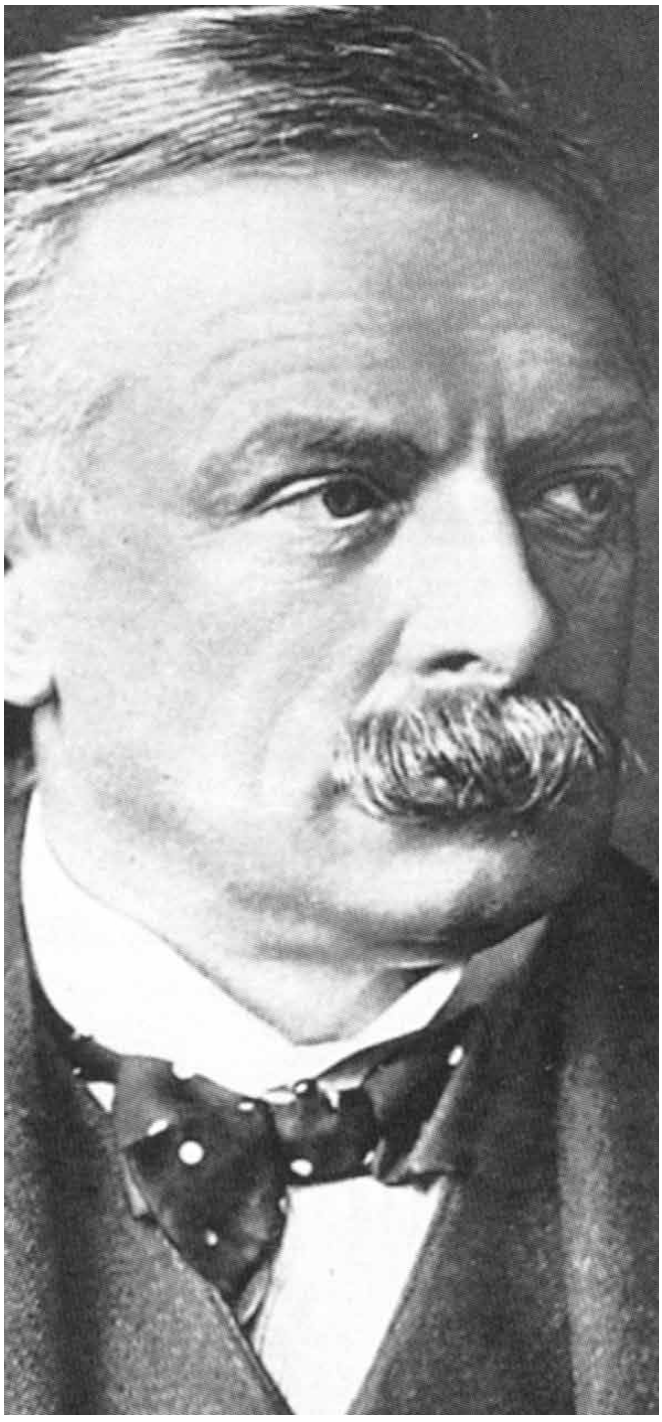
Liberal divisions

The History of Parliament Trust's annual lecture, delivered by Kenneth O. Morgan (Lord Morgan) at Portcullis House, House of Commons, 7 December 2016.

7 December 1916: Asquith, Lloyd G



George and the Crisis of Liberalism

A hundred years ago today, minus one hour, David Lloyd George kissed hands as prime minister. The following evening, 8 December, Asquith convened a large gathering of Liberals, members of parliament and peers, at the Reform Club. This meeting confirmed his leadership by acclamation. But it also confirmed the death of a great party twenty-four hours earlier. The attendance there was politically a mixed one. There were stout allies and admirers of Asquith but also critics like Winston Churchill. Christopher Addison, a non-attender and supporter of Lloyd George noted in his diary that there was 'A pretty considerable stampede on to LG's side'.[1] Why did all these momentous events happen? At the Reform Club, Asquith had no doubt. He spoke of there having been 'a well-organised conspiracy'. In his remarkable eulogy on Lloyd George in the Commons in March 1945, Winston Churchill spoke of Lloyd George 'seizing' power, which startled some MPs. But he also quoted Thomas Carlyle on Oliver Cromwell – 'he coveted the place. Perhaps the place was his'.[2]

Until the late 1960s, blame for the Liberal schism was placed firmly on David Lloyd George. He was the Welsh Cain who slew the English Abel. He was also incidentally attacked for the irregularity or immorality of his private life, though this accusation tended to fade away after the revelations came of Asquith's intimate relationship with a very young woman, Venetia Stanley, to whom he revealed secrets about war strategy and other matters. Much of the writing about 1916 came from pro-Asquithians who condemned the little Welsh attorney from a rural shoemaker's cottage, who conspired against his leader, allied with the Tory enemy, took cash for peerages and inspired universal distrust. Almost the last of these works was Roy Jenkins's biography *Asquith* (1964), the work of a fellow Balliol man, who portrayed his subject as the 'noblest Roman' laid low by an envious Casca from Criccieth.

The battle for reputations went on after their deaths. The two men did not produce especially revelatory memoirs unlike the leaders of New Labour. Asquith's memoirs are guarded about Lloyd George. The latter's *War Memoirs* talk of Asquith being tired and lethargic during the war years but are far from consistently critical. More forceful combatants were the two daughters, Lady Violet Bonham-Carter and Lady Megan Lloyd George; Lady Violet greatly admired Churchill and in 1951 contemplated an electoral pact with the Conservatives. Lady Megan joined Labour and sat for Carmarthen. The Reform Club had been very hostile to the Welshman over the years. But now the National Liberal Club has a Lloyd George Room, adorned by Christopher Williams's portrait of the great man, while the Reform Club itself has a bust of Lloyd George, presented by the sculptor, in the Smoking Room of the very epicentre of Asquithianism. Perhaps in this great conflict we have reached an armistice at last.

Since the Beaverbrook Library, housing the Lloyd George, Bonar Law and Beaverbrook Papers opened in 1967, the balance of historical judgement has turned strongly towards Lloyd George – in the work of Alan Taylor, John Grigg, and perhaps myself – emphasising his radicalism, and charismatic inspiration as leader in war and peace. Now he has his statue in Parliament Square, close to that of another great world war leader. He is the only non-Conservative represented there. And yet Lloyd George's was put up a full seventy years after that of Clemenceau, *père de la victoire*, in the Champs-Elysées in Paris. In Britain, in the official commemoration of the centenary of the First World War, Lloyd George has so far been a conspicuous absentee. This is partly because of what we are discussing this evening. The crisis of 7 December 1916 is still very much alive.

Asquith and Lloyd George came from very different wings of the Liberal party. Asquith, the older by eleven years, was the son of a

H. H. Asquith (1852–1928), Prime Minister 1908–16, Leader of the Liberal Party 1908–26

David Lloyd George (1863–1945), Prime Minister 1916–22, Leader of the Liberal Party 1926–31

minor employer in the Yorkshire woollen industry. He won a classics scholarship to Balliol and took a first in Greats (classics). He had a successful career at the bar (including prosecuting the publishers of a famous novel by Emile Zola), he won a safe Liberal seat in East Fife, he immediately impressed in the Commons and became home secretary in Gladstone's government in 1892. He was, or had become, the supreme insider.

Lloyd George was always the supreme outsider. Like James Callaghan and John Major, he had to do it the hard way – an unprivileged background in a shoemaker's cottage in Welsh-speaking north Wales, education in a tiny village school in Llanystumdwy near Criccieth, his religion Campbellite Baptist (a fringe radical wing within the wider Baptist community) and there was no question of his being able to go to university. He made his way as a local solicitor and used this as a local base to attack the ascendancy, Anglicised landowners and clergy. His boyhood hero was Abraham Lincoln – not the great emancipator but the great democrat. His admirers made much of the log cabin to president mystique, in books with titles such as *Village Green to Downing Street*.[3] In 1890 he won Caernarfon Boroughs, a Liberal gain, by just eighteen votes at the age of 27, after a radical campaign. It has been claimed that twenty-four voters, all lifeboatmen from Pwllheli in his new constituency and all Conservatives, were working out at sea and thus unable to vote. Even in this early phase, Lloyd George had Napoleon's cherished quality of being a lucky general.

From the start, Asquith exuded effortless superiority and patrician self-control in parliament. He was a success as home secretary under Gladstone and Rosebery in 1892–5 – working with other imperially minded Liberals like Grey and Haldane. The coming man had definitely arrived. An early widower, he married the glamorous socialite Margot Tennant, a wealthy, snobbish woman who relished high society. Lloyd George, a relatively poor man, married the unassuming daughter of a local Caemarfonshire farmer (a woman who disliked city life and loved *le Pays de Galles profond*). Margot patronised her as a 'homely little woman'. Asquith went straight into Cabinet in 1892. Lloyd George, by contrast, was from the first a freelance backbencher and a rebel. He admired the radical Joseph Chamberlain. Gladstone, however, he thought was hostile to the causes of workers and nonconformists, and basically a Tory at heart.

The first contact between the two men was not a happy experience. In May–June 1895, the government majority had almost disappeared. Lloyd George then led a small group of four *Cymru Fydd* (Young Wales) Liberals in opposition to the government during the committee stage of the Welsh Disestablishment Bill. He then moved an amendment to set up a Welsh national council to administer the funds of the disendowed Church in Wales. This failed narrowly by ten votes. Soon afterwards, on 20 June, on a similar amendment, the government majority fell to only two. The next day the Rosebery government was defeated by seven votes on a different and trivial issue – supplies of cordite – and resigned. The Liberals lost the subsequent general election, heavily.[4]

Some in Wales now blamed Lloyd George for an act of wilful disloyalty. Asquith rebuked Lloyd George's Welsh colleague, Tom Ellis, the Liberal chief whip, for appearing to exonerate him for 'the underhand and disloyal way' in which he acted. He saw the rebellious member for Caernarfon Boroughs as 'a natural *frondeur*'.[5] After this, Asquith frequently showed a broad dislike of the Welsh in general – Jenkins quotes him as describing them as '*moutons enragés*'. On another occasion, Asquith declared that 'I am not passionately fond of the Welsh'. In 1924, when approached about a Welsh constituency, he observed, 'I would sooner go to hell than to Wales'.[6] Lloyd George attacked Asquith in return – 'the worst thing he ever did was to join the Church of England'. He did so not 'because of principle but because of society'.[7]

Both men advanced rapidly thereafter – but on opposite sides of the party. Asquith, like Grey and others was a Liberal imperialist; Lloyd George was a 'little Englander'. Asquith was a key figure in Lord Rosebery's Liberal League, an imperialist federalist, very supportive of the Boer War in 1899–1902. Lloyd George was a passionate pro-Boer who won celebrity by fierce personal attacks on Joseph Chamberlain, the all-powerful colonial secretary. He worked with anti-war radicals in condemning the British concentration camps on the Veldt. It was he who introduced the famous campaigner against these genocidal camps, Emily Hobhouse, to the Liberal leader, Campbell-Bannerman. From Emily the latter picked up the powerful phrase he applied to British tactics in South Africa – 'methods of barbarism', three little words which in due time helped to overthrow the greatest of empires.

Both men were prominent in the Liberal resurgence in 1902–5, being both active in speaking for free trade and other Liberal priorities. Instructive was education and their respective approaches in opposing Balfour's Education Act of 1902. Asquith offered a distinguished forensic dissection of it in the Commons and in formal meetings around the country. Lloyd George, by contrast, led a

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nationwide revolt by the Welsh county councils (all Liberal controlled from 1904 onwards) in a populist programme of organised passive resistance towards the Act and of denying funds to National schools – a policy of civil disobedience that was clearly illegal. When the Liberals returned to office in December 1905, there was a revealing episode involving Asquith. The Liberal imperialists had made a private compact that they would all refuse office and ask Campbell-Bannerman to stand down from his seat in the Commons and retire to the Lords. But when offered the chancellorship, Asquith promptly broke his word and accepted the offer of this prestigious new post. He was an intensely ambitious man, even though in this instance he acted somewhat similarly towards Campbell-Bannerman as Lloyd George, Bonar Law and Carson were to do in December 1916, which he was to characterise as a conspiracy. Lloyd George now. took office at the Board of Trade in Campbell-Bannerman's new government. Both shone in office. Asquith proved to be a surprisingly radical chancellor, Lloyd George an adventurous president of the Board of Trade, casual in his attitude towards the Liberal shibboleth of free trade. In April 1908 Asquith became prime minister; Lloyd George followed him at the Treasury.

For the next seven and a half years, theirs was a tremendous partnership – far more harmonious than, for example, Tony Blair and Gordon Brown after 1997. 'Puffin', Asquith's son, and Megan Lloyd George, played together happily as children in the garden of No. 10 Downing Street. The two ministers collaborated closely from the start with the launching of Old Age Pensions when Lloyd George took over Asquith's proposals. Asquith had in fact seriously underestimated the cost of pensions, which amounted to almost £8.5m, and Lloyd George then added to the cost as the Finance Bill went through committee. To help pay for this, Lloyd George's 'People's Budget' of April 1909 included radical proposals on direct taxation, new land duties, including on the 'unearned increment', and welfare reforms such as children's allowances. It was the new progressive increases in income tax and the new 'super-tax' on higher incomes that made the difference financially rather than the land duties, which were generally unproductive. The budget was resisted in Cabinet by conservative ministers such as Reginald McKenna, Walter Runciman and 'Lulu' Harcourt. Haldane crudely (and quite wrongly) claimed that Lloyd George did not understand his own budget. But Asquith was always strongly supportive. He saw clearly that it seized the political initiative from the Unionist tariff reformers. It provided a free trade answer to the need to pay for social reform ('the rich will pay') and also offered a new radical response to the challenge of Labour for working class votes. For Asquith was an intellectual but also a strongly partisan intellectual who despised the Tories and was certain that there was no more appropriate prime minister to run the country than himself. He helped steer the People's Budget through Cabinet with the ineffable words, 'I think there is substantial agreement on this point', the emollient formula of vice-chancellors down the ages.

The Parliament Act of 1911, clipping the powers of the House of Lords, was Asquith's triumph as the People's Budget was Lloyd George's. Prime minister and chancellor were in agreement on all key points of policy and strategy, even if Asquith had to get Lloyd George to tone down some of his more aggressive personal attacks on dukes. They were very close as political comrades in the struggle. But they were very different types of men, and not close personally (Margot's snobbish instincts emerged after she invited the Lloyd Georges around for dinner). Lloyd George did not share Asquith's enthusiasm for bridge, while the latter had only languid fondness for either of Lloyd George's interests – the golf course or the singing of Welsh hymns. Asquith became increasingly addicted to brandy while Lloyd George was, for public purposes at least, a teetotaller. But each recognised the other's remarkable qualities. The events of 1909 and 1911 were a joint triumph. Asquith was also to back up Lloyd George on his various other enterprises in 1911–14 – National Health insurance, the land campaigns, collective bargaining with organised labour, negotiations over Irish home rule, and growing pressure to revive the government's fortunes with more radical policies including a possible form of national health service, based on the health insurance panels which Lloyd George and Addison were to discuss in the summer of 1914.

The supreme test of their partnership came in 1912 with the famous Marconi case. Lloyd George took a great risk in buying shares from the American Marconi company, when the government of which he was a member was negotiating a contract with the linked British Marconi company. He had committed a technical, but serious, offence as a minister of the Crown, even if he lost money in the transaction as he often did. If he wished, Asquith could have got rid of him. But his approach was predictably partisan. He knew Lloyd George, unpredictable though he might be, was the government's greatest asset. He had charisma and energy like no other member of

the administration. So Asquith brushed aside any idea that Lloyd George and his associate Sir Rufus Isaacs (through whom Lloyd George had actually bought the Marconi shares) should resign. Asquith urged instead that they should face it out and strive to avoid giving 'undue detail' even though he took some private pleasure from the discomfiture of his chancellor – the idol was left 'a bit clipped' he observed.[8] But Asquith could walk the low road of politics as well as the high. Liberal England, run by tough-minded survivors from Balliol and Brynhyfryd, won the day.

There were no problems between the two when war broke out in August 1914. After a few weeks of uncertainty, Lloyd George declared his strong backing for the war in a great speech at the Queen's Hall on 19 September. Before a large audience of London Welshmen, he declared it to be a war waged to defend Liberal principles, for the defence of 'the little five-foot-five nations', gallant little Serbia and Montenegro, gallant little Belgium (and perhaps by extension gallant little Wales).[9] In Cabinet debates on war strategy in early 1915, Lloyd George took a vigorous part but was not in any way manoeuvring against Asquith. When the Liberal government came to an abrupt end in May 1915, being replaced by a coalition still under Asquith's leadership, the main cause of instability was Churchill not Lloyd George. Asquith then re-formed his government quite ruthlessly (he cheerfully sacrificed Haldane, 'old Schopenhauer', ditched for the spurious reason that he had an interest in German Hegelian philosophy). All the key offices were retained by Liberals, even ministers with talents as limited as Walter Runciman and Augustine Birrell. Throughout the crisis, Lloyd George was totally supportive of his leader and this was recognised.by the Asquith family.

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Margot Asquith wrote that 'Ll.G. has come grandly out of all this; he has the sweetest nature in the world.' She added, perhaps predictably, 'He has wonderful charm'.[10] Asquith thanked him personally for 'your devotion, your unselfishness, your powers of resource… your self-forgetfulnenss. They give the drabness of politics a lightning streak of nobility.'[11] It was a very emotional letter, and marked the high point of their long relationship.

The great crisis then began in the late summer of 1915 over the issue of military conscription to replace the current system of voluntary recruitment to the armed forces. Asquith disliked it as a threat to civil liberties and the free choice and movement of citizens. His close colleague, Sir John Simon, the home secretary, resigned from the government in protest. Lloyd George, however, strongly supported it, as did most of the Conservatives. For him it was a litmus test of how committed the country was to total war. His reputation had been greatly enhanced now by his commanding role as minister of munitions, in effect taking the manufacture of shells, guns and the new tanks into national control. He was also now identified as the major spokesman of the aggressive policy of 'the knock-out blow'. His friend George Riddell, owner of the *News of the World*, noted how he was now breaking with his old party. The old radical had completely changed. 'It looks as if he is going the same road as Chamberlain. L.G.'s attitude to the war makes his severance from the Radicals inevitable.'[12] After prolonged and bitter argument in Cabinet, eventually in April 1916 conscription was adopted for all men between 18 and 45, with exceptions for men working in reserved occupations at home such as miners. Here lay the seeds of profound future division. It was in April, not December 1916, that the roots of the great split in the Liberal Party really lay. Ministers like McKenna and Runciman supported Asquith in his reservations. Conversely, a backbench group, the Liberal War Committee, led by Sir Frederick Cawley and also including Sir Alfred Mond and Freddie Guest declared its strong support for conscription. In effect it was potentially a pro-Lloyd George group. More important, Christopher Addison, Lloyd George's staunch ally and his deputy at the Ministry of Munitions, drew up with F. G. Kellaway and David Davies, two important backbenchers, an unofficial list of over 100 Liberal MPs who would back Lloyd George if a governmental crisis were to occur. Addison, a distinguished medical man, had been close to him since the passage of National Insurance in 1911. A. J. P. Tay|or, with some exaggeration perhaps, has even called him the kingmaker, 'the true maker of the Lloyd George government.'[13]

The course of war now got steadily worse. There followed the slaughter on the Somme, the hard-fought naval battle of Jutland, the retreat from the Dardanelles, the failure to assist Rumania in the autumn of 1916. Sir Maurice Hankey, secretary to the government's War Council, like others increasingly blamed Asquith's listless leadership. His leisurely War Council, with its variable membership and failure to reach conclusions or record ministerial decisions about high strategy was manifestly inadequate. Even in Ireland when Lloyd George, asked to intervene by Asquith, was unable to get a settlement with the Irish Nationalists, blame fell on Asquith, for policies that varied from being too dilatory to being too ruthless after the Easter rising in Dublin. Lloyd George was now extraordinarily vocal as war

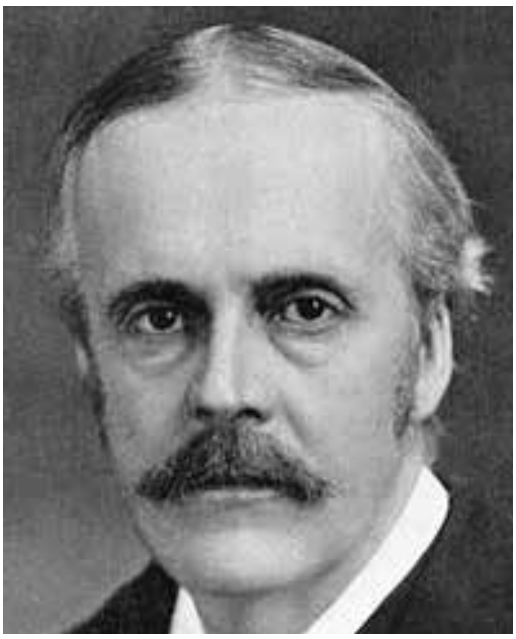
minister (in which post he had succeeded Kitchener). In a searing speech on 20 December 1915, he condemned his own government: 'Too late in moving here. Too late in arriving there. In this war the Allied forces have been dogged by the mocking spectre of too late'. He produced for the Cabinet 'a most lugubrious and pessimistic' analysis of the military situation.[14] He told Hankey in November 1916, 'We are going to lose this war'.

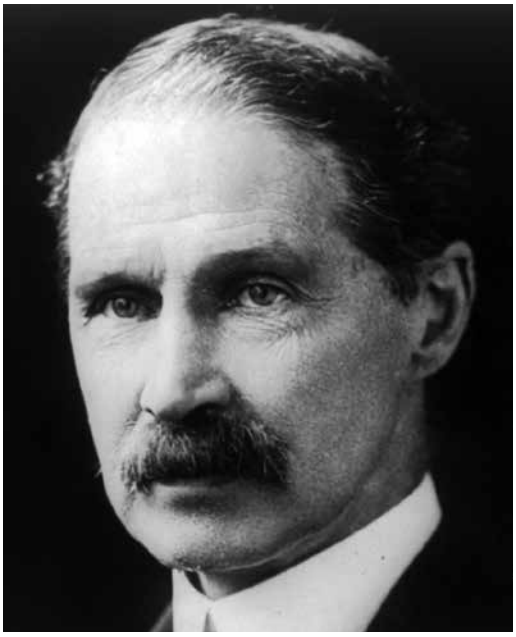
The ultimate crisis occurred at the end of November and early December. A problem here is that we are still heavily dependent on the memoirs of Lord Beaverbrook, especially his *Men and Power*. He was a remarkably knowledgeable observer of the high politics of the time, and a participant in them of much importance, but his account is a hybrid of fact and fiction, notably his attempt to boost the role of Bonar Law. The crisis began with Maurice Hankey, a civil servant. He proposed a War Committee far smaller and more influential and effective than Asquith's version. Lloyd George, the Unionist leader Bonar Law, and the influential Unionist backbencher, the Irishman Sir Edward Carson then started having almost daily private meetings from 20 November onwards, to a degree convened through the newspaper magnate, Max Aitken, owner of the *Daily Express*. They argued that an efficient War Committee should be detached from the Cabinet and consist of only three members, without portfolio, not a dozen or more. As Lloyd George observed, drawing on his biblical knowledge, 'You cannot govern with a sanhedrin.' On 1 December. Bonar Law formally proposed to Asquith that a War Committee should be set up separate from the Cabinet; the prime minister not being a member though having the right of veto over its decisions. This was the work of a 'little gang of brigands', said Margot Asquith. It confirmed her worst fears ever since Lloyd George, that 'ignorant little sneak' had gone to Munitions.[15] (15)

There are some important points to be noted about these events. First, it was not a conspiracy working behind Asquith's back. He was constantly kept informed in detail about the meetings in which Lloyd George played a central part. He was regularly briefed in some – though not complete – detail by Bonar Law. Secondly and importantly, it was not intended by Lloyd George as a blow directed against the prime minister. Lloyd George wanted to run the war and believed with some reason that he could do so better than anyone else. But he did not want to become prime minister and take on all the responsibility of running the House and negotiating with the political parties. His plan for a new War Committee was directed not against Asquith but against the generals, notably Sir William Robertson. Yet, third, in fact many generals favoured his scheme. They recognised that Asquith, a tired and despondent figure who had recently lost his son on the western front, was too leisurely a leader and the current war committee far too slow-moving. But Asquith would have to be made to agree, and he seemed most reluctant to do so. On 2 December, Lloyd George wrote a dramatic short note to Bonar Law – 'The life of the country depends on resolute action by you now.'[16]

Lloyd George and Asquith leaving a meeting of the War Cabinet, 28 January 1915

Then on the 3rd the idea of a new War Committee was accepted by Asquith. The problem seemed to be resolved. Asquith wrote to Reginald McKenna's wife on Sunday 3 December 'the "crisis" shows every sign of following its many predecessors to an early and unhonoured grave.'[17] A formal memorandum was drawn up to confirm it by Hankey and Bonham-Carter, Asquith's secretary. And then came another sensation. On the morning of Monday 4 December, Asquith changed his mind again. He reversed his view, citing a leading article, actually written by Geoffrey Robinson, in Northcliffe's *Times* that morning





Unionist leaders:

A. J. Balfour (1848–1930), First Lord of the Admiralty 1915–16, Foreign Secretary 1916–19

Andrew Bonar Law (1858–1923), Colonial Secretary 1915–16, Chancellor of the Exchequer 1916–19

George Curzon (1859–1925), Marquess Curzon of Kedleston, Leader of the House of Lords 1916–19

which saw the new scheme as a great humiliation and downgrading of Asquith. Asquith's change of view led directly to the great Liberal split. How, when and why this occurred is still a matter of historical debate. It is noticeable that at the later Reform Club meeting on 8 December, Asquith indicated that his change of mind had occurred before 4 December, meaning that the leading article in *The Times* was not a crucial factor. Some scholars have claimed that Asquith's mind was changed for him by a meeting with other leading Liberals. But Asquith was at Walmer Castle on the Kent coast on the night of 3–4 December, and it is difficult to find out that any such meeting took place. It looks as if Asquith had a rapid rethink and reached a different view all on his own. It was a fatal change of attitude.

The political party background to the events on 3–4 December was complex but crucial. Unionist disaffection with Bonar Law had been profound for some time, ever since a Unionist revolt on the theme of German property in Nigeria in early November. Carson was a major figure in this. Such leading Unionist figures as Lord Curzon and Walter Long all harboured their own ambitions. An even more important Unionist was the former prime minister, Arthur Balfour. To Asquith's great astonishment, Balfour (who was on his sick-bed) wrote late on 4 December saying, in effect, that he would be prepared to consider taking office under Lloyd George, if asked.[18] This was a major turning point in the crisis. Perhaps it was Balfour, not Addison, who turned out to be the real kingmaker.

In the Liberal ranks, things were very confused. Asquith had around him a group of strongly anti-Lloyd George Liberals, headed by McKenna, who urged defiance. But he himself was amazingly casual in defending himself. At the height of the crisis on 3 December he had taken the extraordinary decision to take a trip to Walmer Castle in eastern Kent, the residence of the Warden of the Cinque Ports which involved a long, slow drive and removed him from the centre of the action in London at a crucial moment. Meanwhile, Addison was again busy mobilising the ranks of the potential pro-Lloyd George Liberals, growing rapidly in number.[19]

Apart from manoeuvres in the political parties, another background factor was the unique influence of the press in wartime. With a supposed party truce in place and traditional party politics in abeyance, it was in the wartime press that much of the debate, speculation and gossip was now occurring. This gave particular importance to press men like Robert Donald in the *Daily Chronicle*, Henry Dalziel's *Reynolds*

News, C. P. Scott in the *Manchester Guardian*, and above all the energetic though highly erratic Lord Northcliffe in *The Times* who saw Lloyd George almost every day. Lloyd George's links with the newspaper world, journalists, editors and proprietors, was a central thread in his political career from the start of his parliamentary career in Wales. By contrast, Asquith largely ignored the press (he had enormous contempt for Northcliffe) and he was to pay a heavy price.

In the end, Asquith concluded early on 5 December that the price demanded for the new War Committee was too high, and said this to the king. Unionist support was melting away, while grandees like Lord Curzon pursued their own ambitions. Asquith now resigned along with all his ministers – this was intended not as a surrender but as an aggressive gesture, which assumed that he would shortly return to office since no other leader could be found or could command sufficient support. Bonar Law soon declined the king's proposal that he become premier. Then at 6.30 pm on 6 December, the king asked Lloyd George if he could form a government. It took just twenty-four hours. Liberal backbench MPs were again approached by Addison on behalf of Lloyd George: there were 49 firm supporters plus another 126 who would support him if he were prepared to become premier, well over half the 260-odd Liberal MPs in the Commons). Finally and crucially Lloyd George, by one vote only (according to his *War Memoirs*),[20] or more probably half a dozen or so, won over the support of the Labour Party national executive – a key factor was that their leader, Arthur Henderson, would join the future five-man War Cabinet. Lloyd George then went to see King George V around 7.30 pm on 7 December. One fascinating feature of their conversation was that Lloyd George appears to have rowed back and agreed to keep Carson at the Admiralty, rather than put him in the War Cabinet (Milner went there instead and was a great success). This unusual act of deference to his monarch by a Welsh radical (and half republican) merits attention. It may have been a rare modem example of a king successfully insisting on a change of personnel amongst his ministers, comparable to George VI apparently determining the offices of Ernest Bevin and Hugh Dalton when Attlee formed his Labour government in 1945. It was Milner who filled up the place in the War Cabinet while Carson went to the Admiralty – where it must be said George V's confidence in his ministerial talents was soon disabused. In the end, Carson, something of a pliant tool of the admirals, had to be sacked.

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The truth of these tumultuous events is that Lloyd George and Asquith were both ambitious men playing for the highest stakes in politics. But Lloyd George did so far more effectively. Asquith misjudged all the Unionists, especially the outlook of Arthur Balfour, whose personal ties with Lloyd George had been formed during the Parliament Bill crisis back in 1910. He despised Bonar Law and thought him 'third- rate'. 'I would sooner wrestle with a chimney sweep,' declared Asquith of the Unionist leader.[21] Similarly Asquith's old colleague, Lord Haldane, dismissed the new government as 'very lower class'. Asquith disregarded Labour as relatively unimportant and took for granted that his own loyal Liberals would inevitably follow his lead. He forgot Addison as Lord Randolph Churchill had in 1886 allegedly forgotten Goschen. He exaggerated his own indispensability and assumed his old Liberal loyalists would follow him regardless. He thought it totally improbable that Lloyd George would be able to form a government at all. It was Asquith who broke the tentative accord on 4 December and therefore triggered off his own downfall. The next day, Friday 8 December, the mass meeting of Liberal MPs and peers at the Reform Club was to endorse Asquith's leadership. But the Liberal split had been institutionalised. Even Generals Haig and Robertson appeared to support Lloyd George's rise to power at the time.[22] There was now a leader at last.

Thereafter Lloyd George launched a political revolution – Richard Crossman has even suggested, with much exaggeration, that he did away with traditional Cabinet government with a new era of prime ministerial government more akin to the regime of an American president. Certainly he launched the Cabinet Office (at first the Secretariat), he handled matters from negotiations with Clemenceau to private agreements with the trade unions, he talked at first hand to the press, he had his squad of special advisers, some of them working in the grounds of No. 10 – the 'garden suburb' headed by Philip Kerr.

It must be asked whether, after this dramatic crisis, Lloyd George proved to be a better war leader than Asquith had been? Certainly, he made bad mistakes, notably in backing the disastrous French army offensive under General Nivelle in the spring of 1917 which undermined morale in the French army and led to mutinies in the ranks. In the summer, Passchendaele occurred under his watch, when he was outvoted in Cabinet by his usual allies, Milner and General Smuts. But overall Lloyd George was clearly in command in a way that Asquith could never approach in wartime and

was an inspirational force who rallied the nation with his eloquence. By contrast, Asquith was, in effect, a poor leader of the Opposition. He performed badly in the Maurice debate (9 May 1918) when he seemed half-hearted in trying to defend General Maurice's charges that the government had reduced British forces on the western front and lied about it to parliament. In the debate, Lloyd George destroyed Asquith, showing that the government's own figures about the reserves had come from Maurice's own office. It was a devastating parliamentary triumph and it was well that he won it in order to preserve civilian not military control of wartime government, Subsequently the Liberals divided up into pro- and anti-government MPs. At the general election of December 1918, the followers of Asquith claimed fewer than thirty MPs, while Lloyd George won a landslide with 520 'couponed' supporters including 130 Coalition Liberals. Asquith was defeated at East Fife and, no doubt wisely, refused Lloyd George's offer (a very half-hearted one) of the post of Lord Chancellor.

The odds were totally against Asquith at this stage. There had been a visionary aspect about some of Lloyd George's wartime leadership. In international affairs, he had produced, before the trade unions, his own version of the 'fourteen points', perhaps more realistic than the utopian ideas of the US president, Woodrow Wilson. His government was also an important one in domestic reform. It passed votes for women, an important state education Act, much social reform including Addison's social housing schemes, a Ministry of Health, and extended unemployment insurance. The government's attempts at Reconstruction, though later derided, proved to be the last hurrah for the New Liberalism of pre-1914[23] Some called it a Land Fit for Heroes, which indeed, contrary to Keynes's later accusations, was what the government primarily offered the electors in their manifesto in the so-called 'coupon' general election of December 1918.

Liberals thereafter were haunted by the legacy of the December days of 1916, nowhere more so than in the Reform Club where Asquith's followers were powerful, notably his biographer, J. A. Spender. Asquith remained president of the club's political committee until his death in 1928 when he was succeeded by his old Whiggish ally, Lord Crewe. Politically, Lloyd George supplied new energy, ideas and policies for his party down to 1929, but was now a divisive force whose Political Fund (put together by selling off titles and peerages in the clubs of Pall Mall) created a wave of distrust and perhaps disgust. Old Asquithians were to leave him after the general election in 1931 – he was left with a family party of four, while the National Liberals, formed by Simon, Runciman and other former Asquithians, in effect became Conservatives. Lloyd George's controversial *War Memoirs* did not help in winning followers at this juncture. It was ironic that an old Liberal, Winston Churchill, finally became prime minister in May 1940, to some degree with Lloyd George's rhetorical support. Unlike Lloyd George, he was to make sure of his political base by ensuring that he became party leader of the Conservatives after the death of Neville Chamberlain. In the First World War, his old Liberal comrade had in effect been a prime minister without a party.

But it would be wrong to leave the relationship between Asquith and Lloyd George as simply a record of distrust and division. Until perhaps the summer of 1916 they were a hugely effective partnership, perhaps our greatest ever in times of peace. The qualities of both were needed – as Matthew Arnold put it, those of 'the Saxon and the Celt'. There was Asquith, Balliol's 'noblest Roman', with rare clarity of judgement (even if, as A. J. P. Taylor wrote, 'the toga was somewhat tattered'),[24] and the irrepressible Welshman with unique dynamism and vision. It was an irresistible combination. World war fatally disrupted their partnership and undermined their alliance. But for years they had made their party an incomparable instrument of government. They changed their country irreversibly and for the better. A hundred years on from the crisis, to the very day, the very minute, perhaps that is what we should most remember.

Professor Lord Morgan FBA is a former Fellow and Praelector of The Queen's College, Oxford and Vice-Chancellor, University of Wales; he is presently Visiting Professor, King's London, a Labour peer and a member of the House of Lords Select Committee on the Constitution.

1 Christopher Addison, *Politics from Within, 1914–1919*, vol. I (Herbert Jenkins, 1924), p. 274: entry of 9 Dec. 1916. Addison's informant was F. G. Kellaway MP; *The Times*, 9 Dec. 1916, for reports of the meeting.
2 HC Deb., vol. 409, cols. 1377–92 (28 Mar. 1945).
3 J. Hugh Edwards, *From Village Green to Downing Street: Life of the Rt Hon. D. Lloyd George MP* (Newnes, n.d [1908]).
4 Kenneth O. Morgan, *Wales in British Politics, 1868–1922* (Univ. of Wales Press, 1963), pp. 152–7.
5 Asquith to Tom Ellis, 30 Nov. 1895 (Nat. Lib. Wales, Aberystwyth, Ellis Papers, 74), 'private'; Stephen Koss, *Asquith* (Allen Lane, 1970), p. 114.
6 Roy Jenkins, *Asquith* (Collins, 1964), pp. 84–5, 344 n. 2, 505.
7 Colin Cross (ed.), A. J. Sylvester, *Life with Lloyd George* (Macmillan, 1975), pp. 143–4 (entry of 30 Jul. 1936).
8 Jenkins, *Asquith*, pp. 250–4.
9 *The Times*, 20 Sep. 1914.
10 Cited in Michael and Eleanor Brock (eds.), *Margot Asquith's Great War Diary, 1914–1916: the view from Downing Street* (Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 161.
11 Asquith to Lloyd George, 25 May 1915 (NLW, Aberystwyth, Lloyd George family letters).
12 *Lord Riddell's War Diary* (Ivor Nicholson and Watson, 1933), pp. 136–7, 139.
13 A. J. P. Taylor, *Lloyd George: Rise and Fall* (Cambridge University Press, 1961), p. 26.
14 Stephen Roskill, *Hankey: Man of Secrets, vol. I, 1877–1918* (Collins, 1970), p. 318.
15 See Anne de Courcy, *Margot at War* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2014), and Michael and Eleanor Brock, op.cit., p. 301.
16 Lloyd George to Bonar Law, 2 Dec. 1916, quoted in David Lloyd George, *War Memoirs* (Odhams, 1938 edn), vol. I, p. 589.
17 Stephen Koss, *Asquith*, p. 219
18 Balfour to Asquith, 4 Dec. 1916, quoted in Jenkins, *Asquith*, p. 453.
19 Addison, *Politics from Within*, vol. I, pp. 270–2 (entry of 9 Dec. 1916).
20 Lloyd George, *War Memoirs*, vol. I, p.

632.

21 Michael and Eleanor Brock, op. cit, citing Margot Asquith, p. 123; Jenkins, *Asquith*, p. 367

22 Entry from Robert Donald's diary, 24 Nov. 1916, quoted in H. A. Taylor, *Robert Donald* (Stanley Paul, 1934), p. 110. Robertson said approvingly that 'the only man who could decide quickly, say "Yes" or "No" without hesitation was Lloyd George' and that was what the nation required now.

23 See Kenneth O. Morgan, *Consensus and Disunity: the Lloyd George Coalition Government 1918–1922* (Oxford University Press, 1979) for an overall view.

24 In a critical review of Roy Jenkins' *Asquith*, in *The Observer*, 1 Nov. 1964.

Research in Progress

If you can help any of the researchers listed below with sources, contacts, or any other information, please pass on details to them. Details of other research projects in progress should be sent to the Editor (see page 3) for inclusion here.

Letters of Richard Cobden (1804–65)

Knowledge of the whereabouts of any letters written by Cobden in private hands, autograph collections, and obscure locations in the UK and abroad for a complete digital edition of his letters. (For further details of the Cobden Letters Project, please see www.uea.ac.uk/his/research/cobdenproject). *Dr Anthony Howe School of History, University of East Anglia, Norwich NR4 7TJ; a.c.howe@uea.ac.uk*.

Dadabhai Naoroji

Dadabhai Naoroji (1825–1917) was an Indian nationalist and Liberal member for Central Finsbury, 1892–95 – the first Asian to be elected to the House of Commons. This research for a PhD at Harvard aims to produce both a biography of Naoroji and a volume of his selected correspondence, to be published by OUP India in 2013. The current phase concentrates on Naoroji's links with a range of British progressive organisations and individuals, particularly in his later career. Suggestions for archival sources very welcome. *Dinyar Patel; dinyar.patel@gmail.com or 07775 753 724.*

The political career of Edward Strutt, 1st Baron Belper

Strutt was Whig/Liberal MP for Derby (1830-49), later Arundel and Nottingham; in 1856 he was created Lord Belper and built Kingston Hall (1842-46) in the village of Kingston-on-Soar, Notts. He was a friend of Jeremy Bentham and a supporter of free trade and reform, and held government office as Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Commissioner of Railways. Any information, location of papers or references welcome. *Brian Smith; brian63@inbox.com*.

The Liberal Party in Wales, 1966–1988

Aims to follow the development of the party from the general election of 1966 to the time of the merger with the SDP. PhD research at Cardiff University. *Nick Alderton; nickalito@hotmail.com*.

The emergence of the 'public service ethos'

Aims to analyse how self-interest and patronage was challenged by the advent of impartial inspectorates, public servants and local authorities in provincial Britain in the mid 19th century. Much work has been done on the emergence of a 'liberal culture' in the central civil service in Whitehall, but much work needs to be done on the motives, behaviour and mentalities of the newly reformed guardians of the poor, sanitary inspectors, factory and mines inspectors, education authorities, prison warders and the police. *Ian Cawood, Newman University College, Birmingham; i.cawood@newman.ac.uk.*

The life of Professor Reginald W. Revans, 1907–2003

Any information anyone has on Revans' Liberal Party involvement would be most welcome. We are particularly keen to know when he joined the party and any involvement he may have had in campaigning issues. We know he was very interested in pacifism. Any information, oral history submissions, location of papers or references most welcome. *Dr Yury Boshyk, yury@gel-net.com; or Dr Cheryl Brook, cheryl.brook@port.ac.uk*.

Russell Johnston, 1932–2008

Scottish Liberal politics was dominated for over thirty years (1965–95 and beyond) by two figures: David Steel and Russell Johnston. Of the former, much has been written; of the latter, surprisingly little. I am therefore researching with a view to writing a biography of Russell. If any readers can help – with records, other written material or reminiscences – please let me know, either by email or post. *Sir Graham Watson, sirgrahamwatson@gmail.com; 9/3 Merchiston Park, Edinburgh EH10 4PW.*

Liberal song and the Glee Club

Aiming to set out the history of Liberal song from its origins to the days of the Liberal Revue and Liberator Songbook. Looking to complete a song archive, the history of the early, informal conference Glee Clubs in the 1960s and 1970s, and all things related. *Gareth Epps; garethepps@gmail.com.*

Policy position and leadership strategy within the Lib Dems

This thesis will be a study of the political positioning and leadership strategy of the Liberal Democrats. Consideration of the role of equidistance; development of policy from the point of merger; the influence and leadership strategies of each leader from Ashdown to Clegg; and electoral strategy from 1988 to 2015 will form the basis of the work. Any material relating to leadership election campaigns, election campaigns, internal party groups (for example the Social Liberal Forum) or policy documents from 1987 and merger talks onwards would be greatly welcomed. Personal insights and recollections also sought. *Samuel Barratt; pt10seb@leeds.ac.uk.*