

# MANCHESTER LIBERALISM AND THE 1918 GENERAL ELECTION

Brendon Jones

The experience of Liberalism in Manchester in the period before and during the 1918 general election campaign graphically conveys the problems which faced the party. The First World War had totally changed the political landscape within Britain. Victory in three consecutive pre-War general elections counted for nothing as the Asquithian wing of a divided Liberal Party was reduced to a rump of only 29 M.P.s in 1918. This national collapse was fully reflected in Manchester. The period 1903 to 1914 had witnessed an improvement in the electoral fortunes of Manchester Liberalism to the extent that on the outbreak of the First World War the party occupied a position of relative strength. In 1918, however, the city did not return a single Liberal candidate. This article examines Liberal politics in Manchester prior to and during the 1918 general election in an attempt to explain the remarkable collapse of the party at local level.

The political truce which had been maintained throughout the First World War had resulted in a decline of local Liberal Associations, as political activities were suspended. Consequently organisation had deteriorated, particularly as many of the political activists and agents had joined the armed forces. This needed to be addressed in the later months of the War by the Manchester Liberal Federation; wide-ranging organisational reform was required both to re-stimulate enthusiasm and to address the changes which would be required to meet the challenges posed by the Fourth Reform Act, most notably a greatly enlarged electorate and revised constituency boundaries. Liberals had also been placed in an invidious position by the dichotomy which had gradually emerged in Liberal politics after December 1916. Each Liberal candidate had to choose whether to support Lloyd George and the Coalition or to take an independent stance and identify with the Asquithian position. The 'coupon' election marked the formal division of the Liberal party, with Lloyd George endorsing 'couponed' candidates, both Liberals and Unionists, against Asquithian Liberals. Inevitably there were differences which prompted confusion. Within Manchester the Liberal candidates in the Blackley, Moss Side and Hulme divisions emphasised support for Lloyd George and the need for a Coalition government to maintain national unity while the difficult issues raised by the peace and domestic reconstruction were tackled. In the Exchange, Rusholme and Withington divisions the candidates adopted the opposite position attacking Lloyd George and arguing that the election raised important questions regarding the freedom of the electorate and the independence of Parliament. These divisions, combined with the 'khaki' atmosphere which dominated the campaign and the failure of Manchester Liberals to address organisational reform fully, ensured that Liberalism experienced an electoral debacle in Manchester. Asquith later claimed the Liberal party suffered a blow in the 'coupon' election from which it never fully recovered.

## Organisational Weakness

The Fourth Reform Act radically extended the franchise, and restructured the electoral map of the United Kingdom. This compelled the Manchester Liberal Federation to confront organisational changes, to meet the challenges which new constituency boundaries, combined with the introduction of universal male suffrage and the enfranchisement of women over the age of thirty presented. After the introduction of the Representation of the People Bill into the Commons, in mid-1917, these issues were regularly discussed at meetings of the Federation's Executive Committee. As a consequence, in the eighteen months which elapsed between the Bill's emergence and the 1918 general election there were some innovations in the party's organisational structure in Manchester. However, in the light of the party's experience in the 'coupon' election, these were arguably too late and not sufficient.

In the months immediately after the introduction of the Bill, there was a lack of dynamism within the Manchester Liberal Federation, which delayed the introduction of changes. Although there was a widespread recognition that there was a need to reorganise, this initially took the form of informal meetings between the officers of the Federation, representatives from the Women's Liberal organisation within the city, and delegates from the Stretford, Prestwich and Gorton divisions, which under the proposals of the Bill were to be included in the Manchester electoral area.<sup>1</sup> These meetings continued throughout 1917, but failed to produce any concrete organisational changes; emphasis rested on vague assertions of the necessity to address the problems raised, rather than on effecting the required changes as quickly as possible, to allow sufficient time for them to become established. It was not until January 1918 that the larger meetings were refined into a smaller Reorganisation Committee. The committee was assigned the task of addressing issues in depth, with a view to producing a thorough report which the Federation could act upon. This decision was the product of a recognition that definite action was required, if the party was not to face a complete electoral disaster at the next contest, which was not likely to be delayed for a long period of time after the Bill became law.

In the meantime, whilst the Reorganisation Committee prepared its report, attempts began to utilise female supporters of the party, which in the new electoral conditions would be an important component in future Liberal success. In late November 1917, following pressure from Geoffrey Howard, the Asquithian Chief Whip, the Federation advertised for a women's organiser.<sup>2</sup> However, as with other matters, a decision was delayed and it was not until early in spring 1918 that Miss Maude Illingworth was appointed to the position. This represented an example of the loss of valuable time, in a principal area, owing to a lacklustre

approach. This was intensified because once the appointment was confirmed it took Illingworth several weeks to plan a suitable scheme. As a result it was not possible to begin changing the old structure until midsummer. With hindsight, this delay, combined with the inevitable inaction during a large part of the summer, ensured that by the calling of the election in November, little had been achieved. This failure had an important impact on the party's electoral performance in the city, which will be discussed later.

It was not until late in April that the Reorganisation Committee had produced a scheme. Although no copy appears to have survived, it may be inferred from the evidence available that emphasis was placed on the role of agents in individual divisions to take action, according to the specific needs of each seat. In this sense the recommendations advanced were weak; there needed to be a more co-ordinated approach across the city.<sup>3</sup> The subsequent campaign supports this point; emphasis was placed on individual candidates fighting their respective campaigns without a centralised lead. It is also important to note that it was necessary to adopt one agent to cover two divisions each.<sup>4</sup> This was a legacy of the war; the political truce had put an end to routine political work for the duration of hostilities. This had prompted the decline of political organisation which was heightened by the fact that many of the men who had played an active role in the pre-war period had been called up to fight. There had been little concern from within Liberalism about this, as "Liberals applied themselves energetically to winning the war, and their liberalism was subordinated to the task. There was little concern that local associations did not meet, or that constituencies no longer had agents."<sup>5</sup> Although this would have been a problem for each of the political parties Martin Pugh indicates that it was the Liberal party which experienced greatest difficulties in this area. The First World War had dealt a mortal blow to the Liberal professional cadre of agents whose stock had been high in the years before 1914. Pugh also points out that those agents which survived adopted "an attitude of severity mingled with resignation about the whole business of registration and electioneering in 1918."<sup>6</sup> Although concrete evidence for the position of the Unionists and Labour regarding this area does not appear to have survived, the criticisms made by Colonel Thomas Tweed, the Secretary of the Manchester Liberal Federation, when he analysed the reasons for the 1918 defeat indicate that it was a greater problem for the Liberal party in Manchester. Tweed asserted that the principal difficulty facing Manchester Liberalism in 1918 was one of manpower, noting that "young men are not joining our organisations".<sup>7</sup>

It is clear that little of concrete advantage had been achieved. The inaction continued during the summer. There was a special meeting of the Executive held in mid-July "to discuss the position of the Federation in the event of a Khaki Election", at which the chairman outlined the present position in Manchester regarding candidates.<sup>8</sup> The ensuing discussion highlighted the mounting concern amongst Manchester Liberals regarding their position if a general election was held. This would have been heightened by C. P. Scott, the editor of the *Manchester Guardian* and a leading figure in both national and Manchester Liberal politics. Scott played a dual role: on the one side he conveyed the views of the rank and file to the leadership, whilst also informing the Manchester Liberal Federation of the opinions emanat-

ing from London. It was in the latter role that he passed details to the Federation regarding "plans and prospects of a General Election", in the summer of 1918.<sup>9</sup> In early August Geoffrey Howard speculated to Scott that Lloyd George planned to hold a Khaki election. This was confirmed by Lloyd George's secretary, Joseph Davies, who maintained that the Prime Minister needed an election to strengthen his position both against Opposition Liberals and Tories. This view was substantiated the following day by Lloyd George, who answered Scott's claim that no political party wanted an election with the comment, "You have forgotten one party ... perhaps the most important."<sup>10</sup>

In the light of all the evidence it is all the more telling that inaction remained the chief characteristic within Manchester Liberalism. Although it was clear that an election was imminent, there was little activity in the selection of parliamentary candidates. This had been a central concern of the meeting held in mid-July. The failure regarding selection is shown plainly in the Exchange Division. The issue was not considered until mid-October. It was only on the eve of the general election being called that Sir Arthur Haworth consented to stand. This was not an isolated example within Manchester, as Walter Butterworth in Rusholme, G. F. Burditt in Withington and Tom Stott in Moss Side were not selected until October. This gave them little time to establish their position within the respective divisions. It is also worth noting, that the Exchange Division provides further examples of Liberal weakness owing to the Federation's earlier lacklustre approach. It has already been noted that emphasis had been placed on individual divisions and the agents in charge of them to reform organisation. In this context, the failure to take action in Exchange is particularly serious. It was not until mid-October that the Liberal Association in the division resolved "that an organisation Committee be formed consisting of the officers with the Chairman and Hon Secretary of each Ward Committee". This was far too late, which was confirmed at the first meeting which revealed the derelict state of the party in significant parts of the division; St John's, Cheetham and Collegiate wards were completely unorganised, for example. In addition there was a lack of manpower on the ground, which would be vital for canvassing.<sup>11</sup>

## National Divisions

Before considering the election campaign itself, it is important to analyse the views of leading Manchester Liberals towards the division which had gradually emerged within Liberalism nationally after December 1916. Scott received information in the summer of 1916 which indicated that there was a real possibility of Liberal unity, through the integration of Asquithian Liberals into the Coalition. In August F. E. Guest, the chief whip of the Liberal M. P. s who supported Lloyd George, insisted, "he was quite prepared for a deal with the Opposition in regard to the General Election, but his terms would be rather stiff."<sup>12</sup> During a visit to London in late September, which was in part at the request of the Manchester Liberal Federation, to see Geoffrey Howard and Asquith about the prospect of a General Election, Howard implied to Scott "that there had been an attempt at agreement between the Government and the Opposition".<sup>13</sup> In late October Lloyd George also remarked to Scott, "there could be no combination at a General Election between his party and the Liberal Opposition, but



Parliamentary  
Election,

December 14, 1918.

---

TO THE ELECTORS  
OF THE

Blackley  
Division.

---

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

I have been invited by the General Council of the Blackley Division Liberal Association to represent them as their Candidate at the coming Election. As one born in the Constituency, I count such an invitation a great honour, and I have very willingly accepted the candidature.

I ask for your suffrages as a Liberal, and a supporter of the Coalition Government.

The Prime Minister by his idealism, his enthusiasm, and his breadth of vision, has been of incalculable service, not only to his own Country, but to the democracies of the World. By the unity of command he saved our fortunes in War: by the united help of all men of good-will, it is surely his privilege to rebuild our fortunes in peace. Especially is it the duty of all Citizens to support to the utmost the Government at present in power during the continuance of the Peace negotiations, throughout the difficult period of Demobilization and in the initial steps of Reconstruction.

*Liberal Election leaflet, Blackley 1918.*





## Parliamentary Election, 1918.

### *Blackley Division.*

#### CANDIDATURE OF **Mr. PHILIP M. OLIVER.**

J. GOODFELLOW, Esq., J.P.,  
*Chairman.*

H. ROTHWELL, Esq.,  
*Treasurer.*

H. CASE, Esq.,  
*Hon. Secretary.*

JOSEPH HAYDEN,  
*Election Agent.*

*Central Committee Rooms:—*

**21, CANNON STREET.  
MANCHESTER.**

December 9th, 1918.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

Towards the conclusion of the Election I may perhaps be allowed to touch a personal note.

Like other Candidates before you, I am no stranger to the constituency. I was born in Crumpsall, and my family has long been closely connected with Manchester life.

I have myself taken a deep interest in social and political questions, especially those affecting the welfare of the people, and at the request of Mr. Lloyd George I have given special attention to the land and housing conditions of Manchester.

If returned to Parliament, I hope, as a Liberal and a democrat, to support the Coalition Government. I shall follow them faithfully, but not blindly, for I am pledged only to my constituents.

I shall support the Government—

In the conclusion of a clean peace.

In bringing the Kaiser to justice.

In exacting full reparation, including indemnities, from Germany.

In the establishment of a real League of Nations.

In all schemes for the benefit of the discharged and disabled sailors, soldiers, and airmen.

In radical land and housing reform; and

In a democratic reconstruction of industrial and social life.

The districts of Crumpsall, Blackley and Moston have behind them a long tradition of Liberalism. According to all the standards of fair play, they should, under a coalition, be represented by a Liberal. As the Conservatives have decided, along with Labour, to attack a Liberal constituency and a Liberal Candidate, I ask those electors who place national unity above party considerations to support me at the poll on December the 14th.

Sincerely yrs.

*Philip M. Oliver*

Printed and published by W. Houghton & Sons, 2, Swan Court, Market St., Manchester.

*Liberal Election leaflet, Blackley 1918.*

only between the Coalition Government and the Opposition. Asquith could not enter the Government at its head, but he might have a great place in it – say as Lord Chancellor”.<sup>14</sup> These comments stress the uncertainty which existed regarding the shape of post-war politics, and undoubtedly led prominent Manchester Liberals to assume rapprochement between the two Liberal leaders and their supporters could be attained. The fluidity of the situation was clearly apparent at a meeting of the General Committee of the Federation held on November 12, which discussed the attitude of the Federation at the ensuing general election. It was recorded that, “the meeting showed that it unanimously was of the opinion that the Federation should support all Manchester Liberal candidates whether standing as Free Liberals or Coalition Liberals.”<sup>15</sup> It was only later with the issuing of ‘coupons’ and the decision of Asquith and his followers to contest the election independently of the Coalition that attitudes hardened and divisions emerged.

In the period following the November 12 meeting the Manchester Liberal Federation sent a deputation including Scott, Ernest Simon, G. F. Burditt and Thomas Tweed, to visit both leaders separately, in an attempt to secure a reconciliation between the two and their respective followers. Although “both L. G. and Asquith made out an undoubtedly strong case against the other” it appears the deputation was able to persuade Lloyd George to offer Asquith the post of Lord Chancellor in the government with posts for some of his allies.<sup>16</sup> In a letter to *The Times* in 1929 Vivian Philipps, Asquith’s private secretary in 1918, referred to a meeting between Asquith and Lloyd George in the period immediately after the armistice noting “I was aware that the interview was taking place because the Manchester Liberals had expressed to Mr. Lloyd George the desire that an effort should be made to bring Mr. Asquith and himself together before the election.”<sup>17</sup> This information is corroborated by Lloyd George who also made clear that it was as a result of the Manchester deputation that he offered Asquith the post of Lord Chancellor.<sup>18</sup> However, Asquith rejected the suggestion; although the Manchester Liberals, through Scott, pressed him to give a positive response to the suggestion.

It is not surprising that the Manchester deputation had failed to produce a rapprochement between the two sides, since the meetings with each leader had made wholly plain the dichotomy which had emerged in Liberal politics and which was to dominate the 1918 campaign. Lloyd George had stressed, “He had carried out great Liberal reforms during the war: franchise, agricultural minimum wage, Fisher’s education act ... He was a Liberal and the Coalition would have a great Liberal programme ... Coalition was the condition for successful reconstruction and (he) would fight any Liberal who would not join the Coalition and act in coalition spirit; but he would never ask anybody to sacrifice Liberal principles.” In contrast Asquith insisted that the Coalition was not democratic and informed the deputation that: “He would not join a Government in which the power was shared equally between Parliament and the Press. There was a strong feeling about it in the country and it must be put back into its legitimate place.”<sup>19</sup> Asquith’s refusal to enter the government and the statements made by both leaders regarding their respective positions dashed any hopes that existed amongst Manchester Liberals for reunion between the two sides. The initiative now passed to the Manchester Liberal Federation and subsequently to individual Liberal candidates to determine their own stance.

In spite of the statement issued by the Manchester Liberal Federation on November 12, regarding the status of Liberal candidates, confusion remained. This was enhanced by Lloyd George’s exhortation to electors on November 16, “to investigate ‘ruthlessly’ the credentials of Liberals claiming to be his supporters”.<sup>20</sup> The issuing of lists of authorised Coalition candidates, who also received a letter signed by both Lloyd George and Bonar Law which recognised them as the official government candidates in their constituencies, heightened the confusion. In the light of this the Federation repeated its earlier position, stressing, “the selection of a candidate is in the hands of the general council of each Parliamentary division ... Liberal candidates thus selected will receive the support of the Federation impartially, whether they are described as Liberals or as Coalition Liberals.”<sup>21</sup> It is quite clear that in spite of the problems raised by the Coalition there was to be no change in the Federation’s policy “to allow the divisional associations complete autonomy in their choice of candidates and the conduct of their own affairs”.<sup>22</sup> This stance failed to define the circumstances in which individual Liberal candidates should feel able to pledge support to the Coalition government. In part this was the consequence of the lack of a lead from the national party with Asquith commenting early in the campaign, that the first question for Liberals in this election was “where ought they to stand?”<sup>23</sup>

A more definite position only emerged after the National Liberal Federation issued a circular on November 22. This stressed the position the Manchester Liberal Federation had previously asserted, namely, “The right of Liberal Associations to select their own candidate without extreme interference.” More importantly for the first time it outlined the circumstances in which Liberal candidates could promise support to the Coalition, that is whilst it existed for the purpose of “(a) securing a clean and durable peace. (b) of promoting such consequential measures of social and political reconstruction as do not contravene in any vital particulars the declared policy of the Liberal Party.”<sup>24</sup> Within a few days of this statement Tweed was able to state, “So far as I know the position defined by the National Liberal Federation circular of November 22 has been adopted by each of the Liberal candidates in Manchester.”<sup>25</sup> This view was confirmed at a meeting of Liberal candidates or their chairmen on November 27. There was full agreement, “that the candidates, while declining in any way unconditional support of a Coalition Government should one be formed as a result of the general election, are prepared to support such a Government in any measures of social or political reform which do not contravene in any vital particular Liberal and democratic principles.” It was underlined that there was a common position; whilst there were differences regarding the value of a Coalition government and the merits and demerits of particular points in the Coalition programme, “there are none as to the need of complete independence on the part of every Liberal candidate in regard to the action he may take in the assertion or defence of Liberal principles.”<sup>26</sup>

### Liberal Candidates and the Lloyd George Coalition

This statement still left individual candidates with the key role; each had to decide how far the Coalition was contravening Liberal principles. In many cases it was a difficult

decision to make. Ernest Simon, although not at this point a candidate, gives a lucid insight into the problem the question posed to the individual's conscience; he noted in his diary that it proved "a great mental struggle, whether to support the Coalition be elected, or refuse to compromise."<sup>27</sup> After consulting the Webbs, Simon opted for the latter course. All six Liberal candidates in Manchester adopted a similar viewpoint, emphasising they would not give an indefinite pledge to the Coalition but would support it in the conclusion of peace and the introduction of progressive legislation along liberal lines. However, in spite of this broad agreement there were significant differences between them on the subject of Lloyd George and the Coalition.

Philip Oliver in Blackley and Tom Stott in Moss Side strongly favoured Lloyd George and the Coalition. This produced an ambiguous stance from the two. Throughout his campaign Oliver refused "to give a definite pledge to any Coalition Government for an indefinite number of years." Yet on the other side he also consistently expressed the opinion that in the medium term the only Government possible was a Coalition one. It was in this context that he justified his position "as a supporter of Mr. Lloyd George under whose strong leadership, idealism and heroism a Coalition could accomplish great and beneficent reforms in the reconstruction that is now going on." Consequently under such circumstances he believed that all Liberals should back the Coalition government, "until it cut across some vital principle of Liberalism."<sup>28</sup> These statements of support for Lloyd George and the need for a Coalition government helped to ensure that Oliver's Conservative opponent did not receive the 'coupon'.<sup>29</sup>

Tom Stott adopted a similarly uncertain position in Moss Side. He emphasised throughout his opposition to the calling of a general election but tempered this with praise for Lloyd George, maintaining that he was "willing to trust the wisdom and judgement of the Prime Minister in the matter."<sup>30</sup> Stott also argued in favour of the principle of Coalition asserting that in the light of the serious and important problems which would confront the country in the future something more than party government was required. He argued that a Coalition government would provide "the best medium for settling the problems of reconstruction."<sup>31</sup> As with Oliver he concluded that owing to the situation he would support Lloyd George and the Coalition, "so long as it continued to introduce legislation on progressive lines and carried out the policy of reconstruction which the Prime Minister had detailed, and unless or until it cut across some vital principle of Liberalism."<sup>32</sup> Stott's position again ensured no candidate in the Moss Side division received the 'coupon'. This prompted the *Manchester Guardian* to describe Stott as "the Liberal and Coalition candidate".<sup>33</sup> In this context it is also interesting to note that the *Manchester Evening News* pointed out that both Oliver and Stott had been adopted under the pledge, "Liberal candidate and supporter of the Coalition."<sup>34</sup>

In contrast in the Exchange, Rusholme and Withington divisions the Liberal candidates turned Lloyd George and the election into issues: "The charge was dictatorship. Liberals claimed that the election was an attempt to eliminate all opposition and secure a House of Commons subservient to the Prime Minister."<sup>35</sup> A central issue in these campaigns was, therefore, the freedom of the electorate and the inde-

pendence of Parliament. In Exchange, for example, Sir Arthur Haworth followed the National Liberal Federation lead, insisting that he would endorse a Coalition government led by Lloyd George in the negotiation and conclusion of a peace treaty and whilst it legislated "on progressive lines".<sup>36</sup> However, he refused to be held to a pledge, arguing that he was "an out-and-out liberal . . . and he wanted no adjectives, or titles, or prefixes or suffices." In Haworth's opinion Lloyd George wanted men returned to parliament who would support him in any situation, which would be more like the state of affairs which had pertained in Germany under the Kaiser or Russia under the Tsar. Furthermore, he attacked the work of a small group of men in London who had imposed candidates on the constituencies. This interfered with the freedom of the electorate which marked, for Haworth, "an end to self-government which was the glory of the English people."<sup>37</sup>

Similarly in Rusholme Walter Butterworth pledged himself to support "all Liberal measures with which Mr. Lloyd George was associated".<sup>38</sup> However he qualified this by also asserting that he stood as a Liberal without qualifications – in Mr. Asquith's phrase "without prefix or suffix."<sup>39</sup> He pressed the argument that the election was undemocratic; he stated it was unnecessary and with so many servicemen abroad "could not be a genuine one."<sup>40</sup> Although he accepted the argument that the government should remain in power until peace had been concluded, he believed that Lloyd George was cynically using this in an attempt to hold power for the coming five years. He was also quick to vilify the Coalition as a device created by party politicians; the secret negotiations which had taken place with those Lloyd George had always opposed had been aimed to ensure the majority of new Members of Parliament would not be representative of the country but rather of "a cabal, an arranged thing."<sup>41</sup> It is plain that many of the points Butterworth had raised corresponded to those made by Haworth.

The viewpoint Burditt expressed in Withington was identical. He would guarantee to back the government until a peace treaty had been settled and in those areas of social reform Lloyd George had outlined. However, he found "it impossible to give an unqualified pledge to support the Coalition Government in whatever measures it may bring forward; by doing so I should feel that I was sacrificing freedom – one of the oldest principles of Liberalism".<sup>42</sup> As a consequence, he described himself as "the 'Free' Liberal candidate for the Withington division." Like Butterworth he criticised the calling of an election, since "women had only just gained their parliamentary voice, and the men who had borne the brunt of the fighting had no opportunity of studying what was now taking place, and what they were invited to vote upon." He maintained the government had falsely used the pretext that it needed the country's backing to make the conditions of the peace, since these were already being arranged and might even be completed by the announcement of the results without the electors knowing anything about them. Under such circumstances Burditt concluded, "This election, in fact, was anti-democratic."<sup>43</sup> He expressed concern at the position of parliament as a consequence of the election as "the present effort to pledge men to go into the House of Commons committed to an unknown line of action was really making them into a set of automata."<sup>44</sup> Unlike the candidates who had received the 'coupon' Burditt insisted that he stood "for a free parliament



and a free expression of opinion by the Commons representatives of the people."<sup>45</sup>

A particularly interesting campaign occurred in the Hulme division where Christopher Needham, who had been Member of Parliament for Manchester South-West from December 1910, was selected as the Liberal candidate and received the 'coupon'. This was probably the consequence of the prominent role Needham had played within Manchester Liberalism both before and after his election. It is likely the Coalition leadership hoped that endorsing Needham would encourage rank-and-file Manchester Liberals to support Lloyd George and the government. However, he repudiated the 'coupon' on the grounds that he would not give an unconditional pledge except to the electors of Hulme to represent them in the Commons if elected. In spite of this Needham issued his election address "as Liberal candidate and supporter of the Coalition Government."<sup>46</sup> In this he expressed support for Lloyd George and the government, arguing: "It is of vital importance that the Government should obtain an overwhelming vote of confidence ... The days of uncertainty and difficulty in the future must be met by a united front, and party interests must be put to one side. For this reason I support the Coalition Government, which I trust to deal in an energetic and wide-minded way with the grave problems of reconstruction."<sup>47</sup> Despite this support he was opposed by a Conservative, Nall, who received backing from the local Conservative Association. Coalition headquarters, through Bonar Law, appealed to Nall to withdraw in Needham's favour but he insisted that this was not possible owing to Needham's previous record "as a somewhat independent supporter of the Coalition in the last Parliament."<sup>48</sup> Needham had voted against the government on many occasions including the 'Maurice' debate, which was used as the acid test in a number of cases to assess the loyalty of individual Liberal members to the Coalition, and therefore: "The Hulme Conservative and Unionist Association ... were satisfied that Mr Needham had really been a thorn in the side of the Government since Mr Lloyd George took over the Premiership some two years ago."<sup>49</sup> Under such circumstances they had nominated Nall to stand and he would not withdraw.

Despite the unity between the six Liberal candidates in Manchester, in their insistence that they could not give an indefinite pledge to the Coalition but would support it in the conclusion of peace and the introduction of legislation which followed Liberal lines, there were clear differences in their views towards Lloyd George and the Coalition. Oliver, Stott and Needham emphasised their support for Lloyd George, and the need to preserve national unity and non-party government in order to make peace and deal with reconstruction at home. In contrast Haworth, Butterworth and Burditt stressed their opposition to the calling of an election, Lloyd George's actions, aims and the idea of a Coalition government which militated against the independence of parliament and the freedom of the electorate. These differences were a feature of Liberal campaigns throughout the country; Manchester was not an isolated example.<sup>50</sup>

### Election Campaign Issues

The issues which were central to each campaign are a further



*Sir Arthur Haworth*

important factor in illuminating the perceptions and loyalties of the various candidates. A central question in this context is the attitude adopted towards Free Trade, which was a prominent concern within Manchester.<sup>51</sup> Oliver and Stott did not mention Free Trade which had been compromised in Lloyd George and Bonar Law's joint manifesto; it was a paramount concern in the campaigns of Haworth, Butterworth and Burditt. In Exchange, which despite recent re-distribution still contained a large business district, Haworth repeated throughout the campaign that Free Trade "was not only a vital matter for Lancashire but for Britain and the world ... Free Trade made for peace, while hostile tariffs were in themselves an act of war."<sup>52</sup> Similarly in Rusholme Butterworth placed at the head of his priorities the continuance of freedom of trade and therefore an abundance of cheap food, since the free exchange of food and commodities between countries would keep prices low. Burditt also professed staunch adherence to Free Trade insisting that if elected he would represent Withington as a "Liberal Free Trader".<sup>53</sup> It is significant that Needham did not avoid the topic but adopted the position of Lloyd George and Bonar Law on the issue, arguing that owing to the war economic conditions were abnormal and therefore each situation should be considered on its merits. "I am of the opinion that it is necessary to protect those key industries which are indisputably essential to the security of the nation ... and although I am opposed to any system which would involve tariffs or a taxation of food, I would support preference on articles which for our own purposes we have imposed a duty."<sup>54</sup>



*C.P. Scott*

Like Free Trade, Irish Home Rule was another Liberal policy which was compromised by the Coalition leadership. Consequently it was avoided by Oliver, Stott and Needham, whilst it received much attention in the other three campaigns. Interestingly, in spite of this, both Stott and Needham were endorsed by the United Irish League with the former even gaining personal support from T. P. O'Connor, the president of the League in Great Britain and the Irish Nationalist member for the Scotland division of Liverpool. This was probably owing to the lack of a Labour candidate in Moss Side; although Stott had not referred to Home Rule it was undoubtedly considered preferable for a Liberal to be elected than a Unionist who opposed the policy on principle. In Blackley and Rusholme the Labour candidates were favoured, although in the latter case Butterworth had made Home Rule a central tenet of his campaign. Haworth and Burditt, who faced straight contests with a 'couponed' and an unofficial Conservative respectively, were recommended to the electors.<sup>55</sup>

All six candidates were united on the questions raised by the peace; German reparations, the trial of war criminals and the Kaiser, proper provision for veterans and the widows and orphans of the war dead and the establishment of a League of Nations. Significantly on the first two points strong retribution was advocated. Throughout the campaign there were Liberal calls for the punishment of the Kaiser, "The mad dog of Europe".<sup>56</sup> This would be achieved by his extradition; there was also a need for the payment of "full reparations and indemnities" by Germany.<sup>57</sup> Traditionally historians have claimed that those candidates who were 'couponed' used the theme of retribution for electoral advantage. However, it was clearly also employed by

Independent Liberal candidates. However, this should be qualified, since retribution was inevitable in the 'khaki' atmosphere which dominated an election campaign fought in the aftermath of the armistice. H. A. L. Fisher noted in his diary, after speaking at a meeting for Needham: "The main interest in Hulme is the expulsion of all Germans in the district. The trial and execution of the Kaiser is popular."<sup>58</sup> Ernest Simon commented after the election that in Withington, "Carter the Unionist and Coalition candidate ... has got in by screaming angrily, 'Support the man who won the war, hang the Kaiser and make Germany pay.'" Under such circumstances Burditt was forced by popular pressure, "to support the expulsion of many interned Germans, and to demand that Germany should pay to the utmost of her capacity."<sup>59</sup> Furthermore it was the nature of the retribution demanded which is important. Plainly, that sought by the Independent Liberal candidates in Manchester, although strong, was not as jingoistic as that called for by most 'couponed' candidates, "with Ministers such as Barnes demanding the hanging of the Kaiser and Sir Eric Geddes prophesying, for the benefit of Cambridge electors, 'the squeaking of German pips.'"<sup>60</sup>

The six Liberal candidates were also united on the question of social reform. Demands for housing, educational, health and pension reforms were at the forefront of their agendas, in contrast to Yorkshire, where "social reform was a secondary issue for many Liberals, sharing the spotlight with a host of traditional concerns like land reform, temperance reform and retrenchment."<sup>61</sup> Interestingly, in Manchester other than Free Trade and Irish Home Rule the traditional issues of Liberalism received little attention, except for land reform in Oliver's campaign. This was a consequence of the prominent role he had played in Lloyd George's pre-war land campaign, having been appointed to make investigations on the question of land in the North of England.

## Election Result

The election results show a clear defeat for Liberalism with the party failing to win a single seat in the city. The Liberal candidate was second in straight fights in Exchange, Moss Side, and Withington, whilst Butterworth was only marginally ahead of Labour in Rusholme, and Oliver was in third place in Blackley. Greater success could have been expected in the Exchange, Hulme, Moss Side, and Rusholme divisions. Despite recent redistribution Exchange contained a significant business sector which presumably would have been concerned about the threat the Coalition provided to Manchester commerce, particularly cotton, in the light of its earlier introduction of Indian cotton duties. In the case of Hulme, which in the main was the old South-West division, a stronger vote could have been expected owing to the popularity of Needham, the retiring member. The position in Moss Side and Rusholme should have been better since these seats had been carved out of the South Manchester seat which essentially had been "Liberal in politics."<sup>62</sup> The result was even worse than it at first appears since the Coalition leadership had "used the coupon sparingly" in Manchester; only Haworth and Butterworth were opposed by 'couponed' Conservatives.<sup>63</sup> In Blackley, Moss Side and Withington "the Coalition looked with equal favour on the Conservative and Liberal candidates" whilst Needham received the 'coupon'.<sup>64</sup> Nevertheless the Liberals had failed to win any seats at all in a previously strong



Liberal area. Moreover, the Liberals had not contested Ardwick, Clayton, Gorton or Platting which allowed the Labour party to seize the initiative in these divisions. The failure to contest these divisions in 1918 allowed the Labour party to establish a hegemonic position in them. This is confirmed by the various attempts which were made to re-establish Liberalism in the Clayton, Gorton and Platting divisions during the 1920s which failed miserably.

There are important national factors which contributed to this poor result. Independent Liberal candidates throughout the United Kingdom fared badly electorally. There were only twenty nine Asquithian Liberals returned to the new House of Commons, with the vast majority of the leadership failing to be re-elected. There is no question that the dichotomy which had gradually emerged after December 1916 had placed Independent Liberal candidates in an invidious position. This was not fully resolved during the 'coupon' election campaign; there was a great deal of confusion, which militated against electoral success. This problem was intensified by the 'khaki' atmosphere which necessarily dominated the campaign, Independent Liberal candidates were facing a strong leader in Lloyd George who capitalised on the popular support which he had gained as the man who had won the war. When these two factors are combined together, it is not surprising that greater success was not achieved.

However, although national factors should be taken into consideration it is obvious that a key problem was the weakness of Liberal organisation in Manchester. There is no question that the Asquithian Liberals faced major problems in 1918 since: "There was little time to reform organisation to suit the new boundaries, or to mobilise old members and supporters".<sup>65</sup> The war had severely dislocated political life, which has already been addressed. This was pinpointed as a major problem in Manchester by William Royle, the chairman of the Federation. After an investigation into the condition of Liberalism in Salford, Royle noted that: "Conditions in Salford as to political apathy and the shortage of men on the divisional councils were pretty much like our own."<sup>66</sup> There were plainly major problems. However, this argument is only valid to some extent. There is no question that on balance in Manchester this weakness was the consequence of the failure to take action earlier. Twelve months had been wasted on vague expressions of the need to institute organisational change; this was the most vital time, if reforms had been put into place during this period they would have been firmly established by the time of the election. Clearly these may not have been sufficient but could only have enhanced the electoral position of Liberalism. This bankruptcy was most clearly shown by the failure of the Liberal party to make inroads into the newly enfranchised female electorate; Haworth recognised this weakness, informing Walter Runiciman that in the

Exchange division "the business vote, I think, has stood well, but the working class vote, and especially the women among them, have all been out for the Kaiser's head."<sup>67</sup> Richard Holt, formerly M. P. for Hexham and in 1918 candidate for Eccles, expressed similar sentiments about the whole Manchester district, noting: "I am afraid I am beaten – mainly by the women vote which came up freely and I feel sure was hostile ... I gather that was the common phenomenon in the Manchester district and my own feeling is that we were not as smart as we might have been in organising a canvass of the women by the women."<sup>68</sup> This claim was certainly true in the case of the Manchester divisions; there is no doubt that the failure of the Manchester Liberal Federation to take decisive action earlier had weakened its electoral support amongst women, a central group within the newly enfranchised electorate.

## Conclusion

The 'coupon' election in Manchester provides a valuable case study of the malign impact the First World War had upon Liberal politics. It had resulted in the replacement of Asquith with Lloyd George as Prime Minister but not as party leader in December 1916; this prompted the gradual emergence of a dichotomy within Liberal politics. This inevitably produced confusion, which was clearly evident during the 1918 general election campaign in Manchester. This was in large degree the product of the lack of a lead from the party nationally. When the National Liberal Federation issued a statement, ten days into the campaign, it asserted individual Liberal candidates had to decide whether or not to support the Coalition, using as a basis how far they considered it was contravening Liberal principles. By assigning such a key role to individual candidates there were inevitably differences between campaigns. This was plain within Manchester, with the candidates in Blackley, Moss Side and Hulme supporting Lloyd George and the Coalition government, whilst in the Exchange, Rusholme and Withington campaigns the emphasis was totally the opposite. Such confusion militated against electoral success. The organisational framework of Manchester Liberalism had also been severely disrupted by the First World War. The political truce had stopped routine activity which had caused a decrease in the number of activists as a consequence. The party was forced to address these difficulties in the context of the Fourth Reform Act, which in itself produced the need for a radical overhaul of organisation by extending the franchise and re-drawing the boundaries of parliamentary divisions. It was clearly the case that the approach taken within Manchester to this was lacklustre. This combined with the confusion promoted by the division within Liberalism nationally produced a disastrous result for the party in a city where until 1914 it had occupied a position of relative strength.

## Notes

1. Manchester Reference Library Archives (hereafter M. R. L.), Manchester Liberal Federation (hereafter M. L. F.), Executive Committee Minute Book, M283/1/3/3, 23 May 1917 – 23 Jan. 1918.
2. Geoffrey Howard had a close relationship with many Manchester Liberals, most notably C. P. Scott. In this case he exerted pressure on the Federation through its Treasurer, G. F. Burditt. M. R. L., M. L. F., Executive Committee Minute Book, M283/1/3/3, 27 Nov. 1917.
3. *Ibid.*, 24 April 1918. It is only possible to speculate on this owing to the absence of an actual copy of the report; the minutes of the relevant meeting only cite the names of the agents it was proposed to put in charge of each of the divisions.

4. *Ibid.* The following divisions shared agents: Exchange and Gorton, Hulme and Moss Side, Clayton and Ardwick, Rusholme and Withington.
5. M. Hart, 'The Liberals, the War and the Franchise', *English Historical Review*, 97 (1982), p. 620.
6. M. Pugh, *Electoral Reform in War and Peace 1906-18* (1978), pp. 174-5.
7. T. Tweed, 'Rusholme. The Need For New Methods of Organisation With A Few Notes On Rusholme', *Liberal Agent*, Jan. 1920, pp. 28-36.
8. M. R. L., M. L. F., Executive Committee Minute Book, M283/1/3/3, 14 Oct. 1918.
9. John Rylands University Library of Manchester (hereafter J. R. U. L. M.), Manchester Guardian Archive (hereafter M. G. A.), C. P. Scott diary, Box 134, 7-8 Aug. 1918.
10. *Ibid.*
11. M. R. L., M. L. F., Exchange Division Liberal Association Executive Committee Minute Book, M283/4/1/1, 14 Oct. & 21 Oct. 1918.
12. J. R. U. L. M., M. G. A., C. P. Scott diary, Box 134, 7-8 Aug. 1918.
13. J. R. U. L. M., M. G. A., C. P. Scott diary, Box 134, 23-25 Sept. 1918. These are probably the negotiations referred to in John Turner, *British Politics and the Great War: Coalition and Conflict 1915 - 1918* (1992), pp. 313-4.
14. J. R. U. L. M., M. G. A., C. P. Scott diary, Box 134, 25-26 Oct. 1918.
15. M. R. L., M. L. F., General Committee Minute Book, M283/1/4/1, 12 Nov. 1918.
16. M. R. L., E. D. Simon MSS, Ernest Simon diary, M11/11/11/5 addnl. Green No. 286, 16 Nov. 1918.
17. Letter from Vivian Phillips to *The Times*, 8 March 1929, as quoted in J. A. Spender and C. Asquith, *Life of Lord Oxford and Asquith*, Vol. 2 (1932), p. 312.
18. D. Lloyd George, *The Truth about the Peace Treaties*, Vol. 1 (1938), pp. 173-5.
19. M. R. L., E. D. Simon MSS, Ernest Simon diary, M11/11/11/5 addnl. Green No. 286, 16 Nov. 1918.
20. T. Wilson, *The Downfall of the Liberal Party 1914-35* (1966), p. 139.
21. *Manchester Guardian*, 19 Nov. 1918, p. 7.
22. *Manchester Evening News*, 19 Nov. 1918, p. 2.
23. Asquith to the London Liberal Federation, 18 Nov. 1918 as quoted in Wilson, *Downfall*, p. 164.
24. House of Lords Record Office (hereafter H. L. R. O.), Stansgate MSS, letter from F. Guest to Barter, ST43/180, 1 May 1919.
25. *Manchester Guardian*, 27 Nov. 1918, p. 6.
26. *Ibid.*, 28 Nov. 1918, p. 5.
27. M. R. L., E. D. Simon MSS, Ernest Simon diary, M11/11/11/5 addnl. Green No. 286, 26 Nov. 1918.
28. *Manchester Guardian*, 27 Nov. 1918, p. 6.
29. See T. Wilson, 'The Coupon and the British General Election of 1918', *Journal of Modern History*, 36 (1964), p. 41.
30. *Manchester Guardian*, 28 Nov. 1918, p. 6.
31. *Ibid.*, 13 Dec. 1918, p. 9.
32. *Ibid.*, 28 Nov. 1918, p. 6.
33. *Ibid.*, 11 Dec. 1918, p. 6.
34. *Manchester Evening News*, 19 Nov. 1918, p. 2.
35. G. Bernstein, 'Yorkshire Liberalism during the First World War', *Historical Journal*, 32 (1989), p. 124. Although Bernstein is referring to the campaigns in Yorkshire his comment is just as valid for those in Exchange, Rusholme and Withington.
36. *Manchester Evening News*, 29 Nov. 1918, p. 3.
37. *Ibid.*, 3 Dec 1918, p. 3.
38. *Manchester Guardian*, 21 Nov. 1918, p. 6.
39. *Manchester Evening News*, 19 Nov. 1918, p. 2.
40. *Manchester Guardian*, 21 Nov. 1918, p. 6.
41. See, for example, a speech made by Butterworth reported in the *Manchester Guardian*, 22 Nov. 1918, p. 6.
42. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
43. *Ibid.*, 3 Dec. 1918, p. 8.
44. *Manchester Evening News*, 3 Dec. 1918, p. 3.
45. *Manchester Guardian*, 5 Dec 1918, p. 8.
46. It is impossible to reach concrete conclusions as to why Needham received the 'coupon', owing to a lack of evidence. Needham's name appears on the lists of Liberal candidates which it was proposed to give 'coupons' to in the Lloyd George papers but there is no indication why he had been chosen. In addition to a desire to have a prominent Liberal within Manchester supporting Lloyd George it is also possible that there was a wish to harness Needham's reputation as a radical, which he had exhibited both within Manchester Liberal politics and during his period in the Commons to the Coalition.  
C. T. Needham's election address as quoted in the *Manchester Guardian*, 27 Nov. 1918, p. 6. Needham was unable to campaign owing to a severe case of influenza.
47. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
48. T. Wilson, 'The Coupon', p. 41.
49. *Manchester Guardian*, 10 Dec. 1918, p. 8.
50. See Wilson, *Downfall*, pp. 135-87 for examples. A valuable regional study is Bernstein, 'Yorkshire', pp. 124-6. Bernstein clearly



shows the different approaches taken by Liberal candidates in Yorkshire towards Lloyd George and the Coalition; these approaches plainly mirror those described of the six Manchester candidates. For examples from the West Riding of Yorkshire in particular, see J. Reynolds and K. Laybourn, *Labour Heartland: A History of the Labour Party in West Yorkshire during the inter-war years 1918-1939* (Leeds, 1987), pp. 34-8.

51. Fisher noted in his diary after speaking for Needham in Hulme "Free Trade also prominent", Bodleian Library, Oxford, Fisher MSS H. A. L. Fisher diary, 65/14, 3 Dec. 1918.
52. *Manchester Guardian*, 10 Dec. 1918, p. 8.
53. *Ibid.*, 22 Nov. 1918, p. 6.
54. Needham's election address, as quoted in *Ibid.*, 27 Nov. 1918, p. 6.
55. *Manchester Evening News*, 9 Dec. 1918, p. 3.
56. *Manchester Guardian*, 27 Nov. 1918, p. 6.
57. *Ibid.*, 28 Nov. 1918, p. 6.
58. Bodleian Library, Oxford, Fisher MSS, H. A. L. Fisher diary, 65/14 3 Dec. 1918. Fisher's comment refers to Germans living in the Hulme division. However, from general comments in Ernest Simon's diary concerning anti-German feeling, this view was prevalent throughout Manchester.
59. M. R. L., E. D. Simon MSS, Ernest Simon diary, M11/11/11/5 addnl. Green No. 286, 15 Dec. 1918.
60. K. O. Morgan, *Consensus and Disunity: The Lloyd George Coalition Government 1918-1922*, Oxford (1979), p. 39.
61. Bernstein, 'Yorkshire', p. 124.
62. *Manchester Evening News*, 5 Dec. 1918, p. 3.
63. Wilson, *Downfall*, p. 179.
64. T. Wilson, 'The Coupon', p. 41. It is important to qualify Wilson's claim that this was because both candidates favoured the Coalition, although this was clearly the case in Blackley and Moss Side; in the light of evidence already cited this was not so in Withington.
65. D. Tanner, *Political Change and the Labour Party 1900-1918*, (Cambridge, 1990), p. 405.
66. M. R. L., M. L. F., report from William Royle regarding the inclusion of Salford into the Manchester Liberal Federation, no date, but it is in a file with a number of letters for October 1918, so it may reasonably be assumed that it dates to that period, M283/1/3/3.
67. Robinson Library, University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Runciman MSS, letter from Sir Arthur Haworth to Walter Runciman, WR169, 17 Dec. 1918.
68. Robinson Library, University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Runciman MSS, letter from R. D. Holt to Runciman, WR169, 17 Dec. 1918.

## CENTRE FOR THE HISTORY OF SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND MEDICINE

### University of Manchester

The Centre was established in 1986 to support research and teaching in this expanding and exciting field of history. It concentrates on the period from the industrial revolution to the present, and has strong interests in local, regional and social history. It incorporates the **Wellcome Unit for the History of Medicine** and the **National Archive for the History of Computing**.

Present research topics include: history of hospitals and medical services, especially in the North West; medicine and war; biomedical sciences and technologies; science in an around Manchester; informatics; agricultural sciences; the therapeutic powers of music; physics/chemistry and industry; African medicine; and radio-astronomy. Other research interests could be accommodated. There is an active programme of workshops, seminars etc.

CHSTM offers two innovative postgraduate programmes: the MSc in History of Science, Technology and Medicine, and the MA (Econ) in History and Social Anthropology of Medicine. We welcome enquiries from graduates wishing to study full-time or part-time for these degrees, or for a PhD.

**Please write to: The Secretary**  
**Centre for the History of Science, Technology and Medicine**  
**Mathematics Tower**  
**University of Manchester**  
**Manchester M13 9PL**

Tel: 0161 275 5850;

E-mail: [chstm@fs4.ma.man.ac.uk](mailto:chstm@fs4.ma.man.ac.uk)

[http://www.man.ac.uk/science\\_engineering/chstm/frontpag.htm](http://www.man.ac.uk/science_engineering/chstm/frontpag.htm)