NOT A NEW IDEA:

ELECTORAL PACTS IN BRITAIN

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Introduction

One of the most recurrent ideas in British politics over the last few years has been the idea of an electoral pact of some description between different political parties - principally an "anti-Thatcher" pact between the Labour and Liberal Democratic/Alliance/Social Democratic parties, and more recently Dr David Owen's attempt to enter into a pact with one or other of the main parties to keep himself and his colleagues in the Commons.

It can in fact be argued that the history of British politics would have been different without them; without one, the Labour Party might never have got off the ground. Some of them have also been highly successful; the biggest landslides of this century: 1906, 1918 and 1931 were the direct result of electoral pacts.

1886-1906:The First Pacts

"Mr Gladstone's existence was the greatest source of strength the Conservative Party possessed". Lord Salisbury's words would appear to be borne out by the facts; certainly Mr Gladstone's policies split the Liberal Party, restored Lord Salisbury to No 10 and, of most relevance here, prompted the first of the electoral pacts.

The General Election of 1885 gave the Liberals 335 seats; the Conservatives 249 and Parnell's Irish Nationalists 86. Liberal leader Gladstone was a strong supporter of Irish Home Rule, although he kept silent on the subject until after the election. The "Hawarden kite" flown by Gladstone's son Herbert on December 17th, that is, his letting slip to the press his father's support for Home Rule, put the lid on it. The following month, Parliament reconvened and Salisbury was out. However, the amendment that removed him revealed the Liberals' already-existing divisions; 18 of them voted with the government and 74 abstained.

Already the old Whigs, the right wingers under Lord Hartington (Harty Tarty), a very different Liberal from his leader, (1) had refused to join the government. By the end of March, anti-Home Rule Radicals led by the dynamic, hard-headed Joseph Chamberlain had joined them.

When the Home Rule Bill came before the Commons on June 7th, it was voted down by 343 votes to 313; 93 Liberals crossing the floor against it. The General Election that followed saw the first of the pacts, between the Conservatives and Liberal Unionists, who generally refrained from fighting each other.

To cite a few examples: in Islington West, the Liberal MP turned Liberal Unionist had a clear (and successful) run against the "loyalist" Liberal. Bethnal Green East saw the "Lib-Lab" (2) candidate hold off a Liberal Unionist despite his "siphoning off" some Liberal votes. St Pancras South went Liberal Unionist in a straight fight with the Liberals; and some of the two member seats saw what might be termed successful pacts. In Bath, the Conservatives and Liberal Unionists each put up one candidate and won; the LU polled 3,309 votes, the Tory 3,244, and 3,155 voted for both of them. In Leicester, the Conservatives stood down for the Liberal Unionists; a Conservative and Liberal Unionist stood in tandem and won in Portsmouth, lost in Newcastle and Northampton. The overall result of the election showed that

pacts work: the Liberals fell to 191 MPs, the Conservatives on the other hand rose from 249 to 316, the Liberal Unionists won 78, and the Irish Nationalists, 85.

Half a century later, George V was to tell Ramsay MacDonald that it had been a mistake not to pass Gladstone's Home Rule Bill; it is highly unlikely that any Liberals would have disagreed, looking at the consequences for their party. While they were out, who was in? Lord Salisbury (generously perhaps) offered to serve under Lord Hartington in a Con-LU coalition, a forerunner of those later led by Lloyd George and MacDonald. Hartington, however, turned him down; the Liberal Unionists, while certainly not willing to support Gladstone, were not yet ready to join Salisbury either. Whatever his own ambitions, Hartington knew that he headed a reverse version of today's Scottish Nationalists: unionist rather than separatist but still a group united on one issue while divided on others. The general view was that, if Hartington joined up with the Tories, Chamberlain and his followers would go back to the Liberals, although, since it seems (3) that his supporters outnumbered Chamberlain's by 57 to 21, such a Coalition would still have commanded 373 MPs. The Liberal Unionists, however, claimed to still be Liberals on everything but Ireland, but, as will be shown, they were soon firmly in the Tory embrace, just as happened to the Liberal Nationals in the 1930s.

Leaving this aside, in 1886 Lord Salisbury formed a minority government which lasted until 1892. Before the year was out, a Liberal Unionist was Chancellor. Talks between Chamberlain and Gladstone at the Round Table conference of 1887 came to nothing. (4) The Conservatives and Liberal Unionists grew closer together, to the point where both of them were referred to as simply "Unionists". (5)

In 1891, when Hartington succeeded his father as Duke of Devonshire, Chamberlain became leader of the Liberal Unionist MPs. The General Election of 1892 saw the Con-Lib Unionist pact continuing and being counteracted to some extent by the Liberals. Not only were there already Lib-Lab, that is working class-backed Liberal MPs, but 1892 saw independent Labour candidates standing in their own right. Three of them won: John Burns and Keir Hardie in straight fights with the Conservatives, Havelock Wilson in a 3-cornered fight. Keir Hardie's victory might be said to be due to a Lib-Lab pact; the local Liberal organiser had persuaded his party to stand down and Keir Hardie himself had said that he agreed with the Liberal programme "as far as it goes". Indeed, when Keir Hardie had first stood for Parliament in 1888, it had been under the slogan "a vote for

Hardie is a vote for Gladstone", even though he was standing against a Liberal candidate!

The election itself saw the Liberals and Irish Nationalists with a combined majority of 40; the Liberal Unionists fell from 78 MPs to 47. 1893 saw Home Rule being thrown out by the Lords and the formation of the Independent Labour Party. This was due partly to the Liberals shortsightedly taking the Lib-Labs for granted and refusing to either adopt working men as candidates or carry out any radical reforms.

1895 saw another General Election; the Conservatives and Liberal Unionists stayed together and won by a landslide. 341 Conservatives and 70 Liberal Unionists gave the Tories an overall majority in their own right; however, the Coalition and pact continued, despite the LUs rejecting fusion. If they hadn't, Chamberlain might have become Prime Minister after all.

Leaving this aside, the pact again worked. As usual at this time, Joseph Chamberlain's candidates had a clean sweep in Birmingham, where Unionists won every seat until 1924. In the two-member seats, the Con-LU alliance won Bath again; as in 1892, the Tory finished narrowly on top (1892: Con 3,198; LU 3,177; both 3,105; 1895: Con 3,445; LU 3,358; both 3,310).

On the left, Burns was re-elected as a Lib-Lab; Keir Hardie, on the other hand, lost his seat as a result of being too outspoken and independent. And, in Newcastle, the case for some kind of Lib-Lab pact was shown by the result; in this two-member seat, the lowest-finishing Conservative received 12,120 votes; the highest-finishing Liberal, 11,862; 2,302 voted for the sole ILP candidate.

The next General Election, in 1900, further proved that Disraeli's 1852 claim that "England does not love coalitions" was not necessarily true; on the contrary, this, the first of the *Khaki Elections*, saw this particular coalition win 402 seats, slightly down from 1895, but still a landslide. Spilt over the Boer War, the Liberals won 186 seats, better than they'd expected, partly due to the government's attempting to brand all Liberals as pro-Boer.

The election of 1900 also saw the formation of the Labour Representation Committee, which put up 15 candidates; in the words of Roger Moore [history lecturer and author of *The Emergence of the Labour Party (1880-1924)*], "There was a marked tendency for the LRC candidates to line up with the anti-war section of the Liberal Party." Both their MPs were elected with

Liberal backing; Keir Hardie in Merthyr was elected with the votes of anti-war Liberals who refused to vote for Pritchard Morgan, a Liberal Imperialist who dubbed both Keir Hardie and his own fellow Liberal as pro-Boer; in Derby, Richard Bell was elected as a result of a pact with the local Liberals.

In the two-member constituencies, the strength of the Con-LU pact in Bath was confirmed; the two were now one party in everything but name. In Leicester, a Lib-Lab and Tory beat a Liberal and Labour (Ramsay MacDonald) candidate. In Newcastle, the ILP's not standing this time failed to win the seat for the Liberals; nor did Liberal and Labour running in tandem manage to win Sunderland.

The aftermath of the election, more accurately, the first few years of this century, saw Joseph Chamberlain's insistence on keeping his Liberal Unionists formally separate from the Conservatives possibly costing him the Premiership in 1902; ironically, the big split among the Conservatives over Free Trade that followed, a kind of Tory version of the Liberal split over Home Rule two decades earlier, was led by the same men; Chamberlain led the Tariff Reformers, Hartington, now Duke of Devonshire, the Free Traders. Both men resigned from the Government in 1903. Chamberlain expected to see a Liberal victory at the General Election, followed by a victory for a Tariff Reform Conservative Party led by him in the one afterwards.

At the same time, Balfour attempted to persuade the Liberal League (6) to follow the example of Hartington and Chamberlain and "come over" in some way; he failed, as did attempts by Unionist Free Traders to conclude a pact with the Liberals.

1906: The Pact That Worked

There was, however, one pact that did succeed: the MacDonald-Gladstone Pact concluded between the Labour and Liberal Chief Whips. This pact, concluded in 1903, provided for the Labour Representation Committee to have a clear run in 30 seats and to "demonstrate friendliness" to the Liberals elsewhere. This was certainly done; LRC MP Richard Bell's friendliness towards the Liberals led to his being dropped by his party!

The pact was to last only for one election, the LRC not wishing to "lose their independence" as the Liberal Unionists had done. Its necessity had been shown by past results: left wing candidates from the Social Democratic Federation fron 1892 and 1895 in Salford South had split the vote and let the Tory in, as had North Lanark when the local Liberals refused to stand down for Bob Smillie in 1901, despite his being endorsed by the Liberal Whips.

Both parties faced obvious problems: would the Liberal League on the one hand or the ILP on the other support an agreement? Keir Hardie himself had said, of two- party constituencies, "If the Liberal Party would select one candidate and would leave the Labour Party with one, that fact alone would be proof of good fellowship."

In 1906, something like that happened, successfully for both parties and without a split. The LRC put up fifty candidates in 1906, 31 of them without opposition from the Liberals. Twenty-one had straight fights against Unionists in single member constituencies; ten ran in tandem with the Liberals in two member constituencies. The result, some four hundred Liberals and Lib-Labs and twenty-nine Labour MPs, vindicated the pact to an extent that could hardly be matched, especially as the Liberals had attracted less than half the popular vote. As leading Liberal Sir Jesse Herbert wrote to Herbert Gladstone afterwards, "Was there ever such a justification of a policy by results?" (7) Interestingly, there does not seem to have been an "anti-socialist backlash" by Liberal voters or an "anti-capitalist backlash" by socialist voters, as the failure of the candidates of the Marxist Social Democratic Federation proved. Their best performance was 38.3% in Accrington, where, intriguingly, 56.8% voted Liberal and there was no Tory candidate, despite their having polled 46.1% in 1900. A *de facto* Con-Lib pact?

The pact had not been a complete one. Without the partial pact, Labour would have been all but annihilated and the Liberals would have had a much lower majority. With a full scale one, it would have seemed that the Labour Party (as it renamed itself after the election) was entirely dependent on Liberal votes, and (to a limited extent) vice versa. In the two-member seats this time, putting up "one candidate each" worked. Ramsey MacDonald and Philip Snowden were among the new MPs elected in this way. In Newcastle, Norwich and Sunderland, the same happened. Intriguingly, the Labour candidate received 46 more votes than the Liberal in Newcastle; the only "anti-socialist backlash" seems to have been in York, where

the Liberal was elected with 6,423 votes but the Labour candidate, with 4,573, wasn't.

The late 1900s saw the pact hold up fairly well, considering it had only been planned to last for one election. The bye-elections of these years might be said to have indirectly vindicated the pact in some cases and argued against it in others. In 1906 in Cockermouth, the Liberals won a straight fight; the bye-election that August saw the Conservatives gain the seat with 46.2% of the vote. 39.2% voted Liberal and 14.5% Labour. In 1907, what might be termed "anti-pact socialists" had two arguments given to them; in Jarrow, a four-cornered bye-election saw a Labour gain with the Liberal third; while in Colne Valley, Independent Socialist Victor Grayson won a three-cornered fight by a very narrow margin. Less than 500 votes separated the three candidates.

In 1908, two Tory gains seemed to make the "pro-pact" argument. Pudsey, where the Liberals had won a straight fight with the Liberal Unionists in 1906, saw the Conservatives poll 45%; Liberals, 44%; and Independent Labour, 11%. In Newcastle-upon-Tyne, the Social Democratic Federation split the anti-Tory vote with 10.4%, leaving the Tories winning by 48.5% to 41.1%.

In 1909, Sheffield Attercliffe saw a Liberal win turn into a four-cornered fight. Labour won with 27.5%; the Conservatives polled 26.2%; Liberals 24.6% and an Independent Unionist, 21.7%; a Tory split very lucky for their rivals. In Mid-Derbyshire, the Liberal MP was replaced by a Liberal backed by the local miners who was pledged to sit with Labour in the Commons: this joint candidate won a big majority in a straight fight.

In the words of Roy Douglas, 'The Labour Party was very anxious to emphasise its distinctiveness from both of the older parties." (8) Unfortunately, the effect of this in Bermondsey was to split the anti-Tory vote in such a way as to give the Conservatives another gain (Con 47%, Lib 37%, Lab 16%).

1910: Two Elections, Two Pacts

"Relations between the Liberal and Labour parties varied considerably."(9) MacDonald and Henderson negotiated a fresh agreement with the Liberals: the decision of the miners' union, (the Miners' Federation of Great Britain)

to affiliate to the Labour Party and thus take some Lib-Lab members with them was met by a Liberal candidate's standing successfully against the "new" Labour MPs in Gateshead.

The Liberals contested and regained Jarrow and Colne Valley, but gave Labour a clear run in Attercliffe. In addition, they stood down for Labour in Manchester East, gained from Balfour in 1906. The election itself proved a case for the pact; the Liberals fell to 275 seats, the Unionists rose to 273, Labour won 40 seats and the Irish Nationalists, 82.

However, Labour leaders' attitudes varied. Dockers' leader Ben Tillett condemned the pacts and the *Labour Leader;* the ILP paper, called the Liberals "...the most dangerous foes of the Labour Party candidates." (10) However, in three-cornered fights, the Labour Party won no seats and came second in only five. The case for the pact can be seen from such seats as Bermondsey, where its renewal led to the Liberal beating the Tory in a straight fight, and in such two-member seats as Blackburn, Derby and Leicester, where Labour and Liberal candidates won in tandem. To show the strength of the pact, in Leicester, the Liberals polled 14,643 votes and Labour's Ramsey MacDonald, 14,337. Conversely, in Sunderland, a Tory-backed former Liberal standing as an Independent Tariff Reform candidate gained the seat along with a Conservative.

In the words of Moore, "Clearly, Labour held its seats only by courtesy of the Liberal Party"; (11) on the other hand, the Liberals could be said to have been kept in power by courtesy of the Labour Party, in that, had Labour adopted a "sectarian Socialist" policy and gone it alone, the result would have undoubtedly been to split the progressive vote in such a way as to restore the Conservatives to power.

The following December's second General Election of 1910 was basically a repeat of January; the Pact continued, Labour winning 42 seats out of 56 contested rather than 40 out of 78. The Unionists won 274 seats, the Liberals, 270, the Irish Nationalists, 84.

In 1911, Labour upheld their independence; and no formal Coalition offer from Liberal to Labour was made until March 1914. However, while MacDonald and Henderson might have been attracted by the idea, it would have torn the Labour Party apart; the ILP Executive Council was only one of the many Labour organisations which totally rejected any idea of coalition. And, while the Irish Nationalists instructed Irish electors on the main-

land to vote Liberal, they could hardly have joined a coalition without risking immediate political oblivion.

In 1912, the Liberal Unionists at last formally joined the Conservatives; for years they had been Tories in everything but name, continuing in formally "independent" existence only out of deference to Joseph Chamberlain, paralysed since his 1906 stroke. Ironically, had the formal fusion occurred earlier, his son Austen would probably have become leader in 1911 rather than the compromise choice of Bonar Law.

As for the pre-1914 bye-elections, they again vindicated the need for the Pact. In Oldham, a two member seat, the Liberals had won a straight fight in 1910; in 1911, the Conservatives polled 40%; Liberals, 35%; and Labour, 25%. Between 1911 and the outbreak of the First World War, the Liberals lost fifteen seats to the Conservatives and gained two from Labour. Labour also lost two to the Conservatives. The Tories, though, never staked a claim to form a Government based on their being the largest party. In turn they lost two seats, one to the Liberals, Londonderry interestingly, considering the Irish Home Rule campaign at the time, and one to an independent Conservative. Five of the Liberal losses were due to Labour intervention; the three Labour losses were all caused by Liberal intervention. Hanley, indeed, saw the "Lib-Lab turned Labour" mining MP succeeded by a Liberal in a bye-election in which the Labour candidate came a humiliating third, losing nearly 4-1 to the Liberal. Chesterfield saw the Liberals supporting the Labour candidate, who responded by taking the Liberal whip on election.

By the summer of 1914, both Asquith and Lloyd George were bemoaning the break down of relations between the parties. MacDonald was certainly keen on retaining the alliance, as, almost certainly, were most Labour MPs. Snowden was later to write in his autobiography that Labour could win "only half a dozen" seats without an agreement.

In other words, the Labour Party would have had a choice between probably doing comfortably in terms of seats but losing its independence and becoming an adjunct of the Liberals or going it alone, preserving its independence, and being annihilated. Continuing the pact might have saved the Labour Party its seats but would have undoubtedly led to an outflow of socialists to "outside left" groups like Hyndman's British Socialist Party. One might say that, while the Pact would have worked in the short term, in the long term its inevitable result would have been to turn Labour into a left wing version of the Liberal Unionists.

The Wartime Truce

The outbreak of the First World War had, paradoxically, the effect of quelling things in Britain; it defused tension over labour relations, votes for women, and, most of all, Ireland. On 20th August, the Tory, Liberal and Labour whips agreed not to contest bye-elections against each other. The agreement was renewed periodically until the end of the war. It was undoubtedly in the interests of national unity, as the Tories were united in support of a popular war while the Liberal and Labour parties had vocal anti-war factions. There were, however, contested bye-elections throughout the war.

In March 1915, the bye-election in Merthyr after the death of Keir-Hardie saw the local Labour Party select an anti-war candidate. A pro-war independent Labour candidate won the seat by a landslide of 63% to 37% with the backing of the Tories and Liberals. The next contest was a very different one; in Cleveland that December, the legendary Horatio Bottomley, best described as a corrupt populist demagogue, put up a candidate for his own John Bull League, who polled 27% against the Liberal, Herbert Samuel.

Bottomley's campaigns were for an intensified war effort, a better deal for the "common man", and, of course, himself! It is intriguing that, for all the books and TV programmes since about anti-war activists and conscientious objectors in the "Great War," few of the challenges in the bye-elections came from the anti-war left; most were for a tougher war effort.

1916 began with an Independent Labour opponent of liquor controls polling 23% against a Liberal in Newington West and the Bottomley-backed hawk Noel Pemberton Billing polling nearly 45% in Mile End, where a Liberal Unionist was replaced by a Conservative (as happened in Droitwich the following month). In March, Pemberton Billing, later to figure in a famous libel case in which he proclaimed his belief in the mythical *Black Book*, won Hertford against an official Conservative. In the same month, an Independent from the Attested Married Men's Protest (over conscription) Society polled 32% in Harborough; 44% voted for a Bottomley-backed candidate from the National Union of Attested Married Men in Hythe. In April, a Billing-backed NUAMM candidate polled 44% in Wimbledon; 17% voted for a Billing-backed independent in Tewkesbury in May. Bottomley-backed independents polled 14% in Berwick in August and 37% in Mansfield in September. In October, an anti-liquor controls candidate polled 28% in Winchester-and the first anti-war Independent, backed by the

Union of Democratic Control, polled 15% in a straight fight in Ayrshire North.

1917 saw the first few Independent anti-war challengers; war-weariness had led them to come out into the open, without success. None of the three, even leading Socialist Frederick Pethick-Lawrence, could manage more than 23% of the vote.

After a National Federation of Demobilised Soldiers and Sailors Candidate, campaigning for ex-servicemen's welfare, polled 26% in Liverpool Abercromby in July, Scottish Prohibitionist Edwin Scrymgeour polled 22% against Churchill in Dundee in August. The last challengers of the year were hawks: in October, Islington East saw a Billing-backed Independent poll 32% against the Government-backed Labour candidate, while 11% voted for Page Croft's extreme right-wing National Party. In November, Salford East saw Independent Labour man Ben Tillett win the seat with 65% on a programme combining a hard line on the war with socialism at home.

In 1918, war weariness saw a Co-operative Party candidate poll 25% at Prestwich in January and an ILP man break the truce with 32.5% at Keighley in April; May saw big votes for protest candidates: 35% for the Agricultural Party in Ross; 47.5% for an Independent Labour Mine-backed candidate in Wansbeck. June and July saw the last of the "protest" candidates, 42.5% for Billing-backed anti-Semitic fanatic Henry Hamilton Beamish in Clapham and a total of 40% for two hawkish candidates, one Billing-backed, in Finsbury East.

1918:The Coupon Election

As the end of the war approached, Lloyd George faced a problem: while his Coalition and Premiership were impregnable during the war, could he stay in power afterwards? A general election fought on pre-war party lines would almost certainly have resulted in a Conservative victory, aside from the fact that a majority of Liberal MPs preferred Asquith to Lloyd George. The Prime Minister didn't have a party of his own until a Coalition Liberal organisation was set up in May 1918. This was followed by an agreement in July between Lloyd George and Bonar Law, originally planned for wartime election, for an electoral arrangement. (13) Exactly how many candidates received the coupon and exactly which ones did are two of those mysteries that will probably never be solved; there were certainly some local difficul-

ties, pressure from Conservative Central Office being needed to persuade local parties to stand down in places like Banbury and Newport. There were cases of coupons being sent to people who didn't want them, like the Asquithian Liberal F.C. Thornborough and Labour's Josiah Wedgewood. Equally, there were a few cases of government supporters being denied a coupon while it was sent to opponents; Liberal Leader Asquith, while he lost his East Fife seat, lost it to a Unionist who'd been denied a coupon.

Chris Cook, in his *The Age of Alignment* lists 362 Conservatives, 145 Liberals, 5 Labour, 1 Independent and 18 members of the "Patriotic Labour" National Democratic Party as having been sent the coupon; one of the NDPers receiving it as a compromise between the Liberals and Conservatives. In addition, Suffragette leader Christabel Pankhurst, running as a *Women's Party* candidate, received Government support without a formal coupon; and there was the case of uncouponed Liberal Barnet Kenyon, nominated by both Liberals and Conservatives but endorsing uncouponed candidates in nearby constituencies. In two-member seats like Blackburn, Oldham and Stockport, Conservatives and Liberals ran together like Labour and Liberal before the war - with equal success.

The more one tries to work out the precise number of Coalition, "coupon", candidates, the more confused one becomes. What can be said without fear of contradiction, however, is that the agreement worked. Lloyd George got his landslide; according to Cook, 332 couponed Conservatives, 127 Coalition Liberals, 4 Coalition Labour, and 9 National Democrats were returned: 473 out of 531, in all. The opposition was composed of 73 Sinn Feiners (who never took their seats), 47 uncouponed Conservatives, 3 Ulster Unionists, some 60 Labour, 36 Asquithian Liberals(not including either Asquith himself or most of his ex-Ministers) and 17 others. The Coalition Liberals, however, had the long-term disadvantages of having no real grass roots organisation and being reluctant to fight other Liberals in any case.

The next few years saw the Liberal Party torn apart; it can be argued though that the Coalition Liberals owed the Conservatives a debt of gratitude, in that many of them undoubtedly owed their seats to having received the coupon and consequently no Tory opposition. The aftermath was not so pleasant; quite simply, the Coalition couldn't hold permanently. As the years went by, discontent and disillusion grew; a full-blooded fusion between the Coalition parties failed. While leaders like Lloyd George, Birkenhead, Balfour and Churchill favoured the idea, Coalition Liberal Ministers on the one hand and the Tory rank-and-file on the other, opposed it. Any such Coalition "Centre Party" would have simply converted the three-

party system into a four-party system. Bonar Law told Balfour that he expected "...something on the lines of the Liberal Unionists and Conservatives in the early days...I do not like the idea of complete fusion...more important from LG's point of view than ours." In short, whatever his own inclinations, Lloyd George would be the Liberal leader of a Tory government; like Margaret Thatcher in 1990, the supposedly impregnable leader wasn't. An examination of coalition bye-elections shows this; disillusion set in fairly quickly on both left and right, when the "land fit for heroes" was unavoidably postponed.

From February 1919 onwards there were anti-coalition swings; Coalition Conservatives lost on massive swings (32% in Kingston-upon-Hull) to Labour and Liberal alike. In December, Spen Valley saw the Coalition Liberal come bottom of the poll to Labour and Liberal with less than half his party's General Election percentage, and in 1920 Horatio Bottomley reentered the field, supporting an independent who won Wrekin with 41% against 38% for Labour and 21% for the Coalition Liberal. Every bye-election saw an anti-Coalition swing, generally to Labour or the Liberals; in Camberwell, where they held on, and Norfolk South, where they didn't, Coalition Liberal appears to have meant Tory, as both the opposition parties contested the seats. Bottomley's man held Wrekin again in a straight fight with Labour with 58%, only 4% less than the combined Bottomley-Coalition Liberal vote earlier that year.

1921 began with Dover, where a Bottomley-backed candidate from Lord Rothermere's "cut spending" extreme right-wing *Anti-Waste League* beat a Coalition Conservative in a straight fight; the same happened that June in Hertford and St George's Westminster. Faced with crises like the economy, Russia, Ireland, demands for cuts in spending from the Tories and better social services from the Coalition Liberals, Lloyd George seems to have lost direction.

In addition, his style of government led to his being personally distrusted and, by the end of 1921, he was seen as an electoral liability. What eventually brought down the Coalition was a rank and file Tory MPs' revolt at the Carlton Club following on their winning the Newport bye-election of October 1922; but already the National Union had come out against coalition, the threat from the Anti-Waste League having been headed off by the Tories moving in their direction and the "Geddes Axe" of early 1922 which granted part of its demands. Even had the Coalition not been ended in 1922, it was certain that many anti-Coalition Tories would be standing anyway. Most Tories shared Baldwin's view that Lloyd George's "dynamic

force" would do to their party what it had already done to the Liberals. Should Lloyd George and his followers have formally joined the Conservative Party? Perhaps, but it is doubtful if they would have been able to take former Liberal voters with them.

1922-1931: More Pacts

With the fall of the Coalition and ensuing General Election, Lloyd George and his "National Liberals" had only one immediate object: survival. Whether some MPs were Lloyd George or Asquithian Liberals is debatable; *The Times* referred to the "confused state of party politics resulting from the break up of the coalition" on November 15th. There were some cases of National Liberals defending their seats with Asquithian backing in what one might call a Lib-Lib Pact. Equally, there were some 30 cases of Asquithians and Nationals challenging each other. Most of the Coalition Liberals decided to make arrangements with the Conservatives; a party with no real grass roots, they had to do the best they could at local level. Taking the offensive and challenging sitting Conservatives, as Lloyd George had threatened, was hardly practical politics; the National Liberals were very much on the defensive as Tories challenged them in many seats.

In Scotland, with one or two exceptions, a full-blooded pact was reached; in England, the "coalies" had to do the best they could locally. A few received official Conservative support, but only after promising support to a Conservative government.

The result showed that the National Liberals were, like the Liberal Unionists before them and Labour in 1910, dependent on the "bigger party" for much of their survival. The Conservatives, with 482 candidates, won 344 seats; the National Liberals with 144, had 53 MPs. 62 Liberals (from 333 candidates) and 142 Labour (from 414) MPs were elected. Only 4 National Liberals had beaten Conservatives; indeed, many survived only due to the fact that the suddenness of the General Election hadn't given the Conservatives time to adopt a candidate. One of the 8 National Liberal gains was by future Liberal leader Sir Archibald Sinclair, defeating a Coalition Liberal who'd turned Asquithian; one of their 78 losses Winston Churchill, losing in his two-member Dundee seat to a local pact between the Labour and Scottish Prohibition parties. In other two-member seats, Con-Nat Lib pacts held Blackburn and Stockport but two Conservatives beat National Liberals in

both Southampton and Sunderland. Intriguingly, Oldham saw Coalition Conservative and Liberal MPs replaced by National Liberal and Labour.

After the 1922 debacle, Lloyd George and Asquith alike agreed on the need for Liberal re-union; by the General Election of 1923, this had become official policy, albeit only a month before. The intervening months had seen Lloyd George at one time float the idea of a "radical" party combining his supporters with Labour moderates - without success, as had happened when Asquith had approached Labour in 1920 with the idea of a pact. On the other hand, Churchill and Lord Birkenhead were both in favour of something like the return to something like the Coalition, a union of the National Liberals and Conservatives, but when former National Liberal Chief Whip Freddie Guest called for such an arrangement with the National Liberals as the "left wing of a great national party", he was instantly repudiated.

From the point of view of both the main parties, the destruction of the Liberals was in their interest; Labour wanted to be the "Progressive" party, the Conservatives the "anti-Socialist" party, and both believed with good reason that they had more chance of winning a straight fight with each other.

The 1923 General Election saw the Protection issue splitting Coalition Conservatives from Free Trade Liberals like Churchill and Guest. Indeed, only the resurrection of this issue prevented widespread local anti-Socialist pacts; Tory Chairman Sir George Younger was in favour of such arrangements, and they occurred in some areas: Stirling, Falkirk, Dundee, Blackburn, Aberavon, Rhondda and Accrington among them. (14). On the other hand, there were Lab-Lib pacts in Shropshire (in Shrewsbury and Wrekin both won), Staffordshire, and North and East Dorset; and, in seats where one of the parties was in no position to fight (e.g.Labour in Finchley, the Liberals in Mitcham), they supported each other. When the dust had cleared, the various pacts seem to have paid off for the Liberals, most of whose 158 seats were won in straight fights with their opponents.

The first Labour Government, minority as it was, carried on as if it had a majority, totally opposed to any pacts or deals with the Liberals or anyone else. On the contrary, Labour adopted a policy of contesting bye-elections where the Liberals had won narrowly in straight fights with the Tories. In Oxford, Labour's candidate split the vote and handed the seat to the Conservatives.

As for a Con-Lib Pact, Lloyd George, soon disillusioned with Labour, had vague ideas about returning to coalition; in the late 1980s, he was emulated on a smaller scale by David Owen. However, Liberals, led by Churchill, were already going Tory anyway, either directly, or in his case as an "Anti-Socialist". The 1924 General Election saw a few pacts; Churchill was among several ex-Liberals elected as "Constitutionalists" with Tory support. Similarly, seven of the eight Liberal gains from Labour were in seats where the Conservatives stood down, as they often did in places where the Liberals had a chance to beat Labour in a straight fight.

Of the 40 Liberal MPs who were elected in 1924, only seven won three-cornered fights. Liberals stood down for Conservatives in constituencies like Ipswich, Penrith, Waterloo, Kinross, and Wallasey where they couldn't afford to fight; there were anti-Socialist pacts in areas like Rotherham, Glasgow, and Paisley, to "save Asquith" (it didn't); despite some local opposition, there were all straight fights in Glasgow. However, these pacts were selective; radical Liberals in seats like Galloway found themselves defeated by Conservatives who'd allowed them straight fights in 1923. In South Wales, there were anti-Socialist pacts almost everywhere, with only two three-cornered elections; North Wales wasn't much different. It would be tedious to list all the anti-socialist pacts in their various details; suffice to say that in a few constituencies (eg Bothwell) there was joint candidate selection, the Liberals had no candidates in Sheffield, and Captain Freddie Guest, after winning a straight fight with Tory backing, actually applied for both whips! A few Liberals either refused to back the Tory (15) or even endorsed Labour (16); the only formal pact, in the two-member seat of Preston, split the local party.

The elections certainly showed the case for pacts. Four hundred and twelve Conservative MPs were returned; had there been no pacts, Labour would have done better but the Liberals would have fared a great deal worse.

Mention should also be made of Battersea North, where Labour backed the Communist Saklatvala for the third time and straight fight in a row; as in 1922, he won. Chris Cook makes the point (17) that a pact was not always entirely effective; in Paisley, for example, it was opposed by many local Conservatives, some of whom "may even have voted Labour" (18); and a speaker at a conference of Liberal-Trade Unionists in 1925 said that anti-Labour Pacts "drove industrial Liberals into the hands of Labour".

In 1929, pacts were generally conspicuous by their absence; indeed, the Liberals lost some seats because Labour had a lot more candidates (19) and there were far less straight fights. Many Tory losses were due to there being a lot more Liberal candidates. There were only a few pacts: in Spen Valley, where the Tory David Maxwell-Fyfe stood down for the Liberal Sir John Simon, and two-member seats like Blackburn (Con-Lib lost), Norwich (Lib won, Con lost) and Dundee, where Labour and the Scottish Prohibition Party won for the fourth time in a row.

The 1930s: Another Pact Government

The 1931 General Election could be called the most successful pact of them all: what could be described as pact candidates won 90% of the seats. Ironically, before the formation of the National Government, the existing Labour government had been planning legislation to change the electoral system from first past the post to Alternative Vote, which would have obviated any need for parties to stand down for each other.

The National Government had been planned as a temporary "crisis" administration. MacDonald had anticipated that it would last about five weeks and end his political career; Baldwin that the next General Election would be "a straight fight on tariffs and against the Socialist Party" as soon as the emergency measures had been passed. However, the violently anti-MacDonald mood of the Labour Party on the one hand, and the Tories' desire for an election on the other, helped persuade him otherwise. MacDonald and his followers' expulsion from the Labour Party on 28th September 1931 made it inevitable that the National Government would fight the election as just that, in what became essentially an anti-Labour pact between the Conservative, Liberal National, Liberal and National Labour parties.

The Liberal division was between pro-tariff Liberal Nationals under Sir John Simon, "official" Liberal free traders under Sir Herbert Samuel, and Lloyd George's "family group", the great man himself opposing the Coalition and supporting Labour where there was no Liberal candidate.

In the pact, 54 Conservative MPs stood down, 35 for Liberal Nationals; there were only 5 contests, one of them a straight fight, between these parties, whereas there were 81, 26 of them straight fights, between Conservatives and Official Liberals.

To say that the Pact succeeded would be a gross understatement: the Government had, after the election, 552 MPs, including 471 Conservatives, 35 Official Liberals, 33 Liberal Nationals, and 13 National Labour, as well as the four members of Lloyd George's family group. The Liberals' decline was further shown by the fact that, in the 51 seats contested in 1929 and 1931 by all three parties, their vote slumped. 62 of the 72 Liberals had had no Conservative opponent; all their 26 gains were from Labour.

The two-member seats this time included the Labour-SPP Pact in Dundee losing to a Con-Lib Pact, and a Conservative-National Labour (Jimmy Thomas) Pact winning in Derby.

In the aftermath, the Pact basically held; while the Official Liberals left the Coalition in late 1932, the "Con-Lib Nat-Nat Lab" Pact held. The two smaller parties, especially after MacDonald's retirement in 1935, became more and more Tory adjuncts as the years went by.

On the other hand, the Independent Labour Party left Labour to "go it alone" after the 1931 debacle; as we shall see later, a Lab-ILP pact might have been useful. However, Sir Stafford Cripps' Socialist League's later proposal for a "United Front" with the Communists and ILP was rejected on the grounds that experience of both the Communist Party and politics generally had convinced Labour's leaders that the only beneficiaries would be the Communist Party. The "Popular Front" of the late 30s, with all "progressives" uniting behind one candidate, had more success.

Looking at the elections themselves: the bye-elections of 1931-35, with the rise in unemployment and calmer post-election atmosphere, saw an inevitable swing to Labour. The efficacy of pacts was shown when in 1932 Montrose saw the Liberal National hold the seat despite a big swing to Labour. The Liberals gained Cornwall North in July, almost certainly because of Labour's standing down; they won a straight fight 52%-48%,while the General Election had gone Tory by 49%-45%, with 6% for Labour. September saw a straight Lib-Lab fight in Cardiganshire with a 76%-24% Liberal victory become a 3-cornered fight with 49% voting Liberal, 32% Conservative, and 19% Labour.

In 1933, Rotherham changed from 51%-49% Tory to 69%-31% Labour in a straight fight; it would have certainly never been Tory without the 1931 pact. Ashford, where there'd been the only straight Con-Nat Lib fight in 1931, saw the Conservatives poll 48%, the Liberals 34, and Labour 18: the case for a Lib-Lab pact?

Kilmarnock that November saw the National Labour party hold the seat due to a split in the Socialist vote; 27% voted Labour, 21% ILP (who'd had a straight fight with National Labour in the General Election). In early 1935, a split Conservative vote gave Labour victory in Liverpool Wavertree with 35%; the official Tory got 31%, rebel Tory Randolph Churchill 24%.

The 1935 General Election can be summed up succinctly: the pacts held, despite a swing to Labour. The Conservatives won 386 seats; the Liberal Nationals, 33; National Labour, 8; Labour improved to 154 seats but the Liberals fell to 21. All the Liberal National and National Labour MPs were dependent on Tory votes; none were opposed by Conservatives and only two of the Liberal Nationals even by Liberals. Only six of the Liberals had won three-cornered fights; both their gains had been in straight fights with the Conservatives.

The Communist Party had only put up two candidates, one of whom won and the other did well in a straight fight with Labour. However, despite this self-abnegation, which might have given Labour a few seats, proposals for pacts including the Communists were declined without thanks. The case for a Labour-ILP pact can be seen from two results: Bradford East, where the Conservatives won with 33% while the ILP and Labour polled 49% between them, and Northern Lanarkshire, where the Conservatives polled 48%, ILP 37% and Labour 15%.

The post-1935 bye-elections saw more of the same; swings to Labour and the Government pact holding, with the exception of Randolph Churchill's contesting Ross and Cromarty against National Labour in February 1936, until October 1938 when the famous Oxford bye-election saw the Master of Balliol College, himself a Labour Party member, stand as an Independent Progressive with Labour, Liberal, Communist and some covert Tory support in the aftermath of Munich, and polling 44%, 7% up from Labour's 1935 performance, also in a straight fight.

The following month, Independent Progressive Vernon Bartlett actually won Bridgewater and in December, rebel Tory the Duchess of Atholl, deselected by her local party, fought a bye-election in her Kinross and West Perthshire constituency and lost 53-47 ina straight fight with an official Tory; as she had beaten a Liberal by 60-40 in a straight fight in 1935, one can assume that there was a pact in her support.

It is interesting to speculate as to what anti-appeasement Tories would have done if Chamberlain had called a General Election in the aftermath of Munich; Churchill himself was almost deselected, after all. And had they been dropped, would the anti-appeasers have received support from their local Labour and/or Liberal parties in standing as independents? Leaving this aside, May 1939 saw an Independent Progressive poll 32% in a straight fight with the Conservatives in Westminster Abbey.

Mention might also be made of the Liberals' other activities relating to pacts, but talks over the issue of nationalisation with Labour in 1937 came to naught. There were many local pacts with the Conservatives in anti-socialist "municipal alliances" in places like Leicester, Plymouth and Doncaster. It would also appear that the Liberal and Labour parties managed to drop their mutual antagonism in the common anti-Chamberlain cause, nationally at least.

The Second Wartime Truce

As soon as the Second World War broke out, a new agreement was reached between the three main parties - with some Liberal misgivings which increased over the years - not to contest bye-elections against each other and not to hold a General Election in 1940. The Pact this time wasn't as successful as that in the First World War; of course, the war lasted longer, so unrest grew, especially as, while victory in the First World War hadn't been certain until the summer of 1918, it was clearly only a matter of time from at least late 1942 in the Second World War.

In the actual wartime bye-elections, turnout generally fell drastically, especially in the early years; its nadir was the 10.7% at Harrow in December, 1941. This might be one reason why challengers did better than usual in terms of percentage: fringe party supporters were more likely to vote.

Leaving this aside, many wartime bye-elections were contested. In October 1939, an anti-war ILP-backed Independent polled 6% against Labour in Clackmannan on a 35% turnout; Stretford in December saw, on a 36% turnout, the ILP poll 15% and the Communists 5% (no anti-war pact there) against a Conservative.

In 1940, the "phony war" period seemed to have its effect at the ballot box. In February, Southwark Central saw an anti-war Communist-backed In-

dependent poll 19% and an anti-hanging Independent 17% on a turnout of under 25%. In Silvertown, both the Communists and Fascists entered the field scoring 6% and 1% respectively!

In March, an anti-war Labour candidate polled 27% in Kettering; however, a BUF candidate polled just 3% in Leeds NE, showing that the "phony war" was hardly helping them.

April saw the Scottish Nationalists poll 37% in Argyll and a Labour CLP break the truce to poll 12% in Glasgow Pollok and get itself disbanded; however, a Communist-backed anti-war candidate managed a mere 7% in Battersea North. And, as late as May 9th, an ILP candidate polled 19% in Renfrewshire East. The rest of 1940, however, saw most bye-elections uncontested and all challengers: Fascist, Communist, Christian Pacifist - slaughtered on low turn outs.

In 1941, there were far more contests; in February, a Communist saved his deposit with 15% in Dumbartonshire. In May, there were two challengers in Kings Norton: an "Independent Bomb Berlin" candidate polled 7%, and a Pacifist 6%. In the same month, Noel Pemberton Billing made his political comeback, polling 27% (admittedly on a 21% turn out) as a National Independent "Bomb Germany" candidate in Hornsey. In July, he managed 44% in Dudley and in September, 38% in the Wrekin.

An Independent Progressive polled 39% in Scarborough; in October, Lancaster saw 24% vote Independent Liberal and 19% for the ILP's Fenner Brockway. In November, Billing's last electoral foray saw him poll 24% in Hampstead on a 17.3% turn out; the ILP polled 29% in Edinburgh Central in December on a 20% turn out.

In 1942, the anti-Tory shift in public opinion caused by the war became obvious. March saw a Labour candidate defying the truce to narrowly win Grantham; he was to be re-elected in 1945 despite official Labour opposition. In April, Brockway polled 25% in Cardiff East, William Douglas-Home 21% as an Independent Progressive and the ILP 14% in Glasgow Cathcart. In Wallasey, a "safe" Tory seat (67% in 1935) fell to an independent backed by Sir Richard Acland, founder of the Common Wealth Movement that year; while Rugby saw a Labour-backed Independent, W J Brown, win the seat and in 1945 hold it against Labour.

May saw an Acland-backed Independent poll 39% in the Tory stronghold of Chichester. In June, an Independent Labour candidate polled 40% in

Llandaff and Barry, William Douglas-Home 42% in Windsor. Two challengers were to poll 32% between them in Salisbury in July; and a Christian Socialist polled 14% in South Poplar in August.

In 1943, Common Wealth and the like took off like a rocket; 30% in Ashford, 48% in Mid-Lothian, 46% for Independent Labour in King's Lynn, 40% in Portsmouth, 38% for a CW-backed Independent Labour and 7.5% for the ILP in Bristol Central, 46% in Watford, followed by a Common Wealth victory in Eddisbury - 44% for them, 41% for National Liberal, and 15% for Independent Labour. In Daventry, CW polled 33% while an Independent Liberal polled 21%.

In Newark, the case for a "progressive pact" might be said to have been made; 31% for an Independent Progressive, 14% for CW, and 11% for an Independent Liberal against 44% staying Conservative. The Tories narrowly held off an Independent Liberal in Chippenham and a CW-backed Independent Labour candidate in Peterborough.

At the end of the year, the ILP polled 27% in Woolwich West and 28% in Acton - where an independent Right-winger, Dorothy Crisp, polled 8%. In Darwen, a CW-backed ex-Liberal called Honor Balfour lost by only 90 votes to the Conservatives - and came third in 1945.

1944 saw more of the same; CW won Skipton in January and polled 42% at Rusholme in July. A CW-backed Independent Liberal polled 44% at Bury St. Edmund's in February, when Derbyshire West saw an Independent Labour candidate win the seat - and hold it for Labour in 1945. In Bilston that September, the ILP polled 49% against the Conservatives.

In 1945, the end of the European war meant the end of the truce; the last weeks of them both saw the Scottish National Party win Motherwell, CW win Chelmsford on a 54% turnout, and the ILP poll 45% in Newport. In the General Election, although both main parties left some seats uncontested, the only formal pact the current writer has been able to trace is one in which the Conservatives gave full backing to the Liberal Gwilym Lloyd George. (20) Several Liberals were elected in straight fights with Conservatives; the Liberal Nationals, despite wartime talks with the Liberals about reunion, continued their alliance with the Conservatives.

Intriguingly, in 1945, Common Wealth held Chelmsford without a Labour candidate; another of their MPs had joined Labour in 1945 and lost in the General Election, being followed into the Labour Party by Common Wealth

MP E R Millington in 1946. In addition, all Common Wealth's good performances in 1945 were in seats without a Labour candidate; however, correspondence with former Common Wealth MP Hugh Lawson elicited the following reply: "There was no pact between Common Wealth and the Labour Party in 1945 or at any other time. The LP resolutely refused to discuss the matter with us.

"I do not know why Millington had a clear run at Chelmsford - possibly he had some personal understanding with Labour there, but I've no knowledge of this."

Post-War Pacts and Non-Pacts

After the 1945 General Election, the Liberals and Liberal Nationals merged in London but nowhere else; the Woolton-Teviot agreement of 1947 formally regularised the relationship between the Conservative and National Liberal Parties, allowing for union at constituency level. Some constituencies saw such mergers, although many of them had very few Liberals involved. 1950 saw 53 candidates calling themselves National Liberal and Conservative, Conservative and Liberal, and the like, regardless of Liberal indignation. In fact, 34 Tory candidates still included the term "Liberal" in their party label in 1959, and the last pre-war National Liberal was in the Commons until 1966, the Liberal National organisation being finally wound up in 1968 (One of its last leaders was a Mr John Poulson!).

In all fairness, Churchill had offered the Liberals a pact after 1945, offering them a clear run in some sixty seats, but was turned down. It must be remembered that Churchill saw himself more as an anti-socialist than as a Conservative; apart from his robust reply to Gwilym Lloyd George, he privately referred to the Tory party as "they" and offered Liberal leader Clement Davies a Cabinet post in 1951. Can there be any doubt that an electoral pact would have been part of this?

There were certainly local pacts between Conservatives and Liberals in Huddersfield from 1950 and Bolton from 1951. In the same year, Churchill himself spoke for Liberal candidate Lady Violet Bonham-Carter in Colne Valley, and the Conservatives adopted a selective policy towards Liberal MPs, giving "free runs" to Clement Davies, Rhys Hopkin Morris and Roderic Bowen; indeed, Jo Grimond was the only Liberal to win a three-cornered fight. However, any idea of this becoming a full blooded pact be-

tween them was opposed by Lord Halisham, Conservative Party Chairman from 1958-9, whose arguments against it (21) included "[electorally disastrous] for a party in office...impossible to arrange...[couldn't get the Tories to agree to] PR or getting Tories to stand down for Liberals...votes not automatically transferred...Independent Liberals and Conservatives [would run]."

Surely the past history of his party and indeed of his own career rather refutes these "pacts don't work" arguments. (22) Pacts had worked well so far, although the point should be taken about it not being such a good idea for a party in office to make such arrangements. However, generally they gave Liberal MPs a free run. There would only have been three Liberal MPs without this, and, in Carmarthen in 1957, the local Liberals replaced Hopkin Morris with a Right-wing pro-Suez candidate who was endorsed by the Conservatives but lost the seat to Liberal-turned-Labour Lady Megan Lloyd George.

On the other hand, when Labour MP Woodrow Wyatt suggested in detail a Lib-Lab Pact in 1961, the only result consisted of howls of condemnation from his own party, not just from the Left, but from his leader, Hugh Gaitskell. In the case of a Lib-Lab Pact, of course, there was the further problem that it might not have worked; a 1959 opinion poll had shown that two thirds of Liberal voters preferred the Conservatives to Labour.

In 1964, the pacts in Huddersfield and Bolton came to an end with the inevitable result of Liberal defeat; after this, there were no more pacts until the 1970s. It was the turmoil in the Labour party and Northern Ireland that led to their revival.

In 1973, rebel Labour MP Dick Taverne won a landslide victory in the Lincoln bye-election with Liberal backing, narrowly holding his seat in February 1974 before losing that October, again with Liberal backing. In the two years before the beginning of Reg Prentice's reselection problems and his defection to the Conservatives, there was talk of his standing as an Independent with not only Liberal but Conservative support. Indeed, the Newham Conservatives were split over this. There was even talk of "wet" Tory MPs supporting him against the official candidate, a Monday Clubber; whether or not they would have is of course another matter.

In Northern Ireland, the turmoil led to the old Unionist Party splitting into several parties: the Pro-Assembly Unionists and Alliance on the one hand, the Anti-Assembly Official, Democratic and Vanguard Unionists on the

other. In 1974, the Anti-Assembly Unionists came to a pact and the Pro-Assembly parties, Unionists, Alliance, SDLP, Northern Irish Labour, didn't. The result of this was that eleven of the twelve *United Ulster Unionist Coalition* candidates won, in spite of the fact that their opponents polled more votes in toto in six of the twelve constituencies, including all four in Belfast. This tends to raise the question: would a "pro-Assembly pact" have succeeded? In other words, would Catholic SDLP voters have been willing to vote for Unionists, whether or not pro-Assembly? Furthermore, it might be said that anti-Assembly Republicans delivered two more seats to the UUUC. In Fermanagh and South Tyrone and Mid-Ulster, where there were two "Catholic" candidates rather than one in 1970, the pro-Assembly Unionists polled miserably and the UUUC were let in.

In Fermanagh, Official Unionist Harry West polled 44%; Unity (and Anti-Assembly) MP Frank McManus, 26%; 25% voted SDLP; and 5% Pro-Assembly Unionist. In Mid-Ulster, Vanguard Unionist John Dunlop polled 39%; the SDLP 29%; MP Bernadette McAliskey, 25%; and the Pro-Assembly Unionists, 7%.

The collapse of the Assembly that May meant the collapse too of the Faulkner Unionists, who fought on without success as the Unionist Party of Northern Ireland. However, that October saw the UUUC keeping their pact but losing one seat, Fermanagh, where the "Catholic" parties united behind Independent Republican Frank Maguire.

In 1979, the UPNI probably managed to put DUP MPs in by splitting the vote in Belfast East and North. Whether their supporters would have voted OUP or Alliance is uncertain; probably the former, as UPNI joined the OUP when they disbanded in 1981.

The 80s: Pacts Again

In 1977, there had been no suggestion of turning the Lib-Lab Pact into an electoral pact; any such attempt to get the two parties to stand down for each other would have inevitably provoked "rebel" candidates and probably ended the pact. On the other hand, in 1981 the Liberals did enter into a pact: the alliance with the newly formed SDP. In spite of some limited opposition within the Liberal Party, opponents including both the Left-wing radical Young Liberals and the Right-wing populist Jeff Roberts, a full-blooded agreement was concluded, with many Liberal candidates standing

down for the SDP. There were, of course, some "hiccups". The Young Liberals refused to endorse Roy Jenkins in Warrington in 1981; Shirley Williams wanted to fight Croydon North West, but the local Liberals insisted on their own candidate (who won, and certainly wouldn't have without the Alliance). The Liberals were reluctant to stand down in Hillhead; however, a full-blooded pact was reached with very few rebellions. Of the only three Labour defectors who the local Liberals refused to endorse, one stepped down and the other two were opposed by Independent Liberals. In spite of this, their combined votes wouldn't have won them the seats. Overall, the result saw the Alliance win 25.4% of the votes but, due to the vagaries of our electoral system, only 23 seats: 17 Liberal and 6 SDP.

Had there been no SDP, a Liberal revival would probably have happened anyway (both post-war Liberal revivals had been under Conservative governments); indeed, the SDP's sole gain, Ross, Cromarty and Skye, was in a strong Liberal area. However, there can be no doubt that without the SDP some Liberal MPs with small majorities would have lost. And, had they run against each other, the result in many seats would have been mutual destruction. While Cyril Smith or David Penhaligon would have almost certainly won with or without an alliance, can the same be said for the two MPs with three figure majorities?

As for the SDP, looking at their candidates' majorities, only David Owen (4,936) and Robert MacLennan (6,843) would have won without the Alliance.

The same thing happened in 1987: the Liberals won sixteen seats and the SDP five. In the intervening years. the two parties had gained three seats in bye-elections: two, Brecon & Radnor (Lib) and Greenwich (SDP) by landslides; the other, Portsmouth North(SDP), by a narrow majority that "needed" the Alliance.

In fact, two of the SDP and 10 of the Liberal MPs each had a majority of less than 10% over the runner-up; how many of them would have held on without the Alliance? Probably only three: Truro and Mossley Hill, in strong Liberal and weak SDP areas; and Rochdale, where Cyril Smith's 43.4% of the votes might have stayed solid enough to beat the 38% Labour vote.

After 1987, the split in the Alliance over merger certainly made one difference in bye-election results. The combined SLD and SDP vote in Richmond, Yorks. was higher than the winning Tory vote; had David Owen gone

along with the merger, who knows what might have happened. Another, less publicised pact was organised in Northern Ireland. In response to the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985, all 15 Unionist MPs resigned their seats in protest and fought bye-elections, refraining from opposing each other. This OUP-DUP pact was generally successful in winning seats, although it saw the SDLP gain Newry in 1986 due to a swing from Sinn Fein to the SDLP (the seat had seen a "split Catholic vote" give the seat to the OUP in 1983).

In 1987, the pact failed to save Enoch Powell in Down South, and the Unionist vote fell slightly; there was a swing from the Unionists to the Alliance party, especially in the seats held by DUP MPs Ian Paisley (9% fall on 1983's combined Unionist vote) and Peter Robinson (8% swing from Unionist to Alliance). It would seem that, while DUP voters were willing to "follow orders" and vote OUP, some OUP voters (a third in Robinson's constituency and more in Paisley's) weren't willing to reciprocate, preferring the middle-of-the-road Alliance as more in line with their way of thinking than the extreme Right-wing DUP.

Electoral Pacts Today and Tomorrow

Before Mrs Thatcher's resignation, many proposals for an anti-Thatcher "Popular Front" had been made: by Labour MPs Frank Field and Austin Mitchell (23) and writers Martin Harrop and Geoff Shaw among others (24). Mr Mitchell went into details, listing 73 Tory marginals, 30 with the Democrats in second place and 43 with Labour, where the two parties should stand down for each other.None of this came to anything, of course: not only would any attempt to enforce such a pact have torn the Labour Party apart but, by the time Mrs Thatcher resigned, Labour were well ahead in the polls and looked set for victory in their own right.

This is, of course, ignoring what one might call *de jure* pacts by the voters, ie tactical voting, in which people vote for the party they feel has the best chance of beating the one they most dislike. This could be said to have gained the Liberal Democrats, Ribble Valley and Eastbourne, and Labour, Mid-Staffordshire and Monmouth; people voted to "get the Tory out". This kind of thing has been going on for decades. (26)

As for the future of electoral pacts, outside Northern Ireland, they seem rather unlikely at present. There just isn't the same kind of anti-Major urgency that there was against Thatcher, especially now with Labour moving

towards PR and the general move towards "consensus politics". As for Dr Owen's attempts at entering into a pact with one of the two main parties, these are now history, rather like his political career. Andrew Gimson, in the *Independent on Sunday* (June 16th 1991) advised the Conservatives to enter into such a deal while the *Times*, stated that Dr Owen "now looks like a compass needle in the middle of a magnetic storm..." negotiations with Mr Major seem to have foundered on his insistence that the Tory Party withdraw its candidates from Greenwich and Woolwich, held by [SDP MPs] Rosie Barnes and John Cartwright".

The *Times'* view was that Dr Owen should "come out" as a Tory and join the Cabinet but that the Tories couldn't stand down for his colleagues. However, the Conservatives were third in both Greenwich and Woolwich in the last General Election. Rosie Barnes and John Cartwright might be able to beat Labour in straight fights, so why don't the Conservatives help them do it? The Conservative party, as this pamphlet has shown, has a tradition of entering into agreements of this kind.

As for an "SDP-Lab" pact in return for Dr. Owen's endorsement, that would have been unthinkable. Private information in the Greenwich area indicates that neither the Greenwich nor Woolwich Labour parties would have even considered standing down for either "dozy Rosie" or the ex-Labour defector Cartwright; nor would Devonport Labour party have been prepared to do anything to help David Owen. Any attempt by the Labour party nationally to force them to stand down would undoubtedly have produced independent candidates and torn the party apart.

Conclusion: Do pacts work?

The lesson of history would appear to be - yes, to some extent. They certainly did in years like 1906, 1918, 1931- indeed, they appear to have worked every time. However, there is one obvious proviso- there must be a " common interest" between all parties concerned, at least an agreement on policy. Furthermore, all pacts must of necessity be of a temporary nature. It's inevitable that, in the long term, they will result in either a merger of the parties - generally in the form of one absorbing the other or will break down.

History clearly shows this; the Conservatives and Liberal Unionists were united over Ireland and became indistinguishable with the years, the first

eventually absorbing the second. Similarly, the MacDonald-Gladstone pact was only made possible by the Labour and Liberal parties of 1906 sharing common "progressive" aims in the field of social reform. However, the pact was already proving untenable by the First World War as the Labour party faced the choice of either merging with the Liberals or going it alone - either of which would have split the Labour party.

The pacts of 1914 and 1918 were each concluded with a common objective: "win the war" in the first case, "win the peace" in the second - with, in that instance, the mutual benefit of Lloyd George and the Conservative party. The pact broke down when the Tories both faced a serious split if it continued and didn't need Lloyd George any more; on the contrary, he had become more of a hindrance than a help.

The 1931 pact, the most successful of all, had the twin objectives of solving the economic crisis and smashing the Labour party; in all due fairness, Ramsey MacDonald had nowhere else to go after it had expelled him. The "pact parties", Liberal National and National Labour, were basically Tory adjuncts, and became more so as the decade went by and the pact held to the mutual benefit of all concerned.

The post-war pacts, (local Con-Lib ones in Huddersfield and Bolton during the 1950s, Unionist in Northern Ireland during the mid 70s and 80s, and of course the Alliance of the 1980s), further prove this point. However, the Alliance, of course, ended.

So, to sum up, pacts do work in the short term. There are, however, not that many "sectarian" voters in practice. In the long term a pact must end with either a full-blooded merger or its dissolution.

Notes and References

(1) One can hardly imagine Gladstone having a prominent courtesan as his mistress!

(2) Liberals backed by the local Labour movement.

(3) Ackers Douglas, Tory Chief Whip, quoted in Robert Blake's article 1783 - 1902 in *Coalitions in British Politics,* edited by David Butler, 1978.

(4) *History of the Liberal Party, 1895-1970,* by Roy Douglas, Sidgwick and Jackson, (1971).

(5) Eg *Psmith in the City* from *The World of Psmith* by P.G. Wodehouse, Herbert Jenkins, (1974) in which the bank manager is described as having first stood for Parliament as a Liberal and now standing as a Unionist.

(6) Right wing Liberal Imperialists led by Lord Rosebery.

(7) Douglas (op cit).

(8) Douglas (ibid).

(9) Douglas (ibid).

(10) *The Times*, 10th Dec. 1909 - quoted by Douglas.

(11) *The Emergence of the Modern Labour Party, 1880 - 1924* by Roger Moore, Hodder and Stoughton, (1978).

(12) A book said to contain details of the private vices of 47,000 important people - unfortunately, it didn't exist!

(13) An official letter of support dubbed the "Coupon" by Asquith sent to the government's preferred candidate and signed by both Lloyd George and Bonar Law.

(14) In Dundee, the "Labour-SPP pact" MPs continued in office against a Con-Lib pact until 1931. The pact in Aberavon was directed against Ramsey MacDonald; and that in Rhondda involved a "Unionist Free Trader and Anti-Socialist" in the East and a Liberal in the West.

(15) eg in Rotherhithe.

(16) eg in Windsor.

(17) "The Age of Alignment"

(18) Ibid.

(19) This time: 590 Tory, 513 Liberal and 569 Labour.

(20) Liberal only in name; he was a Tory front bencher who, when he originally said he would only sit on it as a Liberal, elicited the response from Churchill "What the hell else would you sit as?"

(21) in his autobiography *The Door Wherein I Went*, (1975))

(22) he was Tory candidate in the 1938 Oxford bye-election.

(23) In his book *Beyond the Blue Horizon*, Bellew, (1990).

(24) In the Fabian paperback *Can Labour Win?* by Martin Harrop and Andrew Shaw, Unwin, (1990).

(25) Mitchell (op cit).

(26) For instance, Sir Cyril Smith recorded in his autobiography *Big Cyril*, (published in 1977), the pleasure of proclaiming in his election campaign in Rochdale in 1972 that "a Tory vote is a wasted vote" to get Labour out.

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