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The establishment of a new electoral normalcy? Party adaptation, organisational activity and press perspectives in Leeds from 1918 to 1924

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The establishment of a new electoral normalcy? Party adaptation, organisational activity and press perspectives in Leeds from 1918 to 1924

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## Abstract

This dissertation investigates the implications of the 1918 Representation of the People Act in the United Kingdom, at the national and local level with specific focus on the impact of the reforms on the political environment and electoral outcomes in Leeds, West Riding of Yorkshire. The study investigates how the Labour, Unionist and Liberal party organisations adapted to the challenge of appealing to the new electorate, whilst attempting to maintain their core pre-war support. How the local and regional press reported on the new electorate and how far the perspectives of their editors and journalists were calculated to have influence on the decisions of voters, is key to understanding the political climate of the city post-1918.

The study analyses the local and regional activity of the parties in comparison to the national picture and in order to put the enormous changes of the 1918 enfranchisements into context, some chapters are more focused on the national scene than the local. The theoretical framework of the research is based around the tenets of new political history (NPH), a perspective in historical writing shaped in 1990s by political historians that emphasises the importance of the 'cultural context' of the voting public in determining electoral choice.<sup>1</sup> This thesis is led by empirical evidence, based on the analysis of archival resources of committee meetings, local, regional and national conferences, publications and correspondence of the three major parties and the reportage and editorials published in local, regional and national newspapers relating to the impact of the Act on the political climate in Leeds.

The study concludes that a new 'electoral normalcy' did develop in Leeds between 1918 and 1924. In this new environment political parties could no longer count solely on support from

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<sup>1</sup> Windscheffel, A. (2007). *Popular Conservatism in Imperial London 1868-1906*. London Woodbridge, Boydell and Brewer.

voting *blocs* based on class, sectional interest or gender. The parties needed to work harder to enlist support and the study shows that at the local and regional level, party organisations reacted intuitively to change well in advance of any guidance from central office. Indeed, the Leeds and Yorkshire based organisations were often at the forefront of developing novel approaches in dealing with the new electoral challenge. Initiatives driven by division level Labour and regional Unionist organisations were often later adopted at the national level. The newspapers in the city and region were highly partisan, with reportage being aimed at reinforcing prejudices and preferences, and in shaping voter perspectives. In Leeds and nationwide the Liberals were the victims of their own failure to adapt their organisation and mind-set to the 'cultural context' of the new electorate, but more important still was the enormous influence that the anti-socialist narrative in both the Unionist and their own Liberal media exerted on the voting public, new and old.

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## Chapter One

### Review of Literature

Traditional histories of party-political change and electoral success have tended to locate the agents of change at the centre of political parties. According to this analysis, change was driven by high politics; the leader, central office, or parliamentarians were the drivers of innovation. In the 1960s and 1970s the emerging branch of history designated by some as social history, borrowing frameworks from sociology, investigated the role of the electorate more closely, and the new electorates created by the reforms of 1867, 1885 and 1918 in particular. From this stemmed a series of works discussing the dynamics of class struggle in the processes of democratisation. Historian Peter Clarke, who is discussed more extensively later in the chapter, in his 1972 article 'The electoral sociology of modern Britain' outlined that the 'electoral sociology' was based on a number of assumptions with regard to the voting public and their electoral choices. His and other similar studies were often based on factory towns and their working-class citizens, and they were often written by left-wing historians seeking change-actors in the working-class movements. Within the context of these works working-class support for the Unionists/Conservatives and Liberals was ascribed to deviance or deference.

One advocate of the electoral sociology perspective, Patrick Joyce, persuasively introduced the concept of 'political *fiefdoms* at street level' and "denominational allegiance and ethnic feeling,"<sup>2</sup> as being essential components of voting behaviour. He claims that the Act he focussed on, the Second reform Act of 1867, 'enfranchised communities as much as, and rather more profoundly than, it enfranchised individuals.'<sup>3</sup> Joyce was writing about factory towns where sectional interests were very visible and clear cut, and in this type of environment and in that time period Joyce's paradigm has a great deal of value. However, with the more

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<sup>2</sup> Joyce, P. (1975). The Factory Politics of Lancashire in the later nineteenth century. *Historical Journal*. 18 (3), pp.525-553, p.527

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

complex electorate of the post-1918 enfranchisements, a more holistic approach had to be made to political history that allowed for individual interest rather than 'communities' of interest to be studied more insightfully. As a consequence, by the 1990s a body of literature which became known as New Political History developed. This literature is still focussed on 'the people', but does not accept some of the simplistic notions made in electoral sociology, for instance, that working-class Unionism/Conservatism was deviant behaviour. The studies were, like electoral sociology, often based in urban areas around the crucial times of democratic change, but were more interested in individual agency than in sectional blocs. The structures and activities of local and regional political organisations were studied; parties, voluntary organisations and party ancillary associations.<sup>4</sup> The objective was to uncover the street level appeal of the political parties, the approaches they took to engage new voters and how well organised they were in addressing new challenges. The aim was to place the changes into the 'cultural context' which was acting upon the electorate at this time, and to understand voter choice as a product of complex variables, not just a function of class or status.

This thesis will adopt an NPH approach to analyse the conduct of the parties in Leeds between 1918 and 1924, and as a result the bulk of this literature review will engage with these NPH works contrasted with the 'electoral sociology' canon. The principle debate between the two forms of analysis are that one discusses the electorate more or less as a series of entities, the other as individuals. Alex Windscheffel's extensive historiography covering electoral sociology and NPH convincingly relates that electoral sociologists like Cornford, Blewitt, Pelling and

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<sup>4</sup> For examples of this canon of literature, Fielding S., 'Review article: looking for the 'new political history'', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 42, 3 (2007), 515–24, provides an informative overview of the development of this methodology and select texts such as Moore, J.R. (2003) Liberalism and the politics of suburbia: electoral dynamics in late nineteenth-century South Manchester. *Urban History*. 30 (2), 225-250, McCarthy, H. (2007) Voluntary Organisations and democratic politics in interwar Britain. *Historical Journal*. 50 (4), 891-912, Roberts, M. (2006) Constructing a Tory world-view: popular politics and the Conservative press in late-Victorian Leeds. *Historical Research*. 79 (203), 115-143. Coetzee, F. (1997) Villa Toryism Reconsidered: Conservatism and suburban realities in Late-Victorian Croydon. *Parliamentary History*. 16 (1), 29-47, Lawrence, J. (1993). Gender in the making of urban Toryism, 1880-1914. *English Historical Review*. 108 (428), 629-652, have been influential in shaping this study of Leeds politics.

Parry<sup>5</sup> *et al* detect 'mutually antagonistic social blocs', 'socio-economic cleavages' and 'British politics...reconfigured along class lines' in their studies of pre-First World War voting patterns. However, he quotes Talcott Parsons, 'the question is not so much...for what is he voting, as with whom is he associating in voting.' In this regard 'associating' is not necessarily a class or party phenomena and some NPH scholars embark on analytical studies which study associations in numerous forms, and often disprove simplistic national level analysis and challenge notions of deviance and deference preferring to seek out voter preference. For instance, Windscheffel, Lawrence and Coetzee all look closely at the Primrose League and its impact on drawing the aspirational working classes, especially women, towards its association.

This argument is more sophisticated than the 'socio-economic cleavages' perspective since the class system was never a series of blocs in such a way that voters would or could move *en masse* from one party to another. The UK employment market was so complex and segmented, even in the main period of the industrial revolution, that a single 'working-class' never existed. This is a particularly important point when analysing voting behaviour in a city like Leeds, where the economy was extremely diverse and geographically segmented and the influences of the trades unions was weak. For example, in Leeds Central, the city's most deprived division, small margins of victory led to changing party success in elections, with general elections returning a Liberal in 1918, a Unionist in 1922, 1923, 1924, and Labour in 1929. Clearly there is no evidence of groups of voters switching party in unison.

In electoral sociology, for instance in Blewitt's observations on the decline of the Liberal party, this type of phenomenon was labelled as 'class exodus', yet the reality as this dissertation bears out was far more subtle. Peter Clarke makes another contention, 'the fundamental stability of electoral behaviour suggests that it is more based upon the habits of a lifetime than on the passing whim of the moment'<sup>6</sup> is also called into serious question by the results of this

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<sup>5</sup> Windscheffel, A. (2007) *Popular Conservatism*, p.4

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p.5



study of Leeds. If the electoral sociology argument of Clarke is followed, the Liberal Party in Leeds and elsewhere would not have suffered the fate of collapse that it did, its voters would not have changed their 'habits'. There is clear evidence in Leeds that a shift from the Liberals was not immediate, and from raw turnout statistics that large numbers of new voters had voted for the Liberals in the post-war period. What doomed the Liberals was that their strategy had failed to maintain these new allegiances through local networks and associations. In that respect an NPH approach is required that is specifically focussed on how those local groups tried to create new 'habits' in the new voters is essential to the study of voter choice in Britain's cities, in this period. This thesis fulfils that analytical gap for Leeds between 1918 and 1924.

The traditional approach to explaining political change in this period had been to chart Labour success or Liberal decline as key with the Unionists being an unlikely success story and the key beneficiary of the battle between the two 'social democratic' alternatives. On the national level, by joining Lloyd George's coalition government of 1918 to 1922, and winning in 1922 and 1924, Conservatism managed to dominate the period. Since Unionist success was a symptom of anti-socialism, and Liberal decline due to the 'exodus' of middle-class support, or working-class deviance, then little academic work was conducted at the local level. However, Moore has identified that the exodus of the middle classes from Liberalism was exaggerated, and Coetzee has concluded that suburbanisation was as desirable for the ambitious working classes as it was for the middle class. In addition, as Chris Cook identified, though effective in some areas, in a large number of others, anti-socialist alliances were not as widespread nor impactful as was first deduced<sup>7</sup>. Coetzee notes in the preliminary to his study of Croydon, 'the Conservative party's evolution was considerably less tranquil and more uncertain than the Tory mythology (received wisdom) implies.'<sup>8</sup> and so the need for a new methodology in

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<sup>7</sup> Cook, C. (1975). *The Age of Alignment: Electoral Politics in Britain 1922–1929*. London: The MacMillan Press p.57

<sup>8</sup> Coetzee, F. (1997), 'Late-Victorian Croydon', p30

studying elections and party success or failure was clear from these failings of the old models. Studies of electoral success demanded a lot more work and effort than grand assumptions on the national scale or a simplistic class-based model, they needed an in-depth analysis of the local level activities of the parties, their ancillary groups and other social and political forces.

Coetzee's research in Croydon suggests that Unionist success was by 1918 a significantly local level phenomena, despite the cheerleaders like Willoughby de Broke who attributed success to himself and others in the national organising committees<sup>9</sup>. He argues that the Unionist platform was not just a matter of 'percolation from above' but also a 'function of local organisation, local notables local concerns', with the articulation of these concerns being 'absorbed into party policy at the national level.'<sup>10</sup> This has been definitively proved for the Unionists through the Leeds analysis. Unionists national organisers ultimately conceded to the demands of regional organisations after the 1923 election debacle and were successful in 1924, largely as a consequence of listening to the regional federations' policy proposals.

Jon Lawrence, in 'Class and Gender in the Making of Urban Conservatism' questions the electoral sociology concept, that working class Toryism was a function of 'deviance' or 'apathy' culminating in Lawrence's most useful expression, 'popular politics relied on the *fluid and contingent* nature of political identities.'<sup>11</sup> His statement, 'the historical understanding of political belief comes to rely on the reconstruction of self-perceived interests and identities, rather than on externally imposed assumptions of objective interests'<sup>12</sup>. Hence, there is a dynamic between Lawrence's individual 'subjective' interest and Joyce's communal fiefdoms which forms an interesting debate. Lawrence's conclusion that by 1918 political language had transformed to engage with the 'feminized franchise' was a more important contribution to Unionist inter-war success than the policies derived from the pre-war period.

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<sup>9</sup> Coetzee F. 'Late-Victorian Croydon', p30

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.p30

<sup>11</sup> Lawrence, J. (1993). 'Gender in the making of urban Toryism', p.630

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. p.632

David Jarvis in two key articles in the 1990s argues for a reinterpretation of Unionist post-war success after 1918 as a function of the adaptation of the Party's federations to embrace the women's vote and create women's organisations and promote women organisers. Jarvis argues that working-class women Unionists were not a product of deviance as some electoral sociology tracts have insinuated but embraced their opportunity to make choices about parties and policy based on their own world view, though one of the key functions of Unionist women's organisations was to help to shape this view. The subtlety in approach was a matter of socialising rather than politicising the working women, through associations like the Primrose League and magazines like the Leeds based *Conservative Woman* which is discussed below.<sup>13</sup>

Helen McCarthy's investigation of the dynamic relationship between inter-war parties and associations,<sup>14</sup> undertakes an analysis of the Womens Institute, Scouts and Guides, the British Legion and Rotary Club, anti-socialist groups and the 'auxiliary' organisations of the Unionist Party. By carefully plotting the effectiveness of these associations in socialising the new electorate, McCarthy argues that 'inroads (being) made by many non-party associations amongst the working class,'<sup>15</sup> were key to the securing the success of the Unionists in the post-1918 era.

James Moore's study of Manchester finds allegiances of a different kind, not based around sectional or economic blocs, but communities of interest. Moore's 'Liberalism and the politics of suburbia' draws attention to suburban obsessions like the failure of authorities to provide adequate 'sewerage, transportation, school and the promised quality of life.'<sup>17</sup> This was definitely the case in Headingley and other Leeds suburbs in the early 1920s where voters

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<sup>13</sup> Jarvis, D.(1996) British Conservatism and class politics in the 1920s The *English Historical Review*, 111(440), pp59-84. Jarvis, D. (1994) Mrs Maggs and Betty: The Conservative Appeal to Women Voters in the 1920s, *Twentieth Century British History*, 5(2), pp129-52.

<sup>14</sup> McCarthy, H. (2007). Voluntary Organisations and democratic politics in interwar Britain. *Historical Journal*. 50 (4), pp891-912.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. p902

<sup>17</sup> Moore, J.R. (2003). Liberalism and the politics of suburbia: electoral dynamics in late nineteenth-century South Manchester. *Urban History*. 30 (2), pp225-250. p.249

had similar gripes. Local adaptation to these demands created municipal platforms which were initially at odds with the national party. However, these demands were later articulated by regional Unionist Federations and then adopted as policy by Unionist strategists at the national level. Stanley Baldwin, adopted many of these once-contested municipal platforms as the basis of the 1924 election manifesto. It is argued in this thesis that listening to the complaints of and also adopting some of the policies practiced by the local organisations was one of the keys to Unionist success in inter-war politics.

Perhaps the most important guide for this thesis amongst the academic writing is Matthew Roberts' 'Constructing a Unionist world-view.'<sup>18</sup> This study of the late-Victorian press in Leeds emphasises how language and identity were used by Unionist newspapers to shape the mental environment for their readers. The cultivation of 'niche audiences' by different Unionist newspapers targeted at different segments of society delivered specific material to create communities of interest. This thesis in a way explores Roberts' findings. Some of these readers may not have achieved the vote until 1918 but the 'Unionist world-view' would have been carried over from their pre-war exposure to the targeted Unionist press. Without doubt this type of editorial focus was employed in the post-war period by the Leeds and Yorkshire papers of all political persuasions, but, like Roberts, it is argued here that the Unionist press was most successful in its pursuit of shaping public opinion, especially around the concept of anti-socialism.

As Lawrence and Roberts show, the language of parties and newspapers had a profound impact on voting behaviour, and Leeds editors and candidates undoubtedly shifted their focus to target the feminized electorate when they realized women would come out to vote *en masse* and that they might differentiate their political leanings from their husbands. Newspapers like *Conservative Woman* and *Labour Woman* were initiatives driven by the women's branches of their parties in recognition of the import of the female electorate and provided sophisticated

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<sup>18</sup> Roberts, M. (2006). 'Constructing a Tory world-view: popular politics and the Conservative press in late-Victorian Leeds' *Historical Research*. 79 (203), pp115-143.

analysis of politics as well as stereotypical women's issues, and celebrated the growing female role in the political sphere. This bears out Roberts 'niche audiences' rubric. The parties were particularly concerned in their committees about the role of the press and increasing circulation of their respective propaganda organs.

A series of articles in the February volume of *Parliamentary History* in 2018 celebrated the centenary of the 1918 Reform Act with a special edition of articles with recent research focus. Stuart Ball expounded that there was a 'franchise factor' in the record of success of the Unionists, in which the inclusion of women voters certainly played an important part – although it should not be accorded too prominent a role. Like Jarvis, Ball discusses the Unionists appeal to the 'man (and woman) in the street' and the substantial efforts made to engage with women voters from as early as 1917. By the mid-1920s the party's electoral success was predicated on the votes of women alongside its core middle-class support and the support of middle-classes who at heart were Liberal, but who wanted to staunch the ambitions of a burgeoning Labour Party.

What is borne out by this dissertation is that in a city as complex as Leeds, not one of these paradigms is a suitable explanation for the patterns of electoral choices in the post-war period, but that each concept has some useful contribution to make in understanding the behaviour of voters. There are patterns in Leeds after 1918 of class based voting which at times even seem to follow the patterns of Clarke's electoral sociology class-based framework, at least in individual constituencies like socialist Leeds North East and Unionist Leeds North. However, even in these divisions no single factor dominated.

As a consequence, a key theme of this research is to explore the electoral history of the post-war electorate in order to test the extent to which the conclusions drawn from academic research into this period are borne out in the case study area of Leeds. There is a significant gap in the literature here, both for Leeds and for the 1918-1924 period. Much of the NPH

literature discussed covers earlier periods, none covers Leeds and electoral sociologists have tended to focus more on the factory towns with a less complex economic structure than Leeds.

The second theme is to identify the adaptation of the three main political parties and the partisan newspaper press to these new conditions identifying the strategies which led to success and the omissions which led to failure. There is a great deal of academic research in this area, some quite recent, but none with coverage of all three main parties within the context of a single city.

The third theme and the major aim of the research is to establish whether a 'new electoral normalcy' was established in Leeds by 1924. Here 'electoral normalcy' is taken to mean more than simply a change in voter behaviour or in the parties being elected, being more accurately a change in the cultural context of elections where new forces were at work amongst the voting public which demanded that parties, their organisations and their press adapted to the new conditions or became irrelevant.

The thesis is divided into four chapters. Chapter Two discusses the national context of the electoral reforms and the outcomes of the general elections between 1918 and 1924. Key to the discussion is the debate over Unionist survival and Liberal decline. The chapter also includes the contention that 1924 was the first election of the period where the new conditions of the 1918 franchise were fully realised and was the only election where a true picture of the success of the parties in adapting to the new franchise could be gauged.

Chapter Three focusses on the local study of Leeds and draws from resources from all three parties to form a perspective on how effectively the local and regional organisations adapted to the challenges posed by attracting the new electorate whilst maintaining the loyalty of the old. The local archives for the parties are not complete for the period, but from an analysis of the available local resources and extensive regional resources, an in-depth picture of the reactions of all three parties has been developed and conclusions successfully drawn from these.

Chapter Four specifically addresses the new voters and how the political parties framed their propaganda to appeal to the new male and female voters. Local, regional and national archival resources are used in this analysis and the approaches taken by the parties at these different levels are compared in terms of the focus on the new men and women and the success of these strategies.

Chapter Five focusses on the Leeds and Yorkshire press and their attempts to shape the political agenda in the wake of the new franchise, focussing in particularly on the practice of the Liberal and Unionist press in setting an anti-socialist agenda in the city.

## Chapter Two

### The impact of the electoral reforms on party success: a national survey

This chapter is a survey of the general elections of the 1918-1924 period in the UK. In the debate regarding the new 'electoral normalcy' which is central to this thesis, it is argued that it took the whole period from 1918 to 1924 for the parties to adjust to the new political culture, reshape their message and to form a new core vote. As such 1924 was the first 'normal' election of the period and only in that election was the full impact of the 1918 Act experienced.

Most all of the press supported the reform of the franchise, along with, as time went on, either pragmatically or as a matter of conscience, did most MPs. Votes for women had been keenly debated for decades before the war and twice rejected in parliament, key figures like Asquith and Churchill in the Liberal cabinet of 1906 to 1916 being some of the strongest opponents of female enfranchisement.

However, by 1918 the all-party push to include those who had contributed to the military victory including soldiers, sailors and munitions 'girls' reflected what Bingham, Searle and Pugh with different emphasis postulate; that war work and the concerted public effort towards the war created the environment into which previous press and political critics of the extension of the franchise to young men and all women, could find suitable cover to escape from their previous opinions. In the end the best analysis for the reason that the lower orders were now allowed to vote is summarised in Bingham's expression, 'enfranchisement (was) an outcome of service to the nation'.<sup>21</sup> Yet, ironically, in the deliberations for the extension, it was the young women's vote which was the victim of the parliamentary compromise, were the very munitions 'girls' who had mostly been unmarried women under 30. Prime Minister David Lloyd George's admission during a meeting with Millicent Fawcett's deputation to him in 1918, that the 'age

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<sup>21</sup> Bingham, A. (2018) 'The British Press and the 1918 Reform Act,' *Parliamentary History*, 37(1), pp150-167, p150



limit was illogical and unjustifiable, unpalatable and undesirable,'<sup>22</sup> was probably the most honest appraisal of the contrived parliamentary compromise of the 1918 Act, adding that in reality it was the only thing that would get the act passed, as it ensured there would not be as many female as male voters. The establishments of the Liberal and Unionist parties felt young women would be too radical or flippant to vote. However, the political fudge created to exclude young women from the polling booths and the quite contrary rules for candidature to the House of Commons where women must only be over 21, were outlined by the Middlesbrough Labour MP Ellen Wilkinson in 1928, 'having neither husband nor furniture, although I was eligible to sit in this House, I was not eligible for a vote.'<sup>23</sup> It seems, retrospectively, that the conditions for females were explicitly created to enfranchise the least radical, most domesticated sections of their sex, and thus hope to ensure a 'conservatism' amongst this group to counter-balance the dangerous elements which lay amongst the working-class males gifted with citizenship in 1918.

Bingham recounts that what many newspapers and politicians wanted to stress was that female agitation had not been responsible for the changes of mind of parliament on this issue, war work, especially work in pursuit of military victory, had established a moment in history and that given this contribution, women must be included in those responsible for the direction of the post-war reconstruction. This compromise of 1918 did not mean permanence in the right to the franchise for men or women, in fact, it was a get out clause for later attempts at raising the voting age for non-propertied men, who were for some politicians and papers, a potentially more radical element than women.

Takayanagi actually takes a different perspective on the reform in that 1918 reflects continuity not change, not service, though this is important, but the application of traditional constitutional rules to a much wider group. The 'traditional considerations of electoral eligibility' are reflected

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<sup>22</sup> Takayanagi, M. (2018) 'Women and the Vote: The Parliamentary path to Equal Franchise, 1918-1928', *Parliamentary History*, 37(1), 169-185, p173

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. p172

quite clearly in all of the reforms of 1918, though the men's vote only partially since it eschewed all but the age qualification. The women's vote was determined by age, 30 years' old which excluded a third of the female population over 21; respectability, property and class, the property qualification for women reflecting their own propertied status or that of their husband, therefore the respectability of marriage and finally; education with the university vote being allowed for women of 21 plus years. This is aptly summarised in her contention that 'gender equality and rewarding war service were not as important principles as retaining traditional considerations of electoral eligibility ...age, respectability, class, property and education.'<sup>25</sup>

However, this was piecemeal and incremental revision of the conditions for qualification during the discussions in the Speakers Conference, in Parliament and presumably in the offices of the various party whips. It was a numbers game, as Lloyd George had stated to Fawcett. To interpret the processes at work in 1917 and 1918 as driven by 'traditional constitutional considerations' would be to reverse the process which was actually at work.

As Bingham discusses, 1918 was a 'characteristically British process of incremental democratisation',<sup>27</sup> but the war had accelerated the process to a point where the increment in 1918 was far greater, and less prepared for, than any previous increase. The fact that Labour, the 'radical' party of the day, was discussing adjustments to the male and female vote to be equalised at 25 years of age, reflects that potential discord that could be caused by unharnessed 21-25-year-old males. The rules of 1918 became a permanent feature for men until 1967, but in the aftermath of rewarded war service and the commencement of reconstruction, many papers and most parties felt the male vote, not the female, was the one which needed to be ameliorated. The poor showing of males at the ballot boxes, in contradistinction to buoyant women's turnout in all but 1923, was a proven and remarked upon phenomena.<sup>28</sup> The *Leeds Mercury* reported on December 16<sup>th</sup> 1918, 'indifference amongst the

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<sup>25</sup> Takayanagi, M. (2018) 'Women and the Vote', p172

<sup>27</sup> Bingham, A. (2018) 'The British Press', p151

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. p152

male electorate...enthusiasm of the women voters...woman takes husband to polls.'<sup>29</sup> The *Yorkshire Evening Post* carrying on election day, 'Women first to the polls. A queue in Leeds before 8am.'

Moreover, the *Daily News* in commentary on the Speakers Conference in 1917 had admitted that Britain needed new constitutional arrangements, 'a new machine for new work,'<sup>30</sup> in order that the challenges of reconstruction could be met and voices of the many heard. Due to this 1918 marked a shift in the considerations and policies required of the parties, the old tropes of Home Rule, Free Trade and Empire were no longer a sufficient framework for the nation's political agenda. Instead, the discussion moved to economics, social provision and pressing issues like slum clearance.<sup>31</sup> The struggle to deal with these issues called for the previous emphasis on local remedies to these issues to be replaced by a national structure of reforms, and in tandem with this, a national structure for party policy. In the aftermath of war, the piecemeal municipal reforms of the nineteenth century, dominated largely by middle class concerns for better services to their suburban homes, could no longer take prime cuts of government budgets.

In addressing the issue of what would be considered the first 'normal' election of the new phase of democratisation after 1918, Chris Cook in the *Age of Alignment* proposes 1922 as the first normal election of the new period of mass democracy in the UK.<sup>32</sup> To Cook, 1918 was confused as a result of the the timing of the election, the extraordinarily low turnout, the lack of a real campaign, the impact of patriotism drawing the electorate to the Right and the preponderance of essentially fixed constituency results under the Coupon agreement. However, it could be contended that neither 1922 nor 1923 are normal either for several reasons. In 1922, the new electorate's democratic schooling had been the abnormal election of 1918 and the political parties were still fluid in their identity. Lawrence identifies the problems

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<sup>29</sup> See Appendix 1

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p.156

<sup>31</sup> *Yorkshire Evening Post* 9 December 1918 'How will women vote?'

<sup>32</sup> Cook, C. (1975) *The Age of Alignment*, p.4

the parties had with developing a platform for the new electorate and identifying which of the electoral strategies and techniques of 1910 would operate in the new democratic context. Cook notes that the redistribution of 1917 had profound impact, as the reworked constituencies did not only have more voters, the boundaries had changed to accommodate the movement of people within constituencies over the years since the last redistribution of 1884.<sup>33</sup> Suburbanisation had led to constituencies with overblown numbers in areas which had been rural areas in 1884. Re-mapping of the electoral districts would have been necessary in 1917 irrespective of the enfranchisement. As a consequence, constituencies with safe seats relied upon by the dominant parties' in the pre-war political arena, may have been re-shaped and now be contested. What this meant in political terms was that the Unionists and the Liberals would be forced to adapt to the post-war electoral conditions. Where once they could rely on 200+ seats and put their electioneering efforts into the marginals, after 1918 a new strategy for national and local campaigns needed development. Urban growth in the industrial cities favoured the Unionists, who had traditionally gained the inner-city vote. Stuart Ball calculates that the 1917 boundaries redistribution secured a solid 30 constituencies for the Unionists.<sup>34</sup> With the impact of the burgeoning Labour Party as yet unknown, it was the Liberals who were most under threat from the franchise extension and redistribution of seats and they who would most need to adapt to the new conditions.

A section of the Liberals governed from 1918 to 1922 as part of the post-war Unionist-dominated coalition with Lloyd George at its head. Though this experiment failed after the Carlton Club Meeting in 1922, Lloyd George Liberals' still toyed with the idea of a Lib-Con Centre Party under his leadership, and this reflects the failure of their leader to adapt to the new electoral environment. He would rather create a party to overwhelm the others by removing the contest in electoral districts between Liberal and Unionist much in the manner the 'coupon' had done in 1918. By 1922 the Unionists had fitted themselves out with new

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<sup>33</sup> Cook, C. (1975) *The Age of Alignment*, p.4

<sup>34</sup> Ball, S. (2018) 'The Conservative Party', p37

messages and policies in light of the new electorate. By 1924 Unionists had a campaigning strategy and more concrete local networks. In 1918 Coalition Liberal FE Guest remarked, 'new methods will have to be adopted if the vast electorate is to be got at.'<sup>35</sup> Unfortunately, neither side of the split Liberal Party had investigated new methods and the continuing split up to 1923 meant they could not make coherent policy or strategy.

Meanwhile, as Ross McKibbin discusses in his 'The Evolution of the Labour Party 1910-1924' that Labour in particular were working at the municipal level to understand voter demands. Their success in municipal elections, by-elections and the massive improvement in their parliamentary membership after 1922 reflects this concentration on voter requirements.<sup>36</sup>

As to Chris Cook's claims 1922 as the first normal election of the post-war period, it is contested here that Cook is inaccurate in this assessment. Within the evidence he provides of 1922 and 1923 there is a pattern of abnormality which suggests that 1924 can be the only election to be considered normal under the 1918 conditions. In the aftermath of the 1918-22 government's generally failed record, anti-coalition sentiment was evident in a considerable 'protest vote' which favoured whatever party was likely to beat the coalition incumbent. Although the election had truly competitive races this time around (though not universally), along with the anti-coalition mood, the clear anti-socialist sentiment embodied in some local deals, and the anti-socialist rhetoric employed, meant that the 1922 electorate were often choosing who to *vote against* rather than who to vote for. According to Lawrence, in 1922 Party programmes were sparse and techniques to deliver the manifesto promises were inadequate to engage with the demands of the mass electorate. The result of the 1922 election still suggests a system in flux, not one which was stable, or the new normal. Labour were the main beneficiaries of the election with 86 gains but also 19 losses. Unionists gained 45 new berths but lost 63 and the Liberals of both stripes were the victims of the election, with 75

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<sup>35</sup> Cook, C. (1975). *The Age of Alignment*, p.14

<sup>36</sup> McKibbin R, 'The Evolution of the Labour party 1910-1924' *American Historical Review* (6) 1976

losses with less than half of that gained at 36. Therefore, though the election was contested on the same boundaries as 1918, there were too many random variables in 1922 to claim that the election was a reflection of the political system settling down after the upheaval of war.

The snap election of 1923 cannot either be held as a normal election. This election was essentially called to settle divisions in the Unionist Party on the issue of Protection versus Free Trade. Baldwin's decision to hold the election in 1923 had divided his party further. So close to the elections of 1922 the funding machinery of the parties was essentially dormant. Only Labour went into the election with anything like a full set of pledges. Although the Liberal split between Asquith and Lloyd George was temporarily on hold, the glue which briefly held them together was a common policy of free trade and little else. Bitterness caused by five years of internal division meant that the united front at national level was not mirrored at the local or amongst the party's agents.

The 1923 election returned a minority Labour government, partly because the Unionist splits were indicative of a party the public thought not fit to govern in that moment, and partly because of Liberal failure to field sufficient candidates due to poor organisation and finance. Labour, building an effective organisation initially through local elections and developing a more extensive list of agents, gave the traditional parties a scare in 1923 which meant that by 1924 they had to be ready with a programme to take on a party who seemed to have tapped into the seam of the new electorate. The socialist party, in government in 1924 for nine months, changed the three- and four-party framework of the post-war period definitively back to Britain's normative state, a two-party system. Labour's flirtation with power had shown some on the liberal left that Labour could be relied upon to govern, and some on the right that the tacit threat of socialism could become a *de facto* reality. Unionists relying on impoverished Liberals to provide anti-socialist defence in some districts had been tried in 1922 but by 1924 was recognised as a folly which could ultimately lead to a government committed to a socialist agenda. The 2 million increase in the Unionist vote in 1924 from 1923 perhaps reflected that

though the threat made by anti-socialist rhetoric in the post-war period had attracted few voters, the reality of socialist government in 1924 had sharpened fears.

It is therefore contended here that 1924 was the first 'normal' post-war election. What might be held for 1922 and 1923 is that though they were not the start of a normative post-war political system in Britain, they were a source of engagement and education for both the people and the parties. The new voters had been called to the polls regularly. In addition to the three general elections in the five years to 1923 there were numerous municipal elections from 1919. Additionally, a sixth of all parliamentary seats had had at least one by-election in the period. Thus, new voters had been able to make their choices of candidates in as many as six elections in five years.

The 1924 election was the first election where the full expression of the newly enfranchised voters was brought to bear in any meaningful way. At nearly 16 million and a 77% turnout, 1924 compared favourably to 1922 and 1923 at 73% and 71% respectively, and as such reflects the highest turnout in the new era and also the highest in the 30-year period until 1951. 1924 was the first election since December 1910 that the Liberals under Asquith, were a single party with a coherent policy programme and the first since January of the same year that two parties had fielded more than 500 candidates, with the Unionists 534 and Labour fielding 514, their highest ever. The irony for Labour was that this reflected the strength of their organisation, but their parliamentary return was a drop of 40 seats to 151 and removal from power. A closer examination of the actual figures, Labour gained a million more voters than in 1923, bore out Labour's underlying growth in popularity and thus the strength of their organisations was improving despite the loss of the election. More important still was the decimation of the Liberal vote from just over 4 million in 1922 and 1923 to just 2.8 million in 1924 and a loss of seats of 118, reducing them to only 40 seats.<sup>37</sup> What percentages of the

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<sup>37</sup> Cook, C. (1975) *The Age of Alignment*, p.316-328. The statistics above are from Chapter 19 of Chris Cook's thorough analysis of the elections from 1918-1924

Liberal vote gravitated to left or right cannot be known, though Unionist grandee Austen Chamberlain thought it was two-thirds Labour and with his own party picking up the other third.

The Unionists had clearly absorbed the lessons of 1922 and 1923 and strained to operate a more targeted anti-socialist campaign at the unions and Labour backbenchers rather than publicly popular MacDonald. They also adopted a stratum of manifesto promises that mirrored those of the Labour Party, much as Leeds and other municipal Unionist Parties' had been doing since the 1890s when they co-opted elements of leftish programmes and coined the expression 'municipal socialism'. Baldwin's campaign of 1924 contained a variety of 'progressive' promises focussing on slum clearance, housing policy, unemployment and educational improvements much like their Victorian forbears at the local level had done. This and the palpable vilification of the 1924 Labour government and barely guarded insinuations, in line with the Rothermere and Beaverbrook press, of Moscow dictating Labour policy, were the central themes of Unionist policy. The Zinoviev/Apfelbaum letter was a case in point and no doubt reinforced rather than created middle class anxiety about the looming threat of a socialist government, rhetoric that Baldwin repeated in the conclusion to the 1924 manifesto.

The experiment of a minority Government has proved a short-lived failure. But it has afforded sufficient indication of what would be the character of a Socialist Government dependent, not upon other Parties, but upon the extremist section of its own majority, to make it imperative upon all who wish to see the restoration of prosperity and social peace, to unite their efforts in averting such a possibility.<sup>38</sup>

As Seaman astutely observed, 'Labour represents, (for middle class opinion), literally the figure of the Bolshevik of the cartoons, an unwashed, ill-dressed, truculent immigrant from the neighbouring Labour cities...In the face of such a vision, it falls back on the protection of the Government.'<sup>39</sup> With the Liberal Party in freefall there was no other alternative to Labour than

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<sup>38</sup> 1924 Conservative Election manifesto

<sup>39</sup> Seaman, L.C.B. (1967) *Post-Victorian Britain 1902-1951*, p.24



the Unionists, and Baldwin's policy packaging, and the technological prowess he harnessed with propaganda through the cine-reel, had a clear impact in revitalising a somnolent suburban vote. His seven and a half million supporters represented near enough half of the population who voted in 1924 and provided Baldwin with a strong mandate for his, what might be described as, One Nation agenda.

What was most important about Labour's 1924 experiment was, as Seaman appreciates, that 'Labour was absorbed into the existing social and political order by being given official status as the natural alternating party to the Unionists' and that 'henceforth the discontented now had more than a political party of their own...they had an alternative government.'<sup>40</sup> Labour was thus now one of the two parties in the traditional two-party state. The Liberals were the losers.

The Liberal historian, Chris Cook's analysis of the Liberal failure of the 1920s is that the Liberals won seats but were 'unable to keep seats' which he ultimately puts down to the lack of organisation and propaganda, and claims that should they have had this they would have regularly won 200-250 seats in the inter-war period.<sup>41</sup> The flux of Liberal victories is summed up in the expression 'although they managed to win 281 seats on different occasions between 1918 and 1929 ...won only 22 of these seats on all 5 occasions'<sup>42</sup> He continued that the 'real Liberal problem was retaining seats won on a favourable tide' and there had been several favourable tides for a number of reasons, anti-Coalition Unionists protest voting for Asquith Liberals in 1922, Labour apathy and Unionist abstention in 1923, and in several elections of the period Unionists who felt they could stand aside and allow a Liberal candidate to provide sufficient anti-socialist cover. Cook proceeds that 137 constituencies in the 1918 to 1929 period 'returned a Liberal on a single occasion'<sup>43</sup> and thus the 'favourable tide' was necessary for Liberal victory. The three-horse races which became a more regular feature after 1924 were detrimental to their success. As is proven by the period after 1918, both the Unionists

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.28-31

<sup>41</sup> Cook, C. (1975). *The Age of Alignment*, p.174

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

with vibrant and rejuvenated local associations and Labour with a principal focus on building local organisation through municipal elections before addressing large-scale parliamentary challenges, adapted to the new voters and conditions much more effectively than did the Liberals, who were split nationally and locally for most of the period to 1924.

Thus, the decline of the Liberal Party was mostly but not completely of their own making. Only in 1923, when they supported the Liberals, did the influential Beaverbrook and Rothermere press fail to support the Unionist Party, even if they did not always favour Baldwin as leader or some of the policy adopted to appeal to specific new categories of voter. That Baldwin and Amery amongst other Unionists were willing to put Labour in power in 1923 reflects how confident many were that their core support would return from the Liberals once their own divisions were reconciled. As Amery eluded to Baldwin the moment was ripe for the final 'deathbed' of Liberalism and that 'the real healthy and natural division of the parties in this country is between constructive Conservatism ...and Labour-socialism,' some fellow Unionists came to see the logic that the demise of the Liberals opened up a richer vein of the voting public for their party in contradistinction to Labour.<sup>44</sup>

Thereafter, there would be a clearer division in British politics, meaning that, as in the anti-socialist atmosphere of 1924, there would only be one alternative to 'Bolshevism', that being the Unionists. Austen Chamberlain as much as warned the Liberals in the parliamentary debate which put Labour into power in January of 1924, that this moment would be reflected back upon as their 'swansong' should they vote Labour into power. He was, to a large degree, quite correct as Cook admits, the Liberals were 'launched on the disastrous course that culminated in the debacle of October 1924,' and Amery's clear line between conservatism and socialism was realised in the aftermath of that election.<sup>45</sup> As contended at the start of this chapter, the election of 1924 was the first normal election of the period and marked the clear start of a new political era. This new cultural context of mass politics forced the parties to place

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<sup>44</sup> Cook, C. (1975). *The Age of Alignment* p183

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p194

significant importance on organisation at the grass roots level in order to 'take the pulse' of the nation and to reach the massive new electorate of the 1918 franchise. The next chapter is an in-depth investigation of the way in which the three main parties addressed these challenges using the case study of the six parliamentary divisions of the city of Leeds.

## Chapter Three

### **New divisions, new voters and the response of the party organisations**

This chapter addresses the changes to the electorate of Leeds after the 1918 reform act and evaluates the response of the three main parties to the changes locally and how far they followed or led trends nationally. The chapter draws on extensive evidence from the archives of the Leeds and Yorkshire organisations of the Liberal, Unionist and Labour parties. The first part of the chapter focuses on the context of this thesis, the Leeds Parliamentary Divisions and how they changed as a consequence of the electoral and boundary reforms of 1917 and 1918. The second part of the chapter goes on to analyse how the parties adapted to these challenges through local initiatives and innovations, despite sometimes problematic relationships with party organisers further up the metaphorical food chain. The chapter concludes that the consequences of the re-mapping of the Leeds divisions under the Redistribution of Seats Act 1917 and the extension of the franchise in 1918 led to all three parties having some degree of difficulty in adapting to the challenges of new boundaries and new voters. The case locally mirrored the conclusions drawn in Chapter Two about the national picture, the once dominant Liberal Party were the ultimate victims of the reforms, and again, they were often their own worst enemy.

In 1918 Leeds was a city with a population of 454,155.<sup>46</sup> With diverse industrial and commercial interests, Leeds was the 'town that made everything', from locomotive engineering to the manufacture of fine worsted suits, and many professions, from university professors to financial directors. The physical and human fabric of Leeds divisions reflected the range of salaries and incomes gained from these miscellaneous employments. A burgeoning middle-class lived increasingly in leafy suburban districts like Roundhay and Shadwell in the North-East Division, and Chapel Allerton and Headingley in the North. Here the 1921 Census reported low levels of Infant Mortality and family sizes. This contrasted with areas in Central Division

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<sup>46</sup> *Census of England and Wales, Yorkshire, West Riding 1911*

and the South-East where there were poor to appalling standards of living, especially amongst non-unionised labour. These divisions were characterised by intense poverty, slum housing and industrial pollution which led to some of the highest Infant death rates in the city, and Leeds was only second in terms of these statistics to Newcastle in the whole country. In 1918 West Ward in the Central Division had an infant mortality rate of 189/1000 live births. This was distinct from 106/1000 in the semi-rural Bramley Ward in the wealthier West Division.<sup>47</sup> Two of the pockets of poverty, Leylands in Central Division and Holbeck in the South-East contained Leeds largest ethnic minority communities, an eastern European Jewish community and a large Irish Catholic contingency respectively. In the 1924 Health Survey of United Kingdom Cities, Leeds frequently appeared in the top three for TB, IMR and death rate. Some accolade, this was a league table of the worst rates for these types of deaths.

In 1915 Leeds had 78,981 Parliamentary electors.<sup>48</sup> The extension of the franchise nationally to all men over 21 and women of 30 plus added 14 million new voters to the 7 million already enfranchised, 8 million women and 6 million men. In Leeds the new franchise saw the register nearly triple to 223,678 voters by 1920. The city had grown to such an extent that it required a new, sixth, parliamentary division to properly reflect its size. The 1917 Redistribution of Seats Act adopted a mathematical formula that attempted to guarantee equal representation across the country, redressing the previous imbalance between borough and county seats. According to this rubric less than 50,000 was too small for a constituency with the ideal size being 70,000.<sup>49</sup>

The impact on Leeds was to create an enlarged Leeds Central Division, now straddling the River Aire rather than sitting northwards of it. Its 89,552 population was large compared to the 69,674 and 69,381 respectively, of the North and South Divisions. These two did however lose about half of their physical acreage. The old East Division was carved up between the newly

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<sup>47</sup> Morrisons *Leeds Blue Book and City Record* 1919

<sup>48</sup> Morrisons *Leeds Blue Book and City Record* 1910

<sup>49</sup> Wrigley, C. (2018), The Labour Party and the Impact of the 1918 Reform Act. *Parliamentary History*, 37: 64-80. p69

formed North East with 74,054 souls and South East with 76,153. A re-shaped West division was similar to its pre-1918 size, but shifted southward. It contained 74,134 people.<sup>50</sup> The creation of North East Division was necessitated to some degree by the addition of Shadwell, Roundhay, Crossgates and Seacroft to the city in 1912, adding around 7500 to the



Figure 1. Leeds Five Parliamentary Divisions (in large upper-case text) and Municipal Wards from 1885-1917.<sup>51</sup>

population of Leeds.<sup>52</sup> The seemingly massive population of the Central Division was not so anomalous when considering the actual electorate of the district, which at 43,496 in 1918 was

<sup>50</sup> H.M.S.O. Boundary Commission Report 1917, Yorkshire, West Riding

<sup>51</sup> Woodhouse, T. (1996) 'Nourishing the Liberty Tree: Liberals and Labour in Leeds', 1880-1914.

<sup>52</sup> All figures in this section from Morrison's *Leeds Blue Book and City Record* 1919

only 4,500 more than the West, the second largest division at 38,766. The other four divisions numbered between 35,000 and 38,000 registered voters in 1918.<sup>53</sup>



Figure 2. Leeds Six Parliamentary Divisions 1917 onwards. Source F.W.S. Craig, *Boundaries of Parliamentary Constituencies 1885-1972*

Conventional wisdom would have it that 1918 saw women over 30 years old receiving the vote. Unfortunately, this was only partially true. Many married women were now included in the parliamentary register, but too often unmarried women, women in service and women in lodgings were still excluded. This was a consequence of the piecemeal reforms of 1918. The

<sup>53</sup> Comparing Figure 1 and 2 shows the splitting of the old North and East Divisions into North and North-East was a relatively straightforward cartographic exercise, as Figure 2 shows, with Roundhay, Seacroft and Shadwell now clearly absorbed into Leeds NE. South of the River Aire the old West and South Divisions were significantly re-worked into the new South-East, South and West Divisions with Central Ward now creeping just over the river to absorb the Municipal South Ward.

parliamentary register was not a separate entity but based on the municipal register of each division. Consequently, the women's vote was conditional on age, and property. For men it was age alone which determined their eligibility.<sup>54</sup>

In Leeds, statistically only 829/1000 (83%) of women over 30 had the parliamentary vote as opposed to 98% of men.<sup>55</sup> According to Pat Thane the national average for women over 30 disenfranchised at the national level in 1918 was 22%,<sup>56</sup> so in this respect, only the North East division posted numbers as high as this, indicating that in Leeds the women's parliamentary vote was above average for the nation as a whole, the West division having *only* 12% of women disenfranchised.<sup>57</sup> Across Leeds 96,161 out of 116,572 females were eligible to vote. There were 20,581 widows over 30 most of whom would, most likely, be the heads of households, and therefore reap the benefit of the parliamentary and municipal vote. The 525 widows between 20 and 29 would presumably achieve the municipal vote, but not the parliamentary vote. Assuming that the numbers are relatively accurate, the university vote applying to all of the female students recorded in the 1921 census, there were 408 female students over 20 of whom 316 were over 25.<sup>58</sup>

Having addressed how the changes to the franchise affected the voting public in terms of numbers, it is now necessary to investigate how this translated into party support across the city. From the results of the parliamentary elections of the 1900s in the Leeds divisions it became clear that the two-party split in the city between Liberal and Conservative had been replaced as early as 1906 and 1910 (see Table 1), that being before the franchise extension, with a Liberal/ Labour split. The Leeds East Division, the city's most working-class area, being strongly Labour, victory achieved at the expense of the Conservatives. Liberals had usurped

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<sup>54</sup> Takayanagi, M. (2018) 'Women and the Vote', p169

<sup>55</sup> Morrison's Leeds Blue Book and City Record 1920

<sup>56</sup> Thane, P. (2013) 'The Impact of Mass Democracy on British Political Culture', 1918–1939 in J. Gottlieb & R. Toye (Eds) *The Aftermath of Suffrage: Women, Gender, and Politics in Britain 1919-1945* (pp. 54-69). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, p55

<sup>57</sup> Doyle B. (2014) *The Politics of Hospital Provision in Early Twentieth-Century Britain* London, Pickering and Chatto, p.24 describes Leeds as a 'women's city'

<sup>58</sup> *Census of England and Wales, Yorkshire, West Riding 1921*



Conservatives in Central and North divisions whilst the South and West had been Liberal since 1885. Leeds seats looked set as a Liberal or Labour strongholds after the reforms. However, the khaki election of 1918 skewed the results in that year as coalition Conservatives did not contest divisions where the Liberals were strongest. In the seats where Liberal victory had been achieved in 1910 Coalition Liberals won again in 1918. In the new seat of Leeds North East, the absorption of the wealthier areas like Roundhay, left the Coalition Conservatives with more chance for victory there, and no Coalition Liberal candidate was proffered. Neither party bothered to contest the new South East division in 1918. In fact, in all of the elections of the period to 1924, with Unionists, Liberals and Communists all having a go at various times, Labour always secured a 4000+ majority in that division. Leeds South East became the anticipated Labour stronghold.

Table 1 – Outcomes of General Elections on Leeds Divisions 1885-1910<sup>59</sup>

Constituency	1885	1886	1892	1895	1900	1906	1910	1910
Central	UNIONIST	UNIONIST	UNIONIST	UNIONIST	UNIONIST	LIBERAL	LIBERAL	LIBERAL
East	UNIONIST	LIBERAL	LIBERAL	LIBERAL	UNIONIST	LABOUR	LABOUR	LABOUR
North	UNIONIST	UNIONIST	UNIONIST	UNIONIST	UNIONIST	LIBERAL	LIBERAL	LIBERAL
South	LIBERAL	LIBERAL	LIBERAL	LIBERAL	LIBERAL	LIBERAL	LIBERAL	LIBERAL
West	LIBERAL	LIBERAL	LIBERAL	LIBERAL	LIBERAL	LIBERAL	LIBERAL	LIBERAL

As is clear from Table 2 below, from 1922 until 1924 a more accurate image of the scene appears and tends to support the two-party equation. A National Liberal victory by 904 votes in Leeds West in 1922 is the only divergence from the two-party split which Leeds exemplified after 1922. As expected, one of the two parties was Labour. Perhaps, unexpectedly, with the formbook of pre-1914 being firmly Liberal, the other successful party was the

<sup>59</sup> Compiled from Morrison's *Leeds Blue Book and City Record* 1910-1914, *Manchester Guardian*, *Yorkshire Post* and *Leeds Intelligencer*

Unionists/Conservatives, who won Central, North and North East in every election and by-election until 1924. In 1923 and 1924 Labour and Unionist/Conservative shared the city with three divisions each, with Liberals relegated to also-rans in most divisions. Some divisions were so poorly organised that in some cases a Liberal didn't run at all.

Table 2 – Outcomes of General Elections on Leeds Divisions 1918-1929<sup>60</sup>

Constituency	1918	1922	1923	1924	1929
Central	COA. LIBERAL	UNIONIST	UNIONIST	UNIONIST	LABOUR
North	COA. LIBERAL	UNIONIST	UNIONIST	UNIONIST	UNIONIST/ CONSERVATIVE
North East	COA. UNIONIST	UNIONIST	UNIONIST	UNIONIST	UNIONIST/ CONSERVATIVE
South	COA. LIBERAL	LABOUR	LABOUR	LABOUR	LABOUR
South East	LABOUR	LABOUR	LABOUR	LABOUR	LABOUR
West	COA. LIBERAL	NATIONAL LIBERAL	LABOUR	LABOUR	LABOUR

This thesis contends that between 1918 and 1924 the party organisations at regional and local level were key to strategy and organisational adaptation, and that the national level strategists were struggling to keep up. For instance, one of the reasons behind the Liberal collapse in Leeds and nationally may be understood better from an organisational perspective, particularly the dispute between party agents and central office. Though there are few surviving records for the Liberal associations and party organisation in Leeds, a lucrative seam of archival resources was uncovered in the West Yorkshire Archives relating to the national organisation of the Society of Certified and Associated Liberal Agents from 1916- 1925, which led the research into the sometimes intensely debated issue of Liberal failure in the period.

<sup>60</sup> Compiled from Morrison's *Leeds Blue Book and City Record 1917-1930*

This debate is still to a degree dominated by reflections of the national split between Lloyd George and Asquith from 1916 to 1923, by which time the party had been surpassed by its rivals. However, in this research the immediate cause of the decline after the 1918 Act can be seen to be much more of an operational issue, the longstanding dispute between the party and its professional agents about remuneration and superannuation between 1916 and 1920 being a massive distraction from the work to be done - committee meetings of SCALA being dominated by this issue rather than their need to discuss the implications of the new franchise. With a large group of well-trained professional agents, SCALA, Society of Certified and Associated Liberal Agents, the Liberal Party would have seemed to be most fitted for the new franchise. They had been the party of government nationally and dominated Leeds politics holding four of the five Leeds parliamentary elections since 1906. However, a long running internal dispute between central office and the Liberal agents and the divisions in the party between the Lloyd George and Asquith sections reverberated through the organisation and stymied its attempts at reformation for the crucial six-year period immediately after the franchise extension. Freeman reports Asquith's frustration with his associations at national and local level, describing them as, 'with one or two exceptions, a simple-minded and dunder-headed lot, with no experience of politics, and a plentiful supply of ingenuous vanity'<sup>61</sup>

This assessment had some validity, but in other ways was ignorant of some efforts made by the agents to cope with change, and insensitive to the challenges facing the party organisers. For the Liberals, having been dominant in Leeds and elsewhere before the war, they now had to adjust their tactics. Adapting meant essentially throwing a successful formula away and required innovation and imagination to engage with the new environment. Agents and organisers lamented the straightforward, well-practiced methodology of registration,

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<sup>61</sup> Freeman, G. (2018), 'The Liberal Party', p.51

canvassing and the courts, where expunging 200 names from a register could eradicate the opposition challenge for that election cycle.<sup>62</sup>

There were few unknown knowns in the old system and complacency had set in, which meant resistance to the new system amongst Liberal agents and party organisers. One discussion at the 1919 SCALA AGM discussed the following approaches to the new challenge, and responses. The tone is as telling as the content, '(1) the complete canvas - impracticable...unreliable; (3) tracing removals - waste of energy; (5) sending of Election addresses to individual voters - too expensive and unnecessary; (6) printed leaflets - needless extravagance; newly-enfranchised women - in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred vote the same way as their husbands.' There was a call for '(9) some suggestions for dealing with the new conditions' but this was after dismissing just about every tried and tested method in points 1-8.<sup>63</sup> Freeman reflects on this lack of certainty of direction, 'At the same time, given the increased franchise, Liberal constituency agents were wondering whether canvassing was outdated. Crucially, there was no equivalent attempt at reorganisation from the Liberal Party.'<sup>64</sup>

The organ set up for Liberal agents to share their experiences, the imaginatively titled *Liberal Agent*, was more reflective of the discord between agents and the party, but also of the intra-party rivalry between the 'treacherous' agents' of the Lloyd George Liberals and the Asquithians. The feigned re-unification of the party at the national level was certainly not mirrored in the ranks of the party's agents. As early as 1921 HC Rivers Hon. Sec. for SCALA had written a letter to Sir Henry Paget-Cooke central office about the discord between official Free Liberal agents numbering 360 and 'a score or two who are known as Coalition Liberals...working actively against the Free Liberals...working hand in glove with our hereditary opponents the Tories.' He wanted to know if these agents could be expelled.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Rix K, (2016) *Parties, Agents and Electoral Culture in England, 1880–1910*. Woodbridge: Boydell Press for the Royal Historical Society

<sup>63</sup> Society of Certified and Associated Liberal Agents (SCALA) AGM 1919

<sup>64</sup> Freeman G. (2018), 'The Liberal Party', p.54

<sup>65</sup> HC Rivers Hon. Sec. for SCALA had written a letter to Sir Henry Paget-Cooke

Of the three parties, they were the one most harmfully affected by the redistribution, and the blame game and discord within the party did not help. As a SCALA letter from Chair J. Manus to all agents in December 1922 outlines, agents had been blamed for the election failure in that year, 'it is not unusual for scapegoats to be searched for and it is sometimes suggested that the Agents did not pull their weight.'<sup>66</sup> Infighting and recriminations, the superannuation and remuneration dispute and the Lloyd George/Asquith split all contributed to Liberal organisations being distracted and disjointed.

The fact that the Lloyd George Fund was not at the disposal of the constituency associations and the party was hard pressed for cash to run its operations was another reason for failure.<sup>67</sup>

Probably most telling though was the lack of consultation of the party apparatchik with the party apparatus. A SCALA conference report in July 1923 regretted the lack of internal networks for policy discussion, 'They (leadership) do not seek our voice in directing policy or informing programmes.' The Agents were eager to contribute their 'expert opinion' as they were 'in contact with the people, not only with the members and associations but with the electors generally.'<sup>68</sup> This was July 1923, nearly five years after the enfranchisement and the Liberal hierarchy were remote from the public who they claimed to represent and even from their own agents, who were clearly keen to advance the cause of Liberalism.

There was another serious impediment for the Liberals. Many authors correctly observe the inherent benefit to the Unionists of the newly written boundaries of 1917, this extra boost came from the creation of about 37 new seats within their own pre-existing suburban strongholds around London and Birmingham in particular. Here, massive pre-war constituencies, overblown with voters due to Victorian and Edwardian suburbanisation, were broken down into several new constituencies as a result of the long overdue Boundaries Commission report. Organisationally, what favoured the Unionists here was that many organisations in large

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<sup>66</sup> Chair J. Manus to all agents in December 1922

<sup>67</sup> SCALA Conference Report 1923

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

constituencies were fairly well adjusted to a massive electorate before the Act of 1918, some Tory Borough seats being 50000+, and also that when the new seats were created from these areas, a branch would have to expand or split to cover the new districts but would have the organisational structure in place.

The Liberals had been the natural party of government in the 19<sup>th</sup> century precisely because they had been able to adapt to their agenda and at times their personnel to the extant threats of the three reform acts of 1832, 1867 and 1885. That their organisation was unfit for the post-war period has been put down to their split, but since the Coalition Liberals and Liberals stood in over 420 seats in 1918, 489 seats in 1922 as National Liberals and Liberals (7 more than the Unionists), 457 seats in 1923 as a combined Lloyd George/ Asquith Liberal Party, (30 more than Labour) and only in 1924 under Asquith did Liberals field fewer than both of the other parties at 339 candidates of whom 299 were unsuccessful. This is a little misleading as Liberals did stand against each other in some three and four-way contests in 1918 and 1922, but the fact that the party was split and that two Liberal parties could field so many candidates suggests that the organisation was not impossibly irreparable in this period.<sup>69</sup>

The 1922 General Election results in the Leeds divisions showed that support for Liberalism was strong and high, it was just split between two Liberal parties. National Liberals polled 22,943 votes and Asquith Liberals 32,761, together eclipsing the Unionist vote of only 40,231. Yet their dissipated strength led to the ironic outcome, they lost two seats, Central and North to the Unionists and one, South division to Labour. Labour topped the overall poll that year with 59,578 votes.<sup>70</sup>

The Liberals were eager to revisit old glories but did not have the working machinery to do so. This was mirrored in Leeds politics. By 1918 Labour had stolen the social policy and union vote the Liberals had been the beneficiaries of until the war, and the Unionists won the women's vote in suburbia and even the slums of Central Division. Ultimately, as Freeman

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<sup>69</sup> Freeman, G. (2018), 'The Liberal Party', p.47

<sup>70</sup> *Yorkshire Evening Post* 17<sup>th</sup> November 1922

tellingly observes, 'crucial time was wasted while politics was in flux... by the Liberal leadership.'<sup>71</sup> Discord with and the disorganisation of Liberal agents could have been dealt with better, the bitter dispute with Lloyd-George could have been handled better and Asquith could have taken a much more positive view towards the women in the new electorate.

How did the Unionists turn this Liberal implosion to their advantage? David Jarvis explains that their willingness to learn the lessons the new electorate were 'teaching' the Unionists locally and nationally was essential to their success. As Jarvis explains 'the party sought to develop its electoral constituency in the light of social and political change...in practice to acknowledge the reality of class alignment in politics, and so to develop their own ideas about political socialization'<sup>72</sup>

A lot of the motivation and engagement of the successful line of 1924 policy can be traced back to Yorkshire and even Leeds Unionist Federation and long-term efforts, dating back to 1917 and 1918 to engage with the male working classes and female middle and working classes. Even in 1917 the Leeds Unionist Central Committee were discussing the potential and pitfalls of the new franchise and boundaries and creating contingencies for the possible outcomes of the reforms. The Council of the Unionist Yorkshire Division showed a similar willingness as early as 1917. During the final stages of the writing of the Franchise Bill, their November Council meeting agreed that party policy 'party policy (should be) broadened and made more comprehensive (towards) meeting the legitimate demands of labour.'<sup>74</sup> They felt that there was no time to spare on the women question, 'women's associations should be formed at once...and women('s) representation on our committees.'<sup>75</sup>

The Unionist associations and organisations, and their list of agents had been decimated by war, a long roll call of the fallen was produced at the 1919 annual conference of the Yorkshire Federation and the rebuilding efforts were required immediately, perhaps because of this tried

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<sup>71</sup> Freeman G. (2018), 'The Liberal Party' p62

<sup>72</sup> Jarvis D. (1996) 'British Conservatism' p64

<sup>74</sup> YDONUA 8 Nov 1917

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

and tested methods under the old franchise regimen could be abandoned and more flexible new approaches taken.<sup>76</sup> Engagement with the British Workers League from 1918 and the massive efforts placed into the development, integration and elevation of women within the organisation (though there were scant few opportunities for women to stand as candidates) reflected the advanced initiatives the party had developed regionally.

The Yorkshire Unionist Federation AGM of 1920 reacted to a call by the National Executive for a 'women's committee composed of the wives of MPs in each area' with derision 'in the case of Yorkshire where a (women's) Federation already exists which more than covers the requirements outlined in the suggested scheme.'<sup>77</sup> In 1922 a resolution was passed at the Yorkshire Federation AGM recognising the lack of leadership of 'our leaders in London' and to get 'some idea what was to be the policy of our party in the future.'<sup>78</sup>

By 1922 Yorkshire may have been a proudly self-professing bellwether of Tory progress but they had had to build from a battered machinery in 1918. In the immediate post-war period Yorkshire Unionists suffered a scarcity of funds and had only 36 full-time agents for the 57 Yorkshire divisions,<sup>79</sup> but by 1923 they were even confident enough to canvass previously untapped mining areas, 'to combat the propaganda of the South Yorkshire Miners Federation.'<sup>80</sup> Indeed, throughout the period the Unionists were locally, regionally and sometimes, stutteringly, nationally, framing an agenda that could find a broad base of support amongst the new and old electorates, and though in Leeds they did not always proffer candidates for all divisions, they calculated success and protected funds for more winnable contests. For instance, not until 1929 did the Unionists bother to contest the predominantly Irish Catholic and heavily unionised South East Division.

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<sup>76</sup> Close D, (1973) 'Conservatives and Coalition after the First World War', *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol 45, No.2, pp.240-260

<sup>77</sup> Yorkshire Division of the National Unionist Association AGM 1920

<sup>78</sup> YDONUA AGM 1922

<sup>79</sup> YDONUA Annual Report 1920

<sup>80</sup> YDONUA 20 November 1923



By 1924, the Unionist Party had begun to adapt to the post-war voter, recognise their own failings from previous election failure, identify the fragmented nature of the electorate, and employ a raft of different techniques to try and engage with the new politics. Freeman outlines the differences between the two established parties,

The Unionist Party responded to the 1918 franchise by relaunching their junior movement and founding organisations for women and trade unionists to try and attract some of the new voters ... while the Unionists were adapting their party structure to the changes brought by the 1918 Reform Act, the Liberals were paralysed due to division and the fear of widening that division further.<sup>81</sup>

Meanwhile, having concentrated on the development of its municipal organisations in the pre-war period Labour had developed machinery to cope with the demands of ward level rather than constituency level issues like canvassing. Labour fielded 361 parliamentary candidates in 1918, 414 in 1922, 427 in 1923 and 514 in 1924. Michael Kinnear explains Labour's strategy, 'after 1922, the Labour Party's organisation continued to spread, so that by mid-1923 it was organised in 597 of the 603 English, Welsh, and Scottish constituencies.'<sup>82</sup> Labour built their organisations before they stood their candidates, conserving funds and planning strategies into the process. In the redistribution it was easier for Labour to adapt than the Liberals, the breaking up or dissolution of the old divisions was a phenomenon that the Liberal's division level organisations and committees were ill-prepared for. It was easier to expand or merge ward level organisation into division level as Labour did, than re-form committees to mirror the new boundaries.

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<sup>81</sup> Freeman G. (2018) 'The Liberal Party', p.54

<sup>82</sup> Kinnear, M. (1968) *The British Voter: An Atlas and Survey since 1885* 40–4; p72

Duncan Tanner observes that Labour had been more prescient than their rivals, and had begun its re-organisation under Arthur Henderson at party headquarters as soon as word was out that electoral reform was possible in the post-war period. In January 1918 Henderson stated,

...it was felt very strongly that our machinery should be adapted so as to bring into the ranks of the Party those large sections of the public, who for various reasons, have neither the necessity or opportunity of joining trade unions on the one hand, or, on the other, who are not prepared to associate with the Socialist organisations already affiliated with the Party.<sup>83</sup>

Labour, the new party of progressivism gained seats, faltering at times, though it was in a gradual upwards flow. Labour, was not always united in its approach. This split was between predominantly liberal minded organisers nationally and officers in the constituencies, and the trade unionists who were more akin to socialist, even Marxist, doctrine.

In the early post-1918 period increases in Labour politics and membership largely lay with union expansion and activity, especially during the war, and the miners' federation in particular was successful in getting candidates elected to office at Westminster. Labour's cause was helped markedly by the growth of Trades Union membership during the previous two decades as over 200 unions and friendly societies, including the Co-operative Society, were affiliated to the party and paid dues to the party funds. In the year of formation of the party, 1900, there were 1,971,923 union members and by 1918, 6,624,000.<sup>84</sup> This threefold increase did not immediately transmit to the ballot box, all union members were not Labour voters by any means, but it boosted the funding, and the engagement with workers to pass on propaganda and more than a million men and women were jointly union members and party members.

Tanner suggests that Labour were reliant on the unions,

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<sup>83</sup> Tanner, D. (1983), 'The Parliamentary Electoral System, the "Fourth" Reform Act and the Rise of Labour in England and Wales', *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, lvi 205–19

<sup>84</sup> Peoples Yearbook (Labour Publication) 1919

Part of the trade union movement's enhanced financial reserves was spent in backing union members as parliamentary candidates. The unions' political funds rose from £37,999 in 1913 to £133,000 in 1918, and then to £185,000 in 1920. The Miners' Federation of Great Britain funded 51 candidates in the 1918 general election'<sup>85</sup>

Much of Labour's success was in spite of a negative press environment. The high circulation press was more or less Unionist, excepting the *Leeds Mercury* locally and *Manchester Guardian* nationally which were Liberal oriented, and so it was Labour who had the most deleterious atmosphere to work in.<sup>86</sup> Opponents made much of the many union leaders in parliament, and Liberal and Unionist local party organisers and ancillary groups formed formal and informal anti-socialist alliances to combat potential labour victories. Labour did not have the core of millions of pre-war voters that the Liberals did, they were building from near scratch. Labour readily admitted that the female vote, even amongst working class women, was predominantly Unionist. They had pushed for the enfranchisement of 21-29-year-old women before 1918 as they expected her to be more radical than her 30-year-old counterpart. They continually pushed amendments and an Equal Franchise Bill from 1919 onwards to this end and by 1929 the policy paid dividends.

Whilst Liberals had SCALA, the organisation for professional Liberal agents, who were paid and pensioned, the Labour Party was taking a piecemeal approach to the retention of professionals to do this now very complex job. Leeds Central were even in dispute about the efficacy of the role as a part-time occupation, and proposed the use of sub-committees to handle the work of the agent. Prompted by the defeat of Central Division candidate HH Slesser in the 1922 general election they ultimately settled on £40 per annum part time role with Mr Barton as their new agent.<sup>87</sup> When reviewing Barton's role from his reports, it becomes obvious from the variation in responsibilities and the need to be flexible and take the initiative that only paid agents could effectively fulfil the agent's duties. Where once the work of the

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<sup>85</sup> Tanner, D. (1983), 'The Parliamentary Electoral System', p210

<sup>86</sup> Wrigley, C. (2018) 'The Labour Party' pp64-80

<sup>87</sup> Central Division of the Leeds Labour Party Executive Committee Minute-book January 14<sup>th</sup> 1923

Victorian agent was mostly maintaining a register and disputing registrations through the courts, the new agent had this requirement along with a range of other responsibilities. The agent was a liaison between his own division and local, regional and national committees, delivering a monthly and bi-annual report, monitoring the party financial statement, canvassing, recruiting members. In 1922-23 there were 257 new members to the Central Division Labour Party, raising of funds, and election strategy.<sup>88</sup> This was a full-time job and deserved a decent wage.

Therefore, in response to the franchise extensions, some manner of change was happening in Labour organisational structures generally, with the need to professionalize the party especially in its engagement in electoral politics through professional agents. In Leeds this adaptation proved so successful that having been in third place in terms of overall Leeds vote in 1918 they celebrated the general election victories in three divisions and the Labour poll of 60,000 votes across Leeds in the election as compared to 58000 and 34000 for the Unionists and Liberals respectively.<sup>89</sup> This increased to 68000 in the following election.

This progress of Labour in replacing the Liberals as the party of progressivism in Leeds and beyond was not short of setbacks. Like the Lloyd George debacle in the Liberal Party, Labour were split over how to deal with a demon of their own. The National Executive Committee had decided against the affiliation of the Communist Party of Great Britain to the Labour organisation, despite the knowledge that some even amongst the Labour MPs were sympathetic. Even so, that the party conference and Leeds City Labour Party had expelled CPGB members did not mean that the issue was sealed. It was debated lengthily in the Leeds Central Division Committee and a vote December 1923 was carried against affiliation by the narrow margin of 46 to 40.<sup>90</sup> Labour's attempt to distance itself from communism was therefore not necessarily a priority locally that it was nationally. Although Henderson was probably the

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid. August 1923

<sup>89</sup> December 1923 Letter from Central Division of the Leeds Labour Party Executive Committee

<sup>90</sup> City of Leeds Labour Party Minutes of the General Committee (May 24 1923)

most influential of national party organisers, he could not dictate policy to all Labour party division organisations.

There were new divisions, enormous numbers and the need for organisational change, and the most successful proponents of the 'party adaptation' to the new electorate and boundary conditions had been the Unionists. As speaker J. Ellison Haggas discussed at a Unionist Meeting as early as 1917 'Party policy should be broadened and made more comprehensive...meeting the legitimate demands of labour.'<sup>91</sup> At this the Tories became adept. As Stuart Ball explains, 'During the following decade, the Unionist Party made substantial efforts to reach the female, younger, and working-class voters...it was reassured by electoral success, and especially support from women'<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Yorkshire Division of the National Unionist Association 8 Nov 1917

<sup>92</sup> Ball, S. (2018), 'The Unionist Party', p23

## Chapter Four

### **New women, new men and the need for new attitudes**

This chapter builds on the discussion of the previous chapter on the organisational adaptation of the main parties to look specifically at the reaction of the parties to the new female and male voters of 1918-1924. It is often forgotten in the hubris of the debate about women's suffrage that, along with 8 million women, around 6 million men were enfranchised in 1918. According to Tanner this represented in the region of 5 million working class men and  $\frac{3}{4}$  to a million middle class men who had previously been excluded as a result of age or property conditions. The gender debate in voting reform should therefore be as much a debate about the male vote as the female vote and the second part of this chapter addresses the issue of the engagement of newly enfranchised men in politics.

As has been discussed above, this massive increase in the number of voters required a multi-level organisational response and a re-framing of the party message for the diverse new voting public. Parties had to adapt to new types and classes of voters, amongst them working-class women, non-unionised working-class men, and live at home middle-class man. To engage this new public and maintain their current core vote was an intense challenge and perhaps because they were the party of government before the war, the Liberals were most resistant at the organisational level to these changes. They were particularly late in appealing to women, and never really recovered from this. As discussed in the previous chapter, if the Liberals had been organisationally disrupted at the local and regional level by the SCALA dispute, then the direction at national level would have to be perfect and especially sensitive to women. Unfortunately, Asquith's attitude to women voters was little less than appalling. The way in which Asquith blamed 'these damned women voters' for the party's defeat in the Spen Valley by-election of December 1919 helps to explain why he was not able to provide more effective leadership to help the Liberals reach these newly-enfranchised voters. Similarly,

during his own by-election campaign for Paisley in 1920, he described the approximately 15,000 women on the electoral register as

a dim, impenetrable, for the most part ungettable, element – of whom all that one knows is that they are for the most part hopelessly ignorant of politics, credulous to the last degree, and flickering with gusts of sentiment like a candle in the wind.<sup>93</sup>

Asquith's comment was both a reference to the female vote, and also the passing of the 'rowdiness' and 'macho' politics of the past amongst male voters. As Freeman observes, 'One possible explanation for the Liberals losing their populist edge was of how dismissive some of them were towards the new electorate, as Liberal constituency agents commented on their 'neurotic and butterfly minds.'<sup>94</sup>

Indeed, on the women's vote, the penny only dropped for the Liberals too late. SCALA's AGM of 1923 was for the first time discussing 'the establishment of women's Liberal Associations,' and some divisions still did not have women's sections as late as 1924. Though the Liberals won 37% of the female vote in 1923 this had been the 'housewife's rebellion' regarding the Unionist split over tariff's which brought down Baldwin's 1922 government. However, the sluggishness in creating women's committees and shaping female-friendly policies meant that the party organisation was behind the new wave and there was a lack of organisational strength or coherence in the party to maintain the female interest of 1923. In 1922, the Leeds Liberal Party organisers had been ahead of their national counterparts in promoting the candidature of Leeds first ever female parliamentary candidate, Mary Pollock Grant, a fascinating personality who had been a mission teacher in India, a policewoman and an active suffragist.<sup>95</sup> The South East division that year saw a struggle between a Scots daughter of the Manse and an Irish Catholic in James O'Grady. Of all of his challengers after 1918 she came closest to toppling 'Big Jim', but he still managed a 4,100 majority.

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<sup>93</sup> Freeman, G. (2018), *The Liberal Party and the Impact of the 1918 Reform Act* p54

<sup>94</sup> Ibid. pp51-52

<sup>95</sup> See Appendix 3

Labour's attitude to women was more successful, though they did not have a perfect record nor did they choose significant numbers of female candidates during the period, and despite overall party success at the polls, the organisation's practical integration of women's sections had a challenging path. Their problems were two-fold. Women's sections had been in existence before the war but the female franchise now added import to their role. They were no longer just another unit pulling in the same direction as the rest of the party, they were still advocating Labour's cause, but also the cause of women, and the cause of women within the Labour Party. The women's sections celebrated circa 150,000 members in 1923<sup>96</sup> and 'The Peoples Yearbook' of 1920 had carried figures of 2.2 million women union members. However, as the strength of the women's organisations was rising the number of women candidates for Parliament remained abysmal. 14 women of 414 candidates stood in 1922 and 14 of 427 in 1923. Most were in unwinnable seats, though in 1923 there were three victories for women. The Labour Party Executive had few women members and at local and regional level the response to selecting women candidates had been fractured and contentious.

The 'Report of the Organisation of Women within the Labour Party', an annual publication, reflected these disputes. In 1920 they reported that though there had been an increase in women candidates for municipal seats, 'it has to be regretted that every local Labour Party has not endeavoured to place women amongst its candidates.'<sup>97</sup> Even by 1924 a similar refrain could be heard from the same publication regretting the fact that 'there are still places where women's sections with their own officers and meetings have not been developed.'<sup>98</sup> Two years later, the Labour Women's Central Committee Report (1926) reflected that in Yorkshire the organisation of women's committees was strong in Leeds and Sheffield but weak in other areas.<sup>99</sup> The Advisory Council of Labour Women (West Riding of Yorkshire) published a statement of intent in their 1923 Constitution that each women's section should be allowed

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<sup>96</sup> Report of the work of the Labour Party in Women's Interests at Home and Abroad May to April 1923-24

<sup>97</sup> Report of the Organisation of Women within the Labour Party 1920

<sup>98</sup> Report of the Organisation of Women within the Labour Party 1925

<sup>99</sup> Labour Women's Central Committee Report (1926)



one representative at conferences. A letter from Arthur Henderson a year earlier had confirmed that the Labour Party Executive, not the women's section SJC, was responsible for the organisation of the Annual Conference of Labour Women and this tended to prove that the women's section was seen as a tool of the national party rather than having its own independent value.<sup>100</sup>

The second major challenge for Labour women's sections was that the 1918 Act created an electoral environment which was not instantly conducive to a Labour agenda. Irrespective of burgeoning female membership of the women's sections or the unions, the exclusion of women under 30 (about 6m) and, due to the property qualification for women, even over 30 (about 1.2m) meant that the more radical younger female was excluded from voting. To this end the party and the women's section were adamant that an amendment to the 1918 act or a new act must be delivered to correct the disenfranchisements.

The *Labour Woman* magazine produced by the committee and edited by Dr Marion Phillips chair of the Women's Labour League was aware of the compromise which had to be made in promoting the cause of female integration into the political debate. Phillips was DSc (Econ) from the London School of Economics and at the sharp end of the policy debates of the national party, but the election propaganda aimed at women and much content of the *Labour Woman* revolved around the 'women's issues' of health, children, education and food. In some part because of this emphasis, and the work of Philips and the Women's Committees these became key election winning issues by 1924.<sup>102</sup>

Phillips letter in 1920 recognised the need for the political education of women, 'amongst present women voters so many have not taken part in politics before' but also the need to focus largely on 'those questions bearing especially upon the women's position'.<sup>103</sup> More than capable of engaging in high level debate, Phillips measured the content of Labour women's

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<sup>100</sup> Advisory Council of Labour Women, West Riding of Yorkshire letter Jan 1922

<sup>102</sup> See Appendix 8.

<sup>103</sup> Report of the work of the Labour Party in Women's Interests at Home and Abroad 1919-20

sections publications and the *Labour Woman* with the political realities of the female electorate. Specific reference in some reports that special appeal needed to be made to the 'home-maker'<sup>104</sup> and pamphlets created by women's sections on children, widowed mothers and health issues reflected the fact that Phillips resisted pressure for more ideological content from the women's sections.<sup>105</sup> For instance, with a pragmatic eye on electoral relevance, Phillips upset some women activists by strongly opposing committing Labour to promoting birth control in the 1920s. She was concerned that it would lose votes from the Roman Catholic working-class. This would have been telling in Leeds as the SE Division was regularly carried for Labour by the Irish Catholic vote. Phillips realistic leadership did much to maintain a segment of the female vote, though did little to increase it.

It becomes very clear through the minutes of committees at Leeds level that Labour women existed on equal terms to men in shouldering the burden of work and initiative in shaping the agenda and operations of the local party. There were 508 women members, six Labour women's sections and Labour women sat on several public bodies, Boards of Guardians and Leeds City Council. Miss Adams (forename not used) was a key unifying force across Leeds through her work as Leeds City Labour Party co-ordinator and her name appears frequently in City and Central Division minutes. Essential to the functioning of Central Division Party was committee member Mrs Lenora Cohen, who appears frequently as contributor to meetings, financial support for the party (the division was usually in debt to her to the tune of £30), and on one occasion as an outcast, having supported an unofficial socialist candidate in a local election. She was re-admitted by a unanimous vote of the membership reflecting her popularity in the division. With regards to women Labour was beginning to harness their skills, respect their contribution and, to a limited degree, though more so than the other parties, promote them as candidates. Labour was more liberal for women, albeit within a frame of reference where the party was still discriminating between 'women's issues' and those of men.

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<sup>104</sup> Report of the work of the Labour Party in Women's Interests at Home and Abroad 1919-20 1922-23

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 1923-24

From a Unionist perspective, by 1924 the women's vote had become a staple and as will be discussed below, Unionist associations were rigorous in their pursuit and retention of the female vote. Only in 1923 were there criticisms of women voters for failing to vote, and this only from a few in Unionist central office, elsewhere there was much fanfare for their organisational skill in associations, and engagement, high turnout and political savvy in elections. Women organisers were particularly significant in Tory successes, the AGM of the Yorkshire Unionist Federation reporting in 1922, that the election was carried by,

the great enthusiasm at the time of the actual campaign for which the women were largely responsible...succeeding in the great task of organising and interesting the women electors...several MP's attributed their success to the highly creditable efforts of the women, who welcomed this opportunity of testing the machinery they have been steadily constructing.<sup>106</sup>

Reflecting on their importance, the Unionists supported a regional magazine specifically aimed at the woman voter. The *Conservative Woman* magazine, ran from February 1921 and was a very cleverly tailored and professional publication with a clear focus on politics, specifically women in politics and profiles of the Leeds Unionist MP's and candidates.<sup>107</sup> One edition from August 1922 carried articles on 'Conservative Women and Propaganda', 'Ward News', 'Leeds City Council; a woman's point of view' and only had one short section monthly entitled 'Matters pertaining to the home' which covered stereotypical 'women's' issues. It was a focal point for women organisers and gave advice on electoral strategy, canvassing, forming associations and in this respect, it was not like the other Unionist women's magazine, *Home and Politics*, which David Jarvis covers extensively in his 1994 article, but far more politicised.<sup>108</sup> It formed

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<sup>106</sup> AGM of the Yorkshire Unionist Federation reporting in 1922, the admiration for Unionist women was shared by the party's newspapers, see Appendix 4 and 5

<sup>107</sup> *Conservative Woman* No.19 August 1922

<sup>108</sup> Jarvis, D (1994) 'Mrs Maggs and Betty: The Conservative Appeal to Women Voters in the 1920s, *Twentieth Century British History*, 5(2), pp.129–52

an essential bridge between the Federations, local organisations and women's committees and the Unionist candidates.

If there seems to be excessive coverage in this essay of women amongst the new voter as the focus of the attention of the parties, it is not due to an omission of young males over 21, but a reflection of the general approach and attitude of the parties to this group.

There is very little content at all from the Leeds and Yorkshire party organisations in consideration of the young male voting public as a category of voter to be approached with a specific policy framework, if approached at all. There was certainly activity in the parties towards youth development. The Yorkshire Liberals circa 1923 began to stress the importance of attracting young liberals and Labour Women's Conference of May 1923 passed a resolution 'Education for Peace' demanding 'the NEC will give consideration for the formation of something similar to the Boy Scouts and Girl Guides...which shall have definite pacifist influence'.<sup>109</sup> The follow up to this from the National Executive in 1924 saw circulars to constituency organisations urging the creation of 'Young Peoples Sections' with 150 having successfully been created by 1925, although there are no figures for membership in the reports.<sup>110</sup> Still, however, with these organisations focussing specifically on youth, the male vote after 1918 was still untapped.

Working with Tanner's assumptions, five million of the enfranchised men of 1918 were working-class. The working-class male vote was unpredictable, and sometimes indolent. However, by 1924 it must have been active to some degree since 15 856 215 people voted in the 1924 general election. This was 4.7 million shy of a full turnout. With about 7 million working class men on the register, at least a few million of the new male voters must have been engaged in politics that year, even in a limited way. Some commentators put this down to a shift in British political culture stemming from the enfranchisements of 1918. Whereas pre-

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<sup>109</sup> Labour Women's Conference of May 1923

<sup>110</sup> Report of the work of the Labour Party in Women's Interests at Home and Abroad 1924-25

war elections had been highly charged rough and tumble affairs with the non-voting public, especially young men, being engaged in the process through attendance at mass meetings, often testing the candidates resolve through heckling and taunting, the post-war atmosphere of the public meeting was staid, civilised and often exclusive.

According to Lawrence, the conduct of the public in elections differed significantly in the pre- and post-war periods so much that the election process before the war was, ironically, more dynamic and democratic than the process after the war. The election processes, the public meetings, 'hustings', the 'rolling' polling days which allowed for the parties to distribute their keynote speakers to support local candidates on local issues on the night of an election, became a minor part of, by 1924 in particular, a more machined, mass market, media driven politics rooted in the national agenda and increasingly in the national press.<sup>111</sup>

Prior to the war, and the franchise extension, rowdy behaviour and even outright violence between rival supporters at campaign meetings was seen as a normal part of the democratic expression of the public, mostly the non-voting sections were involved in the heckling, 'ragging' and even 'mobbing' of candidates, but this was placed by the political elite as a demonstration of a healthy polity, and since it was one of the few opportunities for the non-voting public to express their annoyance at, or support for, a candidate, it was cathartic process to purge aggression which could otherwise spill over into more serious action against the *status quo*. Election agents wrote manuals for candidates on how to deal with disruption and many saw the campaign melee as a 'useful test of a politician's character'<sup>112</sup>

With the enfranchisement of the mass of adult males, that group which would have been the 'rowdies' before the war, were now formal participants in the system and as such, just as critics of the mob had stated before the war, should now take on the mantle of the serious elector, they should now be the 'quiet citizens who had come to listen,'<sup>114</sup> since they now had a stake

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<sup>111</sup> Lawrence, J. & Taylor, M. (1997) *Party, State and Society*

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.* p188

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.* p191

in the system. Perhaps this transition to a sedate mind-set from the previous maelstrom of activity during election times was what meant that the engagement of young working-class males in particular between 1918 to 1923 was minimal, a 'Dead Sea of stagnation' according to some contemporary commentators.<sup>115</sup> When election disruption was seen again in pockets rather than as the norm, it was now seen as unconstitutional and even the sinister and deliberate act provoked by an opposition party or extra-parliamentary groups, usually Labour, to challenge not just the candidate in question but to undermine the entire system.

Particular emphasis was made in the anti-socialist press to make all incidences of rowdyism appear as an attack on the system by the left of the Labour movement. In 1923 and 1924 in particular the Yorkshire and Leeds papers were riddled with the slightest hint of election disruption being labelled as Bolshevik rowdyism.<sup>116</sup> By 1924 all parties settled on the perspective that the 'true public' were the 'very antithesis' of the types who would take part in the 'rowdy public meeting' and that a party complicit in arranging disorder 'would pay dearly at the polls.'<sup>117</sup> Lawrence's conviction is that the transformation was complete with a concerted official Unionist policy against 'Labour rowdyism' in 1924, conflating this activity with 'Bolshevik methods in English politics... terrorism...based on the Russian model' was augmented by the Zinoviev letter 'affair' to create a 'red scare' with British constitutionalism the victim of the demonic socialists.<sup>118</sup> Open meetings in public spaces now became a thing of the past with only isolated incidents being reported. Labour leaders realised the damage to their reputation that 'noisy politics' would entail. As a consequence, 'politicians went to unparalleled lengths to control their supporters' behaviour at public meetings.'<sup>119</sup> This was not just propaganda. Lawrence argues that many Unionists, Baldwin included, feared the masses had been enfranchised too quickly, would be agitated by the glacial pace of change in a democratic

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<sup>115</sup> Lawrence, J. & Taylor, M. (1997) 'Party, State and Society' p.188

<sup>116</sup> *Yorkshire Evening Post* 1 December 1923 'Chivalry of the 'Reds: Woman candidate kicked and spat upon'  
*Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer* 12 December 1924 'Women Rowdies'

<sup>117</sup> Lawrence, J. & Taylor, M. (1997) 'Party, State and Society', p.192

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.* p.191

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.* p.188

society, and follow the revolutionary examples of the Bolsheviks and Spartacists from Russia and Germany. Baldwin stressed that it was imperative that the masses whom the war had 'brutalized' must be civilised in order to impose order on a society and politics in flux.<sup>120</sup>

Labour leaders too felt that violence and disorder would reinforce the prejudices of the middle classes, who, if they were to win an election, Labour would have to get several hundred thousand votes from. Whilst some in the Labour rank and file toyed with Bolshevism, MacDonald wanted to keep any discord under control, the mass media could easily report it in print or newsreel, undoing years of careful cultivation of an image of an unthreatening face for socialism. Again 1924 was to be a crucial moment in this development. The three parties now coalesced around the belief of election disruption as 'mob law' and all 'sought to mould a public politics that would be restrained and rational, rather than noisy and impassioned'<sup>121</sup> If the disappointing election turnouts amongst young men were due to anything, they may have been due to this counter-revolution in political theatre.

As to success, it proved to be enough for the Unionists and Labour to engage the new women and more or less ignore the new men. The Liberals seemed averse to engaging with either. Many party agents and activists may have bemoaned the passing of the old-style politics and criticised the new politics and the feminization of the electorate.

The engagement of the new women and new men of 1918 was therefore a story of two sides. On one side that of concerted efforts, at least by two of the parties, to engage with the massive new female section of the electorate in an unpatronizing and considered manner, identifying segments of this group as suitable for targeted propaganda and by engaging women in the organisation of their parties. The other side, the new men, were much harder to engage. Perhaps politics was too conservative for them now, election campaigns laced with tedious speeches rather than the rabble-rousing and heckling of politicians which characterised the pre-war electoral arena. According to Lawrence, the effectiveness of all three parties in rallying

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<sup>120</sup> Lawrence, J. and Taylor, M. (1997) 'Party, State and Society', p.203

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

the male working-class vote had been limited since the war, and Labour was only a little better at it than the established parties.



## Chapter Five

### The impact of the Press and the Leeds electorate between 1918 and 1924

This chapter reflects on the manner in which the Leeds, regional and nationwide press endeavoured to shape the agenda of the post-war period to promote the philosophies of the parties and politicians they represented, but also, just as the responsive parties had done, how they adapted to the demands of the new environment and trimmed their content and comment to the new conditions of 1918 and beyond. Ultimately, it is argued that from 1918 onwards, the Liberal and Unionist press in Leeds, in the West Yorkshire region and nationally, were consistent in promoting a profoundly anti-socialist narrative and had more impact on shaping the agenda than the parties were able to. Formal anti-socialist alliances by the 'capitalist' parties and standing aside in strategic seats was less of a factor than the encouragement middle-class voters had from the newspapers to vote for the 'anti-socialist', 'anti-Bolshevik' or 'anti-red' candidate. The party that looked most likely to succeed in forming a bulwark against socialism was the Unionists and they found favour with middle-class voters of Leeds and elsewhere, leading to their success locally and nationally.

During the period 1918 to 1924, the circulation of national newspapers doubled as if to emphasize the shift in the nation's consciousness after the franchise extension as well reflecting the manner in which the new voter engaged in politics. Despite the mass enfranchisement, the numbers through the door at public meetings and party membership stayed relatively steady. The new voters were engaged but their medium was impersonal. The introduction of new channels of party propaganda through the radio, cinema and Baldwin's innovative cinema vans, focussed the attention on the national agenda and the party leader. Ball observes that,

'The party's other response to the enlarged electorate was the development of new methods of communication and campaigning to reach a mass audience. More emphasis was placed on propaganda, mainly through leaflets, and the party made its own

propaganda films which were shown around the country by a fleet of cinema vans, which were especially effective in rural areas.<sup>122</sup>

Baldwin's avuncular soliloquys and Labour leader Ramsey MacDonald's striking looks and soft Scots brogue made them ideal for the mass communication age, but Asquith was cast adrift from the new methods of public discourse. Lloyd George was capable in these circumstances, but the reunited Liberal Party had the Edwardian Asquith as its 'leader' and he was unfit for purpose in the new age.

Obviously, the Unionist and Liberal papers were opinionated to a significant degree, and the term socialist was essentially used as a slur to be replaced almost exclusively by the equating of socialism, Labour and Bolshevism as one and the same thing especially after Labour's 1924 dalliance with power and the misguided Soviet loan debacle. Even so, the *Mercury* generally on the Asquithian Liberal side, and the Unionist *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer* and *Yorkshire Evening Post*, were composed without the air of carrying a distinct ideology, making instead commentary and editorial the key areas of their partisan support, with responses in the letters pages often used for the vilification of the supporters of the other parties.

There were still rare cases of generous treatment for some Labour candidates. Captain James O'Grady, serial victor in the South East Division before and after the war, was treated with a degree of respect by the opposition press, with emphasis on his rank and war service. An interview with his daughter in 1924 on the subject of her shopping trip to buy 'pretty dresses' for her journey with father and family to his new post in Tasmania seemed to show that at least one Labour MP was not a rabid Marxist. Affectionately known as 'Big Jim', O'Grady garnered immense all-party respect due to his service to Leeds over the previous decades, and made South East an unwinnable seat for anyone but Labour. The *Manchester Guardian* reported, 'any attempt to oust Mr O'Grady would have been a forlorn hope,'<sup>123</sup> and consequently the

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<sup>122</sup> Ball, S. (2018), 'The Unionist Party' p.37

<sup>123</sup> *Manchester Guardian* 13 October 1924

Liberal and Unionist papers didn't see the point of picking him out. A tremendous amount of goodwill was shown in the Liberal *Manchester Guardian* in 1924 on O'Grady retiring the seat to take up the position of Governor of Tasmania.<sup>124</sup>

Contrast this with the treatment of his replacement, HH Slessor, who had three times been defeated in the difficult Central Division. For the Tory and Liberal press, South East was now a seemingly winnable division in the absence of 'Big Jim' and Slessor was the subject of a campaign of intense maliciousness from the opposition press. That his religious beliefs stemmed from an unusual form of Christian socialism, that he was a pre-war German émigré who had changed his name to a more anglicized version to cloak his German roots, 'Mr Slessor nee Schlosser...the glib-tongued importation'<sup>125</sup> as well as him being Solicitor General of the 'Bolshevik' Labour Government of 1924<sup>126</sup> disposed the media to what was essentially a hate campaign. When Slessor, during an interview in 1924, made comment to voters that returning a Unionist government may amount to bloody revolution by more radical elements of the working classes, the *Post* insinuated that he had threatened revolution, and even fabricated a quote, with the seeming end of misleading readers. They reflected 'Had Sir Henry Slessor said flatly, "If you return a Unionist government we will involve you in bloody revolution," he could not have more definitely conveyed his meaning.'<sup>127</sup>

Despite fabrications and accusations, it was South East Leeds, he was Labour, and so he won the seat. He and Labour chairs and candidates in a Trades and Labour Club meeting in November 1923,<sup>128</sup> had certainly been accurate in decrying this type of personal attack in contributing to his defeat and a clear anti-socialist vote by Liberals in Central Division in 1923. Even the *Yorkshire Evening Post* had admitted that 3,000 Liberals had had to vote Unionist

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<sup>124</sup> *Manchester Guardian* 13 October 1924

<sup>125</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer* 24 July 1922

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.* 20 January 1924 'Zinovieff and Mr McDonald'

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.* 24 October 1924

<sup>128</sup> *Leeds Weekly Citizen* 14 November 1923

for Sir Charles Wilson<sup>129</sup> to be returned with a majority of 1700 votes ahead of Slessor.<sup>130</sup> The presence of formal anti-socialist alliances had been a victim of the end of the coalition and the Liberal split but this had not stopped individual Liberal voters from voting tactically to protect their position in society.

The attacks on Slessor and support for Wilson reflected a trend in the Leeds and Yorkshire Liberal and Tory press. They had quickly adopted a defensive anti-Labour strategy in the new conditions of the mass franchise and used a number of techniques over the 1918-24 period to counter the perceived threat of socialist influence on the working classes. From early association of Labour with pacifism<sup>131</sup> and the Germans being given an easy ride at Versailles to outright accusations of Labour complicity with Russia in 1924, 'the present socialist government...joined hands with aliens, whose known object is to destroy the British Empire,'<sup>132</sup> Leeds papers were inventive in diminishing the Labour Party at all turns. Appealing to patriotism against the Kaiser and Zinoviev was extremely effective in the years where such an obvious opportunity existed but subtler techniques were used effectively in intervening years. They consistently equated Labour with the unions and intellectual elitists<sup>133</sup> and from 1918 to 1922 consistently used these methods of attack, claiming that Labour did not represent the working classes, a creative article in the Post in the run up to the 1922 election,

many union members have to pay for the Labour party through their union funds but ...take good care not to vote for them...in 1918 there were about 6750000 members of trade unions...the votes cast for Labour were 2387208...working men and women are repelled by the "Labour"

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<sup>129</sup> Sir Charles Wilson was a long-standing councillor, council leader and Alderman for the Unionists in Leeds. In this position he was at the forefront of the absorption of several local villages into the Borough of Leeds in the 1900s and aimed for a Leeds from 'Pennines to the Coast' His impact on Leeds politics between the 1890s and 1920s was profound

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer* 16 December 1918 'Pacifist Rout'

<sup>132</sup> Ibid. 28 October 1924

<sup>133</sup> Ibid. 14 December 1918, 'Labour Party that does not represent Labour'

programme and from this it follows that the labour name is a mis-description...which the Socialists outside the British Empire have not indulged.<sup>134</sup>

Labour was therefore a fake cover for a rabidly socialist party and the interchangeability of 'socialist', 'Bolshevik' and 'Red' in the columns of the Tory and Liberal press in Leeds were consistent.<sup>135</sup> Alternatively, labouring people were being manipulated by representatives who were not from their own class background, but 'wirepullers'.<sup>136</sup> These people weren't even socialists or Bolsheviks but career politicians hoping to board the gravy train on the back of working-class voters and empty promises, 'the middle-class adherents of the Labour Party ... with their lack of acquaintance with working-class life and aspirations...their 'smart' sayings modelled on those of Mr Bernard Shaw.'<sup>137</sup>

Strong support for anti-socialist candidates and prominent articles supporting even poorly supported anti-socialist organisations were daily fare in the press. The *Evening Post* ran an article on the activities of the Leeds and District Economic League a devoutly anti-Labour Party organisation it was covered extensively despite its miniscule support. Claiming that 107,000 people had attended its meetings since 1919 seemed to evidence the support for anti-socialism. However, since there had been 962 meetings across Yorkshire during this time the attendances look a little less impressive and the prominence given to any anti-socialist voice in the Tory and Liberal press.<sup>138</sup> By 1923 and in 1924 these papers outwardly promoted tactical voting, the Liberal *Leeds Mercury* and the Unionist *Yorkshire Post* on several occasions in October 1924 supported appeals by candidates and party organisers of both stripes to vote for the other where a socialist candidate is likely to win. The Post of 31 October 1924 warned against 'triangular contests' due to their impact of 'weakening the anti-socialist forces.' Despite the lack 'of a formal truce' the assumption by 1924 became one where each of the anti-socialist parties would promote the candidate most likely to stand longest in the

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<sup>134</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 11 November 1922

<sup>135</sup> Examples of graphic versions of this anti-socialist motif can be seen in Appendix 6 and 7

<sup>136</sup> *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 31 December 1918

<sup>137</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 6 December 1918

<sup>138</sup> *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 24 November 1922

contest. By 1924 some articles did not carry the party affiliation of the candidate. The *Mercury* article merely records Major Whiteley's candidature in SE Division as the anti-Socialist candidate (he was a Liberal) and the intense efforts of the Unionist women's committee in that division in canvassing for him against Slessor. It certainly worked, the *Evening Post* reported 'uncommonly heavy polling in Leeds' and 'anti-socialist parties aroused.'<sup>139</sup>

Where was Labour's response to this? Their media organs, the *Daily Herald* and in Leeds, the *Weekly Citizen* were a constant focus of effort in the party. Meeting after meeting in the Central and City Divisions Minutes, record the drive to 'increase circulation', at one point with Arthur Henderson himself sending out an appeal to branches to make more effort. It was very clear from the text of the papers, especially the *Citizen*, that the target audience for the papers was the already committed Labourite. Couched in class-based language and referring to Tory and Liberals as the 'capitalist parties', the Liberal press as the 'yellow leaflets', the papers were too ideological to attract a general readership. Again, and again at election time Labour reflecting on results identified the impact of the opposition press as an influence in dissuading voters from polling for Labour, and bemoaning the lack of press supporting the Labour cause.<sup>140</sup> But had they adapted the content and language of their own press this would not have been as overwhelming a factor. Labour newspaper editors had as an example the *Labour Woman*, which had been specifically tailored to keep the class-based rhetoric to a minimum in order to engage with a wider public, but some sections of the *Citizen* read as an anti-Liberal satirical magazine, rather than a serious newspaper, and didn't absorb this lesson from the Women's Section.

In Leeds, 1923 marked the demise of the final Liberal MP in the city, when John Murray's seat in Leeds West fell to Labour after polling Liberal since 1885. Nationally, 1924 proved the final moment of Liberal defence. Reflecting the paucity of funds and lack of organisational development since the war, there was a reduction by 118 of the number of Liberals standing

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<sup>139</sup> *Yorkshire Evening Post* 29 October 1924

<sup>140</sup> *Leeds Weekly Citizen* 21 November 1923, 'the press is in the hands of our opponents'

in 1924. 1923 had seen many three-sided contests where the 'capitalist' vote had been split and Labour had won by default but that was rarely the case in 1924, with middle class Liberals polling Unionist to block Labour's progress. The Liberals net loss of seats was the exact same at 118 as the reduction in candidates. There was much delight in Labour ranks at the unlikely demise of the Radical Party. The regular column 'Gadfly' reported in the *Citizen* that Central Leeds Liberalism was 'As Dead as a Dodo' and the Liberals ceased to be an electoral force, roundly vilifying the Liberal 'bourgeoisie' for 'voting Tory in a solid body.'<sup>141</sup> David Jarvis challenges this simplistic narrative of Tory success due to Liberal decline and disloyal voter switching merely in the cause of anti-socialism,

what particularly seems to bedevil the historiography of interwar Conservatism. The implicit assumption that women would locate themselves politically within existing parties parallels the more overt contention that the Unionists would inevitably benefit from the consolidation of anti-socialism in the 1920s once the Liberal Party began its well-analysed decline. In both cases the Unionists appear almost passive beneficiaries of a contest for party support in which voters defined their own political identity in exclusively party terms.<sup>142</sup>

Jarvis is more or less accurate in this analysis. What was remarkable about the Unionists was the reaction to their object lesson of the 1923 failure, when a divided party with a limited platform of reform had failed drastically. The phoenix which rose from the ashes of 1923 was a party driven by Baldwin's languid rhetorical style, a vilification of socialism, Imperial preference and defence to please the patriots, but also a development of earlier 'municipal socialist' Tory policies, with a raft of social, educational and housing policy. The criticism from the press of the Unionist leadership in 1923 had pushed the party into this definitive new identity and the anti-socialist vitriol had a massive impact from 1924 in the Liberal voter

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<sup>141</sup> *Leeds Weekly Citizen* 31 October 1924

<sup>142</sup> Jarvis D (1994) 'Mrs Maggs and Betty', p.132

switching to Unionist candidates. The Tory press had framed the agenda expertly. The Yorkshire and Leeds papers had emphasised that the agenda for change had come from them and the Yorkshire Unionist organisations in support of the demands of the new voters. This and the brief Liberal rebound of 1923 drove the message home, adapt or die. Central Office had listened to the regions and papers who had in turn listened to the electors. This was the epitome of the 'new electoral normalcy'.



## Conclusion

The findings of the previous chapters in this essay have proved instructive in assessing how the main political parties nationally and their associations in Leeds adapted to the new electorate, how the press attempted to shape the political agenda and how this contributed towards a new political *status quo* in the UK and Leeds after 1918 which was distinctly removed from that of the pre-war period. The conclusions of the dissertation have been shaped by the evidence available from the archives of the newspapers, parties and associations of the period and the result is a useful contribution to the understanding of the political scene in Leeds in the 1918 to 1924 period. Also, by uncovering some new material from the period, the SCALA archive relating to the attitudes and activities of Liberal agents in Yorkshire, the research has introduced a new perspective into the debate that George Dangerfield's 'rampant omnibus of war' began in 1935; why did the party of power in 1914 become the forgotten party only a decade later?

It is possible to feel extremely sorry for the demise of Leeds Liberalism and the party nationwide. A series of tsunami's hit the party during the early post-war period, mostly stirred up by tropical storm Lloyd George. The ambition of this brilliant but flawed and self-involved individual, according to Takayanagi, was responsible for the divisions rife in the party. Dangerfield's 'rampant omnibus of war;' had opened the soft underbelly of the party, and rent divisions in its ideological integrity between the pragmatic and demagogic Lloyd George and the bastion of liberal philosophy HH Asquith. The shock of defeats in solid areas of pre-war support like Leeds, the lack of funds because of the split in the party, the Agents dispute and the slow reaction to the realities of the women's vote all weakened the party further.

Asquith had adopted a 'Peoples Budget' style manifesto in 1924, to maintain Liberal principles and still appeal to the working classes. Though short-lived the Labour government of 1924 had been liberal in social, economic and foreign policy right up to the Campbell Case and Soviet Loan and Labour's personnel made them a more authentic choice than the Liberals in

relation to unionised labour. This meant that although the Liberal Party had essentially created the ideas of modern British politics since 1880, their clothes had been stolen by the moderate wing of the Labour Party and the Liberals internal dissonance destroyed their ability to organise effectively in order to challenge Labour again.

Their death had yet another cause, the death of the environment in which their core principles could be put into action. Hart argues that,

the war and its consequences made the Liberals inadequate and lacking in direction...

Liberal division was a reason why the party was unable to recruit the support of 15 million new electors, and the war had caused the party to break up intellectually.<sup>143</sup>

Liberty had been usurped by war, Reason had been suspended in the patriotic fervour of the post-war Kaiser hunt and the anti-Bolshevik middle class zeal that Tories and their press were only too willing to stoke up, and Retrenchment was irreconcilable with mass participation politics, slum clearance, social policy and the mixed economy that the socialists had promoted and the Unionists had adapted to. However, Freeman is more astute in identifying the cause of Liberal decline, it was operational and organisational failures more than any other factor,

The provisions of the 1918 Reform Act are not responsible for this key cause of Liberal decline.

It was due to the Liberals' own organisational weaknesses that the increased electorate proved to be an obstacle rather than an opportunity for them. Quite clearly, the Liberals did not adapt themselves to the changed political situation of an enlarged electorate.<sup>144</sup>

He builds on this conclusion and has suggested that 'many of the attacks on the supposedly neurotic and irrational post-war electorate represented nostalgia for the exclusively male pre-war polity'.<sup>145</sup> He summarises that, 'The evidence suggests that it might be less the franchise that was important, and more the ways in which the Liberals perceived the new electorate and

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<sup>143</sup> Freeman, G. (2018), 'The Liberal Party' p54

<sup>144</sup> Ibid. p51

<sup>145</sup> Ibid. pp51-52

democracy'. That conclusion is certainly reinforced from the evidence presented here for Leeds in this period.

The reflections on national party policy and how this agenda had been to some degree a product of local contributions to the national debate are borne out by the dissertation, especially in reference to the Unionists, and the minutes of SCALA meetings clearly depict the failure of Liberal apparatchik to listen to the, if a little late, pleadings of its agents in framing their behaviour and policy. As such this thesis contributes to the debate on the decline of inter-war Liberalism as a political force. Eschewing the simplistic narrative that Labour replaced the Liberals as the radical party, Liberals switching to swell the Labour working class vote, the study finds that Liberals in general adopted a defensive posture, in divisions where their party failed to succeed they switched to the Unionists to restrain an agenda that was too radical. Either through deliberate anti-socialist pacts or encouraged by a burgeoning national, regional and local press through the choices of individual middle-class voters to switch to the anti-socialist with most chance of victory, the Liberal voter polled for the old enemy against the newer more unpredictable one. The shift in the Tory agenda to accommodate the findings of canvassing at 'street level' provided switchers and new voters a package of reforms which were trimmed to some of their requirements of a government in the new era.

After 1918 the splits in the party were less about policy, Asquith and Lloyd George were the fathers of the Peoples Budget and their agenda closely mirrored the social necessities of the time, and more about personality, a division at the top which drove a wedge in its personnel lower down the ranks. Once decided, a Lloyd George or Asquith supporter would not change their preference. The temporary truces between the leaders did not resonate further down the organisation/s, where the divide still remained, and handicapped the party from making real progress.

Labour's failure to sufficiently move beyond centrally dictated party policy, actually surrendering policy control to the 'wirepullers' and 'intellectuals' the opposition press often criticised, meant that they retained a narrow class-based electorate up to 1924, especially amongst unionised working-class men. Marion Phillips attempts to drag women up into the controlling heights of the party were unsuccessful and Labour only marginally increased its female supporters over the period. Enough women and non-unionised men dissented from their 'natural' allegiances to regularly return Unionist candidates even in poverty-stricken areas like Leeds Central where Labour leaders would have expected victories. Even HH Slesser, a well-funded candidate with excellent credentials lost twice in Leeds Central to Unionist victors.

Unionists benefitted of course from defensive support in the wealthier areas of Leeds, but this alone could not have carried them to success. The findings of this research acknowledge the interpretations in the national analysis of Unionist success but place a greater emphasis on local and regional organisations leading the agenda up to Baldwin's initiatives of 1924 after which national office do play a more significant role. What was most profound about the Unionist success was that they had modernised whilst maintaining a strong pillar of tradition at the centre of their party and agenda. Hierarchy and paternalism remained even if the policies shifted. Women's groups did not push fervently for female representation, the candidates were still drawn extensively from the armed forces and business, were male and upper middle class, the women's groups were often chaired by the wives of the squirearchy. Even though they rarely contended to have their own representatives, according to Ball, women dominated the Unionist organisations after 1918.

'A preponderance of female membership became the common pattern at local level in the interwar period, and in the safer seats particularly this could be as large a ratio as four times the number of men. The claims in the later 1920s that the party had a million

women members may have been inflated, but not greatly, and the true figure was probably between 750,000 and one million.’<sup>147</sup>

The Yorkshire Federation’s willingness to ‘take on’ Central Office on policy and procedure was not to undermine the structures in place, but to inform the hierarchy of their need to adapt to a new One Nation platform in light of the demands of the new voters of 1918 and the regional federation’s own interrogation of these demands through its links to working men’s associations and canvassing the new districts. Many of the areas surveilled to absorb this new data were in Leeds and Sheffield and they helped to shape a national agenda which had gone off the rails in 1923.

What speaks through the party archives is that Leeds parties had their own voices inattentive to those of the often disorganised, in-fighting and sometimes divisive policies of central office. These voices pushed the agenda of the street, and also the avenue, boulevard and crescent, from respect for the normal lives and non-ideological demands of the average voter. From the committees it is clear that ideology takes a minor place in discussion of strategy, canvassing, fundraising and the employment of agents. Ideology is oft subsumed beneath that most Yorkshire of all conceptual frameworks, thrift, good value and practicality.

As for the press, the partisanship of the Leeds and Yorkshire Unionist press was passionate and sustained throughout the period with an unrelenting anti-socialist narrative and knack to reflect the popular mood. It created a platform for Unionist candidates and supported their efforts towards election success by saying some of the things that the candidates and MPs, in the context of the more ‘civilised’ etiquette of the political platform in the post-war era could not. The Liberal press was partisan until around 1922, though it favoured Lloyd George in 1918 it then switched to Asquith fairly soon after but by 1924 had lost much of its early optimism and was often supportive of anti-socialist candidates whatever their political colours. The Labour Press was never mass circulation and its vehicles were couched in language that

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<sup>147</sup> Ball, S. (2018), ‘The Unionist Party’, p.25

would not appeal to the average newspaper reader. It had little if any impact beyond those who were already supporting the party.

Ultimately, there was a 'new electoral normalcy' in Leeds and in the nation by the time of the first 'normal' election of 1924. A new paradigm had developed locally and nationally which required parties to adapt their strategies and personnel to the new electorate. There could not be reliance on pre-war policy to win over the new voters and the parties had to be adapt to survive. Leeds by 1924 proved to be split more or less down the middle by Labour and Unionist. This was to become the pattern nationally, but as recent historians of the Conservatives/Unionists have forcefully stressed, this was not a foregone conclusion. Nor was it a symptom of the failure of the Liberals to provide a politically viable agenda, they did that in 1923 and 1924. It was not the product of contrived anti-socialist alliances; these were not widespread. Instead it was the Unionists own calculated, diligent and pragmatic efforts which ensured their survival. At times they were reactionary but more often reactive. They had reacted to the franchise extension in 1917, before any of the other parties, built new organisational strength, appealed to new voters, adopted new policy. They had a natural constituency across the Leeds and the nation, but to win they had to attract a new body of support. This was not only dissenting Liberals fearing the rise of the rabid socialism vilified by the right-wing press. It was new voters amongst the working classes and many women of all classes. The Unionist response to the franchise extension had been timely, focussed and determined, the Liberals had lost because they were none of these.

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## Primary Resources

Yorkshire Division of the National Unionist Association - Council Minute Books 1917-1924

Yorkshire Division of the National Unionist Association - Executive Minute Books 1917-1924

Yorkshire Federation of the Women's Unionist Association – Council 1918-1924

*The Conservative Woman Magazine* 1922-1924

Morrison's Leeds Blue Book and City Record 1910-1925

Society of Certified and Associated Liberal Agents – Reports 1916- 1925

Yorkshire Liberal Federation Committee Minutes 1902-1921

Leeds Liberal Federation Executive Committee Minute Books 1917-1925

Leeds Liberal Federation Cabinet Committee Minute Books 1922-24

City of Leeds Labour Party Minutes of the General Committee 1918-1924

City of Leeds Labour Party Minutes of the Women's Central Committee 1918-1924

Central Division of the Leeds Labour Party Executive Committee Minutes 1917-1924

Labour Party National Conference for Women Conference Papers 1919-1925

*The Labour Woman Magazine* 1924-1925

Advisory Council of Labour Women for the West Riding of Yorkshire conference papers and reports 1919-1923

Holbeck Socialist Party Minutebook 1923

Boundaries Commission Report of 1917

## Periodicals

*Leeds Mercury* 1918-1924 Published by Edward Baines and Sons to 1923, Yorkshire Conservative Newspaper Company Limited 1923-1924

*Yorkshire Evening Post*, 1917-1924

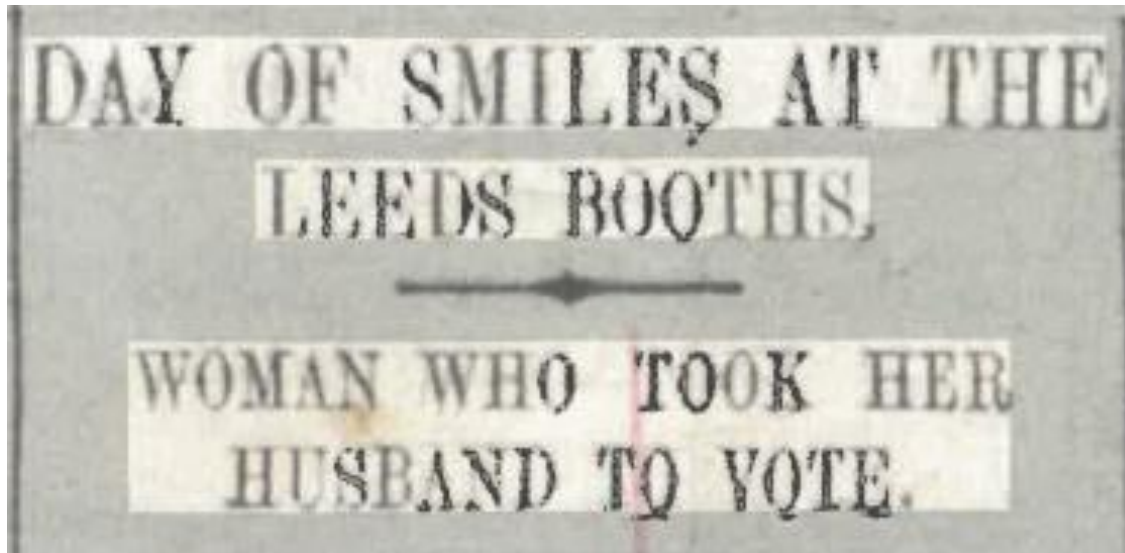
*Leeds Weekly Citizen*, Leeds Labour Publication Society, 1917-1924

*Manchester Guardian*, Guardian Newspapers, 1917-1924

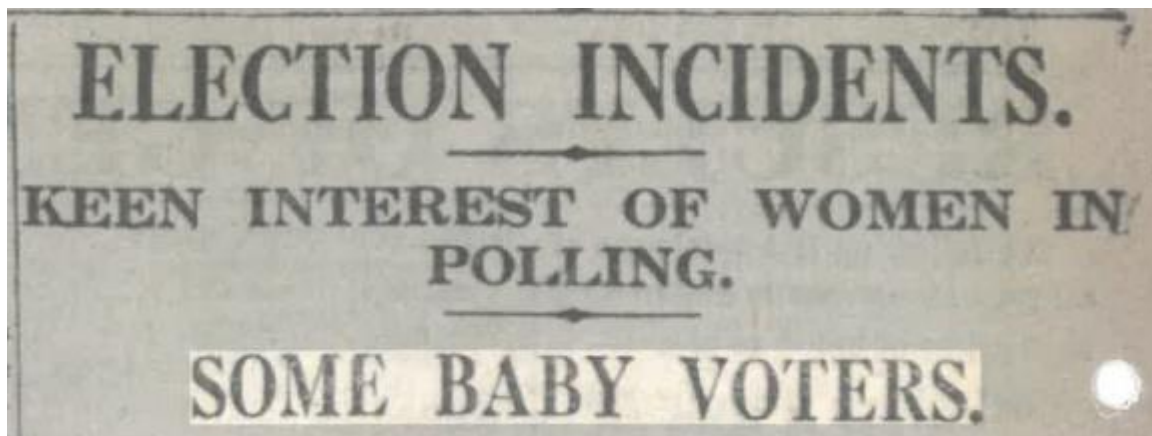
*Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, Yorkshire Conservative Newspaper Company Limited 1917-1924

## Appendix

Excerpts from Newspapers and Journals 1918-1924



*Yorkshire Evening Post* – two days after election day 16<sup>th</sup> December 1918 (1)



*Leeds Mercury* 16<sup>th</sup> November 1922– reflects on the continuing interest of women voters (2)



*Yorkshire Evening Post* 8<sup>th</sup> November 1922 (3)

Reports on the campaign of Mary Grant – a Liberal and the first woman to stand for election in a Leeds division was defeated by ‘Big Jim’ O’Grady in South East

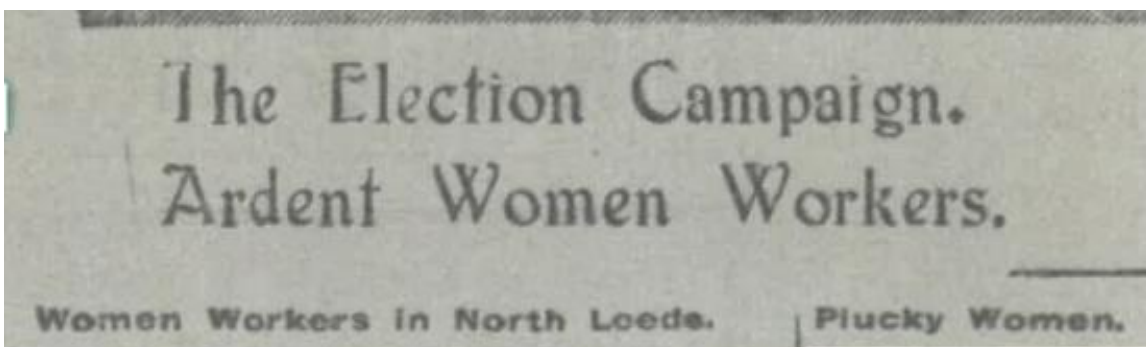
Mary Grant is shown speaking at a rally during the campaign



*Leeds Mercury* 6<sup>th</sup> December 1923 (left) (4 + 5)

21<sup>st</sup> October 1924 (below)

During the period 1918 to 1923 the influence of women in the Unionist organisations was profound. Some commentators put the Unionist success in the period down to the enthusiasm and efforts of women organisers and canvassers, Unionist candidate Alexander Renton’s wife is seen with Unionist grandee Lady Queensbury

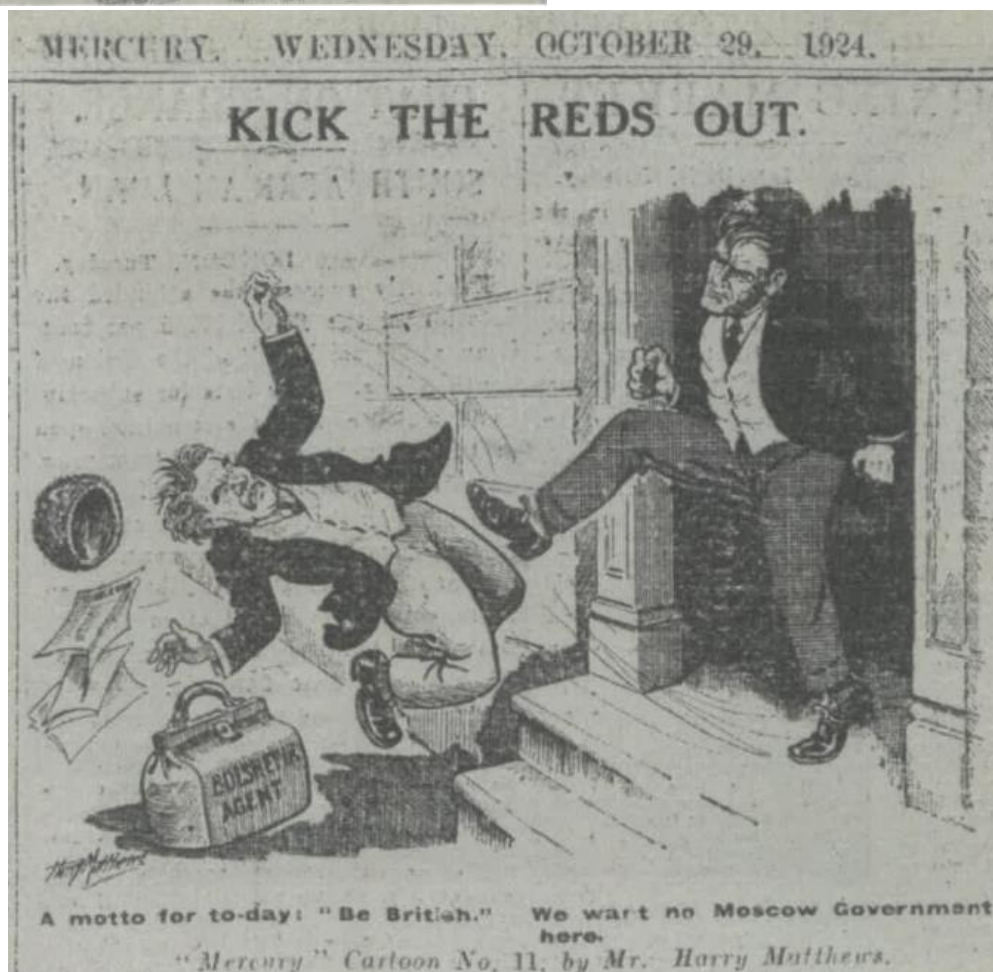




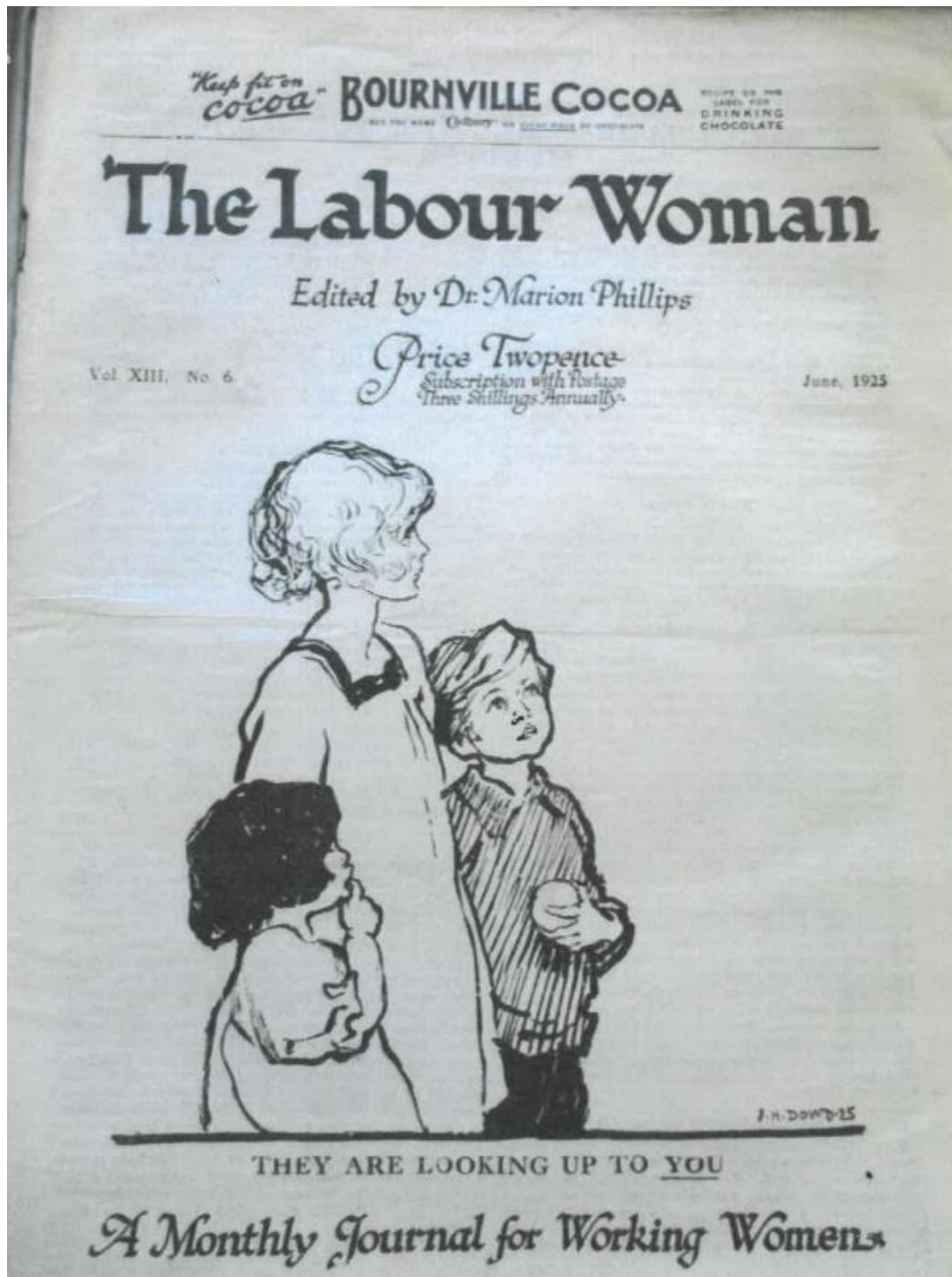
(6 + 7) Anti-socialism

*Leeds Mercury* 25<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> October 1924

The continuing campaign of anti-socialism, dominated the agenda set by Unionist papers nationally and locally and here in the Liberal press, a similar narrative can be seen. The phenomena succeeded in pushing middle class voters into a defensive anti-socialist political position, which ironically for the *Mercury*, led in some part to the Liberal collapse.







(8) The *Labour Woman* magazine was crafted to appeal to working class, unionised and middle-class women. Unlike the ideologically oriented socialist papers the *Daily Herald* and *Leeds Citizen*, the editor Dr Marion Phillips mixed social and political comment with family matters and practical household tips to appeal to a wide range of women.