

IRISH POLITICS IN MANCHESTER 1890-1914*

SUMMARY: This article questions the prevalent assumption that prior to 1914 the Irish in Britain were unquestioningly attached to the Liberal party. It suggests that Home Rule forced the Irish into wider political sympathies which embraced both radical Liberalism and Labour. The Irish in Manchester are highlighted and the “progressive” nature of local Nationalism described. It is also denied that the transfer of Irish loyalties to Labour was proof of the emergence of a class politics or of their integration into the unskilled working-class. It is suggested that this was, in fact, evidence of their continued cultural and political distinctiveness.

the present alliance of the Liberals, Labour and Irish parties was going to continue until every reform dear to the hearts of the Liberal and Labour parties was carried into law despite the powers of privilege and class – (Loud cheers.)

Willie Redmond, Nationalist M.P., St. Patrick’s church hall, Ancoats, Manchester, 1912.¹

I

The twenty-five year period prior to 1914 brought fundamental change to British politics. The formation of the Independent Labour party (ILP) in 1893 and of the Labour Representation Committee (LRC) in 1900 marked the emergence of a third force which sought to challenge the Liberal and Conservative duopoly on working-class votes. Nevertheless, in the three elections of 1906 and 1910 the Labour party remained harnessed to the Liberals within a “progressive alliance” which took account of their many shared ideals and objectives as well as a mutual hostility to Conservatism. Historians are divided as to whether Labour would have eventually broken free had it not been for the intervention of the First World War and its disastrous effect upon Liberal fortunes. In spite of this disagreement there is a consensus that the pre-war years saw the emergence of a politics based upon class rather than other social influences such as religion.²

* This article is the result of Ph.D. research at the Social History Centre, University of Warwick. Earlier versions have been presented to London’s Irish in Britain History Group in September 1987 and at a conference organised by Manchester’s Irish in Britain Representation Group in November 1987. My thanks to the organisers and participants of these events. My special thanks to Dr Tony Mason of the Social History Centre for keeping me “at it”.

¹ *Manchester Guardian* [hereafter *MG*], 11th May 1912.

² For this debate see P.F. Clarke, *Lancashire and the New Liberalism* (Cambridge, 1971);

The role of the Irish in Britain within this period of transformation has been mainly left obscure. Their desire to achieve Home Rule and the consequent Parliamentary alliance between Nationalists and Liberals are seen by many historians as setting them at one remove from wider political developments. The central and directive role of the Irish Parliamentary Party (IPP), the Catholic hierarchy's periodic support for the Conservatives and the sheer poverty of most Irish are thought to have dominated Irish political allegiances.³ The Irish aren't even seen as "proper" Liberals by some but instead presented as an awkward pressure group which only used the party for their own particular purposes.⁴ Prior to 1914, therefore, the Irish are considered to have had little time for Labour as they "remained loyal to their national, not their class loyalties".⁵ Consequently, in his standard account of the rise of the Labour party Ross McKibbin failed to once mention the constructive part played by the Irish working class.⁶

This interpretation can be questioned on a number of points. Firstly, "national" and "class" loyalties were not exclusive: numerous Nationalists attempted to create a sense of mutual self-interest between the Irish and English working-class. Michael Davitt was only the most prominent and extreme example of this tendency.⁷ Furthermore, many Labour members were only too well aware that an Irish national identity did not preclude Irish cooperation and support.⁸ Secondly, importance is granted to the actions of Nationalists in Parliament at the expense of the Irish in the Council Chamber, while many studies also pay too much attention to the simple counting of the Irish vote rather than assessing the complicated decisions which lay behind the way it was cast.⁹ Although they shared many of the same loyalties as their countrymen "across the water" the Irish in

K.D. Wald, *Crosses on the Ballots* (Princeton, 1983); Keith Burgess, *The Challenge of Labour: Shaping British Society 1850-1930* (Beckenham, 1980); Alun Howkins, "Edwardian Liberalism and industrial unrest: a class view of the decline of Liberalism", *History Workshop Journal*, no 4 (1977).

³ M.W. Walker, "Irish immigrants in Scotland: their priests, politics and parochial life", *Historical Journal*, vol. XV, no 4 (1972), p. 663; Sheridan Gilley, "English attitudes to the Irish in England 1789-1900", in C. Holmes (ed.), *Immigrants and Minorities in British Society* (London, 1978), pp. 104-106.

⁴ D.A. Hamer, *Liberal Politics in the Age of Gladstone and Rosebery* (Oxford, 1972), p. 153.

⁵ I.G.C. Hutchison, "Glasgow working-class politics" in R.A. Cage (ed.), *The Working Class in Glasgow, 1750-1914* (Beckenham, 1987), p. 133.

⁶ As pointed out in E.D. Steele, "The Irish presence in the north of England 1850-1914", *Northern History*, vol. XII (1976), p. 241.

⁷ T.W. Moody, "Michael Davitt and the British labour movement 1882-1906", *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th series, vol. 3 (1953).

⁸ See Philip Snowden's comments in *Labour Leader* [hereafter *LL*], 31st October 1918.

⁹ For the latest example of this type of study, Alan O'Day, "The Irish Influence on Parliamentary Elections", in Roger Swift and Sheridan Gilley (eds), *The Irish in the Victorian City* (Beckenham, 1986).

Britain need to be distinguished from them. This independent identity was demonstrated as early as 1885 when local political allegiances placed Lancashire's Irish Nationalists in disagreement with their Parliamentary leaders. Parnell's instruction to abstain from voting Liberal was challenged by sixteen of the county's Irish National League (INL) branches. Most of them eventually followed their leader's wishes, albeit reluctantly, but the Gorton branch still defiantly endorsed the Liberal candidate. There was a similar reluctance to toe the line amongst some Nationalists in Scotland.¹⁰ Thirdly, the period 1890-1914 does not allow for clear cut distinctions between Liberals and Labour. It was a time of flux and change in which Labour candidates often spoke the language of Liberalism in elections mainly fought on Liberal issues. Finally, the extent of Labour voting amongst non-Irish workers has been over-emphasised, as even many trade unionists were unimpressed by the party.¹¹ If "class politics" had arrived during this period it was in an extremely attenuated form.

This article will concentrate upon the course of Irish politics in Manchester and will trace the careers of Dan Boyle and Dan McCabe who led the city's Irish Nationalists from the fall of Parnell to the eve of the First World War. This was an era when a peaceful and constitutional resolution of the Irish Question seemed within reach. The central concern is, therefore, the Irish presence in local politics, an aspect of their activity which historians tend to dismiss.¹² It will be shown that at this level they were concerned with much more than the mere manipulation of votes and the cynical exploitation of political parties for particular ends. It will be suggested that local Nationalist politics paved the way for significant Irish support for radical Liberalism and then Labour before 1914. It will also propose that this political alignment was, nevertheless, not part of the politics of class as most historians generally understand it for the Irish remained socially and politically distinct from their counterparts in the English working class.

II

Lancashire was an important area of Irish settlement. The county's industrial towns and cities had borne the brunt of the massive first wave of poor

¹⁰ C.H.D. Howard, "The Parnell Manifesto of 21 November 1885 and the Schools Question", *English Historical Review*, vol. LXII (1947), p. 49; Ian Wood, "Irish immigrants and Scottish Radicalism, 1880-1906", in Ian MacDougall (ed.), *Essays in Scottish Labour History* (Edinburgh, 1978), p. 72.

¹¹ Chris Wrigley, "Labour and the trade unions", in K.D. Brown (ed.), *The First Labour Party 1906-1914* (Beckenham, 1985), p. 152.

¹² Paul Thompson, *Socialists, Liberals and Labour. The Struggle for London, 1885-1914* (London, 1967), pp. 25-27; Alan O'Day, *The English Face of Irish Nationalism* (Dublin, 1977), pp. 118-125.

Irish peasants desperate to escape from the great Famine of the 1840s. Irradiating outwards from the port of Liverpool these immigrants were forced to take to the least attractive occupations and lived in the worst type of accommodation. Manchester quickly became one of the most significant points of this immigration and in 1851 nearly 17% of the city's population was Irish-born.¹³ The pace of Irish immigration into Britain quickly slackened as the Famine receded into memory and by 1901 only 3.6% of Mancunians had been born in Ireland.¹⁴ However, many second- and third-generation Irish – whose social and political identities were formed by their national origins – also considered themselves “Irish”.¹⁵ According to American figures the number of Irish-born should at the very least be doubled in order to arrive at a more accurate idea of the full “Irish” population.¹⁶ This, however, would probably be an underestimate as contemporaries often estimated the size of the “Irish” community by counting the number of Catholics which in Manchester came to 14% of the population.¹⁷

The Irish mainly lived in the poorest quarters of the city and in 1887 it was suggested that about two-thirds of all Manchester's Irish inhabited the northern district of Ancoats.¹⁸ In 1900 this area still contained nearly 40% of Manchester's Catholics.¹⁹ The population of Angel Meadow, the grimmiest part of this area and the city's worst slum area, was 50% Irish in 1871 and by the turn of the century at least 50% were Catholic.²⁰ Areas adjacent to the Meadow contained fewer Catholics but the proportion never fell much below one-third.²¹

Manchester's occupational structure was distinct from that found in most

¹³ 1851 *Census*. For further background for the Irish experience in Manchester during this earlier period see Frederick Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (London, 1979), pp. 87–88, 93–98, 100; J.M. Werly, “The Irish in Manchester 1832–1849”, *Irish Historical Studies*, vol. XVIII, no 71 (1973).

¹⁴ 1901 *Census*.

¹⁵ John Denvir, *The Life Story of an Old Rebel* (Dublin, 1910), p. 2.

¹⁶ In 1900 there were 1.6 million Irish-born in the U.S. and 1.8 million of their offspring (figure includes the American-born spouses of the Irish-born). Stephan Thernstrom (ed.), *The Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups* (Cambridge, Mass, 1980), p. 528, Table 2.

¹⁷ John Denvir, *The Irish in Britain from the Earliest Times to the Fall and Death of Parnell* (London, 1892), p. 430.

¹⁸ “The Irish in Manchester (By One of Them)” (1887), “Manchester” cuttings collection, Local History Department, Manchester Public Library.

¹⁹ Figure based upon estimates of parish population contained in the *Salford Diocesan Handbook* (Manchester, 1900).

²⁰ Irene Boocock, “Angel Meadow: A Study of a Migrant Community in Victorian Manchester” (B.A. dissertation, Manchester Polytechnic, 1980), p. 59; Census of households in St. Michael's (Church of England) parish, c. late nineteenth century, M330/2/6, Manchester Archives Department, Manchester Public Library; Salford Diocesan Census, 1900, available Bishop's House, Wardley Hall [hereafter Salford Census].

²¹ Salford Census.

of the cotton towns by which it was surrounded. The city was involved as much with commerce and distribution as with industrial production and by the turn of the century the public service sector also accounted for a large proportion of the workforce. Whilst by no means all those of Irish origin worked at the bottom of the occupational ladder it seems clear that most did. In 1900 one-third of the inmates of Strangeways prison were Catholic and between 1881 and 1914 an average of 50% of the inmates of New Bridge Street workhouse were also Catholic.²² A large number of male immigrants “just off the boat” worked as building labourers whilst their female counterparts were largely employed as domestic servants.²³ After marriage many of the Irish-born, as well as their offspring, became Corporation labourers or worked on the trams. However, the huge Smithfield Market, which supplied northern England with most of its imported food, was probably the biggest single employer of Irish labour. Situated in the heart of north Manchester and in the midst of the Irish population, it dominated the local economy.²⁴ Every level of activity had significant Irish representation: many of the merchants who imported produce, much of it from Ireland, were prominent Irish Nationalists, about 25% of the stallholders were Catholic whilst many of the humble porters and general labourers were of Irish origin.²⁵ Also existing on the Market’s periphery was an army of Irish street traders and hawkers eking out an insecure living.²⁶

Contemporary estimates of the number of the city’s Irish electors are infamously unreliable but they indicate that, despite a franchise heavily biased against the poor, the Irish constituted a significant part of the electorate in three strongly working-class divisions. In the North, North-east and South-west they amounted to about 10% of all voters.²⁷ The Irish concentration in the poorest parts of north Manchester rebounded to their advantage as here they dominated the municipal wards of St. Michael’s in the North division and neighbouring New Cross in the North-east. Irish Nationalism, therefore, had an important part to play in the political life of a number of the city’s working-class districts.

²² Salford Census; Religious creed registers for New Bridge St. workhouse, M4/11/1-31, Archives Department, Manchester Public Library.

²³ Manchester Studies Oral History Collection, Manchester Polytechnic [hereafter Manchester Studies], tapes 122(1), 266, 823(1), 1024.

²⁴ *Manchester Faces and Places* [hereafter *MFP*], vol. X (1899).

²⁵ *Manchester City News* [hereafter *MCN*], 22nd April 1899; *Manchester Catholic Herald* [hereafter *MCH*], 26th January, 2nd February 1906, 22nd February 1908.

²⁶ Mick Burke, *Ancoats Lad* (Swinton, 1985), pp. 4, 43.

²⁷ This conclusion is based upon estimates contained in various local newspapers. Herbert Gladstone considered these divisions to be “dominated” by the Irish, cited in Clarke, *Lancashire and the New Liberalism*, Appendix C.

III

The formal membership of Manchester's Irish Nationalist movement was quite modest. In 1910 there were only 1,500 members of the Manchester and District United Irish League (UIL), about 10% of the total "Irish" population. This was, in fact, a very good year for the UIL as membership had appreciably increased with the apparently improving chances of Home Rule.²⁸ Most members were drawn from the professional middle-class or were retailers and wholesalers, skilled workers, publicans and priests. The poor and unskilled nevertheless participated in more informal ways. A number of unaffiliated Irish clubs, such as Ancoats' Irish National Club, existed on the margins of legality and were concerned as much with drinking, dancing and gambling as politics. More often than not they expressed their patriotism by selling Irish whiskey. However, they also contributed to Nationalist funds, held meetings on the party's behalf and many club members were active during elections.²⁹

The pub was also an influential part of informal politics. Unlike his English counterpart, however, the Irish publican was a force in favour of Liberalism rather than Conservatism due to the former's support for Home Rule.³⁰ Publicans canvassed for the Liberals during the 1890s in spite of the party's advocacy of a limitation on the numbers of public houses. As one publican noted "it was in the Catholic public house that the National League was cradled".³¹ The dominance of drink, nevertheless, did not go unchallenged within the local Nationalist movement. Some puritan critics suggested that the party's numerous branches were devoted more to drinking and gambling than Home Rule.³²

Nationalism also embraced the dispossessed by its extensive use of public display. Both the St. Patrick's rally and the Manchester Martyr's procession had become well orchestrated set pieces by the 1890s. The Irish also held separate meetings during both Municipal and Parliamentary election campaigns.³³ Therefore, in one way or another, Nationalism embraced all social classes, from the middle-class of Moss Side who prefaced meetings with delicate piano recitals to the poor workers of Ancoats who drank themselves into oblivion on St. Patrick's Night.³⁴ This was an appeal based upon

²⁸ *MCH*, 7th May 1910.

²⁹ *MG*, 18th, 23rd March; *MCH*, 30th March, 20th April, 11th May 1906.

³⁰ For the way Manchester's Conservatives used the pub for their own purposes, Geoffrey Seuss Law, "Manchester's Politics, 1885-1906" (Ph.D., University of Pennsylvania, 1975), pp. 210-211 [hereafter "Manchester's Politics"].

³¹ *MCH*, 26th July, 12th August 1892. The National League was a precursor of the UIL.

³² *MCH*, 9th November 1907.

³³ Arthur G. Symonds, "Unfashionable Manchester", *East Lancashire Review*, vol. 3, no XVIII (1899).

³⁴ *MG*, 9th December 1890.

nationality, that is a discrete social identity which found little favour with the rest of the working-class. However, if Nationalism was to achieve Home Rule it could not afford to remain within a political ghetto and had to align itself with more powerful indigenous forces. Home Rule did not set the Irish apart but forced them to become active thereby transforming both Irish and Mancunian politics.

Nationalism's principal objective was the achievement of Home Rule through strictly constitutional means. The failure of the city's Fenians, the "physical force men", was one of Dan McCabe's boyhood memories and he was consequently concerned that the Irish should not travel down this violent path again.³⁵ The movement's formal task was essentially procedural – to place individuals on the electoral register and ensure they voted for the approved candidate.³⁶ This was a self-consciously level-headed and practical movement in which Nationalism's romantic and messianic strand found no home.³⁷ Few of the city's Nationalists were interested in the Gaelic League's attempt to revive "Irish" culture.³⁸ Unlike in Ireland there was little support for factionalism, which was seen as a luxury detracting from the movement's main purpose. The Irish in Manchester were loyal not to one man, but to the cause of Ireland, something which Parnell, Healey, and O'Brien all found out to their cost when they opposed the majority of the IPP.³⁹

The Irish realised that they had to defend their cause in a city which was either apathetic or hostile to Home Rule. As the prominent Nationalist Thomas Freeman Kelly suggested, his fellow countrymen had to

seek by temperance in conduct and in speech to win the goodwill of their fellow subjects in England, for they knew it was impossible for a small people like the Irish ever to obtain their liberty except by the favour of the people among whom they lived.⁴⁰

Accordingly, one of the city's Nationalist leaders described the Irish as a "loyal race of people" whilst the movement as a whole favoured a moderate version of independence which left Ireland firmly within the Empire.⁴¹ Some even argued that Home Rule would prove beneficial to Imperialism.⁴² Manchester's Nationalists were also careful to distance themselves

³⁵ *MG*, 17th March 1913.

³⁶ At least according to the Chairman of the INL's O'Connell branch, Ancoats, *MG*, 9th April 1892.

³⁷ F.S.L. Lyons, "The revolutionary generation", in Lyons, *Culture and Anarchy in Ireland, 1890-1939* (Oxford, 1979).

³⁸ *MCH*, 26th February 1904.

³⁹ *MG*, 18th March 1898.

⁴⁰ *MG*, 20th March 1900.

⁴¹ *MG*, 2nd February 1892.

⁴² *MG*, 9th July 1894, 19th March 1895, 17th March 1911, 3rd February 1913.

from Queen Victoria's more intemperate critics in Ireland and, on the eve of her 1900 visit to Dublin, she was described as "the most illustrious lady in the world".⁴³ Similarly when the Irish National League of Great Britain's (INLGB) annual conference of 1897 advised the Irish to abstain from celebrating the Queen's Diamond Jubilee it deliberately stated that this was not meant as an insult to Victoria herself.⁴⁴

The Irish constitutionalist strategy was not only bred of the earlier failure of physical force but also of generous Nationalist representation in the Commons which gave them a loud voice if, for most of the time, little power. The conversion of Gladstone to Home Rule gave the movement hope. However, such a strategy led to a number of fallow years when the Liberals were either unwilling or unable to take a Home Rule Bill through Parliament. To keep the troops in line Nationalists adhered to two "necessary myths" which sustained faith in their supposedly inevitable triumph. The first optimistically asserted that, despite all the evidence, Home Rule was constantly just around the corner and claimed that the final struggle was always about to be fought.⁴⁵ The second placed great faith in the agencies of democracy which, to all intents and purposes, were defined as the working-class and their political representatives both the Liberals and Labour. These myths were given an annual airing at the St. Patrick's rally in the city's Free Trade Hall.⁴⁶ Here 5,000 Irish patriots expectantly gathered, their boisterous enthusiasm whipped up by Nationalist songs and the heavily rhetorical speeches of prominent Parliamentary Nationalists.⁴⁷ On these set-piece occasions the English working class was pointedly not blamed for their opposition to Home Rule which Nationalists put down to an ignorance fostered by the Conservatives. They were confident that once workers knew the true situation they would fully support the Irish cause. Instead Nationalists reserved all their hatred for the Conservative and landowning enemy and their bastion in the House of Lords. According to them it was only the self-interest of this latter group which stood between the Irish and Home Rule.⁴⁸ As John Denvir stated, the Irish grievance was not with English workers but with the landowners "the class which misgoverned us, just as it, to a lesser extent misgoverned them".⁴⁹

⁴³ *MG*, 20th March 1900.

⁴⁴ *MG*, 7th June 1897.

⁴⁵ For the example of 1903, a very bleak year indeed for the prospects of Home Rule, see *MG*, 18th March 1903.

⁴⁶ For example see *MG*, 19th March 1895, 20th March 1899, 18th March 1904.

⁴⁷ For the description of such a rally, *Daily Dispatch*, 18th March 1901.

⁴⁸ *MG*, 18th March 1890, 20th March 1899, 18th March 1901 and 19th March 1906; F. Sheehy-Skeffington, *Michael Davitt: Revolutionary Agitator and Labour Leader* (London, 1908), pp. 5-6.

⁴⁹ Denvir, *Life Story of an Old Rebel*, p. 253.

IV

Nationalists identified Conservatism with landlordism and Unionism so it was only with great difficulty that they could make an alliance with the party, as 1885 proved. However the Conservatives were able to win some Irish votes when the education issue placed the Liberal and Labour parties in opposition to the Catholic Church. These two parties wanted to take education out of the hands of religious bodies or, at the very least, deny them state grants. The Conservative party's defence of the state's continued funding of denominational education served it particularly well in the municipal contests of 1904-13 when the issue split the Nationalist movement. In St. Michael's the party won the ward six times during this ten year period, as opposed to only the once between 1894 and 1903. In this later period Home Rule was largely neglected by the Liberals so discipline was consequently harder to enforce on even the most active Nationalists. In 1908 five Committee members from the Parnell UIL branch in Ancoats were suspended for canvassing on behalf of the Conservative in the North-west Manchester by-election of that year.⁵⁰ Manchester's Nationalist movement was essentially Catholic but by no means clerical. Dan McCabe proved this in 1910 when he and a number of supporters provoked a shouting match with Father Sassen of St. Bridget's who objected to his support for Labour's candidate in East Manchester in January of that year. In the aftermath of this very public dispute McCabe even won the backing of the Nationalist branch found in St. Bridget's parish.⁵¹

Catholicism, however, did not always encourage Conservative voting. Although the hierarchy was inclined towards Conservatism Nationalists could usually rely upon the spiritual and physical powers of the large numbers of Irish priests in the city. In 1910 Dean Hennessy of St. Patrick's concluded that parishoners should support the Nationalist Charles Egan rather than his Conservative opponent not due to any difference of policy but because Egan was "their own candidate".⁵² During a meeting in St. Michael's ward in 1905 Fr. O'Callaghan warned anti-Liberal hecklers that

He wished he had a dozen of them, one after another, and he would not only show them that he was a priest and a Catholic but also an Irishman [. . .].⁵³

Some Catholics even suggested that only Labour candidates could implement the Pope's reformist policies for the amelioration of the condition of

⁵⁰ *MCH*, 13th June 1908.

⁵¹ *MCH*, 5th, 12th March 1910.

⁵² *MG*, 1st November 1910.

⁵³ *MCN*, 28th October 1905.

the workers.⁵⁴ Manchester, however, failed to produce a figure of John Wheatley's stature although there were a number of Catholics willing to defend the more negative proposition that 'socialism' and Catholicism were not mutually exclusive creeds.⁵⁵

The Conservatives were, in any case, strongly associated with the promotion of anti-Irish feeling through their opposition to Home Rule. During the 1895 election the *Manchester Guardian*, albeit no impartial observer, suggested that "the truth is that the whole case against Home Rule begins and ends with an attack on Irish personal character."⁵⁶ Even Arthur Balfour, the urbane sophist and future Prime Minister in the midst of the 1892 campaign declared that

if we have to choose between injustice to Englishmen and Scotchmen and injustice to Irishmen, I, for my part, am prepared to go for injustice for Ireland as the least of the two evils. – (Cheers).⁵⁷

Similarly, in the eyes of Abraham Williamson the leader of Salford's working-class Conservatives before 1914, Home Rule was plain treachery.⁵⁸ Even when Home Rule wasn't at issue Irish voters were subjected to Conservative attack. In 1906 the party's candidate in New Cross ward suggested that

It is a disgrace to have Irishmen coming into your own town and filling your berths [. . .]. If I thought I was going in on an Irish vote I would not go.⁵⁹

Although this prejudiced element within the party was in decline with the reemergence of Home Rule in 1910 Conservatism once more appeared in an anti-Irish and anti-Catholic light.⁶⁰

V

Due to Conservative opposition to Home Rule after 1886 Parliamentary arithmetic made a Nationalist-Liberal alliance inevitable. In Manchester, however, this developed into much more than a merely instrumental relationship. From the late 1880s to 1914 St. Michael's ward was dominated by

⁵⁴ This point was made by the *Preston Catholic Herald* during a by-election in 1903. Cited in F. Bealy, H. Pelling, *Labour and Politics, 1900-1906* (London, 1958), p. 149.

⁵⁵ *MCH*, 7th September 1907. On Wheatley see David Howell, *A Lost Left. Three Studies in Socialism and Nationalism* (Manchester, 1986), pp. 229-280.

⁵⁶ *MG*, 18th February 1895.

⁵⁷ *MG*, 28th June 1892.

⁵⁸ *Salford City Reporter*, 18th February 1955.

⁵⁹ *MG*, 1st November 1906.

⁶⁰ *MCH*, 25th January 1908; *MG*, 7th October 1909.

Nationalists who stood as Liberals. Here the two parties conducted selection jointly and they also cooperated on registration work.⁶¹ In 1894 C.P. Scott declared in *New Cross* that “All the good work they had done in the ward for years had been done by the union of the Liberal and Irishman.”⁶² Liberals and Nationalists cooperated in other wards in a similar manner.

The fall of Parnell from the leadership of the IPP in 1890-91, although effectively engineered by Gladstone, confirmed Nationalism’s reliance upon the Liberals. After the revelation of the O’Shea divorce Gladstone forced Nationalists to abandon their leader as the price for a continued alliance with the Liberals, an alliance which tantalisingly promised Home Rule. Parnell was sacrificed for the greater cause. The Irish in Britain abandoned their former leader well before their countrymen in Ireland. When the INLGB’s May 1891 annual convention held elections for its Executive anti-Parnellites swept the board.⁶³ Manchester’s Nationalists also firmly backed the majority of anti-Parnellites in the IPP. When North Manchester’s Michael Davitt branch held elections for officers only anti-Parnell candidates were successful.⁶⁴ At the St. Patrick’s rally of that year only two voices reportedly raised objections to a resolution supporting the new leadership.⁶⁵ Such was their opposition to Parnell that his supporters in Ireland felt that the Irish in Britain had been contaminated by Liberalism.⁶⁶ Given Gladstone’s part in Parnell’s fall from grace it was ironic that, in the vacuum left by the split IPP, he replaced Parnell as the main object of Irish loyalty and affection. Simply to mention the name of “our benefactor” and “the world’s greatest statesman” at Irish meetings was enough to cause an audience to cheer.⁶⁷

Following from this alliance Irish men and women gained prominent positions within Liberal ward and divisional parties. Many became Liberals in both word and deed, strongly identifying with the party’s Radical wing.⁶⁸ Even discussions of Irish history were coloured by contemporary Liberal economics. For example, during a talk on “Irish commerce and its destruction in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries” at the Thomas Davis UIL branch the speaker explicitly blamed English tariffs.⁶⁹ In contrast the larger number of Irish in Liverpool displayed a greater sense of indepen-

⁶¹ For the details of this arrangement see *MG*, 24th October 1890, 21st October 1891, 8th December 1910; *MCN*, 28th October 1905.

⁶² *MG*, 31st October 1894.

⁶³ Denvir, *Irish in Britain*, pp. 376-378.

⁶⁴ *MG*, 9th March 1891.

⁶⁵ *MG*, 18th March 1891.

⁶⁶ Denvir, *Irish in Britain*, p. 381.

⁶⁷ *Manchester Courier*, 19th March 1894; *MG*, 25th March 1893, 20th March 1899.

⁶⁸ *MG*, 28th January 1890, 1st September 1891.

⁶⁹ *MG*, 13th October 1909.

dence from Liberalism.⁷⁰ In Manchester the Irish were in no position to dominate the party as they were powerful in only a handful of ward associations and very weak at the divisional level. This was reflected in the composition of the North-east division's Liberal Association in 1897. Although thirteen out of twenty-six members of New Cross ward's Executive Council had obviously Irish names there were only two out of eleven in Miles Platting and none at all at Newton Heath.⁷¹ Consequently, when the division elected eight representatives to sit on the Manchester Liberal Union only one, Dan Boyle, was Irish.⁷²

Despite the alliance in both the country and Commons a number of differences continued to plague English and Irish Liberals. Some English Liberals, such as Louis Nott who was Chairman of the Protestant Thousand, were as opposed to Catholicism as any Orangeman.⁷³ Religious differences also made some English and Irish Liberals unwilling to allow the intermarriage of their offspring.⁷⁴ Many English Liberals also considered Home Rule either unimportant or undesirable. Until 1891 those Liberal Unionists who actively supported anti-Home Rule Conservatives were able to remain members of Manchester's Reform Club.⁷⁵ Sir George Kemp who represented the middle-class division of North-west Manchester was such an opponent. Although he absented himself from the Home Rule Bill's Second Reading in 1912 his Divisional Association, on which there were few if any Irish, didn't feel it was important enough to comment on the matter.⁷⁶ The Irish, on the other hand, were less inclined to become involved in Liberal temperance campaigns. This was due both to the political importance of the Irish publican and Catholicism's antipathy for the Nonconformists who organised such events.⁷⁷ The most important difference, apart from Home Rule, was Irish support for voluntary Catholic education which placed them in even starker conflict with the party's strong Dissenting element which opposed all denominational schooling.⁷⁸

The careers of Dan Boyle and Dan McCabe best exemplify the "progressive" nature of the Irish presence in the city where they represented two

⁷⁰ Joan Smith, "Labour tradition in Glasgow and Liverpool", *History Workshop Journal*, no 17 (1984), p. 46.

⁷¹ *MG*, 8th February 1897.

⁷² *MG*, 17th February 1897.

⁷³ *MG*, 17th May 1899.

⁷⁴ Mary McCarthy, *Generation in Revolt* (London, 1953), pp. 4, 13, 22-26.

⁷⁵ *MG*, 14th, 15th October 1891.

⁷⁶ North-west Manchester Liberal Association minutes, 13th May 1912 and attached letter from Kemp explaining his conduct, M283/4/1/1, Archives Department, Manchester Public Library.

⁷⁷ *MG*, 23rd October 1907.

⁷⁸ Thomas Freeman Kelly thought it was the only difference separating Irish and English Liberals, *MG*, 31st January 1891.

neighbouring poor and mainly Irish wards. However, they were not mere politicians for both men also called upon Irish and Catholic communal loyalties. On average Boyle won 290 more votes than his fellow Liberal, invariably an Englishman, in his two-member ward. At a public meeting during the 1897 election his running mate was “cordially received” whilst in contrast Boyle was “received with prolonged applause”.⁷⁹ In his last election of 1906 Boyle managed to poll 603 extra votes. McCabe’s rise up the municipal ladder, which culminated in his election as Manchester’s first Catholic Lord Mayor in 1913-14 and 1914-15, was watched by both Church and people alike with extreme pride.⁸⁰

Boyle, born the son of a Fermanagh farmer in 1857, trained to be a teacher but when he came to Manchester in 1877 it was as a railway clerk. He swiftly rose from this humble position through the Nationalist movement and during the 1880s took a leading role in establishing the city’s Irish National Foresters being twice elected Grand High Chief Ranger. He also became the INL’s organiser for Lancashire and Cheshire and correspondent for the *Freeman’s Journal*. Elected as Councillor for New Cross in 1894 he represented the ward until 1917 despite also being a Nationalist M.P. for North Mayo between 1910 and 1918. Active within the Liberal Party Boyle held the post of Vice-President of the North-east Liberal Association and even served as Liberal Campaign Manager for the division during the 1900 Parliamentary election.⁸¹ In contrast, Dan McCabe was born in Stockport of Irish parents in 1853 and raised in St. Patrick’s parish, Ancoats but in middle age still spoke with an Irish accent. At St. Patrick’s he was active in parochial confraternities, the Sunday school as well as the Old Boys Association. A graduate of a Mechanics’ Institute he came to own a small clothing factory in the district. He represented St. Michael’s ward, in which lay St. Patrick’s, from 1889 until his death in 1919 and like Boyle also held the post of Vice-President of his divisional Association in North Manchester.⁸²

Boyle and McCabe were elected to a Council dominated by Conservatives and represented a Liberal party that had only reluctantly and belatedly adopted a reforming Municipal Programme. They were, nevertheless, both keen advocates of the Council extending its economic and social role and endorsed the municipalisation of the city’s gas supply and tramways sys-

⁷⁹ *MG*, 19th October 1897.

⁸⁰ When McCabe was elected Mayor in 1913 an Irish tramguard excitedly telegraphed the news to his wife on holiday in Ireland, *Manchester Studies*, tape 794.

⁸¹ This account is based upon *MFP*, vol. VIII (1897); *Manchester Evening Chronicle* [hereafter *MEC*], 12th November 1906; *MCN*, 22nd August 1925; M. Stevenson and S. Lees (eds), *Who’s Who of British Members Of Parliament*, vol. II (London, 1978).

⁸² This account is based upon *MFP*, vol. VIII (1987); *MEC*, 28th January 1907; *MCN*, 13th January 1912; *Catholic Federationist*, November 1913; *Harvest*, March 1895, November 1919, May 1922; *St. Patrick’s Silver Jubilee Souvenir* (Manchester, 1961).

tem.⁸³ They also supported the introduction of the eight hour day for municipal employees, hoping that the Corporation would thereby “set the tone” in both hours and conditions for workers employed by private companies.⁸⁴ In 1904 Boyle envisaged the Corporation acting “as a kind parent, and take the weakly by the hand and help them out of their difficulties”.⁸⁵

As a result both men were enthusiastically embraced by trade unions grateful for their efforts. In 1895 McCabe received a unanimous message of support from members of the Manchester lodge of the United Operative Street Masons, Paviours and Stone Dressers Society. They thanked him for

the democratic services he has rendered on all occasions in the interests of the toilers in the last six years. The members had always been pleased to note that whenever the workmen’s welfare had been under consideration Mr. McCabe had taken a very prominent part in their favour.⁸⁶

Although Boyle was unsuccessfully challenged by the Secretary of the Bargemans’ Union who stood for the ILP in 1894 when he came up for reelection in 1897 this former opponent sat on his platform and described Boyle as “the most stalwart champion in the Council that the Labour cause had ever had”.⁸⁷ Such was his support for the interests of trade unions that in 1906 Boyle was the only Municipal candidate to win the unsolicited endorsement of Manchester’s Trades Council.⁸⁸

Both Boyle and McCabe used their position within the Council to improve their standing in other ways, for each created his own “little kingdom” within the Corporation.⁸⁹ It is very doubtful, however, that they came anywhere near emulating the example of their compatriots in the United States. In cities such as Boston and New York patronage – not to say corruption – was a vital weapon in the creation of the Irish political machine. In Manchester such power to dispense Corporation jobs was severely restricted by the nature and mores of British local government.⁹⁰ Nevertheless, each man held some limited influence over the livelihood of a number of their electors. Dan McCabe became Chairman of the Market Committee’s Smithfield Market Sub-Committee which among other duties

⁸³ Philip Whitaker, “The Growth of Liberal Organisation in Manchester From the 1860s to 1903” (Ph.D., University of Manchester, 1956), p. 221.

⁸⁴ *MG*, 27th October 1893, 21st and 25th October 1895.

⁸⁵ *MCN*, 22nd October 1904.

⁸⁶ *MG*, 19th October 1895.

⁸⁷ *MG*, 21st October 1897.

⁸⁸ Leslie Bather, “A History of Manchester and Salford Trades Council” (Ph.D., University of Manchester, 1956), p. 167.

⁸⁹ Law, “Manchester’s Politics”, p. 67.

⁹⁰ Edward M. Levine, *The Irish and Irish Politicians* (Notre Dame, 1966), pp. 112-113; Dennis Clark, *The Irish in Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1973), pp. 136-142.

set stall rents and made contracts with the suppliers of produce. As a consequence he was seen as responsible for the market's economic fortunes.⁹¹ During a particularly hostile 1907 election meeting he was forced to defend an increase in stall rents but transformed the audience's mood by announcing the signing of a new contract to import American cattle.⁹² Between 1898 and 1906 Dan Boyle was Chairman of the Tramways Committee during the initial period of municipalisation. Through this tenure he became personally identified both with the trams, which were known as "Dan Boyle's light railway", and the policy of extending the Corporation's economic role.⁹³ His was a successful Chairmanship: rate payers were said to be pleased with the trams whilst employees also had cause to be grateful for, as G.R. Askwith noted, they were "the best paid, best cared for, and taking it as a whole, have more holidays, than any similar set of men in the kingdom".⁹⁴ At first Boyle had been reluctant to take up such a delicate position having felt that his religion made him uniquely vulnerable to Conservative criticism.⁹⁵ His caution was justified as Conservatives eagerly pointed to the large number of Irishmen working on the trams. In 1900 one opponent suggested that "there were few men who could obtain a job under the Tramways Committee unless they were Roman Catholic". This accusation was met by Irish protests and eventually provoked a fight amongst the audience: when Boyle was attacked so were all Irish Catholics.⁹⁶ His competence was defended in a similar manner. In 1906 when a Conservative suggested that the Tramways Committee was losing money his meeting was also broken up by irate Irishmen.⁹⁷

Both men were part of Liberalism's advanced guard in other matters and enthusiastically supported working men candidates in the 1890s and endorsed official Labour representatives in the 1900s. Almost alone amongst Liberals they looked favourably upon the ILP's attempt to defend the party's right to hold political meetings on the Municipally owned Boggart Hole Clough in 1896. In the company of trade unionists, socialists and other radicals both men took prominent positions in the battle. Boyle proposed an important amendment in the ILP's favour whilst McCabe was only one of six Councillors to vote against the introduction of a by-law which sought to prevent all political meetings taking place in public parks.⁹⁸

⁹¹ *MG*, 25th October 1895.

⁹² *MG*, 22nd October 1907.

⁹³ *MCH*, 10th December 1917.

⁹⁴ *MG*, 30th March 1906; letter dated 27th July 1906, LAB/101/CLS/L967/1906, Public Record Office.

⁹⁵ *MG*, 1st November 1906.

⁹⁶ *MG*, 19th October 1900.

⁹⁷ *MG*, 1st November 1906.

⁹⁸ *MG*, 24th October 1896; H.C. Rowe, *The Boggart Hole Contest* (Manchester, 1896); Fred

Nationalist and ILP policies appeared to be so similar during an 1894 by-election in New Cross that the *Clarion* complained that the Nationalist-Liberal candidate had “‘annexed’ the Socialist programme bag and baggage”.⁹⁹ However, in spite of their “progressivism” there was no question that the INL would abandon the Liberal alliance as it remained strategically necessary for Home Rule. McCabe outlined this position to a crowded meeting of Irish electors at Shamrock Hall, Ancoats, during the 1895 general election. According to him Nationalists wanted

to bring about, *as speedily as possible*, the freedom of Ireland. They believed they would best do this by the continuation of their alliance with the Liberal party.

He recognised, however, that there were

many men at that meeting who were favourable to the labour movement. He above all others had not one word to say against the Labour party, and he believed that, above all other men, the Irishmen of this country had nothing to say against any party that went for the improvement of the condition of the labouring classes. The Irishmen in this country had to earn their bread from the sweat of their brows, and whatever was good for the working people and for the bettering of their condition would be to the advantage of the Irish masses in England. But he for one believed that the Irish alliance with the Liberal party would more certainly bring about the improvement in the condition of labour than by following the Labour party *at the present moment* [. . .] The Labour party was still young, and all it could do at present was to transfer Liberal seats to the Tories. – (Hear, hear.)¹⁰⁰

Apart from the realities of Home Rule politics, therefore, McCabe offered few reasons to oppose independent labour politics. His was a position dictated by Parliamentary numbers for, during the 1890s the ILP was being merely pretentious in declaring itself a viable successor to Liberalism. Manchester’s socialist movement was, in any case, particularly weak.¹⁰¹

The Nationalist policy of granting preference to Liberals caused much hostility between Nationalists and the ILP. After his 1894 defeat in West Ham an angry Keir Hardie even went so far as to suggest that this Irish strategy would reawaken sectarian violence.¹⁰² This Nationalist preference has, however, obscured the wide area of common ground which Nationalist shared with “socialist”. Nevertheless, there can be little doubt that during

Reid, “Keir Hardie and the ‘Labour Leader’, 1893-1903”, in Jay Winter (ed.), *The Working Class in Modern British History* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 24-28.

⁹⁹ *Clarion*, 30th June 1894.

¹⁰⁰ *MG*, 11th July 1895. My emphasis.

¹⁰¹ In 1898 there were only a reported 500 members in the District ILP, *ILP News*, December 1898.

¹⁰² *LL*, 20th July 1894.

the 1890s a number of other impediments prevented friendly relations between Nationalism and the ILP. Firstly, the ILP felt that Home Rule was an obstacle to its own progress. Although Leonard Hall, the party's candidate for North-east Manchester in 1894, felt that the ILP was Ireland's staunchest friend he also made the point that

to win this seat it is absolutely necessary to convert at least a percentage of Tory workmen and indifferent voters to Labour and progressive principles. Will that be done by talking about nothing but poor old Ireland and Home Rule? Will it be done by putting Home Rule and Ireland in the forefront of the fight and at the head of the programme? No, sir.¹⁰³

Secondly, the Catholic Church's hostility to what it saw as "socialism" contributed to the failure of the party to win much support amongst either English or Irish Catholics. As the third-generation Irishman Joe Toole discovered, membership of the Social Democratic Federation (SDF) could lead to ostracism by family, friends and Church.¹⁰⁴ Consequently when James Connolly visited the city in the early 1900s he came as the paid guest of the ILP and SDF rather than Nationalists and failed to make an impact upon the city's Irish population. The only branch of his Irish Socialist Republican party known to have been formed in the city was established amongst the miners of the distant Pendleton township who faced particularly appalling working conditions.¹⁰⁵

VI

The formation of the Labour Representation Committee transformed Labour politics and turned it down a largely non-socialist track making it more amenable to cooperation with the Liberal party. The LRC in Manchester was especially moderate and retained strong sympathies for Lib-Labism.¹⁰⁶ This change improved Labour's relations with Nationalism, a process largely completed when Ramsay MacDonald and Herbert Gladstone signed an agreement in 1903 which reduced the number of seats in which Labour and the Liberals opposed each other.¹⁰⁷ This pact ceded North-east Manchester

¹⁰³ *Clarion*, 31st March, 21st April 1894.

¹⁰⁴ Joe Toole, *Fighting Through Life* (London, 1935), p. 100.

¹⁰⁵ *Justice*, 30th August 1902; C. Desmond Greaves, *The Life and Times of James Connolly* (London, 1961), pp. 107-108.

¹⁰⁶ Jeffrey Hill, "Manchester and Salford politics and the early development of the Independent Labour Party", *International Review of Social History*, vol. XXVI (1981), pp. 191-196; N. Reid, "The Manchester and Salford ILP", *North West Labour History Bulletin*, no 5 (1978-9).

¹⁰⁷ The formation of the LRC in London also marked an improvement in London. H.W. Benjamin, "The London Irish: A Study in Political Activism, 1870-1910" (Ph.D., University of Princeton, 1976), pp. 323-326.

to Labour, dashing Dan Boyle's hopes of becoming Liberal candidate for the division on account of his "strong Labour sympathies".¹⁰⁸ In spite of his disappointment the Irish in the division rallied behind Labour. This sea-change in Labour politics was clearly evident during the 1906 General Election when J.R. Clynes and G.D. Kelley respectively Labour's Parliamentary candidates in North-east and South-east Manchester spoke almost exclusively in the language of Liberalism.¹⁰⁹ In this election the Irish worked enthusiastically and successfully for Labour and where UIL branches had once been decked in Liberal red and Irish green they were now also decorated in Labour yellow. After this famous victory John Redmond, leader of the Parliamentary Nationalists, came to Manchester to congratulate his countrymen on the part they had played in returning Labour's candidates. He looked forward to the time when the party formed a majority in the Commons for "the Labour representatives [. . .] are our best friends".¹¹⁰

The two elections of January and December 1910 marked the summit of the Liberal-Labour-Nationalist alignment. The most important factor which underpinned this alliance was the Lords' veto of Liberal social legislation which placed a large question mark over the fate of the newly proposed Home Rule Bill.¹¹¹ The Lords, "the real enemies of progress", stood between all the members of the alliance and their various objectives.¹¹² They made real the Nationalist claim that the achievement of Irish Home Rule and English social reform were intertwined. Politics in this period was, for those such as Dan Boyle, conveniently dichotomous: the Lords versus the People.¹¹³ The Lords also succeeded in rekindling old progressive prejudices for, if Radicalism was sustained by nothing else, it was a hatred for aristocratic landowners.¹¹⁴ In Blackburn opposition to the Lords drew together on one platform an unlikely collection of Liberals, Nationalists, the SDF, Band of Hope and the Free Church.¹¹⁵ The second chamber held a very special place within Nationalist demonology, being seen as the almost sole cause of Ireland's troubles. As Dan McCabe declared, the Lords were responsible for "*all* the sorrow and *all* the misery and *all* the emigration from Ireland during the last hundred years",¹¹⁶

¹⁰⁸ *MCH*, 5th January 1906.

¹⁰⁹ *MG*, 2nd, 3rd January 1906.

¹¹⁰ *MG*, 19th March 1906.

¹¹¹ *MG* 25th November 1910; Neal Blewett, *The Peers, the Parties and the People* (London, 1972), pp. 90-91.

¹¹² *MG*, 8th January 1910.

¹¹³ *MG*, 25th October 1909.

¹¹⁴ T.W. Heyk, "Home Rule, Radicalism and the Liberal party, 1885-1895", *Journal of British Studies*, vol. XIII (1974), pp. 68-69.

¹¹⁵ David Howell, *British Workers and the ILP, 1888-1906* (Manchester, 1983), p. 210.

¹¹⁶ *MG*, 24th November 1910. My emphasis.

Their obstructionist and reactionary political role aside, the land issue lay at the back of this widespread hatred for the Lords. As the UILGB manifesto for December 1910 made clear "Landlordism and the House of Lords are synonymous terms".¹¹⁷ A fundamental transformation in the nature of land ownership was anticipated by most members of the alliance. Underneath this canopy socialists and Liberals, Nationalists and English, town dweller and villager found common ground. Manchester's Labour candidates in 1900, 1906 and 1910 saw the land question and 'crushing landlordism' as one of the main obstacles to social progress.¹¹⁸ The New Liberals also thought the land question to be of central importance.¹¹⁹ Land was also a vital issue in municipal politics and was discussed with equal vigour by all three members of the alliance. In New Cross and St. Michael's Irish candidates were particularly keen to attack the power of land.¹²⁰ It was with no small degree of conviction, therefore, that Dan Boyle stated that, in attacking the Lords "for the first time the interests of the English working classes and the interests of the Irish people are identical".¹²¹

Such was the force of the argument that, particularly in the January election, the Lords dominated debate in Manchester's North, North-east and South-west divisions where Conservative candidates were unable to find a suitable defence for the second chamber. One was forced to advocate reform whilst another went so far as to propose abolition.¹²² In the second election Conservatives attempted to divert attention from the Lords by making Home Rule the main issue, something which did not endear them to Nationalists.¹²³

Nevertheless, there were still difficulties within the alliance. Although the UILGB's manifesto gave no formal priority to the Liberals over Labour on those occasions when they stood against each other it almost invariably backed the Liberal. For the Parliamentary Nationalists the alliance with the more powerful Liberals came first.¹²⁴ These decisions infuriated Labour members who could argue, with some justice, that they were more committed to Home Rule than many Liberals.¹²⁵ In a manner similar to 1885 a number of individual UIL branches also disagreed with their national leaders. In Middlesborough only intense local Irish pressure forced the national UIL to endorse the sitting Labour member against a renegade

¹¹⁷ *MG*, 23rd November 1910.

¹¹⁸ *MG*, 19th August 1900, 2nd, 9th January 1906; *LL*, 23rd November 1910.

¹¹⁹ P.F. Clarke, "The Progressive movement in England", *Royal Historical Society Transactions*, 5th series, vol. 24 (1974), pp. 175-177.

¹²⁰ *MG*, 31st October 1903, 21st October 1904, 1st October 1910, 31st October 1912.

¹²¹ *MG*, 10th January 1910.

¹²² *MG*, 5th, 6th January 1910.

¹²³ *MG*, 24th, 25th, 28th, 30th November 1910.

¹²⁴ *MG*, 23rd November; Blewett, *Peers*, p. 351.

¹²⁵ Blewett, *Peers*, p. 324.

Liberal.¹²⁶ When the Liberal candidate in a Glasgow division was endorsed by the Parliamentary Nationalists officers of the city's largest UIL branch resigned in protest.¹²⁷

Only one contest strained Irish loyalties in Manchester when the ILP's J.M. McLachlan sought to replace the retiring Labour member for South-west Manchester in January. Although he won backing from the national Labour party the Liberals had staked a much earlier claim once Kelley's decision to stand down was made plain, adopting Needham as their candidate well before Labour took up McLachlan.¹²⁸ When both sides refused compromise Dan Boyle was given the difficult job of convincing the division's Irish electors that they were duty-bound to follow the UILGB's instruction and vote Liberal. His appeal reflected the delicate nature of the task facing him and was cautious, unenthusiastic and almost apologetic. During this address, in which there appeared to be only negative reasons for voting Liberal, Boyle was forced to return to first principles. He reminded his audience that the UIL

did *not* support Mr. Needham because he was Mr. Needham, *nor* because he was a Liberal, *nor* did they oppose Mr. McLachlan because he was a Labour man. They simply acted as a united organisation which existed for the specific purpose of winning self-government for Ireland and those responsible for the management of the organisation – and they had no reason to doubt their capacity – had asked them to support the Liberal on this occasion. They had *no* personal fault to find with Mr. Maclachlan whatsoever [. . .].¹²⁹

Although this directive was only reluctantly followed the Irish defection nevertheless put an end to McLachlan's campaign based as it had been on an appeal both to trade unionists and the Irish.¹³⁰ With the progressive vote remaining split, however, the Conservatives were still able to take the division. The Irish, therefore, could still be prevailed upon to vote Liberal rather than Labour if only with some difficulty. However, it is one thing to argue that they voted Liberal because they felt an obligation and quite another to suggest they voted for the party out of choice.

VII

In spite of such difficulties it is clear that prior to 1914 many Irish in a number of British cities had transferred their primary political allegiance to

¹²⁶ Blewett, *Peers*, p. 352.

¹²⁷ Iain MacLean, *The Legend of the Red Clydeside* (Edinburgh, 1983), pp. 193-194.

¹²⁸ For more detailed background see Blewett, *Peers*, pp. 24-29.

¹²⁹ *MCH*, 15th January 1910. My emphasis.

¹³⁰ *MG*, 14th January 1910; *LL*, 21st January 1910.

the Labour party.¹³¹ Already lying on the radical wing of Liberalism this was a smooth process, for the Irish saw Labour more as a further leftward extension of Liberalism rather than a decisive break into “socialism”.¹³² In Manchester the movement towards the new party was unremarkable as during the three elections of 1906 and 1910 the Liberals had, at one time or another, conceded most working-class divisions to Labour.¹³³ In North-east Manchester the party had completely replaced the Liberals as the progressive pro-Home Rule party and fought elections side by side with Nationalists.¹³⁴ Straight after the announcement of his victory in December 1910 Clynes ensured that he first visited the UIL branch at New Cross in order to thank those Irish who had worked for his re-election.¹³⁵ “Labour and Nationalist” candidates appealing to Liberals, Labour and Irish voters in municipal elections had been standing since 1900 in St. Michael’s, New Cross and St. George’s, Hulme. Increasingly Labour’s municipal candidates could rely upon Nationalist support.¹³⁶ Nevertheless, whilst many younger Irishmen joined Labour, McCabe and Boyle remained firmly Liberal. Given the latter’s radicalism and support for trade unionism coupled with Labour’s pronounced affinity with Liberalism this move to Labour was a transformation of form rather than content and of emphasis rather than programme.¹³⁷ To many of Manchester’s Irish Labour was simply a clearer form of the type of Liberalism that had always supported. In December 1910 *Labour Leader* appealed for Irish votes in terms more commonly heard coming from Nationalist mouths. It declared that

the greatest argument of all for political unity is that economic circumstances have long since united us in bonds that are indissoluble. The landlord and capitalist class captured the Parliament of Ireland, seized the land of Ireland, controlled the judicial system, instituted a police system that has cursed the country; they drove the people abroad [. . .] And yet all they did to you they did too us likewise [. . .].¹³⁸

¹³¹ For Edinburgh see Bernard Aspinall and John F. McCaffrey, “A comparative view of the Irish in Edinburgh in the nineteenth century”, in Swift and Gilley, *Victorian City*, p. 146; for Glasgow see MacLean, *Clydeside*, pp. 193–194, 200.

¹³² Dan McDermott, “Labour and Ireland” in Brown, *The First Labour Party*, pp. 260, 265.

¹³³ Whilst North Manchester remained the possession of a radical Liberal, North-east went Labour in 1906 and thereafter, East went to Labour in January 1910 and South-west was held by Labour in 1906 only.

¹³⁴ Manchester Liberal Federation, General Committee, minutes 7th July 1911, 6th June 1913, M283/1/4/1, Archives Department, Manchester Public Library.

¹³⁵ *MCH*, 10th December 1910.

¹³⁶ The Father Sheehy UIL branch supported Labour in St. George’s ward, Hulme. *MCH*, 29th October 1910.

¹³⁷ This is David Howell’s general interpretation of the transition from Liberalism to Labour, “Was the Labour party inevitable?”, *North West Labour History Society Bulletin*, no 10 (1984–5).

¹³⁸ *LL*, 2nd December 1910.

It was, therefore, neatly emblematic that one of the Irish Catholic councillors to represent St. Michael's ward after 1918 was a former official of the Paviours' Union which had earlier received so much help from the two Irish Liberals.¹³⁹ Even in the interwar period Irishmen who supported Labour still retained an attachment to Liberalism due to the party's role in supporting Home Rule. At least one still regarded Gladstone as Ireland's saviour and kept a portrait of his hero above the fireplace.¹⁴⁰

It is suggested that the most significant shift in Irish political allegiance occurred before 1914 upon a shared social platform and under the umbrella of a common hostility to the Lords which kept Liberals, Labour and the Nationalists together. Nevertheless it took the combined trauma of the First World War and the Irish civil war to shake the Irish completely loose from the Liberals.¹⁴¹ The post-war collapse of Liberalism, its support for the execution of the Easter 1916 rebels, the introduction of conscription to Ireland and the brutal suppression of Irish resistance after 1918 contributed to the final detachment of Irish support. The War cleared the decks and forced even Parliamentary Nationalists to wholeheartedly support Labour. Moreover, increasingly after 1918 Labour rather than Liberals seriously challenged Conservatism – pre-War electoral logic now worked against them. These factors, however, merely accelerated a process which had its roots in the 1890s.

This realignment had little to do with the emergence of “class” politics nor was it a function of the increased social integration of the Irish into working-class life: Labour voting was an imperfect measure of these processes. As noted earlier they were predominantly unskilled and casual workers. Unlike the Irish English members of this strata had a politics sustained by a combination of apathy, alienation and a general respect for rank.¹⁴² Consequently, a large proportion of Manchester's working class were attached to Conservatism well into the 1920s and even as late as 1923 Hulme remained a Conservative stronghold in which the “Trade” was said to have more influence than trade unions.¹⁴³ Prior to 1914 Labour politicians looked to the skilled artisan rather than the street hawker for support. As Ramsay MacDonald suggested

¹³⁹ *Evening Chronicle*, 20th December 1946.

¹⁴⁰ Manchester Studies, tape 87.

¹⁴¹ On the general effect of “trauma” on post-war political allegiances, Wald, *Crosses on the Ballots*, pp. 252-254.

¹⁴² Gareth Stedman Jones, *Outcast London* (London, 1984), pp. 341-344; Robert Roberts, *Classic Slum* (London, 1983), pp. 30-31, 167-168; Jerry White, *The Worst Street in North London* (London, 1986), pp. 105-112.

¹⁴³ *MG*, 3rd December 1923.

Socialism is not to be found in the slummy and most miserable quarters of towns, but in those quarters upon which the sun of prosperity manages to shine.¹⁴⁴

When J. R. Clynes reported on his January 1910 victory in North-east Manchester he noted that

The very poorest people, who least understood the causes from which they suffer, were the least responsive to our appeals; and many who had suffered from unemployment were deceived by the quack remedies of the Tariff "Reformers".¹⁴⁵

In supporting Liberalism and then Labour the Irish were, therefore, unique amongst the unskilled.

After the War St. Michael's ward returned a Labour candidate eighteen out of twenty times between 1919 and 1938, a record rivalled by no other commensurate ward. Yet, within interwar Labour politics the Irish retained their own identity, one sustained by the discrete and often complementary communal institutions of public house and parish church.¹⁴⁶ It was no accident that St. Michael's provided the only two publicans to sit with the City Council's Labour group.¹⁴⁷ Manchester's working class remained socially and politically divided: "class" politics was a long time coming. During most of the interwar period the Labour party derived the majority of its support from two distinct elements within the working-class: unionised workers in the heavy industrial districts of Bradford, Gorton and Openshaw and the unskilled Irish of north Manchester.¹⁴⁸

Irish municipal representatives took on the form of figureheads able to call upon loyalties that at times transcended politics. Due to the disciplines of Home Rule these politicians were forced to position themselves within a wider field occupied by radical Liberals and eventually Labour. The notion that social justice was intertwined with the issue of Home Rule allied to the obdurate opposition of Conservatism to any form of independence meant that this party was never seriously considered. The logic of progressivism, Labour's position as Liberalism's junior partner and the pro-Labour sympathies of both local and national Irish leaders removed any real obstacles to Irish support for Labour. Nevertheless Manchester's Irish politics re-

¹⁴⁴ J. Ramsay MacDonald, *The Socialist Movement* (London, 1912), p. 93.

¹⁴⁵ *LL*, 21st January 1910.

¹⁴⁶ Neil Richardson, *The Old Pubs of Ancoats* (Swinton, 1987), p. 3.

¹⁴⁷ Tom Regan, "Labour members of Manchester City Council, 1894-1965", BRF/352/04273/RE1, Archives Department, Manchester Public Library. This was also the case in Glasgow, MacLean, *Clydeside*, pp. 183-184.

¹⁴⁸ This was similar to the voting pattern found in Liverpool. R.S.W. Davies, "The Liverpool Labour Party and the Liverpool working-class", *North West Labour History Society Bulletin*, no 6 (1979-80).

mained Janus-faced. Although Irish leaders became integrated into a wider, increasingly class-based, politics their electors remained wedded to a parochial and introspective culture. Therefore, whilst appearing to be in the vanguard of their class the politics of the Irish remained as distinct and unique as their culture.