Lloyd George in wartime

Did Lloyd George 'abandon Liberalism' in the face of the demands of fighting total war? **Matthew Johnson** examines the evidence.

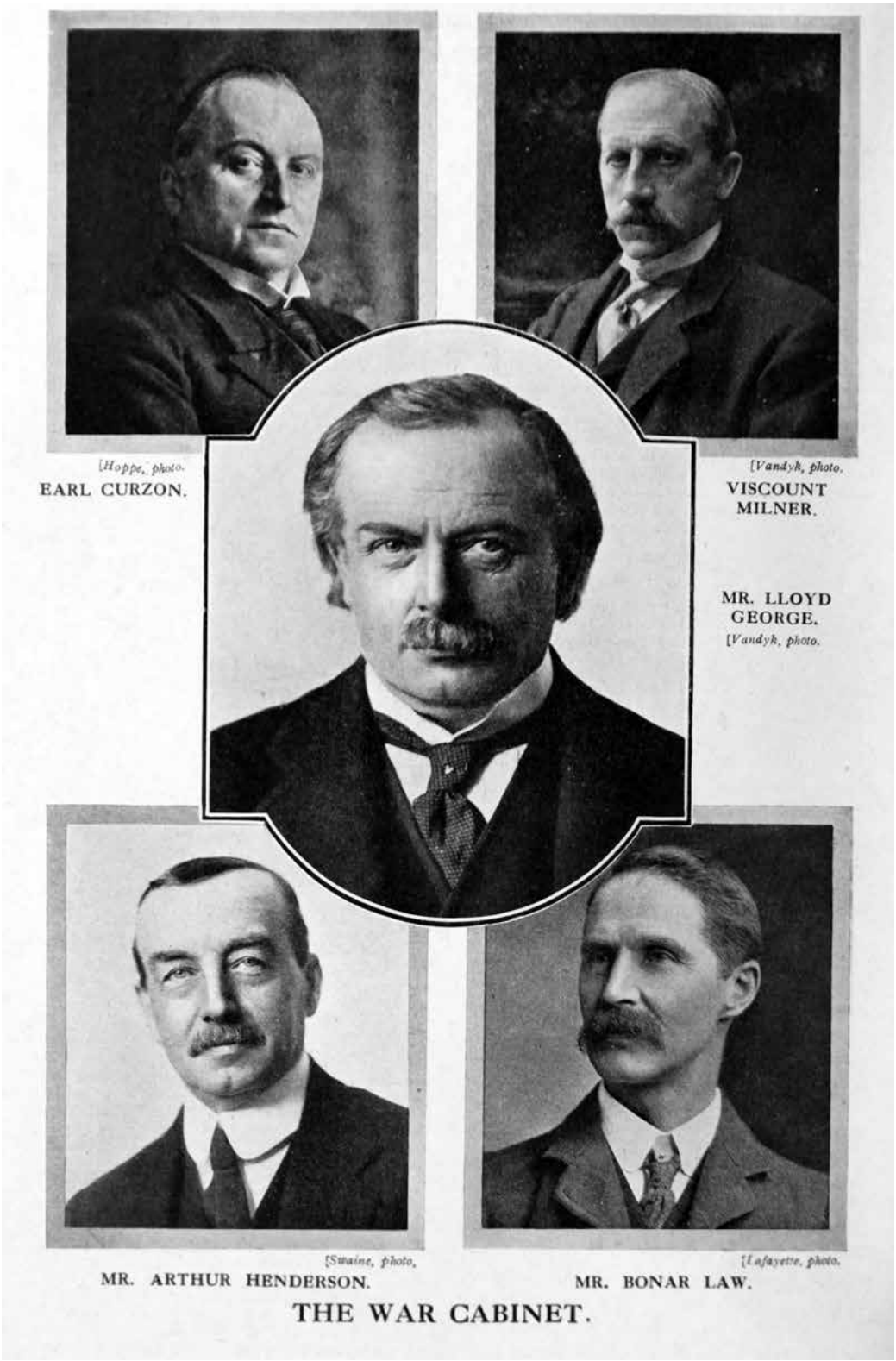
Lloyd George, the Liberal Crisis, and the Unionist Party during the First World War

On 19 October 1922, Conservative MPs gathered at the Carlton Club in London and voted to withdraw their support from David Lloyd George's coalition government. After six years as prime minister, finding himself now unable to command a majority in the House of Commons, Lloyd George resigned. He never again held governmental office. His fall from power was not simply a personal defeat. It was also, in many respects, the symbolic culmination of a period of acute Liberal crisis in Britain. The Liberal Party had fractured during the First World War, dividing into rival factions loyal to Lloyd George and to his predecessor as prime minister, Herbert Henry Asquith. This division quickly hardened, effectively creating two rival Liberal parties that contested the general elections of 1918 and 1922 in opposition to one another.

More profoundly, historians have often talked of this period in terms of a crisis, not only for the Liberal Party, but for Liberalism itself. The demands of waging 'total war' after August 1914 – the growth of state economic and industrial control, the curtailing of individual liberty, censorship of the press, and, above all, the introduction of military conscription – have been seen as posing an existential challenge to Liberal values.[1] According to A. J. P. Taylor, by 1916 Liberals found themselves confronted by a stark choice: 'abandon Liberalism or abandon the war'.[2] Lloyd George, it has often been claimed, chose the former option.[3] Despite his past as a radical opponent of British imperialism during the South African war of 1899–1902, Lloyd George emerged during the First World War as a strong advocate of military conscription and state-directed industrial mobilisation, and in December 1916 he joined with the Unionists (as the Conservatives were then known) to overthrow Asquith and form a new coalition government, committed to a more vigorous prosecution of the war.

Lloyd George remained in office following the military victory in 1918 and the famous 'coupon' election that was called immediately thereafter. But he was always dependent on Unionist support for his parliamentary majority. The reputation that Lloyd George gained during the war – that of a cynical politician who abandoned his Liberalism in pursuit of military victory and political power – followed him to the end of his life. In the damning verdict of the economist John Maynard Keynes, Lloyd George was merely a political adventurer, 'rooted in nothing'.[4] In this telling of the story, Lloyd George's ignominious eviction from office in 1922 might seem a fitting fate: having abandoned his principles and his party, the prime minister was cast aside in turn by his former coalition partners.

Lloyd George himself sometimes appeared to concede the charge that he had turned his



[Hoppé, photo.
EARL CURZON.

[Vandyk, photo.
VISCOUNT MILNER.

MR. LLOYD GEORGE.
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MR. ARTHUR HENDERSON.

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MR. BONAR LAW.

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back on his Liberal faith during the war. In his *War Memoirs*, published in the 1930s, he frankly acknowledged the scale of the dilemma that had faced Liberal politicians after August 1914, and did not shy away from the ideological compromises he had felt compelled to make in pursuit of military victory. 'War', he observed, 'has always been fatal to Liberalism', because its prosecution demanded the 'surrender [of] individual right and freedom', and victory could be achieved only by 'the triumph of force and not of reason'.[5] Lloyd George sometimes presented his own wartime actions as having been driven by a ruthless pragmatism, which saw him welcome support from any quarter, without regard to peacetime partisan loyalties. He was scathing in his criticism of Liberal cabinet colleagues such as Reginald McKenna, whom Lloyd George described as lacking in 'imagination, breadth of vision, or human insight', while paying warm tribute to the Unionist Party leaders, whom he hailed as 'men of high character and capacity whose patriotism was above suspicion'.[6]

However, Lloyd George's relationship with Liberalism during the First World War was always more complicated than this narrative suggests. He never wholly suppressed his radical Liberal instincts after August 1914, and this fact was to have significant implications for his relationship with the Unionists, during the war and afterwards.

As the diplomatic storm clouds darkened during the summer of 1914, Lloyd George had initially equivocated over the question of Britain's military obligations in Europe. But, once convinced of the case for military intervention, he emerged as one of the most energetic advocates of British entry into the war. This was a disappointment to some of his radical colleagues and supporters, but Lloyd George was firm in his insistence that the struggle against Germany should be understood as both a necessary and a just war. In a speech delivered at the Queen's Hall in London, on 19 September 1914, he dwelt on the lawlessness of the German invasion of Belgium and the moral imperative of confronting and defeating 'German militarism'.[7] This was a theme to which he returned repeatedly during the war, and again in his memoirs, where he reiterated his claim that 'the challenge to international right and freedom was so tremendous that Liberalism – *above all Liberalism* – could not shirk it'.[8]

It is worth emphasising that this position in no way placed Lloyd George outside the Liberal mainstream. Most Liberals were not pacifists. It is true that many elements in the cabinet, the wider party, and the Liberal press had initially hoped that British neutrality might be preserved in the summer of 1914. As late as 24 July, Asquith was able to write to his confidante, Venetia Stanley that, although Europe appeared to be on the brink of war, 'happily, there seems to be no reason why we should be anything more than spectators'.[9] However, the political situation was transformed by the German invasion of Belgium, and Liberal opinion quickly rallied behind the decision for war. The dissenters who resigned in protest from Asquith's government were isolated and their departure was of little immediate consequence. The Liberals might not have sought war, but nor did they shrink from it. Indeed, sixty-six sitting Liberal MPs would serve in the armed forces during the conflict.[10]

Where Lloyd George did begin to part ways from many other Liberals was in his enthusiasm for a more vigorous prosecution of the war. It was one thing for Liberals to agree in principle that the German violation of Belgium must be opposed, but quite another to embrace the full implications of 'total war' in practice. During the early months of the war, most Liberal ministers favoured a 'limited liability' strategy, under which the Royal Navy would sweep enemy warships from the seas and blockade the German coast, while the French and Russian armies would undertake the lion's share of the fighting on land. Leading ministers such as McKenna, the home secretary, and Walter Runciman, the president of the Board of Trade, were anxious to minimise economic disruption at home, while

preserving Britain's ability to lend financial and industrial support to the other *Entente* powers.[11] In practice, it soon became apparent that this cautious approach would not deliver victory. Within the government, Lloyd George railed with growing urgency against the 'Business as Usual' approach to the war favoured by his colleagues. In a cabinet memorandum prepared in February 1915, he called for the government to take sweeping new powers to 'mobilise the whole of our manufacturing strength' for war production, to deal as necessary with labour difficulties and shortcomings, and to close public houses in areas where armaments were being manufactured.[12]

Lloyd George never wholly suppressed his radical Liberal instincts after August 1914, and this fact was to have significant implications for his relationship with the Unionists, during the war and afterwards.

In May 1915, following a political uproar over the failure to supply the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) with adequate munitions – the so-called 'shells crisis' – Asquith dissolved his government and formed a new coalition administration with the Unionists and the Labour Party. Lloyd George was appointed to lead the newly created Ministry of Munitions, a role which he discharged with characteristic dynamism. Munitions production was rapidly and dramatically expanded through the creation of new state-owned National Factories and the contracting out of production to 'controlled establishments', in which industrial processes, conditions of labour, and profits were tightly controlled by the government.[13] Within months, however, Lloyd George had embarked on a new and still more controversial political campaign: an attempt to secure the introduction of military conscription. In his February cabinet memorandum, Lloyd George had urged that 'every effort should be taken to increase the number of men whom we can put into the field'.[14] But this was not simply a question of numbers: Lloyd George was also increasingly concerned about the indiscriminate and inefficient operation of Britain's system of voluntary recruiting, under which large numbers of skilled workers in vital war industries had enlisted in the forces, while other men who were not essential to the war economy had remained at home.

Lloyd George's enthusiasm for compulsory service saw him increasingly estranged from most of his senior Liberal colleagues (with the notable exception of Churchill, who resigned from the government in November 1915 to embark on a period of military service on the Western Front).[15] It also brought him into closer collaboration with the Unionist leadership, most of whom were strongly in favour of conscription. In combination with the Unionists, Lloyd George placed increasing pressure on Asquith over the second half of 1915 to abandon the system of voluntary recruiting. By the end of the year, Lloyd George was threatening resignation if steps to introduce conscription were not undertaken.[16] In January 1916, Asquith finally took the plunge, and introduced a Military Service Bill providing for the compulsory enlistment of unmarried men between the ages of 18 and 41. A second Act, extending liability for military service to married men, was passed four months later. Radicals were appalled. H. W. Massingham, the editor of the Liberal weekly journal *The Nation*, warned darkly that a political party could scarcely 'commit suicide more effectually than by surrendering its principles, which are its spiritual life'.[17]

The introduction of conscription brought little political respite to Asquith's government. The following months saw the outbreak of the Easter Rising in Ireland, the surrender to Ottoman forces of the British garrison at Kut al-Amara, a costly and inconclusive naval engagement at Jutland, and the appalling casualties suffered by the BEF in the Somme offensive. Lloyd George increasingly despaired at

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[December 20, 1916.]

the lethargy and the lack of a coherent strategic vision that seemed to characterise Asquith's management of the war effort. The Unionist leadership shared these frustrations, and in December 1916, Lloyd George, Bonar Law, and the Ulster leader Sir Edward Carson presented

Asquith with what was effectively an ultimatum, demanding that he turn over responsibility for the day-to-day running of the war to a small executive 'war committee'. Asquith regarded this as an unacceptable challenge to his authority as prime minister and a political power struggle broke out, which ended with Asquith resigning and the king inviting Lloyd George to form a new government. The senior Liberal ministers from Asquith's cabinet followed their chief onto the Opposition benches in the House of Commons, and the new administration formed by Lloyd George was dominated by Unionists. To his Asquithian critics, Lloyd George's betrayal of both his principles and his party now appeared complete.

However, Lloyd George remained able to mount several lines of defence against the charge that he had cast aside his Liberal principles. The first and simplest was the argument that, precisely *because* war was inimical to Liberalism, any steps that might hasten victory should be welcomed by Liberals. According to this reasoning, as Michael Bentley has observed, even 'conscription could be defended on "Liberal" grounds as being the most effective expedient available to bring to an end the war that was making Liberalism impossible'.[18] In his memoirs, Lloyd George lamented the resentment provoked in some Liberal quarters by his efforts at the Ministry of Munitions, and expressed contempt for those of his colleagues who had embraced the self-defeating logic that 'War is a hideous thing. You must show your aversion by waging it half-heartedly.'[19]

At the same time, Lloyd George rejected the accusation that he had been uniquely culpable in the supposed sacrificing of Liberal principles, pointing out that many of the most controversial wartime measures expanding state control or restricting the liberty of the citizen had been enacted not under his premiership but under Asquith. It was Asquith who, as prime minister, had overseen the introduction of the Defence of the Realm Act in 1914, which laid the groundwork for, among other things, the wartime system of press censorship. It was Asquith who, to the dismay of many of his colleagues, had dissolved the last Liberal government in May 1915 and invited the Conservatives to join him in a coalition administration. And it was this government, under Asquith, which in January 1916 introduced the Military Service Bill that would implement a system of conscription – a Bill that passed the House of Commons with the support of a sizeable majority of Liberal MPs. It is notable that McKenna and Runciman, the leading voluntarists in Asquith's cabinet, based their opposition to compulsory service on grounds of practicality rather than principle, warning that conscription would break the British economy. Only Sir John Simon, the home secretary, was ultimately prepared to resign from the government in protest at its acceptance of military compulsion.[20] Lloyd George even argued that Asquith had shown himself willing to assent to a 'Protectionist Budget' in 1915, thereby casting aside the Liberal commitment to free trade.[21] Of course, many Liberals acquiesced in measures such as conscription only reluctantly and out of necessity – either military necessity or political, since it was feared that the failure of controversial legislation might bring down Asquith's government. But this left Lloyd George able to maintain that the real difference between himself and his rivals in the cabinet was not the latter's strict fidelity to Liberal orthodoxy but merely their record of 'waging war nervelessly'.[22] As Kenneth Morgan has suggested, in this respect, the Liberal schism was arguably 'a matter of temperament rather than ideology'.[23]

More controversially, Lloyd George argued that the policies he had pursued in the prosecution of the First World War were themselves not intrinsically incompatible with Liberal values. This claim was less laughable than it might at first glance appear. A. J. P. Taylor suggested that Liberals struggled to respond effectively to the challenge of the First World War because of their commitment to 'free enterprise' and 'laissez faire' principles.[24] But the Liberal Party

of the early twentieth century had never been strictly committed to laissez faire governance. In the years following their great general election victory of 1906, the Liberals had pursued (however haltingly and piecemeal) a striking agenda of collectivist social reform. This had included the introduction of old age pensions, national insurance against sickness and unemployment, and the first steps in a Lloyd George-led land campaign, looking at questions of urban housing and rural conditions of labour, as well as new experiments in progressive taxation in the famous 'People's Budget' of 1909.[25] The 'New Liberalism' that had sought to advance and provide an intellectual underpinning for this collectivist and redistributive approach existed in tension with a more established Gladstonian Liberal orthodoxy, whose adherents were alarmed at what they perceived as the emergence of a 'socialistic' tendency within their party.[26] Space thus existed within Liberalism, even before the war, for a sincere debate about the proper scope and powers of the state.

After August 1914, some of Lloyd George's parliamentary supporters, in particular the members of the pro-conscription Liberal War Committee, argued that Edwardian experiments in social policy, as well as longer-established precedents in compulsory taxation and education, served as proof that the principle of state compulsion was in no way antithetical to Liberalism.[27] Lloyd George himself, during a debate on the second Military Service Bill in May 1916, declared himself unconvinced that military conscription was 'inconsistent with the principles of either Liberalism or democracy'.[28] This rhetorical juxtaposition of 'Liberalism' and 'democracy' was significant. Rejecting the association of military conscription with 'Prussianism', Lloyd George presented it as an essentially 'democratic' and egalitarian wartime measure. He characterised his voluntarist critics as inflexible and dogmatic – 'men brought up on the peace-loving precepts of Cobden and Bright and Gladstone', who remained wedded to a mid-Victorian strand of Liberalism that could offer no solutions to the existential challenge of total war.[29] Against this, he sought to root his own support for military compulsion in an older and more timeless tradition of 'liberty and true democracy', arguing that conscription had been a weapon wielded in defence of democracy throughout history, from Ancient Greece, through the *levée en masse* of the French Revolution, to Abraham Lincoln's efforts to save the Union and defeat slavery during the American Civil War.[30]

Needless to say, not all Liberals accepted Lloyd George's elastic interpretation of Liberal and democratic principles, nor did all agree with his reading of history.[31] Many continued to regard conscription as 'a paradigm of the very system they believed themselves to be fighting'.[32] But it is striking that, even in December 1916 when he supplanted Asquith as prime minister, Lloyd George was able to carry the support of a significant portion of the Liberal parliamentary party, including talented and progressive administrators and reformers such as Christopher Addison and H. A. L. Fisher, as well as radical journalists such as C. P. Scott, editor of the *Manchester Guardian*.

It is also striking that one of the defining controversies in Lloyd George's own wartime premiership came in the realm of civil–military relations, in his bitter feud with Sir Douglas Haig, the commander-in-chief of the BEF, and Sir William Robertson, the chief of the Imperial General Staff. During 1915, Lloyd George had found himself closely aligned with the military leadership in his support for conscription. However, he quickly grew disillusioned by the heavy casualties suffered in the BEF's offensives on the Western Front and became increasingly sceptical about the ability of Britain's military commanders to secure victory at an acceptable cost in British lives.

As prime minister, Lloyd George sought to undermine Haig and Robertson's operational autonomy, first by attempting to subordinate the BEF to the overall command of the French commander-in-chief Robert Nivelle, and then, in November 1917, through the creation of a new inter-allied body, the Supreme

War Council, which was intended to coordinate Allied action on the Western Front. In February 1918, Lloyd George manoeuvred Robertson into resigning over the proposed creation of an Allied general reserve, which Lloyd George wanted to place under the control of an executive war board chaired by the French general Ferdinand Foch. In May, however, Lloyd George's struggle with the soldiers was renewed when Major-General Frederick Maurice, a close ally of Robertson who until recently had served as director of military operations at the War Office, published a letter in the press accusing the prime minister of starving Haig of reinforcements and misleading parliament about the strength of the BEF on the Western Front in the lead-up to the great German Spring Offensive.

This feud with the generals placed Lloyd George in a vulnerable position. Robertson and Haig enjoyed the support of the king, the Tory press, and much of the Unionist Party in parliament, including Lord Derby, the war secretary. Robertson's cause was also taken up in the House of Commons by Asquith, who in May 1918 forced a debate over the substance of the Maurice letter, in his most direct challenge to Lloyd George's authority since resigning as prime minister. Lloyd George survived this challenge by presenting his struggle with the generals not simply as a disagreement over strategy between a civilian 'amateur' and military 'professionals' but as a question of confidence in his leadership of the nation. He later went so far as to accuse Robertson of having conspired to overthrow the government and institute a 'military dictatorship'. Such a charge undoubtedly overstated the case, but it allowed Lloyd George to present himself as upholding the 'Liberal' and constitutionally proper position of insisting on civilian political control over the army, while Asquith had been willing to serve as the instrument of the 'military clique' in parliament.[33]

These episodes, and the ways in which Lloyd George sought to defend his actions both at the time and in later years, reveal much about the wartime Liberal crisis and about Lloyd George's own political trajectory. The idea that Liberalism was fundamentally unable to develop a response to the challenge of total war is too simplistic, as is the claim that Lloyd George and those Liberals who followed him abandoned their Liberal principles wholesale. It would be more accurate to see the Liberals as being pulled in different directions after August 1914, divided over how best to balance individual liberty and collective endeavour, and perhaps ultimately disagreeing over what actually constituted core 'Liberal' and 'democratic' values. Lloyd George undoubtedly moved a considerable distance away from orthodox Liberalism during the war, but he retained his radical instincts, and was at pains to justify his actions by appeals to 'democracy' as well as to military exigency.

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There are, of course, obvious reasons for refusing to accept Lloyd George's self-justifications uncritically. He was a skilled and persuasive politician, and his *War Memoirs* were published at a time when he was desperately trying to rehabilitate his own reputation in order to effect a return from the political wilderness. Nevertheless, his arguments about the moral imperative of a war against 'Prussian militarism' carried real force, and his framing of his own actions in pursuit of victory both as necessary and as in keeping with 'democratic' ideas of citizenship and robust state action was by no means intellectually incoherent.

To acknowledge this radical dimension to Lloyd George's wartime politics is also to understand a vital aspect of his relationship

with the Unionist Party during and after the conflict. That relationship was never seamless. Lloyd George's coalition government from the very start represented a coming together of discrete and distinct political factions. Like all coalitions, it was subject to strong centrifugal forces, although it enjoyed some advantages in this respect over its Asquithian predecessor. Asquith in May 1915 had hoped to muzzle Unionist criticism of his government by binding them with shared responsibility for the prosecution of the war (in the process avoiding the prospect of a wartime general election). But he had little respect for the Unionist leadership – he once compared debating with Bonar Law to wrestling with a chimney sweep – and even less interest in sharing real power with them.[34] Accordingly, the coalition administration formed by Asquith kept almost all the key offices of state in Liberal hands.[35] There was little sense of a shared strategic or political vision within the new cabinet. The administration was essentially an artificial and unbalanced stitching together of rival parties, and never established itself as a 'National Government' in any meaningful sense.[36]

The coalition formed by Lloyd George after he succeeded Asquith in December 1916 was both more stable and more cohesive. It rested on a narrower and therefore less fractious parliamentary base, the Asquithian ministers having departed for the Opposition benches (although Lloyd George did retain the support of Arthur Henderson and the Labour Party). Above all, its existence was based on a shared commitment to the vigorous prosecution of the war and the pursuit of military victory. This unity of purpose was a source of significant political strength, but it also meant that the cohesion of the government was to a considerable extent contingent on the crisis of the First World War. Once the war was over, what would hold the coalition together?

In the event, the end of the war came abruptly and somewhat unexpectedly in late 1918. The failure of the German spring offensive, and a successful Allied counterattack launched in August, the Hundred Days Offensive, convinced the German authorities to seek peace. An armistice was signed on 11 November, on terms set by the victorious Allies. The Lloyd George government announced a general election almost immediately after the signing of the armistice. Lloyd George's Liberal ministers met on 12 November and agreed to fight the election as a coalition, but an attempt (of uncertain sincerity) to reconcile with Asquith, to whom Lloyd George offered the lord chancellorship, was rebuffed. The Labour Party also withdrew from the coalition. The 1918 election thus formalised the split in the Liberal Party between supporters of Asquith and Lloyd George. Around 150 of the latter were issued with the coalition 'coupon', a letter of endorsement signed by both Lloyd George and Bonar Law. The election resulted in a landslide victory for the coalition, with the Conservatives providing by far the largest cohort of its strength in the new House of Commons.

The record of Lloyd George's peacetime administration between 1918 and 1922 – its achievements, scandals, and its foreign and domestic policy missteps – is examined in closer detail by other contributors to this issue. The immediate challenges facing the government after December 1918 included the drafting of a peace settlement with the defeated Central Powers, the problem of Ireland, where Sinn Féin had now firmly established itself as the dominant force in Irish Nationalism, and the demobilisation and reintegration into civilian society of millions of British soldiers. Over the longer term, the coalition was anxious to confront the threat of 'socialism' and the rising power of the organised working class. These fears were driven in part by the recent Bolshevik coup in Russia. Closer to home, the government was worried about the electoral advance of the Labour Party, which had now formally committed itself to 'socialism' (even if this was not precisely defined), and the growing power of the trade unions, whose

membership doubled between 1914 and 1920. The war years had seen a sharpening of class tensions, and in particular an increase in middle-class resentment of the working classes who, they believed, had sought to shirk military service (as members of 'reserved occupations') while using the threat of strikes to extract higher wages at a time of national emergency.[37]

In this context, as Kenneth Morgan has observed, the central objective of the coalition government after 1918 was to keep the class war at bay.[38] Many in the Unionist Party leadership regarded Lloyd George as essential to this task. Indeed, Austen Chamberlain wanted not merely coalition with Lloyd George but 'fusion' between the Conservative and Liberal parties in order to contain the Labour threat.[39] The problem was that, in his ideological outlook and political instincts, Lloyd George remained a world away from the Conservative backbenchers and local constituency associations on whose support his government depended. Lloyd George certainly showed himself capable of pursuing illiberal policies during his peacetime premiership, most notoriously in the government's suppression of industrial unrest from 1919 and its toleration of indiscriminate military 'reprisals' against the IRA in Ireland.[40] But in key areas of policy, Lloyd George simply did not think or act like a Conservative. He quickly showed himself ready to resume some of the unfinished business of pre-war Liberalism, including disestablishment of the Church in Wales and the question of land reform, with the Land Settlement (Facilities) Act in 1919 providing smallholdings to ex-servicemen. The tension between Lloyd George and Conservative opinion was particularly evident in the Unionist outrage at the Anglo-Irish Treaty which the prime minister signed in 1921. But this tension was also profoundly destabilising to the government's attempts to pursue a domestic policy agenda that would enable it to retain the support of the cross-class electoral coalition that had returned it to power in 1918.

Between 1918 and 1920, the Lloyd George administration pursued an ambitious programme of social reconstruction, including housing measures, an expansion in national insurance, and the deliberate encouraging of a post-war economic boom, which facilitated the absorption of ex-soldiers into the civilian workforce. However, this entailed levels of taxation and inflation that were simply unacceptable to much of the suburban, salaried, and professional middle class who formed the bedrock of the Conservative Party's electoral support. The result was a middle-class revolt – manifest in the emergence of groups like the Anti-Waste League, which ran candidates against the coalition in a series of by-elections in 1921 – that sufficiently alarmed the government that it eventually, and somewhat reluctantly, embraced a policy of austerity and retrenchment: the famous 'Geddes Axe'.[41] This victory for austerity and the embracing of a deflationary political economy which prioritised the interests of the Conservative middle class at the expense of higher unemployment and an attack on social spending on the workers was also, ultimately, a defeat for the logic of a cross-class coalition against socialism led by Lloyd George.[42]

Despite the ideological compromises he had made during the war and the Liberal shibboleths he had cast aside in pursuit of victory, Lloyd George remained a radical in his temperament, his ideological outlook, and even in his pragmatism. This fact represented a significant structural weakness in his post-war administration, especially once the government was forced to mediate the competing economic demands of different elements in the electoral coalition that had supported it in 1918. Lloyd George retained the loyalty of (almost all) the Unionist leaders who sat with him in cabinet, even in 1922. Yet he never developed any significant depth of loyalty in the wider Conservative Party. After 1918, Conservatives acknowledged Lloyd George's achievement as 'the man who won the war'. But ironically, without the crisis of the First World War to

give it cohesion, the coalition government's foundations were soon revealed to be dangerously shallow.

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1 T. Wilson, *The Downfall of the Liberal Party, 1914–1935* (London, 1966), pp. 36–7. This interpretation of the Liberal decline has been challenged over the years but remains a powerful and well-supported one. In a cogent analysis of British politics during this period published in 2010, Ross McKibbin re-emphasised the extent to which the war presented many Liberals with 'fundamental ideological problems'. See R. McKibbin, *Parties and People: England 1914–1951* (Oxford, 2010), p. 22.

2 A. J. P. Taylor, *Politics in Wartime and Other Essays* (London, 1964), p. 24.

3 Trevor Wilson argued that Lloyd George 'rejected out of hand liberal practices and principles – not to mention Liberal statesmen – when he considered them a hindrance to the war effort': *Downfall*, p. 38.

4 J. M. Keynes, *Essays in Biography* (London, 1933), p. 36.

5 D. Lloyd George, *War Memoirs of David Lloyd George*, new edn. (2 vols, London, 1938), vol. i, p. 448.

6 Ibid., vol. i, pp. 130, 447–9.

7 D. Lloyd George, *Through Terror to Triumph: Speeches and Pronouncements of the Right Hon. David Lloyd George, MP, Since the Beginning of the War* (London, 1914), pp. 10–11.

8 Lloyd George, *War Memoirs*, vol. i, p. 448. [Italics added]

9 M. Brock and E. Brock (eds.), *H. H. Asquith: Letters to Venetia Stanley* (Oxford, 1982), p. 123.

10 M. Johnson, 'Leading from the Front: The "Service Members" in Parliament, the Armed Forces, and British Politics during the Great War', *English Historical Review*, 130/544 (2015), pp. 613–45, at p. 624.

11 D. French, 'The Rise and Fall of 'Business as Usual', in K. Burk (ed.) *War and the State: The Transformation of British Government, 1914–1919* (London, 1982), pp. 7–31.

12 National Archives, CAB 37/124,40: 'Some further considerations on the conduct of the war', memorandum by David Lloyd George, February 1915.

13 Ibid., pp. 807–9; C. Wrigley, 'The Ministry of Munitions: An Innovatory Department', in K. Burke (ed.) *War and the State: The Transformation of British Government, 1914–1919* (London, 1982), pp. 46–51.

14 National Archives, CAB 37/124,40: 'Some further considerations on the conduct of the war', memorandum by David Lloyd George, February 1915.

15 McKenna, Runciman, John Simon, and Sir Edward Grey all threatened to resign from Asquith's cabinet in late 1915 if conscription were introduced (although, as noted below, only Simon followed through on this threat in the end). See J. Turner, *British Politics and the Great War: Coalition and Conflict, 1915–1918* (London, 1992), p. 73.

16 Ibid., p. 73; J. Grigg, *Lloyd George: From Peace to War* (London, 1985), pp. 326–32.

17 *The Nation and Athenaeum*, 22 Jan. 1916, p. 604.

18 M. Bentley, *The Liberal Mind, 1914–1929* (Cambridge, 1977), p. 34.

19 Lloyd George, *War Memoirs*, vol. i, pp. 444–5.

20 M. Johnson, 'The Liberal War Committee and the Liberal Advocacy of Conscription in Britain, 1914–1916', *Historical Journal*, 51/2 (2008), pp. 399–420, at p. 415.

21 Ibid., vol, i, p. 449. In September 1915, Reginald McKenna, the Liberal chancellor of the exchequer in the coalition government, had introduced a raft of duties on luxury imports. Lloyd George probably overstated the 'Protectionist' character of McKenna's budget, but it did represent a controversial watering down of the Liberal commitment to free trade.

22 Ibid., vol. i, pp. 444–5.

23 K. O. Morgan, *Consensus and Disunity: The Lloyd George Coalition Government 1918–1922* (Oxford, 1979), p. 14.

24 A. J. P. Taylor, *English History, 1914–1945* (Oxford, 1965), p. 34.

25 Searle, *A New England*, pp. 366–406.

26 Ibid., p. 395.

27 Johnson, 'The Liberal War Committee', p. 413. It should be noted that leading New Liberal theorists such as J. A. Hobson were fiercely opposed to military conscription during the First World War. See M.

Freeden, *Liberalism Divided: A Study in British Political Thought* (Oxford, 1986), pp. 20–6.

28 Hansard, H.C. Deb. (series 5) vol. 82, col. 180 (1916).

29 Lloyd George, *War Memoirs*, vol. i, p. 444.

30 Hansard, H.C. Deb. (series 5) vol. 82, col. 181 (1916).

31 See, for example, the rebuttal by William Pringle MP in the debate on the Military Service Bill: Hansard, H.C. Deb. (series 5) vol. 82, cols. 184–94 (1916).

32 Bentley, *The Liberal Mind*, p. 26.

33 Lloyd George, *War Memoirs*, vol. ii, pp. 1668–9, 1688–9.

34 R. Jenkins, *Asquith* (London, 1964), p. 367.

35 The premiership, the Exchequer, the Home Office, the Foreign Office, and the new Ministry of Munitions were all retained by Liberals, while Bonar Law had to content himself with the Colonial Office.

36 See, for example, the criticisms levelled at the government by the journalist Lovat Fraser: *Daily Mail*, 2 Aug. 1915.

37 McKibbin, *Parties and People*, pp. 35–6.

38 Morgan, *Consensus and Disunity*, p. 76.

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17 Bridgeman diary, 22 Sep. – 5 Oct. 1921, Bridgeman papers. Bridgeman was first lord of the Admiralty.

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23 The cuts in the education budget were stoutly resisted by Fisher, the education minister (National Archives, CAB 27/72). It is a little-known, but honourable, part of his career in high politics.