

Defections 1918–29

The post-First World War period saw many Liberals, including high-profile personalities such as Winston Churchill, decide that the time was right for them to change political parties. **Dr Roy Douglas** examines why.

A failure of leadership

An explanation of Liberal defections 1918–1929

Liberal defections from 1918–1929 were mostly related, directly or indirectly, to the tensions which were set up in the party during the course of the Great War; tensions from which it never fully recovered.

On 2 August 1914, Sir Edward Grey, Foreign Secretary in the Liberal government, made a speech in the House of Commons which left little doubt that Britain would soon be at war. A group of radical MPs, nineteen of them Liberals, signed a resolution protesting that there was not sufficient reason for Britain to intervene.¹ The German invasion of Belgium on the following day appears to have changed the minds of some doubting Liberals, but not all. Two members of the Cabinet — Viscount Morley and John Burns — and a junior Minister, C. P. Trevelyan, resigned from the government. None of them, had been signatories to the resolution. The reasons for the resignations of Burns and Morley is not entirely clear, and neither of them played any great part in later events; but Trevelyan was opposed to the war and remained very active for a long time to come.

Throughout the conflict, there was a small group of Liberal parliamentarians more or less opposed to the war. That group was rather ill-defined but some indications of its strength is provided by the fact that on 13 February 1918 a resolution calling on the government to keep open diplomatic moves for peace was supported in the division lobbies by twenty Liberal MPs. Some, but not all, of the Liberal critics of the war adhered to a body called the Union of Democratic Control (UDC) which brought them in close contact with the Labour minority holding similar views.

Disputes over how to fight the war produced much deeper Liberal divisions. Many Liberals were far from happy about the government's immediate decision to set controversial matters like land taxing and Irish Home Rule into cold storage 'for the du-

ration', in order to establish 'national unity' with the Conservative² opposition. The formation of the Asquith Coalition in May 1915 was not universally popular in the party and when the new government introduced the notorious McKenna Duties later in the same year, many staunch Liberal free traders became restive. The introduction of conscription in 1915–16 was also a matter of serious controversy among Liberals and occasioned the resignation of the Home Secretary, Sir John Simon. Several other very famous Liberals nearly resigned with him.

Towards the end of 1916 came the strange 'palace revolution' which resulted in Asquith's departure and the establishment of a new coalition under Lloyd George. Asquith and his principal associates left the government altogether. But Asquith remained the Liberal leader, while the organisation and finances of the party remained in the hands of its Chief Whip, John Gulland. Lloyd George, as Prime Minister, proceeded to appoint government Chief Whips, one a Liberal, the other Conservative. Gradually, Lloyd George's Liberal friends amassed their own finances. Here was the origin of what would later be famous as the Lloyd George Fund.

The Maurice debate of May 1918 was of critical importance. Ostensibly, the issue turned on the accuracy of government statements about the strength of the army in France, and the appropriate way of discovering the truth of the matter. There is good reason for thinking that there was grave but wholly excusable misunderstanding on both sides.³ Be that as it may, Liberal MPs were deeply split: seventy-one voting with the government, ninety-eight against it. Labour was also divided, but with only a single exception the Conservatives backed the government and so saved the situation for Lloyd George.

There remained the serious possibility that a general election would be held while the war was still in progress and in July 1918 Freddie Guest, Lloyd

George's Chief Whip, drew up lists of Liberal, and also of Labour, MPs who could, and could not, be regarded as government supporters.⁴ Thus the Liberal parliamentarians were already under deep stress, not on one issue but on several, long before the Armistice of November 1918. This stress became greater as time went on and would soon lead to many defections from the party.

The coupon election

Immediately after the Armistice, the Prime Minister called a general election. He originally hoped to keep the wartime coalition in being and even to extend it. Some weeks before the Armistice, he made a very attractive offer to induce Asquith and his associates to join the government; but the offer was rejected.⁵ Lloyd George also hoped that Labour would remain in the coalition but Labour decided by a large majority to withdraw. So the coalition was now, for practical purposes, the Conservatives and half the Liberals, with a few hangers-on.

The 1918 general election had many extraordinary features. The electorate had been greatly increased. For the first time, women received the parliamentary vote, though only at age thirty. The male electorate, which had been more or less restricted to householders before 1918, was now extended to nearly all over twenty-one. The Labour Party, which had never fielded more than eighty-one candidates before the war, now had close on 400. In Ireland, a relatively new force, Sinn Féin, stood posed to fight nearly everywhere. In a sense, the electorate was more naïve than it had been for a long time, because for four years all politics had been about the war itself, and the great issues which were bound to arise in the aftermath had received little public discussion.

The popularity of Lloyd George – 'the man who won the war' – was enormous. One of his Liberal supporters described him as 'the greatest man

since Jesus Christ'. But which candidates should be regarded as supporters of Lloyd George and his government? Letters of approval – the so-called 'coupons' – were sent to selected candidates in most British (though not Irish) constituencies, over the signatures of Lloyd George and the Conservative leader, Bonar Law.

Where a Conservative MP was defending his seat, he nearly always received the 'coupon'. Where a former Conservative MP was standing down, the 'coupon' usually went to the new Conservative candidate. The same rules were applied to Liberals who were on Guest's 'approved' list. Agreements were reached for most other British constituencies by the headquarters of the Conservative and Lloyd George Liberal organisations. In some cases the 'coupon' was given to a mushroom wartime body, the National Democratic Party (NDP). A few British constituencies did not receive the 'coupon' at all, including those contested by Labour candidates who had been on Guest's list. Conservatives usually did not stand in constituencies where they were not scheduled to receive the 'coupon', while Liberals usually stood whether they were to receive the 'coupon' or

not. The Asquithian organisation did not denounce Liberals receiving the 'coupon' but Asquith himself, and most of his principal followers, were denied it.

Those Liberals who had been more or less open opponents of the war were treated

roughly by everyone else, including Asquithians and Lloyd Georgites alike. The experiences of three noted members of that group will illustrate what happened. R. L. Outhwaite, Liberal victor of a sensational by-election at Hanley in 1912, was opposed by an Asquithian Liberal, a Labour candidate, and an NDP candidate who received the 'coupon'. Arthur Ponsonby was opposed at Dunfermline by a Liberal who received the 'coupon' and also by an in-

dependent Labour candidate. C. P. Trevelyan, at Elland, was opposed by a Conservative recipient of the 'coupon', an Asquithian Liberal and a Labour candidate.

The upshot was a huge win for the Coalition.⁶ 132 'couponed' Liberals and thirty 'uncouponed' Liberals were elected. Asquith, and all his principal followers, were defeated. All Liberal members of the UDC and others about whose attitude to the war there was any real doubt, were defeated, most of them heavily so. The Conservatives, with 380 MPs, formed a large overall majority in the House of Commons.

Aftermath

It was immediately apparent that a good many Liberals felt, and would continue to feel, much animosity and mistrust towards others in their party. Asquithians who had lost their seats as a result of the 'coupon' arrangements felt deeply aggrieved. Liberal pacifists had no reason to feel affection for either of the main groups in the party. Some, indeed, had begun to depart even before the General Election – E. D. Morel, not an MP, but Liberal candidate for the highly winnable constituency of Birkenhead – became secretary of the UDC in 1914 and forfeited his candidature.⁷ In April 1918 he joined the ILP, which was then affiliated to the Labour Party. Shortly before the election, Trevelyan indicated his intention to join Labour⁸ — but that did not save him from Labour opposition. Ponsonby joined the ILP soon afterwards. So did Outhwaite, though he later adhered to a much smaller movement, the Commonwealth Land Party.

Once politics began to settle down after the election, there were further Liberal defections. Josiah Wedgwood had been Liberal MP for Newcastle-under-Lyme since 1906. He shared the enthusiasm for land taxing evinced by his colleague Outhwaite, who sat for a neighbouring constituency, and in the debate on 3 August 1914 had taken a similar view about foreign policy. When war came, however, he went out to fight and won the DSO. There is considerable doubt how Wedgwood's candidature in 1918 should be labelled; he seems to have been offered the 'coupon'

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David Lloyd George, Liberal Leader 1926–31 and Prime Minister 1916–22.

but refused to use it as he had little confidence in the Coalition. In any event he was unopposed. For a very brief moment he inclined towards the Asquithians; then he despaired of them too and joined Labour. Noel Buxton, who had sat as a Liberal MP for North Norfolk down to 1918, was defeated by a ‘couponed’ Conservative. What decided him to defect was the iniquitous peace treaties which began to emerge in 1919. Early in 1920, when Asquith was fighting his successful campaign in Paisley for return to the House of Commons, nine men who had formerly sat as Liberal MPs sent a letter of support to his Labour opponent.⁹

Why had there been so many Liberal defections to the Labour Party? We may reject the cynical retort that these people were seeking personal advantage. The Labour Party had certainly made some advances in 1918, but, lumping the two Liberal groups together, there were still far fewer Labour than Liberal MPs and there was not much reason yet for believing that Labour would soon become the principal party of change.

On the negative side, the main reason for most of the defections was their loss of confidence in the Liberal leadership during the war, Asquithian and Lloyd Georgeite alike. Either that, or their distress at the treaties which emerged from the Paris Peace Conference. On the positive side, some of them were attracted by the growing pacifism of Labour in the last year of

the war. There had also been a sea change in the character of the Labour Party. Before 1914, it was essentially a working class pressure group attempting to influence Liberal or Conservative governments rather than a party defined by ideology seeking to become the government itself. From 1918 onwards, political ideology became much more important. The Labour Party began to see itself as a possible party of government, and it was open to all comers sharing its ideology. Perhaps some of the Liberal defectors felt that Labour policies were still not fully defined and that they could play a large part in shaping those policies in future.

For some time after the ‘coupon’ election, local Liberal Associations continued to include supporters and opponents of the Coalition; but the central organisations of the Asquithians and Lloyd Georgeites became more and more deeply hostile to each other. Several critical by-elections, including the Paisley contest of March 1920, when Asquith was returned to Parliament, increased the mutual animosity. Asquithians made eager war on Coalitionists; while the ‘Coalies’ eventually set up their own organisation and became known as the National Liberals. (They must be distinguished from the Liberal Nationals, who were established in very different conditions in 1931.)

The next general election came unexpectedly in the autumn of 1922, when the Conservative rank-and-file rebelled against their own leaders and pulled their party from the Coalition. Equally suddenly and unexpectedly, Bonar Law – who had withdrawn from politics for health reasons in the previous year – emerged as Conservative leader and then as Prime Minister.

No party was really prepared for this contest. The Liberals were split into two hostile groups. The Conservatives seemed on the point of splitting as well. Labour was undoubtedly a rising force but the Labour Party of 1922 contained a wide range of disparate elements.

The Conservatives, with 345 seats, won an overall majority. For the first time, Labour, with 142, ran second. There were 116 Liberals. Not all of these may be classified with any certainty as ‘official’ or as National, Liber-

als; but the two groups were of roughly similar size.¹⁰ Seven men who previously sat as Liberal MPs were now on the Labour benches.¹¹

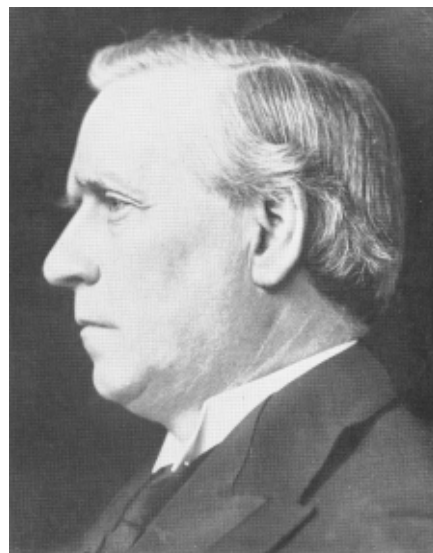
The politics of chaos

In the new Parliament there was some *rapprochement* between Asquithian and Lloyd Georgeite Liberals but nobody anticipated another general election in the near future and such contacts were leisurely.

Bonar Law resigned in May 1923, when his health finally collapsed and was succeeded by Stanley Baldwin. A few months later, the new premier declared in favour of tariffs and this led to another general election at the end of the year. The cause of free trade brought disparate Liberals together in unwonted union, just as it had done twenty years earlier. The Liberal manifesto was signed jointly by Asquith and Lloyd George. With very few exceptions, Liberals went into battle as a united party.

Even this moment of Liberal reunification witnessed one significant defection. Dr Christopher Addison had been an important minister in Lloyd George’s Coalition, but he broke with the government in 1921 because the housing policy with which he had been associated was frustrated by the Conservative element in the Coalition. He then became an Asquithian but lost his Parliamentary seat in 1922. In 1923, while the election campaign (in which he was not a candidate) was in progress, he announced his intention to join the Labour Party.

H. H. Asquith, Liberal leader 1908–26 and Prime Minister 1908–16.



The result of the 1923 general election was 258 Conservatives, 191 Labour and 158 Liberals. Thus no party had an overall majority. The Conservatives were still the largest single party but they had been heavily defeated on the very issue on which the election had been called. Labour was ahead of the Liberals but not greatly so; and unlike the Liberals, they had few people with ministerial experience. There were intense discussions about possible ways of resolving the problems posed.

The Conservatives remained in office until the new Parliament met in January 1924. Labour predictably moved a critical amendment to the King's Speech. The Liberals, in view of the circumstances of the election, could hardly support Baldwin, and would emerge with little dignity if they abstained from voting.

Winston Churchill was still a Liberal at the time but had lost his seat at Dundee in 1922 and had failed to secure election at West Leicester in the following year. He advanced an intriguing suggestion.¹² The Liberals should support the critical amendment but should follow this with one of their own, denouncing socialism. Both motions would be carried, one with Labour and one with Conservative support; and constitutional practice would require the King to call on Asquith to form a government. Churchill's advice was rejected. 138 Liberals voted for the Labour amendment, ten against it, seven were absent unpaired and three were absent paired.¹³ The government was defeated by 330 votes to 258. Baldwin resigned and Ramsay MacDonald formed the first Labour government.

Nobody could have been surprised about three of the ex-Liberals included in the new Cabinet — Charles Trevelyan, Noel Buxton and Josiah Wedgwood. They were among the few Labour MPs who had substantial parliamentary experience. Nor could there have been much surprise when Ponsonby became a junior minister.

What was really remarkable was the presence of Viscount Haldane as Lord Chancellor. He certainly had no leanings in a pacifist direction. At the turn of the century, Haldane had been a

prominent member of the imperialist wing of the Liberal Party. In the pre-1915 Liberal government he had served as Secretary of State for War and later as Asquith's Lord Chancellor. His army reforms were the foundation of his reputation as an administrator and were much admired by men like Kitchener. In later life, Haldane's particular interest was education and his views on that subject appear to have attracted him to Labour. Labour was desperately short of distinguished lawyers and when the 1923 general election results were revealed MacDonald and Haldane immediately discussed the possibility that he might join a Labour government.

Thus far, most of the important Liberal defections since 1918 had been in the direction of Labour. Immediately the new parliament met in January 1924, there were signs that some might be looking in a different direction.

Winston Churchill was the first great departure. In February 1924 he was urged by the press lords, Beaverbrook and Rothermere, to stand as an independent in the forthcoming by-election in the Abbey division of Westminster. Writing to his wife, Churchill noted that 'there are thirty Liberals in the House and at least another thirty candidates who wish to act with the Conservatives and who [sic] the Conservatives are anxious to win as allies'.¹⁴ Churchill had apparently hoped for both Liberal and Conservative support in the by-election but in fact he got neither and all three established parties ran against him. Nevertheless, he missed election by only forty-three votes.

Lacking an overall majority, the new Labour government was in a vulnerable position. The Conservatives, however, were not willing to precipitate another general election for some months to come, while Liberals faced appalling problems over finance. The 'official' funds of the party were at a very low ebb, and the impressive campaign of 1923 was only possible because the Asquithian organisation received a large

subvention from the well-heeled Lloyd George fund. Liberal reunion, however, did not mean united finances, and for months there were complex manoeuvres on the subject. Until that matter was resolved, the last thing the Liberals wanted was a general election. In the end however the Labour government was defeated — perhaps it actively courted defeat over the Campbell case, and a new general election was forced in the autumn of 1924.

The Liberals faced disaster, and they probably knew it. Some money was granted from the Lloyd George fund but it was too little and too late. The party could only field 340 candidates, against 453 a year earlier. For the first time, it was now obvious to the world that a Liberal government, or a government in which Liberals formed a major

element, was out of the question.

Events of the previous twelve months had produced another effect on the Liberal Party. The old tensions between pacifists and pro-war Liberals, and then between Asquithians and

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Lloyd Georgeites, had already played a major part in reducing the party from first to third place in British politics. Now the Liberal Party began to experience tensions of a different kind; between those who preferred Labour to the Conservatives and those preferred Conservatives to Labour.

So matters stood before polling day arrived. When it came, the results were even worse than might have been expected. The Conservatives secured a large overall majority. Labour lost some ground but did not fare disastrously. The Liberals were reduced from 158 seats to forty-two. Asquith and many other well-known Liberals were defeated. Over one hundred Liberal seats were lost to the Conservatives and sixteen went to Labour. Seven of the eight Liberal gains from Labour were in constituencies which the Conservatives did not fight.

In the immediate aftermath came the final breach with Churchill. At the elec-



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tion, he won Epping as a 'Constitutionalist' with Conservative support. To widespread astonishment he then secured the post of Chancellor of the Exchequer in Baldwin's second government. The appointment of a political maverick who, whatever else was at heart a free trader, served notice that the Conservatives had learned the lesson of 1923 and were unlikely to make a frontal assault on free trade for a long time to come. It was important in attracting to Conservative ranks those Liberals whose main reason for being Liberal at all was this single issue and who regarded the prospect of a Labour majority with something close to terror.

Other Liberals soon began to drift to the Conservatives. By the middle of 1925, Hamar Greenwood and Brigadier-General E. L. Spears, both of them important Coalition Liberals, though currently out of the House, had departed in that direction. Later in the year, the Liberal Party adopted a new land policy, at Lloyd George's behest; this was the cause, or at least the occasion, of the departure of two of the small band of remaining Liberal MPs — Hilton Young and the great industrialist Sir Alfred Mond. Neither man saw

fit to give notice to the voters in his constituency the opportunity of deciding if they were happy with an MP wearing a new label. About the same time, two men who had entered the House since the war, but were defeated in 1924, departed in the same direction; the Asquithian C. F. Entwistle and the Lloyd Georgeite, H. C. Hogbin.

One MP who did not renounce his Liberal allegiance was almost as embarrassing to the party as the various apostates. Freddie Guest, Lloyd George's sometime Chief Whip, regis-

tered one of the few Liberal gains of 1924, in Bristol North. This victory, however, was clearly explained by the fact that the Conservatives, who had fought there in 1923, withdrew from the contest and allowed Guest a straight fight against Labour. Thereafter Guest sat as a Liberal, but usually voted as a Conservative: a fact which excited considerable protest from West Country Liberals.

The Lloyd Georgeite revival

After the 1924 general election, Lloyd George won a rather acrimonious contest for the chairmanship of the Liberal MPs but Asquith, although no longer in the House, remained leader of the party. This state of affairs continued even after he received the Earldom of Oxford and Asquith in the following year. In the middle of 1926, however, he had a stroke, which led him to resign the leadership a few months later. Thereafter he played little part in politics and he died in 1928.

Very soon after Lord Oxford's retirement, the Liberal Parliamentary Party suffered another important defection, this time to Labour. Lieutenant-Com-

mander Joseph Kenworthy was heir to a peerage dating from the fourteenth century. He was also an Asquithian hero in more senses than one. Kenworthy had a distinguished war record, and at a by-election in 1919 had captured Hull Central from the Conservatives with a huge overturn of votes. When Kenworthy defected to Labour, he took the honourable view that a man elected in one interest should not transfer to a different one without giving his electors the opportunity of deciding whether they still wanted him as their representative. So he resigned his seat and defended the constituency in the ensuing by-election. Kenworthy was comfortably victorious; the Liberal fell to a derisory third place.

After Asquith's resignation there was a sharp struggle for control of the Liberal Party. At the turn of 1925–26, Lloyd George won, although he never bothered formally to claim the post of Leader. Money was poured into the organisation from the Lloyd George fund, while high-powered committees worked assiduously on policy questions.

Soon another prominent Liberal MP, William Wedgwood Benn (later Viscount Stansgate and father of Tony Benn) seceded to the Labour Party. Benn had sat as a Liberal MP since 1906. He was a very loyal Asquithian and in the immediate aftermath of the 1918 general election Asquith sought, unsuccessfully, to persuade him to become Chief Whip of the non-Coalition Liberals.¹⁵ When Benn changed parties, he, like Kenworthy, considered it his duty to resign and there was a by-election in his constituency, Leith. Unlike Kenworthy, however, Benn did not stand as a candidate in that election. Ernest Brown retained the seat for the Liberal Party. The majority was small but it was the first encouraging by-election result for a long time.

The fortunes of the Liberal Party improved greatly. Four days after Leith polled, the Liberals won another by-election, this time a gain from Labour in the London working class constituency of North Southwark. Six further seats were captured by Liberals in by-elections in the next couple of years, against only one loss. In addition to

these changes, the Liberals regained Carmarthenshire when Mond obtained a peerage. For the time being, the flow of Liberal defections was staunch.

Soon, however, there were further developments in the Freddie Guest saga. Towards the end of 1928, a gathering of Liberals in his Bristol North constituency passed a resolution condemning his disposition to support the Conservatives and also his inattention to Parliamentary duties. The rebels constituted themselves as the Bristol North Liberal and Radical Association. They

were soon recognised as the proper Liberal Association for the constituency and adopted a candidate who stood against Guest at the ensuing general election.¹⁶ Labour won the seat and in 1930, Guest formally switched to the Conservatives.

At the general election of 1929, all three parties fought in the great majority of constituencies and the Liberals were able to mount a more powerful campaign than five years before. The Liberal representation, only forty-two in 1924, was increased to fifty-nine but this was not really a victory at all. The party had thrown in everything it had and it was still in third place, far behind the other two. Labour won more seats than the Conservatives; the Conservatives won more votes than Labour. Theoretically, the Liberals held the balance of power; in practice this was not the way matters worked out. Baldwin resigned and MacDonald formed the second Labour government, without either man bothering to discover how the Liberals would act.

As in 1924, the Labour Prime Minister was short of lawyers. Haldane, who had been Lord Chancellor in 1924 was dead; but this time MacDonald was able to appoint one of the Lords Justice of Appeal for the job and did not need to poach from another party. He was still short of a convincing Attorney-General, however, and for that post he did look to the Liberals. Preston was one of the relatively small number of towns which sent

two MPs to Westminster and where each elector had two votes. Before 1914, it often happened in such places that a Liberal and Labour man ran in harness against two Conservatives. Preston was the only constituency where this old practice still prevailed in 1929. A Labour man headed the poll, with the Liberal, William Jowitt, also elected close behind him. MacDonald immediately turned to

The 1923 revival was wrecked by the foolish decision to set another party in office, instead of striking out for power themselves.

Jowitt and he accepted the office of Attorney-General. This implied a change of party and Jowitt resigned to cause a by-election.

The general demoralisation of the Liberal Party was signalled by what happened next. Liberal headquarters left the decision whether to contest the by-election to the local party. The Preston Liberals refused the challenge. The votes of both Labour and Conservative candidates were close to what they had been a month or so earlier, so Jowitt was returned under his new colours.

Reflections

Winston Churchill once said that the use of recriminations about the past was to enforce greater efficiency in the present. Modern Liberal Democrats may usefully ask whether the circumstances attending past defections and other disasters should be pondered by people directing the party today.

In the present article, attention has been given to defections by Liberals who were prominent at national level. These, of course, were not the only defections which were taking place and perhaps not the most important ones. There are records of many defections by people active in local government; but there were innumerable ordinary Liberals who just quietly dropped out and who have left no record.

In the period between Campbell-Bannerman's acceptance of the Premiership in December 1905 and the eve of the Great War in 1914, the Liberal Party promoted many radical changes which could hardly have been anticipated at the start. Yet the prominent Liberal defections were few.

Harold Cox, who opposed the policy of old age pensions, is the most famous; but even Cox took no steps to join a different party. We might, perhaps, add the group of 'Lib-Lab' miners who followed the advice of the trade unions and transferred to the Labour Party just before the general election of January 1910, but this defection was not opposed by Liberal headquarters and might justly be regarded as 'collusive'.

The contrast with the period 1918–29 is enormous. The various schisms of the wartime period were obviously of major importance in bringing about the many defections; but it is surely significant that the defections continued long after the war was over and even when the schisms had been – formally at least – healed.

The great difference between the pre-war and post-war Liberals was that in the earlier period they were almost continuously fighting for what were perceived as great causes, against a formidable enemy; while for a large part of the post-war period, compromises of one kind or another were made with other parties. This applied particularly, but not exclusively, to the post-war period of Lloyd George's Coalition. The compromises which were implied by Coalition were necessarily dispiriting because real differences were resolved not by confrontation between open antagonists but by obscure and secret deals between members of the same government.

The two points in the post-war period which really did provide some encouragement for the Liberals were the general election of 1923, when they were defending the historic cause of free trade, and the years 1927–29, when they were fighting on a radical programme of reform designed to break the economic inertia of the period, with its gloomy accompaniment of mass unemployment.

The 1923 revival was wrecked by the foolish decision to set another party in office, instead of striking out for power themselves. It was not a coalition; the Liberals were free agents to vote against the Labour government if they chose — and, indeed, they eventually did so. But just as their connection to the Conservatives in the Coalition period drove

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many Liberals to Labour, so did their apparent leanings towards Labour in 1924 drive many Liberals to the Conservatives. Neither set of defections occurred exclusively during the critical period; each one continued for long afterwards.

The 1927–29 revival failed partly because it came too late and partly because Lloyd George – the only man could possibly inspire and lead it – was profoundly mistrusted not only by other politicians but by a large section of his own party. That mistrust, in its turn, traces back inescapably to the compromises of the Coalition period.

Defections could take place so easily either to Labour or to the Conservatives essentially because positive Liberal policy was obscure. For a large part of the period considered here, it must have been difficult for an outsider to perceive what the Liberals would do with power if they got it, or how they would differ from the other parties if they were in government. There seemed little reason why a Liberal

who was preoccupied with social reform should not slide into the Labour Party, or why a Liberal who was preoccupied with the dangers inherent in socialism should not slide into the Conservative Party. In both cases, some defectors acted for cynical reasons of personal advantage but most seem to have been motivated, at least in part, by an honest judgement of what would conduce to the public good. On balance, the main blame for the defections must lie not with the defectors but with the inept leadership provided.

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Tory cuckoos in the Liberal nest?

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- 6 Figures are variously given. The present author has made a detailed analysis in *A Classification of the Members of Parliament elected in 1918*, Bull Inst. Hist. Res. XLVII, No.115 (1974), 74–94.
- 7 *Dictionary of National Biography: Missing Persons*. Oxford 1993, pp 475–6.
- 8 A J A Morris: *C P Trevelyan: Portrait of a Radical*. Belfast 1977, pp 139–141.
- 9 They were: C R Buxton, brother of Noel Buxton and briefly an MP in 1910; J King; R C Lambert; H B Lees-Smith; R L Outhwaite; A Ponsonby; C P Trevelyan; A V Rutherford; Col. J Wedgwood — *Liberal Magazine* 1920, p70.
- 10 David Butler and Jennie Freeman, *British Political Facts 1900–1960* (London 1963) p213 give 62 National Liberals and 54 Liberals. Michael Kinnear, *The British Voter* (London 1968) p94 gives 47 Lloyd Georgeites, 40 Asquithians and '29 'prefixless' MPs who were evenly divided between Asquith and Lloyd George'.
- 11 They were: C R Buxton, Noel Buxton, E G Hemmerde; H B Lees-Milne; A Ponsonby and J C Wedgwood. Perhaps, technically, we should add an eighth, Frank Hall, elected as a Lib-Lab in 1906.
- 12 *The Times* 18 January 1924; given in Martin Gilbert, *Winston S Churchill Vol V companion* (London 1979) pp 94–97.
- 13 Listed in *Liberal Magazine* 1924, p124.
- 14 Gilbert, op cit p113.
- 15 Benn to Asquith, 11 January 1919. Asquith papers, Bodleian Library, 18, fo 41.
- 16 *Liberal Magazine* 1929, 1–2, 76, 264, 341.