DOZEN has been some recognition of late that the focus of the continuing debate on the state of British politics in the last years before the outbreak of the Great War should not be confined to the respective fortunes of the Liberal and Labour parties, but should include a triangular structure involving the Unionist party as well. The fact is that the whole British party political system in the first years of the twentieth century, rather than just the Liberal–Labour relationship, was extremely fluid. The reason for this is clear. The two main parties were, after the Home Rule crisis of 1886, inherently unstable coalitions, owing their existence to the single issue of Ireland, but unable because of their internal diversity fully to work out their policies in relation to a wide range of other issues. In such a situation realignment remained, even in the first decade of the twentieth century, a distinct possibility. Any such realignment, however, would take place within an electoral context that was also relatively new. Perhaps the most conspicuous feature of the political structure of the late nineteenth century was a hiatus between the existing Liberal and Unionist parties, still reflecting a political age that was all but passed, and the British electorate as successively enlarged in 1867 and 1884 to include substantial sections of the working class. Both parties had made gestures in the direction of the expanded electorate, particularly in terms of their national and local organisations. Moreover individual politicians, most noticeably Joseph Chamberlain for the Liberals and Randolph Churchill for the Unionists, had shown signs of wanting to direct their respective parties into more democratic channels, though the genuineness of their intentions, particularly the latter’s, remains open to question. These concessions and shifts of emphasis had proved only partially successful. Had their success been unqualified, had they succeeded completely in assimilating the working-classes into the existing party political structure, there would presumably have been no
The need for a new working-class party to emerge in the last years of the old century.

The General Election of 1906 provided a renewed spur to both Liberals and Unionists to consider the problems of working-class politics. Although the resultant landslide Liberal victory served superficially to clarify the political situation, the emergence for the first time in the House of Commons of a substantial number of Labour M.P.s revealed to the prescient in both traditional parties that they might themselves not indefinitely hold a monopoly of political power. In the years which followed both Unionist and Liberal politicians voiced mounting apprehensions at what they saw as the spread of 'socialism'. Despite frequent repetition the phrase lacked precise meaning. It was used in relation to the official Labour party, but could also be a reference to the growth of trade unionism, the increasing self-assertion of organised labour or indeed the tendency of some of the Liberal government's social-welfare legislation. At all events the two parties, or at least sections of them, clearly felt the need to respond to the new developments and the new challenges on the political horizon.

The weight of historical attention has focused on the efforts of the Liberal party to cope with these problems, with the aim of assessing the true health of that party on the eve of the Great War. By contrast, with the exception of Dr Sykes's recent study, less attention has been paid to the way in which Unionists reacted to the politicisation of the working-classes. Recent scholarship suggests that regional studies may be the way forward, though the historian must remain wary of the conclusions he can draw from such work. Liberal historiography has already pointed the warning light. The Welsh Liberalism described by Dr Morgan seems curiously at odds with that in Lancashire analysed by Dr Clarke and there is no clear indication which was the more typical. The aim of the present paper, therefore, is to provide some tentative assessment of the development of the Unionist party in Lancashire in the decade before the Great War.

It needs to be stressed that in many ways Lancashire politics were not typical of those in the rest of the country. The large number of Irish immigrants was primarily responsible for making Lancashire the most Catholic county in England. This factor inevitably produced a state of latent tension between the immigrant and indigenous populations with the result that the larger the proportion of Irish immigrants, the greater was the tendency of the working-class in reaction to vote Conservative. Indeed Dr Morgan has suggested that the vitality of the New Liberalism in Lancashire may owe much to the existence there of a distinctive working-class Protestant toryism. Running against the national
tendency towards class politics, Unionism in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Lancashire still rested heavily on the Anglican predominance, and significantly the real backbone of Unionist strength was on the western side of the county and particularly Liverpool, where the religious conflict was most acute. The city's relatively high wages had lured a vast influx of cheap labour from Ireland. These immigrants, whenever they did not have their own Irish candidates, naturally tended to vote Liberal because of that party's long-standing commitment to Home Rule. The Conservative vote was therefore organised not merely on the defence of the Union, but also on a strident anti-Catholicism. Even in the other great conurbation of Manchester, compared with the rest of the country, Liberalism was stronger in the middle-class and weaker in the working-class, while the reverse applied to Conservatism. Yet although the county was somewhat atypical in complexion it is clear that the political managers of the day recognised its crucial importance in electoral terms. To capture Lancashire was widely seen as the key to national electoral success. This was particularly the case with the second General Election of 1910. Throughout the year the Tariff Reformers in the Unionist party maintained their efforts to convert the county, efforts which culminated in the staging there of the Tariff Reform League Conference from 8 November. In October Balfour had described Lancashire as 'the very key and centre of the next electoral battlefield.' Such calculations clearly underlay the decision to persuade a man of 'light and learning' such as Andrew Bonar Law to stand for North West Manchester in an attempt to sway the political allegiance of the whole county. Part of Lancashire's significance lay in the contemporary practice of staggered elections, as a result of which it was believed that polling declarations in the North of England would serve immediately to influence the voting patterns in the rest of the country at the same election.

The two most significant figures in Unionist politics in Lancashire in the decade before the Great War were Alderman Archibald Salvidge, from 1892 President of the Liverpool Working Men's Conservative Association, membership of which was restricted to Protestants, and Edward George Stanley, seventeenth Earl of Derby. It was they who gave Unionism in Lancashire its distinctive character and there can have been few, if any, comparably successful combinations in local party management at this time. The liaison was peculiarly apt since it combined the past with the present and future. Derby was one of the last of the great political magnates who exercised influence largely as a result of their territorial possessions, while Salvidge, a supreme
'professional', served to indicate that the leisurely days of part-time politics were coming irrevocably to an end. Together the two men showed that they had, both in terms of party organisation and party policy, a considerably greater appreciation than did their national leaders in London of the need of the Unionists to come to terms with a mass working-class electorate whose lot was becoming no easier in the conditions of Edwardian England.

Lancashire was not immune from the anti-Unionist landslide of 1906. Indeed the swing away from Unionism was generally greater than in other parts of the country, largely because it was felt that Free Trade was vital to the future of the cotton and coal industries. Sir Almeric Fitzroy recorded: 'The uprising of Labour was no doubt the principal factor, as was strikingly exemplified in ... Newton. [In Manchester]...it was Labour working on the lack of interest felt in the fortunes of the late Government.' The results in Manchester were particularly disappointing, all four Conservative and the single Liberal Unionist seat being lost. The party leader, A. J. Balfour, was among the electoral casualties, and the return of two Labour members was perhaps ominous. The Manchester Guardian noted:

A candidate had only to be a Free-trader to get in, whether he was known or unknown, semi-Unionist or thorough Home Ruler, Protestant or Catholic, entertaining or dull. He had only to be a Protectionist to lose all chance of getting in, though he spoke with the tongues of men and of angels, though he was a good employer to many electors, or had led the House of Commons or fought in the Crimea.

In Liverpool the picture was somewhat brighter. Only two seats were lost to the Liberals but these included that of the future Earl of Derby.

Despite these Lancashire setbacks it was to Liverpool and to Archibald Salvidge that Joseph Chamberlain turned in the wake of electoral defeat as he began to give thought to the problems of party organisation in the context of the democratic state. Chamberlain, who had of course himself developed the political management of Birmingham in the successive interests of the Liberal and Unionist parties into something of an art, wrote:

Personally I am anxious that the representative Associations of the party shall now be reviewed, especially with the object of popularising them and of securing the cordial assistance of the working classes.... Having satisfactorily determined the basis of our policy we can proceed with confidence to secure a more efficient and democratic representation.... I shall take care that you are invited to attend and to give us the advantage of your large and successful experience.

In his assessment of the situation Salvidge stressed the importance of the Working Men's Association through which he had
Lancashire Unionist Party encouraged the participation of working men in the political life of the city. Salvidge clearly believed that the working-man was not automatically the political possession of the Radical and Socialist parties, but rather that he could be wedded to the ideals of Church and State through the concept of Tory democracy. The threat from the left, however, would have to be met positively. In 1907 Salvidge was horrified to find that the Central Office possessed no literature suitable for opposing the Labour candidate at the Kirkdale by-election. 'It is not sufficient to call socialists names', he warned Central Office, 'send us arguments'.

In the years of opposition which followed, the Unionists’ control of Liverpool was further refined and efforts made to extend the same level of efficiency to the county as a whole. The secret of Salvidge’s success lay in his meticulous attention to detail at municipal and ward level and his successful fusion of local and national politics. In all developments Derby was kept closely in touch. As Randolph Churchill noted when preparing his biography of the earl: ‘I have made a selection of the Lancashire correspondence. Quite clearly nothing happened there without his permission and his interest appears to have included the most minor electoral points—e.g., what sort of system was used by canvassers’.

One manifestation of the efforts by which Lancashire Unionist Associations attempted to counter the challenge of local Liberals after 1906 was in the creation of junior associations, culminating in March 1910 in the organisation of the Federation of Lancashire and Cheshire Junior Unionist Associations. Junior associations were formed in Leigh in September 1909, Bolton and Westhoughton two months later, and Farnworth, Preston, Rochdale, Horwich and Heywood in the first months of 1910. In June 1914 Salvidge noted:

The conference of the Lancashire and Cheshire Junior Unionist Federation which was held in Liverpool on Saturday last was a great success. The Working Men's Association acted as hosts; entertained the delegates to tea; formed a combined procession of Junior Unionists and Working-Men and marched to the landing stage when we took them for a trip on the river.

The National Union, briefly invigorated under the attempted central party reorganisation of 1906, was also active in the county with its headquarters at Manchester. It is clear that the constituencies it represented made considerable use of its services between 1906 and 1910. Between 1907 and 1909 the Lancashire division granted 359 applications for speakers, while in 1909 and 1910 vans were sent out into the constituencies to distribute literature and organise open-air meetings.
Salvidge and Derby recognised the crucial importance of sustaining the vitality of political activity at grass-roots level in the long years that could elapse between general elections. The most effective means of achieving this was to introduce the major elements of national politics into the continuous framework of local political organisation. As Derby wrote to Percy Wodehouse, deputy chairman of the Manchester Conservative Association:

I had a few words with Freston yesterday. Although he does not quite like the idea of fighting municipal elections on purely political lines, he thinks that where a man has done well on the City Council he should be supported even if opposed to us. Now I cannot agree to that. We have got men who could do just as well as their men do and we ought to give our men a chance. What I feel is that we should try and get more people of standing to go in for the City Council.20

Derby was ‘perfectly determined’ to fight municipal elections in ‘quite a different spirit to what they have been fought before’. He described the system that had been successfully developed in Liverpool:

At the present moment it is nothing but a question of trying to secure people so as not to have a contest. A Councillor goes in as a Conservative and he probably votes Radical and never does any party work for the whole of the three years he is in office and only gets busy just towards the end of his term. Now, as you know, it is very different in Liverpool where we fight the elections on purely party lines, because certain Municipal things must crop up, but no man is returned on our side unless he is an absolute Unionist and unless he is thoroughly loyal to Unionist principles. Moreover, as you know, he is in constant touch with the Working Men’s Association, visiting one of the lodges probably every week through most of the year. Now that is what I am going to try and get going in Manchester and if they won’t have it, they must have somebody else to be their leader.21

Thus, as Petrie put it, ‘it is really the same machinery that works the municipal elections as does the parliamentary and by having annual elections in each ward as we have, it keeps our people together and does not allow the organisations to grow stale in any way’.22

The whole question of party organisation at a national level came to a head in 1910 as a result of two further general election defeats in that year. Although the January election revealed serious deficiencies in the party’s organisation in Manchester, the Chief Whip, Alick Acland-Hood, allowed the situation to go un-repaired before the city went to the polls again at the end of the year—much to the dismay of Jack Sandars, Balfour’s private secretary.23 Hood in fact blamed the problems of party organisation in the North of England upon the tendency of the local organisations to go their own way and to ‘brook no interference
from Central Office'. The December election produced further evidence of disorganisation, indeed of chaos, in the Unionist ranks in Manchester, making the party's recovery in Liverpool all the more striking by contrast. The Conservative Agent in Manchester reported his 'conviction that the organisation of the Party can only be improved by one method and one method alone and that is by doing away with divided responsibility and placing all the staff in the hands of the Central Association'. Not surprisingly it was not long before national newspapers of Unionist sympathy were looking to Liverpool and Salvidge's Working Men's Association as the ideal model upon which a thorough overhaul of the national party should be based. In January 1911 The Times commented, 'There is no difficulty in making clear what is meant when it is suggested that the organisation in the country should be put on a more democratic basis, for the organisation in Liverpool, and the Liverpool area, which Alderman Salvidge has brought to such perfection, serves as an example ... If Alderman Salvidge's services are available to bring about the changes suggested a beginning should be made at once'.

Almost inevitably Salvidge was included in the Organisation Committee set up in 1911 with a wide-ranging brief to reorganise the party machinery. The alderman soon became aware of the enormity of the national problem confronting him. 'As you know,' he told Walter Long,

I have not ventured up to the present any opinion upon the condition of affairs at Headquarters but have come to the conclusion based upon the experience I have gained within the last few weeks that if we are to be successful more supervision, initiative and discipline will be required from Headquarters. ... When I entered upon this work outside Liverpool I did so with a view to ascertaining whether it were possible to adopt our plan of Working Men's Associations in more Constituencies, but I am now of the opinion that in most places before thinking of starting auxiliary organisations the ordinary Conservative Associations, which should be the parent Association in each division, require overhauling and putting upon a thoroughly representative and workable basis.

Although not all the county was organised on the same efficient lines as Liverpool, Lancashire in general revealed a marked superiority over the rest of the country. Joynson-Hicks, all of whose previous electioneering had been done in Lancashire, was 'astonished at the difference he found at Sunderland'. Nevertheless Salvidge took advantage of the opportunity provided by the Organisation Committee's enquiries to stress again the need to structure municipal politics in Manchester along party lines. In this way, he argued, 'the political machinery is kept in motion and weak spots discovered'. Salvidge continued:
In addition there is an incentive to the officers and the rank and file to achieve victory in local elections in the hope that the work put in may have its influence in Parliamentary affairs. I cannot too strongly emphasise this because I am satisfied that the success of an organisation depends very largely upon frequent opportunities being afforded of having something to work for... the fact that Aldermen and Councillors meet monthly under the supervision of the Leader and Whips introduces not only a political element but that *esprit de corps* which makes for success in Parliamentary struggles.  

* * *

No matter how professional and efficient the party organisation, however, Lancashire Unionists needed also to present the electorate with policies that had a broad appeal. Salvidge was an early convert to the idea that tariff reform was such a policy. The social side of the tariff reformers’ argument was that the condition of the working-man was dependent upon the prosperity of British industry, that this required tariff protection against foreign competition and that only imperial preference could prevent the disintegration of the Empire, whose unity, strength and markets were vital to the welfare of the working class. Since to adopt a system of preference would entail a sacrifice for the working-man in terms of higher food prices, he was to be offered compensation in the form of more work at better rates of pay, with the promise of social reform including a scheme of old age pensions to be financed from tariff revenues. As Dr Judd has put it, ‘the intelligent and businesslike ordering of the Empire’s resources seemed to [Chamberlain and others] the key to social change and material improvement in Britain’. 

Even in the wake of the 1906 débâcle Salvidge could assure Chamberlain that ‘your policy has not lost ground in Liverpool. Not only did the meetings listen with approval to speeches on Tariff Reform but on occasion big miscellaneous crowds in the streets, made up of people of all politics, showed sympathetic interest in the subject’. But though Salvidge insisted that the ‘democratic constituencies of Liverpool... went solidly for those candidates who supported your programme in its entirety’, there was an element of self-deception here since, as usual, Salvidge had made Protestantism the main electoral issue, thus rendering the impact of tariff reform difficult to judge. Similarly, in the county as a whole, though the defeated candidate for St Helens could claim that he ‘gained votes as a whole-hearted tariff reformer’, it is clear from the behaviour of Unionist candidates in the course of the campaign, and particularly after the first results were declared, that they regarded tariff reform as an electoral liability. In the years that followed no consensus emerged amongst Lancashire
Unionists on the question of tariff reform. Indeed the continuing discord served to nullify the efforts of many local Unionist organisations to reorganise and revive their machinery. Nonetheless, as late as the Conservative conference at Manchester in 1909 Derby, as President of the National Union, still called for the acceptance of tariff reform by all Conservative candidates, and even welcomed Bonar Law's candidature for South Manchester specifically as a tariff reformer a year later. The Cotton Trade Tariff Reform Association was founded in 1910 and in the first General Election of that year several cotton employers stood as Unionist parliamentary candidates. The acceptance of tariff reform by Lancashire Unionists by 1910 as 'the first constructive policy of the party' remained however tactical and something less than whole-hearted. Partly this was the result of the close association between much of the county's traditional industry and the concept of Free Trade, and partly the fact that tariff reform carried with it the incubus of food taxes. Increasingly after Lloyd George's celebrated budget of 1909 had revealed that there was an alternative strategy which did not involve taxing the people's food in order to meet the twin revenue demands of national defence and social reform, Lancashire Unionists came to have doubts whether they could ever capture the popular vote while remaining wedded to the whole-hogger policy of tariff reform.

The Unionists' failure to return to power following the General Election of January 1910 could not but confirm and extend these doubts. The great Liberal majority of four years before had indeed been eliminated, but the high hopes Unionists had entertained since around 1908 of outright electoral victory had been disappointed. Significantly, however, the Unionist Free Trade Club had decided as early as February 1908 to concentrate its attention on Lancashire, and that attention now began to bear fruit. Following constituency difficulties in the South, two of the most notorious Free Traders in the country, Lord Robert Cecil and George Stewart Bowles, accepted invitations to stand for Blackburn in January 1910. Neither was returned at an election, notable in Blackburn at least for the success of Liberal-Labour co-operation. Cecil, feeling that he had been handicapped by the policy of the leadership, was not slow to draw attention to the Unionists' loss of working-class support, especially to the Labour candidates. In the weeks which followed, the pressure upon Balfour to do something to modify the party's tariff policy grew to the point when, on the eve of the December General Election, the party leader announced at the Albert Hall that a future Unionist government would not implement a tariff budget until after further reference to the electorate through a referendum.
A variety of forces were at work upon Balfour leading him to this decision, but the most crucial appears to have been the opinion of the erstwhile staunch tariff reformer, Andrew Bonar Law, now standing for election for North-West Manchester. In the course of 1910 Law became convinced by Derby and the local party managers that Lancashire could not be won on a policy of food taxes. For some while Derby had been in sympathy with the position of the Unionist Free Fooders and had written to Balfour’s private secretary, Jack Sandars, in this sense, but the conversion of so influential an advocate as Bonar Law allowed him to make his position public. Lord Cromer predicted that what had ‘now happened ought to produce a great effect in Lancashire and elsewhere and I shall be most anxious to learn the result’.

Even the referendum pledge, however, failed to effect the return of a Unionist government, although it is noticeable that in Lancashire between the two elections of 1910 there was a greater shift of opinion than in most other regions, thus proving to the satisfaction of the referenders at least that Unionism without tariff reform was very much more attractive to the ordinary voter. J. L. Garvin wrote to Sandars, ‘We have done rottenly in London and splendidly in Lancashire’. The general opinion was that the Referendum had been announced too near to the election itself for its true impact to be felt. This was the view of Archibald Salvidge, who argued forcefully that Balfour’s Albert Hall pronouncement on the whole helped the party in Liverpool. In the uncertainty which followed the election as to whether the referendum pledge still held good, Derby urged that the whole party should stand by the Albert Hall pledge. ‘Tax manufactured articles for revenue purposes and abandon food taxes’, he insisted, ‘and we should sweep this part of the world.’ Referring to the whole-hogger policy of the stricken Joseph Chamberlain, Derby confessed that he was ‘tired of being dictated to by a paralytic old man who has ruined two parties’. Derby’s conviction that the Referendum pledge ‘did a great deal of good in Lancashire’ was unanimously confirmed by the meeting of the Lancashire branch of the National Union early in the New Year. Providing this plebiscitary safeguard was maintained, Derby was convinced of the continued progress of the cause of tariff reform in the county. Its best friend, he maintained, was socialism ‘because small men are undoubtedly getting frightened at socialism and the only party they can turn to to save them is the Tariff Reform party’. Derby believed that the increasing Labour unrest was ‘due to the fact that the price of living has gone up in an immeasurably greater proportion than has been the rise of wages’.
To go into a fourth general election 'with our opponents able to taunt us with still further increasing the price of food' would be fatal to any chance of Unionist victory. 53

Derby impressed this message upon Bonar Law when the latter became party leader in November 1911:

I will tell you perfectly candidly that I am quite convinced that Tariff Reform as at present advocated will not do for us here and by hook or by crook we have got to make some such alteration as will prevent our opponents having the very taking cry that we are taxing the people's food. 54

Nonetheless, it was a reflection of the divisions within the Unionist hierarchy that it was not until April 1912 that the Shadow Cabinet met to decide whether to abandon the referendum pledge and thus revert to the full policy of tariff reform. Prior to the meeting at which the decision was taken, Derby tried to use his influence to stop the shadow cabinet from taking this fateful step. 'Please believe me', he stressed to Law, 'whatever you hear to the contrary, there is still as great an opposition to the food taxes in Lancashire as there was when the proposal was first brought forward'. 55 When the party returned to government and came to introduce food taxes, Derby doubted whether he would be able to go along with the decision. Walter Long, investigating the situation at first hand in Liverpool and Manchester, merely confirmed this assessment. There was

practically a unanimity of opinion that Tariff Reform had not made any headway since the last Election and nearly everybody I spoke to on the subject was convinced that there is great hostility to food taxes. The average Lancashire voter firmly believes the proposals of the Tariff Reform Party will cause an increase in his cost of living. 56

In a by-election in South Manchester the Tariff Reform League had attempted to make their policy a vital issue and had sent a large number of speakers and canvassers into the division. But Long was confident that their policy had been of no assistance to the party and 'in fact, if we had been defeated, I should certainly have ascribed it to the work performed by the Tariff Reform League. 57

Inside the shadow cabinet, however, it was the intense pressure from the Chamberlainite faction which prevailed. As the chief whip argued, for many tariff reformers food taxes were an integral part of their policy and 'it was a point of honour that we should not abandon them'. Law summed up, 'in short these taxes are a handicap but we must carry our handicap and carry it boldly'. 58

Derby, according to Austen Chamberlain, admitted that it was not possible to drop food taxes, although he would do anything to be able to do so. 59 In the account of F. E. Smith, Derby
subsequently gave Bonar Law a personal pledge that he would be loyal to the shadow cabinet’s decision, but by September he was warning the chief whip that he was ‘coming out against the Food Taxes. I can’t stand them any longer’. The shadow cabinet’s decision was finally made public by Lord Lansdowne in a speech at the Albert Hall on 14 November 1912. The reaction in Lancashire was both swift and predictable. In the Manchester cotton trade the response was one of despair ‘followed in some by the complete political apathy of men who feel their cause lost and in others by rage at what they hold to be a betrayal’. Salvidge, feeling his party loyalty severely strained, was particularly annoyed that so important a pronouncement had been made ‘without any consultation or without advice being solicited’. As one who was always conscious of the need to keep the leadership in harmony with the party rank and file, he could not but be appalled at the way in which Bonar Law and Lansdowne had given in to the arguments of the Chamberlainite faction. The press also jumped into the fray and on 12 December the _Liverpool Courier_ launched its ‘Great Alternative’ campaign which called for a reconsideration of Unionist policy—a campaign in which much of the national Unionist press was soon involved. Two days later the _Courier_ thundered:

Party loyalty has definite boundaries. It becomes mere servility when it is a support of leaders who are moving where their followers are unwilling to go, it becomes mere criminal folly when it is an endorsement of a policy condemned by every canon of sound thinking.

James Thompson, a local Unionist agent, noted that the _Courier_’s campaign expressed ‘what I hear all around me’. Indeed the reaction that had begun in Lancashire was soon spreading to the rest of the country. As Austen Chamberlain was later to comment: ‘In a few weeks, almost in a few days, the revolt had become general; the panic had spread to all but a few stalwarts.

To begin with, however, many important figures including Derby were kept from open expression of hostility by the knowledge that Bonar Law was going to make an important speech at Ashton-under-Lyne shortly before Christmas. This speech, however, only confirmed Lansdowne’s Albert Hall declaration and added an unfortunately expressed sentence to the effect that there would be no tax on wheat or meat unless the Dominions wanted it, which was misconstrued as meaning that the onus of the proposal would be placed upon Canada and Australia. Derby’s position was now extremely difficult. As President of the Lancashire division of the Unionist Association, which was due to meet on 21 December, he would have to chair a meeting at
which motions critical of the Leadership's policy were bound to be proposed. The newly appointed chairman of the party, Arthur Steel-Maitland, attempted to persuade Balfour, now very much the party's elder statesman, to intervene to prevent Derby from lending his name to the growing criticism. Balfour admitted that the time might come when Derby would feel obliged to express his dissent, but reminded Derby that 'if Bonar Law goes the Party... is doomed'. F. E. Smith warned that 'things in Lancashire are on the eve of a smash' and predicted that Salvidge would side with Derby in opposing food taxes. He hoped to make use of the Ashton M.P., Max Aitken, to steady the wobblers since 'unless the position is promptly dealt with we are going straight on the rocks'. Garvin feared that the renewed pressure upon Bonar Law to drop food taxes might bring the Unionist party crashing down 'in a squalid, ludicrous, ignoble fiasco'.

Derby confided to H. A. Gwynne of the *Morning Post* his intention to express his opinions freely and frankly at the forthcoming meeting. But he was anxious that no hasty decision should be arrived at and his hope was to summon a further meeting for the following February. If by that time no alternative policy had been prepared by the leadership, he would no longer be able to keep silent and would publicly declare himself against food taxes. Indeed, on the very eve of the meeting, Derby warned Bonar Law that the abandonment of the referendum would have a 'very disastrous effect in this county unless some substitute is provided'.

In actual fact, although not all observers in London were so convinced, Derby's behaviour at the Lancashire meeting was thoroughly loyal to Bonar Law. As Derby himself explained, 'I would not let them come to a vote but if they had I have not the least doubt that they would practically unanimously have passed a vote asking that the question of preferential treatment with the Colonies should be postponed and not be a subject for discussion at the next General Election.' Of one fact he was certain. All present were convinced that seats would be lost if the question of food taxes were not submitted to a referendum. Nonetheless, though his public behaviour could not seriously be questioned, Derby made a rather desperate attempt to draw Balfour back into the political fray 'with a policy that did not include food taxes'. As Derby explained:

I could not keep silent when I knew that, if the present policy is persevered with, it must mean a certain defeat at the next Election and a great loss of seats in this County. The feeling roughly is this. We have been dictated to by Birmingham for several years past. We have fought three elections with the millstone of Tariff Reform tied round
our necks and each time we have been defeated. We are going to cut ourselves away from it now. Surely we have paid enough tribute to the Birmingham gang?  

Derby was adamant that a split in the party would be inevitable unless the food taxers gave way. He was not going to be ‘brow-beaten... any more’.  

Bonar Law was unconvinced that Derby had behaved properly. He believed that the earl was ‘the cause of all the trouble as I suspected’. Henry Chaplin, too, believed that ‘Derby is doing mischief in Lancashire’. In fact the report of the meeting which Law received through Steel-Maitland was highly unreliable and tended to blind Law to the central truth, which Derby had grasped, that a party committed to food taxes could never effectively present itself to a working-class electorate. In urging the chief whip to attend the next Lancashire meeting accompanied by as many of the Lancashire members as he could persuade to support him, Law was attacking the manifestation of his difficulties rather than their cause. But by delaying the showdown to a further meeting of the Lancashire association, Derby was allowing time for further pressure to be brought to bear on the party leadership. Though warned that persistence in his policy might lead to the resignation of Bonar Law and Lansdowne, with no member of the front bench able to take up the leadership in their place, Derby was taking a calculated risk. Austen Chamberlain urged Law to stand firm and suggested a six weeks’ campaign to educate the party to the whole hogger point of view. Leo Amery scathingly commented that ‘three-quarters of the party are like panic-stricken sheep and temporarily beyond the reach of argument, prepared to swallow everything they have said for the last few years... prepared to ask their leader to discredit himself... anything rather than face a purely imaginary bogey invented by themselves and certain other old women on their local committees’. Law’s nerve, however, failed. He proposed to summon a party meeting and to resign—a prospect which panicked the party towards the well-known Memorial to the leaders, by which Law remained leader while the party agreed to the postponement of food taxes.  

Such, then, is an outline of the Unionist crisis of 1912-13. What in fact, though, had happened and what does it tell us about Lancashire Unionism? Certainly a provincial division of the National Union had succeeded in formulating the policy of the party, something which Law had previously described as ‘unheard of’. Over an issue on which the leadership and the rank and file were going in opposite directions the grass-roots of the party had been seen to triumph. Recently Dr Sykes has con-
eluded that ‘the failure of tariff reform [in 1913] was the failure
... of radical Unionism itself. By 1913 it was clear that the
Liberals would be the party of change and the Conservatives the
party of resistance in social as well as constitutional questions’. 85
The subsequent history of the Conservative party and its successful
transformation in the interwar years into a party which, though
offering domestic stability, was also conscious of the need for
social improvement, raises an important question mark over Dr
Sykes’s assessment. But even to look at the crisis of 1912–13 from
the standpoint of the Lancashire Unionists is to see the weakness of
Dr Sykes’s argument. The fortunes of the Unionist party as a
party of progress were not inextricably linked with the policy of
tariff reform and its promised consequences of social betterment.
It was precisely because the Lancashire Unionists recognised that
in the age of popular politics the whole-hearted policy of tariff
reform carried with it insuperable handicaps in terms of electoral
appeal that they determined to modify the party’s policy, even
though this meant challenging the authority of the leadership.
They began, too, to sense that opposition to the Government’s
Home Rule Bill offered more likely electoral advantage than did
the continuing self-destruction of the tariff reform debate. Accord­
ingly, Lancashire Unionists seized readily upon the Irish issue to
work up once more Protestant fears in order to counter-act the
Liberal and Labour challenge. Looking back on the crisis forty
years later, Leo Amery, a committed tariff reformer, concluded
that the ‘practical result’ of the 1913 compromise was to ‘damp
down the enthusiasm of all our best working-class supporters’. 86
But the Lancashire Unionists were convinced that the main­
tenance of food taxes could cost their party up to fifty seats in a
general election and thus postpone sine die their return to power
at Westminster. Walter Long lamented that ‘the real difficulty
of the situation arises from the fact that we have no means of
accurately ascertaining what the views of our followers in the
country are upon these questions’. 87 ‘This was true. But all the
evidence suggests that the Lancashire Unionists had succeeded
to a far greater degree than had the national leadership in tailoring
their policies to the needs and wishes of the rank and file—a
process that was of paramount importance granted the existence
now of a large working-class electorate which was showing an
increasing propensity to vote. As Derby put it with total candour:

I am not forcing my opinion on the Lancashire people.... It is in
this county, in Yorkshire and in Scotland that you have got to gain
seats if you are going to get a majority and if you persist in the position
now taken up you are not going to gain anything like the number of
seats you require, even if you do not as a matter of fact lose some.
Commenting on Bonar Law’s position, Derby continued: ‘You have got to choose either between leaders without followers or followers without leaders. On the whole I think perhaps the second alternative is the best one to take. Leaders under such circumstances generally appear’. 88

Looked at as a whole the Unionist party in the decade of opposition before the Great War took little account of the need to appeal to a wide electorate. Even the tradition of paternalistic concern for social conditions, the legacy of old-fashioned Toryism, was apparently on the wane. The candidature of Sir John Gorst as a Liberal in the general election of January 1910 was perhaps symbolic of the passing of the great days of Tory Democracy. As Gorst himself explained, ‘As far as I am personally concerned . . . the change has come because of the altered attitude of the parties of the state on the question of social reform’. 89 Bonar Law, like Balfour before him, appeared to believe that for the Unionists social reform was not, on the whole, a profitable line to pursue. The result was that the more progressive side of the party, epitomised by the Unionist Social Reform Committee (whose activities Dr Sykes curiously ignores) remained on the periphery of Unionist activity. At least in Lancashire there were signs of an appreciation that in the last resort it is votes which count and that mass politics demand practical politics and a party organisation geared to the modern age. In the county’s more progressive political atmosphere where, as Dr Clarke has shown, the Liberals too were giving proof of successful adaptation to the needs of industrial society, one finds perhaps the seeds of the Unionists’ successful transformation into the country’s natural governing party of the twentieth century.

NOTES

2 Ibid., ch. 7.
3 Searle, ‘Critics of Edwardian Society’, p. 81; Sykes, Tariff Reform, ch. 6.
7 Pelling, Social Geography, pp. 246 and 285.
8 A. M. Gollin, The Observer and J. L. Garvin 1908–1914 (London,
Lancashire Unionist Party

10 Pelling, Social Geography, p. 285.
14 Ibid., p. 70.
15 Ibid., p. 76.
16 Note in Derby MSS 2/18.
18 Derby MSS 1/29, Salvidge to Derby 29 June 1914.
21 Derby MSS 2/18, Derby to Walter Russell 15 Jan. 1911.
22 Derby MSS 2/20, Petrie to Derby 14 Dec. 1910.
23 Balfour MSS 49766, Sandars to Balfour 18 March 1910. At the time of Balfour’s defeat at Manchester in the general election of 1906, Leo Maxse had suspected that the political organisation there was 'absolutely rotten’, Bonar Law MSS 18/2/12, Maxse to Law 29 Jan. 1906.
27 Salvidge, p. 104.
28 Ibid., pp. 105–6.
29 Wiltshire County Record Office, Long MSS 449/19, Salvidge to Long 3 Feb. 1911.
30 Derby MSS 2/18, C. Barlow to Derby 4 Jan. 1911.
32 Salvidge, p. 47.
35 Salvidge, p. 70.
36 Clarke, Lancashire and the New Liberalism, p. 375.
40 Ibid., p. 274.
42 Clarke, ‘Blackburn Politics’, p. 323.
44 The Unionist Free Traders also applied pressure on Balfour through Lansdowne. See Derby MSS 2/19, Cromer to Derby 30 Nov. 1910.
45 Bodleian Library, Sandars MSS c. 762/39, Derby to Sandars 13 Nov. 1910.
46 Lord Cromer wrote ‘[Derby] is really on our side though he is too strong a party man to say so publicly’, Balfour of Burleigh MSS 33 (in possession of Lord Balfour of Burleigh), Cromer to Balfour of Burleigh 23 Nov. 1910.
47 Derby MSS 2/19, Cromer to Derby 30 Nov. 1910.
48 Pelling, Social Geography, p. 286.
50 Salvidge, pp. 102–3.
52 Derby MSS 4/39, Derby to Joseph Lawrence 14 Jan. 1911.
54 Bonar Law MSS 24/3/30, Derby to Law 13 Nov. 1911.
57 Report on South Manchester by-election 8 March 1912, Bonar Law MSS 26/1/76.
59 Ibid.
60 Salvidge, p. 127.
61 Bonar Law MSS 27/2/7, Balcarres to Law 5 Sept. 1912.
63 Long MSS 446/5, Salvidge to Long 28 Nov. 1912.
64 Salvidge, p. 124.
65 Liverpool Courier, 14 Dec. 1912.
66 Clarke, Lancashire and the New Liberalism, p. 306.
68 Balfour MSS 49862, Steel Maitland to Balfour 18 Dec. 1912.
69 Balfour MSS 49743, Balfour to Derby 20 Dec. 1912.
71 Bodleian Library, Selborne MSS 73/73, Garvin to Lord Selborne 19 Dec. 1912.
72 Bodleian Library, Gwynne MSS 22, Derby to Gwynne 19 Dec. 1912.
73 Bonar Law MSS 28/1/65, Derby to Law 20 Dec. 1912.
74 Bonar Law MSS 28/1/65, 21 Dec. 1912, and 28/1/72.
75 Balfour MSS 49743, Derby to Balfour 22 Dec. 1912.
78 Long MSS 446/34, Chaplin to Long 26 Dec. 1912.
80 Gwynne MSS 22, Gwynne to Derby 29 Dec. 1912.
81 J. Amery, Joseph Chamberlain and the Tariff Reform Campaign, p. 980.
82 Gwynne MSS 14, Amery to Gwynne 3 Jan. 1913.
84 Diary of Colonel R. A. Sanders, 29 Dec. 1912, courtesy of Mrs V. Butler, Cullompton, Devon.
85 A. Sykes, Tariff Reform, p. 6.
87 Gwynne MSS 20, Long to Gwynne 19 Dec. 1912.
88 Gwynne MSS 22, Derby to Gwynne 31 Dec. 1912.
89 Clarke, Lancashire and the New Liberalism, pp. 403–4.