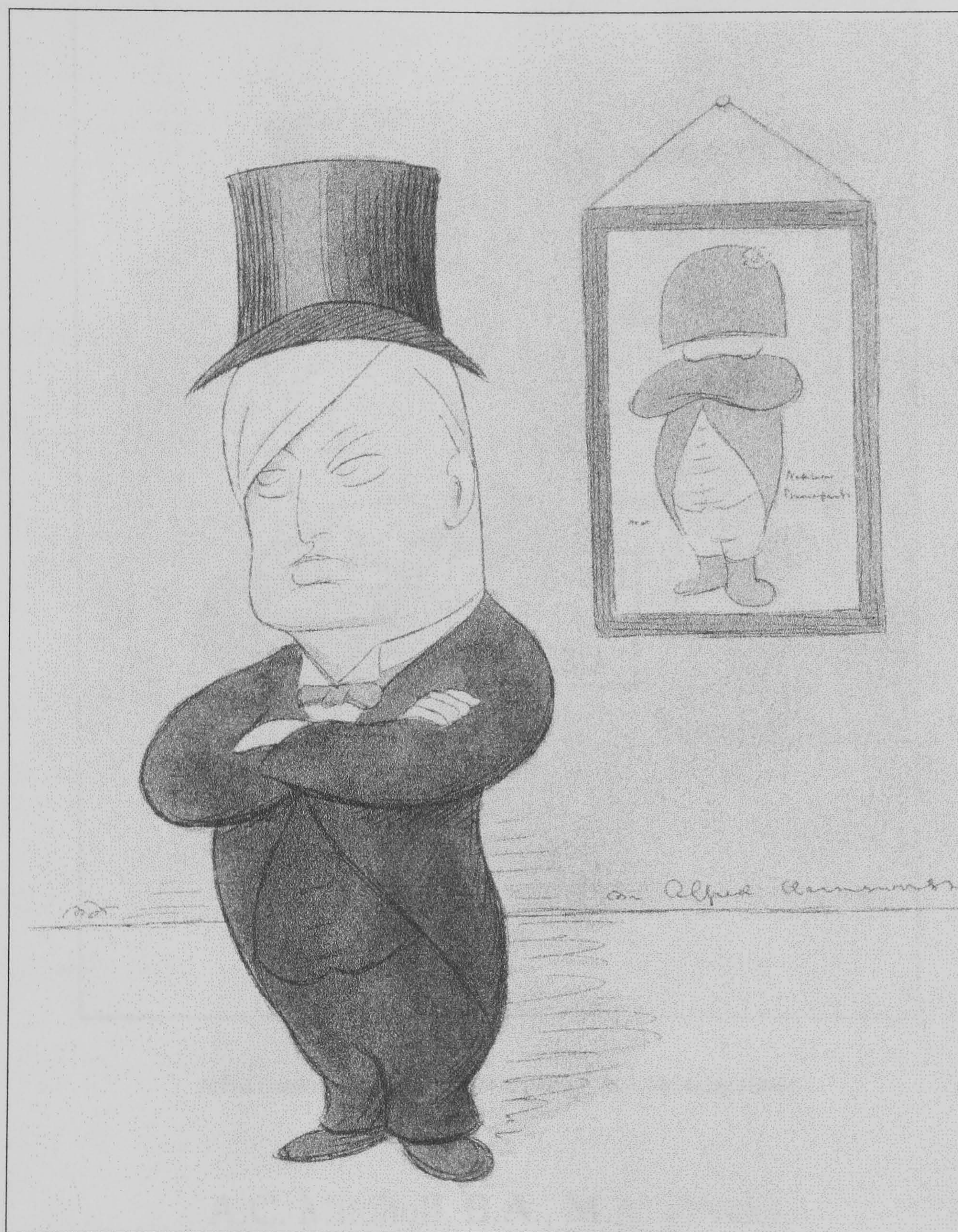


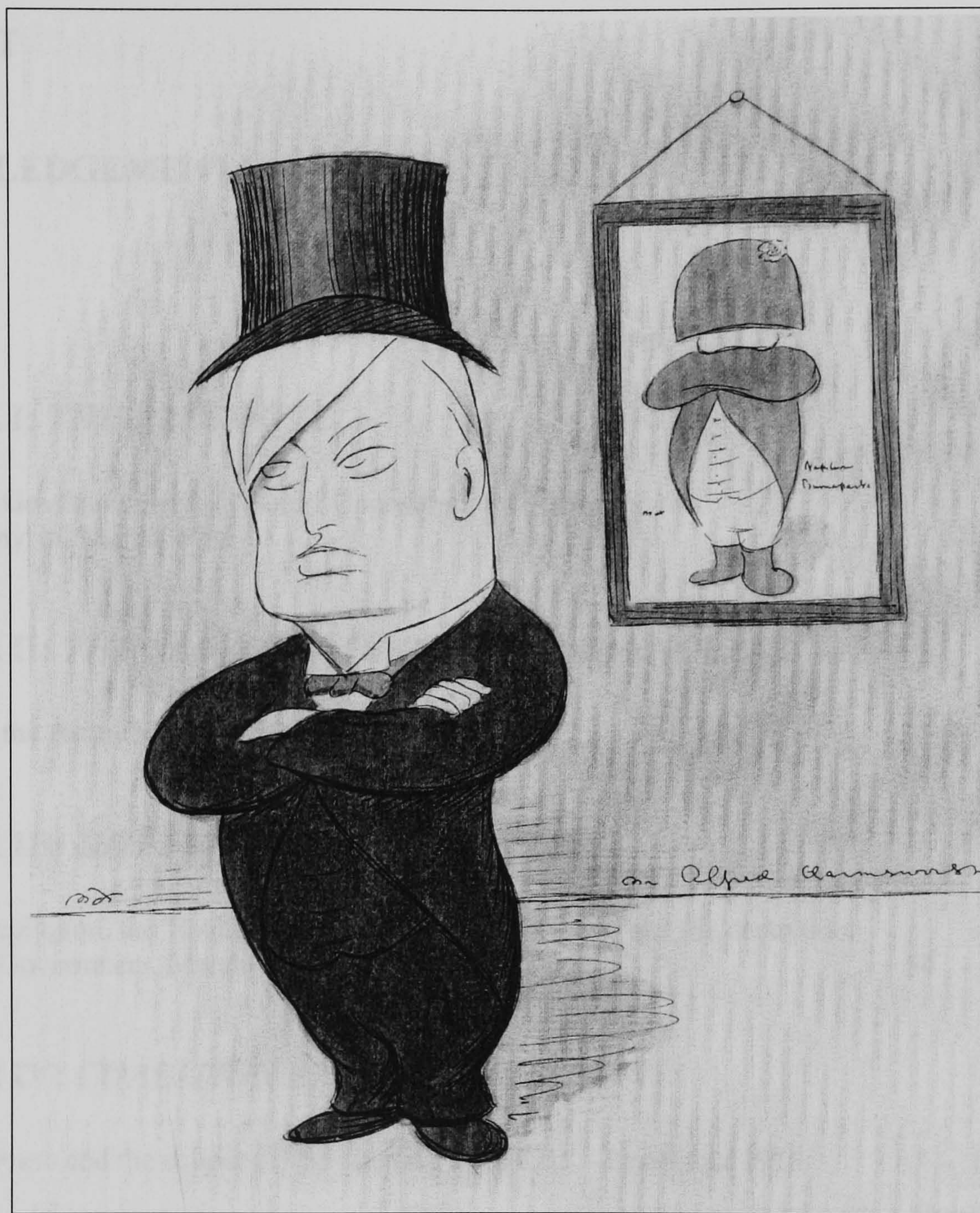
THE UNIONIST PRESS
AND THE
POLITICS OF THE GREAT WAR.



Alfred Harmsworth, 1st Viscount Northcliffe - Max Beerbohm (1903).

A.C. Mitchell

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ABSTRACT.

The thesis addresses the shifting rôle played by the Unionist Press in the politics of the Great War of 1914-1918; consisting of a detailed analysis of the relationship between the Press and the politicians which often proved to be a shifting pattern of symbiotic, suspicious and transitory alliances. The thesis aims to cover two distinct aspects of the political rôle played by the British Press during the conflict; the impact upon political discourse occasioned by the Press' reporting of, and their opinions regarding, the news. To this end a detailed examination has been made of several collections of private papers – of politicians, proprietors, editors and journalists – together with copies of the influential national newspapers of the period. The thesis aims to illustrate the development of the Press as an independent political force and to examine the limits to that influence. Despite the work of Stephen Koss investigation into the political influence of the Press during this period marks, in one's opinion, a distinctive contribution to the knowledge of the period.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.

I wish to thank my Thesis Supervisor, Mr. J.W.D. Trythall, for his unfailing assistance and patient guidance throughout the course of my entire postgraduate career. It would have proved impossible to complete this thesis without the assistance of numerous archivists and librarians, I would therefore like to thank the staff of the following institutions: Hebden Bridge Library; the J.B. Morrell Library, University of York; the Public Records Office; the Manuscript Collection, the British Library, British Museum; the House of Lords Records Office; the Department of Documents, the Imperial War Museum; the Archives of Churchill College, University of Cambridge; the Special Collections, Brotherton Library, University of Leeds; the Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, King's College, University of London; the British Library of Political and Economic Science, the London School of Economics; 'The Manchester Guardian' Archives, John Rylands' Library, University of Manchester; the Department of Western Manuscripts, Bodleian New Library, Bodleian Library, University of Oxford; 'The Times' Archives, News International Archives; Liverpool Records Office; and West Sussex Records Office.

PREFACE.

Originally envisaged to encompass the rôle played by the Press in the politics of the Great War the boundaries of the thesis have, through reference to the available archival resources, narrowed somewhat in scope so as to concentrate upon the Unionist Press. Nevertheless where possible the actions, or otherwise, of the Liberal Press are detailed; chiefly to provide light and shadow for the actions of the Unionist Press. However this study is not intended to be a narrative history of the Unionist Press coverage of the Great War of 1914 – 1918; rather it is to consist of a detailed analysis of the relationship between the Press and the politicians and the efforts of the former to fulfil the prediction of William Randolph Hearst that:

"Government by newspaper.....will be realised in the 20th Century." ¹

This relationship was rarely one of adversaries; indeed the dichotomy between the politician and the journalist often dissolved under the impact of events; more often it proved to be a shifting pattern of symbiotic, suspicious and transitory alliances.

Whilst the Press scarcely acted as anything other than *laudatores temporis acti* with respect to the martial aspects of the conflict (praising victories, finding advantage in stalemate and either minimising, excusing, or ignoring defeat) its political aspect was quite another matter. Hence the Press regarded the criticism of the Government's conduct as being of great moment; a stance which not only allowed expressions of approval or disapprobation, but positively demanded them. As such this study will eschew detailed analysis of the twin issues of war reporting and censorship, excepting where they proved to exert a significant influence upon the political debate of the day, instead it aims to cover two distinct aspects of the political rôle played by the British Press during the conflict; the impact upon political discourse occasioned by the Press' reporting of, and their opinions regarding, the news. To this end a detailed examination has been made of several collections of private papers – of politicians, proprietors, editors and journalists – together with copies of the influential national newspapers of the period. These include:

(London daily newspapers) *The Daily Chronicle* (Radical Liberal), the *Daily Express* (Unionist), the *Daily Mail* (Unionist), the *Daily Mirror* (Unionist), the *Daily News* (Liberal), *The Daily Telegraph* (Unionist), *The Morning Post* (Unionist), and *The Times* (Unionist);

(Provincial newspapers) *The Manchester Guardian* (Liberal);

(London evening newspapers) *The Evening News* (Unionist), *The Evening Standard* (Unionist), *The Globe* (Unionist), *The Pall Mall Gazette* (Unionist), and *The Westminster Gazette* (Liberal);

(London Sunday newspapers) *The Observer* (Unionist), *Reynolds's News* (Radical Liberal), and *The Sunday Times* (Unionist);

In addition *The Spectator* (Unionist), *The Nation* (Liberal), and *The National Review* (Unionist), while not strictly newspapers, are nevertheless periodicals of some importance.

The study is intended to cover the influence of Press opinion upon specific occasions during the course of the Great War including: the debates into the so-called 'Shells Scandal' of 1915; the clamour for the introduction of Conscription and that for the creation of a Coalition in 1915; the fall of the Asquith Coalition, with particular attention being devoted to the rôle played by Robinson's leader in *The Times*; and the conflict between Lloyd George and the Generals. The study largely ignores the regional Press – the sole exception being *The Manchester Guardian* – as it exercised little or no political influence at this time. Instead it concentrates almost exclusively upon the newspapers produced in London - both morning and evening – daily and weekly periodicals. For it was these publications, listed above, which exercised most vigorously that which Stanley Baldwin, echoing Kipling, was later to famously term:

¹ William Randolph Hearst, leading article, *New York Journal*, 31st December, 1899.

"power, and power without responsibility - the prerogative of the harlot
throughout the ages" ²

- that power being generated through the exercise of political influence without the burden of
corresponding responsibility.

² Stanley Baldwin, speech in London, delivered at the Queen's Hall, 17th March, 1931; quoted by Keith Middlemass & John Barnes, *Baldwin*, (Weidenfeld and Nicolson. 1969)., p.600.

THE PROLOGUE.

During the Nineteenth Century the Press threw off the last remnants of crude partisanship and emerged as a factor in the political intercourse of the day, its approbation to be sought with diligence and possessed of a dignity of which hitherto it had been deemed unworthy. The metamorphosis is illustrated by the eagerness on the part of the Government to ensure that William Howard Russell accompanied the Brigade of Guards to the island of Malta in February of 1854. Such an occurrence is in sharp contrast to the attitude towards the Press which was displayed at the time of Britain's previous major exercise in the projection of power. The Press could boast contact with the newly politicised middle classes, contact which was latterly extended throughout the country, due to the growth of the railways, and socially to the literate elements of the working classes as they entered the political sphere. Through these 'conversations' the 'yellow press', like its more prestigious cousins, acquired a patina of political influence.

The influence wielded by each newspaper varied greatly across the spectrum from: the mass-market *Daily Mail*, through *The Times*, *The Daily Telegraph*, and *The Manchester Guardian* to the élitist Liberal evening newspaper *The Westminster Gazette*. This variation was due to the different audience which each newspaper addressed; whilst the message might often differ, the medium did not. For to a greater or lesser extent the Press was divided between those which enjoyed influence through the private political prestige of their readership; and those organs whose opinions were enshrouded in political weight by virtue of the numbers who read them. The latter category acquired influence through the kindling in the politician's breast of a fear of offending the newspaper's multitude of loyal readers. The 'Prestige' Press conversely acquired political capital through its concentration upon a readership of the élite; thereby ensuring that its opinions touched the political élite more quickly than those of its more widely-read counterparts.

Acquired in one of two ways, influence may be dispensed in a similar fashion. The first of these, editorial opinion, lends itself readily to the mass-circulation Press; though the 'Prestige' Press is not above an overt expression of opinion, it is able to employ other methods of influence - an article appearing in such a newspaper as *The Times* or *The Westminster Gazette* is more likely to form part of a concerted campaign undertaken by a *Press Coalition*, as a warning shot or else as a method of last resort. The latter guise, that of exercising a clandestine influence upon the political élite, is a *modus operandi* more readily associated with the 'Prestige' Press. Such actions rely not only upon contacts within the élite but also upon a substantial measure of fear of the political damage risked in spurning such advances. An example of such necessary contacts are those of the General Staff and Officer Corps of the British Army in the spring and early summer of 1914.

* * *

The close relationship between the Press, Unionist backbenchers and leading military figures of the time could be traced back to its formation during the course of the Second Boer War of 1899-1902. That conflict was graced by a veritable galaxy of figures who had, at the time of the Great War, risen to occupy positions of influence in Parliament, the Military and the Press. The chief conduit between the Unionist leadership and the military establishment, the Unionist member for Sparkbrook, Leo Amery, had acted as the principal War Correspondent for *The Times* in South Africa and had come into close contact with a number of officers on the Staff of the Commander-in-Chief in South Africa, General Buller (1899-1900) and later Field Marshal Lord Roberts (1900). The Staff officers with whom Amery came into contact included Lieutenant-Colonel Charles à Court - later the Military Correspondent of *The Times*, Lieutenant-Colonel Charles à Court Repington.

Repington had been recognised by all "as the most brilliant man of his year" ¹ at Staff College and served with brilliance on Buller's Staff (1899-1900) as Deputy Assistant Adjutant-

¹ Brigadier-General Sir James E. Edmonds, Repington sketch, *Dictionary of National Biography* (1922-30), p.717.; also quoted by Jay Luvaas, *The Education of an Army. British Military Thought, 1815-1940*, (Cassell & Co. 1964), p.294.

General (DAAG) until the relief of Ladysmith when he was invalided home due to his wounds. Previously having served on Lord Kitchener's Staff during the 1898 Sudan Campaign, Repington had by 1914, come to occupy the rôle of the doyen of Military Correspondents. The position occupied by the Press in relation to the Government, the Unionist Opposition, and the Military, which came into its own during the course of the Great War was prefigured by both the Second South African War (1899-1902), and more immediately, and pertinently, by the events in Ireland in the early months of 1914.

Amongst the officers serving on Roberts' staff in South Africa were two who would come to occupy key positions in the Governmental-Military-Press nexus. One was Repington's friend, Captain William Robertson, who acted as DAAG Intelligence at Army Headquarters, another his erstwhile protégé, Captain Henry Wilson, who served as DAAG (1900-02). Robertson served in South Africa from February to October 1900; however he spent much of the war serving in the Intelligence Branch at the War Office in London - thereby coming into contact with both politicians and journalists in the fevered atmosphere of a wartime capital. Repington and Robertson's friendship was further strengthened by their mutual antipathy towards Wilson.

Repington had secured Wilson's first Staff appointment in 1894, and had generally acted as his sponsor; thus Repington requested that Wilson accompany him to that year's French Army manoeuvres. In return Wilson took advantage of Repington's indiscreet womanising to bring the latter's glittering Army career to an abrupt halt. Whilst serving in Egypt Repington had become involved with Lady Mary Garstin, the wife of a prominent member of the Egyptian Civil Service, the affair had been tacitly condoned. Before Repington was allowed to take up his post on Buller's Staff an undertaking was extracted from him that there would be no recurrence of the liaison. The affair was renewed and the husband instituted divorce proceedings, at which Wilson testified against Repington, an action which led to Repington resigning his commission.

It is scarcely surprising that henceforth there should be enmity between them; not least as it was widely held at the time that Wilson, motivated by his perception of Repington as a threat to his own advancement, hawked the undertaking, of which he was the custodian, around the War Office until the latter's resignation was demanded. † Robertson's advancement was also the target of Wilson's intrigues, though with conspicuously less success. Following the conclusion of his own appointment as Commandant of the Staff College at Camberley in 1910, Wilson sought to queer Robertson's pitch by loudly stating in several quarters the undesirability of appointing an 'ex-ranker' as his successor as Commandant. This explains the close relations which Repington enjoyed in March 1914 with the Director of Military Training (DMT) at the War Office, Robertson, and the rather more distant one, with the Director of Military Operations (DMO), Wilson.

The war in South Africa also gave rise to the development of close relations between the chief War Correspondent of Reuters in South Africa, H.A. 'Taffy' Gwynne, and a number of officers and politicians who would prove extremely useful to Gwynne during his tenure as editor of *The Morning Post*. Thus in addition to his previous acquaintance with Kitchener during the course of his campaign in the Sudan (1896), Gwynne attached himself to the Staff of Roberts upon his arrival and followed his operations which culminated in the capture of Pretoria. Indeed he was one of three journalists who received the surrender of Bloemfontein on 13th March, 1900, in advance of Roberts' arrival. Gwynne thereby came into contact with Roberts, Kitchener, Robertson and Wilson at Staff headquarters, and also with *The Morning Post's* celebrated War Correspondents, Rudyard Kipling and Winston Churchill. In addition, like Amery, Gwynne came into the orbit of the British High Commissioner in South Africa, Sir Alfred - later 1st Viscount Milner. Whereas Gwynne developed a respect for Milner, he came to develop a close friendship with Lieutenant-General Sir John French, Roberts' cavalry commander. This relationship, together with acquaintance with French's Chief of Staff, Lieutenant-Colonel Douglas Haig, was to make him sympathetic to the position of the General Staff during the course of the Great War;

† Brigadier-General Edmonds was expressing a widely held view of Repington and Wilson's contemporaries, when he remarked that had not Repington been obliged to resign his commission then he would:

"certainly have been Chief of the Imperial General Staff" ‡

before Wilson.

‡ Notes of a conversation with Edmonds at the United Services Club, on 22nd April, 1937, taken by Captain Sir Basil Liddell Hart; quoted by Jay Luvaas, *op. cit.*, p.297.

a sympathy which was apparent in the editorial line adopted by *The Morning Post*. Gwynne's friendship with French also proved extremely important in his successful attempts to persuade one of the Army's few Liberal Generals to resign his post as Chief of the Imperial General Staff (CIGS) in the wake of the Curragh débâcle.

The editor of *The Times* in 1914, Geoffrey Robinson, spent the first part of the Boer War serving as a Civil Servant in the Colonial Office in London. Appointed Assistant Private Secretary to the Secretary of State, Joseph Chamberlain, before long his work in London brought him to Milner's attention in South Africa; thus he joined Milner's *Kindergarten* as his Assistant Private Secretary from November 1901 until March 1905, becoming closely associated with his Chief's efforts at reconstruction and reconciliation between Boer and Briton. In consequence of his time in London, Robinson became acquainted with the political background to a war, developing amongst others a close friendship with Leo Maxse, the editor of *The National Review*; whilst his time in South Africa at Milner's side brought him into contact with a number of figures such as Kitchener, Wilson and Amery.

The Radical Liberal anti-war agitation in Britain also led to the formation of a number of alliances and friendships which were to influence the course of events during the course of the Great War. These included those between the principal 'pro-Boer' M.P., the Radical Liberal member for Caernavon Boroughs, † David Lloyd George; the Liberal member for Leigh and the proprietor and editor of *The Manchester Guardian*, C.P. Scott; and the editor of the principal Liberal daily newspaper, *The Daily Chronicle*, H.W. Massingham. The latter's critical editorial line ultimately provoked his resignation; thereafter Massingham worked as a journalist on both the *Daily News* and *The Manchester Guardian*, before joining *The Nation* as editor in 1907, where he once more campaigned against Britain's entry into a conflict.

* * *

In 1893 the Commander-in-Chief, Ireland, Lord Wolseley, wrote to the Commander-in-Chief of the Army, the Duke of Cambridge, confiding his belief that:

"If ever our troops are brought into collision with the loyalists of Ulster and blood is shed, it will shake the whole foundations upon which our Army rests to such an extent that I feel our Army will never be the same again." ²

That the statement was put to the test resulted from the opposition of the House of Lords to the Radical legislative programme of Asquith's Liberal Ministry.

The passage of the Parliament Act of 1911 served to remove the obstruction to Home Rule previously provided by the House of Lords; hence following the House of Lords defeat of the Irish Home Rule Bill in January and July 1913, the way was clear for the Government to re-introduce the Bill which, upon successful passage of the Commons, would receive Royal assent and become law. Hence the political temperature in Ulster had been rising since 1911; indeed that year saw a clear indication of Ulster's mood in the announcement by a representative convention that Ulster would resist by force of arms any attempt by a Dublin parliament to exercise its authority. It is interesting to note at this point that Lloyd George advanced the notion in Cabinet on 3rd February, 1912, that any Irish county should be able to secure exclusion from the provisions of the Irish Home Rule Bill by way of referendum. Lloyd George later confided in Herbert Lewis that he had questioned his colleagues around the Cabinet table as to:

"What will we do about Ulster if it rebels?...Can we order the soldiers in? If they go will they actually fire?" ³

[†] The spelling of 'Caernavon' is as it appears in Schedule E of the 'Representation of the People Act' of 1832, by which the constituency was created; the spelling was subsequently altered in 1918.

² Letter from General Lord Wolseley to H.R.H. the Duke of Cambridge, 23rd April, 1893; quoted by Colonel Willoughby Verner, *The Military Life of H.R.H. the Duke of Cambridge*, (John Murray. 1905)., Volume II, p.381.; also quoted by Elizabeth A. Muenger, *The British Military Dilemma in Ireland. Occupation Politics, 1886-1914*, (University Press of Kansas. 1991)., pp.165-66.

³ J. H. Lewis, diary entry, 18th February, 1912; National Library of Wales, J.H. Lewis Papers 10/231.

The unpromising response appeared to be one of 'Wait and See'. In failing to adopt the policy of Ulster's exclusion from the provisions of the Home Rule Bill the Government forfeited an excellent opportunity to detach moderate Unionist opinion from the 'die-hards'; Bonar Law confided to Lloyd George's friend the newspaper proprietor Sir George Riddell, that:

"If Ulster, or rather any county, had a right to remain outside the Irish Parliament, for my part my objectives would be met." ⁴

Asquith however eschewed the insertion of any such provision into the Home Rule Bill which he introduced into the House of Commons on 11th April, thereby heightening political antipathy, as witnessed by Bonar Law's statement that:

"I can imagine no length of resistance to which Ulster will go, which I shall not be ready to support and which will not be supported by the majority of the British people." ⁵

Meanwhile the Government affected unconcern at the plethora of illegalities occurring in Ulster; Brigadier-General Gleichen observed that:

"During the summer, if one went for an afternoon walk, as I have often done, one would hear voices and words of command, and looking over the hedge one would see small bodies of men drilling in the fields in the dark [*sic.*]." ⁶

Such observations can have done nothing to lessen unease in the Army over Ulster's inclusion in Irish Home Rule. The Army's unease had been apparent since the summer of 1913 in a number of disparate quarters, though not apparently to either Asquith or the Cabinet. On 2nd July Robinson sought to elicit Repington's views on the Army's discontent over the prospect of coercing Ulster into Irish Home Rule. Robinson confided that:

"I am rather concerned about the growing effect of the Government's Irish policy on the moral of the Army, and incidentally, of course, on the other public services. So far as one can foresee the Government is not sufficiently fatuous to allow the thing to come to actual fighting, but it looks as if they might come very near it. Meanwhile, I hear already of officers preparing to go and fight for Ulster, and others preparing to send in their papers and get out of the whole business, and of others arguing that it is the business of a soldier to obey constituted authority, and that this is not the hundredth case where rebellion is justified. No doubt the majority are still unmoved and trust vaguely that some sort of settlement will be reached. But I cannot help feeling that the kind of conversation which is going on in messes must be extremely prejudicial to the best interests of the Army, and I contemplate an article pointing this out." ⁷

In pondering that, Robinson was clearly acknowledging his preparedness to act as a conduit between the Military and the Civil authority. That affairs had reached such a pass in the early summer of 1913 is in itself eloquent of the nascent breach between the Cabinet and the Officer Corps. Repington replied the following day to the effect that:

"I have no doubt that our line ought to be to deprecate in the strongest manner any inconsiderate and hasty action on the part of officers in the Army.

⁴ Andrew Bonar Law, attributed to by Sir George Riddell, diary entry, 14th March, 1912; quoted in Lord Riddell, *More Pages from My Diary*, (Nicholson and Watson. 1934), pp.252-53.

⁵ Bonar Law, speech at Blenheim Palace, 24th July, 1913; quoted by Elizabeth A. Muenger, *op. cit.*, pp.168-69.

⁶ Major-General Lord Edward Wilfred, Count Gleichen, *A Guardsman's Memories: A Book of Recollections*, (Blackwood's. 1932), pp.367-68., also quoted by Elizabeth A. Muenger, *op. cit.*, p.170.

⁷ Letter from Geoffrey Robinson to Lieutenant-Colonel Charles à Court Repington, 2nd July, 1913; News International Record Office, *The Times Archives*, Dawson/Repington MSS.

We can sympathise with them, share their indignation, and throw the whole onus of any trouble upon the Government. But we should, I think, in a temperate but firm manner, hold up the maintenance of discipline as the first duty of the corps of officers, and even suggest that disciplinary measures be taken against any who desire to retire for the purpose of aiding Ulster in resisting the law. We dare not admit politics to the Army".⁸

The Times leader of 14th July served as a shot across the Government's bows, one which should have been heeded. The article drew its readers' attention to the "spirit of anxious restlessness"⁹ over the prospect of being ordered to coerce Ulster into incorporation in the Government's Irish Home Rule Bill which was abroad in the Army.

The Government chose not to heed the import of the article. Such a display should not be taken to indicate resolution in Cabinet or any lack of political influence on the part of *The Times*, rather it tends to reveal the extent to which the Cabinet was guilty of formulating policy in isolation from the realities which would govern its imposition. In this the Government - many of whose senior members had been sitting in Cabinet since the *felo de se* of the Balfour Ministry in December 1905 - was displaying a fault characteristic of ministerial longevity - the assumption that policy will metamorphose into reality with a rapidity and ease proportionate to the desire of its framers. In short if the Cabinet wished hard enough Ulster would surrender itself to inclusion in an Ireland ruled from Dublin. However, if the Cabinet was immune to the direct influence of the Unionist Press, it was shortly to find itself all too vulnerable to its indirect attentions. Ironically the Asquith Government's Olympian distaste for the machinations of the Press only served to provide the Unionist Press with a clear field in which to operate. The 'briefing in' of friendly Liberal newspapers, of which there was at this point no shortage, the instigation of 'spoiling' newspaper campaigns and the associated concerted attacks upon Opposition politicians and journalists lay in the murky future of a Lloyd George premiership.

That the Unionist leadership was on-board the developing anti-Home Rule coalition was amply underscored by the Leader of the Opposition; for Bonar Law stated that the Liberals:

"can be true to their allies only by being false to their country.....it is their present intention to carry out their policy to the bitter end, and on that assumption it becomes our duty, which we do not undertake willingly or lightly, by every means in our power to prevent them from committing what in our hearts and consciences we believe will be a great crime."¹⁰

The Government was deaf to all warnings as to the consequences of Ulster's inclusion. The attitude of the Government towards Ulster was illustrated in a meeting between Morley and Esher; † the latter noting that:

"Morley is himself very undecided and has no clear insight or opinion, at one moment overwhelmed with dismay at the prospect of armed conflict, at another using language of menace towards 'rebels'. This attitude is characteristic of the whole Government."¹¹

Ministerial irresolution was assailed in *The National Review*; for, commenting on a speech by the Attorney-General, Sir John Simon; the journal stated that:

⁸ Letter from Repington to Robinson, 4th July, 1913; News International Record Office, *The Times* Archives, Dawson/Repington MSS.

⁹ John Brainered Capper, 'Home Rule: Fact or Theory', leading article, *The Times*, 14th July, 1913.

¹⁰ *Op. cit.*, quoted in 'British Troops'; quoted in *The National Review*, *op. cit.*, p.898.

† Reginald Baliol Brett, 2nd Viscount Esher, (1852-1930), the *éminence grise* of late Victorian, Edwardian and pre-war politics. More noted for those posts which he declined than those which he accepted, Esher was an intimate of Edward VII, a former Liberal M.P. (1880-85), the Keeper of the Royal Archives, Deputy Constable and Lieutenant-Governor of Windsor Castle, as a Permanent member of the Committee of Imperial Defence (1905-18) he was instrumental in the establishment of a General Staff; together with both MI5 and MI6.

¹¹ Esher, journal entry, 19th January, 1914; quoted in Esher, *op. cit.*, p.153.

"It is idle for an Attorney-General to gush about Mr. Asquith as 'commanding' anybody or as a man to whom 'unlimited allegiance' is due.....

The Prime Minister's 'authority' is an invention of the platform and the coalition Press. It does not exist. The only control over the Cabinet is that of Mr. Redmond." ¹²

The position of the Irish Nationalists, and their leader, John Redmond, in acting as a guarantor of Asquith's Parliamentary majority could hardly be viewed as being motivated by altruism.

With the Government disinclined to listen, the Unionist Press was devoted to thwarting Asquith's Irish Policy. In this aim such articles were invaluable, serving as they did to heighten its readers' doubts over Asquith's motives with reference to the Liberal dependence upon Redmond's Irish Nationalists serving to strengthen the association of Ulster's inclusion in Irish Home Rule with Asquith's subordination to Redmond. Such a linkage would prove invaluable in promoting the curious concept of 'loyal disloyalty' on the part, initially, of the Ulster Volunteers and latterly of the Army itself. The promulgation of this line of argument was to provide the justification of Unionist resistance to the Government's Irish Policy; in so doing the Unionist Press acted in concert with both the Unionist Party and the Army. Periodicals such as *The National Review* and *The Globe*, were prominent in politicising the non-Irish elements within the Officer Corps and their broader readership in Britain; and latterly; in conjunction with the Unionist leadership, strove valiantly to foster a climate of opinion in which the refusal of the Officer Corps to obey the Civil Authority was received in the country at large with equanimity.

It was therefore little surprise that in the same month the Irish *imbroglio* moved inexorably towards centre stage. Asquith - having proposed that Ulster be provided with the right of veto over any legislation emanating from the proposed Dublin parliament - began to suspect that Bonar Law and the Unionists were seeking tactically to extend their opposition to Irish Home Rule by making use of the House of Lords to veto the Annual Army Bill. Such an action would have the effect of causing the British Army to cease its existence for no less than two years, thereby removing the option of coercion from the Government's armoury when faced with recalcitrant Ulster. Asquith's disquiet was akin to the biter bit; for the Unionist manoeuvre was designed to take the gun out of Irish politics at the precise moment when the Government was inclined to use it. The Unionist action had received the support of the energetic Wilson who visited Bonar Law and noted in his diary that after an hour's discussion:

"he entirely persuaded me to his side. The proposal is for the Lords to bring in an amendment to the effect that the army shall not be used against Ulster without the will of the people expressed at a General Election. This gets over my difficulty. Bonar Law told me that the only alternative to this is to go on in the ordinary way, in which case the Bill will be passed as it stands, Carson will set up his provisional government, and civil war is inevitable. We discussed it all backwards and forwards, the handle it will give against the Lords, the possibility of no army remaining after April 30, the effect abroad; and I am convinced that Bonar Law is right. Desperate measures are required to save a desperate situation." ¹³

If the Unionists were to prove successful the Government would soon find itself *in extremis*.

For the intended policy of extending Irish Home Rule to embrace Ulster clearly required a substantial degree of coercion; should the Army become embroiled in a prolonged campaign of coercion Britain's European policy would swiftly be rendered impotent. For the occupation of Britain's limited military strength in internal strife would render her alliance with France less attractive in Paris and less imposing in Berlin. For the Government to sacrifice France and the maintenance of the *Balance of Power* in Europe on the altar of Irish Home Rule would have been perverse in the extreme; France and Flanders for Fermanagh can hardly have struck anyone as an

¹² 'The Real Scandal-mongers', leading article, *The National Review*, February 1914; quoted in *The National Review*, *op. cit.*, p.887.

¹³ Major-General Sir Henry Hughes Wilson, diary entry, March 1914; quoted by Major-General Sir Charles E. Callwell, *K.C.B., (Ed.), Field-Marshal Sir Henry Wilson, Bart., G.C.B., D.S.O., His Life and Diaries*, (Cassell & Co. 1927)., Volume I, p.138.

attractive exchange. On 4th March Robinson confided to Repington that Asquith's proposals:

"will almost certainly be such as Ulster will and ought to refuse. Liberals realize this and they are therefore making desperate efforts to create the impression that the Unionists have already rejected the proposals in advance without knowing what they are. This would make a fine card at a General Election, which is bound in any case, I think, to occur during the summer. That is why I strove to counteract this in the leader this morning, and all that I have heard and read to-day confirms me in thinking it was the right policy." ¹⁴

Such unease was further compounded by intelligence from Paris and Berlin. Whilst the French political scene was undergoing one of its periodic tumults, the Berlin Correspondent of *The Times*, J.E. Mackenzie, reported on the emergence of an apparently orchestrated anti-Russian campaign in the pages of the German Press. The following day, *The Times*' Chief Leader Writer, John Woulfe Flanagan, regretfully concluded that:

"Unfortunately spectres of this kind are easier to raise than to lay, and while they are about they painfully affect the commerce and the credit of those who raise them, as the Berlin Bourse experienced yesterday. Even abroad they have untoward effects. If anything were wanted to draw the bonds of the Triple Entente closer, or to confirm the mass of Frenchmen in their determination to uphold the three-years' system for their army, nothing could supply it more effectively than the kind of articles now appearing in the German Press." ¹⁵

Flanagan continued in a similar vein on 16th March pointing out to readers that the Germans, in speculating as to the desirability of a pre-emptive war waged upon Russia, were guilty of assuming that:

"the rival State is permanently hostile; that, for the moment, it is the weaker of the two; that its military forces grow faster than theirs, and that, if left to develop them, it would strike when it was able. As some of these assumptions must always be highly speculative, Bismarck reprobated 'preventive war' as a folly. The question remains: Why was the alarm worked up, if it is groundless?" ¹⁶

The leader concluded that:

"There is room in Europe for all her nations; for competition between them in trade and commerce, and even in armaments, since efficiency of armaments, in this imperfect world, is the only guarantee of national freedom and security. But there is no room for undue military preponderance in any quarter. This has been for many centuries a cardinal principle of British foreign policy." ¹⁷

Nevertheless the spectre of Germany launching a 'preventive war' remained abroad whilst both Britain and France were absorbed in domestic political imbroglios. Appearing as a seemingly objective report from Berlin, Mackenzie's dispatch served to reinforce the impression that the Unionist alone were interested in the national interest, and that the Liberals, in pandering to Mr. Redmond, were equally guilty of providing the Kaiser with a free hand in Europe.

Ulster's temporary exclusion was adopted, with no small amount of relief, by the Cabinet at its meeting on 4th March; with the decision being swiftly conveyed by Asquith to the King, and, with the same degree of alacrity by persons or persons unknown - albeit suspected - to the Lobby Correspondent of the influential Liberal daily, the *Daily News*. The resulting article,

¹⁴ Letter from Robinson to Repington, 4th March, 1914; News International Record Office, *The Times* Archives, Dawson/Repington MSS., also quoted in *The History of 'The Times'*, *op. cit.*, p.161.

¹⁵ John Woulfe Flanagan, 'What Does it Mean', leading article, *The Times*, 10th March, 1914.

¹⁶ Flanagan, 'Preventive War', leading article, *The Times*, 16th March, 1914.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

which appeared the following morning, proved to be a great embarrassment to both Asquith and Redmond, revealing as it did the extent to which the initiative over Irish Home Rule had passed from the Liberals and their Irish Nationalist clients to Bonar Law and especially Carson. For the chief effect of the proposed extension was to provoke Carson into uttering one of the more memorable phrases of his political career; as he informed the House in the name of the Ulster Unionists:

"We do not want sentence of death with a stay of execution for six years." ¹⁸

Asquith retained his equanimity in the conviction that Carson was bluffing. Ironically Carson's behaviour during the course of the crisis was coloured by his poor estimate of Asquith, formed whilst practising as a barrister, that Asquith neglected to fight his cases to the utmost, particularly where it involved anything disagreeable to him, and tended to slough off much of his work upon his juniors - traits which Asquith was to carry with him into the House.

On 14th March Seely dispatched a letter of instructions to Lieutenant-General Sir Arthur Paget, G.O.C. Ireland, ordering him to deploy troops from Dublin and its environs to Armagh, Omagh, Enniskillen, and Carrickfergus; four strategic points from which to commence the investment of Ulster; stating that the War Office had received indications that "evil-disposed persons" ¹⁹ were intending to raid the Army's stores of arms and material. However the orders were so worded as to allow Paget to interpret them as an injunction to move stores rather than soldiers. Thus Paget, in a letter to the Secretary to the War Office, R.H. Brade, stated that:

"It would be preferable from the point of view of safety only to provide guards at once for Armagh and Omagh from the Infantry battalion at Mullingar, and to evacuate the recruits at those places; but in the present state of the country, I am of the opinion that any such move of troops would create intense excitement in Ulster and possibly precipitate a crisis." ²⁰

Such a situation he believed, probably inaccurately, to be one which the Government was seeking to avoid.

Against such a background of military reluctance and backsliding a characteristically bellicose speech by the First Lord of the Admiralty was scarcely helpful. † Churchill's plans are revealed through a reading of Admiralty telegrams of the time, published only two months later in *The National Review*. For on 19th March the Admiralty ordered Lewis Bayly, the Vice-Admiral commanding the Third Battle Squadron, then sailing off the Galician coast, to:

"proceed at once.....to Lamlash. After clearing Ushant you are yourself to proceed in your flagship to Plymouth, handing over command of squadron temporarily to the Rear-Admiral [Monty Browning]. From Plymouth you are to

¹⁸ Carson, speech in the House of Commons, 9th March, 1914; quoted by R. Jenkins, *op. cit.*

¹⁹ Letter from Colonel J.E.B. Seely to Lieutenant-General Sir Arthur Paget, 14th March, 1914; University of Leeds, Glensk-Bathurst MSS, Lady Bathurst Papers 1990/1/2079.

²⁰ Letter from Paget to R.H. Brade, Secretary to the War Office, 17th March, 1914; quoted in *Hansard*, Parliamentary Debates (Commons), Fifth Series, LX, p.1372.

† Churchill stated that:

"If Ulstermen extend the hand of friendship it will be clasped by Liberals and by their Nationalist countrymen in all good faith and in all good will; but if there is no wish for peace; if every concession that is made is spurned and exploited; if every effort to meet their views is only to be used as a means of breaking down Home Rule and of barring the way to the rest of Ireland; if Ulster is to become a tool in party calculations; if the civil and Parliamentary systems under which we have dwelt so long, and our fathers before us, are to be brought to the rude challenge of force; if the Government and the Parliament of this great country and greater Empire are to be exposed to menace and brutality; if all the loose, wanton, and reckless chatter we have been forced to listen to these many months is in the end to disclose a sinister and revolutionary purpose; then I can only say to you, 'Let us go forward together and put these grave matters to the proof.'" ‡

‡ Winston Churchill, speech at Bradford, 14th March, 1914; quoted by George Dangerfield, *The Strange Death of Liberal England*, (Constable & Co. 1936), pp.328-29.

come to London and report yourself at the Admiralty, subsequently rejoining the squadron overland at Lamlash, whither your flagship is to proceed in the interval." ²¹

The choice of the Third Battle Squadron is indicative of Churchill's deep involvement in the naval measures directed against Ulster. For Bayly was not only unusual in his support for Irish Home Rule, he was also a close friend of the First Lord; he appeared therefore to be the perfect choice to implement Churchill's naval advance.

Despite appearances, dissatisfaction at the Government's proposed policy of coercing Ulster into inclusion in Irish Home Rule was present within the Navy; prominent amongst the Naval opposition was Churchill's Naval Secretary, Rear-Admiral Sir Dudley de Chair. On 20th March de Chair noted in his diary that:

"Matters looking black today; have resolved if Govt. try to use Navy to coerce Ulster, will resign.

Conference with 2nd Sea Lord [Vice-Admiral Sir John Jellicoe] expressed my opinion that sea officers looked to Board of Admiralty to see they were not put into a false position. First Lord will not discuss this serious matter with me." ²²

However whilst a number of senior officers of the Navy might choose to disobey the Admiralty's directions, the doubtful temper felt throughout the Army rendered its compliance with embarkation even less reliable.

The temper of the Army meantime appears to have escaped the attention not only of the Cabinet, but also of French. For Wilson noted that the Government:

"are contemplating scattering troops all over Ulster, as though it was a Pontypool coal strike. Sir John pointed out that this was opposed to all true strategy, *etc.*, but he was told that the political situation necessitated this dispersion. He said that, as far as he could see, the Government were determined to see the thing through.....

I then told him that in my opinion if the Government wanted to crush the North, they would have to mobilize the whole army, and that, even so I had great doubts whether they could do it, as there would be serious work for troops in the rest of Ireland and also in the large towns of England, and that the Continent would not look on unmoved. Furthermore, there would be a large proportion of officers and men who would refuse to coerce Ulster. He seemed surprised at all this. I told him the whole thing was a nightmare to me, and that I could not believe that the Government were so mad as to start this war. After I left him I began to think that I ought to have spoken more about his personal position as C.I.G.S. and his responsibility, I will see him to-morrow." ²³

Meanwhile General Paget, had spent all of Wednesday, 18th March, and much of the following day, in discussions with Seely, the Secretary of State for War, in an attempt to secure concessions from the Government for those officers who felt themselves unable to move against the Ulster Volunteers. Paget might reasonably have expected to receive a somewhat dusty response from any effective Secretary of State, however he secured an assurance that any officer, domiciled in Ulster, who felt himself unable to obey the Government's orders to move against the Ulster Volunteers would be allowed to absent himself; such a stance marked a substantial shift away from the resolute policy outlined to Esher by Haldane the previous September.

Such an assurance did little to remove the prospect that the Government would deploy the Army to Ulster, less to dampen violence than to provoke it; such a policy having been

²¹ Telegram from the Admiralty to Vice-Admiral Lewis Bayly, H.M.S. *King Edward VII*, 19th March, 1914; quoted in 'Episodes of the Month: A Lunatic at Large', *The National Review*, May 1914; *op. cit.*, Volume LXIII, p.379.

²² Rear-Admiral Sir Dudley de Chair, diary entry, 20th March, 1914; Imperial War Museum (I.W.M.), de Chair MSS., DEC/1/6.

²³ Wilson, diary entry, 18th March, 1914; I.W.M., Wilson Diary, DS/MISC/80, HHW 23.

intimated by Churchill at Bradford the previous Saturday. For in the course of his speech he had stated that if Ulster were indeed to reject the proffered six year exclusion, from the provisions of Irish Home Rule, then:

"any unconstitutional action by Ulster can only, in a phrase from Mr. Gladstone once used on another occasion, 'wear the aspect of unprovoked aggression', and I am sure that the first British soldier or coastguard, bluejacket or Royal Irish Constabulary man, who is attacked and killed by an Orangeman, will raise an explosion in this country of a kind they little appreciate or understand, and will shake the very foundations, the basis, and structure of society." ²⁴

Churchill's loquacity was unfortunate for the Government, for as *The National Review* observed the speech revealed:

"in plain words the plan of the Pogrom. A conflict was to be precipitated in Ulster, in which the Volunteers were to be made to appear as aggressors, and necessary steps would be taken to secure that object.....The Army was to be brought in "to restore law and order".....Happily limelight politicians cannot keep their own counsel. Mr. Churchill cackled over his Pogrom like a hen over a new-laid egg. His hearers must have been astonished to learn from the lips of a prominent member of the peace-at-any-price Government that "Bloodshed no doubt is lamentable. I have seen some of it, more, perhaps, than any of those who talk about it with such levity, but there are worse things than bloodshed even on an extended scale". The reader can now judge for himself as to whether the epithet "bloodthirsty bounders", which we have applied to this Government, is justified or not." ²⁵

A more accurate epithet might well be '*blundering* bounders'.

In ascribing to the Government some elaborate Machiavellian plan to coerce Ulster into the waiting arms of governance from Dublin, after over a century of that of Westminster, the editorial line adopted by Leo Maxse favours the Government with a degree of intelligence and constancy which closer inspection of its actions tends to disprove. For the conclusions reached on 18th March at the meeting in the Seely's room at the War Office, and modified at a meeting in Downing Street the following afternoon, served to indicate that the Government was blithely considering the imposition of martial law upon the whole Province of Ulster; an action which only the use of the Army as a coercive force could serve to uphold. In doing so the Cabinet was guilty of manipulating the forces of the State in the service of narrow partisan interests.

The Opposition Press was not slow to attack the Government on that very point; the effects of those selfsame attacks upon the Government's Irish policy were swiftly felt. On 19th March, Major-General Rawlinson wrote to Henry Wilson enquiring:

"Did you see the enclosed in the Daily Mail of yesterday? My boys are becoming perturbed and are asking if they will be given time to send in their papers before being sent to fight Ulster. A large percentage will not go to Ulster. The question is being much discussed amongst senior officers and what you will find is that all those who can afford to leave will leave, and that those that can't afford it will go with very bad grace." ²⁶

The Unionist Press was proving efficacious in rendering the Officer Corps sympathetic to the Ulster cause. The process continued with an article in the *Daily Express* of 23rd March, in which its readers were informed of the compact between Asquith and Redmond, an alliance:

²⁴ Churchill, speech at Bradford, 14th March, 1914; quoted in 'Pinchbeck Napoleon', leading article, *The National Review*, May 1914; quoted in *The National Review*, *op. cit.*, p.361.

²⁵ 'The Agent Provocateur', leading article, *The National Review*; quoted in *The National Review*, *op. cit.*

²⁶ Letter from Major-General Sir Henry Rawlinson to Wilson, 19th March, 1914; I.W.M., Wilson MSS., HHW 73/1/18.

"so astounding, so utterly at variance with all sense of patriotism, justice, and concern for the welfare of the people, that we should hesitate to give it publicity were we not justified by the undoubted accuracy and proof of our statements..... The Compact is in writing. Mr. Redmond holds his copy. He is in a position to make use of it at any time it may suit his purpose to do so." ²⁷

The article concluded by describing the nature of the 'Compact' and its effects:

"The Nationalists on their part agreed to support, vote for, and assist in every way in the passage of all Liberal measures. They even went so far as to swallow the Budget, to which they were opposed to a man. In return Mr. Asquith agreed to force Home Rule on the nation in spite of any and all opposition.....It was further agreed that if Ulster showed fight the Government would eventually extend the privilege of exclusion for a limited period, but beyond that it was stipulated in the Compact not to budge an inch. The offer of exclusion for a limited term is the last word of the Compact. Beyond that Mr. Redmond's terms do not permit Mr. Asquith to go. Now comes Settling Day." ²⁸

Having emphasised the 'unpatriotic' nature of the Government the reader was invited to segue into the notion that those forces arrayed against the imposition of Irish Home Rule upon Ulster were acting in the 'National Interest'.

On 19th March Wilson, together with Robertson, attempted to instil into French some degree of understanding as to the position of the majority of the officer corps over the coercion of Ulster. The former recorded in his diary that:

"The Cabinet sure to think that they can settle the Ulster question as they would a coal strike. It is a profound mistake, & will lead to disaster. Sir John, I think, agreed with very little of what I said. He is absolutely 'snaffled' by this cursed Cabinet." ²⁹

Robertson continued his attempts the following day by drafting a memorandum dealing with the difficulties likely to be confronted in coercing Ulster which concluded by stating that:

"to suppress Ulster may tax the powers of our Exped: Force to the utmost limits, and be a matter of several months". ³⁰

The Government's response was evasive; with Seely informing French that:

"Any serious menace of hostile attack from outside would have the result (a) that the Govt. and the Opposition would agree to postpone a settlement of their differences until the outside menace had been dealt with, (b) the Ulster Forces would cease aggressive action." ³¹

Once bellicose passions had been aroused, however it would prove problematic to soothe them once again; Civil Wars, unlike court cases, cannot easily be adjourned.

The Government's decision to dispatch an officer to adopt the position of Military Governor of Belfast did not long remain confidential; for Major-General Friend informed Gwynne, at noon on Friday, 20th March:

²⁷ Leading article, *Daily Express*, 23rd March, 1914.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Wilson, diary entry, 19th March, 1914; I.W.M., Wilson Diary, DS/MISC/80, HHW 23.

³⁰ Memorandum by Major-General Sir William Robertson, DMT, to French, 20th March, 1914; I.W.M., French MSS., 75/46/8.

³¹ Note by Seely to French, 20th March, 1914; quoted in Beckett (*Ed.*), *op. cit.*, p.71.

"that 'he was going up to Belfast that morning, as Military Governor of Belfast'. These were his exact words." ³²

Gwynne continued his memorandum by noting that:

"On Saturday, 21st March, General Sir C. Fergusson told me in conversation that the outline of operations against Ulster was as follows - 'Blockade Ulster by land & sea. & then the police were to seize the buildings of importance in Belfast, which they expected would create trouble'." ³³

It appeared clear that the Government was contemplating the early moves in a sustained and prolonged campaign against the Ulster Unionists; a view which the War Office's orders relating to the provision of ammunition and the creation of a temporary ammunition train by the artillery units stationed in Ireland did much to enhance.

The previous day Seely had reported to the Prime Minister that Paget:

"strongly urged that in a few exceptional cases where officers have direct family connection with the disturbed area in Ulster, so that in the event of serious trouble arising their future private relations might be irretrievably compromised if they were engaged with our troops, they should be permitted to remain behind either on leave or with details. Sir John French & Sir Spencer Ewart having expressed their concurrence with this view it was decided that this course should be followed." ³⁴

The political and disciplinary difficulties involved in such an extraordinary dispensation were, one would have thought, all too obvious. However Seely's note expresses no disquiet at the spectre of the Government willingly relinquishing control of the British Army for the first time since the Glorious Revolution of 1688.

The situation is rendered all the more remarkable when one reads that both the Secretary of State and the Adjutant-General of the Forces ignored, not for the first time, French's exhortation to court martial any officer or other rank refusing to obey the orders of the properly constituted civilian authority. For as Seely confided to Asquith:

"Sir John French was of the opinion that such officers should be court-martialled, a view which he had urged upon me a year ago. Upon Sir Spencer Ewart pointing out the technical difficulties and delay that might be involved, Sir John French agreed for the present that removal should be the course followed."³⁵

The crass stupidity which the adoption of such a course of action involved was to become all too clear once Paget had returned to Dublin; and held a conference of his seven most senior officers on the morning of Friday, 20th March. †

During the course of the conference Paget employed such sulphurous tones as to inculcate in the minds of his officers the notion that a descent upon Ulster was imminent; would they, he inquired, feel themselves able to follow the Government's orders, or did they prefer to

³² 'Links in the Chain', memorandum by H.A. Gwynne; University of Leeds, Brotherton Library, Glensesk-Bathurst MSS., Gwynne Papers 1990/1/836.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Letter from Seely to Asquith, 20th March, 1914; University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, New Library, MS. Asquith 40, f.19.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

† In addition to Paget, the meeting was attended by Major-General Lovick B. Friend, Second-in-Command Ireland; Brigadier-General Forestier-Walker, Army Staff; Major-General Sir Charles Fergusson, GOC 5th Infantry Division; Brigadier-General S.P. Rolt, GOC 14th Infantry Brigade (5th Infantry Division); Brigadier-General G.J. Cuthbert, 13th Infantry Brigade (5th Infantry Division); Brigadier-General Sir Hubert de la Poer Gough, 3rd Cavalry Brigade; and Colonel Hill, OC Army Depots in the North of Ireland.

resign their commissions? Those choosing the latter course of action were to absent themselves from the conference's second part, scheduled for two o'clock that afternoon. One of those who availed himself of this latter option was Brigadier-General Sir Hubert Gough, the commanding officer of the 3rd Cavalry Brigade - quartered at the Curragh, some thirty miles to the south-west of Dublin. Gough informed Headquarters, Irish Command, of the almost complete refusal of his officers to act against Ulster. Paget's response was to dispatch two telegrams to the War Office in London. In the first, received at 7:00 p.m., he baldly informed Horse Guards that:

"Officer commanding 5th Lancers states that all officers except two, and one doubtful, are resigning their commissions to-day. I much fear same conditions in the 16th Lancers. Fear men will refuse to move." ³⁶

The second telegram, received at 11:35 p.m., informed the War Office of the seriousness of the situation unfolding in the Curragh Garrison:

"Regret to report Brigadier and fifty-seven officers Third Cavalry Brigade prefer to accept dismissal if ordered north." ³⁷

The reaction in London contained a surprising degree of calm. For Seely telegraphed Paget at midnight on 20th March, informing him that:

"Your telegram with reference to 5th and 16th Lancers received. You have authority of Army Council to suspend from duty any senior officer who have tendered their resignations or in any other manner disputed your authority.

Take whatever action you think proper and report to the War Office.

Direct Gough and Officers Commanding 5th and 16th Lancers to report themselves to the Adjutant-General at the War Office without delay. They should leave by first possible boat. They should be relieved of their Commands, and officers are being sent to relieve them at once.

Resignations of all officers should be refused." ³⁸

Asquith's view of the 'mutiny' was that it had been created by agitators rather than by the intemperate manner in which the Government sought to coerce both Ulster, and latterly the Army, into acquiescing with a deeply unpopular policy pursued with insensitivity and incompetence at every turn. Thus the Prime Minister, writing to his mistress Venetia Stanley, the daughter of the prominent Liberal peer Lord Sheffield, opined that Gough:

"is a distinguished Cavalry officer, an Irishman, & the hottest of Ulsterians, and there can be little doubt that he has been using his influence with his subordinates to make them combine for a strike." ³⁹

Once more one is struck by the Government's immediate response to the crisis being to equate the crisis in Ulster to a 'strike'; such a myopic attitude had coloured the Cabinet's handling of the unfolding crisis from the outset. Asquith's belief that the events at the Curragh could be ascribed to the oratorical gifts of a lowly Brigadier-General is curious in the light of the repeated warnings delivered to the Cabinet; both in private meetings and through the pages of the Unionist Press.

The Prime Minister further informed his inamorata that:

"it seems likely that there was a misunderstanding. They seem to have thought,

³⁶ Telegram from Paget to War Office, dated 20th March, 1914; quoted by G. Dangerfield, *op. cit.*, p.331.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Telegram from Seely to Paget, 20th March, 1914; University of Leeds, Glensk-Bathurst MSS, Lady Bathurst Papers 1990/1/2079.

³⁹ Letter from Asquith to Venetia Stanley, 20th March, 1914; quoted in Michael & Eleanor Brock (*Eds.*), *op. cit.*, pp.58-59.

from what Paget said, that they were about to be ordered off at once and to shed the blood of the Covenanters, and they say they never meant to object to do duty like the other troops in protecting depots & keeping order. This will be cleared up in a few hours".⁴⁰

Asquith continued to treat the matter as one of semantics; thereby ignoring the relevance of the repeated 'tremors' in the Unionist Press which ought by their very accumulation to have alerted him to the seriousness of the situation. Further, it appears strange that Asquith's opinion of Gough should have altered so dramatically in the space of a few sentences; for Gough had metamorphosed from a rabid Orangeman into a man baffled by opaque orders.

At Printing House Square around 11:00 p.m. on Friday, 20th March, telegram and telephone messages began to arrive which contradicted the official line advanced by both the War Office and the Admiralty; namely that the military and naval activity in and around Ulster was a precautionary measure to protect arsenals and stores. Hence *The Times* informed its, doubtless thunderstruck, readers that there had been:

"wholesale resignations of officers at Dublin - the 5th Lancers, then the whole Cavalry Brigade and meetings of Ministers in London".⁴¹

The intensity of that feeling, provoked in little over a day, it need hardly be stated, was universally opposed to the course of action adopted by the Government.

The Cabinet's mishandling of the 'Ulster Question', allied to the Unionist Press campaign, had served to heighten feeling in the Army to such a degree as to render it worthless. The following day, at the Travellers' Club, Robinson met both Milner and Wilson and was informed of the events in Dublin of the previous day. At 5:00 p.m. Robinson went to Buckingham Palace to discuss the crisis in Ireland with Lord Stamfordham, the King's Private Secretary; at this meeting Robinson was informed that the King had learned of the seriousness of the crisis in Dublin only through the pages of *The Times*. On Sunday, 22nd March, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. Davidson, turned to Robinson for advice as to the most useful rôle which he could play in the efforts to resolve the crisis; thereby allying two of the trinity of influential men - Archbishop of Canterbury, editor of *The Times* and Prime Minister - against the third. Robinson confided in Davidson his perception that:

"The Army crisis was infinitely more serious than the Irish problem proper, but that it was increasing every moment, and that something authoritative ought to be said to arrest it first thing in the morning, without waiting for the meeting of Parliament in the afternoon."⁴²

In a prime example of the manner in which the Press could exert discreet pressure upon the Government, Davidson passed in Robinson's view at a meeting with Asquith later that same day; the upshot of which was that Robinson was hurriedly invited to 10 Downing Street that afternoon in order to enunciate his views to Asquith in person and at somewhat greater length.

The meeting is illustrative of the Government's acknowledgement of the prestige of *The Times*, its ignorance of the wider aspects of Press influence, and of the harried atmosphere then prevailing in Whitehall. Furthermore, it is somewhat ironic that a meeting of such provenance should be described by Asquith, in a letter to Venetia Stanley, in the following terms:

"...(contrary to my settled practice) I saw Geoffrey Robinson of *The Times*, & gave him a few hints of a quieting kind."⁴³

Whilst the remark indicates an awareness on the part of the Prime Minister of the importance, to

⁴⁰ Letter from Asquith to Venetia Stanley, *op. cit.*; quoted in Michael & Eleanor Brock (*Eds.*), *op. cit.*, p.59.

⁴¹ Dr. Arthur Shadwell, 'Need for Cool Heads', leading article, *The Times*, 21st March, 1914.

⁴² Geoffrey Robinson, in conversation with Dr. Davidson, Archbishop of Canterbury, 22nd March, 1914; quoted by John Evelyn Wrench, *Geoffrey Dawson and Our Times*, (Hutchinson. 1955), p.98.

⁴³ Letter from Asquith to Venetia Stanley, 22nd March, 1914; quoted in Michael & Eleanor Brock (*Eds.*), *op. cit.*, p.59.

his Government's Irish policy, in quieting *The Times*, it strikes one as more likely that words of a quieting, if not chastening, nature were travelling in the opposite direction. Asquith further informed his inamorata of the seriousness of the implications of the 'mutiny':

"there is no doubt if we were able to order a march upon Ulster...about half the officers in the Army - the Navy is more uncertain - would strike. The immediate difficulty in the Curragh can, I think, be arranged, but that is the permanent situation, and it is not a pleasant one. Winston is all for creating a temporary Army *ad hoc* - but that of course is nonsense." ⁴⁴

It was thus a Prime Minister aware, finally, of the extremely important implications of the Government's loss of authority over the Army that Robinson met that Sunday in the Cabinet room.

Robinson's account of the meeting understandably differs from the account with which Asquith furnished his mistress. For Robinson recalled that Asquith, after assuring the editor that he, foolishly, intended to see no other representative of the Fourth Estate, requested that *The Times*:

"correct the prevailing rumours about the action of the Government in moving troops, issuing warrants for the arrest of leaders, etc., etc., in the morning. I said that this could only be done on his (published) authority, and he assented, adding something to the effect that the King (from whom he had just come) saw no objection. I then offered to go away, reduce what he had told me to the form of a statement suitable for publication, and bring it back for his approval later in the evening....[Asquith at length agreed]." ⁴⁵

It is interesting to note that the Prime Minister, a man notably wary of engaging in close discourse with the Press, should have chosen to do so on this occasion; and moreover, should have chosen as the vehicle for his statement *The Times* rather than the pages of some representative of the Liberal Press, such as *The Daily Chronicle* or the *Daily News*. The Prime Minister's action served to annoy the editors of his supporters in the Press, whilst his statement, through its very scarcity of facts, would later cause him discomfort through his efforts to explain his earlier reticence.

If Asquith believed that the affair had run its course, then the events at the War Office on Monday, 23rd March, did much to ensure that its spectre lingered. For it was on that day that Gough and his three colonels; who had arrived in London from Dublin the previous day, were to be interviewed at the War Office. The indications given by Gough's choice of temporary residence in London were not encouraging for the Government, for, Gough and his three regimental commanders journeyed straight to Wilson's house from the railway station. Thus on the morning of Monday, 23rd March, Gough breakfasted with the DMO, shortly thereafter the two met again at the War Office - though now dressed in the garb of 'mutineer' and 'censurer'. The interview between Gough and the ineffectual Seely merely served to further the *opera bouffe* tone of the proceedings. Indeed when Seely proposed that the Brigadier-General simply return to the Curragh as if no disobedience had occurred - and this in the midst of a meeting called to discipline the recalcitrant officers of the 3rd Cavalry Brigade - Gough refused.

Moreover Gough did not simply refuse, he added piquancy to that refusal by demanding a written assurance that the Government had not, did not, and would never consider deploying the Army to impose Home Rule upon Ulster. Staggeringly Seely complied. Ewart recorded that Gough's interview with Seely and French concluded when:

"Seely said he must go over to the Cabinet and would I draft such an assurance as Gough had asked for consideration of the Cabinet. I drafted it and a little later

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Memorandum by Geoffrey Robinson, 22nd March, 1914; University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, New Library, MS. Dawson 64, ff.32-35.

sent it over to the Cabinet." ⁴⁶

The document stated :

"You are authorised by the Army Council, to inform the Officers of the 3rd Cavalry Brigade that the Army Council are satisfied that the incident which has arisen in regard to their resignations has been due to a misunderstanding.

It is the duty of all soldiers to obey lawful commands given to them through the proper channel by the Army Council, either for the protection of public property and the support of the civil power in the event of disturbance, or for the protection of the lives and property of the inhabitants.

This is the only point it was intended to put to the officers in the questions of the General Officer Commanding, and the Army Council have been glad to learn from you that there has been and never will be any question of disobeying such lawful orders." ⁴⁷

However the already exceptionable document was rendered even more so when Seely and Lord Morley, apparently without Asquith's knowledge, added two further paragraphs; the celebrated 'peccant paragraphs'. Whilst it is true that the first of these two additions did little to increase the scope of action, already considerable in the original Cabinet-approved draft, the second proceeded to grant Gough too much latitude even for the previously supine Asquith. For the additions read:

"His Majesty's Government must retain their right to use all the forces of the Crown in Ireland, or elsewhere, to maintain law and order and to support the civil power in the ordinary execution of its duty.

But they have no intention whatever of taking advantage of the right to crush political opposition to the policy or principles of the Home Rule Bill." ⁴⁸

Ewart further recorded in his diary that:

"Eventually, about 2 p.m. I think, the memorandum which I had drafted came back from the Cabinet. My original document had been corrected in the handwriting of the Prime Minister, but two very important paras had been added in the handwriting of Seely which practically pledged the Cabinet not to apply coercion to Ulster. Seely sent me a message that he would sign the document if possible, but that, if he was in the House, I and French were to sign it on behalf of the Army Council." ⁴⁹

However Ewart balked at such a step and instead sought, successfully, Seely's approval of the document. That evening a jubilant Gough informed Gwynne at Euston Station, prior to his departure for Dublin, that:

"I have got the assurance I asked for; they are in my pocket and I am taking them back to my brigade. I dictated the terms, and wrote them with my own hand. The document was signed by French. I have the assurance that my brigade will not be used for political purposes to force Home Rule on Ulster" ⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Lieutenant-General Sir Spencer Ewart, diary entry, 23rd March, 1914; Scottish Records Office (S.R.O.), Ewart MSS., RH4/84/3., f.126.

⁴⁷ Assurance for Brigadier-General Sir Hubert Gough, written by Major-General Sir Spencer Ewart, and amended by Asquith, 23rd March, 1914; quoted by R. Jenkins, *op. cit.*, p.311.

⁴⁸ Amendment written by Seely and Morley, 23rd March, 1914; quoted by R. Jenkins, *op. cit.*, p.312.

⁴⁹ *Op. cit.*, pp.191-92.

⁵⁰ Notes of a conversation between Gwynne and Gough, 24th March, 1914; I.W.M., Gwynne MSS., HAG/9/1.

Thus Gough returned to the Curragh in triumph, with the written assurance, and arguably the Government itself, in his pocket. Wilson's reaction was one of delight; Asquith's was not.

For as soon as the Prime Minister read the offending paragraphs he sought to order Seely to strike them out of the assurance; it was however, rather too late as Gough was already *en route* to Dublin. Wilson - acting as a focal point of the combined Military-Political-Press campaign against the Government's policy of involving the Army in coercing Ulster - recognised that the final draft of the assurance had the effect of signalling the Government's abject surrender to Gough and the Colonels of the Curragh; moreover it was clear that someone had blundered. The Government was of a similar opinion. Hence Ewart was summoned to the House of Commons on the afternoon of 24th March to be questioned by Asquith, Lloyd George and Churchill as to the history of the contentious document. As Ewart noted:

"I left the room perfectly staggered for it now appeared that Seely must have added off his own bat to a Cabinet document which I and French had signed believing it to be a Cabinet document and on the strength of which officers had been induced to return to duty.

Nothing but necessity would ever really have induced us to give Gough any assurance on paper, but we felt that, unless the Cavalry officers could be induced that afternoon to return to duty, we might have a sympathetic strike and widespread resignations throughout the Army." ⁵¹

It was notable that Seely was absent from the Prime Ministerial inquest.

Nevertheless it was apparent that French had been somewhat impetuous in providing Gough with his own interpretation of the document, rather than merely referring the Brigadier-General to the printed page. Henceforth French was honour bound to uphold Gough's interpretation; as a result the Government's immediate decision to repudiate the amended version - the immediacy is illustrated by the swift establishment of the 'Coroner's Court' in Bonham Carter's rooms - placed French's continued tenure as CIGS in marked question. Such a state of affairs quickly occurred to French himself. As Wilson noted, not without a tincture of *Schadenfreude*:

"Robertson went in to Sir John to try to tell him this, but only got his head snapped off, which amused me. However, he found out that Sir John has not yet told Seely of the little addition he made to the letter to Hubert last night. Bonar Law rang me up in the morning and we discussed the day's work. I told him how Hubert went back, and on what guarantees. He also told me he was putting up Arthur Lee to ask Seely some questions this afternoon. Arthur Lee also rang me up and talked about the situation, which I explained". ⁵²

Whilst Bonar Law strove in vain to extract a Parliamentary explanation from either Asquith or Seely of the Government's tortuous conduct of the previous days, the Press made great play at the Cabinet's expense; insult was added to injury when a copy of the assurance given to Gough was published in a Government White Paper. The result was uproar in the House with the Prime Minister forced to dissociate himself, and his Ministry, from the two additional 'peccant' paragraphs drafted by Seely and Morley which had done so much to arouse chagrin on the Government benches. Asquith sought to deflect criticism of the shambolic manner in which his Government had conducted itself throughout the course of the crisis by placing the responsibility for the paragraphs at issue upon Seely; having done so, it was contrary of the Prime Minister to refuse to accept his proffered resignation. As Ewart noted on 25th March:

"he [Seely] told me that though he should announce his resignation the Prime Minister did not intend to accept it - which seemed rather like a sacrificial goat and no knife." ⁵³

⁵¹ Ewart, diary entry, 24th March, 1914; *op. cit.*, p.193.

⁵² Wilson, diary entry, 24th March, 1914; quoted in Callwell (*Ed.*), *op. cit.*, pp.142-43.

⁵³ Ewart, diary entry, 25th March, 1914; quoted in Beckett (*Ed.*), *op. cit.*, p.194.

A simile which is equally applicable to the Government's previous attempts to coerce Ulster.

However Asquith's hand was forced by the influence exercised by both Wilson and by Gwynne upon French. For Gwynne wrote to French informing him that:

"There is one outstanding point in the whole matter and it is round this point the whole difficulty centres. *It is that the Army will not consent to be used to coerce the Ulster people to submit to Home Rule.*

Any settlement which does not recognise that absolute fact is no settlement at all but only a postponement of the difficulty. If Colonel Seely tries to arrange the matter in a way which will allow the politicians to argue hereafter that there is nothing in the settlement which might prevent the Army being used in Ulster, *once the Home Rule Bill has become law*, then we shall have a similar state of things to that which occurred on Friday but it will spread throughout the Army.

.....

..... Your duty seems to me to be quite clear. It is to lay it down to the politicians as an absolute incontrovertible fact that the Army will not allow itself to coerce Ulster.....no settlement or agreement or statement will do the slightest good unless the Government say in plain language that they have no intention of allowing the Army to coerce Ulster. If they say that, the Army is saved: if they say anything less officers in the Army will resign en masse and the finest force in the world will be ruined." ⁵⁴

The letter was but an opening salvo in Gwynne's unrelenting efforts to influence French.

The position of the Government was increasingly being undermined by intelligence that served to depict the soldiers, rather than the politicians, as the defenders of the constitution and the liberties of the British people. That morning's *Times* carried Robinson's leader on the subject of the on-going crisis in Ulster, which concluded by stating that:

"In the light of these latest revelations of what actually happened, it is frankly impossible to come to any other conclusion than that of a deliberate conspiracy to provoke or intimidate Ulster at a moment when the peace of the Province was neither broken nor threatened." ⁵⁵

The Government, through its close relationship with Redmond's Irish Nationalists, was becoming tarred with the same brush of political conspiracy and illegality; that such an indictment should originate from the pen of a journalist so amenable to the Government's case as to 'ghost' the Prime Minister's defence three days earlier could only have served to heighten its impact.

The previous day Gwynne had advised French that:

"there was sure to be a row about the whole affair and....the Government would find themselves obliged by the intensity of the feeling of their back benches to go back on the contract which they had made with Gough. This in our morning interview he refused to believe, but in the afternoon when I saw him, he informed me that he had seen the Prime Minister and it looked as though his promise would be repudiated. I then informed Sir J.F. that, of course, if this took place, he would obviously have to resign.

This curiously enough came as quite a surprise to him, and he went into the next room to the Adjutant-General and told him of the new view of the case. I put forward all the arguments I could in favour of his resignation, and on Wednesday night I kept him up to the mark." ⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Letter from Gwynne to French, 23rd March, 1914; University of Leeds, Brotherton Library, Glenesk-Bathurst MSS., Gwynne Papers, 1990/1/2079.; University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, New Library, MS. Gwynne 19.; I.W.M., Wilson MSS., 73/1/18.; I.W.M., French MSS., 75/46/8.

⁵⁵ Robinson, 'The Plot that Failed', leading article, *The Times*, 25th March, 1914.

⁵⁶ Memorandum by Gwynne, 2nd April, 1914; University of Leeds, Brotherton Library, Glenesk-Bathurst MSS., Gwynne Papers, 1990/1/2078.

The pressure imposed by the Cabinet upon French to rescind his resignation grew proportionately as the week progressed.

The Unionist Press' onslaught upon the Cabinet's position appeared to be unrelenting; for the first time in many years the full panoply of a political crisis was being presented for the delectation of the electorate through the medium of the Press. The focus of the affair had switched decisively to the War Office in London; in particular, the attention of the principal actors in the drama was increasingly held by the saga of French's position. Gwynne's efforts bore fruit on the morning of Thursday, 26th March, for at 11:00 a.m. French formally submitted to Seely his letter of resignation from the post of CIGS. The Cabinet's response was immediate; it panicked. The pressure placed upon both French and Ewart to withdraw their resignations was immense; French especially being visited by a succession of Cabinet ministers, all eager to persuade him to rescind his decision. As Gwynne records:

"Winston Churchill saw him, Colonel Seely, and the Prime Minister saw him also. But he put it to them that he could not in honour withdraw his resignation. The Prime Minister by dint of much persuasion got him to withdraw his resignation temporarily, and immediately all sorts of suggestions were made that would allow him to remain on. He remained firm, however all that day. Late in the evening Haldane and the Prime Minister made a most astounding proposition. It was to this effect, that Sir J.F. should write a private and confidential letter to General Gough pointing out the difficulties of the Government and also that in spite of any action the Government might take in Parliament, his, J.F.'s letter to Gough, would hold good, and to add that his private and confidential letter was written with the knowledge of Lord Haldane, Colonel Seely and the Prime Minister." ⁵⁷

The Government was surrendering the policy of Irish Home Rule, and moreover the sovereignty of Parliament to a Colonel; † its only condition being a request that he not broadcast the fact. The whole spectacle was as bizarre as it was absurd.

Gwynne advised French to refuse to have anything to do with the ingenious scheme proposed by both Haldane and Asquith; however Haldane was not to be so easily brushed off. Hence on Friday, 27th March, Haldane proposed that his speech in the House of Lords the previous Monday ‡ should be regarded by French and the Army as the Government's policy on the matter. The erstwhile Secretary of State for War therefore proposed that Asquith make a statement to the House stating that French's resignation was withdrawn on the understanding that Haldane's statement embodied the position of the Cabinet. Gwynne noted that:

"Sir J.F. was inclined to accept this, but I pointed out that in view of what the Prime Minister had said on Wednesday, it was quite impossible and that it was really only playing with the question to suggest such a thing as that." ⁵⁸

Whilst the Cabinet continued to strive manfully in its increasingly desperate attempts to persuade French to remain at his post, the effect of the tumultuous week upon the nerves of the Liberal Party in the House of Commons was becoming all too apparent. For, as Cecil Harmsworth recorded in his diary on Wednesday, 25th March, there had been:

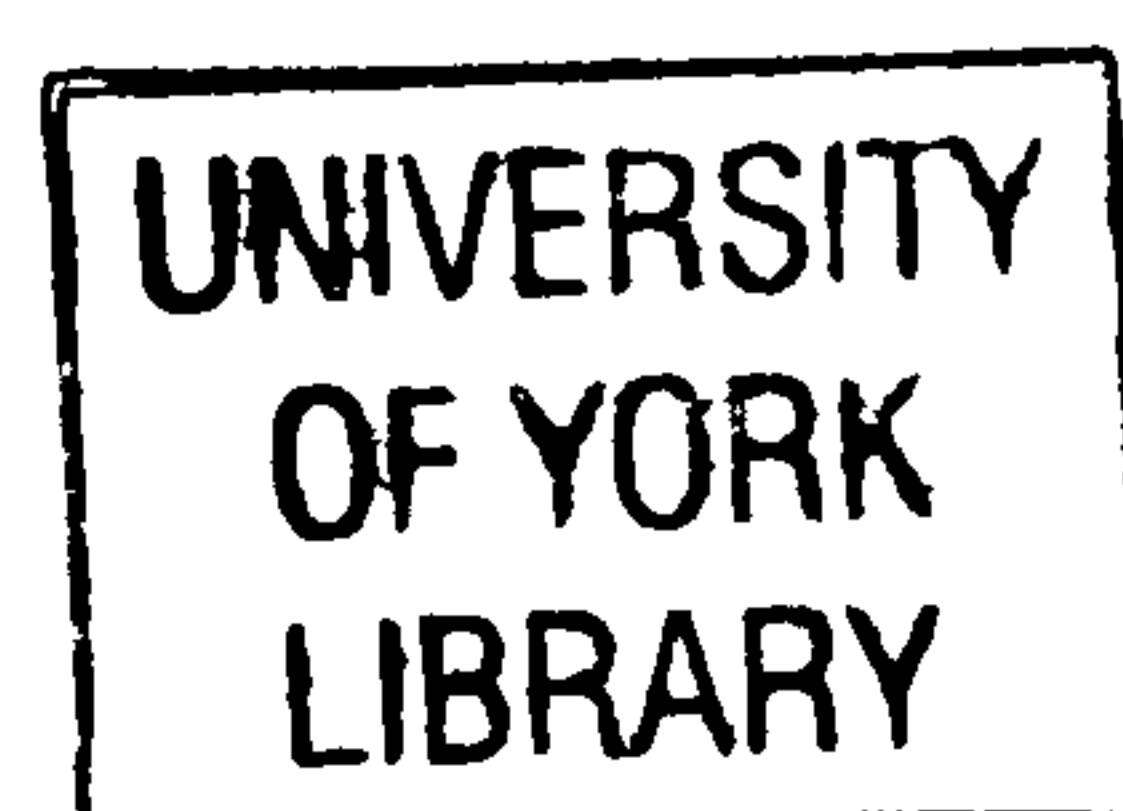
"Greater excitement in the House this week than I have ever known.....Liberal members all over the House gathered in gloomy knots and anxiously canvassing [*sic.*] the situation. I find Winston Churchill singing blithely to himself in the lavatory behind the Speaker's Chair. I thank him for his reassuring

⁵⁷ Memorandum by Gwynne, 2nd April, 1914; University of Leeds, Brotherton Library, Glensk-Bathurst MSS., Gwynne Papers, 1990/1/2078.

† Strictly speaking at the time 'Brigadier-General' was an appointment rather than a rank; hence both terms were used inter-changeably.

‡ A speech in which Haldane effectively stated that the Army would on no account be used against Ulster.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*



cheerfulness and he tells me that it is his habit to confront difficult situations with an outward serenity of aspect." ⁵⁹

The Cabinet's efforts at persuasion, if ultimately unsuccessful, did have the more immediate effect of coaxing French into delaying his departure from the War Office until after the weekend of 28-29th March. However, Gwynne's influence swiftly came into play once more in order to ensure that delay did not segue into cancellation, for shortly after reading of Asquith's statement to the House on the afternoon of Friday, 27th March, he informed French that the Prime Minister's assertion was incompatible with the assurance provided to Gough by Seely and French. Thus bolstered, on the morning of Saturday, 28th March, French once more informed Seely that his decision to resign stood. Seely, having believed that an arrangement had been reached which would enable the Government to persuade French to remain at his post at the War Office, thus found himself engaged in renewed attempts to reconcile French to the Government's position. Moreover he put it to the CIGS that if he persisted in his determination to resign, then:

"he [Seely] would have to go too.....on Sunday morning..Lord Haldane...once more brought forward the last suggestion of a letter that Sir J.F. should write to the Prime Minister to be read out in the House of Commons. This letter was a rigmarole of legal phrases which really meant nothing and finally on Sunday night, I put it to Sir J.F. that this document was of no use and that the best thing we could do was to authorise me practically to announce his resignation, which I did in the M.P. on Monday last the 30th March." ⁶⁰

Gwynne's part in the endgame at the War Office was acknowledged by Wilson in his diary entry for 29th March; for he records that when he went to 94 Lancaster Gate, to see French, at 5:00 p.m., he was greatly perturbed to find that:

"he was still hivering. He had been for hours with Haldane who had produced another letter to square the circle again. I read this letter carefully several times.....

The idea then is that Asquith should read this letter out to the House of Commons to-morrow, and that then Sir John and Ewart should withdraw their resignations.....

Gwynne is to see Sir John at 7 p.m. At 9 p.m. I rang up Gwynne and he told me Sir John was resigning. He said to me that he saw Sir John and saw the letter, and even with the obnoxious paragraph † cut out, he objected *in toto*. On this Sir John told him that he might announce that he had resigned. This is splendid." ⁶¹

Thus it was that Gwynne was entitled to boast as he did to his proprietress, Lady Bathurst, that:

"I have been behind Sir J. French in the matter. It was I who suggested that he should resign. I have been the antidote to all the poison poured in on him by the Cabinet and the Govt. I am glad to say we have won as you will see by tomorrow's M.P. but I assure you that it has been the most terribly trying business I have ever been engaged in." ⁶²

⁵⁹ Cecil Harmsworth, diary entry, 25th March, 1914; quoted by Reginald Pound & Geoffrey Harmsworth, *Northcliffe*, (Cassell & Co. 1959), p.454.

⁶⁰ Memorandum by Gwynne, 2nd April, 1914; University of Leeds, Brotherton Library, Glenesk-Bathurst MSS., Gwynne Papers, 1990/1/2078.

† In Haldane's proposed letter it was stated that French and every other officer was satisfied by Asquith's statement of Friday, 27th March.

⁶¹ Wilson, diary entry, 24th March, 1914; quoted in Callwell (*Ed.*), *op. cit.*, p.143.

⁶² Letter from Gwynne to Lillas, Countess Bathurst, 29th March, 1914; University of Leeds, Brotherton Library, Glenesk-Bathurst MSS., Gwynne Papers, 1990/1/2261.

Hence, as Asquith informed Venetia Stanley on 30th March, 1914:

"When I got back this morning I heard (as I expected) that the Generals (i.e. French & Ewart) had gone back to the position that as a matter of personal honour they must go. Poor Seely, who was there, of course was bound to follow suit." ⁶³

The affair saw a clear-out of personnel from the War Office - Seely resigned as Secretary of State for War, to be replaced by Asquith *pro tempore*; and both French and Ewart resigned as CIGS and Adjutant-General of the Forces respectively, to be replaced by Sir Charles Douglas and Sir Henry Sclater. Despite Wilson's glee there was a substantial element of opinion in the Army that:

"The crowning folly was asking of soldiers what they want to do. If Government's are to govern, they must make up their minds, after due discernment, no doubt, but must issue orders." ⁶⁴

This opinion was also shared by the General Officer Commanding Aldershot, Lieutenant-General Sir Douglas Haig, amongst others. The political aspect of the affair was perhaps best summed up by the notable Unionist backbencher and barrister, F.E. Smith. The brilliant Unionist M.P. sagely informed the Liberals seated opposite him that:

"Nobody can ever persuade us on this side of the House that we have not been justified in the things we have done, and no one will ever persuade the honourable gentlemen opposite that they equally on their part were not justified in what they have done. These events will be decided by the historian, and he will care very little to hear us complaining with a loud voice that the beginning and end of all these difficulties has been merely your subjugation to the Irish Nationalist party. He will care less to hear you say that the principal responsibility rests upon the shoulders of those who inculcated and preached the doctrine of insurrection. What he will say is, 'The Whole House of Commons - all of you - who ought to have been trustees, not for any party, but for the nation as a whole, inherited from the past a great and splendid possession, and where is it now?'.....

The scheme was Napoleonic. But there was no Napoleon." ⁶⁵

Whilst Smith was non-partisan in dispensing his strictures the Press was not. For the abject manner in which the Government conducted itself throughout the affair; a state of affairs which continued beyond its conclusion; gave rise to a great deal of criticism from the Liberal Press as well as from the exultant Unionist quarter of the Fourth Estate. For as the chief leader writer of *The Daily Chronicle*, Robert Ensor, later remarked Asquith's decision to step into the breach at the War Office caused by Seely's belated resignation, whilst impressing his more naïve supporters as:

"a drastic policy, such as only a prime minister could put through; in fact, it heralded a policy of surrender, such as only a prime minister could put over." ⁶⁶

The Government had sought a Napoleon and had found a Dumouriez.

It appeared clear that the Government had been panicked into dropping its more belligerent stance by the opposition of the Army; as Gough remarked approvingly to Wilson on 7th April, the coverage of the affair in the pages of the Unionist Press had been highly effective:

⁶³ Letter from Asquith to Venetia Stanley, 30th March, 1914; quoted in Michael & Eleanor Brock (*Eds.*), *op. cit.*, p.62.

⁶⁴ Lieutenant-General Sir George MacMunn, *Behind the Scenes in Many Wars*, (John Murray. 1930), p.105.

⁶⁵ F.E. Smith, speech in the House of Commons, 30th March, 1914; quoted by G. Dangerfield, *op. cit.*, pp.333-34.

⁶⁶ Sir Robert Ensor, *England 1870-1914*, (O.U.P. 1936), p.479.

"Did you see Tuesday's M.P? - very straight, & unpleasant for some people." ⁶⁷

Indeed *The Morning Post* continued to attack the Government over its handling of the Curragh affair; the effectiveness of its barrage was borne witness to in a letter from Esher to Gwynne; for in the missive, written on Windsor Castle notepaper and dated 9th April, Esher confided that:

"I read your article on the Army & Ulster in the M.P. of April 7 with deep interest.

It is full of information which every one believes to be perfectly accurate.

However, I am asked to tell you for your private information, that Sir Arthur Paget had no authority to use the King's name, or to refer to His Majesty's "wishes".

The King, between ourselves, never saw Sir Arthur Paget, and had no communication with him directly or indirectly until after the whole affair was over; nor had the King any knowledge of what was going on prior to the public announcement of the resignation of General Gough and his officers" ⁶⁸

It is interesting to note that the King should be so anxious to impart intelligence of his passive rôle in the past *imbroglio* to the editor of a newspaper. Whilst the Unionist Press received a number of such testimonials as to the effectiveness of its actions during the crisis, the Liberal Press received only criticism. As Esher noted in an aside on 12th April:

"Everything in the papers points to the exclusion of Ulster coming along as the only practical solution. Of course the Radical papers are very bitter, but it is only their bark. They have no teeth left." ⁶⁹

The Unionist Party, allied to the Opposition Press, continued to harry the Government over the whole affair; thus *The Morning Post* reported on 20th April that Seely, in a speech delivered to his constituents at Langley Mill, Derbyshire, two days previously had stated that:

"I had the full approval of all my colleagues in the action which I took, and when history comes to be written I think they will be a little puzzled at my ultimate resignation, because every order I gave was punctually and implicitly obeyed, and every step I decided on I carried out to the full." ⁷⁰

If Seely was not the singular miscreant of the Cabinet's authorised version then the culpability for the Cabinet's actions, and inactions, during the course of the Curragh affair was, as the Unionist Press had long been proclaiming, rather more evenly distributed. Nevertheless History does not find itself overly puzzled by Seely's fate; rather the explanation is a simple one - it appears that Asquith had found his knife. It was this point which most exercised the prominent Irish Nationalist, John Dillon; for on 26th April he visited the editor of *The Manchester Guardian*, C.P. Scott. At the meeting Dillon:

"Took very serious view of the Unionist campaign about the 'Ulster plot', fearing its effect on English public opinion & urging that the real plot of Unionists to suborn the army shd be exposed and emphasized to counter-act this. Described this plot as a Titus Oates plot over again in its absolute baselessness." ⁷¹

⁶⁷ Letter from Gough to Wilson, 7th April, 1914; I.W.M., Wilson MSS., 73/1/18.

⁶⁸ Letter from Esher to Gwynne, 9th April, 1914; I.W.M., Gwynne MSS., HAG/8/1.

⁶⁹ Letter from Esher to M.V. Brett, 12th April, 1914; quoted in Esher, *op. cit.*, p.162.

⁷⁰ Seely, speech at Langely Mill, Derbyshire, 18th April, 1914; quoted in *The Morning Post*, 20th April, 1914, and in *The National Review*, May 1914, quoted in *The National Review*, *op. cit.*, pp.368-69.

⁷¹ C.P. Scott, diary entry, 26th April, 1914; University of Manchester, John Rylands Library, *The Manchester Guardian* Archives, C.P. Scott Papers, Box 133.

The effect of the *imbroglio*, and the Press comment which it aroused, upon the Government's immediate position was less than had been anticipated. For though agitation had served to weaken the Cabinet's authority, in both Parliament and the country in general, and had done much to breed doubt in the collective mind of the electorate as to the motivation which lay behind the Government's Irish policy; the Government continued to sit to the Speaker's right. As Esher confided, with rather more than a tincture of regret, to Gwynne on 22nd April:

"I am afraid the Government will manage to persuade at least half the country that the 'plot' was non-existent. The situation becomes more deplorable every day." ⁷²

Whilst the Unionist Press had not proved able to bring about the dissolution of the Liberal Government, it had - combined with the Unionist Party and the Army - been rather more fortunate in ensuring that a refusal of the military to enforce the edict of the civil power had metamorphosed into a successful challenge to a principal plank of the Cabinet's political agenda. The success of this confrontation had left the Liberal Government in pieces, its alliance with the Irish Nationalists in some considerable doubt and the Unionists resurgent; a situation acknowledged by Hobhouse in his regretful diary entry of 22nd May, in which he stated his belief that:

"History, if it concerns itself with us at all, will write us down as either the most patient, wise, farseeing Govt. this or any country ever had, or else as the [most] inept, blind, and cowardly crew that ever disgraced Downing Street." ⁷³

It appeared likely that the electorate would soon deliver its verdict in favour of the latter proposition; such an alteration in fortunes could not have been achieved without the efforts of the Unionist Press, or the quiescence of its Liberal counterpart.

Asquith, unable to coerce Ulster into acceptance of her inclusion in Irish Home Rule, was obliged to accept terms; the Prime Minister's acquiescence had largely been achieved by a coalescence of forces as represented by Bonar Law, Carson, Robinson, Gwynne, Gough and Wilson. The bitterness engendered by the affair in Asquith towards the energetic DMO is apparent in the former's memoirs; for in them Asquith observed that Wilson:

"was voluble, impetuous, and an indefatigable intriguer...he was endowed by Nature with a loose tongue, and was in the habit of wielding a looser pen." ⁷⁴

The fact that a man of whom the Prime Minister had formed such a damning impression was able to retain his post at the War Office further signals the totality of Asquith's defeat.

By July the Irish crisis was already being overshadowed in Northcliffe's mind by the private intelligence reaching him of Germany's preparedness for war. Originating from a source close to President Raymond Poincaré, this intimation of German bellicosity indicated that an attack upon the neutrality of Belgium was imminent. In the midst of increasing tension across Europe, on the evening of Thursday, 23rd July, Churchill returned to London from the Royal Review of the Third Fleet, which had undergone a test mobilisation in the English Channel. Churchill observed that the Cabinet meeting that day, at which the spectre of civil war in Ireland was as Banquo's ghost at the feast, saw the Government vainly "turning this way and that in search of an exit from the deadlock" ⁷⁵ over the construction of a boundary between the putative Irish State and recalcitrant Ulster. He records that the Cabinet "toiled around the muddy byways of Fermanagh and Tyrone" ⁷⁶ with little success and that:

⁷² Letter from Esher to Gwynne, 22nd April, 1914; I.W.M., Gwynne MSS., HAG/8/3.

⁷³ Charles Hobhouse, diary entry, 22nd May, 1914; quoted in Edward David (*Ed.*), *Inside Asquith's Cabinet. From the Diaries of Charles Hobhouse*, (John Murray. 1977), p.171.

⁷⁴ Asquith, *Memoirs and Reflections*, (Cassell & Co. 1928), Volume II, p.155.

⁷⁵ W. Churchill, *The World Crisis, 1911-1918*, (Odhams Press. 1939), Volume I, p.155.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

"The discussion had reached an inconclusive end, and the Cabinet was about to separate, when the quiet grave tones of Sir Edward Grey's voice were heard reading a document from the Foreign Office. It was the Austrian note to Serbia. He had been reading or speaking for several minutes before I could disengage my mind from the tedious and bewildering debate which had just closed. We were all very tired, but gradually as the phrases and sentences followed one another, impressions of a wholly different character began to form in my mind. This note was clearly an ultimatum; but it was an ultimatum such as had never been penned in modern times. As the reading proceeded it seemed absolutely impossible that any State in the world could accept it, or that any acceptance, however abject, would satisfy the aggressor. The parishes of Fermanagh and Tyrone faded back into the mists and squalls of Ireland, and a strange light began immediately to fall and grow upon the map of Europe." ⁷⁷

Thus the spectre of civil war was banished by the storm of steel which was the Great War.

The approaching conflagration offered further opportunities for the exercising of those contacts which had been utilised so successfully during the course of the recent crisis in Ireland; for the 'Curragh Mutiny' had revealed to the wider political world, not to mention the general public, the existence of a network of close links and alliances. This network forged on the *veldt* which linked the Conservative and Unionist Party, the Opposition Press and certain senior elements in the Army. The whole affair serves to illustrate the readiness of both the Military and politicians to employ the services of the Press in furtherance of their machinations. The successful disobedience of the Military to the authority of the Government in March 1914 was a situation the recurrence of which Lloyd George was determined to prevent in 1917-1918; during the 'Easterner' versus 'Westerner' debates, and Press criticism of the Prime Minister's attempt to subordinate the military conduct of the war to civilian control. Moreover it is an ironic aspect of the episode that the Army, in revolting against the policy of the civilian authorities, should have adopted, albeit in an attenuated form, an aspect of the traditional Prussian military code. In borrowing this feature - a feature which placed the interests of the nation above loyalty to the authority of the State's body politic; a feature which was most notably upheld by Yorck and Clausewitz during the Napoleonic Wars - the Army was following an example of a system, the 'Prussian militaristic' system, which it was shortly to strive mightily to destroy.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

THE SLOW DEATH OF LIBERAL ENGLAND.

On Sunday, 28th June, the Austro-Hungarian Heir Apparent was assassinated by a Bosnian Serb student in the garrison town of Sarajevo. The initial reaction in Britain was one of cautious support for Austria-Hungary; *The Times* reacted by observing that:

"only the horror of the assassinations engrosses thought, but they must assuredly add fresh clouds to the political outlook in Austria-Hungary." ¹

The overwhelming emotion evinced was one of sympathy rather than any degree of apprehension; even by July the Press displayed little unease at the situation in the Balkans; *The Times* went so far as to congratulate the Viennese Press on its restraint:

"No inclination has been shown by most of the newspapers to call for vengeance." ²

The Morning Post was almost alone, on 6th July, in warning that an over-reaction to the death of the Heir Apparent on Vienna's part might well lead to a general European War. Failure to foresee the repercussions of the events in Sarajevo was not confined to the Press; on the same day as Gwynne's warning, Sir Arthur Nicolson, the Permanent Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, expressed the view that the events in Sarajevo:

"would have no serious political consequences at any rate outside of Austria-Hungary." ³

Whilst there was no delineated 'Ministerial Press' in Britain as existed elsewhere in Europe, its absence was rendered largely superfluous by its assumption in foreign political and diplomatic circles. Recognition of this assumption should therefore have been present in the diplomatic and political calculations of both the Cabinet and the Foreign Office; that it was not, further strengthened the hand of the Press, whilst also serving to shroud British foreign policy in a miasma of doubt and apparent duplicity. The absence of Foreign Office influence upon the editorial policies of such newspapers as *The Times* and *The Westminster Gazette*, whilst one was assumed in Berlin, Vienna and St. Petersburg, conspired to lend a spurious official weight to the opinions of such figures as Robinson and Spender. Such an assumption in turn translated into actual influence in Westminster and Whitehall.

Throughout the 'July Days' the Press was the target of a great deal of attention from both the German and the Austro-Hungarian embassies, its object being to inculcate sympathy for Austria-Hungary. The policy was inspired by the Wilhelmstrasse; the suggestion being passed to Vienna on 8th July. The following day the Ballhausplatz instructed its ambassador in London, Albert Graf von Mensdorff, to initiate a campaign to arouse British public opinion against Serbia and in favour of the Dual Monarchy. The Ballhausplatz further stated that Mensdorff was to utilise:

"all the wide social connections at Y.E.'s disposal in England, your long-standing friendly relations and the personal connections of all the members of the Embassy and the Consulate-General, in order to create, in the English Press, a feeling friendly to ourselves and unfriendly towards Serbia." ⁴

The result of this Teutonic wooing was to be seen in the pages of *The Times* on Thursday, 16th July, with the appearance of a leader written by the newspaper's Foreign Editor, Henry Wickham

¹ Lovat Fraser, 'Tragedy at Sarajevo', leading article, *The Times*, 29th June, 1914.

² Flanagan, 'The Murdered Archduke', leading article, *The Times*, 2nd July, 1914.

³ Sir Arthur Nicolson, 6th July, 1914; quoted in Michael & Eleanor Brock (*Eds.*), *op. cit.*, p.92.

⁴ Telegram from the Ballhausplatz to the Austro-Hungarian Ambassador in London, Albert Graf von Mensdorff, 9th July, 1914; quoted in *Österreichische Aktenstücke*, Volume VIII, no. 10127, p.357.

Steed. In the article Steed sought to remind Belgrade of the seriousness of the situation; rebuking Serbia for openly advocating the destruction of the Dual Monarchy; a policy which had given rise to a climate in which conspiracies aimed towards Vienna had been allowed to flourish. The article concluded by observing that an attempt by Vienna to bully Serbia:

"would constitute a fresh peril to European peace, and that, we are confident, the Emperor and his most sagacious advisors very clearly perceive".⁵

The article was well received by Mensdorff; he telegraphed Vienna at once, informing Berchtold that:

"*The Times* to-day publishes leading article headed 'Austria-Hungary and Serbia', admitting that we are fully entitled to insist on thorough investigation of all ramifications which are doubtlessly at the bottom of the plot, and to ask for guarantees against agitation brought from Servia to the borders of the Monarchy. Provocative language of Serbian Press strongly disapproved. *Passim*, however, also virulent language of *Reichspost* and *Militärische Rundschau* mentioned. Mr. Steed cannot even on this occasion refrain from addressing some admonitions to the Monarchy; but this article is much more favourable than anything which, for a long time, has come from his pen. I had a long conversation the day before yesterday with Mr. Steed who has also conversed with members of the Embassy repeatedly."⁶

One speculates that the article was considerably less well received in Belgrade. The Austro-Hungarian campaign of influence continued apace. On Friday, 17th July, Steed dined with Max Goldscheider, the London Correspondent of the *Neues Wiener Tageblatt*, and the chief members of the Austro-Hungarian Embassy, with the sole exception of the Ambassador himself. The following morning Steed received an invitation to converse with Mensdorff the following Tuesday. Mensdorff urged Steed to utilise the prestige of *The Times* to enunciate support for Austria-Hungary's proposed policy of retaliatory measures aimed at Serbia:

"If *The Times* were to give the lead, the rest of the Press would follow, public opinion would remain friendly towards Austria, and the conflict localized."⁷

Steed sought to point out to Mensdorff the complexities of the situation; for though a friend to Austria-Hungary, Steed had been a consistent critic of Vienna's policy towards the Southern Slavs. He further pointed out that whilst Austria-Hungary would doubtless swiftly extinguish Serbian resistance, such a victory would prove Pyrrhic in the long-term. For any military action aimed at Serbia would inevitably carry with it the danger of drawing Russia into the conflict, thus having the unfortunate effect of broadening the confrontation from a Balkan conflict into a full-scale European War.

Steed's reaction was twofold; for whilst returning to Printing House Square he met with Sir William Tyrrell † at the Foreign Office. Steed impressed upon Tyrrell the importance of Grey making a series of public announcements of Britain's policy in the event of a broadening of the crisis beyond the Balkans; his intention being to elicit a series of public statements which would serve to dispel the impression that in the event of war Britain would remain neutral. His efforts were unrewarded and the Government's indecision continued. Steed's second reaction, that of informing both Robinson and Northcliffe of the scope of his conversations with Mensdorff, was to have a rather more immediate impact; if the Foreign Office dithered *The Times* most certainly did not. In the leading article which resulted from Steed's briefing; Flanagan warned Vienna that:

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Telegram from Mensdorff to the Ballhausplatz, 16th July, 1914; quoted in *Österreichische Aktenstücke*, Volume VIII, no. 10304, p.461.

⁷ Conversation between Mensdorff and Steed, 21st July, 1914; quoted in *The History of 'The Times'*, *op. cit.*, p.188.

† Sir William Tyrrell was the Principal Private Secretary to the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.

"The Government of Austria-Hungary has acted hitherto with complete moderation We cannot, however, shut our eyes to the indications that a wholly different attitude is now finding favour in influential quarters...it is not clear that Austria-Hungary, did she draw the sword, would localize the conflict if she could, and it is clear that the decision would not rest with her alone...".⁸

The article, by hinting at the probability of British intervention into any European conflict arising out of the Balkan *imbroglio*, was aimed at those in positions of authority in London, Vienna and Berlin as well as the newspaper's more usual readers. Despite Tyrrell's rebuff *The Times* sought to make use of the continental assumption of a linkage between the Foreign Office and Printing House Square in order to douse nationalist passions in the Ballhausplatz, the Wilhelmstrasse and the Bendlerstrasse.

Though Vienna had by this point made no demands of Belgrade, it was clearly perceived in Printing House Square that any peremptory demands would follow the completion of the inquiry into the assassinations in very short order; thus the leader continued by observing that:

"The Government of the Dual Monarchy has not yet spoken, but the belief is general that, when the enquiry into the Sarajevo murders is complete, they will present certain demands to Serbia of a peremptory kind...Every state has the right to put down sedition within its own borders, and the right to require other States not to tolerate conspiracies against it."⁹

The leader continued by tacitly recognising its previous support for the Austro-Hungarian cause, stating that such rights were inseparable from sovereignty; therefore any refusal on the part of another State might well be conceived as a *casus belli*.

However Flanagan, having conceded the essential point of the Austro-Hungarian case, swiftly sought to mitigate the impact of the concession by opining that for such a construction to be placed upon such a refusal, the injured State must first establish that these conspiracies truly existed, that they represented a danger to its internal tranquillity, and moreover, that these charges could be substantiated:

"to the reasonable satisfaction of European opinion, or incur the reprobation of that opinion as an aggressor, and a danger to the general peace."¹⁰

The tone towards the Dual Monarchy was some distance from that of Steed which had elicited such contentment some six days earlier.

The leader also addressed the view that the crisis in the Balkans was being appropriated by the Triple Alliance in order to ascertain the solidity of the Triple Entente. As *The Times* observed in magisterial tones:

"We should be loath to think that this was the case, so long as such a conclusion can be avoided. Peace, indeed is the first interest of the Entente and the first interest of England. Both will spare no efforts to preserve it. But any plans which may be based on the supposition that the policy of either has changed, or is likely to change, are doomed to disappointment and to failure. Our friendships are firm, as our aims are free, from all suspicion of aggression. While we can hope to preserve peace by working with the Great Powers who are not immediate parties to this dangerous quarrel we shall consider that end above all else. But should there arise in any quarter a desire to test our adhesion to the principles that inform our friendships and that thereby guarantee the balance of power in Europe, we shall be found no less ready and determined to vindicate them with the whole strength of the Empire, then we have been found ready whenever they have been tried in the past. That, we conceive, interest, duty, and

⁸ Flanagan, 'A Danger to Europe', leading article, *The Times*, 22nd July, 1914.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

honour demand from us. England will not hesitate to answer their call." ¹¹

The leader concluded by stating the seriousness of the position as perceived in Printing House Square, if not, regrettably, in Whitehall. The piece further emphasised that Vienna's hopes for a small, localised conflict in the Balkans, as enunciated by Mensdorff to Steed at their *tête-à-tête*, were illusory. Thus Flanagan posed a series of uncomfortable questions to both Vienna and Berlin:

"What chance is there of 'localizing' a war between German and Slav, between a Roman Catholic and an Orthodox Power in the Balkans; what prospect that such a war would end without disaster to the Dual Monarchy?" ¹²

The leader was as well received in St. Petersburg; the British Ambassador, Sir George Buchanan, related to Grey how the shift in the tone adopted by *The Times* towards Austria-Hungary had been received in the upper échelons of the Russian Government. For Buchanan described how, in the course of a meeting between himself, the French Ambassador and the Russian Foreign Minister, Sergei Sazonov, the latter had observed that:

"With the exception of *The Times* the whole of the English Press is on the side of Austria." ¹³

Such a statement not only illustrates the individual influence wielded by *The Times*, but also hints at a greater difficulty for the Liberal Press. For in any crisis in which Russia was involved the position of the Liberal Press, and to a lesser extent that of the Liberal Party in Parliament was greatly complicated by the Liberal 'folk memory' of its opposition to the oppressive Russian autocracy. This situation was further compounded by remembrance of the numerous incidents of agitation on the part of the Liberal Press against the regime in Russia. Hence the widespread reluctance of the Liberal Press to be seen to take Russia's part in any confrontation; only with Germany's violation of Belgian neutrality would the Liberal Press emerge from a tortured period of quiescence to tacitly support Russia's autocracy against the more immediate threat posed by German militarism. Thus *The Manchester Guardian* opined, on 23rd July, that:

"Vienna is notoriously the most jumpy capital in Europe, and the talk about war between Austria and Servia is surely not to be taken very seriously." ¹⁴

A dismissive attitude which was to remain for little over forty-eight hours.

If the Liberal Press was indifferent to the events on the continent, the Unionist Press, led by *The Times*, was anything but; thus on Thursday, 23rd July, there appeared in *The Times* a *tour d'horizon* of the political situation in Europe by Flanagan. Inspired by the visit of the French President to St. Petersburg, Flanagan informed his readers of the virulent anti-Serbian campaign being waged in the pages of the Austro-Hungarian Press, a development deprecated not only by *The Times* but also by the *Frankfurter Zeitung*. This latter organ was quoted approvingly as expressing the fear that such a campaign had aroused such a high degree of patriotic fervour in Vienna, Budapest and Belgrade that popular feeling was in danger of drowning intelligent diplomatic discourse; an explosive situation in which even a minor frontier incident might well serve as the pretext for war. *The Times* itself expressed the hope that the meeting between President Poincaré and Tsar Nicholas II would serve as a warning to the more bellicose nations in Europe:

"The Franco-Russian visit is well timed at a moment when language of menace and of defiance is being exchanged across the Danube. It is a reminder to all the Powers of what are the bases upon which peace rests, and of the risks which any

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Telegram from Sir George Buchanan, British Ambassador in St. Petersburg, to the Foreign Office, 25th July, 1914; P.R.O., FO 371/1899.

¹⁴ 'Austria and Servia', leading article, *The Manchester Guardian*, 23rd July, 1914.

infringement of peace must bring them and their subjects. It is an answer to the suggestion that the controversy between Austria-Hungary and Serbia concerns themselves alone, and that an armed strife between them might readily be 'localized'." ¹⁵

The piece continued by offering its readers a descant upon the subject of the Alliance System in Europe; a system consisting of the Entente - Russia, France and Great Britain - and the Triple Alliance - Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy. Such an association, as *The Times* had repeatedly warned since June 1912, placed moral restraints upon each country's bellicose impulses; a single Power could no longer provoke a *casus fœderis* without previously convincing her allies of the necessity of the act. Moreover such an evaluation could no longer be left to any one Power, as through the medium of the alliance mechanism, she no longer bore sole responsibility for her actions.

Flanagan continued the survey of the European scene, perhaps a touch complacently, by stating that such a consideration:

"is one powerful check upon selfish ambitions, upon violent passions, and upon hasty decisions. The second is the general consciousness of the tremendous consequences which a conflict between the groups themselves must involve...Austria-Hungary is a member of the Triple Alliance and as such cannot engage in a dangerous quarrel without exposing her partners to risks which are, indeed, contingent but which are also obvious. We cannot suppose that either of them is disposed to be lightly drawn into perils of that kind." ¹⁶

The Times was in effect striving to impress upon both capitals that such a conflict would swiftly and certainly expand into a Pan-European conflagration involving both alliance systems in their entirety; the newspaper was also seeking to impress upon the Cabinet the futility of refraining from uttering a clear declaration of British policy in the event of a conflict erupting in the Balkans involving one or other of the alliances.

Whilst *The Times* had been increasingly forthright in its concern occasioned by developments on the European scene, the Liberal Government, like the Liberal Press, remained resolutely mired in the Irish *imbroglio*. The reluctance of both Unionists and Liberals to abandon the well-traversed battle-grounds of Ireland for the more pressing concerns of the European continent is readily apparent in Asquith's communication with Venetia Stanley on Friday, 24th July. For Asquith, informing his mistress of the events of a momentous day, wrote that:

"At 3.15 we had a Cabinet where there was a lot of vague & not very fruitful talk about Ulster, the provisional government &c; but the real interest was Grey's statement of the European situation, which is about as bad as it can possibly be. Austria has sent a bullying and humiliating Ultimatum to Serbia, who cannot possibly comply with it, and demanded an answer within 48 hours - failing which she will march. This means, almost inevitably, that Russia will come on the scene in defence of Serbia & in defiance of Austria; and if so, it is difficult both for Germany & France to refrain from lending a hand to one side or the other. So that we are within measurable, or imaginable, distance of a real Armageddon, which would dwarf the Ulster & Nationalist Volunteers to their proportion. Happily there seems no reason why we should be anything more than spectators. But it is a blood-curdling prospect - is it not?" ¹⁷

Asquith was manifesting that most serious flaw possible in a senior politician, an inability to concern oneself with more than one crisis at any given time. For having missed the languorous genesis of the crisis due to his immersion in things Hibernian, Asquith was temperamentally

¹⁵ Flanagan, 'The Franco-Russian Visit', leading article, *The Times*, 23rd July, 1914.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Letter from Asquith to Venetia Stanley, 24th July, 1914; quoted in Michael & Eleanor Brock (*Eds.*), *op. cit.*, pp.122-23.

unable to devote himself to the startling appearance of the unfamiliar.

On Sunday, 26th July, the 1st and 2nd Fleets of the Royal Navy were completing the final stages of their test mobilisation and war manœuvres off Portland, in which evolutions they had been occupied since 15th July. The combined fleets were scheduled to disperse at 7:00 a.m. the following morning; however after reading the special editions of the Press, which appeared that Sunday, the perspicacious First Lord confirmed the previous order of the Anglo-Austrian First Sea Lord, Prince Louis of Battenberg, † in forestalling the Fleet's dispersal. The following day, with Grey's agreement, the text of the Admiralty communiqué appeared in the Press, the first official intimation of the likely direction of British policy in the event of a European war to emerge from the Cabinet. Ironically Churchill followed Printing House Square in seeking to utilise the Press to impress upon both Vienna and Berlin the likely consequences of any belligerent action on their part; thus Churchill's telegram to Admiral Callaghan appeared in the pages of the Press on the morning of Monday, 27th July. Churchill's action was taken without consulting the main body of the Cabinet, for they would no doubt have viewed such developments with unmitigated horror, a reaction which the Liberal Press was to adopt for itself.

Curiously in light of succeeding events, the 'bullying and humiliating Ultimatum' presented to Serbia by Austria-Hungary was embraced as being entirely justified by much of the Liberal Press; the *Standard*, *The Manchester Guardian*, the *Daily News* and *The Daily Chronicle* were all prominent in their support for Berchtold's hard line. *The Manchester Guardian's* editorial stance was indicated by a somewhat aloof leader which stated that:

"War between Austria and Servia would be very regrettable; still it would not be a European calamity and, when all is said and done, Servia would have brought it upon herself." ¹⁸

Only in the latter part of July did Press opinion begin to shift against the Triple Alliance. The shift, though anticipated by *The Times* remained almost completely confined to the Unionist Press. Hence *The Times* responded to the Austro-Hungarian ultimatum on Monday, 27th July, by placing the Continental news on the 'Bill page' for the first time. In the article - which, as if to illustrate the shifting concerns in the political arena, appeared alongside an article on the recent fighting in Dublin - *The Times* continued to warn the Central Powers that Britain would intervene in any European conflict arising out of the crisis in the Balkans. The article thundered that:

"Should there arise in any quarter a desire to test our adhesion to the principles that form our friendships and that thereby guarantee the balance of power in Europe, we shall be found no less ready and determined to vindicate them with the whole strength of the Empire than we have been found ready whenever they have been tried in the past. That, we conceive, interest, duty and honour demand from us. England will not fail to answer to their call." ¹⁹

The article's import, primarily addressed to Vienna, also aimed at influencing Berlin to dissuade her ally from any belligerent act. The article's tone was scarcely better received in the editorial offices of the Liberal Press than in the German and Austro-Hungarian Embassies. Scott's reaction was one approaching apoplexy; having once again met with the Irish Nationalist leader, John Dillon, he noted that the latter had:

"agreed as to the monstrous character of 'Times' leader promising England's support to dual Alliance in event of war - I said we shd do our utmost to turn out

† Admiral His Serene Highness Prince Louis Alexander of Battenberg was born in Gratz, Austria, on 24th May, 1854, the eldest son of Prince Alexander of Hesse; and a grandson of Louis II, Grand Duke of Hesse-Darmstadt. He settled in Britain through the friendship of his mother, Countess Julia Theresa von Haucke, with Princess Alice, the daughter of Queen Victoria and consort of Prince Frederick of Hesse; he was naturalised a British subject prior to his entry into the Royal Navy in 1868. Due to his parents' marriage being morganatic Battenberg's title was Battenberg rather than 'Prince Louis of Hesse'.

¹⁸ 'A Terrible Danger', leading article, *The Manchester Guardian*, 27th July, 1914.

¹⁹ Flanagan, 'Europe and the Crisis', leading article, *The Times*, 27th July, 1914.

Govmt, whatever the cost, if they took such a course." ²⁰

Scott's comments betray not only that the Liberal Press had been left far behind by the shifting allegiance of the more vigorous representatives of the Unionist Press, but also, and rather more quixotically, that Scott found himself in a position whereby his pacific inclinations ran increasingly contrary to the direction in which events were impelling the Liberal Government.

The Unionist Press, not least in the august shape of *The Times*, was anxious to add its weight to that of events. *The Times* on Monday, 27th July, contained an article by Repington in which he sought to warn his readers that Austria-Hungary might well initiate military operations against Serbia at any moment, and moreover in such an event:

"Serbia's only hope is to keep the field sufficiently long to enable Russia, and possibly Rumania to intervene with effect." ²¹

The Daily Telegraph leader warned its readers that:

"the real pivot of the situation lies primarily in St. Petersburg, and only in a secondary degree in Berlin.....Great Britain is by no means necessarily involved in the present Balkan trouble, but circumstances might easily arise in which her sympathy with the two other partners of the Triple Entente might suggest the necessity of some kind of action." ²²

The Morning Post observed that:

"If the word 'mobilization' is pronounced in St. Petersburg, Berlin and Paris, it will have to be pronounced in London also." ²³

Whilst Repington offered a bleak appraisal of Serbia's likely fortunes in the absence of support from a major Power, the leading Liberal newspaper, *The Manchester Guardian* presented its readers with a survey of the positions adopted by the Press over the crisis in the Balkans:

"On the whole, English newspapers have avoided taking sides in the quarrel. All with, we think, only one exception † have recognized the extreme provocation that Austria has received, and her right to take the strongest measures to secure the punishment of all concerned in the assassination of the Crown Prince. All without exception agree that there are faults in the Austrian Note, and perhaps also in its substance. All again recognize that Russia has a mutual interest in the independence of Serbia." ²⁴

Whilst both *The Manchester Guardian* and *The Times* advocated that Britain adopt the rôle of mediator in the Balkan dispute, they differed markedly in the tone with which they advanced their respective cases; the former's advocacy was grounded in a belief that Britain's mediation should be that of a disinterested party, whilst *The Times* was consistent to its previously espoused line of advocating British mediation from a position of some strength; that is to say warn Austria-Hungary that the most likely outcome of any belligerence in the Balkans on her part would be a broadening of the conflict to include Russia, France and Great Britain arrayed against the Triple Alliance.

Unsurprisingly *The Manchester Guardian's* position was one which echoed one already

²⁰ Scott, diary entry, 27th July, 1914; University of Manchester, John Rylands Library, *The Manchester Guardian* Archives, C.P. Scott Papers, Box 133.

²¹ Repington, *The Times*, 27th July, 1914.

²² Leading article, *The Daily Telegraph*, 27th July, 1914.

²³ Colvin, leading article, *The Morning Post*, 27th July, 1914.

† *The Morning Post*.

²⁴ 'A Terrible Danger', leading article, *The Manchester Guardian*, 27th July, 1914.

found within the Cabinet itself; for Scott had met the un-official leader of the Cabinet's 'peace party', David Lloyd George, earlier that same day. In the course of their conversation Lloyd George had assured Scott that Britain would not intervene in any conflict arising out of the assassinations at Sarajevo; so reassured Scott recorded Lloyd George's opinion being that:

"As to the European situation there could be no question of our taking part in any war in the first instance. He knew of no Minister who wd be in favour of it and did not believe the 'Times' article represented the views even of the Foreign Office officials - But he admitted that a difficult question wd arise if the German fleet were attacking French towns on the other side of the Channel and the French sowed the Channel with mines".²⁵

Scott further noted that the Chancellor of the Exchequer:

"evidently contemplated our going a certain distance with France and Russia in putting diplomatic pressure on Austria - Then if war broke out we might make it easy for Italy to keep out by as it were pairing with her - This wd be a service to France by relieving her of one antagonist."²⁶

The equation of Great Britain to Italy is illustrative of the political desperation then abroad in both the Liberal Cabinet and Press.

So bolstered Scott printed a leading article the aim of which was apparently to persuade Grey that, despite the increasing frequency of the fulminations emanating from the Unionist Press, Britain had neither a need nor a duty to fly to France's aid in the event of war. For, the article opined:

"We have no...commitments. Not only are we neutral now, but we could and ought to remain neutral throughout the whole course of the war. It is strange that Sir Edward Grey should not have referred [in his statement to the House of Commons of the previous day] to the fact which is the chief source of our moral authority in Europe."²⁷

The article continued by stating that:

"We want peace in Europe, but we want England to be and remain at peace even more. We wish that all Englishmen would think and say the same."²⁸

It appears to have escaped the attention of *The Manchester Guardian* that Britain had *de facto* abandoned her previous policy of 'splendid isolation' upon joining the Triple Entente alliance system; and moreover had entered into something very closely approximating a military alliance with the opening of the 'Military Conversations' with France in the course of the period from 1904-05. Such a development had not escaped the attention of the Unionist Press, not least because, in the case of *The Times*, the newspaper employed as its Military Correspondent the man who had acted as an intermediary in those 'conversations'.

In chastising Grey for his omission *The Manchester Guardian* was seeking to establish in the minds of its readers that the sentiments expressed in the leader were shared by the mass of Englishmen; the opinions espoused by *The Times* being thereby dismissed as representative only of a minority, however vocal. This view was explicitly stated when, after critically quoting *The Times* leader of 27th July which called for Britain's intervention in the event of a continental war, *The Manchester Guardian* assailed the policy advocated by Printing House Square as being one which:

²⁵ C.P. Scott, diary entry, 27th July, 1914; University of Manchester, John Rylands Library, *The Manchester Guardian* Archives, C.P. Scott Papers, Box 133.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ 'England and the European Crisis', leading article, *The Manchester Guardian*, 28th July, 1914.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

"seems to mean that if Russia, Germany and France start fighting we must fight too. The whole future of England depends on the suppression of that spirit. It is war to the knife between it and Liberalism. Either it kills us or we kill it.....Why should Germany choose this, of all the times in the world, to test our adherence to what 'The Times' calls 'the principles of our friendship.' She already has Russia, and probably France, against her...[As for the] balance of power - the 'foul idol of our foreign policy', as Bright once called it, that has done incomparably more mischief than any worshipped by the heathen." ²⁹

No doubt such a call to arms for the pacifist wing of the Liberal Party was well-received by the newspapers readers; however its rather muddled logic can have done little to persuade others to advocate its cause.

If the Liberal Press remained opposed to Britain's entry into a Continental war one member of the Liberal Cabinet at the very least was in favour. For Asquith wrote to his mistress on Tuesday, 28th July:

"what you say a propos of the War cutting off one's head to get rid of a headache is very good. Winston on the other hand is all for this way of escape from Irish troubles, and when things looked rather better last night, he exclaimed moodily that it looked after all as if we were in for a "bloody peace"!

.....

We had a Cabinet yesterday after I wrote to you: mainly to talk about war & peace. I am afraid that Grey's experiment of a Conference a quatre won't come off, as the Germans refuse to take a hand. The only hope is that Austria & Russia may well come to a deal between themselves. But at the moment things don't look well, & Winston's spirits are probably rising." ³⁰

Unlike Venetia Stanley the Press did not receive regular intelligence from the Cabinet table. It therefore appeared that the views of *The Manchester Guardian* had been confirmed when the following day's *Times* contained a dispatch from Berlin in which the newspaper's correspondent, F.E. Mackenzie, reported that he:

"had reason to suppose that Germany has, with the necessary tact, made it plain enough that Germany would give at least as good advice in Vienna as France might give in St. Petersburg. Germany is certainly, and no doubt sincerely, working for peace." ³¹

Hence that night *The Times* remained hopeful that war could still be avoided. However the following evening brought with it an intimation that Germany had not only refused to take part in Grey's proposed plan of mediation; but she had also failed to prevent Vienna from declaring war upon Serbia and was herself poised to mobilize her troops - thereby transforming the Third Balkan War into the Great War. For on the night of Tuesday, 28th July, Mackenzie wired Printing House Square with the intelligence that:

"The Serbian reply, presumably in consequence of a definite Austrian request, was refused publication here yesterday and this morning. It is published to-night in a framework of hostile comment prepared by Vienna. I find that, as published in the 'German Imperial Gazette', the reply does not contain the most humiliating of Serbia's concessions - the publication as an Army Order of Serbia's confession of wrong-doing.....I am perfectly convinced that a simple publication of the Serbian answer yesterday would have created an immense sensation here, and even to-day the 'Post' - the most Chauvinistic of all the newspapers - says that Serbia has given way in all important points and that the

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Letter from Asquith to Venetia Stanley, 28th July, 1914; quoted in Michael & Eleanor Brock (*Eds.*), *op. cit.*

³¹ F.E. Mackenzie, *The Times*, 28th July, 1914.

Austrian comment is offensive, and only shows that Austria is determined to have war." ³²

The dispatch appeared in *The Times* on the morrow. With it appeared confirmation that Austria-Hungary had resolved upon a course of action designed to extirpate Serbia, and further that she had received Germany's approval before embarking upon such a course, thereby setting in train a series of events which would lead to a broadening of the conflict beyond the confines of the Balkans. For Serbia, confronted with the reality of the threat posed to her continued existence by the anticipated German-backed Austro-Hungarian military action, would inevitably turn to her fellow Slav Great Power, Russia - her support would thus proceed to draw France into the conflagration, thus completing the process of exporting the brutalities of a Balkan confrontation onto a wider European stage.

The reaction in Printing House Square to the impending conflict was to strive, once again, to spell out to the Triple Alliance Powers that any expansion of the conflict beyond the Balkans would in consequence invite Britain's entry on the Entente side; such a prospect it was believed might yet cause Berlin and Vienna to pause for thought. Hence *The Times* on 29th July printed two leading articles devoted to the deteriorating European situation. In the second of these leaders, the newspaper stated that:

"the Government and the people of England.....know what a European War would mean to the whole world. But they know, too, that the surest way to preserve that peace.....and perhaps the only way, is to make clear to all that if their friends are forced into such a war England for her part will support them to the full. We have no selfish interests to serve. We have no direct interests at all, except those of seeing elementary fair play in a quarrel between Vienna and Belgrade." ³³

Moreover, the article concluded by reminding its readers that Britain had been unencumbered by any direct interests in the controversy at Algeciras, and had none at all at Agadir, yet had been prepared to stand ready to support her friends:

"We did so because it is our settled interest and traditional policy to uphold the balance of power in Europe. It is for that object that we entered the Entente with France and her ally. To that Entente we shall remain faithful in the future, come what may." ³⁴

Such a peroration was calculated to trade on the impression abroad in both Berlin and Vienna that *The Times* was a 'mouthpiece' of the Foreign Office; to achieve its aim of dampening the belligerence of both the Ballhausplatz and the Wilhelmstrasse.

The isolationist Liberal Press, not unaware of the influence exerted by Printing House Square in foreign chancelleries, was violent in its adherence to a pacific policy; chief amongst these dissenting voices was *The Manchester Guardian*. For on Thursday, 30th July, Scott's newspaper responded to the advocates of British intervention by publicly reminding the Prime Minister, in impeccable Gladstonian sentiments, that:

"Englishmen are not the guardians of Serbian well-being or even of the peace of Europe. Their first duty is to England and to the peace of England. We ought to feel ourselves out of danger, for whichever way the quarrel between Austria and Servia went it would not make a scrap of difference in England. We care as little for Belgrade as Belgrade does for Manchester. But, though our neutrality ought to be assured, it is not". ³⁵

³² *Op. cit.*, 29th July, 1914.

³³ Flanagan, 'The Efforts for Peace', leading article, *The Times*, 29th July, 1914.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Leading article, *The Manchester Guardian*, 30th July, 1914.

The article continued by contrasting official reticence with un-official garrulity, the last instance referring to the series of leading articles advocating Britain's entry into any general conflict arising out of the Balkan *imbroglio*, especially those which appeared in *The Times*. For the *Manchester Guardian* leader denounced *The Times* as a newspaper:

"whose influence at great crises in our foreign affairs has almost always been for evil." ³⁶

The article concluded by setting before its readers the newspaper's case for Britain's continued neutrality:

"We have not seen a shred of reason for thinking that the triumph of Germany in a European war in which we had been neutral would injure a single British interest, however small, whereas the triumph of Russia would create a situation for us really formidable. Why then should not we be determined to remain neutral? And why should we not increase our influence in Europe and strengthen our position by saying so at the earliest possible moment? If Russia makes a general war out of a local war it will be a crime against Europe. If we, who might remain neutral, rush into the war or let our attitude remain doubtful, it will be both a crime and an act of supreme and gratuitous folly. Yet this is the crime to which 'The Times' clearly points, and unhappily 'The Times' is regarded in Europe as speaking with the voice of the British Foreign Office." ³⁷

This argument strikes one as being indicative of an editorial staff fully engaged in fighting the Crimean War rather than facing the prospect of Britain's involvement in a 'Great War'.

Whilst the semi-official journals in Germany continued to urge upon Austria-Hungary the necessity of undertaking punitive action against Belgrade, Mackenzie reported the curious incidence with which the ultra-Chauvinistic Press forcefully expressed their irritation and displeasure with Vienna. Such chagrin was generated by Vienna's prolonged contemplation of action against Serbia serving to embroil Berlin in an international crisis without prior consultation; and in having undertaken an adventure which might well serve to increase the influence, within the Dual Monarchy, of the Slavs at the expense of the Monarchy's German population. *The Times* leader opined that:

"some of the indignation was beside the mark". ³⁸

For if Austria-Hungary had previously failed to disclose her plans in detail to Berlin, it could scarcely be doubted now that:

"she revealed their general scope and got a blank cheque from Germany to fill in at her discretion. That Germany is now surprised and to some extent alarmed at the amount of the draft made upon her is perhaps the truest explanation of the apparent indecision of her present attitude." ³⁹

In the face of the apparent inevitability of war, Printing House Square one more returned to the policy which it had been pursuing implicitly since 10th July; and explicitly since Flanagan's leading article 'A Danger to Europe' appeared on 22nd July.

For the newspaper sought, even at this late hour, to elicit a statement of Britain's policy in the event of war from the Government; thereby convincing Germany that she was on the brink of becoming engaged in a two-front war that she could not hope to win. Hence on 30th July *The Times* printed a communication from Mackenzie to the effect that:

"Some very good judges are beginning to believe that the only remedy - and

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Flanagan, 'Lowering Clouds', leading article, *The Times*, 30th July, 1914.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

time is pressing - will be found in a hardening of the British attitude, or rather in a more definite statement of the attitude which Great Britain would adopt if the European alliances found their military expression." ⁴⁰

In the absence of such a statement from the Foreign Office, *The Times* took it upon itself to fill the breach. In response to a claim in the Austro-Hungarian press that the Imperial Government in Vienna had thought out the remotest possible consequences of a move against Serbia, *The Times* stated that:

"We believe no man can foretell them. But we do know what some of the immediate results of this intervention of another Great Power must be to Europe and to ourselves...this Government and this nation reserve for themselves, it need hardly be said, the most complete liberty of action in such an event. If France is menaced, or the safety of the Belgian frontier which we have guaranteed with her and Prussia by treaties that Mr. Gladstone's Government in 1870 confirmed, we shall know how to act. We can no more afford to see France crushed by Germany, or the balance of power upset against France, than Germany can afford to see Austria-Hungary crushed by Russia and that balance upset against Austrian and Hungarian interests." ⁴¹

Such a course of action remained anathema to the Liberal Press, though as events would prove, not ultimately to the Liberal Government. Furthermore the reference in the leader to Gladstone served to tweak the collective tail of those members of the Cabinet and the Press who, considering themselves to be the political heirs of the 'Grand Old Man', harboured deep suspicion of any and all foreign entanglements mitigated only where their concern was with aiding the oppressed. The same day elicited a measure of support from the remainder of the Unionist Press for the stance adopted by *The Times*. Thus *The Daily Telegraph* leader on 30th July pronounced in bellicose tones that:

"Great Britain, too, is waiting, perfectly prepared to discharge whatever her obligations to the Triple Entente may involve. To the Entente she intends, now and always, to remain faithful." ⁴²

On Friday, 31st July, as war clouds continued to gather across Europe, the French Ambassador to the Court of St. James, Paul Cambon, visited Unionist leaders bemoaning the lack of support which France was receiving from the British Government at this critical juncture:

"All our plans are arranged in common. Our General Staffs have consulted. You have seen all our schemes and preparations. Look at our Fleet! Our whole Fleet is in the Mediterranean in consequence of our arrangements with you and our coasts are open to the enemy. You have laid us open!" ⁴³

That very day *The Times* printed a special leading article in a conspicuous position on the leader page which sought to provide some degree of solace for the harried French ambassador; though unsigned, the article entitled 'Interests and Duty of Britain' was written by Steed, and analysed Britain's geographical, political and military position in Europe. After reminding his readers that during the South African War Britain had stood friendless in Europe, Steed stated that Britain had committed herself to the maintenance of the balance of power and the European alliance system as the mechanism to achieve that result when she signed her Entente with France in 1904, and her alliance with Russia three years later. Since that time Britain had enjoyed the advantages which the system had to offer; the time had now come to honour her commitments.

⁴⁰ Mackenzie, *The Times*, 30th July, 1914.

⁴¹ Flanagan, *op. cit.*

⁴² Leading article, *The Daily Telegraph*, 30th July, 1914.

⁴³ Paul Cambon, in conversation with Andrew Bonar Law, 31st July, 1914; quoted by Barbara W. Tuchman, *August 1914*, (Constable. 1963), p.101.

Steed continued his discourse by opining that Britain's vital interests, despite views to the contrary were indeed at stake in the forthcoming conflict. For Britain possessed an interest in preserving the balance of power in Europe - a policy which she had followed for centuries; and she also possessed a direct interest in maintaining the effective independence of both the Netherlands and Belgium. Such a policy would inevitably be threatened by any German offensive action aimed at France; for, as Steed pointed out, the fortification of the Franco-German border along the Vosges was so formidable as to render a German advance through neutral Belgium and into northern France a probability instead of a possibility. Such an offensive, if successful, might well result in Germany seizing control of the Channel ports of Antwerp, Flushing, and possibly also Dunkirk and Calais, thereby posing a direct threat to the maintenance of Britain's maritime economy. Steed baldly observed that:

"Our duty is plain. We must make instant preparations to back our friends if they are made the subject of unjust attack....The days of splendid isolation are no more. We cannot stand alone in a Europe dominated by any single power, or any single group of powers." ⁴⁴

The Daily Telegraph leader pronounced, in a markedly subdued, albeit resolute, conclusion that:

"Nevertheless, here, once again, comes in that constraining and imperative obligation to be true to our friendships, the final justification of which resides in the necessity of a balance of power, in order to keep a fretful Europe in awe. We detest the very idea of war. But we have made up our minds to shoulder our responsibilities.....There must be no change or shadow of turning in that resolve." ⁴⁵

The Manchester Guardian offered its readers a quite different reading of the strategic and diplomatic imperatives shaping Britain's policy; for the newspaper's leader plaintively consoled its readers that:

"We have, moreover, been specifically assured that there is no contract between us and France which impairs our freedom of action in the event of a war." ⁴⁶

The stance is indicative of the Liberal Press' simultaneous need for legalistic assurance and diplomatic evasion. For Steed, however, the necessity, for the continued well-being of both Britain and the British Empire, of Britain safeguarding navigation through the English Channel led one to state that:

"France does not threaten our security. A German victory over France could threaten it irremediably." ⁴⁷

Such a statement of policy flatly contradicted that expounded by *The Manchester Guardian* only the previous day.

It is clear that the rôle played by the Press during the 'July Days' was one not uninfluenced by politicians; indeed a number of prominent Unionist politicians sought to utilise the pressure being brought to bear by the Opposition Press so as to force the Government into honouring her commitment to the Entente Powers. Amongst those striving so to do was the Unionist backbencher Leo Amery, who noted in his diary on Friday, 31st July, that:

"Some time after dinner George Lloyd † rang me up to say that he felt that

⁴⁴ Henry Wickham Steed, 'Interests and Duties of Britain', *The Times*, 31st July, 1914.

⁴⁵ Leading article, *The Daily Telegraph*, 31st July, 1914.

⁴⁶ 'The Nation's Danger', leading article, *The Manchester Guardian*, 31st July, 1914.

⁴⁷ Steed, *op. cit.*, *The Times*, 31st July, 1914.

† George Lloyd, 1st Baron Lloyd (1879-1941), sat as a Conservative and Unionist member of the House of Commons from 1910-18, and 1924-25.

something more definite was required in the way of a statement by our Government as to where they stood. He came round for a talk and we both agreed strongly that it was essential that our leaders should voice even more definitely than they had done their readiness to support the Government in doing its duty by France. He had already written a letter to Austen [Chamberlain] and I wrote another, as well as one to Lord Milner. Subsequently I rang up Henry Wilson and heard from him that the Government was absolutely rotten and in favour of betrayal all along the line. I got on the telephone to Gwynne to urge him to write as strongly as he could, while Lloyd went off to see Robin[son]."⁴⁸

Gwynne's response was twofold, and as such encapsulates the diverse manner of Press influence during the course of the Great War. For the following day's issue of *The Morning Post* contained a leading article on the subject which conformed to Amery's wishes, whilst Gwynne himself composed a private letter to Tyrrell, in which he exhorted the Foreign Office to publicly state Britain's intended course of action in the event of the outbreak of a general European conflagration.

Whilst the Cabinet continued its languorous drift, the Unionist Press sought solace in action. Thus the chief leader writer of *The Morning Post*, Ian Colvin, wrote in a leader calculated to aggravate the Liberal Press that:

"this country must stand by France, which means, in the existing situation, standing by Russia also."⁴⁹

The article appeared on 1st August, a date which was by coincidence a Bank Holiday Saturday. It appeared that the Unionist Press was to be disappointed by the spectre of a British Government reneging on its commitments, tacit or otherwise. Such a stance, though criticised from Unionist quarters, would have been rapturously received by the Liberal Press. Indeed such was the distaste with which the Liberal Press viewed Britain's possible involvement in a continental conflict that the naval precautions implemented by the energetic First Lord came to illustrate the degree to which the Press was divided upon partisan lines. Thus the Unionist Press, in the guise of Sir Arthur Pearson's *Daily Express*, had on 31st July called upon the Cabinet to publicly announce that:

"an invasion of Belgium or France would mean the instant blockade of the North Sea ports and the closing of the Baltic".⁵⁰

The attitude of the Liberal Press was sharply delineated from that of the Unionist; thus the isolationist voice of the Liberal Press found expression through the pages of Massingham's weekly Radical-Liberal journal *The Nation*. The Quaker-owned newspaper was thus in-step with the remainder of the Liberal Press in its criticism of the Admiralty's placing the Navy on a war footing as:

"needless, dangerous and ill-advised."⁵¹

The Nation leader further stated that:

"after the submissive and correct answer of Serbia, no case whatever for war exists.....Each Power is watching the other's preparations for mobilization.... Under the sense of secrecy, all the Powers are taking precautionary measures towards mobilization. It is stupefying to learn that this country is no exception to the rule. These preparations can but add to the general unrest, and convey to our

⁴⁸ Amery, diary entry, 31st July, 1914; quoted in John Barnes & David Nicholson (Eds.), *The Leo Amery Diaries*, Volume I: 1896-1929, (Hutchinson, 1980), p.103.

⁴⁹ Ian Colvin, 'The Need for Guidance', leading article, *The Morning Post*, 1st August, 1914.

⁵⁰ *Daily Express*, 31st July, 1914.

⁵¹ *The Nation*, 1st August, 1914.

friends of the Triple Entente the suggestion of actual support, which no British Government dare give. Our rôle is that of mediator." ⁵²

The opinion of *The Nation*, if not shared by the nation, was at least shared by the Cabinet at its meeting on Saturday, 1st August.

That evening, wearied by a prolonged, though ultimately indecisive, Cabinet Asquith wrote to Venetia Stanley:

"We had a Cabinet wh. Lasted from 11 to ½ 1. It is no exaggeration to say that Winston occupied at least half of the time. We came, every now & again, near to the parting of the ways: Morley & I think the Impeccable † are on what may be called the 'Manchester Guardian' tack - that we shd. Declare now & at once that in no circumstances will we take a hand. This no doubt is the view for the moment of the bulk of the party. Ll. George - all for peace - is more sensible & statesmanlike, for keeping the position still open. Grey, of course, declares that if an out & out uncompromising policy of non-intervention at all costs is adopted, he will go. Winston very bellicose & demanding immediate mobilisation. Haldane diffuse.....and nebulous. The main controversy pivots upon Belgium & its neutrality. We parted in a fairly amicable mood, & are to sit again at 11 to-morrow (Sunday) an almost unprecedented event." ⁵³

The Cabinet's mood in favour of non-intervention was one which mirrored that of the Liberal Press; as exemplified by *The Manchester Guardian*. Whilst that newspaper was notable in its call for the Government to issue an immediate pledge of non-intervention in any and all circumstances, the leading London Liberal dailies, *The Daily Chronicle* and the *Daily News*, were both quite as opposed to British intervention as their northern cousin. However where the two metropolitan newspapers differed from their Lancastrian counterpart was in their retaining some degree of caution with regard to the question of Belgian neutrality.

It is one of the ironies of the situation that whilst the leading Liberal newspapers criticised the Government for undertaking intemperate action, their Unionist counterparts should choose to castigate the Government for its inaction. Notable amongst the latter grouping was the Northcliffe Press; Northcliffe's temper had been severely tested by the spectacle of Government inertia. The result was an editorial meeting at Printing House Square at 4:00 p.m. Present were Northcliffe, Robinson, Steed, and Thomas Marlowe, the editor of the *Daily Mail*. The meeting's purpose was to allow Northcliffe to pass on to both Robinson and Marlowe the intelligence that the Government were preparing to retreat into neutrality. Intelligence had been carried from Amery to Northcliffe and Steed at Printing House Square by Lloyd at midnight on Thursday, 30th July, of a Cabinet divided and poised to renounce Britain's commitments to France; such tidings were lent weight for their recipients through their having originated with the 'Khaki Eminence', Henry Wilson.

The fruit of the conference was to be read in the 'Extraordinary' edition of *The Times* which appeared the following day. The edition contained a 'Special' article by Steed, entitled 'Britain's Part in the Crisis', in which he restated the arguments in favour of British intervention which had, upon their previous appearance, so angered the pacific *Manchester Guardian*. On this occasion Steed wrote that the crisis was:

"not a question of Serbia, nor of Russia. It is a question of isolating England in order that when isolated she may be compelled to submit to German dictation." ⁵⁴

That *The Times* was not the only newspaper chosen by disgruntled Unionists as their medium to stiffen the sinew of an apparently invertebrate Cabinet is scarcely surprising; however the decision not to rely upon Printing House Square could well have been influenced in part by the manner in which the newspaper was edited; for Robinson was, by both background and inclination, an

⁵² *Ibid.*

† Sir John Simon, the Attorney-General.

⁵³ Letter from Asquith to Venetia Stanley, 1st August, 1914; quoted in Michael & Eleanor Brock (*Eds.*), *op. cit.*, p.140.

⁵⁴ Steed, 'Britain's Part in the Crisis', leading article, *The Times* (Extraordinary edition), 2nd August, 1914.

advocate of Imperial ties rather than of alliance in Europe, was by personality chary of overt partisanship and knew little of the European scene. In consequence the policy of *The Times* during the 'July Days' rather devolved upon Steed, this division necessarily 'blurred' the editorial stance of the newspaper at a time when the Government was particularly vulnerable. Hence Robinson's admission that:

"We have made as little as possible in 'The Times' of a condition of affairs approaching to panic which prevailed in London yesterday." ⁵⁵

It is difficult to imagine either Gwynne or Leo Maxse proving so charitable. In contrast to the critical stance occupied by printing House Square *The Daily Telegraph's* leader was surprisingly supportive of the Government:

"that we may be compelled, for reasons that no patriot could question, to take part in it is quite clear.....Both the Admiralty and the War Office are prepared, down to the last detail, for instant and decisive action so soon as the Cabinet should decree it.....Thus the matter stands. At any hour the decision may be precipitated. Meanwhile, Great Britain maintains her poise, moved as yet by no animosity and no reckless impulse, but fully prepared to strike if she must." ⁵⁶

The degree to which the Cabinet was crippled by indecision became apparent at its meeting on Saturday, 1st August; Churchill's request that the Cabinet authorise him to mobilise the Fleet - an authority which he had done very well without - was refused. Likewise Grey's request for the Cabinet to delegate authority to him so that he might implement the previously entered into agreements with the French Navy was greeted with a dismay that culminated in several threatened resignations. Those proposing such a course of action were drawn from the Gladstonian-Isolationist wing of the Liberal Party whose beliefs found expression in the pages of *The Manchester Guardian*, and included Lord Morley, the 'Grand Old Man's' biographer; John Burns, the Trades Union leader; Sir John Simon, the Attorney-General; and the Colonial Secretary, 'Lulu' Harcourt. Thus it was that twelve of the eighteen members of the Cabinet pledged themselves opposed to providing France with any assurance of British support in the event of war, thereby abrogating Britain's obligations under the Entente system.

The prospect of the break-up of both his Cabinet and his Party upon the rock of Britain's commitment to a European war did little to impel Asquith to act decisively. Thus Grey was obliged to inform Cambon that:

"France must take her own decision at this moment without reckoning on an assistance we are not now in a position to give." ⁵⁷

It is therefore hardly startling that Cambon allowed his anger to break through his diplomatic façade. Thus, following his brief interview with Grey, he sought refuge in the room of his old friend the Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office, Sir Arthur Nicolson, and gave vent to his feelings:

"Ils vont nous lacher!" ⁵⁸

In a rather more sardonic vein, in reply to Robinson's enquiry as to his intentions, Cambon informed the editor of *The Times* that:

"I am going to wait to learn if the word 'honour' should be erased from the

⁵⁵ Letter from Robinson to Maurice Headlam, 1st August, 1914; quoted by J.E. Wrench, *op. cit.*, p.104.

⁵⁶ Leading article, *The Daily Telegraph*, 1st August, 1914.

⁵⁷ Sir Edward Grey, in conversation with Paul Cambon, 1st August, 1914; quoted by Barbara W. Tuchman, *op. cit.*, p.101.

⁵⁸ Paul Cambon, ["They are going to desert us!"], in conversation with Sir Arthur Nicolson, 1st August, 1914; quoted *op. cit.*, p.102.

English dictionary." ⁵⁹

On the pivotal day of Saturday, 1st August, Lloyd once more took up his rôle of conduit; for on that day he visited both the French and Russian Ambassadors, Cambon and Count Aleksandr Benckendorff respectively. Cambon informed Lloyd that:

"the French regarded themselves as completely betrayed and were in an awful state of mind. They delayed their mobilization at our insistence and Cambon said quite straight to Lloyd that if we stood out and the French won they would gladly do everything to crush us afterwards, whereas if they lost we should naturally follow suit.....it would be worse for us even than Napoleon was." ⁶⁰

Informed by Lloyd of the French stance at a luncheon, also attended by Maxse, Amery's response was not only to inform the Unionist leadership, but also to telephone the editor of *The Observer*, J.L. Garvin, enjoining:

"him to write all he could in 'The Observer' to stiffen things". ⁶¹

Things, especially the Cabinet, needed stiffening. Symptomatic of the Government's indecision was the metamorphosis of opinion - noted at the time by the Postmaster General, Charles Hobhouse - on the part of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, David Lloyd George.

Lloyd George, who had so famously burnished his teutonophobe credentials during the Moroccan Crisis of 1911, was prominent during the 'July Days' not through his belligerence, but rather through his conciliatory stance. The stance was characteristically occasioned by a recognition that:

"the Liberal papers were very anti-war [thus] he veered round and became peaceful." ⁶²

Lloyd George's position remained pivotal to Asquith's calculations. Whilst the strong isolationist element in the Cabinet was led by Lord Morley, the principal threat to the maintenance of unity in both the Cabinet and the Party at large was that posed by the threat of the Chancellor's resignation. It was therefore notable that the editor of *The British Weekly* journal, W. Robertson Nicoll, a man close to the Chancellor; should insisted in a leading article, which appeared in the newspaper on 30th July, that:

"the quarrel in no way concerns us and we are fortunately unbound by any engagements that would require us to intervene". ⁶³

The situation was rendered more precarious by Lloyd George's recent decline in popularity within the ranks of the Liberal Party. With his position as the heir apparent to Asquith increasingly threatened by his former protégé, Churchill, the present crisis offered Lloyd George a splendid opportunity to position himself against the First Lord's energetic bellicosity and thus re-install himself as the darling of the party's Radical-Gladstonian wing, the same section which his belligerent rhetoric at the Mansion House in 1911 had served to alienate.

In the Liberal Press however, the policy of non-intervention necessitated widespread and severe criticism of those organs of the Press, amongst which *The Times* was prominent, which had consistently argued that Britain could no longer hold herself aloof from the events on the continent. Hence a leader in *The Manchester Guardian* informed its readers, on Saturday, 1st August, that:

⁵⁹ Paul Cambon, in conversation with Robinson, 1st August, 1914; quoted *op. cit.*

⁶⁰ Paul Cambon, attributed to by Amery, diary entry, 1st August, 1914; quoted in J. Barnes & D. Nicholson (*Eds.*), *op. cit.*, p.103.

⁶¹ Amery, diary entry, 1st August, 1914; quoted in J. Barnes & D. Nicholson (*Eds.*), *op. cit.*, p.104.

⁶² Charles Hobhouse, diary entry, August [n.d.], 1914; quoted in Edward David, *op. cit.*, p.179.

⁶³ W. Robertson Nicoll, leading article, *The British Weekly*, 30th July, 1914.

"There is in our midst an organised conspiracy to drag us into the war should the attempts of the peacemakers fail." ⁶⁴

It was quite clear to whom the article was referring. The *Daily News* also sought to denounce the rôle of *The Times*, in a leading article, written by the newspaper's editor, A.G. Gardiner, which appeared on the same day. In the piece, entitled 'Why We Must Not Fight', Gardiner railed against the Unionist Press in forthright vein:

"They talk of our 'obligations to our friends'. We have no obligations except the obligation to preserve this country from any share in the crime that threatens to overwhelm Europe.....If we crush Germany in the dust and make Russia the dictator of Europe and Asia, it will be the greatest disaster that has ever befallen Western culture and civilization....Let us announce our neutrality to the world. It is our only hope." ⁶⁵

Gardiner was joined in his pacific call to arms by the Chief Leader Writer of *The Daily Chronicle*, Robert Ensor, who attacked the Unionist Press for seeking to exhort a commitment to the Entente from Grey:

"Nothing could be worse than such an attempt to usurp his [Grey's] functions as was made yesterday and the day before by 'The Times' in articles as ill-calculated to assist the peacemakers as any could be. Everybody with knowledge has been aware for a week that the chances of averting war rested mainly on counsels of discussion addressed by Berlin to Vienna and by London to St. Petersburg. How could the latter be otherwise than most seriously hampered by the fervid declarations of 'The Times' that Great Britain could not help fighting for the Entente in the case of war? Such passages were certain to be telegraphed to Russia where people could not be expected to realize, as we do, how completely 'The Times' has ceased to draw inspiration from, or to reflect the Foreign Office, as it unquestionably did some years ago." ⁶⁶

Such a passage is precisely illustrative of the differing priorities of the Liberal and Unionist Presses. Whereas the former sought to promote mediation, and in consequence feared the effect of the latter upon Russia's stance; the latter strove to avoid war by promoting a statement of Britain's commitment to the Entente, thereby effecting the policy of the Wilhelmstrasse. In both cases there existed a clear acknowledgement of the influence wielded by the Press; and more over a recognition that that influence was one which was exercised not only upon the policy of the British Government, but also upon that of foreign powers.

The criticism of *The Times* in the pages of the Liberal Press continued apace, though in a slightly different garb. For the letters page of the doyen of the Liberal isolationist Press, *The Manchester Guardian*, was littered with letters from the newspaper's readers outraged at the editorial policy of *The Times*. Thus H.W. Nevinson continued in a similar vein by congratulating Scott on his pacific editorial stance:

"More clearly than anyone you have exposed the abominations into which 'The Times' and its attendant satellites are attempting to drag us." ⁶⁷

A Liberal backbencher, C.T. Needham, added his voice to the barrage of criticism aimed at Printing House Square by complaining that:

"...'The Times' lays down the dangerous theory that if France is involved we

⁶⁴ 'England's Duty', leading article, *The Manchester Guardian*, 1st August, 1914.

⁶⁵ 'Why We Must Not Fight', leading article by A.G. Gardiner, *Daily News*, 1st August, 1914.

⁶⁶ 'What will be the British attitude?', leading article by Robert Ensor, *The Daily Chronicle*, 1st August, 1914.

⁶⁷ H.W. Nevinson, *op. cit.*

must go to her defence because our honour and self-preservation are at stake." ⁶⁸

The Daily Chronicle's leading article in the 'Special' edition, of Sunday, 2nd August, shared the view of the communicative readers of *The Manchester Guardian* that Austria-Hungary had good reason to press for compensation from Serbia, and that any conflict arising out of the Balkan *imbroglio* was no concern of Britain's. Thus the leader, pessimistically entitled 'The Coming Armageddon', stated that:

"There can be no question of our sending troops to the Continent, even if the half-dozen divisions we have for sending anywhere would make any difference in a war of six million combatants.....The events of the week have illustrated the difficulty of deciding in a great war who is the aggressor." ⁶⁹

The ambivalent tone of the article is characteristic of the editorial stance adopted throughout the Liberal Press; the reluctance with which the Liberal Press confronted the prospect of impending conflagration, and Britain's rôle within it, formed a lacuna in the centre of Liberal editorial policy. The time devoted to the filling of this void further served to divert the attention of the Liberal Press during the early months of the conflict; during which time it lost further ground, prestige and political influence to the Opposition Press.

Whilst the Liberal Press engaged in futile soul-searching, the Unionist Press continued to urge upon the Government the necessity of standing by Britain's alliance obligations to both France and Russia. The uncompromising stance adopted by the Unionist Press was increasingly supported by intelligence from the continent. For at 5:15 p.m. on the afternoon of Saturday, 1st August, Germany ordered the mobilisation of her forces - the Liberal Press was left in the wilderness, raging against the fates. It had been the belief of *The Times'* editorial staff since the night of Thursday, 30th July, that, despite its previous undertakings to France, the Cabinet was positioning itself to declare Britain neutral in the conflict; moreover this belief had hardened into something approaching a conviction since the afternoon of Saturday, 1st August. Such a jaundiced view of the Government was fully justified by its inability to grasp the responsibilities towards France which Britain had undertaken with the creation of the Entente; thus Grey was moved to warn the Cabinet that whilst Britain might not be bound to France in strict legal terms:

"We have led France to rely upon us and unless we support her in her agony I cannot continue at the Foreign Office." ⁷⁰

An observation which elicited the plea from Harcourt to Lloyd George:

"Speak for us. Grey wishes to go to war without the violation of Belgium." ⁷¹

On the morning of Monday, 3rd August, a whole raft of leading articles appeared throughout the Liberal Press advocating Britain's continued neutrality. *The Manchester Guardian* leader stated that:

"SATURDAY and Sunday were the fateful days of a century. On Saturday Germany declared war on Russia. Early the next morning her troops invaded Luxemburg, and in the course of the day they are alleged to have crossed the French frontier at two points not specified. The war party in England will use these facts to work up feelings against Germany as the aggressor and violator of international law; but sober Englishmen, while grieving that Germany should have thought fit to take this frightful responsibility, will not let German military

⁶⁸ C.T. Needham, *op. cit.*

⁶⁹ 'The Coming Armageddon', leading article, *The Daily Chronicle*, 2nd August, 1914.

⁷⁰ Grey, attributed to by Masterman, 2nd August, 1914; quoted by Riddell, *Lord Riddell's War Diary 1914-1918*, (Ivor Nicholson and Watson. 1933), p.6.

⁷¹ Note from Lewis Harcourt to Lloyd George, 2nd August, 1914; H.L.R.O., Beaverbrook Library, Lloyd George Papers, C/13.

opinion of what is best for Germany effect their own judgement of what is best for England." ⁷²

The Daily Chronicle attacked the notion that the violation of Belgian neutrality was in of itself a *casus belli*:

"The Belgian question 'standing by itself' would not necessarily overcome the argument for peace." ⁷³

Whilst the *Daily News* plaintively stated that:

"We are under no obligation to defend against all and sundry the neutrality of Belgium by force of arms, and if there is a political case for doing so it has not yet been presented, nor do we believe it can be made out." ⁷⁴

However such expressions of Liberal distaste for continental entanglements were easily discounted. Thus at 3 o'clock that afternoon Grey rose to address a packed House of Commons, informing the House for the first time of the existence of the Anglo-French military conversations whilst stressing that Britain was not bound by any secret alliance. Grey continued by informing the House of Britain's naval agreement with France, and stated, in words which were the echo of those uttered by Cambon and written by several Unionist journalists, that:

"if the German Fleet came down the Channel and bombarded and battered the undefended coasts of France, we could not stand aside and see this going on practically within sight of our eyes, with our arms folded, looking on dispassionately, doing nothing!" ⁷⁵

The Opposition benches responded with cheers, the Treasury benches remained uncomfortably silent. The Foreign Secretary concluded by informing the House that:

"even if we stand aside, we should [not] be able to undo what had happened, in the course of the war, to prevent the whole of the West of Europe opposite us from falling under the domination of a single power.....and we should, I believe, sacrifice our respect and good name and reputation before the world and should not escape the most serious and grave economic consequences." ⁷⁶

Britain was, at last, committed to stand alongside France.

Writing of Grey's statement, Robinson pronouncing himself:

"well satisfied with Grey's speech of which I listened to every word this afternoon. Considering everything it was a great performance, and one which I hardly expected yesterday afternoon." ⁷⁷

He further observed that:

"Saturday was a black day for everyone who knew what was going on - more than half the Cabinet rotten and every prospect of a complete schism or a disastrous and dishonouring refusal to help France. The tide only turned yesterday

⁷² 'On the Brink', leading article, *The Manchester Guardian*, 3rd August, 1914.

⁷³ Leading article, *The Daily Chronicle*, 3rd August, 1914.

⁷⁴ Leading article, *Daily News*, 3rd August, 1914.

⁷⁵ Sir Edward Grey, House of Commons, 3rd August, 1914; *op. cit.*

⁷⁶ *Op. cit.*

⁷⁷ Letter from Robinson to his Aunts, Margaret Dawson and Kitty Perfect, 3rd August, 1914; quoted by J.E. Wrench, *op. cit.*, p.105.

afternoon, when Grey took the bull by the horns and committed us, and the evening Cabinet (fortified by the news from the Continent) brought over most of the wobblers. One or two will still go, I think, but all that will do no harm." ⁷⁸

Robinson concluded that there could no longer be any:

"doubt now that we're all in it up to our neck." ⁷⁹

The editorial staff of *The Manchester Guardian*, together with the remainder of the Liberal Press begged to differ; on Monday, 3rd August, the newspaper opined that:

"The position of this country is one of neutrality not only between contending nations, but between contending nations, but between contending principles; in the position of neutrality alone we can maintain that balance the preservation of which I believe to be essential to the peace and safety of the world". ⁸⁰

The newspaper further sought to expose:

"the baits with which it is sought to entrap simple people with acquiescence in the plot to drag England into the war. But there is one that cannot be passed over, the cynicism is too shameless. We mean the patience that it would be to the good of European morals that we should ourselves thrust in. It is actually said by 'The Times' that Russia "will fight on the side of European moral" and that the cause of "civilized relations between peoples" and even - crowning effort of the cant - the cause of the "peace of the world" would gain by our backing her." ⁸¹

Philip Morell spoke for a number of Liberals anxious to evade the ineluctable when he told the House of Commons on 3rd August that:

"If Germany threatened to annex Belgium, or to occupy Belgium.....we might be bound under our Treaty obligations to go to war to protect Belgium. But...what is it we are being asked to do? We are asked to go to war because there may be a few German regiments in a corner of Belgian territory." ⁸²

The Liberal perception of neutrality appeared to open to a very liberal interpretation; one would have thought that neutrality, like pregnancy, was one of life's absolutes. Nevertheless Massingham loftily dismissed the experience of several centuries of British foreign policy by loftily stating that:

"Any grave changes in the European equilibrium could be averted with the help of the Fleet." ⁸³

A contention which would have caused the most ardent disciple of Mahan pause. The retreat upon the notion of Britain's involvement in the conflict being restricted to the Fleet was one which unsurprisingly aroused a good deal of support in the editorial offices of the Liberal Press; moreover, it was a stance to which the Liberal Press obstinately clung even after the reluctant Cabinet had been forced to relinquish its inherent comforts.

Thus it was in keeping with a strand of Liberal thought, both within and without

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Op. cit.*, p.106.

⁸⁰ George Canning, quoted in 'On the Brink', leading article, *The Manchester Guardian*, 3rd August, 1914.

⁸¹ 'A Shameless Argument', leading article, *The Manchester Guardian*, 3rd August, 1914.

⁸² Philip Morell, speech in the House of Commons, 3rd August, 1914; quoted in *Hansard*, Parliamentary Debates (Commons), *op. cit.*, Column 1835.

⁸³ Massingham, letter to the editor, *The Manchester Guardian*, *op. cit.*

Westminster, that on 3rd August the Liberal newspaper closest to the Cabinet, *The Westminster Gazette*, and the most popular Liberal daily, *The Daily Chronicle*, continued to advocate that Britain restrict her intervention in the war to a display of her naval might; thus the former opined:

"We cannot throw this army into the seething cauldron of the European struggle." ⁸⁴

The reluctance to deploy the six divisions of the B.E.F. to the continent was shared in the highest échelons of power; thus Asquith wrote a letter to his mistress, Venetia Stanley, on Sunday, 2nd August, in which he stated his view that:

The dispatch of the Expeditionary force to help France at this moment is out of the question & wd. serve no object." ⁸⁵

Only with the German violation of Belgium neutrality did the Cabinet, and even more reluctantly the Liberal Press, reluctantly embrace the prospect of war; only the spectre of 'plucky little Belgium' prostrate beneath the 'Hunnish boot' could obscure the unpalatable fact that Britain had engaged herself in a conflict allied to the Left's traditional enemy, the oppressor of liberty and 'the prison of nations', Tsarist Russia.

Yet the Liberal Press, together with Asquith, continued to indulge their Liberal pretensions by advocating that Britain engage in semi-hostilities, restricting herself to the deployment of the Fleet; a stance which was to linger. As Lloyd George, the erstwhile leader of the 'Peace Party' within the Cabinet, confided to Scott:

"Up to last Sunday only two members of the Cabinet had been in favour of our intervention in the War, but the violation of Belgian territory had completely altered the situation." ⁸⁶

Despite Lloyd George's protestations the Cabinet remained reluctant to engage fully in hostilities; a reluctance which proved to be particularly galling for Wilson, who had built his career upon Britain acting in conjunction with France in the event of war. As Amery noted on Monday, 4th August, the Government was:

"determined at all hazards not to send the Expeditionary Force. Wilson particularly worried because unless the mobilization order sent out that afternoon added the words 'and embark' to mobilise the moving of the Territorials to their various stations would delay the mobilisation of the Regulars by something like four days." ⁸⁷

The response of Amery and Wilson to the Government's 'half-cocked' mobilisation was to mobilise the Unionist leaders both Parliament and the Press to strive to coerce Asquith into acting with dispatch:

"Lovat † went off to Bonar Law, while Wilson and I went to Milner and explained the situation to him. Wilson went on [to] the War Office while I rang up Austen and as soon as Milner had explained the situation to him they both went on to Lansdowne leaving word for Bonar and Lovat to follow.....

[Later] Lovat came into the Lobby and told me he had seen Cambon who very strenuously denied the rumour which was being busily put round in

⁸⁴ Leading article, *The Westminster Gazette*, 3rd August, 1914.

⁸⁵ Letter from Asquith to Venetia Stanley, 2nd August, 1914; quoted in Michael & Eleanor Brock (*Eds.*), *op. cit.*, p.146.

⁸⁶ David Lloyd George, attributed to by Scott, diary entry, 3rd August, 1914; University of Manchester, John Rylands Library, *The Manchester Guardian Archives*, C.P. Scott Papers, Box 133.

⁸⁷ Amery, diary entry, 4th August, 1914; quoted in J. Barnes & D. Nicholson (*Eds.*), *op. cit.*, p.107.

† Lovat Fraser, Special Correspondent and Chief Leader Writer of *The Times*.

Government circles that the French did not require the Expeditionary Force. On the contrary Cambon said it represented something like 33% of their actual fighting strength in the field where the armies would meet. Everything had been arranged for it and to do without it would upset their mobilisation and be an immense handicap.....

[In response] I stirred up several Liberals and then went down to the 'Times' office and did the same by Robinson." ⁸⁸

In the latter case he was undoubtedly successful. *The Times*, in common with the remainder of the Unionist Press, was not backward in coming forward to urge upon Asquith the necessity of prosecuting the war with the utmost vigour.

⁸⁸ *Op. cit.*, pp.107-08.

STIFFENING THE SINEWS.

The House of Commons elected in December 1910 was ill-composed for directing and prosecuting a 'Great War'; the Liberal Cabinet, and Asquith in particular, were hobbled by their need to combine the prosecution of the war with observance of Liberal tenets. The moral aspect of the conflict remained a debilitating influence upon the limited vitality of the Asquith Ministry; for the Liberal Party, both in Parliament and in print, the necessity to promote the war's 'moral' aspect fed into the necessity to prosecute the war by Liberal means. The unsuitability of Liberal methods of governance for the martial maelstrom is nowhere more apparent than in Asquith's direction of the Cabinet; for throughout his premiership he presided over the Cabinet as an arbitrator. Such a method of leadership was in essence passive, and as such was to prevent Asquith from prosecuting the war with the requisite vigour.

Following Britain's entry into the war Asquith's reticence towards the Press was writ large in the Government's treatment of War Correspondents and the Press in general; however the partisan manner in which the restrictions were applied led to the widespread belief that the introduction of censorship was motivated less by the need for operational security than of political security. Thus Northcliffe later opined that:

"treatment has been meted out with particular severity to newspapers that took a prominent line in the anti-Home Rule agitation." ¹

The Government further alienated the Unionist Press with a series of ill-considered decisions on the part of the Press Bureau which culminated in the suppression of *The Times* dispatch from Mons; the predominant attitude was that:

"The country was in danger; and the country being in danger it was not going to allow a free press." ²

War placed the War Office centre-stage; *The Times* opening its wartime account by taking an active part in the search for a new War Secretary. With Haldane's reinstatement frustrated by Unionist opposition, Kitchener's appointment was facilitated by the campaign of press agitation waged by the very organization which had first brought his name to the attention of the public - the Northcliffe Press. At the beginning of August Kitchener had been on the point of returning to his duties as 'Sirdar' in Cairo; only the French mobilisation and the resultant lack of rail transport served to detain him on the English side of the Channel. Thus Kitchener was still present in Britain when Repington wrote a piece in *The Times* in which he proposed Kitchener for the War Office. Repington later wrote that:

"on Aug. 3, with the approval of the editor of the 'Times', Mr. Geoffrey Robinson, I made the first proposal in the Press that Lord Kitchener, who was at home on leave from Egypt, should be appointed War Minister. This proposal was warmly taken up all over the country and soon bore fruit. Lord K. sent Sir Henry Rawlinson † to see me and find out what political game was behind my suggestion. I told him that I knew of none, and that I had made the suggestion in the public interest without any prompting from anybody." ³

The article's impact was bolstered by Northcliffe's order that *The Times* launch an attack upon the

¹ Letter from Northcliffe to Bonar Law, 4th February, 1915; H.L.R.O., Beaverbrook Library, Bonar Law Papers, L/36/3/11.

² Harold Spender, *Fire of Life*; quoted by Stephen Koss, *The Rise of the Political Press in Britain*, Volume II: *The Twentieth Century*, (Hamish Hamilton. 1984), p.242.

† Major-General Sir Henry Rawlinson was a protégé of Kitchener; having served with him in both the Sudan and South Africa.

³ Repington, *The First World War, 1914-1918*, (Constable & Co. 1920), Volume I, p.20.

'Teutonophile' Haldane, an attack which was linked to an article extolling Kitchener's credentials for the post.

Asquith's policy was thus influenced by a campaign of Press agitation, though in this instance the success was soon to be tainted by a realisation that the idol possessed an abundance of flaws. Nevertheless the Government was soon influenced by Repington's article in a number of ways, the more 'discreet' of which operated through Churchill, who had had the article brought to his attention by Balfour, who in turn had been informed of the piece by Amery, an embodiment of the nexus between the Unionist leadership and Press. Spurred by Repington's published suggestion, Churchill forwarded Kitchener's name to Asquith on the same morning that the article appeared in *The Times*; Churchill observed that:

"I could see from Mr Asquith's reception of my remarks that his mind was moving, or had already moved, along the same path." ⁴

The efficacy of Kitchener's appointment was soon the subject of some doubt in Unionist circles; in his journal, on 12th August, Esher noted Kitchener's ignorance of modern European warfare:

"Our military arrangements are thrown into confusion owing to our Secretary of State's inexperience of our organisation at home. If he persists in raising this new army, I am afraid he will destroy the morale of the Territorial Force. His new army should be raised behind, and not in front of the Territorials." ⁵

Esher expanded upon the subject of his doubts over Kitchener's *modus operandi* at the War Office, on 25th August, noting that:

"Lord K. is hampered by the weakness of the War Office. With a few exceptions all the most capable officers, and those who have had experience of the working of our military machine, are in France. Lord K. is navigating the ship with an inexperienced crew. His staff is green, and the knowledge of this strengthens in him the already strong inclination to try and do everything himself. He arrives early and leaves late. He leaves no latitude or responsibility to his subordinates. Either the physical strain will prove too much for him, or our organisation will suffer. Either he or it will break down." ⁶

Recognition that Kitchener's disinclination towards operating within a staff environment militated against his effectiveness was to become increasingly widespread amongst Whitehall and the Unionist Press; curiously the Liberal Press appears to have latched upon Kitchener to lead them through the darkness of the war.

The immediate actions of the Unionist Press appeared designed to ensure to keep the Government up to the mark; however the methods which each newspaper applied to achieve that end differed markedly. Thus Robinson and Marlowe of *The Times*, and 'Harry' Lawson of *The Daily Telegraph* inclined towards moderation; Robinson went so far as to state that:

"an article in 'The Times' runs the risk of achieving rather more than it intended." ⁷

Whilst more strident opposition was offered by: Steed and Repington of *The Times*; Ralph Blumenfeld, of the *Daily Express*; Marlowe, of the *Daily Mail*; Gwynne and Palmer, of *The Globe*; and the editor of *The National Review*, Leo Maxse. On the other extreme Garvin, the

⁴ Churchill, quoted by Michael & Eleanor Brock (Eds.), *op. cit.*, p.152.

⁵ Esher, journal entry, 12th August, 1914; quoted in Esher, *op. cit.*, p.176.

⁶ *Op. cit.*, 25th August, 1914; *op. cit.*, p.180.

⁷ Letter from Robinson to Milner, 3rd November, 1914; University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, New Library, MS. Milner 349, f.342.

editor of *The Observer*, whilst possessing an enviable range of confidential sources, delighted rather in playing off one against the other than in applying pressure upon the Government.

The campaigns waged by the Press were more often conceived in Westminster than in the editorial offices of the newspaper in question; such a state of affairs did not however apply in any large degree to the Northcliffe Press. Such liaisons, together with their diverse audiences, serve to explain the different tenor adopted by the respective members of the Opposition Press. Thus *The Daily Telegraph* supported Balfour; as, in a rather curious manner, did Northcliffe's *Daily Mail* - in the latter case however the support was a doubtful advantage. For the support of Lord Northcliffe's newspapers, unlike many others, was liable to change unpredictably and at the most unfortunate times. Indeed the case of Northcliffe's other main newspaper, *The Times*, was a curious one. For whereas Robinson's membership of the 'Kindergarten' pre-disposed him towards his erstwhile chief in South Africa, Lord Milner, such an attitude could not be relied upon to overcome the views of others at Printing House Square; not to mention the views of the proprietor himself. The *Daily Express* and its editor, Blumenfeld, through the medium of the backbench Unionist M.P. Max Aitken - a close friend of Bonar Law and, from 1916, proprietor of the *Daily Express* - placed its faith in Bonar Law. Indeed such was the intimate nature of the association that Arnold White's regular columns in the *Daily Express* and *The National Review* were held by many to be directly inspired by Bonar Law, Carson and Long. The more right-wing Unionist organs, *The National Review*, edited by Maxse, and *The Morning Post*, edited by Gwynne, were close to Austen Chamberlain and the military establishment.

In contrast to the Central Powers, the armies of the Entente Powers, in particular those of the B.E.F., displayed an intolerance of the activities of War Correspondents which owed rather more to Kitchener's behaviour in the Sudan than to Roberts' at Bloemfontein. Suspicions were buttressed by the establishment of both the Press Bureau and the Foreign Office News Department; dissemination of information being the object of neither body. The imposition of a policy in which propaganda and censorship formed the twin pillars only served to exasperate. Thus Northcliffe informed the Liberal Chief Whip, Alexander Murray, Master of Elibank, that:

"What the newspapers feel very strongly is that, against their will, they are made to be part and parcel of a foolish conspiracy to hide bad news.

...I do not think he [Churchill] understands the English mind or he can not have thought out the 'Audacious' † matter very carefully. Thousands of American newspapers, containing the news, with photographs, have been sold during the last few days at the great hotels in London, Manchester, Liverpool, Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Paris and elsewhere.....

The German newspapers are giving much more attention to the 'Audacious' than they otherwise would, and are spreading the news in Italy, Spain and other countries.

English people do not mind bad news. Inasmuch as the Germans know of the disaster there can be no possible reason for suppressing it. It is a boomerang policy that will hit this Government very hard in the course of the long war that we are now commencing." ⁸

The boomerang was already in flight.

With the British entry into the war party militancy all but vanished from the precincts of the Palace of Westminster, only to re-appear with re-doubled force in the pages of the Press. As the parties within Parliament sought to present a bland face to the world, so their differences were explored in the pages of the Press, with political attacks being delivered from editorial offices rather than from the Dispatch box; the Press increasingly came to act as the 'picture' to the Parliamentary 'Dorian Grey'. Hence as the Press expanded into ever increasing manifestations of partisanship their proxy party militancy provided one of the few successful examples of 'Business as Usual'. However the brand of political partisanship which filled the Press was one freed from

[†] The *Dreadnought* battleship, H.M.S. *Audacious*, 2nd Battle Squadron, struck a German mine and sank on 27th October, 1914, off the north coast of Ireland; her loss was only admitted by the Admiralty following the Armistice four years later, on 13th November, 1918.

⁸ Letter from Northcliffe to Alexander Murray, Master of Elibank, 1st December, 1914; British Museum, British Library, Manuscript Collection, Northcliffe MS. 62158, f.55.

the constraints of Parliament; it can not be merely coincidental that as the Press struck its political pose, its coverage of Parliament should markedly decrease. Not that there remained a great deal to cover, for as Taylor remarked:

"Silence in high places cleared the way for demagogues...Still more, it cleared the way for the masters of the press. The public wanted news, and could only find it in the newspapers...the public wanted leadership and again only the newspapers provided it." ⁹

Whilst Taylor's analysis strikes one as somewhat over-emphatic in its latter point, it remains the case that those sensible of the shift in the power to mould opinion - a shift away from Westminster to such places as Printing House Square - increasingly sought to exercise leadership through the Press, whether directly or through a conduit. As Scott regretfully remarked:

"the truce of parties certainly doesn't apply to the party press." ¹⁰

That segment of the Press which possessed a political consciousness was; in the new environment of *Burgfrieden*, albeit one restricted at times merely to Parliament; allowed its head, and:

"in so far as guidance and encouragement were needed, journalists received both in bountiful measure from frustrated politicians, who furtively adopted them as surrogates. Newspapers, permitted to broach topics that were proscribed within the parliamentary arena, were willingly used to circumvent a system that party spokesmen were formally pledged to uphold." ¹¹

As if in recognition of the Press' influence the Government sought to impose a regime of silence over the first collision of the élite battalions of the B.E.F. with their more numerous German counterparts at Mons. Such a regime of silence possessed, from the Government's point of view, the inestimable advantage of preventing the use of that battle's outcome by the advocates of conscription within the Press. The Press argued that such a veil of secrecy did the Army a disservice as the lack of intelligence from the front served to foster complacency within the population at large; with an accompanying detrimental effect upon recruiting as potential recruits simply failed to recognise that the Army still required their services.

The agitation of the Unionist Press in favour of conscription was spurred by a recognition that the Western Front was the pivotal point of the Great War; it was therefore necessary, in order to win the war, to defeat the German Army in that theatre - an end which depended upon the creation and assembly of a large and efficient Entente force. In this the Unionist Press was following General von Clausewitz's dictum 'Overthrow of the Enemy'. For Clausewitz observed that:

"All that theory can here say is as follows: That the great point is to keep the overruling relations of both parties in view. Out of them a certain centre of gravity, a centre of power and movement, will form itself, on which everything depends; and against this centre of gravity of the enemy, the concentrated blow of all the forces must be directed." ¹²

The Government's failure to recognise the Western Front as the War's 'centre of gravity', not for the last time, caused some degree of consternation in the General Staff. Likewise, not for the last time, the response of the Generals was to seek out their allies in the Press.

⁹ A.J.P. Taylor, 'Politics in the First World War', *Essays in English History*, (Pelican. 1976)., p.224.

¹⁰ Letter from Scott to L.T. Hobhouse, 2nd November, 1914; University of Manchester, John Rylands Library, *The Manchester Guardian Archives*, C.P. Scott Papers, Box 334.

¹¹ Stephen Koss, *op. cit.*, p.255.

¹² Carl von Clausewitz, 'Overthrow of the Enemy', *On War*, (Penguin. 1982)., p.389.

Thus Callwell, † the DMO at the War Office, wrote to Gwynne on 27th August remarking:

"I wish that in an article on the war you would insist strongly on the importance of devoting attention and concentrating effort, as far as land operations are concerned, upon the decisive point - the theatre of war on the Franco-Belgian frontier." ¹³

Whilst Callwell's appreciation of the strategic situation is impeccably Clausewitzian in tone, the more interesting point of the letter is that, barely a fortnight into his tenure at the War Office, he should seek to influence the Government's direction of the war through the medium of the Unionist Press. Callwell further confided that:

""K" does not understand war and it takes us all our time to prevent these insufferable follies being committed. In the meantime French and his troops, who have done so splendidly, want every bit of help tht we can give them.

There is not the remotest fear of raids now that the Territorials are fully mobilised and heaped up as thick as thieves all round the coast, but the Government are lamentably timid, and "K" is the worst of the lot." ¹⁴

Thus before the close of August Kitchener's reputation was already tarnished by his inability to grasp the requirements of a modern European war. Callwell concluded his letter by assuring Gwynne that:

"Our fellows have had a terribly difficult task and have done splendidly but that the task has been so difficult has largely been the fault of the Government." ¹⁵

It was precisely this atmosphere of Unionist frustration at Governmental inertia that the dispatch from *The Times* War Correspondent, Arthur Moore, so effectively punctuated.

Moore had originally been dispatched to the Continent by Printing House Square in order to report on the military confrontation between Serbia and Austria-Hungary. However with Britain's entry into the war he was recalled from Corfu to cover the main theatre of operations; initially Moore was detailed to cover the operations of the southern most French Army. Thus, working behind the B.E.F. lines, Moore found himself amongst the disparate elements of the Fourth Division retreating from Mons. Chastened by the experience, Moore wrote a lengthy dispatch in the early hours of Saturday, 29th August. The dispatch reached Printing House Square that evening and, after a good deal of self-censorship, was submitted; in the absence of both Robinson and Repington; by Freeman and Steed to the less than tender mercies of the Censor's blue pencil. The Censor's reply, in the person of the Unionist backbencher F.E. Smith, was most unexpected. For not only did Smith pass the dispatch; he sought to 'improve' it by restoring many of the deletions made by Freeman and Steed. In his covering letter Smith apologised for his few excisions and begged forgiveness for his:

"clumsy journalistic suggestions but I beg of you to use the parts of the article which I have passed to enforce the lesson - re-inforcements and re-inforcements at once." ¹⁶

The Censor's *laissez-faire* attitude did much to persuade a reluctant editorial staff of the need to

† Acting Major General Charles Callwell, succeeded Wilson as DMO on 14th August, 1914.

¹³ Letter from Callwell to Gwynne, 27th August, 1914; University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodleian New Library, MS. Gwynne dep 17.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Letter from Smith to Freeman, 29th August, 1914; quoted in *The History of 'The Times'*, *op. cit.*, p.222.

publish the dispatch, a situation which is not without its attendant ironies.

The article caused a considerable stir, not least amongst members of the Government itself. The communiqué appeared on the front page of all three editions of the 'Extraordinary' issue on Sunday, 30th August. In the final edition it was still more prominently printed and appeared beneath a new headline which announced:

BROKEN BRITISH REGIMENTS.

BATTLING AGAINST ODDS.

UNTARNISHED HONOUR OF OUR TROOPS.

MORE MEN NEEDED.

Beneath this Moore wrote that:

"It is important that the nation should know and realize certain things. Bitter truths, but we can face them. We have to cut our losses, to take stock of the situation, to set our teeth.

First let it be said that our honour is bright. Amongst all the straggling units that I have seen, flotsam and jetsam of the fiercest fight in history, I saw fear in no man's face. It was a retreating and a broken army, but it was not an army of hunted men. Nor in all the plain tales of officers, non-commissioned officers and men did a single story of the white feather reach me. No one could answer for every man, but every British regiment and every battery of which any one had knowledge has done its duty. And never has duty been more terrible." ¹⁷

Moore continued by stating that:

"Regiments were grievously injured, and the broken army fought its way desperately with many stands, forced backwards and ever backwards by the sheer unconquerable mass of numbers of an enemy prepared to throw away three or four men for the life of every British soldier. Where it is at present it might not be well to say even if I knew, but I do not know, though I have seen to-day in different neighbourhoods some units of it. But there are some things which it is eminently right that I should say.....". ¹⁸

The tone of the dispatch, taken with Callwell's letter to Gwynne, lead one to believe that Moore's dispatch might well have been facilitated by the General Staff in order to place additional pressure upon the Government to more forcefully prosecute the conflict.

Moore's account continued by baldly stating that:

"Our losses are very great. I have seen the broken bits of many regiments.....

Apparently every division was in action. Some have lost nearly all their officers. The regiments were broken to bits, and good discipline and fine spirit kept the fragments together, though they no longer knew what had become of the other parts with which they had once formed a splendid whole." ¹⁹

¹⁷ Arthur Moore, 'Amiens Dispatch', *The Times*, 30th August, 1914; also quoted *op. cit.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

Moore concluded his dispatch with the peroration:

"To sum up, the first great German effort has succeeded. We have to face the fact that the British Expeditionary Force, which bore the great weight of the blow, *has suffered terrible losses and requires immediate and immense reinforcement.* † The British *Expeditionary Force* has *won indeed imperishable glory, but it needs men, men, and yet more men.* The investment of Paris *cannot be banished from the field of possibility.* I saw the rolling stock being hurriedly moved to-day [from Amiens]. *Proximus ardet Ucalegon.* ‡ *We want reinforcements and we want them now.*" ²⁰

Such a message was not only sure to be well received by the General Staff but also, through its implicit argument in favour of conscription played into the Unionist Press' long-time campaign of agitation for the introduction of coercion into the provision of manpower for the military; such a message would do little to ease the discomfort of a Government attempting to wage war whilst retaining its Liberalism.

To Moore's dispatch was added a further report from the Front. The appearance of a second dispatch in the pages of *The Times* being necessitated by a need to acquit Moore of any charge of unwarranted despondency which the Government might otherwise be tempted to level. Hence *The Times* and the *Daily Mail* carried a second dispatch from Amiens, written by Hamilton Fyfe of the *Daily Mail*, which also appropriately appeared in the Sunday newspaper the *Weekly Dispatch*. The article's appearance in 'The Thunderer' was heralded by the headline:

GERMAN "TIDAL WAVE."

OUR SOLDIERS OVERWHELMED BY NUMBERS.

PLAIN DUTY OF THE NATION.

(Copyright telegram to the 'Daily Mail').

Sent to London in company with Moore's dispatch - with which it also shared the dateline 'Amiens, Aug. 29' - Fyfe's account served to bolster the veracity of Moore's dispatch whilst, more immediately, serving to heighten its impact. For Fyfe's article began:

"This is a pitiful story I have to write. Would to God it did not fall to me to write it. But the time for secrecy is past. Only by realizing what has happened can we nerve ourselves for the effort we must make to retrieve it." ²¹

Fyfe, having begun his report in unconscious echo of Moore, concluded with a passage which anticipated the broad thrust of Smith's 'improvements'; for he wrote that:

"England should realize, and should realize at once, that she must send reinforcements, and still send them. Is an army of exhaustless valour to be borne down by the sheer weight of numbers while young Englishmen at home play golf and cricket? We want men, and we want them now." ²²

The import of both dispatches was clear; not least in the latter case. For the language employed by Fyfe explicitly recalled that of Kipling in his poem 'The Islanders':

† The words printed in italics were added by Smith in the course of his 'improving' Moore's original dispatch.

‡ This quotation from Virgil's *Aeneid*, II lines 311-12, was misquoted by Smith and corrected in Printing House Square.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Hamilton Fyfe, *The Times, Daily Mail, Weekly Dispatch*, 30th August, 1914.

²² *Ibid.*

"And ye vaunted your fathomless power and ye flaunted
your iron pride
Ere - ye fawned on the Younger Nations for the men
who could shoot and ride!
Then you returned to your trinkets; then ye contented
your souls
With the flannelled fools at the wicket or the muddied
oafs at the goals." ²³

The verse, written during the South African War, had by 1914 become closely associated with the agitation of the National Service League for the introduction of compulsion into the nation's manpower debate. The warning contained therein was thus a stark one for the Government which had set its face against waging the war on anything other than Liberal principles. The implicit message of both articles was that if Britain harboured any pretensions to adequately prosecuting the war, the Government must place a measure of conscription on the statute book. Moreover, the dispatches resonated with doubts as to the ability of a Liberal Government, possessed as it was of a large proportion of backbenchers who viewed such a measure with acute distaste, to achieve such an end; thereby serving to raise questions as to the long-term viability of the Liberal Government remaining in office whilst Britain remained actively involved in hostilities.

Whilst Smith's subsequent statement to the House of Commons proved regrettably ambiguous, there is little doubt that his request the article be published served to severely embarrass the Government, despite the hypocritical posturing which a substantial portion of the Press indulged in at *The Times's* expense. Such embarrassment provoked Churchill to complain to Northcliffe on 5th September that:

"I think you ought to realise the harm that has been done by Sunday's publication in the "Times". I do not think you can possibly shelter yourself behind the Press Bureau, although their mistake was obvious. I never saw such panic-stricken stuff written by any war correspondent before; and this served up on the authority of the "Times" can be made, and has been made, a weapon against us in every doubtful State." ²⁴

In reply to this testimonial to the influence of *The Times* Northcliffe wrote:

"This is not a time for Englishmen to quarrel, so I will not say all that I might about the publication of the Amiens message in The Times. Nor will I discuss the facts and tone of the message, beyond saying that it comes from one of the most experienced correspondents in the service of the paper." ²⁵

Having dealt with the absurd question as to Moore being 'panic-stricken', Northcliffe continued by informing Churchill as to the precise nature of the Press Bureau's 'mistake':

"I understand that not a single member of the staff on duty last Saturday night expected to see it passed by the Press Bureau. But when it was not merely passed, but carefully edited, and accompanied by a definite appeal to publish it, there was no other possible conclusion except that this was the Government's deliberate wish." ²⁶

Thus Northcliffe effectively spiked Churchill's guns over this issue with a charge of Governmental incompetence which could not easily be discharged.

²³ 'The Islanders', Rudyard Kipling; *The Times*, 4th January, 1902.

²⁴ Letter from Churchill to Northcliffe, 5th September, 1914; British Museum, British Library, Manuscript Collections, Northcliffe MS. 62156., f.60.

²⁵ Letter from Northcliffe to Churchill, 7th September, 1914; *op. cit.*, f.61.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

Northcliffe gave further vent to his anger at the apparent duplicity of the Government's position in a splenetic passage addressed to the Liberal Chief Whip. For in the letter Northcliffe observed that:

"Every newspaper man that I know regards Winston as responsible for many of the initial evils of the Press Bureau, and he himself is aware of his own letter to me about 'The Times' dispatch from Amiens, which was inserted in 'The Times' by the special request of Mr. F.E. Smith, who not only made the request, but personally embellished and altered the article. My newspapers were held up in the House of Commons by Mr. Asquith and others of acting disloyally, and, in the House of Lords, by Lord Haldane, although they were all aware of the fact that Mr. F.E. Smith asked 'The Times' and my other newspapers to publish the article." ²⁷

The Government's handling of the whole incident can have done little to secure Northcliffe's support for its continued existence.

The 'Amiens Dispatch' served to heighten an already pervasive dissatisfaction within the Unionist Press at the manner in which the Government was conducting the war. Thus Maxse wrote to Gwynne remarking:

"I devoutly trust that Unionist newspapers are not going to adopt the attitude of saying ditto to whatever the Government does. The Government remains as rotten as ever, except for the presence of Kitchener, and is not to be trusted a yard on any single point." ²⁸

Maxse's observation is interesting not least as it indicates support, albeit momentary, for Kitchener completely at odds with the attitude which Callwell previously expressed to Gwynne. Furthermore Maxse's attitude is indicative of the Unionist Press' distrust of Asquith's Government inclination and capacity to adequately prosecute the war, for he remarked that:

"you and I have no right to sit down, fold our hands, shut our eyes, open our mouths and be content with whatever Squiff is prepared to give us." ²⁹

No one can have long entertained the idea that Maxse would placidly accept anything proposed by Asquith. The effect of the articles was to tear the veil of secrecy from the visage of the Cabinet's prosecution of the war; a veil which was increasingly perceived by the Unionist Press to have been constructed less to obscure the realities of war than to shield the Government from the charge of negligently prosecuting the war. In so doing the dispatches re-ignited the Unionist Press' campaign in favour of the introduction of conscription, and with it the placing of the war's direction on a proper footing; a change which implicitly anticipated a shift in the political complexion of the Government. In so doing Moore's report fractured the British *Burgfrieden* and served to announce the launching of an attack, if only in implicit terms, upon the inadequacy of the measures adopted by the Government in the course of its dilettantist conduct of the war.

The Unionist Press was not loathe to harry the Government. Thus Maxse remarked to Gwynne that:

"I wish to Heaven I had control of a daily paper just now. I would Delane the Government every day and force them to do the right thing. We must not allow ourselves to be hypnotised by the prestige of Lord Kitchener, who is a magnificent hustler but doesn't pretend to understand many of the problems which he is now tackling for the first time. The elementary principle in all strategy, which after all is applied common sense, is to get decisive force to the

²⁷ Letter from Northcliffe to Murray of Elibank, 1st December, 1914; British Museum, British Library, Manuscript Collection, Northcliffe MS. 62158, ff.55-56.

²⁸ Letter from Maxse to Gwynne, 2nd September, 1914; I.W.M., Gwynne MSS., HAG/19/5.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

decisive point. This is precisely what the Government has systematically failed to do in refusing to organise a serious army for an inevitable war, in cutting down the Expeditionary Force from four Divisions to two Divisions, in delaying the Expeditionary Force, in sending out reinforcements in dribbles, etc.

.....they can only be got to do the right thing, not by obsequious acquiescence, but by the number of kicks they receive...

According to my information, and this is not gossip, our casualties by last Friday amounted to nearly 20,000. Contrary to statements by Ministers, our guns, of which there was always a shortage, have not been replaced and only about 6000 reinforcements had dribbled out. Our boots are almost worn out and there is a fearful shortage of overcoats which had presumably been lost in the retreat. In the Crimea the press was not afraid to denounce a Government which failed to do its duty to its soldiers abroad. Why should the press be afraid to-day?"³⁰

The invocation of the spectre of Delane and the Crimea would only have alarmed the Government.

Churchill's erratic judgement was once again displayed on the evening of Friday, 2nd October. He met a number of his Cabinet colleagues at Kitchener's house and was informed that the Belgian Government intended, on the morrow, to evacuate Antwerp, which had been besieged by the German Army since 28th September. Therefore the Cabinet determined to dispatch a Royal Marine Brigade to defend the city; and with it the Channel ports and the British Army's cross-channel lines of communication.

Churchill, with the blessing of Kitchener, determined to repeat the headline-grabbing activities, which had last been aired at the Siege of Sidney Street in 1911. As Asquith reported to his mistress:

"Winston succeeded in bucking up the Belges, who gave up their panicky idea of retreating to Ostend, and are now going to hold Antwerp for as long as they can, trusting upon our coming to their final deliverance. Winston had already moved up his Marines from Dunkirk, and they are now in the Antwerp trenches.....

We are doing our best for the Belgians, for tho' we are dangerously short of regulars in this country, K is sending off to-day to their help an Expeditionary Force, consisting of the 7th division (18,000 of our best infantry) and a Cavalry Division (also the best) running to 4000. These with 8000 Winstons[†] make 30,000 men & 87 good guns. The French force wh. is to co-operate with them - mainly Territorials and "Fusilier Marines" - will amount to 23,500 men & 40 guns; wh. gives a total of over 53,500 men, & 127 guns: quite a big army."³¹

The Antwerp adventure, like many of Churchill's subsequent strategic plans, proved to be a costly fiasco. The city capitulated on 10th October with the loss to the Royal Naval Division of: seven officers and fifty men dead, 158 officers and men wounded, 936 captured by the Germans, and some 1,500 together with 20,000 Belgian troops interned in neutral Holland. As a result of the scale of casualties, in particular those suffered by the Naval Division, Churchill came under intense criticism from the Unionist Press. Ian Colvin, the chief leader writer of *The Morning Post*, was forthright in a leading article, entitled 'The Antwerp Blunder', on 13th October. He advised the Government to restrain Churchill's impulsive tendencies, stating:

"The attempt to relieve Antwerp by a small force of Marines and Naval

³⁰ Letter from Maxse to Gwynne, 7th September, 1914; I.W.M., Gwynne MSS., HAG/19/6.

[†] Men of the Royal Marine Light Infantry and Artillery, and raw Naval reservists of the 1st and 2nd Naval Brigades.

³¹ Letter from Asquith to Venetia Stanley, 5th October, 1914; quoted by Michael & Eleanor Brock (*Eds.*), *op. cit.*, pp.262-63.

Volunteers was a costly blunder, for which Mr. W. Churchill must be held responsible.....

Is it not true that the energies of Mr. W. Churchill have been directed upon this eccentric expedition, and that he has been using the resources of the Admiralty as if he were personally responsible for the naval operations? It is not right or proper that Mr. Churchill should use his position as Civil Lord to press his tactical and strategic fancies upon unwilling experts..... We suggest to Mr. Churchill's colleagues that they should, quite firmly and definitely, tell the First Lord that on no account are the military and naval operations to be conducted or directed by him." ³²

The theme of civilian interference in military operations was one which this newspaper was to develop more fully at a latter stage of the conflict. Further to this leader Gwynne wrote to explain its genesis in a letter to Lady Bathurst. Thus he wrote that:

"our casualties in this little adventure of Mr. Churchill at Antwerp cannot be much under 8,000..... The whole adventure was one which in my opinion deserves the severest condemnation inasmuch as it was, as far as I can make out, wholly a Churchill affair and does not seem to have been considered or thought over, or consented to, by the Cabinet †.... This man Churchill gathered from all the ends of England a force which he called the Naval Reserve Volunteer Force. It consisted of old men and youths, men who had not fired a rifle in their lives, officers who had not been trained and had just come from the Officers' Training Corps. The consequence was that they were led to perfect slaughter..... The whole thing was a horrible blunder which deserves not only the severest condemnation but which ought to bring about the resignation of Churchill. Imagine our Fleet being commanded by a man of this calibre." ³³

Colvin's attack was soon bolstered by the remainder of the Unionist Press; thus on 14th October the *Daily Mail* reprinted Colvin's article of the previous day. In addition the newspaper continued the charge in a leader of its own in which it was stated that:

"The public has a right to know who is responsible for a gross example of mal-organization which has cost valuable lives and sacrificed the services during the continuance of the war not only of a considerable number of gallant Englishmen but also of a considerable section of the Belgian Army." ³⁴

Nevertheless Churchill's actions were defended by certain sections of the Press. *The Pall Mall Gazette*, edited by Garvin, defended the First Lord's conduct on the curious ground that Britain was morally obliged to come to Antwerp's aid, an assertion to which the Liberal Press had proved singularly unresponsive some two months earlier.

Colvin returned to the attack by denouncing Churchill for seeking to act outside the sphere of his ministerial responsibilities:

"What we desire chiefly to enforce upon Mr Churchill is that this severe lesson ought to teach him that he is not, as a matter of fact, a Napoleon; but a Minister of the Crown with no time either to organise or to lead armies in the field.....

.....

He should seek rather to earn the nation's gratitude by a steady

³² *The Morning Post*, 13th October, 1914.

† Churchill had in fact secured the agreement of both Grey and Kitchener, on 3rd October, to his transfer of the Royal Marines from the 1st and 2nd Royal Naval Divisions.

³³ Letter from Gwynne to Lady Bathurst, 13th October, 1914; University of Leeds, Brotherton Library, Glensk-Bathurst MSS., Gwynne Papers, 1990/1/2288.

³⁴ *Daily Mail*, 14th October, 1914.

devotion to his proper duties than to dazzle the world by the gallantry of an ex-captain of dragoons." ³⁵

Colvin succinctly represented a strand of opinion within not only political and journalistic circles, but also the upper échelons of the Royal Navy. Hence by the latter part of October Churchill's tenure as First Lord was looking increasingly tenuous; not least of the reasons for this was the Unionist Press agitation which portrayed his conduct of the naval war as a succession of disasters: the escape through the Dardanelles Straits of the *Goeben* and *Breslau*, the loss of the *Cressys*, the Antwerp débâcle, the failure to track down the *Emden* in the Indian Ocean, and the 'secret' loss of the *Audacious* to a German mine on 27th October.

Lacking allies within the Liberal Party, and cordially hated by his erstwhile colleagues on the Opposition benches, Churchill appeared amply fitted for the rôle of scapegoat to assuage the public's unease at the Navy's inability to bring the *Hochseeflotte* to battle. However, as was often to prove the case during the course of the war, the public's clamour, inspired by the Press, for a Byng was assuaged by the sacrifice of a figure other than that demanded. The First Lord's position was saved by the sacrifice of Battenberg. As a later Liberal politician remarked in a similar situation:

"Greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his friends for his life." ³⁶

The Press reaction to the changes at the Admiralty was overwhelmingly positive; only *The Morning Post* of the leading Opposition organs remained dissatisfied. That emotion was evoked less by the change itself than by the fact that Gwynne had, like George V, been a staunch Beresfordite in the debate which had split the Royal Navy during the previous reign. Ironically Gwynne viewed the reformed Board of Admiralty, including as it did Fisher as its professional head and Churchill as its political head, as a distinct deterioration over its predecessor. For he remarked in a letter Maxse on 30th October that :

"all my pleasure is rather dashed by the fact that Fisher is going to be First Sea Lord". ³⁷

In effect Churchill had shot his fox. Thus Gwynne wrote that:

"I am rather like a man I once met in South Africa, who prayed for rain and had his house washed away. I wanted the change from a weak to a strong Admiralty in the hopes that it might ultimately end at least in curbing Winston's activities and restoring some confidence to the Fleet. Now Jackie Fisher's advent has made me thoroughly miserable, especially as I do not see how I can make any further attack. I have said my say about him and it was hardly eulogistic. All I can do is trust and pray that he may be a better man than I ever thought he was. My Naval friends who mistrust him very much, advise me that this is the best policy to adopt, for if I continue attacking Jackie they are perfectly sure that I shall not succeed in getting him out, and the only result would be that I should create a profound mistrust in the Navy for their leaders, which, of course, would be a very bad thing indeed, especially in the present state of jumpiness. So there I am, tongue-tied and very unhappy." ³⁸

The alteration in the composition of the Board of Admiralty was nevertheless another victory for the campaign of Press agitation waged by the Unionist Press against the insipid

³⁵ *The Morning Post*, 19th October, 1914.

³⁶ Jeremy Thorpe, commenting upon Harold Macmillan's 'Night of the Long Knives' Cabinet Reshuffle and his dismissal of his Chancellor of the Exchequer and close friend, Selwyn Lloyd, speech in the House of Commons, 12th July, 1962; quoted by Alisdair Horne, *Macmillan*, Volume II 1957-1986, (Macmillan. 1989), p.348.

³⁷ Letter from Gwynne to Maxse, 30th October, 1914; West Sussex Public Records Office (W.S.P.R.O.), Maxse MSS 469, f.571.

³⁸ Letter from Gwynne to Maxse, 2nd November, 1914; W.S.P.R.O., Maxse MSS 469, f.584.

prosecution of the war which had characterised much of the Liberal Government. It was moreover a campaign which succeeded to such an extent in its aim of highlighting the Admiralty's failures that Asquith was caused to remark that the Germans:

"are so much better off than we are on the sea." ³⁹

A statement remarkable in its strategic naïveté, even for Asquith.

Criticism of ministers, hitherto confined to personal attacks upon Churchill and Haldane, became a persistent feature of the Opposition Press throughout the latter part of 1914 and the early months of 1915. Whilst Northcliffe shunned personal publicity, his newspapers began to assume their position in the vanguard of the Opposition Press' continuing attacks upon the Government's prosecution of the war; a situation which had not been seen in London since Russell and Delane of *The Times* had waged a concerted and sustained campaign against the manner in which both Aberdeen and Raglan prosecuted the Crimean War. The Ministerial Press, in the unlikely guise of *The Pall Mall Gazette*, gave vent to its feelings at such attacks in an article which appeared beneath the headline 'Crabbing Kitchener', on Tuesday, 24th November. For the leading article observed that:

"The suspension of party warfare, which is our usual safety-valve for the forces of national quarrelsomeness, is undoubtedly a trial to many temperaments. But it is very important that those who must be critical or perish should not unite in finding a target in the man whose activities are just now of vital importance to the whole Empire. Every one would agree, if the point were put to him broadly, that the game of "crabbing KITCHENER" was one of the poorest and meanest that could possibly be indulged in by an Englishman in such times as this. Probably no one stands confessed to himself as engaged in that unpatriotic and pusillanimous pastime. But in effect a great deal of the more paltry and petulant criticism that is current, if we analyse it, lies to the address of the Secretary for War....It is upon him, therefore, that every impulsive complaint, every misinformed protest, every hotly urged objection brings its momentum, great and small. He is the "whipping-boy" of the campaign, as well as its director." ⁴⁰

The article serves as an illustration both of the on-going deification of Kitchener which the Ministerial Press indulged in, and as an indication of Garvin's increasing distance from the Unionist leadership.

The attitude expressed in the leader was precisely that which Maxse had vividly attacked in his letter to Gwynne, on 29th October, in which he wrote that:

"I venture to say that those of us who from the outset resolutely resisted the suggestion that our sole duty in war is to slobber over the Government have been abundantly vindicated. The Government has not changed its character simply because it is at war. It can only be compelled to do its duty by perpetual kicking and the moment kicking is relaxed, it will relapse." ⁴¹

Maxse, for one, was resolved to continue his vigorous kicking.

Northcliffe, like Garvin, aroused considerable unease in Unionist circles, though for considerably different reasons. For even by such an early stage of the war Northcliffe had come to assume, for both Unionists and Liberals, the position of supreme hate-figure in their respective demonologies. Despite this, attacks upon such figures as Asquith and Kitchener, however damaging to the immediate circulation of his newspapers, proved to be successful in tapping into the population's frustration towards a ministry whose scruples prevented an effective prosecution of the war. The message which emanated from the Northcliffe Press; that of the necessity of the

³⁹ Letter from Asquith to Mrs. Edwin Montagu (née Stanley), 4th November, 1914; quoted by A.J. Marder, *op. cit.*, p.82.

⁴⁰ 'Crabbing Kitchener', leading article, *The Pall Mall Gazette*, 24th November, 1914.

⁴¹ Letter from Maxse to Gwynne, 29th October, 1914; I.W.M., Gwynne MSS., HAG/19/10.

introduction of conscription and the formation of a Coalition; was increasingly echoed by other elements of the Unionist Press.

The principal point at which the Unionist Press concentrated its attention was the Liberal Government's reluctance to grasp the realities of modern industrialised conflict. A reluctance which was nowhere more apparent than in its evasion of the necessity of the introduction of Conscription; a disinclination which contrived to limit Britain's available manpower thereby contributing to the prolongation of the war. A further evasion of the ineluctable was that propounded by Lloyd George in a memorandum to Asquith, written on 31st December, in which he advocated that the 'Kitchener Armies', then under training, should not be 'wasted' on the Western Front. He continued by advocating:

"two independent operations which would have the common purpose of bringing Germany down by the purpose of knocking the props under her, and the further purpose of so compelling her to attenuate her line of defence as to make it more easily penetrable." ⁴²

Lloyd George's schemes were for Britain to evacuate her forces from the Western Front in favour of their deployment, alongside Roumanian, Serb and Greek forces, for a landing on the Dalmatian coast to conduct operations against Austria-Hungary; and secondly for Britain to land troops in Syria to campaign against the Ottoman Empire. Both instances marked a clear departure from the Clausewitz doctrine of concentrating one's forces at the enemy's 'centre of gravity'; it is doubtful whether the Bendlerstrasse viewed the German Army's centre of gravity to reside in either locale. Furthermore Lloyd George's memorandum serves as an extremely serious mis-reading of the strategic position which Britain found herself in with her entry into the war, a mis-reading which is encapsulated in Lloyd George's own plaintive enquiry of Churchill on 29th January, 1915:

"Are we really bound to hand over the ordering of our troops to France as if we were her vassal?" ⁴³

A Clausewitzian reading of the situation revealed that the German 'centre of gravity' resided in her Army; its 'centre of gravity' was in turn to be found on the Western Front, a recognition of strategic imperatives which was obvious to any number of military observers. Robertson entertained little doubt that:

"the decisive front was fixed for us by the deployment of the enemy's main masses in France and Belgium." ⁴⁴

Similarly Haig noted on 28th March, 1915, that:

"We cannot hope to win until we have defeated the German Army." ⁴⁵

Despite such authoritative opinions Lloyd George, together with others in the Cabinet, most notably Churchill, were continually guilty of hawking:

"a patent substitute for fighting, which he decorates with the name of 'Strategy'". ⁴⁶

⁴² Memorandum by Lloyd George, 31st December, 1914; University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodleian New Library, Department of Western Manuscripts, MS. Asquith 133, f.15.

⁴³ Letter from Lloyd George to Churchill, 29th January, 1915; University of Cambridge, Churchill College, Churchill Papers, 26/2.

⁴⁴ Robertson, *Soldiers and Statesmen*, Volume II, (Cassell & Co. 1926), p.75.

⁴⁵ Haig, diary entry, 28th March, 1915; quoted by John Terraine, 'The Substance of the War', Hugh Cecil & Peter H. Liddle (Eds.), *Facing Armageddon. The First World War Experienced*, (Leo Cooper. 1996), p.13.

⁴⁶ Letter from John St. Loe Strachey to Haig, 29th November, 1917; H.L.R.O., Strachey Papers, S/8/1/4.

Such notions entertained by the Cabinet were contrary to Kitchener's acute perception of the reality of compromise inherent in waging a Coalition war, and moreover doing so from a subordinate position. Thus Kitchener observed that:

"We cannot make war as we ought, we can only make it as we can." ⁴⁷

Such an observation ran counter to the Cabinet's political imperatives - the attainment of military gains at no political cost. Such a chimera would continue to tantalise and frustrate in equal measure British strategic thought throughout much of this war and the next; not for nothing did Major-General J.F.C. Fuller term such contrivances 'The Strategy of Evasion'. [†]

To this end, on 3rd January, 1915, Churchill, despite the profound misgivings of his Naval Staff; and of Fisher in particular; initiated the attempt by a naval force, unsupported by the military, to force its way through the Dardanelles. It is beyond the scope of this study to deal in detail with the intricacies of the Dardanelles campaign. Suffice it to say the operation was ill-conceived on a number of levels. The Government had initially believed that a successful naval forcing of the Straits would bring about the fall of the regime in Constantinople; thereby occasioning the Ottoman Empire's exit from the war. It is one of the curiosities of the whole adventure that Kitchener should confidently assure his protégé General Sir Ian Hamilton that:

"If the Fleet gets through, Constantinople will fall of itself". ⁴⁸

A more accurate assessment of the enterprise is that contained in a letter from Haig to Kiggell, written on 2nd April. For in the letter Haig confided in his friend his bafflement at the dispositions of the Dardanelles operation:

"I can't understand why the fleet was allowed to bombard the Dardanelles forts, before troops were on the spot to reap the fruits of the bombardment! I suppose there is some Winstonian subtlety in the plan which has not appeared yet!" ⁴⁹

None ever did.

The Liberal Government's all consuming quiescence in the prosecution of the war, inspired in part by the shock of the original declaration of war, had ended with uncomfortable completeness with the calendar year; Lloyd George in particular was to display a dizzying talent for 'war winning ideas', the military effectiveness of which, unlike the political, was limited if not actually negative. The mutual unease and friction between Kitchener and Lloyd George, already apparent by the first autumn of the war, was to grow prodigiously; the antagonism led to Lloyd George's adoption of munitions as a ready stick with which to beat Kitchener - thereby indirectly flagellating Asquith's prosecution of the war. Such a course of action had the coincidental effect of allying Lloyd George to the restless spirit of bellicosity on the Unionist benches and in the pages of the Unionist Press. The effectiveness of this strategy might well be judged from a diary entry of one of the principal leaders of the belligerent backbench Unionist Business Committee, the Unionist member for Hereford City, Professor W.A.S. Hewins. For Hewins opined that:

"Lloyd George has no prejudices and would be willing to act.....He would therefore have to risk something with his party.....Action could be taken if the Unionist leaders would co-operate and share responsibility." ⁵⁰

Emanating as it did from a Unionist body whose formation in January 1915 was inspired by

⁴⁷ Kitchener, attributed to by Churchill; quoted in Churchill, *op. cit.*, p.271.

[†] Major-General J.F.C. Fuller, *The Conduct of War 1789-1961. A Study of the Impact of the French, Industrial and Russian Revolutions on War and its Conduct*, (Eyre and Spottiswoode. 1961).

⁴⁸ Kitchener, in conversation with Hamilton; quoted by Trevor Wilson, *op. cit.*, p.108.

⁴⁹ Letter from Haig to Major-General Sir Launcelot Kiggell, Director of Home Defence, War Office, 2nd April, 1915; Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives (L.H.C.M.A.), King's College, London, Kiggell Papers II/2.

⁵⁰ Professor W.A.S. Hewins, diary entry, nd (February 1915); quoted by R.J.Q. Adams & Philip P. Poirier, *The Conscript Controversy in Great Britain 1900-18*, (Ohio State University Press. 1987)., p.74.

widespread irritation on the Unionist benches at the muzzling of criticism by the frontbench *Burgfrieden*, such a testimonial bears witness to Lloyd George's Damascene conversion from the brink of resignation over Britain's entry into the war to champion of those impatient with Government inaction.

Doubts over the supply of high explosive munitions had been voiced by Haig on 4th October, 1914. In his letter to Kiggell, Haig had stated:

"We really want effective high explosive shells", ⁵¹

and he noted in his diary for 15th November, 1914, that:

"It is impossible to fight battles on a scale of ammunition like that." ⁵²

Such concerns over munitions chimed with the doubts as to Kitchener's conduct at the War Office previously expressed by several members of the Unionist Press; thus Gwynne's memorandum, entitled 'Memorandum on the Question of a Coalition Government', addressed to Bonar Law on 26th March, contained the observation that:

"Up to the present the Cabinet do not seem to have been able to influence Lord Kitchener's policy and the Admiralty's policy, especially in regard to munitions of war and the utilisation of the business talent of the country. Indeed I would go farther and say that there are indications that the Cabinet have given up to Lord Kitchener all kinds of control which they ought to have kept in their own hands, and that precedent being established I do not see how a Coalition Government can be of any practical use. The truth is that for good or ill Lord Kitchener is trusted absolutely by the people, and we must put up with any mistakes he may make, for no Cabinet, be it Coalition, Liberal, or Conservative, could afford to quarrel with him". ⁵³

Such a sense of disillusionment with Kitchener was widespread in the editorial offices of the Unionist Press. No where was such an attitude more prevalent than in Printing House Square and Carmelite House; such was Kitchener's ignorance of administration that within the environs of the War Office he swiftly earned for himself the soubriquet of 'K. of Chaos'.

Throughout the first winter of the war Northcliffe's two principal press organs, the *Daily Mail* and *The Times*, had pressed for an increase in the production of munitions and the introduction of compulsion into the recruiting process. This latter point was the subject of the first leading article which appeared in *The Times* in the New Year - 'The Compulsion Controversy', 22nd January, 1915 - and came to be the *leitmotiv* of the newspaper's editorial policy throughout the subsequent two years. The ardour with which Northcliffe pursued Kitchener was perhaps fuelled by the former's regret over his rôle in the latter's installation at the War Office; a regret which could only have been added to by a recognition that the War Office's logistical difficulties stemmed from three basic factors, all of which could be traced back to Kitchener's over-centralisation of the department.

This initial weakness was further compounded by the punctiliousness of the Master-General of Ordnance, Major-General Sir Stanley von Donop, an attitude which, allied to Kitchener's own paucity of staff experience, led to Kitchener remaining in ignorance of the procedures of either the War Office's bureaucracy and of the world of commerce in general. While Kitchener may have been correct that:

"My colleagues tell military secrets to their wives, all except Asquith, who tells them to other people's wives" ⁵⁴

⁵¹ Letter from Haig to Kiggell, Director of Home, 4th October, 1914; L.H.C.M.A., King's College, University of London, Kiggell Papers I/38.

⁵² Haig, diary entry, 15th November, 1914; quoted by John Terraine, *op. cit.*, p.10.

⁵³ 'Memorandum on the 'Question of a Coalition Government', memorandum by Gwynne for Bonar Law, 26th March, 1915; I.W.M. Gwynne Papers, HAG/38/13.

⁵⁴ Kitchener; quoted by Lord Beaverbrook, *Politicians and the War 1914-1916*, (Archon Books. 1968)., p.63.

his obsession with secrecy was a further obstruction to success. This element of Kitchener's character left him extremely wary of dealing with the Press, as Churchill had discovered to his cost in the Sudan. Kitchener's treatment of the Press, barely tolerated in the Sudan and South Africa, proved to be a grave error of judgement in Whitehall.

Exasperation with Kitchener's methods and the inadequate provision of munitions was not confined to the Unionist Press. Lloyd George, having turned from ruminating upon the causes of the conflict to reflecting upon the elements required for its successful, it rather limited, prosecution, sought to utilise his relationship with Scott to secure Liberal Press support for his conflict with the slothful Kitchener. Thus, whilst breakfasting with Scott on 15th March, Lloyd George complained of the delays involved in the supply of munitions and was unambiguous in identifying the cause of the obstruction to the production and supply of munitions adequate to the B.E.F.'s needs. Lloyd George stated, as Scott later noted:

"The difficulty was...Kitchener...a man without imagination, jealous of his own authority and distrustful of all civilian interference." ⁵⁵

Ironically whilst Lloyd George succeeded, albeit briefly, in firing even such arch-Liberals as Scott with enthusiasm for the construction of "a nation marshalled and regimented for service" ⁵⁶ regardless of the cost which such a development would entail for the liberty of the individual. The original advocate of such a policy, Northcliffe, continued to be castigated by the Liberal Press for his expression of such opinions.

The issue of munitions supply to the B.E.F. came centre stage following the Battle of Neuve Chapelle, from 10th-12th March. The offensive was successful in arousing the admiration of Joffre, not least as it contained a number of features which were henceforth to become *de rigueur* in any artillery-based plan of offensive; in this Neuve Chapelle serves as a rebuke to those who continue to denigrate the martial accomplishment of the British General Staff. The B.E.F.'s commanders, unlike the Cabinet, did not attempt to evade the central difficulty in striving to secure forward momentum on the Western Front; that is the imbalance towards the defence created by the presence of elaborate earthworks, rapid-fire weapons, and barbed-wire entanglements. Instead the commanders sought to overcome such obstacles through the concentrated application of meticulous staff preparation, tactical and strategic concealment, and an overwhelming concentration of troops, artillery and munitions on a comparatively narrow front; in short G.H.Q. was seeking to:

"refine the conduct of an offensive to the point where it would deprive the defenders of their balance of advantage." ⁵⁷

The failure of the offensive to produce the expected break-through was ascribed by French to a want of munitions, an opinion repeated by Haig to Kiggell, on 2nd April, when he stated that:

"if K. would only give me gun ammunition we wd. chase the Germans out of France in 6 ticks!" ⁵⁸

The Northcliffe Press took French's point and intensified a campaign of agitation aimed at the Government's provision of munitions which was already in train. Thus the *Daily Mail* which had observed on 24th March that:

"Ministers, whose motto is or used to be 'Trust the People', are maintaining a very curious attitude in this war" ⁵⁹

⁵⁵ David Lloyd George, in conversation with Scott, 15th March, 1915; University of Manchester, John Rylands Library, *The Manchester Guardian Archives*, C.P. Scott Papers, Box 133.

⁵⁶ Letter from Scott to Hobhouse, May, 1915; University of Manchester, John Rylands Library, *The Manchester Guardian Archives*, C.P. Scott Papers, Box 334.

⁵⁷ Trevor Wilson; *op. cit.*, p.123.

⁵⁸ Letter from Haig to Kiggell, 2nd April, 1915; L.H.C.M.A., King's College, University of London, Kiggell Papers II/2.

⁵⁹ *Daily Mail*, 24th March, 1915.

returned to the fray on 3rd May. That day's issue contained an attack upon the Government couched in quite explicit terms; the article stated the belief of Carmelite House that:

"this Government, which did not see the war coming, does not now understand the terrific nature of the struggle before it".⁶⁰

Similarly the editorial position of *The Times* was utilised by Northcliffe in his continued efforts to exploit the Government's anomalous policy of seeking to effectively prosecute the war in the light of fastidious observance of Liberal sentiment. Thus the Government remained adamantly opposed to the introduction of Conscription, even though the ambition indicated by its strategic schemes merely served to underline its necessity; however on no point was the incompatibility of the Government's Liberal sentiments with a vigorous prosecution of the war more apparent than on the supply of munitions.

With Lloyd George's ire having apparently been diverted, through declarations that alcohol was the true explanation for the shortfall in munitions production, into the somewhat quixotic endeavour of rendering the entire population, monarch included, teetotal for the duration, Northcliffe became increasingly restive. Thus primed, he was greatly angered by the optimistic sentiments which underpinned Lovat Fraser's leading article in *The Times* on 11th April. In response Northcliffe set out his position as antithetical to the continuance of the Liberal Government:

"I rarely interfere with the editorial writing in "The Times", but I must say that this morning's leading article distresses me greatly and I know that the Editor is in accord with my views.

Anyone who has studied the war knows that our army in France is unable to move. Its position is growing harassing to the French who are anxious to move. It cannot move for three reasons: Firstly, because many of the shells that should have been sent to it have been dispatched to the Dardanelles; Secondly, because the 29th Division, which was promised to the French, has been sent to the Dardanelles; and, Thirdly, because the Government has not availed itself of the small contractors who had offered to supply shells."⁶¹

Northcliffe's letter continued with the damning observation that:

"The whole war is being unduly prolonged".⁶²

That opinion was the central aspect of Northcliffe's editorial policy throughout the period between Britain's entry into the War and the creation of the Coalition Government; its implementation was most apparent in Northcliffe's attitude towards the B.E.F.'s supply of munitions. Northcliffe continued his letter to Lovat Fraser by observing that:

"The whole question of the supply of munitions of war is one on which the Cabinet cannot be arraigned too sharply.

Personally, I do not often like the "Morning Post" leaders, but I do like theirs this morning infinitely better than ours. The whole effect of your column is to whitewash the Government and mislead the public.

When, recently, I saw those splendid boys of ours toiling along the roads to the front, weary but keen and bright-eyed...I could not help feeling very, very bitter at the thought that many of them were on the way to certain mutilation and death by reason of the abominable neglect of the people here."⁶³

⁶⁰ *Daily Mail*, 3rd May, 1915.

⁶¹ Letter from Northcliffe to Lovat Fraser, 11th April, 1915; British Museum, British Library, Manuscript Collection, Northcliffe MS. 62251, f.115.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Op. cit.*, f.116.

The letter concluded with Northcliffe's dismissal of Lloyd George's latest notion; an idea which he opined to be a blind-alley:

"while we are talking about the alleged drunken habits of the working man (in which I do not believe), the guns at the front are starved for want of the only means of putting an end to this frightful slaughter of the best which any nation has to give." ⁶⁴

Lovat Fraser replied two days later with a lengthy letter, in the course of which he presciently warned Northcliffe that:

"I believe the time will come when we shall have to say that we cannot run this war with a Cabinet of tired lawyers; but we must first be very sure of our ground, and not move unless we are convinced the country will be with us. Remember that if that time comes we shall probably have to arraign Lord Kitchener also, and that will be a very big and difficult thing." ⁶⁵

Lovat Fraser was correct in his appraisal of the situation; however Northcliffe was sufficiently irked by the intelligence from France to ignore his leader writer's pusillanimous warnings.

Northcliffe might well have been bolstered in his determination by a recognition that dissatisfaction with Kitchener's stewardship of the War Office, and doubts over the supply of munitions to the Army in France, was becoming ever more apparent in the political sphere. Thus on 8th April Professor Hewins formulated a resolution for the Unionist Business Committee to be presented to the Commons. The resolution stated that:

"This House, while welcoming well-considered steps for increasing the mobility and efficiency of labour, is of the opinion that it is urgently necessary that the resources of all firms capable of producing munitions of war should be enlisted under a unified administration in direct touch with the producing firms." ⁶⁶

The resolution was adopted by the Unionist parliamentary delegation at a meeting held at the Carlton Club that evening; the acceptance of the resolution was made with the acquiescence, albeit extremely reluctant, of Bonar Law. The wording of the resolution serves to illustrate the incompatibility of the U.B.C.'s aims with any lingering Liberal philosophy around the Cabinet table. The resolution also served to indicate that the genie of debate over the inadequacies of the Government's provision of munitions was well and truly out of the bottle; Asquith was to toil in vain throughout the forthcoming month in an effort to restore the *status quo ante*.

The establishment of a Coalition Ministry had also been mooted by Garvin in a leader, entitled 'The Temper of the Nation', which appeared in *The Observer* on Sunday, 21st March. For in the article Garvin stated that:

"The nation for the first time is uneasy about the Government. It believes in some individual Ministers like Mr. Lloyd George and Mr. Churchill, Lord Kitchener and Sir Edward Grey, but it distrusts a purely party Cabinet framed with no view to the efficient conduct of the war in the greatest of world's crises, and it is beginning to doubt whether we have at the very head the strong directing, yet unifying, force which is a prime requisite for the supreme vigour of our effort, and the triumph of our arms." ⁶⁷

The article represented a significant broadening of the Press campaign against the Liberal Government. For Garvin, as his attitude over the Antwerp débâcle had indicated, represented a

⁶⁴ *Op. cit.*, f.117.

⁶⁵ Letter from Lovat Fraser to Northcliffe, 13th April, 1915; British Museum, British Library, Manuscript Collection, Northcliffe MS. 62251, f.122.

⁶⁶ Hewins, 8th April, 1915; quoted by Adams & Poirier, *op. cit.*, p.74.

⁶⁷ Garvin, 'The Temper of the Nation', leading article, *The Observer*, 21st March, 1915.

strand of moderate Unionist opinion not noted for its antipathy towards the Asquith Ministry; thus the article served to indicate that dissatisfaction with the manner of the Asquith Government's prosecution had spread to the 'Ministerial' Press. The dissatisfaction of most Unionist newspapers was more acidic in tone. Colvin in *The Morning Post* dissected Asquith's 'languid' style of premiership:

"In masterly fashion he has shown how easy it is to combine the appearance of personal responsibility with the complete deliverance of autonomy to aspiring and unquiet colleagues. During his reign the office of Prime Minister has profoundly changed. To spend long hours on the Treasury Bench, to take frequent part in debates great or small, to keep a firm hold on the domestic, foreign and Colonial policy of the country, and to give the touch of a superintending hand to the more important Departments of the Government has of late years been little more than an interesting tradition in Downing Street..... The powers which, as Prime Minister, he should have sought [to look into the manufacture and supply of munitions] have at length been taken over by the Chancellor of the Exchequer: and a Minister burdened with the cares of an important Department has stepped into the place of his leader, who has none." ⁶⁸

The thinly veiled implication behind the article being that a more vigorous handling of the Opposition would remove the excrescence which was the increasingly moribund Liberal Ministry.

Stung by such sallies the Liberal Press, in the guise of *The Daily Chronicle*, responded with a leader, entitled 'The Intrigue Against the Prime Minister', in which the newspaper advanced the perplexing notion that *The Observer* article was an expression of a Unionist attempt to finesse Asquith's removal as they remained impotent so long as he continued as Prime Minister. The rebuttal of the *Observer's* charges had the curious effect of infuriating Lloyd George to such an extent that, upon reading the offending item, he immediately telephoned Donald and demanded to know if the article had been inspired by his Liberal rival the Home Secretary, Reginald McKenna. Donald replied in the negative. However McKenna's 'intrigue' had assumed the status of an *idée fixe* for Lloyd George; despite a second attempt to determine the Home Secretary's guilt having elicited the same response from Donald, he nevertheless complained bitterly of McKenna's conduct to Asquith.

The degree to which *The Daily Chronicle's* supportive article had illustrated the fissures within the Cabinet is further evidenced by Asquith's letter to Venetia Stanley, written on that evening. For the Prime Minister informed his inamorata that:

"I had heard sinister and, as I believed, absurd interpretations wh. were being given to the articles in *The Times*, *Observer*, *Morning Post* &c. I've never seen him [Lloyd George] more moved. He made a most bitter onslaught upon McKenna whom he believes, thro' his animosity against Winston, to be the villain of the piece & the principal mischief-maker. He vehemently disclaimed having anything to do with the affair: Kitchener, he said, is the real culprit because, in spite of every warning, he has neglected up to the 11th hour a proper provision of munitions: & K. being a Tory, or supposed to be one, the Tory press, afraid to attack him, are making me the target of their criticism." ⁶⁹

Asquith's attempt to slough off upon Kitchener ultimate responsibility for his Government's failure to prosecute the war to the utmost is typical in its self-justificatory myopia of the attitude displayed by Asquith to criticism of his conduct throughout much of the period; had not *The Pall Mall Gazette* published a leading article the previous November entitled 'Crabbing Kitchener'? Despite Asquith's defence to his mistress it remains clear that the article in *The Daily Chronicle* rather than serving to lay rumours of internal intrigues aimed at Asquith, had instead conspired to magnify them. In addition the temperature in Cabinet surrounding the article merely served to underline the veracity of the original attacks of the Unionist Press and the weakness of any

⁶⁸ Colvin, 'An appeal to the Prime Minister', leading article, *The Morning Post*, 29th March, 1915.

⁶⁹ Letter from Asquith to Venetia Stanley, 29th March, 1915; in Michael & Eleanor Brock (Eds.), *op. cit.*, p.519.

Liberal defence; as the editor of the Asquithian-Liberal evening newspaper *The Westminster Gazette*, Spender, admitted to Cook, the:

"real foundation of it [the Press agitation] is A's laziness & lack of ideas." ⁷⁰

This appreciation was to gain ever wider currency throughout the editorial offices of the Liberal Press as the 'crisis' progressed. Asquith was to all intents and purposes now involved in a debate with the Unionist Press; the cut and thrust of which was to be found in editorial pages and on public platforms.

Asquith's position was however undermined by French's expressions of dissatisfaction at the provision of munition supply for his forces; thus he set out in a pointed passage of his 'Neuve Chapelle' dispatch that:

"Battles can be shortened and losses lessened if an almost unlimited supply of munitions enables attacks to be supported powerfully by artillery." ⁷¹

Asquith's characteristic disdain for details was to prove most unfortunate for both him and his Ministry in this particular instance. Secure behind the *glacis* of his complacency Asquith disparaged all talk of the existence of a problem in munition supply; for in a speech delivered in Newcastle on 20th April, the Prime Minister remarked that:

"I do not believe that any...army has ever either entered upon a campaign or been maintained during a campaign with better or more adequate equipment. I saw a statement the other day that the operations, not only of our Army but also of our Allies, are being crippled, or, at any rate, hampered, by our inability to provide the necessary ammunition. There is not one word of truth in that statement." ⁷²

The speech was all the more remarkable for the fact that his audience had come expecting some expression of the Government policy on the control of alcohol; instead they received a speech which served as one of the more major blunders of Asquith's premiership. For in his extrapolation of Kitchener's assurance as to future operations to include past actions of the B.E.F. Asquith laid himself open to a barrage of opposition; the misjudgement is further emphasised by the fact that there were numerous instances in which senior Cabinet colleagues of the Prime Minister had lamented the state of munitions supply. Indeed Lloyd George the following day contradicted Asquith's position with his statement in the Commons debate on supply that:

"In the recent two weeks around Neuve Chapelle almost as much artillery ammunition was used as in two and three quarter years of the Boer War, and what was needed was not shrapnel but high explosive." ⁷³

The statement acted as a handsome vindication of the *Times* leaders on the subject. Thus Asquith's speech in Newcastle amounted to nothing less than baiting an already exasperated Unionist Press.

The following day there appeared in the leader pages of *The Times* an article entitled 'Mr. Asquith's Omissions'. The article was a damning attack upon Asquith's speech and the inadequacies of his inefficient prosecution of the war, he never, the article observed:

"removed his blinkers.....That is why we hold that it was short of courage. When he came to the specific question of the supply of munitions of war, he made

⁷⁰ Cook, diary entry, 3rd April, 1915; quoted by S. Koss, *op. cit.*, p.272.

⁷¹ French, 9th April, 1915; quoted in 'How the Truth Came Out. 'The Daily Mail' and The Shells Question', *op. cit.* British Museum, British Library, Manuscript Collection, Northcliffe MSS. 62377, f.132.

⁷² Asquith, speech in Newcastle, 20th April, 1915; quoted *op. cit.*

⁷³ Lloyd George, speech in the House of Commons, 21st April, 1915; *Hansard*, Parliamentary Debates (Commons), Fifth Series, LXXI, Columns 311-14.

statements that will not bear examination. In particular, he said that the operations of our army had not been hampered by 'our failure to provide the necessary ammunition.' This is an assertion we are reluctantly required to challenge." ⁷⁴

The article continued by stating that though the B.E.F. was indeed well equipped:

"there has been too much jam and too few shells." ⁷⁵

A statement which could well serve as the motto of the Unionist Press' campaign against the Asquith Government.

As was becoming increasingly apparent the division in the Press was no longer one of partisan political affiliation, rather it was between those who articulated their criticisms of the Asquith Government and the manner in which it prosecuted the war, and those who restricted such criticisms to their private correspondence. The latter category being exemplified by Scott who wrote Hobhouse of Asquith's Newcastle speech:

"It's a wretched business and unhappily one can never make the truth known. Really Asquith gets worse as he gets older and it is time he were dead and buried - politically!" ⁷⁶

In public however the Liberal Press continued its defence of the Liberal Government. Whilst Gardiner conceded that the Cabinet had been guilty of errors of judgement he wrote:

"What war has ever been conducted without mistakes?.....no Ministry ever met an unexampled emergency with more efficiency, more capacity, or more success." ⁷⁷

Reaction to Asquith's speech on the Unionist backbenches served to indicate an unwillingness to subscribe to Gardiner's optimistic appreciation of the Asquith Ministry's proficiency in conducting the war; the Unionist backbencher William Bridgeman caustically noted in his diary that:

"whilst Kitchener & Jellicoe & everyone from the front express their fears on account of shortness of shells & guns, Asquith makes a speech at Newcastle, saying we have never suffered from want of ammunition, which everyone knows is a lie. Jack Tennant † assures me this speech was made from a letter written to him by French (to order, I presume)." ⁷⁸

It appeared clear that the Government were seeking to manipulate the imposition of wartime censorship so as to block the exposure of politically embarrassing insights into the pitfalls of 'Business as Usual'.

The Northcliffe Press displayed a ready willingness to assault the breach in the Cabinet's façade exposed by Asquith's incautious oratory. Thus the *Daily Mail's* leader page on 23rd April contained an attack upon the central flaw in the Liberal Government prosecution of the war; its evasion of the issue of Conscription with its resultant damaging effects upon industrial output. For the leading article stated that:

⁷⁴ Lovat Fraser, 'Mr. Asquith's Omissions', leading article, *The Times*, 22nd April, 1915.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ Letter from Scott to Hobhouse, 23rd April, 1915; University of Manchester, John Rylands Library, *The Manchester Guardian Archives*, C.P. Scott Papers, Box 334.

⁷⁷ Gardiner, leading article, *Daily News*, 8th May, 1915.

† Junior Minister at the War Office, 1911-16, and Asquith's son-in-law.

⁷⁸ William Bridgeman, diary entry, May 1915; quoted in Philip Williamson (*Ed.*), *The Modernisation of Conservative Politics: the diaries and letters of William Bridgeman, 1904-1935*, (Historians' Press. 1988)., p.84.

"Now it is the obvious defect of the voluntary system that it does not provide the men and the shells at the same time. It is quite true that up to date it has given very large numbers of men. It has not enabled the Government to pick and choose the men so as to take those whose services were not indispensable to industry. Hence, the skilled labour, which should have been at work making shells or providing the raw materials for them, is being expended in the trenches by its own noble and valiant choice. We cannot blame the worker who obeys the patriotic impulse to go to the front. The State, however, can alone decide fairly which should and which should not go, and can pronounce without injustice to individuals whether a man is more urgently needed in the workshop or the firing line. The State has abdicated this duty, and the result is unfortunate." ⁷⁹

The newspaper continued in this vein on 30th April, castigating the Government as:

"it failed to realise the need for munitions at the outset, and did not organise the productive power of this country at once. It is not certain that even now the whole productive power is being organised and employed." ⁸⁰

The following day Northcliffe sought to further explore the breach in the Government's position with the active co-operation of Sir John French. He wrote French a letter whose language indicates the like-mindedness of the two, expressing the concern that:

"The evil effects of the secrecy with regard to your army are assuming new form. On April 21st, Mr. Lloyd George, in the House of Commons said that there were 36 divisions at the front. That statement has been interpreted by the British and French publics as meaning that you are in command of 750,000 men. People are asking, and writing to our newspapers letters to this effect - If Sir John French has three-quarters of a million men, why is he only occupying thirty miles of line? Why are we not able to give more substantial assistance to the French? Early this week Lord Kitchener expressly forbade the newspapers analyzing Mr. Lloyd George's statement, and you are therefore believed to have this vast army at your disposal." ⁸¹

Northcliffe continued by stating that:

"In the absence of some strong statement from you the Government have your friends at their mercy, because they are able to get their newspapers to say that any agitation for less secrecy is unpatriotic and playing the enemy's game.

As a further result of secrecy, Mr. Asquith is able to assure the nation that your operations have never been hampered for want of ammunition.

I have told Mr. Moore, and Col. Repington agrees with me, as does the Editor of "The Times", that the inevitable result of secrecy will be eventually to cast blame upon you. If the public believe that you have 750,000 men, as they do believe, and that you have ample ammunition, which is also believed, it is natural they should ask, "Why is our position in Flanders obviously not improving, and how is it that in ninth month of the war we are far from advancing to Berlin, and are, in fact, holding on by the skin of our teeth to a position hundreds of miles from that city.

A short and very vigorous statement from you to a private correspondent would, I believe, render the Government's position impossible, and enable you to secure the publication of that which would tell the people here

⁷⁹ 'The Voice from the Trenches: When are you going to make war?', leading article, *Daily Mail*, 23rd April, 1915.

⁸⁰ *Op. cit.*, 30th April, 1915.

⁸¹ Letter from Northcliffe to French, 1st May, 1915; British Museum, British Library, Manuscript Collection, Northcliffe MS. 62159, ff.67-68.

the truth and thus bring public pressure upon the Government to stop men and munitions pouring away to the Dardanelles as they are at present." ⁸²

Such sentiments no doubt influenced French to make public the shortage of munitions - especially high-explosive shells - under which his command had laboured, following the repulse of his attack upon Aubers Ridge on 9th May. The medium he chose was that of his close friend, and coincidentally the Military Correspondent of *The Times*, Lieutenant-Colonel Charles à Court Repington.

The Liberal Press continued to profess its support for the continued stewardship of the Asquith Ministry, thus Massingham in his 'London Diary' for 8th May noted with pleasure that *The Observer* and *The Pall Mall Gazette*:

"have rather markedly retired from the anti-Prime Minister movement, while *The Times*, retiring perhaps in order to jump back again, pleads that it is only out for the right of criticism. Who hinders? The door of criticism has never been shut since the door of war was opened. The only question is as to spirit and intent. The intent of *The Times* is obviously to change horses at the point and moment that the stream is running its fiercest." ⁸³

Such a stance only served to ignore the effect which the barrage of Press criticism had already produced; for it was clear by the first week in May that the Government's position was breached, perhaps decisively so. Indeed Hewins of the U.B.C. judged the breach to be practicable, for he noted in his diary on 6th May that:

"I have never believed that this Government could carry the War through successfully. It is quite discredited and the sooner it is reconstituted the better." ⁸⁴

The Morning Post added its voice to those seeking to ensure such a reconstitution arose on 7th May. For that day (which also saw the sinking of the *Lusitania*) marked the beginning of the newspaper's campaign for the creation of a 'Cabinet of Talents' which would be able to reform the manner in which the war was being fought so as to eliminate "the waste involved in improvised methods". ⁸⁵ The lesson was clear, and for the Liberals unpalatable, opined the newspaper's leader page on 12th May:

"The state should at once requisition the entire male population." ⁸⁶

The *Daily Express* thundered on 11th May with a banner headline of 'The Only Way - Conscription!', and proclaimed on 13th May that:

"The People demand a leader from their leaders." ⁸⁷

Similarly the *Daily Mail*, in an article written by Lovat Fraser and entitled 'Wanted - A War Government', railed against those, such as Massingham, in the Liberal Press who denounced changes in the Government on the grounds that such alterations would encourage the Germans. Such a proposition was, Fraser opined:

"Absolute nonsense. If the Germans can derive encouragement from the news that it is sought to fight harder and better by discarding the jellyfish, and

⁸² *Op. cit.*, ff.68-69.

⁸³ Massingham, 'London Diary', *The Nation*, 8th May, 1915.

⁸⁴ Hewins, diary entry, 6th May, 1915; quoted by Adams & Poirier, *op. cit.*, p.75.

⁸⁵ Leading article, *The Morning Post*, 7th May, 1915.

⁸⁶ *Op. cit.*, 12th May, 1915.

⁸⁷ *Daily Express*, 13th May, 1915.

forming a Government of the best and ablest men in the country, they are welcome to such stimulus as they can derive".⁸⁸

The Observer, contrary to Massingham's belief, joined in the growing Unionist Press campaign in favour of the formation of a Coalition Government. Thus on 9th May Garvin called for the creation of an all-party 'Committee of Public Safety'; the following day Balfour added his influential voice to the chorus. In a speech at the Westminster Palace Hotel, referring to the sinking of the *Lusitania*, he stated that:

"if, as I believe will be the effect, of this latest outrage is to convince the people of this country that, not only our soldiers, but the whole nation is at war, and that every ounce of weight in every direction must be directed to bringing that war to an end - if that is the effect of it, then we can thank the Germans for the latest instance of their barbarous methods."⁸⁹

By May French was concerned enough about Kitchener's intentions as to seek to buttress his reputation by resolving to launch an attack by three corps of the B.E.F. upon the German positions on Aubers Ridge. However even before the operation was launched there existed clear doubts in the minds of senior officers as to the adequacy of the B.E.F.'s munitions stocks; thus Haig noted in his diary for 16th March that French:

"approved of my plan of operations but *there was no ammunition at present, as the expedition to the Dardanelles had to be supplied.*

.....This lack of ammunition seems serious. It effectively prevents us from profiting by our recent success and pressing the enemy before he can reorganise and strengthen his position."⁹⁰

In May Joffre planned a major French offensive in the Artois region; the aim of which was to capture the strategic observation position of Vimy Ridge. The B.E.F.'s I Army was to co-operate in the campaign by capturing Aubers Ridge; if both positions were seized the whole northern sector of the German position on the Western Front would be jeopardised. Haig's plan of attack showed the influence of Neuve Chapelle employing as it did a brief 'whirlwind' bombardment to screen the advance of the infantry before the enemy could bring up re-inforcements; however the offensive, launched on 9th May, mis-fired.

The bombardment contained a number of flaws; accurate registration of targets had not been carried out, much of the artillery proved inaccurate as a result of worn gun-barrels, a large number of the available shells proved faulty, whilst the limited stocks of artillery munitions contained a higher proportion of shrapnel than was desirable. Whilst ineffective in the martial sense, the offensive did prove effective in forcing French to forestall any rekindling of Kitchener's ambitions to replace him. This was done by launching a combined Press and political campaign of agitation against the Secretary of State for War in general, and his failure to secure adequate provision of munitions supply to the B.E.F. in particular.

For French, already exasperated at the orders emanating from the War Office, the final straw was a telegram from Kitchener on 10th May ordering that some 20,000 rounds of artillery munitions be dispatched from the B.E.F.'s meagre stocks to Hamilton's M.E.F. in the Dardanelles. Bolstered by the support of his immediate staff French sought to exploit the mis-fire of the I Army's attack so as to ensure, once and for all, the primacy of operations in France and Flanders in the War Office's provision of manpower and munitions. To this end he dispatched his Military Secretary, Lieutenant-Colonel Brinsley Fitzgerald, and an *aide de camp*, Captain Frederick Guest, Churchill's cousin, to London to inform a number of influential people of the straits to which French and his army were reduced.

Both officers met with Lloyd George on 12th May, and during the course of the meeting

⁸⁸ Lovat Fraser, 'Wanted - A War Government', leading article, *Daily Mail*, 8th May, 1915.

⁸⁹ Balfour, speech at the Westminster Palace Hotel, 10th May, 1915; quoted in *The Daily Telegraph*, 11th May, 1915.

⁹⁰ Haig, diary entry, 16th March, 1915; quoted in Robert Blake (Ed.), *The Private Papers of Douglas Haig 1914-1919*, (Eyre & Spottiswoode. 1952), p.88.

they showed the Chancellor copies of French's correspondence with the War Office and a memorandum setting out the urgent need for an increase in the supply of high explosive, rather than shrapnel, munitions. Such was the background to the publication, on 14th May, in the pages of *The Times* of a dispatch from G.H.Q. by Repington which appeared beneath the provocative headline of:

**NEED FOR SHELLS.
BRITISH ATTACKS CHECKED.
LIMITED SUPPLY THE CAUSE.
A LESSON FROM
FRANCE**

The message, stamped with the 'G.H.Q.' official stamp to facilitate its evasion of the Censor - thereby indicating the complicity, at the very least, of senior officers on French's staff if not of the Field Marshal himself - was admirably suited to its purpose of highlighting the inadequacies of the supply of munitions arising out of Kitchener's stewardship of the War Office and the Liberal Government's prosecution of the war. For as Repington wrote:

"The attacks (on Sunday last in the districts of Fromelles and Richebourg) were well planned and valiantly conducted. The infantry did splendidly, but the conditions were too hard. The want of an unlimited supply of high explosive was a fatal bar to our success." ⁹¹

The latter sentence would ultimately prove fatal to the Liberal Government itself. However Repington enlarged upon his dispatch in a private letter to Robinson which accompanied it. For in the missive Repington explicitly attributed the failure of the British offensive:

"to want of high explosive of which we only possess 6% for our 18 pr field guns while the French have 75%. † It is impracticable to level the German defences, as the French do, without unlimited high explosive, & our 40 minute preparation is not equal to the French 4 hour. There was much wire still uncut, parapets not knocked down, & most of the maxim positions uninjured. Hence our losses & failures." ⁹²

That such a situation arose should not come as a surprise; the General Officer Commanding the Dardanelles operation, General Sir Ian Hamilton, had previously remarked upon the soubriquet applied by the French to the British artillery - 'the-one-round-per-gun force'. Such were the straits to which the B.E.F.'s artillery had sunk, following the cacophony generated on 10th March, that for some months afterwards the artillery were restricted to the daily use of some four rounds per gun; such parsimony did little to heighten the B.E.F.'s offensive capacity. One Royal Artillery officer later remarked of early 1915 as:

"the period when it was almost 'reasons in writing' for firing away a shell." ⁹³

Repington continued his article with the incendiary observation that:

"It is certain that we can smash the German crust if we have the means. So the means we must have and as quickly as possible.....The Government, who have so seriously failed to organize adequately our national resources, must bear their

⁹¹ Repington, *The Times*, 15th May, 1915.

[†] These figures refer to the percentage of high explosive shells contained within the total amount of ammunition for each field gun.

⁹² Letter from Repington to Robinson, 11th May, 1915; quoted in *The History of 'The Times'*, *op. cit.*, p.274.

⁹³ Letter from Lieutenant-Colonel Neate to Terraine, October 1962; quoted by John Terraine, 'The Substance of the War', *op. cit.*, p.11.

share of the grave responsibility." ⁹⁴

Thus the shortage of munitions at Neuve Chapelle was increasingly perceived, across the partisan political spectrum, as evidence of a certain laxity in that manner in which the Liberal Government was prosecuting the war; Churchill later described the atmosphere in Cabinet provoked by Repington's dispatch as "sulphurous". ⁹⁵ Beaverbrook may well demur, but for the troops the fact that Asquith had been aware of the problems in the supply of munitions since October 1914 merely served to highlight his inaction. With mail from the Front being heavily censored, it is interesting that much of Northcliffe's information about the situation in Flanders was gleaned, in person, from wounded officers in Lady Northcliffe's hospital at Sutton Place.

Moreover it is clear from reading Repington's letter that many of the phrases used in subsequent *Daily Mail* articles on the subject borrowed heavily from this original letter. Thus in the articles ordered by Northcliffe, in order to sustain the pressure upon both Kitchener and Asquith, one finds mention of the folly of using shrapnel against the elaborate defensive systems employed by the Germans; thus:

"it is like using a pea-shooter". ⁹⁶

Kitchener's response to the appearance of Repington's article was to dispatch a stinging rebuke to French over his close relationship with the journalist:

"A good many remarks are being made about *The Times* correspondent who is apparently staying with you and writing to his paper. At the War Council to-day I heard for the first time that this was a fact. Until war correspondents are allowed by the Government, I do not think it is right for you to allow Repington to be out with the Army." ⁹⁷

French's reply indicates the confidence generated in the Commander-in-Chief by Repington's article; for he wrote dismissively to Kitchener stating that:

"Repington is an old friend of mine and has constantly stayed with me for the last 10 or 12 years. He was here for a day or two in an entirely private capacity. I really have no time to attend to these matters". ⁹⁸

Whilst it is clear that the missive might be construed, at best, as disingenuous, the tone of the communication illustrates the extent to which G.H.Q. had effectively dismissed Kitchener from their calculations. For Kitchener's myopia with regard to the plenteous provision of artillery munitions, a failing which owed a great deal to his having achieved a high reputation through the attainment of Colonial victories with meagre logistical support, was increasingly the subject of Press concern on an ever-broadening front. Thus Garvin entered the lists with a leader in *The Observer*, on 16th May, in which he castigated the Government's negligence over the provision of munitions:

"We must have more shells and still more shells and still more shells and shells without end. We must have more men and still more men until we are able to sustain the West. British armies twice or even thrice as large as now so that the enemy, pressed at many points simultaneously, and, no longer able with effect to manipulate his admirable railway facilities for the transfer of reinforcements to successive points in turn, may be sooner shattered and routed." ⁹⁹

⁹⁴ Repington, *The Times*, *op. cit.*

⁹⁵ Churchill, quoted in Churchill, *op. cit.*, p.364.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ Letter from Kitchener to French, 14th May, 1915; P.R.O., Kitchener Papers, PRO 30/57/50.

⁹⁸ Letter from French to Kitchener, 15th May, 1915; *op. cit.*

⁹⁹ Garvin, leading article, *The Observer*, 16th May, 1915.

The impression created by Repington's dispatch that Asquith's Newcastle speech on the adequacy of munitions supply was not only inaccurate, but actually bordered upon criminal deception was gaining ground.

An already beleaguered Liberal Government found itself assailed from a fresh quarter, for the previous day had brought forth an early visit by the First Lord of the Admiralty to Downing Street. Churchill had informed Asquith around 9:30 a.m. that Fisher had proffered his resignation in protest at the continued depletion of the Navy's resources in home waters in favour of the Dardanelles campaign; the intelligence was both imparted and received without undue seriousness, a stance arising out of Fisher's oft exercised propensity towards the dramatic. Fisher's letter of resignation, which reached Asquith shortly thereafter, was accompanied by a minute in which the First Sea Lord wrote:

"As I find it increasingly difficult to adjust myself to the increasing policy of the First Lord in regard to the Dardanelles, I have been reluctantly compelled to inform him this day that I am unable to remain as his colleague and I am leaving at once for Scotland so as not to be embarrassed or embarrass you by any explanation to anyone." ¹⁰⁰

However this aquatic Achilles departed not for Scotland, but instead to sulk in the comfort of the Charing Cross Hotel. Asquith, informed once again of Fisher's departure later that day, by Lloyd George, observed that:

"Fisher is always resigning. This is nothing new." ¹⁰¹

It is probable that Fisher's motive in 'resigning' was to extract from Asquith an assurance that the Admiralty would be reconstructed so as to exclude the increasingly over-bearing Churchill, a reading of the affair which is supported by the subsequent actions of both Asquith and Fisher himself. A note to Asquith of 20th May makes abundantly clear that Fisher's aim in proposing resignation was to secure Churchill's resignation and his own metamorphosis into a uniformed First Lord in the style of Lord St. Vincent and Kitchener.

Garvin's later contention that Fisher's resignation was the compelling reason behind the collapse of the Liberal Government [†] is problematic in its evasion of the central point that Churchill's departure from the Cabinet table would have elicited protests from no quarter, Asquith included; to advance therefore the notion that Asquith accepted Fisher's departure so as to retain Churchill is simply absurd. The re-organisation of the Admiralty, whether on Fisher's preferred lines, or with the restoration of McKenna to the Admiralty as Fisher's nominal chief was a comparatively simple political manoeuvre. The anticipated departure of the First Lord was a largely peripheral matter for the Prime Minister's continued tenure, which was not the case with Asquith's position on the provision of munitions. In short the munitions crisis, touching upon as it did the veracity and honour of the Prime Minister, was the real issue; an appreciation fully shared at the time by Spender, who stated that:

"Repington has put the Government very neatly between the devil and deep sea." ¹⁰²

On the same day that Garvin's editorial appeared Northcliffe met with Lloyd George for over an hour to discuss the munitions crisis at some length; the talks apparently progressed to the satisfaction of both parties - Northcliffe later opined the meeting to have been "very useful" ¹⁰³ - for the following day it was arranged that Lloyd George meet Repington in the former's rooms at

¹⁰⁰ Minute from Fisher to Asquith, 15th May, 1915; University of Cambridge, Churchill College, Fisher Papers, I/9.

¹⁰¹ Asquith, attributed to by Riddell, diary entry, 15th May, 1915; *op. cit.*, p.93.

[†] Garvin's memorandum 'Admiralty Crisis May 1915', 6th October, 1919; H.L.R.O., Beaverbrook Library, Beaverbrook Papers, BBK G/5/V.

¹⁰² Letter from Spender to Esher, 17th May, 1915; quoted by S. Koss, *op. cit.*, p.276.

¹⁰³ Riddell, diary entry, 17th May, 1915; *op. cit.*, p.87.

the House of Commons. Riddell later confided to his diary his belief that both meetings, neither of which he attended, indicated:

"that some sort of an understanding was arrived at between him [Lloyd George] and N." ¹⁰⁴

The fruits of this understanding were shortly to be seen in the editorial pages of both *The Times* and the *Daily Mail*. Repington's links with Lloyd George served to bolster the impact of the former's dispatches whilst buttressing the latter's position; thus on 17th May Repington furnished the Chancellor with a detailed memorandum on the inefficiency of the War Office's provision of artillery munitions. Thus fortified Lloyd George penned a lengthy letter to Asquith on 19th May in which he essentially repeated information provided to him by Repington.

The same day *The Times* announced that Churchill's removal from the Government was:

"a *sine qua non* of reconstruction...[whilst]...the great driving power of Mr. Lloyd George will of course be retained." ¹⁰⁵

The latter point bears the stamp of an injunction rather than that of a plea. Similarly the *Daily Mail* continued its attritional attacks upon the Government by printing an article in which it insisted that:

"The public has not yet grasped the fact that shrapnel shell is of little more use in destroying German trenches and wire entanglements than a pea-shooter. Somebody blundered badly at the *outbreak of the war* in not ordering sufficient shells of the high-explosive kind necessary to prepare the ground for our men's advance and save them from the death on barbed wire which has resulted from the use of ineffective shrapnel. That is the plain English of the shell question..... What has caused so many deaths in this war has been the lack of a sufficiency of explosives to destroy the barbed wire in front of the German trenches. When our men advanced they were impaled on the undamaged German barbed wire and shot down by German machine guns" ¹⁰⁶

The article continued by stating that though:

"we supported...the appointment of Lord Kitchener...we confess that we should have done so with considerable hesitation if we could have foreseen the extravagant uses to which the Government have put him." ¹⁰⁷

Northcliffe was still treading warily around Kitchener's public persona, though such caution was rapidly losing its attraction for the 'Chief'.

On 20th May the Liberal Press, in the guise of *The Manchester Guardian*, pronounced to its readers that:

"The present position of the country in the matter of the supply of arms, and above all of explosives, after ten months of war is not merely unsatisfactory; it is deplorable." ¹⁰⁸

The newspaper was known to be close to Lloyd George; thus the mine planted by Northcliffe's agitation was proving to be devastating to the Government's fortunes. Three days earlier, on 17th May, Bonar Law, faced with the prospect of a revolt by his backbenchers, spurred on in no small

¹⁰⁴ Riddell, diary entry, 17th May, 1915; British Museum, British Library, Manuscript Collection, Riddell MS. 62975.

¹⁰⁵ *The Times*, 19th May, 1915.

¹⁰⁶ Leading article, *Daily Mail*, 19th May, 1915.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ 'The New Government', leading article, *The Manchester Guardian*, 20th May, 1915.

part by the Press attacks upon the ponderous nature of the Government's prosecution of the war, approached Lloyd George. The meeting produced the notion of the Government's reconstruction adopting the garb of a Coalition. Bonar Law's difficulties crystallised around the troublesome person of the First Lord of the Admiralty; however the eagerness with which firstly Lloyd George, and latterly Asquith, seized upon the idea of a Coalition - a proposal which the Prime Minister had stated as "not in contemplation" ¹⁰⁹ only five days earlier - is rather more indicative of the extent to which the Liberal Government had been undermined by the sustained attentions of a highly critical Press. In short the Asquith Government bore an uncanny resemblance to Oscar Wilde's Mr. Bunbury; for the Press found out that the Liberal Government could not live, so it died.

If the aforementioned blast emanated from an unexpected quarter, then the most powerful and infamous blast was that delivered by the leading article, penned by Northcliffe himself, which appeared in the *Daily Mail* on 21st May, 1915. Northcliffe arrived at Carmelite House late in the afternoon of 20th May and, his face white and set, wrote the next day's leading article. To the observation by the *Daily Mail* journalist, H.W. Wilson, that the tenor of the leader could bring down upon his head the wrath of the Government, Northcliffe replied:

"I don't care what they do to me. The circulation of the *Daily Mail* may go down to two and the circulation of *The Times* to one - I don't care. The thing has to be done! Better to lose circulation than to lose the war." ¹¹⁰

This was a genuine *cri de cœur* by Northcliffe, and as such interestingly reveals the determination with which upon occasion he wielded the political influence of the *Daily Mail*. Furthermore the personal nature of Northcliffe's agitation is illustrated by its appearance in the newspaper which he had founded; Robinson had baulked at joining the attack upon a national institution. The resultant leader - headlined **KITCHENER'S TRAGIC BLUNDER** - would, as the editor of the *Daily Mail*, Thomas Marlowe, observed, have the effect of "smashing the people's idol." ¹¹¹ However such an action had become necessary in Northcliffe's view, for as he retorted "that man is losing the war!"¹¹² Thus Northcliffe's leader stated that:

"What we do know is that Lord Kitchener has starved the Army in France of high-explosive shells." ¹¹³

On 22nd May, the Radical Liberal *Daily News* confided to its readers that Northcliffe and French had a:

"special friendship...[which had been]...notorious for some time". ¹¹⁴

Thus the newspaper ascribed Northcliffe's campaign of Press agitation to the machinations of G.H.Q., an appreciation which serves to somewhat overstate the rôle which French played in the crisis, whilst conveniently ignoring altogether that of Lloyd George.

The reaction to the *Daily Mail* article was enormous and immediate; the gates of Carmelite House were locked and patrolled by a special police guard. Michael MacDonagh, a journalist on *The Times*, noted that whilst the article was:

"a tremendous indictment! [And].....though it is believed in the lobbies of Parliament that the assertion is well founded, the general mass of the community

¹⁰⁹ Asquith, reply in the House of Commons, 12th May, 1915; *Hansard*, Parliamentary Debates (Commons), Fifth Series, LXXI, Column 1642.

¹¹⁰ Letter from Northcliffe to H.W. Wilson, 20th May, 1915; quoted by R. Pound & G. Harmsworth, *op. cit.*, pp.477-78.

¹¹¹ Thomas Marlowe, editor of the *Daily Mail*, in conversation with Northcliffe, 20th May, 1915; quoted by R. Pound & G. Harmsworth, *op. cit.*, p.478.

¹¹² Northcliffe, in conversation with Thomas Marlowe, 20th May, 1915; *op. cit.*

¹¹³ Northcliffe, 'Kitchener's Tragic Blunder', leading article, *Daily Mail*, 21st May, 1915.

¹¹⁴ *Daily News*, 22nd May, 1915.

have too much confidence in Kitchener to credit it." ¹¹⁵

That confidence found expression in a number of spectacular displays of anger at Northcliffe's attacks upon the public's totem. MacDonagh further noted in his diary that:

"The fat was in the fire yesterday, and no mistake! According to sensational reports in all the papers this morning the fire was lit in the Stock Exchange and the fat was a copy of yesterday's *Daily Mail*, which was ignominiously consigned to the flames by the stockbrokers enraged by a leading article attacking Kitchener. † 'Infamous', 'Unpatriotic', they cried. There has been nothing like this incident in London since the eighteenth century, when books and newspapers reflecting on Crown or Government were publicly burned by the common hangman." ¹¹⁶

In the short term Northcliffe's vitriolic attacks had two, and at first glance, paradoxical results. For whilst the public rallied to acclaim Kitchener's patriotism, and members of the political *milieu* recognised - on Garvin's part not without some degree of regret - that his immediate position had been strengthened, they also noted that his previously supreme rôle at the War Office had been reduced through Northcliffe's article to something approaching a titular one. It was this development, together with the establishment of a Ministry of Munitions, which were the direct fruits of Northcliffe's campaign of Press agitation.

In addition the whole debate provoked by Northcliffe served to galvanise opinion, even Liberal opinion, against the continuance of the Asquith Government. The opinion, expressed by forcefully by General Sir Henry Wilson, that:

"Asquith has never gone to war, he is not at war now, and he never intends to go to war" ¹¹⁷

began to gain considerable ground. Indeed such was the influence of Northcliffe's ceaseless attacks upon the Government, combined with dissatisfaction at the manner in which it had prosecuted the war - an opinion which had itself been promoted assiduously by the Unionist Press throughout the course of the war - that C.P. Scott could excoriate the Government's conduct in a letter to L.T. Hobhouse. Thus Scott observed:

"The Government has failed most frightfully and discredibly in the matter of munitions. Kitchener was no doubt primarily to blame, but the matter was so vital that no Government which neglected to make itself thoroughly informed as to the facts could be absolved from grave responsibility. The Tories may well have said to themselves 'This won't do. We can no longer trust this Government. We must either come in so as to have some control or the country must know the full facts - damaging as they would be to our credit.' I'm not sure that in their place, with thousands of lives uselessly sacrificed.....I shouldn't have felt like that. Party feeling may have come in. Very likely it did. It is certainly operative enough just now, and on both sides." ¹¹⁸

Similarly Cook, his opinion influenced by the erstwhile Liberal Solicitor-General, Lord Buckmaster, passed his verdict on the relative influence of the two crises in occasioning the downfall of the Liberal Government; thus he observed that:

¹¹⁵ Michael MacDonagh, 22nd May, 1915; *op. cit.*, p.67.

† It was over its attacks upon Kitchener during this period that *The Times* was banned from the environs of both the Naval and Military and the United Services Clubs.

¹¹⁶ Michael MacDonagh, diary entry, 22nd May, 1915, *In London during the Great War. The diary of a journalist*, (Eyre & Spottiswoode. 1935)., pp.66-67.

¹¹⁷ Wilson; quoted by R. Pound & G. Harmsworth, *op. cit.*, p.475.

¹¹⁸ Letter from Scott to Hobhouse, 23rd May, 1915; University of Manchester, John Rylands Library, *The Manchester Guardian Archives*, C.P. Scott Papers, Box 334.

"the explosives telegram fixed the mine...the Govt. might have survived the Winny row".¹¹⁹

Arnold Bennett, briefed by McKenna, was rather more concise but equally certain:

"Crisis made by Repington's article in *The Times*".¹²⁰

Churchill concurred in this assessment. For he pointedly confided in an interview with Lloyd George's friend, the newspaper proprietor Sir George Riddell, his belief that:

"Had I spent some of my time in lobbying newspapers instead of working twelve hours a day, I should not be in this plight."¹²¹

Churchill continued by delivering his verdict upon the newly formed Coalition Government, stating his opinion that:

"This is a Northcliffe Cabinet. He has forced this."¹²²

The Liberal Party's grandees were appalled at the apparently casual manner in which Asquith brought to a close the Liberal Ministry; thus Lord Loreburn wrote to Lord Bryce lamenting that although he was:

"not surprised to hear this change of Government...[was the product of]...a Press intrigue. Nor am I surprised that for the first time in our history a Press intrigue had succeeded."¹²³

Bryce, in similar vein, wrote to Scott opining the Coalition's formation to be the result of:

"an intrigue worked through the Harmsworth press".¹²⁴

Lloyd George himself commented to Riddell on 26th May that:

"Northcliffe was right in his facts and I am not sure he was wrong in directing public attention to them as he did.' LG did not mention that he had seen Northcliffe again on Sunday 24th [*sic.*]. I have a shrewd suspicion that LG has been a party to the attack on Kitchener in the 'Times' and the 'Daily Mail' and the 'Manchester Guardian'.....LG is very deep and subtle in all his proceedings. He rarely tells *all* the story."¹²⁵

In this case the Northcliffe Press had proved more than adequate in its telling of the charges against the Liberal Government; the result of the Press campaign of anti-Governmental agitation was to presage the collapse of the last Liberal Government, and the establishment of the Liberal-dominated Coalition Government. The demise of the Asquith Ministry went unlamented even by the editor of the most prestigious Liberal newspaper. It is difficult to conclude other than that Northcliffe's campaign of Press agitation against the 'amateur' manner in which the Asquith

¹¹⁹ Cook, diary entry, 19th May, 1915; quoted by S. Koss, *op. cit.*, pp.276-77.

¹²⁰ Arnold Bennett, diary entry, 21st May, 1915; *op. cit.*, p.276.

¹²¹ Churchill, attributed to by Riddell, diary entry, 20th May, 1915; British Museum, British Library, Manuscript Collection, Riddell MS. 62975.

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ Letter from Lord Loreburn to Lord Bryce, 24th May, 1915; quoted by S. Koss, *op. cit.*, p.280.

¹²⁴ Letter from Bryce to Scott, 26th May, 1915; British Museum, British Library, Manuscript Collection, Scott MS. 50908., ff.95-96.

¹²⁵ Riddell, diary entry, 26th May, 1915; British Museum, British Library, Manuscript Collection, Riddell MS. 62975.

Government had resolved to prosecute the war greatly assisted in the destruction of the last Liberal Ministry.

COALITION AND CONSCRIPTION.

On Wednesday, 19th May, 1915, it appeared that the Unionist Press's agitation had ended the contradiction of a Liberal Government attempting to wage a total war. However the manner in which the Unionist Press, and the Northcliffe Press in particular, had impelled Asquith to reconstruct his Ministry in the style of a Coalition was such as to invite resistance. For having conceded that the Liberal Government was moribund, Asquith sought to revive it behind the façade of a Coalition. In so doing he departed from the Coalition's initial conception as an alliance of the Front benches against the bellicosity of recalcitrant Unionist backbenchers; in and of itself this marked a failure to adequately respond to the demands contained within the agitation carried in the Unionist Press for a thorough overhaul of the dilettante manner in which the Liberal Government had hitherto waged war. Moreover Asquith also discerned in the Coalition a bulwark against the imposition of Press agitation, especially that emanating from Carmelite House, in place of Cabinet government; in this Asquith was guilty of failing to appreciate the influence accrued by the Press during the course of the war.

For politics was practised in the editorial page rather than the House of which the Prime Minister was master. That political power should have migrated from the Westminster to Fleet Street was in no way inevitable; Asquith's leadership style, unaltered by the exigencies of war, facilitated the passage. The danger posed by Asquith's anaemic premiership was that leadership would increasingly devolve upon the leader writer; if the process was allowed to continue, its reversal would prove increasingly problematical. Asquith's temperament ensured that the process continued parallel to the Government's debilitation under Asquith's stagnant direction. It is therefore arguable that the Press remained supreme throughout the war until there emerged a credible, disciplined, and self-confident Parliamentary leadership under Lloyd George in the spring and summer of 1918; indeed the moment at which the political initiative passed back to the Executive from the Editorial may be said to be marked by the 'Maurice debate'.

Asquith resolved to maintain Liberal control of the principal posts concerned with the delicate political questions of the prosecution of the war, and notably that of the tendentious issue of conscription and industrial compulsion. This resolution was most apparent in Asquith's treatment of Bonar Law. Not only did Asquith decline to appoint Bonar Law to a post befitting the leader of the Unionist Party, but he also actively sought to undermine his position as leader by cultivating Balfour, Curzon and Carson. Such unsubtle manœuvres could not but promote distrust and distaste amongst the Unionists, both in Parliament and the Press, at the unexpectedly high price which they were being asked to pay for maintaining Asquith in office. Essentially Asquith and the Liberals viewed the Coalition as being a continuation of the previous Liberal Ministry; such a conception may well be viewed as natural amongst senior ministers enmeshed in Government since the Unionist débâcle of 1906. However such a degree of understanding was not widespread amongst Unionists for whom the Coalition was an entirely new venture; indeed that quality was its very *raison d'être*; hence they demanded that Unionists be accorded a rôle equal, if not superior, to that accorded the Liberal members of the former ministry.

Whilst Asquith's political manœuvres did much to salvage the Liberal position from the effects of the incendiary Press agitation in the immediate term, his treatment of the Unionists, and of Bonar Law in particular, was to prove incompatible with the sustained existence of the Coalition; in contrast with Lloyd George's later actions, Asquith's avowed disdain for Bonar Law led to his failing to create in Bonar Law and the Unionists a bulwark for his premiership. Thus Asquith's personal prejudice against Bonar Law conspired to create a situation in which in seeking to defend his position from Pompey he instead favoured Cæsar.

The Coalition Government which assembled for the first time on Thursday, 27th May, was a source of severe disappointment, and not a little frustration, to those in the Press who had laboured to topple its predecessor. Garvin, impelled by distaste at the reality, wrote:

"I wanted a coalition but never dreamed of one like this".¹

The Liberal Press displayed its bafflement at the course of events to which, unlike its Unionist

¹ Letter from Garvin to Haldane, 26th May, 1915; National Library of Scotland (N.L.S.), Haldane MSS. 5911, f.104.

counterparts, it had contributed little. The resolutely Asquithian-Liberal organ *The Westminster Gazette* sought solace in its blind faith that Asquith had doubtless acted for the best, whilst *The Manchester Guardian* characteristically hailed the Coalition with an appreciation of the advantages in Lloyd George's greater responsibilities at the Ministry of Munitions, without apparently stopping to consider in which direction those responsibilities would draw the erstwhile Radical Chancellor. Doubts as to the wisdom of the enterprise surfaced however in the Press organ of Lloyd George's former constituency of the Radical Liberal. Thus Gardiner, in a leader in the *Daily News*, greeted the appearance of the Coalition with the decidedly lukewarm appreciation that:

"No one, I think, looking at the new Government with a knowledge of real values, will feel that the position of this country has been strengthened".²

The Coalition evinced a similar lack of enthusiasm amongst a number of its own members; Walter Long confided to Gwynne that:

"I loathe the idea of a Coalition Gov't...How on earth are we going to work with men of whom we hold as low opinion as we do of the present administration?"³

Long's sentiments were mirrored by those of Augustine Birrell who remarked to the Irish Nationalist leader John Redmond that:

"you cannot imagine how I *loathe* the idea of sitting cheek by jowl with these fellows".⁴

Such sentiments did not bode well for the continued well being of such a potentially ill-harmonious body as the Asquith Coalition.

Such an atmosphere of intensified Press agitation was underpinned by a belief that the formation of the Coalition served to guarantee the eventual triumph of those who had long advocated the introduction of a coercive element into the direction of manpower in wartime. Thus Henry Wilson noted in his diary for 18th May that:

"with the new Government ought to come conscription."⁵

Similarly Colonel Bridges wrote to his friend Bonar Law on 18th May stating that:

"The Army will expect that compulsory service will be a condition of your participation in the Government."⁶

Despite Asquith's opposition there existed a widespread presumption amongst Unionists, both in Parliament and in the Press, that the reconstruction of the Government ensured that Conscription would be introduced. Immediately prior to the Unionist entry into the Coalition Long bombarded Bonar Law with a succession of missives devoted to the issue of Conscription, on 20th May he advised his 'Chief' that:

"We must have compulsion for Army & Labour."⁷

² Gardiner, leading article, *Daily News*, 5th June, 1915.

³ Letter from Long to Gwynne, 20th May, 1915; University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodleian New Library, Department of Western Manuscripts, MS. Gwynne dep 20.

⁴ Augustine Birrell, in conversation with John Redmond; quoted by Denis Gwynn, *The Life of John Redmond*, (Harrap, 1932), p.425., also quoted by George H. Cassar, *Kitchener: Architect of Victory*, (William Kimber & Co. 1977), p.109.

⁵ Wilson, diary entry, 18th May, 1915; quoted by Adams & Poirier, *op. cit.*, p.85.

⁶ Letter from Colonel Thomas Bridges to Bonar Law, 18th May, 1915; H.L.R.O., Beaverbrook Library, Bonar Law Papers, L/37/2/39.

⁷ Letter from Long to Bonar Law, 20th May, 1915; H.L.R.O., Beaverbrook Library, Bonar Law Papers, L/117/1/12.

The following day he wrote that:

"Surely if we consent to come to the aid of this miserable Gov. we can insist on our own terms....if we have to shoulder a most terrible burden we are entitled to make our own terms. This view is in my opinion sound & is widely held by our men." ⁸

It is clear that Long envisaged Conscription as being the first of those terms. Bonar Law was not alone in receiving Long's splenetic notes on the subject of the Liberal Government and Conscription prior to the establishment of the Coalition. Thus Long informed Carson on 25th May that:

"I would support the D- himself as P.M. with a Cabinet of his pet angels, if they would adopt compulsion all round and prosecute the war with vigour." ⁹

Long's views found echo amongst the Unionist Press, most especially in the mind of Gwynne. For as he wrote to his proprietress on 26th May:

"I think that one of the first things the Government will have to do is to bring in compulsory service. The country is crying out for it and if the Government are not careful they will see processions going up and down the country demanding it; there is no doubt in my mind that the public are quite determined to have it and with these infernal politicians this is the only argument." ¹⁰

Garvin shared the ubiquitous assumption of inevitability:

"a scheme of compulsion, wisely and considerately framed,...will be accepted by the nation as a whole with relief and enthusiasm". ¹¹

Whilst Beatrice Webb noted in her diary for 5th June that:

"Rumours as to the meaning of this sudden and unexpected change fly hither and thither. Some say that it has been engineered by Lloyd George and Balfour; others declare that it is the only way round the administrative incompetence of Kitchener; others again hint that the Government is expecting a big disaster at the Dardanelles and the breakdown of the Russian defence and want to silence criticism; whilst the knowing ones whisper that it means compulsory military service." ¹²

And Robinson wrote that:

"we have got a good movement going in the direction of National Service, the introduction of which is really the main justification of this change of Government." ¹³

That the expectations harboured in so many disparate quarters should have been shown

⁸ Letter from Long to Bonar Law, 21st May, 1915; H.L.R.O., Beaverbrook Library, Bonar Law Papers, L/117/1/14.

⁹ Letter from Long to Carson, 25th May, 1915; P.R.O.N.I., Carson Papers, D/1507.

¹⁰ Letter from Gwynne to Lady Bathurst, 26th May, 1915; University of Leeds, Brotherton Library, Glenesk-Bathurst MSS., Gwynne Papers 1990/1/2329.

¹¹ Garvin, leading article, *The Observer*, 23rd May, 1915.

¹² Beatrice Webb, diary entry, 5th June, 1915; quoted in Margaret I. Cole (Ed.), *Beatrice Webb's Diaries, 1912-1924*, (Longmans, Green and Co. 1952), pp.37-38.

¹³ Robinson; quoted by Paul Guinn, *British Strategy and Politics, 1914 to 1918*, (O.U.P. 1965), p.85.

to be false is directly attributable to Bonar Law's unwillingness to force Compulsion upon Asquith as a prerequisite to Unionist involvement in the Coalition. Hence in the coming months the Unionist Press devoted itself to a sustained campaign of Press agitation designed to force Bonar Law's hand - and thus by implication that of the Prime Minister himself - over the issue of the introduction of Conscription, both martial and industrial.

The failure of the Unionist entry into Coalition with Asquith and the Liberals to enforce Robinson's 'justification' sparked off a series of agitations amongst the Unionist Press all designed to achieve what their Party leader had failed to demand from the outset. Notable amongst the agitation was that launched from Printing House Square, for this campaign, unlike previous examples, was motivated by an *éminence grise* other than Northcliffe; on 24th May Robinson wrote to Milner:

"I hope you approved of the leader which I wrote this morning. The pitch has been terribly queered by recent events, but we cannot afford to drop the real question because it has been allowed to degenerate elsewhere into a personal squabble." ¹⁴

The tone is indicative of the subordinate rôle which Robinson occupied with regard to Milner; together with Robinson's subsequent behaviour the letter serves to substantiate Wickham Steed's observation that:

"Milner was really the Editor of *The Times* all through the [first] Dawson † period." ¹⁵

The letter also serves to indicate Robinson's eagerness to dissociate himself from Northcliffe's actions in attacking Kitchener over the provision of munitions. In this Robinson was at one with Milner. For in a memorandum prepared for the King whilst at Windsor, Milner recorded his pessimistic view that:

"A great deal of fuss has been made about the "Northcliffe" agitation... Personally I discouraged it for all I was worth, foreseeing that, as Northcliffe is a 'red rag to a bull' not only to the Liberal but to a large section of the Unionist press, the fact of his making himself prominent in the agitation for National Service would create a reaction against it." ¹⁶

Milner continued by stating that just such an occurrence was:

"just what had happened. Almost the whole Press – the *Morning Post* is almost the only exception – has joined in the hue and cry against Northcliffe." ¹⁷

Milner's eagerness to call into question the effectiveness of the Northcliffe Press's agitation is of a piece with the unease displayed by a number of prominent Unionists concerning the efficacy of Press agitation at the more 'vulgar' end of the Fourth Estate. Reading Milner's correspondence one is confronted with a double standard regarding the effectiveness of Press agitation; for where he boasts to Gwynne amongst others of the degree of control which he exercised, through Robinson, over *The Times*, he apparently felt himself quite able to categorise Northcliffe's Press support as counter-productive. Had such an assertion possessed a scintilla of truth, rather than a portmanteau of petty jealousy and arrogance, it is doubtful that Northcliffe's support would have

¹⁴ Letter from Robinson to Milner, 24th May, 1915; University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodleian New Library, Department of Western Manuscripts, MS. Dawson dep 61., ff.106-07.

† In August 1917 Robinson, in order to comply with the terms of entail of his aunt's estate, changed his surname to Dawson by deed-poll.

¹⁵ Wickham Steed, in conversation with M.R.D. Foot, 4th January, 1950; News International Record Office, *The Times* Archives, Memoranda/Notes, Wickham Steed MSS.

¹⁶ Memorandum by Milner, 29th August, 1915; quoted by S. Koss, *op. cit.*, p.283.

¹⁷ *Op. cit.*, pp.283-84.

been courted with such assiduity.

Nevertheless, the relationship between Robinson and Milner, which had ensured that the former played little or no part in the campaign of agitation over the B.E.F.'s munitions supplies, further determined that *The Times* should occupy a central rôle in the Unionist Press's campaign of agitation in favour of Conscription. † Thus the 'announcement' of the Conscription Press agitation appeared in *The Times* beneath the headline of :

'Unfair Methods: Lord Milner's Call for Leadership'.

In the letter Milner opined that:

"The State ought not to be obliged to tout for fighting men. It ought to be in a position to call out the number it wants.....and to call them in the right order....."

It is high time that the whole of our able-bodied man-hood should be enrolled.....except those who can render the most efficient aid in other ways. And the nation is ready to obey the order. It only needs the captain on the bridge to give the order." ¹⁸

The letter proved efficacious in stimulating not only the quiescent National Service League but also the rather more active Unionist Press; indeed such was the vigour with which the Unionist Press campaigned for the introduction of Conscription that *The Manchester Guardian* felt itself compelled to warn its readers on 1st June that:

"The attempt to stampede the country into conscription is now in full swing." ¹⁹

One element of the 'stampede' was provided by the Northcliffe Press; intriguingly however Northcliffe at this point had not yet overcome his qualms concerning compulsion. Instead the campaign of agitation expounded by Northcliffe from Carmelite House was a continuation of that which had provoked the formation of the Coalition the previous month; agitation, worryingly for the Liberal Press, often consisted of prominent reporting of the speeches of the newly appointed Minister of Munitions. Thus the *Daily Mail* approvingly reported Lloyd George's incautious speech, delivered at the Houldsworth Hall in Manchester on 3rd June, whose effect was to attack the record of the Liberal Government, question the continuance of trades-union privileges and raise the prospect of state regulation in wartime. For he stated that:

"the nation has not yet concentrated one-half its industrial strength on the problem of carrying this great conflict through successfully. It is a war of munitions.

We are fighting against the best-organised community in the world – the best organised whether for war or for peace – and we have been employing too much of the haphazard, leisurely, go-as-you-please methods, which, believe me, would not have enabled us to maintain our place as a nation even in peace very much longer.....We want to mobilise in such a way as to produce in the shortest space of time the greatest quantity of the best and most efficient war material." ²⁰

The incaution of Lloyd George's speech lies less in its explicit content than in the logical direction in which the speech propelled both the speaker and the more thoughtful amongst his widespread audience. For it is clear that the speech, which fits neatly within the broad sweep of

† On 8th June, 1915, Milner became the President of the National Service League; thereby providing the League with a central figure of national political significance, the absence of which had rendered the League quiescent since the death of Lord Roberts.

¹⁸ Milner, 'Unfair Methods: Lord Milner's Call for Leadership', *The Times*, 27th May, 1915.

¹⁹ Leading article, *The Manchester Guardian*, 1st June, 1915.

²⁰ Lloyd George, speech at Manchester, *Daily Mail*, 4th June, 1915.

the Northcliffe campaign of agitation with which the new Minister was so intimately involved, serves to question the previous Government's conduct of war, though the language employed to do so is of necessity opaque, and hints at the prospect of industrial conscription. As such the speech serves as an exercise in 'kite flying', a kite which was designed to be kept aloft by his allies in the Northcliffe Press.

The Manchester Guardian related that:

"The real necessity is a mobilisation of our industrial resources, and here, while preferring to rely on persuasion, Mr. Lloyd George more than hinted at the drastic powers which the Defence of the Realm Act gives the Agents of the State." ²¹

In contemplating the introduction not only of military, but more potently of industrial conscription, Lloyd George served to ally himself with the more ardent of the Unionist proponents of Conscription. Indeed such actions also served to underline Esher's observation, made on 6th June, that:

"People say that Lloyd George will oust Asquith. It is possible. He has the ear of the groundlings, and the Tories have taken him to their bosom as I always knew they would." ²²

A week later Esher repeated his observation to the King.

The veracity of Esher's appreciation is further evidenced by the curious manner in which Lloyd George launched an offensive through the medium of the Press against his opponents within Cabinet. Lloyd George and Northcliffe having developed a mutually beneficial relationship throughout the course of the 'Shells Scandal'; continued and deepened their relationship following the creation of the Coalition. Thus Lloyd George met with Northcliffe on several occasions and also wrote a letter to the proprietor stating that he would substantiate Northcliffe's attacks upon Kitchener and further that he would resign if he were not allowed scope to act at the Ministry of Munitions. It is clear that Lloyd George was seeking to silence his critics within Cabinet through the initiation of a campaign of Press agitation. Further to this Lloyd George spoke freely with Robertson Nicoll, † the editor of the Nonconformist journal, *The British Weekly*; the result of these conversations was the appearance of a somewhat sensational article on Thursday, 10th June, which related Lloyd George's difficulties. Whilst the article was undoubtedly a reflection of the Minister's thought, the ambiguous manner of its inspiration allowed Lloyd George to retain a tincture of 'deniability'; following a Disraelian level of flattery of its subject's rhetorical powers, the article related that Lloyd George:

"accepted the new post of Minister of Munitions, and he has been called to it by a nation universally of the opinion that if he cannot accomplish the titanic task no one else can do it. Lloyd George should not be hampered in this work by the government or the House of Commons. If he is he will and he should refuse to go on. He is the last man to be influenced by pique...it is not and cannot be his duty to undertake a task which he knows is hopeless from the beginning. He must be trusted. Humanly speaking, everything depends on him." ²³

The Times observed that the article was being read as a threat by Lloyd George to force the fracture of the Coalition and bring about a General Election; the incident marks the first intimation of the detachment of Lloyd George from Asquith and the Liberals.

With Northcliffe unengaged Milner fulfilled the rôle of the driving force behind the campaign which the Unionist Press waged throughout June and early August. Hence Milner

²¹ *The Manchester Guardian*, 4th June, 1915.

²² Letter from Esher to Brett, 6th June, 1915; quoted in Esher, *op. cit.*, p.247.

† Nicoll was a well-known intimate of Lloyd George; any article stemming from his pen therefore carried additional weight, bearing as it appeared to Lloyd George's imprimatur.

²³ Robertson Nicoll, leading article, *The British Weekly*, 10th June, 1915.

sought to mobilise the Unionist Press; *The Times* raised the political stakes by calling for the introduction of "universal service",²⁴ thereby raising a spectre which could only heighten opposition. As Milner sought to mobilise the resources of *The Times*, through his relationship with Robinson, so Wilson utilised two officers serving on the G.H.Q. staff to influence leading Unionists in both Parliament and the Press. Thus the Liberal M.P., Captain Freddie Guest served as a conduit for Wilson's views to his cousin Churchill, Carson and Gwynne; whilst Major John Baird, Bonar Law's Parliamentary Private Secretary, acted as a link with the Unionist leader. Thus Wilson acted as the fulcrum of the cabal's attempt; in this guise he joined Long in his uncharitable assessment of the Cabinet. For he noted in his diary for 27th June that:

"Freddie Guest showed me a long letter he had received from Walter Long – poor devil – to the effect that no case had yet been made out for conscription & etc – Marvellous."²⁵

The failure of the Cabinet debate surrounding the national register to address the fundamental contradictions between the Liberal and Unionist positions over conscription served to spur on Wilson and his cohorts; their ultimate aim being to replace Kitchener with a substantially empowered CIGS and Asquith with a vigorous Prime Minister; the principal candidates for both posts being Wilson himself and Carson. To this end Gwynne sought to influence Bonar Law in favour of conscription by revealing to him the full extent of the Army's manpower requirements. Thus he wrote to the Unionist leader on 7th July, enclosing a letter dispatched to him from the DMO at the War Office, Callwell. Callwell wrote that:

"I am afraid that we shall before long be in serious difficulties as to men. The recruiting is now not going at all well and as far as I can gather – for it is not part of my work – it will become a serious problem as to how casualties are to be made good when the Army grows by three hundred thousand men, or more, at the front."²⁶

Callwell's missive continued by criticising the manner in which, even post 'Shells Scandal', Kitchener continued to conduct affairs at the War Office:

"Could you not give a hint to the Unionists in the Cabinet? They are quite entitled to ask what provision is being made for maintaining the growing Army. The wastage when we have three New Armies at the front in addition to what there is now will be at the rate of quite 70,000 a month – more in a bad month – and if the wastage cannot be made good the whole thing comes to the ground."²⁷

Such opinions, and with such provenance, could not fail to impress themselves both recipients; however the immediate effect of the letter was negligible; not least due to Bonar Law's timidity when dealing with Asquith.

Northcliffe had by July resolved to play a full part in the campaign of agitation in favour of conscription; a decision which served to discomfort the more punctilious of his comrades amongst the conscriptionists. The first stage of that campaign was marked by the introduction of Long's National Registration Bill, which was commended to the House of Commons on 29th June. In the debate over the bill the opponents of conscription gave full vent to their anger at the measure's stalking horse qualities. Thus the Welsh Radical member, Llewellyn Williams, enunciated the position of many amongst the Liberal Party when he stated that:

"It is obvious from every speech in support of the Bill, from every article which has been published in the newspapers in support of this Bill, that there is an

²⁴ *The Times*, 17th June, 1915.

²⁵ Wilson, diary entry, 27th June, 1915; I.W.M., Wilson Diary, DS/MISC/80, HHW 23.

²⁶ Letter from Callwell to Gwynne, 7th July, 1915; H.L.R.O., Beaverbrook Library, Bonar Law Papers, L/51/1/11 (Enclosure).

²⁷ *Ibid.*

ulterior motive and object. We are introducing a Bill which can never be put into effective operation unless it is followed by a stringent measure of compulsion." ²⁸

The Coalition's ubiquitous fissures over conscription were by no means confined to mere partisan divisions. Thus Asquith found his policy of evasion attacked by both Guest and Leo Amery. The former notable for his connection to Wilson, his activities as a conduit between the 'Khaki Eminence', Churchill, Carson and Gwynne, and his position as a leading light amongst the small grouping of belligerent Liberals; the latter for his post at the War Office where he possessed free rein to devote himself to the conscriptionist agitation. Thus Amery and Guest formed a nexus which linked the War Office, G.H.Q. in France, the Unionist Business Committee, the pro-conscription Coalition Unionists, the backbench Liberal 'ginger' group, the Milnerites and the National Service League - by now all but synonymous - and the Unionist Press. Gwynne wrote to Bonar Law to impress upon the Unionist leader the urgency of the Army's need for the introduction of conscription:

"whether we like it or not, compulsory service has got to come for the simple reason that the reserves necessary to keep men in the field that we have promised to keep there, will go far beyond what we can provide by the voluntary system". ²⁹

As the campaign without the Cabinet continued to be waged, so those advocates of conscription within the Cabinet, notable amongst whom was Long, redoubled their efforts to force conscription upon the reluctant Asquith whilst the House was in recess. Thus he stated his view that:

"It seems to me that the Cabinet must come shortly to a definite decision upon the subject of compulsory service. A statement is likely to be required when Parliament reassembles in the autumn. I suggest, therefore, that we should seize the opportunity of comparative leisure which is afforded by the Recess to arrive at a settled opinion; it is with this object that I venture to submit the following suggestions to my colleagues." ³⁰

The injunction towards speed in debate, in common with that contained within Gwynne's memorandum indicates how far both documents were designed to achieve their ends in conjunction; furthermore both go some distance to explaining the resentment which the campaign of public and private agitation aroused amongst volunteerist Liberals who often felt themselves to be the victims of an attempt to 'stampede' them into abandoning both their position and their principles.

By the autumn of 1915 the advocates of conscription could perceive their ultimate victory drawing ever closer as the dynamics of the Cabinet were ever more favourable to their cause. Gwynne was not alone in harbouring the sentiments which underlay his declaration to his proprietress, on 20th August, that:

"victory can only be got by national service and national service is, I believe, on the eve of being adopted. It has been hard work but well worth the labour." ³¹

Confronted with the threat posed by Conscription, Asquith sought solace in the time-worn device of establishing a Cabinet Committee; a move which did little to mask the fact that its composition

²⁸ Llewellyn Williams, House of Commons, 5th July, 1915; quoted by Adams & Poirier, *op. cit.*, p.97.

²⁹ Letter from Gwynne to Bonar Law, 27th July, 1915; H.L.R.O., Beaverbrook Library, Bonar Law Papers, L/51/1/38.

³⁰ Long, memorandum, 5th August, 1915; P.R.O., CAB 37/132/6.

³¹ Letter from Gwynne to Lady Bathurst, 20th August, 1915; University of Leeds, Glenesk-Bathurst MSS, Lady Bathurst Papers 1990/1/2336.

signalled his capitulation. For the Conscriptionist complexion[†] of the Committee goes some distance towards revealing the paucity of Asquith's leadership by this stage of the war; Asquith's failure to provide a measure of strong leadership served to ensure that:

"As his government lurched from one crisis to another, he painstakingly devised and imposed compromises that were intended less to win the war than to satisfy all parties."³²

The Committee's failure to discern a compromise, instead of relaxing existing tensions within the Coalition the establishment of the Committee only served to coax them into the open. Thus Lloyd George expressed his opinion in forceful terms to the Committee on 18th August:

"If you ask me personally whether it [Conscription] would help the efficient conduct of the war I say at once that it certainly would. I would say that every man and woman was bound to render the services that the State required of them, and which in the opinion of the State they could best render."³³

Whilst Lloyd George thus plainly signalled his defection from Liberal orthodoxy, the President of the Board of Trade, Walter Runciman, in his statement before the Committee revealed the extent to which the Cabinet was divided over the issue. For Runciman positively revelled in the extent of his opposition to Conscription when he stated that:

"I would say we could maintain an army of 2½ millions, and every man we go beyond that will weaken us, because it would cut away the [economic] foundations on which we rest."³⁴

A similar line of argument was forwarded by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Reginald McKenna, when he faced the Committee on 23rd August. McKenna also extended the scope of Runciman's thesis to include the war effort's rapacious consumption of both goods and services, thus McKenna confided to the Committee his fears that:

"If the nation is going to spend on its own consumption at the present rate, you cannot devote more labour for the use of the Army or for the purpose of supplying our Allies."³⁵

Such a position went far beyond merely seeking to defend the *status quo* of voluntary enlistment, rather it served to question the very sustainability of Britain's war effort itself. McKenna subsequently repeated his assertion that Britain could not prosecute the war other than by utilising the Pitt System of seapower and subsidy in an interview with Hobhouse, which the latter reported to Scott on 24th September. Thus Hobhouse quotes McKenna as stating that:

"We can go on ten years if they will only leave industry alone....There are 100 ways of winning the war and only one of losing—conscription."³⁶

The existence of such mutually contradictory opinions led to Kitchener being perceived as pivotal to the entire debate; Liberal opinion appeared ready to reconcile the irreconcilable should some external influence be exerted.

[†] The body was headed by Crewe; suspicious of compulsion; and consisted Churchill, Curzon, Chamberlain and Selborne; all Conscriptionists; and Arthur Henderson, the Coalition's sole Labour representative.

³² Cassar, *Asquith as War Leader*, (Hambleton Press. 1994.), p.131.

³³ Lloyd George, 'Report of the Proceedings of the War Policy Committee', 18th August, 1915; P.R.O., CAB 37/132/28.

³⁴ Runciman, *op. cit.*, 19th August, 1915; P.R.O., CAB 37/133/1.

³⁵ McKenna, *op. cit.*, 23rd August, 1915; P.R.O., CAB 37/133/9.

³⁶ McKenna, quoted by Hobhouse in a letter to Scott, 24th September, 1915; quoted in Trevor Wilson (*Ed.*), *The Political Diaries of C.P. Scott 1911-1928*, (Collins. 1970.), p.137.

Unfortunately for Asquith Kitchener remained unwilling to commit himself; a position which ensured that the political atmosphere became progressively more intemperate, with positions on both sides more entrenched; the impasse could no longer be circumvented by some political *coup de main*. Thus Kitchener reluctantly appeared before the Committee on 24th August; however his evidence was preceded by that of his subordinates: Generals Montgomery, Director of Recruiting; Murray, Deputy CIGS; and the loquacious Callwell, DMO. Each officer was an ardent advocate of Conscription, yet each was obliged to sing from Kitchener's hymn sheet. This contradiction led Callwell to confide in Gwynne that:

"In dealing with Cabinet Committees it is very difficult not to expose the business. I am not a good liar – the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak- and you cannot fool people like Curzon & Winston who know the business." ³⁷

Callwell added his rather disingenuous hope that:

"Northcliffe may get hold of the facts because Repington somehow has very useful sources of information, and if he does he may make trouble much more effectually than he did on munitions. K. trusts to bluffing them all; but he may not succeed." ³⁸

Doubtless Callwell, one of Repington's sources within the War Office, would strive mightily to ensure that Kitchener did not succeed in his doubtful endeavour. That Callwell should find solace in recourse to the Unionist Press is of a piece with the effectiveness of the Conscriptivist Press' campaign in placing that policy at the head of the Government's agenda. A development which Kitchener deprecated:

"I greatly regret that there has been this discussion in the country. I think it is very premature and can only have done harm". ³⁹

Whilst he admitted that enlistment was averaging less than 20,000 men per week, the 'War-Lord' continued his evidence by calling for a force in the field numbering some seventy divisions; a force the size of which necessitated an intake of no less than some 35,000 per week. Whilst not explicitly intended to act as death-notice for volunteerism, it could scarcely be viewed in any other light.

The Cabinet Committee, rather than facilitating a compromise agreement, instead contrived to lay bare the Coalition's divisions and tensions; for it presented the Cabinet with three options:

- "(a) To maintain the Army under the present recruiting system at about its present strength, employing the men enlisted for the later units as drafts, and avoiding the creation of further new formations.
- (b) To endeavour to increase the supply of recruits on the voluntary basis by informing the public in this country of the main facts of this enquiry, including the extent to which the French Government are entitled to expect us to contribute 70 divisions; and either (1) trust that the explanation will produce such an increase as is necessary, or (2) announce that, unless it is promptly forthcoming, some method of compulsory selection will be instituted at a given date in order to supply the balance.....
- (c) The institution as soon as possible of some form of compulsory service confined to the period of the war.....". ⁴⁰

³⁷ Letter from Callwell to Gwynne, 24th August, 1915; University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodleian New Library, Department of Western Manuscripts, MS. Gwynne dep 17.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Kitchener, 'Report of the Proceedings of the War Policy Committee', 24th August, 1915; P.R.O., CAB 37/133/10.

⁴⁰ 'Report of the War Policy Committee', 8th September, 1915; P.R.O., CAB 37/134/9.

The failure to finesse the issue was testified to by the plethora of minority reports which the process spawned. Curzon, Chamberlain and Churchill collaborated to produce a Conscriptionist 'White Paper'; whilst Henderson expressed his reservation that:

"If we try to make the journey in one stage from voluntary enlistment for an undefined object to conscription for a defined object, without having taken the people into our confidence by giving them all the information and facts at our disposal, we shall meet with almost insuperable difficulties, accompanied with a divided Cabinet, a divided Parliament, and a divided nation." ⁴¹

Henderson continued in a similar vein by referring to the recently expressed opposition to conscription of both the T.U.C. and the General Federation of Trade Unions, and argued that:

"they cannot be brought to that alternative [that of conscription or defeat] suddenly, or apart from the conviction that it is a military necessity. They must have time. And if the time is spent in a final endeavour, made after the most solemn appeal and on a full and reasoned statement of our obligations to our Allies, to meet those obligations voluntarily, I believe that one of two results will follow. Either conscription will be accepted without serious injury to the nation, or it will be proved to be unnecessary." ⁴²

Such concerns were to give rise to Asquith's final delaying tactic; the Derby scheme which marked the final throw of the volunteer principle.

Whilst Asquith's position was buffeted by conflicts within the Cabinet he remained all too aware of those external forces seeking to exert influence upon this question. Thus when he lunched with the proprietor of *The Daily Telegraph*, Lord Burnham, on Thursday, 2nd September, he informed the proprietor, as Burnham later recorded, that:

"He knew of the dinner at which I had been present, given by Captain the Honble F. Guest, of 26, Park Lane, ten days before, and he ridiculed the men who were conducting the agitation. I pointed out to him that they drew their strength entirely from the Harmsworth papers, and that the sinister figure at the back of the whole of this agitation - as in many other ways - was Colonel A'Court Repington, Military Correspondent of "The Times", who supplied the M.P.s with their figures and arguments." ⁴³

Such a confirmation that the Northcliffe Press was pivotal in the campaign of agitation being waged across the pages of the Unionist Press and amongst the more bellicose of the Unionist backbenches cannot but have contributed to Asquith's unease at the direction which events were taking.

The Cabinet's divisions over conscription were spectacularly placed before the public on 13th September. For on that day Lloyd George released to the Press the preface to a new collection of his wartime speeches, entitled *Through Terror to Triumph*, the incendiary nature of the document being that the Minister was explicit in his judgement as to the inevitability of national service, and moreover its desirability. For in the piece Lloyd George stated that:

"If we are not allowed to equip our factories with adequate labour to supply our armies, because we must not transgress regulations applicable to ordinary conditions; if practices are maintained which restrict the output of essential war material; if the nation hesitates, when the need is clear, to take the necessary steps to call forth its manhood, to defend honour and existence; if vital discussions are postponed until too late; if we neglect to make ready for all probable eventualities; in fact we give ground for the accusation that we are

⁴¹ Henderson, 'Minority Report of the War Policy Committee', nd September, 1915; P.R.O., CAB 37/134/5.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ Notes by Burnham, 2nd September, 1915; I.W.M., Lord Burnham Papers, HLWL/10/3.

slouching into disaster as if we were walking along the ordinary paths of peace without an enemy in sight; then I can see no hope".⁴⁴

However, despite Lloyd George's statement the advocates of conscription in the Unionist Press remained impatient at the reluctance of the Government to grasp the nettle of the issue. Thus Northcliffe wrote to Repington on 16th September:

"I agree with you that conscription must come. It is merely a question of when the Government will tell the country the whole truth. I believe that [there] are existing cadres [which] could absorb 250,000 more men tomorrow if we could get them, and that the weekly intake of recruits has now fallen to less than half of the weekly totals which we need to maintain existing forces in the field. I consider it positively criminal to keep the facts from the public."⁴⁵

Such impatience was not however confined to Printing House Square and Carmelite House, for on 20th September Gwynne received a letter from a prominent Unionist discomfited by the Government's reluctance to face the ineluctable issue of the day; in the light of subsequent events it is ironic that Gwynne's correspondent should be Lord Derby. For Derby wrote that:

"We are indeed as you say in a dreadful muddle and all to my mind because Asquith is too lazy to make up his mind. I think Lloyd George's letter in this morning's papers will bring matters to a head."⁴⁶

Thus the issue of conscription had by the autumn of 1915 served to exploit the ideological dichotomy which lay at the heart of the Coalition to such good effect that the scintilla of cooperative spirit which had existed at the Coalition's outset had been extruded. The Cabinet was firmly divided between those such as the Radical Liberals - amongst whom were numbered McKenna, Runciman, Simon, Harcourt and Montagu, with Crewe and Grey offering support - and the proponents of a more vigorous prosecution of the war; the latter grouping consisting of all the Unionists, with the possible exception of Balfour, together with Churchill and Lloyd George. The former gathering were bolstered in their opposition to the introduction of conscription by a substantial portion of the 1906 Radical Liberal entry on the backbenches, in addition to the vocal support of such Liberal organs as the *Daily News*, *The Daily Chronicle* and *The Manchester Guardian*. Broadly speaking this group of opinion was associated with that opposed to Britain's involvement in the Great War at the outset; perhaps in consequence this strand of Liberal opinion refused to recognize that the conflict was likely to be a prolonged one, hence their stolidity saw no pressing need for the introduction of such an ill-Liberal and contentious measure as that of conscription.

Despite such a body of support - this group would also stand behind Asquith during the course of the schism of December 1916 - Asquith's position was considerably weaker than at any other point in his wartime premiership to date. Whilst the Prime Minister's supporters continued to express their support for his position, such acclamations carried less and less weight in the political arena as the approbation became progressively more detached from political reality; the Liberal Press castigated Lloyd George rather than engaging in a pragmatic appreciation of the political and military situation. In striving to bolster Asquith his supporters only succeeded in enhancing his intractability; a characteristic which was to greatly contribute to the erosion of his position. Thus whilst Lloyd George lost influence within the Cabinet, and Bonar Law without, so Asquith's Coalition Government was fatally weakened; it is interesting to note that the behaviour of the Liberal volunteerists, not least McKenna, in their vitriolic loathing of the only two Liberal conscriptionists within the Cabinet, Churchill and Lloyd George, served to greatly assist those in the Unionist Press such as Gwynne who aimed to make the Liberals synonymous with opposition

⁴⁴ Lloyd George; quoted by Bentley Brinkerhoff Gilbert, *David Lloyd George. A Political Life*, Volume II: *Organizer of Victory*, (B.T. Batsford. 1992), p.260.

⁴⁵ Letter from Northcliffe to Repington, 16th September, 1915; British Museum, British Library, Manuscript Collection, Northcliffe MS. 62253, ff.43-44.

⁴⁶ Letter from Derby to Gwynne, 20th September, 1915; University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodleian New Library, Department of Western Manuscripts, MS. Gwynne dep 22.

to conscription; and by implication far less eager to defeat Germany.

The Government's weakness with regard to the manpower question further called into question the strategic cost involved in the 'side shows', such as the Dardanelles and Salonika. Northcliffe was at the centre of the efforts of the Press to force upon the Coalition Government the necessity of withdrawal from the Dardanelles. To this end he seized upon the report of an Australian journalist, Keith Murdoch, into conditions on the Peninsula. Originally dispatched to investigate the condition of postal provision amongst the Australian troops, Murdoch produced a critique of the operation – written in the form of a letter to a certain Mr. Fisher of the Australian High Commissioner's Office - which is startling in its similarities to those penned by Russell in the Crimea. Northcliffe wasted little time in contacting the Australian, remarking to Murdoch that:

"If I were in possession of the information you have, involving as it does the lives of thousands of your compatriots and mine, I should not be able to rest until a true story of this lamentable adventure was so well known as to force immediate steps to be taken to remedy the state of affairs. The matter has haunted me ever since I learned about it." ⁴⁷

Northcliffe had clearly resolved that the matter should haunt a number of others; to that end he resolved that they would be in possession of such information.

Thus Northcliffe, through Lloyd George, passed on Murdoch's colourful report to the Cabinet. In the dispatch Murdoch stated of "the unfortunate Dardanelles expedition" ⁴⁸ that:

"It is undoubtedly one of the most terrible chapters in our history...there has been a series of disastrous underestimations...had any one of these been luckily so unEnglish a thing as an overestimation, we should have been through to Constantinople at much less cost than we have paid for our slender perch on the cliffs of the Peninsula." ⁴⁹

Murdoch continued by observing that:

"The first two efforts, those of the fleet alone and of the combined forces in April-May, failed miserably mainly because London expected far too much from floating artillery. It is only now being recognised that the naval guns, with their flat trajectory, are of little avail against the narrow Turkish trenches. The last great effort, that of August - 6-21, was a costly and bloody fiasco because, in addition to wretched staff work, the troops sent were inadequate and of a most uneven quality. That failure has created a situation which even yet has not been seriously faced - i.e. a choice between withdrawal of our armies and hanging on for a fresh offensive after winter." ⁵⁰

Murdoch offered the Cabinet the unenviable prospect of the conducting operations on the very basis, that of attrition, which they had been designed to evade – truly Fuller was correct in his observation that the:

"peripheral endeavours to discover a penetrable front were a waste of effort, and in expenditure of man-power – the vital factor in mass-warfare – costly in the extreme. The stalemate laughed each to scorn." ⁵¹

⁴⁷ Letter from Northcliffe to Keith Murdoch, 30th September, 1915; British Museum, British Library, Manuscript Collection, Northcliffe MS. 62179.

⁴⁸ Letter from Keith Murdoch to Mr. Fisher, Australian High Commissioner's Office, 23rd September, 1915; British Museum, British Library, Manuscript Collection, Northcliffe MS. 62196, f.1.

⁴⁹ *Op. cit.*, ff.1-2.

⁵⁰ *Op. cit.*, f.2.

⁵¹ Fuller, *op. cit.*, 'The Conduct of World War I', '3: Strategy of Evasion', p.165.

Murdoch might well have noted that the overriding reason for the failure of the Dardanelles operation was that the Government had sought to achieve strategic goals whilst failing to apply either strategic resources or logic to the undertaking; thus the adventure was under-manned to achieve its object, whilst also being grossly over-manned for a subsidiary theatre of operations.

Greatly impressed by Murdoch's account Northcliffe confided to Philip Witham, from whom he leased his house at Sutton Place, that:

"I am concentrating every moment of my time trying to get our poor men out of the Gallipoli trap. If they are not removed in a few weeks they will be destroyed. They are entirely dominated by the Turkish guns. Their losses have been appalling." ⁵²

Thus inspired Northcliffe furnished - in addition to Murdoch's report - Asquith's intimate, Alexander Murray, Master of Elibank, on 7th October, with a further report on the situation in the Dardanelles by the American Military Attaché. [†] The latter document was accompanied by Northcliffe's observation upon the Government's obduracy:

"Long experience has taught me that it is useless offering any costly and very active service of private news to the Government. They will apparently take anything optimistic from anybody, but will not listen to anything regarding the Gallipoli catastrophe or Germany's strength." ⁵³

Despite his deprecation of the Government, Northcliffe's offer elicited from Murray a response in which he stated that:

"Your offer to allow the Government to see your secret information will, I feel sure, be of immense assistance, and I am very happy to be the medium in transmitting it to them. I think you have already rendered incalculable service to them and the country in bringing Mr. Murdoch in touch with them, and the statement of the American military attaché has really stirred them up. I gave Grey and L. G. copies." ⁵⁴

Hence, despite his lack of faith in the Government as a whole to act, Northcliffe, who evidently did possess faith in the Minister of Munitions, arranged a meeting between him and Murdoch on 13th October.

It is interesting, not least in the light of the subsequent 'Westerner' *versus* 'Easterner' debate, to note that neither Churchill nor Lloyd George drew the same conclusion from the Dardanelles débâcle as that which Fuller reached. For Scott records that during the course of a meeting with both Lloyd George and Churchill:

"Both [were] very hostile to the policy of attack now being carried out on Western front, any considerable success from which they regarded as impossible - The whole of the Cabinet had been opposed to it except one man - Kitchener -Both L. G. & Ch. insisted on the far greater possibilities of the Eastern front - As Ch. put it the same effort & expenditure which had given us the village of Loos wd have given us Constantinople & the command of the Eastern world". ⁵⁵

Both men appear to have been, and to have continued to be, oblivious of the danger that in

⁵² Letter from Northcliffe to Philip Witham, 7th October, 1915; quoted by R. Pound & G. Harmsworth, *op. cit.*, p.488.

[†] Lieutenant-Colonel George O. Squier.

⁵³ Letter from Northcliffe to Murray of Elibank, 7th October, 1915; British Museum, British Library, Manuscript Collection, Northcliffe MS. 62158, f.72.

⁵⁴ Letter from Murray of Elibank to Northcliffe, 12th October, 1915; British Museum, British Library, Manuscript Collection, Northcliffe MS. 62158.

⁵⁵ Scott, diary entry, 1st October, 1915; University of Manchester, John Rylands' Library, *The Manchester Guardian* Archives, Scott Papers, Box 133.

gaining Constantinople they might lose Paris.

The cherishing of such strategic fallacies goes some way towards indicating the reason why the Unionist Press continued, despite his advocacy of conscription, to view Lloyd George with distrust. Thus Repington remarked to Northcliffe on 13th October that:

"All is well at the moment, but when a Welsh mystic honestly conceives himself to be sent by Heaven to win the war, there is no accounting for what he may do, I wish he would surround himself with proper men but I do not like his cronies a bit." ⁵⁶

Similarly Gwynne confided to Balfour's erstwhile Private Secretary, Jack Sandars, that:

"I too have my doubts about Lloyd George. Indeed, who has not who knows him?" ⁵⁷

However Gwynne enunciated the Unionist Press' acute dilemma when he continued:

"But as sure as we are alive we shall come to some appalling disaster if we go on under the present man. It is not that he is not able, or that he lacks energy; but he has the most fatal of all defects in war: he cannot come to a decision.....I will not say that I am not a little bit afraid of Lloyd George, but frankly I would rather see Lloyd George Prime Minister than the present one." ⁵⁸

Fortunately for such voices in the Unionist Press there emerged in October a credible Unionist 'Pretender' in the guise of Carson. For dissatisfied with the manner in which Coalition prosecuted the war Carson resigned from the Government on 12th October.

Similarly the Unionists reacted unfavourably to the Government's attempt to ameliorate their political situation by instituting a further delay in the face of the seemingly inevitable. That was the construction placed upon Kitchener's approach, assented to by Asquith, to the arch-Unionist and stalwart of the voluntary recruitment campaign, the 'Uncrowned King of Lancashire', the seventeenth Earl of Derby, to head the last throw of the Volunteerist principle. That Derby should be singled out for the dubious honour is understandable in view of his almost singular prestige, and his friendship with Kitchener; both possessed enormous prestige in the country, prestige which was liable to wither when confronted in person. Beaverbrook later recorded the Whitehall view of Derby that:

"this imposing façade covers the weakness of a swithering viewpoint. Derby, it says, will agree in taking up a certain attitude but in the next ten minutes he will flop on to the other side if he meets an opposing viewpoint." ⁵⁹

Haig concurred, though in a rather more memorable and concise form; for he opined of Derby that:

"like the feather pillow he bears the mark of the last person who sat on him". ⁶⁰

Despite Haig's reservations, it is doubtful if Derby viewed his scheme as anything other than the 'final endeavour' called for by Henderson; he described his position as that "of a receiver who was put in to wind up a bankrupt concern." ⁶¹ Similarly Derby advised Asquith on 20th October, the

⁵⁶ Letter from Repington to Northcliffe, 13th October, 1915; British Museum, British Library, Manuscript Collection, Northcliffe MS. 62253, f.95.

⁵⁷ Letter from Gwynne to J.S. Sandars, 21st October, 1915; University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodleian New Library, Department of Western Manuscripts, MS. Sandars c768.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Beaverbrook, *Politicians and the War 1914-1916*, *op. cit.*, p.252.

⁶⁰ Haig; quoted by Taylor, *English History, 1914-1945*, (O.U.P. 1965), p.53, Note 3.

⁶¹ Derby, speech in Rossendale, 5th October, 1915; quoted in the *Star*, 6th October, 1915.

day after the announcement of the Scheme, that he should have a conscription bill to hand; in effect Derby was acknowledging that the Scheme was the precursor rather than the alternative to conscription.

Throughout November it had become abundantly clear that the Derby Scheme was doomed to failure by its inability to persuade bachelors of military age to volunteer. Pressed by Derby, Asquith secured the Cabinet's agreement on 1st November for a statement to be made clarifying the Government's position regarding attestation and married status. He informed the House the following day that if once:

"the whole of this machinery has been in operation and has achieved what it can, there should still be found a substantial number of men of military age not required for other purposes, who, without excuse, hold back from the service of their country, I believe that the very same conditions which make compulsion impossible now, namely the absence of general consent, would force the country to the view that they must consent to supplement by some force of legal obligation the failure of the voluntary system." ⁶²

Asquith's acknowledgement of the proximity of compulsion led to a great deal of Liberal unease and recrimination, the target for much of which was Lloyd George. Lloyd George's links to both Northcliffe and the Unionists had aroused suspicion in his enemies and discomfiture amongst his friends from the outset of the Coalition. Thus Riddell had confided to his diary on 9th November that:

"It is evident that Lloyd George is working closely in touch with Northcliffe, and gradually shedding the sentimental section of the Radical Party....for whom he now has the heartiest contempt. None of the Radicals in the Cabinet are working with him. McKenna, Simon, Runciman, McKinnon Wood, Buckmaster, Harcourt, etc. are opposed to him. He finds his supporters among the Conservatives. It looks as if he is going the same road as Chamberlain. L.G.'s attitude to the war makes his severance from the Radicals inevitable..... Bereft of his associates on the great question of the day, he is obliged to seek support elsewhere. L.G.'s future is interesting." ⁶³

In the Lloyd George-McKenna antagonism may be perceived the schism which was to destroy the Asquith Coalition, and with it the Liberal Party itself, some twelve months hence.

By the latter part of December the advance of Conscriptionist opinion within Cabinet was almost complete; its passage being eased by a climate of resignation amongst the remnants of Volunteerists. Thus, despite Scott's hysterical fears that:

"if the attempt is made to enforce military service on angry men there will be bloodshed at home as well as abroad and very grave labour troubles besides" ⁶⁴

the Liberal Press remained hamstrung by the insubstantial nature of the Parliamentary opposition to Conscription. As Dillon observed to Scott:

"The threat of a general election—and the conviction was/is universal, that an election on the issue of the present Bill would result in the Conscriptionists sweeping the country—caused a very large number of radical and labour members opposed to the Bill to support the Government. And of course the fact that only 45 members from Great Britain could be got to vote against the Bill is a serious fact which must modify the opposition." ⁶⁵

⁶² Asquith, speech in the House of Commons, 2nd November, 1915; quoted by Adams & Poirier, *op. cit.*, pp.129-30.

⁶³ Riddell, diary entry, 9th November, 1915; British Museum, British Library, Manuscript Collection, Riddell MS. 62976.

⁶⁴ Letter from Scott to Bonar Law, 6th January, 1916; H.L.R.O., Beaverbrook Library, Bonar Law Papers, L/52/2/13.

⁶⁵ Letter from Dillon to Scott, 7th January, 1916; quoted in T. Wilson (*Ed.*), *op. cit.*, p.165.

The Nation was reduced to railing against:

"this historic reversal of Liberalism and democracy, led and promoted by Mr. Lloyd George".⁶⁶

Hence when Asquith came to introduce the Military Service Bill to the Commons on 5th January, it was to the background of rather muted criticism within the Liberal Press. However, much to the chagrin of the Unionist Press and the Conscriptionists within Parliament, Asquith commended the Bill to the House as being a mere extension of the Derby Scheme rather than marking the destruction of the volunteerism which it was. The Bill was greeted by Gardiner in a leading article in the *Daily News* with the weak response that it was preferable:

"to accept this dangerous innovation in our national life...[from Asquith]..rather from any other hand, for we know that he has come to his decision unwillingly, that he has yielded to considerations which are above suspicion, and that he will limit the operation of the system strictly to its present military needs".⁶⁷

Such a commendation was not so much an exercise in faint praise as in no praise whatsoever. However Asquith was not so widely supported in the pages of the Liberal Press that he could afford to disdain even such thin expressions of solidarity as Gardiner's. Scott was almost silent, Massingham severe and Donald's pronouncements were judged for what they clearly were, assaults upon Lloyd George attired in Asquithian garb. Thus Gardiner sought to acclaim Asquith on the rather curious grounds that the Prime Minister:

"was big enough to do a base thing when he believed that something greater than his own honour was at stake".⁶⁸

If the Liberal Press's response was less than ecstatic then the attitude of the Unionist Press and Conscriptionists in general was clearly one of dissatisfaction. In short as Amery observed in the House, the failure to include married men in the provisions of the Bill merely served to ensure that Parliament and the nation as a whole would be obliged:

"to traverse the whole ground over again, and why should we have to have the same controversy over again, and the same irritating and exasperating delays?"⁶⁹

Delays, he might well have added, which were increasingly being seen by Unionists as the hallmark of the Asquithian Coalition. It is not without irony that Asquith's carefully constructed position should be assailed by Kitchener within weeks of his return from the Near East. For the Field Marshal declined to act as a moderating influence upon either Robertson and Haig when he informed Asquith that:

"As regards men we have only to look at the streets and country to see masses of men who could serve without any material interference with trade."⁷⁰

Asquith and the die-hard opponents of conscription had yet to discover an effective reply to the reproach first enunciated by Kipling at the turn of the century, of which Kitchener's was merely the latest echo. The underlying fact remained, as Simon rhetorically reminded the Commons on 5th January, that:

"Does anyone really suppose that once the principle of compulsion has been

⁶⁶ Leading article, *The Nation*, 1st January, 1916.

⁶⁷ Gardiner, leading article, *Daily News*, 8th January, 1916.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ Amery, House of Commons, 5th January, 1916; *Hansard*, Parliamentary Debates (Commons), LXXVIII, col.194.

⁷⁰ Letter from Kitchener to Asquith, 11th January, 1916; P.R.O., Kitchener Papers, P.R.O. 30/57/76/35.

conceded that you are going to stop here?"⁷¹

One of the principals in seeking to ensure the principle did not do so was Repington, whose efforts operated on two levels. The first of these consisted, as he confided to Northcliffe on 16th January was that of a potential Conscriptionist candidate for Parliament. For he informed his proprietor that:

"I have been approached privately to know whether I will stand for a division of Manchester in place of a member who will resign in my favour. I shall be glad of your advice".⁷²

Northcliffe was not encouraging. For he replied to Repington stating his view that:

"in fighting Governments (for that, alas, has to be our position at present) it is best to chose one's own battlegrounds, and I hope that I can say, without lack of modesty, that in my opinion the pages of my newspapers form better entrenchments from which to deliver one's attacks than the floor of either House of Parliament.

In my own case, if I go down to the House of Lords I find the enemy well entrenched on the Government benches, whereas from Printing House Square or Carmelite House I am able to bombard him every day with good result.

As Military Correspondent of "The Times" you are unique. As one of six hundred and seventy members of the House of Commons you become simply one of the leg-pulled and wire-pulled back benchers.

Nothing will induce me to let the enemy choose my ground for fighting him."⁷³

In the coming months Repington was to have cause to regret following such advice.

However in the immediate term Repington was most effective in discomforting the Government through his private briefing of influential figures. In this Repington's activities corresponded to a desire on the part of both Robertson and Haig to:

"take charge of the thing in politics in much the same way [as] we are gradually beginning to do in military affairs."⁷⁴

Such an action was further encouraged by the severe downturn in recruitment following the placing of the Military Service Act on the statute book. For as Taylor has written:

"The immediate effect of conscription was to stop voluntary recruiting, which ceased on 27 January 1916 - the day the first Military Service Act became law. Thereafter the compulsory system, far from bringing men into the army, kept them out of it.....

When the act was passed, it arranged 48,000 recruits [from amongst the 'unattested' bachelors] in its first six months of operation (about half the average number raised in a single month by the voluntary system). Its more important result was to produce 748,000 fresh claims to exemption, most of them valid."⁷⁵

Dissatisfaction with Asquith amongst the Unionist Press was not confined to either

⁷¹ Simon, House of Commons, 5th January, 1916; *Hansard*, Parliamentary Debates (Commons), XCIX.

⁷² Letter from Repington to Northcliffe, 12th January, 1916; British Museum, British Library, Manuscript Collection, Northcliffe MS. 62253, f.53.

⁷³ Letter from Northcliffe to Repington, 20th January, 1916; British Museum, British Library, Manuscript Collection, Northcliffe MS. 62253, f.54.

⁷⁴ Letter from Robertson to Haig, 17th February, 1916; L.H.C.M.A., King's College, University of London, Robertson Papers, I/22/22.

⁷⁵ Taylor, 'Politics in the First World War', *op. cit.*, pp.231-32.

Carmelite House or to Printing House Square; Gwynne confessed that:

"I am coming more and more to the conclusion that we can never do anything with Squiff; and I have therefore devoted the whole of my energies towards securing in Parliament a majority, one of the results of whose efforts would be Squiff's resignation. The thing is going very well, but we are all waiting for Carson to get out of his bed. He is all right, there is nothing the matter with him except what the doctors call a 'tired heart', and his tired heart is being set right by keeping him closely confined to his bed.

I pin very little faith in our people in the Cabinet, from Bonar Law down. They all seem to have fallen under the glamour of the P.M. and I see no hope except in his disappearance." ⁷⁶

The absence of Carson from the Commons at the point, due to a prolonged bout of illness, will have served to ease Asquith's passage through a turbulent period. However despite Carson's incapacity, Gwynne continued to exert himself to prepare the way for his preferred champion's assault upon Asquith. His only concern appears to have been that the Coalition might fall before Carson was able to resume his central place in affairs. Gwynne further elaborated upon his actions in a rather over-due letter to his proprietress:

"Everything is prepared and I am only waiting for him to take his seat. I have over 160 M.P.s of both sides sworn to stand by him, I have arranged the debates, got facts together, got him private secretaries, his whips, in fact everything. He is rapidly getting better but I hoped to have him in the House this week. I am afraid it will be the end of next week. Then - we shall see." ⁷⁷

Carson's 'coming out', on 28th March, thereby served to greatly re-inforce the increasingly self-confident opposition to Asquith. Moreover his position did not suffer from any lack of support. For in January two new 'ginger' grouping of backbenchers dissatisfied with the manner in which the Government was prosecuting the war appeared. The first of these, the small Liberal War Committee, consisting of some thirty members under the chairmanship of Sir Frederick Cawley, though alarming to Asquith was not of any immediate import. The same could not be said of its rather larger Unionist counterpart. Numbering some 150 members, the Unionist War Committee [†] was unambiguous in looking towards Carson for leadership; thus it was that on 28th March the Unionist War Committee met with Carson in the chair. It was not long before the parallel activities of the U.W.C. and the Unionist Press had succeeded in plunging the Coalition into crisis.

The Daily Chronicle responded to such attacks upon the Coalition as a whole, and upon the Prime Minister in particular, with a series of leading articles in which it sought to extol Asquith's virtues. The article pointed to the increasing unease amongst Liberal circles at Lloyd George's ever-closer relations to leading Unionists. Such unease would only have been heightened had such persons as Donald known that Lloyd George had met the Coalition's principal critic. Exasperated at Asquith's reluctance to confront the issue of conscription, Lloyd George met Carson on the evening of 31st March at the home of Carson's lieutenant, Ronald McNeill. Riddell recorded Lloyd George's impressions of the meeting in his diary the following day, noting that:

"L.G. told me that he is much dissatisfied and thinks he must leave the Cabinet. He feels he is taking part in a fraud which is sacrificing and will sacrifice hundreds and thousands of lives. Mr. A. has no plan, no initiative, no grip, no driving force. He made a poor showing at the conference [in Paris]. L.G. thinks

⁷⁶ Letter from Gwynne to Wilson, 17th February, 1916; I.W.M., Wilson MSS., HHW 73/1/20.

⁷⁷ Letter from Gwynne to Lady Bathurst, 20th March, 1916; University of Leeds, Glenesk-Bathurst MSS, Lady Bathurst Papers 1990/1/2370..

[†] The Unionist War Committee and the Liberal War Committee met together on 13th and 14th March to put further pressure on the Government in relation to Military Service.

he will have to resign soon. The condition of affairs is serious." ⁷⁸

The opponents of conscription in the Liberal Press sought to counter the barrage of conscriptionist agitation through recourse to McKenna's argument of 23rd August; thus *The Daily Chronicle* opined that:

"The demand in some quarters for a further Compulsion Bill is being made with little visible regard for the necessary balance between Men, Munitions and Money. All three must be forthcoming if we are to produce our maximum effect on the war and give our maximum help to our Allies. But if so, we cannot expand indefinitely in any one of these directions." ⁷⁹

Despite Ensor's protestations the effect of Carson's resolution was to once again focus attention upon the single issue of conscription. Such was the political charge in the air as to impel Scott to journey to London on Thursday, 13th April. Once arrived Scott met with Lloyd George, apparently by accident, at the Ministry of Munitions whereupon Lloyd George related to Scott:

"his strong and increasing dissatisfaction with the conduct of the war and his intention to bring matters to a head by resigning if a measure of general compulsory service were not adopted on the lines of the motion of which Carson had given notice". ⁸⁰

Such an action on Lloyd George's part would clearly produce a result not necessarily in Asquith's best interests. Indeed such was Asquith's perturbation as to the implications of Lloyd George's intentions as to force him to inquire of Addison whether he believed his 'Chief' would indeed resign over the issue; Addison replied that he did.

Further pressure was placed upon the Coalition by the re-emergence of active political opposition at the hustings. For the political *burgfrieden* was challenged in April from an intriguing quarter; the by-election at the parliamentary seat of Wimbledon being contested by Northcliffe's erstwhile business partner, Kennedy Jones. The contest was given greater piquancy by the support furnished by with some little glee by Carmelite House, and with rather more reluctance by Printing House Square. Kennedy Jones' candidature was condemned throughout the Liberal Press - not least because Northcliffe stood at his back - with Gardiner railing against those who would propel:

"the country back into the vortex of party politics". ⁸¹

Though Kennedy Jones' efforts were ultimately unsuccessful, the narrowness of their failure - some 1,811 votes at the count on 19th April - was to 'rattle' both Asquith and his supporters. Despite the expression of thanks which both Liberal and Unionist Parties bestowed upon Gardiner, the lesson implicit in the vote was one of encouragement to Asquith's critics. The threat posed to the sustained existence of the Coalition by even such negligible figures as Kennedy Jones was indicative of the decline in the position of both Asquith and the Ministry which he headed.

It was in such a fevered political atmosphere that the Liberal Press, and most notably the *Daily News*, sought to bolster Asquith's position. Thus Ensor informed his readers on 17th April that:

"The personal authority of the Prime Minister is in this situation the country's greatest asset. Let him exercise it boldly, and it [the country] will

⁷⁸ Riddell, diary entry, 1st April, 1916; quoted by Riddell, *op. cit.*, p.168.

⁷⁹ Ensor, 'The Cabinet and Conscription: Meeting a Crisis', leading article, *The Daily Chronicle*, 12th April, 1916.

⁸⁰ Scott, diary entry, 13th April, 1916; quoted in T. Wilson (*Ed.*), *op. cit.*, p.197.

⁸¹ Gardiner, leading article, *Daily News*, 15th April, 1916.

follow." ⁸²

A hope which was somewhat mis-placed even as it was written. The reality of the situation was rather more febrile. For with both the Army Council and Lloyd George threatening resignation should Asquith continue to balk at the introduction of fully-fledged conscription the *de facto* guarantor of the continuance of the Asquith's Coalition, Bonar Law, was placed in an invidious position. As the influential Unionist member for Oswestry, William Bridgeman, who plainly informed his leader on 17th April that:

"If you support the Government and have to admit that it is against the opinion of the Army Council, I do not think a quarter of our party would go with you." ⁸³

Such testimony served to force Bonar Law's somewhat reluctant hand.

The spectre of General Compulsion served to concentrate the efforts of the anti-conscriptionists both within and without Parliament. Thus the *Daily News* on 18th April informed its readers that:

"The present demand for a general conscription of married men is put forward as if it were a matter purely on its own merits. In point of fact, as everyone is aware who has taken the trouble to analyse the figures given in the Derby Report, it has no merits." ⁸⁴

Unbowed by the virulence of the conscriptionists the *Daily News* once more sought to inculcate some measure of resistance into the increasingly invertebrate anti-conscriptionist caucus within the Cabinet:

"The Derby Scheme...brought to the colours all the fit and available men of military age except a quite trivial number. Yet almost before the ink was dry, the conscriptionists unchained a fresh agitation to go beyond it; and before its results have been reaped, they have precipitated this new crisis. One may well ask, what is the use of talking about settlements or compromises with such people, who have obviously no intention of abiding by any." ⁸⁵

Expressions of dissatisfaction with the Coalition, and particularly the leadership offered by both Asquith and Bonar Law, were becoming ever more common. Thus Northcliffe wrote to *The Times* correspondent in Canada, Sir John Willison, on 22nd April to disavow any political ambitions which he was oft said to harbour. Thus Northcliffe remarked that:

"I have no anxiety to enter the Government. I believe that the rotary press is more powerful than the portfolio. If I can be of any service at any time and am invited I will enter the Cabinet, but not such a Cabinet as the existing one, which is composed of a number of faint hearts and one or two active pro-Germans. I hate the thought of the wastage of the splendid British, Canadian and Australian lives that has been involved by these people's compromise. Unless we can get rid of Asquith, Kitchener, Balfour and Bonar Law we shall lose the war." ⁸⁶

The inclusion of Bonar Law's name makes clear the extent to which the conscription

⁸² 'The Cabinet and Compulsion: Strength in Unity', leading article, *The Daily Chronicle*, 17th April, 1916; University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodleian New Library, Department of Western Manuscripts, MS. Ensor dep 69.

⁸³ Letter from Bridgeman to Bonar Law, 17th April, 1916; H.L.R.O., Beaverbrook Library, Bonar Law Papers, L/53/1/14.

⁸⁴ Ensor, 'No Divided Councils: Let the Premier Give a Strong Lead', leading article, *The Daily Chronicle*, 18th April, 1916; University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodleian New Library, Department of Western Manuscripts, MS. Ensor dep 69.

⁸⁵ Ensor, 'Conscription: A Cabinet Crisis', leading article, *The Daily Chronicle*, 19th April, 1916; University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodleian New Library, Department of Western Manuscripts, MS. Ensor dep 69.

⁸⁶ Letter from Northcliffe to Sir John Willison, 22nd April, 1916; quoted by R. Pound & G. Harmsworth, *op. cit.*, p.498.

crisis had served to sour his leadership. Indeed Northcliffe's unease at Bonar Law's stance over conscription led to him viewing both Carson and Lloyd George with increasing favour; for in a letter to H.G. Wells Northcliffe described Carson as:

"a man without any personal ambition who is willing to devote the scant remains of his energy and health, not to any personal ambitions, but to the incessant need for quickness." ⁸⁷

Northcliffe's appreciation of Asquith could not have differed more. For he wrote to Massingham on 26th April stating that:

"I distrust Mr. Asquith because he obviously distrusts himself. I do not know him well, but my belief is that he is too kind. Nobody is punished, and among many other blemishes there is little of [a] sense of the need for celerity in any Government department." ⁸⁸

Whilst Northcliffe came to praise Carson, Gardiner came to bury Lloyd George; an interment which he hoped to achieve by way of his second 'Letter to Mr. Lloyd George', which appeared in the *Daily News* that day. For in this incendiary article, which also marks the opening of the last phase of Lloyd George's breach from the Liberals, Gardiner wrote that:

"You, caught by the flair at a great occasion, impatient at democracy, seized with a sort of apocalyptic vision of yourself as the saviour of Europe, have turned to compulsion, not with the cold philosophy of Lord Milner, who is not only German in origin but German in thought, but with a fine Celtic frenzy of one who has no philosophy, only a revelation....[You were] one of the chief architects of the fall of the Liberal Government and of the establishment of the Coalition...[and have subsequently worked] in close intimacy...[with the]...chief assailants [of your own Liberal colleagues]". ⁸⁹

One of the notable incidental effects of Gardiner's vitriolic attack was to spur Addison into canvassing Liberal members as to their support for Lloyd George; an action which gave rise to a list which was to prove useful come December.

Whilst Lloyd George sought to rebuff attacks upon his Liberal credentials Asquith endeavoured to save his Ministry from foundering upon the perilous rock of conscription. Thus in the wake of a lacklustre speech in the Secret Session of the Commons on Tuesday, 25th April, Asquith was visibly shaken at the unfortunate turn of the House's temper; indeed so acute was Asquith's disquiet that he excused himself from introducing the compromise bill into the House, pleading the state of Irish affairs in mitigation. The decision proved to be a pragmatic one as Long, in Asquith's stead, swiftly came to act as a lightning-rod for the various complaints and disquietude at the Government's prosecution of the war which were harboured by the conscriptionist; not even Long's own conscriptionist credentials were to prove a shield from the barrage. Thus the Home Secretary, Herbert Samuel, reported to his Sovereign that:

"Neither the matter of the Bill nor its presentation were acceptable to the House, and its proposals were received with an unbroken chorus of disapproval from men holding every variety of view....No member rose in any part of the House to support the motion for the introduction of the Bill, and in the circumstances, there was no course open but to withdraw it." ⁹⁰

Asquith responded to the reverse by informing the House that:

⁸⁷ Letter from Northcliffe to H.G. Wells, 22nd April, 1916; quoted by R. Pound & G. Harmsworth, *op. cit.*, p.499.

⁸⁸ Letter from Northcliffe to Massingham, 26th April, 1916; British Museum, British Library, Manuscript Collection, Northcliffe MS. 62176B, f.129.

⁸⁹ Gardiner, 'Letter to Mr. Lloyd George', leading article, *Daily News*, 22nd April, 1916.

⁹⁰ Letter from Samuel to George V, 27th April, 1916; quoted by Adams & Poirier, *op. cit.*, p.167.

"As an old Parliamentarian I always know what the House of Commons feels towards a Bill, and when the House feels as it does towards this Bill, it is not weakness but wisdom on the part of the Government to recognize the conditions of the case and to acquiesce in the determination of the House." ⁹¹

The Parliamentary Correspondent of *The Times*, in all probability Northcliffe himself, greeted news of the Government's retreat, on Friday, 28th April, by observing that:

"The Government have landed themselves into another recruiting mess. The House of Commons set its face yesterday against any more makeshifts, and intimated plainly to the Government that the only way in which they could get the additional men urgently needed for the Army was by boldly extending the principle of compulsion to all men of military age." ⁹²

The Times leader, entitled 'A Just Condemnation', related to its readers that:

"The new Military Service Bill was withdrawn yesterday by the PRIME MINISTER before leave had even been obtained to introduce it. Few, if any, Bills can ever have had so brief and ignominious a career; yet none has been heralded by such elaborate ceremony and solemn fuss." ⁹³

Northcliffe was also swift to place the credit for the Government's severe reverse in the correct quarter. For the 'Parliamentary Correspondent' informed his readers that:

"Sir Edward Carson rent the stillborn Military Service Bill from top to bottom". ⁹⁴

The newspaper's leader further opined that:

"There is something ludicrous in the contrast between the fate of the Bill and the events that led up to it - the Cabinet Crisis, the Secret Session, and all the rest. But its reception by the House of Commons left the Government no option....There is not the slightest doubt that the general public will endorse the condemnation of the House of Commons." ⁹⁵

The leading article concluded by stating that:

"The result is a severe blow to the Government, but they have brought it upon themselves by refusing to face the situation in a straight-forward way." ⁹⁶

Northcliffe went further by opining that:

"How the Government came to propose such an impossible measure to the House, whose mood it had had many opportunities of testing, is a mystery. Ministers had been warned that the House would not tolerate the Bill, but they insisted on going forward with it, apparently for the purpose of satisfying the letter of the artificial compromise by which according to the official account, a

⁹¹ Asquith, speech in the House of Commons, 27th April, 1916; quoted in *Hansard*, Parliamentary Debates (Commons), LXXXI, col.2560.

⁹² Northcliffe, 'Political Notes. Another Recruiting Fiasco', *The Times*, 28th April, 1916.

⁹³ 'A Just Condemnation', leading article, *The Times*, 28th April, 1916.

⁹⁴ Northcliffe, *op. cit.*

⁹⁵ Arthur Shadwell, 'A Just Condemnation', leading article, *The Times*, 28th April, 1916.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

break-up of the Government had been averted. The result was a humiliation, which would have broken a Government at once in normal times. Here was a major Bill so severely mauled by critics in every part of the House that it was actually withdrawn before it had been introduced and printed. It marks the turning point of the political history of the war." ⁹⁷

Though the House of Commons delivered the *coup de grâce* to the Government's inveterate policy of evasion, the rôle of the Unionist Press had been pivotal in the establishment of the coalition of interests, headed by Carson and the Unionist War Committee, which pushed Asquith and the Coalition into recognising the urgent need for general conscription. Riddell records Lloyd George as subsequently stating that:

"The Press has performed the function which should have been performed by Parliament, and which the French Parliament has performed." ⁹⁸

The refusal of the House to acquiesce in a further accommodation also served to question Asquith's continued tenure as Prime Minister, for any alteration in that office had often previously been held to be impossible during wartime owing to the inability to discover an alternative candidate who possessed an equal mastery over the House of Commons. The situation was most accurately summarised by Hankey in his diary entry of 2nd May, in which he observed that the:

"people who want compulsory service don't want Asquith, while those who want Asquith don't want compulsory service". ⁹⁹

Whilst the Unionist Press continued to agitate for Asquith's removal, the introduction of general conscription was received with equal disfavour by its Liberal counterparts. Thus the *Daily News* continued its opposition to conscription in a bitter leading article, entitled 'The Last Phase', by characterising the conscriptionist agitation as being "only a means to an end". ¹⁰⁰ Gardiner continued by stating he believed that Asquith:

"has been out-manceuvred in this long and squalid battle by more supple intriguers." ¹⁰¹

Where the Liberal Press, most particularly in the persons of both Donald and Gardiner, had led, so the Liberal Party in Parliament followed in attacking Lloyd George over his conduct in espousing the policy of conscription. Thus on 4th May the Welsh Radical member, Llewellyn Williams, launched a personal attack upon the Minister of Munitions upon the floor of the House. For Williams informed his audience:

"Today we are told that immediately after I sit down, we shall hear for the first time the greatest democratic leader this country has ever seen - and I say that in all sincerity - explaining to the House of Commons, and to his countrymen the reasons which have made him, an old Pro-Boer, become a militarist, and the reasons which have induced him to impose his will in this matter upon a reluctant and mutinous Cabinet, on an indifferent and, until four months ago, a hostile House of Commons, and on a country that is bewildered at the change." ¹⁰²

⁹⁷ Northcliffe, *op. cit.*

⁹⁸ Lloyd George, quoted by Riddell, diary entry, 23rd June, 1916; quoted in Riddell, *op. cit.*, p.151.

⁹⁹ Hankey, diary entry, 2nd May, 1916; quoted by Adams & Poirier, *op. cit.*, p.168.

¹⁰⁰ Gardiner, 'The Last Phase', leading article, *Daily News*, 3rd May, 1916.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² Llewellyn Williams, speech in the House of Commons, 4th May, 1916; quoted in *Hansard*, Parliamentary Debates (Commons), LXXXII, col.166.

Williams concluded by stating that:

"It is the greatest wrench of my life, to make a speech even purporting to be against any policy in which he is interested." ¹⁰³

The attack cut Lloyd George to the quick, not least due to its source. He replied by taunting his erstwhile friend; taunts which provoked Williams into interrupting the Minister. Ultimately the debate descended into a shouting match between the two former colleagues; in effect the death notice of the old Liberal Radical alliance had been aired on the floor of the House.

Gardiner's sustained agitation was further effective in provoking Lloyd George into a colourful public denunciation of the efforts of the *Daily News* on 6th May. The denunciation elicited from Gardiner a leading article, in the course of which Gardiner informed the Welshman that:

"The charge against you is not that you have had disagreements with Mr. Asquith, but that you have had agreements with Mr. Asquith's declared enemies and enemies of the Government....If we inquire what is the link between you and Lord Northcliffe we shall find that it is in the common belief in the idea of dictatorship....You cannot walk in step with Mr. Asquith and Lord Northcliffe at the same time". ¹⁰⁴

Lloyd George's connection with Northcliffe, the generic villain of any piece for the Liberal Press, aroused unease in the Minister's friends as well as his critics. Thus Riddell noted in his diary on 21st May that:

"There is no doubt that LG and Northcliffe are acting in close concert...LG never tells me about his meeting with Northcliffe, but I am sure they are in daily contact." ¹⁰⁵

Riddell also noted the direction in which Lloyd George's activities and relations were leading him:

"LG is growing to believe more and more every day that he (LG) is the only man to win the war. His attitude to the PM is changing rapidly. He is becoming more and more critical and antagonistic. It looks as if LG and Northcliffe are working to dethrone Mr. A." ¹⁰⁶

Whilst the Liberals disintegrated into acrimonious bickering the Unionist Press sought to exploit the disarray in which the Liberal element of the Coalition found itself to address the fundamental question which Asquith had rather avoided at its formation; that is the fact that the Coalition was the successor to the Liberal Government, not its continuation. Thus Strachey opined that:

"The Government has been a Coalition Government. We now desire to make it a National Government in the very widest sense, and so give the best possible pledge that there will be no further attempts to prolong our term of office or to keep ourselves in power after the war has come to an end." ¹⁰⁷

Mere political manoeuvres, smacking as they did of Asquithian evasion, were something to be avoided at almost any cost; a state of affairs which acts as ample witness to the disquiet to which

¹⁰³ *Op. cit.*, col.169.

¹⁰⁴ Gardiner, leading article, *Daily News*, 8th May, 1916.

¹⁰⁵ Riddell, diary entry, 21st May, 1916; British Museum, British Library, Manuscript Collection, Riddell MS. 62977.

¹⁰⁶ Riddell, diary entry, 21st April, 1916; British Museum, British Library, Manuscript Collection, Riddell MS. 62977.

¹⁰⁷ Memorandum by Strachey on reconstruction of the Coalition, 22nd May, 1916; H.L.R.O., Strachey Papers, S/18/3/18.

the peregrinations of the Coalition around the policy of conscription had given rise. With that, as Taylor has remarked:

"For the moment, the life appeared to go out of political controversy. There were no more Independent candidates at by-elections, demanding a more energetic conduct of the war. Few members listened to Winston Churchill..... when he preached the doctrine of full War Socialism.....Lloyd George...now hoped to establish his fame by the simple expedient of winning the war." ¹⁰⁸

An expedient rendered all the more practicable by the death of Kitchener.

In practical terms Kitchener's successor must inevitably be drawn from one of Bonar Law or Lloyd George. † It is therefore intriguing that the latter should seek to mobilise support for his candidature through the initiation of a Press campaign. Hence the *British Weekly*, edited by Lloyd George's intimate, Robertson Nicoll, launched its campaign on Thursday, 15th June, for Lloyd George's elevation to the War Office. In the course of the leading article the newspaper asserted that:

"We believe that a large majority are also of the opinion that the new Secretary must be a great figure, calculated to command the respect and indeed, the enthusiasm of all. In particular, he must be pleasing to the Allies and the Army. These requirements would be supremely satisfied by the appointment of Mr. Lloyd George. It is not known, however, whether Mr. Lloyd George would accept the position with its new limitations". ¹⁰⁹

Though Lloyd George's direct involvement in Robertson Nicoll's leading article can not be proven, it is striking that the line of argument which Lloyd George deployed in his own lengthy memorandum to Asquith, written on 17th June, on the subject of the War Office utilised quite strikingly similar language. For Lloyd George called for the appointment of:

"a Secretary of State for War who, apart from possessing personality, will possess real power and influence". ¹¹⁰

However Lloyd George was greatly angered to read the leading article in *The Daily Chronicle* that very day in which Donald sought to thwart Lloyd George's martial ambitions, calling as he did for the next Secretary of State to be content to:

"shine in his own orbit, without infringing on the orbit of the Chief of the General Staff". ¹¹¹

Lloyd George was thrown into a rage against Donald, moreover it was a rage from which he arguably failed to recover until October 1918.

The Unionist member for Plymouth and proprietor of *The Observer*, Waldorf Astor, wrote to Garvin on 2nd August, opining that:

"It looks as if the A regime might crumble at no distant date. The old man has had 2 black eyes & his wind knocked out over the Registration, Mesopotamia, & Irish incidents. He is obviously rattled & has certainly for the time lost his hold on the House." ¹¹²

¹⁰⁸ Taylor, 'Politics in the First World War', *op. cit.*, p.237.

† For an account of the events immediately following Kitchener's death see Beaverbrook, *op. cit.*, pp.202-12.

¹⁰⁹ Robertson Nicoll, leading article, *British Weekly*, 15th June, 1916.

¹¹⁰ Memorandum by Lloyd George, 17th June, 1916; quoted by S. Koss, *op. cit.*, p.295.

¹¹¹ Donald, leading article, *The Daily Chronicle*, 17th June, 1916.

¹¹² Letter from Astor to Garvin, 2nd August, 1916; quoted by Trevor Wilson, *The Myriad Face of War*, *op. cit.*, p.414.

Astor's opinion was widely shared amongst Unionist, thus Gwynne wrote to Wilson on 17th June on the subject of Asquith's faults:

"As for Squiff himself, the main quality he seems to have is indifference...all his mistakes, I feel sure, are the result of idleness, laziness, and a mind incapable of understanding the first principles of war....We had the opportunity of our lives when the Coalition was formed if Bonar Law had been strong enough to fight; but he is a weakling and soft, and he seems to have fallen entirely under the influence of Squiff".¹¹³

In a similar vein Northcliffe, whilst dining at G.H.Q. in July expressed himself forcefully on the subject of the political situation in London. Thus Brigadier-General Charteris noted in his diary that:

"Northcliffe was amazingly outspoken in his comments on people back home; he regards Asquith as quite played out, [and] Lloyd George as only out for his career, but says that the latter has more vim than all the rest put together."¹¹⁴

Haig also reported to his wife Northcliffe's appreciation of Lloyd George, stating that:

"He [Lloyd George] never sticks to the same plan for six hours in succession..... Lord Northcliffe calls him "a shirt-sleeve politician" and he told me that L.G. does whatever he (Lord N.) advises!"¹¹⁵

So marked was Northcliffe's influence over Lloyd George held to be that hysterical speculation over the possibility of Northcliffe possessing some hold over the Welshman arising out of the Marconi share Scandal was soon abroad.

Nevertheless despite Northcliffe's testimonials the General Staff in France was scarcely impressed by their newly-minted departmental head. Haig noted his impressions of Lloyd George, and compared him unfavourably with the Prime Minister. Thus he wrote on 13th September that:

"Lloyd George has been with me during the last two days; so I have been able to notice the differences in the two men and to realise how much superior in many ways Mr. Asquith is to L.G. I have got on well with the latter very well indeed, and he is anxious to help in every way he can. But he seems to me very flighty - makes plans and is always changing them and his mind..... I have no great opinion of L.G. *as a man or leader*."¹¹⁶

It was to prove unfortunate for both men that no meeting of minds had taken place. If Haig's immediate impressions of the Secretary of State were scarcely to his great credit, such a character appreciation was to undergo a marked revision downwards in the light of intelligence furnished by Foch of Lloyd George's questioning the Frenchman as to the ability of the British General Staff. The incident was to prove extremely damaging to Lloyd George's reputation with both the General Staff and the military-minded element of the Unionist Press.

Thus *The Morning Post* on 28th September savagely attacked Lloyd George for his Churchillian jaunts across the Channel. The leading article continued by berating Lloyd George for his actions in seeking to discuss his subordinates with their French counterparts; thereby serving to display rather more confidence in the judgement of the French General Staff than he evidently entrusted to Haig and his colleagues. The episode also marked the first skirmish in the clash between Lloyd George and the General Staff which was to disfigure much of the remainder of his wartime premiership.

¹¹³ Letter from Gwynne to Wilson, 17th July, 1916; I.W.M., Wilson MSS., HHW 73/1/20.

¹¹⁴ Brigadier-General Charteris, *At G.H.Q.*, (Cassell. 1931)., also quoted by R. Pound & G. Harmsworth, *op. cit.*, p.502.

¹¹⁵ Letter from Haig to Lady Haig, 11th September, 1916; quoted in Robert Blake (*Ed.*), *op. cit.*, p.166.

¹¹⁶ Letter from Haig to Lady Haig, 13th September, 1916; quoted in Robert Blake (*Ed.*), *op. cit.*, p.166.

However the incident is of note in that Lloyd George's actions were the subject of criticism principally by the Press; as such the indiscretion marks the move of the Press away from the coalition which had brought about conscription and also pre-figures the re-alignment of the Unionist Press into Ministerial and Opposition groupings which was to follow Lloyd George's installation at 10 Downing Street. To this end Northcliffe replied to Sassoon's account of the Lloyd George-Foch *tête-à-tête* by pointing out Lloyd George's vulnerability to Press attacks:

"You are dealing with people, some of whom are very thick-skinned, others very unscrupulous, but all afraid of newspapers. It is urgently necessary that they should be told, and more than once: 'Hands off the Army.' They are now definitely aware that any interference will lead to exposure. Probably Sir Douglas thinks 'Save me from my friends'. If he looks back over the incidents of the visit he will realize that it is well to nip this thing in the bud at the outset." ¹¹⁷

Northcliffe himself sought to nip Lloyd George's military meddling in the bud. Thus according to J.T. Davies, Lloyd George's Personal Secretary, Northcliffe burst into Davies's room at the War Office on Tuesday, 10th October, and, when Davies sought to deny Northcliffe entry to Lloyd George's room, motioned Davies to resume his seat, and stated vehemently that:

"I don't want to see him—you can tell him for me that I hear he has been interfering with strategy and that if it goes on I will break him." ¹¹⁸

Northcliffe related a slightly different scene in his letter to Sassoon:

"The news from my sector of the Home Front is that on Tuesday the 10th, hearing from a mutual friend that General Robertson was not sleeping owing to the interference, I telephoned to our Welsh friend saying that I wanted to see him urgently about interference with the army. Either he was afraid to see me, or he was really away, and as I had to leave town that afternoon, I replied that I would come and express my views to Mr. J.T. Davies, his personal secretary, to whom I said plainly that I shared the national gratitude for Mr. Lloyd George's energy in shell matters and his attempts to settle Home Rule; that I had given him a personal hint in conversation and several hints in my newspapers that I could no longer support him and if further interference took place with Sir William Robertson I was going to the House of Lords to lay matters before the world, and hammer them daily in my newspapers. This may seem a brusque and drastic thing to do, but I think I know the combination I am dealing with better than you folks who are engrossed in your splendid and absorbing task." ¹¹⁹

Northcliffe's actions were no doubt more noted by Lloyd George than by Davies, for the former was constantly aware that Northcliffe, in Burnham's words:

"although Northcliffe might be one of the men who made the war, his principal way of making it was to put his ear to the ground, and then to shout out what he heard in the loudest possible voice in all his papers. There is no doubt that the General Staff are using him as their weapon. The same idea is on foot that led to the attacks on Kitchener last year." ¹²⁰

Lloyd George had no wish to succeed Kitchener in anything other than the War Office.

¹¹⁷ Letter from Northcliffe to Sassoon, 2nd October, 1916; quoted by R. Pound & G. Harmsworth, *op. cit.*, p.506.

¹¹⁸ J.T. Davies; quoted by R. Pound & G. Harmsworth, *op. cit.*, p.508; also quoted in a slightly different form by Beaverbrook, *op. cit.*, p.323.

¹¹⁹ Letter from Northcliffe to Sassoon, 18th October, 1916; quoted by R. Pound & G. Harmsworth, *op. cit.*, pp.508-09.

¹²⁰ Burnham, 'Notes of a Conversation between Lord Burnham and Mr. Lloyd George', 1st November, 1916; I.W.M., Lord Burnham Papers, HLWL/10/5.

Northcliffe's efforts at muffling Lloyd George's martial enthusiasms received the approbation of Robertson who observed that:

"It is very hard work trying to win this war. The Boche gives me no trouble compared with what I meet in London. So any help you can give me will be of Imperial value." ¹²¹

Northcliffe's assistance also manifested itself directly in the editorial policy of the *Daily Mail*. For he addressed a memorandum to the editorial staff stating that:

"If we continue to grind into the public mind the terrible fact that political interference means an increase of the death roll of our army, Sir Douglas Haig and Sir William Robertson will not be worried as they are at present." ¹²²

It is ironic to note that in their eagerness to defend the General Staff from interference by Lloyd George, the Unionist Press, most notably in the guise of both *The Morning Post* and the *Daily Mail*, should find themselves confronted with the dilemma of choosing whether or not to defend the military at the probable cost of damaging their best hope of supplanting Asquith. It is a dilemma with which Gwynne sought to acquaint Lloyd George. For he wrote on 11th October stating that:

"You and I are not seeing eye to eye just now. It is a great pity because you are the only man in the Cabinet who sees clearly that we have to beat the Germans thoroughly or go under. The rest of your colleagues are already whispering the words "armistice" and "peace". But why on earth can't you let the Army alone? With it enthusiastically on your side victory over Germany becomes easier while if you quarrel with its leaders you will jeopardise the issue and lose influence in the country. And all the time we want a man who is all out for beating the German. You put those who are anxious to help you in that task in an awkward dilemma for while they are determined to do their utmost to prevent tinkering with the Army to its detriment, they want to stop it without injuring your reputation." ¹²³

The warning was clear, Lloyd George, by his indiscreet actions in France was imperilling the support of the Unionist Press, and by proxy certain sections of the Unionist Party within Parliament, for his forthcoming confrontation with Asquith; the seeds of the December Crisis were readily apparent to the Unionist Press even as they sought to restrain the Welshman.

¹²¹ Letter from Robertson to Northcliffe, 11th October, 1916; quoted by R. Pound & G. Harmsworth, *op. cit.*, p.508.

¹²² Memorandum from Northcliffe to the *Daily Mail*, 13th October, 1916; quoted by R. Pound & G. Harmsworth, *op. cit.*, p.508.

¹²³ Letter from Gwynne to Lloyd George, 11th October, 1916; I.W.M., Gwynne Papers, HAG/15/7.

A LITTLE LOCAL DIFFICULTY.

Robinson asserts that the 'December Crisis' began on Monday, 27th November. However, the conviction that Asquith's premiership was incompatible with the successful prosecution of the war was increasingly ubiquitous throughout the preceding two months; as early as 6th October Northcliffe had met with Lloyd George at Milner's house in Great College Street, Westminster - Milner being indisposed with a cold at Sidmouth. Intriguingly the meeting, despite its location, remained secret even from Robinson who continued to believe the two men estranged.

The 'December Crisis' is best presented as the convergence of editorial and political views, for much of the episode the Press was subordinated to the promptings of the politicians in a way absent from the 'Shells Crisis'. Such promptings were transmitted through an elaborate system of Press-political linkage. Aitken, Riddell and Dalziel moved from the rôle of political confidant to that of newspaper proprietor. Carson communicated his intentions to Blumenfeld, Robinson, and most notably Gwynne; Milner did likewise with Robinson, whilst Garvin sought to exploit his own and his proprietor's extensive range of political contacts. True Press independence was to be found in the Liberal titles, its existence indicative of isolation than of influence; Scott was isolated by geography, Spender and Gardiner by the decline of their cause.

The arena of the crisis was the enclosed world of Westminster politics; † recognition of that fact was absolute and sharply coloured the actions of the Press throughout the episode. Unlike the 'Shells Scandal' the public pronouncements of the Press were intended to act directly upon this select grouping, rather than diffracting through the medium of public opinion; hence the pivotal rôle of the 'Prestige' Press. The opening act in the drama was provided by the Nigeria Debate, on 8th November, which was ostensibly concerned with the Government's disposal of confiscated enemy property in that country. However the actual effect of the debate was to alert Bonar Law to the danger posed to his leadership by Carson's broadening support on the Unionist backbenches. For the debate indicated that Carson's hold over mainstream backbench Unionist opinion posed a direct threat to the Coalition's keystone, continued Unionist support. Bonar Law was faced with the prospect of a backbench revolt against both his leadership and the coalition with the Liberals, a Unionist Schism, or a dissolution and election in which Asquith would present himself to the country opposed by a deeply divided Opposition. The seriousness of the threat to Bonar Law is indicated by Long's observation to Lady Londonderry:

"that Sir E. Carson intends to do all in his power to secure... a sufficient number of Unionists to force Bonar Law to resign and so smash the Gov. and that Lloyd George approves.....It seems to me...that if Lloyd George is not satisfied with...things he should resign and bring the Gov. down in an open fight and then form his own." ¹

This observation confirmed the Opposition now possessed a figure around whom any successor Government could coalesce; a Unionist *rapprochement* with Lloyd George had been signalled on the leader page of *The Times* even prior to the Nigeria debate. For *The Times* hailed Lloyd George as:

† The respective political strength in the House of Commons during the Crisis was stated, on 6th December, in *The Pall Mall Gazette* of that date, as being:

Liberals	-	260
Unionist	-	287
Labour	-	37
Irish Nationalists	-	75
O'Brienites	-	9
Independents	-	2

The figures reveal the nominal Liberal majority, even bolstered by Labour, to number a scant ten votes in the division lobbies.

¹ Letter from Long to Lady Londonderry, 18th November, 1916; Durham County Record Office (D.C.R.O.), Lady Londonderry Papers, D/Lo/C 666 (291).

"a great driving force and an invaluable leader of democracy in war".²

The newspaper also revealed its disdain of the Government in a scathing leading article inspired by intelligence that the Cabinet was musing over a plan to embark upon a speaking-tour of the country:

"The House is done to death with phrases, and yet the closer realities of war escape it, in the face of a Cabinet which grasps power, hides knowledge, and suppresses much opinion, without giving an assurance of political competence or a clear direction of the war... We wonder whether the Government have any conception how these perpetual evasions are exasperating the country, which thoroughly understands the real necessity for speed and thoroughness in the winter preparations. If they do not, we are afraid they may have a rude awakening when they come to face public opinion in the provinces."³

Dissatisfaction at the Government's prosecution of the war was not confined to the Unionist Press. On 18th November *The Nation* had complained of the Coalition's inability to direct the war effort:

"It is not a Food Controller that we want. It is a Policy Controller, a statesman who will work out the threefold equation of our war needs - the relationship of man-power, money-power, work-power; and having arrived at it, fix it as the basis of our total effort."⁴

Such a central authority lay at the heart of the demands of both Lloyd George and Carson.

As the Press had been utilised by the politicians for its inherent propaganda value, so it was also exploited to indicate the movement of the respective 'Sponsors'. Thus Gwynne announced the alliance between Carson and Lloyd George on 23rd November with a leading article which sought to portray the latter as the nation's saviour:

"He is not a strategist, he is not an administrator; but he is a power which makes for victory; he is a force to which the nation may adhere, which the nation may follow. And we believe also that he now sees the wisdom of working cordially with the Army. He is staunchly supporting Sir William Robertson and Sir Douglas Haig, and is doing all in his power to provide them with the means of victory."⁵

The article was successful in shaking Liberal opinion; not least as the newspaper was widely perceived as declaiming Carson's own views. Thus Massingham responded to intelligence of this 'concordat' by advising Lloyd George that he would:

"do well to refuse the proffered crown of the *Morning Post* and to beware of those who go about with lists of Cabinets in their pockets".⁶

However the relations between Lloyd George and Carson had advanced at too great a pace to be halted by such advice. For both men had met with Bonar Law for the first time at the Hyde Park Hotel on the evening of Monday, 20th November; henceforth the deliberations of the 'Triumvirate' gathered considerable pace. The three met twice the following day and again on the Thursday; the next meeting of the group, on Saturday, 25th November, resulted in the drafting by Aitken of a memorandum which advocated the establishment of a three man executive with Asquith as its

² Robinson, 'The Admiralty—and the Air', leading article, *The Times*, 7th November, 1916.

³ Robinson, 'Deeds Not Words', leading article, *The Times*, 22nd November, 1916.

⁴ Massingham, leading article, *The Nation*, 18th November, 1916.

⁵ Leading article, *The Morning Post*, 23rd November, 1916.

⁶ Massingham, leading article, *The Nation*, 25th November, 1916.

titular head. Asquith's response to the proposal, was to opine to Bonar Law that Lloyd George:

"has many qualities that would fit him for the first place, but he lacks one thing needful—he does not inspire trust....Here, again, there is one construction, and only one, that could be put on the new arrangement, that it has been engineered by him with the purpose, not perhaps at the moment, but as soon as a fitting pretext could be found, of displacing me. In short, the plan could not, in my opinion, be carried out without fatally impairing the confidence of loyal and valued colleagues, and undermining my own authority." ⁷

So rebuffed the Triumvirate retreated to consider their next move; the Press however displayed no such inhibitions.

Thus, perhaps inspired by a somewhat piqued Carson, the following day *The Morning Post* labelled the Coalition:

'The Lose the War Party'.

The Carsonite organ produced a further sensation in political circles with its call for the creation of "a War Council" ⁸ of four. Efforts to influence the Coalition to adopt a more decisive policy in its prosecution of the war were not confined to Gwynne, for Donald was not inactive in his efforts, albeit for different motives, to spur the Government to act. For he lunched on Friday, 24th November, with Robertson and elicited that the CIGS was:

"in favour of some arrangement which gave Mr. Lloyd George greater power". ⁹

This interview, together with one later in the day with Bonar Law at the Colonial Office, inspired Donald to write a leading article seeking to impel Asquith to undertake a reform of his Ministry. Thus *The Daily Chronicle* informed its readers that:

"The Ministry's arch-defect is [its] inability to make up its mind. It is not so much that it reaches wrong decisions, as that for weeks and even months it fails, in crucial matter after crucial matter, to reach any decision at all." ¹⁰

The article's severe tone, combined with the quarter from whence it came, ensured an immense sensation, most particularly amongst the Asquithian Liberals. Thus one of the Liberal Whips in the Commons, Geoffrey Howard, greeted the *Chronicle's* Lobby Correspondent, Harry Jones, with the effusion:

"My dear Harry, there is a dirty intrigue on against the P.M. I hope that the *Chronicle* is not in it." ¹¹

Jones denied the implication that Donald had sought to involve himself and his newspaper in any such intrigue. Nevertheless, as Howard perceived:

"Still, your article coming now will encourage the plotters." ¹²

Donald was joined in his attempt at constructive criticism of the Coalition by Spender in the

⁷ Letter from Asquith to Bonar Law, 26th November, 1916; quoted by R. Jenkins, *op. cit.*, p.426.

⁸ Leading article, *The Morning Post*, 29th November, 1916.

⁹ Memorandum by Donald, 24th November, 1916; quoted by H.A. Taylor, *Robert Donald*, (Stanley Paul & Co. 1934), p.110.

¹⁰ 'Trials of the Coalition: Firmer Methods Needed', leading article, *The Daily Chronicle*, 29th November, 1916.

¹¹ Geoffrey Howard, 29th November, 1916; quoted by Harry Jones, 'Notes of the Crisis'; H.L.R.O., Beaverbrook Library, Beaverbrook Papers, Box IV/5.

¹² *Ibid.*

Asquithians' 'House newspaper'. For in the front-page leading article the newspaper deplored:

"an appearance of delay and indecision, which may belie the fact, but none the less makes an unhappy impression." ¹³

The same could be said for the attempts at assisting Asquith by the two newspapers.

On Thursday, 30th November, Howard's prediction was amply fulfilled when Lloyd George expressed his exasperation at the manner in which the Coalition continued to flounder in language strikingly similar to that employed by Donald. Addison later noted that:

"He [Lloyd George] had taken the bit in his teeth and was determined to make a finish of it so far as he was concerned.....He says he is not keen to be P.M. but is determined there shall be a small War Committee entirely emancipated from departmental committees which could drive along and get decisions made." ¹⁴

Three days earlier Lloyd George's dissatisfaction with the Government had been confided by Carson to an influential dinner party, on Monday, 27th November, at the home of F.S. Oliver; the party consisting of Milner, Oliver, Astor, Wilson and Robinson. Robinson recorded that they had:

"discussed Lloyd George's conviction, of which Carson told us, that matters could not possibly go on as they were. He [Lloyd George] had been completely converted to the project of a small War Council in place of the cumbrous contrivance of an over-crowded War Committee of the Cabinet. All of us were unanimously of the opinion, since he [Carson] was evidently seeking outside advice, that he [Lloyd George] should press for this reform at once or go out of the Government." ¹⁵

Robinson's advice to Northcliffe was similarly effective. For Northcliffe met with Lloyd George and Milner at the home of Lloyd George's intimate, Arthur Lee, on Thursday, 30th November. The meeting was a prolonged one, with additional contributions to the conversation being made by Derby, however it was a less frosty occasion than many would have believed, Northcliffe having already advertised his opinion on the question of the Government's re-construction in an article in *The Times* on 29th November. The article was sharply critical of the Government's:

"failure to take decisions, to wage the war with vigour, and to organize the nation and themselves". ¹⁶

On Friday, 1st December, Robinson attacked the Government in a vituperative leading article entitled 'Weak Methods and Weak Men'. In the article was particularly scathing of the Coalition's War Committee, viewing that body to be:

"an immense concession extorted by incredible pressure....but it never became a War Council in constant session devoted to forethought and decision. For all practical purposes we are back in the old peace-time groove.....to this hopeless method of government in war-time we attribute much of the present weakness, and we are delighted to find that it is a view which is shared at last whenever the facts are known. We have never had the slightest doubt about the remedy. A War Government, like any other vital business, can only be effective if its directing members are few, harmonious, and in the closest possible touch from

¹³ Leading article, *The Westminster Gazette*, 29th November, 1916.

¹⁴ Addison, diary entry, 4th December, 1916; quoted by Addison, *op. cit.*, p.268.

¹⁵ Letter from Robinson to *Times* Correspondents in Paris, Pretoria, India and Washington D.C., 12th December, 1916; University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodleian New Library, Department of Western Manuscripts, MS. Dawson 66., f.171.

¹⁶ Northcliffe, *The Times*, 29th November, 1916.

hour to hour." ¹⁷

Robinson concluded by opining that the Government contained men:

"incapable of facing new conditions, encrusted in the old party habit, worn out (as well they may be) by a period of office which has lasted, continuously in some cases for more than a decade. Such men, with the best will intentions, are a sheer danger to the State. They are not fit, either physically or mentally, to deal with the sudden difficulties which may be placed in their way at any moment by a desperate but undefeated enemy." ¹⁸

Whilst *The Times* leader was scathing in its assessment of the Government, it was not directly inspired by any member of the 'Triumvirate', the same could scarcely be said of the leading article which appeared in Edward Hulton's *Evening Standard* that same day. For the piece informed its readers that:

"we are on the eve of important political changes, so far as the conduct of the war is concerned.....new methods will have to be employed, and the war run by two or three men of force and energy, and not, as now, by a debating society presided over by a politician who always shirks decisive action." ¹⁹

The newspaper buttressed the thrust of its argument by printing 'An Appeal' to Lloyd George in which it called upon the Secretary of State:

"If you believe that the perils of the hour cry aloud for change, do your part without counting the cost, without calculation as to personal results. Be true to and straight with this great, proud, fearless British people, and you shall not lack your reward." ²⁰

The reward anticipated was clear.

The origin of both pieces may be traced directly to Lloyd George's circle. The previous day Harry Jones, the *Chronicle's* Lobby Correspondent, had had a lengthy conversation with the Liberal M.P., J.W. Pratt, the secretary of the Liberal War Committee and prominent Lloyd Georgeite. When Jones read *The Evening Standard's* panegyric on the virtues of the Welshman, he noted his opinion that:

"That article is a free paraphrase of Pratt's talk with me. I have no doubt that it was written by him." ²¹

The pivotal weekend opened on Saturday, 2nd December, with Robinson's leader in *The Times* opining that:

"It is this innermost circle [of the Cabinet] which needs purging and strengthening to-day. Place that on a real war footing, and the rest will very quickly follow." ²²

An observation which Lloyd George appeared determined to test. For, unlike Asquith who almost

¹⁷ Robinson, 'Weak Methods and Weak Men', leading article, *The Times*, 1st December, 1916.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Leading article, *The Evening Standard*, 1st December, 1916.

²⁰ 'To Mr. Lloyd George: An Appeal', *The Evening Standard*, 1st December, 1916.

²¹ Harry Jones, 'Notes of the Crisis'; H.L.R.O., Beaverbrook Library, Beaverbrook Papers, Box IV/5.

²² Robinson, 'The Turning Point of the War', leading article, *The Times*, 2nd December, 1916.

unbelievably had left London on Friday for Walmer Castle, † Lloyd George remained in town throughout the weekend. In the course of the day Lloyd George met both Aitken and Northcliffe, and later and more importantly met and 'briefed' Dalziel with regard to his intentions. Having 'squared' the Press, Lloyd George turned his attention to Asquith. For in the afternoon he summoned Montagu, knowing full well that everything he related to the 'Assyrian' would be related in turn to Asquith. In the course of the interview Lloyd George showed Montagu his unsent letter of resignation in which he opined that:

"There has been delay, indecision, lack of forethought and vision." ²³

Montagu subsequently informed Asquith that:

"The situation is irretrievably serious. I have just come from L.I.G., with whom I have spent an hour of hard fighting, but it seems to me to be of no avail, and I fear he has committed himself.....

He regards it as essential that the small War Committee should sit so frequently and act with such rapidity that the P.M., whoever he were, ought not to have a place on it". ²⁴

There lay the crux of the matter, Lloyd George wished to see established a small War Committee consisting of some three to four members with Asquith excluded; Asquith, not unreasonably, wished for the Prime Minister to retain control of the Government's direction of the war. Long summarised the situation in a letter to his Parliamentary Private Secretary, Sir William Bull, written at 4:30 p.m. on 2nd December, in which he stated that:

"I believe the situation is impossible & cannot go on: at the same time I dread the change as I don't like the man [Lloyd George]. It is a terrible situation. The P.M. declines to budge...I find it impossible to support him." ²⁵

Whilst Long expressed his unease at the prospect of a Lloyd George Ministry, the Liberals were in some disarray. For Hobhouse penned a rather premature letter to Scott in which he expressed his view concerning:

"the question raised by your draft leader and the Times of today. There is to be a Lloyd George Government getting rid of Asquith Balfour Grey and Lansdowne..... What we *know* we shall get from the Times Government is the dismissal of all the moderating element. I have no more respect than you for Asquith, but Grey is another matter. He represents a negotiated peace—to which in my belief we shall ultimately be driven. But it will be a defeat to be *driven* to it, a success to compass it by our own efforts. George combines the most pessimistic view of the conditions of the war with the most extreme view of the victory to be aimed at.....

.....

† Hankey noted in his diary on Friday, 1st December, that:

"Very shortly after lunch the Prime Minister left by motor for Walmer Castle. It was very typical of him that in the middle of this tremendous crisis he should go away for the week-end! Typical both of his qualities and of his defects; of his extraordinary composure and of his easy-going habits." †

† Hankey, diary entry, 1st December, 1916; quoted by Hankey, *The Supreme Command, op. cit.*, Volume II, p.565.

²³ Letter from Lloyd George to Asquith, 2nd December, 1916; H.L.R.O., Beaverbrook Library, Lloyd George Papers, E/2/23/11.

²⁴ Letter from Edwin Montagu to Asquith, 2nd December, 1916; University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodleian New Library, Department of Western Manuscripts, MS. Asquith 31.

²⁵ Letter from Long to Sir William Bull, 2nd December, 1916; University of Cambridge, Churchill College, Bull Papers, 4/14.

The difficulty I admit is to defend Asquith. He is never one thing or another, but if he yields to George, taking Grey with him, the last remnant of liberalism and moderation vanishes from the Government." ²⁶

Where Hobhouse adopted an almost fatalistic acceptance of Asquith's fall, Milner displayed rather more insouciance in his letter to the Unionist Chief Whip, Sir Arthur Steel-Maitland when he opined that:

"There is once more a Crisis. Once more in all probability it will be patched up. Then in six weeks or 2 months, after the usual intervening disaster, there will be another Crisis and so on." ²⁷

Unlike Milner the Press continued to view the Crisis with an excited eye. Thus the *Daily Express* thundered:

'Coalition Crisis - New War Control.

Control of the War.

Sudden Crisis in the Coalition.

Rule of Five?

Mr. Asquith, Mr. Lloyd George,

Mr. Bonar Law, Mr. Balfour, and Sir E. Carson'

An editorial line which, due to an adroit manœuvre by both Aitken and Lloyd George's minions at the War Office, † also appeared in *The Daily Chronicle* beneath the headline of:

'New and Smaller British Council of War'.

The Press onslaught upon the Government was joined by *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Morning Post* and the *Daily Mail*. The last-named carrying a leading article entitled:

'The Limpets: A National Danger'

a phrase which was repeated across London on that newspaper's contents bill. It is scarcely surprising that Hankey should observe that:

"The morning papers contained a great deal of information obviously inspired by Lloyd George." ²⁸

One newspaper which held out against the Lloyd Georgeite agitation was the *Daily News* which once more attacked Lloyd George for his choice of allies and his disloyalty to both the Prime Minister and to Liberalism. Thus Gardiner, whilst insisting that he did not "regard Mr. Asquith as a godlike person", ²⁹ refused to:

²⁶ Letter from Hobhouse to Scott, 2nd December, 1916; quoted in T. Wilson (*Ed.*), *op. cit.*, pp.241-42.

²⁷ Letter from Milner to Steel-Maitland, 2nd December, 1916; H.L.R.O., Beaverbrook Library, Bonar Law Papers L/53/4/29.

† See S. Koss, *op. cit.*, p.302.

²⁸ Hankey, diary entry, 2nd December, 1916; quoted by S. Roskill, *op. cit.*, p.323.

²⁹ Gardiner, 'A Letter to a Critic', leading article, *Daily News*, 2nd December, 1916.

"be among the mongrel pack that yelps at his heels".³⁰

The clear implication was that Lloyd George was at the forefront of the disparate group. Gardiner continued his rather elegiac piece by reluctantly stating that he was:

"prepared to admit Mr. Asquith failed to deal with the menace...[posed by]..the ignorant hysteria fomented by a sensational and irresponsible Press...[by employing adequate]...newspaper advertisement".³¹

Gardiner concluded the article with a warning of the inherent instability of:

"any Government which lives by the sanction of a Press dictator".³²

In short Gardiner succeeded in striking a rather defeatist note, he appeared, like Montagu, to be in despair at the between the Liberal Party's two principal figures. Nevertheless Asquith remained unimpressed. Indeed his calm reached Milnerite proportions when he invited *hubris* with the comment to Pamela McKenna that:

"The "Crisis" shows every sign of following its many predecessors to an early and unhonoured grave."³³

That it did not do so is due in large part to the appearance of two newspaper leading articles, and the reaction in political circles which each elicited.

Events began to move with ever greater rapidity on Sunday with the appearance of the first of these influential leaders. For the calm of the Sabbath was broken by the appearance of the article 'inspired' by Lloyd George's briefing of Dalziel on the preceding Friday. The article, which was rather reminiscent in its phrasing to Lloyd George's unsent letter to Asquith of the previous Friday appeared beneath the arresting headline of:

'Grave Cabinet Crisis

Lloyd George to Resign

Campaign in the Country to Follow'

The article itself stated as an accomplished fact that:

"Mr. Lloyd George has intimated to the Prime Minister his intention to resign his post as Secretary of State for War.....Mr. Lloyd George has arrived at the definite conclusion that the methods of dilatoriness, indecision and delay which characterize the action of the present War Cabinet are such, in his opinion, as to endanger the prospects of winning the war...[Lloyd George] is fully satisfied that by the present methods the war cannot be won, and he will ask the people of the country to save themselves from the blunders and delays of the Government. He will, in short, appeal from the Cabinet direct to the people."³⁴

The piece was received in political circles as accurately representing Lloyd George's position.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Letter from Asquith to Pamela McKenna, 3rd December, 1916; quoted by R. Jenkins, *op. cit.*, p.443.

³⁴ 'Grave Cabinet Crisis. Lloyd George to Resign. Campaign in the Country', leading article, *Reynolds' News*, 3rd December, 1916.

Thus it provoked Asquith into returning to town and embarking upon a series of meetings with significant figures in the drama.

The morning also saw a meeting of the Unionist leadership at Bonar Law's home in Kensington, at which the Unionists were for the first time acquainted with the details of the Lloyd George-Asquith power struggle and the part which Bonar Law had played in it. † Following lengthy discussions the meeting concluded with the adoption of the resolution that:

"It is evident that a change must be made, and, in our opinion, the publicity given to the intention of Mr. Lloyd George makes reconstruction from within no longer possible.

We therefore urge the Prime Minister to tender the resignation of the Government.

If he feels unable to take that step, we authorise Mr. Bonar Law to tender our resignation." ³⁵

Thus the article in Dalziel's newspaper had clearly had an influence upon the position of the Unionist Party to the proposed re-constitution of the Government. As Crawford noted:

"The country and the press don't want a reshuffling of the cards, they want a new pack!" ³⁶

Crawford's appreciation was not shared by Asquith. As Crawford caustically remarked:

"We said reconstruction was no longer possible - Asquith proposes to reconstruct". ³⁷

Asquith had clearly been shaken by the appearance of the *Reynolds's News* leader; so much is indicated by his decision to summon Lloyd George to London in order to meet with him late that afternoon. For in the course of the meeting Asquith conceded Lloyd George's central point that a small War Committee should be established in order to direct the Government's prosecution of the war; moreover, Asquith also conceded that the Prime Minister should not be member of that body. However that concession was made with the condition that:

"The agenda of the War Committee will be submitted to him; its Chairman will report to him daily; he can direct it to consider particular topics or proposals; and all its conclusions will be subject to his approval or veto. He can, of course, at his own discretion attend meetings of the Committee." ³⁸

Upon Lloyd George's acceptance of the conditions, the Welshman departed for the War Office where he met with Northcliffe at some length. The latter elicited sufficient material from the interview to write a two column article on the Crisis which, once again, appeared in the pages of *The Times* ascribed to 'Our Parliamentary Correspondent'. Thus on the evening of Sunday, 3rd December, it appeared clear that the article in *Reynolds's News* had succeeded in coercing Asquith into acceptance of the Government's reconstruction on Lloyd George's terms. For as Carson appreciated Asquith:

"had got all he required; that if the Prime Minister cared to attend and preside

† For a full and *reliable* account of the meeting see John Vincent (Ed.), *The Crawford Papers. The Journals of David Lindsay, twenty-seventh Earl of Crawford and tenth Earl of Balcarres, 1892-1940*, (Manchester University Press, 1984), pp.369-72.

³⁵ Unionist resolution, 3rd December, 1916; quoted by R. Jenkins, *op. cit.*, p.435.

³⁶ Earl of Crawford, diary entry, 3rd December, 1916; quoted by John Vincent (Ed.), *The Crawford Papers, op. cit.*, p.371.

³⁷ *Op. cit.*, p.371.

³⁸ Letter from Asquith to Lloyd George, 4th December, 1916; H.L.R.O., Beaverbrook Library, Lloyd George Papers, E/2/23/12.

over every sitting no one could have prevented him." ³⁹

However that which the Press had constructed, in the shape of Dalziel's 'inspired' article, so the Press especially in the guise of Robinson's leader in *The Times* on Monday, 4th December, tore asunder.

The Manchester Guardian dissected the 'agreement' between Asquith and Lloyd George and concluded, unlike Carson, that it represented a humiliation for the Prime Minister:

"The most natural constitutional course for Mr. Asquith would be either to resist the demand for a War Council, which would partly supersede him as Premier, or alternatively himself to resign". ⁴⁰

However the most damaging attack upon Asquith was that conceived at Cliveden and launched from Printing House Square.

Robinson had spent Saturday, 2nd December, as a guest of Waldorf Astor at Cliveden, where the first part of the article was written; Astor himself influenced the article by furnishing intelligence which had missed the deadline for *The Observer*. Robinson also discussed the article with his mentor, Milner, another guest at Cliveden, who pressed him to meet with Carson; a suggestion which he adopted upon his return to London on the afternoon of Sunday, 3rd December. It was this meeting which directly inspired the vitriolic anti-Asquith passage in the article's second half:

"we seem at last to be within measurable distance of the small War Council, or super-Cabinet for war purposes, which has been pressed in these columns for the last year and a half. On Friday, according to our parliamentary correspondent, MR. LLOYD GEORGE'S decision took shape in the form of written representations to the PRIME MINISTER, and these have since been followed by personal discussion between them. The gist of his proposal is understood to be the establishment forthwith of a small War Council, fully charged with the supreme direction of the war." ⁴¹

The article continued with the key passage, inspired by Carson, which was clearly intended to wreck the Asquith-Lloyd George 'concordat'. For Robinson stated that:

"Not since the days when the Coalition was forming has any political situation produced such excitement or, we may add, such a general feeling of optimism. As we write on Sunday night the result of all these deliberations is still incomplete. But the essential facts remain as we have stated them, and there are good reasons for hoping that there are forces at work which will carry the necessary reform without interregnum or delay.

Obviously the first of these reasons is the character of the PRIME MINISTER, who has never been slow to note political tendencies when they become inevitable. The testimony of MR. ASQUITH'S closest supporters—even more, perhaps, than the pressure of those who have no politics beyond the war—must have convinced him by this time that matters cannot possibly go on as at present. They must have convinced him, too, that his own qualities are fitted better, as they are fond of saying, to "preserve the unity of the nation" (though we have never doubted its unity) than to force the pace of a War Council." ⁴²

³⁹ Carson; quoted by Colvin, *op. cit.*, p.209.

⁴⁰ 'The Government to be Reconstructed. Mr. Lloyd George Demands a New War Council. Resignation to Follow Refusal. Mr. Bonar Law's Intentions: A Vital Factor in the Situation', leading article, *The Manchester Guardian*, 4th December, 1916.

⁴¹ Robinson, 'Towards Reconstruction', leading article, *The Times*, 4th December, 1916.

⁴² *Ibid.*

The attack upon Asquith was clearly intended to operate on the personal level. It attacked his character rather than his policies and did so with a hitherto unseen delight. The incendiary article concluded with a passage clearly designed to address Unionist concerns at the prospect of a Lloyd George premiership:

"The Celtic temperament is apt to concentrate on a single passion, and MR. LLOYD GEORGE has somehow succeeded in impressing even the bitterest of his old opponents with his complete abandonment of any other thought beside the passion for victory. It was only a question of time before he found it impossible to work with the old digressive colleagues under the old unwieldy system. No elaborate theory is needed to account for his revolt. Nor, for the matter of that, is the country at large under any illusions about it".⁴³

The Lobby Correspondent of *The Daily Chronicle*, Harry Jones, observed that Robinson's leader, with its:

"vicious reflections on the P.M...deliberately conveyed the impression that the P.M. had been, as it were, extruded by force from the Council, and made it appear before the world as if he had suffered a grievous humiliation".⁴⁴

Whilst Hankey judged the piece to be:

"an intolerable, one-sided, and obviously inspired 'leader'".⁴⁵

Austen Chamberlain observed, in a letter to the Viceroy of India, Lord Chelmsford, that the result of *The Times* leader was to imply:

"a complete surrender by the Prime Minister, who was to be left in his position only on condition that the whole conduct of affairs was placed in Lloyd George's hands".⁴⁶

Montagu went to Downing Street at Lloyd George's behest on the morning of 4th December, as the Secretary of State was perturbed by the fact that he had yet to receive written confirmation of the 'concordat'. However as Montagu later recorded in his diary, the immediate impact of the article was so immense as to render the receipt of any such missive extremely doubtful. For as Montagu rapidly perceived Asquith, in the light of Robinson's efforts, now viewed the 'agreement' with Lloyd George as defunct, and with it the Government. In effect the article had succeeded in turning Asquith against an agreement which was eminently open to subsequent re-interpretation by such a practised political manipulator as the Prime Minister. Consequently Asquith addressed Lloyd George with a letter throwing over the entire settlement:

"Such productions as the first leading article in today's *Times*, showing the infinite possibilities for misunderstanding & misrepresentation of such an agreement as we considered yesterday, make me at least doubtful as to its feasibility. Unless the impression is at once corrected that I am being relegated to the position of an irresponsible spectator of the War, I cannot possibly go on."⁴⁷

Lloyd George, rather weakly, replied that:

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Harry Jones, 'Notes of the Crisis', 4th December, 1916; H.L.R.O., Beaverbrook Library, Beaverbrook Papers, Box IV/5.

⁴⁵ Hankey, diary entry, 4th December, 1916; quoted by S. Roskill, *op. cit.*, p.323.

⁴⁶ Letter from Chamberlain to Lord Chelmsford, 8th December, 1916; quoted by S. Koss, *op. cit.*, p.304.

⁴⁷ Letter from Asquith to Lloyd George, 4th December, 1916; H.L.R.O., Beaverbrook Library, Lloyd George Papers, E/2/23/12.

"I have not seen 'The Times' article, but I hope you will not attach undue importance to these effusions. I have had these misrepresentations to put up with for months. Northcliffe probably wants a smash. Derby and I do not. Northcliffe would like to make this and any other rearrangement under your Premiership impossible. Derby and I attach great importance to your retaining your present position—effectively. I cannot restrain, or, I fear, influence Northcliffe." ⁴⁸

Despite Lloyd George's protestations Asquith's line was the only one which Robinson's literary efforts left open to him; for the piece had ensured that one or other of the two dominant figures of the Liberal Party would depart the Coalition, it only remained to determine which would.

Cecil Harmsworth recorded the distracted mood of the House of Commons in the wake of the Press onslaught over the weekend, noting that:

"In the House of Commons, confusion and bewilderment. Most people have been growing uneasy under the nerveless direction of the P.M., but most people also regard the possible partnership [*sic.*] with dismay." ⁴⁹

By Tuesday morning Asquith was faced with the opposition not only of the hostile Press, but of his own Cabinet; Derby wrote to the Prime Minister stating that:

"Lloyd George has shown me a copy of his letter to you tendering his resignation. Whilst he has naturally had more opportunity than I have of judging the effects of the Cabinets indecision, my own experience during the last few months has made very apparent to me the perilous state which such indecision has had on the conduct of the war - notably in the provision of an adequate number of men for the army.

I feel therefore it is quite impossible for me not to associate myself with L.I. George and would ask you to accept my resignation at the same time as his." ⁵⁰

Derby was almost the last person to read that much perused document before it was finally dispatched to its intended recipient. The destruction of the Coalition was perceived by Margot Asquith when, observing from the vantage point of a window in 10 Downing Street, she saw the spectacle of Northcliffe and Lloyd George walking in the Garden of No. 11 whilst engaged in earnest conversation. Thus she noted in her diary that:

"We are out!" ⁵¹

Early in the evening of Tuesday, 5th December, Asquith formally tendered his resignation to the King. An action which he entered into secure in the knowledge that the Liberal Party would continue to back him. For it was strongly held in Liberal circles that, as *The Westminster Gazette* stated on 6th December, the support amongst Liberal M.P.s which Lloyd George could command in the Division Lobbies stood at a mere twenty votes. Consequently *The Westminster Gazette* announced to its readers, with rather more certitude than accuracy, that Asquith had taken a "firm stand" ⁵² against Lloyd George; the unstated belief was that the Welshman's inevitable failure to form a Ministry would necessitate Asquith's return and would also have the incidental effect of bringing the Welshman down a peg or two. Whilst the *Star* was equally sure in its expression of pleasure that the Cabinet Crisis was over and that:

⁴⁸ Letter from Lloyd George to Asquith, 4th December, 1916; H.L.R.O., Beaverbrook Library, Lloyd George Papers, E/2/23/13.

⁴⁹ Cecil Harmsworth, diary entry, 4th December, 1916; quoted by R. Pound & G. Harmsworth, *op. cit.*, p.513.

⁵⁰ Letter from Derby to Asquith, 5th December, 1916; Liverpool Records Office, Derby Papers, 920 DER (17), 47/3.

⁵¹ Margot Asquith, diary entry, 5th December, 1916; quoted by R. Pound & G. Harmsworth, *op. cit.*, p.514.

⁵² Leading article, *The Westminster Gazette*, 5th December, 1916.

"the Labour Party had been too strong for Mr. Lloyd George." ⁵³

It therefore came as something of an unpleasant surprise when Lloyd George succeeded with no little ease in forming a Ministry through the conjunction of substantial backbench Liberal support and the assistance of the Unionists. Realisation that Asquith's premiership was actually at an end occasioned an orgy of inquests throughout the metropolitan Liberal Press. Thus Cecil Harmsworth recorded on 6th December that:

"The London Liberal daily newspapers are full of denunciations of Northcliffe, whom they regard as the arch-wrecker of the Asquith Govt. There is truth in this, of course, but not all the truth. Grave dissatisfaction with the P.M.'s leadership has been growing apace among Liberals in the House and had found expression in such staunchly Liberal papers as the *Manchester Guardian* and *The Nation*." ⁵⁴

The attribution of blame for the collapse of the Asquith Coalition in little over a week was not however limited to the Liberal Press. For Asquith himself soon announced his belief that:

"there has been communication in a press conspiracy against us. Whatever I say or do appears in the papers in a lying form. The account given in this day's "Times" of the transactions between us [Asquith and Lloyd George] is utterly mendacious". ⁵⁵

The Liberal Chief Whip, John Gulland, in conversation with Scott, was unequivocal in his denunciation of the activities of *The Times* throughout the course of the crisis, and reserved special vehemence for that newspaper's "lying leader" ⁵⁶ of Monday, 4th December. Furthermore the *Daily News* warned that:

"having destroyed one Government Lord Northcliffe is going to exercise the powers of a dictator over its successor". ⁵⁷

A theme which Gardiner later returned to when he opined that:

"The great fact for democracy is that it [the Lloyd George Coalition] could not have been made without the driving power of a Press campaign of unbridled ferocity. Mr. Asquith has been dethroned and Mr. George reigns in his stead by virtue of the will of Lord Northcliffe." ⁵⁸

Although the destruction of the Asquith Coalition was greeted with bitterness in Liberal circles, the establishment of the Lloyd George Coalition was viewed with some measure of satisfaction in the Unionist Press, albeit satisfaction which was from the outset tempered by concern. Thus *The Times* leader page welcomed "the surprising rapidity with which Mr. Lloyd George has asserted his new position." ⁵⁹ For it was, the leader went on to state:

"the feature above all others in this kaleidoscopic crisis which has created the greatest impression amongst experienced politicians. They realize that only some powerful and unusual force could have enabled him to attain it within so

⁵³ Leading article, *Star*, 5th December, 1916.

⁵⁴ Cecil Harmsworth, diary entry, 6th December, 1916; quoted by R. Pound & G. Harmsworth, *op. cit.*, p.514.

⁵⁵ Note by Burnham of an interview with Asquith, 6th December, 1916; I.W.M., Lord Burnham Papers, HLWL/10/7., f.2.

⁵⁶ Gulland; quoted by Scott, diary entry, 6th December, 1916; quoted in T. Wilson (*Ed.*), *op. cit.*, p.250.

⁵⁷ Leading article, *Daily News*, 9th December, 1916.

⁵⁸ Gardiner, leading article, *Atlantic Monthly*, March 1917.

⁵⁹ Flanagan, 'The End of Pacifism', leading article, *The Times*, 8th December, 1916.

brief a space. That force, it need hardly be said, is the determination of a united people to secure an efficient Government for War and the belief that he can give it to them...The exclusive *régime* of Tadpole and Taper is no more." ⁶⁰

Strachey was rather more circumspect three days earlier, in his letter to Lord Robert Cecil, when he remarked that:

"Fate seems to have determined that we should have the rogue elephant in power, and therefore the essential thing is to surround him with as many tame and trusted elephants as possible." ⁶¹

Strachey also noted that:

"The first problem of the hour is, will Lloyd George really leave the soldiers alone? I expect his intentions at the moment are quite excellent in this respect, and that as long as things go perfectly right he will stick to his intentions. The trouble will come if things don't go right and we get into some serious difficulty, even if only of a temporary character. Then I am afraid of his trying short cuts to victory." ⁶²

Events would prove Strachey's appreciation of the Lloyd George-General Staff relationship to be rather more accurate in its appraisal than that with which Robinson had sought to soothe Unionist nerves.

Nevertheless the rôle which the Press had played in the Crisis, and would continue to play in Lloyd George's political calculations may be seen by reference to *The Times* on 12th December, which, with no little self-satisfaction, carried an article from the Liberal Press in which it was stated that:

" Lord Northcliffe, by virtue of that power he exercises, is one of the chiefest figures in the great drama. There are those who contemptuously regard Lord Northcliffe as merely the personification of what one calls "the ha'penny press mind." Whether he is greater or littler than that it is anyhow an admission. He is at once democracy and also democracy's master; he is a million people's voices—but he is also the mouth whih [*sic.*] shapes what those voices utter. And Lord Northcliffe has just brought down the Asquith Cabinet." ⁶³

The piece continued by arguing that:

"The fact remains that it was after reading Monday's "Times" that Mr. Asquith sent in his resignation. By that alone Lord Northcliffe (we speak now from the solely journalistic point of view) has achieved probably the greatest journalistic feat in history. He has out-lioned all the famous lions of the "Times" itself. There is no need to emphasise the magnitude of the deed. One only needs remark that Mr. Asquith's was the longest Administration of recent times, which is equivalent to saying that it must equally have been inherently the strongest. It collapsed in rather less than four days." ⁶⁴

Such expressions help to explain the fact that it has been observed of Lloyd George, arguably the first Prime Minister to exhibit a genuine fascination with the workings of the Press, that:

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ Letter from Strachey to Lord Robert Cecil, 9th December, 1916; H.L.R.O., Strachey Papers S/4/4/20.

⁶² Memorandum by Strachey on fall of the Asquith Coalition, December 1916; H.L.R.O., Strachey Papers, S/18/3/47.

⁶³ 'The Greatest Dictator. Lord Northcliffe's Supreme Journalistic Feat'; quoted in *The Times*, 12th December, 1916.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

"The editor of *The Times* has often thought himself more important than the prime minister. Lloyd George was the only prime minister who apparently shared this belief." ⁶⁵

Despite his appreciation of the rôle of the Press, and the significant part played by the broad-ranging Press coalition in his elevation to the premiership, Lloyd George was soon confronted with disquietude, both in and of the Press. For the Government's reliance upon Press opinion gave cause for remark. Lord Bryce spoke for many Liberals when he opined that:

"It is no good omen for the future of England or democracy that the press of one man, speaking with many voices to the mob of the streets and that of the clubs, should play the part of Kingmaker.....we used to complain of Delane for infinitely less!" ⁶⁶

Whilst the Liberal Press castigated Lloyd George to varying degrees for his abandonment of Liberalism and the intimacy of his relations with the Unionists, the latter's representatives in the Press ironically greeted the Coalition with something less than undisguised glee. Thus *The Times* and the *Daily Mail* amongst others voiced doubts over the Government's inclusion of the Unionist 'Old Gang', especially Balfour and Lord Robert Cecil, whilst such newspapers as *The Morning Post* were soon out of sympathy with the new Ministry over its relations with the Military.

Lloyd George, lacking any substantial support in the Liberal Press, and with the Unionist Press having abandoned their line of preceding weeks the Prime Minister felt himself to be rather isolated. The steps which he undertook to remedy his isolation took the form of various attempts to 'square' the Press. Thus Lloyd George met with Gardiner on 21st December at 10 Downing Street in order to discuss President Wilson's 'Note to the Belligerents'. Whilst the attempt to foster closer relations between Lloyd George and the Liberal Press failed to signally develop in this particular instance, the *rapprochement* did succeed in greatly ameliorating the opposition which the *Daily News* displayed towards the Lloyd George Coalition. With the *Daily News* divided in its attitude towards Lloyd George and with *The Manchester Guardian*, for the moment, brought 'on side' Lloyd George's strategy towards the Liberal Press appeared to be effective.

The intricacies of the strategy were revealed most notably with regard to Lloyd George's relations with the principal organ of the Asquithian Press, *The Westminster Gazette*. For both the proprietor, Lord Cowdray, and one of the principal shareholders of the newspaper, Murray of Elibank, were members of Lloyd George's Ministry. Their acceptance of office thus allowed Lloyd George the freedom to attack the conduct of that newspaper with something akin to impunity. Hence his observation to Murray that he had:

"never heard of another case where a member of a Govt. financed a paper to attack his own colleagues" ⁶⁷

rather suggests that Cowdray's principal qualification for the Air Ministry was that his acceptance of the post rendered *The Westminster Gazette* more amenable to the Prime Minister's counsel. As the Assistant Secretary of the War Cabinet and another of the Prime Minister's Welsh coterie, Tom Jones, observed of Lloyd George:

"There is no doubt that a man with a paper in his pocket has a big leverage in political circles here...The P.M. particularly "studies" and "humours" such people." ⁶⁸

⁶⁵ A.J.P. Taylor, *English History, 1914-1945*, *op. cit.*, p.187.

⁶⁶ Letter from Lord Bryce to Sir George Otto Trevelyan, 22nd January, 1917; University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodleian New Library, Department of Western Manuscripts, Bryce Papers; quoted by S. Koss, *op. cit.*, p.314.

⁶⁷ Letter from Lloyd George to Murray of Elibank, 17th September, 1917; Elibank Papers, N.L.S.; quoted by S. Koss, *op. cit.*, p.312.

⁶⁸ Letter from Dr. Thomas Jones to his wife, n.d. (March 1917); quoted by Keith Middlemass (*Ed.*), *Whitehall Diary*,

Whilst the Liberal Press was concerned with addressing conflicting allegiances, the Coalition's support amongst the Unionist Press was greatly reduced through a resurgence of concern at the relations between the new Prime Minister and the General Staff. Throughout the course of his premiership Lloyd George had shown himself quick to appreciate the influence of the Press; a virtue which he characteristically carried to a fault. Thus Maxse sought to exploit Northcliffe's links to Lloyd George in order to reduce the friction which existed between the two parties. Thus he wrote, appropriately enough on 14th February, exhorting Northcliffe:

"to do something to keep him [Lloyd George] straight about the Army lest he runs amuck [*sic.*] and loses the war. He undoubtedly has mischievous friends who are perpetually trying to egg him on against Haig and Robertson and make their positions impossible, and L.G. being so impulsive, so round-the-corner in his methods, and so appallingly ignorant of what an Army is, runs considerable risks of falling into this palpable trap".⁶⁹

With such a background of suspicion and mutual antipathy it is scarcely surprising that the summer and early autumn months of 1917 should witness a campaign of pro-'General Staff' Press agitation in the pages of such organs as *The Morning Post* and *The National Review*. The principal effect of the campaign was to stymie Lloyd George's aim of dismissing the triumvirate of Robertson, Haig and Derby.

For the substantial support, encompassing politicians, public opinion and the Press, which the Press campaign served to elicit illustrated the degree to which the Prime Minister's latitude of action was circumscribed by the weakness of his political position. Hence Lloyd George, unable to act openly, turned to the Press as the principal, if not sole, instrument of achieving his policy goals of dismissing one or all of the triumvirate. Such a decision marked a departure from the previous perception of the Press as an adjunct of political action to one in which the clandestine nature of the former lent itself to the subordination of the latter. Such a strategy was not employed before Lloyd George had exhausted a number of more duplicitous avenues. That recourse to the Press should not be a first option is indicative of the limitations implicit in such a course of action; limitations which are only underscored by the reluctance of a Prime Minister, otherwise notorious for his elevated perception of the Fourth Estate, to entrust all his eggs to the one basket. Lloyd George did however succeed to a very remarkable extent to reducing the opposition of the Unionist Press to his attacks upon the General Staff by employing the simple expedient of removing Northcliffe from the equation. As Lloyd George later wrote that:

"It is the wisdom of successful government that it should harness powerful but unruly natural elements to some beneficent task."⁷⁰

To this end the Prime Minister sought to persuade Northcliffe throughout April and May that he should succeed Balfour in heading the American Mission.. An appointment, which Hankey viewed as:

"really a dodge to get rid of Northcliffe, of whom he [Lloyd George] is afraid".⁷¹

The appointment was received with varying degrees of incredulity. Maxse later wrote in *The National Review*, in response to Buckmaster's "elaborately malignant speech"⁷² that Northcliffe was:

(O.U.P. 1969), Volume I, p.26.

⁶⁹ Letter from Maxse to Northcliffe, 14th February, 1917; British Museum, British Library, Manuscript Collection, Northcliffe MS. 62175, f.90.

⁷⁰ Lloyd George, *War Memoirs*, (Odhams Press. 1938), Volume I, p.1005.

⁷¹ Hankey, diary entry, 24th May, 1917; University of Cambridge, Churchill College, Hankey Papers, HNKY/1/3.

⁷² Dawson, quoted by R. Pound & G. Harmsworth, *op. cit.*, p.543.

"the man for this Mission.....Though it may be exceedingly astute of the Prime Minister to expatriate at this critical moment a potentially formidable critic, and in a sense to 'noble' the Northcliffe press.....we regret it, because Lord Northcliffe's influence is indispensable at home. He has rendered enduring service throughout the war - necessarily making some mistakes - and over and over again he has literally saved the situation." ⁷³

A cartoon in the *London Opinion* showed both Lloyd George and Carson gleefully discussing the prospect of Northcliffe's prolonged absence. Carson was shown saying:

"if Asquith had conceived such a splendid idea, he would have been Prime Minister still!" ⁷⁴

Wickham Steed later bemoaned to Northcliffe himself that:

"fear of press criticism is much decreased because he [Lloyd George] imagines that as you are not there to bite him, public opinion as revealed in the Press is a more negligible quantity". ⁷⁵

However the result of Northcliffe's absence was rather to lead Lloyd George to over-estimate the strength of his own position; a miscalculation which was to lead directly to his ill-considered speech in Paris on 12th November, in which he initiated an attack upon the General Staff.

⁷³ Maxse, *The National Review*, June 1917.

⁷⁴ *London Opinion*, June 1917.

⁷⁵ Letter from Wickham Steed to Northcliffe, 20th September, 1917; British Museum, British Library, Manuscript Collection, Northcliffe MS. 62246 A.

EAST VERSUS WEST.

As the casualties entailed in the British offensive in Flanders continued to mount, Lloyd George was increasingly involved in complex attempts to manoeuvre Haig into ending his campaign. However Haig and Robertson, backed by the King, large sections of the Press, and numerous influential Liberals and Unionist politicians, refrained from obliging; indeed when, in late August and early September, Lloyd George attempted to halt the Western offensive by shifting troops to the Isonzo campaign in Italy, he was routed in Cabinet by Robertson. The case for reinforcing Italy was associated by Lloyd George with Marshal Foch's scheme to establish an Allied General Staff to 'supervise' strategy from the Channel to the Adriatic; Robertson observed that:

"Lloyd George being keen on the Italian project for the time being and knowing that I am against it and that the French are for it, and as the French keep rubbing in that it is necessary to have a Central Staff at Paris, I can see Lloyd George in the future wanting to agree to some such organisation so as to put the matter in French hands and to take it out of mine." ¹

Once more the British Army would find itself subordinate to Paris in a way which it had ceased to be since the Somme offensive of 1916. It was as a result of these intrigues that Robertson wrote to Gwynne on 1st September, remarking that:

"all you people (perhaps not you) overdid the L G thing and have banked on him, & therefore it only seems possible for me to make the best of him. But there must be a row one day I fear. Each day brings a fresh proposal more wild than its predecessor, regardless of time & space." ²

Once more civilian control of the military strategic direction of the war came to the fore; Foch arrived in London on 3rd September in order to persuade the Cabinet to allow the French First Army (which was supporting Haig's troops) to send 100 heavy guns immediately from the Western to the Italian Front. This proposal was swiftly opposed by both Robertson and Haig, who arrived in London shortly thereafter in order to throttle it at birth. Faced with unanimity in the Army's opposition, the unity of the Cabinet began to fracture; Hankey noted that:

"L.G. had been very truculent about the idea of overruling the soldiers, but, when he came to the point, he funk'd it". ³

Lord Robert Cecil, remarked to his cousin, Arthur Balfour, that:

"I dislike serving a Prime Minister whom I distrust. L.G. may over-ride the soldiers again in some far more vital matter. I have no confidence in his strategic intuition as B.L. has.....Still less do I like the way he treats Robertson and Jellicoe." ⁴

Carson, who had himself emerged as one of the principal opponents of Lloyd George and:

"the meddling now practised by the Prime Minister and other politicians" ⁵

¹ Letter from Robertson to Haig, 9th August, 1917; quoted in Robert Blake (*Ed.*), *op. cit.*, p.251.

² *Ibid.*

³ Hankey, Hankey diary, 4th September, 1917; University of Cambridge, Churchill College, Hankey Papers, HNKY/1/3.

⁴ Letter from Lord Robert Cecil to Balfour, 4th September, 1917; British Museum, British Library, Manuscript Collections, Balfour MS. 49738., ff.150-51.

⁵ Carson, attributed to by Haig, diary entry, 14th September, 1917; *op. cit.*, p.254.

advised Haig to confide in Asquith his frustration at Lloyd George's antics "because the latter, though in opposition, has very great power".⁶ In addition he assured Haig:

"that the War Cabinet would not be allowed to interfere with [his] arrangements".⁷

It is therefore scarcely surprising that the Unionist Press, led by *The Morning Post*, picked up the scent of a schism between the War Cabinet and the General Staff.

Lloyd George was not unwilling to enter into such a public fracas; indeed he was only restrained from doing so initially by Milner, and latterly by his preoccupation with the potent political implications of the Kühlmann peace initiative. Such a degree of irresolution was to prove fortunate for the Prime Minister in this case, for if Lloyd George had ordered Robertson and Haig to dispatch some 300 or more artillery pieces the 'Westerner' Robertson would have resigned as CIGS. Such an eventuality would have provoked a political crisis, a crisis moreover in which the vulnerable Lloyd George would have found himself almost universally castigated in the columns of the Press; a situation which was not to be the case a few months later. Lloyd George would also have had the ground removed from beneath his very feet as to the urgent need to bolster the Italian Front by the *volte face* of the commander of the Italian troops, General Cadorna, in deciding not to launch an offensive in the remainder of the year.

His reluctance to act unilaterally against the military authorities limited Lloyd George's influence; the War Office remained immune to his blandishments. Unable to break free of the Western Front's dominance of strategy, and overwhelmed by a sense of impotence, Lloyd George sought refuge at Criccieth. Lloyd George's belief in 'patent war-winning measures' continued to irk Robertson who observed that:

"There never was, and never is, any difficulty in knowing a brilliant way of quickly ending a war; but there is and always has been enormous difficulty in actually doing what one would like to do, especially if the enemy gets the first 6 tricks before one starts off. You have many times put the case so correctly that I shall not restate it. But what the hell is the use of people preaching patience and resolution when from hour to hour they display impatience and opportunist irresolution. And we have not half done yet what we must do before we win. So much for this aspect of the case. You can see how my mind is working, and what deceitful rot is sometimes spoken about more - interference with 'strategy'. Interference is constant."⁸

Having failed to convince the General Staff to fall in with his 'Easterner' schemes, Lloyd George toyed with the idea of concluding a compromise peace with Germany - at Russia's expense - in September and October; such thoughts being occasioned by the Papal peace initiative of August, and latterly by the German Foreign Secretary's *démarche* in September and October. † As he remarked to Riddell in late August:

"Unless the war is conducted on different lines we are certain to lose it, and unless a change is made it would be better to make the best peace possible."⁹

Lloyd George's pacific inclinations having come to naught, and perceiving himself to be baulked by the military establishment, he increasingly manifested a disdain for the opinions of the professional soldier. To the evident concern of Hankey he expounded questions of military

⁶ *Op. cit.*, 15th September, 1917; *op. cit.*, pp.254-55.

⁷ *Op. cit.*, 16th September, 1917; *op. cit.*, p.255.

⁸ Letter from Robertson to Gwynne, 1st September, 1917; I.W.M., Gwynne MSS., HAG/26/14. C.P. Scott Papers, Box 133.

† For an account of the Kühlmann *démarche* of September 1917, and its reception in London see A.C. Mitchell, *Cedant armae togae. Britain, Germany and the Kühlmann démarche of September-October 1917*. (Unpublished M.A. thesis, University of York. 1996).

⁹ Lloyd George, in conversation with Riddell, diary entry; *op. cit.*, p.267.

strategy with distressing frequency before audiences of journalists and proprietors.

In Northcliffe's absence the climate of opinion in Fleet Street began to shift; elements of the Press, amongst which *The Manchester Guardian* was prominent, began to air opinions critical of the military direction of the war. Such voices however, unlike those of May 1915, were critical not of the civilian government's conduct, but rather that of the General Staff. Dawson, whose customary degree of editorial latitude had been even further extended in Northcliffe's absence, had, by late 1917, become the key figure in the ranks of the General Staff's critics. Open to Lloyd George's influence through Milner, Dawson 'shadowed' his erstwhile 'Chief' in his move away from the 'Westerner' position, taking *The Times* with him. Dawson's defection had a number of notable implications, the most immediate being the stifling of Repington. In addition, through the medium of his Parliamentary Secretary, Major Waldorf Astor, the proprietor of *The Observer* and *The Pall Mall Gazette*, Lloyd George had by September initiated a Press campaign praising Milner in various newspapers, amongst which *The Observer* was prominent. The pro-'frock' † influence upon Dawson wielded by Milner was further reinforced through 'Robin's' membership of the 'Round Table' group, a dining group held by Hankey to be:

"among the most influential [political congeries] at the present moment....They dine every Monday usually either at the house of Major Waldorf Astor M.P., Sir Edward Carson, or Oliver. Milner is the real leader of this group, which includes Amery, Philip Kerr, and the editor of 'The Times' Geoffrey Robinson (who has just changed his name).....Ll. George sometimes attends their gatherings." ¹⁰

The military were not unaware of the imminence of the 'intrigue' aimed at silencing the 'Westerner' school of strategy; Haig wrote to Gwynne on 29th September stating that:

"final victory can only be achieved by unswerving concentration at the decisive point - the Western Front.....that is the only way to complete this "won" war." ¹¹

Such a missive served as a 'call to arms' for the 'Generals' Press'; and a reminder to Lloyd George and his acolytes of the political potency of the General Staff. By 1917 the principal points of divergence between the War Cabinet and the General Staff were manpower, and the allocation of the existing establishment of the British and Empire forces; that is the 'Westerner' versus 'Easterner' debate. This debate flared into violent life once more in October.

Dissatisfied with the military advice which he was receiving Lloyd George sought to undermine Robertson's position. Thus on 9th October, in Robertson's absence, Lloyd George initiated a meeting of the War Policy Committee at which the quality of the professional military advice which it received was discussed. As such it formed an explicit attack upon Robertson's position, and marked a victory for Lloyd George's prolonged campaign against the General Staff. His success in this matter emboldened the Prime Minister to endeavour to impose military strategic direction upon the General Staff. The reluctance of his colleagues to accede to this request; as shown by Carson's previously quoted assurance to Haig, led directly to Lloyd George resurrecting his plan to establish a committee of senior soldiers to examine the strategic direction adopted by the General Staff. Having failed in his attempt, on 25th September, to install Foch as the Commander-in-Chief of all the Allied armies, a failure which was due in no small part to the excoriating criticism which both Press and Opposition politicians heaped upon his scheme, Lloyd George sought instead to achieve his aim, the subordination of military strategy to civilian control, in stages. The first of these was the establishment of an Inter-Allied War Council, with a permanent General Staff, at Versailles; once the Opposition Press and politicians had grown used to the innovation, Foch could, it was believed, be quietly installed as the Allied Supreme Commander.

Balked in this plan Lloyd George instead sought to reduce the influence of Robertson, over the strategic direction of the war, through the medium of a rigged 'War Council', to which

† During the course of the dispute between the War Cabinet and the General Staff, each side frequently made use of less than flattering epithets; the General Staff dubbed the politician the 'frock-coats', or simply the 'frocks', and was in turn collectively referred to as 'brass-hats'.

¹⁰ Hankey, diary entry, 15th August, 1917; University of Cambridge, Churchill College, Hankey Papers, HNKY/1/3.

¹¹ Letter from Haig to Gwynne, 29th September, 1917; I.W.M., Gwynne MSS., HAG/9/3.

Wilson and Lord French - the former unemployed at the time, the latter unemployable - were invited to act as military advisers. As Hankey observed:

"the whole thing is a clever plot on L.G.'s part....he fortifies himself with apparently unbiased military opinion on the great struggle with Robertson and Haig, which he knows he cannot face without. The which intregue [*sic.*], if unsavoury, is very skilfull [*sic.*]. [Yet] I am glad I had no hand in it".¹²

Confronted with such disregard for Robertson's professional military opinion, and the extent to which Lloyd George indulged in intrigues in order to receive the military 'advice' which he wanted to hear, one concurs with Strachey's view that:

"if he really thinks that Haig and Robertson are preventing us winning the war, then it was his duty to dismiss them, and put Harry Wilson and the new school in their place. To side-track them by an elaborate intrigue is the most dangerous thing he could have done."¹³

Robertson's initial reaction was to offer his resignation, an occurrence which Lloyd George's elaborate minuet had clearly been designed to achieve. Unfortunately for the Prime Minister's intrigues both Haig and Robertson enjoyed the protection of several influential leading Unionist politicians; Hankey was informed by Curzon on 10th October, that Robertson's departure would be followed by those of himself, Cecil, Balfour, Derby and Carson. Such a diminution of the Unionist presence in the Coalition would no doubt have cast doubt on its continued viability; and on that of Lloyd George's premiership itself. An assessment which the most casual perusal of the events of 1922 can only underscore.

Regrettably for Lloyd George, having indulged in a prolonged period of intriguing against the position of the General Staff, and of Robertson in particular, he now found himself in the slightly awkward position of being forced to back down in a most humiliating fashion. Hence, at the next meeting of the War Cabinet on 11th October, he was obliged to assert that the decision to convene a War Council:

"was not due in the slightest degree to any lack of confidence in anyone, more especially the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, in whom they [the War Cabinet] had the utmost confidence."¹⁴

A statement which is almost as ridiculous as Derby's remark to Amery that "Henry [Wilson] was in no sense an intriguer".¹⁵ The tension between the 'frocks' and the 'soldier's party' was becoming increasingly intense; Lloyd George's government was in grave danger of self-destructing, not least due to the premier's use of the ambitious and embittered Wilson and French against the Robertson-Haig combination and his dalliance with the unity of command in order to finesse a shift in strategical imperatives.

On 12th November, in the course of a speech in Paris, Lloyd George allowed his bitterness at the manner in which, hitherto, the General Staff had conducted the war, to blaze forth in public. A speech which had been preceded by a campaign of pro-Ministerial Press agitation attacking the General Staff and praising the concept of the Supreme War Council. Thus *The Manchester Guardian*, on 1st November opined:

"If politicians and civilians are to have nothing to say about the conduct of the war, then the nation is being wagged from its least intelligent end, and that is not conducive to success".¹⁶

¹² Hankey, diary entry, 20th October, 1917; University of Cambridge, Churchill College, Hankey Papers, HNKY/1/3.

¹³ Letter from Strachey to Lord Charring [??], undated [late 1917]; H.L.R.O., Strachey Papers, S/18/4/1.

¹⁴ Lloyd George, attributed to by Hankey, War Cabinet minutes, 11th October, 1917; P.R.O., CAB 23/13, W.C. 247B.

¹⁵ Derby, attributed to by Amery, diary entry, 4th November, 1917; quoted in J. Barnes & D. Nicholson (*Eds.*), *op. cit.*, p.177.

¹⁶ Leading article, *The Manchester Guardian*, 1st November, 1917.

As the campaign of pro-Ministerial Press agitation continued Scott was wired by Lloyd George's secretary, Frances Stevenson, on the night of Saturday, 10th November, with a request that he meet Smuts the following Monday. As Scott notes:

"His object in seeing me was to tell me of the speech [Lloyd] George was to deliver that night in Paris of which he gave me an outline [,] and to ask for support for the policy of a combined General Staff and War Council against national particularism and the opposition of the separate General staffs and personal military jealousies." ¹⁷

The Observer joined the barrage with a demand that the generals and politicians:

"SEE IT WHOLE"; ¹⁸

thereby, purely coincidentally, mirroring one of Lloyd George's constant themes, that is that the Front-line, from the North Sea to the Adriatic should be treated as a single front. Buoyed by such evidence of Press support Lloyd George was so emboldened as to publicly condemn the General Staff's failure to treat the war as a single entity. Thus he castigated the General Staff's concept of war as:

"a collection of completely independent schemes pieced together. Stitching is not strategy. So it came to pass that when these plans were worked out in the terrible realities of war, the stitches came out and disintegration was complete.....

When I look at the appalling casualty lists [resulting from the offensives on the Western Front], I sometimes wish it had not been necessary to win so many [victories].

.....

Personally I had made up my mind that, unless some change were effected, I could no longer remain responsible for a war direction doomed to disaster for lack of unity." ¹⁹

It is significant that before delivering the speech Lloyd George had dispatched one of his more loyal Cabinet colleagues, General Smuts, to London in order to co-ordinate a favourable Press campaign in the pro-'frock' newspapers: *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Evening Standard*, *The Observer*, *The Daily Chronicle* and *The Manchester Guardian*. Nevertheless the speech proved to be a severe political mis-calculation, not least as it brought into the public gaze the link of the Supreme War Council with his campaign against the General Staff's strategic direction of the war.

The political damage caused by the speech began even before Lloyd George spoke; for the previous day *The Sunday Times* had stated that the formation of the Supreme War Council was intended, by the Prime Minister, to serve as a prelude to new leadership on both the Western Front and the General Staff in London. Such a prospect did little to thrill the section of the Press which had maintained its support for Haig and Robertson against Lloyd George's encroachments upon their preserve of the military direction of the war. Most voluble in the defence of the 'brass-hats' were *The Morning Post* and *The National Review* together with the embattled pen of Repington. Maxse praised Robertson and warned against civilian:

"gambling [and insisted that the] supreme direction of the war remain in the hands of the soldiers, and in theirs alone." ²⁰

¹⁷ Scott, diary entry, 16th November, 1917; University of Manchester, John Rylands Library, *The Manchester Guardian* Archives, C.P. Scott Papers, Box 133.

¹⁸ Leading article, *The Observer*, 4th November, 1917.

¹⁹ Lloyd George, speech in Paris, 12th November, 1917; quoted by D.R. Woodward, *op. cit.*, pp.224-25.

²⁰ 'Sir William Robertson', leading article by Maxse, *The National Review*, September 1917; *op. cit.*, Volume 70, pp.41-42.

Whilst Gwynne, in leading articles like 'The Amateur and the Soldiers' (5th September) and 'Political Strategy' (23rd October) vigorously assailed Lloyd George's impudence in indulging in civilian meddling in military affairs; Lloyd George, believing that these articles were directly inspired by the General Staff, sought to counter-act their influence by conducting a pro-'frock' Press campaign of his own. Amazingly, Lloyd George went so far as to admonish Robertson and Haig for using the Press in order to oppose his schemes!

Whilst Gwynne and Maxse conducted a campaign against Lloyd George, Repington, the most formidable and visible champion of the General Staff, found himself in the awkward position of being the only consistent supporter of the military and the 'Westerner' view on the staff of *The Times*. Repington's almost constant theme was, as he repeatedly warned Northcliffe, that the:

"dominating question...of men. Everyone of our staffs implores us to push the man-power question. We are short and are going to be very short." ²¹

However such pleas were no longer heeded at Printing House Square; Dawson was increasingly tied to the Ministry, through the medium of Milner, whilst Northcliffe had developed close links to the Government. Such was the extent of Repington's isolation, and the clash of editorial views which his articles produced, that Dawson repeatedly refrained from printing the more extreme of Repington's articles; moreover when his articles succeeded in finding their way into print, they had more often than not, been mutilated by the editor's blue pencil. Repington's pleas over the Army's woeful man-power situation thus passed unheard; in this Repington found himself sharing a predicament with Haig. For Haig had submitted a memorandum to the attention of Lloyd George on 24th November; in which he wrote that:

"Assuming that six divisions will be despatched to Italy, and that reinforcements for these divisions will have to be provided.....it is evident from calculations based on previous experience that the British Infantry in France will be approximately 250,000 or about 40% below establishment on the 31st March next.

It will be fully recognised that under such conditions not only will the offensive power of the British Armies in France be completely paralysed, but [also] that their defensive power will also be curtailed, and they will not be able to hold the same amount of line as heretofore." ²²

And so it was to come about. The effects of Lloyd George's numerous 'Easterner' adventures would become apparent in the following spring in the manner in which the British Army was forced to retreat in the face of the German *Frühsoommer* offensive of 1918 until their backs were against the wall.

However in November when Lloyd George travelled back to Charing Cross station he entered the midst of a political crisis which was almost wholly of his own making. For, whilst both the *Daily Mail* and *The Times* were circumspect in their reaction to the Prime Minister's Paris speech, the storm of protest in the Press against Lloyd George's sentiments, as expressed in his Paris speech, was not limited to the right-wing pro-General Staff Press. Indeed the storm also emanated from the distinctly Asquithian elements of the Press, elements such as *The Westminster Gazette* and *The Nation* which had largely been quiet since the fall of their hero in December 1916. Other newspapers were not quite so cautious. The *Daily News* accused the Prime Minister of striving to establish himself as a "military dictator"; ²³ *The Nation* carried a headline of:

"THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF MR. GEORGE"; ²⁴

²¹ Letter from Repington to Northcliffe, 27th April, 1917; *The Times* Archives, Repington MSS.

²² Memorandum by Haig, 24th November, 1917; H.L.R.O., Beaverbrook Library, Lloyd George Papers, F/44/3/33.

²³ *Daily News*, 14th November, 1917.

²⁴ *The Nation*, 17th November, 1917.

the *Star* exclaimed:

"HANDS OFF THE BRITISH ARMY!" ²⁵

Whilst *The Spectator* argued that:

"The risks run by having at the head of affairs a man capable of such levity, such irresponsibility, such recklessness, such injustice, are beyond endurance. Unless the House of Commons marks its condemnation of the speech, and so dismisses Mr. Lloyd George, we shall be in an hourly peril of national shipwreck. All parties must join to put the vessel and her priceless cargo beyond the reach of Mr. Lloyd George's frantic egotism." ²⁶

Nevertheless a substantial portion of the Press remained supportive of Lloyd George, whether motivated by the need 'to keep hold of nurse' or from more positive considerations. Lloyd George wrote to Burnham, the proprietor of *The Daily Telegraph*, on 15th November:

"I feel I must send you a word or two to let you know how much I appreciate the support which you have given me over recent events. I know the course I am taking is the right one, but nevertheless the powerful backing you gave at the critical moment had a decisive effect. All the sane Press have followed suit and the plot has been a conspicuous failure." ²⁷

One wonders to which 'plot' Lloyd George was referring. Despite Burnham's support Lloyd George's Paris speech had proved most effective in fanning Unionist unease and in sparking the first stirrings of an effective opposition to the Prime Minister; thus hinting at the eventual fracturing of the pre-war Liberal Party. †

As Strachey developed his position in a letter to Cecil, on 27th November, he commented upon Lloyd George's 'Easterner' faith, in words that recall Kitchener:

"We are, alas, controlled by the force of circumstances, and must fight where we can and not where we would: and this means the Flanders front. But L.G. in his flighty mind won't admit this, because it is disagreeable and a check on his wilfulness. That might be pardoned to him, however. What is unpardonable is to hurl the force of circumstances in the face of the soldiers, as if it was their fault, and to fill them with the thought, which I am sure they genuinely feel, that if things were to get worse (which of course they may do without any body's fault) they will not be thanked for not despairing of the Republic, but will be thrown to the wolves, and thrown with vituperative epithets, such as: 'Butchers', 'Pilers up of unnecessary casualties', 'Winners of kilometres, when they might have won leagues and Provinces', and so on. That is the sort of language which makes soldiers play for safety, and not for victory." ²⁸

In a further letter, this time to Haig, written on 29th November, Strachey bluntly stated that:

"the real crux of the question is that L.G. doesn't really want to fight, but wants to find a patent substitute for fighting, which he decorates with the name of 'Strategy'.....He insinuates to the public that by dealing at his shop they can get

²⁵ *Star*, 15th November, 1917.

²⁶ *The Spectator*, 17th November, 1917.

²⁷ Letter from Lloyd George to Burnham, 15th November, 1917; I.W.M., Burnham Papers, HLWL/5/2.

† Paradoxically, opposition to Lloyd George's attacks upon the General Staff, combined with Lansdowne's letter advocating the negotiation of a compromise peace settlement to coax the Asquithian-Liberals from their prolonged quiescence.

²⁸ Letter from Strachey to Lord Robert Cecil, 27th November, 1917; H.L.R.O., Strachey Papers, S/4/4/27.

all the results of fighting at a much less [*sic.*] price in casualties." ²⁹

This tendency of Lloyd George to seek to avoid the unpleasantness implicit in a war did not go unremarked by Clemenceau. The naïveté displayed by the principal 'amateur strategist', Lloyd George, as to the realities of modern warfare is stunning; he was constantly thinking of the Great War as a neo-Napoleonic conflict in which *coups de main* would enable one to decisively defeat the enemy. Such an attitude was, as Wilson reports, held in utter contempt by Clemenceau. For Wilson noted in his diary after talking with the 'Tiger' on 13th December that:

"Lloyd George had written to him a couple of days ago saying he understood Pétain had a plan of attacking without losing life, and would he tell Lloyd George the secret and send it over by an officer! Clemenceau said Lloyd George was a fool and the only way to save life was not to attack." ³⁰

Even that appreciation fell some way short of the baleful truth of the Great War; a truth pithily expressed by General Charles Mangin in his regretful observation, *à propos* the French divisions at Verdun, that:

"quoi qu'on fasse, on perd beaucoup de monde". ³¹

The defection of *The Times*, under Dawson's Milnerite editorship, from its previous support of the General Staff to one of approval of Lloyd George's stance was, unexpectedly, confirmed upon Northcliffe's return from America. The attitude of *The Times* was, through the medium of its editor, linked directly to that of Milner, whose Imperial perspective led him by 18th September to agree with Lloyd George's 'Easterner' plans; an agreement signalled by a Ministerial Press campaign in praise of the noble lord. The reaction of the Asquithian press was swift, if a trifle incredulous. Three days later the *Star*, in an article entitled 'Lord Milner, Democrat!', thundered:

"The weekend has been marked by a strange outburst of praise of Lord Milner. First a Liberal morning newspaper published a long eulogy, signed by a well-known Tory journalist; an influential Sunday paper followed with a leading article extolling the same subject; and the picture papers joined in with photographs of him walking about Criccieth in company with Mr. Lloyd George. The phenomenon suggests that the War Cabinet, being about to give Lord Milner some new job, feels that a little bell-ringing in his interests would not go amiss". ³²

However Milner who had as late as 9th October assured Robertson of his support against the Prime Minister's "intolerable conduct" ³³ wrote to Lloyd George on 3rd November stating that:

"The more I think of it, the more dangerous appears to me the idea of our tying ourselves up more than ever in France. The soldiers will like it because it keeps their army together. But it means that for the whole of 1918 our Army will be condemned to a merely defensive role, while our more distant expeditions will also be smitten with paralysis, if not failure.

...The great point is that if, next year at any rate, we cannot make the force strong enough to break through, it is [a] waste to keep it stronger than is

²⁹ Letter from Strachey to Haig, 29th November, 1917; H.L.R.O., Strachey Papers, S/8/1/4.

³⁰ Clemenceau, attributed to by Wilson, diary entry, 13th December, 1917; quoted in Callwell (*Ed.*), *op. cit.*, Volume II, p.41.

³¹ General Charles Mangin, ["whatever you do, you lose a lot of men"]; quoted by John Terraine, *The Smoke and the Fire. Myths and Anti-Myths of War 1861-1945*, (Leo Cooper. 1992), Note, p.45.

³² 'Lord Milner, Democrat!', leading article, *Star*, 24th September, 1917.

³³ Letter from Robertson to Haig, 9th October, 1917; quoted in Robert Blake (*Ed.*), *op. cit.*, p.259.

necessary for a lively defensive." ³⁴

Such an opinion, ludicrous though it is in its grasp of strategic reality, was to prove invaluable to Lloyd George. For its impeccable Unionist source offered him the opportunity to out-flank the criticism of the Unionist pro-military press; through the medium of *The Times*; and, in addition, to neutralise the opposition of the War Office to the Versailles Council.

Repington continued to decry Lloyd George's 'Easterner' proclivities which had led to a state of affairs in which:

"We are feeding over a million men in the side-show theatres of war, and are letting down our strengths in France at a moment when all the Boche forces from Russia may come against us and after a campaign in which our men have had to fight double our number of divisions. The P.M. is obsessed by the idea that it is a stalemate in France...

....To win in a secondary and lose in a principal theatre is sheer fatuity, but the War Cabinet is completely ignorant of strategy and the art of war, and will not listen to those who know." ³⁵

Regrettably he did so without the support of either Dawson or Northcliffe to which he had grown accustomed. Hitherto a defender of the General Staff against Lloyd George's machinations, the failure at Cambrai to convert the long-awaited breach of the German line into a breakthrough soured Northcliffe's perception of the Generals. Henceforward his newspapers displayed a similar degree of determination in their attacks upon Robertson and Haig as they had previously reserved for those upon Asquith and Lloyd George; a stance made apparent by Northcliffe in his memorandum to the staff of *The Times* categorising the Cambrai offensive as:

"one of the most ghastly stories in English history". ³⁶

The Times echoed Northcliffe's sentiments in a leader entitled 'A Case for Inquiry'. Hence Repington's exasperation at Northcliffe's myopic alliance with the Prime Minister:

"My difficulties are that Northcliffe has tied himself to L.G.'s chariot wheels. I am unable to get the support from the editor of the 'Times' that I must have to rouse the country, and I do not think that I will be able to go on with him much longer." ³⁷

Northcliffe was joined in his onslaught by Scott who repeated Lloyd George's doctrine of the 'broad view'; and subsequently assailed the General Staff:

"If it had not been for the excessive preponderance in their counsels of the vested military interest of Flanders we should long ago have won this war in the East." ³⁸

Though increasingly isolated Repington continued to exhort the War Cabinet to reinforce the Western Front with troops drawn from the numerous 'side-shows'; however such a notion directly contradicted Lloyd George's view that the British were 'over-insured' with troops on the Western Front.

Robertson's attempts to prevent such absurd schemes as Amery's Levant imbroglio from

³⁴ Letter from Milner to Lloyd George, 3rd November, 1917; H.L.R.O., Beaverbrook Library, Lloyd George Papers, F/38/2/20.

³⁵ Repington, diary entry, 7th December, 1917; quoted in Repington, *op. cit.*, p.149.

³⁶ Memorandum to *The Times* staff by Northcliffe, 12th December, 1917; quoted by R. Pound & G. Harmsworth, *op. cit.*, p.598.

³⁷ Repington, diary entry, 7th December, 1917; quoted in Repington, *op. cit.*, p.149.

³⁸ Leading article, *The Manchester Guardian*, 1st December, 1917.

being put into practice led to Lloyd George attempting to take advantage of Parliament's recess in late December 1917 to appoint Wilson CIGS. Northcliffe, perceiving in Robertson a hindrance to victory akin to that of Kitchener, sought to secure the CIGS's supersession. His actions however continued to leave many in a state of some confusion. Strachey gave full vent to his bewilderment:

"I am indignant at this monstrous attack upon Robertson by the Northcliffe Press, but really the situation at the moment is so complicated that I can't make head or tail of it. The only path of light I see is that L.G. has begun his campaign to get rid of Robertson, and I suppose ultimately Haig, and that he is using the Northcliffe Press as the instrument." ³⁹

Esher was also critical of the influence of the Northcliffe Press, enquiring of Burnham on 28th January:

"What is going to be done about the growing power of the Northcliffe Press?

Is anyone going to have the courage to attack the Octopus and to point out to the Country the risk it takes by allowing this new Inquisition to grow up in its midst?

.....

As matters stand today you will all of you be reduced to impotence by a machine that Controls the Press by means of a huge Combine.

Coupled with Ministerial information and support owing to the Controller forming part of the Government.

Even France would not stand such a system." ⁴⁰

The antics of the Northcliffe Press led to Repington's resignation from *The Times* on 16th January. In his letter of resignation Repington complained of the:

"subservient and apologetic attitude which the paper has adopted towards the present War Cabinet, an attitude which has permitted this body throughout the past year to neglect the vital interests of the Army, particularly with regard to men, despite my reiterated representations to the Editor whom I have kept constantly informed of the true position of affairs." ⁴¹

Northcliffe was later to inform Dawson of his agreement with Repington's charge, for he wrote on 4th May that:

"I have carefully been reflecting upon the attitude of "The Times" towards the Prime Minister, and I must say that the Paper, in my opinion, lacks independence....."The Times" has been very non-critical for months and I do not wonder that it is regarded as a Government organ". ⁴²

As Lloyd George continued his intrigues against the General Staff unchecked by *The Times*, Robertson was moved to write to Gwynne:

"What a damned disgraceful position for a Government to be in, to have to

³⁹ Letter from Strachey to Bonham Carter, 23rd January, 1918; H.L.R.O., Strachey Papers, S/18/5/3.

⁴⁰ Letter from Esher to Burnham, 28th January, 1918; I.W.M., Burnham Papers, HLWL/1/3.

⁴¹ Letter from Repington to Northcliffe, 16th January, 1918; British Museum, British Library, Manuscript Collections, Northcliffe MS. 62253, ff.122-23.

⁴² Letter from Northcliffe to Dawson, 4th May, 1918; British Museum, British Library, Manuscript Collections, Northcliffe MS. 62225, ff.16-17.

resort to such vile and unmanly tactics to get rid of those they don't like!"⁴³

Repington, freed from the ravages of Dawson's blue pencil, was as Milner had feared soon "up to some devilry in other quarters".⁴⁴ Even prior to his formal joining of *The Morning Post*, on 21st January, Repington was busy urging his new editor:

"to begin by exposing the man-power muddle... to do through you about the men..... what I did through 'The Times' about the shells."⁴⁵

Such a threat could not be treated lightly by Lloyd George. Once in place Repington resumed his defence of the General Staff against the War Cabinet's 'unmanly tactics', and the attacks upon the Prime Minister which Dawson and Northcliffe had temporarily stilled.

Whilst Repington once more prepared to visit 'devilry' upon the War Cabinet's heads, Northcliffe waded into the debate with all the zeal of a late convert. For on 21st January the *Daily Mail*, which gloried in the self-applied soubriquet of 'The Soldier's Friend', carried an article by Lovat Fraser. The piece, which appeared under the headline of 'Hidden Things', was sharply critical of:

"the ridiculous theory of attrition....the strategy of the Stone Age".⁴⁶

The reaction of the Press and Opposition in London was immediate and immense; on 24th January the U.W.C. passed a resolution supporting the General Staff, and further demanded that the War Cabinet condemn the Press campaign against Haig and Robertson which it had itself initiated. In addition the 'Generals' Press' was encouraged by the scent of Lloyd George's blood. Gwynne wrote to Lady Bathurst stating that:

"What has been happening lately in the Press is that the Prime Minister instead of getting rid of Haig and Robertson, as he ought to have done if he thinks them inefficient, (although I think they are the only people who stand between us and destruction) gets Northcliffe and his reptile press to 'create an atmosphere' of hostility to these two men so that he can wreak his wicked will upon them.....it's a desperate shame that these poor fellows who are fighting for us always have to have one eye looking behind to see if they are going to be stabbed in the back."⁴⁷

Lloyd George was further assailed by the appearance of Repington's first article in the pages of *The Morning Post*, in the course of which he deployed detailed statistics of the B.E.F.'s rifle strength, furnished by the DMO, Major-General Maurice, to support his previously expressed view that the Western Front was being starved of troop reinforcements by Lloyd George in order to further his 'Easterner' theories of military strategy:

"The one question which concerns most every man, woman, and child in the United Kingdom is whether Sir Douglas Haig's armies will not be sufficiently reinforced to enable them to compete with the enemy on fair terms, and my opinion is that they will not be."⁴⁸

Such an attack was almost calculated to arouse Lloyd George's latent paranoia over the relationship between the Press and the General Staff. However, whilst he continued to harbour

⁴³ Letter from Robertson to Gwynne, 22nd January, 1918; I.W.M., Gwynne MSS., HAG/26/15.

⁴⁴ Letter from Milner to Lloyd George, 18th January, 1918; quoted by A.M. Gollin, *op. cit.*, p.463.

⁴⁵ Letter from Repington to Gwynne, 19th January, 1918; University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, New Library, MS. Gwynne 21.

⁴⁶ 'Things Hidden', leading article, *Daily Mail*, 21st January, 1918.

⁴⁷ Letter from Gwynne to Lady Bathurst, 25th January, 1918; University of Leeds, Brotherton Library, Glenesk-Bathurst MSS., Gwynne Papers 1990/1/2431.

⁴⁸ Repington, *The Morning Post*, 24th January, 1918.

suspicious over Robertson's relationship with the Press - he even went so far as to encourage *The Daily Chronicle*, on 26th January, to accuse the CIGS of passing information to Repington - Lloyd George's demand that Derby investigate the 'leak' proved to be in vain.

On 8th February *The Morning Post* contained a telegram (dated 5th February) from Repington in Paris in which he stated that:

"The decisions of the recent Inter-Allied War Council regarding the control of British troops in the field are reported to be of such a strange character that Parliament should demand the fullest details and a Parliamentary Committee should examine them at once and take the opinions of our General Staff and our commanders in the field concerning the new arrangements." ⁴⁹

Despite the belief of Milner and Lloyd George, it appears probable that the article was inspired not by the General Staff, but rather by Clemenceau, with whom Repington enjoyed good relations. The reaction of the Prime Minister to this article was as panic-stricken as that to Repington's previous article on the subject of manpower. It fully bears out Northcliffe's belief that Lloyd George feared the power of the Press. Milner was summoned to Downing Street to bolster Lloyd George's resolve; he was informed by the Prime Minister that Robertson, whom he took to be Repington's source, was to be succeeded as CIGS by General Sir Herbert Plumer, with the former sent into exile at York. Such a decision however did not remain for long.

That evening the relative calm of the London political world was shattered by an article in *The Globe*, intriguingly headlined:

**"WHAT HAPPENED AT VERSAILLES?
DISQUIETING RUMOURS FROM PARIS
REGARDING THE HIGHER COMMAND.
DEMAND FOR HOUSE OF COMMONS INTERVENTION".**

The newspaper reprinted Repington's telegram alongside a call to arms to defend the General Staff from Lloyd George's intrigues. The article thundered:

"The veil of mystery with which His Majesty's Ministers have sought to involve the proceedings of the Supreme War Council at Versailles was lifted this morning by a disquieting telegram from the Military Correspondent of 'The Morning Post' [Repington] who is in Paris, and evidently knows the facts that have been so jealously withheld from the House of Commons.

It may be hoped that, as Mr. Asquith was responsible for entrusting the Higher Command to Sir Douglas Haig.....and Sir William Robertson who both to a peculiar degree enjoy the confidence of the British Army and the British nation - he will not stand by and allow this arrangement to be broken up to gratify the whim of any individuals, however important.

It may also be hoped that the House of Commons, which claims to be the seat of power, will refuse to allow itself to be elbowed out of its proper functions, and that at least we may be allowed to know what is going on behind the scenes, as no arrangement can make for military efficiency that precipitates a crisis in our Higher Command on the eve of a new campaign." ⁵⁰

Milner's response, in a covering letter written to Lloyd George, was to exhort the Prime Minister to act. For Milner opined:

"I think the sooner we move the better. This kind of thing cannot be allowed to go on.

About Haig, I greatly doubt whether he would make common cause with any W.O. people against the Government ...

⁴⁹ Repington, *The Morning Post*, 5th February, 1918.

⁵⁰ Leading article, *The Globe*, 8th February, 1918.

On the other hand, I do think that he is likely to offer a resistance of his own to the proposal, that he allow any of his divisions to be placed in a General Reserve ... he is incapable of seeing any point of view but his own.....

.....

It is no use having a great rumpus and getting rid of Robertson if the policy is to be side-tracked, for quite different reasons, by Haig.

... it would be better to lose both Haig & Robertson than to continue at the mercy of both or either of them. The situation is much too critical for that....The Army will be quite happy, if the worst comes to the worst, with Plumer and Harrington vice Haig and Bertie Lawrence." ⁵¹

It is difficult to imagine the Army reacting as Milner supposed to the dismissal of the Commander-in-Chief. Rather it appears probable that Plumer would have declined to succeed Haig, and that the 'new broom' would be in Downing Street rather than in St. Omer. Lloyd George continued to prevaricate.

On Monday, 11th February, *The Morning Post* printed an inflammatory article by Repington attacking the plan to defeat Turkey, which involved large troop deployments from the Western Front, the formation of the General Reserve and the usurpation of Robertson's powers as CIGS which it involved. Repington thundered against Lloyd George, whom he said was attempting to teach the:

"soldiers how and where to make war....My opinion is that by starving our Armies in the field, by advocating adventures contrary to the advice of his legitimate military advisers, and by approving a decision which deprives our Commander in France of his full command, Mr. Lloyd George has clearly and finally proved his incapacity to govern England in a great war. This is the situation which Parliament must clear up in such a manner it thinks best." ⁵²

The War Cabinet's anger, with Lloyd George in the van, was such that it closed down the newspaper and prosecuted both Repington and Gwynne for breach of the Defence of the Realm Act, a course provoked by an erroneous belief that the article was inspired by Robertson.

Whilst Lloyd George busied himself with thoughts of retribution Gwynne was closely involved in fomenting the Parliamentary opposition to the Prime Minister's attacks upon the General Staff. Thus he briefed Asquith, on 11th February:

"At the time of writing everything seems to be in confusion. The Army Council met this morning and seemed pretty decided to resign *en bloc*. Meanwhile the P.M. is in a great state of mind and is ready to accept almost any compromise rather than face Parliament.

The points which are of importance are:

- (a) the General Staff does not from what I gather object to the creation or the separate use of Reserves
- (b) the original decision to leave the disposal of the Reserve to the Versailles Council is already dead
- (c) the Army Council, up to the present, object to the arrangement and seem prepared to fight to the death to upset it." ⁵³

During his reply to Asquith's questioning the following day Lloyd George completely mis-read the mood of the House by cloaking his refusal to explain the Versailles decision in security concerns; for the response of the Commons, when Asquith rose to object to the deeply unsubtle implication, was to greet him with thunderous cheers. Lloyd George, despite apologising for the intended smear, was unable to recover his balance and the remainder of his speech was

⁵¹ Letter from Milner to Lloyd George, 8th February, 1918; quoted by A.M. Gollin, *op. cit.*, pp.474-75.

⁵² Repington, *The Morning Post*, 11th February, 1918.

⁵³ Letter from Gwynne to Asquith, 11th February, 1918; University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodleian New Library, Department of Western Manuscripts, MS. Gwynne dep 14, Box 14.

delivered to an increasingly unfriendly audience. Despite Lloyd George's concluding words challenging the House to replace his Government with another if it was dissatisfied with his conduct of the war the expression of the Commons' ire was, as Gardiner wrote in the *Daily News*:

"a declaration that the government of this nation is vested in Parliament and not in the Press, in the House of Commons and not in the House of Harmsworth." ⁵⁴

It is ironic that such a reaffirmation of the primacy of the House of Commons should emanate from a journalist whilst several leading politicians appeared eager to prove the reverse. The Government teetered on the brink of self-destruction; Milner and Barnes appeared all too ready to resign in disgust at Lloyd George's tergiversation. Rawlinson later observed to Gwynne that:

"Things are boiling up....L.G. has not improved his position by his speech in the house and it is no good putting it down to his having a cold!.....The opposing parties i.e. L.G, H W, † Northcliffe and some members of the War Cabinet versus Squiff, Wullie, DH ‡ and the Army Council, will have a trial of strength and I am not at all sure that, with yours and Repington's support, the latter will not win. For the B[ritish] P[eople] are an eminently suspicious crowd and unless N succeeds in throwing dust in their eyes you have a very strong case. The position of Wullie and D.H. in the country is stronger than L.G. thinks and he will break himself on that rock if he is not careful." ⁵⁵

On Saturday, 16th February, the centre piece of Lloyd George's intrigue against the General Staff, the trial of Repington and Gwynne, intended to silence the most articulate of the Generals' spokesmen, began to great society interest. The trial achieved its intended aim for it served to distract attention of the leading members of the anti-'frock' Press away from Robertson's predicament and towards their own. The anti-climactic end to Robertson's tenure as CIGS had therefore been achieved, whilst both Gwynne and Repington had their backs turned. Gwynne later wrote to Lady Bathurst with an appreciation of Lloyd George's *modus operandi*; thus he observed of Lloyd George's manner of conducting Government that:

"We are now governed by a Junta of Press magnates with a bit of a scoundrel on top, and no man is safe these days. As you rightly say: 'Anybody he may wish to remove will be secretly attacked long before until the public confidence in him is undermined and then he is kicked out.'" ⁵⁶

The effectiveness of Lloyd George's campaign of Press agitation is borne out by Robertson's exile to the Eastern Command - surely an ironic fate for such a devout 'Westerner' - a campaign greatly assisted by Asquith's identification with Robertson's cause; as the *Daily Mail* put it:

"WHICH WOULD YOU GO TIGER HUNTING WITH?

ASQUITH OR LLOYD GEORGE?" ⁵⁷

If the General Staff and their allies had lost the battle over the strategic direction of the war and Robertson's position as CIGS, then the strength of feeling which the latter's fall elicited served to indicate that their ardour had not yet cooled. Thus the stage was set for the forthcoming tussles

⁵⁴ Leading article by Gardiner, *Daily News*, 16th February, 1918.

† Henry Wilson.

‡ Douglas Haig.

⁵⁵ Letter from Rawlinson to Gwynne, 14th February, 1918; I.W.M., Gwynne MSS., HAG/24/21.

⁵⁶ Letter from Gwynne to Lady Bathurst, 18th February, 1918; University of Leeds, Brotherton Library, Glenesk-Bathurst MSS., Gwynne Papers 1990/1/2434.

⁵⁷ *Daily Mail*, 14th February, 1918.

over the manpower of the B.E.F. in the face of the German *Frühsummer* Offensive in March, and the associated Maurice debate.

Following Robertson's dismissal 'Easterner' sentiment became the dominant orthodoxy in Whitehall, if not in Fleet Street. For as Beaverbrook recounts, the alliance between the Asquithian Liberals and the General Staff was witnessed by:

"the persistent and hostile voices of the newspapers [which] joined the attack upon Lloyd George. *The Globe*, *The Morning Post*, *The Westminster Gazette*, *The Daily News*, [and] *The Daily Chronicle*, all were vehicles of an opinion damaging to the Government and directly supporting military control of the War machine." ⁵⁸

Meanwhile *The National Review* warned Lloyd George and Wilson that they would be held directly responsible for any military failures in the future:

"Those who have at last succeeded in getting rid of Sir William Robertson must at least have the courage of their opinions. They will assuredly be held responsible for anything that goes wrong." ⁵⁹

The sentiment has less the tone of a warning than of a promise.

Despite Maxse the Press was growing ever more quiescent; Lloyd George had enticed Northcliffe, Rothermere and Beaverbrook into his Ministry, the former after a prolonged courtship which only ended with his acceptance of the post of Director of Propaganda in Enemy Countries on 7th February. Northcliffe joined a plethora of newspaper tycoons who gathered around the Government like moths around a flame. The Government now 'boasted': Rothermere, Air Minister; and Beaverbrook, Minister of Information; and the active support of Riddell, Astor, and Dalziel. It is scarcely to be wondered that unease was evoked in certain quarters. However Lloyd George's 'inclusive' nature succeeded in curtailing the destructive influence of the Press; with Northcliffe's quiescence the two most powerful organs of opposition were silenced. Henceforth any coalition of the Opposition Press possessed insufficient mass readership to successfully embark upon an extra-parliamentary campaign of agitation and an inadequate degree of prestige to provoke Cabinet action on the strength of a report or a leading article; the Prime Minister appears however to have anticipated Lyndon Johnson's dictum concerning tents.

The storm of protest was as fierce as it was predictable. *The Spectator*, whose editor had long speculated upon Northcliffe's desire for the Premiership, was joined in its opposition by the Asquithian-Liberal organ, the *Daily News*. Neither organ may be said to have provoked Prime Ministerial palpitations. Nevertheless the *Daily News* fulminated in a leading article against:

"the advance of the newspaper proprietor [who] is advancing from the sway of opinion to the throne of actual power. We are in some danger of having a newspaper Administration in this country." ⁶⁰

On 21st March - in an offensive which witnessed the subordination of the strategic to the tactical - following a five-hour bombardment by some 6,000 guns which announced the beginning of Operation 'Michael', 1,000,000 German troops of the 17th, 2nd, 18th and 7th German Armies attacked along a front of almost fifty miles from Vimy to Barissis the line held by the British Third and Fifth Armies. As Repington noted:

"Alea jacta est! This morning there began the much discussed German offensive in the West against our British Armies between the Oise and the Scarpe. We were furiously attacked by heavy masses which got into some of our front lines after suffering great losses. Only the valour of the British soldier

⁵⁸ Lord Beaverbrook, *Men and Power, 1917-1918*, (Hutchinson. 1956)., p.203.

⁵⁹ *The National Review*, March 1918, Volume 71, pp.33-34.

⁶⁰ Leading article, *Daily News*, 25th February, 1918.

can atone for the follies of the War Cabinet." ⁶¹

On 25th March, in a letter to Gardiner, Walter Runciman regretfully observed:

"How dreadfully we have to pay for incompetence & conceit in running the war.....even the qualities attributed to England's present Prime Minister are being shown at tragic cost to be the qualities of the Quack." ⁶²

Lloyd George's reaction to the offensive was one of apprehension; for to a large extent he had pinned his political future, and incidentally that of his country, upon the adoption of a defensive posture on the Western Front. His position therefore was greatly weakened by the events of 21st March which testified to the accuracy of both Robertson and Maurice's forecasts which he had chosen to ignore.

As ever the sense of bitterness felt by many of the anti-'frock' journalists towards the War Cabinet is best illustrated by Repington. For in his diary for 23rd March he observed that:

"The War Cabinet much rattled, and L.G. tells the miners that "it is absolutely essential for us, if we are to avoid defeat to have more men to maintain our Armies in the field". He added, "I have never heard any one challenge that need." He also says that "the Germans have attacked us with overwhelming forces." Let him compare this cry of anguish with the speech of the War Cabinet spokesman, Mr. Bonar Law, only a fortnight ago, on March 7, when he declared that "there will be no dangerous superiority on the Western Front from the point of view of guns any more than from the point of view of men," and that he was "still a little sceptical" about the threatened offensive. To that I replied in the 'Morning Post', on March 16, that it was not legitimate to be sceptical about the offensive, and that I drew the conclusion from B.L.'s speech that the War Cabinet "has no sense of the realities of war, nor of its mechanics, nor of the manner of fighting of the Germans, nor of the advantages of the initiative." All the blindness and folly of the War Cabinet for a year past are now bearing their bitter fruit." ⁶³

If Lloyd George was magnificent in a crisis, the lustre was tarnished by the knowledge that the crisis was largely of his own creation. For the War Cabinet's Committee on Manpower (consisting of Lloyd George, Curzon, George Barnes, Carson and General Smuts) which was established in December 1917 had concluded that the Navy, the Air Force, shipbuilding, munitions, food production, timber-felling and the provision of cold-storage accommodation should all receive priority over the Army in the allocation of manpower.

Thus when the Army asked for some 615,000 men in 1918 it received merely 100,999 category 'A' men; the Navy received some 50,000. The rationale behind this decision was based upon the War Cabinet's long-cherished, and long erroneous, belief that the defensive was less costly in terms of casualties than the offensive. In order to disguise the effect which such a 'starvation' diet had upon the B.E.F. it was proposed to reduce the establishment of the fifty-seven British and Empire divisions in the field. Such a move, it was claimed, merely followed the example set by both the German and French Armies in reducing the establishment of their divisions from four regiments, each consisting of three battalions. That assertion:

"ignored the brute fact that the French and Germans had reduced establishments in order to create more divisions; the British did it to disguise a failure to meet manpower needs." ⁶⁴

⁶¹ Repington, diary entry, 21st March, 1918; quoted by Repington, *op. cit.*, p.254.

⁶² Letter from Walter Runciman to Gardiner, 25th March, 1918; quoted by S. Koss, *Fleet Street Radical. A.G. Gardiner and the 'Daily News'*, (Allen Lane. 1973), Note 5, p.238.

⁶³ Repington, diary entry, 23rd March, 1918; quoted by Repington, *op. cit.*, pp.255-56.

⁶⁴ John Terraine, *To Win A War; 1918: The Year of Victory*, (Sidgwick & Jackson. 1978), p.49.

The reorganisation necessary with the reduction of each division from twelve to nine battalions, and each brigade from four to three battalions was completed by the First on 19th February, the Fifth by 25th February, the Third two days later, and the Fourth, stationed in Flanders, by 4th March; hardly the best preparation for repulsing a German Offensive which was by now widely expected. As Terraine remarks:

"the governments of Australia, Canada and New Zealand declined to adopt similar measures, with the result that the ten Dominion divisions on the Western Front retained their twelve battalions each; this turned out to be most fortunate." ⁶⁵

Hence in January 1918 the total strength of the B.E.F.'s infantry was some 126,000 soldiers below its establishment of the previous year. † Meanwhile 600,000 trained category 'A' men remained in Britain; of which only 449,000 were considered, by the Cabinet Committee, to be available for drafts to France. Yet trained troops continued to chase Lloyd George's imperial ambitions across the worthless terrain of the secondary theatres, and Ireland remained free of conscription; some 900,000 officers and men were 'employed' in the peripheral theatres of the war so beloved of the War Cabinet.

Lloyd George displayed his 'appreciation' of the strategic situation in the wake of the *Frühsummer* Offensive in a discursive interview with Burnham at 10 Downing Street on 2nd April. In the course of the interview Lloyd George confided to the proprietor of *The Daily Telegraph* that:

"In regard to the attack there was no surprise in it - he said "none whatever". As to the numbers of the Germans, we knew every division we had in front of us, and we out-numbered the Germans on our own front." ⁶⁶

An appreciation which would no doubt have greatly interested Gough amongst others. In point of fact by March 1918 the respective Orders of Battle on the Western Front served to indicate an acute imbalance of forces in favour of Germany; there were some 192 German divisions opposed by some 169 Allied - consisting of 98 French, 57 British (10 of which were Dominion troops) and sundry Belgian, Portuguese and American formations. Furthermore at the point of the British-held line at which the German attack was concentrated the German superiority in numbers was overwhelming; some 300,000 British troops of the Fifth (Gough) and Third (Byng) Armies were assailed by some 750,000 German soldiers.

Nevertheless Amery persisted in advocating to the War Cabinet, in his memorandum 'War Aims and Military Policy', that:

"for the next eighteen months at least the only theatre in which the Allies can take the strategical initiative is in the East." ⁶⁷

It is difficult to believe that such a statement could be received by the War Cabinet with anything less than incredulity; the very effectiveness of the German offensive clearly revealed the cost of the Prime Minister's decision to surrender the initiative in the West.

Pressure upon Lloyd George was eased by the presence of *The Times*, *The Daily Telegraph*, the *Daily Mail*, the *Daily Express*, the *Daily Mirror*, *The Manchester Guardian*, *The Observer*, the *News of the World*, *Reynolds's News* and *The Pall Mall Gazette* at his side rather than at his throat. The remaining Press was of distinctly smaller calibre. It was in this atmosphere of muddle and incipient Ministerial collapse that George Lansbury urged the Asquithian Liberal

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

† On 17th January, 1918, Maurice prepared a précis of the military situation of the Western Front for the War Cabinet. He concluded by stating that the Allied strength on the front had fallen from 178 to 163 divisions between January 1917 and January 1918, whilst the German strength had risen from 129 to 165 divisions over the same period.

⁶⁶ 'Interview between Lord Burnham and the Prime Minister', memorandum by Burnham, 2nd April, 1918; I.W.M., Burnham Papers, HLWL/10/12., f.1.

⁶⁷ 'War Aims and Military Policy', memorandum by Amery, 15th June, 1918; H.L.R.O., Beaverbrook Library, Lloyd George Papers, F/2/1/25.

member, William Pringle, to:

"make a real effort to kick [Lloyd] George out.....It is an appalling business to take over, but a few brave men are needed, especially men who won't care about the Press but rely on the people. The Press is not the people, and there is a tremendous volume of opinion against [Lloyd] George and his conduct, not only of the War, but of the aims and objects of the War. A rallying point is needed, and it should be found in the House of Commons." ⁶⁸

Instead, and not for the first time during the Great War, such a rallying point was to be found in Fleet Street. For on 8th April *The Morning Post* renewed its attack upon the War Cabinet's conduct of the war by demanding an explanation for the débâcle of 21st March; the chief explanation the newspaper held was the failure of the Government to adequately supply the B.E.F. with sufficient numbers of men. In an article reminiscent of those which he had penned earlier in the War over the 'Shells Scandal' of 1915, Repington asked his readers:

"Why have the reiterated demands of the Army for men remained unanswered? Who but Mr. Lloyd George is responsible for the failure to supply the Army's needs? I think that we shall have to be more ruthless towards Ministers who have failed the country and that our easy tolerance of incompetence is a public danger." ⁶⁹

The difference from 1915 was to prove crucial, for whereas in *The Times* and the *Daily Mail* Repington possessed access both to an influential and a mass-readership, *The Morning Post* possessed a reputation for eccentric and fevered views. Furthermore whilst in 1915 there existed an alternative to the continuation of the Asquith premiership, the situation in 1918 was rather less clear cut. Nevertheless flawed though it may have been Gwynne added his own voice to the Press attack upon the Prime Minister with an article which posed the apposite question as to why:

"Hundreds of thousands of men who might have given us victory in France were squandered upon eccentric expeditions to points of minor consequence." ⁷⁰

The Morning Post was unsurprisingly joined in the attack by *The Globe*, and rather more surprisingly by the two Asquithian-Liberal organs the *Daily News* and its evening cousin, the *Star*. The pro-General Staff *Globe* thundered that:

"the present situation is the inevitable result of our national folly in allowing the war to be managed by men who know nothing of war". ⁷¹

Yet it thundered to the converted. The advocate that might have alarmed the Prime Minister, *The Times*, or the mass-readership which might well have obliged him to take note of the electorate's views - the *Daily Mail*, the *Daily Express* or the *Daily Mirror* - was absent. That is not to suggest that the Press agitation had no effect upon Lloyd George, for the Prime Minister was notoriously thin-skinned where the Press was concerned; for a man who has risen by one method is liable to be wary of others imitating him.

Despite the Press criticism Lloyd George continued to throw the blame for the débâcle upon the General Staff, a stance which the anaemic Opposition Press lacked the authority decisively to counter. Thus Lloyd George informed the House of Commons on 9th April that:

"Notwithstanding the heavy casualties in 1917 the Army in France was considerably stronger on the 1st January, 1918, than on the 1st January, 1917." ⁷²

⁶⁸ Letter from George Lansbury to William Pringle, 11th April, 1918; H.L.R.O., Pringle Papers, II/74.

⁶⁹ Repington, *The Morning Post*, 8th April, 1918.

⁷⁰ Gwynne, *The Morning Post*, 8th April, 1918.

⁷¹ *The Globe*, 8th April, 1918.

⁷² *Op. cit.*, p.1328.

Lloyd George's statement was misleading in that it implied that Haig's rifle strength had risen. However, this and other 'mis-statements' relating to the B.E.F.'s manpower were clearly disprovable; not least by the outgoing DMO himself, General Maurice. The implication of this disingenuous speech was that the disaster which befell the B.E.F. on 21st March was the sole responsibility of the General Staff; an assertion which is as poisonous as it is false. The implication formed merely one element in the War Cabinet's attempt to evade responsibility; the first move in this campaign had been Gough's dismissal.

Repington slipped the Censor's muzzle on 17th April with the appearance of an article which even he judged to be:

"pretty severe. I am told that it cuts like a knife. It exposes L.G.'s prevarications about numbers, the Eastern expeditions, and the American "disappointment". I am surprised that the Censor has let it pass. So is Robertson, with whom I lunched to-day." ⁷³

Repington's choice of luncheon partner could not fail but to add credence to the Prime Minister's belief that *The Morning Post's* agitation and the subsequent 'Maurice affair' were inspired by 'Wully'. Ironically it appears that it was Repington, acting as something of an *éminence grise*, who bolstered Robertson's belief that he could emulate Fisher and return to the War Office as CIGS. Hence Robertson following his conversation with Repington on 17th April declined the Prime Minister's offer of a post at G.H.Q. - as he informed Haig:

"My job is C.I.G.S. or nothing". ⁷⁴

Whilst it is possible to detect a degree of *Schadenfreude* in Repington's writings, those of Gwynne reek of the anger which the anti-'frock' Press felt towards Lloyd George. Writing on 16th April he fulminated against Lloyd George:

"The man is impossible and will lose the war for us for certain. He has flaunted the warnings of the soldiers, he has lied to everybody, including the House of Commons and now, with the enemy battering at our gates, he still wants to play his dirty little political games. I don't believe he is sincere, even in his desire to conscript Ireland. He has played fast and loose with England and will bring her to the dust. I do think we ought [not] to restrain our opposition any longer. Whoever succeeds him must be better. He has surrounded himself with the rotters of finance and the newspaper world. There is neither good nor conscience nor any sort of right in him - only low political cunning. I am quite convinced that if he remains at the head of affairs, we shall lose the war." ⁷⁵

At this point in time Lloyd George's position began to look anything but secure, owing to the concerns expressed in *The Morning Post* and other pro-General Staff organs which served to exploit the inherent weaknesses of Lloyd George's position as a Radical premier in a Unionist Government.

Repington's article succeeded in destroying Lloyd George's claim that only three white divisions were serving in Egypt and Palestine; in the same newspaper Gwynne accused Lloyd George of deploying "fancy figures" ⁷⁶ in order to conceal the truth over the B.E.F.'s weakened position. The following day he returned to the attack in an article headlined '**BRING ROBERTSON BACK**', an exhortation which was endorsed by *The Globe*. One is once more inclined to speculate as to the effect upon Lloyd George's already tenuous position if the Opposition Press had been joined in its agitation by either the Northcliffe or the Beaverbrook Press. As it was the relative weakness of the Press Coalition waged against the Prime Minister

⁷³ *Op. cit.*, 17th April, 1918; *op. cit.*, pp.274-75.

⁷⁴ Letter from Robertson to Haig; quoted by D.R. Woodward, *op. cit.*, p.297.

⁷⁵ Letter from Gwynne to Lady Bathurst, 16th April, 1918; University of Leeds, Glensk-Bathurst MSS, Lady Bathurst Papers 1990/1/2443.

⁷⁶ Gwynne, *The Morning Post*, 17th April, 1918.

necessitated the confrontation ultimately moving to the stage of the House of Commons - a change in venue which all but ensured the Prime Minister's survival. Of more immediate concern for Lloyd George and the War Cabinet was the re-emergence of the link between the Opposition Press and the Opposition politicians; for Repington, following his luncheon with Robertson on 17th April, met with the prominent Asquithian-Liberal, Colonel Charlie Burn. Burn informed Repington that the B.E.F. had come to blame the Prime Minister and the War Cabinet for much of its difficulties; increasingly Repington was acting as the focal point of the Opposition's agitation against Lloyd George's conduct of the war.

It was revealing of the flaws in the Opposition that the focal point of their attacks upon the Prime Minister should be outside Parliament with no access to a mass-circulation newspaper. On 18th April the Asquithian Liberal M.P., Sir Godfrey Baring, sought to embarrass the War Cabinet by pointedly inquiring as to whether Lloyd George:

"when he said that the British Army in France was considerably stronger on 1 January, 1918, than on the 1 January, 1917.....was including the Labour battalions and other non-combatant strength".⁷⁷

And further, whether the Prime Minister was really advancing the notion that:

"the British Army was greater or less at the beginning of this year than at the beginning of last year?"⁷⁸

The reply of the War Office spokesman, J. Ian Macpherson, was as concise as it was erroneous:

"The combatant strength of the British Army was greater on 1 January, 1918, than on 1 January, 1917. My Right Hon. Friend the Prime Minister did not necessarily include the labour and other non-combatant units, but their inclusion would, of course, make the increase more marked."⁷⁹

The very explicitness of this fabrication did much to encourage the Government's critics. Repington noted in his diary that evening that Brigadier-General Laycock had assured him that:

"the Army are very pleased with my defence of them, and with my having told the truth when the politicians here lied."⁸⁰

The Morning Post continued its campaign by calling for '**A CHANGE OF GOVERNMENT**'. The latest candidate proposed by the Press to replace Lloyd George, the Home Secretary, Sir George Cave, being nominated by Gwynne. Cave joined such curious candidates as Austen Chamberlain, Mr. Speaker Lowther, Robertson, and even Balfour as names mooted as possible denizens of No. 10 Downing Street in succession to Lloyd George. This was but one more instance of a divergence between events in 1915 and those in 1918; for whereas Asquith had been confronted with a number of putative successors, the cupboard in 1918 was rather bare - as the Opposition was to discover, when replacing the People's idol it is necessary to possess at least a nominal alternative.

The agitation against the War Cabinet's treatment of the B.E.F. in the months leading up to the débâcle of 21st March, entered a new phase on 23rd April. For on that date criticism of the War Cabinet moved, from the contentious subject of the B.E.F.'s rifle strength, to the extension of the line occupied by Haig's forces. On 22nd April, two days after Maurice retired from the post as DMO at the War Office, having:

"done in one month with the help of the Boche what I failed to get through in

⁷⁷ Sir Godfrey Baring, House of Commons, 18th April, 1918; *Hansard*, Parliamentary Debates (Commons), Fifth Series, CV.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ J. Ian Macpherson, House of Commons, 18th April, 1918; *op. cit.*

⁸⁰ Repington, diary entry, 18th April, 1918; quoted by Repington, *op. cit.*, pp.276-77.

two years" ⁸¹

Repington once more met with George Lambert, and with Burn the following day. The outcome of these two meetings was revealed in the House of Commons on 23rd April. The degree of Press agitation as to the true cause of the Fifth Army's defeat led, by 2nd April, to Hankey preparing a memorandum on the whole affair for the Prime Minister.

That same day - in a move which signalled not only that the Government was aware of Repington's key rôle in the mounting agitation, both in the Press and in the House, but also its fear at his effectiveness - Davies, Lloyd George's Parliamentary Private Secretary, attempted to smear Repington by claiming that, as a retired officer, he had no right to wear the King's uniform. The smear proved to be a decidedly clumsy one, for Colonel Burn swiftly came to Repington's defence and Davies was obliged to withdraw from the field. Lambert's notice that he intended to ask Lloyd George if he could provide any explanation for the failure of the Fifth Army to hold the line on the Somme, and whether the British line had been extended against the advice of Robertson and Haig, provoked a great deal of debate by the War Cabinet. The War Cabinet's discussions concluded by reaching a decision that:

"a reply should be given in the sense that there was not the smallest justification for the suggestion that this portion of the line [held by Gough's Fifth Army] was taken over contrary to the judgement of Sir William Robertson and Sir Douglas Haig; the arrangements in the matter were made entirely by the British military authorities." ⁸²

Such was the line which the Government adapted that afternoon. Bonar Law, replying to Lambert's question, stated that:

"There is not the smallest justification for the suggestion that this portion of the line was taken over contrary to the judgement of Sir W[illiam] Robertson and Sir D[ouglas] Haig. The arrangements in the matter were made entirely by the British and French military authorities." ⁸³

As can be seen by comparing the two, the Government was once more engaged in an attempt to evade the responsibility for the destruction of the Fifth Army and the fracture of the Allied lines. The implication of Bonar Law's statement was that Haig and Pétain spontaneously decided to extend the amount of front line held by the B.E.F., a decision arrived at without a scintilla of pressure from the War Cabinet or from the French Government. That is difficult enough to believe; however it is rendered incredible by the fact that the War Cabinet had earlier embarked upon a crusade against just such an example of military control over the strategic direction of the war. Bonar Law was further questioned by Burn as to:

"whether the Commander-in-Chief of the British Force at the time did not make a protest, owing to the short number of divisions at his disposal, against taking the extra line from the French?" ⁸⁴

Once more Bonar Law denied the assertion that the extension of the British line had been opposed by the General Staff:

"there is not the smallest truth in any such suggestion. Naturally, there have been differences of opinion as to the extent of line which should be taken over, but such representations as occurred between the two Governments on the subject always were left to the military authorities to decide. Of course, if they had not agreed, a decision would have had to be made by the Governments, but

⁸¹ Maurice, diary entry, 19th April, 1918; quoted in N. Maurice (*Ed.*), *op. cit.*, p.83.

⁸² Hankey, War Cabinet minutes, 23rd April, 1918; P.R.O., CAB 23/6, W.C. 397.

⁸³ Bonar Law, House of Commons, 23rd April, 1918; *Hansard*, Parliamentary Debates (Commons), Fifth Series, CV.

⁸⁴ Colonel Charles Burn, House of Commons, 23rd April, 1918; *op. cit.*

that did not arise." ⁸⁵

Lambert, briefed by Repington, picked up on the inaccuracy in Bonar Law's answer and pressed him further by enquiring whether:

"Sir William Robertson and Sir Douglas Haig...[made]...no objection at any time to taking over any part of the line?" ⁸⁶

Bonar Law continued to extemporise upon a theme by Lloyd George by re-affirming that:

"such differences were always left to be decided by the military authorities." ⁸⁷

The attack upon the Government's position was joined at this point by the prominent Asquithian-Liberal William Pringle, who enquiring whether the matter had been discussed at the Versailles War Council, an assertion which Bonar Law denied.

On 22nd May Maurice wrote dealing with the whole matter of the extension of the British-held front line; in the process he refuted all of the assertions made by Bonar Law in the House on 23rd April. Maurice also dealt with the Prime Minister's comparison of the B.E.F.'s strength between 1st January, 1917, and 1st January, 1918. Thus he observed that those dates:

"were in fact unfortunate dates to choose in order to impression of the comparative strengths for purposes of battle of the Army in those two years.

The situation on 1 January, 1917, was that the Army in France was low in strength as the result of the fighting on the Somme and on the Ancre. It steadily increased in strength during the spring of 1917 and entered upon the Battle of Arras on 9 April of that year much stronger than it had been at the beginning of the year.

The situation on 1 January, 1918, was that the strength of the Army was again low as the result of the fighting in Flanders and at Cambrai, and it was not made up to strength sufficiently to allow existing establishments to be maintained. The infantry, on the eve of the battle of 21 March, 1918, was more than 100,000 weaker than they were on 1 January, 1917. The result of this was that the infantry brigades in the British divisions had to be reduced from four battalions to three, entailing a reduction of some 140 battalions, while at the same time two cavalry divisions were broken up. There were increases in artillery, aircraft, machine guns, and tanks, but none of these increases were sufficient to compensate for the weakness in infantry and in cavalry, when it was a question of meeting a great attack on an extended front." ⁸⁸

The implication was clear; Maurice was preparing to launch an attack upon what he perceived to be an concerted campaign by the War Cabinet to pass the blame for the failure of an under-strength B.E.F. to halt the German Offensive on to the maligned General Staff.

Repington's view that *The Times* under the direction of a temporarily satiated Northcliffe and the Milnerite editor, Dawson, had ceased to be regarded as an independent newspaper was confirmed by no less a source than Carson, the *de facto* leader of the Unionist Opposition. For as Repington was informed by Lady Carson on 25th April:

"Carson had recently met L.G. by accident at a dinner given by G. Dawson. L.G. had asked himself at the last moment, and Dawson had apologised to Carson. L.G. went at Carson for his speech about Jellicoe, and Carson had answered back and claimed the right to speak upon a question which he

⁸⁵ Bonar Law, House of Commons, 23rd April, 1918; *op. cit.*

⁸⁶ George Lambert, House of Commons, 23rd April, 1918; *op. cit.*

⁸⁷ Bonar Law, House of Commons, 23rd April, 1918; *op. cit.*

⁸⁸ 'The Story of the Crisis of May, 1918', memorandum by Maurice, 22nd May, 1918; quoted in N. Maurice (*Ed.*), *op. cit.*, p.103.

understood and knew all about. A question of the newspapers came up and Carson said that he liked to hear both sides, and so read one Government and one independent paper. L.G. asked which they were, and Carson said that 'The Times' was the Government organ and 'The Morning Post' the independent organ. This made Dawson gloomy, and L.G. tried to help him out by saying that the 'M.P.' had a smaller circulation. Carson rejoined that wherever he went he now found people reading 'The Morning Post' in preference to 'The Times'." ⁸⁹

Indeed such was the close identification of interests between Printing House Square and Downing Street that Northcliffe, in connection to the Prime Minister's dalliance with the idea of a negotiated peace settlement, later berated Dawson that:

"The present attitude of "The Times" is such that it is known throughout the country as a Government organ. So long as Sutherland continues to tell Lloyd George that 'The Times' will dance to any tune he plays, so long will he continue his covert negotiations [with left-wingers and Lansdownites]". ⁹⁰

If Dawson was proving himself amenable to the War Cabinet's most illustrious member, Milner, Repington most assuredly did not. Indeed he went so far in an article, written on 26th April, as to dare to criticise that august gentleman in his efforts to stymie the War Cabinet's attempts to shift the blame for the 21st March débâcle onto the General Staff:

"he is deeply involved in the past errors and miscalculations of the War Cabinet of Mr. Lloyd George, whose henchman he has been....Next only to the Prime Minister, it is to Lord Milner that we owe the cutting down of our infantry by one-quarter for the campaign of 1918, the want of drafts, and the defeats and losses of the past month.

In any future arraignment of the Ministry for its culpable misconduct of the higher direction of the war during the past fifteen months, Lord Milner must take his place on the bench of the accused alongside the Prime Minister. The infatuation and the ignorance of the War Cabinet and its contempt of the best military advice are the sole and only causes of the present crisis on the Western Front...It is certainly astonishing that one so fully responsible as Lord Milner... should be placed in charge of the Army which, by these decisions, has been brought into deadly peril. Bankrupt indeed must be an Administration....to place at its head, under the Crown, one of the two men most responsible for having brought things to their present pass". ⁹¹

Milner's initial reaction to the article was that it merely served to confirm his belief that its author was an "unprincipled scoundrel"; ⁹² however his chagrin was considerably increased by the knowledge that Repington's views were re-printed across the Atlantic in the pages of the *New York World*. Hence Milner requested that Waldorf Astor, proprietor of *The Observer*, ensure Repington's temerity did not go unpunished. However before Garvin's article, to which he devoted a fortnight's work, could appear, the War Cabinet was obliged to turn its attention elsewhere in reaction to General Maurice's letter to the Press.

The War Cabinet's difficulties, and those of the Prime Minister in particular, arising from the success of the German Offensive and the previous manpower policy of the Government were heightened by the existing view of Lloyd George held by much of the Opposition Press. On the eve of the publication of Maurice's letter, that was, in Gwynne's words of a man to whom:

⁸⁹ *Op. cit.*, 25th April, 1918; *op. cit.*, pp.283-84.

⁹⁰ Letter from Northcliffe to Dawson, 5th July, 1918; British Museum, British Library, Manuscript Collection, Northcliffe MS. 62245, f.127.

⁹¹ Repington, *The Morning Post*, 26th April, 1918.

⁹² Letter from Milner to Northcliffe, 22nd April, 1918; British Museum, British Library, Manuscript Collection, Northcliffe MS. 62339, f.169.

"A lie seems to come more easily...than the truth, and sometimes quite unnecessarily".⁹³

Hence the very serious threat inherent in Maurice's attack upon just such an expression of the Prime Minister's elevation of falsehood over policy. For such an elevation, as illustrated in his speech to the House on 9th April, conspired to bring Lloyd George to the brink of ejection from office, an apposite fate for a man who had in turn brought Britain closest to defeat than at any other time since Mons. Ironically in the light of subsequent events, Esher wrote to Gwynne on 5th May, bemoaning the absence of an effective opposition, within Parliament, to Lloyd George:

"As for L.G., I fear that he would topple over easily if his enemies knew how to attack in the old Dizzy manner. But they don't or won't."⁹⁴

That Lloyd George was attacked by his enemies in Parliament is clear; their knowledge of effective parliamentary attack in the Disraeli tradition markedly less so.

The storm which had been building since the German onslaught was about to break. Maurice, angered by the Government's continuing failure to grasp its responsibility for the 21st March débâcle, was all too aware that he possessed information which would enable him to demolish the edifice erected, since 21st March, by the War Cabinet in its collective efforts to evade both responsibility and blame. Hence he wrote to the CIGS, Henry Wilson, on 30th April, informing him that:

"When I was last over in France [13-16th April] I was told by many officers both at GHQ and elsewhere that certain of the Prime Minister's statements in his speech of 9 April had had a very bad effect on the Army, because a very large number of all ranks knew them to be incorrect.

.....

I have now just heard that a similar impression has been produced by Mr Bonar Law's answers on 23 April to questions as to taking over the line.

.....

The general effect has been, I am told, to produce a feeling of distrust and lack of confidence [in the Government] in France."⁹⁵

Unsurprisingly perhaps, no answer was forthcoming from the usually loquacious Wilson. When the CIGS failed to answer Maurice's concerns, he turned instead to the Press in an effort to exact satisfaction.

Thus resolved to act Maurice wrote to the editors of *The Times*, *The Morning Post*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Daily Chronicle* and the *Daily News*, on 6th May, 1918. Surprisingly all bar *The Daily Telegraph*, which had earlier printed the Lansdowne letter, obliged by printing Maurice's missive. In it the erstwhile DMO challenged the veracity of the War Cabinet's claims on three fronts. Thus Maurice wrote:

"Sir,—My attention has been called to answers given in the House of Commons on 23 April by Mr. Bonar Law to questions put by Mr. G. Lambert, Colonel Burn, and Mr. Pringle, as to the extension of the British front in France (Hansard, Vol. 105, No. 34, page 851). These answers contain certain misstatements which in sum give a totally misleading impression of what occurred."⁹⁶

He continued by quoting Pringle's question and Bonar Law's answer, and observing that:

"I was at Versailles when the question was decided by the Supreme War

⁹³ Letter from Gwynne to Esher, 2nd May, 1918; University of Cambridge, Churchill College, Esher MSS. 5/55.

⁹⁴ Letter from Esher to Gwynne, 5th May, 1918; I.W.M., Gwynne MSS., HAG/8/29.

⁹⁵ Letter from Maurice to Wilson, 30th April, 1918; quoted in N. Maurice (*Ed.*), *op. cit.*, pp.96-97.

⁹⁶ Letter from Maurice to the Editors of *The Times*, *The Morning Post*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Daily Chronicle* and the *Daily News*, 6th May, 1918; quoted in N. Maurice (*Ed.*), *op. cit.*, p.97.

Council to whom it had been referred." ⁹⁷

Neither did Lloyd George escape castigation for his 'terminological inexactitudes'. After quoting the Prime Minister's assertions with regard to the fighting strength of the B.E.F., Maurice baldly stated:

"That statement implies that Sir Douglas Haig's fighting strength on the eve of the great battle which began on March 21 had not been diminished.

That is not correct." ⁹⁸

Lloyd George's claim that there were only three white divisions in Egypt was dismissed with equal contempt. Maurice concluded by stating that:

"this letter is not the result of a military conspiracy. It has been seen by no soldier.....

My reasons for taking the very grave step of writing this letter are that the statements quoted above are known to a large number of soldiers to be incorrect, and this knowledge is breeding such distrust of the Government as can only end in impairing the splendid morale of our troops at a time when everything possible should be done to raise it.....

I ask you to publish this letter in the hope that Parliament may see fit to order an investigation into the statements I have made." ⁹⁹

In the concluding passage of the letter Maurice was guilty of displaying the same prevarication as the politicians he attacked. For he had engaged in correspondence with Robertson, initially on the subject of the Government's 'mis-statements', though latterly on that of his intended course of action with which Robertson was in total agreement; indeed it was the former CIGS who at first advised Maurice to appraise Asquith of his concerns. To this end Maurice wrote to the former Prime Minister on 6th May informing him that:

"I have to-day sent to the press a letter which will, I hope, appear in to-morrows [*sic.*] papers.

When I asked you to see me last Thursday I had intended to consult you as to this letter, but on second thoughts I came to the conclusion that if I consulted you it would be tantamount to asking you to take responsibility for the letter & that I alone must take that responsibility. I ask you to believe that in writing the letter I have been guided solely by what I hold to be the public interest." ¹⁰⁰

The effect of Maurice's intervention was to add an authority to the Opposition Press attacks upon the Prime Minister's position, which the lack of support by either the Northcliffe or Beaverbrook Press had withheld, whilst also serving to remove much of the overt partisanship which had enveloped the Press agitation from the outset, emanating as it did from such a narrow base. Despite this, Maurice's letter certainly did not form part of some all-embracing military conspiracy. However it was in such a garb that Lloyd George's imagination clothed the letter; one biographer of the Prime Minister has asserted that Lloyd George regarded the whole Maurice affair as being:

"yet another attempt by Robertson and Repington, encouraged by Asquith (and

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ *Op. cit.*, p.98.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ Letter from Maurice to Asquith, 6th May, 1918; University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, New Library, Department of Western Manuscripts, MS. Asquith dep 18, f.32-33.

probably Jellicoe as well!), to bring down his Government." ¹⁰¹

It was perhaps natural that Lloyd George should discern in others the mainsprings of his own actions. On 19th May, Milner confided to Lloyd George that he also perceived in Maurice's action:

"Repington and 'The Morning Post' crowd [as] being really the devils of the piece." ¹⁰²

In this view he was partly correct, for it is doubtful if Maurice would have been moved to act had not pressure from the pages of the Opposition Press and the benches of the Parliamentary Opposition forced Lloyd George into making his rash claims. However, reference to the correspondence of both Gwynne and Repington swiftly reveals that both men were as surprised at Maurice's action as the remainder of the Press if at a slightly earlier date. They were visited at the offices of *The Morning Post* by Maurice on 6th May, and shown the text of the letter. Repington confided his reaction to his diary:

"To our astonishment Maurice has deliberately decided to contradict the account given by L.G. and Bonar Law in Parliament, and gave us a letter to insert tomorrow. M. has sent similar letters to some other papers. He had shown the letter to no soldier. He is risking his professional future by this brave act, but he says that there is no one else to do it and he feels that it is his duty to his country. Gwynne and I discussed ways and means and the line to be taken in the leader." ¹⁰³

Gwynne wrote to Gough that evening:

"Tomorrow morning you will see in the 'Post' a letter from a distinguished soldier, who is risking the whole of his career in order to tell the truth. The effect of this letter I think will be to show up Lloyd George in his true light, which is that of a man who has no regard whatever for the truth. It may indeed result in his losing office." ¹⁰⁴

The rôle of the Opposition Press was pivotal, if not in the execution of the letter as Milner and Lloyd George believed, in its exploitation. For it was Gwynne who first informed Asquith of Maurice's action by dispatching a proof of the letter to him, the general having decided to fall in with Robertson's re-considered advice that he should not precipitously inform the Leader of the Opposition. Thus it was Gwynne who sought to involve Asquith at the eleventh hour following his recognition that:

"it is primarily an affair for the House of Commons, since there is ample evidence in the letter that the Ministers of the Crown have lied to the House of Commons." ¹⁰⁵

Such a statement serves as a tacit admission of the circumscribed influence of the narrow Opposition Press which was arrayed against Lloyd George. The remainder of the Opposition Press shared Repington's astonishment, while *The Morning Post's* leader announced to its readers that:

¹⁰¹ Peter Rowland, *Lloyd George*, (Barrie and Jenkins. 1975).; quoted by W.M. Ryan, 'From 'Shells Scandal' to Bow Street: The Denigration of Lieutenant-Colonel Charles à Court Repington', *Journal of Modern History*, [On Demand Supplement], 50/12 (1978), Note 93, p.1113.

¹⁰² Letter from Milner to Lloyd George, 19th May, 1918; H.L.R.O., Beaverbrook Library, Lloyd George Papers, F/38/3/33.

¹⁰³ Repington, diary entry, 6th May, 1918; quoted in Repington, *op. cit.*, p.296.

¹⁰⁴ Letter from Gwynne to Gough, 6th May, 1918; I.W.M., Gwynne MSS., HAG/9/11.

¹⁰⁵ Letter from Gwynne to Asquith, 8th May, 1918; University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodleian New Library, Department of Western Manuscripts, MS. Gwynne dep 14.

"This matter concerns the Army, for the Army has a right to justice; but it concerns also Parliament, for Parliament has a right to truth.....It is not only the honour of the Army, but the reputation of the House of Commons that is concerned in this matter. The Prime Minister can no longer refuse justice to the one and the truth to the other." ¹⁰⁶

The newspaper further responded to Maurice's allegations by launching an attack upon Lloyd George's fitness for high office. The newspaper closest to the General Staff stated, in Colvin's most imaginative prose, that:

"He [Lloyd George] has presumed to drive the chariot of war. He would have been wiser to have left the management of those fiery steeds to stronger and more experienced hands. If he succeeded he would have had the credit! As he has failed he must abide the consequences." ¹⁰⁷

Similarly the increasingly independent Liberal daily, *The Daily Chronicle*, stated in its leader that:

"If it were the case that Sir Douglas Haig, with the German menace piling itself up against him month after month, was left by the War Cabinet actually with fewer troops than in 1917, the country would not view the Cabinet's responsibility leniently.

We say this without in any way desiring to prejudge the case. It is not a case that ought to be prejudged.

But it is emphatically one that ought to be tried, and tried by the only adequate tribunal, a Parliamentary inquiry.

If the two Ministers have, as they may well have, a good and conclusive answer, let them make it there without delay." ¹⁰⁸

The furore was joined by the evening newspapers. The Asquithian-Liberal *Star* greeted the letter's appearance with the headline 'GEN. MAURICE'S BOMBSHELL', and a leader in which the newspaper opined that:

"The Maurice Affair is the culmination of a series of similar Affairs—the Jellicoe Affair, the Robertson Affair, and the Trenchard Affair. Taking these four Affairs together, it is beyond question that there is something wrong with the present Government in its relations with the Navy and the Army. In fiction and in drama the long arm of coincidence can be used to make the improbable seem probable and the impossible seem possible. But in war these four coincidences strain the most fantastic credulity. If the case of Jellicoe had been an isolated one, or even if the cases of Jellicoe and Robertson had stood alone, those who cling desperately to the mystical faith that Mr. Lloyd George is our only war-winner might have managed to hold on. But four!—Jellicoe, Robertson, Trenchard, and Maurice—really, there is a limit." ¹⁰⁹

The scope of the Press opposition was further revealed by the article in *The Westminster Gazette*, widely regarded as the principal organ of the Asquithian Liberals. The newspaper responded to Maurice's claims by stating that:

"It is now for the House of Commons to assert itself and insist on a searching inquiry into General MAURICE's allegations, whatever the consequences to

¹⁰⁶ Leading article, *The Morning Post*, 7th May, 1918.

¹⁰⁷ *The Morning Post*, 7th May, 1918.

¹⁰⁸ Leading article, *The Daily Chronicle*, 7th May, 1918.

¹⁰⁹ Leading article, *Star*, 7th May, 1918.

him or the Government." ¹¹⁰

Whilst the Opposition Press swiftly took advantage of Maurice's letter the Government was thrown into paroxysms of panic. Amery records how he found the "War Office buzzing over Maurice's foolish letter"; ¹¹¹ moreover he, like Lloyd George and Milner, immediately, and erroneously, detected Repington's hand in the whole affair:

"There is no doubt that Maurice has been got hold of by Repington and that the whole thing is a plant aimed at creating a Parliamentary situation in which Asquith, by the help of the disgruntled Unionists, may climb back to power. To the House, where we heard Bonar heckled by Asquith and finally promise to give a day (9th May) for discussion [of the allegations made by Maurice in his letter]". ¹¹²

Amery, held by Gwynne to be notorious for his inability to 'read' the mood of the House, had completely mis-read the situation. Indeed it seems probable that Maurice's letter, like Dora Kaplan's actions in Russia, had merely served to anticipate a rather more sophisticated effort to overthrow a dictator. The skirmishes between the War Cabinet and the pro-General Staff Opposition Press which had raged since Robertson's fall, and had intensified since the 21st March débâcle, now erupted into a pitched battle; at stake was the very survival of Lloyd George's Government. A measure of the War Cabinet's unease is provided by Hankey's diary entry for 8th May. For with the War Cabinet having royally scared itself with tales of a mass military-Press conspiracy to unseat the Prime Minister and the Ministry, Hankey recorded that he was informed by Mark Sykes that:

"Robertson had lunched with Asquith on the previous day. Later I learned from [J.T.] Davies, who got it from Ll. G.'s valet (!) that a few days ago Robertson gave a dinner to Trenchard, Repington & Gwynne.....& Maurice, & that after dinner the party were joined by Asquith & Jellicoe; that the Maurice letter was discussed, and that at the end Robertson said he would have nothing to do with it." ¹¹³

A recent writer on Lloyd George's relations with the Military has remarked that:

"one would not have been overly surprised to learn that Kitchener had returned from the depths of the sea to add his name to this list of the 'outs' of the military establishment." ¹¹⁴

Maurice, once he had delivered his letter to the newspaper editors, retired from the stage and played little part in the drama which bears his name. Instead he was called to account for his breach of regulations by the Adjutant-General on 7th May, and was removed from the Army's active list and placed on half-pay on 11th May. Moreover, in a display of spite, he was retired on the half-pay of a Major, despite the fact that he held the substantive rank of Major-General, and had done so since 1916.

The Opposition's apparently strong position began to crumble away. On 8th May Repington was informed by Carson that:

"he had been with the Unionists to-day, and says that their hate of Asquith overrides all other considerations and that they will not back him to-morrow in the Maurice debate. Carson says that it is no use for him to speak, as he will

¹¹⁰ *The Westminster Gazette*, 7th May, 1918.

¹¹¹ Amery, diary entry, 7th May, 1918; quoted in J. Barnes & D. Nicholson (*Eds.*), *op. cit.*, p.219.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ Hankey, diary entry, 8th May, 1918; University of Cambridge, Churchill College, Hankey Papers, HNKY/1/3.

¹¹⁴ D.R. Woodward, *op. cit.*, p.300.

have no following." ¹¹⁵

The potential to unseat Lloyd George existed, however a viable candidate to install in his stead did not.

Further proof of the disintegration of the Opposition's position was provided when *The Westminster Gazette*, the semi-official organ of Asquithian Liberalism, drastically altered its position on the very eve of the Maurice debate. For the newspaper, in an article which can only have been received by many of its readers with incredulity, opined that:

"General MAURICE'S letter is merely an opportunity for those whose real object is the overthrow of the present Government. That is the real issue which members will have before them tomorrow. The unity which has hitherto been preserved in the face of the enemy is threatened, and at a moment of unparalleled danger we look like being Involved in a storm of internal dissension. It is a situation which must give every patriotic man occasion for the most severe self-examination and discipline." ¹¹⁶

As the parliamentary Opposition fragmented, so Lloyd George's allies in the Press sought to re-focus the affair into a personal clash between Lloyd George and Asquith, a tactic which had proved so effective, and so memorable, in the *Daily Mail's* headline following Robertson's dismissal. Hence the Unionist evening newspaper, *The Evening News*, launched its attack upon the Prime Minister's critics in the pro-military Press, by labelling the agitation as "**THE ASQUITH OFFENSIVE**". ¹¹⁷ Whilst the *Daily Mail* was explicit in its leader, entitled 'General Maurice's Letter. What Lies Behind It?', in informing its readers that Maurice's failure to vouchsafe that his letter had been seen by 'no politician' in addition to 'no soldier':

"coupled with Mr. Asquith's manœuvres yesterday afternoon, suggests that the Old Gang believe they have found a weapon that will destroy the Government and that they imagine the country to be ready for the overthrow of Mr. Lloyd George and the return to power of Mr. Asquith, Lord Lansdowne, Viscount Grey, Mr. McKenna, and Mr. Samuel.

We believe these infatuated partisans to have made one miscalculation. No one not utterly besotted by the craze for "politics" can suppose for a moment that Mr. Lloyd George and Mr. Bonar Law deliberately lied to the House and to the country; nor can anyone fail to see that the surest and speediest way of bringing the matter to the test is an immediate inquiry, such as the Government propose, by two independent judges. Apart from that, Mr. Lloyd George is waging the war with all his might, means victory, and will be satisfied with nothing else. It has no such confidence in the discredited and dilatory politicians and their pacifist hangers-on who were driven from office eighteen months ago to the great relief of Great Britain and all her Allies." ¹¹⁸

Such a reduction of the complexities of the argument surrounding Maurice's allegations was also the course chosen by Lloyd George in the debate of 9th May.

Following prolonged discussions in the War Cabinet, Lloyd George decided to counter Maurice's allegations by making a statement to the House, rather than through the establishment of a select committee. Such a decision was in line with the attitude previously adopted by the 'Ministerial Press'. Shortly before 4:00 p.m. on the afternoon of Thursday, 9th May, Asquith rose to his feet to open a debate whose outcome had already been decided. In a dry, colourless speech Asquith chose to dwell upon the technical merits of a select committee, as opposed to a judicial enquiry, to enquire into the veracity of Maurice's claims. In effect Asquith, by declining to deal with the question of Maurice's assertions against the Government's flawed prosecution of the war,

¹¹⁵ Repington, diary entry, 8th May, 1918; quoted in Repington, *op. cit.*, p.298.

¹¹⁶ *The Westminster Gazette*, 8th May, 1918.

¹¹⁷ *The Evening News*, 8th May, 1918.

¹¹⁸ 'General Maurice's Letter. What Lies Behind It?', leading article, *Daily Mail*, 8th May, 1918.

was being punctilious in striving to censure the Government whilst simultaneously seeking to support its continued existence. In so doing his speech served to endorse Esher's view of a week or so earlier. For Esher had assured Wilson on 1st May that:

"There is nothing to fear so long as Asquith shrinks from office." ¹¹⁹

This, as *The Westminster Gazette* had previously revealed, he continued to do. Lloyd George's reply included flights of oratorical fancy which served to cover his failure to decisively refute Maurice's claims; such an achievement being beyond him, the charges were after all true. Thus Lloyd George opened by attacking Maurice's apparent reticence:

"During the time he was in office [as DMO] he never challenged those statements, when he had not merely access to official information, but when he had access to the Ministers themselves." ¹²⁰

On the issue of the B.E.F.'s fighting strength the Prime Minister delivered a bravura performance:

"I said that the fighting strength of the Army had increased. General Maurice says that it had diminished, as compared with the previous year. The figures which I gave were taken from the official records of the War Office, for which I sent before I made the statement. If they were incorrect, General Maurice was as responsible as anyone else. But they were not inaccurate." ¹²¹

This was the section of the Prime Minister's speech so injurious to Maurice's reputation. However contrary to Lloyd George's assertion, Maurice had not been asked by the Prime Minister, nor by anybody else for that matter, to prepare any figures on the B.E.F.'s strength for his statement to the House on 9th April. Moreover when pressed, by Lord Hugh Cecil, to lay before the House those disputed figures which had supposedly emanated from Maurice, he instead placed on the table of the House the erroneous figures produced by the Adjutant-General's office, and given to the Under-Secretary of War by the DDMO, Colonel Walter Kirke.

Lloyd George, having sought to discredit Maurice's reputation, continued by striving to muddy the waters as to the difference between combatants and non-combatants. For he asked the House if:

"those men who stopped the advance of the German Army to Amiens the other day combatants? (HON. MEMBERS: "Yes!") They are not, if you begin to make a distinction between combatants and non-combatants - I am speaking of General Carey's force - they would not be treated as combatants. Are the men who under fire every day, making and repairing roads and tramroads and railways, and who suffer severe casualties, combatants or non-combatants? In most lists that have been drafted they would be non-combatants. Does anyone mean to tell me that they are not part of the 'fighting strength' of the Army? Take the men who, when the British Army retreated, and had to improvise defences under shell-fire to relieve the infantry - are those men no part of the fighting strength of the Army? When you have not got them, you have to take Infantry out, and set them to that work.....and they are not part of the 'fighting strength' of the Army! I decline absolutely to accept that interpretation." ¹²²

Never was so much arrant nonsense spoken in such a short period of time to so many with so few objections. The whole farrago of nonsense which Lloyd George used to blind the House to the basic fact that, under his policies, the rifle strength of the B.E.F. had been reduced to such low

¹¹⁹ Letter from Esher to Wilson, 1st May, 1918; H.L.R.O., Beaverbrook Library, Lloyd George Papers, F/47/7/24.

¹²⁰ Lloyd George, House of Commons, 9th May, 1918; *Hansard*, Parliamentary Debates (Commons), Fifth Series, CIV.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² Lloyd George, House of Commons, 9th May, 1918; *Hansard*, Parliamentary Debates (Commons), Fifth Series, CIV.

levels as to render it incapable of repulsing the German Offensive of 21st March. The whole passage merely serves to confirm Gwynne's view that Lloyd George did not possess the 'war mind', and was completely unable either to understand the reality of war, or to abstain from meddling in its minutiae.

The tactics employed by Lloyd George in the debate were a mixture of evasion and falsehood; for example, Hankey confirmed that Lloyd George was in possession of the incorrect figures:

"showing that the fighting strength of the army had increased from 1 Jan. 1917 to 1918, he had the Adjutant General's figures saying the precise contrary, but was discreetly silent about them." ¹²³

In this Lloyd George once more conformed with Gwynne's appreciation of his character, that a lie came easier to the Prime Minister than the truth, even an unnecessary lie. For Lloyd George, convinced that he was facing a concerted military-Press conspiracy, instead of attacking the Adjutant-General's, vulnerable, distinction between combatant and non-combatants head on, instead reacted by suppressing the DMO's corrected figures, and instead relied upon figures which he was clearly aware were fundamentally flawed. This combination of evasion and falsehood forms a thread which runs throughout the Prime Minister's speech. As Gooch has stated:

"Lloyd George dwelt in ponderous detail on the history of the extension to the British line, and was at pains to show that Haig had bowed to serious pressure from the French Government and military authorities in extending the line, a course of action in which he had the full approval of the British Cabinet. He then diverted the attention of the House from the burden of the charges by switching to a broader, more emotional plane in concluding his speech. He implied that to condone Maurice's action by admitting that there was any truth in his charges would be to unleash a flood of controversy within the Army"; ¹²⁴

he therefore urged the House to end the agitation by defeating the motion for the establishment of a select committee. As Lord Hugh Cecil dryly remarked:

"I cannot help thinking that it was a much more effective speech as an attack on General Maurice than as a defence of the Government." ¹²⁵

Cecil further pointed out that Lloyd George:

"had assumed a bewildering variety of rôles. Sometimes he was the prisoner on his defence, and so claimed indulgence. Sometimes he was the judge, pronouncing what was the truth. Sometimes he was the prosecuting counsel, attacking General Maurice, but more often he was the principal witness in his own defence. They all recognised that of all forms of inquiry the least desirable seemed to be the Prime Minister sitting alone in judgement about himself, selecting the evidence, reviewing it, and ultimately announcing himself acquitted of all charges." ¹²⁶

However, few other members appeared to notice the paucity of the Prime Minister's speech which dealt with a direct refutation of Maurice's claims; hence the House divided at 7:21 p.m. on the motion, the result, unsurprisingly, was a victory for the Government of some 293 votes to 106. The Opposition, such as it was not, was scarcely helped by Asquith's performance. For as Burn informed Maurice, in a rather apologetic tone:

¹²³ Hankey, diary entry, 9th May, 1918; University of Cambridge, Churchill College, Hankey Papers, HNKY/1/3.

¹²⁴ John Gooch, 'The Maurice Debate 1918', *The Journal of Contemporary History*, 3/10 (1968), p.224.

¹²⁵ Lord Hugh Cecil, House of Commons, 9th May, 1918; quoted by Gooch, *op. cit.*

¹²⁶ *Op. cit.*; quoted in the *Star*, 10th May, 1918.

"When Asquith made his indictment he did it in such a faltering way and with no confidence - indeed I have never heard him so feeble. He was answered by Lloyd George in his best form and with no one in a position to counter him with the evidence you must have in your possession; it was inevitable that he should carry the House with him." ¹²⁷

The reaction of the Opposition Press was one of acute bitterness, the *Star* greeted the result of the 'Maurice debate' caustically:

"If we were not at war, if the British Army were not fighting for its life, if our sons were not offering up the supreme sacrifice, it might be possible to extract cynical amusement from the Prime Minister's brilliant exercise in the art of political camouflage. But æsthetic pleasure of that sort when it is mixed with blood and tears is fit only for devils, not for men. This war is not a comedy by Molière or Sheridan. Tartuffe and Joseph Surface are not welcome on the stage of world-tragedy. War is reality, and when the hearts of men and women are bleeding, even the cynic's palate is humane.

Well, the grand camouflage which we predicted has succeeded, as we prophesied that it would succeed. The smoke clouds, the fog clouds, the dazzle-painting, the cubist splashes, the futurist blotches, and the deluge of whitewash have given the hundred placemen and the expectant placemen their excuse for evading the inquiry which forty-eight hours previously the Government had declared to be necessary. There is to be no inquiry, either by the two judges or by a Select Committee.....

.....
.....We are at war, and we all want to get on with the war and to win it. In order to do so, we want a Government which we can trust, and not one which flounders out of one crisis of suspicion into another, with men like Jellicoe, Robertson, Trenchard, Maurice and Sir Bryan Mahon flitting like shadows in a procession of resignations and dismissals. The Army is not satisfied. The nation is not satisfied." ¹²⁸

The Spectator later remarked upon the hollowness of the Government's victory. For in a leading article on 18th May, the journal observed that:

"A large proportion of those who voted for the Government voted as they did for the single reason that they did not wish to pass what Mr. Lloyd George called a vote of censure on the Government while there was no alternative Government ready to step into office. Some of them may have thought that Mr. Lloyd George really disposed of Sir Frederick Maurice's charges, but we can hardly believe that more than a very few did so if they troubled to look closely into Mr. Lloyd George's arguments.

.....Sir Frederick Maurice's letter would not have been written if there had not been a belief among responsible officers in the Army that the Government were putting on the Army blame that they ought to bear themselves." ¹²⁹

Despite such reservations such was the ease of Lloyd George's victory that the whole business left many of his supporters in the Press baffled. Thus Scott remarked to Lord Courtney, on 10th May, that:

"The Maurice affair is something of a mystery. It looks as though he were rather a foolish person who had been made use of by others. There really seemed to be

¹²⁷ Letter from Colonel Charles Burn to Maurice, 9th May, 1918; quoted in N. Maurice (*Ed.*), *op. cit.*, p.132.

¹²⁸ 'We Told You So!', leading article, *Star*, 10th May, 1918.

¹²⁹ Leading article, *The Spectator*, 18th May, 1918.

no case worth enquiring into, unless it were one against Maurice. The result is to strengthen [Lloyd] George." ¹³⁰

If Scott was bewildered by the events of 7-9th May, his fellow Liberal editor, Gardiner was fortunate in receiving an explanation from Maurice himself. Thus a somewhat disconsolate Maurice confided to Gardiner that:

"My object in making the statements I did was to compell [*sic.*] the Government to accept the responsibility for actions of theirs which directly affect the conduct of the war.....The Government decided that it could not send enough men to France to keep the armies up to full strength & consequently large reductions had to be made. The Government must take responsibility....[it] decided to keep large numbers of troops in Palestine some of whom might have been in France & again they must take responsibility. Mr Bonar Law's answer of the 23rd & the Prime Minister's speech of the 9th implied that the Government had taken every necessary step to meet the German offensive, the inference being that the responsibility for failure rested only with the soldiers. I fear that I have made a great sacrifice in vain, but knowing what I did I could not remain silent." ¹³¹

Anxious to avoid any repetition the Government mounted a concerted attack upon both Maurice and Repington. Maurice - having been retired on a Major's half-pay - had been employed as *The Daily Chronicle's* Military Correspondent. This piece of independence was ultimately to prove costly to the newspaper's editor, Robert Donald, however the first target of the Government's irritation was Maurice himself. For Maurice's first article for the newspaper was, perhaps unsurprisingly, interfered with by the Censor in a display of petulance. As the *Truth* commented:

"Misleading statements from the Treasury Bench are no new thing, but the scandal has never been exhibited so flagrantly as in this instance. Soldiers have been the worst victims of it, and it is so again here. The more you insist upon the gravity of General Maurice's offence against discipline, the more indefensible you make the resort to unfair methods in order to squelch him." ¹³²

Repington thundered in *The Morning Post* in a similar fashion; writing that:

"I do not know a precedent for the reckless disregard of the truth which has marked the public utterances of Mr. Lloyd George and some of his adherents on the conduct of the war." ¹³³

If the *Truth* was ignored, Repington assuredly was not; for Milner, positive that the whole business of Maurice's charges had been engineered by Repington sought to 'dish' the journalist once and for all.

Hence Milner, with the assistance of Buchan, Astor and Garvin, sought to comprehensively destroy Repington's prestige. Thus shortly after the 'Maurice Debate', on Sunday, 12th May, *The Observer* delivered Milner's journalistic *coup de grâce* to the troublesome correspondent with a two-pronged attack. For Garvin attacked Repington in a vitriolic leading article on the Maurice debate, which appeared under the headline 'Political Poison-Gas'. In the leader Garvin denounced the various military 'intrigues' and exhorted the Prime Minister to respond with a 'Knock-Out Blow' to his critics. He remarked that:

"Mr. Lloyd George has appealed for fair play. He will never get it until he kills

¹³⁰ Letter from Scott to Courtney, 10th May, 1918; B.L.P.E.S., Archives Division, L.S.E., Courtney Papers, 12/131, ff.231-32.

¹³¹ Letter from Maurice to Gardiner, 10th May, 1918; B.L.P.E.S., Archives Division, L.S.E., Gardiner Papers, 1/20.

¹³² *Truth*; quoted by H.A. Taylor, *op. cit.*, p.169.

¹³³ Repington, *The Morning Post*, 15th May, 1918.

off evident foul play." ¹³⁴

Whilst the image of Lloyd George as the upright Corinthian strikes one as somewhat absurd, the leading article served as an excuse for the editor's deployment of 'black propaganda' in the same newspaper. Hence in a provocative article, headlined 'An Exposure "Naturalised News" and Military Scandal Chapter and Verse', Garvin accused Repington of pursuing a personal vendetta against Lloyd George and Wilson. Garvin continued by remarking upon:

"the profound weaknesses of character and judgement which have always marred Colonel Repington's versatile ability and thwarted his career...and have now equally made him, in effect, one of the worst enemies of his country." ¹³⁵

This latter point strikes one as rather over-egging the pudding; not least in its echo of *le roi soleil* - '*l'état, c'est moi*' - in the erroneous supposition that Lloyd George and the country were as one. Having established Repington's credential as the worst scoundrel in Britain Garvin continued his character assassination by attacking Repington's apparent inconsistencies in writing for *The Morning Post* and the Liberal organ, *The National News* - a point which he illustrated by the use of highly selective quotations from Repington's writings. Garvin concluded this sanctimonious exercise by stating that there:

"must be an end to Colonel Repington's campaign of calumny...there will be no health in the public service until the criminal mischief making we have exposed has become a cancer of public life in war-time. We say that it must be cut right out....Mr. Lloyd George and Lord Milner are the men to make an end of this mutinous nuisance." ¹³⁶

The *Daily Express* joined the attack, on 13th May, by re-printing a lengthy extract of Garvin's article under the heading of '**CUT OUT THE CANCER**'. The article for all its spite and venom, did little to actually destroy the *Generals' Press*; that they were quiescent for several months was instead due to the failure of 9th May. Indeed some of the more prominent journalists, and organs, of the Opposition Press turned their attention away from military matters to such topics as the possibility that the Government was prepared to secure a negotiated settlement to the conflagration.

Despite this, as events were later to show, the Opposition Press's relationship to the General Staff was still a strong one. The War Cabinet sought to take advantage of the brief respite with Amery advancing the preposterous plan that troops be detached from the Western Front, once the situation had been 'stabilised', to Palestine in order to allow Allenby to launch his offensive! Wilson appeared to add a veneer of strategic logic to this plan when he informed the War Cabinet, on 27th May, that:

"We must indulge in no operations of the Passchendaele type [on the Western Front] in this period [before American reinforcements gave the Allies superiority of numbers].....Consequently, between the time when our anxieties had been relieved and we would be able to strike a decisive blow in the Western front, a long period must exist. He was examining the situation on the basis that this period might be employed for striking a blow in one or other of the outlying theatres." ¹³⁷

Plus ça change. One would have thought that the War Cabinet, especially since the alarms of 21st March, had realised that no blow in the East would prove decisive in the war! The implication of the drift of British strategic preoccupation, away from the Western Front once

¹³⁴ Garvin, 'Political Poison Gas', leading article, *The Observer*, 12th May, 1918.

¹³⁵ Garvin, 'An Exposure "Naturalised News" and Military Scandal Chapter and Verse', leading article, *The Observer*, 12th May, 1918.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ Wilson, attributed to by Hankey in 'X' Committee minutes, 27th May, 1918; P.R.O., CAB 23/17.

more, was that Lloyd George was reverting to his pre-*Kaiserschlacht* policy of striving to secure bargaining counters in the East for a future compromise peace settlement with Germany, whilst avoiding the casualties associated with the Western Front. Thus Gwynne was pointing towards the next clash between the Press and the War Cabinet when he warned his proprietress, Lady Bathurst, on 15th May that:

"The situation is serious.....L.G. looks upon this war as a supreme opportunity for himself. Now nobody who thinks of himself is worth a hang in these days. L.G. has corrupted Parliament....One great argument that is urged in his favour is that he is all out for war to the bitter end. [However] Yesterday I had a Foreign Office man lunching with me and he disposed of that argument by telling me to beware of the Prime Minister because he is capable of making a disgraceful peace at any moment." ¹³⁸

Thus the Opposition Press prepared itself to continue the agitation against Lloyd George's premiership by substituting *guerre à l'outrance* for the well-worn slogan of 'Hands off the Generals'; it was in effect 'Business as Usual'.

¹³⁸ Letter from Gwynne to Lady Bathurst, 15th May, 1918; University of Leeds, Glenesk-Bathurst MSS, Lady Bathurst Papers 1990/1/2447.

ENDGAME.

With the defeat of both Repington and Maurice fresh in his mind, Lloyd George had acquired sufficient political capital to speculate upon the possibility of reaching an accommodation with Germany; not averse to a negotiated settlement with Germany, as his reaction to the Kühlmann *démarche* of the previous year had indicated, Lloyd George had long been attracted to such a *political* settlement. A startled Scott noted in his diary that:

"the rather startling fact became quite apparent to me that George did not want to defeat the German ambitions in the occupied [Russian] provinces - that in fact he was now bent on giving effect to the policy which he would have adopted even under the Kerensky Government, if he could have carried it out in his Cabinet, of paying the Germans in the East in order to square them in the West. He told me this in so many words (he said the Germans could not be expected to surrender their colonies and compromise in Alsace-Lorraine and get no compensation) and it seemed, in any case the only intelligible explanation of his policy. It savours rather of the 'realpolitik' of Bismarck than of Wilson's idealism which we are supposed to share." ¹

The political reality which had prevented Lloyd George from successfully proposing such a *quid pro quo* in response to Kühlmann's *démarche* of the previous September no longer applied.

Following the 'Maurice' debate the most visceral of the Prime Minister's Press critics had been marginalised, whilst the War Cabinet's conduct served to bind a number of leading Unionists to Lloyd George's chariot. In addition the Prime Minister enjoyed, in the quiescent Northcliffe Press and *The Observer* for the first time in his premiership the services of a clique of popular right-wing journals. So emboldened, Lloyd George once more entered into *pourparlers* with Kühlmann, a decision which was vigorously opposed by both the Foreign Office and the Admiralty. The enmity of the Admiralty towards the War Cabinet had been earned by the intemperate language used by several ministers in accusing the Admiralty of hoarding large numbers of skilled labour. On 4th May the effect of the Admiralty's worsening relations with the War Cabinet became clear. On that date reliable news reached London from Norwegian sources that the German Army had admitted suffering some 600,000 casualties on the Western Front up to 18th April. The source also stated that the German people were increasingly disaffected and anxious for the conclusion of a compromise peace. Shortly after this intelligence some 'mysterious' persons arrived in London from Holland, and were promptly denounced by both the Foreign Office and the Admiralty as enemy agents; both departments had their own reasons for wishing the *démarche* to be terminated.

The service departments were assisted in their opposition by *The Times*, for on 6th May the newspaper published a leading article under the headline 'The Coming Peace Offensive'. The leader warned the public that there were:

"all sorts of signs that an attack of this kind is impending....The lull continues on the Western Front but all soldiers know that it is ominous of fresh attacks." ²

Hankey was incandescent and wrote to Balfour:

"protesting against the atmosphere of intolerance created by the Foreign Office and the press every time there is even a mention of the word peace." ³

¹ Scott, diary entry, 8th January, 1918; University of Manchester, John Rylands Library, *The Manchester Guardian* Archives, C.P. Scott Papers, Box 133.

² Flanagan, 'The Coming Peace Offensive', leading article, *The Times*, 6th May, 1918.

³ Letter from Hankey to Balfour, 6th May, 1918; British Museum, British Library, Manuscript Collections, Balfour MS. 49704.

Informed by Clemenceau of the recent Franco-German agreement on the exchange of prisoners, Lloyd George perceived in the talks the vehicle for the conclusion of a settlement on the Western Front, where he believed no decision could be achieved by force of arms alone. Hence the Prime Minister resolved once more to live down to the reputation of 'Perfide Albion'. Despite the scepticism of the service ministries, Lloyd George decided to enter into negotiations with the German Government, initially dealing with the repatriation of P.O.W.s and latterly with the prospect of a negotiated settlement in the West in return for giving Germany a free hand in the East. In this the terms were markedly similar to those implicit in Kühlmann's *démarche* of September 1917. Hence once the Maurice affair was concluded Lloyd George moved to enter into talks with the German Government. In the early months of 1918 Kühlmann had initiated an exchange of messages, through a neutral conduit, with Sir William Tyrrell, the head of the Foreign Office's Political Intelligence Department, a close friend from the former's time as Counsellor at the German Embassy in London. Kühlmann's second *démarche* contained proposals that British and German delegates should meet at The Hague in order to discuss the exchange of their respective P.O.W.s. It was the *Staatssekretär's* intent that such discussions should develop into an informal peace feeler which would be mooted at Middachten Castle in the Netherlands.

The War Cabinet's positive reaction to Kühlmann's offer was cordially greeted by *The Times*; in a leading article, entitled 'The Scandal of the British Prisoners', which appeared on 16th May, the newspaper expressed its guarded approval of Newton's declaration that the British Government was once more prepared to contemplate an exchange of P.O.W.s with Germany. The article did however temper its praise by acknowledging the reluctance of both the War Office and the Admiralty to become involved in the repatriation of prisoners to Germany. The following day Smuts, recently returned from the abortive peace talks in Switzerland with envoys from the Dual Monarchy, delivered a speech which emphasised the need to use both martial and diplomatic means in order to bring the conflict to a conclusion.

The speech, reported in *The Times* on 18th May accompanied by that newspaper's explicit support for a direct exchange of P.O.W.s, was interpreted by Kühlmann as an unofficial indication that the War Cabinet were amenable to receiving his peace feeler. As Lloyd George inched closer towards Kühlmann's *démarche*, so Northcliffe was chafing under the restrictions imposed by his newspapers' support of the Government. Thus Northcliffe, having previously warned Dawson of the dangers of *The Times* being perceived as a ministerial organ, signalled Printing House Square's impending break with the Government in a letter to the night editor of *The Times*, George Freeman. In the brief missive, written on 24th May, the 'Chief', having become aware of the rumours of an Anglo-German negotiated settlement then circulating in London, remarked that:

"Lloyd George has been much with Haldane lately and also with Sidney Webb. If there is any sign of wobbling or peace talk, please deal with the Prime Minister drastically." ⁴

It appeared that if the Prime Minister was reluctant to go tiger hunting, Northcliffe did not share that state of mind; he would apparently utilise the discussions in The Hague as a staked goat to lure Lloyd George from beneath the cover of bellicosity in which he hid his intentions.

Lloyd George had been installed as Prime Minister in preference to Asquith offering the prospect of a more vigorous prosecution of the war. If that assumption were no longer to hold true, then Lloyd George's premiership, which had been damaged by the furore surrounding the manpower levels of the B.E.F. in the recent 'Maurice Debate', would find itself in grave danger. The prospect of Lloyd George's occupancy of Downing Street drawing to a close could only be increased by the growing disenchantment of the Northcliffe Press with the War Cabinet's conduct of the war. As was becoming clear, Northcliffe's alliance with the War Cabinet in the wake of the inconclusive Cambrai offensive was a temporary aberration from his more usual posture as the independent critic of the Government. Whilst Northcliffe was aware of intimations that the War Cabinet were contemplating the prospect of a negotiated peace with Germany, Dawson and much of the newspaper's editorial staff were unaware that the Prime Minister, the War Cabinet and some members of the Labour Party, had privately considered the prospect of securing a negotiated settlement to the War in the West by giving the Germans a free hand in the East. To such elements in the Government, the prospect of exploiting the treaty of Brest-Litovsk as a pretext for

⁴ Letter from Northcliffe to Freeman, 24th May, 1918; quoted by R. Pound & G. Harmsworth, *op. cit.*, p.641.

securing a negotiated settlement at Russia's expense was not unattractive.

However, despite the bellicose under-pinning of his premiership, Lloyd George's 'Easterner' strategy, which had dictated that Britain strive to achieve a favourable resolution to the war in any theatre other than the Western Front, logic demanded that Britain reach an accommodation with Germany in which the Entente's Western *desiderata* would be traded for Germany's in the East. The Prime Minister had toyed with such an accommodation in response to Kühlmann's previous *démarche* of September 1917, only to be rebuffed by the War Cabinet. In the summer of 1918, however, Lloyd George perceived his political position to be immeasurably stronger. For he had seen off the threat posed by the Opposition Liberals, disgruntled Unionists, and the anti-frock Press in the 'Maurice debate'; thereby securing his premiership for the duration of the war, whilst his nascent political apparatus, together with his ever-closer links to Conservative Central Office, offered the prospect of a prolonged tenure of No. 10 Downing Street. Hence Lloyd George felt himself able to enter into *pourparlers* with the Germans against the advice of his Foreign Secretary, Balfour. The P.O.W. talks in The Hague, in which the Home Secretary, Sir George Cave, superseded Newton as head of the British delegation, provided an excellent pretext. Lloyd George's political appreciation was however fundamentally flawed, for he underestimated the degree to which his political position owed its impregnability to his previously expressed willingness to wage *guerre à l'outrance* rather than through any personal following.

Following the intimation in open court during the Billing case[†] that the Government were engaged in *pourparlers* with the Germans at The Hague, Lord Robert Cecil was obliged to acknowledge that such talks were indeed taking place. The effect of Billing's agitation against the negotiations in The Hague soon bore fruit following his acquittal. For on 5th June in the House of Lords the Parliamentary Secretary to the War Office, Earl Stanhope, in reply to a question as to whether the military authorities were still opposed to the exchange of P.O.W.s Stanhope replied unequivocally that:

"Yes, the reasons against an exchange of prisoners hold good as much as they ever did If we put back a large number of prisoners into Germany, the opinion of the military authorities is that it must tend to prolong the war."⁵

Such a statement, combined with Balfour's constant opposition to the spectre of a negotiated peace settlement with Germany, clearly reveals the extent to which divisions had opened up within the War Cabinet. Indeed the impact of Stanhope's statement is heightened, as it is difficult to believe that he adopted this position in the debate contrary to the wishes of his departmental chief, Lord Milner.

That Lloyd George had succeeded in losing the support of Milner, so shortly after the former's conspicuous support of the Prime Minister over the whole 'Maurice affair', is indicative of the extent to which opposition to any talks with Germany permeated the Foreign Office and both service Ministries. Indeed the situation is not without its irony, for in supporting the War Office position against the Prime Minister's desire for a diplomatic *coup de main*, Milner found himself in alliance with Repington, whose reputation he had so recently sought to destroy. Whilst the elements in the War Cabinet opposed to the talks marshalled their forces the *pourparlers* themselves reached an impasse. For Kühlmann's envoy, Hatzfeldt,[‡] reported back that he had received the impression, from Newton and the British delegation, that the British Government entertained doubts as to the readiness of the Wilhelmstrasse and the German people to conclude a

[†] On 29th May the curious case of 'defamatory libel' brought by the theatrical producer Jack Grien and the actress and dancer Maud Allen against the colourful Noel Pemberton Billing, the Independent Member of Parliament for East Hertfordshire, over articles in his newspaper the *Vigilante*, opened at the Old Bailey. In the articles Billing had stated that the audience of Wilde's *Salomé*, produced by Grien with Allen in the title rôle, would be made up of those elements of society who had been sexually corrupted by the 'mysterious influence' of a fifth column of Germans. Through Repington's exertions the case was used to 'expose' the Government's dalliance with the notion of arriving at a negotiated settlement with Germany, by way of the P.O.W. negotiations in The Hague.

For further details on the whole picturesque affair see both Michael Kettle, *Salomé's Last Veil. The Libel Case of the Century*, (Granada. 1977)., and Philip Hoare, *Wild's Last Stand. Decadence, Conspiracy & the First World War*, (Duckworth. 1997).

⁵ Lord Stanhope, reply in the House of Lords, 5th June, 1918; *Hansard*, Parliamentary Debates (Lords), Fifth Series, CXVIII.

[‡] Son of the former German Ambassador in London.

compromise peace settlement.

Despite such reservations, on 6th June, Lloyd George dispatched instructions to Cave that he should listen to any peace offer forwarded by the German delegation without committing either himself or the War Cabinet to any course of action. In the War Cabinet meeting that day Lloyd George sought to coerce support for his newly rediscovered pacific policy. He had, he informed the War Cabinet meeting of the afternoon of 6th June:

"during his recent visit to France,.....been told that a great deal of harm had been done in that country by the idea which obtained that the M. Clemenceau intended to reject every peace overture. The working-classes there had the impression that the Government were determined not to make peace. This was unfortunate, as those same classes were quite prepared to fight on as long as they felt that, if a really favourable approach were made for an honourable peace, the Government would be prepared to take it into serious consideration." ⁶

The inference in Lloyd George's statement was that the War Cabinet should not make a similar mistake by deprecating the worth of the Kühlmann *démarche*. Whilst it is by no means clear how far the 'peace talks' progressed, it is clear that the Foreign Office remained deeply averse to the whole idea of reaching a negotiated compromise peace with Germany.

On 15th June an article appeared in *The Times* announcing that an impasse had been reached in the 'P.O.W.' talks at The Hague; on 20th June the House of Commons turned its attention to the delay in the negotiations. The Labour Party had put down a motion stating:

"That this House desires an assurance that the Government will lose no diplomatic opportunity to settle the problem of war by agreement." ⁷

Balfour, replying for the Government, attacked the German 'peace offensives' of 1917 and after, which he held were intended merely to divide the Entente. The Foreign Secretary in effect defied Kühlmann to commit both himself and his Government to the negotiation of a compromise peace settlement. For Balfour stated that:

"We have never rejected any proposals which we thought had the slightest probability of producing the sort of peace which most of us and, I hope, all of us - desire.....There is no evidence whatever that the German Government have ever been serious in making such offers of peace. Have the German Government ever openly and plainly said that Belgium is to be restored? The Allies are prepared to listen collectively to all reasonable arrangements. Certainly His Majesty's Government are not going to shut their ears to anything that can be called a reasonable suggestion". ⁸

The extent to which the Government had already committed itself to 'an honourable peace', despite the objections of the War Office, Milner, the Admiralty, the Foreign Office and Balfour, was revealed as the whole story of "the pacifist intrigue" ⁹ became public. On 13th June, the Foreign Editor of *The Times*, Henry Wickham Steed, was visited by Clifford Sharp.

Sharp, editor of the *New Statesman* (1913-31), had been seconded from military service for 'special service' in Sweden - where he had also acted as *The Times* Correspondent to the International Socialist Conference in Stockholm, during the summer of 1917 - and returned to Britain in the summer of 1918. Steed was incapacitated at the time, having been knocked down by a Piccadilly omnibus, outside the Ritz Hotel, earlier in the month; consequently Sharp committed the subject of his visit to paper on 13th June:

"It appears that the chief exponent of the idea of a negotiated peace with

⁶ Lloyd George, attributed to by Hankey, War Cabinet minutes, 6th June, 1918; P.R.O., CAB 23/6, W.C. 427, f.157.

⁷ Labour Party motion, House of Commons, 20th June, 1918; *Hansard*, Parliamentary Debates (Commons), *op. cit.*

⁸ Balfour, speech in the House of Commons, *op. cit.*

⁹ Steed, *op. cit.*, Volume II, p.220.

Germany at Russia's expense is Milner † who has gradually converted two or three of his colleagues to the idea. When, about 8 or 10 weeks ago L.G. wanted the Webbs to dine with him and they refused, he arranged to meet them at Haldane's house. The idea of course was to get, through them, at the Labour Party. L.G. did not hesitate to avow that much nor did he make any bones about showing that it was mainly this question of giving Germany a free hand in Russia that he wanted to discuss with them." ¹⁰

Sharp implicated Lansdowne in what Steed came to refer to as 'the pacifist intrigue', observing that:

"Curzon's attitude appears to be what might be described as favourably neutral pending further developments on the Western front. The rest [of the War Cabinet] presumably don't matter, unless Chamberlain - after all the one Englishman in the War Cabinet! - makes the subject as [*sic.*] one of the rare cases in which he decides to assert himself.

The idea of course is dead or moribund for the moment, but it is likely to be revived shortly. Lansdowne, at a private meeting of his supporters the other day, elaborated it and announced that he had another letter drafted on these terms, i.e., giving Eastern Europe to Germany, which he would send to the Press, as soon as any new German peace move provided an occasion. He added that he was very confident of success this time because he had the private support of 'influential members of the War Cabinet itself.'" ¹¹

The erstwhile correspondent for *The Times* in Stockholm corroborated the otherwise distinctly dubious testimony of Captain Spencer that Britain was engaged in peace discussions with Germany at The Hague. For he related that Lansdowne had:

"also stated (what is a fact, though God knows how he knew it) that the German Government had definitely proposed a fortnight ago that the present discussions at The Hague should be made the occasion of informal peace negotiations and had intimated that they were ready to offer very favourable terms. The proposal had been turned down but he (Lansdowne) was assured that the rejection was not of a very determined sort and that the German Government would renew the attempt publicly or privately very shortly.

The last point at least is of course common knowledge. But the whole thing - all the points together - including by the way the statement in 'The Times' the other day (from Amsterdam wasn't it?) as to the intention of the Germans to offer just such a peace - is very sinister." ¹²

Indeed such was the startling nature of Sharp's intelligence, especially that contained within this final passage, that Steed at once sent for Northcliffe's private secretary to make three copies of the letter. The copies were sent to Northcliffe, Balfour and Hughes, the Australian Prime Minister - then in London for meetings of the Imperial War Cabinet.

Hughes informed Steed by telephone that he was aware of the existence of the pourparlers, though his efforts to frustrate them had proved to be unavailing. Balfour expressed himself 'appalled' by the situation; evidently he had been previously unaware as to the tenacity with which Lloyd George had pursued the prospect of peace. Northcliffe's response was on a more practical level; he immediately enquired what course of action Steed suggested:

† Milner's position is a curious one. Initially he had supported the War Office and Admiralty's view that any exchange of prisoners would only serve to prolong the war; however as an article in the *Evening Standard*, on 17th October, 1918, made clear he came to advocate an eleventh-hour compromise peace with Germany.

¹⁰ Letter from Clifford Sharp to Steed, 13th June, 1918; News International Record Office, *The Times* Archives, General Correspondence, Wickham Steed MSS.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

"I told him that I thought a sensational leading article in the 'Daily Mail' would be the best means of spoiling the intrigue, if intrigue there was. An article in 'The Times' might cause too much alarm." ¹³

Despite Steed's somewhat weak explanation as to why the *Daily Mail*, rather than *The Thunderer* was chosen, it strikes one that the choice may well have been dictated by the merits of the respective editors. For Dawson had previously caused concern to Northcliffe - and presumably Steed, who shared many of his proprietor's opinions - by his close relationship to the Government. It therefore appears that the choice of the less influential organ was influenced by the desire to catch the War Cabinet unawares; such an occurrence could not be guaranteed at *The Times* due to the editor's close attachment to the Secretary of State for War, Lord Milner.

Thus it was from the pages of the *Daily Mail*, on 18th June, that Steed observed that:

"The great offensive in the West has, so far, disappointed German hopes. The great Austrian offensive seems unlikely to revive them. There remains the great peace offensive, which is the third string to the German bow.

Launched by Herr von Kühlmann, we know what it would mean. He is an 'Easterner', who thinks it would be worth Germany's while to buy off England and France by evacuating Belgium and even restoring Alsace-Lorraine (for the time being) on condition that Germany should be given 'a free hand' in Russia and the East." ¹⁴

Steed continued his article by asking, somewhat disingenuously, whether:

"he [is] preparing some such offer as this? Has he any ground for supposing that any British statesmen to be so stupid as not to see that with a 'free hand in Russia and the East' Germany could, a few years hence, turn against the West with redoubled strength, reconquer Belgium, reannex Alsace-Lorraine, and place England herself in the direst peril?" ¹⁵

Having established, for the benefit of the War Cabinet, if for no one else, that he was in possession of information relating to the existence of the *pourparlers* in The Hague, Steed began to twist the knife:

"We should like to be sure that the cunning German diplomatist has no such ground. Lord Lansdowne's motley supporters are whispering that another Lansdowne letter, proposing to give Germany a free hand in the Eastern Europe, is already drafted and will be sent to the press as soon as a new German peace move provides an occasion. They add that the frightened Marquis is confident of success this time because he has 'the private support of influential members of the Government.' This sounds frankly incredible.

Our ministers may be weak and foolish, but we have no right to think them traitors; and traitors they would be were they to listen, even for an instant, to any idea of giving Germany 'a free hand in the East'. They would deserve to be, as they probably would be, hanged by their indignant fellow countrymen and countrywomen, who would not suffer the war to end in so shameful a betrayal.

But Lansdowne, Haldane (and his satellites the Webbs), and others are meeting and talking. They are alluding knowingly to the Prisoners Conference at The Hague as likely to bring us a German 'peace offer on very favourable terms'.

We strongly advise all members of the War Cabinet, and, indeed, all important Ministers, to state without delay in plain, unequivocal language that they never had, have not, and will not have any truck whatever with any idea of

¹³ Steed, *op. cit.*, p.218.

¹⁴ Steed, 'Watch Lansdowne - And Others', leading article, *Daily Mail*, 18th June, 1918.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

purchasing a trumpety 'peace' in the West by giving Germany 'a free hand in the East." ¹⁶

Despite the reference to the Webbs - inserted by Northcliffe, as a blind, into Steed's original manuscript - it was clear to whom the article was addressed.

Such Press agitation against the cause of a negotiated peace served to greatly strengthen the position of Balfour, who rose in the House of Commons, on 21st June, to ridicule any possibility that Britain would enter into a negotiated settlement to the war merely on the basis of the restoration of Belgium. In effect the Foreign Office's disinterest, if not downright opposition, served to render Lloyd George's interest all but irrelevant. The obituary of the *démarche* was written in *The Times* on 3rd July; that newspaper apparently being regarded as safe once more after the secrecy required on 18th June. Thus under the heading of "'Peace' Ground Bait", the newspaper, in its first leading article, condemned the recent Kühlmann peace offensive, commenting that the *Staatssekretär's* speech of 24th June had:

"given rise to a number of obscure quarrels in Germany, both as to its real aims and as to the share of responsibility for it which belongs to various German personages of eminence and authority." ¹⁷

The War Cabinet's dalliance with the prospect of reaching an accommodation with the Germans receded from their collective memory as the Entente forces successfully counter-attacked on the Western Front throughout the late summer and autumn of 1918. However the success of the B.E.F. was not without its disagreeable aspects for Lloyd George and the War Cabinet. For with the martial success of Haig the 'Generals' Press once more came to the fore; their latest point of criticism of the Prime Minister being his apparent reluctance to acknowledge the substantial, if not leading, part played by Haig and the B.E.F. in the Allied advances.

From the outset of his premiership, Lloyd George had sought to add to his allies in the Press; his two principal targets being the Asquithian evening newspaper, *The Westminster Gazette*, and the leading Liberal daily, *The Daily Chronicle*. The former target; a curious one in respect to the fact that its influence was derived, almost exclusively from the newspaper's editor, the pro-Asquithian Spender; had managed to elude his grasp by the end of 1917 - *The Daily Chronicle* was not to be so fortunate. As became increasingly apparent in the latter course of 1918, Downing Street was waging a campaign against certain elements of the Press. On 15th September a meeting was held at 10 Downing Street of London editors at which Lloyd George briefed them on the proposals which the Government had received from the Austrian Government regarding the possibility of securing a negotiated peace. The editors of *The Morning Post*, *The Daily Chronicle* and the *Daily News* were all mysteriously absent. J.T. Davies wrote to Gwynne the following day to explain, rather unconvincingly, the omission. He stated:

"I very much regret that in my great hurry, and owing to the difficulty of getting replies from newspaper offices on a Sunday afternoon, I overlooked the 'Morning Post' and I can only ask you to accept my very sincere apologies, together with an assurance that there was no intention to exclude such an important paper as the 'Morning Post' from the Conference". ¹⁸

The reply from Gwynne was tart:

"I am much obliged to you for your letter and must accept your explanation that in the short time at your disposal you overlooked the 'Morning Post'. But you also overlooked the 'Daily Chronicle' and the 'Daily News', and it was these omissions, in addition to the omission of the 'Morning Post', which led me to think that possibly there was a definite policy in the treatment of these three

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *The Times*, 3rd July, 1918.

¹⁸ Letter from J.T. Davies to Gwynne, 16th September, 1918; I.W.M., Gwynne Papers, HAG/20.

papers." ¹⁹

It appeared that Davies' memory was curiously political in its lapses; a fault which no doubt failed to bring his master's wrath down upon his head.

Instead of only attracting the displeasure of Lloyd George, *The Daily Chronicle* also attracted his covetous gaze. On 7th March A.E. Cutforth, of Deloitte, Flender, Griffiths & Co., sent a report on *The Daily Chronicle's* financial position to the Coalition-Liberal Chief Whip, Captain Guest. As Donald later wrote:

"On several occasions since he has been Prime Minister, Mr. Lloyd George has dropped hints to me that he would like his friends to acquire the Daily Chronicle as the Official Organ of his Party. The first time was in January 1917". ²⁰

Discussions over the newspaper's future opened in September 1917; as Donald later wrote:

"I dined at [Sir William] Lever's in September 1917. He discussed the Daily Chronicle and the property and seems to think that the ordinary shares could be bought for about £250,000...Apparently the subject had been discussed with Captain Guest, the chief whip, if not with the Prime Minister. He said that £650,000 was available - partly I understood from Leverhulme and partly from the whip's fund." ²¹

However shortly thereafter there appeared reports in other sections of the Press stating that both Lords Leverhulme and Beaverbrook were involved in negotiations to purchase *The Daily Chronicle*; in some sections only the name of Beaverbrook was mentioned.

On 18th April Donald pressed Beaverbrook as to whether the covenant for *The Daily Chronicle* under his control would support the Prime Minister for the following five years:

"was intended to apply also to the 'Daily Express'.

'My god, no!' he answered and laughed boisterously.

..... It was quite evident that he had been discussing the subject with Guest recently. The conclusion of his conversation was that under the new conditions, it was a case of getting party money either from the official Liberals or Lloyd George. He knew that L.G. had a fund and he mentioned half a dozen names of gentlemen who had appeared in recent honours lists who must have contributed to L.G.'s war chest. This money was available up to £450,000 but it must carry control." ²²

It appeared that Guest had greatly overestimated the extent of Beaverbrook's support for the Prime Minister. Indeed Beaverbrook's attempts to acquire control of *The Daily Chronicle*, though eventually unavailing, did assume various intriguing guises. The most interesting of these was Beaverbrook's proposal to purchase *The Sunday Times* to form a stable of newspapers together with *The Daily Chronicle* and his existing newspaper, the *Daily Express*. The spectre of another Northcliffe bestriding Fleet Street unsurprisingly failed to meet with Lloyd George's approval; thus the Prime Minister's factotum, 'Freddie' Guest, was deputed to shoot the Canadian's fox. Relations between Donald and Lloyd George grew increasingly cool. At a meeting between the editor and Guest, on 28th May, Donald stated that:

"the whole scheme [involving Beaverbrook] was a very dirty business and...I

¹⁹ Letter from Gwynne to Davies, 17th September, 1918; I.W.M., Gwynne Papers, HAG/20.

²⁰ Robert Donald, 'Daily Chronicle Negotiations 1917-1918', n.d.; H.L.R.O., Donald Papers, D/2/3, f.2.

²¹ *Op. cit.*, ff.2-3.

²² Donald, diary entry, 18th April, 1918; *op. cit.*, f.9.

could not be expected to trust people who adopted such methods";²³

amongst whom could be included Lloyd George himself. The once amicable relationship between the editor of the leading Liberal daily and one of the foremost Liberal politicians had deteriorated markedly since Lloyd George entered 10 Downing Street. Following its adoption of a watchful stance during the *cause célèbre* surrounding the 'Maurice debate', Donald had intrigued many journalists, and angered Lloyd George by swiftly engaging Maurice as the newspaper's Military Correspondent; in so doing, Donald effectively signalled the break of *The Daily Chronicle* from the Prime Minister.

Thereafter the newspaper became increasingly identified with that section of the Press - heretofore overwhelmingly Unionist in composition - which defended the General Staff from attacks initiated in Downing Street. The Prime Minister's recent *bête noir*, Maurice noted on 7th September the absence of a congratulatory message for the achievements of the British forces on the Western Front emanating from Whitehall. Maurice further noted that although the Canadian Government had congratulated General Currie and the Canadian Corps upon their achievements of the counter-offensive, and that even the Trades Union Congress was amongst the plethora of bodies which had sent congratulatory messages to Haig:

"there has been no word from our own Government. Why has our Government expressed no recognition of Sir Douglas Haig's leadership and the valour of our men? We are often accused of concealing the performances of our own troops and giving the credit to others. This time there has been no concealment, which makes it more remarkable that so conspicuous a success should have been allowed by the War Cabinet to pass unnoticed."²⁴

The Daily Chronicle continued its criticism of Lloyd George's unedifying attitude in a short leading article the same day. The article which appeared under the robust title of 'Well Done Haig!', expressed something of the gratitude towards Haig which Maurice felt should also have been emanating from the War Cabinet.

On 12th September, Lloyd George delivered an important speech in his birthplace, Manchester. It was felt in certain quarters that such an occasion would be made use of by the Prime Minister in order to make an *amende honorable* to Haig and the B.E.F.; he did not. The following day *The Daily Chronicle* returned to its attack upon Lloyd George, stating that:

"He did right in doing homage to Marshal Foch, but his omission to make any reference to the prominent part played by Sir Douglas Haig in the achievement of the recent victories was very marked. It is a small mind that petulantly refuses to acknowledge the services of a great soldier."²⁵

Strachey also, somewhat pointedly, noted in *The Spectator* that Lloyd George:

"did not see fit to say any word in praise of Sir Douglas Haig, whose name was not even mentioned."²⁶

The Daily Chronicle, in its last critical issue before being acquired by Lloyd George, once more criticised the War Cabinet's failure to acknowledge the part played in the victorious advance of the Allies by Haig and the B.E.F.; thus the newspaper observed on 3rd October that:

"The British successes on the West[ern] front since 8th August are much the greatest in scale ever won by the British Army or a British General.... Within the period under review General Pershing and General Allenby have received official congratulations of the British Government, and Mr. Lloyd George has

²³ Donald, diary entry, 28th May, 1918; *op. cit.*, f.15.

²⁴ Maurice, *The Daily Chronicle*, 7th September, 1918.

²⁵ Leading article, *The Daily Chronicle*, 13th September, 1918.

²⁶ Leading article, *The Spectator*, 3rd October, 1918.

congratulated Marshal Foch. Various private organizations have sent congratulations to Sir Douglas Haig, including the Labour Party and the National Liberal Federation; but the War Cabinet has remained silent." ²⁷

The last point being a sly dig at Lloyd George's lack of an effective party machinery behind him. However, with the success of the Allied offensive signalling the imminent end to the War, Lloyd George sought to construct one; the irony is that *The Daily Chronicle*, containing as it did in 1918 two of the Prime Minister's fiercest journalistic critics in Donald and Maurice, should fall as one of the first victims to that construction. The direction of Lloyd George's covetous glances had been signalled to Donald by Beaverbrook early in April; for the editor was informed, on 18th April, that Lloyd George was:

"very anxious to get hold of an influential paper on whose support he could rely." ²⁸

With the prospect of a General Election entering into Lloyd George's consciousness during the course of the summer of 1918, a note of urgency entered into the previously languid negotiations. Thus provoked, Guest dispatched a letter to Davies on 24th August, in which he laid before the Prime Minister's Private Secretary the details of the scheme. For the purchase of the newspaper would pivot around Dalziel, with the Berry brothers (owners of *The Sunday Times*) and Beaverbrook firmly excluded. Guest concluded by stating that:

"The P.M. can now with his influence with H.D. close and achieve a very great & vital coup in his own interest." ²⁹

Thus encouraged the negotiations gathered pace; indeed by 1st October Riddell was able to note that:

"The 'Daily Chronicle' purchase has been completed. L.G. is to have full control of the editorial policy through Sir H. Dalziel, who will in effect be his agent." ³⁰

The final act in the drama came swiftly, particularly so when contrasted with the months of laborious months of negotiation which preceded it. On Wednesday, 3rd October, the newspaper's staff were informed that the title had been sold. The reaction in the offices of *The Daily Chronicle* was one of consternation; Donald and Maurice immediately responded by announcing their departure from the newspaper.

Maurice was himself one of the spurs to Lloyd George's purchase of the newspaper, if only to silence this one critic. Ironically due to Donald's exertions Maurice's pen was not stilled for long, for his erstwhile editor exerted himself to ensure that the former DMO was offered, and accepted, employment on the *Daily News*. Thus Lloyd George was frustrated in his aim of silencing Maurice; however he did succeed in acquiring a docile organ of the Liberal Press upon which he, as opposed to the Unionist members of the Coalition, could rely. The newspaper was purchased by the Prime Minister's 'friends' on 5th October, for the astronomical sum of £1,600,000. Henceforth the previously critical Liberal daily was silent; in making this purchase Lloyd George was effectively paying the Opposition Press the compliment that he had withheld from Haig. In addition to silencing the pen of Donald, and in ensuring himself of support from a metropolitan Liberal daily, Lloyd George was firing the first shot in the 'Coupon' election † campaign, a campaign in which the Prime Minister prepared himself for his memoirs by engaging

²⁷ *The Daily Chronicle*, 3rd October, 1918.

²⁸ Donald, diary entry, 18th April, 1918; *op. cit.*, f.10.

²⁹ Letter from Guest to Davies, 24th August, 1918; H.L.R.O., Beaverbrook Papers, Lloyd George Papers, F/21/2/34.

³⁰ Riddell, diary entry, 1st October, 1918; quoted in Riddell, *op. cit.*, pp.352-53.

† 'Coupons'; in reality letters co-signed by both Lloyd George and Bonar Law; attesting to the endorsement of the Coalition, were issued to one candidate in each contest. In the absence of a formal party structure they served to differentiate between Lloyd George-Liberals and Asquithian-Liberals.

in a positively Napoleonic re-writing of history.

For at the election in December, he presented both himself and his Government as the determined prosecutors of the war; scarcely six months after engaging in peace discussions with the German delegation at The Hague, Lloyd George was striving to blacken Asquith's name as one who had countenanced a compromise settlement to the war - a vile calumny if ever there was one. The sale of *The Daily Chronicle* was announced to an unsuspecting world by *The Morning Post* on 7th October. The newspaper commented in a sardonic manner that it was:

"at least a coincidence.....[that the sale of *The Daily Chronicle* should occur just as] the journal was developing into an outspoken critic of Lloyd-Georgian politics".³¹

On 15th October, during question time in the House of Commons, the prominent Asquithian-Liberal, William Pringle asked Bonar Law whether his attention:

"had been called to the recent purchase of London newspapers for the purpose of changing their political policy, whether the Government would set up a Committee to inquire into the tendencies towards monopolistic control of the Press, and whether a supply of paper would be granted for new newspapers to promote the policy of the newspapers purchased."³²

Unsurprisingly the Government would not oblige on either count; for as *The National Review* observed, Lloyd George possessed:

"a positive craze for the Press, being convinced that, given sufficient journalistic backing, nothing else matters."³³

Despite the hyperbole, it was doubtless true to state that in a situation in which the electorate - containing women for the first time - was going to the polls for the first time in eight eventful years, the rôle of the Press was indeed pivotal.

As Lloyd George's relations with Northcliffe slipped to their nadir so the Prime Minister became more reliant upon the influence of another Harmsworth, Lord Rothermere. In a letter to the Prime Minister, written on 14th November, Rothermere bluntly informed Lloyd George that:

"Your Administration has been sustained by a Coalition of the Press, a section of the Liberal Party, and the Conservative Party. Without the aid of the Press, it is a fair thing to say that the present Coalition Government could not have survived the storms of the last eighteen months."³⁴

The price for his support, and that of other newspaper proprietors, was a step in the peerage; thus Rothermere was promised a viscountcy, and Hulton and Dalziel a barony each (the King complied with regard to Rothermere, delayed Dalziel's peerage until 1921, and refused outright to confer any honour above a baronetcy upon Hulton).

Hence at the 'Coupon' election the Labour Party found itself at a serious disadvantage without a major national newspaper with which to place its policy before the electors. A similar situation confronted the Asquithian-Liberals. With *The Daily Chronicle* under the ownership of Dalziel, and *The Manchester Guardian* firmly of the Lloyd Georgian persuasion, the anti-Coalition Liberals found themselves in dire straits, for:

"they were reduced to minority representation in the national press.

³¹ *The Morning Post*, 7th October, 1918.

³² Pringle, House of Commons, 15th October, 1918; *Hansard*, Parliamentary Debates (Commons), *op. cit.*, Columns 78-94.

³³ *The National Review*; quoted by R. Pound & G. Harmsworth, *op. cit.*, p.667.

³⁴ Letter from Rothermere to Lloyd George, 14th November, 1918; H.L.R.O., Beaverbrook Library, Beaverbrook Papers, C/282 (Copy).

Massingham's tergiversation left them without a weekly forum. On Sundays they were voiceless. Their chief resources were 'The Westminster Gazette' and the 'Daily News', with the 'Star' as its appendage." ³⁵

As McKenna later remarked to Gardiner, the *Daily News* had:

"almost single-handed in the London press...[succeeded in keeping]....our flag flying." ³⁶

It was a sad commentary on the dire consequences for the Liberal Party of the Asquith-Lloyd George schism.

Provoked by the Northcliffe Press, Lloyd George began to emit bellicose noises with regard to the fate of the Germans at the forthcoming Peace conference. Despite the degree of obfuscation practised by Lloyd George - the *Daily News* echoed *The Times* in inquiring of its readers:

"Has Mr Lloyd George come to you and told you honestly what he means on any of the great questions on which he claims your mandate?" ³⁷

- the Coalition gained a massive majority. The Unionists won 384 seats, the Coalition Liberals 138, and the Pro-Coalition Labour candidates 14 seats; on the Opposition side, Labour gained some 58 seats (Henderson, MacDonald and Snowden were not amongst their number), the Asquithian Liberals 27 (amongst the prominent Liberals to lose their seats were Pringle, Simon, McKenna, and Asquith himself who lost the East Fife constituency seat which he had held since 1886), 7 Irish Nationalists and some 73 Sinn Fein members.

The effect of the election was to confirm the disintegration of the Liberal Party which had occurred over the previous two years and remove the 'Irish Question' from the centre stage of British politics; whilst hinting at the emergence of the Labour Party as a serious political force. However the election also served to underline the extent to which Lloyd George was reliant upon the Unionists; henceforth just as the number of Lloyd Georgian Liberals was overshadowed by that of their Conservative allies, so the Prime Minister would increasingly be made aware that the influence of *The Daily Chronicle* was as nothing compared to the newspapers controlled by Lords Northcliffe, Rothermere and Beaverbrook.

³⁵ S. Koss, *op. cit.*, p.344.

³⁶ Letter from McKenna to Gardiner, 19th December, 1918; B.L.P.E.S., Archives Division, L.S.E., Gardiner Papers, 1/22.

³⁷ Leading article, *Daily News*, 14th December, 1918.

CONCLUSION.

The influence exerted by the Press upon the political debate of the Great War did much to validate Hearst's prediction that:

"Government by newspaper.....will be realised in the 20th Century." ¹

The momentum towards that position was such that the political appreciation of the rôle of the Press shifted to a marked degree; one which is marked by the antithetical stances of Asquith and Lloyd George. In 1914 the Prime Minister was able to boast of not trafficking with the Press; by 1918 its central place in the political calculations of all but the most myopic parties was assured. A shift indicated by Lloyd George's anxiety to successfully conclude the purchase of *The Daily Chronicle*; anxiety, which the events of the subsequent 'Coupon' Election showed to be justified. For Lloyd George, above all other politicians, was aware of the importance which the Press had attained; a point bluntly brought home to him by Rothermere's assertion of 14th November that:

"Your Administration has been sustained by a Coalition of the Press, a section of the Liberal Party, and the Conservative Party. Without the aid of the Press, it is a fair thing to say that the present Coalition Government could not have survived the storms of the last eighteen months." ²

Once installed he bent his efforts to ensuring that the same fate did not befall him through any inattention; an attitude which gave rise to the exaggerated concern for Press opinion and the wholesale inclusion of Press magnates within his particular 'tent'. Whilst the former premier opined that:

"the Press had ceased to a large extent to be in any trustworthy sense a news-agency" ³

his successor was accused of possessing:

"a positive craze for the Press, being convinced that, given sufficient journalistic backing, nothing else matters." ⁴

The former's troubled relationship with the Press contributed greatly to the decline of his political career.

It is one of the ironies of the period that the sophistication of Lloyd George's dealings with the Press, arising as they did out of a recognition of its potency, inhibited Press influence in a manner which Asquith's Olympian disdain singularly failed to attain. As Spender noted, the Unionist Press flourished most readily in the absence of other more usual sources of authority:

"The virtual suspension of Parliament gave newspapers a power which they do not exercise in normal times, and the atmosphere of war furnished a unique opportunity of playing upon popular alarms and prejudices." ⁵

Prior to the *Burgfrieden* the Press acted as the agent of party rather than as its substitute. The 'Curragh Mutiny' reveals the energies of the Unionist Press deployed in fomenting sympathy for

¹ William Randolph Hearst, leading article, *New York Journal*, 31st December, 1899; see also the citation in the Preface, Note 1, p.4.

² Letter from Rothermere to Lloyd George, 14th November, 1918; H.L.R.O., Beaverbrook Library, Beaverbrook Papers, C/282 (Copy); see also the citation in Chapter VII, Note 34, p.178.

³ Letter from Asquith to Gardiner, 16th December, 1918; L.S.E., Archives Division, B.L.P.E.S., Gardiner Papers 1/1A.

⁴ *The National Review*; quoted by R. Pound & G. Harmsworth, *op. cit.*, p.667.

⁵ Spender, *The Public Life*, (Cassell & Co. 1925)., Volume II, p.122.

the 3rd Cavalry Brigade by promoting the doubtful concept of 'loyal disloyalty', and latterly towards the exploitation of the Government's imbecilic mishandling of the crisis. However to extend the martial metaphor, while the Press remained an arm of exploitation, it did not yet sample the delights of strategic direction. Any pretension on the part of the Unionist Press to the latter rôle was limited by the tendency of the Liberal Government to formulate policy in isolation from the uncomfortable political realities of the day. Though the activities of the Unionist Press were conducted on a narrow tactical front they were no less successful for that. The efficacy of the Press agitation in politicising the Officer Corps did much to forestall the Government's policy of coercing Ulster into Home Rule; yet one must bear in mind that the instrument of that conclusion was the Army rather than the rotary press.

The most effective display of Press influence in the crisis concerned those in which 'discreet' pressure was brought to bear upon Asquith by Robinson in their interview of Sunday, 22nd March, 1914; and latterly that exerted by Gwynne upon French to resign his post as CIGS in the wake of the 'peccant paragraphs'. Whilst both examples illustrate the extent to which the 'Prestige Press', in the form of *The Times* and *The Morning Post*, was able to privately intercede with principal figures in the drama, the practice also serves to point up the ready appreciation of Press influence as understood at that time. For such an exercise of politic intercession rested upon an unspoken acknowledgement of the influence which the Press could wield if forced to resort to more public forms of persuasion. Thus when Robinson entered 10 Downing Street that Sunday evening his way was cleared by the looming figure of his proprietor. Such intercessions depended for their effectiveness upon ready access to senior political figures. The absence of such access, as during the 'July Days', served to frustrate that avenue of influence. Whilst *The Times* failed to elicit a deterring enunciation of British policy from the Foreign Office before the casting of the die, its recourse to trading upon its 'Ministerial' reputation effectively ensured that Printing House Square attempted to supplant the vacillating Cabinet with a clarity of message of which the factional Liberal Government was incapable. In so doing the newspaper attempted to exploit its perceived influence to attain a goal which its actual influence had failed to achieve.

The apogee of the Unionist Press's political influence occurred in the period between Britain's entry into the war and Lloyd George's accession to the premiership. The renunciation of partisan Parliamentary activity, which followed in the wake of the German incursion into Belgium, allowed the Unionist Press to assume ever greater prominence in a political arena deserted by many of the players. In this quiescent atmosphere the Unionist Press confronted a greatly compromised executive and a weakened legislature. An unbridled Press opposed a Cabinet, already gravely weakened by the failure of its pacific intentions, which was acutely vulnerable on its right flank; the charge of inadequate prosecution of the war was made with some frequency and no little effect. Despite Koss's assertion, the Press was not merely the mouth-piece of disgruntled politicians, rather it was increasingly independent of political control. The extent of that autonomy was revealed by the publication of Moore's 'Amiens Dispatch', together with Fyfe's corroborative account in the *Daily Mail*, which shattered the *Burgfrieden* entered into by the front benches only days earlier. The incident is rather unusual in the course of the war in that the dispatch itself was essentially an illustration of traditional news gathering. The dispatches' impact was heightened by their unexpected appearance, for not only did it fracture the only recently constructed party truce but it did so in a manner calculated to promote doubts as to the ability of the Liberal Government to successfully prosecute the war; a line of argument which the Unionist Press was to pursue until the formation of the Lloyd George Coalition.

Throughout Asquith's wartime premiership the Government which he headed was vulnerable on its right flank. The charge that the Liberal Government was unsuited, either by personality or by principle, to the prosecution of industrial warfare was an effective one; its attribution to the Lloyd George Coalition would have been less efficacious. The simplicity of the message was tailored to the strengths of mass-market Press agitation. Whilst Asquith's difficulties, exacerbated by the existence of a panoply of potential premiers prepared to 'out-bid' him in bellicosity, contrived to encourage the activities of the 'Prestige' Press. Lloyd George was not similarly inhibited. The co-existence of both factors contrived to ensure that Press attacks upon Asquith's Ministry were all too credible, and all too ubiquitous. The Press in turn was in a stronger position than under Lloyd George. For having grasped the initiative yielded by the *Burgfrieden* the Unionist Press was able to shape the form and direction of political debate in the country. That such a debate was in a direction antithetical to the Government's interests was not coincidental. Thus both sections of the Unionist Press attacked the Teutonophile attitude of the Liberal Party through the person of Haldane, were critical of peripheral strategic actions initiated

by the Cabinet rather than the Military; initially with regard to Dunkirk, latterly concerning the Dardanelles; and proved most effective in reviving the debate over conscription. The latter point, first raised by Moore's celebrated 'Amiens Dispatch' and latterly by Repington's 'Shells Scandal', was to prove a redoubtable stick with which to beat the 'pacifist' Asquithian Ministries.

The destruction of the Liberal Government acted as a powerful testimony to the influence of the Press beyond what was in fact credible. For Liberal critics the events of May 1915, and still more of December 1916, affirmed their belief in the destructive power of Northcliffe. It was a belief which refused to acknowledge that the Press was only able to exploit existing fissures within the Government. Time was to reveal the Press to be rather less efficacious in attempting to breach more formidable positions, its effectiveness being further degraded by Lloyd George's fracture of the Unionist Press. The Liberal backbencher Walter Roch observed that:

"It is possibly one more instance of the good luck which never deserted Mr. Lloyd George throughout the war, that Lord Northcliffe, unlike M. Clemenceau, did not combine the ambitions of a politician with those of a journalist!"⁶

It was rather to the contrary. For when Northcliffe acted as a journalist his actions were likely to discomfort the Government, when his enthusiasms were diverted into rather more nebulous forms, his quiescence, and that of his newspapers, swiftly followed. It is an indication of Lloyd George's sophistication in his dealings with the Press that he should seek to ameliorate Press opposition by the appointment of Press magnates to posts and titles before their resistance should be revealed. Repington for one was left to reflect that:

"Songs may inspire us, - not from his lyre;
Deeds will be done, - while he boasts his quiescence"⁷

The number of the Opposition Press was further reduced by the entry into Government of a number of political sponsors; the most notable example being the quiescence which Milner's entry occasioned in Robinson and *The Times*. Hence, even as his Ministry began, so Lloyd George was faced with a much reduced threat of negative Press comment; an irony given that as the destructive ability of the Unionist Press declined, so the Prime Ministerial appraisal of its importance rose markedly. Lloyd George's position was eased still further by the inability of the remaining Opposition Press to discover an alternative premier around whom to coalesce. The failure to discover such a figure, combined with the Opposition Press's inability to compensate for the defection of the Northcliffe Press, served to ensure that the campaigns against Lloyd George were of lesser import than those which assailed his predecessor.

The degree to which Press influence was dependent upon political circumstance is apparent in contrasting the successful 'Shells Scandal' agitation with the unsuccessful campaign which culminated in the 'Maurice' debate. The former saw the Cabinet out-flanked and assailed by the combined might of the Northcliffe and Unionist Presses. The effectiveness of the agitation was under-pinned by two chief points: the Press had, from the outset, laboured to establish in the public mind the unreliability of the Liberal Government in actively prosecuting the war, and there existed a number of credible candidates for the premiership eager to promote their bellicose credentials. The latter instance saw a Prime Minister at the head of a Ministry united if only in bellicosity. The Opposition Press was an emaciated figure, with *The Morning Post* and *The Daily Chronicle* offering but a pale imitation of *The Times* and the *Daily Mail*. The technical nature of the charge also served to inhibit the effectiveness of any recourse to public opinion; whilst the inability of the Opposition Coalition to resolve the absurdity of supplanting Lloyd George and the Unionists in favour of the 'bellicose' Asquith and the discredited Asquithian-Liberals was rather more than problematic. Nevertheless the events of the Great War affirmed Burke's assertion that:

"Those who have been once intoxicated with power....can never willingly

⁶ Walter Roch, *Life of David Lloyd George*, (London. 1920)., Volume IV, p.164.; also quoted by J.M. McEwen, 'Northcliffe and Lloyd George at War, 1914-1918', *Historical Journal*, 24/3 (1981)., p.672.

⁷ Robert Browning, *The Lost Leader*, lines 19-20.

abandon it." ⁸

The Press having developed its own political voice was loathe to relapse to repeating the cries of others. The intoxication was deep and lasting.

⁸ Edmund Burke, *Letter to a Member of the National Assembly* (1791); quoted in *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke*, Volume VII: *The French Revolution 1790-1794*, edited by L.G. Mitchell, (O.U.P. 1989.), p.301.

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Lord Robert Cecil, 1 st Viscount Cecil of Chelwood	MSS.
Lord Kitchener of Khartoum - Lieutenant-Colonel R.J. Marker	MSS.
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Lieutenant-General Sir James Wolfe Murray -	
General Sir William Robert Robertson	MSS.
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Henry Lawson Webster Lawson, 1 st Viscount Burnham	MSS.	
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T.B. Ford	MSS.	
Lovat Fraser	MSS.	
Field Marshal Sir John French, 1 st Earl French of Ypres	MSS.	
Howell Arthur Gwynne	MSS.	
Field Marshal Sir Henry Hughes Wilson	MSS.	(Microfilm).

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Major-General Sir John Frederick Maurice	MSS.	
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Alfred George Gardiner	MSS.	
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NATIONAL LIBRARY OF SCOTLAND.

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Lord Robert Cecil, 1 st Viscount Cecil of Chelwood	MSS.
Sir Edward Grey, 1 st Viscount Grey of Falloden	MSS.
Sir Maurice Pascal Alers Hankey, 1 st Baron Hankey	MSS.
Lord Kitchener of Khartoum	MSS.
Lieutenant-General Sir George Macdonagh	MSS.

THE TIMES ARCHIVE.

Ernest Brain	MSS.
Geoffrey (Robinson) Dawson.	MSS.
Alfred Charles William Harmsworth, 1 st Viscount Northcliffe	MSS.
Lieutenant-Colonel Charles à Court Repington	MSS.
Harry Parry Robinson	MSS.
James Edward Thurston	MSS.
Henry Wickham Steed	MSS.

UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE.

Sir Winston Spencer Churchill	MSS.	(Churchill College).
Reginald Balliol Brett, 2 nd Viscount Esher	MSS.	(Churchill College).
Sir Maurice Pascal Alers Hankey, 1 st Baron Hankey	MSS.	(Churchill College).
Charles Hardinge, 1 st Baron Hardinge of Penshurst	MSS.	(University Library).
General Sir Henry Seymour Rawlinson, 1 st Baron Rawlinson	MSS.	(Churchill College).
Field Marshal Jan Christian Smuts	MSS.	(Microfilm, University Library).

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Howell Arthur Gwynne	MSS.	(Glensk-Bathurst Papers; Brotherton Library).
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Charles Prestwich Scott	MSS.
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Walter Runciman, 1 st Viscount Runciman of Doxford	MSS.	(University Library).
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Herbert Henry Asquith, 1 st Earl of Oxford and Asquith	MSS.	(Microfilm; New Bodleian Library).
Geoffrey (Robinson) Dawson.	MSS.	(New Bodleian Library).
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