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ST. LOE STRACHEY AND THE IDEOLOGY OF FREE TRADE UNIONISM

by

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INTRODUCTION

The home rule controversy of 1886 ushered in a formative period in modern British political history. Gladstone's espousal of home rule for Ireland destroyed the unity of his party and negated the advantages that Liberals expected to gain from the franchise reforms of 1884 and 1885. The Whig faction led by Lord Hartington joined with a smaller group of dissentients led by Joseph Chamberlain, the Radical tribune, and John Bright, the Radical patriarch, in opposing the home rule bill, a measure which they saw as an abdication of British authority and a step towards the abandonment of the Union of 1800. The result was the formation of the Liberal Unionist party--the official product of an unlikely marriage de convenance between the Hartington Whigs and Chamberlain Radicals.

Liberal Unionism has been seen as an "instrumentality" for "the wholesale transfer of personnel, wealth, and influence from the Liberal to the Conservative party."¹ It served also as a halfway-house on the road to conservatism for Liberal intellectuals concerned with the dangers of unbridled democracy or Radical demagoguery.² But the permanence of these defections was not apparent to the dissentient Liberals of 1886. Most, Whig and Radical alike, envisioned

a reunion with their party once home rule was defeated and the G.O.M. retired. They had no idea that the separation would become a divorce--that after a brief period of independence they would merge with the Conservatives in the "Unionist" party that was to dominate British politics in the decade after 1895.

It was, ironically, an internal struggle among the former Liberal rebels of 1886 that was ultimately responsible for eroding the unity and strength of the Unionist party. The Whig element in the party provided the most steadfast opposition to Joseph Chamberlain's attempt after 1903 to convert the party to tariff reform. Chamberlain and Hartington (now the Duke of Devonshire) thus acted out, within the confines of a Unionist government, the denouement of a struggle between Whigs and Radicals that began in the Gladstone ministries.

The history of Liberal Unionism is an aspect of the political history of Britain which has not yet been subject to sufficient exploration. In The Passing of the Whigs,³ Donald Southgate carries his narrative up to the formation of the new party in 1886, and since then, no published study has dealt with the movement in its totality. Several historians, notably Peter Fraser, a biographer of Chamberlain, have explored various aspects of Liberal Unionism with an emphasis on the activities of the tariff reformers.⁴ Alfred M. Gollin, for example, has contributed a valuable

study of J.L. Garvin, the prominent Chamberlainite publicist and editor of the Observer.⁵ The Unionist free traders, the other progeny of Liberal Unionism, have until recently, been neglected by historians of the period. Richard Rempel has corrected that imbalance by emphasizing in Unionists Divided the activities of the free traders and their political values and economic interests.⁶

This study will attempt to provide further evidence for an evaluation of free trade Unionism through a consideration of the ideas and activities of its principal publicist, St. Loe Strachey, the editor of the Spectator.⁷ His career in journalism and politics began with his opposition to home rule in 1886 and spanned the decades to the creation of the Irish Free State in the years following the first world war. During the tariff controversy, he identified the Spectator with the Duke of Devonshire and other free trade Unionists, whose opposition to the program and methods of the Chamberlainites were a stumbling-block to the latter's domination of the Unionist party. Although he welcomed the Liberal victory in the election of 1906 he was drawn back to the Unionist party by his opposition to Liberal policies-- social legislation which he considered "socialistic," the attack on the veto of the house of lords, and, finally, the revival of the home rule issue.

By his own definition, Strachey was a "bottomless Whig"⁸--the apostle of political moderation and individualism. Throughout his career he expressed the concern of his poli-

tical associates with the decline of those values in parliamentary government, a trend signalled by the tightening of party discipline, the waning of the "private member," and the use of closure and the "guillotine" to shorten debate. Strachey saw a cure for the evil of single-chamber government in the principle of "direct democracy." He proposed the popular referendum as a means of bolstering the resistance of the house of lords to drastic legislative changes that did not reflect the will of the people. As the foremost popularizer of the referendum, he played a creative role in its acceptance by the Unionist party during the constitutional crisis of 1910-11. In his constitutional opinions, as well as in his opinions on Ireland, free trade, and social reform, Strachey delineated the ideology of free trade Unionism.

¹Gordon L. Goodman, "Liberal Unionism: The Revolt of the Whigs," Victorian Studies, III (December 1959), 174.

²John Roach, "Liberalism and the Victorian Intellects," Cambridge Historical Journal, XIII, No. 1 (1957), 183-186.

³Donald Southgate, The Passing of the Whigs 1832-1886 (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1962).

⁴Peter Fraser, "The Liberal Unionist Alliance: Chamberlain, Hartington and the Conservatives, 1886-1904," The English Historical Review, LXXVII (January 1962), 53-78; "Unionism and Tariff Reform: The Crisis of 1906," The Historical Journal, V, No. 2 (1962), 149-166.

⁵Alfred M. Gollin, The Observer and J.L. Garvin 1908-1914: A Study in a Great Editorship (London: Oxford University Press, 1960).

⁶Richard Rempel, Unionists Divided: Arthur Balfour, Joseph Chamberlain and the Unionist Free Traders (Hamden, Conn., Archon Books, 1972).

⁷The published sources for the career of St. Loe Strachey are his autobiography, The Adventure of Living (1922), and a posthumous biography by his wife, Amy: St. Loe Strachey--His Life and Papers (1930). The Adventure of Living is characteristic Strachey, revealing much about his personality, political beliefs and literary interests. But in his desire to avoid polemics, he refused to discuss political associates who were still living and omitted any account of his activities as a leading Unionist free trader after 1903. His wife's biography, while more detailed, suffers as well from these self-imposed limitations. My Master's thesis, "John St. Loe Strachey: Unionist Free Trader" (Hunter College, 1966), was based on secondary material available in the United States. Since then, Strachey has been the subject of a study by Harry D. Bralley ["St. Loe Strachey and the Politics of Dilemma: A Study of Political Journalism During the Edwardian Era." Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of South Carolina, 1971]. The focus of Bralley's work is on the tariff reform controversy and Strachey's involvement in Unionist politics from 1900-1914.

⁸Strachey often referred to himself in his correspondence as "a bottomless Whig," a term which he borrowed from Boswell's Life of Johnson. Dr. Johnson, speaking presumably of Edmund Burke said: "Sir, he is a cursed Whig, a bottomless Whig, as they all are now." Strachey, a great admirer of Burke, adopted the epithet to describe himself.

CHAPTER I

THE SHAPING OF AN EDITOR

"I may classify myself as thrice blessed in being brought up in Whig ideas, in a Whig family, with Whig traditions. . . ."1

John St. Loe Strachey was born in Clifton, Somersetshire on February 8, 1860. St. Loe, as he was known by family and friends, spent his childhood in Sutton Court, the old country seat of a family active in English public life and letters since the sixteenth century.² His great-grandfather, Sir Henry, created the modern reputation of the Stracheys. As secretary to Clive, he established an unbroken tradition of Indian service that stretches into the present century.

By the age of Victoria, the Stracheys were securely set in the upper middle class of English society. St. Loe's grandfather Edward was a judge, a diplomat, and a good friend of Thomas Carlyle. Two of his six sons were among the famous band of young men who, under Mountstuart Elphinstone, "served India with something of a religious dedication."³ As members of the Council of India, Sir Richard and Sir John Strachey took part in the administrative reforms that followed the Mutiny, earning the accolade of James Fitzjames Stephen as "the Stracheys that govern

India."⁴

Of the remaining Strachey brothers, Sir Henry served in India as a lieutenant-colonel in the Bengal army, and George Strachey as minister to the court of Saxony. But the most unusual of St. Loe's uncles was William Strachey, who, although serving only five years in India, kept "Calcutta time" for the rest of his life, "rising in the late afternoon and going to bed with the sun."⁵

St. Loe's father, Sir Edward, the eldest of the Strachey brothers, was trained at Haileybury for an Indian career, but a crippling joint disease forced him to settle for the duties and pleasures of a Somerset squire and antiquarian scholar. In 1858 he succeeded his uncle, the second Sir Henry Strachey, as baronet and inherited the Sutton Court estate. For the rest of his life he devoted most of his energies to Somersetshire affairs, serving as magistrate, high-sheriff, and member of the first Somerset county council.

Sir Edward's second wife, Mary Isabella, was the sister of the historian and critic John Addington Symonds. Her sister (St. Loe's aunt Charlotte) was married to the Oxford idealist philosopher T.H. Green. Although an invalid for most of her married life, Mary Isabella had four surviving children: Edward, who succeeded his father as baronet and was later raised to the peerage as the first Lord Strachie; St. Loe; Henry, an artist; and a daughter, Frances.

The intellectual atmosphere of Sutton Court, the

family traditions embodied by Sir Edward, were of crucial importance in shaping the ideals and opinions of St. Loe Strachey. Acknowledging that debt, he intended the childhood chapters of his autobiography to be an "apologia for the country gentleman of moderate means."⁶ But Sir Edward did not conform to the popular literary stereotype of the English country squire. Neither a sportsman nor a huntsman, he relished the contemplative life, and was a student of Greek, Latin, French and Italian literature as well as the author of a book on Hebrew politics. He shared with other members of his family a strong streak of eccentric individuality. An "eager knight errant," his intellectual balance could be easily disturbed by any tale of suffering inflicted by the strong upon the weak.⁷

Sir Edward's quixotic temperament led him in his youth towards Owenite socialism and he was subsequently a disciple and friend of the Christian Socialists Frederick Maurice and Charles Kingsley. While always a loyal member of the Church of England, his opinions were heterodox. He was "a wholehearted disbeliever in hell and its flame" and was critical of sacerdotalism in any form. St. Loe inherited from his father a concern for the spirit of religion as opposed to "ritual or formularies or doctrinal shibboleths."

In politics the young Sir Edward had been a Radical and a partisan in the cause of reform. An abolitionist since childhood, he supported the North during the American

Civil War. In his later years, he was a loyal Gladstonian Liberal, remaining till the end "full of the most earnest zeal for the people's cause." Despite their differences on other subjects, St. Loe would always share his father's commitment to the principles of political democracy in Great Britain.

The Strachey family embodied the ideals of the Enlightenment; "lucidity, good sense, balance and order."⁸ St. Loe found these qualities in the "aura" of Whiggism that pervaded Sutton Court. He identified his family heritage with the historical development of Whig principles:

. . . the principles of Halifax, of Somers, of Locke, of Addison and of Steele--the principles of the Bill of Rights and of "the Glorious Revolution of 1688"; the Whiggism which had its origins in the party of Cromwell and the Independents, of John Milton and Richard Baxter; the party which in its decadence flowered in England in Chatham and William Pitt, and in America in Washington, John Adams and the founders of the Republic.⁹

For Strachey these principles were summarized in the ideal that the will of the majority must always prevail. He saw his father as the personification of that ideal.

It is likely that Sir Edward would have rejected the Whig mantle bestowed by his son. He considered himself a Liberal, at times a Radical, and regarded the Whiggism of his own day, the Whiggism of the great landed aristocrats, as "little better than a specially bad type of Toryism."¹⁰ Even towards the end of his life he was ready to advocate measures that were outside of the Whig tradition. During the debate over the Franchise Bill of 1884, which was

obstructed by the house of lords, he called for the abolition of the veto of that house, on the grounds that the advance of democracy required the popularly-elected chamber to have absolute authority. Mere reform of the house of lords was not the answer--there was no need for the house at all. He wrote:

We have no real use for a "Second Chamber." Its place is in Utopia, not in England. In England there is neither room nor need for it.¹¹

He predicted that the legislative role of the house of lords would suffer the same decline as the executive power of the monarchy. Once deprived of its actual power, the house would live on as a harmless, even useful ornamental survival, symbolizing along with the monarchy "that historical continuity, that progress without revolutionary cataclysms" that was prized by Englishmen.¹²

It is ironic that Sir Edward's son would later defend the house of lords as an essential defense against revolutionary changes in the British constitution that were without the support of the majority of the people. But St. Loe forgave his father's occasional lapses into "Jacobinism" and believed that Sir Edward was still "the best of Whigs":

Moderation, justice, freedom, sympathy with suffering, tolerance, yielded not in the form of patronage, but in obedience to a claim of right which could not be gainsaid,--these were the pillars of his mind.¹³

* * *

St. Loe Strachey's early education was unusual for a boy with his social background. His father's unpleas-

ant memories of the bullying and cruelty of his own public school days made him determined that St. Loe, who was a sickly youth, should be educated at home. He was sent for tutoring to the home of the vicar in the neighboring village of Chewton Mendip. As a result, with the exception of mathematics, his education was extremely haphazard. His handwriting and spelling were the bane of several generations of Spectator editors, while his ignorance of Greek and Latin was a handicap to his university education.¹⁴ But Strachey compensated for the lack of formal training by poring through the volumes in the family library. He acquired, in the process, a passion for Elizabethan poetry and drama that was expressed in a fondness for quotation which was a hallmark of his writing and conversation.

When it came time for matriculation at Oxford, it was obvious that Strachey's classical education was woefully inadequate for the entrance examination. After family consultation, he was sent, at age 17, to live at Oxford with his uncle Professor Green, where he was tutored for Balliol responsions. He remained, to the end, "Greek and Latin proof," despite the sympathetic efforts of two famous classical scholars.¹⁵ He benefitted, nonetheless, from the friendship of his tutors and from the stimulating atmosphere of the Green household.

Strachey saw in his uncle "the working of a great and good mind and a noble character." He was impressed by Green's religious views; the product of a mind which "could

take nothing which had not the sanction of Reason, or . . . of an intuition guarded so closely by Reason, that very little of the mystic elements of faith remained unchallenged."¹⁶ It is curious that Strachey was more influenced by T.H. Green the man than by T.H. Green the philosopher. At a time when his uncle was teaching an entire Balliol generation to question the tenets of political and economic individualism, Strachey fell under the influence of orthodox political economy.¹⁷

After a year of preparation, Strachey passed his responsions and entered Balliol in 1878. Under Benjamin Jowett, the college was then a famous nursery of public men, which welcomed students of varying personalities and from different strata of society. But Strachey believed he was somewhat of an oddity at Balliol. He totally lacked the public school veneer and was as ignorant of sports as he was of the classics. His spontaneity and his naive literary enthusiasms annoyed the Oxford dons. The "Stracheyphobia" which he perceived, was shared by Jowett, who pronounced that St. Loe would never be able to do anything but write "light trifles for the magazines."¹⁸

In spite of his initial setbacks, Strachey looked back upon his Oxford days with great affection, particularly relishing his friendships and the conversations with his classmates. Among his best Balliol friends were Arthur Grant Duff, James Renell Rodd, and Cecil Spring-Rice, all of whom had distinguished diplomatic careers, the latter

serving as ambassador to the United States during World War I. He was friendly with Henry Beeching, later Dean of Norwich, and J.W. MacKail, subsequently an Oxford professor of literature. George Curzon, Edward Grey, and Alfred Milner were also among his Oxford acquaintances.

Strachey's Oxford days were also the source of his political education. When he arrived at Balliol, he was determined to do his part to improve the condition of the poor and find a policy to secure "a better distribution of wealth and of the good things in the world." His politics were colored by his love of poetry. Influenced by Shelley, Swinburne, and Whitman, he was "an ardent if theoretical Republican and Socialist."¹⁹ He supported free trade in principle, but only in so far as it did not contribute to the perpetuation of poverty and injustice. Here again he was much like his father, who was never an orthodox free trader. Sir Edward had taken the Shaftesbury rather than the Manchester position in the controversy over the Factory Acts and never forgave John Bright for referring to the poor as the "residium."²⁰

Strachey's opinions were put to the test by Bernard Mallet, a Balliol classmate who was to be his best life-long friend. He was the son of Sir Louis Mallet, the civil servant and economist who served as Cobden's secretary during the negotiation of the Cobden-Chevalier Treaty. Mallet was drawn to Strachey by the fact that his father, as under-secretary of state for India, was a colleague and friend

of St. Loe's uncles. He had been schooled in political economy and believed that its principles constituted a philosophy relevant to the moral and spiritual as well as the economic life of the nation. After leaving Oxford, he followed his father into the civil service, where he served as commissioner of inland revenue and registrar-general. He was the author of several books, including an authoritative study of British public finance.²¹ In politics, Mallet was a life-long Liberal, though serving in the 1890's as private secretary to Arthur Balfour.

In their first conversation in the Balliol common room, Strachey conveyed to Mallet his passionate hatred for the injustices of the social order. In reply, Mallet argued that the principles of political economy had never been adequately tested, and that "enlightened economists" accepted no responsibility for the inequities of the existing system, which, he claimed, came from disobeying the teachings of free exchange. Strachey later remembered the crux of Mallet's argument as follows:

We want as much as any Socialist to get rid of poverty, misery and destitution. . . . There would be plenty of good things in the world for everybody if we did not interfere with production, and if we did not destroy capital, which would otherwise be competing for labour, not labour for it. By the madness of war, we lay low that which prevents unemployment. We are always preventing rather than encouraging exchanges, the essential sources of wealth. Yet we wonder that we remain poor.²²

Strachey claimed to have greeted these words as a revelation, and with the guidance of his friend he began the study and discussion of the classics of political economy. Free trade

became one of the central convictions of his political beliefs.

* * *

Strachey made up for his inauspicious beginnings at Balliol by graduating in 1882 with a first in modern history. After a year of travel he settled in London to read for the bar at the Inner Temple of Lincoln's Inn. But he was diverted from his legal studies by the lure of journalism. While at Oxford he had written occasional articles and reviews for the Daily News and the Saturday Review, a practice which he continued in London with contributions to the Pall Mall Gazette and the Academy. Then, at the end of 1885, he began his long association with the Spectator. With a letter of introduction from his father, an old friend of the editors, he visited the old Spectator office on Wellington Street and was assigned his first reviews for the weekly.²³

The same impetuous enthusiasm which antagonized his Oxford dons seems to have charmed Richard Hutton and Meredith Townsend. They were impressed with his initial contributions and encouraged him to abandon law for the regular staff of the Spectator, which was an influential, though decidedly stodgy organ of intellectual Liberalism. He needed little persuasion. In 1886, at the age of 26, he began to write weekly leaders, replacing another Balliol man, Herbert Asquith, who resigned to enter politics. It was understood, almost from the start, that Strachey would be groomed as the

future editor of the paper. Townsend advised him not to surrender his prospects "unless somebody offers you a colonial governorship."²⁴ He was promised a half-share of the paper upon the death or retirement of one of the partners.

Strachey's choice of journalism and the Spectator coincided with the major political commitment of his life. In the crisis of home rule his political orientation, obligations and friendships were formed. He turned his back on the Gladstonian traditions and loyalties of his family during the dispute over the first home rule bill. His fathers and brothers remained Liberals, but Strachey followed the political lead of Lord Hartington (later the Duke of Devonshire) and Joseph Chamberlain when they began the cooperation with the Conservatives which produced the Unionist party. In Strachey's account of this decision he compared the union with Ireland to the political union of the American states. He claimed that the bonds that tied England and Ireland were as indissoluble and inviolate as Lincoln, his childhood hero, had believed the ties of Union were. Strachey thought that any change in the relationship between the various parts of the United Kingdom would require the approval of all parts of the British Isles.²⁵ The editors of the Spectator took the same position, ending their paper's support of Gladstone over this issue.

In the general election of 1886, Strachey took his first plunge into politics. He served as election agent

for his Somerset neighbor Henry Hobhouse, a Liberal m.p. who was standing for re-election as a Liberal Unionist. His family connections gave him access to the inner circles of the Liberal Unionist Club, which, under the presidency of Hartington, was maintaining its separate identity as a third political party. The young journalist established contacts with several of the luminaries of the Liberal Unionist camp: Hartington, Chamberlain, George Goschen, Arthur Elliot and the Duke of Argyll.²⁶ He was elected to the executive committee of the Club and edited the party journal, the Liberal Unionist until its demise in 1892.

At this time Strachey met his future wife at a dinner party in London. Amy Simpson was the daughter of Charles Turner Simpson, a London counsellor, and the maternal granddaughter of the economist and poor law commissioner Nassau Senior. They courted during the heat of the home rule controversy and once attended a stormy meeting at Kensington town hall, at which, according to Mrs. Strachey, a gang of toughs left their marks upon her fiancé. They were married on July 13, 1887 and lived for the first years of their marriage with Mr. Strachey's parents.

Through his in-laws, Strachey entered into London literary society. At the Simpson house in Cornwall Gardens he met Robert Browning, W.H. Lecky and Leslie and James Fitzjames Stephen. He also met Matthew Arnold and became a good friend of his nephew, William Arnold, the Gladstonian editor of the Manchester Guardian.²⁷ In 1890 the

Stracheys bought a house at Newlands Corner in Surrey. Mrs. Strachey's recollections of the weekend guests at Newlands indicate the broad range of her husband's acquaintances. Austen Chamberlain, Alfred Milner, James Bryce, Leonard Courtney, as well as the "Fabians," Bernard Shaw, Graham Wallas, and the Webbs, were among those entertained by the Stracheys at their new country home. Beatrice Webb helped to secure Amy Strachey's appointment as the representative of the London County Council on the governing board of the Chelsea Polytechnic, a training school for girls.²⁸

In 1896 Strachey established a friendship which later proved to be of vital importance to his influence in English politics. In the spring, he and his wife sailed for Cairo bearing a letter of introduction from Richard Hutton to Lord Cromer, the great English proconsul in Egypt. The Stracheys were warmly received by Cromer, who had been a colleague of St. Loe's uncles on the Council of India.²⁹ The two men found they had a lot in common. Cromer was a Baring, the member of a Whig family that had long been famous in the world of business and finance. His first cousin was Lord Northbrook, the Viceroy of India. Although family tradition made him a Liberal, his ties to the party were strained during his Egyptian service by bad relations with Gladstone, and broken when the latter declared for Irish home rule. Cromer, according to his biographer, was a confirmed individualist, who mistrusted government interference with the economy. As finance member of the Indian

Council he produced a budget which removed all previous duties.³⁰

Strachey and Cromer were drawn together, despite the great difference in their ages, by political and intellectual affinities. Strachey later recalled:

I had not spent a half hour in his company before I realized that I had at last found a man dealing with great affairs in a great way--not only a man who satisfied me absolutely in theory, but a man with whom I could act unreservedly, because his mind was tuned to the same pitch as mine.³¹

When Strachey returned home, he initiated a steady correspondence with Cromer that lasted until the latter's retirement and return to England in 1907 enabled him to renew and cement their relationship.

At this time Strachey completed his journalistic apprenticeship. Apart from his work at the Spectator he frequently contributed to the Observer, the Manchester Guardian, and the Economist. For several years he wrote leaders for the stately Tory Standard, his only experience in daily journalism. In 1895, George Smith, the publisher, persuaded him to accept the editorship of the Cornhill, a once popular literary magazine that had suffered a period of decline. Strachey relished his adventure with belles lettres and made a number of innovations in the style and format of the magazine during his short tenure as editor.³² He was disappointed when increased responsibilities at the Spectator forced him to give up the Cornhill along with his other journalistic commitments.

With the retirement and death of Richard Hutton in 1897, Strachey became co-editor and half-partner in the Spectator. Alfred Harmsworth, who was building his chain of papers at this time, expressed interest in purchasing the Spectator, but negotiations broke down, evidently because Townsend was reluctant to end the tradition of editor-proprietors. The result pleased Strachey, who wanted the complete editorial independence that would have been impossible with Harmsworth as publisher. In 1898, with Townsend's retirement, he became sole proprietor and editor-in-chief.³³

* * *

Under St. Loe Strachey's direction, the Spectator nearly doubled its subscribers and, with an average weekly circulation of about 20,000 was the most widely read political weekly in Great Britain, with a following throughout the English speaking world, a position it held without serious challenge until the eve of the first World War. The Spectator was successful because it was an "original", the unique reflection of the personality and opinions of its editor. Apart from his work as editor and proprietor, Strachey wrote most of the weekly political leaders. His cousin, James Strachey, who was St. Loe's private secretary for six years, has written a revealing account of his editorial routine. In the early part of each week he was visited by his contributors to discuss the forthcoming issue:

St. Loe was a tremendously fluent talker, producing floods of remarkable ideas and amusing anecdotes-- many of which would have startled the vicarages.

These he poured over the heads of his visitors at top speed, interlaced with detailed instructions about what was to be written in the leader, the sermon, or the review concerned. . . . But this was not all. On Thursday afternoons, silent perhaps for the first time in the week, St. Loe sat back comfortably in a chintz-covered armchair with a pencil in hand, and read through the galley proofs of the whole of the forthcoming issue. He altered a word here and there, he scribbled a fresh sentence in the margin, he struck out a whole paragraph and replaced it with one of his own.³⁴

The result was that every issue of the Spectator, from the "News of the Week" to the short literary notices, bore the stamp of Strachey's distinctive opinions and style. No contributor was safe from his editorial blue pencil, including such respectable stylists as John Buchan, an assistant editor for several years, and James' brother Lytton, who wrote literary reviews and was the paper's first drama critic.

The most characteristic feature of the Spectator style, aside from its rather pontifical manner, was the persistence of certain subjects and themes that Strachey wanted to plant firmly in the public consciousness.³⁵ Themes developed in the leading articles were often continued in capsule form in the book reviews and notes.³⁶ The result was a remarkable sense of continuity. No reader could ever really be in doubt about Strachey's views.

He was proud of the fact that there was "less external influence over the Spectator than over probably any paper in the world."³⁷ He said that this freedom imposed certain moral responsibilities, which he defined as an

obligation to seek out and state the truth regardless of personal consequences. He saw the Spectator as a newspaper of "comment" with the goal of making and directing rather than pandering to public opinion.³⁸ Strachey's editorial positions would antagonize his readers and alienate him from both of the great political parties, but, as his son John has noted, people read the Spectator, not for a mirror of their own opinions, but "to see what Strachey was thinking."³⁹ His success was based on his reputation for independence and sincerity even among those who disagreed with his politics.

¹John St. Loe Strachey, The Adventure of Living: A Subjective Autobiography (London: Hodder and Stoughton Ltd., 1922), p. 34.

²The Stracheys were landed gentry in the reign of Queen Elizabeth. William Strachey (born ca. 1570) was first secretary to the colony of Virginia and helped to draw up its code of laws. John Strachey (1634-1674) was a friend and correspondent of John Locke. St. Loe (pronounced Loo) was named after fifteenth century ancestors who built Sutton Court. The name is said to have derived from the town of St. Laud in Normandy.

³Betty Askwith, Two Victorian Families (London: Chatto and Windus, 1971), p. 29.

⁴Drayton Ford, "J. St. Loe Strachey: Editor of the Spectator," The Bookman, 37 (January, 1910), 173.

⁵Askwith, Two Victorian Families, p. 100.

⁶Strachey Papers, Beaverbrook Library, London. Strachey to Sir Edward Grey, 21 December 1922.

⁷This account of the character of Sir Edward Strachey is based on St. Loe Strachey's recollections of his father. [Adventure of Living, pp. 39-47, 75.]

⁸Charles Richard Sanders, The Strachey Family 1588-1922: Their Writings and Literary Associations (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1953), p. 4.

⁹Strachey, The Adventure of Living, p. 34.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 35.

¹¹Spectator 57 (July 26, 1884), 977.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Strachey, Adventure of Living, p. 35.

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 124-125.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 136. Strachey's tutors and lifelong friends were Henry Nettleship, later Regius Professor of Latin and the biographer of T.H. Green, and Sir Herbert Warren, later President of Magdalen College.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 137.

¹⁷Melvin Richter, The Politics of Conscience: T.H. Green and His Age (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1964).

- ¹⁸Adventure of Living, p. 145.
- ¹⁹Ibid., pp. 159-160, 165.
- ²⁰Ibid., p. 162.
- ²¹Bernard Mallet, British Budgets 1887-8 to 1912-13 (London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd., 1913).
- ²²Strachey, Adventure of Living, p. 161.
- ²³Ibid., pp. 2-3. The Spectator founded in 1828 as a voice of political reform, with the financial support of the Radicals, Joseph Hume and Douglas Kinnaird. Under its first editor, Robert Stephen Rintoul, the originator of the slogan "the Bill, the whole Bill, and nothing but the Bill," it established its position among the foremost literary and political weeklies of the reform era. After a brief decline following Rintoul's death in 1858, it revived in the years after 1860 under the co-editorship of Hutton and Townsend. [William Beach Thomas, The Story of the Spectator 1828-1928 (London: Methuen and Co., Ltd., 1928), p. 74.]
- ²⁴Amy Strachey, St. Loe Strachey: His Life and His Paper (New York: Brewer and Warren, 1930), p. 18.
- ²⁵Strachey, Adventure of Living, pp. 442-443.
- ²⁶Ibid., p. 189.
- ²⁷Strachey, Adventure of Living, pp. 280-282.
- ²⁸Amy Strachey, St. Loe Strachey, pp. 62-63.
- ²⁹Strachey, Adventure of Living, p. 368.
- ³⁰The Marquess of Zetland, Lord Cromer (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1932), pp. 11-12.
- ³¹Strachey, Adventure of Living, p. 367.
- ³²Ibid., chapter XV. One of his Cornhill discoveries was Walter De La Mare.
- ³³Amy Strachey, St. Loe Strachey, pp. 88-91. Strachey had no capital of his own and borrowed to buy Hutton's share of the paper. He acquired complete control in 1898 with an agreement to pay a fixed sum to Townsend's estate upon the latter's death.
- ³⁴Lytton Strachey, Spectatorial Essays (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1964, 1965), preface by James Strachey, pp. 8-9. The Spectator was an object of

fun for the younger members of the Strachey family, who applied the term "Spectatorial" "to any particularly pompous and respectable pronouncement."

³⁵Some indication of the range of Strachey's editorial enthusiasms can be seen in this lampoon which appeared in 1914.

"The Spectator"

The only organ of Didactic Individualism
The Champion of Free Trade, Universal
Service and the Referendum.
No cross headings, interviews or portraits.
The Animal's Friend
Equally detested by Post-Impressionists,
High Anglicans, Nationalists, Socialists,
Three-Colour Printers and Mr. Lloyd George.
The World put (right) before you every week.

Six-pence, or the price of six "British Weeklies."
[Edward Vertall Lucas and Charles Larcom Graves, All the Papers--A Journalistic Review (London: Putnam and Sons Ltd., 1914). p. 16.]

³⁶Strachey justified this repetition by quoting Cobden to the effect that "the only way to get an idea into the heads of the British public was to say it a hundred times in different words." J.B. Atkins, "Reminiscences of the Spectator Office," Spectator 141 (November 3, 1928), 18.

³⁷Strachey Papers, Northcliffe file, Strachey to Ernest Dykes n.d.

³⁸Strachey, Adventure of Living, pp. 294-298.

³⁹Spectator 141 (November 3, 1928), 14, supplement, "The Centenary of the Spectator."

CHAPTER II

THE LIBERAL UNIONIST

St. Loe Strachey's Spectator accurately reflected the political outlook of Liberal Unionism in the decades following the home rule split of 1886. As a young leader writer and later as editor, Strachey's political opinions were shaped in the heat of controversy over home rule, free trade, empire and social legislation. His editorials betray their journalistic origins, lacking intellectual depth and originality, but they were simple and clear and often expressed in the language of Gladstonian idealism, even on the issues where he was most at odds with the mainstream of the Liberal tradition. He regarded himself as a political moderate, a "bottomless Whig," and his ideal was Lord Halifax, the "Trimmer," a patriotic compromiser who worked for a specific good cause with those who disagreed with him on other matters.¹

His contemporary political model was Lord Hartington, later the Duke of Devonshire, the patrician Whig statesman who led the Liberal Unionist secession in 1886. Hartington lacked the dash, ambition and intense personal pride of the "Ruperts of debate," the great aristocratic leaders of the past. He was "quiet, sober-minded, reasonable, judicious"; qualities associated with the businesslike middle class, rather than the aristocracy.² He stood above the fire of party antagonisms,

respected by his enemies as well as his allies. In Strachey's opinion, Hartington

. . . has always dealt with the question, not with the men, and has endeavored to solve the real question at issue, not to secure a party triumph--to bring advantage to the nation, not to gain a personal victory over an opponent.³

While Hartington and Strachey both regarded themselves as Whigs, there were significant temperamental and intellectual differences between the two men. Hartington's phlegmatic brand of politics often frustrated Strachey. There was a strain of fanaticism in his nature, as John Buchan who knew him well later observed.⁴ When the causes closest to his heart--the union with Ireland and free trade--were threatened, he responded with the fervor of a true believer.

More importantly, Hartington and Strachey differed in their understanding of the Whig values they espoused. In 1883 Hartington expressed his sense of the Whig tradition:

I admit that the Whigs are not the leaders in popular movements, but the Whigs have been able, as I think to the great advantage of the country, to direct, and guide, and moderate those popular movements. They have formed a connecting link between the advanced party and those classes which, possessing property, power,⁵ and influence, are naturally averse to change. . . .

To be sure, Strachey accepted this traditional view of the historic role of Whiggism. But his own politics were an amalgam of Whiggery, his father's unconventional, often Radical views, and his own peculiar vision of popular democracy. In this curious hodgepodge of ideas and traditions, Cromwell, Lincoln and Theodore Roosevelt joined Halifax, Locke and Burke in the Whig pantheon.

While Strachey defined the essence of Whiggery as the notion that "the will of the majority must always prevail," contemporaries did not see the connection between democracy and the Whig tradition. The Edinburgh Review praised the Whigs for their "habitual reserve towards the people" and rejoiced that they had never accepted the modern doctrine that "legislation is to be dictated by public opinion."⁶ But Strachey rarely seemed aware that there might be a conflict between his acceptance of democracy and his adherence to Whig principles. His blending of the two traditions was later manifested in his campaign for the referendum, a device by which constitutional legislation would be referred directly to the people by the aristocratic house of lords.

* * *

Strachey was first and foremost a Liberal Unionist. He received his political baptism during the first home rule controversy, and the Irish question continued to be the touchstone of his politics. When, after 1895, home rule was no longer an immediate question, his free trade opinions led him away from the Unionist party. He rejoined that party when the threat to the union was Ireland was renewed.

What explains this single-minded preoccupation with the home rule issue? His family did not share his militancy on the question. Sir Edward remained a loyal Liberal till his death in 1901, and his eldest son Edward, later Lord Strachie, entered the house of commons as a Liberal in 1892 and later served in the Asquith ministry as secretary to the

board of agriculture and postmaster general. St. Loe's closest friend, Bernard Mallet, who had converted him to free trade, saw no reason to desert the Liberal party over home rule.

Part of the explanation for Strachey's earliest and most important political choice can be found in the atmosphere of the London journalistic and literary world that he entered at the time of the home rule controversy. Fresh from Oxford, he stepped from one venerable Victorian institution, the Strachey family, to another quite as formidable--the Spectator. Its editors, Richard Hutton and Meredith Townsend were reluctantly severing their close personal and political ties with Gladstone to espouse the cause of the Union. Through his association with the Spectator Strachey was a witness to and a participant in the birth of Liberal Unionism. He later recalled in his autobiography:

My conversion was not in any way sought by my new friends and chiefs at The Spectator office, though they at once took the Unionist side. I have no doubt, however, that my intercourse with Hutton and Townsend had its effect, though I also think that my mind was naturally Unionist in politics.⁷

Strachey's "natural" inclination to Unionism was reinforced by his contacts in London's intellectual and literary society, which, once Liberal in persuasion, was now embracing the Unionist cause. Men of the caliber of Lecky, the Stephens, and Lord Arthur Russell were decidedly unsympathetic to home rule.⁸

Strachey's friendship with A.V. Dicey was another important influence on his Irish views. Dicey, the Vinerian professor of English Law at Oxford, was, like Strachey, the

member of an old Whig family.⁹ During the home rule controversy he earned a reputation as the most prominent defender of the Union outside of parliament. Strachey regarded his England's Case Against Home Rule (1886) as "the most influential contribution to an important political question since the publication of the American Federalist Papers."¹⁰ In that book, Dicey argued that home rule would mean the end of the sovereignty of parliament and the beginning of a revolutionary process that would "unloose the ties which bind together the huge fabric of the British Empire."¹¹ This argument appealed to Strachey who also suspected that home rule was a halfway house to full Irish independence and a signal for imperial disintegration.

As an English nationalist Strachey was unsympathetic to the national aspirations of the Irish. He viewed home rule as retrogressive--a step towards "particularism" and away from the advances of civilization that had been breaking down the obstacles that kept Englishmen, Scotsmen and Irishmen apart. Strachey full agreed with Dicey's comment:

We are living in 1886, not 1782; the nineteenth century is not the age for small States or for weak States.¹²

Characteristically, Strachey expressed his opposition to home rule in the language of democracy. He declared that his Unionism was the natural product of his belief that the "will of the majority" must prevail. The main thrust of his argument against all three home rule bills was that there could be no change in the relationship between the various

parts of the British nation without the approval of the electors of the entire nation. If Ireland could leave the union at the wishes of her electors, so might Scotland and Wales and even the outlying portions of England. The result would be "a veritable apotheosis of political fissiparousness."¹³

Concern for the rights of the Protestants of Ulster was another consideration in Strachey's opposition to home rule. Ireland, he noted, was not a homogenous nation. There were two Irelands:

. . . the Ireland of the Protestant Teuton and the Ireland of the Catholic Celt--the Ireland of idle thriftlessness and the Ireland of industry and enterprise--the Ireland of dreams and sentiment and the Ireland of seriousness and common sense.¹⁴

Neither of these Irish "nations" could be justly subjected to the other, but both could be peacefully united through the maintenance of the union with England, Scotland and Wales.

In the autumn of 1890 Strachey visited Dublin and Belfast. He came back, according to Mrs. Strachey, "determined to oppose any Home Rule Bill from which Ulster was not excluded."¹⁵ After a second trip on the eve of Gladstone's second home rule bill, he set himself the task of making the British public understand the mood of the Ulstermen. Parliament, he argued, might eject Northern Ireland from the union, but it had no moral right to subject the Ulster Protestants to a Dublin parliament. Home rule, a measure intended to pacify Ireland, would succeed only in provoking rebellion.

Ulstermen would justifiably invoke "the sacred right of insurrection against intolerable injustice."¹⁶ He saw no bluff in the slogan "Ulster will fight, and Ulster will be right."

A less public but nonetheless important element in Strachey's hostility to home rule was his low opinion of the Irish, a prejudice he shared with many Englishmen of his class and time. In Strachey's eyes, the southern Irish were bigoted, priest-ridden, undemocratic and prone to violence; in other words, unfit to govern themselves. Home rule would abandon the Protestant minority to the rule of "the most unenlightened and bigoted Catholic population on the face of the earth."¹⁷ He was sensitive to insinuation that prejudice was at the root of his opposition to home rule. Theodore Roosevelt, Strachey's American friend, noted that Englishmen looked upon the Irish in much the same way that the Magyars regarded the Slavs, the Germans the Poles, believing that "the Lord has created them superior and that it is impious for others not to accept this view."¹⁸ Strachey objected to the comparison. "What I do see," he replied, "is that many Irishmen regard Englishmen with a social loathing and hatred which I cannot in the least feel for them."¹⁹

But despite this denial, there was a large measure of condescension, even distaste, in Strachey's attitude towards the Irish. He was, in fact, oblivious to most national sensibilities. Essentially an "English" patriot,

he could never understand why any Briton would object to being called English. The bond of the English language was, after all, "stronger than the claim of birth for a Saxon, a Kelt, or a Gael."²⁰ His insensitivity was noted by Lord Balfour of Burleigh, the Scottish Unionist peer, who gently chided Strachey for his persistent use of "England" rather than "Great Britain" in the Spectator.²¹

As editor of the Liberal Unionist, Strachey contributed to the tactical debate within the Unionist camp following the home rule split of 1886. The first issue appeared shortly after the "Round Table Conference" of January and February 1887 failed to reconcile Joseph Chamberlain and his followers with the Liberal party. In his lead editorial, Strachey stated that reunion was impossible so long as Gladstone continued the Parnellite alliance. No liberal Unionist would recognize "the exclusive right of the Irish representatives to decide what shall be done for Ireland."²²

Strachey took a negative position on proposals for an Irish compromise based upon the federal principle.²³ Joseph Chamberlain's national councils scheme, later known as "home-rule-all-round," would give Ireland a large measure of self-government in a system of national councils or provincial chambers throughout Britain, modelled after the Canadian Constitution of 1867. The scheme was eminently democratic and, it could be argued, was a broadening of the principle of elected local government that would be put into practice by the Salisbury Government in 1888 and extended to

Ireland in 1898.

At first Strachey was cautiously neutral. He distinguished between home rule, which he regarded as a surrender of parliamentary government, and local government which was only its delegation. While home rule catered to nationalism by creating a legislature representing the whole Irish people, local government was only the management of local affairs by bodies strictly subordinate to parliament. To ensure the supremacy of parliament, Unionists had to insist upon a strict definition of the subordinate and delegate nature of the local body, rendering it "incapable of usurping or being invested by popular sentiment, with a national or quasi-national character."²⁴

These reservations were made more explicit in the Spectator. Strachey argued that Chamberlain's plan could not work as a form of local government because the Irish would regard it as a concession to nationalism. Federalism would encourage the demand for complete independence. Britain, he concluded, could not adopt the federal principle without reversing the entire history of her political development.²⁵ But this did not preclude the eventual grant of a safe degree of local government to Ireland:

When once disorder and discontent are driven from Ireland, and its people have become as loyal and as law abiding as those of Scotland, all Unionists will be eager to confer upon them as liberal a system of self-government as is enjoyed in other portions of the United Kingdom.²⁶

Strachey would not only strictly define and limit Irish

local government, he would defer it to an indefinite future.

Strachey also took part in the ongoing discussion of the relationship between the Liberal Unionist and Conservative parties, advocating that the Liberal Unionists retain their separate organization and identity. In 1887, the National Review was advising Liberal Unionists to draw closer to the Salisbury government and thus ward off the danger to the union with Ireland by common action and organization. To Strachey, this was "inopportune" advice, against the long term interests of both parties. By acting independently, Liberal Unionists could appeal to a wider section of the electorate. The existence of the party had prevented a large number of Liberals who refused to vote Conservative from drifting back to the ranks of the Liberal party.²⁷ The independence of Liberal Unionism also emphasized the national and non-party nature of the struggle. Unionists needed, according to Strachey, a joint program of action rather than a common organization. He suggested that Unionists move from the negative emphasis on the Irish question, to other subjects that were in the public interest, such as social reform.

Gladstone's second home rule bill convinced most Liberal Unionists that a merger with the Conservatives was inevitable. The demise of the Liberal Unionist in September 1892, after the defeat of the Conservative government in the general election, symbolized this trend. It was decided that the fusion between the two sections of Unionism was "too complete for so technical a paper to be carried on."²⁸

Strachey was disappointed but continued to argue for alliance instead of fusion.²⁹ He did not want to see a complete merger until the threat to the union was ended. A continued alliance would prevent the identification of the opposition to home rule exclusively with the Tory party.

Ultimately, the Liberal Unionists chose to maintain formal independence while drawing into their closest cooperation with the Conservatives since 1886. When the Unionists returned to power in 1895, Liberal Unionist m.p.s took their seats for the first time on the government benches, while their leaders, including Devonshire and Chamberlain, took office in what was now officially referred to as a "unionist" ministry. The Liberal Unionist Association continued, however, until its formal amalgamation with the Conservative party in 1912.

* * *

The home rule controversy convinced Strachey that there were defects in British representative government that allowed the will of the majority to be thwarted, even on questions of such fundamental importance as home rule. The Liberal Unionist revolt in 1886 and the subsequent resistance of the house of lords prevented home rule from being pushed through against the will of the majority of the nation. But Strachey was concerned about the drift towards single-chamber government which he detected in the power of the cabinet over a compliant party majority in the house of commons. The closure and the guillotine were being applied increasingly

to shorten debate. Party discipline was, at the same time, increasing from year to year with almost arithmetical precision. Individual m.p.s voting the "wrong way" were in danger of being branded by their party whips as "turncoats and political traitors." The circumstances seemed to Strachey carefully devised "to render it easy for party chiefs to lead the people into doing what they do not want to do."³⁰ Although his criticism echoed that of more conservative critics such as Henry Maine and James Fitzjames Stephen, Strachey refused to see these developments as the inevitable consequences of the democratic franchise. He desired a parliamentary system that was more rather than less responsive to "the will of the majority legally and justly expressed." But Strachey was not a political theorist. He looked for direct and practical solutions to problems. As a panacea for the ills of parliamentary government he turned to the referendum. For over three decades it was the identifying feature of his editorial policy.

Strachey's attraction to the referendum was another by-product of his friendship with Albert Venn Dicey, the man who first brought the device to the attention of the British public. Dicey's interest in the referendum had been stirred by the outcry against the house of lords that followed its obstruction of the franchise bill of 1884, an agitation which culminated in John Bright's proposal for the limitation of the house of lords to a suspensory rather than an absolute veto.

Although this particular quarrel was settled amicably, Dicey was pessimistic about its meaning for the future. He foresaw a decline in parliamentary politics if no check were imposed upon what he regarded as the "tyranny" of the party majority. One possible check was the house of lords, to him the traditional guardian of the constitution. But the events of 1884 demonstrated how fragile that "bulwark" might be in the face of an organized assault by "the Democracy." He suggested the use of the referendum to settle disputes between the two houses of parliament, but, not as yet convinced of its efficacy, he suspected that it might be "one of the more dubious devices of Swiss democracy."³¹ Dicey therefore neglected to define the circumstances in which or the method by which the referendum could be introduced into the British system of government.

The home rule bill of 1886 removed Dicey's doubts about the referendum. Some institution was needed to bolster the resistance of the house of lords to legislation that did not reflect the will of the nation. In A Leap in the Dark, he recommended that Gladstone's second home rule bill be submitted to popular referendum,³² arguing that the referendum had the advantage of being strictly democratic and yet essentially conservative at the same time. The "sovereignty of the nation" had to be called upon to combat the danger that "sections or classes would arrogate to themselves authority which belongs to the State." Dicey encouraged Strachey to promote the referendum as "the only check on

party management which is in perfect harmony with democratic sentiment."³³

Strachey, like Dicey, believed that parliamentary government had become "a very vicious form of government by party."³⁴ He pointed to "a deep distrust of representative bodies" that was growing in Europe and America. To remedy this decline, he predicted that:

Democracy will desire . . . to devise some method at once more final than a dispute in words, something which can coerce all the parties and compel all who are struggling to cease their disputation and obey.³⁵

That "something" could only be the referendum. Every constitution required some form of veto, and in a democracy that power had to rest ultimately with the people.³⁶ The referendum would be most useful as a supplement to parliamentary action, as "the very simplest way of terminating a dispute between Lords and Commons."³⁷ The house of lords, acting as "the people's remembrancer" was the proper agency to initiate the appeal to the people. Strachey hesitated to define strictly the nature of the measures to be submitted, thinking that, as a matter of constitutional etiquette, the house of lords should submit only those bills involving constitutional changes.³⁸ These could be referred without necessitating a dissolution and general election. The referendum would enable voters to distinguish between support of a government and support of a particular bill introduced by that government.³⁹

Most Englishmen regarded the referendum as an exotic Swiss plant that could never flourish in English soil. Henry

Maine, the influential conservative constitutional authority, dismissed it as inapplicable to British parliamentary practice.⁴⁰ Strachey could not agree; he found a place for the referendum within the British political tradition, dating back to the English Civil War, when the Council of the Army of the Commonwealth sought to restrain "single-chamber government" by placing a demand for popular approval of constitutional changes into the "Agreement of the People."⁴¹ The referendum was revived in revolutionary America and incorporated into most state constitutions, where it flourished as "a home-grown institution, directly derived from those English principles of Government which the first settlers took with them as they took their language and their social habits."⁴²

Strachey had other proof of the proper "Englishness" of the referendum that was more convincing than such historical antecedents. He insisted that it was in harmony with contemporary constitutional practice regarding the veto power of the house of lords:

It is at the moment almost, if not quite, an admitted constitutional custom, that the Lords, though they have not the right to reject legislation absolutely, have a right to demand an ad hoc dissolution.⁴³

In the case of legislation which it determined was contrary to the wishes of the nation, the house of lords would exercise its veto, appealing from the majority in the house of commons to the nation itself. The Government of the day could pass its bill only by dissolving parliament and seeking the verdict of the electors at a general election.

In using this language, Strachey had in mind Lord

Salisbury's referendal theory of the role of the house of lords.⁴⁴ The theory had emerged during the debate over the Irish Church Bill in 1869, which followed Gladstone's impressive victory in a general election fought on the issue of disestablishment. In the house of lords, Salisbury opposed further obstruction, noting that "the nation had decided against the Protestant ascendancy in Ireland." He argued that the house had no choice but to give the bill a second reading. But this did not mean that the house of lords would always accept the will of the house of commons:

It may be that the House of Commons in determining the opinion of the nation is wrong; and if there are grounds for entertaining that belief, it is always open to this House, and indeed it is the duty of this House to insist that the nation be consulted. . . . We must decide whether the House of Commons does or does not represent the full, the deliberate, the⁴⁵ sustained convictions of the body of the nation.

Lord Salisbury thus marshalled the principles of direct democracy in the service of the constitutional prerogatives of the house of lords. The referendal theory gave a new vitality to that chamber and was an important element in parliamentary politics until the parliament act of 1911.

The main objection to Lord Salisbury's theory was that, in practice, the house of lords insisted on its referendal function only in response to Liberal legislation. This was dramatically evidenced during the Gladstone and Rosebery ministries of 1892-1895. Since the first home rule bill most Whig peers had deserted the Liberal party, producing a house of lords that was overwhelmingly Unionist in composition. As a result, the second home rule bill was

defeated by a lopsided margin, and the peers produced amendments that struck at the heart of the parish councils and employer's liability bills, causing the latter to be withdrawn entirely. This defiance revived Liberal calls for a curtailment of the Lords' veto, and provoked Lord Rosebery to promise to seek a popular mandate that would enable the house of commons to assert its position as the "predominant partner" in the constitution.⁴⁶

In response to the threats against the veto of the house of lords, Conservative leaders gave favorable consideration to the referendum as a safety measure. While Arthur Balfour stopped short of admitting that it was an absolutely essential innovation, he predicted that it would become so if the house of lords were "checked in the exercise of its constitutional duties."⁴⁷ At the same time Lord Salisbury was asserting that he would welcome the referendum as a "constitutional court of appeal for the country."⁴⁸ The Rosebery Government was, however, in no position to make good on its threats against the house of lords. It could not restrict the powers of that house without "a great wave of popular feeling sufficient to sweep away all barriers and ancient landmarks."⁴⁹ The General Election of 1895 gave no evidence of such feeling. The Rosebery Government was defeated and a large Unionist majority returned to the house of commons.

Strachey did not see this victory as a reversal of the deeper trend towards single-chamber government. He

viewed the popularity and strength of the house of lords as the fleeting result of its opposition to home rule. In the future, bills in the house of commons would be passed more frequently by closure, while "the authority of the house of lords as a chamber of revision will wane instead of growing or remaining where it is."⁵⁰ Although the peers had stopped home rule cold, there was no guarantee that they could do so when a stronger and more popular Liberal government were in office. Dire consequences would follow if the peers rejected legislation that was popularly supported. In the long run, the only effective check on the house of commons was the referendum. Strachey urged the house of lords to show the nation that they were "as good and probably a good deal better democrats than the Gladstonians."⁵¹ He advised them to introduce a bill making the referendum a permanent part of the constitutional machinery. Its rejection would unmask those who "usurp the forms without the spirit of popular government."⁵² Its passage, on the other hand, would make home rule impossible, for, he argued, it could not stand the test of the poll of the people.

Strachey's appeal stimulated a series of replies in the March number of the National Review. Decey was the only favorable commentator, defending the referendum as a cure for the defects of parliamentary government resulting from "the unchecked though temporary supremacy of any party which can gain a majority in the House of Commons."⁵³ But George Curzon, a former classmate of Strachey's at Balliol, present-

ed the most telling criticism of the referendum. It could, he argued, weaken the foundations of parliamentary government and produce evils worse than it was proposed to cure. He disliked any proposal that would convince the electorate of its infallibility and encourage it to dispense with "informed and independent direction." As for Strachey's "kill home rule" argument, Curzon believed it to be morally indefensible:

Because Mr. Gladstone aspires to revolutionize the Constitution in one direction, there can be no necessity for us, in order to defeat him, to revolutionize it in another.⁵⁴

Curzon's arguments would later be repeated by Liberal critics of the referendum. But by that time a real threat to the power of the peers had caused him to change his mind about the device.

Strachey was confirmed in his view that the referendum was entering the realm of practical politics by the favorable speeches of Salisbury and Balfour.⁵⁵ Lord Salisbury's statements were quoted in Conservative Party campaign literature, which Strachey took to be a sign that the referendum was "inscribed on the Conservative banner."⁵⁶ But there was no attempt to legislate the referendum into existence during the decade of Unionist ascendancy that followed the election of 1895. This lent credence to the charge that the house of lords acted as an auxiliary to the Conservative party, using its veto only to block Liberal legislation.

Many looked to house of lords reform to correct this bias, but Strachey thought that the peers should be left alone. He was not enthusiastic about schemes to convert the

house into a sort of "Atheneum Club" comprised of elected members and various public dignitaries.⁵⁷ The English public would not consent to a second chamber with powers subtracted from the house of commons. It was better, he argued, to let the peers survive as "a picturesque body" with the useful function of initiating the referendum. But his advice was ignored, and, in fact, neither the referendum nor house of lords reform received much attention until after 1905, when they were revived under circumstances that were much less favorable to the Unionist party.

- ¹Strachey, Adventure of Living, p. 434.
- ²Liberal Unionist III (March 1, 1889), 125.
- ³Ibid.
- ⁴Spectator, 145 (October 18, 1930), 549.
- ⁵Bernard Holland, The Life of Spencer Compton, Eighth Duke of Devonshire (London: Longman's, Green, 1911), Vol. I, pp. 405-406.
- ⁶Southgate, Passing of the Whigs, p. 418.
- ⁷Adventure of Living, p. 9
- ⁸Roach, "Liberalism and the Victorian Intelligentsia," 79-80.
- ⁹His father, Thomas Edward Dicey, a prominent Whig reformer, was proprietor and editor of the Northampton Mercury, a paper which gave a loyal, if critical support to the Liberal party until 1886.
- ¹⁰Liberal Unionist I (May 4, 1887), p. 90. Dicey's other contributions to the struggle against home rule were: Letters on Unionist Delusions (1887), A Leap in the Dark (1893), and A Fool's Paradise (1913).
- ¹¹A.V. Dicey, England's Case Against Home Rule, third edition (London: John Murray, 1887), p. 134.
- ¹²Ibid., p. 137.
- ¹³Adventure of Living, p. 443.
- ¹⁴Nineteenth Century XXXI (February 1892), 883.
- ¹⁵Amy Strachey, St. Loe Strachey, p. 47.
- ¹⁶Nineteenth Century XXXI (February 1892), 884.
- ¹⁷Liberal Unionist I (May 18, 1887), 120.
- ¹⁸Strachey Papers, Theodore Roosevelt to Strachey, 22 February 1915. Strachey a great admirer and friend of the United States, initiated a correspondence with Roosevelt, then Governor of New York, in the 1890's. When in 1901 Roosevelt succeeded to the Presidency after McKinley's assassination, the Stracheys were his guests at the White House.
- ¹⁹Ibid., Strachey to Roosevelt, 19 March 1915.

²⁰Ibid., Balfour of Burleigh to Strachey, 20 May 1907.

²¹J. St. Loe Strachey, Industrial and Social Life and the Empire (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1895), p. 122.

²²Liberal Unionist I (March 30, 1887), 8.

²³Chamberlain made this proposal in a meeting of Gladstone's cabinet in May 1885 and made it public in his "Unauthorized Programme" during the general election of that year. It was later the basis for discussion at the unsuccessful attempt to reunify the Liberal Party in 1887. Michael Hurst, Joseph Chamberlain and Liberal Reunion: The Round Table Conference of 1887 (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1967).

²⁴Liberal Unionist II (October 1, 1887), 41.

²⁵Spectator 60 (February 19, 1887), 251-252. It is interesting that Strachey's advocacy of the referendum would be also criticized as contrary to the British political tradition.

²⁶Liberal Unionist II (June 1, 1888), 170.

²⁷Ibid., 2 (August 3, 1887), 11. See also 3 June 1, 1889), 182-183.

²⁸Amy Strachey, St. Loe Strachey, p. 71.

²⁹Nineteenth Century 37 (June 1895), 904-917

³⁰Spectator 71 (December 23, 1893), 904-905. For a discussion of these developments by contemporary constitutional authorities, see: A. Lawrence Lowell, The Government of England (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1926); Sidney Low, The Governance of England (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1913).

³¹Robert S. Rait, ed., Memorials of Albert Venn Dicey (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1925), p. 122.

³²A.V. Dicey, A Leap in the Dark (2nd ed., London: John Murray, 1911), pp. 189-190.

³³Strachey Papers, Dicey to Strachey, 29 January 1894.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Spectator 63 (October 5, 1889), 425-426.

³⁶Ibid., 72 (February 10, 1894), 189.

³⁷Ibid., 63 (October 5, 1889), 426.

³⁸Ibid., 72 (February 10, 1894), 188-189.

³⁹Ibid., 71 (September 30, 1893), 426-27.

⁴⁰Benjamin Lippincott, Victorian Critics of Democracy (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1938), pp. 167, 457-459.

⁴¹John St. Loe Strachey, The Referendum: A Handbook to the Poll of the People, Referendum or Democratic Right of Veto on Legislation (London: T. Fisher Unwin Ltd., 1924), pp. 16-21.

⁴²Samuel Robertson Honey, The Referendum Among the English (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1912), Introduction by Strachey, p. xx. Strachey also found an advocacy of the referendum within his own family. He published excerpts of a scheme for house of lords reform written by Nassau Senior, recommending a referendum in cases of disagreement between the two houses of parliament. The Liberal Unionist 4 (February 1, 1890), 123-24.

⁴³Spectator 72 (February 10, 1894), 189.

⁴⁴The following discussion is indebted to Professor Corinne C. Weston's paper, "The Conservative Party and Democratic Ideology Before 1914," presented to Conference of British Studies, regional meeting in Ohio, April 1971.

⁴⁵³ Hansard cxcvii, 83-5. Cited in H.J. Hanham, The Nineteenth Century Constitution (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), pp. 183-185. In an article for the National Review in 1892 Salisbury discussed the need for some further means of securing that important constitutional changes reflected the will of the majority of the people. He did not, as yet, use the term "referendum." [National Review (November 1892), 289-300.]

⁴⁶Annual Register-1894, p. 112. John Morley at Newcastle, May 21, 1894. See also The Times (October 28, 1894, p. 7. Lord Rosebery at Bradford, October 27, 1894.

⁴⁷The Times, February 5, 1894, p. 5. Arthur Balfour at Leicester, February 3, 1894.

⁴⁸Annual Register 1894, p. 115. Lord Salisbury at the banquet of the Grover's company, London, May 29, 1894.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 163.

⁵⁰Spectator 72 (February 10, 1894), 188. See also 79 (September 25, 1897), 396-97.

⁵¹National Review XXII (February 1894), 741.

⁵²Ibid., 739.

⁵³Ibid., 22 (March 1894), 66. The issue included articles on the referendum by A.V. Dicey, Lord Farrer, Mr. Grey, Admiral Frederick A. Maxse and G.N. Curson (later Lord Curson).

⁵⁴Ibid., 73.

⁵⁵Spectator 72 (February 10, 1894), 188.

⁵⁶Nineteenth Century XXXVII (February 1895), 213.

⁵⁷Spectator 72 (May 5, 1894), 619-620.

CHAPTER III

IMPERIALISM AND FREE TRADE

Strachey's Liberal Unionism went hand-in-hand with his belief in imperialism. Few "Little-Englanders" deserted the Liberal party after 1886, and the very term "imperialism" was first used in its present sense to describe the beliefs of those Liberals who broke with Gladstone on the home rule issue.¹ Strachey, like most Liberal Unionists, believed that home rule would be a prelude to the dissolution of the Empire. But unlike his attitude toward Ireland his imperialism was part of his inheritance from a family of dedicated colonial civil servants. It is reflected in the names he chose for his sons: Thomas Clive (b. 1888), after the patron saint of the family; Evelyn John (b. 1901), after Lord Cromer (Evelyn Baring), the man he regarded as "the greatest living Imperialist."²

It is surprising that Strachey, an ardent imperialist, showed little enthusiasm for the acquisitions which the "new imperialism" added to the Empire in the 1890's. For the most part, he never regarded these as more than hazy, ill-defined areas, inhabited by "various races of men of dark skin and inferior civilization."³ In such lands British imperialism served the historic purpose of ending

slavery and establishing humane and stable government. But he felt the methods used to promote the new expansion were inconsistent with the great "trust" Britain had undertaken in regard to all dependent peoples. Imperialism did not justify "a multitude of misdeeds."⁴ He agreed with Lord Hugh Cecil that there were actually two imperialisms: "one false, the other true, one the Imperialism of material, the other of moral greatness." The true imperialism held that the government of the Empire was a trust and that Britain could not seek excessive profits at the expense of the colonial population. The false imperialism, on the other hand, sought only economic advantage and monopoly.⁵

Strachey's imperial bête noire, the man he regarded as the epitome of false imperialism, was Cecil Rhodes, the "empire builder." With a vehemence that was remarkable even for Strachey, he denounced the "arch corrupter" who "bought policies as other men buy pictures."⁶ Rhodes' methods were an affront to national honor and a danger to the true interests of the empire. To get his South African charter from parliament he bribed the Parnellites, "the bitter enemies of the Empire and of England"; he showered shares in his company on useful politicians; he attempted to use his money to influence Liberal policy towards Egypt. In South Africa and Rhodesia he contributed to the cleavage between the Dutch and English and embittered the blacks with harsh forced labor.⁷ For all of these alleged misdeeds Rhodes was denounced repeatedly in the Spectator,

which called, after the Jameson raid, for an official inquiry into the activities of Rhodes and his company.⁸

Considering his distaste for the methods used to promote British interests in Africa, it is not surprising that Strachey was ambivalent about the events leading to the Boer War. As the tensions between Boers and English increased in the 1890's, he focused upon the evils of Rhodes but was uncritical of the complicity of the Unionist government.⁹ He remained hopeful that a peaceful reconciliation could be had with those "hardy God-fearing farmers," the Boers, that would provide for the rights of the British settlers, the "Uitlanders." As war became imminent, he swallowed his misgivings and decided that the defeat of the Boers, might, after all, be in the interest of the Empire. He denied that Britain was supporting the Uitlanders as a pretext for annexing the Transvaal. The costs of war, he argued, would outweigh any material gains. If Britain went to war, it would be "to show the British race throughout the Empire and the world that it is no empty boast when the people of the homelands proclaim themselves trustees."¹⁰

By the time hostilities began, Strachey was ready to defend the morality of the war. Apart from the Uitlander problem, he stressed Boer treatment of the Bantus, arguing that if Britain lost the war, the Boers would re-establish slavery "in open defiance of European ideas."¹¹ The question of the blacks was thus the real moral problem of South Africa. Strachey argued that it could be solved only by the British,

who had set the example for just government of dark races in India.

The Boer War demonstrated the inadequacy of British military preparation and converted Strachey to the "un-English" cause of conscription and universal military service. From 1900 on, his growing fears of the "German menace" prompted him to identify the Spectator with Lord Roberts' efforts on behalf of the National Service League. He believed that Britain could not protect her empire or maintain her sea power unless she could call upon every male citizen to make "a renunciation of ease and comfort for his country's good."¹² He also wanted a reservoir of trained men that could be called upon in an emergency, and organized the "Spectator Experimental Company."

The Boer War did little to sour Strachey's enthusiastic imperialism. It strengthened his commitment to a "democratic imperialism" based upon ties between Britain and the self-governing colonies, where men of English birth and traditions created "a new England beyond the sea."¹⁴ He shared Lord Milner's vision of "a group of states, independent of one another in their local affairs, but bound together for the defence of their common interests and the development of a common civilization."¹⁵ If imperial unity was maintained, the "English-speaking race" would teach its laws and customs to less fortunate nations, thus contributing to the "peace, civilization and security" of mankind.¹⁶

By "race" Strachey meant linguistic, cultural and

political affinities which were to be the basis for imperial unity. He did not, for example, exclude the United States, which was "peopled by men of our blood and faith, enjoys in a great measure the same laws as we do, reads the same Bible, and acknowledges, like us, the rule of King Shakespeare."¹⁷ If the United States joined the British dominions in a great Anglo-Saxon alliance, it would be possible to "impose upon the whole earth, civilised and uncivilised, not the 'might and majesty' of universal dominion, but of the Pax Anglicana."¹⁸

Always careful to stress the voluntary nature of such associations, Strachey was sensitive to the desire for autonomy on the part of the self-governing countries of the Empire. For this reason, as will be seen, he opposed the schemes for a formal federal constitution advanced by the advocates of imperial federation.

* * *

The third tenet of Strachey's political creed was his dedication to the cause of free trade. In this, as in his Unionism and imperialism, he shared the views of the majority of Liberal Unionists, who, though they left the Liberal party in 1886, remained Gladstonian in questions of trade and public finance. This consensus was reflected in the Liberal Unionist, in which Strachey often turned from the Irish question to pay tribute to the principles of free exchange and laissez-faire. Free trade, he affirmed, was

to society "what the unimpeded flow of blood is to the human body"; neither could be healthy if its circulation were checked or restricted.¹⁹ This was particularly true for England, a nation which lived by her trade rather than by agriculture, and which was therefore dependent upon the free flow of international trade for her growth and prosperity. He denounced "protectionism" as a branch of socialism; a philosophy that looked to the state to increase the prosperity of its citizens at the expense of their economic and personal liberty.²⁰

While Strachey was still at Oxford there was a revival of protectionism in the form of "fair trade," a movement offering the first serious challenge to Britain's free trade policy since the repeal of the Corn Laws. Free trade had never completely triumphed in the minds of all Englishmen. The resentment at Peel's "betrayal" voiced at mid-century by Tory farmers passed down to succeeding generations as a muted but persistent call for the reimposition of duties on imported grain as the first step towards revitalizing British agriculture. During the prolonged period of bad trade after 1873, which has been called the "Great Depression,"²¹ the demand for protection extended beyond the purely agricultural interest. The Conservative M.P.s and businessmen who formed the National Fair Trade League in 1881 blamed the distress on the protectionist laws of commercial rivals and the government's unwillingness, because of free trade scruples, to secure the reciprocity of

trade by means of retaliatory duties.²²

Protection became increasingly attractive to Conservatives concerned with the relative decline of British commerce and industry. Although the Fair Trade League itself contained no prominent Conservative politician, it found sympathizers in the highest circles of party leadership. There were several ministers in Salisbury's first ministry who were not adverse to changing British commercial policy. Both Sir Stafford Northcote, the leader in the house of commons, and Lord Randolph Churchill, the Secretary for India, publicly asserted that fiscal orthodoxy was a handicap to commercial relations with foreign protectionist nations. They were supported by the prime minister, who charged that the trust in free trade had assumed the form of "fetish worship" among Englishmen. Declaring himself for retaliatory tariffs against nations taxing British imports, Salisbury spoke hopefully of future free trade between Britain and her self-governing colonies.²³ He demonstrated his fiscal flexibility by appointing, in August 1885, a Royal Commission on the depression in trade and industry that included several outspoken fair traders among its members. Northcote was named chairman.²⁴

This attack on free trade orthodoxy by Conservative leaders inspired Strachey's first contribution to a national political debate. On the eve of the General Election of 1885 he wrote a political broadside called The Great Bread Riots, or, What Came of Fair Trade. He raised the spectre

of Britain in the throes of economic collapse and revolution as the result of the triumph of fair trade.

In this political fable, the "National Labour Protection League" led by the "champion of Tory democracy" (a thinly veiled caricature of Lord Randolph Churchill) manipulates the election of a protectionist house of commons by appealing to a variety of special interests and spending a fortune on propaganda and electioneering. A protectionist ministry is formed, headed by the president of the League, which appeals to working-class support by a program of social reform funded by duties on foreign imports of food and manufactures. In a short time, however, the corn duty is raised to the point where it imposes an intolerable burden on the poor:

Such was the drastic proposal of the League, which, now firm in the saddle, had rather shaken off the socialist and working-men elements, and was beginning to stand only as a ring of desperate land-owners and speculative manufacturers, financed and kept going by a syndicate of cosmopolitan money lenders.²⁵

In response to the distress caused by the exorbitant price of food, socialist societies sprang up, demanding not a return to free trade but "the right to work" and "public labour." The result was mob violence and revolution; disorders that were quelled only when "the strong sense of order and of social organization in the English race asserted itself."²⁶ The government was dissolved, elections were held, and a new parliament was elected which promptly restored the free trade system. It is ironic that the statesman who

comes forward in Strachey's fable to lead the free trade forces to victory was modelled after Joseph Chamberlain, who as a Unionist, would later launch a more threatening assault upon the citadel of free trade than was mustered by the fair traders in the 1880's.²⁷ The Great Bread Riots was distributed by the Cobden Club during the General Election of 1885 and was said to have received the "hearty approval" of Gladstone. It was translated into French and published in Le Globe, a Parisian free trade paper.

The events described in Strachey's pamphlet never came to pass. Britain's free trade commercial policy was not in serious jeopardy in 1885. The following year witnessed the short lived but dramatic third ministry of Gladstone, in which the home rule controversy completely eclipsed all other political issues. When Salisbury returned to office in August 1886, his dependence on a still uncertain alliance with the Liberal Unionists made him wary of encouraging any form of protectionist sentiment that might offend the free trade sensibilities of his new associates. For the time being, divisive changes in economic policy were out of the question.

From 1886 to 1890 the Conservative front bench enforced a policy of censorship on the fair trade question and the more vociferous advocates of protection were "hidden away on the back benches."²⁸ They managed, nonetheless, to make their voices heard. Although the majority report of the Northcote commission concluded that it would be unwise

to tamper with Britain's free trade system, the minority report was a forceful statement of fair trade principles. It recommended duties of from ten to fifteen percent on imported manufactured goods, and similar duties on foreign foodstuffs that could otherwise be supplied by the colonies. To offset the anticipated rise in the price of food, it was suggested that duties be abolished on tea, coffee and sugar, products supplied almost entirely by the colonies.²⁹

But Salisbury could offer no encouragement to the protectionists. He described himself as being in much the same situation as Peel was in 1846. The political argument against the Corn Laws weighed more heavily with Peel than the economic, and in Salisbury's words, "that argument had lost none of its force" in the intervening years. The cry of the "dear loaf" was still a political liability, to be avoided whenever possible. The Spectator, which, under Hutton and Townsend was a staunch defender of economic orthodoxy, greeted Salisbury's remarks cheerfully. There was now "as much hope of getting Protection from Lord Salisbury as there is of getting it from Gladstone."³⁰

The rebuff from Salisbury combined with an improvement in economic conditions to produce a decline in the fortunes of fair trade. It was temporarily resuscitated by the blow dealt to British industry by the McKinley tariff of 1890, which "did more than ten years of fair trade agitation to bring discredit to the Cobdenite school."³¹ The McKinley tariff prompted Lord Salisbury to criticize the

"legends and traditions" with which the Cobdenite "rabbis" had surrounded the doctrine of free trade. The rest of the world had not followed Britain's example and it was thus necessary to use the threat of retaliation to open these markets to British trade.

Salisbury's remarks were offensive to his Liberal Unionist allies. Strachey warned that tampering with free trade would threaten the alliance with the Conservatives: "While Radical Unionists refrain from attacking the Church, the Protectionist Tories should surely keep their hands off free trade."³² The analogy was revealing. For Strachey, free trade assumed a quasi-religious character, and he was sensitive to any hint of heresy.

In the General Election of 1892 the fair traders worked to return candidates pledged to the cause of fiscal reform. The Liberal victory in that election gave Gladstone a majority of forty in the house of commons--"the final deathblow to the fair trade movement."³³ The League was formally disbanded and many of its supporters espoused the more popular cause of empire. Much of the energy of the fair trade movement was channeled into the imperial federation movement.

The Imperial Federation League was founded in 1884 by W.E. Forster, a former Liberal cabinet minister, and was composed of prominent figures from both political parties, and of various economic opinions. It generated enough publicity to inspire the first Colonial Conference of prime

ministers from the self-governing colonies which met in London in 1887. Although the delegates were unable to reach agreement on sharing the costs of imperial defense, Jan Hendrick Hofmeyer, the prime minister of Cape Colony, proposed that the cost be met by a two percent imperial customs tariff. The chairman of the conference, colonial secretary Sir Edward Stanhope, shelved the proposal as contrary to Britain's free trade principles and incompatible with the terms of existing treaties.³⁴ After the conference, the fair traders within the Imperial Federation League insisted that the Hofmeyer proposal be made the official policy of the organization. They were opposed by the free traders, led by Lord Hartington, president of the influential London branch of the League. His vision of imperial federation made no allowance for a tariff that might endanger Britain's free trade economy. The dispute was symptomatic of the split between free trade and fair trade federationists that contributed to the demise of the League in 1893.

Like Hartington, his modern political model, Strachey was both an imperialist and a free trader. In 1886, in one of his earliest articles for the Spectator, he wrote enthusiastically of an empire which he hoped would be more closely united by the extension rather than the restriction of free trade. Noting that the commerce between Britain and the self-governing colonies was growing in spite of colonial protectionism, Strachey envisioned a future commercial union founded on free trade; a union in which "the wealth and

resources of every continent" would be "as freely exchanged across the Pacific as across the Thames, and by which the looms of Lancashire should supply the citizens of Melbourne as unchallenged as they do the citizens of London."³⁵

This free trade imperialist vision made Strachey suspicious of the goals of imperial federation, which were increasingly identified with a protectionist commercial policy. He advised those who really cared about imperial unity to allow both Britain and the colonies "to work out their economic salvation in their own way."³⁶ He was critical of the demand of the federationists for a common imperial parliament, believing that a formal and rigid structure would be a source of irritation that would weaken rather than strengthen the ties of empire.³⁷

Strachey's unyielding orthodoxy on the subject of free trade and the empire involved him in his first serious dispute with Joseph Chamberlain, the statesman whom he regarded as a man of vision, as the creative genius in English politics. For Strachey, the self-professed Whig, Chamberlain's heroic action in 1886 erased the sins of his Radical past. Since 1887 he had been on friendly social terms with Chamberlain and his sons, and was a frequent guest at their weekend parties at Highbury.³⁸ For Strachey, Chamberlain was the symbol of the progressive side of Unionism; the man who would give the party a positive program of social reform. He cited Chamberlain's commitment to and public identification with that cause as the main

attraction of the Unionist appeal to working class voters.³⁹ Although Strachey had reservations about the details of Chamberlain's old age pension and workmen's compensation schemes, he had complete faith in his commitment to free trade. On the eve of the General Election of 1895 he recommended that Chamberlain be named chancellor of the exchequer, so that responsibility for launching these social reforms would not be separated from the responsibility of financing them.⁴⁰

Before 1895 there was little or no indication that Chamberlain's free trade faith was wavering. He vigorously defended the system against fair trade attacks in the 1880's. But in retrospect it appears that the arguments of the fair traders, and more particularly the imperial federationists, had made their mark upon Chamberlain. His biographer, Peter Fraser, believes that he had privately decided to meet the colonial request for preference before taking the colonial office in Salisbury's third ministry.⁴¹ Imperial preference was to be the spur to expanded trade with the colonies, trade that would restore prosperity and avert what Chamberlain thought was the serious possibility of social upheaval.⁴²

The first public sign of the change in Chamberlain's economic opinions came during the Congress of the Chambers of Commerce of the Empire in London in 1896. He advocated commercial union of the Empire as the first step towards the creation of an Imperial Council to which all questions

concerning the Empire as a whole could be referred. He favored a plan brought forward by the Toronto board of trade calling for an imperial "Zollverein" or customs union. Practical if not absolute free trade would prevail between the various countries of the Empire, but the individual states could be free to make their own arrangements as to duties on foreign goods. To facilitate this arrangement, Chamberlain suggested that Britain place a moderate duty on foreign imports of corn, meat, and sugar, which would be remitted in favor of colonial imports of these commodities. For their part, the colonies would have to remove or substantially reduce their tariffs on British imports.⁴³ But the response from the colonies was not encouraging; they were not prepared to make the sacrifices that the scheme required on their part.

As might be expected, Strachey thought that Chamberlain was treading on dangerous ground.⁴⁴ He sympathized with the goal of imperial unity but believed that cause was best served by the liberty which each country had to arrange its commercial relations according to its own calculation of self-interest. The colonies were not ready to give up their right to protect infant industries by taxing British imports; and even a moderate dose of protection could injure British trade, the bulk of which was with nations outside of the Empire. Strachey believed that a corn duty would raise a cry from "the labouring millions" that would make the sacrifice intolerable.⁴⁵

After this initial difference over the question of preference there were further indications of a growing coolness between the great statesman and the young editor--a disharmony that ended on a note of complete personal alienation. When Chamberlain told an audience of Birmingham businessmen that commerce was "the greatest of all political interests," Strachey was obliged to disagree. The nobler goal was the creation of "a great and disinterested social life." The rise of monopolies and trusts was a sign that the ideal of commercial justice was being sacrificed to the unrestrained lust for material gain. Unless commerce was subject to a higher law, it could degrade rather than ennoble a nation. Strachey regretted that Chamberlain did not warn his listeners of the great danger facing the English and Americans, the danger of being "too exclusively or too greedily commercial."⁴⁶

If this lecture on commercial ethics irritated the colonial secretary, there was no immediate sign that it affected their warm personal relations. Strachey defended Chamberlain against the charges hurled against him after the Jameson raid. When he succeeded Hutton as co-editor in 1897, he was congratulated by Chamberlain for attaining "the position which was indeed your natural inheritance."⁴⁷ But Strachey soon had first-hand evidence that Chamberlain could no longer be counted in the ranks of free traders. In the winter of 1898-1899 he dined with the Stracheys in London and spoke of the need for a system of imperial pre-

ference based on a tax on imported corn. Mrs. Strachey remembered him saying, in effect: "I don't say that I shall carry out this policy, but I do say that any statesman who carried it out would sweep the country."⁴⁸ Chamberlain's deviation from free trade orthodoxy extended beyond his acceptance of preference. In a letter to Strachey in January 1899 he compared the "fanatical free-trader" to the "fanatical peace-at-any-price man." Just as it was necessary to risk war in order to preserve the peace, it might be necessary to threaten retaliation in order to secure free trade.⁴⁹ But Strachey would not accept the need for preference or retaliation. His disagreement with Chamberlain, was, according to Mrs. Strachey, "the first note of the storm that was to wreck St. Loe's political career."⁵⁰

It was another issue, however, that prompted the complete break in personal relations between Strachey and Chamberlain, an issue involving Strachey's perception of his editorial role as "the watchdog of society." On August 8, 1900, Lloyd George charged in the house of commons that favoritism had been shown in the awarding of government contracts to a Birmingham firm headed by Chamberlain's brother, Arthur. The company in question was Kynoch Ltd., a manufacturer of cordite, an element essential to the explosives needed in the Boer War. In his editorial comment on this charge, Strachey argued that while Chamberlain was above suspicion, it was regrettable that his brother accepted the chairmanship of a company doing business with

the government.⁵¹ This brought the accusation of Arthur Chamberlain in the Birmingham Post that Strachey was lending his weight to the Radical and Little Englander assault on his brother. Strachey replied that the democratic statesman, like Caesar's wife, had to be above suspicion. Suspicion was the tool of the demagogue and every statesman had to avoid every opportunity for it to arise.⁵²

These editorials prompted Joseph Chamberlain privately to express "astonishment and pain" that his friend was encouraging "attacks of the basest sort on the honour of public men." By pandering to democratic suspicions, Strachey would help to "drive out of public life every man who has a stake in the country," leaving its administration to the professional politician. He said he would resign rather than ask his brothers to give up their positions after twenty years of legitimate business with the government.⁵³ In his reply Strachey defended himself against the charge that he was "pandering" to the "Democracy." An informed public opinion was the only guarantee against corruption, and he believed that without such a safeguard repeated and serious scandals were inevitable.⁵⁴ But Chamberlain was still convinced that he had been "wounded in the house of my friends." Strachey was leading the public to suspect that there actually were grounds for suspicion in his brother's relationship with the Government.⁵⁵ The correspondence ended on this bitter note and there is no indication that the two men were ever in direct

communication thereafter.

It is significant that Strachey was the only Unionist editor to treat the Kynoch charges in a manner at least implicitly critical of Chamberlain. It is unlikely that he would have pressed the matter so stubbornly were he not already disenchanted by Chamberlain's conversion to retaliation and preference. The incident was an ominous prelude to the events of 1903, when Chamberlain's tariff reform campaign forced Strachey to break his ties with the Unionist Party and "seek safety in the ocean of independence."⁵⁶

¹ Bernard Semmel, Imperialism and Social Reform-English Social-Imperial Thought 1895-1914 (New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1968), pp. 45-46.

² Adventure of Living, p. 301. Thomas Clive, Strachey's elder son, died of pneumonia during his first year at Balliol in 1907.

³ Strachey, Industrial and Social Life, p. 124.

⁴ Adventure of Living, p. 299.

⁵ Spectator 88 (May 10, 1902), 716-717. Strachey discussed Cecil's address in the house of commons during the debate on the Education bill, May 6, 1902.

⁶ Adventure of Living, pp. 299-302.

⁷ Spectator 78 (January 2, 1897), 8-9.

⁸ Ibid. According to Strachey, Rhodes never understood the hostility of the Spectator. His attempt to make peace led to a melodramatic confrontation in a hotel in Mayfair, which Strachey recounts with obvious relish in Adventure of Living, pp. 304-310.

⁹ Spectator 78 (June 5, 1897), 789. It is interesting that there is no mention of the Boer War in Adventure of Living.

¹⁰ Spectator 82 (June 15, 1899), 77-78.

¹¹ Ibid., 83 (October 7, 1899), 487-488.

¹² J. St. Loe Strachey, A New Way of Life (London: Macmillan, 1909), pp. 4-5. Lord Roberts, the retired commander-in-chief of the army, founded the National Service League in 1908 to lobby for compulsory service. Strachey donated the proceeds of A New Way of Life to the League.

¹³ Amy Strachey, St. Loe Strachey, p. 240.

¹⁴ Strachey, Industrial and Social Life, p. 123.

¹⁵ A.M. Gollin, Proconsul in Politics: A Study of Lord Milner in Opposition and Power (London: Anthony Blond, 1964), p. 123. Milner served as governor-general of South Africa until 1905. Gollin quotes from his famous farewell address in Johannesburg.

¹⁶ Strachey, Industrial and Social Life, p. 130.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 210.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 130.

¹⁹Liberal Unionist III (May 1, 1889), 172.

²⁰Ibid., VI (October 1, 1891), 42.

²¹In recent years there have been reassessments of late nineteenth century economic history which suggest that the usual economic indicators for the years 1873-96 (prices, wages, interest rates, employment, etc.) do not demonstrate the existence of a unified period that can be labelled justifiably "the Great Depression." [S.B. Saul, The Myth of the Great Depression 1873-1896 (New York: St. Martins, 1969).]

²²Benjamin Brown, The Tariff Reform Movement in Great Britain 1881-1895 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1943), pp. 17-28. Among the founders of the League were David MacIver, M.P. a parliamentary advocate of retaliation, W. Farrer Ecroyd, a worsted manufacturer, S. Cunliffe Lister, a silk manufacturer, and Sampson Samuel Lloyd, M.P., former chairman of the Chambers of Commerce of the U.K. See also: Sidney H. Zebel, "Fair Trade: An English Reaction to the Breakdown of the Cobden Treaty System," Journal of Modern History XII (1940), 161-185.

²³Spectator 58 (November 7, 1885), 1404-5.

²⁴Brown, The Tariff Reform Movement, pp. 62-63.

²⁵S.L.S., The Great Bread Riots, or What Came of Fair Trade? (Bristol: J.W. Arrowsmith, 1885).

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Strachey published a second edition in 1903 in response to Chamberlain's tariff reform crusade. In his introduction he comments on the parallels between 1885 and 1903. The Great Bread Riots--A Political Romance (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1903), p. 4.

²⁸Brown, The Tariff Reform Movement, p. 65.

²⁹Zebel, "Fair Trade," pp. 174-175.

³⁰Spectator 61 (March 17, 1888), 375-376. Report of Salisbury's speech before the house of lords, March 12, 1888.

³¹Brown, The Tariff Reform Movement, p. 76.

³²Liberal Unionist VI (June 1, 1892), 211.

³³Zebel, "Fair Trade," pp. 174-175.

³⁴ Sidney H. Zebel, "Joseph Chamberlain and the Genesis of Tariff Reform," Journal of British Studies, VII (November 1967), 137.

³⁵ Spectator 59 (August 14, 1886), 1075-76. In his combining of zealous imperialism with orthodox free trade ideology, and in his belief that the two together would guarantee British commercial and industrial supremacy, Strachey was the heir of the "free trade imperialists" of the early nineteenth century. He was following an old Spectator tradition. Stephen Rintoul, the founder of the paper, was the chief publicist for Edward Gibbon Wakefield and the school of colonial reformers. See Bernard Semmel, The Rise of Free Trade Imperialism: Classical Political Economy, the Empire of Free Trade and Imperialism, 1750-1850 (Cambridge: University Press, 1970), p. 125.

³⁶ Ibid., 68 (January 30, 1892), Literary supplement, pp. 138-140. Strachey criticized the scheme of Australian federationist Maurice Herbey for an imperial commercial union based upon relative free trade within the Empire and a wall of protection against the rest of the world.

³⁷ Ibid., 59 (August 14, 1886), 1075-76.

³⁸ Strachey, Adventure of Living, p. 385.

³⁹ Nineteenth Century XXXVII (February 1895), 214.

⁴⁰ Spectator 74 (January 20, 1895), 124-125.

⁴¹ Peter Fraser, Joseph Chamberlain: Architect of Democracy (New York: A.S. Barnes and Co., 1966), pp. 230-231.

⁴² Zebel, "Joseph Chamberlain and the Genesis of Tariff Reform," pp. 133-134.

⁴³ Spectator 76 (June 13, 1896), 826.

⁴⁴ A meeting between Chamberlain and Strachey failed to convince the latter of the merits of the "Zollverein." Strachey Papers, Joseph Chamberlain to Strachey, 13 April 1896.

⁴⁵ Spectator 76 (June 13, 1896), 829-830.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 77 (November 21, 1896), 717-720.

⁴⁷ Strachey Papers, Joseph Chamberlain to Strachey, 9 July 1897.

⁴⁸ Amy Strachey, St. Loe Strachey, p. 93.

⁴⁹ Strachey Papers, Joseph Chamberlain to Strachey,
23 January 1899.

⁵⁰ Amy Strachey, St. Loe Strachey, p. 93.

⁵¹ Spectator 85 (August 11, 1900), 162-163.

⁵² Ibid., 85 (August 18, 1900), 198-200.

⁵³ Strachey Papers, Joseph Chamberlain to Strachey,
18 August 1900.

⁵⁴ Ibid., Strachey to Chamberlain, 21 August 1900.

⁵⁵ Ibid., Chamberlain to Strachey, 22 August 1900.

⁵⁶ Strachey, Adventure of Living, p. 450.

CHAPTER IV

THE UNIONIST FREE TRADER

The political struggle inaugurated by Chamberlain's tariff reform crusade produced the first crisis in the career of St. Loe Strachey. His defense of free trade forced him to sever many of his closest political connections and ultimately cost him his influence within the Unionist party. His first political cause, the Irish question, had been apparently defused by the decade of Unionist ascendancy, and leading Liberals regarded home rule as a disastrous political liability.¹ With the union with Ireland no longer in immediate danger, Strachey refused "to play the good party man" and accept the decisions of his leaders. He stubbornly opposed tariff reform as a program that would destroy rather than strengthen the empire. The Spectator, which had reflected the principles of Liberal Unionism, became the distinctive voice of the Unionist free trade.

The first rumble of the controversy was heard shortly before Arthur Balfour succeeded his uncle, Lord Salisbury, as prime minister after the latter's retirement in 1902. The issue of free trade versus protection, which haunted the Balfour ministry and led to its downfall in 1905, had its roots in a small duty on imported corn, im-

posed for revenue purposes by Sir Michael Hicks Beach, the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Sir Michael, a fiscal conservative was deeply troubled by the rise in public expenditure and was advocating "retrenchment." He was forced, however, by the costs of the Boer War, to turn to fiscal measures which he ordinarily would have avoided. He resorted to large loans, raised the income tax, and, in his budget for 1902, imposed a registration duty of three pence per hundred-weight on imported grain and flour. Hicks Beach stressed that the duty was non-protective both in intent and predictable effect, but his proposal was greeted with embarrassing warmth in the house of commons by old-fashioned Tory protectionists and former fair traders such as Henry Chaplin, James Lowther and Sir Howard Vincent.²

While acknowledging the good intentions of Hicks Beach, Strachey and other perceptive Unionists regarded the measure as a dangerous precedent. Their opposition to the corn duty assumed the absolute necessity of maintaining a free and open market in the British Isles. To Strachey, the only effective way to avoid tampering with free trade was through decreased government spending. He wanted to see tighter control of expenditure and thought it could be achieved by a return to the system whereby the prime minister was both first lord of the treasury and chancellor of the exchequer.³ He developed his specific objections to the corn duty at some length: it imposed an unjust burden on the food of the poor; it provided protective discrimination

in favor of the British farmer and miller; it required costly new machinery of collection and would accelerate a rise in food costs that would outpace the yield to the exchequer.⁴

But Strachey's chief objection to the corn duty was political. It had raised false hopes among the protectionists, who hailed it as "the thin edge of the wedge of protection."⁵ He feared an attempt to make the tax the basis of an "imperial Zollverein" within which the colonies would receive preferential treatment. His reservations were justified by prime minister Sir Wilfrid Laurier of Canada, who declared that the tax was a stepping stone to preference for Canadian grain in Britain. At home, Chamberlain nourished these same hopes by affirming the need for a change in British commercial policy. It would be tragic, he argued, if "economic pedantry" prevented Britain from moving closer to her colonies and from defending herself against the hostile trade policies of foreign powers.⁶ It was with Chamberlain in mind that Strachey urged a repeal of the corn duty that would make "the protectionist sand-castles crumble."⁷

Winston Churchill made the ominous connection between Chamberlain's disenchantment with free trade and Tory protectionist enthusiasm for the corn duty. Then a young Unionist m.p. making a reputation as a pugnacious critic of his party's leadership, Churchill predicted that the issue could produce an alteration in the composition of the

existing political parties. With remarkable foresight, he speculated on what would happen if the fair trade program were revived "by some responsible person of eminence and authority in the country."

They would stand once more on the old battlegrounds. . . . Party bitterness would be aroused such as the present generation could furnish no parallel for, except in a brief period of 1885-86.⁸

The events of the following year justified the warnings of Churchill and Strachey, but at the time, most Unionist m.p.s accepted the necessity for the tax and the fiscal soundness of the approach taken by the chancellor of the exchequer.

Chamberlain decided to fight for imperial preference within the Balfour cabinet because the results of the conference of colonial premiers which met in London in the summer of 1902 were generally disappointing. Since accepting the colonial office in 1895, he had worked to strengthen imperial unity and bolster Britain's economic and military strength in a world filled with increasingly powerful rivals. But seven years of frustrating experience had taught him that the colonial premiers were deaf to his arguments for a permanent council of the empire and greater cooperation for imperial defense. They were "empire-minded" only with respect to trade. This attitude convinced Chamberlain that preferential trade was the only realistic key to imperial unity. Imperial resources could be more efficiently pooled and total production increased if Britain erected a tariff

barrier against the outside world, with a preferential reduction in favor of imperial imports, especially on goods like corn and meat, which were supplied by the British dominions. He was encouraged by the fact that Canada, in a bid for British preference, had unilaterally lowered her tariffs on British manufactures by 25% in 1898 and 33 1/3% in 1900.⁹

The Colonial Conference of 1902 reinforced Chamberlain's commitment to preference. While the colonial premiers refused once more to accept more than a nominal share in the costs of imperial defense, they were enthusiastic about the possibility of improved commercial relations with Britain and passed a resolution calling for imperial trade preference based upon an exemption from or reduction of British duties on colonial imports. Armed with this resolution, Chamberlain now put his case before the cabinet. On October 21, 1902, he proposed that the corn duty be remitted in favor of Canadian grain. At that time the only serious objection to his proposal was voiced by C.T. Ritchie, the new chancellor of the exchequer, who had replaced Hicks Beach earlier in the year. At a second meeting on November 19, Chamberlain won the approval of the cabinet. He embarked on a triumphal three months tour of South Africa, confident that his colleagues had agreed, at least in principle, to implement Canadian preference in the budget for 1903.¹⁰

Chamberlain had seriously underestimated the continued hold of free trade orthodoxy on the minds of so many

influential Unionists. While he was away, the forces opposed to his policy began to organize. Ritchie, with the support of the "Gladstonian garrison" at the treasury and other free traders within the government, sought to reverse the cabinet's decision. In February, Ritchie circulated a cabinet memorandum stating his objections to preference and privately informed Balfour that he would resign if it was implemented. After Chamberlain returned home in March, Ritchie formally proposed to drop the corn duty from the forthcoming budget and his advice was accepted by the prime minister and cabinet. Chamberlain, ill and exhausted from his trip, bitterly complied with the decision.¹¹

Many Unionists were annoyed by the abandonment of the corn duty and the apparently inconsistent withdrawal from the policy of "broadening the base of taxation" which their leaders had made so much of in the previous year. The Times asserted that there was no reason for Ritchie's action as the corn tax had not produced any visible rise in the price of bread. But the potentially protective effect of the duty was indicated by the agonized protests against its repeal from British agricultural associations and from protectionist m.p.s in the house of commons.

Strachey, for his part, made no attempt to conceal his relief at the withdrawal of the duty. He noted in the Spectator:

We feared that if once corn were taxed it would never again be free, but happily our fears have proved to be unfounded. Mr. Ritchie is in the fortunate position

of Peel and Lowe. He will be able to boast that he has relieved the bread of the poor from taxation.¹²

The attacks upon Ritchie confirmed his belief that the corn duty had been a dangerous weapon in the hands of the protectionists. Its repeal disarmed the advocates of an Imperial Zollverein. But Strachey's familiarity with the determination of Chamberlain gave him ample warning that the victory was only the first skirmish in a long and protracted battle.

Chamberlain's tactical defeat within the confines of the cabinet convinced him of the need to carry his program onto the public platform. The timing of his famous speech at Birmingham on May 15, in which he declared his support for tariff reform, was determined by a variety of political considerations. The popularity of the government was at its lowest point since 1895. The Education Act of 1902, one of the more constructive achievements of the ministry, had nonetheless inspired determined resistance by the nonconformists and provided a rallying issue for the badly divided Liberal party. Many of Chamberlain's nonconformist supporters were alienated by the Act, and he had to intervene personally to prevent the Birmingham Radical Unionists from going into open rebellion.¹³ The Unionist party was also having trouble with its own back benchers. The "Hughligans" a group of young malcontents led by Lord Hugh Cecil and Winston Churchill, called for new blood in the party leadership and launched a devastating attack upon

Sir John Broderick's army reform scheme in February. A series of defeats and reduced majorities in by-elections signalled the declining fortunes of the government.¹⁴

Chamberlain intended his Birmingham speech to restore his position within the Unionist party while at the same time identifying that party with a great imperial cause. Although there was little in the speech that he had not said before, it was regarded as a challenge to those elements within the cabinet and party-at-large who were opposed to change in Britain's free trade economy. A week later, in the house of commons he suggested that the fiscal changes proposed at Birmingham might produce the funds needed to support a scheme of contributory old age pensions. This crucial link between tariff reform and social reform became an essential element in tariff reform propaganda.

The Unionist Party was soon faced with a crisis of major proportions. While Chamberlain rapidly gathered support among the party rank and file, his policy was opposed by influential free traders within the cabinet and parliament. Balfour, while favorable to fiscal reform, took a neutral position and worked to avoid a split--urging his colleagues to "consent to differ." For the next three months the cabinet was held together on the pretext of an impartial inquiry into the fiscal question; the ministers agreeing to refrain from public statements that would contribute to party disunity.¹⁵ But outside the cabinet both free traders and tariff reformers were arming for an inevitable test of

strength.

* * *

In the days following the Birmingham speech, Strachey lived and breathed the fiscal controversy, confessing to his brother that he was "in the thick of the fight with Joe and enjoying it intensely."¹⁶ He urged Unionists of free trade persuasion to organize to prevent Chamberlain and the "Birmingham gang" from capturing the party for tariff reform. Their first duty was "to prepare, to arm, and so to get ready an organization." If the defense of free trade were left to the Liberals, the Unionist party would be branded as the party of protection. Within a fortnight of the Birmingham speech he was contacted by Winston Churchill, who informed him of plans "to form a League . . . to counter Chamberlain's impending campaign. Beach is taking the lead and our little group knows of at least 30 members."

"Without organization," Churchill stressed, "we are bound first to be silenced and secondly to be destroyed."¹⁷ With Churchill's encouragement, Strachey called in the Spectator for Hicks Beach, the most prominent free trader outside the cabinet, to come forward and lead the opposition to tariff reform.¹⁸

On June 11, Strachey attended a private dinner held under the auspices of Hicks Beach at the house of commons. The other guests included Churchill, Hugh Cecil and George Goschen.¹⁹ This preliminary discussion resulted in the formation of the Unionist Free Food Club on July 13, with Hicks

Beach as chairman and over fifty Unionist m.p.s as charter members. The club's name reflected the belief of free traders that preference would tax the food of the poor and adversely effect the political fortunes of the party. The rival Tariff Reform League, founded in the same month by the supporters of Chamberlain, quickly developed a powerful political machine, consciously modelled after Cobden's Anti-Corn Law League. But a large number of Unionists remained aloof from either faction and supported the via media of the prime minister. The "Balfourites," who included the majority of the peers and party officials in their number, accepted the need for fiscal reform but were unwilling to let the Chamberlainites control the party. They supported Balfour's espousal of retaliatory tariffs as a measure with less dangerous political implications than "food taxes."

The cabinet truce was ended in September, when Joseph Chamberlain, with Balfour's blessing, resigned from the government to campaign for tariff reform. At the same time, the prime minister took the opportunity to force from his cabinet those free traders who were opposed to compromise on the fiscal question. Ritchie, Lord Balfour of Burleigh, Lord George Hamilton and Arthur Elliot now joined the "elder statesmen," Hicks Beach, Goschen, and Lord James of Hereford, on the executive committee of the Free Food League. Balfour persuaded the Duke of Devonshire to remain in the cabinet but his former colleagues urged him to resign. Devonshire found himself in an embarrassing situation and

he resigned from the cabinet when Balfour committed the party to fiscal reform at Sheffield on October 1. By the end of the month he reluctantly accepted the leadership of the Unionist free traders and was elected president of the Free Food League at a well attended meeting in London.²⁰

* * *

The Unionist free traders were frustrated in their efforts to win back their party to free trade. This is surprising, considering that they initially outweighed their opponents in the important areas of prestige, experience and ability. Apart from Chamberlain, there was no tariff reformer equal to Devonshire, Hicks Beach, or even the seven other former cabinet ministers who led the Free Food League. There were few tariff reformers in the house of commons who matched the skill and promise of a Cecil or a Churchill. Nor was there a tariff reformer of consequence in the house of lords before Milner adopted the cause in 1906. Yet Chamberlain was able in the long run to turn this initial weakness to his advantage. With an impressive display of political talent, he forged an organization that was unquestionably loyal to its leader and armed with a positive program that promised to solve all of Britain's social and economic ills. This unity and energy was too much for the free traders, who were forced into a negative defense of the status quo and were divided from the start on the question of tactics. Apart from a consensus on free trade and the Irish question there was little unanimity and the

older differences between Liberal and Conservative Unionists sometimes emerged. For example, Strachey and Elliot held broad-church, latitudinarian opinions on religious and educational questions that were unacceptable to high church Tories like High and Robert Cecil. There was complete agreement on only one point, as Hugh Cecil indicated when defining a Unionist free trader as "an opponent of Mr. Chamberlain's policy."²¹

The first sign of the disunity of the free fooders was displayed in their ambivalent attitude towards the prime minister. They knew where Chamberlain stood but the dexterous maneuvering of Balfour threw them into disarray. Devonshire had been reluctant to leave the cabinet and join the free fooders for fear they would adopt an unduly hostile stance towards the government. He accepted the presidency with the condition that the League was to limit its opposition to Chamberlain. His reservations were embodied in the free food manifesto, which declared a readiness to consider Balfour's retaliation proposal "in a friendly and loyal spirit."²² Hicks Beach, the original leader of the free fooders, went to even greater lengths in an effort to maintain party unity. In November, he announced at Manchester that, under certain conditions, he had no objections to retaliatory tariffs. Eight days later on the same platform with Balfour at Bristol, he admitted the need for fiscal reform and declared that moderate reformers like Balfour were the true free traders.²³

Strachey saw no value in the attempt to woo the prime minister away from Chamberlain. He regarded Balfour as "a Chamberlainite without the courage of his opinions," and spoke for many free fooders, who saw the via media as a threat to free trade.²⁴ Strachey welcomed Devonshire's leadership of the Free Food League but rejected his tactical support for the government. He accused Hicks Beach of "hauling down the flag" in his Bristol speech.²⁵ The more fiery spirits among the free fooders in parliament shared Strachey's attitude, including Churchill, Cecil and Elliot.

By the end of the year the League adopted a more aggressive policy. The Spectator may have contributed to new militancy, but it was more likely a response to Chamberlain's whirlwind campaign to spread the tariff reform gospel. In the course of his speaking tour, Chamberlain increasingly stressed the protective rather than the preferential side of his program. At the same time, the Tariff Reform League was extremely active on the local level, and by November had captured the constituency associations of many free food members of parliament.²⁶ Devonshire now saw that the issue at stake was the struggle with Chamberlain, regardless of what Balfour said or did--a struggle between free trade and protection, pure and simple.²⁷ The Free Food League had to go beyond mere opposition to food taxes and to take a stand against all protective taxes, including Balfour's "retaliation."

The first sign of stiffening resistance on the part

of the free fooders came with their decision to fight tariff reform in the constituencies. On December 12, Devonshire's "Lewisham" letter appeared with the advice that free traders withhold their votes from any candidate in the Lewisham and Dulwich by-elections who "expressed his sympathy with the policy of Mr. Chamberlain and the Tariff Reform League."²⁸ The letter was interpreted to mean a definitive split in the Unionist Party and was denounced in the Chamberlainite press as a betrayal. With the notable exception of Hicks Beach, who could now be counted in the Balfourian section of the party, all free food leaders seconded the Duke's position.

The crucial test of Unionist free trade militancy arose over the question of cooperation with the Liberals. The Opposition had been revived and reunified by the fiscal controversy, and looked forward to a general election in which it would stand as the party of free trade. At the beginning of 1904 rumors were flying that the free fooders were on the verge of a formal alliance with the Liberals, and it looked for a time as if the pattern of 1886 might be repeated. Unionists were establishing contacts with Liberals and it was not long before public signs of an interest in joint action were forthcoming from leaders of the Opposition. The Chamberlainite National Review found Devonshire third in line for a "free-trade premiership," after Rosebery and Campbell-Bannerman, an allegation which drew a prompt denial from the Duke.²⁹ A successful coopera-

tion with the Liberals depended upon Devonshire, the free food leader with the greatest national stature, and Strachey and the militant free food m.p.s urged him to open official negotiations. Hugh Cecil stressed that without Liberal assistance it would be unlikely that any free fooder could be returned at the next election.³⁰

On December 10 the executive committee of the League favored making common cause with the Liberals in constituencies where Chamberlainites had captured the local Unionist organizations.³¹ Armed with this mandate, Devonshire contacted the Liberal leaders. On December 12, the same day that the controversial Lewisham letter appeared in the Times, he informed Lord Rosebery of the desire of his "young men" to discuss cooperation with the Liberals in parliament in return for Liberal support in retaining their seats.³² The proposal was considered by a group of former cabinet ministers, and Lord Spencer, Liberal leader in the house of lords, reported that it would be possible to make some arrangement in the cases of certain free food m.p.s. Herbert Asquith and Herbert Gladstone were appointed to conduct negotiations towards that end, and several free fooders subsequently received assurances of Liberal support for their re-election.³³

Not all free fooders were happy with this piecemeal arrangement. Churchill, for example, envisioned a much more comprehensive alliance along the lines of 1886, an alliance based upon an agreement on the education question

between Lloyd George and Hugh Cecil, under the auspices of Lord Rosebery.³⁴ If free fooders negotiated individually they would be "swallowed up whole" by the Liberal party and lose the chance to influence its policies.³⁵ Churchill urged Devonshire to seize the opportunity to reconstitute the Liberal Party "in its old power and integrity."³⁶ But Churchill, who had privately decided to cross over to the Liberals, did not speak for most free fooders when he asked the Duke to "drive straight ahead" towards an accord with the Liberals without attempting to accommodate the conflicting views and interests among the members of the League.³⁷ Those differences were to be the stumbling block to successful negotiations with the Liberals.

The advocates of alliance were pinning their hopes on a close cooperation with the Liberal Imperialists, an arrangement which they thought would prevent the Liberal party from falling into the hands of the Little Englanders, Irish Nationalists and Labourites. Strachey and Elliot, both Liberal Unionists, looked forward to working together with Asquith, Haldane and Grey, men with whom they felt personally and politically compatible. Strachey went so far as to envisage a Rosebery-Devonshire coalition government in the belief that the Liberal Imperialists would support an administration headed by the Duke.³⁸

But here he differed from most Conservative free traders who opposed formal alliance with the Liberals. Lord George Hamilton told Devonshire: "I have fought too long and

too consistently against Radical doctrine to be able to modify my attitude towards my old opponents."³⁹ While Lord Hugh Cecil respected Rosebery and the Liberal Imperialists, he did not believe they represented the "main stream" of the Liberal party:

That stream is Gladstonian in foreign, colonial and Irish questions . . . non-conformist in ecclesiastical questions. . . . Radical in questions concerning property, and Trade Unionist in questions affecting labour and capital.⁴⁰

Despite his militant free trade views, Cecil could not contemplate breaking the centuries old ties between his family and the Tory party. In a memorandum addressed to the officers of the Free Food League, he advised limiting cooperation with the Liberals to the promise of assistance in "a great parliamentary attack upon the Chamberlain policy." In return the Liberals would be asked to do whatever was possible to save the seats of Unionist free traders. Beyond this general agreement the tactics of each member would be determined by the situation in his own constituency. Cecil warned against attacks on the government, urging that the activity of free fooders be "avowedly and notoriously limited to opposing Mr. Chamberlain." He was hopeful that the next election would produce a relative parity of Unionist and Liberal strength that might place free fooders in a position of greater influence.

Strachey favored a more aggressive policy than Devonshire and Cecil were prepared to follow. His insistence on a no-compromise stance on free trade precluded the pos-

sibility of reconciliation with the tariff reformers and held the door open to an alliance with the Liberals. By January, 1904, he was convinced that Balfour's fiscal policy was, in essence and effect, protectionist. Unionist free traders therefore had to be ready to cooperate with the opposition in replacing the Balfour Government with one committed to free trade. He called upon them to vote for free traders irrespective of party, so as "to deliver the coup de grace to Protection."⁴¹ If Unionist free trade m.p.s expected Liberal votes they had to take a firm and consistent line towards the government, both in parliament and in the constituencies. They would have to run candidates against protectionist incumbents in traditionally Unionist constituencies.

Strachey believed that decisive action on the part of Unionist free traders would increase their bargaining power with the Liberals and lead to a concordat similar to that reached between the Tories and Liberal Unionists in 1886.⁴² But there were limits to how far he would go. Strachey was no Churchill on this question. He insisted that free trade Unionists were not seeking a "halfway house" on the road to Liberalism. Cooperation should be restricted to the question of free trade, lest the negotiation of details on other issues lead to a closer association than either side desired.⁴³

With the approach of the new parliamentary session, the Liberals made it clear that support for Unionist free

trade m.p.s was contingent upon their cooperation in an assault upon the fiscal policy of the Balfour ministry. They were determined to split the free fooders from the Government by moving a free trade amendment to the Address. Devonshire did not think his followers were ready for such a direct vote of confidence, and he tried, without success, to get the Liberal leaders to modify their tactics.⁴⁴ On February 12, 1904, John Morley introduced an amendment to the Address which touched off a heated debate on the tariff reform question lasting a week. The debate was notable for the absence of two of the principals to the controversy. Arthur Balfour was ill with influenza, and Chamberlain was recovering in Egypt from the ardours of his speaking tour.

The government hedged in the face of Liberal and Unionist free trade attacks. Gerald Balfour and John Broderick declared against food taxes and restricted tariff reform to the Balfourian formula of retaliation. The Chamberlainites responded with a defence of the full tariff reform program. The moderation of the government speakers added to the confusion in the ranks of the Unionist free traders. By supporting the Morley amendment they might lose the chance to drive a wedge between the Balfourians and Chamberlainites. By supporting the government, however, they would forfeit any chance for Liberal support in their constituencies. In the end the Morley amendment was defeated by fifty-one votes. The vote was a measure of the divisions in the free food camp. Of the fifty-two free food m.p.s,

twenty-six voted with the Liberals, fourteen followed Hicks Beach into the Government lobby, and twelve either abstained or were absent unpaired. Among those voting against the Government were Cecil, Churchill, Elliot, Hamilton and Ritchie.

The vote was a landmark in the brief and frustrating history of the Free Food League. It determined the attitudes of both Unionist and Liberal leaders towards the Unionist free trade dissidents. Balfour learned that he could keep the loyalty of at least a significant minority of free fooders as long as he did not go beyond his Sheffield policy. His strict adherence to that policy until the election of 1906 earned him the enmity of the extreme tariff reformers, but it neutralized the threat to his government from a coalition of Liberals and free fooders.⁵⁶ The Liberals learned that they could not count on unanimous support from the free fooders in embarrassing or turning out the government. They were reluctant to offer electoral support to any Unionist m.p. who had not consistently demonstrated his free trade militancy in the house of commons.⁴⁵

By the spring of 1904, the breach between free trade and tariff reform Unionists widened to a gulf as a result of the crisis which developed within the Liberal Unionist Association. Since October, 1903, tariff reformers had been capturing the local branches of the Liberal Unionist Club. The organization was, nonetheless, officially neutral on the fiscal question. In January, Devonshire, the presi-

dent of the Association, published an extensive correspondence with Chamberlain on the question of whether that neutrality had been broken by the tariff reformers. The Duke was eventually forced to recognize Chamberlain's capture of both the central and local organizations as a fait accompli. In May, the Chamberlainite majority on the Liberal Unionist Council voted for reorganization of the Association on democratic lines. This inspired a farewell address by Devonshire, who said that he could no longer remain in an organization united on one issue, home rule, yet so divided on a question which he considered equally important.⁴⁶ Strachey and other prominent free traders also resigned from the Association. Arthur Elliot declared that the reorganized body was "a machine for promoting the new Birmingham doctrines of Preference and Protection."⁴⁷ The purge of the free traders made the Liberal Unionist Council a tariff reform command post, rivalling the Conservative Central Organization within the Unionist party.

The disappearance of the old Liberal Unionist Association marks a symbolic point of no return in the relations between free trade and tariff reform Unionists. Only a complete renunciation of its position by one side or the other could have brought the party back together in 1904. Chamberlain's easy victory within the Liberal Unionist Association convinced his opponents that the fight against tariff reform required the same energy and determination that marked the earlier resistance to home rule. The

practically moribund Free Food League was no fit instrument for that struggle. Its members were unable to agree on a common course of action, especially on the questions of opposition to the Balfour Government and cooperation with the Liberals.

* * *

In the summer of 1904, a new organization, the Unionist Free Trade Club, grew out of the efforts of Strachey and Elliot to forge a more militant and homogenous organization, dedicated to the reconversion of the Unionist Party to free trade principles.⁴⁸ Although the organizers were former Liberal Unionists, they envisioned an organization open to Conservative and Liberal Unionist free traders alike, provided that they were agreed on the double object of maintaining the union with Ireland and defending free trade. They were determined to avoid repeating the ostrich-like tactics of the Free Food League, which had been prevented by "timid and divided counsels" from effectively serving the free trade cause.⁴⁹ It was decided that the Club would support only free trade candidates, irrespective of their party affiliations or their views on subjects other than free trade and Ireland.⁵⁰

The new organization gained momentum when several of the statesmen most identified with the free trade cause gave support. At a meeting at Devonshire House on December 1, 1904, the Unionist Free Trade Club was formally established with Devonshire as its first president. In January 1905 the Duke wound up the affairs of the Free Food League

by personally assuming its remaining debts. Hicks Beach advised him to "let it drop quietly out of existence," noting that "it has done so little that no one will notice its extinction."⁵¹

Strachey welcomed the Devonshire's leadership because it guaranteed that there would be nothing "weak-kneed" in the action of the Club.⁵² But he found that the Duke was still unwilling to adopt a policy that would place him in a position directly antagonistic to Balfour. The Duke rejected Strachey's suggestion that the Club officially oppose candidates who did not pledge themselves to resist the policies of Chamberlain. He insisted on a rule requiring his express consent before any electoral action was taken by the Club.⁵³

In its early stages, the Unionist Free Trade Club was a homogenous political grouping consisting almost exclusively of former Liberal Unionists, who, according to Strachey, were not afraid of "taking the consequences of their opposition to Protection" even if it meant a breach with the Unionist party.⁵⁴ Only twenty-nine m.p.s joined the new association, a marked decline from the fifty-three claimed by the Free Food League. In fact, when the free traders attempted to broaden the base of their membership, they encountered the same problems that had plagued the League. Prominent Conservative free traders like Hugh and Robert Cecil were invited to join but had serious reservations.

The Cecils believed that Unionist free traders had to take advantage of the differences which still existed between "Balfourians" and "Chamberlainites." At Edinburgh,

in October 1904, Balfour had presented his two-election policy, which promised that a Unionist government would not enact a preferential policy until after two general election victories. This infuriated the Chamberlainites and led many free traders to conclude that Balfour would resist tariff reform.⁵⁵ Robert Cecil reasoned that the failure to distinguish between "full-blooded Protectionists" and "lily-livered Ministerialists" could drive the latter into the Birmingham fold and further weaken the cause of free trade.⁵⁶ Cecil also believed that Conservative free traders could not pledge unreserved support to Liberal candidates opposing protectionists in parliamentary elections. "I do not think," he told Elliot, "that a Free-trader who is also a believer in Religious Education, in Unionism, and in moderate Imperialism, should vote for a Cliffordite, a Home Ruler, and a Little Englander, even if he was a Free-trader as well."⁵⁷ The increasing aggressiveness of the tariff reformers eventually forced Lord Hugh and Lord Robert Cecil to join the Unionist Free Trade Club, but they continued to demand that its activity be limited to opposing the Chamberlain brand of tariff reform.

Strachey, who distrusted Balfour's fiscal policy as much as he did that of Chamberlain, suspected that the unwillingness of the Cecils to break with their cousin was based on other considerations than the defense of free trade. He included them in his category of free traders whose views depended more upon dislike and distrust of Mr. Chamberlain than upon any special regard for economic

principle. They did not hate so much the sin as the sinner, and were chiefly indignant that an ex-Radical should be allowed to sow dissension in the Unionist Party.⁵⁸

Strachey warned Hugh Cecil that his policy of qualified support for Balfour would paralyze the Unionist free traders at a time when they needed to be the most active and vigorous.⁵⁹

The tactical dispute was reflected in Cecil's attempt to establish a free trade newspaper that would be more loyal to the prime minister. Unionist free traders were hampered by their lack of representation in the national press. The London Unionist dailies--the Times, Morning Post, Daily Telegraph, Daily Express and Pall Mall Gazette--gave their support to tariff reform.⁶⁰ The same was true for the regional press and, to a lesser degree, for the Unionist weekly and monthly journals.⁶¹ The Standard, the only Unionist free trade daily, was purchased in the fall of 1904 by Arthur Pearson, an enthusiastic tariff reform convert. Pearson was building a chain of eleven newspapers, which already included the Daily Express.⁶²

The Spectator was the only remaining vehicle of Unionist free trade opinion; a situation which was disquieting to the Cecils and other Tory free traders who objected to Strachey's unremitting hostility to the Balfour administration. Hugh Cecil saw the need for a free trade newspaper that was dedicated to supporting "the traditional principles of the Conservative party." For Cecil these

were the preservation of the union of Great Britain and Ireland, national defense, defense of the Established Church and religious education, and support for well-considered social reforms that preserved "the principle of individual liberty." On fiscal policy, the paper would adhere to the line drawn by Balfour at Sheffield and Edinburgh; opposing protection and food taxes, but supporting retaliation "in proper cases," and welcoming "a free discussion with representatives of the colonies and of India of any subject of interest to the empire--including Imperial defence and trade relations." In general the paper would be pledged "to support Mr. Balfour's administration and to work for the harmony of the whole Conservative Party."⁶³

Strachey did not believe that a newspaper could be "free trade" and "Balfourian" at the same time. He advised Cecil that "the impossible thing in journalism is to execute a daily 'egg dance.' The public becomes either confused or weary or indignant--or all three."⁶⁴ Cecil denied that his newspaper would "egg dance" and promised a forceful rather than ambiguous free trade policy.⁶⁵ But Strachey's warning may have struck home. Lord Hugh admitted that a policy of "straddle" would defeat the purposes of the paper. He explained his views to his brother:

I don't mean that the writers of articles need be in their hearts opposed to Preference for ever and ever, but that they must avoid language of the "at present" kind, since that implies that at a future day the paper will be in favour of Preference, and opposition

is thus practically transformed into support.⁶⁶

The difficulties of defining an unambiguous fiscal policy were secondary to the problem of financing a new paper. Cecil estimated that £250,000 was needed for the venture. He thought that the Observer, an ailing weekly, could be purchased and converted into a daily.⁶³ Lord Robert Cecil tried to stir up interest in the City, using Edgar Vincent, a Unionist free trade m.p., and Samuel Jeyes, the former editor of the Standard as intermediaries.⁶⁸ The results were discouraging. Lord Rothschild, a free trader by conviction and a Balfourian in practice, regretted that a long standing rule of his firm precluded any connection with the press.⁶⁹

Cecil's efforts were encouraged by prominent Liberal Imperialists. Richard Haldane reported that Lord Rosebery approved of Cecil's principles and wanted to see a truly independent paper established.⁷⁰ For a time there was a possibility that Albert Speyer, a wealthy Liberal financier, would contribute £200,000 to the venture. But Speyer ultimately decided that he did not wish to be associated with a "Tory" paper.

In the end the project was abandoned because of a lack of capital. Cecil's designs on the Observer were thwarted by Alfred Harmsworth, who purchased the weekly in 1905. After floundering for a few years, it became, under the editorship of J.L. Garvin the most respected organ of tariff reform opinion.⁷¹ Cecil could find no back-

ers who had the resources or imagination of Harmsworth. Wealthy free traders were unwilling to invest in a new paper that would have such slim chance of survival in the competitive world of London journalism. Edgar Vincent reported his disappointment at finding "capital so timid, and mind so invariably dissociated from wealth."⁷²

* * *

In the winter of 1904, the intensified attacks by the Tariff Reform League on the seats of Unionist free traders in parliament demonstrated the need for a more vigorous policy. Lord Hugh Cecil at Greenwich, Arthur Elliot at Durham, and Edgar Vincent at Exeter were among those free traders who were asked not to stand for re-election by the tariff reform majorities in their constituency associations. The Cecils wrote a number of passionate appeals to Balfour, protesting an organized attempt to drive all free traders out of the house of commons and the party. Lord Robert Cecil argued that the attacks were confounding the efforts of free traders like himself, who were working to keep the peace. "Of course," he noted, "St. Loe Strachey et hoc genus omne are triumphantly saying, I told you so!" He warned that unless Balfour repudiated the tactics of the Tariff Reform League, the views of Strachey and Elliot would prevail among Unionist free traders, with the likelihood of a formal break with the party.⁷³

Balfour sympathized with the plight of Hugh Cecil, and even tried to intervene on his behalf with Chamberlain.

But by the early months of 1905 the trend was clear. Balfour had to accept the wishes of local Conservative associations which were supporting tariff reform candidates and withdrawing support from sitting free traders.

The tariff reform assault made Hugh Cecil more anxious to arrange a reconciliation between the free traders and the prime minister. He wanted to give Balfour greater independence from his protectionist supporters, and thereby weaken the influence of Chamberlain on the party. To that end Cecil prepared a "manifesto," which suggested the extent to which free trade Unionists could accept the fiscal policy statements made by Balfour since 1903.⁷⁴ His object was to define the free trade position in terms that were as conciliatory to Balfour as possible, while still clearly antagonistic to Chamberlain.

In the first place, the principle of retaliatory tariffs was to be accepted, provided that such tariffs could be instituted only by act of parliament and were strictly limited to furthering commercial relations with individual nations. Secondly, Cecil proposed approval for Balfour's "two election" scheme, by which any scheme for preferential duties arising out of a Colonial Conference would not be binding on a Unionist government unless it was referred to the people in a second general election and approved. The controversial subject of "dumping" should be referred to a royal commission representing all opinions in the fiscal controversy. Cecil concluded by repeating the firm refusal

of Unionist free traders to consider any proposal for protective tariffs.

The manifesto was intended as a wedge to separate Balfour from Chamberlain. It would, Cecil argued, strengthen Balfour's hand while placing Chamberlain in some difficulty, "for unless he is ready to give up his policy he cannot accept it, and it would not be easy to attack it without also attacking A.J.B."⁷⁵ Nor did he consider that he had surrendered his free trade principles. The proposal committed them to little more than the principle of submitting fiscal reforms to the people in a general election.⁷⁶ But most free trade leaders agreed with Lord Goschen, who argued that the compromise would weaken their moral position in the country while failing in its goal of stiffening Balfour against Chamberlain.⁷⁷ Strachey, while insisting that he was not an "impossible purist" when it came to party politics, thought that the proposal would make it impossible for a genuine free trader to belong to the free trade section of the Unionist party.⁷⁸ The Cecil Manifesto was rejected by the Executive Committee of the Unionist Free Trade Club, with Lord Balfour of Burleigh raising the only voice in its behalf.⁷⁹

An atmosphere of defeatism pervaded the proceedings of the Unionist Free Trade Club during the last months of the Balfour government. Although the leaders rejected Cecil's proposed modus vivendi with Balfour, they were unwilling to endorse Strachey's request for vigorous action in the constituencies against both Chamberlainite and

Balfourian tariff reformers. Devonshire defined the role of the Club as providing "a centre and nucleus" around which the scattered remnants of the Unionist party could rally after the next election. The inevitability of that defeat, reasoned the Duke, temporarily placed the cause of free trade out of danger. There was thus no reason for free traders to attempt to guarantee the fiscal orthodoxy of every Unionist candidate as a condition for their support. They could weigh other considerations than fiscal views before casting their votes.⁸⁰

Devonshire's retreat from the militancy of his Lewisham letter disturbed Strachey. He regarded the Duke's advice as "a most dangerous piece of optimism," which could result in "the extinction of the Unionist Free Traders in parliament."⁸¹ He was still hoping for a last minute concordat with the Liberals to protect the seats of Unionist free traders. But such help would require reciprocal support by the Club for Liberals opposed by tariff reformers. Devonshire was unwilling to give such support.

In his quest for an arrangement with the Liberals, Stachey recognized that he was "keeping strange company."⁸² He dined in the house of commons with Asquith, Haldane, Grey and Morley, and met Campbell-Bannerman at a private dinner in the home of a mutual friend, Sidney Buxton. Strachey urged the Liberals to concentrate their attack on the free trade question, and avoid emphasis on other controversial issues that might scare away Unionist free trade

votes. He was particularly concerned with the question of home rule. In March 1905, Strachey and Elliot met with Haldane, Asquith and Lloyd George, and received assurances that home rule would be played down in the coming election campaign as an issue that had to be deferred to the indefinite future.⁸³

On December 14, 1905, Balfour submitted the resignation of his government, bringing a decade of Unionist rule to a close. Campbell-Bannerman formed a Liberal ministry, determined to call for a general election at the earliest opportune moment. But most Unionist free traders took no solace in the fact that a free trade government was now in office. They faced an uncertain future with their ranks divided and their morale at low ebb. In the house of commons their influence had been weakened during the session of 1904 when ten free traders, including Churchill, John Seely, Sir John Dickson-Poynder and Ivor Guest crossed the floor to join the Liberals. By the time of the General Election of 1906, seven more had made the pilgrimage. Unionist free trade ranks in the house of commons were further depleted when Ritchie and Hicks Beach accepted peerages and Lord George Hamilton announced his retirement. Out of the original group of free trade leaders only Elliot and Hugh Cecil stood for re-election in 1906, both opposed by official Unionist candidates named by their constituency associations. Many other free traders realized that their political future looked dim and gravitated to the central, Balfourian section

of the party for protection.⁸⁴

Strachey was disgusted with the waverings of his colleagues and decided to cross his personal Rubicon. In April 1905 he accepted an invitation to stand for parliament as an independent Unionist free trader with Liberal endorsement, at the Universities of Edinburgh and St. Andrews. His opponent was to be Sir Henry Craik, a moderate tariff reformer, who was the official Unionist candidate.⁸⁵ Strachey also gave his editorial support to the new Liberal ministry.

Although individual free traders like Strachey made arrangements with the Liberals, a new party coalition reminiscent of 1886 failed to materialize. The Duke of Devonshire regarded the substantial range of issues still separating Unionist free traders and Liberals as an insuperable barrier to alliance. He admitted to Balfour:

At the Home Rule time, there were fortunately no very serious differences between Liberal Unionists and Conservatives which might have prevented a practical alliance. There are no doubt now many more serious differences between the Free Trade Unionists and the Radicals, and it is this fact which has hitherto prevented any similar alliance being formed.⁸⁶

A Unionist free trader might be steadfast in defense of free trade but at the same time oppose the Liberal position on educational, financial and imperial policy. Balfour shrewdly pressed these differences to his advantage in his correspondence with Devonshire and the Cecils. He raised the spectre of "Home Rule all round," Welsh disestablishment, taxation of ground rents, and payments of members, as evils that would be "within the range of practical politics" as

soon as the Liberals were in office.⁸⁷

The accession of the Gladstonian, Campbell-Bannerman, to the premiership was enough to convince some Unionists that the union with Ireland was in danger. A.V. Dicey, for example, regarded himself as a "Free Trade Unionist" rather than a "Unionist Free Trader."⁸⁸ Believing that an extended period of Liberal rule would lead inevitably to home rule, Dicey suggested that it was the duty of Unionist free traders "to make clear to themselves and to others, whether, should the disastrous necessity for a choice arise, it is to Unionism or to Free Trade that they would give their preference."⁸⁹

Strachey did not see the necessity for such a choice. He thought that the new ministry would avoid any action that would weaken the forces against protection. He accepted Campbell-Bannerman's assurances that no home rule bill would be introduced in the new parliament. The home rule "bogey" was, in his eyes, a false issue promoted by the Chamberlainites to weaken the defenses of free trade. Strachey suggested that the real threat to the union might eventually arise from a protectionist government, based on an alliance between the Irish Nationalists and the Chamberlainites.⁹⁰

The Duke of Devonshire was not alarmed by the home rule "bogey," and was angered by Balfour's refusal to make a public renunciation of preference.⁹¹ On the eve of the election, he published a letter to Elliot which denied that the union was threatened, and urged free traders to concentrate on the real question of the day--the defense of

free trade. The immediate danger was that the Unionist party might become predominantly protectionist. He advised free trade voters to take such action as was necessary "to show that the Party was uncommitted to a retrograde fiscal policy, by whomsoever it was proposed."⁹²

Strachey was disappointed that the Duke refrained from specifically advising his followers to vote for Liberals in preference to tariff reformers. By withholding such advice, Devonshire forfeited the moderating influence that Unionist free traders might exert on a Liberal Government. Strachey wanted the Liberals to know that the support of Unionist free trade votes was an essential element in their victory. He believed a Liberal ministry could resist the more extreme demands of its Irish and Labour supporters if the impact on Unionist free trade opinion had to be taken equally into account.⁹³ To contribute to that end, Strachey phrased his editorial advice to British voters in no uncertain terms: In constituencies where the Unionist candidate did not officially repudiate Chamberlain's policy, and the Liberal candidate gave assurances on home rule similar to his party leaders, it was the duty of Unionist free traders to vote for the Liberal.⁹⁴

The General Election of 1906 resulted in a spectacular defeat for the Unionist party. Any appeal that tariff reform might have had as an electoral weapon was more than blunted by almost three years of continuous controversy that had divided and weakened the party. The cry

of "dear food" undoubtedly hurt the Unionists and Strachey was reasonable to conclude the election was fought and won on the issue of free trade.⁹⁵ But some contemporaries and certain historians of the period have given partial or equal weight to other issues.⁹⁶

The majority of Unionist free trade m.p.s had reconciled with their party in the last days of the Balfour government and were opposed by Liberals in the general election. Only eleven out of fifty-six free trade candidates were returned to the new parliament. In just six contests, including those of Strachey and Elliot, the Liberals stepped aside and left a clearcut fight between a free trade and a tariff reform Unionist. In only one of these contests was the free trader victorious.

The poll at Edinburgh and St. Andrews was taken late in the election, long after the general outcome was assured. Strachey was at a distinct disadvantage, contesting as he did a traditionally Conservative University seat against an incumbent who was both a Scot and a medical doctor. He was "roundly beaten" by his tariff reform opponent.⁹⁷ But in spite of his personal defeat, Strachey was pleased with the verdict of the polls, which he saw as a vindication of the policy he had followed in the Spectator since 1903.⁹⁸ His only regret was the failure of most Unionist free traders to pursue a similarly aggressive policy before and during the election campaign. They had, he told Margot Asquith, "acted a most sorry part," and deserved their

political extinction. He was proud of his own role in the election:

I, at any rate, showed no weakness or wobbling, but did my best to place a Free Trade Government in power and to defeat Protection.⁹⁹

In the long run, however, Strachey had little cause for celebration. The most able Unionist free trade m.p.s--Hugh Cecil, Elliot, Gibson Bowles--had been defeated. Strachey's hopes for a reconstruction of the party on free trade lines after the election were dimmed by the fact that the great majority of Unionists who survived the Liberal landslide were supporters of Chamberlain. In the days following the election, the latter would intensify their efforts to purge the Unionist party of free traders and make their full program the official party doctrine.

¹The Liberal Imperialists welcomed the tariff reform controversy as an opportunity to demonstrate that home rule was no longer the line of demarcation between the Unionist and Liberal parties. H.C.G. Matthew, The Liberal Imperialists--The Ideas and Politics of a Post-Gladstonian Elite (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), pp. 102, 265-286.

²Parliamentary Debates (House of Commons) fifth series, vol. 106, pp. 200-208.

³Spectator 88 (April 19, 1902), 580-581.

⁴Ibid. (April 26, 1902), 636; (May 31, 1902), 828.

⁵Ibid. (May 31, 1902), 828.

⁶Amery, Life of Chamberlain, IV, 405.

⁷Spectator 88 (May 31, 1902), 828.

⁸The Parliamentary Debates (House of Commons) fifth series, vol. 106, pp. 239-240.

⁹Richard A. Rempel, Unionists Divided: Arthur Balfour, Joseph Chamberlain and the Unionist Free Traders. (Hamden, Conn.: David and Charles, 1972), p. 18.

¹⁰Amery, Life of Chamberlain, V, p. 125.

¹¹Ibid., pp. 150-152, 157-161.

¹²Spectator 90 (April 25, 1903), 648.

¹³Amery, Life of Chamberlain, V, pp. 100-106.

¹⁴The causes for this decline are analyzed by Neal Blewett in The Peers, the Parties, and the People--The British General Elections of 1910. (Toronto Press, 1972), pp. 24-31.

¹⁵Rempel, Unionist Divided, pp. 41-42.

¹⁶Strachey Papers, Beaverbrook Library, St. Loe Strachey to Henry Strachey (copy), 22 May 1903.

¹⁷Strachey Papers, Churchill to Strachey, 30 May 1903.

¹⁸Spectator 90 (June 6, 1903), 881.

¹⁹Sir Archibald Salvidge, the Conservative "boss" of Liverpool, was also present at the meeting and stated his objections to any "cabal" against Joseph Chamberlain. See

Stanley Salvidge, Salvidge of Liverpool, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, Ltd., 1934), p. 48.

²⁰Annual Register 1903, p. 212.

²¹The Times, January 28, 1904, p. 8.

²²Annual Register 1903, p. 212.

²³The Times, November 6, 1903, p. 9; November 14, 1903, p. 12.

²⁴Spectator 91 (September 26, 1903), 448.

²⁵Ibid., 91 (October 24, 1903), 636; 91 (November 21, 1903), 856.

²⁶Devonshire Papers, Chatsworth, 340.2995, Lord George Hamilton to Devonshire, 6 October 1903. Hamilton reported that his election committee was against him "almost to a man" on the fiscal question.

²⁷Sir Almeric Fitzroy, Memoirs (London, 1931), I, pp. 170-171.

²⁸The Times, November 25, 1903, p. 10.

²⁹Ibid., January 14, 1904, p. 8.

³⁰Devonshire Papers, 340.3033, Lord Hugh Cecil to Devonshire, 2 December 1903. Cecil summarized the views of Winston Churchill, John Seely, Ernest Beckett, Edgar Vincent and Ivor Guest, all young Unionist free trade M.P.s.

³¹Ibid., 340.3034, Devonshire to Cecil, 4 December 1903.

³²Ibid., 340.3038, Devonshire to Rosebery, 12 December 1903.

³³Ibid., Lord Spencer to Devonshire, 7 January 1904.

³⁴Quickwood Papers, Hatfield, QUI 63/19, Churchill to Hugh Cecil, 1 January 1904.

³⁵Devonshire Papers, 340.3055, Churchill to Devonshire, 6 January 1904.

³⁶Ibid., 340.2997, Churchill to Devonshire, 6 October 1903. Churchill's views were shared by Sir John Dickson Poynder, Major John Seely, and Ivor Guest in the house of commons, and Lord Goschen and Lord James of Hereford in the house of lords.

- ³⁷Ibid., 340.3063, Churchill to Devonshire, 13 January 1904.
- ³⁸Spectator 92 (January 9, 1904), 38.
- ³⁹Devonshire Papers, 340.3062, Lord George Hamilton to Devonshire, 12 January 1904.
- ⁴⁰Quickwood Papers, QUI 2/5-11, Memorandum by Lord Hugh Cecil. "The Relations Present and Future of the Unionist Free Traders to the Unionist and Liberal Parties," January, 1904.
- ⁴¹J. St. Loe Strachey, "The Unionist Free Traders," The Nineteenth Century and After, 56 (August, 1904), p. 238.
- ⁴²Spectator 91 (December 12, 1903), 1012-13.
- ⁴³The Nineteenth Century and After, LVI (August 1904), p. 240.
- ⁴⁴Devonshire proposed that as an alternative to moving an amendment to the Address, Campbell-Bannerman should ask Balfour to give time after the Address to a debate on the fiscal question. This was rejected by the Liberal leaders. Devonshire Papers, 340.3067, Lord Spencer to Devonshire, 29 January 1904.
- ⁴⁵Rempel, Unionists Divided, p. 89.
- ⁴⁶The Times (January 1, 1904), p. 8; May 19, 1904, p. 3.
- ⁴⁷The Annual Register 1904, p. 165.
- ⁴⁸Cromer Papers, Public Record Office, vol. 18, pp. 52-55. Arthur D. Elliot, "Notes on the Unionist Free Trade Club," May, 1908.
- ⁴⁹Spectator 93 (July 2, 1904), 4-5.
- ⁵⁰Cromer Papers, vol. 18, p. 53.
- ⁵¹Devonshire Papers, 340.3123, Hicks Beach to Devonshire, 14 January 1905.
- ⁵²Spectator 93 (December 3, 1904), 884.
- ⁵³Cromer Papers, vol. 18, p. 53.
- ⁵⁴Spectator 93 (December 3, 1904), 884.
- ⁵⁵Rempel, Unionists Divided, pp. 123-4.

⁵⁶Cecil of Chelwood Papers, Hatfield, CHE 93/81.
Lord Robert Cecil to Arthur Elliot, 14 July 1904.

⁵⁷Ibid., Dr. John Clifford, a Baptist minister, was the leader of nonconformist resistance to the Education Act of 1902.

⁵⁸Spectator 93 (December 3, 1904), 884.

⁵⁹Quickwood Papers, QUI 2/156, Strachey to Cecil, 29 December 1904.

⁶⁰The cause of free trade was championed by the Liberal dailies: The Westminster Gazette, The Daily News, The Daily Chronicle, The Manchester Guardian and the Leeds Mercury.

⁶¹The National Review under Leo Maxse, the Saturday Review, and the Empire Review were partisan Chamberlainite journals. Blackwood's, the Fortnightly, and Nineteenth Century, maintained their neutrality, publishing articles on both sides of the question. The free trade viewpoint was expressed in Arthur Eliot's Edinburgh Review and in the Liberal journals; The Monthly, Quarterly, and Contemporary Reviews.

⁶²Arthur Pearson was chairman of the Executive Committee of the Tariff Reform League.

⁶³Cecil of Chelwood Papers, Hatfield, CHE 83/90.
"Memorandum on the Principles of a New Paper," 1904.

⁶⁴Quickwood Papers, QUI 2/144, Strachey to Hugh Cecil, 22 December 1904.

⁶⁵Strachey Papers, Hugh Cecil to Strachey, 23 December 1904.

⁶⁶Cecil of Chelwood Papers, Hatfield, CHE 83/71-72.
Lord Hugh Cecil to Lord Robert Cecil, n.d.

⁶⁷Strachey Papers, Hugh Cecil to Strachey, 12 November 1904.

⁶⁸Cecil of Chelwood Papers, Hatfield, CHE 93/64.
Edgar Vincent to Lord Robert Cecil, 24 November 1904. CHE 83/70, S.H. Jeyes to Lord Robert Cecil, 6 January 1905.

⁶⁹Ibid., CHE 93/66-67. Lord Rothschild to Robert Cecil, 30 November 1904. Rothschild believed that a paper identified exclusively with the fiscal question would be doomed to failure. He added that his experience showed "that little or no interest is taken in the Fiscal ques-

tion--and, on the contrary, the Education Act is most unpopular, to my great regret, and may lead to disastrous consequences."

⁷⁰Ibid., CHE 83/80. R. Haldane to Robert Cecil, 5 February 1905.

⁷¹Alfred M. Gollin, The Observer and J.L. Garvin 1908-1914; A Study in a Great Editorship (London: Oxford University Press, 1960).

⁷²Cecil of Chelwood Papers, Hatfield, CHE 83/65. Sir Edgar Vincent to Robert Cecil, November 1904.

⁷³Balfour Papers, British Museum, Add. Mss. 49737, fos. 29-32. Memorandum by Lord Robert Cecil, 1905; fos. 27-28, Robert Cecil to J.S. Sandars, February 18, 1905.

⁷⁴Devonshire Papers, 340.3135. Draft of Lord Hugh Cecil's proposed Manifesto, 1905.

⁷⁵Ibid., 340.3134. Hugh Cecil to Devonshire, Good Friday, 1905.

⁷⁶Ibid., 340.3137, Hugh Cecil to Devonshire, n.d. (1905).

⁷⁷Ibid., 340.3136A Lord Goschen to Devonshire, 27 April 1905.

⁷⁸Strachey Papers, Strachey to Hugh Cecil, 3 June 1905.

⁷⁹Quickswood Papers, QUI 3/129. Note by Hugh Cecil (n.d.) on cover of Memorandum on Policy of Unionist Free Traders, 1 May 1905.

⁸⁰Annual Register 1905, p. 117. Report of speech by Devonshire at the Banquet of the Unionist Free Trade Club, April 10, 1905.

⁸¹Spectator, 94 (April 13, 1905), 540.

⁸²Strachey Papers, St. Loe to Henry Strachey, 31 March 1905.

⁸³Rempel, Unionists Divided, pp. 144-5.

⁸⁴Amery, Life of Chamberlain, VI, p. 769.

⁸⁵Strachey Papers, St. Loe to Henry Strachey, 22 April 1905.

⁸⁶Devonshire Papers, 340.3158. Devonshire to Balfour, 8 November 1905.

⁸⁷Ibid., 340.3155. Balfour to Devonshire, 27 October 1905.

⁸⁸Robert S. Rait, ed., Memorials of Albert Venn Dicey (London: Macmillan Co., Ltd., 1925), pp. 116-117.

⁸⁹A.V. Dicey, "The Paralysis of the Constitution," Contemporary Review, LXXXVIII (July-December 1905), 305-316.

⁹⁰Spectator 95 (September 9, 1905), 341-2; 93 (March 19, 1904), 441; 96 (January 27, 1906), 129.

⁹¹Devonshire had offered Unionist free trade support in return for an anti-protection declaration by the prime minister. Rempel, Unionists Divided, p. 152.

⁹²Annual Register 1906, p. 2.

⁹³Cromer Papers, vol. 18. Memorandum by St. Loe Strachey on the policy of the Unionist Free Trade Party. 29 December 1908, pp. 114-116.

⁹⁴Spectator 96 (January 6, 1906), 4-5.

⁹⁵Ibid., 96 (January 20, 1906), p. 81. Richard Rempel concludes that the existence of the Unionist free traders induced thousands of normally Unionist voters to abstain or vote Liberal. Unionist Divided, p. 164.

⁹⁶Julian Amery, the biographer of Joseph Chamberlain, places the fiscal question last in importance in his list of the four major causes of the great defeat. The active opposition of Labour and the alienation of the Nonconformists are emphasized by Amery as being more central to that defeat than the tariff reform or Chinese Labour questions. See Julian Amery, Life of Chamberlain, VI, pp. 790-795.

⁹⁷Amy Strachey, St. Loe Strachey, p. 157.

⁹⁸J.A. Spender, the editor of the Liberal Westminster Gazette, later complimented Strachey for keeping on "unflinchingly and most courageously when many of his colleagues were picking their way back into the Conservative camp." [Life, Journalism and Politics, (New York: Frederick Stokes, 1934), II, p. 118.]

⁹⁹Strachey Papers, Strachey to Margot Asquith, 15 November 1906.

CHAPTER V

THE LESSER EVIL: TARIFF REFORM OR SOCIALISM ?

The years of the Campbell-Bannerman and Asquith ministries were a time of frustration and defeat for the Unionist free traders. Victims of a successful campaign by the Chamberlainites to capture the party for tariff reform and of a purge of free trade dissentients, they found the alternative of cooperation with the Liberals unacceptable as well. Though Strachey welcomed the election of 1906 as a great victory for free trade, within a short time the government's social reform legislation appeared to him to be a betrayal of the cause of free trade. He predicted such legislation would lead the nation down the path to socialism or to protection.

Strachey had always been conservative on the question of social reform, opposing state intervention in the domestic market economy with the same vehemence that he defended free international exchange. Even Charles Booth's revelation that almost a third of the population of London lived in poverty did not shake Strachey's faith that a society organized on an individualistic basis was still "a fairly efficient piece of machinery for securing the greatest (material) happiness of the greatest number."¹ He believed

that all attempts by the state to improve the condition of the poor had to answer the following question:

Would the class which it is proposed to help by the new law be able to help themselves if the State did not interfere?²

He regarded the Poor Law of 1834, with its "less-eligibility" principle, as the model for all social legislation.³

Strachey shared the concern of Dicey and other Unionist free traders with the decline of laissez-faire individualism in the last decades of the nineteenth century.⁴ When editing the Liberal Unionist he turned on occasion from the Irish question to offer "plain words on socialistic problems," by which he meant the modifications of laissez-faire individualism. His articles on that subject read like a Cobdenite, anti-socialist catechism:

Should those who desire, above all things, an improvement in the condition of the Labourer become Socialists?
No.
Why not?
Because Socialism, if carried out, would injure instead of benefiting the Labourer.⁵

Socialism would impoverish the national economy by destroying the incentive of self-interest, the "motive force" of the machinery producing wealth. It would also impoverish the national character by producing "a universal sameness of life, universal obedience, and universal freedom from competition."⁶

Strachey believed that the British were by nature resistant to the regimentation and minute supervision of a truly socialist regime. The more immediate danger was

"collectivism" as preached by the Webbs, which called for the regeneration of society through positive action by the state. The statist philosophy was particularly formidable because it corresponded to the trend towards monopolies and trusts in industry. A "lawless capitalism" Strachey noted, was as great a threat to individualism as a "lawless communism."⁷ Strachey's attitude towards social reform became more inflexible during the tariff reform controversy. He opposed ambitious and costly reforms that could not, he believed, be financed within the free trade system. Ironically, Strachey accepted the argument of his protectionist opponents, who claimed that tariff reform, with its promise of full employment and prosperity, was the only alternative to socialistic, "confiscatory" taxation. Strachey refused to accept either alternative, urging limitation of expenditure to a level that could be financed out of ordinary tax revenues.

Strachey's fears for the survival of the free trade economy lent an extra note of bitterness to his criticism of Liberal social reform policy. Within months of the election of 1906 he charged that a victory fought and won on the question of free trade was being used as a mandate for socialistic measures designed to please class and sectional interests.⁸ Denouncing the trend towards "the manufacture of paupers" by the state, he opposed proposals for relief of the unemployed, state feeding of school children, and non-contributory old age pensions as measures that would

weaken personal responsibility and destroy the structure of the family.⁹

Strachey's concern with these measures led him to join the British Constitution Association in the spring of 1907. His cousin, William Chance, was an organizer of the Association, which was founded in 1905 to oppose what its members considered was a dangerous drift towards socialism in the legislation proposed by the new Campbell-Bannerman ministry.¹⁰ Many Unionist free traders were active members of the organization, including Lord Hugh Cecil, Lord Balfour of Burleigh, and Dicey. Strachey was elected to the governing council and tried, with varying degrees of success, to recruit other prominent free traders.¹¹

In his keynote address at the annual conference of the Association in 1907, Strachey noted that its primary object was "to uphold the individualist principle as opposed to the socialist principle, as the foundation of any Government or national policy." The state could not guarantee the love of its citizens through social welfare legislation. Duty, not privilege, was "the soil in which patriotism flourishes best." The immediate practical objectives of the Association were to oppose state-provided universal old-age pensions, school meals, and the demoralization of labor through the "endowment" of the unemployed.¹²

Conspicuously missing from his list of objectives was any reference to the defense of free trade. Although Unionist free traders dominated the Association, Strachey

and Cecil were concerned to attract the tariff reformers-- to separate them from those who like Lord Milner, were calling for the adoption of social reform by the Unionist Party.¹³ Although he wanted the Association to avoid the fiscal controversy, Strachey was hopeful that the fight against socialism might cause tariff reformers to question their beliefs. He explained to Lord Rosebery:

Protection and Socialism are really joined at the base. Both involve State servitude; one by forbidding free exchange and free competition in commodities, and the other by interfering in the exchange of human services.¹⁴

But the only notable tariff reformer who appears to have joined the Association was the Chamberlainite m.p., Sir Frederick Banbury, a recruit who Cecil thought would lend an impression of "monied respectability" to the Association.¹⁵

Strachey's criticisms of Liberal social policy continued to mount after Asquith succeeded Campbell-Bannerman as prime minister in 1908. His particular grievance was the government's commitment to non-contributory old-age pensions. While believing that pensions were "a right inherent in every member of the community," Strachey had objected to Charles Booth's proposal for universal pensions at the expense of the state, believing that they would be too costly and would discourage people from providing for their own old age.¹⁶ He preferred Joseph Chamberlain's plan for reinforcing voluntary thrift through a system of supplementary pensions to contributors to Friendly Societies or to a post office insurance scheme.¹⁷

For Strachey the Liberal proposal was objectionable on the same grounds that he had opposed Booth's plan in the 1890's. But his fanatic resistance to the measure can be explained only by his fears for free trade. He told Margot Asquith:

This pledge is the most deadly blow which has ever been aimed at Free Trade, and for that reason I can no longer regard the Ministry as the bulwark of the cause which I hold dear.¹⁸

Old age pensions would be the straw that broke the back of free trade finance. How could they be paid for unless by an enormous increase in indirect taxation--in other words by the imposition of a tariff?

Strachey's argument drew an unusual personal rejoinder from the prime minister, who regretted that the Spectator was losing its way on the question of financing old-age pensions. Arguing that no free trade government could neglect social reform, Asquith noted:

I have realized from the first that if it could not be proven that social reform (not Socialism) can be financed on Free Trade lines, a return to Protection is a final certainty.¹⁹

His argument was based upon the assumption that the emergence of the working class vote and the Labour party had made social reform a primary issue of the day. The leaders of both parties were of this opinion and, in fact, the old age pensions bill passed through both houses with a minimum of resistance. But fiscal conservatives like Strachey were not the only critics of the bill. It was opposed as well in influential sectors of the organized working class.²⁰

John Strachey has left an account of his father's reaction to the passage of the act:

For us it was a day of family mourning. I was not, so far as I can remember, prompted in the least to wonder why the fact that certain old men and women were going to receive a few shillings a week was such a catastrophic disaster. But I saw that my father really thought that some tremendous principle had been outraged and that national decay had now set in.²¹

Strachey's intense dislike for the bill had even prompted him to abandon his counsels of moderation to the house of lords. He regarded its failure to reject or postpone old age pensions as a sign of the "breakdown of the Constitution."²² "My quarrel with the House of Lords," he informed Mrs. Asquith, "is not that they pass too few Liberal measures, but that they pass too many."²³

Strachey predicted that the legislation would entail a calamitous growth of public expenditure that could not be met by existing sources of revenue--a claim that was dismissed by Asquith as the exaggerated pessimism of his "poor, weebegone friend, the editor of the Spectator."²⁴ But in this matter Strachey had the last word. The applications for old age pensions far exceeded government expectations, and revenues set aside for the purpose were exhausted before the end of the first year. The expense of the pensions, added to increased naval expenditure, created a fiscal dilemma for the government. The result was the controversial Lloyd George Budget of 1909.

* * *

While Strachey and the Unionist free traders were

hostile to the policies of the government, they found that the door to reconciliation with the Unionist Party was barred against them by tariff reform extremists. After the election of 1906, the Chamberlainites made their most aggressive bid to capture the party for tariff reform. Chamberlain, supported by nearly two-thirds of the Unionists in the house of commons, used his strength to exact full support of his program from the party leaders. His followers attacked the "Byzantine" theory of party leadership and called for a democratic caucus system that would weaken the authority of Balfour and the Central Office.

Balfour was willing to compromise to ward off a direct challenge to his leadership. In the "Valentine" correspondence with Chamberlain he declared that tariff reform was henceforth "the first constructive work of the Unionist Party." When the Unionists returned to office there would be a general tariff on manufactured goods and a small duty on corn produced outside the empire. Chamberlain welcomed this commitment to both protection and preference as a policy around which the party could unite.

The Valentine correspondence became the "Holy Writ" of the tariff reformers--a standard of orthodoxy used to banish free trade heretics into the political wilderness.²⁵ There was a concerted effort to drive the free traders out of the house of commons and from all positions of influence within the party.²⁶ Chamberlain's paralytic stroke increased the zeal of his adherents to complete the conversion

of the party. A secret society, known as the Confederates was formed early in 1907 to act as "the inquisitorial arm of the tariff reform movement."²⁷

Strachey proposed an independent and aggressive response to this challenge. To counter attacks in the constituencies, the Unionist Free Trade Club had to transform itself into a political party, contest elections, and hold up the banner of free trade until such time that the Unionist party returned to its senses. He predicted that this would not happen until the Unionists suffered another election defeat and "wandered in the wilderness for ten to twelve years."²⁸

The Unionist Free Trade Club was ill-equipped to take such action. The election had reduced its representation in parliament and it had no local machinery that could compete with the infiltration of constituency organizations by the Tariff Reform League. Devonshire was aware of the Club's weakness and hostile to any action that would widen the breach in the party. Alarmed at the large Labour vote and opposed to most aspects of the Liberal program, he saw no alternative but to work for Unionist reconciliation.

This disagreement with Devonshire was particularly painful for Strachey, who, up to then, had regarded the Duke as the exemplary British statesman. He was forced to drop his proposal when Devonshire threatened to resign if it was accepted by the Club.²⁹ There was obviously no Unionist free trader of sufficient stature to take his

place. Strachey summed up his frustration in a letter to Margot Asquith:

If you ask me who I could follow as a political leader I shall not know how to reply, for, much as I admire and respect the Duke of Devonshire, he hardly fulfills the office of a leader, owing to his natural reticence and apparently instinctive dislike of leadership.³⁰

He resigned himself to the role of a "free trade free-lance" for the immediate future.

For Strachey, the vacuum in political leadership was filled when Lord Cromer returned to England following his retirement from service in Egypt in 1907. His friendship with the famous proconsul was to be an essential element in his political influence in succeeding years. Cromer found himself in unfamiliar and uncongenial political surroundings. Like Strachey he could not identify himself completely with either the Liberals or Unionists.³¹ He was by nature what Chamberlain contemptuously dismissed as "the cross-benchmind" and he took his place naturally on the cross benches of the house of lords.³²

Despite his poor health, Cromer was persuaded by Strachey and by his brother-in-law Sir Hugh Shaw-Stewart to join the Unionist Free Trade Club. He had been interested in the fiscal controversy from its inception, and his letters to Strachey from Egypt were dominated by the question of the day.³³ Cromer regretted that his official position prevented him from taking a public stand in defense of free trade. Now, however, he was free to speak his mind. At a Unionist Free Trade banquet in his honor, he

declared himself as "a convinced and wholly unrepentant Free Trader." The Spectator placed him at the side of those statesmen determined "to defend the Union, to combat Socialist legislation, and to maintain Free Trade."³⁴ After the death of Devonshire in 1908, Cromer became the recognized leader of the Unionist Free Trade Club and was elected to its presidency.

Strachey established a close working relationship with Cromer and was consulted by him often in matters of public affairs. They found that they were in accord on all the great problems of the day. Strachey later recalled that during their lengthy discussions Cromer would frequently exclaim: "Strachey, you and I have been absolutely right from beginning to end."³⁵ Strachey believed that their personalities and experience were complementary. While Cromer was a statesman with first-hand contact with the problems of practical administration, Strachey was accustomed to dealing with the same problems as abstractions. He described his political cooperation with Cromer as resembling the relationship between a medical researcher and a practicing surgeon. The former, he explained:

. . . does not himself come into contact with the patient, though he is asked to investigate several points. His opinion may have great weight and influence but he does not carry out the physical cure of the patient.³⁶

Strachey thus claimed to have contributed the tactical and theoretical framework for Cromer's activities within and without the house of lords.

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Shortly before he assumed the leadership of the Unionist Free Trade Club, Cromer began to sound out the possibility of renewed cooperation with the Unionist leaders. He informed Lord Lansdowne that his associates were ready for unity, if it could be obtained without a sacrifice of essential principles. While recognizing the unlikelihood that free traders and tariff reformers could agree to common action on the fiscal question, Cromer suggested that they might "agree to differ" and work out an arrangement that at least would avoid confrontation in the constituencies.³⁷ At the same time, Strachey was in touch with Lord Curzon, who was relatively neutral in the tariff controversy, concerning his proposal for a truce while an impartial royal commission dealt with the questions of free trade, protection, and preference.³⁸

But any possibility of a modus vivendi within the party evaporated in the early days of 1908 when the Confederates intensified their efforts to purge free traders from the house of commons. Lord Robert Cecil, Thomas Gibson Bowles, and Abel Smith all faced censure and rejection by their constituency associations.³⁹ To add insult to injury, Lord Robert was prevented from presiding at a dinner of the Cecil Club through the intervention of the Confederate chieftain Edward Goulding.⁴⁰ Cecil's appeals to Balfour and the central office fell on deaf ears. Balfour was personally opposed to proscription, but he insisted that he could not interfere with the right of local associations to choose

their own candidates.⁴¹ Acland Hood, the Conservative chief whip, stated that no candidate would receive the active support of the Central Office who did not fully subscribe to the tariff reform policy elaborated by Balfour at Birmingham in November 1907.⁴² The writing on the wall was clear. Unionist free traders would either have to modify their views or face political extinction.

Strachey regarded the situation as a vindication of the policy he had defended with little success in the organizing committee of the Unionist Free Trade Club. Only if the Club were prepared to contest by-elections with its own candidates could it make its weight felt by both parties and secure a better bargaining position. As it was, Unionist free traders were ignored by Balfour and attacked by the Confederates, while the Liberals introduced legislative schemes that made cooperation with them impossible.⁴³

The rebuffs from Balfour and the Central Office made more free traders willing to listen to Strachey. In February 1908 the Executive Committee approved his motion for the appointment of a subcommittee to determine which constituencies should be contested by Unionist free traders at the next general election.⁴⁴ Strachey, Robert Cecil, Arthur Elliot and Edward Mortimer were elected to the subcommittee.

But the first test of Strachey's policy was an absolute fiasco. Winston Churchill, the newly appointed president of the board of trade, had to stand for re-election in Northwest Manchester, a constituency with a large number

of Unionist free trade voters. Realizing that the Unionist leadership was particularly eager to defeat Churchill, Strachey conferred with Manchester free traders E.L. Oliver and Edward T. Broadhurst as to the possibility of an agreement. He proposed that support for the Unionist candidate, Joynson-Hicks, be made conditional on the favorable allocation of seats to Unionist free traders at the next General Election.⁴⁵

Joynson-Hicks was amenable to such an arrangement and was even willing to state that the fiscal question was in abeyance, and to fight the election on the issue of opposition to socialism. But Strachey's plans were shattered when Acland Hood called Joynson-Hicks on the carpet and warned that he would not be regarded as a Unionist candidate if he fought on the lines negotiated with the Unionist free traders. Lord Ridley, the president of the Tariff Reform League, also threatened to place a candidate against him.⁴⁶ Joynson-Hicks backed down, thus leaving the Unionist free traders to contemplate another sign of their political impotence.

Though there was talk of running Broadhurst against both Churchill and Joynson-Hicks, this proved impossible for the usual reason. The Club was too torn by tactical disputes to give its full support to an independent candidacy. Lord Hugh Cecil wanted no confrontation with the Unionist Party for any less cause than a direct attack on the seat of a free trader.⁴⁷ Lord James of Hereford did not

think that the Unionist free traders had enough electoral strength to warrant independent action.⁴⁸ Elliot refused to support a third candidate because he wanted Churchill re-elected as a rebuff to the Unionist leadership.⁴⁹ These same divisions carried over into the election in April. Lord Avebury signed Joynson-Hicks election manifesto while Elliot and Broadhurst actively campaigned for Churchill. In the end, Joynson-Hicks defeated Churchill by a narrow margin of votes.⁵⁰

The Manchester election proved the political weakness and vulnerability of the free traders. It convinced Robert Cecil that his political future depended on some form of compromise with the tariff reformers. In May 1908 he came to an agreement with his constituency association in East Marylebone which involved considerable concessions on the fiscal question. Cecil agreed not to oppose a duty on corn or even colonial preference provided that these formed part of a general tariff for revenue purposes only. He promised that if he ever found himself at variance with the fiscal policy of a Unionist government he would resign his seat in parliament. On the basis of this pledge a resolution in Cecil's favor was passed by his constituency association.⁵¹

* * *

Nothing is more indicative of Strachey's frustration with practical party politics after 1906 than his pursuit of the ephemeral will-o'-the-wisp of a Centre party. During the Campbell-Bannerman ministry he frequently speculated in

the Spectator on an ideal cabinet, composed of Devonshire and the leading free traders and Rosebery and the Liberal Imperialists.⁵²

In July 1907 Strachey and Lord Hugh Cecil dined with Rosebery to discuss "the possibility of moderate men of both sides acting together and getting more representation in the daily press." They agreed that while moderates in both parties had practically no voice in party affairs, they nonetheless represented a substantial body of opinion in the nation at large.⁵³ Strachey called upon Rosebery to rally this audience against the menace of socialism and protection:

What a tremendously strong combination could be obtained if you and Cromer and the Duke were to act together. No combination (excuse one's falling into the terminology of Disraeli's novels) could inspire more confidence in the country.⁵⁴

At Strachey's request, Hugh Cecil prepared a memorandum outlining the steps that could produce the desired coalition. He suggested that Lord Rosebery should issue a public appeal for moderate Liberals and Unionist free traders to join in an attempt to form a Centre Party. The Liberal League and the Unionist Free Trade Club could then merge to form a new organization, which would raise funds and prepare to run candidates.⁵⁵ Strachey listed the principles of the proposed new party: maintenance of the Union with Ireland, sane imperialism, free trade, resistance to state socialism, maintenance of a second house in the legislature, and maintenance of the Established Church.⁵⁶

Strachey hoped that the occasion for the formation

of a Centre party would arise from a crisis within the Liberal party.⁵⁷ He regarded the secession of the Liberal Imperialists as the first step towards the reconstruction of the Unionist Party on free trade lines. He believed that a strong Centre coalition would speed that process:

. . . if anything comes of it, we may not only defeat Tariff Reform, but also in the end restore the true basis of the Unionist Party and purge it of the worst, i.e. the Birmingham type of Tariff Reformer. . . . The Unionist Party . . . would surely be tempted to throw over Austen and Bonar Law if it could get a strong centre group in exchange.⁵⁸

But the rough treatment received by the Unionist free traders in the Manchester election made it clear that it was they, rather than the Roseberyite Liberals, who were most in need of a new political connection.⁵⁹

Strachey was concerned that the Unionist free traders were bargaining at a disadvantage and might make too many concessions. He advised Lord Cromer against addressing a meeting of the Liberal League, stressing that it had to be clear they were forming a centre organization and not merely joining a section of the Liberal party. The new party had to be as much a break with the Liberals as with the tariff reformers.⁶⁰

While the discussions with the Liberal League continued, the Unionist free traders were also approached by the leaders of the Liberal-dominated Free Trade Union. They held out the prospect of an electoral alliance in the constituencies that could help to save the remaining seats held by Unionist free traders in the event of a general

election.⁶¹ Strachey was hostile to these overtures. He regarded the Free Trade Union as a branch of the Liberal party and believed that joint action would work chiefly to the benefit of Liberal candidates. He told the secretary of the Union, G. Wallace Carter, that cooperation would be impossible until the government gave up old age pensions and pledged to withdraw its opposition to Unionist free trade candidates.⁶²

In the end, no Centre party emerged from this series of negotiations. For their part, the Unionist free traders were too divided in purpose and lacked the political and financial resources necessary for a viable third party. The majority were in sympathy with most of the aims of the Unionist party and wanted to avoid a final breach. Rosebery, on the other hand, was not the rock upon which a new party could be built. After encouraging the speculations and negotiations he decided that a new organization would be premature and resolved "to keep clear of politics" until a crisis arose in which he could be useful.⁶³ When his former Liberal League associate, Herbert Asquith, succeeded Campbell-Bannerman as prime minister, Rosebery declared that he had no longer any quarrel with the government. To Strachey's dismay he was soon praising the ministry publicly as "a bulwark against Socialism."⁶⁴

* * *

After the death of Devonshire in March 1908, Lord Cromer had the unenviable task of determining the future

policy of the Unionist Free Trade Club. Internal divisions had reduced the Club to what he sarcastically referred to as "a policy of masterly inactivity." A clear definition of policy was necessary before the next general election.⁶⁵

Cromer believed that nothing could be gained from further strife within the Unionist party. He personally could not support the government because of its social reform policy and its threats against the house of lords.⁶⁶ Nor was he optimistic as to the future, predicting that the next budget would be of such a nature to make cooperation impossible. Under these circumstances, he would advise Unionist free traders to vote for Unionist candidates at the next election, regardless of their fiscal beliefs. Tactics thereafter could be improvised. If the Unionists returned to power there were bound to be differences between moderate and extreme tariff reformers. The free traders could then side with the moderates to preserve whatever was left of "the wreck of Free Trade." Cromer also discouraged his associates from entering three-cornered contests, which he felt, would only benefit the Liberal candidate.⁶⁷

Strachey, heretofore the most belligerent free trader, was converted to moderation by Lord Cromer. He agreed that it was no longer possible to support the government. If the Liberals were to be defeated at the next election it was essential that free traders claim a share in the Unionist victory. He advised Cromer to ask Balfour for an appeal for Unionist free trade support--on the

grounds of the Union, sound finance, and the prevention of single-chamber government.⁶⁸

Most Unionist free traders thought that their organization should do nothing. The Cecils thought that an aggressive posture towards either party would weaken the individual bargaining power of free trade m.p.s. They suggested that Cromer declare his opinions independently of the Club and leave its members free to decide what action to take in each individual contest.⁶⁹ Lord James of Hereford indicated that the factions joined in the Club would be torn apart by support for the Unionists. He pointed to the different degrees of Unionism in the Club:

There is the Conservative, who has nothing of the Liberal within him save Free Trade. But there is also the Liberal Unionist of 1886, who has much of Liberalism left in him, apart from Free Trade. Surely these classes of men will be differently activated when resolving upon their votes.⁷⁰

Once again Cromer's move towards support for tariff reformers was undermined by an intensified campaign by the Chamberlainites to unseat the free traders. In January 1909 a blacklist of sixteen free food m.p.s was published by the Morning Post and its call for their expulsion was echoed by other Unionist dailies. Bowles and Abel Smith were rejected by their constituency associations with the knowledge and approval of the central office. Lord Robert Cecil came under renewed attack at East Marylebone when he made a strong speech against protection at the opening of the parliamentary session. He was charged with breaking the

"conditional resignation" agreement of the previous spring.⁷¹

In desperation, the Unionist free traders were forced to abandon their scruples against negotiating with the official Liberals. The Club decided to ask Asquith what the attitude of his party would be towards free trade m.p.s who were opposed by tariff reformers.⁷² The prime minister favored an arrangement with free traders in constituencies that were traditionally Unionist in politics. The decision, however, was not his. The local Liberal associations would have to make a determination based on local conditions and influences.⁷³

No agreement emerged from these overtures. Most Unionist free traders were unwilling to have anything to do with the government. Strachey believed that its actions would destroy even a nominal alliance within six weeks. He summarized the arguments against cooperation in a letter to Robert Cecil:

They are for constitutional change as regards the House of Lords, a change which we abhor. Next they are almost certain to go in for a scheme of land taxation, which is unjust and vicious in a high degree. Then come all their socialistic projects; and last, but by no means least, there is their Irish policy, legislative and administrative. This alone . . . is enough to forbid any alliance with them.⁷⁴

Cromer, for the same reasons, was unwilling to commit the Club to retaliation against the tariff reformers. He anticipated correctly that the entire political atmosphere would be changed by the issues of the budget and the house

of lords. "Free Trade versus Protection" was falling into the background, and he predicted that before long the real fight would be "Socialist versus anti-Socialist."⁷⁵

* * *

Most Unionist free traders drew closer to the Unionist party during the political crisis over the Lloyd George budget. The Asquith government was beset by domestic and foreign difficulties which accentuated its inability to move its legislative program through the house of lords. The fiscal year 1908-1909 resulted in a deficit requiring increased taxation. The program of social welfare legislation and naval expenditure called for new sources of revenue. In the finance bill of 1909, Lloyd George presented a budget providing for a general increase in taxes, including a new "super tax" on annual incomes **over** £5,000. But the most novel and controversial element was the provision for a land valuation designed to facilitate a tax on the "unearned increment" of the value of land. This aroused the landowners, and their disapproval was forcefully expressed in the house of lords. The Chancellor dramatized the conflict by attacking the landlords and aristocracy as a class in a nation-wide speaking tour.⁷⁶

The most emotional reaction against the budget came from the Chamberlainite section of the Unionist party. They regarded the new tax proposals as a challenge to their claim that tariff reform alone could produce the revenue necessary to support social reform. From his bed at Highbury, Chamber-

lain sounded the call for uncompromising resistance. His followers in parliament and in the press wanted the house of lords to reject the budget, thus forcing a general election in which the Unionist party could fight on the positive issue of tariff reform versus socialism.⁷⁷

The Unionist free traders were concerned that the budget would provide the means by which the Chamberlainites could complete their mastery of the party. Strachey predicted the new taxes would increase the number of people anxious to adopt the "nostrums" of the tariff reformers.⁷⁸ Lord St. Aldwyn agreed that the budget gave "the final shove to the movement of the Unionist Party to Tariff Reform." St. Aldwyn noted:

A man may be a Free Trader by reason and conviction . . . but if he has anything to lose . . . he will certainly prefer an indefinite Tariff Reform policy . . . to the fiscal policy which is initiated by the present Budget.⁷⁹

The Unionist free traders also faced an immediate tactical problem. It would be difficult to oppose tariff reform actively if their action implied support of the budget.⁸⁰

Strachey detested the budget and particularly objected to the land clauses, which he regarded as violating the principle that a man should be taxed according to his ability to pay. He advised the peers to resist government pressure and to ensure that the obnoxious clauses were dropped from the bill or referred to the people.⁸¹

But on one important issue Strachey was at odds with the Unionist leaders. While admitting the constitutional

right of the peers to reject the entire budget, he thought that such action would be disastrous to the interests of the house of lords and the nation. If the peers forced a dissolution, the government would not contest the election on the issue of the merits of its budget. They would confuse the issue with a matter on which voters could easily be misled: "the question of whether the Lords have a moral, even if they have a constitutional right, to interfere with questions of taxation."⁸² To the ordinary citizen, the peers, rather than the ministry would appear to be the revolutionaries.⁸³

Lord Cromer assumed the leadership of those Unionist free trade and independent peers who were working against rejection.⁸⁴ But his efforts were in vain. Cromer and his associates decided to abstain on an amendment by Lansdowne stating that the budget would not be approved until it had been submitted to the judgment of the country.⁸⁵ Cromer explained that objectionable as the budget was, the house could not reject it without incurring more risks than would be involved in its acceptance. Rejection would weaken the house of lords in the imminent constitutional struggle with the government.

Cromer's cautions went unheeded. On November 30, 1909, the finance bill was rejected on its second reading. Parliament was dissolved and the nation prepared for the general election. Cromer was convinced of the absolute necessity for a Unionist victory and wanted to commit the

Unionist Free Trade Club to support of tariff reform candidates. But the continuing division within the Club made an official statement of policy impossible. Arthur Elliot, representing the "left wing" of the Club, argued that support for tariff reformers would compromise its founding principles. He believed that many members were letting their "Free Trade-ism" be overbalanced by a desire to support the Unionist party.⁸⁶

Cromer agreed that individual members would have to decide where they stood in the election. But he suggested their decision would depend "not so much on the question of Free Trade versus Tariff Reform as on the relative importance of Free Trade as compared to other subjects."⁸⁷ For Cromer, the threat of single-chamber government had supplanted free trade as the question of the day. He therefore personally appealed to every Unionist free trader to vote for a tariff reformer "in the absence of a candidate who fully represents his own views."⁸⁸

On the eve of the election Strachey echoed Cromer's advice in the Spectator. He reminded his readers that in 1906 he had worked to convince all men of moderate views to vote Liberal to preserve free trade. It was now the duty of those same men to vote for tariff reformers in order to defeat single-chamber government and socialism.⁸⁹

The general election of January 1910 produced a campaign of "unwonted bitterness and ferocity."⁹⁰ The continued decline in trade and the spread of unemployment cut

deeply into the strength of the government at the polls. The Unionist party fought the election with a firm commitment to tariff reform as a solution to the ills of the nation.⁹¹ The free traders, fearful of weakening the house of lords, refrained from emphasizing their differences with the tariff reformers. Their position was best expressed by Strachey:

Our point is that the Tariff Reformers, presuming that they confine themselves to Tariff Reform, will do less evil with their false theories, than the Socialists with their false theories.⁹²

The election greatly reduced the government's majority and made it dependent upon its Labour and Irish allies. The Unionists thus found little consolation in their improved showing. The election also saw the virtual extinction of the Unionist free traders in the house of commons. Robert Cecil and Bowles had been forced to give up their London constituencies and stand at free trade Blackburn where they were defeated by Liberals. The only prominent survivor was Hugh Cecil, who was returned for Oxford, "the home of lost causes."

In the aftermath of the election the long-postponed breakup of the Unionist Free Trade Club took place. It was apparent that the Club could not continue in its divided condition. Arthur Elliot, who had supported Cromer's resolve to keep it going until after the election, warned that his associates would probably prefer to join Sir Edward Grey and the Liberal moderates "rather than fling in

their hats with any Protectionist Party."⁹³ Cromer, on the other hand, concluded that the Club could not function effectively unless purged of the "Radical" element represented by Elliot and his friends.⁹⁴ It was decided that a new organization would be formed, bringing together only those men who

. . . while believing in Free Trade, now regard other issues, such as the maintenance of an effective Second Chamber and of the Union, and the opposition to Socialism, as being of more immediate urgency.⁹⁵

The Unionist Free Trade Club was formally disbanded at its last general meeting on March 22, 1910. On that same evening, the "Constitutional Free Trade Association" was established, pledged to support the Unionist Party on all issues except tariff reform. The left wing of the Club, led by Elliot and James of Hereford, withdrew to join the Liberal dominated Free Trade Union.⁹⁶

The dissolution of the Unionist Free Trade Club reflected the political changes that had taken place since its foundation in 1904. For Strachey, Cromer and the large majority of its members, the constitutional question had replaced free trade as the central issue in British politics.

- ¹Spectator 70 (March 25, 1893), 389-390.
- ²Strachey, The Citizen and the State, p. 96.
- ³J. St. Loe Strachey, Problems and Perils of Socialism: Letters to a Working Man (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1908), pp. 65ff.
- ⁴Dicey traced the erosion of the doctrine of Benthamite individualism in Lectures on the Relationship Between Law and Public Opinion in England During the Nineteenth Century (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1905).
- ⁵Liberal Unionist, V (July 1, 1891), 222.
- ⁶Spectator 82 (April 8, 1899), 479-480.
- ⁷Strachey, Problems and Perils of Socialism. Introduction, p.v. Strachey dedicated the book to Theodore Roosevelt, who for Strachey was the exemplary anti-socialist and "trust buster."
- ⁸Spectator 97 (November 19, 1906), 712-713.
- ⁹J. St. Loe Strachey (ed.), The Manufacture of Paupers. (London: John Murray, 1906), introduction, pp. 1-14. This collection from the Spectator included articles on state school feeding, old age pensions, outdoor relief and poor law institutions.
- ¹⁰British Constitution Association, First Annual Report, Second Annual Report, (London: 1906-1907).
- ¹¹Strachey Papers, Devonshire to Strachey, September 10, 1907. Devonshire, Rosebery and James of Hereford were agreed that an organization to resist socialism would be premature since public opinion was not sufficiently aroused on the issue.
- ¹²Strachey, "The Problems and Perils of Socialism," A reprint of his address before the First Annual Congress of the B.C.A. National Review, XLIX (August 1907), 949-962.
- ¹³Strachey Papers, Strachey to Hugh Cecil, 10 April 1907.
- ¹⁴Ibid., Strachey to Rosebery, 22 July 1907.
- ¹⁵Ibid., Hugh Cecil to Strachey, 22 April 1907.
- ¹⁶Spectator 81 (July 16, 1898), 75; Ibid., 82 (May 13, 1899), 672-3.

¹⁷Ibid., 81 (July 16, 1898), 75.

¹⁸Strachey Papers, Strachey to Margot Asquith, 5 July 1907.

¹⁹Strachey Papers, Herbert Asquith to Strachey, 9 May 1908.

²⁰Both the practical and the ideological reasons for working class dissatisfaction with the government's bill are explored by Henry Pelling in "The Working Class and the Origins of the Welfare State," Popular Politics and Society in Late Victorian Britain (New York, St. Martin's, 1968).

²¹John Strachey, "J. St. Loe Strachey." Spectator 141 (November 3, 1928), 14.

²²Strachey, along with most Unionist free traders (excluding the Cecils), was against the rejection of the Education Bill of 1906. He warned the house of lords against becoming "a branch of the Birmingham caucus." Spectator 96 (June 16, 1906), 932-933; ibid., 101 (July 25, 1908), 118-119.

²³Strachey Papers, Strachey to Margot Asquith, 15 December 1908.

²⁴Spectator 102 (January 30, 1909), 169-170.

²⁵Rempel, Unionists Divided, p. 169.

²⁶Sir Edgar Vincent was denied renomination at Oxford and Sir Edward Clarke was forced to resign his seat for the City of London. Lord Robert Cecil appealed to Balfour to speak out against the purge. Cecil of Chelwood Papers, Hatfield, CHE 92/76. Robert Cecil to Balfour, 24 May 1906 (draft).

²⁷Blewett, The Peers, the Parties, and the People, p. 66. Henry Page-Croft, Edward Goulding, Lord Winterton, and Thomas Comyn Platt were members. Bonar Law and Leo Maxse possibly served as advisors.

²⁸Strachey Papers, Strachey to Theodore Roosevelt, 29 January 1906.

²⁹Strachey Papers, Strachey to Henry Strachey, 2 March 1906.

³⁰Ibid., Strachey to Margot Asquith, 15 November 1906.

³¹In 1905 Cromer had rejected an offer to serve as foreign secretary in the Campbell-Bannerman ministry.

³²The Marquess of Zetland, Lord Cromer, p. 11.

³³Cromer Papers, vol. 8, pp. 286-299, Cromer to Strachey, 10 July 1903. A detailed analysis of the arguments in the fiscal controversy with observations based on Egyptian experience.

³⁴Spectator, 99 (November 23, 1907), 807.

³⁵Strachey, Adventure of Living, p. 372.

³⁶Ibid., p. 366.

³⁷Cromer Papers, vol. 18, pp. 304-312, Cromer to Lansdowne, 27 January 1908.

³⁸Strachey Papers, Strachey to Lord Curzon, 2-8 November 1907.

³⁹Cecil of Chelwood Papers, British Museum, Add. Ms. 51072, fol. 50, Robert Cecil to Walter Long, January, 1908.

⁴⁰Ibid., Add. Ms. 51158, fos. 255-259, Robert Cecil to Acland Hood, 14 November 1908.

⁴¹Balfour Papers, British Museum, Add. Ms. 49708, fos. 106-130, Balfour to Selborne, 6 March 1908.

⁴²Cecil of Chelwood Papers, Add. Ms. 51158, fos. 260-261, 17 November 1908.

⁴³Strachey Papers, Strachey to Arthur Elliot, 18 January 1908.

⁴⁴Cromer Papers, vol. 18, pp. 312-315, Cromer to Hugh Cecil, 12 February 1908.

⁴⁵Strachey Papers, E.L. Oliver to Strachey 9 January 1908, 12 January 1908; Strachey to Elliot, 18 January 1908; Cecil of Chelwood Papers, Add. Ms. 51072, fos. 1-5, Strachey to Cromer, 28 January 1908. [Copy]

⁴⁶Cecil of Chelwood Papers, Add. Ms. 51158, fos. 184-185, E.T. Broadhurst to Strachey, 4 March 1908.

⁴⁷Ibid., Add. Ms. 51157, fol. 7, Hugh Cecil to Robert Cecil, 6 March 1908.

⁴⁸Cromer Papers, vol. 18, pp. 39-40, James of Hereford to Arthur Elliot, 20 February 1908.

⁴⁹Cecil of Chelwood Papers, Add. Ms. 51158, fos. 199-200, Leonard Darwin to Cecil, 20 March 1908.

⁵⁰Randolph Churchill, Winston Churchill, vol. II, p. 249.

⁵¹Cecil of Chelwood Papers, Add. Ms. 51159, fos. 145-148, Lord Ludlow to Robert Cecil, 30 March 1909.

⁵²Spectator, 97 (October 27, 1906), 609-610; 98 (June 8, 1907), 888-889; 100 (March 7, 1908), 360. Also see letter by Hugh Cecil signed "Centralist" in vol. 100 (March 7, 1908), 369.

⁵³Strachey Papers, Strachey to Elliot, 23 July 1907.

⁵⁴Ibid., Strachey to Rosebery, 4 September 1907.

⁵⁵Quickswood Papers, Hatfield, QUI 9/43-45, Memorandum on the possible consequences of the formation of a Centre Party, February 1905.

⁵⁶Spectator, 100 (March 7, 1908), 360.

⁵⁷Ibid., Strachey thought that this crisis might be precipitated by the old age pensions bill.

⁵⁸Cecil of Chelwood Papers, Add. Ms. 51158, fos. 172-173, Strachey to Robert Cecil, 22 February 1908. Cecil dangled the prospects of an alliance with the Liberal Imperialists before the Unionist leaders. He warned Walter Long that unless free traders were to be assured of protection from within the party, they would seek for it outside. Ibid., Add. Ms. 51072, fos. 65-66, Robert Cecil to Walter Long, 24 February 1908. [copy]

⁵⁹Strachey Papers, Strachey to Robert Cecil, 5 March 1908.

⁶⁰Cecil of Chelwood Papers, Add. Ms. 51158, fol. 174, Strachey to Robert Cecil, 27 February 1908.

⁶¹Ibid., fos. 199-200, Leonard Darwin to Robert Cecil, 20 March 1908. Charles Mallet, the General Secretary of the F.T.U. told Darwin that he was urging the Liberal Whips to protect the seats of seven to eight free traders.

⁶²Strachey Papers, Strachey to Robert Cecil, 26 March 1908.

⁶³Ibid., Rosebery to Strachey, 24 February 1908.

⁶⁴Ibid., Strachey to Rosebery, 22 May 1908.

⁶⁵Cecil of Chelwood Papers, Add. Ms. 51072, fos. 19-21, Cromer to Robert Cecil, n.d. [1908].

⁶⁶Cromer Papers, vol. 18, pp. 99-113. Memorandum by Lord Cromer on the position of Unionist Free Traders,

December 1908. See Chapter VI for a discussion of Campbell-Bannerman's Veto Resolutions.

⁶⁷Ibid., pp. 109-111. Cromer exempted Harold Cox, a Liberal MP from Preston, from his general rule.

⁶⁸Ibid., pp. 113-118, Memorandum by Strachey, 29 December 1908.

⁶⁹Ibid., Memorandum by Hugh Cecil, n.d. 1908-1909, pp. 119-121; Robert Cecil to Cromer, 5 January 1909, pp. 125-128.

⁷⁰Ibid., pp. 133-135, James of Hereford to Cromer, 13 January 1909.

⁷¹Cecil of Chelwood Papers, Add. Ms. 51159, fos. 106, 140-1, 145-8, Sir Samuel Scott to Robert Cecil, 25 February-29 March 1909; Lord Ludlow to Cecil, 30 March 1909.

⁷²Cecil of Chelwood Papers, Hatfield, CHE 93/309, Cecil to Asquith, 21 January 1909. [copy]

⁷³Ibid., CHE 93/213, Asquith to Cecil, 27 January 1909.

⁷⁴Strachey Papers, Strachey to Robert Cecil, 3 February 1909.

⁷⁵Cecil of Chelwood Papers, Add. Ms. 51072, fos. 40-41, Cromer to Cecil, 28 May 1909.

⁷⁶Steven Watson, "The Budget and the Lords--The Crisis of 1909-11." History Today, III, no. 4 (April 1953), 242-248.

⁷⁷Amery, VI, pp. 934-937.

⁷⁸Spectator, 102 (May 1, 1909), 688.

⁷⁹Cecil of Chelwood Papers, Add. Ms. 51159, fol. 183, St. Aldwyn to Robert Cecil, 23 May 1909.

⁸⁰Ibid., fos. 174-175, Broadhurst to Cecil, 8 May 1909.

⁸¹Spectator, 102 (June 26, 1909), 1016-1017.

⁸²Ibid., 103 (September 25, 1909), 44.

⁸³Strachey Papers, Strachey to Dicey, 5 August 1909.

⁸⁴Ibid., pp. 365-367, Cromer to Lansdowne, 12 August 1909. Cromer met with twenty-three peers, including Balfour of Burleigh, St. Aldwyn, James of Hereford, Bath, Jersey and Lytton.

⁸⁵Parliamentary Debates (House of Lords) fifth series, vol. iv, pp. 589, 821-831, 1043.

⁸⁶Cromer Papers, vol. 18, pp. 220-223, Elliot to Cromer, July 19, 1909.

⁸⁷Ibid., p. 358, Cromer to Elliot, July 19, 1909.

⁸⁸Parliamentary Debates (House of Lords) fifth series, vol. iv, p. 827.

⁸⁹Spectator, 104 (January 15, 1910), 80.

⁹⁰Emily Allyn, Lords versus Commons, p. 186.

⁹¹Neal Blewett, The Peers, the Parties and the People, pp. 121-122. Blewett estimates that the great majority of Unionist candidates considered tariff reform to be the chief issue of the campaign.

⁹²Spectator, 104 (February 12, 1910), 247-248.

⁹³Cromer Papers, vol. 18, pp. 220-223, Elliot to Cromer, 17 July 1909.

⁹⁴Quickwood Papers, QUI 13/45-46, Cromer to Shaw-Stewart, 2 March 1910. [copy]

⁹⁵Ibid., QUI 13/48-49, Draft of Unionist Free Trade Club circular sent to Lord Hugh Cecil by Lord Cromer.

⁹⁶Annual Register 1910, p. 66.

CHAPTER VI

THE REFERENDUM IN BRITISH POLITICS

The demise of the Unionist Free Trade Club signalled the decline of the tariff reform issue from the central place it had occupied in British politics since 1903. The Lloyd George budget brought together Unionists of all persuasions in common hostility to the policies of the Asquith ministry. This unity was cemented during the assault on the veto of the house of lords that culminated in the parliament act of 1911. Strachey and his associates knew that the destruction of the veto would insure the passage of Irish home rule, a measure against which the house of lords stood as a bulwark. In the long run, Unionism outweighed free trade as a claim to the loyalty of the Unionist free traders.

In this setting, Strachey's panacea, the referendum, was adopted by the Unionist Party as a device to resolve deadlocks between the two houses without a drastic alteration in the historic powers of the house of lords. The Unionists were accused by Liberals of acting out of mere political expediency. But the attraction of the referendum was the fact that it was a logical extension of the claim by the house of lords to reject legislation which it determined was contrary to the will of **the nation** or upon

which the electorate had not pronounced a definite verdict at the polls. This claim was asserted during the parliament of 1906, when the peers rejected the education and plural voting bills.¹ Government spokesmen at that time pointed to the anomaly of an overwhelmingly Unionist, hereditary house of lords rejecting the legislation of a recently elected house of commons with a huge Liberal majority.²

This charge was answered by the Duke of Devonshire, who made a forceful restatement of the referendal function of the house of lords in his last speech before that chamber.³ Noting that the peers had never permanently thwarted "the clearly expressed will of the country," Devonshire cited instances where the house of lords had proved to be "a more faithful and a more accurate exponent of the real will of the people" than the house of commons. He quoted Salisbury's speech during the Irish Church Bill debate in 1869 as a "canon" which had guided and would continue to guide the actions of the house of lords. Devonshire concluded:

So long as this House accepts that canon for its conduct I do not feel it can go far wrong. Cases may arise in which it makes mistakes in forming its view as to the true opinion of the people. It may from time to time interpose delays in necessary legislation; it may cause friction irritating to the Party which may be in power, but it will never permanently obstruct the settled will of the nation, and it will never permanently obstruct legislative reforms clearly and evidently desired by the people, even if in some cases those reforms may be, in its opinion, unwise.⁴

Devonshire predicted that if the cabinet proposed the referendum as a means of settling differences between the

houses, it would receive a sympathetic hearing from the house of lords. He was echoing the growing sentiment among Unionists that the referendum, or direct appeal to the people, was the best means of buttressing the referendal function claimed by the house of lords.

The Unionist free traders deserve considerable credit for converting the Unionist Party to the referendum. Strachey, Cromer, the Cecils, and Balfour of Burleigh were among the earliest and most dedicated promoters of that reform. Since his first advocacy of the referendum in 1889, Strachey had, almost single-handedly, kept it before the public as the best method of breaking deadlocks between the houses of parliament. During the Budget controversy, he advised the house of lords to initiate a referendum on the disputed clauses of the finance bill rather than rejecting it in toto.⁵

The Cecils were also active supporters of the referendum, influenced, no doubt, by their father's support for "direct democracy" as an alternative to the pitfalls of single-chamber government.⁶ Lord Robert Cecil had also suggested to Balfour that a referendum amendment might be attached to the finance bill. But unlike Strachey Cecil favored rejection and thought that the referendum might conciliate Unionist moderates. He expected the government to reject the referendum, thereby weakening its argumentative position with the voters.⁷ After the election of January 1910 the Cecils took the lead in urging that the

referendum become an essential part of the new constitution that would emerge from the constitutional crisis.⁸

The growing support for the referendum was reflected in the report of a committee of the British Constitution Association which declared "a poll of the people" on important legislation to be both necessary and desirable.⁹ Strachey set the tenor and tone of the report. As chairman, he had the satisfaction of seeing his closest political colleagues officially adopt a program which he had championed in the Spectator for two decades.

The report granted that the situations in which the referendum should be used were open to debate, but it concluded that it would be best if any new law which annulled or contravened any "fundamental enactment" was automatically subject to referendum. But there were problems involved in implementing this principle: it would necessitate declaring certain acts to be fundamental laws, and might require a new judicial body to determine whether such laws were contravened by newly proposed legislation. Such a reform would, in effect, give Britain a written constitution comprised of these fundamental laws.

Because of the inherent difficulties implied in such a sweeping change in British constitutional practice, the committee recommended an application of the device in situations where it was more immediately practicable; i.e. in cases of disagreement between the two houses of parliament. The report suggested that the peers initiate a test

case for the referendum by passing a disputed bill in the form submitted, with the addition of an amendment calling for "a poll of the people" before that bill could pass into law. If the house of commons accepted the amendment to avoid a deadlock, a working experiment in the use of the referendum would be obtained. If accepted by the public it could then possibly become part of the permanent machinery of government.¹⁰

After the general election, the referendum received a full airing in the public arena. Journals expressing all shades of political opinion devoted considerable space to the question of the applicability of the referendum to the British constitutional framework. A writer for the Edinburgh Review thought that the current interest in the device could be explained as the logical outcome of the acceptance by both parties of the democratic doctrine that the will of the people must prevail.¹¹ The referendum was seen as a panacea for the ills of the British system of party government. Through it, the public could reject unpopular measures without cutting adrift a ministry which still retained the confidence of the nation. The referendum recommended itself as an antidote to log-rolling and a means of making British politics more "honest and straightforward."

* * *

It was by no means certain that the referendum was to be the exclusive property of the Unionists. It was attractive to several prominent Liberals and was discussed as

an alternative to the proposal for the restriction of the house of lords to a suspensory veto that was introduced by Campbell-Bannerman in his resolutions of June 24, 1907.¹² The ultimate triumph of the veto plan in the form of the parliament act of 1911 has obscured the fact that it was never regarded by Liberal leaders as the only or even the proper way to deal with the obstruction of the house of lords. Campbell-Bannerman arbitrarily rejected a plan to resolve deadlocks by joint sittings that was recommended by a cabinet committee in 1907.¹³ His successor, Asquith, reluctantly supported the veto plan, but as prime minister, he avoided a definite commitment to the suspensory veto until after the general election of January 1910.¹⁴

The most vociferous Liberal opponent of the veto plan was the economist J.A. Hobson. In a series of articles for the Manchester Guardian in February 1907 he explored the practical applications of the referendum as an alternative to the suspensory veto. Hobson was concerned that the limitation of the legislative function of the house of lords would create single-chamber government in Britain, a situation that he doubted was either safe, desirable, or in accordance with the wishes of the people. He quoted John Stuart Mill as to the evil effect on the holders of power of having only themselves to consult. By removing the constitutional check provided by the peers, the house of commons would have "sucked into itself" not only the legislative powers which once belonged to the crown and the

house of lords, but "those powers which in most democratically ordered states are still reserved to the veto of the people."¹⁵

To prevent the danger of "cabinet autocracy," Hobson suggested that the house of lords be given the power to initiate a referendum on bills over which it was in dispute with the house of commons. This was, Hobson argued, the most reasonable way to apply the doctrine of the "mandate" which Unionist leaders had cited in defense of the actions of the peers.¹⁶ It was also in accordance with the trust in the people professed by political liberalism. Hobson advised the Liberal ministry to sponsor a measure of constitutional reform that would give the electorate "the final arbitrament" in disputes over legislative policy.¹⁷

Campbell-Bannerman would have nothing to do with the referendum. On the day that he introduced his veto resolutions to the house of commons, he referred disapprovingly to the "very vague, and, I think, not very well-informed proposals for a foreign institution called a referendum." In the liberal tradition, Campbell-Bannerman argued, "the supremacy of the people" in legislation had always meant the authority of the house of commons. Unless the nation was prepared to use the plebiscitory methods of the first and third Napoleons as a way of "getting behind the backs of the elected to the electors themselves" there was no choice but "to recognise ungrudgingly the authority which

resides in this House and to accept the views of the nation as represented in its great interests within these walls."¹⁸

Campbell-Bannerman also raised most of the objections that would be cited by opponents of the referendum during the constitutional controversy: The referendum was inconsistent with and destructive of the traditions of parliamentary government; it would be used only against the legislation of Liberal governments; it was impossible to isolate the subject for a referendum from "the whole range of political feeling."¹⁹ Herbert Samuel had an additional word of warning for Liberal and Labour m.p.s who were interested in the referendum. The expense of frequent referendums would give political advantage to the wealthy and to those who control the press. Small parties like the Labour party would find it impossible to raise the money to carry out effective propaganda. According to Samuel, the referendum was also condemned by the company it kept. The fact that it was championed by the late Lord Salisbury, his son Robert Cecil, and Professor Lecky, "a strenuous opponent of democracy," was reason enough for true democrats to regard it with suspicion.²⁰

These criticisms of the referendum were echoed in the editorials of the British Weekly, a Nonconformist journal, whose editor, William Robertson Nicoll was a close associate of Lloyd George. Throughout the spring of 1907 the Weekly and the Spectator engaged in a running debate on the virtues and defects of the referendum.²¹

Liberal interest in the referendum continued, despite official rebuffs, even after the rejection of the Lloyd George Budget revived the call for limiting the peers to a suspensory veto. When Asquith introduced his own veto resolutions to the house of commons in 1910, he noted that while inclined to favor the referendum, he believed it would undermine the responsibility and independence of the house of commons if used as an ordinary instrument for solving legislative deadlocks. But he held the door open to its use as "possibly the least objectionable means of untying the knot in some extreme and exceptionable constitutional entanglement."²²

Asquith also gave serious thought to applying the referendum to the parliament bill which was being framed along the lines of his veto resolutions.²³ Later, during the Constitutional Conference of 1910, the Liberal delegation was willing to agree to a limited use of the referendum for certain specified categories of legislation.²⁴ The breakdown of that conference ended the possibility that the referendum could be instituted with the support of a Liberal government.

* * *

While the Asquith ministry flirted with, but ultimately rejected the referendum, Unionist leaders were making it a part of official party policy. As the constitutional crisis deepened, it attracted ever-increasing support from influential sectors in the Unionist camp.

Strachey encouraged the party to make the referendum an issue at the next general election, noting that if the Liberals opposed the project they would prove to the public that "they are Jacobins rather than democrats."²⁵ He shed light on the practical motivations that turned Unionists toward the referendum when he suggested that the parliament bill and Irish home rule were examples of legislation that should be put to a poll of the people.²⁶ Strachey advised the house of lords to avoid bargaining with the government over the provisions of the parliament bill. They should, rather, pass the bill as it stood, with the addition of a referendum amendment. Strachey preferred "tacking" the referendum onto the parliament bill because he believed that many members of parliament would agree to an isolated experiment with the referendum, though they would not support it as a permanent piece of the legislative machinery.²⁷

The Earl of Selborne, a brother-in-law of the Cecils, was the most dedicated enthusiast for the referendum in the inner councils of the party. He was apprehensive about the government's intentions, fearing that neither the empire, the monarchy, "nor anything else worth living for" would survive the abolition of the veto. Selborne saw the path to salvation in house of lords reform together with the referendum. But rather than assigning the task of initiating the referendum to the house of lords, Selborne preferred that the ministry of the day have the right to refer any bills on which there had been no agreement during the parlia-

mentary session.²⁸

Selborne's arguments were well-received by Lord Lansdowne, Unionist leader in the house of lords, who was cognizant of the tactical advantages of the referendum. Although admitting that he had never favored the device on its own merits, he thought that it would be a popular issue with the voters. He informed Austen Chamberlain that the combination of a reformed house of lords and the referendum "might not be a bad cry with which to meet the demand for single-chamber government."²⁹

In April, the referendum was discussed at Lansdowne House, where leaders of the party met to map out their strategy in the constitutional crisis. In his account of that meeting, Austen Chamberlain reported that the Marquess of Salisbury wanted the party "to take up the referendum." Chamberlain, Curzon, Londonderry, Bonar Law and Alfred Lyttleton were cool to the proposal, fearing that the party would suffer from frequent appeals to the electorate because it had no local organization comparable to the Liberal "chapels." This opposition was offset by Lansdowne, who was leaning towards the referendum, and by Selborne and the Cecils, who gave it their unqualified support.³⁰ The referendum had clearly made its debut in Unionist politics.

* * *

The usefulness of the referendum as a solution to the constitutional deadlock was considered by several Unionist leaders to be dependent on the reform of the

house of lords. They argued that the body entrusted to the task of referring important measures to the people had to command the respect of the nation. The general election proved that the unreformed house of lords did not have enough support among the voters to oppose the government successfully in a constitutional confrontation. Lord Cromer was one of the keen advocates of reform. Before the general election he urged Lansdowne to commit the party to the reform of the composition of the house of lords.³¹ He later advised Strachey to appeal to the two parties to agree to this reform as well as a definition and limitation of the power of the peers over money bills. An amicable settlement was in the interest of all Unionist moderates, for it would be madness, Cromer argued, to go to the country again asking support "for the House of Lords plus the food taxes."³²

Lord Rosebery, who had proposed reform in 1888, and served as chairman of the Select Committee appointed to investigate the subject in 1907, was the first to make it a public issue in the constitutional crisis. In February, he addressed a British Constitution Association dinner in honor of Harold Cox, where he called upon "the silent and independent voters" of the nation to organize in favor of a strong and efficient second chamber.³³ When the new Parliament met, the King's speech implied that the government contemplated reconstructing the house of lords as well as altering its relationship to the house of commons.

Rosebery urged that the peers "seize the opportunity of reforming themselves." He gave notice that he would move in March that the house resolve itself into a committee to consider the best means of reforming its constitution. At a meeting of the unofficial Unionist peers, most present, including Curzon, Cromer, Rosebery and the Archbishop of Canterbury agreed that a scheme of reform should be introduced into the house of lords as quickly as possible. Lord Cromer wrote to Lansdowne to urge the presentation of a program of reform, not necessarily elaborated in all its details, but precise enough for the public to judge its merits. He did not want the legislative functions of house of lords altered, but thought that no reform would be acceptable that did not introduce an elected element to the extent of at least one-half of the total members of the house.³⁴

As was the case with the referendum, the idea of a reformed house of lords was not without support in the Liberal camp. Jack Seely, the former Unionist, suggested a small second chamber, to which any elector might be a candidate, elected by the same constituencies as the house of commons. But most Liberals regarded reform of the house of lords as a revolutionary device that was intended to weaken the representative character of the house of commons. A group of thirty "advanced" Liberals, headed by Sir Charles Dilke, sent a deputation to Asquith demanding that the government concentrate on limiting the veto of the peers.³⁵

In March, Lord Rosebery introduced his reform resolutions in the house of lords. They affirmed that "a strong and efficient Second Chamber" could only be achieved through a reform and reconstitution of the house of lords based on the acceptance of the principle that the possession of a peerage should no longer of itself give the right to sit and vote in the house of lords.³⁶ The resolutions were passed by the peers but were subsequently dropped at the request of the Unionist leadership as part of the truce that was declared in the constitutional struggle following the death of King Edward VII in May 1910.

* * *

Strachey's efforts on behalf of the referendum came closer to fulfillment when the nation's political leaders made that device a prime topic of conversation behind the closed doors of the constitutional conference of 1910. After the death of King Edward, it was generally agreed that his successor, George V, should not be confronted immediately with a major political crisis in which he might be compelled to play a major role. Asquith, acting on the King's advice, proposed to Balfour that four leaders from each party meet in conference and attempt to settle their outstanding differences.³⁷

The conference met for the first time on June 17, 1910 and twenty-two meetings were held before its failure was announced on November 10. The government was represented by Asquith, Lloyd George, Augustine Birrell and Lord Crewe.

Balfour, Lansdowne, Austen Chamberlain and Lord Cawdor represented the opposition. The meetings were closed to the press and no official statement was ever issued concerning their proceedings. Many of the participants, however, discussed the conference in their subsequently published letters and memoirs.³⁸

The essential problem considered at the conference was the provision of machinery for dealing with recurrent disputes between the two houses of parliament. During the discussion three types of legislation were distinguished: ordinary, financial and constitutional. The Unionists suggested that the house of lords would relinquish their claim to veto money bills so long as machinery was provided to prevent "tacking"; i.e. the addition to financial legislation of provisions that had social and political consequences. In his editorial recommendations to the conference, Strachey suggested that such a determination could be made by a tribunal consisting of the speaker of the house of commons, the chairman of committees of the house of lords, and the senior Lord Justice of the court of appeals.³⁹

The Liberals were ready to make impressive concessions on the subject of financial legislation. Substantial agreement was reached at the conference on the proposal of Lloyd George that a committee consisting of seven members from each house, with the speaker presiding and exercising a casting vote, should determine whether or not "tacking" was involved.⁴⁰

Regarding "ordinary" legislation, Asquith proposed for the government that differences arising in two successive sessions of parliament could be settled by a joint committee of the two houses, consisting of the entire house of commons and a delegation from the house of lords. The size and composition of the latter were left open for negotiation. This proposal was a version of the "Ripon plan" which had been recommended by a cabinet committee in 1907 as an alternative to Campbell-Bannerman's veto resolutions. It indicates that Asquith and his ministers were not inflexibly committed to the suspensory veto as a solution to the constitutional crisis.⁴¹

The Unionists would accept this plan only as part of a general settlement that would provide securities for financial and constitutional legislation, the latter including home rule bills. Lloyd George submitted a memorandum which established a category of constitutional legislation requiring special treatment, but excluded home rule from that category. This was presented to the Unionists as an ultimatum and came close to jettisoning the Conference.⁴²

The critical problem facing the conferees was thus the status of constitutional or "organic" legislation, a problem that was aggravated by the traditional split over the question of Irish home rule. The Unionists proposed that constitutional legislation, including home rule, be exempted from the joint sitting apparatus and be made

subject to the referendum. The government, for its part, was willing to use the referendum for categories of legislation upon which both parties were agreed.⁴³ They refused, however, to include home rule in this category. Asquith did not relish the thought of staking the fate of his government on that perennial bone of contention.⁴⁴

In a final concession, the Liberals offered to treat home rule as a special question. They adopted Lloyd George's proposal that a general election would be held on the next occasion that the house of lords vetoed a home rule bill. If the government carried the election, it would proceed with home rule; if it lost, it would resign, and any future Liberal ministry would be free to carry through home rule under the ordinary provisions of the forthcoming Parliament Act. The Unionists would agree to this offer only if home rule was permanently excluded from the operation of the Parliament Act. When this suggestion was rejected, largely at the insistence of Lloyd George, the Conference was forced to admit its failure and to dissolve.⁴⁵

In the days following the constitutional conference Strachey and the Unionist free traders entered into their closest cooperation with the Unionist Party since the split of 1906. For the first time in several years, Strachey and Cromer had the ear of Unionist leaders. Strachey advised Lansdowne that the most effective way for the house of lords to deal with the parliament bill would be to add a referendum amendment that would refer the bill to the

people.⁴⁶ He asked if it was possible to let an independent peer, such as Rosebery, propose the amendment, with Unionist peers given a free hand to vote as they pleased.⁴⁷ Lansdowne thought that the government would reject any such attempt to force the issue. He considered a referendum on the parliament bill a two-edged sword. If accepted, the Unionists would then have to "swallow" the bill with no further fight.⁴⁸

But Lansdowne had not given up on the referendum as an alternative to the parliament bill. On November 16, during the debate on the bill in the house of lords, Lansdowne rose to state the position of the Opposition. He noted that his party stood for the reform of the house of lords and would work for the elimination of the hereditary principle as the sole criterion for membership in that body. With tongue obviously in cheek, he praised Asquith for raising the question of the referendum in the house of commons and admitting its possible application in solving constitutional entanglements. But he regretted that the question had never been thoroughly discussed in either house.⁴⁹

On November 23, Lansdowne brought forward his controversial alternative plan to the parliament bill, which was approved by the house of lords after a few days' debate. The "Lansdowne resolutions" were basically a public statement of the case presented by the Unionists at the Constitutional Conference. Lansdowne explained that the

government's declared hostility to any attempts at amendment forced him to adopt the vague and general outline of the resolutions. He adopted the proposal, which had originated with the government at the Conference, that differences arising between the two houses, in two successive sessions over the period of one year or more, be adjusted in a joint sitting composed of members of both houses. If, however, these differences involved a problem of great gravity "which has not been adequately submitted for the judgment of the people," it would be submitted to the electorate in a referendum.⁵⁰

Lansdowne affirmed that the peers were ready to surrender "their constitutional right" to reject or amend legislation of a purely financial character. Any question of "tacking" would be referred to a joint committee of both houses, with the speaker of the house of commons as chairman, having only a casting vote. If it was determined that the bill was not purely financial in nature, it would be referred to the joint sitting of the two houses.

Lansdowne admitted that he could not offer any strict definition which could be used to distinguish between "grave" and "ordinary" legislation. He believed the house would agree, however, that there were certain "capital" questions which required greater safeguards than others. Among these would be legislation effecting the constitution of the country; i.e., "proposals for altering, not the laws of the country, but the parliamentary machinery by which

these laws are made."⁵¹ It appears that Lansdowne had accepted Strachey's argument that the Parliament Bill itself was a "capital question" that should be submitted to referendum.

Lansdowne hoped to see the referendum employed, not only as a means for settling differences between the houses, but also, ultimately, as a check upon legislation on which both houses were agreed. Such an arrangement would answer the Liberal complaint that when there was a Conservative house of commons, Great Britain virtually had "Single-Chamber Government," in which any Government measure could be carried without difficulty.⁵²

Lansdowne explained that his proposals were necessitated by the insufficiently representative character of parliamentary government as it was then constituted. The members of the house of commons claimed their mandate from the constituencies that returned them during a general election. Yet the turmoil and excitement of election time, when several issues are usually before the public, prevent the electorate from registering a clearcut decision on any one subject. Because a member of parliament might conceivably fail to represent the opinions of his constituents on questions raised during an election, he was even more likely to misrepresent them on new issues arising during the course of a parliament lasting for six years.

Lansdowne predicted that the institution of the referendum would promote a more conciliatory attitude on

the part of the house of commons and the government. The very knowledge that the referendum was waiting in the wings would make "a settlement out of court" more likely in controversies between the houses. A government would agree to an appeal to the nation only in cases where it was reasonably certain that the appeal would be successful.⁵³

The Lansdowne resolutions were the most dramatic attempt by Conservatives to appeal to the principles of "direct democracy" as part of a criticism of the defects of parliamentary government. They made the referendum a major issue in British politics, and stimulated a national controversy that was initiated on the very night of their introduction. Lord Crewe, the government's spokesman, defined the issue on strictly party lines. Liberal measures, he noted, were to be subject to the referendum, while conservative measures were not. Tariff reform, a Conservative project, would not go to the people, while Irish home rule and the abolition of plural voting would have to be tested. Crewe cited the revolutionary implications of the Lansdowne resolutions. They represented a rejection of the system of parliamentary government. Members of the house of commons would feel that it mattered little what they did or in what form they legislated, because the whole thing would have to go to the country in a referendum.⁵⁴

The Lansdowne resolutions were defended by Lord St. Aldwyn (the former Sir Michael Hicks Beach) whose support carried some weight, because, with other Unionist free trade peers, he had not taken part in the rejection

of the licensing bill and budget. He noted that tariff reform need not be excluded from the test of a referendum. While all the details could not be efficiently referred it would be simple to ask: "Will you have Colonial Preference, or will you have a tax on manufactured goods?"⁵⁵ In the following day's debate, Lord Curzon, a recent convert to the cause of referendum, expressed mock surprise at Liberal suspicions towards that device. It was, after all, an essentially democratic institution which was based on the belief, publicly expressed by almost every member of Parliament, that "in the last resort we accept the will of the people." Curzon denied that the referendum would weaken the sense of responsibility in members of parliament. It would, on the contrary, stimulate that virtue, since representatives would realize that they would be called directly into account for their actions. The referendum would weaken party autocracy and put an end to log-rolling and wire-pulling.⁵⁶

As the parliamentary debate continued, Strachey rejoiced in the fact that, while only a year ago, it had been impossible "to get men's minds to bite on the question of the referendum," new friends and advocates were now springing up on all sides.⁵⁷ Dicey wrote to congratulate Strachey on the fact that their long crusade was at last bearing fruit.⁵⁸

* * *

The controversy surrounding the Parliament Bill

was remarkable in that both of the leading political parties brought forth proposals which were designed to alter historically hallowed political traditions and relationships. Several contemporaries saw this "remodelling" as the greatest political enterprise faced by the British people since 1689--more crucial than electoral or fiscal reform because it dealt with the "soul" of government rather than with its particular functions or manifestations.⁵⁹

Although the programs of both parties grew out of dissatisfaction with recent trends in British politics, Unionist grievances had the deepest roots. Their intensity is indicated by the radical stance adopted in the Lansdowne resolutions and proposals for the reform of the house of lords. They were prepared during a constitutional struggle which brought even the most conservative peers to the realization that extensive reform could no longer be avoided. Liberal critics at the time were contemptuous of this "deathbed repentance," and ridiculed the unseemly spectacle of mossbacked Tories embracing radical reforms.⁶⁰ This contemporary verdict of opportunism has been repeated by a recent historian of the controversy, but others have seen a valid logic for the developments within the Conservative political tradition.⁶¹

Sidney Low found historical parallels for the positions taken by the parties. The Whigs, he noted, have always been "Parliament" or "House of Commons" men. They, and their Liberal inheritors express an "exaggerated belief"

in the representative system. Low charged that they have also expressed a preference for "class government," claiming a monopoly of political power and wisdom for the section of the population that could command a majority in the house of commons: "the landowners and borough manipulators of the eighteenth century . . . the trade union working men at the present day."⁶²

The Tories, on the other hand, held, according to Low, a larger conception of the "nation" than the Whigs. In supporting the referendum, Balfour and Lansdowne were thus continuing the tradition of great Tory leaders who "set the nation as a whole against a privileged governing section." The Liberal position was actually conservative, in that it continued the long development of "cabinet autocracy." But the Unionist position was frankly democratic. It would, Low predicted, "make vast inroads upon the forms and even the spirit of the Constitution; and it would sweep away most of the barriers which still protect property and privilege." For Low, the referendum was the triumph of "Tory Democracy": its final decision to withdraw from the "entrenchments of privilege and property and throw itself boldly upon the people."⁶³

Even if one accepts this partisan overstatement of the glorious past of Tory Democracy, there is no doubt that, in 1910, the adoption of the referendum appeared to be a definitive theoretical break with Conservative tradition and with the constitutional development of modern Britain.

It was defended by its keenest supporters, Dicey and Strachey, not so much as a link with the past, but as the firmest commitment to democracy.⁶⁴ The referendum was designed to take the final decision on certain legislative matters out of the hands of parliament and to place it in the hands of the electorate. This proposed substitution of "popular" for "parliamentary" sovereignty was the direct challenge to the supremacy of parliament that was established by the Glorious Revolution.

* * *

When the peers' determination showed no signs of weakening, Asquith announced the dissolution of parliament, and the second general election within twelve months was held in December 1910. The Unionist free traders thought that the campaign should concentrate exclusively on the constitutional issue. Since the break-up of the Constitutional Conference Strachey had been stressing the necessity for Unionist unity during the inevitable dissolution and election. He appealed directly to Joseph Chamberlain, the ailing seer of tariff reform, to issue a call for unity and to pledge that the party would not use a victory to institute tariff reform without "a further reference to the people."⁶⁵ Although Strachey did not specify how the "reference" was to be made, his correspondence with Lansdowne suggests that he envisioned a second election rather than a referendum. He explained that money bills were essentially "executive acts" and, as a rule, should not be

subject to referendum.⁶⁶

As the campaign got under way, the Liberals made a good deal of political capital with the argument, first raised by Crewe in the house of lords, that Unionists wanted a referendum on home rule but not on tariff reform. Unionist free traders were sensitive to this charge, particularly because they already regarded tariff reform as a Unionist liability in the election. But they were determined to preserve the newly won unity of the party. When Harold Cox proposed demanding the reference of tariff reform to a royal commission as the price for their support, he got a cold shoulder from Cromer. Unionist free traders would do nothing to divide the party in an election in which the house of lords and the union with Ireland were considered to be at stake.⁶⁷ Cromer and his colleagues made unqualified declarations of support for the Unionist cause. They published a letter in the Times urging all moderates to drop their differences and vote against the Government.⁶⁸

While determined not to press their views to the point of renewed friction with the Chamberlainites, Strachey and Cromer cautiously advanced the idea that the Liberal challenge might be blunted if Unionist leaders promised to refer tariff reform to the people. Strachey asked Selborne to persuade the Chamberlains to consider his second general election proposal.⁶⁹ Cromer, at the same time, was trying to convert Lord Derby, the powerful Unionist magnate in Lancashire, who was impressed by the extent

of free trade feeling in his constituencies.⁷⁰ Cromer also tested the subject with Austen Chamberlain, urging that they give "a front seat" in the election to subjects upon which the whole party was united. Chamberlain replied bluntly that they were ruled by the party system and when unity was necessary, it was the minority (in this case the free traders) who had to give way. **Retreating from** tariff reform might win a handful of free trade votes, but thousands were needed to win the election. Chamberlain still insisted that tariff reform would capture the imagination of the masses, and he wanted the issue as prominently displayed as possible.⁷¹

But as the election drew near, tactical considerations attracted even tariff reformers to the idea of a referendum pledge on tariff reform. Asquith demanded that his opponents "condescend to particulars" and state the criterion and categories for the question of "great gravity" that were to be referred to referendum.⁷² The challenge increased the fears of Unionists in many quarters who thought the cry of "taxes on food" was hurting their election chances. J.L. Garvin, the dedicated tariff reform publicist, was convinced that the Unionists could not win unless they announced that tariff reform was also to be liable to referendum. He pushed the idea in the Observer and in his activities behind the scenes.⁷³ Garvin was seconded by Andrew Bonar Law, another prominent tariff reformer, whose influence was crucial in persuading Balfour and Lansdowne

to take action.⁷⁴

By this time the Unionist free traders had dropped their inhibitions about insisting upon a tariff reform referendum. Cromer told Lansdowne that the tariff reform argument was the "strongest weapon in the armoury of the Radicals." Thousands of votes would be lost if the public were convinced that the Unionists intended to exclude tariff reform from the referendum.⁷⁵ Lansdowne passed Cromer's letter on to Balfour, and was soon able to report that he thought the leader would "make the announcement which you (and I) desire." He noted that there were difficulties, but thought that they should be faced.⁷⁶ The chief difficulty, of course, was the attitude of the extreme tariff reformers.

On November 29, Asquith, speaking at Readington, repeated his referendum challenge and placed special emphasis on the tariff reform question. Balfour, after hurried consultation with Lansdowne, decided to respond to the challenge that very evening at a huge Unionist rally at Albert Hall. Balfour gave his full support to the Lansdowne resolutions and noted that Asquith's questions were irrelevant to the issue at hand: the solution of the deadlock between the houses of parliament. He declared, however, that provided there were no technical difficulties, "I have not the least objection to submitting the principle of tariff reform to a referendum." The declaration was received with a thunderous acclamation by the partisan audience, and the

enthusiasm was revived when Balfour challenged the Liberals to respond by offering to submit home rule to a referendum.⁷⁷

The "Albert Hall pledge" made the referendum a major issue in the election campaign. Balfour worded the statement in purposely vague terms to mollify the feelings of the Chamberlainites. "I have not the least objection to submitting" is not the equivalent of "I propose to submit." Yet Balfour's remarks were interpreted as a campaign pledge and were stressed as such in party literature. Voters everywhere were told that tariff reform would not become law unless first approved by popular referendum. The pledge was especially directed at free traders, who were told they could now support party candidates without fear of endangering the fiscal system of the nation.⁷⁸

The turn of events was quite naturally greeted with dismay by prominent Unionists such as Austen Chamberlain and F.E. Smith who had been lukewarm to the referendum to begin with, and positively hostile to the notion that it should be applied to tariff reform. Chamberlain protested vehemently against what he considered to be a rash bid for the free trade vote without proper consultation within the party. He later told Lansdowne that the Albert Hall declaration was the worst disappointment that he had ever suffered in politics. Arguing that the tactic disheartened the party's staunchest supporters while failing to conciliate its opponents, Chamberlain urged the party to avoid tying itself permanently to the provi-

sional answer to a challenge that had proven to be a trap.⁷⁹

The critics of the pledge laid the blame at the feet of the Unionist free traders. Mrs. Joseph Chamberlain complained bitterly that "Lord Cromer and the others who have done their best to put the clock back, should now be the arbiters."⁸⁰ But in fact it was ardent tariff reformers like Garvin and Bonar Law who were responsible for converting Balfour. Lansdowne told Chamberlain that the pronouncement was urged "not merely by free fooders, but by scores of our orthodox friends." He added that the tactical advantages had seemed unquestionable.⁸¹

Lord Cromer would have cheerfully accepted the full responsibility for the Albert Hall pledge. He regarded it as a sign that the opinions of free traders were finally being taken seriously in the highest circles of the party. He told Leonard Darwin:

We have been waiting for a long while for an opportunity, and I think we have at last got it. I had to act on my own authority without consulting others, but I trust you and all others with whom I am acting will agree on what I have done. There cannot be any doubt that it has been the pressure behind the scenes of the Unionist Free Traders which has brought about the declaration in connection with submitting tariff reform to referendum.⁸²

Cromer believed that the statement dealt a death blow to protectionism in its most extreme form.

Strachey was ecstatic. He claimed to feel as Cassandra would have felt if the Trojans had suddenly admitted, "the old girl has been right all along."⁸³ He told Lansdowne of his immense relief at being back again whole-

heartedly in the counsels of his party. The adoption of the referendum lifted a great weight from his mind.⁸⁴ Although he had been pessimistic about Unionist chances at the election, he thought that the Albert Hall pledge had turned the tide. On the eve of the election he told Lord Onslow, a Unionist free trade peer: "Balfour and Chamberlain have both behaved splendidly and so has Lansdowne and I really feel we shall now win."⁸⁵

A recent historian has referred to the Albert Hall pledge as "one of the most fateful decisions ever taken by a British party leader under the stress of an election campaign."⁸⁶ Although its effect on the results of the election are debatable, it had a profound influence on the internal politics of the Unionist Party. It produced the first real breach in the ranks of the tariff reformers and was a sign that the tariff reform issue was being obscured by more pressing problems. As was the case with Strachey and the Unionist free traders, the defense of the house of lords and the union with Ireland had replaced the fiscal issue as the first question in the minds of those tariff reformers who supported the referendum.

¹During the debate on the Education Bill in the house of commons, Balfour declared that "the real discussion must be elsewhere." Asquith labeled this as Balfour's "signal to the House of Lords." Allyn, Lords versus Commons, pp. 171-172.

²Strachey and most Unionist free traders, including Devonshire were opposed to the peers treatment of the Education Bill. Emily Allyn has concluded that the rejection was "unconstitutional" even under Salisbury's definition of the proper role of the house of lords. Ibid., p. 174.

³Parliamentary Debates, (House of Lords), fourth series, vol. 174, pp. 10-14. Devonshire spoke during the debate over Lord Newton's house of lords reform bill.

⁴Ibid., p. 14.

⁵Strachey Papers, Strachey to Balfour, 9 July 1909.

⁶See pages 31-33.

⁷Balfour Papers, Add. Mss. 49737, Robert Cecil to Balfour, 22 November 1909, fos. 113-114.

⁸Sir Charles Petrie, Walter Long and His Times (London: Hutchinson Co., Ltd., 1937), p. 140.

⁹British Constitution Association, The Referendum: A Report of the Special Committee of the British Constitution Association (London: 1909), B.C.A. Leaflet no. 31, p. 2. The other members of the committee were: A.V. Dicey, Mark H. Judge, Edward Moon, C.F. Ryder, Charles V. Sale, Laurence Zimmerman and H. Hutchinson Harris.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Edinburgh Review CCXI (January, 1910), 131.

¹²Under the terms of Campbell-Bannerman's plan, a disputed bill would go to a small conference representing each house equally. If no agreement were reached the bill could be reintroduced after an interval of at least six months and referred to a second conference if disagreement persisted. The whole procedure might be repeated a third time. If the third conference were unsuccessful, the bill would become law without the consent of the house of lords.

¹³Corinne Comstock Weston, "The Liberal Leadership and the Lords' Veto, 1907-1910," The Historical Journal XI, no. 3 (1968), 508-537. The report, known misleadingly as the Ripon Plan, was chiefly the work of Asquith and Crewe. It later was the basis for the Liberal proposal at the Constitutional Convention of 1910.

¹⁴Neal Blewett, The Peers, The Parties and The People--The British General Elections of 1910 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972), pp. 91-92.

¹⁵Manchester Guardian, February 18, 1907, p. 6. Hobson also devoted two chapters of The Crisis of Liberalism (1909) to an advocacy of the referendum for Britain and a study of its use in Switzerland.

¹⁶Ibid., February 21, 1907, p. 6.

¹⁷Ibid., (February 25, 1907), p. 6. J.A. Spender, another Liberal editor, was persuaded by Strachey as to the merits of the referendum for constitutional questions but he opposed its use for ordinary legislation: [Westminster Gazette (July 19, 1910).]. Also see Spender's review of The Adventure of Living [Spectator 129 (October 7, 1922), 464-6.]

¹⁸Parliamentary Debates (House of Commons) fourth series, vol. 176, p. 911.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 924. The referendum was defended during the debates by Lord Robert Cecil and Sir William Anson, the Oxford constitutional historian and Unionist m.p. Ibid., pp. 997-1002, 1176-1182.

²⁰Ibid., pp. 1008-1009. Although Labour leaders officially rejected the referendum it had its supporters among the Hyndmanite socialists. During the Parliament Bill debate, a writer in the Westminster Review argued that the device could be used to further the propagation of revolutionary ideals--as a great step towards "untrammelled democracy." [Finem Respice, "Rule by Referendum," Westminster Review 175 (February, 1911), pp. 129-138.]

²¹Jane Stoddart, a writer for the British Weekly, summarized the debate over the referendum among Unionist, Liberal, and Labour supporters and critics in Against the Referendum (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1910). Introduction by W. Robertson Nicoll.

²²Parliamentary Debates (House of Commons) fifth series, vol. 15, p. 1173.

²³The parliament bill was introduced in the house of commons and read for the first time in April 1910. There were three essential provisions: Money bills were to become law one month after passage by the commons, even if rejected by the lords. Questions as to whether a particular bill was a money bill were to be decided by the speaker of the house of commons. Other bills might become law without the peer's consent if passed by the commons in three successive sessions, enabling the peers to delay a bill for two years but not to block it permanently. Finally, the legal life of a parliament was reduced from seven to five years.

- ²⁴ See pages 145-147.
- ²⁵ Spectator 104 (April 23, 1910), 659.
- ²⁶ Ibid. (May 7, 1910), 756.
- ²⁷ Ibid. (May 14, 1910), 795.
- ²⁸ Austen Chamberlain Papers, AC 8/4/2, Memorandum by Lord Selborne, 28 February 1910.
- ²⁹ Ibid., Lansdowne to Austen Chamberlain, 23 March 1910.
- ³⁰ Sir Austen Chamberlain, Politics From Inside, pp. 263-264. Salisbury, like his brother-in-law Selborne, was in the Balfourian wing of the party.
- ³¹ Cromer Papers, vol. 19, p. 146. Cromer to Lansdowne, 3 January 1910.
- ³² Ibid., pp. 150-152. Cromer to Strachey, 1 February 1910.
- ³³ Annual Register 1910, pp. 10-11.
- ³⁴ Cromer Papers, vol. 19, pp. 158-159. Cromer to Lansdowne, 24 February 1910.
- ³⁵ Annual Register 1910, p. 12.
- ³⁶ Parliamentary Debates (House of Lords), fifth series, vol. 5, pp. 140-169.
- ³⁷ A.M. Gollin, The Observer and J.L. Garvin, Chapter VI. The way for the conference was cleared by almost unanimous support in the Unionist press. Garvin in the Observer and F.S. Oliver, writing under the pseudonym "Pacificus" in letters to the Times, called for a "Truce of God" under which party leaders could meet to defuse the constitutional crisis.
- ³⁸ The outline of an explanatory statement by Balfour, prepared by his secretary Sir Robert Finlay, is included in Austen Chamberlain's Politics From Inside, pp. 295-297. The Austen Chamberlain Papers also contain his own notes of the meetings with annotations by Lansdowne--the best record of the proceedings. AC 10/2/35-65.
- ³⁹ Spectator 104 (June 18, 1910), 1004-1005.
- ⁴⁰ Chamberlain, Politics From Inside, p. 295.

⁴¹For a description of the evolution of the Ripon Plan and the most complete secondary account of the proceedings of the Conference, see: Weston, "The Liberal Leadership and the Lords' Veto," pp. 508-537.

⁴²*Ibid.*, pp. 526-528. Although Lloyd George was often less flexible than his Liberal colleagues at the Conference, he was busy promoting, outside its doors, a grandiose scheme for a national government or "ministry of all talents" that could solve all the pressing problems of the day. See: G.R. Searle, The Quest for National Efficiency: A Study in British Politics and Political Thought, 1899-1914 (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1971), chapter VI, pp. 171-204.

⁴³The Liberal delegation was considerably less hostile to the referendum than is indicated in Roy Jenkins' account (Mr. Balfour's Poodle, pp. 104-105). But the Liberals suggested a different use of the device than the Unionists. If the houses disagreed on a constitutional question it would be dropped. Only such questions on which the houses were agreed would be submitted to the electorate.

⁴⁴J.A. Spender and Cyril Asquith, Life of Herbert Henry Asquith, Lord Oxford and Asquith (London: Hutchinson and Co., Ltd., 1932), vol. I, p. 290. Asquith told King George that it would be impossible to get the Liberal Party to agree to the referendum. Balfour, on the other hand, was wary of concessions on home rule that might wreck the Unionist Party.

⁴⁵Weston, "The Liberal Leadership and the Lords' Veto," pp. 530-532.

⁴⁶Strachey Papers, Strachey to Lansdowne, 18 November 1910. Strachey made the advice public in the Spectator. [105 (November 19, 1910), 844.]

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, Strachey to Lansdowne, 22 November 1910. Strachey admitted to "very great anxiety" about Unionist chances at the next election: "It seems to me almost impossible" he noted, "that we can obtain a majority or reduce the Government majority to a small figure. But nothing less can save the situation."

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, Lansdowne to Strachey, 19 November 1910; 28 November 1910.

⁴⁹Parliamentary Debates (House of Lords), fifth series, vol VI, pp. 687-689.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, vol. VII, pp. 838-839.

⁵¹Ibid., pp. 842-843.

⁵²Ibid. This suggestion also originated with the Liberal delegation at the Conference.

⁵³Ibid., pp. 844-845.

⁵⁴Ibid., pp. 855-856.

⁵⁵Ibid., pp. 861.

⁵⁶Ibid., pp. 946-947.

⁵⁷Spectator 105 (November 26, 1910), 892.

⁵⁸Strachey Papers, Dicey to Strachey, 1 December 1910.

⁵⁹Sidney Low, "The End of the Old Constitution," Fortnightly Review, LXXXIX (January-June 1911), 115.

⁶⁰Roy Jenkins, Mr. Balfour's Poodle, p. 129. In a speech at Hull, Asquith attributed the motive for "this feverish exhibition of destructive and constructive ardour" to purely political considerations.

⁶¹Ibid., pp. 127-128. Jenkins notes that "in constitutional matters, and where its own influence is at stake, the Tories can sometimes be a party of restless innovation." While admitting that political expediency has influenced the occasions on which the Conservatives have applied the referendal principle, Cecil Emden has concluded that the Conservatives have been more ready "to magnify the power of the people in regard to policy" than the Liberals: [The People and the Constitution (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933), pp. 225-235.] Neal Blewett regards the adoption of the referendum as "a realistic response to the predicament of the Edwardian Unionist Party." It was attractive to a minority party which nonetheless considered itself "the guardian of the national interest" against a Government serving sectional interests. [Blewett, The Peers, the Parties and the People, pp. 174-175.]

⁶²Sidney Low, "The End of the Old Constitution," p. 122. Low, the author of the Governance of England, was the former editor of the St. James Gazette and a friend of Rhodes, Cromer, Curzon and Milner.

⁶³Ibid., 125-126.

⁶⁴See A.V. Dicey, "The Referendum and its Critics," Quarterly Review 212 (April 1910), 540.

- ⁶⁵Spectator 105 (November 12, 1910), 784-785.
- ⁶⁶Strachey Papers, Strachey to Lansdowne, 22 November 1910.
- ⁶⁷Cromer Papers, vol. 19, pp. 79-80, 250. Cox to Cromer, 25 October 1910; Cromer to Cox, 9 November 1910.
- ⁶⁸The Times, November 24, 1910, p. 24. Arthur Elliot and Henry Hobhouse, the free trade secessionists, published their own letter calling for support of the Government.
- ⁶⁹Strachey Papers, Strachey to Selborne, 16 November 1910.
- ⁷⁰Cromer Papers, vol. 19, pp. 213-215. Cromer to Strachey, 20 October 1910.
- ⁷¹Ibid., pp. 91-96, 251-253. Cromer to Austen Chamberlain, 16 November 1910; Austen Chamberlain to Cromer, 17 November 1910.
- ⁷²H.W. Horwill, "The Referendum in Great Britain," Political Science Quarterly XXVI (September 1911), 419-420. Asquith spoke at Hull on November 25.
- ⁷³Gollin, The Observer and J.L. Garvin, pp. 258, 262, 266-267.
- ⁷⁴Blewett, The Peers, The Parties and the People, pp. 183-185.
- ⁷⁵Cromer Papers, vol. 19, pp. 261-262. Cromer to Lansdowne, 28 November 1910. Cromer made these views public in a letter to The Times on November 29.
- ⁷⁶Ibid., Lansdowne to Cromer, 29 November 1910, p. 115.
- ⁷⁷The Annual Register 1910, p. 252.
- ⁷⁸Horwill, "The Referendum in Great Britain," p. 42.
- ⁷⁹Chamberlain Papers, AC 8/7/6, Chamberlain to Lansdowne, 18 December 1910.
- ⁸⁰Ibid., AC 4/3/1323, Mrs. Chamberlain to Mrs. Endicott, n.d.
- ⁸¹Ibid., AC 8/7/19, Lansdowne to Chamberlain, 14 December 1910.

⁸²Cromer Papers, vol. 19, pp. 265-267. Cromer to Darwin, 1 December 1910. Cromer received many letters of congratulation from tariff reformers, including Moberly Bell the editor of The Times: Ibid., pp. 126-127, 2 December 1910.

⁸³Strachey Papers, Strachey to Henry Strachey, 5 December 1910.

⁸⁴Ibid., Strachey to Lansdowne 6 December 1910.

⁸⁵Ibid., Strachey to Onslow, 2 December 1910.

⁸⁶Blewett, The Peers, the Parties and the People, pp. 178, 188, 203-204. Blewett suggests that Balfour's failure to call a Shadow Cabinet before making his speech created "strong currents of antagonism" that eventually surfaced in the "Balfour Must Go" movement.

CHAPTER VII

THE PEERS AND THE PARLIAMENT BILL

The Albert Hall pledge made the referendum the first plank of the Unionist platform in the election of December 1910.¹ But it did not win enough votes to carry the day for the Unionists, whose impressive gains in free trade Lancashire were cancelled by losses in London and the South. Emerging with a majority that was even more dependent on its Irish and Labour allies, the Asquith ministry interpreted the results as a popular mandate to proceed against the house of lords. The stage was set for the final confrontation on the constitutional question.

The Unionist struggle against the parliament bill released pent up frustrations within the party resulting from continuing internal divisions and three successive election defeats. The "ditchers," who included both tariff reformers and free traders in their ranks, openly accused Balfour and Lansdowne of weak-kneed leadership and called for bitter-end resistance to the parliament bill by the house of lords. They were opposed by the "hedgers," who feared the consequences of a swamping of the house of lords with newly-created ministerial peers. As was the case in

1909, Strachey and Cromer chose the side of moderation.

While the votes in the December election were still being counted, Strachey was disturbed by rumors that the Unionists would not accept a government victory as a mandate for the parliament bill, and that the King was being pressured to refuse to create new peers. Strachey conveyed the concern of Unionist moderates to Lansdowne. What was needed, he urged, was

. . . steadiness, and a refusal to adopt violent or extra-constitutional action, especially as there is a very strong desire not to run any risk of throwing the Monarchy after the House of Lords.²

Lansdowne agreed on the need for caution but was still hoping for a change in "the political weather" that might enable the Unionists to "engage the enemy with every prospect of success."³ Strachey was less hopeful, viewing the final submission of the peers as inevitable. If the Liberals insisted on taking their "full pound of flesh" there was nothing that could stop them.⁴

Strachey thought that the only constitutional course of action open to the house of lords was to strengthen its case before the public by embodying the Lansdowne resolutions in concrete legislative proposals. A committee of prominent Unionists under the chairmanship of Lansdowne was appointed for the purpose, but failed to agree on the crucial question as to when the referendum was to be employed.⁵ Salisbury and Selborne, committed to the principle as well as the tactical advantages of the referendum, wanted it applied to

all cases of disagreements between the houses.⁶ Austen Chamberlain, still smarting from the pain of the Albert Hall pledge, preferred to see it restricted to cases of irreconcilable differences only on constitutional questions. The drawback of the latter scheme, as noted by Lansdowne and Selborne, was that it ruled out a referendum on tariff reform. To remedy this, Selborne proposed giving the government the power to refer measures on which no difference of opinion had arisen. This would enable a future Unionist ministry to honor the Albert Hall pledge by referring tariff reform, even when there was a majority supporting it in both houses.⁷

The committee postponed a decision on a large scheme of reform in order to concentrate on the immediate tactical problem of which amendments to move when the parliament bill was reintroduced. They recommended a number of individual amendments, including a proviso for the application of the referendum to all bills deadlocked between the houses and a category of reserved bills dealing with constitutional questions. The need was also cited for a separate bill dealing with the machinery of the referendum. Unless such legislation was forthcoming, the Unionists were open to the charge that the referendum was impracticable and that they "had never dared to get to close quarters with it."⁸

When the new parliament convened in February 1911, the parliament bill was reintroduced in the house of commons. Although Lansdowne, on the same day, announced his intention

of putting a house of lords reform bill before parliament, no action was taken on that, or on any other Unionist reform proposal, before the parliament bill received a second reading in the house of commons at the end of February.

Strachey was incensed at the delay in presenting a referendum bill to parliament. Complaining that Unionist leadership was "as bad as ever it can be," he decided that a bill should be introduced independently by a private member.⁹ He convinced Lord Balfour of Burleigh, his colleague in the British Constitution Association, to sponsor such a bill in the house of lords. With Balfour of Burleigh's approval, he enlisted the help of Francis Pember of Lincoln's Inn, an old Balliol classmate with a reputation as a parliamentary draftsman, to prepare the bill.¹⁰

Strachey paid Pember for his efforts and was delighted to do so because the referendum had been his "pet scheme" for so many years.¹¹ But his experience did not exempt him from the difficulties that had troubled the Unionist committee. He originally wanted to include a list of "scheduled" subjects in the bill that would be referred even in cases where the houses were agreed.¹² In the course of long discussions with Lord Balfour and Pember, however, he decided it was not practical to keep the referendum within narrow limits by artificial means. The problem of selecting a tribunal to judge whether a bill fitted the reserved category might make "the cure . . . worse than the disease."¹³

On March 2, 1911, the parliament bill passed its

second reading in the house of commons by a division of 368 to 243 votes. On that same evening the referendum was the subject of a bill for the first time in British history. Balfour of Burleigh's reference to the people bill, introduced in the house of lords, provided that the referendum, or poll of the electors as Lord Balfour preferred to call it, would be a permanent part of the parliamentary machinery. It was to be used not only in cases of deadlocks between the two houses, but would apply to bills passed by both but challenged by a minority of two hundred members of the house of commons. Unlike the Lansdowne resolutions, the bill made no distinction among the types of measures that were to be referred. The poll was to be taken throughout the nation on one day with all eligible electors voting and no plural voting permitted. If the total affirmative vote exceeded the total negative vote by no less than two percent, the bill in question would become law.

Balfour of Burleigh defended the referendum as an institution tested by experience in other countries, which could be profitably applied to remedy defects in the British representative system. He claimed it would stimulate rather than inhibit parliamentary debate and increase the ordinary citizen's interest in and power over public affairs.¹⁴ The Earl of Crewe, the government's spokesman, answered that the bill was a revolutionary departure from constitutional practice. He suggested that "initiative" would follow referendum and noted that complicated legislation could not be presented to the voters as a single issue.¹⁵ Selborne spoke

for the opposition in the absence of Lansdowne, who was ill. Declaring that his party preferred the referendum to single-chamber government, he explained that while not familiar with the details of the bill, he believed it was in the public interest that the question was being discussed in parliament.¹⁶

In the interim between the first and second readings, Strachey and Lord Balfour canvassed for support for their bill but were discouraged by their findings. Many Unionists had reservations about details, most notably the provision for referral in cases where the houses were agreed. Rosebery expressed the view of many peers when he told Strachey that he would support the referendum only for rare and exceptional cases and not as "our daily bread."¹⁷

When the bill came up for its second reading on March 28, the debate proved that the period of reflection had dampened the enthusiasm of many Unionist peers for the referendum. For some it had never been more than a tactical ploy--an alternative to the parliament bill that might attract popular support outside of parliament. The referendum was basically uncongenial to their conservative instincts. It could prevent home rule but might also be used to effect a radical change in land tenure and taxation. The most crucial misgivings about the bill were thus raised from the Unionist benches.

Lord Willoughby de Broke, a die-hard Tory peer, declared that he no longer loved the referendum quite so

much as he had during the election campaign. He objected to the elimination of plural voting in Lord Balfour's plan.¹⁸ Lansdowne, the champion of a more limited referendum, spoke for the Unionist leadership when he stated that the bill went further than he was prepared to go. The debate showed that the referendum could no longer be dismissed as

...a mere crotchet or fad...an absurd invention designated by a dog-latin name and occasionally mistaken for some variety of turnip or potato.¹⁹

But Lansdowne wanted the referendum restricted to resolving differences between the houses on matters of crucial import--the position taken earlier by Austen Chamberlain. He feared an atmosphere of resentment and impatience if bills passed by both houses were to be referred regularly to the nation.²⁰

Lansdowne's limited definition of the uses of the referendum was a withdrawal from the position implied in the Albert Hall pledge--a tactical retreat that was dictated by the intricacies of internal Unionist politics. Austen Chamberlain and the tariff reformers were already at odds with the leadership of the party. It is unlikely that they would have tolerated official support for a referendum bill framed by Unionist free traders and obviously designed to encompass tariff reform legislation. Lansdowne suggested that Balfour of Burleigh consent to withdraw his bill before a division was taken in order "to allow time for further development of the political situation."²¹ With

Lord Balfour's consent, the debate was adjourned and never subsequently resumed.

Strachey and Balfour of Burleigh were, needless to say, disturbed by the scrapping of their bill. While the proposal was being drafted, Lansdowne had offered encouragement, and in the interval between the readings had said nothing to suggest that he disliked the bill either in principle or practice.²² Balfour of Burleigh blamed his change of heart on an organized effort by the tariff reform interests. Noting that the latter opposed the bill because of its free trade origins, he was certain that pressure had been brought to bear which prevented the Unionist front bench from giving support.²³ Strachey found some encouragement in the fact that Lansdowne had at least "nailed the flag of the referendum to the Unionist mast" and committed the party to the device, though not, of course, in the form of Lord Balfour's bill.²⁴

Subsequent events showed that the Unionists had not given up on the referendum. In April, George Cave, an m.p. working closely with Lansdowne, introduced a referendum amendment to the parliament bill in the house of commons. Cave, like Lord Balfour, made no distinction as to the nature of legislation that was to be referred. He did, however, restrict the application of the referendum to bills that were rejected three times by the house of lords.²⁵ The debate on the amendment proceeded along party lines and it was ultimately rejected by 286 to 164 votes.

The debate was interesting in that Asquith and Balfour highlighted the ideological differences that distinguished their parties. Each presented an interpretation of the historical development and significance of representative government. Balfour sought to answer the prime minister's charge that the referendum was contrary to the English political tradition. He noted that the system of representative government in Britain had been the product of a slow, gradual growth. No theorist in any age had ever argued that the representatives could be taken as equivalent to those who elect them:

What we do is not always what the people would want us to do if they had present to their minds the whole of the facts; nor is it probable or possible that in any representative system the representatives and those they represented should be regarded as equivalent bodies.²⁶

Balfour stressed that the members of parliament were much better fitted than those who sent them there for some purposes and much worse for others. The house of commons often deals with questions which in their scope and detail are beyond the purview of the general public. Yet it also has the authority to initiate fundamental changes in the constitution which the public would probably reject if the case was put before them. The latter contingency could be avoided by the popular referendum.²⁷

Balfour also touched on a key problem associated with the referendum. In Britain the burden for carrying through legislation traditionally rests with the cabinet.

Would a Government have to resign if an important bill carried through the house of commons was rejected by a referendum? Balfour answered, "No." He claimed that the great merit of the referendum was that it decided major questions without necessitating a change of government and without the personal rancor involved in the contest for a seat in parliament.²⁸

In his reply to Balfour, Asquith stood by his charge that the Unionist proposals marked a radical departure from constitutional tradition. He upheld the tradition of representative, or parliamentary democracy against the innovation of direct, or plebiscitary democracy. The parliament bill was designed to keep the final decision on legislation within the purview of parliament.²⁹ History, according to Asquith, demonstrated that democracy as a working system has always consisted of "the rule of the majority for the time being." The British had perfected the machinery of representative government that enables any nation, however large its size and population, to make the will of the majority felt in legislation. Asquith adopted what he called "the language of toryism" to urge that the old way be preserved against "violent innovations that would strike a deadly blow at the very foundation of representative government."³⁰

Strachey closely followed the debate and professed to be amused that the author of the bill took such pains to avoid the language of Lord Balfour's bill while adopting

most of its principles. He regarded the official support for the bill as a sign that Unionist leaders would push the referendum as the only practical alternative to the parliament bill.³¹

* * *

On May 15, 1911 the parliament bill completed its passage through the house of commons and was sent on to the more hostile atmosphere of the house of lords. In the preceding weeks Unionist leaders had mapped out the strategy to be followed by opposition peers during the second reading and committee stages of the bill.³² Amendments would be offered aimed at eliminating "tacking" in money bills, and referring issues of constitutional importance to the referendum. Cromer was in close consultation with Lansdowne on these matters, and was commissioned to work with the parliamentary draftsman, Seymour Lloyd, in preparing the "anti-tacking" provisions.³³ The result of this collaboration were the amendments to clause I of the parliament bill, which were introduced by Cromer during the committee stage of the bill in June, and subsequently passed by the house of lords on July 13. These provided that a joint committee of both houses, rather than the speaker alone, was to determine what was and what was not a money bill. If the committee ruled that the governing purpose of a money bill, or any part of a bill, was not purely financial, the bill would be treated as general legislation under the provisions of clause II of the parliament bill.

Cromer's cooperation with Lansdowne was evidence of a rapprochement between Unionist free traders and the party leaders. He was a wise choice to introduce the financial amendments because he was known for his independence and moderation and had opposed the rejection of the budget in 1909. But neither Cromer nor the Unionist leaders believed that these amendments were crucial to the resistance to the parliament bill. Arthur Balfour thought it unwise to provoke Asquith to "declare war" over the financial clauses, an issue upon which the house of lords could not expect to find much support in the country.³⁴ Cromer saw a need for the peers to put all their money on the "referendum horse."³⁵ Lansdowne agreed, but thought it best that the lords begin their attack on an extensive front.³⁶

On July 4, during the committee stage of the parliament bill, Lansdowne introduced his important amendment to clause II, calling for the submission to a popular referendum of any bills which affected the existence of the monarchy or protestant succession; which established a national parliament or council in any of the three kingdoms; or which, in the judgment of a joint committee, raised an issue of great gravity on which the country had not as yet clearly pronounced its opinion. Lansdowne warned that if the parliament bill were passed as it stood, none of the cherished institutions of the nation would be safe, and the bill might be made even more revolutionary in the

future. The only safeguard against such an eventuality would be a referendum on matters of grave importance.³⁷

Lansdowne's amendment was specifically designed to insure a referendum on home rule, and the ensuing debate revealed that the Irish question was foremost in the minds of the opponents of the parliament bill. Most Unionist speakers dwelt upon the probability that the government would soon try to pass home rule without a reference to the people. They attributed the parliament bill to Irish nationalist pressure on the government. Yet there was criticism of the amendment from within Unionist ranks. Die-hard Tories such as Lord Halsbury and Willoughby de Broke repeated their misgivings about the revolutionary implications of the referendum. After two days of debate it was nonetheless passed by a vote of 253 to 46.³⁸

The government refused to accept the Unionist amendments and was prepared to resort to extreme measures to force the peers to submit. Before the December election the King reluctantly had given contingent guarantees to the cabinet, promising that if the ministry won an "adequate majority" in the new house of commons, he would, if necessary, create enough peers to secure the passage of the parliament bill.³⁹ Balfour and Lansdowne officially learned of this guarantee in July and were told that the government would not again risk losing the bill in the house of lords.⁴⁰

The dilemma of the house of lords was now posed in the clearest of possible terms. Either the parliament bill

would be allowed to pass in the form presented by the house of commons, or enough Liberal peers would be created to swamp the Unionist opposition in the house of lords. The choice between these evils produced a controversy within the Unionist party that was extraordinary for its heat and lasting bitterness. Unionist free traders were divided on the question. As has been seen, Strachey and Cromer advised the peers to follow the path of caution, arguing that Unionists had no business acting like revolutionaries by insisting upon the swamping of the house of lords with Liberal peers. Such action would enable the Liberals to pass home rule and other controversial measures without even the two year delay provided for by the parliament bill.⁴¹

Strachey's position was criticized by his fellow free trader, Hugh Cecil, who favored a "damn the torpedos" resistance to the parliament bill in the house of lords. In a letter to the Spectator in January, Cecil had attacked the bill as an unconstitutional and revolutionary challenge to the historical seat of sovereignty in the nation. The sovereign in Britain was "the King in Parliament"; that is, the King (or his ministers) acting by and with the advice and consent of both houses of parliament. The parliament bill would enable the King's ministers to act with the advice and consent of the house of commons alone. Asquith, according to Cecil, was thus asking the crown, "by a mere act of prerogative," to destroy one of the houses of parliament. This was "unconstitutional in the highest degree,"

and had to be resisted to the last by the house of lords.⁴²

In a private letter to Strachey, Cecil expressed his hope that the King would avoid a "flat prostitution of the prerogative" by refusing to create peers if requested to do so by Asquith.⁴³ Strachey believed that such action would compromise the crown's traditional position of impartiality, and he raised the issue in an editorial reply to Cecil's Spectator letter. The Unionists he argued, should not "throw the monarchy after the House of Lords." If the King took the position recommended by Cecil, the Government could rightfully charge that "the House of Lords and the Crown were combining to deprive Englishman of their ancient liberties."⁴⁴

Strachey's editorial infuriated Cecil, who charged that the editor had discussed private information and had misrepresented his views with the goal of prejudicing the King against resistance. He regarded the matter as a lesson against trusting to Strachey's discretion in matters of confidence.⁴⁵ For his part, Strachey lamented Cecil's lack of political judgment, but informed Cromer that he did not want the argument to continue in public because the Unionist free traders were "so small a group, that we cannot well quarrel among ourselves without becoming ridiculous."⁴⁶

The dispute between Strachey and Cecil was merely a reflection of the split in the Unionist party at large. Lansdowne and Balfour were convinced that it was now in-

advisable for the peers to insist upon their amendments, and recommended that their followers abstain when the question came up for a final vote in the house of lords.⁴⁷ In this appeal for non-resistance, Lansdowne was firmly supported by Lords Cromer, St. Aldwyn and Curzon. Curzon had been calling for "a fight in the last ditch," but gradually arrived at the conclusion that the situation called for surrender. He publicly stated his case in a letter to the Times on July 24, and thereafter there were regular meetings at his home to organize support for Lansdowne.⁴⁸

The "hedgers," as the supporters of Lord Lansdowne were called, were opposed by the "die-hards" or "ditchers," who grouped themselves in the Halsbury Club, and were prepared to "damn the consequences" of the creation of new peers.⁴⁹ Halsbury, Selborne, Salisbury, and Willoughby de Broke provided the leadership for this group in the house of lords. In his study of this intra-party struggle, Peter Fraser suggests that the moving force behind the ditchers came from the tariff reform interest.⁵⁰ Austen Chamberlain and F.E. Smith, allegedly the representatives of the more radical or "forward" elements among the Unionists, allied themselves with the most conservative members of their party. This strange alliance was the outcome of the tariff reformer's deep rooted discontent with party leadership, a dissatisfaction which had been growing steadily since Balfour's Albert Hall pledge during the December election. By

participating in a movement that appeared to be "a reassertion of traditional conservatism," the tariff reformers, were actually concerned with putting pressure upon Balfour and Lansdowne.⁵¹

This interpretation of the motives for the ditcher alliance is substantiated by the opinions of contemporaries. Strachey saw the shadow of the tariff reformer behind the solid Tory figurehead of Lord Halsbury. He agreed with Curzon that the conflict was really a test of will between Lansdowne and Balfour on one hand, and Chamberlain and Smith on the other. It would be disastrous, Strachey noted, if the die-hards triumphed, and the party were left in the hands of Chamberlain and his Birmingham group, "inspired by the unscrupulous advocate on the make, F.E. Smith."⁵²

There is, however, one element in the ditcher movement that is not accounted for in Fraser's analysis. The most active organizers of the group in the house of lords were Selborne and Salisbury, whose loyalty to Balfour and Lansdowne had hitherto been unquestioned. The younger members of the "Cecil connection," Hugh and Robert Cecil, were also ditcher fanatics, who could not be accused of wanting to discredit the Unionist leaders, thereby benefitting the tariff reformers. These men, the true heirs of Lord Salisbury, reacted emotionally to the attempt to end the referendal function of the house of lords that had been eulogized by their father. They believed that honor required them to be implicated in no way with the passage of the parliament bill.

Their adherence to the extremists was also inspired by the same blind hatred for the government that had prompted Hugh Cecil to shout down Asquith in the house of commons.⁵³

As has been shown, the earliest and most steadfast opposition to the ditcher mentality in the British press was found in the pages of the Spectator. Strachey continued to urge moderation, noting that after the parliament bill was passed, the various elements in the Government's majority would lose their cohesion over more divisive issues like home rule, and the Unionists would have their opportunity.⁵⁴ Once back in office they could institute the referendum, which would, in effect, "repeal" the Parliament Act. In the meantime, Strachey was appalled to see "the English aristocracy...acting like a lot of Frenchmen and running violently down a steep place on some supposed point of honour or out of party or personal pique."⁵⁵

Strachey's early advocacy of "non-resistance" drew criticism from his closest friends and colleagues, who felt that showing the "white flag" might strengthen Asquith's hand.⁵⁶ When it became apparent, however, that the government was about to make good on its threat to create peers, a sizable number of Unionists, including the party leaders themselves, were converted to his viewpoint. Lord Knollys, the private secretary of George V, made it clear that the King appreciated his efforts. Knollys hoped that the peers would be convinced and "accept the inevitable."⁵⁷

Historical accounts of the constitutional crisis have generally focused on the ditchers, whose activities ultimately led to Balfour's resignation as leader of the opposition. There has been little attention given to the role of the small group of independent, back-bench Unionist peers, who, acting without the official support of Lansdowne, were able to prevent the house of lords from insisting upon its amendments to the parliament bill.

Lord Cromer was the leader of this group of independents. By his nature and by his diplomatic training, he was disposed to compromise when there seemed no hope of successful resistance. He therefore lent his weight to Curzon's effort to gather support for Lansdowne, who was now officially recommending that his supporters abstain from voting on the amendments. Recognizing that the issue might be resolved by a small number of votes, Cromer asked Lord Middleton (St. John Broderick) to "prowl about" in the library and sitting room of the house of lords to determine the opinions of the peers.⁵⁸ As a result of these recruiting efforts, over 300 peers indicated in writing that they would accept Lansdowne's advice.⁵⁹

It appeared, however, that even with the abstention of Lansdowne's supporters, the ditchers might still outnumber the Liberal peers in a showdown on the amendments.⁶⁰ To avert the consequences of that situation, both Strachey and Cromer were prepared to carry their opposition to the ditchers to its logical conclusion. Patriotic Unionist and

independent peers would have to vote with the government in order to cancel the votes of the ditchers.⁶¹

Cromer learned from Lord Crewe that the ministry was debating whether to create peers at once, or risk rejection of the parliament bill.⁶² The question obviously hinged on how many Unionists would vote with the government. Cromer asked Lord Newton to canvass privately to determine how many peers were prepared to vote against insistence on the amendments. Cromer and St. Aldwyn also arranged for a meeting of sympathetic peers at the home of Lord Bath on August 4.⁶³

In preparation for the meeting, Cromer asked Crewe to give a "distinct assurance" that if a specified number of opposition peers voted against insistence on the amendments, no new peers would be created. It would also be helpful, Cromer noted, if Crewe could publicize the fact that as many as 300 new creations were intended. This might change the mind of many peers who had the false impression that the government was either bluffing or that the new creations would be minimal.⁶⁴

After consultation with the cabinet on August 3, Crewe reported that the government could not give a formal reply to Cromer's questions because they "did not wish that there should be the least appearance of any distinct arrangement between themselves and any section of the Unionist party."⁶⁵ It was agreed, however, that Cromer could report to his associates that the government would return the

parliament bill to the house of lords without advising the creation of any new peers. If, however, that house continued to insist on its amendments, the government would then advise a creation of peers "sufficient definitely to safeguard the bill against any opposition it could possibly encounter in the house of lords."⁶⁶

Cromer faced serious difficulties in his efforts to counteract the strength of the ditchers by organizing Unionist votes for the parliament bill. The ditchers were quick to raise the cry of treason to the party and to label Cromer and his supporters as the "Judas" group. Curzon warned that the ditchers were suggesting that Balfour and Lansdowne were encouraging the hedgers. In order not to further weaken the position of the leaders, it had to be made clear that the efforts to prevent the creation of peers were initiated by "spontaneous action on the part of independent members of the Unionist party."⁶⁷ Lansdowne himself responded to pressure from within the party by publishing a letter that disassociated him from any efforts to secure a Unionist vote for the parliament bill.⁶⁸ This made Cromer's task even more difficult.

Another serious blow was dealt to Cromer's efforts by the Duke of Norfolk, an influential Catholic peer, who declared he would go over to the ditchers if any Unionist peer voted with the government. It was assumed that Norfolk would carry an undetermined number of his associates along with him. The peers who met with Cromer and St.

Aldwyn at Lord Bath's on August 4, thus were faced with a strategical dilemma. If they proceeded with their plans they risked driving a considerable number of peers into the ditcher camp. Cromer consulted Lansdowne on the question and decided that it would be best to abandon any formal attempt to organize a Unionist vote on the Government side.⁶⁹ He thought the result would depend upon whether the government peers with some slight help from individual Unionist peers, could beat the "no-surrender men."⁷⁰ His decision was confirmed at the meeting and publicly announced in the hope that it would deter the Norfolk group from leaving Lansdowne's camp. Lansdowne was "hugely relieved" by the decision, and noted that if the parliament bill was passed without the creation of peers, Cromer would be able to take a large share of the credit.⁷¹

The issue, however, was far from resolved. Since a number of Unionist peers were continuing their resolve to vote with the government, Norfolk announced his intention to vote with the ditchers. This meant that ditcher strength would be sufficiently increased to insure insistence on the lord's amendments. Cromer now had to make a last ditch effort to reverse the decision of the meeting at Lord Bath's, and get his supporters to vote with the government. At this critical juncture, however, he was stricken with a severe attack of gout, which forced him to his bed, and in his words, "came within an ace of being of historical importance." Without Cromer to give the lead the

situation depended upon St. Aldwyn. But at the last moment the latter decided, despite his previous assurances to Cromer, that he could not vote with the government or advise others to do so.⁷² Cromer thus commissioned Lord Heneage a fellow free trader, to state his position before the house of lords and make it clear that he intended to vote with the government had illness not prevented him from doing so. In Cromer's absence, Heneage also served as a "whip" for the thirty-six Unionists who voted in the government lobby on the evening of August 10.⁷³ It was these crucial votes that produced the majority of 131 to 114 against insistence on the lord's amendments.⁷⁴

A few days after the dramatic denouement of the constitutional crisis, Lansdowne wrote to Cromer to express his satisfaction at the outcome and to thank Cromer for his advice and assistance.⁷⁵ Cromer, however, was privately expressing his dissatisfaction with the quality of Lansdowne's leadership during the crisis. It would have been "monstrous," he maintained, if the ditchers had succeeded simply because the party leaders lacked the "moral courage" to assert their opinion by voting against insistence on the amendments. If Cromer had been present he would have declared that too much attention was being paid to the immediate interests of the Conservative Party, and not nearly enough to the "permanent interests of Conservatism."⁷⁶

Strachey, for his role in the struggle, was de-

nounced by Austen Chamberlain at a banquet of the Halsbury Club and received a gift of white feathers as a demonstration of the ill-opinion in which he was held by the "country die-hards."⁷⁷ He was, nonetheless, relieved that the parliament bill was passed without a creation of peers. If the party devoted itself to converting the nation to the referendum, its future success would be assured. Unity was, above all, necessary if the party was to resist successfully the inevitable attempt of the government to destroy the legislative union with Ireland.⁷⁸

¹Blewett, The Peers, the Parties, and the People, pp. 173-174.

²Strachey Papers, Strachey to Lansdowne, 15 December 1910.

³Ibid., Lansdowne to Strachey, 19 December 1910.

⁴Spectator 105 (December 17, 1910), 1068-9.

⁵Austen Chamberlain Papers, AC 9/1/13. Report of the committee, 3 February 1910. The members of the committee were Austen Chamberlain, Gerald Balfour, Sir Robert Finlay, and three referendum enthusiasts--Selborne, Salisbury and the constitutional authority Sir William Anson.

⁶Ibid., AC 9/1/20. Salisbury memorandum, January 1911.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid., AC 9/1/13. Report of the committee, pp. 2-9.

⁹Strachey Papers, Strachey to Henry Strachey, 2 February 1911.

¹⁰Ibid., Strachey to Balfour of Burleigh, 9 February 1911.

¹¹Ibid., Strachey to Balfour of Burleigh, 2 March 1911.

¹²Ibid., Strachey to Pember, 10 February 1911.

¹³Ibid., Strachey to Balfour of Burleigh, 7 March 1911.

¹⁴Parliamentary Debates, (House of Lords), fifth series, vol. VII, pp. 253-258.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 266.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 277.

¹⁷Ibid., Strachey to Balfour of Burleigh, 7 March 1911. Strachey brought together Selborne and Pember, so that the latter could explain the process by which the bill evolved and why it was necessary to eliminate the modifications favored by Selborne. [Ibid. Strachey to Selborne, 24 March 1911.]

¹⁸Parliamentary Debates, VII, pp. 700-706.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 681.

²⁰Ibid., p. 692.

²¹Ibid., p. 692.

²²Strachey Papers, Balfour of Burleigh to Strachey, 24 February 1911. In February, Lord Balfour explained the course he intended to take to Lansdowne, and reported that the latter "entirely approved."

²³Ibid., Balfour of Burleigh to Strachey, 31 March 1911.

²⁴Ibid., Strachey to Cromer, 31 March 1911.

²⁵Sir Charles Mallet, Lord Cave--A Memoir (London: John Murray, 1931), p. 142.

²⁶Parliamentary Debates (house of commons), fifth series, vol. XXIV, p. 1856.

²⁷Ibid., p. 1857.

²⁸Ibid., p. 1858.

²⁹Ibid., p. 1864. Asquith expressed mock surprise at the opposition's adoption of the referendum, quoting Disraeli's remark on the occasion when the Tory party adopted free trade: "Nothing like it has occurred since the Franks were converted in platoons and baptized in battalions."

³⁰Ibid., p. 1870.

³¹Strachey Papers, Strachey to Balfour of Burleigh, 27 April 1911.

³²Austen Chamberlain Papers, AC 9/1/5. "Memorandum by A.J. Balfour on the policy which should be pursued on the Second Reading and committee stages of the Parliament Bill." 11 May 1911.

³³Cromer Papers, F.O. 633, vol. 34, pp. 96-99. Cromer to Lansdowne, June 2, 1911.

³⁴Austen Chamberlain Papers, AC 9/1/5, Balfour Memorandum.

³⁵Cromer Papers, vol. 34, pp. 98-99. Cromer to Lansdowne, 2 June 1911. Hugh Cecil told Cromer that if the amendments to Clause I were pressed to a division against the Government, Parliament might be dissolved and an election fought on an issue on which "the country is decidedly against us." Ibid., Cecil to Cromer, 3 June 1911.

³⁶Ibid., pp. 23-23. Lansdowne to Cromer, 5 June 1911.

³⁷Parliamentary Debates (house of lords), fifth series, vol. IX, pp. 100-101.

³⁸Ibid., p. 276.

³⁹Harold Nicolson, King George the Fifth--His Life and Reign. (London: Constable and Co., Ltd., 1952), pp. 133-138.

⁴⁰Lord Newton, Lord Lansdowne, p. 417.

⁴¹Spectator, 107 (June 24, 1911), 953.

⁴²Ibid., 106 (January 7, 1911), 11-12.

⁴³Strachey Papers, Cecil to Strachey, 2 January 1911.

⁴⁴Spectator, 106 (January 7, 1911), 4-5.

⁴⁵Strachey Papers, Cecil to Strachey, 5 January 1911.

⁴⁶Ibid., Strachey to Cromer, 6 January 1911, 12 January 1911.

⁴⁷Annual Register, 1911, pp. 175-176. Lansdowne offered this advice at a meeting of Unionist peers at his home on July 21.

⁴⁸The Earl of Ronaldshay, The Life of Lord Curzon, (London: Ernest Benn Ltd., 1927), Vol. III, p. 56.

⁴⁹Chamberlain, Politics from Inside, p. 318. Lord Halsbury was supported in the house of lords by the Dukes of Bedford, Westminster, and Marlborough, by Lords Selborne, Salisbury, Milner, and Willoughby de Broke; in the house of commons by Edward Carson, George Wyndham, Robert and Hugh Cecil, Austen Chamberlain, and F.E. Smith.

⁵⁰Peter Fraser, "The Unionist Debacle of 1911 and Balfour's Retirement," The Journal of Modern History, XXXV (December, 1963), 354.

⁵¹Ibid., 355.

⁵²Strachey Papers, Strachey to Curzon, 1 August 1911.

⁵³Cecil's state of mind during the crisis is best illustrated by his actions on the evening of July 24, when he led those members of the Opposition who prevented Asquith from speaking in the house of commons. [Jenkins, p. 230].

⁵⁴Spectator, 107 (July 1, 1911), 5.

⁵⁵Cromer Papers, vol. 34, pp. 11-13. Strachey to Cromer, 3 April 1911.

⁵⁶Even Cromer felt that Strachey's articles on the house of lords were "premature." [Ibid., pp. 94-95. Cromer to Strachey, April 7, 1911]. A.V. Dicey regarded Strachey's policy as "the surrender of everything for which the Unionist Party has stood." [Strachey Papers, Dicey to Strachey, 18 May 1911].

⁵⁷Strachey Papers, Knollys to Strachey, 3 July 1911.

⁵⁸Cromer Papers, pp. 103-105. Cromer to Middleton, 13 July 1911.

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 135. Memorandum on Proceedings in Connection with the Passage of the Parliament Bill. August 1911.

⁶⁰Cromer Papers, pp. 39-40. Lansdowne to Cromer, 30 July 1911.

⁶¹Spectator, 107 (July 29, 1911), 164. Strachey urged Lansdowne and Balfour to advise their followers to vote for the bill in sufficient numbers to cancel the votes of the "Chamberlain-Smithite Peers."

⁶²Cromer Papers, p. 135. Cromer Memorandum.

⁶³Ibid., Cromer to Newton, 27 July 1911.

⁶⁴Ibid., pp. 136-137. Cromer to Crewe, 2 August 1911.

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 138.

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 139.

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 39. Curzon to Cromer, 28 July 1911.

⁶⁸The Times (August 1, 1911), p. 9.

⁶⁹Cromer Papers, pp. 122-124. Cromer to Lansdowne, 3 August 1911.

⁷⁰Ibid., pp. 125-126. Cromer's letter to Unionist peers, 4 August 1911. Cromer's policy at this point was influenced by a serious underestimation of ditcher strength by the Daily Mail, which identified 68 ditchers, while Lord Crewe claimed to be able to put 75 men into the Government lobby.

⁷¹Ibid., pp. 47-48, 53. Lansdowne to Cromer, 3 August 1911; 5 August 1911.

⁷²Ibid., p. 130. Cromer to Gosse, 12 August 1911.

⁷³Ibid., pp. 140-141. Cromer memorandum.

⁷⁴The Times, August 11, 1911, p. 6. The Times praised and listed the names of the 37 "patriotic Unionist peers" who voted against insistence upon the lord's amendments.

⁷⁵Cromer Papers, pp. 91-92. Lansdowne to Cromer, 15 August 1911.

⁷⁶Ibid., pp. 131-132. Cromer to Blythswood, 12 August 1911.

⁷⁷Strachey, Adventure of Living, p. 456.

⁷⁸Spectator, 107 (August 12, 1911), 236.

CHAPTER VIII

BACK IN THE UNIONIST FOLD

The renewed threat to the legislative union with Ireland awakened "the spirit of '86" in the soul of St. Loe Strachey. Believing that the struggle against home rule took precedence over all other questions, he advocated a complete reconciliation between the tariff reform and free trade wings of the party. For Strachey the only test for serving in the Unionist army was "opposition to the disastrous scheme for breaking the unity of the United Kingdom."¹ Both sides would have to make concessions. Free traders would have to cease their criticism of the tariff reform program while tariff reformers would have to give way on the food tax issue.

Strachey's hopes for Unionist harmony were dashed by the assault on the party leaders that followed the passage of the parliament act. "Balfour Must Go," originally a slogan of opposition to his equivocal fiscal policy, became the expression of a broadly based discontent with party leadership. The criticism was centered in the Halsbury Club, an outgrowth of the ditcher movement, which called for full support for tariff reform and imperial preference and all out opposition to home rule.

Strachey distrusted the forces behind the movement to depose Balfour, whom he now regarded as the only bulwark against the domination of the party by tariff reform extremists. Backing down from his past criticism of Balfour, he praised his "mastery of the art of opposition" and charged that attacks upon the leader were dividing the party at a time when its united energies had to be directed against the policies of the government. He called upon the Halsbury Club to demonstrate its loyalty to the party by passing a vote of confidence in Balfour and Lansdowne.²

To Strachey's dismay, Arthur Balfour yielded to the pressure and resigned the leadership which he had exercised in the house of commons for twenty years. Austen Chamberlain and Walter Long, his heirs apparent, were both earnest tariff reformers, but Chamberlain, as the leader of the "Birmingham gang," was by far the least acceptable to Strachey and the free traders.³ Their distrust was reinforced when Chamberlain declared, on the day of Balfour's resignation, that he would no longer be bound "either as leader or as follower," to the Albert Hall pledge to submit tariff reform to referendum.⁴

The stalemate between Chamberlain and Long was broken when, in the interests of unity, both relinquished their claims in favor of a third candidate, Andrew Bonar Law. The new leader was a dedicated protectionist who had been active in "Confederate" efforts to purge free traders from the house of commons. The choice was not calculated

to instill confidence in the hearts of Strachey and his colleagues.

Bonar Law inherited the full burden of internal divisions in the party which had compromised Balfour's position. His biographer, Robert Blake, notes that the problem of the status of the referendum pledge came close to destroying his leadership within less than a year after he assumed it.⁵ Despite his earlier identification as a tariff reform extremist Bonar Law was not eager to antagonize the free trade elements within the party. The latter were opposed to tariff reform in general but believed that food taxes were particularly unpopular with the public and would defeat the party at the polls. They wanted to retain the Albert Hall pledge as the only hope of winning the next general election.

As a tariff reformer Bonar Law's natural sympathies lay with the Chamberlainites, but he viewed the preservation of party unity as the first task of his leadership. He therefore postponed taking sides in the debate within the party as to whether the Albert Hall pledge was still valid and binding.⁶ Addressing a large Unionist rally on January 29, 1912, he invited the Unionist free traders to stand with the rest of the party in opposing "Lloyd-Georgeism," and promised that any Unionist change in the fiscal system would be "as little revolutionary as possible."⁷

Bonar Law was helped in his efforts to unify the party by the third home rule bill, a measure that was

detested by Unionists of all fiscal opinions. Although Joseph Chamberlain and other prominent Unionists had once expressed theoretical approval of federalist concepts similar to those contained in the bill, the party in 1912 was united in opposition to home rule.⁸ The government introduced the measure on April 11, with the knowledge that the machinery of the parliament act would ensure that home rule would become law by the summer of 1914, despite the resistance of the house of lords.

The only tactic left open to the opposition was to attempt to force a dissolution or convince the government that its home rule proposal was unworkable. The chief weapon in the Unionist arsenal was the attitude of the Protestants of Northern Ireland. The Ulster issue thus became the official rationale for Unionist resistance to home rule. But playing the "Orange card" required a united party that was willing to drop its concern with the fiscal question and any other divisive issues.

Strachey suggested that free traders would gladly give up their organization if Bonar Law promised not to pass food taxes without an appeal to the people.⁹ He believed that food taxes would defeat the Unionists even in an election fought basically on the Irish question. The resistance to home rule required that the party get the support of the voter who says: "Union or no Union, socialism or no socialism, I am not going to risk my food being made dearer by taxation."¹⁰ Although the tariff reformers could

not reasonably be asked to drop such a vital part of their program, the dilemma could be resolved by the retention and reassertion of Balfour's pledge to submit tariff reform to referendum.

Other free traders were going to greater lengths in their efforts at reconciliation. Robert Cecil was elected with tariff reform support in a November 1911 by-election after announcing his support for the retaliatory tariff, a measure regarded by Strachey as the halfway house to full protection.¹¹ Lord Robert and his brother Hugh also suggested a method by which the party could drop the referendum pledge without "scandal" or division. They urged the party to follow the precedent of the Liberals, who in 1906 had pledged not to raise the home rule question in the new parliament. By adopting the same procedure in regard to food taxes the Unionists would be free to repudiate the Balfour pledge, which applied to tariff reform measures in general.¹²

The free traders failed to convert the party to their views. While Curzon, for example, admitted that the party could not win an election "with food taxes around its neck," he feared that a split in the party would cancel any votes gained by the dropping of food taxes.¹³ Joseph Chamberlain warned Hugh Cecil of the dangers of switching horses while crossing the stream.¹⁴ At the same time, his son, Austen, urged the earliest possible repudiation of the Balfour pledge, noting that any revival of the referendum

for tariff reform measures would lead to great trouble within the party.¹⁵

In the end the tariff reformers had their way. In April, the shadow cabinet decided to retain food taxes in the party program and to drop the referendum pledge. Bonar Law persisted in the face of free trader protests, believing that any other course of action would split the party from top to bottom. After conferring with Sir Robert Borden, the new Canadian prime minister, who was interested in imperial preference, Bonar Law and Lansdowne decided to make the repudiation of the referendum pledge public. They scheduled the event for the meeting of the Conservative National Union at Albert Hall in November. Lansdowne, who, as a party to the original pledge would speak with greater authority, agreed to make the declaration.¹⁶

Strachey was now faced with a clearly defined conflict between his desire to defend free trade and his concern for the preservation of the union with Ireland. He had justified his break with the party in 1906 with the argument that a Liberal victory would pose no immediate threat to the union. That threat had now materialized and Unionist free traders would once more have to make a choice between two evils; "between tariff reform which they dislike, and Lloyd Georgeism which they detest."¹⁷ Tariff reform, even with food taxes, was the lesser of the two evils. However badly the Unionist free traders had been treated on the referendum pledge he would "not say a word

to encourage such feelings in others."¹⁸

Bonar Law's desire to erase any bad feelings within the party that would hurt the defense of the union brought Strachey and other free traders into close cooperation with the Unionist leader.¹⁹ Bonar Law actively courted this support, meeting privately with Strachey, Cromer and the Cecils. From these discussions there emerged the understanding that the free traders would abide by any final decision of the party.²⁰

Lansdowne officially repudiated the referendum pledge at a Unionist rally at Albert Hall on November 14, 1912. Unionists, he declared, would not sidetrack tariff reform. The referendum pledge had been proposed as part of "a great scheme of constitutional reform" which was derided by the Liberals and defeated at the polls. The Unionists had thus regained their freedom. The next Unionist ministry would seek ways to meet the financial obligations inherited from the Liberals, and to grant reciprocal trade to the Dominions.²¹

Strachey found it hard to contain his indignation at the withdrawal of the referendum pledge, a change which he interpreted as the victory of extremist over moderate tariff reformers.²² Although he reaffirmed his promise to Bonar Law to say or print nothing that would damage the Unionist cause, Strachey regarded the action as politically suicidal.²³ Believing that the leaders had been pushed too far by the Chamberlainites, he thought the decision could be

reversed if moderate opinion was rallied.²⁴ He urged the Unionists of Lancashire to express their disapproval, advising them to drive home to the Irish Unionist leader, Edward Carson, that food taxes jeopardized the cause of Ulster.²⁵

Strachey kept himself in the background, fearing that Austen Chamberlain would denounce his activity "as a case of wrecking by the Unionist free traders." Cromer praised his "yeoman's service" to the union, but warned against making the Spectator a forum for Bonar Law's fiscal policy. Such a turnabout would cause free traders to lose all credibility with the public.²⁶

In his correspondence with Bonar Law and Lansdowne, Strachey claimed to be in the predicament of counselling moderation to Unionist free traders at a time when most tariff reformers were apprehensive about the repudiation of the referendum pledge. He was accused by the latter of being "more royalist than the King" for accepting that policy.²⁷ As he was hoping, the Lansdowne speech was raising a furor among the Unionists of traditionally free trade Lancashire and Yorkshire, who believed that the decision would destroy their chances at the polls. This fear was soon general in all sections of the party. The Northcliffe press, led by the Times and Daily Mail, was converted to the free food camp and waged a campaign against "stomach taxes."

Bonar Law, now under pressure from all sides, wrote to Strachey on December 9 to explain his position:

So far as I am concerned, I entirely agree with your main proposition. I think the Union is more important than Tariff Reform; but the Union can only be preserved by a united party, and now at least, there is no chance of a united party in any other way than by adherence to the policy laid down at the Albert Hall.²⁸

In a speech in the heart of free trade country, in Ashton-under-Lyne, Bonar Law reaffirmed the decision to abandon the referendum pledge, but declared that any imposition of food taxes by a future Unionist Government would depend upon an agreement by a colonial conference called to consider the question of preferential trade.²⁹ Strachey wanted Bonar Law to go still further and promise that no recommendation of an imperial conference involving food taxes would be enacted without an appeal to the electors.³⁰

In spite of Bonar Law's speech, the resistance of the dissident Unionists of Lancashire and Yorkshire, under the leadership of the Earl of Derby, was approaching the stage of open rebellion against party leadership. The Times estimated that only 17 of the 282 Unionists in the house of commons were willing to hold out for the food tax policy.³¹ Bonar Law felt that his leadership was compromised, and despite appeals from Austen Chamberlain to hold firm, he planned to summon a meeting of the party and announce his resignation.

To avert a serious split in the party, Edward Carson and F.E. Smith prepared a memorial addressed to the Unionist leaders requesting that they remain in office, but declare that no new duties on food would be imposed until they were

submitted to the people at a general election. It was signed by all but six of the Unionist members of parliament. In the face of such evidence Bonar Law agreed to capitulate. In a letter to the party on January 13, 1913 he officially accepted the terms of the memorial on behalf of himself and Lord Lansdowne.³²

Bonar Law's surrender dealt a blow to the cause of tariff reform from which it never fully recovered. Although it lived on as the official orthodoxy of the Unionist party, the tariff reform program was deprived of its most ambitious and idealistic element; imperial preference for the self-governing dominions based upon duties on imported foodstuffs. As Cromer wisely noted, a policy of protection without food duties was less defensible and more impracticable than Joseph Chamberlain's original conception.³³ In the bitterness of the moment, Austen Chamberlain accused the party of abandoning the cause for which his father had "sacrificed more than life itself."³⁴ Nonetheless he refused to encourage resistance to the memorial. It was also a sad moment for Bonar Law, whose political career had been built upon a vigorous advocacy of tariff reform. He sacrificed that policy for the sake of what he regarded as a greater cause, the preservation of party unity for the struggle against home rule.

The settlement of the food tax controversy removed the only remaining obstacle to the reunion of the Unionist free traders with their party. Only a few months earlier

Strachey had complained that despite his steadfast defense of the Union, he was regarded as "a loathsome and hateful creature" because of his free trade views.³⁵ Yet Bonar Law's efforts to unite the party brought Strachey into his closest cooperation with the party leaders since 1903.³⁶ He thus took personal satisfaction from the outcome of the dispute. The party, he told Bonar Law, could now show a united front to the enemy without the danger of losing votes because of "the food tax prejudice."³⁷ The outcome was not, however, an unmitigated success for Strachey. His campaign for the referendum was never to recover from the setback it received in the repudiation of the Albert Hall pledge.

* * *

With the settlement of the food tax controversy, Strachey was free to devote his complete attention to the struggle against home rule; the cause with which he began his journalistic and political career in 1886. Like most Unionists at the time, he regarded the "orange card" as the strongest in the Unionist deck. He hoped the demand for separate treatment of Ulster might actually destroy the entire home rule bill. For the first time in many years Unionism was identified with a popular national cause and there was new confidence that the defeats, divisions and frustrations of the last decade could finally be erased.³⁸ In the two years during which the house of lords would delay the bill from becoming law, Unionists might succeed in forcing a dissolution or proving to the Government that its passage

would be a national disaster.

There was, Strachey thought, considerable dislike for Irish home rule among the voters of England and Scotland that was based on a concern for the rights of the Ulster Protestants. Since his trips to Belfast during the controversies of 1886 and 1895, he had maintained his contacts with Ulster Unionists, and was convinced that an attempt to force Ulster to accept the rule of a Dublin parliament would produce a violent confrontation.³⁹

Strachey's talk of civil war drew a sharp rebuke from Margot Asquith, who chided him for writing about bloodshed "just because you have been brought up to hate the Irish and to hate home rule."⁴⁰ Strachey replied that by the elementary laws of justice "home rule" should include the right of any Irish county to continue its relationship with the Parliament at Westminster.⁴¹

Even before the bill was actually introduced, Strachey wrote to Bonar Law to urge that the party concentrate on Ulster as "the crux of the home rule problem." He suggested an amendment to the forthcoming bill that would give any county of Ulster the right to refuse to go under the jurisdiction of a Dublin parliament. Strachey explained that he did not intend this as a compromise under which the Unionists could accept home rule. If properly managed, the question of Ulster exclusion could wreck the home rule bill. The Government, Strachey predicted, would reject exclusion because of the opposition of Redmond and the Irish National-

ists. Yet such a denial would weaken the federalist rationale for home rule while strengthening Ulster's moral cause for resistance and its support from the British public.⁴²

As the home rule bill made its stormy way through parliament in the sessions of 1912, 1913 and 1914, there were ominous signs that it could not be enforced in north-east Ulster without violence. In September 1912 Edward Carson and James Craig led Ulster Unionists in the signing of a "Solemn League and Covenant" to resist home rule. An Ulster volunteer army was soon drilling and, in September 1913, plans were announced for a provisional government with Carson as chairman, that would go into effect on the day parliament passed the home rule bill for the third time.

Confronted with the probability of armed rebellion in Ulster, pro-Unionist sentiment at home and a problematic situation in the army (later confirmed by the Curragh Incident), Asquith came to the conclusion that the partition of Ulster was the only practical alternative to civil war. Unionist moderates were increasingly inclined to agree.

By the fall of 1913 Strachey was reluctantly converted to the compromise of Ulster exclusion--though it meant home rule for the rest of Ireland. The moderate line which he adopted in the late stages of the controversy distinguished him once more from Unionist die-hards, who were willing to go to the wall in their efforts to destroy home rule and topple the government. Strachey's correspond-

ence poignantly conveys the extent to which his feelings were divided. Believing in Ulster's unquestionable right of resistance he affirmed that there was "a point where the moral right of insurrection arises and...it arises in a case of this kind."⁴³ He never ceased to admire Sir Edward Carson and declared him to be "the best friend of law and order in Ireland."⁴⁴ He informed Dicey that he would make a large and open contribution to the Ulster covenanters even if it left him open to the charge of treason.⁴⁵ On the other hand, Strachey admitted that if British troops were ever actually deployed to crush an Ulster rebellion he could not do anything that would add to the horrors of civil war. He was hopeful that such a tragedy would be avoided. The nation was against the coercion of Ulster, and that fact would be convincingly demonstrated if the Government agreed to a referendum or general election.⁴⁶

Even before the question of Ulster exclusion became an official topic for negotiation, Strachey opposed those Unionists whose hatred for home rule led them to contemplate measures of dubious constitutionality. His main target was the effort to persuade King George V to veto the home rule bill unless there was a dissolution of Parliament before the final reading in the house of commons. Bonar Law himself used this tactic, bluntly informing the King that he would either have to accept the home rule bill and its violent consequences or dismiss his ministers and select others who would support his veto. Bonar Law admitted that

either choice would alienate half of the King's subjects, but argued that use of the veto prerogative was justified since the Parliament act had destroyed the traditional buffer between the King and the house of commons.⁴⁷

Strachey regarded this flirtation with the revival of the royal veto as a dangerous game for Unionists to play. He placed it in the same category as the rejection of the Budget of 1909 and the attempt to force a creation of peers during the Parliament bill controversy.⁴⁸ In a memorandum prepared for Lord Stamfordham, the King's secretary, he expressed indignation at the attempt "to blackmail the King into gambling with the monarchy in order to help the Unionist party."⁴⁹ Even if the King had the constitutional right to employ his veto in this fashion, Strachey would oppose it for its disastrous consequences at the polls, where the constitutional issue would take precedence over home rule. If the Unionists were to win they would win on home rule alone and not by relying upon a dangerous constitutional "red herring." The duty of Unionists was to make the consequences of the coercion of Ulster clear to the British public.⁵⁰

At Strachey's request, Lord Cromer addressed himself to the arguments that were being used to justify the revival of the royal veto. It was plausible to assert that since the destruction of the veto power of the house of lords had removed all checks on the house of commons, the King could use his veto to ensure that the electorate would be heard. But democracy, Cromer noted, was not entirely governed by

reason. The argument was "far too subtle to be understood by the masses." Like Strachey, Cromer believed a revival of the veto would result in a repeat of the budget debacle of 1909. The country would regard the King's action as a move activated by sympathy for the Unionist party and as a step towards the re-establishment of the personal power of the crown.⁵¹

Cromer rejected the Unionist assertion that home rule had never been approved by the electorate and therefore ought to be vetoed. The proposal, he noted, had been before the nation for a quarter of a century and was supported by leading Liberal statesmen. Although it was true that it played a secondary role in the last general election, Cromer asserted that it was well known that Irish home rule was an important part of the Government's program. He recommended that rather than refusing his assent to the bill, the King should instead make it known in writing that he advised his ministers of the danger of civil war and of his belief that the risk would be minimized if the measure was suspended until after a general election. If the ministers chose to ignore this advice, responsibility would rest on their shoulders alone.⁵²

The veto issue became public property in August 1913 when Arnold White appealed in the Daily Express for a Unionist petition requesting the King to withhold his assent from home rule until a general election was called. Strachey thought that White's proposal could split the party from top

to bottom.⁵³ With the encouragement of Stamfordham, he attacked the "mischievous movement for putting pressure upon the King to commit a revolutionary act." He argued that under "the theory of the constitution" the King's acts were the acts of his ministers and that the latter were wholly responsible.⁵⁴

By this time, Strachey had set himself to the thankless task of preparing Unionists to accept home rule with Ulster exclusion as the only alternative to civil war. He was encouraged by an atmosphere of compromise in which government and opposition leaders were discussing various proposals for the separate treatment of Northeast Ulster. But Strachey was surprised at the extent to which the die-hard contagion had spread to his closest political associates. His long time friend, A.V. Dicey, advised him against supporting the compromise in the Spectator, noting that it would be regarded as a surrender of the Union. Dicey opposed any concessions that would enable the Government to carry home rule in any form.⁵⁵

At the same time, Robert Cecil suggested that the house of lords could prevent the coercion of Ulster by refusing to pass the annual army act which established military discipline in Great Britain, unless the Government agreed to refer home rule to a referendum or general election.⁵⁶ In January 1914, with negotiations with the Government at a temporary standstill, Unionist leaders gave serious consideration to Cecil's proposal.⁵⁷ Strachey

regarded this tactic as more dangerous than the plan to revive the royal veto, and it took a direct plea from Bonar Law to prevent him from denouncing it in the Spectator.⁵⁸ Yet in spite of Bonar Law's assurance that no action would be taken without the unanimous support of the party, Strachey thought that the very idea of tampering with army discipline was symbolic of the reckless spirit of the times. On May 19, the eve of the ominous Curragh incident, he informed Curzon that Bonar Law and everyone else he talked to in the house of commons, was "reaching the point of exasperation." What was missing, Strachey noted, was "cool thinking and cautious action."⁵⁹

Despite his preoccupation with the Irish question, Strachey continued his efforts to promote the referendum as a vital part of Unionist policy. The withdrawal of the Balfour pledge had removed the "poll of the people" from the pedestal it briefly occupied during the constitutional debate, and most tariff reformers now regarded it with undisguised suspicion and hostility. To that liability was added the understandable refusal of the government to submit its legislative proposals to the additional test of the referendum. Strachey and a small band of apostles nonetheless continued to insist that the referendum was the only way to "repeal" the parliament act and prevent the passage of major legislation that was without majority support in the nation.⁶⁰ Among its most active supporters were Lord Selborne and Robert Cecil, who called for a referendum

amendment to the parliament act as the first order of business of the next Unionist Government.⁶¹

When the national insurance bill was sent up to the house of lords, Strachey saw another opportunity to focus public attention on the virtues of the referendum.⁶² He turned once again to Francis Pember, who redrafted the Balfour of Burleigh bill in the form of an amendment to the insurance bill.⁶³ But the party leaders did not encourage Strachey's efforts. They had decided, in the end, to yield on the insurance bill in order to conserve their resources for the Irish debate.

Home rule was precisely the kind of measure that Strachey thought ideally suited to the referendum. In October 1911, before the bill was even introduced, he advised Bonar Law to consider a referendum amendment. He did not expect the Government to accept a referendum but felt that its refusal would give Ulster "a moral basis for resistance" in the eyes of the nation.⁶⁴

By 1914, however, the Government had come around to accepting a modified version of the referendum as a method of ensuring peace in Ireland. In March, Asquith announced plans for an amending act that would permit any county of Ulster, by a majority poll of its electors, to be excluded from the provisions of the home rule act for six years. The Ulster problem, in short, was to be settled by local referendum. In his reply for the opposition, Bonar Law recommended that the referendum on home rule be extended

to the entire nation. Strachey regarded these developments as "the triumph of the referendum." He rejoiced in "the astonishing sight of both parties...clutching at the referendum as the only way of avoiding the unspeakable disaster to the verge of which representative institutions, unchecked by some form of popular veto, have led us."⁶⁵

Strachey did not like the actual terms of the amending bill. He opposed the time limit and argued that a county by county plebiscite would be unjust to the large protestant minorities in Tyrone and Fermanagh.⁶⁶ As an alternative, he proposed one unified referendum for all of northeast Ulster--in the six counties (Antrim, Armagh, Derry, Down, Fermanagh and Tyrone) which constituted, according to Strachey, "a bona-fide homogenous community."⁶⁷ This was, to be sure, a community in which Protestants were in the decided majority. It is essentially the area that comprises Northern Ireland today.

Strachey never contemplated extending the benefits of the referendum to the Southern Irish. When Samuel Honey, an American authority on the referendum, raised the possibility of an all-Ireland referendum Strachey rejected the suggestion as certain to lead to a majority for home rule. It was not possible, he explained, for the democratic process to function in Southern Ireland:

The priests and the Leaguers would insist on the people voting their way, and any man who did not would be a marked man...the ballot, as you know, has very little secrecy in Ireland.⁶⁸

But there was a more basic reason why Strachey could not support an Irish referendum on home rule. He had always opposed the federalist ideal and intended the referendum as a measure of the will of the entire British nation. He came to accept the idea of a local referendum in Ulster only as an alternative to civil war.

* * *

In the months before the outbreak of the European war produced a temporary shelving of the Irish question, Strachey attempted to quiet Unionist passions stressing the benefits of a settlement that was satisfactory to the Ulster Unionists. He told Bonar Law that no "mistaken punctillos" on the part of Southern Irish Unionists should be allowed to stand in the way of a compromise.⁶⁹ In a letter to Sir Edward Carson, he stressed that Ulster's adherence to the Union would create "a garrison in the enemy's country."⁷⁰ The exclusion of Ulster would leave "three-quarters of a million guardians of the interests, not only of the Loyalists of Ireland, but of Imperial interests, securely planted in the soil of Ireland."⁷¹

When the amending bill was sent up to the house of lords, Strachey encouraged Cromer, who was in almost continual bad health at the time, to use his influence for moderation. He thought that the peers should make only those minimal changes in the bill that were necessary to prevent a civil war in Ulster. By averting disaster at the eleventh hour, the house of lords could demonstrate its

useful moderating influence and add to the case against its destruction.⁷²

But despite the efforts of Cromer and Strachey the house of lords refused to be the agency of compromise. The amending bill was revised to provide for the exclusion of all nine counties of Ulster, a proposal that was completely unacceptable to the government and to the Irish Nationalists.

At the end of July, the ominous situation in Europe turned Britain's attention away from Ireland and towards the continent. The debate on the amending bill was postponed on July 30, and when Britain entered the war in August it was mutually agreed that the Irish question would be tabled for the duration. In September, despite the official protest of Bonar Law, the home rule and Welsh disestablishment acts were placed on the statute book. The Unionists were appeased with a suspensory clause delaying the operation of home rule until the end of the war.

Strachey was relieved that the spirit of cooperation produced by the war had eliminated "the danger of fratricidal strife" at home. While reconciling himself to Irish home rule, he at least had the satisfaction of knowing that Britain had been spared "the sting of civil war" and the possibility of grave damage to her political institutions.⁷³

- ¹Spectator 107 (August 19, 1911), 271.
- ²Spectator 107 (October 21, 1911), 628-629.
- ³Ibid., 107 (November 11, 1911), 780-781. Strachey favored the choice of a leader who was neutral on the tariff reform question. He recommended J.W. Lowther, the Speaker of the house of commons.
- ⁴Austen Chamberlain, Politics from Inside, pp. 386-287.
- ⁵Robert Blake, The Unknown Prime Minister--The Life and Times of Andrew Bonar Law 1858-1923. (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, Ltd., 1955), p. 105.
- ⁶Ibid., pp. 105-107.
- ⁷Annual Register 1912, p. 9.
- ⁸Chamberlain, Politics from Inside, p. 570.
- ⁹Cromer Papers, vol. 20, pp. 119-120. Strachey to Cromer, 23 November 1911.
- ¹⁰Spectator 107 (November 18, 1911), 844.
- ¹¹Ibid., pp. 95-97. Lord George Hamilton to Cromer, November 13, 1911. Hamilton regarded Cecil's arrangement as a free trade victory and defended his "retaliation" compromise.
- ¹²Cecil of Chelwood Papers, Hatfield House, CHE 71/13-18. Memorandum by Lord Robert and Lord Hugh Cecil, "The Taxes on Food," 6 March 1912.
- ¹³Lord Quickswood Papers, Hatfield House, QUI 15/30-42. Lord Curzon to Lord Hugh Cecil, 12 March 1912.
- ¹⁴Ibid., QUI 15/153. Joseph Chamberlain to Lord Hugh Cecil, 4 March 1912.
- ¹⁵Bonar Law Papers, 25/2/29, Austen Chamberlain to Bonar Law, 17 February 1912.
- ¹⁶Blake, Bonar Law, pp. 108-111.
- ¹⁷Spectator 108 (February 3, 1912), 176-177.
- ¹⁸Strachey Papers, Strachey to Hugh Cecil, 7 November 1912.
- ¹⁹Through the intermediary of Walter Long, Bonar Law expressed his disapproval of any renewal of Confederate attacks on the free traders. Bonar Law Papers, 2 6/4/33.

Walter Long to Bonar Law, 21 June 1912; Long to T. Comyn Platt (a Confederate) 2 June 1912.

²⁰Cromer Papers, vol. 21, p. 115. Strachey to Cromer, 13 May 1913; Strachey Papers, Strachey to Robert Cecil, 25 October 1912; Quickswood Papers, QUI 15/164, Strachey to Hugh Cecil, 28 October 1912. This did not prevent Strachey from urging that the party reconsider its action. He suggested that the Unionist make the referendum pledge applicable only to food taxes. [Spectator 109 (July 6, 1912), 5.]

²¹Annual Register 1912, pp. 237-238.

²²Spectator 109 (November 23, 1912) 840-841.

²³Strachey Papers, Strachey to Bonar Law, 15 November 1912.

²⁴Cromer Papers, vol. 21, pp. 207-209. Strachey to Cromer, 27 November 1912.

²⁵Strachey Papers, Strachey to E.L. Oliver, 28 November 1912.

²⁶Cromer Papers, vol. 21, pp. 228-230. Strachey to Cromer, 13 December 1912; pp. 326-329. Cromer to Strachey, 14 December 1912.

²⁷Strachey Papers, Strachey to Bonar Law, 12 December 1912; Strachey to Lansdowne, 5 December 1912.

²⁸Strachey Papers, Bonar Law to Strachey, 9 December 1912. Cited in Blake, Bonar Law, p. 118.

²⁹Blake, Bonar Law, p. 112.

³⁰Spectator 109 (December 21, 1912), 1048-1049.

³¹Times (January 3, 1912), p. 8.

³²Amery, Joseph Chamberlain, VI, pp. 980-983.

³³Cromer Papers, vol. 22, pp. 258-261. Cromer to Strachey, 26 March 1913.

³⁴Amery, Joseph Chamberlain, VI, p. 981. Letter from Austen Chamberlain to Mrs. Joseph Chamberlain, 7 January 1913.

³⁵Strachey Papers, Strachey to Dicey, 4 May 1912.

³⁶ Ibid., Bonar Law to Strachey, 17 January 1913. Bonar Law thanked Strachey for his public support of the memorial compromise.

³⁷ Bonar Law Papers, 28/2/54. Strachey to Bonar Law, 11 January 1913.

³⁸ D.G. Boyce, "British Conservative Opinion, the Ulster Question, and the Partition of Ireland, 1912-21." Irish Historical Studies 17 (March 1970), 89-90.

³⁹ Strachey was in particularly close communication with Andrew Sinclair, a Belfast Liberal Unionist m.p. Strachey arranged a meeting between Sinclair and Bonar Law. Strachey Papers, Strachey to Sinclair, 22 November 1911.

⁴⁰ Ibid., Margot Asquith to Strachey, 19 November 1911.

⁴¹ Ibid., Strachey to Margot Asquith, 21 November 1911.

⁴² Strachey Papers, Strachey to Bonar Law, 17 November 1911.

⁴³ Strachey Papers, Strachey to Dicey, 12 July 1912.

⁴⁴ Spectator 111 (October 18, 1913), 597.

⁴⁵ Strachey Papers, Strachey to Dicey, 22 May 1913.

⁴⁶ Ibid., Strachey to Dicey, 12 July 1912.

⁴⁷ Austen Chamberlain, Politics from Inside, p. 487. Chamberlain recounts a conversation between the King and Bonar Law on May 4, 1912. Bonar Law later summarized his arguments in a memorandum addressed to the King in September. [See Blake Bonar Law, pp. 133, 150-152.]

⁴⁸ Strachey Papers, Strachey to Dicey, 18 February 1913.

⁴⁹ Ibid., Memorandum on Home Rule Tactics, 20 February 1913.

⁵⁰ Strachey urged the Archbishop of Canterbury to take the lead in convincing the Government to allow Ulster to "contract out of the home rule bill." Strachey to Stamfordham, 20 February 1913.

⁵¹ Cromer Papers, vol. 22, pp. 228-232. Cromer to Strachey, 22 February 1913.

⁵²Ibid., p. 232. Strachey sent his own and Cromer's memoranda to Lord Lansdowne, with the comment that the revival of the veto would discredit the Unionist party whose role was to be conservative and constitutional. Strachey Papers, Strachey to Lansdowne, 24 June 1913.

⁵³Strachey Papers, Strachey to Stamfordham, 11 August 1913.

⁵⁴Spectator 111 (August 9, 1913), 200-201.

⁵⁵Strachey Papers, Dicey to Strachey, 16 October 1913. In September Dicey had joined other prominent Unionist constitutional experts (Halsbury, Sir William Anson, George Cave) in backing the demand of Bonar Law that the King dismiss Asquith and force a dissolution.

⁵⁶Bonar Law Papers, 52/3/1. Memorandum by Robert Cecil, 4 June 1913.

⁵⁷Blake, Bonar Law, pp. 173-177.

⁵⁸Strachey Papers, Strachey to Curzon, 19 March 1914.

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰In November 1911 the Referendum League was chartered; an avowedly non-party organization dedicated to ending the "usurpation of despotic power by the house of commons." Spectator 107 (October 7, 1911), 548.

⁶¹Bonar Law Papers, 31/2/50. Memorandum on the Referendum, January 20, 1914. Lord Curzon and Walter Long were among those who expressed approval of the memorandum.

⁶²Strachey Papers, Strachey to Lansdowne, 13 November 1911, 23 November 1911, 27 November 1911, 30 November 1911.

⁶³Ibid., Strachey to Pember, 27 November 1911, 5 December 1911.

⁶⁴Ibid., Strachey to Andrew Sinclair, 16 October 1911, Strachey reported to Sinclair on his conversation with Bonar Law.

⁶⁵Spectator 112 (March 14, 1914) 422-423.

⁶⁶Ibid. (May 30, 1914), 900-901.

⁶⁷Ibid. (May 2, 1914).

⁶⁸Strachey Papers, Strachey to Samuel Honey, 2 May 1912. Honey was the author of The Referendum and the English.

⁶⁹Ibid., Strachey to Bonar Law, 13 February 1914.

⁷⁰Ibid., Strachey to Carson, 10 March 1914.

⁷¹Spectator 112 (March 7, 1914), 376.

⁷²Cromer Papers, vol. 23, pp. 34-35. Strachey to Cromer, 21 April 1914.

⁷³Spectator 113 (August 1, 1914), 157-158.

CHAPTER IX

THE LAST YEARS

The European war came as no great surprise to Strachey, who, since the Boer war, had been warning his countrymen of the "German menace" and urging military preparation.¹ He was always convinced of the righteousness of British participation, it being, characteristically, necessary for him to believe "that the Allies were 100 per cent perfect, and the Central Powers 100 per cent. evil."² Serving as high sheriff of Surrey at the start of the war, he threw his full energy into the recruiting effort that produced Kitchener's volunteer army. His Surrey home, Newlands Corners, was converted into a forty bed auxiliary hospital administered by his wife and daughter. In the early years of the war, Strachey served the cause of Anglo-American understanding by providing a link between visiting American journalists and the British government. Weekly briefing sessions were held at his London home at which officials were always present to answer questions.

The extensive state supervision necessitated by the war modified Strachey's laissez-faire orthodoxy. He was convinced that the liquor trade was hurting Britain's war effort by lowering the efficiency of labor and contributing

to the food shortage. At first he advocated prohibition for the war's duration, but by 1915 he was calling for a more drastic measure. "I am somewhat staggered by my own audacity," he told Bonar Law:

. . . but the more I think on the matter, the more I feel that we are getting into a hopeless position on the Drink question. I can see no way out which will be fair to the Trade and also fair³ to the Nation--except State purchase and State monopoly.

It is significant that it took the crisis of war to shake Strachey's laissez-faire beliefs. In the span of his career, the "Drink question" and conscription were the only issues on which he urged State intervention.

In a sense, Strachey himself was a "casualty" of the war; the strain of his many activities permanently injured his health. In 1916 he was stricken with a near fatal attack of "pernicious anaemia" and he never fully recovered from its effects. He deeply felt the loss of his friend and closest political associate, Lord Cromer, who died in 1917, shortly after completing his work as chairman of the Dardenelles Commission. Strachey had earlier acknowledged his debt to Cromer:

There is no man from whom I have learned so much as I have from you. . . . I was a Whig, using the word in its true sense, by nature, but you confirmed me in that habit of mind, and made me realize that true, ordered liberty and its children, moderation and common sense, are the ideals to pursue in the government of men⁴

In the years after the war, Strachey's declining health forced him to ease his editorial routine and to entrust more and more work to his subordinates. His children, John and Amabel, joined the Spectator to write on political

and literary subjects and to help with its financial management. He used his new free time to summarize the interests of a lifetime--writing or editing six books between 1922 and 1926.⁵ He also gave thought to the future of the Spectator and confided his ambitions to his friend John Buchan.

I have a very strong feeling that in the Spectator there is a tremendous opportunity for doing two things which are very dear to my heart: (a) Acting as a liaison officer between the two branches of the English-speaking race. (b) Taking the place of the anti-revolutionary and anti-Bolshevik organ, not only of England and⁶ America, but of the whole English-speaking world.

To accomplish these ends, he considered purchasing shares in the Independent, a Boston based weekly to which he was already contributing articles. Joseph Brewer, his young American private secretary, was commissioned to look into the possibility of converting the Independent into an "American Spectator."⁷

Strachey's plans were upset, however, by his son's conversion to socialism. In 1923 both John and Amabel Strachey joined the Labour party, and in the general election of the following year John stood as its candidate for a Birmingham constituency.⁸ This came as a great disappointment to St. Loe, who had always hoped to pass on his paper to his son. Concluding that it would be inappropriate for a socialist to inherit the Spectator, he decided, with John's approval, that the latter's contributions would be restricted to the literary and business side of the paper.⁹

Strachey's wife and son have attested to the fact that he was moving "to the left" in the last years of his

life. As John Strachey recalled:

. . . the old Liberal tendencies . . . which had been so active in his youth, but had lain dormant for long years, seemed to reawaken. It was not, indeed, that he changed his politics in the sense of leaving one party or joining another. He rather stepped back from and out of the political contest.¹⁰

Strachey's letters and activities confirm this impression. He informed Margot Asquith that if the Liberals had not placed themselves under the leadership of the "unscrupulous opportunist," Lloyd George, he would be

very much more inclined, now that the Irish question is out of the way, to be a Liberal than a Conservative. I am anti-Socialist, but I am all for doing anything that can possibly be done in the way of progressive amelioration of social conditions.¹¹

Strachey became an enthusiastic advocate of "Christian co-operation" between capital and labour as an alternative to class struggle. One of the last acts of his public life was his service on a "committee of national reconciliation" that attempted to negotiate a just settlement of the miners' strike of 1926.¹²

To the end of his life, Strachey was committed to a radical transformation of the British constitutional system for a parliamentary to a direct democracy. In 1926 he received a letter from Beatrice Webb, who predicted that future generations might react against all forms of political democracy. "What I fear," she noted

is another sixteenth century, with the rise of creed wars, only the rival creeds will be economic and political, and not theological. The world has gone into a state of creedlessness, and I am afraid the reaction will be fanaticism.¹³

But Strachey was unshaken in his faith in "the will of the majority and representative government, checked by the referendum." He was still, he insisted, "a bottomless Whig."¹⁴

In 1923 he appealed to Stanley Baldwin, the new prime minister, to remake the Unionist party as "a democratic constitutional party" and to institute the referendum as the only security against the danger of minority rule:

I implore you to give us such a development of the Constitution as will make minority rule impossible. Do not let us continue under a system which puts our lives and liberties at the mercy of a log-rolling cabal in the House of Commons.¹⁵

But the Unionist party no longer considered the referendum to be practical politics. Home rule was an accomplished fact, and the referendum, which had formerly attracted support as a deterrent to home rule, had lost its political magic. Strachey, nonetheless, continued to push for the referendum in his correspondence, in pamphlets, in periodical articles and in the Spectator.

In the summer of 1925, with his health failing, Strachey finally terminated his proprietorship of the Spectator, selling enough shares to his managing editor, Evelyn Wrench, to give the latter majority control of the paper. Strachey predicted the effect of this change in a letter to Bernard Mallet:

Wrench will make a much less important paper politically than I made, but it will be quite a good paper and a much more paying one. No doubt you won't like this, but the public has already begun to like it better. I was too much a pure politician for them.¹⁶

Strachey retained a financial interest in the Spectator and continued, until his death in 1927, to contribute, often using the new innovation of signed articles and reviews.

* * *

When Strachey cast his lot with the Liberal Unionists back in 1886, his political outlook was fixed in a stable compound consisting of one part "free trade" and one part "opposition to home rule" in relatively equal proportions. In later years the continuing strength of these convictions was detrimental to his political fortunes. The influence of the tariff reformers within the Unionist party forced Strachey and the free traders into a political "no man's land," where the Spectator was a voice in the wilderness denouncing the vices of both major parties. He was drawn back to the Unionist fold by his distaste for the "socialistic" tendencies of the new Liberalism, by the assault on the veto of the house of lords, and finally, by the revival of home rule in 1912.

Strachey's political stance was fundamentally negative: he was a "nay-sayer." His position with regard to Ireland and free trade was a defense of the status quo. For all his experience in the world of affairs he was an unpractical politician. With his dislike of party discipline and special interests he would have been happier living in "the golden age of the private member." John Strachey was right when he noted that if his father had ever entered parliament he "would have been a nightmare to his Whips."¹⁷

Strachey's most constructive political contribution came after 1907, when, in cooperation with Lord Cromer, he was an influential voice for moderation at a time when many Unionists were contemplating actions of dubious constitutionality. In the controversy over the parliament bill, he threw his weight behind reasonable compromise at a time when Unionist leadership was singularly ineffective.

It has been customary for historians to treat the Unionist free traders as men who were out of step with their times. Recently, Strachey has been described as the spokesman for the Victorian upper middle class--a class whose values were questioned in the Edwardian era and failed to meet the test.¹⁸ In this light, the fiscal controversy within the Unionist party appears to be a struggle between "traditional" conservatives (the free traders), and "progressive" conservatives (the Chamberlainites), with the latter representing the more flexible and creative approach to the problems of the economy, social reform, and the empire.¹⁹

Like many generalizations, this interpretation blurs the complexity of the situation. The tariff reformers, for example, for all their vaunted flexibility on the question of social reform, were remarkably unproductive of concrete legislative proposals.²⁰ They never went beyond Chamberlain's promise of contributory old age pensions that were to be partially financed out of tariff revenue--and even this proposal was dropped from their program after 1906.

As has been seen, the tariff reformers were at least as hostile as the free traders to the social legislation of the Liberal government, especially the Lloyd George budget.

There is truth, nonetheless, in the assertion that the free traders looked to an earlier era for their political values. Their plight can only be understood in the light of the reaction against Gladstonian individualism in the late Victorian and Edwardian eras--a reaction that cut across party lines and was manifested in the call for positive intervention by the state in economic, social and imperial problems. The world war completed the destruction of the individualistic world that Strachey and the free traders cherished. Characteristically, Strachey himself did not see that his world had been destroyed. The perennial optimist, he looked to the good sense of the British people to mollify the dangers of collectivism and class struggle which loomed on the postwar horizon.

¹Bralley, "St. Loe Strachey and the Politics of Dilemma," Chapter X, Strachey and the Preparedness Campaign, pp. 246-268.

²John Strachey, "J. St. Loe Strachey." Spectator 141 (November 3, 1928), 15.

³Strachey Papers, Strachey to Bonar Law, 17 April 1915.

⁴Cromer Papers, vol. 21, pp. 72-73. Strachey to Cromer, 13 March 1912.

⁵The Adventure of Living (1922) an autobiography; Economics of the Hours (1923) a defense of free enterprise and the profit motive; The River of Life (1924) a literary and travel diary; The Referendum (1924); The Madonna of the Barricades (1925), a novel about the caronari and the revolutions of 1848; American Soundings (1926), an expression of Strachey's fascination with America.

⁶Strachey Papers, Strachey to Buchan, 26 November 1920.

⁷Joseph Brewer Papers, New York City. Joseph Brewer to Paul Hollister, 6 August 1924. The author is indebted to Mr. Brewer, an Oxford classmate and friend of John Strachey, for his reminiscences about the Stracheys, pere et fils and the Spectator office in the 1920's.

⁸Hugh Thomas, John Strachey. (London: Eyre Methuen, 1973), pp. 36-43.

⁹Strachey received a letter of sympathy from Beatrice Webb: "I suppose," she noted, "if we had a son he would be a Conservative--it is a very wholesome instinct on the part of young people to react against the opinions of their immediate elders, as it brings fresh blood into each political party, and helps it from degenerating into a hereditary sect." Strachey Papers, Beatrice Webb to Strachey, 9 May 1924.

¹⁰John Strachey, "J. St. Loe Strachey," Spectator 141 (November 3, 1928), 15.

¹¹Strachey Papers, Strachey to Margot Asquith, 30 December 1924.

¹²Amy Strachey, St. Loe Strachey, p. 380.

¹³Strachey Papers, Beatrice Webb to Strachey, 10 December 1926.

¹⁴Ibid., Strachey to B. Webb, 13 December 1926.

¹⁵ Ibid., Strachey to Baldwin, 28 May 1923.

¹⁶ Ibid., Strachey to Mallet, 13 August 1925.

¹⁷ John Strachey, "J. St. Loe Strachey," 15.

¹⁸ Bralley, "St. Loe Strachey and the Politics of Dilemma," p. 270.

¹⁹ Neal Blewett, "Free Fooders, Balfourites, Whole Hoggers," pp. 100-101; Bernard Semmel, Imperialism and Social Reform-English Social-Imperial Thought 1895-1914. (New York: Doubleday and Co., Anchor Books edition, 1968).

²⁰ James F. Govan, "Union and Strength: The Political Programme of the Tariff Reformers 1903-13." Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Johns Hopkins University, 1959, p. 204.

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