

A FORGOTTEN LIBERAL—

THE CONSTITUTIONALISTS AND THE 1924 GENERAL E

Collaboration between Liberals and Conservatives in British politics is not new. Some past arrangements, such as the Lloyd George Coalition, or the National Government of 1931, have been well researched, while others, including the Constitutionalists, have barely received any attention. Whilst it is fairly well-known that Churchill labelled himself as a Constitutionalist at the 1924 general election, in an attempt to straddle the Liberal–Conservative divide, he was not the only candidate bearing the label. **Alun Wyburn-Powell** identifies the other candidates who also styled themselves Constitutionalists, and investigates their electoral records, their views and their objectives.



CONSERVATIVE ALLIANCE ELECTION – A NEW PARTY OR A WORTHLESS COUPON?

IN ANALYSING THEIR performance at the 1924 election, it is possible to draw conclusions about the success of the Constitutionalist experiment and its impact on the Liberal Party, placing it in the wider context of the Liberals' decline and, in doing so, to answer the question as to whether the Constitutionalist were a putative new party, or simply a loose grouping using a coupon for short-term electoral advantage.

The Lloyd George Coalition and the 1920 attempt at fusion

The closeness of the political relationship between some Liberals and Conservatives was such that during the Lloyd George Coalition Government of 1916–22, there were moves towards 'fusion' of the Coalition Liberals and the Conservatives. However, these manoeuvres were not seen favourably throughout the parties and the moves were blocked, even within the Lloyd George Liberal side of the alliance, in 1920. At the following election in 1922, Lloyd George led a depleted band which stood for that election under the name 'National Liberal', exposed to competition from Labour and, in some cases, also from Asquithian Liberals. Hastily-made arrangements for the National Liberals to be spared Conservative opposition were only partly implemented and 43 of Lloyd George's

Winston Churchill in 1924, after his election as Constitutionalist MP for Epping

162 candidates faced a Conservative contender.¹

By the following election, in 1923, the political landscape was very different. Lloyd George and Asquith were reconciled and the Liberal Party was more or less reunited, in opposition to the Conservatives' plans for protection. The Liberals gained seats, winning 159, against 191 for Labour and 258 for the Conservatives. The inconclusive outcome of the election placed the Liberals in the invidious position of having to permit or deny Labour their first opportunity to form a government. They allowed Labour a milestone nine-month term in office, much to the annoyance of most Conservatives and many right-leaning Liberals. For many voters, and even some Liberal MPs, this suggested that the Liberal Party had become superfluous, with the essential battle of ideas raging between the Labour Party and the Conservatives.

Between the ending of the fusion plans in 1920 and the 1924 election, three former Liberal MPs – Hilton Philipson, Arthur Evans and Walter Waring – defected to the Conservatives. Other Liberals, in particular Winston Churchill, continued to harbour hopes for some form of alliance with the Conservatives. It was against this background that the Constitutionalist emerged as an attempt at an anti-socialist alliance. The aims of the Constitutionalist were similar

to those of the Fusionists, and some of the groups' membership overlapped. Whilst the Fusionists had been more strategic in their long-term ambition permanently to merge their branch of Liberalism with the Conservatives, the Constitutionalist were more short-term and their focus was primarily concerned with maximising their chances of victory at the 1924 election, by avoiding a local Liberal–Conservative contest.

The first publicity for a putative Constitutionalist group appeared in *The Times* in September 1920, as a display advertisement inviting readers to attend a conference in London to 'help to carry out the preliminary organisation of the Constitutional Party'.² It was placed in the name of Charles Higham, an export merchant, who sat as the Coalition Conservative MP for Islington South from 1918 to 1922. No further publicity appeared and no new party emerged. The Constitutionalist label was used occasionally in the early 1920s in local politics, notably by the ruling Liberal–Conservative alliance in Bootle in 1920–21 and then by the local Conservatives alone in 1922–23.³

The term reappeared in national politics when George Jarrett, the one-armed former chief organiser of the Lloyd George Coalition-supporting National Democratic and Labour Party (NDP), described himself as a 'constitutionalist' in

a letter to *The Times*. He stood in the 1922 election as the nominee of both the National Liberal and Conservative associations in Dartford, winning the seat against both Labour and Asquithian Liberal opposition. At the following contest, in 1923, Jarrett wrote in his election address: 'A year ago you honoured me by returning me ... without respect to party ... Again I stand as the Constitutional Candidate.'³ His name appeared on both the Liberal and Conservative Party official lists of candidates in 1923. However, in a straight fight with Labour, he was defeated. Jarrett thus served only one year in Parliament, from 1922 to 1923, but was the first to do so as a Constitutionalist.⁵ He formally joined the Conservative Party in January 1924.

Jarrett was a close associate of Algernon Moreing, who was first elected for the East Yorkshire constituency of Buckrose as a Coalition Liberal in 1918. He was a strong advocate of fusion in 1920.⁶ In 1922 Moreing changed constituencies and was successful as the National Liberal candidate for Camborne. However, the 1923 election in this constituency illustrated that Liberal reunion was less than total; the only two candidates in Camborne were both Liberals, Moreing's only challenger being the Asquithian Liberal, Leif Jones. Moreing's name also appeared on the official list of Conservative candidates. Unresolved differences between the followers of Lloyd George and Asquith in Camborne led to the nomination of the two Liberal candidates and the so-called United Liberal Committee in London declared its neutrality between the candidates, rather than risk fuelling the local split. Jones was the winner of the 1923 contest. In February 1924, Moreing and Jarrett wrote to Churchill complaining about the difficult position in which they had been put by the Liberals' support for Labour and declaring that they looked to Churchill for leadership.⁷

By 1922 Winston Churchill had already been a Conservative, a Liberal, a Coalition Liberal and a National Liberal. As an enthusiastic advocate of fusion, he had considered calling the proposed new party 'The Constitutional Reform Party'.⁸ He continued to speculate about other possible labels, to aid his return to Parliament after his

1922 defeat at Dundee. In May 1923, he described himself in private as 'a Tory Democrat'.⁹ However, the arrival of the general election in December 1923 forced him to abandon his oscillation over party labels. He settled for the Liberal candidacy at West Leicester, where he hoped that he might be spared a Conservative opponent, although it was, as Roy Jenkins observed, impossible to see why he should have thought this 'remotely likely'.¹⁰ His wife, Clementine, so often more objective than her husband about his career, advised Churchill: 'I am sure the old *real* Liberals will want you back but ... do not give them cause ... for thinking that you would like a new Tory Liberal Coalition ... if you were to lose a seat ... it would be better for you to be beaten by a Tory (which would arouse Liberal sympathy) than by a Socialist'.¹¹ Churchill lost West Leicester to Labour and, like Jarrett and Moreing, he was very unsympathetic towards the Liberal Party when it supported Labour after the 1923 election. When he was asked in February 1924 to stand again as a Liberal, Churchill replied that he would not be willing to fight the Conservatives.¹² On 26 February 1924 the *Glasgow Herald* declared that Churchill was preparing the way for his return to the Conservative Party.¹³

When the Westminster Abbey by-election was called in February 1924, Churchill was caught between parties. He was convinced that Baldwin wanted him returned, and wondered if the local Conservative association might adopt him as their candidate, despite the fact that he was not even a member of their party.¹⁴ But when the Westminster Conservative Association adopted Otho Nicholson as their candidate instead, Churchill decided that he would still contest the seat. Baldwin did not intervene. Churchill was variously described in the press as a 'Constitutionalist' or as an 'Independent anti-Socialist'.¹⁵ Even though a Liberal candidate was standing in the by-election, the party was virtually inactive in the election; Asquith was ill and Lloyd George took no part in the campaign. Churchill lost to Nicholson by just forty-three votes, but performed the 'paradoxical feat of opposing an official Conservative ... while moving himself

in a more Conservative direction'.¹⁶ The result turned Lloyd George's thinking away from his plans for an alliance with the Labour government and towards a revival of a Liberal-Conservative arrangement. To Lloyd George, and many other Liberals, the Abbey by-election result demonstrated the strength of Anti-Socialist Liberalism and, at the same time, the weakness of the Liberal Party. This was a widely-drawn conclusion at the time but, as pointed out by Chris Cook, an erroneous one. Churchill had mainly attracted former Conservative voters and the Liberal Party had hardly campaigned.¹⁷ Churchill's eve-of-poll speech had advocated a united Conservative party 'with a Liberal wing'.¹⁸

The 1924 cast of Constitutional characters

After the Westminster near-miss, Churchill decided to improve his negotiating position by gathering around him a Liberal group ready to co-operate with the Conservatives; he envisaged that his followers would occupy the same position as the Liberal Unionists had in 1886. On 10 May 1924 Churchill informed Baldwin that he was organising a group of Liberal MPs who would be willing to co-operate with the Conservatives – Churchill provisionally called them 'Liberal-Conservatives'.¹⁹ He told Baldwin that there were at least twenty Labour seats which could be won by Liberals, and only Liberals, if they were given Conservative support.²⁰ This helped Churchill persuade Baldwin to try and find him a safe Conservative seat in or near London and, if possible, a seat for which there was no Liberal candidate. They agreed that at this stage Churchill would not join the Conservative Party, but that he could stand under the label of 'Constitutionalist'. On 5 August 1924 the Chairman of the Epping Conservatives wrote to Churchill to ask if he would allow his name to go forward as a candidate for the seat.²¹ He did; but a Liberal candidate was also in the field. As the October 1924 election approached Churchill was in negotiation with the Unionist Central Office to arrange for a raft of his 'Constitutionalist' candidates to be given a clear run by the Conservatives. He reported

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hopefully that the deal would cover '25 or 27' candidates.²²

Hamar Greenwood was Churchill's key ally in the Constitutionalist venture. Brought up in Canada, Greenwood had strong Imperial leanings and was brother-in-law to the arch-Imperialist Conservative MP, Leo Amery.²³ During his first spell in the House of Commons, from 1906 to January 1910, Greenwood had been Churchill's Parliamentary Private Secretary. He was re-elected in December 1910 and rose to be Chief Secretary for Ireland. He lost his seat in 1922 and failed to be re-elected the following year. By 1924, he was exploring alternative avenues back to the Commons, and was offered the Liberal candidature for Central Cardiff, at the instigation of Lloyd George.²⁴ However, Greenwood declined, saying that: 'the best way to defeat Socialism ... is ... to unite in common action. These views must preclude acceptance of your suggested nomination ... where there is already a Conservative and a Socialist candidate in the field'.²⁵ A more attractive offer came when the Unionist MP for East Walthamstow announced his retirement in late September 1924 and an arrangement was reached for Greenwood to stand there as a Constitutionalist, unopposed by the Tories.²⁶ However, like Churchill, Greenwood was not given a clear run against Labour. He also faced a Liberal opponent, who argued that the withdrawal of his own candidature would make a present of the seat to Labour; he claimed that Greenwood had tried to persuade Liberal headquarters to have him 'retired'.²⁷ However, in the event only Greenwood, Moreing and Churchill went into the 1924 election facing a Liberal opponent; the other Constitutionlists managed to avoid this.

Considerably less strident in his anti-Socialist views than most of the others who became Constitutionlists, and not alienated by the Liberals' attitude to the first Labour government, was John Leng Sturrock. Sturrock was first elected as Coalition Liberal MP for Montrose in 1918, being re-elected in 1922 and 1923. He wrote after the 1923 election that: 'If ... [Labour leader Ramsay] MacDonald desires to form a Government he is entitled to do so'.²⁸ While serving as a Liberal

MP, Sturrock publicly questioned his party's continued survival, writing to *The Times* a letter including the comment: 'When the obituary of the Liberal Party comes to be written, as come it may ...'.²⁹ In 1924, Sturrock moved south to contest North Tottenham as a Constitutionalist with Liberal and Conservative support.³⁰

Henry Cairn Hogbin was first elected to Parliament in 1923, for Battersea North. Standing as a Liberal, he beat his only opponent, Shapurji Saklatvala, then standing as a Labour-Socialist candidate.³¹ In 1924 Hogbin again faced only Saklatvala, but by this time the two men had both changed party labels; Hogbin stood as a Constitutionalist, and Saklatvala as a Communist, having been denied Labour support. Thus, the contest had the unusual feature of having no Liberal, Labour or Conservative candidate. If ever there was a contest where Constitutionalism had an unfettered opportunity to pit its virtues against its antithesis, this was it. Hogbin put the question of the Constitution in the forefront of his address and claimed that the great issue was 'whether you will have Constitutional Government ... or submit to the forces of revolution and disorder'.³²

By background, John Ward had little in common with most of the other Constitutionlists, who were mainly wealthy and well-educated. Ward had received little formal education, working initially as a navy and only learning to read as a teenager. In 1886 he had joined the far-left Social Democratic Federation and three years later he founded the Navvies' Union. In 1914 Ward was commissioned into the army as a Lieutenant-Colonel and, using his connections with organised labour, recruited five battalions. His service as a commissioned officer was, however, a distinction which he shared with many of the other Constitutionlists.³³ The Constitutionlists' military training may have contributed to their tendency to focus on results, irrespective of the means. Ward represented Stoke in Parliament from 1906, initially as a Lib-Lab member. He had refused to sign the Labour Representation Committee constitution in 1903, and was elected without their endorsement.³⁴ He therefore

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faced repeated Labour opposition. In 1924, Ward stood as a Constitutionalist, although the Liberal Party always claimed him as one of their members and supported his candidature. He was ill and unable to take an active part in the election campaign, but there was a joint campaign of Liberals, Conservatives and trade unionists on his behalf.³⁵ The press commented that the local Conservatives, who had been 'lukewarm' at the previous election, rallied enthusiastically to his support in 1924 'in a joint Anti-Socialist effort'.³⁶

In 1924, nine of the ten Staffordshire seats saw straight fights between Labour and one other challenger. In seven of these nine, the Conservatives faced Labour, without Liberal intervention. In the remaining two – Stoke and Burslem – Labour faced a challenger fighting under the Constitutionalist banner. Ward contested the Stoke seat and William Allen fought Burslem as the Constitutionalist candidate.³⁷ Allen was a barrister and had been a Liberal MP from 1892 to 1900. In 1924, no party label appeared on the front of his election address.³⁸ The document had very little policy content, was moderately anti-Labour in tone, and made no mention of the Conservatives, or of any party leader at all, but Allen did declare that he had 'accepted the invitation of the Liberal Association to become a Candidate'.³⁹

(John) Hugh Edwards was the author of three biographies of Lloyd George. Before the First World War, Edwards had become notorious for his anti-socialist campaigning. He sat for Mid Glamorgan from December 1910 until his defeat in 1922.⁴⁰ He then stood in Accrington in 1923, where he was elected as a Liberal. In 1924 he again stood for Accrington, this time as a Constitutionalist with support from the local Liberal and Conservative associations. Edwards was received with 'great cordiality' at the Accrington Central Conservative Club, where his candidature was adopted unanimously. Edwards pledged himself 'that he would never lose an opportunity of voting against Socialists'. He claimed he had done so 'even to the annoyance of the heads of his own party' and that he had 'stuck to the Conservatives on all occasions' since the last election.⁴¹

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Thomas Robinson used the label Constitutionalist for his campaign in Stretford in 1924, where he was already the sitting MP. During the whole period from his first election in 1918 to his retirement in 1931, he was elected as the result of a local Liberal–Conservative pact. He stood under a variety of labels, generally variations on ‘Independent Free Trade and Anti-Socialist’, although he was always claimed by the Liberal Party as one of their candidates.⁴² Robinson’s 1924 election address was strongly anti-Labour in tone.⁴³

Abraham England was another Lancashire MP who was elected as the result of a local pact between the Liberals and Conservatives, and who stood as a Constitutionalist in 1924. Robinson and England, although adopting the Constitutionalist label in 1924, were therefore effectively just continuing a pre-existing local arrangement. England claimed he had ‘been no Party hack ... I am anti-nothing ... If you examine my record for the last Parliament you will probably be astonished to find the number of votes I gave to the Labour Party. I

have never let Party influence any vote.⁴⁴ However, he was one of the Liberal MPs who had defied the party whip on 21 January 1924 and voted against putting Labour into office, along with Hogbin, Robinson, Edwards and Sturrock. As a result, local Conservatives strongly supported England’s candidature in 1924, some signing his nomination papers.⁴⁵

The assembled group of Constitutional candidates fell well short of Churchill’s target. Ten Liberal or former Liberal MPs stood as Constitutionalists, listed in Table 1.

In addition to the former Liberals mentioned in Table 1, four other candidates were listed in some newspapers as Constitutionalists. These were the former Coalition NDP MP, C. Loseby, standing in Nottingham West, film producer, E. Doran, standing in Silvertown, the former Conservative candidate and heraldry expert, A. Fox-Davies, in Merthyr Tydfil and first-time candidate J. Davis, contesting Consett.⁴⁶ Higham, the promoter of the first attempt at a Constitutionalist organisation, had retired from the House

of Commons in 1922 and did not contest another election. Jarrett had joined the Conservative Party before the 1924 election and unsuccessfully fought this and two later elections as a Conservative candidate, never being re-elected.⁴⁷

Constitutionalist candidates only stood in England and Wales, nearly all in urban seats, mainly north-east of London and in Lancashire and Staffordshire. In most Scottish constituencies, an informal pact existed between the Conservatives and Liberals, but the label Constitutionalist was not used. Only 15 Scottish seats of the total of 71 had both a Conservative and a Liberal candidate in 1924.⁴⁸

The past electoral record of the Constitutional candidates convinced them that their chances of victory would be much enhanced if they faced only Labour opposition. Between them at the last two elections (1922 and 1923) they had prevailed in every straight fight with Labour except one (ten of the eleven such contests); whereas they had failed in all but one of their other contests (five of the six), as shown in Table 2.

There are no records of meetings of the Constitutionalists to thrash out party policy, and certainly nothing to suggest that the group agonised over their political philosophy. Their election addresses did not bear the hallmark of any central co-ordination. The choice of the name Constitutionalist loosely fitted their political positions and highlighted their fears of an unbridled socialist government. The origins of Constitutionalism can be traced back to the theories of John Locke, that government should be legally limited in its powers and that its authority depended on its observing these limits. In Britain, with its uncodified constitution, the potential for government excess was certainly present in theory, but the record of the first, timid, respectable, safe and rather rule-bound Labour government had already dispelled most fears on this score.

The Constitutionalists did not co-ordinate their activities as a group in the approach to the 1924 election. They had no party manifesto and organised no joint meetings. A common theme of their election addresses was the absence of any mention of political parties

Table 1 Former-Liberal Constitutional Candidates in 1924

Candidate	Constituency	Incumbent MP
W Allen	Burslem	W E Robinson, Lib, retiring
W L S Churchill	Epping	C Lyle, Con, retiring
J H Edwards	Accrington	Edwards incumbent Lib
A England	Heywood & Radcliffe	England incumbent Lib
H Greenwood	Walthamstow East	L S Johnson, Con, retiring
H C Hogbin	Battersea North	Hogbin incumbent Lib
A H Moreing	Camborne	L Jones, Lib, re-standing
T Robinson	Stretford	Robinson incumbent Lib
J L Sturrock	Tottenham North	Morrison, Lab re-standing
J Ward	Stoke-on-Trent	Ward, incumbent Lib

Table 2 Previous Results for Constitutionalist Candidates

	1922		1923	
	Opponents	Result	Opponents	Result
Churchill	SPP, ⁴⁹ Lab, Lib, Con	lost	Lab, Con	lost
Greenwood	Con, Lab, Lib	lost	Con, Lab	lost
Hogbin	Lab, Lib	lost	Lab	won
Edwards	Lab	lost	Lab	won
Moreing	Lib, Lab	won	Lib	lost
Ward	Lab	won	Lab	won
England	Lab	won	Lab	won
Robinson	Lab	won	Lab	won
Sturrock	Lab	won	Lab	won
Allen	Did not stand	–	Did not stand	–

or of the leaders whom they supported; only those leaders whom they opposed were mentioned. Whilst the common enemy was clearly Labour, the stridency of their criticism varied from mild in the case of Allen to rabid in the case of Moreing. The Constitutionalists did not behave as a party, and were not treated as such by the other parties. At the 1924 election, Ward, England, Edwards, Allen, Sturrock and Robinson had the backing of their local Liberal associations and faced only Labour opponents. Moreing, Churchill and Greenwood, who did not have the backing of their local Liberal associations, were faced with Liberal opponents.

The Constitutionalists' election results

The Constitutionalists' results in the 1924 election were mixed. Seven of the ten former Liberal Constitutionalists were elected. This represented a net loss of one seat – Battersea North, contested by Hogbin – when comparing seats where the same candidate contested the 1923 and 1924 elections. However, when comparing votes where the candidates contested the same seats as in 1923, their aggregate majorities improved by 14,984, giving an average improvement of just under 2,500 votes per seat.⁵⁰ The 1924 election was a much more difficult election than 1923 had been for candidates standing as Liberals and, had the Constitutionalists all stood under the Liberal banner, their aggregate vote would almost certainly have fallen. Three of the Constitutionalists failed to achieve a clear run against Labour, but still won their contests. Conversely, two who enjoyed a clear run against Labour failed to be elected, as did Hogbin, standing against only a Communist challenger, as shown in Table 3:

Ward, Edwards, England and Robinson repeated their victories of 1923, in the same constituencies, with straight wins against Labour. The Constitutionalist label helped to ensure that they did not face a Conservative challenger, but the Conservatives had not contested any of these seats in the last two elections anyway. However, the label helped to galvanise a greater level of active support from local Conservatives than would have

Candidate	Opponents	Result	Majority ⁵¹	Change from 1923 result ⁵²
Churchill	Lib, Lab	Won	9,763	different seat
Greenwood	Lib, Lab	Won	3,066	different seat
Moreing	Lib, Lab	Won	2,310	+6,008
Robinson	Lab	Won	9,306	+4,786
Ward	Lab	Won	4,546	+3,929
England	Lab	Won	3,824	+1,934
Edwards	Lab	Won	2,243	-945
Hogbin	Comm	Lost	-542	-728
Sturrock	Lab	Lost	-557	different seat
Allen	Lab	Lost	-606	did not stand

been the case had the candidates stood as Liberals.

The position of Churchill, Greenwood and Moreing was different. They were seen to be closer to being Conservatives than Liberals by this stage, and their results can more reasonably be compared to that which Conservative candidates would have achieved in the same constituencies. Churchill's seat at Epping was essentially a safe Conservative seat. Walthamstow East, where Greenwood was elected, had been a Conservative seat at the last three elections, but more marginal. Moreing's constituency of Camborne was a knife-edge marginal, where left and right had alternately won; however, the main contest recently had been between the two brands of Liberalism – Moreing as a Lloyd George Liberal and Leif Jones as an Asquithian. In 1924, with a revival on the right and a Liberal decline, the seat would probably have swung to the more rightward contender, whatever the party label.

So, overall, the Constitutionalist experiment achieved modest success as a defensive tactic, but it did not herald an electoral breakthrough or the emergence of a new party, or even a grouping, with a distinct identity.

The diverging paths of the Constitutionalists after the 1924 election

After the election, the 'Constitutional Group' of MPs held a dinner at the Constitutional Club, which was attended by over fifty guests. The Constitutional Club had been founded in 1883, one year after the National Liberal Club, both in anticipation of a large number of

potential members as a result of the widening of the franchise in 1884. The longer-established Conservatives' Carlton Club and the Liberals' Reform Club were both, by that time, fully subscribed. Members of the Constitutional Club had to pledge support to the Conservative Party.

The only Constitutional candidates to attend the dinner at the Constitutional Club were Churchill, Greenwood and Moreing.⁵³ Ward was invited but sent his apologies. Almost all the other attendees at the dinner were figures from the Conservative Party. Churchill claimed at the dinner that although he 'and his Constitutionalist friends represented a very small group of members in the House of Commons ... [t]hey also, to some extent, represented a larger group of Liberal members, who had stood with Conservative support and who would certainly recognise that fact in the action which they would take in the new Parliament'.⁵⁴

This was not to be so. The Constitutionalists' political paths were already diverging. Table 4 illustrates the political paths which the Constitutionalists subsequently followed.

Ironically, it was in the announcement of its demise that the press finally accorded the Constitutionalists the status of a party. 'The Constitutional Party is no more', the *Times* reported only seven weeks after the 1924 election:

It has always been difficult to calculate exactly how many members the party embraced, but the general impression after the election was that the correct total was seven ... then Mr. Churchill joined the Government and

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Candidate	1924 result	Subsequent allegiance
Churchill	Won	took Conservative whip
Greenwood	Won	took Conservative whip
Moreing	Won	took Conservative whip
Sturrock	Lost	would have taken Conservative whip
Hogbin	Lost	defeated as a Conservative in 1927
Robinson	Won	took Liberal whip, then Independent
Edwards	Won	took Liberal whip
Ward	Won	took Liberal whip
England	Won	took Liberal whip, Liberal National in 1931
Allen	Lost	re-elected in 1931 as a Liberal National ⁵⁵

'followed the Chancellor in his transfer of allegiance'.⁵⁷ However, he retained a benevolent attitude towards the Liberal Party, warning that: 'Liberals ... represent an element not inferior, at least intellectually or patriotically, to what one may find in Conservative or Socialist ranks ... [T]elling Liberals to put their shutters up immediately ... is calculated to produce anything but an exact antithesis of what is desired ... Government supporters are unwise to indulge in an anti-Liberal vendetta.'⁵⁸ Hogbin endured the distinction of being the only Liberal MP ever to be defeated by a Communist. He was given one more opportunity to avenge his defeat at the hands of the left, and it was potentially an easy path. He was selected to stand as the Conservative candidate at the Stourbridge by-election in 1927, caused by the death of the sitting Conservative MP, who had enjoyed a majority of just under 2,000 votes. At a meeting the week before the by-election Hogbin arrived saying that he was 'all to pieces' and had come against the advice of his doctor.⁵⁹ His campaign suffered and he lost the election to Labour by a margin of over 3,000 votes, thus ending his political career.

Robinson continued his ambiguous relationship with the Liberal Party for the rest of his parliamentary career, which lasted until he retired in 1931. In 1929, he again had the support of both Conservatives and Liberals, but said that he 'acknowledged no party Whip in the House of Commons. He went there, not in the interests of any party, but in the interests of the nation.'⁶⁰ In a letter to the *Daily News* in 1929, he claimed that he had been 'an Independent MP' since the Coalition was dissolved in 1922. 'Notwithstanding this', he said, 'my Liberal friends in the House of Commons generously continued to send me their whip which I have regarded as an act of courtesy. To prevent however any possibility of misunderstanding in the future on this point, I arranged that the sending of the whip to me should be discontinued in this Parliament'.⁶¹

The remaining three successful Constitutional candidates – Edwards, Ward and England – all resumed their allegiance to the Liberal Party in the House of Commons after the 1924 election.

	1923	1924	1929
Camborne	Lib	Const	Lib
Epping	Con	Const	Con
Walthamstow East	Con	Const	Lab
Stoke-on-Trent, Stoke	Lib	Const	Lab
Accrington	Lib	Const	Lab
Heywood & Radcliffe	Lib	Const	Lib
Stretford ⁶⁴	Lib	Const	Ind
Tottenham North	Lab	Lab	Lab
Battersea North	Lib	Comm	Lab
Stoke-on-Trent, Burslem	Lib	Lab	Lab

was classified as a Conservative, and the Liberals claimed Colonel England, Colonel Ward, Mr. Edwards and Sir Thomas Robinson, reducing the party to two, Sir Hamar Greenwood and Captain Moreing, who have both now agreed to accept the Conservative Whip.⁵⁶

The varied career paths of the Constitutionlists after 1924 demonstrated that they were never more than a loose grouping, using the Constitutionlist label as a coupon to avoid splitting the anti-Labour vote.

The three successful Constitutional candidates who took the Conservative whip after the 1924 election – Churchill, Greenwood and Moreing – enjoyed varying fortunes in their subsequent careers. Churchill was appointed Chancellor of the Exchequer in the new Conservative government and remained in Parliament as a Conservative until 1964, twice

serving as Prime Minister. Greenwood served just a single further term in the House of Commons, but never returned to ministerial office. In 1929 he was elevated to the peerage, after which he served as honorary treasurer to the Conservative Party, being advanced to a viscountcy towards the end of his term. Moreing beat his arch-rival, Leif Jones, in 1924, but in 1929, in the last head-to-head contest between them, Jones overturned the result. Moreing was by then labelled as a Conservative. This was his last outing at the polls, having stood in five successive elections, each time under a different party label: Coalition Liberal in 1918, National Liberal in 1922, Liberal in 1923, Constitutionlist in 1924 and Conservative in 1929.

Two of the unsuccessful Constitutional candidates – Sturrock and Hogbin – would also have taken the Conservative whip in the House of Commons had they been elected. Sturrock announced that he had

Edwards re-took the Liberal whip once it was clear that there was no prospect of closer formal ties between the Liberals and Conservatives. He sat until the 1929 election, when he was defeated as the official Liberal candidate by Labour. He then retired from national politics. Ward, like Edwards, served out the full 1924 Parliament as a Liberal and stood as the party's official candidate at the 1929 election. He was beaten by Lady Cynthia Mosley, representing the Labour Party, and retired from active politics. After the 1924 election, England re-took the Liberal whip, but 'acknowledged the great help of the Conservative Party, who had given loyal support to a candidate not quite their own colour'.⁶² In 1929 his election address said that he again offered himself as the 'Liberal Candidate'; however, he included a separate message from the local Unionists saying that they would not nominate a candidate and would again urge support for him. He supported the Liberal Nationals in 1931, but retired at the election that year.

Although Allen had sat as the Liberal MP for Newcastle-under-Lyme from 1892 to 1900, he failed to in his bid to return in 1924. However, he was re-elected as the Liberal National MP for Burslem, for one Parliament, in 1931. His return to the House of Commons after an absence of thirty-one years was probably the longest interval between periods of service of any MP.

Loseby, the former Coalition NDP MP from 1918 to 1922, failed to return to Parliament as a Constitutionalist in 1924. He again lost in 1929, standing as a Conservative in Nottingham West. Davis fought only the one, unsuccessful, election campaign as a Constitutionalist candidate, in Consett in 1924. Fox-Davies did not contest any further parliamentary elections, but he did sit as a Conservative local councillor. Doran, who failed as a Constitutionalist in 1924, was eventually elected as a Conservative in 1931. However, his time in Parliament was controversial for his anti-Semitic views and he was defeated in 1935.⁶³

The Impact of the Constitutionlists on the Liberal Party

The Constitutionalist episode provided a route for Churchill,

Greenwood, Moreing, Sturrock and Hogbin to transfer their allegiance from the Liberal Party to the Conservatives, avoiding a public rupture with the Liberals and the need for a personal explanation of defection. They were following a path which they would have followed in any case. However, it was a one-way street: no Conservative came to the Liberal Party via the Constitutionalist route. Although the Liberal Party lost some of its already erring personnel, it did not lose a single seat to the Conservatives as the result of the Constitutionlists venture, when comparing the situation in 1923 (before the Constitutionlists) with that in 1929 (after the Constitutionlists). Of the seats involved in the Constitutionalist venture, those lost went to Labour, and this was in line with prevailing national trends. Table 5 illustrates the changes in party incumbency in the seats where Constitutionlists stood in 1924.

Conclusions

The Constitutionalist episode accounted for a very small proportion of the total exodus of MPs and former MPs from the Liberal Party. The departure of Churchill was a serious loss to the Liberals, but it would have occurred in any event, even without the Constitutionalist venture. What is, perhaps, surprising is that Churchill, with all his leadership skills, actually took fewer defectors with him than did John Simon – generally regarded as a political loner – during the Liberal National split after 1931.

In the longer term context, one-sixth of all the Liberal or Liberal Democrat MPs elected from the December 1910 to the 2010 elections – 116 of the 707 elected – defected from the party at some stage after their first election.⁶⁵ Within this context, the Constitutionalist departures were a small augmentation of an established trend. Including the Constitutionlists who went on to join the Conservatives, 34 Liberal MPs or former MPs defected to the Tories over the course of the century from 1910 to 2010; a slightly larger number (47) defected to Labour. A striking feature of this exodus was that all those former Liberals who joined the Conservatives remained happy in their new party, whilst over half

of those joining Labour regretted their move.⁶⁶ This strongly suggests that, among other factors, there is a fundamental cultural compatibility between Liberals and Conservatives which does not apply to the relationship between Labour and the Liberals or Liberal Democrats. This compatibility was evident in the relations which were established between the Constitutionlists and their local Conservative associations in 1924. It reappeared with the Liberal Nationals after 1931 and it was again borne out in the events leading up to the formation of the 2010 coalition.

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- 1 The figure excludes Independent Conservative challengers and two-member seats where one Conservative and one National Liberal stood.
- 2 *Times*, 17 September 1920, p. 7, col f.
- 3 Davies, S. and Morley, B., *County Borough Elections in England and Wales, 1919–38*.
- 4 *Gravesend and Dartford Reporter*, 18 October 1924, p. 4, col e.
- 5 W.D. Harbison was also designated as a 'Constitutional and Democratic' candidate for Saffron Walden at the 1922 election. He was included on the official list of National Liberal candidates, but he was not elected.
- 6 Moreing to Guest, 31 March 1920, Parliamentary Archives, Lloyd George Papers, LG/F/22/25.
- 7 Moreing and Jarrett to Churchill, 5 February 1924, Churchill Papers, Churchill Archives Centre, CHAR 2/132/29–31.
- 8 Maclean MSS 467 fol 69, 17 January 1924, quoted in Hart, M.W., 'The decline of the Liberal Party in parliament and in the constituencies, 1914–1931', Oxford, D. Phil., (1982), 176.
- 9 Riddell Diary, discussion Riddell and Horne, 30 May 1923, quoted in Gilbert, *Churchill, Volume V*, 7–8.
- 10 Jenkins, Roy, *Churchill*, (Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2001), 381–5.
- 11 Clementine Churchill to Churchill, n.d. (November 1923?), quoted in

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- Gilbert, *Churchill, Volume V*, 18.
- 12 Gilbert, *Churchill, Volume V*, 25–26.
- 13 *Glasgow Herald*, 26 February, 1924.
- 14 Gilbert, *Churchill, Volume V*, 28.
- 15 *Times*, 3 March 1924, p. 12, col d.
- 16 Jenkins, *Churchill*, p. 390.
- 17 Cook, C. and Ramsden, J., *By-elections in British Politics* (Macmillan, 1973), pp. 53–62.
- 18 Jenkins, *Churchill*, pp. 388–90.
- 19 Gilbert, *Churchill, Volume V*, 43.
- 20 *Ibid.*, p. 39, quoting letter Birkhead to Derby, 28 March 1924.
- 21 Gilbert, *Churchill, Volume V*, 43.
- 22 Churchill to Balfour, 11 October 1924, quoted in Gilbert, *Churchill, Volume V Companion Part 1*, p. 218.
- 23 Notes on Greenwood, n.d. but 1917 or later, Lloyd George Papers, LG/F/168/2/12.
- 24 Greenwood to Lloyd George, 3 October 1924, Lloyd George Papers, LG/G/8/9/1.
- 25 Greenwood to Saunders, 4 October 1924, Lloyd George Papers, LG/G/8/9/1.
- 26 *Walthamstow and Leyton Guardian*, 26 September 1924, p. 4, col c.
- 27 *Ibid.*, 17 October 1924, p. 5, col b.
- 28 Letter by Sturrock, *Times*, 15 December 1923, p. 8, col b.
- 29 Letter by Sturrock, *Times*, 21 April 1924, p. 4, col a.
- 30 *Montrose Review*, 17 October 1924, p7, col c.
- 31 *Battersea Borough News*, 31 October 1924, p. 3, col b.
- 32 *Times*, 29 November 1923, p. 13, col g.
- 33 These included Moreing, Greenwood, Churchill, England and Allen.
- 34 Brodie, Marc, 'Ward, John (1866–1934)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.
- 35 *Staffordshire Weekly Sentinel*, 18 October 1924, p. 9, col a.
- 36 *Staffordshire Weekly Sentinel*, 1 November 1924, p. 6, col a.
- 37 Craig, *British Parliamentary Election Results, 1918–1949*, (Macmillan, 1977), p. 251.
- 38 *Ibid.*, 18 October 1924, p. 9, col a.
- 39 Allen, Election Address, 1924, Bristol University Archives.
- 40 The constituency was renamed Neath in 1918.
- 41 *Accrington Gazette*, 18 October 1924, p. 3, col a.
- 42 Craig, *Parliamentary Election Results, 1918–1949*, p. 406.
- 43 Robinson, Election Address, 1924, Bristol University Archives.
- 44 *Radcliffe Times*, 25 October 1924, p. 6, col d.
- 45 *Radcliffe Times*, 18 October 1924, p. 4, col b.
- 46 Craig describes Loseby and Davis as Constitutionalists, and Doran and Fox-Davies as Conservatives.
- 47 Freddie Guest, the former Coalition Liberal Chief Whip, did not use the label Constitutionalist at the 1924 election, but he was closely associated with those who did. Guest's 1924 election address described him as the 'Liberal Anti-Socialist Candidate' and he stated that he was prepared to support a Conservative Government under Baldwin's leadership.
- 48 Excludes Dundee, a two-member seat which had one Liberal and one Conservative candidate in 1924.
- 49 Scottish Prohibition Party
- 50 Calculated by aggregating the increases or decreases in margins of victory or defeat from all the seats where the same candidate contested the seat in 1923 and 1924.
- 51 Positive figures represent a majority, negative figures represent a margin of defeat.
- 52 Where the same constituency was fought by the same candidate at the 1923 and 1924 elections.
- 53 Freddie Guest also attended.
- 54 *Times*, 4 November 1924, p. 16, col c.
- 55 Allen is described by Craig, p. 251, as Nat (NL) after the 1931 election.
- 56 *Times*, 17 December 1924, p. 14, col c.
- 57 Letter by Sturrock, *Times*, 18 February 1929, p. 8, col d.
- 58 *Ibid.*
- 59 *County Express*, 19 February 1927, p3, col d.
- 60 *Stockport Advertiser*, 10 May 1929, p11, col c.
- 61 Robinson to *Daily News*, 8 July 1929, quoted Craig, *Parliamentary Election Results, 1918–49*, p. 406.
- 62 *Radcliffe Times*, 1 November 1924, p. 6, col f.
- 63 The Constitutionalist label made one, unrelated, reappearance, when used by Leslie Haden-Guest in 1927. Haden-Guest was no relation to Freddie Guest and was from a Labour background.
- 64 Stretford was held by Robinson in 1923, 1924 and 1929 under different party labels.
- 65 Wyburn-Powell, Alun, 'Defectors and the Liberal Party since December 1910', University of Leicester PhD., (2010), p. 27.
- 66 Wyburn-Powell, 'Defectors and the Liberal Party', pp. 153–54.

Joseph Chamberlain: Imperial standard-bearer, national leader, local icon

Conference: Newman University, Birmingham, 4 July 2014; The Library of Birmingham, 5 July 2014

Joseph Chamberlain, the most significant mayor of modern Birmingham, MP for Birmingham East for thirty-seven years, President of the Board of Trade from 1880 to 1885, Colonial Secretary from 1895 to 1903 and 'the man who made the weather' in British politics for twenty years, died on 2 July 1914.

Although the event was overshadowed by the Bosnian crisis caused by the assassination of Franz Ferdinand four days earlier, *The Times* printed an obituary of Chamberlain that ran to three pages and public activity in Birmingham completely halted as a mark of respect during his funeral after the Chamberlain family rejected an internment at Westminster Abbey.

Chamberlain's complex and frequently misunderstood career is to be the subject of a major international conference to be organised jointly by the *Journal of Liberal History* and Newman University, Birmingham, in collaboration with Birmingham City Council and Severn Trent Water.

The first day, at Newman University, will begin with a keynote address from Professor Peter Marsh, author of *Joseph Chamberlain: Entrepreneur in Politics* and *The Chamberlain Litany* and will focus on Chamberlain's career beyond Birmingham. Panels of presentations will explore themes such as Chamberlain's career as an educational reformer, his relations with other senior figures of the late Victorian establishment and his political, economic and social philosophy.

That evening, a conference dinner with a speaker will be held at Joseph Chamberlain's home, Highbury Hall.

On 5 July, at the new Library of Birmingham in the city centre, the leader of Birmingham City Council will introduce a day debating Chamberlain's contribution to the 'Second City'. There will be a panel of MPs from each of the three major parties arguing that their party embodies Chamberlain's inheritance, and posters, artefacts and documentary evidence from the city's archives and museums for delegates to explore. It is hoped that the event will conclude with a walking tour of important sites in the City associated with the Chamberlain family.

Proposals for papers may consist of individual papers or of papers grouped for a panel session. For session proposals, two, or preferably three papers should relate to a common theme, not necessarily bound by a chronological framework.

For an informal discussion of ideas for papers or panels or other issues, please contact the conference organiser, Dr Ian Cawood, Head of History at Newman University and author of *The Liberal Unionist Party 1886–1912: A History* at i.cawood@newman.ac.uk.