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The impact of the Representation of the People Act of 1918 on the politics of the West Midlands.

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Abstract:

Despite the impact of the Representation of the People Act (1918) on the political culture of the west midland region in the inter-war years, the elements of continuity in the politics of the region are striking. The Labour Party failed to dislodge the Unionists' political control in the region (with the exception of the Black Country) for most of the 1920s and 1930s, despite the presence of a significant industrial working class population in the bulk of the region's constituencies. The article argues that the lack of significant redistribution of seats in the region, despite wartime growth in all urban areas, enabled the well-organised and well-funded Unionist organisations controlled by Stanley Baldwin and Neville Chamberlain to adapt the cross-class, non-denominational message to appeal to the newly enlarged electorate. Although the Labour Party appeared on the brink of a breakthrough in the west midlands, owing to this 'franchise factor', the Unionists adapted better to the new age of mass communications and political sloganeering which replaced the Edwardian politics of confrontation and public meetings. The Representation of the People Act of 1918 may have changed the political culture of elections in Britain, but, in the west midlands at least, it did not alter the Unionists' ability to manage the outcomes of the elections.

Keywords

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The Representation of the People Act (RPA) had a greater impact on British politics than any other single piece of legislation since the Great Reform Act of 1832. The introduction of universal male suffrage and the extension of the franchise to most women aged 30 years and over significantly increased the parliamentary electorate, while a redistribution of constituencies increased the importance of large cities and industrial counties. Only one in four of the electorate in 1918 would have been on the electoral roll in 1910. In Birmingham, for example, the Act increased the electorate from 95,000 to 427,084 voters (165,000 of whom were women over 30). Across the whole of the west midland region the number of registered voters increased between 1910 and 1918 from 573,231 to 1,581,439. Despite this transformation, Pat Thane has recently noted that the political system created by the RPA of 1918 was remarkably stable, when compared to the rest of Europe.¹ The best symptom of that stability in the west midlands was the preservation of largely pre-war voting patterns across the region, despite the mass enfranchisement and the effects of the First World War. William Miller asserted in 1977 that 'the West Midlands were always pro-Conservative and anti-Labour.'² Whilst this judgement is rather crude as it fails to understand the uniquely 'Unionist' nature of politics in the region and takes no account of the breakthrough of Labour in the Black Country and the Staffordshire Potteries after 1918, it is true that the region was at the heart of the Unionists' national dominance between 1918 and 1939. This was achieved despite an apparent transformation in the political culture of Britain after the First World War, which demonstrates the continued resilience, adaptability and successful leadership of the Unionist Party in the region.

Before 1918 west midland politics had been dominated by Joseph Chamberlain's radical Liberal Unionists, although the party's control had retreated

towards the city of Birmingham as his older son, Austen, failed to prevent Conservatives from being allocated the outlying constituencies on the retirement of Liberal Unionist MPs and the Liberal Party was resurgent in the region after 1900 (although this was not as extensive as elsewhere).³ Whilst the trades councils had proved less antagonistic during the First World War than in most areas, there was clear evidence of growing militancy in towns such as Wolverhampton and Wednesbury.⁴ Any potential growth of the Labour Party to challenge the middle class political hegemony in the region had largely been stifled by the limited franchise in the Edwardian period. However, after 1918, Labour was increasingly able to offer itself as an alternative to the traditional message of cross-class Unionism and the carefully presented rural appeal of Baldwin.⁵ Labour made a sufficiently large breakthrough in the region in December 1918, winning six seats in the Black Country and the Potteries, that they were able to persuade one of the few National Democratic and Labour MPs, Eldred Hallas, who had won Birmingham Duddeston, to cross the floor of the Commons and join them in 1919. Although Hallas retired at the 1922 election, Birmingham had seen its first Labour MP, albeit one who the Unionist newspaper *Straight Forward* derided as having 'deserted those who had made easy his pathway into Parliamentary life'.⁶ Labour also made some significant progress in local politics, with the Birmingham Labour Party stealing a march on the complacent local Unionist associations and launching an effective municipal campaign nearly six months before the local elections were held, focusing on 'housing, our Municipal Services...Gas and Tram charges and the elimination of a narrow, selfish policy'.⁷ They consequently experienced a significant increase in their vote in the ward elections and in November won 12 of the 20 municipal seats contested in Birmingham and a third of the seats in Coventry.⁸

In the historiography of post-1918 British politics, the Labour Party has been traditionally seen as the chief beneficiary of the expansion of the electorate, and the sudden decline of the Liberal Party in the west midlands seems to confirm the arguments of those who believe in the ‘franchise factor’.⁹ Those who supported ‘progressive’ policies in the region now tended to vote for the Labour candidate who offered the stronger challenge to the Unionist candidate. As Michael Dawson has explained, the restriction of electoral expenses meant that ‘Labour could now afford to fight more seats than before the war, which created an insurmountable challenge for a divided and demoralised Liberal party’.¹⁰ By contrast, Duncan Tanner has pointed out that ‘there were no inherent sociological reasons why the newly enfranchised men should have voted solidly for Labour’.¹¹ It should be noted that after their initial breakthrough, Labour failed to make much more significant progress in the region until the later 1920s, which suggests that the effects of the RPA were more complex than have hitherto been recognized.

The implications of the RPA for party organisation were swiftly realized, with the Unionist *Gleanings and Memoranda* reporting on the likely outcomes of the Speaker’s Conference as early as February 1917.¹² This presented a serious challenge for all of the parties which had been largely dormant in the latter years of the conflict. The Conservative Party Archive at the Bodleian library notes that ‘no pamphlets were issued by the Conservative [sic] Party during the war years 1915, 1916 and 1917’ (although *Gleanings and Memoranda* continued to be printed monthly until February 1917).¹³

In the same way that party organisation had had to respond to the advent of a mass electorate in 1884, with the increased professionalization of Liberal, Conservative and, subsequently, Liberal Unionist associations, so there was a need

for greater efforts in management of both party and electoral issues once the age of near-full democracy arrived in 1918. Neville Chamberlain took the opportunity to press the much over-due fusion of Liberal Unionist and Conservative organisations in Birmingham in early 1918 and, similarly, he ensured that the regional body, the Midland Union, was also revitalised.¹⁴ The central National Unionist Association attempted to challenge the new Birmingham Unionist Association when it involved the patriotic National Democratic and Labour Party in the 1918 electoral campaign.¹⁵ When its leading figures, such as Eldred Hallas and Victor Fisher, were forced upon west midland constituencies, Chamberlain ‘objected to this procedure on the part of the Central Office’, as his father had done before him in the 1890s, and Fisher’s disastrous campaign in Stourbridge allowed Chamberlain to demonstrate his superior local political knowledge.¹⁶ In April 1919, the Unionist Central Office handed effective control of the choice of west midland candidates to Chamberlain. He now held the wires of party patronage firmly in his hands and he insisted upon local constituencies accepting his chosen candidates.¹⁷ When ‘dissident Unionists’ in Kings Norton objected to his choice of Sir Herbert Austin as their candidate on unspecified ‘questions of policy’ in October 1918, they were swiftly slapped down.¹⁸ The revitalised Midland Union also spread its influence in the immediate post-war years, resisting an attempt by Derbyshire to break away and taking Gloucestershire under its control.¹⁹

If the years before the First World War had required an increasingly professionalised party organisation²⁰, the effects of the RPA tested the resources of all the parties. The Unionist Party’s apparatus may have rested during the war, manned by a skeleton staff, but it emerged far more united and capable of fighting the series of four general elections that ensued between 1918 and 1924, appointing W.A. J.

Gibbs as the organising agent for the midlands in August 1920, putting up candidates in all of the seats that were uncontested by 'couponed' non-Unionists in 1918 and then contesting every seat with a Unionist candidate in 1922, 1923 and 1924.²¹ The style of organisation had to evolve, however, as the scale of campaigning was now the crucial work of the local association, rather than making challenges to the electoral register.²² The Birmingham Unionist Association quickly identified the need for

polling-district committees and their officers , the arranging of frequent meetings of such committees, the splitting up of the polling districts into streets or parts of streets so that each particular member of a polling-district committee should be responsible for the electors in a particular street or part of such a street.²³

The Association consequently established a Propaganda Society and organised a well-attended free 'Demonstration and Garden Fete' at the Birmingham Botanical Gardens on 18 September 1920, where the political speeches were interspersed with an 'amusement side' which featured performances by 'the Birmingham Small Arms band, concert parties, conjuror, ventriloquist, concertina performers and other artistes.'²⁴ As well as the Women's organisations, a Junior Unionist association was launched in Ladywood in July 1921.²⁵ The result of all this activity was that in the municipal elections of November 1920, the feared socialist advance failed to materialise with the Unionists winning 22 out of 23 contested wards.²⁶ The divided Liberal Party, starved of funds, was swiftly pushed to the margins in the region in the 1918 general election, with only two Asquithian Liberals returned²⁷, together with one independent Liberal²⁸ and just one 'couponed' Liberal.²⁹ Any coalition Liberals standing in municipal election were entirely dependent on Unionist organisational

support. The Labour Party swiftly overtook the Liberals as the chief opposition to the Unionists, standing in 27 west midland constituencies in 1918 and it was the sole opposition to the Unionists in ten of these seats. Labour organisation, largely funded by the growth of trade union membership during the war, took time to develop, with eight Unionists and one Coalition Liberal candidate in the region who faced no contest in the general election of 1918. This allowed the Unionists to build a strong parliamentary tradition in the county seats and larger boroughs which Labour was unable to overturn fully, even in 1929.³⁰

The War Emergency Workers National Committees, which David Powell identifies as providing vital support for Labour in the post-war years elsewhere, were noticeably absent in the west midlands.³¹ The Birmingham branch of the Independent Labour Party was, unlike elsewhere, also distinctly ineffective at first, spending most of autumn 1918 focussing on attending national conferences, passing resolutions protesting against issues such as the imprisonment of John Maclean, and discussing the release of Karl Liebknecht by the new SPD government in Germany, rather than preparing for the imminent general election. Councillor Mundy warned the branch in February 1919 ‘that elections couldn’t be won from platforms.’³² The Birmingham Central Labour Party and Trades Council had largely been captured by pacifists and anti-conscription campaigners in 1915 and their 1918 election campaign was as hapless as that of the local ILP. This was in marked contrast to the effective organisation of the local party in the Black Country, and even in such unpromising rural constituencies as Oswestry and Shrewsbury.³³ However, after its electoral rout in 1918, the Birmingham Labour Party quickly learned its lesson and swiftly re-organised, appointing a new executive committee and divisional organisers, a professional clerk and offices equipped with a telephone.³⁴ Funds were

raised for elections, well in advance, with George Cadbury annually contributing £50.³⁵ They also adopted a new slogan to distance themselves from their previous mistakes: ‘Not Pious Resolutions, but WORK & VOTE FOR LABOUR CANDIDATES.’³⁶ It was the development of the *constituency* Labour parties which harnessed the enthusiasm of individual party members and which gradually enabled the Labour Party to organise sufficiently so that it was able to contest 11 seats successfully in the 1923 election (including the capture of Coventry, the Wrekin and Lichfield) and even to gain 46% of the vote in Neville Chamberlain’s own seat at Ladywood.³⁷ The Labour Party also began organising a plethora of affiliated social organisations such as choirs, cycling clubs and drama groups. The Birmingham Labour *Town Crier* was also a far less overtly party political publication than the Birmingham Unionist *Straight Forward*, continuing the vibrant print culture of pre-war Birmingham by including book and theatre reviews, ‘our children’s corner’, a gardening column, a serial story and items on socialist history. By contrast, *Straight Forward* failed to print anything more than encomiums of party leaders, details of Unionist events and endless exhortations for ‘armchair Unionists’ to rouse themselves. Even with the backing of local Unionist businesses such as Mitchell and Butlers, Bird’s of Wolverhampton and Birmingham Small Arms, *Straight Forward* was only ever a monthly publication, with often more illustrations than editorial material, while *Town Crier* survived as a weekly until after the Second World War, despite only carrying adverts from Westwood’s (kitchenware) and the S.M. Company (‘shirts and overalls...made by trade union labour’) in its early editions and only achieving an estimated circulation of 1,500 copies.³⁸ This was probably due to the response to regular appeals for financial support such as that issued to local trade unionists in November 1920.³⁹

The Labour Party did attempt to appeal beyond its traditional support-base among unionised industrial workers, as soon as the war was over. In the west midlands, Labour contested county seats such as Oswestry and Evesham for the first time in December 1918 even though, as Clare Griffiths notes, ‘most rural areas had no Labour organisation before 1918.’⁴⁰ Yet in 1918 Labour won 40% of the votes in Oswestry, where Tom Morris was the sole opponent to the Coalition MP, William Bridgeman. 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.’⁴¹ Although the local party in Oswestry admitted after the election that it had been poorly organised and it was hampered by a lack of support in the Shropshire press, Labour central office provided effective focused propaganda such as the leaflet, ‘Why the men and women who work on the land should join a union and vote for the Labour candidate’, which asserted that ‘the Labour representatives on the District Wages Commission have wrung A HIGHER MINIMUM WAGE from the farmers’ and promised ‘a still higher minimum wage...if the Labour party is sufficiently strengthened in Parliament.’⁴²

Likewise, the Unionists ‘gradually develop[ed] a variety of popular appeals after 1900, rooted in class, gender and regional identities’ as David Thackeray has recently noted.⁴³ One of the most successful Unionist leaflets in 1918 was ‘Cards and Coupons’ which made effective political capital out the popular antipathy towards rationing and regulations that was marked in a region such as the west midlands where the working class still prized what John Tosh has termed ‘manly independence.’⁴⁴ The leaflet promised that, under a coalition government, Britons would not be ‘regulated more than is indispensable for a day longer than is necessary’, and contrasted their position with that of ‘the theoretical socialists of the

ILP and the Labour Party' who wanted 'tickets for everything and officials to look after everybody.'⁴⁵ Although the Unionists did manage to appeal to working-class men in this way, the most important achievement of the party after 1918 was in its appeal to the newly enfranchised female voter.

Nicola Gullace has convincingly argued that the female voters who were enfranchised in 1918 were those 'who had proved their aversion to pacifism and their support for the war' and that limiting the franchise to those over thirty was designed to reward those mothers who had sacrificed 'the blood of their sons.'⁴⁶ Not surprisingly, an electoral discourse of sacrifice which focused on the 'glorious dead' of the previous four years emerged across the west midlands among Unionists and those who wished to benefit from association with the Coalition's victory.⁴⁷ The Unionists worked hard to tailor their message to this new group, with the Birmingham Unionist Association appointing 'a woman under-secretary to organise the woman vote.'⁴⁸ The Association also produced a series of effective campaign leaflets in 1918 (including one titled *A word to the Ladies!* which focused on the need for adequate children services⁴⁹). Candidates such as Edward Manville, who successfully stood in Coventry, included pledges of 'equal pay for equal work done by women' in their campaign literature.⁵⁰ The Liberals, still wedded to the electoral value of the public meeting, organised women-only meetings in Wednesbury and Stourbridge and relied on electoral material from the Liberal Publications Department that stressed pre-war issues such as temperance and free trade, even in leaflets ostensibly aimed at women.⁵¹ Labour also struggled to focus its appeal to women at first. Even in the 1918 election leaflet, *Why women should join the Labour Party*, tellingly described the targets of its appeal as 'every worker, man and woman.' Labour also failed at first

to develop its women's organisation in the west midlands, beyond trade unions such as the National Federation of Women Workers.⁵²

On the other hand, there is much evidence that, in the west midlands, women were not immediately accepted as fit to exercise the franchise, which tallies with Laura Beer's conclusion that 'the media represented and appealed to [women] as unequal citizens'.⁵³ In 1918 the *Rugby Advertiser* mocked the female voters' electoral choices, commenting that 'women's logic is perplexing' and citing a female canvasser who, when challenged, said 'don't ask me anything about politics!' even though there was an active branch of the Unionist Women's Citizen Association in the town.⁵⁴ The *Birmingham Post* adopted a patronising tone in the final days before voting

In these notes nothing has been said on any 'woman's question' Why ?

Because the reasons for supporting the Coalition are precisely the same for you as for your brothers and husbands and sons. You now possess full citizenship and the first duty of the citizen is patriotism.⁵⁵

Similarly the Birmingham Unionist organ, *Straight Forward*, commented that women needed 'training...by reason of their inexperience in politics' and cited a recruiter for a 'newly formed Women's Unionist Association' who was unable to explain the nature of the Association to those she sought to enlist.⁵⁶ The dismissive attitude towards female voters in the local press is in contrast to the largely inclusive and egalitarian attitude towards women voters in the national press identified by Adrian Bingham.⁵⁷ In the west midlands, women appear not to have been immediately welcomed into the public sphere.

The political parties soon realised that supposed female ignorance of politics was, in fact, a symptom of women's antipathy towards party politics, as demonstrated by the rise of non-political groups such as the Townswomen's Guild and the Women's Institute in the inter-war years.⁵⁸ Although Beatrice Chamberlain expressed concern during the war that women were leaving Unionist Associations in favour of organisations such as the National Union of Women Workers which were 'ostensibly outside politics', in fact the Conservative were well placed to exploit this trend, having organised the Primrose League as a largely social group in the pre-war years with a message of national unity and domestic renewal specifically aimed at female voters.⁵⁹ The Midland Union Council swiftly added an amendment to its rules, decreeing that the executive committee of the Council should include at least three women.⁶⁰ It must be noted, however, that a distaste for party politics following the collective war effort was not merely restricted to women, as the Birmingham Unionist Association noted the popular anger against party in their review of the 'khaki' election.⁶¹ To counter female voters' avowed dislike of organisations that were too overtly political, Anne Chamberlain, wife of Neville, founded Unionist Women's Institutes in Ladywood and Rotton Park and used the resources of the West Midlands Women's Unionist Organisation to promote this clear attempt to hijack the growth of non-partisan women's social gatherings by giving talks on issues relevant to women over thirty and holding children's tea parties, limelight lectures and sewing parties.⁶² Neville Chamberlain was astonished when he spoke at the UWI meeting in his own constituency to find that the meeting 'seemed more like an infant welfare centre than a political gathering.'⁶³ The organisation soon spread across Birmingham and into the wider west midlands and Annie Chamberlain found herself running the West Midland Women's Unionist organisation.⁶⁴ The Unionist women's organisation

also benefitted from the decision of the Women's Unionist and Tariff Association and branches of the Primrose League formally to amalgamate with the party and to rebrand themselves as the Women's Unionist Association.⁶⁵ Although some within the party criticised the 'segregation' of the party into gender-based organisations, others welcomed the contribution that these bodies could offer. As one writer to the *Conservative Agents' Journal* put it, success in an age of mass democracy 'stands or falls on ... whether or not there is a good women's organisation in the constituency.'⁶⁶ This judgement appeared to be proved correct when 115 women canvassed Ladywood on behalf of Neville Chamberlain during the 1923 electoral campaign and enabled him to retain his seat, despite a sustained Labour challenge.⁶⁷ The Unionist Party's ascendancy was, in David Thackeray's opinion, 'built, in part, on its ability to develop a substantial women's movement, dwarfing its rivals' which in turn was due to the creation of separate men's and women's branches of the Midland Unionist Association.⁶⁸ By contrast, the Labour organisations were much slower to organise, with the Birmingham branch of the ILP only organising a conference on women's organisations in February 1922 and then failing to discuss the issue again for at least a year.⁶⁹

The Women's Party, founded in autumn 1917, was savagely anti-Bolshevik and anti-pacifist, but simultaneously progressively feminist, supporting equal pay for equal work, equal marriage and reform of the divorce laws, equal opportunities in employment, state provision of maternity and infant care and co-operative housing scheme with the provision of hot water, crèches, nurseries and laundries, medical services and even gymnasiums.⁷⁰ Although the policies were popular, the failure clearly to identify their audience had serious consequences. Following the hasty decision by parliament in November 1918 to allow women to stand for election, an

unprepared Christabel Pankhurst was parachuted into the newly created seat of Smethwick in the Black Country. Lloyd George fulfilled his sense of obligation to the Pankhursts by granting Christabel the coupon, but she was no match for a Labour candidate who had been nursing the seat for years. Pankhurst was accurately seen as a candidate who had been, in the words of the ousted Unionist candidate, ‘sent down for the good of the country and possibly for the good of the women’s cause.’ In a ludicrous attack in a seat where the Labour candidate had led wartime recruitment drives and the National Union of Women Workers had a strong membership, Pankhurst claimed that ‘the Labour Party...was, in fact, a Bolshevik party because it was led by Bolsheviks.’⁷¹ Pankhurst clearly lacked electoral literature, as the *Daily Mail*, one of the most enthusiastic backers of the Women’s Party, claimed that her campaign was hindered by rain which washed her supporters’ chalked slogans away.⁷² She lost by 755 votes and with this setback, as June Purvis puts it, the Women’s Party swiftly ‘faded away.’⁷³ The local Unionist association determined to develop female politicians more locally, with two female councillors elected in 1918. Although both, together with a third female candidate, stood for the 1921 Birmingham municipal elections, only one was successful and the Birmingham Unionist Association’s enthusiasm for female candidates swiftly waned.⁷⁴ There were no female Unionist candidates in the 1923 Birmingham municipal elections. Anne Chamberlain, Neville’s tireless wife, continued to demonstrate that the chief political contribution that women could make in such a highly patriarchal society was that of the organiser and canvasser, playing a vital role in the 1924 Ladywood contest between Neville and Oswald Mosley which the former won by only 77 votes, thus guaranteeing that Neville’s swift political rise would not be halted.⁷⁵ Labour seemed equally reluctant to put women forward with only Mrs C. M. Mitchell standing

(successfully) in the Birmingham municipal election in November 1919 and Mrs M. E. Cottrell standing unsuccessfully in November 1920.⁷⁶

A crucial factor in the outcome of all elections is the social composition of the constituencies. The contrast between rural and urban seats was clearly evident between 1886 and 1910, with the Liberals, both Unionist and Gladstonian, dominating the more heavily industrial urban areas and the Conservatives operating an effective control of the rural and suburban seats. Pelling draws a clear, if somewhat questionable, distinction between 'working-class' constituencies such as Coventry and 'middle-class' seats such as Shrewsbury before 1914.⁷⁷ The effect of the redistribution of constituencies which accompanied the RPA was to heighten the distinction between constituencies where the numbers of manual workers dominated and those more suburban and light industrial areas where there was a more professional and business profile to the electorate.

While there were certainly fewer problems in reorganising the constituencies of the west midlands than there were in Ireland⁷⁸, as the *Birmingham Daily Post* reported in January 1918, there was 'considerable interest' in the redistribution of seats in the city, largely owing to the dramatic change in Birmingham's constituency boundaries. It noted that appealing to old loyalties (which had saved Birmingham for Unionism in 1906) would no longer suffice, as 'each of the present members who seeks re-election will have to ask for the suffrage of voters in new districts as well as those of old supporters.'⁷⁹ In the whole of Great Britain the number of constituencies increased from 670 to 707 in 1918. Across England the number of borough and county seats increased by 29, so it is striking how little the west midlands benefitted from the redistribution. In 1910, the region returned 47 MPs and this did not change in 1918, in contrast to the increase in representation than was afforded to Wales and

Scotland. What did occur in the west midlands was a redressing of the balance between borough and county seats with *The Times* suggesting in November 1917 that the redistribution amounted to ‘an increase in the political power of the great towns.’⁸⁰

In 1910 Birmingham itself had eight MPs, Joseph Chamberlain’s famous ‘seven’⁸¹ and Aston Manor, which was effectively part of Birmingham and had been recognized as such in the 1911 reorganisation of municipal boundaries. In 1918 the number of seats in the city was increased to twelve, but in reality, this merely drew clearer boundaries between the borough and county seats. The boundaries of Birmingham had actually grown between 1885 and 1918 to include portions of a further three seats, Staffordshire Handsworth, Tamworth and Worcestershire East. The first had been represented by Liberal Unionists continuously since 1886 while the last had been Austen Chamberlain’s seat for 26 years until 1918, which demonstrated their close affinity with Birmingham’s pre-war politics. Nevertheless, the verdict of most Birmingham politicians was that the city had been ‘favourably dealt with’ as the city now had, ‘more members than any other city outside London’ apart from Glasgow.⁸² This provoked a backlash from the agricultural interest in the region which lobbied one of the assistant commissioners of the boundary review at Birmingham Town Hall in August 1917. Lawrence Tipper, chairman of the Worcestershire chamber of agriculture, claimed that under the proposed distribution of seats in and around Birmingham, ‘agriculturists would be overpowered and outvoted by the urban population.’⁸³ Reviewing the RPA later in 1918, Arthur Hobbs suggested that Birmingham’s increased electoral representation was partly as a result of the business premises qualification, which was designed, in his opinion ‘to

preserve the separate identities of the commercial constituencies such as the City of London and certain divisions of Birmingham...and other large towns.⁸⁴

One of the chief purposes of redistribution was supposedly to equalise the size of constituencies to reflect the changes in population since 1885 and the impact of the expansion of the franchise. Whilst this produced a large number of seats where the electorate was between 30, 000 and 40,000 there were a number of exceptions. County towns which retained a seat, even if the constituency expanded to include some of the surrounding countryside, such as Shrewsbury and Worcester had significantly smaller electorates, both having less than 26,000 electors. On the other hand, Coventry, which had grown considerably due to pre-war expansion and war-time industry, saw the enfranchisement of its largely working class population in 1918, which resulted in an electorate of 62,066. The local press had been concerned at this inequality and had reported with some justified doubts, the claim of the Boundary Commission that some boroughs (including Coventry) would not be given two seats, despite their large populations, because the increase was purely the result of recruitment to munitions factories and would not be permanent.⁸⁵ The *Coventry Standard* argued that Coventry's growth would be permanent due to the expansion of the suburbs of Coundon, Foleshill, Keresley and Binley in recent years and that there was a danger that disparity between parliamentary and municipal boundaries would cause 'an increase of trouble and a diminution of satisfaction.'⁸⁶ Similarly, in Stoke-on-Trent, the increase in representation from 2 to 3 MPs was felt to be inadequate, given the huge growth of the population since 1885.⁸⁷ The issue in Coventry was raised by the City Council and then D. M. Mason, the Liberal MP for Coventry, took up the issue in parliament and moved an amendment on the Representation of the People Bill. However, he received no support in the house

(possibly due to having been deselected by the Coventry Liberal Association before the war began), in reply, the Home Secretary, Sir George Cave, merely commented that he hoped Coventry ‘would do better in the next bill.’⁸⁸ Cave’s dismissive attitude provoked an angry response from the local press and the Coventry board of guardians, but in truth, it was too late and Mason was too marginalised a figure in the Commons to achieve anything.⁸⁹

Other areas were angered by the increase in the size of the constituency which redistribution brought. The leader column of the *Leamington Spa Courier* described the proposed expansion of the Warwick and Leamington constituency as ‘unwieldy’ as it now contained Kenilworth, Stratford-upon-Avon and Alcester as well as the two towns. The population of this area was 83,000 people, and the paper noted that this was far in excess of the 70,000 figure fixed by the Speaker’s conference as the ideal size of a constituency. It was also far higher than the county borough seat of Worcester, which fell at least 40,000 people short of the ideal figure, yet which was retained in the redistribution.⁹⁰ The *Courier* also noted that agricultural and urban issues would be confused and that ‘the historic continuity of such a historic borough as Warwick’ would be destroyed.⁹¹ The removal of the name Stratford-upon-Avon was regarded as ‘a snub or rather a humiliation.’⁹² The renaming of the North Worcestershire constituency as ‘Stourbridge’ also drew the ire of Oldbury District Council who objected that their town had not been named in the constituency, despite being almost the same size as Stourbridge.⁹³ Their concerns were not resolved, but when Evelyn Cecil raised the issue in the House that the proposed naming of a new Birmingham constituency as ‘Hockley’ would mean the end of the ‘West Birmingham’ constituency, famously associated with Joseph

Chamberlain, Cave swiftly backed down and allowed the old name of the seat to survive, prompting cheers from the government benches.⁹⁴

When the boundary commissioners visited the west midlands in July 1917, they were largely faced with apathy from a population focused on the increasingly bitter conflict in Flanders and a political class that had been ‘quiescent’ since 1914.⁹⁵ Only the size of the representation of Coventry and the constituency boundaries of South Warwickshire were seriously challenged.⁹⁶ In Leamington and Warwick, the challenge was quite ill-tempered, with the chairman of Warwickshire County Council claiming that the proposal redistribution of seats ‘bore the stamp of having been drawn by some clerk in London who did not know much of the interior working of the county.’⁹⁷ The anger of the Unionist Association was also noted, largely as two fairly safe seats, Stratford and Warwick would be combined into one. Ludford Docker, brother of the influential Birmingham industrialist, Dudley Docker, had been nominated as the successor to the sitting Stratford MP, and the amalgamation of the two urban areas left him without prospects.⁹⁸ The level of protest was relatively muted, however, and the boundary commissioners’ initial recommendations were ultimately forwarded to Parliament and accepted by them without revision.

If the redistribution of seats in 1918 had had little impact in the region, the clauses in the RPA which attempted to reduce electoral corruption did more to transform the culture of politics in the west midlands. Worcester had been notorious as a corrupt borough before 1914. There had been allegations of ‘treating’ by Conservative candidates in the municipal elections of November 1904.⁹⁹ The relatively small size of the parliamentary electorate and the threat of a Liberal victory had encouraged the Conservative candidate’s supporters to engage in similar tactics in 1906. The Liberals, defeated by a mere 129 votes that year, had petitioned

parliament and a Royal Commission had been held. Although it did not find evidence of widespread corruption, the Commission did conclude that ‘a class of voters, numbering about 500...are prepared to sell their vote for drink or money.’¹⁰⁰ It was behaviour such as this that the RPA’s expenses clauses aimed to stamp out. The banning of auxiliary organisations from campaigning for candidates under the RPA to ensure equality between candidates of different parties (and to restrict the influence of trade unionists in favour of the Labour candidate), did much to reduce the bitter antagonism that such bodies had brought to Edwardian politics.¹⁰¹ This had the effect of reducing the extent of disturbance and destruction traditionally associated with elections, though this was arguably more influenced by the presence of women as political actors, which would have considerably affected the public behaviour of men in the political arena. To give one example of the sudden change in political street culture after the war, a shop opposite Worcester Guildhall (the site of the declaration in the constituency) was barricaded in the expectation of crowd trouble on 28 December 1918, but only 200 people were present for what the local paper described as the ‘tamest declaration day ever seen in the city’.¹⁰²

Under the terms of the 1883 Corrupt Practices Act, returning officers routinely sent the candidates’ expenses to the press, and those that were printed indicate that Smith Child, the successful candidate in Stone in December 1918, spent £878 14s. 10d. in winning the seat. The maximum sum permitted in election expenses was sevenpence for every registered voter in a county constituency, fivepence in a borough constituency.¹⁰³ From a survey of the expenses of other Staffordshire candidates, Smith Child’s appears a fairly average claim, although it is noticeable that most Labour candidates claimed less than their coalition rivals, a shrewd political move given the contemporary national hostility towards ‘profiteering’ and

'waste'.¹⁰⁴ The statement printed in the *Staffordshire Advertiser* clearly indicated that Smith Child was not claiming any personal expenses as he excluded the £61 10s. as 'paid by himself'. It was, however, striking that Child paid a mere £43 8s. 3d. for the hire of rooms, compared to his Labour co-operative rival, George Townsend, who spent £71 16s. 7d. on room hire, out of expenses that only amounted to £595 12s .10d.¹⁰⁵ Possibly Smith Child had gathered that money spent on public meetings was increasingly wasted as a smaller proportion of the electorate now attended these and he was choosing instead to spend more on advertising (Smith Child spent £462 14s. 11d. on 'goods supplied and work and labour done'). Or perhaps, given his position as Commander in the Royal Artillery of the 46th (North Midland) Division of the Territorials, he had been offered premises *gratis* by patriotic and wealthy supporters.¹⁰⁶ Smith Child's large expenses, allowed given the increase of the electorate, were overshadowed by those of the Welsh architect, William Rees, who claimed £979 2s. 4d. for his unsuccessful bid to unseat James Parker, the Coalition Labour candidate in Cannock.¹⁰⁷ But not even Rees' profligacy could match that of the hapless Willie Dyson, the National Democratic and Labour candidate for Nuneaton, who claimed for expenses totalling £1,131 4s. 4d., despite only gaining 1,101 votes, which meant that each vote had cost over £1, as the Unionist *Tamworth Herald* somewhat gleefully pointed out.¹⁰⁸ The possibility of the misuse of taxpayers' funds which this suggests is borne out by curious expenses returns such as those of Ernest Pollock, who claimed for £599 1s. 1d. at Warwick and Leamington, including nearly £200 for the employment of an agent, clerks and messengers and £43 5s. 7d. for 'miscellaneous expenses' in an election where he faced no opponent.¹⁰⁹

Nonetheless, by 1922, a correspondent to *The Times* noted that the unforeseen result of the election expenses clauses of the RPA, had, in fact, been a

de facto glass ceiling on the social class of potential candidates. As the Walsall-born Unionist MP John Lort-Williams commented,

choice is restricted, generally, to candidates with means, such as professional, business or professional men in middle-age or older, profiteers, pensioners, what is left of the landed gentry and scions of the nobility with sufficient means and those who have succeeded in marrying wives with money.¹¹⁰

In the 1922 election, it is notable that several west midlands candidates put in expenses claims of over £1,000, indicating that the costs of campaigning were notably higher once normal times had returned after 1918.¹¹¹

With the reduction of candidates' permitted expenses and the increase in the size of the electorate, the nature of political communication underwent a final shift away from the public meeting which had been a vital feature of pre-war political culture.¹¹² Hiring halls and paying to staff the meetings was a risky venture with limited funds when there were frequently few locations in a constituency which could house a reasonable audience and no guarantee that those who attended were those undecided voters who the candidate most needed to persuade. Instead, the Edwardian explosion in printed, highly visual propaganda continued, together with an increased use of publicity materials and commercial advertising, especially in leaflets and local newspapers.¹¹³ The decline in direct confrontation between political opponents that the public meeting had traditionally provided, also contributed, according to Jon Lawrence, to a far less rowdy and disruptive political culture in the inter-war years.¹¹⁴

The RPA permitted the sending ‘free of any charge for postage...one postal communication containing matter relating to the election only, and no exceeding two ounces in weight.’¹¹⁵ This led to a development of increasingly sophisticated publicity materials, best exemplified by Sir Edward Manville’s election leaflet, distributed across Coventry in November 1918. Manville and his local party association managed to present their electoral message using both sides of the small leaflet, even designing it to be read when it was folded for postage through voters’ letterboxes and filled with dates of meetings, advice for voters and attractive non-partisan slogans.¹¹⁶ Given the limited number of posters that could be produced in time for the hastily-called contest in December 1918, this was a highly effective alternative means of delivering the Unionist message, and Manville won the seat against five rival candidates with a majority of over 7,000 votes.

The post-war politics of the west midlands was marked henceforth by press battles rather than physical aggression. Once the dust had settled from the 1918 election, the Unionists of Birmingham, worried by the rise of Labour in the city after November 1919, discussed the ‘urgent need for a local Unionist publication of some kind to counter-act the Socialistic propaganda.’¹¹⁷ This ‘propaganda’ had chiefly appeared in the form of the *Town Crier* which had been relaunched by the Birmingham Labour Party, the ILP and the Birmingham Trades Council in October 1919, as well as the daily *Birmingham Gazette* which had backed Labour since the split in the Liberal Party in 1916.¹¹⁸ It was agreed by the BUA management committee that the journal should be named *Straight Forward* and the first issue, costing one penny, was printed in September 1920 with a mission statement ‘to expose false prophets who seek to delude ignorant people.’¹¹⁹ The Unionist

Association then established a propaganda committee to promote a nuanced message suited to the working men and women of the city.¹²⁰

The most significant change in political culture instigated by the RPA in the west midlands appears to have been a decline in the effect of denominationalism on political allegiance.¹²¹ Before 1914, the alliance between nonconformist churches and liberalism was already breaking down, as D. W. Bebbington observed when he commented that 'sections of nonconformity...were swayed by their economic interest to transfer their votes from the Liberals...to the Unionists' and he noted that Wesleyan Methodists were particularly prone to do so.¹²² Once the bulk of the population had been enfranchised in 1918, this process was rapidly accelerated, as the indifference of working class communities to religious denominationalism had long been a concern of Victorian and Edwardian Christians. The issues of temperance, disestablishment and religious control of education, so central to Liberal politics and a crucial feature of their revival between 1902 and 1906, failed to resonate with a new class of voter, more concerned to see his or her children at the best possible school, to be able to afford a decent standard of living and looking for comfort following the sacrifices of the Great War.¹²³ Once the First World War began, as Arthur Burns has established, the Church of England proved itself better placed than the nonconformists to exploit its status as the 'national' church.¹²⁴ The cathedrals of the west midlands, such as Worcester, St Philips in Birmingham, Lichfield and the newly raised St Michael's in Coventry, became the location of chapels of remembrance, with tattered flags, books of remembrance, memorials to 'the glorious dead' and annual services on 11 November, to which flocked thousands of different faiths (and none) flocked. Stanley Baldwin spoke of 'the grand old national church of England' in a fashion which transcended denominational lines of

belief and secured the Church of England a place of respect and admiration in post-war Britain that it had scarcely enjoyed in the Victorian era.¹²⁵

Among the Labour activists, the moderate ‘Labour Church’ movement which had been particularly powerful in pre-war Birmingham, was revived by the Birmingham branch of the ILP, but there is no indication from the pages of the *Town Crier* that this movement reached an audience beyond existing ILP members.¹²⁶ Neil Johnson goes so far as to suggest that the ‘Labour Churches’ were merely ILP meetings held on a Sunday evening, so called in order ‘to placate certain sensitivities about political events taking place on the Sabbath.’ He also theorises that the term ‘Labour Church’ was actually re-animated in post-war Birmingham as a (largely unsuccessful) ploy to overcome the peculiarly ‘consensual nature of industrial relations in Birmingham’ after 1918.¹²⁷ In the elections of 1918, 1922, 1923 and 1924, the lack of a clear denominational divide between the parties was consistently noted, and the attempts of long-serving Liberals to appeal to nonconformist consciences had very limited effect as Robert Outhwaite, David Mason, John Wilson and Richard Fairbairn all soon discovered.¹²⁸ Stanley Baldwin and Neville Chamberlain both continued the tradition, begun by Joseph Chamberlain in the 1880s, of appealing to the nonconformist tradition as part of British civic identity rather than as a separate entity and then delivering the votes of this community to the Unionist cause.¹²⁹ The only religious group clearly excluded from the national collective was ‘the Jew’ who was frequently associated with Bolshevism in both Germany and Russia in Unionist publications and was frequently the butt of jokes regarding his assumed untrustworthiness and ‘cosmopolitan’ identity.¹³⁰ As Stuart Ball has noted, ‘there certainly was an under-current of anti-Semitism in

Conservative [and Unionist] circles' especially in the febrile atmosphere of post-war Europe.¹³¹

Shortly after becoming prime minister in 1923, Baldwin appointed Neville Chamberlain as his Chancellor of the Exchequer, forming an alliance which would last for the next fourteen years. Baldwin and Chamberlain used the west midlands as the electoral base from which to control the Conservative Party and the politics of the nation. Only once, in 1929, was their dominance in the region challenged and this was soon rectified in the landslide of 1931 when they even made in-roads into the only Labour area in the region, the Black Country.¹³² Their appeal was, appropriately enough in the former 'fiefdom' of Joseph Chamberlain, based on liberal values of religious and wider cultural tolerance, social reform (in particular, housing) and, of course, protectionism in 1923 and 1931 (and its more limited industrial form of 'safeguarding' in 1924 and 1929). This programme was designed to offer a more convincing alternative to Labour than that offered by the fractious and increasingly penurious Liberal Party or by Lloyd George and the ardent coalitionists (the latter including Neville's half-brother, Austen, who had, in Peter Marsh's words, 'lost touch with the grass roots of his party').¹³³ The west midland Unionists made it clear that they regarded the 'Labour' Party as a deception practised on the working man, by men 'who work hand in hand behind the scenes with Russian Bolsheviks and German Jews.'¹³⁴ Neville Chamberlain's sincere commitment to social issues and his family's philanthropic efforts to improve housing in Birmingham paid rich political dividends in a city where, as Briggs explains in the official history of the city, 'housing [was pushed] into the centre of the picture before the war ended in 1918.'¹³⁵

Baldwin's strategy, to trump both traditional local-sectarian and newly emerging class-based politics with a seemingly non-political appeal to a nation

hungry for a purpose in the aftermath of a shattering war has been described as ‘new Conservatism.’¹³⁶ But in many ways, this approach was a partnership between Baldwin’s rural traditionalists and the urban liberalism of Neville Chamberlain and his supporters. Very rarely have commentators noticed that the two men, whose partnership was the key to the Unionist dominance of the period between 1922 and 1937, were MPs for west midland constituencies that were a mere 20 miles apart.

The key responses of Baldwin and Chamberlain to the RPA were a shared willingness to consider social and imperial reform, resistance to the demands of right-wing ideologues in their party and in the press, and tolerance of the legitimacy of the Labour Party (albeit a tolerance marked with vigorous political opposition). In this respect, the two men built on the traditions of ‘Tory democracy’ and radical Unionism and thereby managed to outmanoeuvre challengers to their dominance from both within the Conservative Party (such as Winston Churchill) and without. In the west midlands, Conservative extremists such as Sir Richard Cooper and alternative right-wing parties such as the National Democratic and Labour Party, the National Party and the Women’s Party were soon side-lined once their electoral appeal proved short-lived. Chamberlain and Baldwin realized that the decline of the Liberals, the sudden removal of the issue of Irish home rule and the more extreme policies of Labour afforded the Unionists a political opportunity that might not come again. Less cynically, both men had been genuinely impressed by the patriotic response that the war had evoked from all social groups and they wished to articulate policies that would continue to bring the national community together.¹³⁷ Despite their antipathy towards Lloyd George, both men had supported the coalition government until 1922 in the belief that it would promote and maintain the cross-class unity of the Great War.¹³⁸

Baldwin is celebrated as a great communicator, rather than a great legislator and Robert Self has shown that Neville Chamberlain also proved to be a very effective speaker, despite his personal reserve.¹³⁹ Both men sought to exploit radio and cinema to transmit their message of practical, non-ideological, common-sense responses to domestic and international problems to as wide a range of the mass electorate as possible. Both men enjoyed a (largely) positive relationship with the local press and both were careful to cultivate the support of John Reith, the anti-Churchillian Director-General of the recently-founded BBC.¹⁴⁰ They both endorsed a style of political campaigning that saw the Unionists in the west midlands routinely running regular ‘surgeries’ and visiting the homes and recreational clubs and institutes of their constituents (even though Neville Chamberlain clearly did not enjoy this experience, referring to it in private as ‘slumming’).¹⁴¹ They ensured that the apparatus of party organisation and the staffing of party bodies remained in their hands, refusing to allow any democratisation or too much centralisation of the political system in the west midlands. The Unionists of the region may have successfully presented themselves as patriotic, moderate social reformers, but they remained paternalistic elites who largely saw the newly enlarged electorates as entities to be ‘managed’ rather than consulted.

¹ Pat Thane, ‘The Impact of Mass Democracy on British Political Culture, 1918-1939’, in *The Aftermath of Suffrage: Women, Gender and Politics in Britain, 1918-1945*, ed. J.V. Gottlieb and Richard Toye (2013), 54.

² W. L. Miller, *Electoral Dynamics in Britain since 1918* (1977), 203.

³ Ian Cawood, *The Liberal Unionist Party, 1886-1912: A History* (2012), 211-241.

⁴ Paul Fantom, ‘Community, Patriotism and the Working Class in the First World War: The Home Front in Wednesbury, 1914-1918’ University of Birmingham PhD, 2015, 51-69; 135-60.

⁵ Ian Cawood, 'Life After Joe: Politics and War in the West Midlands, 1914-1918' *Midland History*, xlii (2017), forthcoming).

⁶ Library of Birmingham, Archives and Heritage Service, uncatalogued item, *Straight Forward: A Journal of Constitutional Progress*, no. 4 (Dec. 1920).

⁷ Library of Birmingham, Archives and Heritage Service, 329.94249LAB, Birmingham Central Labour Party minute book, 1918-1919, 27 June 1919.

⁸ Library of Birmingham, Archives and Heritage Service, LB 76.22, *Town Crier*, new series, no. 6, 7 Nov. 1919; Library of Birmingham, Archives and Heritage Service, 329.94249Con, Birmingham Unionist Association executive committee minutes, 21 Nov. 1921; Peter Walters, *Great War Britain: Coventry, remembering 1914-1918* (Stroud, 2016), 136.

⁹ H.C.G. Matthew, Ross McKibbin and J. A. Kay 'The Franchise Factor in the Rise of the Labour Party', *EHR*, ccclxi (1976), 732-52.

¹⁰ Michael Dawson, 'Money and the real impact of the Fourth Reform Act' *HJ*, xxxv (1992), 369-81.

¹¹ Duncan Tanner, 'The Parliamentary Electoral System, the Fourth Reform Act and the Rise of Labour in England and Wales' *BiHR*, lvi (1983), 219.

¹² Bodl., Conservative Party Archive (hereafter CPA), X. Films 64/20, 'Electoral Reform', *Gleanings and Memoranda*, Feb. 1917, 6-7.

¹³ Bodl., CPA, X Films 63/3, Pamphlets and Leaflets part 3, 1915-1925.

¹⁴ Bodl., CPA, ARE MU 1/5, minutes of the annual meeting of the Midland Union Council, 15 July 1918; Roger Ward, *The Chamberlains: Joseph, Austen and Neville, 1836-1940* (Stroud, 2015), 123.

¹⁵ Birmingham Conservative and Unionist Association executive committee minutes, 14 July 1918.

¹⁶ University of Birmingham, Cadbury Research Library, Neville Chamberlain MSS, NC18/1/190, Neville Chamberlain to Ida and Hilda Chamberlain, 9 Nov. 1918; Bodl., CPA, ARE MU 2/5, Midland Union executive committee minutes, 19 June 1918; Nigel Keohane, *The Party of Patriotism: The Conservative Party and the First World War* (Farnham, 2010), 127.

¹⁷ Bodl., CPA, ARE MU 2/5, Midland Union executive committee minutes, 28 Apr. 1919; Robert Self, *Neville Chamberlain: A Biography* (Aldershot, 2006), 69-70.

¹⁸ Birmingham Conservative and Unionist Association executive committee minutes, 17 Oct. 1918.

¹⁹ Bodl., CPA, ARE MU2/5, Midland Union general purposes and finance sub-committee minutes, 3 Dec. 1920.

²⁰ See Kathryn Rix, *Parties, Agents and Electoral Culture in England, 1880-1910* (2016).

²¹ The minutes of the Midland Union Council reveal the strong financial position of the party by 1920; Bodl., CPA, ARE MU 1/5, Midland Union Council annual meeting minutes, 3 Dec. 1920.

²² Stuart Ball, ‘Local Conservatism and the Evolution of the Party Organization’, in *Conservative Century: The Conservative Party since 1900*, ed. Antony Seldon and Stuart Ball (Oxford, 1994), 261-311.

²³ Birmingham Conservative and Unionist Association minutes, ‘Memorandum by Ald. Davis and Mr Walthall’, 29 Jan. 1919.

²⁴ Birmingham Unionist Association management committee report, 15 Oct. 1920.

²⁵ *Straight Forward*, no. 12, Aug. 1921.

²⁶ Birmingham Unionist Association management committee minutes, 12 Nov. 1920.

²⁷ George Thorne in Wolverhampton East and J.W. Wilson in Stourbridge.

²⁸ Josiah Wedgwood in Newcastle-under-Lyme who faced no contest.

²⁹ Sir Courtenay Warner in Lichfield.

³⁰ Labour finally won in Birmingham in the 1929 general election, capturing half of the city’s seats and coming within 43 votes of defeating Austen Chamberlain, but all of these were regained by the Unionists in 1931.

³¹ David Powell, *British Politics, 1910-1935: The Crisis of the Party System* (2004), 88.

³² Library of Birmingham, Archives and Heritage Service, A329.94249IND, minutes of the Birmingham city branch of the Independent Labour Party 1915-1921. The decision of the secretary of the Birmingham ILP, R. Warden Briggs, to refer to all those present at meetings as ‘comrade’ between November and December 1918, is perhaps, a small indication of just how out touch the Birmingham branch was with their electorate. This practice ceased in January 1919.

³³ Brock Millman, *Managing Domestic Dissent in First World War Britain* (2000), 106-107.

³⁴ Lib. Of Birmingham, 329.94249LAB, Birmingham Central Labour Party minute book 1918-1919, 16 Jan. 1919.

³⁵ Lib. Of Birmingham, 329.94249LAB, Birmingham Borough Labour Party minute book, i, 1919-21. Labour Party municipal election fund, n.d. (1919?).

³⁶ Birmingham Central Labour Party minute book 1918-1919, agenda for meeting, 13 Nov. 1919.

³⁷ David Howell, *MacDonald’s Party: Labour Identities and Crisis 1923-31* (Oxford, 2002), 18.

³⁸ *Town Crier*, new series, no. 2, 10 Oct. 1919; Peter Drake ‘The Town Crier: Birmingham’s Labour Weekly, 1919-1951’, in *Worlds of Labour: Essays in Birmingham Labour History*, ed. Anthony Wright and Richard Shackleton (Birmingham, 1983), 103-126. The editor of the Town Crier, W.J. Chamberlain, sought ‘immediate financial assistance’ for his paper from the Birmingham Borough Labour Party within six months of its launch; Birmingham Borough Labour Party minute book, i, 1919-21, 12 Feb. 1920.

³⁹ Birmingham Borough Labour Party minute book, i, 1919-21.

⁴⁰ C. V. J. Griffiths, *Labour and the Countryside: The politics of rural Britain 1918-1939* (Oxford, 2007), 45.

⁴¹ Nicholas Mansfield, ‘Farmworkers and Local Conservatism in South-west Shropshire, 1916-1923’ in *Mass Conservatism: The Conservative and the Public since the 1880s*, ed. Stuart Ball and Iain Holliday (2002), 38.

⁴² *Llangollen Advertiser*, 28 Feb. 1919; Nicholas Mansfield, ‘Farmworkers, local identity and Conservatism, 1914-1930’, in *The English Countryside between the Wars: Regeneration or Decline?*, ed., Paul Brassley, Jeremy Burckhardt and Lynne Thompson (Woodbridge, 2006), 84-5; Bodl., Archives of the British Labour Party, X Films, 81 81/18/59, series II: pamphlets and leaflets.

⁴³ David Thackeray, *Conservatism for the Democratic Age: Conservative Cultures and the challenge of mass democracy in early Twentieth Century Britain* (Manchester, 2013), 5.

⁴⁴ John Tosh, *Manliness and Masculinities in nineteenth-century Britain* (Harlow, 2005), 93.

⁴⁵ Bodl., CPA, X Films 63/3, ‘Cards and Coupons’, pamphlet 1918/15.

⁴⁶ Nicola Gullace ‘*The Blood of our Sons*’: Men, Women and the Regeneration of British Citizenship during the Great War (2002), 193. Martin Pugh described female support for the Coalition as a ‘vicarious blow’ against Germany: Martin Pugh, *The Making of Modern British Politics* (3rd edn, Oxford, 2002), 163.

⁴⁷ A female speaker in Leamington Spa commented that women had ‘a debt of honour to pay’ following the war: *Leamington Spa Courier*, 22 Nov. 1918.

⁴⁸ Birmingham Conservative and Unionist Association executive committee minutes, ‘Memorandum by Ald. Davis and Mr Walthall’, 29 Jan. 1919,; David Jarvis, ‘Mrs Maggs and Betty: The Conservative Appeal to Women Voters in the 1920s’, *Twentieth Century British History*, v (1994), 129-52.

⁴⁹ Neville Chamberlain MSS, NC18/1/38, n.d. (? Nov. 1918).

⁵⁰ Herbert Local History Centre, Coventry, PA1177/41/2, Edward Manville’s election leaflet, 1918.

⁵¹ *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 6 Dec. 1918; *Dudley Chronicle*, 30 Nov. 1918; Bodl., archives of the British Liberal Party, X Films 90/18/27&29, *To Every Woman Voter: The Message of Liberalism and A Word to the Women*, series 1: pamphlets and leaflets.

⁵² The limited appeal of these bodies was demonstrated when Mary MacArthur, the organiser of the Cradley Heath women chain-makers' successful strike of 1910, was defeated in Stourbridge in the 1918 general election, despite only facing an Asquithian liberal and Victor Fisher, honorary secretary of the National Democratic and Labour Party, who had been forced on the Unionist local association against their wishes. *The Times*, 29 Nov. 1918; *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 6 Dec. 1918; *Daily Mail*, 14 Dec. 1918.

⁵³ Laura Beers, 'A timid disbelief in the equality to which lip-service is constantly paid to gender, politics and the press between the wars', in *Brave New World: Imperial and Democratic Nation-Building in Britain between the Wars*, ed. Laura Beers and Geraint Thomas (2012), 130.

⁵⁴ *Rugby Advertiser*, 14 Dec. 1918.

⁵⁵ *Birmingham Daily Post*, 13 Dec. 1918.

⁵⁶ *Straight Forward*, no. 16, Jan. 1922.

⁵⁷ Adrian Bingham, 'Enfranchisement, Feminism and the Modern Woman: Debates in the British Popular Press, 1918-1939', in *Aftermath of Suffrage*, ed., Gottlieb and Toye, 87-104; Adrian Bingham, *Gender, Modernity and the Popular Press in Inter-War Britain* (Oxford, 2004), 120-7.

⁵⁸ Thane, 'The Impact of Mass Democracy', 61-2.

⁵⁹ Neville Chamberlain MSS, NC1/13/2/156, Beatrice to Neville Chamberlain, 10 Feb. 1917.

⁶⁰ Bodl., CPA, ARE MU 1/5, minutes of the annual meeting of the Midland Union Council, 15 July 1918.

⁶¹ Birmingham Unionist Association executive committee minutes, 29 Jan. 1919.

⁶² *Straight Forward*, no. 5, Jan. 1921; no. 8, Apr. 1921. The National Unionist Association conference, held in Birmingham in June 1920 had also included a 'mass meeting of women' at the Midland Institute with over 700 present: Birmingham Unionist Association management committee minutes, 9 July 1920.

⁶³ Neville Chamberlain to Hilda Chamberlain, 26 Sept. 1920, quoted in *The Neville Chamberlain Diary Letters, i: The Making of a Politician, 1915-1920*, ed. Robert Self (Aldershot, 2000), 388.

⁶⁴ *Straight Forward*, no. 9, May 1921; no. 10, June 1921; no. 5 Dec. 1921.

⁶⁵ Thackeray, *Conservatism for the Democratic Age*, 125.

⁶⁶ Bodl., CPA, pub 3/3, *Conservative Agents' Journal*, Apr. 1923, 68.

⁶⁷ Thackeray, *Conservatism for the Democratic Age*, 144.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 147; Neville Chamberlain MSS, NC5/10/11, Neville Chamberlain to Anne Chamberlain, 1 Feb. 1918;

Bodl., CPA, ARE MU 1/5, Minutes of the annual meeting of the Midland Union Council, 3 Dec. 1920.

⁶⁹ Minutes of the Birmingham city branch of the Independent Labour Party 1921-1923, 2 Feb. 1922.

⁷⁰ *Britannia*, 2 Nov. 1917.

⁷¹ *Birmingham Daily Post*, 11 Dec. 1918; George Barnaby, *Socialism in Birmingham and the Black Country*, (Wolverhampton, 1998), 229.

⁷² *Daily Mail*, 12 Dec. 1918.

⁷³ Jane Purvis, 'Emmeline Pankhurst in the Aftermath of Suffrage, 1918-1928', in *Aftermath of Suffrage*, ed. Gottlieb and Toye, 21. See also Nicola Gullace, 'Christabel Pankhurst and the Smethwick Election: right-wing feminism, the Great War and the ideology of consumption' *Women's History Review*, xxiii (2014), 330-346; Jane Purvis, 'The Women's Party of Great Britain (1917–1919): a forgotten episode in British women's political history', *Women's History Review*, xxv (2016), 638-51.

⁷⁴ The re-elected councillor, Henrietta Bartleet, was only returned with a majority of 89 in her Soho ward: *Straight Forward*, no. 14, Oct. 1921.

⁷⁵ Peter Marsh, *The Chamberlain Litany: Letters within a governing family from Empire to Appeasement* (2010), 193.

⁷⁶ *Town Crier*, new series, no. 6, 7 Nov. 1919; no. 58, 5 Nov. 1920.

⁷⁷ Henry Pelling, *Social Geography of British Elections, 1885-1910* (1967), 173-203.

⁷⁸ J. D. Fair, *British Inter-Party Conferences: A Study of the Procedure of Conciliation in British Politics, 1867-1921* (Oxford, 1980), 179-80.

⁷⁹ *Birmingham Daily Post*, 26 Feb. 1918.

⁸⁰ *The Times*, 5 Nov. 1917.

⁸¹ When the Unionists had retained all the Birmingham seats in 1906, despite the national Liberal landslide, Chamberlain's supporters printed a postcard with the caption 'Well done Birmingham!! We are Seven!!!' Andrew Reekes, 'Birmingham exceptionalism, Joseph Chamberlain and the 1906 General Election', University of Birmingham PhD, 2014, 35.

⁸² *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 6 Oct. 1917.

⁸³ *Birmingham Daily Post*, 9 Aug. 1917.

⁸⁴ A.O. Hobbs, *A Guide to the Representation of the People Act, 1918* (1918), 29.

⁸⁵ *Midland Daily Telegraph*, 9 Oct. 1917; 12 Oct. 1917; 13 Oct. 1917.

⁸⁶ *Coventry Standard*, 6 July 1917.

⁸⁷ *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 14 July 1917.

⁸⁸ Herbert Local History Centre, PA68/5, minute book of the Coventry Liberal Association (6 Feb. 1912- 22 Oct. 1922); *Evening Despatch* 29 Oct. 1917; *Midland Daily Telegraph*, 6 Nov. 1917.

⁸⁹ *Midland Daily Telegraph*, 7 Nov. 1917.

⁹⁰ *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 30 June 1917.

⁹¹ *Leamington Spa Courier*, 29 June 1917.

⁹² *Coventry Standard*, 6 July 1917.

⁹³ *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 30 June 1917.

⁹⁴ *Birmingham Daily Post*, 30 Nov. 1917.

⁹⁵ *Walsall Observer and South Staffordshire Chronicle*, 14 July 1917.

⁹⁶ *Coventry Standard*, 13 July 1917.

⁹⁷ *Leamington Spa Courier*, 13 July 1917. The lack of consultation with the local leaders was also 'strongly resented' in Staffordshire: *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 14 July 1917; *Walsall Observer*, 21 July 1917.

⁹⁸ *Birmingham Daily Mail*, 14 July 1917.

⁹⁹ *Worcestershire Echo*, 2 Nov. 1904.

¹⁰⁰ Royal Commission on the Worcester Election, *Report of Royal Commission appointed to enquire into the existence of corrupt practices at the last election for the city of [together with minutes of evidence] 2 vols.* (1906).

¹⁰¹ E.H.H. Green, *The Crisis of Conservatism: The politics, economics and ideology of the British Conservative party, 1880-1914* (1995); Thackeray, *Conservatism for the Democratic Age*, 117-18. Thackeray does note that newspapers largely ignored the legislation until 1922, when it was amended to include any corporate bodies which intervened in an election.

¹⁰² *Worcester Herald*, 4 Jan. 1919.

¹⁰³ Sylvain Mayer, *Representation of the People Act 1918 and the Redistribution of Seats (Ireland) Act, 1918* (1918), 119.

¹⁰⁴ As the 1918 Staffordshire results reveal, this did not necessarily translate into electoral weakness. Samuel Finney spent £517 8s 5d in contesting Burslem, compared to his Unionist rival, Sampson Walker, who spent £613, but Finney won the seat with a majority of over a thousand votes: *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 8 Feb. 1919.

¹⁰⁵ *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 1 Feb. 1919. William Ormsby-Gore, who likewise defeated a Labour candidate at Stafford, only spent £43 19s on room hire. *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 25 Jan. 1919.

¹⁰⁶ *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 1 Feb. 1919.

¹⁰⁷ *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 8 Feb. 1919.

¹⁰⁸ *Tamworth Herald*, 22 Feb. 1919.

¹⁰⁹ Leamington Spa Courier, 10 Jan. 1919, By contrast, John Ward, unopposed in Stoke, claimed £43 19s 6d. *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 11 Jan. 1919.

¹¹⁰ *The Times*, 4 Feb. 1924.

¹¹¹ Those candidates in 1922 for whom figures are available who spent over £1,000 included David Wallace in Rugby, James Parker and Harold Abrahamson in Cannock and Courtenay Warner and W.J. French in Lichfield; *Leamington Spa Courier*, 30 Dec. 1922; *Lichfield Mercury*, 29 Dec. 1922, *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 23 Dec. 1922.

¹¹² David Butler, *British Political Facts, 1900-1985* (1986), 247.

¹¹³ James Thompson “‘Pictorial Lies’? – Posters and Politics in Britain, c.1880-1914”, *Past and Present*, cxcvii (2007), 177-210.

¹¹⁴ Jon Lawrence, ‘The Transformation of British Public Politics after the First World War’ *Past and Present*, cxc (2006), 185-216.

¹¹⁵ Mayer, *Representation of the People Act 1918*, 70.

¹¹⁶ Herbert Local History Centre, Coventry, PA1177/41/2.

¹¹⁷ Lib. of Birmingham, 329.94249Con, Birmingham Unionist Association publication sub-committee minutes, 31 Mar. 1920.

¹¹⁸ Birmingham Central Labour Party minute book, 1918-1919, 14 August 1919; *Town Crier*, new series, no. 1, 3 October 1919; Drake, ‘The *Town Crier*’, 104-8.

¹¹⁹ Birmingham Unionist Association management committee minutes, 28 May 1920; *Straight Forward*, no. 1, Sept. 1920.

¹²⁰ Birmingham Unionist Association executive committee minutes, 21 Nov. 1921.

¹²¹ K.D. Wald, *Crosses on the Ballot: Patterns of British Voter Alignment since 1885* (Princeton N.J, 1983), 213-14.

¹²² David Bebbington, 'Nonconformity and Electoral Sociology, 1867–1918', *HJ*, xxvii (1984), 646.

¹²³ The removal of denominationalism from state schools in the 1918 Education Act, also hastened this development.

¹²⁴ Arthur Burns, 'The Authority of the Church' in *Liberty and authority in Victorian Britain*, ed. Peter Mandler (Oxford, 2006), 197-200.

¹²⁵ Philip Williamson, 'The Doctrinal Politics of Stanley Baldwin' in *Public and Private Doctrine: essays in British history presented to Maurice Cowling*, ed. Michael Bentley (Cambridge, 1993), 181-208.

¹²⁶ Minutes of the Birmingham city branch of the Independent Labour Party 1915-1921, 3 Mar. 1917; Barnsby, *Socialism in Birmingham and the Black Country*, 353-56; John Boughton, 'Working Class Politics in Birmingham and Sheffield, 1918-1931' University of Warwick PhD, 1985, 286-9.

¹²⁷ N. W. Johnson, "So Peculiarly its own" The Theological Socialism of the Labour Church', University of Birmingham PhD, 2015, 262-4.

¹²⁸ Outhwaite came a poor third in Hanley in 1918. Mason came last in the poll of six candidates in Coventry in Dec. 1918 and Wilson lost the seat which he had held for 27 years in 1922 – the first time he had faced a Unionist candidate. Fairbairn lost three of the four elections he contested in Worcester in the period, in 1918, 1922 and 1924.

¹²⁹ Stephen Koss, *Nonconformity in British Politics* (1975), 174-7.

¹³⁰ See *Straight Forward*, especially no. 1 Sept. 1920 and no. 12 Sept. 1921.

¹³¹ Stuart Ball, *Portrait of a Party: The Conservative Party in Britain: 1918-1945* (Oxford, 2013), 65; G.R. Searle, *Corruption in British Politics, 1895-1930* (Oxford, 1987), 328-337. It must be noted that there was evidence of racial prejudice within the Birmingham Labour Party as well, as a meeting of the party in 1920 unanimously approved a motion which protested against 'the invasion of Germany by black troops' and called on the

government 'to secure the withdrawal of this menace from Europe.' Lib. Of Birmingham, 329.94249LAB,

Birmingham Borough Labour Party minute book, i, 1919-21, 15 April 1920.

¹³² In 1931 the Unionists won Wednesbury, West Bromwich, Smethwick and Kingswinford, all of which had been held continuously by Labour since 1918.

¹³³ Marsh, *The Chamberlain Litany*, 155.

¹³⁴ Neville Chamberlain, 'Our Task', *Straight Forward*, No. 1, Sept. 1920.

¹³⁵ Asa Briggs, *History of Birmingham ii: Borough and City 1865-1938* (Oxford, 1952), 228.

¹³⁶ A. J. Taylor, 'Stanley Baldwin, Heresthetics and the Realignment of British Politics', *British Journal of Political Science*, xxxv (2005), 429.

¹³⁷ See Baldwin's anonymous letter to *The Times*, June 1919 in *Baldwin Papers: A Conservative Statesman, 1908-1947*, ed. Philip Williamson and Edward Baldwin (Cambridge, 2004), 43-44

¹³⁸ Powell, *British Politics, 1910-1935*, 91.

¹³⁹ John Ramsden, *An Appetite for Power: A History of the Conservatives since 1830* (1998), 253; Self, *Neville Chamberlain*, 261.

¹⁴⁰ James Curran & Jean Seaton, *Power Without Responsibility: The Press and Broadcasting in Britain* (5th edn, 1997), 111-127.

¹⁴¹ Neville Chamberlain to Ida Chamberlain, 7 Jan. 1922 in *The Neville Chamberlain Diary Letters ii: The Reform Years, 1921-27*, ed. Robert Self (Aldershot, 2000), 90; Broughton, 'Working class politics', 415-19.