
Political Change in Britain, August 1914 to December 1916: Lloyd George Replaces Asquith:
The Issues Underlying the Drama

Author(s): Michael Fry

Source: *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 31, No. 3 (Sep., 1988), pp. 609-627

Published by: Cambridge University Press

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2639759>

Accessed: 01/02/2010 08:44

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/action/showPublisher?publisherCode=cup>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Cambridge University Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Historical Journal*.

POLITICAL CHANGE IN BRITAIN, AUGUST 1914 TO DECEMBER 1916: LLOYD GEORGE REPLACES ASQUITH: THE ISSUES UNDERLYING THE DRAMA

MICHAEL FRY

University of Southern California

I

On 7 December 1916 David Lloyd George became prime minister, leading the second coalition government of the war. No archival sources of significance remain to be consulted to help explain how and why the particular composition of the new government emergēd. A great deal has been written on the first years of the war, from many perspectives, but a satisfactory political history of Asquith's two administrations remains to be crafted.¹ A sustained narrative, set in the appropriate context, which relates the political significance of the issues to the drama of politics, to the way individuals lose office and governments fall, which establishes trends, and measures cumulative effects is still unwritten.

The context is well understood. At home it embraced debate on the nature of the state, the expanding role of government, the efficiency of the free market system, the challenge of socialism, the powers of adaptation of liberalism and the management of a war economy. Abroad it was the conduct of the war, the expectation of victory, and the real threat of stalemate or even defeat. Domestic and international issues came together in a debate over the costs of seeking victory and the longer term implications of the war for British society. There was concern over what was temporarily acceptable in wartime and reversible, and what might prove unpalatable but permanent in the long run.

Historians have recounted the drama of November–December 1916. We

¹ S. Koss summarized the state of the literature in his 'Asquith versus Lloyd George: the last phase and beyond', in A. Sked and C. Cook, *Crisis and controversy* (London, 1976), pp. 66–89. Ten years on one should consult J. A. Turner, 'The formation of Lloyd George's "garden suburb": Fabian-like Milnerite penetration?' *The Historical Journal*, xx, 1 (1977), 165–84; J. D. Fair, 'Politicians, historians and the war: a reassessment of the political crisis of December 1916', *Journal of Modern History*, xlix, 3 (1977), abstract, iii; P. Fraser, 'Lord Beaverbrook's Fabrications in *Politicians and the War, 1914–1916*', *The Historical Journal*, xxv, 1 (1982), 147–66; P. Fraser, 'British war policy and the crisis of Liberalism in May 1915', *Journal of Modern History*, liv, (1982), 1–26; and J. M. McEwen, 'The struggle for mastery in Britain: Lloyd George versus Asquith, December 1916', *The Journal of British Studies*, xviii, 1 (1978), 131–56; and 'Lloyd George's Liberal supporters in December 1916: a note', *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, liii, 128 (1980), 265–72. As a result of this work and the many recent biographies, the mixture of accurate paths and false trails laid out by participants on the events of December 1916 are more easily followed and avoided.

have almost hourly accounts in some cases capturing individual machinations and personal preferences. When skilfully done, the drama is related to political realities and constraints, and to individual standing in party hierarchies. A good deal is explained in this way about the redistribution of office and power. The cost, however, is threefold. First, while conspiratorial behaviour undoubtedly occurred, the uncovering of plots and the unmasking of plotters led to the construction of misleading, resilient stereotypes and caricatures. They set a genteel, gallant and honourable Asquith against a merciless, disloyal and grasping Lloyd George in a sordid December coup, or a determined, responsible and cautious Lloyd George against a scheming, dissolute and indefensible Asquith in an act of salvation. The scholarly literature has put such reasoning aside. Lloyd George was neither a fully frank critic nor a Judas; Asquith had retained power far too long in an ineffective executive structure, undermined by his record, but he was neither without value and merit nor entirely bankrupt. Lloyd George was full of energy and experiment with fire in the belly. Asquith was indolent and conventional with fire only in the soul. Both, in the course of that essentially oligarchic rather than parliamentary process in December 1916, where a small handful of men decided and acquiesced, shared conflicting and partial information, mixed signals with uncertainty, absorbed and dispensed provocation, and demonstrated a capacity for ineptness as well as intrigue. So did most others in the act.

Second, the tendency has been to assume that simple trends of cohesion or alienation were established during the period, and that resulting political realignments were predictable and determined that the final drama would be acted out in the way it was. In fact, sustained debate over issues both created and divided groups, and helped to destroy and forge political alignments. Prominent men broke ranks and clustered according to their position on policy questions, sometimes acting individually and at others in small conclaves with shared identities. This hesitant process provided perspective and conviction. It both reinforced and diluted political loyalties and threw up as much doubt as it did determination. Lloyd George, for example, became differentiated over policy matters from Asquith and his Liberal supporters, and they from him, and yet he tightened his links with other prominent Liberals. He found a level of accord with leading Unionists and the apolitical, and with some Labour leaders. That was the trend, brought on by issues and policy debate, but to give it too much certainty is to misconstrue its very essence. Not all questions pulled political leaders in a sustained way in the same direction. In addition, there were the uncertainties and reservations that reflected personal preference, memories of past conduct, and ambition. For Lloyd George to get closer to Bonar Law, the Conservative leader, was not necessarily the same thing as striking an accord with other prominent Conservatives. Liberals who identified with Lloyd George still preferred Asquith or Bonar Law to Lord Milner. Thus, a line of personal and political strength cast to one person or group could be a flimsy, treacherous thread when tossed in other directions.

The management of policy problems naturally elevated the issue of competence. Who was fit to lead and govern became a question, if not of entirely clinical and rational, then of very pointed debate. Patterns of achievement and failure, of applause and condemnation, unfolded as reputations were made and lost, confirmed and dismantled. Personal loyalties were weakened as a preface to political boundaries being obscured and then crossed. The process could unseat a prime minister and point, even for the reluctant and the wavering, to an alternative who took on a hint of indispensability. War placed something of a premium on Lloyd George's talents and preferences, and made less relevant his frailties. He was experienced, accomplished, and, from November 1914, he seemed aroused temperamentally by the challenges of protracted warfare. His thought processes were stimulated, and he welcomed the opportunity to exercise executive authority in new fields, in fresh ways. He was neither weary, nor hindered by low recuperative powers. His nerve, will and health were intact. He discovered again that he felt shackled rather than protected by party loyalties and discipline.² Lloyd George experienced a sense of fresh opportunity and even destiny. A war government must ignore the conventions of peacetime, risk reputations and defections, refuse to be bound by accepted but inadequate modes of business, and neither pander to vanity nor protect incompetence.³ These were commendable sentiments, but applause for them did not necessarily point to Lloyd George supplanting Asquith so completely and in the way he did.

It follows, as the third problem, that the reciprocal relationship between debates over policy questions and political alignments, and the cumulative political significance of those processes has not been explored satisfactorily. The history of the change of government in December 1916 is unbalanced, top heavy and incomplete. Cameron Hazlehurst, on conscription before May 1915, J. A. Turner on drink, Robert Scally and others began the analysis.⁴ But the agenda of the war comprised a mosaic of problems which had complex political significance. Ultimately, by late 1916, the process of debate over issues became sufficiently cumulative and weighty that a new working if unstable balance of political alignments emerged. What had been sketched in became codified. The process made possible and then compelled political rearrangement; the balance of credibility had altered, even while the

² Lloyd George raised the question of a coalition government and resurrected his 1910 memorandum for the benefit of Bonar Law and Austen Chamberlain in January 1915 (A. Chamberlain memorandum, 29 January 1915. A. Chamberlain papers, AC/13/2/2 and Lloyd George papers, C/3/14/8). See also Bentley L. B. Gilbert, 'Lloyd George and the historians', *Albion*, II, 1 (1979), 74-86.

³ Lloyd George to Montagu, 24 January 1915, Lloyd George papers, C/1/2/5. In a similar vein he deplored the way social connexions preserved incompetents in their positions at the Admiralty. (Scott diary, 27, November 1914, C. P. Scott papers, Add 50901.)

⁴ J. A. Turner, 'State purchase of the liquor trade in the First World War', *The Historical Journal*, xxiii, 2 (1980), 589-615; C. Hazlehurst, *Politicians at War* (New York, 1971); and Robert J. Scally, *The origins of the Lloyd George coalition* (Princeton, 1975).

hesitation and reservations remained. But there were many fluctuations of significance along the way.

The press played a substantial part in these processes. It mirrored accurately and distorted, it informed, influenced, judged, took sides to bring about or prevent change, helped set the agenda and thus to determine who was vulnerable. The press was a creator of images and a source of power. It was in turn used by those politicians with requisite skill, adaptable taste, ready appetite and durable contacts. Lloyd George had never dominated parliament; that had been Asquith's forum. But he developed an understanding of the press, a sense of its possibilities, and he used it, effectively, and unashamedly, as it used him. He would not even have understood why Edwin Montagu would describe journalists as 'the lowest form of life who wallowed in the mire defying anyone in Sodom and Gomorrah to touch them for filth'.⁵

II

Even in a brief article one can capture some of the cumulative political significance of the policy problems of the war, while not attempting a description of any of them. The most revealing issues were the conduct of diplomacy, strategic policy, civil-military relations, Ireland, conscription, the regulation of economic life in such areas as food, drink and munitions production, finance, and tariff and postwar economic policy. Debate over them ultimately produced the demand for executive reconstruction and for a renewed commitment to victory in December 1916.

Relations with the allies, Balkan problems, Anglo-American affairs, the future of the Ottoman Empire and the development of war aims were issues which, in their various ways and to different degrees, caused the rapport between Sir Edward Grey, the foreign secretary, and Lloyd George to evaporate.⁶ Grey's penchant for secrecy, his deviousness and his determination to preserve the monopoly of an increasingly inept foreign office by evading cabinet scrutiny and avoiding the coordination of policy with other departments, increased the strain. If Grey and his senior officials lacked nerve, vigour, confidence and the determination to pursue victory could they be retained? The answer seemed clear and yet, in October 1916, Lloyd George described Grey as second only to himself in public popularity, and included his name, perhaps tactically, in a possible war committee of three Liberals and three Unionists. Nevertheless, Lloyd George and those who shared his views came to regard Grey as a tired liability to be moved aside with Asquith, for they were tied together indissolubly.

In December 1914, Lloyd George made his first serious attempt to influence strategic policy but failed to secure the support of Asquith, Grey, and any Liberal minister of consequence except Winston Churchill, at the Admiralty,

⁵ Montagu to Lloyd George, 26 April 1916, Lloyd George papers, D/17/16/1.

⁶ Michael G. Fry, *Lloyd George and foreign policy*, Volume 1: *The Education of a Statesman, 1890-1916* (Montreal, 1977) pp. 216-97.

and perhaps Lord Crewe, the secretary of state for India.⁷ From December 1914 to September 1915, only Churchill afforded any importance to the Balkan theatre and to Lloyd George's proposal for a Salonika expeditionary force. Grey was both sceptical and mildly sarcastic. Between September 1915 and January 1916 Crewe joined Churchill in supporting Lloyd George over the Salonika force, but neither wanted to abandon the Dardanelles, as Lloyd George urged, although Crewe wavered. In the discussions involving the Balkan theatre from June 1916, Lloyd George operated without the sustained assistance of any Liberal colleague. The chancellor of the exchequer, Reginald McKenna, predictably, was opposed and Grey disliked particularly Lloyd George's belligerent attitude toward Greece. Lloyd George's divorce from his fellow Liberals over Rumania was the logical, final event, for they blamed the Rumanians themselves and Russia for Rumania's collapse.

In contrast, at least in part, from September 1915 Lloyd George found support among certain Unionists, with Bonar Law, the colonial secretary from May 1915, the most consistent. The Unionist leader favoured a forward move in the Balkans from Salonika and preferred to evacuate from the Dardanelles. His scepticism over the salvaging of Rumania in October 1916 was his only deviation of note, and it was purely temporary. Walter Long, president of the local government board, and Robert Cecil, at the foreign office, also shared Lloyd George's concern for the Balkans and the Italian and Russian fronts, and his desire to cut losses at the Dardanelles.⁸ However, Lord Curzon, lord privy seal, and Austen Chamberlain, secretary of state for India, from May 1915, disparaged Lloyd George's strategic preferences and were opposed particularly to an evacuation from the Dardanelles. So were Arthur Balfour, at the Admiralty, and Lord Lansdowne, minister without portfolio, as they supported Asquith against Bonar Law and Lloyd George, although Balfour aided Lloyd George briefly in January 1916 and found merit in an offensive from Salonika that spring. Balfour, like Grey, however, deplored Lloyd George's attitude toward Greece in the fall of 1916. Conversely, Curzon supported him on that question, but not over the responsibility for Rumania's collapse.⁹

Edward Carson, attorney general from May to October 1915 and head of the Unionist war committee, stood with Lloyd George over both the Balkan theatre and the Dardanelles when in office, and remained sympathetic. Lord Milner, hovering outside the coalition, was concerned, like Lloyd George, about the Eastern front proper and a Russian collapse. His group, rapidly disenchanted with the Western front, preferred to try new theatres and thus forged a bond with Lloyd George. Leopold Amery, for instance, in 1916, advocated an attack through the Balkans to open a path to Hungary and to

⁷ Ibid. pp. 273-9 and 288-9.

⁸ Cecil memorandum, 20 September 1915, Balfour papers, file 49737, and Cecil to Asquith, 10 October 1915, FO/800/196. The mishandling of Balkan and Near Eastern affairs necessitated, in Cecil's view, a small cabinet to direct the war.

⁹ War committee, 1 December 1916, Cab. 42/26/6.

help defeat Turkey. The Milnerites did not share all Lloyd George's views; Milner himself supported the Greeks and Serbs against the Bulgars; Amery denounced both the 'whoring after the Bulgars' and the treaty of London.

Clearly, however, the debates over strategy divided Lloyd George in a profound way from his Liberal colleagues. In contrast, they forged a bond with Bonar Law and Carson, and to a lesser degree with Cecil and Long. The Milnerites were more sympathetic to his views on strategy than to those of the other Unionists in the coalition government.

Criticism of the war office and the Admiralty, in wartime, was controversial in itself and forced consideration of fundamentally important questions in the realm of civil-military relations. Lloyd George's dissatisfaction with Lord Kitchener, the secretary for war, was very evident by May 1915, and became acute by October.¹⁰ Most Unionists, except a reluctant Bonar Law, Cecil and Balfour, deplored interference with and criticism of the war office. Carson, like Curzon, disagreed with Lloyd George on this issue. In May 1916, Lloyd George described the war office, which he had challenged from the ministry of munitions, as a devastating liability. Once installed there himself, his relationship with the C.I.G.S., Field Marshal Sir William Robertson, was very uneven, a situation which Bonar Law found disagreeable and suspicious. His lack of confidence in Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig, the commander in France, grew as military operations proved indecisive and seemed to court defeat.¹¹ Balfour himself, as first lord of the Admiralty, faced a decidedly critical Lloyd George in 1916, to the point where Lloyd George declared him unfit for his position.¹² The failure to cope effectively with submarine warfare convinced Lloyd George that the nation was not well served by its admirals.

In contrast, Asquith and Grey, seemingly devoted to Kitchener and unwilling to challenge their naval and military advisers, were, in Unionist eyes, behaving correctly.¹³ Lloyd George expressed his frustration in terms of

¹⁰ Balfour-Lloyd George correspondence, 5 and 6 March 1915. Lloyd George papers, C/3/3/1 and 2; Bonar Law to Lloyd George, 1 November 1915, *ibid.* D/17/8/9; Cecil memoranda, 20 September and 17 October 1915 and 27 November 1916, Cecil papers, Add 51105 and Cab. 37/160/21; Riddell diary, 11 September 1914, 7 March and 29 October 1915 and 1 October and 26 November 1916, Lord Riddell, *War diary, 1914-1918* (London, 1933), pp. 31, 65, 130, 213 and 222.

¹¹ War policy committee, August-September 1915, Cab. 27/2; Lloyd George to his brother, 15 April 1916, W. George, *My brother and I* (London, 1958), p. 254; Lloyd George to Asquith, 30 May and 26 September 1916, Lloyd George papers, D/18/2/11, and E/2/23/5; Lloyd George-Robertson correspondence, 23 and 26 June and 27 September, *ibid.* D18/8/18, 19 and 20, and E/1/5/2, and 12 October 1916, Asquith papers, file 30; Lloyd to D.M.O., 4 September 1916, Carson papers, D/1507/1. 1916-25; Derby to Lloyd George, 12 November 1916, Lloyd George papers, E/1/1/9; and David R. Woodward, *Lloyd George and the generals*, (Newark, 1983), pp. 15-130.

¹² War committee, 1 March, 10 May and 28 November 1916, Cab. 42/10/1, 42/13/6 and 42/26/1; Scott diary, 6-8 June 1916; Scott papers, Add 50902.

¹³ In fact in November 1915, Asquith agreed to rusticate Kitchener by dispatching him to the Near East, in order to bring greater harmony between the war office and the munitions ministry. In this way, they would avoid the need to dismiss Kitchener, secure greater efficiency, and satisfy Bonar Law. Asquith concluded, 'I have told no one else - but you and I must act together'. (Asquith to Lloyd George, 3 November 1915, Lloyd George papers, D/18/2/12.)

a paradox. Liberals were now Tories because they worshipped the war office and the Admiralty; Asquith had become a Conservative as he bowed to military experts. He himself remained the true radical, sceptical of what passed for expertise. Indeed, radical traditions, curiously enough, demanded that he become a strategist in his own right. These issues of civil-military relations, therefore, while strengthening Asquith, must have damaged Lloyd George's standing amongst the Unionists, except Bonar Law, Balfour and Cecil, and with the Tory press. Against these considerations was the fact that Lloyd George was not identified closely with either naval disaster or military defeat. He was associated with success, in the realm of finance and munitions, rather than failure, even though the evidence does not always support the reputation. The Milnerites were impressed.

Ireland became an urgent issue in the spring of 1916 and resulted, temporarily at least, in a surge of co-operation between Asquith and Lloyd George. In May the prime minister implored him to take on the problem, to do the big and courageous thing. He assured Lloyd George that his touch was vital and that he would earn the eternal gratitude of the empire if he brought about a settlement.¹⁴ Lloyd George's Irish negotiations in the summer invoked, however, the sympathy of only Bonar Law and F. E. Smith, the attorney general, among the Unionists. Long, Curzon, Cecil, Lord Selborne, at the board of agriculture, and Lansdowne were deeply disappointed and even hostile. Austen Chamberlain was ambivalent at best.¹⁵ In the face of this criticism and in the absence of success, Asquith, in Lloyd George's view, was less than supportive. Ireland, therefore, had helped, temporarily at least, to shore up the relationship between Asquith and Lloyd George only to produce further disillusionment and doubts about the prime minister's nerve and constancy. Alternatively, Ireland, reinforcing the influence of the strategic debates, had pulled Lloyd George, Bonar Law and Carson together. The issue made Lloyd George more appreciative of the potential value of co-operation with leading conservatives. Through Carson, moreover, members of the Unionist war committee must have looked more favourably on Lloyd George. At the same time Carson, in the name of efficiency, was determined to rid the nation of the Asquith-Bonar Law combination. He responded positively, therefore, to Lloyd George's letter of 3 June 1916:

¹⁴ Asquith to Lloyd George, 22 May and Margot Asquith to Lloyd George, 23 May 1916, Lloyd George papers, D/14/1/5 and 7.

¹⁵ Lloyd George to Long, 12 June 1916, Lloyd George papers, D/14/2/32, where he announced that he had relinquished the negotiations and resigned from the government because of Long's opposition; Lloyd George to Asquith, 2 letters of 12 June 1916, *ibid.* D/14/2/29 and 30. The first was a letter of resignation and was not sent; the second recorded a decision to fight Cecil and the Unionists. Asquith to Lloyd George, 17 June 1916, enclosing a Selbourne letter to Asquith, *ibid.* D/14/3/9; Lloyd George to Dillon, 20 June 1916, *ibid.* D/14/3/22, where he reported that only Balfour, Bonar Law and F. E. Smith supported him and the prime minister, and that the ungentlemanly and treacherous Long was spreading lies in Ulster and seeking to discredit Carson; Austen Chamberlain to Asquith, 22 June, and Lloyd George to Asquith, 23 June 1916, *ibid.* D/14/3/34.

The terrible disaster in the North Sea makes it more necessary than ever that we should get Ireland out of the way in order to press on with the war ... The management of the war on the part of the Allies is fortuitous and flabby, and unless something is done immediately the British empire and civilization will sustain the greatest disaster since the days of Attila. I must, therefore, have a talk with you with a view to taking immediate action to force a decisive change in the control of the war. An appreciation of the situation by the General Staff has just come into my hands. It has filled me with gloomy forebodings. There is no time to lose. I must have a talk with you on Monday, not only about Ireland but about the whole position, before you leave for Belfast. Let us settle Ireland promptly....¹⁶

The adoption by the state of compulsory powers and the specific issue of military conscription and industrial exemptions produced perhaps the most far-reaching effects on political relationships. It is easy to exaggerate the differing rates at and the extent to which Lloyd George, as opposed to Asquith, Lord Haldane, lord chancellor until May 1915, Grey, McKenna and Walter Runciman, president of the board of trade, accepted sterner and more comprehensive government measures as being necessary to the conduct of the war. None of them rejected a degree of compulsion and only John Simon, the home secretary, resigned on that principle, although Grey, McKenna, and Runciman wavered.¹⁷ For the first twelve months of the war Lloyd George himself accepted the balance achieved between military and industrial needs by voluntary procedures, and, despite Churchill's influence, the concept of a great democratic army raised by those means. At the same time he came to regard as essential state control and direction of other resources, human, industrial and financial, but he was not ahead of many Unionists and Milner in that regard.¹⁸ He turned more specifically to the conscription issue in September 1915, but, as he told C. P. Scott of the *Manchester Guardian*, it would be easier to judge the government if his colleagues divided clearly between those who supported the energetic conduct of the war and those who did not, and between those who would accept compulsory service and those who would not.¹⁹

The conscription issue, focusing on the Unionist-sponsored National Registration Act of August 1915, the creation of the reserved occupation committee in October 1915, the badging system and the inadequacies of the Military Service Act of January 1916, won Lloyd George support within the

¹⁶ Lloyd George to Carson, 3 June 1916, Carson papers, D1507/1, 1916/25; Henry Wilson to Milner, 11 April 1916, Milner papers, file 142; Scott diary, 14 June 1916, Scott papers, Add 50902; and Carson to Lloyd George, 1 October 1916, Lloyd George papers, E/2/7/2.

¹⁷ Grey to Asquith, 29 December 1915, Asquith papers, file 28. He regretted the fact that he had not resigned with Haldane in May.

¹⁸ Lloyd George memoranda, 22 February 1915, Cab. 42/1/39, and 29 June 1916, Cab. 42/15/14; War policy committee, 16 and 18 August 1915, Cab. 37/132/21, Mun. 5/123, and Cab. 3713228.

¹⁹ Scott diary, 3 September and 26 October 1915, Scott papers, Add 50901 and 50902; Riddell diary, 23 October 1915, Riddell, *War diary*, p. 129; Lloyd George speeches, 20 December 1915, Parl. Deb. H. of C., 5th Ser. LXXVII, 95–122, and 6 May 1916, D. Lloyd George, *Slings and arrows* (Toronto, 1929), p. 246.

Liberal war committee and, naturally, among Liberal conscriptionists. It showed Asquith to be indecisive in the face of the Unionists, and devious with his fellow Liberals. Lord Devonport, a Liberal peer, for instance, in April 1916, urged Lloyd George not to compromise. He must force full conscription on the government or resign from it. Either course of action, Devonport assured him, would make him the idol of the people. It would confirm that he alone enjoyed popular support, for the prime minister 'exudes weakness at every pore'.²⁰ Not surprisingly, Margot Asquith saw things differently but sensed the danger. As she had told McKenna at the end of December 1915, '... I feel very sad over the present situation and can't speak of Kitchener and Lloyd George without spitting. Kitchener has *really* bungled the whole conscription question, but Lloyd George's speech is the most vile I have ever read. Poor Henry, I'm sorry for him...' ²¹ Quite perceptibly the military conscription question then began to divide Lloyd George from his Liberal colleagues. It made a reconciliation with McKenna and Runciman, always the faintest of possibilities, improbable. As Asquith leaned increasingly on McKenna, that division took on the utmost significance.

In the course of correspondence with Austen Chamberlain in January 1916 Lloyd George had described conscription as the necessary step to increase the size of the army, which itself was the only way to avoid defeat. He found Britain's war effort embarrassingly inadequate in comparison with that of France; the latter enlisted one in six men and still produced vast quantities of munitions. Britain enlisted only one in eleven.

We must win through even though we win in rags. The notion of keeping up our trade as if there were no war is fatal. The single eye always triumphs in the end. Thus Germany fights - her trade gone and her people rationed on potatoes. I implore you not to give assent to the McKenna-Runciman position. If you desert us on this point we shall be baffled and Britain will be beaten.

The war committee must, Lloyd George continued, decide whether fifty-seven or seventy divisions were necessary. 'Compromises in war are fatal. You hold the key. Everything depends on the stand you make.'²²

McKenna, naturally, had forced consideration of the financial ramifications of conscription. He insisted that they could not afford seventy divisions in the 1916-17 financial year. Runciman felt that they simply could not raise the manpower. McKenna fixed the cost of fifty-seven divisions at £5 millions a day which itself would result in a deficit of £2,000 million by March 1917. He regarded that figure as absolutely the maximum deficit permissible. Curzon, Chamberlain, Bonar Law, and Lord Selborne had agreed with Lloyd George; they must raise seventy divisions and do so by a form of conscription.

²⁰ Devonport to Lloyd George, 20 April 1916, Lloyd George papers D/6/11/3; C. Bathurst to Lloyd George, 28 December 1915, *ibid.* D/16/5/1; F. G. Kellaway M.P. to Lloyd George, 4 December 1916, *ibid.* E/2/19/16.

²¹ Margot Asquith to McKenna, December 1915, McKenna papers, file 5/9/4.

²² Lloyd George-Chamberlain correspondence, 8 January 1916, Lloyd George papers, D/16/7/4 and A. Chamberlain papers, AC/13/2/1-104.

Chamberlain acknowledged that, '... business as usual is an absurdity. The War Office estimates of manpower requirements were obviously faulty and an effort was required to assist France and Italy with both food and finance.'²³

Lloyd George's successful campaign to extend the application of compulsory military service in April 1916 won further Unionist applause. In November 1916, in the war committee, Lloyd George attacked the deficient handling of industrial manpower, conscious of the growing lists of protected and exempt workers.²⁴ They must comb out all fit men not employed in essential tasks and conscript them into the army. The trades union leadership itself saw the need and accepted the shared responsibility. They must also use foreign and female labour in munitions, steel, and aircraft production. The alternative meant a reduction in the strength of the army and the continued failure to match France's efforts. The state must, Lloyd George declared, draft gardeners and green-keepers, press older men, single females and even boys below the age of 17 into the agricultural labour force, and direct the utilization of all male workers up to the age of 55.

In the same vein, and challenging Lord Crawford, president of the board of agriculture from July 1916 and a Tory, he demanded state intervention to secure more efficient food production and price regulation. The appointment of a food controller was long overdue. By such measures Lloyd George sought to increase production, eliminate waste, make each village self-sufficient, and forestall pacifist and other subversive activity. The food tsar would wield the powers necessary to regulate production, distribution, and prices, and would not waste his time answering questions in parliament. Grey, deeply concerned over shipping losses, voiced his complete agreement. Bonar Law supported measures required to offset food shortages and conserve shipping space. On 23 November he and Lloyd George proposed a food-rationing system. The government must, Lloyd George argued, reduce the non-essential use of transportation facilities by the general public, service men, and, of course, the breweries. On 30 November 1916, at the penultimate meeting of Asquith's war committee, Lloyd George called for the institution of compulsory national service, to the applause of Bonar Law, Curzon and Cecil.

These issues, the state's adoption of compulsory powers and specifically that of conscription, raised directly questions about Liberal dogma. Radicals, in particular, deplored what they regarded as the sacrifice of sacred principles in the quest for victory. Perhaps they feared that Liberalism was so tender a plant that once harshly pruned would never flower with vigour again. Gilbert Murray, scholar and Asquithian, equating what he saw as an attack on Liberalism with the debasement of political standards, feared lest Britain

²³ Cabinet meeting, 31 December 1915, Cab. 37/139/70; House diary, 11 January 1916, E. M. House papers and diary, vol. viii; Curzon to Lloyd George, 26 March, 5 August and 15 September 1915, Lloyd George papers, D/16/10/1, 4 and 5; Riddell diary, 10 October 1916, Riddell, *War diary*, p. 213.

²⁴ War committee, 13, 21, 23 and 30 November 1916, Cab. 42/24/5, Cab. 42/25/1, Cab. 42/25/7, and Cab. 42/26/4; Lloyd George memorandum on Food Supply, 10 November 1916, Cab. 42/24/3; Army Council to Lloyd George, 28 November 1916, Cab. 37/160/25.

become European and Prussian. A 'Prussianized Turk', he declared, would make Milner and Horatio Bottomley, editor of *John Bull*, seem like 'clean men'.²⁵ H. W. Massingham, editor of the *Nation*, insisted that one Germany in Europe was sufficient. He was upset by the call for conscription and exasperated by the war office's requisitioning of the National Liberal Club; the former was a breach of faith, the latter of taste and good manners. But what else could one expect from the new secretary of state for war, Lloyd George.²⁶

Asquith, however, could not escape criticism on this score, because of the McKenna duties of 1915, the requisitioning of factories and the restriction of the right to strike, and his support for postwar discriminatory economic policies adopted at the Paris conference in June 1916. The prime minister, moreover, had employed Balfour, and had then agreed to preside over the first coalition in May 1915, whether as a tactical, political move or as a compromise on doctrine and policy that seemed unavoidable given the emerging demands of total war.²⁷ He had evicted certain Liberals and tied himself too closely to Bonar Law and illiberal policies for his own good. Liberals and radicals did not easily forget either his patronizing comments about fellow Liberals, or the fact that he, Grey, and the then service ministers, Churchill and Haldane, and not Lloyd George, seemed most responsible for Britain's involvement in the war. On the other hand, Lloyd George was convicted in radical eyes by his progression through office, from treasury to war, via munitions. He cavorted with Tories and worse; he appeared to enjoy the role of war lord, and could not seem to work harmoniously with respected Liberals.

Seeböhm Rowntree, in careful praise of past achievements and in fear of future dislocations, dissented from this judgement of Lloyd George. Those Liberals, he wrote, who attacked Lloyd George over conscription seemed to forget his splendid service to the cause of freedom. His record in the Boer War, on the naval estimates, social insurance and temperance, his 1909 budget, his assault on the lords, and his land programme were an unrivalled contribution to the Liberal Party. But for his courage and genius, Rowntree declared, it would have deteriorated to the level of the decrepit continental parties. Rowntree understood why Liberals deplored Lloyd George's consorting with the Tories, and the way the Northcliffe press praised him while condemning the Liberal Party. The greatest danger, however, Rowntree warned, was that Lloyd George would leave the party. He might survive without the party, but it could not prosper without him. His advice to Lloyd George was clear; mend political fences, match Asquith, and show that he had deserted neither Liberalism nor the cause of social reform.²⁸ While Rowntree insisted that

²⁵ Gilbert Murray to Bertrand Russell, 25 December 1915, Bertrand Russell papers; Riddell diary, 11 June and 9 November 1915, Riddell, *War diary*, pp. 104 and 136-7.

²⁶ Massingham to the *Daily News*, 8 and 11 September 1916, Lloyd George papers, E/3/4/1. See also L. T. Hobhouse to McKenna, 29 December 1915, McKenna papers, 5/9/12.

²⁷ Asquith to Balfour, 18 September 1915, Asquith papers, file 28.

²⁸ Rowntree to R. Cross, 26 April 1916, Lloyd George papers, D/20/2/90. See also N. Buxton to Lloyd George, 13 March 1917, Buxton papers.

Lloyd George's illiberal ways of conducting the war were purely temporary and not to be feared, others were less sure. His proposals to deal harshly with conscientious objectors and what he regarded as unpatriotic newspapers such as *Vanguard* and *Forward* seemed particularly reprehensible. His accusations against men such as Charles Trevelyan and Bertrand Russell for seeking, in his view, to paralyse the war effort and injure recruitment seemed excessive and heretical.

Lloyd George was unimpressed and unrepentant; all great democracies had, he argued, resorted to compulsion in wartime and in legitimate self-defence. In turn, he came to view his Liberal colleagues as timid, indecisive, unimaginative, and bound by irrelevant party and personal loyalties. Those who had been far more enthusiastic than he in August 1914 to involve the nation in limited warfare now seemed unable to face the consequences when that prospect evaporated. By the spring of 1916 he had come to doubt the capacity of his fellow Liberals to tackle the urgent problems facing the war committee; he felt more sure of certain Unionists and of himself.²⁹ Perhaps he learned of Montagu's scheme to have him play the role of scapegoat at the war office, in case of further military defeats and heavy casualties.³⁰ No doubt he pondered the treatment given Haldane and Churchill in 1915.

III

As these issues cumulatively affected political relationships, Lloyd George was pulled away from the Liberals and toward the Unionists and Milnerites. It is unwise, however, to exaggerate the rate, extent and irreversibility of this trend, for to do so would distort the period, hide critical nuances and regression, and make seemingly inevitable outcomes that were merely probable. While several issues created rapport between Lloyd George and certain Unionists, and the Milnerites, others did not; when issues brought them together personal differences could keep them apart. Not all problems divided him from the Liberals. Not all issues hurt Asquith's reputation and rebounded to Lloyd George's advantage; Lloyd George's gain was not always Asquith's loss. While many Liberals were alienated by Lloyd George's conduct they were reluctant to risk his defection. The Liberal and radical press mirrored these fluctuations. The *Daily News*, *The Star*, the *Daily Chronicle* and the *Labour Leader* attacked him. The *Westminster Gazette* became lukewarm. The *Manchester Guardian* saw him as essential to any government.

²⁹ Lloyd George speech at Conway, 6 May 1916, Lloyd George, *Slings and arrows*, p. 246; Lloyd George to Bonar Law, 13 December 1915, Lloyd George papers, D/16/5/2; Asquith to McKenna, 25 March, and McKenna to Asquith, 16 June 1916. McKenna papers, 5/10/18 and 5/8/9; Samuel memorandum, 7 December 1916, Samuel papers, A/55; Esher to Scott, 24 November 1916, Scott papers, Add 50909. At Conway he said: 'It is the business of the statesman to strain every nerve to keep a nation out of war, but once they are in it, it is also their business to wage it with all their might.'

³⁰ Montagu to Asquith, 20 June 1916, Lloyd George papers, D/17/10/5, Montagu distributed his loyalty and the reserve fairly evenly between Lloyd George and Asquith.

In the early stages of the war, for example, as had been the case during the crisis of July–August 1914, Churchill not Lloyd George favoured closer co-operation with the Unionists. Lloyd George insisted that the government must remain a Liberal preserve for ‘They [i.e. the Conservatives] will support us steadily until we get into difficulties and public opinion gets restive, and then look out’.³¹ Christopher Addison, a junior minister under Asquith, and other Liberals stood with Lloyd George, and rallied to him in December 1916. Crewe looked on him as a vital ally in May 1915 against the Unionists, and their mutual regard remained intact, at least in part.³² Crewe was a realist in such matters and perhaps the events of December 1916 were something of a relief. As he pointed out subsequently to Grey,

...you and I looking back to the winter of 1916 know that no compromise which was possible at that moment could have stood the strain of events and that a renewed breach later on would have been more disastrous to the country than the one which actually occurred.³³

Nevertheless, Lloyd George’s relations with Grey declined markedly. The hostility between Lloyd George and McKenna, deeply-rooted before 1914, was given the briefest respite in the first months of the war, and then flowered in all its acrimony. McKenna was one of the few to challenge Lloyd George’s record as munitions minister. In February 1916 he pronounced him a failure and unfit to be prime minister. He saw Lloyd George’s threats of resignation as he always had, as pathetic exercises in self-delusion. Where McKenna trod, Runciman, of course, was also to be found.³⁴ Lloyd George, in turn, came to view McKenna as the most sinister conspirator, divorcing him from Asquith. Perhaps, as Lord Riddell noted, McKenna and Lloyd George shared but one sentiment, distrust of Churchill.³⁵

³¹ Lloyd George, cabinet notes, 10 and 11 August, and Lloyd George–Churchill exchanges, October 1914, Lloyd George papers, C/13. On Churchill’s record generally see the third volume of Martin Gilbert’s biography.

³² Crewe to Lloyd George, 24 May 1915, Lloyd George papers, C/4/1/22. On Addison see K. O. & J. Morgan, *Portrait of a progressive. The political career of Christopher, Viscount Addison* (Oxford, 1980), pp. 47–57.

³³ Crewe to Grey, 19 February 1928, Crewe papers, C/17.

³⁴ Lloyd George to Sir F. Black, 24 September 1915, Mun. 4/526/45/6; Lloyd George to Sir E. Geddes, 22 May 1916, Mun. 4/7067/17/24 and 25; Scott diary, 22–23 February and 13–20 April 1916, Scott papers, Add 50902; Asquith to McKenna, 25 March 1916 and McKenna to Asquith, 16 June 1916, McKenna papers, 5/10/18 and 5/8/9; McKenna to Hankey, 4 July 1916, *ibid.*; War committee, 21 June 1916, Cab. 42/15/10; Samuel memorandum, 5 December 1916, Samuel papers, A/55; and A. C. Geddes, *The forging of a family* (London, 1952), pp. 223–36.

³⁵ Riddell, *War diary*, p. 34. The Lloyd George–Churchill relationship was uneven, forfeit to political realities, opportunism, and policy difference. It benefited Lloyd George to maintain a certain distance from the discredited Churchill. (Churchill to Lloyd George, 5 and 7 April 1915, Lloyd George papers, C/3/16/24 and 25; Scott diary, 20–22 November 1915, Scott papers, Add 50902; Lloyd George to his brother, 13 March 1916, W. George, *My brother*, p. 253.) In November 1914, Lloyd George blamed Churchill for the Admiralty’s poor performance, for the Antwerp affair, and for Turkey’s belligerence (Scott diary, 27 November 1914, Scott papers, Add 50901). After May 1915 he did not protest at Churchill’s humiliation and never made his return to office an issue. Yet Lloyd George attempted to preserve Churchill’s reputation against unfair allegations

Yet a certain bond remained intact almost to the end between Lloyd George and Asquith. Theirs was a subtle relationship, breeding more than contempt and distrust. He did not break with the prime minister either easily or lightly; his loyalty evaporated neither rapidly nor completely. It could not be otherwise after a decade of co-operation, and such feelings did not go entirely unreciprocated. In May 1915, Lloyd George ran and stood with Asquith, if only to serve his own purposes. He in turn, in an unusual outburst to be sure, praised Lloyd George effusively for his invaluable help, sustained support, powers of resource, devotion and unselfishness. These were, he said, the qualities which made the drudgery, the petty, personal squabbles, and the squalor of politics bearable. They gave the drabness of politics a stroke of nobility and 'I thank you with all my heart'.³⁶ This tribute did not reflect a sadistic sense of humour, for Margot Asquith was still, at that stage, cultivating Lloyd George as an ally.³⁷

Asquith was less than impressive at the allied conference in March 1916 and Lloyd George's will to preserve him seemed to diminish from that point. Ireland, however, temporarily revived their co-operation in the summer. At the same time, even though it became convenient for Lloyd George to chronicle in his memoirs a tale of mounting disaster, he shared in the optimism about the progress of the war which lasted until September. In July he told the allied conference that as a result of Russia's recent victories, the outcome at Verdun, the stabilizing of the Italian front, and the improved allied record in the production of guns and munitions, the enemy had lost the initiative. The allies had crossed the watershed, weathered the storm, and the tide of victory had begun to flow in their favour; Germany would not attack Russia again that year.³⁸ In August 1916 Lloyd George insisted, in the war committee, that they give the prime minister a free hand to conduct negotiations at the forthcoming allied meetings. In November 1916, Lloyd George did not blame Asquith personally for the profoundly disappointing results at the Paris conference. He told his brother that Asquith had been effective, largely

over the Dardanelles and Mesopotamian campaigns, and insisted that they recognize his contribution to the development of the tank (War committee, 11 July and 18 September 1916, Cab. 42/16/5 and Cab. 42/20/2; Dardanelles commission of enquiry, 30 October 1916 and 2 April 1917, Cab. 19/29 and 33; unsigned memorandum, 9 October 1916, Carson papers, D/1507/5/26).

³⁶ Asquith to Lloyd George, 25 May 1915, Lloyd George papers, D/18/2/1. Riddell recorded critical comments by Lloyd George about Asquith for the first time in March 1915 (Riddell, *War diary*, pp. 65 and 70). See also Lloyd George to Bonar Law, 13 December 1915, Lloyd George papers, D/16/5/2.

³⁷ Margot Asquith to Lloyd George, 3 November 1914, 24 March and May 1915, *ibid.* C/6/12/13, 15 and 16. By December she had become decidedly hostile. (Margot Asquith to McKenna, December 1915, McKenna papers, 5/9/4; Margot Asquith to Hankey, 15 October and 31 December 1915.) See also S. Roskill, *Hankey, man of secrets*, 1 (London, 1970), 228 and 240-1.

³⁸ Lloyd George statements, 13 and 15 July 1916, W. O. 32/5089 and Lloyd George papers, E/10/4/1; Lloyd George to W. George, 26 September 1916, *ibid.* I/2/2/53; Riddell diary, 19 September 1916, Riddell, *War diary*, pp. 210-211.

because he was detached from the sinister environment in London.³⁹ Milner feared a compromise between them to the end.

By the spring of 1916, however, the fissures dividing Lloyd George from many leading Liberals had become wide and very evident. As Lloyd George told an old friend, Sir Edward Russell, editor of the *Liverpool Post*, the personal attacks had gone well beyond the commons and the National Liberal Club to the country at large.⁴⁰ The 'poisonous virus of innuendo' undermined his effectiveness as a minister by suggesting that he criticized government policy not out of patriotism but from a desire to supplant Asquith. He feared a catastrophe, regretted that he had not resigned, and knew that if the public questioned his motives they would not heed his warnings. He must, therefore, deal promptly with his critics and force the nation to face the grim realities.

The Unionists, not excluding Bonar Law, were suspicious of Lloyd George to the end, but could not dismiss him either as a potential ally or warlord. There was almost too much to forget, a decade of distrust and even hatred to overcome. It permitted an appreciation of Lloyd George's qualities, an acknowledgment of his success with finance, labour, and munitions, but dictated that Tories dwell on his defects. They found much to admire, but almost as much to question, particularly his judgement and reliability. Austen Chamberlain, Long, Cecil and Lansdowne expressed this ambivalence freely, the latter two retaining a certain regard for, in their view, the more gentlemanly Asquith.⁴¹ Robert Cecil, for instance, in March 1916, told Sir Cecil Spring-Rice, the ambassador in Washington, that while Lloyd George was heir apparent, he personally was not convinced that dropping Asquith would be an improvement. He expected Asquith to rule as long as disaster was averted simply because of the absence of a credible alternative. He proposed dual structures of responsibility in November 1916 to counter schemes to grant Lloyd George supreme power, or to elevate Lloyd George, Bonar Law and Carson.⁴²

Austen Chamberlain assured Lord Chelmsford that although Lloyd George demonstrated great energy and resolution, and would gather round him men of ability, he was emotional and of uncertain temper. He indulged in intrigue, became alternately buoyant and depressed, and was, like Carson, a Celtic

³⁹ Procès-verbaux, Paris Conference, 26-28 March 1916, Cab. 37/144/77 and Cab. 28/1; War committee, 22 August 1916, Cab. 42/18/4; Lloyd George draft of P.M.'s statement for the Paris conference, Cab. 28/1; Lloyd George to his brother, 18, 22 and 27 November 1916, W. George, *My brother*, pp. 255-6; Paris conference, minutes, 15-16 November 1916, Cab. 28/1; War committee, 21 November 1916, Cab. 42/25/2.

⁴⁰ Lloyd George to Russell, 28 April 1916, Lloyd George papers, D/18/11/5.

⁴¹ Lansdowne to A. Chamberlain, 5 February 1915, Chamberlain papers, AC/13/2/1; Long to Bonar Law, 30 May and 13 June 1915, Bonar Law papers, 50/3/69 and 70; Long memorandum, 29 November 1916, Cab. 37/160/27; and Curzon memo, 7 December 1916, Austen Chamberlain papers, AC/15/3/1-44. See also R. R. James, *Memoirs of a Conservative* (London, 1969) and J. Vincent, *The Crawford papers, 1892-1940* (Manchester, 1984).

⁴² Cecil to Spring-Rice, 29 March 1916, FO/800/196; Cecil to Asquith, 8 December 1916, Asquith papers, file 17.

sentimentalist. Chamberlain concluded, 'I have no confidence in his judgment'.⁴³ There was then, in 1916, little sign of the regard which later developed between Lloyd George and Chamberlain.⁴⁴ Lansdowne recalled Lloyd George's 1910 coalition proposal, describing it as 'a marvellous document', but warned Bonar Law, on 1 December 1916, not to commit himself irrevocably and prematurely to Lloyd George. If he did he would divide the Unionists, for 'The power of imagination is a quality in which many of us are no doubt deficient, but I cannot help believing that Lloyd George has too much of it'.⁴⁵ He insisted that they owed it to Asquith to avoid any action which would seem to be a concerted attempt to displace him.

Bonar Law needed little reminding to be cautious in his dealings with Lloyd George, if only because of the insecurity of his own position. Their relationship, ultimately pivotal, was, according to Lord Beaverbrook, quite uneven throughout 1915 and 1916. There is some validity in that view, which Lloyd George acknowledged in his memoirs. Competition flourished between them. Bonar Law, for example, could neither match Lloyd George's war record and his popularity in the country at large, nor welcome his contacts with other prominent Unionists. September 1915 witnessed a particularly distressing incident. Lloyd George took exception to what he regarded as an ungentlemanly attempt by Bonar Law to displace him as deputy leader in the commons.⁴⁶ In March 1916, Bonar Law, forecasting the collapse of the government, with Lloyd George and Carson assuming power, insisted that Asquith was still the most suitable prime minister.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, despite this lack of trust, Bonar Law, like Carson who was himself never personally close to Lloyd George and disparaged Bonar Law, shared Lloyd George's viewpoint on almost every single issue examined here. His greatest reservations, and Carson's, came over Lloyd George's attacks on the military establishment. Even the drink question in 1915 found them in sympathy with each other.⁴⁸

⁴³ A. Chamberlain to Lord Chelmsford, 8 December 1916, Austen Chamberlain papers, AC/15/3/1-44.

⁴⁴ Chamberlain wrote later that he and Lloyd George had never liked each other until after Bonar Law's breakdown, and that Lloyd George had offered him the treasury in 1918 only out of deference to Bonar Law (Chamberlain to Long, 11 December 1922, *ibid.* AC/15/3/1-44). In fact, in the euphoria of the party truce they had found some common ground (Chamberlain to Lloyd George, 8 August 1914, Lloyd George papers, C/3/14/1). See also D. Dutton, *Austen Chamberlain: gentleman in politics* (Bolton, 1985), pp. 130-4.

⁴⁵ Lansdowne to Bonar Law, 1 December 1916, Bonar Law papers, 117/1/29.

⁴⁶ Bonar Law to Lloyd George, 14 and 15 September 1915, Lloyd George papers, D/17/8/6 and 7; Lloyd George to Bonar Law, 15 September 1915, Bonar Law papers, 117/1/20; Lloyd George to Asquith, 16 September 1915, Lloyd George papers, D/18/2/17.

⁴⁷ Spender memorandum of conversation with Bonar Law, 15 March 1916, J. A. Spender papers, Add 46388. Bonar Law no doubt expected this comment to get back to Asquith.

⁴⁸ Lloyd George to Bonar Law, 7 April 1915, Lloyd George papers, C/5/8/31; Bonar Law to Lloyd George and Asquith, 17 May 1915, *ibid.* C/5/8/5; Bonar Law to Lloyd George, 28 June 1915, *ibid.* D/17/8/2; Bonar Law to Henry Wilson, 15 July 1915, Bonar Law papers, 53/6/33; Lloyd George to Bonar Law and Carson, 25 September 1915, Bonar Law papers, 51/3/21 and Lloyd George papers, D/20/2/30 and D/17/8/8; Scott diary, 20-22 November 1916, Scott papers, Add 50902. On Balfour see M. Egremont, *Balfour* (London, 1980), pp. 282-4 and R. F. Mackay, *Balfour: intellectual statesman* (Oxford, 1985), pp. 304-9.

In contrast, while conscription pulled Lloyd George and Curzon together, Ireland, civil-military relations and strategy drove them apart. Strategy, conscription and executive reconstruction united Lloyd George and Cecil, but Ireland divided them. Austen Chamberlain differed from Lloyd George on strategy and Ireland and agreed with him on conscription. Balfour's sharpest disagreement with Lloyd George came in the realms of conscription, strategy, and over his own fitness for office; and so on. With Bonar Law and Carson it was different, and that is what counted in December 1916. Sir Arthur Lee, F. E. Smith, the attorney general, Lord Derby, Aitken, Neville Chamberlain and other Tory light-heavyweights were mere lubricants, though political processes, like machines, falter without grease. No single pattern marked the response of the Tory press. The *Spectator* traded hostility for support, the *Observer* remained convinced of Lloyd George's indispensability, the *Morning Post* and the *National Review* warmed to him as did *The Times* and the *Daily Mail*.

Lloyd George's relationship with the Milnerites followed a somewhat different pattern. The war confirmed the worst fears of Milner and his group. Most politicians seemed inadequate, parties were irrelevant, the parliamentary system was ineffective, and the empire was in jeopardy. The formula for victory was equally clear; efficient leadership, state control of industrial, financial and human resources, and more rigorous and imaginative strategic policies.

In May 1915, Amery described Asquith's coalition as impotent, lifeless, and unfit to govern even in peacetime.⁴⁹ Predictably, he made no exception for Lloyd George; he and other Milnerites had as much to forget as the Unionists. To defeat Germany and consolidate an impregnable empire, they must not only destroy the new government but also prevent the emergence of another 'patched-up' affair. F. S. Oliver had long regarded Asquith as hopeless, describing him as, 'the argufying machine, at his wits end, and without a policy'.⁵⁰ In August 1915 Milner predicted to Philip Kerr that disaster would befall the allies, resulting in the conclusion of an unsatisfactory peace before the fall of 1916.⁵¹ Asquith, Balfour, and Bonar Law were particularly pathetic; only Kitchener, Curzon, Carson, Selborne, Austen Chamberlain, and, significantly, Lloyd George seemed adequate. In November, Waldorf Astor, owner of the *Observer*, reported that Amery was 'beginning to speak well of Lloyd George', and the *Round Table* had warmed to him.⁵² In turn Lloyd George had come to agree with the Milnerites and the 'Ginger Group' on national service.⁵³ He had also employed R. Brand and L. Hitchens in the

⁴⁹ Amery to Milner, 20 May 1915, Milner papers, file 140.

⁵⁰ Oliver to Waldorf Astor, 3 March 1914, Garvin papers, box 59.

⁵¹ Milner to Kerr, 20 August 1915, Milner papers, file 140.

⁵² Astor to Garvin, 16 November 1915, Garvin papers, box 48; Anon, 'The schism of Europe', *Round Table*, v, No. 8 (1915), 345-411. See also J. Barnes and D. Nicholson (eds.), *The Leo Amery diaries*, volume 1: 1896-1929 (London, 1980).

⁵³ The National Service issue established ties with Milner, Oliver, G. Robinson, Astor, Kerr and Henry Wilson.

ministry of munitions, at significant levels of responsibility. By February 1916 the Milnerites had begun to regard an executive embracing Milner, Lloyd George, Carson, Curzon, and Austen Chamberlain as vital. Amery confirmed this to be so in April; they must break Asquith. Milner, now seeking a triumvirate of Lloyd George, himself, and Carson, came to view Lloyd George as essential for that purpose.⁵⁴ He had proved himself beyond any question; he was now almost a kindred spirit.

The political significance of these issues, the attitudes they had fostered, became unified in December 1916 over the question of executive reorganization. The war committee under Asquith was, as Lloyd George testified, a decided improvement on its predecessors.⁵⁵ By November 1916, however, it was overburdened by unresolved problems, weighed down by personal differences, and unsure whether it could guide the nation to victory.⁵⁶ A consensus formed on the need to restructure the government, even though no agreement existed on its form, the size and powers of its constituent parts, their relationships, and the persons the process should elevate or demote, bring in or remove entirely. In what became an issue of office and power some Liberals such as Addison worked relentlessly to elevate Lloyd George. Others such as McKenna and Runciman identified themselves resolutely with Asquith; Crewe and Montagu wavered, but preferred Asquith. Grey seemed absent, Samuel and Buckmaster almost irrelevant, while Churchill held to a course that temporarily cost him office. The Unionist leadership were concerned to profit from Liberal disunity. They attempted to control the course of events and to bring about a maximum of change to their own advantage with a minimum of disruption. They secured both. They fought out their own battles over the demise of Asquith's government. Curzon, Chamberlain, Long and Cecil were not overly impressed with Bonar Law's effectiveness as leader and would not serve under Carson. Bonar Law did not seek to perpetuate Balfour's career. Conservative unity was thus a factor in any attempt to secure executive reorganization, reflecting the fact that there was no viable candidate for the premiership in their ranks. They were not indifferent between Asquith and Lloyd George and came to respect the latter to a greater degree. After almost daily fluctuations, they concluded that they would get more of office, power and policy preference under him. Lloyd George, Bonar Law and Carson became the keys to reorganization, but Cecil especially, and Balfour far less so, did not relish the prospect of that triumvirate in command, augmented by Arthur Henderson, the Labour incumbent at the board of education.

⁵⁴ Amery to Lloyd George, 6, 13, 14 and 20 April 1916, Lloyd George papers, D/16/2/2, 4, 5 and 8; Milner to Chamberlain, Austen Chamberlain papers, AC/13/3/1-104; Milner to Garvin, 4 December 1916, Garvin papers, box 45; Milner to Lady E. Cecil, 3, 5 and 8 December 1916, Milner papers, file 143. F. S. Oliver was hostile to Lloyd George, however, as late as June 1916. Turner's work on the Lloyd George secretariat amends conclusively that of Gollin and Lockwood.

⁵⁵ Asquith memorandum, 28 October 1915, Lloyd George papers, D/23/1/8; Grey to Crewe, 22 October 1915, Crewe papers, C/7; Cabinet meetings, 21 October and 11 November 1915, Cab. 37/136/26 and Cab. 37/137/14; Lloyd George testimony before the Dardanelles committee of enquiry, 30 October 1916 and 2 April 1917, Cab. 19/33.

⁵⁶ Lloyd George to Asquith, 1, 4 and 5 December 1916, Asquith papers, file 31.

But when personal regard and animosity, intrigue and conspiracy, ambition and reluctance have had their due and the blow by blow accounts of the first week of December 1916 are given, the cumulative impact of issues on political relationships and alignments retains the greatest significance. The composition of Lloyd George's war cabinet and of the broader cabinet reflected that process. Who was in and who was left out, and why, followed logically for the most part from rational debate.

Some did not regard the reorganization of December 1916 as necessarily the final one of the war. Lloyd George was a credible prime minister; his abilities, successes, and his reputation abroad made him so. His political options had emerged clearly in the spring; press on with Asquith and court the Liberals, resign and stump the country in opposition, or force an executive reconstruction and reshape the coalition. By November 1916 he was convinced that the third possibility would best serve the nation and himself. Others agreed, but, because of the residue of distrust and doubt, did so with inner reservations. The point is, however, that Lloyd George was the second prime minister of the war, on trial, removable if the hint of indispensability proved false. December 1916 brought the decisive change of the war but there is no reason to think that all participants felt that at the time. Lloyd George had his opportunity but no more than that. He understood that to be the case.

There were two bouts of significant ministerial change during the remainder of the war, in July-August 1917 and in the spring of 1918, but the coalition lasted the war and beyond. By February 1918, Lloyd George, urged on by J. L. Garvin, editor of the *Observer*, was already thinking of forming a new party. He would unite under his leadership those who thought as he did on the issues of the day and shared his vision of the future.⁵⁷ His premiership was marked by institutional innovation; a new party would be the most daring innovation of all.

⁵⁷ Edward Goulding to Garvin, 13 February 1918, Garvin papers, box 72.