

'MAISTLY CAMPBELL-BANNERMAN A

Herbert Asquith's epithet for Andrew Bonar Law, 'the unknown Prime Minister', might apply just as well to another premier from the west of Scotland – Henry Campbell-Bannerman. Although the Edwardian Liberal Party, the general election of 1906 and the policies of the government over which he presided have been extensively studied, the career of Campbell-Bannerman has been neglected. **Ewen A. Cameron** assesses the record of the man who led the Liberal Party into the famous 1906 election landslide.



SCOTCH' AND LIBERAL LEADERSHIP

THE ONLY substantial modern biography, a comprehensive and sympathetic work by John Wilson, was published in 1973. Earlier works include the official life by J. A. Spender and an instant production by the Irish nationalist MP, T. P. O'Connor.¹ Although there are some difficulties in the biographical study of CB, notably his tendency to brief letters – a trait which annoyed the King in regard to the Prime Minister's weekly accounts of Cabinets – other reasons have to be found to explain the neglect.²

The first surrounds the perception that Campbell-Bannerman acceded to the leadership of the Liberal Party by accident, as the least-bad option in the chaos of the party in the late 1890s, a lowest common denominator who had none of the objectionable characteristics of more prominent politicians such as Harcourt, Morley or Rosebery; the last one left standing when these heavyweights ruled themselves out of the race in one way or another.³ A second point also relates to his leadership: retrospective chronology places him between the glories of the Gladstonian age and the excitements generated by his glittering successors, Asquith and Lloyd George. Third, he had not held particularly high office prior to

his becoming leader of the party in 1899 and Prime Minister in 1905. He had served in the War Office under Lord Cardwell, and at the Admiralty; from 1884 to 1885 he was Chief Secretary for Ireland (outside the Cabinet); in Gladstone's third and fourth administrations and under Lord Rosebery, in 1886 and 1892–95, he had been Secretary of State for War. This last post occasioned the most notable public event of his career, a House of Commons censure over inadequate supplies of cordite for army ammunition which precipitated the resignation of Rosebery's unhappy government. Fourth, he left behind no established body of political thought or doctrine on the conduct of government, although he was highly skilled in the latter. This contrasts with the classical Liberalism established by Gladstone's long career or the radical rhetoric of anti-landlordism bequeathed by Lloyd George, although both those leaders were responsible for fundamental ruptures in the party.

Fifth, his biography contrasts with many of those around him in the Liberal politics of the 1890s and 1900s. He came from a solid middle-class Glaswegian background. His family were Tories; indeed, his brother James Campbell was MP for the Scottish Universities from

1880–1906.⁴ His private life was entirely stable; he was famously devoted to his wife, Charlotte, whom he nursed in her final illness to the detriment of Prime Ministerial duties in 1907. By contrast, Lord Rosebery had risen rapidly in Liberal politics; had masterminded Gladstone's Midlothian campaigns in 1879 and 1880; had married into the Rothschild family; had, as a racehorse owner, won the Derby three times; and was one of the most popular, even iconic, figures in Scotland in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, his lustre continuing well after his disastrous premiership, burnished by recruiting speeches during the Great War. Asquith also had Scottish connections, through his seat in East Fife and his marriage into Scottish industrial wealth. Even if the Tennants could not rival the Rothschilds, Margot assisted his social and political status as well as his financial security.

Finally, in an age when politicians spent much time speaking to large audiences in punishing schedules of public meetings, and their words were reported verbatim in the local and national press, CB lacked oratorical buzz. The sources agree, even allowing for the sympathetic nature of the biographies and the countervailing hostility

**Punch, 21
February 1906:
Full speed
ahead**

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of the press in Edinburgh, Glasgow and London, that he was a poor speaker.

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This short article does not seek to provide a comprehensive review of Campbell-Bannerman's career, nor does it seek to be 'revisionist'. Its principal objective is to focus on the elements of his political career which relate most closely to his Scottish roots.

Campbell-Bannerman, it should be added, is as much the forgotten Prime Minister in his homeland as in other parts of Britain and Ireland.⁵ He represented a Scottish seat, the Stirling district of burghs (which also included Dunfermline, Culross, Inverkeithing and South Queensferry). Scotland was secure Liberal territory; between 1832 and 1910 the party won a majority of Scottish seats, with the exception of 1900, and even that was a blip soon ironed out by by-election victories. In 1910 when Liberal support slipped in England, Scottish representation was stable and crucial to the government's retention of power. Furthermore, although Liberal Unionism was popular in the West of Scotland, tariff reform and Liberal Imperialism were not. Campbell-Bannerman was solidly supported by the constituencies and although the Scottish Liberal Association was less enthusiastic, it was not in thrall to Lord Rosebery, despite his personal popularity in south-east Scotland where his estates lay.

Within Scottish Liberalism Campbell-Bannerman was a distinctive figure, in that he was home-grown in an age when there were so many carpet-baggers grateful for the safety of Scottish Liberal seats. In 1886 Gladstone had the notion of trying to persuade Campbell-Bannerman to transfer from the Stirling Burghs to Edinburgh East to challenge the Liberal Unionist G. J. Goschen and act

as a candidate around whom the party could rally, rather in the role Gladstone himself had played in Midlothian in 1880. Wisely, after consulting Rosebery (with whom he had cordial relations at this point), Campbell-Bannerman refused to act as Gladstone's pawn.⁶ He told the Prime Minister that Goschen was entrenched in the seat with a good organisation compared to the Liberals and he concluded:

There is no reason why the seat should not be fought, but it seems to me to be a good reason why we should not make the contest more conspicuous than is necessary, and risk a damaging and almost humiliating defeat.⁷

Although he was never parochial, as his knowledge of European languages (in contrast to his Foreign Secretary Edward Grey) demonstrated, his Scottish identity was important: he described his ideal diet as 'maistly Scotch', and something of this characterised his politics, as will be shown below.⁸

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Nevertheless, the British and imperial dimensions must not be neglected and it was a speech on the latter theme which yielded the phrase for which he is best remembered, when he is remembered at all. Given his reputation as a weak orator it is ironic to note that this came in a brave and powerful speech. On 14 June 1901, in an address to the National Reform Union in London, citing British criticism of Spanish conduct in Cuba in 1898 and drawing on details provided by Emily Hobhouse of the horrific mortality among women and children in the concentration camps for the Boer civilian population in South Africa, he remarked:

I do not say for a moment, that this is the deliberate and intentional policy of Her Majesty's

government ... at all events it is the thing which is being done at this moment in the name and by the authority of this most humane and Christian nation ... A phrase often used is that 'war is war', but when one comes to ask about it one is told that no war is going on, that it is not a war. When is a war not a war? When it is carried on by methods of barbarism in South Africa.⁹

This section of the speech, unscripted and spontaneous according to the *Manchester Guardian* after his death, defined later hostile views of Campbell-Bannerman: he was perceived as a pro-Boer, unpatriotic, a slanderer of the army, defeatist, and anti-imperialist. These sins were compounded in the eyes of his critics by the fact that he was a former Secretary of State for War.

This speech, although it gave much ammunition to the hostile press, did not signify that he was a Pro-Boer in the manner of Dr Gavin B. Clark (MP for Caithness until 1900) or the Irish MPs. It did, however, expose the divisions in the Liberal Party over the war. Campbell-Bannerman tried to deny their existence, but this was impossible in the light of the activities of Rosebery and his Liberal Imperialist henchmen, especially Asquith, Grey and Haldane, men who would later conspire against Campbell-Bannerman at the formation of the Liberal government in December 1905.¹⁰ The divisions in the party over the war were profound and the 'methods of barbarism' speech led to the opening up of political and social gaps between the Liberal Imperialists around Lord Rosebery, moderates around Campbell-Bannerman and the fully fledged pro-Boers. A Unionist speaker in Cambridge characterised the party as 'a Liberal dog with a head of Lord Rosebery, an inside of Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, and a tail of Labouchere and Dr Clark. The

whole body would be wagged by the tail, and they would have a mongrel of the very vilest description.¹¹

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In the view of most commentators Campbell-Bannerman's greatest achievement was to preside over the recovery of the Liberal Party from these chronic divisions. Not only this, but the disastrous final phase of the Boer War, after the general election of 1900 and even his speech of June 1901, seemed to vindicate the critics of the conduct of the war rather than its defenders. As CB wrote to Murray of Elibank in September 1903: 'Those, of whom you are one, who took the right view about the war, have now our chance for a chuckle, but I suppose we must do it with some reserve.'¹² Nevertheless, his status as leader was not assured for many years after 1900; it was often a matter of debate at Liberal meetings whether he should be thanked as 'Leader of the party in the country' or merely 'in the House of Commons'.¹³ The party tended to reserve the unqualified title of leader for former Prime Ministers. Increasingly he came to be recognised as the unrivalled leader, although his status was not entirely secured until he was invited to form a government in December 1905.

When he did accede to the premiership and confirmed his right to that role with the great victory of 1906 he went on to deliver a united government. Several factors, as well as his shrewd ability to exploit the weaknesses of his internal opponents – Asquith's vanity and desire for high office, for example, or Rosebery's tactical ineptitude – helps to explain this feat. Three further points are significant. First, the weakness of the Liberal Imperialists was that they had nowhere else to go. They did not have a common programme on wider issues and they were certainly hostile

to the Unionists on important issues like free trade.¹⁴ Rosebery was a possible exception to this rule; he was becoming more detached from the Liberal Party and after the election of 1906 he became ever more reactionary. This confirmed the belief of some Unionists that he had been in the wrong party all along. Second, subsequent divisions on fiscal policy shifted the political agenda on to territory which was much more favourable to the Liberals. Asquith was the principal rhetorical vehicle of opposition to Chamberlain's tariff reform campaigns, and free trade helped to rally the party, especially in areas, such as Scotland, where the results of the 1900 general election had been uncharacteristically bad and where tariff reform was unpopular among farmers and businessmen. Third, and perhaps most important, was the fact that the 1906 election renewed the Liberal Party. The host of new members were uninterested in ancient squabbles and factions: the debates of the Boer War suddenly seemed antique.

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In assessing this achievement much historical comment has emphasised Campbell-Bannerman as a tactician, a shrewd (an oft-used word) reconciler of factions, a man who worked behind the scenes to deal with seemingly intractable problems: the healing of the wounds in the Liberal Party after the Boer War; the puncturing of the Relugas conspiracy in which Asquith, Grey and Haldane sought to consign him to the Lords; and, earlier in his career, the successful and delicate campaign to persuade the Duke of Cambridge, cousin to the Queen, to retire as Commander-in-Chief.

An alternative view would be that he used his deliberately cultivated image of self-effacement to mask a keen ability and determination in close-quarter political combat. This was sufficient

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to outmanoeuvre Rosebery in 1901 and 1905, although that may not have been especially difficult since the latter possessed none of these skills.¹⁵ This is damnation by faint praise in comparison with the historical reputations of other politicians, and also represents the neglect and undervaluing of the kind of political skills which Campbell-Bannerman exhibited throughout his career. If one compares the unity of the Liberal Party, and its successes in government, during the period from 1899 to 1908, then Campbell-Bannerman's reputation ought to be higher than it is. Gladstone had left a divided party. Rosebery had been a disaster as premier and by his egomaniacal behaviour in the late 1890s and 1900s had compounded underlying problems. Campbell-Bannerman's much vaunted successors, Asquith and Lloyd George, presided over the creation of new factions around their personalities and the ultimate destruction of the party. Later Liberal leaders merely managed decline into marginal status.¹⁶ In contrast, Campbell-Bannerman produced a coherent Liberal administration in circumstances when that was thought to be impossible.¹⁷

Taking advantage of the new atmosphere in the House of Commons after the election in 1906, he sought to change the nature of political debate. Balfour, whom he disliked, brought his subtle metaphysical style to a different house on his return to Parliament after his defeat at Manchester and his subsequent victory in the City of London. He was brought up short by his less celebrated successor:

The Right Honourable Gentleman is like the old Bourbons in the oft quoted phrase – he has learnt nothing. He comes back to this new House of Commons with the same airy graces, the subtle dialectics, the light and frivolous way of dealing with a great question, and he little knows the temper

of the new House of Commons if he thinks that those methods will prevail here ... enough of this foolery ... let us get to business.¹⁸

As well as giving a higher priority to Campbell-Bannerman's ability to fix problems, extinguish fires and lead the party in an understated but successful manner, can we find other dimensions to his political career?

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A. J. A. Morris refers to Campbell-Bannerman as 'Britain's first and only radical Prime Minister'.¹⁹ Is this a fair assessment?

In some respects he was a traditional Gladstonian: he had served in Gladstone's governments in the 1880s and 1890s and he expressed traditional Liberal virtues, especially free trade, prominent in his election speeches in 1906 – as one would expect of a Liberal candidate in a Scottish constituency.²⁰ Further, he was firm in his belief in Irish Home Rule; some would argue that constitutional reform was at the heart of his political outlook. One of the major achievements of his government was the constitutional settlement with the Boer republics which, through its magnanimity, brought these former enemies back into the imperial fold.

Although the question of reform of the House of Lords did not have the urgency which it acquired after 1910, the upper house prevented progress on land reform and education. After Cabinet Committee was appointed to consider the question, Campbell-Bannerman did not like its complicated recommendation and put forward the 'suspensory veto', which became government policy and the basis of the 1911 Parliament Act.²¹ Nevertheless, his government did not legislate on Irish Home Rule (nor on another awkward Celtic question, Welsh disestablishment); it did not have

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to as, unlike the previous two Liberal administrations, it did not require the parliamentary support of the Irish. As early as 1899 Campbell-Bannerman had indicated that Irish Home Rule, although part of the Liberal programme, was not a practical proposition; this gave the party greater flexibility on the question in 1900 and, more particularly, in 1906.²² Despite this he remained popular with the leaders of Irish politics, especially Redmond and O'Connor, to whom he explained that Irish Home Rule legislation need not be expected in the early period of his administration and that when it came it was unlikely to achieve Home Rule in one step.²³ Coming from Campbell-Bannerman this seemed acceptable in a way which it would not have from Harcourt or Rosebery, both of whom were suspicious of Irish Home Rule, despite their support for Gladstone when the Liberal Party divided over the issue in 1886.

This Irish perception of Campbell-Bannerman's benignity had developed over a long period, and represents another of his positive virtues as a Liberal leader: he was able to appeal to the constituent nations of the United Kingdom. This was not as simple a matter as it may seem for a Scot in the late-Victorian or Edwardian period. There was great suspicion of Scots in nationalist Ireland; Scotland was perceived as a nation which had sold its soul to Britain and the empire and Scots farmers in Ireland had a terrible reputation for evicting small tenants to make way for sheep. Thus, it is not surprising that Tim Healy, that most vituperative of nationalists, should have greeted Campbell-Bannerman's appointment as Chief Secretary for Ireland in 1884 with something less than rapture. He remarked:

How would Scotsmen like to be ruled by an Irishman sent over from the sister Ireland – an Irishman, it might be, who

you greatly admired, myself for instance? ... Yet I venture to say that I have as much knowledge of Scotland as Mr Campbell-Bannerman has of Ireland.²⁴

Campbell-Bannerman's effective discharge of his duties as Lord Spencer's Chief Secretary was the first step in the transformation of his reputation in Ireland. He did not complain about the prospect of being sent to Ireland, unlike his mournful predecessor George Otto Trevelyan, who was nearly driven out of his wits by the threatening atmosphere. Once the drains in the Chief Secretary's residence had been sorted out to the satisfaction of Charlotte, he seemed to regard it as he did the other political offices which he held, a job to be done to the best of his ability.²⁵

Like many Scottish Gladstonians, Campbell-Bannerman was also in favour of Scottish Home Rule. This was a question which had little autonomous existence; it tended to be discussed in the context of Irish Home Rule. The Scottish Home Rule Association was established in 1886 partly as a result of the Irish debate. Although Campbell-Bannerman favoured the concept he did not regard it as practical politics, recognising that it could only be implemented in the context of granting home rule to other parts of the United Kingdom; an asymmetrical system would be dangerous. Logically this would have to involve some sort of English devolution and, since this concept was neither understood nor demanded, it meant that 'Scotch home rule must wait until the sluggish mind of John Bull is educated up to that point'.²⁶

As a Scottish Presbyterian he was not necessarily a supporter of disestablishment – a segment of the Free Church of Scotland adhered to the principle of established churches – but Campbell-Bannerman *was* a

disestablisher. He saw political logic in the idea – contrary to Gladstone, as he remarked to Rosebery in 1894: 'the Church people are and will remain hard against us, and that we must not in the futile hope of pleasing them damp the zeal of our own best supporters.'²⁷ Interestingly, as Prime Minister he took great time and trouble over his duties in the matter of Church of England appointments.

The issue of Scottish disestablishment was less prominent by the time he had become Prime Minister than it had been in the 1880s or 1890s. The United Presbyterian Church had united with the Free Church of Scotland in 1900, and the long project to heal the fracture in Scottish Presbyterianism which had taken place in 1843 and before was a more important practical question of ecclesiastical politics north of the border than the issue of disestablishment. This was not, of course, true in Wales, where disestablishment of the Church of England in Wales was *the* principal Welsh question and had been one of the issues to which Lloyd George, a minister in Campbell-Bannerman's government, had emphasised in his noisy and vivid rise to prominence. It was also, like Irish Home Rule, another question which was not dealt with by Campbell-Bannerman's government which recognised the insurmountable nature of the obstacle provided by the House of Lords.

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Finally, there is the question of land reform. Campbell-Bannerman had dealt with this at the Albert Hall rally which launched the 1906 election campaign, producing another memorable phrase:

We desire to develop our own undeveloped estate in this country, to colonise our own country – to give the farmer greater freedom and greater security in the exercise of his

business, to secure a home and a career for the labourers, who are in too many cases cut off from the soil. We wish to make the land less of a pleasure ground for the rich and more of a treasure house for the nation.²⁸

He appointed Lord Carrington to the Board of Agriculture and English land reform was taken forward through the mechanism of the county councils.²⁹ In Scotland this route was made awkward by continuing landlord domination of rural local government, and the subject of land reform was inherently more controversial.³⁰ John Sinclair had been appointed Secretary for Scotland and a Small Landholders Bill was taken forward early in the life of the government. This had to be withdrawn due to pressure of parliamentary business, but when it was reintroduced in 1907 it ran into the immovable obstacle of the House of Lords. A similar fate awaited another Scottish land bill in 1908.

These bills sought to extend the dual-ownership system of the 1886 Crofters Holdings (Scotland) Act to the rest of Scotland. This was sufficient to ensure the opposition of lowland farming and landlord interests, incorporated in the Scottish Chamber of Agriculture and the newly formed Scottish Land and Property Federation. They were horrified that a system of land tenure designed for feckless subsistence crofters was to be foisted on the sophisticated and modern farmers of southern Scotland. The parliamentary debates on Scottish land reform were graced by some reactionary comments by Campbell-Bannerman's old foe Lord Rosebery, himself a lowland landowner with substantial estates around his seat at Dalmeny in Midlothian.³¹

The Bill, however, actually went much further than this, indicating that Campbell-Bannerman's land policy was more than refashioned

Gladstonianism. Landowners were horrified because the Bill would have removed their monopoly on their choice of tenants. A new Board of Agriculture for Scotland would have the power to create new holdings on privately owned land. Further still, although the funding available for the new Board was modest, at £250,000 per year, it represented public expenditure on land reform, which undermined one of the key principles of Gladstonian dual ownership – that it was cheap.

Scottish land reform ran into difficulties not only because of the newly concerted action by landowners and the related opposition of the House of Lords, but also because of hostility in the Cabinet. The Bill was only solidly supported by Campbell-Bannerman, loyal to his crony John Sinclair, and other radicals such as Lord Loreburn, the Lord Chancellor. Halldane and Tweedmouth were notably hostile and others were merely lukewarm. It was seen as a faddist measure emanating from the prejudices of radicals such as Sinclair and Loreburn. After Campbell-Bannerman's death the subject slipped down the agenda and was only implemented in a watered-down form in 1911, its effect being very limited prior to the outbreak of the Great War.

Two reflections are stimulated by this episode. The first is that this represents a rare example of a failure of Campbell-Bannerman's instinct for what was possible. He seems to have kept the issue alive out of loyalty to Sinclair and against the wishes of many Cabinet colleagues, despite his feeling that the disagreements were 'nasty'.³² Even the King, with many friends among the owners of Scottish sporting estates, was known to be worried about the implications of the Bill.

Second, Campbell-Bannerman's motivations for land reform are also worthy of brief comment. He was a decidedly

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lowland politician with little sympathy for the aggrieved highland crofters who had stirred the conscience of Gladstone in the 1880s. He was not in the habit of travelling in the highlands in the manner of Harcourt, who had learnt much about the subject while on yachting holidays on the west coast. Campbell-Bannerman preferred the delights of a French novel and the regime at Marienbad to the rigours of stalking or fishing amidst the chilly mists of the Scottish highlands. Although he was an urban politician with roots in the middle class he represented a constituency composed of small towns and he had not been involved in the Georgite campaigns for land restoration which were so popular among urban radicals in the Scottish industrial cities in the Victorian period. Nevertheless, we should not assume that he was an insincere advocate of land reform. His motivation can be found in his view of urban society, concerns about which he expressed in a speech on the occasion of his receipt of the freedom of the City of Glasgow in January 1907:

Little by little we have come to face the fact that the concentration of human beings in dense masses is a state of things which is contrary to nature, and that, unless powerful counter-attractive agencies are introduced, the issue is bound to be the suffering and gradual destruction of the mass of the population ... Here and elsewhere today you have the spectacle of countless thousands of our fellow-men, and a still larger number of children, who are starved of air and space and sunshine, and of the very elements which make a happy life possible. This is a view of city life which is gradually coming home to the heart and understanding and conscience of our people. The view of it is so terrible that it cannot be put

away. What is all our wealth and learning ... if the men and women on whose labour the whole social fabric is maintained are doomed to live and die in darkness and misery in the areas of our great cities.³³

Oddly, Rosebery had expressed similar views in his rectorial address at the University of Glasgow, although his concern was with the impossibility of rearing an imperial race from the 'slums and rookeries' of industrial cities rather than with stimulating a back-to-the-land movement.

English educational reform was an issue upon which Campbell-Bannerman could not rouse himself to master the details, much to the exasperation of his Cabinet colleagues and leading churchmen.

Campbell-Bannerman's attitude to the Scottish land question is mirrored by that on another issue on which his government failed to carry the day – English educational reform. An education bill, designed to reassert state control over state-funded Church of England schools, caused sectarian bitterness between Anglicans and Non-conformists and constitutional strife between the houses of parliament. Provoked by the drastic amendment of their bill by the Lords the government chose not to force a constitutional crisis so early in its term of office and on an issue which excited so little popular excitement outside dissenting strongholds. Further, this was an issue upon which Campbell-Bannerman could not rouse himself to master the details, much to the exasperation of his Cabinet colleagues and leading churchmen.³⁴

Another issue on which the government was not successful in this period was the Irish Councils Bill, which offered a measure of devolution short of the full Home Rule demanded by the Irish party. Campbell-Bannerman was characteristically downbeat in a speech at Manchester in May 1907, referring to it as a 'little, modest, shy, humble effort to give administrative powers to the Irish people'.³⁵ When it became clear

that such an approach would be unacceptable to Irish opinion the bill was withdrawn. Campbell-Bannerman's Irish secretaries, Bryce and Birrell, had, respectively, created and dealt with this problem and despite the fact that the unsatisfactory Irish Councils Bill represented a failure of Campbell-Bannerman's government his relatively high stock among leading nationalists meant that the consequences were less problematic than they might have been.³⁶

Campbell-Bannerman's legislative activities were more popular in labour than in dissenting or Irish circles. He went much further than previous Liberal leaders in making advances to the labour movement, not least in the secret Gladstone-MacDonald pact of 1903, which gave Labour a free run in a number of English seats and facilitated their capture of twenty-nine constituencies in 1906. The deal was concluded at a time when it was by no means clear that the Liberals were likely to win the next election, so any assistance in tackling the Conservatives was welcome. (The pact was not operative in Scotland, where Liberal dominance was such that they had little to fear from Labour, who won only two seats in 1906 (one of which was Bonar Law's at Glasgow Blackfriars), or the Conservatives.) Also in the matter of the Trades Disputes Act of 1906 Campbell-Bannerman surprised his colleagues by accepting Labour's more advanced bill.

Much in CB's background and career made him act as a traditional Gladstonian – his views on Ireland, for example. His 'methods of barbarism' speech might also be placed in the same tradition of Liberal concern for human rights which motivated Gladstone's agitation for the

Bulgarian Christians or the Armenians. In matters relating to disestablishment, on which Gladstone was fearful lest it further disrupt the Liberal Party and endanger the Church of England, Campbell-Bannerman was certainly more radical. The same was true of his views on land reform or labour politics.

The Liberal Party has had many leaders from Scotland, and perhaps the Scottish political culture from which he emerged is the most sensible point of view from which to consider Campbell-Bannerman. He was by no means uncomfortable or out of his depth in London society, but it was not his natural milieu. In this we have to be wary of his deliberate cultivation of his image as an avuncular Scot puzzled by the odd ways of metropolitan politics. This image tended to lull opponents, both within his own party and on the other side of the House, into a false sense of security.

He had a circle of Scottish radical friends which remained important to him throughout his political career. He sustained charges of cronyism by his appointment of the former Scottish whip, John Sinclair, as Secretary for Scotland. Robert Reid, Lord Loreburn, was his Lord Chancellor and he was closely associated with Thomas Shaw, the Lord Advocate, a fiery radical who might have achieved higher office if he had desired it.

No one becomes Prime Minister by accident and Campbell-Bannerman certainly did not. In 1883 or in 1895 he might have become Speaker of the House of Commons, but he did not, possibly regretfully on the second occasion. Once he became party leader in 1899, however, his career moved into a new gear. He could have backed out of the premiership, or at least taken an ornamental view of the office from the House of Lords in 1905, but he chose not to. He faced down Lord Rosebery, a man whose

political sagacity was as often exaggerated as Campbell-Bannerman's was underestimated, on a number of occasions. He successfully outmanoeuvred the Relugas conspirators and ensured that they became loyal ministers – including a very successful one in an unfashionable office, in the case of Haldane as a reforming Secretary of State for War (his leader's old stamping ground, of course).

Although no master of detail, and absent from the front line through concern for his wife and his own ill health for a substantial period of his premiership, he did much to establish the character of the Liberal government and make subsequent reforms possible. He did this by grasping the opportunity of minority government presented by Balfour on the assumption that it could not be done; by appointing a Cabinet which, if it was not united in outlook, was prepared to submerge its differences; and by allowing talented departmental ministers – Asquith, Haldane, Lloyd George – the freedom from interference to develop policy. This may have stemmed from his notorious reluctance to master detail rather than a grand strategy, but it was the way he operated.³⁷

It might be argued that a positive view of Campbell-Bannerman rests on the good fortune of the moment at which he held the premiership. There is no doubt that things did become more difficult for the Liberal government after his death. By-elections and the general elections of 1910 saw dissipation, especially in England, of the electoral assets which had been banked in 1906. A number of the issues which had been foreshadowed from 1905 to 1908 became more difficult, even intractable, from 1908 to 1914: Ireland, labour questions, women's suffrage, to name just three. This cannot merely be put down to the loss of the late Prime Minister's sagacity. Campbell-Bannerman

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might well have found that his hands-off approach might have required some amendment in a more contested political environment, especially after 1910. An additional factor is the renewed aggression of the Conservatives after the accession of Bonar Law to the leadership in 1911; the new Conservative leader's style was in marked contrast to that of his predecessor which Campbell-Bannerman had found so easy to deflate. Nevertheless, to end this article where it began, with a thought about the connections between Campbell-Bannerman and Bonar Law, it would have been interesting to see how political debate would have developed between these two men from the business community of the west of Scotland.

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- 1 John Wilson, *CB: A life of Henry Campbell Bannerman* (London, 1973); J. A Spender, *The Life of Sir Henry Campbell Bannerman, G.C.B.*, 2 vols (London, c.1924); T. P. O'Connor, *Sir Henry Campbell Bannerman* (London, 1908).
- 2 The reports to the King on Cabinet meetings were certainly terse; see London, British Library, Henry Campbell-Bannerman Papers, Add. MS 52512.
- 3 Jose F. Harris and Cameron Hazlehurst, 'Campbell Bannerman as Prime Minister', *History*, 55 (1970), pp. 361–62; Peter Rowland, *The Last Liberal Governments: The Promised Land, 1905–1910* (London, 1968), pp. 34–35.
- 4 Henry had taken the additional name of 'Bannerman' as a condition in the will of his uncle Henry Bannerman who left him an estate in 1871.

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- of *Conservative Politics: The Diaries and Letters of William Bridgeman 1904-1935* (The Historians' Press, London, 1988), p. 215.
- 13 Keith Middlemas (ed.), *Thomas Jones: Whitehall Diary Vol. II: 1926-1930* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1969), pp. 175-76 (entry for 6 March 1929).
- 14 'The exploitation of unemployment: Mr Churchill on "One of the meanest things"', *The Times*, 14 May 1929.
- 15 Speech of 5 June 1935.
- 16 Winston Churchill to Archibald Sinclair, 31 Jan. 1942, in Ian Hunter (ed.), *Winston and Archie: The Letters of Sir Archibald Sinclair and Winston S. Churchill, 1915-1960* (Politico's, London, 2005), pp. 338-39.
- 17 'Major Lloyd-George's Future', *The Times*, 20 March 1945.
- 18 "'Vote National, Not Party'", *The Times*, 5 June 1945.
- 19 'In West Riding Valleys', *The Times*, Wednesday, 4 July 1945.
- 20 'Government Hopes in Scotland', *The Times*, 5 July 1945.
- 21 Archibald Sinclair to Clement Davies, 3 Dec. 1945, Thurso Papers, Churchill College, Cambridge, THRS IV 1/10. It should be noted that, after 1945, Gwilym Lloyd-George hyphenated his surname, whereas his sister Megan Lloyd George did not; she had objected to her father's acceptance of a peerage, as Earl Lloyd-George of Dwyfor, in the last weeks of his life, and her refusal to use the hyphen reflected this.
- 22 Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, 'Rationing, Austerity and the Conservative Party after 1945', *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 37, No. 1 (March 1994), pp. 173-97 at p. 192.
- 23 Churchill to Lord Woolton, 3 Aug. 1946, Conservative Party Archive, Bodleian Library, Oxford, CCO 3/1/64.
- 24 'Dangerous Economic Position: Mr Churchill's Attack On The Government', *The Times*, 17 May 1947.
- 25 See Michael Kandiah, 'Conservative Leaders, strategy - and "Consensus"?' 1945-64, in Harriet Jones and Michael Kandiah (eds.), *The Myth of Consensus: New Views on British History, 1945-64* (Macmillan, Houndmills, Basingstoke, 1996), pp. 58-78, at 62-63.
- 26 Alan Watkins, *The Liberal Dilemma* (MacGibbon and Kee, 1966), p. 48.
- 27 E. C. Bradbury to the General Director of the Conservative Party (Stephen Pierse), 21 Jan. 1950, Appendix B, Conservative Party Archive, CCO 4/3/43.
- 28 Churchill to Davies, 25 Jan. 1950, quoted in Martin Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill*, vol. VIII: 'Never Despair', 1945-1965 (Heinemann, London, 1988), p. 504.
- 29 See Davies to Sinclair, 30 May 1946, Thurso Papers, Churchill College, Cambridge, THRS IV, 1/10. It is possible that Davies warmed more to the idea as time went on given that, by 1950, he was reported as saying that he would not mind if individual constituency parties made their own local agreements for cooperation spontaneously. (I am grateful to David Dutton for this information.) This may, however, have reflected his recognition that he could not control the situation on the ground.
- 30 Lord Woolton to WSC, 7 Aug. 1947, Churchill Papers, Churchill College, Cambridge, CHUR 2/64/21.
- 31 Churchill to Lord Woolton, 11 Aug. 1947, Churchill Papers, CHUR 2/64/19-20.
- 32 Conclusions of Consultative Committee, 14 July 1948, Conservative Party Archive, Bodleian Library, Oxford, LCC 1/1/3.
- 33 'The floating vote', 6 Dec. 1949, quoted in Zweiniger-Bargielowska, 'Rationing, Austerity and the Conservative Party after 1945', p. 191.
- 34 H. G. Nicholas, *The British General Election of 1950* (Macmillan, London, 1951), pp. 86-87.
- 35 *Ibid.*, p. 94.
- 36 Speech of 8 Feb. 1950.
- 37 Woolton to Lord Salisbury, 28 Sept. 1950, Woolton Papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Woolton 21, ff. 73-83.
- 38 D. E. Butler, *The British General Election of 1951* (Macmillan, London, 1952), p. 95.
- 39 *Ibid.*, p. 247.
- 40 Speech of 17 May 1955.
- 41 National Liberal Policy, *The Times*, 6 Oct 1951.
- 42 See Scott Kelly, *The Myth of Mr. Butskell: The Politics of British Economic Policy, 1950-55* (Ashgate, Aldershot, 2002), pp. 159-71.
- 43 Churchill to Davies, 25 Jan. 1950, quoted in Gilbert, *Never Despair*, p. 504.
- 44 "'Vote National, Not Party": Prime Minister's Broadcast Attack on Socialism', *The Times*, 5 June 1945.
- 5 'Although the apparent prospect of a Gordon Brown premiership has induced some sections of the Scottish media to reacquaint themselves with the Scots who have made it to No 10 Downing St.; see Allan Burnett, 'The Scottish Premier League', *Sunday Herald*, 7 Jan. 2007, 'Seven days' section, pp. 14-15.
- 6 Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, Rosebery MSS, MS 10002, ff.40-43, Campbell-Bannerman to Rosebery, 10, 12 Jun. 1886.
- 7 BL, Add. Mss, 44117, f.55, Campbell-Bannerman to Gladstone, 11 Jun. 1886.
- 8 Wilson, CB, 122. In making this remark he did not refer to whisky but to Scottish produce, such as the soft fruit grown on the farms around his home at Meigle.
- 9 Wilson, CB, 349; Spender, *Life*, i, 336; George L. Bernstein, 'Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman and the Liberal Imperialists', *Journal of British Studies*, 23 (1983), pp. 111-13.
- 10 For an assertion of the unity of the party see a speech at Dalkeith in October 1900, *Scotsman*, 2 Oct. 1900, p. 6.
- 11 Quoted by Paul Readman, 'The Conservative party, patriotism and British politics: the case of the general election of 1900', *Journal of British Studies*, 40 (2001), p. 116.
- 12 Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, Murray of Elibank MSS, MS 8801, f. 29, Campbell-Bannerman to Murray, 12 Sep. 1903.
- 13 B.L., Add, MS 41252, ff. 235-39, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman's leadership, notes from Scotland, by W[illiam] W[ebster], Jun. 1922.
- 14 Wilson, CB, 354.
- 15 David W. Gutzke, 'Rosebery and Campbell-Bannerman: the conflict over leadership reconsidered', *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, 54 (1981), 241-50.
- 16 I was forcibly reminded of this point at the conference from which this article arises by David Howarth, Alan Beith and Duncan Brack. I am grateful for their comments.
- 17 T. Boyle, 'The formation of Campbell-Bannerman's government in December 1905: a memorandum by J.A. Spender', *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, 45 (1972), pp. 283-302; Wilson, CB, pp. 423-66; Spender, *Life*, ii, pp. 188-205.
- 18 *Parliamentary Debates*, 4th series, vol. 153, cols 990-92, 12 Mar. 1906.
- 19 A. J. A. Morris, 'Bannerman, Sir Henry Campbell- (1836-1908)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004)
- 20 *Dunfermline Press*, 13 Jan. 1906
- 21 Harris and Hazlehurst, 'Campbell Bannerman as Prime Minister', p. 381; Wilson, CB, pp. 549-66, esp. 562.
- 22 George. L. Bernstein, *Liberalism and Liberal Politics in Edwardian England* (London, 1986), pp. 30-31.
- 23 Rowland, *The Last Liberal Governments*, pp. 55, 132.
- 24 Quoted by Wilson, CB, p. 78.
- 25 NLS, Rosebery MSS, MS 10002, ff. 13-14, Campbell-Bannerman to Rosebery, 27 Oct. 1884.
- 26 Quoted by Wilson, CB, p. 155.
- 27 NLS, Rosebery MSS, MS 10002, ff. 184-85, Note by Campbell Bannerman, 16 Mar. 1894.
- 28 *Scotsman*, 22 Dec. 1905, p. 5.
- 29 John Brown, 'Scottish and English land legislation', *Scottish Historical Review*, 47 (1968).
- 30 The following section is based on Ewen A. Cameron, *Land for the People? The British Government and the Scottish Highlands, c. 1880-1925* (East Linton, 1996), pp. 124-43.
- 31 *Parliamentary Debates*, 4th series, vol. 180, col. 988, 13 Aug. 1907.
- 32 B.L., Add. MS, 41230, f. 208, Campbell-Bannerman to Sinclair, 1 Jan. 1908.
- 33 Quoted by Wilson, CB, p. 588; Spender, *Life*, ii, p. 321; *Glasgow Herald*, 26 Jan. 1907.
- 34 G. R. Searle, *A New England? Peace and War, 1886 to 1918* (Oxford, 2004), p. 362; Bernstein, *Liberalism*, pp. 83-86; Wilson, CB, pp. 554-60.
- 35 Quoted by Wilson, CB, p. 115.
- 36 Patricia Jalland, 'A Liberal Chief Secretary and the Irish question: Augustine Birrell, 1907-1914', *Historical Journal*, 19 (1976), pp. 426-30.
- 37 Harris and Hazlehurst, 'Campbell Bannerman as Prime Minister', pp. 377-81.