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TO SAVE ENGLAND FROM DECLINE

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"To Save England from Decline"

The National Party of Common Sense: British Conservatism and the Challenge of Democracy (1885–1892)

Fulvio Cammarano

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Preface

The Italian edition of the present work was published 1990 by Lacaita. Publication of the English version was recommended by reviews received in Great Britain, and especially from dr. Agatha Ramm who called for its translation in the *English Historical Review*. Compared to the Italian version the chapter called 'An European Transition' was added and new secondary sources and recent historiographical data were taken into consideration. Ten years on, it seems to me that the original thesis of the book still retains its value.

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Chapter 1

An European Transition

At the turn of the 19th century, the European political scene was undergoing great transformations, whilst Great Britain seemed to be a unique exception. This was not due to the existence of incomparable problems, as many continental history books have suggested. On the contrary, many of the questions posed by continental political systems regarding the capacity for endurance of traditional institutions and the ruling classes were perfectly mirrored in the debate enlivening the political and intellectual milieu of a country characterized by a very peculiar social context, such as Great Britain. Who was entitled to participate in the decision-making process? What role did parliament and the executive play? Where was the legitimate boundary of state intervention to be drawn? These were some of the questions that British constitutional thought, not unlike other countries across the Channel, had raised since Edmund Burke's time. The late Victorian period was faced with extended suffrage and the increasing organization, on the unionist and political front, of class interests. Such issues were gradually transformed into controversies regarding possible solutions and, above all, into manifest uncertainties about the staying power of liberal institutions.

If European élites experienced fears that frequently went from being purely political to questions regarding the very survival of civilization, British élites were certainly no less anxious about their own future. What was the nature of this British peculiarity? Possibly it concerned the undeniable crisis of the classical liberal tradition which, in that period,

did not necessarily imply a crisis of the liberal political system and of representative institutions as had occurred in many other countries ruled by a parliamentary system.

Of course, there were several, often complex, reasons behind such resistance. This work does not claim to offer an overall explanation of the phenomenon of institutional continuities and schisms in Great Britain, but aims to focus on an historical moment which even contemporaries perceived as critical, since it was suggestive of the crisis of liberal culture present throughout Europe. When, some years ago, I began working on comparative analyses of late Victorian political and institutional events[1], I realized that the 1880s had been crucial in making the British aware of the decline of the idea of a constitutional 'diversity' that would safeguard the country from the turmoils of continental democracy. Ironically, as often happens in history, such awareness grew while the rest of Europe was being introduced to the reassuring image of British institutions as described in the late 1860s by Walter Bagehot in his *The English Constitution*. The reasons behind the marked 'Anglophilia' in Europe during this period[1] lie in the unavowed need of the liberal ruling classes to understand how to make the élitist machinery of the liberal political system coexist with the growing demands for political and social transformation coming from the subordinate classes. Hence the myth of the great imperial power, ruled by a parliamentary government unaffected by any desire for authoritarianism where intensive economic development had not given rise to any class estrangement and had not jeopardized the prestige of the ruling class and parliament.

Indeed, in Italy and France - two examples of continental parliamentary regimes - the liberal intelligentsia was totally rethinking the efficacy of liberal institutions, and, first and foremost, of parliament. In 1889, Maggiorino Ferraris, editor of the prestigious journal *Nuova Antologia*, wrote:

> In science and in practice doubts are now being expressed as to whether parliamentary rule, not in its ideals, but rather in its very best applications, is the fittest and most definitive way of ruling people.[2]

In France, the economic crisis of the 1880s had prompted the development of boulangiste trends: 'Par ailleurs, la République "opportuniste" deçoit, et favorise, l'antiparlamentarisme alimenté à partir de 1885 par une instabilité ministerielle croissante.'[3] Confidence in the parliamentary institution, after all, had arisen in a well-defined historical and cultural environment, where reason, tolerant moderation and debate were considered to be the typifying features of a period that credited itself with leaving absolutism behind, with its appendices of violence and coercion.[4]

During the golden age of the British parliament and in the period of the *Chambre Orléaniste* in France, political assemblies were mainly engaged

in debates rather than in the production of laws. Bagehot thought that the primary task of the House of Commons was to cooperate with the executive in the management of the state and to guarantee, through internal debate, the political education of the country.[5] Proposals aimed at formulating laws were usually considered unnecessary or dangerous[6] and were replaced by lengthy verbal skirmishes. In the liberal literature of the time, this classic tool of freedom was therefore beginning to resemble a place where increasingly powerful democratic and demagogical pressures were preparing to impose a new tyranny. Such a misunderstanding was due to the slow but relentless shift from the primary principle of legitimation of this body which, created as an assembly in which to debate the expression of the *ratio* of the upper classes,[7] had become the principal tool of the 'Jacobean' ideal of the people's sovereignty.[8] Scant attention has been paid to the fact that during this period invective against the decline of parliament was often heard alongside complaints about its excessive power. Both attitudes expressed the rejection of a situation that aimed to institutionalize the conflict. Elected Houses were thought to be the outcomes of a substantial deterioration of the electorate, and the repository of a new sort of political staff such as professional mediators, whose work removed the certainty of rights and institutional stability in favour of an increasing number of vested interests and political conflicts.[9] Whatever the attitudes of representatives - whether coercing the executive or passively enduring the decisions of a 'strong' government - liberal literature could not help recognizing, inside the parliamentary institutions of the late nineteenth century, all the inconsistencies typical of a passage from an élitist political system to a more widely participatory one. This particular form of omnipotence-impotence[10] was labelled parliamentarianism and was often considered to be the main cause of corruption and the epitome of any action contrary to the overall interests of the nation.[11] None the less, it remained the cornerstone of any realistic liberal strategy of constitutional compromise,[12] and the means through which 'modern' needs for political participation could achieve actual legitimation.

Accepting the challenge posed by democracy *vis-à-vis* the change and redefinition of the values of political obligation in a mass society implied however, further estrangement from the classic liberal cultural heritage,[13] already weakened by a long period of coexistence with imperialistic, anti-individualist and protectionist theories. As a consequence, even the old political and parliamentary aggregations experienced a crisis, and a large sector of the traditional ruling class was marginalized. It was this sector that lacked a balanced relationship with the new social patterns, stuck in its role as the sole homogeneous expression of 'lawful' society as a whole.[14] At the close of the century, the organic unity achieved by binding 'revolutionary' spirit[15] and social status was no longer sufficient to grant political legitimation. Sizeable sectors of the ruling class[16] disappeared - either dispersed or recycled - inside this black hole, along with the last illusions of politics as an arena for moral commitment reserved for the

'aristocracies of the intellect'.

Of course, most liberal critics of the parliamentary system did not feel that parliament should be abolished. The question was simply to find a way to limit the primacy of people's representation or, in other words, to curb the 'excessive' influence of the elected House.[17] In a way, the 'average' liberal culture acknowledged that the processes of political democracy under way were irreversible,[18] and worked to dilute their effects, more or less energetically, depending upon the vitality of the ruling classes it represented.[19] During the 1870s, confidence in the ruling qualities of freedom still exceeded the fears of an ungovernable democracy. On closer inspection, therefore, many crucial moments of European political life in the 1870s still revealed the presence of a confident, albeit limited, hope in a non-conflictual management of democratic issues and in the smooth-running supervision of the request for participation coming from below. In fact, it may be hypothesized that the illusion of diluting democracy in liberalism still represented the unifying need that went beyond the peculiarities and 'tactical strategies' typical of individual national political situations.[20] It underlay patterns and choices such as the 'leap in the dark' desired by the Conservative Disraeli with the extension of suffrage in 1867, the successes achieved by French moderate republicans between 1875 and 1877, the rise of the historic Left in Italy in 1876 and the comparative prestige still enjoyed by German liberals until the turning-point of 1878-79. Such an illusion was destined to disappear as the social situation in the subsequent decade became increasingly radical. In France, the *conjonction des centres* that had inspired the 1875 constitutional laws was waning;[21] in Italy, the 'transformist' balance was deteriorating; in Great Britain, political strife was becoming radicalized; in Germany, liberalism was declining, and after 1880 Germany witnessed a Conservative turn. These were but some of the most apparent signs[22] of the erosion of that illusory intermediate space - that 'clear area of consciences' - upon which, only a few years before, liberalism had hoped to build a popular government where the image of the King and of the notables at the "service" of the people would be the safest antidote to democratic pressures.

It was during this stage that political organization was first seen as a possible tool for mediation and political legitimation in a society that inclined towards a rejection of the automatic overlapping of social and political powers. Taking possession of democracy then became an articulate, complex operation requiring the appropriate instruments and a willingness to reassess the role of politics in the light of a new culture. This development, extraneous to the old establishment and traditional élites, used organization, public appeal, propaganda and partisanship as tools for filling the 'modern' gap between the state and individuals. It was a crucial transformation in the European constitutional landscape. At the time it was perceived as stimulating and epitomizing the intensification of all forms of collective life.[23] The politicization of social policies, a new

and resolute standard for defining state intervention in an industrial society, and the relative problems of bureaucratization, national debt and tax reforms, were perceived by contemporaries[24] as the most direct and inevitable outcomes of a society reshaping itself into opposing groups.[25]

A closer examination, however, reveals that the main inconvenience for the liberal culture of the late nineteenth century was not represented by the worry about the emerging party-form (except in Great Britain almost always confined within the extra-constitutional sphere), but by the unfolding of 'partisan' interests, of the centrifugal needs of civil society. In those systems where political representation merged with administrative centralization, this new development seemed to be inexorably heading (through 'parochialism', 'imperative mandates' and 'hideous alliances') towards both a restriction of governmental authority and a reduction in actual parliamentary privileges.

In this situation of *impasse*, most representatives of liberal culture thought it necessary to restore the power of the executive, removing it from the area of the sinister interests of politics. In times of democracy and people's representation, this implied that parties acted demagogically, pressed by their electoral needs, engaging in ceaseless innovative political engineering, inevitably leading to a dangerous alteration of traditional class relationships. A number of 'anti-parliamentary' proposals were developed within a cultural framework increasingly ruled by nationalistic embitterment, racial intolerance, economic and imperialistic competitiveness and therefore inclining towards a simplifying (and, accordingly, effective) image of political power. The survival of the bureaucratic-Napoleonic scheme in France[26] and Crispi's policy-making in Italy showed how the Caesarist pattern, embodied in Bismarck's chancellorship,[27] represented a viable perspective of the European constitutional system. This went beyond the personal status of the protagonists and beyond national specificities. While the need to reconnect national sovereignty with political decision-making worked its way through, other hypotheses came to light within the framework of a liberal anti-parliamentary culture namely a culture aiming to recover a constitutional balance and bar the way to a democratization or politicization of the system through parliamentary action.[28]

In the years following the Home Rule Bill proposal, the crisis of the Liberal party in Great Britain seemed to overlap with the crisis of the institutions or, more precisely, with the crisis of the pivotal principle of British institutions, namely, the constitutional balance.[29] Understandably enough, such a crisis developed along with the settling down of the Victorian electoral framework. This had been achieved through a substantial expansion of the electorate in 1867, the product of logical and inertial adjustments free of the political and civil passion that had previously characterized liberal public opinion. British political culture, for the most part, had slowly reached the conclusion that the political and social liberties for which the radicals of the 1860s had fought had been

achieved. In the words of the Liberal Bruce Smith: 'the (what I would term) aggressive function of Liberalism has been exhausted, and, with certain minor exceptions, the equal liberties of citizens generally, with a view to their preservation.'[30]

Faced with the ascent of a mass electorate, the classic idea of a balance of powers had become, in the course of time, an idea of a balance of the interests represented within the House of Commons and therefore, in a true metaphor of the British political system, the ability both to resist the tyranny of 'numbers'[31] and to absorb sizeable sectors of subordinate classes within the constitutional sphere without visibly altering the power relationship between upper and newly enfranchised classes. This image of constitutional balance rested on the delicate mechanisms that Walter Bagehot[32] and Henry Maine[33] deemed fundamental to the preservation of the very essence of civilization - a cautious but constant interplay between tradition and innovation. A new political culture gradually began to superimpose itself on this image, a culture which paid greater attention to the problems of the economy and national efficiency. Large middle-class sectors, faced with problems of economic competition and social control previously unknown in the British tradition of imperial hegemony, began to consider the issue of the working of the whole political system within the new framework opened up by the struggle between rising powers to dominate the world market. They thus left aside the traditional combinations of constitutional balances. This peculiar situation allowed men from different cultural and political milieu to focus the debate on the rationalization of political decision-making as a premise for any attempt to face external 'challenges' and internal 'disorder'.

This work will therefore endeavour to focus on the political and cultural consequences of this transformation, through an analysis of the period when this creeping uneasiness resulted in open conflict. The years 1885-1892 were indeed characterized by the crisis of the Home Rule project, which soon proved to be the culmination of all the tensions built up since the end of the Palmerstonian period. It provided an opportunity for breaking with old loyalties, for reassessing old commonplaces and releasing dormant political energies in the struggle for a more effective pattern of government of change that might represent the needs of 'popular government', which now seemed unstoppable. In fact, such a conflict appeared to 'cross' the traditional party system and to contrast with the modalities and institutions that were to guarantee the place of the ruling class in this phase of transition from a government of the élite to a government of 'the people'. 'Radicals' on the one side favoured one single 'transformist' political group, in order to manage effectively - even if by authoritarian rule or, in any case, without the controls and cautiousness of parliamentary tradition - the process of the rationalization and control of social change. On the other side, the so-called 'constitutionalists' found themselves in conflict in everyday political matters but were of one mind in considering the traditional balance of the British socio-political

system, and above all its features of pragmatic gradualism, as the best antidote to the poison of disorder creeping into society.

This dualism, overlapping and certainly not replacing the rivalry between Liberals and Conservatives, was often limited to a narrow domestic context, or was even considered to be an expression of personal disagreements and ambitions. In actual fact, it embodied the British expression of the more general issue of the 'morality' of politics. While the problem could be traced back to the French Revolution,[34] the era of extended suffrage strongly revived the basic issue of the existing relationship between progress and politics, and whether the latter should aim at reshaping society.

In the two decades of their primacy on the political scene, Gladstone and Disraeli no doubt helped this issue to emerge by imposing a new means of 'contact' between public and private sectors - namely, the modern party system. During this period, the institutionalization of Whigs and Tories did fulfil a need largely felt by society for change and emancipation from *de facto* power relationships which were especially strong in a society throughout which social hierarchy still played a remarkable political and economic role. Nevertheless, such institutionalization did not seem like an overturning of constitutional mechanisms, since it perfectly answered expectations as far as the overall balance of the system was concerned. Anyway, it was Disraeli's task to ignite the crisis of the theory and mechanism of 'natural counterweights', in his attempt to contrast the impact of Gladstonianism on the people[35] and to conquer the vote of the newly enfranchised classes. Disraelian conservatism, therefore, was an attempt to strengthen the age-old ties between Conservative squires and the popular masses through the demagogic tools of populist paternalism. The preservation of traditional institutions and the ruling classes was therefore legitimate only when it was 'at the exclusive service of the people'.

This work aims to investigate the political and intellectual environment that Salisbury worked in following the death of Disraeli and the nigh mythical status he attained. An analysis will also be offered of his careful and patient reconstruction of the image of Conservatism, of how he gave his party back an identity that had for so many years been uncertain and restored its pride in resisting the processes of democratization, without fear of a direct confrontation with opponents. Generally speaking, this was an attempt to head off the growing calls from the working classes for greater participation in the public sphere. In Great Britain, precisely because such calls had been heard for some time, the *trasformismo* became, in the years after the First Reform Act, a reality that was practiced in parliament even if it was never set out in theoretical terms or discussed at a political level. What happened therefore between 1885 and 1892 was an attempt to institutionalise this practice at precisely the same time as "the silent pact" seemed to be fading due to the rift created by the proposal of Home Rule. The idea of institutionalizing the *conjonction des centres*

in Great Britain did not however stem from those quarters most interested in maintaining the *status quo* (albeit under the banner of defending the "revolution" as in Italy and France) but came rather from those parts of society in favor of strengthening the mechanisms of political power to achieve greater administrative and institutional efficiency. This was deemed indispensable for answering the challenge of mounting international competition.

The conclusions reached by this work suggest that the defeat of this political perspective and the choice of a pattern, which might be defined as 'competitive', was not accidental. As mentioned before, in Great Britain, as in the rest of Europe, the need emerged for a 'centre party', that is, cooperation among the 'sane' forces (the National Party of Common Sense) for a balanced defence of the existing system. This was perhaps the British version of the concept of moderation or/and 'transformism' that the Swiss jurist Johann Kaspar Bluntschli deemed necessary for the achievement of a new political balance in parliamentary systems. Such a balance would no longer depend upon the confrontation between progress and conservation, but on a combination of the two in order to reject the increasing claims of the 'physiological' but nevertheless dangerous extreme wings of the political system, radicalism and reaction. In other words, the political centre was increasingly perceived as the only political and cultural choice able to satisfy the widespread need expressed by the European liberal bourgeoisie to 'preserve progress', an apparently contradictory expression but one which indicates the will to preserve the results deriving from changes in the previous decades without weakening the élitist political and social mechanisms that had brought them about, now jeopardized by the subordinate classes' request for reform.

This was a peculiar period in British history - an important transformation that transcended the basic aspects of conflict between parties or personalities. Peter Marsh showed how Salisbury, having realized that 'pure "squire" Conservatism is played out',[36] was able to combine the twofold need to carry out a policy of resistance to the democratization of the system while proceeding to 'modernize' the party apparatus[37]. The problem now is understanding why the defensive response to the pressure of democratic growth did not yield an open transformation of the traditional political balance that had played a major role in the creation of the myth of orderly, but inexorable, progress.[38] To this purpose it is first of all useful to reconsider the close similarity between the liberal bourgeoisie and progressive ideology.[39] In Europe, from the Restoration until at least the 1870s, it was only British political culture which had not obsessively pursued 'progress', due to its perception of itself as being at the peak of a process of material and intellectual civilization that only required to be preserved. By contrast, in other countries slowness in this direction somehow urged the whole liberal intelligentsia to line up in favour of constitutional change, which was the emblem and premise of

any idea of progress. On the continent after 1848, and particularly after 1870, the liberal bourgeoisie became estranged from the original political outline of the concept of progress that had taken on the appearance of a password with no idea of change; it had also been adopted by moderate circles that desired only 'progress in lawfulness' and by Conservatives who, for example, preached that faith was the only source of true progress.[40]

Around the mid-1880s, the prospect of a likely stagnation, or indeed an economic and social decline, began to be evident in Great Britain too. This prompted Victorian political culture as a whole to engage in a thorough evaluation of the validity of the traditional constitutional apparatus, and of the limits of progress as an ideology of development at a time when the problems of the consolidation of a hegemony in jeopardy had to be faced. It became clear that the anxious late-Victorian liberal bourgeoisie would consider the powerful identification between a certain kind of political progressivism and Gladstone's evangelism as a demagogic perspective, unfit for solving the problem of national efficiency that, on the contrary, appeared to demand a sound administrative realism.

Taking advantage of this cultural and political upheaval intensified by the Home Rule 'scandal', Salisbury's Conservatism managed to appear the most reasonable type of politics with which to overcome the crisis - politics that, while preserving the core of Gladstone's constitutional design (balance), eliminated its 'moral-reformist' component. Thus, between 1885 and 1892, an articulate governmental plan was outlined, based on a particularly effective combination of modernizing socio-political integration (the Primrose League), national-imperial identity (the Unionist alliance) and party apparatus for the administration and optimization of the electoral consensus (the Middleton machine). All this was expressed in a language particularly suited to those times: that is, it combined the celebration of 'olde England' (myth) with a cynical political realism (efficiency). In fact, it represented the acceptance of Bagehot's thesis of the basic role played, in the constitutional balance, by the integration of 'performance' and 'efficiency'. This was a truly strategic argument, responding fully to the demand for "rest" coming from British upper and middle classes, without, however, giving the impression that it aimed to impede the modernization of the system.

The apparent and inevitable expansion of the public sphere to the detriment of the private one undeniably meant that politicization was indeed in progress in the country, symbolized by the acceptance of new forms of militancy. Examples of the latter were the Primrose League, with its universalization of traditional values, and the National Union, centring on 'professional' political activity leading to an acceptable substitute, a sort of 'lay chapel' in which to celebrate the community, political rituals and the transmission of centre/periphery input and vice versa, free from the risks typical of 'militant' radicalism, which sought to influence the choices made by the leadership.

After all, the Conservative leader, albeit not absolutely convinced himself, was demonstrating with facts the validity of the Tory Democrats' ('antagonists') credo that the mechanism of progress (the acceptance of the state as a means of intervention and of organization as the cornerstone of political consensus) was not the exclusive ideological heritage of the Liberals but could be managed more profitably by the Conservatives. On this foundation, however, Salisbury, rather than defeating Gladstone's perspective, which favoured the extension of democracy as a means of saving the balance of the old system (a perspective that he only aimed at 'cooling down', since he was sure it could not be avoided in the long run) also overthrew, besides the old Conservative identity, a more dangerous threat. This was the claim advanced by the liberal intelligentsia to control the new political stage through the promotion of a new political line-up, a sort of National Party that, disguised in a tactical, largely anti-Gladstonian perspective and in the name of the rationalization of political decision-making, would yield a different kind of moderatism. It would follow the pattern of 'centrist' aggregations typical of continental parliamentary patterns, devoid of historical identity and therefore of any real power of political legitimation.

The meaning of what has been, in retrospect, defined as Tory strategy (which, as obviously happens in political conflicts, did not correspond to any rationally devised plan) cannot therefore be limited to the acknowledgement of the ascent of a Conservative hegemony. Rather, it must be extended, in my opinion, to the restoration, carried out by Salisbury (with Gladstone's productive, albeit involuntary, 'cooperation') of a liberal political system whic, restating the need for institutionalizing political conflict as a legitimate resource of the system, offered a sizeable contribution to the overall ascendancy of British liberal institutions, even in the first difficult decades of the twentieth century. As with the fascism that emerged a few decades later, *trasformismo* did not find fertile soil in Great Britain.

Notes

1. On the image of England in nineteenth-century French political thought, see Quagliariello (1993), Jennings (1986); on contemporary Italian political thought, see Cammarano (1992, 309-38); for Germany, Sheehan (1978, 46; 132-3)

2. Ferraris (1889, 541)

3. Guchet (1990, 242)

4. Cuomo (1981)

5. 'Lastly, there is the function of legislation, of which of course it would be preposterous to deny the great importance, and which I only deny to be as important as the executive management of the whole state, or the political education given by Parliament to the whole nation'. See Bagehot (1983, 153)

6. In 1881, when in the United Kingdom, too, the need arose for a more rational and effective legislative programme, a worried Lord Salisbury wrote to Balfour: 'In my view there ought [to] be a strong distinction drawn between those parliamentary functions, the performance of which is absolutely necessary to secure the working of the executive machine and those which having no other object but to change laws under which we are living quite tolerably, can be suspended certainly without serious injury, and often with great advantage.' Quoted in Smith (1972, 94-95)

7. Benedetto Croce underlined the European nature of this *idem sentire*: 'what on the one hand was happening in Italy, was also happening all over Europe and in England: works by scholars in other countries are full of the same complaints voiced in Italy concerning the Subalpine Parliament, as they noticed the inferiority of conduct and oratory of the Parliaments of the 1880s compared to those of fifty years before in France and England, or at the 1848 Frankfurt Assembly, when men of great distinction nobly debated issues of the highest order. Those who ventured abroad reported that the Parliamentary institution was declining not only in Italy but all over Europe'. See Croce (1943, 20)

8. In Italy, Gaetano Mosca wrote the most thorough liberal appraisal of the working of the parliamentary system and of the political class. See Mosca (1884; 1887; 1896). He pointed out that, in England, the House of Commons had always been the most powerful body in the state, but that in the past 'voting rights were only granted to a small minority of citizens ... all this meant that the election of a fair number of representatives depended upon a few hundred great landowners, who often sat by hereditary right in the House of Lords ... Actually, it sufficed to make the elected House the representative body of the prevailing political forces and to have it elected through an extended or even universal suffrage, to make believe that the old state ... had been transformed into a regime based upon the people's sovereignty'. See Mosca (1975, 230-31). On Mosca, see Albertoni (1987).

9. On the transformation of parliamentary staffs at this time, besides the classical work by Ostrogorski (1902), for Great Britain, see Guttsman (1963). With regard to France, the issue of the liberal debate on the 'democratization' of representatives is analysed by Le Béguec (1987, 25-40).

10. 'Omnipotence in subordinating the state to everything else, impotence, almost, in imposing the state on everything else'. Turiello (1894, 30).

11. Benoist, in 1895, recalled that 'le Parlement fait et défait, demande un gouvernement et empêche ou renverse tout governement, affirme et nie, se précipite et s'enfuit, acclame et anathémise: la France en est absente, ou ne bouge pas; et l'on ne sait ce qui des deux est le plus inquiétant, de ces convulsions du Parlement ou de cette atonie du pays'. Quoted in Mangoni (1985, 50). In turn, *The Nineteenth Century Review* in 1885 felt that 'the House of Commons works hard, does little, and does that little badly'. Fowler (1885, 69).

12. Turiello recalls some of the theoretical proposals advanced in Italy during those years as alternatives to the House's 'excessive power': 'Bonghi suggests [the creation of] a Private Council for the Crown and a greater involvement of the latter in the citizens' life, in order to increase its authority within the state. De Gubernatis suggests an ephorate. Lombroso a tribuneship.' Turiello (1894, 30) In

this area fell also the more feasible requests for 'conservative decentralization' and for 'reviving' the Senate.

13. Some of the theoretical transformations of liberalism that began at the end of the last century are analysed in Freeden (1978), Clarke (1978), Collini (1979, 1991), Bentley (1987), Eley (1980) and Le Béguec (1976). In Italy, Mosca and Pareto were the main representatives of the trend towards the revival of liberal thought through a more disillusioned approach to myths and traditions in politics. A meaningful example is supplied, for the Right, by the journal *L'Idea Liberale,* founded in Milan in 1892, supporting a 'scientific' liberalism theoretically, but not always effectively, in contrast with the national political class and with the bourgeoisie it represented. See Rizzo (1982).

14. In 1858 Cavour, answering a parliamentary question posed by Menabrea, stated: 'I believe that the only representation of the people can be found in this House [of Representative]. I do not know whether other representations exist; indeed, if I think of our electoral system, one of the most liberal systems of Europe, I believe it would be a great mistake to say that the true thinking of the nation is not faithfully represented here'. Cavour (1858, v. 15).

15. Typically, the legitimation process of the European ruling classes appealed to loyalty to the principles of the revolutionary traditions in each country. The 1688 Glorious Revolution, the 1789 French Revolution, the Italian and German events in the period 1848-1870 all represented, on the one hand, the ideal heritage of loyalty and continuity with the myth of the origins of the nation. On the other hand, in more recent cases, they embodied a true political and ideological discriminating factor in the 'competition' for power. Therefore, it is not possible to separate nineteenth-century European liberalism from the idea of nationality and *Risorgimento.*

16. An in-depth historical analysis is certainly necessary regarding the achievements, both sociological and political, of some important liberal parliamentary groups that during this very period experienced a definite political decline. Apart from the Whigs' clear-cut loss of influence in Great Britain, recovered only in part and for a limited time during the 'Home Rule' crisis, one cannot ignore at the same time the agony of groups hardly well disposed towards institutionalizing the processes of political mediation, such as the Historical Right, the German National-Liberals and the French centre-left. In a short period, from the 1880s onwards, these groups lost the prominence they had enjoyed until recently and, in the 1890s, met with great difficulties.

17. A good example of 'progressive' anti-parliamentarism is offered by Lanaro (1979, 190-202).

18. As the *orléaniste* Jacques Piou, founder in 1890 of the parliamentary group *Droite républicaine,* wrote in the prestigious *Revue des deux mondes:* 'la question n'est plus de savoir si la démocratie sera ou ne sera pas; il s'agit d'autre chose. La démocratie serait-elle césarienne ou libérale?' Quoted in Mangoni (1985, 21).

19. 'Another important feature of our times is that the liberal movement has followed an increasingly democratic orientation, so that the two concepts of freedom and equality seem to combine, in the mind of many, to form only one ...; the popular masses that, under other forms of free rule, while enjoying the privileges

of freedom, played no direct role in the government of the state, have now become almost absolute arbiters of it, and their predominance, besides affecting the organization of the state deeply, has transformed its action and its enlivening spirit, and with them, the whole structure of society ... But, as it is wrong to believe that it was the barbarians who mainly determined the fall of the empire and civilization of ancient Rome, it is as wrong to believe that the lower classes, raised to the dignity of people and summoned to cooperate in the government of the state, will bring about the destruction of the superb and glorious building of modern civilization'. Zanichelli (1893a, 67-9).

He who hopes for violent remedies to the excessive power of assemblies shows he does not know well the political circumstances of modern societies. Assemblies draw such a strength from the flow of democratic ideas, that they would shatter any obstacle erected to stop them, they would wipe out any body of the state that overtly planned to oppose them.' Zanichelli (1893b, 42)

Henry Maine wrote in 1882:

> We, too, who belong to Western Europe towards the end of the XIX century, live under a set of institutions which all, except a small minority, regard as likely to be perpetual. Nine men out of ten, some hoping, some fearing, look upon the popular government which, ever widening its basis, has spread and is spreading over the world, as destined to last for ever. Maine (1886, 366)

20. The analysis of individual national situations, during the period considered and with reference to constitutional and political-institutional history, is based on an endless series of historical contributions. Mention is made here only of some works of basic importance for the study of the countries concerned. On Italy: Candeloro (1970), Romanelli (1979), Capone (1981), Gherardi (1993), Cammarano (1999). On Great Britain: Shannon (1974), Feuchtwanger (1985), Matthew (1985), Pugh (1982). On France: Mayeur (1984), Levillain (1982), Rudelle (1982), Burns (1984), Guchet (1987). On Germany: Craig (1978), Wehler (1987).

21. Mayeur (1973, 26-36)

22. For a comparative survey of European liberalism in that period, see Bellamy (1992), Ullrich (1985, 317-31), Kocka and Mitchell (1991), Feuchtwanger (1987, 3-15). A comparative approach to the constitutional events of the main European countries is provided by Pombeni (1990, 249-438). For a comparison with German liberalism, see also Jarausch and Jones (1990), Lill and Matteucci (1980). Studies oriented towards the continuities, rather than the gaps, in the history of German liberalism are Cervelli (1988), and Schiera (1987).

23. The uninterrupted production of 'social laws,' prelude to the rise of real 'social states,' was undoubtedly the most worrying among such 'intensification.' Luzzatti wrote:

> In times past, governments fought with force, and extinguished anarchic factions of any kind in blood; today they debate, select the best part from claims put forth with strength and cruel wrath, and they challenge such claims for ruling over unfortunate classes. Luzzatti (1883, 708-23)

24. According to Burckhardt, needs began increasing everywhere after the French revolution, and they were accompanied by economic theories supporting

them. Also growing were national debts 'that are but the greatest basic and most miserable joke of the nineteenth century ... The very practice of squandering beforehand the heritage of future generations shows that the basic feature of the present century is ruthless conceit.' Sasso (1984, 79-80).

25. In order to escape such danger, Bismarck used Lorenz von Stein's theory on 'social monarchy', according to which the carrying out of social policies is the exclusive concern of the state – the impartial bearer of general interests. On the issue, see Gozzi (1988, 140-49). See also Gall (1990). State, parliament and liberalism in Germany were peculiarly interrelated, even though the political-parliamentary events following Bismarck's decline confirm that it was not an exceptional instance but simply a national variation of the difficulties encountered by liberalism during the processes of democratization. On the subject, see Corni and Schiera (1986). On the limits of German liberalism, see Sheehan (1982). In France, new aggregations began to form during this period: 'the issues of order and society ... became the focus of civil debates and therefore, as already seen, discriminatory as far as the right-left cleavage was concerned.' Sirinelli (1993).

26. Already Tocqueville (1856) had considered the point, which was to become a major issue of the moderate controversy against political transformation. See Ferrand (1904)

27. On the concept of Bismarckian Caesarism, see Gall (1990). For a more detailed analysis of the concept of Caesarism, see Cervelli (1972, 41-61), Mastellone (1978, 257-62).

28. Of course, the principal role was played in this case by the whole European juridical-political culture of the period. It planned to carry out a large-scale, complex effort to redefine the liberal constitutionalist tradition in the light of the new 'destabilizing' role taken on by elected assemblies. In Italy, the spreading of Bluntschli's doctrine fostered the growth of the principles of pure constitutional monarchy. Sonnino would be their main supporter but, alongside his radical point of view, other attempts were to be made to give juridical ground to the legitimacy of parliament, apart from any democratic and populist combination. Vittorio Emanuele Orlando intepreted such an hypothesis as a stage of the process that could be defined, in synthesis, as the 'nationalization of Liberalism' – that is, a process involving the primacy of state administration over society.

On these issues and on Orlando's decisive role in the scientific construction of the Italian *Rechtsstaat*, based solely on the logical-juridical method without any historical and philosophical 'interference', see Cianferotti (1980), who also provides a well documented view of the interdependence of European juridical culture at the end of the nineteenth century. See also Mozzarelli and Nespor (1981), Mangoni (1982, 75-100), Tessitore (1963). The relevance of German juridical thought is highlighted by Fioravanti (1979).

29. On this issue, Burrow (1988).

30. Quoted in Taylor (1992, 34).

31. Kent (1978).

32. Crossman (1963).

33. On this issue, see Burrow (1993).

34. Jaume (1990), Rosanvallon (1990).

35. Biagini (1992).

36. Clarke (1991, 54).

37. Marsh (1978).

38. Von Arx (1985).

39. Interesting and to the point is the debate proposed by Eley and Blackbourn on the 'German peculiarity,' in which the authors, on the basis of an obvious alliance between emerging bourgeoisie and constitutionalism, assume that the German case is one of 'betrayal' of the British pattern. See Blackbourn and Eley (1984).

40. For an overview of progress as a leading concept in 19th century Germany, see Koselleck and Meier (1975).

Chapter 2

The Conservative Mind

From Community to Polity

The period 1883-1886 is central to the political history of the Victorian era.[1] Various, sometimes imperceptible changes had affected the country's traditional constitutional pattern since the Napoleonic Wars. The process of change now quickened its pace as it worked to reshape the public arena according to what could be called 'political rationality', as opposed to - and frequently superimposed upon - the traditional 'community rationality'. The 1883 Corrupt Practices Act was meant to free voters from extrapolitical 'pressures',[2] the Third Reform Act of 1884 further extended voting rights,[3] the 1885 Redistribution Act rationalized electoral representation[4] and, in 1886, there was a dramatic political clash over the Irish Home Rule Bill. These were the main catalysts of prolonged social pressure for an expansion of popular participation in political life and of a simultaneous reduction in overt 'factual' power in favour of the more sophisticated power of the political system. It was a typical pattern among industrialized and industrializing countries during the nineteenth century. However, its British expression was rather peculiar due to the proud and functional tradition of local governments. The need arose to 'nationalize' state intervention and to interfere with sectors traditionally outside the executive decision-making process, such as social politics. Structures had to be erected to meet the challenge from other industrialized countries to British economic and military primacy. This led to a decisive transformation of the constitutional arena, with Great Britain yielding to the tendency to bureaucratize its political life. This urge occurred late in the Victorian age and found its ideal channel in the 'modernization' and

development of political organization within binding rules. Political modernization became a constitutional and socially decisive instrument through the widespread diffusion of easily understood ideological-rhetorical abstractions and thus provided the founding principles for the need for identification, which was represented by the sense of exclusion-belonging and obligation.[5] It represented a true secularization of religious values that, within a national and imperial framework, replaced and simultaneously restored the declining local loyalties which were also jeopardized by a considerable mobility in the population.[6]

From this perspective, political modernization in Great Britain - that is, a willingness to redefine relationships between existing interests by resorting to political rather than economic-social instruments - reached a point of no return in the second half of the 1880s. This happened as the party system was entrusted with the task of keeping a balance between the population's need for greater participation in public life and the need of the ruling classes to legitimate their new role in this new era.[7] Political representation was thus thoroughly yet silently transformed, in that the old, balanced institutions such as the Crown, the House of Lords and the House of Commons were left to management by parties. In the past, the British parliament was seen as being composed of 'governing persons' who were also powerful outside the parliamentary chambers. By the late nineteenth century, parliaments, in line with a widespread culture embedded within in a Conservative organicism based on Carlyle's thought, had severed most of their community roots. They were seen as mere creatures of the polls, powerless when it came to social problems since they no longer embodied society's values or reflected the real division of power within it.

> Political sovereignty nominally rests with the Queen in Parliament, as executive authority rests with the Queen in Council. But in fact the three powers in the State are ceasing, if they have not already ceased, to be the Crown, the House of Lords, and the House of Commons. They are, to a large extent at present and likely to be to a larger extent in the future, the Prime Minister, the Cabinet, and the House of Commons. For the Queen in Parliament we have the Prime Minister in Parliament, usually in the House of Commons; for the Queen in Council we have the Prime Minister in the Cabinet. At an earlier stage of our history, the Crown, the House of Lords and the House of Commons were powers of different origin, and represented different forces and interests.[8]

In fact the emergence of the figure of the Prime Minister and the pre-eminent role of the Cabinet and House of Commons which, in 1867, Bagehot, in *The English Constitution*, had considered the key to the interpretation of the modern British political system, were revealed to be only the institutional premises of a longer process that led to the professionalization of politics and the imposition of the party as the best

means for electoral representation in an age of democratic suffrage.[9]

Until the 1880s no formal parliamentary opposition to government existed. The House of Commons as a whole was entitled to a monitoring function over the executive. The propertied classes of the golden age of Lord Palmerston's parliament felt they were represented not so much by alignments and factions, which were not that functional in an assembly with strong local interests, as by the proud 'autonomy' voiced by individual members of parliament during (parliamentary) debates, which, however, at the time of divisions often returned to form a solid 'centre party': 'Government in the early eighties was almost as much "government by the centre" as it was "party government"'.[10] By the mid-1880s, this balance definitively broke down. A proper party government developed, resulting in changed relationships between individual members of parliaments and parties and between the executive, the majority and the opposition, who were increasingly subject to rigid party discipline. In the meantime, the previously dominant figure of the amateur politician began to disappear. The party spirit of times past

> ...confined itself within certain limits. Rival statesmen and rival political connections would differ from each other on some great principle...but they did not carry their warfare into the details of legislation, whether they affected these principles or not. When a Party was returned to power by the popular verdict, the Opposition accepted the fact, recognised the national voice, and did not think it was their duty to throw any obstacles in the way of the Government but such as arose out of the ordinary course of public business. Then, of course, the party system was no hindrance to the work of the country being conducted with dignity and efficiency. But now, when, as soon as a Government is in office, the Opposition think of nothing else but to how to get them out again as quickly as possible, and with that object in view devote all their energies to the task of harassing, crippling and defaming them; when not a single measure is discussed upon its merits, but only for the purpose of ensuring its ultimate collapse, or, when that is impossible, of casting suspicion on its honesty, and poisoning the public mind against its authors...then, indeed, we cannot be surprised that grave and responsible statesmen should raise a note of warning, and suggest that ere long party government may be standing in the dock.[11]

Consequently, as party conformity increased, 'party leaders were compelled to find a new basis for legislative support - and they found this in their backbench followers'. Governments obviously no longer enjoyed an overall consensus among the ruling class and 'found themselves unable to rely on opposition support for their decisions'.[12] It is not surprising therefore to read, in 1886:

> ...that our Constitution, far from being a glorious, is a very inglorious one

> indeed, and that it has, for some time, been exercising, and still continues to exercise, a deteriorating effect on the national character as well as a damaging influence on national affairs.[13]

The Crown and the House of Lords being powerless, the country's institutional power now seemed to be embodied by that combination of personal ambitions and plots shaping the relationship between the House of Commons and the Cabinet. In fact, both were nothing more than appendages of the electorate's will and its manipulators. In Lowell's words, for example:

> ...if the predominance of the House of Commons has been lessened by a delegation of authority to the Cabinet, it has also been weakened by the transfer of power directly to the electorate. The two tendencies are not, indeed, disconnected. The transfer of power to the electorate is due in part to the growing influence of the Ministers, to the recognition that policy is mainly directed, not by Parliament, but by them...No doubt, the ministry depends for its existence upon the good pleasure of the House of Commons; but it really gets its commission from the country as a result of a general election.[14]

This rift was not solely the result of the protracted battle over Gladstone's project for Irish Home Rule. It was also rooted in the need to strengthen the executive, through the creation of a steady and safe majority, so that it could undertake the more intensive legislative activity[15] arising from the new and exacting duties of public administration.[16] The proud 'self-government' of 'city-states' and a tradition of voluntarism were no longer sufficient to solve the increasingly serious social problems born out of the disintegration of the old socio-economic order, undermined by industrialization, the agricultural crisis of the 1870s, and the technological innovations that were largely responsible for the emergence of mass society. Within this setting the politicization of social politics or, rather, the realization that it was impossible to keep it 'out of politics' through the use of local resources,[17] was the most valuable result of the widespread pressure for democratic reform which we should consider the main cause of the 'bureaucratization of modern British culture'.[18] In fact we are currently witnessing the modification of the comparative interpretation which suggested that Great Britain was atypically stable and not subject to the tensions characteristic of the liberal constitution in the first phase of the contemporary state.[19] A reappraisal of this approach highlights features other than the traditional issue of the lack of a class opposition to the political system or the apparent 'regime-based' stability. It also arranges those very events that elicited such interpretations into scientifically accurate categories.

It was pointed out[20] that, during the period 1860-1880, the trend was to 'destabilize' the traditional political framework rather than to 'perfect'

the standards of a system whose ruling class consciously indulged in transforming it into a legendary tradition.[21]

Most debates on this destabilization merely focused on the electoral aspect in a never-ending *querelle* on the relevance of changes brought about by complex electoral reform. The major problem, however, is less concerned with this issue (carefully negotiated between the two major parties) than with the role of reform within the changing economic-social framework described above - of which historians are quite aware - and the changing constitutional situation which is less well known and hardly ever considered.

As political scope was widening, some chance circumstances were taking place. For example, after the shock of Prince Albert's death, Queen Victoria abandoned the 'spectacular' style of rule which had typified the first two decades of her reign. Hence, the demand grew for new mechanisms which would guarantee the balance that was seemingly no longer to be found in the natural course of events.

Many factors led to a new perception of politics, according to which politics had to open up in order actively and directly to incorporate and rule over the consequences of such destabilization. Among such factors were increased governmental activity, the professionalization of politics, the extension of participation to the lowest levels of management, stricter rules for parliamentary organization,[22] and the decline of old reference points in international politics - in other words, the power standard now replaced the standard of fair and rational order.

Liberals and Conservatives thrived in this climate, as it traditionally measured progress not only in terms of the unavoidable law of history, but also as the manipulable law of history.[23] Changes were part of nature, but the mark and the direction that events would impose upon history could not be forecast.[24]

The 'Centre Party': Transformism Revealed

The 1880s were therefore significant both for Great Britain, with its deep-rooted parliamentary traditions, and for other European countries. They heralded the crisis of a liberal culture, which was essentially the crisis of the values of a ruling class that had developed within a clearly defined historical and cultural context. The myth of the 1688 revolution was in fact the beginning of an inextricable tangle of constitutional and political history, which represented the first source of legitimation of the whole Whig culture in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The Glorious Revolution, which the Whigs claimed as their exclusive heritage, had granted freedom a definitive victory over tyranny, and had allowed the return to a balanced constitution where monarchy, aristocracy and representation of the people coexisted. This had amounted to a 'Conservative revolution' that had restored rights and privileges

endangered by King James II's absolutist ambitions. The Constitutional balance of powers thus became the foundation myth for any future political legitimation. It was also a milestone marking historical continuity and immutability that, in the early years of the century, bound together the Tory and Whig cultures.[25] A satisfied British political culture attributed to this legendary balance the lack of violent and recurrent disruptions of the established order that were so typical of continental Europe. As early as the beginning of the nineteenth century, reformers had to solve the difficult problem of the coexistence of the myth of a 'Conservative' revolution - in that it had saved the constitution from the King's despotic innovations - and the need to achieve inevitable constitutional adjustments. Great social changes and electoral reforms therefore set in motion a whole process for the reinterpretation of the notion of 'balance'. It no longer lay in the old balance of powers, largely superseded by constitutional developments, but rather

> ...in the notion of political continuity itself and in the advocacy of a particular kind of political style as distinctively British or English: gradualist, pragmatic, untheoretical, watchful to make timely innovations when required, but essentially reverent and respectful of precedent...To behave politically in this way came to be accepted as an aspect of the national identity, and English history was held to demonstrate its rewards. Instead of a balance of powers, so to speak, we have political wisdom presented as a kind of balance between innovation and precedent, between a pragmatic rationality and a deliberate reverence for the past.[26]

Around 1865 Bagehot, for example, suggested that the strength of the British constitution lay in the balance between its emotional and traditional components ('the dignified part'), such as the monarchy and the House of Lords, and its rational and practical components ('the efficient part'), such as the Cabinet and, in part, the House of Commons. The former referred to the past and granted stability; the latter supplied the motive force which allowed the country to adapt to innovations.

Obviously all this was included in the rather complex context of the evolution of a political culture which was rediscovering the legitimating power of history, and not only on the Conservative front, of course. From Macaulay to Freeman, and to Acton himself, Whig culture had resorted to the past, grounding itself as regards the philosophy of history in the Scottish Enlightenment. Yet it is clear that in any event the use of history and the 1688 myth finally yielded that 'national culture' (and, in part, the legitimation of the myth of a specifically British approach to politics on which Conservative intellectuals would build their proposal for leadership).

Other major figures, besides those mentioned above, took part in this historiographic enterprise. One was the Anglican Bishop Stubbs, who fitted perfectly into the trend of the period analysed here.[27] The perception of British political thought as being homogeneous was, however, quite

common throughout Europe. Stubbs and Freeman are quoted as being perfectly compatible authors in that both underline the peculiarity of the British constitution which, to their way of thinking, had been taught by history to assimilate revolutions.

Thus there was a deep cultural bond throughout the British world, arising from a sense of pride in a country where wise legislators prevented revolutionary disruptions. The debates concerning the introduction of the first electoral reform (1832) are good evidence of an almost unanimous desire to be able to manage political transformations, thereby preventing a revolution.

However, by the end of the nineteenth century, most intellectuals apparently agreed that the seemingly unchanged, delicate balance of British institutions was in fact being altered by that 'spiritual and physical change known as revolution.'[28] In 1890 a discouraged scholar of the British constitution wrote:

> In England we had this balance from 1832 to 1868, or let us say to 1885. Now things are tending to the ascendency of a single power in the State, the House of Commons, and to that of a single class in the community, the working classes.[29]

The most prestigious journals of that period published concerned analyses of the irreversible effects of the ongoing transformations, and so provide an accurate account of the anxious attitude of cultivated public opinion. In some instances, journals published contributions and debates that were to leave their mark on the political culture of the time.[30] They also often served as disseminators of scientific literature that, starting with the uncertainties brought about by the end of Palmerston's era and by the 'leap in the dark' of electoral reform around the mid-1860s, was, not surprisingly, concerned about the future of British institutions and society.[31]

The main issue, of course, was not how to resist the powerful impact of events, but how to absorb the internal upheavals within institutions designed for the expression of the upper classes' *ratio*. The Liberal literature of the period[32] ascribed such constitutional 'decline' to the increase in democratic pressures[33] resulting in alterations of parliamentary functions: 'Men who are strictly honest in their transactions with their neighbours' according to W.H. Smith, Conservative leader in the House of Commons, 'have come to regard Parliament as an instrument by which a transfer of rights and property may equitably be made from the few to the many.'[34] In fact, Victorian intellectuals felt that not only was the sacred nature of parliament endangered, but also the very image of progress based on the established pattern of what was generally termed Whig historiography. Faith in a slow, well balanced, steady growth of civil liberties and well-being under the careful guidance of the ruling classes had, in a short space of time, become an anxious search for an effective

way of safeguarding that precarious harmony between tradition and innovation, which is the basic requirement for any prospect of progress.[35] The many accelerations and political and social instabilities caused by a reform-oriented culture transformed the 'optimists of individualism of the 1860s' into the 'Cassandras of the 1880s and 1890s';[36] they departed from Gladstone's progressive party, a split which greatly affected public opinion. People sensed that this was a point of no return, and its political implications could be appreciated by recalling that, only a decade before, most of the intellectuals belonging to that generation had strongly supported reforms. According to Whig tradition, reforms (in the philosophical sense) were not mere concessions to the people, but necessary adjustments of the public sphere to the evolution of society.

It was typical of English moderate liberalism to proceed by degrees: this ensured that the state and the increasing needs of the uncultivated masses would have a minimum impact on individual free initiative. The 1867 electoral reform therefore represented a dividing line in that it broke down the obstacles preventing the non-propertied classes from taking part in the political life of their own country. On Palmerston's death, in 1865,[37] fear grew that large masses of 'persons who have no sense of decency or morality'[38] would upset the delicate British constitutional balance. This became more apparent during the great debate of the late 1870s on the relationship between democracy and the emerging 'political machine', the *caucus*,[39] epitomized by the Birmingham Liberal organization led by Joseph Chamberlain,[40] a somewhat controversial flare-up that, by the beginning of the 1880s, seemed to have subsided. However, it did outline the features of a debate that was to continue in other areas and was to have a major impact on the transformation of British political culture. The issue of the 'party', as imposed by Chamberlain, was the typically radical topic of the rationalization of public life through the 'organized' attempt to rule over current social transformations.

> When all arguments against the caucus are collected and compared [wrote Chamberlain in defence of the new organization] it will be found that they resolve themselves into three, repeated with great variety of expression and ingenuity of illustration: 1) It will lead to political corruption; 2) it will disenfranchise minorities and crush out individuality; and 3), somewhat inconsistently, it will misrepresent the real opinion of majorities, and give undue power to an insignificant fraction of electors...It cannot be too strongly insisted that the caucus does not make opinion, it only expresses it...If the new organization succeeds in preventing the waste and division of Liberal strength, it will have accomplished no mean and unimportant work...But these are not the only results to be hoped for from the spread of political organization. It is part of the great democratic movement of our time, which, not swiftly, ...is still slowly and surely establishing and extending the foundations of liberty.
> Every institution which assists the political education of the people, which increases their interest in public affairs, which tempts them to take their share in moulding the destines of the nation, everything, in short, which helps the people to govern themselves, is a contribution to this great end.[41]

Politics, therefore, was no longer exclusively in the hands of the "aristocracy of intellect", but resembled instead an arena for political experiments and interventions, taking no account of the requirements of balance that Whigs felt were a basic condition for progress, while for Chamberlain it meant 'stagnation in public business'.[42] The response of 'apprehensive Liberalism' centred on the belief that the new machine would negatively affect the expression of the representatives' free conscience. There are many examples which demonstrate such coercion of people's will. If Bagehot noticed the inclination 'to frenchify our institutions', recalling the Napoleonic pattern, and if Chamberlain's adversaries, especially Goldwin Smith, accused him of 'Americanizing' them, Trollope, the novelist, did not hesitate in likening the caucus to the Italian *camorra*:

> Wherever a comparatively small number of active, energetic, unscrupulous, audacious and self asserting individuals are found in the midst of a much larger number of apathetic, indolent, timid, stupid and meek-tempered persons, there 'Camorra' will be found in a large school...The English for Camorra is Caucus. And the action of the Caucus system upon our representation is exactly the same in kind...as that of the Camorra led electoral colleges in Italy.

How did a caucus-*camorra* work? By taking advantage

> ...of an artificial bond of union, skilfully calculated to stimulate to the utmost the passion of partisanship, to develop esprit de corps, and to diminish all the restraints of individual conscientiousness, the body thus leagued together becomes one of the most despotic and tyrannical oligarchies that the world has ever seen. The modern caucus ...issues its decrees, not only to the sheep-like electors of the party, but to the member whom its fiat has returned.[43]

The pessimistic conclusion was that a truly representative system 'is an impossibility in a large social body' and that, in the future, the nation would be controlled 'by small groups of self-appointed men, unauthorized representatives of nothing if not of the meddlers who nominated them'.[44] The problem with a caucus, however, was not only whether or not it was able to resist inevitable democracy. Robert Lowe, a champion of the old élitist liberalism had contested Tocqueville's proposition as 'ignavia ratio, the coward's argument', during the parliamentary debate on the Second electoral reform. A large proportion of British political thinkers, both Conservative and Liberal, found 'artificial bonds of union' (in Trollope's

words) unacceptable. The only possible alternative was between the natural/common system of 'communities' and the freedom of any individual citizen to be master of his own ideas and destiny. It was not mere chance that the principle character of one of Disraeli's novels stated that, being of good lineage, he had already found his political ideas and had no need to look for them 'like a philosopher or an adventurer'.[45] However, to reduce the situation to such levels would be an oversimplification.

It must instead be recalled that there had been a great explosion of classical culture throughout Europe since the French Revolution, something Pocock defined as 'the Machiavellian moment',[46] although it actually had a much more general value.[47] In this perspective the extension of suffrage was perceived as 'demagogy', the repetition of Roman and Athenian decadence (James Bryce was to argue against this *topos* in his contribution in *Essays on Reform* of 1867).

In addition to these literary reminiscences, a relevant role was to be played by Comtism which contributed a new dimension to political theory.[48] Government as decision-maker and not just as mediator between the demands of various social actors formed the theoretical basis for the 'radical' Chamberlain's performance as mayor of Birmingham. The outrageous issue here was not so much the manipulation of consciences as the use of a mechanism which offset the opposition's veto rights in the guise of fighting for a platform. The winner would then be entitled to carry out his programme without negotiating with the opposition.

Chamberlain was to find himself alone on this issue, since everybody was to agree that it was going too far: when a battle is fought by 'referendum', the latter must concern great general issues of interest to the whole population, according to Gladstone's principles, and not just a detailed listing of administrative tasks based on the principle of a spoils system.

The debate on the caucus was, however, only the visible tip of a greater discomfort felt by the English intellectual class. The idyllic picture of democracy as providing an increased influence to cultivated people, whose task was to lead society towards the abolition of all class privileges and to help economic and intellectual development, was in jeopardy. It was significant that the organization of politics and the 'dangerous' re-forming of civilized society into opposing groups were also developing in other countries, parallel to the growth of democratic/socialist-oriented movements. In the early 1880s, therefore, Great Britain, like the rest of Europe, witnessed a dramatic increase in social pressures as well as the international arena being increasingly dominated by nationalist tensions, racial intolerance, and economic and imperialist competition. Thus the dream of establishing a serene realm of conscience on which liberal culture had, only a few years before, hoped to build a 'realm of freedom' came to an end.

It was in this climate of tangible lack of faith and disillusion[49] that the

divorce came about between British intellectuals and the Liberal party or, rather, its undisputed leader, William Ewart Gladstone.[50] The spark that set the event off was the Home Rule Bill, which proposed partial self-government for Ireland. Because of the Irish problem, the political situation was in stalemate and the elderly Liberal leader hoped that Home Rule would grant parliament renewed control over the issue. Moderate public opinion, however, saw it merely as a short-cut to the dissolution of the empire,[51] the final act of a radical policy that was forever drawing up and planning new legislation. Gladstone's proposal was rejected, with a large group of 'secessionist' Liberals also voting against it.[52]

Indeed, a large share of moderate liberal public opinion felt that Home Rule was the inevitable political consequence of a 'philosophy' based on abstract principles of progress and social justice. Therefore, politics would become a mere tool for the planning and allocation of resources, in view of a new and more rational level of legitimation for the ruling class. Such a culture, shaped by Bentham's utilitarianism, was, in the opinion of Conservatives and moderate Liberals, to mark the beginning of an era devoid of moral strength.[53]

'Gladstonianism', the British version of a more general European political phenomenon, faced with the problem of the masses' entry into public life, therefore, chose to follow the path of political engineering and legislative intervention. The aim was to govern the steady social changes whose origins lay in the French Revolution. For some years, liberalism had found it difficult to propose a language common to the ruling class as a whole.[54] Thus, the language broke down into a wide range of expressions that were to make the old élitist organization of politics obsolete:

> Times and circumstances are changing. Whigs and Tories, Liberals and Conservatives are names of the past. A great revolution has been effected, and the rights of property and of individual liberty are threatened in a manner unknown in English history.[55]

It was, then, natural, following Italy and France and in the face of social danger, that 'the best men of both parties may agree to forget differences, at best purely nominal, and may be brought together by the sense of a common danger, and that from the ashes of parties which have served their time and purpose, a new national party may arise...'[56] The commonly felt opposition to Home Rule stressed the artificial nature of most political distinctions which still separated moderate Liberals and Conservatives. Such distinctions had an historical origin but no contemporary basis. Hostility against Gladstone

> ...springs from men who really were one in political feeling, and separated only by political distinctions of a purely artificial and unreal character...; the liberal principles, which formed the banner of the old liberal party are

> either settled, or accepted and supported by every political party...the assertion of the Democratic power has destroyed, at once and for ever, the old Tory principles and the old Whig doctrines.[57]

The key issue of political and cultural debates in these years concerned the usefulness of a 'national' or 'centre' party. In fact, the issue embodied the political formalization of an underground phenomenon of realignment of the national bourgeoisie. Begun in the late 1860s, it had been precipitated by the 'radical' perspectives that Gladstone imposed on his cabinets, which were seen as external to the moderate tradition of liberalism: 'it is enough for my present purpose', states Edward Dicey, 'to say that the policy of the late Government, both at home and abroad, was inconsistent with and antagonistic to the ideas, principles, and convictions to which I, as a Moderate Liberal, attach vital importance'.[58]

Gladstone, therefore, was charged with deserting the liberal arena for radicalism, both in foreign and internal policy. 'The Liberal party – according to the *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* - [...] are not the advocates and exponents of the principles for which, as Liberals, the giant reformers of the early part of this century fought and conquered. Theirs is spurious Liberalism of a dangerous and socialistic character [...]'.[59] The Whigs' rebellion was consequently seen, not as a betrayal, but rather as a due reinstatement of old Liberal principles which now seemed better safeguarded by the Unionists[60] or indeed the Conservative party.[61] This, of course, did not necessarily mean that breakaways would join Salisbury's party,[62] but it did mean they realized that:

> ...if in these fifteen years the Conservative party has given us no great cause for hope, what shall we say of the Liberal party, in whom we trusted?...All that we can hope of the old Liberal party, in which we placed the innocent trust in youth, is that it is dead.[63]

It was therefore necessary to consider all strategies:

> Is it the duty or the interest of Moderate Liberals to place Mr Chamberlain in a position to commence, if not to execute, his Socialist programme?...The time has come when we Moderate Liberals have got to show that we care much more about our principles being carried out in practice than we do about our leaders being placed in office. We have got in fact to do what the Independent Republicans did at the last presidential election in America when they voted the Democratic ticket - what the Moderate Republicans have just done in France when they polled for the Conservatives...We know very well what we fear, and have reason to fear, in the event of the Liberals returning to power. On the other hand, we know perfectly well that we have nothing to fear in the event of the Conservatives remaining in Office...Between ourselves and the Conservatives the difference is one of degree; between ourselves and Radicals it is one of principles.[64]

This was a politically significant statement on the eve of exhausting electoral battles during which, in one way or another, the old reformist intelligentsia was to fight against Gladstone. He was depicted as a demagogue with no sense of the common good who, for years, had tricked and corrupted the country. The estrangement of the moderate wing of the Liberal party transcended the contemporary political battle and involved the perception of public morality itself. As the Whig John Tyndall wrote to one of the Unionist leaders, Lord Selborne:

> ...It is not the political question that I regard as most serious, it is the moral putrefaction that Mr Gladstone has sown broadcast throughout this land of England.[65]

His career, according to one branch of Conservative opinion, was an endless one of

> ...demagogy the brilliancy of which is without parallel in history. No man probably, has ever possessed a temperament so well adapted to sway the impulsive and emotional element which, predominant in all democracies, is nowhere more vehement and overpowering than in England...He unites the fervour of the Scotch preacher to the shrewdness of the electioneering agent.[66]

The Prime Minister's statesmanship, never questioned before, was now being challenged. Matthew Arnold, poet and critic, and one of the most authoritative intellectuals of his times, maintained that Gladstone was, unlike Cavour or Bismarck, no statesman, but merely 'an unrivalled parliamentary leader and manager'.[67] Others proposed an unlikely comparison with one of the most controversial and ambiguous European politicians of the time, General Boulanger:

> ...Both are masters of arts of self advertisement, both are fighting for political existence; both appeal to the superior potency of persons over principles. 'Revision' is to General Boulanger what 'Home Rule' is to Mr Gladstone...in both cases the term is a dexterous shift to conceal irreconcilable differences of opinion; and the success of either...would mean a civil war.[68]

So many hopes had been placed in Gladstone: why did he fail?

> Probably because, having to be the minister of the modern development of English society, he was born in 1809. The minister of a period of concentration, resistance, and war, may be spiritually rooted in the past; not so the minister of a work of civil development in a modern age. I once ventured to say to Lord Salisbury...that he interested me because, though a Conservative, he was reared in a post-Philistine epoch and influenced

> by it...Such, then, is our situation. A captivating Liberal leader, generous and earnest, full of eloquence, ingenuity, and resource, and a consummate parliamentary manager - but without insight, and who as a statesman has hitherto not succeeded, but failed...[The liberals] do really seem to have reached the nadir. They have shown us about the worst that a party of movement can do, when that party is bounded and backward and without insight, and is led by a manager of astounding skill and energy, but himself without insight likewise.[69]

Apart from its leader's deficiencies, the very role of the Liberal party appeared ambiguous in this historical period when, according to the emerging Conservative theorist Mallock, the attack on private property matched 'the tendency of population to press against the means of subsistence'. 'Heresies' on these two topics formed 'the subject-matter of all contemporary agitation in this country, and - what, perhaps, is still more important - to be the essential part of all those unsettling dreams as to the limits and the rapidity of possible social progress.'[70] The Liberals were charged with having particular abilities 'to excite the imagination of an uninstructed electorate, and posing as the party of Progress, to dazzle the people by endless schemes of legislative change, which, according to them, are infallibly to secure the greatest happiness of the greatest number'.[71] Now, however, it was necessary to consider finished the 'enlightened' era of dreams and hopes for a painless social change that would leave the status quo unaltered. As a result, the 'progressive' party's task could also be considered over.

> The plain truth is that the Liberal party as we have known it hitherto, has well-nigh fulfilled its mission. All the important political reforms, consistent with the existing political and social institutions of the country, have been accomplished; and it is impossible to advance much further than we have done already in the way of democratic legislation without attacking the Constitution or the established order of society...It is enough for my present purpose to say that the Liberals, whom I am now addressing, are anxious to preserve our existing Constitution and are opposed to all Socialist ideas. This being so, co-operation with Conservatives is a thing to be desired in itself, apart from the immediate object this co-operation has in view, namely the maintenance of the Union. The Conservatives of to-day have practically become converts to the principles which formerly were associated with liberalism. The Radicals, on the other hand, have largely abandoned these principles...Liberals of the class represented by Lord Hartington and Mr Goschen have much more in common with the views held by Lord Salisbury than with those propounded by Mr Chamberlain. If the fundamental institutions of the country are to be secured against attack, if individual liberty and the rights of property are to be protected in the future against the encroachments of Socialism, it must be by the combined action of the Conservatives and the Liberals...I rejoice at

> the probability of this coalition leading to a permanent fusion. Our old party names have ceased to represent facts. Whether as Unionists or Constitutionalists, or under whatever name fortune may assign them, the friends of law and order and individual liberty will soon have to form one united party...I would once more repeat the advice I proffered to Liberals, as opposed to Radicals, at the last election, and urge them to support the Conservatives openly and loyally, as fellow workers in the same cause with themselves.[72]

The Conservatives had seemingly become the trustees of the original Liberal culture. Matthew Arnold, calling himself 'a Liberal of the future', admitted that 'on the reasonableness of the Conservative party our best hope at present depends'.[73] At its lowest point in history, Gladstonian liberalism was blamed for not showing concern for the insecurity felt by the petty and middle bourgeoisie. Victorian journals reiterated the hypothesis of a return to common sense after years of radical estrangement. It was also an effort to recover 'realism', with no party labels but based on that very Tory party which had always been supportive of the immutability of things, privileges included, and therefore alert to the fallacy of radical demagogy, ever ready to propose reforms and abolish customs. Indeed, the Conservatives seemed to have made an impression on moderate public opinion by repeating that:

> ...in this country the danger of over-legislation is serious. The public press of all parties has gradually slipped into the habit of periodically urging upon Governments, at the opening of each parliamentary session, the necessity for undertaking a series of far-reaching and important measures; and at the close of the session the same public press bases its estimate of a Government upon the number of public experiments - described as great legislative achievements - which it has carried out. The voracity for change bears no relation to the merits of each case. We must move with the time, is the phrase upon the lips of every one; but no one troubles to enquire whether change constitutes reform or improvement; and just as a magic lantern interests by its constant variations, so a Government has to please the people by an exhibition of restless legislative proposals. Yet neither experience nor probability affords any ground for thinking that popular Governments have either been successful as legislative Governments, or that there can be an infinity of legislative innovation at once secure and beneficent. On the contrary, it would be a safer conjecture that the possibilities of reform are strictly limited. Legislation is, among popularly-governed countries like England, the great centre of public interest and excitement...

Therefore, the core of Conservative politics should not be legislative acceleration; rather

> ...the strength of the Unionist party has to be measured...not by what it can do, but by what it can prevent being done. The Unionist party consists of men whose political views are historically but not practically different; of men who recognize the Democratic force, but,...believe their duty is to lead and not to be led by it.[74]

Because of this cautious attitude, Conservatives were often seen as a weak party, opposed to progress if not obscurantist; during these years, however, those classes wishing for a pause in society's 'disorderly' process of growth began to see such caution as positive.[75] The main problem was to stop Gladstone's 'political enthusiasm' that had already broken the tradition of 'detachment' and 'administrative neutrality' typical of mid-Victorian governments, thus exacerbating the social question.

In Mallock's words, 'Our aim is not to extinguish popular hopes, but merely to make these hopes sober'. In order to compensate for the excesses of radical demagogy, the party had to 'find the way to the popular common sense'.[76] The editor of the *National Review*, Alfred Austin, wondered instead:'...is it impossible to constitute a Party of Common Sense?...The Party of Common Sense must likewise be the Party of Honest Men.' The strategy aimed at recovering the values that, in the past, had made the empire great; it was embodied in the claim for sound 'stability' that Gladstone's party lacked, ruled as it was by 'sentimental Liberalism' and inspired by 'non-sense'. The Conservative party, conversely, had often

> ...obtained for it the designation of the 'stupid Party'. But on the whole, the stupid people have been right; and even the clever people are now beginning to find out that in politics very little cleverness suffices; for politics is nothing more than the knowledge of human nature applied to the safety and welfare of the State.[77]

This, then, was the theoretical basis for the Conservative counterattack at the end of the century: a lack of confidence in the reason and rationality of the masses as the main instrument for interpreting reality. 'Anti-intellectualism' had no specifically Conservative origin, as the Whig culture epitomized by Walter Bagehot's works shows: as early as the 1860s, he had already pointed out the role played by inertial factors in politics, as well as the functional character of a system that valued the 'stupidity' of the masses. The conviction that man was not naturally endowed with a 'political character' thus led moderate and conservative liberalism to exalt the virtues of imitation and the unconscious, the immutability of human nature[78] and of community life, which had always centred on hierarchy and inequality.[79]

Once again, the issues here were ambiguous and not clearly traceable to a clear political-parliamentary schism. Bagehot had spoken of politics which, in appealing to public opinion, should be aware that:

> 'public opinion...is the opinion of the bald-headed man at the back of the omnibus.' It is not the opinion of the aristocratical classes as such; or of the most educated or refined classes as such; it is simply the opinion of the ordinary mass of educated, but still commonplace mankind.[80]

As far as 'real' public opinion was concerned, between 1860 and 1880 a fierce battle had taken place between those who accused the Conservatives of basing their opinions on the 'beer and Bible' combination, and those who charged Liberals with not perceiving that the breakdown of the system of 'pre-political' relations would mean surrendering to instability and to demagogues. This clash was partly responsible for the Liberal interest in an American model, which seemed to prove that a community with no system of deference could nevertheless develop in an 'orderly' way, thanks possibly to the very same despised political machine. In 1888, the success achieved by James Bryce's *The American Commonwealth* clearly showed that, in cultural terms, the fact of mass democracy could no longer be dismissed. In addition, this new 'voyage to America' of a Liberal-moderate political scientist supported the idea that even that 'anomalous' example was nothing more than a kind of nationalization imposed on an élite and on a tradition-oriented culture, making a government of transformation possible.[81] Conservatives, too, had to come to terms with that idea, as Lecky's work shows.[82]

The appeal to instinct, race and tradition allowed Conservatives to stress the role of social order and the mutual responsibility between classes. Liberals, conversely, in the Tories' view, emphasized individualism, thus destroying the fabric of society. In a framework where the bonds between individuals were no longer perceived as an obligation, the quest for political freedom led directly to permanent disorder. In fact, the July 1886 elections seemed to embody the disquiet and anxiety of moderate public opinion faced with a possible institutionalization of 'anarchy'. An even larger electorate, recruited among the poorest classes in both town and country,[83] went to the polls in constituencies where one seat only was to be allocated, thus making impossible the traditional mediation between parties to divide up the two or more seats, which had been available before the 1885 Redistribution Act. Another important factor was the greater impact of ideology and propaganda,[84] a result of the Corrupt Practices Act of 1883, but also of the higher level of partisanship resulting from the nationalization of the political clash and, at the same time, the personification of party controversies epitomized, in the 1870s, by the 'duellists' Gladstone and Disraeli. Moreover, this particular election began increasingly to look like a referendum on the great challenge of Home Rule, proposed by Gladstone and rejected by the House with the help of the two extreme wings of a Liberal party now even more formally divided. Never before, stated the leading article in *The National Review*, had the British people been summoned to express their opinion on so important an issue. The 'more educated' sector of the electorate seemed to appreciate the relevance

of the problem. 'But how is it with the two and half million electors lately admitted to the franchise? They have had little education of any sort...and of political education and experience, in the serious sense of those words, they have had none whatever.'[85] This was in fact one of the favourite topics of the critics of political democracy. In 1878, for example, *The Nineteenth Century Review* published a debate on 'Is the popular judgement in politics more than just that of the higher orders?' Lord Arthur Russell wrote that an ignorant crowd would never be able to form a political opinion of its own without a leader

> ...whose success will be equal to his eloquence. There can be no doubt that a certain emotional response...can be obtained from an ignorant crowd, by an eloquent speaker, with greater facility than from an assemblage of enlightened men...A Dieu le veult will not carry off, nowadays, a cultivated assembly to a crusade.

A radical representative, Fredric Harrison, answered Lord Russell, admitting 'that the uneducated masses are only in the right when led by right-minded leaders', agreeing with those who found it absurd 'that an illiterate collier should be sent to the Foreign Office'. However, in the end, he moved on to the problem of the meaning of the term 'political education', 'a totally different thing from literary education' since it could also be acquired through participation in the new forms of political life.[86]

In the event, the elections yielded disastrous results for home rulers. The fears of Whig intellectuals and of Conservative public opinion were thus dispelled, since

> ...in spite of the great infusion of democracy into the English Constitution, the spirit of historical patriotism is still the paramount instinct in the English nation. The Election points to the existence of a deep and strong Imperial feeling in the mass of the English people. Yet so imperfectly does our representative system reflect the temper of the community.[87]

The actual outcome 'forms a great turning-point in our history, for in effect, if not in name, it has been the first experiment we have ever made with a House of Commons based upon the widest democratic franchise.[88] However, the Liberal defeat in the 1886 elections was immediately interpreted in the light of long-term social phenomena that had little or nothing to do with the contingent Irish question.[89]

> He would be but a superficial observer of contemporary politics who conceived that Mr Gladstone's Home Rule propaganda was the causa causans of that wide-spread desertion of modern Liberalism by the upper and middle classes; the movement has been steadily continuous since the introduction of the abortive Reform Bill of 1866 and has been from time to time accelerated throughout the series of democratic measures which marked Mr Gladstone's administrations: the Home Rule policy precipitated and almost completed an exodus which hitherto had been gradual and therefore less perceptible.[90]

The reasons for such a change were to be found in the completion of an historical cycle of battles fought by a now satisfied liberal bourgeoisie:

> ...the battle of the middle class has been fought and won. Free trade, the removal of religious disabilities and perhaps preponderance of the commercial interest in the work of government have transferred the bourgeoisie from the party of progress to the party of rest.[91]

It was an uninterrupted transfer, as also demonstrated by the fact that the Conservative electoral defeat of 1880 was achieved by only a marginal number of votes: 'no close observer can believe that the counties were lost by any real revolt from the Imperial policy of Lord Beaconsfield'.[92] Moreover, some people began by reconsidering the significance of the Liberals' electoral supremacy. 'Between 1832 and 1885 the Liberals have had majorities in nine Parliaments, and the Conservatives in two. [...] This great inequality, however, was brought about for the most part by the Scotch and Irish votes, and in five out of the eleven elections the Conservatives had a clear English majority'.[93] The more detailed analysis developed in the *National Review* praised the realism of new generations:

> Fifteen years ago the current of political opinion among the young set as strongly in favour of Liberalism as it now runs in the counter direction. Conservatism has often been stigmatized as the creed of the upper classes and the old; of those who have that which they wish to keep...Liberalism...was the creed of the middle and lower classes...and the young, whose imagination was fired by its brilliant theories and resounding phrases. Now, however, the middle classes have ceased to be acquisitive, having for the most part acquired the objects of their ambition; the lower classes suffer from fewer political inequalities; and the young have been disillusioned by the spread of education. The result is a prodigious absorption into the Conservative body of many of the most distinctive elements of the old Liberal Party. When I speak of the young men...I speak with particular reference to the young men of the middle and lower classes, clerks, apprentices, shopkeepers, mechanics and artisans, who at each succeeding election are found enlisted in large numbers in the Conservative ranks.[94]

The prophecy 'that all which is connoted by the names Tory or Conservative would become extinct...and that the crowd would sweep away the old bases of society and build up a fresh nation upon the ruins'[95] did not come true. Another prophecy was realized instead - one that in the

past 'was ridiculed in certain quarters as an impracticable dream, that a new party in politics might be formed embracing the moderate men of both sides...The prediction has thus been fulfilled...The new party suggested nine years ago exists to-day as a fact'.[96]

> No circumstance more strange or more gratifying presents itself in the history of the decade than the alliance of the Conservatives and the dissident Liberals effected in 1886. In sending such men as Lord Hartington, Mr Goschen and Mr Chamberlain to the Conservative fold, Mr Gladstone's Home Rule Bill was a national boon, a veritable blessing in disguise. It has given England what the Conservative Party always claimed to be, and what Lord Beaconsfield in that eccentric little pamphlet, 'What is He?'...said was needed to save England from decline, a National Party.[97]

For some liberal predominance till then had been "accepted" on the grounds that the liberals had succeeded in curbing the "intemperances" of radicalism. Now these intemperances seemed to be out of control. The time had come to shift the balance of power by joining together the "centre" parties of the British political system. On a closer look, this reflection was none other than the reproposal of that key passage in the development of modern political systems that the Swiss jurist J. Kaspar Bluntschli had defined as "conjonction des centres". On a theoretical basis, the union of the "centre virile parties", the moderate liberals and the moderate conservatives, had already been postulated in 1869, borrowed from the political culture of a number of European countries, especially France and Italy. The idea also began to circulate in certain intellectual circles in England. The conservative T.E. Kebbel, for example, in 1886, reconstructed the political developments of his own country by drawing on the ideas of Bluntschli.

> The Reform Bill of Lord Grey broke up the House of Commons into four parties, quite as distinct from one another as those which sat last month at Westminster. There were the Tories, the Whigs or moderate Liberals, the Radicals, and the Repealers; and the differences between them were quite as strongly marked in 1833 as they are in 1886. Hansard proves this; and if the Party system was to continue at all, it was absolutely necessary that the effect of these divisions should be neutralized, by combining two or more of these sections into a single Party under one authority as of old. Such a combination was found, almost as a matter of course, in the union of the Whigs and the Radicals, which lasted nominally down to the present day; and, as it was impossible for the Tories to unite with the Repealers, the new Allies were for the most part masters of the situation. But it is a great mistake to suppose that the Whig-Radicals ever exhibited the solidity of a homogeneous party, or that the connection was ever free from those internal dissentions, which are sometimes peculiar to a more recent stage of Party history. On the contrary, we have the authority of Sir Robert Peel for saying, that in the first Reformed Parliament the Whigs were constantly kept in power by the support of the Opposition, who could have turned them out on several occasions without either compromising their own principles, or violating any of the recognized rules of Parliamentary warfare[98].

Many intellectuals viewed the expected emergence of such a 'centre party' as a step towards abandoning the party system - that is, the traditional division of parties typical of British political history. 'Parties as they once existed were, in a way, intermediate bodies between the people and the House of Commons,' Kebbel wrote, whereas in his time mediation seemed, to have disappeared due to the omnipotence of the electorate which directly controlled the House of Commons. The caucus was therefore 'the direct result of the dissatisfaction that is necessarily produced by the combination of democracy and party', a lethal mix in that

> ...the party was never meant for democracy, will not work with democracy, and that all attempts to yoke the two together must end in disappointment and disaster...If party government, which was once extolled by good judges as a useful and excellent device, is now condemned by the same as a source of weakness and mismanagement, it is because the conditions of the problem are altered, and that what answered very well under aristocratic or middle class control has broken down under a democracy.[99]

The end of the party system and the creation of a big centre grouping seemed the only way for ensuring, in an era of uncertainty, government stability, given that it was no longer possible to grant oneself the luxury "of trying to govern without a fixed Parliamentary majority." Though not realizing it, Kebbel in reality was hoping for an "institutionization" of the old Palmerstone majority of the 50s, an invocation of what on the continent was called *trasformismo* (political opportunism).

> In its favour it may be urged, that though up to a certain point it would increase the power of individuals, already perhaps a danger of the future, since a Minister with no organized opposition to encounter would under ordinary circumstances be able to do nearly as he liked, yet that the evil would be balanced by important countervailing benefits. In the first place, the very fact, that the rejection of Ministerial measures did not involve a change of Ministry, would allow many men to vote against them who now feel obliged to support them for fear of provoking that catastrophe. [...] In the second place, if men were not bound together by Party ties, there would be no reason why they should all attack and defend the same measures; reason and conviction would have fair play; while, in great emergencies, the leading statesmen of the House would have less difficulty in coming together and making it impossible for a really bad Minister to retain office.

Alongside the advantages of an end to the party system, the conservative intellectual did not however neglect the possible risks:

> Not that we look forward to the extinction of the Party system with equanimity. On the contrary, we foresee the gravest inconveniences arising from it. [...]
> It is impossible not to see that the conduct of Parliamentary government without Party, though it would remove great abuses and deliver us from great embarrassments, would be accompanied by many unpopular circumstances; and that, while securities against a Ministerial dictatorship might still exist, the difficulties of opposition would be heightened, and the facilities for corruption multiplied

The possible decline of the party system might have called for a more active role for the Sovereign who "should take a more prominent part in Ministerial arrangements than has been customary in recent times, to supply those checks on personal government which had vanished with the Party system" [100].

The hope to neutralize social conflicts by altering the party system was in fact one of the typical illusions of European nineteenth-century moderation. Marco Minghetti or De Laveleye could have written Hodgson's statement: 'among serious and well meaning men there is a commonplace observation that the Party System is out of date'.[101] The problem was not a simple one but embodied the fierce battle for the redefinition of the 'political centre'.[102] In the process, the various components of British liberalism tried to achieve legitimation in the eyes of public opinion as the only representatives of 'true' liberalism and 'true' progress.

The alliance with the Unionists was, from this point of view, of primary importance: 'there are many things for which we have good cause to be grateful to the Government of the last six years', wrote a democratic Tory in 1892, 'if for nothing more than the alliance between the Tories and the Liberal-Unionists.' It was in fact thanks to them that a political centre composed of 'moderates of both parties' was able to establish itself in the open for the first time.[103] Thus,

> ...if there is to be a Right Party formed in the future...,at least we have seen the possibility of a Centre Party which should receive the fullest support in the country at large. It is no small thing that the active and energetic spirits who headed the revolt of the middle class against Gladstonism should have been brought by necessity into close union with the best men that the aristocratic party has produced for many years.[104]

The old balance of the system now seemed to be combined with the new, vigorous Conservative Unionism, since

> ...the old lines have melted away in the crucible of a great national danger,

> and ancient war-cries have become mere empty sounds. There is no longer a Tory party in the sense of the term in pre-Disraelian times. In its stead there is a growing popular conservatism, full of vitality...As to the Liberal party, it has ceased to exist as a whole. There are, indeed, groups of politicians vaguely labelling themselves with the Liberal name - a fraudulent trade-mark.[105]

In a world where 'social sentiments, aspirations, needs hitherto unknown or buried beneath the surface, are upheaving the strata of society,' one main problem concerned the government:

> How are these political, intellectual, material, and spiritual aspirations, needs, and requirements to be satisfied? By what means and in what way is this national imperial sentiment to work out the safety of the nation? How are the forces newly generated among us to be guided, controlled, and wrought into beneficial action? Which of our political parties is most naturally adapted to deal successfully with the great problem of the day?....The Whigs, as a party, cannot be looked upon as a serious factor in the future; they have done their work and have had their day...They are the Celestials of politics. Unchanged and unchangeable, they cannot adapt themselves to our future cravings...Is the safety to be found in Radicalism?... Modern Radicalism is a mere aggregation of imperfectly cohering atoms,...Professional politicians, enthusiastic philosophers, fanatics, faddists, quacks, cynics, humorists, bound together by the loosest tie, without a programme and with no definite object worthy of serious consideration, find in radicalism a stage on which to strut and air their fantastic fallacies. Fruitful in talk but fruitless in results, they are distinguished by no intelligible adhesion to any possible programme. Radicalism in short conveys no meaning...Of all our political combinations, the Tory party alone can act adequately in the future without prejudice to its past. It alone can deal with problems now pressing upon us without departing from its traditions, or violating those principles which have guided it in former days. No reform which is honest and complete can be attempted until certain fundamental, social, moral, and political conditions are first assumed. The Tory party stands upon the firm principles and sure foundation of liberty, property, and law;...It holds fast to the ancient constitutional institutions of the land, but realises that changing circumstances require changing treatment, that systems and laws must be modified in order to remain the same, and that institutions are made for man, not man for institutions...The problem of the future is...how to reconcile the individual with the social instincts...Toryism standing on the solid rock of liberty, property, and law, untrammelled by the past, viewing the present with open and unprejudiced eyes, believing in progressive reform, is alone capable of converting sound theory into wholesome results. No other political combination can do so without compromising itself and losing its identity in the traditions, principles,

and objects of the Tory party. For these reasons, as it appears to me, the Tory party is alone capable of successfully handling the problems of the day, of avoiding inaction on the one hand and revolution on the other, and of leading the modern democracy safely along the paths of prosperity and peace.[106]

Efficiency and Authority

The equation 'governability - prosperity' introduced one of the typical arguments of Conservative anti-Gladstonianism of the 1880s - that of 'national efficiency'. This, along with the myth of the empire, represented, though often indistinctly, one of the prevailing (and unifying) features of the intolerance of some intellectual and middle-class circles when faced with the decline from the status of Great Power.[107] During this period some doubts were cast on the reliability of military, educational and bureaucratic organization in Great Britain, especially in connection with the, by then, open competition with Germany and the United States.[108] This awareness was transformed into a rethinking of the customs and institutions which, until a few years before, had been considered the basis of the civilized development of the country. The new needs of public life, for example, were such that the debate-oriented nature of the House of Commons, which both Walter Bagehot and the mid-Victorians deemed a basic ingredient in the political education of the British people, gradually became an obstacle to the working of the parliamentary organization.[109] Another hindrance was represented by 'Irish' obstructionism. In 1890, Joseph Chamberlain, following the example of the United States, confirmed his partiality, as a 'radical', for procedures that guaranteed a quicker political decision-making process:

...the practice of unlimited discussion has become incompatible with the proper progress of business under modern conditions. The great underlying principles of representative government do not require it - democracy has shown no particular desire to preserve it. Its limitation, with any regulations that may be devised to encourage the majority to proceed with that spirit of fairness which is consistent with English traditions, is urgently and speedily demanded if we would preserve the potent instrument of popular government from ridicule and failure, and if we would see the House of Commons once more command the confidence of the people and the respect of other nations.[110]

There was a pervasive image of the government as completely submissive to the will of the commons, which was seen as having 'gradually absorbed the whole authority of the Executive Government'.[111] The general trend was towards recovering authority, which seemed to have been eroded through the partial decline of the social role of the landed

aristocracy and the growth of democracy. One aspect of this trend, which most people supported, was the demand for a more substantial role in decision-making. British moderates, along with continental liberal culture, felt that authority could be recovered only if the institutions were free of the passion of political conflict. Austin, for example, an authoritative spokesman for the Conservative trend which aimed at restoring a balance by giving greater institutional power back to the Crown and the House of Lords while taking it away from representatives,[112] wondered why

...the Crown should not be entrusted, not nominally only, but actually, with the selection of the Minister whom we now call Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs...A Standing Committee upon Foreign and Imperial Affairs could easily be constituted...Such a body would, in the true sense of the word, be a deliberative Body;...No passion, no Party spirit, no sudden enthusiasm about particular persons, would be imported into the question.[113]

In the 1880s, however, most reform projects and the attention of politicians and intellectuals were focused on the House of Lords. Radical groups largely demanded its abolition on the grounds that it was a body with no popular mandate. Conservatives fought for reform aimed at strengthening the Upper House which, for over 50 years, had submitted to the will of the House of Commons.[114] The Conservatives' defence was based on the belief that the Lords did not hold a different degree of 'deliberative wisdom', like senators in other countries. Rather, they represented the specific and recognized interests of an important social class, the landed aristocracy.[115] The latter had always claimed to be directly and soundly linked with the nation, thus denying any credibility to the concept of parliamentary representation of the people.[116] The House of Lords was thus depicted as the only stronghold of the rights of the people against the degeneration brought about by democracy:

All history proves that a Second Chamber is necessary...It is impossible to obtain any adequate guarantee that a single Chamber will not sometimes act in opposition to the wishes of the country at large. It too often happens that a Parliamentary orator obtains such an ascendancy in the House of Commons that he can secure a majority even for unpopular measures, and in such cases it is only the power of the House of Lords which prevent them from passing into law. In this way the Upper House is the protector of popular rights against the excessive power of one man, who might practically become an arbitrary dictator if he had only to deal with the House of Commons.[117]

Conservatives, therefore, had no doubts that a second House was necessary. The problem lay rather in the criteria for selecting the Lords. In Goldwin Smith's words:

> The only valid argument in favour of the retention of the House of Lords is, in fact, the difficulty which the Bicamerists find in devising anything to be put in its place. Nomination is a total failure...If both Chambers are elective...the result is a collision and a deadlock...Co-optation in any form, or election by an order, would give us the oligarchy over again...Not only as to the mode in which their Senate is to be elected are the Bicamerists at fault; they are equally at fault as to the special materials of which it is to be composed. If age or wealth is to be the qualification, impotence or odium will be the result. If the wisest are to have their seats in the Senate, the popular House will be deprived of its best leaders. Supreme power must centre somewhere; it will centre in that body which most directly represents the national will. Let the assembly, then, which is the seat of supreme power, be the seat of collective wisdom...Frankly recognize its authority, and invest it at the same time with a full measure of responsibility.[118]

This was what Salisbury had in mind when, in 1884, he launched the successful campaign to reduce the elected House's room for manoeuvre[119] through a reassessment of the tasks of the Upper House. It was an important transition, based on the cavalier use that the Conservative leader made of the referendal theory,[120] which had been formulated in the late 1860s. Important decisions made by the House of Commons should be submitted to the Lords who, according to Salisbury, were entitled to verify whether most of the population - in whose name they deliberated - agreed.[121]

Goldwin Smith, however, suggested that declining authority in a period of extended suffrage was due not only to the limited political sway of the most prestigious institutions, but principally to the weakness of the executive branch:

> ...the nations have been so much engaged in taking authority out of bad hands, that they have forgotten that it is a good and necessary thing in itself. Government has become dangerously weak. The greater part of its energy is now expended, not in the work of administration, but in preserving its own existence...A Country with an Empire and a world-wide diplomacy cannot afford to have an executive, the policy of which is always shifting with the wind of opinion, and which can exercise no forecast, because it is not sure of its existence for an hour...Those who are as far as is the writer of this paper from being Imperialists, must see, nevertheless, that while the Empire exists it creates a special necessity for a strong and undemagogic Government, and that on any hypothesis, a disruption, or general dissolution from a collapse of the central authority, is not the thing to be desired. The Radicals themselves are saying that what the country now wants is a strong government, by which, however, people often mean a government strongly imbued with their own ideas...[122]

Smith added to these limits the question of the lack of the codification

of the 'powers' and 'duties' that rule public life, as could be detected in the 'paradox' that the 'cradle' of constitutional government had no formalized constitution:

> Actually she [Great Britain] has nothing but a Balance of Power, or rather the power no longer balanced of the House of Commons...The term 'Constitutional', though it seems full of mysterious and august meaning, has never really denoted anything but the limit of practical force...England, like other nations under the elective system, needs a written constitution, defining all powers and duties, guarding against any usurpation, and entrusted to the keeping of a court of law. Traditions and understandings, which may be maintained and serve their purpose so long as the government is in the hands of a family group of statesmen walking in the ancestral paths, will not command the same respect in a far different order of things...A written constitution in no way interferes with the freedom of development which is the supposed privilege of the unwritten. It only provides that development shall proceed in the way of regular and legal amendment, and not in that of violent collision and intimidation by street parades.[123]

Imperial Instinct or Conservative Democracy? The Dilemma of the Conservative Mind Faced with Victory

While Gladstone had to withstand the attacks of those who felt that the rule of progressive liberalism was over, Salisbury was compelled to face a new Conservatism that was disinclined to accept a defensive approach to politics as political counterweight, so dear to the Tory leader.[124] Indeed, the clear-cut assertion of the Unionist forces, led by Conservatives, initiated an articulate debate on the nature and tasks of an anti-Gladstonian coalition, a debate cross-cut by several rifts, such as the one dividing Unionist Liberals from Chamberlain's Radicals, or the one setting the still lively Tory democracy of Randolph Churchill against the 'defensive' Conservatism of the 'old identity'.[125] This latter *querelle*, in particular, signalled the vast rebuilding of Conservative political culture and its adaptation to the changing social and political conditions within the party and in the country. When, in the British political system, the 'stupid party' came almost unwittingly to the fore with unprecedented strength, the complicated process of redefining the image of Conservatism began. This had been tentatively started by Disraeli in the 1870s, and vigorously carried on by Randolph Churchill until the mid-1880s. The true nature of this conservatism, now rampant in the country, was explained as follows:

> The Country, then, may be said to be Conservative in the broad sense of the word. It only remains for the Conservative Party to interpret truly the Conservatism of the Country. There is no longer any excuse for the timidity

which, while the party was in hopeless minority, hesitated to proclaim a definite policy, or for the recklessness which entered into a competition with demagogy on its own ground. True conservatism certainly does not consist in blind adherence to the obsolete machinery of a more aristocratic age, but it has no surer foundation in what is rather absurdly called Tory democracy. Its real basis is the Imperial instinct that exists in all classes of the Community.[126]

The most traditional elements of conservatism could not forgive democratic Toryism for introducing into the party the typically radical fixation for constantly planning political agendas: 'Tory Democracy is compounded of all the old Radical commonplaces', wrote the Conservative Baumann in 1887, blaming Churchill for acting out of mere personal ambition. In fact, the former Chancellor of the Exchequer

...sees clearly that Gladstonian Radicalism has hitherto been very popular in this country, and he knows that, had it not been for the Home Rule infatuation, Mr Gladstone would now be in power. It seems, therefore, to have occurred to Lord Randolph, that if he simply eliminated Home Rule, and labelled the residuum of Gladstonism 'Tory Democracy', he would defeat the Radicals, turn off all Tories who showed the slightest symptoms of Conservatism, and secure for his party fixity of tenure in Downing Street.[127]

Opposition to the 'Tory Democratic Intrigue' wanted to reaffirm the historical role of Conservatism, based on passive resistance to the progressive party and on the recovery of the social influence of the 'English gentleman', whose duty it was to see that 'his local connections regain the local influence'.[128] Old Tories felt that getting involved in proposals for reforms was a mistake, since this would not lead to a reshaping of radicalism, but would instead alter the natural balance of the system:

...when a 'progressive' measure has been proposed by our own Party the Radical Party will always be found ready to 'go one better'...Our Party may conduct its business on very 'progressive' lines; but there will always be a Party more 'progressive' still...The fact that we cannot outbid the Radicals is less important than the fact that we must make any attempt to do so. To promote Progress is not the proper function of the Tory Party. The proper function of that Party is to see that the measures of progress promoted by the other Party shall as far as possible embody the principles of true political science. It must use every means to prevent those measures from being assaults upon liberty and property. [Otherwise there will be] instead of a Radical Party and a Tory Party, two Radical Parties competing with each other in reaction...In all civilized communities men naturally fall into two groups, the Conservatives and the Radicals; and it is the outcome of the constant opposition of the movements which those groups

condition that genuine progress, the development of true civilization, is found. It is of less importance to the Realm that either Party should be much in power than that both Parties should be constantly true to their natures... Clearly, then, the natural function of the Tory Party, the Party of negative force, is to prevent the Radical Party, the Party of initiative force, from using power wrongly.[129]

For,

...if Tory democracy means the warm sympathy of Toryism with the People, and the eagerness of Toryism to mitigate the harshness of the nature of things...then Tory democracy may be welcomed as an excellent Party designation. But if it signifies that Toryism is going to enter into competition with Radicalism in false promises, and in pretending to wage war against that individual liberty and those rights of property from which social inequality necessarily ensues, then Tory Democracy is a cheat and a trick and can be accepted by no honest Conservative.[130]

Such appeals against Tory democracy revealed that a Liberal perspective had slowly been assimilated. Terms like 'contract' and 'competition' were found alongside 'status' and 'collaboration', stressing some aspects not previously prominent in Conservative culture, such as individual freedom and the priority of property rights. From this point of view, the old identity of the party was no relic of the past, but provided instead an environment where resistance to legislative intervention and the growing intrusiveness of the public sphere would be able to evolve into a proper Conservative culture, attentive to the needs of the free market and capitalism.[131]

Conversely, the political outlook of Tory democracy usually proudly recalled the 'social' perspectives of Disraeli's activity. He was seen as the forerunner of 'democratic' Conservatism[132] - the term 'democratic' here not implying greater popular participation in directing the party, but rather meaning politically 'active' or 'reformist', since it represented the aspirations of a middle class still in a decidedly subordinate position within the party. Curzon wrote:

...I believe that at the present moment there is a more widespread activity, and a more genuine enthusiasm for reform, in the ranks of the Conservative party, than at any previous period during this century...Lord Beaconsfield...taught his followers the invaluable lesson of taking the initiative, and created for them a policy, in domestic as well as in foreign affairs.[133]

The meaning of Tory democracy was also discussed by its undisputed leader, Randolph Churchill, in a speech delivered in Manchester in 1885:

What is the Tory democracy that the Whigs should deride it and hold it up

> to the execration of the people? It has been called a contradiction in terms; it has been described as a nonsensical policy. I believe it to be the most simple and the most easily understood political denomination ever assumed. The Tory democracy is a democracy which has embraced the principles of the Tory party. It is a democracy which believes that a hereditary monarchy and hereditary House of Lords are the strongest fortifications which the wisdom of man, illuminated by the experience of centuries, can possibly devise for the protection, not of Whig privilege, but of democratic freedom. The Tory democracy is a democracy which adheres to and will defend the Established Church, because it believes that the Establishment is a guarantee of State morality, and that the connection between Church and State imparts to the ordinary functions of executive and law something of a divine sanction. The Tory democracy is a democracy which, under the shadow and under the protection of those great and ancient institutions, will resolutely follow the path of administrative and social reform.[134]

This somehow represented a bridgehead opening the way to a lasting reconciliation between Conservatism and democracy, and, generally, with the culture of 'progress'. In other words, the issue at stake, democracy, had to be 'neutralized', proving that it did not belong within the fickle, and therefore dangerous, scope of politics and ideology, but rather to the sounder and more reassuring domain of facts and material growth.

In 1893, in a long and well-argued article review entitled 'Conservatism and Democracy' Mallock admitted the following:

> In urging all this we have a practical end in view. The genesis of English democracy has more than a speculative interest. A right apprehension of it, if general throughout the Conservative party, would have an effect as important as it would be immediate and permanent. It would enable Conservatives to realize their own position, and the real nature of the things for which they are contending, and by what means, in what form, and to what extent, we may hope to preserve these things in the future. And in order to arrive at this clear state of mind, it is necessary before all things to realize the truth on which we have been just insisting, namely, that English democracy represents not ideas but facts - and facts of the hardest, the most prosaic, the most material, the most unalterable kind; and that we can no more return to the régime that existed before the first Reform Bill than we can suppress newspapers, annihilate third-class trains, reduce Birmingham to an insignificant village, and change the population of England from thirty millions to eight.

Supporters and detractors of democracy alike wrongly searched for the motivation of the democratic phenomenon in the political sphere, as if they were due

> ...to the growth of ideals, of aspirations, of principles, of the sense of equality, even the emotion of brotherly love...or to various other incidents in the moral and intellectual sphere...What the growth of democracy in England really expresses is no new ideal...It is simply the result and expression of material progress, with the consequent growth of population...It is the child of science...as the result of manufactures, locomotion, and the material condition of life generally; and if we wish symbolically to represent its true father, we should draw a picture not of an idealist but of a steam-engine...The causes of democratic progress in England are, broadly speaking, three...They are steam-power, the growth of population and the development of cheap printing...

It was therefore useless to oppose democracy.

> We can defeat ideas; but we cannot defeat facts; and since English democracy is the necessary consequence of facts, the moral for Conservatives is that they must accept democracy, and not affect either to ignore or denounce it. They must realize and admit frankly that old-fashioned Toryism is impossible; and that it is impossible for the final and simple reason that old-fashioned England no longer exists...It does not mean that conservatives need abandon their Tory sympathies, or that they need think less highly of the old Tory system of government. It only means that, though retaining their old sympathies and their old principles, they must under changed circumstances give effect to them in a different way...The only way in which to preserve what is really vital in political principles, is to be constantly modifying their application - modifying it slightly when circumstances change slightly, and, when circumstances have changed greatly, modifying it to a correspondent degree...This is the true answer to those who taunt the Conservative party, whether from within its ranks or without them, with having been false to its principles and traditions, because it has passed measures which it once condemned, and has developed a tone and a temper which in former times would have been abhorrent to it.

Mallock thinks that this reinterpretation of democracy also inevitably involves a different approach to the political facts of the preceding decades, since it shows that the democratic path does not belong to radical liberalism. Radicalism only aims at striking and mortifying aristocracy and is therefore not at all related to the classic problem of democracy - that is, the improvement of people's living standards.[135] Indeed, one should look

> ...at the history of Liberalism, or of Radicalism, as distinct from the history of Democracy. The growth of democracy, as we have endeavoured to make clear, has been a social fact not a political fact. The primary causes of it have been wholly independent of party.

In the first half of the century, Liberals had in effect played the role of spokesmen for the new principles accompanying the growth of democracy, while Conservatives had confined themselves to opposing them. Therefore:

> ...there was accordingly, and we are not concerned to deny it, considerable justice in the name which they applied to the Tories - the name of 'The Stupid Party'. Liberalism, at that time, in spite of its pretensions, was very far from being scientific; but the truths it proclaimed, no less than the falsehoods, were treated by the Tories in much the same spirit as that in which science, till recently, was treated by an half-educated curate...Indeed, putting particular measures aside, and speaking merely with reference to general principles, we may say that the Tories rarely had recourse to argument at all. They appealed to sentiment, they appealed to prejudice, and above all to those feelings still so characteristic of Englishmen - the instinctive affection for what is old, and the instinctive distrust of what is new.

That had been the situation fifty years before. Radicals, and frequently Conservatives too, naively considered it unchanged, believing that culture and intellect were still the heritage of Liberals. On the contrary,

> We believe the situation of fifty years ago to have been not only changed, but to have been actually inverted or reversed. We believe that Conservatives and Liberals so far as intellect and education go, have changed places; and that the Conservatives are now the intellectual, and the Liberal, the stupid, party.

Mallock also saw this in electoral trends, where Radicals gained more ground in those counties where the educational level was still low, while Conservatives achieved their best results especially in the towns, where it was likely that the highest percentage of people with higher than average culture lived. It was therefore clear to Mallock that democracy, being an inexorable social phenomenon, did not belong to any party and that all a party could do was 'to guide and educate it - to satisfy its wants in an orderly manner'. Hence, Tories should not be fearful of the actual nature of Conservatism, which

> ...will always be aristocratic, and by adapting our old institutions will not sacrifice but save them...because aristocracy is the natural social expression of a fact of human nature, which of all facts is the most enduring and the most universal - the great fact of inequality.

This certainty had to guide Tories in their analysis of social forces tending towards democracy, since they 'in themselves are not necessarily and naturally hostile to what we desire to conserve; and will become so only if mismanaged and misdirected, and unfairly dealt with by those who are best qualified to direct them'.[136]

First and foremost an adequate ruling class should, according to many Conservatives, be concerned with maintain social obligations or, more concretely, with reforms that not only seemed inevitable but, above all, increasingly essential to of conserving the social fabric. An inspiring example in this context, in an era of infatuation with social organicism, was represented by surgical progress. Radcliffe suggested that, according to old-school Conservatives,

> ...even reform of admitted abuses is no part of the functions of the Tory Party - that Tories are to be content solely to lie by and (if I may use a colloquialism) 'pull the leg' of the Radicals. It seems to me, on the contrary, that there is a method of reform which, preserving as far as possible the traditions of the past, offends few and is generally acceptable. I was much struck many years ago by an expression used by a young surgeon who was describing the idea which was at the root of modern surgical progress. 'Our great idea nowadays', he said, 'is conservative surgery'. This sounds paradoxical; but is not so. In the good old days, when anything was amiss with a limb, the only plan was to cut it off. Now the great endeavour is to keep it on - but to cut off obnoxious growths, to stimulate the natural powers of healing and adaptation,... This has always seemed to me an apt illustration of what may be called Conservative Reform.[137]

Recovering the value of social obligation was, however, a hard task. By the end of the nineteenth century, the landed aristocracy had been replaced by capital and the middle class as the prevailing force in society. Thus, Disraeli's concept of the sacredness of nation and empire and the idea of a strong popular leadership seemed to embody the primary goal of combining the old 'collectivist' spirit of Toryism with the modern needs for social discipline and political legitimation. Disraeli had revived the aristocratic and paternalistic tradition of evangelical Toryism and the social responsibilities of the gentry and aristocracy, who were committed to 'defending' the masses against the class 'privileges' of the 'rule by the Manchester Liberal bourgeoisie'. Thus, the two conflicting 'nations', disapproved of by Disraeli in his novels, were to become one, reconciled by popular government - that is, the undisputed and undivided power of the upper classes put 'to the service' of the masses.[138] The latter, according to Disraeli's approach, were not only not endowed with the radiance of divinity[139] but were also essentially conservative and, at any rate, less close-knit and politically homogeneous than Radicals would care to admit.[140]

Randolph Churchill's Tory democracy thus established, on behalf of new urban middle-class supporters, a culture of social regulation and 'political engineering' that led to a major clash within the Conservative party in the 1880s. Salisbury, in 1883, was confident in pointing to popular politics as one of the causes of the disintegration of the British

constitutional system as a whole. The Conservative leader felt that it impaired its core principle, as well as the impartiality of government and of law, in favour of popular, and therefore partisan, politics.[141]

According to the old Conservative guard, the fatal 'democratic mistake' which emerged within the party under Disraeli's leadership contributed greatly to such disaggregation:

> Lord Beaconsfield's conviction that the wealthy had not done all they could, and should, for the poor, and his sympathy with the dark and dreary condition of so large a proportion of British labour, full as they were, never probably caused him to fear the upheaval which is taking place. If he had lived to assist at the extension of the Franchise to 2,000,000 men, the majority of whom hardly knew what a vote was, and none of whom realized the responsibility which its possession involved; if he had lived to hear the demagogue practically assure the most illiterate of beings that he was possessed of a political prescience which those whose lives have been devoted to political study cannot lay claim to; he would have known that the flood-gates of unreason had been opened.[142]

Actually, Tory democracy certainly did not foster the extension of the role of the working class, but, rather, the much more functional extension of the range of influence of the political system.[143] A 'new' middle class was anxious to participate, albeit in subordinate positions, in the rituals of political decision-making, while still respecting the values of hierarchy and the empire, being no longer under the spell of enlightenment illusions.

> It is a matter for a serious reflection for the Party that the class which by its adhesion gives to that Party its real importance in the country has practically no voice in its management or in the shaping of its destinies. It is the middle class (ranking in that term all who are obliged to work for their living, from professional men down to the superior artisan) who are the backbone of the Unionist Party. They do all the voluntary work in connection with the organization of the Party. They provide all the speakers, whether at election times or not. They found and manage the clubs, look after the registration, and, in short, do all the real work of the Party. Moreover, they are indubitably the most highly educated, thrifty, and broad-minded section of the community...In short they are the pick of the country. Their adhesion was the making of the Liberal Party of the former days; and is the mainstay of the Unionist Party now.[144]

The middle class, despite its gradual social estrangement during the last decades of the Victorian era,[145] still appeared to be the core of society, while the politically pressing issue became how to restore to that class its own central political and social role. This was why the lack of a satisfactory integration of the middle class within the party could jeopardize the future goals of Conservatives:

> Of course, the ostensible leaders of the Party are of necessity brought into contact more or less with men of the middle class, and are obliged to listen occasionally to the expression of their opinions. But there is no real sympathy between them. They live their daily life in a different sphere.[146]

'Old school' Tories once again proposed a two-party system, the symbol of a social reality seen as complementary (rather than antagonistic) dualism, and still aimed at maintaining the overall balance of the system and its natural components 'progress' and 'conservation' rather than struggling for leadership. Instead, Tory democracy chose to meet the challenge of transformation, and therefore raised the issue of maintaining an active Conservative hegemony both in the government and in public opinion.

Notes

1. For a better overall view of the Victorian constitutional system, see Kitson Clark (1962), Hanham (1969), Shannon (1974), Le May (1979), Pugh (1982).

2. Many unsuccessful attempts had been made to curb corruption and threats during elections, but the Corrupt and Illegal Practices Act was the first to achieve some results. The law aimed at rationalizing electoral expenditures which, as the chief Tory agent John Gorst admitted, were outrageous. This was due not so much to classic, gross forms of corruption, but to the copious allocations of money for any kind of propaganda. At this stage land rents were declining and it was increasingly difficult to manage an ever-growing electorate. This is a relevant factor in the positive cooperation between political forces aiming at enforcement of the law. On the meaning of electoral corruption and the concept of political morality in Victorian Great Britain, see: Gwyn (1962), Moore (1969, 5-36), Nossiter (1975), Cammarano (1996, 262-303).

3. The 1884 Representation of the People Act was the last electoral reform law of the nineteenth century. On the basis of the previous electoral reform of 1867 it established a homogeneous electoral body, no longer classifying citizens by county or town. The minimum qualification for men to be entitled to vote was proof that they paid at least £10 rent per year and had been residents for at least one year. In fact the nineteenth-century British electoral system was extremely complex. It was based on a series of processes deriving from social fragmentation and from the political autonomy of British territorial patterns. Such dishomogeneity derived from a clear historical heritage. Voting had a different meaning and relevance in counties and in towns. Many densely populated towns still had no parliamentary representative, while small nondescript villages could count on up to two representatives. Different rules established access to the vote in England, Scotland and Ireland. The right of individual citizens to vote depended not only on questionable prerequisites, often hard to verify, but also on a series of casual events, all connected to the willingness and ability of private individuals rather than to impersonal mechanisms. See Cammarano (1988, 864). An introduction to the 1884 law is supplied by Harrison (1885). For an overall view, see Jones (1972).

4. It tended to rationalize the voters-representative ratio by making constituencies homogeneous. One of the main effects was that many constituencies elected only one representative, thus hindering the traditional policy of compromise and sharing of seats among the parties involved. On this subject, see Chadwick (1976, 665-83).

5. The literature on the birth and development of the British party system is vast. Among others, see McKenzie (1955), Jennings (1961), Beer (1965), Beattie (1970, v. I), Ball (1981), Jenkins (1996).

6. Between 1851 and 1951, the main migrations between counties took place in the period 1861-1891. The peak was between 1871 and 1881, when 8.6% of the population moved to another county. See Friedlander and Roshier (1966, 239-79).

7. In this context, the fundamental change, represented by the creation in 1888 of elected county councils, must be recalled. They began modifying the traditional structure of political obligation between local government and the local community. On this topic, see Dunbabin (1963, 226-52; 1965, 353-79).

8. Hill (1888, 622-23).

9. Bagehot is a key author for understanding the 'turn of mind' of modern British politics. He witnessed the birth of a political system that was to combine effective decision-making with legitimation of consent through representation. The 'new' procedure for the analysis of political facts is well explained by John Burrow in Collini, Winch and Burrow (1983, 161-81). A brilliant portrait of Bagehot's figure and activity is supplied in the lecture given on 3 March 1987 by the editor of his *Collected Works*, St John-Stevas (1968).

10. Berrington (1968, 361-2). Lowell was a pioneer scholar in this field at the turn of the century. Berrington must be credited with amending the hagiographical picture of the 'sound' two-party contrast in the political history of Victorian Great Britain. His detailed studies on the degree and quality of parliamentary 'dissidence' suggest that, up to 1886, the prevailing parliamentary pattern refers to an alliance between Liberals and Conservatives against radicals. In 1883, for example, 'the leadership of the two parties were on the same side in 46% of the whip divisions' (p. 361). Other in-depth studies have been carried out by Cromwell (1982, 281-2).

11. Kebbel (1892, 19).

12. Berrington (1968, 371).

13. 'The Constitutional Question. "Our Glorious Constitution"', *National Review*, September 1886, p. 51.

14. Lowell (1920, v. I, 437).

15. Only a few years before, Bagehot had denied that legislative activity was, for the House of Commons, 'as important as the executive management of the whole state, or the political education given by Parliament to the whole nation.' See Bagehot (1867, 1983edn, 153). The liberal parliamentary tradition saw legislative activity as mainly aimed at shaping and enforcing laws. It was also deemed unnecessary and dangerous: up to the 1880s, Parliament was the forum for long and often desultory verbal skirmishes, where representatives 'were prepared to devote as much "outlay of brain" to the passage of a gas bill "as might suffice to govern the Indian empire for six months"'. See Briggs (1959, 415).

16. This was clear to contemporary scholars: 'Take up a volume of the eighteenth- century statutes, and compare it with a volume of the Victorian period, and you will find yourself in a new world. In the eighteenth century there was no Local Government Board, no Board of Education, no Board of Agriculture, and the duties of the Board of Trade were almost nominal...The functions, both of the central and local authorities, were comparatively few and simple...Parliament concerned itself little or not at all with educational or sanitary questions, and factory legislation was a thing of the future. Industry was indeed regulated, but mainly in a paternal fashion by Justices of Peace...The shifting centre of political gravity after the Reform Act of 1832, the enormous strides of scientific discovery, commercial enterprise, and industrial activity, the new problems presented by the massing of great numbers in towns and factories under artificial conditions...all these causes have materially altered the character and increased the volume of Victorian legislation. New authorities have been created with new duties, new powers, and new areas...The net result of the legislative activity which has characterized... the period since 1832, has been the building up piecemeal of an administrative machine of great complexity...' See Ilbert (1901, 211-13).

17. On this subject, see Harris (1983, 58-79).

18. A concise survey of these topics is provided by Rothblatt (1983, 484-99).

19. The diffusion of that model in the European political culture can now easily be re-examined through the many works of Miglio (1989).

20. Arnstein (1990, 178-94).

21. Hobsbawm and Ranger (1993).

22. See Cromwell (1968, 1-24); Fraser (1960. 444-63).

23. See Burrow (1993).

24. See Burrow (1966). For a good synthesis of the liberal perspective, see Bentley (1987). An overall view, with special consideration of the political aspect, is in Marsh (1979).

25. The acceptance by the traditional conservative wings of the results of the 1688 revolution prevented more dangerous anti-patriotic 'delegitimation': 'Both parties are patriotic - each has had its share in attempting useful legislation; and to claim for one or the other a monopoly of good intentions or useful performances, is unworthy of a British statesman.' See Knatchbull (1885, 580).

26. Burrow, *Lecture* delivered at the University of Bologna, 18 March 1988, on the occasion of his *Laurea Honoris Causa.* The issue is analysed at length in Burrow (1988).

27. For an outline of this historical line of thought, see Burrow (1981); for a less general view, see Tulloch (1988a).

28. Gavan Duffy (1885, 722). The author underlines the fact that, by that time, all 'revolutionary' Chartist claims were part of the current legislation and that the class that 40 years before had been considered an enemy to society, now held supreme power: 'if this be not revolution, in what does revolution consist?' (Ibid., 724).

29. Hill (1890, 200).

30. It is common knowledge that, at this time, many authors published

collections of their journal essays. In the 1880s, a good example is Herbert Spencer, collecting four of his 1884 *Contemporary Review* articles in the book *The Man versus the State*.

31. Classic references are the works by Burke, Bentham and John Stuart Mill. Other significant works, besides Bagehot (1867, 1983edn) are Carlyle's pamphlet (1867) and Arnold's book (1869). Two years later, Matthew Arnold published *Culture and Anarchy*. In 1873 came James Fitzjames Stephen with *Liberty, Equality and Fraternity*. The debate reached its peak in the 1880s with Henry Maine's *Popular Government* and Albert Venn Dicey's *Introduction to the Study of the Law of the Constitution*, both published in 1885. In 1883 John Seeley had written *The Expansion of England* and in 1886 William R. Anson published his *Law and Custom of the Constitution*.

32. Benedetto Croce stressed the 'European' nature of the perception of decline in that 'it happened all over Europe and in England itself: the works by scholars in other countries are filled with the same complaints that were voiced in Italy about the subalpine parliament, as they noticed the inferiority of conduct and oratory of the parliaments of the 1880s, as compared with those of fifty years before in France and England, or at the Frankfurt assembly of 1848, when men of great distinction nobly debated over the most worthy problems. Those who ventured abroad reported that the parliamentary institution was declining not only in Italy, but in the whole of Europe'. See Croce (1943, 20).

33. One of the main critics of the democratic results of political development, Goldwin Smith, claimed that 'supreme power is now in the hands of those who elect the House of Commons...representation has been reduced to delegation, and the member has been degraded into the mere bearer of a mandate; so that not only is supreme power vested in the Constituencies, but on all great questions its exercise by them is direct. The electorate, in a word, is the Government.' See 'Conservatism and Female Suffrage' (1888, 737).

34. Quoted in Chilston (1961, 184). In 1885, the *Edinburgh Review* underlined "that whilst the advanced Radical party seek to extend the power of election to its widest limits, they also seek to narrow the area of taxation; so that the classes which claim a larger share in the public expenditure become more numerous and powerful, whilst the classes from whom the renevue is levied by direct taxation are a comparatively feeble minority", "Plain Truth and Popular Fallacies" (1885, 573).

35. The leading scholar of the cultural environment surrounding this generation of intellectuals is J. Burrow. Among his works are: *Evolution and Society. A Study in Victorian Social Theory*; *A Liberal Descent*; *Whigs and Liberals*; 'Henry Maine and Victorian Ideas of Progress', in Diamond (1993); with S. Collini and D. Winch (1983), *That Noble Science of Politics*.

36. Burrow (1993, 15).

37. '"The truce of parties is over" wrote Disraeli on Palmerston's death in 1865. "I foresee tempestuous times, and great vicissitudes in public life"' Quoted in Briggs (1954, 235). 'There was no one left to take his place, no one who could combine the moderate men of all parties in his favour as Lord Palmerston has done.' See Kebbel (1892, 6).

38. So maintained the main opponent of the 1867 reform, the Liberal Robert Lowe, who stated his opposition to any reformist policy, which he saw as a short-cut towards democracy. Hence, he did not believe those who think 'that when you have passed this Bill you will have settled anything; all that you do is to unsettle everything, perhaps to lay the foundation of a real agitation, because people, when they find that so much will be gained with such little trouble, will be encouraged to ask for a great deal more.' Quoted in Briggs (1954, 250-1).

39. On this topic, see Pombeni (1988, 37-62); Jay (1981); Marsh (1994).

40. The historical background of this phenomenon is in Tholfsen (1959, 161-84).

41. Chamberlain (1878).

42. Chamberlain (1877). On the party as an instrument of mediation and control of democracy, see Roper (1983, 23-33).

43. Trollope (1885, 845-9).

44. Ibid.

45. Disraeli (1844).

46. Pocock (1984).

47. Besides John Burrow's appraisal of the issue, see, with regard to the French Revolution, Guerci (1979); on the relationship between this pattern with Constant's thought (whose connections with England are relevant) see Fontana's introduction to B. Constant (1988).

48. Particularly interesting on this point is Pombeni (1988).

49. A meaningful example of the changes taking place throughout Europe, and leading to a new political and cultural attitude of the intelligentsia and the bourgeoisie can be found in the following excerpt: 'Some fifteen years ago I was an undergraduate at Oxford, member of a College which was held to be full of intelligence, and which was certainly full of zeal for political and social reform. With two or three of my best friends, who were no less keen than I, I used to discuss the good time coming. To us it seemed as if a fairer day was close at hand;...we heard the promise of mutual help between nations, of a brotherhood of European States...We told each other...that we were in the midst of a great peaceful revolution; we looked (how pathetic seems our innocence!) to the practical politicians of the day to lead us as fast as might be on the desired path of reform...Our old zeal, our old hopefulness has gone; we have been driven to a cheerless cynicism...as plain men, who looked for some plain result from the incessant speaking of politicians, that we are discontented.' See Sturgis (1886, 183-4).

50. One among the innumerable biographies of Gladstone is quite remarkable: Feuchtwanger (1975). For a thorough narration of his political life, see Matthew (1968-90; 1990; 1995); Shannon (1999); Biagini (2000).

51. See The Archives of the British Conservative and Unionist Party, Part I, Pamphlets and Leaflets 1868-1901. *Reasons Why Englishmen should Oppose Home Rule for Ireland*.

52. New light was thrown on these events by three studies: Jenkins (1988); Lubenow (1988); Parry (1993); Searle (1992).

53. Bentley (1987). The perspective was reversed for new generations: see

Skidelsky (1983, I).

54. On the historical consequences of such difficulty, see Clarke (1978), and Freeden (1978).

55. Cecil (1885, 206).

56. Ibid. 'Let the term Conservative, and the designation Tory, as far as we are concerned, perish for ever, and let the title liberal accompany them to the tomb of all Capulets...We will frankly say that the intellectual calibre of what is now termed the Conservative Party would be enormously increased...by the infusion into it of the best elements of Liberalism.' See, The editors, 'Mr. Gladstone's Coming Defeat' (1886, 582).

57. Wallop (1891, 550-1).

58. E. Dicey (1885, 842). Lord Acton explains how to distinguish a Whig from a Liberal: 'one is practical, gradual, ready for compromise. The other works out a principle, philosophically. One is a policy aiming at philosophy. The other is a philosophy seeking a policy.' See Fears (1986, III, 542)

59. [Knatchbull] (1885, 585).

60. Harry Verney, an old Liberal, wrote to Lord Selborne: 'I am equally decided in my conviction that the Liberal Unionists are the true followers of the old Whigs.' See Harry Verney, 10 October 1891, Manuscripts Selborne, Bodleian Library,

61. 'It seems that principles which I have known and valued as represented by the name of Liberalism - the principles of moderate progress, of individual freedom, and of equal rights - are safer in the hands of the party which nowadays calls itself Conservative.' See E. Dicey (1887, 550).

62. 'Shall we join the Conservative party?...The Conservative party is not reactionary; it is not even stagnant...But here is the reason why we do not find rest for our perturbed spirits in the bosom of the Conservative party. We hold it to be still a party of reformers in spite of themselves. And we hold it to be still to too great an extent a party of landlords. Its able and experienced leader is never so incisive and effective as when he is pointing out the difficulties of some much-needed change.' See Sturgis (1886, 187).

63. Ibid. (189).

64. E. Dicey (1885, 844-6).

65. John Tyndall, 2 December 1888, Manuscripts Selborne, Bodleian Library.

66. 'Party or Empire?' (1886, 723).

67. Arnold (1886, 652).

68. Prothero (1889, 567).

69. Arnold (1886, 652-8).

70. Mallock (1885, 226).

71. 'Party or Empire?' (1886, 724).

72. E. Dicey (1886, 12-13).

73. Arnold (1886, 662). For an overall view of the history of the Conservative party, see Blake (1985); McDowell (1959); Southgate (1974). On the origins of the party, see Stewart (1978); Coleman (1988). For a synthesis of British Conservative thought, see O'Gorman (1986).

74. Wallop (1891, 541-2).

75. A pause involving no easing up of foreign and imperial policies, where

England 'can make itself respected by the strength of armaments; and these will not be strong unless money, which means taxation, be generously expended on them'. See A looker-on, 'The Strength and Weakness of Conservatism' (1885, 714).

76. Mallock (1885, 240). The author wonders how to gain access to the patterns of thought of the masses: 'We have a great belief in the efficacy of visible example, models, diagrams, call them what we will, which the eye can take hold of, as aids in teaching statistical or economic truths. This is especially the case when the end we have in view is to instruct, at once rapidly and accurately, large masses of men, most of whom have never had any clear knowledge as to the topics dealt with' (Ibid). Two years later, Mallock deals again with techniques for educating the masses. See '"Go ye and teach!": A Hint to Political Organizations' (1887, 483).

77. Austin (1886b, 564-5). 'What so many Conservatives seem to lack is courage of their opinions, and a belief in the sovereign.' See Baumann (1887, 483).

78. See Bagehot (1872).

79. Of course, according to Whig tradition, the British constitution grants a system of 'removable inequalities' reconciling freedom with progress. See Bagehot (1887).

80. Ibid.(247).

81. On this point, see Tulloch (1988b); Pombeni (1991; 1994); Quagliariello (1993).

82. Lecky (1896) offers a comparative view (wide reference is made to Bryce for the American part), but outlines his subject-matter from a rather pessimistic perspective (see also the 1898 second edition of the book).

83. The view that the 1884 reform definitively handed political power over to the lower classes was widespread: '...the Reform Bill of 1884 has effected another revolution on a more important scale, and has again transferred the centre of gravity of political power to another class...has transferred, perhaps finally and irrevocably, the power over our fortunes from the upper and middle classes to the artisans and the labourers.' Howorth (1887, 539). On the same subject, see also [Knatchbull], (1885).

84. The 1880 elections underlined a new aspect 'destined perhaps to be the determining factor in all our future triumphs and defeats, whichever fate may have in store for us; we mean the power of the tongue. The public opinion which now decides the fate of parties is formed by talking - by constant, incessant harangues, addressed to the most ignorant and illiterate class of voters by the advocates of both parties'. Kebbel (1892, 12). Lecky recalls that Carlyle 'once said to me that two great curses seemed to him to be eating away the heart and worth of the English people. One was drink. The other was stump oratory, which accustomed men to say without shame what they did not in their hearts believe to be true, and accustomed their hearers to accept such a proceeding as perfectly natural.' Lecky (1891, 526). On demagogy in the Victorian age, see Matthew (1987, 34-58).

85. The editors, 'Mr. Gladstone's Coming Defeat' (1886, 577).

86. *The Nineteenth Century Review*, January (1878, 797-822).

87. 'Party or Empire?' (1886, 722).

88. Howorth (1887, 537).

89. 'Previous to the great Home Rule secession, moderate Liberals were dropping gradually out of the Liberal fold. They felt that the party was being driven by the forces of agitation.' See Wallop (1891, 551).

90. Atherley-Jones (1889, 186-7). The Conservative journal, *The Quarterly Review*, also emphasized that 'the general conversion of educated classes from Liberalism to Conservatism dates from the first ascendency of Mr Gladstone in 1868. It has been fostered by his successive abandonments of all fixed Liberal principles, and reckless lapse into opportunism'. See Whitmore (1891, 254). On shifting political stances and related causes, see the classic Cornford (1963, 35-6).

91. Atherley-Jones (1889, 187).

92. Whitmore (1891, 258).

93. [Kebbel] (1886, 239)

94. Curzon (1887, 582-3). Curzon stresses with particular satisfaction the generational factor in Conservative performances: 'No more remarkable phenomenon has been witnessed during the past ten years, or still more during the last six, than the wholesale and continuous conversion of the younger generation to Conservative views.' (Ibid., 582).

95. Howorth (1887, 537).

96. Crackanthorpe (1888, 719).

97. Salmon (1891, 268).

98. [Kebbel] (1886, 238-9).

99. Kebbel (1888, 234-7).

100. [Kebbel] (1886, 247-250 *passim*)

101. Hodgson (1887, 242). The author recalls that '...the Party System many of us are deploring is not the Party System under which our nation became great. In two very important respects, those systems are altogether different from each other.' Up to Palmerston's day the division was a sharp one and the parties, a small body of aristocrats, 'divided into two by certain simple principles that seemed then to be immutable...Each party certainly fought valiantly for its own hand; but both were for the State. That was the Party System in England's brighter days. What is the Party System now?...Neither of the two great parties has definitiveness and cohesion...each party is an indefinite, incoherent moiety of the masses so richly endowed with heterogeneous ignorance and prejudice...both are for the State only in so far as that is necessary to the success of its efforts for itself...The fact, then, is that the Party System is disestablished'. (Ibid, 243-4).

102. 'The Unionists must get rid of their separate organizations, must weld themselves into one undivided whole, and assume the high position which awaits them in the country - that of the Central, or National Party. Central they already are, because they hold within their ranks politicians drawn from opposite sides.' See Crackanthorpe (1888, 724).

103. Baumann (1887, 9).

104. Ibid. (148).

105. Dunraven (1889, 196-201). Even in 1885 it was quite evident that 'it is the old Toryism of former days that is extinct and impossible, not the principles of moderate liberal government, to which all the statesmen of the present day are paying a willing or an unconscious homage'. 'Plain Truths and Popular Fallacies' (1885, 559).

106. Ibid.

107. On the subject, see Searle (1971), esp. ch. I. Colin Matthew suggests that the quest for national efficiency was 'a slogan intended to suggest a willingness to use government power to organize and legislate for an "Imperial Race" fit to meet the challenges of the world.' See Matthew (1985, 101).

108. It is common knowledge that the *querelle* was to peak at the end of the century, with the Boer War. Some facets of the issue, however, were already visible in the 1880s, as shown by two significant articles published in *The Nineteenth Century Review* on the country's military potential: Hamley (1885), and Forbes (1885). In 1900, also due to the difficulties encountered during the Boer War, the reliability of a system largely based on 'amateur' and 'voluntary' activity was once again the core issue of a heated debate. See, among others, three other articles published in the same journal: Stopford (1900); Bridge (1900); Brodrick (1900).

109. A recurrent problem in this period was the reform for rationalizing parliamentary procedures. In 1889, Conservatives - who were no longer an endangered minority - admitted the need for such reform, which they had opposed just a few years before. This and the main procedural obstacles in the House of Commons were dealt with by a major Conservative representative, for years leader in the Lower House before moving, in 1885, to the Upper House: Northcote (1889, 882-7). On the consequences of procedural transformations, see Lucy (1889, 372-81).

110. Chamberlain (1890, 875).

111. [Kebbel] (1886, 251)

112. 'I...should wish to see: 1) A Crown, anything but despotic, but possessing real attributes and exercising clear prerogatives. As an instance of what I mean, the Crown should have, not in theory only, a Right of Dissolution, quite apart from and in despite of, the Ministry of the moment. It should likewise have the power to address Parliament and the Nation with its own voice, instead of having, as now, hypocritically to sanction with its voice measures and policies it thinks unwise. 2) A second Chamber, likewise possessing well ascertained attributes, against the exercise of which street demonstrations and clamour would have no more effect, and be no more tolerated, than street demonstrations and clamour against some decision of the judges. 3) That the House of Commons should occupy its proper place, but only its proper place, in the body politic, and should wisely abdicate those excessive functions the attempt to exercise which have made it somewhat resemble, in its chaotic and incapable despotism, the Ruler we lately dethroned in Burmah. 4) That all men should say what they really think, and take the consequences.' See Austin (1886a, 129).

113. Austin (1885, 748). On the need to restore greater dignity and decision-making power, see Hill (1890). In another essay Hill admits that 'the

democracy (to use an objectionable abstraction) is supreme. But it may sometimes happen that its opinion, and still more its inarticulate sentiment, will find more accurate interpretation in an able Prince than in a Minister of the second order.' See Hill (1892, 162).

114. Bagehot 'encoded' the historical diversification of the roles of the two Houses at a popular level too, granting the Lower House the role of spokesman for the nation, while the Upper House only remains 'a chamber with (in most cases) a power of revision but with no other powers or rights.' Bagehot (1867, 1983 edn, 131).

115. 'Yet the whole theory of a Second Chamber', writes Goldwin Smith, 'as a necessary part of Parliamentary institutions appears to have no other origin nor any sounder basis than a mistaken view of the nature of the House of Lords, which all the world has supposed to be a Senate, when in fact it was an estate of the feudal realm, representing not a higher grade of deliberative wisdom but simply the special interest of the great landowners.' Smith (1885, 322-3).

116. According to Salisbury, 'the "People", as an acting, deciding, accessible authority, are a myth...The people do not speak at all. You have put into their mouths certain ways of expressing themselves, by means of conventions, which, though convenient, are purely fictitious: as for instance,...that a man's mind is a perfect reflex of the minds of fifty thousand of his fellow citizens on all subjects because he was chosen, as the best of two or three candidates, in respect to a particular crisis and a particular set of subjects, by a bare majority of those who took the trouble to vote on a particular day.' Salisbury (1883, 571).

117. The Archives of the British Conservative and Unionist Party (ACP) (1888), Pamphlets and Leaflets, *The Value of the House of Lords*.

118. Smith (1885, 323). Conservative propaganda often emphasized the irreplaceability of the hereditary principle: 'If the Upper House were elected by the same constituencies as the House of Commons, it would be in such absolute agreement with the Lower House that we might as well have no Second Chamber at all...On the other hand, nomination by the Crown would tend to destroy the independence of the Chamber.' See *The Value of the House of Lords*.

119. 'I should be very glad to see the House of Lords take a deeper interest and insist upon a stronger share than it takes now in the legislation of the country. But any step that it takes in that direction must have the effect of diminishing the power of the House of Commons.' (ACP, Pamphlets and Leaflets, *Speeches of the Marquis of Salisbury*, 1889).

120. On the subject, see Weston (1982, 103-29).

121. '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 the duty of this House [of Lords] to insist that the nation should be consulted, and that one House without the support of the Nation shall not be allowed to domineer over the other. We must decide whether the House of Commons does or does not represent the full, the deliberate, the sustained convictions of the body of the nation.' Lord Salisbury quoted in Le May (1979, 136).

122. Smith (1885, 330-2).

123. Ibid.

124. For Salisbury's biography until 1892, see Cecil (1921-1932); Taylor (1975); Cecil (1987, 30-59); Steele (1999); Roberts (1999).

125. 'Is not even the Tory Party, though as a Party of reaction less exposed to disintegration than a Party of progress, rent by divergent tendencies towards Conservatism on one side and Tory democracy on the other?' Smith (1885, 329).

126. 'Party or Empire?' (1886, 728).

127. Baumann (1887, 8).

128. Smith (1888, 736).

129. An Old-School Tory (1892, 152, 157, 159).

130. A looker-on, 'The Strength and Weakness of Conservatism' (1885, 713-14).

131. A very effective analysis is provided on this observation by Green (1985, 667-92; 1995).

132. In 1883, Randolph Churchill wrote that Tory achievements 'will be fewer...unless, indeed, the policy and the principles of the Tory party should undergo a surprising development; unless the secret of Lord Beaconsfield's theory of government is appropriated, understood, believed in...broadcast among the people; unless the mantle of Elijah should fall upon someone who is capable enough and fortunate enough, carrying with him a united party, to bring to perfection those schemes of imperial rule, of social reform, which Lord Beaconsfield had only time to dream of, to hint at, and to sketch...the "Tory Democracy" may yet exist.' See Churchill (1883, 621).

133. Curzon (1887, 582).

134. Quoted in Kennedy (1911, 116-17). In his reply to Baumann, the Earl of Dunraven emphasized that 'There is nothing antagonistic between the terms "Democracy" and "Conservatism"...The aim of the Tory Democrat is to enable the Tory Party to be the vehicle of national feeling...I say that Tory Democracy is especially conservative and constructive, because, if any distinction can be drawn between it and Toryism, it consists in this, that the Tory Democrat is more constructive and more truly conservative because more adaptive.' See Dunraven (1887, 299, 316). For an overall view of Tory democracy in the early 1880s, see Foster (1983, 147-75).

135. The 'social' nature of young Mallock's Liberalism, despite its subsequent change of course, clearly showed through in the novel *The Old Order Changes*, serialized in *The National Review* in 1885 and published as a book during the following year. The characters depicted in the novel revealed the author's powerful distaste for Radicals, whose interest in popular needs was merely opportunistic, and much less decisive than the interest shown by aristocrats and by socialists. On this issue, see Tucker (1962, 231). On the symbolic meaning of this novel, see Cannadine (1990, 30-1).

136. Mallock (1893, *passim*).

137. Radcliffe (1893, 652-3).

138. 'While Conservatism means a firm resistance to all movements subversive of our cherished institutions, it is far from asserting that changes and modifications may not be required from time to time...A local Radical newspaper described me as a "democratic Tory". In reply to that statement I said "If this term means that I

have a firm reliance upon and belief in the Conservative instincts of the people, then I am a democratic Tory"...My conviction is that the working classes must, from the necessity of their position, have a leaning to Conservatism. In the event of social disorder or disturbance they are the first to feel any ill effects;...The worst policy the Conservative party can adopt is to exhibit a want of confidence in the people. Trust them, and they will reciprocate the sentiment. My experience of the feelings of the working classes is that they are far from sympathizing with the Radical shibboleth for abolishing class distinctions, nor are they advocates of the doctrine of equality and fraternity in a Republican sense...They are...alive to the necessity of Government being conducted by the better-educated people and those who have leisure to devote to the work...Whilst we in the abstract evince a sympathy with the labouring classes, we must not let our sentiments stop at this point, but let them take a concrete form. No selfish class legislation must mark our policy; we must pay as much regard to measures "conceived in the interests of the working classes" as we do to the wants of any other body in the community. In past years the Conservatives have shown their sympathy with the people by supporting such measures as the Factory Acts and the Reform Act of 1867. Let a similar policy activate us today...' See Forwood (1883, 300).

139. According to Goldwin Smith: 'The people is no more divine than kings, though its divinity was proclaimed by the Maratists; it is capable of governing itself as wrongly as any king can govern it.' See Smith (1885, 316). For Hodgson as well 'the presumption that the masses have a divine right to rule and the ability to do so satisfactorily is a gross and mischievous superstition.' See Hodgson (1887, 245).

140. Howorth in fact suggested that the ultimate meaning of the 1886 elections lay not so much in the immediate victory but in the discovery 'that the homogeneousness of view and sympathy, which some people attribute to the masses, is nowhere to be found.' See Howorth (1887, 542). Dunraven felt that 'the people can be trusted; they have no liking for revolution, no desire for violent change.' See Dunraven (1889, 199).

141. See Salisbury (1883).

142. Salmon (1891, 272).

143. This definition is used here according to Paolo Farneti's interpretation: 'a legitimate system of power aiming at freeing itself from the allocation of *de facto* power within civil society, that is at defining in a specifically political view the terms of social conflict.' See Farneti (1971, 115).

144. Radcliffe (1892, 146).

145. A process fully perceived by contemporaries who wondered what had happened to that class, which only 25 years before 'you could not open a newspaper without alighting upon some reference to them and their sentiments...But now?...Of classes we hear very much, no doubt; but of the great middle classes, as they said to be called, nothing. ...Now they are absolutely silent, speaking not even when they are spoken to, all nerveless, indifferent or ashamed, and to all appearance done for as a politcal force.' See Greenwood (1885, 175, 177).

146. Radcliffe (1892, 146-7).

Chapter 3

Innovation in Resistance. Salisbury and the Premises for Modern Conservatism

'Tory Men and Whig Measures': Unionists or Conservatives?

British historians have always been fascinated by the events that produced the schism between Unionist Liberals and Gladstonians. The central issue was the meaning of this 'schism', which appeared so final and seemed to herald deep transformations in the British political framework. Was this a realignment of forces based on clearly identified class-oriented emergencies[1] or was the only real contrast mainly, if not exclusively based on the issue of imperial integrity?[2] A chronicle-like reading of the events that took place between the summer of 1885 (as Gladstone realized the inevitability of the Home Rule Project)[3] and early 1887 (as any kind of agreement between Unionists and Gladstonians definitively failed) seems to support the interpretation of political history as an irrational unfolding of unforeseeable and therefore 'undecipherable' events.[4] The intense 'episodic' interweaving of interpersonal relationships and personality clashes did, however, hide real disquiet on the part of the upper classes over the convulsive transformation of the parameters for appraising reality, and the need of the restricted circle of the British ruling class to adjust the mechanisms of political legitimation to the new 'democratic' dimension of society.

This is why the Conservative victory of 1886 did not simply represent an electoral turnround, but was rather the result of a profound upheaval in the political and social framework, at the centre of which lay a large sector

of the urban bourgeoisie and the Liberal party that, more than anyone else, had hoped for a process of constitutional revision. In terms of electoral circumstances, the Conservative victory was easily explained by the opposition to Home Rule, but, taking into account the subsequent and protracted hegemony of Salisbury governments, it might not have been unconnected with the changed perception of liberalism by the Victorian bourgeoisie from the 1870s onwards. From this standpoint, the Unionist phenomenon, developed as it was around the issue of safeguarding the integrity of the empire, provided an indispensable basis for a general reordering, in the conservative sense, of the British political framework. Once support for the basic principles of the Conservative programme was assured,[5] the crucial feature of Liberal Unionism lay, in fact, in the exercise of a partial political and organizational autonomy. This granted the Tory grassroots the opportunity to experience the 'popular' nature of the government,[6] while reassuring the liberal bourgeoisie that a 'party of rest' was compatible with its remaining within the great 'church' of liberalism. Thus, the impact of what was meant to be a temporary tactical alliance with a party traditionally estranged from Whig culture, such as Salisbury's, was made less dramatic. Hartington and Chamberlain's followers felt that the basic safeguarding their Liberal identity went hand-in-hand with their belief that the predicted and imminent end of Gladstone's political career would allow them to revert to a different political order in the Liberal party. As Chamberlain warned Hartington in a letter:

> Our real policy is never to vote with the Tories unless they are in danger, and to vote against them whenever we can safely do so. This policy would be the best for them as well as for us, for if we lose our hold on Liberal opinion, we can bring them no strength on critical occasions. The results of any other course will be that what I may call your section will gravitate to the Tories and be absorbed by them; while mine will make their peace with the Gladstonians.[7]

Balfour,[8] a future Conservative leader, particularly feared this possibility, since he saw Chamberlain as an irreplaceable pillar of the new political order. In a letter to Chamberlain, he raised the hoary point of the difficult relationship between the various allies, and felt that:

> ...Chamberlain could not & would not join. It is probable that our party could not & would not have him. But if he was deserted by Hartington and his followers, he would probably rapidly drift back into the bosom of the True Radical Church, and we should lose the value of his support. I rate this more highly perhaps than you do. But it means the Birmingham seats certainly, other doubtful seats in the Midlands probably, and one of the most useful speakers & debaters in the House. It is true that he could hardly leave us while Gladstone lives: and that after Gladstone dies he would probably leave us anyhow.[9]

The positive outcome of the 1886 elections for the Unionist candidates finally allowed the putting into practice of a notion that had been circulating for some years among sceptical Conservatives - the realignment of all moderate forces against the 'revolutionary' tide. Of course, the major political repercussions in the second half of the 1880s concerned the form that such a possible moderate 'reorganization' was to take. Should ex-Gladstonians become members of Salisbury's party or should Conservatives adapt to Whig needs and perspectives? And again, was it necessary to aim at one political organization alone or was it better to keep them separate? Who was to manage the post-Gladstonian era? Very soon, journals and letters between the protagonists transformed the question into a lively intellectual and political debate, which revealed manoeuvres and tensions directed at controlling and managing the political agenda to oppose the Liberal one. In fact, during the summer of 1886, the winning party was torn by the uncertainty of the significance of such an unforeseen electoral change and by the undefined power relationships within the alliance.

The new feature upsetting the troubled, but inevitable process of realignment among moderates was the split between Gladstone and Chamberlain. In March 1886, the latter resigned from the Liberal Cabinet because of his opposition to the Prime Minister's decision to pursue his Home Rule aims. In a letter to his brother Arthur, Chamberlain declared his move would be as limited and temporary as quick and successful:

> The immediate result will be considerable unpopularity and temporary estrangement from the Radical Party. There is little backbone in politics and the great majority are prepared to swallow anything and to stick to the machine. In the Cabinet I have no support worth mentioning...I shall be left almost alone for a time. I cannot, of course, work with the Tories, and Hartington is quite as much hostile to my radical views as to W.G.'s [William Gladstone] Irish plans. But in time the situation will clear. Either Mr Gladstone will succeed and get the Irish question out of the way, or he will fail. In either case he will retire from politics and I do not suppose the Liberal Party will accept Childers or even John Morley as its permanent leader.[10]

It is easy to detect the note of opportunism aspect in Chamberlain's attitude, disguising both a deep dissatisfaction with the limits put on his action by Gladstone's 'cumbersome' presence and a 'radical' inclination to force the existing political framework through a strategy of *fait accompli*. The Birmingham MP had already made a bid for the party leadership; in May 1886, however, he felt he had found the right way, telling the Radical-imperialist Charles Dilke: 'I think I shall win this fight, and shall have in the long run an increase of public influence.'[11] The issue of Ireland seemed to be irrelevant to the motives underlying his action.[12]

Hartington, on the eve of the implementation of the Home Rule Bill, was not afraid to oppose the project, appearing in public with Salisbury.[13] Chamberlain, especially at first, preferred to avoid mixing with 'embarrassing' company, trying to safeguard his image in the Liberal party in view of a possible return. Circumstances, however, then took an unforeseen turn. Negotiations with Gladstone to modify the text of the Home Rule Bill at second reading failed and, on 14 May, Chamberlain reached an agreement with Hartington. Their alliance was to prove decisive on 7 June, when the Irish Home Rule Bill was rejected, with 311 votes in favour and 341 against; among the latter were the votes of Chamberlain's Radicals and Hartington's Whigs.

This ballot marked an historical moment not only because, having compelled Gladstone to resign, it condemned Liberals to an almost uninterrupted 20-year period in opposition, but also because it confirmed the end of Liberal centrality within the British political system. On the eve of the elections, the two 'rebel' groups formally left Gladstone's party and created two independent organizations: the Liberal Unionist Association, led by Hartington, and Chamberlain's National Radical Union. Thanks to an electoral agreement with the Conservatives,[14] Liberal-Unionist representatives kept most of the seats they had previously held as Liberals, thus granting 'anti-separatist' forces an overwhelming majority in the Lower House.[15] Although Salisbury asked Hartington to lead the Cabinet, he refused, thereby opening the way to an exclusively Conservative government.

Despite the many frictions still existing between the Unionist Liberal components, between August 1886 and early 1887 all chances of reunification with Gladstone were swept away; more particularly, Chamberlain realized he could not turn the situation to his advantage.[16] The Irish emergency became more politically prominent and urgent, thus stimulating bipolarization and realignment of public opinion in relation to the 'historical' leadership of the two major parties. In other words, there was a tendency for increased dramatization and partisanship, inevitably putting all 'heterodox' sectors of the two political alignments on the defensive. In particular, the sectors led by Churchill and Chamberlain were endeavouring to create an intermediate political arena: a central 'national party' that aimed to combine the more moderate wings of the two line-ups in defence of the empire. The project was outside the conventions of any transformist phenomenon and came to nothing because of limited tactical manoeuvres.[17] "This tortuous manoeuvring led to nothing. The venture was probably doomed by Churchill's volatility, on the one hand, and, on the other, by Chamberlain's realisation that in the long run he had more to gain from working with Salisbury than with the wayward ex-Chancellor".[18] In fact "the two men approached the possibility with different degrees of seriousness. While Chamberlain could accept it as a useful dream, it offered Churchill his only hope for escape from isolation"[19]. In reality, it expressed the dissatisfaction of its promoters,

who used the topic of renewal in order to demonstrate strength in their ambition to gain that which could grant them political autonomy. It is not difficult to detect the roots of a 'Disraelian' notion of politics in the theoretical postulates of such a project - politics which focused on political decision-making rather than on purity of principles or the constitutional balance. It was not mere chance that Chamberlain's and Churchill's previous public activity, although based on different and sometimes contradictory points of view, was, on the whole, informed by mutual respect[20] and a similar impulse to use the democratic-popular dimension of politics as a basis for authoritative leadership.[21]

Early in 1887 Chamberlain became more and more isolated ('I hope that when I do return politics may be a little less mixed & that I may be less completely isolated than I appear to be at the present'[22]); he was caught between Gladstone's rigidity in the Liberal arena and the compromising repressive policy of Salisbury's government in Ireland.[23] The situation was paralleled by Churchill's momentous isolation. In December 1886, he had resigned from the prestigious position of Chancellor of the Exchequer. Like Chamberlain a few months before, Churchill, too - aware of his strong ascendency in conservative public opinion - wished to bring the clash to a head with the establishment of his own party. His resignation, readily accepted, actually proved to be counterproductive,[24] since Salisbury was thus relieved of a dangerous opponent on the domestic front and could redefine his hopes and plans for Tory democracy. As the House of Commons conservative leader, W.H Smith, wrote at the end of 1886, "it was really Salisbury or Churchill: and if Salisbury had gone, none of us could have remained – not even those who are disposed to go with him on Allotments and Local Government rather than with Salisbury..."[25] The head of government felt that his minister's opinions 'on several subjects were not those of his colleagues...and his friendship with Chamberlain...made him insist that we should accept that statesman as our guide in internal politics'.[26]

Churchill was somehow becoming the influential spokesman, in the Cabinet and in public opinion, of a decidedly Liberal, if not Radical[27] reform programme, at least as regards his public statements. In his speech of 2 October 1886 (the Dartford Manifesto), he stated his approval of a considerable number of reforms, from the extension of elementary schooling to easier procedures for the transfer of land.[28] Churchill spoke 'as in England only the head of a government speaks, as if he had either consulted his colleagues or intended to press his proposals on them in a manner not admitting of demur'[29]. Arthur Baumann, Conservative, wrote in *The National Review*: 'What I complain of is, that whenever Lord Randolph Churchill has the choice of two policies, a Conservative and a Radical policy, he invariably, as if by instinct, chooses the Radical policy.'[30]

On the issue of local government, Churchill, in full agreement with Chamberlain, became the spokesman for the typically Radical principle

according to which future elected bodies should manage poverty benefits.[31] As Chancellor of the Exchequer he did not hesitate to attack the interests of landowners[32] and proposed a sizeable increase in taxation on luxury goods.

Confident of their personal charisma, both Churchill and Chamberlain[33] pursued their challenges, underestimating the inertia of those very 'machines' that they themselves had so authoritatively helped to create. It was not surprising that the Radical Labouchère, in a letter to Churchill on his resignation day, charged both of them with the same mistake: 'Parties just do not hang together by principles. They are gangs greedy of office...You and Chamberlain seem to me both to make the same mistake. You ignore the power of the "machine". It has crushed many and able men.'[34] An additional final obstacle to a viable 'centrist' perspective was Hartington's refusal to lead the initiative. He was seen as the key character of any possible anti-Gladstonian alliance,[35] in that he was the only leader in a position to secure the support of influential Whiggery and to appeal to the moderate electorate. 'Hartington saw no purpose in joining an embittered Churchill apparently hell-bent on undermining Salisbury's authority.'[36] His choice to remain in the ranks of a 'Conservative Unionism', rather than head a coalition aimed at a 'Reformist Unionism'[37] clearly showed that, behind his opposition to Home Rule, there was a strong class-based resistance - that is, he was reluctant to redefine, in social terms, the increased political significance of the masses. In other words, large sectors of the gentry and the middle class were not willing to accept the costly conditions, imposed by the self-promotion policy fostered by Chamberlain and Churchill, in order to defeat the velleity of the home rulers. This would involve increased interference in private property, a gradual rise in taxation and continuous growth in the level of politicization of the lower classes.

Salisbury was an acute observer of these moods and succeeded in maintaining an acceptable degree of cohesion within the pro-Government forces, while limiting their reformist impact. This is attested by the fact that, in the summer of 1887, with the Unionist Liberal Goschen in Churchill's place [38], the Prime Minister regarded the stage of consolidation of the Unionist-based Conservative government as complete and the 'radical' challenge by those who aimed at altering the core of the coalition as repulsed.[39] "The venture was probably doomed by Churchill's volatility, on the one hand, and, on the other, by Chamberlain's realisation that in the long run he had more to gain from working with Salisbury than with the wayward ex-Chanchellor. A combination between the two men would anyhow have required the support of Hartington, who periodically gave the idea of a 'National Party' a guarded public welcome but was unprepared to take the matter further"[40]. Thus, slowly but inexorably, Salisbury's favoured type of realignment came to the fore. The only centre party of which the Conservative leader approved was one embodying a parliamentary alliance that guaranteed a Conservative hegemony and had

least influence on the character and autonomy of his own party. Unionist Liberals had no choice then but to loyally support the government from the outside until 1892. After drawing even closer to the Conservatives during the Liberal government of 1892-1895, Unionist Liberals formally participated in the subsequent Salisbury Cabinet.

Having succeeded in amalgamating all the 'natural' components of Conservatism under his leadership, Salisbury was now faced with the difficult task of legitimating the new political course, making the most of the forces and feelings that contributed to its emergence.

Salisbury's undisputed supremacy over his unruly allies and internal challengers[41] also represented a remarkable 'turn of mind' from the point of view of political culture, since it allowed the Conservatives to shake off their perennial state of 'subjugation' to the Whig tradition. As late as December 1886, the principal agent of the Conservative party called for more power 'to instill into the Party a spirit of self-reliance rather than foster the idea that our leaders cannot govern the Country'.[42] Queen Victoria herself felt that the Whigs' role was prominent. She promptly identified a way in which to save the country through the formation of 'a strong Whig party which the Conservatives would support and which might lead ultimately to an amalgamation or rather juncture of Conservatives and Whigs'. In 1886, the Queen continued to favour a coalition under Whig intellectual and cultural leadership: 'It is the only chance the Country has of a strong government able to resist Democracy and Socialism as well as separation (as regards Ireland).'[43]

Like the Queen, just about all political and intellectual circles entertained the idea of a realignment of the moderate components of British politics. Such an idea, of course, won wide support so long as it remained merely a general statement of intent. Things became more complicated when it was necessary to provide the detail over exactly how the Unionist wing of the Liberal party would fuse with the Conservatives. How, indeed, a 'national party' would emerge from the union between Hartington and Chamberlain's Liberal-Radicals and the most advanced sectors of Conservatism, namely Churchill's Tory democracy. Chamberlain felt that:

> ...the Liberal Unionists are more serviceable where they are than they would be if fused with the Conservatives. He has no thoughts of rejoining the Gladstonians. But he professes to look forward to the formation of a third party - a 'Moderate Liberal party' - which shall stand upon its own bottom. He must know in his heart that this is impossible. Both the Conservatives and the Radicals are now too powerful and too numerous to admit of such a party growing up between them, holding itself aloof from both, and yet strong enough to govern the country.[44]

The formation of a centre party would involve a high degree of risk for Salisbury. His political ability had emerged in these crucial years owing to his clever handling of relations with his minority, but determined, allies.

In other words, he had allowed the initial ideological harshness and political dangers of the alliance to settle down. 'I do not myself think', he wrote in June 1887, 'that fusion will take place under the auspices of any names conspicuous now. A new name will be wanted - it might have been Randolph's if he had had the most rudimentary common sense.'

The very fact that Salisbury identified his fiercest internal opponent - albeit hopefully endowed with more common sense - as the only viable leader for a possible new coalition was proof, for the prime minister, of the limited credibility of a project that, in the short run, would in any case exclude Salisbury himself from the government.[45] The problem for the Conservative leader was how to hold on to power without interfering with the other Unionist components, while also avoiding traumatic breaches with them. He felt that an alliance rather than actual merger would serve his purposes much better.[46]

Unionist Liberals too also harboured doubts about an accelerated merger process. First, many felt that a permanent autonomous organization would make it easier to lure other Liberals away from Gladstonianism. Moreover, there was a feeling that such an organization would prevent total subordination to the Conservatives. In a letter to Hartington in July 1886, the 15th Earl of Derby expressed his doubts about such a situation:

> ...A coalition with Salisbury would make the breach between you and the Liberal party irreparable...The coalition would be only in name. The leader of 300 must necessarily be more powerful than the leader of 60. You would be really subordinate, even though nominally chief.[47]

Conservatives felt the same way about the possibility of Hartington's leadership. According to the Conservative group-leader in the Lower House, W.H. Smith, Minister of War, and the head of the Irish Office, Michael Hicks Beach:

> The party would consent to be led by Hartington in the Commons if you thought it advisable; but this would only be endured if you were chief...To make Hartington absolutely chief would break up the Conservative Party - ...they have regained the position they lost in 1880 and must occupy the first place...The Unionists seem altogether opposed to a Coalition.[48]

Others, of course, supported the idea of a merger because of the practical benefits it could yield. First of all, at the electoral level, since

> to keep double machinery going in the Constituencies is but a waste of power. Joint Unionist committees should at once be formed throughout the country.[49]

Then, it must not be forgotten that

> ...the English public are not accustomed to the existence of a third English party, and that young men of ambition and ability, who hold Liberal opinions, are more likely to attach themselves to a Unionist Party which would comprise the Old Liberal principles, than to a Liberal Unionist party which has no seats to offer them and no immediate prospect of official life. We have endeavoured to show that the Unionist party might very carefully consider whether the time has not arrived for a joint political programme to be put forward by a united party.[50]

Among the main supporters of definitive integration between Unionist Liberals and Conservatives, Edward Dicey suggested that a problem of image would arise if the two organizations were kept apart, for it was impossible to conceal 'the great and increasing difficulty of permanent collaboration between two political parties fighting under different names, led by different leaders, and belonging to different organizations'.[51]

One almost felt that 'each section keeps up its separate organization as if it anticipated the rupture at no distant date of the link that attaches it to the other section'.[52]

Balfour himself, tackling the problem of the coalition from a practical point of view, stressed his dissatisfaction with the plurality of decision-making bodies:

> It is possible that the fusion of parties might (as Randolph would say) 'influence the popular imagination' and gain votes. While it is almost certain that it would get rid of the miserable policy of those L.U.s, who cannot manage the registration in their own constituencies and will not allow us to manage it for them. It would provide us with a leader who would certainly command the highest admiration of his followers. And above all it would save us from the difficulties on which we have more than once nearly made shipwreck, the difficulties I mean arising from having a separate and irresponsible Council of War directing the movement of one wing of the allied Army. This difficulty is not likely to diminish. It will become formidable again as soon as ambitious legislation is attempted.[53]

However, tactical problems and the recognition of significant political opportunities were, at the organizational level, of secondary importance. Of more moment was the fact that, in the debate on the recomposition of parties, a significant theoretical demarcation line could be detected which, in general, seemed to separate those who gave priority to a renewal of the party system based on the existence of a large and sufficiently vague 'National Party'[54] and those who still thought that the two-party tradition was the best way to ensure political balance and therefore to deliver a more efficient political system.

Disraeli, Churchill and Chamberlain represented the former principle. Their interest in the 'planning' aspect of politics, independent of their

political origins, prompted them to stress decision-making and therefore the executive, at the expense of constitutional balance and mediation among parties. In such a context, the majority, in parliament as well as at party meetings, was a means and not an end, and organization became a way of dislodging traditional ideological standpoints and subjecting them to the 'governing body'. The need for a prevailing 'central opinion' was one of the most emblematic and possibly least known aspects of that phase of political emergency arising from the need to adapt 'public' responses to the challenges raised by the new representatives of social democracy. Hence, a new type of Conservatism emerged, combining imperial needs and defence of property, while expressing the need for *dirigisme* and, thus, for the adoption of a programme that

> ...would involve not...the disappearance, but the transformation of the old Conservative party. It would signify that, having finally relinquished the purely defensive position, which they have maintained for the last fifty years, they offered with fearless confidence to lead the people in a forward movement.[55]

Those against this view included Gladstone and Salisbury, who felt that the traditional two-party system guaranteed the preservation of functional courses of political obligation - indispensable prerequisites for any plan to rationalize social balances.[56] It was not surprising that both Conservative and Liberal leader strongly supported the idea of an ever sharper political distinction between the parties involved. Thus, through great symbolic conflicts,[57] the more general divergence between the two lines of thought would become apparent. Furthermore, it must also be noted that, during these years, the Gladstonian reappraisal of the old Conservatism strongly condemned Tory democracy, vilifying it as 'demagoguism...applied in the worst way, to put down the pacific, law respecting, economic elements which ennobled the old Conservatism'. It had no roots and, 'inflaming public passion', it was unable to 'resist excessive and dangerous innovation'.[58]

In the 1880s, of course, this need for bipolar politics was informed by the radicalization of the social conflict, showing more clearly than before the growing divergence of class interests. This propensity to return to a somewhat traditional representation of the political clash also embodied the need to channel and control social unrest, reviving old divisions. It was not surprising that in 1891 the Unionist Liberal Jesse Collings criticized the tendency shown by Gladstonian Liberals and Tories to resume old *querelles*: Gladstonians aimed at portraying the clash 'as the old one between "Liberals" and "Conservatives", and ignoring the Irish Question altogether, or as far as they possibly can. They are striving to fight on the lines of 1885 with the advantages of an attacking party which they had not then.' As for Conservatives, they did their best to help Gladstonians recover the image of a traditional two-party system:

> ...firstly, by conceding to them in the Press and on platforms the names of 'Liberals' and 'Radicals'. In all the elections I have taken part in Conservative Chairmen, Speakers, Agents etc., etc., almost invariably by habit allude to the Gladstonians by these Party names...Secondly, by speeches, leaflets, etc., dealing with the respective action in past years of the 'Liberal' and 'Conservative' parties (before 1886). Instituting historical comparisons between the two parties and contending for the superiority of the 'Conservative' policy...It should be avoided now as it assists the Gladstonians in putting Home Rule out of sight and mind...and effectually helping them in their efforts to make the electors believe that the contest is one between 'Liberals' and 'Conservatives'.[59]

The 'revolutionary' Home Rule proposal itself stemmed from Gladstone's illusory hope to oust those forces which, like the Irish representatives, interfered with institutional mechanisms and hindered the fundamental activity around which the whole British constitutional apparatus was built - that is to say, the search for mediation through the confrontation of politically divergent but socially homogeneous interests. The emblem of such a confrontation was at first the relationship between Cabinet and Parliament, subsequently replaced, when party government was established, by the relationship between majority and opposition. Within this context, the role of the parties was a crucial one in that it not only ensured representation, but also guaranteed an efficient working of the government-parliament relationship. It was therefore generally accepted that the survival of the peculiar British social balance depended upon the success of the delicate two-party system as highlighted by an article published in the Conservative *Quarterly Review*. Unlike supporters of 'fusion', the author asked 'reliable' members of the Liberal party to remain inside their party, since:

> ...there is no danger imminent which makes it necessary for all the weightier men in politics to collect in the same citadel...Party government has only one *raison d'être*...namely the securing of efficient criticism for even the best men and the best measures. The strength and usefulness of party government in England have involved the fundamental fact, which continental parties have never appreciated, that men of ancient lineage, of wealth, experience and political education, have habitually ranged themselves in the same fold with those whose programme has involved much more advanced, if not revolutionary, theories. It is thus that discussion of affairs has been so markedly dominated by common ends and interests, if by varying means, and we have postponed or avoided revolutions by continuous compromise and change.[60]

Salisbury, however, felt that reaffirming confidence in the role of his own party meant resisting the pressures that aimed at eradicating the Tory tradition by diluting it with the nebulous indistinctiveness of Liberal

moderatism, or perhaps even trying to assimilate it. This required uncommon efforts of organization and advertising, given the widespread pessimism about the fate of true Conservative principles, which even the Tories saw as dying, if not already dead. Lord Eustace Cecil, Salisbury's brother, wrote in 1887:

> As far as I can see, Conservatism is dead as the landed interest. Unionism is possible - but only by great concessions on the Conservative side - and a reconstruction in principles which must eventually be followed by a change of name. God help you through it all.[61]

The opportunity to reject successfully the allure of fusion was therefore strictly connected to the identification of a well-defined partisan policy that might facilitate the recovery of Conservative pride, while strengthening the electorate's confidence, after decades of more or less forced adaptation to the democratic outcomes of social transformation.

The 'Kentish Gang': Setting up New Loyalties

Disraeli's defeat in 1880 and Churchill's estrangement from the political scene in 1887, while partially reaffirming the 'old identity' of the party, did not succeed in solving one of the main problems precipitated by democratic Toryism. This was the role of organization in a political and social context that could no longer be controlled by means of traditional paternalistic patterns of social obligation. Randolph Churchill's rapid ascent showed that organization was closely linked to the need of the new Conservative grassroots - the 'urban middle class supporters' of Liberal descent - to have greater weight within the party, at least at the intermediate level, in recognition of their irreplaceable presence.[62] Had the issue been ignored, Salisbury's leadership might have been further attacked, particularly because of the greater influence that the lower classes had achieved in public issues, while the opportunity to gain their attention and support might have been hindered.

In 1885, having acted as principal agent of the Conservative party for two years, Bartley resigned from office. His assessment of the overall organizational situation[63] indicated that many of the old problems that had troubled and defeated his predecessor, John Gorst, still remained. The basic contrast was between the 'aristocratic' nature and image of the party, too often seen as 'the amateur amusement of the upper classes', and the new, popular 'rank and file'.[64]

> They - the rank and file - are each year growing more educated; they are aware they have the power of settling the election...Hitherto we have tried to organise and put party from the top; we must now do it from the bottom. We have been trying to heat a mass of water by placing fire at the top of the kettle...We must now place the fire at the bottom, and so allow each atom of the water to rise to the level which its warmth justifies. If this is done, in a very short time the whole mass will be heated. It may, indeed, boil over and get out of bounds, but this depends on the cook, and it is a danger that must be faced.
>
> Obviously, any organization granting its grassroots a high degree of freedom risks witnessing power fall into the hands of meddlers and demagogues. It is an inevitable risk and...the danger, however, will be found to be less the broader the basis of the organization is made and the keener the interest that is taken in the party by that organization.
>
> The real *crux*, however, conceal it how we may, is this - Does Conservative organization mean continuing the old dead system, and putting a working man in here and there just to keep him and his class in a good humour and to make pretence we are going with the times; or does it mean that awful Frankenstein creation, where every man, however humble, will have his share in the party, and which when perfected will be an organization to really appoint and lead the future leaders both in pace and policy? I am convinced that this last is the only organization worth the name. Come it must - with the household suffrage it comes as sure as fate. If the Conservative is afraid of it he is afraid of the inevitable. If it really means the extinction of the Conservative party, the party must be extinguished. If, on the other hand, it means - as I venture to think it does - a feeling of an individual share, responsibility, and interest in the doings of the Conservative party by each Conservative, however humble in station, the building of the party by the people, the foundation of the party on the people, the nationalisation of the Conservative party, carrying out the idea of Lord Beaconsfield when he asked, 'What is the Tory party unless it represents the national feeling?' - then, I venture to assert, that it will electrify the valley of the dry bones with new life, with youthful powers, and with national usefulness.[65]

Bartley felt that the masses could endanger institutions if the ruling classes lost ties with them and the masses were not guided. The chief agent stressed here the delicate relationship existing between the party's political leaders and its rank and file:

> ...the aristocratic leaders live in a lofty sphere but in a limited one. The upper ten thousand is a very important body, but now that there are to be five million voters it is very small numerically, and will carry less and less party weight.

The extension of suffrage, however, left no alternative open: 'whether we like it or not, the future Conservatism will be democratic, and the future Conservative organization will also be democratic. It will include the base of the pyramid as well as the apex.' Bartley's beliefs reflected his position as 'manager' of the Conservative electoral machine during

the two years in which profound electoral changes definitively altered political representation in the Victorian age. Like Gorst in the 1870s, Bartley also deemed it possible to stop the advance of radical democracy by establishing a sound Conservative democracy. The latter, however, could take root and grow only if a well structured organization existed that, on the one hand, guaranteed the daily working of an ever larger and by now indispensable management, and, on the other, fulfilled the growing demand for 'political' participation which was one of the consequences of the extension of suffrage. Such a pattern would of course endanger the old élitist notion of the party and was therefore opposed by the old aristocratic clique.

Bartley immediately wrote to Salisbury to complain about indifference among the top ranks of the party towards his recommendations:

> I feel I am not in the confidence of the leaders of the party...The organization throughout the country is most inefficient. Many of the agents are apathetic and new ones of a different class are needed in many places. The Conservative press is miserable[66]...but to carry this out requires in my judgement someone as agent...who will enjoy the full confidence of the party leaders and receive from them their constant direction, support and assistance.[67]

Salisbury reacted to these complaints in his own way. Indeed, this aristocratic and introvert politician, whose temperament and culture made him mistrust the party as an organized entity, had in the 1880s begun to adapt to the idea of the 'necessary evil', as represented by new organizational needs.[68] However, unlike the Tory democrats, Gorst and Bartley who were committed to building a party with a more democratic organization, Salisbury's aim was to ensure the efficient working of the machine without having to share control of the party. From this point of view, Salisbury felt that neither Gorst nor Bartley was trustworthy. They had indeed contributed significantly to the rationalization of the party organization, but were dangerously inclined to 'politicize' organizational work - for personal purposes and ambitions too. Gorst, as a member of Parliament, took part in parliamentary manoeuvres and intrigues.[69] Bartley, whose aim was to grant the rank and file more power, did not conceal the grudges he bore the traditional leadership. Conversely, the Conservative leader expected the organization to function efficiently as the result of the absolute loyalty of its different components. Salisbury naturally believed that limiting democratic 'intrusions' in political decision-making was an important objective to be achieved, first of all, within his own party.

The new undisputed leader was personally convinced that the 1867 Second Reform Act had removed the only real obstacle to the advance of popular government.[70] Representative bodies would, in his opinion, undergo inevitable development.[71] He nevertheless felt that it was still possible to revive the natural sources of Conservatism existing throughout

the country, and thus to weaken and regulate the democratic transformation in progress. It was a question of locating the channels through which such 'unexpressed' Conservatism could coalesce into a real political force. At the institutional level, the major channel was no doubt the Upper House. However, in order to reach the lowest levels of society, the only feasible instrument, in times of declining community loyalties, was the party.

For the executive, under Salisbury's leadership, it was a matter of modifying the context in which Disraeli had acted in attempting to keep up Gladstone's reformist 'pace'. In other words, it was necessary to lower the temperature of the ongoing dispute in order to guarantee a dispassionate political and institutional arena. Salisbury felt that Conservatism, whether in government or in opposition, should find the way to strengthen defensive and negative aspects. Also, it should not fake a Liberalism aimed solely at fulfilling the calls for artificial changes put forth by demagogues and willingly taken up by the 'uncultivated masses'. His political orientation in fact seemed more suited to administering the opposition rather than the government,[72] in that it chiefly exploited the antagonistic aspects of public life, as could also be inferred from the lack of interest shown by his governments towards the legislative 'construction'.[73] 'Individual reforms - E.H.H. Green has recently pointed out - were seen as possible, perhaps even desirable, but a programme of social reform was an anathema to Salisbury's *Weltanschauung*'.[74] In his opinion, the executive must have nothing to do with the perpetual class struggle. An excessive use of legislation[75] might speed up the conflict and widen social rifts. Salisbury, on the other hand, referred to himself as a policeman whose presence was due only to the existence of 'criminals'.[76] He thus stressed the image of politics as a 'reaction' firmly opposed to the democratic results of social change, but also unable to find an alternative stand to Liberal reformism.[77]

At this time no sector of parliamentary Conservatism could claim to have well-founded plans either on the great constitutional issues or on education or local government, that did not follow the logic of Liberalism and extended suffrage. This adjustment was undoubtedly affected by Salisbury's especially painful perception (though increasingly disenchanted in the course of time) that any effort intended to check the rise of democracy was useless.[78] Another important factor was the essentially homogeneous nature of the Victorian ruling class.

Awareness that the general historical trend was unfavourable to the forces of conservation did not prevent the Tory leader recognising the demand for moderation coming from the nation. The Liberal proposal for Home Rule and the actual economic and political conditions at home and abroad made the Conservative ascent to government easier. Nevertheless, it was thanks to Salisbury's strategic nous that a minority party - internally split and symbolized by the figure of the 'country gentleman' who resisted being politically organized in any way - was able to exploit such an opportunity for laying the foundations of modern mass Conservatism, aware of its chances of becoming the establishment party. Salisbury

appealed for renewed class pride, rejecting what he felt were deceptive and ambiguous Disraelian populist evocations. He thus helped draw the new profile of the Conservative party that, having played down the traditions of Toryism and social obligation,[79] went on to become the main reference point for all the established interests of society. These were, of course, the interests of those privileged, mainly urban classes that, according to Gladstone, acted as a separate and hostile body towards the masses in a country where, according to the Liberal leader, very deep rifts between class had not yet occurred.[80]

With the cooperation of a new and trustworthy staff, Salisbury set out therefore, from as early as 1885, to make the organizational machinery both functional and harmless. In this operation, the key men, labelled 'the Kentish gang' on account of their geographical origin and the complicity that united them,[81] shared an attribute that Salisbury particularly appreciated: an absolute lack of political ambition. The devotion and efficiency of the Chief Whip[82] in the Lower House, Aretas Akers Douglas,[83] and the chief agent Richard Middleton[84] seemed the ideal tools to compensate for the lack of enthusiasm on the part of the misanthropic and solitary leader with respect to organizational issues and contacts with the rank and file. In the House of Commons, Akers Douglas proved to be a brilliant and determined organizer, serving as *trait d'union* between the unapproachable and unfriendly prime minister and most Conservative backbenchers. His role was to watch over the ranks of Conservative representatives, making sure that they formed a united front when voting, and also to keep the headquarters informed about the opinions and doubts of the majority concerning the executive's goals. It was a particularly difficult task in that Akers Douglas, in close contact with W.H. Smith, Conservative leader in the House of Commons, had to be able to compensate for the 'anomaly' of a party and government leader who, despite the crucial weight of the Lower House vote, did not conceal his scepticism about the very principle of popular representation.[85] The Chief Whip, with Salisbury and the principal agent, was involved in the new, more functional Central Office, whose primary task was to manage the organization of the electoral campaign. Its revised structure allowed the Chief Whip to exert greater pressure on candidates. Indeed, the funds donated by the richer supporters increasingly flowed from local associations to the coffers of the party organs in London, thus confirming a gradual centralization of political activity. The increased funds available to the central bodies gave them greater control and influence over peripheral political activity and the chance to impose the crucial organizational changes developed in that period,[86] in contrast with the claims for autonomy on the part of most of local party activists.

The most dramatic restructuring, however, took place in the mechanisms and tasks of local organizations and the body uniting them, the National Union of Constitutional and Conservative Associations (NUCCA), in effect the main extra-parliamentary expression of Conservatism. The key figure

in this operation was the principal agent, Middleton, who had joined the management staff of the party machine with Akers Douglas shortly before Salisbury assumed the leadership of the brief 1885 government.[87] He was undoubtedly talented, and was therefore entrusted with the production and distribution of propaganda,[88] with arranging electoral coordination between local associations and the Central Office, and, above all, with planning[89] and controlling the restructuring of the national organizational network[90]. This meant gradually replacing the various solicitors and part-time officers in the electoral management of each local association with full-time agents. As Middleton wrote later, in recalling this period:

> It was a critical time just after the great extension of the franchise which necessitated immense changes in party organization. The day of the provincial solicitor who looked after the local interests of his party was over. We had to find men who could devote their whole time to work.[91]

His final goal was to set up a comprehensive network of professional agents, acting as the central nervous system, so to speak, of the whole national apparatus.[92] Any organizational matter was to be reported to the agent, who was to act as reference point and controller of the area entrusted to him.[93] These agents soon became a decisive component in elections. In fact, in 1891, Middleton supported the creation of the National Society of Conservative Agents, based on the federation of former regional associations, which aimed at providing the instruments for transforming semi-amateur staff into a network of professionals with a clearly defined status and salary, as well as ensuring the highest professional commitment on the part of the agents themselves.[94] Middleton, of course, tried to combine this need for rational management with a stronger, more powerful and secure political leadership. To do so, he kept in touch with agents at all levels, both personally and through the regional lieutenants. Above all, by appointing agents to constituencies where they had no previous personal contacts of any kind, he managed to avoid the development of local 'potentates'.[95] This new type of organizational network was immediately enacted in the major constituencies and, by the turn of the century, functioned in about 50 per cent of all the constituencies in the country.

As for the National Union, in 1885 a rule was passed that all Conservative associations of England and Wales would automatically become members of it, thus putting an end to the former criterion of entry based on free choice. The following year, Middleton developed a new system based on ten divisional (or provincial) unions, each one reproducing on a smaller scale the functions and subdivisions of the National Union. These unions acted under the full control of the principal agent, who appointed at the head of each provincial federation a trustworthy agent, paid by the Central Office, while a parliamentary Whip and Middleton himself (as honorary secretary of the National Union) were entitled, *ex-officio*, to seats on the Executive Committee and the Council of all

divisional unions. The aim of such widespread organization was to safeguard the party's core structure from possible attacks, such as the one by Churchill in 1883, by 'filtering' out the insidious claims for greater representation inside the party and the 'popular caprice and personal ambition' inherent in these political bodies.[96] This channelling of the inexorable organizational growth (in 1887, the NU numbered as many as 1100 associations) represented a viable system for keeping the advance of democracy within the party under control. In fact, through the bureaucratic process of transferring representation from the periphery to the centre, the 'protective' function was recovered - a function previously assigned to the practice of co-optation that, up to 1884, had served as the basic principle for appointing members to the Council and the Executive Committee of the National Union. While unable to develop a truly autonomous position, the divisional unions proved to be an important means for communicating the mood of the party's rank and file. They also pointed to the need to keep local influence alive and active - certainly not a point of secondary importance when preparing for the growth of representative democracy. That is why Salisbury - despite his conversion in the late 1880s to the new organizational style - did not fail to emphasize the importance of the 'local' aspect in any associational activity, as an antidote to the changing social relationships in modern society. He stated:

> Do not let any consideration of central action divert your attention for a moment from the supreme importance of having local organizations - a local organization of personal influence of man with man.[97]

Middleton followed a similar course in order to strengthen the potential of Conservative clubs, that had previously been quite important as far as political propaganda was concerned. With the aim of enlivening their activities, in 1885 he set up a Political Committee in one of the top London clubs and, in 1894, the Association of Conservative Clubs, with Salisbury as chairman. The latter, in a few years, would comprise most English Conservative clubs.[98] The workers' clubs were particularly important as they represented the simplest way of keeping in touch with and influencing working men. Membership was often conditional to offering an oath of loyalty to the party and its leaders.[99]

Salisbury's idea of a perfect organization was that of a party guaranteeing sound parliamentary cohesion and high electoral support without generating demands for greater participation in political decision-making or increasing participation or political enthusiasm. Salisbury's ability to limit democratic pressures on his own leadership largely depended on the functioning of the party, since he could not, owing to temperament and tradition, rely on any kind of charisma or demagogic power. Akers Douglas and Middleton were tireless and efficient,[100] as were the members of his staff, conduits through which he could enjoy fundamental contact with the party's rank and file and the real situation in

the country. His tremendous political insight helped him exploit such contacts and put them to work according to the requirements of a Conservative political strategy.[101] The special feature of this structure, however, was not so much its remarkable efficiency and uncommon loyalty to the party headquarters, as its ability to guarantee that both the represented and representatives supported the political choices made by a leader who considered such popular representation merely a deleterious result of the country's unbalanced constitutional development. Middleton enacted a process of gradual bureaucratization and professionalization of the organizational structures, and thus reconciled an efficient Tory party with democratic demands, while keeping the impact of the latter to a minimum. Indeed, it could be said that the chief agent was responsible for preserving the party's organizational identity at a time when pressures towards a vague moderate front might have confused the Conservative electorate.

The partial successes achieved during these years did not, of course, alter Salisbury's overall perception of himself as the leader of an historically doomed venture. The victories in the last decades of the century actually served as a paradoxical confirmation for the Conservative leader who, more than anyone else, had censured the consequences of 'modernization'. In fact, it became clear that a possible, partial halt to the forces of political transformation and change of social pace could only be obtained through the instruments that these very forces had made available; such a success would inevitably fall into the category of a bitter Pyrrhic victory.

The Primrose League

The phenomenon that best embodied the search for a more clearly defined Conservative identity, and Salisbury's mixed feelings about the new organizational set-up, was probably the Primrose League.[102] This epitomized not only the transformation of Conservatism at the end of the century, but of the whole British constitutional fabric. Salisbury himself, while acknowledging this new tool of Conservative 'resistance', was well aware that it both affected and resulted from that dreadful, inexorable cultural change begun in 1867:

> The old Conservative associations have done, and do still, an infinite amount of service, but in some respects and for some purposes they were better fitted for the old suffrage, the old arrangements of party, than they were for those which now exist. The Primrose League is freer. It is more elastic. It brings classes more together ...Now the Primrose League, in that respect represents to my mind the modifications of our constitution that have taken place in the past and modifications that will probably take place in the future.[103]

The Primrose League was founded in November 1883, on the initiative

of the members of the 'fourth party',[104] most notably Randolph Churchill, Sir Henry Drummond Wolff and John Gorst. At the outset, it resembled one of the organizational offspring of the restless heirs of Tory democracy,[105] so much so that its inspiration and name must be ascribed to the mythicizing of Disraeli that began immediately after his death.[106] After the July 1884 agreement between Churchill and Salisbury, the association lost its early mysterious and heterodox image and soon became one of the major mass organizations of the time, if not the 'most permanently successful of all political organizations that have ever been known in England'.[107] The initial choice to give the League a distinctly élitist character was almost immediately rejected in order to give access to the popular classes - a decision that no doubt also helped to extend recruitment to the upper classes, of whom there were a large number among League members.[108] Once promoted to the highest position in the Party and the Cabinet, Churchill, leader of the 'rebellious' group of founders, quickly lost interest in it. At the same time, the sizeable presence of large sectors of the ruling class, together with the rapid increase in the number of party members, made the League absolutely innocuous as regards political manoeuvering.

As far as goals were concerned, the Primrose League had no formal links with the Conservative party. It addressed all those who, whatever their political loyalties and social status, were interested in strengthening and promoting religious principles and the image of Crown and Empire.[109] However, after only a few years, it became an important supporting structure for the Conservative party. On its behalf, it carried out an intensive, voluntary programme of propaganda, and also helped in electoral registration and canvassing. The crucial feature of the Primrose League was that it went beyond mere propaganda and electoral activity (although it did include both); it was in effect directed towards more complex and continuous militancy.[110]

Keen observers of the political situation of the period, such as Ostrogorski and Lowell, immediately realized that the League's great success was due to general political indifference. Also, a fair proportion of the population, starting with the new country voters, were not yet ready to manage their own vote and could therefore be vulnerable to intense pressures.[111] An innovative approach was thus needed in order to bridge the gap between the distant world of Westminster and the great popular masses, to reach out to the newly enfranchised classes. Such an approach had to relate to the emotional rather than the political-rational aspects of propaganda. Above all, it required constant activity to break with the institutional pace of politics, usually centred around elections, and set in motion a more systematic and rewarding process of political acculturation and social integration. The latter did not aim to attenuate class differences, but to reconfirm and take them on by strengthening the sense of social hierarchy and its ability to guarantee mechanisms of social imitation and deference that, just a few decades before, had to a certain extent helped

maintain balance in the mid-Victorian political and social framework. Even the League's restoration of the image of the English gentleman, of knights and the old orders was part of the overall need for stability that, culturally and in terms of the collective imagination, was expressed by the romantic phenomenon of 'Victorian medievalism' - a nostalgic mythicizing of the Middle Ages and its traditions of social obligation and loyalty,[112] in contrast to a period of disorder and shattered social relationships.

Masonic-like rites and denominations[113] were used from the beginning, signalling the League's clear-cut desire to abandon the classic course of political association, whose 'rules' had been set out by Liberals and passively accepted by Conservatives. With the Primrose League, for the first time, Conservative culture emerged as such. Confidently and unhesitatingly, it proudly opposed the progressive 'enlightenment' of Liberals with the belief that even the most traditional battles fought by Conservatism could be won if they were boldly and imaginatively pursued. The innovations that the Primrose League brought about must therefore be seen in this light, not only its outward structure and organization but, above all, its language and 'revolutionary' use of means of communication.

The Primrose League was structured into basic local units called Habitations. Their representatives met once a year in London at the Grand Habitation. The whole structure was managed by a Great Council, including the League's honorary leader, the Grand Master, four deputy Grand Masters, the chief of the League's executive, the Chancellor, and a salaried managing officer, the Vice Chancellor: all these offices were strictly reserved to parliamentary leaders who co-opted other Grand Council members. In 1886, the uninterrupted expansion of the association led to the setting up of semi-decentralized bodies - Divisional Councils - to coordinate activities in neighbouring districts.[114] The Grand Council could promote by mandate individual Habitations ruled through the Council's Precepts and directed by Ruling Councillors, who headed Executive Councils that the Habitation members would elect each April. Within the local associations, members had a well-defined position in the hierarchy: at the lowest level were the Associates, who paid both the enrolment fee and a small yearly subscription (established locally) to their Habitation. At a higher level were Knights[115] and Dames, whose fees were higher and were paid directly to the Grand Council, to which they also paid a yearly tribute, as well as an enrolment fee to their Habitation. The titles were also effective from a theatrical point of view, being accompanied by a vast apparatus of diplomas, badges, pins, ribbons and other decorations, according to rank and the services performed.[116] The Conservatives did not seem to worry about the Liberals' sarcastic attitude towards such devices, as they felt they comprised a fundamental step in constructing strong party discipline and creating an all-embracing 'circuit' that could guarantee both mobility and loyalty:

> Some sorry sneers have been directed against the nomenclature and decorations of the Primrose League, but the answer to these is found in the fact that all are proud to bear the titles which testify to their energy and chivalrous work. The badges are of enormous value, for they are not only a certificate of membership but an absolute introduction into Primrose circles, and thus give every member the opportunity of using his talents and influences in every part of the country.[117]

The Primrose League guaranteed all its members political and social advancement, and in exchange asked them to share 'faith' in tradition and to be consistent in carrying out their functions:

> ...every associate can earn promotion, without fee or tribute, to high rank, upon representation by the Habitation to which he belongs that he is deserving of the honour. And here occurs the obvious reflection that any man making his way to distinction through the grades of the Primrose League has the road open to him for all political eminence. He who cares to study public affairs and to cultivate his talents, with a view to the persuasion of others and the defence of approved principle, will soon make his mark and be welcomed as one of those who can guide men aright. The people have sought for a new faith in these times of change and turmoil...But a true doctrine has now been propounded. It is based on the highest traditions of British statesmanship as handed down by Pitt and Palmerston and Beaconsfield.[118]

League members were asked to commit themselves totally. Any member who was not engaged 'in other political duties' was, according to regulations, obliged to put himself

> ...at the disposal of the Council, for the execution of political work, especially in actively and energetically canvassing any sub-district to which he may be appointed, so as to acquaint himself perfectly with the social position, influence, and political movements within the district, and shall at all times be especially watchful of the organization and proceedings of the opposite party, and by every lawful means shall endeavour, to the best of his ability, to promote the objects of the League.
>
> Every Member shall make himself acquainted, as soon as possible, with the most efficient means of political organization.
>
> Every Member shall endeavour to see that all adherents in his district are placed on the Register of Voters, and shall furnish a list of such persons to the Secretary of the Ruling Councillor of the Habitation.
>
> Every Member, if required, shall report, either in person or by letter (as may be most convenient to him), the results of his labour and observation.
>
> Every Member is expected to give his attendance, or report by letter, at one or more of the meetings of the Habitation in each year, and any Member failing to do so for a whole year, shall be liable to have his name struck off the Register of the Habitation.[119]

This crucial canvassing activity was accompanied by the even more important public meetings, through which social events were raised to the rank of political initiatives. Each Habitation would put on, free of charge or for a minimum fee, musical or theatrical performances, puppet shows, excursions, dances and tea parties, 'aspiring to be political but not boring, educational but not "improving", respectable but not censorious'.[120] Propaganda, in fact, played a secondary role during such events. Tedious political speeches were replaced by new and more 'efficient' instruments of communication such as 'magic lanterns' and *tableaux vivants*, showing, for example, images of imperial magnificence. Frequently, to reinforce the image of an association that aimed to put classes in touch with each other, Habitation members visited aristocratic country houses where, albeit briefly, the aspiration of social integration became reality, thereby fulfilling one of the League's principal goals. Algernon Borthwick wrote that:

> ...one of the chief duties incumbent on every Primrose centre is to combat and destroy the Radical fallacy that in modern politics classes are antagonistic. The League, on the contrary, brings all classes together. All vote on a footing of absolute equality, and all meet on terms of the truest fraternity.[121]

The most significant feature of the Primrose League was, however, the active inclusion of women in political life. It is likely, in fact, that the experience of this Conservative league substantially, albeit accidentally, helped overcome the great prejudice against women and their political involvement. Although it never dealt with the topic of suffrage,[122] the League was extremely successful in mobilizing women and introducing them to political life well before the extension of suffrage to women in 1918. No political organization had ever before employed women in militant groups. The Primrose League did not merely exploit their contribution but, according to Ostrogorski, 'in every respect it may be said that the League rests on women; it is they who keep it going and eventually ensure the success'.[123] Women were granted membership from December 1883,[124] and in many Habitations they constituted the majority, showing considerable ability in organizational activities and in canvassing,[125] where the 'persuasive gentleness characteristic of their sex'[126] proved to be crucial in overcoming the mistrust usually ensuing from any impact with political propaganda. A representative noted:

> The Primrose Ladies do not confine their work to the making of speeches...they organize election arrangements; they canvass electors; they manage the work of the polling days; they lend their carriages to bring voters to the polling places; they take voters in their carriages and personally charioteer them to the pool.[127]

Moreover, their contribution greatly helped to increase the League's appeal, thanks to an extensive management of social relations aimed at uniting not only classes but gender as well.[128] The influential presence of women in the League even resulted in a central body for women - the Grand Council of Dames - located in London, whose activity, nevertheless, was totally subject to the decisions of the Grand Council, an exclusively male agency.

The painstaking activism of Conservative women alarmed Liberals, compelling them to spend a good deal of energy on trying to recover ground. In 1886, they founded a federation of the Associations of Liberal Women, following the organizational pattern of the Birmingham Caucus, based on representation and self-government. Indeed, unlike the Primrose League, the statute of the federation of Liberal women did not foresee a central autocratic power, and membership was open to women only.[129] Liberal women's associations aimed at granting a 'political education' through speeches, readings and courses in civic education.[130] However, this action was generally less fruitful than the proposals forwarded by the Conservative League. Political colour notwithstanding, the phenomenon of emerging female militancy was a feature of a more general trend towards the growth of extra-parliamentary political activity.

This did not necessarily mean that the party's inner circle was subject to increased pressure from outside. The Primrose League, for example, never claimed to participate in debate on the Conservative political line. On the contrary, the very nature of the League's appeals to defend the empire and religion made it a potentially non-party structure, suitable for attracting followers among those approaching politics for the first time or those who were uncertain of their choices. A Primrose Dame wrote:

> I am convinced that the broader the foundations and the more truly liberal (which is a word I am disinclined to leave entirely to our opponents) we can make this Association the more certainly we shall attract all the moderate, earnest men, and keep them in our ranks.[131]

Their steadfast cooperation with the Conservatives did not in fact yield any official connection. The League was thus granted greater working autonomy, while the party enjoyed the benefits of a supporting mass organization without the inconveniences usually associated with this type of body.

Not surprisingly, the unofficial presence of the League stirred up latent conflict within the National Union, the other great Conservative mass body. For instance, the party's principal agent, Middleton, expressed his disapproval of the attempts by some Habitations to establish a regular relationship with the party.[132] While the National Union was trying to project the image of a political body, with internal factions more or less favourable to the party establishment, the Primrose League was projecting itself as a 'popular', undemanding and, indeed, self-funded association.

By not interfering with political decision-making, it fitted perfectly into Salisbury's overall strategy, and thus substantially helped overcome the fear of an organizational/electoral impasse after the 1883 Corrupt Practices Act. The League was officially separate from the party; it supplied free-of-charge militancy, and could use its financial resources without encountering legal difficulties.

Of course, to understand the huge success of the Primrose League one must refer to anthropological/political concepts and the issue of acculturation and discipline as legitimating strategies.[133] It was not mere chance that the League's ultimate goal, apart from activities related to electoral needs, was to permeate the daily life of the masses: a major role in this respect was undoubtedly played by the unprecedented interest shown towards the sectors of the population traditionally excluded from the political-electoral systems. Habitations brought together sections of society that the party usually neglected: women, children, non-voters and even non-Conservatives. It can therefore be affirmed that the association was vital to the modernization of the British political system in that it was the most important 'systematic attempt to make political loyalty an integral part of the lives of a large number of people rather than the private language of an élite'.[134] A further indication of this trend was found in the Primrose League's desire to overcome age, as well as gender barriers. As of the 1890s, the League officially promoted the entry into its organization of *Juvenile* Branches, comprising children aged 7-16.[135]

The all-encompassing potential of the League's organizational experience represented the other side of the coin for men like Salisbury, who were grateful for its immediate functional effectiveness, but were also aware that 'the Conservative associations act mainly by public speaking. The Primrose League acts by private intercourse'.[136] This was a huge difference and unquestionably speeded up the 'alterations' to the system that were so dreaded by the Conservative leader. As seen before, he viewed the tendency to give political spin to feelings previously considered without class or party boundary (and to occupy greater space in public and private sectors traditionally thought extraneous to politics), as a warning that society was becoming increasingly vulgar[137] and that a deep, irreparable constitutional transformation was under way.[138]

Notes

1. The 'founder' of this interpretative trend was Cornford (1963, 35-6).

2. Studies based on a *quantum* analysis of the Unionist parliamentary vote incline towards this second hypothesis. See Fair (1986, 219-314).

3. A strong confutation of some speculative appraisals on the timeliness and opportuneness of the Gladstonian Home Rule project can be found in Matthew (1990, xxvii-cxcii).

4. See Rothblatt (1983, 498-9).

5. 'As regards assurance to Salisbury, he ought not to expect nor to receive any but the most general promises. His best security lies in our evident interest to keep him in power until Mr Gladstone and his Irish policy are finally out of the way.' (Chamberlain-James, 3 July 1886, Devonshire papers 2022). The analysis of the parliamentary behaviour of Unionist Liberals at this stage showed 'a state of uncertainty between autonomy and union with the Conservatives.' Fair (1986, 309).

6. Significantly, the personality that Conservatives feared the most had a large propagandistic impact on them, as Churchill pointed out to Chamberlain himself: 'You made a splendid speech last night. It is curious that you have more effect on the Tory party than either Salisbury or myself. Many of them had great doubts about our policy until you spoke.' Quoted in Marsh (1978, 140).

7. Quoted in Fraser (1962, 60).

8. An hagiographic biography of Balfour is by Egremont (1980).

9. A.J. Balfour to Lord Salisbury, 23 November 1888, in Harcourt Williams (1988, 261).

10. Quoted in Hurst (1962).

11. Quoted in Gwynn and Tuckwell (1917, 221).

12. On the previous lack of interest in imperial topics and on the absolute inconsistency of Chamberlain's public Unionist motives, see Jay (1981, 123).

13. See Fraser (1962, 55).

14. The agreement, formally confirmed the following year, declared that the seats 'held or contested' by candidates belonging to the alliance must not be challenged by members of the alliance itself. Instead, to hold or contest Gladstonian seats, a joint decision between Unionist and Conservative leaders in the Lower House was needed. See Fraser (1962, 56).

15. In the July 1886 polls, Unionists obtained 77 seats, Conservatives 317; in the opposition were 191 Liberals and 85 Irish nationalists. See Cook and Stevenson (1988, 74).

16. A wealth of literature is available on the feverish and often controversial events leading to Unionist stabilization. Classic references are: Fraser (1962); Goodman (1959, 173-89); Hurst (1967; 1964, 64-93); Cooke and Vincent (1974). Other interpretations are provided by: France (1987, 219-51); Fair (1986, 291-314); Lubenow (1988) and Jenkins (1988).

17. A non interpretative approach is Bradley's (1981, 41-3). On the subject see Searle (1995, 26-52).

18. Searle (1995, 36).

19. Marsh (1994, 275).

20. Despite great temperamental differences and the electoral clash that saw them as opponents in the Birmingham constituency, the two politicians never concealed their mutual admiration; in 1885, when the situation was still clear, Chamberlain stated that Churchill was 'a man I really like and who might be - and perhaps will be - on our side some day.' See Foster (1981). Randolph Churchill's political career is quite well documented in this work.

21. Chamberlain 'in 1886 told Arthur Balfour that his Radicalism at least demanded a strong imperial parliament, a view reflecting the Birmingham

experience that, where there was "work to be done", political authority had to be clear and decisive'. Jay (1981, pp. 124-5).

22. Quoted in Marsh (1994, 282)

23. See Davis (1975, 85-104); Gailey (1987).

24. The pretext for the split was the traditional debate on the budget between the Ministers of the Navy and of War (who as usual expected exceptions to their budgets) and Churchill who, as Chancellor of the Exchequer, had drafted a strict programme to cut down expenses: 'When he threatened to resign, almost a routine step in such circumstances, Salisbury took him at his word. The immediate ground for the breach was, from the Prime Minister's point of view, well chosen, for "the classical annual resignation of a Chancellor of the Exchequer against his colleagues in the Army and Navy", as Chamberlain called it, was not likely to enable Churchill to mobilize a wide measure of support. He began instead to experience the disfavour which Tories traditionally reserve for rockers of the boat, particularly at a time when the boat's position was so obviously insecure.' See Feuchtwanger (1985, 194). On January 1st, 1887 Churchill wrote to Chief Whip Akers-Douglas 'that he had left himself free to join any "coalition, fusion or reconstruction.... Which by its composition and its policy will be an earnest and a guarantee to the country that a period of peaceful, progressive administration has in reality set in'". Quoted in Foster (1981, 321).

25. Quoted Shannon (1996, 233).

26. Quoted in Coleman (1988, 178).

27. In March 1887, the Conservative journal *National Review* contained a direct attack on Churchill, accusing him of considering 'the financial policy of Lord Salisbury's Government, as extravagant; its domestic policy, as inadequate; and its foreign policy, as meddlesome and methodless...And if Lord Randolph sincerely believes these charges to lie at Lord Salisbury's door - and his belief is shared by some gentlemen - what separates him and them from the Gladstonian Radicals, and what united them with the Conservative Party?...' See Baumann (1887, 3).

28. See *The New Conservative Programme,* London, 1887, a collection of Churchill's major speeches.

29. Quoted in Foster (1981, 295).

30. Baumann (1887, 4). A meaningful opinion of Churchill is expressed by the Queen, who found him crazy and disloyal. See M. Hardie (1938, 125).

31. Salisbury said that this would be 'rather like leaving the cat in charge of the cream jug'. Quoted in Feuchtwanger (1985, 193).

32. Reacting to Salisbury, who feared loss of support among small landowners, Churchill stated: 'The country gentlemen, like the farmers, always think they are being plundered and ruined.' Quoted in Coleman (1988, 178).

33. By the mid-1880s, it was being said in all political circles that Churchill was preparing to become the leader of the Conservative party and head of government. On this issue, see Foster (1981). His friend and esteemer, Chamberlain, had similar hopes and, in February 1887, still displayed a defiant self-assurance: 'Of course I shall be Premier, there is nothing more certain, and...I will rebuild the fortress. I will reform the Party, so rudely torn asunder by Mr.

Gladstone.' Jay (1981, 150).

34. Quoted in Chilston (1961, 110). Both men, in the author's view, deluded themselves that they were indispensable 'to their original parties and that ultimately the latter must surrender to them and take them back on their own terms'. (Ibid., 111).

35. In August 1887, Churchill reminded Chamberlain that 'you and I can do nothing by ourselves. I think we must both stick to Lord H[artington] coute que coute.' Quoted in Fraser (1962, 62).

36. Searle (1995, 37)

37. See Feuchtwanger (1985). 'We shall not have Home Rule,' Chamberlain wrote in February 1887, 'we shall have improved Government in Ireland, there shall be great Reforms throughout Great Britain and Ireland.' Quoted in Jay (1981, 150).

38. 'Goschen was a crabbed ditherer without a scintilla of Churchill's charisma either in the Commons or the country. True, apart from the Fair Trade angle, from Salisbury's point of view Goschen had been detached from Gladstone and official liberalism'. Shannon (1996, 235)

39. Between 1888 and 1892, while Churchill left the political scene because of a serious and mentally debilitating illness that was to result in his untimely death, Chamberlain was caught in a situation that offered no political outlets; despite several threats to leave the alliance, he grew closer and closer to Conservative positions. See Jay (1981, 155-169). According to Jay: 'The political decline of the idea of a "National Party" can also be ascribed to the erosion of the status of its promoters. Between 1887 and 1889, in fact, the controversies between Churchill and Chamberlain reached unprecedented levels and, shrewdly exploited by the Conservative leadership, led to the end of their political association.' (161-2). Marsh pointed out that: 'Together Churchill and Chamberlain might have turned Unionism in a centrist direction. But after resigning from Salisbury's cabinet, Churchill followed an erratic course, prone to outbursts against ally and enemy alike. Meanwhile Chamberlain's interest in empire brought out differences in policy between the two men, particularly over defence expenditure, which Churchill sought to reduce and Chamberlain to increase'. Marsh (1994, p.314).

40. Searle (1995, 36-37).

41. When Churchill made use of the National Union against Salisbury, Baumann wrote: 'Lord Salisbury was a mere name outside London. Since that day there has been growing up slowly - for confidence is a plant of slow growth - a deep and enthusiastic attachment among Conservatives for Lord Salisbury, founded on admiration for his great qualities, his patience, his courage, his lofty magnanimity, his far-seeing sagacity, tutored by experience: qualities which mark him out, not only as the great leader of a party, but as the trusted and beloved Minister of a Nation. It is this fact which Lord Randolph Churchill seems, for the moment, to have forgotten.' See Baumann (1887, 10).

42. Quoted in Chilston (1961, 104). Hicks Beach, assistant to Salisbury, declared, in 1886, all his doubts about the possibility of maintaining a Conservative government: 'I confess to much doubt whether the country can be governed nowadays, by persons holding opinions which you and I should call even moderately conservative.' See Hicks Beach (1932, I, 301-302).

43. 'The object to be obtained for the safety of the country', the Queen wrote to the Unionist Liberal George Joachim Goschen, 'is a union with the Conservatives to put a check on revolutionary changes.' The name suggested for this new grouping was 'Loyalist' or 'Constitutionalist'. Quoted in Coleman (1988, 179).

44. Kebbel (1892, 21). Edward Dicey too is quite sceptical about any kind of party recomposition other than the one featuring unionist liberals 'coalescing with the Conservatives'. It is inevitable because 'the time has gone by for any reconciliation of the moderate and extreme liberals on a common platform other than of Home Rule...If therefore, the Liberal Unionists still image that by refusing to call themselves Conservatives they are keeping open the door for a possible reconstruction of the old Liberal party, they are blind to the evidence of facts...No real progress is being made toward the formation of a third party, independent of, and distinct from, Gladstonians and Conservatives alike.' See E. Dicey (1889, 642-3).

45. The principal expert on this issue remarked: 'A National or Centre party would possess the degree of internal cohesion which the party of resistance Salisbury desired would require. But whereas the party of resistance would exclude Chamberlain, the National party would exclude Salisbury. Churchill's plan had no place for Salisbury even at the Foreign Office, which he promised to Lord Rosebery.' See Marsh (1978, 124).

46. Salisbury's main problem was not so much the inevitable concessions to the allies as keeping a firm hold on the government: 'if for the sake of a great public object, of an object transcending all other objects, you are maintaining the Government on the support of that which is not a coalition, but is an alliance, you must not wonder, you must not blame us if to a certain extent...the colour of the convictions of the Unionist Liberals joins with the colour of the convictions of the Conservative party in determining the hue of the measures that are presented to Parliament.' ('Salisbury at Liverpool', *The Times,* 13 January 1888).

47. France (1987, 226-7).

48. Ibid. (227). On a possible coalition under Hartington's leadership, Middleton, principle agent, stated: 'Outside the House the effect would I fear be disastrous and although it might be possible to keep the more educated in hand the bulk of the Party would go to pieces.' Quoted in Chilston (1961, 104).

49. Crackanthorpe (1889, 753).

50. Wallop (1891, 554). The same 'practical' criteria were followed by many Liberal and Conservative intellectuals. In R.E. Prothero's words, 'In the extension and consolidation of that alliance, and its fusion into a homogeneous whole, lies the germ of the National Party...which will attract to its ranks, not only Conservatives and Liberals, but every democrat...' See Prothero (1889, 572).

51. E. Dicey (1889, 646).

52. Crackanthorpe (1889, 751).

53. A.J. Balfour to Lord Salisbury, 23 November 1888, quoted in Harcourt Williams (1988, 261).

54. As Chamberlain suggested during a meeting in Birmingham, a 'National party which should exclude only the extreme sections of the party of reaction...and

the party of anarchy.' Quoted in Jay (1981, 153).

55. An Imperialist (1885, 184-5).

56. 'With us the rupture of party has always been succeded sooner or later by fresh consolidation into two opposing hosts'. [A. Elliot] (1890, 583)

57. In January 1887, Salisbury declared: 'If you look into the history of this country since Parliamentary Government began you will find that parties range themselves, not according to their opinion on 20 smaller subjects which might occupy a portion of their time, but on some one great issue by which men's minds are turned. First, it was a dynastic issue; later on you had the American War; then you had the French Revolution; then you had the great question of Reform; next, the great question of Protection; now we have the great question of Ireland.' Quoted in Marsh (1978, 118). This is a peculiar feature of British politics, which Gladstone and Disraeli more than anyone else helped develop, focussing the 'election-referendum' machinery on key issues which were meant to appeal to the electorate.

58. Quoted in Matthew (1990, xii).

59. Quoted in Boyce (1987, 13).

60. Howorth (1887, 541).

61. France (1987, 234).

62. 'It becomes clearer' the chief agent Bartley complained to Salisbury, 'after every appointment that though men may work their hearts out and make every sacrifice financial and otherwise when the Conservative party is in opposition and in difficulties yet in prosperous times all is forgotten and all honours, emoluments and places are reserved for the friends and relations of the favoured few, many of whom were in the nursery, while some of us were fighting up hill battles for the party.' Quoted in Cornford (1967, 268).

63. Bartley (1885, 611-19).

64. On the links between Conservatism and the working classes, see McKenzie and Silver (1968).

65. Bartley (1885, 611-19).

66. *The National Review* repeatedly dealt with the endemic weakness of the Conservative press. See in particular a Conservative journalist (1886, July).

67. Quoted in Feuchtwanger (1968, 164-5).

68. After the 1880 electoral defeat, Salisbury's wife wrote to Disraeli: 'We must have caucuses', as she considered this to be the reason for the Liberal electoral success. Quoted in Marsh (1978, 184).

69. In 1891 Balfour wrote to Salisbury that Gorst, though a member of Parliament, if not of the Cabinet, showed 'that he is not bound by the ordinary rules of honour which regulate the relations between colleagues. Neither you nor I who have long watched his career, are in the least surprised: but it is impossible longer to resist the conclusion that he is irreclaimably treacherous both by temper and by calculation.' See A.J. Balfour to Lord Salisbury, 28 September 1891, quoted in Harcourt Williams (1988, 357).

70. On Salisbury's attitude from before the Second Reform Act until his achievement of the party leadership, see 'Introduction' in P. Smith (1972).

71. Salisbury described this inevitable occurrence by means of metaphor: 'I

believe there is an amusement popular in Canada that is called tobogganing. When you begin to go downhill you must follow the course which those who started you designed for you, and you must follow it, though you may have the profoundest conviction that it was not the wisest course to select; and you must follow it although you may reserve to yourselves abundant right to denounce with any amount of energy of language you please those who set you on that downward career.' Quoted in France (1987, 236).

72. Salisbury thought that Conservatism could sometimes better express its true nature in opposition, and the premier himself revealed to Balfour that, on some issues, he could obtain 'better terms for property out of office, than I can in office, upon this point'. (Salisbury to Balfour, 28 January 1892, Balfour Papers, British Library).

73. 'In my view', wrote Salisbury in 1881, 'there ought to be a strong distinction drawn between those Parliamentary functions, the performance of which is absolutely necessary to secure the working of the executive machine: and those which having no other object but to change laws under which we are living quite tolerably, can be suspended certainly without serious injury, and often with great advantage.' Quoted in P. Smith (1972, 95). A synthesis of the social laws of Salisbury governments is offered by Bellairs (1977, 20-4).

74. Green (1995, 125)

75. See Wallop (1891, 539-40).

76. See P. Smith (1972, 106).

77. For a different perspective that emphasizes the 'social' dimension of Salisbury's conservatism, see Steele (1999, 227-242).

78. See France (1987) and Thompson (1972, 254-5).

79. On some aspects of the tradition of democratic Toryism, see Glickman (1961, 111-43); P. Smith (1967); Feuchtwanger (1968).

80. In April 1886, Gladstone wrote to Rosebery about the struggle over the Irish question: 'More and more this becomes a battle between the nation and the classes.' On this aspect of the dispute, see Matthew (1990, xii).

81. The 'Kentish gang' comprised a group of 'organizers' of the Conservative party, headed by Lord Abergavenny, including Akers Douglas and the previous Chief Whip, Sir William Hart-Dyke. They supported the appointment of their fellow countryman Middleton to the office of principal agent.

82. The tasks of the representative assigned to be Whip, especially Chief Whip, are described in Lowell (1908, I, 449-55); Gladstone (1927, 519-28).

83. Born in 1851, in 1885 Akers Douglas was a representative of the St Augustine constituency in Kent. For his political career and biographical notes see Chilston (1961) and Our Conservative and Unionist Statesmen (1899, III, 108-11).

84. Little and vague information is available on the life of the unassuming principal agent, engineer of the reorganization of the Conservative party after 1885. Richard W. E. Middleton was born in 1846 in Putney, of an old Scottish family of seafaring traditions. At 13, he began his career in the Navy, which he abandoned in 1881; he then became secretary of the West Kent and Greenwich Carlton Club. In December 1882, he became agent for the Conservative party in

the West End constituency, holding the position until March 1885 when he was appointed principal agent. Afterwards he became Chairman of the National Society of Agents, of the Political Committees of the Constitutional and the Junior Constitutional Clubs, and of the Association of Conservative Clubs. See Our Conservatives (1899, VI, 109-112), one of the main - albeit unused - sources of biographical information about him.

85. See Salisbury (1883, 571).

86. On the modifications brought to party financing, see Stewart (1978); Feuchtwanger (1968, 199-200); Hanham (1968, 26; 1954, 69-90); Gwyn (1962).

87. His appointment could be seen as 'a real landmark. Middleton worked very closely with Salisbury and between the two men grew a rapport which delighted both and which was of immeasurable significance to the Conservative Party'. See Introduction in James (1970, xiii).

88. Middleton gave a substantial boost to the production and distribution of propaganda. According to the principal agent, the party pamphlets must be available 'through any bookseller...the object is to reach that class of people who are willing to read the truth as published by our side but who will not use the Conservative organization for the purpose.' (Quoted ibid.). As well as pamphlets and posters, the Central Office published, starting with 1885, *the Constitutional Year Book*, a sort of political agenda, easy to consult, listing facts and statistics of public interest; and, from 1892, *the Campaign Guide*, supplying electoral candidates with data, information and answers for their electoral campaigns. Specific attention was also devoted to developing local Conservative dailies. See Borthwich (1885, 634-45). On this issue see the comments by Marsh (1978, 201-2).

89. Sir Albert Rollit was also involved in the task. See Lowell (1908, 557).

90. See Shannon (1996, 307-343).

91. Quoted in Fawcett (1967, 14-15).

92. The registration agent had to find his way through a multitude of regulations while trying to secure the highest possible number of voters favourable to the party. He was now supported by the election agent, whose tasks were more complex. At the constituency level he 'was a man who organised a team of up to several thousand paid workers, so that they got through the essential work of canvassing and making arrangements for taking electors to the polling booths with the minimum of friction, with the maximum of noise and publicity'. See Hanham (1959, 236).

93. 'At every level, constituency, regional and national, the professional agent served and hence supervised the corresponding popular association of party stalwarts and volunteers.' See Marsh (1978, 194).

94. This was no easy process and came up against several obstacles, as was shown by the unsteady progress of the National Society of Conservative Agents, the uncertain success both of the magazine of Conservative agents, The Tory, founded in 1892, and the voluntary insurance fund that Middleton promoted. The Conservative Agents Benevolent Association was founded in 1892, but only 70 agents out of the 400 active in England and Wales actually subscribed. Similar difficulties were encountered by the corresponding Liberal organizations, showing the complexity of the passage from the concept of social organicism, where political

activity was but one feature of the vast network of social obligation, and the vote merely a visible acceptance of such activity. On the issue see A. Fawcett (1967); Comfort (1958); Marsh (1978).

95. Middleton himself underlined the point: 'I found most of these men myself, and so brought the provinces into closer touch with headquarters. I have kept them in close touch ever since'. Quoted in A. Fawcett (1967, 15). Control was so tight that none of these men achieved national appointments. Ibid.

96. 'Representation...', wrote Lowell, 'passed by graduated steps from the individual elector, through the branch or district associations and clubs, and through the central associations in each constituency to the provincial councils to be summed up in the Conference and Council of the whole Union'. See Lowell (1908, 559).

97. Quoted in McKenzie (1955, 175).

98. The Association offers 'free of charge, to any Conservative club that had chosen to affiliate itself, lectures and prizes for debating, lends them boxes of books, and supplies them with club requisites at cheap prices. It has organised a cycling club; publishes a monthly gazette for a penny a number.' See Lowell (1908, II, 7).

99. Ibid.

100. 'Douglas and Middleton', Salisbury declared, 'have never put me wrong.' Quoted in Marsh (1978, 190).

101. Middleton offered a brief description of the respectful hierarchical relationship between organizers and the political 'mind': 'all the excitement, and all the enthusiasm, were absolutely wasted unless there was one man at the head of affairs cool-headed, calm, and clear, who had in his mind the whole scheme he wished to work out, and who could direct all the energy and enthusiasm into the channel where it would have the greatest effect.' *Tory*, LI-LII, April-May (1897, 11-13).

102. The relevance of this association was detected, albeit only in part, by Ostrogorski. Aside from Robb (1942), it was not until 1985 that the first work was published offering an overall appraisal of the role played by the League in British political and social history: Pugh (1985). The study is useful for a detailed account of the emergence and development of the League.

103. Quoted in Rover (1967, 105).

104. On the origins of this small and rather unorthodox Conservative parliamentary lobby, see Gorst (1906); James (1959, 73-191); Quinault (1976, 315-40).

105. The Primrose League also had among its founders the owner and the editor of the Conservative daily *Morning Post*, Sir Algernon Borthwick and Sir William Hardman, respectively; the Members of the House of Commons, F. Dixon Hartland and Sir Henry Hoare; Churchill's brother-in-law, Lord Wimborne, and, also part of Churchill's milieu, Colonel Fred Burnaby and Sir Alfred Slade. On the origins of the association, initially called the Primrose Tory League, see The Primrose League (1887).

106. The name was supposedly chosen because primroses were Disraeli's favourite flowers. See The Primrose League (1887, 1-3) and Pugh (1985, 11-13).

107. Paul (1904-1906, IV, 192). To understand the successful growth of the League, it is useful to consider the data on the exponential increase in members and the total number of Habitations. The figures, although not absolutely reliable, clearly indicate the largest and most widespread political organization of the time. In March 1884, there were 46 Habitations and 957 members, including Knights, Dames and simple members. One year later, there were 169 Habitations and 11,366 members; in 1886, 1,200 local units counted 200,837 members; in 1887, 1,710 Habitations hosted 550,508 members. An uninterrupted growth resulted, in March 1891, in over 1 million members enrolled in 2,143 Habitations. See Pugh (1985, 26-8). Slightly different data are quoted, for the 1886-87 period, by Robb (1942, 208). An analytic description of the organizational structure until 1890, together with a list by counties, Habitations, and names of executives and founding dates are supplied in The Primrose League (1890).

108. Following the 'approval' of the League after the 'truce' between Churchill and Salisbury, many members of Parliament joined the Grand Council, with Salisbury and Northcote becoming patrons of the initiative.

109. On enrolment to the League, members had to subscribe to the following: 'I declare on my Honour and Faith that I will devote my best ability to the maintenance of Religion, of the Estates of the Realm, and of the Imperial ascendancy of the British Empire; and that consistently with my allegiance to the Sovereign of these Realms, I will promote, with discretion and fidelity, the above objects, being those of the Primrose League.' Quoted in Pugh (1985, 23).

110. A meaningful example is represented by the 1886 elections: 'During the elections the League was busy day and night furthering the Conservative and Unionist cause. At one time organising meetings, providing speakers, and dispensing literature; at another canvassing the electors and looking up out-voters. After the General Election the League...continues its labour with a punctuality and assiduity equal to a Government office.' In The Primrose League (1887, 18).

111. See Ostrogorski (1902, I, 551) and Lowell (1908, II, 13). In 1886 it was accepted that 'Knights and Dames particularly directed their efforts to the conversion of the newly enfranchised electors'. See The Primrose League (1887, 19).

112. The League was born 'from the spirit of emulation and honour of all the classes of that genuine volunteer force our forefathers called chivalry. Hence the Primrose League was formed on the basis of the old orders of knighthood.' The Primrose League (1887, 2).

113. To my knowledge, there is no literature specifically citing the relationship between Masonic institutions and mass political parties in England, nor on the Masonic pattern taken as a model for education politics. It was Wolff's idea to shape the Primrose League after the style of charitable institutions, of Masonry and the Orange Societies. See Sir Wolff (1908, II, 270), and Pugh (1985, 13 and 16). On the influence of Orange Lodges upon Conservatives, see Robb (1942, 147-8), and on the Lodges' role in English political activities in the 1830s, see Gash (1982, I, 142).

114. Divisional Councils or local head centres consisted of the officers and delegates of affiliated Habitations in the district, who met with the object of exchanging views on local organization, settling differences, and generally taking counsel together, while still holding themselves amenable to the paramount authority, the Grand Council of the League at headquarters. See The Primrose League (1887, 18-19).

115. There were also Knight Companions and, at a higher level, Knight Harbingers. Religious representatives had the title of Knight Almoners.

116. See The Primrose League (1887, 32-3).

117. Borthwick (1886, 38-9).

118. Ibid. (39).

119. The Primrose League (1887, 36).

120. Pugh (1985, 28).

121. Borthwick (1886, 36).

122. On women against female suffrage, see Cammarano (1984-1985, 5-22). On the political course of women's suffrage, see Rover (1967); Morgan (1975); Hollis (1979). The debate that developed in Britain during that period is thoroughly examined in Rossi-Doria (1990); Harrison (1978); Lewis (1987); van Wingerden (1999), Purvis and Stanley Holton (2000).

123. Ostrogorski (1902, I, 547).

124. 'Strange as it may seem the first intention of the founders of the Primrose League was to confine membership to the superior sex, but the question of including ladies soon decided itself; applications from duchesses downwards poured in, and a special branch was invented for them in the Spring of 1884.' See The Primrose League (1887, 4). On the foundation of the women's sphere of the League, see Lady Randolph Churchill (1908), especially ch. 6.

125. This activity became so important that a neologism was coined, replacing 'canvassing' with 'primrosing'. 'Lady Dashleigh is "primrosing" the village'. See *A Little Primrose Knight. A Story of the Autumn of 1885 by a Primrose Dame* (1890, 120).

126. The Primrose League (1885).

127. McCarthy (1891, 572).

128. Habitations with their own social activities satisfied various social needs; one representative sarcastically called the league 'a matrimonial agency'. See Pugh (1985, 30).

129. The back cover of the undated pamphlet, Women's Liberal Federation, stated that 'the object of the Federation is to bring into union all Liberal Associations of which Women are members and so to encourage their co-operation in the promotion of Reform. Each Association pays a fee of one guinea per annum.' The issue of female suffrage led to a further split among Liberal women, as did the Unionist issue when the Women's Liberal Unionist Association was founded. Gladstone's resistance to granting women the right to vote caused a stir in the Federation, so that the most moderate groups, loyal to the leader, had to split and reconvene in the National Liberal Association of Women. A synthesis of events is supplied by one of the protagonists: M.G. Fawcett (1912).

130. See Reid (1887), reprinted from the *Westminster Review*, prefatory note by Catherine Gladstone.

131. Malmesbury [Susan Harris] (1886, 416).

132. See Middleton to Mr Read, 24 May 1886, Chilston Papers, Middleton Copybook, Maidstone, Kent Archives Office.

133. Anyone who watches the work of Conservative Associations, wrote *The Quarterly Review* in 1891, 'and the astonishing vitality of the Primrose League and compares their activity with the state of Conservative organizations, even between 1880 and 1885, will be struck with the advance in the number of strenuous workers, in their devotion to the work, and with the fact that very frequently the most untiring and unselfish of these men are drawn from the middle and working classes.' All these outcomes and those of the future of course depended 'largely upon the extent to which the wealthier classes by their public spirit, and practical sympathy with their poorer neighbours, justify to the people the existing bases of society'. See Whitmore (1891, 258, 272).

134. Pugh (1985, 42).

135. The role of children in political activities was also encouraged by means of a certain type of propaganda. A novel written 'by a Primrose Dame' narrated the story of a child whose canvassing work helped a Conservative representative gain victory, by one vote only, cast by a dubious voter induced by the child to take the Conservative side. See *A Little Primrose Knight* (1890).

136. Quoted in Marsh (1978, 203-4).

137. Speaking about the Primrose League, of which she was one of the most visible representatives, Lady Salisbury stated: 'Of course it's vulgar, that's why we are so successful.' Quoted in Rowse (1958, 294).

138. A particularly meaningful example here was the newly created 'cycling corps' - units of League volunteers able to move quickly to intervene in case of a war emergency (i.e. the oft-feared invasion from the continent). On the issue, see Pugh (1985). Although amateur, such paramilitary forces were not merely an expression of the more general nationalistic embitterment at the end of the century, but also showed the reversal of the role and concept of political association even in the area of traditional political culture.

Chapter 4

Conservative Public Opinion and Political Engineering

In Search of an Artificial Community: The Electoral Maze

The transformation of the concept of representation and, parallel to this, of electoral procedures, was one of the most emblematic difficulties encountered in the process of institutionalizing political power in nineteenth-century Great Britain. In the 1880s, the constitutional balance referred to by those wanting to demonstrate the presumed superiority of British public institutions, was in fact maintained only by a delicate balance between de facto power and the political system. Power was the direct expression of a communities logic centring on the recognition of an organic, therefore 'legitimate' and functional, social hierarchy; it used economic strength and social obligations to redefine the relationship between conflicting interests. In contrast, the political system was a vehicle for the rationalization of the public sphere, in Weberian terms, choosing to act with political instruments.

It can therefore be said that, for most of the nineteenth century, elections in Great Britain, were more a phenomenon of community life than the expression of the voters' political will.[1] The entire electoral competition was organized and managed by the candidates themselves; until 1867, they were even expected to deal with the construction or preparation of the polling stations. The only state machinery provided by the 1832 reform was the registration of voters. In each constituency, this task was entrusted to the overseer, usually a small shopkeeper or a farmer with no training or specific technical knowledge, who already collected, unpaid, the poor

rate. The electoral register was drafted on the basis of formal requests made by applicants, and was given public exposure so that any citizen, at his own expense, could make a complaint if certain people were listed without the right or, conversely, if potential voters were not listed. If the overseer was unable to settle the issue, then a revising barrister - a new, part-time official - was summoned to make judgement.

On the whole, it can be said that the British electoral machinery worked thanks to the enterprising spirit of private citizens. The overseer, untrained and unmotivated, was indeed unreliable. In any case, the complicated process of checking the correctness of the registers was beyond his capabilities, given the careless keeping of the rate books - the only source for assessing the real value of properties. Revising barristers themselves had only very limited powers of intervention: for example, not only were they unable to remedy obvious irregularities unless petition was made by another voter, but, until the 1878 Registration Act, they could not even rectify the innumerable errors in the electoral registers which, more often than not, resulted in the exclusion of valid individuals from the voting list. The lack of a specific bureaucratic-administrative structure responsible for the operation of the electoral machinery set up by the 1832 and 1867 reforms[2] compelled local and national political groups to take completely upon themselves the management of the electoral register on which the attention and manoeuvres of candidates were centred.[3] Each local political association had a registration agent whose task was to attract potential new voters to enrol on the register, while trying to expel the highest possible number of opposing voters.[4] While carrying out this partisan activity, agents often took the whole work of registration upon themselves and sometimes, especially in big cities, also drafted the overseer's preliminary register. Elections, therefore, were won only by taking good care of the register. Hence, registration agents and, more specifically, election agents, although not recognized by the law, were to become key figures in British electoral life. As already mentioned, within a few decades, part-time solicitors, recruited by the electoral committee of any one constituency and entrusted with registration tasks, were replaced by full-time agents who were responsible for more complex and continuous electoral organizational activities. For almost a century, these men pragmatically shaped the British electorate, drawing its boundaries on the basis of a controversial and complex registration system that, by the end of the century, was ruled by as many as 118 laws and over 650 sentences - a fertile ground for negotiation and argument between the parties concerned.

On the eve of the First World War, approximately 4 million potential voters were still unable to enter this system, in which actual legal difficulties were accompanied by the parties' interest in manipulating voter eligibility according to their needs.[5] As a rule, however, the electoral machinery seemed to be substantially based on agreement between the contending parties. Agents often met after the publication of preliminary registers, and reached a compromise on the objections and requests to be heard and

on the cases to be brought before the revising barristers. The latter occasionally summoned the agents of opposing committees who then drafted the lists by mutual consent. This informal practice worked well in a poorly institutionalized context such as the British one, since agents, working for their own candidate, also guaranteed the overall functioning of the system.[6]

Until at least the 1880s, elections were based on candidates rather than parties, although this did not mean that candidates in the competition held much power. The aspiring candidate was often controlled by his agents and, in the electoral campaign, would play a role proportional to the secondary importance attributed to the ideas and the political-ideological debate current in his constituency. The image was of a system where the whole electoral process, lacking any real institutional substance and submerged in a sea of custom, tended to reflect the very nature of the civil society it was meant to represent. It is therefore apparent that Victorian Britain was, for a long time, deprived of political representation ensuing from the knowledgeable actions of an electorate aware of its political rights and duties, called to the polls once every seven years. Nor was Great Britain endowed with electoral institutions which could substantiate those values that the state guaranteed. During most of the century, locally- and community- oriented voting patterns prevailed, epitomizing a network of influences of which the elector and the elected were an integral part, within a close relationship of political and social obligations. This, of course, not only failed to invalidate the function of representation, but in fact elicited forms of virtual representation that helped assimilate into the traditional political system the many social imbalances, thereby limiting their 'anti-system' virulence.[7] Actually, this situation, more than any other phenomenon, reflected the organic nature of British society; that is, its ability to express a 'natural' leadership and to transform elections into a ritual of recognition and introjection of community hierarchies.[8] It must be emphasized, however, that the social logic prevailing in Victorian society was, in every respect, one of identification/obligation, a logic which gave rise to the twin values deference/paternalism that Bagehot identified as the irreplaceable cornerstone of the British constitutional system.[9] Deference and unaffected gratitude towards those who ensured security and welfare did not exclude - indeed included - the widespread and generalized phenomena of bribery and malpractice, both understood as tangible electoral pressures.[10] Making a fine distinction between encouragement and coercion, between reward and corruption (in other words, defining the scope of political morality as related to individual freedom) is a difficult task. The ruling classes were at a loss as to how to solve the problem of electoral malpractice. Indeed, the legitimating value of the vote was substantially at odds with the 'natural' legitimacy of large estates and with the hierarchical social order. Following the nationalization of problems and increasing domestic and international difficulties, blaming 'corruption' and 'intimidation' no longer seemed sufficient. Thus, the

political system had to change its distribution of *de facto* power and reform its operating mechanisms. From this point of view, however, 'corruption' and electoral reforms appeared to be two opposing means of achieving the same goal: to mend the organic fabric of a society that was in disrepair and had lost all its sustaining community traditions.

The extension and more rational redistribution of seats following the laws of 1867 and 1884-85[11] were certainly two basic steps on the road towards emancipation and the institutionalization of political rights. The real collective catharsis of political life, however, occurred in the debate on corruption between the 1860s and the 1880s, leading to the approval of the Ballot Act in 1872[12] and the Corrupt Practices Act in 1883.[13] During this period began the basic transformation of the legitimacy of 'political' behaviour and of the true significance of the electoral process. The idea of the vote as a public responsibility requiring a public statement waned. Thus, the basis was created for atomizing the electorate and for the birth of the individual autonomous voter. Secrecy granted him a direct political-institutional connection with Westminster, without having to face the critical judgement of the community. Moreover, with the drastic reduction in electoral corruption, participation in an 'ideological community' - a sort of secularization of religious values - became the principal method of replacing and recovering the community and the process of collective identification.

The essential vehicle for such a change was the voluntary political organization which, by imposing binding regulations, revived a basic facet of community life - that is, the relationship of political obligation upon which the fundamental sense of exclusion-belonging thrived.[14] Ultimately the emergence of partisanship systematically took over all the public and private space previously considered as neutral, subsuming it within a political line of thought that gradually replaced the community's traditional 'natural' ties with 'artificial' bonds, in order to facilitate integration of the popular classes into the nation and communities into the state.

Democracy was therefore the cause of the destruction of the mid-Victorian balance for which moderate public opinion was now openly nostalgic. Whether Tory or Radical, democracy represented, in the eyes of traditional political forces, the ideological and organizational drive that inspired some sectors of society (Irishmen, working men and so on) to try to assert themselves over others which, in turn, altered the traditional British political representation.

Salisbury maintained that the 1867 Reform Act had irrevocably destroyed the delicate constitutional balance, since it had accorded the working classes supremacy over all other classes. This meant that they controlled the parliamentary majority, which in turn, unfavourably influenced the executive and therefore the general interests of the country. The popular masses, Salisbury wrote in 1865,

> ...may not ask for supremacy...But they may ask for a share of political power proportioned to the share which their labour gives them in the country's wealth. Such a claim, if it be advanced, must be met in a very different tone from that which has justly been used to repel the intolerable claim of supremacy...Their doctrines are not adverse to the claims of any particular class, except when that class is aiming to domineer over the rest. And, therefore, there is nothing inconsistent with their principles in any system of representation, however wide its scope may be, so long as it does not ignore the differences of property which exist in this country, and maintains with an even hand, the balance of power among the various classes of which the nation is made up.[15]

Disraelian radicalism had shattered all the barriers. For Salisbury, the electoral issue was no longer one of principle, but rather an occasion for clever tactical manoeuvres, such as had occurred with the Reform Bill of 1884 that allowed him, through the extension of suffrage, to favourably redraw the electoral map. After the 1884-85 electoral reforms, many people of diverse political persuasions felt that the political system had reached the absolute limit for 'responsible' representation, beyond which Victorian public opinion believed it would encounter only the abstract ferment of universal suffrage.

Nor did Salisbury give up fighting in the electoral sphere to limit the influence of the democratic-popular component in institutions. As mentioned earlier, at a time of 'tyranny by the majority' this involved an adjustment of the machinery to the detriment of old, obsolete organizational traditions and the painful suppression of well-established positions of power. To mention but one example, in 1889 Salisbury informed the Queen that the organization of the party

> ...under the old franchise, was managed locally, generally by the family solicitor of the principal person in the place. Since the franchise was changed in 1867, and afterwards in 1885, there has been the greatest difficulty in inducing these persons, who are entirely incompetent, to give place to more active men. We are doing it gradually: but it requires time: and there is the greatest possible reluctance on the part of the local magnates to admit any central interference at all.[16]

The gradual transformation of the party, no doubt connected to the social change that had characterized British Conservatism since the 1860s, revealed the existence of a deep conflict between the old identity, which aimed at reaffirming its authority through traditional means, and emerging groups. The latter felt that the imposition of a pattern of 'political' intervention was the only realistic standard for competition in a mass society. W.H. Smith, the Conservative group-leader in the Lower House and an expert on the party, became a symbol of such conflict when, while informing Salisbury about the difficulties in transforming the party's staff and propaganda machinery, he wrote:

> You know quite as much as I do of the habits and customs of the Tory but I have not found them to be eager volunteers in canvassing or organization. The machinery of an election has had to be provided at somebody's cost hitherto and much of this is to be prohibited in the future...The Radicals have the Trade Unions, the Dissenting Chapels and every Society for the abolition of property and morality working for them. Our supporters only want to be let alone, to be allowed to enjoy what they have: and they think they are so secure that they will make no sacrifice of time or of pleasure to prepare against attack or to resist it. So to stave off the evil day as long as possible, I should wish to retain the power of fighting elections by paid agency if necessary as in the past but I am afraid I am in a small minority in the party in the House of Commons who only think of one thing, issuing the cheque to be drawn on their bankers.[17]

The modernization of the electoral apparatus, approved by Salisbury, did not necessarily mean adhering to the democratic results of the transformations in progress. On the contrary, it implied a more rational commitment towards selecting and limiting political participation. Middleton for one was quite skilful in pursuing such goals, using all available means to hinder popular participation in the elections. In 1890, for example, he advised Salisbury on the timing of the elections, in case a ballot was necessary:

> ...the best time for creating such a vacancy would in my opinion be about the first week in May so that the election would take place about the 20th May or a little later - the labourers will thus have had two or three months of good wages and the hay harvest will not be engrossing the attention of the Farmers which might be the case in June.[18]

To the same end, the most effective obstacle was of course electoral registration since, when cleverly used, it guaranteed firm control over the electorate. Dissent on the obstructive use of registration was certainly not lacking within the party. Sir Albert Rollit, member of the Lower House, one of the promoters of the new structure of the National Union, presented an agenda, during its annual assembly, requesting an urgent revision of the registration laws. In his report, he denounced the negative and 'impolitic' aspects of registration:

> ...it involves at the present time work of a routine character, a character possessing in some respects the mark of political drudgery, which occupies time that had much better be devoted to the necessary work of political teaching of the people and real political work.[19]

Improving the suffrage of householders and eliminating all obstacles to the registration of those qualified did not mean, for Rollit, contributing to the development of a full political democracy but, rather, avoiding the danger of more general male suffrage. Once again, the issue of 'radical'

political decision-making as an antidote to the 'inertia' of tradition came to the fore. It was not mere chance that the Tory representative insisted upon the non-party nature of such legislative intervention, recalling that the issue 'is not a party question. In the House the views which I have ventured to express have been taken by leading men of all parties.' Rollit ended by criticizing the residence qualification as too prolonged (12 months officially, but in practice 18) and the plethora of stumbling blocks and exasperating technical distinctions connected with the issues of residence and rent that discouraged many potential voters.[20] The reasons for new style 'politics' - understood as a willingness to redefine one's position by using new instruments and on a larger scale - clashed with the desire to safeguard the existing order. Middleton reminded the 'idealists' of the requirements of safety and stability, which were guaranteed by the very complexity of the electoral system:

> I rather doubt the wisdom of making registration such a very simple matter for everybody...If a man values his vote at all he should be willing to take a little trouble to secure it. I certainly would not make it difficult but, I think that it could not be made too easy.[21]

The principal agent, of course, by defending the existing system, also supported the apparatus that he managed and that drew its strength and consideration from a stronger electoral maze. Nevertheless, the most important task was to defend the image of an electorate that was totally disconnected from the concept of the 'right to vote' and was seen instead as a narrow élite, well known in its own constituency and stable from both a social and geographic point of view. Therefore, the Conservative establishment was obviously in favour of retaining all the barriers encompassed by registration since it could thus minimize the prospects of electoral legislation and 'pragmatically' prevent many newly enfranchised, but politically dangerous, social sectors from gaining access to the right to vote. Salisbury, and most party managers, had a strong interest in the low poll and 'in making the electors vote Conservative, not in making them Conservatives'.[22] Such an interest was indicative not so much of the Conservative's fear of an 'open' conflict with the Liberals, which however existed[23], as of the difficulty in accepting the political system as the sole battleground. In many ways, the Middleton machine did replace the party's waning local-patriarchal base though its efficiency was not informed by purely political considerations. It guaranteed that the party's necessary modernization, taking place at the expense of the old identity, would not become an insidious politicization, but would simply ensure more efficient electoral activity. Salisbury would be in charge, aiming not at the democratization of the system but at mediation between the general declared policy - represented by the acceptance of, and participation in, the electoral laws - and the need to defend to the bitter end the social hierarchies from the claims of popular government.

The National Union: A Faithful, Restless Servant

After the 1885 reorganization, every English or Welsh Conservative Association was automatically affiliated to the National Union of Constitutional and Conservative Associations which thus became, for the first time since its foundation in 1867, a proper national organization,[24] as well as a reliable voice for the moods and needs of the Conservative rank and file throughout the country. At the special London conference in May 1886, new rules for the National Union were adopted.[25] According to Middleton, they would create a structure immune from any attempt to use the organizational 'machinery' against the party's political 'mind'.

The new rules, however, were not meant to limit internal debates, but simply to prevent any budding Churchill from gaining control over a key sector of the party and using it for his own purposes. The Provincial Unions, in particular, acted as a sort of 'filter' for local issues between individual associations and the Council. The best 'guarantee' was, however, the lack of a leader on the political scene ready to transform the dissatisfaction of the rank and file into a true revolt against party headquarters.[26]

The man who, a few years before, had led the rising protest had now become a member of the establishment; in 1886, Churchill stood before the National Union and gave his approval to the new image of the association, even though it did not fulfil the demands of the 'fourth party'. His aim being to repay his debt to the Cabinet's inner circle, he took it upon himself to dampen enthusiasm through firm, albeit occasionally acrobatic, intervention in favour of a 'normalisation' process:

> ...you have succeeded in transforming what was a few years ago little more than a name, into a real patent living powerful political machine and, moreover, a machine which derives its power and its potency from the fact that it is truly a representative machine and that you who have come here together today are representatives and can speak for great masses of the electors who have elected you, who have placed their confidence in you and who know that in your hands their interests will be represented and will not be neglected...I trust this satisfactory state of things may continue to exist and through the agency of this association, spreading as it does all over the country, the leaders of our party...may be kept constantly informed of matters which are interesting and which are exercising the minds of the electors. There is a question which I am anxious to draw your attention to and in referring to it I know I shall be speaking the mind of the entire cabinet. It is with regard to the question of holding at the present moment frequent political demonstrations. My own opinion is ...that the nature of the times is not such as to make it imperative to hold great numbers of large political demonstrations. Of course I exclude this Bradford meeting because it is a meeting of the National Union and an annual affair. What I am alluding to are the large political demonstrations which local party managers are naturally very eager to get up and which to a certain extent and under certain circumstances, are undoubtedly of great utility, but these great demonstrations ought generally to be reserved for a time of crisis and political exigency. We hope and believe that England has passed through a time of crisis and may look forward to a time to be quiet and what appears to me to be more necessary at the present moment than great political demonstrations...are a great quantity of regular small local meetings at which you must make your members and your candidates attend. ... our great ambition and our great idea of the present Government is to be a working Government and not a talking government...and therefore if you really wish the present Government to be an efficient and successful administration I would impress upon you...to discourage as far as lies in your power...the constant holding of political demonstrations at which it is necessary that a member of the Government or more should attend.[27]

The National Union had the potential, most feared by the leaders, to become an organ which, legitimized by its great organizational commitment and its representational structures, could aim at being politically significant and active.

Indeed, from 1885 onwards, many of the issues dealt with unleashed considerable political energy that went beyond simply coordinating and developing organizational activities.[28] This energy tended to transform delegates and representatives of the National Union into a sort of political middle management, with a number of local organizers and parliamentary backbenchers[29] in search of a more satisfactory public image. Through its normal activities and annual assembly, the National Union provided most of its protagonists with a chance to 'participate' but, above all, with the illusion that, by means of motions and questions, speeches and controversies, such participation might translate into political decision-making.

The perception that its role had changed was evident in the issue raised during the 1890 congress, about whether it was still right to follow the tradition of excluding journalists from debates. In general, it epitomized the new boundaries emerging in the public/private relationship *vis-à-vis* the overall needs of politics. The division was between those who felt that secrecy should be kept as a basic component of the organization[30] and those who were willing to give a political - and therefore a public - meaning to the activity of the National Union. The chairman, the representative Dixon Hartland, thought:

> ...that the days are past when our party could afford to hold a hole and corner meeting. We have nothing that we have need to be ashamed of, but on the contrary the great party which we represent have everything to be proud of. The more we praise our opinions, the more people will come round to them.[31]

Sir Albert Rollit was also in favour of opening up to the press.[32] As the inspirer of the new rules, Rollit fought to put changes to work through a more direct relationship between the public and representation. In his opinion, this was the real reason for taking part in the Council and the annual meeting of the National Union, the old criteria of privilege and social status having now been superseded.

> The principles upon which the rules are based are broadly two. First, the complete representation of the party, from the individual to the United Kingdom, and second the development of local effort as essential to the complete success of that party...The whole of the United Kingdom will be able to make its voice heard through its representatives, the expression of its feelings in case of any emergency via that universality which is the chief principle on which these rules are based...The time for any limitation, any exclusion of the opinion of the great mass of the party, is past; and though it may have been a privilege to some of us to have been placed upon this Council, still in future the great condition of our presence here will be the representation of large bodies of voters and opinions in the districts from which we come.[33]

The National Union was meant to be a powerful tool, exclusively designed for propaganda and organizational coordination.[34] This led to the formation of a strong critical component, which legitimately made increasingly strong attacks on the traditional 'deferential' habits in the party, such as maintenance of the rule allowing the appointment of honorary members or vice-presidents upon payment of considerable sums of money. Mr Howard, the Manchester representative, claimed that:

> ...the elected members of this conference under these rules, are going to be swamped by another set of members who ought not to have an equal position. Every man who subscribes a guinea is placed exactly in the same position as Mr Preston and myself who represent here 60,000 electors. It seems to me that is a position which it is almost impossible to continue if the National Union is to be a powerful body and to have the respect of the constituencies. The notion that every man who subscribes a guinea should have precisely the same power and influence seems inconsistent.[35]

The charge of inefficiency, brought upon the central organs in 1886,[36] was based above all on the honorary nature of certain appointments. F.S. Powell, representative, declared:

> I hope these Provincial Councils elect gentlemen who not only consent to be nominated but who will promise to work. One of the great weaknesses I have felt in these central bodies is this, that you elect men from the provinces who may be the best men and the most worthy and fitted men, but whose efficiency is not very great so long as they do not attend. I therefore hope that all the provincial Councils will choose men who are ready and prepared to give the time for their regular attendance at the Central Council in London.[37]

This concept was confirmed a few months later during the ordinary conference:

> ...the great object in electing suitable members for the Council is not only high position and prominent names but fairly regular attendance at the meetings and interest in the work of the Union.[38]

Dissatisfaction with the traditional methods of party management was apparent. In some instances, this was but a new manifestation of an old divide - that between Central Office's need to centralize and the Provincial Unions' drive towards autonomy.[39] During the 1887 congress, for example, Lord Grimston proposed a motion in favour of greater autonomy in the organization of propaganda,[40] thereby eliciting a reaction from those who felt that centralization was the only way to deal with the heavy task of propaganda campaigns.[41] The traditional organizational tension between centre and periphery re-emerged within the National Union too. On various pretexts, the two factions carried on a dispute that regularly came to the surface during congress debates, manifesting a structural tension between the need to strengthen the voice and role of local organizations and the need to leave more room for manoeuvre to the more professional sector working with the Central Office. In 1890, during the Liverpool Conference, a delegate from Reading proposed a resolution stating 'that the Representation of the provincial Divisions in the Council of the National Union should be increased'; it was also stressed that the Council was a governing body 'formed not only on the elective but on the representative principle'. Such a proposal was not unexpected, as another delegate pointed out, but arose from the 'dissatisfaction among the rank and file of those who attend this Conference at the way in which the Council is elected'. This opinion was unconditionally supported by those delegates who felt that local members would express the real needs of the Conservative party in the country better than the members elected by the Congress.[42] The issue was also taken up by the Brighton delegate who made things worse by recalling how 'the council has a large representation belonging to the upper classes and the middle classes; I believe that the working classes to a very great extent are left out of it.'[43] Ashmead Bartlett, one of the Conference leaders, rejected such grievances, proving with ease that the problem of a larger provincial representation was in no way connected with the problem of the lack of working men within the Council.[44] Bartlett then mentioned that, by Statute, the Conference elected 21 members, while 30 came from the provinces, 'a distinct majority of representation'. The soundest motive in favour of the existing system was still, in Bartlett's opinion, that of efficiency. Those

> ...21 are not too many for us to elect, and by electing them here you elect a nucleus of men who are largely the same, who know the work of the Council and Conference, and who go on from year to year; whereas the provincial representation constantly alters...But there is another argument against the change. Look at the record of attendances. The members from the provinces are at the bottom of the list with the exception of two only - most creditable exceptions...Before you increase the provincial representation you ought at least to make an effort to send up gentlemen who will attend the meetings...The proportion of 30 to 21 is surely large enough in favour of the provincial divisions and I hope that, in the interests of the Council, of the Divisions, and of the Conference itself, you will not carry this resolution.[45]

The resolution was actually rejected, but again came to the fore in a different form the following year. Colonel Horace Gray, on behalf of the Metropolitan Division, asked that the chairmen of each of the ten Divisions be admitted by right to the executive branch of the National Union. Bartlett, according to the principle of the professionalization of the Council, requiring continuity of tasks and regular attendance in London, maintained his opposition, but finally had to surrender to what he considered an alteration of 'the balance of power on the Council'.[46]

Despite the ritual assurances - regularly repeated 'for good luck' during all Conservative assemblies - that they did not aim to coerce individual participants nor to impose their ideas upon the party's top strata, after 1885 the National Union became the seat of political confrontation and debate within the Conservative *milieu*, proposing itself as a channel for mediation between the party's inner circle and its grassroots. Although the leadership usually ignored such disputes when shaping its strategies, this did not alter their political significance. Rather, it simply demonstrated a Conservative tradition according to which leaders had no political links with the general public; indeed, party leaders and government expected no less than unconditional support and cooperation.

In 1885, during the Newport conference, the chairman, Lord Claud Hamilton, appealed to the 'practical character' of Conservatives to prevent the debate from becoming 'an occasion for letting off political fire-works' according to 'that method of doing things which marks the proceedings of the liberal organizations'.[47] Once again, the assembly was asked not to 'bother' leaders with embarrassing and impracticable issues. The annual meeting, however, seemed the perfect opportunity for promoting political slogans. For example, the representative George Curzon dealt with the issue of the imperial federation and acknowledged that 'we meet here for discussion and not for dictation. This is a conference and not a caucus'. In addition,

> ...looking at the representative character of the meeting and looking also to the fact that it is the only occasion, I believe, in the course of the year in which representative Conservatives are gathered together from all quarters of the Kingdom, I think it is not an undesirable thing that this question of imperial federation should go forth from the meeting with the seal and imprimatur of the Conference upon it...I want...to make it certain that at the next elections no Conservative candidate shall come before his constituency without introducing a reference to this question in his election address.[48]

It is worth recalling that a new image of the imperial question, increasingly connected to the issues of protectionism and of the working class,[49] began to emerge in this period, an issue which divided the annual meetings of the National Union.

Although many Conservatives felt that the caucus was a negative symbol, to be rejected altogether, a number of its features nevertheless found their way into the culture of Tory extra-parliamentary assemblies.[50] The most obvious of these was the typical Liberal tendency to throw doubt upon party policies. Infringing such a taboo naturally led to confusion as to the powers and goals of Conservative assemblies.[51] Nevertheless, no particular traumas ensued, thanks to the clever handling of the question by Middleton and other National Union officers. They smoothed out tensions by appealing to traditional feelings of loyalty and, above all, to the 'culture of emergency' - to the need to fall in behind leaders when the country was in danger of being 'dismembered'. Middleton was probably the planner of the 1892 manoeuvre that privileged 'organization' over 'politics', following the increasingly popular pattern among the delegates at the National Union Conference. In fact, the party organizer strongly supported the request by the Birmingham representative, Mr Barton, to admit *ex officio* to the annual Congress meetings the 'principal paid Conservative agent' of every constituency.[52] Middleton obviously aimed at reshaping the conference, starting with the network of loyal men he directly managed, in order to ensure that internal debates, though lively, were safe.

From this perspective, the labour question undoubtedly greatly helped during these years to transform the National Union into an arena for debate. After 1885, several delegates proposed granting more space within the party to workers' representatives, stressing how extended suffrage had revolutionized the political scene.[53]

> I know that the great upper classes are for the most part Conservative as are also the middle classes and that it is to the workingmen, the great mass of workingmen, that the future government of this country will depend whether it is to be Conservative, or Liberal or Radical. I say it is high time that you as a body open your eyes to this fact and get thoroughly in touch with the masses of the people.[54]

The issue, however, did not terminate with general statements of

principle but led to increasing requests to the government for social legislation.[55] In 1891, the assembly approved a motion that, acknowledging 'the great importance of labour questions at the present, considers it desirable that a Labour Department should be formed to be presided over by a Minister of the Crown, to be termed "the Labour Minister"'.[56] Also in 1891, Rankin, a representative, presented a proposal in favour of state support for small landholders. The issue involved the dangerous question of state intervention[57] but aimed at very specific goals, as its promoter himself emphasized:

> It would be a good thing politically because it would strengthen and increase the number of those who would hold property in the country. It would strengthen their respect for property - and I need hardly say that it is a very good Conservative doctrine to preach - and it would also give them better health and better strength and of course if that was the case more happiness.[58]

During the summer of 1892 Lord Salisbury's fears that 'these social questions are destined to break up our party'[59] were mirrored in the debate within the National Union. During the 1892 Sheffield conference, the representative Wrightoon stated in his motion 'that the time has arrived when Parliament may well afford facilities for the acquirement by working men of their own houses'. The proposal was supported by the influential Sir Albert Rollit, who recalled how

> ...socialism in an unwise form is in the air. There may be great political and social changes, and what I chiefly dread as a politician is that there should be no machinery for effecting these changes silently and wisely, instead of through revolution.

Such intervention caused contrasting reactions: 'I am surprised', said a working man delegate who claimed to be advocating less legislative paternalism and more self-respect and independence, 'that gentlemen like Sir Albert Rollit and Mr Wrightoon present before this Conference nothing but socialist doctrines.' The proposal, however, was not only approved but was also followed by another resolution which demanded, on behalf of the Conference, 'that in suitable constituencies this Conference would urge the adoption of Conservative workingmen as candidates at Parliamentary elections, believing their presence in Parliament would tend to the consolidation of the party and the general wellbeing of the country'.[60] This was powerful pressure that Balfour, current leader at the Conference, could not ignore.[61] After recalling the institutional tasks, and therefore the limits, of the National Union ('...your duty which consists of the perfecting of the Unionist party organization'), Balfour went on with

> ...one word not exactly of caution or warning, but one word upon the general principles which we ought not to lose sight of in dealing with those vast questions of social reform which are present to the mind of every man who interests himself in the political future of the country, and which are occupying, and deservedly occupying, as large a share not of our practical work but of our speculative attention.

In Balfour's opinion, the Gladstonians were responsible for this, guilty as they were of sacrificing the parliamentary and political debate on reforms to 'attempts at constitutional revolution'. Apart from this, the Conservative leader of the House of Commons had

> ...the impression...that those who talk so glibly of this reform or that reform in the social and industrial organization of the country, really spend very little of their time in thinking, and very greatly underestimate the magnitude of the subjects they talk of so freely. Depend upon it, gentlemen, in this matter of social legislation the beginning of wisdom is to recognize the enormous difficulty and complexity of the problems with which you have to deal, the enormous risks which you run if you deal with them in a hasty or partisan manner...The temptation, therefore, to regard these social questions as mere topics for platform oratory, and as devices to catch a vote here and a vote there, is necessarily very great. But as you love, I will not say your country, but as you love your party, resist that temptation.[62]

The issue of female suffrage was also recurrent in National Union assemblies, emerging on the fringe of debates on the great political and social transformation taking place throughout the country. The fears voiced by the delegate Blandford on the 'dangers' connected with the issue were quite significant:

> ...I think it is not the business of this conference to discuss great questions of policy (Cries of 'Oh' and 'Why not?') but I do think we should discuss questions of organization (Cries of 'Oh' and 'vote')...We are not a caucus but a conference. We do not wish to dictate to any leader...what they should bring forward at any particular time...I consider that it is not desirable that we should interpose to bring forward any question of policy in this conference.[63]

Those who supported the extension of suffrage to women, provided they were spinsters or widows, considered such a charge unfounded. Mr Dalton, for one, attested that 'this matter is not a party matter...and because this is a non party question I think we ought to be enabled to express our opinions by our votes without prejudice on our principles'. Consequently, from 1885 onwards, the issue was dealt with almost every year during the annual assembly of the National Union, gaining the interest of the majority of delegates, albeit amidst division and controversy. In 1891, an

unprecedented event in the history of the Conservative national association took place: Mrs Fawcett, a female activist favouring a moderate extension of female suffrage, was invited to the tribune.[64]

As Salisbury's 'resistance' project took off, the National Union seemed to represent the hardest internal test for him in that it was the expression of both the sometimes inadequately 'filtered' moods of the Conservative rank and file and the need of many activists and mid-management officials for political visibility.

When he took over in 1885 as uncontested leader after neutralizing Churchill, it was no surprise that Salisbury found an unsteady and confused organization. The two 1886 conferences, held at a time of great difficulties for the Liberal world, highlighted an identity crisis epitomized by widespread dissatisfaction with the label attached to the party in the public arena - that is, the term 'Conservative'. The demand to change the name seemed, on the one hand, a manoeuvre to gain support among Liberal deserters, and on the other, clearly showed the cultural and psychological subordination of Conservatives to what was considered the most representative liberal-progressive tradition. It expressed a feeling of 'inadequacy' and embarrassment on the part of Conservatives concerning a name more suitable for a minority resistance party. As the chairman Bartlett declared during the conference on reorganization:

> I venture to suggest that neither of the two names by which our party is now known - neither the name of Tory nor the name of Conservative - is a really popular and convincing name to the majority of the people...one or the other of these names is largely unpopular and is...associated in the minds of large masses of our countrymen with resistance to progress and with opposition to popular rights...There are...only three alternative names...Loyalist, Unionist and National. I am bound to confess that my own feeling is strongly in favour of the latter name...It would be of great assistance in enabling many of our patriotic Liberal opponents, who are unable at once to sever old ties, to join a party by name to which they have been traditionally opposed - it would be of great assistance to them to find that they were joining the ranks not of a Conservative or Tory party but of a great National party. And I think...it may be said we are now indeed the National party. We are the party that would defend the interest of the nation as a whole.[65]

The proposal became official a few months later during the Bradford conference, when a delegate presented the following resolution before the assembly:

> 1) That in view of the recent changes that have taken place in the political circumstances of the country, and the altered relation of parties to each other, it is expedient that the designation of Conservative, as applied to the Loyal Constitutional Organization, be relinquished, and one adopted in its place of intercomprehension, and fitter adaptation to the political circumstances and prospects of the time. 2) That in the opinion of this Conference the name Progressive would adequately express the idea of the basis, the object and the general policy of the Loyal Constitutional Party of the future.[66]

Although opposed by some,[67] the proposal revealed the presence of 'transformist' inclinations that Salisbury's staff had to tackle before changing direction - that is, before establishing new ways of bolstering Conservative self-esteem, by reappraising and strengthening many traditional features of the Conservative identity, while making due concessions to the 'spirit of the times'.

One of the main tasks for Middleton and his staff was to control and exploit, from an electoral standpoint, a structure aspiring to the 'dangerous' status of a political organ. They succeeded in guaranteeing control over the party by stressing professionalization, while commending tradition and inertia. In fact, the National Union was not only a valuable tool for 'government' of the electorate, it also played an important role in the institutionalization of extra-parliamentary aspects of Conservatism which could by then no longer be relinquished. The National Union served as a basis for shaping a new middle management that, although exerting no real influence on the political decision-making process, was a decisive factor in the political mobilization of a mass society. After all, the events taking place in the second half of the 1880s led Salisbury to believe that the democratic ideal allowed an expert Conservative 'pilot' great room for manoeuvre. Indeed, it became clear in that period not only that the lower classes were more sensitive to tradition than to change but that debate and argument were not necessarily destructive mechanisms or prerogatives of a party of disorder. Ably managed and supervised by the party's inner circle, internal opposition and proposals for extreme action played a major role in creating a strong feeling of actively belonging, helping to strengthen, not diminish, the Conservatives' political identity.

The Government of Transformation

In 1894, Herbert Spencer, speaking at the British Association, criticized Lord Salisbury for having previously made a sarcastic attack upon Darwinism, and in particular the theory of evolution.[68] The scholarly dispute, while resembling the usual discussions of that period between evolutionists and creationists, was especially interesting due to the status of the contenders and what they symbolized. Spencer established a close connection between natural cycles and historical and social development, while Salisbury proposed a contrasting, disdainful assessment of the fixedness of animal species.[69] Both attitudes revealed a malaise typical not only of academic opinion but also of a whole generation, fully aware of the great transformation in progress but uncertain as to the inevitability

of its consequences. While European political culture as a whole was relinquishing the illusion of a possible, comforting identification of evolutionism with teleological progressivism,[70] the fears expressed since the late 1860s about the difficult coexistence of democratic ideals and the Liberal system reached a head. In the second half of the nineteenth century, it became apparent, that politics was not merely a negotiation between the central power and a number of social bodies on the management of a limited sphere of the common good. Indeed, the main problem was to locate the new actors of parliamentarism and, beyond the actual arguments between more or less organized groups, to understand how an overall pattern of politics could be reshaped.

Political Liberalism advanced its candidacy for redefining the rules of politics at a time when the government 'by the grace of God' was failing and when politicians were urged to act and 'make speeches' in order to accelerate the identification of new 'political bodies' - actors and recipients of political negotiations. The collocation and potential of such a definition were, at least in part, determined by the role played by bureaucratic ,lites within the system and whether they were dissociated from or integrated with the socially ruling classes. In countries like Germany, the structures of absolutist rationalization[71] remained untouched. This produced a bureaucratic élite partially estranged from society, since its power was directly subordinated to the sovereign. Constitutional adjustment seemed then to incline towards a system guaranteeing the same benefits that the previous 'rational' pattern had ensured, as far as 'order' and power were concerned. This helps to explain the peculiar experience of German Liberalism that, in 1848, did not actually fail, but was unable to propose any alteration to the previous system that would have no impact on state 'order' and power.[72] The problem therefore lay not so much in the weakness of the bourgeoisie as a class during the Liberal 'revolution',[73] but in the deep political uncertainty about the theoretical issue of institutional change, together with its practical corollary of adapting the system to new circumstances.

The situation was quite different in Great Britain, where Liberalism was considering

> ...what group should, or rather can, rule when the landowners have ceased to be able to do so by themselves, as an aristocracy? The specific groups which might be nominated as successors to the aristocracy, are hard to find appealing or adequate. The army, business, an organized working class, social leaders without the old social functions of landed aristocracy, an intelligentsia - none of these, taken as they are usually found to be, can run a country with the easy command that the landowners once had. And yet however much a country may lack a natural social base for a government, it is impossible to have a political system in which power does not derive from being for or against wellmarked kinds of people or institutions.[74]

To answer this question, British Liberalism could count on a peculiar political culture which has to be taken into account when trying to understand the different historical process of this country. British culture reacted to the French Revolution by developing a theory that predicted a possible political and social disruption if a sizeable imbalance continued to exist between the political system and the economic-social situation.[75] This meant it was doubtful whether the political-bureaucratic élite could be kept distinct from that of the 'commercial society' (by definition mobile). The dilemma came to the fore during the 1832 debate on electoral reform, when even the most reluctant participants admitted that a wait-and-see attitude could lead to revolution.

Within this context an intellectual trend emerged that could not be underestimated. The remarkable process of constitutional reassessment that took place between 1832 and 1867 developed alongside the reflections of Walter Bagehot and Sir Henry Sumner Maine on the transformation of institutions and society. Both thought that the evolution of institutions was inevitable, but that such institutions had, as it were, an 'anthropological' basis.[76] Institutions could change and adapt to the times, but their purpose would still be the fulfilment of the more or less elementary, and as such permanent or at least long-term needs expressed by human nature and by the social spirit. With this approach the fear of change was dispelled and the 'manipulation' of change became possible as well as rational. The law of progress in other words was not 'independent' from the sphere of politics which might in some way be able to 'guide' it.

For those sectors of the ruling class who felt that their ascendancy was threatened by enhanced social mobility, such a cultural attitude made it possible not to be shocked by change or, at least, to believe that such change was still unformed and could be moulded by the forces leading it.

General considerations of this kind always run the risk of offering a Machiavellian representation of historical 'becoming', with actors who are fully aware of the play they are performing and determined to pursue their own goals and projects clearly and rationally. The historian cannot afford to fall into this trap, dealing as he is with a subject far from clear-cut and intertwined with so many different interpretations. What should be emphasized is that this was a stage of transition, with changes in the cultural framework that help explain not only events in British politics in the mid-1880s, but also a more general European trend. The need for the political framework to adjust to the mobilization of the ruling classes (set in motion by the social changes consequent on early industrialization) had waned. A new question had arisen: was there a chance of putting the lid on the 1832 reform, or was the only solution (as suggested by the furious debate of the late 1870s on Chamberlain's 'new political organization') the 'Americanization of our institutions'?

On closer examination, the debate weakened one of the theoretical pillars of old Liberalism. It was no longer a matter of preventing revolution

by homogenizing politics and society. Instead the new hypothesis posited the constant advance of radicalism which, in order to bring society in line with its abstract nature, was willing to create an artificial context, the product of political agenda planning which was ahead of its time.[77]

Whenever there was no 'theological issue' to divide intellectual opinion, as would happen later in France over the Dreyfus affair and the reopening of the clerical/anti-clerical rift, the only reasonable solution was to strengthen the centre. This was the answer of European Liberal culture which saw the centre as a form of defence against 'disruption'. The 'transformation of political sides' was therefore not something peculiar to countries like Italy where the identity of parties was somewhat fragile. It was, rather, a result of the Liberal constitution faced with a change of climate that eclipsed the great intellectual divide between supporters of innovation and those resistent to change.

During the first half of the 1880s the gradual political homogenization of élites in Great Britain seemed to have completed its cycle. It was an unequivocal sign that the 'constituent' stage, which had begun with the 1832 First Reform Act and terminated with the great electoral reforms of the 1880s, was considered over. During its course, party conflict (though ending in Liberal hegemony) showed political orientation visibly in the making. This conflict did indeed help to channel political demand and to develop a concerned public opinion, but, within Parliament it never transcended clear-cut distinctions on basic principles. All of this, while excluding any 'sopra partes' arrangement in current state affairs, supported that peculiar image of continuity and pragmatic gradualism which was in tune with historical development and traditions. The Conservative-Liberal dichotomy therefore finally produced a centre-oriented parliamentary re-union, based on a type of political wisdom that was no more than a reworking of the old 'balance' - no longer a balance of power but a shrewd integration of old and new, innovation and preservation. It should then be no surprise that the foremost model for the British political class of the nineteenth century was still the Palmerston governments. During the golden age of Liberalism, according to the Tory Kebbel, 'from 1846 to 1869 there had been no demand for the regular Conservative party, because Radicalism was in abeyance, and Liberals and Conservatives, Whigs and Tories, were all content to acquiesce in the genial rule of Lord Palmerston'.[78] It was not so much Palmerston's ability that guaranteed the safe achievement of this kind of 'transformism'. It was due to a 'pacified' economic-social context where traditional Liberal values - such as stability, moderation, centrality of debates and priority of national interests over specific ones - could emerge. The economic crisis and social change of the 1880s had slightly threatened these values but, from their different standpoints, Gladstone and Salisbury, the last great representatives of what we previously defined as the 'constituent' stage of political struggle, fought for their recovery. Thus, it could be said that both saw Home Rule as another manifestation of the recurrent schism on

great principles, as well as an occasion for reinstating 'order' in both their respective parties[79] and in a political framework that was out of balance and threatened by social pressures that could no longer be controlled within the old boundaries of community paternalism.

The terms disintegration, degeneration and decline were once the typical warnings of 'voices of conscience', such as Robert Lowe or Thomas Carlyle, about unlikely, and at any rate deferrable, scenarios for popular government. In the eyes of the disillusioned generation of Liberal intellectuals at the turn of the century, they were gradually became keywords the everyday vocabulary used to describe what appeared to be a bitter reality. They summed up the defeat of a political culture that had imagined democracy as the natural outcome of the spread of public virtue and not as a clash of interests and class conflict. Initially, many spokesmen for the upper classes had viewed the concept of democracy with a certain degree of optimism. Already by the 1880s, the mood had changed into a sad acceptance of an uncontrolled descent towards increasingly strong constitutional imbalances. The social framework was such that the organization of sinister interests slowly displaced the delicate mechanisms of social obligation and community deference. Gladstone's moral progressivism had indeed epitomized a great period of 'democratic legislation', while Lord Salisbury's lucid pessimism best represented the need to curb the 'enlightened' culture of reform. However, both approaches assumed that a constitutional balance existed, based on the old principles of mixed government rather than on 'modern' standards of administration and 'exchange'. After all, both Gladstone, when he attacked the privileged classes for strangling the just aspirations of the Nation, and Salisbury, when he condemned the exorbitant claims of the masses as detrimental to the whole community, aimed at strengthening their own political side, for the sole purpose of providing a healthy counterweight to an instability deemed unfair and unnatural.[80] Therefore any characterization of this stage as a clash between a 'reactionary project' and a 'Liberal project', with their respective champions, is unrealistic. The British political scene was fractured by differences and affinities that party affiliation alone could not explain. The question of the most rational way to 'rule democracy' did not only concern control over the electorate or the intensity of the legislative commitment of the House of Commons. It also concerned the level of social legitimation and the processes of institutional adjustment by the, lites. From this point of view, men like Salisbury and Gladstone would always refer to the centrality of parliament and a two-party system as a reworking of the 'duellist' model, the basic principle of which had never been the elimination or co-option of opponents, but rather their limitation and distinction.[81] This was a perfectly reasonable perspective for a political class that was substantially homogeneous from both social and political perspectives.[82]

As Gladstone wrote in 1892:

> ...The natural condition of a healthy society is that governing functions should be discharged in the main by a leisured class. It matters where the narrow interests of that class seem to be concerned, it has its besetting sins and dangers. But for the general business of government it has peculiar capacities; and whatever control a good system may impose, by popular suffrage, by gathering representation from all classes, by tradition, or opinion, or the press, yet, when the leisured class is depressed, that fact indicates that a rot has found its way into the structure of society.'[83]

Gladstone's perception did not much differ from Salisbury's when the latter reminded an impatient Churchill that 'the Tory party is composed of very varying elements, and there is merely trouble and vexation of spirit in trying to make them work together. I think the "classes and the dependents (sic!) of class" are the strongest ingredients in our composition, but we have so to conduct our legislation that we shall give some satisfaction to both classes and masses'.[84]

In this perspective, Salisbury's activity was not an alternative to Gladstone's but represented its natural counterweight. Both the Liberal and Conservative leaders showed their open distrust of intellect as a means to solve the basic issues of common living[85] and both trusted, although from different standpoints, the deep, often unfathomable popular judgement. The two leaders thought that ethical principles and beliefs represented values that transcended any possible advantage of intellectual debate or political opportunism.[86] It is not surprising that, in 1886, on comparing Gladstone and Chamberlain, Salisbury wrote that the latter 'will never make a strong leader. He has not yet persuaded himself that he has any convictions: and therein lies Gladstone's infinite superiority'.[87]

It is therefore not rash to state that Salisbury and Gladstone, both members of the old territorial ,lite and substantially in agreement on the intrinsic value of the social hierarchy,[88] were also on the same side in defending the traditional system of political balance from the attacks of the sectors (which also traversed party alignments) asking for greater power to be allotted to executive and political decision-making. Chamberlain and Churchill did not conceal their ambition to take the lead sooner or later of a new party which expressed the country's demand for efficiency. Underpinning their ambitions was the need to translate into politically explicit terms a radical culture that, since the 1880s, had expressed in different ways its dissatisfaction with the concept of 'constitutional balance'.

To understand the turning-point we should, however, start from the change in the intellectual scenario. It was not the reactionary supporters of a pre-modern past, but a proportion of the intelligentsia, bred by university reform, and opinion makers who began to question the significance of the government of progress. When this concluded in the demand for a new 'national party' - a common-sense party - it was seen that identification with the new political-social system (though in a 'moderate' version) was becoming commonly accepted; thus, the common-sense belief meant that such a system was the final moment of historical evolution and not the dawn of a new world of unknown direction and rules. Furthermore, resort was often made - sometimes boldly so - to history, to account for the foundation of the nineteenth-century constitution.[89]

Salisbury, of course, exploited this climate by laying the foundations for his future achievements. However, he mistrusted the tendency to solve the problem of what was initially an unstable and limited Conservative hegemony through the institutionalization of a well-structured 'conversion towards the centre'. His activity as a man of the party was constantly directed towards achieving the best electoral result possible, but he also aimed at clearly outlining the tasks and limits of the various party components. Thus, with very few concessions to the widespread rhetorical principle of the virtual transformation of Conservatism into elemental Liberalism, Salisbury succeeded in reviving a political identity that had been intimidated by the allies' 'progressive' prestige and that risked disappearing altogether within the concentration of moderate forces operating since 1886. His goal, not unlike Gladstone's, was still to safeguard the two-party system of British politics. In 1867 he wrote:

> ...it is the duty of every Englishman and of every English party to accept a political defeat cordially, and to lend their best endeavours to secure the success, or to neutralize the evil of the principles to which they have been forced to succumb.[90]

Indeed, the main problem for a man whose roots were deeply embedded in the nineteenth-century liberal-moderate environment was the safeguarding of an overall balance of the system, which, for a Conservative facing the 'flames' of modernization, could only be reached by cooling down all the components, beginning with the most overheated of them all - the state.

Salisbury was aware that an unlimited expansion of state intervention would produce that kind of 'administrative' culture that would be supportive of a strong government without the hindrances of constant control (as was happening in other countries). This might appear an ideal situation for a moderate Liberal who had always put the needs of the whole constitutional system before those of the executive. In fact, as the prime minister wrote, such a situation would require a rigid system endowed, like the American one, with '"fundamental laws", which could only be altered by special machinery. With us the feebleness of our government is our security - the only one we have against revolutionary alterations of our laws'.[91]

During the two closing decades of the nineteenth century, however, an ever increasing proportion of British political opinion, and of most Liberal parliamentary regimes, felt that the 'weakness' of the executive, linked

with the excessive power of parliamentarism,[92] was no longer an admirable quality but the very image of the crisis of liberalism. On these grounds, in Great Britain too, the idea grew that the constituent struggle was over. That is to say, the traditional ruling classes were now aware of the stabilization attained by the new political system, with its wider foundations; they thus accepted the changed constitutional patterns. This idea implied a new transformist perspective, based on a reappraisal of the old political balances that were considered unfit to respond to the demands of the emerging social sectors. The conditions for the unique, organic transformism, typical of Palmerston's era, no longer held sway; the demand for national efficiency was best expressed by the heirs of the radical culture which had developed from the 1860s onwards, in the wake of the Comtist suggestion of an 'authoritarian' democracy as the solution to the 'immoral' static balance. The challenges mounted by Churchill and Chamberlain to the leadership of their respective parties between 1883 and 1885, although different in character, both aimed to attract the support of middle-class voters for the hypothesis of political acceleration. This was to be achieved through more incisive action by the executive, first of all by a more determined use of the administrative tool, the 'unifying' nature of which was somehow opposed to the disruptive static nature of traditional political divisions. The fact that Chamberlain came closer to the positions of radical Conservatism strengthened those political sectors averse to 'limited' executive branches and in favour of the state as a regulating force of social life.[93] During a conversation with Balfour, the former mayor of Birmingham stated that:

> ...a Democratic Government should be the strongest Government, from a Military and Imperial point of view, in the world, for it has the people behind it. Our misfortune is that we live under a system of Government originally contrived to check the action of kings and Ministers and which meddles therefore far too much with the Executive of the Country. The problem is to give the Democracy the whole power, but to induce it to do no more in the way of using it than to decide on the general principles which it wishes to see carried out and the men by whom they are to be carried out. My radicalism at all events desires to see established strong Government and an Imperial Government.[94]

Randolph Churchill, the acknowledged heir of Disraelian Democratic Toryism, had already indicated his opinion, often vaguely and evocatively, on the role of the executive. In 1884, however, during a significant interview, Churchill clearly revealed his idea of the relationship between society and the state.[95] Asked whether he would 'proceed all along the line of domestic policy in the same direction as Prince Bismarck, with State Socialism and Customs Revenue?', Churchill answered:

> Precisely, and does not Prince Bismarck know what he is about? He is the biggest man in the world...['What about Ireland? Is there a lesson to be learned from Bismarck there also?'] If a large expenditure of money by the State or public works is Bismarckian, yes. There would be an immediate and an enormous manner of pacification...Let me say this in conclusion. You have said the schemes I have been telling you about sound as if they were learned in the school of Bismarck. Well, when Prince Bismarck first propounded his domestic policy, everybody said it was absurd, and the English newspapers in particular conspired to ridicule it. Yet Prince Bismarck seems to be getting on pretty well, don't you think? - and there is universal suffrage, remember, in Germany'.[96]

Such attitudes, their contexts notwithstanding, epitomized the intellectual gap between the two different political cultures. As they drew closer to executive power, Churchill and Chamberlain's radicalism seemed to reveal a substantial indifference towards the problem of discovering and organizing political consensus - an attitude that had typified most of their unorthodox careers. The idea of strengthening the administration of the executive resembled an attempt to move firmly established systems of balance through a process of modernization 'from above', carried out at the expense of political democratization. The project aimed to neutralize the political sphere but, as in other countries, it required a realignment of traditional loyalties.

From this point of view, the 'National Party' desired by Chamberlain and based on Tory radicalism, although arising from a substantially Conservative perspective, would, in Salisbury's opinion, jeopardize the constitutional balance through an inevitable but dangerous movement of political energies designed to support and build up the government's legislative programme. The Conservative leader was opposed to the new proactive spirit of the time and claimed that he was better in opposition than in government; however, this did not prevent him reaffirming his belief in the capacity for social control. With this goal in mind Salisbury - and also Gladstone - accepted the competitive ethos, using an instrument that was extraneous to him, i.e. mass organization. The battleground was that of the clash between classes, which resulted in a recrudescence of party identities along new lines. With this in mind, he also succeeded in turning to his advantage enthusiasm for the widespread need for a 'party of rest' by channelling such enthusiasm through an apparatus that was eminently capable of transforming the political climate into votes.

Contrary to popular belief, the 'party-machine' was not an exclusive product of that Americanization of politics abhorred by all. In fact, the 'political machine' was one thing, and the 'party-machine' another. The fact that instruments were needed for gaining consensus and controlling deference was a technique well known in all political systems, if only for its resemblance to the experience of the Church. Conservatives, in thought and in practice, were certainly aware that political legitimation derived from forms of *sociabilité*. It was the Whig, Goldwin Smith, who charged

the Birmingham model with introducing into the Liberal arena the repugnant Tory techniques for gaining consensus based on the 'beer and bible' strategy.

Salisbury and his staff therefore needed no daring intellectual forays with modernity to concede that a ruling group could not be safe without 'machinery'. It was a matter of agreeing on the type of machinery and on the value to be attributed to it. The 'Middleton machine' appeared as distinct from the 'party', at least according to the theoretical pattern expounded by Comtist intellectuals who gathered around Chamberlain in the 1870s. There was no agenda to control the candidates' programme, nor to execute the programme by free-membership groups in which the rank and file played a major role. The problem was, on the one hand, setting up an organization for attracting votes and, on the other, outlining a pattern for the sound identification of the 'Conservative universe'. This way, the policies outlined by a ruling class might be experienced by social groups as their own, accepting leaders only because they embodied a hierarchy and a social order they felt part of. Within this framework arose the competitive dualism between the Primrose League and the National Union. The former guaranteed unconditional social respect and transparent, uncritical political loyalty, but also tended to appear as an all-encompassing structure. The National Union guaranteed the working of the organization, but represented a potential counterpart to the party leadership.

Our perception of this phenomenon, however, is distorted by the passage of time. Since subsequent Radical-Liberal movements conformed to the pattern of viewing sociabilit, as fundamental for ensuring political obligation, we are led to think that Conservatives, instead of adapting their cultural instruments (already part of their heritage) to the times, had been 'converted' to the pattern of the modern party. Such a conviction is supported by the fact that, owing to the lack of a bureaucratic leadership, it was virtually only in Great Britain that this historical relationship between social and political leaderships survive. Therefore, instead of comparing Great Britain with the ideal *Sonderweg* type, it is better to liken it to the model of continental development, according to which political sociabilit, compensates for the loss of the sociabilit, of natural communities. That is why, in my opinion, Conservatives emerge as having cleverly exploited a model extraneous to them.

The impulse towards the creation of the Conservative machinery must be traced back, in principle, to the sphere of 'deference', which is not inherent in the 'great British spirit'; it emerges from a social system with a constitution of its own which must be strengthened and nurtured, especially since the electoral system is largely based upon it. The British electoral system is not 'liberal' in the broad sense of the word, but a progressive adjustment of old mechanisms so that significant sectors of society can be involved in more or less marginal political decision-making processes. Consensus and eligibility to the vote go together, in the sense that the vote is a form of acknowledgement of the consensus attributed to

the system by a given social class.[97] That is why control over the electoral system and the possible development of a political project go hand-in-hand.

This interpretation, however, is not aimed at a banal overturning of perspectives. The goal is not to demonstrate that Salisbury was a man of the old regime and that his presumed modernity was actually an illusion. It is true that the Conservative leader departed from the background described earlier, but this in no way empowered him to stop the changes that new techniques brought about within the social *milieu* which he came from.

That is why the National Union was an important factor. It was set up in 1885, in order to solve the problem of controlling the new voters without claiming to exercise any influence over the leadership. It demonstrated, however, the fallacy of the idea that a party composed of backbenchers, organizers and 'officials' would remain silent and insignificant when faced with the problems created by the classic party of militants (and enthusiasts) that was, at its best, the Liberal party. Indeed, the lively debate within the National Union showed that these men were not mere canvassers or 'dumb' parliamentarians.

Conservative agents and National Union delegates engaged in a political debate and, after 1885, appeared quite passionate about the great issues of the age, aware that times were indeed changing. They were knowledgeable and committed, and the proceedings of their debates reveal a high level of team spirit. Thus, contrary to expectations, the 'Middleton machine' did involved itself in politics. It endeavoured to intervene in the construction of the leadership and in political decision-making. The suggestion that the internal debates of the National Union did not much influence Salisbury and his staff does not diminish the fact that they were becoming increasingly important. This at a time when engaging in politics demanded greater degree of professionalization and participation, both suggesting a changing environment for the 'education' of the ruling classes. Moreover, since this mid-level political staff often expressed the demands and needs of the electoral rank and file, it was also necessary to understand to what extent the criterion of representation changed and how it moved from parliament to party. All scholars of contemporary politics know that legitimating power comes from having a representative function.

In conclusion, the passage of British politics between 1885 and 1892 deserves much more attention than it has received up to now. Home Rule, the split in the Liberal party, and the beginning of Conservative hegemony have often obscured a more complex conflict that emerged during this period involving the transformation of the British constitution, itself part of the more complex European trend of the time. Faced with the problem of governing democracy, the British ruling classes chose to adapt the old strategy of division and institutional confrontation between bodies representing opposite interests, rather than entrust a centrist group with the difficult and costly task of reshaping the constitutional system by means

of the socially disruptive device of 'administrative pacification'. The defeat of Chamberlain's and Churchill's 'transformist' radicalism actually highlighted, by way of contrast, the lack of a 'culture of emergency' so typical of the continental ruling classes, who lacked strong community traditions and structured links with the lower classes and who were therefore completely extraneous to any confrontation other than an administrative and paternalistic one. That Salisbury succeeded in carrying out, within the same institutional framework of which Gladstone approved, a political project of 'resistance', using and even improving on the means at his disposal, with goals quite different from those of his historical enemies, is less a proof of his political ability than of the fact that the events of the period were marked by ambiguity and uncertainty. These features typified a political world trying to rule over a social context different from the one that had engendered it and a social universe inhabited by actors, places and functions different from the ones that until then had served as points of reference.

Notes

1. Fundamental on this subject are: Seymour (1915) and Hanham (1959). Some interpretations of the British electoral situation can be found in O'Leary (1978); Biagini (1988, 809-38); Cammarano (1996, 262-303).

2. The main rulings of the 1832 Representation of the People Act, concerning the allotment of seats in Great Britain and Wales were: a) the loss of parliamentary representation for 56 urban constituencies and the loss of one of the two representatives for 30 more constituencies; b) the creation of 22 new urban constituencies entitled to two representatives and 20 entitled to one. As a result, Yorkshire was granted six representatives, 26 counties went from two to four seats and seven more went from two to three. As far as electoral qualifications were concerned, the right to vote was granted a) in the counties: to owners with a rent of at least œ10 or a landed rent of at least 40 shillings; to life tenants who paid no less than œ10 rent; to tenants paying at least œ50 rent; b) in the cities: to proprietors or tenants of a house, warehouse, shop or office located within the city, worth at least œ10 per year, who had paid the relevant taxes for at least one year. These were the basic qualifications; there were several other categories, all connected to specific forms of property. Some rulings were specific to Scotland and Ireland. Registration of voters became compulsory.

The 1867 Representation of the People Act further modified the allotment of seats: four city constituencies lost representation because of corruption; among towns with fewer than 10,000 inhabitants, three lost both members, 35 lost one out of two and 4 the only one they had; two new two-seat and nine one-seat constituencies were created; Birmingham, Leeds, Liverpool and Manchester went from two to three seats, while Salford and Merthyr Tydfil went from one to two seats; 10 counties each obtained two additional representatives; one seat was created also for the University of London. As far as electoral qualifications were concerned: the right to vote as citizens was extended also to those who lived in boarding-houses or in rented rooms at a minimum value (unfurnished) of œ10 per year, with at least one year of residence. In counties, an annual rent of œ5 was enough for owners or life tenants and œ12 rent (œ14 in Scotland) for tenants, provided they had paid the poor rate. The Minority Clause was implemented, according to which, in three- and four-seat constituencies, voters were entitled to two and three votes respectively.

As regards data, regulations and analysis of the electoral reforms of 1832 and 1867, see Evans (1983a; 1983b); Cook and Keith (1975, 117-19); Hanham (1968, 33-35); F.B. Smith (1966); Cowling (1967).

3. On the practice of electoral registration, see Cox and Grady (1868); Ostrogorski (1902, I, 371-82); Blewett (1985, 27-56); Thomas (1950, 81-98). To put matters simply, in order to be enrolled on the register, a male adult of sound mind had to prove he was entitled to vote on the basis of one of the existing qualifications, whose exact number was never clear. A list was compiled of up to 17 different qualifications, the most common of which fell into the following categories: property, 'freeman', university, possession, property of a house, rent and civil service. He also had to prove that he paid poor rates, that he was not entitled to any poverty benefit and that he had lived at the same address for at least 12 months, and precisely from July of a certain year to June of the following year. Having satisfied all these prerequisites, the applicant's name was entered in a preliminary register. If, by September, it was not contested or had overcome possible objections, it would appear on the electoral register that came into effect in the following month of January. The actual cycle lasted 18 months. This standard course for inclusion in the register was in fact littered with an incredible number of exceptions and complications. An ironic description of some of the difficulties inherent in the interpretation of electoral qualifications can be found in Ostrogorski (1902, 374-5).

4. The right to vote was lost in the case of: loss of qualifications entitling one to vote; non-payment of the poor rate; enjoying poverty benefits; moving to another constituency. Tenants, unlike owners, lost the right to vote even when moving within the same constituency. See Blewett (1985).

5. An example of the battle over electoral registers in Manchester between 1880 and 1885 shows most clearly how tenuous was the status of the voter in Victorian Britain. After the Liberal victory in the 1880 elections, Manchester Conservatives decided to 'clean-up' rolls, expelling 2772 Liberal voters in the 1880 registration. The Liberals reacted the following year by expelling 2133 voters considered Conservatives versus 2033 more Liberals. In the battle, 2876 'neutrals' also lost their right to vote. In the two largest working-class neighbourhoods, 5489 residents were deprived of their right to vote. This battle was fought every year during registration; by 1884, Manchester had 8945 fewer voters than in 1880. See Hanham (1959, 235).

6. It was not surprising that a tentative reform proposed by the Liberal Harcourt in 1872, based on simpler registration and the creation of a more efficient category of officials, was rejected by the House of Lords, while, the following year, the government proposal that left things virtually as they stood was accepted. On the

role and tasks of election agents, see Parker (1885).

7. See Biagini (1988, 810).

8. Until the 1872 Ballot Act, a candidate obtained his public nomination through a show of hands on the part of the crowd (in theory comprising people entitled to vote). If no other candidates were available, this meant direct acceptance of the candidate. When the number of nominations exceeded the number of seats available in that particular constituency, then there was an election, where voters had to pronounce clearly and loudly the name of the candidate they chose, trying to overcome the din and unruly behaviour of the crowd that had deliberately gathered there. For a description of elections and their 'back-stage' episodes, see the collection of related extracts taken from nineteenth-century British literature edited by Nicholas (1956).

9. Two different interpretations of deference and social identification are found in Cornford (1967, 268-311) and Moore (1976).

10. On the debate about the morality of electoral politics in the Victorian age, on data concerning malpractices and the parliamentary reforms enacted to defeat them, see Gwyn (1962); O'Leary (1962); Moore (1969, 5-36); Clarke (1972, 31-55); Nossiter (1975).

11. An overall picture of the results of the electoral reforms is provided by Dunbabin (1988, 93-126). The Representation of the People Act of 1884 granted a uniform right to vote to all areas of Great Britain without distinction between city and county constituencies. It was based on the qualification of ownership or tenancy of premises with a œ10 minimum rent and a 12-month minimum period of residence. The Redistribution of Seats Act of 1885 outlined a system of one-seat constituencies. Many of the new constituencies were artificially created by counting the resident population: all boroughs with fewer than 15,000 inhabitants were merged with county constituencies; boroughs with 50,000 inhabitants were entitled to one representative; boroughs with between 50,000 and 165,000 inhabitants, to two; those with over 165,000 inhabitants had three parliamentary representatives, plus one for every additional 50,000 inhabitants. The number of constituencies rose from 416 to 643. An introduction to the 1884 law is provided in Harrison (1885); Jones (1972). On redistribution, see Chadwick (1976, 665-83); Fair (1980, especially 35-55); Craig (1974).

12. The law radically altered the previous electoral procedures. The new rules stated that a request for candidacy was to be presented in writing by two voters in the constituency and countersigned by at least eight additional voters. Where ballots were resorted to, a ballot paper was used, printed with the names and titles of candidates. One of the first effects of the system was the decrease in turbulence and unrest typical of electoral periods. On the Ballot Act, see Kinzer (1982); and on the violence erupting before and during elections, see Richter (1971, 19-25).

13. On the effects of the enactment of this law, see Gwyn (1962), and O'Leary (1962).

14. On the British parties as subjects of social integration see Pombeni (1990, 249-87). Specifically, this line is followed by Garrard (1977, 145-63).

15. Lord Salisbury (1865, 572).

16. Quoted in Marsh (1978, 185-6).

17. Quoted in Feuchtwanger (1968, 159).

18. Middleton to Salisbury, 3 April 1890, Chilston Papers, Middleton Copy Book, Maidstone, Kent Archives Office. On the issue, Pelling (1967), had already stressed the high level of non-voting in rural constituencies in the general elections of 1892, 1895 and 1900.

19. The Archives of the British Conservative and Unionist Party (ACP), *Minutes and reports of the Conservative Party Conference,* '1892 Conference'. The reform of the registration system was a recurrent topic in the yearly meetings of the National Union. As early as 1886, a delegate had denounced the uncertainties of the electoral laws because of the many conflicting judgements of the revising barristers. See Ibid., '1886 Conference.' Simpler registration procedures would have allowed 'a large body of political workers to do political work and teaching instead of being harassed in the drudgery of details which they rightly ought not to be subjected to. I hope therefore that we...who desire that the community shall have the opportunity of expressing its voice, will pass the resolution.' See Ibid. '1892 Conference.'

20. Ibid. .

21. Middleton felt that the register guarded the system from the danger of impersonations on a large scale: 'Take the City of London as an illustration. There the removers in the course of a year are something like 80,000 to 100,000 from one place to another. Take it at lower figures, say 60,000. They are usually of the lower classes of society who move and wander about from one place to another as their occupation calls them. If they were allowed to claim successive occupation and the period reduced to three months, or any similar period which would entitle to the claim, I should defy any personation agent to tell if the people who voted at the time of election were those who had come into the district. It is absolutely impossible under a successive occupation of this sort, with men who go wandering about the country, if the necessary qualification is reduced to three months. I venture to say that under these conditions a well organized band of 500 men could record several thousand of votes in the course of a general election. That is a danger we must avoid'. Ibid.

22. Stewart (1978, xv).

23. A significant example here was the reluctant attitude taken to the issue of organization in some areas of the country, as late as the 1880s. Asked to explain why, in Dorsetshire, there was no organizational structure whatsoever for the 1880 elections, the local representative said 'that he had discussed the matter with his colleague Mr Floyer and they had deliberately come to the conclusion that it was better to have none, for fear of raising the activity of the Liberal party.' Quoted in Cornford (1964, 407).

24. Figures clearly show how different the National Union was before and after the reform. In 1878, out of 950 Conservative Associations in the country, only 266 were members and, out of these, only 46 had delegates at the annual meeting; in 1887, as many as 1100 associations were affiliated and represented in the Union assembly. See Lowell (1906, 539, 557). Only after 1885 did the National Union Congress begin passing political resolutions. On this and other aspects of the organization, see McKenzie (1955, 146-85).

25. Rules adopted during a special Conference of the National Union, held on 5 May 1886 at the Westminster Palace Hotel, and partially revised during the Oxford Conference of 22 November 1887. See ACP, The Rules of the National Union 1867-1938.

26. Quite meaningful were the various resolutions in favour of 'preferential tariffs', that had been ignored until a powerful leader like Joseph Chamberlain decided to use the issue for political purposes. See Lowell (1906, I, 563).

27. ACP, *Minutes and Reports of the Conservative Party Conferences*, '1886 Conference'.

28. One delegate stressed the need to improve the organization, recalling 'that organization does not mean going over the same ground only again and again, but it means progressive organization'. Ibid., '1886 Conference'. Organizational problems, however, were given institutional priority anyway, as the Chairman himself recalled: 'by the rules of the Union any question relating to organization must take precedence of other matters'. Ibid., '1891 Conference'.

29. Quite a few saw the most active representatives within the National Union as 'third-rate politicians who took ample revenge for their failure in the House of Commons by practically monopolising the platform on the occasions of the annual gathering'. Bridges (1906, 174).

30. Mr Raitt brought to the fore the issue of the need to have 'a private discussion upon matters of very great weight' and Mr Gardner decided 'to support my friend Mr Raitt...It appears to me that one of the principal duties of this Conference is to discuss questions of organization, intimate questions which require free discussion.' In Mr French's opinion 'our discussion will be very much hampered if every thing that is said is to be reported at large.' (ACP, *Minutes and Reports of the Conservative Party Conference*, '1890 Conference').

31. Ibid.

32. Ibid.

33. Ibid., '1886 Special Conference'.

34. In 1886 Sir Albert Rollit declared that 'those who take an interest in party matters will admit that we could have been occupied by nothing of more essential importance than that question of organization. It is not, perhaps, too much to say that the disaster of 1880 which lost to this country the Earl of Beaconsfield and his policy was due in a very great measure to that own confidence which arises from ignorance and want of organization.' Ibid., '1886 Conference'.

35. Middleton's answer expressed mediation: 'if you ask a man to subscribe a guinea you ought to give him something in return for it. The Council elect these honorary members very carefully indeed and they turn up at these conferences in very small numbers indeed, and therefore we have not interfered with their right of voting.' Ibid., '1886 Special Conference'.

36. Mr Colfax of Bradford intervened on the failure of the relationship between the centre and periphery: 'We feel in the country that we have not the best assistance that can possibly be offered to us from this great centre of London.' Ibid.

37. Ibid., '1886 Special Conference'.

38. Ibid., '1886 Conference'.

39. Bartlett stated: 'There had been in the past some friction between the National Union and the Central Office. Our earnest desire has been to avoid any suspicion of this and to prevent it from recurring in the future. The representative Council of the Conservative Associations (that is the National Union) and the organising electoral agency (that is the Central Office) ought to work in harmony for the common good.' Ibid..

40. Grimston's amendment motion stated: 'To leave out the Rule 21 and the National Union Rules the concluding words "and arrangements for lectures and addresses shall be made by the executive Committees of the Provincial Divisions respectively."' Ibid., '1887 Conference'.

41. A delegate from North Berkshire spoke in defence of centre-oriented organizational machinery: 'We have had capital lectures and well known members of Parliament sent to us and on two occasions even Cabinet ministers. I want to know if these wants would be equally well met if the country had to depend, not upon a powerful central association in London, but upon the provincial unions.' Ibid.. Grimston's motion was rejected by a large, but not absolute, majority, after a long and passionate debate.

42. 'The members who are elected solely by the Conference', claimed the delegate Beresford Hope, 'look to the general purposes and are apt in my humble opinion to overlook details whereas those who are elected by divisions have the details well grounded before they are elected and know precisely what is needed.' Ibid., '1890 Conference'.

43. Ibid.

44. 'Before you bring forward the argument that additional provincial representation will bring in additional working men candidates you must begin by showing you send working men to the Conference from the provinces, and also to the Council. It may well be asked "why do you not send working men to the Council from the Provinces?" The only working man on the Council is one whom we carried by the vote of the Conference last year, I mean Mr. Cropley.' Ibid.

45. Ibid.

46. Ibid., '1891 Conference'.

47. Ibid., '1885 Conference'.

48. Ibid., '1886 Conference'.

49. An anonymous worker-delegate declared that 'all parties are recognising that the working man is now the factor, in the imperial politics'. Ibid. In 1891 a resolution was proposed according to which 'the principles advocated by the United Empire Trade League favouring the extension of commerce upon a preferential basis throughout all parts of the British Empire will be of the highest collective and individual advantage'. Ibid., '1891 Conference'. The issue was also taken up the following year by Howard Vincent, an influential Council member, but was opposed by those who believed that 'the principles advocated by the United Empire Trade League favouring the extension of commerce upon a preferential basis throughout all parts of the British Empire will be of the highest collective and individual advantage.' Ibid., '1891 Conference' and 'this Conference, as I understand it, has not merely to pass resolutions upon a preconceived basis, but to meet for discussion and to hear calmly both sides of every question put before

it...The resolution is inopportune...I venture to say that as there is at the present time a period of depression under Free Trade, there were formerly periods of equal depression when Protection was in force (A voice: "We have no Free Trade"). We have Free Trade but not, according to some of my friends, fair trade...I maintain that the time has not come when we can give our unhesitating opinion in favour of Protection, but on the contrary, that it would be fatal to us, and fatal to the great interests of this Empire.' Ibid., '1892 Conference'. On the internal divisions of Unionists on tariff policies, see R.A. Rempel (1972), *Unionists Divided: Arthur Balfour, Joseph Chamberlain and the Unionist Free Traders*, Newton Abbot.

50. According to Sir Albert Rollit 'although we recognize the necessity of organization, although we must learn to some extent from our opponents, it is not our object to create a Conservative Caucus in any sense. Our object is not to formulate, impress and coerce the opinions either of yourselves or of the party generally.' Ibid., '1886 Special Conference'.

51. A delegate, faced with the request by a working man to grant popular forces a greater role in the party, wondered: 'have we power to deal with this question?' and the chairman answered that 'we have no power to deal with the matter but the resolution simply means that we recommend it for future action'. 'Ibid., 1886 Conference'.

52. Ibid., '1892 Conference'.

53. During the 1886 Bradford Conference, Mr Cropley thought it necessary 'to place more confidence in the working men and to allow them to have their proper position and power in the party'. He was supported by an East Berkshire delegate who complained about the lack of 'that direct representation of the workingmen that there ought to be seeing the overwhelming political power which he possesses'. Ibid., '1886 Conference'.

54. Ibid., '1890 Conference'.

55. The issue was dealt with in an exhortative motion saying 'That social legislation ought to be in its future as it has been in the past, a main feature of Conservative policy'. Ibid.

56. Ibid., '1891 Conference'.

57. Rankin: 'Is the State to do what is to the public advantage if private effort is unable to do it...A principle which has entered into a good many of our matters at various times in very late years.' Ibid.

58. Ibid.

59. Quoted in France (1987, 244).

60. The Archives of the British Conservative Party, Minutes and Reports of the Conservative Party Conferences, '1892 Conference'.

61. The presence of leaders at the Conference was obviously a duty, as Balfour's restlessness clearly showed in writing to Salisbury in 1885: 'I, for my sins, have got to go to the said Jubilee banquet: but it gets me off the National Union - so I ought not to grumble too much.' (A.J. Balfour to Lord Salisbury, 2 October 1885, quoted in Harcourt Williams (1988, 124).

62. ACP, *Minutes and Reports of the Conservative Party Conferences*, '1892 Conference'.

63. Ibid., '1886 Conference'.

64. Mrs Millicent Garrett Fawcett also asked the assembly to appraise the issue 'not from a Party point of view, but from a commonsense point of view...We have in England and Wales alone nearly 38,000 women landowners, about 20,000 women farmers. Is it right and just that the ploughmen and the...employed by these ladies should have the right to vote and the ladies themselves be excluded from it?' Mrs Fawcett wondered then why many Liberals, previously favourable to an extension of suffrage, had changed their minds. 'It is, I believe, because they have become convinced, as many of us have become convinced, that the enfranchisement of women would be a powerful reinforcement of the party of order...We do not propose by any means any sort of universal womenhood suffrage, we merely propose that those women who are ratepayers, homeowners and landowners... should also be entitled to vote.' Ibid., '1891 Conference'.

65. Ibid., '1886 Special Conference'.

66. Ibid., '1886 Conference'.

67. Representative Stuart Wortley stated: 'Unfortunately the resolution goes further and recommends a name which I cannot subscribe to.' Mr Jonathan Adams: 'If you put before the working men of Lancashire such a title as "Progressive" you will be laughed at. If there is to be a change I for one strongly advocate the old word "Tory". It may be argued that that word has meanings which are not in accordance with the present age but I say we will give it a new meaning. I think the proposal which is before the conference is not likely to be accepted and neither do I think the word "Constitutionalist" will become popular. It is too long a word and might prove a difficulty for after-dinner speeches (laugh).' Another delegate felt that 'any attempt to change our name, with the...bringing about of a permanent union with the Liberal Unionists, is as unwise a thing as we can possibly do and that we had better let things remain as they are.' The chairman closed the session recalling that 'the matter has been under the consideration of the Council and I think it is understood that it is a question very much for the leaders of the party'. Ibid.

68. Spencer (1895, 740-57). Fundamental to this issue is Burrow (1966).

69. Salisbury stated during his speech: 'If we think of that vast distance over which Darwin conducts us, from the jellyfish lying on the primeval beach to man as we know him now; if we reflect that the prodigious change requisite to transform one into the other is made up of a chain of generations, each advancing by a minute variation from the form of its predecessor, and if we further reflect that these successive changes are so minute that in the course of our historical period - say three thousand years - this progressive variation has not advanced by a single step perceptible to our eyes, in respect to man or the animals and plants with which man is familiar, we shall admit that for a chain of change so vast, of which the smallest link is longer than our recorded history, the biologists are making no extravagant claim when they demand at least many hundred million years for the accomplishment of the stupendous process.' Quoted in Spencer (1895, 753).

70. See Bowler (1989). The discussion in Italy and France on the meaning of evolutionary theories is analysed by Mangoni (1985, 70-2).

71. A general approach to the issue can be found in the classic works by Otto

Hintze and, more recently, by Reinhardt Koselleck. A stimulating overall reinterpretation of such topics is in Schiera (1987).

72. The issue was still being debated during the First World War when many German intellectuals supported the idea of an alternative political system to 'British democracy' see Tommasi (1988, 63-96), as opposed to Max Weber who firmly maintained the inevitability of the despised 'demagogic' pattern of a 'democracy of leaders with political machinery'.

73. On the 1848 German failure, see Blackbourn and Eley (1985), esp. the 'Introduction'.

74. Vincent (1966, xii). This work provides a classic interpretation of the development of the Liberal party.

75. On the issue, see Collini, Winch and Burrow (1983), and Fontana (1985).

76. See Burrow (1993).

77. A comparative analysis of the existence of such issues in European Liberalism is offered by Cuomo (1981); Ullrich (1985, esp.317-31); Cammarano (1990, esp. 13-30).

78. Kebbel (1892, 8).

79. This thesis is analysed in Cooke and Vincent (1981). It was, however, pointed out that the rift created by Home Rule did not affect those who were already integrated in the party system as much as it did intellectuals. See Harvie (1990).

80. 'If reactionary measures are to be carried, the Liberal party takes the rudder, from the correct assumption that it will not overstep the necessary limits; if Liberal measures are to be carried, the Conservative party takes office in its turn from the same consideration.' (Quoted in Ibid., 153). On the issue, O'Sullivan (1976, ch. 4).

81. The shaping of the intellectual basis of such a pattern is described by Pinto-Duschinsky (1967). See esp. pp. 104-18 on the theory of balance.

82. See Guttsman (1963).

83. Quoted in Young (1944, 27).

84. Quoted in Churchill (1906, 1952edn, 565).

85. 'Gladstone believed that while the intellect was important it was not a sufficient guide to right decisions on fundamental questions in politics.' See Matthew (1990, xlii), 'Introduction' to the volumes X and XI.

86. Talking to a spirited member of his family, Salisbury stated: 'You are like Joe [Chamberlain] who again is like Randolph. You don't care the least for character. We cannot dissolve Parliament with our work half-finished without loss of character.' The quotation and an assessment of the importance Salisbury attached to character - that is, consistency in not betraying public confidence on commitments already made - are in Marsh (1979, 239). This essay also offers a partial comparison of Gladstone and Salisbury's moral attitudes. Also quite meaningful within this context was the anti-positivist controversy that Gladstone waged against Herbert Spencer and Fredric Harrison. In an article of 1876 in *The Contemporary Review* he stated: 'Schemes, then, may suffice for the moral wants of a few intellectual and cultivated men, which cannot be propagated, and cannot be transmitted; which cannot bear the wear and tear of constant re-delivery; which cannot meet the countless and ever-shifting exigencies of our nature taken at large; which cannot do the rough work of the world.' Quoted in Harvie (1990, 160).

87. Lord Salisbury to A.J. Balfour, 29 March 1886, quoted in Harcourt Williams (1988, 138).

88. See Cannadine (1990, 222-224).

89. See Burrow (1981).

90. 'The Conservative Surrender' (1867, 534-5).

91. Lord Salisbury to A.J. Balfour, 29 March 1886, quoted in Harcourt Williams (1988, 359). Salisbury's partiality to a 'fortified' executive was also confirmed in 1891 when, answering Balfour's requests for strong intervention by the government on the political scene, he stated that '"Resolute government" is only possible in Ireland'.

92. The theory of the omnipotence of parliamentarism was quite widespread during this period and was also supported by the prestigious A.V. Dicey, who, in *Law and Constitution* (1885) confirmed the absolute power enjoyed by Parliament. This was summarized by the Duke of Devonshire, who, during a parliamentary debate in 1893, stated: 'In the United Kingdom, Parliament is supreme not only in its legislative but in its Executive functions. Parliament makes and unmakes our Ministries; it revises their actions. Ministries may make peace and war, but they do so at pain of instant dismissal by Parliament from Office, and in affairs of internal administration the power of Parliament is equally direct. It can dismiss a Ministry if it is too extravagant, or too economical; it can dismiss a Ministry because its government is too stringent or too lax. It does actually and practically, in every way, directly govern England, Scotland and Ireland.' Quoted in Greenleaf (1983, I, 198).

93. Greenleaf (1983, II, 223-31). Shortly before leaving the Liberal party, Chamberlain had worried Gladstone with a programme predicting greater state intervention, to be financed through increased taxation of the privileged classes. To the Liberal leader, the disruptive aim of such projects was quite obvious: 'Its pet idea is what they call construction, that is to say, taking into the hands of the state the business of the individual man.' The radical programme left no doubt as to the extent of Chamberlain's belief in state intervention, 'in the direction of which the legislation of the last quarter of a century has been tending - the intervention...of the State on behalf of the weak against the strong, in the interests of labour against capital, of want and suffering against luxury and ease.' (Ibid., 227-8). On the political relationship between Gladstone and Radicalism, see Barker (1975).

94. A.J. Balfour to Lord Salisbury, 24 March 1886, quoted in Harcourt Williams (1988, 137).

95. On this aspect of Churchill's idea of the impact of democracy on the transformation of the role of the state, see Greenleaf (1983, II, 217-23).

96. 'The Toryism of Tomorrow. An Interview with Lord Randolph Churchill', in *Pall Mall Gazette*, 27 November 1884, quoted in Foster (1981, 407-8). During the interview Churchill stressed his opinion - contrary to Gladstone's - in favour of limited public expenditure - that tax revenues should be increased, through a revision of customs fees, in order to tackle the issue of social legislation: 'we are

not hampered by any devotion to imaginary dictates of political economy, as the Whigs are, and we should not shrink from a large investment of public money and a large amount of State intervention for the benefit of the masses of the people.' (Ibid., 406-7).

97. Here, the term 'consensus' to the system means not so much enthusiastic support for individual government policies, but in a more technical sense, an appraisal of the legitimacy of the nature and basic rules of the system itself and the consequent acceptance of a form of political obligation.

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