‘Rank-and-file movements and Political change before the Great War; the Durham miners’ “Forward Movement”’

Lewis Mates

Abstract

This article examines political change in the Durham coalfield, which sustained one of best established, largest and most influential Edwardian trade unions. It engages primarily with Duncan Tanner’s work, which remains the most influential account of the process of Labour’s supplating of the Liberals. Locating Tanner’s approach in the ‘New Political History’s’ emphasis on agency, it argues that the hitherto ignored rank-and-file movements’ size and significance (especially the Durham Forward Movement from May 1912) demands a central explanatory role. Re-inserting the rank-and-file movements into the ‘political change’ narrative offers a rather different perspective on many of the key debates around the period, most importantly on the nature and strength of the Independent Labour Party’s (ILP) challenge to the Liberal hegemony within the Durham Miners’ Association. Focussing on actors and agency in the context of the formal organizations through which they operated, the article argues that ILP leaders effectively articulated a radical ‘class’ language. Notwithstanding the militants’ institutional under-representation in the DMA, and continued rivalries between larger (modern) and smaller (effectively over-represented) lodges, the agency of a new, younger generation of emerging ILP activists, framing an appeal to miners’ material interests harnessed to a radical reforming agenda and support for Labour, meant that

Labour's prospects in the Durham coalfield by August 1914 were rather more positive than has been recognised.

Introduction

The Labour Party's supplanting of the Liberals in the early twentieth century has provoked intense debate.[1] Broadly speaking, two schools of thought emerged. The first ('inevitabilist' or 'evolutionist') regarded emerging (working-)class politics as responsible for marginalising the Liberals. This approach emphasised the class-based nature of Labour's appeal, growing from a deep and solidarisitic class-consciousness evident in the integral role played by trade unions.[2] It also highlighted the organisational strength of Labour's nascent centralising machine before 1914 and its distinctive ideological appeal. The second ('revisionist' or 'accidentalist') approach argued that the terminal split in the Liberal Party during the Great War allowed Labour to prevail.[3] It emphasised the continued

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[1] For a useful overviews of the debates see K. Laybourn, 'The Rise of Labour and Decline of Liberalism: The State of the Debate', *History* 80:259 (1995), pp.207–226 and M. Roberts, *Political Movements in Urban England, 1832–1914* (Basingstoke, 2009), pp.128–160.

[2] The classic text is R. McKibbin, *The Evolution of the Labour Party 1910–1924* (Oxford, 1974).

[3] See for example, P.F. Clarke, *Lancashire and the New Liberalism* (Cambridge, 1971).

ability of both old and 'new liberalism' to attract the working-class and Labour's consequent continued electoral weakness before August 1914.

Duncan Tanner's *Political Change and the Labour Party* (1990) provided a qualified endorsement of the 'revisionist' approach.[4] It came in the wake of a general postmodernist assault in the 1980s on Marxist-dominated labour history and its central explanatory concepts such as 'class'. Tanner's became an essential work in the postmodernist-influenced approaches of the emerging 'New Political History' that decisively reject deterministic class-based sociological interpretations and instead emphasise the role of political language, ideology and (often) agency.[5]Tanner ambitiously detailed the political dynamics of all regions and industries, arguing that by 1914 'Labour had not developed

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[4] D. Tanner, *Political Change and the Labour Party 1900–1918* (Cambridge, 1990).

[5] Steve Fielding delineated a 'New Labour History' as an adjunct of the 'New Political History' in 2002. Arguably, some of Fielding's '[New] New Labour History' of the 2000s differs little from the original 'new labour history' ('history from below') developed in the 1960s by E.P. Thompson, Eric Hobsbawm and others in terms of its focus and general approaches. That said, the continued sociological determinism of Hobsbawm's approach was quite clear in his famous 1978 lecture 'The Forward March of Labour Halted?'; the differences with historians influenced by post-structuralism clearly demonstrated in Stedman Jones' 1983 response to Hobsbawm. S. Fielding, '"New" Labour and the "New" Labour History' in *Mitteilungsblatt des Instituts für die Geschichte der sozialen Bewegungen*, 27 (2002), pp.35-50 (see also in same volume A. Croll, 'The Impact of Postmodernism on Modern British Social History', pp.137-152); E. Hobsbawm, M. Jacques, F. Mulhern, *The Forward March of Labour Halted?* (1981), pp.1-19; G. Stedman Jones, 'Why is the Labour Party in such a mess?' in *Languages of Class* (1983), pp.239-256. For the 'New Political History' see L. Black, 'What kind of People are you?' in J. Callaghan, S. Fielding and S. Ludlam (eds.), *Interpreting the Labour Party* (2003), pp.23–38.

the ideological/political strength to support an expansionist strategy. It had not created a solid "class" vote […] It had not even the uniform support of trade unionists'.[6] While Tanner's study drew immediate criticism regarding some of his case studies, subsequent work has tended to endorse his basic argument.[7]

Consequently, Liberal pre-1914 strength is now the general tenet, though there are two recent historiographical battlegrounds.[8] First, Declan McHugh argued (contrary to Tanner) that the 'progressive alliance' in Manchester was 'unlikely to have survived much longer regardless of the impact of war'.[9] Second, Valerie Hall's study of Northumberland miners' consciousness undoubtedly suggested Labour strength before August 1914.[10] Yet there remains much more to explore in local-regional and industry-specific case studies. This article re-examines the Durham miners. Foremost of the district miners' unions (in terms of wealth and prestige), winning their allegiance away from the Liberals was crucial to the

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[6] Tanner, *Political Change* p.317.

[7] Reviewers criticised Tanner's treatment of parts of Yorkshire, Leicestershire and the Rhonda. Laybourn, 'Rise of Labour', p.221; S. Berger, 'The Decline of Liberalism and the Rise of Labour: The Regional Approach', *Parliamentary History*, 12:1 (1993), pp.85–6; B. Lancaster, 'The Rise of Labour', *Labour History Review*, 57:3 (1992), pp.98–99.

[8] Liberal strength is argued in, for example, I. Packer, 'Contested Ground: Trends in British By-elections, 1911–1914', *Contemporary British History* (2011), p.170 and M. Cole, 'The Political Starfish: West Yorkshire Liberalism in the Twentieth Century', *Contemporary British History*, 25:1 (2011), pp.175–188.

[9] D. McHugh, 'Labour, Liberals and the Progressive Alliance in Manchester, 1900–1914', *Northern History*, 39:1 (2002), pp.93–108.

[10] V.G. Hall, 'The anatomy of a changing consciousness: the miners of Northumberland, 1898-1914', *Labour History Review*, 66:2 (2001), pp.165–186.

nascent Labour Party.[11] And, indeed, the Durham miners moved rapidly from an apparently firmly entrenched liberalism to electing one of the first Labour-run County Councils in 1919. Durham was thus important in terms of its own influence on the national scene and also as an 'extreme' case study of a region that saw considerable and speedy political change. Furthermore, it was not entirely exceptional among British coalfield districts as the South Wales, Derbyshire, Yorkshire and Scottish coalfields, for example, were certainly experiencing similar tensions between fulltime often Liberal-inclined leaders and sections of their members in this period.[12] While accepting, like Roy Gregory, that the Durham coalfield was one of the more advanced areas in terms of Labour's growth, Tanner still highlighted the party's relative weakness there before August 1914. But there is a significant gap in Tanner's account: the omission of the rank-and-file movements and especially the Durham Forward

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[11] In March 1912 the DMA had 121,805 members and £468,186 in funds. Of the MFGB affiliates, the DMA was second in size only to SWMF but with far superior finances (the SWMF had 135,553 members and £150,230 in funds). *Durham Chronicle,* 15 Mar. 1912; 26 July 1912.

[12] That said, the extent to which the ILP led rank-and-file movement in the Durham coalfield was exceptional remains unclear. C.L. Baylies, *The History of the Yorkshire Miners, 1881–1918* (1993), pp.367–397; J.E. Williams, *The Derbyshire Miners: a study in industrial and social history* (1962), pp.393–441; D.K. Davies, 'The Influence of Syndicalism, and Industrial Unionism in the South Wales coalfield 1898–1921: A Study in Ideology and Practice'. Ph.D. thesis, University of Wales, 1991; D. Smith, 'Tonypandy 1910: Definitions of Community', *Past and Present,* 87 (1980), pp.158–184; C. Williams, *Democratic Rhondda: Politics and Society, 1855–1951* (Cardiff, 1996); R. Page Arnot, *South Wales Miners to 1914* (1967); A. Campbell, *The Scottish Miners, 1874–1939 (2 vols.)* (Aldershot, 2000).

Movement (DFM), which drew mass support in the coalfield from May 1912.[13] This article argues that placing the DFM at the centre of discussion about political change in the Durham coalfield allows these complex processes to be more fully appreciated. In doing this, it lays the essential foundations for developing the first comprehensive and convincing account of how Labour came to predominate over the Liberals in County Durham.

In examining the centrality of the Independent Labour Party (ILP) to the organisation of the rank-and-file movements in the coalfield, this article builds on David Howell's approach to the ILP (to 1906), exploring the varied ways it developed in specific local and industrial contexts.[14] It is also situated in recent historiographical developments that have sought to rehabilitate the role of the ILP in trade union politics (albeit in the rather different context of post-1932).[15]

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[13] Tanner's account drew considerably on Gregory's earlier work, though the latter was more positive of Labour's overall position in the Durham coalfield by 1914. Gregory, too, failed to mention the rank-and-file movements and his study is poorly referenced. R. Gregory, *The Miners and British Politics, 1906–1914* (Oxford, 1968).

[14] Central to Howell's approach was an emphasis on the importance of agency and locality in understanding the ILP's importance. Since Howell, very many studies of the ILP have sought to examine it with local case studies. D. Howell, *British Workers and the Independent Labour Party 1888–1906* (Manchester, 1983). See also G. Cohen, 'Myth, History and the Independent Labour Party', in M. Worley (ed.), *The Foundation of the British Labour Party: Identities, Cultures and Perspectives, 1900-39* (Farnham, 2009).

[15] See K. Gildart, 'Coal Strikes on the Home Front: Miners' Militancy and Socialist Politics in the Second World War', *Twentieth Century British History*, 20:2, (2009), pp.121–151; G. Cohen, *The Failure of a Dream: The Independent Labour Party from Disaffiliation to World War II* (2007) especially pp.54-62.

Indeed, the ILP's industrial activities in the Durham coalfield to 1914 suggest the party deserves considerably more than a 'walk-on part' in understanding Labour's challenge after 1906. Furthermore, the rhetoric inspiring their rank-and-file movements allows for insights into the notoriously 'difficult to pin down' nature of ILP local activist ideology.[16]

While recognising the importance of agency, the approach adopted in this article accepts that certain socio-economic conditions were favourable to particular political discourses. It thus analyses the ways that political actors, operating through formal trade union (and other) organizations, interacted with structural/contextual conditions, arguing that they required formal organization to make their rhetorical appeals to discontented miners effective. Generally speaking, the emphasis on agency in the 'New Political History' has tended to favour 'revisionist' interpretations of Labour's rise. But rejecting class-based sociological interpretations does not mean that social class is of no value as an explanatory mechanism, nor does reasserting the importance of agency necessarily favour interpretations emphasising pre-war Labour weakness.[17] Indeed, analysis of the DFM suggests that Labour-supporting miner activists were very successful in deploying a class-based rhetoric that resonated within a considerable constituency. This article begins by contextualising developments

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[16] Cohen, 'Myth', p.108.

[17] Tony Adams noted that social class was significant in places like Manchester, but argued that a renewed emphasis on social factors did not mean that the rise of Labour was inevitable. T. Adams, 'Labour Vanguard, Tory Bastion or the Triumph of New Liberalism? Manchester Politics to 1914 in Comparative Perspective', *Manchester Region History Review,* 14 (2000), pp.25–38.

in the Durham coalfield to 1910. It then provides a brief narrative of the DFM to 1914, before exploring the various ways in which the movement's features, successes and shortcomings more fully explain the Labour challenge to Liberalism in this vitally important coalfield.

I

Liberalism dominated the Durham coalfield both politically and economically in the late nineteenth century. Durham mining constituencies increasingly returned Liberals after 1885, the mining vote growing in many as the coalfield expanded eastwards towards the sea. The Durham Miners' Association (DMA) played a major role in getting its members to vote Liberal. Similarly, the DMA endorsed liberal economic notions that miners' wages should be tied to the price of the coal they produced. John Wilson, who, as general secretary from 1896, occupied the DMA's most powerful official position, embodied the liberal hegemony. A Durham Liberal MP from 1885, Wilson staunchly advocated conciliation and arbitration (as miners and owners apparently had common interests in maintaining profitability), opposing strikes, socialism and Labour.[18] The influential *Durham Chronicle*, the self-styled miner's friend', enthusiastically endorsed Wilson's position.[19]

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[18] *The Times*, 25 Mar. 1915; J. Wilson, *Memories of a labour leader: the autobiography of John Wilson, JP, MP* (Durham, 1907).

[19] The *Durham Chronicle* did however produce verbatim communications from DFM and gave its meetings detailed and not notably unsympathetic coverage. It is thus an excellent primary resource.

The Independent Labour Party (ILP), established in 1893, spearheaded an organised socialist challenge. By 1907, after a faltering start, the Durham coalfield was an ILP stronghold, especially in Chester-le-Street constituency.[20] There were also electoral advances for Labour (though not necessarily for 'socialism'). Most importantly, Arthur Henderson won Barnard Castle in a 1903 by-election and J.W. Taylor took Chester-le-Street (with a 50 per cent mining population) from the Liberals in 1906.[21] An apparently significant advance in the ILP's campaign to sever the DMA's links with the Liberals and forge new ones with Labour came in late 1907 when union members voted to join the Miners' Federation of Great Britain (MFGB) by a 3:1 majority. The DMA had been outside the MFGB as it opposed Federation policies on the eight hour day (the most influential grades of Durham miner, the hewers, already worked a seven hour day). The following year the MFGB voted to affiliate to the Labour Party; more ILP activists were being elected for a year's service to the DMA's Executive and the radical Liberal full-time official, Alderman William House, converted to Labour.[22] By late 1909, the ILP appeared to be emerging triumphant. Two more Labour supporters, James Robson (1911) and William Whiteley (1912) were then elected full-time officials in quick succession.

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[20] Howell, *British Workers*, pp.45–49; C. Marshall, 'Levels of Industrial Militancy and the Political Radicalisation of the Durham Miners, 1885–1914', Durham Univ., MA thesis, 1976, pp.194, 198.

[21] Gregory, *Miners,* p.96; Tanner, *Political Change*, p.216; Marshall, 'Industrial Militancy', p.157.

[22] J. Saville, 'William House', in J.M. Bellamy and J. Saville (eds), *Dictionary of Labour Biography, Vol.2* (1974), p.186.

Yet the cause of independent Labour representation in the DMA was actually in a weaker position than first appeared. The guileful John Wilson ensured that the DMA's members did not, unlike the other districts, actually vote on whether the MFGB should affiliate to Labour. This allowed Wilson to continue as a 'Lib.-Lab.' MP, standing unopposed in 1910. It also muddied the waters regarding the DMA's position on election candidates and it did not formally support any candidates in 1910.[23] Under Wilson's influence, the DMA became a powerful conservative force inside the DMA, resisting its demands for a minimum wage and then putting obstacles in the way of achieving a majority for strike action on the issue in 1911. The onus was *still* on radical lodges to force their Liberal-dominated leadership to act more radically inside the MFGB as well as to alter the DMA's constitution to formally commit it to exclusive support for Labour candidates. But an attempt to do this in December 1911 was defeated in a lodge vote. Lodges had already rejected, in January 1910, a call for more MFGB-sponsored Labour candidates in Durham after a reluctant Executive argued that the financial burden of the measure would fall on lodges.[24] The ILP-led radicals also needed to find mechanisms to exercise better control over their fulltime officials, in part to compel their leaders to behave more progressively inside the MFGB.

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[23] Tanner, *Political Change*, p.215.

[24] D[urham] [R]ecord [O]ffice, D/DMA 30, Council Meeting, 22 Jan. 1910; D/DMA (Acc: 2157(D)) 202(box), DMA Council Annual meeting programme, 16 Dec. 1911.

Table showing general election results in mining constituencies (10 per cent plus of the electorate) in County Durham, 1906-1910[25]

The 1910 general election results further dented Labour hopes. Labour held five mining (or part mining) constituencies in Durham and contested a sixth.[26] By December 1910, Labour had recorded a net loss of two MPs to the Liberals including losing Jarrow (with miners comprising 20 per cent plus of the electorate). The context was a backlash against the DMA's settlement over the Eight Hours Day legislation. DMA officials had agreed without lodge consultation that the owners could implement a three-shift system, which was very unpopular for the dislocation it brought to miners' family lives.[27] Mass unofficial strikes against the agreement ensued in January 1910 and the DMA leadership very narrowly survived a lodge 'no confidence' vote on the issue. Two DMA officials standing for Parliament in January 1910 were faced with riotous protests: one, John Johnson (elected a Liberal in 1904 but who had since taken the Labour whip), lost his Gateshead seat and House, standing for Labour in Bishop Auckland, also suffered. These developments put the ILP, an advocate of the eight hour day, in serious difficulties. Indeed, the strikes of early 1910

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[25] From data in W. Field, *British Electoral Data, 1885-1949* [computer file]. Colchester, Essex: UK Data Archive [distributor], November 2007. SN: 5673 and Gregory, *Miners.*

[26] Johnson stood as a Labour candidate in Gateshead in 1910 but lost. Henderson and Taylor twice held Barnard Castle and Chester-le-Street respectively. In two-member Sunderland, John Summerbell lost a Labour seat in January but F.W. Goldstone won one back in December.

[27] W.R. Garside, *The Durham Miners, 1919–1960* (1971), pp.19–26.

heralded –in the Durham coalfield as elsewhere– a period of industrial unrest that potentially brought problems for Labour. Revolutionary syndicalists began claiming that the organised working-class could achieve all its aims in the industrial sphere without the need for Parliamentary representation. The main published accounts highlighted further Labour electoral failures after 1910 in the Durham coalfield, suggesting that 1909 was the high-tide before decline abruptly set in. Yet none of these accounts attached any importance to the post-1910 focus of ILP activity within the DMA in terms of reinvigorated rank-and-file movements and, most importantly, in the DFM.

II

The DFM originated from the Minimum Wage Movement (MWM) which, invigorated by a rapidly rising cost of living with wages not keeping pace and by increasing trade union belligerency, had been agitating in the coalfield from August 1911. The DFM's moment came after the rather hollow victory of the national miners' strike that ended, after six weeks, in April 1912. The strike secured a miners' minimum wage, but it was to be fixed at individual district levels rather than nationally. Four prominent MWM activists called a Durham rank-and-file conference for 4 May 1912, from which the DFM emerged.[28]

These four signatories became the DFM's main elected leaders. The two most prominently active were Jack Lawson and W.P. Richardson. Lawson (DFM assistant secretary and later secretary) was an ILP member from 1904 and, from

[28] *Durham Chronicle*, 8 Sep. 1911; 29 Dec. 1911; 12, 26 Jan. 1912; 1 Mar. 1912; 26 Apr. 1912.

1910, checkweighman at Alma pit, near Chester-le-Street. Checkweighmen, voted for and funded by miners to make sure all were being paid the full amount for the coal they mined, were widely respected. W.P. Richardson (DFM chairperson) was, by 1910, chair of Gateshead ILP district and lodge secretary of Usworth, Washington.[29] Richardson was very unusual in the front ranks of DFM leaders in not being a checkweighman. The other two main leaders, Andrew Temple (DFM secretary) and Henry Bainbridge (DFM treasurer), were checkweighman at Twizell (very near Lawson's pit) and Shield Row (West Stanley) respectively.[30] The vast majority of the second ranking activists in the DFM were also checkweighmen, including figures such as James Gilliland (Ouston 'E', Birtley), Joseph Batey (St. Hilda), J. Herriotts (Windlestone), and John. E. Swan (Delight pit, Dipton).[31] The movements' main platform speakers, if they were not checkweighmen, were invariably lodge officials. The DFM was thus, through its leading figures, very firmly embedded in DMA lodges. The term 'rank-and-file' remains appropriate to describe their movements, however, as they remained firmly critical of, and in opposition to, the DMA's fulltime elected leaders. Other historians of the coalfield, such as Dave Douglass, have used this terminology to express the same oppositional relationship between lodge leaders (and members) and fulltime district officials.[32]

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[29] *Durham Chronicle*, 8 September 1911; 12 April 1912; C. Marshall, 'Levels of Industrial Militancy and the Political Radicalisation of the Durham Miners, 1885–1914' (unpub. MA Thesis, Durham Univ., 1976), F4.

[30] Lawson, *Man's Life*, pp.74, 95–111, 116–120. *Durham Chronicle*, 6 September 1912.

[31] *Durham Chronicle*, 20 March 1914.

[32] As discussed below, the relationship became more complex when rank-and-file movement activists were elected to the DMA's Executive Committee as this then made them part of the

The DFM represented an important advance in the Durham rank-and-file agitation. First, it adopted a more concrete organisation than the earlier MWM, aiming to be 'a permanent institution until our objects are accomplished..'.[33] It had four officers and a committee of six and invited lodges to pay an affiliation fee (1s. per 100 members) and nominate for all posts, to be elected democratically.[34] Second, the DFM's activity, which revolved around organising mass meetings and conferences and issuing press circulars, was periodically as or more intense than that of its predecessor movement. It was also sustained for longer. Third, the DFM built on the hardcore of MWM supporting lodges, including the overwhelming majority of the largest lodges in the coalfield.[35]

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district leadership, albeit not remunerated. The relationship became even more complex again when, in 1915, the first rank-and-file movement leaders were elected fulltime officials themselves, not least because the DFM continued agitating. D. Douglass, 'The Durham Pitman', in R. Samuel (ed.), *Miners, Quarrymen and Salt Workers* (1977), pp.246–266.

[33] *Durham Chronicle*, 26 Apr. 1912.

[34] By July 1912, the organisation was formally named the 'Durham Forward Movement'. In April 1914, DFM officials were up for re-election. DRO, D/DMA 327/6, Marsden Lodge Joint Meeting Minutes, 17 May 1914; *Durham Chronicle*, 10, 17 May 1912; 26 July 1912; 16 Aug. 1912; 6 Sep. 1912; 1 May 1914;

[35] DRO, D/DMA (Acc: 2157(D)) 230 (vol), Oxhill Lodge Minutes, Ordinary Meetings, 31 Aug. 1911; 23 Nov. 1911; 18 Jan. 1912; DRO, D/DMA (Acc: 2157(D)) 165 (vol), Andrew's House Lodge Minutes, General Meeting, 2 Sep. 1911; 16 Nov. 1911; DRO, D/DMA 327/3, Marsden Lodge Minutes, Joint Meetings, 17 Dec. 1911; 4, 18 Feb. 1912; 28 Apr. 1912; *Durham Chronicle*, 8, 15, 29 Sep. 1911; 13 Oct. 1911; 10 Nov. 1911; 15, 29 Dec. 1911; 5, 12, 26 Jan. 1912; 23 Feb. 1912; 1 Mar. 1912; 10 May 1912; 7 June 1912; 26 July 1912; 18 Oct. 1912; 31 Jan. 1913; 23 May 1913; 15 Aug. 1913; 17, 31 Oct. 1913; 1 May 1914.

While attendances fluctuated, the 'large and enthusiastic' crowd at an August 1913 DFM meeting was broadly representative.[36]

Fourth, the DFM broadened the MWM's remit. It continued the thrust of earlier agitation, campaigning for amendments to the new Minimum wage Act and for improvements in miners' wages and conditions outside the Act. But the DFM also moved more definitively onto the offensive on the more obviously 'political' plane. Initially, it did this by moving against the DMA's Liberal-dominated leadership, through the DMA's power structures. These require explanation: the DMA had five full-time officials in 1910 (rising to seven by summer 1913) who all sat on the Executive Committee. They were joined by another twelve lodge representatives for one year terms, with half being replaced every six months. The Executive Committee covered day-to-day decision making, but bi-monthly DMA councils were (theoretically at least) the DMA's main decision-making body. The last council meeting of each year was the annual meeting and this took ordinary council business as well as overseeing the election of all full-time officials (normally a formality), and voting on amendments to the DMA's rule book and standing orders. The DMA council voted on resolutions put by both the Executive and lodges. All votes -for full-time officials, Executive representatives and on matters of policy at DMA council- were exercised by lodges. From 1884, lodges were allocated between one and six votes each depending on their memberships with any lodge with 750 members or more possessing the maximum six votes.[37] Full individual ballots of

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[36] *Durham Chronicle*, 15 Aug. 1913.

[37] Marshall, 'Industrial Militancy', pp.105, 151.

all DMA members were rare and only came when, for example, the DMA voted to join the MFGB or when voting on national strike action over the minimum wage in 1912. Effectively, considerable control resided at the top of the DMA; the Executive could decide to not let lodge resolutions appear at council meetings for example. The Executive, in turn, was controlled by full-time officials, still mostly Liberal and all in the thrall of Wilson, a very canny operator. By agitating for democratic reform of the DMA, the DFM aimed to wrest institutional control from the Liberals. The DFM's inaugural conference suggested four specific proposals largely to empower individual members over full-time officials and to ensure lodge accountability. Soon after there came a short-lived DFM demand for a new DMA 'propaganda and education department' to inform members on policy and trade unionism and produce statistics to counter the coalowners.[38]

To reform the DMA, lodges first had to vote in favour of amending the rule book in principle, before then submitting suggested changes. The lodges voted against rule changes in 1912, but in favour in 1913.[39] In October 1913, a DFM meeting agreed to take 'united action' on five suggestions. The focus had shifted slightly from earlier proposals: there were no longer any suggestions on improving lodge accountability but three separate reforms aimed at more individual and lodge control of officials. There was also a new and highly

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[38] *Durham Chronicle*, 17 May 1912; 26 July 1912; 23 Aug. 1912; 18 Oct. 1912.

[39] DRO, D/DMA 30, DMA Council Meeting, 12 July 1913; *Durham Chronicle*, 7 June 1912; 23 May 1913.

significant departure; a desire to alter the rule book to commit the DMA firmly to Labour.[40]

The DMA's annual meeting of December 1913 passed two of the DFM's five suggestions. While a success rate of two from five seemed disappointing, the DFM was relatively effective compared to proposals fielded at the same annual meeting by lodges involved in the DFM that were not among the movement's agreed aims.[41] First, there was a new rule that all full-time officials be elected by an individual ballot of all members, thereby removing the vote from the lodge committees' hands. Second, the union now had an additional object; 'To promote and financially support Parliamentary candidates' who had to be DMA members 'and run solely under the auspices of the national Labour Party and be subject to its decisions if elected'.[42] Securing the DMA's unequivocal endorsement for Labour in December 1913 was the DFM's most important achievement from its list of specific demands. True, the rule change came in the context of the MFGB's agreement in autumn 1913 that its affiliates should endorse independent representation, after the embarrassment of the Liberal-supporting Derbyshire Miners' candidate standing at the Chesterfield by-election in summer 1913. Nevertheless, it was significant that all the suggestions

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[40] *Durham Chronicle*, 17 Oct. 1913.

[41] Of the thirty-two pages of suggested amendments only a handful passedN[orth] E[ast] E[ngland] M[ining] A[rchive] and R[esearch] C[entre], NUMDA/1/6/38, DMA Council Meeting (Annual) Programme for 20–24 Dec. 1913.

[42] NEEMARC, NUMDA/1/6/38, DMA Council Meeting (Annual) Programme for 20–24 Dec. 1913.

on this issue at the DMA's annual meeting came from DFM lodges; the Executive remained noticeably silent and inactive.[43]

Now it was unequivocally won institutionally, the DMA's enormous prestige and resources could be brought to bear exclusively for Labour. The DFM (and MWM before it) had become the chief means for ILP activists to mobilise lodge opinion against the Wilson-dominated DMA leadership, simultaneously building and consolidating ILP influence in the lodges. But this was merely part of the DFM's significance for political change before August 1914. The rule change was but further evidence of a power-shift within the DMA away from the Liberals and effected by the DFM.

III

There are several ways in which the DFM had a wider significance for understanding political change in the Durham coalfield. The first relates to how ILP activists in the DFM effected the lodge mobilisation. There were two essential features to their rhetoric. Firstly, they deployed a militant and aggressive language of class war. The DFM's May 1912 circular set the tone: 'to obtain a fair share of the fruits of our labour we must be aggressive… Better wages and improved conditions of labour come only when by the power of organisation we compel them, not before'.[44] Secondly, the DFM invariably

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[43] D. Howell, 'The Ideology of Labourism', in D. Howell, D. Kirby and K. Morgan (eds), *Commitment and History: Themes from the Life and Work of a Socialist Historian* (2011), p.186.

[44] *Durham Chronicle,* 17 May 1912.

allied its industrial militancy rhetoric with explicit support for the Labour Party's project in Parliament. The May 1912 circular delineated the DFM's two-pronged strategy of working through the MFGB 'on the industrial battlefield, and the National Labour Party in the political arena'.[45] This was another development specific to the DFM, as the MWM before it had tended to ignore the Labour Party. DFM meetings repeatedly emphasised the need for activity through the Labour Party, urging miners to run Labour candidates at local elections and to vote (under the new Trade Union Act) in favour of using trade union funds for political purposes (i.e. funding the Labour Party).[46] As Jack Lawson remarked in August 1913, 'the workers must realise that whether they liked it or not trade union questions were now political questions'.[47] The successful December 1913 DMA rule change was the logical outcome of this rhetoric. While securing the DMA's exclusive support for Labour was not one of the DFM's original proposed reforms, it is clear that the DFM was by far the most significant vehicle for conveying the ultimately triumphant arguments on this issue. Perhaps, in May 1912, ILP activists simply had not anticipated quite how effective –in this particular respect, at least– the DFM could be.

Naturally, there was a fine balance to strike between political and industrial agitation, evident in a DFM circular of November 1912; 'We do not encourage the delusion that Trade Union action can bring about the millennium, but we are convinced that unless Trade Unionists take up an aggressive attitude on

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[45] *Durham Chronicle*, 17 May 1912.

[46] *Durham Chronicle*, 31 Jan. 1913; 15 Aug. 1913.

[47] *Durham Chronicle*, 15 Aug. 1913.

particular questions, which affect their living and working conditions, they will go backward in these things'.[48] In terms of the relations between action on the two planes, DFM activists (theoretically at least) saw no contradiction between employing industrial action to help force through political measures in Parliament (as occurred, of course, during the national Minimum wage strike). Certainly, there was no public indication of DFM activist discontent with the Labour Party's performance in Parliament. While Tanner documented north-east ILP activists citing national compromise as an obstacle to them organising locally, no DFM activist criticised publicly Labour in Parliament for its timidity or for working with the Liberals.[49] Indeed, DFM supporting-lodges tended to retain a faith in both Parliamentary action and the Labour Party and seemed to be looking for reasons to praise Labour in Parliament.[50] This was strengthened when Labour MPs attempted to alter the Minimum Wage Bill in Parliament before voting against it during its third reading. Marsden miners, for example, praised the 'indefatigable efforts' of Labour MPs 'endeavouring to make the bill workable and acceptable'.[51] There was something of a symbiotic relationship developing, with Labour MPs' actions further strengthening the DFM's platform inside the DMA. In May 1912 the local ILP organiser claimed that Labour MPs' actions over the Minimum Wage Bill had given the movement in the north-east 'more power than at any time during the last ten years. The work done on this

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[48] *Durham Chronicle*, 6 Dec. 1912.

[49] Tanner, *Political Change*, p.241.

[50] For example, Chopwell lodge, which issued a statement of support for Labour MPs who had spoken against the government's use of the military against strikers in October 1911. *Durham Chronicle*, 27 Oct. 1911.

[51] DRO, D/DMA 327/3, Marsden Lodge Minutes, Joint Meeting, 26 March 1912.

measure alone would justify the presence of the Labour Party in Parliament'.[52] It is possible that Durham activists in particular were further appeased because Labour *did* fight by-elections against Liberals in the coalfield. As part of a national strategy, MacDonald began endorsing challenges to Liberals in the coalfields, in part to clear up confusion over Lib-Labism. In spite of his determination to stick with the Lib-Lab pact, even MacDonald saw scope for Labour's advance.[53]

In practice, the DFM's inability (perhaps combined with some reluctance) to pursue its aims through self-contained industrial action invariably threw the onus onto Labour in Parliament. By April 1914, the shift in emphasis firmly towards political action was effected. Thus, while the DFM expressed enthusiasm for the nascent industrial triple alliance, its own strategy now firmly emphasised the political path to redemption: 'if the workers would be free they must fight together industrially and politically. Voting *is easier and more effective* than fighting' [my emphasis].[54] The DFM began concertedly encouraging miners to interrogate their Parliamentary candidates about the miners' Minimum Wage Act, which was due for amendment before they would vote in an anticipated 1915 general election. A June 1914 DFM circular outlined this strategy arguing that 'we can strike surer at the ballot box on this question than in any other way; therefore we say "Strike"'.[55] DFM leaders must have

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[52] B[ritish] L[ibrary] [of] P[olitical] [and] E[conomic] S[cience], ILP_12/1/2, ILP Annual Conference Report, May 1912, p.59.

[53] M. Pugh, *Speak for Britain!: A New History of the Labour Party* (2010), pp.95-6.

[54] *Durham Chronicle*, 10 Apr. 1914.

[55] *Durham Chronicle*, 12 June 1914.

anticipated that Labour candidates would appear more attuned to miners' needs than their Liberal counterparts. That an MFGB deputation failed to convince Asquith to include the hitherto excluded mine surfaceworkers in any amended Minimum Wage Act in March 1914 surely suggested that DFM leaders' low expectations of the Liberals were well founded.[56] It was no coincidence that the emphasis in the DFM's dual strategy shifted decisively after securing DMA support for Labour in December 1913. With the institutional battle for support for the Labour Party finally (and this time unequivocally) won, the next task was to find a mechanism to persuade DMA members to vote for Labour candidates.

Recognising the DFM as a motor of political change provides new perspectives on a second area, debates about the nature and role of ideology in terms of socialism's challenge to liberalism. This terrain was important; Tanner emphasised the 'ideological', arguing that Durham miners' traditionally held liberal economic understandings were broadly maintained throughout this period.[57] The ILP's campaign for the miners' minimum wage constituted the major thrust of its challenge to liberal economic notions that wages should be invariably tied to prices. In the spring 1912 votes on national strike action, around two thirds of Durham miners already consistently favoured some form of minimum wage.[58] While this was not overwhelming, it still constituted a majority, in ballots conducted under complex and difficult conditions for minimum wage advocates. Furthermore, the DFM attacked outright the liberal

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[56] NEEMARC, NUMDA/1/6/39, Wilson's Monthly Circular, No.219, Mar. 1914; *Durham Chronicle*, 10 Apr. 1914.

[57] Tanner, *Political Change*, p.198.

notion held by DMA leaders like Wilson of the need for understanding and cooperation between owners and miners for mutual benefit. Its May 1912 circular was clear that 'Our interests and those of the owners are not identical; they never were and never will be'.[59] Naturally, this fell short of a Marxist claim that owners' and workers' interests were necessarily entirely antagonistic, but it still cut across the coalfield's apparent economic religion. That the DFM grew in size and influence immediately after the minimum wage strike suggested that more lodge activists *and* ordinary rank-and-file miners were being won to support for a proper minimum wage and away from liberal economics.

But what of the nature and appeal of the ILP activists' ideology? Tanner rightly emphasised the limited 'social basis' for an ILP appeal based on 'ethical socialism' in areas like County Durham.[60] Instead, Tanner suggested that the politics of activists like Lawson and W.P. Richardson (and House) 'more "Labour" than "Socialist"'.[61] Indeed, ILP activists tended not to deploy the term 'socialism' itself from DFM platforms. They did, however, on occasion articulate a clear language of class war; in Lawson's words that the miners 'would only get from the coal owners what they were compelled to give at the point of a sword'.[62]

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[58] *Durham Chronicle*, 19 Jan. 1912; 5 Apr. 1912.

[59] *Durham Chronicle*, 17 May 1912.

[60] Tanner, *Political Change*, p.214.

[61] Tanner, *Political Change*, p.214.

[62] *Durham Chronicle*, 19 July 1912.

Describing this rhetoric as 'labourist' (albeit of a militant form), rather than truly 'socialist' stretches 'labourism' too far. While Lawson and Richardson advocated making working-class gains in Parliament, their rhetoric was plainly not 'class collaborationist insisting in theory and usually endorsing in practice the unity of capital and Labour'.[63] Ideologically speaking, this language drew a very sharp line between the likes of Lawson and John Wilson, even though, rather ironically, both had experienced similar conversions from young lives of gambling, drinking and excess to teetotal activity in the Chapel and the DMA.[64] Lawson's support for measures like nationalisation, as well as his self-defining as 'socialist', surely placed him firmly in the socialist camp. Naturally, some DFM activists *may* have indulged in a more militant rhetoric than they actually believed. But the key point is that they thought this rhetoric would resonate with their disgruntled audience and, moreover, that it actually did so.

This also has implications for the influence of Methodism among DFM activists. A strong relationship is suggested by the 'Forward Movement's very name. The Welsh Methodist and Christian socialist Hugh Price Hughes led his radical 'Forward Movement' in Wesleyan Methodism in the late nineteenth century and the later Durham rank-and-file movement's meetings were in some respects reminiscent of a Methodist revival. But it was a very secular revival; while Lawson and other activists' rhetoric sounded rather more like that of Hughes' far more radical fellow Christian socialist, S.E. Keeble (who opposed the Lib-

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[63] Nor did these activists endorse conciliation and arbitration in the industrial sphere. Howell, 'Ideology of Labourism', p.176.

[64] Jack Lawson, *A Man's Life* (1944) pp.48–50; Wilson, *Memories*, pp.205-07.

Lab. Pact, for example), it was striking that there were no allusions to Biblical themes in the rhetoric delivered from DFM platforms.[65] The bulk of speeches were confined to the details of the movement's various demands, with the occasional wider 'class war' rhetorical flourishes noted above. There were no examples of the kind of reference ILP leader Keir Hardie made to the 'great working man' Jesus of Nazareth at the 1910 Durham miners' gala.[66] Lawson was particularly interesting in this context, as his speeches from DFM platforms gave no indication that he was a Methodist lay preacher. Indeed, Lawson's influences were rather varied in this period as he remained in contact with individuals from his time at Ruskin College whose politics was revolutionary. A C. Pattinson, for example, belonging to the revolutionary 'class conscious proletarian element of the socialist party; none of your laborism for us', wrote to Lawson from Canada in August 1912. Praising Lawson's involvement in the DFM, Pattison asked for copies of two pamphlets; Lawson's on the minimum wage and the South Wales syndicalists' *The Miners' Next Step.*[67]

Lawson was not an isolated example either. Will Lawther, at the time a young secretary of the Chopwell ILP branch, recalled an indoor meeting in the village at which Vipond Hardy and Harry Bolton, both 'sincere members of their chapel

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[65] R. Moore, *Pit-men, preachers and politics: the effects of Methodism in a Durham Mining Community*, (Cambridge, 1974), pp.58-9. See also C. Oldstone-Moore, *Hugh Price Hughes. Founder of a new Methodism, conscience of a new nonconformity* (Cardiff, 1999).

[66] *Durham Chronicle*, 19 August 1910.

[67] P[alace] G[reen] A[rchive], D[urham], LAW 2/1/13, C. Pattinson letter to Jack Lawson, 21 August 1912.

and opposed to us' converted to the ILP.[68] Hardy, who was Chopwell lodge delegate, was soon a key local DFM activist and, by 1914, Bolton was inviting the militant Irish trade unionist Jim Larkin to visit Chopwell after he had spoken at the Durham miners' gala.[69] In sum, the movement's rhetoric endorses Moore's claims about the decline in Methodism's political influence as well as suggesting that the 'circumstances of class', were mounting a serious threat to the 'politics of patronage' in the DMA before 1914, somewhat earlier than suggested by Beynon and Austrin.[70] That said, Lawson himself appeared to be in a radical phase in this period; his Methodism reasserted itself in far more moderate politics in the post-war period. Bolton's Methodism, by contrast, did not dim his radical fervour. In 1919, for example, Bolton used his influence to secure a Methodist chapel as a venue for visiting revolutionary organiser T.A. Jackson to talk on 'Isaiah the Bolshevik'.[71]

In fact, these ILP Durham miner activists employed a good deal of the same rhetoric, and to advance similar immediate aims, as the syndicalists of South Wales. They were appealing to essentially the same disgruntled rank-and-file in their respective coalfields, but the Durham ILP activists were by some measures

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[68] *Newcastle Journal*, 15 March 1955.

[69] National Library, Dublin, William O'Brien mss, MS 15679(1), Harry Bolton letter to Jim Larkin, 19 July 1914 (I am very grateful to Emmet O'Connor for this reference); *Durham Chronicle*, 20 June 1913.

[70] H. Beynon and T. Austrin, *Masters and Servants. Class and Patronage in the Making of a Labour Organisation* (1994), p.348

[71] T.A. Jackson, *Solo Trumpet: Some Memories of Socialist Agitation and Propaganda* (1953), pp.157-161.

more successful. Indeed, the DFM's monopolising of this discontent was such that the revolutionary movement in the Durham coalfield remained relatively marginal.[72] Thus the 'anti-liberal minority' (in reality, as argued above, a popular majority if the 1912 minimum wage strike votes are the yardstick) was not significantly (contrary to Tanner) 'weakened by defections to syndicalism and the far left' in Durham.[73] Indeed, the Durham coalfield ILP was perfectly capable of maintaining more far left activists in its ranks, including some sympathetic to syndicalism. For example, in May 1912 George Jacques, a leading local ILP activist, welcomed 'the advent of syndicalism or industrial unionism; their ideal is commendable. But I venture to think that several of our young men today will be grey haired and wrinkled before they can mend our surface workmen's condition'.[74] Evidently, moderation (attempting to blur the barriers with Liberals) was not necessarily the most promising, even less the only, path to success for Labour in Durham, especially not when it came to capturing the DMA from the Lib-Labs.[75]

There were obvious tensions between these languages of class (including syndicalist languages), and the 'ethical socialism' of ILP leaders like Snowden and MacDonald. Indeed, MacDonald's doubts about both trade unions and, indeed, the working-class, meant that the Durham ILP activists' strategy of

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[72] L.H. Mates, 'The Syndicalist Challenge in the Durham coalfield before 1914', in D. Berry, R. Kinna, S. Pinta and A. Prichard (eds.), *Libertarian Socialism: Politics in Black and Red* (2012), pp.57-77.

[73] Tanner, *Political Change*, p.226.

[74] *Durham Chronicle*, 24 May 1912.

[75] Tanner, *Political Change*, pp.218, 236, 241.

fomenting rank-and-file movements was unlikely to have appealed to him. That said, Lawson's writings promoting the Durham movement and his pamphlet on the minimum wage did receive national ILP coverage and backing.[76] If these ILP activists were not standard 'ethical socialists', what were they? The popularity of the maverick socialist Victor Grayson among Durham miners offers some suggestions. Grayson was one of four guest speakers (elected by the lodges) for the 1909 and 1911 annual Durham miners' galas. He was an ILP member whose candidature at Colne Valley parliamentary by-election, which he won in 1907, was opposed by the national ILP but endorsed by his local branch. Grayson has been regarded as rather shallow ideologically, and little more than a rabble-rouser. But his militant brand of socialism –Grayson's 1912 gala speech included calling for solidarity action with striking Welsh miners and his attacks on labour movement leaders chimed with syndicalist critiques– appeared to resonate among sections of Durham miners.[77] That said, the DFM's emphasis on the need for a coherent Labour Party in parliament was at odds with Grayson's wayward and undisciplined attitude to parliamentary work. Nevertheless, as with Grayson's local ILP branch, the ILP in South Wales (which retained syndicalists among its membership for much of the pre-1914 period), and the DFM showed that the party was rather ideologically heterogeneous, and that the ethical socialism of its leaders, itself a rather flexible concept, was not

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[76] Lawson's pamphlet on the minimum wage in the coalfield received national ILP sponsorship and Lawson reported on the campaign in the ILP's paper. BLPES, ILP/5/1912/20, John [Jack] Lawson, *A Minimum wage for miners. Answer to critics in the Durham coal fields* (ILP Publication Department, National Labour Press, 1912); BLPES, ILP_12/1/2, Report of the 20th ILP Annual Conference, Merthyr, May 1912, p.14; *Labour Leader*, 11 August 1911.

[77] *Durham Chronicle*, 30 July 1909; 28 July 1911; Morgan, *Labour People*, pp.64–68.

invariably articulated by its most significant grassroots activists in some distinct localities.[78]

As problematic was Tanner's conflating the politics of Durham ILP activists like DMA official Alderman House and Lawson, which obscured a crucial ideological cleavage in the Labour challenge.[79] House's politics –evident in, for example, speeches praising the Liberal government in 1912– remained far more accommodating towards the party House had only fairly recently left, than those of the DFM/ILP activists.[80] Indirectly or directly, House was the butt of many DFM attacks and he responded in kind, albeit usually implicitly.[81] The cleavage in Labour ranks was partly between the leaders (DMA full-time officials) and the led. It was even more evident from a second Labour-supporting DMA official, James Robson, who was openly aggressive towards his supposed Labour comrades in the DFM. At the 1912 miners' gala, Robson reacted angrily to a pro-DFM speech by questioning the movement's leaders' integrity and loyalty. Disorder ensued.[82]

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[78] D.K. Davies, 'The Influence of Syndicalism, and Industrial Unionism in the South Wales coalfield 1898–1921: A Study in Ideology and Practice', Univ. of Wales, Ph.D. thesis 1991, p.64; P. Davies, *A.J. Cook* (Manchester, 1987), pp.10–11. Tanner's (*Political Change*, p.214) sharp definition of three different Labour ideologies enforced rather too firm a pattern on many and varied ideas that were subject to various definitions and changes of emphasis in the minds of individual activists. Berger made the same criticism, pointing out that Keir Hardie's socialism fell into all three of Tanner's categories. Berger, 'Decline of Liberalism', p.92.

[79] Tanner, *Political Change*, p.214.

[80] *Durham Chronicle*, 19 Jan. 1912; 2 Aug. 1912.

[81] *Durham Chronicle*, 25 July 1913.

[82] *Durham Chronicle*, 2 Aug. 1912.

The cleavage within Labour was also partly generational. While House and Robson were born in 1854 and 1860 respectively, DFM leaders W.P. Richardson (1873) and Lawson (1881) were born significantly later. Indeed, contemporary commentators noticed both the political and age differences; by October 1912, the DFM leaders had been dubbed 'the young men in a hurry' by the northern press.[83] A letter from an anonymous miner in the *Durham Chronicle* alleged the same division over the minimum wage vote, lamenting that boys aged eighteen were admitted as full DMA members and so could vote on these issues (and were more likely than their fathers to support striking).[84] Similarly, the Chief Inspector of Mines also observed the generational divide in Durham and the 'more violent' feature of the DFM rhetoric.[85]

The final tangible (albeit indirect) DFM (and MWM) achievement was in catapulting several ILP activists to notoriety as champions of the militant rank-and-file. This was particularly the case for DFM's four main officials W.P. Richardson (DFM chair), Andrew Temple (secretary), Jack Lawson (assistant secretary and later secretary) and Henry Bainbridge (treasurer). None had their DFM positions contested and all emerged in 1912 or shortly after from part or total obscurity as main contenders for the top lodge-elected DMA positions including those on the Executive Committee.[86] That the DFM was a very

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[83] *Durham Chronicle*, 11 Oct. 1912.

[84] *Durham Chronicle*, 12 Jan. 1912.

[85] Holton, *British Syndicalism*, p.112.

[86] *Durham Chronicle*, 15 Aug. 1913; 28 Nov. 1913; DRO, D/DMA 12a and D/DMA 12b, DMA Committee and Council minutes, balance sheets, etc., Jan.–June 1912 and June–Dec. 1912;

effective vehicle in advancing specific ILP activists within the DMA can be observed in the minutes of lodges such as Marsden, which, after it became involved in the movement, began voting for DFM activists for DMA positions.[87] The DFM's efficacy became even more apparent when Lawson and Richardson were placed among the five elected in a ballot for new DMA parliamentary candidates (from a field of seventy nominees) in April 1914. This vote was an unequivocal victory for the (generally) younger and unquestionably more militant Labour generation who led the DFM. Only one of the five elected (and the only DMA official) James Robson, represented the more conciliatory Labour tradition (and, unlike House, he had not been an official when the Eight Hours Agreement was signed).[88] Remarkably, the other two elected and all five beaten candidates in the final ballot had been involved (albeit to differing degrees) in

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NEEMARC, NUMDA/1/6/38, DMA Minutes, Circulars etc. Jan.–June 1913 and July–Dec. 1913; NEEMARC, NUMDA/1/6/39, DMA Minutes, Circulars etc. Jan.–June 1914; D/DMA (Acc: 2157(D)) 231(vol), Unidentified Lodge Minutes, General Meeting, 15 Jan. 1914; Marshall, 'Industrial Militancy', appendix F4.

[87] DRO, D/DMA 327/3, Marsden Lodge Minutes, Joint Meetings, 26 May 1912; 16, 30 June 1912; D/DMA 327/5, Joint Meetings, 14 Dec. 1913, 11, 25 Jan. 1914; 15 Feb. 1914; Committee Meeting, 17 Jan. 1914; D/DMA 327/6, Committee Meeting, 14 Mar. 1914; Joint Meeting, 15 Mar. 1914; Full Meeting, 30 Apr. 1914; Howell, *British Workers*, p.45.

[88] In 1918 Robson supported the right-wing 'British Workers' National League', which endorsed the Lloyd George Coalition. M. Pugh, 'The Rise of Labour and the Political Culture of Conservatism, 1890–1945', *History*, 87:288 (2002), p.532.

the rank-and-file movements.[89] The local press certainly equated the DFM leaders' new prominence intimately with their activism in the DFM.[90]

In the short-term, successfully getting its activists elected to the Executive potentially inhibited the DFM's immediate room for manoeuvre and demanded a change of emphasis in its rhetoric. The DFM became far less overtly critical of the leadership (and keener to assert its loyalty and desire to strengthen the union) than was the MWM.[91] This did not, however, prevent flash-points as the DFM's opponents in the leadership, such as James Robson, were swift to seize on the apparent discrepancies surrounding activists who, as Executive members, had opportunities to air their grievances without having to resort to rank-and-file organisations.[92] Somewhat awkwardly, Robson was standing next to these very people as he spoke at the DMA's annual gala and the two sides rubbed shoulders and exchanged barbed remarks on gala platforms again in 1913.[93] Thus, far from beginning to heal the breach in Labour ranks, this situation further underscored the ideological gulf and considerable tension between the ILP/DFM activists and Labour DMA officials like Robson and House. Evidently, DFM leaders on the DMA Executive were in an awkward position,

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[89] NEEMARC, NUMDA/1/6/39, DMA Minutes, Circulars etc. Jan.–June 1914; *Durham Chronicle*, 3 Apr. 1914.

[90] *Durham Chronicle*, 15 Mar. 1912; 29 May 1914;

[91] For loyalty see *Durham Chronicle*, 17, 24 May 1912; for criticism see *Durham Chronicle*, 16 Aug. 1912.

[92] *Durham Chronicle*, 2 Aug. 1912.

[93] *Durham Chronicle*, 25 July 1913.

but the 1914 PPC vote suggested that they had managed to avoid being deemed guilty by association.

IV

The reasons for the DFM's failures both to act on certain issues and to achieve many of their stated aims play as important a role as its successes in providing a full and rounded understanding of political change in the coalfield. The DFM's failures fall into two groups; those more specific to reforming the DMA and wider practical issues relating to mobilising the miners' vote for Labour (considered in the next section). In terms of the former, one glaring apparent failure was that John Wilson, the single greatest obstacle to the ILP's advance inside the union, continued in his powerful position apparently unhindered. This in itself suggested the continued strength of liberalism in the DMA. Given Wilson's symbolic as well as actual importance it was perhaps surprising that the DFM made no major effort to remove him. Instead, it proposed ways to trim Wilson's power, including abolishing his monthly circular 'which is in the main an expression of personal opinion'.[94] It advised replacing the monthly circular with either a magazine produced by its suggested new propaganda department or with reports from the officials of each DMA organisational department. It also proposed to throw Wilson's position into doubt by introducing a new rule that no DMA official could be an MP simultaneously.[95] The former idea was soon dropped and the latter also failed to make it into the DFM's five proposed

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[94] *Durham Chronicle,* 26 July 1912; 23 Aug. 1912.

[95] *Durham Chronicle,* 17 May 1912.

reforms of October 1913. That said, several DFM-supporting lodges' proposals did include a mechanism that precluded MPs from being officials simultaneously, though two of these effectively exempted Wilson from any changes and, in any case, none were passed.[96] Indeed, Wilson tended not to be singled out for criticism from rank-and-file movement platforms even before the DFM halted its general criticism of the union's leadership.

There were several reasons for this, some born of the rank-and-file movement's relative institutional weakness to Wilson's strength. The latter was evident when Wilson and the other full-time officials survived (albeit very narrowly) a 'no confidence' vote over the Eight Hours Agreement in 1910. If the lodges would not remove Wilson over this, it seemed unlikely that anything could get him out.[97] Wilson's longevity also helped him. As the last remaining DMA founder member, Wilson enjoyed an elevated status, regarded as having served the Durham miners well in the past, irrespective of his more recent record. Even some self-proclaimed socialists, like Jos Ritson (checkweighman at Monkwearmouth), claimed Wilson was 'head and shoulders above other miners' leaders in the County'.[98] From January 1912, Wilson liked to announce to appreciative crowds that he took no DMA salary at all.[99] His years of experience

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[96] NEEMARC, NUMDA/1/6/38, DMA Council Meeting (Annual) Programme for 20–24 Dec. 1913.

[97] DRO, D/DMA 11, 'Result of Slip vote of all Lodges on motions calling for resignation of the agents, and Executive Committee over the settlement for the 8 Hour Act', 12 Feb. 1910; *Durham Chronicle*, 31 Dec. 1909; 18 Feb. 1910.

[98] *Durham Chronicle*, 22 Aug. 1913.

[99] *Durham Chronicle*, 24 May 1912.

allowed him to wield skilfully the general secretary's substantial powers. Wilson could influence the Executive, retained his personal mouthpiece (the monthly circular) and could call on massive financial backing (whereas his opponents had to raise their own finance) and so forth.[100] His well-honed rhetorical and debating skills were well able to defuse or deflect the most vigorous of challenges. All Wilson's rhetorical skills were on display in court when defending himself from revolutionary activist George Harvey's accusations that he served the coal owners' interests in October 1912. Wilson's humorous responses made a mockery of Harvey's reasoned arguments and detailed supporting evidence.[101] It seems likely that all of Wilson's experience -his ability to manipulate the rules and steamroller opposition- was deployed to great effect when DFM activists joined the Executive from 1912. An example of how the Executive (under Wilson's guidance) could counter lodge influence came with the DFM's claim that the results of a lodge vote taken on altering the DMA's rules in early 1911 were made available as late as September 1911, giving lodges only twelve days to discuss a hugely complex document containing over 200 suggested rule-changes. The movement further claimed that 'hundreds' of lodge resolutions had been suppressed (ruled 'out of order') by the leadership.[102] There is undoubtedly no need to resort to a 'form of conspiracy

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[100] Marshall, 'Industrial Militancy', pp.311–313.

[101] *Evening Chronicle*, 7 Nov. 1912. Wilson influenced DMA council by playing 'the game very low'; see Howell, *British Workers*, p.45.

[102] *Durham Chronicle*, 24 May 1912.

theory' to suggest that those in positions of power could find many means to subvert democratic processes if it suited them.[103]

Yet, if DFM activists in the Executive suited Wilson, his remaining in office also, in some respects, served the DFM's aim. Wilson cut an increasingly marginalised and anachronistic figure, repeatedly urging miners to remember their apparent common interests with the owners (who were busying themselves in finding increasingly ingenious means to deny their workers the minimum wage) and all the while fighting a rearguard action against the militants outside the Executive (if not in it). The DFM could try to reform the organisation around its general secretary (who was, in any case, proving difficult to dislodge), while working to improve its own standing in the hope of being best positioned to provide the replacement for a now elderly Wilson. With every pronouncement on the minimum wage and the industrial and political means to make it worth having, DFM activists struck a blow against Wilson and the politics he embodied.

Indeed, in terms of debates around ideology, Wilson was the single most significant Liberal in the political world of most Durham miners. As a Liberal *and* an overt opponent of the minimum wage, Wilson emphatically could not be regarded by Durham miners as radical and responsive to material questions.[104] Wilson singularly failed to depict the minimum wage legislation as Tanner

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[103] R.A. Church, *The History of the British Coal Industry. Vol. 3, 1830–1913: Victorian Pre-eminence* (Oxford, 1986), p.711.

[104] Tanner, *Political Change*, p.206.

claimed centrist Liberals did, 'to combine the interests of local miners with ideologically "acceptable" forms of state intervention'.[105] Indeed, Wilson was entirely incapable of adapting ideologically to the rapidly changing world around him. Yet, in 1910 and subsequently, Wilson was consistently re-elected at DMA annual meetings. This was in part because a section of Durham lodge leaders retained the same liberal values. But, by 1911-12, it was clear that Wilson's views were not shared by a significant and growing section of his members; the DMA members' votes on the minimum wage showed this unmistakably.

So, if the DFM did represent the majority of the rank-and-file by 1912, why was it unable to get so many of its proposed reforms passed by lodges and to tackle Wilson more effectively? The answer relates to debates around the issue of 'representation'. In essence, the DFM was institutionally under-represented in terms of lodge vote allocation. The DMA's rule of a maximum of six votes for lodges with 750 members or more made no allowance for the ever-growing modern pits.[106] Thus, by 1912, the DMA's fiftieth largest lodge (with 791 members) had the same six votes as the largest lodge with over three times its membership. This particularly disadvantaged the DFM as much of its strongest support came from the larger, under-represented lodges. At least twenty-two of the largest thirty DMA lodges were active in the DFM. They contributed 27 per cent of the DMA's membership, but exercised only 18 per cent of votes on DMA council. Effectively the voting system greatly overrepresented smaller and

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[105] Tanner, *Political Change,* p.209.

[106] Marshall, 'Industrial Militancy', pp.105, 151.

often more moderate lodges. Indeed, the larger lodges' influence was further weakened when the 1911 annual meeting voted to divide the coalfield into six wards each electing two representatives to the Executive.[107] At the 1913 annual meeting, seven of the largest thirty lodges (all involved in the DFM) made various suggestions for allocating extra votes for memberships over 750. But, as at several previous annual meetings, none of their proposals was endorsed.[108] A voting system more proportionately related to lodge membership would have given DFM lodges a majority on DMA council. In this situation many more of the DFM's proposed reforms would almost certainly have been successful.

The DFM used the anomaly for propaganda purposes. A DFM circular complained in May 1912 that the DMA's administration and rules were created when the membership was half its 1912 level.[109] Further, the larger DFM lodges were clearly keen to address the issue (though it is difficult to determine if they had co-operated outside of the DFM). But the DFM itself did not explicitly call for any redistribution of votes to lodges more commensurate with their individual memberships and made no subsequent effort to co-operate on this apparently crucial representation issue. Quite why this was, considering the potentially significant advantages a victory in this area offered the DFM, is unclear. Perhaps the issue was not on the DFM's agenda as its three most prominent lodges ranked among the smallest third of DMA lodges. With the rules as they stood, these lodges were effectively overrepresented in the DMA

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[107] DRO, D/DMA 30, DMA Annual Meeting, 23, 26 and 27 Dec. 1911.

[108] NEEMARC, NUMDA/1/6/38, DMA Council Meeting (Annual) Programme for 20–24 Dec. 1913.

and a change in vote allocation would have diminished the standing of the smaller lodges' leaders. While this possible explanation casts the main DFM leaders, like Lawson, in a rather poor light, other reasons for this curious oversight do not readily suggest themselves. Thus, while the DFM was an alliance of smaller and larger lodges that often experienced quite different industrial relations, there remained potentially self-defeating tensions between them.

A second dimension to 'representation' debates, however, apparently suggested that the ILP was *overrepresented* at lodge level. Roy Gregory argued that lodge votes 'were notoriously unreliable guides to the general opinion of miners, particular on political questions'.[110] This was because lodges cast all their votes in DMA council one way after most issues were decided by a single and probably poorly attended lodge meeting. Gregory argued that this allowed a dedicated ILP grouping to cast votes that the majority of any lodge's passive membership did not endorse. Similar claims formed part of contemporary discourse. At the 1913 gala, Alderman House criticised rank-and-file apathy, claiming that it was 'well known' that all lodge business was being done by five or six per cent of members.[111] Taken in context, this was a veiled suggestion that the DFM did not represent majority rank-and-file opinion.

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[109] *Durham Chronicle*, 17 May 1912.

[110] Gregory, *Miners*, p.70.

[111] *Durham Chronicle*, 25 July 1913.

There was a degree of truth in claims about low levels of lodge involvement, but two points require emphasis. First, this situation equally allowed for small organised groups of more moderate miners to exert the self-same unrepresentative control; and in at least one case against a *more militant* rank-and-file majority feeling. The incident came in Marsden lodge, which had fairly well-balanced militant and more moderate factions active in the lodge committee whose influence ebbed and flowed. In November 1913, their relative strengths were finely poised, as the lodge meeting voted on issues that it might put to a full ballot of lodge members. The meeting's vote twice tied on the issue of re-affiliating to the DFM and agreed on a third vote (by twenty-six to twenty-four votes) to put the issue to the full membership. The membership then showed itself rather more supportive of the DFM than its lodge activists, voting 503-314 in favour of (re-)joining it.[112] In this example, lodge activists had come very close to preventing the membership from expressing its more militant stance. The scarcity of detailed lodge minutes means that other examples are not forthcoming, but there is no reason to think that Marsden was untypical of the larger, more modern Durham lodges.

Second, Marsden provided an example of a wider process of *democratisation* of lodge politics as it had begun to ballot its full membership on the choice of lodge officials (as well as other selected issues). This was a relatively novel idea. Traditionally, lodge officials had been chosen by a show of hands at a

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[112] DRO, D/DMA 327/5, Marsden Lodge Minutes, Joint Meeting, 23 Nov. 1913; Committee Meeting, 6 Dec. 1913.

single meeting.[113] The extent to which this practice was catching on is difficult to gauge, but by August 1914 six-monthly full lodge membership ballots elected officials in at least five other lodges.[114] These more democratic lodges differed in size, age and location but at least four of the five actively supported the DFM. These lodge officials were undoubtedly more representative of and accountable to all their members though, naturally, an endorsement on union matters did not necessarily mean popular support for lodge officials' political stances. Even if ILP groupings *had*, however, successfully hijacked some lodge committees and were unrepresentative of lodge members, the DFM still worked (to some extent successfully) to remove lodge committees' powers and place them in the hands of all DMA members. This was undoubtedly more democratic. Furthermore, it seems reasonable to suppose that, for example, when the DFM called for an individual ballot for all full-time DMA officials, it anticipated (correctly as it turned out) this would favour its nominees at the expense of the Lib.-Labs. Indeed, another way of counteracting its lodges' under-representation in the central DMA was to remove powers from lodge-level decision making and place them in the hands of the entire membership. This was clearly not the strategy of an organisation determined to capture and undemocratically wield lodge votes against the wishes of an essentially Liberal but hopelessly apathetic mass membership. In essence then, the ILP's support through the DFM was greater than the sum of its successes, thanks in large part to the biases of the DMA's institutional machinery. That said, the movement could probably have achieved more if it had acted with more unity in some areas. Nevertheless, even with

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[113] *Newcastle Journal*, 11 Mar. 1955.

[114] *Durham Chronicle*, 13 Sep. 1912; 27 Dec. 1912; 13 Mar. 1914.

these difficulties, it is clear that the movement was crucial in building a Labour-supporting culture inside the unions and in coalfield communities in the final pre-war years, as well as being central to democratisation debates and processes at central and lodge level that it correctly anticipated it would benefit from.

V

A second group of shortcomings relate to the DFM's apparent inability to affect the miner vote. In spite of all its agitation, ordinary individual Durham miner voters continued to favour Liberals. As Tanner pointed out, Labour only managed third place in the two immediately pre-war County Durham by-elections. In Houghton-le-Spring (1913) Labour got 26.2 per cent of the vote; in North-west Durham (1914), 28.9 per cent in constituencies with estimated miner electorates of 56 per cent and 61 per cent respectively (in 1910). The failure in North-west Durham was particularly striking as the constituency contained many rank-and-file movement supporting lodges and the DFM had by then won exclusive DMA support for Labour.[115]

To what extent was the DFM culpable? Its leaders, if Lawson was representative, did not seem overly anxious to explore the forms of political action required to get more ordinary miners to vote Labour and the types of organisation required to effect this. Even Lawson, the Labour election agent in Jarrow in 1910, confessed to ignorance of electoral law and that he 'knew little

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[115] Gregory, *Miners*, p.96.

of the technique of organisation'.[116] That there was no party organisation in the constituency anyway meant Lawson was not overly self-reproachful for his political ignorance, though this attitude rather neglected to recognise the role of the organiser as that of making and running an organisation. Obviously, it was not the exclusive fault of DFM leaders and activists that in 1913 Houghton-le-Spring had no Labour Party organisation to speak of. Yet Lawson was partly culpable in that in the area where he worked, the Labour stronghold of Chester-le-Street, there was also no formal constituency organisation until 1914.[117] That said, Lawson had been indefatigable in the DFM before this time, and getting the DMA's formal support for Labour was merely one of the movement's many aims. He had a legitimate excuse for a relative neglect of the more overtly 'political' side of organising.

Considering Lawson's attitude (as a leading DFM activist most experienced in running political organisations), it was hardly surprising that miners' lodges generally were not involved in their local Labour Representation Committees (LRCs). Both Gregory and Tanner emphasised lodge non-involvement in LRCs as evidence that Labour had far to go in Durham.[118] In fact, lodges differed considerably on this question. Predictably, rather moderate lodges such as Andrew's House showed no interest in the Labour Party or local LRC (or the

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[116] Lawson, *A Man's Life*, pp.109–10.

[117] Tanner, *Political Change*, p.217.

[118] Tanner repeated Gregory's claim that lodges in Jarrow and Gateshead constituencies refused to affiliate to their LRCs; Gregory provided no reference for this claim. Gregory, *Miners*, p.80; Tanner, *Political Change*, p.206.

DFM).[119] Yet in the case of Oxhill lodge, renewed activity in the DFM accompanied a new involvement in the LRC. Oxhill's new interest in the DFM came in the wake of involvement in a coalfield-wide campaign against increased doctors' fees in early 1913 (an effect of the Liberal government's new National Insurance Act) in which many DFM lodges (though not the organisation itself) were heavily involved.[120]

The relationships between support for the DFM and Labour Party can be traced in detail in Marsden lodge's records. As Tanner noted, Marsden refused to join its local LRC on two occasions 1911–1913.[121] But in between these two votes, support for affiliation to the LRC and/or Labour Party often grew. In April 1914, the tide turned decisively as a full lodge ballot voted (701 to 528) in favour of affiliating to Labour (a vote Tanner did not mention). Later attempts to reverse this decision were unsuccessful. Support for both the DFM and Labour in Marsden lodge fluctuated largely in sync, suggesting a strong relationship between the two (albeit with the DFM invariably better supported).[122] Late spring 1914 might well have marked something of a turning point in terms of Durham lodge support for LRCs; the records of an unidentified lodge reveal

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[119] DRO, D/DMA (Acc: 2157(D)) 165 (vol), Andrew's House Lodge Minutes.

[120] DRO, D/DMA (Acc: 2157(D)) 230 (vol)), Oxhill Lodge Minutes, Ordinary Meetings, 31 Aug. 1911; 30 Jan. 1913; 27 Feb. 1913; 13 Mar. 1913; 8 May 1913; 4 Dec. 1913; 23 Apr. 1914; Special Meetings, 4 Apr. 1912; 3 Mar. 1913; *Durham Chronicle*, 24, 31 Jan. 1913; 7 Feb. 1913.

[121] Tanner, *Political Change*, p.206.

[122] DRO, D/DMA 327/4, Marsden Lodge Minutes, Joint Meeting, 1 Dec. 1912; DRO, D/DMA 327/5, Joint Meetings, 10 Aug. 1913; 9 Nov. 1913; 23 Nov. 1913; 25 Jan. 1914; 19, 26 Apr. 1914; 7, 17 May 1914.

support for the DFM in early 1914 and a vote to affiliate to the constituency Labour Party in May 1914.[123]

More generally, Marsden's records illustrate the political flux in lodges in this period, as decisions were determined by the numbers that rival moderate and militant factions could turn out at any given lodge meeting. Nevertheless, it remained clear that the DFM struggled against a cultural tendency among lodges to ignore organisations (overtly 'political' and not) outside of the DMA. This was clear in Marsden's records; two full lodge ballots in 1912 decisively rejected using lodge funds for both political and municipal purposes and in summer 1913 the lodge committee voted not to hold a full membership ballot on whether the lodge should affiliate to the Trades Council and the Workers' Educational Association, among others.[124] Indeed, it was noteworthy that some of the most significant victims of this tendency were on the industrial side of the movement: many lodges other than Marsden consistently refused to affiliate to local Trades Councils before 1914, a characteristic still observable in the 1930s. The DFM, firmly in and of the lodges, did not suffer directly as a result of this cultural tendency, but LRCs, to some extent, did.

Clearly, activity in the industrial context did not necessarily automatically translate directly (and immediately) into a more overtly 'political' context; not without clear mechanisms for enabling any such transition. This was also

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[123] DRO, D/DMA (Acc: 2157(D)) 231(vol), Unidentified Lodge Minutes, Ordinary Meeting, 17 Apr. 1914; 13 June 1914; Special Meeting, 10 May 1914; Committee Meeting, 12 Aug. 1914.

suggested by the fortunes of the Durham ILP's organisation after 1911. While ILP activists had, in the words of Sunderland Labour MP, F.W. Goldstone, given 'point and expression to the present unrest which was caused mainly by the wages question', the ILP itself benefited only very modestly from its members' activity in the rank-and-file movements.[125] With well over 100 branches by August 1914, the ILP was firmly established in the Durham coalfield, but only a handful, at best, of these branches was founded or re-founded during or after 1911.[126] Furthermore, ILP branches' fairly even distribution throughout the coalfield, in areas that had both militant and more moderate controlled lodges, suggested only a weak relationship between ILPers active in lodge politics and the ILP operating in the more strictly 'political' sphere.[127] Indeed, while Jack Lawson was regularly addressing ILP meetings at this time, the activity of ILP miner activists in general seemed heavily skewed towards the DFM. This could only tend to reinforce the cultural tendencies in miners' lodges to remain relatively aloof from the forms of organisation and activity required to get uncommitted miners to vote Labour.

In terms of qualifying the DFM's culpability, specific aspects of both Parliamentary by-elections require comment. The DFM itself could hardlyhave been expected to mobilise in support of the three-shift system tainted House. As

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[124] DRO, D/DMA 327/3, Marsden Lodge Minutes, Committee Meeting, 20 Jan. 1912; Joint Meeting, 30 June 1912; DRO, D/DMA 327/5, Joint Meeting, 8 June 1913.

[125] *Durham Chronicle*, 31 May 1912.

[126] *Durham Chronicle*, 20 Sep. 1912; 31 May 1912; 7 June 1912; Marshall, 'Industrial Militancy', pp.195, 203–208.

[127] Marshall, 'Industrial Militancy', pp.326–328.

it was, DFM lodges were heavily involved in the doctors' fees agitation at the time the election was on, an issue which received far more local press column inches than the by-election. At Houghton-le-Spring a crucial determinant was the *actual* Labour candidate, Alderman House, and the area the constituency covered, which included Murton and the other three other large pits that had struck the longest against the changing shift system in 1910. As a DMA official, many miners held House responsible for the Eight Hours Agreement and the tremendous anger directed at him in the 1910 elections had not abated in 1913. House's arrogant refusal to apologise and crude attempt to deflect the blame when speaking at Murton in the final days of the 1913 campaign merely inflamed the anger.[128] A second important determinant was the Irish vote: a significant section of the electorate that was expected to vote solidly Liberal over the issue of Home Rule.

Third was the ideological dimension, where House was again found wanting. Many of the lodges angriest at House were those most involved in the DFM and likely inclined towards a more militant brand of Labour politics than House offered. The Liberal choice of an unknown but radical candidate, Tom Wing, was, as Tanner claimed, a shrewd move.[129] Wing was easily able to further blur the already narrow ideological gap with House by emphasising the 'Lib.-Lab. party' of which Wilson (and other north-east 'miners' champions' Burt and Fenwick) were part.[130] While Wing seemed ideologically little different to

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[128] *Durham Chronicle*, 14, 21 Mar. 1913.

[129] Tanner, *Political Change*, p.220.

[130] *Durham Chronicle*, 14 Mar. 1913.

House, his strength lay in offering hope for Irish voters on Home Rule and that he was not, unlike House, tainted over the three-shift system. Indeed, that House secured as much of the vote as he did was an achievement. This is not to deny that, as Tanner (and Gregory) claimed, lodges were split between Liberal and Labour at leadership and rank-and-file levels.[131] But it remained clear that House's poor showing was to a great extent a function of his low personal following; his role in the three-shift system in 1910 and his ideological inability to distinguish himself from the Liberals.

In North-west Durham, the most mining-dominated constituency in the coalfield, a miner Labour candidate seemed a necessity. As such, MFGB leader Robert Smillie, thought to have a good chance by local ILP activists like Tom Richardson MP, was mooted as a possible candidate. Smillie was reluctant to stand and would not entertain doing so without the financial endorsement of the DMA, which he suspected would not be forthcoming.[132] In the event, the Labour candidate was G.H. Stuart, secretary of the Postmen's Federation, trying to appeal largely to miners (albeit he was a socialist).[133] Furthermore, some significant non-mining sections of the working-class electorate, such as the Irish

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[131] Tanner, *Political Change*, p.205; Gregory, *Miners,* pp.79–81.

[132] BLPES, ILP/4/1913/273, Francis Johnson letter to J. Keir Hardie, 25 Nov. 1913; ILP/4/1913/289, R. Smillie letter to W.E. Moll, 1 Dec. 1913; ILP/4/1913/290, Francis Johnson letter to W.E. Moll, 3 Dec. 1913; ILP/4/1913/291, T. Richardson letter to Francis Johnson, 3 Dec. 1913.

[133] Tanner, *Political Change*, p.220; Gregory, *Miners,* p.80. Curiously, the ILP often put up 'outsider' candidates. See J. Lawrence, *Speaking for the people: party, language and popular politics in England, 1867–1914* (Cambridge, 2002), pp.129–132.

steelworkers of Consett, were likely Liberal voters.[134] Timing was crucial too. While the DMA was now formally committed to supporting Labour, this by-election came too soon after the rule change. A DMA Executive meeting of 6 January 1914 simply publicised a call for members to give Labour 'their whole support'.[135] The DFM, too, was inactive in this period. It was unfortunate that its 'No Minimum Wages in the Act - No Vote!' campaign, a fairly sophisticated mechanism for influencing the Labour vote, did not appear until April 1914.[136] Before then, its energies had been understandably deployed elsewhere. Still, it was significant too that in August 1914 the DMA chose to sponsor a candidate in Houghton-le-Spring, partly encouraged by the amount of propaganda work done since House's failure. That it did not even consider North-west Durham emphasised the continued lack of organisation there.[137]

More speculatively, issues around the DFM's support base were relevant to debates around the 'franchise factor'.[138] As far as can be gauged, the DFM tended to appeal most to younger miners who worked in the more modern,

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[134] Pelling, *Social Geography of British Elections 1885–1910* (1967), pp.336–7.

[135] NEEMARC, NUMDA/1/6/39, DMA Executive Committee Minutes, 6 Jan. 1914.

[136] *Durham Chronicle*, 12 June 1914.

[137] NEEMARC, NUMDA/1/6/39, DMA Council Meeting, 22 Aug. 1914.

[138] Key texts in this debate are; H.C.G. Matthew, R.I. McKibbin and J.A. Kay, 'The Franchise Factor in the Rise of the Labour Party', *English Historical Review*, 91 (1976), pp.723 –52; D. Tanner, 'The Parliamentary Electoral System, the "Fourth" Reform Act and the Rise of Labour in England and Wales', *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research,* 134 (1983), pp.205–219; Berger, 'Decline of Liberalism', p.89.

larger pits.[139] This chimes with Childs' work on the generational component of Labour's support. Childs argued that the twenty-one to thirty age group was more likely to identify with Labour than their parents and least likely to have the vote pre-war.[140] Robert Moore also observed this phenomenon in the Durham coalfield.[141]

There was also a strong generational element to the unofficial industrial militancy in the Durham coalfield. A wave of pit lad strikes (mostly unofficial), and largely by 'putters' (who shifted coal in tubs from the face to the surface), further intensified after 1910 period. These can be regarded as a youthful generational revolt, albeit in part determined by the Durham coalfield's career pattern which meant that specific grades of workers were rather more defined by age than in most other British coalfields.[142] Martin Daunton critiqued mining histories that placed 'an emphasis upon […] the actions and ideology of the leadership, and a narrative of strikes' in favour of understanding the underlying

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[139] The features of the Hirst area of Ashington that housed much of the (often young and unmarried) workforce of the new pit of Woodhorn, which was at the forefront of radical politics in the Northumberland coalfield, applied to pit villages like Jack Lawson's Boldon in the Durham coalfield. Lawson, *Man's Life*, pp.113–114; Hall, 'Miners of Northumberland', pp.177–181.

[140] M. Childs, 'Labour Grows Up: The Electoral System, Political Generations, and British Politics 1890–1929', *Twentieth Century British History*, 6:2 (1995), pp.123–125.

[141] Moore, *Pit-men,*, p.168.

[142] Church, *British coal industry*, p.713; M. Daunton, 'The Export coalfields: South Wales and North-eastern England, 1870-1917' in R.W. Sturgess, ed., *Pitmen, Viewers and Coalmasters: Essays on North East Coalmining in the Nineteenth Century* (Newcastle, 1986), p.148.

'social relationships of work'.[143] In the case of Durham putters from 1910, however, strikes and social relations at work were rather closely related. The eight hour day had acutely altered the labour process in the Durham coalfield by lowering the earning potential of grades of underground pieceworkers like putters by reducing the length of their shifts. The extent to which this industrial militancy fed into growing support for Labour among the young putters of the Durham coalfield is difficult to establish; the DFM made no special attempts to address putters' grievances as it had those of surfaceworkers and the elderly and infirm.

Returning to the franchise, immigration was another significant consideration. Twelve months' residence in one place was necessary to get onto the electoral register under the household qualification, so high levels of coalfield migration disenfranchised many. While the workforce turnover of settled collieries was 15 to 20 per cent annually, in the newer pits, such as Chopwell, it was around 30 per cent annually. High population turnover definitely helped to introduce and fortify left-wing ideas in pit villages like Chopwell.[144] But it also meant that a higher proportion of the larger, more modern and generally more militant pits was less likely to qualify to vote.[145] Miners more likely to support the DFM, and thus Labour, were therefore less likely to be able to vote before 1914, had they wanted to.

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[143] M.J. Daunton, 'Down the Pit: Work in the Great Northern and South Wales Coalfields, 1870-1914', *Economic History Review*, 34:4 (1981), p.579.

[144] See Will Lawther's discussion of his family moving to Chopwell from the Northumberland coalfield in 1905 in *Newcastle Journal*, 11 Mar. 1955.

[145] Marshall, 'Industrial Militancy', pp.306–309; 333.

VI

By August 1914 four DFM activists, who now so dominated among the next generation of elected DMA Prospective Parliamentary Candidates, had specific seats to contest.[146] On the news of Lawson's appointment as North-west Durham PPC, H. Sanderson Furniss, his lecturer at Ruskin College, told Lawson; 'I always thought the Durham miners were sensible people and now I am sure of it'.[147] The DMA's political sub-committee was remarkably enthusiastic about its candidates' prospects at Houghton-le-Spring (W.P. Richardson) and South Shields (Batey).[148] Undoubtedly, the DMA's resources were beginning to be brought to bear in terms of practical groundwork for Labour Parliamentary candidates, albeit in fewer constituencies than some of the more optimistic DFM activists wanted.

DFM activists had to bide their time a little longer before taking official positions inside the DMA. But, when Wilson finally died in 1915, it was no coincidence that Richardson and Batey, two of his fiercest DFM critics, replaced him as full-time officials. They were the first officials elected on a ballot of all DMA members, one of the rule changes they had worked so hard to bring about through the DFM in 1913. These 1915 elections heralded a new era inside the

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[146] NEEMARC, NUMDA/1/6/39, DMA Council Meeting, 22 Aug. 1914; Wilson's Monthly Circular, No.222, June 1914.

[147] PGAD, LAW 2/1/15, H. Sanderson Furniss letter to Jack Lawson, 10 April 1914.

[148] NEEMARC, NUMDA/1/6/39, DMA Council Meeting, 22 Aug. 1914; Purdue, 'ILP', pp.22, 33.

DMA. As the old guard Lib.-Lab. officials gradually died or retired, so candidates drawn from the DFM replaced them. All five of the DMA's full-time officials elected between 1915 and 1934 (when Will Lawther was elected) had been involved in the DFM.[149]

In terms of the rise of Labour debates, according the hitherto neglected rank-and-file movements of the Durham coalfield a key explanatory role throws considerable new light on debates around political change. First, they show (contrary to Tanner) that the ILP achieved considerable political advances after the 1910 debacle in the Durham coalfield and that they did so operating essentially in the industrial sphere through the rank-and-file movements they formed and led. Indeed, the rank-and-file movements, and the DFM in particular, were the main vehicles for Labour's advance inside the DMA from 1911. With the DFM, the ILP had created a far more effective vehicle within the DMA than its own organisation alone could be.[150]

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[149] These were Richardson, Batey (who became an MP in 1922), Peter Lee, J.E. Swan and James Gilliland. Of these only Lee was a peripheral figure in the DFM. The rule amendment that no DMA full-time official could be an MP (a DFM aim) that was eventually passed meant a higher turnover of officials too. Lawther himself had been a revolutionary critic of the DFM at the time.

[150] Purdue wrote that; 'neither in ideology nor administrative structure was the ILP the perfect vehicle for the pragmatic Parliamentarist strategy pursued by the national leadership…'. A.W. Purdue, 'The ILP in the North East of England', in D. James, T. Jowitt and K. Laybourn (eds), *The Centennial History of the Independent Labour Party: a collection of essays* (Halifax, 1992), p.p.33.

Second, the DFM allowed younger ILP activists to harness growing discontent in the coalfield over material conditions and the limp Lib.-Lab leadership with a message of industrial militancy which, by aping some syndicalist languages and ideas, outflanked the ILP's revolutionary competitors in the coalfield. This ideology also clearly differentiated the ILP activists of the rank-and-file movements from an older guard of more moderate Labour activists already represented among the DMA's full-time officials (chiefly House and Robson). While the politics of Labour-supporting officials like House undoubtedly did complicate the situation, as Tanner suggested, the successes of the DFM/ILP activists in elected positions (as PPCs and full-time officials 1914-15) reveal that they were not deemed culpable for leadership shortcomings. The DFM reveals that, again contrary to Tanner, a more militant and aggressive brand of politics could be articulated by ILP activists (notwithstanding the continuing but declining influence of Methodism) and, more importantly, that it was capable of galvanising majority support within the DMA membership.

Third, their platform successfully channelled inchoate industrial discontent into growing support for a substantial and firmly independent Labour parliamentary presence. Indeed, the rank-and-file movements were essential to ensuring that what had been a paper victory for Labour in Durham when the MFGB affiliated to the party became a real victory. In amending the DMA's rules to provide exclusive support for Labour, the DFM finally overcame the ambiguity that Wilson had engineered after 1908. More importantly, the ambiguity was surmounted by the rank-and-file movements actually convincing more ordinary DMA members of its message, evident in the growing support it garnered after the minimum wage was won in April 1912. Thus, when the revolutionary Irish

trade unionist Jim Larkin urged the July 1914 DMA gala crowd to 'for God's sake' let Labour 'be independent and not connected with the flabby vindictive Liberal Party', he was voicing the opinion of a majority of DMA members.[151]

Fourth, the DFM's campaigns effectively undermined both economic and political liberalism within the DMA. Liberals in the union, and most importantly the most influential Liberal John Wilson, were increasingly discredited and marginalised by their continued insistence that miners and owners shared interests. The institutional shifts inside the DMA, effected by the DFM and the direct result of growing rank-and-file pressure (and achieved with ILP lodges still constitutionally under-represented), indicated that the transfer of loyalties among DMA lodges and members was well advanced before the outbreak of war. In the short term, however, the struggle with the Liberals for ideological and actual control of the DMA was not over. The July 1914 miners' gala elected Lloyd George among the four top choice speakers.[152] Though the result of a disproportionate lodge voting system, this still represented a stubborn minority element of Liberal support within lodge leaderships and memberships.[153] In 1915, T.H. Cann, the most senior remaining official and a Liberal, replaced Wilson as general secretary and the DFM was soon agitating again, albeit now stripped of the leadership of Lawson, away fighting on Western Front. But the demographic of the DFM's supporters who were, like many of its leaders, often

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[151] *Durham Chronicle*, 31 July 1914.

[152] NEEMARC, NUMDA/1/6/39, 'Gala speakers, 1914', n.d..

[153] For an individual example of continuing Liberalism among the Durham miners see L.H. Mates, 'Charles Wilson, the Pitman's Poet', in K. Gildart and D. Howell (eds.), *Dictionary of Labour Biography, Vol. XIII* (2010), pp.372–381.

miners too young or too mobile to qualify for the pre-1914 franchise, also suggested a strong generational element to potential Labour voters; the future lay with Labour in the post-war period.

That said, the DFM's record revealed some weaknesses; a continued political divide between the smaller, older lodges and more modern, larger, radical lodges that inhibited the movement's ability to achieve all its aims inside the DMA. More importantly, the pre-war DFM did not pay much obvious attention to finding mechanisms for transforming hypothetical support for Labour in Parliament to actual votes for Labour candidates at elections, nor for overcoming the cultural reluctance among miners' lodges to become involved in local LRCs. The DFM did belatedly (and understandably given it needed to win official DMA backing for Labour first) develop an electoral strategy cunningly tying miners' material interests around improving the minimum wage to support for Labour candidates, but this could not be tested at a 1915 general election that never came.

Furthermore, the militants still had to consider how to win over the non-trade union mining vote, still around a third of the entire mining workforce.[154] Theoretically, this task would become easier with the financial clout and tremendous prestige of the DMA behind them, and be further facilitated as the DMA extended its grip on the mining workforce in the war years and after. As Purdue wrote; 'only control in the mining unions could seem to promise, given the geographical concentration of miners, a harvest of Parliamentary seats as a

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[154] *Durham Chronicle*, 16 Feb. 1912; 15 Mar. 1912.

corollary'.[155] In practice, the relationship between DMA institutional support and securing Labour votes from Durham miners was rather complex. The DMA's pre-war optimism over South Shields, for example, proved to be ill-founded in the light of Labour's inter-war record there (although the constituency had a small percentage of miner voters). Certainly, further research on the relationship between the industrial and more narrowly 'political' spheres and focussing on local and national elections in the Durham coalfield in the first quarter of the twentieth century is necessary.

The rank-and-file movements by themselves do not offer a complete explanation for all the myriad processes involved in 'political change'. Nevertheless, placing the ignored rank-and-file movements into the narrative of political change after 1910 undoubtedly shifts the interpretation decisively towards viewing the ILP/Labour challenge as more fluid, vital, militant and effective in the Durham coalfield before the outbreak of war than has been recognised in the major texts. This is not, however, to endorse some crude sociological determinist version of the rise of Labour. Clearly, Labour was potentially threatened and was certainly not inevitably set to benefit from the industrial unrest that swept the coalfield 1910–1914. As Joe White pointed out there was not a 'zero sum' relationship between organised labour's gains in either the industrial or political sphere automatically meaning losses in the other. White suggested that both industrial and political socialist 'tendencies might have grown together, despite the clear

[155] Purdue, 'ILP', p.25.

and irreconcilable theoretical differences separating them'.[156] The genius of the DFM/ILP leaders in Durham after 1910 was to take these apparently (and probably actually) irreconcilable tendencies and somehow weld them into what appeared, at least, to be a coherent whole, harnessing the discontent of often younger, more militant miners aggrieved with wages declining in real terms to steadfast, uncritical and oft-repeated support for the Labour Party in Parliament. They did this operating within formal organizations; the various governing institutions of the central DMA, in lodge-level politics and within their own rank-and-file organizations created specifically for the purposes of articulating their political and industrial demands. Their class-based rhetoric required this formal organization to be effective. The rank-and-file movement's rhetoric certainly suggests that social class remains of value as one explanatory variable among several, especially in relation to how class languages could be framed and effectively deployed in period of socio-economic upheaval.[157] Thus the ILP activists' a agency is crucial to understanding the process of political change in the period; had they not acted as they did, the outcome in the Durham coalfield might have been far less favourable to the Labour Party's future prospects. Clearly, this case study of Durham cannot, by itself, refute Tanner's entire thesis. Yet, combined with other critical responses to Tanner's work (discussed in the introduction) it certainly strongly suggests the need for more robust case studies. The debate around political change in Britain in the early twentieth century has some life left in it yet.

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[156] J. White '1910–1914 reconsidered', in J.E. Cronin and J. Schneer, eds, *Social conflict and the political order in modern Britain* (1982), p.92.

[157] See Dick Geary's reclamation of 'class' as an explanatory variable in 'Labour History, the "Linguistic Turn" and Postmodernism', *Contemporary European History*, 9 (2000), pp.445–462.