Life after Joe: Politics and War in the West Midlands, 1914-1918.

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Abstract
By considering the political effects of the First World War in the whole of the West Midlands (rather than just Birmingham or the Black Country), this article seeks to demonstrate that, although the political culture of the region shifted in terms of behaviours and priorities, many of the features of the late Victorian and Edwardian regional polity survived the 'deluge' of war. The region became less politically homogenous, however, as the pressures of the war and the political responses to these exposed significant differences between the rural counties, the Black Country and the Birmingham conurbation. It concludes that the future political direction of Britain was by no means decided by 1918 and that the electoral results of the first fully democratic election demonstrated that there were many possible alternative choices for a population keen to cement the perceived unity of Britain which was credited for winning the longest and bloodiest struggle since the British Civil Wars.

Key Words

British Political History
West Midlands History
Representation of the People Act 1918
Twentieth Century Political Culture
Impact of the First World War

The West Midlands, despite lacking a coastal port, can act as a microcosm for the whole of Britain in assessing the impact of the First World War on political alignments, behaviours and culture. Using roughly the same regional boundaries laid down by C.B. Fawcett and effectively employed by Henry Pelling in his *Social Geography of British Elections*, the West Midlands serves as a case study for the whole variety of British political complexity of the early twentieth century. It varied from the highly rural counties of Worcestershire, Herefordshire and Shropshire, to the mixed counties of Warwickshire and Staffordshire. The urban spaces range from traditional county towns such as Shrewsbury and Worcester, smaller towns such as

Leamington and Stafford, dispersed areas of industry such as the Black County and large centres of varied trade such as Birmingham and Coventry. Before the First World War, almost all varieties of political identity could be found, despite the area's reputation as Joseph Chamberlain's 'fiefdom'[1]. There were 'backwoods' Tories in Worcester and Evesham, more conciliatory Conservatives such as Stanley Baldwin in Bewdley, traditional Liberals such as John Wilson in North Worcestershire, radicals such as David Mason in Coventry and the Lib-Labber, William Johnson, in Nuneaton. The distinctive feature of the region, however, was the persistent strength of the Liberal Unionist party. While the rest of the party had collapsed as a result of the tariff reform split and the 1906 electoral debacle, the Liberal Unionists still held the majority of Birmingham seats in 1914. This one exception to the broader political map in 1914 can be attributed to the personal appeal of Joseph Chamberlain and his circle of loyal Radical Unionists who fused patriotic support for crown, Empire and Union with genuine enthusiasm for substantial social reform.[2] Birmingham's distinctiveness had, however, gradually faded after Joseph's debilitating stroke in 1906, as Austen Chamberlain had grown far closer to Balfour and Bonar Law than his father. Seats once held by Liberal Unionists in Birmingham and the surrounding area had been meekly handed over to Conservatives to contest and finally the national Liberal Unionist Association had merged with the Central Conservative Associaton in May 1912 in response to the introduction of the third Home Rule Bill.[3] Although the issue had been discussed in 1914, the Birmingham Liberal Unionist Association had held out against 'fusion' for almost the whole duration of the war, largely as a result of Austen's vacillations on the issue. Neville Chamberlain,

[1] M.C. Hurst, *Joseph Chamberlain and West Midland Politics, 1886-1895* (Oxford, 1962).
[2] I. Cawood, *The Liberal Unionist Party, 1886-1912* (London, 2012); I. Cawood and C. Upton (eds.), *Joseph Chamberlain: Imperial Statesman, National Leader and Local* Icon (London, 2016).
[3] Cawood, *The Liberal Unionist Party,* 240-41.

determined to re-assert his control of the city's political structure after his failure at the National Service Department, faced down a challenge from Arthur Steel-Maitland, MP for Erdington and former Conservative Party chairman and took control of the now-united organisation in early 1918.[4] He took this step because he was aware of several challenges which needed to be faced in order to maintain Unionist control of the city. Firstly, the 1918 Representation of the People Act (RPA) had increased Birmingham's electorate from 95,000 to 427,000 and the number of constituencies had increased from seven to twelve. This expanded and redistributed electorate was organised into seats far more class-homogenous than had been the case until December 1910. Secondly, the new electorate included women over the age of thirty for the first time, and Chamberlain needed a centralised organisation to reach out to these new groups.[5] His wisdom in cutting the Gordian knot of Unionist identity in the city is shown by the fact that, although the election was called unexpectedly on 14 November 1918, the Birmingham Unionist Association was able to produce swiftly a series of effective campaigning leaflets (including one titled *A word to the Ladies!*[6]) which meant he never had to release his own copy of the 'coupon' in order to win his seat.[7]

In addition to the influence of Joseph Chamberlain's socially progressive brand of Unionism, there was also a strong regional tradition of the working class conservatism which was rooted in distrust of middle-call 'faddist' Liberal interference in traditional masculine behaviour, most particularly drinking. Jon Lawrence has identified that in Wolverhampton resistance to liquor control was a potent recruiter to

[4] R. Ward, *The Chamberlains: Joseph, Austen and Neville, 1836-1940* (Stroud, 2015), 123.
[5] Beatrice Chamberlain to Neville Chamberlain, 28 April 1918. Neville Chamberlain papers, NC1/13/5/24a; Beatrice Chamberlain to Neville Chamberlain, 19 May 1918, NC1/13/5/27.
[6] Neville Chamberlain papers, NC18/1/38.
[7] Neville Chamberlain's copy of the 'coupon' is preserved by the University of Birmingham, marked 'not used'. Neville Chamberlain papers, NC5/12/7.

Conservative causes in the pre-war years.[8] The drinking culture of the Midlands' working classes remained problematic throughout the war. *The Times* reported in April 1915 that 'unrest among operatives engaged in various branches of trade in the Birmingham...is to do [in part] with the drink question' and that in Redditch drinking was interfering with production at the Royal Enfield motorcycle factory.[9] In 1917, a Commission of Enquiry was 'frankly amazed at the strength of objection in the region to the liquor restrictions' that had been introduced in October 1915 and the War Cabinet spent time discussing the region's worrying propensity for alcohol.[10] The Coalition Liberal candidate in Lichfield, Sir Courtenay Warner, when questioned on his attitude towards licensing during the 1918 election, cleverly avoided being associated with the moralising traditions of his party, conscious as he was that he was competing with a Labour candidate for the working class vote, when he rejected the idea of prohibition and only gave lukewarm support for the idea of a national scheme for the control of the liquor trade.[11]

In order to test the impact of the First World War on the politics of the West Midlands, this article will explore the degree of continuity found in the political discourse during the war in the region, the behaviour and attitudes of the politicians, activists, journalists, interest groups and the voting public and the relative performance of the three main parties (despite the complexities of the Lloyd George Coalition) in the General Election of 1918. The election was called within days of the declaration of the armistice and which was the first modern election in which voting

[8] J. Lawrence, 'Popular politics and the limitations of party: Wolverhampton, 1867-1900' in E. Biagini and A. Reid (eds.), *Currents of Radicalism: popular Radicalism, organized labour and party politics in Britain, 1850-1914*, (Cambridge, 1991), 65-85.
[9] *The Times,* 19 April 1915.
[10] W. Chance, *Industrial Unrest: The Reports of the Commissioners (July 1917) collated and epitomised* (London, 1917), 28; A. Gregory *The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War* (Cambridge, 2008), 197.
[11] *Birmingham Daily Gazette,* 6 December 1918.

took place on a single day (14 December), although the complexities of organising the voters of servicemen meant that the result was not declared until 28 December. The electoral campaign was opened by Prime Minister Lloyd George on a visit to Wolverhampton Town Hall on 23 November 1918 at which he acknowledged 'how much we had to depend upon the Midlands' in the war and where he also first promised 'to make Britain a fit country for heroes to live in'[12] Lloyd George led a coalition government dominated by the Unionists, with only the support of a third of the Liberal Party since the fall of Herbert Asquith in December 1916. The majority of the Labour party had left the coalition at the end of the war, in order to exploit the splits within the Liberal party, while seeking to heal the divisions between 'patriots' and pacifists in its own ranks. To capitalise on his popularity as the 'man who won the war' and to clearly identify the supporters of his government in a period of complex loyalties and party labels,[13] Lloyd George and the Conservative leader, Andrew Bonar Law, issued coalition endorsements to individual candidates which Asquith mocked as 'coupons' and the liberal Birmingham Gazette called 'tickets.'[14] Given the impact of the First World War on British society and culture and the dramatic increase in the electorate following the 1918 RPA, the focus on this election is justified because, as John Turner has decisively proved, 'the Coupon election was unique…an important member of a series of elections which steadily transformed British electoral geography.'[15]

[12] *Birmingham Daily Post*, 25 November 1918.
[13] See 'The Voter's Nightmare', *Punch* 4 December 1918.
[14] T. Wilson, 'The Coupon and the British General Election of 1918' *Journal of Modern History* 36: 1 (1964), 28-42; R. Douglas, 'The Background to the 'Coupon' Election Arrangements' *English Historical Review* 86: 339 (1971), 318-336.
[15] J. Turner, *British Politics and the Great War: Coalition and conflict, 1915-1918* (London, 1992), 401. The West Midlands electorate had tripled from 500,00 to 1.5 million registered votes.

One of Neville Chamberlain's dearest hopes was that the war would see the collapse of old party labels.[16] Chamberlain's dream was shared by others, both within and outside the traditional party limits and across the whole political spectrum and, although it did not come to pass, the fluid politics of the West Midlands which had been produced by the debates over Home Rule and Tariff Reform continued for many years after the war. When it eventually settled into traditional two party politics in the later 1920s, it appeared to do so in a different fashion and according to different agendas than in 1914. This article will argue that the degree of change was relatively superficial, however, and that West Midlands political culture proved remarkably resilient to the challenge of the First World War.

For the majority of the war the West Midlands, like most of Britain, saw little formal party politics in the sense of political meetings and election campaigns. The chief political issue, the level of support for the war, galvanised the meetings that took place in and around Birmingham in late July and early August 1914. These were initially opposed to intervention in the conflict, until Belgian neutrality was violated and the Liberal cabinet and the nation, including the Labour Trades Councils, rallied to the protection of France and Belgium.[17] John Bourne has recently commented that, following this initial volte-face, 'there can be no doubt that Kitchener's "call to arms" met with a ready response in the midlands.'[18] Pacifist groups such as No Conscription Fellowship and the Union of Democratic Control did have some

[16] Birmingham Liberal Unionist Association, *Speeches addressed to the Grand Committee by the Rt Hon Austen Chamberlain MP and by Neville Chamberlain on 18th December 1917* (Birmingham, 1917), Neville Chamberlain papers, Cadbury Research Library, University of Birmingham, NC1/6/7/42, 12-15. D. Dilks, *Neville Chamberlain Volume 1 1869-1929* (Cambridge, 1984), 265.

[17] G. Barnsby, *Socialism in Birmingham and the Black Country* (London, 1998), 203.

[18] J. Bourne, 'Introduction: The Midlands and the Great War', *Midland History* 39:2 (2014), 158; see also J. Hartigan, 'Volunteering in the First World War: The Birmingham Experience, August 1914 - May 1915', *Midland History* 24:1 (1999), 167-186.

support, particularly in urban areas where there was a strong Quaker presence. The artist Joseph Southall chaired the Birmingham branch of the Independent Labour Party, which officially opposed conscription and in July 1916 they joined with the No Conscription Fellowship to organise a rally of 1,200 people in Bournville.[19] Fervid patriotism, although challenged by these groups, was encouraged by the bulk of the print media and led to the emergence of new parties such as the National Party, the British Workers' League (which put forward candidates for the 1918 election under the name of the National Democratic and Labour Party) and the Women's Party, founded by Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst. All of these parties claimed that they shared Neville Chamberlain's vision for a true patriotic alliance which placed the interests of the whole community before narrow, sectional interests, yet all three failed to make a significant impact on the politics of the region.

The National Party was co-founded in August 1917 by Richard Cooper, MP for Walsall, and was, according to Martin Pugh, anti-German and opposed to 'the alien problem' (in other words, he was anti-Semitic).[20] He drew, therefore, on a tradition of radical right wing politics in Edwardian Britain, previously delineated by Ewan Green.[21] The National Party campaigned against corruption in public service through its journal, *National Opinion*, a key issue at a time of rising anger against political jobbery and 'profiteering'. Rowland Hunt, MP for Ludlow since 1903, briefly joined the Party, but he retired before the General Election of 1918. [22] Cooper had won the Walsall seat in 1910 and although the National Party which he and Page Croft

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[19] S. Roberts, *Great War Britain – Birmingham: Remembering 1914-1918* (Stroud, 2014), 118-20.

[20] M. Pugh, *Hurrah for the Blackshirts: Fascists and Fascism in Britain between the wars* (London, 2005), 75-76; *Walsall Observer and South Staffordshire Chronicle,* 30 November 1918.

[21] E.H.H. Green, *The Crisis of Conservatism: The Politics, Economics and Ideology of the British Conservative Party, 1880–1914* (London, 1997).

[22] W. D. Rubinstein, 'Henry Page Croft and the National Party 1917-22', *Journal of Contemporary History* 9:1 (1974), 129-148.

created was not officially endorsed (not surprisingly, given the Party's antipathy towards Lloyd George), no Conservative candidate was put forward for the 1918 election in Walsall. Neither the Liberal nor the Labour candidates received the coupon and, with the backing of National Democratic and Labour Party leaders such as Havelock Wilson, Cooper won the seat with a comfortable majority of 6,156.[23] As will be seen, this went against the wider regional political trends of the Black Country and can be interpreted as evidence of loyalty towards those sitting members who demonstrated unquestioning enthusiasm for the war. It is also possible to see the National Party's undiluted enthusiasm for Tariff Reform as contributing to the victory in a region which had struggled with European imports before the war and feared the consequences of a lenient peace with Germany.

The National Democratic and Labour Party (NDLP) was a somewhat more complex organisation. It had the support in the West Midlands of genuinely popular Labour figures, such as W.J. Davis, General Secretary of the National Brassworkers and Metal Mechanics Union, John Beard, co-founder of the Workers' Union and Eldred Hallas, leader of Birmingham Municipal Employees Union.[24] This was because the Birmingham Trades Council had split in 1915 between an anti-conscription and a patriotic Labour group.[25] Davis and Hallas had then helped to found the British Workers' League (BWL) in March 1916 as an alternative to a national Labour Party split by the attitude of pacifists such as Ramsay MacDonald and Philip Snowden.[26] The NDLP was founded in spring 1918 by the BWL to fight the election, and it

[23] *Walsall Observer and South Staffordshire Chronicle,* 30 November 1918; Rubinstein, 'Henry Page Croft and the National Party', 139.
[24] Roberts, *Great War Britain – Birmingham* p. 118; p.120*;* A. J. Reid, 'Davis, William John (1848–1934)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, May 2007 [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/48752, accessed 9 May 2016].
[25] B. Millman, *Managing Domestic Dissent in First World War Britain* (London, 2000), 106-107.
[26] R. Ward, 'Hallas, Eldred (1870–1926)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, Sept 2013 [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/105127, accessed 9 May 2016].

secured immunity from Conservative competition from Bonar Law himself.[27] For Neville Chamberlain, however, this hindered the 'usefulness' of the BWL, as it made them appear an external opponent of the official Labour party, rather than an alternative faction within it.[28] The NDLP clearly regarded the West Midlands as a fertile recruiting ground, however, as they adopted a new position as a patriotic, pro-Coalition labour party.[29] Of their twenty eight candidates in 1918, four stood for election in seats across the region.[30]

Neville Chamberlain and Arthur Steel-Maitland persuaded the Duddeston Unionist Association to endorse Eldred Hallas's candidature, though Chamberlain was privately worried by the strident vitriol of other NDLP speeches and articles in the *British Citizen and Empire Worker*.[31] Victor Fisher, a protégé of Milner's and another co-founder of the BWL, was allocated the newly created seat of Stourbridge and duly issued with the 'coupon'. This high-handed treatment of the constituency was reminiscent of the pre-war actions of Joseph Chamberlain in the region and provoked a similarly negative reaction, with Fisher's meetings very poorly attended.[32] The sitting Liberal MP, John Wilson, had held the seat since 1895 and had carried his constituents' loyalty when he had left the Liberal Unionists and re-joined the Liberals over Tariff Reform in 1903.[33] Wilson held the seat by 1,333 votes, the

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[27] *The Times*, 1 June 1918; R. Douglas, 'The National Democratic Party and the British Workers' League' *Historical Journal* 15:3 (1972), 540.
[28] Neville Chamberlain to Ida Chamberlain, 16 February 1918. Neville Chamberlain papers, NC18/1/153
[29] See the letter by Victor Fisher, Honorary Secretary of the BWL, to *The Times*, 26 January 1918.
[30] William Dyson (Nuneaton), Victor Fisher (Stourbridge), Eldred Hallas (Birmingham Duddeston), James Shaw (Wolverhampton East). Douglas, 'The National Democratic Party and the British Workers' League, 541.
[31] *Birmingham Daily Post*, 5 December 1918. Neville Chamberlain to Ida and Hilda Chamberlain, 9 November 1918. Neville Chamberlain papers, NC18/1/190; N. Keohane, *The Party of Patriotism: The Conservative Party and the First World War* (Farnham, 2010), 127.
[32] I. Cawood, 'Joseph Chamberlain, the Conservative Party and the Leamington Spa candidature dispute of 1895' *Historical Research* 79, 206 (2006), 544-577; *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 2 December 1918.
[33] Cawood, *The Liberal Unionist Party*, 236n.

largest majority of his career.[34] The NDLP was also clearly short of money, as demonstrated by the abortive campaign of Willie Dyson, who was forced to use a horse to travel to his ill-attended meetings around Nuneaton, as he could not afford the exorbitant petrol prices from his election funds.[35] The party's brief moment in 1918, pointed towards the significance of cross-class politics during the war which will be explored further below; as Hallas put it during his campaign: 'down with pacifism, down with party politics, up with the Coalition.'[36] Nigel Keohane observes that the NDLP should be seen as a continuation of the 'Joseph Chamberlainite…endeavour to win the working classes over…through positive polices of national applicability.'[37] However, once the passions of the war had died down, the appeal of the NDLP swiftly faded. Hallas crossed the floor in 1919 and joined the Labour Party and Seddon lost his seat in the 1922 election.

The Pankhursts' Women's Party briefly enjoyed the support of the Northcliffe press, in particular the *Daily Mail*.[38] In October 1918, the *Mail* printed a prominent article entitled 'Join the Women's Party' highlighting the fear of socialism provoked by the series of strikes in 1917-18, including those in the hitherto quiescent West Midlands.[39] For reasons still not entirely clear, almost at the last minute, Christabel Pankhurst was allowed to contest Smethwick and Lloyd George and Bonar Law

[34] Likewise, in Wolverhampton East, the Liberal, George Thorne, defeated the couponed Rev. J. A. Shaw, a former member of the Independent Labour Party, who had joined the NDLP. J. Lawrence, 'The complexities of English progressivism: Wolverhampton politics in the early twentieth century', *Midland History* 24 (1999), 160.
[35] *Nuneaton Chronicle*, 13 December 1918. Dyson came fourth in the poll, with less than 5% of the vote.
[36] *Birmingham Daily Post*, 30 November 1918.
[37] Keohane, *The Party of Patriotism,* 128.
[38] J. Purvis, 'The Women's Party of Great Britain (1917–1919): a forgotten episode in British women's political history' *Women's History Review*, (2016), 1-14.
[39] *Daily Mail,* 2 October 1918. In the two months before the election, the *Mail* carried frequent adverts for the Women's Party.

forced the withdrawal of the Unionist candidate, Major Thompson, on 4 December.[40] As in Stourbridge, the parachuting in of a candidate to suit the priorities of the party leaders had unfortunate consequences.[41] When Thompson presided at one of Pankhurst's meetings, hecklers called for him to stand anyway. Thompson responded, somewhat unhelpfully' that 'for what reason that mandate was sent down he did not know… but he felt that it was sent down for the good of the country and possibly for the good of the women's cause.' In a largely middle class seat, Christabel's rhetoric may have been better received, but she had clearly little idea of the attitude of the Smethwick electorate when she then stated that 'the Labour Party...was, in fact, a Bolshevist party because it was led by Bolshevists.' [42] Such 'blistering anti-trade union rhetoric' Nicola Gullace concludes, 'may thus have alienated the wives of workers whose material well-being seemed to rest on collective bargaining and their husbands' wages.'[43] Her Labour opponent, J.E. Davison, was actually a well-respected union official who had led recruitment drives and played his part on government committees and he was easily able to prick the bubble of Pankhurst's rhetoric.[44] She lost the seat by 775 votes, with her sister, Sylvia, commenting sardonically in the *Workers' Dreadnought* that 'perhaps only the Irish electorate was quite ready to elect a woman.'[45] Christabel defiantly announced that the result 'shows it will not be long before I am in the House'[46] but the Women's

[40] *Manchester Guardian,* 4 December 1918. Pankhurst had asked Thompson to stand aside. He commented to the *Manchester Guardian* that 'I treated the matter as a joke at first' but clearly ceased to do so, once Pankhurst contacted Bonar Law.
[41] A local Labour paper noted that women voters were not impressed by Pankhurst and that 'a local candidate would have done better.' *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 6 December 1918.
[42] *Birmingham Daily Post*, 11 December 1918.
[43] N. Gullace, 'Christabel Pankhurst and the Smethwick Election: right-wing feminism, the Great War and the ideology of consumption' *Women's History Review* 23:3 (2014), 330-346.
[44] M. Pugh, *Speak for Britain! A New History of the Labour Party* (London, 2010), 126
[45] *Workers' Dreadnought*, 4 January 1919.
[46] *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 30 December 1918.

Party folded when it ran out of funds and Christabel left Britain in 1921, with her mother joining the Tories.[47]

There was a final organisation which may have only contested two West Midlands seat by itself, but which played a significant role in the 1918 election, the National Federation of Discharged and Demobilised Soldiers and Sailors (NFDDSS), one of a number of ex-servicemen's organisations which were eventually combined into the apolitical Royal British Legion. The NFDDSS was formed in 1917 in opposition to the government's recall of wounded ex-servicemen and it developed a left-wing programme of increased pay for soldiers and nationalisation of the land and means of production (a year before the Labour party). It also refused to allow officers to join unless they had risen from the ranks. It was, however, fiercely patriotic, as anti-German as the National Party with red, white and blue election colours and decidedly anti-Socialist.[48] The NFDDSS put up a candidate in Aston, J. H. Dooley, in opposition to Sir Evelyn Cecil, a nephew of the late Prime Minister, Lord Salisbury. Although described by the Unionist *Birmingham Daily Post* as 'a redundancy', Dooley's candidature did reveal the anti-party sentiment that motivated the three larger alternative parties in the area. At a meeting on behalf of Dooley, an anonymous speaker expressed the view that 'by accepting the Coalition 'ticket' [Cecil] had become a penny-in-the-slot machine, an automaton.'[49] In Moseley, although they did not stand, the NFDDSS intervened to support the candidature of the Liberal, Wilfred Hill, as 'he pledged his word that he would not be a party

[47] J. Purvis, 'Pankhurst, Dame Christabel Harriette (1880–1958)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2011 [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/35375, accessed 10 July 2016.
[48] N. Mansfield, 'Farmworkers and Local Conservatism in South–west Shropshire, 1916-1923' in S. Ball and I. Holliday (eds.). *Mass Conservatism: The Conservative and the Public since the 1880s* (London, 2002), 38-39.
[49] *Birmingham Daily Post*, 9 December 1918.

politician and would not allow his vote to be influenced by the fortunes of his party.'[50] In Coventry, Arthur Bannington, a follower of Henry Hyndman, stood as a 'Silver Badge' candidate in collaboration with the rival National Association of Discharged Sailors and Soldiers (NADSS).[51] Bannington had risen to the rank of sergeant during the war and had been sent home suffering from shell shock in 1916 where he had established a branch of the NFDDSS in Coventry in 1917. He had intervened in the November and December engineering strikes in the city and attempted to persuade the strikers to return to work and he stood under the banner of 'no party tag'.[52] The nuanced position of the NFDDSS seemed to have little effect, however, apart from splitting the small Liberal vote, with Dooley and Bannington both getting less than 10% of the votes in Aston and Coventry and Wilfrid Hill coming last in Moseley behind the Labour candidate.

Rather than strictly political issues such as Home Rule and Tariff Reform, the war in the West Midlands was unsurprisingly dominated by the question of living and working conditions. Although campaigns to raise the salaries of servicemen and to improve the pensions of those discharged and the dependents of the dead were sporadically noted, largely through the influence of the NFDDSS, it was the campaign for the improved wages and conditions of workers in reserved occupations that did most to upset the social harmony that was a distinctive feature of pre-war West Midlands political identity. Adrian Gregory has noted the 'in the Midlands, food prices were 'the chief cause of unrest.'[53] By January 1916 the Wolverhampton Trades Council was complaining that prices had risen 45% cent since the beginning

[50] *Birmingham Daily Post*, 11 December 1918.
[51] K. Richardson, *Twentieth Century Coventry* (Coventry, 1972), 194-95.
[52] F. M. Carr 'Engineering Workers and the Rise of Labour in Coventry 1914-1939' Unpublished PhD thesis, (University of Warwick, 1978), 102-105; Bannington's Election Leaflet, Herbert Local History Centre, Coventry. PA1177/41/4.
[53] Gregory, *The Last Great War,* 197.

of the war and wages, allowances to dependents of servicemen, and relief paid by the Board of Guardians had not risen to the same extent. In the campaign for the Aston seat in 1918, one speaker commented bitterly that

> It had been suggested that on the memorial to the brave men who had fallen should be the words 'their names liveth for evermore' but the mothers of those brave men were expected to live on sixpence a day.[54]

When rationing was finally introduced in the town in January 1918, the Trades Council complained that the scheme had been introduced too late due to the power of the shopkeepers on the City Council. The food situation continued to deteriorate and became, in the words of Emma Sproson at a local ILP Conference in February 1918 called to discuss the issue, 'second only to the war itself.' The late and limited development of a system of rationing, to combat profiteering by producers and shopkeepers and to ensure that the poor could still access all foods, was a source of resentment across the region. [55] By failing to guarantee affordable food, the state was widely seen to be favouring the wealthy, and this attitude was entrenched by the fuel shortages in the harsh winter of 1917-18.[56] As the 1917 Commission on Industrial Unrest concluded, the failure to restrict prices would lead the public to 'continue to blame the Government for not dealing with profiteers so long as high prices continue.'[57]

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[54] *Birmingham Daily Post*, 9 December 1918.
[55] A. Faber, 'The Provincial Press during The First World War: A Case Study of the Wolverhampton *Express & Star* between January and March 1918' Unpublished MA thesis, Birmingham University (2006).
[56] The Unionists in Birmingham were largely exempt from some of this criticism, however, as a Coal Purchase Committee had been established by Neville Chamberlain the city in 1916 .J.T. Jones, *History of the Corporation of Birmingham, Vol. V (1915-1935*) (Birmingham, 1940), 29-30.
[57] Chance, *Industrial Unrest*, 14.

In the whole of the West Midlands, the main weapon that the workers could wield to challenge their deteriorating standard of living was that of the strike. Strikes had, of course, taken place before the war, most notably the 1913 Black Country strike which had also affected Birmingham as some of the plants on strike were part of the Large Metropolitan Company and had factories at Saltley and Smethwick.[58] The trade union movement, previously of relatively little influence in Birmingham a city largely comprised of small workshops and paternalistic owners such as the Kenricks, the Cadburys and the Nettlefolds, had been boosted by the growth of munitions factories such as B.S.A., Kynoch's and the National Shell Factory at Washwood Heath and the diversification of existing production in 'controlled establishments' such as armoured car and aircraft manufacture at the Longbridge Austin works.[59] The right to strike in war industries was removed by the 1915 Treasury Agreement and compulsory arbitration substituted. By 1917, however, anger with the continued rise in prices and the gradual erosion of the protection of skilled trades from military service led to the development of shop stewards committees. In the West Midlands these were initially most powerful in Birmingham and Coventry and then spread into Wolverhampton and the Black Country. In December 1917, 150,000 engineering workers in the West Midlands threatened to strike if the shop stewards were not recognised by the employers, and this matter was quickly resolved. But strikes became more frequent as the war proceeded, with a dispute over exemptions from service that led to 10-12,000 Birmingham aeroplane workers briefly striking in January 1918, a stoppage of munitions workers across the region in July 1918 and, in September 1918, a national rail strike which extended into

[58] P. Fantom, 'Community, patriotism and the working class in the First World War: The Home Front in Wednesbury, 1914-1918' Unpublished PhD thesis (University of Birmingham, 2016). 51-69.
[59] R.G. Brazier & E. Sandford, *Birmingham and the Great War, 1914-1919* (Birmingham, 1921), 111-127; E. Hopkins, 'Working Class Life in Birmingham between the wars, 1918-1939' *Midland History* 15:1 (1990), 131.

Worcestershire, Herefordshire and Shropshire.[60] From the available evidence, the impact of the war on trade union membership in the West Midlands was dramatic. The number of trade unionists in Wolverhampton, for example, rose from 5,000 in 1914 to 20,000 by 1918.[61] This consequently gave the newly established Labour party much greater ability to put forward candidates in the December 1918 election than the divided and demoralised 'Squiffites', but as, John Turner observed, it was 'less certain that these members all represented potential Labour votes' as many workers joined trade unions for distinctly non-progressive motives. [62]

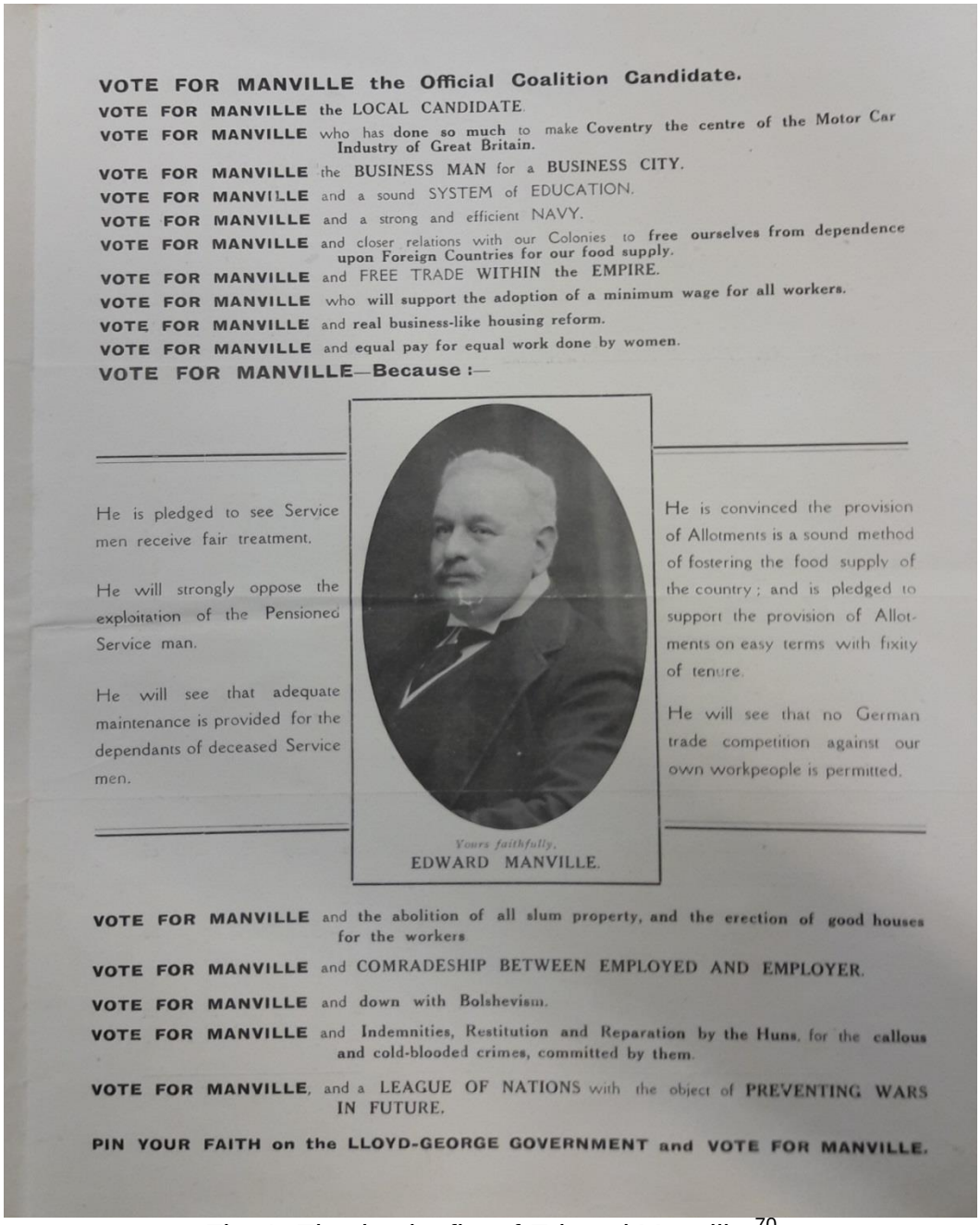
From the results of the 1918 election, however, it seems that there was little widespread anger towards the owners of the factories in Birmingham and Coventry. A sense of social responsibility had clearly endured among certain industrialists, despite the challenge and opportunities presented by the war. Herbert Austin had deliberately kept his prices low, in order to challenge what he regarded as an unfair cartel in the arms trade and he frequently failed to make any profit on government contracts, as an example to others.[63] Similarly, Stanley Baldwin decided to get 'rid of my war profits' and proceeded to donate a fifth of his wealth, approximately £120,000, as a contribution towards alleviating the War Debt.[64] Hallewell Rogers, chairman of B.S.A., was far more professional than Herbert Austin, managing to achieve net profits of over £400,000 for nearly every year of the war and to pay a

[60] *Manchester Guardian*, 18 January 1918; *Manchester Guardian,* 29-30 July 1918; *Manchester Guardian,* 25 September 1918.
[61] G. Barnsby, *A History of Wolverhampton, Bilston and District Trades Union Council, 1895-1990* (Wolverhampton, 1994), 56.
[62] Turner, *British Politics and the Great War*, p. 396. See also A. Reid, 'The impact of the first World War on British workers' in R. Wall and J. Winter (eds.), *The Upheaval of War: Family, work and welfare in Europe, 1914-1918* (Cambridge, 1986), 221-234.
[63] R. Church, *Herbert Austin: The British Motor Car Industry to 1941* (London, 1979), 57.
[64] P. Williamson*, Stanley Baldwin: Conservative Leadership and National Values* (Cambridge, 1999), 139-40.

dividend of 20% to the shareholders from 1914 to 1918.[65] Rogers was a supporter of the National Alliance of Employers and Employed (NAEE), however, a body designed to prevent industrial conflict and he spoke of his support for a new model of co-operation between capital and labour during the 1918 election campaign.[66] In December 1918, his company also produced a leaflet on the company's history stressing the 'welfare work among B.S.A. employees' such as the provision of a surgery, a gymnasium and education classes.[67] Sir Edward Manville, the B.S.A.'s vice chairman and the chairman of the B.S.A's subsidiary, the Coventry-based Daimler company, was on the executive committee of the NAEE and was a close associate of Dudley Docker, Birmingham's 'industrial titan' who was now at the centre of national business and politics.[68] Manville's campaign literature during the 1918 Coventry election pledged his support for 'the adoption of a minimum wage for all workers', 'equal pay for equal work done by women' and 'comradeship between employed and employer' (see fig. 1). Austin, Rogers and Manville were all comfortably elected in December 1918. Perhaps the relative failure of the Coalition in Staffordshire can be explained by the failure of the business class in the Black Country to effectively reach out to both the established and the newly industrialised workers of the region. With the exception of Richard Cooper in Walsall and Alfred Bird in Wolverhampton West, the Coalition's candidates were less prominent figures than those such as the Chamberlains, Austin, Rogers, Hallas and Manville. Arthur Beck, the Birmingham electrics magnate, lost heavily in Kingswinford as the support

[65] M. Lewis, R. Lloyd-Jones, J. Maltby and M. Matthews, *Personal Capitalism and Corporate Governance: British Manufacturing in the first half of the Twentieth Century* (London, 2011) , 108-110.
[66] *Birmingham Daily Post*, 9 December 1918. K. Middlemas, *Politics in Industrial Society: The Experience of the British System since 1911* (London, 1979) 129; 139.
[67] Anon., *B.S.A. History from the Days of the Crimea* (Birmingham, 1918).
[68] In 1915 Docker had been appointed by Lloyd George to control the Midlands District Office of the Ministry of Munitions. Lewis et al, *Personal Capitalism and Corporate Governance*, 111; R. P.T. Davenport-Hines, *Dudley-Docker: The Life and Times of a Trade Warrior* (Cambridge, 1984), 84-104.

of Dudley Docker had much less cachet in the Black Country than in Birmingham and he could not match the oratory or the impeccably patriotic and trade union credentials of his opponent, Charles Sitch.[69]



VOTE FOR MANVILLE the Official Coalition Candidate.

VOTE FOR MANVILLE the LOCAL CANDIDATE.

VOTE FOR MANVILLE who has **done so much** to make **Coventry the centre of the Motor Car Industry of Great Britain.**

VOTE FOR MANVILLE the BUSINESS MAN for a BUSINESS CITY.

VOTE FOR MANVILLE and a sound SYSTEM of EDUCATION.

VOTE FOR MANVILLE and a strong and efficient NAVY.

VOTE FOR MANVILLE and closer relations with our Colonies to **free ourselves from dependence upon Foreign Countries for our food supply.**

VOTE FOR MANVILLE and FREE TRADE WITHIN the EMPIRE.

VOTE FOR MANVILLE who **will support the adoption of a minimum wage for all workers.**

VOTE FOR MANVILLE and **real business-like housing reform.**

VOTE FOR MANVILLE and **equal pay for equal work done by women.**

VOTE FOR MANVILLE—Because :—

He is pledged to see Service men receive fair treatment.

He will strongly oppose the exploitation of the Pensioned Service man.

He will see that adequate maintenance is provided for the dependants of deceased Service men.

Yours faithfully,
EDWARD MANVILLE.

He is convinced the provision of Allotments is a sound method of fostering the food supply of the country; and is pledged to support the provision of Allotments on easy terms with fixity of tenure.

He will see that no German trade competition against our own workpeople is permitted.

VOTE FOR MANVILLE and **the abolition of all slum property, and the erection of good houses for the workers**

VOTE FOR MANVILLE and COMRADESHIP BETWEEN EMPLOYED AND EMPLOYER.

VOTE FOR MANVILLE and **down with Bolshevism.**

VOTE FOR MANVILLE and **Indemnities, Restitution and Reparation by the Huns, for the callous and cold-blooded crimes, committed by them.**

VOTE FOR MANVILLE, and a LEAGUE OF NATIONS with the object of PREVENTING WARS IN FUTURE.

PIN YOUR FAITH on the LLOYD-GEORGE GOVERNMENT and VOTE FOR MANVILLE.

Fig. 1. Election leaflet of Edward Manville.[70]

[69] Davenport-Hines, *Dudley-Docker,* p.122*;* For the limits of Beck's qualities as a speaker, see the report of his meeting at Wordsley, *Dudley Chronicle,* 23 November 1918. By contrast, Sitch's effective campaign focused on repeal of the military service acts and D.O.R.A. and his role as secretary of the Anchorsmiths' Society and other trade unions in the Black Country. *Birmingham Daily Gazette,* 6 December 1918; *Staffordshire Advertiser,* 4 January 1919.

Some radical Labour and Liberal members delighted in the freedom from conventional politics that the splits in their parties provided them. No longer at the margins of the political debate, pacifists and radicals in both parties sought to drive their agendas home, despite the opposition from within and the antipathy without. The words of those such as John Kneeshaw in Ladywood, Robert Outhwaite in Hanley and David Mason in Coventry produced a heated response from both middle and lower class electors in the region. Kneeshaw, who took on the hopeless task of challenging the new political 'duke' of Birmingham, Neville Chamberlain, had led the pacifist takeover of the Birmingham TUC in 1915, which had driven Hallas, Davis and many other patriotic working men into the arms of the Chamberlains. Given such an outspoken opponent, Chamberlain seemed to speak of Kneeshaw more in mockery than in anger, commenting that, in the unlikely event of Neville's defeat, Kneeshaw's 'influence [at Westminster] would be no greater than it was in the City Council, where, indeed, he had absolutely none at all.'[71] He left the smears to others. The *Birmingham Daily Post* thundered to its readership that 'Kneeshaw stands out egregiously as the leader in the constituency of that band of political intransigents with Bolshevist leanings.'[72] His constituency association produced an effective leaflet, *What Labour thinks of Kneeshaw,* which quoted the councillor's speech of 20 September 1918 in which he had stated 'the purposes of the allied governments in this war are precisely the same as the purposes of the Germanic powers' and reprinted the condemnations of this 'treacherous speech' from Sidney Webb, W.J. Davis and J.H. Thomas.[73] Chamberlain's majority was decisive, nearly 7,000, even

[70] Herbert Local History Centre, PA1177/41/2.
[71] *Birmingham Daily Post*, 12 December 1918.
[72] *Birmingham Daily Post*, 6 December 1918.
[73] Neville Chamberlain Papers, NC18/1/39.

though only 40% of the electorate bothered to vote.[74] Mason of Coventry proved similarly determined but hapless. His electoral leaflet showed him in the formal dress of an Edwardian politician and the contents were similarly dated, with electoral slogans such as 'I am and always have been a staunch supporter of Free Trade', 'religious freedom', 'self-government for Ireland' and 'land reform' demonstrating how little he, like so many Liberals in the region, had failed to adapt to the changing agenda caused by the war and the coming of near full democracy.[75] As a local paper noted, 'Mr D.M. Mason's position at the bottom of the poll has, perhaps, surprised no one but himself.'[76] Although individual conscientious objectors in the West Midlands, especially those who 'took a religious stand' such as the Quakers, were treated with grudging respect from the public[77], no candidate who expressed sympathy for pacifism was elected in the West Midlands. Millman concludes, 'working class patriotism for most of the war and in most of Britain was the majority reaction.'[78]

Patriotism, a factor which is often asserted as of crucial significance in such elections as 1886 and 1900[79] and which is described by Jonathan Parry as 'at its most effective as a cry when domestic [and] …foreign themes could be worked together'[80], was promoted ceaselessly throughout the war by the press, voluntary groups such as Central Committee of National Patriotic Organisations and the Ministries of

[74] Dilks, *Neville Chamberlain, vol. 1*, 264.
[75] Mason's Election Leaflet, Herbert Local History Centre , PA1177/41/3; Minute book of the Coventry Liberal Association (6 Feb 1912- 22 Oct 1922), Herbert Local History Centre, PA68/5.
[76] *Midland Daily Telegraph,* 30 December 1918. Mason blamed his defeat on the actions of the President of the Liberal Association and claimed that 'he practically presented the seat to the reactionaries and tariff reformers.' *Coventry Standard*, 3 & 4 January 1919.
[77] P. Spinks, 'First World War conscientious objection in South Warwickshire' *Local Historian* 42:4 (2012) , 280-291.
[78] Millman, *Managing Domestic Dissent*, 100.
[79] P. Readman, 'Conservative Party, Patriotism and British Politics: The Case of the General Election of 1900' *Journal of British Studies* 40 (2001), 107-45.
[80] J. Parry, 'Patriotism' in D. Craig & J. Thompson (eds.), *The Languages of Politics in Nineteenth Century Britain* (London, 2013), 71.

National Service and Information.[81] It certainly became more precisely defined and allied with a strongly xenophobic nationalism during the 1918 election campaign. The common factor among all the Unionist candidates, both former Liberal Unionists and Conservatives, was the strident anti-German rhetoric which they used in their election literature, their formal election addresses and their public speeches. Calls for all Germans to be deported, for German goods to be boycotted and for the blockade against Germany to be maintained were not unusual.[82] More common, of course, was the demand that Germany should be handed a bill of reparation at the Paris peace talks, that the Kaiser (and the leading German generals) should face justice and that there should be immediate confiscation of all German overseas possessions. This demand was used effectively to drum up support for the Coalition, for example in Nuneaton, where the Coalition candidate, a Coventry solicitor named Henry Maddocks, ceaselessly attacked his three opponents for their failure to take a stronger line against the Germans.[83] As John Turner has shown, this message played particularly well with the new enfranchised 'wives and mothers of the dead and wounded.'[84] Enjoying the full support of the local newspaper, the *Nuneaton Chronicle*, Maddocks was able to promote a patriotic message strong enough to defeat his divided opposition, despite his lack of a personal wartime record (see fig 2).[85]

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[81] J. Beckett, 'Patriotism in Nottinghamshire: Challenging the Unconvinced, 1914-17' *Midland History* 39:2 (2014), 185-201; D. Monger, 'Familiarity breeds consent? Patriotic Rituals in British First World War Propaganda' *Twentieth Century British History* 26:4 (2015), 513-18; S. Hockenhull, 'Everybody's business: Film, food and victory in the First World War', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 35:4 (2015), 579-595.

[82] Such aggression may have been affected by memories of the Zeppelin raid of 31 January 1916 which killed 34 people in the Black Country, including nine children. P. Fantom, 'Zeppelins over the Black Country: The Midlands' First Blitz', *Midland History* 39:2 (2014), 236-254.

[83] *Nuneaton Chronicle,* 15 November 1918.

[84] Turner, *British Politics and the Great War*, 415;.417. See also M. Pugh, *The Making of Modern British Politics* 3rd ed. (Oxford, 2002), 162-63.

[85] On the day before the poll, the *Chronicle* claimed that a vote for Maddocks was 'a duty you owe to the sacred dead' *Nuneaton Chronicle*, 13 December 1918.

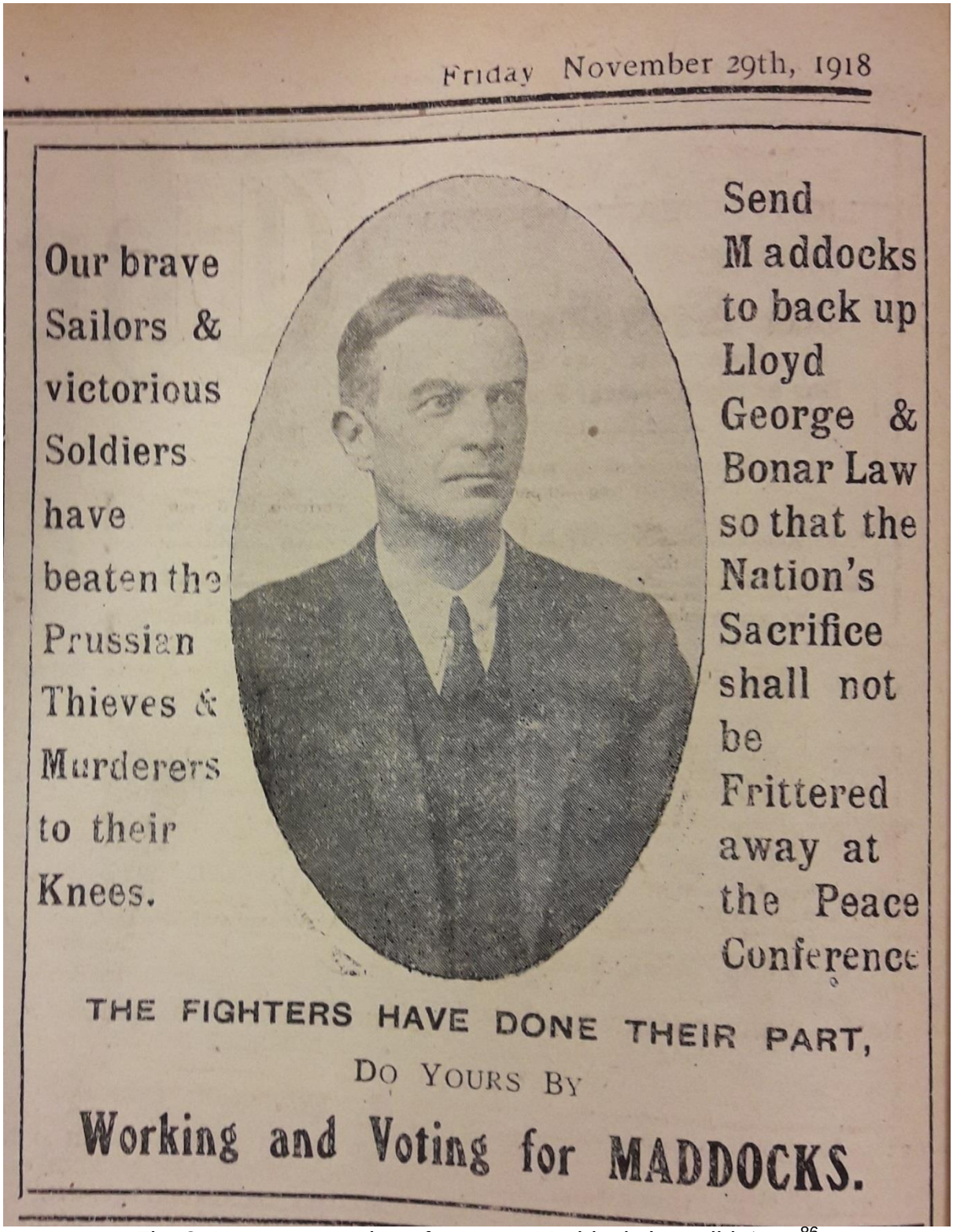

Fig. 2. Newspaper advert for Henry Maddocks' candidature.[86]

[86] *Nuneaton Chronicle*, 29 November 1918

Where a candidate did have a record of military service, this was ruthlessly exploited by both couponed and uncouponed candidates alike. John Baird, at Rugby was careful to be photographed for his sympathetic local paper in his uniform, with his military honours listed below.[87]

As Matthew Johnson has pointed out, this was particularly effective in the case of sitting MPs with a military record.[88] Across the West Midlands, eleven of the MPs who had seen active service retained their seats.[89] With the ballot papers printing the occupation of the candidates, it is conceivable that instinctive patriotism may have decided the choice of floating voters in the voting booths on 14 December 1918 in cases such as that at Kidderminster where Eric Knight's employment status as 'Major in His Majesty's Army' was in stark contrast to that of his Labour opponent which was given as 'Trade Union Secretary.'[90]

In the case of John Gretton in Burton, his status as chairman of the town's largest employer, the brewers Bass, Ratcliff and Gretton Ltd, was so enhanced by his position as Colonel of the 6th Battalion of the North Staffordshire Regiment that he was unopposed in 1918.[91] Although standing for the Liberal party in Coventry, Sir Courtenay Mansell was photographed for his election portrait in the uniform of an air force officer (see fig. 3) to distinguish him from that of the deselected Liberal pacifist MP, Mason. Mansell also made it clear that he supported the coalition government, even though it was Sir Edward Manville who was awarded the coupon and who

[87] *Rugby Advertiser,* 30 November 1918.
[88] M. Johnson, 'Leading from the Front: The "Service Members in Parliament, the Armed Forces and British Politics during the Great War' *English Historical Review*, CXXX (2015), 643-44.
[89] John Gretton (Burton), William Ormsby-Gore (Stafford), Smith Hill-Child (Stone), Thomas Hickman (Wolverhampton Bilston), Arthur Griffith-Boscawen (Dudley), John Baird (Rugby), E.C. Meysey-Thompson (Birmingham Handsworth), Leo Amery (Birmingham Sparkbrook), Bolton Eyres-Monsell (Evesham), Eric Knight (Kidderminster), Charles Ward Jackson (Leominster).
[90] Worcestershire Country Council Acting Returning Officer correspondence and other papers relating to Parliamentary elections in Worcestershire: Kidderminster Division, 1918, The Hive, Worcester, 22/6/2/1/1.
[91] *Burton Mail*, 27 July 2015.

advertised himself as ‘the official coalition candidate.’ (see fig. 1). In Staffordshire, however, the tactic was less successful. In Leek, William Bromfield, the Labour candidate, secured a majority of 678 over his Coalition Liberal opponent, Rear Admiral Sir Guy Gaunt.[92] In West Bromwich, Viscount Lewisham was defeated despite his positon as a lieutenant-colonel in the Staffordshire Yeomanry, though Lewisham’s defeat was partly due to his incapacity caused by contracting malaria while on service in Palestine.[93]

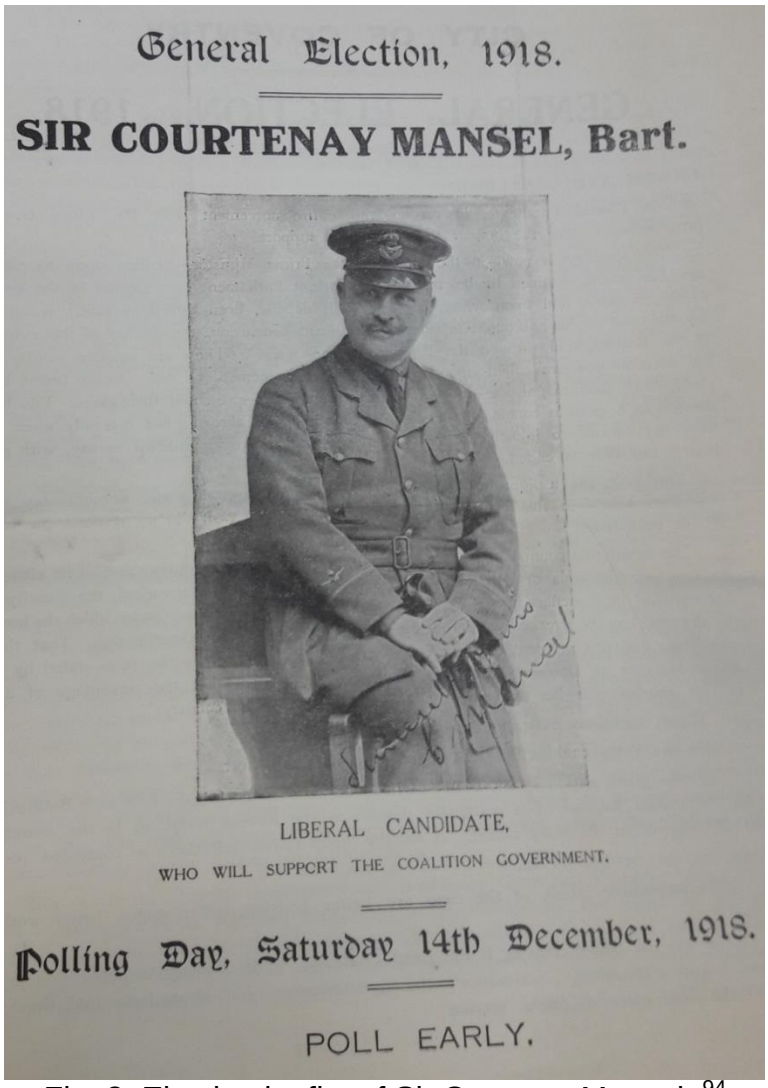

Fig. 3. Election leaflet of Sir Courtney Mansel. [94]

[92] *Staffordshire Advertiser,* 4 January 1919.
[93] *Birmingham Daily Post*, 30 December 1918.
[94] Herbert Local History Centre, PA1177/41/1.

For those candidates without a military record, evidence of service in aid of the war effort was usually sufficient for any officially endorsed Coalition candidate to win a seat, given the political cachet that already attached to them from their attachment with Lloyd George. Neville Chamberlain's experiences as Director of National Service may have been a relative failure, but they were still cited in his campaign materials.[95] And in Lichfield, the Coalition Liberal candidate, Sir Courtenay Warner, comfortably defeated his Labour rival with the local press stressing that he had given up his home in Suffolk to be used as a VAD hospital during the war.[96] Failing that, a local industrialist's financial contribution was a third means of demonstrating patriotic commitment. That of Hallewell Rogers in Moseley has already been noted, and he was matched by the custard magnate, Alfred Bird, at Wolverhampton West, who personally subscribed £100,000 to the War Loan campaign and £15,000 to the Wolverhampton 'Feed the Guns' campaign in the last month of the war.[97]

This cross-party patriotism was also marked in the frequent calls for old party ties and old party practises to be left behind, once the war had rendered these redundant. Party may have been 'the dominant organising theme of late Victorian politics' but it had never been popular with the public or local politicians.[98] Ernest Pollock, the unchallenged MP for Warwick and Leamington, expressed the wish 'that the domestic problems of pre-war days shall be discarded in favour of the "solid affairs of the nation."' He went on to add that:

[95] Neville Chamberlain Papers, NC5/12/13.
[96] *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 4 January 1919.
[97] T. A. B. Corley, 'Bird, Sir Alfred Frederick, first baronet (1849–1922)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/46633, accessed 28 July 2016]; *The Times*, 25 January 1917; *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 2 November 1918.
[98] D. Powell, *British Politics, 1910-1935: The Crisis of the Party System* (London, 2004), 18.

> I should be…sorry if at an election we were once more to return to the old controversial and domestic issues which we left behind us in August 1914. I have myself no stomach for fighting battles on subjects many of which are out of date and may be put in the lumber-room of matters past.[99]

As Laura Beers has somewhat cynically explained, in this way the Unionists were seeking 'to craft a national political rhetoric which would help the party to hold onto power in the era of mass democracy.'[100] This analysis fails to take a sufficiently nuanced view of the spectrum of ideology across the recently unified Unionist party, however. Promises of social reform, often very detailed ones, were common in most Coalition Unionist election addresses. Unionist, Liberal and Labour candidates all recognised that, by taking the 'coupon' they were signing up to Lloyd George's reforming agenda, as well as sharing in the glory of the government's military victory. If they, as in individual MPs, were forced to give up long-held beliefs, they gladly accepted this as a symbol of the on-going need for mutual sacrifice for the national good which the preceding four years had taught them. As Philip Williamson has convincingly described, the Conservative party increasingly absorbed Whig and Liberal tenets and values as it sought to readjust its position and appeal to a new electoral audience. Some of its leaders, such as Baldwin and Halifax, did so in order to try to act as a genuinely national body, able to put aside class, gender and religious differences and to behave in a fashion which brought peace and reconciliation to a country divided by the demands of war.[101] The model of the new Britain posited by Baldwin and the whiggish Tories was largely a backwards-looking

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[99] *Leamington Spa Courier* 15 November 1918.
[100] L. Beers, 'Counter-Toryism: Labour' response to anti-socialist propaganda, 1918-1939' in M. Worley (ed.*)* *The Foundations of the British Labour Party: Identities, Cultures and Perspectives, 1900-1939* (Farnham, 2009), 232.
[101] Williamson*, Stanley Baldwin*, 122-142.

rural vision of a lost Eden, which played well in Worcestershire, Herefordshire and Shropshire, while that of Neville Chamberlain and the Birmingham Unionists was far more urban and industrial, but equally meritocratic, paternalistic and scornful of those who called 'class warfare – a barbarous policy of ill-will which had in it the possibilities of anarchy and bloodshed.' [102] Chamberlain was one of the founders of the NAEE, which was backed by the Federation of British Industry and involved a number of trade union leaders. They, like Baldwin and his supporters, as well as Henry Page Croft and Sir Richard Cooper, were deeply suspicious of the consequences of war-time state intervention and wished to see a return to pre-war industrial relations, albeit on a less antagonistic and more co-operative footing.[103] That the promises of the Coalition candidates were unfulfilled in the post-war was, Jon Lawrence argues, largely the fault of the financially orthodox Treasury rather than cynical vote-grubbing on the part of the candidates.[104]

Of course, some issues persisted which had divided the nation for decades before 1914, such as tariff reform, temperance, Irish Home Rule, even if they were reframed into the new patriotic discourse of 1918.[105] On the other hand, certain issues, most notably religious identity and the position of the nonconformist faiths, previously so significant in the political culture of the region, were almost completely absent from the debate during the election. It is possible to conjecture that popular anger towards those whose religious conscience prevented them from taking a full part in the war effort, drove this issue off the agenda. A survey of the political positions of the various Christian denominations in Leamington Spa by the *Leamington Spa Courier*

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[102] Arthur Griffith-Boscawen speaking in Dudley, *Birmingham Daily Post*, 3 December 1918.
[103] Turner, *British Politics and the Great War*, 278-389.
[104] J. Lawrence, 'The First World War and its Aftermath' in P. Johnson (ed.), *20th Century Britain: Economic, Social and Cultural Change* (London, 1994), 161-62.
[105] *Nuneaton Chronicle*, 29 November 1918.

in late November revealed that the Baptists, the Anglicans and the Congregationalists of the town were all in accord in their judgement that the judicious punishment of Germany was the priority, in order to avert future conflicts. The Catholics of St Peter's and the Christadelphians may have been more forgiving, but they too focused on the need for reconstruction and the sovereignty of a future League of Nations, rather than denominational issues.[106] Although some evidence has been presented to suggest that religion continued to be one of the main determinants of voting behaviour in post-war Britain, in the West Midlands there is little to suggest that it rivalled occupation or gender as a clear influence.[107]

Perhaps the most distinctive survival from the pre-war days was the fetish for assessing a candidate's 'character'.[108] This measure of an individual's fitness to act as a constituency's MPs involved estimates of the candidate's personal moral and financial probity. It also signified respect for a candidate's willingness to express his views freely, even if these were not shared by a substantial proportion of his electorate or his own political party leaders and managers. The Liberal Unionists had, in the 1880s, prided themselves on their 'manly' independence and resistance to the political demagogues and 'wire-pullers.'[109] These issues were especially germane, given the issuing of the 'coupon', which seemed to suggest to some commentators that the chosen candidate would be an instrument of the Coalition leadership, unable to act for himself. Neville Chamberlain, as has been noted, refused to use the Coalition's official endorsement in his election campaign. In the

[106] *Leamington Spa Courier*, 22 November 1918.
[107] K. D. Wald, *Crosses on the Ballot* (Princeton NJ, 1983); W.L. Miller, *Electoral Dynamics in Britain since 1918* (Basingstoke, 1977).
[108] S. Collini, 'The idea of "character" in Victorian political thought' *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, *5th series*, 35 (1985), 29-50; A. Hawkins, *Victorian Political Culture: Habits of Heart and Mind* (Oxford, 2016), 248.
[109] Cawood, *The Liberal Unionist Party*, 61-65.

parish magazine of St Nicholas church in Warwick, vicar of St Nicholas voiced a common concern 'the coming general election will be perhaps the most important we have ever had. The great hope of it is that it will send to Parliament real men, not marionettes.'[110] Coalition-endorsed candidates did attempt to address this criticism, however, such as J. W. Dennis in Deritend who deliberately used the language employed by the Liberal rebels against Gladstone's Home Rule policy thirty years earlier to explain his position:

> He did not want to go to Parliament as a delegate….whatever was going to be for the good of the country, as a whole, and for the uplifting of the conditions of the working classes in particular, he should vote for.[111]

As David Craig and James Thompson have recently reminded scholars, 'languages may have a very different salience in alternative contexts, whether regional or institutional.'[112] It is certainly clear that the more traditional language used by sitting Liberal MPs was demonstrably different to that of the Coalition MPs and candidates and that the Labour candidates, both 'official' Labour and NDLP were employing new modes of expression altogether. Patriotism was a common theme used by all, but the meaning of the concept varied according to the candidate, the opposition and the local identity of areas within the West Midlands, such as the Black Country, the western rural shires, Birmingham and its environs. As Simon Skinner has implied, patriotic discourse, with its focus on sacrifice, selflessness and moral duty, emerged from the war as a replacement for the Victorian nonconformist conscience, with the added advantage that all could make use of the concept to support their ideologies,

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[110] *Warwick and Warwickshire Advertiser* 7 December 1918.
[111] *Birmingham Daily Post,* 27 November 1918.
[112] D. Craig & J. Thompson, 'Introduction' in D. Craig & J. Thompson (eds.), *The Languages of Politics in Nineteenth Century Britain* (London, 2013), 11.

whether these were Liberal demands for social justice, Labour demands for ethical socialism or defence of the propertied order and the institutions of the state and economy by the Conservatives.[113]

It is difficult to reach a decisive conclusion on the effects of the war on political culture, given the peculiar nature of the 1918 election. No party had sufficient funds to spend on expensive visual election materials which had become the norm since 1906. The 1918 RPA had not only placed millions more on the electoral roll, a large proportion of whom were serving overseas, thus making any canvassing material hopelessly out of date, but it had also included a redistribution clause which split up constituencies and rendered old loyalties void.[114] The election was also taking place in the midst of one of the worst medical crises of the 20th century, the influenza pandemic, and many candidates were incapacitated for the duration of the campaign.[115] In these circumstances, voters and candidates complained of an unwanted and rushed 'khaki' election called just days after the news of the armistice by a Prime Minister looking for a vote of confidence in his shaky coalition government. Even Austen Chamberlain, a cabinet minister, grumbled about

> a want of workers, absence of organisation. I have never hated [an election] so much. The voters are apathetic, the dividing lines of parties obscure and uncertain, the issues ill-defined, cranks and numerous worse elements very much in evidence.[116]

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[113] S. Skinner, 'Religion' in Craig & Thompson (eds.), *The Languages of Politics in Nineteenth Century Britain*, 113.

[114] Birmingham increased from five constituencies to twelve. M. Farr, 'Waging Democracy: The British General Election of 1918 Reconsidered', *CERCLES* 21 (2011), 69.

[115] M. Honigsbaum, 'Regulating the 1918-19 pandemic: Flue, stoicism and the Northcliffe press', *Medical History* 57:2 (2013), 165-185.

[116] Austen to Ida Chamberlain, 8 December 1918, Austen Chamberlain Papers, Cadbury Research Library, University of Birmingham, AC1/8/6/35.

Despite these circumstances, it is possible to suggest that contemporary complaints about the relative apathy of the voters were misplaced, as were more extreme reactions, such as that of Sylvia Pankhurst's *Workers' Dreadnought*, which proclaimed that the election proved that 'Parliamentary Government is a failure.'[117] Studies of modern elections with low-turn outs, such as those in recent US history, have revealed that voter apathy can be read as an endorsement of the existing political system and of the governing party and the personalities of the leaders.[118] Voters with genuine concerns and grievances do not tend to stay at home. The level of apathy should not be overstated either, for there was a turn-out of at least 50% in three quarters of the thirty nine contested seats in the West Midlands, with at least 60% of the electorate exercising their vote in thirteen of the contests, which could be interpreted as a relatively positive achievement, given the disruption of December 1918. In the constituencies where the turn-out was especially low, most of which were in Birmingham, one might excuse this on the poor quality of the Labour and Liberal challengers to the Coalition candidate. On these terms, one can hardly see the 1918 results as a ringing endorsement of the Coalition in Birmingham seats such as Deritend and Duddeston, where the choice between a Liberal and Couponed candidate persuaded less than 40% of the electorate to attend the polling stations on 14 December.

As Martin Farr concludes, the First World War marked a beginning rather than an end to a pattern and culture of politics.[119] Many features of Victorian political culture, recently defined by Angus Hawkins, survived the cataclysm: dislike of party managers, respect for the consistency, courage and personal integrity of a

[117] *Workers' Dreadnought*, 4 January 1919.
[118] M. Rolfe, *Voter Turnout: A Social Theory of Political Participation* (Cambridge, 2012).
[119] Farr, 'Waging Democracy', 97.

candidate, preference for local issues over national ones.[120] Other changes that the war, or rather the 1918 RPA, appeared to stimulate actually had long antecedents in pre-war politics, such as the gradual decline of the open meeting, the battle for control of a sympathetic press and the growing significance of visual signifiers as electoral material. Jon Lawrence stresses the decline in political violence in 1918 and in the years immediately after, and the local press did emphasis what a difference there was during polling and on the day of the declaration, 28 December 1918.[121] The *Coventry Herald and Coventry Times* reflected that 'many Coventry people remember…when…the polling places were captured by one side or the other and held against the enemy, when men were hired to rally the party crowds…when the centre of the city was a seething mass of fighting electors.'[122] Rather than ascribing this to the unique circumstances of the campaign, the article asserted that there has been a shift in political culture as a result of the war:

> Modern Coventry has no use for exhibitions of the kind. It attends election meetings, listens quietly, asks questions and votes on the way to work or when returning home, all without display... the increasingly deeper and wider appreciation of the value of business which has seized most people has contributed to the welcome change that since the birth of the new century has been enlarging and tightening its grasp on the electorate.[123]

The change was not entirely anticipated throughout the Midlands, however, for the *Worcester Herald* noted that a shop opposite the Guildhall, where the result was

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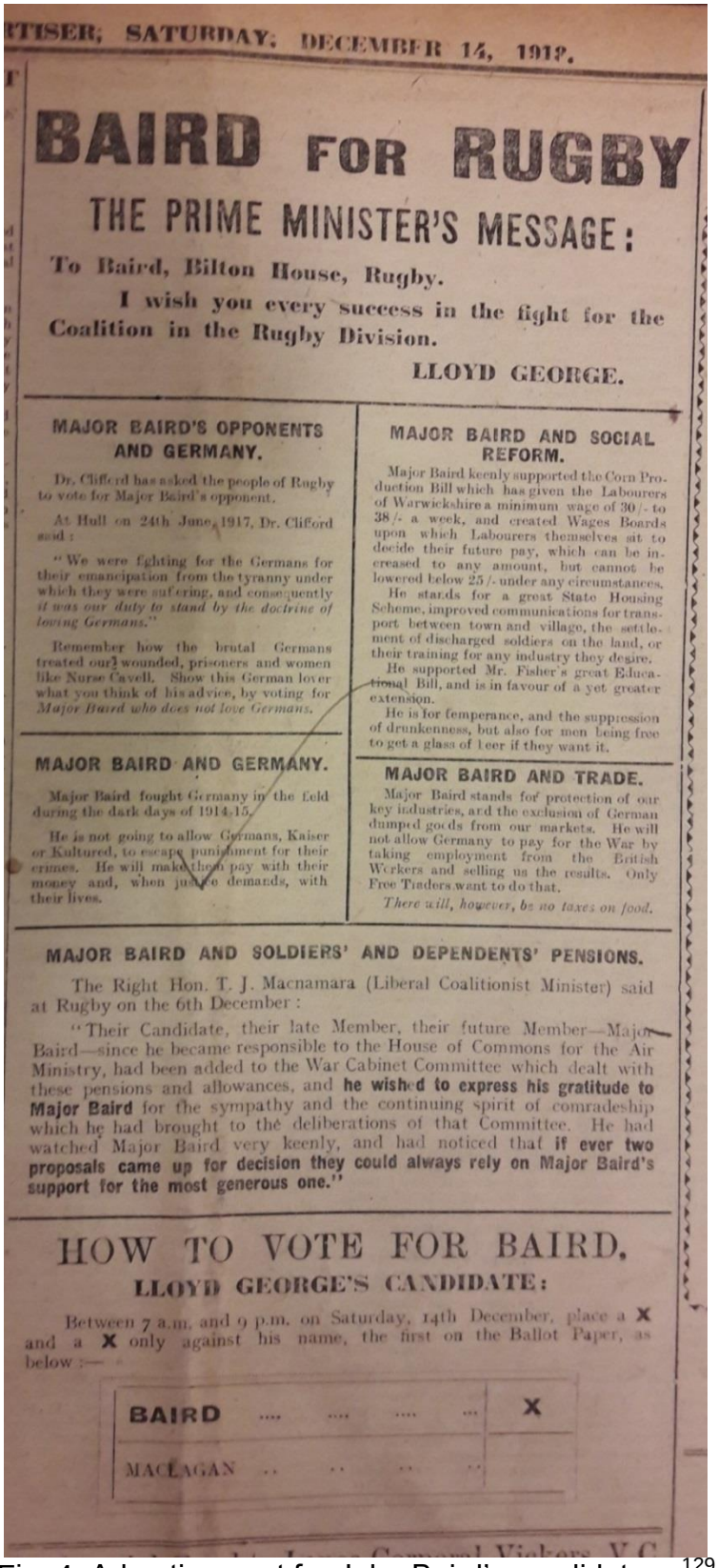
[120] Hawkins, *Victorian Political Culture,* 174-76.
[121] Lawrence, 'Transformation of British Public Politics', 190-192.
[122] *Coventry Herald and Coventry Times*. 13/14 December 1918.
[123] *Coventry Herald and Coventry Times,* 6/7 December 1918.

declared, had been barricaded in the expectation of crowd trouble, but that only 200 people were present for the 'tamest declaration day ever seen in the city.'[124]

The replacement for the mass meeting, the hustings and the use of intimidation was the greater use of advertising, reflecting Britain's increasingly commercialised economy. This was also made necessary by the lack of canvassers in autumn 1918 and the disruption of the electoral roll caused by both war and the RPA. In certain local newspapers, candidates battled for voters through their respective advertisements. In the *Nuneaton Chronicle* on 22 November there was a front page advert for the Liberal candidate, William Grant, emphasising him as 'the local candidate' while on the same page Maddocks, the Coalition candidate declared that he was 'the Coalition candidate.'[125] It took the Nuneaton Worker's Union a fortnight to place a far smaller sixteen line front page notice announcing their candidate, Gregory.[126] As can be seen by the expenses returns of Eric Knight, the successful Coalition candidate in Kidderminster, other than the salaries for agents and clerks, the largest costs were for 'printing and stationery' (£580 0s. 8d), 'postages, telegrams and telephone' (£96 9s.1d) and advertising, (£75 19s. 4d). Knight only spent £15 12s.3d of his total expenses of £1,143 2s.4d on public meetings.[127] By contrast, Mary Macarthur, the unsuccessful Labour candidate in Stourbridge spent £102. 11s.1d on public meetings, but her victorious opponent, John Wilson, spent a mere £35 15s, 11d.[128] Already in decline before 1914, the political meeting was no longer seen as central to a successful electoral campaign by experienced politicians. Perhaps the most through use of political advertisement was that printed by the

[124] *Worcester Herald,* 4 January 1919.
[125] *Nuneaton Chronicle,* 22 November 1918.
[126] *Nuneaton Chronicle*, 6 December 1918.
[127] Figures reprinted in *Kidderminster Journal,* 7 February 1919.
[128] *Smethwick Weekly News,* 7 February 1919; *Smethwick Weekly News*, 21 February 1919.

*Rugby Advertise*r for Baird, the Coalition candidate (fig. 4).Lloyd George's personal endorsement for Baird was printed in a large typeface at the top of the advert, with a further endorsement from a Liberal minister below sections expressing Baird's views of social reform, retribution against Germany, trade and soldiers' and dependents' pensions. At the bottom of the page, clearly with the newly enfranchised voters in mind, there was a reproduction of a ballot paper with a clear indication of how to vote for 'Lloyd George's candidate.'



TTISER; SATURDAY, DECEMBER 14, 1918.

BAIRD FOR RUGBY

THE PRIME MINISTER'S MESSAGE:

To Baird, Bilton House, Rugby.

I wish you every success in the fight for the Coalition in the Rugby Division.

LLOYD GEORGE.

MAJOR BAIRD'S OPPONENTS AND GERMANY.

Dr. Clifford has asked the people of Rugby to vote for Major Baird's opponent.

At Hull on 24th June, 1917, Dr. Clifford said:

"We were fighting for the Germans for their emancipation from the tyranny under which they were suffering, and consequently *it was our duty to stand by the doctrine of loving Germans.*"

Remember how the brutal Germans treated our wounded, prisoners and women like Nurse Cavell. Show this German lover what you think of his advice, by voting for *Major Baird who does not love Germans.*

MAJOR BAIRD AND GERMANY.

Major Baird fought Germany in the field during the dark days of 1914-15.

He is not going to allow Germans, Kaiser or Kultured, to escape punishment for their crimes. He will make them pay with their money and, when justice demands, with their lives.

MAJOR BAIRD AND SOCIAL REFORM.

Major Baird keenly supported the Corn Production Bill which has given the Labourers of Warwickshire a minimum wage of 30/- to 38/- a week, and created Wages Boards upon which Labourers themselves sit to decide their future pay, which can be increased to any amount, but cannot be lowered below 25/- under any circumstances.

He stands for a great State Housing Scheme, improved communications for transport between town and village, the settlement of discharged soldiers on the land, or their training for any industry they desire.

He supported Mr. Fisher's great Educational Bill, and is in favour of a yet greater extension.

He is for temperance, and the suppression of drunkenness, but also for men being free to get a glass of beer if they want it.

MAJOR BAIRD AND TRADE.

Major Baird stands for protection of our key industries, and the exclusion of German dumped goods from our markets. He will not allow Germany to pay for the War by taking employment from the British Workers and selling us the results. Only Free Traders want to do that.

There will, however, be no taxes on food.

MAJOR BAIRD AND SOLDIERS' AND DEPENDENTS' PENSIONS.

The Right Hon. T. J. Macnamara (Liberal Coalitionist Minister) said at Rugby on the 6th December:

"Their Candidate, their late Member, their future Member—Major Baird—since he became responsible to the House of Commons for the Air Ministry, had been added to the War Cabinet Committee which dealt with these pensions and allowances, and **he wished to express his gratitude to Major Baird** for the sympathy and the continuing spirit of comradeship which he had brought to the deliberations of that Committee. He had watched Major Baird very keenly, and had noticed that **if ever two proposals came up for decision they could always rely on Major Baird's support for the most generous one.**"

HOW TO VOTE FOR BAIRD.

LLOYD GEORGE'S CANDIDATE:

Between 7 a.m. and 9 p.m. on Saturday, 14th December, place a **X** and a **X** only against his name, the first on the Ballot Paper, as below:—

BAIRD	X
MACLAGAN	

Fig. 4. Advertisement for John Baird's candidature.[129]

[129] *Rugby Advertiser*, 14 December 1918.

Not all elements of the pre-war political material culture disappeared, however. Political leaflets remained as important as they had become among a newly literate audience in the Edwardian era, perhaps more so given the limited number of posters that could be produced in time for the hastily called contest.[130] These did begin to evolve however, with leaflets designed to be folded and posted through voters' doors, filled with dates of meetings, advice for voters and attractive electoral slogans employed by successful candidates such as Manville in Coventry.[131]

McKibbin suggests that the new political alliance that won the election may have done so by excluding the Labour Party, Trades Unionism and the manual working classes in general, but the evidence on both sides of the political spectrum appears to challenge this assertion.[132] In Birmingham, the victory of Neville Chamberlain's new Association was achieved through a carefully calibrated message that included all sections of the community, except those who, through questioning the war effort, had set themselves outside the pale. Chamberlain may have collaborated with Milner's BWL, somewhat reluctantly, but Jephcott's candidacy in Yardley was more typical of Chamberlain's vision for the Unionists to become a truly 'national party.'[133] Jephcott was encouraged to emphasise that 'he was a working man and a trade unionist', going on to add that 'it was a disgrace to his party that he was the only Unionist working man standing in the present election.' In his opinion, only a substantial contingent of working class Unionists would enable them 'to stand up for a progressive policy not of revolution but of evolution and to combat some of the

[130] Political posters are notoriously ephemeral, but it is striking that while the Imperial War Museum holds two Labour posters for the1918 election, the extensive Conservative Party archives at the Bodleian Library and the London School of Economics archives hold no posters from the 1918 election. Art. IWM PST 12201; Art. IWM PST 12194.
[131] Herbert Local History Centre, PA1177/41/2.
[132] R. McKibbin, 'Class and Conventional Wisdom: The Conservative Party and the 'Public' in Inter-war Britain' in R. McKibbin, *Ideologies of Class: Social Relations in Britain, 1880-1950* (Oxford, 1990), 259-93.
[133] Dilks, *Neville Chamberlain Volume 1,* 265.

principles urged by the extreme Labour party in the House of Commons.'[134] Roger Ward concludes that 'the election of Labour leaders such as Jephcott… was a signal that Birmingham Unionism…was socially progressive.' [135]

Labour historians have drawn attention to the party's victories in elections in and around Staffordshire against couponed opponents, such as Roberts in West Bromwich, Davison in Smethwick, Short in Wednesbury, Bromfield in Leek and Sitch in Kingswinford. [136] The victories at Kingswinford and Wednesbury were particularly notable as the opposition to the couponed unionist candidate was divided between Liberal and Labour candidates.[137] Perhaps equally significant, however, was the size of the vote gained by Labour candidates in the areas which Pelling lumps together as 'agricultural districts.'[138] Clare Griffiths has pointed out that 'most rural areas had no Labour organisation before 1918' and that in particular, 'the rural divisions in the West Midlands…appeared entirely beyond Labour's reach...most of Herefordshire, Worcestershire and Shropshire register as blanks in Labour's electoral record'[139] Yet in 1918 Labour won 36% of the vote in Shrewsbury and 40% in Oswestry. This was partly due to what Nicholas Mansfield has described as 'the ambivalence to the war on the part of many of the rural poor' which was expressed through 'passive opposition to conscription, appeals to military tribunals and…strikes.'[140] Yet Mansfield fails to account for the relative success of the Labour candidates in Shrewsbury and Oswestry compared to the performance of Sydney

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[134] *Birmingham Daily Post*, 29 November 1918.
[135] Ward *The Chamberlains,* 126.
[136] Pugh *Speak for Britain*, 126; H. Pelling and A. Reid, *A Short History of the Labour Party* 12th ed. (London,, 2005), 41-42; D. Tanner, *Political Change and the Labour Party 1900-1918* (Cambridge, 1990), 413; A. Thorpe, *A History of the British Labour Party*, 3rd ed. (London, 2008), 51; see also P. Fantom, 'Industry, Labour and Patriotism in the Black Country: Wednesbury at War, 1914-1918' in N. Mansfield and C. Horner (eds.) *The Great War: Localities and Regional Identities* (Newcastle, 2014), 74.
[137] Fantom, 'Community, patriotism and the working class', 249-253.
[138] Pelling, *Social Geography of British Elections*, 198.
[139] C. Griffiths, *Labour and the Countryside: The politics of rural Britain 1918-1939* (Oxford, 2007), 45; 328
[140] Mansfield, 'Farmworkers and Local Conservatism', 38.

Box in Hereford, who failed to win even a quarter of the votes in a straight fight with the former Ross-on-Wye MP, Charles Pulley.

As transport hubs in otherwise agricultural counties, there was a considerable 'railway vote' and there had been stoppages in Shrewsbury in September 1918 caused by wage demands in the face of price rises.[141] Arthur Taylor in Shrewsbury had made sure he had secured the backing of J.H. Thomas and, given the war-time presence of women as farm labourers, Taylor also sensibly held discussions with the National Union of Women Workers.[142] Tom Morris in Oswestry was the vice-president of the North Wales Miners' Association and had been adopted as a candidate by the Oswestry Trades and Labour Council before the armistice, in anticipation of a snap election.[143] The National Miners' Federation put forward nearly fifty candidates, all of whom were endorsed by the Labour executive, grateful for the fact that they would not have to fund the campaigns from their meagre resources.[144] Morris, admitted to being 'amazed to find the growth of the Labour movement in the Oswestry Division' and gratified to find that he had the unquestioning support of the National Union of Railwaymen, the National Union of Agricultural and Allied Workers, the Amalgamated Society of Engineers and the Carpenters' and Joiners' Unions. Although Morris freely admitted to being ill-suited to the campaign, owing to his limited education, the 'enthusiastic and businesslike manner' of the call for food prices to be maintained to ensure that the farmer could afford both his rent and 'adequate wages to agricultural labourers'[145] revealed the potential of union co-

[141] *The Times*, 25 September 1918.
[142] *Birmingham Daily Gazette* 10 December 1918; 11 December 1918.
[143] *North Wales Chronicle*, 20 September 1918.
[144] *Yorkshire Post*, 2 November 1918.
[145] *Llangollen Advertiser*, 13 December 1918.

operation and organisation.'[146] Morris did admit, after his defeat, that his party had not paid the attention to female voters that his couponed opponent had done, and that the lack of 'a single women's organisation' had cost them dearly.[147] Labour in Shropshire also lacked any voice in the local press, with the main weekly newspaper, the *Shrewsbury Chronicle*, owned by the right wing Ludlow MP, Sir Beville Stainer, voicing its opinion that the Labour party had no rightful place in local politics.[148] As the election posters of Will Dyson suggest, however, many voters saw the Labour party as a better embodiment of the new community forged by the war than that offered by Lloyd George (see fig. 5).

[146] *Llangollen Advertiser*, 4 October 1918.
[147] *Llangollen Advertiser*, 28 February 1919.
[148] N. Mansfield, 'Farmworkers, local identity and conservatism, 1914-1930' in P. Brassley, J. Burckhardt & L. Thompson (eds.), *The English Countryside between the Wars: Regeneration or Decline?* (Woodbridge, 2006), 84-85.

Fig. 5. 1918 Labour election poster.[149]

As Jon Lawrence pointed out in his study of Wolverhampton politics, 'the ideal of progressive co-operation had not been wholly expunged' by the circumstances of the war and there is good evidence that the tradition of the 1903 Gladstone-MacDonald agreement did continue in the West Midlands.[150] Alfred Hazel stood down in West Bromwich, complaining that 'the Coalition wire-pullers are trying to effect the political

[149] Imperial War Museum, Art.IWM PST 12201.
[150] Lawrence, 'The complexities of English progressivism', 160.

assassination of every Liberal member who presumes to think for himself.' Despite his support for Lloyd George's stated programme of reform, Hazel commented that he would 'feel more confident of its being carried out on democratic lines, if vested interests were less prominent in the Prime Minister's following.' This enabled the Labour candidate, Frederick Roberts, who had an impeccable record of service for the war effort, a free run against the Coalition Unionist, Viscount Lewisham, and to use Liberal rhetoric to appeal to Hazel's supporters.[151] Roberts, who was also vice-chairman of West Bromwich Albion in an area of impassioned working class football allegiance, won with a majority of 1,709, somewhat helped by Lewisham's inability to campaign due to illness.[152] Even the Labour-supporting *Birmingham Daily Gazette* confessed this was 'one of the great surprises of the day', but Roberts recognised that 'the fact that the Radicals …declined to split the democratic vote has also been a great factor'. His pugnacious refusal to accept the myth of national solidarity, pointing out there were few 'well-to-do' people in food queues, clearly connected with his largely working class audience.[153] Duncan Tanner asserts that West Bromwich and Smethwick were revelations to the Labour leadership. If Labour could spread its 'sharply defined, more independent image [and] repress its radical/pacifist/moralist wing', adopt a practical programme like Roberts' (he demanded housing with bathrooms, a rent act and a minimum wage), it could capture more seats like these in future elections.[154] In other seats, the Labour party was prepared to allow the Liberal a free run against a Unionist opponent if he was sufficiently radical. Despite a

[151] *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 28 November 1918; *Midland Chronicle*, 3 January 1919.
[152] *Birmingham Daily Post*, 30 December; Pugh *Speak for Britain*, 126.
[153] At one of Roberts' meetings attacking the selfish behaviour of the wealthy, a woman called out that her errand-boy son had delivered 100lbs of sugar to a large house whereupon it had been carried up to the attic. *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 10 December 1918.
[154] Tanner, *Political Change and the Labour Party,* 413; *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 10 December 1918. Although unsuccessful, John Baker won nearly 10,000 votes at Kidderminster for Labour due to his wartime record when the Liberals stood aside. *The Times*, 14 May 1939. The Liberals also stood aside in Stafford.

large presence by unionised railwaymen in Worcester[155], Richard Fairbairn, a Liberal, was the sole 'uncouponed' candidate put forward in November 1918. Fairbairn, a city councillor and manager on the trams, had been made Food Transport Officer for the Midlands and had actively participated in Worcester's recruitment drives both before and after the introduction of conscription in January 1916.[156] This positive wartime service, together with his pre-war advocacy of welfare reforms, his support for keeping key industries under state control and his public statement that he was not 'a whole-hearted supporter of the Prime Minister' convinced the small local Labour association that he could embody their aspirations adequately and they refused to put forward a candidate.[157] Despite the formal backing of the Worcester Co-operative Society, Fairbairn fell ill from influenza and was unable to campaign. Although he failed to achieve more than half the vote of Sir Edward Goulding, the Unionist sitting MP, he had made a positive impression and went on to win the seat (briefly) in 1922 following Goulding's ennoblement with the backing of now firmly established Worcester Labour party.[158]

In Birmingham, Neville and Austen Chamberlain and their Coalition allies benefitted from an unusually high proportion of three-cornered contests, compared to the rest of the region. In eight of the city's twelve new seats, the approved candidate faced a divided opposition.[159] Consequently Birmingham could now comfortably boast that

[155] The Worcester railwaymen had participated in the brief strike of September 1918 *The Time*s, 25 September 1918.
[156] *The Times*, 16 November 1922.
[157] D. Mylechreest, 'A Singular Liberal: Richard Robert Fairbairn and Worcester Politics, 1899-1941' unpublished MPhil thesis, University of Worcester (2007), 41-48; 54-55; 60-61; *Worcestershire Echo*, 7 August 1918.
[158] Mylechreest, 'A Singular Liberal', 62-73.
[159] In Erdington, Kings Norton, Ladywood, Moseley, Sparkbrook and Yardley, the Coalition candidate faced a Labour and a Liberal opponent. In Aston and Handsworth the Unionist candidate faced an independent candidate as well as the Labour candidate.

'we are twelve'.[160] The Liberal Party, which had staged a significant resurgence in the West Midlands in 1906, was bitterly divided here as elsewhere and the Liberal press in the region was unsure who to endorse. Fear of socialism, the impact of patriotic discourse and the promise of liberal reconstruction by Lloyd George appears to have persuaded many Liberal voters to support the Coalition candidate, pushing the Liberal candidate into third place in twelve of the fifteen three-cornered elections, except in Stourbridge, where the NDLP split the Labour vote and allowed Wilson to retain his seat. He and George Thorne in Wolverhampton East were the only Asquith Liberals to retain their seats. With only two coalition Liberals, the party was effectively finished in the region and has never significantly recovered in the one hundred years since.

James Thompson has drawn attention towards the significance of the concept of 'public opinion' in Edwardian political discourse and has highlighted how values such as 'earnestness' and 'rationality' were prized by contemporary commentators as true expressions of public spirit.[161] This definition of certain prized public characteristics clearly survived the First World War in the West Midlands. The newly enfranchised voters were frequently praised in the press when they failed to respond to the promises of socialism or when they rewarded those whose wartime service fitted them for public office. Equally, women voters were mocked for their irrational choices and lack of public engagement.[162] The dominant voices in the press, among candidates, the government and other commentators were still those of the middle classes and largely conservative (or anti-socialist) ones at that. There was no

[160] *Birmingham Daily Gazette* 17 December 1918; *Manchester Guardian*, 18 January 1918.
[161] J. Thompson, *British Political Culture and the idea of 'Public Opinion', 1867-1914* (Cambridge, 2013), 243-251.
[162] See for example the *Rugby Advertiser*, 14 December 1918, which commented that 'women's logic is perplexing' and told the story of a female canvasser who, when challenged, said 'don't ask me anything about politics!'

sudden imperialist passion for tariff reform, there was only limited enthusiasm for the idea of a League of Nations and no desire for class-based politics. Instead, almost all the coalition candidates sought to bring the new voters into the new consensus, promising to bury their previous shibboleths (whether Home Rule, temperance, or laissez-faire social policy) and attempting to build a new political culture which was less antagonistic and aimed instead at the benefit of the whole community. This was, after all, a nation which had shared unparalleled suffering and which was clearly fused by a common victory which (almost) all had contributed towards. Egregious profiteers and shirking pacifists notwithstanding, the newly enlarged British political system was endorsed, if rather unenthusiastically by the electorate in the West Midlands in 1918. Victorian liberal culture was alive and well in and around Birmingham in 1918, as it was elsewhere in Britain.[163]

Ross McKibbin's conclusion that 'a coalition of classes and interests' was created in 1918 'which was united only by a normative hostility towards a political notion of the working class', may hold true for Birmingham (to an extent), but the seizure of the Birmingham Labour movement by extremists was an unusual phenomenon.[164] In the Black Country and even in such unpromising areas such as Shrewsbury and Oswestry and amidst the chaos of Coventry's five sided election, a significant portion of the working classes chose to put their faith in the official Labour party for the first time, despite the best efforts of the coalition, the regional and national press, the business interests of the region and, inevitably, the Labour party's own leadership. They did so not due to class-hatred and trade unionist fervour, but largely as the Liberal party was effectively moribund and Labour was the only true representative

[163] S. Pedersen & P. Mandler (eds.) *After the Victorians: Private Conscience and Public Duty in Modern Britain: Essays in Memory of John Clive* (London, 1994); R.F. Haggard, *The Persistence of Victorian Liberalism* (Westport, Conn., 2000).
[164] McKibbin, 'Class and Conventional Wisdom', 292-93.

of the region's progressive politics that both Liberals and Liberal Unionists had championed before the war. In the wider West Midlands, British political life was not particularly 'in flux'[165]; a new politics of class-division and partisan hostility did not emerge fully-formed from the war from the war. Rather, three alternative means of building a pluralist political response to the war emerged in the region's three distinctive socio-economic areas. In the industrial cities of Birmingham and Coventry, a liberal Unionism looked towards collaboration between 'patriotic' labour and a business elite keen to avoid industrial unrest; in the rural shires, a more paternalistic, semi-feudal vision of a mythic England, of healing and reconciliation was promulgated by Baldwin and the Conservative Associations; finally in the Black Country, the hope for a new Britain where the soldier and the worker would take power for himself or herself and create a more equitable society with the benefits of the economy shared for all provided the significant breakthrough that Labour needed to overhaul the faltering Liberals. Any exceptions to this pattern were largely the result of electoral accidents where one vote or another was divided by multiple candidates. Of course, the emergence of alternative political models to that of the former Liberal Unionists left the Chamberlain family isolated in Birmingham and far less powerful than they had been in the days of 'good old Joe' but this was a process that had begun in 1906 and was merely accelerated by the political consequences of an unprecedented war effort in the heart of England.

[165] Lawrence, 'Transformation of British Public Politics', 195 .