912, he pointed out that its provisions were more generous to the Anglican Church than its predecessor in 1909. But the projected loss of revenue, including the traditional titles, did not go down well with the Churchmen listening in the galleries, nor the Opposition. The ensuing verbal clashes between the Cecils and Lloyd George, the Parliamentary defender of Nonconformity, entertaining though they were, did not alter the fact that by 1912 Disestablishment could no longer command much enthusiasm and support in Wales - let alone outside it.[363]

The treatment of the Disestablishment Bill in Parliament reflected the lack of interest shown externally. The Bill reached the Statute Book in 1914, but was only implemented in 1920. In contrast to

the apathy of many Liberal M Ps, the Unionists resisted the Bill to the utmost using the House of Lords' power of delay. It seems to have been more than just obstruction of 'sectarian' legislation forming a staple part of the Liberal programme, [illegible]r the old, familiar pattern of 1892-5 and 1906-09. The Government's foes saw the Bill as another 'tyrannical' imposition and placed the Disestablishment Bill - along with Home Rule-in the same category as legislation which 'demanded' a dissolution and a popular stamp of approval, or dis approval, prior to enactment.[364] A determination not to cooperate, and to make the Government's tenure of office as difficult as possible characterized the Opposition's actions from late 1912 onwards.

The usually staid Commons were to witness scenes eclipsing even latter-day Tory/Labour slanging matches. As Ilbert, the Clerk of the Commons wrote to Bryce in the United States, the Opposition were in a 'nasty mood', not soothed by by-election success. The volcano of bad feeling erupted on Wednesday, 13 November 1912, when Asquith tried to propose the annulment of an Opposition amendment to the financial provisions of the Home Rule Bill. This was intended to reverse the defeat in a snap division taken two days earlier. The Prime Minister was howled down by the irate Unionists. Harcourt tried to speak, and received a similar dose of 'real old Tory politics'.[365] Describing the week's events that Friday, Ilbert opined that it was one of the stormiest weeks he could recall in all his long parliamentary experience.[366]

Such an atmosphere was not conducive to impassive political debate, and the Opposition seized on the ensuing Marconi scandal with an avidness which, as Liberals complained, was 'a shocking example of the lengths to which uncharitable party feeling can go'.[367] The Scandal arose from the fact that Attorney General Sir Rufus Isaacs, A.C.Murray and Lloyd George had decided to have a 'flutter' by buying Marconi shares The trouble was that the shares t hey bought from Godfrey Isaacs were bought prior to the drawing up of the Government contract with American Marconi and before the shares were available to the public.

The press disclosures about the transaction monopolized public attention from the end of March 1913. Lloyd George's biographer John Grigg points out that the Chancellor not only showed lack of foresight but an unwillingness to accept the same censure he had been willing to pass in

an analogous case during the South African War concerning Joseph Chamberlain's links with an armaments firm. His indiscretion had led the Government on to thin ice.[368] As Ilbert unsympathetically wrote to Bryce, Lloyd George had 'lost his halo'.[369]

The Select Committee appointed by the Government to investigate the affair exonerated the protagonists of charges of corruption, but Asquith did not care to risk a general election despite the slight revival of Liberal electoral fortunes earlier in the year. Like other ministers, Harcourt was no doubt anxious to see the affair forgotten as quickly as possible, irrespective of his personal feelings about the Chancellor's discomfiture. As he wrote to the West Indian Governor, accused of illicit share speculation of his own,[370] there was

> a miasmic wave of unfounded suspicion about here for a moment, but the air will clear ...[371]

In this instance, time was on the side of the Government, but the absence of a central, guiding policy was harder to overcome than any isolated scandal, however embarrassing.

Harcourt was aware of the need for a major new point of departure, and the area which suggested itself was land policy. He read demands for a new attack on agricultural problems, such as that in the July 1913 issue of the Contemporary Review:

> The cry of discomfort from a badly housed, under-paid peasantry wi ll not cease just because Liberals are weary of well-doing. The people cannot wait. Once more the Liberal Party has discovered that the law of its being must be always to go forward.[372]

As Lloyd George had put it to his friend George Riddell the previous May, something was needed 'to put fresh life into the dry bones'.[373]

However Harcourt had nothing new to offer on the land question. It was the Chancellor who was to lead the Liberal Party forward on this critical contemporary issue. By late 1913 the Land Enquiry Committee

chaired by Liberal elder statesman Sir Arthur Acland had already been working for over a year. Set up in June 1912 after a meeting of Liberal theorists at Lloyd George's residence, it was to spread the way for a land campaign. The Enquiry looked into existing rents, agricultural wages and living conditions, and spread its nets wide to include Liberals classified as 'Radical Plutocrats'. Thus Harcourt was amongst those asked about the working conditions of his tenants and how many small holdings he had on his own estates.[374] But small holdings did not really interest Lloyd George.

His two-fold emphasis was on payment of higher wages to rural labourers, and rating reform for urban land. The latter reform was the price land taxers like Wedgwood, Trevelyan and Outhwaite asked for their support of the Chancellor's rural campaign.[375] The Enquiry's final report appeared in early October 1913, in time for the start of Lloyd George's campaign, which had been delayed. The report on urban land was only issued the following April, which reflected the lack of synchronization between the rural and urban campaigns. Nonetheless, Unionist agrarians were perturbed by the new line of attack because in their own party alleviation of rural poverty was a low priority.[376] The much publicised campaign was officially launched on 11 October 1913.

Yet, as the year 1913 drew to a close, the major domestic issue was not, despite Lloyd George's efforts to the contrary, the Land Question. The nation's eyes focussed on the tension in Ireland which, Unionist politicians warned, would be the scene of civil war if the Government stuck to its plans for Home Rule. It has been argued, in a recent study of Liberal Irish policy, that the Government's internal lack of coherence on Ireland was a sign of its pre-war debility, quite apart from the strains imposed on it by militant suffragettes and belligerent workers.[377] From the outset of the frequent Cabinet discussions over Home Rule it was apparent that only Churchill was in favour of excluding Ulster from Home Rule legislation. As usual, on controversial matters, Asquith adopted a 'wait and see' attitude, but the issue was not about to be amicably resolved by the passage of time.

The furore over Home Rule also involved the crown. The Government once more expected George V to support it; any other action would lead to a major constitutional clash between him and his appointed minis-

ters. The Unionists brought pressure to bear on the King, both publicly and privately, to dissolve Parliament or announce to the Government that he would not allow the Home Rule Bill to pass without another dissolution and a general election. Harcourt thought the Royal intervention:

> is rendered somewhat more possible by the unfortunate withdrawal of Knollys [whose retirement left the pro-Unionist Stanfordham as the King's sole private secretary] which leaves the King without any man of sound judgment in his entourage.
>
> Of course any such act would at once create a strong Republican party in Grt. Britain, and would lead to denunciations of the King from every Liberal platform, and make a Liberal victory a defeat of the King.
>
> Those same foolish people destroyed the H. of Lords by the rejection of the Budget of 1909 and if they go on 'damning the consequences' they may topple over the Monarchy on to their own silly heads.[378]

By late 1913, Asquith and Crewe - his most valued adviser, were more inclined to think of at least some form of Ulster exclusion, whatever the number of counties involved.[379] Lloyd George also favoured a compromise, and Haldane, Morley and Grey were also moving towards exclusion. The 'die-hards' in the Cabinet who combined to oppose Ulster exclusion were, as Patricia Jalland has shown, mainly McKenna, Runciman, Samuel and Harcourt. During September, Harcourt was one of the Ministers in Attendance at Balmoral, and tried to impress on George V the Government's determination to see Home Rule enacted. The King, McKenna informed Riddell in conversation, never made an important speech without consulting the advice of his ministers. During September George V was sorely in need of advice, but the opinions of his succession of visitors differed widely.

Apart from the Liberal Ministers in Attendance in that month - Grey, Harcourt, Churchill and Birrell - George V was also attended by several Shadow Ministers - Lansdowne, Bonar Law, Curzon and Balfour. Much of the present knowledge of what Harcourt said to George V comes from the diary of one man whom, more than any other, could be considered the grey eminence of Edwardian politics. From Lord Esher's account,

it is clear that Harcourt made a considerable impact with his arguments - though not a favourable one. Although he was a good friend of Harcourt's, Esher sympathized with the Opposition over Ireland, and he urged the King to stand firm against Liberal intimidation during his stay at Balmoral, from 9-15 September. Esher recorded that Harcourt was one of the main culprits in this respect.

During a long talk with Esher on the morning of Wednesday, 10 September, the King grumbled that Harcourt had spoken with 'absolute freedom' to him the previous evening, putting the Government's cards on the table. Part of what Harcourt said was recorded in Hobhouse's diary, when the Colonial Secretary subsequently showed his colleague a memorandum of this two-hour long interview. The general tenor of the proceedings is evident from one exchange: the King said that if he signed a Home Rule Bill he would be hissed at in the streets of Belfast. Harcourt replied that if he didn't, he would be hissed at in the streets of London.[380] The King repeated what Harcourt had said, showing, Esher noted, very accurate recall of many of the Colonial Secretary's 'bludgeoning sentences'.

Presumably Esher agreed with the King that Harcourt had been 'damned impertinent', as the aggrieved monarch put it. In turn, he warned George V that Harcourt and Morley had told him that a royal dismissal of the Government would make it a question of whether the country was ruled by the King or the people. Esher opined that every Minister from Asquith down, including Grey, would attack the King personally if it came to this. The sole exception might be Crewe.[381] On 13 September Esher warned Balfour of this intimation by Harcourt that the Government would see it as its duty to treat the Crown li ke the House of Lords if it stood in the way of Home Rule. At the same time, the Government would like to make use of the Crown to pass the Bill without consulting the people.[382]

Despite Esher's concern, Harcourt was not speaking for what was still an essentially uncertain, divided Cabinet. But the Colonial Secretary *had* voiced the opinion of those Gladstonians in the Cabinet who were determined that nothing should stand in the way of Home Rule. Yet, as Esher himself noticed, even the most thinly-veiled threats of dire consequences in the event of Royal non-compliance did not preclude fraternization with the enemy. On 15 September Esher wrote that Harcourt and Bonar Law

> are gibbering on the sofa near to where I am writing to you ... In every other country in the world, Loulou would be the Tory and Bonar Law the democrat. We are still a unique nation.[383]

The leader of the Opposition was, in fact, more disposed to reach a compromise than some of his earlier public utterances had indicated. This was clear from his meeting with Asquith - an informal, secret one - on 14 October. The main point at issue remained precisely *which* counties of Ulster would be excluded from the Bill - Bonar Law thought Asquith tacitly agreed to six counties, whereas the Prime Minister would find it hard to get his party to agree to more than the four north-east counties. In Cabinet, after this secret meeting, Asquith still insisted on a tough stance towards Ulster, and in particular the threats of the Ulstermen to resist the Bill's implementation. In November, at a speech at Bradford, Harcourt indicated he was still firmly against Ulster exclusion.

Again, he displeased George V by his well publicised remarks: that any unconstitutional action by the King 'would reduce the throne to a hopeless ruin which no one would attempt to rebuild'. Bigge, now Lord Stanfordham, conveyed the royal displeasure at the way Harcourt had launched himself on delicate ground. 'The terms in which you did so', he admonished, 'seemed to His Majesty somewhat trenchant and monitory'. Nonetheless, Harcourt was unrepentant in Cabinet, where he stated his firm belief that Home Rule excluding Ulster was 'impossible' because Liberals 'would have none of it'.[384] All the same, by the end of the year the balance of opinion in the Cabinet had tilted against the unaltered retention of the Home Rule Bill in its 1912 form.

Haldane was apparently converted to the exclusionist camp by Lloyd George, while even Morley began to change his stance as the possibility of unrest and bloodshed in Ulster loomed larger. Harcourt's obstinacy seems all the more surprising in view of the fact that the Ulster Volunteers (reported by the end of January 1914 to be over 80 000) had smuggled thousands of rifles and several machine guns into Ulster. The Volunteers began, from late September, to hold regular drills, and

not to be outdone, an organization known as the Irish Volunteers was formed in the south of Ireland which also began to arm itself with smuggled weapons. The Government was alarmed by these trends, but the royal proclamations issued in early December prohibiting the import of arms and weapons into Ireland and their coastal transport only succeeded in annoying the Nationalists,[385] and did not represent a real solution.

The extremists on either side could cite the speech made by Asquith at Leeds on 27 November 1913 at which he stated the Government's intention to pass Home Rule *before* a general election: the situation in Ireland now resembled a kettle in which steam inexorably builds up pressure against the restraining lid. It seemed, in the early months of 1914, that only open conflict would 'resolve' the dispute, in the absence of more constitutional means. Whereas Morley for one thought civil war seemed inevitable, Harcourt adopted the more fatalistic attitude that events would 'take their course'. He told Esher, who thought that the Government proclamations on Ulster had been a bad mistake, that he did not expect the King to interfere. Esher told his host that:

> I knew nothing and was quite ignorant of the King's views, but that I felt sure that it would be foolish and rash to assume that the King would shrink from any acti on, whatever the risk to himself, if he could avert the risk of civil war. He [Harcourt] did not appear to relish the remark.[386]

Despite Asquith's insistence in a talk with George V on 5 February 1914 that a general election would solve nothing, the King still personally preferred thi s to a possibility of civil unrest. In the end, the compromise scheme Asquith presented to the Commons in March 1914 provided for a six-year period of exclusion of Ulster from the Home Rule Bill, which could allow at least one, or even two, elections to be held over the future of Ulster. Coldly received by many of his own supporters as compromise pushed to the extreme (although it was actually a reversio n to a scheme proposed earlier by Lloyd George), the plan did not meet with the approval of Carson and the Ulstermen. Carson did not want 'sentence of death' stayed for six years, but Asquith would not grant an indefinite period of exclusion. The deadlock was complete.

As Patricia Jalland has written, whereas Asquith regarded the Unionist rejection of his proposals as just another setback in a lengthy process of manoeuvering, other ministers like Churchill and Lloyd George were now thinking in terms of coercion of Ulster. On the eve of what has become known as the Curragh Mutiny,[387] it was clear that arrangements made for the possible dispatch of British troops to Ulster were inadequate. This was partly because of the Cabinet's ambivalence about the use of force, and a reflection of the fact that the incumbent at the War Office, Jack Seely, was less efficient than his predecessor Haldane. To add to the complications, in 1914 the annual Army Act was up for consideration in Parliament. If this Act were amended, there would be no legal standing army, and hence no troops could be utilized against Ulster.

Only pressure from the Unionist back-benchers persuaded the Unionist leaders not to adopt this line of action.[388] This was fortunate for the Government, because police reports circulated on 6 and 11 March warned that the Ulstermen had drawn up plans to attack military barracks and obtain access to stores and magazines assisted internally by sympathetic soldiers at these depots. Harcourt played no role in the Cabinet committee set up on 11 March to look into the planning of the operations against Ulster. The troop manoeuvres drawn up were influenced by Churchill, who overshadowed Seely. The First Lord also envisaged the support of a naval squadron during the 'precautionary moves' to be executed on the evening of 20 March. Apparently confused by the imprecise nature of his instructions, Sir Arthur Paget, the Commander-in-Chief of Ireland, did not make it clear enough to his officers that the manoeuvres were intended as *pre-emptive* precautionary measures.

As a result, fifty-eight officers under his command offered to resign rather than move against Ulster. Seely compounded his error by assuring Brigadier-General Hubert Gough, the spokesman of the rebellious officers, that the Army would not be used to coerce Ulster into accepting Home Rule. These two sentences were added by Sealy on the document Gough was to take back to Ulster . The document was publicised and, of course, the Prime Minister repudiated it. Seely's handling of the Curragh affair handed the Opposition excellent political ammunition. Although they did not make best use of it, the Government was on the defensive during the weeks following Seely's resignation. At Harcourt's suggestion, Asquith assumed responsibility for the War Office as well as the premiership, in what the Radical Charles Trevelyan described as 'the greatest coup of

the whole of this memorable business'.[389]

As Harcourt's own wife noted, the Government White Paper issued on 25 March 1914 was, at best, confusing even to those who did not subscribe to the view that the Government's Irish 'plot' had failed.[390] One of the Colonial Secretary's critics wrote in to express his amazement that

> the strongest ministry during my time should have allowed itself to be dictated to by a military junta from the Curragh ... with General Gough as dictator

To this Harcourt replied that neither he nor the Cabinet were in any way responsible for surrender to the threats of a military clique, and that the Government's actions in the last few days had shown that 'we are prepared at any cost to meet what amounts to little less than an attemped military revolution'.[391]

Asquith's replacement of Seely, and Churchill's powerful speech in defence of the Government on 30 March, helped to restore some of the administration's battered credibility. Nonetheless, the army now no longer seemed reliable, and the successful distribuion of about 35 000 rifles and 3 000 000 rounds of ammunition by Ulster Volunteer gun-runners on the night of 24/25 April 1 91 4 only underlined thebloodshedwhich could occur if the situation degenerated into open hostilities. The Government now had to try to reach a *political* agreement with the Unionists: As Churchill put it, it was no longer a case of whether the Government would coerce Ulster , but whether Ulster could be prevented from coercing it. Yet even now several m inisters, including Simon, Hobhouse and Burns wanted to support Redmond whatever the consequences. Harcourt presumably shared the attitude of his brother Robert who warned Churchill that there was strong feeling in the party against any parleying 'with the enemy'.[392]

The search for a negotiated settlement continued right up to the eve of the Great War,[393] but the Buckingham Palace Conference in mid-1914 continued to underline the mutually exclusive demands of the main parties involved: for the Nationalists, Redmond was prepared to leave out only four counties, Law stated the Opposition's demand for six, and Sir Edward Carson wanted exclusion of the entire province. The Government's willingness to discuss the time-limits of exclusion

did not extend to the *area* involved, which was essentially the four counties Redmond was prepared to accept. This deadlock now made Harcourt and Asquith's leisurely search for a new Lord Lieutenant of Ireland barely a year earlier seem incredibly optimistic.[394]

In the event, the outbreak of war on the Continent precluded the beginnings of open civil war in Ulster, but this was in any case a mixed blessing in view of the subsequent bloodily suppressed Sinn Fein uprising in Dublin in Easter 1916, and the further bloodshed during 1919-21. Another 'benefit' of the war was that it seems to have avoided an irrevocable Cabinet split over Home Rule.[395] Whatever the *extent* of the contribution of the Home Rule issue to the destruction of the Liberal Party itself, there can be no question that Ireland was a force for Liberal destruction rather than unity from late 1913 onwards. This was far from what William Gladstone had intended when he first linked the Liberal Party's fortunes to this issue in 1886, but by the first decades of the twentieth century Ireland was a millstone around the Liberals' necks. Nor did the inflexible attitude of inveterate Gladstonians like Harcourt on Ulster exclusion make a solution any easier.

Since the Cabinet crisis of 1909/10 the Radical 'economists' had made little impact on the question of naval and army expenditure. They were, in effect, outmanoeuvred by McKenna over the 1911/12 estimates, and by his successor Churchill for those for 1912/13.[396] Early in 1912 the Army Estimates were presented to Parliment without even being submitted to the Cabinet. 'We laughed!', Harcourt noted. Haldane said 'they had been about for some time'. I replied 'about where?'[397] The replacement of McKenna by Churchill on 23 October 1911 had not by any means helped the 'economists'. McKenna was replaced essentially because of his department's poor showing compared to the professionalism displayed by Sir Henry Wilson at the CID meeting of 23 August 1911, and because of his endorsement of the contention by First Sea Lord Sir Arthur Wilson that the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) should not be dispatched to France on the outbreak of war.[398]

Asquith regarded Haldane as a far more important member of the Cabinet, so when it came to a choice of retaining McKenna or the

War Secretary, the outcome was a foregone conclusion.[399] Once established as First Lord of the Admiralty, Churchill adopted a very different stance from that of 1908/9. Whereas in the aftermath of the Agadir crisis the Cabinet wanted to find ways to improve relations with Germany, Churchill was determined to secure whatever sums the Admiralty deemed necessary to maintain naval superiority over Germany. In the search for an Anglo-German agreement any reduction of naval construction would, Sir Edward Grey argued, have to come from the German side, in recognition of British naval supremacy.[400] Against this anti-German policy trend was the pacifist bloc including Morley, Burns, Harcourt and Loreburn.

Following the latter's resignation from the Cabinet in June 1912, Morley and Harcourt thought it important to stay on to keep a show of strength for the benefit of the elements in Berlin advocating Anglo-German *rapprochement*.[401] What brought the naval construction issue to the fore again in 1913/14 was the candid admission by Churchill at the annual Mayoral banquet on 10 November 1913 that the estimates would be 'substantially greater' than usual. This infuriated not only the Radical wing of the Liberal Party but Liberal associations nationwide, as well as the Liberal Press. Even Margot Asquith complained to Lloyd George that 'If we can't be a little economical when all foreign countries are peaceful than I don't know *when* we can'.[402]

Her husband was furious with what the Chancellor described to Riddell as a 'piece of madness'. Churchill had hinted at an increase as early as January 1913, but had made a mistake by not coupling the announcement with a renewal of his 'naval holiday' proposals first spelt out at Manchester on 18 October.[403] Churchill's Guildhall speech belied the Government's claim to be committed to peace and retrenchment. Moreover, as Lloyd George explained to Asquith, Grey, Crewe and Haldane on 12 November, he anticipated a deficit of £3 500 000 and an added burden of heavy naval estimates would oblige him to raise money with new taxes - a course of action which was unappealing for political reasons.[404] The First Lord agreed to cut his estimates from £52 000 000 to £50 694 800 which was the figure presented to the Cabinet on 5 December. This cut satisfied Lloyd George, but not Churchill's other Cabinet critics, who wanted further reductions.

Samuel, the Postmaster-General, who was apparently - according to Hobhouse - as generally distrusted by the Cabinet as Harcourt, argued

that two Dreadnoughts would suffice for 1914/15, and was supported by Pease, Runciman and Hobhouse. Masterman, who had replaced the latter as Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster in 1911, informed Riddell that these four ministers formed the core of the Cabinet opposition to Churchill's estimates. In the early stages of the dispute McKenna hung back uncertainly, perturbed by Lloyd George's lack of action on behalf of the First Lord's opponents.[405] Some accounts of the Cabinet meetings during December 1913 have attributed Lloyd George's uncharacteristic passivity to his gratitude to Churchill for standing by him during the Marconi scandal.

This is what the Chancellor told Riddell, but he did add that Churchill had been 'extravagant' and that he expected Churchill to amend his figures to meet the Party's views.[406] Harcourt's reaction to this Cabinet struggle is hard to assess. He does not seem to have been as vigorous as usual in his attack on inflated estimates, and perhaps part of the reason was his greater awareness of naval needs. In defence of his estimates, Churchill pointed out that Canada's refusal to supply ships had added £1 500 000 to the supplementary estimates - Harcourt had been informed of these negotiations, in which future Admiral of the Grand Fleet Sir John Jellicoe had been despatched as a spokesman, and had been careful to keep his department's intermediary role in the parleying over naval contributions confidential.[407] As argued earlier, his duties at the Colonial Office had drawn him further away from a 'Little England' stance on defence than has hitherto been realized.

The Christmas recess came and went with the estimates issue unresolved, and by now news of the tension in the Cabinet was becoming common knowledge. Liberal advocates of 'economy', like A.G. Gardiner of the Daily News, wrote outspoken articles in support of the opponents of the estimates. The president of the NLF, the Radical magnate Sir John Brunner, made an impassioned appeal against the proposed expenditure on New Year's Day. And on that same day the Daily Chronicle published an interview with Lloyd George in which the Chancellor summarily denounced the estimates as folly.[408] Churchill clearly had formidable forces arrayed against him, but continued to hold out for four Dreadnoughts in order to maintain the sixty percent superiority in this type of ship over Germany, which was Cabinet policy, and formed part of the six-year construction programme.

The next Cabinet meeting was set for Thursday, 22 January, and the outlook for the Government seemed grim. Either Churchill would go, supported now by Grey, or the Chancellor might resign - as he told Riddell,[409] perhaps accompanied by others like McKenna, Runciman, Simon, Samuel and Hobhouse. The latter wrote to Harcourt, revealing that there was some confusion in the Cabinet about the situation:

> When I was at Newtimber [Buxton's home] last Sunday, [11 January] I gathered from Sydney that he regarded the Navy Estimates, apart from the question of 2 or 4 new big ships, for 1914-15 as accepted.
> I did not so understand the attitude of the Cabinet. I thought the whole question remained open ... Unless I have completely failed to judge the temper of the people in this country, if we go to them with demands for more money and new taxes in order to meet naval bills we shall alienate completely that section of the artisan class which is wavering between Liberalism and Socialism.
>
> The loss of Churchill might be a parliamentary blow. To lose the electorate I refer to would be to permanently cripple, if not destroy progressive but sane Liberalism. If you think as I do, can you not intervene to stop this unnecessary expansion of destructive expenditure by supporting in Cabinet opposition to the figures of £49 960 000 ... The party, or shall I say the friends, of economy have procured delay; we have brought the Ch. of Ex out of of his tent, and we ha[ve]..procured the hesitation of the P.M.
>
> So much depends on the issue that I venture, perhaps quite unnecessarily, to appeal for action in words next Wednesday.[410]

Several interesting points emerge from this letter. Firstly, as an indication of *which* of the party's supporters Hobhouse expected the estimates to alienate. Secondly, it is clear from the letter that Harcourt

had not, as yet, openly committed himself to opposing the estimates in Cabinet. As one defender of 'sane but progressive Liberalism' to another, this is the appeal Hobhouse was making. And, even more significantly, Harcourt did *not* heed the appeal: the deputation which urged Asquith to agree to Churchill's retirement from the Admiralty - and the Cabinet if possible - on 21 January did not include Harcourt. The Cabinet spokesmen for the 'economists' who approached the Prime Minister prior to the Cabinet meeting to be held next day were Lloyd George, Simon, Samuel and Beauchamp.[411]

This deputation came over from number 11, the Chancellor's residence, to repeat what Hobhouse had already told Asquith in a preceding personal interview: that the Liberal Party would not be prepared to accept the large additional estimates the First Lord proposed to append to the o y estimates. When the deputation arrived to ask for Churchill's retirement, Asquith said 'Oh, this is a personal question.' 'No,' replied Simon, 'a question of temperament'. Hobhouse recorded that this exchange clearly surprised and upset the Prime Minister, but shortly afterwards Crewe arrived and confirmed the deputation's views - nine-tenths of the Cabinet believed Churchill would choose between Home Rule (and his exclusionist policy) or estimates as a pretext for resignation.[412]

If, as seems almost certain, Harcourt was amongst this majority, he did not try to hasten Churchill's resignation, whether or not he was on the winning side. Perhaps his reasoning was that if you don't enter the field you can't lose: and as it turned out, his non-committal stance was vindicated by Lloyd George's *volte face*.

After another two hour Cabinet wrangle on 29 January agreement seemed as distant as ever, and Hobhouse noted that the Chancellor did not attack Churchill this time. In fact, he summoned the First Lord to No 11 the next morning to tell him that he agreed with his wife that too many Dreadnoughts were better than too few! Probably the *real* reason, as Patricia Jalland suggests, was that Lloyd George was prepared to compromise over the estimates so as to have Churchill's support for his Ulster policy of a limited period of exclusion.[413] The 'economists' had lost once again. Left in the lurch by Lloyd George they could not but agree - grudgingly - to estimates of £51 580 000, far above the figures Hobhouse had refused to accept. These figures were agreed to by the Cabinet on 11 February, and in return Churchill promised substantial reductions for

the 1915/16 estimates.

As one of the First Lord's biographers notes, he had lost only three small cruisers and twelve torpedo boats for habour defence, but otherwise he had little to complain about.[414] And by 1915 Britain was in the midst of war, so he was not pressed to keep his earlier promise. The sorry showing of the 'economist' lobby, even supported as it was by non-Radicals in this dispute, clearly showed to what extent it lacked a determined leader. The opponents of increased expenditure had looked to Lloyd George to lead them,but the Chancellor had - despite a short-lived flurry - retired to his 'tent'. Whether Loreburn would have done better or not, the fact was that Harcourt no longer fulfilled the ex-Lord Chancellor's 'watchdog' function. Immersed in colonial and imperial affairs, Harcourt exemplified the debilitated state of parliamentary radicalism by 1914.[415]

Harcourt's most important venture in the sphere of foreign policy was his attempt to improve Anglo-German relations via colonial agreements. Germany had been seeking a greater share of the colonial cake or a 'place in the sun' long before Kaiser Wilhelm II made this well-known speech in 1911. There was little left to go over since the partition of Africa at the turn of this century. Lüderitzland, or German South West Africa, and German East Africa were the only two major German possessions on the continent, apart from a few thousand acres of Congo jungle ceded by France as compensation for its presence in Morocco in 1911. Britain, as a 'satisfied' power, had no further colonial ambitions by the time Harcourt became Colonial Secretary.

It did not particularly matter to Sir Edward Grey which foreign powers bordered British colonies - as he put it, expansion was over and Britain's task now was consolidation and development.[416] In the rest of the Cabinet, there was no specific pro-German movement as such; only individuals, like Harcourt, Haldane and Loreburn who sought to improve relations with Germany. As early as July 1910, the latter minister proposed a closer political understanding with Germany, but nothing came of the suggestion at the time because of the Foreign Secretary's fear of jeopardizing good relations with France and Russia.[417] Even after Loreburn's resignation in 1912, and Haldane's replacement of him as Lord

Chancellor, Harcourt's actions did not mark him as the *leader* of a pro-German group in the Cabinet.

It was Loreburn's initiative which led to the creation of a Cabinet committee on foreign affairs, and in particular Anglo-German relations, in January 1911. Set up by the Prime Minister the committee was comprised of Grey, Lloyd George, Crewe, Morley and Runciman. The inconclusive nature of the Committee's collaborations emphasized that its creation was something of a short-lived 'flurry', an exception to the general Cabinet lack of interest in foreign affairs. In the aftermath of the Agadir crisis of 1911, Lloyd George had gone over to the Liberal Imperialists in the Cabinet - Asquith, Haldane and Grey. And, significantly, the latter three members of the committee - Crewe, Morley and Runciman, did not receive invitations to the CID meeting of 23 August 1911 which, as noted earlier, discussed Anglo-French military cooperation in the event of a continental war.

The anti-war lobby in the Cabinet and the pro-Germans had a common interest, insofar as a war was most likely to be against Germany despite Anglo-French friction in the past, but the ministers concerned did not coordinate their efforts so as to see that their views prevailed. With the sole exception of the anti-Grey agitation in 1911, caused by the belated revelation of Anglo-French military planning, there was an essentially haphazard, individualistic approach to foreign policy by the Cabinet's pacifists. Harcourt's own contribution to the search for an Anglo-German understanding in the 1911-14 period was a good example. It was during a Commons debate in November 1911 that the Prime Minister suggested allowing Germany leeway for her colonial ambitions in Africa.

Since colonial arrangements were Harcourt's own particular sphere of interest, Harcourt had already been considering how Germany could get her 'place in the sun' without detriment to British colonial interests. He had, in fact, already been holding informal, exploratory talks with Richard van Kühlmann, First Secretary of the German Embassy, about possible colonial arrangements. The obvious point of agreement was Angola and Moçambique, Portugal's African colonies. In terms of a secret Anglo-German agreement of 1898, these colonies would be shared between Britain and Germany should Portugal be unable to retain them. Asquith's

declaration in the Commons was seized upon by the German Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg who instructed the German Ambassador in London to remind Grey of the secret clauses.

Count Metternich duly reminded Grey of Asquith's statement on 20 December 1911, and although he was not enthusiastic about this pact against an old ally, the Foreign Secretary agreed to consult his fellow minister for the colonies. Harcourt, in turn, instructed his Permanent Under-Secretary to look for potential areas of agreement with Germany, not only in Africa, but the Pacific. Harcourt's stipulation was that any 'deal' had to be fair: Germany should be given no reason to complain that she had been 'done', as he put it. At the same time, Harcourt noted in a second letter to Anderson, it would be important to avoid offending the Union of South Africa - handing over Walfisch Bay to Germany as part of any exchange might produce a revolution! This might be avoided by a simultaneous publication of the secret treaty of 1898.[418]

At the time Harcourt wrote to Anderson, Portugal's hold on her Southern African colonies seemed tenuous. The parlous state of Portuguese finances raised the possibility of *indirect* German infiltration into the Portuguese zones, via loans for development. As early as January 1911 the Foreign and Colonial Offices had been concerned by a report that German capital might be used for extension of harbour and railway works at Lourenço Marques. Baron Emil D'Erlanger, head of the banking firm of D'Erlanger & Co of Paris and London, had informed the Foreign Office that there was to be a German share in the loan of £1 000 000 requested by the Portuguese. The British embassy at Lisbon had had no inkling of the proposals by Messrs D'Erlanger & Co to provide a 'small loan' for what was to be a purely 'domestic' (that is, Portuguese) affair.[419]

Harcourt had further enquiries made to the British Ambassador at Lisbon. The reply from Colonel d'Andrade, the Governor-General of Moçambique, was that neither the Portuguese government nor the administration of the province had acted on the matter of the loan referred to by Baron D'Erlanger. However he noted that the province needed to borrow to develop its revenues and keep up with its neighbours, and would need £500 000 at least. There was no intention of pledging the customs revenue, or harbour and railways against a loan. The intention was to borrow against the general revenues of the province, and he saw no reason why this could not be done.[420] On this information Harcourt wrote the

note 'Show to F.O.', because it was precisely the latter Portuguese procedure that the Foreign Office objected to.

The Foreign Office did not object to the use of German capital in a loan, but did not want the German share to be guaranteed on the revenues of Lourenço Marques. The effect of such an arrangement would be to give the Germans a toehold, which might later be used to claim greater territorial concessions. The latter possibility loomed large later in the year, due to the political turmoil in Portugal. A republican coup d'état had toppled Manuel II of the House of Braganza in 1910, ushering in a chaotic period which saw forty-five changes of government in Portugal during the next sixteen years. The upheaval presented opportunities for foreign incursions into Portuguese territory, and it was not only the Germans that the British had to consider: the Union Government was more than willing to move into any new vacuum created on the coast.

There was a need to 'show the flag', but Herbert Gladstone conceded in a message to First Lord McKenna that the Admiralty's resources were strained to the limit:

> I am telegraphing to Loulou about possible complications at Lourenço Marques. If a ship has to stop there we shall be pretty high and dry.[421]

In his telegraph, Gladstone noted the 'restrained eagerness' of Botha and Smuts when they came to discuss the Portuguese revolution with him, and added that there were 'plenty of people, monied and political' who would be prepared to support Jameson-like raids.[422] As it turned out, only a fortuitous combination of circumstances prevented such a snatch of Lourenço Marques by the Union.[423]

In effect, in its dealings with the Union Government and any other would-be interlopers in the Portuguese zones, the Imperial Government was seeking the best of both worlds: it sought to keep its military presence in the region to a minimum, yet also wanted to have a say in its affairs. The Portuguese Governor-General had justifiably objected to the British curiosity about Moçambique's financial affairs. But from Harcourt's point of view, all developments there were of interest. For the

Colonial Secretary, part of the usefulness of the secret Anglo-German treaty was that it could be used as a bargaining counter to foster good relations between the Union and the Colonial Office. The Union Government was very interested in the ports of Beira and Lourenço Marques and the secret treaty provided for their reversion to Britain. However Anderson's reply put something of a damper on the Colonial Secretary's speculations.

Anderson pointed to the widespread feeling in the Dominions that all foreign power occupation of territory near their borders was seen as purely temporary. The Union of South Africa believed no less firmly that Lüderitzland would eventually belong to it, than Australia and New Zealand that their flags would eventually fly over German New Guinea and New Caledonia. Nor could Anderson see any scope for the 'deal' proposed by the Colonial Secretar y, because Germany had no colonies of any interest to Britain. The only possibility lay in Portugal's shortage of money , which might lead to a request for financial assistance.[424] Anderson saw no reason why Germany should not obtain central Angola if the treaty did come into effect.

This would include St Paul de Loanda the centre of a large volume of trade, and which was the terminus for a railway into the interior, at this time extending about 480 km inland. Provided that British trade was unimpeded, on the lines of the American 'open door' policy in China, Anderson could see no objections to German possession.[425] Unrestricted British access for trade purposes was one of the points Harcourt subsequently stressed during his talks with von Kühlmann. In just the same way, von Kühlmann had sought for assurances of 'open door' treatment of German enterprises in Persia from the Foreign Office the previous year. Grey's anxiety to reach agreement with Germany in the Persian Gulf area[426] was duplicated in his concern to see Anglo-German relations improved via negotiations over African territory.

What Harcourt did not realize was that an agreement over Portugal's African colonies was simply an expedient to Grey, insofar as it could be used to ease Anglo-German tension. Grey kept Balfour informed of the negotiations, and the former Prime Minister, who had engineered the secret treaty, concurred w ith Grey that it was 'an excellent thing to do anything to convince Germany that we are not animated in or relations with her either by jealousy or enmity'.[427] Just as, for Grey, these proposed colonial rearrangements were just a useful diplomatic device, so too for the Germans they were really a sideshow. Strategically, German attention was focussed on the Balkans, Austria and Russia.[428]

It has been stated by an historian who has examined the negotiations that 'for a while' Harcourt and Dr Wilhelm Solf, his German counterpart, 'were powerful enough to influence the policies of their governments'.[429] It would seem more accurate to see Harcourt and Solf's efforts as only a minor, subsidiary part of their respective countries' foreign policies. Harcourt believed that his preliminary conversations with von Kühlmann over possible territorial exchanges were a 'moving factor', as he put it, behind the German offer to resolve the *impasse* over naval construction early in 1912.[430] But there seems to be no evidence to support that contention. Albert Ballin, the German shipowner who invited Churchill to accompany Sir Ernest Cassel (a naturalized German financier) on a visit to Berlin early in 1912 was apparently acting privately, on his own initiative.[431]

Observers did not overlook the possibility that Anglo-German agreement might entail colonial bargaining as well as agreement on reduction of naval construction. The French Government asked its representative at Lisbon about rumours that Germany intended to purchase Angola.[432] The Nation commented on the 'rather mysterious' visit of Dr Solf, the German Colonial Secretary, to London. The ostensible reason was to 'study the diamond trade', but Massingham correctly attributed the trip to discussions over the secret treaty of 1898. Denouncing Portuguese rule - '... it has meant slavery, waste and stagnation', the article enthused about German rule which 'would mean not only an end of these cruel scandals, but order, progress and energetic development'. Sir Edward Grey could consider himself the benefactor of mankind 'twice over' if at the price of agreeing to a thing good in itself, he could secure Anglo-German friendship and a stop to the naval rivalry.[433] However, during late January, Cabinet attention focussed on Ballin's offer to Churchill.

At its meeting on 2 February 1912 the Cabinet decided to send Haldane as an emissary instead of Churchill. But the Haldane Mission, as it was called, achieved little concrete. It resulted neither in a political agreement nor a naval compromise satisfactory to both sides. Harcourt did not take warning from the failure of the Haldane Mission as an indication of the importance of his own talks in the diplomatic scheme of things. Ironically, since he was to be accused of precisely the same *faux-pas* by disgruntled Foreign Office officials,[434] Harcourt appended an indignant question mark to his copy of a Cabinet paper which

cited Haldane's 'unconditional' offers of Belgian and Portuguese territories in Africa. Harcourt was not the only one who felt that Haldane had offered too much.[435]

On 13 February, after Haldane's return from Berlin, Grey's Permanent Under Secretary Sir Arthur Nicolson reminded his superior that France had to be consulted about the proposed cession of Pemba and Zanzibar to Germany, for a controlling interest in part of the Baghdad Railway. During subsequent meetings with Count Metternich, Grey emphasized that Haldane's talks with Bethmann-Hollweg were not to be seen as having produced a definite agreement. Presumably briefed by his chief to this effect, von Kühlmann reassured Harcourt at an informal talk on 8 March that Zanzibar and Pemba were not essential to a political agreement. The main focus of German interest, according to von Kühlmann, was on Angola.

Far more serious, as an obstacle to a political agreement, was the mutual inability to agree on limitation of naval construction. Harcourt told von Kühlmann how 'distressed and disturbed' he was by German reluctance to revise the Novelle, but when the Colonial Secretary and Grey met Metternich for lengthy, informal talks next day, the British had nothing new to offer. Germany wanted a declaration of 'benevolent neutrality' in the event of a war on the continent. But from the British point of view, as Sir Francis Bertie, the British Ambassador at Paris, wrote to Nicolson, benevolence and neutrality were mutually exclusive. Grey fully concurred.[436] Disappointed by the lack of British neutrality offers during the talks with Harcourt and Grey, Metternich was authorized to convey a more substantial offer.

On 12 March he summoned Haldane, and informed the War Secretary that the German Novelle (or Fleet Law) would be reduced in size, though not withdrawn altogether, if Britain offered an acceptable neutrality formula. At this time, when the Cabinet was preoccupied by the Coal Strike, Haldane's message came as a complete surprise. Harcourt considered the German offer 'amazing' and Grey found it no less 'extraordinary'. But, as before, negotiations foundered over British reluctance to include the word 'neutrality' in the wording of a declaration. What Bethmann-Hollweg sought, as Metternich admitted, was a British

declaration of unconditional neutrality in the event of a Continental war.

Even before Haldane had conveyed the latest German offer, Harcourt had tried to persuade Grey to accept a 'neutrality' formula, to no avail. Harcourt noted that Grey was

> evidently afraid of losing French entente. I tried to prove to him that 'neutrality' declaration was no more than we had put in our [previous] formula. Cd. not move Grey ...[437]

Harcourt was also aware that Grey was not only thinking of the Anglo-French entente. On 20 March, just after Metternich had made it clear that unconditional neutrality was wanted, there was pressure from a new quarter.

On that date Grey informed Sir Claude MacDonald, the British Ambassador in Japan, that his host country had intimated to the Foreign Secretary its uneasiness about the wording of the draft neutrality formula asked for by Germany. It had not occurred to Grey that if Japan were to go to war with Germany, Britain might not be able to help her Far Eastern ally. And Japan was a useful, though difficult, ally: the alliance meant a reduction of the British naval presence in the Far East was possible, in return for which Japan was left to indulge in her expansionist ambitions in non-British territories, particularly in China.[438] Grey hastened to assure the Japanese *chargé d'affaires* that Britain had no intention of agreeing to anything which might affect her alliance with Japan.[439]

Evidently Harcourt did not consider that the same limitations which prevented a political agreement designed to slow the naval race applied to the talks over colonial readjustments. Bertie dismissed the Haldane Mission as 'a foolish move intended ... to satisfy the Grey-must-go Radicals', but it in fact represented a very real desire on both sides to reach an agreement. What the peace factions at Downing Street and the Wilhelmstrasse were slower to recognise was the diplomatic and political parameters which limited the areas of possible agreement and,

ultimately, precluded significantsuccess. And,.on the German side, the negotiators were under greater pressure to succeed.

Whereas the concerted Radical pressure of 1911 failed to topple Grey, German diplomats and officials were more vulnerable to criticism, and liable to be replaced for real, or perceived,failure. Solf, a former governor of Samoa, owed hisappointmentto the resignation of von Lindequist in the wake of the Agadir crisis. His appointment was only supposed to be temporary, although he remained in office until 1918, but Solf had to tread carefully. Nominally, he was answerable only to the Chancellor, who was responsible for all Imperial offices and various Secretaries of State. But Solf did not have *carte blanche* for his envisaged creation of a German colonial empire in *Mittel Afrika*, as Britains's 'junior partner'.

To a greater extent than was the case in Britain, German foreign policy was manipulated for *domestic* political purposes, and it was assumed that 'the prime means of making the colonies a useful adjunct to Germany was to enlarge them through diplomatic manoeuvre'.[440] Solf and his associates were expected to produce results. At first it seemed that they would get them. The negotiations were concluded by May 1913, with Germany getting a larger share of Angola than in the 1898 treaty, and Britain getting only slight compensation in Moçambique. The Union Government had been informed of the negotiations, in confidence. By August, the revised agreement had been initialled,but now there was a dispute over publication of the treaty. Grey was influenced by his anti-German Senior Clerk Eyre Crowe, who waited simultaneous publication of the revised treaty *and* the Anglo-Portuguese treaty of 1899.

On the German side, there was an understandable reluctance to do this: the 1899 treaty would reveal to the German public that the previous agreement with Britain was undermined by the renewal of the Anglo-Portuguese alliance, which also made the revised Anglo-German agreement of limited value.[441] Grey did not abandon the revised treaty, but he was quite content not to press the issue of publication, so the initialled treaty remained unratified. This outcome to the negotiations was less pleasing to Harcourt who, unlike the Foreign Secretary, had wanted more than a token improvement of Anglo-German relations. Early in 1914, Harcourt vented his spleen, against the use of the term

'Triple Entente' in despatches. Harcourt protested against the use of 'this mischievous and misleading phrase', 'this terminological inexactitude'.[442]

Grey's reply emphasized his continued commitment to *détente* with Germany, and denied that the terminology implied any alliance with, or obligations to, foreign powers. When Harcourt persisted, Grey threatened to take the matter to the Cabinet, and the Colonial Secretary had to back down.[443] At the time Harcourt was writing to Grey, the Cabinet was in any case more concerned with the crisis over the Navy Estimates and the situation in Ireland than with foreign affairs. So it does not seem likely that Harcourt could have drummed up much support against Grey on the issue. Despite Harcourt's disappointment, the non-ratification of the revised treaty did not in itself harm Anglo-German relations. The more serious consequence was an indirect one.

The credibility of the pro-English party in Berlin was undermined. Solf and his colleagues could no longer convincingly claim that there were substantial territorial benefits to be derived from cooperation with Britain.[444] There can be no question of the genuiness of the desire for peace among the officials on both sides who favoured negotiations. A senior German officer whom Harcourt had hosted during his 1912 visit, Admiral Eisendecher, made this clear to Harcourt in a subsequent letter:

> I know you are doing your best in the right direction and thanks to your influence much has been gained already to remove suspicion and create confidence ... The time will surely come when we look back on this period of scares and panics as a kind of temporary insanity. Why in the world should we mistrust each other when there are really no serious clashing interests between us and all-important reasons to be friends? ... Unfortunately the 'Fleet Question' still survives between us, but it is treated in a much quieter way on both sides and the certainty gains ground that we never can commit the sort of double suicide to attack each other...[445]

The store of mutual good will was never effectively tapped,

and the realities of power-politics prevailed. Less than five months after Eisendecher wrote his letter, war had broken out. There were no longer any 'good' or 'bad' Germans and Britons.[446]

# CHAPTER FOUR

## EMPIRE AT WAR

> '[T]he kinship of the Empire which has been wielded into an impregnable whole by blood and iron' - Lewis Harcourt at the central London YMCA, on 'A Free Empire in War Time', January 1915.

The issue of why Britain went to war in 1914 remains controversial. Contemporary accounts of Cabinet Ministers, including that of Harcourt, presented the German invasion of neutral Belgium as a crucial factor. The thrust of much recent historical research has been that the precarious unity of the Cabinet pacifists was 'shattered by the course of events and the determination to enter the war as a united government'.[1] Certainly the rapidly changing situation did affect the assembled ministers' attitude towards intervention during the ten Cabinet meetings held between 27 July and 5 August. But in his persuasive conclusion to his essays on the determinants of pre-war British foreign policy, Keith Wilson points to the political component in the Cabinet's decision for war.[2] The political factor has been rather underplayed in previous accounts.

In terms of Wilson's argument Harcourt, like most of his colleagues, cannot escape the charge of political opportunism. The European crisis of July/August 1914 was certainly the severest test of Cabinet unity yet, and the surprising aspect of the whole affair is, as Wilson notes, that there were not *more* resignations than those of Morley and Burns. In Harcourt's case, it was not just because of his lack of presence in the Cabinet despite his 'courage and wisdom':[3] his actions during the crisis show that he *did* wish to avoid war but that in the end, as for most of his colleagues, Imperial and party-political considerations tilted the balance in favour of supporting British intervention. In reconstructing the crucial Cabinet meetings which led to the British declaration of war on Germany, historians have been helped by a variety of sources.

Surviving records include Asquith's letters to his young confidante Venetia Stanley, the diaries of Burns, Hobhouse and Pease, and notes scribbled by ministers during Cabinet meetings.[4] This evidence shows that, as in previous crises, Harcourt was unable to influence the direction of Cabinet policy. As argued in the previous chapter, the Colonial Secretary's greater awareness of, and involvement with, Imperial problems ill-fitted him for the role of chief critic of Grey's foreign policy following the resignation of Loreburn in 1912. Nor did Harcourt seek to play such a role during the crisis itself. He *did* try to unite the waverers in favour of neutrality, but could not, as Cameron Hazlehurst has pointed out, provide intellectual or moral impetus.[5] It is generally agreed by analysts of the crisis that the only minister who could have marshalled the anti-interventionists was Lloyd George.

Several pleas to this effect were made to Lloyd George, via a note from Harcourt on 31 July, and one by Masterman on 2 August which read 'for Heaven's sake let us all stand together'. The reason why Lloyd George did not try to create an anti-war faction might simply be that he had no intention of doing so. Up until 2 August, when Germany presented its ultimatum to Belgium, the Chancellor told his colleagues, like Runciman, that he was not sure what he was going to do.[7] In his War Memoirs, Lloyd George stated nineteen years after the event that the German ultimatum made all the difference, because Britain was honour bound to honour its 1839 treaty obligations. Testimony to the contrary is provided by his then mistress and secretary Frances Stevenson, who wrote that he knew from the outset Britain would have to go to war. Belgium was just an excuse.

If so, this would provide a rationale for the sequence of events, in which Lloyd George managed to keep the pacifists in the Cabinet, and keep the Liberal Party in power, via the appeal to Belgian neutrality.[8] Harcourt's role in the unfolding crisis would seem to have been a less calculating one than that of the Chancellor, but both men initially thought the likelihood of Cabinet agreement to war remote. The first warning by Grey of the seriousness of the European situation came during the Cabinet meeting held on Friday, 24 July. International tension had been increasing steadily since 28 June, when the Bosnian nationalist Gavrilo Princip had shot the visiting Austrian Archduke and his wife at Sarajevo. When the Cabinet heard that the ensuing Austrian demands on

Serbia could lead to a general European war, they were horrified. Grey was told to find ways of mediating a peace.

As it turned out, the Foreign Secretary found it was not going to be possible to bring the disputing powers to the conference table, as he had done during the Balkan crisis of 1913. The reports that reached him made it clear that France would firmly support Russia against Austria and Germany if necessary. But, when the Cabinet reassembled on Monday, 27 July, no decisions were taken on what Britain would do if a Four Power Conference could not be held, and the question of what to do in the event of violation of Belgian neutrality was held over to the next meeting. Even at this early stage of the crisis, none of the ministers wanted to force an open split. Lloyd George confidently told CP Scott of the Manchester Guardian after this meeting that there was 'no question' of British intervention, and that he knew of 'no minister who would be in favour of it'.[9]

Next day, 28 July, Austria declared war on Serbia. This, coupled with Germany's rejection of Grey's proposal for a conference in London, shifted the issue to whether Britain would take part in a general war, which now seemed virtually unavoidable. The deteriorating European situation was the sole topic discussed at the Cabinet on 29 July. Again, nothing was decided about intervention, except that the Belgian question would, if it had to be considered, be taken as a matter of *policy* rather than a legal obligation. This seemed to beg the question, but in itself was an indication that the anti-war group was nowhere near as large as the waverers, whose doubts the Cabinet indecision reflected. The point was, as Asquith feared, that an unconditional declaration of British neutrality might actually *escalate* the European conflict.[10]

The general lack of coordination of the Cabinet pacifists is evident in their piecemeal reactions to the crisis. Burns asked Morley to 'stand firm', but the old Gladstonian only thought in terms of resigning, not leading an anti-war group. The younger Harcourt, though trying to 'shepherd' the waverers similarly revealed - in his notes to Morley - that he was considering resignation.[11] Lloyd George, the one minister who could perhaps, as noted earlier, have led a substantial section of the Cabinet against intervention, does not seem to have had any intention of doing so. At the same time as he told CP Scott of the

Cabinet's apparent determination not to intervene, he hinted that it would make good diplomatic sense to stand by France.

Still more significantly, he was to urge patience on Churchill on 1 August, hinting thereby that there might yet be a reconciliation of views if the First Lord did not press too hard - and thus presumably alienate the pacifists who still thought that the Chancellor was with them.[12] Although Cameron Hazlehurst has written that there is no reason to suppose that even *had* the pacifists stood firm they would have looked to the Chancellor for leadership, Harcourt's note to Lloyd George on 2 August makes it clear that they would have: Harcourt's plea was that Lloyd George should 'speak for us', because 'Grey wishes to go to war without violation of Belgium'.[13] Harcourt's note smacked of panic, insofar as the situation had changed significantly from 31 July to 2 August.

On Friday, 31 July, Harcourt had confidently written, in a note to Pease, that 'It is now clear that *this* Cabinet will not join in the war'.[14] The Colonial Secretary's optimism was based on the fact that the meetings held that day had still yielded no definite Cabinet statement about British intentions in the event of war. When the Cabinet met again on Saturday, Churchill suggested that the fleet reserves be readied, as part of preparations for war, but the proposal was rejected. Morley and Simon were prominent i n expressing opposition to intervention under any circumstances, although the latter was not senior enough to take over the leadership of the pacifists. Asquith, anxious as ever to preserve Cabinet unity, had no cause for anxiety as yet, and noted that ' we parted in a fairly amicable mood'.[15]

This was not the case at the Cabinet talks held at 11 am on 2 August. A Sunday morning meeting was almost without precedent, in itself an indication of the seriousness of the situation. Germany had declared war on Russia. Prior to this meeting, Harcourt had agreed with Lloyd George, Lord Beauchamp, Simon and Pease that only 'certain circumstances' like the 'wholesale' invasion of Belgium might persuade them to change their views on intervention. The Colonial Secretary was confident, as he told Morley, that at least half the Cabinet would oppose Grey if he argued that Britain should support France due to obligations of honour and policy commitments.[16] As Michael Fry has pointed out, this climate of opinion meant that Grey's ensuing attempt to win the Cabinet over to intervention was fiercely resisted.

Grey threated to resign, and it was presumably at this point that Harcourt passed his supplicatory message to the Chancellor. At this stage he had no reason to suppose that Lloyd George was not sincere in opposing 'any kind of intervention in any event'.[17] The deadlock would not be easily resolved Harcourt thought, but news received in the late afternoon showed that Germany was proceeding with an attack on France and stood poised to cross the Belgian frontier. At the evening meeting on 2 August the possibility of 'substantial violation' of Belgian neutrality was conceded by the Cabinet as a reason for British intervention. This marked a significant move away from the stance taken at the morning meeting. Yet intervention itself was still rejected.

Herbert Samuel, the chief of the Local Goverment Board, had estimated that only three ministers would have stood by Asquith and Grey had intervention been insisted upon at the evening meeting.[18] Nonetheless, by starting to define the conditions under which Britain would step in, the Cabinet was moving closer to tacit acceptance of war. And if there *was* to be war, the Cabinet clear ly favoured a naval war. This was indicated by the decision on 1 August against sending the Expeditionary Force to France, to the horror of Sir Henry Wilson. Several accounts of the July crisis have pointed out that this decision made nonsense of previous British continental strategy, but it could be - and was - defended by Grey on the grounds that the French had no written promises of British assistance. His subsequent appeal for intervention on 2 August was based on the need to defend the balance of power, threatened by Germany, and to honour *informal* obligations.[19]

But why did the Cabinet commit itself to the possibility of a *naval* war? The reason behind this shift, as agreed to on 1 and 2 August, was the Anglo-French agreement over naval redeployment dating back to 1912. Germany would not be allowed to dominate the seas off the British coast, and in terms of the 1912 arrangements Britain was to defend the French coasts off the channel and in the North Sea while France defended the Mediterranean. The majority of the Cabinet would not allow France to be left defenceless on the coastal areas the British had promised to guard. Anti-French as he was, Harcourt himself would not allow this - as he confessed to Pease.[20] The waverers had been drawn closer to agreement to war. Belgium was to be the *casus belli*.

The pacifists and the waverers seem consistently to have treated the issue of Belgian neutrality as one of *policy* rather than legality or moral obligation. Just as it was conceded, even by Grey, that there was no moral obligation to France, so too, the same attitude was taken to Belgium. It is important to note that when the Cabinet authorized Grey to warn the German Ambassador about Belgium on 1 August, the warning stated that it would be 'extremely difficult to restrain *public* feeling' if Belgian neutrality were violated. This placed the onus of responsibility onto Germany, insofar as the Cabinet did not set itself up *directly* as a guarantor of Belgian territorial integrity: the public might 'force' it to act. The German reply was evasive, and on Monday, 3 August, the Cabinet found out about the German ultimatum to Belgium, and that country's decision to resist. This was to push the Cabinet to war.

However, the prospect of British intervention did not daunt the German military, whose war plans hinged on a wide sweep across Belgian territory into France. As the Kaiser had disparagingly remarked about the British preoccupation with the balance of power at the turn of the century, 'there is no balance of power except me and my thirty Army Corps'.[21] For the hard-core Cabinet pacifists like Runciman, Simon and Harcourt the commitment to defend Belgium was not binding. A treaty made in 1839 was not considered relevant to the existing circumstances. For Harcourt, the real significance of the German threat to Belgium was *strategic*, and hence as early as the evening of 2 August he had decided not to resign, and other ministers like Beauchamp and Simon decided likwise.

> Morley felt betrayed. As he told Esher:
>
> Harcourt wrote a sort of apologetic letter ... in which he said that he had decided to remain in the Cabinet for Imperial reasons, which, however, he did not think it necessary to explain.[22]

In a letter written on 5 August, just after the expiry of the British ultimatum to Germany, Harcourt did explain his motives:

> I have acted not from any obligation of Treaty or of honour, for neither existed, and it has been part of my work for the last four years to make it perfectly plain that such was the fact, but there were three overwhelming British interests which I could not abandon.

The three 'overwhelming' interests Harcourt listed as: denial of the North Sea and English Channel to the German fleet, which British neutrality would allow; prevention of a German occupation of the north-west coast of France facing British shores; and the violation of Belgian independence, which would make German-occupied Antwerp a permanent menace to the British.[23] Only Burns and Morley resigned out of a Cabinet of twenty. Neither would have been likely to make a substantial contribution to the war effort. Morley's career was all but over anyway; Burns left the Board of Trade, but his brief tenure there had hardly been more inspiring than at the Local Government Board. It is all too easy to state that only those two ministers had the courage of their convictions.

Firstly, as Bentley Gilbert argues, in the long-term Lloyd George actually did his country a service by not splitting the Cabinet and, almost certainly, toppling the Liberal Government. He could have done so, and according to Runciman, the Chancellor actually rejected the possibility of leading an anti-war faction.[24] Charles Trevelyan, then Permanent Secretary to the Board of Education, opined that Harcourt 'is of the opportunist type in the long run',[25] but for a life-long pacifist it probably *was* 'the most terrible decision of my life' as he later recalled his retention of office. He had nothing to gain personally by staying on, unlike Simon, who received a hint of promotion.[26] In fact, as described below, the Colonial Secretary seriously endangered his health by clinging on to his responsibilities - longer than he should have done.

In this respect he emulated the tenacity of the last Liberal Government and its ministers. Since he did devote attention to strategical issues before the July crisis, he did not 'discover' an interest in them as a rationalization for his decision not to resign. It may well be, as Keith Wilson argues, that party-political considerations played a larger role in his, and his colleagues', decisions than they

were prepared to admit. But even in this element of 'opportunism' there was a consistent strand of disinterest, insofar as the last Liberal Government was convinced that it was the best safeguard of the national interest. Which governments believe otherwise?

For better or worse, the Cabinet had committed the nation to war, with allies whom several ministers regarded as uneasy bedfellows. As a former minister put it to Harcourt during the height of the August crisis:

> ... there will be no doubt (sic) recriminations and charges of perfidy if the thing comes to a point and France goes to war without our aid.
>
> But I cannot bring myself to believe that any Government will be capable of entering upon this war, especially on the side of Frenchmen and Russians who are wholly untrustworthy allies.[27]

In the end, Loreburn's prediction was wrong, and it is certainly arguable that the issue of Belgium provided the Cabinet pacifists with a convenient escape hatch. But they were sufficiently well versed in statesmanship to realize that if Britain *did* have to go to war it was better that it did so as a united nation. The Unionists also realized this, and the Opposition's pledge of support made the decision of Harcourt and his anti-war colleagues easier. In the ranks of Labour itself, dissent was drowned by the rising tide of patriotism which swept all before it, in England and on the Continent.

As before the war, Asquith gave his ministers virtual *carte blanche* in the running of their departments. And it was not long before Lord Kitchener was virtually running the Government. Kitchener was appointed as War Secretary on 5 August, and was the first soldier to be admitted to the Cabinet since 1660. Asquith was uneasy about this 'hazardous experiment' but such was the reputation of the 'unattackable K', as Runciman referred to him, that in the eyes of the public he

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