

The Multi-Dimensional Elements of Early Twentieth Century

British Labour

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Introduction

The majority of early twentieth century British Labour literature has assessed the movement by focusing upon a few significant elements, namely, the trade unions, various socialist associations, and the Labour Party. For brevity's sake, this paper will exclude the Communist Party and focus on the relations between the Labour Party and its affiliated bodies. British Labour historians have generally been concerned with explaining the causes which prompted the Labour Party to rival the Liberals and Conservatives.

Marxist historians George Tate and A.L. Morton have analyzed the rise of Labour within the lens of class struggle. Class consciousness, they argue, had increased due to industrial advancements and the decline of craft industry.¹ These developments caused the working class to band together. Meanwhile, rank and file left-wing organizations served to grow socialism's influence within Britain. Nonetheless, the Labour movement was hampered by the mindless initiatives put forth by the Liberal-influenced leadership of the party.² Moreover, as the party's influence grew trade union MPs became increasingly disconnected from the sentiments of those they represented. Morton, asserts that this detachment occurred due to the party's lack of adherence to scientific socialism.³

Another point of criticism among Marxist scholars lay in the party's apparent inability to create a coherent socialist programme which was devoid of Fabian and Liberal elements.⁴ Revisionists have largely dismissed these arguments due to their ideological underpinning.⁵ However, there is some validity to the Marxist perspective. For instance, when the Labour Party

¹ George Tate and A.L. Morton, *The British Labour Movement*, (London: Lawrence and Wishart Ltd, 1956) 289.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*, 293.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Duncan Tanner, *Political Change, and the Labour Party* (New York, Cambridge University Press, 1990) 10.

attained office in 1924, MacDonald's government operated similarly to past governments with respect to its treatment of trade unions.⁶

Historians sympathetic to the Liberal Party frame the political advancement of the Labour Party as a direct result of the wartime government's poor performance. Trevor Wilson explored how the Great War created an environment which increased the importance of co-operation between the unions and the government. Thereby Wilson argues, the political consciousness of trade union members grew.⁷ Furthering the 'war thesis' was P.F. Clarke, who argues that the alliance with 'socialism' and the rivalry between Asquith and Lloyd George ultimately allowed the Labour Party to become the main representation of the centre left.⁸ In contrast, Ross McKibbin declared that an increase in Labour support during by-elections after 1910 proved that Labour was on the verge of replacing the Liberals.⁹ To support this notion McKibbin, argues that Labour had become a 'class-based party' and that the electoral alliance with the Liberals was to be terminated prior to the outbreak of war.¹⁰

This paper seeks to build on existing research by analyzing the main factors that propelled Labour's rapid rise. The arguments mentioned above attempt to understand Labour's improvement by linking the movement to deterministic factors such as class consciousness or World War One. However, they seem to ignore the pragmatic motivations of the movement's organizations and political actors. These include how trade unions in their desperation sought political support to combat anti trade union legislation. Furthermore, key labour leaders, MacDonald and Hardie, viewed the party as a vessel to espouse their respective views of

⁶ Henry Pelling, *A History of British Trade Unionism* (Baltimore: Penguin Books Ltd, 1963) 169.

⁷ Trevor Wilson, *The Downfall of the Liberal Party*, (London: Collins Clear Type Press, 1966) 29.

⁸ Tanner, *Political Change, and the Labour Party*, 2.

⁹ *Ibid*, 3.

¹⁰ *Ibid*.

socialism. Conversely, MacDonald's ideological critics allowed Labour to appeal to a wider electorate. Furthermore, Labour proved to be more successful in combatting its political factionalism when compared to the Liberals. This development was a key feature in Labour's transition to a 'conventional' party. With the aid of contemporary newspaper articles and political documents this paper aims to underscore the benefits that evolved from the multi-dimensional nature of the individuals and bodies associated with the movement.

The Birth of a Pressure Group

The emergence of the Labour Representation Committee in 1900 was the result of mutual co-operation between trade unions and various associations that were sympathetic to socialism.¹¹ The Independent Labour Party established in 1893, played a major role in the formation of the LRC. This was of the utmost significance for two reasons. First, the party produced an environment in which many of Labour leaders would gain valuable political experience. Especially notable was Keir Hardie, an illegitimate Scotsman whose views of socialism had been crafted by his experiences in the mines of Lanarkshire. In addition, Ramsey MacDonald joined the ILP in 1894 after clashing with the Southampton Liberals regarding his suggested candidacy.¹² Other ILP members included Phillip Snowden and John Bruce Glasier. The former served as the ILP's leading propagandist whilst the latter supported political moderation. Second, the ILP viewed the trade unions as a valuable ally in their cause for labour reform.¹³ However, some unions still supported the Liberals or Conservatives and did not view the ILP as a viable alternative.

¹¹ Henry Pelling, *The Origins of the Labour Party* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965,)209.

¹² David Howell, *British Workers, and the Independent Labour Party 1888-1906* (New York: Manchester University Press,1983) 4.

¹³ *Ibid*, 1.

During its infancy the ILP sought to create an association that would be committed to independent labour representation. To finance this endeavour the ILP courted trade union support. However, the unions associated with the production of coal and cotton rejected the ILP's appeal.¹⁴ Many cotton union heads were sympathetic towards conservatism and thus were apprehensive of political action as it could reveal ideological divisions among its members.¹⁵ The miners rejected the notion of labour representation on different grounds, as they already had MPs who represented their interests.¹⁶

In contrast, some unions found the idea of independent labour representation appealing due to the technological developments of the late nineteenth century. For instance, members of boot and shoe making unions were fearful of their dwindling position in society. According to Henry Pelling, "the destruction of... old world home-working systems sharpened the operatives' sense of political grievances."¹⁷ Another factor included the growth of Employers' Federations which sought to curtail the influence of unions.¹⁸ This development caused some unions to search for an avenue that would defend their interests.¹⁹ Lastly, the growth of trade union membership was not paralleled by an increase in the number of trade union M.Ps. in parliament. This lack of growth caused many union officials to question the Liberal Party's ability to further the Labour movement's interests.

The Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants proved to be the most influential of all unions with respect to the question of independent labour representation. The leaders of the

¹⁴ Pelling, *Origins of the Labour Party*, 193.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 194.

¹⁶ *Ibid*.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 198.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 195.

¹⁹ Keith Burgess, *The Challenge of Labour, Shaping British Society 1850-1930*, (London: Croom Helm Ltd,1980) 99.

ASRS were acutely aware of the role played by ‘railways interests’ at Westminster.²⁰ Moreover, the ASRS was not acknowledged by its employers.²¹ This resulted in terrible working conditions as well as an attempt to unify railway workers against company exploitation.²² Nevertheless, this endeavour failed and the ASRS began to endorse the concept of a federation of labour associations which would protect their legal interests.

Within this context, James Holmes of the ASRS proposed a resolution to the Parliamentary Council of the Trade Unions Congress. The proposal sought to call an assembly that would be attended by officials from various socialist organizations and trade unions.²³ The goal of this conference would be to discuss the methods that should be implemented to increase labour’s influence within Parliament. The proposal was debated at length at the Congress of 1899. Supporters of the motion cited the inadequacies of labour members of Parliament being affiliated with one of the two conventional parties. Keir Hardie also offered his support in the pages of his newspaper the *Labour Leader* stating, “too much importance cannot be attached to this resolution.”²⁴ In opposition, Thomas Ashton of the Cotton Spinners expressed his doubts, claiming that his union would disintegrate if the proposal was successful. Ultimately, the proposition passed after a vote of 546,000 in favour and 434,000 against.²⁵

Representatives from the Fabian Society, the Marxist-influenced Social Democratic Federation and the ILP accordingly met to draft an agenda for the meeting.²⁶ ILP representatives concluded that candidates attempting to gain office should have “no connection with either the

²⁰ Pelling, *The Origins of the Labour Party*, 198.

²¹ *Ibid*, 199.

²² *Ibid*, 198.

²³ *Ibid*, 206.

²⁴ *Labour Leader*, 1st of July 1899, 203.

²⁵ Pelling, *The Origins of the Labour Party*, 206.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 207.

Liberal or Tory Parties.”²⁷ MacDonald and Hardie were present at the meeting and supported the future alliance with the Liberal Party, albeit in differing manners. Nonetheless, the environment to pursue a pact had not been created, and at this juncture the sole goal for two of Labour’s most prominent leaders was to create an organization that would defend the interests of the working class at Westminster.

Thus, on the February 27, 1900, various representatives came together at Memorial Hall in London to form the Labour Representation Committee. During the conference, ILP delegates adopted a moderate stance to gain as much trade union support as possible.²⁸ This is exemplified by the ILP acceptance of an amendment which revoked the need for Labour candidates to be members of the working class.²⁹ The ILP also voted against the SDF proposal which sought to bind the committee to “a recognition of class war.”³⁰ Furthermore, in response to this proposal, Hardie drafted a declaration which described the committee’s immediate aims. Working-class interests were to be represented by men who were sympathetic towards the labour movement.³¹ Most importantly, Hardie’s amendment declared that the committee was not averse to co-operating with any party. The pragmatism displayed by Hardie in this instance would become a recurring theme during the LRC’s development.

The South African War of 1899-1902 had spurred sentiments of jingoism among the populace. Robert Cecil’s government sought to take advantage of the situation by calling an election. The LRC was ill prepared and lacked the resources available to the Conservatives and

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Henry Pelling, *A Short History of the Labour Party* (London: The MacMillan Press, 1961)7.

²⁹ Pelling, *The Origins of the Labour Party*, 209.

³⁰ *Labour Leader*, March 10, 1900, 76.

³¹ Pelling, *The Origins of the Labour Party*, 209.

Liberals. Consequently, of the fifteen candidates who had committee support, only two were able to attain office:³² Hardie, and Richard Bell, a representative of the ASRS.

The issue of the South African War also had the effect of underscoring the divisions within the labour movement. The National Administrative Council of the ILP claimed that the war was an act of aggression, and that Britain's strength lay in its economic rather than military power.³³ In contrast the Fabian Society did not endorse a formal position. As a result, many of its members left the society, MacDonald included. In response to their loss of some key members George Bernard Shaw drafted *Fabians and the Empire*. In essence this document supported the war effort, arguing that Britain was simply exercising its imperial authority over Africa.³⁴ Differences of opinion on key issues would become a recurrent theme within the LRC. The various factions within the LRC would constantly attempt to take advantage of these disputes to further their group's specific interests. Labour's political factionalism can be attributed to the differing currents of socialism which ran through the party.

The initial goal of the ILP was to utilize the fiscal contributions from trade unions to further their socialist agenda. However, MacDonald in his role as secretary of the committee, was acutely aware of the philosophical splintering within the LRC. Hence, when MacDonald attempted to create a theoretical foundation for the committee, he did so tactfully. In his works discussing socialism, MacDonald "sounded sufficiently like a socialist to satisfy the ILP-ers but reassured the unions by using language that suggested continuity with Radicalism."³⁵ In this context Radicalism was linked to defending the political aims of the trade unions. MacDonald

³² Andrew Thorpe, *A History of the British Labour Party* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1997) 14.

³³ Martin Pugh, *Speak for Britain!* (London: The Bodley Head Ltd, 2010) 56.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid, 61.

also did not subscribe to “economic struggle acting as a mobilizing agent.”³⁶ This political outlook caused the SDF to promptly withdraw its affiliation with the committee in 1902.³⁷

Aside from philosophical issues, the LRC also faced more practical concerns. During its infancy, the committee had to cope with having a limited amount of funding from trade unions. In 1901, the House of Lords, acting in its role as the highest judicial court in England, passed a ruling that made unions responsible for the damages resulting from a strike.³⁸ Hardie came to the defence of the unions, stating, “trade unionism... should be restored to its previous position.”³⁹ The court case caused affiliation with the LRC to increase rapidly. From 1900 to 1906 affiliation expanded from 376,000 to 921,000.⁴⁰ This allowed the LRC to pay their MPs a salary if they were able to gain office. The Taff Vale case was a key issue in the committee’s evolution into a conventional party.

The Taff Vale judgement was reversed by the Trade Disputes Act in December 1906. This shift in policy allowed the unions to operate without being fearful of legal intrusion in their affairs.⁴¹ John Lovell has questioned why many unions remained affiliated with the LRC after they had attained this goal.⁴² The bond between unions and the LRC had undoubtedly been strengthened by Taff Vale, but this was not the sole reason for continued union support. Prior to the establishment of the LRC, representatives from the Trade Unions Congress had been forced to represent one of the two ‘traditional’ parties, both of which had entrenched political values.⁴³

³⁶ Tanner, *Political Change and the Labour Party*, 33.

³⁷ Ralph Miliband, *Parliamentary Socialism*, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1964) 20.

³⁸ John Lovell, “Trade Unions and the Development of Independent Labour Politics” in *Trade unions and British Politics*, edited by Ben Pimlott (London: Longman Publishing Inc, 1982) 51.

³⁹ *Labour Leader*. April 18, 1906, 124.

⁴⁰ Pugh, *Speak for Britain!* 62.

⁴¹ Lovell, *Trade Unions and Labour*, 55.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 56.

By focusing for the most part on labour representation the LRC was able to appear more attractive than its counterparts.

Another integral development for the LRC's growth was the establishment of an electoral pact with the Liberals. The origins of the progressive alliance can be found in the late nineteenth century, a period during which the ILP entertained the possibility of combining with the SDF.⁴⁴ This political fusion was dismissed by party leaders Glasier and Hardie, who viewed affiliation with the SDF as detrimental to gaining union support due to the Federation's link with Marxism. Thus, the Liberals began to be viewed by the ILP as a possible ally. Moreover, MacDonald and Hardie co-authored an article describing the ILP as a worthy successor to the Liberal Party⁴⁵ while also claiming that the ILP would not be averse to "working with those who are willing to go a long way with us."⁴⁶

Colonial Secretary Joseph Chamberlain's decision to leave cabinet to support tariff reform in 1903 allowed ties between the Liberals and the LRC to strengthen.⁴⁷ Free trade for many Labourites and Liberals was bonded to inexpensive food prices, international peace, and "clean government."⁴⁸ Thus, the issue of free trade provided the impetus for MacDonald to negotiate a pact with Chief Liberal Whip Herbert Gladstone. The agreement allowed Labour candidates to stand unopposed by a Liberal counterpart in constituencies where Liberal support was weak. In addition, the agreement stipulated that Labour candidates would not contest 'Liberal strongholds.'⁴⁹ MacDonald utilized the issue of free trade to provide a much-needed

⁴⁴ Pugh, *Speak for Britain!* 49.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 49.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 60.

⁴⁸ Thorpe, *A History of the British Labour Party*, 16.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*.

sense of political stability to the LRC. Without the pact the LRC most likely would have stagnated as a left-wing pressure group.

With the pact established the LRC sought to increase its influence by supporting Will Crooks and Arthur Henderson during two by-elections. Crooks, a former mayor of Poplar, successfully attained office in 1903 as a representative for Woolwich. The pact allowed Crooks to attain office, as the Liberals did not put forth a candidate. Henderson was also victorious, due to his Liberal counterpart seemingly supporting economic protection.⁵⁰ In addition, an article in the Liberal newspaper the *Westminster Gazette* describes how the “progressive parties” agreed to support a single Liberal candidate against Balfour in the next general election.⁵¹ This instance underscores the junior partner status of the LRC, as they were unable to field a candidate in a high-profile constituency. These relatively small gains and tribulations foreshadowed the complications that would derive from the alliance.

The issue of free trade allowed the LRC and the Liberal Party to sympathize over a single matter. However, the defense of free trade was not the propelling force behind the alliance. In fact, the motivation for both parties to join the alliance drastically differed.⁵² The Liberal Party sought to support its standing across all social classes. Nevertheless, splintering within the Liberal Party, created difficulties in their attempts to create a single programme which would appeal to much of the population. Therefore, an alliance with Labour would allow the Liberals to appeal to a wider range of voters.⁵³

Prior to the 1906 election, labour leaders Henderson and MacDonald desired to utilize the pact as a vessel to emphasise the LRC’s ideals. By acting in unison with the Liberals, the LRC

⁵⁰ Ibid, 18.

⁵¹ *Westminster Gazette*, March 11th, 1904, 8.

⁵² Tanner, *Political Change and the Labour Party*, 41.

⁵³ Ibid, 40.

sought to call the public's attention towards the abhorrent social conditions which were engulfing the poor.⁵⁴ Moreover, Henderson and MacDonald proposed that the pact would allow a foundation for socialism to be established within Great Britain. These sentiments are echoed in the pages of the *Labour Leader* which asserts that the poor were becoming reduced to "automatic machines."⁵⁵ Working-class discontent had become tied to the woeful working conditions found across the mines and factories of England. Although the Liberals were willing to aid Labour in the fight against poverty, this issue was not their sole focus. MacDonald's central aim was to underscore this distinction between both parties, which would in due course allow Labour to become Great Britain's leading anti-Tory Party.⁵⁶

Steps toward Conventionalism

In December 1905, Prime-Minister Arthur Balfour resigned hoping that the Liberals under Campbell-Bannerman would not be able to form a government. Balfour conceived that the question of Irish Home Rule could be utilized "for a Unionist appeal to the country."⁵⁷ Nonetheless, the Liberals, under Henry Campbell Bannerman, accepted office and shortly thereafter a General Election was called.

Labour's election platform, for the most part, paralleled that of the Liberals. An emphasis was placed upon supporting Free Trade, opposing the use of Chinese labour in South-Africa, and repealing the Taff Vale judgement.⁵⁸ By supporting this stance, the LRC sought to appeal to a wide array of voters. It is also worth noting that during the election, the ILP endorsed socialism

⁵⁴ Ibid, 41.

⁵⁵ *Labour Leader*, June 8th, 1906, 35.

⁵⁶ Tanner, *Political Change and the Labour Party*, 42.

⁵⁷ Philip Poirier, *The Advent of the Labour Party* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd 1958) 243.

⁵⁸ *Labour Leader*, March 17th, 1905, 396.

as an ideology that could aid the masses.⁵⁹ The ILP defined socialism as a program of “reforms and a commitment to free education, land reform and the eight hour day.”⁶⁰ However, the principal focus for the LRC was the maintenance of ties with the Liberals.⁶¹ Consequently, the LRC abandoned a conference resolution which emphasised the need for capitalism’s abolishment.⁶²

The MacDonald-Gladstone pact proved to be a success during the election. Of the fifty LRC supported candidates only eighteen faced Liberal opposition. Within ten dual-member boroughs, Liberal and Labour candidates campaigned together against their Conservative counterparts.⁶³ Upon completion of the election, twenty-nine LRC MPs were elected including MacDonald. Additionally, at Blackburn, Snowden was able to gain entry to Westminster by “drawing support from conservative working men.”⁶⁴ LRC candidate Thomas Glover also gained conservative support by representing himself as a candidate not bonded to either ‘conventional’ party.⁶⁵ Although these electoral gains were impressive, they concealed significant issues.

Two-thirds of the twenty-nine LRC MPs represented northern England constituencies. This ‘regional enclosure’ was a result of the electoral pact. LRC results in other localities were quite dreadful. Within the greater London area Labour won three seats, in Scotland three, and in Wales one.⁶⁶ Labour’s best results came in Lancashire-Cheshire as the Liberals found it acceptable to allow Labour candidatures in these constituencies. The pact had allowed Labour to

⁵⁹ Labour Leader, Jan 5, 1906, 483.

⁶⁰ Pugh, *Speak for Britain!* 38.

⁶¹ Thorpe, *A Short History of the Labour Party*, 18.

⁶² Pugh, *Speak for Britain!* 65.

⁶³ Pelling, *A Short History of the British Labour Party*, 15.

⁶⁴ Pugh, *Speak for Britain!* 66.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Thorpe, *A History of the British Labour Party*, 19.

gain a foothold in parliament, but it also had the effect of neutralizing Labour's growth in areas where both parties had supporters.⁶⁷

There were also more overt ramifications stemming from the pact, some Liberals were unhappy. Prior to the 1906 election, most North-East Liberal constituency leaders opposed the alliance. Then chairman of the Northern Liberal Federation, Samuel Storey, voiced this collective displeasure in the *Daily News*. Storey asserted that "we will not consent to have forced upon us candidates chosen only by one class, the effect of surrendering will be the destruction of Liberalism."⁶⁸ Nineteen of the twenty-three constituency leaders supported this declaration. Storey's successor Charles Furness viewed Labour's encroachment in a similar fashion. Under his guidance the federation "fought against independent Labour representation."⁶⁹

The pact engendered many critics within the Labour movement.⁷⁰ These critics included the pacifist George Lansbury, who had been unable to secure election in 1906. As a devout Anglican, Lansbury regularly proclaimed his faith in the poor of Great Britain.⁷¹ MacDonald's support for "rational middle-class intellect"⁷² stood in opposition to this admirable perspective. For Lansbury, Labour organizations should pursue social welfare policies that would be financed by higher taxation. Another advocate of this perspective was Labour MP Fred Jowett, who viewed the middle-class's influence within the Labour movement as being detrimental to socialism's appeal to the working class.⁷³ By having a variety of political perspectives, Labour

⁶⁷ Pugh, *Speak for Britain!* 66.

⁶⁸ H.V. Emy, *Liberals Radicals and Socialist Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973) 91.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ Thorpe, *A History of the British Labour Party*, 17.

⁷¹ Duncan Tanner, "Ideological Debate in the Edwardian Labour Party" in *Currents of Radicalism* edited by Eugenio Biagini (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) 291.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 291.

was able to appeal to a diverse number of groups. MacDonald's outlook attracted "working class Liberals,"⁷⁴ while some of his critics cultivated left-wing socialist support.

S.G. Hobson's attempt to represent Rochdale in 1906 is another illustration of the problems that were conjured up by the alliance. The majority of LRC candidates had been sponsored by trade unions, local LRCs, and the ILP. In an uncommon practice, Hobson had gained support from the ILP as well as the local SDF body. In the General Election of 1900, the Liberals had lost Rochdale by a miniscule nineteen votes.⁷⁵ Thus, the Liberals denied MacDonald's proposition to run a Labour candidate. Hardie who had previously been averse to the pact, attempted to dissuade Hobson from seeking election.⁷⁶ In addition, Glasier approached Hobson stating that "the Labour Party was going to be a big thing and we should be a part of it."⁷⁷ This instance exemplifies the pragmatic nature of Labour's leading figures. The pact created an environment wherein the LRC could increase its political power. Hence, men like Hardie who had previously opposed the alliance now sought to defend it.

Promptly after the election, the LRC changed its title to the Labour Party.⁷⁸ Andrew Thorpe asserts that the name change was a feature of Labour's "bid for status."⁷⁹ By preserving 'Labour' in its title the party would avoid connotations associated with the Social Democratic parties of the continent. Moreover, a 'Labour Party' would "mean all things to all people,"⁸⁰ thus widening its allure as a new political force for *all* employees.

⁷⁴ Thorpe, *A History of the British Labour Party*, 17.

⁷⁵ Poirier, *The Advent of the Labour Party*, 252.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 229.

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 252.

⁷⁸ Thorpe, *A History of the British Labour Party*, 19.

⁷⁹ *Ibid*.

⁸⁰ *Ibid*.

Other post-election developments included the establishment of a Parliamentary Labour Party composed of former Liberals, trade-unionists, and socialists.⁸¹ At this juncture, the Labour Party lacked an official leader. Therefore, the most pivotal position within the party was the chairman of the PLP. Hardie was the first to hold this office, defeating notable trade unionist David Shackleton. Interestingly, Shackleton was a considerably superior political organizer than Hardie. However, Hardie's reputation within the party held considerable sway and vaulted him into the position.⁸² To exert influence within the Labour Party, its members required recognition from not only their own faction, but from others as well. Consequently, politicians such as Hardie and MacDonald recognized these circumstances and were able to exert a substantial amount of influence within Labour politics.

The Strengthening of Political Organs

The issue of utmost importance for the Labour Party after gaining a respectable presence in Westminster was unemployment. Unsurprisingly, due to the party's factionalism Labour candidates had not adopted a single uniform stance on the matter. This 'position' generally duplicated the Liberal view of the issue which was "vague and imprecise."⁸³ Nevertheless, once the Labour Party had achieved a notable presence in Westminster it sought to differentiate itself from its progressive colleagues by evolving the party's general view "that each man had an inherent right to work, and that the state was financially and morally responsible for the unemployed."⁸⁴ In order to attain this goal Labour Party members were forced to collaborate with the Liberal Radical John Burns, who served in cabinet as President of the Local

⁸¹ Ibid, 20.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Kenneth Brown, *Labour and Unemployment* (London: David and Charles Publishing, 1971) 72.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

Government Board. At first glance, the appointment of Burns seemed favourable for the Labour Party as he had been a key figure in spurring the unemployment protests of 1886. However, Burns' views had drastically shifted by 1906, and the Labour Party found in Burns an enemy rather than an ally.

To placate their progressive allies, Prime Minister Campbell Bannerman declared that he would provide "two sops"⁸⁵ for Labour. These included the Trade Disputes Act, which resolved the Taff Vale judgement, and a Workmen's Compensation Bill. For cabinet minister Lord Ripon the latter issue was of importance, and he urged the Prime Minister to come to terms with Labour before its MPs became restless. Accordingly, the cabinet met and concluded that the Unemployed Workman Act of 1905 was to be revised.⁸⁶ However, when Labour MP Will Thorne discussed the issue with Burns, he stated, "that no day had been fixed to amend the bill."⁸⁷ This lack of regard for unemployment policy stirred some notable Labour MPs into action by means of a Hyde Park demonstration, in which Labour members Hardie, Barnes, Thorne, and Seddon participated.⁸⁸ If reform was to be achieved, the Labour Party would have to present its own bill.

With the goal of spurring further discussion regarding the unemployment issue, ILP member Frank Smith, declared that "the Labour Party must act to justify its existence."⁸⁹ Consequently, a meeting of Labour members concluded that the party's discontent should be manifested against Burns at Westminster. Moreover, MacDonald, Henderson, and Shackleton introduced a memorandum to Bannerman questioning the government's stance on the matter.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid, 73.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

The document had the support of 115 Labour and Liberal MPs combined.⁹⁰ Liberal encouragement for the memorandum showed the growing dissatisfaction among the party's back-benchers. In response, Burns argued that a revision of policy would not occur prior to the conclusion of the report of the Poor Law Commission, which sought to investigate the medical conditions of the poor.⁹¹ Meanwhile public discontent surrounding unemployment continued to increase. Hence it was decided by the Local Government Board to provide a grant of £200,000 within the parameters of the Unemployed Workman's Act.⁹²

For Labour leadership, the grant provided by Burns was hardly a permanent measure that would have lasting effects. It was expected in early 1907 that Edward VII would devote a portion of his King's Speech to unemployment. However, there was no mention of the issue as the King focused upon interactions between the House of Lords and the Commons. In response the Labour Party put forth a "censure motion on the government."⁹³ Will Thorne plainly stated that "absolutely nothing was done to cope with the problem of unemployment."⁹⁴ Will Crooks harboured similar grievances, displaying his anger on the floor of the Commons.⁹⁵ Hardie viewed the grant as being "virtually useless"⁹⁶ and he suggested that a resolution regarding the question of unemployment would be vigorously pursued by the Labour Party.

To achieve this end, a Joint Board comprised of delegates from the Labour Party, TUC, and the General Federation of Trade Unions created two sub-committees. These panels would draft a bill that would resolve the matter. Labour MPs Steadman, Hardie, MacDonald, and John

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Greenwood, *The Poor Law Commission*, *British Medical Journal*, August 20th, 1910, Vol.2, 493.

⁹² Brown, *Labour and Unemployment*, 73.

⁹³ Ibid, 79.

⁹⁴ *Labour Leader*, March 1st, 1907, 650.

⁹⁵ *Labour Leader*, March 20, 1908, 541.

⁹⁶ *Labour Leader*, March 1st, 1907, 650.

Ward would organize the political elements while Isaac Mitchell of the GFTU and A.H. Gill MP, would focus upon the finances needed for the endeavour to be successful.⁹⁷ The resolution to draft a bill arose when Burns asserted that the grant would not be renewed. After a few months of deliberation, MacDonald, in conjunction with the Joint Committee, produced a draft known as Right to Work Bill.⁹⁸ The proposed bill argued for the creation of local unemployment committees, which would be presided over by a commissioner.⁹⁹

The growth of the Right to Work Bill coincided with Labour's development into a 'conventional' party. During their first substantial tenure at Westminster, Labour leaders developed a foundation which would allow it to become Britain's leading party. For instance, while publicizing its stance on unemployment the Labour Party organized numerous addresses; in fact, by September of 1907 MacDonald had delivered 45 speeches. Moreover, Arthur Henderson gained valuable political experience in the Commons by way of his denunciations of the government. Lastly, 20,000 copies of the draft proposal were circulated to the public.¹⁰⁰ Nonetheless, the Right to Work Bill "got nowhere"¹⁰¹ as the Liberal government viewed the Labour Party as an indicator of working-class sentiments and nothing more.¹⁰² Although the Labour Party failed in its bid to reduce unemployment, the process of drafting and publicizing the bill had strengthened the party's political organs. In addition, Labour had successfully pressured their progressive allies. Lord Ripon's urgency in Cabinet and the growing dissatisfaction among Liberal backbenchers underscores this assertion.

⁹⁷ Brown, *Labour and Unemployment*, 80.

⁹⁸ *Ibid*, 84.

⁹⁹ *Ibid*, 83.

¹⁰⁰ Brown, *Labour and Unemployment*, 86.

¹⁰¹ Thorpe *A History of the British Labour Party*, 21.

¹⁰² *Ibid*.

Aside from the issue of unemployment, the Labour Party succeeded in spurring other social reform measures. These included the introduction of the Old Age Pensions Act in 1908, an establishment of a school meals program, and an expansion of the Workmen's Compensation Act.¹⁰³ To many Labourites, these gains were insufficient. Unemployment continued to increase, and numerous Labour members began to question the PLP's tactics. By-elections thus provided ILP activists a platform to question the party's leadership.¹⁰⁴ Conversely, MacDonald viewed this development with anxiety as it could potentially fracture ties with the Liberals. The fight for Cocker mouth in 1906 proved that MacDonald's uneasiness was well-founded. Prominent ILP member Robert Smillie's candidature split the Liberal vote allowing the Conservatives to claim victory. The ILP was then forced by the Labour Party to refrain from contesting by-elections.¹⁰⁵ However, the deaths of two Liberal MPs representing Colne Valley and Jarrow proved too enticing an opportunity for Labour's dissidents.

Local ILP branches at Jarrow supported Gas Workers Union representative Pete Curran. It is worth noting that Labour's appeal was growing. During the campaign the *Jarrow Labour Herald's* advertisements indicated "that Labour could tap a wide range of small businesses for support."¹⁰⁶ Furthermore, Curran criticized the landowners of the constituency, describing them as "robbing the workers."¹⁰⁷ Ultimately, Curran emerged victorious due to the Liberal vote being divided. On the surface Curran's victory would appear to be a success for Labour. However, the party's leadership was fearful of Curran's participation in government as he declared in a speech that he would "fight all comers to bring about social change."¹⁰⁸ This

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Pugh, *Speak for Britain!* 68.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Shields Daily News, May 14, 1907, 3.

contrast of ideologies was not detrimental to the Labour Party; rather, a variety of political perspectives propelled Labour's appeal in the coming years to a wider electorate.

Since Colne Valley had not been contested by an LRC candidate during the 1906 election Victor Grayson did not receive party support in the following year's by-election. The ILP had not considered Grayson a viable option for its proposed list of candidates as he represented a "challenge to Labour's National Executive Committee."¹⁰⁹ Undeterred by these developments Grayson stood as an Independent Socialist and enthusiastically supported the reduction of unemployment. By June the unemployment index had increased to 7.9 percent, by August this figure reached 8.5 percent.¹¹⁰ Thus, working-class dissatisfaction surrounding a lack of job opportunities manifested itself against the Labour Party's inability to stimulate legislation. Therefore, Grayson appeared as a 'true' representation of Labour values and would emerge victorious, defeating his Liberal rival by 153 votes.¹¹¹ More importantly, Grayson would inspire others within the Labour movement to criticize the party in a similar fashion.

Notable among those who were influenced by Grayson included moral socialists Lansbury, Jowett, and James O'Grady.¹¹² From their perspectives Labour's adoption of centrist Liberal resolutions would not allow poverty to be combatted effectively. Support for national insurance, they argued, should be replaced with an emphasis on ameliorating poor wages and working conditions. They also critiqued the party's pro-Liberal posture on women's suffrage, asserting that it was a "betrayal of the dispossessed."¹¹³

¹⁰⁹ Pugh, *Speak for Britain!* 69.

¹¹⁰ Brown, *Labour and Unemployment*, 98.

¹¹¹ Pugh, *Speak for Britain!* 69.

¹¹² Tanner, *Political Change and the Labour Party*, 52.

¹¹³ *Ibid*, 53.

Trade union activist Ben Tillet harboured similar grievances but was more outspoken and aggressive in his criticism. His dissatisfaction came to the fore in a scolding pamphlet, *Is the Parliamentary Labour Party a Failure?*¹¹⁴ Regarding Labour's position in government, Tillet declared that "The lion has no teeth or claws and is losing his growl too... The Labour Party should be rebels in everlasting and open warfare with the powers that be."¹¹⁵ For Tillet cooperation with the Liberals would stagnate Labour's growth while also reinforcing the current political status quo. Furthermore, Tillet reprimanded party leadership for supporting the Liberal Licensing Bill, saying "they are the wire-pullers of the Party and are more sinister than simple."¹¹⁶ Tillet's declarations undoubtedly angered the party's leadership. Hence, when he stood for election MacDonald stated that "had I a vote for Swansea it would not be given to Mr. Tillet."¹¹⁷ Martin Pugh describes Grayson and Tillet's aggression towards party leadership as exposing the Edwardian Labour Party's flaws.¹¹⁸ However, this argument can be challenged as both men drew the attention of the public to working class issues, which surely had a positive effect on Labour's growth.

Ideological factionalism within the party was also on display at the Labour Conference of 1909. Tillet seconded the motion "that no candidate run under the auspices of the Labour Party shall support any measure upon the same platform as members of the capitalist parties."¹¹⁹ The proposal was resoundingly rejected 788,000 to 113,000.¹²⁰ This figure exemplifies the lack of

¹¹⁴ Jonathan Schneer, *Ben Tillet: A Portrait of a Labour Leader* (London: Routledge Press Inc, 2018) 136.

¹¹⁵ Tillet, *Is the Parliamentary Labour Party a Failure*, in Dewsbury, Beasley and District Social Democrat, 6.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Pugh, *Speak for Britain!* 70.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Schneer, *Portrait of a Labour Leader*, 136.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

sway radical socialism held over the early Labour Party. Of the 29 MPs, only six had ties to the ILP. Most members were union heads who combined socialism with conservative values.¹²¹

Meanwhile the Labour Party faced a threat to its financial security. In 1907, Liberal supporter and trade unionist Victor Osborne, advocated for the legal elimination of union donations to political parties. Osborne's proposal was passed by the House of Lords in 1909. The judges justified their ruling on the basis that the 1875 Trade Union Act did not define trade unions as having the capability to promote political parties.¹²² As a result, numerous Labour candidates scrambled to find funds during the General Elections of 1910. In addition, various regional Labour offices were forced to halt operations.

The Osborne Judgement had seemingly weakened Labour's political prospects. However, by 1913 the payment of MPs had become the responsibility of Westminster while the Trade Union Act allowed unions to contribute their funds to political parties.¹²³ The matter also served to strengthen ties between the TUC and the Labour Party. The evolution of this relationship can be attributed to Labour MPs such as J.W. Taylor, who argued that the payment of MPs would not replace the need for union contributions.¹²⁴ In this instance, the Labour Party operated admirably as it sought to defend the legal and political interests of its affiliated unions. Lastly, to reverse the judgement the Labour Party proposed the Trade Union Law Amendment Bill.¹²⁵ Although the bill did not reach a second reading, its development presented Labour leadership an opportunity to hone their political skills in a fashion that paralleled Labour's fight against unemployment.

¹²¹ Pugh, *Speak for Britain!* 70.

¹²² Henry Pelling, *The Politics of the Osborne Judgement*, *The Cambridge Historical Journal*, Vol.25 No.4 (1982) 890.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 896.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 900.

The affiliation of the Miners Federation of Great Britain was another integral event in the Labour Party's evolution, coming in 1908. Unlike many unions the MFGB had not affiliated with the Labour Party after Taff Vale. In his role as President of the MFGB Ben Pickard sought to increase the number of 'miner MPs' by working closely with local Liberal Associations.¹²⁶ Roy Gregory argues that "Pickard was no revolutionary"¹²⁷ and that under his leadership the MFGB viewed the Liberal Party as providing the best avenue to defend the legal interests of the miners. This course of action proved unsuccessful, as some Liberal Associations refused to accept the placement of MFGB candidates in mining constituencies.¹²⁸ This lack of success prompted the MFGB with an incentive to seek affiliation with Labour.

The souring of relations between Liberal Associations and the MFGB was one of several factors that contributed to affiliation. Members within the federation who advocated for affiliation were undeterred by a ballot held in 1906, which rejected the proposal to join Labour.¹²⁹ In the following year supporters of the motion called for the issue to be re-evaluated.¹³⁰ Consequently, representatives from the South Wales Miners' Federation (SWMF) declared that they were considering joining the ranks of Labour independently if the MFGB in its entirety refused to do so. If the SWMF pursued this course of action other federations could possibly follow suit.¹³¹ Thus, Pickard's successor, Enoch Edwards, resolved that the results of the following ballot were to be respected.

The MFGB debates regarding affiliation were closely monitored by Labour's leadership since their political standing would be strengthened if the MFGB chose to ally itself with Labour.

¹²⁶ Roy Gregory, *The Miners and British Politics* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968) 25.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 26.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 30.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

However, MacDonald asserted that Labour “should not undertake any overt propaganda at the official level.”¹³² Local ILP divisions did not adhere to MacDonald’s announcement since a goal of attaining union contributions to further their political agenda was at the core of ILP doctrine. To accomplish this objective ILP members disseminated propaganda in Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, and Yorkshire.¹³³ The *Labour Leader* also called for miners to “wake from their slumber as paid servants.”¹³⁴ The ILP’s overtures were a success, and in May 1908, the MFGB voted for affiliation with 213,137 for and 168,446 against.¹³⁵ The results of the ballot were then debated at length as a number of union heads wished to maintain relations with the Liberals. Ultimately, after significant deliberation, the MFGB formally affiliated with the Labour Party. The integration of the federation provided 550,000 new members and eighteen MPs for the Labour Party.¹³⁶

Almost immediately after the MFGB’s integration into the Labour Party a General Election was called. David Lloyd George’s radical budget had been rejected by the Tories, who held a majority in the House of Lords. To restore his mandate Prime Minister Asquith disbanded parliament.¹³⁷ MacDonald and the party’s leadership did little to differentiate itself from the Liberals’ election platform, as the election was bound to issues of free trade and the ‘peers against people’ question.¹³⁸ Labour put forth seventy-eight candidates of whom forty entered parliament.¹³⁹ In a substantial decrease the Liberals only won 272 seats compared to the 397 they had gained in 1906. A second election revolving around the proposed reformation of the

¹³² Ibid, 30.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ *Labour Leader*, July 1908, 421.

¹³⁵ *Labour Leader*, June 1908, 373.

¹³⁶ Paige Arnot, *The Miners Years of Struggle* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd,1953) 124.

¹³⁷ Thorpe, *A History of the British Labour Party*, 23.

¹³⁸ *Labour Leader*, January 21st, 1910, 43.

¹³⁹ Ross McKibbin, *The Evolution of the Labour Party*, (London: Oxford University Press,1974) 12.

House of Lords took place in December. Labour was able to gain two more seats while the other parties' positions also remained relatively unchanged. The short time span between elections hampered Labour's ability to improve.¹⁴⁰

Union heads and party leadership were both cognizant of the electoral benefits that derived from the pact.¹⁴¹ Hence, MacDonald was given support to renew the electoral alliance with the Liberals. As a result, Labour leadership was required to support the Liberal stance on Irish Home Rule, land reform, and unemployment insurance.¹⁴² MacDonald assured his Liberal colleagues that he would "keep the Labour members up to the mark in supporting the government's National Insurance Bill."¹⁴³ Moreover, MacDonald had a cordial relationship with Chief Liberal Whip Alexander Murray. During a round of golf together the two Scotsmen jovially discussed the possibility of MacDonald leading the House of Lords.¹⁴⁴ For MacDonald the maintenance of relations with the Liberal Party was a political investment, and in 1924 his tactics would pay dividends when he included progressive Liberals within his ministry.¹⁴⁵

MacDonald's shrewd judgements had the effect of further alienating the rank and file of the ILP. Following the first election of 1910, an ILP subdivision in East Ham announced that alliances with other parties were harmful to their pursuit of Socialism.¹⁴⁶ Nonetheless, the party's leadership recognized that their sway in government had increased since the Liberals were now reliant on Labour's presence in Westminster if they were to implement reforms. In opposition, ILP activists underscored the lack of success Labour candidates had during three

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 16.

¹⁴¹ Tanner, *Political Change and the Labour Party*, 56-57.

¹⁴² Pugh, *Speak for Britain!* 81.

¹⁴³ *Ibid*, 80.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 81.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid*.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 80.

cornered elections.¹⁴⁷ It is also notable that when facing Liberal opposition during the January Election only one candidate emerged victorious.

To combat their lack of influence within Labour politics McLachlan, Douthwaite, and Belcher of the ILP's National Administrative Council drafted a document called *Let us Reform the Labour Party*. This commentary, also known as the 'Green Manifesto,' aimed to emphasise the lack of ideological coherency among the Labour movement's leading figures. For the writers of the pamphlet, MacDonald's support for "gradual reform, legislative achievement and incremental expansion" was linked to revisionism.¹⁴⁸ Those opposed claimed to be revolutionists in that they would battle MacDonald's views. Moreover, McLachlan regarded reason as not being a central tenet of socialism.¹⁴⁹

Along the same lines as the East Ham ILP branch, the writers of the pamphlet aimed to underscore the PLP's junior partner status in relation to the Liberals. McLachlan asserted that legislation put forth by the Liberals should be vehemently opposed if the Labour movement was to advance.¹⁵⁰ To support their position the dissidents pointed to an instance wherein PLP secretary George Barnes threatened not to cooperate with Asquith as a result of the Prime Minister's decision "not to remove the Lords veto on finance."¹⁵¹ The PLP did not support Barnes' position as the maintenance of ties with the Liberals was of more significance than a single issue.¹⁵² It was argued by the authors that the merits of every proposal should be

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, 79.

¹⁴⁸ Tanner, *Political Change and the Labour Party*, 51.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, 52.

¹⁵¹ Dylan Morris, "Labour or Socialism: Opposition and Dissent Within the ILP 1906-14 (University of Manchester, 1982) 210.

¹⁵² Ibid.

explored. Furthermore, the Green Manifesto argued for a noticeable increase in the number of by-elections contested by Labour candidates.¹⁵³

In response to his critics, MacDonald accepted the notion that socialism was vital to the progress of the Labour movement. However, he did not see the House of Commons as a stage for demonstrations of the Hyde Park sort.¹⁵⁴ Rather Westminster was a setting wherein moderate socialism could be applied. An aggressive strategy towards by-elections was also viewed by MacDonald as an unnecessary attempt at spreading Labour propaganda. The suggestions of Grayson and McLachlan were essentially cast aside by pragmatic party heads.

The Last Piece of the Puzzle

On the eve of World War One the Labour Party trailed the Irish Parliamentary Party, Conservatives, and Liberals in terms of representation at Westminster. By 1922, the Labour Party would become the official opposition and in 1923 MacDonald would attain the office of Prime Minister. This startling rise can be attributed to in part to the Labour Party's performance during World War One. During the conflict the party was able to combat its factionalism in a manner superior to its Liberal counterparts. Furthermore, a coherent political programme was created under the guidance of MacDonald, Henderson, and the Fabian Beatrice Webb.

Labour's initial response to the Kaiser's declaration of war against Russia was to organize a demonstration at Trafalgar Square which "urged the government to keep out."¹⁵⁵ Significantly, Arthur Henderson had been a key figure in the coordination of the protests, stating in the *Labour Leader* that "The long threatened European War is upon us... It is for you to take

¹⁵³ Tanner, *Political Change and the Labour Party*, 52.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 54.

¹⁵⁵ Pelling, *A Short History of the British Labour Party*, 35.

full account of the desperate situation and to act promptly and vigorously in the interest of peace.”¹⁵⁶ In contrast, support for British involvement was rationalized by Foreign Secretary Edward Grey, who argued that Britain had a commitment to France, Russia’s ally, as the two nations had similar tactical interests.¹⁵⁷ In response, MacDonald asserted that “Grey has not persuaded me,”¹⁵⁸ while also promptly resigning from his position as Chairman of the PLP. Henderson then took the post, pragmatically remarking that since “our protests could not keep England out of a war... we could serve her better by unswerving if protesting loyalty.”¹⁵⁹

In the meantime, MacDonald and Snowden endorsed the termination of secret diplomacy through the newly created Union of Democratic Control. Others who were associated with the pressure group included Charles Trevelyan the notable pacifist E.D. Morel. MacDonald’s objection towards the war had resulted in public humiliation; his illegitimate background had been revealed in the pages of *John Bull*.¹⁶⁰ Nevertheless, Henderson did not ostracize Labour members who opposed the war effort, as he had become a silent member of the UDC.¹⁶¹ In addition, the UDC supported a future “British policy that pays less attention to the balance of power while relying more on international councils to settle disputes.”¹⁶² The UDC also called for an end to the arms race; these contentions would become linked to Labour’s approach to foreign policy in the 1920s.

For the first time since the party’s inception a Labour member participated in Cabinet. Henderson was appointed to preside over the Board of Education within Asquith’s coalition.

¹⁵⁶ Labour Leader, August 6th, 1914, 5.

¹⁵⁷ Pugh, *Speak for Britain*, 100.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid, 101.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, 103.

¹⁶¹ Pelling, *A Short History of the British Labour Party*, 37.

¹⁶² Pugh, *Speak for Britain!* 103.

However, in practice Henderson's role was to act as a mediator between the government and the trade unions.¹⁶³ Ultimately, Henderson's role in Asquith's Cabinet was short lived, as the Prime Minister was ousted from office by Lloyd George, who had attained conservative support. Henderson then joined Lloyd George's cabinet under the title of Minister without Portfolio. George Barnes also participated in the five-man Cabinet, acting as the Minister of Pensions.

After the fall of the Russian monarchy, Lloyd George dispatched Henderson to Russia with the aim of "persuad[ing] Russian socialists of the need to stay in the war and to boycott the Stockholm conference."¹⁶⁴ Henderson's experience in Russia left upon him the impression that peace "must be held out to the Russian people."¹⁶⁵ For this goal to be realized Henderson proposed for a Labour delegation to be present at the conference. Infuriated by this turn of events, Lloyd George forced Henderson to resign from Cabinet.¹⁶⁶

Henderson's departure from Cabinet marked a significant period in the Labour Party's development into a conventional party. No longer beholden to the war cabinet Henderson, MacDonald, and the Webbs drafted Labour's manifesto on *War and Peace Aims*.¹⁶⁷ This text sought to underscore Labour's opposition towards Lloyd George's coalition. Moreover, Labour's National Executive Committee was expanded to include more trade union representatives. Most importantly, "local labour branches were established in every constituency."¹⁶⁸ Trevor Wilson has framed the Labour Party's rise as being bonded to the coalitions' poor performances.¹⁶⁹ This contention is simplistic as it disregards the various obstacles Labour overcame to emerge as a

¹⁶³ Ibid, 108.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, 109.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid, 118.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid, 119.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid, 120.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Keith Laybourn, *The Rise of Labour*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1988) 30.

political force. World War One did provide Labour with a unique opportunity, but the framework to take advantage of the Liberal's party's failures was established prior to and during the conflict.

Conclusion

This paper has sought to demonstrate that there was no single factor which propelled the Labour Party's rise. Several British accounts analyzing Labour have tried to isolate factors that supposedly explain the party's rapid progress. Marxist historians have argued that Labour rose due to an awakening of class consciousness. On the other hand, Trevor Wilson declared that factionalism within the Liberal Party allowed Labour to become the leading anti-Tory Party. In response to Wilson's declaration, Ross McKibben has argued that "Liberal policies were irrelevant,"¹⁷⁰ and that Labour's improvement could be linked to party successes during by-elections after 1910. Nonetheless, these perspectives ignore the pragmatic motivations of the movement's organizations and political actors. This overarching sense of pragmatism allowed the Labour Party to shift from being a pressure group into being a 'conventional party.'

The establishment of the LRC was the result of co-operation between the ILP and the TUC. Both organizations sought to create a political association that would further their own aims. On one hand the TUC sought to be affiliated with a body that would defend the legal interests of its members. On the other hand, the ILP intended to utilize union contributions to gain political influence. The LRC's leadership was then faced with a general election, Ramsey MacDonald logically concluding that an electoral pact with the Liberals would grow Labour's presence in Westminster. The pact had many critics within the Labour movement, but this was not detrimental to the party's appeal as some have argued.¹⁷¹ Labour's critics were able to

¹⁷⁰ Tanner, *Political Change and the Labour Party*, 3.

¹⁷¹ Pugh, *Speak for Britain!* 70.

engage with the public on working class issues, which surely aided in propelling Labour's growth. In addition, the party's leadership gained valuable political experience during the development of both the Right to Work Bill and the Trade Union Bill. Furthermore, Labour's role as the champion for the unemployed allowed the party to be perceived in a manner apart from the Liberals. Other developments which aided in Labour's evolution included the integration of the MFGB into the Labour Party. Lastly, World War One allowed the Labour Party to publicly challenge the Liberals, thereby marking its transition from a pressure group into a 'conventional party.'

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