AN ELITE'S RESPONSE TO DEMOCRACY: HOW THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY ADAPTED TO EXTENSIONS OF THE FRANCHISE; AND COPED WITH ENSUING POLITICAL REPERCUSSIONS 1867-1914.

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS.

This thesis investigates how the Conservative party coped with the far-reaching effects of democratic reform between 1867 and 1914. It analyses the performance of successive party leaders through their exploitation of high politics; and how ideology influenced their policy, and decision making. It also examines how the party's organization was periodically revised to manage changing political circumstances. The relationships between these three elements, high politics, ideology, and organization are then analysed to explain the Conservative party's appeal for electoral support during the period of study. The respective contributions made by the three elements to the party's electoral performance are considered in relation to each other. Using this approach the thesis explains how the Conservative party managed to improve upon its dismal electoral record between 1832 and 1874; how it achieved electoral dominance between 1886 and 1906; and why its electoral fortunes declined so dramatically thereafter.

The conclusions reached are threefold. Firstly, the importance attached to high politics by the Peterhouse school of thought may, in some respects, be exaggerated, certainly regarding elections. High politics, by its very nature seeks to exert influence at a level far removed from the mass electorate. Political rhetoric has obvious uses during elections, not least in the field of extra-parliamentary speech-making. But in the absence of any reliable indicators of what the electorate actually felt or desired, the effectiveness of political rhetoric could not be gauged *a priori.* The results of political manoeuvring at the highest levels may have been apparent to voters, but was of little concern to them. At worst, they were ignorant of it, and at best, ambivalent to it. Secondly, party leaders, whether knowingly or unknowingly, exploited the flexibility of Conservative ideology in their quest for votes. However, the core concepts of that ideology remained inviolable, only contingent values were successfully subjected to re-appraisal and revision to attract the voters. When ideological core values were misunderstood or misinterpreted the party suffered accordingly. Thirdly, the value of the Conservative party's organization has been underestimated. High politics and ideology may have combined to produce a Conservative message for the voters, but the appeal of that message was unknowable. On the other hand, the party's organization, when empowered to do so, adroitly and effectively utilized all the tools available to them to manage and maximize all potential Conservative support. Organization may be viewed as a make-weight, but like all make-weights it possessed the power to tip the electoral scales one way or the other.

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AN ELITE'S RESPONSE TO DEMOCRACY: HOW THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY ADAPTED TO EXTENSIONS OF THE FRANCHISE; AND COPED WITH ENSUING POLITICAL REPERCUSSIONS 1867-1914.

INTRODUCTION.

Democracy was not the progenitor of the British Constitution; rather democracy was incrementally wedded to a pre-existing, elitist parliamentary system. Unsurprisingly the marriage was not always a happy one. Nevertheless it has become a commonplace to assume that once the missile of democratic reform was launched, in the shape of the 1867 Reform Act, it would travel unerringly to its target *viz.* universal suffrage, and liberal democracy. But this was not the case. Opinions vary on the impetus available. For example, R. B. McCallum writes that 'in 1851 Lord John Russell had made an attempt to alter the parliamentary franchise, and from that moment the finality of the Act of 1832 was disavowed.'[1] Whereas Maurice Cowling is of the opinion that 'there was nothing inevitable about the course they followed. If a restrictive Act could have been passed on a conservative basis they would have passed it. If party conditions had been suitable, they would have persisted in March 1867 with a restrictive proposal.'[2] Gertrude Himmelfarb rightly adds that 'it was during the debate over this Act [1867] that the case for and against democracy was most cogently argued. But once this first step was made, no one seriously doubted that others would follow,' but she cogently adds that 'this was not an orderly, planned, or even coherent progression, to claim so does violence to the reality, imposing order upon chaos, necessity upon contingency, and principle upon expediency.'[3] Thus although the path of democratic reform can be closely followed its trajectory is much harder to track. One of the main forces influencing that trajectory was the debate over democracy itself, as referred to by Himmelfarb above. However, that debate was not stilled by the passage of the 1867 Act, in fact evidence suggests that the debate actually intensified post 1867. ‘Victorians did not claim that their system of government was democratic, a term that smacked of continental abstraction and implied an excess of equality characteristic of American society, rather it produced effective government, it guaranteed liberty, and it was representative.’[4] The debate coalesced around several key interrelated themes, representation (including proportional representation), the actual nature of the franchise (right, trust, privilege etc.), liberty (the swing from negative to positive liberty), equality (characterized by the rise of meritocracy) and whether democracy should be seen as an ideal or as a workable system of government. Although the debate can be seen as ongoing, certain issues brought one or other of these themes into prominence. For example, the passage of the Ballot Act in 1872 highlighted differences of opinion over the nature of the franchise; or the Northcote Trevelyan report on the Civil Service influenced attitudes towards equality. Post 1884-5 the debate over ideal or policy shifted, significantly, into the realm of the practicability of democracy rather than idealism.

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[1] R. B. McCallum writing in Elie Halevy, (1951) *Victorian Years (Incorporating The Age of Peel and Cobden).* Ernest Benn Ltd, London, p.440.

[2] Maurice Cowling, (1967) *1867: Disraeli, Gladstone, and Revolution.* Cambridge University Press, p.310. *cf.* Contemporary evidence supports this opinion. For example, *St Paul's Magazine* of March 1868 said, ' if vote by ballot had existed in Parliament, surrounded by inviolable secrecy, time after time Mr. Disraeli's household suffrage measure would have been thrown out by overwhelming majorities.'

[3] Gertrude Himmelfarb, (1975) *Victorian Minds*, Peter Smith, Gloucester Massachusetts, pp.333-335.

Similarly it has become a commonplace to contend that the dominant ethos of Victorian Britain was Liberalism. The core value of liberal ideology, liberty, became the determinant of both political philosophy and policy. J. S. Mill’s *On Liberty* published in 1859 set out the concept of “negative” liberty in unequivocal terms

> ‘the object of this essay is to assert one very simple principle, as entitled to govern absolutely the dealings of society with the individual in the way of compulsion and

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[4] Martin Pugh, (1982) *The Making of Modern British Politics: 1867-1939*, Blackwell, Oxford, p.2.

> control, whether the means used be physical force in the form of legal penalties, or in the moral coercion of public opinion. That principle is that the sole end for which mankind are warranted, individually or collectively, in interfering with the liberty of any of their number is self protection.'[5]

He could hardly have been more assertive, the only justification for interference of any kind in the affairs of anyone was to prevent harm to oneself or to others. Nevertheless, even though nineteenth century Britain may not have been a democracy 'it was a free society in which the ideas bubbling out of the controversy of public opinion fashioned and re-fashioned the form of the state';[6] and it was this idea, that society possessed its own dynamic, an underlying sense of a common interest, that philosophers such as T. H. Green seized upon later to justify a new definition of liberty. It was accepted that liberty was a right, and Green argued that rights could not exist independently of society. 'There can', he said, 'be no right without a consciousness of common interest on the part of members of society.'[7] He agreed that 'freedom rightly understood, is the greatest of all blessings,' but he was adamant that freedom should not be defined as 'merely freedom from restraint or compulsion', or 'merely freedom to do as we like irrespective of what it is we like.' According to Green

> 'when we speak of freedom as something to be so highly prized, we mean a positive power or capacity of doing something or enjoying something worth doing or enjoying, and that, too, something that we do or enjoy in common with others…the ideal of true freedom is the maximum of power for all members of human society alike to make the best of themselves.'[8]

Cliff Leslie encapsulated the argument, writing in 1879 'practical freedom involves more than the absence of legal and social restraint, every limitation of power [of the individual] is an abridgement of positive liberty.'[9]

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[5] J. S. Mill, (1859) *On Liberty* (Everyman Edition 1940) pp.72-73.

[6] Esme Wingfield-Stratford , (1930) *Those Earnest Victorians*, Longmans, London, p.318

[7] T. H. Green, (1924 edition) *Lectures on the Principles of Political Obligation.* Longmans Green & Co., London, p.48.

[8] T. H. Green, 'Liberal Legislation and Freedom of Contract', in R. L. Nettleship, (Ed.) (1888) *The Collected Works of Thomas Hill Green*, London, p.368. and pp.370-372.

Within the context of nineteenth century politics the new concept of positive rather than negative liberty could be seen as a victory for progress. But, just as, in the absence of universal suffrage, giving all votes equivalence is not political equality, so, positive liberty without universal suffrage is not political liberty. Nevertheless such a reading of events would provide the foundation of a framework which could be used to investigate political advances and developments in nineteenth century Britain. It has been noted, however, that

> 'all histories are fictions, reconstructions of the past, never the past itself. The quality of the fiction depends on how it is constructed – the methods and the framework of interpretation that are employed. It is a mistake to suppose that the necessity of choosing between frameworks can ever be dispensed with, and some standard of objective truth and objective method enthroned to guide research…Though there are good grounds for choosing between theoretical frameworks, there are no absolute objective ones.'[10]

This is undoubtedly an important observation, and the main, and most obvious, objection to the framework suggested above is that although Liberalism may indeed have been the dominant ethos during the nineteenth century, and the evolution of its core ideological value, liberty, may indeed have been the pre-eminent political development; the most successful political party, following the 1884 Reform Act until 1906, was the Conservative party. This, despite the fact that it has been argued

> 'in the Conservative conception of freedom…there is a great deal of double-talk and many layers of concealed consciousness. Conservatives, if they talk about freedom long enough, begin to believe that that is what they want. But it is not freedom that Conservatives want; what they want is the sort of freedom that will maintain existing inequalities or restore lost ones, so far as political action can do this.'[11]

If we accept the dominance of Liberal values**,** such a conception of freedom would appear to be incongruous with the Conservative's electoral success, especially as they were not viewed by everyone as the "natural" party of government. 'As for the conservative party its proper function in the *Edinburgh [Review]'s* scheme of things was to provide the opposition.'[12] The *Edinburgh Review* was, of course the official organ of Whig opinion, but this attitude was not confined to opponents of the Conservative party. Salisbury, writing to the Rev. C. R. Coneybeare on 19th September 1881offered his opinion that 'if it were possible to maintain a party under such conditions, I should be disposed to wish that the Conservatives should remain permanently a very strong opposition. That is undoubtedly the condition of things under which the wearing away of the constitution is most nearly suspended.'[13] Others saw Conservative electoral success as the beneficiary of external influences, for example, Sir Michael Hicks-Beach wrote to Arthur Balfour on 20th September 1909, 'all the political history of the last fifty years shows that the Unionists (or Conservative) party cannot win a General Election without some special aid, such as Home Rule, or the South African War. Without that we are in a minority.'[14]

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[9] Quoted in Anthony Arblaster, (1984) *The Rise and Decline of Western Liberalism,* Basil Blackwell, Oxford and New York. p.287.

[10] Andrew Gamble, (1974) *The Conservative Nation,* Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, p.VII.

[11] Maurice Cowling, 'The Present Position', in Maurice Cowling, (Ed.) (1978) *Conservative Essays,* Cassell, London, p.9.

It can be argued that that there was little to choose between the competing parties. For example, 'in debate, differences of principle might be discovered or differences in matters of detail exaggerated, but this dialectical athleticism and point scoring in parliament and on the platform cannot disguise how small a gap often divided the parties.'[15] On the other hand it has been suggested that

> 'the opposition between Liberalism and Conservatism in the political market was a contest in which each party drew on different sections of the nation for support…The

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[12] R. B. McDowell, (1959) *British Conservatism 1832-1914,* Faber and Faber, London. p.94. See *Edinburgh Review*, Vol. 137, p.581; Vol. 139, p.288, and pp.557-9; and Vol. 198, p.282.

[13] Quoted in Peter Marsh, (1978) *The Discipline of Popular Government: Lord Salisbury's Domestic Statecraft 1881-1902*, Harvester Press, London, p.37.

[14] Quoted in Lady Victoria Hicks-Beach, (1932 Two Vols.) *The Life of Sir Michael Hicks-Beach (Earl St Aldwyn)* Macmillan & Co., London, Vol.2, p.260.

[15] R. B. McDowell, (1959) op cit. p.10.

> electoral ideologies of the Conservative nation in its period of formation were the ideologies of the Empire and the established order of England. This separated them sharply from the Radicals in the Liberal coalition.'[16]

Depending upon prevailing circumstances either **"**a small gap dividing the parties**"** or a "sharp separation" may have been correct, to a greater or lesser degree; but both may be accommodated in the statement that 'traditional Toryism …has its boundaries located in the centre of British politics.'[17] The questions, therefore, which must be addressed are, what exactly are those boundaries? What gave Conservatism its unique character? And, quintessentially what did Conservatives stand for in the years 1867 to 1914? It may then be possible to evaluate how much these factors contributed to the Conservative Party's electoral fortunes. It is important at this juncture to explain why this specific time period has been chosen as the focus for this investigation.

Firstly, the history of the Conservative party can be said to have begun in the 1830s under the leadership of Sir Robert Peel. This opinion

> 'is in conformity with the distinguished contributions of modern historians. It is a convenient and appropriate date in that, for the first time, the expression "Conservative" was coming to be commonly and popularly applied to a distinctive party grouping in Westminster and to a body of recognizable political attitudes.'[18]

By the time of the 1867 Reform Act the Conservative party was a force to be reckoned with in British politics; a force that must be ready to enter the debate that the 1867 "leap in the dark" engendered. Politicians had argued and calculated how far they dared travel (mainly in their own interests) towards democracy, and whether remodelling the system of representation would be necessary to dull the cutting edge of Reform: others were campaigning to have the democratic ideal accepted in its own right. For example, *Macmillans Magazine* declared in 1865, ‘it cannot be too often or too emphatically repeated that without political equality there is no real political liberty.’[19] A year later the *Westminster Review* echoed the words of Auguste Comte that, ‘the fundamental doctrine of modern social life is the subordination of Politics to Morals.’[20] Those of a more prosaic bent countered that the argument was ‘not a subject in which excitement has any place, as little is it a question of abstract philosophy or metaphysics. It is a question depending upon facts to which no abstract meaning will help us,’[21] or, put more bluntly, ‘the truth is that the exercise of political power is a function, not a right…the beginning and end of it is good government…it cannot be an end in itself.’[22] The Conservative party needed to enter this seminal debate knowing exactly where it stood on this issue. Was democracy an ideal worthy of pursuing for its own sake; or must it be tailored to meet the demands of political expediency?

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[16] Andrew Gamble, (1974) op cit. p.203.

[17] Neill Nugent and Roger King, (Eds.) (1977) *The British Right: Conservative and Right Wing Politics in Britain.* Saxon House, Farnborough, p.5.

[18] Philip Norton and Arthur Aughey, (1981) *Conservatives and Conservatism,* Temple Smith, London, p.92.

Secondly, in this debate the Conservative party supported the latter position, that of expediency and practicality. Conservative politicians became a party of political practice driven by ideas rather than dogma, with the qualification that ‘ideas are only important in so far as they are part of that practice.’[23] This doctrine was to guide and inform Conservative policy and form the basis of their political practice. However, it was later pointed out that

> ‘to understand a political practice we must understand the political system in which it takes place. In Britain since the nineteenth century the political system has been radically transformed by the introduction of universal suffrage, and there is little meaningful continuity across this divide.’[24]

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[19] *Macmillans Magazine,* Vol.13, 1865, p.260.
[20] *Westminster Review,* Vol.30, 1866, p.483.
[21] *Edinburgh Review,* Vol.122, 1866, p.283.
[22] *Quarterly Review,* Vol.123, No. 245, July, 1867, p.250
[23] Andrew Gamble, (1974) op cit. p.2.
[24] Ibid. p.2.

In 1914, the outbreak of World War One obviously disrupted “normal” political practice; and universal male suffrage and limited female suffrage were introduced immediately it ended in 1918. It can be legitimately argued, therefore, that 1914 represents a date when “continuity” was broken and the “divide” opened up. The period from 1867 until 1914, therefore, represents a time when an uneasy relationship developed between expanding democratic practices, and groupings that became recognizable as modern political parties. Ever since the publication of Mosei Ostrogorski’s *Democracy and the Organisation of Political parties* in 1902 it has become accepted that ‘oligarchic controls, manipulation of the electorate, and a blurring of ideological differences between parties are inherent in the organizational pressure on parties operating under conditions of universal suffrage.’[25] Put simply, therefore, the accepted view is that democracy gave birth to modern political parties and party machines. This may be true under conditions of universal suffrage, but the position is less certain during the transitional period between 1867 and 1914 when the suffrage was being incrementally expanded. Research suggests that the reverse opinion also carries some weight, in so far as evidence suggests that the rival political parties in 1867, or at least their leaderships, saw the advantages to party of a wider democratic mandate and backed reforms on this basis. Furthermore far from being a time of “a blurring of ideological differences” this was a time of establishing ideological differences to attract new voters. Contemporary evidence makes clear that politicians were aware that extensions to the franchise would enhance and consolidate the position of political parties; as early as 1860 the Secretary of the Liberal Association of London had warned ‘if the suffrage were extended an election would depend to a much greater extent than it does at present (and it does too much now) upon political organizations. *It would increase the power of those political associations.’*

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[25] Seymour Martin Lipset, (Ed.) (1964) (in his introduction to an abridged version of *Democracy and the Organization of Political Parties* (1902) by Mosei Ostrogorski), Anchor Books and Quadrangle Books inc. Chicago, p.XII.)

(my emphasis)[26] Thomas Hare's system of proportional representation which represented a system to ensure the much feared "tyranny of the majority" may be nullified, was eventually discarded because it was realized that it would render party organizations largely redundant. Leonard Courtney wrote in 1876 that if it was adopted they would fade away; 'they may return' he said, 'but will come as supplicants to beseech. Instead of masters to command.'[27] By 1885 Gladstone was articulating what he saw as the clear ideological divide between the two main parties; 'the principle of Liberalism' he said, 'is TRUST IN THE PEOPLE, QUALIFIED BY PRUDENCE. The principle of Conservatism' he argued, 'is MISTRUST OF THE PEOPLE, qualified by fear.' (original emphasis)28

Both main parties, but especially the Conservative party, strove to establish a recognizable identity and ethos in the face of constantly changing circumstances. The responsibility for carrying out this process fell to the respective party leaders. 'The Victorian era in Great Britain; [was] the golden age of individualism. Parliament [was] dominated by persons rather than politics.'[29] The influence exerted by Gladstone and Disraeli, as politicians grappled with the development of democratic processes, can hardly be exaggerated. They were also great rivals and their rivalry 'became personal and insults were traded.'[30] A. G. Gardiner succinctly captured the essence of the relationship between the two men when he wrote 'Gladstone always seemed to be hurrying with a message from Mount Sinai and meeting Disraeli coming from the feet of Scheherazade. The gravity of the one and the levity of the other left them no common ground of intercourse.'[31] The conflicting personalities of these two leaders would have a potent influence, not only on the parties they led, but on the relationship between those two parties, and even on the relationship between the two houses of parliament.

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[26] *Blue Books of 1860* Vol. 12, p.226. Evidence given to the Committee of The House of Lords.

[27] Leonard Courtney MP, (1876) 'The Representation of Minorities', in *Nineteenth Century* Vol. 6, July 1876, p.155.

[28] Quoted in Donald Read, (1979) *England 1868-1914: The Age of Urban Democracy*, Longmans, London. p.119. (From *Why I am a Liberal: Being Definitions and Personal Confessions of Faith by the Best Minds of the Liberal Party,* published 1885)

[29] The Marquis of Zetland (Earl Ronaldsway) (Ed.), (1929 Two Vols.) *The Letters of Disraeli to Lady Bradford and Lady Chesterfield*, Ernest Benn Ltd., London, p.13.

[30] Donald Read, (1979) op cit. p.168.

> 'Each had created a new party. Gladstone had been a Tory, but had never been a Whig, and the party he led was a new instrument, forged by his own genius and inspired by his own imperious purpose. Disraeli had been a Radical in his youth, but he had never been a Tory, and the party he led was the creation of his own romantic imagination.'[32]

Previously political parties had been 'the instruments through which politicians at Westminster worked upon the constituencies'[33] post 1867 the electoral necessity of party re-organization risked giving greater influence to constituency associations. Politics entered a transitional state of flux, 'politicians acknowledged that the interests which it was their profession to reconcile had shifted significantly…but they lacked any understanding of what the new order required of them,'[34] and this uncertainty applied as much to party leaders as to their followers.

The details of franchise reform; the history of the Conservative party; the nature of conservative ideology; and Conservative party organization, have all been the object of much discussion and examination by scholars. Indeed, much of that scholarship will be referred to and utilized later. The aim of this study is to investigate the relationships between these different themes and to discover how those relationships translated into the electoral success that the Conservative party came to enjoy during much of our period of study.

'High politics, as a mode of traditional political behaviour, did not die with the birth of democratic conviction, (in the Edwardian era)…the assumption [remained], common to virtually everyone who operated the political system, that a tiny oligarchy still possessed the power to start and stop, to accelerate or retard.'[35] Or, as Viscount Esher put it 'newspapers, politicians, mobs, all these are useful enough. But the support of the half dozen men or so -who *count*- is vital'[36] It is for this reason that this study will view evidence through the prism of "High Politics". However, this choice is not to be interpreted as an unqualified endorsement of the "Peterhouse" school of thought,[37] if only because Peterhouse tends to focus exclusively on those circumstances in which the elite can be deemed to have dictated change, leaving occasions when the electorate appeared to exert power to be explored by social and labour historians, whose focus is upon history "from below". Rather it is an acknowledgement that during the period under investigation, there was a 'stubborn persistence of gentry and aristocracy at this higher level, when at the lower echelons of politics, new groups had already gained ascendancy.'[38] High politics remained a "closed shop" accessible only to a chosen few.

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[31] A. G. Gardiner, (1923 Two Vols.) *The Life of Sir William Harcourt.* Constable & Co., London. Vol. 1, p.208.

[32] Ibid. p.208.

[33] H. J. Hanham, (1968) *The Reformed Electoral System in Great Britain 1832-1914,* The Historical Association, p.5

[34] Michael Bentley, (1984) *Politics Without Democracy 1814-1914: Perception and Preoccupation in British Government,* Fontana, London, p.194.

Chapter One, therefore, will investigate how the intrigue and artifice of high politics impacted upon nineteenth century British politics, and explain more fully why this "top down" methodology has been adopted.

Party leaders were influenced by their interpretation of ideology, and because of the power they wielded, this interpretation guided what the Conservative Party actually stood for. Whilst the substantive core of Conservative ideology may have remained inviolable, there were many re-assessments and changes to contingent values, principles, and concepts. The question of whether such developments altered the very nature of Conservatism between 1867 and 1914 will be addressed, within the context of changing political circumstances, in Chapter Two.

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[35] Michael Bentley, (1984) op cit. p.343.

[36] Lord Esher to Fisher 15th October 1907.In Maurice V. Brett (Ed. For Vols. 1 &2) and Viscount Oliver Esher, (Ed. For Vols. 3&4) (1934 Four Vols.) *Journals and Letters of Reginald Viscount Esher,* Ivor Nicholson & Watson Ltd., London, Vol. Two, p.252.

[37] In the words of its leading proponent, Maurice Cowling, 'the phrase "the Peterhouse school of history" was coined, I believe, on the fertile tongue of Professor Joseph Lee of the University of Cork who was a fellow of Peterhouse in the 1970s. What Professor Lee meant, however, was not a philosophical position but what he called…the "high political" works which had been written about the history of nineteenth and twentieth century English politics by Professor J. R. Vincent, Dr. A. B. Cooke, Dr. Andrew Jones, and myself in the years between 1965 and 1976.' (Maurice Cowling, (1986) 'The Peterhouse School', *New York Review of Books,* Vol. 33, No. 6, 10th April, 1986.)

[38] David Cannadine, (1990) *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy,* Yale University Press, New Haven and London, p.21

Changing political circumstances, of course, impacted not only upon the upper echelons of the party, but also upon those further down the hierarchy, the party workers in the constituencies. These were the people who conducted elections at the local level and attempted to maximise the party's support. Chapter Three will, therefore, examine the organization of the party to discover the extent to which organizational changes, designed and implemented by the party leadership, affected the character of the party, and contributed to its electoral performance.

High politics, ideology, and organization were all necessary components in the pursuit of electoral success. Chapter Four will use evidence from the preceding chapters devoted to these elements to analyze the Conservative Party's appeal for electoral support during our period of study. In an era of extensions to the franchise, and an increasing acceptance that democracy was to be a permanent feature of the political process, direct appeals to the electorate assumed ever greater importance. The public face of the party, therefore, needed to be carefully constructed to appeal to as broad a constituency as possible. The Conservative message needed to be assertive but flexible; attractive but practical; and most of all, to promote policies that appeared achievable and workable.

The fortunes of the Conservative party waxed and waned during our period of study. The final chapter will draw conclusions from all the evidence presented to explain these fluctuations. How did the Conservative Party improve so successfully upon its dismal electoral record between 1832 and 1874? What respective merit ought to be given to the contributions made to the party’s electoral revival from 1885 until 1906, by its organization, its ideology, and its leadership? And why did the party’s fortunes decline so drastically in the early twentieth century?

CHAPTER ONE.

HIGH POLITICS IN NINETEENTH CENTURY BRITAIN.

Any investigation into high politics must, self evidently, begin with two questions. Firstly, what is taken to be understood by the term “high politics”; and secondly, what form of methodology is to be employed. Then follow two secondary questions, is the definition of “high politics” valid; and why has a particular methodology been chosen.

The first question is reasonably straightforward. High politics was formerly the term used to describe the formulation and operation of foreign, as distinct from domestic, policy. However, in its modern interpretation high politics can be taken to mean, as the phrase suggests, politics that took place at the highest level. It was the politics employed by party leaderships and top politicians, the nature of the relationships between them, and their reactions one to another. Who ought to be included within the realm of high politics was largely decided by those who actually engaged in high politics. The criteria for membership was based, as Maurice Cowling has argued, upon ‘mutual recognition; not from office, but from a distinction between politicians, inside parliament and outside, whose actions were thought reciprocally important, and those whose actions were not.’[39] High politics set the parameters for all other political action and initiative, it was, therefore, unsurprisingly, not an exact science. ‘High politics was primarily a matter of rhetoric and manoeuvre…Political rhetoric was an attempt to provide new landmarks for the electorate. Political manoeuvre was designed to ensure that the right people provided them.’[40] Put simply, high politics in nineteenth century Britain was the politics of leadership, and was the preserve of a small select band of hugely influential people, who would decide what they and their party stood for, and what image was to be projected to the people.

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[39] Maurice Cowling, (1971) *The Impact of Labour 1920-1924: The Beginning of Modern British Politics*. Cambridge University Press, p.4.

[40] Ibid. p.5.

It can be argued that Cowling's definition of high politics is too narrow, and ignores important outside influences. For example, Stuart Ball argues that

> 'despite the more extreme arguments of the "high politics" school, grass-roots party opinion did matter and was constantly in the awareness of MPs and cabinet ministers. Party opinions could not simply be massaged and managed, though skill in response made a considerable difference; politicians had to work with the grain of their supporters and those who failed to do so soon found their influence and even their careers to be at an end.'[41]

There is a great deal of evidence to support this point of view, but even so it need not detract from the validity of our investigation. Certainly studies focusing on local politics, and therefore, much nearer to "grass roots Party opinion" have proved to be illuminating and informative. [42] To extrapolate the conclusions derived from local studies into a national perspective would be extremely problematical, if only because of the pre-eminence accorded to local issues in specific regions. Even so, evidence from local studies will be useful when considering the changes that were made to party organization, and in examining the Conservative party's appeal for electoral support. Nevertheless, decisions of major importance were still only taken at the highest possible level, albeit possibly from a range of options circumscribed by ideology and more populist opinion; and, furthermore

> 'if we ascend the political hierarchy, from the voters upwards, we find that at each level – the membership of political parties, party activists, local political leaders, MPs, national leaders – the social character of the group is slightly less "representative" and slightly more tilted in favour of those who belong to the middle and upper levels of our society.'[43]

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[41] Stuart Ball, (Ed.) (1996) 'National Politics and Local History: The Regional and Local Archives of The Conservative Party 1867-1945.' in *Archives The Journal of The British Records Association.* No. 94, Vol. XXII, April 1996, p.59.

[42] See, for example, J. Lawrence, (1998) *Speaking for the People: Party Language and Popular Politics in England, 1867-1914,* Cambridge University Press, for a study of Wolverhampton, and Patrick Joyce, (1980) *Work, Society, and Politics: The Culture of the Factory in Later Victorian England,* Harvester Press, London, for a study of Lancashire.

[43] W. L. Guttsman, (1963), *The British Political Elite,* MacGibbon & Kee, London, p.27

This was never more true than in nineteenth century Great Britain. Those who engaged in high politics were invariably drawn from a narrow stratum at the apex of society. Moreover, even if we accept that ‘the more political affairs are analysed the more difficult it becomes to establish a point where party domestic affairs end and high policy begins,’[44] the realm of high politics will still lie at the opposite end of a continuum from grass-roots activism. It is equally true that the nearer any investigation gets to the apex of political decision making, self-evidently, the more those who participate in it will appear to constitute a “closed circle”. The scope of high politics, therefore, may also be retrospectively discovered from the political activities of those who constituted that “closed circle”. ‘The study of politics at the top, is, therefore, not a simple matter. One is dealing with a problematical, high-level activity where the meaning of the material is not self evident’,[45] however, the specific realm of activity that constitutes “high politics” may be assessed with reasonable certainty and accuracy, even if tapping into it remains extremely difficult.

Having concluded that only a comparatively small group of people engaged in high politics; it would appear reasonable that any investigation into the subject ought to concentrate upon the activities of those very people. Certainly it has already been noted that the Victorian era in Great Britain was the golden age of individualism. Parliament was dominated by persons rather than political dogma.[46] We can claim, therefore, that a few individuals are of paramount importance, but even they relied upon the support of their party. Unfortunately where party politics are concerned the public pronouncements of politicians must always be treated with the utmost caution, political expediency and, on occasions, deliberate obfuscation are often the order of the day. Can we justify concentrating upon the small group who engaged in high politics, and if so, can an adequately rigorous academic methodology be constructed to do justice to such an investigation.

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[44] Eric Alexander, Third Viscount Chilston, (1961) *Chief Whip: The Political Life and Times of Aretas Akers-Douglas First Viscount Chilston*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, p.xi. Nb. Even if in this instance “high policy” is taken to mean “foreign policy” the implication remains unaltered.

[45] Maurice Cowling, (1971) op cit. p.9.

[46] See footnote 29, page 9.

It has been suggested, perhaps somewhat patronisingly, that in the nineteenth century

> ‘for the greater part the newly enfranchised masses, being uneducated, unsophisticated and sentimental were incapable of developing anything that could be called a political opinion. Hence they were apt to find a focus for their feeling more easily in the person of an individual: to such the right or wrong of politics were represented by Gladstone or Disraeli, Randolph Churchill or [Joseph] Chamberlain etc. Indeed, in 1868 and in 1874 the vote of the country was virtually a plebiscite in favour of Gladstone in the first place and of Disraeli in the second.’[47]

On the other hand it has been noted by H. J. Hanham that

> ‘politics for more than twenty years after the 1867 Reform Act became the central pre-occupation of the nation. The party system was remodelled to encourage popular participation on an unprecedented scale. The number of votes cast in general elections rose rapidly, each party gaining over a million votes for the first time in the general election of 1874.’[48]

Hanham goes on to suggest that ‘almost everywhere politics came to occupy a central position in community life. Workingmen’s clubs, co-operative societies, friendly societies, and other charitable organizations were often identified with one party or the other.’[49] However, he also observes that ‘everywhere the normal pattern was for the “natural” leaders of the community to take their place as political leaders.’[50] These local political leaders were well down the hierarchy described by W. L. Guttsman, referred to earlier, and were distanced from the elite; however, Hanham is in agreement with Viscount Chilston on the popular influence exercised by those at the top, those who engaged in high politics. ‘Disraeli and Gladstone’ he points out, ‘became popular heroes featured on hundreds of thousands of plaques, horse brasses, salt cellars, and tiles.'[51] The inference is that even if voters were ignorant or well informed, apathetic or interested, it was those who influenced politics at the highest level who exerted the greatest influence upon them, who had the capacity to mould their opinions. For example, a Conservative party organizer wrote to the principal party manager Lord Nevill in 1867

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[47] Eric Alexander, Third Viscount Chilston, (1961) op cit. p.7.

[48] H. J. Hanham, (1978 ed.) *Elections and Party Management: Politics in the Time of Disraeli and Gladstone.* Harvester, London, p.XI.

[49] H. J. Hanham, (1978 ed.) op cit. p.XIV.

[50] Ibid. p.XIV.

> 'It is quite wonderful the way these working men devote their time and energy to politics. I trust however that we shall not be like Frankenstein, and have raised a spirit that we cannot control! – it is a dangerous power to give them, but they are so determined to have it, that all we can do is to keep them on the right road.' [52]

The influence exerted by Gladstone and Disraeli, as political circumstances changed and developed has already been noted. They became indispensable talismans. It may even be argued that they became the embodiment of their respective parties: it was they who interpreted the ideology which underpinned doctrine and informed party decisions. Neither had been party leaders at the time of the 1867 Reform Act but both had been chosen to steer their parties through the minefield of franchise reform. As the Act took effect they were entrusted with the task of ensuring that their respective parties gained the best advantage possible from its provisions. Thus, to a certain extent, they were allowed a free hand until the repercussions of the Act became apparent. This is not to suggest that either were autocrats who exercised total control over cohorts of "yes-men", or that they were the only formulators of policy and strategy. They were ably assisted by like-minded colleagues. 'The most important political leaders did not occupy small patches of rhetorical ground: they "recognised the force" of all effective opinions and batted on all sides of whatever wicket they chose to make their own.'[53] They were also flexible, pragmatic and able to manage changing circumstances; as when new members aspired to engage in high politics. Men such as

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[51] H. J. Hanham, (1978 ed.) op cit. p.XIV.

[52] Major the Hon. C. J. Keith-Falconer to Lord Nevill, 1st September 1867, quoted in Paul Smith, (1967) *Disraelian Conservatism and Social Reform*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, pp.117-118.

[53] Maurice Cowling, (1971) op cit. p.7.

> ‘Bright, Forster, Stansfield, and Chamberlain who came into the political elite as spokesmen of new social groups and a new segment of the “body politic”. Their power and influence at Westminster often derived from the fact that they were the leaders and spokesmen of the new party organizations, both on the local and on the national level.’[54]

The nineteenth century was a time of great change, Reform, and upheaval in British politics, but it can be argued with much certainty that in the nineteenth century power was concentrated in an oligarchy which was not very different in form from that of the eighteenth century. That oligarchy was overwhelmingly aristocratic, ‘new men …entered it, but they…generally become assimilated into the groups from which the majority of their colleagues spring.’[55] There may have been exceptions to this rule, for example ‘the entry of David Lloyd George, a man of a very different social background, into the House of Commons in 1890 may have shown that the era of the “cottage-bred man” had arrived.’ But this did not signal the end of the *ancien regime*, it may have been under attack, but the old order was still resilient ‘the entry of William Waldegrave Palmer [later Lord Selborne] into that same House five years earlier demonstrated that the era of the estate-bred man was far from over.’[56] Further evidence that a tight-knit oligarchy continued to hold sway in the field of high politics can be deduced from the fact that ‘the character of Cabinet membership is still [by the 1900s] much more predominantly aristocratic and upper class than that of the House of Commons from which it is drawn.’[57] This suggests that at the highest level politics is concerned with influence rather than numbers, thus ‘by 1906 the aristocratic group of the cabinet had been relegated to a minority position, *although a strong one*.’ (my emphasis)58 Entry into the world of high politics, however, had to be earned and needed to bring something other than loyalty, finance, or industry into the arena.. Many wealthy people, of elevated social rank, may have seen new democratic practices as a pathway to office and power, but the circle remained closed to all except those with the right contacts and credentials. Consider this somewhat bitter complaint,

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[54] W. L. Guttsman, (1963) op cit. pp.84-85.
[55] Ibid. p319.
[56] George Boyce, (Ed.) (1987) *The Crisis of British Unionism: Lord Selborne’s Domestic Political Papers 1885-1922*, Historian’s Press, London, p.VIII.
[57] W. L. Guttsman, (1963) op cit. p.90.
[58] Ibid. p.78.

> ‘it becomes clearer after every appointment that though men may work their hearts out and make every sacrifice, financial and otherwise, when the Conservative party is in opposition and in difficulties, yet in prosperous times all is forgotten and all honours, emoluments and places are reserved for the friends and relations of the favoured few, many of whom were in the nursery while some of us were fighting up-hill battles for the party.’[59]

Effort alone was never enough, whereas ‘the appointment of R. A. Cross as Home Secretary by Disraeli in 1874 was, so Disraeli’s biographer wrote, “the natural outcome of the substantial support given by his native Lancashire to the Conservative cause.”’[60] Cross’ biographer, on the other hand, suggests that his appointment may have been influenced by his relationship with Lord Derby; adding that Disraeli ‘looked upon the appointment as a gamble.’ [61] The Liberal Party’s inner circle were equally exclusive.

> ‘The governing hierarchy of the Liberal Party in the age of Gladstone [were] something of a distinct group within, but also apart from, the Parliamentary Party; a group with its own traditions, its own loyalties, and its own code of disinterested, efficient and high-minded service.’[62]

Nor were those excluded from high politics unaware of their ostracism or always ready to quietly acquiesce. Robert Wallace MP. complained in 1895,

> ‘The House [of Commons] has no voice in the selection of the Government, only the invidious and practically useless option of objecting. Once in, the party heads, not elected, but co-opted by predecessors similarly co-opted, are masters of the situation. On any signs of independent action in their party, they can put the pistol of dissolution to

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[59] G. C. T. Bartley (Cons. Party Agent 1882-85) to Lord Salisbury 22nd Oct. 1898, quoted in J. P. Cornford, (1967) ‘The Parliamentary Foundations of the Hotel Cecil’, In Robert Robson, (Ed.) (1967) *Ideas and Institutions of Victorian Britain: Essays in Honour of George Kitson Clark*, G. Bell & Sons, London, p.268.

[60] W. F. Moneypenny and G. E. Buckle, (1929 Two Vols.) *The Life of Benjamin Disraeli, Earl of Beaconsfield,* John Murray, London, Vol. 2, p.629. Quoted in Guttsman W. L. (1963) op cit. p.85.

[61] Dennis J. Mitchell, (1991) *Cross and Tory Democracy: A Political Biography of Richard Assheton Cross,* Garland, New York and London, pp.56-57.

[62] Paul Adelman, (1970) *Gladstone, Disraeli, and Later Victorian Politics,* Longman Group, London, pp. 4-5.

> their heads and say "your vote or your life, if you do not come to heel, we will blow your parliamentary brains out," and so bring mutineers to their senses. Looking at facts rather than phrases, the actual government of this country is properly neither a Monarchy nor a Democracy, but mainly an alternation of two traditional Oligarchies, each composed of an aristocratic nucleus, continually drawing recruits that suit it into its "ring," getting into power and place through the efficacious manipulation of party resources, and then sticking to them as long as it can, by managing the members of its Parliamentary following through a dextrous blending of menace, cajolery, and reward.'[63]

Nor was criticism confined to the left of the political spectrum

> '[Hilaire] Belloc and Cecil Chesterton from the radical right argued, in a similar vein, that the old-boys network dominated parties. They sought to show "how restricted a group of men the functions of government have come to be entrusted…Groups of this size could not possibly arise in a genuine democratic society; and, what is more, [they] are more closely and intimately bound together even than they were in the days when the government of this country was avowedly that of an oligarchy. The tendency to govern by decree is not decreasing; it is increasing."' [64]

We can conclude, then, that the ruling groups of both parties were enduring and resilient, furthermore they were pragmatic and capable of utilising legislation to their own ends, even when such legislation was ostensibly of a democratic nature. Even the Parliament Act of 1911 served to reinforce the grip on power of those who actually pulled the levers of power.

> '[One] result of the Parliament Act was to tighten the grip of the executive on the House of Commons. Alarm at the growing subjection of the Lower House to the cabinet had begun as far back as the [18]90s. Sidney Low published an article called "*If The House of Commons Were Abolished?*" in which he pointed out the transfer of the Commons' powers to the cabinet, the party caucus, the press and the platform. This transformation was in part a natural consequence of the extended franchise which had led to the creation of party machinery which increased the subjection of private members to the whips on the one hand and their constituents on the other. It was partly the result of revised rules of procedure, restricting the rights of unofficial members and reducing the opportunities for criticizing the general policy of the government…Members are urged and induced to support the cabinet on many matters on which they might otherwise oppose it in order not to imperil the bill, which means that the power of the party machine over the individual member is largely increased.' [65]

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[63] *Nineteenth Century,* No. XXXVII, March 1895, pp.192-193.

[64] Hilaire Belloc and Cecil Chesterton, (1911) *The Party System*, S. Swift, London, p.41. Quoted in H. J. Hanham, (Ed.) (1969) *The Nineteenth Century Constitution 1815-1914: Documents and Commentary,* Cambridge University Press, p.210.

[65] Emily Allyn, (1931) *Lords Versus Commons: A Century of Compromise 1830-1930*, The Century Co., London. p.219.

There is, therefore, overwhelming evidence that the realm of high politics during the nineteenth century and early twentieth century was the exclusive preserve of a limited oligarchy who jealously guarded their privileged position. Moreover it cannot be gainsaid that the individuals who made up the membership of this oligarchy were the pre-eminent political personalities of their time, or how great their influence was.

> 'If it be objected that this suggests that it can be "rational" for a few men to exercise a political and economic power and political and intellectual influence very much greater than the influence exercised by others, it must be answered that the recurrent existence of such disproportion is one of the plainest facts of human history,' [66]

Having determined the realm, nature, and scope of high politics in nineteenth century Britain, and an understanding of which groups operated within this realm, the salience of an investigation into the activity is unquestionable. What is open to question is what methodology is best suited to carry out such an investigation to enable the workings of high politics to be documented. It can be argued, for example, that 'it would be unreal to separate artificially the drama of high politics from either the slow burning changes in the cities, the countryside, the factories, and the boardrooms, or from the movement of ideas and perceptions.' [67] Indeed there can be little doubt that social changes impacted upon the realm of high politics,

> 'The world of high politics was not, of course, entirely monastic or Rotarian. But there were two reasons why it was atypical. In the first place, it was self-perpetuating. Secondly changes in the social structure were not readily reflected in the character of the political power. Until 1916 the original "workshop of the world" was governed by country gentlemen, dukes' relatives, rentiers, literary radicals, educated intellectuals and professional politicians.' [68]

We have seen previously that "cottage-bred" men began to make inroads into the closed shop of high politics, the same may be said of industrialists, businessmen, trade unionists and others.

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[66] Maurice Cowling, (1963) *The Nature and Limits of Political Science,* Cambridge University Press, p.193.

[67] E. J. Feuchtwanger, (1985) *Democracy and Empire: Britain 1865-1914,* Edward Arnold, London, p.146.

[68] Maurice Cowling, (1971) op cit. p.10.

> ‘The entry of the men from other ranks and occupations than those which had been traditionally associated with the political career could not have taken place if the growth of local party associations, although limited in scope and uncertain of their powers at first, had not brought new voices and methods into the process by which candidates, and consequently MPs were selected.’ [69]

But they, and anyone else who aspired to positions of power had little choice but to adopt the rules and conventions that awaited them. According to Cowling ‘these conventions are only intelligible from within.’ [70] This is obviously to overstate the case, since if taken literally, it would preclude study by any outsider, including Cowling and his colleagues, but the basis of the argument is nevertheless worth noting. Parliament represented ‘an arena for conflict between politicians...[but] In practice conflict divided parliamentary politicians far less than consciousness of the power of parliament united them.’ [71] For example, there were at least three prominent politicians of the period, namely Harcourt, Campbell-Bannerman, and Edward Stanhope, who had brothers sitting on the opposite side of the House. [72] Moreover they were not only affiliated by familial ties, Lord Beaconsfield wrote to Hartington in 1876 to thank him for a gift of some grouse in these terms, ‘My Dear Lord – It is very kind of you to remember me; one likes to be remembered. I am sorry I shall not meet you so often in the future, but we may meet perhaps more frequently in those secret societies where we sometimes encounter each other…I hope you are well, and that you will win all your encounters; except, of course, at St Stephens.’ [73] The situation hardly changed after the turn of the nineteenth century, ‘Balfour and Asquith shared many friends, sometimes leaving dinner parties in the same hansom for the House of Commons to lambaste one another in a late debate.’ [74] An *esprit de corps* existed between those privileged to occupy positions of power, conflict was inescapable, but fell within “the rules of the game”. It has been noted that ‘the adoption, when the [Conservative] party was in Opposition, of sharp and constructive alternatives to the policies of those in power was not common, the tendency being in such circumstances to exaggerate, by attacks on the governing party, the differences between ministers and alternative ministers by mainly destructive attacks.’ [75] The reason for this strategy is that, as has already been made clear, high politics was concerned with rhetoric and manoeuvre, it was about people and individuals; and about the business of government. It remains an inescapable fact that, at least, in nineteenth century Britain,

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[69] W. L. Guttsman, (1963) op cit. p.80.
[70] Maurice Cowling, (1971) op cit. p.10.
[71] Ibid. p7.
[72] See J. P. Cornford, (1967) op cit. p.272.
[73] Lord Beaconsfield to Hartington, 6th September 1876, quoted in Bernard Holland, (1911 Two Vols.) *The Life of Spencer Compton Eighth Duke of Devonshire,* Longmans Green & Co. London, Vol. One, pp.174-175.
[74] Max Egremont, (1980) *Balfour,* Collins, London, pp.215-216.

> ‘immediate and effective power in the sphere of government is vested in a very small number [of people]…A democratic political system cannot make elites superfluous, though it may ensure their rapid and regular circulation. Hence our interests in the wielders of power.’ [76]

May it not, therefore, be appropriate to investigate high politics by concentrating upon the men who mattered, those who actually participated, in the context of the environment in which they operated. ‘It was from these politicians that almost all initiative came. The language they used, the images they formed, the myths they left, had a profound effect on the objectives other politicians assumed could be achieved through the political system.’ [77]

The first objection to such a methodology is that it may limit the scope of any investigation. Peterhouse, for example, often implies that it was Westminster which ultimately determined decision making, therefore, historians need to study Westminster in intricate detail. It is argued that it was a ‘highly specialized community’ whose members’ ‘primary interest’ was their own

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[75] Donald Southgate, (1974) *The Conservative Leadership,* Macmillan, London, p.14.
[76] W. L. Guttsman, (1963) op cit. p.15.
[77] Maurice Cowling, (1971) op cit. p.3.

'very private institutional life' [78] This argument, though, was somewhat challenged by Maurice Cowling when he pointed out that the academic study of politics should be explanatory, not predictive, and not judgemental; because 'at a certain stage in the development of an academic discipline, when the landmarks have disappeared from sight, attempts must be made to bring them back into view.'[79] Concentrating research upon individuals, therefore, need not necessarily mean that wider issues are excluded, for example, it may be convincingly argued that demands from the working class for better conditions could only be accommodated through existing institutions, but in the process needed to be transformed in order to be made tolerable to ruling opinion. Therefore, 'if we observe British politicians within the context of their society and see their rise under the influence of new social forces and in changing social conditions we may also gain some understanding of structural changes in British society.'[80] The main thrust of our investigation, therefore, must be upon individual politicians, but also in the context of their environment. We have already noted that the public utterances of politicians must be treated with caution, especially if the intention is to manipulate opinions. Thus the contentious "Irish Question" of the 1880s may be interpreted as 'a temporary and particular name' given to 'a continuous and permanent existential problem' which confronted party managers. The difficulty was to uncover 'party lines, divisions, and alignments, and then rationalizing these for the benefit of that great majority of even their senior colleagues.' [81] Research, therefore, needs to concentrate upon private opinions and statements, gleaned from diaries, memoirs, correspondence, etc. It can, of course, be argued that even by this approach it is, perhaps, impossible to discover what a person actually "believed" or "intended" 'what one is talking about…whether writing about the nineteenth century or the twentieth, is the springs of human conduct, to these we have but uncertain guides' and some 'prefer to stop short of making definite pronouncements about such matters' because it appears uncertain 'that information in such fields can be convincingly related to a sound structure of theory.' [82] However, if the theory postulated is one of the exclusivity and detachment of the world of high politics, such obstacles may be overcome, because even if the focus is upon the Westminster elite it will also involve contextualizing these men into a wider culture. Since we have concluded that high politics relies upon rhetoric and manoeuvre within the confines and conventions of the system , we may assume that senior politicians holding positions of power and responsibility within their parties

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[78] See A. B. Cooke and John Vincent, (1974) *The Governing Passion: Cabinet Government and Party Politics in Britain 1885-1886,* Harvester, Brighton, pp20-22.

[79] Maurice Cowling, (1963) *The Nature and Limits of Political Science,* Cambridge University Press, p.17.

[80] W. L. Guttsman, (1963) op cit. p.16.

[81] A. B. Cooke and John Vincent, (1974), op cit. p.18.

> 'cannot usefully be said themselves to have wanted, desired, or believed anything except what was wanted by all other participants in the system…[we may assume] on the contrary, that, by the time they emerge as commanding figures, they have adopted a way of thinking and acting whose function is the playing of a role which their positions as repositories of the hopes and ambitions of their followers forces them to respect. In a sense, therefore, it is idle to ask whether they self-consciously believed, personally desired or independently wanted anything in particular.' [83]

Except, of course, the power of office to put into practice their chosen policies. Also, as Maurice Cowling has argued, too much importance may be attached to political intention. Confusion arises, he says, from three misleading tendencies. Firstly there is a

> 'tendency to forget that consequences are as important as intentions and that the consequences of even the most limited intentions are at the mercy of many factors over which no single will can have control.' [84]

Thus although it is important to concentrate upon individuals, this cannot be done in isolation from all other actors who may exert an influence. Secondly it is important not to forget

> 'that intentions are as important as consequences, and that, in explanation, it is difficult to determine the intention of any particular actor and misleading to infer it from the consequences of his action. The goodness of an action resides not in the consequences

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[82] H. J.Hanham, (1978) op cit. p.XX.
[83] Maurice Cowling, (1967) op cit. p.311.
[84] Maurice Cowling, (1963) op cit. p18.

> merely but in the intention also; and the connection between intention and consequence is as devious as the nature of the intention is elusive.' [85]

Therefore, concentrating upon intentions or consequences in isolation one from another will not provide a legitimate interpretation of events. Thirdly we should not suppose that by studying the structure of government

> 'light will be thrown on the way government works – as though those who govern make public the factors which determine the decisions they take (whereas it is as likely that the reverse is true.)' [86]

If these pitfalls are not avoided, argues Cowling, the resulting explanation will show 'only the outside of *what* happened and not at all *how* it happened, it tends to imply that nothing else *could* have happened.' [87] To discover, and attempt to explain what happened on the *inside* there is no alternative other than to concentrate research upon the individuals who were inside. This is probably the only way to comprehend how politicians understood the responsibilities they shouldered in the exercise of power. The elite was as much subject to the established ways of politics, which it was their function to perpetuate, as were those voters whose acceptance of the *status quo* politicians wanted to encourage. [88]

Outside movements and developments cannot be ignored but the essence of any investigation of high politics must lie with the individuals concerned.

> 'we must examine the varying impacts made by the movement of events on the major political leaders. It is important to examine the leaders one by one. Although we speak of a movement of events which it is the historian's business to uncover, that movement was the outcome of conflict between the wills and minds and actions of the actors who were responsible for creating it. No one actor was responsible completely. No one actor could know the inwardness of the whole movement. The historian cannot know completely, but he alone has the chance to see what went on over the heads, beneath the feet or

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[85] Maurice Cowling, (1963) op cit p.19.
[86] Ibid. p.20.
[87] Ibid. pp.21-22.
[88] A. B. Cooke and John Vincent, (1974), op cit. pp.12-13..

> despite the intentions of all the actors in the movement. He alone can begin to distinguish the parts they controlled or knew from the parts about which they had no knowledge or understanding at all. If he is to show to what extent they were carried along by forces they did not control, and forced by circumstances into reactions they did not intend, he must not only recognize that some of them knew exactly what they wanted and got it…he must also deal with them in the first place individually.' [89]

Adopting such a methodology, therefore, need not restrict the scope of the investigation; in no way devalues it; and does not detract from its academic rigour. On the contrary the resulting explanation will throw light upon other areas which fall outside its remit, and inform other investigations which may approach the subject from a wholly different perspective.

The following chapter will employ the methodology described above to determine what conservatism actually meant to Conservatives in our period of study: how that meaning was informed by ideology; how high politics adapted that ideology: and, of equal importance, how conservatism and the Conservative party was promulgated to a much wider audience.

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[89] Maurice Cowling, (1967) op cit p.289.

CHAPTER TWO

WHAT DID CONSERVATIVES STAND FOR IN THE PERIOD 1867-1914?

What is it that distinguishes Conservative ideology from all others? This is a difficult question to answer, not least because

> 'Conservatives themselves have often tried to place their ideas and beliefs on a different plane from communism, socialism, liberalism, fascism etc. on the grounds that conservatism is not an ideology…on this account, conservatism is a set of attitudes and dispositions rather than a fully fledged political programme, and this serves to emphasize the basic problem of dealing with conservatism as a theory of politics.' [90]

This may be so, but it has already been established that as early as the 1830s the term "Conservative" represented "a body of recognizable political attitudes", so at the very least, there existed by 1867 a tradition of conservative thought that was felt worthy to be put before an enlarged electorate. If a "tradition" is taken to be 'a conception of how things should be done, a manner of understanding and dealing with certain matters, a complicated cluster of criteria and skills which cannot be captured in simple formulae or diagrams,' [91] we may begin to discover what parameters constitute the "boundaries" of conservatism. 'If then we are searching for the real Tory tradition…it resides…in the history of the Conservative party.' [92] A history that betrays a yearning for office and the power bestowed by that office. It was Robert Peel who rebuilt the old Tory party after the Reform Act of 1832 and

> 'at the social and economic level Peelite Conservatism sought to bring the ideas of old Toryism into line with the new world of industrialisation and urbanization; in an attempt to generate industrial and economic growth while protecting the powers and privileges of the landed interest and preserving what could be preserved of the structure of the old constitution.' [93]

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[90] R. J. Bennett in Neill Nugent and Roger King, (Eds.) (1977) op cit. p.12.

[91] Shirley Robin Letwin, 'On Conservative Individualism', in Maurice Cowling, (Ed.) (1978) *Conservative Essays,* op cit. p.62.

[92] Andrew Gamble, (1974) op cit. p.15.

[93] Frank O'Gorman, (1986) *British Conservatism: Conservative Thought from Burke to Thatcher,* Longmans, London, p.26.

Yet, although seeking to update his party, and bring it well and truly into the industrial age, Peel also endorsed 'and sought to preserve many of the traditional elements of the old Toryism. It was the gospel of strong and sound government, of law and order, of the defence of property and preservation of the constitution.' [94] Some elements were not only seen as desirable, but indispensable, 'what was inviolable was strong executive government, buttressed by the constitution and the Anglican establishment, and so thereby capable of suppressing popular agitation in the interests of order and property.' [95] Added to this, of course, was the imperative of convincing the voters that conservatism was a just and equitable political philosophy.

We can see from the above some basic form of the party inherited by Benjamin Disraeli, a desire to conserve what is considered valuable, a dislike of radical change, a suspicion that human nature is inherently untrustworthy, a belief that society is in some way "organic" and not a human construct. In fact Disraeli feared that society was in danger of total disintegration,

> 'throughout his life he assumed that traditional civilisation was threatened by a combination of social and political dangers. The emerging urban world of the industrial revolution threatened the old balanced constitution, while the selfishness of Whig oligarchs in enriching their class threatened to provoke revolution.' [96]

Added to his fears for tradition, continuity, and law and order, were his concerns regarding the almost doubling of the electorate which resulted from the 1867 Reform Act which he himself had piloted through parliament. For Disraeli was no democrat, in fact 'his fear of democracy should never be underestimated.' [97] The Conservative party now had to appeal to a new electorate if they were to have any chance of gaining office, and the necessity became even more pressing after the party lost the general election of 1868. It has been argued that he 'embarked upon a series of brilliant and bewildering ideological and political stratagems designed both to satisfy the powerful political and psychological needs he was arousing while shifting his party on to more attractive political ground.' [98] Although he was to restore his party's electoral credentials and point it in a new direction, this opinion may be seen as hagiographic. It is equally convincing to argue that

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[94] Frank O'Gorman, (1986) op cit. p.26.

[95] Robert Eccleshall, (1990) *English Conservatism Since The Restoration: An Introduction and an Anthology*, Unwin Hyman, London, pp.80-81.

[96] Frank O'Gorman, (1986) op cit. p.31.

[97] Ibid. p.32.

> 'Disraeli's intellectual liveliness makes it easy to over-emphasize the importance of theory in his political life. Successive sessions in opposition bred in him a grim determination to score a point by any methods which an elastic pragmatism permitted him to square with his party's principles.' [99]

In any event, he had realised that there was a necessity to woo the middle and working classes by a promise of social and humanitarian reform. This was partly a response to developments within the Liberal party; after about 1865 Liberalism had moved from being primarily a "defender of property" into a more democratic "commercial" Liberalism appealing to the urban classes. [100] The need to counter this rival initiative was clear 'The Conservative party must become the party of popular welfare. Tory Democracy concerned not merely the people's electoral rights but their welfare, providing Conservatism with both popular and legislative purpose.' [101] To do this Disraeli began to expand upon a theme he had introduced as early as October 1867 when, in a speech made at Edinburgh he had argued 'that the opportunities presented by the [1867] Act in a new and uncertain situation amounted to a challenge which only a truly national party could meet.' [102] His "brilliant stratagem" was to create the concept of "one nation conservatism." The Conservatives' desire to focus their appeal to the electorate on a national perspective rather than on a class basis became central to their whole electoral strategy. The problem remained, however, how to convince the electorate that such a policy was practical and workable. ‘Disraeli’s own solution…was to proclaim the Conservatives the party of imperialism on the one hand, and the party of social reform on the other.’ [103] It has been said that ‘Conservatism and the patriotism which emphasizes the importance of power, do not necessarily go together, but they are frequently allied.’ [104] As early as 1809 in his *Tract on the Convention of Cintra,* Wordsworth, a “romantic conservative” had pointed out moreover, ‘that the humblest peasant is the most likely recipient of sentiments of nationalism than the upper class, who tend to cut themselves off from the life of the nation.’ [105] Thus by wedding imperialism (tinged by patriotism) and social reform (based upon humanitarian foundations) to existing conservative values

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[98] Frank O'Gorman, (1986) op cit. pp.31-32.

[99] R. B. McDowell, (1959) op cit. p.83. *cf.* 'Scholars are in general agreement about Disraeli's approach to practical politics…as a practical politician he was largely uninfluenced by principles or beliefs.' John Vincent (1990), *Disraeli,* Oxford University Press, p.55.

[100] See Michael Bentley, (1984) op cit. pp.180-183

[101] Frank O'Gorman, (1986) op cit. pp.32-33.

[102] Ibid. p.157.

> ‘Disraeli had enabled the party to face two ways at once. On the one hand it could claim to be the party of order, property and stability, appealing to the innate instincts and to the vested interests not only of the landed aristocracy and gentry but also of the urban middle class. On the other hand, by its image of a socially reforming party with a concern for the rights of labour, it could also claim to be the party of the people.’ [106]

Following electoral success in 1874 the Conservatives took office and historians have pointed out ‘the contrast between Disraeli’s rhetoric and his achievements, the failure of his second Ministry to prepare a considered programme of reforms and, still more, its failure to legislate one,’ [107] For whatever reason this is probably true, but Disraeli’s and his party’s certainty about the efficacy of “one nation conservatism” should not be underestimated. ‘The Tories use, in 1874, of public houses for meetings (and paying for the privilege) shows the importance they placed on getting to the people. Few people are so well placed to influence voters as publicans.’[108] The party was quoted in *The Times* as saying ‘we are not for the classes or the masses, for their interests are one.' [109] In his private correspondence Disraeli wrote to Lady Bradford

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[103] Andrew Gamble, (1974) op cit. p.18.
[104] R. B. McDowell, (1959) op cit. p.179.
[105] Frank O’Gorman, (1986) op cit. p.108.
[106] Philip Norton and Arthur Aughey, (1981) op cit. p.108.
[107] Frank O’Gorman, (1986) op cit. p.33.
[108] H. J. Hanham, (1978 edition), op cit. p.22.

> 'we did well in the House [of Commons] last night and carried the second reading of our Friendly Societies Bill. That, with the Artisans Dwelling Bill, is the second measure of social improvement that, I think we shall now certainly pass. It is important, because they indicate a policy round which the country can rally...I have the Court with me, and the Parliament and, I really think, the country' [110]

Although he had no way of knowing the "country" was with him. And again he wrote of

> 'the great good fortune and triumph which attended us in our labor (*sic*) Laws last night. I cannot express to you the importance of last night. It is one of those measures that root and consolidate a party. We have settled the long and vexatious contest between Capital and Labor (*sic*) [Giving the same news to Lady Chesterfield in another letter he wrote 'This is the greatest measure since the Short-Time Act and will gain and retain for the Tories the lasting affection of the working classes.'] [111]

Events would demonstrate that he had seriously overestimated "the lasting affection of the working classes". Nevertheless, he had created a style of Conservatism that was prepared to be flexible, even pragmatic, in the face of pressing changes in society. This, however, ought not to be taken as a softening of attitude towards the necessity and relevance of class boundaries in that society. For example, on one occasion Disraeli left the House of Commons at midnight on the understanding that there would be no more divisions, but there was another. He wrote to Lady Bradford, not about being out-manoeuvred, or about the importance of him missing the division, what he complained about was, 'Mr. Secretary Cross talked…of the Prime Minister's absence on account of *the state of his health!!* What language! This comes of giving high office to a middle class man.' [112] Such snobbery undoubtedly impacted upon policy. For example, when discussing the problems in Ireland Disraeli asserted that Irish MPs 'got ashamed of their low associates, the pork butchers of Covan, & co., who are now County Members!' [113] This must not, however, be taken as a manifestation of straightforward pomposity, it merely illustrates that 'the Conservative conception of a social structure not only assumes that marked inequalities are inevitable but also declines to justify them because their inevitability makes justification unnecessary.' [114] This view is consistent with the conservative attitude that society is organic, thus if all men were equal there would be no inequality, since inequality is a fact of life, there can be no right to equality. Moreover to tamper with society to produce greater equality was dangerous and pointless W. H. Mallock [115] wrote

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[109] *The Times* 18th September 1876.

[110] Disraeli to Lady Bradford, 26th February 1875, in The Marquis of Zetland (Earl of Ronaldsway), (Ed.) (1928 Two Vols.) op cit. Vol.1, p.208.

[111] Ibid. Disraeli to Lady Bradford 29th June 1875, Vol.1 p.260.

[112] Ibid. Disraeli to Lady Bradford 18th April 1874, Vol.1 p.72.

> 'equality can mean nothing more than ruin. It can mean no process of levelling up…but a general levelling down, to a level below the lowest. Inequality would be seen to be a phoenix, which not only, if it died, would die amidst flames and ashes, but which out of those very ashes would be sure to redevelope (*sic)* itself.' [116]

Disraeli, therefore, had attempted to reconcile conservative attachment to order and tradition with the needs of an ever changing society, as he himself said,

> 'in a progressive country change is constant and the great question is not whether you should resist change which is inevitable, but whether that change should be carried out in deference to the manners, the customs, the laws and the traditions of a people or whether it should be carried out in deference to abstract principles and arbitrary and general doctrines.' [117]

The answer to this question was for Disraeli and his party straightforward and assertive; abstract principles and dogma had no place in conservatism. The controversial book *Essays on Reform* published, by various authors, in 1867 had in part, sought to justify democratic reform on moral grounds. In his contribution George C. Broderick had maintained that democracy was the only political doctrine which allowed men to freely exercise their rights

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[113] Disraeli to Lady Chesterfield 31st July 1874, in The Marquis of Zetland (Earl of Ronaldsway), (Ed.) (1928 Two Vols.) op cit. Vol. 1 pp.119-120

[114] Maurice Cowling, (Ed.) (1978) op cit. p.11,

[115] William Hurrell Mallock (1849-1923) Author, notably of *The New Republic* (1877), and *Social Equality* (1882). Failed to gain a seat as a Conservative but wrote in support of them all his life.

[116] *Nineteenth Century* Vol.8, 1880, p.743.

[117] Quoted in T. E. Kebbel, (Ed.) (1882 Two Vols.) *Selected Speeches of the Earl of Beaconsfield*, Longmans, London, Vol.2, p.487.

> ‘the best government’, he argued, ‘is that which confers the greatest benefits on its citizens. The best man is he who acts from the best motives. The test of one is political, of the other moral. The one must be judged by *a posteriori* empirical considerations, the other by *a priori* principles…good government must imply a conviction of justice among its subjects, and thus involves considerations of morality.’ [118]

He conceded that ‘real facts are more trustworthy than the dictates of political justice,’ but insisted that ‘the latter are more trustworthy than hypothetical facts.’ Thus it was ‘quite essential that we should realize the existence of rights, both civil and political, distinct from so-called natural rights, and paramount to legal rights, which may properly be called moral rights.’ The existence of these “moral rights” was, he said, a real, not a hypothetical fact. Such thinking was anathema to the Conservative party and its main organ the *Quarterly Review* stated their case eloquently. They accepted that government ought to include a moral dimension, but argued that this aspect could only be acknowledged ‘only so far as sentiments of moral displeasure or approbation bear on the question of expediency.’ Expediency, ran the conservative argument, must be the watchword; adding that ‘if these moral rights really exist, it is no doubt essential that we should realise their existence, especially as they do not come by nature nor by law, and are paramount to the latter, without having the sanction of the former.’ The *Quarterly* hoped and thought that such rights did not exist, since they could only do so like ‘that most dangerous of all metaphysical figments “natural rights”, in the mind, and cannot be constrained by law.’ Such a situation, claimed the *Quarterly* was untenable because the law was sometimes called upon to expedite unpopular but necessary legislation. Equality in law was used as an example ‘the equality of all citizens before the law means not the fact of, but the right to such equality. The possible existence of political rights (of equality) which have not acquired a legal sanction cannot be assumed *a priori.’* [119] This debate was instrumental in confirming that conservatism ‘is not logically connected with any particular beliefs about the universe, the world in general, or the nature of man, but only with beliefs about the activity of governing and the instruments of government,' [120]

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[118] *Quarterly Review* Vol.123, No. 245, July 1867, pp.246-247.
[119] Ibid, p.247.

It has been argued that 'Conservatism in the late Victorian era was an ideological response to the steady march of democracy.' [121] The capriciousness of the electorate was brought home to the Conservative party when they decisively lost the 1880 general election. Disraeli told the Queen that they had lost because they had been 'too confident, and that they had not had the same organization or worked as hard as the Liberals had.' [122] Organization will be dealt with in a later chapter, but the issues of overconfidence and effort were also taken on board by the party. They realized the need to appeal directly to the voters.

Disraeli died in 1881, and his eventual successor as leader, Lord Salisbury, was less than enthusiastic about democracy, even in his party's limited conception of "Tory democracy." [123] 'Salisbury's acceptance of the irrevocability of the Second Reform Act [1867] reduced his objection from the avoidance of popular government to the disciplining of it.' His view was that 'the picture taken of the popular will at election time bore no necessary resemblance to its configuration later in the life of a parliament.' He repeatedly pointed out that, if 'two thousand voters in the constituencies where the contest was closest [in 1880] had cast their ballots for Conservatives instead of Liberals, the Liberals would not have emerged with a majority in the House of Commons.' [124] Salisbury was not alone in his distrust of democracy and its

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[120] Andrew Gamble, (1974) op cit. p.2.
[121] Frank O'Gorman, (1986) op cit. p.36.
[122] W. F. Moneypenny and G. E. Buckle, (1910-1924 Six Vols.), op cit. Vol.6, p.535.
[123] Dennis J. Mitchell attributes the creation of "Tory Democracy" to R. A. Cross and his Lancashire allies. 'It was a Lancashire created policy of the middle class – aristocratic alliance designed to substitute social and administrative reform for democracy.' Dennis J. Mitchell, (1991) op cit. pp.235-236.
[124] Peter Marsh, (1978) op cit. pp.11-12. See also Salisbury in 'Ministerial Embarrassments' in the *Quarterly Review* Vol. 151, No. 302, April 1881, p.541; also Salisbury to the South Essex Regiment, quoted in *The Times* 25th May 1881, and Salisbury speaking at Dorchester, quoted in *The Times* 17th January 1884.

institutions, Richard Altick has identified what he describes as ‘an anti-democratic reaction which was intensifying in the years between the Reform Bills of 1867 and 1884.’ [125]
This was part of a more ‘general swing to the right by the intelligentsia in the 1870s and the 1880s especially by Sir Henry Maine and Sir James Fitzjames Stephens. Yet their published works *Liberty, Equality, Fraternity* [Stephens 1873], and *Popular Government* [Maine 1885] were hailed as contributions to the philosophy of politics, whereas Salisbury’s *Disintegration* [1883] was criticised as illiberal and against popular government.’ [126] This demonstrates the care that those instrumental in high politics needed to take if making their innermost feelings public; despite the fact, that as Frank O’Gorman suggests, ‘a distinct shifting of emphasis towards a theoretical brand of right-wing politics was taking place in conservative circles, within and without the Conservative Party.’ [127] Academics although not immune to popular criticism need not necessarily react to it. Politicians, however, have a constituency whose support they rely upon, therefore, their reaction must be swift and convincing. Salisbury had declared himself

> ‘as the champion of the “sacredness of property”; and expressed a strong preference for the old form of parliamentary government which was controlled by the Crown and the aristocracy. It was their task, he argued, to arbitrate between contending classes in the State. A House of Commons could never be an arbitrator – it was itself a cockpit of contention. Moreover a democracy consisting of men who must be ordinarily engrossed by the daily necessities of self-support, only attends to public affairs partially and fitfully. The people, he wrote, as an acting, deciding, accessible authority, are a myth.’[128]

Indeed Sir Henry Lucy said of him that he regarded the House of Commons ‘with the animosity of a dismissed lover.’ [129] Salisbury, then, was faced with the prospect that his deeply held, old-style Tory, beliefs risked alienating his party from the middle and working classes whose support Disraelian conservatism had striven so hard to secure and then let slip. ‘When Disraeli died in 1881 the party election manifesto was still a personal appeal from the party leader, not a statement of future policy prepared and endorsed by the leading men of the party.’ [130] Moreover, the very idea of election manifestos was in many respects alien to Conservative leaders but had been forced upon them; Disraeli had written ‘I saw the necessity of accepting the challenge of Gladstone, which of course he counted on my not being able to do. But a political manifesto is the most responsible of all undertakings and I had not a human being to share that responsibility.’ [131] That solitary task now fell to Salisbury, and he saw real danger ahead if the Conservative party could not present an acceptable face to the electorate, and mobilise their support. W. H Smith warned him

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[125] Richard Altick, (1974) *Victorian People and Ideas*, J. Dent & Sons, London, p.294.
[126] Peter Marsh, (1978) op cit. pp.15-16.
[127] Frank O’Gorman, (1986) op cit. p.37.
[128] A. L. Kennedy, (1953) *Salisbury 1830-1903: Portrait of a Statesman*, John Murray, London, p.145.
[129] H. W. Lucy, (1908) *Memories of Eight Parliaments*, Heineman, London, p.120.

> ‘the Radicals have the Trades Unions, the Dissenting Chapels and every society for the abolition of property and morality working for them. Our supporters only want to be left alone, to be allowed to enjoy what they have, and they think they are so secure that they will make no sacrifice of time or of pleasure to prepare against attack or to resist it.’ [132]

Salisbury was not to know, at that time, that the Liberal party would split over Home Rule, thereby severely damaging their electoral credibility, his concern was the electoral prospects of his own party, and to rally his own troops. His solution was to borrow from classic liberal ideology ‘he appealed to hard self-interest which he broadened for popular consumption by stressing the dependence of labour on capital.’ [133] The state, he argued, needed to be just, but this did not mean that it should be munificent, there was sufficient potential wealth available to enable the state to remain non-interventionist. He stated his case thus

> ‘the Conservative points the working man forward to obtain wealth which is as yet uncreated: the Radical, on the contrary, does not tell him to create new sources of wealth, but says that the wealth which has already been obtained is badly divided…and

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[130] H. J. Hanham, (1978 Edition) op cit. p.200.
[131] Disraeli to Lady Bradford, 26th January 1874**,** in The Marquis of Zetland (Earl of Ronaldsway), (Ed.) (1928 Two Vols.) op cit. Vol.1, p.49.
[132] W. H. Smith to Salisbury 14th August 1883, in H. J. Hanham, (1978 Edition) op cit. p.247.
[133] Peter Marsh, (1978) op cit. p11.

> the real remedy is to look back and fight among yourselves for the wealth that has already been obtained.' [134]

In this way Salisbury was able to present conservatism to the electorate as forward looking and dynamic, rather than as a party of retrenchment and reaction. He acknowledged the urgent need for action in areas such as working class housing and sanitation and urged his supporters to dissipate 'this absurd delusion that the dislike of democracy entertained by the Tory party means indifference to the welfare of the poor.' [135] He was, also, not averse to taking full advantage of his privileged position to articulate his vision of conservatism, even if this meant deviating from tradition. 'By campaigning in the general elections of 1885 and 1886 until the eve of voting, …[he] shattered the convention which prohibited a peer from intervening personally in an election after the issue of writs.' [136] Nothing was to stand in the way of his determination to impress upon the electorate that labour and capital were mutually dependent, that law and order was dependent upon traditional values, or indeed that the existing social structure offered opportunities for all, requiring only minimum interference from the state. 'The function of the Conservative politician henceforth was, for Salisbury, clear: to attach liberality to Conservatism;…to emphasize the practical and everyday "work of the church"…[and] to preach the virtues of obedience and the necessity of authority.' [137]

The Conservative party, under the leadership of Lord Salisbury, was to enjoy great electoral success, albeit with the support of Liberal Unionists. During this time the political climate changed not least because of the steady growth of the Labour movement, and the trials of the Liberal party. It has been noted that 'the period after 1885 saw the real rise of the modern

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[134] A. L. Kennedy, (1953) op cit p.193.
[135] Salisbury to Austin 25th November 1883, quoted in Peter Marsh, (1978) op cit. p.50.
[136] Peter Marsh, (1978) op cit. p.187.
[137] Andrew Jones and Michael Bentley, 'Salisbury and Baldwin', in Maurice Cowling, (Ed.) (1978) op cit. p.27.

Conservative party and the real construction of the political market and the modern party system.' [138] The "politics of power" became the watchword for political parties, it being accepted that principles were worthless unless they could be implemented by the acquisition of power. The cooperation between Salisbury and Chamberlain 'depended upon the continued subordination of doctrine to the requirements of a shared appreciation of political reality.' [139] The Conservative party demonstrated its 'complete conversion to the politics of power…by their resolute indifference to the decline of British agriculture in the 1880s and 1890s, despite the overwhelming support they now enjoyed from landed interests,' [140] their attention was focused on the more numerous middle and working class voters, and upon success in the expanding urban areas.

> 'The Conservative vision of London as an imperial and international financial capital, and emphasis on the intersection of the empire with the daily routines of Londoners, proved to be both durable and mutable in late-Victorian metropolitan parliamentary elections. Conservatives sought to transplant the conditions of metropolitan success onto the national political stage by elevating the importance of the capital.' [141]

Initiatives such as this helped to give conservatism a new vibrancy which resonated with public opinion.

> 'Conservatism at the end of the nineteenth century then, concerns consolidation: of the United Kingdom, of the rights of capital over labour, of the power of the state over the nation, and the rights of the ruling establishment. Most of all, Conservatism concerned the expansion and consolidation of the empire. Conservatism, in this as much else, caught the mood of the moment.' [142]

Catching "the mood of the moment" in order to court the electorate also sometimes entailed a softening of attitudes on principles that had previously appeared inviolable. Consequently

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[138] Andrew Gamble, (1974) op cit. p19.

[139] John France (1987) 'Salisbury and the Unionist Alliance', in Lord Blake and Hugh Cecil (Eds.), (1987) *Salisbury: The Man and His Policies,* Macmillan, London, p.240.

[140] Andrew Gamble, (1974) op cit. p19.

[141] A. C. Windscheffel, (2000) *Villa Toryism? The Making of London Conservatism 1868-1896*, PhD. Thesis, London Royal Holloway College, and Bedford New College, p.68.

[142] Frank O'Gorman, (1986) op cit. p.40.

> ‘in the late nineteenth century British conservatives prided themselves on being members of a great imperialist party. Fired by imperial potentialities, but fully aware that the British empire and British race had to maintain their place in a highly competitive world, conservatives advocated in some spheres planned expansion and vigorous state intervention.’ [143]

Interventionism, and even planning, may initially appear inimical to the Conservative tradition, but as in so many other areas, the flexibility of the tradition means that it may be accommodated with certain provisos.

> ‘The party had not a traditional adherence to *laissez faire* so that when approaching social problems it was not inhibited by a doctrinaire deference to an economic system, though its policy was tempered always by a profound respect for property rights and frequently by timidity.’ [144]

This timidity is, of course, associated with the conservative principle of not tampering with the *status quo* unless absolutely necessary: but the conservative principles of order and hierarchy enable interventions to be made *because* of the strength of the establishment.

> ‘In conservative usage, then, the free economy has been consistently attached to an argument for firm government. It is the persistent image of society as a command structure in which the responsibilities of leadership can be exercised within the framework of a strong state…that distinguishes English conservatism from rival ideologies.’ [145]

It can, therefore, be argued that until the demise of Lord Salisbury in 1903, whilst displaying flexibility and adaptability,

> ‘Conservatism may be deemed the intellectual justification of inequalities in society and the preservation of the privileges that such inequalities entail. It is the justification of the authoritative relationships based upon those inequalities, for just as Conservative politics are geared to perpetuating a structure of social inequality, so Conservative ideology enshrines the values that accompany this condition. This is the essence of the Conservative party’s role – to formulate policy that conserves a hierarchy of wealth and power and to make this intelligible and reasonable to a democracy.’ [146]

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[143] R. B. McDowell, (1959) op cit. p.180.
[144] Ibid. p.145.
[145] Robert Eccleshall, (1990) op cit., p.18.
[146] Philip Norton Phillip and Arthur Aughey (1981) Op cit. p.47.

Unfortunately for Salisbury's successors, however, cracks had begun to appear in the previously solid and united Conservative edifice. His nephew Arthur Balfour, who would take over the conservative leadership after Salisbury, had spoken as early as 1892 about the demand for social betterment. He said that,

> 'we all of us see – the blindest of us must see – that a change has come over the character of political controversy, political speculation, and political aspiration during the last generation, which some people describe as Socialism, but…which ought more properly to be described as a desire for the amelioration of the lot of the great classes of the community.' [147]

Balfour was convinced that the Conservative party must address this desire or risk alienating the support of these "great classes". He wrote to his uncle, quoting the opinion of the Liberal Unionist Joseph Chamberlain 'the mood for "social legislation" is in the air; it is our business to guide it. This policy is as much (or more) in harmony with Conservative traditions than Liberal ones. We the Unionist Party, *can* do it, which the other side *cannot.* I am strongly in favour of a programme and a Queen's speech.' [148] This would have provided an example of the power of the executive being utilised for interventionism under Conservative party tenets. However, not all of the party were prepared to go so far.

> 'By the end of the nineteenth century Conservative voices were being raised against the evils of collectivism and Socialism. As Noel Sullivan has remarked: "the conservative enemy is no longer liberalism but socialism; and what happens as a result, is that conservatism visibly begins to adopt the liberal values it had formerly opposed."' [149]

As the *fin de siècle* approached new ideas and initiatives were constantly proposed. By 1900 'apostles of national efficiency were advocating all sorts of changes in the structure of government, in national institutions, and even in the national character.' [150] Notwithstanding this many conservatives within the party, and outside it, thought that conservatism was abandoning principles in an unseemly attempt to retain power. A correspondent describing himself as a *plain Tory* had written

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[147] Quoted in Blanche E. C. Dugdale, (1936 Two Vols.) *Arthur James Balfour, First Earl of Balfour KG, OM, FRS, etc.* Hutchinson & Co. Ltd., London, Vol.1, p.207.
[148] Balfour to Salisbury 24th July 1892, in Blanche E. C. Dugdale, (1936 Two Vols.) op cit. Vol. 1, pp.211-212.
[149] Frank O'Gorman, (1986) op cit. p.38.
[150] E. J. Feuchtwanger, (1985) op cit., p.238.

> ‘indeed as things go at the present, all strong Governments by whatever political label they may choose to be known, must be socialistic, must be against property, since large majorities are only to be obtained by bribery, and as the bribes cannot yet be evolved from the ether of space, they must be extracted from the pockets of the wealthy.’ [151]

On the political front their policy of dissolving parliament in 1900 to take advantage of the war fever surrounding the Boer War in South Africa was bitterly resented by the Liberal party and considered unsavoury even by conservatives. [152]

> ‘Wilfred Blunt recorded in his diary that George Wyndham (Irish Secretary in the Tory Cabinet) had told him that ‘he considered the Tory party had ruined its prospects by forcing on the General Election after the Boer war, the Khaki Election. It had all been [Joseph] Chamberlain’s doing, he, George, having strongly opposed it in the Cabinet. It was unfair according to the rules of Party politics, and they were suffering from it now.’ [153]

Thus on taking over Salisbury’s mantle in 1902 Balfour was already facing divisions within his party, but a much more damaging division was to be the schism caused by the debate over Tariff Reform. Joseph Chamberlain leader of the Liberal Unionists and Balfour’s friend and ally chose to “go-it-alone” to promote the cause of Tariff Reform; advocating the imposition of import tariffs to protect British goods from ever increasing foreign competition, despite the fact that such a policy would inevitably lead to an increase in the price of food. The Conservative/Liberal Unionist alliance split over this issue. Chamberlain argued that

> ‘In the course of another generation, this will be much less an industrial country,

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[151] Quoted in Peter Marsh, (1978) op cit. p.164.

[152] ‘The remark [that a seat lost by the government is a seat gained by the Boers] was originally made by the Mayor of Mafeking. Chamberlain quoted it, with attribution, in a speech at Tunstall Staffordshire, on 27th September. At that stage it did not attract great publicity. A few days later he was asked to send a message to the Heywood division of Lancashire and repeated the phrase, this time without attribution. In transmission it was changed to “A seat lost to the Government is a seat sold to the Boers.” The new version produced an even sharper storm of Liberal protest than the original would have done, but the protestors, quite naturally, were not greatly mollified when a correction was published. In any case, on innumerable Unionist posters, the slogan was soon appearing as “a vote for a Liberal is a vote for the Boers.”’ Roy Jenkins, (1964) *Asquith*, Collins, London, footnote (1) p.119.

[153] Quoted in Emily Allyn, (1931), op cit. p.165.

> inhabited by skilled artisans, than a distributive country with a smaller population consisting of rich consumers on the one hand, and people engaged in the work of distribution on the other…we may be richer, yet weaker.' [154]

Paradoxically in this way Chamberlain was providing some opportunity to restore unity to the alliance. 'In making his challenge after 1903, Chamberlain found a cause for the cause mongers of the party. By treating unemployment, not dearer bread, as the real dread of the working man, and by inducing the working man to consider himself as a producer rather than a consumer, he called urban conservatives to a crusade.' [155] Unfortunately many Unionists and Conservatives were unwilling to embrace Tariff Reform, and many opposed it outright. The formerly united party threatened to split asunder as disastrously as the Liberal party had divided over the issue of Home Rule. Around 1905 'a group of young, mainly aristocratic, mainly high Anglican, unionists, led by Lord Hugh Cecil (Hughligans) and including the new member for Oldham Winston Churchill, felt that 'if the Tory party became protectionist it would become "rich, materialist, and secular" and lobbies would produce corruption of an American type.' [156] Concurrently 'many of the strands of anti-statist sentiment were brought together after 1905 in the British Constitution Association founded to resist the rethinking tendencies in the Conservative Party and specifically to oppose everything that Joseph Chamberlain stood for in respect of economic and social reform.' [157] Ironically these attempts served only to distance the party from its traditional grass-roots support and alienate the local electorate.

> 'Around the turn of the century politics in the counties came increasingly to revolve round national rather than local issues…Constitutional associations were concerned less to choose the best man to represent the county, than to register votes in a national plebiscite, or to strike a blow in a national controversy.' [158]

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[154] E. J. Feuchtwanger, (1985) op cit., p.248.

[155] Maurice Cowling, (Ed.) (1978) op cit. p.30.

[156] E. J. Feuchtwanger, (1985) op cit. p.248.

[157] W. H. Greenleaf, (1973) 'The Character of Modern British Conservatism' in Robert Benewick, R. N. Berki, Bhitkhu Parekh, (Eds.) (1973) *Knowledge and Belief in Politics: The Problem of Ideology,* George Allen & Unwin, London, p.197.

[158] J. Ridley, (1985) *Leadership and Management in the Conservative Party in Parliament, 1906-1914.* D.Phil. thesis, Oxford, p.21.

This placed ever more pressure upon the leader**.** Balfour was in a perilous position and tried his best to persuade Chamberlain that re-election would be impossible unless a compromise could be found. He wrote a long and involved eight page typewritten letter, including the argument that

> ‘the prejudice of a small tax on food is not the fad of a few imperfectly informed theorists: it is a deep rooted prejudice affecting the large mass of voters, especially the poorest class, which it will be a matter of extreme difficulty to overcome…My impression is that the local leaders, the squire, the middle-class members…and so forth, are as a rule highly sympathetic to Tariff reform and indeed often hold protectionist views…and that the obstacle with which the Candidate is confronted is not the opinion of the local leaders, but the absolute impossibility of inducing the mass of voters to do anything which they can be made to think would increase the price of bread.’ [159]

Chamberlain was unrepentant and continued with his crusade, imploring Balfour to support Tariff Reform. He wrote to the Prime Minister ‘in my experience the ordinary voter never cares for detail. He seizes upon a principle or a large issue, and is quite willing to delegate to his representative all questions of detail and method.’ [160] An enlightening account of Chamberlain’s attitude was delivered to Sandars, Balfour’s secretary, by Iwan-Mullar who recounted a two and a half hour conversation with Chamberlain on 10th June 1905, ‘his last words were characteristic. “Arthur and I can win together, for each has the qualities the other lacks; Arthur can manage the House of Commons, and I can manage the electors.”’ [161] Chamberlain’s over-confidence was badly misplaced, it had been apparent for some time that

> ‘the cohesion of the party…depended to some extent on which kind of issue happened to be to the fore, and to some extent on the skill and tact with which the Government conducted itself. Not only the Unionist alliance, but the Conservative party itself was in danger of disintegration whenever the focus shifted from Irish and Imperial affairs to social questions. [162]

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[159] Quoted in, Anthony Blond, (1965) *Balfour’s Burden: Arthur Balfour and Imperial preference,* Alfred Gollin, London, p.246.

[160] Chamberlain to Balfour 24th February 1905. Quoted in Peter Fraser, (1966) *Joseph Chamberlain: Radicalism and Empire 1868-1914,* Cassell, London, pp.260-261.

[161] Ibid. pp.267-268.

[162] J. P. Cornford, (1967) in Robert Robson, (Ed.) (1967) op cit. p.307.

Tariff Reform represented just such a focus, and the beleaguered Balfour thus led his divided and squabbling party into the general election, and unsurprisingly lost. The general election of January 1906 was not primarily a contest over tariff reform but 'where this issue loomed largest, in Lancashire, the prevailing conditions of relative prosperity induced the artisan to prefer the "large loaf" argument of the Liberals to the "more employment" argument of the protectionists.' [163] Across the whole country the Unionists suffered a heavy defeat. Balfour, it may be said, had failed to learn from the experience of the Liberal party; Lord Rosebery had taken over as prime minister after the resignation of Gladstone, but quickly realised he had no mandate from the electorate or indeed from his own party. He wrote in 1896

> 'you must remember…that I have never been, actually or formally, chosen or recognised as leader of the Liberal Party. I was indeed nominated first Minister by the Queen, and I accepted that office at the insistence of the great mass of my colleagues. But the party – the rank and file – have never adopted or approved that nomination. They may approve it or they may not. But it is fairly open to anyone to say, "I do not acknowledge Lord R as my leader. I never chose him. I voted no doubt for the late Government, but I had no other choice, except to let in the Tories; and I voted, not for him, but for the excellent A, B, or C, who were in the Government. They, and not he, were my guides and my polestars." This is an element in the situation.' [164]

Rosebery had failed to command the respect of the party afforded to his illustrious predecessor, and could not heal the schism in his party caused by Irish Home Rule. He made his feelings public in a speech of October 9th 1896, saying, 'a united party behind an inferior leader is more efficacious than a disunited party with the best leader that ever lived.' [165] To be successful in the realm of high politics it was necessary to, at least, appear to be listening to one's core supporters. Shortly after the 1906 election Campbell-Bannerman met a recently retired senior civil servant, and asked him for a frank opinion on attitudes to the new Government. '"Well" said C.B.s friend “it is generally admitted that it is good individually, collectively above the average strength. But they say” and here he hesitated, “what do they say?” enquired C.B. “they say the tail wags the head” “they are quite right,” C.B. replied, “and I am the tail.” [166] The Liberal party leadership had learned that to engage successfully in high politics it was now necessary to have a rank-and-file power base and popular appeal. Balfour, on the other hand, owed his position to rank and privilege, and seemingly believed that this was still sufficient to justify and bolster his leadership, although he too could not command the respect his predecessor had enjoyed: and he had failed miserably to reconcile divisions in his party over Tariff Reform.

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[163] Peter Fraser, (1966) op cit. p.273.

[164] Lord Rosebery to Asquith 29th January 1896, quoted in J. A. Spender and Cyril Asquith, (1932 Two Vols.) *Life of Herbert Henry Asquith, Lord Oxford and Asquith,* Hutchinson and Co., London, Vol. 1, p.116

[165] J. A. Spender and Cyril Asquith, (1932 Two Vols.) op cit. Vol. 1, p.117.

Balfour was not magnanimous in defeat, in a speech at Nottingham on 15th January 1906, immediately after his defeat at Manchester in the general election, he declared that ‘it was the bounden duty of each one whom he addressed, to do his best to see that “the great Unionist Party should still control, whether in power or whether in opposition, the destinies of this great empire”’ [167] It is difficult to conceive of a more controversial and inflammatory statement, Balfour was making it clear that the Conservative party intended to employ its in-built majority in the upper House to stymie any distasteful Liberal legislation. On 13th April 1906 Balfour wrote to Lord Landsdowne, the Unionist leader in the House of Lords

> ‘I do not think the House of Lords will be able to escape the duty of making serious modifications in important government measures: but, if this can be done with caution and tact, I do not believe that they will do themselves any harm. On the contrary, as the rejection of the Home Rule Bill doubtless strengthened their position, I think it quite possible that your House may come out of the ordeal strengthened, rather than weakened, by the inevitable difficulties of the next few years.’ [168]

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[166] John Wilson, (1973) *A Life of Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman,* Purnell Book Services Ltd., London, p.495.
[167] Quoted in Emily Allyn, (1931) op cit. p.171.
[168] Balfour to Lord Landsdowne 13th April 1906 quoted in Max Egremont, (1980) *Balfour,* Collins, London, p.211.

A Bill reversing the Taff Vale judgement was allowed through the Lords (although it is worth noting that D. J. Shackleton, Labour MP for Clitheroe, had introduced a private members Bill to do just this in 1903, and again in 1904 and 1905, the first being defeated on a second reading, and the other two perishing in committee [169]), but an Educational Bill of 1906, and the Plural Voting Bill of 1906 were rejected. The policy continued in 1907, four Land Bills were introduced, two referring to Scotland were vetoed, and the other two concerning English smallholdings and the eviction of Irish Tenants were emasculated. 'A resolution introduced by Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman for a curtailment of the Lord's power was also thrown out by the peers, [despite] having been passed in June by The House of Commons by 432 votes to 147.' [170] The die was cast and the policy of Balfour in opposition was clear to all; the Constitution, as interpreted by the Tory leadership, was to be ruthlessly exploited in their own interests, a course bound eventually to raise questions of fair-play with the mass electorate. It is difficult for modern political commentators to comprehend how experienced and practical politicians such as Balfour and Landsdowne could embark upon such a short-sighted, and obviously suicidal path. The answer may be that they hoped to follow the example of Lord Salisbury, 'whenever his party was in opposition he relied on what may be called a referral or "referendal" theory to cripple Liberal legislation.'[171] He reasoned that the House of Lords had a constitutional duty to refer controversial measures to the electorate, if in their opinion the House of Commons had no popular mandate for the proposed legislation. Should the electors subsequently support the proposal, then the Lords would acquiesce. In this way a democratic dimension could be claimed for a wholly unelected body. It is hardly surprising that Balfour and his colleagues endorsed this opinion; but rejection of a budget (and, therefore, supply) was unprecedented. Added to this, their alternative proposal for raising revenue, tariff reform, had already been rejected by the voters, and several Liberal Bills had already been vetoed. They gambled everything without any method of gauging whether the electorate would agree with their point of view. Why then did Balfour, party leader in the Commons, and Lansdowne, leader in the Lords, commit their respective Houses to a political war without any clear recognition as to what the consequences would be? Perhaps the answer lay in their venerable, but obsolete and misguided sense of patriotism,

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[169] See Roy Jenkins, (1958) *Sir Charles Dilke: A Victorian Tragedy,* Collins, London, p.394.

[170] Max Egremont, (1980) op cit. p.214.

[171] C. C. Weston, (1982) 'Salisbury and the Lords, 1868-1895' in *The Historical Journal*, Vol.25, Issue 1, 1982, p.105. For a comprehensive account see C. C. Weston, (1995) *The House of Lords and Ideological Politics: Lord Salisbury's Referendal Theory and the Conservative Party, 1846-1922,* The American Philosophical Society. *Passim.*

> ‘the psychology of it was that both were aristocrats born in the purple. Passionately devoted to the greatness of England, these men were convinced that she owed it to patrician rule. In their view her nineteenth century parliamentarianism had worked successfully, because the personnel of parliaments and cabinets was still (with a few much resented exceptions like Bright) upper-class, and the function of the lower orders was limited to giving the system a popular *imprimatur* by helping to choose which of two aristocratic parties should hold office…From their standpoint the House of Commons elected in 1906 was far worse than that of 1880…[In the 1906 Parliament 318 out of 670 were new members [172]] To persons born like Landsdowne and Balfour (and only to a little less to Rosebery) it appeared out of the question that a House of Commons so composed and led should effectively rule the nation; and…they felt justified in using any resource…to crush the challenge.’ [173]

Be that as it may, what is indisputable is that Balfour led the Conservative party, in opposition, into the debacle of the Lords’ rejection of Lloyd-George’s 1909 Budget.

> ‘A dissolution was of course inevitable once the Lords had performed the act of rejection. There was no dispute in the Cabinet about this. The legislature had refused Supply, and in these circumstances no government could carry on. This fact gave the full measure of what the Lords had done. They had not merely confronted the Government with the choice between an immediate election and acceptance of the loss of a particular measure, as they had frequently done before. They had left ministers with no choice, and had taken upon themselves the right of deciding when a government could carry on and when it could not, when a Parliament should end and when it should not. It was a claim which, if allowed, would have made the Government as much a creature of the hereditary assembly as of the elective assembly.’ [174]

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[172] See John Wilson, (1973) op cit. p.494.

[173] Sir Robert Ensor, (1936) *England 1870-1914,* Clarendon Press, Oxford, pp.387-388.

[174] Roy Jenkins, (1964) op cit. p.202.

And consequently the Conservatives suffered an ignominious defeat at the ensuing general election. It was noted at the time that,

> 'the government went to the country [in January] with a magnificent electioneering battery. The liberties of England, the food of the people, the pensions of the old, the job of the workman, the future of the trade unions, the continuance of non-conformity, the authority of the Ten Commandments – all were in imminent peril from the Conservative party.' [175]

The subsequent Parliament Act of 1911 removed the House of Lords' veto, thereby reducing the stranglehold the Conservative party had previously held on the passage of legislation. Importantly, also, 'one of the incidental results of the Parliament Act was to require Parliament to work at the highest pressure during the subsequent session, so that measures threatened by the House of Lords [who retained a power of delay] might have the benefit of its provisions within the term of the Parliament.' [176] Thus reform of the House of Lords was inextricably linked with the organization of legislation, which now became the primary object of government. Balfour resigned following the passage of the Parliament Act, and was replaced by Andrew Bonar Law. Bonar Law was left with few tools other than dangerous support for Ulster Unionism, and vituperative rhetoric, with which to attack the Liberals under Herbert Asquith. He 'took an early opportunity of announcing that the era of compliments between politicians was ended, and greatly delighted an enthusiastic audience at the Albert Hall at the end of January with a speech which was described at the time as full of "biting japes and stinging sores". The Government were "artful dodgers," "Gadarene Swine," "Humbugs," and "tricksters." This was the new note which was to become shriller with every month until July 1914.' [177] Asquith, it appears, took all this in good part, perhaps illustrating that the affinity felt between those in high politics still transcended party rivalry, he wrote in his memoirs

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[175] 'The Elections and their Morals' in *Blackwoods Magazine* No.187, March 1910, p.431.
[176] J. A. Spender and Cyril Asquith Cyril (1932 Two Vols.) op cit. Vol.1, p.355.
[177] Ibid, Vol.1, pp.351-352.

> ‘There can be no doubt, whatever may be thought of its taste, that Mr. Law’s frequent resort to what I described as the “new style” in the early days of his leadership aroused the enthusiasm of the more bloodthirsty of his followers, who spoke and wrote of him admiringly as the “Fighting Leader.”’ [178]

But pure rhetoric, despite what Cowling and his associates may assert**,** however combative, proved to be no substitute for vision, policy, and direction, and by 1914 it appeared that the Conservative party had lost all three. When the Conservative party was at a low ebb in 1913

> ‘F. E Smith made a bold attempt to define the principles on which a conservative government programme of social reform should be based. Characteristically he proceeded to define by exclusion, that is to say by attacking the alternative systems, *laissez faire,* individualism and radical socialism. The adherents of *laissez faire* wanted the state to touch nothing, the socialists wanted the state to touch everything in the wrong way, Conservatives were ready to adopt any measure which would stimulate the productive efficacy of the people even if it involved state intervention. But they recognized the rights of property and the need to preserve social continuity and regarded the inculcation of class hatred as “the parricide of politics”’ [179]

The problem of trying to uncover exactly what Conservatives stood for between 1867 and 1914 encounters a similar problem; it appears easier to discover what they did not stand for rather than what they did. Conservatism was, self-evidently, anti-radical and anti-utopian; since society was not a human construct, any attempts to create a perfect society were regarded as being illusory. The Conservative response to any concrete issue would be mediated by these important criteria. Nevertheless as Nugent and King have observed,

> ‘it is possible to select four main elements in a distinctly conservative approach to politics and society, namely,
> (1) A particular attitude towards political and social change.
> (2) A dislike of abstract rationalism.
> (3) A qualified pessimism as regards human nature.
> (4) The view that government is a limited, and primarily remedial institution.

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[178] Herbert Asquith, (1928 Two Vols.) *Memories and Reflections 1852-1927 The Earl of Oxford and Asquith KG,* Cassell & Co., London, Vol. 1, p.205.

[179] R. B. McDowell, (1959) op cit. p.151.

> Of course these features are still vague, but they are not totally vacuous…at the very least they will act as general guidelines, and at best they will rule out certain proposals as being inherently un-conservative.' [180]

In extremis it has been argued that 'Conservatism argues for continuity but recognises the necessity to adapt.' [181] But can the twists and turns, the machinations, policy changes and even reversals, displayed by conservatism throughout our period be accommodated in this analysis? The answer may be that 'because a tradition is perpetuated by individual interpretations of what has gone before, there is unceasing change in every tradition. But because what is new keeps connections with the old, order is preserved by continuity. Consequently a traditional order is both stable and flexible, and can comprehend individual variations without losing its character.' [182] This is a step forward, but is too reliant upon the supposedly inviolable conservative attachment to continuity; and the notion that it is impossible to uncover a conservative "ideology" rather than a conservative "tradition." Recent scholarship challenges both assertions.

> 'The proposition that conservatism is rooted in a natural dislike of change is of negligible analytical value, conflating as it does ahistorical patterns of individual behaviour with the emergence – at a specific moment…among particular social groups – a cluster of ideas about the purposes of government and the organization of society. Conservatism is to be understood not as an expression of recurring habits and instincts , but as a distinctive perspective on society shaped by the political struggles and class divisions of the post medieval state.' [183]

Thus conservatism may justifiably display a dislike of change, but not a dislike of change *per se* for its own sake. Moreover,

> 'nor should much credence be given to the suggestion that conservatism is qualitatively different from other political doctrines because it belongs outside the realm of ideology [because of its pragmatism and flexibility]…This insistence that conservatism is not an

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[180] Neill Nugent and Roger King, (Eds.) (1977) op cit. p13.

[181] Philip Norton and Arthur Aughey, (1981) op cit. p25.

[182] Shirley Robin Letwin 'On Conservative Individualism' in Maurice Cowling, (1978) op cit. p.62.

[183] Robert Eccleshall, 'Conservatism' In Robert Eccleshall, Vincent Geoghegan, Richard Jay,Michael Kerry, Iain McKenzie, and Rick Wilford, (1994 2nd Edition) *Political Ideologies: An Introduction*, Routledge, London, p.62.

> ideology is itself an ideological ploy by those sympathetic to the doctrine, part of the rough and tumble of political argument rather than an analytical exercise.' [184]

Such a theoretical framework begins to clarify how conservatism in our period could change so much, yet still remain quintessentially different from all other doctrines, with or without the knowledge of its moderators, namely those who indulged in high politics. 'Whether someone is consciously committed to a particular ideological position, or whether his/her beliefs unconsciously reflect an established ideology, the implication is the same: and ideological position is a partisan position, non-neutral and non-objective.' [185] Therefore, we will be able to identify core Conservative values despite changes of policy and the expediency of government. To apply this school of thinking as an attempt to answer what did conservatives stand for between 1867 and 1914 it is necessary to make clear exactly what we mean by "ideology." 'Ideologies are importantly attached to social groups, not necessarily classes.' In our example this is clear, Conservative leaders constituted a group of privileged men who engaged in the practice of high politics and opposed radicalism. 'Ideologies are produced by, directed at, and consumed by groups,' again this is apparent as Disraeli's conservatives directed "one nation conservatism" at the electorate, or when Salisbury convinced the electorate that labour and capital were mutually dependent. 'Ideologies are distinct thought-products that invite careful investigation in their own right,' which is, of course the purpose of this exercise. Thus 'we are directing our analysis at actual arrangements of political thinking.' [186] Furthermore it is then possible to state with some certainty what conservatism is rather than what it isn't.

> 'Conservatism is about doing, and about understanding what one is doing, not about thinking in the sense of planning what to do.- Conservatism is unreflective to the extent that it does not deal with packages of coherent ideas about human beings and their

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[184] Ibid. p.62

[185] Anthony Arblaster, 'Ideology and Intellectuals' in Robert Benewick et al. (Eds.) (1973) op cit. p.115.

[186] Michael Freeden, (1996) *Ideologies and Political Theory: A Conceptual Approach*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, pp. 22-23.

> societies, but is a method of recognising reality through experiencing it, intellectually unintelligible for non-participants.' – Consequently 'it is non-transmutable, unless this be done by direct instruction in its practices.' [187]

If indeed conservative ideology is hidden from all except those who are instructed in it, and/or engage in its operation, then this would explain why it has become commonplace to assert that conservatism is primarily concerned with upholding the status quo. This then becomes its central defining feature which substitutes for the absence of specific core and associated beliefs and values regarding, for example, social justice, liberty, and democracy. It has already been concluded in this investigation that such an analysis is too simplistic, but it is undeniable that Conservatism may be seen as an ideology almost obsessively preoccupied with the problem of change; not necessarily in the sense of eliminating it, but to make it safe and manageable. Also it is apparent that Conservatism is responsive, though not necessarily reactionary.

> 'The conservative only thinks systematically when he is moved to reaction, perhaps because he is forced to set up a system counter to that of the progressive, or because the process has progressed to a point where he has lost touch with the present state of things, so that he is compelled to intervene actively in order to reverse the process of history.'[188]

This is the most convincing explanation for Lord Salisbury appearing to successfully promote a policy of retrenchment concerning the march of democracy. He was also adept in the art of high politics.

> 'Whether an issue became prominent or not was hardly within the control of politicians…[but] The advantages conferred by leadership were some degree of control over the manner and timing of the attempted solution. There can be little doubt that Salisbury's position enabled him to delay and modify innovations to which he was opposed: there can equally be little doubt that his position rested upon the fact that the dominant issues confronting his governments were ones on which his own views and sentiments were widely shared within his party.' [189]

It is possible to identify with some certainty two substantive core concepts in conservative ideology. Firstly, ‘a resistance to change, however unavoidable, unless it is perceived as organic and natural.’ Secondly, ‘an attempt to subordinate change to the belief that the laws and forces guiding human behaviour have extra-human origins and therefore cannot and ought not to be subject to human wills and whims.’[190] Unlike other ideologies conservatism does not get weighed down by any other additional substantive characteristic features, instead ‘it produces two underlying morphological attributes’ [191] which ultimately provide it with its flexibility, adaptability, and its pragmatism. Namely

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[187] Ibid. p.321

[188] Michael Freeden, (1996) op cit. p.336.

[189] J. P. Cornford, (1967) op cit. p.307.

> ‘The fashioning of relatively stable (though never inherently permanent) conservative beliefs and values out of reactions to progressive ideational cores. This allows all substantive concepts in the employ of conservatism, other than the two enumerated above, to become contingent. They are subjected to a complex swivel-mirror technique, superimposed on a retrospective diachronic justification of the current beliefs held by conservatives. In each instance, the consistent aim is to provide a secure structure of political beliefs and concepts that protect the first core concept of conservatism, and does so by utilising its second core component.’ [192]

This is a complex analysis, but would explain how Disraeli was able to overcome his party’s resistance to democracy and social mobility, by retaining the core substantive concept in defining the extension of the franchise as a natural progression, and a change that could be managed by the party to their electoral advantage. He was aided and abetted by ‘substantive flexibility in the deployment of decontested concepts, so as to maximise under varying conditions the protection of the conception of change.’[193] A concept becomes “decontested” when focus is concentrated upon those aspects which accord with ideological tenets, whilst associated aspects which do not are jettisoned. In Disraeli’s case these decontested concepts included “one nation conservatism” which eschewed any notions of equality, and the need to pacify the working classes by limited social legislation, whilst simultaneously not endorsing extensive state intervention to do so.

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[190] Michael Freeden, (1996) op cit. p.344.
[191] Ibid. p.344.
[192] Ibid. pp.344-345.
[193] Ibid p.345.

Thus it can be concluded that from the mid nineteenth century, conservatism found itself in acute competition with the rising ideologies of the left, initially liberalism, and then socialism. Conservatives reacted by deploying, and adhering to, their core substantive concepts, and were surprisingly successful, simply because they were standing for what conservatism had always believed and stood for. By the end of that century, the struggle had become one of political survival on the institutional level. Again conservatism was able to succeed because of its underlying morphological attribute, it flexibly deployed the decontested concepts of limited interventionism, and social betterment through housing and sanitation Acts; it skilfully managed the Third Reform Act, utilising its key asset to garner political kudos. 'The Lords rejection of the 1884 Franchise Bill because of the lack of a Redistribution Bill was nothing more than a political manoeuvre, since the Radicals and the Liberals would have been almost as anxious for this as for the Franchise Bill itself.' [194] All the while the Tories offered resistance to the democratic tide which they perceived as not a natural progression. The twentieth century confronted conservatism with major problems: it failed to fashion a relatively stable package of conservative beliefs and values when faced with divisions within the conservative party over expensive new demands for interventionist social legislation and over Tariff Reform. It could not marshal a divided party to counter the Liberal/Labour alliance. Socialism began demanding rapid and radical changes in society that conservatism's core concepts could not defeat, or accommodate if the Conservative party was in opposition. What conservatism stood for after 1906 was seemingly not what the nation wanted, and conservatives were bystanders as ill conceived resistance resulted in the power of the House of Lords' veto being removed. They became just another political party in the rough and tumble of political life until the catastrophe of World War One changed the political scene forever. Even so, the Conservative party had enjoyed hitherto unparalleled electoral success, until losing its ideological way. One of the main reasons for that success was the astute marshalling of the forces at its disposal. The organization responsible for marshalling those forces will be examined in the next chapter.

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[194] Roy Jenkins, (1958) op cit. pp.186-187.

CHAPTER THREE.

CONSERVATIVE ORGANIZATION AND RE-ORGANIZATION.

Having established a methodology that concentrates, although not exclusively, upon the contribution and influence of individuals; and also having decided exactly what Conservatives actually stood for; our investigation of the Conservative Party's organization will inevitably be informed by those findings, and reinforced by the notion that 'ideology is best seen as the product rather than the precursor of political activity.' [195] The empirical facts about the party's organization are well known, [196] the focus of this investigation is more concerned with relationships. How did the party work in relation to its leaders, what was their response to incremental franchise extensions, what organizational changes were made in an effort to mobilize voters, and how did the various branches of the party relate to one another as these changes took effect.

Prior to 1867 Conservative Party organization was rudimentary, indeed it was only following defeat in the general election of 1852 that Disraeli assumed the responsibility of instilling some efficiency into the system. He divided, for the first time, the parliamentary and constituency functions, appointing Sir William Jalliffe as Chief Whip, and his personal solicitor Sir Philip Rose, a man known to him as an able and competent manager, to head a new network of constituency agents, and to interview all prospective parliamentary candidates. [197] The then leader of the party, Lord Derby, was to preside over three ministries, in 1852, 1858-1859, and 1866-1868, but none of these administrations enjoyed a majority in the House of Commons and the need to secure a majority, and reaction to defeat, were to repeatedly stimulate reassessments of the party organization. Thus, for example, regarding the latter, 'the conservative defeat in the election of 1865 caused Lord Nevill, the principal party manager, to increase the number of local associations concerned with the registration of electors and with bringing them to the polls.' [198] As regards the former, an important meeting took place at The Freemasons Tavern, London, on 12th November 1867 to form the National Union of Conservative and Constitutional Associations. It was made clear at the time that it was 'not a meeting for the discussion of Conservative principles …, it is only a meeting to consider by what particular organizations we may make those Conservative principles effective amongst the masses.' [199] Political principles and policy were to remain the preserve of the leadership and 'the meeting showed not the slightest inclination to discuss any of the political issues of the day' and with only one exception 'none of the delegates showed any disposition to challenge the ideas of their betters.' [200] Indeed it was noted in 1867 that 'Disraeli… is the government,' [201] and even John Gorst, who thought of himself as a Tory Democrat, 'always emphasized in his reports that the organization of urban conservatism involved finding the middle-class leaders who would in turn mobilize the working class voters.’ [202] The nascent party organization, although much stronger than the intermittent ad hoc co-operation between those sharing a common goal which had previously passed as “party organization”, was dedicated to achieving office for the parliamentary party, not interfering with the prerogatives of that branch of the party.

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[195] John Barnes, (1994) 'Ideology and Factions', in Anthony Seldon and Stuart Ball, (Eds.) (1994) *Conservative Century: The Conservative Party Since 1900,* Oxford University Press. p.318.

[196] See, for example R. T. McKenzie, (1955) *British Political Parties*, Willam Heinemann, London. And Zig Layton-Henry, (1978) 'Democracy and Reform in the Conservative Party', in *Journal of Contemporary History,* Vol. 13, No.4, October 1978 pp.653-670.

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[197] Donald Southgate, (Ed.) (1974) op cit., p.98.

[198] Zig Layton-Henry, (1978) op cit. pp.655-656.

[199] Quoted in R. T. McKenzie, (1955) op cit. p.149.

[200] Ibid. p.154.

[201] The diary of Knatchbull-Hugesson 29th May 1867, quoted in Maurice Cowling, (1967) *Disraeli, Gladstone and Revolution: The Passing of the Second Reform Bill,* Cambridge University Press, p.217.

To this end ‘in 1868 they had a network of committees every few days during the canvass. The principal Conservative agent in the division met with his local agents – both to spur them on, and to evaluate information.’ [203] This would have appeared a reasonably sophisticated system prior to the 1867 Act, but the provisions and effects of that Act were far-reaching and largely unanticipated, although Robert Lowe had told the House of Commons as early as May 1867 ‘this session we have not had what we before possessed – a party of attack, and a party of resistance. We have instead two parties of competition who, like Cleon and the Sausage-seller of Aristophanes, are both bidding for the support of the Demos.’ [204] The Act was to change electioneering for ever, ‘the “leap in the dark”…had ended the confusion of parties for which both Disraeli and Gladstone had despaired of finding a remedy….The electorate was now consciously choosing its Government.’ [205] It was, therefore, crucial that agents mobilized the voters, but the 1868 general election posed other problems for party managers. Quite simply, ‘after 1867 more seats were worth contesting, 374 were uncontested in 1859,’ furthermore, ‘the contest was often between candidates of the same party, or, in two member constituencies…the weaker party only put up one candidate.’ [206] Thus as a consequence of the 1867 Act

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[202] Edgar Feuchtwanger, (2000) *Disraeli*, Arnold, London, p.166.

[203] D. C. Moore, (1967) ‘Social Structure, Political Structure, and Public Opinion in Mid Victorian England’, in Robert Robson, (Ed.) (1967) *Ideas and Institutions of Victorian Britain: Essays in Honour of George Kitson Clark*, G. Bell & Sons, London, pp.43-44.

[204] Quoted in J. T. Ward, (1974) ‘Derby and Disraeli’, in Donald Southgate, (Ed.) (1974) op cit. p.72.

[205] G. N. Sanderson, (1966) ‘The Swing of the Pendulum in British General Elections 1832-1966’, in *Political Studies*, Vol. 14, 1966, p.351.

[206] H. J. Hanham, (1978 Edition) op cit. p.197.

> ‘The elections of 1868 were contested in far more constituencies than any previous elections. In many cases contests occurred simply because local politicians realized the inadequacy of their knowledge of how voters would behave if a contest did occur. In effect, an actual contest was their only means of discovering the relative strengths of the different political groups in the constituency.’ [207]

The Conservative party organization was thus faced with two simultaneous shortcomings and although ‘the minds of the leaders (especially Disraeli’s) were groping after new party machines…it seemed more important to find numerous candidates and provoke as many contests as possible rather than to improve the party organizations.’ [208] In one sense this priority was achieved when only 211 seats out of a total of 658 were left uncontested, [209] unfortunately the greater prize, election victory, was not. J. F. S. Ross has observed that ‘it is curious that a provision of the 1867 Act intended to secure the fair representation of minorities had its greatest effect in the fillip it gave to the organizations of the two big parties.’ [210] He was referring to the multiple vote in three and four member constituencies, and the Liberals, following the example of Joseph Chamberlain in Birmingham, had developed the “caucus” to operate in such constituencies. In three-seat constituencies each voter had two votes, and where the Liberals were in a minority they organized to guarantee that they would win one of the three seats, where they were in a clear majority they would organize to capture all three seats. The system worked so well that in Birmingham and Glasgow they won all three seats, in Liverpool they prised one seat from the Conservatives, and in the five cities with three seats they wrested seats as the minority group. The Conservatives had nothing to compare with such a sophisticated organization, and although it may be argued that ‘elections are never won by organization’ it is equally true that ‘the history of party organization is dominated by the rhythm of elections.’ [211] Losing the general election in 1868 after having passed the 1867 Reform Act was a great blow to the Conservative party leadership. ‘Disraeli was the first to recognize the need for more elaborate party machinery to cope with the new conditions, and devoted much attention to the matter in the years of opposition between 1868 and 1874.’ [212]

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[207] D. C. Moore, (1967) op cit. p.56.

[208] Cornelius O’Leary, (1962) *The Elimination of Corrupt Practices in British Elections 1968-1911*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, p.44.

[209] *Cf.* ‘As late as 1900 the astonishingly large number of 243 seats was uncontested; the largest figure since the second Reform Bill’ G. N. Sanderson , (1966) op cit. p.354.

[210] J. F. S. Ross, (1955) *Elections and Electors: Studies in Democratic Representation*, Eyre and Spottiswood, London, p.171.

This study has previously examined Disraeli’s “one nation conservatism”, it is, therefore, unsurprising that his re-organization of the party was influenced both by this ideological approach, as well as his thirst for power. The general election failure of the Conservatives in 1868 prompted the party leaders to take steps to improve the party organization. [213] To this end in April 1870, Disraeli appointed John Gorst, who was seen as a young and able politician despite losing his seat at the election, as Party Agent in charge of the management of the party organization. Gorst’s first innovation was to establish a central Conservative Office, partly, ostensibly to organize election administration and arrangements, but also because the party leadership felt that the efficient operation of the National Union of Conservative Associations (formerly the National Union of Conservative and Constitutional Associations) ‘required the establishment of a cadre of full time professional party workers…responsible to the Leader of the Party rather than to the popular organization of the Party.’ [214] This may be interpreted as an early sign that the Leadership had no intention of allowing the NUOCA to build a power base that could challenge their hold over the party, a view perhaps reinforced by the fact that it was the Central Office which held the register of approved candidates which it would make available to the constituencies. Gorst also became Secretary of the NUOCA in 1871 and thus occupied unprecedented dual positions from which to co-ordinate the party machine. Under his direction the NUOCA rapidly became 'the propaganda arm of Central office, calling conferences and publishing a stream of pamphlets intended for popular reading.' There can be no doubt that 'Gorst concentrated on winning support from urban middle and working class voters', [215] in fact it has been suggested that 'the urgency of the Conservative appeal to the working classes is the most striking feature of the early work of the National Union.' [216] This view gains support when examining the literature issued by the NUOCA .The earliest publication date is 1872, but some of the pamphlets are reprints of literature in circulation during the 1868 election. For example, pamphlet number five (originally published March 1868) is entitled 'Practical Suggestions to the Loyal Working Men of Great Britain on Points of Policy and Duty in the present Crisis,' whilst number six, gives details of prior Conservative legislation which it claims benefited the working classes (for example, Lord Shaftsbury's Factory Acts). [217] Pamphlet number seven 'The Political Future of the Working Classes or Who are the Real friends of The People' clearly set out the reasoning behind the Conservatives' appeal to the voters, and the need for "one nation conservatism"

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[211] E. J. Feuchtwanger, (1968) *Disraeli, Democracy, and the Tory Party.* Clarendon Press, Oxford, p.130.
[212] Emily Allyn, (1931) op cit. p.90.

[213] See, for example, Zig Layton Henry, (1978) op cit. p.656. *Cf.* John Ramsden has argued that ‘it is as much the Conservative Party’s appetite for power…as the appeal of individual leaders or policies, that explains the Party’s extraordinarily successful record. The Tories, he argues, have only rarely lacked the collective will to win.’ Quoted on the dust cover of John Ramsden, (1998) *An Appetite for Power: A History of The Conservative Party Since 1830.* Harper Collins, London.
[214] R. T. McKenzie, (1955) op cit. p.260.

> 'whatever troubles the waters of society, whatever frightens the timid and the rich – and money is always timid – the artisan and the labourer are the first sufferers. The shopkeepers or the manufacturers lose their profit, but he loses his daily bread. [however]…continued agitations destroy the confidence of the classes above us…capitalists can seek other spheres.' [218]

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[215] Donald Read, (1979) op cit., p.155.

[216] R. T. McKenzie, (1955) op cit. p.147.

[217] E. J. Feuchtwanger, (1968) op cit. p.129.

[218] Quoted in R. T. McKenzie, (1955) op cit. p.148. *Cf.* An example of the attention given to detail in the espoused ethos of the NUOCA can be seen in the fact that its original title was to have been the National Union of Conservative and Constitutional Working Men's Associations. The "Working Men's" was dropped by Disraeli as being unsuitable for a party which sought to rise above class divisions. (See R. Blake,(1966) *Disraeli*, Eyre and Spottiswood, London, p.536.)

G. N. Sanderson characterizes the period after the 1868 general election as a time of ‘unprecedented impact of parliamentary politics upon the “common man” and [of] the rapid emergence (within a decade or so) of a recognisably modern form of party politics and party organization.’ [219] John Gorst, occupying two key roles in the new Conservative Party organization, certainly sought to ensure that the conservative message was disseminated as widely as possible to the new electorate. ‘He visited constituencies, met local leaders and worked to co-ordinate and assist the growing number of Conservative working men’s associations and clubs that had been formed as a result of the agitation for, and passage of, the reform act in 1867.’ [220] By and large, he was very successful, as the general election victory of 1874 was to prove, but some independent extra-parliamentary initiatives proved to be too radical to gain universal acceptance within the party.

Many of the Tory leaders felt that the party needed to drum up support among the working classes even if this meant creating unprecedented initiatives. This is well illustrated by the ‘curious episode of the New Social Movement in 1871.’ [221] This movement sought to give real substance to Disraeli’s vision of a union between the upper and the working classes, however, had it reached fruition, it would have been largely autonomous and beyond the control of the party leadership. Under the plan a “Council of Legislation” consisting of Peers, would meet and negotiate with a “Council of Workmen” consisting of Labour Leaders, in an attempt to secure mutual agreement on better working class conditions. Amongst those vehemently opposed to this initiative was the, already influential, future prime minister Lord Salisbury. ‘The *Times* commented that Salisbury’s repudiation of the New Social Movement … was fatal to its prospects of acceptance…[furthermore] In the *Quarterly Review* of October 1872 he insisted that Toryism was incompatible with offering a rival programme of change…The Parties stood, and ought to stand for two opposite moods …of the English mind.' [222] Because of incompatibility and mounting mutual recriminations The New Social Movement was probably doomed from the start, 'in some ways it was too absurd to be regarded as very important, but even Gladstone took it sufficiently seriously to utter a public warning against the Tory machinations.' Nevertheless it proved that 'the Tory leaders were at least prepared to toy with these ideas.' [223] It may also be taken as another indication that the "Tory leaders" intended to keep tight control over their party organization; and not risk alienating their core support, or those naturally inclined towards their party. It has been noted that by the 1870s further reform was likely to be '"radical" (even socialist) and a threat to property,' thus many of the new middle class voters veered towards conservatism. As Lord Salisbury noted in the *Quarterly Review* of October 1869 in *The Past and Future of The Conservative Party,* ' "the army of so-called reform, in every stage of its advance necessarily converts a detachment of its force into opponents."'[224] It has also been noted that the chief interests of working class leaders for the twenty years after 1867 were social not political. [225] Thus, even at this early stage of Conservative party re-organization, it becomes obvious that any 'appearance of democratic control was rather deceptive, as the real control of candidates and funds was in the hands of the Central Office, a secret, unrepresentative body.' [226]

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[219] G. N. Sanderson, (1966) op cit. p.352.
[220] Zig Layton Henry, (1978) op cit. p.656.
[221] E. J. Feuchtwanger, (1968) op cit. p.91.

For all his rhetoric about "one nation conservatism" Disraeli had been complicit in a measure that was specifically designed to ensure that there were in fact, politically, two nations.

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[222] David Steele, (1999) *Lord Salisbury: A Political Biography,* UCL Press, London, p.81.

[223] E. J. Feutchwanger, (1968) op cit. pp.93-94.
[224] Donald Read, (1979) op cit. p.159.
[225] See H. J. Hanham, (1978) op cit. p.323
[226] Emily Allyn, (1931) op cit. p.90.

> ‘The reformers of 1867 deliberately went out of their way to give the boroughs a franchise entirely different from that of the counties, so increasing rather than playing down the traditional difference between them…The counties became strongholds of the old order, the boroughs, or rather the bigger boroughs, became the field for experiment in “democratic” political organization.’ [227]

It would be folly to underestimate the major role Disraeli’s played in formulating the reforms of 1867: Gorst, however, charged with re-organizing the party, now found himself ‘unable to exert much influence in the counties and smaller boroughs where pre-democratic methods of electioneering prevailed under the influence of local landowners.’ [228] Disraeli, rather than cause friction with his core vote ‘recognised the limitations of Gorst’s influence when he set up a special committee of influential men in 1873 to manage the elections in these areas.’ [229] Gorst was far from happy with this arrangement, and as far as is known he received ‘no special mandate on his duties, or on how to reorganize the party.’ [230] Nonetheless, the importance he gave to achieving and then consolidating the party’s support in urban areas is well illustrated by his efforts, spread over two long years, to organize Disraeli’s visit to Manchester in 1872. The visit proved to be worth the effort and was a great success. For his part

> ‘Disraeli gave the National Union the seal of respectability by choosing it as the audience for his great Crystal palace speech in 1872, and from that point on the National Union became an integral part of the Central Office organization and was used by the party leaders as a mouthpiece and as an organizational front for popular demonstrations. The National Union had thus assumed its role as the main body through which the leadership could organize the party’s voluntary workers.’ [231]

It is perhaps also worth noting that in 1872 the National Union had its headquarters moved under the same roof as the Central Office, at that time under the administration of the Whips office and directly responsible to Disraeli. Lord Hamilton, in an attempt to forestall any misgivings, said that the move was 'not to restrict or fetter local actions, but to endeavour to stimulate and assist country associations, and to promote the circulation of opinion between them and the leaders of the party.'[232] Such circulation of opinion was certainly needed, the Conservatives were not universally viewed as the next party of government, and were still viewed in some quarters as reactionary. *The Economist* of 24th June 1871 wrote of 'the secret opinion of the Conservatives that the classes could govern better than the masses', [233] whilst the *Saturday Review* of 6th July 1872, castigated the Conservative Party over its opposition to the Ballot Bill, then before parliament, accusing them of "flogging a dead horse." [234] Nevertheless the close proximity of Central office to the NUOCA was, for the local associations, at the very least, worrying, at worst, intimidating. This, however, did not stop the parliamentary party continuing to urge local agents to redouble their efforts for the good of the party. Mr. Wheelhouse MP told the 1873 Conservative Annual Conference

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[227] H. J. Hanham (1978) op cit. p.XXV.

[228] Zig Layton Henry, (1978) op cit. p.656.

[229] Ibid p.656.

[230] Archie Hunter, (2001) *A Life of Sir John Eldon Gorst: Disraeli’s Awkward Disciple,* Frank Cass, London, p.83.

[231] Robert Shepherd, (1991) *The Power Brokers: The Tory Party and Its Leaders.* Hutchinson, London, p.92.

> 'work not only at your dinner on this occasion, but at your register; work every single soul of you. Don't suppose you have finished your work when you go home tonight; pull someone up to the register, and when the day of election comes, every man of you take some half-dozen to the poll.' [235]

Despite his trials and tribulations, Gorst was recorded as saying in March 1873 that he believed the party was as well prepared for an election as it ever should be. [236] His whole strategy appeared to be vindicated in 1874 when the Conservatives not only won the general election but won handsomely. Explanations were sought for the massive swing to the Conservatives in 1874 'but nowhere was it mentioned that since 1868 the Conservatives had developed a national organisation and the Liberals were still without one.' Except that is amongst those who had actually done the hard work; the minutes of the Eighth Annual Conference of the Conservative Party, organized by the NUOCA, boasted of 'a remarkable fact…which appears to prove, in an unanswerable manner, the great value even for electoral purposes possessed by political associations.' [237] The party leadership, especially Disraeli who had done so much to improve the party's organization, inexplicably offered little reward to those who had secured victory. Disraeli, incredibly, told the Queen on 18th February, 'nothing like this could have been anticipated, and no party organization could have caused this result of a majority of nearly 64.'[238] He and the party leadership were too preoccupied with government appointments to pay much attention to party organization, which was allowed to run down. Gorst who had so ably rallied and marshalled support in the urban constituencies felt that the rewards of patronage which came with office had 'gone to the landed gentry who dominated the party. The Tory strength in the boroughs was totally neglected..' [239] Gorst was so incensed that, even eight months after the election, he 'wrote at length to Dyke [Sir William Hart Dyke, Patronage Secretary] complaining about misdirection of patronage.' [240] Disraeli, it appears was more concerned with party unity than with rewarding the work-horses of the party organization, he wrote to Lady Bradford that 'the government is a very strong government and gives much satisfaction. I have contrived in minor and working places to include every "representative" man, that is to say every one who might be troublesome…and all those sort of men, who would have made a Tory cave.' [241] He was, of course, under pressure from a number of quarters regarding his dispensation of patronage, he wrote, again to Lady Bradford, that

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[232] R. T. McKenzie, (1955) op cit. pp,157-158.

[233] Quoted in Cornelius O'Leary, (1962) op cit. p.87.

[234] Ibid. p.81.

[235] Quoted in R. T. McKenzie, (1955) op cit. p.156.

[236] See entry in The Earl of Derby's diary 25th March 1873, quoted in John Vincent, (Ed.) (1994) *A Selection from the Diaries of Edward Henry Stanley 15th Earl of Derby (1826-93): Between September 1869 and March 1878,* Royal Historical Society, Camden Fifth Series, Volume 4, p.133.

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[237] Cornelius O'Leary, (1962) op cit. p.109.

[238] R. W. Davis, (1976) *Disraeli*, Hutchinson, London, p.166.

[239] Zig Layton Henry, (1978) op cit. p.657.

[240] E. J. Feuchtwanger, (1968) op cit. p.133.

[241] Disraeli to Lady Bradford 27th February 1874, in The Marquis of Zetland (Earl of Ronaldsway), (Ed.) (1929 Two Vols.) op cit., Vol. 1, p.55.

> ‘it is a curious thing, but there has not been a place or a living of importance, in my gift that HRH [The Prince of Wales], has not asked me for one of his friends – and always the most unqualified candidates. But because the Prince is good-natured, I must not be silly. And I think that the reputation of a Minister depends more on his appointments than any other circumstance.’ [242]

To add to Gorst’s annoyance others within the party, but higher placed than he, were successful in promoting their protégés. The Chief Whip Gerard Noel, wrote to Disraeli,

> ‘I am most anxious to see four *new men* brought prominently to the front because I am sure they would add greatly to its strength not only in the House of Commons but in the country. These are W. H. Smith, Cross, Beach, and Sandon, all are good speakers and men of ability and sound judgement. (original emphasis) [243]

Eventually Smith became Financial Secretary to the Treasury, R. A. Cross became Home Secretary, Sir Michael Hicks-Beach became Chief Secretary for Ireland, and Lord Sandon became Vice President of the Council for Education. It became obvious to Gorst that the professionals at Central Office, and those of high social standing, could exert some influence, but the voluntary party workers, and even himself, could not. He was disappointed not only because his own efforts and achievements appeared to go unrecognized, but also because those who had worked tirelessly in the boroughs, where success had been essential to bring the new administration into office, were similarly overlooked. He regained a parliamentary seat at a by-election in 1875, but his influence as Party Agent had evaporated after the general election when management of the party’s organization had reverted to the parliamentary Whips office. This was ‘much to Gorst’s disgust as he saw this as a move back to the corrupt and inefficient methods which had prevailed before his appointment. He continued to give advice and help in party management until 1877 when he finally resigned.’ [244] Meanwhile Disraeli continued to exercise his patronage in a manner hardly likely to encourage loyalty from his party organization. He appeared wholly unaware that his eccentric appointments could cause discontent and rancour. In 1879 he wrote to Lady Bradford

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[242] Disraeli to Lady Bradford, 23rd May 1875, Ibid. Vol. 1, p.246.

[243] Noel to Disraeli 12th February 1874, Quoted in H. J. Hanham, (Ed.) (1969) op cit., p.103.

[244] Ibid. p.658.

> ‘I am glad you approve of Y’s [Lord Yarmouth] appointment [as Controller of the Household]. It was a compliment to his father who has been a most useful and influential member of the party. Y himself, I am told, is the stupidest fellow that ever lived – the only man who ever stood two contested elections and never opened his mouth: absolutely.’ [245]

Thus although ‘once the Tories were in power, the bulk of their domestic legislative activity was in fact directed towards the urban working classes’ [246] the organization that had secured the votes of those classes was allowed to wind down, whilst those who had been instrumental in that effort were left out of government and went unrewarded. Patronage favoured the old Tory hierarchy at the expense of seemingly more worthy candidates and problems for the future steadily built up. However, even though the Conservatives had been more nimble than the Liberals in adapting their Party organization to the new circumstances, and reaped the benefit of the changes in the election of 1874, the Liberals did not lag far behind. ‘Joseph Chamberlain copied American machine politics in his organization of the Birmingham Caucus, and was the prime mover in the formation of the National Federation of Liberal Associations in 1877.’ [247] The NFLA differed from its counterpart the NUOCA in that its impetus came from the constituencies rather than from the party hierarchy; nevertheless it was welcomed, albeit with reservations. Gladstone wrote to Lord Granville in 1877 saying that ‘as I understand the matter, you are in great want of improved electoral organization, and we are not likely to get it from any other source.’ [248] In 1878 he wrote again to Granville ‘I am sensible of its [the Birmingham Model] dangers but I think it may cure the *worst* of the evils that beset the Liberal party.’

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[245] Disraeli to Lady Bradford 6th February 1879, in Marquis of Zetland (Ed.) (1929 Two Vols.) op cit. Vol. 2, p.207.

[246] E. J. Feuchtwanger, (1968) op cit. p.94.

[247] Emily Allyn, (1931) op cit. p.91.

[248] Gladstone to Granville 19th May 1877, in Agatha Ramm, (Ed.) (1962 Two Vols.) *The Political Correspondence of Mr. Gladstone and Lord Granville 1876-1886*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, Vol.2, p.40.

(original emphasis) [249] By 1880 he was becoming more concerned writing that, ‘my opinion is that the Birmingham organization is a good thing…But it is like a tonic, good at a certain stage of recovery from disease, and inapplicable to other stages.’ [250] However, the founder of the NFLA had no such doubts . In the view of Joseph Chamberlain

> ‘The chief aim of the Caucus was not to make government but to make opinion. The election of 1874 had in Chamberlain’s view returned individual Liberals “without a leader and without any policy…pledged to no measure, with no programme, for every man to do what seemed to him right in his own eyes.” The apathy of the Liberal supporters in the country was the cause and also the result of such a spineless party. The remedy was to form a programme of interlocking policies serving the needs of the various sections of Liberalism and carried by the combined force of all. Only in this way, Chamberlain contended, could the party make head[way] against the concerted forces of “organised selfishness” which combined instinctively without formal organization.’ [251]

We may forgive Chamberlain’s rhetoric about “organized selfishness” but he was being less than accurate in his assertion that the Conservatives operated without any “formal organization”. His own brainchild, the NLFA, itself posed many questions ‘were party machines in every town to be allowed to dictate to the mass of Liberal electors the way in which they should vote? Was a nation-wide federation of these machines to determine current political orthodoxy? And was the party outside parliament to become almost as important as the party within it?’ [252] These questions it may be argued, were equally applicable to the new Conservative organization as they were to the Liberal caucuses.

Donald Southgate has described Disraeli’s decision to go to the country in 1880 as his last great error; [253] the party’s popular organization was now *de facto* under the control of the Whips’ office and despite mounting evidence he ignored, intentionally or not, Gorst's warnings that the new party organization was stagnating. Since Gorst's resignation in 1877 the organization had simply not kept up with developments. There had ostensibly been no extension of the franchise since 1867 but the 1878 Registration Act had increased the gap between the borough and county electorates by 'providing much fuller preliminary lists of borough voters and by reducing opportunities for frivolous objections. In some constituencies more names were added to the register after 1878 than after 1867.' [254] It was in these urban constituencies that the Conservative victory in 1874 had been won, 'in fact 35 of their 85 gains [in 1874] were in boroughs where the population was greater than 20,000.' [255] Registration and challenges to registrations were a vital component of electioneering and

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[249] Gladstone to Granville 5th September 1878. Ibid. p.75.

[250] Gladstone to Granville 18th February 1880. Ibid p.113.

[251] Peter Fraser, (1966) op cit. p.31. (Detail of a speech of April 9th 1877)

[252] H. J. Hanham, (1978 ed.) op cit. p.140.

[253] This may be a harsh judgement. Gathorne Hardy noted in his diary on 9th February 1880, that ‘the general bias is now to an early election & if it is pushed for by our opponents they will be gratified I expect soon.’ Quoted in Nancy E. Johnson, (Ed.) (1981) *The Diary of Gathorne Hardy, Later Lord Cranbrook, 1866-1892: Political Selections*, Oxford University Press, p.435.

> 'the annual sessions at the receiving barristers court [registration lists] became a struggle between rival attorneys paid by the local parliamentary candidates, MPs, or party magnates, and on the outcome of these struggles depended the result of elections. Indeed, all over the country the main function of the local party organizations down to 1914 was the supervision of registration. Useful as this might be as a spur to party organization, it had the effect of excluding from the register a considerable number of people, and of making inclusion on the register essentially a matter for the local party organization.' [256]

Disraeli's neglect of his party's local organization was now ready to return and haunt him. An indication as to the extent of that neglect can be gleaned from his comments to Lady Chesterfield about the 1880 general election, he wrote 'how can there be news about the Election? Both sides have now placed their men and both are at the mercy of the Ballot, which baffles estimates.' [257] The party had also overlooked another important facet of the electioneering process 'three of the inner Cabinet, Beaconsfield [Disraeli], Salisbury, and

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[254] Donald Read, (1979) op cit. p.151.

[255] Zig Layton Henry, (1978) op cit. p657.

[256] H. J.Hanham, (Ed.) (1969) op cit. p.257.

[257] Disraeli to Lady Chesterfield, 29th March 1880, in, Marquis of Zetland, (Ed.) (1929 Two Vols.) op cit. Vol.2, p.263.

Cairns, were, as peers, by custom debarred from the electioneering struggle and thus unable to copy Gladstone and other Liberal leaders on whistle-stop tours.' [258] In the final analysis the Conservative party's organization was run-down and demoralized, it was in no fit state to fight an efficient co-ordinated general election campaign. After the defeat Disraeli told the Queen that 'that the Liberals had worked on that American system called caucus, originated by the great radical, Mr. Chamberlain.' [259] Recognition, it appears, that the Liberal's organization had been a vital component in their victory; and praise, albeit grudgingly given, for the architect of that organization. Strangely it appears that, in a similar reaction to the Conservative victory in 1874, 'no newspaper put down the result to the Liberals superior organization, and when [Joseph] Chamberlain wrote to the *Times* pointing out that the caucus had been successful in 60 out of 67 boroughs where it was established, the letter provoked neither a reply nor an editorial comment.'[260] However, the Conservative party leadership realised, albeit belatedly, that their organization was not up to scratch. In July 1880, during a meeting with W. H. Smith and Sir Stafford Northcote, Gorst was prevailed upon to revitalize the party's organization, and promised that if the next election could be won 'the offer of office for which he might be eligible would be made.' [261] Gorst cynically replied that a similar offer had been made in 1874 but had not been honoured - but he acquiesced. Northcote, Conservative leader in the House of Commons since Disraeli's elevation to the peerage, had noted in his diary on 1st May 1880, 'it is my notion that we ought to have a small committee of parliamentary leaders, who should keep themselves in constant communication with the managers of the Central Association. Much might be done, and many mistakes avoided, if we were better informed as to the feelings of the party throughout the country.' [262] It is noteworthy that Northcote concentrated upon "the feelings of the party" rather than the feelings of the voters. This suggests that he felt that the ordinary voter was not considered to be sufficiently knowledgeable about the intricacies of the new party politics to be addressed directly. Conversely it also demonstrates that political leaders saw little possibility of accurately assessing public opinion other than in the crudest fashion, for example, using by-election results as 'a yardstick of the governments popularity among the reformed electorate.' [263] The difficulty of appealing directly to the new voters had yet to be resolved. The thoughts and desires of the voters, and the effects of political rhetoric upon them, were all unknown**.** 'The political culture engaged areas of feelings far removed from the politics of individual opinion…reflecting oligarchy at one end, organization projected the purely symbolic nature of participation at the other end of the social spectrum.' [264] It was now manifest that

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[258] Cornelius O'Leary, (1962) op cit. p120.
[259] W. F. Monypenny and G. E. Buckle, (1910-1924, Six Vols) op cit., Vol. 6, p.535.
[260] Cornelius O'Leary, (1962) op cit. p.129.
[261] Viscount Chilston, (1965) *W. H. Smith*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, p.161.

> 'the neglect of party organization and the weaknesses of the traditional methods of conducting elections were exposed by the electoral disaster that engulfed the Conservatives in 1880 and Disraeli, now Lord Beaconsfield, established a committee to consider methods of reforming, popularising and improving the party organization. This committee, which became known as the central committee, assumed the direction and management of party affairs and control of central party funds.' [265]

Unfortunately all this was too little and too late for Disraeli, already aged and ailing at the time of the 1880 election he died on April 19th 1881. After his death 'it was far from obvious who took precedence between Salisbury and Northcote when, after 1881, they led in the two Houses in uneasy partnership. Salisbury was senior in rank and the party's favourite, Northcote the senior in length of service and still backed by many Conservative MPs.' [266] The succession was further complicated when Lord Randolph Churchill opted to utilise the party organization itself to further his own bid for the party leadership. The Conservative party had no procedure or mechanism designed to *elect* a leader, the reasons being that such an arrangement 'satisfied those who believed that party leaders should emerge by general agreement rather than by election, and reduced the danger of a rift in the party to a minimum' [267] Salisbury and Northcote had both accumulated adequate credentials to be considered as party leader, but as Maurice Cowling has pointed out 'it was the tension between existing and possible party alignments which gave alternative leaders the chance to identify their futures with unexplored possibilities…The centre of tension was continuous theorising about the next thing politicians claimed to wish to do with party, government, or the constitution.' [268] Lord Randolph Churchill was a young, popular, and charismatic politician, whose activities with the so-called "Fourth Party", [269] with his allies John Gorst, Sir Henry Drummond Wolff, and Arthur Balfour, had given him a very high profile

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[262] Quoted in Andrew Lang, (1890 Two Vols.) *Life Letters and Diaries of Sir Stafford Northcote, First Earl of Iddesleigh,* William Blackwood & Sons, Edinburgh and London, Vol. 2, p.315.

[263] Michael Bentley, (1984) op cit. p.199.

[264] Patrick Joyce, (1980) *Work, Society, and Politics: The Culture of the Factory in Later Victorian England,* Harvester Press, London, p.301.

[265] Zig Layton Henry, (1978) op cit. p.658.

> 'As Churchill's popularity among Conservatives in the country grew, it was natural for him to attempt to capitalize on this support in his efforts to improve his position in the party and supplant the ineffective official leadership. He was well aware of the dissatisfaction of provincial Tories both with the conduct of the opposition in Parliament and the way the party organization was being run, over neither of which they had any control.' [270]

He saw the "tension between existing party alignments" and the "unexplored possibility" of the next thing he "wished to do with party, government, and the constitution". He would climb aboard the bandwagon of democracy. ‘Churchill, therefore, put himself at the head of the campaign for Tory democracy and determined to capture the democratic part of the party organization – the National Union… [he] wished to abolish the undemocratic Central Committee and transfer its functions and powers to the National Union.’ [271] He had chosen what to “identify his future with.”. ‘Tory democracy was the catch-phrase of Churchill’s campaign, yet, as he himself admitted, opportunism was its chief characteristic.’ [272] Opportunistic or not, he succeeded in becoming Chairman of the NUOCA in 1884, and waged a campaign for the leadership which lasted approximately ten months. It has been observed that his ‘profound cynicism was not lost on those able to observe him at close quarters,’ [273] but his popularity, or at least the power of his popularity, remained undiminished, Michael Hicks Beach wrote to Lord Salisbury that ‘whatever objections may, in any case, exist to the formation of a Conservative Government would, I think, be rendered insuperable if such a Government had to be formed without the man [Churchill] who is far and away the most popular Conservative in the House of Commons.’ [274] Churchill’s popularity both within the party, and with many of the newer voters, forced Lord Salisbury, no lover of democracy, to seek a reconciliation and compromise to prevent any further damage to the party. He wrote to Churchill

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[266] John Ramsden , (1998) *An Appetite for Power: A History of the Conservative Party Since 1830,* Harper Collins, London, p.140.

[267] H. J.Hanham, (Ed.) (1969) op cit. p.225.

[268] Maurice Cowling, (1971) op cit., p.8.

[269] Arthur Balfour described the Fourth Party thus 'It possessed no distinctive creed: its very name was an accident of debate; it consisted at its gayest and best of no more than four friends who sat together in the House, supported each other in difficulties, consulted freely on points of tactics, and made it their business to convince the Government that large majorities did not adequately cover a multitude of sins.' Blanche E. C. Dugdale, (1936 Two Vols.) op cit. Vol. 1. p.57.

[270] Zig Layton Henry, (1978) op cit. p.658.

> ‘it appears to us [himself and Northcote] that organization is, and must remain, in all its essential features local. But there is still much work which a central body like the Council of the National Union can perform with great advantage to the party. It is the representative of many associations on whom, in their respective constituencies, the work of the party greatly depends. It can superintend and stimulate their exertions; furnish them with advice, and in some measure with funds; provide them with lecturers; aid them in the improvement and the development of the local press; and help them in perfecting the machinery by which the registration is conducted and the arrangements for providing volunteer agency at election times. It will have special opportunity of pressing

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[271] Zig Layton Henry, (1978) op cit. pp.658-659.
[272] Max Egremont, (1980) *Balfour*, Collins, London, p.63.
[273] David Steele, (1999) op cit. p.157.
[274] Hicks Beach to Salisbury 10th June 1885, in Lady Victoria Hicks Beach, (1932 Two Vols.) *The Life of Sir Michael Hicks Beach (Earl St Aldwyn)* Macmillan & Co., London, p.234.

> upon the local associations which it represents the paramount duty of selecting, in time, the candidates who are to come forward at the dissolution.' [275]

Salisbury, therefore, made it clear that the NUOCA was to concentrate upon the business of running and winning elections in their respective localities, and that the Central Council must be accessible by the NUOCA and assist and guide them in any way possible. No contemplation is made of influence being exerted upon the party leadership. The issue of the Central Committee, who at that time oversaw all aspects of party organization was addressed a week later.

> 'The Central Committee,' Salisbury wrote, 'are appointed by us and represent us: and we could not in any degree separate our position from theirs. I hope, however, that there is no chance of the paths of the Central Committee and the National Union crossing: for there is plenty of good work for both to do.' [276]

Churchill, however, had two great assets to his campaign, he had the support of John Gorst, reinstated as Chief Party Agent following the defeat of 1880, who had wide experience and knowledge of the party's management; [277] and, perhaps more importantly

> 'the provincial leaders who were represented on the council of the National Union were increasingly dissatisfied with the leadership of the party and the reliance of the central committee on traditional methods of electioneering which were totally unsuited to conducting elections and organizing the vote in urban areas.' [278]

Salisbury's main concern was that the leadership must retain their independence from the NUOCA, continue to be the sole formulators of policy, and the final arbiters of party affairs. He was also aware that re-organization was necessary if the party was to stand any chance of ever regaining office. He was, therefore, surprisingly amenable to a compromise

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[275] Salisbury to Randolph Churchill 29th February 1884, quoted in R. T. McKenzie, (1955) op cit. pp.171-172.

[276] Salisbury to Randolph Churchill 6th March 1884, quoted in R. T. McKenzie, (1955) op cit., p.172.

[277] It must be noted that Gorst was not wholly satisfied with his position. He wanted a free hand with no oversight from the Central Committee, and this was opposed especially by Henry Percy and W. H. Smith. See Balfour to Lord Salisbury 23rd January 1882, quoted in Robin Harcourt Williams (Ed.) (1988) *Salisbury – Balfour Correspondence: Letters Exchanged Between The Third Marquess of Salisbury And His Nephew Arthur James Balfour 1869-1892,* Hertfordshire Record Society, pp.76-79.

[278] Zig Layton Henry, (1978) op cit p.659.

> ‘The main results were the abolition of the Central Committee, democratic reforms in the organization of the National Union, and official support for the Primrose League which had been founded by Churchill and Gorst. The management of party affairs, however, remained with the party leaders.’ [279]

Salisbury took Churchill into the party leadership, then turned his attention to propaganda, which had been sadly neglected because of ‘the internecine conflict into which it…pleased RC to plunge our organization’ [280]

In the summer of 1885 Richard “Skipper” Middleton replaced Gorst as Chief Party agent and immediately set about re-starting the party’s propaganda machine, he wrote to Salisbury in July ‘we are raising a special fund for the purpose of distributing pamphlets, leaflets and etc, from house to house throughout England. The men we employ for the purpose of distributing these leaflets are good Conservatives and working men who will talk to any they meet on the way’[281] The initiative was apparently a great success, in September he reported to W. H. Smith ‘the free distribution of leaflets is giving great satisfaction and I think will prove of great service – as far as possible we are endeavouring to leave some Conservative literature at every house in England.’ [282] The NUOCA already spent from one half to two thirds of its budget annually for literature and lectures, with the help of his special fund ‘Middleton almost doubled the annual rate of publications in his first year. It doubled again in 1886 and redoubled in 1895.’ [283] He followed the precedent set by Gorst when in 1886 he became honorary Secretary of the National Union. He thus occupied a pivotal role and ‘became the key figure in tying together the three principal sections of the party, the party in parliament, the mass organization (the National

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[279] Zig Layton Henry, (1978) op cit. p.660.

[280] Salisbury to Austin 24th July 1884 Quoted in David Steele, (1999) op cit. p.159.

[281] Middleton to Salisbury 17th July 1885 in Eric Alexander 3rd Viscount Chilston, (1961) op cit., p.52.

[282] Ibid. p.53.

[283] Peter Marsh, (1978) op cit., p.200.

Union) and the Central Office. He had direct access to the Leader of the Party, he administered the affairs of the Central Office as Principal Agent, and he had effective control of the work of the National Union in his capacity of Honorary Secretary.' [284] Middleton was also charged with overseeing the changes brought about by Salisbury's compromise with Churchill. In 1885 it was decided that every Conservative Association should be affiliated without the need of any formal action. This simple device ensured that the NUOCA became a truly national body. A new set of rules were adopted in 1886 which included provision 'for the setting up of ten provincial or divisional unions which were to include all the members of the National Union within the territorial divisions concerned.' [285] It has been argued that 'the Area Offices were established…in order to bring Central Office into closer touch with the organization at constituency level' [286] However, the fact that the Area Offices were in the employ of Central Office has led some to see Salisbury's involvement as crucial in determining their actual *raison d'etre*. A. L. Lowell claimed that the provincial divisions 'were expected to act like watertight compartments, as it was believed that all ten divisions would not go mad at once, and that any man would find it hard to capture enough of them, one at a time, to control the Union.' [287] If this interpretation is correct, and Lowell was writing only some twenty years after the event, then it illustrates that the leadership had learnt a salient lesson from the challenge of Randolph Churchill and had determined that never again should their own party organization be utilised as a weapon against them.

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[284] R. T. McKenzie, (1955) op cit. p.264.

[285] R. T. McKenzie, (1955) op cit. p.175.

[286] Stuart Ball, (1994) 'The National and Regional Party Structure', in Paul Whitely, Patrick Seyd, and Jeremy Richardson, (Eds.) (1994) *True Blues: The Politics of Conservative Party Membership,* Clarendon Press, Oxford, p.209.

[287] A. L. Lowell, (1908 Two Vols.) *The Government of England,* Macmillan, London, Vol.1 p.573.

‘In [June]1885 Gladstone was forced into resignation by dissension within the Liberal Party and a change of tactics by the Irish Party’. [288] And ‘with the defeat of the Liberal government in 1885, the Queen called Salisbury to the office of Prime Minister; her selection was accepted.’[289] Salisbury was now the unchallenged leader of the Conservative Party. His aims he made clear ‘were to keep the Tories together, and to present them as a party of government, while educating the public and moderate Liberals in particular, about the dangers, in which he really believed, from the new model radicalism. Like Northcote but with greater boldness and more constructively, *he worked to create the conditions for a Liberal split.’* (my emphasis) [290] Salisbury was also amenable to embracing any faction that would help him further his aims. As early as October 1880 he had written to his nephew Arthur Balfour saying ‘the leader, even of a diminished party, must behave as the arbitrator between its various sections: and if he has ground for hoping to attract a new section, they must come within the scope of the arbitration.’ [291] He had taken office as head of a minority government only reluctantly, and at the first opportunity in November 1885 he resigned office forcing a general election. Salisbury had, unlike Disraeli, always privately acknowledged that if the Conservative party were to remain true to the principles that underpinned it, then it may be necessary to concede a majority in the House of Commons and rely upon the in-built Tory majority in the House of Lords to stymie any radical legislation. In fact ‘he saw the House of Lords and the Conservative Party as the mirror of the checks and balances written into the American Constitution.’ [292] He was, therefore, not overly concerned that the Liberals won the most seats in the general election in December

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[288] G. N. Sanderson, (1966) op cit. p.352.

[289] R. T. McKenzie, (1955) op cit. p.126. *cf.* Gathorne Hardy in his diary, 18th April 1885, had noted ‘the press daily & monthly seem to take for granted the leadership of Salisbury.’ Quoted in Nancy E. Johnson, (Ed.) (1981) op cit. p.552.

[290] David Steele, (1999) op cit. p.145.

[291] Salisbury to Balfour 5th October 1880, quoted in Robert Robson, (Ed.) (1967) op cit. p.303.

[292] Peter Marsh, (1978) op cit. p.13.

1885, since they had no overall majority, but he still had to rely upon the support of 86 Irish Nationalist MPs. He had written as early as 1867 that ‘it is the duty of every Englishman, and of every English party, to accept a political defeat cordially, and to lend their best endeavours to secure the success, or to neutralize the evil, of the principles to which they have been forced to succumb.’ [293] It would be mistaken to assume from all this that Salisbury was simply complacent. Although he was aware of the potency of the Conservative majority in the House of Lords, he was also aware that a party appearing to be permanently in a minority could not be successfully sustained indefinitely, and although he had opposed Disraeli on many issues ‘he found in Disraeli when he was an old man, one fixed political principle – that the party must on no account be broken up.’ [294] Despite this conviction he had ‘wondered whether the country would move [after the death of Disraeli and Gladstone] from two ideologically amorphous parties into several more strongly defined groups on the French model and that prospect held some attractions for him.’ [295] When ‘Gladstone’s official adoption of Irish Home Rule [in December 1885]…irrevocably split the Liberal Party and, more importantly, the Radical vote,’[296] Salisbury seized his opportunity and engineered a Commons defeat for his government, leaving Gladstone with no alternative but to take office. A sizeable faction within the Liberal Party opposed to Irish Home Rule, led by Joseph Chamberlain and Lord Hartington, christened “Liberal Unionists”, pledged to support a Conservative government that would oppose Irish Home Rule. Salisbury was happy to accommodate the Liberal Unionists, and after Gladstone’s Irish Home Rule Bill was defeated in the House of Commons in June 1886, the alliance became formal and arrangements were made to combine forces in the forthcoming general election.

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[293] *Quarterly Review,* Vol.123, October 1867, p.534.

[294] Donald Southgate, (1974) op cit. p.11.

[295] Salisbury to T. H. S. Escott, 1st November 1882, quoted in Peter Marsh, (1978) op cit. p.13.

[296] G. N. Sanderson, (1966) op cit., p.352

> ‘As long as Irish Home Rule remained, either actually or potentially, the dominant issue in British politics, a symmetrical swing of the [political] pendulum was unlikely to recur. Nor did it do so. In the election of 1886 there was certainly a massive swing; but the large number of successful candidates fighting independently as Liberal Unionists suggests that it was against Home Rulers rather than towards the Conservatives. [297]

This may be true, but Salisbury’s contribution ought not to be underestimated. He had seen the “tension between existing party alignments” in the Liberal Party, discovered the “unexplored possibility” of Irish Home Rule, and now saw the way clear to next thing he “wished to do with party, government, and the constitution”. He would retain power in alliance with the Liberal Unionists, and thereby guarantee the cohesion and influence of his own party and its principles. Whilst it is true that ‘in 1886 Gladstone dissolved for a second election within six months, and with his party rent by schism and with few of the prominent figures in the party sharing his suicidal enthusiasm for home rule,’ [298] it would be misleading to assume that Gladstone’s “suicide” was the only reason for the Conservative election success. Gladstone’s ministry had passed four Acts of parliament which had impacted greatly upon party organization. The Representation of the People Act in 1884 and the Redistribution Act of 1885 which came to be collectively known as the Third reform Act, and in addition The Corrupt and Illegal Practices Act of 1883 and the Registration Act of 1885 all demanded response from party organizations. The most important feature of the 1883 Corrupt practices Act in the context of this study is that it ‘prohibited parliamentary candidates from directly purchasing the services (and sometimes voters) to secure their victories. The work of volunteers was [thus] needed to replace those activities.’ [299] The main opposition to the Act had come from Conservative back-benchers ‘who loudly protested the impossibility of conducting an election within the narrow expense margins allowed.’ [300] Gorst, who possessed unparalleled knowledge of electioneering replied, with a hint of sarcasm, that ‘many members had extravagant ideas of what expenditure was really necessary to conduct an election.’ [301] The Act was never in any real danger of not reaching the statute book since as ex-Attorney-General Sir Hardinge Giffard bluntly pointed out ‘a class had grown up with no political convictions, but the firm purpose of extorting as much money as possible from candidates at election times, and that the principle of a limit to expenditure was of the highest importance to both sides.’ [302] Nevertheless, limiting election expenses was a serious problem, especially from a conservative point of view. W. H. Smith wrote to Salisbury voicing his fears that

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[297] Ibid p.352.
[298] Neil Blewett, (1972) *The Peers, The Parties, and The People: The British General Election of 1910,* Macmillan, London, p.22.
[299] Jani Lovenduski, Pippa Norris, and Catriona Burnes, (1994) ‘The Party and Women’ in , Paul Whiteley et al. (1994) op cit. p.617.

> ‘an election has had to be provided at somebody’s cost hitherto, and much of this is to be prohibited in the future. The result will be, I am afraid, that we shall not poll anything approaching our strength. The Radicals have the Trades Unions, the Dissenting Chapels, and every society for the abolition of property and morality working for them. Our supporters only want to be left alone, to be allowed to enjoy what they have, and they think that they are so secure that they will make no sacrifice of time or pleasure to prepare against the attack or to resist it. So to stave off the evil day as long as possible I should wish to retain the power of fighting elections by paid agency if necessary as in the past: - but I am afraid I am a small minority in the Party in the House of Commons – who only think of one thing – lessening the cheque to be drawn on their bankers.’ [303]

Sir Stafford Northcote accepted the inevitability of the Act and began to seek a solution, he confided to his diary ‘what will come out of the Corrupt Practices Bill is a question. It will render it necessary for us to develop voluntary action much more that has yet been done, for there will be little money to spare for paid agents.’ [304] Fortunately for the Conservatives in 1883 Drummond Wolff and Randolph Churchill had founded The Primrose League originally intended ‘to mould into a compact body the more active and energetic portions of the newer and more democratic school of Conservatism.’ [305] The League crossed the boundaries of age and gender, members were “Knights” or “Dames”, and with the addition of “Associates” in 1885 it

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[300] Cornelius O’Leary, (1962) op cit. p.164.
[301] Ibid. p.165
[302] Ibid. pp.165-166.
[303] W. H. Smith to Salisbury 14th August 1883. in H. J.Hanham, (1978) op cit. p.247.
[304] Andrew Lang, (1890 Two Vols.) op cit. Vol. 2, pp.372-373.
[305] Peter Marsh, (1978) op cit. p.58.

also bridged class boundaries. It provided a formal and institutionalised way to influence the political opinions of the population outside the narrow confines of Westminster. It offered only a small dose of politics amongst many other entertainments and was ideally placed to exploit the constraints of the Corrupt Practices Act, if only because it was virtually self-financed, and could provide a source of unpaid, willing, and enthusiastic party workers at election time.

The long overdue Representation of the People Act of 1884 equalised the franchise between County and Borough constituencies. Overall the electorate was increased by 67%, but in the counties the increase was understandably much higher at 162% [306] Such a measure alone would prove no advantage to the Tories as it would simply increase their majorities in their own heartlands. It had been pointed out in 1884 that

> 'the proportion of Conservative seats in the 1880 parliament was less than their percentage in the elections. Thus it would be in the Conservative interest to accept Liberal proposals for an extension of suffrage in the Counties, as long as such an extension was accompanied by a redistribution of seats which took away the built-in bias against them.' [307]

Added to this reasoning was the evidence from the 1874 and 1880 general elections where 'the county and small borough results showed, as both Disraeli and Salisbury realized, that the Conservative party need no longer fear a redistribution of seats contingent on the extension of the county franchise.' [308]

Consequently the Tories prevented the Representation of the People Act becoming law until the Redistribution Act of 1885 was passed. The chief effect of the Act 'was to abolish the electoral advantage of the South of England (two-thirds of the entire House of Commons being elected by one-quarter of the voters) and come closer to the ideal of equal electoral districts, although the theoretical distinction between boroughs and counties was preserved.' [309] The electoral; "playing field" was now more level than it had ever been, at least in England, but the Act also 'reinforced the power of the "Celtic Fringe"…The Welsh and the Irish were over-represented relative to their populations.' [310] The overall impact of these changes meant that organization became more vital than ever before.

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[306] See Cornelius O'Leary, (1962) op cit. p.182.

[307] 'The Value of Redistribution: A Note on Electoral Statistics', in *National Review*, Vol. IV, October 1884, pp.145-162. Quoted in Michael Pinto-Duschinsky, (1967) *The Political Thought of Lord Salisbury 1854-1868*, Constable, London, pp.157-158.

[308] E. J. Feuchtwanger, (2000) op cit., p.204.

'The Registration Act of 1885 meant that constituency party agents had to work very hard to keep working class voters on the registers. The fact that registration should depend on the activity, and be undertaken in the interests of a political party, was rightly criticised as an indefensible anomaly.' [311] As noted earlier registration of voters was a huge burden for constituency agents 'by 1900 registration was governed by 118 Acts and over 650 Judicial judgements, 60 forms were involved.' [312] The procedure became so complicated, yet so important, that in 1891 the National Society of Conservative Agents was formed to organize and oversee the process.

Thus the outcome of these four Acts was that 'parties had to form new local agencies for the increased number of constituencies – 426 in 1880 rising to 643 in 1885. Bribery and treating were no longer viable…[and] the number of party workers who could be paid was drastically reduced.' [313] Aided by their reformed and revitalized organization under the direction of "Skipper" Middleton the Conservatives had been able to take advantage of the split in the Liberal party and achieve election victory in 1886. Salisbury, however, was sensitive to the fact that their majority rested on their alliance with the rebel Liberal Unionists, in fact 'the sharp rise in the number of uncontested constituencies [in 1886] (219, almost one-third of the House) was due partly to pacts between the Conservatives and their allies the Liberal Unionists.' [314] He was .also concerned with the issue of confidence, he wrote to Balfour 'we shall not recover the confidence of the country. For it is the central figure of a party in the Commons to which constituents are wont to look, if their confidence is asked for that party.' [315] This was somewhat unfair to Northcote who was a tireless, if uninspiring, platform speaker. Salisbury returned to this theme in 1891, when in a speech at Nottingham he said 'if I were asked to define Conservative policy, I should say it was the upholding of confidence.' [316] Such pronouncements could be interpreted as insecurity, or indeed as a determination not to lose the advantage his party had gained. Certainly Middleton continued to exhort his party workers to maintain a high level of activity even after the 1886 election. In 1887 he circulated a letter to all party agents which is worth quoting here in full. It said

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[309] Cornelius O'Leary, (1962) op cit. p.182.
[310] Michael Bentley, (1984) op cit., p.250.
[311] Donald Read, (1979) op cit. p.310.
[312] Peter Marsh, (1978) op cit. p.194.
[313] Donald Read, (1979) op cit. p.312.

> Dear sir, the experience gained by the late elections have shown that the only method by which we can cope with the activity of the Gladstonian Party, is by placing able and energetic volunteer workers to reside in each parish during the period of a contest for the purpose of carefully watching the action taken by the Radical emissaries and counteracting without delay the mostly false statements with which they attempt to gain the votes of the labouring classes.
>
> With this object in view I shall be very glad if you can let me have the names of any gentlemen who will be prepared to undertake the work for the good of the party.
>
> I am also anxious, if it be possible, to obtain the services of volunteer cyclists as canvassers and for general work on the day of the poll. The employment of gentlemen cyclists has been tried on a small scale at the late elections and has been found most useful and a very great saving of expense.
>
> I shall be glad if you will give this your earliest attention so that should a by-election be sprung upon us at any moment we may be prepared to take the field with a fair prospect of success.' [317]

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[314] Cornelius O'Leary, (1962) op cit. p.185.

[315] Salisbury to Balfour 10th April 1886, in David Steele, (1999) op cit. p.158.

[316] David Steele, (1999) op cit. p.230.

[317] Quoted in Eric Alexander etc. (1961) op cit. pp.147-148.

The intention plainly was that the Conservative party organisation was to run like a well oiled machine, and be ready at short notice to meet any eventuality. Moreover Salisbury proved himself amenable to any device that would help to keep the party in power that did not contradict his strict principles. For example on the issue of working class candidates he wrote 'As far as I am concerned my vote is entirely in favour of Conservative Labour Candidates, wherever they have a good chance of winning the seat.' [318] A view confirmed by Northcote 'I should be very glad to see two or three Conservative Working-Men in parliament.' [319] 'He urged Middleton to co-operate with a campaign which Lord Woolmer planned in 1892 for systematic heckling of Gladstonian candidates.' [320] And he concurred with Middleton that the timing of elections should coincide with harvestime so that agricultural labourers would be distracted from voting. [321] We can conclude that Lord Salisbury was well aware of the importance of party organization,

> 'careful organization was even more important for the Conservatives than for the Liberals, he argued, placing his personal impress on the subject. For whereas Anglican clergy tended to keep their support for the Conservative party discreetly informed, Nonconformist denominations and Trade Unions did not hesitate to place their organization at the disposal of the Liberals. Salisbury urged upon Conservatives the duty of "perfecting your organization, to furnish a complete and legitimate substitute for these advantages."' [322]

His colleagues agreed and were at pains to ensure that the party organization understood that its function was to support the parliamentary party and not to challenge it. 'What we want is a professional and competent person who…knows how to turn to the best account the political forces which it is not his business to call into existence, which it is not his business to direct in matters of policy, but which it is his business to bring to the polls when the day of trial comes.'[323] To this end the twin appointments of "Skipper" Middleton as party agent, and Akers Douglas as chief whip, in conjunction with the electoral legislations of 1883-1885 which had revolutionized the conditions of political life, ushered in a new era in the central organizations of the Conservative party. These factors are well illustrated by the election of 1885 which was 'the first to be more or less dominated by the party associations. In 1880 many candidates had stood on their own initiative, in 1885 very few were not nominated or actively supported by their local party groups.' [324] The capable Middleton and Akers Douglas worked hand in glove 'providing Lord Salisbury with a party intelligence service upon which the latter came absolutely to rely.' [325] The Conservative organization had obviously outstripped that of their opponents in terms of efficiency, for example

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[318] Salisbury to Akers Douglas 3rd April 1885, in Eric Alexander etc. (1961) op cit. p.175.
[319] Northcote to Akers Douglas 5th April 1885, in Eric Alexander etc. (1961) op cit. p.176.

[320] Peter Marsh, (1978) op cit. p.190.
[321] Ibid. p.207.
[322] Ibid. p.185.

> 'whereas up to 1886 there was no marked difference between the two parties in the number of unopposed seats, after that date the number of seats unopposed by the Liberals increased considerably. In 1895, for example, the Liberals allowed 114 Conservatives to be returned unopposed (compared with only 10 Liberals); in 1900 the figure was 138 (compared to 22 Liberals).' [326]

However, the iron grip that the leadership held over the party organization meant that 'some of the National Union conferences in the Salisbury – Middleton era appear to have been so docile that they failed to fulfil their responsibility to keep the parliamentary leaders of the party informed of the mood of Conservative groups in the country.' [327] In as far, at least, as they were able to gauge that mood. The same could be said of the parliamentary party 'at the turn of the century, the Conservative party in the House of Commons had a leader and it had whips, but it lacked any form of organization that entailed Conservative MPs meeting on a regular basis.' [328] Had such machinery existed controversy over the timing of the "Khaki Election" of 1900, referred to earlier [329] may have been avoided. As it was 'Conservative Central Office's official Campaign Guide for the Khaki Election had more than a whiff of gunpowder to it,' [330] which many in the party found objectionable. Following victory in that election Salisbury had handed over the premiership to his nephew Arthur Balfour, but the legacy was something of a poisoned chalice.

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[323] Ibid. p.183.

[324] Cornelius O'Leary, (1962) op cit. p.183.

[325] Eric Alexander etc. (1961) op cit. p.52.

[326] Paul Adelman, (1970) op cit. p.53.

[327] R. T. McKenzie, (1955) op cit. p.177.

> 'Though he had played a crucial role in converting the party opportunity that Disraeli had created into actual power, and achieving thereby twenty years of Unionist domination of British Politics after 1886, Salisbury and his "old gang" had been unable to keep up with the pace of change, unable and indeed unwilling to keep their party facing towards the future. And for that there would be a terrible price to be paid.' [331]

Akers Douglas had been promoted to ministerial office in 1895

> 'and by the time Middleton resigned in 1903 it was clear that the party organization was running down. This crisis was aggravated by the fact that the party organization had become the focus of agitation by a rising group in the party, namely the tariff reformers led by Joseph Chamberlain.' [332]

Their aim was to gain control of constituency associations and support MPs who were in sympathy with their views, and also to gain control of the NUOCA and use it as a weapon to influence party policy. This second strategy was reminiscent of Randolph Churchill's campaign some twenty years earlier, however, Chamberlain presented a more serious threat. Churchill's position 'had been created by exploiting dissatisfaction both with the parliamentary leadership and with the organization of the party. When this dissatisfaction had been relieved by his own assumption of the leadership and by the re-organization of the party in 1886, he had no secure base from which to operate.' [333] Chamberlain, on the other hand, faced greater political problems, but he was shrewd enough never to forget that the source of his influence was largely his independent electoral base. Because of this 'by 1906 the Tariff Reform League had secured the support of some 300 constituency associations and gained control of the National Union.' [334] Conservative commitment to Tariff Reform can partly be explained because it offered a revenue-raising measure which could spread the burden of increased taxation across all sections of society, the bill for social reforms would not then be paid through class-based taxation. This was obviously attractive to the better-off classes who were Conservative supporters. Nevertheless the Unionist party was split, this was evident specifically at the very highest level, [335] it has been suggested, for example, that

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[328] Philip Norton, (1994) 'The Parliamentary Party and Party Committees', in Paul Whiteley et al. (1994) op cit., p.97.

[329] See footnotes 151 and 152 above.

[330] Andrew Roberts, (1999) op cit., p.777.

[331] John Ramsden, (1998) op cit. p.189.

[332] Zig Layton Henry, (1978) op cit. p.661.

> 'Chamberlain's single-handed advocacy of imperial preference bore the appearance of an attempt to salvage his own political fortunes at the expense of the conservatives and even of the other sections of the liberal unionists. This was the chief reason for the determination of the chancellor of the exchequer, Ritchie, to dish his proposal by refusing to put it in the budget. For Ritchie as well as being devoted to the theoretical interests of free trade was foremost in the manoeuvres, of dubious constitutional propriety, to form an anti-Chamberlain cabal within the Cabinet.' [336]

The party whips were faced with the problem of how 'to manage cliques and be aware how far leaders could go and still retain solid party support.' [337] The party leadership was thus facing problems on a number of fronts, and appeared impotent in its efforts to solve them. ‘Problems of policy and leadership played a large part in the 1906 defeat, but there was also a widespread feeling that the methods of party management were old fashioned.’ [338] That Balfour knew that his party was in disarray can be seen by his statement written some years later that ‘the greatest victory at the polls ever won by any party was won upon no policy at all – CB’s victory in 1906.’ [339] He had written immediately after the election, ‘it is curious that the Govt. which has the largest majority of modern times contains not a single individual whose personality appeals to the general public.’ [340] It could not have escaped Balfour’s notice that the Conservatives had been trounced by opponents whom he thought were totally lacking in policy initiatives and charisma, or what this implied about his own party.

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[333] J. P. Cornford, (1967) in Robson Robert (Ed.) (1967) op cit. p.303.

[334] Zig Layton Henry, (1978) op cit. p.661
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[335] For a detailed investigation, especially of the rivalry between Balfour and Chamberlain, see, David Dutton, (1979) 'Unionist Politics and the Aftermath of the General Election of 1906: A Reassessment' in *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 22, Issue 4, 1979, pp.861-876.

[336] P. Fraser, (1962) 'The Liberal Unionist Alliance: Chamberlain, Hartington, and the Conservatives, 1886-1904', in *English Historical Review*, 77:302, January 1962, pp.70-71. *Cf.* 'Sir Robert Morant's comments upon the conditions on the Cabinet of 1902 are recorded in Beatrice Webb, *Our Partnership,* [1946, Edited by Barbara Drake and Margaret I. Cole Longmans, London] p.240: as "Impossible to find out after a cabinet meeting…what has actually been the decision…So I gather that cabinet meetings have become more than informal – they are chaotic – breaking up into little groups, talking to each other without any one to formulate or register the collective opinion. Chamberlain would run the whole thing if he were not so over-worked by his own department."' Ibid. footnote p.69.

[337] Donald Read, (1979) op cit. P.316.

Ironically although their policy had apparently been rejected by the voters the Tariff Reform League emerged from the election as the strongest group in the party. ‘They demanded democratic reforms of the party organization *vis à vis* Central Office. These reforms would have made them even more influential in the party as Central Office strongly supported Balfour.’ [341] He stubbornly resisted, turning to the party grandees for support.

> ‘Lansdowne – whose attitude was summed up in his advice that “ The generals cannot be expected to take orders from the rank and file” – [and his associates] were the men that Balfour consulted. Like Gladstone in 1885, he could not bring himself to summon together all his ex-official colleagues to resolve the deadlock, fearing that the result might go against his personal inclinations: and like Gladstone he supported himself on the self-made assumption that his mediatory role was indispensable. But unlike Gladstone he had no solution of his own. Instead he was playing a purely defensive and Conservative game, resisting as Salisbury in similar circumstances had resisted Randolph Churchill’s bid in the 1880s to democratise the party.’ [342]

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[338] Stuart Ball, (1994) in Paul Whiteley et al. (Eds.) (1994) op cit. p171.

[339] Blanche E. C Dugdale, (1936 Two Vols.) op cit. Vol. 1, p.424.

[340] Balfour to Hicks-Beach 26th January 1906, quoted in Lady Victoria Hicks-Beach, (1932 Two Vols.) op cit., Vol.2, p.224.

[341] Peter Fraser, (1966) op cit., pp.274-275.

[342] Zig Layton Henry, (1978) op cit. pp.661-662.

However, because of the strength of his enemies Balfour was forced into concessions and reluctantly allowed a re-organization, the National Union assumed control of propaganda and publications, while the constituency associations gained the right to select and adopt their candidates. The Chief Whip and three men of his own choice were to consult with three chosen members of the National Union and liaise between The national Union and Central Office to bring important issues to the attention of the party leader. Re-organization could not help with the Conservative debacle over Lloyd George's 1909 "people's budget" and 'the two electoral defeats in 1910 [343] resulted in further demands for reform of the party machine, but perhaps because the Tariff reformers had gained the policy concessions they wished, the demands were concentrated on improving the electoral efficiency of the party.' [344] which had sunk to a new level. For example, a disgruntled Sir Joseph Lawrence wrote 'we lost Lancs. and York: - principally the former by rotten candidates… Fancy that popinjay Ian Malcolm with his perfume and dilettantism…in a constituency where people walk in clogs and women wear shawls on their heads at meetings.' [345] As a result 'in February 1911 Balfour appointed the Unionist Organization Committee (UOC) under the chairmanship of Aretas Akers Douglas a former Chief Whip…The responsibilities of the Chief Whip were to be limited to those of parliamentary management, and his other burdens would be shouldered by a Party Treasurer and a Party Chairman.' [346] The UOC reversed many of the reforms of 1906. 'Organization, finance, the provision of speakers and the provision of literature were vested in Central Office which thus regained the latter two functions.' [347] It has been argued that when Middleton had resigned in 1903 his successor had declined the post of Honorary Secretary of the National Union and it was this which helped precipitate ‘considerable shuffling and re-shuffling of responsibilities between the Central Office and the National Union in the course of the re-organizations which took place in 1906 and 1911, but none of these changes significantly modified the role of either organization.’ [348] But this is to ignore the fact that one new official, ‘the chairman of the party organization, a politician with cabinet rank was to replace the Chief Whip as head of Central Office and was to be appointed by the leader of the party.’ [349] Another, the Party Treasurer was to control finance. Thus, in a very real sense electoral efficiency gained the ascendancy over democratic principles, and the National Union, which had appeared to be flexing its muscles, reverted back to its original role of guaranteeing effective organization in the constituencies and representing, as far as possible, their interests to the leaders, but having no influence in policy making. In fairness to the Tory leadership, it must be pointed out that attempts to democratise the Liberal party’s organization had suffered a similar fate. ‘By the end of the 1890s the National Liberal Federation had totally abandoned its claim to shape Liberal policy: and in 1906 formulation of the Liberal programme for the landslide election victory was left to Campbell-Bannerman, the party leader.’ [350]

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[343] The Liberals lost their overall majority but retained power with the support of the Irish nationalists.
[344] Zig Layton Henry, (1978) op cit. p.662.
[345] Sir Joseph Lawrence to Sir Leo Maxse 2nd February 1910, in Neil Blewett, (1972) op cit. p.272.
[346] Stuart Ball (1994) in Paul Whiteley et al. (Eds.) (1994) op cit. p172.
[347] Zig Layton Henry, (1978) op cit. p.662.

With Balfour’s resignation in November 1911 the Tory Party entered uncharted waters. No Tory Party leader had ever before stepped down whilst in opposition. [351] Also, possibly for the first time, the new leader carefully considered accepting the position because of the state of the party. ‘Bonar Law’s alleged dictum “I am their leader. I must follow them” indicates something of the deliberation with which his choice was made, as does his reported remark to the Prime Minister in February 1912, “I am afraid I shall have to show myself very vicious, Mr Asquith, this session. I hope you will understand.”’ [352] Rhetoric and invective were still considered necessary in the public sphere. The Conservative Party organization had developed and evolved since Disraeli had started the ball rolling in 1852, it had challenged the leadership and failed, and yet the party still looked towards a strong leader to direct and control it. High Politics still held sway. As the free trade controversy rumbled on F. E. Smith wrote to Lord Derby ‘surely the right course is to avoid all *public controversy* at all costs and try to swing the party into a tenable position by *private* influence legitimately exercised.’ (original emphasis) [353] Not that such machinations were to be made public knowledge; Lord Derby’s brother wrote to him that ‘it seems…that the only possible way to do things is to discuss privately the question of the food taxes…and to pass publicly a vote of confidence in Bonar Law and Lord Lansdowne.’ [354] Donald Southgate concludes that ‘it is not suggested that mere organization could have achieved victory either in 1880 or 1906, but defeat was surely made more severe by a falling-off in organizational efficiency.’ [355] The Conservatives appeared to have learned that lesson well. If nothing else conservatism is pragmatic. They would regain a share of power in 1915 as part of the War-Time coalition, the party would then remain the dominant electoral force until the end of another World War in 1945.

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[348] R. T. McKenzie, (1955) op cit. p267.

[349] Zig Layton Henry, (1978) op cit p.662.

[350] Donald Read, (1979) op cit., p.322.

[351] Robert Shepherd, (1991) op cit p.113.

The question whether party organization deserves to be ranked alongside ideology and high politics as part of the Conservative party’s electoral armoury will be addressed in the conclusion. It can be stated at this juncture, however, that ideology appeared to be very difficult to transmit directly to the electorate; and the effect of political rhetoric was impossible to judge before elections, especially in new constituencies where there was no history of voting patterns. The party organization, at grass roots level, could at least communicate any information it uncovered to the party leadership when channels were established for it to do so.

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[352] John Ramsden, (1998) op cit. p216.

[353] F. E. Smith to Lord Derby 28th December 1912, quoted in Randolph S. Churchill, (1959) *Lord Derby: “King of Lancashire”* Heinemann, London, p.178.

[354] The Hon. George Stanley to Lord Derby 2nd January 1913, Ibid. p.180.

[355] Donald Southgate, (1974) op cit. p.25.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE CONSERVATIVE APPEAL FOR ELECTORAL SUPPORT.

This study has, so far, gone to great lengths to establish a justified and legitimate methodology; to explain exactly what Conservatives actually stood for in our period of study; and how the Conservative Party continually modified its organization as conditions constantly changed and evolved. It is now time to consider how all these factors translated into votes. How the party directly appealed to an expanding electorate, especially the then most numerous sector, the working class. Integral to understanding this process will be the role trade unionism and extra-parliamentary organization played in later Conservative strategy. Before carrying out this task it will be useful to reiterate both the ground-rules and findings of our investigation, and to show how circumstances, trends, and perceptions may dictate that principles and beliefs must sometimes be modified if they are to have any useful impact. Former Prime Minister, Tony Blair, told the 1995 Labour Conference (Labour were then in opposition), that ‘power without principle is barren, but principle without power is futile.’ The Conservatives during our period faced a similar dilemma, how they addressed that dilemma is one subject of this chapter.

Chapter one of the study has shown that there is overwhelming evidence that the realm of high politics during the nineteenth and early twentieth century was the exclusive preserve of a limited oligarchy who jealously guarded their privileged position. Moreover it cannot be gainsaid that the individuals who made up the membership of this oligarchy were the pre-eminent political personalities of their time, or that their political significance was immense. As Maurice Cowling has observed ‘power is exercised and decisions made, not by vast movements of opinion, but specifically by individual men.’ [356] However, it would be wholly misleading to suggest that these men operated in complete isolation and free from outside influence. ‘Since others followed where they led, innumerable opportunities arose for the exercise of creative power, but they were limited by the situations in which they found themselves, and reflected as much as they created the climate in which they worked.’ [357]

It has also been made clear that high politics was concerned with rhetoric and manoeuvre. ‘Rhetoric is the weaving of a narrative tale deliberately employed as a persuasive device…In politics, rhetoric may in addition involve simplification of complex ideological patterns for the sake of public presentation.' [358] Political manoeuvre highlights the 'relationships between situational necessity and the intentions of politicians' [359] when parameters are constantly under revision and a balanced response in the face of changing circumstances is demanded. High politics thus can be seen as the "politics of the possible"; about people and individuals; and about the business of government. 'But at the centre of power [in the nineteenth century] an oligarchy persisted which was not very different from that of the eighteenth century.' [360] Policy was indeed formulated at the highest possible level; but during our period the votes essential to enable the execution of that policy needed to be garnered from across a much wider social spectrum. This becomes evident when it is noted that

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[356] Maurice Cowling, (1963) op cit. p.22..

[357] Maurice Cowling, (1967) op cit. p.311.

> 'Of the seven changes of Ministry from party to party between 1846 and 1867, no less than six had no connection with the results of a general election. Since 1867 no such change of ministry has taken place, except during the two World wars, other than as a result of, or an immediate prelude to, a general election.' [361]

Over time it became apparent that leaders could no longer operate and dictate from their "ivory towers". 'The result of the electorate's choice…[was decided] as it happened, by majorities of much the same size drawn alternately from the two major parties.' [362] In 1885 it was noted that 'more and more…every year the battle of politics is transferred from Westminster, and is waged in the constituencies.' [363] The terms and conditions of that battle will be investigated here.

Chapter two of this study contained a necessarily long and complex investigation of what Conservatives stood for in our period. We were able to conclude that it is possible to identify with some certainty two substantive core concepts in conservative ideology. Firstly, an innate dislike of and resistance to change, however inevitable, unless such change may be characterized as "organic" and "natural." Secondly, the endeavour to make unavoidable change subservient to a belief that the forces which guide and control people and society are not man-made, and, therefore, ought not to be dependent upon the vagaries of human impulse. 'The process is abetted by substantive flexibility in the deployment of decontested concepts, so as to maximize under varying conditions the protection of that conception of change.' [364] This ultimately provides conservatism with its flexibility, adaptability, and its pragmatism. This conclusion is not, of course, unchallenged, for example, 'others such as Eccleshall and Cowling, rather than assembling a coherent dogma, have struggled to locate a core impulse to Conservatism which lay…in its vindication of inequality.' [365] This is a valid observation, but a "vindication of inequality" can easily be accommodated within our definition as a "decontested concept", albeit an important one. For example, 'Disraeli's gamble of extending the franchise to the urban masses was, therefore, justified in the interests of his party; it won the election of 1874, and in the longer term strengthened rather than weakened the electoral position of the Tories.' [366] Consequently, an orthodox reading of his motives in 1867 could be that he convinced his party to back a radical extension of the franchise on the grounds that it would benefit conservatism in the long run; but equally compelling is the assertion that 'nowadays historians regard Disraeli's triumph over the Second Reform Act of 1867 less as a bold attempt to mobilize new Tory voters than as a careful stratagem designed to make the party's existing supporters count for more in the election of MPs.' [367] Neither interpretation need challenge our ideological conclusions. The additional questions to be answered will be what other stratagems were employed, both to ensure the support of existing supporters, to woo the new voters created by successive extensions of the franchise; and how far Conservatives were prepared to compromise their principles to achieve those ends? A good illustration of such compromise is the action of Lord Salisbury, a vocal anti- democrat, concerning the 1884-1885 Franchise and Redistribution Acts. Although in opposition at the time, he managed to balance

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[358] Michael Freeden, (1996) op cit. p.35.
[359] Maurice Cowling, (1971) op cit. p.5.
[360] W. L. Guttsman, (1963) op cit., p.33.
[361] G. N. Sanderson, (1966) op cit. p.351.

[362] G. N. Sanderson, (1966) op cit. p.352.
[363] P. H. Bagenal, (1885) *The Tory Politics of The Marquis of Salisbury*, London. Quoted in Richard Shannon, (1996) *The Age of Salisbury 1881-1902: Unionism and Empire,* Longman, London and New York, p.61.

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[364] Michael Freeden, (1996) op cit. p.345.

[365] Jeremy Smith, (1996) 'Conservative Ideology and Representation of the Union with Ireland', in Francis Martin and Zweinger – Bargielowski (Eds.) (1996) op cit. p.19.

[366] E. J Feuchtwanger, (1968) op cit. p.82.

[367] Martin Pugh, (1988) 'Popular Conservatism in Britain: Continuity and Change, 1880-1987.' in *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 27, No. 3, July 1988, p.256.

> ‘a Liberal franchise reform against a bill to redistribute the constituencies. This redistribution, though it brought Britain close to the radical principle of equal sized constituencies, helped the Conservatives in two ways: first, the new pattern of single-member seats created strongholds for Conservatives in suburbs, seaside resorts, and in the residential enclaves of hitherto radical cities; and, second, the proliferation in the number of separate constituencies maximized the scope for plural voting, from which the Tories, as the representatives of propertied men, stood to benefit most. Between 1885 and 1914 there were around half a million plural voters who were believed to favour the Conservatives by about four to one.’ [368]

Compromise? Certainly, but unavoidable change managed in accordance with conservative ideology. ‘Ideologies do not go away,’ [369] nevertheless by employing his own pragmatism, and the flexibility of Conservative ideology Disraeli had created a concept of one-nation-conservatism; a conviction not shared or promoted by Salisbury, although both coveted the power of office. This chapter will, therefore, also investigate how Conservatives managed to disseminate their chosen message and secure support from an ever-expanding working class electorate. An endeavour inevitably hampered by the realization that, ‘Conservatives have always believed the [trade] unions posed a political and industrial threat…Historically, the Conservative Party has tried to distinguish between the working class and trade unions, but, as trade unionism proved difficult to divorce from the working class, it was difficult to attack the unions without attacking the working class.’ [370]

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[368] Martin Pugh, (1988) op cit., p.256.

[369] Iain Mackenzie, (1994) ‘The Arena of Ideology’, in Robert Eccleshall et al. (1994) op cit., p.22.

[370] Andrew Taylor, (1994) ‘The Party and The Trade Unions’, in Anthony Seldon and Stuart Ball, (Eds.) (1994) op cit., p.499. For a full investigation of this issue see Ross Mckibbin, (1990) *The Ideologies of Class: Social Relations in Britain 1880-1950*, Oxford University Press.

Changes to Conservative Party organization were examined in chapter three, and it is obvious that many of the changes that took place were designed to help boost electoral support. For example,

> ‘the National Union [was] founded in 1867 for the specific purpose of organizing Conservative support in the urban areas, where the franchise had been greatly extended and where the party had to gain ground if it was ever to escape from the minority position it had occupied since 1846.’ [371]

That said, party organization was to be kept on a tight rein; Disraeli was adamant that the party hierarchy would not be threatened, or that the carefully nurtured notion of “one nation conservatism” be compromised by appeals made specifically to any one class of voters. Shortly after its foundation he felt it necessary to admonish the National Union for transgressing this principle, saying ‘I have never been myself at all favourable to a system which could induce Conservatives who are working men to form societies confined merely to their class.’ [372] Within these confines, however, organization was correctly seen as imperative to electoral success. The Conservative victory in the 1874 general election was attributed largely to the improved party organization put in place by John Gorst; for which he received much praise, but, tellingly, little tangible reward. It has been argued that the party structures put in place after 1867 were ‘artificial growths, fostered by the few to involve and socialize the many into the discipline of the party.’ [373] Artificial or not, they had proved their worth, and despite feeling that his efforts had not received the full acknowledgement they merited Gorst continued to campaign for more organizational effort. In 1877 ‘he spoke of the importance to the Conservative Party of keeping its organization in perfect order. He drew a distinction between political organization and party management, the latter of which he characterized as skirmishing while upon the former devolved the real battle.' [374] This distinction is salient to understanding how the Conservative Party directed its appeal to voters. Party management was confined to the environs of high-politics, political organization was concerned with grass-roots activism and vote gathering. This is not to say that party leaders were disinterested in the activities directed at proselytising the Conservative message, but it did argue that party leaders must take account of the information and opinions that came from grass roots activists at the sharp end of electioneering. There was an understandable consensus that organization alone could not win power, but there was also the realization that poor organization could preclude electoral victory. Following the Conservative defeat at the 1880 general election Gorst made this point in a suitably nuanced manner,

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[371] Stuart Ball (1994) op cit. p.196.

[372] Richard Shannon, (1992) *The Age of Disraeli: 1868-1881: The Rise of Tory Democracy*, Longmans, London., p.167

[373] John Ramsden, (1978) *A History of the Conservative Party: The Age of Balfour and Baldwin*, Longmans, London, p.xi.

> 'it was not fair to say' he said, that in recent years 'the Conservative organization went to pieces,' he was glad of the opportunity to state publicly that it was not fair to say that their organization had gone 'to utter ruin,' or that their defeat was mainly attributable to defective organization. 'It was, however, right to say that their organization had not greatly improved, and that as compared with the organization of their opponents they were certainly left far behind.' [375]

This chapter, therefore, will also examine the strategies, ruses, and machinations of the Conservative Party organization as it strove to make up the ground lost to its opponents.

Even before the Reform Act of 1867 it was evident that those who engaged in high politics would need to take their message to the people if they harboured serious hopes of achieving power, they needed to be seen as well as heard. 'Gladstone was the first major statesman to take it for granted that a party leader with a policy to expound must go amongst the people to expound it. His speeches in South Lancashire in 1865 and 1868 offered an entirely new type of party leadership.'[376] The Conservatives had no comparable orator of equivalent standing nationally, and their defeat at the 1868 general election only served to highlight this deficiency. Furthermore, 'in the election of 1868 there was no "swing of the pendulum". There was merely an increase to about 110 of the 1865 Liberal majority of about seventy. But the enlarged electorate had decisively rejected the minority Conservative Government that had held office since 1866 – the first decisive rejection of any ministry since 1841.'[377] The resultant changes to Conservative Party organization have been dealt with in Chapter three of this study, but another equally important change was forced upon all leading politicians, not only Conservatives.

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[374] NUCCA minutes, 11th annual conference, Southsea, 30th June 1877, Quoted in Richard Shannon, (1992) op cit. p.329.

[375] NUCCA minutes, St James' Hall, London, July 1880, Quoted in Richard Shannon, (1992) op cit. p.382.

> 'From 1872, the famous speeches – famous in their day and in the history books – are, on balance, extra parliamentary speeches. Parliamentary speeches of general political significance are few compared with those of the Manchester Free Trade Hall, the Crystal Palace, "peace with honour", the Midlothian Campaigns, the tariff reform campaign…The extension of the franchise made extra parliamentary speechmaking necessary; the continuing limits on the electorate made it effective.'[378]

Gladstone had set the trend and it was imperative that the Conservatives made the most of this new weapon. By and large, 'Disraeli made few speeches outside the House of Commons',[379] but at the prompting of his lieutenants, mainly John Gorst, he took up the challenge, and the few speeches he did make were momentous. At Manchester, on 3rd April 1872, during a visit that had taken two years to arrange,[380] he set out his vision of conservatism, but also utilized the opportunity to point out that the Liberal Party, which had been in power since 1868, had practiced policies in both domestic and foreign affairs that deserved public opprobrium. At

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[376] H. J. Hanham, (Ed.) (1969) op cit., pp.224-225.

[377] G. N. Sanderson, (1966) op cit., p.351.

[378] H. C. G. Matthews, (1987) 'Rhetoric and Politics in Great Britain', in, P. J. Waller, (Ed.) (1987) *Politics and Social Change in Modern Britain: Essays Presented to A. F. Thompson.* The Harvester Press, Sussex and St Martins Press, New York. p.39.

[379] H. J. Hanham, (Ed.) (1969) op cit. p.224.

[380] The Earl of Derby noted in his diary on 30th March 1872 that Disraeli was reluctant to make the visit, 'it had been forced upon him by importunity continued ever since the last General Election…and at last he was obliged to give way.' Quoted in John Vincent, (Ed.) (1994) op cit. p.102.

Crystal Palace, on 24th June 1872, he admitted that his party too had made errors in the past, and set out its future path in greater detail.

> 'The Tory party' he said, 'unless it is a national party, is nothing. It is not a confederacy of nobles, it is not a democratic multitude; it is a party formed from all the numerous classes in the realm – classes alike and equal before the law but whose different conditions and different aims give vigour and variety to our national life. Liberalism', he contended, had 'endeavoured to substitute cosmopolitan for national principles.' Toryism, on the other hand had three great objects, 'to maintain the institutions of the country…to uphold the Empire of England…[and] the elevation of the condition of the people.' [381]

With hindsight this speech was little short of a *tour de force*, it succinctly summed up the Tory doctrines, attacked the Liberals, made clear the difference between the two parties, and gave a vision for the future. He was attempting to tap into the national *zeitgeist* by 'adopting a newly popular course rather than pioneering a novel notion, so far from creating the sentiment, he merely recognized it and sought to exploit it.' [382] He was appealing, in a large degree, directly to those members of the electorate who were not "natural" Conservative voters. This was to prove a hugely successful ploy, in fact it has been argued that 'it is to the continuity of a broad (and broad minded), dominant popular culture that the Tory party appealed with the most success.'[383] But there were caveats to this new brand of conservatism, 'Disraeli was introducing his party to the politics of mass mobilization, but hardly to those of mass participation, and certainly not to those of mass arousal.' [384] . Preservation of the *status quo* was one of the overriding principles that the Conservative party stood for, one of their ideological priorities, the last thing they wanted was a whole tranche of new voters seeking to assert their rights or make demands via the ballot box. The answer to this conundrum illustrates the Janus-faced nature of Disraeli's appeal to the people,

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[381] J. T. Ward, (1974) op cit., pp.88-89.

[382] Ibid. p.89.

[383] Patrick Joyce, (1980) op cit. p.302.

[384] Paul Smith, (1996) *Disraeli: A Brief Life*, Cambridge University Press, p166.

> ‘the 1872 speeches were designed not to invite him [the working man] to assert his claims from below, but to assure him of the satisfaction of his needs by beneficent agency from above…Manchester and the Crystal Palace, rather than welcome the working man into the political arena, sought to persuade him of the merits of staying out of it – except to vote Conservative.’ [385]

To achieve these seemingly incompatible goals the Conservatives were tapping into a resource which had been identified among the lower classes, that of “deference”. As early as 1867 Walter Bagehot in his classic work *The English Constitution* had identified deference as a major aspect of English society, and Disraeli and his colleagues astutely sought to exploit the phenomenon for their own interests. ‘The deferential voter would literally believe that those of a higher social class would be best fitted to represent his interests and his area in parliament. This was the deference of a man who “knew his place.” [386] This apparent contradiction of seeking to woo the working man to conservatism, whilst at the same time seeking to exclude him from politics may, at first, appear irrational, but can be explained by a contingent principle of conservative ideology and their newly discovered synergy with the electorate. Thus

> ‘it would be quite misleading to argue that all Tory speeches were non-rational or intended to be so, but it would be fair to say that Tories in general distrusted the concept of politics based on rationality, that they perceived the growing significance of symbol in politics, and that they had, especially in the heritage of Disraeli, a clear and early understanding that, as Graham Wallas observed, “the empirical art of politics consists largely in the creation of opinion by the deliberate exploitation of sub-conscious, non-rational inference”. The themes of monarchy, religion, race and imperialism fall conveniently into this category.’ [387]

The success of the Conservative party in the 1874 general election would appear to vindicate Disraeli’s vision of one-nation-conservatism, and also to prove the effectiveness of extra-parliamentary speech-making. A. V. Dicey remarked after the election that because deference was still so widespread and powerful, ‘democracy in England is as yet, it should be noted, by no means wholly democratic.’ [388] This may be so, but just as organization alone cannot win elections, neither can rhetoric or deference. The Tories had been successful in consolidating those they considered as natural supporters. Frederic Harrison concluded after the election,

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[385] Ibid. pp.166-167.

[386] Robert Waller, (1994) ‘Conservative Electoral Support and Social Class’, in, Anthony Seldon and Stuart Ball, (Eds.) (1994) op cit. p.583. *Cf.* see Robert McKenzie and Allan Silver, (1968) *Angels in Marble: Working Class Conservatives in Urban England,* Heinemann Educational, London, *passim*, for a detailed and illuminating explanation of working-class deference.

[387] H. C. G. Matthews in P. J. Waller, (Ed.) (1987) op cit. p.50. The quotation is taken from Graham Wallas, (1920 3rd Edition, originally published 1908) *Human nature in Politics,* A. Constable, London, p.98.

> ‘The real truth is that the middle-class or its effective strength has swung round to Conservatism…When we look at the poll in the City of London, in Westminster, in Middlesex, in Surrey, in Liverpool, Manchester, Leeds, and Sheffield, in the metropolitan boroughs and in the home counties, in all the centres of middle-class industry, wealth and cultivation, we see one unmistakeable fact, that the rich trading class, and the comfortable middle-class has grown distinctly Conservative.’ [389]

The upper-class, of course, had always been susceptible to conservatism, but now the newly enfranchised middle-class ‘the ratepayer democracy of the growing cities, faced with a Liberal Party increasingly inclined to social intervention, seemed to have moved towards the Conservatives as the party of property and cheap government.’ [390]

The tendency of the upper and middle classes to develop conservative leanings inevitably had a “knock-on” effect regarding working class support. There were self-evidently ‘many reasons why it might be felt “politic” to vote for the local landowner, plutocrat, or other man of influence.’ [391] Even so there were other influences at work which assisted the Tories. The symbolism of Disraeli’s triumphant trip to Lancashire, culminating in his Manchester speech, was not lost on the working men of industrial Britain; who, furthermore had a well developed culture all of their own.

> ‘The notion that Conservative support, especially among working class voters arises from feelings of deference to a governing elite of superior social status only describes attitudes associated with a social identity which is determined by other factors. Electoral

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[388] Quoted in Donald Read, (1979) op cit., p.173.

[389] Frederic Harrison, ‘The Conservative Reaction’ in *Fortnightly Review*, Vol. 15, March 1874, pp. 298 and 304.

[390] Bruce Coleman, (1988) *Conservatism and the Conservative Party in Nineteenth Century Britain,* Edward Arnold, London, p.173.

[391] Robert Waller in Anthony Seldon and Stuart Ball, (Eds.) (1994) op cit. p.584.

> ideologies can reinforce an existing social identity and help to make it politically significant by assisting the organization of mass political parties with particular political images.' [392]

In short, the working class could not be bullied, but even so evidence points to 'the staggering weight of influence rather than coercion, above all in Lancashire.' [393] Importantly that influence was not always politically motivated. It was noted at the time 'in Lancashire for example rival factories contested elections on other than political grounds, "politics resolve themselves into partisan warfare, and the real objects of political parties are totally forgotten in the zest of local clanships."' [394] It was common to 'hear of "Tory Mills" and "Liberal Mills", or "Tory Shops" and "Radical Shops"…The borough [Blackburn] is divided…there are no relations and no contacts but that of foe with foe.' [395] The explicit and vehement support given by the Tories to the Church of England, and the confluence of Nonconformity with Liberalism, also gave the Conservatives a political advantage, especially among working men, especially when religion was a major factor in the electoral equation.

> 'Protestantism articulated a widespread popular dislike for the narrowness and restrictiveness of Nonconformity. It also took the form of a Tory populism that sometimes capitalized on this opposition of temper, combining it with elements of class feeling…The notion that the Church of England was the National Church, "the church of the people", differentiated from the congregational ethos of Nonconformity by its parish system and the pastoral care of all was an idea that received considerable support.' [396]

The "church of the people" also offered greater freedom than strict Nonconformity, a fact which resonated with many working men, 'Nonconformity's obsession with temperance lay at the root of this opposition of feeling, giving it a special value for the Tory party.' [397] The Conservatives' association with the brewing industry was useful in the years before the 1883 Corrupt Practices Act, simply because

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[392] Andrew Gamble, (1974) op cit., p.204.
[393] Patrick Joyce, (1980) op cit. p.218.
[394] W. A. Abram, 'Social Conditions and Political Prospects of the Lancashire Workmen', in *Fortnightly Review*, Vol. 4 (New Series) Oct. 1868, p.439 Quoted in Patrick Joyce, (1980) op cit. p.201.
[395] Patrick Joyce, (1980) op cit., p.206.
[396] Patrick Joyce, (1980) op cit. pp.241 and 253.
[397] Ibid. p.254.

> ‘political largesse was a continuation of the politics of the market by other means, but for large parts of the electorate the politics of the market were nothing other than an adjunct to the politics of influence…The Conservatives seem in general to have been better able to respond to politics as participatory, local and convivial, and to maintain these elements in political conduct as a means of managing the mass electorate.’ [398]

Thus the Conservative party was able to capitalize on a range of favourable local influences their ‘deliberate identification with key aspects of urban popular culture, such as the pub, football and racing, was intended to distinguish them from the “moral reforming” style of Liberal politics.’[399] It was true that the new voters had freedom of choice under the protection of the 1872 Ballot Act, but nevertheless ‘the lower down the nineteenth century social scale was the voter, the more likely was he to incline – or succumb – to the political complexion of his primary neighbourhood.’ [400] The inclusiveness of the Conservative message meant that in many urban communities of the time that political complexion was Tory.

Once in power Disraeli’s administration passed legislation that improved the working man’s legal status and employment rights, ‘the considerations which persuaded…Disraeli to take a major step in the reform of labour law seem to have been largely ones of electoral expediency, though there may also have been some gratitude to those sections of the enfranchised working classes which had voted Tory in 1874.’ [401] This was not to be enough, however, to secure another term in office. In his election manifesto in 1880,

> ‘the only direct appeal open to him as a peer…caused surprise. It took the form of an open letter to the Duke of Marlborough as Viceroy of Ireland and concentrated almost entirely on the danger of Irish separatism…[he] was using the threat from the Home-

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[398] Ibid. p.276

[399] Jon Lawrence, (1993) ‘Class and Gender in the Making of Urban Toryism, 1880-1914’ in *English Historical Review*, Vol. 108, Issue 428, July 1993, p.638..

[400] Patrick Joyce, (1980) op cit.223.

[401] Bruce Coleman, (1988) op cit. p.147,

> Rulers to focus on what he saw as his strongest claim to re-election, that he had raised the power and prestige of the country – when Gladstone, he said, had done the reverse.' [402]

Having had his finger on the pulse of the nation in 1874, he had been unable to keep it there. He blamed the 1880 defeat on overconfidence and poor organization, but there were other possible reasons. 'The economic situation …had certainly hit the government hard in both counties and cities. "Hard Times"…has been our foe concluded Disraeli, though Salisbury heard tales that the Anglican clergy had failed them, "either by actively voting against or at least by skulking".'[403] Looking to the future, Salisbury was particularly perturbed that 'the size of the Liberal majority might indicate a shift of grim proportions in a radical direction in the desires of the electorate, fulfilling his forebodings in 1867.' [404] In any event the reality was that the Conservatives found themselves back in opposition, and following Disraeli's death in 1881 the party was thrown into further turmoil, with not even the choice of his successor being a foregone conclusion. Lord Salisbury, who was eventually to take over the leadership, knew that some things needed to be persevered with. For example,

> 'he blamed Gladstone for introducing extra-parliamentary speaking [and] despite
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> loathing the whole process and considering it personally demeaning, Salisbury realised that the advancing democratic tide meant that he could not allow Gladstone to monopolize British platform oratory. Between 1880 and 1886 Salisbury appeared more than seventy times all over the country…he was to excel at platform oratory.' [405]

Oratory alone, however, would never be enough to restore the fortunes of the Conservative party after the blows of losing a general election, their charismatic leader, and their political direction. Becoming leader, under these circumstances, was something of a double-edged sword for Salisbury. On the one hand,

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[402] Edgar Feuchtwanger, (2000) op cit., p.203.

[403] Bruce Coleman, (1988) op cit. p.156.

[404] Salisbury to Balfour 10th April 1880, quoted in Mrs. Edgar Dugdale, (Ed. 1930), *A. J. Balfour, Chapters of Autobiography*, Cassell & Co. Ltd., London, pp.127-128.

[405] Andrew Roberts, (1999) *Salisbury: Victorian Titan*, Weidenfield & Nicolson, London, pp.248-249.

> ‘at this time many middle-class as well as working-class voters were being encouraged to identify a common interest with the ruling parliamentary elite as members of a patriotic British nation increasingly under threat from outside…it was Lord Salisbury who proved to be the chief practitioner, and certainly the beneficiary, of this approach to politics.’ [On the other hand], ‘Salisbury recognized that the latent conservatism in the British people could not automatically be translated into Conservatism; it had to be cultivated and mobilized for political purposes.’ [406]

Populism was anathema to Salisbury who made no secret of the fact that he distrusted democracy. In fairness, however, others of his rank and status had similar reservations, for example, ‘Lord Hartington and Lord Rosebery among the Liberals might feel little more love for democracy than did Salisbury; but without too great a strain on their consciences they could in public express a watery sympathy with popular government, while, in the privacy of high party councils and high office, they attempted to restrain it.’ [407] Salisbury had opposed many of the policies and organizational reforms that now made up Disraeli’s legacy, but the core values of his conservatism remained official policy. ‘In particular, Tories propagated such causes as the defence and expansion of the empire, the monarchy, the church establishment, the defence of religious education, the union with Ireland, private property, and the House of Lords.’ [408] Despite this, a major stumbling block was that many senior Conservatives were still very wary of the prospect of creating a modern party with a mass membership to compete with the Liberals. ‘The Tory defeat in 1880 only deepened the dilemma: if they resisted the creation of a popular Toryism, they might simply continue to lose elections, yet if they tried to go down the Liberal road, they might well destroy the whole character of Conservatism.’ [409] Salisbury was the embodiment of traditional Conservatism and was determined that its substantive core concepts would not be compromised, its ideological integrity and coherence must be preserved at all costs. He

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[406] Martin Pugh, (1988) op cit., p.273.
[407] Peter Marsh, (1978) op cit., pp.16-17.
[408] Martin Pugh, (1988) op cit., p.273.
[409] Martin Pugh, (1988) op cit. p.259.

> ‘made a sharp distinction between the general philosophy of Toryism and the short-term political needs of the Conservative Party. After 1867, he recognised that the interests of the former were not always realised through the vehicle of the latter…[he] was acutely conscious of the Conservative Party’s failings, principally its traditional willingness to ditch its principles when the prospect of office beckoned.’ [410]

Liberalism, especially after the election victory in 1880, had accustomed the electorate to view the government as basically beneficent. [411] In fact, ‘from 1884 a central assumption of British politics, which the Conservative party did not dispute, was that finding an answer to the social question was bound to be an electoral imperative…[however] ‘“Libertarian” Conservatives were implacably opposed to big government and a “dependency culture”’ [412] Wholesale state intervention would never be seriously considered by Salisbury, but he was amenable to a “quietist stance”, that is he was ‘prepared to accept that State action was helpful to social problems, but on a piecemeal basis, with proposals being assessed on their individual merits.’[413] Allied to this concession to state interventionism, he instigated a policy that on every possible occasion ‘Conservatives laboured the point that redistribution of the property of the rich would not benefit the poor, but that their security lay in the property of the rich. “What is of all things important to them is that capital should flow, that employment should exist, that wages should fertilise the channels of commerce.”’ [414] In this way Salisbury was able to accommodate most factions within his party, and at the same time dangle several carrots to the working class electorate. Even so, he, like some others, but unlike Disraeli, had always conceived of the Tories as a minority party. Because of this ‘at various times Peel, Derby, and Salisbury had each concluded that true Conservative policy was best pursued from the opposition benches, a view that took for granted Tory strength in the Lords.' [415] The salience of this strength in the House of Lords, however, would be difficult to communicate to many somewhat unsophisticated grass-roots Tories, especially those of the working class, therefore, the pursuit of power was imperative to stave of any danger of the party declining or breaking up.

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[410] Andrew Roberts, (1999) op cit. p.849.

[411] For a more detailed explanation of this view see Richard Shannon, (1996) op cit. pp. 182-183.

[412] E. H. H. Green, (1996) op cit., pp.227 and 229.

[413] Ibid. pp.231-232.

[414] Lady Gwendolen Cecil, (1931,3rd, of an eventual 4 Vols.) *The Life of Robert Marquis of Salisbury,* Hodder & Stoughton, London, Vol. 3, pp.65-66,

The Conservatives, and Salisbury in particular, were helped out of this dilemma by a little recognised dimension of Victorian politics, namely that

> 'despite the enthusiasm of historians for reading a "two-party system" into nineteenth century politics at every opportunity, success in the parliamentary game had often gone to leaders capable of drawing support from beyond a single party…Change of political fortune had not always depended on shifts of "public opinion" between two monolithic parties.' [416]

Salisbury was well aware that it would be difficult to independently achieve an overall parliamentary majority in the House of Commons, but needed to be cautious as to whom he was perceived to be aligned with. There had, for example been '"Lib-Lab" MPs in Parliament from 1874 onwards, but never any "Tory-Labs."' [417] . Thus when Gladstone's government fell, over a vote on a budget issue in June 1885, Salisbury formed a minority government and, since the parliament was nearing the end of its office, began to plan for an election. It is, of course, in the arena of inter-party negotiations that high politics comes into its own, and, following the effects of the 1884 Representation of the People Act, the Irish Home Rule Party led by Charles Parnell was forecast to capture the vast majority of Irish seats. That same Act had also greatly increased the British electorate making the forthcoming election a test of the popularity of the two major parties. 'Home Rule was not a major issue in the campaign because as yet neither Liberal nor Conservative leaders had wanted it to be,' but it had been discussed in private, and 'Salisbury rejected overtures from Gladstone to enact it.' [418] Although Salisbury knew that Gladstone favoured Home Rule, and that he and his party would never seriously countenance such a move, he did have the advantage of being in charge of the, albeit minority, incumbent government. Using this advantage, and with Salisbury's knowledge, his 'Irish minister, Lord Carnavon, was secretly discussing a Home Rule pact with Parnell.' [419] This was a useful ploy to tempt the Home rulers into believing that they may possibly exact some concession from the sitting Tory government. 'Though there was no formal deal – indeed studied ambiguity was essential for Salisbury as he strove to hold his cabinet together and to keep his following in the country blissfully ignorant – Parnell advised Irish voters in Britain to support Conservative candidates, a move reckoned to be significant in some twenty borough constituencies.' [420] These machinations represent high politics at its most effective in terms of electoral power-broking, they also illustrate its inherent duplicity

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[415] Bruce Coleman, (1988) op cit. p.207.

[416] Ibid. pp.204-205.

[417] Henry Pelling, (1968) *Popular Politics and Society in Late Victorian Britain*, Macmillan, London, p.104.

> 'Whether Gladstone's behaviour in being a convinced home-ruler but taking care that neither the Irish, the British public, nor the Liberal party should know it, or Salisbury's behaviour as a convinced anti-home ruler in encouraging the Irish to hope that something worthwhile might be got out of the Conservative party was the most reprehensible political manoeuvre is a nice question.' [421]

It would, however, be misleading to cast the Irish in the part of innocent dupes, they were understandably playing the same game seeking to further their own cause. The Home-Ruler Timothy Healy wrote to the Liberal Henry Labouchere explaining their strategy.

> 'If we supported your party next time, the Lords would throw out or render useless any Bill the Commons passed…If that institution were abolished we should be great fools not to be friendlier with the Liberals, but they are almost powerless to help us, even if they were sincere, so long as the Lords are all powerful.' [422]

As the general election drew nearer, Healy made it clear that all other considerations counted for nothing. He wrote to Labouchere again

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[418] Bruce Coleman, (1988) op cit . p.172.

[419] Iain Mclean, Alastair McMillan, Denniss Leech, (2005) 'Duverger's Law, Penrose's Index and the Unity of the UK'. In *Political Studies*, Issue 3, Vol. 53, 2005, p.467.

[420] Bruce Coleman, (1988) op cit. pp.172-173.

[421] Richard Shannon, (1996) op cit. pp.188-189.

[422] Healy to Labouchere 25th May 1885, quoted in Emily Allyn, (1931) op cit., p.129.

> Its no use discussing it from any other than the expediency standpoint. We have to make the best fight we can for a small country, and clearly, if we could put the Tories in and hold them dependant on us, that is our game. With the House of Lords behind them and our help, they could play ducks and drakes with the Union, were they so minded.' [423]

The whole Home Rule issue added extra impetus to Salisbury's determination to achieve office in the interest of furthering Conservative principles. 'If Irish Home rule were to be stopped, the election needed to be won, and Salisbury ditched the convention by which peers stayed aloof from elections to the Lower House' [424] by delivering a series of extra-parliamentary election speeches. When he repudiated the pact brokered by Carnarvon, his Irish minister resigned, but Salisbury was unrepentant, he wrote to Carnarvon 'I am representing more than anything else the mandate of the country to resist Home Rule. The country does not understand nuances…The point on which we differ has become the paramount question of the day.' [425] No doubt Salisbury was sincere, and believed what he said, but nevertheless he was careful to ensure that news of Carnarvon's resignation did not leak out before the election. Salisbury's brinkmanship paid off when after the election the Liberal lead of 86 seats over the Tories was exactly cancelled out by the 86 seats of the Irish Home rulers who nominally supported the Conservatives. He thus took office in a hung parliament, hardly a satisfactory state of affairs, but at least the Conservatives retained power and a trump card; Salisbury already knew that the Home Rule issue was to come to his aid.

On 16th December 1885 Herbert Gladstone had briefed the Liberal newspaper *The Leeds Mercury,* that his father was sympathetic to the idea of granting some form of home rule to Ireland. This information was leaked to the Conservative national newspaper *The Standard,* which promptly published an exposé on 17th December. This affair became known as the "Hawarden Kite" and presented the Conservatives with a golden opportunity to cement their currently tenuous grasp on office. Salisbury engineered a Commons defeat for his government over an unimportant amendment to an agriculture Bill on 27th January 1886 and seized the opportunity to resign 'in order that Gladstone's party, rather than his own, would split over Irish Home Rule. (The Carnarvon affair was not revealed for some decades)' [426] Having had his hand forced Gladstone duly introduced a Home Rule Bill in March 1886. It failed in June when 93 Liberals voted with the opposition thereby bringing down the government. Salisbury's deft handling of high politics did not escape the notice of Joseph Chamberlain who wrote that 'the situation is a curious one. There is a majority for the Liberal party, and an immense majority against the policy of its leader. Mr. Gladstone's view appears to be to widen the split, and to drive all his former supporters either out of politics or over to the Tories.' [427] Liberal opposition to the Bill had been orchestrated by Joseph Chamberlain and Lord Hartington, 'but at the time the association was for temporary purposes – the defeat of the Home Rule Bill, against which the two leaders mustered ninety-three "dissident liberals", and the preservation of the parliamentary seats of these followers in the ensuing general election by an agreement with the conservatives. It was only after a year that this agreement became a written compact' [428] These Liberal anti-Home Rulers assumed the title of Liberal Unionists and organized themselves into a separate party: their agreement with the Conservatives was that 'seats held or contested by conservatives, or by liberal unionists, in the election of 1886 should continue to be held by members of the same party within the Unionist alliance, and that the contesting of other seats or disputes about candidates should be determined by the joint decision of the two heads of the parties in the house of commons.' [429] Salisbury and the Conservatives had thus cemented an alliance, utilising the support of another party to retain their grasp on power. After the defeat of Gladstone's Home rule Bill

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[423] Healy to Labouchere 16th October 1885. Ibid. p.129.

[424] Andrew Roberts, (1999) op cit. p.389.

[425] Ibid. p.394.

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[426] Iain Mclean, Alastair McMillan, Denniss Leech, (2005) op cit. p.467.

[427] Chamberlain to Harcourt 19th July 1886, quoted in Peter Fraser, (1966) op cit., p.108.

[428] P. Fraser, (1962) op cit., p.56. NB. This article gives a comprehensive overview of the Alliance without being prolix.

> 'the electoral pact operated with remarkable smoothness and 316 Tories and 79 Liberals supporting either Hartington or Chamberlain were returned on the Unionist side, giving a majority of about 120 over the Liberals and Home Rulers. Not a Tory majority but certainly a Unionist majority.' [430]

It would be wrong to assume that the Conservatives had taken their victory for granted. Salisbury had set up a Special Commission to investigate links between Parnell and his colleagues with those who perpetrated outrages on behalf of Irish nationalism. His 'intention was to connect in the minds of the British public the indelible idea that if not necessarily Parnell himself, then those around him, especially other Irish MPs, condoned and even initiated outrages, including murder.' [431] His opponents ought not to have been surprised at this tactic since it represented established Conservative policy and another weapon in their armoury.

> 'During the period between the Congress of Berlin in 1878 and the outbreak of the Boer War in 1899, it was imperial conflicts and disasters that provided the most plentiful material for the apostles of popular Conservatism. This was the time when Conservatives acquired the habit of impugning the patriotism of their political opponents and portraying them as, at best, feeble friends of Britain's enemies, or, at worst, traitors.'[432]

This aspect of policy, especially after the "Hawarden Kite", gave the Tories a chance 'to regroup on a "national" course reminiscent of Disraeli' [433] In this respect even terminology and rhetoric were deemed worthy of close attention. At a special conference of the NUCCA it was suggested

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[429] Ibid. p.56, footnote 3.
[430] Bruce Coleman, (1988) op cit. p.175.
[431] Andrew Roberts, (1999) op cit. p.452.
[432] Martin Pugh, (1988) op cit. p.273.
[433] Richard Shannon, (1996) op cit. p.190.

> 'that the names Tory and Conservative, always an important obstacle, might become more so.' A delegate, Ashmead Bartlett, 'suggested the advantage of informally dropping into the usage of Loyalist, Unionist, or, preferably National. This would' he pointed out, 'assist many of our patriotic Liberal friends, who would be happy to collaborate with the "great National party." Let it be hoped' Bartlett urged, 'that this would grow into a new usage (although never to be mechanically adopted); for there was obvious need for the electoral support of patriotic Liberal MPs.' [434]

Bartlett went on to form a Patriotic Association which transformed 'jingoism into a patriotism which was organized and respectable, and at the service of the Conservative Party.' [435] Initiatives such as this, of course, whether implemented or not, could only enhance their electoral prospects, but could not disguise weaknesses elsewhere in Conservative policy.

> 'Of all the issues between the parties, Ireland was the one which gave Salisbury's governments the firmest base in majority sentiment, though it was a clear majority only in England, not in Scotland, Wales, or, of course, Ireland itself. Conservative publicists emphasized the centrality of Home Rule as an issue. When other issues came to the fore Conservative support fell away.' [436]

This was the case in the 1892 general election. The Liberals incorporated the Newcastle programme into their manifesto, a detailed schedule of projected reforms; controversial but explicit. Salisbury could only respond with an Address to the Electors of the United Kingdom, 'but his purpose was less to set out a detailed programme than to define the issues on which he thought the election would turn.' [437] He knew that he could not compete with the Radicals on their own terms, and was willing to concede their own ground to them, and stand upon his own: even at the expense of losing votes and disappointing his Liberal Unionist allies.

> 'Salisbury's electoral pessimism (since 1887 the opposition had been making 4 or 5 gains a year in by-elections and they made 5 in 1891) was strengthened by his belief that the democratized "socialist" legislation of his second administration had fatally alienated old-fashioned supporters…Consequently rather than fighting on the legislative

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[434] Ibid. p.203. Taken from the minutes of The NUCCA Special Conference, Westminster Palace Hotel, London 15th may 1886, pp.6-8.

[435] Hugh Cunningham (1986) ' The Conservative Party and Patriotism' in Robert Colls and Philip Dodd (Eds.) (1986), *Englishness: Politics and Culture 1880-1920,* Croom Helm, London, p.285.

[436] Bruce Coleman, (1988) op cit. p.189.

[437] John Barnes and Richard Cockett, (1994) 'The Making of Party Policy', in Anthony Seldon and Stuart Ball, (Eds.) (1994) op cit. p.354.

> achievements of his administration or on Chamberlain's ideas for old-age pensions, he kept as far as possible free of these "doctrinaire issues to fight, in 1892 as in 1886, on the issue of Home Rule.' [438]

The Conservatives lost narrowly in 1892, Conservatives won 268 seats, the Liberals 270, the Irish Nationalists 81, and the Liberal Unionists 47. Gladstone thus formed a government with the support of the Irish Nationalists. Salisbury appeared unconcerned, it had been difficult to assert conservative principles whilst relying on the support of the Liberal Unionists, who were liberal in most things other than Home Rule. He confided to his nephew shortly before the election of 'his strong conviction that I can get better terms for property out of office than I can in office.' [439] He was also secure in the knowledge that future attempts to enact Home Rule would be rejected by the Conservative majority in the House of Lords. His distrust of democracy meant that such an attitude posed no problems for his conservative principles, simply 'excusing some of the anomalous characteristics of the Upper House by pointing out the arbitrariness and folly of treating the Lower as a steadily reliable index of public opinion. Salisbury drew the conclusion that "it is the English Constitution *as a whole,* that has succeeded. The illogical provisions of one part of it have balanced the illogical provisions of another."'[440]

Salisbury's apparent complacency was vindicated when in '1893 the Upper House dismissed Gladstone's second Home Rule Bill by 419 votes to 41, even though the Liberals had won a majority at the recent General Election with this at the top of their programme.' [441] Unfortunately for the Liberals, however, 'in the election of 1892…the swing towards the Liberals merely reduced the Unionist majority over the Liberals from about 200 to about forty, and left Gladstone and Rosebery completely dependent upon Irish support..' [442] The Irish realization that they would never secure their goal unless it received support from the Tories in the House of Lords meant that the Liberal administration was effectively living on borrowed time. Most of the Liberal party acknowledged this and

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[438] Donald Southgate, (Ed. 1974) op cit. p.131 and pp.132-133.

[439] Quoted in Bruce Coleman, (1988) op cit. p.191.

[440] Salisbury in 'Constitutional Revisions', in, *National Review,* Vol. XX, No. 117, Nov. 1892, pp.298-299. Quoted in Peter Marsh, (1978) op cit. p.226.

[441] Donald Read, (1979) op cit. p.318.

> ‘When Mr. Gladstone resigned on 3rd March 1894, a number of factors contributed, in unequal degrees to this event. First, the gradual “closing of the doors of the senses” of which he had complained since 1892, had latterly proceeded apace. This tragic development counselled and must in all probability soon compel retirement. Secondly, with the rejection by …[the] Peers of the second Home Rule Bill his main ostensible reason for remaining in public life had vanished…Finally, the step which he had proposed as affording the sole exit from this impasse – an immediate dissolution and campaign against the House of Lords – found little or no favour with the mass of his colleagues. He hoisted the signal. They put the telescope to the blind eye.’ [443]

The Conservative fear of Home Rule had, for the time being, been alleviated, but “the signal Gladstone had hoisted” in his last speech to the House of Commons on 1st March 1894 still required attention. He had said ‘the question is whether the work of the House of Lords is not merely to modify, but to annihilate the whole work of the House of Commons.’ [444] As already noted Salisbury himself appeared ambivalent to the implications of such a challenge, but not so his allies the Liberal Unionists. Chamberlain was concerned that if the Tory Peers emasculated every piece of Liberal legislation that came before them, even partisan Conservatives would begin to reconsider the constitutional position of the House of Lords.

He sent Salisbury a memorandum

> ‘In considering the action to be taken by the House of Lords in regard to the Bills sent to it by the House of Commons it is of course necessary to bear in mind the effect that may be produced upon public opinion by any amendments which lead to the loss of those Bills. The Gladstonians will naturally throw the whole upon the House of Lords, and although such amendment may be in itself perfectly defensible, the electors are likely to look at general results rather than at the methods by which they have been reached…I think that amendments made by the House of Lords in any Bill now before it should, if

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[442] G. N. Sanderson, (1966) op cit. pp.352-353.

[443] J. A. Spender and Cyril Asquith, (1932 Two Vols.) op cit., Vol. One, p.87.

[444] Quoted in Michael Bentley, (1984) op cit., p.282.)

> possible have considerable popular support behind them, or should be of such a character as not to endanger the passing of the Bill.' [445]

Salisbury was prepared to acquiesce, up to a point, and Chamberlain was at pains to point out that The Working Class Dwellings Act of 1885, County Councils, The Technical Instruction Act of 1889, The Housing of the Working Classes Act of 1890, The Public Health Act of 1890, free elementary education, and The Shop Hours Act of 1892, added up to a significant programme of social reform, which would bear comparison with anything the Liberals were currently planning. 'Although Salisbury generally did not like change and thought it usually for the worse, if established interests were not too badly damaged he was willing to countenance it for a specific, verifiable public benefit and also occasionally of course, for electoral advantage.' [446] Such an attitude is completely in accordance with Conservative ideology as identified in this study; however, others within his party were less enlightened and remained stubbornly reactionary.

> 'He realised that there could be no finality in politics…There are several passages in which he turns roundly on the squires, the specimens of "the political dado." He condemns them, not because he always disagrees with their views, but because their opposition to change comes from instinct rather than from reason.' [447]

Chamberlain, unsurprisingly, pushed for a positive and extensive programme of social reform, arguing (and incidentally showing remarkable prescience) that

> 'elections are carried by the shifting vote of a minority, who do not strictly belong to either party. The working classes are not divided on party lines as absolutely as the middle and upper classes, and my experience is that very large numbers do not actually make up their minds till the time of election comes around and are then very much influenced by the issues presented to them at the moment. Gladstonianism has been a failure. If Unionism or Conservatism gives them the promise of better results they will come over in large numbers and turn a small into a sweeping majority.' [448]

This may well have been sound advice, but the Liberal Unionists were very much the junior partner in their alliance with the Conservatives, and Salisbury was unlikely to compromise his principles to that extent and at the same time alienate old-style Tories. [449]Added to this, of course, was the fact that although acting in tandem with the Conservatives, Chamberlain and his party had always sat on the opposite side of the House of Commons, the same side as that where the working men's representatives sat. Socialism was a growing force and although 'the socialist threat was potential rather than real.. none the less it was a bogy which frightened many capitalists over to the right.' [450] It has also been suggested that 'the socialist threat to property that emerged in the course of the Liberal ministries of 1892-1895 provided just the tide of opinion that Chamberlain wanted to carry his party across the floor [of the House of Commons]' [451] whilst preserving its integrity.

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[445] Chamberlain to Salisbury, 25th January 1894, quoted in, J. L. Garvin, (1933 Two Vols.) *The Life of Joseph Chamberlain,* Macmillan, London, Vol. 2, p.586.
[446] Andrew Roberts, (1999) op cit. pp,569-570.
[447] Michael Pinto-Duschinsky, (1967) op cit., p.95.
[448] J. L. Garvin, (1933 Two Vols.) op cit. Vol. 2, p.617.

Salisbury knew that the Liberals were disunited, and that the electoral pact with the Liberal Unionists meant that the Conservatives could concentrate their energies upon key seats, thereby putting pressure upon the Liberals' organization and finances. Moreover,

> 'Conservatives in 1895 would continue to promote the "social amelioration of the people" but would countenance no "ambitious programmes" which could be constituted as "revolutionary changes." The Liberals crippled themselves from the outset by divided aims. Rosebery wanted the House of Lords issue to the fore. Harcourt pushed the Newcastle Programme… Morley insisted on sticking to the moral imperative of Irish Home Rule." [452]

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[449] It has been argued that 'the measure of success of "Disraelian" social reform [was]…paradoxically, the *absence* of social policy as a central theme before 1900 and the continued primacy of institutional questions in politics.' P. R. Ghosh, (1987) 'Style and Substance in Disraelian Social Reform c1860-1880' in P. J. Waller, (Ed.) (1987), op cit. p.81.

[450] Peter Fraser, (1966) op cit., p.154.

[451] P. Fraser, (1962) op cit. p.66.

[452] Richard Shannon, (1996) op cit. p.414. *cf.* It has been argued that the Liberal leadership were fully conscious of the fact that they had allowed the Unionists, and specifically Salisbury, to dictate the issues upon which the election was fought. See David Steele, (2005) 'Opposition From Strength: 1892-1895' in Stuart Ball and Anthony Seldon, (Eds.) (2005) *Recovering Power: The Conservatives in Opposition Since 1867*, Macmillan, London, p.86.

The result was a landslide victory. The Conservative-Unionist alliance gained a majority of 234 over the Liberals, thereby dispensing with any need to placate the Irish Nationalists, or indeed the Liberal Unionists. Chamberlains influence had declined ‘making it easy for Salisbury to resist the coherent programme of social reform which he had sketched out to direct the new government’s strategy,’ [453] Salisbury had reason to believe that he could look forward to a relatively untroubled period of office, but within a couple of years ‘after the 1897 Jubilee what appeared, superficially, to be a stable national consensus based on patriotism and imperialism soon showed itself to be a brittle phenomenon.’ [454]

It has been noted that ‘the political salience of imperialism was likely to be greater in periods like the late Victorian era when the rival party failed to develop a credible and coherent alternative based on domestic, reform politics.’ [455] Approaching the 1900 general election, the Liberal Party had indeed begun to regroup, but the Conservative-Unionist alliance, and Joseph Chamberlain especially, somewhat cynically, exploited the nation’s patriotism over the Boer War in South Africa. Lloyd-George told the House of Commons in July 1900

> ‘I venture to say that there is no worse eye-glass than the ballot box; and it is through that glass that the Rt. Hon. Gentleman [Chamberlain] has been looking at all these facts…The Rt. Hon. Gentleman is so essentially a political manager that he is always electioneering. He is a kind of political agent, and so permeated is he with that instinct that he has made up his mind that if the war cannot be a military success, at any rate he will make it an electioneering success.’ [456]

Nevertheless the Conservative-Unionist alliance won the election comfortably; and much of the credit for that victory must go to Chamberlain; his speeches around his West Midlands stronghold ‘every other day commanded nationwide attention. Salisbury did not speak at all, contenting himself with a dispirited manifesto. Balfour spoke little and weakly. However unfair it was to speak of "Joe's War," this was certainly his general election.' [457] The Liberal party were understandably saddened by their defeat, but infuriated by the way the campaign had been conducted. Campbell-Bannerman wrote that 'the lowering of the standard of public life is a far worse evil, because more permanent, than toryism, jingoism, or any other heresy; *panem et circenses*; money spent in the country, flags to wave, bluster to shout for – that is the object: let right and freedom go and be hanged! The *commencement de siècle* morals, apparently.' [458] Campbell-Bannerman's complaint ought not to be dismissed simply as "sour grapes" for this was to be the last hurrah for the old-style imperialist appeal. It has been argued that 'the appeal of empire changed over time. With the ending of the Boer War in 1902 the issue ceased to hold centre stage in British politics.' [459] This may well be an exaggeration, but when Tariff Reform split the Conservative party, "the appeal of empire" became a more problematic issue, and thereby a less potent weapon for the Tories to exploit. Furthermore this was not to be the only indication that politics in general, and the Conservatives in particular, were undergoing a *fin de siècle* transformation. The ideology which had served the party so well in informing their policy decisions and in designing their appeal to the voters, was beginning to look out of date. More importantly, perhaps, their Liberal Unionist allies did not necessarily subscribe to the core concepts of that ideology.

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[453] Richard Jay, (1981) *Joseph Chamberlain: A Political Study*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, p.344.

[454] Martin Pugh, (1985) *The Tories and the People 1880-1935*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, p.159.

[455] Martin Pugh, (1988) op cit. 273.

[456] J. A. Spender, (1923 Two Vols.) *The Life of The Right Hon. Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman GCB.* Hodder & Stoughton, London, Vol.1, p.286.

In 1902 Lord Salisbury, ageing and worn out retired, he was to die the following year. He was succeeded as prime minister by his nephew Arthur Balfour, who had to preside over a changing and volatile new political environment. 'A good deal of the political history of the later nineteenth century can be told in terms of the adoption and adaptation of the institutions of the politics of opinion to serve the ends of the politics of influence.' [460] But times were changing; the Conservatives had been dominant in the late nineteenth century because firstly, the mass of voters disliked Conservatives less than they disliked Liberals who they saw as weak and disunited; and secondly because the working classes were more concerned with bread and butter issues which could be settled locally. [461] The issue of Tariff Reform was to reverse this trend.

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[457] Peter T. Marsh, (1994) *Joseph Chamberlain: Entrepreneur in Politics,* Yale University Press, New Haven and London, p.498.
[458] Campbell-Bannerman to Lord Ripon 29th October 1900, quoted in J. A. Spender, (1923 Two Vols.) op cit., Vol.1, p.298.
[459] Martin Pugh, (1988) op cit. p.274.

> 'The tariff reformer appealed to working class support on the grounds that the condition of the working man was dependent upon the prosperity of British Industry, that this required tariff protection against foreign rivals, and that only imperial preference could prevent the disintegration of the empire, whose unity, strength, and markets were vital to the welfare of the working class. Since to adopt a system of preference would entail a sacrifice in terms of higher food prices for the working man, the latter was to be offered compensation in the form of more work at better rates of pay, with a promise of old age pensions to be financed from tariff revenues.' [462]

The main proponent of Tariff Reform was Liberal Unionist leader Joseph Chamberlain, Colonial Secretary in the Cabinet. After failing to get tariff reform adopted as official Conservative- Unionist policy, in 1903 he resigned his cabinet post and embarked upon a three year campaign for British Imperial trade preference. Chamberlain's decision must not be taken solely as a manifestation of his personal ambition. He was not a Tory, for him 'change was not an object of distrust, to him there was nothing repulsive in a period of acute political controversy.' [463] Such an attitude is, of course, anathema to Conservative ideology and Chamberlain's strategy opened up deep fault-lines in the Conservative-Unionist alliance. Balfour was acutely aware that 'though the vote of the working man might put the party into power, the means to attract it could easily alienate the wealthy man whose financial assistance was crucial.’ [464] Added to this was a fear that the working class ‘was always concerned about unemployment and higher prices and often expressed this in its political behaviour.’ [465]

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[460] Patrick Joyce, (1980) op cit. p.222.

[461] See Paul Adelman, (1970) op cit., p.74.

[462] D. J.Dutton, (1981) 'The Unionist party and Social Policy', in, *The Historical Journal,* 24, 4, 1981, p.874.

[463] The opinion of Lord Hugh Cecil, quoted in R. B. McDowell, (1959) op cit. p.167.

Leading his hopelessly divided party into the 1906 general election, against a Liberal party united under the banner of free-trade, Balfour’s Conservatives were decimated. ‘The massive electoral defeat suffered by the Conservatives in 1906 brought the crisis to a head. The Tariff Reform League emerged from the election in an overwhelmingly strong position in the party, even though their policies appeared to have been rejected by the electorate.’ [466] Moreover, there was no pretence of consensus, ‘tariff reform was a policy to which, because of internal dissensions the party was never able to fully commit itself.’ [467] But Chamberlain’s followers were in the ascendancy and consequently support for tariff reform in the party was strong, Balfour was forced to make concessions and point party policy in that direction. Balfour was losing control of his party in opposition. ‘The policy of tariff reform had been conceded by the party leadership not because most constituency associations and the National Union supported it, although this was a factor, but because most Conservative MPs had been converted to tariff reform.’ [468] It became clear that the leader of the party no longer enjoyed the sole right to formulate policy alone, and no longer enjoyed the full backing of his party. ‘Balfour’s embarrassing defeats at the 1904 and 1905 [Party] Conferences, and his problems after 1907, sprang largely from his reluctance to express consistently any clear conviction on the issue of paramount concern to the party [tariff reform]’ [469] If Balfour was losing touch with his party, it is equally evident that his party was losing touch with the electorate. By the 1900s ‘as class became the primary issue in political mobilization, the Conservative Party's loss of working – class support seemed destined to accelerate to the point where the party would be reduced to a permanent minority.' [470] From his beleaguered position Balfour appeared to have no answer to the difficulties which beset his party. A contemporary commentator, a former Irish Nationalist MP, noted that

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[464] D. J.Dutton, (1981) op cit. p.873.
[465] Ibid. p.872.
[466] Zig Layton -Henry, op cit., p.661.
[467] D. J. Dutton, (1981) op cit. p.874.
[468] Ibid. p.662.

[469] Anthony Seldon and Stuart Ball, (Eds.) (1994) op cit. p.234.

> 'Every effort the Conservatives in office have lately been making to hold their full mastery over the country has shown more and more clearly that they have not kept up with movements of thought and are not able to understand the true requirements of the time…the absolute necessity for the recognized leadership of men who understand the difference between the work of guiding the country and the ignoble function of competing for power by imitation and compromise.' [471]

Balfour may, or may not, have been aware of his own limitations, and of the damage that the reactionary element within his party could wreak upon their electoral prospects. What appears indisputable is that although he

> 'may have been conscious of the "New Age", his approach to it looked back to an era that had now passed. His most famous pronouncement on the tactics of the new opposition remains the declaration he made to a Unionist rally that "the great Unionist Party should still control, whether in power or in opposition, the destinies of this great Empire". In other words the obstructive powers of the overwhelmingly Conservative hereditary peerage of the upper chamber would form the basis of Balfour's response to the radical quasi-socialist excesses of the Liberal government..' [472]

When the Unionists entered opposition it appeared that they may indeed have had within their ranks a man who could provide the popular appeal that Balfour patently lacked, unfortunately he was not a Conservative, and did not feel bound by conservative ideology. Even so 'whatever the merits or drawbacks of his fiscal policies, Joseph Chamberlain had at least made the crucial jump from aristocratic paternalism to popular politics, so necessary after the systematic widening of the franchise in the late nineteenth century…but Chamberlain's personal ambition was permanently quelled by the crippling stroke which paralysed his body after the election.'[473] This was a massive blow to the Conservative Unionist alliance, having lost the sure, steady leadership and gravitas of Lord Salisbury, they now effectively lost the charisma and impact of Joseph Chamberlain, who even in the election debacle of 1906, had displayed that he was almost unique among leading Unionists regarding his popularity among the working classes.

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[470] Frans Coetzee, (1990) *For Party or Country: Nationalism and the Dilemmas of Popular Conservatism in Edwardian England*, Oxford University Press, p.63.

[471] Justin McCarthy, (1903) *British Political Leaders*, T. Fisher Unwin, London, p.306.

[472] D. J. Dutton, (1981) op cit. p.873.

There had been many signs that the Tories were heading for disaster prior to the election which Balfour either chose to ignore, or considered unimportant. 'Chamberlain had been anxious that the representative associations of the party should be reviewed, especially with the object of popularising them and of securing the involvement of the working classes.' [474] Intriguingly, however, Chamberlain himself had chosen to disregard an early experimental opinion poll which indicated that his own fiscal policy was not securing working class support. In

> 'July –August 1903 The *Daily Mail* sent out "walking inquirers" to various parts of the Kingdom with instructions to find out by questioning individual members of the public exactly what the country's attitude to Chamberlain's movement was. The first report based upon 2,000 interviews about Chamberlain was published in the *Daily Mail* of 29th August 1903. It revealed that one fifth of the persons interviewed had never heard of the scheme at all; but the rest were practically unanimous in their hostility to Tariff Reform.' [475]

Around the same time, Winston Churchill wrote to the Duke of Devonshire (formerly Lord Hartington) joint leader of the Liberal Unionists, that 'we are on the eve of a gigantic political landslide. I don't think Balfour and those about him realise at all how far the degeneration of the forces of Unionism has proceeded, and how tremendous the counter current is going to be.' [476] Balfour now had to deal with that "counter current", a situation exacerbated by his own declared policy that the House of Lords would be used as a Conservative veto to block any Radical

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[473] D. J. Dutton, (1981) op cit. p.873. .

[474] Ibid. p.873.

[475] Anthony Blond, (1965) op cit., pp.87-88.

[476] Blanche C. Dugdale, (1936 Two Vols.) op. cit. Vol. 1, p.353.

Liberal legislation. He was, in fact, fully aware that the political landscape and climate was undergoing radical change. He wrote to Lord Knollys that ‘we are face to face (no doubt in a milder form) with the Socialist difficulties which loom so large on the Continent. Unless I am greatly mistaken, the Election of 1906 inaugurates a new era.’ [477] Given that Balfour knew how critical the situation was, even with the benefit of hindsight it is difficult to comprehend the apparent naivety of his approach. His networks in the world of high politics and information moving up from the grass roots of the party must surely have set alarm bells ringing, that his party, finding itself in a hole, ought to stop digging. In his defence, however, he was severely constrained by the configuration of his party.

> ‘The trouble was that the existing power structure of the party was dominated by men of a single class who feared the implications of Chamberlain’s intrusion with his concepts of “democracy”. Although business interests were gaining ground within the Unionist party, the landholding interests remained strong and it was a striking fact that throughout the first decade of the twentieth century the parliamentary party contained not a single manual worker.’ [478]

Furthermore, this situation was compounded by the stranglehold that these “men of a single class” had maintained over the party organization. ‘At the inaugural meeting of the National Union, Mr. (later Sir) John Gorst took the chair. Subsequently no commoner held the office of President before 1914. The 34 who were elected president from 1868-1914 included 5 Dukes, 5 Marquises, 15 Earls, and 9 Barons.’ [479] Thus it may be asserted that the power of reaction within the party remained unassailable. This is a compelling argument, but even if valid, it still illustrates that the Conservative Party had strayed from one of its core principles i.e. that if change was inevitable and had popular support, then it must be managed in Conservative interests rather than confronted. Confrontation only provoked a more vehement demand for change from the now powerful Liberals. Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman used his last platform speech at Bristol on 13th November 1907 to attack the House of Lords, and highlight the differences dividing the Conservative-Unionist alliance.

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[477] Balfour to Lord Knollys 17th January 1906. Quoted in D. J. Dutton, (1981) op cit., p.871.
[478] Ibid. p. 875.
[479] R. T.McKenzie, (1955) op cit., p.187.

> ‘Do not take my word for it’ he said, ‘I will give you the words of another. This is what has been said, “the House of Lords for over 100 years has never contributed one iota to popular liberties or popular freedom, or done anything to advance the common weal; and during that time it has protected every abuse and sheltered every privilege.” He [then] pleased his audience by telling them that these were the words of Joseph Chamberlain.’ [480]

The torch was duly taken up by Campbell-Bannerman’s successor as prime minister, Herbert Asquith. In a speech delivered at the National Liberal Club on 11th December 1908 he invited ‘the Liberal Party…to treat the veto of the House of Lords as the dominating issue in politics – the dominating issue, because in the long run it overshadows and absorbs every other.’ [481] An influential faction in the realm of high politics was obviously calling for change and this call was seemingly echoed at grass roots level. Although the general election of January 1906 was not primarily a contest over Tariff Reform or reform of the House of Lords, the Unionists nevertheless were routed,

> ‘obtaining only a quarter of the parliamentary seats…Thus while the Unionists actually secured a greatly increased total of votes over their 1900 figure – 2,463,606 in 1906 as against 1,676,020 in 1900 – the combined total of Liberal and Labour votes was more than doubled, rising from 1,520,285 in 1900 to 3,111,929 in 1906. Such a shift of voting in an electorate which had only increased 7½ per cent in these years marks the operation of more fundamental agencies than party appeals and programmes; the mass electorate had found its feet.’ [482]

It may be added that the Liberals had taken steps to ensure that the radical vote was not split to the advantage of the Conservatives. In 1903 Herbert Gladstone, Liberal Chief Whip, had negotiated a secret agreement with Labour leader Ramsay MacDonald for the mutual withdrawal of one out of two candidates in two member seats, of which there were still many. The arrangement operated well in the election of 1906, leading to the election of 29 LRC

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[480] John Wilson, (1973) op cit., pp.603-604.

[481] Quoted in J. A. Spender and Cyril Asquith, (1932 Two Vols.) op cit., Vol.1, p.241.

[482] Peter Fraser, (1966) op cit. p.273.

(Labour Representative Committee) candidates, but also leaving the Liberals with a free run of their own in many other constituencies. This arrangement was to remain secret until the 1950s.[483] Balfour and his colleagues failed to see the warning signs that they were losing touch both within their own party, and with the force of popular opinion. Their twin policies of supporting Tariff Reform, and using the House of Lords as a Conservative Party veto were to combine one with another to devastating effect. That said, the party organization made attempts to reconcile the traditional Conservative abhorrence of state intervention with growing demands for social reform. The National Union Conference in November 1907 passed a resolution that 'the socialist movement can be met by the insistence upon the constructive policy of the Unionist Party and especially upon fiscal reform, as the only practical means of carrying out a scheme for the provision of pensions for the aged deserving poor and other social reforms.' [484] The fiscal policy referred to was, of course, Tariff Reform. This can be seen as the beginnings of 'the Conservative approach which became dominant in the Edwardian period [which] was explicitly collectivist. In contrast to their Libertarian colleagues, Conservative collectivists did not see extensions of the state as either actually or potentially Socialist, but insisted that state-sponsored social reform was the best antidote to socialism.' [485] How that "state-sponsored social reform" was to be financed became an important political issue, within which the Conservative leadership had little room to manoeuvre.

> 'Tariff reform was displayed as evidence that Conservatives were finally willing to reconsider trade questions as they affected working men. The basic thrust of the tariff message was disarmingly simple: that any increases in the cost of living would be more than offset by the greater prosperity of the economy as a whole. Relief from unemployment or underemployment would be swift and dramatic, and even workers

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[483] See Henry Pelling, (1995) 'The Emergence of the Labour Party', in *New Perspective,* Vol. 1, No. 2, December 1995.

[484] Quoted in D. J. Dutton, (1981) op cit. p.874

[485] Francis Martin and Zweiniger-Bargielowska, (Eds.) (1996) op cit. p.232.

> who were regularly employed might see wages rise as their firms prospered under newly adjusted "fairer" terms of trade..' [486]

If this message was to be successfully transmitted to the working class electorate then a huge effort needed to be made. To this end 'the distribution of [Tariff Reform] League propaganda increased dramatically: over 6,000,000 leaflets in 1908 compared to one-fourth that number in 1906: the circulation of *Monthly Notes on Tariff Reform* doubled to 120,500, and 38,500 copies of the League's updated notes for speakers were distributed.' [487] This may have contributed to why 'by late 1908, the Unionist Free Traders had virtually been reduced to a negligible force.'[488] The position then became consolidated. 'The Tariff Reform League had mobilized the full weight of its considerable forces by providing speakers for more than 15,000 meetings in 1909-1910 and disseminating more than 80,000,000 leaflets and pamphlets during the same period.' [489] Imperial issues in general still remained central to the Conservatives; and added to this Tariff Reform became increasingly attractive; promising, as it did, to spread increased taxation across the whole of society, not just the better-off classes.

Alongside this campaign the Conservatives were faced with a continuing Liberal policy of negating the veto power of the House of Lords. The two issues began to converge. 'As the economic position worsened around 1908, the case for tariff reform became apparently stronger and when the Liberals produced their apparently vote-winning budget of 1909 it was possible to present tariff reform as a revenue-raising alternative to rampant socialism.' [490] This argument, however, was double-edged since, the budget measures undermined Chamberlain's position that tariffs were the only means of financing reform. The Conservative predicament was compounded by the fact that under the plans of the 1909 budget

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[486] Frans Coetzee, (1990) op cit. p.63.
[487] Ibid. p.118.
[488] Ibid. p.120.
[489] Ibid. p.125.
[490] D. J. Dutton, (1981) op cit. p.874.

> ‘approximately 75 per cent of the tax increase would be paid by the income-tax-paying class, approximately 10 per cent of the population; the rest by the other 90 per cent of the population. In an era in which real wages were stationary if not declining and in which working men were well aware that “the world’s increasing riches were passing them by” a budget so conceived was likely to arouse their support.’ [491]

The battle lines had been drawn, on the Liberal’s terms and ‘a party led by Balfour, with Chamberlain on the side lines, could not compete with the crusading spirit with which Lloyd-George presented his budget as a “a war budget” to “wage implacable war against poverty and squalidness’” [492] Using the rhetoric of war *against* the Unionists was, perhaps, ironic given the furore that had surrounded the Conservative tactics in the 1900 “Khaki” election. Another problem for the Conservatives was that the proposed Liberal measures of raising revenue to finance social reform was inherently more attractive to the majority of the electorate than tariff reform, which would have the effect of placing a large burden on the working classes, especially through the inevitable levying of food taxes. Even though Labour unrest was primarily due to the fact that real wages were not keeping place with the cost of living increases, the Conservatives could not exploit this, ‘Liberals were still able to taunt the Unionists with the cry that the latter intended still further to increase the price of food. Many recognized that the folly of running food taxes against land taxes could have disastrous repercussions for the Unionist party’ [493]

Balfour and his colleagues had been hopelessly out-manoeuvred, both on fiscal policy and the issue of the House of Lords. ‘Lloyd George’s peoples budget of 1909 forced the hand of the

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[491] Neil Blewett (1972) op cit., p.70.
[492] D. J. Dutton, (1981) op cit., p.876.
[493] Ibid. p.874.

Conservative dominated House of Lords to flout constitutional convention.' [494] The budget was passed in the House of Commons on November 3rd 1909 by a large majority, amid rumours that the Lords would reject it, which they comprehensively did. 'Both the size of the total vote [350 : 75] and the majority for rejection had been surpassed only once in the previous one hundred years. [the Home Rule Bill of 1893 was defeated on a second reading by 419 : 41] The vote was almost entirely along party lines. Only four Liberals voted or paired against the Bill, only eight Unionists supported it.' [495] Balfour had led his party into a confrontation it could never win, but there is evidence that confrontation was neither inevitable, nor the best course of action. 'The Liberal Cabinet, as a whole, refused to believe that the Lords would throw out the Budget, and it was steadily set about through the summer of 1909 that Mr. Balfour and Lord Lansdowne were in favour of passing it. But Mr. Lloyd George persisted in believing the contrary. "they will throw it out all right" he would always say cheerfully enough: and the only shadow that would pass over his face would come when some one would half convince him to the contrary.' [496] This was the game of high politics being played for the highest stakes. Winston Churchill's reading of the situation is worthy of note; 'that his hope and prayer was that they would throw out the Bill, as it would save the government from certain defeat if the election were put off. The Budget once it became law, would be immensely unpopular, and everybody would be against it. It was, therefore, to the interests of the opposition to let it pass.' [497] Of course, once the Lords had rejected the budget a dissolution was inevitable. The ensuing general election of January 1910 was deemed inconclusive, and the following election of December 1910 was equally close, but the Liberals, with the support of Labour and the Irish Nationalists had a working majority.

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[494] Donald Read, (1979) op cit. p.450.

[495] Neil Blewett, (1972) op cit. p.100.

[496] Harold Spender, (1920) *The Prime Minister [Lloyd George]* , Hodder and Stoughton, London, p.163.

[497] Wilfred Scawen Blunt, (1919 Two Vols.) *My Diaries, Being a Personal Narrative of Events 1888-1914,* Martin Secker, London, Vol.2, p.83.

The details of the constitutional crises are not relevant in the present context of this study [498] but the budget was passed, support for Tariff Reform began to ebb away, and the Parliament Act of 1911 largely nullified the built-in advantage of the Conservative Party in the House of Lords. Leo Maxse voiced the opinion of many Conservatives, 'it is unpardonable, Balfour must go, or Tariff Reform will go – that is the alternative.' [499] As alluded to earlier Balfour had endured much criticism and embarrassment at Party Conferences 'the precise extent to which these machinations prompted Balfour's resignation on the eve of the 1911 Conference is unclear. But it is at least arguable that Balfour, already worn down by years of internecine squabbling, was helped to reach his decision by the prospect of another troubled conference for which resolutions of censure continued to come in from the associations.' [500] In many ways the departure of Balfour as party leader coincided with a change in British politics. For example, 'in 1910 for the last time the general elections were conditioned by an electoral system which was in form and actuality a product of the nineteenth century.' [501] Balfour himself was also tied to the nineteenth-century, he 'thought electorally in 1885, or pre 1885 terms of old issues, old connections, old communities. Regional agents reported with alarm on the loss of working class support.' [502] Their concerns, however, fell upon deaf ears, Balfour and Lansdowne could not adjust to changing circumstances and led their party down blind alleys and into dead end policies.

> 'In Bonar Law, of course, the Conservatives would find after 1911 a leader with the genuine desire and capacity to direct and inspire his troops, but by then the party was engaged in policies and strategies, the sterility of which was sufficient to nullify most of the advantages gained by the change of leadership…although the period before the war was one of visible recovery for Unionism, it was by no means an entirely healthy recovery…The party had little that was positive to offer.' [503]

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[498] But see for example, Neil Blewett, (1972) op cit., and Emily Allyn, (1931) op cit.

[499] Maxse to Goulding 19th December 1910, quoted in Frans Coetzee, (1990) op cit. p.135.

[500] Anthony Seldon and Stuart Ball, (Eds.) (1994) op cit. p.234.

[501] Neil Blewett, (1972) op cit. p.376.

[502] D. J. Dutton, (1981) op cit. p. 877.

[503] Ibid. p.877.

It is evident that with the passing of Lord Salisbury the Conservative party leadership lost its most skilful manipulator of high politics, those who succeeded him were far less adept at managing the subtleties and nuances inherent in the system. It is also evident that these shortcomings had a profoundly detrimental effect upon Conservative electoral fortunes, but this cannot have been the only reason for the failure of the party machine. It has already been accepted that better organization alone would not have avoided defeat in either 1880 or 1906, but equally it has been noted that defeat was surely made more acute by a degeneration in organizational efficiency. Party organization has been dealt with elsewhere in this study, but extra-party organizations, many with an imperial dimension**,** also had a part to play.

> ‘The 1880s marked the beginnings of a significant upsurge in pressure groups with a Conservative complexion such as the Fair Trade League (1881) and the Imperial Federation League (1884)…The launch of the Navy League in 1895 opened the floodgates to a string of associations: The National Service League in 1902, The Tariff Reform League in 1903, The Union Defence League in 1907, The Imperial Maritime League and The Anti-Socialist Union in 1908, and the Budget Protest League in 1909.’ [504]

Groups such as these often proved to be useful adjuncts to the party machine, but because they all had specific well-defined goals, often they provoked disagreements and proved to be divisive. Collectively these pressure groups ‘constituted a nationalist agitation. They would probably have adopted the terms *patriotic* and *patriotism* to describe their chosen means and eventual object.’ (original emphasis) [505] Unfortunately, because of the extremist nature of their rhetoric they often alienated as many people as they attracted, ‘clearly *tariff reform* as a euphemism for *protection* was no more successful than *national service* for *conscription.*’ (original emphasis) [506] There was, however, one association, ironically founded by rivals to Lord Salisbury, that successfully made a major contribution to Conservative unity, and promoted the party's interests on a very wide scale indeed. It was The Primrose League.

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[504] Frans Coetzee, (1990) op cit. p.4.
[505] Ibid. p.7.
[506] Ibid. p.57.

The Primrose League was founded in 1883 by Henry Drummond Woolf and Lord Randolph Churchill, with the declared object 'to rectify the failure of Conservative and Constitutional Associations to suit the popular taste or to succeed in joining all classes together for political objects.' [507] The League was hugely successful attracting hundreds of thousands to its nationally organized "habitations". Its non-discriminatory basis made it an attractive movement for many who had little or no political conviction, if only to engage in its many social activities. 'Woolf was instrumental in opening the League to women and to Christians of all denominations including Catholics, groups that had hitherto not been much in evidence in the ranks of organized Conservatism.' [508] So wide was the net spread that eventually the Primrose League 'was for everyone except Atheists and enemies of the British Empire.' [509] One contemporary described the League as an attempt to mould 'into a compact body the more active and energetic portions of the newer and more democratic school of Conservatism.' [510] The League conferred titles such as "knights" and "dames" upon its members, and leaned heavily upon ceremony and symbolism, albeit in a somewhat light-hearted manner; it promoted traditional values, and was staunchly patriotic. In fact 'the League's strength as a Conservative organization lay in its refusal to apologise for being traditional.' [511] Social gatherings were organized for practically any justification that had a national or patriotic connection, however tenuous 'for however trivial the functions might be, they were considered justified if they exposed large numbers of people to a political message, albeit briefly and superficially.' [512] The League, then, consisted of an alluring and compelling amalgam of old and traditional values, in a new and vibrant organization. Criticism of its quaintness, therefore, 'should not obscure the Leagues effective contribution to the *modernization* of right wing politics in Britain. In the context of late Victorian Britain its antiquarianism was scarcely unusual, nor was it necessarily a defeat for a Conservative movement at a time when the age of improvement was patently faltering.' [513] The 1884 Representation of the People Act had given the vote to a great many people who, because of their comparatively lowly status, had little connection with politics or political parties, and who had no entrenched, class-based, political allegiance. It would be misguided, therefore, to underestimate 'the significance of the Primrose League as a systematic attempt to make political loyalty an integral part of the lives of a large number of people rather than the private language of an elite.' [514] The League spoke to and appealed directly to the people, it avoided dogma, and did not seek to promote any specific political policies; however, this non-doctrinaire approach only served to increase its value to the Conservative cause. 'Ultimately the political significance of the League's brand of patriotism-imperialism-monarchism lay in its sheer woolly imprecision. By avoiding well-defined political options such as imperial federation or compulsory military training it maximized the popular appeal.' [515] It also found resonance in Lord Salisbury's conviction that the Conservative Party was, in the final analysis, a minority party which always needed support from beyond the party faithful if it was to ward off criticism of its aristocratic connections, and actually achieve office when the electorate was predominately working class. The League had no such problems

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[507] Grand Council Minutes 15th December 1883, including 'A Short History of the Formation of The Primrose League', corrected and revised by the Founders, quoted in Martin Pugh, (1985) op cit. p.13.

[508] Martin Pugh, (1985) op cit. p.15.

[509] Andrew Roberts, (1999) op cit. p.276.

[510] Ralph Nevill, (Ed. 1906) *The Reminiscences of Lady Dorothy Nevill,* E Arnold, London, p.286.

[511] Martin Pugh, (1985) op cit. p.24.

'Opponents found it difficult to identify a target which might safely be attacked. This

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[512] Martin Pugh, (1985) op cit.p.32.
[513] Ibid. p.18.
[514] Ibid. p.42.
[515] Ibid. p.92.

> was simply because the sentiments to which the League gave voice met a response that extended far beyond official *Conservatism* and found an echo in the *conservatism* which pervaded both the Liberal Party and the emerging labour movements…when questions of national interest assumed prime significance in the public mind, Conservatives could draw deeply upon a fund of bipartisan sentiment across the lines of class and party.' (my emphasis) [516]

Almost immediately after its formation the Primrose League came to the aid of the Conservative Party to make up a deficiency in its party machinery which no other organization could have provided. The Representation of the People Act 1884, and the Redistribution of Seats Act 1885, in themselves presented all the political parties with huge problems; but the Corrupt and Illegal Practices Act of 1883 impacted especially upon the Tories. Overtly buying votes, either directly or by other enticements, was unrealistic and considered inappropriate even before 1883; but more importantly, the Act considerably reduced the number of party workers who could legitimately be paid for their efforts. The superior financial resources of the Conservatives had always been an advantage at election times, but that advantage was now nullified and leading Conservatives were concerned that the Liberals would now have the upper hand. The Liberal party could call for volunteers from the Non-Conformist denominations and from trade unions, but the Conservatives had no comparable organizations, and the party leadership knew that the problem must be addressed quickly. The Primrose League was tailor-made to step in and fill the breaches.

> 'First and fundamentally, it not only aimed to recruit membership very widely, but also succeeded to a large extent in erasing the boundaries of sex, class, and age. Second it incorporated non-electors. Third, its membership entailed formal enrolment with a signed pledge and payment. Fourth, it adopted an educative and propaganda role. Fifth, its activities were continuous and regular, not determined by the pattern of parliamentary elections. Sixth, its meetings were gatherings of the rank and file members, not merely the ruling elite. And finally, it moved beyond the political sphere into the social life of its members,' [517]

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[516] Martin Pugh, (1985) op cit p.92.
[517] Ibid. p.41.

Thus the Primrose League tapped into a source of latent Conservative support that had previously lain dormant and unrecognized. Also, and equally importantly

> ‘the league, as a separate body from the Conservative party, could freely and legally spend huge sums of money on food, drink, and entertainment designed to benefit the Conservative cause. In this way Conservatives managed to preserve a good deal of *traditional* British political practice at the local level, notwithstanding the modernizing pressures exerted through national legislation. [518]

Furthermore as an essentially a Conservative movement, with thousands of enrolled members, and a national organization ‘it provided a mass movement which would canvass the electorate for the Conservative Party in between, as well as simply during general elections, something that had never really happened before in British politics.’ [519] The Primrose League can justifiably be seen as an indispensable contributor to Conservative electoral successes, as well as being spectacularly successful in its ostensibly primary role of disseminating the conservative message.

When the Conservative Party became characterized by schism over tariff reform and intransigence over the rights and powers of the House of Lords in the early twentieth century, the value of the league to the party was overlooked; a fact illustrated by the fact that ‘it was not officially affiliated to the Conservative Party until 1914.’ [520] The League did indeed cross boundaries. Working class families quite possibly joined habitations out of personal choice, not simply because they were afraid not to because of the local political complexion. How, else can one understand the actions of the Lancashire workers who voted Conservative, but also participated in trade unions and strikes. How indeed? But by widening the analysis it is possible to speculate as to why ‘many Lancashire spinners were Conservative in politics’ [521] This had little to do with trade union membership, ‘from 1867 to 1876 the union leaders made almost continuous advances, which seemed to be so great that direct political action was unnecessary.’ [522] Added to this was the fact that the working class was not an homogenous whole, ‘skilled artisans often considered themselves to be of a status well above that of manual labourers, and could thus be said to have formed a “Labour Aristocracy”’ [523] Thus

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[518] Martin Pugh, (1985) op cit. p.257.
[519] Andrew Roberts, (1999) op cit. p.278.
[520] Ibid. pp.276-277.
[521] Henry Pelling, (1968) op cit., p.46.

> ‘Trade Unionists considered themselves to be a minority elite, numbering perhaps a million and a quarter at the peak …in 1874-1875 (about 600,000 were regular unionists as distinct from temporary adherents) and not much more than ¾ million in 1878-1879. But the real reason for the apathy of trade unions was the firmly rooted belief in *laissez faire* which was almost universally held by all classes.’ [524]

Given such a consensus it is unsurprising that at this time ‘the political wishes of the great majority of the organised working-class electorate were accomplished within the prevailing party system.’ [525]

Thus, whilst being ideologically opposed to trade unionism, Conservatives felt they had little to fear from it. ‘The Victorian acceptance of trade unions had been aided by their character: industrially and politically moderate organizations, dominated by skilled workers, which had a limited impact on the economy and polity.’ [526] Trade unionism, however, began to expand rapidly into the realm of common manual labourers who held more radical views than their skilled counterparts. The movement ‘went from strength to strength. In 1880 the membership of the TUC was less than ½ million- admittedly a bad year. After 1893 it was never again below a million, and after 1912 it was never below 2 million.’ [527] The formation of the Labour Representation Committee (LRC) on 27th February 1900 was a clear indication that many trade unionists now believed that the prevailing party political system could no longer accommodate their aims and goals. Significantly 'the unions which joined the LRC first…tended to be unions of the unskilled.' [528] As noted earlier 'the democracy were Tory for reasons other than democratic participation and social reform… [but] Set fair on the road of Disraelian, bourgeois Conservatism, the party left little room for manoeuvre.' [529] Even the support of the skilled elites was now ambiguous, 'in the Oldham cotton strike of 1885, for example, the Tory clubs provided strike relief.' [530] This was an early manifestation of a different attitude within trade unionism. 'From the late 1880s onwards, the unions' character, their disruptive capacity, and the nature and scale of their political involvement changed.' [531] With "little room for manoeuvre" the Conservative party found itself on a collision course with trade unionism. 'By 1900 the mutual hostility of Conservatives and unions was well established. The Conservative response focused on the legal basis of trade unionism, their party political role, and the problem of industrial unrest.' [532] The Conservative policy of accommodation with the unions found support in the courts. The Taff Vale Judgement of 1901 made effective strike action impossible by restricting the right to picket, and making union funds liable to actions for damages. Unsurprisingly the unions were outraged; Balfour was convinced that the judgement was both legally and morally correct, but he had reservations, arguing 'that union benefit funds should be protected from actions for damages.' [533] Unfortunately the lack of room for manoeuvre again precluded any constructive dialogue. Politically Balfour could offer nothing more than a Royal Commission (1903-1905) to investigate the impasse. Disillusioned by the Conservatives lack of support, the unions unsurprisingly boycotted it. The Royal Commission favoured legislation to define union rights, rules, and regulations. This was the favoured policy of the Conservatives, but one vehemently opposed by the unions. ‘Balfour appeared willing to accept the electoral consequences of legislation but the 1906 electoral defeat ended any developments along these lines.’ [534] The incoming Liberal government immediately passed legislation, the 1906 Trades Dispute Act, to overturn the Taff Vale Judgement; the Act granted the unions immunity from damages from strikes and trade disputes. When the courts again attacked union practices in the 1909 Osbourne Judgement, which found that political expenditure from union funds was illegal, the Liberals again responded with legislation. The 1913 Trade union Act ‘permitted union political expenditure provided it was financed from a separately raised fund approved by a ballot of the membership from which objectors could “contract out”’ [535] The Tories were losing the political battle for popular support on two fronts. Firstly,

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[522] H. J. Hanham, (1978) op cit. p.323.
[523] Robert Waller, (1994) op cit. p.585.
[524] H. J. Hanham, (1978) op cit. p.324.
[525] Patrick Joyce, (1980) op cit. p.312.
[526] Andrew Taylor, (1994) op cit. p.500.
[527] Henry Pelling, (1968) op cit. p.108.

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[528] Henry Pelling, (1968) op cit. p.106.
[529] Patrick Joyce,1980) op cit. p.327.
[530] Ibid. p.283.
[531] Andrew Taylor, (1994) op cit. p.500.
[532] Ibid. p.500.
[533] Ibid. p.500.

> ‘the Edwardian period stands out as the crucial moment when the old pattern gave way to the new. The old-age pensions, school meals, and insurance for health and unemployment, introduced by Asquith and Lloyd-George, were benefits that working families readily appreciated. The Tory leaders dared not oppose the Liberal welfare legislation for fear of losing their working-class vote.’ [536]

On the other hand ‘to try and win working class support by a programmatic appeal risked…a major political crisis, because of the growing involvement of the middle-class in running and financing party organization.’ [537] The Conservative party plainly regretted the growth of trade unionism which it saw as being central to its electoral dilemma, but, there was little they could do to stop it. It has been suggested that ‘For much of the 1910s Bonar Law’s party found itself identified, by implication, with the hard-line, wage-cutting, strike-breaking, and black-leg aspect of industry.’ [538] This perception, however, may not have been wholly deserved, and the observation requires qualification. The new Marquis of Salisbury wrote in 1907 that ‘the vice of the poor, the selfishness of the rich, the hardness of the middle class are moral evils’ and that ‘the solution is beyond the sphere of the politician.’ [539] Such an attitude, of course, is in complete accordance with Conservative beliefs that society, and its attendant faults and inequalities, are organic not made by politicians. However, to make public a belief that Conservative politicians were incapable of addressing such social evils would hardly be good for the party’s image, or encourage voters to offer their support. Furthermore there is evidence

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[534] Andrew Taylor, (1994) op cit. p.500.

[535] Ibid. p.501.

[536] Martin Pugh, (1988) op cit. p.278.

[537] Andrew Taylor, (1994) op cit. p.501.

[538] Keith Middlemas, (1994) *The Party, Industry, and the City*, in Anthony Seldon and Stuart Ball, (Eds.) (1994) op cit. p.460.

> ‘that the working class was not inevitably anti-Conservative and that it was possible to pilot working class political consciousness into less dangerous waters. The Conservative Party’s electoral recovery in the two elections of 1910, Labour’s poor by-election record up to 1914, and the fading of industrial unrest after 1912 supported Bonar Law’s conviction that, if the country wanted social reform, it would not vote Conservative and [therefore] that there was considerable working class support for Conservative politics.’ [540]

Nonetheless, they were forced to acquiesce in the evolving *status quo*. A Unionist Social Reform Committee was constituted in February 1911, the idea being that the state would ‘hold the balance of power and…defend the consumer and the national interest and help unions and employers solve their conflicts peacefully.’ [541] Not being in power, of course, this was only a policy initiative, but

> ‘Following the great industrial disputes of 1911-1912 the committee appointed a sub-committee to report on industrial unrest. Its conclusions emphasized that the Unionist party had never believed that the state should remain indifferent to working conditions and urged that the Board of Trade should be empowered to set up arbitration tribunals in the event of an industrial dispute.’ [542]

Whilst in opposition this, at least, gave the Conservatives some breathing space, and gave them the opportunity to re-group. Conservative leaders were able to

> ‘avoid making any commitment to anti-unionism, by allowing them to distinguish

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[539] Salisbury to Selborne 3rd October 1907, quoted in D. J. Dutton, (1981) op cit. p.880.
[540] Andrew Taylor, (1994) op cit. p.502.
[541] Ibid. p.502.
[542] D. J. Dutton, (1981) op cit. p.881.

> between legitimate and illegitimate union behaviour and between union leaders and their members. Non-intervention could be justified by arguing that industrial relations had evolved from the practical experience of those involved, so outside interference was likely to do more harm than good.' [543]

Such woolly and ambiguous policies are, however, the policies of opposition. The Tories, under Bonar Law, seemed to have nothing innovative or positive to offer the electorate; although, in fairness it must be noted that 'since 1900 the wishes of the [Conservative] leadership have been consistently frustrated over the development of trade unionists' organization.' [544]

The electoral defeats of 1906 and 1910, the rise of the Tariff Reform campaign within the Conservative-Unionist alliance , and the rapid expansion of the trade union movement had led to some re-assessment by the Conservative Party. Nevertheless 'by the outbreak of the Great War, the Unionist party had forgotten some of the lessons of electoral success taught by Disraeli and Lord Randolph Churchill. The candidature of Sir John Gorst as a Liberal in the general election of January 1910 was perhaps symbolic of the passing of the great days of Tory democracy.' [545] The party lacked a clear direction and was ideologically trapped in the past, fighting old battles that it now could not win.

> 'With the imminent passing of the governments Home Rule Bill, the Unionists were obsessively concerned with the situation in the House of Commons to the exclusion of the impact of their policies in the country. Even the party chairman warned that "if we do nothing for the people in the ways immediately touching their lives, while the Radicals and Socialists profess to do all, then the masses as a whole…will gallop to Socialism as hard as they can."' [546]

However, despite the parlous state of the party, and the perceived threat to society, there were many who still longed for strong leadership as an essential component in a bullish attempt to re-establish old-style Tory values. 'The one demand of the Party…is that the White Flag…shall be hauled down: that our parliamentarians shall cease running away from the positions they are pledged to hold and that the Party in the country shall receive a clear and unhesitating call to arms, so that we may know precisely where we are.' [547] The problem was that the party did not know precisely where it was, or indeed where it was going. The Conservatives desperation for an issue to rally around is demonstrated by the decision of the party leadership, after 1912, to exacerbate the Ulster Crisis, purely for electoral reasons. They 'engaged in extreme rhetoric, personal abuse, they legitimated and sanctioned recourse to armed resistance, and attempted all manner of parliamentary trickery.' [548] The party was at a low ebb. The outbreak of World War One, of course, changed everything. It presented unprecedented challenging problems which the Liberals could not be expected to face alone; this 'enabled the Unionists to wear again the Disraelian mantle of patriotism and nationalism.' [549] This, famously, had been the central plank of their peacetime policy - the people, as a whole, not only their own supporters, equated patriotism and nationalism with Conservatism.

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[543] Andrew Taylor, (1994) op cit. p.503.

[544] Stuart Ball, (1994) op cit. p.215.

[545] D. J. Dutton, (1981) op cit. p.884. *cf.* Gorst wrote to the *Times* on 6th February 1907 saying that the Conservative party had become 'the champions of vested interests and the protectors of monopoly and privilege.'

[546] Ibid. p.884.

> 'Not surprisingly the party emerged as the dominant partner in the coalition government that brought the war to a conclusion. But for the Great War, however, might not the second decade of the twentieth century have witnessed the "Strange Death of Tory England"'? [550]

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[547] Leo Maxse to Bonar Law 11th November 1911 quoted in D. J. Dutton, (1981) op cit p.878.

[548] Jeremy Smith, (2000) *The Tories and Ireland 1910-1914: Conservative Party Politics and the Home Rule Crisis*, Irish Academic Press, Dublin, p.6.

[549] D. J. Dutton, (1981) op cit p.884.

[550] Ibid.. p.884.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

The evidence presented in this study has investigated how the Conservative Party evolved and developed after the passage of the 1867 Reform Act. Some changes were freely entered into, others were forced upon the party by circumstances. Drawing conclusions from this evidence, however, is not without problems.

The methodology adopted to conduct this study is broadly influenced by the “Peterhouse” school of thought whose work generally ‘emphasised the elite’s autonomy from the electorate, press, and even their own party machines.’ [551] In the context of this study strict adherence to such an approach would have imposed unacceptable constraints. Even so, Maurice Cowling has countered accusations that the scope of the Peterhouse method is too narrow by arguing that public opinion was important to politicians, but in a subordinate role. Political leaders were proactive in the formation of public opinion rather than reactive to its pressure. They tried ‘not merely to say what the electors wanted to hear but to make electors want them to say what they wanted to say in the first place’ [552]; political rhetoric was designed to draw new electors into ‘the thought-world inhabited by existing politicians.’ [553] Peterhouse, therefore, at least in theory, accepted that complex relationships existed between electors, party rank and file, the parliamentary party, party leaders, and external influences. It is the nature of those relationships which the conclusions arrived at here seek to inform.

An important pitfall is ‘the danger for the historian in recovering objective circumstances with any real degree of precision..[in] that it gives the misleading impression that because this is what we know about them now, this was also what they knew about themselves, then. But that is rarely if ever the case.' [554] It is, therefore, crucial that modern mind-sets and values are not superimposed onto personalities and events that took place in a previous age. To do so would result in conclusions based upon pure conjecture rather than reasoned evaluation.

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[551] Andrew Jones, (1972) *The Politics of Reform,* Cambridge University Press, London, p.12.
[552] Maurice Cowling, (1971) op cit. p.5.
[553] Ibid. p.5.

Ideologically conservatism displayed a remarkable resilience during our period, although it has been noted that 'the late nineteenth century provides an excellent example of the ill-fitting relationship between party and ideology.' [555] This is unsurprising considering that mass political parties were a comparatively new phenomena. Disraeli successfully piloted a far-reaching and radical extension of the franchise through parliament, which inevitably involved a re-appraisal of conservative values. Old style Toryism gave way to pragmatism and flexibility deemed necessary to cope with the new demands of the 1867 Act. Nevertheless the core substantive concepts of conservatism - the resistance to change, however unavoidable, unless it is perceived as organic and natural, and the attempt to subordinate change to the belief that the laws and forces guiding human behaviour have extra-human origins and, therefore, cannot and ought not to be subject to human wills and whims - remained strong. External pressure for franchise reform had built up over a period of years, to the extent that change became unavoidable, Disraeli realised this and managed the change in the best interests of his party and his beliefs. His concept of one-nation-conservatism enabled him to present the Conservatives as the "natural" party of government. Defeat in the general election of 1868 did not result in any ideological concessions, only in a greater effort to disseminate the Conservative message, most notably in his famous keynote speeches at Crystal Palace and Manchester. Victory in 1874 must partly be attributed to the attraction of that message. Disraeli, however, felt that he had exploited the flexibility of conservative ideology as far as was possible, at the time; indeed ‘the party of constitutional order and institutional authority, even for the most honourable of reasons, came close to subverting both.’ [556] Consequently, from an ideological perspective, Disraeli could offer nothing new to the electorate at the 1880 general election. Disraeli’s rhetoric of 1874 had been proved to be just that, he did not deliver. His administration had failed to prepare a considered programme of reforms and, therefore, failed to legislate one.

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[554] David Cannadine, (1990) *The Decline and fall of the British Aristocracy,* Yale University press, New Haven and London, p.22.

[555] Michael Freeden, (1996) op cit. p.348.

The twin blows of losing the 1880 general election and Disraeli’s death in 1881 placed great demands upon the party, but the core of its ideology had to remain inviolable to retain integrity, it was only the priority and prominence given to contingent values and concepts that were capable of revision. The new leader, Lord Salisbury, made no secret of his distrust of democracy. He had opposed the 1867 Reform Act, and had once said that ‘democracy is no way to run an empire.’ [557] He also disagreed with Disraeli’s idea of one-nation-conservatism, for Salisbury the Conservatives were, in essence, a minority party. Salisbury, therefore, was faced with the dilemma of re-asserting old-style Tory values, which had proved unpopular with the electorate in the past, but at the same time seeking office for what he himself acknowledged was a minority party. Undaunted, he was committed not only to achieving power, but in doing so on his own terms, using his own conception of conservatism to guide his party.

The Conservatives, even though in opposition, engineered the best arrangements possible for their party during the passage of the 1884 Reform Act and the Redistribution Act which accompanied it: nevertheless, the passing of those Acts 'tilted the balance of the constitution more markedly and more irrevocably than ever away from notables to numbers' [558] Although innately anti-democratic Salisbury knew that the will of the people must prevail: democracy, he argued, encouraged party politics, which encouraged class antagonism. Ways must be found, he said, to enable 'the generality of the nation' to express its 'cool and deliberate judgement.' [559] Utilizing its ideological pragmatism the Conservative party adapted to the new circumstances enabling Salisbury to give 'substance to a new democratic Toryism talked about since Disraeli. He did it in three ways: by developing the indispensable rhetoric; by his oversight of the machinery of a mass party; and by rhetoric translated into legislation.' [560] The Working Class Dwellings Act of 1885, County Councils in 1888, The Technical Instruction Act of 1889, The Housing of the Working Classes Act of 1890, The Public Health Act of 1890, free elementary education, and The Shop Hours Act of 1892, added up to a significant programme of social reform, which illustrated that, unlike Disraeli's, Salisbury's rhetoric had some substance.

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[556] Philip Norton and Arthur Aughey, (1981) op cit. p.119.
[557] Michael Bentley, (1984) op cit. p.275.

> 'There was no "crisis of Conservatism" while Salisbury led the Tories. For the first time since the Great Reform Bill [1832] they established themselves as the party of government…the language he employed was designed to associate the literate and respectable working class of the towns with the rule of those above them.' [561]

His brand of high politics had more scope and a wider impact than that of his predecessor. Adherence to the core concepts of conservative ideology, it appeared, had paid huge dividends for the party. Conservatism had remained faithful to its ideological core substantive concepts, and effectively shuffled the priority given to contingent values as circumstances demanded. For example, Salisbury was able to pass interventionist social legislation on the grounds that it was necessary, not for ideological purposes, but because deprivation was damaging to society as a whole. The party had no dogmatic attachment to *laissez faire* economics, therefore, interventionism, albeit at a low level, became a contingent value. Similarly, although he did not favour democracy, Salisbury realised that its advancement was inevitable, thus he adroitly resisted the 1884 Reform Act until an acceptable Redistribution Act was negotiated to accompany it. The change was seen as unavoidable, even natural and organic, therefore, it needed to be managed in the best interests of conservative ideology. However, in one sense the core substantive concept that the laws and forces guiding human behaviour have extra-human origins and, therefore, cannot and ought not to be subject to human wills and whims, worked against the party. The 1880s which saw the beginning of the Conservative Party's long period of dominance, was a watershed decade of change and reform. Understandably, from an ideological perspective 'they did not understand in detail the economic, social, and political forces that were responsible; and they misjudged the speed at which these developments would work themselves out.' [562] Rapid, uncontrolled change was anathema to conservatism, and the party, despite its best efforts, was incapable of accommodating the pace demanded. By the time of Salisbury's resignation in 1902 the party was, in effect, "behind the times."

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[558] David Cannadine, (1990) op cit p.27.

[559] Quoted in Peter Marsh, (1978) op cit. p.12. (Taken from "Disintegration" published anonymously by Lord Salisbury, although widely known to be his work even at the time, in the *Quarterly Review*, CLVI, 312, October 1883, p.566.) *cf* It has been noted that although he wrote anonymously Salisbury was not ashamed of his writing, but he did regard his "periodical articles" as 'ephemeral remarks for *pieces d'occasion.'* Michael Bentley, (2001) *Lord Salisbury's World: Conservative Environments in Late-Victorian Britain*, Cambridge University Press, p.126

[560] David Steele, (1999) op cit. p.227.

[561] Ibid. p.376.

Salisbury's successor, his nephew Arthur Balfour, was like his uncle from a patrician aristocratic background. He inherited a party that was now perceived as old-fashioned, and he faced ever increasing demands for radical change. Increasing international competition for trade was seriously affecting the economy, exacerbating an already deep agricultural depression, and an economic downturn. The trade union movement which previously had been more concerned with social issues had deemed it necessary to add a political dimension to their activities with the formation of the Labour Representation Committee in 1900. There was a gathering labour movement which sought fundamental social welfare legislation which would involve intervention by the government at an hitherto unprecedented level. The previously solid alliance that had existed with the Liberal Unionists began to break down when their leader Joseph Chamberlain left the government to champion Tariff Reform as the answer to economic decline, and as a means of financing social welfare. The party was rent by schism. Unfortunately Balfour was

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[562] David Cannadine, (1990) op cit p.31.

> ‘a patrician ultimately out of his depth in a democratic world…He was a bad platform speaker…was inattentive to the party rank and file. He was unable to cope with Chamberlain and Tariff Reform; he could not keep the party together, and he was even less impressive as leader of the opposition [after defeat in the 1906 general election]. He lost three successive general elections, was driven from the leadership by his own supporters, and left his party divided, defeated and demoralised, and without any clear successor.’ [563]

Undoubtedly Balfour had many faults, but he was constrained by his interpretation of the substantive core concepts of conservative ideology. He failed to recognise that some of the changes demanded were, in the long term, unavoidable: and failed to comprehend that interventionist legislation, on a collectivist basis, could be seen as a natural progression rather than as an attempt to subvert the Conservative notion of the organic evolution of society. Even so, in the debacle over Lloyd George’s 1909 Budget, Balfour failed to exploit the flexibility of Conservative ideology. The inevitability of the rise in government financed social welfare ought to have dictated that such unavoidable change needed to be managed rather than opposed. If the Budget had been allowed to pass the House of Lords, then the Conservative majority in that House could have been exploited, at a later date, to tailor economic legislation more in keeping with conservative values. [564] By rejecting the Budget outright, the House of Lord's veto was lost and an invaluable Conservative Party asset was lost forever. Moreover, opposition to Lloyd George's social measures only served to alienate the working class, and some of the party's own grass roots support. Contemporary evidence suggests that the need for a change in attitude, and in ideological interpretation, was recognised at the time.

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[563] David Cannadine, (1990) op cit p.226.

> 'In 1911, Lord Crawford attended a Tory shadow cabinet meeting, at which he found Henry Chaplin, and Lords Londonderry, Salisbury, and Derby. He thought them "excellent though discredited politicians, whose inclusion in future Conservative Governments would create dismay and perhaps even resentment among the rank and file.' [565]

The unstoppable march of democracy dictated 'as Lord Eustace Perry later recalled, [that] Balfour's administration "created for the last time, the illusion of government by a group of ruling families."' [566] The Conservative party realised too late that this was a natural and irreversible evolution, a change that needed to be accommodated and managed. 'But after Balfour's patrician detachment and ineffectual vacillation, middle class firmness and aggressiveness was exactly what the party wanted, and such a leader [Bonar Law] was more in tune with the background and feelings of the party rank and file in the Commons.' [567] Unfortunately although the tone of the party changed under Bonar Law's influence its tenor did not, it continued to be essentially negative. 'Whatever may be said of the party's recovery in the period before the outbreak of war, it was by no means an entirely healthy recovery…The party had little that was positive to offer.’ [568]

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[564] It has been convincingly argued that Balfour's rejection of the Budget was more the result of serious miscalculation rather than simple obduracy. See, R. F. Mackay, (1985) *Balfour: Intellectual Statesman,* Oxford University Press, pp.232-236.

[565] John Vincent, (Ed.) (1984) *The Crawford Papers: The Journals of David Lindsay Twenty-Seventh Earl of Crawford and Tenth Earl of Balcarres, 1871-1940 : During the Years 1892-1940,* Manchester University Press, pp. 191-192.

[566] David Cannadine, (1990) op cit p.208.

[567] John Vincent, (Ed.) (1984) op cit. p.260.

Thus, retrospectively at least, the trajectory of the Conservative Party’s fortunes can be interpreted with reference to the degree with which decisions were informed by conservative ideology. Whether those decisions were taken with ideology in mind must remain open to debate: it is even open to question whether decision makers of the time would have been familiar with the idea of ideology. However, their involvement in high politics dictated that their policy preferences needed to be informed by the contemporary ethos of their party; and moreover, their machinations needed to reflect that ethos.

The personnel involved in decision making, obviously, also had a direct effect on party fortunes. In the realm of high politics, leadership and how it is exercised, is crucial. Disraeli’s rivalry with Gladstone, and his thirst for power, characterized his political career. He demonstrated his grasp of high politics when he successfully managed to out-bid Gladstone in 1867 and secure the passage of the Second Reform Act; having shown consummate skill in convincing his own party that the radical changes he proposed would prove beneficial. [569] He assumed the leadership in February 1868, having in his own words ‘climbed to the top of the greasy pole.’ [570] He survived losing the December 1868 general election and re-vamped the party organization in preparation for the next attempt. Having engineered the 1874 election victory, making an important personal contribution with his extra-parliamentary speeches, he declared that ‘the country required a little more energy in regard to foreign policy and a little less energy in regard to its home policy.'[571] This maxim was to prove costly when he and Gladstone clashed over Britain's Balkan policy in 1876. Disraeli saw the situation as a matter of British imperial and strategic interests, needing to support the Ottoman Empire against Russian expansion. Gladstone, however, saw the issue in moral terms, because Bulgarian Christians had been massacred by the Turks and, therefore, believed it was immoral to support the Ottoman Empire. The latter's pamphlet *The Bulgarian Horrors and the Question of the East,* published in September 1876, sold 200,000 copies and prompted a spate of protest meetings. In a fatal error of judgement Disraeli dismissed the pamphlet as 'of all the Bulgarian horrors, perhaps the greatest.' [572]The *Times* of 21st August 1877 described Gladstone's impromptu speeches, having taken place when parliament was not sitting, as a 'new invention in the way of political agitation.' [573] His more populist approach resonated with the electorate, many of whom were unfamiliar with the niceties of international diplomacy. When Gladstone embarked on his "Midlothian campaign" in 1879 he repeatedly referred back to the issue denouncing what he called "Beaconsfieldism". 'The General Election of 1880 was…fought chiefly on the foreign policy of Lord Beaconsfield's Government' [574] and unsurprisingly, given the effectiveness of Gladstone's campaign, the Conservatives lost. Disraeli became ill soon after and died in April 1881. He had been successful in high politics until being out-manoeuvred by his old rival, an equally skilled practitioner. Despite his reputation as a dilettante [575] Disraeli had commanded great authority within his party, Sir Michael Hicks-Beach recalled that he 'kept a watchful eye on all his colleagues…I have known Lord Beaconsfield enforce his own view on the Cabinet after all its members but one had expressed a different opinion.' [576] Perhaps more importantly he had become the embodiment of his party, the Liberal MP Sir Henry Fowler paid tribute saying

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[568] David Dutton, (1992) *His Majesty’s Loyal Opposition: The Unionist Party in Opposition 1905-1915,* Liverpool University Press, p.265.

[569] Lord Stanley noted in his journal, 12th March 1867, ‘Cabinet on reform bill, long but all agreed: many details gone into.’ And again on 18th May 1867, ‘Long cabinet, chiefly on reform: but all agreed.’ Quoted in John Vincent, (Ed.) (1978) *Disraeli, Derby and the Conservative Party: Journals and Memoirs of Edward Henry, Lord Stanley, 1849-1869,* Harvester, Sussex, pp. 294 and 309.

[570] R. Blake, (1966) op cit., p.487.

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[571] Quoted in Edith Henrietta Fowler, (The Hon. Mrs. Robert Hamilton) (1912) *The Life of Henry Hartley Fowler, First Viscount Wolverhampton, GCSI,* Hutchinson & Co., London, p.112.

[572] R. W. Davis, (1976) op cit. p.199.

[573] Donald Read, (1979) op cit. p.166.

[574] Edith Henrietta Fowler, (1912) op cit. p.112.

[575] For example, after losing the 1868 general election, he worked secretly upon his novel *Lothair* all through 1869, only then did he address the problem of his party's organization. Archie Hunter, (2001) op cit. p.82.

> 'We cannot note the passing away of this great man without noting the passing away of an era. For the last three-quarters of a century, certainly since the death of Pitt and Fox, no two men have so completely impersonated the two great political opinions which divide the bulk of the people of this country into two great political parties, as have Lord Beaconsfield and Mr. Gladstone.' [577]

A ringing endorsement certainly, but one that cannot mask the fact that after reversing his party's dismal electoral record in 1874 Disraeli could not maintain the momentum, and once again his party found itself in opposition.

Lord Salisbury had disagreed with Disraeli often, but concurred with his old leader's maxim that party unity was paramount. Consequently after Disraeli's death he made no attempt to gain sole control of the party, but was content to operate as leader of the opposition in the House of Lords while Sir Stafford Northcote led the House of Commons. Even so it was Salisbury who took the lead in ensuring that the terms of the 1884-5 electoral reforms were the best available to the Tories. 'The decisive factor in committing the party to the transformation was the settlement of 1884, with its recognition of the city and industrial primacy, and the premium thus placed on urban support for Conservatism' [578] It must be emphasized, however, that his success in doing so may well have owed as much to luck as to judgement. In the absence of modern research methods, such as opinion polls, both parties relied very much on instinct rather than reliable information. For example, Liberal negotiator Sir Charles Dilke was reported to have said to a colleague at the end of the Committee stage ‘I have left the Tories not more than twelve seats in London’. At the following November 1885 general election London returned thirty-six Tories to twenty six Liberals. [579] Even the press of the time were unsure

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[576] J. P. Cornford, (1967) op cit. p.305.

[577] Edith Henrietta Fowler, (1912) op cit. p.136.

[578] James Cornford, (1963) 'The Transformation of Conservatism in the Late Nineteenth Century' in *Victorian Studies,* 7:1 September 1963, p.66.. For a more detailed record of events see Andrew Jones, (1972) *The Politics of Reform 1884*, Cambridge University Press, London.

> ‘The *Times* and the moderate journals did not like it, and by contrast the Radicals became convinced that it would play powerfully into their hands. They assumed that the increased number of seats for large urban centres…would mean a huge increase in Radical representation. These places were the “source and centre of English political opinion,” the mainstays of Radicalism. Yet they falsified all Radical predictions when they went Tory in the elections of 1885.’ [580]

Even if he benefited from good fortune in this instance, Salisbury’s handling of the Home Rule crisis illustrate that his talents in the field of high politics were considerable. His use of inside information regarding Gladstone’s intentions, his use of Lord Canarvon in making tentative overtures to the Irish Nationalists, his timing of dissolution, his embrace of the Liberal Unionists and his subsequent control over them, all portray an astute understanding of what was necessary to further the Conservative cause as he saw it.

Lord Salisbury was often pre-occupied with foreign policy and some thought that this led to him being too permissive. Hicks Beach was of the opinion that ‘certainly as Prime Minister he did not exercise the control over his colleagues, either in or out of the Cabinet, that Lord Beaconsfield did…Lord Salisbury frequently allowed important matters to be decided by a small majority of votes, even against his own opinion.’ [581] Of course, Prime Ministers are always pressed for time: Disraeli’s solution was to spend little time on policy, preferring to leave that area to his lieutenants, and devote himself to man-management. Salisbury took an opposite view, spending much of his time working on ‘legislation or diplomacy, coping with the

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[579] Herbert Asquith, (1928 Two Vols.) op cit. Vol. 1, p.90. footnote.
[580] Peter Fraser, (1966) op cit. p.57.
[581] J. P. Cornford, (1967) op cit. p.305.

Queen when and how best he could, and with party hardly at all.' [582] That said, there is evidence that when the issue at stake was party unity, he exercised his authority in no uncertain manner. For example,

> '[John] Gorst, as Under-Secretary for India had several times embarrassed the government by appearing to dissociate himself from his colleagues actions. Salisbury admonished him for desiring greater independence of action than was fitting, and that his actions had detrimentally affected his candidature for promotion to Postmaster General. His ability was recognized, as was his ambition, but if he could not toe the line his advancement would be severely impaired.' [583]

In addition, his influence over the whole parliamentary party was equally effective, 'by the 1890s nine out of ten Conservative members voted in the government's lobby in over 90 per cent of all divisions.' [584] Even beyond his own party, he was in control, as demonstrated by his successful resistance to repeated demands from Liberal Unionist leader Joseph Chamberlain to formulate a "programme" of measures to be fought under at elections.

Although he steadfastly refused to publish a political programme for elections, Salisbury was adept at using the press as a tool in his high politics machinations. Parliamentary speeches had always been covered by newspapers, often in full, as a matter of course, but the advent of extensive extra-parliamentary speechmaking created a new arena of competition for politicians. Randolph Churchill, for example, openly cultivated the press, 'the Central News Agency graded his speeches as "Class 1", for verbatim reporting – a privilege shared only by Chamberlain, Gladstone, and Salisbury' [585] Salisbury was thus well aware that the power of the press could be potent, even if 'political activity, whether reported in the *Times* and *Hansard* or not, did not mean what those untrained in the exercise of power thought it meant.' [586] When Lord Carlingford realised in 1885 that the major newspapers, most notably the *Times,* were not reporting his speeches, he knew that his political career was over. He concluded that, 'that kind of speech is wasted when not allowed to reach the public.' [587] All politicians courted the press

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[582] Michael Bentley, (2001) op cit. p.287.

[583] Salisbury to Gorst 7th September 1891, quoted in H. J. Hanham, (Ed.) (1969) op cit. p.92.

[584] Martin Pugh, (1996), '1886-1905', in Anthony Seldon (Ed.) (1996) *How Tory Governments Fall: The Tory Party in Power Since 1783*, Fontana, London, p.203.

[585] R. F. Foster, (1981) *Lord Randolph Churchill: A Political Life*, Oxford University Press, p.219.

> 'The *Birmingham Post* was a loyal Chamberlainite journal, and Chamberlain had, moreover, the ear of T. H. S. Escott who wrote for the influential Conservative *Standard* (with a circulation of some 150,000). Dilke was in close contact with Frank Hill, editor of the small-selling but important *Daily News,* and both he and Chamberlain kept in confidential touch with John Morley, editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette.'* [588]

The relationship was very much a two-way arrangement. Morley wrote to Dilke, when in office, that 'it would be worth silver, gold, and jewels if I could have ten minutes with you about three times a week.' [589] The cachet of office gave more access to the press but care was needed to ensure that newspaper coverage was advantageous. Salisbury

> 'needed the papers, like any other politician, using them to protect the image of a party and an alliance which preserved the old values while being uniquely capable of reinterpreting them for an industrial democracy. A *Times* man with good connections described Salisbury as the prime minister most accessible to the press: careful about the information he furnished, he gave it freely when he saw fit, and it was valuable.' [590]

He received assistance in his endeavours from an unlikely source. 'As Queen Victoria emerged from her withdrawal to achieve immense popularity during the last thirty years of her reign, so she also revealed a growing preference for Conservative governments. Nor did her prejudices remain a private matter between herself and her ministers.' [591] Because of the power of the press the Queen's preferences became widely known, and influenced at all levels. The Rev. Whitewell Elwin wrote in 1895 that his wife, 'Fanny, tells me that our servants take in three Society Papers, and they like to have their news and sentiments fresh from the Queen herself, or her associates.' [592] Evidence, perhaps, that the deference, previously so astutely exploited by Disraeli, was still a powerful influence.

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[586] A. B Cooke and John Vincent (1974) op cit. p.166.

[587] A. B. Cooke and J. R. Vincent, (Eds.) (1971) *Lord Carlingford's Journal Reflections of a Cabinet Minister 1885,* Clarendon Press, Oxford, p.139.

[588] Dennis Judd, (1977) *Radical Joe: A Life of Joseph Chamberlain,* Hamish Hamilton, London, p.103.

[589] Quoted in Roy Jenkins, (1958) op cit. p.139.

[590] David Steele, (1999) op cit. p.228.

[591] Martin Pugh, (1988) op cit. p.275.

Salisbury's mixture of skill and luck in the field of high politics served his party well, but by the time of his retirement the party had become stale and old-fashioned; Queen Victoria had died as the new century had begun, signalling the dawn of a new era. His successor, Arthur Balfour, rather than seeking to revitalise the party remained firmly entrenched in nineteenth century practices and attitudes. Chamberlain wrote to him as early as 1894 'you do not read the newspapers…but may not this disregard of the Press be carried too far?' [593] This neglect of the press assumes even greater importance when ones opponents take the opposite view, for example, Sir Edward Gosse noted in his diary that Rosebery did not deign to direct 'his address to the House but speaks directly to the Press Gallery.' [594] In fairness to Balfour it must be noted that newspapers, then as now, were politically partisan; and whereas it may be true that 'after the 1886 [Liberal] split the British press became predominately Unionist, having previously been overwhelmingly Liberal.' [595] It is equally true that the Liberals regrouped very successfully and by the 1900s the widely read and influential *Manchester Guardian,* under C. P. Snow, had .become 'the newspaper *par excellence* of the New Liberalism.' [596] Unfortunately his disdain for the power of the press was not Balfour's only shortcoming in the field of high politics. He could not negotiate or compromise, even with his erstwhile friend Joseph Chamberlain, over the problems associated with Tariff Reform; he antagonised the trade union movement by his open support for the Taff Vale and Osbourne judgements; and alienated many important people with his notorious pronouncement, following defeat in the 1906 general election, that "the great Unionist Party should still control whether in power or opposition." This attitude, although in large part a legacy of Salisbury's previously successful "referendal theory", gave the Liberal campaign against the House of Lords greater impetus. Even during the constitutional crisis over the Veto Bill Balfour appeared devoid of insight, writing to Lansdowne that he did not believe 'that men like Mr. Asquith, Mr. Lloyd George, and Lord Crewe would find any satisfaction in acting the part of bullies in the Royal Closet' and that 'they were so completely in the hands of the Irish and of the Labour Party, that they would probably be forced to ask for pledges quite inconsistent with the spirit of the constitution.' [597] He seemed oblivious to the suggestion that 'Liberals believed in Gladstone as a constitutional authority of unimpeachable rectitude and considered themselves to have received from him, as a sacred legacy, the duty of curbing the Lords.' [598] He attempted, vainly, to counter the threat to the House of Lords by touting the idea of referenda for important issues, but even at the time this was seen as little short of a panic measure. Lord Esher wrote that

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[592] Rev. Whitewell Elwin to Lady Emily Lytton, 4th October 1895, quoted in Randolph S. Churchill (1959), p.40.

[593] Chamberlain to Balfour December 1894, quoted in Blanche E. C. Dugdale (1936 Two Vols.) op cit. Vol. 1, p208.

[594] Gosse's diary February 1905, quoted in John Wilson, (1973) op cit. p.423.

[595] H. C. G. Matthews, (1987) op cit. pp.46-47.

[596] E. J. Feuchtwanger, (1985) op cit. p.277.

> 'the Tories are getting deeper and deeper into the mire. All this comes of bidding against the Radicals on their lines. Imagine asking an agricultural labourer to express an opinion on any great legislative measure. He is competent to say whether he will have A. J. B. or Asquith as Prime Minister. That is what hitherto a General Election has decided. But the Referendum is democracy run mad.' [599]

It is perhaps ironic that his predecessor achieved so much for the party as an avowed antidemocrat, and Balfour achieved so little advocating plebiscitary democracy. He was also guilty of "placing all his eggs in one basket" a point not lost upon his colleagues. The Fourth Marquess of Salisbury sent a memo to Austen Chamberlain and Andrew Bonar-Law warning that 'we are asked to risk everything upon the next throw…If we fail this time the power of the House of Lords must go, and with it the Union, the Church, the whole realm of religious interests to which we are attached, and the banner against Socialism.' [600] Lose they did, and although this prediction turned out to be overly pessimistic, it graphically illustrates that Balfour's own colleagues felt that the Conservative party was unsafe in his hands. His inadequacy as a practitioner of high politics was confirmed when he resigned the leadership without endorsing or even suggesting a successor. 'Bonar-Law [was] elected as a "compromise" candidate to avoid splitting the party by a battle between Austen. Chamberlain and Walter Long… "The fools" said Lloyd George, "have stumbled on their best man by accident"' [601]

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[597] Balfour to Lansdowne 27th December 1910, quoted in R. B. McCallum, (1936) *Asquith*, Duckworth, London, p.78.

[598] Ibid. p.79.

[599] Esher to M. V. Brett 30th November 1910. in Maurice V. Brett (Ed. For Vols. 1 &2) and Viscount Oliver Esher, (Ed. For Vols. 3&4) (1934 Four Vols.) op cit. Vol. 3, p.37.

"Best man" or not, Bonar-Law at least tried to instil some urgency and purpose into his party. He adopted a combative style designed to attack those opponents who had so often humiliated his predecessor, and who appeared to enjoy almost every parliamentary advantage. His strategy was also designed to unite the often quarrelsome Tories around a recognizable issue, Ulster Unionism, thereby rallying those whose disillusionment had possibly made Balfour's leadership doomed from the start. Unlike Balfour, he eschewed notions of restraint and behaved as if prosecuting a war, attracting the most committed and dynamic Unionists and seeking to inspire more moderate factions. [602] His methods brought his party under control, but the corridors of real power remained off-limits to the Conservatives until the First World War altered the political landscape.

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[600] 4th Marquess of Salisbury to Austin Chamberlain and Bonar-Law 1st December 1910, quoted in Neil Blewett, (1972) op cit. p.159.

[601] R. T. McKenzie, (1955) op cit. p.31.

[602] See R. J. Q. Adams (1999) *Bonar Law*, John Murray, London, p.72

The importance of high politics to the Conservative party's electoral fortunes appears evident. Disraeli, whilst politically astute and unswerving in his lust for power, concentrated his practice of high politics inwardly towards his own party. Initially to gain acceptance for his radical 1867 Reform Act, and then to promote his one-nation-conservatism. The end result was victory in 1874, but then cavalier complacency leading to the 1880 defeat. Lord Salisbury, in modern terms, "networked" very effectively. He proved to be a superb political manipulator who orchestrated events in a quiet, stable, even staid manner. He was adept at using the press and other people and parties to further his own and his party's ends. Unlike Disraeli he kept his finger on the pulse of developments until advancing years began to dull his political nous. Consequently he presided over a period of unprecedented Conservative electoral dominance but left a tired and worn out party to his successor. With the benefit of hindsight it is possible to argue that Balfour had little chance of repeating the success of his uncle.

> 'The Conservative success of the 1880s and 1890s was in many ways too much an historical success, that is to say it was dependent on a particular set of conditions; any alteration in those conditions would destroy its basis. In particular the Conservatives were vulnerable to any one of three developments: the more positive challenge which would come from a Liberal revival, an anti-Conservative reaction, and the emergence of a third political party. The electoral difficulties of Edwardian Conservatism came about as a result of the conditions arising for all three factors to occur simultaneously.' [603]

He also faced a resurgent Liberal party which had learned the lesson that party unity was the vital pre-requisite for electoral success; and his own party split over the issue of Tariff Reform. That said, his clumsy and incompetent handling of the problems that faced him only served to further damage the Conservative cause, as clearly illustrated by his total failure to achieve a single electoral success.

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[603] E. H. H. Green (1995) *The Crisis of Conservatism: The Politics, Economics. And Ideology of The British Conservative Party, 1880-1914*, Routledge, London, p.137.

The situation did not improve under Bonar-Law's leadership. 'The party's tendency to endorse violent resistance in Ulster, and Law's much vaunted "new style", which seemed to consist largely of abusing Asquith, were symptomatic of the Conservatives inability to discover a real sense of direction.'[604]

It has been accepted by this study that organization alone cannot win elections, yet it surely cannot be coincidence that periods of intense re-organization coincide with times of electoral success. 'It is worth underlining the fact that the parliamentary leaders of each of the parties had originally called their extra-parliamentary organizations into being primarily as vote-getting agencies.' [605] This may appear to be a trite observation, but it highlights the fact that post-1867 "vote-getting" assumed a much higher profile than in previous years. Disraeli realised this when he employed the capable John Gorst to create the Conservative party electoral machine. Gorst's efforts proved to be 'the critical organizational counterpart to Disraeli's rhetorical courting of urban electors.' [606] Specifically organizing to target the new urban electorate was rewarded with success in 1874. It was no accident, therefore, that after the organization put in place by Gorst was allowed to stagnate, the Tories lost the following election in 1880. The Liberals had caught up, and surpassed the Tories in their organization, but Disraeli was reluctant to emulate their system. At a meeting on 19th May 1880 he addressed five hundred assembled Conservative MPs and Peers referring with some aloofness to 'the new foreign political organization of the

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[604] E. H. H. Green (1995) op cit. p.333.

[605] R. T. McKenzie, (1955) op cit. p.9.

[606] Angus Hawkins, (2005) 'The Disraelian Achievement 1868-1874' in Stuart Ball and Anthony Seldon, (Eds.) (2005) op cit. p.40.

Liberals.' [607] It has been argued with respect to Disraeli's party reforms that 'many of these steps were tentative and made little impact at the time. Certainly they did not mark any sudden transformation of politics from the old to the new. A greater watershed in British politics came in the 1880s.' [608]

Salisbury appointed Middleton and Akers-Douglas to rebuild the party organization. 'There was no need for interference with its method. That was the classic period in Conservative electioneering. Under Mr. Akers-Douglas as Whip, and Captain Middleton as Chief Agent, the organization attained a completeness which could hardly have been improved upon.' [609] This revolution in organization was handsomely rewarded. 'The period 1886 until the 1906 general election is rightly seen as one of twenty years of Conservative dominance, turning the tables upon the 40 years of Liberal supremacy which had followed the Conservative Party rift over the Corn Laws in 1846. The Conservatives had won only two elections [1841 and 1874] in the half century since the 1832 Great Reform Act.' [610] There can be no doubt that much of this golden era of Conservative party dominance was attributable to organization. 'There are…numerous tributes by individual MPs to the effectiveness of their local associations.' [611] It was the local associations which held the key to the Conservative's electoral success for almost twenty consecutive years. Organizers had little or no way of gauging public opinion on a national scale. The only national poll was the general election itself, after which, of course, it was too late to make adjustments. Middleton and his allies, therefore, concentrated upon using the limited tools they had available at local level, and the greatest of these was registration. Canvasses were conducted, and objections to registrations were organized based upon the results. A good example of the process took place in Manchester between 1880 and 1885.

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[607] E. J. Feuchtwanger, (1968) op cit. p.143.
[608] Andrew Gamble, (1974) op cit. p.19.
[609] R. T. McKenzie, (1955) op cit. p.265.
[610] Anthony Seldon and Stuart Ball, (Eds.) (1994) op cit. pp. 18-19.
[611] R. T. McKenzie, (1955) op cit. p.64.

> ‘Between 1874 and 1880 the Conservatives had neglected the registers, with the result that the Liberals had made very considerable gains, to which they were only doubtfully entitled, and easily won two of the three seats at the general election. After the election the Conservatives raised a fund to enable them to purify the registers, and by confining themselves to cases about which there could be little dispute they reduced the Liberal strength by 2,772 voters at the October 1880 registration.’ [612]

In this instance the Liberals launched a counter-attack, and by mid-October 1884 the electorate in the constituency was 8,945 smaller than in 1880, a total made up of both Tory and Liberal supporters, as well as neutrals. [613] An important point to note, however, is that the Liberals own 1883 Corrupt practices Act severely limited the number of paid election workers available to the parties. The Conservatives could utilize the willing, even eager, volunteers of the Primrose League to maintain local pressure on the registers, the Liberals had no comparable organization. The issue was considered so important that

> ‘Salisbury took a close interest in the business. A Registration Committee chaired by Smith was established at Central Office. Middleton, in 1889, sent Salisbury “as requested a copy of the report on Registration submitted to Mr. W. H. Smith in the Spring” Middleton reported to Salisbury in October 1889 on the extent of the committee’s enquiry and its examinations of party agents. Smith told [Akers] Douglas a little later “Salisbury expects us at 12.30 on Monday re. registration and organization.” Of this new world of “wire pulling” Salisbury later confesses that he did not “like its appearance very much, but gradually inured himself to it as a necessary of a new state of things.”’ [614]

Like it or not Salisbury realised the tremendous value of the system and ‘tight registers and low polls…[became] classic maxims of Conservative electioneering…Sam Fitton, the Conservative agent demonstrated that a technique of getting more than twice as many objections sustained as did his rival agent could make a vital difference in many a more marginal constituency.' [615] This "vital difference" is illustrated by the fact that Conservative support 'remained remarkably stable between the 1880s and 1914, while that of the Liberals bounced up and down; even in the Edwardian period the Tory vote stood within the 43% to 46% range' [616] Tight registers and "getting the vote out" were invaluable Tory organizational assets which, when properly exploited, paid huge dividends.

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[612] H. J. Hanham, (1978 ed.) op cit. p.235.

[613] H. J. Hanham, (1978 ed.) op cit. p.235.

[614] Middleton to Salisbury 25th October 1889, Smith to Akers Douglas 11th December 1889, and the *Times* 20th March 1896. All quoted in Richard Shannon, (1996) op cit. pp. 312-313.

Organization was obviously vital to the Conservative electoral machine, but 'when Middleton retired in 1903 his successor declined the post of Honorary Secretary of the National Union which resulted in considerable shuffling and re-shuffling of responsibilities between Central Office and the National Union.' [617] The continuity and co-ordination that had existed under Middleton was broken, and his comprehensive oversight of the organization was lost. Just as organization alone cannot win elections, lack of it cannot shoulder the whole blame for defeat. However, it is worthy of note that organizational changes made after the catastrophic defeat of 1906 were characterized by power-broking and internal power struggles rather than by genuine attempts to develop ways of mobilizing the Tory vote. 'The pre-1914 electorate in Britain included only some 60% of adult males, so that a party like the Conservatives would still have done well simply by amassing its support among the propertied sections of society.' [618] Moreover, although the franchise was not yet universal. 'the vast majority of the electorate was to be found in manual occupations, yet they did not deny their support to the Conservatives.'[619] Of Henry Pelling's 'eighty-nine overwhelmingly working class constituencies, twenty eight were more often Conservative or Liberal Unionist than Liberal or Labour in the elections of

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[615] Richard Shannon, (1996) op cit. p.313.
[616] Martin Pugh, (1988) op cit. pp.259-260.
[617] R. T. McKenzie, (1955) op cit. p.267.
[618] Martin Pugh, (1988) op cit. p.271.
[619] Robert Waller, (1994) op cit. p.582.

1885-1910.’ [620] With their core vote properly managed, and more attention paid to crucial marginals, as in the Salisbury era, the party, even led by the louche Balfour, ought to have garnered considerably more success than it actually did. The reason may be that ‘in general Balfour studiously avoided giving any attention to party organization until the election defeats of 1910 forced his hand.’ [621]

It can be concluded that Disraeli’s ideological vision alone could not build upon his 1874 election victory; the organization that had masterminded that victory was allowed to run down and the result was defeat in 1880. Lord Salisbury offered no new ideology but rather returned to the basics. His astute management of high politics split the Liberal vote and ensured electoral success; but to maintain that success he relied upon scrupulous and meticulous organization to maximise the votes available to him. Balfour, faced with major problems was easily outmanoeuvred by his opponents in the realm of high politics. His vacillation and indecision offered no clear leadership, with devastating effects to his party. But even then, it is clear that his neglect of organization made matters much worse than they otherwise would have been. Furthermore, ‘the period prior to 1914 provides little evidence that the Unionists had enjoyed even the levels of success of their Liberal rivals in coming to terms with the demands of governing a mass democracy.’ [622]

It was their ideology and interests which gave the Conservative Party direction. However, public opinion which would have provided landmarks by which to steer the party was largely unknowable, certainly on a national level. It was left to party leaders to utilise their skill in high politics to navigate a course for their party through constantly evolving political circumstances. Importantly though, the impact of ideology, or even its accompanying political rhetoric, on new and often uneducated voters was impossible to gauge; whereas the salience of high politics, by its very nature, was beyond the grasp of the ordinary elector. Thus, paradoxically, the influence of both of these crucial elements was impossible to determine *a priori,* even though the significance of both to the Conservative cause can hardly be exaggerated. The relationship between the two was almost symbiotic in nature, each being informed and governed by the other. The relative importance of these big guns in the Conservative armoury was largely contingent upon circumstances. For example, Disraeli's exploitation of the pragmatic flexibility he saw in conservative ideology was crucial to election victory in 1874; whereas it is equally evident that his failure to translate his high politics rhetoric on social reform into legislation contributed to his defeat in 1880. On the other hand, Salisbury's deft high politics kept his party in the ascendancy during his time as leader; while simultaneously, his strict adherence to the core concepts of conservative ideology was successfully mediated, for popular consumption, by his willingness to deploy decontested concepts, such as limited state intervention, to bolster the Conservative's electoral appeal. Balfour's lack of ideological vision, and his ineptness in high politics, were undoubtedly culpable in his dismal electoral record. Bonar Law struggled in vain to focus his party's ideology, and his high politics became characterized by invective rather than compelling rhetoric. Attempting to assess whether high politics or ideology was of greater importance to the Conservatives during our period of study, is highly problematical; furthermore, the question must be asked, whether it is feasible to do so. The two are so inextricably reciprocal that success or failure in either area, inevitably enhanced or diminished the other. The only touchstone is electoral success. The record suggests that only when ideology and high politics were cogently deployed in tandem was success achieved.

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[620] Robert Waller, (1994) op cit. p.582. Figures taken from Henry Pelling, (1967) *The Social Geography of British Elections 1885-1910,* Macmillan, London.

[621] David Dutton (1992) op cit. p.132.

[622] Ibid. p.278.

Party organization provided the only intelligible link and conduit between party leaders and grass roots support. Even so it, perhaps, cannot rank in importance alongside high politics and ideology, if only because its form and direction was dictated by those two elements. Nevertheless, it crucially acted as the oil that lubricated the Conservative machine to keep it running smoothly and effectively. When organization was allowed to deteriorate the machine stalled and electoral impetus was lost. When organization was seriously neglected the machine seized and the Conservatives were left becalmed and at the mercy of political currents over which they had little or no control. H. J. Hanham has argued that ‘the chief characteristic of party organization in the nineteenth century was its impotence.’ [623] In the sense that Conservative party organization failed to influence the ideological direction of the party, or to influence high politics and policy formulation, and thereby the course that the leadership chose to follow, this is undoubtedly true. However, as regards the vital role of managing support, and making the best use of the limited tools available to engineer electoral success, the Tory party organization proved that when it was given the attention and resources it merited it was far from impotent. It represented a make-weight in the electoral scales, and like all make-weights could tip those scales one way or the other.

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[623] H. J. Hanham, (1978 ed.) op cit. p.347.

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