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British Liberal Internationalism in Retreat: the Channel Tunnel
Controversy and the Naval Defence Act, 1880-1894

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Abstract

This thesis considers the decline of idealistic 'liberal internationalism' within British politics between the Liberal election victory of 1880 and the final resignation of William Gladstone as Prime Minister in 1894. It argues that by this latter date British political attitudes towards international relations had dramatically changed. Where once policymaking was directed with reference to British power and the progress of peace, by the 1890s government decisions were driven by an assumption of British weakness and foreign strength, with sudden, unprovoked and unforeseen war a constant concern. In its conclusion, the thesis explains how this changed environment eventually forced the unrepentant optimist Gladstone out of office by his refusal to endorse Britain's continuing involvement in the European arms race.

In charting these developments the thesis identifies a trinity of themes which brought about the liberal internationalist collapse. These were (1) the anxieties about British vulnerability here termed 'defence pessimism'; (2) the politicisation of the armed forces' officer corps; (3) the manipulation of 'public opinion'. Building on the work of military, naval, social and intellectual historians, the thesis deconstructs many of the foundations upon which the narrative of British defence and foreign policy during this period has been built. British vulnerability is shown to have been largely a myth, generated by 'alarmists' within the British armed forces themselves, in their quest for a larger defence budget; meanwhile assumptions about popular support for the 'anti-internationalist' policy shift of the 1890s are challenged with an analysis which argues that public opinion was misrepresented or ignored in favour of the alarmists. Throughout, these three themes are contrasted with the inability of the liberal internationalists to respond to the anti-internationalist attacks, with the conclusion that the defeat of the former ideology was reflective of a wider malaise within contemporary liberal thought and organisation.

These themes are examined in detail in the two case studies which make up the bulk of the thesis. The first is a study of the 1882 Channel Tunnel attempt, which was cancelled after the War Office whipped up a media 'scare' over fears of French invasion. Unlike previous histories of the nineteenth-century Tunnel this study provides a balanced account of the pro-Tunnel case, framing its defeat not simply as a victory for Francophobic defence pessimism but also as a decisive defeat for liberal internationalism. In the first in-depth look at the state of 'public opinion', the study, challenges the established narrative of overwhelming and popular opposition to the Tunnel borne of British 'insularity', revealing substantial support especially among working class organisations.

The second study looks at the genesis and passage of the 1889 Naval Defence Act, which formally established the Royal Navy's 'two-power standard'. It is commonly believed that the Act was the result of a popular 'navalist' campaign for naval increases and that it enjoyed widespread support both in and out of Parliament. This study completely rejects that assessment, and instead shows how the navalists' success relied not on public support, but on pessimistic hyperbole, a misrepresentation of the strength of the Navy and a lacklustre political response. In a long analysis of the Bill's parliamentary passage the thesis dramatically reverses our understanding of the Liberal Party's attitude to the Act, revealing that, although disorganised, the Party voted repeatedly against the programme, which was framed by the Conservative government as an explicitly 'anti-internationalist' policy. This new understanding is then applied to Gladstone's 1894 resignation, showing how he became a victim of the 'transformed' politics of national defence.

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List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

CRL, UoB	Cadbury Research Library, University of Birmingham
CTC	Channel Tunnel Company
IAL	International Arbitration League
KHLC	Kent History and Library Centre
NID	Naval Intelligence Department
<i>ODNB</i>	<i>Oxford Dictionary of National Biography</i>
Parl. Deb.	<i>Hansard Parliamentary Debates</i>
SCRC	Submarine Continental Railway Company
SER	South Eastern Railway Company
TNA	The National Archives of the UK

Introduction

Framing the Retreat of Liberal Internationalism

A true Colossus, firmly poised and bold,
The light of principles to hoist and hold
Amidst time-serving veerings and vagaries,
And, like the Sun-God of the Rhodian Chares,
While a world's wonder to the common view,
A useful beacon too.

'The Colossus of Words', *Punch*, 13 Dec. 1879, p. 270.¹

¹ See Figure 1.

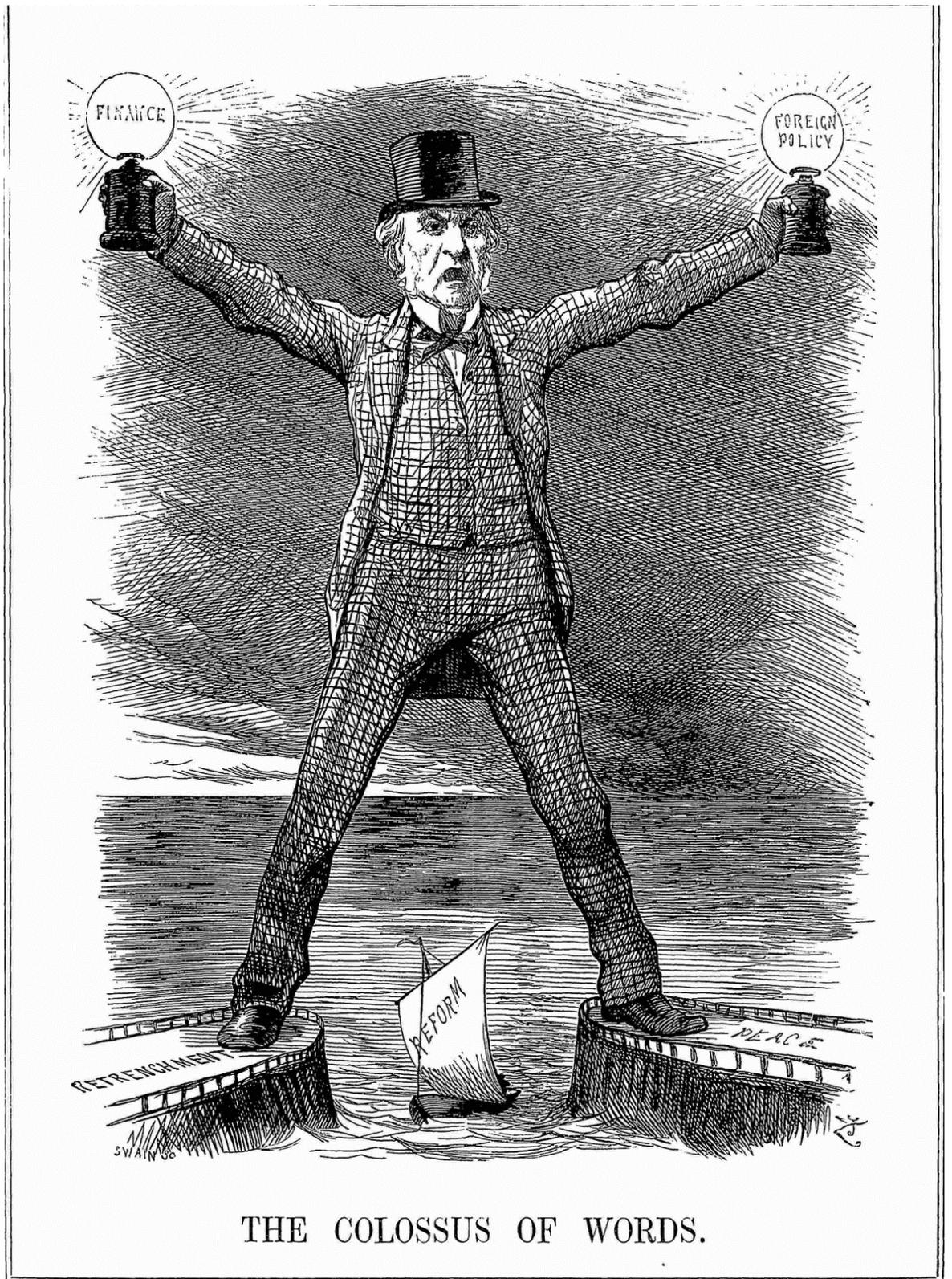


Figure 1: 'The Colossus of Words'.

An image from Gladstone's Midlothian campaign. He holds the beacons of 'Finance' and 'Foreign Policy', his feet resting firmly on the safe harbour of 'Peace' and 'Retrenchment'. Few images better conveyed the awe Gladstone inspired in his supporters and the high regard in which his liberal internationalism was held. *Punch*, 13 Dec. 1879, p. 271.

In the 1880 British General Election, following six years of increasingly ‘imperialist’ and ‘jingo’ government under Benjamin Disraeli’s Conservative Party, the Liberals led by William Ewart Gladstone swept to power on a platform of ‘peace, retrenchment and reform’ [Figure 1]. In a series of speeches during his campaign to win the seat of Midlothian, Gladstone had vividly characterised the differences between the two parties as a struggle between good and evil.² In the Conservatives he saw the savage, almost bestial side of humanity, whose foreign policy was driven by the ‘baleful spirit of domination’. Against this he positioned the Liberal spirit of cosmopolitanism, with its belief in international cooperation built on a foundation of law and justice. Safely removed from the tensions of the European mainland, protected by the Channel and its powerful navy, he argued that the United Kingdom was in a position to promote liberalism across the Continent. Under a Liberal government, the country would be destined for ‘the noblest part that any nation was called upon to play...a part blessed in its origin, worthy of our Christianity...the work of peace and the work of goodwill among men.’³

Fourteen years later, an eighty-four year old Gladstone found himself dejectedly contemplating his final resignation as Prime Minister. His government of 1880, founded on so much hope, had collapsed in 1886 when the Liberals were split in two over Home Rule for Ireland. The subsequent Conservative administration under Robert Gascoyne-Cecil, third Marquess of Salisbury, oversaw increased tensions with European neighbours and a large-scale increase in defence spending, to Gladstone’s growing dismay. Although the Liberals returned to power following a lacklustre victory in the 1892 General Election, Gladstone faced a fundamentally hostile political environment. The proud, confident nation to which he had appealed in 1880 had seemingly disappeared. Barely eighteen months into his fourth premiership he was presented with demands for an enormous increase in naval spending by the First Lord of the Admiralty. The increases, claimed the professional naval chiefs, were necessary to keep pace with the fleets of France and Russia, from whom Britain was vulnerable to sudden attack. The Conservative

² Robert Kelly, ‘Midlothian: A Study in Politics and Ideas’, *Victorian Studies*, 4 (1960), pp. 119-140.

³ William Ewart Gladstone, 22 March 1880 in *Political Speeches in Scotland March and April 1880* (Edinburgh: Andrew Elliot, 1880), p. 222.

Party was keenly pressing for a new naval programme in the Commons, while outside parliament ‘public opinion’ also appeared to be clamouring for such a policy. In January 1894, Gladstone summarised his objections in ‘a memorandum remarkable in the annals of British radical writing’.⁴ He condemned the proposed plan as in excess of public expectation and political precedent; a threat to ‘sound finance’; and a sop to the ‘aggression’ of Britain’s armed forces and the ‘weakness of alarmism’. In language recalling his Midlothian speeches, he refused to ‘dress Liberalism in Tory clothes’:

I shall not break to pieces the continuous action of my political life, nor trample on the tradition received from every colleague who has ever been my teacher[.]

Above all I cannot & will not add to the perils and coming calamities of Europe by an act of militarism which will be found to involve a policy, and which excuses thus the militarism of Germany, France or Russia. England’s providential part is to help peace, and liberty of which peace is the nurse; this policy is the foe of both.⁵

However remarkable, the protest fell on deaf ears. Finding himself in a minority of two in his Cabinet, Gladstone resigned in March 1894. ‘Militarism’, it seemed, had triumphed over peace; the ‘alarmism’ of the armed forces and ‘public opinion’ proved more than a match for the man who had practically defined British budgetary policy since the 1860s. As Admiral John Fisher, then the Third Naval Lord, cheerfully recalled: ‘We got the ships and Mr. Gladstone went.’⁶

*

This thesis analyses the transformation in attitudes towards foreign affairs and national defence that occurred in Britain between 1880 and 1894. Its central argument is that this period was characterised by the retreat of ‘liberal internationalism’, which was pushed from the public and political spheres by a vigorous ‘anti-internationalist’ attack. The primary drivers of this change were the officer corps of the British armed forces, who, as avowed enemies of civilian control over defence policy, used political pressure and sophisticated media manipulation to influence

⁴ H.C.G. Matthew, *Gladstone: 1875-1898* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 351.

⁵ Gladstone, ‘The Plan’, 20 Jan. 1894 in H.C.G. Matthew (ed.), *The Gladstone Diaries*, vol. XIII (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 364.

⁶ Lord Fisher, *Records* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1919), p. 53.

government policymaking towards their own extreme and illiberal interpretation of Britain's geopolitical position. National defence, they argued, was too serious a subject to be left to the 'amateur' politicians. Instead, they embraced the language of 'scientific expertise', which was growing in popularity during the 1880s, to portray themselves as disinterested patriots fighting to save the nation from the 'fanatical economists' who wanted to cut defence spending, most of whom were to be found in the Liberal party. Allying with sympathetic individuals within the Conservative party and the press, these men succeeded in reframing British defence policy, enormously expanding the influence of the professionals at the War Office and Admiralty. By the 1890s, British defence policy was devised not to fit the ideological or economic doctrines of the politicians, but primarily to meet the strategic demands – not to say prejudices and paranoia – of the services. Crucially, the thesis maintains that the anxieties about British naval and military vulnerability which acted as a catalyst for these developments were largely baseless, and that Gladstone was driven out of office in 1894 by a 'myth' of British weakness.

Within this wider narrative, the thesis considers the ways in which the Liberal and Conservative parties responded to these developments. Distracted, divided and lacking coherent leadership, the Liberals made little serious attempt to defend the policies on which they had fought the 1880 election. Opposition to the 'vested interests' of the Army and Navy formed a core plank of Liberal ideology. Nevertheless, during the 1880s the party, with little more than a whimper in objection, witnessed professional soldiers and sailors pick apart the principle of civilian control, reverse government policy and push the defence budget ever higher. Meanwhile the Conservatives, already closely connected to the armed forces through personal networks and political sympathies, were soon won over to the policy aims of the military lobbyists. During the 1880s, Tory MPs and Peers happily pushed for a diminution of the role of parliament in foreign and defence policy, and eagerly embraced the cynical 'realist' view of international relations in order to justify their views. The thesis is especially critical of the attitudes and actions of Gladstone and Salisbury. Both men, in government and opposition, were offered a number of opportunities to slow or reverse the collapse of civilian authority. Yet neither man did: while

Gladstone, distracted by the Irish issue, largely ignored the threat until it was too late, Salisbury took the opportunity to place himself at the head of the 'anti-internationalist' policy shift, sacrificing his commitment to a measured defence policy in the process.

To illustrate these developments the thesis is built around two revisionist case studies of major though understudied events. The first examines Sir Edward Watkin's attempt to dig a Channel Tunnel between Dover and Calais in the early 1880s, which was prevented following an invasion scare whipped up by the War Office. Arguing that the project's defeat should be regarded as a major setback for liberal internationalism, the study shows how the often ignored Tunnel controversy reveals an enormous amount about Britons' attitudes to war and international affairs. The second case study reconsiders the genesis and parliamentary passage of the Naval Defence Act, Lord Salisbury's enormous programme of naval expansion which formerly introduced the 'two power standard' of strength for the Royal Navy. In the first detailed political study of the Act, it is argued that this was not a popular piece of well-balanced Conservative legislation, but rather a triumph for the anti-internationalist worldview of Admiralty lobbyists, built on a misrepresentation of the true needs of the Royal Navy; the narrative is continued in chapter ten to show how Liberal failure to formerly oppose the Act led directly to Gladstone's 1894 resignation. Through these studies the thesis demonstrates how by the 1890s policymakers were operating under substantially changed and largely mistaken assumptions about Britain's defence needs, capabilities and vulnerabilities. Where once British power and European quiescence were taken for granted, the political elites were now largely convinced of the Empire's susceptibility to immediate and unprovoked attack. Internationalist Liberals and Radicals had failed to effectively defend their own ideals and outlook against this rise in realist pessimism, plunging them into a serious ideological and political crisis.

The 'Transformation' of Politics in the 1880s

Historians have long considered the 1880s to be a period of political 'transformation', not only in Britain but across Europe.⁷ Although its previously dominant position had been severely shaken by the 'great depression' of the 1870s, by 1880 liberalism was in power across the Continent's more advanced economies. At the end of the decade, however, the political right had triumphantly returned, buttressed by the adoption of a new harder language of jingoism and imperialism calculated to appeal to the expanded electorates of this 'age of the masses'.⁸

Although the reasons for liberalism's decline continue to encourage vigorous debate, it is clear that the ideology struggled to keep pace with both its conservative and socialist rivals in this more democratic environment, especially after 1885.⁹ In vivid contrast to the internationalist hopes of the early 1880s, the European 1890s were marked by a rapidly spreading arms race, economic protectionism and, in their latter years, a political language which was increasingly dominated by ideas of competition, rivalry and struggle.¹⁰ The two decades prior to the declaration of war in 1914 are frequently regarded as a time of cultural and racial anxiety about national decline and a renewed interest in, even enthusiasm for, armed conflict, reinforcing an increasing loss of optimism in the future of European progress.¹¹ As such, the 1880s have been characterised by some historians as the decade which laid the foundations for the turmoil and warfare of the twentieth century.¹²

Central to these political changes were developments in the rhetoric of national defence. War had become 'democratic': already by 1880 most European nations had or were in the process of

⁷ Norman Stone, *Europe Transformed: 1878-1919* (London: Fontana, 1983), pp. 42-73.

⁸ Stone, *Europe Transformed*, pp. 44-45; Michael D. Biddiss, *The Age of the Masses* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1977); E.J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), ch. 4.

⁹ For an overview see Alan S. Kahan, *Liberalism in Nineteenth-Century Europe: The Political Culture of Limited Suffrage* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), ch. 5.

¹⁰ Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1988), p. 196; Stone, *Europe Transformed*, pp. 96-106.

¹¹ Arno Mayer provides a particularly evocative discussion of this outlook in, *The Persistence of the Old Regime: Europe to the Great War* (New York: Pantheon, 1981), ch. 5. See also H.W. Koch, 'Social Darwinism as a factor in the 'New Imperialism'' in H.W. Koch (ed.), *The Origins of the First World War*, 2nd edn (London: Macmillan, 1984), pp. 319-342.

¹² Pertinent examples include Brian Bond, *War and Society in Europe 1870-1970* (London: Fontana, 1984), chs. 3-4; C.J. Bartlett, *The Global Conflict 1880-1970: The International Rivalry of the Great Powers* (London: Longman, 1984).

adopting more inclusive conscription laws, the most prominent symptom of a growing obsession with comparative military strength.¹³ The same approach also began to pervade thinking about navies, leading to a renewed burst of navalist ‘theatre’, propaganda and shipbuilding which laid the groundwork for the naval arms races of the following two decades.¹⁴ From the mid-1880s onwards, Europeans became re-acquainted with arms races and war scares between the great powers, a phenomenon which had been largely absent during the previous fifteen years.¹⁵ Rapid technological developments added further vigour to this military competition, while also revolutionising the way in which generals and admirals thought about warfare. As the German military successes in 1866 and 1871 illustrated, European conflict had been rendered more deadly by the introduction of breech-loading rifles and machine guns, and more rapid through the adoption of the steamship, railway and telegraph.¹⁶ Encouraged by these developments military theory became increasingly obsessed with the idea that future European conflict would be characterised by swift ‘wars of annihilation’ deciding the fate of nations in mere weeks.¹⁷ Culturally this was reflected in a growing popular preoccupation with ‘the next great war’, an intellectual process termed the ‘rationalisation of slaughter’ by one historian.¹⁸ In many respects British politics followed this wider trend. British patriotism, argues Hugh Cunningham, came increasingly to be identified with ‘Conservatism, militarism, royalism and racialism’ during this period.¹⁹ By the late 1890s the country’s political landscape contained an array of radical right and ‘militarist’ individuals and organisations advocating causes such as

¹³ Ute Frevert, ‘War’ in Stefan Berger (ed.), *A Companion to Nineteenth-Century Europe 1789-1914* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), pp. 417-431 (pp. 421-426); John Gooch, *Armies in Europe* (London: Routledge, 1980), ch. 5.

¹⁴ Arthur Marder, *The Anatomy of British Sea Power: A History of British Naval Policy in the Pre-Dreadnought Era, 1880-1905* (London: Frank Cass, 1964), ch. 2; William McNeill, *The Pursuit of Power: Technology, Armed Force and Society since A.D. 1000* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983), ch. 8; Jan Rüger, *The Great Naval Game: Britain and Germany in the Age of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

¹⁵ David Stevenson, ‘Land Armaments in Europe, 1866-1914’ in Thomas Mahnken, Joseph Maiolo and David Stevenson (eds) *Arms Races and International Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 41-60 (pp. 52-57).

¹⁶ Frevert, ‘War’, p. 428.

¹⁷ Geoffrey Wawro, *Warfare and Society in Europe, 1792-1914* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 124.

¹⁸ Daniel Pick, *War Machine: The Rationalisation of Slaughter in the Modern Age* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993). See also I.F. Clarke, *Voices Prophesying War: Future Wars, 1763-3749*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), ch. 4.

¹⁹ Hugh Cunningham, ‘The Language of Patriotism, 1750-1914’, *History Workshop Journal*, 12 (1981), pp. 8-33 (p. 24).

naval expansion, conscription and economic protectionism to an extent which would have seemed inconceivable twenty years previously.²⁰ In a society which had long prided itself on its small state and voluntary organisations, ‘national efficiency’ emerged as the political catchcry of the early twentieth century, marking a distinct break with the language of orthodox Gladstonianism.²¹ The principle driver of this change was the feeling, widespread especially in Conservative circles, that Britain was a nation under military, economic and diplomatic challenge.²² Within this context Gladstone’s 1894 resignation – and his replacement by the ‘liberal imperialist’ Archibald Primrose, fifth Earl of Rosebery – is easily explained as a symbolic passing of the old untenable Liberal consensus that had governed British politics since the mid-1860s.²³ In the age of high imperialism, Gladstonianism was simply ‘irrelevant’.²⁴

However, this interpretation suggests as many questions as answers. As Jonathan Parry observes, ‘though he [Gladstone] complained that the naval increases of 1894 surrendered to militarist sentiment, Britain was hardly a militarist society.’²⁵ Far from struggling in the enlarged post-1885 electorate, Gladstone had proven himself ‘able to square the circle of making classical liberalism viable in a mass democracy’.²⁶ The Liberal Party, and Gladstone himself, remained remarkably popular among the working classes, who continued to endorse its ideology of a small state, low-taxation and limited defence spending.²⁷ In its refusal to

²⁰ Frans Coetzee, *For Party or Country: Nationalism and the Dilemmas of Popular Conservatism in Edwardian England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990); Anne Summers, ‘Militarism in Britain before the Great War’, *History Workshop Journal*, 2 (1976), pp. 104-123; Anne Summers, ‘The Character of Edwardian Nationalism: Three Popular Leagues’ in Paul Kennedy and Anthony Nicholls (ed.), *Nationalist and Racialist Movements in Britain and Germany Before 1914* (London: Macmillan, 1981), pp. 68-87; A.J.A. Morris, *The Scaremongers: The Advocacy of War and Rearmament, 1896-1914* (London: Routledge, 1984); R.J.Q. Adams and Philip P. Poirier, *The Conscription Controversy in Great Britain, 1900-18* (London: Macmillan, 1987).

²¹ G.R. Searle, *The Quest for National Efficiency* (London: Ashfield, 1990).

²² G.R. Searle, *A New England? Peace and War 1886-1918* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), ch. 8; E.H.H. Green, *The Crisis of Conservatism: The Politics, Economics and Ideology of the British Conservative Party, 1880-1914* (London: Routledge, 1995).

²³ Anthony Howe, ‘Gladstone and Cobden’ in David Bebbington and Roger Swift (eds), *Gladstone Centenary Essays* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000), pp. 113-32 (pp. 125-126).

²⁴ Leo McKinty, *Rosebery: Statesman in Turmoil* (London: John Murray, 2005), p. 213.

²⁵ Jonathan Parry, ‘Crawling towards God’, *London Review of Books* (Nov. 1994), pp. 34-35 (p. 35).

²⁶ Eugenio F. Biagini, *Liberty, Retrenchment and Reform: Popular Liberalism in the Age of Gladstone, 1860-1880* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 4.

²⁷ Biagini, *Liberty, Retrenchment and Reform*, pp. 416-425; Simon Peaple and John Vincent, ‘Gladstone and the Working Man’ in Peter J. Jagger (ed.), *Gladstone* (London: Hambledon, 1998), pp. 71-83 (pp. 76-83).

countenance mass conscription the United Kingdom had established itself as ‘the most liberal country in Europe’ in terms of personal freedoms, while pacific cosmopolitanism increased in popularity during the 1900s.²⁸ The Liberal Cabinet of 1892 was itself largely ‘internationalist’ in outlook, most of its members ideologically adverse to large-scale defence spending. From this perspective, the near-unanimity of the Cabinet behind the Admiralty’s 1894 demands appears curious, to say the least.

This is not to suggest that the ‘transformation’ in attitudes to defence did not occur in Britain. However, the historiography of nineteenth century British politics is remarkably lacking in long-term perspectives on the resignation crisis; historians have neglected to reflect on how, considering the ideological confidence of 1880, Gladstone and his Cabinet found themselves in the situation they did in March 1894. There has, for example, been no real attempt to explain in concrete terms how the abstract concept of a more ‘militarist’ society actually led to Gladstone’s resignation. This is indicative of the fact that defence policy during the decade is largely neglected within the political historiography. The wider political discourse of defence during this time has not been closely probed; the role of the armed forces themselves remains murky; and the state of ‘public opinion’, despite historians’ heavy reliance on the term, remains limited to discussions of organisations like the Navy League or individual newspapers. Although work by military and naval historians has rewritten much of our understanding of Britain’s defence establishment and geopolitical position during this period, this new work has not filtered through into the political narrative. In seeking to address this historiographical gap, this thesis offers a fresh perspective on the origins and nature of the changes which, over the period 1880-1894, rendered high politics – if not popular politics – an environment hostile to the ideals of the Midlothian campaign.

²⁸ Frevert, ‘War’, p. 423; Anthony Howe, ‘Popular Political Economy’ in David Craig and James Thompson (eds) *Languages of Politics in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Palgrave Macmillan: Basingstoke, 2013), pp. 118-141 (pp. 132-134); Paul Laity, *The British Peace Movement 1870-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), ch. 7.

International Relations in Late-Nineteenth Century Britain

It is necessary at this point to detail the nature of the clash in attitudes with which this thesis is concerned. Broadly speaking, contemporaries considered foreign policy in a strictly binary and oppositional context. These two competing approaches have been given many different names: ‘idealism’ versus ‘realism’; ‘internationalism’ versus ‘imperialism’; a ‘cosmopolitan’ policy versus a ‘national’ one.²⁹ In party political terms, by the last decades of the century these two approaches had become vital components of the ideology and self-perception of, respectively, the Liberal and Conservative parties.

All British Liberals were, in the broadest sense of the term, internationalists.³⁰ Nineteenth century internationalism was not, as it subsequently became, the antithesis of nationalism; nor, indeed, was it exclusively employed by any particular party, ideology or social group.³¹ British ‘liberal internationalism’ was thus only one of many interpretations of the creed, although it was by far the most dominant internationalism within the United Kingdom during the 1880s. Nor was it necessarily ‘liberal’ in the sense of being purely the preserve of the Liberal party.³² During the first half of the century, when Gladstone himself was a member, the Tory party maintained its own form of ‘restrained internationalism’ under Robert Peel.³³ By the 1880s, however, there were few genuine internationalists left in the Conservative Party. Instead, driven to a great extent by Gladstone’s leadership, the internationalist outlook had become an important unifying force within the Liberal coalition.

²⁹ For good discussions of this binary clash see John Gooch, *The Prospect of War: British Defence Policy, 1847-1942* (London: Frank Cass, 1981), ch. 2; David Long, ‘J.A. Hobson and Idealism in International Relations’, *Review of International Studies*, 17 (1991), pp. 285-304; Cunningham, ‘Language of Patriotism’ p. 22.

³⁰ Jonathan Parry, *The Politics of Patriotism: English Liberalism, National Identity and Europe, 1830-1886* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 13.

³¹ Mark Mazower, *Governing the World: The History of an Idea* (London: Penguin, 2012), part I.

³² F.R. Flounoy, ‘British Liberal Theories of International Relations (1848-1898)’, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 7 (1946), pp. 195-217, (p. 195).

³³ Roy Jenkins, *Gladstone* (London: Macmillan, 1995), p. 120. See Gladstone’s reflections in *Third Midlothian Campaign: Political Speeches Delivered in August and September 1884 by the Right Hon. W.E. Gladstone* (Edinburgh: Scottish Liberal Association, 1884), pp. 37-38.

As delineated in the work of Casper Sylvest, British liberal internationalism was a broad interpretive framework built on the three principles of progress, order and justice.³⁴ Fundamentally idealist and optimist in outlook, it stressed the importance of international law, co-operation and arbitration over the use of violence and force in settling conflict.³⁵ It was staunchly humanitarian, drawing inspiration from the powerful ‘conscience’ of Christian nonconformity which formed a vital pillar of the Liberal coalition.³⁶ It looked to the future with hope, believing that the historical trend was towards the unification of humanity, socially, politically and technologically. In practical terms it attacked the control of foreign affairs by ‘vested interests’, be they aristocratic, economic or ideological, preferring instead a more open approach which often – though not always – stressed the common-sense wisdom of ‘the people’.³⁷ It was, to be clear, much more of a ‘political vocabulary’ than a cohesive ideology, and as such it accrued a range of interpretations within the Liberal coalition.³⁸ It was often split, for example, between those who believed that Britain should hold aloof from the rest of the world – an attitude that could be indistinguishable from anti-imperialism – and those like Gladstone who were more willing to advocate a ‘moral’ foreign policy, including military intervention in support of national self-determination if necessary.³⁹ There is also truth in the view that liberal internationalism was as much a creation of its enemies as its supporters, a strawman stereotype at which to launch revisionist attacks on the direction of British foreign and defence policy. As such it is important to understand that this thesis does not regard liberal internationalism as a hard, coherent and consistent ideology. Yet, on balance, it is clear that its fierce crusading rhetoric unified Liberals more than it divided them, offering a ‘useful beacon’ by which individuals were able to navigate their own course. Indeed, paradoxically, its opponents’ strawman attacks often helped to harden and clarify many of internationalism’s

³⁴ Casper Sylvest, *British Liberal Internationalism, 1880-1930* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), pp. 3-4.

³⁵ Sylvest, *Liberal Internationalism*, pp. 26-27.

³⁶ D.W. Bebbington, *The Nonconformist Conscience* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1982).

³⁷ Sylvest, *Liberal internationalism*, pp. 12-13.

³⁸ Sylvest, *Liberal Internationalism*, p. 45.

³⁹ For a good discussion of this split see Ian Bradley, *The Optimists: Themes and Personalities in Victorian Liberalism* (London: Faber and Faber, 1980), ch. 5.

positions, as Liberals stepped up to defend ideas which they had previously held to only in theory.

One figure who loomed especially large in the liberalism of the 1880s was Richard Cobden. Although he had died in 1865, one of the contentions of this thesis is that the words, deeds and ideas of Cobden formed a central point of ideological reference within the politics of national defence throughout the 1880s and beyond, in much the same way that Marxism acted during the twentieth century. A Manchester calico printer who came to prominence during the 1830s and 1840s as the leader of the Anti-Corn Law League, Cobden became the defining figure in what was known – more to its enemies than supporters – as the ‘Manchester School’ of economics.⁴⁰ At the heart of his philosophy was a profound faith in the positive power of unrestrained free trade, which he believed would eventually bring the nations together in the spirit of friendly commerce. A firm believer in the principle of non-intervention, it is said that Cobden’s favourite toast was ‘no foreign politics’.⁴¹ Indeed, with its ability to bypass governments and scheming diplomats to forge direct and mutually beneficial relationships between peoples, Cobden regarded free trade as a natural, even divine law. ‘Free Trade is God’s diplomacy,’ he once wrote, ‘and there is no other certain way of uniting people in the bonds of peace.’⁴²

During his later life Cobden regularly found himself in a minority on matters of foreign affairs, and in high politics the ‘Cobdenite’ outlook was often regarded as the ‘excitation of the few’, too radical for many mainstream Liberals.⁴³ After his death, however, Cobdenism became a distinctive and crucial facet of British liberalism and especially popular Radicalism.⁴⁴ As Anthony Howe has demonstrated, by the 1880s the ‘church’ or ‘cult’ of Cobden had recast him

⁴⁰ Anthony Howe, *Free Trade and Liberal England 1846-1946*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 1-8.

⁴¹ A.J.P. Taylor, *The Trouble Makers: Dissent over Foreign Policy 1792-1939* (London: Pimlico, 1993), pp. 53-54.

⁴² Cobden, quoted in J.A. Hobson (ed.), *Richard Cobden: The International Man* (London: New York, 1968), p. 246.

⁴³ J.H. Grainger, *Patriotisms: Britain 1900-1939* (London: Routledge, 1986), p. 141; Sylvest, *Liberal Internationalism*, p. 38.

⁴⁴ Anthony Howe, ‘introduction’ in Anthony Howe and Simon Morgan (eds), *Rethinking Nineteenth-Century Liberalism: Richard Cobden Bicentenary Essays* (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 1-23 (p. 3); Parry, *Politics of Patriotism*, p. 157; Biagini, *Liberty, Retrenchment and Reform*, pp. 130-137.

as a popular hero, ‘the successor of Cromwell, Wilberforce, and Cobbett’, while the Cobden Club – motto: ‘Free Trade, Peace, Goodwill Among Nations’ – worked to ensure that his ideas retained the strength and relevance to successfully resist protectionism prior to 1914.⁴⁵ The more utopian views of the Manchester School were never fully accepted by a majority of Liberals, and Gladstone’s own internationalism always remained distinct from Cobden’s.⁴⁶ Gladstone distanced himself from the Manchester school during the Midlothian campaign, and was more comfortable with the idea of Europe as a ‘family’ or ‘concert’ of nations, rather than a fully integrated continental cosmopolis.⁴⁷ Nevertheless the two men had grown close between 1860 and 1865, a process which, ideologically, continued beyond Cobden’s death.⁴⁸ In his own words, by the 1890s Gladstone had become ‘fundamentally a Peel-Cobden Man’.⁴⁹ A core argument of this thesis is that the ‘renaissance’ enjoyed by liberal internationalism during the 1880s owed much to the surge of interest which Cobden enjoyed during this decade, from both his supporters and detractors.⁵⁰ Whether or not they signed up to all of his views, Liberals found Cobden, much like liberal internationalism itself, an important reference point by which they could set their own views.

Arrayed against this liberal coalition during the 1880s were the ‘anti-internationalists’, represented principally by the Conservative party under its leader, Lord Salisbury.⁵¹ As Sylvest observes, the ideology of anti-internationalism is difficult to characterise, in part because it did not rely on a canon of works and thinkers in the same way as did internationalism itself.⁵² There was no Richard Cobden of realpolitik, although Bismarck and Palmerston were sometimes referred to as such. Nor did Disraeli easily fit the role. Although ‘Beaconsfieldism’ provided an excellent strawman for Gladstone in 1880, Disraeli’s ‘forward’ imperial policy was too overtly

⁴⁵ Howe, *Free Trade*, ch. 4.

⁴⁶ Bradley, *Optimists*, pp. 131-132.

⁴⁷ Parry, *Politics of Patriotism*, pp. 339-340; Kelly, ‘Midlothian’, p. 137. See also K.A.P. Sandiford, ‘Gladstone and Europe’ in Bruce L. Kinzer, *The Gladstonian Turn of Mind: Essays Presented to J.B. Conacher* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), pp. 177-196.

⁴⁸ Howe, ‘Gladstone and Cobden’.

⁴⁹ Howe, ‘Gladstone and Cobden’, p. 114.

⁵⁰ Sylvest, *Liberal Internationalism*, p. 4. Cobden features surprisingly lightly in Sylvest’s work.

⁵¹ Sylvest, *Liberal Internationalism*, pp. 45-49.

⁵² Sylvest, *Liberal Internationalism*, p. 45.

aggressive for most Britons to comfortably endorse, while his opposition to high military spending sat uneasily with many in his own Party.⁵³ Opposition to liberal internationalism therefore differed markedly between individuals. Some were merely pessimistic regarding the future of Europe, while others ascribed to a fully-fledged ‘new imperialist’ and social-Darwinist view of the universe; most were isolationists to some extent, although a minority advocated aggressive imperial expansion.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, there are a number of distinct elements which defined the ‘realist’ outlook.

In the first place, they were united in regarding Cobdenite liberal internationalism as naïve and dangerous. Their world was one of struggle and mutual suspicion: nations, many argued, were ‘natural enemies’ and should be prepared and willing to exploit any weakness in their neighbours.⁵⁵ Lord Salisbury, for example, argued that a willingness to engage in warfare was ‘the *point d’appui* [fulcrum] of diplomacy’.⁵⁶ As such, powerful armed forces were vital both as a diplomatic tool and as a reflection of national prestige. Put crudely, the world the realists inhabited ran on social Darwinian, not Cobdenite principles.⁵⁷ This did not mean that they were necessarily opposed to free trade or international cooperation, although protectionist feeling was steadily growing in the Tory party throughout this period.⁵⁸ They did, however, maintain a profound lack of trust in international law and arbitration. International relations were for them a matter of interests, not ethics.⁵⁹ Indeed, they tended to doubt or even reject the notion of straightforward human progress, arguing that humanity’s jealous, self-interested and violent tendencies would not disappear and could not be controlled other than by force.⁶⁰ While they were rarely openly aggressive, they argued, as we shall see, that warfare – often unprovoked – was a fact of international life. Many believed that a great war was on its way; all believed that

⁵³ Parry, *Politics of Patriotism*, pp. 324-341.

⁵⁴ Bernard Porter, *Britain, Europe and the World 1850-1982: Delusions of Grandeur* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1983), pp. 56-63.

⁵⁵ Porter, *Britain, Europe and the World*, p. 61.

⁵⁶ Andrew Roberts, *Salisbury: Victorian Titan* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1999), pp. 41-42. See also the comparison between Salisbury and Gladstone on pp. 488-489.

⁵⁷ Richard Shannon, *The Age of Salisbury, 1881-1902* (London: Longman, 1996), p. 292; Gooch, *Prospect of War*, pp. 42-43.

⁵⁸ Green, *Crisis of Conservatism*, pp. 30-35.

⁵⁹ Sylvest, *Liberal Internationalism*, p. 48.

⁶⁰ Long, ‘Hobson and Idealism’, p. 286.

the British Empire should ‘play safe, prepare for the worst, and secure by force what in former times she had preferred to secure more subtly.’⁶¹

Neither of these perspectives necessarily matched the reality of nineteenth century Europe. Liberal internationalism was and is easily accused of complacent utopianism and an uncritical belief in the coming millennium.⁶² There was much truth in the anti-internationalist riposte that warfare was unlikely to be abolished simply because nations were more easily able to talk and trade with one-another. On the other hand, the ‘realist’ dystopian vision of the eternal struggle for survival, in which apparently friendly nations might launch a sudden invasion of a neighbour without warning, also carried with it an air of unreality. There was, in 1880, no obvious reason why Britain should be plunged into a war of national survival. Yet the anti-internationalists had the benefits of novelty and intellectual dynamism on their side. With international amity looking increasingly dated as war scares and arms races returned to Europe, this new, harder and more pessimistic outlook was well positioned to challenge liberal internationalism and become the dominant ‘spirit of the age’.

The Channel Tunnel, the Naval Defence Act and National Defence

Using the binary opposition between liberal internationalism and anti-internationalism as its intellectual framework, this thesis provides a new perspective on the ‘transformation’ of British defence policy, 1880-1894. In order to trace this ideological struggle for the direction of Britain’s defence policy, the thesis uses two detailed case studies which have hitherto received only marginal attention from political historians. The first is the rejection of a proposal to dig a Channel Tunnel between England and France during the early 1880s, the result of an apparently widespread fear that it might be used by France to invade. The second is the 1889 Naval Defence Act, the culmination of at least four years of navalist campaigning which enshrined the principle that the Royal Navy must be equal to the next two strongest fleets. The only other historian to place these events into the same narrative is Parry, in a brief discussion towards the conclusion of his book *The Politics of Patriotism* (2006). For Parry, the Channel Tunnel’s

⁶¹ Porter, *Britain, Europe and the World*, pp. 58.

⁶² Sylvest, *Liberal Internationalism*, p. 240.

demise reflected the defeat of ‘Cobdenite optimism’ while the Naval Defence Act showed the strength of ‘Admiralty lobbyists and imperial enthusiasts’.⁶³ Both, he argues, demonstrated the extent to which anxieties about the national defences and fear of sudden French aggression governed British foreign policy during this period. Importantly, both events also had important implications for Gladstone’s Midlothian vision: while the Tunnel controversy showed the limits of what internationalism was now able to achieve, the Naval Defence Act was a serious blow against the Gladstonian enthusiasm for low state spending.

Examination of these two events therefore allows us to appreciate how the transformation of defence policy played out in practical terms within British politics. Such a study also brings to light a trinity of interlinked themes which this thesis argues were crucial to the wider political shift. The first and most important of these was ‘defence pessimism’: the pervasive belief in the vulnerability of the British Isles to direct attack or invasion. Although without credible foundation, this anxiety, which was reliant on the anti-internationalist rejection of ‘civilised’ warfare, spread throughout the political elite during the 1880s and offered the ultimate reasons for the rejection of the Tunnel or the passage of the Naval Defence Act. The second theme was the pivotal role of the armed forces in driving this anti-internationalist policy shift. In both the Channel Tunnel and Naval Defence Act, Army or Navy officers were directly involved in lobbying the government to change tack, going well beyond their roles as simple advisors to their civilian ministers. As such, this thesis has much to say about the nature of civil-military relations during this period, arguing that the 1880s saw a transformation in the power and influence of the service ‘professionals’ within the halls of government. Thirdly, as both changes in policy were presaged by public agitations, the Tunnel and the Defence Act also offer an important insight into how nineteenth century public opinion affected government decision making in defence and beyond. Ultimately, the thesis argues that the Channel Tunnel and the Naval Defence Act, often sidelined within the historiography, deserve to be regarded as important elements of the political narrative of the 1880s.

⁶³ Parry, *Politics of Patriotism*, pp. 354-358.

Furthermore, both case studies offer the historian a window into the outlook of the Liberal and Conservative parties, showing how the former struggled to arrest the internationalist retreat and the latter openly embraced it. This thesis is particularly critical of Gladstone's role, especially during the parliamentary passage of the Naval Defence Act, arguing that the Liberal leader's lack of interest in defence and obsession with the Irish issue left his Party directionless and unable to counter the anti-internationalist attacks. The obvious popular support for a liberal internationalist foreign and defence policy highlighted at the opening of this introduction was squandered, with the result that the illiberal 'defence pessimists' dominated the British public sphere with a strength entirely out of proportion to their numbers. Although an enthusiastic 'pro-Tunneller' and opponent of naval armaments, Gladstone was forced to watch as the ideals which he held so dear were driven back as a consequence of his own failure to defend them effectively.

Methodology and Sources

Traditionally, historians of the British armed forces and British politics during this period have not made great use of one-another's work. Military and naval historians tend to concern themselves only with those politicians who were directly involved in policymaking, neglecting the wider party-political and ideological contexts. Meanwhile the bibliographies of political historians often reveal a profound ignorance of an entire generations' worth of work on British national defence policy, especially on the Royal Navy. As Chapter One explains, historians continue to rely on Arthur Marder's 1940 study *The Anatomy of British Sea Power, 1880-1905*, despite the fact that many of its foundations have been comprehensively discredited by subsequent research, some of which is now itself over twenty years old. Where Marder assumed British weakness, historians now know the opposite to have been true; this fact has profound implications for our understanding of the political decisions taken during this period. One of the principal tasks of this thesis, therefore, has been to combine the political and military/naval historiography into a coherent whole and to consider the new perspective which emerges. The results of this process are then themselves viewed through the prism of the internationalist/anti-

internationalist binary to produce some useful and revealing generalisations about the period as a whole.

In support of this approach the thesis also contains a large quantity of new research in the form of the Channel Tunnel and Naval Defence Act case studies. In both of these the focus has been to create a narrative of the respective events which combines the official, parliamentary and public spheres into a single narrative, demonstrating how these three areas influenced and interacted with one-another. Decisions made around the Cabinet table are considered with an eye to subsequent parliamentary tactics and press reaction; similarly, movements of ‘public opinion’ are evaluated with their effect on ministers always in view. Consequently this thesis draws from a very wide range of sources. Traditional archival and personal sources such as the Gladstone diaries are only one part of a project which also incorporates close readings of parliamentary debates and extensive use of newspaper and other published sources. In the case of parliament, not only have the debates themselves been analysed but the relevant Commons divisions, a source so rarely utilised by historians, have been reconstructed from the divisions lists held at the Institute for Historical Research in London. Through this process the thesis is able to show not simply how popular an issue was within the Commons as a whole, but also how the separate parties divided on the subject, rewriting, especially in the case of the Naval Defence Act, much of the accepted narrative.

One of the most distinguishing features of the present work is its use of digitised newspapers and journals, principally *The British Newspaper Archive*, an archive which has continued to expand at an exponential rate over the four years in which research was conducted. No limit has been placed on the type of papers used, from London staples such as *The Times* to regional weeklies like the *Whitstable Times and Herne Bay Herald*. The benefits of using the latter not only include a greater understanding of local opinion— including more unconventional research, such as the survey of local debating societies made in Chapter Five – but through their substantial coverage of London news these papers also offer a perspective and detail on metropolitan events which the London press sometimes lacked. More generally, the digitisation

of newspapers allows the historian to escape the reliance on contemporary politicians' private papers for summaries of press opinion, a freedom which, in both case studies, has shown much of what previous historians assumed about 'public opinion' to have been flawed. These archives have also allowed this thesis to include a wide range of political cartoons from the satirical journals. The topical doggerel which heads each chapter is largely from the same source: for these the author offers no apology, merely the assurance that he has tried to avoid the inclusion of the very worst examples he discovered.

Thesis Structure

The thesis consists of three parts, one thematic and two case studies. Due to the wide range of historiographical areas engaged with, Chapters 1-3 and parts II-III each contain separate discussions of the relevant academic literature. Part I consists of three Chapters, one on each of the three themes identified above. The first theme, examined in Chapter 1, is the triumph of the 'pessimistic' interpretation of Britain's defence establishment over the 'optimistic'. Building in particular on work by naval historians, the chapter argues that the assumption of British weakness during this period was largely an illusion and that no contemporary European state posed a serious threat to the British Empire. The Royal Navy remained the strongest fleet on the planet and faced little danger even from foreign combinations; consequently, the fears and anxieties which predominated by the 1890s were internally generated and sustained, in part, by the failure of the 'optimists' to effectively dispute them. Once the 'myth' of British weakness had become firmly entrenched in political culture, liberal internationalist interpretations of international affairs rapidly became seriously destabilised.

Chapter 2 examines the self-image and political world view of the British officer corps and their supporters. The armed forces were crucial to the shift in attitudes to defence policy, providing the intellectual framework for the 'pessimist' case and pushing it in the official and public spheres. Drawing from academic literature on professionalism and expertise, the Chapter explains how, by exploiting their positions as 'patriotic' experts, these men attacked the authority of civilian politicians and succeeded in imposing their agenda in areas of

policymaking from which the ‘professionals’ had hitherto been excluded. By 1890, they had converted the Conservative Party wholesale to their opinions while also throwing Liberal defence policy into confusion.

Chapter 3 considers the nature of ‘public opinion’ and its importance to the defence debate. This period is often cited as the first in which the British people took a serious interest in the state of the national defences, and appeals to ‘public opinion’ formed a vital plank of the defence pessimists’ claims to legitimacy. This chapter deconstructs this narrative of public enthusiasm and argues that apparent public support was reliant on the limited and exclusionary contemporary understanding of ‘public opinion’ itself. By exploiting this understanding, alarmists succeeded in convincing the government – and many subsequent historians – that their cause was representative and popular and that the fear of a sudden foreign attack was therefore ‘national’ in scope. Crucial to this was the idea that the public was an unpredictable and irrational creature, prone to dangerous ‘panics’ against which the nation must protect itself just as carefully as against the French Navy.

These themes and arguments are illustrated in two large case studies, which make up the bulk of the thesis. The first, Part II, is a study of the 1882 Channel Tunnel attempt, which was cancelled after Lieutenant-General Sir Garnet Wolseley successfully whipped up a media ‘scare’ over fears of French invasion. Unlike previous histories this study gives equal attention to the pro-Tunnel case, demonstrating that it was rooted in the internationalist philosophy of the mid-century politician Richard Cobden. In this context the defeat of the Tunnel is seen not simply as a victory for British insularity and defence pessimism but also as a decisive rejection of liberal internationalism. In the first in-depth look at the state of ‘public opinion’, the study reveals that the nation was far from unanimously opposed to the Tunnel as historians have assumed. It also pays close attention to the decision-making process of Gladstone’s government, which, in a move indicative of the wider malaise afflicting ‘Cobdenism’ during this time, made little serious attempt to defend a project suffused with the spirit of 1880.

Part III looks at the genesis and passage of the 1889 Naval Defence Act, which formally established the Royal Navy's 'two-power standard'. It is commonly believed that the Act was the result of a popular 'navalist' campaign for naval increases, led by Captain Lord Charles Beresford, and that it enjoyed widespread support both in and out of Parliament. This study completely rejects that assessment, and instead shows how Beresford's success relied not on public support, but on pessimistic hyperbole, a misrepresentation of the strength of the Navy and a lacklustre response from politicians, especially on the Radical wing of the Liberal Party. In a long analysis of the Bill's parliamentary passage, the thesis dramatically reverses our understanding of the Liberal Party's attitude to the Act, revealing that, although disorganised, the Party voted repeatedly against the programme. In its conclusion, the thesis follows this political shift through to the 1890s, providing a more nuanced interpretation of Gladstone's 1894 resignation.

Part I

Pessimism, Professionalism and Public Opinion



"A SCARE."

Chapter One

Defence Pessimism and the Myth of British Vulnerability

I don't want to fight,
But by Jingo if I do;
I am in a woful plight,
If what I read is true:
And I cannot understand,
When I see the money go,
How my dear native land,
Is not safe from a foe.

I was proud to see my sons
Going forth as volunteers;
Of my big breech-loading guns,
Frowning grandly in their tiers;
My Iron-clads I thought,
At a pinch, would ever be
A match for navies brought
From every other sea.

And now I'm coolly told,
If an invader came,
That England could not hold
Her own. It is a shame!
But you can't believe one half
Of what the papers say.
It is bluster, bounce, and chaff,
That makes the dailies pay.

'England Defenceless', *Moonshine*, 26 May 1888, p. 250.

Historians of the European Great Powers during the last two decades of the nineteenth century have commonly characterised the British experience as one of relative decline.¹ Economically, industrially and demographically, other European nations were coming to equal or outstrip the United Kingdom.² Crucially, or so the narrative inspired in particular by Arthur Marder's enormously influential *Anatomy of British Sea Power* maintains, the Empire was under substantial military and naval pressure from the early 1880s onwards.³ This chronology is well rehearsed.⁴ Already outnumbered by every other comparable European force and overstretched by its colonial commitments, investigations during the 1880s revealed the British Army to be suffering from shortcomings in organisation and efficiency; the Channel Tunnel scare of 1882, the invasion scare of 1888 and long-running concerns about the defence of India were all symptoms of this feeling.⁵ This problem was made acute, or so it is argued, by the 'well-justified alarm at the relative impotence of the Royal Navy'.⁶ In 1884, W.T. Stead's *Pall Mall Gazette* exposed the 'Truth about the Navy': British ships were in poor condition, badly armed and armoured and the fleet as a whole had almost sunk to a level of equality with its French rival.⁷ Relative decline of British naval power continued for the rest of the century, in spite of attempts, such as the 1889 Naval Defence Act and the 1895 Spencer Programme, to reverse the trend.⁸ The British occupation of Egypt in 1882 multiplied the Navy's responsibilities in the Mediterranean, while a large and growing trade deficit in foodstuffs caused further anxiety

¹ An excellent summary of this historiography is Keith Neilson, 'Greatly Exaggerated': The Myth of the Decline of Great Britain before 1914', *International History Review*, 13 (1991), pp. 695-725 (pp. 695-696).

² A.J.P. Taylor, *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe, 1848-1918* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954), pp. xxiv-xxxii; Kennedy, *Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, pp. 198-202, 224-232.

³ Marder, *Anatomy*, esp. part II.

⁴ Concise summaries include Gooch, *Prospect of War*, pp. 5-8; Searle, *A New England?*, pp. 243-252.

⁵ Edward M. Spiers, *The Late Victorian Army 1868-1902* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), ch. 3, pp. 222-232; Aaron L. Friedberg, *The Weary Titan: Britain and the Experience of Relative Decline, 1895-1905* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), pp. 212-224; Paul Kennedy, *Great Powers*, pp. 227-228.

⁶ Gooch, *Prospect of War*, p. 5. See also Keith Robbins, *The Eclipse of a Great Power: Modern Britain 1870-1975* (London: Longman, 1983), pp. 35-39.

⁷ Marder, *Anatomy*, pp. 121-122; Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery* (London: Penguin, 1976), pp. 178-179.

⁸ Friedberg, *Weary Titan*, pp. 144-167.

within the Admiralty.⁹ Finally, this position is contrasted with the more vigorous policies of Britain's imperial rivals, principally France and Russia, who together appeared to possess the power to overthrow the *Pax Britannica*.¹⁰ The result was that by 1890 Britain was a nation 'under siege', firmly on the defensive in a world of hostile and predatory opponents.¹¹

It is important to understand that this narrative of British decline is drawn from a close reading of a wide range of primary sources – mainly from the public sphere – that emphasised British military and naval vulnerability. When Joseph Chamberlain, for example, famously characterised the Empire as a 'weary titan' struggling under 'the too vast orb of its fate' in 1902, he was reflecting a deep well of contemporary opinion.¹² In the language of international relations theory, many Britons during this time were labouring under a particularly bleak 'geopolitical vision', which this thesis terms 'defence pessimism'.¹³ Convinced of Britain's relative weakness – not to say defencelessness – in the new world created by steamship, railway and telegraph, pessimists were increasingly anxious that the country's great wealth was a tempting target for an unscrupulous and opportunist foreign state. This perspective implied an inevitable rejection of an internationalist foreign policy, for, as G.R. Searle observes, the 'Gladstonian creed' relied heavily on the assumption of British pre-eminence.¹⁴ In place of the relaxed internationalist outlook, the pessimists argued that Britain must be prepared for a 'bolt from the blue', a surprise invasion or naval strike launched, most likely, by France. This thesis argues that defence pessimism came to dominate the discourse surrounding national defence in Britain during the 1880s, pushing aside the liberal internationalist consensus and sealing the fate of the Channel Tunnel in 1883 and the Naval Defence Bill in 1889. However, the thesis

⁹ Parry, *Politics of Patriotism*, pp. 351-355. Britain's merchant marine constituted forty percent of the global tonnage between 1870 and 1914. Avner Offer, *The First World War: An Agrarian Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

¹⁰ Friedberg, *Weary Titan*, p. 146; Robbins, *Eclipse of a Great Power*, p. 38.

¹¹ Bernard Porter, *The Lion's Share: A Short History of British Imperialism, 1850-1983*, 2nd edn (London: Longman, 1984), pp. 119-129.

¹² This quotation provides the title for Friedberg's *Weary Titan*.

¹³ A geopolitical vision is defined as an 'idea concerning the relation between one's own and other places, involving feelings of (in)security or (dis)advantage (and/or) invoking ideas about a collective mission or foreign policy strategy.' Gertjan Dijkink, *National Identity & Geopolitical Visions* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 11.

¹⁴ Searle, *National Efficiency*, p. 27.

approaches this narrative from a position which rejects the idea that Britain was faced with a genuine threat during this period. A defining feature of defence pessimism was that it bore little relation to reality.

Historians of British decline have often added the caveat that contemporaries exaggerated the Franco-Russian threat.¹⁵ But it is only since the 1990s that the reality of the balance of power during the period 1880-1914 has been subjected to serious scrutiny. Keith Neilson and John Hobson have both demonstrated that the British Empire was hardly struggling during this period, economically or militarily, emphasising how its financial strength allowed it to maintain its pre-eminent position relatively cheaply.¹⁶ Compared to its principal rivals, Hobson argues, Britain suffered ‘fiscal-military understretch’: it was political reluctance, rather than financial pressure, which prevented the country maintaining, for example, an army of comparable size to its neighbours.¹⁷ At the same time, revisionist studies of Britain’s naval strength by John Beeler, Roger Parkinson and Robert Mullins have comprehensively rejected the idea of British naval weakness during this period.¹⁸ Not only have these scholars demonstrated that Britain easily outstripped its rivals in terms of both naval strength and spending, but they have also laid stress on the comparative weakness of those rival fleets.¹⁹ Using tools of quantitative analysis and qualitative evaluation, these historians have convincingly revised our view of Britain’s geopolitical position. What is more, they have concluded that, within the Admiralty at least, British naval supremacy was generally accepted and understood as fact.²⁰ Their conclusions are stark and uncompromising: British vulnerability was a ‘myth’, a ‘gigantic deception’

¹⁵ Kennedy, *British Naval Mastery*, p. 179.

¹⁶ Neilson, ‘Myth of Decline’; John M. Hobson, ‘The Military-Extraction Gap and the Wary Titan: the Fiscal-Sociology of British Defence Policy 1870-1913’, *Journal of European Economic History*, 22 (1993), pp. 461-506.

¹⁷ Hobson, ‘Military-Extraction Gap’, p. 499.

¹⁸ John Beeler, *British Naval Policy in the Gladstone-Disraeli Era, 1866-1880* (Stanford California: California University Press, 1997); Roger Parkinson, *The Late Victorian Navy* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2008); Robert E. Mullins, John Beeler (ed.) *The Transformation of British and American Naval Policy in the Pre-Dreadnought Era* (Palgrave, 2016). This literature is more closely surveyed in Part III, below.

¹⁹ See especially Beeler, *British Naval Policy*, ch. 10; also Matthew S. Seligmann, ‘Britain’s Great Security Mirage: The Royal Navy and the Franco-Russian Naval Threat, 1898–1906’, *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 35 (2012), pp. 861-886.

²⁰ See for example Beeler, *British Naval Policy*, pp. 270-76; Seligmann, ‘Great Security Mirage’, p. 865. See also Part II, below.

perpetrated by interested parties in the armed forces, press and parliament.²¹ This is a theme which runs like a red line throughout this thesis.

The implications that this new perspective has for our understanding of British history are far-reaching. If, in reality, the *Pax Britannica* remained intact during this period, then defence pessimism and the fears, anxieties and scares it inspired including the defeat of the Channel Tunnel and the passing of the Naval Defence Act, can all be shown to have been unnecessary, ‘internally generated and based on illusions that could have been refuted at the time’, to quote Beeler.²² The triumph of anti-internationalism during the 1880s thus changes from a settled inevitability to a serious historical problem lacking a clear explanation. Unfortunately, most historians have not yet come to incorporate the ‘revisionist’ perspective in their work. There has been no detailed attempt to explain the factors which allowed the pessimist attitude to flourish during the 1880s; nor has there been any serious attempt to delineate and deconstruct the pessimist outlook and deceptions.

Building on this revisionist work, this chapter summarises and analyses the nature and development of British defence pessimism during the 1880s. It argues that much of its success can be attributed to the influence of the invasion scares which wracked the country during the mid-century, a formative period for the politicians of 1880-1900. In a short narrative of these events, it shows how they determined the outlook and tactics of the pessimists themselves and those of their ‘optimist’ opponents. As the main inspiration for this latter group, Richard Cobden’s writings on the subject produced during the 1850s and 1860s are examined at some length. Not only was Cobden enormously influential in creating the ideological environment of the 1870s and 1880s, but his analysis, despite its flaws, provides a powerful interpretative framework for the historian. Cobden’s optimistic belief in British security and ‘international morality’ thrived during the 1870s, embodied in part by the Gladstone government of 1868-1874. After establishing this context, the chapter then examines how pessimist denunciations of

²¹ John Beeler, ‘In the Shadow of Briggs: A New Perspective on British Naval Administration and W.T. Stead’s 1884 “Truth about the Navy” Campaign’, *International Journal of Naval History*, 1 (Apr. 2002), p. 3.

²² Beeler, *British Naval Policy*, pp. 276-277.

the state of the nation became more overtly ideological during the 1880s, aimed at destroying the liberal internationalism which occupied a strong position in British thinking about international affairs. Attention is drawn to J.F. Maurice's 1883 book *Hostilities without Declaration of War*, which, it is argued, embodied and defined this new turn. Maurice's deconstruction of 'civilised' warfare and emphasis on the danger of a sudden and unprovoked invasion provided the intellectual tools with which defence pessimists were able to misrepresent the reality of the French threat as it existed at the time, a reality which historians of British defence policy have rarely acknowledged. Therefore, in its final section, the chapter describes in detail the weakened position of France during the 1880s, demonstrating just how illusionary were British fears of attack from this quarter. Overall, it is shown how the pessimist case, built on memory, rhetoric, ideology and history, comprehensively obscured and distorted the military and naval state of the nation and that of its most likely 'foe'.

The Mid-Century Foundations of Defence Pessimism

Although perhaps a statement of the obvious, it is important to note that present-day geopolitics can only be interpreted through the lens of past experience.²³ This was especially true for British attitudes to national defence during the last decades of the nineteenth century. Britons of the 1880s were all too aware that their arguments and anxieties were echoes of a recent, traumatic past.²⁴ In early June 1888, at the height of that year's 'scare', the Radical MP Jacob Bright gave exasperated and sarcastic voice to this feeling:

The country was told that there was danger of invasion, and the country which was to invade us was France. It was always France. He could never recollect the time when we were not in danger from an invasion by France. He did not understand why this should be so, because France was not a country composed of men who were absolutely without sense.²⁵

Most obviously, Bright may have been referring to the experience of two decades of war with France between 1792 and 1815. This conflict, however, lay beyond the lived memory of even

²³ Dijkink, *Geopolitical Visions*, p. 139.

²⁴ See also Parry, *Politics of Patriotism*, pp. 35-36.

²⁵ *Hansard Parliamentary Debates* (hereafter Parl. Deb.), 4 June 1888, col. 1047.

the aged Member for South-West Manchester. Rather, he was reminding his audience of what Richard Cobden had named the ‘three panics’ – three substantial invasion scares and accompanying Anglo-French antagonism which occurred between 1840 and the early 1860s. Understanding these ‘panics’ is crucial for appreciating later developments, as they provided a foundational framework within which the events of the 1880s developed and were interpreted by contemporaries. This is rarely stressed by historians, however, who tend to depict the last decades of the century as an entirely new ‘era’. This section thus aims to re-establish this continuity.

Although the immediate aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars had seen the United States and Russia as the next likely threat to the British Empire, as the steam age dawned it quickly became apparent that only France had the industrial capacity to compete with British naval power.²⁶ Steam appeared to have transformed the British strategic position. No longer, it seemed, would an enemy fleet be at the mercy of the fierce Channel weather. In theory, an army embarked at a Continental port could be steamed across the sea in a matter of hours, while cruisers might attack the coastline with impunity. ‘Naval war’, observed *The Times* in 1844, ‘is now a new game.’²⁷ When, therefore, tensions between Britain and France rose over Egypt in 1840, it was hardly surprising that the old British bugbear of the previous war soon rose its head: invasion.²⁸ In 1845 Viscount Palmerston, then in Opposition, memorably caught the mood when he declared that ‘the Channel is no longer a barrier. Steam navigation has rendered that which was before impassable by a military force nothing more than a river passable by a steam bridge.’²⁹ Added to concerns of French offensive power were anxieties, publicly articulated by senior Army officers, about the strength of Britain’s land defences. In 1846 the Inspector-General of Fortifications Major-General Sir John Burgoyne produced a memorandum ‘on the

²⁶ C.I. Hamilton, *Anglo-French Naval Rivalry, 1840-1870* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 3-4; John Howes Gleason, *The Genesis of Russophobia in Britain* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1950).

²⁷ *The Times*, 18 May 1844, p. 6.

²⁸ Parry, *Politics of Patriotism*, pp. 152-156. For general introductions to the invasion scares of this period see Norman Longmate, *Island Fortress: The Defence of Great Britain 1603-1945* (London: Pimlico, 2001) pp. 303-352; Gooch, *Prospect of War*, ch. 1.

²⁹ Palmerston, Parl. Deb., 30 July 1845, cols. 1223-1224.

possible results of a war with France'.³⁰ Burgoyne questioned the ability of the Royal Navy to prevent a hostile landing, seriously criticised the organisation and efficiency of the Army, and laid stress on the nation's 'absolute' lack of fortresses. The result was an authoritative and profoundly pessimistic document, which, by exaggerating British weaknesses and French strengths, set the tone for all subsequent alarmists. Burgoyne was supported in a private letter from the septuagenarian Commander-in-Chief, the Duke of Wellington, published in January 1848, which maintained that the French could land 40,000 troops 'at any time of tide, with any wind, and in any weather' and seize London.³¹ The motivations ascribed to the French were brutally simple, almost one-dimensional: expansionist greed, jealousy of British power and determination to avenge the defeat of 1815.³²

This 'first' invasion panic lasted only a few short months, but its conclusion did not end the ongoing Anglo-French antagonism. Despite the grand talk of universal peace generated by the Great Exhibition, 1851 saw a reinvigoration of Francophobia in Britain as the Anglo-French naval arms race reached a new peak.³³ In December Louis Napoleon staged a coup which placed the name most associated in the British mind with invasion at the head of a modern steam navy.³⁴ With France in a state of some instability, one emerging fear was that Napoleon might attack Britain in an attempt to unify his own country, an anxiety which long outlived his ill-fated reign.³⁵ The 'second' panic slowly died away during early 1853, finally dissipating in 1854 after France and Britain found themselves allied during the Crimean War. Indeed, the conclusion of the war appeared to herald a new dawn for international law and co-operation, when in 1856 the Treaty of Paris outlawed privateering and recognised the rights of neutral

³⁰ Gooch, *Prospect of War*, p. 2; Longmate, *Island Fortress*, pp. 310.

³¹ Jay Luvaas, *The Education of an Army: British Military Thought, 1815-1940* (London: Cassell, 1965), pp. 73-76.

³² Longmate, *Island Fortress*, 307-312.

³³ Hamilton, *Anglo-French Naval Rivalry*, pp. 53-54.

³⁴ Longmate, *Island Fortress*, pp. 313-16.

³⁵ Parry, *Politics of Patriotism*, pp. 206-207; Jonathan Parry, 'The Impact of Napoleon III on British Politics, 1851-1880', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 11 (2001), pp. 147-175.

shipping. Passionately supported by Liberal opinion in Britain, this declaration gave encouragement to Cobden's view that free trade would eventually abolish warfare altogether.³⁶

The events of 1858-1860 were to strike a severe blow at this new confidence, however. In January 1858, Italian nationalists attempted to assassinate Napoleon using a bomb made in Birmingham. Coinciding with friction over Italian unification and recent French naval increases – including the launch of the world's first seagoing ironclad *Gloire* – it was hardly surprising that these years saw the most severe peacetime invasion scare in modern British history.³⁷ More than any other war scare the panic of 1859 was a watershed moment, leaving its imprint on both the British people and their landscape.³⁸ It inspired the Rifle Volunteer movement, an attempt to turn middle England into 'efficient exemplars of Guerrilla warriors' which was taken up across the nation.³⁹ It also moved Prime Minister Palmerston to fund a multi-million pound fortification programme, unmatched in the history of the British Isles, ringing Portsmouth and Plymouth with guns.⁴⁰ Subsequently known as 'Palmerston's follies', these forts became regarded as an example of the enormous financial and military damage which an invasion 'panic' could wreak: defence spending rose by almost a third between 1859 and 1861.⁴¹

Nevertheless by 1860, with the exception of Cobden and his small group of followers, the outlook of the defence pessimists had become accepted across the British political spectrum.⁴² Indeed, even Cobden was forced to give a sop to this feeling, assuring the Commons in 1862 that, if the Navy was shown to be insufficient, 'I would willingly vote £100,000,000 of money to protect our country against attack', a statement that his followers would later come to regret.⁴³

³⁶ Bernard Semmel, *Liberalism and Naval Strategy*, (Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1986), pp. 56-59.

³⁷ Hamilton, *Anglo-French Naval Rivalry*, pp. 81-84; Michael J. Salevouris, *Riflemen Form: The War Scare of 1859-60 in England* (New York: Garland, 1982), p. 3.

³⁸ Salevouris, *The War Scare*, p. 1; Longmate, *Island Fortress*, p. 324.

³⁹ *John Bull*, 10 Oct. 1859, p. 646; Hugh Cunningham, *The Volunteer Force: A Social and Political History, 1859-1908* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1975); Ian F.W. Beckett, *Riflemen Form! A Study of the Rifle Volunteer Movement, 1859-1908* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Military, 2007).

⁴⁰ Andrew Saunders, *Fortress Britain: Artillery Fortification in the British Isles and Ireland* (Liphook: Beaufort, 1989), p. 175.

⁴¹ Longmate, *Island Fortress*, p. 337; Parry, *Politics of Patriotism*, pp. 234-235.

⁴² Longmate, *Island Fortress*, pp. 322-323.

⁴³ Cobden, Parl. Deb., 7 July 1862, col. 1557; Semmel, *Liberalism and Naval Strategy*, pp. 79-81.

While the intellectual continuity between 1859 and later events is obvious, historians have not tended to emphasise the personal nature of this link. This is an important omission, because a perusal of the biographies of many prominent politicians of the 1880s reveals the ‘third’ panic to have been a formative moment for many of them. Lord Salisbury, at this time a journalist, was deeply impressed by the danger posed by French desire for ‘military glory’.⁴⁴ The future Liberal Cabinet members Joseph Chamberlain and Charles Dilke enthusiastically joined the Rifle Volunteers alongside many other serving and future politicians, both MPs and Lords.⁴⁵ On the other hand, as Palmerston’s Chancellor, Gladstone was forever haunted by his inability to prevent the fortification programme.⁴⁶ In this respect it also had an important effect on Liberal Radicalism. For example Sir Wilfrid Lawson, an ‘advanced Radical’ prominent in the peace movement during the 1880s, was first elected to the Commons in 1859 and never forgot either the cost or the popularity of Palmerston’s fortification programme against which he protested alongside Cobden.⁴⁷ These experiences left a profound impression on an entire generation. While politicians may have remembered the cost and ‘panic’, for alarmists the period provided an important cautionary tale of what could occur if the defences were allowed to slip. This latter impression was given credibility by the fact that, during the 1850s, the French fleet posed a genuine, if exaggerated, technological and numerical challenge to the Royal Navy.⁴⁸ Within naval circles this time was remembered as an ‘era of fortification’ when the Navy was neglected and the importance of sea power forgotten.⁴⁹ It is no coincidence that the second half of the 1860s saw the foundations laid for what would become the ‘blue water’ school of naval theory, which laid emphasis on the Navy as the first and only line of defence against invasion.⁵⁰

⁴⁴ Roberts, *Salisbury*, p. 45.

⁴⁵ Denis Judd, *Radical Joe: A Life of Joseph Chamberlain* (Aberystwyth: University of Wales Press, 1977), p. 29; David Nicholls, *The Lost Prime Minister: A life of Sir Charles Dilke* (London: Hambledon, 1995) p. 8; Beckett, *Riflemen Form*, ch. 2.

⁴⁶ Salevouris, *The War Scare*, pp. 95-99.

⁴⁷ George W. E. Russell (ed.), *Sir Wilfrid Lawson: A Memoir* (London: Smith, Elder & Co, 1909), p. 51.

⁴⁸ Hamilton, *Anglo-French Rivalry*, ch. 3; Salevouris, *The War Scare*, ch. 5.

⁴⁹ George S. Clarke and James R. Thursfield, ‘Introduction’, *The Navy and the Nation* (London: Murray, 1897), p. 7.

⁵⁰ D.M. Schurman, *The Education of a Navy: The Development of British Naval Strategic Thought, 1867–1914* (London: Cassell, 1965), pp. 21-23. For a full discussion see Marder, *Anatomy*, ch. 5.

Equally important was the literary tradition left by the panics. By 1860, the vulnerability of Britain had become a profitable industry, and writing treatises on the subject a common pastime for retired or half-pay armed forces officers. Michael Partridge has identified well over a hundred such works published between 1845 and 1870, from sober theoretical texts on fortification to the hyperbolic *Defenceless State of Great Britain* (1850).⁵¹ In the aftermath of the Franco-Prussian War in 1871 this phenomenon was given a new impetus when Colonel George Chesney published his short story, *The Battle of Dorking: Reminiscences of a Volunteer*, spawning a popular genre of ‘invasion literature’ that only lost its appeal after 1914.⁵² In a vivid account of the invasion and subjugation of Britain by Germany, the Royal Navy is destroyed and the British Army and Volunteers are routed by the efficient Prussian military. In the Carthaginian peace that follows, Britain’s trade and industrial power is usurped by the victor and the Empire is carved up by opportunistic imperial rivals. ‘Truly’, reflects the narrator, ‘the nation was ripe for a fall; but when I reflect how a little firmness and self-denial, or political courage and foresight, might have averted the disaster, I feel that the judgement must have really been deserved.’⁵³ An explicit critique of the dangerously contented ‘commercialism’ that Chesney regarded as a hallmark of the liberal outlook, the story added not only novelty, but also signalled an ideological turn in the arguments of the defence pessimists. From the 1870s onwards, they increasingly strove to attack not simply the ‘defenceless state of England’, but the liberal world-view itself.

The Cobdenite Critique

⁵¹ Michael Stephen Partridge, *Military Planning for the Defense of the United Kingdom, 1814-1870* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1989), pp. 14-15, 176-184. For a good discussion see Longmate, *Island Fortress*, pp. 307-316.

⁵² The classic account of *Dorking* and its influence is Clarke, *Voices*, ch. 2. See also David Finkelstein, ‘From Textuality to Orality – the Reception of *The Battle of Dorking*’, John Thomson (ed.) in *Books and Bibliography* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2002), pp. 87-102. The quantity of academic work on the genre itself is enormous. See for example Clarke, *Voices*; Cecil D. Eby, *The Road to Armageddon: The Martial Spirit in English Popular Literature, 1870-1914* (USA: Duke University Press, 1987); A. Michael Matin, “‘The Hun is at the Gate!’: Historicizing Kipling’s Militaristic Rhetoric, from the Imperial Periphery to the National Center, Part Two: The French, Russian and German Threats to Great Britain’, *Studies in the Novel*, 31 (1999), pp. 432-470; Michael Paris, *Warrior Nation: Images of War in British Popular Culture, 1850-2000* (London: Reaktion Books, 2000), ch. 3.

⁵³ George Tomkyns Chesney, ‘The Battle of Dorking: Reminiscences of a Volunteer’, *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* (May 1871), pp. 539-572 (pp. 571-572).

If the war scares of the 1840s and 1850s provided the foundations of the later defence pessimism, the parallel career and publications of Richard Cobden served as a model for the Radicals and peace campaigners of the 1880s. After the repeal of the Corn Laws, Cobden, along with his close friend and ally John Bright, became closely involved with the British peace movement.⁵⁴ He was an important supporter of the 1851 Great Exhibition, protested Palmerston's foreign and defence policies by refusing a Cabinet position in 1859 and with Gladstone's support attempted to combat the war scare by negotiating a free trade treaty with Napoleon in 1860.⁵⁵ The arguments against the invasion scares he constructed during these years came subsequently to pervade British intellectual and popular thought on warfare, something to which the lack of a proper academic study has blinded us.⁵⁶ When Chesney came to pen *The Battle of Dorking* in 1871, for example, it was Cobden's outlook which he had in his sights. It is necessary, therefore, to summarise Cobden's principle critiques of the mid-century invasion scares in order to understand the ideological context in which the defence debates of the 1880s took place.

For Cobden, war represented a fundamental collapse of human rationality.⁵⁷ As far as he was concerned, the interests of both individuals and the state were directly linked to the peaceful maintenance of industrialism and free trade: war, by disrupting these 'natural' processes, damaged the entire community.⁵⁸ Armed forces, argued Cobden, should be maintained only for defensive needs. Any money spent on warlike preparations represented a waste of state resources and an unnecessary, even tyrannical, burden on the taxpayer.⁵⁹ Interweaving his criticisms with an older anti-aristocratic Radical tradition, he maintained that wars were 'got up'

⁵⁴ David Nicholls, 'Richard Cobden, Middle-Class Radicalism, and the Peace Congress Movement 1848-53', *Journal of British Studies*, 30 (1991), 351-376; Martin Ceadel, 'Cobden and Peace' in Anthony Howe and Simon Morgan, *Rethinking Nineteenth-Century Liberalism: Richard Cobden Bicentenary Essays* (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 189-207.

⁵⁵ Howe, *Free Trade*, pp. 86-99; Parry, *Politics of Patriotism*, pp. 235-237.

⁵⁶ Although the work of Anthony Howe has enormously expanded our understanding of Cobden's posthumous influence on late nineteenth century politics and other writers have stressed the importance of his thought to the British and European peace movements, the way in which his memory persisted in the discussion of national defence more generally during this period has not been examined.

⁵⁷ For a concise discussion see Pick, *War Machine*, ch. 2.

⁵⁸ Peter Cain, 'Capitalism, War and Internationalism in the Thought of Richard Cobden', *British Journal of International Studies*, 5 (1970), pp. 229-247.

⁵⁹ Cain, 'Thought of Richard Cobden', pp. 233-234, 244.

at the whim of diplomats and generals who had either an ideological interest in maintaining the European balance of power, or a personal interest in securing more funding for the military. Convinced that the interconnected world of the nineteenth century had rendered war and imperial expansion obsolete, Cobden argued for an essentially isolationist foreign policy, with Britain acting only to use its 'moral' influence to secure the expansion of liberty and commerce.⁶⁰

As part of his opposition to the invasion scares, Cobden produced two substantive works analysing and refuting the claims of the defence pessimists, *1793 and 1853, in Three Letters* (1853) and *The Three Panics* (1862), the latter perhaps his most famous literary production.⁶¹ Quick to analyse the 'shoal of publications' that resulted from the scare of 1853, Cobden boiled down the pessimistic geopolitical vision to two essential ingredients:

First, that we have made no provision for our defence, and, therefore, offer a tempting prey to an invader; and, next, that the French are a mere band of pirates, bound by no ties of civilization, and ready to pounce upon any point of our coast which is left unprotected.⁶²

Cobden did much to combat these assumptions. In the first instance, he meticulously compared French military and naval strength with the British, arguing that the British navy had long been maintained at a ratio of three-to-two over its French counterpart.⁶³ France, he suggested, had neither the financial, material nor industrial resources to pose a serious challenge. From the British ignorance of these facts he drew an important lesson about the psychological nature of the defence 'panic'. 'It seems to be the peculiar characteristic of these panics,' he reflected, 'that they who fall under their influence are deprived of all remembrance of what has been already done for their security.'⁶⁴

⁶⁰ Cain, 'Thought of Richard Cobden', pp. 241-243.

⁶¹ This section is based on the 'third letter' of *1793 and 1853*, as well as the entirety of *The Three Panics*, both in Richard Cobden, Louis Mallet (ed.), *The Political Writings of Richard Cobden*, vol. II (London: Fisher-Unwin, 1903).

⁶² Cobden, *Political Writings*, p. 344.

⁶³ See for example Cobden, *Political Writings*, pp. 539-547; 608-611.

⁶⁴ Cobden, *Political Writings*, pp. 570-571.

In answer to the idea that the French would act as ‘pirates’, Cobden argued that such fears were entirely at odds with the past and present conduct of that nation. Indeed, whereas alarmists insisted that history showed France to be constantly plotting against its neighbour, in Cobden’s view it was the United Kingdom that had repeatedly ravaged French coasts, landed armies on the Continent and was now constructing an enormous navy despite the lack of any obvious threat.⁶⁵ France, he insisted, was one of the most cultured, commercial and intelligent nations on earth. ‘There is no instance recorded in history’, he continued, ‘of such a country suddenly casting itself down to the level with Malays and New Zealanders by committing an unprovoked act of piracy upon a neighbouring nation.’⁶⁶ Crucially, Cobden stressed the necessity of appreciating the situation from the French perspective, a point which hitherto had been conspicuously absent from the British defence debates. Relentlessly emphasising commercial factors and the interconnectedness of trade, he completely rejected the idea that France could make any profit out of an opportunist war. Not only would its own economy suffer, but Cobden believed it would face the combined wrath of European civilisation:

Intelligent men in that country cannot believe that we think them capable of such folly, nay madness, as to rush headlong, without provocation, and without notice, into a war with the most powerful nation in the world, before whose very ports the raw materials of their manufactures pass, the supply of which, and the consequent employment and subsistence of millions of their population, would be immediately cut off, to say nothing of the terrible retribution which would be visited upon their shores, whilst all the world would be calling for the extermination of a community which had abdicated its civilised rank, and become a mere band of lawless buccaneers.⁶⁷

These appeals to civilisation pointed to a fundamental difference in attitude between the pessimists and the liberal internationalists. For the latter, struggles between states were conceived of almost as a ‘duel between honourable gentlemen’, with all the assumptions about legal processes the metaphor implied.⁶⁸ War, it was argued, was limited by a range of

⁶⁵ Cobden, *Political Writings*, pp. 346-347.

⁶⁶ Cobden, *Political Writings*, pp. 361-362.

⁶⁷ Cobden, *Political Writings*, p. 368.

⁶⁸ Martti Koskenniemi, *The Gentle Civilizer of Nations: The Rise and Fall of International Law, 1870-1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 85-87.

international laws and precedents, including the necessity to issue a formal declaration, respect for the rights of neutral powers and the condemnation of underhand tactics such as spying.⁶⁹ In this ‘civilised’ vision of war the ‘bolt from the blue’ was impossible. For Cobden, this was an important flaw in the pessimist case:

...this hypothesis of sudden invasion is absolutely indispensable for affording the alarmists any standing ground whatever. Take away the liability to surprise, by admitting the necessity of a previous ground of quarrel, and the delays of a diplomatic correspondence, and you have time to collect your fleet, and drill an army.⁷⁰

Cobden’s arguments provided an incisive and rational deconstruction of the invasion fear. He distinguished himself among contemporary commentators not only by his confident declarations of British strength, but also by his close attention to the French perspective. Appealing to perceived economic and diplomatic realities, he undercut many of the alarmists’ most ingrained assumptions. On the other hand, many of Cobden’s criticisms are open to the charges of naivety and insularity. Cobdenite ‘little Englanders’ were and are easily accused of existing in a bubble of total security created by the Channel and the Royal Navy, reasoning away all British weaknesses and foreign threats.⁷¹ Importantly, Cobden and his followers repeatedly demonstrated an inability to understand why capitalists might support belligerent policies for their own personal gain.⁷² Although he anticipated, in an important way, the more hard-headed economic arguments of Norman Angell half a century later, he still relied heavily on arguments from human morality which, if not in themselves weak, were like a red rag to the defence alarmists.⁷³ Fundamentally, he failed to appreciate that technology, trade and communication were not always on the side of the peacemakers. Alongside the many strengths of Cobden’s arguments, the idealists of the 1880s also inherited these weaknesses.

⁶⁹ Koskenniemi, *Civilizer of Nations*, pp. 85-86.

⁷⁰ Cobden, *Political Writings*, p. 562.

⁷¹ Grainger, *Patriotisms*, p. 152.

⁷² Cain, ‘Thought of Richard Cobden’, p. 244.

⁷³ Semmel, *Liberalism and Naval Strategy*, p. 79.

The 'Silver Streak'

From the nadir of 1859, Anglo-French relations slowly improved during the 1860s. Internal politics, the creation of a multipolar European order following the rise of Prussia and Italy, and the increasingly obvious superiority of the Royal Navy all contributed to a period of relative cross-Channel diplomatic calm, something cemented by Prussia's defeat of France's in 1871.⁷⁴ Encouraged in part by this, the 1870s were a decade of relative optimism for Britain's Liberals. 'Gladstone-Cobdenism' had triumphed in the 1868 General Election, ushering in a new era of hope for internationalists.⁷⁵ This mood was caught by the Prime Minister himself in a famous essay of 1870, in which he exhibited his belief in Britain's providential role as a nation which understood, more than any other, 'duty, responsibility and conscience'.⁷⁶ Often missed by historians is the article's profound optimism, prominent especially in its conclusion, where Gladstone argued that a new moral force, more powerful than electricity or steam, was coming to characterise the spirit of the age:⁷⁷

Certain is it that a new law of nations is gradually taking hold of the mind, and coming to sway the practice, of the world; a law which recognises independence, which frowns upon aggression, which favours the pacific, not the bloody settlement of disputes, which aims at permanent and not temporary adjustments; above all, which recognises as a tribunal of paramount authority, the general judgement of civilised mankind.⁷⁸

This was, on the other hand, also a period of increased insularity. Because of its geography, Britain was able to maintain a small volunteer army, in stark comparison with the mass conscription that came to characterise Continental forces post-1870. While the British may have regarded Europe as a bastion of world civilisation, they were also quick to condemn its military 'despotism', characterising France and Germany as little more than 'armed camps', straining

⁷⁴ Hamilton, *Anglo-French Rivalry*, pp. 293-299; Beeler, *British Naval Policy*, pp. 203-205.

⁷⁵ Sylvest, *Liberal Internationalism*, p. 41.

⁷⁶ Parry, *Politics of Patriotism*, pp. 254-255.

⁷⁷ Not unsurprisingly, historians have tended to focus on the more practical comments Gladstone made about British diplomacy and the 'concert of Europe'. See Jenkins, *Gladstone*, pp. 329-331; Richard Shannon, *Gladstone: Heroic Minister 1865-1898*, (London: Penguin, 1995), pp. 89-90; Parry, *Politics of Patriotism*, pp. 254-255.

⁷⁸ W.E. Gladstone, 'Germany, France, and England', *Edinburgh Review* (Oct. 1870), pp. 554-593 (p. 593).

under the massive cost of ‘bloated armaments’.⁷⁹ ‘Happy England!’ wrote Gladstone in the same article:

...happy, with a special reference to the present subject, in this, that the wise dispensation of Providence has cut her off, by that streak of silver sea, which passengers so often and justly execrate, though in no way from the duties and the honours, yet partly from the dangers, absolutely from the temptations, which attend upon the local neighbourhood of the Continental nations.⁸⁰

Though he may have been mocked for the complacency of this essay, the phrase ‘silver streak’ immediately entered the lexicon not only as an alternative name for the Channel, but also as a signifier of British exceptionalism and security.⁸¹ It reflected, too, a newfound confidence in the Royal Navy. As Gladstone pointed out, the United Kingdom possessed the finest ironworks and shipbuilders in the world and was entirely self-sufficient in coal.⁸² Over the following years, until Stead’s campaign of 1884, this confidence only grew. Even in the gloomiest of scenarios there was no navy or conceivable combination of navies which might have challenged British sea power during the 1870s, while the capacity and resources of British shipbuilders meant that any attempt to engage the country in a naval arms race would have been ‘futile to the point of foolishness’.⁸³

Gladstone, of course, could never completely live up to the hopes of his 1868 victory. Despite his best efforts spending on the Army slightly increased, while Britain’s foreign policy was accused of drift and impotence.⁸⁴ Disraeli’s victory of 1874 and the rise of European protectionism following the economic depression of the late 1870s offered much over which Liberals might despair.⁸⁵ Yet Liberal confidence in Britain’s present and future remained buoyant, a feeling which Gladstone was able to exploit in his Midlothian campaign at the end of

⁷⁹ Jörn Leonhard, ‘Nations in Arms and Imperial Defence – Continental Models, the British Empire and its Military before 1914’, *Journal of Modern European History*, 5, (2007), pp. 287-308 (pp. 288-291).

⁸⁰ Gladstone, ‘Germany, France, and England’, p. 588.

⁸¹ Parry, *Politics of Patriotism*, pp. 285-286; Cynthia Fansler Behrman, *Victorian Myths of the Sea* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1977), pp. 45-46.

⁸² Gladstone, ‘Germany, France, and England’, pp. 389-390.

⁸³ Beeler, *British Naval Policy*, pp. 208-209, 253.

⁸⁴ Jonathan Parry, ‘Gladstone, Liberalism and the Government of 1868-1874’ in David Bebbington and Roger Swift (eds), *Gladstone Centenary Essays* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press), pp. 94-112.

⁸⁵ Howe, *Free Trade*, pp. 169-170.

the decade. The victory of 1880, although significant in terms of seats, was won on a small enough margin of votes that to ascribe it to any specific policy is difficult.⁸⁶ Nevertheless the peace movement, which had expanded the number of its own advocates in parliament, was convinced that the event marked a victory for peace and internationalism.⁸⁷ In the immediate aftermath of the victory, ‘Gladstonianism’ was used as an antonym for jingoism.⁸⁸ At that year’s jubilant meeting of the Cobden Club – of which twelve of the fourteen new Cabinet ministers were members – the Liberal success was celebrated as a victory for the ideals of its hero: ‘the political nightmare was over’.⁸⁹

Hostilities without Declaration of War

As a Prime Minister with an established record of opposition to armament spending, it was hardly surprising that Gladstone’s election heralded the return of defence pessimism. Inspired by the increasing ‘militarism’ which was now appearing in mainland Europe, military and naval writers were quick to dust off the fears of Wellington and Burgoyne and present them to a generation more aware of the advance of technology than any before. No pessimist diatribe was complete without an introduction dwelling on the growth of international tension. *England on the Defensive* (1881), for example, one of the earliest of the new wave of publications, introduced its subject with a discourse on the power of science, the fragility of peace, ‘the increasing perfection of continental organization and equipment, and the direful celerity of modern war.’⁹⁰ Three years later Colonel Sir Charles Nugent, an inveterate critic of the state of the nation, began a lecture on the same note:

Look where we will throughout Europe, there is cause for grave anxiety;— a vague feeling of uneasiness and mistrust prevails everywhere. Nation watching nation, all

⁸⁶ Trevor Lloyd, *The General Election of 1880*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 158.

⁸⁷ Laity, *British Peace Movement*, p. 88.

⁸⁸ Martin Ceadel, *Semi-Detached Idealists: The British Peace Movement and International Relations, 1854-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 111.

⁸⁹ *Daily News*, 12 July 1880, p. 2.

⁹⁰ J.T. Barrington, *England on the Defensive or the Problem of Invasion* (London: Kegan Paul, 1881), p. 2.

stand armed to the teeth in painful expectancy... On every side the elements of strife abound.⁹¹

Most famously, in 1887, Sir Charles Dilke published 'a tract for the times' in the form of *The Present Position of European Politics*.⁹² 'The present position of the European world', he began, 'is one in which sheer force holds a larger place than it has held in modern times since the fall of Napoleon.' The 1880s, he reflected, had become 'a period of despair to the disciples of Richard Cobden.'⁹³

Once again, steam was pointed to as negating British insular protection. In a direct attack on the legacy of Gladstone's 1870 essay, retired naval officer Edward Plunkett, 16th Baron Dunsany, dismissed the silver streak as nothing more than a 'delusion as dangerous as any which has deceived a nation.'⁹⁴ 'No naval officer', he declared, 'would contend that in a war with France alone, our present ironclad navy could protect our colonies, our commerce, and our communications with India, and likewise provide a superior force to defend our shores.'⁹⁵ By 1888 there had developed a vocal movement, led by the respected Lieutenant-General Sir Edward Hamley, relentlessly arguing that the next great war 'will, in all probability, be fought out on English soil'.⁹⁶ The 'invasion scare' of that year marked the opening of a public and official debate on invasion defence that did not subside until the end of 1914 [Figure 2].⁹⁷

These new concerns were not completely removed from the international situation. By 1880 France had rebuilt its armed forces, and was obviously imbued with a new sense of confidence.⁹⁸ In 1881, French forces swiftly and easily annexed Tunis, foreshadowing the Anglo-French break over Egypt the following year [Figures 3; 4]. Colonial tensions steadily

⁹¹ Sir Charles Nugent, 'Imperial Defence: Part I. Home Defences', *Journal of the Royal United Service Institution*, 28 (1884), pp. 427-458 (p. 428).

⁹² W.S. Hamer, *The British Army: Civil-Military Relations 1885-1905* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 115.

⁹³ Sir Charles Wentworth Dilke, *The Present Position of European Politics or Europe in 1887* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1887), pp. 1-3.

⁹⁴ Lord Dunsany, 'The 'Silver Streak'', *Nineteenth Century* (May 1881), pp. 737-755.

⁹⁵ Dunsany, 'Silver Streak', p. 744.

⁹⁶ F.N. Maude, *The Invasion and Defence of England* (London: W. Thacker, 1888), p. 2.

⁹⁷ Howard Roy Moon, 'The Invasion of the United Kingdom: Public Controversy and Official Planning 1888-1918', (PhD Thesis: University of London, 1968).

⁹⁸ Kennedy, *Great Powers*, p. 219.

increased during the rest of the nineteenth century, peaking in 1898 when the two nations came close to war.⁹⁹ Complimenting this newfound imperial energy was a vociferous public debate about the future of the French navy. Most prominent was the name of Admiral Hyacinthe Aube, who was Minister of Marine in 1886 and 1887. Aube advocated for an aggressive strategy of commerce warfare and the mass deployment of torpedo boats, a strategy subsequently known as the *Jeune École*.¹⁰⁰ Although in retrospect an admission that France could never hope to equal the Royal Navy's battleship strength, Aube's ideas garnered great attention in Britain, where he was often used by alarmists to illustrate France's hostile intentions towards the Empire.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Kennedy, *Great Powers*, pp. 219-220; T.G. Otte, 'From "War-in-Sight" to Nearly War: Anglo-French Relations in the Age of High Imperialism, 1875-1898', *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 17 (2007), pp. 693-714.

¹⁰⁰ Arne Røksund, *The Jeune École: The Strategy of the Weak* (Boston, Mass.: Brill, 2007).

¹⁰¹ Marder, *Anatomy*, ch. 6.



“THE UNPROTECTED FEMALE”!

Figure 2: ‘The Unprotected Female!’

An image from the 1888 scare. Britannia, surrounded by smashed arms and ‘broken contracts’, clings to ‘patriotism’ as her only weapon. *Punch*, 26 May 1888, p. 247.



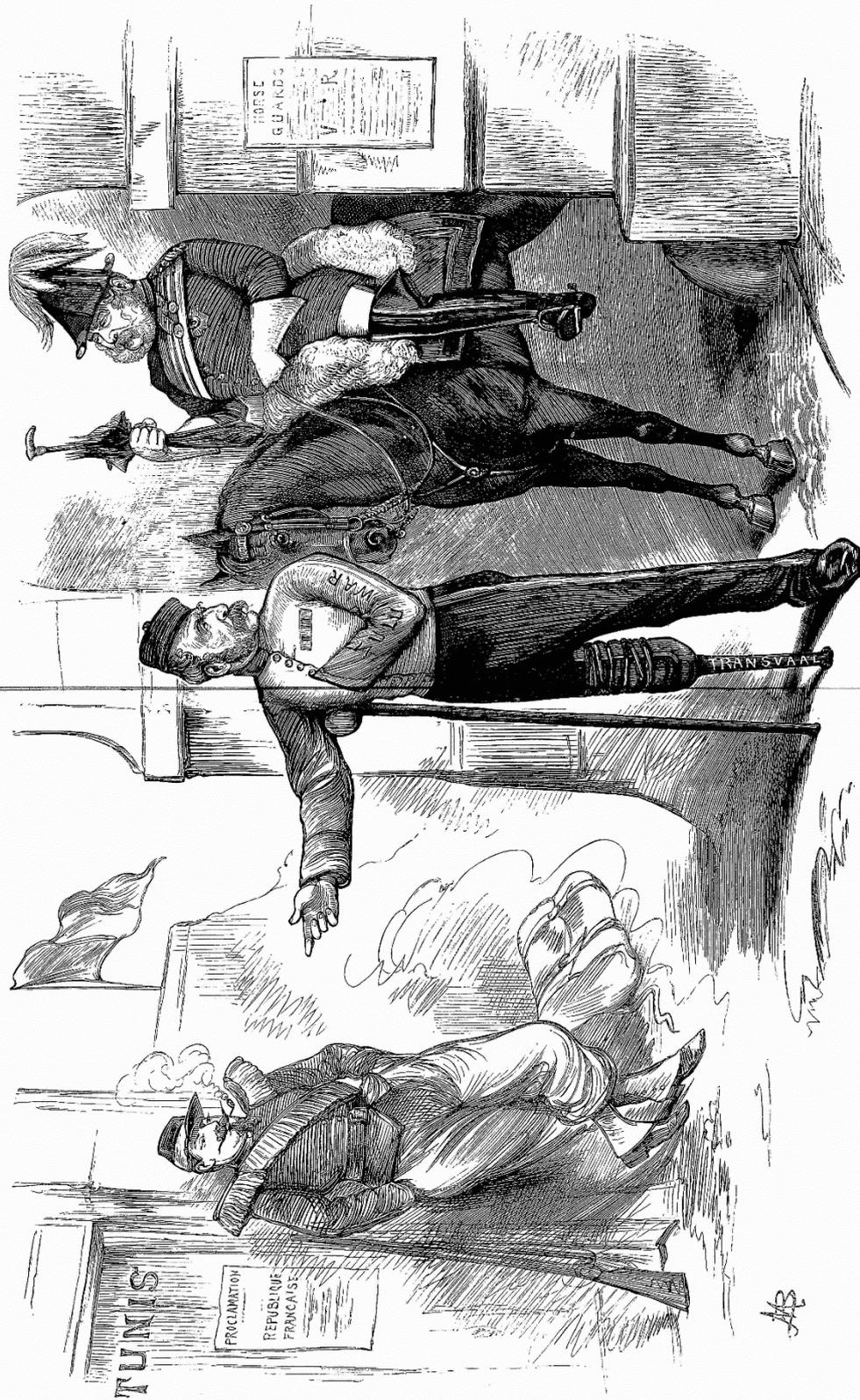
“VIVE LA GLOIRE!”

OR, FASHION REPEATS ITSELF.

Figure 3: ‘Vive la Gloire!’

France re-accustoms herself to military glory, exchanging her Phrygian ‘liberty’ cap for a suit of armour in the aftermath of the 1881 occupation of Tunis. *Punch*, 21 May 1881, p. 234.

MOONSHINE.—May 28, 1881.



TOMMY ATKINS.—"THEY MANAGE THESE THINGS BETTER IN FRANCE, YOUR ROYAL HIGHNESS."

Figure 4: 'They manage these things better in France'.

A British soldier, who has lost an arm in Zululand and a leg in the Transvaal, indicates the ease with which the French occupied Tunis to a mounted Duke of Cambridge, the Commander in Chief of the British Army. *Moonshine*, 28 May 1881, pp. 257-258.

Although these anxieties owed much to the scares of the mid-century, there was an ideological undercurrent common to the works of the 1880s which the pessimism of previous decades had rarely featured. As we have seen, Gladstonian Liberalism was more than simply parsimonious. Its world-view, reflected in the slogan ‘peace, retrenchment and reform’, stood fundamentally at odds with that held by the defence pessimists. The Gladstonian political consensus which combined low-spending commercialism and liberal internationalism was regarded by them as dangerous utopianism, placing the United Kingdom in a profoundly vulnerable position:

Well worth plundering, rich and vulnerable; exciting the envy of her neighbours; unreliable as an ally; unwilling to march a soldier or move a ship, save in defence of her own selfish interests; loudly proclaiming her selfishness to the world; trusting to her own inoffensiveness and meekness under insult to save her from attack – she offers a tempting prize to her poorer and possibly less scrupulous neighbours, who still seem to retain more faith in big battalions than in the doctrines of the international arbitration society.¹⁰²

Above everything else, this perspective was defined by an absolute disavowal of the idea of ‘civilised’ warfare. In the period since Cobden had written *The Three Panics* international law had grown in confidence and popularity, and during the 1870s there emerged in Europe a genuine feeling that war could be ‘humanised’ through legal restrictions.¹⁰³ One important effect of this development was the belief that conflict between states could not occur without a formal declaration of war being issued.¹⁰⁴ Surprise attack, it was argued, was now practically impossible, prevented by diplomatic conventions, intelligence gathering, technological developments and ‘international morality’. This view was summed up by the Liberal *Manchester Guardian* in 1882, in an echo of Cobden’s observations two decades earlier:

Nations as a rule do not go to war without some preliminary diplomatic skirmishing, and even the great military Powers would find it difficult, if not absolutely impossible,

¹⁰² Anon., ‘National Defence’, *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* (March 1889), pp. 437-452 (p. 437).

¹⁰³ Mazower, *Governing the World*, pp. 67-70; Sylvest, *Liberal Internationalism*, pp. 66-81.

¹⁰⁴ Clyde Eagleton, ‘The Form and Function of the Declaration of War’, *The American Journal of International Law*, 32 (1938), pp. 19-35 (pp. 20-21).

to organise a powerful expedition with a secrecy which would elude all observation.

This being so, there would be ample time to prepare for an enemy.¹⁰⁵

This, of course, did not sit well with the pessimist outlook. As Cobden perceived in 1862, the ‘hypothesis of sudden invasion’ was utterly crucial to the cries of ‘England in Danger’. In the face of legal, political and cultural confidence in the declaration of war and the impossibility of surprise attack, pessimists needed more than mere rhetoric to give their arguments intellectual weight. This they acquired in 1883 through the work of Colonel J.F. Maurice.

In January 1882, during Lieutenant-General Sir Garnet Wolseley’s interview before the Board of Trade Committee on the Channel Tunnel, the committee’s Chairman and determined Cobdenite Thomas Farrer treated with scepticism the likelihood that the country could be attacked ‘out of a clear sky without any previous strain or notice that a quarrel was impending’. ‘Has that’, he wanted to know, ‘happened on any single occasion within the last 50 or 100 years?’¹⁰⁶ Struck by this question and his own difficulty in answering it, Wolseley commissioned Colonel John Frederick Maurice of the War Office Intelligence Branch to conduct research into the matter. The result was *Hostilities without Declaration of War: an Historical Abstract of the Cases in which Hostilities have occurred between Civilized Powers prior to Declaration or Warning from 1700 to 1870*, provided as evidence to the 1883 Parliamentary Joint Select Committee on the Tunnel. At the end of 1883 it was published by order of the Secretary of State for War, ‘accessible to the public at a low price’ of two shillings.¹⁰⁷

According to Maurice’s introduction, the findings of *Hostilities* surprised even the author himself. Far from a few isolated cases, Maurice identified 107 examples between 1700 and 1870 where European war had occurred without a formal declaration, and fewer than ten cases where the opposite was true; as far as he was concerned, the practice of declaring war prior to

¹⁰⁵ *Manchester Guardian*, 17 June 1882, p. 9.

¹⁰⁶ *Correspondence with Reference to the Proposed Construction of a Channel Tunnel* (Hereafter *Correspondence*), C. 3358 (1882), p. 223.

¹⁰⁷ J.F. Maurice, *Hostilities without Declaration of War* (London: HMSO, 1883), p. v; Lord Hartington, Parl. Deb., 24 July 1883, col. 288.

aggressive action had very little precedent in history at all.¹⁰⁸ Insofar as official declarations served any purpose, Maurice argued they had traditionally been used by the government of the aggressor nation to inform its own people, rather than to notify the country that had been attacked. Far from the progress of science reducing bellicosity, he argued that his findings showed how new technologies tempted, encouraged and rewarded pre-emptive strikes.¹⁰⁹ He was, he wrote, aware that his book ‘almost assumes the form of an attack upon the national morality of the modern world’.¹¹⁰ Yet he was keen to stress how, at the time they occurred, these apparent breaches of international law went uncondemned by the international community, contradicting Cobden’s assumptions that such ‘piracy’ would be swiftly punished by the community of nations.¹¹¹ For him, the modern feeling against surprise attacks was drawn, not from a reading of history, but from the plays of Shakespeare or wars of classical antiquity.¹¹² ‘Sympathies’, Maurice concluded, ‘do not alter facts’.

Although his preface insisted that the book contained no moral, Maurice was obviously concerned with drawing lessons from the past which might be applicable to the present British situation. For example, in discussing those cases where surprise had been achieved, Maurice assured his readers that ‘the surprise, which overtook the assailed country, was as complete as would be the effect if *to-day*, or at any time during this last year and a half, a foreign army had landed on the shores of England.’¹¹³ To reinforce this point, much of the book’s introduction was dedicated to a comparative discussion of ‘peace’ as experienced in Britain and on the European mainland. As far as Maurice was concerned, only in England and the United States could peace be said to ‘reign’. ‘The profoundest peace in which the Continent ever lives’, he argued, ‘does not present the equivalent of English placid security.’ To support this assertion he gave a practical example from everyday life: while Continental fortress guards went on duty with loaded rifles and orders to shoot trespassers, their British equivalents were not even issued

¹⁰⁸ Maurice, *Hostilities*, p. 4.

¹⁰⁹ Maurice, *Hostilities*, p. 8.

¹¹⁰ Maurice, *Hostilities*, p. 11.

¹¹¹ Maurice, *Hostilities*, p. 11.

¹¹² Maurice, *Hostilities*, p. 8.

¹¹³ Maurice, *Hostilities*, p. vi. Emphasis in original.

ammunition and were reliant on the local police to deal with civilian intruders.¹¹⁴ To those who believed that Britain would never be attacked during a period of ‘profound peace’, Maurice retorted that such an argument ignored this important difference in meaning which the phrase held either side of the Channel. Rarely had Britain’s insular exceptionalism – both its benefits and drawbacks – been articulated with such lucidity.

Although recognised as providing ‘quasi-official backing’ to the idea of surprise attack or invasion, Maurice’s work has generally been neglected by historians.¹¹⁵ This is surprising, not least because its importance was readily recognised upon publication. The Conservative *Morning Post* was effusive in its praise, declaring that ‘the patriotic opponents of the scheme for “invasion made easy” will do well to peruse and digest “Hostilities without Declaration of War.”’¹¹⁶ The *St. James’ Gazette* considered it a fatal blow to the complacent assumption that wars rarely began without a formal declaration.¹¹⁷ In a significant retreat from its former position, the *Manchester Guardian* recommended the ‘remarkable and spirited’ book, observing how it proved neither public nor international opinion were to be depended upon as a ‘safeguard against the recurrence of high-handed proceedings in times of national excitement.’¹¹⁸ The book continued to influence military thought into the twentieth century. In 1905, the Secretary of the Committee of Imperial Defence complained that high-ranking Army officers were continually citing it in support of a larger Army for defence against sudden invasion.¹¹⁹ It was one of two works cited by the Royal United Services Institution when it awarded Maurice the prestigious Chesney Gold Medal in 1907 and in his obituary in 1912 *The Times* referred to *Hostilities* as a ‘classic’ worthy of the attention of contemporary military opinion.¹²⁰

¹¹⁴ Maurice, *Hostilities*, p. 10

¹¹⁵ Spiers, *Late Victorian Army*, p. 225; Gooch, *Prospect of War*, p. 6; Luvaas, *Education of an Army*, p. 184.

¹¹⁶ *Morning Post*, 13 Dec. 1883, pp. 4-5.

¹¹⁷ *St. James's Gazette*, 5 Dec. 1883, pp. 6-7

¹¹⁸ *Manchester Guardian*, 24 Dec. 1883, p. 5.

¹¹⁹ Moon, ‘Invasion of the United Kingdom’, pp. 295-296.

¹²⁰ *The Times*, 9 May 1907, p. 8; 13 Jan. 1912; p. 11. See also *Saturday Review*, 12 Apr. 1913, pp. 460-461.

On closer analysis, however, Maurice's work contained a number of problems. In particular, he had failed to differentiate between attacks that had occurred with total surprise, and the great majority which, while not preceded by any formal warning, had nevertheless taken place during a period of strained relations, when the defenders were not taken unawares.¹²¹ This was the line taken by the *London Standard* in 1883, which expressed surprise that the Intelligence Department appeared willing to spend so much of its time 'forging such terrific thunderbolts against the peace and comfort of human society.'¹²² So many of Maurice's examples, argued the paper, occurred during periods of general European warfare or tension; more importantly, recent European conflicts such as those of 1859, 1866, or 1871 could hardly be said to have fallen out of a clear sky. 'It seems somewhat absurd', it continued, 'to go back a century and a half, when international morality was almost unknown, and was habitually ignored; but the writer in the Intelligence Department sets such store by the action of Frederick the Great in entering Silesia without a declaration of war, that one might think it happened yesterday.' *Hostilities without Declaration of War*, it concluded, was 'difficult to treat seriously as an official document'.

It is hard to deny that Maurice's version of history had not been carefully edited and presented to support his views about present-day 'international morality'. But this should not distract from the fact that he had introduced a level of academic rigour which had hitherto been lacking from the arguments of the defence pessimists.¹²³ Over the following years, soldiers and sailors increasingly turned to the events of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries to inform and support their own theories of how wars should be fought and the state should be defended, a genre which saw its most famous output in 1890 with the American A.T. Mahan's *Influence of Sea Power Upon History*.¹²⁴ A good example of this trend was C.B. Norman's 1887 book, *The Corsairs of France*. Although the bulk of the text provided a history of French privateering, its express aim was to illustrate how vulnerable Britain would be in a future commerce war with

¹²¹ Spiers, *Late Victorian Army*, p. 225.

¹²² *The Standard*, 17 Dec. 1883, p. 5.

¹²³ Luvaas, *Education of an Army*, p. 428.

¹²⁴ A.T. Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power upon History*, 5th edn (New York: Dover, 1987), For an introduction to these developments see Luvaas, *Education of an Army*; Schurman, *Education of a Navy*; Howard Bailes, 'Patterns of Thought in the Late Victorian Army', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 4 (1981), pp. 29-45. For the influence of earlier writers on Mahan see Mullins, *Transformation*, esp. pp. 288-289.

France. Tellingly, the only map attached to the book depicted Anglo-French naval bases in 1887. For Norman, there was no question that wars of the present would follow the lines of those of the past. Dismissing the 1856 Treaty of Paris, he presented a vision of ‘uncivilised’ warfare which owed much to Maurice’s example:

Treaties are still made to be broken, and I presume no sane man in the United Kingdom harbours the most distant hope that Privateering will not be vigorously resumed in the next great war in which England is engaged. These pages show how we suffered at hands of our hereditary foes in earlier days; the map which heads the volume shows how easy it would be for France to inflict a like damage in future years. Her naval stations dominate every commercial route we possess, and yet our coaling stations are unfortified and our swift cruisers unbuilt.¹²⁵

Certainly, Britain was slightly deficient in fast cruisers in 1887, but, as discussed in Part III, the nation was hardly as defenceless as Norman maintained.¹²⁶ If it demonstrated anything, Norman’s map showed the weakness of the French, not the British position: with so many of its naval bases stationed close to major British colonies, it appeared unlikely that they would remain in French hands for long following the outbreak of an Anglo-French naval war. By emphasising France’s historical tradition of commerce raiding, Norman thereby concealed the contemporary weaknesses of the country. This, besides a lack of faith in the home defences, was a defining feature of the British pessimistic outlook: a total failure to rationally appreciate the real position of France. Considering the importance that the myth of French strength played in the political developments of the 1880s, it is worth taking some time to examine how the geopolitical situation looked from the other side of the Channel.

The French Threat: Reality and Perception

The driving fear behind the British invasion and naval scares of the 1880s was that the country would find itself in a position of military and naval weakness from which it would be impossible to recover during wartime. For contemporary France, this situation was, in many

¹²⁵ C.B. Norman, *The Corsairs of France* (London: Sampson Low, 1887), pp. vi-vii.

¹²⁶ Parkinson, *Late Victorian Navy*, pp. 107-109.

respects, a reality.¹²⁷ On the high seas the French Navy was in a position of permanent inferiority to its British rival.¹²⁸ If the British Admiralty struggled with the balance of forces in the English Channel and Mediterranean, the French position was even more acute, forced to spread its smaller number of ships to defend not only both shores of France but also North Africa against the nightmare combination of Britain and the rising naval power of Italy.¹²⁹ On land the situation was little better. Although its army enormously outnumbered the British, relative to the other Great Powers France's population declined during the nineteenth century, leaving it trailing Germany in terms of military manpower, while the more numerous German reservists were generally better trained, organised and supported than their French counterparts.¹³⁰ Unsurprisingly the French economy, which in almost all measures was eclipsed by Germany during the 1880s and 1890s, struggled to maintain armed forces which could defend the country from three potential rivals.¹³¹ These serious geopolitical, demographic and economic problems were compounded by political instability. France had no fewer than ten separate Ministers of Marine during the 1880s, and by the 1890s the regular policy changes had left its fleet 'the least homogenous in the world'.¹³² Meanwhile the Army suffered 'a succession of incompetent War Ministers' and growing political disunity, which culminated in the 'Dreyfus Affair' of the 1890s.¹³³ This is not to say France lacked strengths, not least a strong psychological belief in its own fighting ability which led to increasingly confident and aggressive war planning across the period.¹³⁴ Nevertheless, the challenges it faced were in most respects far greater and more complex than Britain's. Most revealingly in the context of British defence fears, despite occasional belligerent outbursts from individual officers it was not until 1897 that the French army put any serious thought into planning an attack on the United

¹²⁷ For excellent discussions of the French position during the later nineteenth century see J.F.V. Keiger, *France and the World Since 1870* (London: Arnold, 2001); Paul Kennedy, *Great Powers*, pp. 282-290.

¹²⁸ See tables of comparative warship tonnage, spending and ship numbers in Kennedy, *Great Powers*, p. 261; Beeler, *British Naval Policy*, pp. 192, 198.

¹²⁹ The Italian naval budget and tonnage more than doubled between 1880 and 1890. See Kennedy, *Great Powers*, p. 261; Beeler, *British Naval Policy*, p. 192.

¹³⁰ Kennedy, *Great Powers*, p. 255; Keiger, *France*, p. 53.

¹³¹ Kennedy, *Great Powers*, p. 286.

¹³² Seligmann, 'Great Security Mirage', pp. 864-865.

¹³³ Keiger, *France*, pp. 51-52.

¹³⁴ Keiger, *France*, p. 52.

Kingdom, and even this proposal for a small expeditionary force was roundly rejected by a French navy convinced of its own inferiority in the face of the British.¹³⁵

If France alone struggled to offer a concrete threat, the other great British bugbear of the period, a Franco-Russian combination, also collapses under scrutiny. Certainly, the Russian threat to India caused serious consternation in both London and Delhi, and the issue brought the two nations close to conflict in 1885.¹³⁶ Concern about the Russian navy was also substantial, not least because a lack of intelligence served to conceal its true potential from the British.¹³⁷ The danger to the British Isles itself from such a combination was easily exaggerated, however. The Russian Navy was seriously compromised from the top down, suffering problems of organisation, technology and personnel.¹³⁸ Indeed, suggestions that the French and Russian Fleets might work together to destroy the British in the Mediterranean were dismissed by the French, who found nothing to praise in the Russian fleet and balked at the distances involved in any cooperation.¹³⁹ The fact was that a Franco-Russian alliance was never likely during the 1880s, and was only signed in 1894.¹⁴⁰ More generally, it was obvious to any competent observer that Germany remained the overwhelming focus of both the French and Russian armed forces throughout the later nineteenth century; a war with the British would leave either country exposed to attack from this quarter.¹⁴¹

The French therefore had much to be concerned about during this period, and as in Britain, this occasionally manifested itself in defence scares. In January 1894, for example, at the same moment that British pessimists were putting pressure on Gladstone's government over the future of the Royal Navy, a series of 'revelations' about the state of the French Navy were published in the Paris press condemning the 'present deplorable state of things' which prevailed

¹³⁵ Moon, 'Invasion of the United Kingdom', pp. 678-681.

¹³⁶ Neilson, 'Myth of Decline', pp. 708-712; Taylor, *Struggle for Mastery*, pp. 297-301.

¹³⁷ Seligmann, 'Great Security Mirage', p. 864.

¹³⁸ Seligmann, 'Great Security Mirage', pp. 865-866.

¹³⁹ Theodore Ropp, Stephen Roberts (ed.), *The Development of a Modern Navy: French Naval Policy, 1871-1904*, (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1987), pp. 204-205; Røksund, *Jeune École*, pp. 147-149.

¹⁴⁰ Taylor, *Struggle for Mastery*, pp. 261, 316-317, 323.

¹⁴¹ Taylor, *Struggle for Mastery*, p. 292.

in the fleet.¹⁴² *Punch* took the opportunity to poke fun at a situation in which admirals on both sides of the Channel were doing their utmost to condemn their own navies, producing a cartoon showing British and French sailors glumly ‘comparing scares’ [Figure 5].

¹⁴² *The Times*, 15 Jan. 1894, p. 5; A.G. Gardiner, *The Life of Sir William Harcourt*, vol. II (London: Constable, 1923), p. 250.



“CONFIDENCES.”

JOHN BULL. “DID YOU EVER SEE ANYTHING WORSE THAN MY NAVY?”
JEAN CRAPAUD. “YES—*MINE*!!!”

Figure 5: ‘Confidences’.

John Bull and Jean Crapaud lament the strength of their respective navies.
Punch, 10 Feb. 1894, p. 67.

This example from *Punch* brings us to an important question: to what extent were the British conscious of the French position? As has been noted in the introduction to this chapter, many within the Admiralty did appreciate the comparable inferiority of the French fleet, and on occasion these truths found their way into the public sphere, not least through returns submitted to parliament by the Sea Lords.¹⁴³ For example, in an 1885 article following the ‘Truth about the Navy’ scare, the naval historian John Knox Laughton demonstrated how alarmists had manipulated these figures to conceal the fact that ‘our navy has never, in time of peace, been relatively stronger than it is at the present day’.¹⁴⁴ Seven years later the Liberal MP and former Cabinet member George John Shaw Lefevre followed the example of Cobden by producing a perceptive and prescient analysis of the current French geopolitical situation.¹⁴⁵ Arguing that ‘we must look at the position from the point of view of France’, he pointed out that with Germany the focus of its attention, its colonies and trade greatly expanded and its navy effectively cut in two by Gibraltar, France had little to gain from a Franco-British conflict:

She has great interests beyond her shores as well as we have; she has foes on her flank far more threatening and dangerous than any that we have. She has nothing to hope from war with us in the shape of gain; she has very much to lose.¹⁴⁶

Indeed, when events forced the British to seriously examine their relationship with their cross-Channel neighbour, it quickly became apparent that an Anglo-French war was, by any estimation, very unlikely. The best example of this reality was the British reaction to the ‘Boulangier affair’ of the late 1880s, which is sometimes cited by historians as a driver of the 1888 invasion ‘scare’ and 1889 Naval Defence Act.¹⁴⁷ Rising to prominence as French Minister for War during the Franco-German war scare of 1886, General Georges Boulanger captured the attention of Europe as *Le Général Revanche*, committed to rebuilding French military

¹⁴³ Beeler, ‘introduction’, Mullins, *Transformation*, p. xiv, n. 2.

¹⁴⁴ John Knox Laughton, ‘Past and Present State of the Navy’, *Edinburgh Review* (Apr. 1885), pp. 492-513 (p. 499); Mullins, *Transformation*, p. 175, n. 160.

¹⁴⁵ G. Shaw Lefevre, ‘The Naval Policy of France, Past and Future’, *Nineteenth Century*, (Oct. 1891), pp. 606-627.

¹⁴⁶ Shaw Lefevre, ‘Naval Policy of France’, p. 627.

¹⁴⁷ Moon, ‘Invasion of the United Kingdom’, p. 19; Gooch, *Prospect of War*, pp. 5-6; Otte, ‘Anglo-French Relations’, p. 702; C.J. Lowe, *The Reluctant Imperialists, British Foreign Policy 1878-1902*, vol. I, (London: Routledge, 1967), p. 152.

strength.¹⁴⁸ During 1888 he returned as a populist politician, impressively winning a series of by-elections and for a while appeared to be destined for the Élysée Palace in the general election of 1889, although in the event he was forced out of the country by the government, and killed himself in 1891. Nevertheless, in 1888 and 1889 there was some alarm within the Foreign and War Offices that Boulanger might, in an attempt to unify France, launch an attack on Britain.¹⁴⁹ Commentary on this theme appeared in the press and literary magazines, suggesting, for example, that the General might pursue a Franco-Russian war against Britain in order to avoid a clash with Germany.¹⁵⁰ However, while these views were certainly prominent they were also rare. Virtually no major newspaper suggested that Boulanger would press for an attack on Britain. As A.J.P. Taylor observes, ‘Boulangism made France unfit to be anybody’s ally’.¹⁵¹ Indeed, what Boulanger served to emphasise was not France’s muscle but its disunity and fragility. The influential Conservative *Manchester Courier*, for example, considered an Anglo-French war as ‘the most unpopular policy which a French ruler could commit himself to’.¹⁵² ‘If General Boulanger should threaten England with French fleets and armies,’ asserted the Tory *Daily Telegraph*, ‘millions of Frenchmen would protest that he was paid by Bismarck to waste on an island the exertions that should have been reserved for the Rhine.’¹⁵³ ‘Boulanger is infinitely small’, concluded another paper, ‘he only has any strength because France is so utterly weak.’¹⁵⁴

It is at this point important to stress what so many historians have described as the ‘ambiguous’, nature of Anglo-French relations during this period.¹⁵⁵ Certainly there was much mutual

¹⁴⁸ Boulanger’s political rise and fall is chronicled in Frederic H. Seager, *The Boulanger Affair: Political Crossroads of France, 1886-1889* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1969).

¹⁴⁹ Roberts, *Salisbury*, pp. 480, 487; Halik Kochanski, *Sir Garnet Wolseley: Victorian Hero*, (London: Hambledon Press, 1999), p. 180.

¹⁵⁰ Sir Charles Wentworth Dilke, ‘The State of Europe and the Position of England’, *Universal Review* (May 1888), pp. 5-26 (p. 18). See also *Morning Post*, 14 Feb. 1889, p. 4; *Pall Mall Gazette*, 17 Apr. 1888, p. 1.

¹⁵¹ Taylor, *Struggle for Mastery*, p. 323. See also Mullins, *Transformation*, pp. 46-51. For contemporary examples of this perspective see *Pall Mall Gazette*, 12 Mar. 1889, p. 1; *The Observer*, 16 Jun. 1889, p. 4.

¹⁵² *Manchester Courier*, 22 Apr. 1889, p. 5.

¹⁵³ *Daily Telegraph*, 19 Feb. 1889, p. 4.

¹⁵⁴ *Western Morning News*, 28 Jan. 1889, p. 4.

¹⁵⁵ P.M.H. Bell, *France and Britain, 1900-1940: Entente and Estrangement* (London: Longmans, 1996), pp. 1-3; R. Gibson, *Best of Enemies Anglo-French Relations since the Norman Conquest* (London:

antipathy, primarily over Egypt, and the ‘anti-English’ party remained a powerful force in French politics during the period.¹⁵⁶ Theodore Zeldin is not entirely mistaken when he observes that ‘the odd thing about the relations of France and England in this period is that at no stage was there a war between them.’¹⁵⁷ Yet, as Parry argues, while France and Russia certainly constituted the greatest threats to Britain, neither was considered ‘the enemy’.¹⁵⁸ Among British Liberals especially, there was a strong belief in an Anglo-French *entente* of shared ideals, including civilisation and the rule of law, and on most subjects the French were considered as sensible and enlightened as the British themselves. Even Lord Salisbury, for all his concerns about the French danger, was a firm Francophile, keeping a house in the country.¹⁵⁹ ‘The Anglo-French disputes,’ writes Taylor, ‘though fierce, were family quarrels between two nations with a common civilization and a common liberalism; they were conducted with all the bitterness, but also within the limits, of a parliamentary debate.’¹⁶⁰

It is in this context that we should draw our conclusions about the British pessimist use of the French threat. Geographically, economically and militarily France was obviously the nation from which Britain had the most to fear and with which it had the most to quarrel. Yet its obvious weaknesses and preoccupations, not least with Germany, meant that directly accusing France of plotting to imminently invade the United Kingdom was more likely to attract ridicule than agreement. Instead, alarmists treated France as an ever-present yet entirely abstract danger. Building heavily on the theme of French political instability, they posited future, not present war, for which they believed the nation should prepare.¹⁶¹ As the inveterate pessimists at *The Times* observed, in the first editorial to raise security doubts about the Channel Tunnel:

Impress, 2011), ch. 6; Robert Tombs and Isabelle Tombs, *That Sweet Enemy: The British and the French from the Sun King to the Present* (London: Pimlico, 2007), part II.

¹⁵⁶ Otte, ‘Anglo-French Relations’, pp. 694-95; Theodore Zeldin, *France: 1848-1945*, vol. II (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 108.

¹⁵⁷ Zeldin, *France*, p. 100.

¹⁵⁸ Parry, *Politics of Patriotism*, p. 7.

¹⁵⁹ Michael Bentley, *Lord Salisbury’s World: Conservative Environments in Late-Victorian Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 39-40.

¹⁶⁰ Taylor, *Struggle for Mastery*, pp. 292, 315.

¹⁶¹ Moon, ‘Invasion of the United Kingdom’, pp. 16-17.

No doubt such a war is about the most unlikely thing that could be imagined...But France may change, and so may we. One century cannot answer for another...we may one day be divided, as we have been before. France, too, may be ambitious, as she has been before.¹⁶²

If the nature of French military capacity was discussed, pessimists relied on vague, broad statements which, as we have seen, reduced the issue to matters of French advantages and British weaknesses. Compare, for example, Shaw Lefevre's careful analysis of the French geopolitical position quoted above with Lieutenant-General Hamley's characterisation, from an address delivered to the London Chamber of Commerce in 1887:

...in first-class ironclads, which would decide a general engagement, France is much on an equality with us; and having no interests abroad so vital as ours, she could always, for a great object, assemble in her home ports a force equal to our Channel and Mediterranean squadrons combined.¹⁶³

Considering that between them, Germany and Italy possessed more first-class ironclads than did France in 1887, the rashness of such a strategy becomes immediately apparent.¹⁶⁴ Hamley was similarly cavalier about the 'great object' for which France would risk such a venture, which he predicted would occur at some unspecified point in the future, perhaps when Boulanger had seized control.¹⁶⁵ In place of a legitimate case for war he instead suggested 'that the wealth and prosperity of the City [of London] are what invite attack', a declaration worthy of Cobden's accusation that alarmists reduced the French to 'a mere band of pirates'.¹⁶⁶ Yet Hamley dwelt only briefly on the nature and motivations of France. Generally speaking his articles and speeches dealt exclusively with the present flaws in the British national defences without detailed reference to the threats they were to protect from. It is for this reason that the fear of surprise attack, the 'bolt from the blue', was so important. Only by suddenly throwing all of its military and naval strength against Britain, in a manner described by Hamley, might France gain any sort of advantage against the Royal Navy. It was therefore on this simple theme that the

¹⁶² *The Times*, 27 Jan. 1881, p. 9.

¹⁶³ Edward Hamley, *National Defence: Articles and Speeches* (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1889), p. 85.

¹⁶⁴ Beeler, *British Naval Policy*, p. 198.

¹⁶⁵ Hamley, *National Defence*, pp. 106-107.

¹⁶⁶ Hamley, *National Defence*, p. 104.

pessimists focused all of their energies. Guided by the example of the past, exploiting the ideological trends of the present, they appealed to the uncertainty of the future, and demanded that Britain prepare for war.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown how the myth of British vulnerability was constructed during the nineteenth century. Although dormant for some years, by the early 1880s it had been revived by a new generation of alarmists, driven by an ideological hatred of 'naïve' cosmopolitanism, itself largely a strawman stereotype. It was a myth, as Beeler concludes, of 'gigantic' proportions, without obvious foundation or justification, maintained by the methodical misrepresentation of British strength. To reinforce this shaky position, the pessimists constructed an intellectual framework which replaced the established 'civilised' view of warfare with a more brutal interpretation to suit their arguments. In parallel with these developments, they worked to obscure the real position of France, sowing doubt as to its intentions and military capabilities. The result was the creation of a powerful geopolitical vision, completely at odds with the Cobden-Gladstonian understanding of international relations, a rival 'spirit of the age' that would come to pervade British politics during the decade. It was a vision which would throw Liberalism into disarray, bringing about in the process the halting of the Channel Tunnel and the passage of the unnecessary Naval Defence Act. Despite possessing the knowledge and ability to counter it, Liberals entered the 1890s bound by these assumptions and unable to escape them. How this state of affairs came about it is for the remainder of this thesis to explain.

Chapter Two

Politicians, Professionals and Policy

Always the same? Shade of sleek Samuel, yes,¹
With Pepys or Brassey as Chief Secretary,²
Naval affairs seem *always* in a mess;
At least the critics' stories never vary,
In this brave bellicose much blundering land, which
Muddles on still as in the days of Sandwich.³

Your memoirs on the Navy, honest ghost,
By Reed and Robinson might well be edited.⁴
Still croakers croak, official optimists boast,
the cry of "Wolf!" oft heard but half credited.
The one thing *not* in doubt, a fact that's funny,
Is that our Navy – costs a lot of money.

'Twas just the same in your time? Very like!
There's little comfort, though, in that reflection.
I want to know that I can safely strike,
And that the "silver streak" lacks not protection;
And – Northbrook sniffs with mild superiority,⁵
And "sets authority against authority"!

'The Same Old Game', *Punch*, 21 March 1885, p. 134.

¹ Samuel Pepys, naval administrator during the later 1600s.

² Thomas Brassey, Liberal MP, Civil Lord and later Parliamentary Secretary to the Admiralty 1880-1885.

³ Edward Montagu, 1st Earl of Sandwich, prominent naval officer during Pepys' time at the Admiralty.

⁴ Sir Edward Reed, naval architect and Liberal MP; Sir Robert Spencer Robinson, Admiral. Both were prominent naval administrators during the 1870s.

⁵ Thomas George Baring, 1st Earl of Northbrook, Liberal First Lord of the Admiralty 1880-1885.

Although forced out of office in 1894 as a consequence of the myth of British vulnerability, Gladstone did not limit himself to simply attacking ‘militarism’ and ‘alarmism’. Rather, he specifically identified the professional sailors at the Admiralty as the architects of his fall. These men, he believed, had exceeded their traditional positions as advisors to the Cabinet by proactively imposing their pessimistic view of the national defences upon their civilian masters, defeating Gladstone’s attempt to uphold finance and liberal internationalism in the process. In 1895 his attitude towards the ‘experts’ was recorded by his friend, Lord Rendel:

Mr. G. never touches these questions from the military or expert side. He says often of himself, “No man can know less of military questions than I do.” He takes up a position outside these questions. We ought to have our own standard and conscience in these matters. There is no finality in a mere race with other Powers. To leave the decision to Admirals and experts is both cowardice and surrender. They will never be satisfied.⁶

This deep suspicion of military and naval ‘experts’ is regarded as a defining feature of politicians’ approach to the national defences in Britain during the 1860s and 1870s.⁷ This was a culture that prioritised ‘parsimonious prudence’ and ‘short-termism’ over ‘necessity’ – in other words, the amount of money to be spent on defence was decided annually by ministers who, unless alarmed by a ‘scare’, generally adopted a relaxed attitude to Britain’s geopolitical situation.⁸ Specialist involvement beyond the level of advisors was distrusted and discouraged. By virtue of their wide experience and responsibilities, Cabinet ministers were regarded as better able to evaluate the bigger picture than ‘monomaniacal’ generals and admirals.⁹ As should be clear from Gladstone’s 1895 reflections, however, by the 1890s this situation had shifted dramatically. Naval historians now agree that during this period the ‘professional authorities’ at the Admiralty seized the reins of British naval policy, ‘recasting’ it to reflect their

⁶ F.E. Hamer (ed.), *The Personal Papers of Lord Rendel* (London: Ernest Benn, 1920), pp. 115-116.

⁷ This is the central theme of Hamer, *British Army*, see especially comments on p. 33; Searle, *National Efficiency*, pp. 23-24; Paul Smith, ‘Ruling the Waves: Government, the Service and the Cost of Naval Supremacy, 1885-99’ in Paul Smith (ed.) *Government and the Armed Forces in Britain*, pp. 21-52 (p. 22). See also Hew Strachan, *The Politics of the British Army* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 44-48.

⁸ Smith, ‘Ruling the Waves’, p. 22; David G. Morgan-Owen, *The Fear of Invasion: Strategy, Politics, and British War Planning, 1880-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 11-14.

⁹ Searle, *National Efficiency*, pp. 22-23.

own pessimistic and anti-internationalist outlook.¹⁰ Although much less successful in obtaining public funds than their naval colleagues, Army officers had nevertheless also succeeded in setting the political agenda within their own sphere, convincing many in government that a sudden foreign invasion was a realistic possibility which must be guarded against.¹¹ Not only did they use these arguments to see off the Channel Tunnel, but by 1888 they had convinced Salisbury's government to set aside funds for a small number of 'London Defence Positions', built during the 1890s and like Palmerston's follies before them, rapidly declared obsolete.¹² In both the Admiralty and War Office civilians had lost considerable authority, while professionals were now directly involved in policymaking in a way they had not been previously. For Paul Smith:

The eighties and the nineties were a watershed, when relations between government and the Services were being recast as civilian and economical control of the Armed Forces was challenged by the emergence of defence policy driven by external threats, technological imperatives, service demands and public alarms which no minister could easily resist.¹³

It is clear that these developments can be directly linked to a newfound sense of self-assurance within the ranks of the British officer corps and their supporters. Compare, for example, the Duke of Wellington and Lieutenant-General Hamley. Hamley's warnings about the dangers of invasion in 1888 were, in style and substance, little different from Wellington's forty years previously. Crucially, however, Wellington's letter of 1848 had been a private epistle, never intended to be published, and he was angry when it subsequently appeared in the *Morning Chronicle*.¹⁴ Hamley on the other hand did everything in his power to disseminate his views. Not only did he publish articles and speak to organisations such as the London Chamber of Commerce, but he also sat as Conservative MP for Birkenhead between 1885 and 1892, a

¹⁰ Smith, 'Ruling the Waves', p. 22; Parkinson, *Late Victorian Navy*; Mullins, *Transformation*.

¹¹ Spiers, *Late Victorian Army*, pp. 225-232.

¹² Saunders, *Fortress Britain*, pp. 201-202.

¹³ Smith, 'Ruling the Waves', p. 22.

¹⁴ Longmate, *Island Fortress*, p. 310.

position he readily used as a soapbox for his campaign to fortify London.¹⁵ Hamley was confident in facing the glare of publicity and aware of the importance of courting and manipulating the public; he felt more comfortable speaking openly as a ‘professional authority’ than had the Commander-in-Chief of the British Army in 1848. Equally as importantly, he was more explicitly politicised in his status as an expert than the alarmists of the previous generation had been. Not only was he openly aligned with a political party, but his speeches are peppered with attacks on civil servants and politicians of both parties to an extent which was absent from the pessimism that had flourished under the Palmerstonian consensus of the 1850s.

Historians have long recognised the period after 1870 as one of increased public and political activity within the upper echelons of the Army and Navy’s officer corps.¹⁶ Armed forces officers were among the most prolific authors of ‘invasion scare’ fiction, for example, and their work regularly contained overt attacks on the defence policies of the civilian-led government.¹⁷ There has, however, been little attempt to provide a satisfactory reason for these developments. The exception is C.I. Hamilton’s *Making of the Modern Admiralty* (2011), which suggests that these developments were linked to wider changes within British society. During the 1880s, he observes, British political language became more ‘nervous’ and obsessed with applying ‘regularity and purpose’ to governmental organisation, in a way that quickly developed into a challenge to the existing civilian hegemony over defence.¹⁸ Casting the historiographical net wider, there is an obvious link between these reflections and the ‘cult of the expert’ and obsession with ‘scientific government’ identified by G.R. Searle in his study of the early twentieth century ‘national efficiency’ movement.¹⁹ Efficiency campaigners attacked ‘amateur’ party politicians and lionised ‘generals, admirals, administrators, Imperial proconsuls, men who

¹⁵ Luvaas, *Education of an Army*, p. 159.

¹⁶ Strachan, *Politics of the British Army*, p. 20; Hamer, *British Army*, p. x; Luvaas, *Education of an Army*, p. 170; C.I. Hamilton, *The Making of the Modern Admiralty: British Naval Policy-Making, 1805-1927* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 207-208.

¹⁷ A. Michael Matin, ‘The Creativity of War Planners: Armed Forces Professionals and the Pre-1914 British Invasion-Scare Genre’, *ELH*, 78 (2011), pp. 801-831.

¹⁸ Hamilton, *Modern Admiralty*, p. 207.

¹⁹ Searle, *National Efficiency*, pp. 80-86.

had proved their title to be considered real rulers and governors of men.’²⁰ By portraying themselves as above and beyond the party-political struggle, these individuals were able to forge a special position for themselves as disinterested, selfless and patriotic critics of government policy. For the present study, the only limitation of Searle’s work is its focus on the twentieth century. Drawing on his analysis, this chapter argues that defence pessimists had adopted the techniques and language of national efficiency by the 1880s, a development which provided them with both the confidence and rhetorical tools to face the ‘optimistic’ political establishment head-on.

This chapter shows how the spread of defence pessimism was directly linked to broader structural changes within the contemporary political and public sphere of late-nineteenth century Britain. In its first section, it describes how politicians’ obsession with finance and their apathetic attitude towards the details of defence policy created a culture of ‘short-termism’ within the War Office and Admiralty, a situation which drove deep discontent within the ranks of the professional soldiers and sailors who came to regard their services as dangerously disorganised and underfunded. Drawing on literature on the rise of ‘professionalism’, the second section argues that these officers took their resentment into the public sphere by exploiting a contemporaneous trend towards ‘scientific’ government, using their professional authority as ‘experts’ to attack civilian politicians and give their defence pessimism greater legitimacy. In this respect the chapter offers a new perspective on the increase in political activity within the British officer corps during this period. The discussion then turns its attention to the attacks launched by these officers on party politics, examining in particular the public statements of Garnet Wolseley and Charles Beresford in 1888. The national defences were in a bad state, they argued, because the ‘political system of government had utterly failed in connexion with this subject.’²¹ By branding party politics the ‘curse of modern England’, these men sought to portray themselves as ‘non-political’ patriots who alone could rectify the weaknesses of the country. Finally, the chapter considers the position of the Conservative and

²⁰ Searle, *National Efficiency*, p. 93.

²¹ Edward Reed MP in *The Times*, 29 May 1888, p. 11.

Liberal parties in relation to the pessimistic experts. The Tory party is shown to have been extremely vulnerable to the pessimistic onslaught due to its close links with the armed forces. Meanwhile the Liberals were ill-equipped to face the newfound professional confidence, armed with out of date arguments and a ready willingness on the part of many in its ranks to believe the alarmist claims of the ‘expert authorities’.

The Context of Civilian-Led Defence Policy

By the mid-nineteenth century, ‘good government’ had become associated in Britain with the ideals of justice and the common good, most crucially in the area of taxation.²² Government ‘profligacy’ was unpopular with the electorate, especially in working class and trade union movements.²³ Defence spending was a central feature of this discourse for the simple reason that it constituted more than a third of all government expenditure, overtaking debt repayments to become the largest single outgoing by the middle of the 1880s.²⁴ According to W.S. Hamer, the unwillingness of the British public to pay for an expanded army ‘runs like a red line’ through this period.²⁵ ‘Retrenchment’ in this area had long been a core ingredient of plebeian Radicalism, inspired by Richard Cobden’s ‘national budget’ which aspired to halve the defence estimates.²⁶ During the 1850s and early 1860s however, Lords Derby and Palmerston had reacted to the invasion scares by making defence policy a high-profile priority of their governments, and, although they may have been criticised for their focus on fortifications, they nevertheless did their utmost to ensure that the armed forces received a generous financial settlement.²⁷ The ascension of Gladstone to the Liberal leadership substantially changed this

²² James Thompson, ‘Good Government’ in David Craig and James Thompson (eds) *Languages of Politics in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Palgrave Macmillan: Basingstoke, 2013), pp. 21-43 (p. 30). For a ‘bottom up’ perspective on taxation see Peaple and Vincent, ‘Gladstone and the Working Man’, pp. 80-83.

²³ Biagini, *Liberty, Retrenchment and Reform*, pp. 119-138.

²⁴ H.C.G. Matthew, ‘Disraeli, Gladstone, and the Politics of Mid-Victorian Budgets’, *The Historical Journal*, 22 (1979), pp. 615-643 (pp. 632-33).

²⁵ Hamer, *British Army*, p. 81.

²⁶ Biagini, *Liberty, Retrenchment and Reform*, p. 102; Matthew, ‘Politics of Mid-Victorian Budgets’, pp. 618-619.

²⁷ Parry, *Politics of Patriotism*, pp. 208-209, 234-35.

political situation, moving the centre of gravity towards Cobden's old position.²⁸ A staunch proponent of retrenchment, Gladstone exploited the Anglo-French thaw of the 1860s to establish 'fiscal prudence' as the keystone of his political programme.²⁹ Although the Conservatives liked to strike a more conciliatory tone towards the services they too were swept along in the Gladstonian enthusiasm for parsimonious government. Indeed, Disraeli himself was a lifelong opponent of high defence spending, even if his government record and 'imperial' language often failed to bear this out.³⁰ The evocative phrase 'bloated armaments', so beloved of Radical anti-militarists, had actually been coined by Disraeli as early as 1862.³¹ While he was never as enthusiastic on the subject as his Tory predecessor, Salisbury nevertheless emulated much of this language.³²

Certainly, feeling against high spending should not be overemphasised. Radical attempts to reduce the estimates by amendment in parliament were always doomed to failure, and neither House ever refused military spending demanded of it by the government. On the other hand, by the 1870s it had become obvious to soldiers and sailors that their services were funded only begrudgingly, and that successive governments had worked hard to minimise the amount they had to ask parliament for in the first place.³³ Hamley himself gave voice to this discontent when he complained that politicians, working on the 'happy conclusion that nobody desires...to interrupt the peace of the world', were always ready to convince the public that 'it is a heinous offence to give money for armaments or defences'.³⁴ As the previous chapter has explained, however, this accusation was at best an enormous exaggeration of the truth. Even under Gladstonian parsimony, the armed forces cannot be said to have been severely underfunded; the

²⁸ Martin Daunton, 'The Greatest and Richest Sacrifice Ever Made on the Altar of Militarism': The Finance of Naval Expansion, c. 1890-1914' in Robert J. Blyth, Andrew Lambert and Jan Rüger, *The Dreadnought and the Edwardian Age* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2011), pp. 31-49 (pp. 31-34).

²⁹ Parry, *Politics of Patriotism*, p. 235; Bradley, *Optimists*, p. 134.

³⁰ Jonathan Parry, 'Disraeli and England', *The Historical Journal*, 43 (2000), pp. 699-728 (pp. 712, 717).

³¹ Russell, *Wilfrid Lawson*, p. 51.

³² Mullins, *Transformation*, p. 65.

³³ Beeler, *British Naval Policy*, ch. 8. See the examples cited in Hamilton, *Modern Admiralty*, p. 163; Hamer, *British Army*, p. 83.

³⁴ Hamley, *Speeches*, pp. 112-113.

idea that they were was simply part and parcel of the myth of British weakness.³⁵ It is hardly surprising, therefore, that civilians were quick to question whether the armed forces were really as cost-effective as they could be.³⁶ ‘Departmental extravagance’ was a favourite stock-in-trade of Liberal rhetoricians and the principle excuse for Lord Randolph Churchill’s resignation from Salisbury’s Cabinet in 1886.³⁷ ‘We have plenty of authorities assuring us that the French Navy is stronger than ours’, reflected one Radical paper in 1884, ‘but we have none to explain how our inferior fleet happens to cost half as much again as that which we are dolefully assured could blow it out of the water.’³⁸

This determination for economy and cost-effectiveness was matched in most politicians by an obvious lack of interest in the technical details of defence policy. Liberals in particular are characterised as ‘profoundly uninterested in the details of military and naval policy’, details which the leadership were also encouraged to avoid due to its divisive potential.³⁹ Even the so-called ‘Liberal Imperialists’ showed little interest in defence until after the 1899-1901 South African War.⁴⁰ Gladstone’s obsession with ‘conscience’ often obscured his actual opinions, a policy gap rarely filled by his frontbench colleagues. Liberal MPs were, of course, hardly unique in showing little interest in the technical details of national defence during the nineteenth century.⁴¹ Although Conservatives were much more comfortable with the subject, Salisbury himself was ‘fundamentally uninterested in military matters’, only raising them publicly when there was an obvious political benefit in doing so.⁴² In this he was probably in line with the majority of his party: the difference, as we shall see, was the Tories were more comfortable deferring to military and naval professionals than were Liberals. By remaining aloof on everything other than finance, mainstream politics could thus easily find itself intellectually ill

³⁵ Part of the problem was that Britain’s determination not to adopt conscription meant that it got fewer soldiers for its money than did its neighbours. See Hobson, ‘Military-Extraction Gap’, pp. 488-493.

³⁶ Spiers, *Late Victorian Army*, pp. 38-39; Hamilton, *Modern Admiralty*, pp. 172-174.

³⁷ R.F. Foster, *Lord Randolph Churchill: A Political Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), pp. 301-304.

³⁸ *Northern Echo*, 4 Dec. 1884, p. 3.

³⁹ Rhodri Williams, *Defending the Empire: The Conservative Party and British Defence Policy, 1899-1915* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991), p. 78.

⁴⁰ H.C.G. Matthew, *The Liberal Imperialists* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 215.

⁴¹ Beeler, *British Naval Policy*, p. 239.

⁴² Roberts, *Salisbury*, p. 496.

equipped when defence did demand its attention. Another significant outcome of this wider indifference was that discussion became dominated and defined by the political fringes. ‘The customary desultory discussion’ on the annual Army and Navy estimates, for example, was mainly attended by Conservative ‘service’ members and members of the Radical ‘peace party’ group, who quibbled over figures and threw accusations of lack of patriotism or denunciations of ‘bloated armaments’ across the floor at one-another.⁴³

The War Office and Admiralty naturally chafed under this political regime. With each department’s annual funding voted separately by parliament, the sister services were placed in direct competition for resources, famously leaving them on ‘little better than speaking terms’.⁴⁴ The result, as Howard Moon has exhaustively demonstrated, was a running debate between Army and Navy officers as to the best methods of defending the country, a debate that often spilled out into the public sphere.⁴⁵ This narrative of opposition, however, has tended to under-emphasise similarities between the two departments, especially the problems both experienced in the areas of organisation and civilian financial control.⁴⁶ Matters were especially tense within the War Office, the more costly and least efficient of the two departments, where Liberal reforms of the 1870s inspired a ‘mounting chorus of criticism against civilian domination’.⁴⁷ By officially subordinating the Commander-in-Chief – a position held throughout this period by the Queen’s Cousin the Duke of Cambridge – to the Minister for War, the reforms had created a situation where the professional soldiers were responsible for maintaining Army efficiency, but had little say in the amount of resources they received.⁴⁸ Inspired by the defence pessimism that pervaded his department, Cambridge habitually refused to accept responsibility for a service he considered to be inadequately funded.⁴⁹ This tension was exacerbated by a reformist group

⁴³ Marder, *Anatomy*, p. 58; Beeler, *British Naval Policy*, p. 239; Williams, *Defending the Empire*, p. 78. See for example *John Bull*, 17 Mar. 1883, p. 164.

⁴⁴ Marder, *Anatomy*, p. 79. Hamer, *British Army*, pp. 72-76.

⁴⁵ Moon, ‘The Invasion of the United Kingdom’.

⁴⁶ An important exception from this trend is Morgan-Owen, *Fear of Invasion*, esp. pp. 4-6.

⁴⁷ Hamer, *British Army*, p. 9. For descriptions of the War Office during this period see Hamer, *British Army*, chs. 1-2; Spiers, *Late Victorian Army*, ch. 2.

⁴⁸ This is the theme of Warwick Funnell, *Accounting for War: Financial Control of the British Army, 1846-1899* (Accounting and Finance Academic Press, 2003).

⁴⁹ Hamer, *British Army*, p. 67.

within Horse Guards who wished to curtail the powers of the conservative Duke and introduce a more organised regime, clustered around Lieutenant-General Sir Garnet Joseph Wolseley, appointed Quartermaster General in 1880 and Adjutant General in 1882.⁵⁰ Compared to the War Office, the Admiralty was a relatively well-organised and structured department, which contained, in the form of the Admiralty Board, a group of four naval officers with an official position as advisors to their Secretary of State.⁵¹ The level of specialism needed to understand the complexities of a steam navy created less tension in an environment where decisions were necessarily collective, while the fact that a new Board was appointed by every incoming administration meant that there was less chance of a single individual dominating the service as Cambridge did in the Army.⁵² As in the War Office, however, finance proved the sticking point, with the First Lord holding the unenviable task of mediating between the demands of his advisors and the limitations set by the Exchequer.⁵³ The vast task of administration completely dominated Admiralty time, meaning that long-term strategic questions were regularly ignored.⁵⁴ It was enough to encourage a reformist movement to match that in the Army, with Captain Lord Charles William de la Poer Beresford, the bullish hero of the 1882 bombardment of Alexandria and Junior Naval Lord from 1885, as its rising star.⁵⁵

One particularly important consequence of this environment was a sustained and pervasive lack of war planning in either department. It was only in 1888 that the Army was provided with a basic statement of its purpose, and it was not until after the embarrassment of the South African War that either service began to look seriously at developing a proper planning system.⁵⁶ From the point of view of many politicians the lack of decision-making power wielded by the

⁵⁰ Kochanski, *Wolseley*, p. 194.

⁵¹ Hamilton, *Modern Admiralty*, p. 186; Beeler, *British Naval Policy*, pp. 96-101. For an overview of the Admiralty during this time see Hamilton, *Modern Admiralty*, chs. 5-6.

⁵² Beeler, *British Naval Policy*, pp. 38-39. For a contemporary comparison between the two departments see Wolseley to Beresford, 23 Jan. 1888, quoted in Geoffrey Bennett, *Charlie B: A Biography of Admiral Lord Beresford* (London: Peter Dawnay, 1968), p. 147.

⁵³ Hamilton, *Modern Admiralty*, pp. 163-168.

⁵⁴ Smith, 'Ruling the Waves', p. 25.

⁵⁵ Bennett, *Charlie B*, p. 92, ch. 7.

⁵⁶ Ian Beckett, 'The Stanhope Memorandum of 1888: A Re-interpretation', *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, 57 (1984), pp. 240-247; Hamer, *British Army*, p. 31; Strachan, *Politics of the British Army*, p. 120; Hamilton, *Modern Admiralty*, p. 222. See, however, Morgan-Owen's reflections in *Fear of Invasion*, pp. 7-8.

servicemen was a blessing. As W.S. Hamer and G.R. Searle argue, the anti-militarism of Britain's liberal state meant that governments were reluctant to allow the services to plan for a war for fear that this might in turn precipitate one.⁵⁷ In the eyes of the armed forces officers themselves this served only to reinforce the impression that defence policy was dangerously disorganised and amateur in nature, suffering from what Wolseley later termed 'our habitual unpreparedness for war', something he and his colleagues suggested was a uniquely British affliction.⁵⁸

By the early 1880s, therefore, Britain had developed an ethos within defence policymaking that subordinated professional opinion to political responsibility, and was naturally inclined to distrust the former. This culture found its strongest advocates in Gladstone and Salisbury, the latter of whom was famously suspicious of experts.⁵⁹ 'If you believe the doctors,' he once wrote, 'nothing is wholesome: if you believe the theologians, nothing is innocent: if you believe the soldiers, nothing is safe. They all require to have their strong wine diluted by a very large admixture of insipid common sense.'⁶⁰ A fundamental part of this 'liberal' settlement was a 'time-honoured constitutional rule' that forbade servicemen from protesting in public about official government policy.⁶¹ Although not embodied in legislation, this tradition was particularly valued by Liberals and Radicals, who instinctively distrusted the political soldier.⁶² 'I would advise you never to take the opinion of high military authorities', John Bright told a Birmingham audience in 1883, 'except on a question of what should be done when you are actually at war.'⁶³ In order to correct the perceived deficiencies in British defence preparedness, therefore, the armed forces and their supporters required a rhetorical platform that would allow them to denounce the existing system while also protecting them from these liberal prejudices

⁵⁷ Hamer, *British Army*, p. 33; Searle, *National Efficiency*, p. 24.

⁵⁸ Viscount Wolseley, *The Story of a Soldier's Life* vol. II (London: Archibald Constable, 1903), ch. 50.

⁵⁹ See in particular Mullins, *Transformation*, p. 64.

⁶⁰ Roberts, *Salisbury*, p. 218.

⁶¹ Hamer, *British Army*, p. 134.

⁶² Searle, *National Efficiency*, p. 24; Strachan, *Politics of the British Army*, pp. 30-31; Matthew Johnson, *Militarism and the British Left, 1902-1914* (London: Palgrave, 2013), pp. 45-47.

⁶³ John Bright, *Suez Canal & Channel Tunnel: Peace or War with France?* (London: C.F. Roworth, 1883), p. 35.

and accusations of unconstitutional behaviour. This they found in the language of professionalism.

‘Professional Authorities’

As indicated in this chapter’s introduction, from the late 1870s onwards the armed forces and their supporters became more outspokenly political. A number of reasons have been provided to account for this: a reaction against the ‘parsimonious’ political culture; disgruntlement in the Army caused by reforms of the 1870s; opposition to the later expansion of the franchise; and, most commonly, the more general renewal of international tension.⁶⁴ The Liberal adoption of Home Rule in 1886 – regarded as an ‘anti-imperial’ policy in an era when the services were more closely associated with Empire than ever before – also had a galvanising effect.⁶⁵ Yet, even when taken together, these reasons are not entirely satisfactory.⁶⁶ Friction between servicemen and politicians over official policy was hardly new to this period, while the invasion scares of the 1850s had seen no comparable anger against the British political system.⁶⁷ The problem with these proffered explanations is that they fail to appreciate how broader structural changes within British society affected the status and position of armed forces officers and other defence ‘experts’, giving them the confidence to speak their minds and the platforms from which to do so.

The key to these developments was what Harold Perkin has described as the ‘rise of professional society’.⁶⁸ From the 1880s onwards, those in the ‘professions’ – law, science, medicine, etc – came to regard themselves, and were regarded by others, as possessing a special right to speak with authority on subjects related to their own discipline. As Daniel Duman

⁶⁴ Strachan, *Politics of the British Army*, pp. 21-25; Brian Bond, ‘Introduction’ in Paul Smith (ed.) *Government and the Armed Forces in Britain 1856-1990* (London: Hambledon, 1996), pp. xi-xviii (pp. xiv-iv); Hamer, *British Army*, p. 9; Spiers, *Late Victorian Army*, pp. 30-31; Matin, ‘Creativity of War Planners’, p. 805.

⁶⁵ Strachan, *Politics of the British Army*, pp. 98-100. An important part of Joseph Chamberlain’s reasoning for opposing the policy, for example, was that an independent Ireland might weaken Britain’s geopolitical position and even lead to war with an opportunist France. Judd, *Radical Joe*, pp. 133-135.

⁶⁶ See also Hamilton’s reflections in *Modern Admiralty*, pp. 206-207.

⁶⁷ Edgar Feuchtwanger and William J. Philpott, ‘Civil-Military Relations in a Period without Major Wars, 1855-85’ in Paul Smith (ed.) *Government and the Armed Forces in Britain*, pp. 1-20.

⁶⁸ Harold Perkin, *The Rise of Professional Society: England since 1880* (New York: Routledge, 1989).

argues, an important part of this trend was the development of a professional 'ideology' that stressed service as a 'moral imperative'.⁶⁹ By following the path of duty rather than profit, placing themselves and their skills at the service of the 'public', professionals gained respect and status within wider society.⁷⁰ Importantly, they also gained political independence and a sense of superiority over 'party politicians'. Although politicians were also theoretically dedicated to public service, they were often regarded by professionals as driven by partisan concerns rather than the national interest, operating in a system ill-suited to the needs of the modern state. Frank Turner, for example, has demonstrated how, from the late 1870s onwards, a number of scientific writers began to attack the political system for its perceived inability to address the national problems of the day because it lacked the procedures and expertise that only scientists could provide.⁷¹ He continues:

In turn, they [the scientists] pictured science itself as not only the victim of pluralistic, partisan, democratic politics, but also as the potential instrument for salvaging the beleaguered national interest from the dangers posed by partisan politics. Scientists came to define good government, sound politics, and true patriotism as efficient administration based on the principles of science and carried out by persons with scientific education.⁷²

This description can be applied word-for-word to Britain's professional armed forces officers. That an increased sense of professionalism encourages politicisation is not a novel idea within the history of British civil-military relations.⁷³ That this accounts for the increased politicisation of the officer corps post-1870 has not been seriously considered, however.⁷⁴ This is despite the fact that an awareness of themselves as professional experts is detectable in the language of defence pessimists from the early 1880s onwards, in parallel with its development within the

⁶⁹ Daniel Duman, 'The Creation and Diffusion of a Professional Ideology in Nineteenth Century England', *The Sociological Review*, 27 (1979), pp. 113-138.

⁷⁰ Duman, 'Professional Ideology', p. 124; Perkin, *Professional Society*, p. xiii.

⁷¹ Frank M. Turner, *Contesting Cultural Authority: Essays in Victorian Intellectual Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 208-210.

⁷² Turner, *Contesting Cultural Authority*, p. 208.

⁷³ Strachan, *Politics of the British Army*, pp. 42-43.

⁷⁴ In analysing the social makeup of the British Army after 1870, Strachan rejects the idea that it became more professional: in so doing, he neglects the 'spirit of the age'. *Politics of the British Army*, pp. 20-24.

scientific community.⁷⁵ For example, after denigrating the state of the naval defences in his 1881 ‘Silver Streak’ essay, Lord Dunsany launched into a vehement and bitter attack on British politicians ‘from both parties alike’. Clearly inspired by the new political turn in scientific writing, and incensed by the political enthusiasm for financial prudence, he castigated MPs for their ‘stupendous and alarming’ ignorance of the ‘science of war’:

For it is our statesmen, not, as some people think, the professional members of the Admiralty, that really decide upon the force and form of our Navy, and this accounts for its manifest insufficiency to meet emergencies. We heard much lately about ‘scientific frontiers,’ i.e. frontiers devised by experts to meet the requirements of science, but we certainly have not at present a ‘scientific navy’ to answer such a definition, nor have we had one for many long years. The truth is, our navy is a ‘House of Commons navy,’ devised to suit financial, or, as the French would say, ‘Budgetary’ considerations, and to meet the criticisms of a body profoundly ignorant of all military and technical principles.⁷⁶

This binary clash between, scientific ‘high authorities’ and ignorant ‘high officials’ quickly became a staple of pessimistic rhetoric.⁷⁷ ‘The serious matter in our case is that the optimists represent the opinion of those who know nothing, absolutely nothing whatever, on the subject’, declared one letter to the *Morning Post*, ‘whilst the pessimists represent all the scientific and professional experience of the country.’⁷⁸ This ‘scientific’ approach relied heavily on the idea, common in the later ‘national efficiency’ movement, that public administration was reducible to apolitical facts and could be treated as an ‘exact science’.⁷⁹ This was reflected in the more serious attitude officers took towards strategic theory – the creation of the Naval Intelligence Department in 1882 or even the publication of *Hostilities without Declaration of War*.⁸⁰ In 1883, the *Morning Post* made the telling observation that by virtue of his position as an officer in the War Office Intelligence Branch, the author of *Hostilities without Declaration of War* ‘can

⁷⁵ This timing is hardly surprising considering the many shared opinions and interests that existed between scientists and the military during the period. Turner, *Cultural Authority*, p. 227.

⁷⁶ Dunsany, ‘Silver Streak’, p. 744.

⁷⁷ See for example Henry G. Lennox, *Forewarned, Forearmed* (London: William Ridgeway, 1882), pp. 1-2.

⁷⁸ *Morning Post*, 25 May 1888, p. 5.

⁷⁹ Searle, *National Efficiency*, p. 85.

⁸⁰ Smith, ‘Ruling the Waves’, p. 25.

indulge in no political bias, and is scrupulously careful to deal with facts only'.⁸¹ The zeal for 'facts' was further encouraged by the large increase in the number of official commissions, committees and inquiries into the armed forces and defence policy during the 1870s and 1880s, of which the famous 1888 Hartington Commission into 'the civil and professional administration of the naval and military departments' was merely a culmination.⁸² These offered a protected, non-political platform for officers while also adding legitimacy and authority to their criticisms, which were relayed to the public in a commanding manner through the publication of the proceedings in parliamentary 'blue books'.⁸³ This 'official' platform was used to powerful effect by canny officers with an eye to influencing official policy, most notably Wolseley in the case of the Channel Tunnel.

Perhaps the most significant result of this trend towards 'scientific principles' was the special effort made by defence pessimists to exploit the nineteenth century enthusiasm for statistical analysis, which had by the latter half of the century encouraged 'a critical culture of governmental distrust and accountability'.⁸⁴ The classic example of the pessimistic adoption of statistical authority was the 'Truth about the Navy' article, published over six pages in the *Pall Mall Gazette* of 18 September 1884.⁸⁵ Compiled by 'One who Knows the Facts', the piece contained twenty-four tables and an enormous quantity of minute analysis of ship numbers, armour thickness and gun calibres, together with a liberal helping of alarmist rhetoric about French imperial ambitions and naval increases. The numbers, the accompanying editorial assured its readers, had been carefully checked and found to match 'the figures of those who are generally denounced as official optimists'.⁸⁶ 'Unless the facts and figures which we print today can be authoritatively demolished, the case for such a vote [to increase the Navy] is irresistible',

⁸¹ *Morning Post*, 13 Dec. 1883, pp. 4-5.

⁸² John Ehrman, *Cabinet Government and War, 1890-1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958), pp. 6-7.

⁸³ Hamer, *British Army*, p. 127. See also Oz Frankel, 'Blue Books and the Victorian Reader', *Victorian Studies* 46 (2004), pp. 308-318.

⁸⁴ Tom Crook, 'Suspect Figures: Statistics and Public Trust in Victorian England' in Tom Crook and Glen O'Hara (eds), *Statistics and the Public Sphere: Numbers and the People in Modern Britain, c.1800-2000* (London: Routledge, 2011), pp. 165-184 (pp. 175-176).

⁸⁵ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 18 Sept. 1884, pp. 1-6.

⁸⁶ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 18 Sept. 1884, p. 1.

concluded the paper.⁸⁷ The campaign as it developed over the following weeks was itself a case study in the application of ‘professional’ authority, as the *Gazette* proceeded to print voluminous correspondence from retired and serving naval officers and administrators with a heavy emphasis on their expertise and lack of political partisanship.⁸⁸ Despite this, the real ‘Truth about the Navy’ was much less clear. As Beeler has demonstrated, the *Pall Mall Gazette*’s campaign was ‘not based on substantive evidence, but on scandal-mongering alarmism’.⁸⁹ Not only did ‘One who Knows the Facts’ rely on improbable scenarios of European combinations against the Royal Navy, but they completely glossed over the fact that their own figures listed a number of French ironclads as modern and ‘first class’, when in fact they were of an obviously inferior quality to their British equivalents, older, lighter in displacement and predominantly made of wood.⁹⁰ The language of professional authority therefore served as an important smokescreen, lending credence and legitimacy to what were otherwise spurious allegations of British military and naval weakness; without this smokescreen, it is difficult to see how the ‘Truth about the Navy’ and other pessimistic deceptions would have succeeded in achieving such widespread acceptance.

‘The Curse of Modern England’

The ultimate goal of the ideology of professionalism was not simply to combat the ‘official optimists’, but to effect a revolution in civil-military relations, removing defence policy from the hands of civilians and placing it into those of the ‘experts’ themselves.⁹¹ This was driven by the idea that politicians were too ignorant of defence and ideologically obsessed with ‘popular budgets’ – as the economical impulse became known – to properly attend to strategic needs.⁹² Politicians, wrote one anonymous pessimist in 1889, pursued the ‘short-sighted craze for economy, – both Conservatives and Liberals bidding for popular favour by promises of reduced

⁸⁷ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 18 Sept. 1884, p. 1.

⁸⁸ Harvey Blumenthal, ‘W.T. Stead’s Role in Shaping Official Policy: The Navy Campaign of 1884’ (PhD Thesis: George Washington University, 1984), pp. 82-85, 93-96.

⁸⁹ Beeler, ‘In the Shadow of Briggs’, p. 7.

⁹⁰ See also ch. 7, below.

⁹¹ For a discussion of this idea see Hamer, *British Army*, pp. 47-58.

⁹² Funnell, *Accounting*, pp. 118-124; Semmel, *Liberalism and Naval Strategy*, pp. 124-128. For a classic contemporary perspective see Mahan, *Influence of Sea Power*, p. 67.

taxation, a popular budget being of more importance in their eyes than the safety of this magnificent empire.⁹³ Although advocacy of ‘patriotic’ interests over narrow party policy was nothing new in Britain, there was nevertheless a certain vehemence in the language of defence pessimists which made their attacks particularly passionate.⁹⁴ For the ‘Cromwellian’ Wolseley, hatred of the political classes was the defining theme of many of his public statements during the later 1880s, as he became increasingly frustrated with the Conservative Minister for War, Edward Stanhope.⁹⁵ At the Royal United Services Institution in 1887, for example, he attacked the Secretary of State for War and his ‘financial friends’ for too often refusing money for equipment. As a consequence, he concluded, ‘we shall soon have an Army absolutely unsuited and unfitted for the work we have to do.’⁹⁶ Yet this language was tame in comparison with his infamous speech of 23 April 1888 made at an influentially attended dinner in honour of the telegraph entrepreneur and Liberal Unionist politician Sir John Pender.⁹⁷ The target of his ire on this occasion was a political system which demanded public silence on the part of its serving military and naval officers, while encouraging, as he saw it, ministers to conceal their own views in favour of ‘party exigencies’:

...the answer to the question, why the army and the navy is not as strong as it ought to be, is to be found in the system of Government by party – that curse of modern England, which is sapping and undermining the foundations of our country, which is depriving our statesmen of the manly honesty which was once their characteristic.⁹⁸

Politicians, he argued, were more interested in building a ‘clap-trap reputation’ for themselves by cutting defence expenditure than in listening to and acting on the advice of military and naval officers. This, he said, was a ‘crime against the country’, the result ‘of a low and vicious

⁹³ Anon., ‘National Defence’, p. 445.

⁹⁴ For example, the later 1880s saw much speculation regarding a possible combination between the two great political gadflies of the period, Joseph Chamberlain and Randolph Churchill, on a ‘national’ platform. See G.R. Searle, *Country before Party: Coalition and the Idea of ‘National Government’ in Modern Britain, 1885-1987* (Harlow: Longman, 1995), ch. 3.

⁹⁵ Kochanski, *Wolseley*, p. 211; Ian F. W. Beckett, ‘Wolseley, Garnet Joseph’, *ODNB*; Hamer, *British Army*, pp. 134-135; Ian F.W. Beckett, ‘Edward Stanhope at the War Office 1887-92’, *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 5 (1982), pp. 278-307 (pp. 290-291).

⁹⁶ Wolseley, concluding remarks in C.F. Beresford, ‘Tactics as Affected by Field Telegraphy’, *JRUSI*, 31 (1887), pp. 574-592 (pp. 591-592).

⁹⁷ *The Times*, 26 Apr. 1888, p. 13.

⁹⁸ The full speech was reprinted in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, 25 Apr. 1888, pp. 11-12.

standard of morality which is now uppermost in men's minds'. Significantly, there can be little doubt that this speech was made in support of Beresford's public campaign to introduce a more 'businesslike' defence policy and expand the Navy, launched in January 1888 and examined in Part III, of this thesis [Figure 6].⁹⁹ A friend of Beresford's from when the latter had served under him in Egypt and the Sudan, Wolseley wrote on 23 January, wishing him success and expressing the hope that 'it may end in forcing governments to listen to the naval and military experts.'¹⁰⁰ Denouncing the board of the Admiralty as a 'fiction', Beresford himself publicly accused both Liberals and Conservatives of being 'delinquents alike' in allowing finance to overrule strategy.¹⁰¹ The aim of this language was to detach defence policy from the prevailing ideas of parsimonious good government, and instead approach it, in the words of the retired naval Captain C.C. Fitzgerald, 'on its true methods, regardless of party interests'.¹⁰² The only truly patriotic course, it was argued, was to defer entirely to the experts. As the Cobdenite journalist Francis Lawley complained in the context of the Channel Tunnel scare in 1883, this rhetoric allowed the professionals to paint any attempt by civilians to contest their claims as unpatriotic, 'an insult to our gallant defenders by land and sea'.¹⁰³ Beresford, for example, affixed to his attacks on the political classes the observation that it was the sailors, not the politicians, 'who would have to do the work and take command of the British fleets' in wartime, with the insinuation that to question the professional's opinions was tantamount to playing politics with other men's lives.¹⁰⁴ Even this language was relatively mild by some standards; in

⁹⁹ Wolseley provided Beresford with advice and information on the organisation of the War Office for his speeches, and Beresford later obliquely recognised the connection to Wolseley in a letter to the Conservative Chief Whip. See Wolseley to Beresford, 15 Feb. 1888, London Metropolitan Archives, Q/WIL/481; Beresford to Aretas Akers-Douglas, 18 May 1888, Kent History and Library Centre (hereafter KHLC), U564/C84/4. Although Wolseley's 1888 outbursts have been covered by a number of historians, only Halik Kochanski suggests that he may have acted in support of Beresford, though she does not pursue the point. Kochanski, *Wolseley*, p. 181. See also Hamer, *British Army*, pp. 134-138; Strachan, *Politics of the British Army* pp. 98-100; Beckett, 'Stanhope at the War Office', pp. 290-291; Moon, 'Invasion of the United Kingdom', pp. 25-29.

¹⁰⁰ Bennett, *Charlie B*, pp. 97-99, 147; Kochanski, *Wolseley*, p. 161.

¹⁰¹ Charles Beresford, 'A Workable Admiralty', *Nineteenth Century* (June 1888), pp. 809-816 (p. 811); Charles Beresford, *The Memoirs of Admiral Lord Charles Beresford*, vol. II (London: Methuen, 1914), pp. 356-357.

¹⁰² *The Times*, 19 May 1888, p. 9.

¹⁰³ Lawley, 'preface', in Bright, *Peace or War with France?*, p. 6.

¹⁰⁴ Charles Beresford, 'The Admiralty Confusion and its Cure', *Nineteenth Century* (May 1888), pp. 760-765 (p. 761).

an 1884 article, Dunsany suggested that by advocating popular budgets against the advice of their professional advisors politicians were close to committing ‘high treason’.¹⁰⁵

It is important to understand, however, that while the status of professionals may have risen during this period, this did not mean that trust in ‘generalist’, ‘gentlemanly’ politicians necessarily fell.¹⁰⁶ By the 1880s, sceptics could point to a long list of mistakes made by professional experts, who were constantly arguing and disagreeing among themselves.¹⁰⁷

Distrust and public arguments between the services became so common during the later 1880s that one prominent naval theorist even suggested that a public meeting of experts should be called to vote on the best method of defending the state, ‘because the country will only give a certain amount of money for defence ... and the greater excuse it has for being parsimonious will be this, that the experts cannot agree on the most simple and common sense main issue.’¹⁰⁸

More prosaically, it was obvious that, like any other leading professionals, high-ranking armed forces officers had much to gain personally from the government adopting their ideas, and were therefore hardly as disinterested as they claimed.¹⁰⁹ The national defence debates of the 1880s were therefore not simply a clash between pessimists and optimists, but were also marked by a struggle for authority between, broadly speaking, ‘professionals’ and ‘politicians’.

A case in point was the diverse public reaction to Wolseley’s speech in the House of Lords on 14 May 1888, a set-piece example of serious pessimism couched in the language of professional expertise.¹¹⁰ After roundly condemning the national defences and arguing that a sudden French invasion was eminently possible, Wolseley concluded by declaring that ‘the views I have expressed this evening, and upon many previous occasions, are those entertained by nine out of

¹⁰⁵ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 8 Oct. 1884, p. 1.

¹⁰⁶ Crook, ‘Suspect Figures’, pp. 167-170.

¹⁰⁷ Britain’s continued use of muzzle-loading guns long after all other European nations had abandoned them was regularly cited as an instance where the experts had got it badly wrong. Hamer, *British Army*, p. 44. See also *Saturday Review*, 9 June 1888, pp. 683-684; *Daily News*, 14 May 1888, p. 5.

¹⁰⁸ John Colomb, comments in Sir Charles H. Nugent, ‘Thoughts upon Invasion and upon the Means Available or which may be made Available at a few weeks’ notice, for Securing our Coast Line Generally against Sudden Attack’, *Journal of the Royal United Service Institution*, 32 (1888), pp. 145-176 (p. 170).

¹⁰⁹ Turner, *Cultural Authority*, p. 226.

¹¹⁰ Moon, ‘Invasion of the United Kingdom’, p. 28.

every ten soldiers and sailors whose opinions are worth having'.¹¹¹ The Conservative press was split between the likes of the *Spectator*, which called for him to be made 'Minister for War, Commander-in-Chief, and Director-General of Ordnance', and supporters of the government such as the *Manchester Courier*, which unflatteringly compared the Adjutant-General to General Boulanger. Considering that he was a 'servant of the British public', the *Courier* found it incomprehensible that Wolseley continued to draw pay after roundly condemning the system he was employed under.¹¹² Meanwhile the Liberal press was determined on resignations, although without a consensus as to who should go. While the *Manchester Guardian* was quick to suggest 'sacrificing one or two Secretaries of State' if they had really been acting against the advice of the armed forces, the *Daily News* conversely declared that 'officers must back their opinions with resignations'.¹¹³ Although the language of expertise can hardly be said to have been a resounding success in light of these responses, what they demonstrate is that the edifice of civilian pre-eminence was weakening, the language of professional expertise had genuine cross-party appeal and the experts were no longer as tightly bound by the 'time-honoured constitutional rule' of silence as they had once been.

¹¹¹ Wolseley, Parl. Deb., 14 May 1888, col. 102.

¹¹² *The Spectator*, 19 May 1888, p. 677; *Manchester Courier*, 15 May 1888, p. 5.

¹¹³ *Manchester Guardian*, 26 Apr. 1888, p. 5; *Daily News*, 15 May 1888, p. 5.



ON THE COURSE.—WAR-DANCE OF JINGO MINSTRELS.

Charles.—"WE DON'T WANT TO FIGHT, BUT, BY JINGO! IF WE DO— YOU'LL HAVE TO FIND NEW WEAPONS, AND PAY THE MONEY TOO!"
 "CHUCK US YER COPPERS, GENTLES!"

[See Cartoons, *Venus*, p. 240.]

Figure 6 (previous page): ‘War-Dance of the Jingo Minstrels’; Chuck us yer Coppers, Gents!’”.

‘Our Only Sailor’ (Beresford, far right), ‘Our Only General’ (Wolseley, second from right) and ‘Our Patent Commander-in Chief’ (Cambridge, centre, strumming a ‘War Barometer’) play for race-goers as the Chancellor, George Goschen (third from left), collects money. Lord Salisbury (fourth from left) sleeps while Randolph Churchill (far left) looks down his nose at the ‘minstrels’. *Fun*, 30 May 1888, p. 233.

The Parties and the Professionals

There is, however, an important caveat to add to the professional-politician binary, that is the vast majority of pessimistic ‘experts’ were themselves anti-Gladstonian and staunch supporters of the Conservative Party, usually to be found on the ‘radical right’ of the Party.¹¹⁴ This fact has long been recognised by scholars of the literary genre of invasion fiction.¹¹⁵ From the *Battle of Dorking* onwards, argues Harry Wood, tales of imaginary invasion cast the Liberals as contemptible, irresponsible and unpatriotic, with Gladstone becoming for a time ‘the genre’s personification of invasion scepticism.’¹¹⁶ This reflected a state of affairs that pessimists often acknowledged cheerfully. Some, like Fitzgerald, did so in order to emphasise how serious they were in making defence a ‘non-political’ issue.¹¹⁷ Hamley, on the other hand, positively revelled in using his seat in Parliament to attack ‘hon. Gentlemen opposite’ – that is, the Liberal Party – ‘who professed to regard invasion as a bugbear, and were ready to vote away Army, fortifications, and defences of all kinds in their ardent desire to conciliate the taxpayer’.¹¹⁸ Many other figures key to the events of this thesis were similarly politically inclined. The Duke of Cambridge sat in the Lords throughout his career, making a political name for himself as the ‘embodiment of reaction’, while Wolseley believed that Salisbury’s retention of office was ‘essential to the preservation of the Empire’, a reflection of his deep antipathy to Irish Home

¹¹⁴ Bentley, *Salisbury’s World*, pp. 172-173.

¹¹⁵ For a summary see Harry Joseph Wood, ‘External Threats Mask Internal Fears: Edwardian Invasion Literature 1899-1914’ (PhD thesis: University of Liverpool, 2014), pp. 65-68, 203-217. I am indebted to Dr. Wood for providing me with a copy of his work.

¹¹⁶ Wood, ‘Edwardian Invasion Literature’, p. 204.

¹¹⁷ *The Times*, 19 May 1888, p. 9.

¹¹⁸ Hamley, Parl. Deb., 22 Mar. 1886, cols. 1519-1520.

Rule.¹¹⁹ Lord Dunsany also sat for the Conservatives, singling out Gladstone and Sir William Harcourt for special censure in his ‘Silver Streak’ essay, while the most respected sailor of the period, Admiral Sir Geoffrey Phipps Hornby, regarded Gladstonian Liberals as little more than ‘enemies of the state’.¹²⁰ Few could match the political involvement of the populist Tory Democrat Beresford, however, who was the only naval officer of his generation to be elected to Parliament while also on the active list, sitting for five separate constituencies – with substantial gaps for sea service – between 1874 and 1910.¹²¹ Although he lost his seat in 1880, he was elected Conservative MP for East Marylebone as the self-declared ‘member for the Navy’ in 1885.¹²² When retired and volunteer officers are included, ‘service members’ constituted one of the largest occupational groups in Westminster and were overwhelmingly Conservative in allegiance, especially after 1886.¹²³ Indeed, following the 1886 election, the *Liberal and Radical* complained that the number of service members had created a House of Commons ‘dominated by militarism’.¹²⁴ The view from Horse Guards and the view from the Conservative backbenches was therefore a remarkably similar one.

Although it can hardly be regarded as an organised group, the significance of this parliamentary influence should not be underestimated. Considering that over half of Conservative MPs had personal connections with the armed forces, it was hardly surprising that the centre of gravity within the Party moved towards the pessimistic world-view.¹²⁵ The invigorating ideology of expertise not only gave these men more confidence to speaking out, even against their own Party, but it also meant that they could be assured of a supportive echo chamber both within and beyond the House of Commons. The increasing Tory concern with national defence and

¹¹⁹ Strachan, *Politics of the British Army*, p. 37; Wolseley to Cambridge, 27 Apr. 1888, KHL, U1590/O314.

¹²⁰ Dunsany, ‘Silver Streak’, pp. 743-744; Andrew Lambert, *Admirals: The Naval Commanders who made Britain Great* (London: Faber, 2008), p. 287.

¹²¹ ‘Case 1762: Parliamentary Candidature’, The National Archives of the UK (Hereafter TNA), ADM 116/2409B, p. 3.

¹²² Bennett, *Charlie B*, pp. 129-131.

¹²³ ‘Service members’ constituted eleven percent of the Commons in 1886, although their military experience varied enormously. See W.C. Lubenow, *Parliamentary Politics and the Home Rule Crisis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 169, 183. See also Spiers, *Late Victorian Army*, pp. 162-175; Strachan, *Politics of the British Army*, pp. 30-32; Beckett, *Riflemen Form*, pp. 161-165.

¹²⁴ *Liberal and Radical*, 26 May 1888, p. 331.

¹²⁵ Green, *Crisis of Conservatism*, p. 66.

imperial polices during this period can thus be seen in part as a response to the more assertive attitudes of these professional ‘experts’.¹²⁶ Significantly, with the passing of Disraeli, the party had lost a strong restraining influence against war scares and Francophobia.¹²⁷ His replacement, Lord Salisbury, was too canny a politician to allow his distrust of experts to outweigh the concerns of his backbenchers, and was more willing to bow to ‘public opinion’ in such matters, as we shall see.¹²⁸ By the 1890s the Party had developed great confidence in its ‘ownership’ of defence, especially when combined with the anti-Home Rule crusade.¹²⁹ Consequently the deepest ire of the allegedly ‘non-political’ pessimists was increasingly turned against Gladstonian Liberals and that favourite bugbear of the Conservative imagination, the ‘fanatical economists’ and ‘peacemongers’ on the Radical benches [Figure 7].¹³⁰ For his part, Gladstone was acutely aware of how the ‘powerful professional classes’ within the Army both supported and influenced the Conservative party; ‘the Colonels in the House of Commons’, he complained, ‘are always on the wrong side.’¹³¹ As this thesis’ case studies demonstrate, by the end of the period the Tory party had become the principal vehicle for the dissemination of anti-internationalist defence pessimism.

In theory the Liberal Party of the 1880s was in a much stronger position to resist the professional onslaught. The number of ‘service members’ in its parliamentary ranks, little enough before 1886, was reduced to a negligible quantity after the exodus of the aristocratic Whigs over Home Rule.¹³² At the same time the large and growing proportion of the parliamentary party elected as Radicals attested to the fact that it continued to uphold sceptical and anti-militarist traditions, both in the Commons and on the campaign trail.¹³³ The memory of

¹²⁶ See for example Lubenow, *Parliamentary Politics*, pp. 113-115.

¹²⁷ Jonathan Parry, ‘Benjamin Disraeli, Earl of Beaconsfield’, *ODNB*.

¹²⁸ Bentley, *Salisbury’s World*, pp. 172-175.

¹²⁹ Green, *Crisis of Conservatism*, pp. 59-72; Jonathan Parry, ‘Patriotism’ in David Craig and James Thompson (eds) *Languages of Politics in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 69-92 (p. 84).

¹³⁰ Matin, ‘Creativity of War Planners’, pp. 810-814.

¹³¹ Gladstone, holograph dated 14 Aug. 1882, reprinted in H.C.G. Matthew (ed.), *The Gladstone Diaries*, vol. X (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 312; Hamer, *Papers of Lord Rendel*, p. 68.

¹³² Spiers, *Late Victorian Army*, p. 168.

¹³³ Thomas William Heyck, ‘Home Rule, Radicalism, and the Liberal party, 1886-1895’, *Journal of British Studies*, 13 (1974), pp. 66-91 (p. 69).

Cobden also offered the party a tradition of civilian criticism as an alternative to professional expertise. This tradition, however, was suffering by the end of the 1870s, stymied by a lack of leadership. Obsessed with the Irish issue, the Liberal party failed to ‘play a more active role in advancing the sort of institutional development of internationalism implicit in Gladstone’s campaigns ... [of] the 1870s.’¹³⁴ The Party leadership was often unable to operate on subjects outside of Gladstone’s own obsessions with ‘finance, religion, and the immorality of coercive or careless government’, reflected in the fact that his government which took power in 1880 did not enter office with an agreed programme.¹³⁵ Conservative confidence in defence policy drew much oxygen from these failings of its opposition.

Although Liberal ideology could still exhibit considerable dynamism during this period, many within the Party reacted to the lack of leadership by becoming obsessed to a dangerous extent with maintaining mid-century ideological ‘relics’, and this was no-where more common than in defence policy.¹³⁶ Under pressure from reinvigorated militarist and imperialist sentiments, many Liberals simply adopted a ‘fiercer insistence on core elements and the truthfulness of internationalism’.¹³⁷ Reflecting on this in 1934, H.G. Wells, himself a self-declared optimistic utopian, argued that the lack of critical attention paid towards warfare was ‘the most conspicuous blind patch in the English liberal outlook at the close of the nineteenth century’ and his view has generally been endorsed by subsequent historiography.¹³⁸ Matthew Johnson, for example, has recently argued that one reason the Great War was so destructive to the Liberal Party was because prior to 1914 so few within it had seriously attempted to confront the problems thrown up by militarism.¹³⁹ By struggling to exploit the new language and mood of nationalism, argues Parry, the Liberals allowed the Conservatives to paint them as unpatriotic,

¹³⁴ Matthew, *Gladstone: 1875-1898*, p. 318.

¹³⁵ Matthew, *Gladstone: 1875-1898*, p. 115; D.A. Hamer, *Liberal Politics in the Age of Gladstone and Rosebery* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), pp. 84-85; Jonathan Parry, *The Rise and Fall of Liberal Government in Victorian Britain* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), pp. 247-248.

¹³⁶ Michael Bentley, *The Climax of Liberal Politics: British Liberalism in Theory and Practice 1868-1918* (London: Edward Arnold, 1987), pp. 96-100; Thomas William Heyck, *The Dimensions of British Radicalism: The Case of Ireland 1874-95* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1974), pp. 167-168.

¹³⁷ Sylvest, *Liberal Internationalism*, p. 15

¹³⁸ H.G. Wells, *Experiment in Autobiography: Discoveries and Conclusions of a Very Ordinary Brain (Since 1866)* (New York: Lippincott, 1967), p. 148; Bentley, *Climax of Liberal Politics*, pp. 106-108.

¹³⁹ Johnson, *Militarism and the British Left*, p. 184.

naïve and ‘penny-pinching’ cosmopolitans.¹⁴⁰ Meanwhile the British peace movement was in the intellectual, organisational and financial ‘doldrums’ during the 1880s.¹⁴¹ Instead, for example, of answering the 1884 scare with a fresh debunking of the pessimistic exaggerations, the Cobden Club simply reissued *The Three Panics*.¹⁴² Well might Gladstone have lamented that the commercial classes had failed to produce another Cobden.¹⁴³ Instead the Radical press generally limited itself to vehement though dated denunciations of the ‘parasitical’ armed forces, whose rulers, ‘atrabilious Admirals and Tory Lordlings’, it accused of growing fat on military and naval increases.¹⁴⁴ The fact that the ‘Truth about the Navy’ scare was sparked by a Liberal paper edited by W.T. Stead, a prominent anti-war crusader, pointed to another problem that both the party and the peace movement never managed to solve, namely the ‘widespread assumption in Britain of the peaceful nature and ‘disinterestedness’ of the country’s maritime strength’.¹⁴⁵ While a great many Liberals and Radicals were always prepared to attack naval spending, most retained a belief in the navy as the customary defender of ‘English freedom’ and this often compromised the party’s attempts to present a unified front against the demands of the Admiralty.¹⁴⁶ As we shall see in both the Channel Tunnel and the Naval Defence Act, the Liberals found themselves struggling to square ‘little England’ navalism with internationalism or parsimonious critique. More dangerous even than this was the tendency of centrist Liberals, who wished to limit the electoral damage of their party’s reputation for parsimony, to accept uncritically the assertions and demands of the defence pessimists. In December 1884 Lord Kimberly – that representative figure of the ‘quiet mass’ of ‘moderate’ Liberal opinion – lamented ‘how very reluctant Gladstone is to increase expenses even for the most urgent wants of the army or navy’, a reluctance Kimberly believed was ‘mischievous to the public

¹⁴⁰ Parry, *Politics of Patriotism*, pp. 5, 341-386.

¹⁴¹ Ceadel, *Semi-Detached Idealists*, p. 118.

¹⁴² Ceadel, *Semi-Detached Idealists*, p. 125.

¹⁴³ Hamer, *Personal Papers of Lord Rendel*, p. 75.

¹⁴⁴ *Northern Echo*, 4 Dec. 1884, p. 3; *Liberal and Radical*, 2 June 1888, p. 347; *Reynolds’s Newspaper*, 3 June 1888, p. 4.

¹⁴⁵ Laity, *British Peace Movement*, p. 128-129.

¹⁴⁶ Parry, *Politics of Patriotism*, pp. 205-206.

interests.¹⁴⁷ Considering that the weaknesses of Stead's campaign were by this time well understood by Kimberly's political colleagues within the Admiralty, his attitude was symptomatic of his statesman's inability to understand complex defence issues, his inclination to trust the 'expertise' of public alarmists and crucially, his determination to meet the demands of an agitated 'public opinion', the subject of the following chapter.¹⁴⁸

Conclusion

In a society increasingly respectful of specialist expertise, professionalism became central to the armed forces officers' claim to public attention. Disgruntled with the way in which civilian politicians ran Britain's defence policy, pessimistic professionals set about attacking the party system and its idol of 'retrenchment'. In demanding that policy be developed on 'scientific' principles, they aimed to recast the debate within a frame of reference defined by themselves, thereby excluding the older tradition of 'amateur' ministerial policymaking. With most politicians largely uninterested in the complex details of national defence, this strategy was, as we shall see, surprisingly effective. They found a particularly receptive audience in the Conservatives, exploiting the party's existing prejudices to push their own vision of patriotic 'good government' onto a reluctant Lord Salisbury. At the same time, they were able to take advantage of weaknesses within the Liberal anti-armament tradition, which found itself distracted and lacking the intellectual weight to seriously counter the newly invigorated and confident 'professional authorities'. This produced a state of affairs which ultimately proved fatal to the future of liberal internationalism in British politics.

¹⁴⁷ Angus Hawkins and John Powell (eds), *The Journal of John Wodehouse First Earl of Kimberley for 1862-1902, Camden Fifth Series*, vol. 9 (London: Royal Historical Society, 1997), pp. 13, 350.

¹⁴⁸ Beeler, 'In the Shadow of Briggs', pp. 7-8.



Figure 7: 'Days with Celebrities: The Peace Party'.

The Conservative Journal *Moonshine* voices the revulsion Tories felt at the anti-imperialist and pacifist attitudes of many on the Radical wing of the Liberal Party. *Moonshine*, 25 Apr. 1885, p. 193.

Chapter Three

Public Opinion, the Press and Panic

Our Only General went one day,
Determined for to say his say,
And he told John Bull such a horrible tale,
That it made his rosy face turn pale.

It was all about our great countree
and its terrible in-se-cur-i-tee,
Enough to make every boy and gal
Grow lamentablee hy-ster-i-cal.

The Army was fine, of course, but then
It couldn't well fight unless it had men;
and no se-cre-ta-ree of State
Would provide for men in his estimate.

The Navy was that in which we trust,
But its ships were few, and its guns would bust;
And ships and guns were what no First Lord
Appar-i-ent-lee could afford.

If an enemy chose to cross the seas,
He could capture us all with perfect ease;
And when in London he'd made his breaches,
Farewell to after-dinner speeches!

This horrible tale caused quite a scare,
As the *Telegraph* trumpet blared its blare;
And everybody seemed overcome,
Tweedle, twiddle, twaddle, twoddle, twum.

'The "England in Danger" Scare', *Fun*, 23 May 1888, p. 222.¹

¹ See Figure 9.

The importance of public opinion to the transformation of British national defence during the late nineteenth century has long been recognised. For Marder, the 1880s saw the creation of a widespread ‘intelligent interest’ in naval matters, sparked by the ‘Truth about the Navy’ campaign.² Although he strikes a cautious note as to its impact on official policy, Marder nevertheless argues that the public became a ‘useful ally to the Admiralty, enabling it to squeeze more out of the treasury than would have otherwise been possible.’³ Much subsequent naval historiography – including that which has exposed the ‘myth’ of naval weakness – has endorsed this conclusion, stressing the apparent ease with which alarmists were able to harness and direct public feeling, especially through their connections with the press.⁴ By the 1890s, argues G.R. Searle, the Admiralty and the pessimistic world-view it represented had ‘captured the popular imagination’, thereby forcing the hands of policymakers.⁵ On the other hand, military and cultural historians who focus on the fear of invasion after 1870 characterise British society not as intelligent but irrational. According to these academics, fear of naval defeat or military invasion became a ‘peculiar susceptibility’, a ‘chronic anxiety’, a ‘grave national psychosis’ and a ‘national obsession’: late nineteenth century Britain, they argue, was a society pervaded by panic.⁶ Either way, the 1880s have come to be regarded as a watershed moment for popular attitudes towards national defence. After decades of apathy, the public is considered to have ‘woken up’ and become an active force on the side of the pessimists.

On closer inspection, however, this perspective contains a number of problems. In the first place there are some basic chronological issues. Most statements about the ‘spirit’ of the period 1880-1894 are overwhelmingly reliant on sources from the late 1890s, when navalist or ‘invasionist’

² Marder, *Anatomy*, pp. 44-45.

³ Marder, *Anatomy*, pp. 59-61.

⁴ W. Mark Hamilton, ‘The Nation and the Navy: Methods and organization of British Navalist Propaganda, 1889-1914’ (PhD thesis: University of London, 1977); Kennedy, *British Naval Mastery*, pp. 178-179; Beeler, ‘Introduction’, Mullins, *Transformation*, pp. vii-viii; Smith, *Ruling the Waves*, p. 24; Parkinson, *Late Victorian Navy*, p. 240. See also Part III, below.

⁵ Searle, *A New England?*, p. 262.

⁶ Beckett, *Riflemen Form*, p. 7; Cunningham, *Volunteer Force*, p. 5; Eby, *Armageddon*, p. 11; Moon, ‘Invasion of the United Kingdom’, p. 652.

language was far more common.⁷ This in turn is indicative of the lack of detailed research on public opinion during the 1880s. Historians tend to rely on invasion fiction, London ‘clubland’ papers, private or official documents and claims of public support made by obviously interested contemporaries such as Beresford or Hamley, and have not expanded their scope to include provincial or working class newspapers, for example. As we shall see, these problems bedevil work on both the Channel Tunnel and Naval Defence Act. Finally, as touched upon in the preceding chapter, the narrative of popular support for naval expansion or popular fear of invasion has done little to engage with the claims of historians who argue that the British people were economically minded and largely apathetic towards the details of national defence.⁸ In particular, Jan Rüger’s seminal study of ‘popular navalism’ in Britain and Germany during the two decades before 1914 suggests that, while government ‘stage-managers’ might have been enthusiastically interested in the state of the navy, there is little hard evidence that these feelings pervaded the mass of the populace.⁹ In the context of the empire, Bernard Porter has argued that the novelty of ‘new imperialism’ from the 1880s onwards encouraged both its supporters and detractors to overemphasise its popularity, and he draws attention to much evidence which points the other way.¹⁰ Indeed, the obvious continuing popularity of Gladstonian Liberalism in the 1890s presents a serious problem for the assumption of popular enthusiasm for the anti-internationalist pessimist cause. It is telling, for example, that the first sentence of Gladstone’s

⁷ For example, Marder’s celebrated chapter on the pervasiveness of the post-1880 imperialist, militarist and navalist ‘spirit of the age’ relies overwhelmingly on sources produced after 1895. Marder, *Anatomy*, ch. 2. For an enthusiastic endorsement of the chapter from an otherwise critical commentator see Mullins, *Transformation*, p. 175, n. 154. Historians also rely heavily on the PhD theses of Howard Moon and W. Mark Hamilton for their characterisations of the 1880s, despite these studies beginning in 1888 and 1889 respectively.

⁸ See especially Hamer, *British Army*. In Andrew Saunders’ memorable phrase, invasion panics contained all the ‘phantasy and ephemeral puff of smoke of a genie from a bottle’, Saunders, *Fortress Britain*, p. 9. T.G. Otte suggests that foreign policy and defence actually declined in public interest during the later 1880s. ‘The Swing of the Pendulum at Home’: By-elections and Foreign policy, 1865-1914’ in T.G. Otte and Paul Readman (eds), *By-Elections in British Politics* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell, 2013), pp. 121-150 (p. 136).

⁹ Rüger, *Great Naval Game*, ch. 3.

¹⁰ Bernard Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists: Empire, Society and Culture in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), esp. ch. 9.

memorandum of opposition to the naval increases of 1894 read: 'I deem it to be in excess of public expectation'.¹¹

These problems are brought into sharp relief by developments in our understanding of how nineteenth century 'public opinion' was created and represented. Historians are no longer satisfied with assuming that the press or the platform accurately reflected the feelings of the entire nation.¹² It is recognised, for example, that a reliance on London newspapers 'of record' such as *The Times* has skewed our understanding of 'national' opinion, something acknowledged by contemporaries themselves.¹³ As Simon Potter points out, politicians and journalists of this time had few qualms about 'appropriating the voices of people they had not been able to consult in any meaningful way.'¹⁴ This tendency was encouraged by the expansion of the franchise, which turned 'the democracy' from an enemy of the constitutional order into a powerful source of authority which politicians competed strenuously to represent, in the hope that being seen to speak 'for the people' would boost their own personal legitimacy.¹⁵ This tactic proved especially useful for those – like the defence pessimists – who wished to attack 'the tyrannical grip of party'.¹⁶ However, as James Thompson has shown, the specific rhetoric of 'public opinion' could also be used to gain legitimacy by excluding certain classes or constituencies.¹⁷ The 'public' was a vague and limited concept, rarely synonymous with the 'people' and regularly confined to the middle and upper classes.¹⁸ In this way politicians, journalists and commentators were able to co-opt or ignore whole swathes of the country as they saw fit, exploiting the ill-defined boundaries of the political public for their own ends. A key

¹¹ Matthew, *Gladstone Diaries*, vol. XIII, p. 364.

¹² Compare, for example, Marder, *Anatomy*, pp. 11-12 with Rüger, *Great Naval Game*, pp. 124-125.

¹³ Aled Jones, *Powers of the Press: Newspapers, Power and the Public in Nineteenth-Century England* (Aldershot: Scolar, 1996), pp. 92-93; Andrew Hobbs, 'The Deleterious Dominance of *The Times* in Nineteenth-Century Scholarship', *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 18 (2013), pp. 472-497.

¹⁴ Simon J. Potter, 'Jingoism, Public Opinion, and the New Imperialism', *Media History*, 20 (2014), pp. 34-50 (p. 40).

¹⁵ Robert Saunders, 'Democracy' in David Craig and James Thompson (eds), *Languages of Politics in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 142-167 (pp. 156-159). See also Jon Lawrence, *Speaking for the People: Party, Language and Popular Politics in England, 1867-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

¹⁶ James Thompson, *British Political Culture and the Idea of 'Public Opinion', 1867-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 5.

¹⁷ Thompson, *British Political Culture*.

¹⁸ Thompson, *British Political Culture*, ch. 1.

part of the methodology used in this thesis, therefore, involves careful analysis of the reality behind the rhetoric of public support used by both internationalists and anti-internationalists.

This chapter considers the importance of the ‘public’ as a factor in the discourse of national defence. By the 1880s, public opinion had emerged as both ‘an essential element of the political system and an expression of social forces’, with politicians and political campaigners increasingly focussing their energies on cultivating and directing it.¹⁹ As the first section of this chapter shows, national defence was no exception from this trend. Both optimists and pessimists believed that if they succeeded in convincing the people the government would quickly swing behind their own policies. Section two puts these aims into the context of recent scholarship which has shown contemporary public opinion to have been an exclusionary construct that gave greater weight to high ‘society’ and often ignored lower and non-metropolitan classes. By paying special attention to the structure of the nineteenth century press, this section argues that defence pessimists exploited their close links with London newspapers to appropriate the voice of the ‘nation’, sidelining the much larger constituency in the ‘provincial’ and Radical working-class press that was often hostile to the myth of British vulnerability. Finally, the chapter turns its attention to the fear of the irrational public, an idea much used yet rarely analysed by historians. Though regularly hailing common sense as a national characteristic, journalists and politicians alike were deeply concerned that the British people too easily slipped into a state of panic when the issue of military or naval weakness was raised. Drawing on the experience of the mid-century invasion scares and the more general nineteenth century fear of the ‘panic terror’, contemporary commentators came to regard ‘newspaper panics’ as reflecting a fatal flaw within the national psyche. Overall, the chapter provides a much-needed account of the relationship between public opinion and defence policy in late nineteenth century Britain, which both contextualises the thesis’ later case studies and goes some way to explaining why historians continue to assume that ‘the people’ were firmly supportive of the pessimistic cause.

¹⁹ Thompson, *British Political Culture*, p. 2.

Speaking to the People

The first half of the nineteenth century saw ‘the public’ installed as a powerful, sometimes omnipotent force in the minds of Britain’s politicians.²⁰ The reform agitation of 1832, the Anti-Corn Law League of the 1840s and the contemporary Chartist campaigns left a deep impression in the minds of all who witnessed them, demonstrating how vulnerable governments now were to external pressure organised on a large-scale.²¹ As the subsequent invasion scares demonstrated, foreign policy and defence was by no means excluded from this influence. Drawing on his experiences in the Anti-Corn Law League, Richard Cobden always maintained that arms spending and belligerence could only be reduced by educating the nation and bringing ‘the conscience of the people’ to bear upon governments; free trade and liberal democracy would, if properly directed, work hand-in-hand to achieve international peace.²² The Peace Society of the 1880s similarly believed that statesmen would only abandon their warlike policies ‘by the force of public opinion declaring against the perpetuation of the war system, and demanding the institution of rational methods for settling disputed points’.²³ Likewise, defence pessimists were convinced that public opinion was the vehicle by which their views could become adopted as government policy. ‘The only method of obtaining reform in any direction is so to persuade the public of its necessity, that the party in power will perceive that it is more to their own profit to grant than to withhold it’, wrote Charles Beresford in his *Memoirs*.²⁴ A populist Tory Democrat – Lord Salisbury regarded him as ‘too greedy of public applause to get on in a public department’ – Beresford’s language was suffused with appeals to ‘the people’.²⁵ Although the autocratic Garnet Wolseley was far removed from this point of view, he was nevertheless a canny media manipulator deeply aware of the importance of courting public opinion.²⁶ ‘We all profess anxiety for a better state of things,’ he wrote to the

²⁰ Parry, *Rise and Fall of Liberal Government*, pp. 27-34.

²¹ Thompson, *British Political Culture*, pp. 90-91; Parry, *Rise and Fall of Liberal Government*, p. 6.

²² Cobden, *Political Writings* vol. II, pp. 373-376; Howe, *Free Trade and Liberal England*, p. 98.

²³ William Pollard, ‘The Peace-at-any-Price Party’, *Fraser’s Magazine* (Oct. 1880), pp. 490-500 (p. 497).

²⁴ Beresford, *Memoirs* vol. II, pp. 340-341. See also Bennett, *Charlie B*, p. 196.

²⁵ Bennett, *Charlie B*, p. 145. See also Beresford’s reflections on British democracy in his *Memoirs* vol. II, pp. 339-341.

²⁶ Spiers, *Late Victorian Army*, p. 9.

Minister for War in 1887, 'but until the public is taken into confidence our complaints against the present system will have no practical result'.²⁷ 'It must ever be remembered that politicians are merely the weather-cocks of public feeling' reflected one Admiralty critic in 1888.²⁸

These attitudes were predicated on a common perception, which had developed early in the century, of public opinion as an intelligent and patriotic force, capable of responding in a coherent and dynamic way to national issues.²⁹ Inspired by an idealised liberal vision of the sturdy and independent-minded middle classes, this narrative pointed to events such as the repeal of the Corn Laws – a 'triumph of reason' – as evidence that the British public were fundamentally rational.³⁰ Public debate therefore valued the declaration of serious, reasoned and earnest beliefs that treated the nation as capable of evaluating the evidence and coming to its own conclusions.³¹ 'I have great faith in great multitudes when appealed to perseveringly and honestly', wrote Cobden in 1857.³²

Emboldened by their status as professional experts, confident in 'the soundness of our reasoning', defence pessimists found themselves naturally at home in this environment.³³ All they wished to do, they said, was take the country 'into their confidence'. Once the facts of Britain's weakness were clearly articulated, the patriotic public would not fail to 'do their duty' and force the government to bow to the pessimist demands.³⁴ 'We believe this system would not be allowed to go on for a single year,' wrote one navalist, 'if the public were once thoroughly enlightened as to the consequences which must inevitably ensue if we found ourselves at war with a maritime Power.'³⁵ This rhetoric complemented criticisms of the political elite, who, it was often suggested, were actively concealing the facts from the public for political gain. 'The

²⁷ Wolseley to Stanhope, 31 May 1887, KHLC, U1590/O314. See also Wolseley to Cambridge, 27 Apr. 1888, KHLC, U1590/O314.

²⁸ Anon., 'National Defence', p. 449.

²⁹ Parry, *Politics of Patriotism*, pp. 50-51.

³⁰ Thompson, *British Political Culture*, pp. 137-138; Bradley, *Optimists*, p. 149.

³¹ Thompson, *British Political Culture*, pp. 23, 135.

³² Hobson, *International Man*, p. 208.

³³ Anon., 'National Defence', p. 449. See also Hamley, *National Defence*, pp. 103-104.

³⁴ Hamer, *British Army*, p. 157.

³⁵ Charles Cooper Penrose Fitzgerald, 'The Navy and the Country', *Nineteenth Century* (Aug. 1888), pp. 279-296 (p. 287).

country wants to have the truth, which no Government has the honesty to tell’, argued Wolseley in 1888.³⁶ In this way pessimists were able to reinforce their image as honest and ‘non-political’ purveyors of facts rather than mere political lobbyists. In his 1882 condemnation of the Navy, *Forewarned, Forearmed*, the perennial alarmist Lord Henry Lennox concluded:

The numbers of our ships and guns compared with those of France is now before the People of this Country, and it is for them to decide whether England is any longer to hold the doubtful position which she now occupies among the maritime powers of the world!³⁷

In appealing to the rational public, pessimists were challenging liberals on their home ground. An optimistic belief in human intelligence was critical for a world-view that held global unity to be an achievable aim.³⁸ Cobden’s Anglo-French commercial treaty of 1860 was an example of an attempt to put this theory into practise by allowing the ‘natural forces’ of trade and public opinion to pressure governments into adopting less belligerent foreign policies.³⁹ By the 1870s, ‘trust in the people’ had become a central animating force of Gladstonian Liberalism, which interpreted contemporary politics as a conflict between the ‘people’ and ‘privilege’ – with the armed forces situated firmly in the latter camp.⁴⁰ Far from enthusiastic supporters of greater arms spending, peace campaigners believed that ‘the vast masses of the people were growing tired of the old game – tired of sacrificing their children and the wealth they produced’ to feed Britain’s war industries.⁴¹ Gladstone’s Midlothian speeches, for example, appealed to the cosmopolitanism of an electorate which he assumed was naturally inclined to support free trade, retrenchment and moral government, and would never waiver in its patriotic ‘duty’ towards peace, justice and liberty.⁴² The bullish anti-militarism of the British was a staple of Radical literature and was rooted in the conviction that the ‘masses’ were morally superior to the

³⁶ Wolseley to Beresford, 23 Jan. 1888, quoted in Bennett, *Charlie B*, p. 147.

³⁷ Lennox, *Forewarned, Forearmed*, pp. 35-36. Exclamation in original.

³⁸ Parry, *Politics of Patriotism*, pp. 20-21.

³⁹ Parry, *Politics of Patriotism*, pp. 237-238.

⁴⁰ Bradley, *Optimists*, ch. 6; Biagini, *Liberty, Retrenchment and Reform*, pp. 50-60.

⁴¹ James Rowlands MP in *The Arbitrator*, Apr. 1890, p. 31.

⁴² Thompson, *British Political Culture*, p. 150; Gladstone, 22 Mar. 1880 in *Political Speeches in Scotland*, pp. 222-223.

‘classes’ [Figure 8].⁴³ Looking forward from 1882 to the enfranchisement of large swathes of the working classes, the Liberal-Labour MP Thomas Burt assured his readers that the new electorate would bring with it a perspective ‘uncontaminated by interests, unwarped by prejudice’, demanding greater accountability on the part of its government and always opposing the ‘military spirit’ and ‘secret diplomacy’. ‘The forces and tendencies that make for peace and justice are constantly increasing,’ he declared, ‘and with these forces and tendencies the Democracy – which is indeed itself probably the very fount and source of the new spirit – will certainly sympathize and co-operate.’⁴⁴

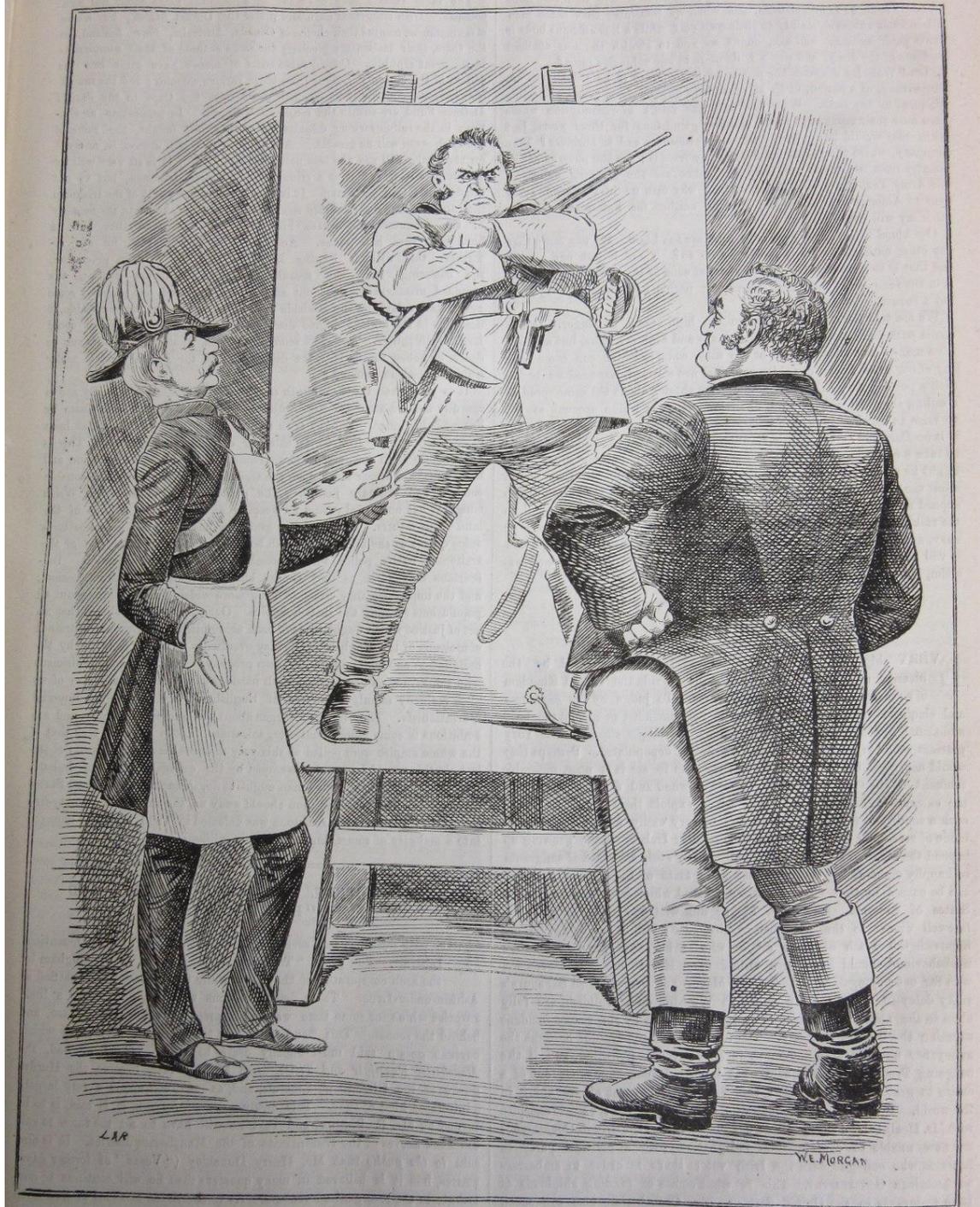
The fight between internationalists and pessimists for the support of the people was thus a test of the nature of British patriotism demanding the nation choose between cosmopolitan or national principles.⁴⁵ In placing their faith in, and appealing to, the influence and power of the people, both sides were hoping to encourage a ‘bottom up’, popular movement for informed, rational and patriotic change, which would outflank unpatriotic politicians or scheming generals respectively. To this end, it is important to understand that national defence was rarely the subject of mutual dialogue or exchange of ideas. Pessimists and optimists were not speaking to one-another: instead, they sought to produce weighty and convincing monologues for the wider audience in the country. In most cases, their aim was not to deconstruct or rebut the arguments of their opponents but to create an alternative narrative, often using the same data, for the consumption of public opinion. They provided the facts, and the people would do the rest. ‘Our business must be with the masses’, concluded Cobden in 1853. ‘Keep *them* right, and we can’t go wrong.’⁴⁶

⁴³ Bradley, *Optimists*, pp. 149-150.

⁴⁴ Thomas Burt, ‘Working Men and War’, *Fortnightly Review* (Dec. 1882), pp. 718-727.

⁴⁵ Cunningham, ‘Language of Patriotism’, p. 22.

⁴⁶ Hobson, *International Man*, p. 97. Emphasis in original.



THE PAINTER AND HIS PORTRAIT.

WOLSELEY: "There, Sir! *that* is what I should like to see you look like."

JOHN BULL: "H'm—no doubt. But I'll see you and the other Jingoed hanged before I'll look such an utter fool as that!"

Figure 8: 'The Painter and His Portrait'.

John Bull expresses the moral revulsion towards Wolseley's militarist and conscriptionist sentiments that Radicals ascribed to the British public. *Liberal and Radical*, 2 Feb. 1889, p. 73.

It is important, however, to recognise that though the people's power and rationality was widely credited, the determination to speak to and educate the public was rooted in the concern that the populace was essentially apathetic towards national issues, including defence. Despite the academic interest in the concept of public opinion in the nineteenth century, the idea of the apathetic public has received little attention.⁴⁷ This is curious, not least because disengagement was a matter of foremost concern to contemporaries. Reflecting on the state of the nation in 1882 Gladstone wrote in private of 'the impossibility of keeping the *public* in mind always lively and intent upon great national interests'.⁴⁸ If Liberals largely kept these concerns to themselves, anxiety that the nation was living in a dangerous state of indifference was a vital ingredient of the pessimistic platform.⁴⁹ 'National complacency' was a central theme of the invasion scare literary genre and regularly served as the self-justification for other forms of 'alarmism'.⁵⁰ In 1884 Colonel Sir Charles Nugent opened a lecture on 'Home Defences' at the Royal United Services Institution by expressing his amazement at the 'apathy and indifference' of the public on the subject. 'Is it', he asked, 'that we are so wrapped up in our individual concerns that we...are content to live in a fool's paradise, from which we may any day be rudely awakened?'⁵¹ Four years later, although admitting that 'there is a growing feeling in the country which may be turned to good account', Nugent again repeated the charge.⁵² In the discussion that followed both occasions his audience largely agreed, stressing education as the only practical remedy.⁵³ 'The public mind is in a fog', observed Captain John Colomb MP in 1888, '...it seems to me that somehow this nation has lost the power of grasping great and wide national principles of defence'. Only by uniting together as experts behind a prominent manifesto, he argued, could a 'healthy' and 'intelligent' public opinion be brought to bear on the

⁴⁷ Thompson's *British Political Culture*, for example, contains virtually no mention of the idea at all.

⁴⁸ Matthew, *Gladstone Diaries*, vol. X, p. 312. Emphasis in original.

⁴⁹ See also the concerns of the 'imperial zealots' identified in Porter, *Absent-Minded Imperialists*, pp. 222-226.

⁵⁰ See the first of A. Michael Matin's seven motifs of the invasion genre in his 'Securing Britain: Figures of Invasion in Late-Victorian and Edwardian Fiction', (PhD Thesis: Columbia University, 1997), pp. 15-6. Beresford, *Memoirs* vol. II, p. 338.

⁵¹ Nugent, 'Home Defences', pp. 427-428.

⁵² Nugent, 'Thoughts upon Invasion'.

⁵³ See for example observations of General Simmons, General Collinson and Lieutenant Tupper, RN, in Nugent, 'Home Defences', pp. 449, 452.

issue.⁵⁴ In this context the effect of the 1884 Representation of the People Act was a matter of great interest to officers, who were keenly aware of the extent to which the defence estimates now rested in the hands of the working classes. Some, such as Sir Edward Hamley, hoped that this new constituency could be converted to an ‘enlightened influence’ and a source of strength for military reformers and administrators.⁵⁵ Unsurprisingly, Wolseley inclined to the opposite view. In September 1888 he published an article which eulogised the ‘great man’, declaring that ‘the torrent of anarchical democracy lately let loose upon England is undermining, and must eventually destroy, that fabric of military and naval strength upon which our stability as a nation rests.’⁵⁶

These concerns were so prominent because both sides feared that the other was best placed to exploit the apathetic public. As we have seen, Cobden had encouraged the idea that warlike activities were driven primarily by the upper classes, who exploited the ignorance, gullibility and apathy of the public to line their own pockets.⁵⁷ In this spirit, Gladstone complained that, while the people were lethargic, ‘the opposite sentiment of class never slumbers.’⁵⁸ Defence pessimists meanwhile never failed to stress the strong influence that ‘economists and peacemongers’ held over official policy.⁵⁹ For both sides, the alternative to an awake, informed and active public was a national policy ruled by their ideological opponents – or, as we shall see, one defined by the anarchic influence of panic.

Listening to the Press

Grandiose claims about the power and influence of public opinion were commonplace during the 1880s.⁶⁰ This attitude persisted despite the fact that the British electoral system was one of the least inclusive in Europe, with only sixty percent of adult males holding the vote and no

⁵⁴ Captain Colomb RN in Nugent, ‘Thoughts upon Invasion’, p. 169.

⁵⁵ Hamley, *National Defence* (Blackwood: Edinburgh, 1889), p. 83.

⁵⁶ Garnet Wolseley, ‘Military Genius’, *The Fortnightly Review* (Sept. 1888), pp. 297-312 (pp. 300-301).

⁵⁷ Hobson, *International Man*, p. 86.

⁵⁸ Matthew, *Gladstone Diaries*, vol. X, p. 312.

⁵⁹ Hamley, *National Defence*, p. 198.

⁶⁰ Jose Harris, *Private Lives, Public Spirit: A Social History of Britain 1870-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 15-16.

form of direct or proportional representation.⁶¹ Indeed, argues Thompson, despite the democratic veneer, ‘public opinion’ actually had little to do with true democratic representation, tending instead to serve as a euphemism for upper and middle class opinion.⁶² All were not equal in a political culture that ‘weighed rather than counted’ opinions, valuing reason, rationality and status above sheer numbers; the voice of a prominent member of the elite was able to outweigh, for example, multiple trade unionists, especially if the latter were expressing an unfashionable view.⁶³ Faced with a country that appeared, in the main, ambivalent or apathetic towards national defence and potentially hostile to increased military spending, this limited and exclusionary interpretation of ‘the public’ became crucial to defence pessimists’ narrative of reasoned public support for their cause. As Parts II and III illustrate, the defence revolution of the 1880s was rooted more in the skilful manipulation of ‘respectable’ London opinion than it was in any kind of groundswell of popular enthusiasm.

By the late nineteenth century there had developed three principal methods of measuring public opinion, the petition, the platform and the press.⁶⁴ Of these the petition was the least used, with formal petitions to Parliament largely limited to issues such as church rates or temperance, although, as we shall see, the format was used during the Channel Tunnel scare, when class prejudice was exploited to present a group of signatories from the metropolitan elite as representative of ‘national’ opinion.⁶⁵ On the other hand, platform speaking and public meetings were a crucial element of all political discourse at this time, and national defence was no exception. Navalist campaigners made extremely effective use of meetings from 1884 onwards, projecting an idealised impression of their movement as an engaged and representative fusion of genuine public opinion and professional expertise.⁶⁶ However, although both the Channel

⁶¹ Saunders, ‘Democracy’, p. 158; For the British franchise in its European context see H.C.G. Matthew, R.I. McKibbin, J.A. Kay, ‘The Franchise Factor in the Rise of the Labour Party’, *English Historical Review*, 91 (1976), pp. 723-752 (pp. 723-724).

⁶² Thompson, *British Political Culture*, p. 245.

⁶³ Thompson, *British Political Culture*, pp. 23, 245; Jones, *Powers of the Press*, p. 89; Potter, ‘Jingoism, Public Opinion, and the New Imperialism’, pp. 40-41.

⁶⁴ Thompson, *British Political Culture*, p. 87.

⁶⁵ Thompson, *British Political Culture*, pp. 129-130.

⁶⁶ For contemporary attitudes to public meetings see Thompson, *British Political Culture*, pp. 117-118. For navalists and public meetings see Steven R.B. Smith, ‘Public Opinion, The Navy and the City of

Tunnel petition and the navalist meetings were central set-pieces of their respective campaigns, they would have been little more than voices in the wilderness were it not for the accompanying support of the press.

Reflecting back, defence campaigners were never in any doubt that it was the newspaper press that had provided them with the crucial advantage needed to push their policies onto the British government. Writing in 1897, Admiral Philip Colomb provided a narrative of the 1880s which stressed the centrality of newspapers as a tool for the transformation of public opinion, and thereby defence policy:

Independent and patriotic editors, with their hands free, and yet stimulated by business instincts, undertook the task which was impossible to statesmen and officials either in or out of office. They set the anonymous pens of the best-informed and keenest men in the country to work; they opened their columns to the free-lances of the navy, and in the earlier eighties initiated and stimulated a tremendous change in the public opinion of the country, reinforcing it in the later eighties, so that it has never ceased to run in the direction then marked out for it.⁶⁷

Colomb was certainly correct that he and his colleagues had made excellent use of the press during this decade. Driven by a self-imposed responsibility to ‘enlighten’ and educate, and designed to appeal to a readership assumed to possess ‘a serious concern for the affairs of a world power’, many newspapers provided a congenial environment for expert defence pessimists.⁶⁸ Yet the limited approach to the press often adopted by historians ignores the fact that it was predominantly the London papers that defence pessimists exploited. Like its readership, the London middle and upper-class press was overwhelmingly Conservative during this period, while the commercial, industrial and shipping interests of the City were disproportionately interested in defence matters as compared with the rest of the population.⁶⁹

London: The Drive for British Naval Expansion in the Late Nineteenth Century’, *War and Society*, 9 (1991), pp. 29-50; part III, below.

⁶⁷ P.H. Colomb, ‘The Patriotic Editor in War’, *The National Review* (Apr. 1897), pp. 253-263 (p. 54).

⁶⁸ Harry Schalck, ‘Fleet Street in the 1880s: the New Journalism’ in Joel H. Wiener (ed.), *Papers for the Millions: The New Journalism in Britain, 1850s-1914* (New York: Greenwood, 1988), pp. 73-87 (p. 85); Lucy Brown, *Victorian News and Newspapers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 111.

⁶⁹ For the politics of the City see David Kynaston, *The City of London*, vol. I (London: Chatto & Windus, 1994), pp. 369-372; for the politics of its press see Stephen Koss, *The Rise and Fall of the Political Press*

Indeed, the fact that the armed forces were themselves an integral part of London high society meant that the City was liable to swallow pessimistic exaggerations wholesale. Consequently, London papers were eager to print such exaggerations: as the editor of *Murray's Magazine* wrote to Beresford in 1888, an article or series of articles on the national defences by their foremost critic would prove 'extremely valuable to the magazine'.⁷⁰

It is therefore hardly surprising that Army and Navy officers maintained close links with sympathetic journalists in the capitol and they regularly provided information or wrote pieces themselves.⁷¹ Consequently, these metropolitan papers were easily swung behind the narrative of British weakness. *The Times* had been known as 'the alarmists' chief spokesman' since the 1840s and the *Morning Post*, which was widely read by Tory party members, also became an eager producer of pessimistic rhetoric.⁷² The *Daily Telegraph* was especially important, printing articles from Wolseley on the danger of invasion which precipitated the 'scare' of 1888.⁷³

Equally as important was the pessimistic domination of the influential London 'clubland' papers, particularly the *Pall Mall Gazette*, the *St. James' Gazette* and the *Spectator*, which specialised in producing analysis and discussion from a consciously 'imperial' perspective for their small but elite readerships.⁷⁴ 'The Truth about the Navy' campaign itself illustrated the power that these papers, working in combination with armed forces 'experts', could wield.⁷⁵

Lastly, it is also important to stress the defence agitators' mastery of that most quintessentially nineteenth-century and middle-class literary phenomenon, the essay.⁷⁶ After 1880, and

in *Britain* vol. I (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1981), pp. 198, 218-219. The interest of the City in defence is the theme of Smith, 'Public Opinion'.

⁷⁰ Edward A. Arnold to Charles Beresford, 21 Jan. 1888, BL, Add. MS 63117.

⁷¹ See especially Brown, *Victorian News*, pp. 137-42. Military-press relations reached their apogee in the 'Curragh Incident' of 1914, when Army officers 'colluded' with newspapers and the Unionist opposition against the Liberal government. Mark Connelly, 'The Army, the Press and the 'Curragh Incident', March 1914', *Historical Research*, 84 (2011), pp. 535-557.

⁷² Longmate, *Island Fortress*, p. 325; Koss, *Political Press*, vol. I, p. 42.

⁷³ Moon 'Invasion of the United Kingdom', p. 29.

⁷⁴ Brown, *Victorian News*, p. 110. On the *Pall Mall Gazette's* imperialism see Schalck, 'Fleet Street', p. 82.

⁷⁵ Raymond L. Schults, *Crusader in Babylon: W.T. Stead and the Pall Mall Gazette* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1972), pp. 88-106; J.O. Baylen, 'Politics and the New Journalism: Lord Esher's Use of the *Pall Mall Gazette*' in Wiener (ed.), *Papers for the Millions*, pp. 107-141 (pp. 118-121).

⁷⁶ For an introduction to the genre see Gertrude Himmelfarb, 'Introduction', Gertrude Himmelfarb (ed.), *The Spirit of the Age: Victorian Essays* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), pp. 1-28 (pp. 18-27).

especially during bumper years such as 1882 or 1888, rarely a month went by without one of the literary journals carrying an article by a concerned pessimist. Self-consciously imbued with intellectual prestige, these journals proved the perfect forum for the discussion of weighty matters of national security, allowing the ‘true’ weakened state of the national defences to be elaborated in full. Foremost among them was the *Nineteenth Century*, edited by the architect and socialite James Knowles, who was determined to run the magazine on ‘utterly impartial’ lines.⁷⁷ By the 1890s the journal had become the first port of call for alarmist articles, with both Wolseley and Beresford publishing their respective manifestoes against the Channel Tunnel and in favour of naval increases in its pages.

This is not to say, however, that the London press’ support for the pessimistic narrative was inevitable. As Part II illustrates, at the opening of the 1880s metropolitan newspapers were enthusiastically supportive of Cobdenite attempts to encourage European peace by a Channel Tunnel, and inclined to be sceptical of alarmist stories about military and naval weakness.⁷⁸ In this context the pessimistic conquest of the *Nineteenth Century* was a damning indication of the wider liberal internationalist malaise. In contrast to the prodigious output of retired Generals and Admirals, few defence optimists put pen to paper in a determined attempt to defend their ideals and rebut the myth of British weakness. Anti-militarist ideologues like Sir Wilfrid Lawson, enthusiasts of retrenchment such as Sir William Harcourt or optimistic Army officers like Sir Andrew Clarke were notably absent from the pages of the literary journals; the essays of John Knox Laughton and George Shaw Lefevre referred to in Chapter One were unique in this respect. The result of this failure was stark. Of the papers most widely read by the London ‘elite’ only a small Liberal minority – the *Daily News* or Henry Labouchere’s gossip magazine *Truth* – consistently attempted to strike an ‘optimistic’ and critical line during times of heightened concern.

⁷⁷ Priscilla Metcalf, *James Knowles: Victorian Editor and Architect* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 273.

⁷⁸ Blumenthal, ‘The Navy Campaign of 1884’, p. 86.

Two areas where optimists and internationalists were likely to gain a more sympathetic hearing were the ‘provincial’ and working class press. The four decades before 1914 were a ‘golden age’ for non-London newspapers, many of which maintained circulations far in excess of *The Times*.⁷⁹ Holding great influence within their local areas they were predominantly Liberal in outlook and thus more sympathetic towards the internationalists.⁸⁰ The Liberalism of Cobden and Bright had been forged not in London but in Manchester and it was to the provinces that Liberals continued to look for support against the pessimists and alarmists in the London press. ‘London never was England’, reflected Thomas Burt in his 1882 discussion of the working classes and British foreign and defence policy. ‘It has been repeatedly pointed out how little the ablest London journalists know of the feelings and thoughts which stir the hearts of the masses of their countrymen.’⁸¹ Considering the country as a whole in December 1884, the Radical *Northern Echo* – which happened to be W.T. Stead’s old paper – asserted:

The present ministry is essentially a peace ministry. But there is a danger of their looking not so much to the facts of the case as to a so-called demand from the country. There is no such demand. There is not even a semblance of it. If the country really wants more means of slaying its neighbours it is surprisingly silent on the subject. The masses of the people have not condescended to discuss the matter, and the ravings of alarmists are to them as meaningless as the crackling of thorns under a pot.⁸²

Although the Liberal split of 1886 pushed many regional papers towards the Unionists, they continued to maintain a sceptical attitude towards the anxieties of the capital. For example *The Scotsman*, which left the Gladstonian fold following the Home Rule crisis, continued to maintain a derisive attitude towards the ‘manifest folly’ of Wolseley and Beresford in 1888.⁸³ Of course, the independence and optimism of the extra-London press should not be exaggerated. As Part II shows, most provincial papers turned against the Channel Tunnel in imitation of their metropolitan counterparts. Nevertheless, they were a realm into which the pessimists rarely directly ventured and where the myth of British weakness often struggled to establish itself.

⁷⁹ Brown, *Victorian News*, p. 32; Hobbs, ‘Deleterious Dominance of *The Times*’, p. 475.

⁸⁰ Koss, *Political Press*, vol. I, pp. 223-228.

⁸¹ Burt, ‘Working Men and War’, p. 720.

⁸² *Northern Echo*, 4 Dec. 1884, p. 3.

⁸³ *The Scotsman*, 18 Dec. 1888, p. 4.

If the provinces were difficult territory, the working class newspapers proved the alarmists' most persistent and principled opponents. Foremost among these were *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper* and *Reynolds's Newspaper*, both published on a Sunday and possessing comparatively enormous readerships: *Lloyd's* had a circulation of well over 600,000 by 1879 and *Reynolds's* 350,000 by the middle of the 1880s.⁸⁴ The political positions of these papers have often received little attention from historians of the press.⁸⁵ Yet this is to ignore, as Alan Lee and Eugenio Biagini point out, the strident Radicalism of both.⁸⁶ In terms of national defence *Lloyd's* and *Reynolds's* tended to take a calmer view of things than *The Times* or *Pall Mall Gazette*, displaying a balanced and competent handling of things like naval policy absent from their metropolitan 'betters'. In September 1884, for example, both *Lloyd's* and *Reynolds's* quickly struck back at the alarmism of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, accusing naval officers of acting out of self-interest and the Conservative opposition of stoking the scare to further its own ends.⁸⁷ *Lloyd's* immediate reaction was to provide its readers with a comparative table showing the superiority of the British Navy over the French, while the more Radical *Reynolds's* combined this with an anti-aristocratic, almost revolutionary tone. Consider, for example, the following extract, taken from the paper's leading column on the front page of the 12 May 1889 issue, reflecting on the passage of the Naval Defence Act and entitled 'The Naval Defences Fraud':

Is there any reason to believe that the disinherited "masses" would be worse under a foreign conqueror than under the existing *regime*? ... Why should men who are ground to the dust by an industrial system which leaves them no escape from practical slavery plus uncertainty of employment trouble themselves about the naval defence of the country or any other kind of defence? As the old Roman proverb has it, "*Vacuus viator*

⁸⁴ Brown, *Victorian News*, p. 52; Alan J. Lee, *The Origins of the Popular Press in England 1855-1914* (London: Croom Helm, 1976), p. 71. Biagini, *Liberty, Retrenchment and Reform*, p. 21.

⁸⁵ Lucy Brown, for example, simply describes them as 'vaguely democratic'. *Victorian News*, pp. 47, 66.

⁸⁶ Lee, *Popular Press*, p. 166; Biagini, *Liberty, Retrenchment and Reform*, p. 21. *Lloyd's* became a Unionist paper in the early 1890s. Koss, *Political Press*, vol. I, p. 288.

⁸⁷ *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper*, 28 Sept. 1884, p. 6; *Reynolds's Newspaper*, 7 Dec. 1884, p. 4.

cantabit coram latrine” (“The penniless traveller will laugh in presence of the robber.”)
... Let them defend it who have a stake in it.⁸⁸

Two weeks later, under the title ‘Humbugging the Working Man’, the paper accused politicians of ‘carefully avoid[ing] all direct contact’ with the working classes, thereby remaining ignorant of the fact that the majority opposed the proposed naval programme.⁸⁹ Of course, it would be easy, as Stephen Koss does in his monumental study of the British ‘political press’, to dismiss the idea that these papers reflected their reader’s political opinions.⁹⁰ This, however, is to ignore much contemporary evidence to the contrary.⁹¹ As Biagaini argues merely buying a copy of *Reynolds’s* was a political act, and he gives much evidence to suggest that the paper’s leader columns were widely read.⁹² This is not to say that the British working classes were unanimously Radical, but it serves to emphasise the little evidence there is pointing the other way, in support of anti-internationalist claims of support. The almost total lack of any mass-circulation Tory Sunday paper during this decade is extremely telling, for example.⁹³

The evidence from the newspaper press, therefore, goes some way to questioning the idea that the British people bought overwhelmingly into the pessimist narrative. As we shall see, Radical MPs repeatedly pointed to provincial and working class opinion as evidence that defence anxiety was not a nation-wide concern. However, as discussed, nineteenth century public opinion was not measured by quantity. Although they may have had a readership in the millions, provincial papers and Radical weeklies were not often read at Westminster, while journals with tiny circulations such as the *Pall Mall Gazette* would have reached every Member of Parliament.⁹⁴ For Conservatives especially, ‘public opinion’ consisted of the ‘clubland’ papers, *The Times* and the literary journals, which together were regarded as speaking for the nation.⁹⁵ As inhabitants of the metropolitan social scene, London journalists were themselves

⁸⁸ *Reynolds’s Newspaper*, 12 May 1889, p. 1.

⁸⁹ *Reynolds’s Newspaper*, 26 May 1889, p. 4.

⁹⁰ Koss, *Political Press*, vol. I, p. 342.

⁹¹ Koss himself provides quotations that dispute his conclusion. *Political Press*, vol. I, pp. 184, 204.

⁹² Biagini, *Liberty, Retrenchment and Reform*, pp. 21, 26-27.

⁹³ Lee, *Popular Press*, p. 166.

⁹⁴ Brown, *Victorian News*, pp. 43-45; Schults, *Crusader in Babylon*, p. 44.

⁹⁵ Thompson, *British Political Culture*, pp. 101-102; Brown, *Victorian News*, p. 193.

susceptible to this top-down, limited and exclusionary view.⁹⁶ Reviewing the aftermath of the ‘Truth about the Navy’ scare in 1886, the editor of the *Fortnightly Review* Thomas Escott declared:

Not from the Government, but from the people, speaking through the press, have come the demands for a strengthened navy and fortification of coaling stations. It will be wise to anticipate the next outcry, and provide the elements of a national army resting on the goodwill of the people.⁹⁷

Escott’s conclusion was only plausible if one concentrates exclusively on London papers. Yet it is this perspective which has been largely adopted by historians.⁹⁸ By heavily influencing the London press, and then claiming that self-same press as the voice of the nation, pessimists largely bypassed the problem of public support. Taken singularly, an article condemning the state of the Army by a retired general was an example of expert authority from above; a number of such articles taken together became ‘public opinion’. This was precisely the method against which Sir Wilfrid Lawson raised a lone voice in the debates on the supplementary estimates following the ‘Truth about the Navy’ scare in December 1884:

It was a misfortune to the country that the Government should be so strongly influenced as it was by the Press and the platform. The fact was that no Government was able to stand against the public opinion of the country. He regretted that they were not able to stand against the force of public opinion when public opinion was false, and he only regretted that that false public opinion did exist. What interest had the people in keeping up these enormous armaments? Their interest was all the other way, and the whole of this panic had been got up by the writers in the Press, anonymous people whom nobody knew.⁹⁹

Lawson’s characterisation of ‘public opinion’ as little more than an anonymous pressure group masquerading as the voice of the nation was one with which many Liberals, including

⁹⁶ Brown, *Victorian News*, p. 143.

⁹⁷ T.H.S. Escott, ‘The Army and the Democracy’, *Fortnightly Review* (Mar. 1886), pp. 339-349 (p. 349).

⁹⁸ Koss argues that late nineteenth century newspapers functioned as ‘agencies through which mass enthusiasms were conveyed to parliamentary leaders’, a conclusion which, even if true, stands somewhat at odds with his dismissal of working class Sunday papers.

⁹⁹ Lawson, Parl. Deb., 2 Dec. 1884, col. 515.

Gladstone himself, agreed.¹⁰⁰ The Party was not, however, united on this score. In a long and rambling pessimistic speech during the 1884 debate, for example, the Liberal shipping magnate Sir Donald Currie produced ‘a letter addressed to me from a working man’, which claimed that ‘the Democracy’ was awakening to the need for increased naval spending.¹⁰¹ These Liberal disagreements about the true state of popular feeling on national defence pointed to a fracture that had existed within the party since its mid-century creation, between those who took their inspiration from Lord Palmerston and those who followed the tradition laid down by Richard Cobden. The former were more comfortable dealing with the populist ‘imperial’ themes of the 1880s and did not regard agitation for greater military or naval spending, or popular support for imperial wars, as an implicit threat to Liberal ideals; many, including Sir Donald Currie, left the party in 1886 over Irish Home Rule. Meanwhile the Cobdenites, as we have seen, desperately hoped that the reason and morality of the people would cause them to reject the allure of jingoism. As the decade progressed however Cobdenites proved far less confident than their imperialist colleagues. By the 1890s, many, including Sir Wilfrid Lawson, had arrived in despair at the conclusion that the alarmist newspaper press did indeed represent the British people. ‘It may be laid down as a rule’, Lawson reflected bitterly in his memoirs, ‘that all wars are popular in England’.¹⁰²

Liberal fear of the irrationality of the people was not new to this period. Despite his hopeful optimism in the future of humanity, Cobden regularly expressed disillusion with the British ‘war spirit’, which, during the Crimean War, he regarded as an all-pervasive ‘moral epidemic’.¹⁰³ ‘I get discouraged as to the effect of reason and argument and facts in deciding the policy of the country’, he wrote in the aftermath of the 1859 war scare. ‘We are a very illogical people, with brute combativeness which is always ready for a quarrel and which can be excited at the will of a governing class that has subsisted for centuries upon this failing in John Bull’s

¹⁰⁰ Thompson, *British Political Culture*, p. 149; see also ch. 6, below.

¹⁰¹ Currie, Parl. Deb., 2 Dec. 1884, cols. 485-486.

¹⁰² Russell, *Lawson*, p. 138.

¹⁰³ Hobson, *International Man*, pp. 114-115.

character.’¹⁰⁴ Although his *Three Panics* was an appeal to reason, it dealt with, and was intended to prevent, periods of unreasonable ‘passion’.¹⁰⁵ In selecting the word ‘panic’ for his title Cobden was using a word already familiar to his audience, especially in the context of financial collapse and geopolitics. By the 1880s the term and the vision of the nation it represented had become central to the lexicon of national defence in Britain.

Fearing the Irrational

Speaking to a Manchester audience in January 1894, the Tory frontbencher and future Prime Minister Arthur Balfour summed up the British attitude to national defence as alternating ‘between intervals of apathy and panic’:

...we let the whole question slide out of our minds for a long interval. We then awake and find that we are in a position of inferiority as regards these armaments, compared with the national obligations we may be called upon to fulfil; we awake with a start, and suddenly begin to make frantic preparations, which would have been wholly unnecessary if we had kept the even tenor of our own way, carefully from year to year considering the necessities of our position, and carefully from year to year seeing that those necessities were fulfilled.¹⁰⁶

By the 1890s, the idea that Britain was uniquely susceptible to defence panics as a consequence of its indifference had become something of a truism. ‘Unfortunately discussions on naval or military inefficiency either leave the public cold or plunge them into panic’, wrote the Liberal politician Reginald Brett, who had worked closely with Stead on the ‘Truth about the Navy’ articles.¹⁰⁷ ‘It seems impossible to generate healthy and sustained public interest in these matters’.¹⁰⁸ Indeed, the trope of the sleeping public suddenly awakened by realisation of its defenceless was as old as the post-Napoleonic defence anxiety itself.¹⁰⁹ By the 1880s Britons

¹⁰⁴ Hobson, *International Man*, p. 289.

¹⁰⁵ Cobden, *Political Writings*, p. 630.

¹⁰⁶ *Manchester Guardian*, 23 Jan. 1894, p. 4.

¹⁰⁷ For Brett (later Lord Esher)’s relationship with Stead on this and other matters see Baylen, ‘Politics and the New Journalism’.

¹⁰⁸ *The Times*, 12 Nov. 1891, p. 12.

¹⁰⁹ In 1840, in what was perhaps the first serious piece of alarmism published after the Napoleonic wars, *The Times*, after noting recent developments in the French navy, warned the country that if it continued to ‘sleep’, it would soon find itself ‘aroused by a sound which none of this generation have ever yet heard –

had come to regard invasion and naval panics as a regular and virtually unpreventable peculiarity of national life.¹¹⁰ ‘Panics, like the poor, are “always with us”’ sighed the *Leeds Times* in 1889.¹¹¹ A year earlier Jacob Bright lamented that defence panics occurred ‘almost with the regularity of the seasons’.¹¹²

For Liberals and Conservatives, optimists and pessimists, defence panics represented the antithesis of the rational public. So widespread was the conviction that the British people were the ‘scariest’ in Europe that, as the historiography quoted in the opening paragraph of this chapter indicates, the language of scare and panic remains a crucial prism through which national defence in Britain between 1870 and 1914 is understood by academics.¹¹³ In their analyses these historians have moved a surprisingly small distance from early twentieth century Liberal writers such as J.A. Hobson or Caroline Playne, who, seeking to explain the apparent ‘madness’ of the South African and Great Wars respectively, drew on the then emerging field of psychology to describe a ‘psycho-neurotic’ mentality of militarism and paranoia which swept over the collective mind of the nation from the 1880s onwards.¹¹⁴ For both of these writers public opinion was excitable, unreasoning and even insane, peculiarly susceptible to alarmist warnings and jingoistic appeals and liable to be driven into a panic that politicians, in their ‘moral impotency’, found irresistible.¹¹⁵

It is, firstly, worth considering the significance the word ‘panic’ held for nineteenth century Britons. As Thomas Lansdall-Welfare and others have recently demonstrated via content-analysis of digitised newspapers, panic was a quintessentially nineteenth century word.¹¹⁶ First emerging into popular use in connection with the 1826 financial collapse, by the depression

the sound of French artillery in our own waters, if not literally at our own doors.’ *The Times*, 12 Aug. 1840, p. 4.

¹¹⁰ For a particularly illustrative example see George Meredith, *Beauchamp’s Career* [1875] (London: Constable, 1909), pp. 1-6.

¹¹¹ *Leeds Times*, 9 Feb. 1889, p. 4

¹¹² Bright, Parl. Deb., 4 June 1888, col. 1047.

¹¹³ Lawley, ‘Preface’, *Peace or War with France?*, p. 9.

¹¹⁴ J.A. Hobson, *The Psychology of Jingoism*, (London: Grant Richards, 1901); C.E. Playne, *The Pre-War Mind in Britain: An Historical Review* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1928), p. 8.

¹¹⁵ Hobson, *Psychology of Jingoism*, p. 20-21; Playne, *Pre-War Mind*, p. 397.

¹¹⁶ Thomas Lansdall-Welfare et al., ‘Content Analysis of 150 Years of British Periodicals’, *PNAS*, 114, E457-E465 (2017), p. 3.

years of the 1870s it had become a commonplace synonym for economic loss and disaster on a personal, national and international scale.¹¹⁷ It was in this context that the word also received an important link with conflict, as ‘wars, rumours of wars, and revolutions’ were the most common cause of major fluctuations on the London stock exchange.¹¹⁸ It was in the nineteenth century that the term ‘panic-monger’ was coined, quickly becoming a charge that public figures would go to great lengths to avoid.¹¹⁹ When, for example, in 1889 it was suggested to Lord Salisbury that a member of the government should speak at a meeting in favour of increased defence spending, he dismissed the idea on the grounds that any accusation of stirring up panic would negate any good which the meeting itself might do the cause.¹²⁰ While the pages of *Hansard* rarely contain direct accusations of panic, they are filled with denials from members afraid that their words, actions or policies might be seen in such a light. By the end of the century panic had become one of the great bugbears of the age, an ineradicable reminder in this ‘Era of Crowds’ of humankind’s evolutionary origins and the ease with which illogical ‘nature’ might gain the upper hand over rational ‘science’.¹²¹ Culturally, it is no coincidence that the later nineteenth century saw a revival of interest in the Greek god Pan, the god of the wild whose pipes were said to have struck all who heard them with fear and from whose name the word derives.¹²² ‘Pan is not dead’ became a favoured refrain of commentators wishing to emphasise the unbroken link between contemporary panics and the fears of the ancients; ‘panic terrors’ sent modern armies fleeing in fear just as they did the Hoplites.¹²³

¹¹⁷ Charles P. Kindleberger and Robert Z. Aliber, *Manias, Panics and Crashes: A History of Financial Crises*, 5th edn (New Jersey: Wiley, 2005), pp. 94-96, 116-119. See for example ‘Famous Financial Panics’, *Answers*, 20 Dec. 1890, p. 67.

¹¹⁸ Gareth Campbell et al., ‘What Moved Share Prices in the Nineteenth-Century London Stock Market?’, *Economic History Review*, 71 (2018), 157-189 (pp. 178-79).

¹¹⁹ ‘panic, adj. and n.2’ *Oxford English Dictionary Online* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, June 2018).

¹²⁰ Salisbury to A.J. Balfour, 10 Jan. 1889 in Robert Harcourt Williams (ed.), *The Salisbury-Balfour Correspondence* (Herefordshire Record Society, 1988), p. 274.

¹²¹ On crowds and rationality in this period see Jaap van Ginneken, *Crowds, Psychology, and Politics, 1871-1899* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 6; Thompson, *British Political Culture*, pp. 167-182.

¹²² Ronald Hutton, *The Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), ch. 3. Curiously, Hutton does not discuss panic in his examination of the Pan revival.

¹²³ See for example ‘Panic Terror’, *Sharpe’s London Magazine*, (Jan. 1868), pp. 236-242; Robert Louis Stevenson, ‘Pan’s Pipes’ [1881] in *Virginibus Puerisque and Other Papers* (London: Chatto & Windus,

Central to the late nineteenth century experience of panic was the news media. The basic idea of a media panic is well understood. In a highly organised and interdependent democracy, social, moral or political panics are possible only through the mass communication of risk. They are therefore both the creation of and entirely dependent on the media, whose dominant interest is profit.¹²⁴ As such, a press panic is defined by numbers; if a newspaper's coverage of an event boosts circulation, then it automatically has an interest in maintaining and expanding its hysterical language. Although the idea of spreading fear and alarm through newsprint was by no means new to the late nineteenth century, the sheer number of papers available during this period constituted a sort of crowd in their own right, magnifying and sensationalising once limited or niche hysterias into national or international events.¹²⁵ In 1882 *Punch* produced a satirical 'Panic-Monger's Guide' in response to a recent collapse on the Paris stock exchange, which neatly illustrated the idea that a newspaper panic could be quantified in terms of leader columns:

Two "Questions" in the House of Commons make twenty-four Leaders. Twenty-four Leaders make one Alarm. Four Alarms make two Panics. Two Panics make one Catastrophe. One Catastrophe makes two hundred Leaders. &c., &c.¹²⁶

Significantly, in a culture which regularly treated the voice of the press as the voice of the people, newspaper panics could easily become regarded as more general phenomena, giving the impression that the entire country was in a state of anxiety.¹²⁷ This was the case with the traditional narrative of the defence panic. As indicated in Balfour's summary, a defence panic was a short period of high-profile media interest and anxiety in the state of the national defences, usually sparked by a particularly influential article or speech condemning some deficiency, real or perceived, in the Army or Navy [Figure 9]. During such events, the usually apathetic public would 'wake up' to its defenceless condition, demand, with ill-thought out

1911), pp. 181-185; 'Panic', *All the Year Round*, 12 Mar. 1887, p. 174; *Punch*, 24 Sept. 1892, p. 138. See also F.W. Hirst's reflections in *The Six Panics* (London: Methuen, 1913), p. 1.

¹²⁴ Keith Tester, *Panic* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), pp. 27-28.

¹²⁵ See Hobson's reflections, *Psychology of Jingoism*, pp. 9-12.

¹²⁶ *Punch*, 25 Feb. 1882, p. 96.

¹²⁷ This attitude was attacked by Hirst in *Six Panics*, pp. 2-4.

haste, the laying down of some new ironclads or the erection of fortifications, and, after a few weeks, retire back into its indifferent state, having added only inefficiencies to the defences and fresh burdens on the exchequer [Figure 10]. As such, like financial panics defence panics were regarded by all sides as dangerously costly, both in terms of cash and in weakening the defence infrastructure, as the post-1859 ‘Palmerston’s follies’ demonstrated.¹²⁸ ‘Panics’, asserted the Tory arch-pessimist Lord Carnarvon, ‘produce bad work and expensive work.’¹²⁹ Somewhat dubiously, Lord Henry Lennox argued that the Royal Navy was in such a weak position because whereas the French had a ‘settled’ shipbuilding programme its British counterpart was a product of panic.¹³⁰ Sensitive to accusations of panic-mongering, Armed forces professionals and their supporters were always careful to frame their criticisms as motivated by a wish to promote ‘such a state of preparedness that the nation may be raised, above the unworthy region of panic, into a higher and serener atmosphere’.¹³¹ Charles Beresford, for example, insisted that he attacked, ‘the fatal, rotten, misleading system’ of civilian government because it had plunged the country into a ‘chronic panic’ from the 1880s onwards.¹³² Speaking to a consultative committee in 1887, Sir Andrew Clarke, former Inspector-General of Fortifications, suggested that ‘actual war itself, when we are plunged into it, will really do less injury to the country than these recurring panics from the supposed defenceless condition of our great centres of commerce and our great lines of communication’.¹³³ In this Clarke was articulating a concern shared by both his fellow officers and his fellow Liberals, for there were no greater critics of ‘government by panic’ than Liberals and Radicals.¹³⁴ Traditionally, the Liberal party had taken a longer-term view of military and especially naval policy than its Conservative counterpart, preferring to build slowly and steadily in anticipation of future crises where the Tories aimed at

¹²⁸ For a contemporary comparison of ‘war’ and ‘financial’ panics see *Manchester Guardian*, 20 Dec. 1893, p. 5.

¹²⁹ *The Times* 29 May 1888, p. 11.

¹³⁰ Lennox, *Forewarned, Forearmed*, pp. 43-44.

¹³¹ Barrington, *England on the Defensive*, pp. 327-328.

¹³² *Daily News*, 20 Mar. 1896, p. 3; Beresford, *Memoirs* vol. II, p. 356.

¹³³ Clarke in ‘Report of a Consultative Committee...Fortification and Armament of our Military and Mercantile Ports’ (1887), KHLC, U1590/O231/3, p. 11.

¹³⁴ *Northampton Mercury*, 11 May 1889, p. 5.

a more 'forward' imperial policy.¹³⁵ As a consequence Liberals tended to regard panics as more of a threat to their own policies as did the Conservatives.¹³⁶ In language which Beresford would have whole-heartedly endorsed, the *Daily News* condemned the 'vicious system of progress by panic, which has really been the cause of all our shortcomings.'¹³⁷ As dangerous as panic measures might prove, however, other commentators believed that the real peril lay in the reversion to apathy and 'placid security', as J.F. Maurice termed it, which followed such events. 'The inevitable result of any irrational panic is the return, when the scare has passed away, of a feeling of equally irrational security', warned *The Observer*.¹³⁸ Alarmist 'gabble', reflected the *Saturday Review*, 'is soon found out, and then the whole thing is dropped in disgust, the good with the bad.'¹³⁹

¹³⁵ Beeler, *British Naval Policy*, p. 154.

¹³⁶ Beeler, *British Naval Policy*, p. 245.

¹³⁷ *Daily News*, 15 May 1888, p. 5.

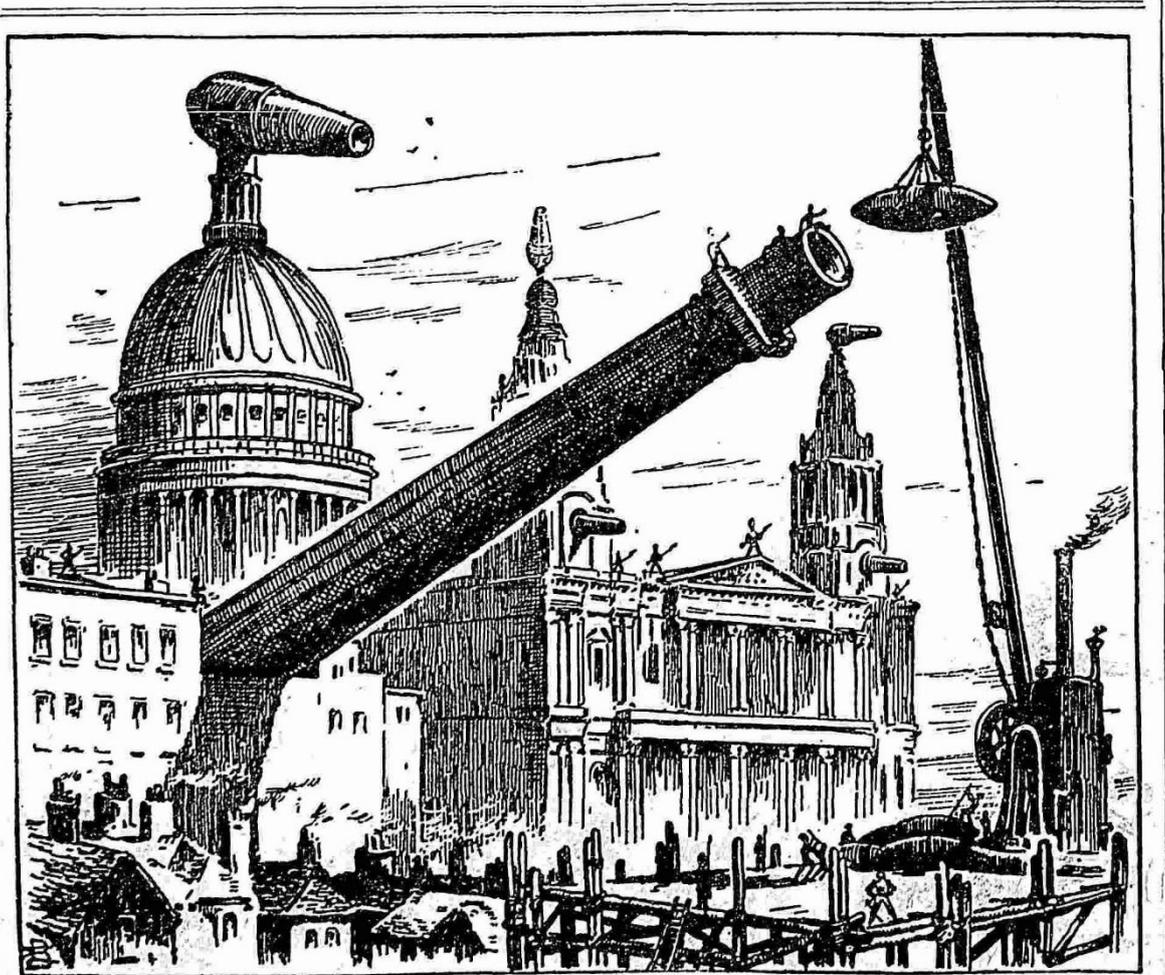
¹³⁸ *The Observer*, 13 May 1888, p. 4.

¹³⁹ *Saturday Review*, 19 May 1888, pp. 582-583.



Figure 9: 'The "England in Danger" Scare'.

General Wolseley gives John Bull a fright via the *Daily Telegraph*.
Fun, 23 May 1888, p. 222.



THE CITY ARMS!

IN VIEW OF THE COMING INVASION, OUR PANIC-STRICKEN ARTIST HAS SUBMITTED THE ACCOMPANYING CUT. ST. PAUL'S ARMED FOR THE CRACK OF DOME, AND THE MONUMENT CONVERTED INTO AN EIGHTEEN HUNDRED AND EIGHTY EIGHTY-ONE-TON GUN, CONTINENTAL PAPERS PLEASE COPY.

Figure 10: 'The City Arms! ... Continental Papers Please Copy'.

Funny Folks satirises the tendency of invasion panics to result in extravagantly expensive and unnecessary fortification schemes. *Funny Folks*, 26 May 1888, p. 166.

For some critics, panics were little more than metropolitan affairs created by and for the enjoyment of ‘society’, though costing the country millions.¹⁴⁰ The satirical journal *Funny Folks*, which was aimed, significantly, at a lower-middle and working class audience, captured this in an 1888 cartoon depicting a very middle-class looking London as the target of the invasion scare of that year [Figure 11].¹⁴¹ For many others, however, the British press’ susceptibility to panic was seen as reflective of an irrational streak within the national psyche, a weak point in the otherwise logical ‘national character’ identified in the first section of this chapter. ‘I think we are in other matters eminently a business-like people, eminently a practical people, eminently a people not given to panic’, opined Balfour. Only in matters of defence, he argued, were the British people susceptible to fright.¹⁴² Writing a decade earlier, the Liberal journalist Francis Lawley echoed Cobden when he declared:

We are so fond of believing that some other nation is preparing to invade us—that gun for gun we are no match at sea for France—that something has happened, or is about to happen, which fundamentally alters our position, and leaves us comparatively at the mercy of some hypothetical foe, that panic-mongers have always had, and always will have, a glorious time of it in our midst.¹⁴³

For his part, Lawley believed that this attitude had perverted British perceptions of what a good citizen should be: ‘panic,’ he asserted, ‘and a ready credulity and alacrity in accepting and entertaining it, are always regarded in this country as evidences of patriotism.’¹⁴⁴

The fear of panic was magnified in the minds of contemporaries by their concerns as to what such a scare might do to the country when it was actually embroiled in a European war. Lord Salisbury himself foresaw a nation ‘incapacitated by panic’ in the event of a wartime invasion rumour, a vision he supplemented with prophesies of riots, looting and mutiny.¹⁴⁵ These views were brought to public attention in the immediate aftermath of the invasion scare of 1888, when

¹⁴⁰ For an interesting perspective from an alarmist on society ‘scares’ see William Le Queux, *The Great War in England in 1897* (London: Tower Publishing, 1894), p. 72.

¹⁴¹ Laurel Brake, Marysa Demoor (eds), *Dictionary of Nineteenth-Century Journalism in Great Britain and Ireland* (Gent and London: Academia Press and the British Library, 2009), pp. 639-640.

¹⁴² *Manchester Guardian*, 23 Jan. 1894, p. 4.

¹⁴³ Lawley, ‘introduction’, *Peace or War with France?*, p. 9.

¹⁴⁴ For a similar perspective see *The Spectator*, 17 Jan. 1880, p. 71.

¹⁴⁵ Roberts, *Salisbury*, pp. 496-497.

as part of a reorganisation of Rifle Volunteer battalions, Salisbury's government issued a letter to commanders of newly created Volunteer Brigades, emphasising the 'grave evils which would result from a panic of an invasion'. 'Timely' and 'judicious' preparations, declared the letter, would be the surest means of instilling in the public 'such a confidence in our powers of defence, that the disorder consequent on a sudden apprehension of invasion may be prevented'.¹⁴⁶ Such concerns combined an acute awareness of the apathy of the public, the volatility of the press and the political significance of 'public opinion', with the collective memory of decades of panics over finance and defence. Britain's unique susceptibility to panic, it was feared, might ultimately prove its undoing. In 1891, Reginald Brett drew upon this experience of past scares to describe the possible effect a press panic might have in wrecking government strategy:

The timid citizens of London and Liverpool and Glasgow, believing the battleships to be their first and last line of defence, frightened by newspaper rumours, would clamour for the presence of the naval forces in British seas, in close proximity to the great exposed centres of commerce; and a Government trembling for its reputation and its Parliamentary majority would doubtless yield to the "force of public opinion."¹⁴⁷

As the studies in Parts II and III of this thesis demonstrate, the fear of panic had a measurable influence on policymaking, ultimately in favour of the defence pessimists. Indeed, for critics of the national defences, the fact that panics were so easily raised only served to prove the 'truth' of their concerns. As such, panic provides an excellent example of the power which the press held over the mind of government. By repeatedly invoking the term, British politicians and journalists built the power and irrationality of public opinion up to enormous proportions, convincing themselves that the nation was suffering from a nervous disposition that might become fatal if the national defences were seen to be neglected. As we shall see in the case of the Channel Tunnel scare, contemporaries feared not only the extravagant expense which resulted from 'government by panic', but that panic might, if allowed to run unchecked, destroy

¹⁴⁶ *The Times*, 8 June 1888, p. 12. See also letter from the Colonel of the Glamorganshire Artillery Volunteers in *The Times*, 28 Aug. 1888, p. 13.

¹⁴⁷ Reginald B. Brett, 'The Unreadiness of England', *The Times*, 12 Nov. 1891, p. 12.

Britain's liberal institutions. So prevalent were these attitudes that they have become picked up by academic scholarship, which all too often uses the language of panic and scare uncritically.



Figure 11: 'The Scare of Unprotected London'.

The head on top of the pole is probably that of Edward Levy-Lawson, the *Daily Telegraph's* proprietor. *Funny Folks*, 19 May 1888, p. 153.

Conclusion

It is no exaggeration to say that the subject of national defence in late nineteenth century Britain revolved around the cultivation, control and containment of 'public opinion'. Inspired by the ideal of the rational public, defence pessimists and liberal internationalists alike believed that, if they were able to bring 'the people' on side, their vision for Britain's defence establishment would eventually triumph. In spite of this attitude, however, public opinion was in fact an extremely problematic term, used as much to exclude and appropriate as to include and consult. Indeed, the idea that the people were largely apathetic loomed large over the debate, exacerbated by the lack of channels through which they might make themselves heard. The result was that attention in Whitehall focused overwhelmingly on the elite metropolitan press, which the pessimists, who dominated it, represented as the true voice of the nation. The alarmists also inspired and drew strength from the widespread fear of panic, which lurked wherever the idea of future warfare was discussed. Far from a rational and patriotic guide for policymakers, many politicians, especially in Salisbury's post-1886 government, came to see the people as a dangerous and unpredictable force that required a strong defence policy to keep in check. The overall result of this elite attitude towards public opinion favoured the methods and propaganda of the defence pessimists, pushing the weighty voices of the London-based armed forces professionals to prominence at the expense of more sceptical voices. In assuming that the 'public opinion' of the London newspaper press represented the great mass of the nation, they made the mistake, as the Cobdenite F.W. Hirst, later complained, of confusing 'the minds and opinions of our people with the nonsense they have to read.'¹⁴⁸ As is illustrated in the remainder of this thesis, this confusion had a decisive effect, helping to define both contemporary policymaking and the historical memory of the 1880s.

¹⁴⁸ Hirst, *Six Panics*, p. 4.

Part II

The Channel Tunnel Controversy and The Defeat of 'Practical Cobdenism'



On 20 January 1882 the ‘Second Railway King’, Sir Edward William Watkin MP, chaired the first meeting of his newly founded Submarine Continental Railway Company (SCRC). Already the Chairman of three other railway companies and the recent recipient of a Baronetcy, Watkin undoubtedly regarded this moment as the opening of his business career’s finest chapter: the construction of a railway tunnel underneath the English Channel. It is impossible to miss the confidence, not to say triumphalism, of his inaugural address to the assembled members:

I think you will agree with me, gentlemen, that to connect the Continent with England is a work without an equal among all the labours until now accomplished by the hand of man. I cannot myself realise, either a better, or a greater, work, and it seems to me that the only question left with regard to it is – its practicability.¹

Even on this score, Watkin displayed few doubts. Underneath the Channel, he told his audience, was a layer of grey chalk, impervious to water. All they had to do was ‘follow the chalk’. The South Eastern Railway Company (SER), of which he was also Chairman, had acquired a patch of land on the foreshore between Dover and Folkestone, at the closest point in the UK to France. The Company had already begun trial diggings using a pneumatic boring machine partly designed by Royal Engineer officer Colonel Frederick Beaumont, with the aim of meeting mid-Channel a tunnel begun by a French company at Sangatte, near Calais. The SCRC had been formed to oversee this work. Colonel Beaumont himself, for whom his role in the SCRC was ‘one of the proudest moments of my life’, told the meeting that once boring was fully under way his machine could tunnel a yard an hour.²

Among the men who addressed the meeting after Watkin, there was a feeling that they were assembled at the dawn of a new, more prosperous and peaceful age. Lord Edward Brabourne, Deputy Chairman of the SER and a director of the SCRC, declared that all associated with the Tunnel would soon have made their names ‘something in history’. Another speaker, Lord Alfred Churchill, was sure that by promoting trade and communication between peoples the Tunnel would ‘do more than anything else to maintain the peace of the world’. It was admitted,

¹ *Report of a Meeting of the Members of the Submarine Continental Railway Company...on Friday the 20th January, 1882* (London: C.F. Roworth, 1882), p. 3.

² *Meeting of the SCRC...20th January, 1882*, pp. 32-33.

and a number of speakers alluded to this, that there were a few objections to the project on military grounds. Lord Brabourne dismissed such fears as belonging to the previous century. Watkin himself was untroubled; those present were men of science and business, imbued with ‘intellect and patriotism’. The moment they combined behind the scheme, ‘no military objections will be allowed to stand in the way.’³

Unfortunately for Watkin, the practicability of the project was rapidly to become the least of his worries. The previous year, following concerns expressed in *The Times* about the Tunnel’s defensibility, the Board of Trade, unknown to parliament or the wider public, had set up a Committee to enquire into the scheme. Meeting during December 1881 and January 1882, the Committee interviewed a number of witnesses including Watkin and the Tunnel’s most prominent opponent General Sir Garnet Wolseley, quickly concluding that a more extensive inquiry was needed. In February 1882, Wolseley published a vehement article in *The Nineteenth Century* arguing that the naive cosmopolitanism of the Tunnel scheme represented a decisive threat to national security. Within a fortnight a wave of anxiety had engulfed the hitherto placid press, and by March ‘public opinion’ appeared to have swung decisively against the scheme. Alarmed by the sudden panic, the government first directed the War Office to set up a ‘Channel Tunnel Defence Committee’, which reported against the project in May 1882, and then established a Joint Select Committee under Lord Lansdowne, which met during the first half of 1883. Although Lansdowne himself found in favour of the scheme the majority of his committee voted against it, a decision the government accepted on 24 July 1883, resulting in the withdrawal of two Bills then before the Commons. Work on the French tunnel, which had never lacked the full support of its government, ceased in March 1883. By this time, the British and French companies between them had succeeded in boring well over 3,000 yards under the Channel without complication, a convincing indication of the project’s feasibility. Although Watkin continued to campaign for the Tunnel, repeatedly introducing Bills into parliament and

³ *Meeting of the SCRC...20th January, 1882*, pp. 22-24.

receiving in 1888 the support of Gladstone, he retired from the Commons in 1895 having failed to reverse the decision of 1883.

Historiography

While the long history of the Channel Tunnel idea, 1802-1994, has generated a respectable amount of academic work, the rejection of the project during the 1880s has received only cursory attention.⁴ *The Official History of Britain and the Channel Tunnel* (2006) dedicates barely four pages to the entire decade, while Michael Bonavia's *Channel Tunnel Story* (1987), although a useful study from the perspective of railway history, is similarly brief.⁵ The most comprehensive work on the pre-1945 Tunnel, Keith Wilson's *Channel Tunnel Visions* (1994), treats the 1880s as a 'prologue' and is essentially a quotation-heavy narrative of various government enquiries, providing little in the way of detailed analysis.⁶ Probably the most balanced account of the 1880s attempt is Anthony Travis' detailed 1991 article, which does much to place the project within its technological, ideological and political contexts, but, again, its length prevents all but the briefest of analysis.⁷ The only extended investigation into the Gladstone government's rejection of the scheme is Robert Culham's insightful 1992 Master's thesis.⁸ Culham emphasises the reluctance of successive British governments to support the project from the 1870s onwards as the principal reason for its failure, branding it an example of 'official mismanagement'. These studies, which all take the official sphere as their focus, have constructed a clear chronology centred on the three enquiries of the Board of Trade (1881-1882), the War Office (1882) and Parliament (1883), culminating in the withdrawal of the Channel Tunnel Bills in July 1883. They largely draw on only two sources: a parliamentary Blue Book, *Correspondence with Reference to the Proposed Construction of a Channel Tunnel*,

⁴ For general surveys of the Channel Tunnel historiography see Richard S. Grayson, 'Britain and the Channel Tunnel', *Twentieth Century British History*, 7 (1996), pp. 382-388; Duncan Redford, 'Opposition to the Channel Tunnel, 1882-1975: Identity, Island Status and Security', *History*, 99 (2014), pp. 100-120.

⁵ Terry Gourvish, *The Official History of Britain and the Channel Tunnel* (Abington: Routledge, 2006), pp. 4-7; Michael R. Bonavia, *The Channel Tunnel Story* (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1987).

⁶ Keith Wilson, *Channel Tunnel Visions, 1850-1945* (London: Hambledon, 1994), pp. 22-49.

⁷ Anthony S. Travis, 'Engineering and Politics: the Channel Tunnel in the 1880s', *Technology and Culture*, 32 (1991), pp. 461-497.

⁸ Robert Bryce Culham 'The Channel Tunnel Project: 1871 – 1883: A Study in Public Sector Mismanagement' (MA Thesis: University of Alberta, 1992).

which covers the period from 1870 up to its publication in August 1882; and the proceedings of the Select Committee, published in July 1883.⁹ As a result, they tend to emphasise the slow and staggered nature of institutional decision-making, minimising both ideological factors and the influence of public opinion.¹⁰ Furthermore, their narrative takes as its principle theme the fear of invasion expressed at length by the likes of Wolseley during the official enquiries, while ignoring Watkin's pro-Tunnel arguments, which, as a public relations campaign, do not feature as strongly in the official material.¹¹ Nor do they take more than a passing glance at the parliamentary situation, despite the fact that the Commons voted on the scheme five times between 1884 and 1890. These problems also bedevil the much earlier studies of Slater and Barnett, (1957) and Thomas Whiteside (1962), which would be of little concern were they not so heavily relied upon by more recent historians despite their tendency to generalise about areas such as public opinion without adequate research to back up their claims.¹²

Alongside these studies of the official attitude to the Tunnel are a number of works by cultural and literary scholars examining the small quantity of pamphlet literature which the Tunnel scare produced. Most notably this included a number of fictional narratives of future war, such as *The Seizure of the Channel Tunnel* (1882) and *How John Bull Lost London* (1882), which gave the invasion genre a fresh lease of life after the *Battle of Dorking* episode. The best of these academic studies, I.F. Clarke's *Voices Prophesying War* (1992), uses the Tunnel to provide an important insight into the development of nineteenth century popular literature.¹³ As historical studies, however, these works are compromised by the shared assumption that their sources are representative of contemporary debate and national opinion. Furthermore, little attempt is made to appreciate the pro-Tunnel case, which did not inspire any comparable output of 'future fiction'. More broadly, they are preoccupied with reading the anti-Tunnel campaign through the lens of British insular national identity, which is approached as irrational, intangible and almost

⁹ *Correspondence; Report from the Joint Select Committee... On the Channel Tunnel; together with the Proceedings of the Committee, Minutes of Evidence, and Appendix* (10 July 1883, HC 248).

¹⁰ See especially Culham's discussion of public opinion in 'Channel Tunnel Project', pp. 3-11.

¹¹ A good summary of the invasion scare is Longmate, *Island Fortress*, ch. 29.

¹² Humphrey Slater and Correlli Barnett, *The Channel Tunnel*, (London: Wingate, 1957); Thomas Whiteside, *The Tunnel Under the Channel* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1962).

¹³ Clarke, *Voices*, pp. 95-98.

undefinable. Cynthia Behrman (1977) uses the affair as an example of Britain's sentimental 'myth of islandhood', characterising the debate as 'emotional, even hysterical, rather than rational', while Amelia Hadfield-Amkhan (2010) argues that the Tunnel was rejected because it attacked the 'matchlessness of English native soil and diminished the unique characteristics of its people'.¹⁴ The most extreme interpretation of this type is forwarded by Daniel Pick (1993), whose argument that anti-Tunnel literature 'alluded, more or less explicitly, to sexual risks of an explosive and invasive kind', appears, to this reader at least, to be reliant more on Pick's own sense of innuendo than the historical sources.¹⁵ By selectively taking words out of context – laying stress, for example, on Charles Bradlaugh's entirely innocent use of the term 'intermingling' in a pro-Tunnel pamphlet – and overemphasising the fear of foreign races or political extremists using the Tunnel to enter and 'corrupt' the country, Pick constructs an image of the anti-Tunnel campaign as resting upon a pathological fear of 'national rape', itself required 'in order to provide the foundation and the support for a viable mythology of national identity'. As the following chapters illustrate, a balanced reading of the source material finds this account to be seriously misleading.

The assumption that the Tunnel debate revolved around a form of innate and irrational British insularity dominates and defines our understanding of the demise of Watkin's scheme. Wilson, for example, cannot resist describing his subject as a struggle between the 'gut and the head'.¹⁶ This view raises one central conclusion, inquiry into which forms the basis of the present study: that British national identity meant that any attempt at building a fixed-link Channel crossing was doomed to founder on the rocks of public opinion during the 1880s. The fundamental problem with this assumption is that it is maintained in the absence of a thorough study of the public sphere, or a close reading of the pro-Tunnel case.¹⁷ More importantly, it appears to seriously clash with our wider understanding of the nineteenth century as a time which

¹⁴ Behrman, *Victorian Myths of the Sea*, pp. 49-53; Amelia Hadfield-Amkhan, *British Foreign Policy, National Identity, and Neoclassical Realism* (Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010), p. 68.

¹⁵ Pick, *War Machine*, pp. 121-135.

¹⁶ Wilson, *Tunnel Visions*, p. xvi.

¹⁷ Grayson, 'Britain and the Channel Tunnel', pp. 385-386.

celebrated ‘reason, science, progress and liberalism’, regarded technological development as inevitable and lauded increases in speed and efficiency of intercommunication.¹⁸ In this context, as Rosalind Williams argues, railway tunnels ‘incarnated what the age understood as progress’.¹⁹ It is unsurprising, therefore, that within the history of British Liberalism the Tunnel has come to be recognised as a project symbolising the spirit of Cobdenite, optimistic free trade internationalism. Most suggestive of all is Boyd Hilton’s description of it as a crowning example of ‘Practical Cobdenism’, which, along with other projects such as arbitration and fiscal union, hoped to build a unified and free trading ‘Europe of municipalities’.²⁰ Both Anthony Howe’s study of Britain and free trade (1997) and Parry’s work on Liberal foreign policy (2006) associate it closely with Cobden’s philosophy and supporters, and cite its defeat as an example of the increasing strength of ‘militarist fears of invasion and patriotic glory in isolation’ during this period.²¹ For H.C.G. Matthew (1995), who ascribes its defeat to a combination of ‘Tories, Whigs, and ‘blue-water’ Radicals’, the fate of the Tunnel was indicative of the anxiety creeping into British defence policy and a symptom of demands for increased naval spending.²² These historians of Liberalism do little more than place the Tunnel in a broad political context, however, and are brief and vague in their appreciation of its defeat. It remains the case that no historian has used this political perspective to revisit the Channel Tunnel scare in detail. David Hodgkins’ otherwise excellent biography of Watkin (2002), for example, contains many of the ingredients for a study of how its subject’s Manchester Anti-Corn Law upbringing drove his spirited defence of his Tunnel, but ultimately fails to draw the link.²³ Pick similarly neglects to apply his own close reading of Cobden to the Tunnel, while Hadfield-

¹⁸ Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Capital 1848-1875* (London: Abacus, 1997), pp. 15-16.

¹⁹ Rosalind Williams, *Notes on the Underground: An Essay on Technology, Society, and the Imagination* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1992), pp. 58-59.

²⁰ Boyd Hilton, ‘Manchester’s Moment’, *The London Review of Books*, 20 Aug. 1998, pp. 20-22.

²¹ Howe, *Free Trade*, pp. 96-97, 186; Parry, *Politics of Patriotism*, pp. 355-356. See also Bradley, *Optimists*, p. 135.

²² Matthew, *Gladstone: 1875-1898*, p. 160.

²³ David Hodgkins, *The Second Railway King: The Life and Times of Sir Edward Watkin, 1819-1901* (Cardiff: Merton Priory Press, 2002).

Amkhan's discussion of the Tunnel's 'political discourse', which does identify many of the arguments of both sides, is devoid of contemporary political context.²⁴

Structure and Arguments of the Case Study

The following case study provides a detailed reinterpretation of the ruin of Sir Edward Watkin's Channel Tunnel attempt. As explained above, existing histories of the 1880s scheme largely ignore the pro-Tunnel case, instead focusing overwhelmingly on the 'insular' and 'military' anti-Tunnel fears. The present analysis corrects this neglect and places the controversy in its proper ideological context by giving equal attention to both the pro- and anti-tunnel arguments. Building on the conclusions of Howe, Parry and Hilton, Chapter Four argues that Watkin and his supporters were motivated by a profound belief in the teachings of Richard Cobden, around whose philosophy the case for the Channel Tunnel was built; far from a simple fixed link between London and Paris, both its advocates and many of its detractors regarded the Tunnel as an example of British liberal internationalism made manifest. In the context of this conclusion, the second half of the chapter re-examines Wolseley's arguments against the Tunnel.

Questioning the characterisation of the anti-Tunnel case as mere insular xenophobia, it is instead argued that Wolseley was driven by a fierce belief in the 'realist' school of international relations. By assuming that nations naturally existed in a state of conflict and struggle, Wolseley argued that a railway line between Britain and the Continent would increase, rather than prevent, the risk of war, tempting an adversary into launching a surprise attack: in short, the very antithesis of Watkin's Cobdenism.

Switching to a more narrative approach, Chapter Five applies this political context to the wider public sphere and provides the first close study of the 1882-1883 invasion 'scare'. It rejects the widely held assumption that British society was unanimously opposed to the Tunnel, and argues that the debate was much more even-handed. Instead of a spontaneous and popular uprising against the SCRC, the chapter identifies how Wolseley and his elite supporters in the armed forces, press and 'society' used the exclusionary and authoritative language of 'expertise' and

²⁴ Hadfield-Amkhan, *Foreign Policy*, pp. 73-79.

‘public opinion’ to portray themselves as the sole voice of the nation, ignoring or concealing the substantial evidence of working class support for the scheme. The resultant press reaction provides an insight into the power which fear of ‘panic’ held within the defence discourse. This chapter therefore materially expands our understanding of the strength of liberal internationalism and defence ‘optimism’ in Britain, especially among the trade union movement, during this period. It also offers an important illustration of how newspapers and ‘respectable’ opinion dominated and directed the ‘national’ discourse.

Chapter Six is split into two substantive parts. The first reconsiders the governmental abandonment of the Tunnel in 1883, highlighting the importance of external influences such as public opinion on what has hitherto been regarded as an affair driven predominantly by official inquires. It emphasises the speed with which Wolseley’s public and private attacks on the Tunnel struck the government and examines the resultant split within the Cabinet. Despite strongly believing in the Tunnel himself, Gladstone failed to act publicly in defence of his internationalism, and was ultimately forced to accept the majority view of his colleagues. The second part of the chapter turns its attention to the five parliamentary debates and divisions on the Tunnel, 1884-1890, which historians have never subjected to scrutiny. It shows how the Tunnel produced heated discussion and intense interest in the Commons, revealing much about MPs’ attitudes to international relations, free trade, public opinion and the position of the armed forces in society. In analysing the divisions, it shows that Liberal opposition was by no means as overwhelming as has been assumed; indeed, the evidence suggests that by 1890, at least half of the parliamentary party was supportive of the idea. Meanwhile the Conservatives overwhelmingly opposed the project, illustrating the extent to which the party had adopted Wolseley’s anti-internationalist and pessimistic world view. Overall, the case study shows the Channel Tunnel question to have been an important milestone in the transformation of British defence policy during the later nineteenth century, an ideological, social and political phenomenon which deserves a more prominent inclusion in traditional narrative of the 1880s.

Chapter Four

The Ideological Context to the Channel Tunnel Controversy

As it's not a mere suspicion
That our insular position
Has its comforting fruition
In our safety, common sense
Will admit there's no occasion
To facilitate invasion
By avoidable erosion
Of our natural defence.

Though there be no present danger
Of intrusion of the stranger
Future time may prove a changer
Of the colour of affairs,
So that every Briton's son'll
Much regret that blessed funnel
Of a precious Channel Tunnel
As the cause of many cares.

If the bonus to the nation
Of the costly speculation
Be the simple obviation
Of the pangs of *mal-de-mer*
To a few unstable qualiers
Who, unqualified as sailors,
Would be likely to be ailers –
Better leave us as we were!

As we've failed in ascertaining
How the country will be gaining
By the boring and the draining
Of this tunnel down below,
Do obligingly inform us
(just to interest and to warn us)
What's the gain that's so enormous? –
As we *should* be glad to know.

'That Little Matter of the Tunnel', *Fun*, 8 March 1882, p. 102.

Though historians have not tended to stress the Channel Tunnel's ideological facets, for contemporaries such matters were at the forefront of the discussion. As Gladstone reflected in 1888, the Tunnel was a subject which hung on 'ultimate principles and modes of thinking which are fixed on one side and fixed on the other'.¹ This chapter examines these 'ultimate principles', reconstructing the ideological case for and against the Channel Tunnel as presented to the government and the public by Watkin, Wolseley and their respective supporters. By approaching it from this perspective, the Tunnel scare emerges as a struggle between two antithetical geopolitical visions, cosmopolitanism and anti-internationalism, optimism and pessimism. More than a footnote to the history of British insularity, it instead provides an important window into the position of liberal internationalism during the 1880s.

Sir Edward Watkin and the Case for a Channel Tunnel

A subject of engineering interest since the 1830s, it was not until the 1870s that a railway tunnel underneath the bed of the English Channel came to be talked of as a serious possibility.² In 1872 the Channel Tunnel Company (CTC) was registered under the chairmanship of Lord Richard Grosvenor, and in 1875 it was empowered by Parliament to acquire land in St. Margaret's Bay in Kent. At the suggestion of the Conservative Foreign Secretary Lord Derby, an Anglo-French Commission was set up to look into the question, producing a draft treaty of agreement in 1876.³ With government approval and an enthusiastic press, construction appeared imminent. Proof of technical viability was still lacking, however, denting investor confidence; stymied by financial problems, the CTC had achieved little serious progress by 1880.⁴

It was during this time that the project attracted the attention of Sir Edward Watkin, independent-minded Liberal MP for Hythe and one of the most famous railwaymen in the country. Although closely involved with the CTC and serving for a time on its board, Watkin's poor working relationship with Grosvenor led to him independently initiating trial borings on SER land midway between Folkestone and Dover in 1880. In late 1881 Watkin formed the

¹ Gladstone, *Parl. Deb.*, 27 June 1888, col. 1456.

² Gourvish, *Official History*, pp. 1-2.

³ Wilson, *Tunnel Visions*, pp. 10-22.

⁴ Hodgkins, *Railway King*, pp. 376-380, 443-453.

Submarine Continental Railway Company with a capital of £250,000 to oversee this work, enormously outstripping the £30,000 with which the CTC had begun.⁵ This was not the only SCRC advantage. Its pneumatic tunnelling machine, designed by Colonel Beaumont and his fellow Royal Engineer officer Captain Thomas English, was superior to anything the CTC had – a modified version of it was quickly adopted by the French company operating from Sangatte – and undersea geology made the SCRC plan far more viable. Indeed, although some opponents tried to claim otherwise, there were few serious doubts as to whether the SCRC possessed the technology and expertise to complete the Tunnel during the 1880s.⁶ Furthermore, Watkin's organisational and publicity skills made the new company a far more confident and dynamic concern than the CTC. He assembled a 'scientific and legal committee' of 'eminent men' to give his company the gravitas and authority of overwhelming professional expertise. This committee included three lawyers, seven civilian engineers, a mining expert, the President of the Royal Society, the famous geologist Professor W. Boyd Dawkins and five retired military officers, although it is difficult to ascertain how many of these individuals were active participants.⁷ With the tunnelling making good progress and Watkin busy promoting his scheme, the project quickly became one of the most widely discussed engineering works of its day.

On 16 June 1881 Watkin announced his belief that a cross-Channel 'experimental' Tunnel, seven feet in diameter, could be completed within five years.⁸ By this time both the CTC and SCRC had Bills before the Commons, requesting permission to continue tunnelling beyond the foreshore. The speed with which the project was now moving appears to have surprised the responsible department, the Board of Trade and its President Joseph Chamberlain. Chamberlain established a Committee, chaired by the Board of Trade and involving the War Office and the Admiralty, to consider what position, if any, the Liberal government should take. As part of this

⁵ Hodgkins, *Railway King*, pp. 377-378; 517.

⁶ For a full discussion of the viability of Watkin's Tunnel and a history of the Beaumont-English machine, see Travis, 'Engineering and Politics', pp. 467-473.

⁷ For the full list see *Meeting of the SCRC...20th January, 1882*, p. 40. See also Hodgkins, pp. 517-518; Geoffrey Tweedale, 'Geology and Industrial Consultancy: Sir William Boyd Dawkins (1837-1929) and the Kent Coalfield', *BJHS*, 24 (1991), pp. 435-451 (pp. 438-439).

⁸ *The Times*, 17 June 1881, p. 8.

inquiry, Lieutenant-General Sir Garnet Wolseley was asked to submit a memorandum of his views on the Tunnel. In February 1882, large parts of this document appeared as a *Nineteenth Century* article, vehemently attacking Watkin's scheme. It was in response to this article that Watkin and his supporters stepped up their pro-Tunnel propaganda campaign.

Aside from his many passionate speeches to SCRC shareholders which were widely reprinted in the press, and his evidence before the Board of Trade and Parliamentary Select Committees, Watkin also gave two papers on the subject. The first in April 1882 was read at a 'crammed' meeting of the Society of Arts in London, while the second was presented in November before a similarly well-attended meeting of the Royal Institution, at Hull.⁹ Watkin's supporters were also hard at work. Most prominent among these was Watkin's friend Edward Hugessen Knatchbull-Hugessen, first Baron Brabourne, the former Liberal MP for Sandwich and a figure absent from the existing historiography. At Watkin's request in March 1882 Lord Brabourne published a long and enthusiastic defence of the Tunnel in the *Contemporary Review*.¹⁰ Colonel Beaumont, who was also a former Liberal MP, also produced a short piece on the defence of the Tunnel for the *Nineteenth Century*, while Professor Dawkins wrote a piece for the *Contemporary Review* and gave a paper to the Manchester Geological Society. The following section uses these and other sources to reconstruct the pro-Tunnel case.

In the first place, Watkin's motivation for sponsoring the Tunnel was naturally commercial, anticipating high passenger and freight demand for a swift London to Paris route which avoided the widely feared Channel crossing.¹¹ In his evidence to the Select Committee of 1883 he suggested that the line could carry between thirteen and fourteen million people a year and twenty or thirty million tons of goods, at a rate of perhaps 250 trains a day.¹² Over the next decade he would forward a number of other arguments in its favour, including its benefits for the security of British food supply in a maritime war and the possibility of building a direct

⁹ Brabourne Diary, 19 Apr. 1882, KHLIC, U951/F25/35; *Hull Packet*, 17 Nov. 1882, p. 5.

¹⁰ Brabourne Diary, 15-20 Feb. 1882, KHLIC, U951/F25/35.

¹¹ For a contemporary summary of the commercial argument see Robert J. Griffiths, *Under the Deep Deep Sea: The Story of the Channel Tunnel* (London: Moffat & Paige, 1887), ch. 3.

¹² Watkin, *Select Committee*, pp. 3-4.

railway line to India. Yet, although he never lost sight of its commercial aspects, in constructing both the justification for and defence of his project Watkin instinctively reached for the philosophy which he had espoused since his youth: Cobdenism, a theme which is inexplicably absent from the existing historiography.

Like his party politics, the exact nature of Watkin's world-view is difficult to characterise. He was not a member of the 'Peace Party', and had a certain imperialist streak; a few months before the 1880 General Election he had been challenged by members of his local party because of the support he had given to the Conservative government's wars in Zululand and Afghanistan, which he defended on grounds of 'patriotism'.¹³ Yet, despite these attitudes, he was at heart a passionate Cobdenite free trader. Born in 1819 in Manchester he worked closely with Richard Cobden in the Anti-Corn Law League, during which time he acquired a lifelong admiration of Cobden's politics and philosophy.¹⁴ Looking back from 1891, he remembered Cobden as a 'new light shining in our dark places'.¹⁵ Indeed, it is possible that Cobden himself sparked Watkin's interest in the Channel Tunnel. Watkin was in regular contact with Cobden while the latter was negotiating his free trade treaty in France, and, according to a later account by Watkin, the two men had discussed the possibility of a submarine railway which Cobden hoped would become a 'true arch of alliance' between Britain and France, a phrase which Watkin quoted at every given opportunity.¹⁶

Richard Cobden himself had certainly looked favourably on the prospect of a Channel Tunnel. In 1861 he met the inventor James Chalmers, who the previous year had published a short book promoting a 'Channel Railway'.¹⁷ Cobden remained in contact with Chalmers until the former's

¹³ *Whitstable Times and Herne Bay Herald*, 6 Mar. 1880, p. 3.

¹⁴ Hodgkins, *Railway King*, pp. 19-34.

¹⁵ E.W. Watkin, *Alderman Cobden of Manchester* (London: Ward, Lock & Bowden, 1891), p. 2.

¹⁶ Hodgkins, *Second Railway King*, p. 372. For a good example of Watkin's use of this quotation see Parl. Deb. 27 June 1888, col. 1433. Whether or not Cobden himself ever actually uttered the phrase is unclear. The earliest reference to it in the press is *The Times*, 18 Jan. 1872, p. 4; the paper later claimed that Cobden originally spoke it in 1858. For Watkin's connection with the Anglo-French treaty see Watkin, *Alderman Cobden*, pp. 178-193.

¹⁷ Richard Cobden to Comte de Persigny, 26 Oct. 1861, Archives Nationales, 44AP4, vol. 11. I am indebted to Professor Anthony Howe for this and the following reference.

death, expressing the view that future generations would construct a Tunnel.¹⁸ Cobden apparently introduced the subject to Michel Chevalier, his collaborator on the 1860 Anglo-French treaty, who later served as chairman of the French Channel Tunnel Company until his death in 1879.¹⁹ Nor did the Channel Tunnel's links with the leading light of the Manchester School end there. John Bright was a staunch supporter, giving at least three pro-Tunnel speeches following his resignation from the government in July 1882.²⁰ Another of Cobden's Anti-Corn Law contemporaries, the former Cabinet minister Thomas Milner Gibson, also privately expressed pro-Tunnel views.²¹ More directly involved in Watkin's publicity drive was John Slagg MP, former President of the Manchester Chamber of Commerce and Cobden's godson, who seconded Watkin's parliamentary Bills in 1885 and 1888. Slagg was keen to root his pro-Tunnel position in his status as 'a humble follower of Mr. Cobden'.²² Watkin clearly felt that closely identifying his project with Cobdenism would win him the support of Gladstone and his ministers, whom he pointedly referred to as 'disciples of the policy of the late Mr. Cobden'.²³ From its inception, therefore, Channel Tunnel was an explicitly Cobdenite undertaking, regarded by its promoters as a continuation of the great man's work; on at least one occasion, Watkin favourably compared his Channel Tunnel advocacy with his earlier work in the Anti-Corn Law League.²⁴

The central argument in favour of the Tunnel was a simple reiteration of Cobden's most optimistic teaching that peace, prosperity and civilisation thrived on communication and free trade. This outlook was summarised by Watkin in his Society of Arts paper, in language typical of Cobdenite millenarianism:

¹⁸ James Chalmers, *The Channel Railway Connecting England and France*, 2nd edn (London: E. & F.N. Spon, 1867), pp. 47-48.

¹⁹ Chalmers, *Channel Railway*, p. 48; Hodgkins, *Second Railway King*, p. 373. Chevalier conceived of the Tunnel as an important step towards eventual European unity. See Michael Drolet, 'Industry, Class and Society: A Historiographic Reinterpretation of Michel Chevalier', *English Historical Review*, 123, pp. 1229-1271 (pp. 1233, 1256-1257).

²⁰ R.A.J. Walling (ed.), *The Diaries of John Bright* (London: Cassell, 1930), pp. 497, 500, 502.

²¹ T.H. Farrer to Lord Lansdowne, 2 July 1883, BL, Add. MS 88906/23/1.

²² Slagg, Parl. Deb., 12 May 1885, col. 335.

²³ Watkin in *Meeting of the SCRC...11th January, 1883* (London: C.F. Roworth, 1883), p. 9.

²⁴ Watkin in *Meeting of the SCRC...April 5th, 1883* (London: C.F. Roworth, 1883), pp. 12-13.

I take it for granted, that increase in the means of intercourse, or journeyings (sic) to and fro between nations, means – as cause is to consequence – the augmentation of wealth, and the expansion of civilisation. It means a great breaking down of barriers, a great letting in of light, the softening of national prejudices, and extension of career for the workman especially, but for all men of work alike – all tending to peace and goodwill amongst men.²⁵

There was, argued Brabourne, no ‘law of Nature which obliges Frenchmen and Englishmen to be enemies’.²⁶ Increased cross-Channel communication as a consequence of steam power had already showed the ‘fancied antagonism of olden times’ to be a crime and a blunder; the Tunnel would allow this realisation to ‘permeate through the masses’ of both countries, who, due to improved education, were already coming to understand that peace was in their best interests. The Tunnel, declared Brabourne, in a traditional Cobdenite attack on aristocratic militarism, was ‘emphatically a People’s question.’²⁷ In support of this argument Watkin and his supporters repeatedly quoted another of Cobden’s observations in favour of the Tunnel, to the effect that it was their duty to encourage friendship between the British and French ‘masses’, by ‘multiply[ing] all the means of incessant contact which will certainly put an end to superannuated prejudice and old ideas of antagonism.’²⁸ Indeed, an understanding of the ‘people’ as an essentially trusting and tolerant force underpinned the entire pro-Tunnel cause.

If Watkin and his supporters sought to directly link the Tunnel with the cause of peace, they also attempted to paint opposition to it as little more than war advocacy. It was with this aim in sight that one of John Bright’s speeches was published under the title ‘Peace or War with France?’, and that Watkin opened the Commons debate of 1884 by demanding to know whether the government wanted a ‘cordial and intimate alliance with France, or whether they preferred a policy of isolation and separation, the logical end of which must be strained relations, and

²⁵ Edward W. Watkin, ‘The Channel Tunnel’, *Journal of the Society of Arts*, 30 (Apr. 1882), pp. 560-572 (p. 560).

²⁶ Lord Brabourne, ‘The Channel Tunnel’, *The Contemporary Review*, (Mar. 1882), pp. 522-540 (pp. 529-530).

²⁷ Brabourne, ‘The Channel Tunnel’, p. 530.

²⁸ *Meeting of the SCRC...20th January, 1882*, p. 4. As with ‘true arch of alliance’, the provenance of this quotation is unclear.

probably war?’²⁹ In 1883 he went so far as to tell one meeting of the SCRC that, were the Tunnel not built and an Anglo-French war subsequently declared, all those present would be ‘guiltless. Whatever happens, we have done our share’.³⁰ Anyone against the Tunnel was accused of ‘anti-Gallican’ prejudice and spreading distrust of foreigners, in the same high-minded tone with which Manchester Radicals had railed against the invasion scares of the mid-century.³¹ Speaking at Hull, Watkin referred obliquely to these past controversies, framing the present struggle as between the ‘old’ spirit of peace and the ‘modern’ realist outlook:

There were the old fashioned people who agreed that God made of one blood all nations of men to dwell upon the face of the earth; then there was the modern school who said that quarrels would in future begin without any reason and without any declaration of war, and if we did not keep awake all night we should be found with our throats cut in the morning (laughter).³²

For Watkin, any suggestion that the French would use the Tunnel to attack Britain unawares – that is, before a formal declaration of war – was contrary to his entire understanding of international law. Although Watkin and Beaumont always attempted to mix this optimism with assurances as to the ease with which the proposed railway might be destroyed, flooded or blocked, Lord Brabourne preferred to avoid dwelling on such contingences, which he considered contrary to the ‘present state of the world’s civilization’.³³ Brabourne argued that a joint agreement neutralising the Tunnel, signed by the Great Powers, would be more than enough to guarantee Britain’s safety. As all nations would quickly develop an interest in keeping this ‘highway of the world’ open for traffic, any attempt to exploit it for warlike purposes would instantly make the aggressor a common enemy of all Europe. The Tunnel would thereby encourage inter-governmental trust and co-operation.³⁴ In this view, the Tunnel

²⁹ Bright, *Peace or War with France?*; Parl. Deb., 14 May 1884, cols. 307-308.

³⁰ *Report of Proceedings held on...April 5th, 1883*, p. 15.

³¹ *Meeting of the SCRC...August 17th, 1882* (London: C.F. Roworth, 1882), p. 9.

³² *Hull Packet*, 17 Nov. 1882, p. 5.

³³ For Watkin and Beaumont on the Tunnel’s defence see *Correspondence*, p. 200; Fred Beaumont, ‘The Channel Tunnel: A Reply’, *Nineteenth Century* (Mar. 1882), pp. 305-312 (pp. 307-308).

³⁴ Brabourne, ‘The Chanel Tunnel’, pp. 528-529.

therefore fitted as much with the Gladstonian vision of Europe as a family of nations as it did Cobden's more universalist creed.

One interesting consequence of this staunchly internationalist outlook was its implication for attitudes towards the English Channel itself. In the context of the commercial spirit of the age, the Channel was not a protective 'silver streak' but a 'break, retarding and embarrassing the great interchanges of nations', excluding Britain from the Continental transport system and pushing the island further into isolation.³⁵ Undoubtedly the most enthusiastic proponent of this view was the economist Professor Leone Levi, another former friend of Cobden, who argued in 1883 that the 'dreaded Channel' had created a 'moral chasm' between Britain and France, driving them apart in politics, commerce and culture.³⁶ He pointed out that millions of years previously Britain and the Continent had been joined by a land bridge. 'Provident nature designed our union', he argued, 'A volcanic agency broke it asunder. Why not endeavour to restore the link?'³⁷ This idea of the Channel Tunnel as a divinely inspired project, in the same vein as Cobden's characterisation of free trade as 'God's diplomacy', was a particular favourite of Watkin's. In one speech he claimed that the Tunnel would restore 'the physical union which the Almighty bequeathed to mankind in the morning of the world'.³⁸ In another, he challenged MPs with the question 'whether they thought Providence had made an accidental mistake in originally annexing England and France as one Continent?'³⁹ Later, in 1887, he claimed that he had explained the geological facts to the late Archbishop of Canterbury, presumably the liberal Archibald Tait, who had told Watkin that he believed 'Providence had placed that wonderful material [the grey chalk] between the coasts of England and France with a view to ultimate intercommunication.'⁴⁰ Through these appeals to morality and providence, Watkin was articulating a politico-religious world-view which was not too dissimilar to Gladstone's own, and which certainly owed something to the Liberal leader's crusading, moralistic rhetoric.

³⁵ Watkin, *Meeting of the SCRC...20th January, 1882*, p. 4.

³⁶ Leone Levi, *The Channel Tunnel: Extracts from a Lecture* (London: C.F. Roworth, 1884), pp. 5-6.

³⁷ Levi, *Extracts from a Lecture*, p. 9. See also W. Boyd Dawkins, 'The "Silver Streak" and the Channel Tunnel', *Contemporary Review* (Jan. 1883), pp. 240-249.

³⁸ Watkin, *Meeting of the SCRC...August 17th, 1882* (London: C.F. Roworth, 1882) p. 7.

³⁹ Watkin, *Parl. Deb.*, 14 May 1884, col. 308.

⁴⁰ Watkin, *Parl. Deb.*, 3 Aug. 1887, col. 1042.

Although Watkin's defence of the Tunnel repeatedly emphasised the importance of international unity and progress, it was also buttressed with a patriotic message which sought to more directly address Britain's national interests. For him the Tunnel stood not only in the same tradition as Cobden's 1860 commercial treaty but also the 1851 Great Exhibition, which, he pointed out, had likewise experienced insular and military opposition.⁴¹ Indeed, one name which appeared in the pro-Tunnel arguments almost as often as Cobden was Prince Albert, the driving force behind the Exhibition, who, it was claimed, had been a supporter of a Channel Tunnel in the years before his death.⁴² Similarly, Watkin also attempted to co-opt Queen Victoria – a known opponent of the Tunnel since 1875 – who had subsequently described the exhibition as a 'peace festival' which united the industry of the world.⁴³ Echoing her, Watkin claimed the Channel Tunnel as a step towards creating a 'permanent "peace festival"'; as the Exhibition had overcome 'vulgar, selfish, ignorant' prejudice, so the Tunnel would work towards the same aims of liberty and progress which, so far as he was concerned, were the secret of Britain's economic, military and imperial success. The Channel Tunnel, argued Professor Dawkins in a paper to the Manchester Geological Society, was a project 'consistent with all those undertakings which have made this country what it is. This country did not become great through fear.'⁴⁴ An important part of this message was an attempt to market the Tunnel as a new weapon in Britain's foreign policy arsenal, helping to spread British values of liberty and free trade across the European mainland. 'It is as a Christian and a patriot', said Lord Brabourne at one SCRC meeting, 'that I feel it desirable that English notions and English views should become more powerful on the Continent, and I believe that they will become more powerful in the measure that access between peoples is facilitated.'⁴⁵ For John Slagg the Tunnel would break down tariffs by allowing continental citizens to more easily discover the cheapness of British goods, while he also hoped that it might 'civilise' the French railway system's many

⁴¹ Watkin, 'The Channel Tunnel', pp. 561-562.

⁴² Watkin, 'The Channel Tunnel', p. 561.

⁴³ For Victoria and the Tunnel see Wilson, *Tunnel Visions*, pp. 14-15.

⁴⁴ W. Boyd Dawkins, 'The Channel Tunnel', *Transactions of the Manchester Geological Society*, 16, (1882), pp. 339-359 (p. 352).

⁴⁵ Brabourne in *Meeting of the SCRC...April 5th, 1883*, p. 16.

‘barbarisms’.⁴⁶ Far from bringing Continental values and dangers to England, then, the Tunnel would annex the mainland to the British Isles, and help to move Europe towards a peculiarly English vision of world unity.

The case for the Channel Tunnel was therefore founded on a serious belief in the civilising potential of trade and communication, and the honesty and goodwill of humanity. It would enrich Europe while also furthering British interests across the Continent and provide a practical demonstration that peace, not war, was the guiding principle by which nations conducted their affairs. More broadly it was to be the ultimate expression of the nineteenth century confidence in the power of scientific and technological progress, in the great tradition of the Suez Canal – Ferdinand de Lesseps was a strong Tunnel supporter – or the Mont Cenis and Gotthard rail tunnels through the Alps, which, it was pointed out, had caused little anxiety among the Swiss, French or Italians.⁴⁷ It is perhaps no surprise that the 1883 annual dinner of the Institute of Civil Engineers loudly and repeatedly cheered a vehemently internationalist pro-Tunnel speech by John Bright.⁴⁸ To go against the Tunnel was, in Dawkins’ view, to ‘go back in the scale of civilization’.⁴⁹ This language of scientific triumphalism was most passionately deployed by Lord Brabourne at the conclusion of his 1882 article:

In spite of all opposition, science ever advances; in such an issue as the present, civilization and Christianity are marching hand in hand; the obstacles suggested, and perhaps for a time sustained, by insular prejudice and professional pedantry, will pale and fade away before the spirit of the age; and, in the triumph of the Channel Tunnel, one more step will be accomplished in the uniting and knitting together the hearts of nations, and in the nearer approach to the full and blessed recognition of the universal brotherhood of mankind!⁵⁰

Sir Garnet Wolseley and the Invasion Danger

Like its modern descendant, the Channel Tunnel project of the 1880s faced a multitude of objections. Commercial factors were heavily debated: while some questioned if the Tunnel

⁴⁶ John Slagg, *Select Committee*, pp. 121-123.

⁴⁷ Beaumont, ‘A Reply’ p. 312; Watkin before Board of Trade Committee, *Correspondence*, p. 199.

⁴⁸ *Daily News*, 9 Apr. 1883, p. 2. An anti-Tunnel reply from R.A. Cross received no such reaction.

⁴⁹ Dawkins, ‘Channel Tunnel’, *Manchester*, p. 352.

⁵⁰ Brabourne, ‘The Channel Tunnel’, pp. 539-540.

could ever be viable, others argued that it had the potential to damage Britain's maritime trade and industrial production by monopolising freight carriage and flooding the market with cheap foreign goods. However, although these views had significant sympathy in some quarters, there is little evidence to show that they were decisive. From a more extreme perspective, a small number of Tunnel opponents argued that the project would bring dangerous political or social influences to Britain. The Conservative MP and protectionist William Farrer Ecroyd, for example, feared that the construction of a Tunnel would more easily facilitate French 'propaganda of an atheistic and socialistic kind' among British workmen.⁵¹ This attitude has been seized upon by some historians, notably Daniel Pick, to characterise the Tunnel's opposition as built on a fear of cultural as much as military invasion from the Continent.⁵² Yet this ignores the fact that Ecroyd's was a lone voice within the anti-Tunnel movement. More usual was the attitude of General Sir Frederick Roberts, who downplayed any risk of social or political corruption in favour of the military argument, believing the submarine railway 'would not appreciably, if at all, increase the flow of continental mischief-makers to London'.⁵³ Far from Ecroyd's cultural isolationism, the objections to the Tunnel as outlined by Wolseley and his supporters were rooted in a political rejection of Watkin's Cobdenite mantras. What they feared was not French atheism, but French soldiers.

If Watkin's campaign encompassed a significant number of high-profile Cobdenites, the movement against the Tunnel was dominated by the societal group against which Cobden himself had spent much of his life struggling: armed forces officers. The leader of this movement was the then Quartermaster-General of the Army, Garnet Wolseley, whose output on the subject was prodigious. In December 1881 he sent a memorandum encapsulating his views to the Board of Trade Committee. In February 1882, modified excerpts from this memorandum

⁵¹ William Ecroyd, *Select Committee*, p. 373.

⁵² Pick, *War Machine*, p. 123

⁵³ Sir Frederick Roberts, 'The Channel Tunnel', Brian Robson (ed.), *Roberts in India: The Military Papers of Field Marshal Lord Roberts, 1876-1893* (Gloucestershire: Army Records Society, 1993), p. 254. On p. 107 of 'Opposition to the Channel Tunnel', Redford describes Roberts as maintaining an 'enigmatic silence' on the Tunnel. In fact, Roberts in India from November 1881 until 1893, almost the entire length of the Tunnel controversy, and as such did not have the luxury of time and proximity afforded to the UK-based officers who issued public protests against it.

were published in *The Nineteenth Century* by Lord Dunsany, a man known for his pessimistic view of Britain's national defences.⁵⁴ Not only was Wolseley clearly identifiable as the author of this piece, but the General also gave an interview summarising its salient points to the Central News Agency early that same month, a public intervention of which historians have hitherto been unaware.⁵⁵ In March Dunsany published another article containing his own thoughts and a further passionate piece by Wolseley.⁵⁶ Wolseley was by no means the only high-ranking Army officer publicly opposed to the Tunnel in 1882. Both the former Commandant of the Staff College Sir Edward Hamley and the Governor of the Royal Military Academy Woolwich Sir Lintorn Simmons published pieces in the May issue of *The Nineteenth Century*, while the Army's Commander-in-Chief the Duke of Cambridge wrote a memorandum to the 1881 Committee, subsequently published in the parliamentary Blue Book of August 1882. The Admiralty, although it was never moved to the same extent as the War Office, was represented by the Senior Naval Lord Admiral Sir Astley Cooper Key, whose firm letter of opposition to the First Lord of the Admiralty Lord Northbrook also appeared in the Blue Book.⁵⁷ Examining these documents, this section considers the philosophical outlook which underpinned the military's opposition to the Channel Tunnel between 1881 and 1883.

At face value, the military case against the Tunnel constituted a straightforward strategic concern about the loss of insularity, a dystopian interpretation of Watkin's claims that the submarine railway would abolish the Channel.⁵⁸ If the Tunnel could remove all impediments to trade, then an enemy in possession of both ends might thereby render the Royal Navy, in the words of Cooper Key, 'a helpless spectator', solving the problems of supply and reinforcement which had hitherto posed such a challenge to potential aggressors.⁵⁹ This scenario allowed

⁵⁴ Lord Dunsany, 'The Proposed Channel Tunnel', *Nineteenth Century* (Feb. 1882), pp. 288-304. The full memorandum was published in *Correspondence*, H.1193, Inclosure 3, pp. 210-218, hereafter referred to as the 'Wolseley Memorandum'.

⁵⁵ The interview was widely reprinted in the press. The full Central News article was published in *Birmingham Daily Post*, 6 Feb. 1882, p. 5.

⁵⁶ Lord Dunsany, 'The Channel Tunnel: A Rejoinder', *Nineteenth Century* (Mar. 1882), pp. 313-332.

⁵⁷ See also P.H. Colomb (ed.), *Memoirs of Admiral Sir Astley Cooper Key* (London: Methuen, 1898), pp. 478-479.

⁵⁸ See especially Redford, 'Opposition to the Channel Tunnel'.

⁵⁹ Sir Astley Cooper Key to Lord Northbrook, 31 Jan. 1882, *Correspondence*, p. 192.

Wolseley ample opportunity to repeatedly denounce the state of Britain's land defences. The nation, he said, was in an 'entirely undefended condition' and 'unprepared for war'.⁶⁰ He particularly relished explaining how utterly inadequate were the defences surrounding Dover, stressing the ease with which the Castle might be taken by a few thousand soldiers.⁶¹ In this he was provided with the firm support of the Duke of Cambridge, who considered that the initially positive reaction to the Tunnel illustrated the extent to which the British public was deluded about the strength of its own defences.⁶² For these officers, the Tunnel issue provided a rare opportunity to bring their criticisms of the national defences before the public in dramatic fashion, and they clearly viewed it as a chance to normalise the idea that the Army was weak and in need of improvement.

Consider these anxieties in the context of Watkin's arguments, however, and the protests of Wolseley and his supporters emerge in a profoundly anti-internationalist light. Wolseley's case against the Channel Tunnel was established upon a reading of diplomatic and military history that completely rejected the link between free trade, communication and peace. Questioned on this point in his Central News interview, he pointed out that the Northern and Southern United States had been closely linked by rail and road, as had Prussia and Austria, and France and Germany; if anything, the ease of cross-border travel had 'intensified the conflict and swelled the carnage.'⁶³ Employing familiar tropes of foreign jealousy, he suggested that the Tunnel might serve to tempt an 'adventurous' foe, a man in the mould of Napoleon or Frederick the Great, into launching an attack on London, famously the only unfortified capital in Europe.⁶⁴ Furthermore, reasoned Wolseley, were France to successfully invade Britain the English entrance would naturally be demanded as an indemnity, just as Germany had retained possession of Strasberg and Metz after 1871.⁶⁵ Annexed to the continent and unable to recover

⁶⁰ Wolseley before Board of Trade Committee, *Correspondence*, p. 223.

⁶¹ Wolseley before Board of Trade Committee, *Correspondence*, p. 224. His assertions about the Dover defences were challenged at length in Beaumont, 'A Reply'.

⁶² 'Observations by His Royal Highness the Field Marshal Commanding in Chief', *Correspondence*, pp. 299-305, hereafter referred to as the 'Cambridge Memorandum' (p. 304).

⁶³ *Birmingham Daily Post*, 6 Feb. 1882, p. 5.

⁶⁴ Dunsany, 'Proposed Channel Tunnel', pp. 296-297.

⁶⁵ Dunsany, 'Proposed Channel Tunnel', p. 295.

behind its protective moat, Britain would face ‘national annihilation’.⁶⁶ ‘The existence of this tunnel would, therefore, I contend, be a constant inducement to the unscrupulous foreigner to make war upon us, as it would hold out to him hopes of a conquest the like of which the world had never known before’, he wrote.⁶⁷ For Wolseley, the ‘specious cry of universal brotherhood’, was little more than dangerous utopianism:

The nation that would shirk the responsibilities of independent national existence, and would hide its want of manhood and its patriotism under these pretty words, deserves to exist, and will exist, no longer than the moment at which its theoretical security is touched by the rough practical hand of the enemy, who will laugh at the cries of “breach of faith” when the “confidence trick” ends in the way it has always ended, in the robbery of the deluded victim.⁶⁸

Where Watkin saw goodwill and international harmony, Wolseley and his supporters suspected a foreign plot. Dunsany, for example, was keen to point out that continental generals and statesmen were relaxed at the prospect of a road ‘connecting them with the richest and, in a military sense, the weakest country of Europe’.⁶⁹ Similarly Wolseley noted that shares in the SCRC were available for purchase abroad, running the risk that the company might be dominated by foreign citizens who could act against British safety.⁷⁰ ‘The road to our ruin’, he wrote, ‘is paved with what look like good intentions’.⁷¹

This attitude was obviously founded on the premise that the international system was not maintained by the rule of law, but the rule of might. A nation which depended for its security on ‘paper treaties’, wrote Wolseley, ‘is far down on the decline that leads to national ruin’.⁷²

Certainly, he agreed that, were the French simply to march a force through the Tunnel upon the declaration of war, its mouth could held by fifty men against an army of 100,000.⁷³ But this was not what he feared. Instead, the Quartermaster-General envisioned a surprise attack during a

⁶⁶ In private Wolseley was even more extreme, declaring that the country would ‘fall like Lucifer – never to rise again...the helots of France for ever’. See Appendix 1 in Wilson, *Tunnel Visions*.

⁶⁷ Wolseley Memorandum, pp. 216-217.

⁶⁸ Wolseley Memorandum, p. 214.

⁶⁹ Dunsany, ‘A Rejoinder’, p. 320.

⁷⁰ Dunsany, ‘A Rejoinder’, p. 322.

⁷¹ Wolseley Memorandum, p. 214.

⁷² Wolseley Memorandum, p. 214.

⁷³ Wolseley, *Select Committee* p. 448.

period of ‘profound peace’, with no warning and without an official declaration of war, ‘whilst we gentlemen of England were abed, dreaming of the time when the lion and the lamb are to lie down together’.⁷⁴ A small group of men might easily cross the Channel on a dark night and seize the British entrance in a ‘*coup de main*’.⁷⁵ Worse, a battalion or two of French soldiers could be secretly entrained and sent on a ‘filibustering undertaking’ to take the Tunnel before the British authorities had realised what was happening, in direct contravention of any neutralisation treaties.⁷⁶ The Duke of Cambridge drew attention to the possibility of Fenians attacking the railway in support of a French attempt, and General Hamley also raised the possibility of treason.⁷⁷ Furthermore, by the time he came to testify before the Select Committee in 1883, Wolseley felt able to speak of such a surprise operation from personal experience. On 20 August 1882, without a formal declaration of war, troops under Wolseley’s command seized the Suez Canal, to the shock of the Egyptian nationalist government and in the face of protests from the Canal’s creator Ferdinand de Lesseps, who had promised the Egyptians the waterway would remain a neutral zone.⁷⁸ Not only did Wolseley cite this as an illustration of the ease with which great engineering works might be abused for military ends, but he also pointed out that the Egyptians had had ample time to block the waterway beforehand, and had failed to do so.⁷⁹ As discussed in Chapter One, Wolseley’s determination to prove to the Select Committee that such surprise attacks were the norm rather than the exception in warfare eventually led him to commission Colonel Maurice to write that fierce attack on the ‘civilised’ interpretation of warfare, *Hostilities without Declaration of War*.

As is noted by historians, the opponents of the Tunnel used the surprise attack argument to cast doubt on any and all schemes for its defence.⁸⁰ There was, argued Wolseley, no complete

⁷⁴ Dunsany, ‘A Rejoinder’, p. 324.

⁷⁵ Wolseley Memorandum, p. 216; see also J.L.A. Simmons, ‘The Channel Tunnel: A National Question’, *Nineteenth Century* (May 1882), pp. 663-667 (p. 665).

⁷⁶ Wolseley before Board of Trade Committee, *Correspondence*, p. 221.

⁷⁷ Cambridge Memorandum, pp. 303-304; E.B. Hamley, ‘The Channel Tunnel’, *Nineteenth Century* (May 1882), pp. 672-674.

⁷⁸ M.J. Williams, ‘The Egyptian Campaign of 1882’ in Brian Bond (ed.), *Victorian Military Campaigns*, pp. 241-278 (pp. 259-262).

⁷⁹ Wolseley, *Select Committee*, pp. 444, 447.

⁸⁰ This is the main theme of Wilson, *Tunnel Visions*, pp. 22-38.

guarantee: even ‘the strongest fortress in the world may be taken by surprise, or may be surrendered through cowardice or treachery.’⁸¹ The 1882 War Office Committee, which itself had suggested the Tunnel be defended by an enormous range of measures from a portcullis to poison gas, warned of defences becoming lax and vulnerable during a long period of peace and concluded that it would be ‘presumptuous to place absolute reliance upon even the most comprehensive and complete arrangements’ for its security’.⁸² While these fears tell us much about the vivid imaginations of Britain’s senior officers, historians have neglected to highlight the deeper criticisms of the British attitude towards defence which they contained. Cambridge, for example, spent some time explaining the necessity of a European-style ‘first class’ fortress overlooking its mouth, which he estimated at a minimum of three million pounds, not including the cost to garrison and maintain it.⁸³ Noting the difficulty the armed forces already had in obtaining necessary funds, neither he nor Wolseley thought Parliament would ever vote sufficient money.⁸⁴ Not surprisingly, the two men demanded that all decisions taken in the construction or defence of the Tunnel must be referred to the ‘military authorities’; in this way they would be able to secure a veto over the project by simply demanding measures so expensive that politicians would never agree to them. Listening to this evidence during the Select-Committee hearings, Lord Lansdowne immediately grasped its significance. In his notebook, underneath a comment from the Duke of Cambridge, he simply wrote: ‘civilians v soldiers?’⁸⁵

The ‘professionals’ quickly warmed to this theme. For Wolseley, the ‘peculiar condition’ of British civil-military relations could prove disastrous if the government hesitated to destroy the tunnel in an emergency – clearly a veiled reference to his wish for a serviceman as Minister for War.⁸⁶ Dunsany likewise attacked ‘the nature of our institutions’ which, he was sure, had left the Royal Navy unable to command the Channel. If the government could not be trusted to

⁸¹ Wolseley Memorandum, p. 217.

⁸² ‘Report of Military Committee on Proposed Channel Tunnel’, *Correspondence*, pp. 251-258.

⁸³ Cambridge Memorandum, p. 301.

⁸⁴ Dunsany, ‘Proposed Channel Tunnel’, p. 294.

⁸⁵ Lansdowne, Channel Tunnel Committee Notebook (1883), BL, Add. MS. 88906/23/1.

⁸⁶ Wolseley before Board of Trade committee, *Correspondence*, pp. 224-225.

secure command of the sea, how could it be trusted to protect a Tunnel?⁸⁷ Indeed, many of these criticisms contained suggestions that Britain's liberal political culture and even its national character were temperamentally ill suited to maintaining the Tunnel's security. 'Owing to our belief in the virtuous intentions of others,' wrote Wolseley, 'we live in a constant condition of unpreparedness for war'.⁸⁸ Cooper-Key referred to 'our well-known national characteristics which lead us to despise dangers till they come upon us', while Lord Dunsany argued that, in British military history, 'careless confidence is the rule, wise precautions the exception.'⁸⁹ 'No one acquainted with the form of our Government, or with the English character, can suppose that we should ever be prevailed upon to make such arrangements as would render it practically impossible for an enemy to seize the Dover end of the tunnel' wrote Roberts privately.⁹⁰

That the British had survived and prospered for so long with such an apparently flawed constitution was due to the 'Silver Streak'. By removing this protection, the Tunnel would not civilise Europe as Watkin had claimed, but continentalise Britain, exposing its fragile liberal society to the dangerous reality of European politics. 'Nothing', wrote Cambridge, 'perhaps shows more clearly the extent to which our population, immersed in peaceful pursuits, remains unaware of the military condition of neighbouring states than the tone which was at first adopted on this question by many of the public.'⁹¹ The Tunnel would smash this sense of placid security by creating a popular awareness that, however small the likelihood, Britain was exposed to the possibility of a land invasion. The result, concluded Wolseley, would be to infect the country with 'the horrid malady from which all nations having insignificant armies, and very powerful neighbours, suffer periodically': panic.⁹² If the rationality of the people was the bedrock of the case in favour of the Tunnel, their sensitivity was an important part of the case against it. Any movement by French troops near Calais might spark fear in Britain that an attack was imminent. By warning against a Tunnel, Wolseley was trying to prevent, not stir up a scare.

⁸⁷ Dunsany, 'The Proposed Channel Tunnel', p. 289.

⁸⁸ Dunsany, 'A Rejoinder', p. 328.

⁸⁹ Cooper Key to Northbrook, *Correspondence*, p. 191; Dunsany, 'A Rejoinder', p. 315.

⁹⁰ Robson (ed.), *Roberts in India*, p. 255.

⁹¹ Cambridge Memorandum, p. 304.

⁹² Dunsany, 'Proposed Channel Tunnel', p. 302.

‘Who’, he asked, ‘is the real panic-monger? Is it he who would have us create a work that must be the prolific parent of panics, or is it the man who strives to warn his countrymen against such an error?’⁹³ The impossibility of developing a failsafe defence system would, Wolseley argued, trap the nation into an escalating series of panics, each of which ending with a ‘rush’ to enormous military spending programmes.⁹⁴

However, such programmes would never be enough to place the British Army on an equal footing with its French or German counterparts. If the Tunnel were to make Britain a European land power– and Wolseley’s reductionist logic allowed for no other interpretation – then it necessarily called for a European safeguard: ‘the industry crushing system of universal service’.⁹⁵ Only a mass conscript army would give Britain the ability to face its French counterpart, and so only such an army would suffice to provide security for the terrified British populace.⁹⁶ The Tunnel would eventually panic the nation into abandoning its liberties. This point was brought home at every possible opportunity. European nations, Wolseley reminded his readers, were forced to:

convert their territory into a camp, to offer up annually all their youth on the foul altar of the grim god of war, and to drain their coffers and their impoverished people of their last farthing in order to support the monster – the army – they have thus created, which, like an insatiable ogre, calls out day and night, “Give, give; more, still more;” the vampire that sucks the lifeblood of prosperity from the people, that is not satisfied as long as there are men, or any class of men, yet left for him to prey upon.⁹⁷

The conscription argument provided a direct rebuttal to the idea that a Tunnel would spread British values across Europe. Instead, Britain would be forced to adopt the least desirable attributes of its continental neighbours. Universal service would outweigh any economic benefits, ‘lessen our powers of production and change the whole nature of our institutions’, in

⁹³ Dunsany, ‘A Rejoinder’, p. 332.

⁹⁴ Wolseley Memorandum, p. 213.

⁹⁵ Dunsany, ‘Proposed Channel Tunnel’, p. 300.

⁹⁶ Redford, ‘Opposition to the Channel Tunnel’, p. 106.

⁹⁷ Dunsany, ‘Proposed Channel Tunnel’, p. 300. Wolseley repeated this same characterisation of conscription in a speech to the University College London Debating Society in May 1882. See *St. James's Gazette*, 23 May 1882, p. 10; Kochanski, *Wolseley*, p. 123.

the words of General Simmons.⁹⁸ Wolseley observed that such an army would be impossible under Britain's currently existing form of government, a suggestion, perhaps, that the Tunnel would do away with Parliamentary democracy itself.⁹⁹ In this reading the greatest threat posed by the Tunnel was not necessarily the horrors of an invasion, but the economic and societal cost of insuring against it.

In summary, the position that Wolseley and his fellow Army and Navy officers took during 1882-1883 was built upon a profound antipathy to the idea that improved communications and trade were of universal benefit. In place of Watkin's optimistic prophesy of Anglo-French amity, Wolseley substituted his own appreciation of inter-state relations which stressed humanity's inherently violent and ruthless nature. As steam had brought with it fears of invasion after 1840, so the Tunnel would jeopardise Britain's security, and even threaten to transform its liberal free trading society into an analogue of the 'armed camp' of the European mainland:

Why, therefore, incur even the possibility of this new peril? What are the new advantages, the direct benefits we are to receive, which should induce us to accept any fresh risk to our national life? Surely, John Bull will not endanger his birth-right, his liberty, his property, in fact all that man can hold most dear, whether he be a patriot or merely a selfish cosmopolitan, and whether this subject be regarded from a sentimental or from a material point of view, simply in order that men and women may cross to and fro between England and France without running the risk of sea-sickness.¹⁰⁰

The Nature of the Debate

As should now be clear, Gladstone's characterisation of the debate as a clash between two fixed world-views was a much more accurate reflection of the controversy than that provided by subsequent historians. There were, however, similarities between the language employed by Watkin and Wolseley which both reflected and encouraged this ideological binary. Rhetorically, both relied heavily on hyperbole and exaggeration. It was in the interests of both, for example, to overemphasise the technical feasibility and haulage potential of the railway. Although

⁹⁸ Simmons, 'A National Question', p. 667.

⁹⁹ Wolseley Memorandum, p. 213.

¹⁰⁰ Wolseley Memorandum, pp. 217-218.

Watkin's own estimations as to the Tunnel's passenger and freight capacity are comparable with the twenty-first century Eurostar and Eurotunnel services, Anthony Travis points out that there was no evidence that the compressed air locomotives which Beaumont proposed to use would have been capable of pulling fully loaded trains for the entire length of track, although electric trains would have gone some way to solving this issue within two decades.¹⁰¹ Certainly it seems unlikely that the commercial revolution promised by the pro-Tunnellers would have developed in the manner they predicted.

If Watkin's arguments were suspect then Wolseley's defence pessimism was at times almost unbelievable. As Michael Bonavia observes, Wolseley's discussions of railway operations were 'woolly' and at times simply incorrect, demonstrating little awareness of the true requirements of such manoeuvres.¹⁰² For example, he never directly addressed the logistical problems facing an invader who wished to supply an army of sufficient strength to subdue a nation of thirty-five million people via a single double-tracked railway tunnel. This point was raised by the Royal Engineer Sir Andrew Clarke in February 1882, who could not think of a single example where a railway had 'served to advance an entire army'.¹⁰³ The idea that an invasion might be organised and launched in total secrecy, declared Clarke, was a 'simple impossibility', and even if the Tunnel had been seized the length of time it would take to deploy an army from it would give ample opportunity for the British to retake the entrance. For his part, Clarke believed that steamship would remain the only method by which an enemy could successfully invade Britain, with or without the Tunnel. Similar points were made by Sir John Adye of the Royal Artillery in evidence before the Board of Trade Committee, where he had made clear that he regarded Wolseley's fears of treachery and invasion as absurd and fanciful.¹⁰⁴ Wolseley never addressed these concerns, relying instead on literary dash to carry his points. He also repeatedly appealed

¹⁰¹ GetLink Group, 'Traffic Figures: Traffic Volumes for the Past 10 Years', <www.getlinkgroup.com/uk/group/operations/traffic-figures/> [Accessed 8 March 2018]; Travis, 'Engineering and Politics', pp. 494-495.

¹⁰² Bonavia, *Channel Tunnel Story*, p. 35.

¹⁰³ *The Standard*, 13 Feb. 1882, p. 3. See also Chapter Five, below.

¹⁰⁴ Adye's memorandum and evidence to the Committee was shorter and lacked the rhetorical punch of Wolseley's, probably because he found the Adjutant General's attitude so ridiculous. See *Correspondence*, H. 1193, Inclosure 4, 'Memorandum by Sir John Adye', pp. 218-219; Inclosure 6, Evidence of Sir John Adye, pp. 227-232.

to the transformative effect which railways had had on European warfare, Prussia's 'railway' wars against Austria and France clearly having made an enormous impression on his mind. Yet, as Clarke pointed out, no recent war had demonstrated that railways had the kind of potential Wolseley attributed to them. In stressing the weakness of Dover or the danger of sudden attack, Wolseley was simply ignoring the most serious problems with his scenario of invasion. The only reason that Wolseley's ignorance of railway questions were sustained was that, occasional notes by Clarke or Beaumont accepted, they went largely unchallenged within the public sphere, lending them credence they did not deserve. By such simple means of rhetoric and persistence did Wolseley turn a provably implausible assertion of British vulnerability into a pervasive myth that would not be finally put to rest until after 1945.

One other theme which linked the language of Watkin and Wolseley was a determination to position themselves as selfless, disinterested, and rational patriots, working with the interests of Britain at heart. From the outset Watkin was keen to stress how backing the Tunnel involved for him a level of self-sacrifice: 'I have given my time, now, for a great many years, gratuitously, of course; I have invested my money; my friends and relatives have done the same.'¹⁰⁵ He always emphasised that he would have preferred the project to be undertaken by the state, and that it was only due to inaction from this quarter that the SER had decided to step in.¹⁰⁶ He was pursuing the Tunnel 'as an Englishman, loving my country and no other', a further illustration of how Cobdenites saw no contradiction between patriotism and internationalism.¹⁰⁷ Their opponents, in Beaumont's words, were paranoid scaremongers, pushing fears which were 'purely imaginary' and which were making Britain the laughing stock of Europe.¹⁰⁸ For his part, as we have seen, Wolseley damned the Tunnel's promoters as 'selfish cosmopolitans' willing to destroy the nation's 'birth right' of insularity in order to enrich themselves. He declared himself to be speaking not only from a military point of view but also in the interests of the British

¹⁰⁵ Watkin in *Meeting of the SCRC...20th January, 1882*, p. 26.

¹⁰⁶ Travis, 'Engineering and Politics', pp. 473-475.

¹⁰⁷ Watkin in *Meeting of the SCRC...8th March, 1883*, p. 9.

¹⁰⁸ Beaumont, 'The Channel Tunnel: A Reply', pp. 306, 310.

taxpayer.¹⁰⁹ Hamley was particularly keen to emphasise this dualistic clash between ‘the gains of private speculators and the interests of the nation’, arguing that those who opposed the Tunnel, because they had no personal interest in it, were more likely to view it from a dispassionate ‘national’ point of view.¹¹⁰ For both sides the aim of this rhetoric was to claim the patriotic mantle while painting the other as holding views inimical to the public good. Cynthia Behrman is broadly correct in concluding that the two sides ‘rarely listened to each other’; they were, instead, aiming for a much wider constituency.¹¹¹ To this end, neither wanted to be seen to be lecturing the public, or lobbying the government to the exclusion the wider country. Their respective broadsides were framed as simple explanations of the facts of the case; both pointedly left the ultimate decision ‘to the common sense of the public’.¹¹²

Conclusion

By the time the initial clash was over in the first three months of 1882, the Tunnel had obtained an ideological significance far beyond its status as an addition to Britain’s already extensive system of underground railways. As this chapter has shown, far from a simple matter of military defence or insular prejudice, the Channel Tunnel produced a highly charged ideological clash between optimistic internationalism and pessimistic realism. By thus polarising the discussion, it demanded that individuals make a choice as to which world-view they ascribed to and what sort of nation they thought Britain was. Were world affairs governed principally by peace or war? Might foreign nations be easily ‘tempted’ to attack Britain? Was British society strong and confident enough to face the increased susceptibility to panics which a tunnel appeared to entail? These were the questions with which the Channel Tunnel confronted Britons during the 1880s. They were questions which cut to the heart of British identity, and especially Liberal identity, offering those who believed in the Gladstone-Cobden interpretation of world affairs a practical opportunity to support a project which claimed to embody them. In the same way the

¹⁰⁹ Dunsany, ‘A Rejoinder’, pp. 329, 321.

¹¹⁰ Hamley, ‘The Channel Tunnel’, pp. 672, 674. See also Hamley’s letter to *The Times*, 4 Aug. 1887, p. 11.

¹¹¹ Behrman, *Victorian Myths of the Sea*, p. 50.

¹¹² Beaumont, ‘The Channel Tunnel: A Reply’, p. 312; Dunsany, ‘A Rejoinder’, p. 332.

Tunnel had consequences for the meaning of patriotism – if it was likely to boost national income, was the patriotic response to support it, regardless of any possible defence implications? In the next chapter, this thesis will examine the manner in which the British ‘public’ engaged with these questions.

Chapter Five

Public Opinion and the Channel Tunnel

Sir Edward Watkin formed a wish to tunnel under sea,
'No, no!' exclaimed the editor of the *Nineteenth Century*:
'The French will come and kill us all while chatting o'er our tea,
By my distinguished magazine I swear it shall not be.'

Agnostics and philosophers and clergymen by scores,
And other persons qualified to guard our native shores,
They rallied round the patriot Knowles in that heroic cause;
Now, if Sir Edward wants to dig, he'll have his choice of *bores*.

'Omne Tullit Punctum', *Notes and Queries*, 26 May 1883, p. 406.¹

¹ Omne Tullit Punctum [wins every hand]: from Horace, 'Ars Poetica'. 'He wins every hand who mingles profit with pleasure, by delighting and instructing the reader at the same time.'

The conventional view among historians of the Channel Tunnel scare is that the British people were overwhelmingly hostile to the project. For I.F. Clarke, ‘opposition to the proposed Channel Tunnel was a popular and national movement that affected every level of society’.² However, as Richard Grayson observes, no detailed work has been done on public attitudes to the Tunnel in the press or elsewhere.³ Instead, information about public debate is drawn almost entirely from the work of one man, the influential editor of the *Nineteenth Century*, James Knowles, upon whom Gladstone would later confer the title ‘murderer of the Channel Tunnel’.⁴ Although his journal was officially neutral, Knowles himself was vehemently anti-Tunnel, fearing that it would destroy ‘the sacred sanctuary of freedom formed by nature herself & held as such by generations of Englishmen’, thereby forcing Britain into a United States of Europe.⁵ His anti-Tunnel campaign of early 1882 was therefore his first sustained attempt to influence public opinion.⁶ During February-May 1882 the *Nineteenth Century* carried no fewer than seven anti-Tunnel essays including those by Lord Dunsany and Wolseley, as well as Beaumont’s pro-Tunnel reply. In April and May it printed a ‘protest’ against the project in the form of a substantial petition, signed by many famous public figures. In early 1883 Knowles republished this protest, alongside the *Nineteenth Century* articles and excerpts from thirty-one anti-Tunnel newspapers in *The Channel Tunnel and Public Opinion*, a 136-page pamphlet.⁷ ‘Intended to show the strength of public feeling in this country against the Channel Tunnel scheme’, Knowles used the pamphlet to paint those in favour of the project as, at best, deluded fanatics of ‘universal brotherhood’, and at worst unpatriotic ‘company-promoters’.⁸ In either case, he was clear that they were completely outnumbered by the nation’s ‘common sense’ majority. Recognised by its contemporaries as an important record for future generations, Knowles’ work has dominated the historical memory of the 1880s Channel Tunnel attempt, despite the fact that

² Clarke, *Voices*, p. 96. See also Wilson, *Tunnel Visions*, pp. 39-40; Bonavia, *Channel Tunnel Story*, p. 3; Whiteside, *Tunnel under the Channel* p. 69.

³ Grayson, ‘Britain and the Channel Tunnel’, p. 386.

⁴ Metcalf, *Knowles*, p. 295.

⁵ Metcalf, *Knowles*, pp. 292-293, 295.

⁶ Metcalf, *Knowles*, p. 292.

⁷ James Knowles (ed.), *The Channel Tunnel and Public Opinion* (London: Kegan Paul, 1883).

⁸ Knowles, *Public Opinion*, p. v.

it was very clearly one of propaganda; it is the basis, for example, of I.F. Clarke's evaluation of anti-Tunnel feeling.⁹

The following chapter aims to provide the first substantive study of British opinion on the Channel Tunnel since Knowles' 1883 pamphlet. Opening with the attitudes of the press during the 1870s, it shows how, up to early 1882, feeling towards the project was almost universally positive. This perspective is then used to contextualise Wolseley's 1882 media campaign, illustrating how radically he was able to change the direction of the conversation through exploiting his position as a non-partisan 'expert'. The chapter then follows the development of popular feeling through to the end of 1882, examining in turn the press, the *Nineteenth Century* petition and the attitudes of commercial organisations, trade unions and the 'public'. Ultimately, it is seen that the Channel Tunnel did not elicit the universal insular distrust claimed by Knowles, but instead split opinion much more evenly. In the process, the chapter provides both a study of popular support for internationalist ideals across British society, and serves as an important illustration of the limited nature of nineteenth century 'public opinion'.

The Spirit of 1876

If sufficient funds had been forthcoming during the 1870s, it is not unlikely that the Channel Tunnel would have been open by the end of the nineteenth century. By the time the joint Anglo-French commission completed its draft treaty at the end of May 1876, a substantial level of enthusiasm had built up behind the venture. This was driven by a narrative which, although tempered by financial concerns, regarded the Tunnel as a project of peace and prosperity, the latest chapter in the heroic age of civil engineering. *The Times* heartily supported what it regarded 'an honourable example of persevering scientific effort and of international co-operation for the common good.'¹⁰ The *Daily News* considered it 'desirable from every point of view' and the crowning enterprise of contemporary science.¹¹ Even the usually reactionary *Morning Post* strongly encouraged investors to come forward and support 'a scheme so

⁹ *Dundee Courier*, 30 Mar. 1883, p. 2.

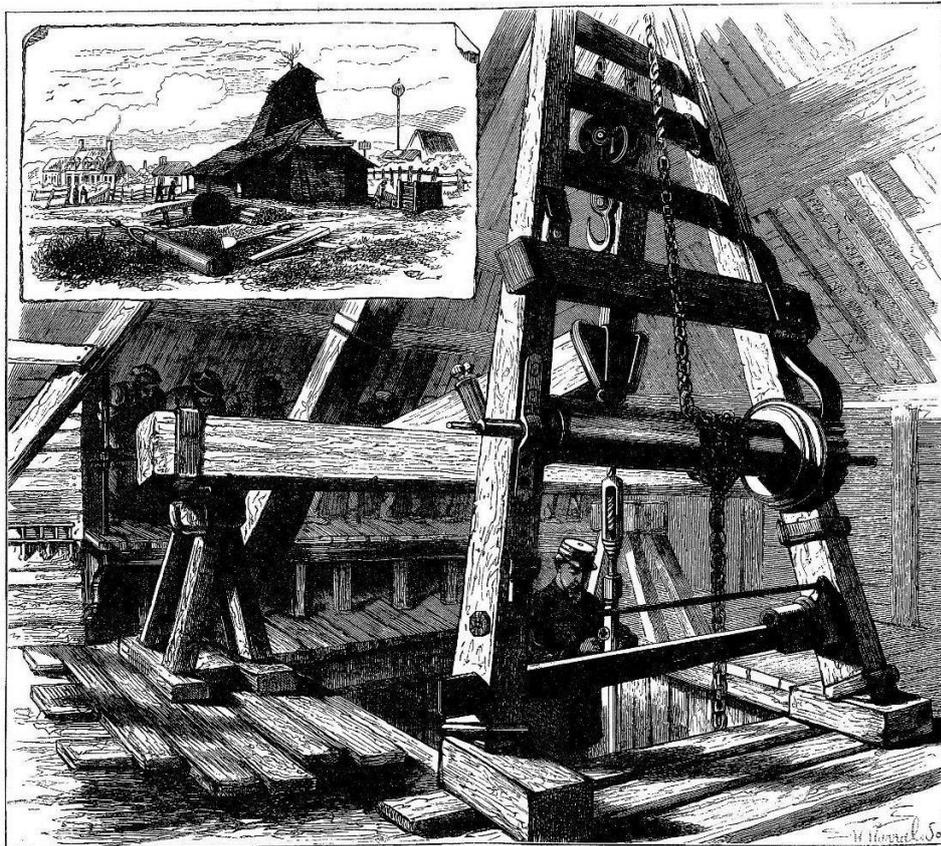
¹⁰ *The Times*, 30 Jan. 1875, p. 9. Watkin quoted this back in a letter to the paper, 6 Jan. 1893, p. 5.

¹¹ *Daily News*, 22 Jan. 1875, p. 5. This issue carried a half-page map of the proposed route.

desirable for the benefit of two great nations'.¹² *The Graphic* produced images of the engineering and surveying work, describing the project as 'a splendid evidence of the determination and perseverance with which obstacles and impediments are met by the scientific men of the present age' [Figures 12; 13].¹³

¹² *Morning Post*, 1 Sept. 1875, p. 4.

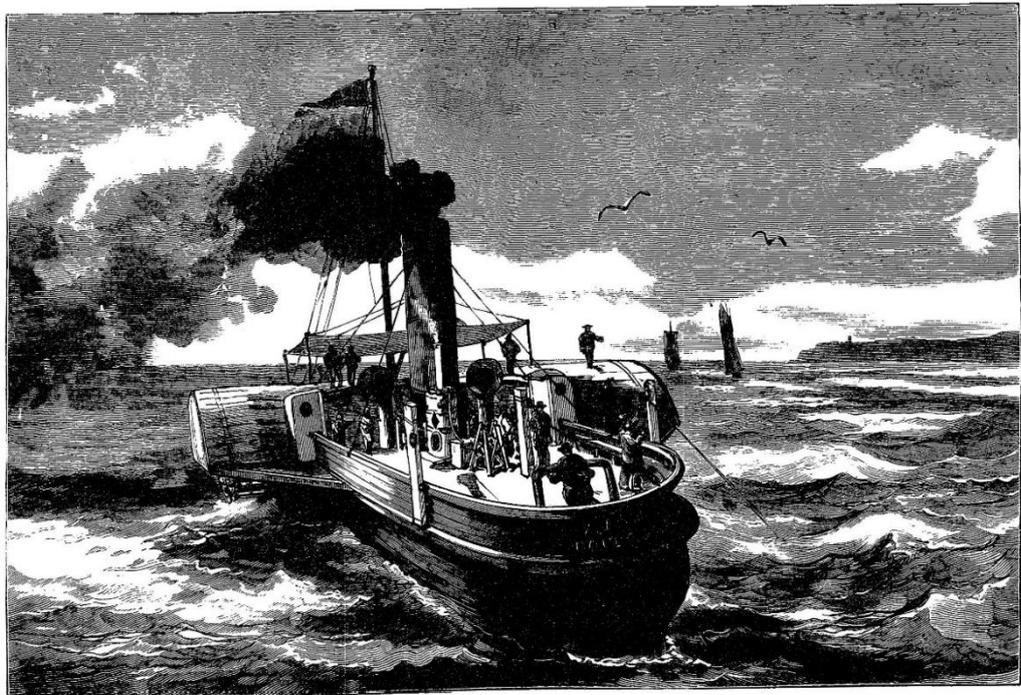
¹³ *The Graphic*, 24 June 1876, p. 4.



THE PROPOSED CHANNEL TUNNEL—THE WORKS AT SANGATTE

Figure 12: The French Channel Tunnel Company works at Sangatte.

The Graphic, 24 June 1876, p. 612.



THE CHANNEL TUNNEL—TAKING SOUNDINGS ON BOARD THE "AJAX"

Figure 13: The CTC steamship *Ajax* taking soundings in the Channel.

The Graphic, 8 July 1876, p. 44.



Figure 14: ‘Sir Edwin Watkins’s (sic) Remedy for the Invasion Scare’

‘Drowning the French Pharaoh in the Channel Tunnel’. *Penny Illustrated Paper*, 30 July 1881, pp. 72-3.

The idea that the Channel Tunnel was opposed out of sheer irrational insularity is clearly undercut by the enthusiasm of the 1870s. Similarly, suspicion of foreign motives is largely absent from the Tunnel discourse of this period. Instead, the press looked forward to the day when Europe's two great 'liberal' powers would be linked permanently under the Channel. There was little evidence that this enthusiasm had been dampened when the SER began experimental borings in 1880. Throughout that year the press maintained regular coverage of the activities at both Dover and Sangatte; at no point were any concerns raised. It was thus out of a clear sky that, in June 1881, the day after Watkin announced that he believed the Tunnel could be completed in five years, *The Times* produced a thunderous editorial citing security concerns. Proclaiming that 'the silver streak is our safety' the paper highlighted a number of possible risks, arguing that 'it is not Sir Edward Watkin and the South-Eastern shareholders who have the only right to a voice here.'¹⁴ Yet, despite many of its points being identical to those which Wolseley later raised, the paper earned only a short rebuttal from Watkin, a small number of other letters, and the incredulity of many of its peers.¹⁵ On the evening of the editorial's publication, the *Pall Mall Gazette* produced a front page column dismissing it as the 'exaggeration of a panicmonger'.¹⁶ No less an organ than the *United Services Gazette* offered its support to Watkin, arguing that the country must be 'degenerate' if it was willing to object to a commercial enterprise for fear of invasion.¹⁷ The *Penny Illustrated Post* took the opportunity to mock the 'timorous old gentleman who now rules the roast at the *Times* office' with an engraving showing Watkin drowning an invading French army [Figure 14].¹⁸ Most other papers simply ignored the fears, continuing to report on the Tunnel's progress with encouragement. Only the *Daily Telegraph* followed *The Times*' lead, although it did so in remarkable style. On 18 June, the day the *Times*' piece went to press, the *Telegraph* carried a long leader hyperbolic in its praise of the Tunnel, concluding that any attempt to damage it would be comparable to

¹⁴ *The Times*, 18 June 1881, p. 11.

¹⁵ *The Times*, 20 June 1881, p. 10; 21 June 1881, p. 8.

¹⁶ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 18 June 1881, p. 1. See also *Western Daily Press*, 20 June 1881, p. 5.

¹⁷ Quoted in *The Globe*, 2 July 1881, p. 5.

¹⁸ *Penny Illustrated Post*, 30 July 1881, p. 70. This illustration is reprinted in most histories of the Tunnel, but is never properly contextualised.

bombarding the Parthenon or pulling down the Pyramids.¹⁹ Three days later, however, the paper produced another editorial completely at odds with the first, expressing deep concern that Britain's military safety would be at the mercy of anyone who might capture the Tunnel.²⁰ This editorial proved as ineffectual as that of *The Times*. The public danger-cry had been decisively rejected, appeals to insular security and Continental intentions proving no match for the optimistic spirit of progress represented by the Tunnel. Nevertheless, the episode illustrated the speed with which the press might turn on the Tunnel if given adequate reason, while within the halls of government *The Times* had had a much greater effect, as the following chapter will show.

Up until late 1881, then, British public opinion was happily excited rather than troubled by the prospect of a Paris to London railway. Not only does this fact emphasise the extent to which the following months and years would see a transformation in attitudes, but it also draws attention to the central role played by armed forces officers in driving that change. Despite its best efforts, not even a newspaper as powerful as *The Times* had the influence with which to whip up a war-scare. Nineteenth Century newspapers followed, not created, 'public opinion'; it required a concurring statement from some eminent military or naval figure to provide credibility. On 11 October 1881, the following letter, addressed to a correspondent in Paris, was published in *The Times*:

Horse Guards, War Office.

Sir,— I should be very sorry if any letter of mine should be published, but I have no objection to its being stated in every newspaper that I earnestly trust the Channel Tunnel may never be carried out, as I feel its construction would be a lasting source of danger to this country.

Very faithfully yours,

Garnet Wolseley.²¹

¹⁹ *Daily Telegraph*, 18 June 1881, p. 4.

²⁰ *Daily Telegraph*, 21 June 1881, p. 5.

²¹ *The Times*, 11 Oct. 1881, p. 5.

Although only a single sentence, this provided a clear foretaste of what was to come. It illustrated Wolseley's determination to use the media to spread his views, and his lack of misgivings about doing so. Most notably, by dating it from the War Office itself, Wolseley was clearly acting to invest his opinions with the gravitas that came with his official position as Quartermaster-General. This tactic was not lost on Watkin, who, speaking in the Commons in 1884, complained that Wolseley had abused his privileged position and breached the political neutrality of the armed forces in an attempt to 'interfere' with government policy. 'If peaceful men could not be allowed to promote communication between nations without letters being written and dated from the War Office by high military authorities', he argued, 'it was quite time that Parliament began to consider the relative positions of the civilian and military classes in the country.'²² Indeed, writing to Gladstone in 1883, he expressed his conviction that Wolseley's letter destroyed not only the Channel Tunnel, but that the increased tension in Anglo-French relations during the 1880s might be directly traced to this single epistle.²³ Unfortunately for Watkin, this apparent conflict of interest was never addressed during the Channel Tunnel debate. Rather, Wolseley proved himself adept at exploiting his rank and reputation to direct and define the discussion within his own understanding of geopolitics and international relations, achieving a victory for the supremacy of the 'military classes' in the process.

The Importance of Expertise

In February and March 1882, Wolseley ran what could only be described as an organised public campaign against the Channel Tunnel directly out of the War Office, with the explicit support of many in the department.²⁴ His memorandum to the Board of Trade Committee of 1881 had always been intended as magazine article, and the excerpts published by Lord Dunsany in February were done so with the full sanction of the Duke of Cambridge, who had reached an

²² Watkin, Parl. Deb. 14 May 1884, col. 317.

²³ Watkin to Gladstone, 21 July 1883, BL, Add. MS 44337.

²⁴ The chronology of this campaign is further analysed in Chapter Six, below.

agreement with the Minister of War Hugh Childers to allow them to be released.²⁵ Most remarkable of all was Wolseley's Central News interview, which dispensed entirely with the pretences of privacy, anonymity, or official enquiry that had lent a fig leaf of propriety to his previous interventions. The crowning moment of his personal campaign was the publication of the Blue Book of Correspondence in August, which, although adding little to that which had already been made public, provided a final gloss of official respectability to his views.

The crucial importance of Wolseley's reputation as a distinguished officer and military expert was immediately apparent. Dunsany's article was summarised and discussed in almost every newspaper in the country, with Wolseley widely identified as the author, and this time the press reaction could not have been more different to that which had greeted *The Times*' editorial of June 1881. For the *St. James' Gazette*, for example, Wolseley's status as a soldier of the 'modern type' meant that he was unlikely to suffer from alarmism 'merely because the Duke of Wellington would have been afraid' – a reference to 1848. As far as the paper was concerned, the General's expert opinion was the only reason needed to abandon the scheme.²⁶ The extent to which military authority was suddenly thrust to the fore of the debate was revealed on 13 February, when the views of Sir John Adye and Sir Andrew Clarke appeared in the press.²⁷ Both men completely rejected the idea that the Tunnel represented a danger, with Clarke, as discussed in the previous chapter, drawing upon his extensive knowledge of railways and fortifications to pick apart Wolseley's concerns. These interventions from 'scientific officers of eminence' – Adye was the Surveyor General of Ordnance and Clarke was appointed Inspector-General of fortifications in June 1882 – gave new heart to the pro-Tunnel press. The *Liverpool Mercury* expressed relief that 'the scientific men are arraying themselves against the alarmists', contrasting Adye's and Clarke's 'special' training and extensive careers with the younger, less experienced Wolseley.²⁸ On the other hand, for the anti-Tunnel press Adye's and Clarke's

²⁵ Wolseley before Board of Trade Committee, p. 220; Wilson, *Tunnel Visions*, p. 37.

²⁶ *St. James's Gazette*, 2 Feb. 1882, p. 3.

²⁷ *The Standard*, 13 Feb. 1882, p. 3. Clarke sat on the War Office's Channel Tunnel Defence Committee, but this experience seems to have done little to affect his pro-Tunnel views. R.H. Vetch (ed.), *Life of Lieut.-General the Hon. Sir Andrew Clarke* (London: John Murray, 1905), pp. 224-225.

²⁸ *Liverpool Mercury*, 15 Feb. 1882, p. 5.

arguments simply highlighted the importance of Wolseley's emphasis on reducing the matter to military 'probabilities'. *The Morning Post* dismissed Adye and Clarke with the simple statement that 'the most that can be said in favour of these arguments is that they are probably sound, not that they are indubitably so.'²⁹ More generally, however, their interventions demonstrated how the subject had been transported suddenly and irrevocably from the realm of civil to military engineering; questions of trade and communication were now forced to play second fiddle to the military debate. The most telling illustration of this change was the view of the *Manchester Guardian*, which, in its commentary on Adye and Clarke's views, considered the question was now 'eminently one to be decided by professional authority', the paper concluding that it would only be satisfied if a large majority of military experts came down in Watkin's favour.³⁰ The traditional Liberal distrust of professional expertise had, in the face of Wolseley's onslaught, completely collapsed.

Once the centrality of armed forces opinion had been established there was little hope of a resolution in Watkin's favour. Adye and Clarke were unusual soldiers in that they were known for their liberal and humanitarian views, especially towards international relations. Adye had won the Légion d'honneur during the Crimean War, while Clarke had served as a British representative on the international committee on the Suez Canal. Both would subsequently stand unsuccessfully for parliament as Liberal Party candidates.³¹ As such, they showed how an individual's world-view defined their attitude to the project. The *Liverpool Mercury* observed that Clarke was 'well disposed to the tunnel on political grounds', while Adye's evidence before the Board of Trade Committee had been articulated in language which was not dissimilar to that of Watkin. For example, he expressed incredulity, when informed of Wolseley's 'bolt from

²⁹ *Morning Post*, 15 Feb. 1882, p. 4.

³⁰ *Manchester Guardian*, 14 Feb. 1882, p. 5.

³¹ E.M. Lloyd, rev. James Lunt, 'Adye, Sir John Miller', *ODNB*; A.G.L. Shaw, 'Clarke, Sir Andrew', *ODNB*. Clarke stood for Chatham in the 1892 General Election during which he was attacked in the press by retired Lieutenant-General J.H. Dunne, a former commandant of Chatham, who argued that Clarke's support for the Tunnel rendered him unsuitable to represent the constituency. Dunne offered himself as a candidate 'to save the town from sending to Parliament a representative with such dangerous ideas'. *The Times*, 2 Jan. 1892, p. 5.

the blue' fears, that a nation would go to war 'for sheer robbery'.³² Unlike these men, the majority of Army and Navy officers were anti-internationalists likely to share Wolseley's attitudes, a fact which became apparent, as the debate progressed.

At the same time the new focus on military opinion also seriously damaged the influence of Watkin and his own 'experts'. Once fearless and energetic men of industry, the Tunnel's promoters were now disparaged as 'capitalists', willing to subject the nation to invasion or conscription simply so that they would be able to have 'another mass of stock to manipulate at discretion'.³³ Combining Watkin's Cobdenism with his financial interest, the *Daily Telegraph* concluded that 'England cannot afford to surrender her insular security to please any number of theorists or to foster the commercial speculations of a few interested and selfish individuals.'³⁴ Politically this accusation was especially damaging because it appealed to both Conservatives and Radicals. For example, although *Reynolds's Newspaper* was extremely contemptuous of the invasion scare which it assumed was a ruse to obtain an increase in the defence budget, it also found the space to describe Watkin's own patriotism as 'nothing more than pounds, shillings and pence'.³⁵ The idea that the Tunnel represented the interests of private investors and not those of the nation was helped along by the established stereotype of railway speculators and directors as complacent, immoral and greedy, an image problem which Watkin himself had long struggled with.³⁶ This was particularly compromising when compared to Wolseley's and Dunsany's own positions as apparently disinterested military and naval officers. Following the publication of Colonel Beaumont and Lord Brabourne's essays in March, the *Daily News* spoke for many moderate newspapers when it noted with 'disappointment' the fact that both men were 'notoriously interested in the schemes for carrying the project into completion', something which was not helped by their articles' attacks on the rival CTC.³⁷ The power of this argument was illustrated by the fact that James Knowles used it as a central theme in his introduction to

³² Adye before the Board of Trade Committee, *Correspondence*, p. 231.

³³ *The Spectator*, 4 Feb. 1882, p. 7.

³⁴ *Daily Telegraph*, 13 Oct. 1882, p. 4.

³⁵ *Reynolds's Newspaper*, 7 May 1882, p. 5.

³⁶ See for example James Taylor, 'Business in Pictures: Representations of Railway Enterprise in the Satirical Press in Britain 1845-1870', *Past & Present*, 189 (2005), pp. 111-145 (pp. 136-138).

³⁷ *Daily News*, 27 Feb. 1882, p. 5.

The Channel Tunnel and Public Opinion, condemning out of hand the ‘company-promoters’ who he accused of attempting to push their Bill through parliament over the heads of a patriotic public.³⁸ Watkin’s financial interests thus contradicted any claims he might have made to be acting in the national interest, leaving the patriotic high ground firmly in the hands of Wolseley and the War Office.

A Certainty, a Probability and a Possibility: The Press, February-December 1882

The nature of the change that Wolseley’s intervention wrought on press attitudes was remarkable. Watkin’s speeches continued to be widely circulated, and SCRC activities reported with even greater diligence. But the admiring language of the 1870s had all but disappeared, replaced with serious discussions on international relations, military strategy and the merits of the ‘silver streak’. ‘It is not often that the mind of Englishmen makes itself up so rapidly on any subject as seems to have been the case in regard to the Channel Tunnel’ observed the *Saturday Review* after reflecting on the press reaction to Dunsany’s February article. ‘It is a curious feature of the case that the more it is examined the worse it looks.’³⁹ An important element of this about-turn was obviously a heightened awareness of the likelihood of invasion were the Tunnel to be built, something which affected newspapers of all political views. *The Times* treated its readers to sweeping editorials on the importance of the Channel to Britain’s national survival, while the *Morning Post*, never one to miss a chance to talk down Britain’s defences, eagerly endorsed Wolseley’s analysis of the nature of international relations.⁴⁰ *The Scotsman*, still sceptical of the invasion threat, nevertheless reminded its readers that the Channel was a ‘sure protection against the covetous inclinations of great military powers’, and even the Radical *Leeds Mercury*, initially a strong supporter of Watkin’s, eventually came to the view that the Tunnel would constitute ‘a vulnerable spot in the heart of England’ and a temptation to the French.⁴¹ Editorials from papers such as this showed that the liberal vision of peace through communication was visibly crumbling under Wolseley’s determinedly pessimistic onslaught,

³⁸ Knowles, *Public Opinion*, p. 13.

³⁹ *Saturday Review*, 11 Feb. 1882, pp. 165-166.

⁴⁰ *Morning Post*, 15 Feb. 1882, p. 4.

⁴¹ *The Scotsman*, 27 Feb. 1882, p. 4; *Leeds Mercury*, 8 Apr. 1882, p. 4.

and reflected the ease with which the British were able to adopt the idea of invasion when it presented itself. Indeed, for some Conservative organs the Tunnel presented an opportunity to reject the entire Cobdenite thesis, as *The Spectator* did in an 1883 leader which argued that ‘until the point has been reached at which two peoples are really fused into one, closeness of intercourse, far from averting the danger of conflict, greatly enhances it.’⁴²

However, when the press reaction is considered in its totality, it is clear that the change of opinion was the result of a more complex process of reasoning which emphasised economic and social risks as much as the military threat. These three, equally significant concerns, were summarised by Knowles in his introduction to *Public Opinion*. According to him, opposition to the Tunnel was rooted in a ‘certainty’ that military expenditure and therefore taxation would have to be increased to defend it; a ‘probability’ that the nation would experience more invasion panics; and, lastly, the ‘possibility of an irretrievable disaster from invasion.’⁴³ Despite the prominence given to the former two reasons by Knowles, only the invasion fear itself has received significant attention within the existing historiography, through the lens of insularity. This is unfortunate, because an appreciation of the socio-economic reasons can tell us much about contemporary anxieties regarding the internal strength of Britain’s liberal society. The ‘certain’ cost of any necessary defences, for example, was a subject of increasing concern throughout the Tunnel debate, and it is rare to find an editorial which did not touch upon it. As we have seen, the security measures demanded by the War Office would have come to millions of pounds on their own, without considering the possibility of conscription. Obviously, such an outlay would have added a substantial burden to the Army estimates and seriously strained Britain’s financially driven model of defence spending, a powerful incentive for many Liberals and Radicals to oppose the scheme. For the *Dundee Advertiser*, one of the most notable strengths of the War Office case was that it came from a perspective that the British taxpayer was likely to appreciate.⁴⁴ To many it appeared as though the SCRC investors were prepared to

⁴² *The Spectator*, 14 Apr. 1883, pp. 478-480.

⁴³ Knowles, *Public Opinion*, pp. 14-15.

⁴⁴ *Dundee Advertiser*, 14 Oct. 1882, p. 5.

see defence spending massively increased in order that they might line their own pockets, and the scheme was regularly condemned as ‘Edward Watkin’s pet project for relieving travellers between England and France from sea-sickness at the cost of a great addition to our military and naval expenditure’.⁴⁵ Indeed, it was often suggested that if the project were to go ahead these fortification costs would have to be borne predominantly or entirely by the SCRC shareholders themselves, a stipulation guaranteed to destroy investor confidence.

The issue of cost would not have had the significance it did were it not for the wider fear of panic. While panic was not key to Wolseley’s argument, once the idea was introduced into the public sphere it quickly became one of the most widely cited reasons for opposition, a fear rooted directly in the Britain’s historical experience of these events. In its first leader following the publication of Wolseley’s opposition, the *Spectator* summarised the potential military dangers and concluded that ‘the English people, without reasoning, feels the magnitude of that danger, and is, consequently, of all peoples the one most liable to panic.’⁴⁶ For the magazine, a serious panic had the potential to be as damaging as an actual invasion, arresting trade for years and wrecking Anglo-French relations. *The Times* predicted that ‘the change...in the position of this country would be distinct, and we should quickly detect the effects in general malaise, new liability to panics, a suspicion of all military operations on the part of our neighbours, and a general demand for the increase of our armaments.’⁴⁷ The paper stressed this point again following the publication of the Select Committee’s findings in 1883, drawing a direct link with the scares of the 1850s:

All those who remember the years of 1858 and 1859 can judge how far we, as a nation, can go in the direction of national uneasiness; and none will wish to revive that state of mind, with all the additional excuse that this tunnel would give it for existing.⁴⁸

Nor were these views limited to Conservative papers. John Morley’s *Pall Mall Gazette* stated that, regardless of what it considered to be the inherent absurdity of invasion fears, ‘no one can

⁴⁵ *Bath Chronicle*, 14 May 1885, p. 5.

⁴⁶ *The Spectator*, 4 Feb. 1882, p. 7.

⁴⁷ *The Times*, 16 Aug. 1882, p. 7.

⁴⁸ *The Times*, 19 July 1883, p. 9.

deny that the Tunnel would increase the impact of every French threat upon the English ear', and it thus opposed the project on these grounds.⁴⁹ The *Manchester Guardian*, which initially brushed aside fears of invasion and panic as 'absurdly illogical', eventually came to accept that an increase in the latter would be unavoidable. 'This fact being certain, nothing more is needed to guide the government to a decision.'⁵⁰ The *Leeds Mercury*'s London correspondent summarised the situation thus:

The soldiers are opposed to it, because they believe it would really add to the risks of invasion, and the peace party object to the tunnel because its existence would cause frequent panics, and would be used as a pretext for greatly increasing the armaments of the country.⁵¹

As *The Scotsman* concluded, 'at present the alarmists are kept at bay by the demonstrable security which the sea affords. Remove or lessen that security, and they will become so much stronger that it will be difficult to resist their demands.'⁵² There were few better examples of the deep, ingrained apprehension towards panic in Britain than the reaction of these newspapers. For them, British society was simply incapable of surviving exposure to the reality of its own fragility, at least compared to the 'militarised' societies of continental Europe.

Most papers, however, were not immediately convinced by Wolseley's first article. During February he was openly mocked, especially within the satirical press where he was branded an alarmist by *Funny Folks* and a 'Timid Hare' by *Punch* [Figures 15; 16]. Papers such as these were not easily convinced by theoretical military arguments, but instead eventually turned against the Tunnel in reaction to the alarm of their peers, which appeared to give a practical demonstration in the ease with which the nation might be panicked. In this context the *Liberal Daily News* provides an interesting case study into how 'panic' spread and developed within the nineteenth century news media. During the previous decade the paper had been an enthusiastic

⁴⁹ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 14 Oct. 1882, p. 1.

⁵⁰ *Manchester Guardian*, 17 June 1882, p. 9; 14 Oct. 1882, p. 7.

⁵¹ *Leeds Mercury*, 14 Oct. 1882, p. 6.

⁵² *The Scotsman*, 27 Feb. 1882, p. 4.

supporter of the ‘great international roadway’.⁵³ When Wolseley’s brief letter of October 1881 was published the paper dismissed it, instead using its editorial to imagine the moment when the last piece of chalk would be broken and the workers ‘stand suddenly face to face with their comrades from the opposite shore.’⁵⁴ The *News* appears to have been given advance notice of Dunsany’s February article, for on 30 January it published a discussion of the piece. It identified a ‘certain illiberality in objecting to greater freedom of communication between nations’ and, while not completely dismissing Wolseley’s objection, was not inclined to accept them.⁵⁵ However, by 13 February there was a visible change in the paper’s stance. Although it remained firmly opposed to a policy of ‘exclusion’ and deeply sceptical of any invasion threat, it had clearly been shaken by the speed with which the invasion scare had taken hold. ‘Is it worth while’, it asked, ‘to run the chance, or rather to incur the certainty, of these scares with their consequent expenditure for the sake of a Channel Tunnel?’⁵⁶ It observed that the railway might affect the steadiness of the London stock exchange, and expressed disappointment that the promoters had, in its view, relied more on emotion than reason in defence of their scheme. On 27 February it published a full discussion of Brabourne’s and Beaumont’s articles in a leader which was dominated by the subject of panic. The invasion scare, it was sure, had been ‘fostered by persons who have nothing to gain by fostering it’ – a reference to Wolseley’s status as an ‘expert’ – while Watkin and his supporters were characterised as ‘interested’ parties. ‘The fears of Lord Dunsany and Sir Garnet Wolseley may be utter folly’, it continued, ‘but they exist, they are shared by hundreds and thousands of other people, and they are not of a nature to be quieted, but to be exasperated by the actual creation of the Tunnel.’⁵⁷ The Tunnel, as one letter to the paper made clear, was increasingly being discussed in Liberal circles as a threat to British society:

Surely the vast majority of your readers must feel that those institutions of freedom and those opportunities of progress in furtherance of which your voice is always

⁵³ *Daily News*, 17 June 1881, p. 5.

⁵⁴ *Daily News*, 19 Oct. 1881, p. 5.

⁵⁵ *Daily News*, 30 Jan. 1882, p. 5.

⁵⁶ *Daily News*, 13 Feb. 1882, p. 5.

⁵⁷ *Daily News*, 27 Feb. 1882, p. 5.

consistently raised are themselves endangered by the tolerated pursuance of this short-sighted scheme, in which the Continent has everything to gain and England has everything to lose.⁵⁸

On 18 March, in a piece which opened with a forceful attack on Watkin's self-interest, the paper declared conclusively against the Channel Tunnel, specifically on the issue of panic. The Tunnel, it was now sure, meant 'constant alarm, constant expense, constant diversion of the national attention and the national purse from useful objects to useless ones.'⁵⁹ In concluding, it observed that no one acquainted with the history of British public opinion could deny panic's dangerous power, clear evidence of how the memory of past scares inspired and reinforced the anxieties of the present.

By the time of the 18 March *Daily News* editorial, Watkin had lost the support of much of the British press, London and regional; certainly by the summer the vast majority had turned against him [Figure 17]. The nature of the papers which remained favourable to the Tunnel were indicative of how isolated his position was. *Reynolds's Newspaper* continued to support the idea, although this was as much to do with its antipathy towards the rest of the media and the 'stupid and ridiculous' War Office than anything else.⁶⁰ The only other major London title in favour was the *Illustrated London News*, which on 4 March ran a strongly pro-tunnel piece incorporating text from Beaumont's article and accompanied by a set of illustrations, including one showing how easily the Tunnel might be defended.⁶¹ This was clearly a propaganda piece inserted on Watkin's behest, however, for he was closely associated with the paper, having managed it during the 1860s.⁶² Inevitably this overwhelming media bias came to be seen by some as representative of the nation as a whole. As early as late February *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper* reflected that, however fine the idea of an Anglo-French railway, politicians, the military and the public were generally against it; by April *The Standard* felt able to write that

⁵⁸ A.N. Blatchford, *Daily News*, 16 Mar. 1882, p. 3.

⁵⁹ *Daily News*, 18 Mar. 1882, pp. 4-5.

⁶⁰ *Reynolds's Newspaper*, 26 Feb. 1882, p. 5; 7 May 1882, p. 5.

⁶¹ *Illustrated London News*, 4 Mar. 1882, pp. 217, 219, 221, 224.

⁶² Watkin had been a close friend of the paper's founder Herbert Ingram, whose widow he married in 1893. Isabel Bailey, 'Ingram, Herbert', *ODNB*.

the SCRC 'are the only persons really interested in its success.'⁶³ For James Knowles, the opposition of the press was 'but the echo of the talk of ninety-nine out of every hundred unbiased men who have considered the subject.'⁶⁴ These assumptions of national unity reflected the contemporary tendency to treat the press as a mirror of the national mood. Certainly, there was a strong and growing feeling in the country against the Tunnel, but the true situation was much more complex than the unanimity painted by Knowles and endorsed by subsequent historians.

⁶³ *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper*, 26 Feb. 1882, p. 1; *The Standard*, 7 Apr. 1882, p. 5.

⁶⁴ Knowles, *Public Opinion*, p. 14.



HOPES AND FEARS; OR, A DREAM OF THE CHANNEL TUNNEL.

Figure 15: 'Hopes and Fears; or, a Dream of the Channel Tunnel.'

Wolsey, depicted as a 'timid Hare', and the Duke of Cambridge, who has a prominent 'white' feather in his hat, take fright at Lord Richard Grosvenor and Sir John Hawkshaw, both of the CTC. Meanwhile, French frogs use the Tunnel to invade. *Punch*, 25 Feb. 1882, p. 87.

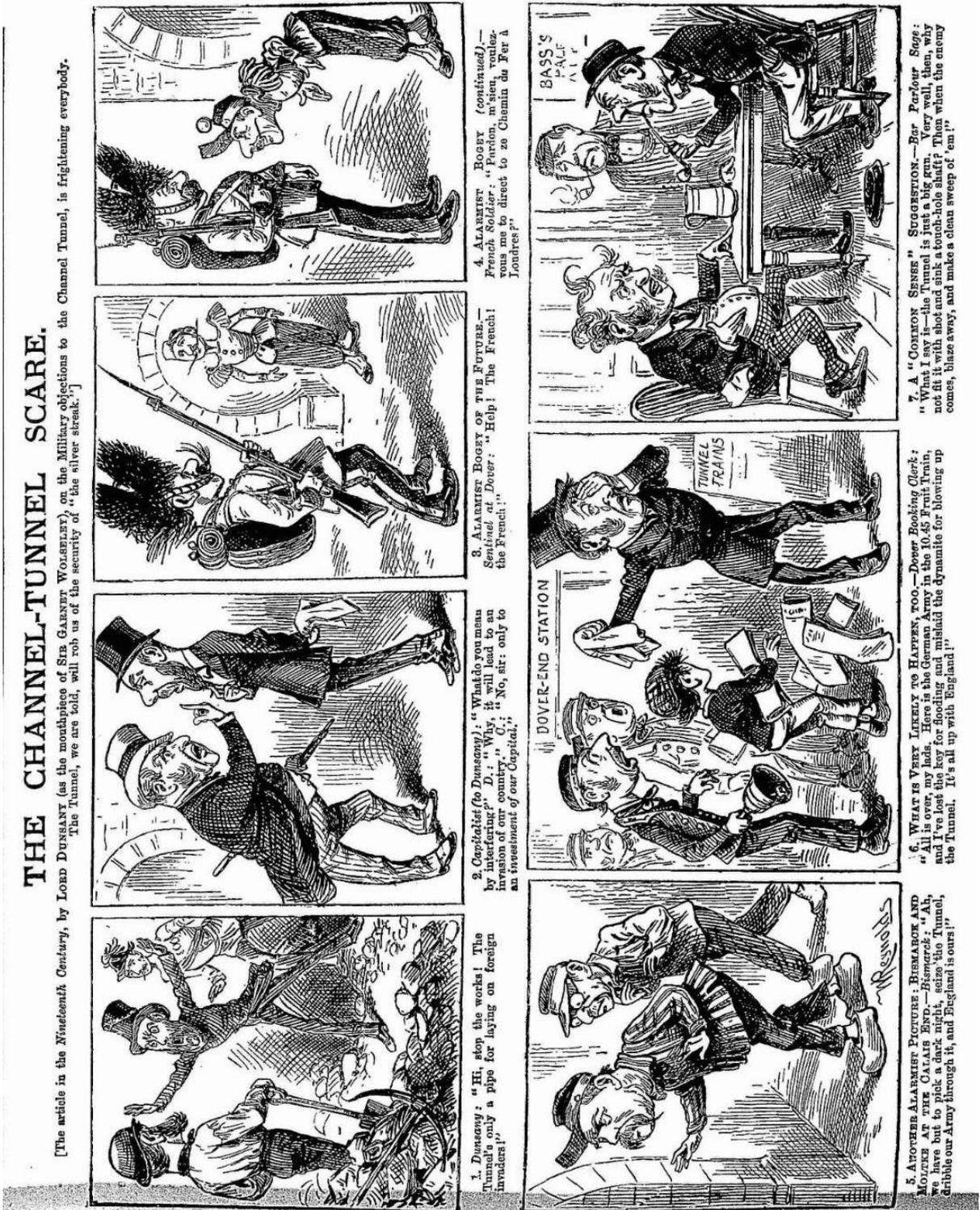


Figure 16: 'The Channel Tunnel Scare'.

Top row, left to right: Dunsany followed by Wolseley attempts to stop the Tunnel construction; Watkin confronts Dunsany; a sentry at Dover confronts the 'alarmist bogey of the future'; The French soldier asks for directions to the train to London. Bottom row, left to right: Bismarck and Moltke examine Calais entrance in 'another alarmist picture'; the German Army invades Britain in the 10:45 fruit train; a 'bar parlour sage' proposes using the Tunnel as an enormous gun to stop the invaders. *Funny Folks*, Feb. 11, 1882, p. 45.

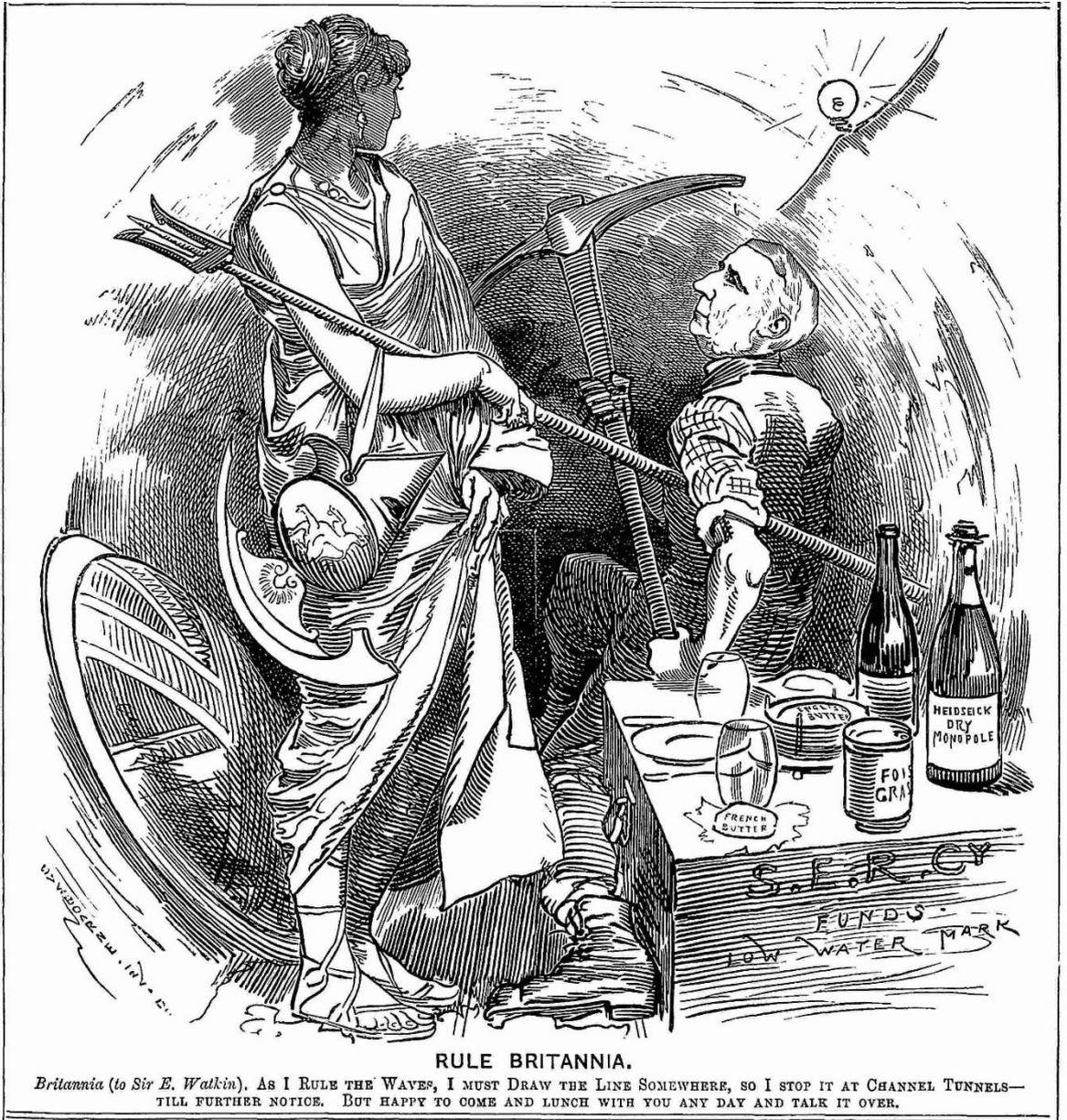


Figure 17: 'Rule Britannia'.

Britannia, representing the will of the people, puts an end to Watkin's digging. *Punch*, 15 July 1882, p. 15.

‘Public Opinion’, 1882-1883

For most nineteenth century political issues, judging the opinion of the public is largely limited to newspaper editorials or public speeches. In this respect the Channel Tunnel was different, because it inspired a wide range of responses which allow for a more far-reaching analysis of attitudes. The first indication that the controversy had created a larger than usual public reaction was the famous *Nineteenth Century* petition protesting the ‘military dangers and liabilities’ of the Tunnel, organised by Knowles himself and published in April and May 1882.⁶⁵

Remembered seven years later as ‘more influentially signed as anything of the kind which had ever been put forward in this country’, and described by Hadfield-Amkhan as ‘comprehensive and representative’, it contained over a thousand signatures, and Knowles claimed that only a lack of space had precluded him from printing more.⁶⁶ The most notable effect of the petition was to confirm the depth of feeling within the armed services and especially among soldiers. 173 army and thirty-three naval officers signed, including fifteen full generals and ten admirals, apparently confirming the Duke of Cambridge’s assertion that the military was overwhelmingly opposed to the scheme.⁶⁷ In this respect the petition probably represented the most significant example of collective political action by Britain’s armed forces between the abolition of purchase in 1871 and the Curragh incident of 1914. Whether or not this was the case, it was certainly true that only a tiny number of serving or retired army officers offered Watkin public support in 1882, limited almost entirely to Adye, Clarke and Beaumont. It is probable that far more officers opposed the Tunnel than put their names on the petition; Cambridge himself, for example, did not appear on it, despite Knowles’ wish to have the Duke at its head.⁶⁸ This did not reflect any want of intimacy between the *Nineteenth Century* and Horse Guards, however. At the end of May the Duke invited Knowles to the War Office to talk with him in anticipation of

⁶⁵ Reprinted in Knowles, *Public Opinion*, pp. 1-12.

⁶⁶ Captain E. O’Callaghan in Colonel H. Montague Hozier, ‘The Channel Tunnel’, *Journal of the Society of Arts*, 37 (Jan. 1889), pp. 124-135 (p. 133); Hadfield-Amkhan, *Foreign Policy*, p. 80.

⁶⁷ Cambridge Memorandum, p. 209.

⁶⁸ Wilson, *Tunnel Visions*, p. 39.

the former's appearance before the Lansdowne Committee, an indication of how closely the military establishment and the press worked together in their opposition to the Tunnel.⁶⁹

The list also included dozens of peers and knights, over fifty Justices of the Peace, and more than 200 clergymen including the Archbishop of York, two Church of England Bishops, and a small number of Nonconformist and Catholic ministers including Cardinals Manning and Newman. This strong religious showing is especially notable in the context of Watkin's attempts, discussed above, to portray the Tunnel as a project sanctioned by divine will.

Although not a strong theme in the oppositional discourse, these claims were publicly objected to on a number of occasions, and the significance of the Channel as a defensive feature created by 'Providence' was a natural ingredient of the vocabulary. During his 1882 paper at the Society of Arts, for example, Watkin was challenged by a retired Admiral who compared the grey chalk under the Channel to Eve's apple, a temptation created by God to test the British nation.⁷⁰ Later that year one Reverend Thomas Burney went so far as to print a twelve-page open letter to Gladstone, sent to every Member of Parliament, which declared the Tunnel to be an act of 'rebellion' against God proved through the interpretation of certain unspecified 'sacred prophecies'.⁷¹ With its insular geography so vital to its security, religion was never far from the British national defence discourse. This being said, it is interesting to note that beyond Knowles' petition and the maverick Burney, religious figures were entirely absent from the Channel Tunnel debate. Research for this chapter uncovered no letters to the press or other expressions of opposition from clergy, including the Bishops in the Lords. Whether this indicated a genuine reluctance to engage in public controversy or a more practical recognition that the matter was better left to the military experts is difficult to tell; what is clear, however, is that feeling against the scheme was reached the very top of Britain's religious elite. Of course, considering the feeling against the Tunnel within high society and the Conservative party, with

⁶⁹ Duke of Cambridge to James Knowles, 30 May 1883, City of Westminster Archives Centre, 0716/6/21.

⁷⁰ Admiral Sir John D. Hay in Watkin, 'Channel Tunnel', p. 572.

⁷¹ Thomas Burney, *The Battle of the Channel Tunnel... A Letter* (Norwich: Self-Published, 1882), pp. 10-12.

which the Church of England was closely intertwined, this religious opposition may be less surprising than it first seems.

Other prominent signatures included establishment pillars such as the Poet Laureate Lord Tennyson and the Governor of the Bank of England H.R. Grenfell, through to the editors of *The Spectator*, *St. James' Gazette* and *The Morning Post*. The renowned philanthropist Baroness Angela Burdett-Coutts, a childhood friend of the arch-alarmist Wellington, also signed, appearing alongside only six other signatories who can be identified as female, an important reminder of the fundamentally male nature of the nineteenth century public sphere.⁷² Twenty-seven MPs put their names down, thirteen of whom were Conservatives including the former Home Secretary Richard Assheton Cross and three men who would go on to hold prominent ministerial posts in Salisbury's next government, Edward Stanhope, Sir Michael Hicks-Beach, and Arthur Balfour – a clear indication that Tunnel opposition had become the majority view within the Party.⁷³

More surprising, however, were the remaining fourteen MPs, all of whom were Liberals. Among the latter were the scientist John Lubbock, the industrialist L.L. Dillwyn, the French-born Pandeli Ralli and, much to the chagrin of his fellow trade unionists, the Radical Thomas Burt; a number of others were noted for the strength of their support for Cobdenite free trade principles.⁷⁴ Knowles had also succeeded in securing a number of other Liberal notables, such as the editor of *Lloyd's Weekly News* Blanchard Jerrold, the evolutionary scientist Thomas Huxley, the social theorist Herbert Spencer, the poet Wilfred Blunt, and the historian Goldwin Smith, all of whom were prominent internationalists. Smith, a passionate member of the Manchester School, published a short essay explaining his opposition in the March issue of *The*

⁷² Edna Healey, 'Coutts, Angela Georgina Burdett-', *ODNB*.

⁷³ In full, the Tory signatories were: Richard Assheton Cross, Admiral John Dalrymple Hay, W. Bromley-Davenport, Henry Holland, Edward Stanhope, Lord Eustace Cecil, Arthur James Balfour, Sir Thomas Bateson, Sir Michael Hicks-Beach, Sir John H. Kennaway, G.W.P. Bentinck, A.J. Beresford Hope, Walter Long.

⁷⁴ In full, the Liberal signatories were: John Lubbock, Arthur Otway, James W. Barclay, Thomas Burt, George Howard, Pandeli Ralli, Hugh Fortescue, Francis Charteris, Marston C. Buszard, Horace Davey, L.L. Dillwyn, Cyril Flower, Sir Harry Verney, J.A. Hardcastle. See also Howe, *Free Trade*, p. 186, n. 219.

Nineteenth Century, alongside Dunsany's second piece.⁷⁵ The Channel, he wrote, was perhaps the most historically significant geographical feature on the globe. It had protected British liberties, and allowed the British to aid those on the Continent struggling against tyranny. He also argued, in an important admission for a follower of Cobden, that the opinions of civilians counted for nothing on military matters. 'On the pacific influence of commerce', he concluded, 'rather too much has been placed; nations, like men, are often governed by their temper as by their interests'. Smith's essay was a significant gain for Wolseley, not least because it appears to have pushed the *Daily News* towards its own opposition, but it also represented a more grievous loss for Watkin.⁷⁶ By arguing for the importance of the Channel in securing British liberties, Smith essentially twisted Watkin's own appeals to liberalism back on himself. Furthermore, in appealing to the unreliable 'temper' of nations, Smith illustrated how otherwise dyed-in-the-wool liberals could be turned against the Tunnel if their fear of populism, jingoism, or panic was stronger than their belief in the rationality of the people.⁷⁷ In a similar manner, it is likely that this lack of faith in the public inspired many other liberals to sign the petition, as the *Scotsman* was quick to point out:

It is safe to say that Professor Huxley and Mr. Herbert Spencer do not share the fears of those who think invasion likely; but they know that the expression of these or like fears has given rise to panics which have cost the country millions of money and brought us sometimes to the brink of war ... The alarmists sign because they are alarmists; the non-alarmists sign because they do not wish the country to be alarmed.⁷⁸

As a document, then, the *Nineteenth Century*'s petition offers a fascinating indication of the extent to which 'public opinion' was beginning to move, willingly or not, away from the optimistic outlook of the 1870s. It reflected a basic nervousness towards the nation and its people which would be so successfully exploited by the alarmists of the following three decades.

⁷⁵ Goldwin Smith, 'The Channel Tunnel: A Civilian's View', *Nineteenth Century* (Mar. 1882), pp. 333-336.

⁷⁶ *Daily News*, 27 Feb. 1882, p. 5.

⁷⁷ Smith's 'belief in democracy and the people, though real, was always fragile'. Christopher A. Kent, 'Smith, Goldwin', *ODNB*.

⁷⁸ *The Scotsman*, 31 Mar. 1882, p. 4.

However, a closer consideration of the petition suggests another interpretation, one which raises a number of questions about the meaning, scope and influence of ‘public opinion’ in nineteenth century Britain. Certainly, there were a great many names from high society, but this was hardly a surprise when one considers Knowles’ own importance within the nation’s elite. A substantial number of the signatories were drawn from those who had previously contributed to the magazine, and eleven particularly prominent names had been members of the famous Metaphysical Society, of which Knowles had been the founder.⁷⁹ Similarly, Knowles was involved in charity work with Burdett-Coutts and wrote to her in April 1882, asking her to approach her friends about the Tunnel.⁸⁰ An architect by trade, Knowles even convinced the master plasterer on his latest building project to sign.⁸¹ The petition thus reveals much about the importance and effectiveness of personal networks, but a focus on these famous names distracts from the fact that Knowles’ attempts to convince many from outside this exclusive set were far from fruitful. In particular he was determined to obtain the support of ‘trades societies’, both Chambers of Trade and Trades Unions, and to this end he dispatched requests for support to such bodies across the country, with the aim of reflecting the ‘overwhelmingly strong’ opinion which, he was sure, existed in all layers of society.⁸²

The reaction of the commercial community was, to say the least, mixed. No Chamber of Commerce gave its official support to Knowles’ petition, reflecting what seems to have been a wider lack of consensus among men of industry and commerce. As a commercial proposition the Tunnel was obviously not a scheme to be dismissed out of hand, especially, as the *Chamber of Commerce Journal* reminded its readers in April 1883, if a repeat of the costly British opposition to the Suez Canal were to be avoided.⁸³ In 1875 seventy three separate Chambers were said to have endorsed the Tunnel, support which Watkin was still claiming in 1888.⁸⁴

⁷⁹ Metcalf, *Knowles*, p. 293. The eleven were Lord Tennyson, Professor Huxley, Sir John Lubbock, Cardinal Manning, Professor St. George Mivart, the Archbishop of York, the Bishop of Gloucester and Bristol, the Bishop of Peterborough, Frederic Harrison, R.H. Hutton and Roden Noel.

⁸⁰ Metcalf, *Knowles*, p. 296; James Knowles to Angela Burdett-Coutts, 5 Apr. 1882, BL, Add. MS 85301.

⁸¹ Metcalf, *Knowles*, p. 290.

⁸² *Manchester Courier*, 15 Apr. 1882, p. 3.

⁸³ *Chamber of Commerce Journal*, 5 Apr. 1883, p. 81.

⁸⁴ *The Times*, 30 Jan. 1875, p. 9; Watkin, Parl. Deb., 27 June 1888, col. 1434.

Certainly, many remained enthusiastic. The Sheffield Chamber and the board of directors of the Manchester Chamber passed supportive resolutions, while Newcastle's president gave a speech praising the scheme's 'enormous commercial advantages'.⁸⁵ Interestingly, considering their geographical proximity to the proposed Tunnel mouth, the assembled members of Canterbury's Chamber of Trade heartily welcomed a speech mocking invasion fears.⁸⁶ When one of Watkin's associates approached a number of Chamber of Commerce directors to see if they would give evidence to the Select Committee he received supportive letters from Bradford, Nottingham, London, Glasgow and Derby.⁸⁷ On the other hand, the chairman and several members of the Edinburgh Chamber opposed the scheme for fear of an increase in military spending and panics, Wolverhampton was 'adverse' to it, while Southampton actually passed a resolution against it, albeit for reasons of a very local nature, namely the fear that the increased railway freight would damage their port's trade.⁸⁸ Significantly, considering Chamberlain's pivotal ministerial role, the Secretary to the Birmingham Chamber reported that none of its members were in favour.⁸⁹

Such division was not limited to differences between Chambers, but also within them. The Aberdeen, Huddersfield, and Bristol Chambers could not come to an agreement on the issue, although the latter's president did sign Knowles' petition.⁹⁰ Even in Manchester the Chamber's board was challenged by one member who accused it of failing to represent the opinions of its constituents, who, according to him, were afraid of conscription.⁹¹ In his evidence to the Select Committee the following year, John Slagg, as ex-President of the Manchester Chamber, admitted that the City's commercial community was divided by the invasion scare.⁹² The London Chamber, along with many others, does not appear to have ever discussed the subject.

⁸⁵ *Leeds Mercury*, 15 Sept. 1882, p. 4; *Manchester Guardian*, 7 Nov. 1882, p. 3, *Newcastle Courant*, 22 Sept. 1882, p. 2.

⁸⁶ *Whitstable Times and Herne Bay Herald*, 4 Mar. 1882, p. 3.

⁸⁷ See list in TNA, RAIL 779/23.

⁸⁸ *Edinburgh Evening News*, 6 Oct. 1882, p. 3; *Birmingham Daily Post*, 4 June 1883, p. 8; *Hampshire Advertiser*, 9 June 1883, p. 8.

⁸⁹ TNA, RAIL 779/23.

⁹⁰ *Huddersfield Chronicle*, 12 Aug. 1882, p. 6; *Dundee Courier*, 31 Mar. 1882, p. 7; *Western Daily Press*, 28 June 1883, p. 5.

⁹¹ *Manchester Guardian*, 7 Nov. 1882, p. 3.

⁹² Slagg evidence p. 123. This division itself appears to have been disputed by one director of the Manchester Chamber. See letter and notes from John Bennett in TNA, RAIL 779/23.

Most directors approached by the SCRC in 1883 either referred the issue to someone else or were otherwise unable or unwilling to give an opinion, a position also taken by the Central Chamber of Commerce when contacted by the Lansdowne Committee.⁹³ In all likelihood, the contentious nature of the issue encouraged most to leave the matter to the government; one director of the Derby Chamber wrote to Watkin's associate in 1883 that, as the matter had become one of 'imperial interests', it would be 'unwise to interfere at present'.⁹⁴ Thus, while it is clear that Knowles' appeals failed to elicit the widespread outpouring of hostility he had anticipated from the commercial community, the scare had nevertheless succeeded in muting many influential voices.

Knowles was similarly keen to see working class organisations represented in his petition. In this respect he was sorely disappointed, for only a handful of minor trade associations were present in the final document, although he did manage to net the labour leaders Thomas Burt and George Howell, both of whom had written for the *Nineteenth Century* on other topics.⁹⁵ Far from apathy, however, Knowles' circular actually uncovered a substantial level of support for the Tunnel within the trade union movement. When, in April 1882, his letter was discussed at the London Trades' Council, the Council instead adopted a resolution condemning the 'absurd' opposition and declaring that Watkin's project would be of great benefit to the people of Britain and France.⁹⁶ The Secretary of the Council was George B. Shipton, a leading member of a number of trades organisations, noted peace campaigner, and editor of the *Labour Standard*, a paper which Friedrich Engels tellingly dismissed as 'predominantly Gladstonian'.⁹⁷ Galvanised by Knowles' letter, Shipton set about communicating and organising meetings with other trades councils around the country, resulting in pro-Tunnel resolutions passed at meetings in

⁹³ TNA, RAIL 779/23. See also Sir Hussey Vivian, Parl. Deb., 14 May 1884, cols. 331-32.

⁹⁴ TNA, RAIL 779/23.

⁹⁵ Metcalf, *Knowles*, p. 293.

⁹⁶ George Shipton, *Select Committee*, p. 127.

⁹⁷ Obituary in *West London Observer*, 20 Oct. 1911, p. 3; Royden Harrison, *Before the Socialists: Studies in Labour and Politics, 1861-1881* (London: Routledge, 1965), p. 312; Brake and Demoor, *Dictionary of Nineteenth-Century Journalism*, p. 339.

Birmingham, Liverpool, Leeds, Bristol and Manchester.⁹⁸ On 3 July Ferdinand de Lesseps, who had recently been given a tour of the Tunnel workings by Watkin, was met in London by a deputation of union leaders including Shipton. Claiming to represent half a million workers, the deputation passed a resolution declaring that the Tunnel would ‘promote closer union between the industrial classes of England and France’.⁹⁹ In August George Potter, former editor of the influential trade unionist *Bee-Hive*, published *The Channel Tunnel and International Progress*, which argued for the working class to make its voice heard:¹⁰⁰

...the working classes, who have the deepest interest in the matter, should speak out unreservedly and emphatically on every point of the question, and especially as one vitally affecting the brotherhood of mankind, the amity of nations, the widest extension of commerce, and the unbounded expansion of the field of remunerative labour.¹⁰¹

On 16 September the Amalgamated Labourers Union convened a special meeting in London which described the Tunnel as an ‘incalculable boon to the labouring classes’, a resolution which they sent to the Prime Minister.¹⁰² A few days later the annual meeting of the National Trades Union Congress was held at Manchester. Although the Congress itself did not discuss the Tunnel, the Congress President and a substantial number of other prominent labour leaders from across the United Kingdom signed a separate declaration calling the military fears ‘unworthy of very serious consideration by the nation at large’. A ‘Workmen’s Channel Tunnel Committee’ was set up with Shipton as its Secretary, and was soon in contact with French trade unions. In September 1883, it sent a deputation to Paris to express their support for the Tunnel. In France they were fêted wherever they went by representatives of French trade unions, were introduced to the President and Prime Minister by the British Ambassador, and were enthusiastically welcomed by a list of names as glittering as that which had signed *The*

⁹⁸ *The Globe*, 4 Sept. 1882, p. 2. Bristol appears to have been particularly enthusiastic: see *Western Daily Press*, 7 Dec. 1882, p. 6.

⁹⁹ *Reynolds’ Newspaper*, 9 July 1882, p. 1.

¹⁰⁰ Henry Pelling, *A History of British Trade Unionism* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1963), p. 60. Potter had been funded by the Cobden Club in 1881 to produce works in support of free trade: Howe, *Free Trade*, p. 130.

¹⁰¹ George Potter, *The Channel Tunnel and International Progress*, (London, 1882), p. 19.

¹⁰² *South London Press*, 23 Sept. 1882, p. 12. For Gladstone’s reply see *St. James’ Gazette*, 3 Oct. 1882, p. 11.

Nineteenth Century's protest, including De Lesseps, Victor Hugo and the editor of the *Revue Nouvelle*, Juliette Adam.

In 1883 an account of this delegation, a list of pro-Tunnel labour resolutions, a summary of the Workman's Channel Tunnel Committee and the text of John Bright's speech to the Institute of Civil Engineers was published as *The Channel Tunnel and Industrial Opinion*.¹⁰³ Addressed directly to 'fellow workmen', the pamphlet claimed to reflect an 'unbiased and spontaneous popular expression of opinion in favour of constructing the Tunnel'.¹⁰⁴ It 'fearlessly asserted' that the majority of Englishmen were in favour of the Tunnel, and accused Knowles of misrepresenting this fact. In an explicit riposte to Knowles' *Public Opinion* it also included an extremely critical review of the *Nineteenth Century* pamphlet.¹⁰⁵ It pointed out the paucity of names on the petition outside of armed forces officers and 'parsons', condemning the latter as believers in 'faith rather than science', and was similarly contemptuous of Wolseley and his fellow officers. In a passage which could have been drafted by Cobden himself, it accused the armed forces and upper classes of hijacking British foreign policy:

We are not constrained to allow the military, naval, and aristocratic authorities, together with a sprinkling of the clergy, magistracy, and journalists of the Press devoted to the upper-class ascendancy, to dictate for us the industrial policy of England ... Our mission is to destroy the necessity for soldiers and dismiss them altogether, rather than hold them up as councillors to guide the international policy of a pre-eminently industrial nation.¹⁰⁶

Read in full, *Industrial Opinion* shows a trade union leadership determined to forge a voice for itself equal to that of 'society'. It illustrates, furthermore, how fiercely many within the movement held Cobdenite interpretations of both free trade and anti-militarism.¹⁰⁷ In this respect, the pamphlet took a firmly internationalist line, repeatedly emphasising how the

¹⁰³ The Workmen's Committee, *The Channel Tunnel and Industrial Opinion* (London: William Bassett, 1883).

¹⁰⁴ Workmen's Committee, *Industrial Opinion*, p. iii.

¹⁰⁵ Workmen's Committee, *Industrial Opinion*, pp. 41-44.

¹⁰⁶ Workmen's Committee, *Industrial Opinion*, pp. iv-v.

¹⁰⁷ Anthony Howe, 'Towards the 'Hungry Forties': Free Trade in Britain, 1880-1906' in Eugenio F. Biagini (ed.), *Citizenship and Community* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 193-218; Biagini, *Liberty, Retrenchment and Reform*, p. 101. Many TUC representatives were also involved members of the peace movement: Laity, *British Peace Movement*, p. 108.

interests of the British and French peoples were ‘mutual and identical’. The printed speeches of the British deputation in France were defined by humanitarianism, liberty, and progress, and looked to the Tunnel as the first step towards an Anglo-French union.¹⁰⁸ In his speech, Shipton argued that by creating an ‘intimate alliance of the two most liberal nations’, the Tunnel would constitute the foundation stone of the Federated States of Europe.¹⁰⁹ This Francophilia contrasts interestingly with the less enthusiastic internationalism of others within the British trade union movement, who distrusted the pronounced revolutionary Marxism of their continental counterparts.¹¹⁰ In this respect the Workmen’s Channel Tunnel Committee was an example of an attempt to unite British and French trade unionists under the banner of liberalism during a period when the two nations’ labour organisations were often politically divided.¹¹¹

Trade union support for the Channel Tunnel was active and substantial. While it is difficult to judge the extent to which these labour leaders reflected the views of their members, it is telling that only the shipping workers of the Port of London appear to have held a meeting against it, and this because they were concerned it would take trade from the Port.¹¹² As a result of his work, George Shipton was invited to give evidence to the parliamentary Select Committee, where he argued that the ‘popular sentiment of the working classes’ was in favour of the Tunnel.¹¹³ Over the following decade trade unions and societies continued to make their voices heard: in June 1885, for example, the Association of Permanent Way Inspectors passed two resolutions in favour of the Tunnel, which they believed would make an Anglo-French war ‘almost impossible’.¹¹⁴ On first consideration, then, it seems remarkable that no historian is aware of the depth and extent of working class feeling.¹¹⁵ Looking more broadly, however, it is clear that this omission is simply a reflection of contemporary biases. Of the 1883 Parliamentary

¹⁰⁸ Workmen’s Committee, *Industrial Opinion*, p. 13.

¹⁰⁹ Workmen’s Committee, *Industrial Opinion*, pp. 15-16.

¹¹⁰ See for example British labour reactions to the First International and the Paris Commune discussed in Biagini, *Liberty, Retrenchment and Reform*, pp. 60-67.

¹¹¹ Pelling, *British Trade Unionism*, pp. 118-119.

¹¹² *South London Press*, 2 Sept. 1882, p. 10.

¹¹³ Shipton, *Select Committee*, p. 131.

¹¹⁴ *Meetings of the SCRC...December 23rd 1885 and January 14th 1886* (London: C.F. Roworth, 1886), pp. 4-5.

¹¹⁵ Wilson very briefly mentions the subject, *Visions*, pp. 39-40.

Joint Select Committee's seven reports not one referred to Shipton's evidence or the wider trade union movement. Newspapers were generally contemptuous of the working class agitation, often accusing it of being in the pay of Watkin, a charge angrily rejected in *Industrial Opinion*.¹¹⁶ Watkin himself appeared to be unaware of the extent of the trade union support in his evidence to the Select Committee, and there is no evidence that he and Shipton ever met during this period.¹¹⁷ Only in later years, as we shall see, was the working class dimension raised in Parliament. That 'industrial opinion' was so roundly ignored is indicative of the contemporary view of public opinion, which could be easily constructed so as to exclude anyone from outside the upper and upper middle classes. Having differed from the fashionable view of the establishment, the working classes were disregarded in favour of 'representative' newspaper editorials and Lord Tennyson's signature.

One other interesting indicator of public attitudes was the popularity of the Channel Tunnel as a subject for local debating and 'parliamentary' societies, a hobby which had become widespread by the early 1880s.¹¹⁸ Looking back in 1887, *The Globe* remembered the Tunnel as 'the question of the day', on which 'excited speeches [were] made in every debating society in the kingdom'.¹¹⁹ Unfortunately reporting on debates was very patchy, but a search of digitised local newspapers identified seventeen Tunnel debates in England in the years 1882 and 1883 [Appendix 1].¹²⁰ Of these twelve resulted in motions against the project and five in favour, but the headline figures conceal some very close and popular discussions. For example, the Colchester Parliamentary Debating Society opposed the Tunnel on a vote of thirty-five to thirty-

¹¹⁶ See for example *Western Daily Press*, 9 Sept. 1882, p. 6; *Manchester Times*, 16 Dec. 1882, p. 5. Workmen's Committee, *Industrial Opinion*, p. 44.

¹¹⁷ Watkin, *Select Committee*, p. 24. Shipton's name was included in what appears to be a list of labour leaders 'who take an interest in this great international work', headed Joseph Arch and Alexander Wilkie, compiled by the CTC's secretary in 1888. TNA, RAIL 779/20, 4 Sept. 1888.

¹¹⁸ The first national congress of parliamentary debating societies was held in Liverpool in April 1882. See *Liverpool Mercury*, 26 Apr. 1882, p. 7. For more information on debating societies and 'local parliaments', and their use in judging public opinion, see Jones, *Powers of the Press*, pp. 190-210; H.C.G. Matthew, 'Gladstone, Rhetoric and Politics' in Peter J. Jagger, *Gladstone* (London: Hambledon, 1998) pp. 213-234 (pp. 215-217).

¹¹⁹ *The Globe*, 25 Feb. 1887, p. 1.

¹²⁰ There is evidence that some Scottish societies tackled the issue, but the results of their debates were not recorded.

nine, after a debate with an attendance of about 160 people.¹²¹ On the other side of the country the Debating Society of the Somerset hamlet of Washford voted against the Tunnel by a majority of one after a two-day debate which saw a ‘capital attendance’ of both men and women.¹²² The subject continued to be popular over the following years, evidentially regarded as a model debating topic. In 1884 the Swindon Debating Society was exactly split after a long and enthusiastic exchange, while in 1887 two debating clubs in Kent returned opposite votes on what was obviously an issue of substantial local interest.¹²³ In 1891 the Folkestone Society came down by a large majority against the scheme, although this was after a poorly attended debate on what by then must have been a subject which the town had long since exhausted itself.¹²⁴

The attractiveness of the Channel Tunnel as a debate question pointed to the interest commanded by the questions it posed about Britain’s position in the world. Where the debates themselves were reported in the press, it was clear that the subject fell along the lines defined by Watkin and Wolseley; between trade and friendly intercourse on the one hand, and the danger of war, expense and panic on the other.¹²⁵ As the Chairman of the Wellingborough Debating Society opined on introducing that society’s debate, the Channel Tunnel was ‘a very good subject for every Englishman to express his opinion on’.¹²⁶ With the caveat that debating was an obviously middle-class hobby, these debates offer another window through which a more representative appreciation of the national picture can be acquired.

The conclusion to be drawn from the above evidence, then, is that the Channel Tunnel debate was much more evenly balanced than historians have hitherto suspected. Other, less public examples might also be cited. Following a visit to the Tunnel in May 1882, twelve Oxford academics, six of whom were professors including the Sedleian Professor of Natural Philosophy, wrote to the Board of Trade to insist that the ‘important and interesting scientific

¹²¹ *Essex Standard*, 13 Jan. 1883, p. 5.

¹²² *West Somerset Free Press*, 27 Oct. 1883, p. 5; 10 Nov., p. 5

¹²³ *Swindon Advertiser*, 23 Feb. 1884, p. 3; *Sevenoaks Chronicle and Kentish Advertiser*, 18 Nov. 1887, p. 5; *Kent & Sussex Courier*, 18 Nov. 1887, p. 8.

¹²⁴ *Folkestone Herald*, 12 Dec. 1891, p. 12.

¹²⁵ See the report on the Tunbridge Wells Debating Club, *Kent and Sussex Courier*, 14 Dec. 1883, p. 6.

¹²⁶ *Northampton Mercury*, 23 Dec. 1882, p. 6.

experiment' be allowed to continue.¹²⁷ Another supporter was the military historian Colonel H. Montague Hozier. A Liberal, Hozier wrote to Lord Lansdowne during the 1883 Select Committee to argue that the Tunnel would further encourage the 'comity of nations', although he also suggested that, were the French to attempt an invasion, 'a few loose engines, with scythes on their wheels' might keep the Tunnel clear without damaging it.¹²⁸ In 1889 Hozier delivered a powerful rebuttal to Wolseley's fears in a paper to the Society of Arts, during which he received the public support of the influential retired naval officers Rear-Admiral Philip Colomb and Admiral Erasmus Ommanney, further illustrating that the defence establishment was not unanimously in favour of Wolseley and Cambridge.¹²⁹

Conclusion

The image of Britain united in insular fury against Watkin's Tunnel does not hold up to close scrutiny. Rather a combination of press reaction, James Knowles' publicity skills, and historians' limited use of primary sources has served to give a false image of popular sentiment. It is remarkable, for example, that the Workman's Committee deputation to Paris is absent from the academic literature, as it was widely reported in the national press. Further problems have been caused by an overreliance on existing secondary literature. A notable example of this is the claim, taken from Thomas Whiteside's *Tunnel under the Channel* and repeated by a number of subsequent historians, that a mob smashed the windows of the CTC's offices in 1882.¹³⁰ Not only is no primary evidence forthcoming for this claim, but there is no evidence that either the CTC or SCRC ever possessed offices of their own to be attacked.

¹²⁷ TNA, RAIL 779/24, *Statement by the Directors of the Submarine Continental Railway Company*, pp. 9-10. In 1888 an old SCRC supporter, Frederick Bramwell, was elected President of the British Association, and gave a pro-Tunnel speech at the annual meeting at Bath. *Western Daily Press*, 6 Sept. 1888, p. 3.

¹²⁸ Richard Davenport-Hines, 'Hozier, Sir Henry Montague', *ODNB*; Henry Hozier to Lord Lansdowne, 27 Apr. 1883, pp. 8, 12, BL, Add. MS 88906/23/1.

¹²⁹ Hozier, 'The Channel Tunnel', p. 132; for Colomb's view of the Tunnel see Colomb, *Memoirs of Sir Cooper Key*, p. 478, n. 2.

¹³⁰ Whiteside, *Tunnel under the Channel*, p. 89. The claim is repeated in Longmate, *Island Fortress*, p. 359; Culham, 'Channel Tunnel Project', p. 9; Hadfield-Amkhan, *Foreign Policy*, p. 89. The earliest reference to the incident this author can find is an article in the *Birmingham Daily Post*, 7 May 1957, p. 6.

While it appears that a majority of Britons who considered the issue eventually decided against the scheme during the 1880s, evidence from the press during the 1870s illustrates that this was by no means an inevitable result. Trade union enthusiasm points to a strong class divide in opinion. On the other hand, geography does not seem to have played any significant role, as evidenced by a comparison between the pro-Tunnel feeling of the Canterbury Chamber of Trade, a group which one may have thought would be more susceptible to invasion fears, and the opposite feeling in its Edinburgh counterpart. Similarly, Watkin's continuance as MP for Hythe until 1895 suggested that those living closest to the proposed Tunnel entrance were not seriously concerned by their representative's leading role in its advocacy.

Much depended, then, on Wolseley's intervention, and his successful use of the media to exploit his own position as a disinterested military expert. Meanwhile the pro-Tunnel lobby lacked a leader of similar stature and thus suffered from a disastrous newspaper 'panic', driven, ironically, by the fear of panic itself, which rapidly annihilated Watkin's support in this crucial area. Due to its exclusion from the prevailing idea of 'public opinion', even substantial trade union support could not make up for this deficiency. As the establishment turned against the scheme, it is likely that many otherwise pro-Tunnel figures, such as those within business or academic circles, were reluctant to speak in its support for fear of being tarred with the same brush as Watkin. As an illustration of the speed and success of this conversion, in June 1883, *Judy's* Parliamentary sketch writer felt comfortable in describing the 'general public' as 'overwhelmingly' against the scheme, the magazine illustrating this observation with a cartoon, which, two years earlier, might quite easily have been read as a pro-Tunnel piece [Figure 18].¹³¹

Watkin himself was in no doubt as to the demographics of the Tunnel opposition. In 1892 he laid the blame firmly at the door of 'those who called themselves "society"', such as the affluent individuals who had signed Knowles' protest.¹³² 'There was nothing', he declared, 'more tyrannical, selfish, or ignorant than what was called "society"'. Watkin never abandoned the conviction that the great mass of the country was in favour of the Tunnel, an assumption which,

¹³¹ *Judy*, 20 June 1883, p. 297.

¹³² *The Times*, 30 Dec. 1892, p. 4.

as we shall see in the following chapter, guided many of its supporters in Parliament. The truth was probably closer to a more even split in opinion, a fact which, as *Funny Folks* shrewdly observed in April 1883, did not suggest a favourable outcome for the project:

Said Sir Edward Watkin to Lord Wolseley the other day: “Your opinion notwithstanding, one half of the inhabitants of the British Isles are in favour of the Channel Tunnel.” “That may be so,” replied his lordship; “but you must remember that *one* half doesn’t make a *’hole*.”¹³³

¹³³ *Funny Folks*, 14 Apr. 1883, p. 114. Emphasis in original.

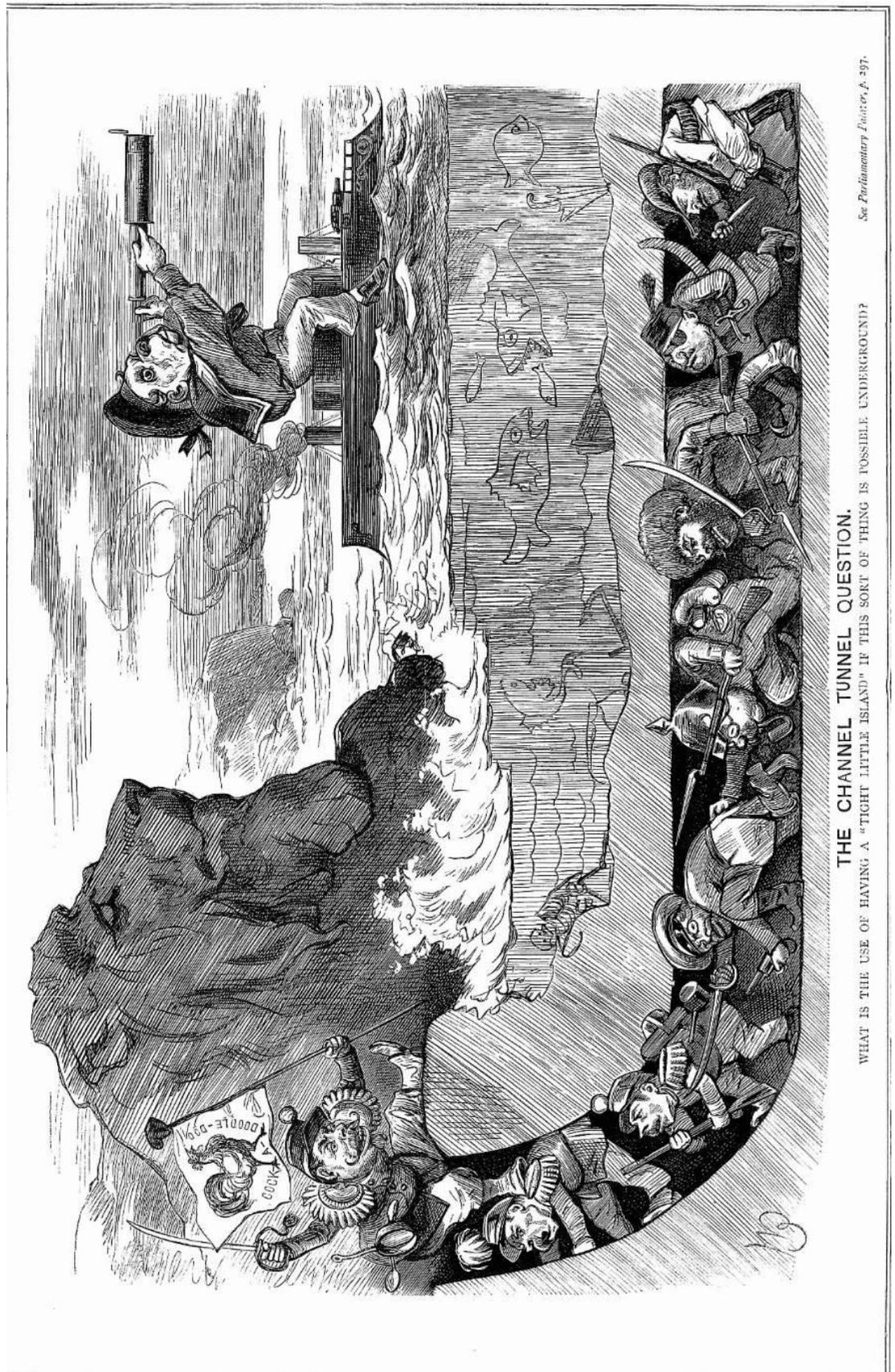


Figure 18: 'The Channel Tunnel Question.'

'What is the use of having a 'tight little island' if this sort of thing is possible underground?' Three Frenchmen, two Germans, a Russian, a Turk and a Boer sneak through the Tunnel. Note the sleeping lion. *Judy*, 20 June 1883, p. 292.

Chapter Six

Government, Parliament and the Channel Tunnel

“Will you walk into my Tunnel?” said the Spider to the Fly,
“’Tis the handiest little Tunnel that ever you did spy.
You’ve only got to pop your head inside and peep, no more,
and you’ll see many curious things you never saw before.
Will you, will you, will you, will you, walk in, Grand Old Fly?”

Now, this particular Grand Old Fly *was* very “fly,” you know,
And had clear business notions and ideas of *quid pro quo*.
Says he, “About your Tunnel patriots doubt, alarmists chafe;
of course, it’s most ridiculous, but *will you swear it’s safe?*
Oh, will you, will you, will you, will you?” said the Grand Old Fly.

Said the Spider to the Fly, “It’s most absurd, upon my soul,
To see so big a nation scared about so small a hole.
To share the scare that’s in the air is worthy, don’t you know,
Not of a Grand Old Fly like you, but of a midge like JOE!¹
Then won’t you, won’t you, won’t you, won’t you, plucky Grand Old
Fly?”

“Will you show the feather white and vote with Joseph, Grand Old
Fly?”
“No, if I do, may I be shot! It may be, by-and-by,
I’ll ask you – but no matter; with you now my lot is cast.”
The Spider laughed, “Ha, Ha! My boy, I’ve got you safe at last!
You will then, will then, will then, will then, really Grand Old Fly!”

‘The Watkin Spider and the Gladstone Fly’, *Punch*, 30 June 1888, p.
302.²

¹ Joe: Joseph Chamberlain.

² See Figure 20.

Through examining the ideological framework of and public reaction to the Channel Tunnel, the previous two chapters have provided context absent from other studies. They have shown that the debate was both more extensive and politically fraught than historians have supposed. Just as significantly, the second chapter illustrates the suddenness of the change in public opinion which Wolseley's intervention inspired – a suddenness which is somewhat at odds with the more sedate narrative followed by historians. By applying this new context to the existing narrative, the first half of this chapter provides a more complete picture of the government rejection of the Tunnel. It shows that the suddenness of the change that overcame the public sphere in February-March 1882 was mirrored within the government, and suggests that the War Office's anti-Tunnel campaign was more organised and coordinated than hitherto assumed. Overall, it argues that the decision to abandon in July 1883 was a direct result of Wolseley's public campaign, which forced Gladstone to submit the issue to Parliamentary Committee in order to avoid the disunity within his government becoming public.

The second half of this chapter carries the story to the end of the decade. All previous histories of the nineteenth century Channel Tunnel attempt end with little more than a nod to the period after 1883. Yet, as David Hodgkins observes, the Channel Tunnel was 'the single most important theme in the last ten years of Watkin's parliamentary career.'³ Between 1884 and 1890 the Commons voted five times on Watkin's Channel Tunnel Bills, divisions which were well attended and closely scrutinised. By analysing these votes and the debates which preceded them, the chapter argues that parliamentary support for the Tunnel was not as niche as might be assumed. However, while its support among Liberals steadily increased, within the Conservative party, which was in government during three of the divisions, opposition to the Tunnel demonstrated the extent to which the party had moved towards an anti-internationalist world view.

³ Hodgkins, *Railway King*, p. 535.

The Board of Trade Committee

As has already been touched upon, prior to 1882 successive British governments had maintained a relaxed if detached position towards the Channel Tunnel. Gladstone's first government was supportive and Disraeli's ministry provided official sanction in 1874, although its failure to follow this with either a comprehensive concession or public money seriously limited investor confidence.⁴ In 1875 the War Office had produced a small number of memoranda which argued that the Tunnel was a potential threat to Britain's traditional 'insularity', but the department was largely excluded from the Anglo-French discussions and the CTC project was abandoned before any more serious opposition could be developed.⁵ Indeed, when, in 1873, Gladstone addressed a short note to Lord Granville discussing Grosvenor's first proposals, he observed that a Tunnel was preferable to improved ferry services because the latter might provide an excuse for the French to construct a large naval base at Calais.⁶ The Tory Foreign Secretary Lord Derby was similarly unconcerned, neatly summarising the Conservative position the following year:

I say, no objection, provided they [the CTC] don't expect government help: in a military point of view it leaves us where we were: since it can be drowned at either end in a few minutes. Commercially it may do some good, but the rates will probably be too high for ordinary traffic: politically, it brings more foreigners into England, which may not altogether be a gain, but it is too late to imitate Japan.⁷

Strictly speaking, the final decision on the Channel Tunnel rested with Parliament, not the government. To allow the completion of the project, parliamentary sanction was needed to put the draft treaty of 1876 into effect. More immediately, both the SCRC and CTC required an Act to allow borings beyond the foreshore and out under the Channel.⁸ Prior to 1882, however,

⁴ Culham, 'Channel Tunnel Project', pp. 27-8. Gladstone remained publicly enthusiastic: see *The Times*, 8 Apr. 1878, p. 10.

⁵ Wilson, *Tunnel Visions*, pp. 16-20.

⁶ Gladstone to Granville, 21 June 1873 in Agatha Ramm (ed.), *The Political Correspondence of Mr. Gladstone and Lord Granville 1868-1876* vol. II, *Camden Third Series*, vol. 82 (London: Royal Historical Society, 1952), p. 385.

⁷ John Vincent (ed.), *A Selection from the Diaries of Edward Henry Stanley, 15th Earl of Derby*, *Camden Fifth Series*, vol. 4 (London: Royal Historical Society, 1994), p. 177.

⁸ For an explanation of the legal context see Geoffrey Marston, 'Some Legal Problems of the Channel Tunnel Scheme, 1874-1883', *British Yearbook of International Law*, 47 (1977), pp. 290-300.

Hansard records practically no interest in the Channel Tunnel. The Bill of 1875 had passed both Houses without comment, and there were few indicators from elsewhere that parliamentarians had any firm opinions on the scheme, let alone opposed it.⁹ Before Wolseley's protests, it seemed likely that any line taken by the government would be endorsed by the Commons and the Lords. By 1881 both companies had Bills before the Commons, overseen by the respective company's chairman, Watkin for the SCRC, and Grosvenor, who was at this time the Liberal Chief Whip, for the CTC. It is in this context that Watkin's optimism in January 1882 should be understood.

Unfortunately for the companies, the Board of Trade was not willing to allow the project to go ahead without conducting one further inquiry. During July and August 1881 the department contacted the War Office and Admiralty to suggest the formation of a Committee, chaired by the Board's Permanent Secretary Thomas Henry Farrer, to examine the question. As Wilson and Culham observe, Chamberlain had evidently been surprised by Watkin's confident assertion on 16 June 1881 that the Tunnel would be completed in five years.¹⁰ They ascribe the creation of the Committee to this surprise alone, apparently unaware of *The Times*' 18 June editorial. Although it had had little effect within the public sphere, the 1882 Blue Book correspondence reveals that *The Times*'s anti-Tunnel outburst was clearly a major driving factor behind the Board of Trade Committee. This correspondence referred to *The Times*' editorial, and gave 'public susceptibility...as to possible danger to this country' as one reason for the Committee's creation.¹¹ The fact that this 'public susceptibility' was, as shown in the previous chapter, limited at best, illustrates not only the importance of *The Times* as the paper of choice for ministers and civil servants, but also suggests how large 'public opinion' – however narrowly conceived – loomed in the official imagination. Set up in order to address this public concern, the Committee instead created the perfect forum for Wolseley to forward his alarmist agenda.

⁹ Wilson, *Tunnel Visions*, pp. 18-19.

¹⁰ Wilson, *Tunnel Visions*, p. 22; Culham, 'Channel Tunnel Project', p. 98.

¹¹ *Correspondence*, pp. 182-183.

In this context, it is important to emphasise that there is no evidence any senior figure at the Board of Trade was ever convinced that the Tunnel would prove a unique danger to national defence. Farrer himself was a thorough Cobdenite and considered the Tunnel to be a project of ‘reason and common sense’, while Robert Giffin, the head of the Board’s Commercial Department, provided the Select Committee with strongly pro-Tunnel evidence in 1883.¹² Chamberlain’s own relaxed attitude is evidenced in a letter of 24 December to CTC supporter Henry Labouchere, which was not reproduced in the Blue Book – in all likelihood because it contained Chamberlain’s personal opinions – and thus not previously consulted by historians. Chamberlain confirmed that the government was concerned with two issues: the ‘military question’, and the danger of the Tunnel becoming the monopoly of a single railway company.¹³ While he referred to Wolseley’s memorandum, which had been submitted on 10 December, and admitted that if the Tunnel were shown to be a danger it would not be allowed to proceed, he concluded: ‘personally the objection on this score appears to me absurd and I do not think it will ultimately be suffered to interfere with the undertaking.’ Of Watkin Chamberlain exhibited nothing of his later animosity: ‘he professes to be governed entirely by patriotic considerations and I have as yet no information which entitles me to dispute the sincerity of his motives.’ Overall, the letter is more concerned with the monopoly issue than defence, its tone indicating a Minister occupied with the legal conditions under which a Tunnel might be built, rather than questioning whether it should be.

The exact course of events during the following two months is significant, as it illustrates the sheer speed with which Cambridge and Wolseley pushed home their opposition, pointing to a real awareness of how to employ political pressure in both the public and official spheres. Sir John Adye submitted his pro-Tunnel memorandum to the Committee in early January; Wolseley was interviewed on the 25th, and Adye on the 26th. By this time Cambridge had organised for

¹² T.H. Farrer to Lord Lansdowne, 2 July 1883, BL, Add. MS 88906/23/1; Robert Giffin, *Select Committee*, pp. 178-196.

¹³ Joseph Chamberlain to Henry Labouchere, 24 Dec. 1881, Cadbury Research Library, University of Birmingham (hereafter CRL, UoB), JC/50/3. Chamberlain had made the same points in a letter to Watkin, 15 Dec. 1881, CRL, UoB, JC5/76/20.

Wolseley's memorandum to be published by Dunsany, leaving the Committee with five days to digest the diametrically opposing views of two distinguished military men before the media had delved into the issue.¹⁴ On 31 January, Admiral Cooper Key sent his letter of opposition to Lord Northbrook, coinciding, whether intentionally or not, with the publication of Wolseley's views in the *Nineteenth Century*. On 1 February, Farrer wrote to Chamberlain and explained that, as his War Office and Admiralty colleagues were now anxious for further military and naval evidence, new instructions were required.¹⁵ The timing of this letter can hardly have been a coincidence, as prior to it there was no indication that the Committee was not to have produced a report; it seems likely that Farrer had been thrown by the sudden publication of Wolseley's evidence. Chamberlain thanked Farrer for his service and referred the matter to 'the responsibility of the Government as a whole' on 3 February.¹⁶ Wolseley's Central News interview appeared in the papers three days later. The political effect was magnified by the Duke of Cambridge on 8 February, when, in proposing a toast to 'the Houses of Parliament' at a public dinner in aid of Richmond Hospital, he expressed hope that the legislature would not support the 'unwise and dangerous experiment'.¹⁷ Within the space of three weeks, the British armed forces had delivered a series of hammer blows to the Channel Tunnel project in a pincer movement which struck the government simultaneously from within and without. The suddenness of this onslaught is not appreciated by historians, principally because the full public context has not previously been investigated.

On 10 February the issue was first raised in the Commons, when the strongly pro-Tunnel Liberal MP Sir Alexander Hamilton-Gordon asked the government to confirm whether the reports of Wolseley's opposition were true, and 'if so, whether Her Majesty's Government intend, on that account, to disapprove of a scheme so eminently calculated to promote peaceful relations between the two Nations?'¹⁸ Childers replied by confirming the existence of the

¹⁴ Wilson, *Tunnel Visions*, pp. 36-37.

¹⁵ *Correspondence*, p. 192.

¹⁶ *Correspondence*, pp. 192-193.

¹⁷ *Daily Telegraph*, 9 Feb. 1882, p. 3.

¹⁸ Hamilton-Gordon, Parl. Deb., 10 Feb. 1882, cols. 383-384.

Committee, and reminded the House of the endorsement of 1875. It was clear, however, that what was once the preserve of the Board of Trade was now a problem for the entire government. The following day the Tunnel was discussed for the first time in Cabinet. In a list which has not before been consulted by Channel Tunnel historians, Gladstone recorded his impressions of each minister's 'Channel Tunnel Leanings' as follows:

Against: Selborne, Kimberley, Harcourt, Granville?, Hartington, Carlingford, Chamberlain?, Forster?

For: Childers, W[illiam].E[wart].G[ladstone]., Bright, Northbrook.

Silent: Dodson, Spencer.¹⁹

Even taking into account Gladstone's uncertainty on five members, and the interesting fact that both Childers and Northbrook, heads respectively of the War Office and Admiralty, were in favour of the scheme, such a split in Cabinet opinion appears remarkable. It stunned John Bright, as he recorded in his diary: 'Cabinet at 2 o'clock: discussion...on Channel Tunnel. Astonished at objection of some at terrors which, to me, are ridiculous and purely imaginary.'²⁰ Nor were such sudden expressions of opposition limited to the Cabinet; as Keith Wilson shows, by early March practically all the senior figures at the Foreign Office, politician and civil servant alike, had turned against the Tunnel, fearing invasion.²¹ This included Sir Charles Dilke, at this time the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and a close ally of Chamberlain, who cited a range of military, diplomatic and social concerns including surprise attack, the chance of Germany seizing the French end during a second Franco-German war, and, perhaps most importantly, 'that the creation of it might lead to panic'.²² On that final point even Gladstone's private secretary Edward Hamilton concurred, writing that, in spite of his chief's confidence, he himself was 'half-hearted' about the project, 'mainly on the ground that its

¹⁹ Mathew, *Gladstone Diaries*, vol. X, p. 210. Punctuation in original.

²⁰ Walling, *Bright*, p. 475.

²¹ Wilson, *Tunnel Visions*, pp. 29-32.

²² Wilson, *Tunnel Visions*, p. 29; Stephen Gwynn and Gertrude M. Tuckwell, *The Life of Sir Charles W. Dilke*, vol. I (London: John Murray, 1917), p. 427. Dilke also claimed to have turned the Prince of Wales against the Tunnel.

tendency will be to create panics and further military extravagances'.²³ What was notable about these feelings was their suddenness. All are dated February or March 1882, a strong indication of officialdom's profound sensitivity to shifts in newspaper opinion. 'We have all been rather surprised by the explosion of hostile feeling', wrote Childers to Lord Roberts on 17 March, 'considering that the idea has been before the public and the Army for ten years'.²⁴

On 14 February the Conservative MP William Bromley-Davenport asked whether the government should not now refer the issue to a Joint Committee of both Houses. Gladstone responded with reference to the Tunnel's recent history, observing that 'when Her Majesty's Government came into Office, and, indeed, until lately, this question appeared to present the aspect of a settled matter.'²⁵ Bromley-Davenport's question appears to have been inspired by Grosvenor, who was demanding that Watkin be ordered to stop work and that an immediate Select Committee be appointed to decide the issue. 'So excited is our worthy whip about this,' wrote Labouchere to Chamberlain in February, 'that he says that if nothing is done, he will himself have to go down to Dover on a filibustering expedition, and pour water into Watkins hole.'²⁶ On 21 February the subject was raised for the first time in the Lords, where Lord Brabourne and the Marquis of Bath, who later appeared at the head of the *Nineteenth Century* petition, had a sharp exchange of words.²⁷ Reflecting in his diary, Brabourne observed that the peers appeared to 'doubt the wisdom' of the Tunnel, hardly a surprising position for a chamber containing so many military and naval representatives.²⁸ The following day, Childers ordered the establishment of the War Office 'Channel Tunnel Defence Committee'.²⁹

Apart from asking Brabourne to produce his counter-article, Watkin's immediate response to this sudden outburst of hostility was to step up his charm offensive by inviting large numbers of

²³ Dudley W.R. Bahlman (ed.), *The Diary of Sir Edward Walter Hamilton, 1880-1885*, vol. II (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972), p. 420.

²⁴ Spencer Childers, *The Life and Correspondence of the Right Hon. Hugh C. E. Childers, 1827-1896*, vol. II (London: John Murray, 1901), p. 78.

²⁵ Bromley-Davenport and Gladstone, Parl. Deb., 14 Feb. 1882, cols. 637-638.

²⁶ Labouchere to Chamberlain, 14 Feb. 1882, CRL, UoB, JC5/50/1. The antipathy was mutual, to the detriment of both the SCRC and CTC. See Hodgkins, *Railway King*, pp. 527-528.

²⁷ Parl. Deb., 21 Feb. 1882, col. 1218-1223.

²⁸ Brabourne Diary, 21 Feb. 1882, KHLC, U951/F25/35.

²⁹ Wilson, *Tunnel Visions*, p. 33.

parliamentarians to the Tunnel, as well as Journalists including artists from the *Graphic* and *Illustrated London News* [Figure 19]. By the end of February 1882 sixty MPs had visited the works at Dover, and a further 100 had put their names down to go.³⁰ Gladstone, Salisbury, and a substantial number of other serving and former Cabinet members attended on 11 March.³¹ Gladstone noted in his diary the ‘beautiful’ electric lighting, and how interesting he had found the entire experience; that same day he read the anti-Tunnel invasion novel *How John Bull Lost London*, perhaps with the intention of getting a feel for the opposition.³² After his visit the local *Sevenoaks Chronicle* reported that the Prime Minister had ‘stated that he believed the work would be successful’, something which, surprisingly, was not picked up by other papers.³³ Regardless, the readings of both Channel Tunnel Bills were postponed, and on 31 March the Board of Trade was ordered to warn Watkin against any further progress.³⁴ Within the space of two months, Wolseley had succeeded in completely transforming both the public and political discourse, throwing an established government policy into confusion, and casting serious doubt on the viability of what in January had been regarded as the greatest achievement of modern engineering.

³⁰ Hodgkins, *Railway King*, p. 524.

³¹ *The Standard*, 13 Mar. 1882, p. 3. Three days later Cambridge and Wolseley also inspected the works.

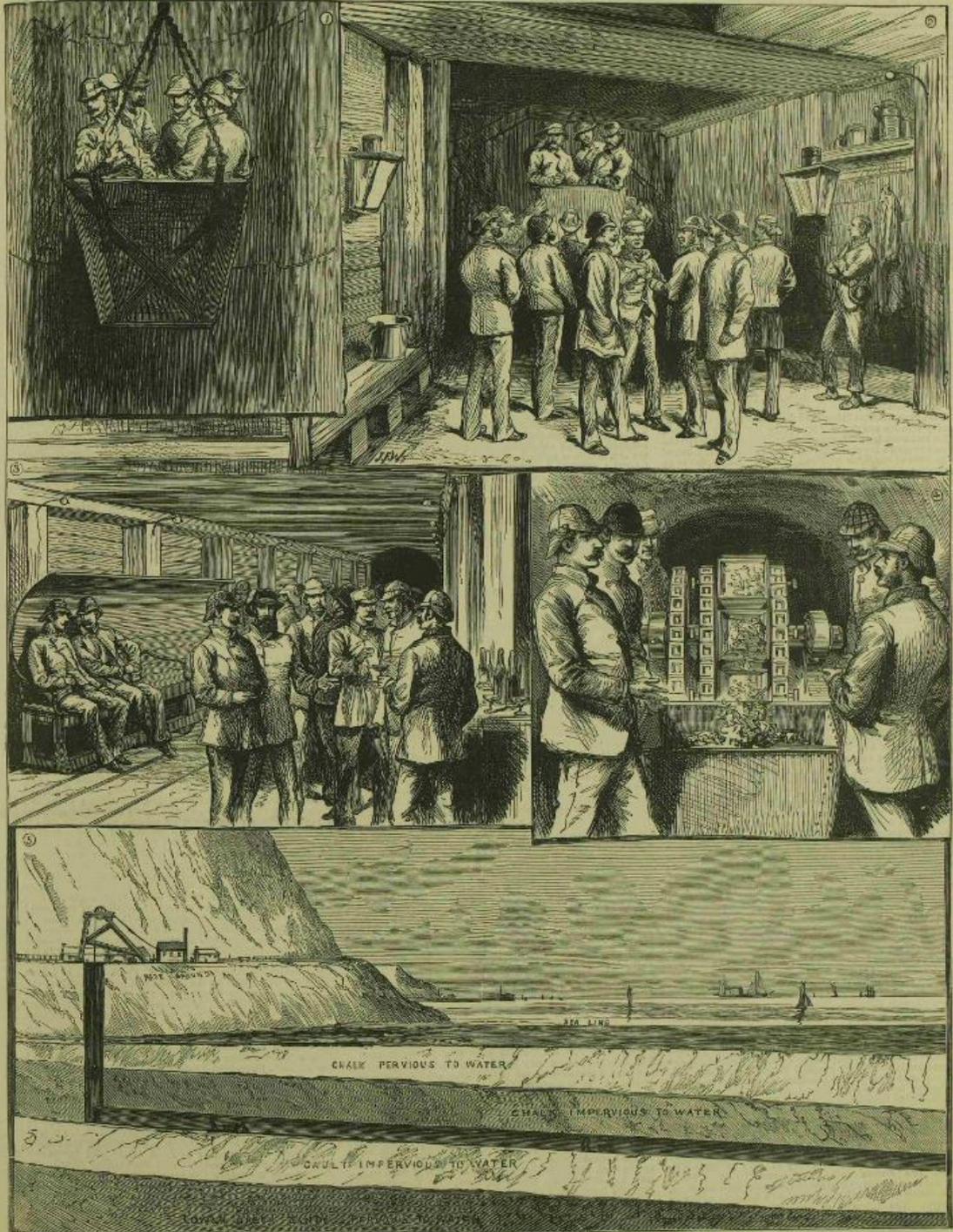
³² Matthew, *Gladstone Diaries*, vol. X, p. 220.

³³ *Sevenoaks Chronicle and Kentish Advertiser*, 17 Mar. 1882, p. 8.

³⁴ Matthew, *Gladstone Diaries*, vol. X, p. 228.

THE CHANNEL TUNNEL WORKS AT DOVER.

SEE PAGE 219.



1. Going down in the Cage. 2. Arrival at the bottom of the Shaft. 3. Swivel Junction. 4. The Compressed-Air Boring Machine. 5. Section of Tunnel.

Figure 19: 'The Channel Tunnel Works at Dover'.

Showing a visit to the Tunnel and a cross-section of the works under the sea.
Illustrated London News, 4 Mar. 1882, p. 217.

The Lansdowne Committee

The War office Committee reported on 12 May 1882. Identifying serious concerns over the Tunnel's defensibility as measured by the department's own exacting standards, it concluded that the scheme should only be allowed to go ahead if a very large number of security measures were adopted.³⁵ Public pressure had, as we have seen, been kept up in the meantime, and in June Chamberlain delivered his own substantial memorandum to the government.³⁶ Throughout this period the SCRC had refused to cease tunnelling operations, and after a long exchange of letters Chamberlain had eventually been forced to take Watkin to the High Court, obtaining an injunction ordering the work to stop.³⁷ Watkin's typically bullish response was to declare his willingness to go to jail for the project.³⁸ In the event the injunction simply earned Chamberlain the 'implacable and undying animosity' of Watkin, who apparently promised to erect an enormous stone pillar on the site of the Tunnel works, upon which was to be inscribed a description of how 'Joseph Chamberlain, of Birmingham' ordered them to be stopped. "Joseph Chamberlain" and "Birmingham" are each to have a line of bad preeminence to themselves,' reported the Parliamentary diarist Henry Lucy, 'for Sir Edward Watkin does not know which is the more hateful in the ears of good men and honest politicians', a reflection Watkin's own *laissez-faire* outlook and his hatred of Chamberlain's Birmingham Radicalism.³⁹

At Cabinet on 12 August Childers suggested a compromise solution: that the Tunnel should not be opposed on condition that the suggestions of the War Office Committee were enforced and the scheme put to a 'strong & probably a Joint Committee.' A note left by Gladstone in his Cabinet minutes is revealing: 'we are fighting on your side. The other alternative is *recalling* the proceedings of [18]72 & 74-5'.⁴⁰ Evidentially he and Childers were prepared to submit to a substantial military presence at Dover, rather than see the project entirely abandoned.

Nevertheless, the Cabinet rejected the proposal. The two Bills were to be disposed of, and it was

³⁵ Wilson, *Tunnel Visions*, pp. 33-36; Bonavia, *Channel Tunnel Story*, pp. 34-35.

³⁶ Wilson, *Tunnel Visions*, pp. 37-38.

³⁷ Wilson, *Tunnel Visions*, pp. 40-41.

³⁸ *Daily News*, 3 July 1882, p. 2.

³⁹ Henry W. Lucy, *A Diary of Two Parliaments, 1880-1885* (London: Cassel, 1886), pp. 265-266; see also Watkin's comments on the same theme in *Meeting of the SCRC... December 23rd 1885*, pp. 3-4.

⁴⁰ Matthew, *Gladstone Diaries*, vol. X, p. 311.

agreed that a Joint Committee would be appointed the following year. This decision was conveyed to the Commons by Chamberlain on 15 August, the same day on which the Blue Book containing correspondence and the findings of the Board of Trade and War Office Committees were published. The following day, after being found in contempt of court, the SCRC finally agreed to turn off its boring machine.⁴¹

The decision to turn to the mechanism of a Select Committee was an unusual move. As Lord Salisbury pointed out, the Channel Tunnel question touched upon matters of foreign policy that the government was both expected and obliged to take responsibility for.⁴² This view was held by Liberals and Tories alike, reflected in the fact that the motion to create a Committee passed by a margin of only thirty-four in the Commons.⁴³ Considering the obvious wish of the House to debate the matter, Gladstone's later excuse that Conservative 'obstruction' and other factors meant that there was no available parliamentary time seems somewhat disingenuous.⁴⁴ Rather, it is clear that, as Edward Stanhope observed, the government was 'hopelessly divided in itself, and could not offer an unanimous opinion to the House', something which Gladstone eventually admitted in 1888.⁴⁵ Even following Bright's resignation in July over the Egyptian War the Cabinet remained in a stalemate, and the creation of an external decision-making body in the form of the Committee provided means through which it could avoid publicly revealing this rift.⁴⁶ While this says much about Gladstone's personal determination not to oppose the Tunnel, it also points to a significant fragility in the Cabinet's commitment to the spirit of 1880, as well as the Prime Minister's own strength of leadership. Within days of being exposed to the fears of the military authorities and a panicked press, a substantial number of ministers – the great majority of whom, it should be remembered, were members of the Cobden Club – had abandoned any support they may have held for this Cobdenite undertaking. 'Some of us were

⁴¹ Wilson, *Tunnel Visions*, p. 41.

⁴² Salisbury, Parl. Deb., 26 Feb. 1883, col. 813.

⁴³ See the remarks of Sir Stafford Northcote and Sir Wilfrid Lawson, Parl. Deb., 3 Apr. 1883, cols. 1371-1372, 1380.

⁴⁴ Wilson, *Tunnel Visions*, pp. 42-43.

⁴⁵ Stanhope, Parl. Deb., 3 Apr. 1883, col. 1382; Gladstone, Parl. Deb., 27 June 1888 cols. 1459-1460. See also *Manchester Courier*, 23 Apr. 1883, p. 5.

⁴⁶ This is suggested by Culham, 'Channel Tunnel Project', p. 103.

what I should call not quite sound and others of us were', reflected Gladstone in 1888, keen to emphasise the difficulty of the position he and the other pro-Tunnel Ministers found themselves in. 'Whether or not we ought to have shown more heroism I do not know. But we thought it idle to persevere in a hopeless struggle.'⁴⁷

The Select Committee was chaired by the Liberal peer Lord Lansdowne, an archetypal Whig who had recently resigned as Under-Secretary for India over Gladstone's Irish policy, and it consisted of six Liberals and four Conservatives.⁴⁸ After interviewing forty witnesses, its verdict was delivered on 10 July 1883.⁴⁹ As is well known, Lansdowne's report was in favour of construction, waxing lyrical on the expected commercial benefits of such a 'great industrial enterprise'.⁵⁰ Although not a military man himself, Lansdowne had accumulated a large quantity of private military evidence during his inquiries including detailed and extremely critical comments on all the interviews conducted with Army and Navy officers by one or more unnamed military experts.⁵¹ This was put to good use in his report, which attacked the military objectors for assuming the 'presence for every condition favourable to the view which they entertain, and the absence of every condition unfavourable to it', and castigated other military criticisms as 'purely political'. In short, it provided both a well-founded criticism of defence pessimism and an excellent 'liberal' defence of the Tunnel. However, when it came to the final vote only three other members supported Lansdowne: Lord Aberdare, a keen reformer whose political outlook was founded on his 'confidence in the people'; William Baxter MP, the Radical President of the Co-operative Congress and a fervent Cobdenite; and Arthur Peel MP, a Liberal whose early career had been defined by 'Peel-Gladstone politics'.⁵²

⁴⁷ Parl. Deb., 27 June 1888 cols. 1460.

⁴⁸ Lord Newton, *Lord Lansdowne: A Biography* (London: Macmillan, 1929), pp. 20-21.

⁴⁹ Wilson, *Tunnel Visions*, pp. 43-47.

⁵⁰ *Select Committee*, pp. ix-xxviii.

⁵¹ Lansdowne's notes and correspondence from the Committee are in BL, Add. MS 88906/23/1. Also included are memorandums from W. Boyd Dawkins, Lord Alfred Churchill and Colonel Henry Montague Hozier.

⁵² Matthew Cragoe, 'Bruce, Henry Austin, First Baron Aberdare', *ODNB*; H.C.G. Matthew, 'Peel, Arthur Wellesley, First Viscount Peel', *ODNB*; Howe, *Free Trade*, p. 117. William Baxter had been an outspoken supporter of the Tunnel during 1882. See *Evening Telegraph* (Dundee), 29 June 1882, p. 2.

In an unusual turn, every other member of the Committee submitted his own report opposing the Tunnel, three of which were shorter than a page in length.⁵³ The two most substantial were those of the Liberals Sir Henry Hussey Vivian MP and Lord Camperdown. Although referencing the invasion arguments, they focused on the costs the Tunnel threatened in terms of fortifications, garrisons and the ‘gigantic evil’, in Vivian’s words, of conscription. Meanwhile the much shorter reports of the Conservatives Sir Massey Lopes MP, Edward Harcourt MP, Lord Shute and Lord Devon, while not neglecting these ‘cost’ issues, spent more time on the dangers of surprise attack, treachery, panic and the possibility of an enemy seizing both ends of the Tunnel. In the event none of these reports were adopted, and on Camperdown’s suggestion the Committee submitted all of the draft reports to Parliament with the conclusion that the majority were against the Tunnel. It is obvious that the state of public opinion was given much weight by the majority of the Committee. Vivian’s report, for example, emphasised the lack of pro-Tunnel communications or petitions from Chambers of Commerce or other ‘representative’ bodies, while Lopes laid stress on the disinterested nature of those who opposed the project.⁵⁴ This points to a certain failure on the part of Watkin to effectively mobilise his supporters, especially those unconnected to the SCRC or CTC. However, it also reflected the way in which Shipton’s evidence had been ignored by the Committee, most of whom evidently attributed little weight to the views of trade unions.

The Committee’s judgement, thought the *Times*, would surprise no-one. Although it was sure that ‘the mass of the nation’ opposed the Tunnel, it also noted that:

If ever there was a case in which the disputants, advancing from opposite directions, contemplated the two sides of the shield, and while some declared it to be silver others affirmed it to be golden, it is with respect to this matter of a submarine communication between the shores of Britain and of the European Continent.⁵⁵

For the London correspondent of the *Manchester Guardian* the inquiry had brought the matter to a ‘rather lame and impotent conclusion...the practical outcome is that the projected tunnel

⁵³ *Select Committee*, pp. xxix-xliv.

⁵⁴ *Select Committee*, pp. xxx, xl.

⁵⁵ *The Times*, 11 July 1883, p. 11.

stands very much where it did before the committee was appointed.⁵⁶ The Cabinet agreed to accept the result on 19 July; on 24 July Chamberlain withdrew both Channel Tunnel Bills. Watkin was not present, but Grosvenor accepted the result with the observation that ‘the present feeling of the House and the country was such that it would be impossible to go on with the Channel Tunnel scheme this year’.⁵⁷ It is important to note, however, that the Liberals gave no definite reason for stopping the work, hiding behind the Select Committee’s vote and focussing instead on Watkin’s legal obstinacy during 1882. Nevertheless, the practical result was a complete victory for Wolseley and his supporters. Overawed by the dominance of defence pessimism in the press, Gladstone’s Cabinet had submitted to the demands of the armed forces and reversed government policy with little more than a whimper.

Parliament: 1884-1890

Following its 1883 rejection, the Channel Tunnel is generally regarded by historians to have been a ‘lost cause’.⁵⁸ If this were true, however, Watkin refused to believe it; he possessed, according to *The Times*, ‘a quality which never fails to command the respect of Englishmen. He does not know when he is beaten.’⁵⁹ In 1886 the CTC and SCRC merged under the name Channel Tunnel Company Limited, leaving Watkin as the sole leader of the project.⁶⁰ Between 1884 and 1890 he introduced five Channel Tunnel Bills into the Commons on his company’s behalf, all of which were opposed by the incumbent President of the Board of Trade and defeated on their second reading. The remainder of this chapter will examine these debates and divisions, and consider Parliamentary attitudes to the Tunnel more broadly.

By 1884 it was obvious that Parliament inclined firmly, although not unanimously, against the Tunnel. As early as June 1881, the London correspondent of the *York Herald* reported that there was a ‘very strong feeling’ against the project at Westminster, although this observation was not

⁵⁶ *Manchester Guardian*, 11 July 1883, p. 5.

⁵⁷ Hodgkins, *Railway King*, pp. 533-534; Parl. Deb., 24 July 1883, col. 285.

⁵⁸ Hodgkins, *Railway King*, p. 534.

⁵⁹ *The Times*, 6 June 1890, p. 9.

⁶⁰ Hodgkins, *Railway King*, pp. 534-535. All mentions of the CTC after 1886 refer to this amalgamated company.

repeated by other papers.⁶¹ The twenty-seven MPs who signed Knowles' petition showed that opposition could come from across the political spectrum, while the publication of the Joint Select Committee reports inspired the *Manchester Guardian* to observe that 'the balance of opinion in the Committee appears about to coincide with that which prevails in Parliament.'⁶² On the other hand, while opposition to the Tunnel quickly gained a cross-bench character the same could not be said of its supporters. Watkin himself characterised the SCRC's Board as a majority of Liberals and 'Tories of a very Liberal character' such as the peer Lord Alfred Churchill, a longstanding Tunnel advocate.⁶³ The CTC was similarly constituted, its shareholders in July 1881 including three Liberal MPs and two Tories, the latter being the Francophone art collector and philanthropist Richard Wallace and Lord Randolph Churchill.⁶⁴ As such, it was not clear, when he introduced his first Bill on 14 May 1884, that Watkin would be able to rely on many MPs beyond a minority of cosmopolitan-minded individuals.

Tables 1-5 show the results of all five Channel Tunnel divisions, broken down by party. Table 6 gives the majority by which each Bill was defeated, and also shows overall Commons turnout. The Channel Tunnel divisions were well attended when compared with the average turnout for divisions in the 1885-1886 parliament of 255 members, or thirty-seven percent.⁶⁵ By far the most popular debate in terms of speakers was that of 1884, when, despite complaints in the press that it was a waste of parliamentary time, twenty-nine members from all three parties took the opportunity to air their views in a four-hour debate which completely dominated the day's

⁶¹ *York Herald*, 20 June 1881, p. 5.

⁶² *Manchester Guardian*, 11 July 1883, p. 5.

⁶³ *Submarine Continental Railway Company... 11th January, 1883* (London: C.F. Roworth, 1883), p. 11. Beaumont had been a Liberal MP until 1880, as had another founder shareholder Sir Julian Goldsmid, while by 1886 the Liberal MPs Sir Michael A. Bass and Arthur Benjamin Cohen were shareholders, alongside the Liberal peer Nathaniel Rothschild and the former Liberal MP Admiral John Hay. For 1881 and 1886 shareholder lists see TNA, RAIL 779/9; RAIL 779/10. Bass and Goldsmid were both directors of other railway companies; Goldsmid was not a shareholder in 1886, by which time he was a Liberal Unionist MP. See Geoffrey Alderman, *The Railway Interest* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1973), pp. 117, 149.

⁶⁴ TNA, RAIL 779/45. The Liberals were Grosvenor, Sir Thomas Brassey and Joseph Dodds. Two former Liberal MPs, Frederick Beaumont and John Hick also owned shares, the latter an industrialist who served as chairman of the Beaumont Compressed Air Locomotive Company – both presumably had been members since the 1870s. *Daily News*, 27 May 1880, p. 4.

⁶⁵ Lubenow, *Parliamentary Politics*, p. 346. The Commons numbered 658 members during 1884-1885, increasing to 670 after 1885.

proceedings.⁶⁶ On the other hand the 1887 debate was rushed to a division after the third speech to allow more time for the Irish Land Bill, something which probably accounts for the low turnout on this vote. The extremely high turnout in 1888 is explained by Gladstone's intervention in the Tunnel's favour, something he also did in 1890, when only himself, Watkin and the President of the Board of Trade Michael Hicks-Beach spoke. The Strangers' Gallery was well attended on both these occasions, and in 1890 it was expected that Wolseley and the Duke of Cambridge would be present.⁶⁷ Although widely regarded as a forgone conclusion, each vote was anticipated by frantic lobbying on behalf of both sides, and the result was closely scrutinised in the next day's papers for evidence of any shift in opinion.

⁶⁶ *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper*, 18 May 1884, p. 6. Length of the debate discussed in *Nottingham Journal*, 17 May 1884, p. 2.

⁶⁷ *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 27 June 1888, p. 3; *Western Daily News*, 3 June 1890, p. 8.

Tables 1-6: Parliamentary Divisions on Channel Tunnel Bills, 1884-1890.
(Tellers indicated in brackets) [Appendix 2; 3]

Table 1: 14 May 1884		
Party	Aye	No
Liberal	54 (1)	119 (2)
Conservative	5 (1)	100
Parnellite	25	3
Total	84	222

Table 2: 12 May 1885		
Party	Aye	No
Liberal	59 (2)	133 (2)
Conservative	9	145
Parnellite	30	3
Total	98	281

Table 3: 3 August 1887		
Party	Aye	No
Liberal	39	13
Conservative	14 (1)	125 (2)
Parnellite	48	0
Liberal Unionist	6 (1)	15
Total	107	153

Table 4: 27 June 1888		
Party	Aye	No
Liberal	89 (2)	33
Conservative	9	232 (2)
Parnellite	63	0
Liberal Unionist	4	42
Total	165	307

Table 5: 5 June 1890		
Party	Aye	No
Liberal	97 (1)	29
Conservative	11 (1)	179 (2)
Parnellite	38	0
Liberal Unionist	6	26
Total	152	234

Table 6: Majorities and Turnout		
Year	Majority	Turnout
1884	138	46.5%
1885	183	57.8%
1887	46	38.8%
1888	142	70.4%
1890	81	57.6%

Watkin as a Parliamentary Promoter

Before examining the positions of the Parties on the Tunnel, it is worth considering the role of the central actor himself. Watkin was famous for his unquenchable conviction that his project would eventually win through.⁶⁸ By 1885 he was becoming known as the ‘member for the Channel Tunnel’ – or, as the Parliamentary columnists for *Funny Folks* and *Punch* would have it, ‘Lord Tannel Chunnel’.⁶⁹ He was no mere fanatic, however, and made sure to put his long experience of lobbying on behalf of railway legislation to good use, aided by the fellow SCRC director and Tory MP for Whitehaven George Cavendish-Bentinck in the Commons, as well as Brabourne and Alfred Churchill in the Lords. Before each vote the SCRC printed and circulated among MPs a pamphlet explaining and defending its Bill, and a month before the 1888 vote a public meeting was organised in London in its favour.⁷⁰ In 1887 Watkin even provided a piece of grey chalk for the House to inspect, in order to prove its waterproof qualities.⁷¹

Watkin’s initial aim in 1884 and 1885 was to force the Liberal government into expressing an opinion of its own. On both occasions he dwelt upon the ‘curious changes of opinion’ which Chamberlain had undergone, and directly challenged Gladstone to state whether he ‘was still in favour, as he used to be’.⁷² In 1885 he promised that, if the Prime Minister publicly stated his opposition, he would withdraw his Bill and wait for a new Parliament which would be ‘more in harmony with the views of the country’.⁷³ He returned to this latter theme in 1887 when, faced with an openly hostile Conservative government, he placed hope in the new ‘Democratic’ or ‘working men’s’ parliament of the 1884 Reform Act, presenting the vote as a chance to find out ‘whether the idea of peace and fraternity between nations permeates the mind of the new

⁶⁸ *Western Daily Press*, 28 June 1888, p. 8.

⁶⁹ *Evening Telegraph* (Dundee), 28 Dec. 1885, p. 2; *Funny Folks*, 24 May 1884, p. 162, 23 May 1885, p. 163; *Punch*, 7 July 1888, p. 11; *Punch*, 14 June 1890, p. 287.

⁷⁰ TNA, RAIL 779/24, *Statement by the Directors of the Submarine Continental Railway Company*; Michael Hicks-Beach referred to one such circular in Parl. Deb., 5 June 1890, cols. 34-35. For the 1888 meeting see *The Channel Tunnel: Report of a Meeting held at St. James’s Hall, Piccadilly, 25th May, 1888* (London: McCorquodale, 1888).

⁷¹ Watkin, Parl. Deb., 3 Aug. 1887 col. 1042.

⁷² Watkin, Parl. Deb., 14 May 1884, col. 307-318; 12 May 1885, cols. 323-333.

⁷³ Watkin, Parl. Deb., 12 May 1885, cols. 323-333.

democracy and their representatives.’⁷⁴ By 1888, perhaps more confident in the support of the Liberals, Watkin made a more concerted effort to appeal to Tories, even making a hopeful if somewhat misguided attempt to exploit Lord Charles Beresford’s criticisms of British naval strength, arguing that the Tunnel could become a secure route for foodstuffs in the event of war.⁷⁵ His 1890 speech was also more forceful on imperial and defence matters. This being said, all of Watkin’s speeches were founded on the same themes he had been using since 1881. In their substance they consisted largely of appeals to the inherent goodness of the project itself, long descriptions of the views of the many eminent men – Cobden, Prince Albert, Disraeli – who had allegedly supported it in the past, and detailed justifications of the SCRC’s dealings with the Board of Trade, accompanied by voluminous quotation from private correspondence, official reports and newspaper cuttings. He took every opportunity to demand whether the House was for ‘peace and union’ or ‘isolation and separation’, and always emphasised the pains his Company had gone to treat the Tunnel ‘patriotically in a national, and not a money-making, spirit.’⁷⁶

An important complicating factor in the Parliamentary votes, however, was the unpopularity of Watkin within the House.⁷⁷ More determined to follow his railway interests than any whip, his vehement *laissez-faire* economic libertarianism meant he was fiercely opposed to Chamberlain’s brand of collectivist Radicalism even before the two men clashed over the Tunnel.⁷⁸ An ‘independent’ Liberal at the best of times, he voted against the Home Rule Bill in 1886, but never obviously acted in the Liberal Unionist interest and maintained a close friendship with Gladstone.⁷⁹ By the time of his retirement in 1895 all three parties had cause to

⁷⁴ Watkin, Parl. Deb., 3 Aug. 1887 col. 1039.

⁷⁵ Watkin, Parl. Deb., 27 June 1888, cols. 1438-1439.

⁷⁶ Watkin, Parl. Deb., 3 Aug. 1887, col. 1037.

⁷⁷ Hodgkins, *Railway King*, p. 519.

⁷⁸ Hodgkins, *Railway King*, pp. 511-512. For Watkin’s clashes with Chamberlain see Alderman, *Railway Interest*, pp. 92-93. This was a hatred he shared with Lord Brabourne, who himself officially sat for the Tories after 1880 despite being known for his ‘democratic and progressive views’. See Brabourne’s obituary in the *Dover Express*, 10 Feb. 1893, p. 5; Alderman, *Railway Interest*, pp. 79-80; W.F. Rae, rev. H.C.G. Matthew ‘Hugessen, Edward Hugessen Knatchbull-, First Baron Brabourne’, *ODNB*.

⁷⁹ *South Wales Daily News*, 9 Dec. 1885, p. 2.

Hodgkins, *Railway King*, p. 512; Lubenow, *Parliamentary Politics*, p. 344.

claim incumbency in Hythe, so unclear had been his political allegiances.⁸⁰ The problems this unpopularity caused for the Tunnel were obvious throughout the debates. Watkin's intransigence during 1882-1883 provided Chamberlain and his Conservative successors with ample material with which to paint him as an untrustworthy and unscrupulous capitalist. In 1884 Henry Labouchere and the maverick Tory Robert Peel used their speeches to define the division as a vote of confidence in Watkin himself; despite his CTC shares, Randolph Churchill was said to have become an opponent of the entire Channel Tunnel idea on the back of his personal hatred for Watkin.⁸¹ Watkin's theatrical repudiations of a profit motive were regularly mocked, with Sir Edward Hamley satirising the amalgamated CTC as a 'benevolent association' in 1888.⁸² The 1884 and 1885 votes were also marked by rivalry between the SCRC and the CTC. Every MP with an interest in the CTC voted No in one or both of these divisions, and the appointment of Grosvenor as the Teller for the Noes in his capacity as Liberal Chief Whip caused a 'good deal of amusement' in 1884. Watkin himself did not see the funny side, threatening 'all manner of dreadful consequences' to Ministers in the lobby that evening, because of his treatment at the hands of Chamberlain.⁸³ Controversy over Watkin's relationship with the Irish Nationalists also affected the 1888 vote, as discussed below. More intangibly, it is possible that the sheer regularity of Watkin's Bills created a certain level of fatigue among members, the 'recurring nuisance' preventing any chance of a period of reflection which might have allowed passions to subside and provided the SCRC a fairer hearing.⁸⁴ While this does not detract from the ideological significance of the Tunnel project, and clearly did not prevent a substantial number of MPs from acting in Watkin's favour, such personal factors must be considered when evaluating the outcome.

⁸⁰ For the two Unionist parties see correspondence relating to the 1895 Hythe by-election, CRL, UoB, JC6/6/1E. According to Lubenow, Watkin officially re-joined the Liberals in 1892, *Parliamentary Politics*, p. 287.

⁸¹ Labouchere and Peel, Parl. Deb., 14 May 1884, cols. 333-337; Hodgkins, *Railway King* p. 536.

⁸² Hamley, Parl. Deb., 27 June 1888, col. 1469.

⁸³ *Western Daily Press*, London Letter, 15 May 1884, p. 8.

⁸⁴ *The Times*, 1 Jan. 1890, p. 7.

The Liberals

Watkin's Bills repeatedly split the Liberals, although in all three post-1886 votes over seventy percent of those who voted sided with the SCRC. Even in 1884, almost double the number of Liberals spoke for the Tunnel than against it. The remarkable drop in Liberal Noes in the last three votes reflected a move in line with the party leadership. In 1887 the former Cabinet Minister George Shaw Lefevre voted for the Bill, while in 1888 Gladstone, Childers, Henry Campbell-Bannerman, John Morely and Anthony Mundella followed his example, although the Party was not whipped on these occasions. Indeed, considering the Liberals had roughly 200 MPs after the 1886 General Election it is clear that by 1890 a full fifty percent of the parliamentary party was willing to support Watkin, with no more than fifteen percent opposed. This makes for a stark contrast with the comparatively few Liberal MPs – certainly no more than forty percent of the entire party – who were willing to follow their leaders in 1884 and 1885, indicating a discomfiture with obstructing a project so closely linked to their own ideological outlook. It is clear, therefore, that historians' assumptions relating to the popularity of the Tunnel in Liberal circles post-1882 must be substantially reversed. Of particular note is the fact that, while twenty-one individual Liberals voted for the Tunnel in every post-1886 division, only four went through the opposing lobby the same number of times, a fact hardly indicative of widespread and sustained antipathy. The great majority of the former group were Radicals and thirteen were members of the International Arbitration League (IAL) in 1891 – in every division, Radicals constituted at least sixty percent of the Liberal Ayes.⁸⁵ It is important to be careful when generalising the Tunnel supporters as determined Radicals, however. For example, one of the twenty-one was Sir Edward Reed, former Director of Naval Construction and a firm 'big navy' man, who nevertheless proved to be a fervent Tunnel advocate, designing his own 'submarine tubular railway' in 1891 in an attempt to allay military concerns.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ List of IAL members in the Commons taken from *The Arbitrator*, July 1891, pp. 76-77.

⁸⁶ The plans and official correspondence relating to Reed's proposals are in TNA, ADM 116/1223. The scheme was later adopted by the CTC.

The obvious strength of Liberal support was reflected in the language used by Chamberlain to oppose the scheme in 1884 and 1885, which, as William Baxter observed, was ‘carefully vague’, avoiding anything which tied the government to the view that the Tunnel might prove a military danger.⁸⁷ Instead he stuck resolutely to the line that the government was to be guided by Parliament alone, suggesting that any apparent change in his own, Gladstone’s or the government’s opinions were ‘entirely a figment of his [Watkin’s] own imagination’.⁸⁸ Much of Chamberlain’s 1884 speech was dedicated to further obfuscating the government’s position by criticising Watkin personally for his defiance towards the Board of Trade during 1882.

The awkwardness of Chamberlain’s tiptoeing rhetoric in the context of Gladstonian Liberalism was obvious. As the Parnellite T.P. O’Connor pointed out in 1885, the Liberals had come to power in 1880 with the aim of improving European relations and encouraging peace, and a Channel Tunnel seemed to him to fit naturally with this policy.⁸⁹ The Liberal Charles McLaren could hardly conceive of anything more unfortunate than ‘the Minister of Trade and Commerce getting up in that House and using his official and moral influence in opposition to a scheme calculated to prove so highly beneficial to the country’.⁹⁰ And indeed, when they were given a chance to speak, Liberal MPs from across the party took the opportunity to express their belief in the Tunnel as an agent of progress and peace, and to castigate the forces holding it back. The project was praised as the embodiment of the age of railways, tunnels and bridges in a display of Liberal confidence in the benefits of technology.⁹¹ The mechanical engineer and member for Monmouth, Edward Carbutt, explained:

Before the age of railways there was that feeling among the ignorant inhabitants of a place to “fling half-a-brick” at the head of a stranger. Railways opening the means of constant intercourse did away with that feeling; and with a railway by which they could

⁸⁷ Baxter, Parl. Deb., 14 May 1884, col. 325.

⁸⁸ Chamberlain, Parl. Deb., 12 May 1885, cols. 336-339; 14 May 1884, col. 317.

⁸⁹ O’Connor, Parl. Deb., 12 May 1885, col. 344.

⁹⁰ McLaren, Parl. Deb., 14 May 1884, cols. 347-349.

⁹¹ Sir Wilfrid Lawson, Parl. Deb., 3 Aug. 1887, col. 1061.

visit France, and Frenchmen could visit England, they would entirely get rid of that antagonistic feeling.⁹²

The Tunnel was compared to the Suez Canal, the British opposition to which, Baxter reminded the House, had made the country the ‘laughing-stock of Europe’, and which his fellow Radical Charles Hopwood marked out as a moment of shame for the nation.⁹³ Such attitudes characterised all of the Liberal pro-Tunnel speeches: to this extent, at least, Watkin’s emphasis on Cobdenism had paid dividends.

The main motivating factor behind the pro-Tunnel Liberal speeches was outrage at the invasion scare. ‘It was discreditable’, said the Radical William Willis, echoing Cobden, ‘to say that the French would act like corsairs and bandits’; such opinions ‘ought to be relegated to a barbarous past, and not uttered at a time when Christian doctrines were mitigating and softening the hearts of men.’⁹⁴ These accusations of prejudice were not, however, directed against the British people, but rather the armed forces. ‘Whenever there was a question of the interests of civilization, so far as they were involved in the intercourse of nations and the maintenance of friendship,’ argued Willis, ‘military men were always on the wrong side.’⁹⁵ John Slagg developed this point further in 1885, when he lamented that ‘upon every policy nowadays the Military and Naval Authorities were invariably referred to as the arbiters.’⁹⁶ Armed forces officers – the Duke of Cambridge was specifically singled out a number of times – were accused of insulting France, spreading panic and exceeding their authority by attempting to direct government policy.⁹⁷ For many Liberals, the Tunnel was clearly an important prize in the struggle between civilians and professionals for control of defence policy.

Fundamental to these criticisms was a belief that ‘the people’ were not accurately represented by invasion alarmism. The problem, insisted the Radical anti-armament campaigner Alfred Illingworth, was not with the people but the Commons, which mainly represented the

⁹² Carbutt, *Parl. Deb.*, 14 May 1884, cols. 368-369.

⁹³ Baxter, *Parl. Deb.*, 14 May 1884, col. 325; Hopwood, *Parl. Deb.*, 14 May 1884, col. 343.

⁹⁴ Willis, *Parl. Deb.*, 14 May 1884, col. 347-349.

⁹⁵ Willis, *Parl. Deb.*, 14 May 1884, col. 338.

⁹⁶ Slagg, *Parl. Deb.*, 12 May 1885, col. 334.

⁹⁷ Alfred Illingworth, *Parl. Deb.*, 14 May 1884, col. 355.

‘miserable’ and ‘prejudiced’ opinions of the upper classes.⁹⁸ Both he and William Baxter looked forward to a near future when a more sympathetic public would consider the question without prejudice.⁹⁹ Three years later – ironically the time when Baxter thought such a change would have occurred – Sir Wilfrid Lawson exhibited a more cautious but still optimistic evaluation of the state of public opinion. For him, parliament did not exist simply to reflect national prejudices, but should set an example for the country to follow:

The only argument that can be used against it is that if we make this tunnel it may increase the chances of scare and panic, from which we are always suffering in this country. But surely my Hon. friend must have arrived at the conclusion that people will not always be as silly as they are now. Surely the nations will get wiser as time goes on. At any rate, it is our duty to teach them the folly of their ways.¹⁰⁰

Not all Liberals spoke in favour of the Tunnel, however. Before every vote except 1888, letters attacking Watkin’s scheme as a farcical waste of parliamentary time and a danger to the public finances appeared in the London press signed by ‘A LIBERAL’ and dated from the Reform Club, each concluding by urging MPs to attend the House and vote against it.¹⁰¹ Like Watkin’s supporters, his opponents came from all areas of the Party. Of the four repeat Liberal opponents of the Bill, two were Radicals and three members of the IAL, including its President and signatory of Knowles’ petition, Thomas Burt.¹⁰² The fourth was R.C. Munro-Ferguson, Lord Rosebery’s private secretary and future ‘Liberal Imperialist’, who went through the division lobby in 1888 alongside two other ‘Limps’, Edward Grey and Sydney Buxton – an indication of the ideological direction these young MPs were taking.¹⁰³

Many of Watkin’s Liberal opponents were afraid of a direct invasion. The Radical Philip Muntz, for example, spent some time in 1884 warning of how a secret French expedition might

⁹⁸ Illingworth, Parl. Deb., 14 May 1884, col. 356.

⁹⁹ Baxter, Parl. Deb., 14 May 1884, col. 326.

¹⁰⁰ Lawson, Parl. Deb., 3 Aug. 1887, col. 1062.

¹⁰¹ *The Standard*, 14 May 1884, p. 5; *The Times*, 21 Apr. 1885, p. 9; *The Times*, 3 Aug. 1887, p. 5; *The Times*, 5 June 1890, p. 5.

¹⁰² Burt exhibited pro-navy sympathies later in his life: see Laity, *British Peace Movement*, p. 199.

¹⁰³ For Rosebery and the Tunnel see chapter ten, below.

seize the English entrance.¹⁰⁴ More broadly, however, their concerns were rooted in the social and economic burdens which had already been aired by the Liberal press. Sir Hussey Vivian predicted ‘perpetually recurring panics’ were the Tunnel to be completed and emphasised his own concerns about conscription, taking the opportunity to defend the views of the military which his fellow Liberals had pilloried.¹⁰⁵ Similarly Henry Wiggin, who had supported the Tunnel prior to 1882, admitted that the views of the naval and military authorities had convinced him that the project would increase taxation.¹⁰⁶ A railway director and strong advocate of closer Anglo-French relations, Wiggin was exactly the sort of man Watkin should have been able to count on for his vote; instead, Wiggin voted against the Tunnel in 1884, 1885 and 1888.¹⁰⁷ Wiggin’s line of reasoning typified the problem which the Tunnel posed for Liberals, forcing them to choose between their belief in the power of commerce and communication on the one hand, and their fears of expense, panic and militarism on the other. The choice was too much even for some of the party’s staunchest pacifists. For example, the Quaker and former president of the Peace Society Sir Joseph Pease abstained on all votes after 1884, explaining that he did not believe the British people had sufficient confidence in their neighbours for the project not to lead to massive defence expenditure. He advised Watkin to withdraw the Bill ‘until the state of Europe offered greater inducements for such a work than it did now.’¹⁰⁸ Such views reflected both the strength of Wolseley’s campaign and serious difficulties which many liberal internationalists experienced in answering it.

Gladstone

1887 proved the turning point in Watkin’s relationship with the Liberal Party. With the amalgamation of the SCRC and the CTC he secured the backing of the influential Radical backbencher Henry Labouchere.¹⁰⁹ Labouchere’s fellow member for Northampton, Charles

¹⁰⁴ Muntz, Parl. Deb., 14 May 1884, cols. 327-329.

¹⁰⁵ Vivian, Parl. Deb., 14 May 1884, cols. 331-333; Parl. Deb., 27 June 1888, cols. 1478-1491.

¹⁰⁶ Wiggin, Parl. Deb., 14 May 1884, cols. 364-365.

¹⁰⁷ In 1888 Wiggin signed a petition, alongside Watkin and a number of other MPs, asking the Earl of Derby to chair an organisation advocating closer Anglo-French relations, including ‘the promotion of readier intercourse’. TNA, RAIL 779/40.

¹⁰⁸ Pease, Parl. Deb., 12 May 1885, cols. 342-343.

¹⁰⁹ See correspondence in TNA, 779/23.

Bradlaugh, also joined the cause by publishing an unequivocally Cobdenite pro-Tunnel pamphlet that same year.¹¹⁰ With the support of these men the Tunnel was confirmed in its position as a Liberal ‘fad’ holding substantial Radical support.¹¹¹ However, the highpoint of Watkin’s year was Gladstone’s public declaration for the Tunnel, made a few days after the 1887 vote as part of a toast marking the start of construction of a railway bridge near Hawarden.¹¹² The following year Watkin wrote to ask Gladstone if he would speak in its favour, which he agreed to do.¹¹³ Promising to provide him with information on the scheme, Watkin also took pains to remind Gladstone that John Slagg, the Bill’s seconder, was Cobden’s godson, clearly playing to the Liberal leader’s increasing veneration of the Radical leader.¹¹⁴

Much of Gladstone’s 1888 Commons speech on the Channel Tunnel echoed that which had gone before.¹¹⁵ He spoke movingly of the benefits of trade and communication; he praised the ‘dignity and self-respect’ of the French, who, he was keen to point out, historically had far more to fear of the British than the British did of them; he listed many examples where military authorities had been subsequently proven wrong in their warnings. At the core of his speech, however, was an incisive deconstruction of the 1882 scare which probed contemporary understandings of ‘panic’ and ‘public opinion’. He commenced by describing the military opposition. Once that had begun, he said, ‘a great ferment began to prevail...the literary authorities were brought to back up the military authorities...to intimidate their countrymen by conjuring up phantoms of danger.’ To these two forces was added a third, ‘society’, which was ‘always ready for the enjoyment of the luxury of a good panic.’ It was this trinity, he contested, which had created and indulged the Tunnel scare:

These speculative panics — these panics in the air — have an attraction for certain classes of minds that is indescribable, and these classes of minds, I am bound to say, are

¹¹⁰ Charles Bradlaugh, *The Channel Tunnel: Ought the Democracy to Oppose or Support it?* (London: Bonner, 1887). For Bradlaugh and Cobden see Howe, *Free Trade*, p. 124.

¹¹¹ ‘The Fads and the Faddists’, *Radical Leader*, 29 Sept. 1888, p. 2.

¹¹² *The Times*, 17 Aug. 1887, p. 9.

¹¹³ Watkin to Gladstone, 26 May 1888, BL, Add. MS 44337.

¹¹⁴ Watkin to Gladstone, 21 June 1888, BL, Add. MS 44337. See also Denis Crane, *The Life-Story of Sir Robert W. Perks* (London: Charles Kelly, 1909), pp. 80-84.

¹¹⁵ Gladstone, Parl. Deb., 27 June 1888, cols. 1454-1469.

very largely to be found among the educated portion of society. The subject of this panic never touched the mind of the nation. These things are not accessible to the mind of the nation. They are accessible to what is called the public opinion of the day — that is to say, public opinion manufactured in London by great editors and clubs, who are at all times formidable, and a great power for the purposes of the moment, but who are a greater power and become an overwhelming power, when they are backed by the threefold forces of the military and literary authorities and the social circles of London. Well, Sir, these powers among them created at that period such a panic that even those who were most favourable to the Tunnel, of whom I was one, thought it quite vain to offer a direct opposition.¹¹⁶

For Gladstone, defence panics were exclusive and artificial phenomena, representative only of the ‘educated’ metropolitan elites who created and encouraged them as much for their own amusement and profit as for any genuine concern for the safety of the country. The language of ‘public opinion’ was therefore nothing more than a dishonest attempt to make a matter of limited concern appear as though it were a national issue. While he was certainly under no illusion as to the power and influence of the newspaper press, neither did he believe, as did so many of his fellow politicians, that it was an accurate mirror of the national mood. Indeed, in the case of the Channel Tunnel it was quite the opposite: Gladstone was aware, for example, of organised working class feeling, having been sent pro-tunnel trade union resolutions by Shipton during 1882.¹¹⁷ The morally ‘uncorrupted’ masses were, for him, far better judges of issues of foreign policy.¹¹⁸ As his speech made clear, the Channel Tunnel was to him an obvious instance of the ‘masses against the classes’, and he was, belatedly, determined to take a public stand with the former.

Gladstone’s apparent ‘conversion’ – or, as *Punch* would have it, capture [Figure 20] – transformed the debate from an amusing side-show into a major political event.¹¹⁹ It also brought James Knowles once more into the struggle with a long letter on Watkin’s renewed

¹¹⁶ Gladstone, Parl. Deb., 27 June 1888, col. 1459.

¹¹⁷ See the news article and opinion piece in *Barnet Press*, 1 July 1882, p. 8. Gladstone’s awareness of Trade Union support is also suggested by Wilson, *Tunnel Visions*, pp. 39-40.

¹¹⁸ Thompson, *British Political Culture*, p. 149.

¹¹⁹ ‘When the right hon. Gentleman’s biography came to be written’, jibed Sir Edward Hamley, ‘it would largely consist of the history of his conversions.’ Parl. Deb., 27 June 1888, col. 1473.

‘folly’.¹²⁰ The speech itself was regarded by many as a triumph, and it clearly had a powerful effect on the Liberal Party. To take but one individual example, Cyril Flower, who signed Knowles’ petition in 1882, voted in favour in both 1888 and 1890, an obvious consequence of his personal admiration for Gladstone.¹²¹ According to Watkin, who quickly arranged for the speech to be reprinted with a forward by Sir Francis Lawley, no less a political opponent than Lord Hartington had told Henry Fowler that it was ‘the finest he had ever heard’.¹²² But it was, of course, not enough. The debate, reflected the *Pall Mall Gazette*, ‘was as brilliant and entertaining as the division was decisive’.¹²³ For *The Times*, ‘Mr Gladstone is, perhaps, the only man in the country capable of persuading himself that there is no danger of an outcry in France which might precipitate a war.’¹²⁴ Nevertheless, Gladstone’s intervention, and his subsequent speech in 1890, appeared to augur well for the scheme. Reflecting on the 1890 vote, the *Daily News* felt able to report that ‘there is a striking agreement of Liberal leaders on the side of the tunnel’.¹²⁵ Future, as well as present leaders: Henry Herbert Asquith and David Lloyd George both supported the Bill in 1890, although Harcourt, importantly, abstained in all three post-1886 votes.

¹²⁰ *Morning Post*, 27 June 1888, p. 4.

¹²¹ John Davis, ‘Flower, Cyril, Baron Battersea’, *ODNB*.

¹²² Watkin to Gladstone, 28 June 1888, BL, Add. MS 44337. *Channel Tunnel: Great Speech by the Right Hon. W.E. Gladstone* (London: Roworth, 1888): according to the cover, Gladstone edited this publication himself. Wilfrid Lawson considered the speech one of Gladstone’s ‘most beautiful’. Russell (ed.), *Wilfrid Lawson*, p. 194.

¹²³ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 28 June 1888, p. 4.

¹²⁴ *The Times*, 28 June 1888, p. 9.

¹²⁵ *Daily News*, 6 June 1890, p. 5. See also *Manchester Guardian*, 6 June 1890, p. 5.

THE WATKIN SPIDER AND THE GLADSTONE FLY.

(New Version.)



"WILL you walk into my Tunnel?" said the Spider to the Fly,
 "'Tis the handiest little Tunnel that ever you did spy.
 You've only got to pop your head inside and peep, no more,
 And you'll see a many curious things you never saw before.
 Will you, will you, will you, will you, walk in, Grand
 Old Fly?"

Now, this particular Grand Old Fly was very "fly," you know,
 And had clear business notions and ideas of *quid pro quo*.
 Says he, "About your Tunnel patriots doubt, alarmists chafe;
 Of course, it's most ridiculous, but will you swear it's safe?
 Oh, will you, will you, will you, will you?" said the
 Grand Old Fly.

Said the Spider to the Fly, "It's most absurd, upon my soul,
 To see so big a nation scared about so small a hole.
 To share the scare that's in the air is worthy, don't you know,
 Not of a Grand Old Fly like you, but of a midge like JOE!
 Then won't you, won't you, won't you, won't you,
 plucky Grand Old Fly?"

"Will you show the feather white and vote with JOSEPH, Grand
 Old Fly?"
 "No, if I do, may I be shot! It may be, by-and-by,
 I'll ask you—but no matter; with you now my lot is cast."
 The Spider laughed, "Ha, ha! my boy, I've got you safe at last!
 You will then, will then, will then, will then, really
 Grand Old Fly!"

Figure 20: 'The Watkin Spider and the Gladstone Fly'.

Gladstone, centre, is lured into the Tunnel by Watkin, right. On the left, a fly labelled 'shareholders' is caught in Watkin's web. *Punch*, 30 June 1888, p. 302.

The Unionists

H.C.G Matthew's suggestion that the Tunnel was generally opposed by the Whigs is given some credence by the voting record of the Liberal Unionists after 1886, of which Watkin was technically a member. Following a poor showing in 1887 a majority of the Party voted against the Bill in 1888, although turnout slumped again in 1890. Radical Unionists, led by Chamberlain's continued opposition, were also more likely to vote against. However, in an illustration of how internationalism continued to maintain a toehold within the party, Chamberlain's fellow Birmingham Radicals Jesse Collings, George Dixon and Joseph Powell-Williams all voted in favour at least once. Repeat Liberal Unionist opponents were few, although it is worth noting that none were Radical, and repeat supporters even fewer – other than Watkin himself, only the anti-imperialist Leonard Courtney voted three times for the Tunnel. Generalisations about the nature of the Liberal Unionist position are difficult, however, because other than Watkin no members of the group spoke in any of the debates.

It can, however, be said for certain that two factors directly influenced the Liberal Unionist voting record. The first, Irish policy, will be discussed below. The second was the position of the Conservatives, who voted against the Tunnel in such numbers and with such regularity so as to dismiss any suggestion that this opposition came from any particular group or clique, such as the service or Volunteer members. Indeed, the Tories brought a greater proportion of their MPs through the No lobby than the Liberals even when the latter were in government. Interestingly, the Conservatives made as little attempt as the Liberals to forge an 'official' policy towards the Tunnel during 1882 and 1883. Neither Sir Stafford Northcote nor Lord Salisbury, the two figures vying for the Party leadership during this time, expressed a personal view of the Tunnel. Indeed, there is evidence to suggest that Salisbury, who was familiar with the Channel Tunnel idea from his time working alongside Watkin as Chairman of the Great Eastern Railway Company during 1868-1872, was actually a supporter of it, possibly a case of his Francophilia

and suspicion of experts outweighing his distrust of internationalism.¹²⁶ Nevertheless, the Conservative party appears to have been whipped in every division, especially in 1888 and 1890 when most Cabinet ministers were in attendance, forcing many who may have sympathised with Watkin to toe the Party line.¹²⁷

‘Conservatives are naturally opposed to progress of any kind,’ reflected one Parliamentary sketch writer in 1882, ‘whether under the sea or over it.’¹²⁸ For the Tory party, opposition to such an obviously ‘liberal’ project came easily. In contrast to Chamberlain’s awkward avoidance of the invasion issue, his Conservative successors as government spokesman on the Tunnel, Baron Henry de Worms in 1887 and Sir Michael Hicks-Beach in 1888 and 1890, clearly relished the chance to rail against the ‘temptation to an invasion of this country’ which the Tunnel represented.¹²⁹ In language which would be almost unimaginable coming from a minister in any other context, they described the Tunnel as a ‘military frontier’ and pointed directly to the danger of a surprise attack by France.¹³⁰ In this, however, they were only reflecting the views of Tory backbenchers who enthusiastically adopted Wolseley’s anticipations of future warfare. ‘If the French were at war with us,’ opined retired Admiral Sir John Hay, ‘they would be unjust to their country if they did not attempt, by every means in their power, by surprise, by every strategy which could be conceived, to bring destruction upon us and success to themselves.’¹³¹ Sir Henry Selwin-Ibbetson and Percy Wyndham reminded the House that no declaration of war had been issued when the French invaded Tunis, Madagascar

¹²⁶ Roberts, *Salisbury*, pp. 102-103. Salisbury allegedly once joked that Britain would have more to worry about from French tourists than the French Army coming through the Tunnel: Wilson, *Visions*, p. 136. In 1929 Salisbury’s son was reported to have said that ‘like his father... he was a strong adherent of the project.’ *The Times*, 12 Jan. 1929, p. 14.

¹²⁷ Watkin to Gladstone, 29 June 1888, BL, Add. MS 44337; *Daily News*, 6 June 1890, p. 5. For Conservative Cabinet ministers see the conclusion of George Goschen’s speech to the St. George’s Conservative Association in *The Times*, 28 June 1888, p. 6; Michael Hicks-Beach to Edward Stanhope, undated letter (probably 1888), asking if Stanhope will speak against Tunnel, KHL, U1590/O289.

¹²⁸ *Birmingham Daily Post*, 1 July 1882, p. 5.

¹²⁹ Hicks-Beach, Parl. Deb., 27 June 1888, col. 1451. De Worms was Parliamentary Secretary to the Board of Trade, while Hicks-Beach was the President.

¹³⁰ De Worms, Parl. Deb., 3 Aug. 1887, col. 1058; Hicks-Beach, Parl. Deb., 27 June 1888, col. 1449.

¹³¹ Hay, Parl. Deb., 14 May 1884, col. 341.

or Indochina— nor, indeed, when the Royal Navy bombarded Alexandria.¹³² War, when it came, would be sudden and brutal, and Britain, lacking a population organised under conscription, was in no position to resist such a strike without the Channel shield.

The debate was more than an opportunity for Tories to lecture the country on a future war with France, however. It also allowed them to display their contempt for the Cobdenite thesis of international relations. For them, the Tunnel was more likely to create ‘jealousies and political combinations’ in Europe and increase tensions with France than allay them.¹³³ The comparison with the Suez Canal, which had been introduced by Baxter and Hopwood, came in for particular scrutiny. Far from a blessing, Wyndham argued that the Canal had been a ‘curse’, for it had resulted in the British invasion of Egypt and plunged the empire into the Sudan crisis.¹³⁴ George Gregory asserted the Canal had damaged British commerce, while Selwin-Ibbetson and David MacIver invoked Lord Palmerston’s argument that it had increased the strategic vulnerability of British India, just as the Tunnel would do the same for Britain.¹³⁵ Also notable was the strong vein of protectionist rhetoric which characterised many of these Conservative interventions, a perspective which was slowly growing in confidence in the Party during this period.¹³⁶ Edward Hicks warned that the Tunnel might damage British manufacturing by facilitating an increase in cheap French goods, and Charles Newdgate argued that the project was yet another example of commercial interests being promoted at the expense of agriculture.¹³⁷ Most remarkable of all was MacIver’s speech, in which he characterised British trade with France as the act of ‘breaking our own heads in regard to many of our industries’, and denied that the British working classes gained anything from cross-Channel trade.¹³⁸ As his fellow Tory John Puleston observed, MacIver’s argument went some way towards ‘reversing all their preconceived ideas

¹³² Selwin-Ibbetson, Parl. Deb., 14 May 1884, col. 345; Wyndham, col. 353. This latter point at least was somewhat of a technicality, as the British had issued an ultimatum to the Egyptians prior to the attack.

¹³³ Sir Massey Lopes, Parl. Deb., 14 May 1884, col. 330.

¹³⁴ Wyndham, Parl. Deb., 14 May 1884, cols. 352-353.

¹³⁵ Gregory, Parl. Deb., 14 May 1884, col. 364; Selwin-Ibbetson, col. 347; MacIver, cols. 371-372.

¹³⁶ Green, *Crisis of Conservatism*, pp. 30-35.

¹³⁷ Hicks, Parl. Deb., 14 May 1884, cols. 351-352; Newdgate, col. 369.

¹³⁸ MacIver, Parl. Deb., 14 May 1884, col. 372.

of trade'.¹³⁹ In a bizarre conclusion to his rambling and somewhat contradictory speech, MacIver revealed that he had actually decided to vote in favour of the Bill, as part of a personal vendetta against the Board of Trade, even though he 'emphatically' opposed the Tunnel. This aside, what was significant about MacIver and the other protectionist MPs was the way in which their ideas, alongside the other attacks on liberal internationalism, reflected a wider trend in Conservative political thought, towards characterising international relations, and Anglo-French relations in particular, as existing in a perpetual state of rivalry and struggle. This was the central theme of the final speech of the 1884 debate, made by the Tory MP for Bridport Charles Warton, who discarded any remaining niceties in a vehement rejection of the proposed *Entente Cordiale*:

He did not wish to say anything harsh about France; but he must say deliberately that he had no confidence in the peace of seventy years with France. He believed their interests clashed with ours all over the world, and they were trying to extend their power in every way they could. He did not believe in an alliance with France; our position and interests forbade that; and we must not live in a Fool's Paradise, or cry "Peace, Peace!" where there was no peace. It was because we must resolutely maintain our insular superiority, and believe in ourselves and not in the smooth promises of French statesmen, that he should oppose this measure.¹⁴⁰

Contrary to the broadly cosmopolitan outlook of the Liberal pro-Tunnellers, Watkin's few Tory backers defy easy generalisation. Some, such as Sir Henry Tyler, a railway director and former Royal Engineer who had been involved in the Anglo-French negotiations of 1875, supported it for its 'humanizing and civilizing' potential.¹⁴¹ Other Conservative supporters from the 'railway interest' included the Manchester MP Sir John Maclure, who acted as Teller for the Ayes in 1890.¹⁴² Others, however, found their own distinctly 'Tory' reasons for voting for the scheme. John Puleston, for example, while echoing Liberal astonishment that the country appeared determined to 'stand still' in the face of progress, was also keen to stress the importance of

¹³⁹ Puleston, Parl. Deb., 14 May 1884, col. 373.

¹⁴⁰ Warton, Parl. Deb., 14 May 1884, col. 382.

¹⁴¹ Tyler, Parl. Deb., 27 June 1888, col. 1501; Alderman, *Railway Interest*, p. 30.

¹⁴² Alderman, *Railway Interest*, pp. 138, 140.

Britain maintaining its position as ‘the foremost commercial nation in the world’.¹⁴³ The most interesting example of a similar perspective was that of SCRC director George Cavendish-Bentinck, a sponsor of the 1884 Bill. Cavendish-Bentinck did not ascribe to the idea that the Tunnel would improve Anglo-French relations and frankly admitted that French jealousy of the British was probably ineradicable.¹⁴⁴ He was himself a ‘fair trader’ and clearly had little truck with Watkin’s Cobdenism.¹⁴⁵ Nevertheless, he also criticised those who feared invasion, pointing out that previous invasion scares over steam power had proved unwarranted. For both Puleston and Cavendish-Bentinck the Tunnel was a matter of preserving British economic power, rather than fostering international peace. This was a view which the likes of Watkin and Brabourne struggled to articulate without resorting to the language of Cobdenism, language which instinctively turned most Tories against their proposals. In this respect Cavendish-Bentinck represented an underused weapon in the SCRC’s arsenal. He was little in the public eye before and during the scare of 1882, when an unquestionably Conservative pro-Tunnel voice was sorely needed. By the time he came to speak in 1884, the project had become too closely linked to Liberal utopianism in the eyes of its detractors.

The Parnellites

At first glance, it might be assumed that the Channel Tunnel was a subject far removed from Irish society and Irish politics. As the Dublin *Daily Express* observed, Irish public opinion had been somewhat apathetic even during the height of the 1882 scare.¹⁴⁶ Such apparent apathy did not stop Irish papers reporting extensively on the Tunnel, however, even if they avoided editorialising on it. Nor, as Alan O’Day has noted, was this apathy reflected by the Irish Nationalists at Westminster.¹⁴⁷ Even before Parnell took full control of the party in 1885 it had a good turnout and strong voting discipline in support of the Tunnel, and it is evident that many in the party felt strongly that the railway should be constructed. Three Parnellites spoke in

¹⁴³ Puleston, Parl. Deb., 14 May 1884, cols. 373-375.

¹⁴⁴ Cavendish-Bentinck, Parl. Deb., 14 May 1884, cols. 356-361.

¹⁴⁵ Green, *Crisis of Conservatism*, p. 334.

¹⁴⁶ *Daily Express* (Dublin), 31 Aug. 1882, p. 4.

¹⁴⁷ Alan O’Day, *The English Face of Irish Nationalism* (Dublin: Macmillan, 1977), pp. 145-146.

Watkin's favour during 1884 and 1885, one of whom, T.P. O'Connor, became closely involved with the amalgamated CTC and was invited to visit the Tunnel in 1886 alongside Labouchere and Bradlaugh.¹⁴⁸ The following year a group of Irish MPs visited the French workings at Sangatte, and in 1888 and 1890 Parnell himself voted for it.¹⁴⁹

Ideologically, the Channel Tunnel fitted naturally into the Irish Nationalist view of international affairs, which generally differed little from that of moderate Liberals.¹⁵⁰ O'Connor, for example, described himself as an 'optimist', and spoke strongly on the potential of the Tunnel to increase international goodwill.¹⁵¹ The Radically-inclined William Redmond echoed Liberal appeals to working class opinion, arguing that if the Tunnel were made an issue at the next general election the country would be seen to be 'absolutely and completely' in favour. 'If the present Bill were not allowed to be read a second time,' he continued, 'it would be because the working classes of England were not represented in the House of Commons as they ought to be'.¹⁵² Where a distinctively Irish attitude emerged, it complemented this wider 'liberal' critique. This was the case in the speech of Charles Dawson, for whom opposition to the Tunnel formed part of a narrative of British prejudice towards 'science' stretching back centuries:

How long was this opposition to the evidence of science, this opposition to the progress of civilization, to last? How long were these fearful prejudices to prevail when any great scientific work was proposed, or any great scientific discovery was made? This country opposed the introduction of the New Calendar, simply because it sprang from the Roman Pontiff—from the Court of Rome. How long was this country going on in its old ways?¹⁵³

Nationalists were not exclusively pro-Tunnel. The prominent member and future leader of the anti-Parnellite faction Justin McCarthy voted no in 1884 and abstained on all subsequent occasions. In 1884 the Carlow MP Donald Macfarlane cited fears of panic and quoted Wolseley in his attack on the idea that 'the lion and the lamb were going to lay down together in the

¹⁴⁸ See letters dated 15 May 1886 in TNA, RAIL 779/20.

¹⁴⁹ *The Nation*, 27 Aug. 1887, p. 7.

¹⁵⁰ O'Day, *Irish Nationalism*, p. 164.

¹⁵¹ O'Connor, Parl. Deb., 12 May 1885, cols. 343-344.

¹⁵² Redmond, 12 May 1885, cols. 346-348.

¹⁵³ Dawson, Parl. Deb., 14 May 1884, cols. 343-345.

Tunnel'.¹⁵⁴ This was a peripheral attitude within the party, however, reflected in the fact that the Scottish-born Macfarlane was himself a marginal figure in Nationalist circles.¹⁵⁵

There was more than ideology at play in the Irish pro-Tunnel vote, however. Although officially a Liberal Unionist, Watkin's relationship with the Parnellites was far from hostile, and by 1888 he had clearly moved far from the Unionist camp.¹⁵⁶ As that year's vote on the Channel Tunnel Bill neared, it was reported that he had devised his own local government Bill for Ireland with the aim of providing a third way between the Unionists and Home Rulers.¹⁵⁷ Then, the day before the Channel Tunnel vote, he abstained himself from an anti-coercion motion tabled by John Morley, rather than vote with his fellow Liberal Unionists.¹⁵⁸ To complete the picture, he had also written a letter in support of Brabourne's son as the Liberal candidate for the Thanet by-election.¹⁵⁹ To the Unionist press, Watkin's motivation was obvious: he had acted in order to secure continued Irish and Gladstonian support for the Tunnel.¹⁶⁰ As a result, any support he may have gained for his project was somewhat nullified by Unionist revulsion.¹⁶¹ 'It was freely stated in the Lobby to-day that, far as the Liberal Unionists were concerned, this line of action would not tend to further the second reading of the Channel Tunnel Bill', reported the *Dundee Courier's* London Correspondent. 'Sir Edward would find that he cannot serve two gods, Gladstone and Hartington.'¹⁶²

Conclusion

The rejection of the Channel Tunnel by Gladstone's government in 1883 demonstrated the power which 'public opinion' held over foreign and defence policy. It showed, too, how adept the armed forces had become at shaping and directing public concern to compliment more traditional official channels. Easily spooked by even the limited efforts of *The Times* in 1881,

¹⁵⁴ Macfarlane, Parl. Deb., 14 May 1884, cols. 326-327.

¹⁵⁵ O'Day, *Irish Nationalism*, p. 140.

¹⁵⁶ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 31 Mar. 1888, p. 4.

¹⁵⁷ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 23 June 1888, p. 6.

¹⁵⁸ Parl. Deb., 26 June 1888, cols. 1290-1418.

¹⁵⁹ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 22 June 1888, p. 10.

¹⁶⁰ *The Times*, 28 June 1888, p. 9; *Birmingham Daily Post*, 28 June 1888, p. 5.

¹⁶¹ *Western Daily Press*, 28 June 1888, p. 8.

¹⁶² *Dundee Courier*, 28 June 1888, p. 3.

policymakers and civil servants alike were rapidly driven to redirect the course of the government in response to the deeply pessimistic world-view forwarded by Wolseley, Cambridge and others. From the limited perspective of those within Whitehall, concerns about invasion and panic seemed to sweep the nation, reflected in the 'mirror' of the press which was their only real connection with wider feeling. Finding himself in a minority in the Cabinet, Gladstone was forced to retreat from the internationalist ideals which had helped take him to power in 1880.

As we have seen, the British nation was not unanimously opposed to Watkin's railway during 1882-1883. Similarly, this chapter's examination of Parliament during the following six years has revealed a far more even-handed debate than historians have assumed. Regardless of the judgement of 'public opinion', substantial numbers of Liberals and Irish Nationalists were willing to stand up against the invasion scare which appeared to hold many of their fellow parliamentarians in its grip. The objective of this chapter has not been to completely reject previous understandings of political attitudes to the Tunnel. Regardless of changes in Liberal opinion, it is clear that the Commons of 1890 was broadly similar in opinion to that of 1882. What had changed was the freedom and willingness of pro-Tunnellers to more openly express their support. More generally, by providing MPs with an opportunity to engage with the issue of Britain's place in Europe, the Tunnel debates tell us much about the direction of the parties during this time. While the Liberals continued the struggle between cosmopolitan idealism and Palmerstonian caution which had always been a hallmark of the party, the Tories demonstrated their relative unanimity under an imperialist, anti-internationalist umbrella which also indicated the first signs that the Party was moving towards a rejection of Free Trade. As such, this more nuanced appreciation of the Tunnel debates further illustrates the extent to which Cobden's vision of international relations was retreating in disarray before the realist 'spirit of the age'.

Part III

The Naval Defence Act and The Triumph of Defence Pessimism



“Tar! Tar!”

On the afternoon of 27 May 1889, the House of Lords opened a debate on the Second Reading of the Naval Defence Bill. That it was up for examination at all was something of a novelty. As the former First Lord of the Admiralty Earl Northbrook observed, the Upper House was rarely given the opportunity to discuss defence policy.¹ However this was no ordinary Bill, a fact which Lord Salisbury was keen to emphasise in introducing it.² It involved, he assured the House, sums of money ‘very much in excess of that which can be called ordinary expenditure’ and in its methods marked a ‘new departure’ in British public spending. Indeed, the proposed expenditure far outstripped the previous post-1815 record for a single British defence programme, the fortifications consequent of the 1859 scare, and marked an unprecedented increase in overall naval spending.³ The Royal Navy was to receive an extra £21,500,000 over five years, for a total increase of seventy warships. Of this, £11,500,000 was to be obtained in the usual way via the annual estimates and spent in the Royal dockyards. However, the real reason for Salisbury’s claims to innovation lay with the remaining ten million, which was to be issued from the Consolidated Fund directly to private shipbuilders. This, he insisted, was to avoid ‘certain Treasury arrangements’; in other words, by removing the money from the annual budget and instead placing it directly in the hands of the Admirals and naval architects, the effect of ‘political influences’ – the ‘desire to save money’ or a ‘panic’ – would be minimised. Of this financial mechanism his audience hardly needed reminding, for a Liberal amendment to remove it had been narrowly defeated in the Commons on 4 April by thirty-three votes, and the Opposition remained furious about the loss of Parliamentary oversight. In total, the Bill represented an average annual increase on naval spending of £2,600,000.⁴

Moving on from this sensitive subject, the Prime Minister outlined what this unprecedented programme hoped to achieve. ‘It has been laid down as a sort of general rule or maxim for the guidance of this country as a great maritime nation’ he declared, ‘that we ought always to have

¹ Northbrook, Parl. Deb., 27 May 1889, col. 1071.

² Salisbury, Parl. Deb., 27 May 1889, cols. 1059-1069.

³ Beeler, *British Naval Policy*, p. 192; Saunders, *Fortress Britain*, pp. 172-175.

⁴ For precise details of the Naval Defence Act see Jon Tetsuro Sumida, *In Defence of Naval Supremacy* (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 13-14.

at our command a Fleet which would be equal to a combination of any two great powers which might be brought against us. I think, on the whole, this ideal state will have been reached in 1894.’ This was the famous two power standard, which defined British naval policy until 1909.⁵ The assumption underlying Salisbury’s speech was that Britain was not currently in this position, although at no point did he make any reference to current naval strengths. Indeed, besides the arbitrary goal of outnumbering Britain’s European neighbours the only justification Salisbury could provide for his programme was a vague appeal to future uncertainties and foreign jealousies. There were, he said, ‘territories coveted and not possessed...past wounds not yet healed’, while modern science assured that danger would come ‘like a thief in the night’. ‘There is’, he concluded, ‘a real and genuine risk’. That there was widespread support for the programme among the Lords was unsurprising considering the enormous Unionist majority there. The only dissenting voice was that of the Liberal leader in the Lords, Lord Granville, who argued that the scheme was based upon fears which he considered to be ‘very largely exaggerated, if not chimerical’.⁶ The veteran of three Gladstonian Cabinets, who had never wavered in calling on the government to ‘think a little of finance’, considered that Salisbury had provided ‘very little defence’ for his proposals.⁷ Nevertheless, the Bill was not brought to a division, and entered into law on 31 May.

This debate, dismissed as ‘desultory’ by the *Daily News*, marked the end of what had been a remarkable seventeen months in Britain’s defence discourse.⁸ Although Salisbury’s pessimistic outlook regarding the European threat was no novelty, his acceptance of the need for such a large increase in naval spending was a remarkable about turn from his position during the previous year, when he had seemed entirely at ease with the state of the national defences. It was an even more radical change from the words uttered by the First Lord of the Admiralty Lord George Hamilton in February 1888, when he had presented a glowing assessment of the country’s naval strength and declared that ‘our relative superiority to other fleets is greater now

⁵ Kennedy, *British Naval Mastery*, p. 229. It was not publicly renounced until 1912, however.

⁶ Granville, Parl. Deb., 27 May 1889, col. 1069-1070.

⁷ Granville, Parl. Deb., 14 May 1888, cols. 108-110; 27 May 1889, col. 1070.

⁸ *Daily News*, 28 May 1889, p. 4.

than it has been for years past.’⁹ The decisive factor which had worked to so utterly transform the political discourse was a highly successful public campaign initiated by the resignation of the popular and populist naval Captain, Lord Charles Beresford MP, from the Board of Admiralty in January 1888. Culminating with two influentially-attended meetings in London in May and June 1888, the campaign used a mixture of theoretical arguments, alarmist rhetoric and ‘public opinion’ to drive the government from its position of contented security and force it, in November 1888, to announce the policy shift which resulted in the passage of the Naval Defence Act.

Historiography

Lord Salisbury’s assumption of British naval weakness, informed by Beresford and other ‘experts’, holds a powerful place in the historiography of later nineteenth century Britain, a position established by Arthur Marder’s *Anatomy of British Sea Power 1880-1905*.¹⁰ Marder contends that the Royal Navy suffered a ‘gradual weakening’ during the 1870s and early 1880s, a process encouraged by public and political apathy and exacerbated by an ‘intensive’ French naval programme.¹¹ Marder’s remained the standard interpretation of the period for more than five decades, most notably restated in 1976, when Paul Kennedy confidently claimed that France and Britain ‘were almost equal in numbers of first-class battleships’ in 1884.¹² Indeed, despite the appearance of more up-to-date work Marder’s book has continued to be used to support the description of the Royal Navy in 1888 as ‘highly unsatisfactory’.¹³ Working from this assumption of naval weakness, historians have been kind to both the navalist agitation of Beresford, and the Act itself, seeing it as a necessary ‘re-establishment’ of the two power standard which had been abandoned immediately following the Napoleonic Wars.¹⁴ As Marder

⁹ *The Times*, 4 Feb. 1888, p. 12.

¹⁰ Marder, *Anatomy*. For an excellent discussion of this book and its importance for our appreciation of the Naval Defence Act see comments by Beeler and Mullins in *Transformation*, pp. v-xv, 43-53. See also John Beeler, ‘“A One Power Standard?” Great Britain and the Balance of Naval Power, 1860-1880’, *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 15 (1992), pp. 547-549; Parkinson, *Late Victorian Navy*, pp. 1-5.

¹¹ Marder, *Anatomy*, p. 120.

¹² Kennedy, *British Naval Mastery*, p. 178.

¹³ Searle, *A New England?*, p. 245.

¹⁴ Marder, *Anatomy*, p. 105; Lambert, *Admirals*, p. 283.

summarises, the weak position of the Royal Navy, combined with the troubling European situation made the scares of 1888 ‘inevitable’.¹⁵

Fascinatingly, however, more detailed study has demonstrated that the image of the Royal Navy presented by contemporary experts, the government and thus the historiography inspired by Marder, was and is mistaken. As long ago as 1928, Caroline Playne pointed out that British naval spending easily outstripped the French total in 1888, suggesting the Naval Defence Act was unnecessary.¹⁶ More recently in 1997, John Beeler’s close analysis of the Royal Navy in the Gladstone-Disraeli era has demonstrated in detail that, far from being a mere ambition in 1889, the ‘ideal state’ of the two power standard was actually an accurate reflection of the contemporary position of the fleet.¹⁷ By the later 1880s the Navy lacked only two coast-defence vessels and two armoured cruisers, information which Beeler points out has long been available to historians.¹⁸ Similarly Britain far outstripped its individual rivals in terms of naval spending, while its 1888 budget was only £618,544 short of the combined Franco-Russian total of £13,618,439.¹⁹ Britain began constructing thirteen armoured warships between 1883-1888 while the French only laid down two. Even had they attempted to do so, French dockyards could never have matched the speed and efficiency with which their British counterparts launched vessels.²⁰ Ironically, therefore, the panics of 1884-1888 occurred at the moment when the Royal Navy was stronger than it had been for years. The logical conclusion to draw from these facts, argues Beeler, is that ‘far from being responses to legitimate threats to British maritime supremacy, the naval scares of 1884-85 and 1888-89 were internally generated and based on illusions that could have been refuted at the time.’ ‘It is hard to see’, he continues, ‘why the public and press bought into the navalist argument when they did’.²¹ The following case study

¹⁵ Marder, *Anatomy*, p. 123.

¹⁶ Playne, *Pre-War Mind*, p. 126.

¹⁷ Beeler, *British Naval Policy*, pp. 191-194, 276, 323 n. 67.

¹⁸ See for example Oscar Parkes, *British Battleships* (London: Seeley Service, 1957), pp. 352-353. Curiously, despite his own figures clearly demonstrating the existence of a two power standard, Parkes himself ascribed to Marder’s interpretation.

¹⁹ Beeler, *British Naval Policy*, p. 192.

²⁰ Beeler, *British Naval Policy*, pp. 273-274.

²¹ Beeler, *British Naval Policy*, pp. 276-277.

aims to provide an answer to this problem, by arguing that the explanation lies in large part in the political situation of the late 1880s.

Beeler's short deconstruction of the Naval Defence Act has since been followed by Robert Mullins and Roger Parkinson, whose work emphasises the use of naval theory and history by Beresford and his fellow officers in their campaign to convince the government. Mullins' book, edited from his PhD thesis (2000) in partnership with Beeler, provides a detailed examination of the Royal Navy's strategic outlook during the 1880s.²² Applying this perspective to a narrative of the public campaign and private lobbying of 1888/1889, Mullins illustrates how this shifted the discourse away from finance and towards a strategy-dominated naval policy. Importantly, Mullins attacks the idea that France and Russia posed a legitimate threat during this period, and provides ample evidence that sailors, civil servants and politicians within the British Admiralty were fully aware of the weaknesses of the French and Russian fleets in comparison with the Royal Navy.²³ He shows how, by the time the 1888 scare had got underway, the already remote prospect of a Franco-Russian alliance had disappeared, and that by 1889 the tense European situation had cleared.²⁴ French preparations during this period were defensive, focused on the danger of an Italian-German combination, something the British government fully understood.²⁵ Mullins' conclusion, which this thesis further develops in Chapter One, substantially changes our understanding of the Naval Defence Act. Not only was there little reality in the danger of a Franco-Russian threat to Britain during the 1880s, but, crucially, there is little evidence that Britons believed in such a threat.²⁶ Such a conclusion strongly supports Beeler's suggestion that the naval 'scares' of this period were created by internal, not external factors.

Although more limited in scope and analysis, Parkinson's work is very strong in its conclusions.²⁷ As far as Parkinson is concerned, in 1888 British naval policy was 'seized by a small group of 'young Turks'' who played upon the false perception of Britain's naval

²² Mullins, *Transformation*, chs. 4-5.

²³ Mullins, *Transformation*, pp. 53-72.

²⁴ Mullins, *Transformation*, p. 48.

²⁵ Mullins, *Transformation*, p. 49.

²⁶ Mullins, *Transformation*, p. 46.

²⁷ For a commentary on Parkinson see Beeler, 'Editor's Introduction', Mullins, p. vi.

weakness to run a successful lobbying campaign, convincing Salisbury's reluctant government into establishing a 'proactive naval policy in place of the cautious reactive policy that had lasted for three-quarters of a century.'²⁸

However, this existing historiography still takes for granted the strength and popularity of the navalist propaganda campaign of 1888, which they regard as dealing the government a heavy blow in January 1888 from which it never really recovered. Neither study includes a truly detailed investigation into the state of 'public opinion', despite the fact that the popularity of Beresford's campaign has been questioned by Steven R.B. Smith in a 1991 article.²⁹

Furthermore, the party political dimension of the Act has been almost entirely neglected. As such, a number of key questions are left unanswered. How did Beresford's campaign, which prided itself on a 'rational' and 'business-like' approach to naval policy, succeed in obscuring the true state of the Royal Navy? What was the real state of 'public opinion'? How did the government justify what was, in many respects, an entirely unnecessary policy? And where was the Liberal opposition to this greatest of all 'alarmist' projects?

These last two questions are particularly pertinent, for despite the extensive literature establishing the importance of the defence scare of 1888 and the Naval Defence Act of 1889 within naval history, the subject has received virtually no attention from political historians, whose gaze remains obscured by the Home Rule vote of 1886, the South African War, and the outbreak of the European war in 1914.³⁰ Historians of the Salisbury ministry generally treat the Act uncritically as part of a 'well-considered plan' of national defence, an interpretation George Hamilton forwarded in his memoirs.³¹ Meanwhile work on the Liberal party almost completely ignores the defence concerns of these years, focussing instead on the Home Rule question. Of

²⁸ Parkinson, *Late Victorian Navy*, pp. 243-244.

²⁹ Smith, 'Public Opinion', pp. 36, 42.

³⁰ The most remarkable omission is Robert K. Massie's thousand-page *Dreadnought* (London: Vintage, 2007), which unaccountably makes no mention of the Act despite dealing closely with the careers of Salisbury and Beresford.

³¹ George Hamilton, *Parliamentary Reminiscences and Reflections, 1886-1906* (London: John Murray, 1922), pp. 107-112; Richard Shannon, *Age of Salisbury*, pp. 299-304; David Steele, *Lord Salisbury: A Political Biography* (London: UCL Press, 1999), p. 252; Roberts, *Salisbury*, p. 539-541. Roberts, in his incorrigible way, describes the Act as 'splendid'.

Gladstone's biographers only Richard Shannon considers the Act worthy of mention, observing simply that his subject's less than active opposition was 'curious' in light of his later resignation over the navy estimates in 1894.³² Broadly speaking, the Act is considered to have been a popular programme, although little to no evidence is produced to support this assertion.³³ Perhaps the most remarkable historiographical gap is the virtual absence of information regarding the programme's passage through Parliament. Every existing study bypasses the Act's parliamentary stage altogether, or else simply repeats Marder's vague assertion that it received 'almost unanimous' support within the Commons.³⁴ Significantly, it is widely assumed that the Liberal leadership voted for the Bill, which as the third chapter of this study shows, is simply untrue.³⁵ Histories of the British peace movement also ignore the Act, a notable omission considering the central role played in its parliamentary opposition by peace movement stalwarts such as William Randal Cremer and Sir Wilfrid Lawson.³⁶ The need for a developed political history of the Act is especially important when one considers that a large number of historians have suggested, to varying degrees, that it should be regarded as an important driver of, if not the original inspiration for, the naval arms race which preceded and encouraged the declaration of war in 1914.³⁷ By teaching the British to conceive national security 'almost entirely in terms of large battleships', the Act was unquestionably important in transforming the politics of the defence during this period.³⁸ For Playne, the Act signalled a decisive political and cultural shift, 'the outcome of a more conscious conception of imperialism than had prevailed before', paving

³² Richard Shannon, *Gladstone: Heroic Minister 1865-1898* (London: Penguin, 1999), p. 482.

³³ Hamilton, 'The Nation and the Navy', pp. 23, 54-60. Hamilton largely relies on the First Sea Lord's own memoirs, *The Times*, and a few navalist opinions for his account of 1889.

³⁴ Marder, *Anatomy*, p. 143. Mullins deals briefly with parliament, *Transformation*, pp. 160-166.

³⁵ Semmel, *Liberalism and Naval Strategy*, p. 125. Sumida merely notes that it received 'light opposition', *Naval Supremacy*, p. 15. Similarly Roberts states that the Opposition 'pledged itself to the programme', *Salisbury*, pp. 539-540.

³⁶ Paul Laity, *British Peace Movement*, p. 114.

³⁷ This theme is pursued most vigorously in Parkinson, *Late Victorian Navy*, p. 247. See also Marder, *Anatomy*, p. 162; Beeler, *British Naval Policy*, pp. 276-277; Offer, *First World War*, p. 325; Marshall J. Bastable, *Arms and the State: Sir William Armstrong and the Remaking of British Naval Power, 1854-1914* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), pp. 191-192.

³⁸ Searle, *A New England?*, pp. 245-247.

the way for the ‘alarmed and fearful spirit’ of the 1890s.³⁹ In its final chapter, this study shows that, after ninety years, Playne’s analysis remains correct in its essentials.

Structure

The following three chapters reconsider the genesis and passage of the Naval Defence Act. Chapter Seven examines the navalist campaign of 1888, focusing on its reception by the press and the ‘public’. Building on the work of Beeler, Mullins and Parkinson, the chapter argues that the navalists relied on the development and dissemination of an ideologically charged rhetoric of naval weakness, appealing to the same pessimistic, anti-internationalist feeling that Wolseley had so successfully mobilised against the Channel Tunnel. Finding that Beresford’s initial resignation had little serious impact, it dismisses the characterisation of 1888 as a year dominated by ‘panic’. Contrary to the claims of the agitators themselves, it finds that there is little evidence of popular enthusiasm for a programme of naval expansion in 1888-1889, contradicting the idea that the Naval Defence Act marked the beginning of the development of ‘popular’ navalism in Britain. Instead, it is suggested that Beresford and his supporters took advantage of widespread public and political apathy towards the state of the armed forces, presenting themselves as the voice of an otherwise silent people.

Chapter Eight moves the focus onto the political response, first of the Conservative government and then the Liberals. For much of 1888, Salisbury’s government was resolute in the face of the navalist onslaught, with George Hamilton and his Parliamentary and Financial Secretary Arthur Forwood capably contesting the exaggerated pessimist claims of naval decline. However, by considering Salisbury’s speech of November 1888, it is suggested that the limited, exclusionary idea of ‘public opinion’ was once again used to good effect by the agitators, eventually convincing the Prime Minister that strengthening the Navy had become a political, if not strategic necessity. In terms of the Liberal reaction, the chapter argues that this was practically non-existent, with the party obsessed by Irish issues throughout 1888. Although a number of individual Liberal voices were raised in opposition to the navy ‘scare’, they served only to

³⁹ Playne, *Pre-War Mind*, p. 126.

betray the wider ideological inertia within liberal attitudes towards defence policy, and the poor state of the British peace movement. As a result, the party had failed to establish a proper policy when the government introduced its expansion programme in March 1889.

Becoming more thematic in its construction, Chapter Nine takes a close look at the parliamentary passage of the Naval Defence Bill. Hitherto, historians have assumed that it sailed through the Commons without serious opposition. In fact, the Bill received serious though very disorganised opposition from the Gladstonian leadership and a furious reception from the Radicals, who correctly identified it as a direct attack on the Liberal doctrines of economic parsimony, civilian control and a balanced, 'gradual' naval policy. In their last-ditch attempt to prevent 'this mad and monstrous proposal', these MPs revealed not only the fractious state of the Liberal party itself, but also the intellectual stupor of the Radical anti-armament cause. For the Tories, the Bill illustrated the extent to which most of the party had accepted the pessimistic 'realist' view of international affairs, and was content to justify the programme via appeals to foreign 'jealousy'. As such, the chapter broadly agrees with Playne's analysis, and argues that the Act should be seen not only as a victory for imperialistic navalism, but also as a decisive defeat for liberal internationalism. In the process, MPs from both sides of the House struggled for the right to be seen to speak for both the public and, equally as importantly from an ideological point of view, the memory and reputation of Richard Cobden. Overall, the case study positions the Act as both a cause and symptom of the pessimistic, alarmist mentality which was steadily enveloping the politics of national defence in Britain.

Chapter Seven

The Navalist Campaign of 1888

“Farewell!” cries Charles. “Away! away!
In the Government vessel I’ll not stay.
I can’t understand, in spite of your tips,
The Hamiltonnage of your ships.
So Belay! belay! Lord Salisburee,
Farewell, farewell to the Admiraltee!
If you experience doesn’t teach,
You’ll lose the sea as you’ve lost your *Beach*.”¹

‘Lord Charles’s Farewell’, *Punch*, 28 Jan. 1888, p. 40.²

¹ Michael Hicks-Beach had stepped down as Chief Secretary of Ireland the previous year.

² See Part III title image.

The public campaign waged by Charles Beresford and a group of retired naval officers during the first half of 1888 has often been regarded as a popular movement, the inevitable result of widespread disquiet about the state of the Navy. Through a close reading of the newspaper press and political developments, this chapter rejects that interpretation. Instead, it shows how a determined navalist lobby group, armed with authoritative arguments and exaggerated rhetoric, succeeded in seizing the political agenda. Despite continued scepticism in the press, they captured the Unionist London commercial elites, building a platform upon which to pose as the voice of ‘public opinion’. As a result, the chapter seriously questions the common assumption among historians that the naval expansion of the 1880s was a popular cause.

Beresford’s Resignation

The national defence agitation of 1888 did not fall out of a clear blue sky. In many ways it was the culmination of a process begun in 1884 by W.T. Stead. In that year his *Pall Mall Gazette* ran the infamous ‘Truth about the Navy’ campaign, which ultimately succeeded in obtaining a supplementary naval estimate of £3,100,000 from Gladstone’s government.³ This campaign set a number of precedents without which the 1888 agitation could not have occurred. It was founded upon direct interviews with serving and retired naval officers, eager to attack the ‘complacency’ of their ministerial masters.⁴ It reasserted the influence of the press over defence policy, influence which had declined since 1860, and introduced many of those officers, including Beresford himself, to the power of ‘public opinion’ as expressed through the press.⁵ It established a link between the London Chamber of Commerce and the naval reformers and, through the holding of a public meeting, constructed the model on which Beresford’s later campaign was based.⁶ Most importantly, it launched the ‘myth of naval weakness’, the ‘gigantic deception’ which took its place in the political discourse alongside the already existing perception of military weakness which the Channel Tunnel scare had reinforced.⁷ The strength

³ For a full account see Blumenthal, ‘The Navy Campaign of 1884’.

⁴ Blumenthal, ‘The Navy Campaign of 1884’, p. 64. See also Baylen, ‘Politics and the New Journalism’, pp. 118-121.

⁵ Beeler, *British Naval Policy*, pp. 267-68; Beresford, *Memoirs*, vol. II, p. 338.

⁶ Smith, ‘Public Opinion’, pp. 31-36.

⁷ Parkinson, *Late Victorian Navy*, p. 92; Beeler, ‘In the Shadow of Briggs’

and effectiveness of modern Royal Navy ships were belittled, while inferior wooden-hulled French warships were treated as frontline vessels.⁸ In short, the 1884 campaign was built on a foundation of ‘misrepresentations, if not outright falsehoods’, propagated by its own officers and eagerly seized by Stead’s crusading ‘New Journalism’.⁹

Despite this, 1888 did not open with the position of the Royal Navy in doubt. In the Admiralty there were no calls for a large building programme, while Hamilton and the First Sea Lord Admiral Sir Arthur Hood were relaxed in their attitudes towards France, both diplomatically and in terms of relative naval strength.¹⁰ When, on 9 January, Beresford resigned from his post as Junior Naval Lord, there was therefore little suggestion that a major policy shift might be demanded of the government. This was reflected in his resignation speech to his East Marylebone constituents on 26 January: far from a declaration of naval weakness, he insisted his resignation was a protest over cuts to the salaries of the Naval Intelligence Department (NID), and he initially focused his attacks on the powers of the First Lord of the Admiralty.¹¹ These powers he held ‘entirely’ responsible for the ‘disgraceful state of disorganisation’ in the Navy. He wanted the First Lord to be forced to work more closely with his Board, which, he was sure, would immediately improve the efficiency of the fleet. He was keen to emphasise that his protest did not extend to a demand for more resources, but rather a better use of existing material. ‘It is not reasonable’, he declared, ‘to expect the taxpayer to contribute still more to the services when officers themselves are crying out that much of it is being wasted’. Admiral Sir Geoffrey Phipps Hornby, who was also in attendance, was even more explicit, assuring the audience that ‘they did not ask for more money; what they wanted was a more efficient expenditure of the existing grants.’

The most recent account of Beresford’s resignation and the responses to it is found in Mullins’ book, which argues that the Captain received strong support from the press, giving him political

⁸ Beeler, *British Naval Policy*, pp. 269-276; Parkinson, *Late Victorian Navy*, pp. 90-93.

⁹ Beeler, *British Naval Policy*, p. 270.

¹⁰ Sumida, *Naval Supremacy*, p. 13; Mullins, *Transformation*, pp. 48-50.

¹¹ *The Times*, 27 Jan. 1888, p. 7.

impetus from the outset.¹² To an extent this was true. As Mullins shows, *The Times* and *St. James Gazette* were particularly sympathetic, and Beresford's record in government was widely praised. More evidence can be provided in support of this account. The *Daily Telegraph* also offered its endorsement, describing Beresford as 'a typical specimen of the best kind of naval expert', a man with practical experience of warfare and administration who cared 'nothing for politics or party in comparison with the great interests of national defence'. It felt sure that the public would provide him with staunch support.¹³ Beresford received personal support from Wolseley and others; a collection of his letters held at the British Library includes one unsolicited letter of congratulation from a self-declared member of 'the public', for example.¹⁴ He was also immediately contacted by the editor of *Murray's Magazine*, asking whether he would like to contribute 'what would certainly be a most popular paper' on the state of the Navy, 'to awaken the country'.¹⁵ In an example of the close links between the armed force and the press during this period, Beresford replied to the effect that he had already promised to write for another periodical, presumably Knowles' *Nineteenth Century* for which he later wrote three articles.¹⁶

Unfortunately, however, Mullins' account suffers from what Andrew Hobbs has termed 'the deleterious dominance of *The Times* in nineteenth century scholarship', for a more balanced investigation of contemporary press reactions reveals that the Captain was generally regarded as a well-meaning but misguided political lightweight.¹⁷ Indeed, with the exception of the three staunchly pro-Beresford organs listed above, few papers thought that his reasons, however principled, really justified resignation.¹⁸ The Tory *Manchester Courier* argued that he had chosen the 'wrong road to achieve a desirable end', and, in common with many papers, hoped

¹² Mullins, *Transformation*, 121-125.

¹³ *Daily Telegraph*, 27 Jan. 1888, pp. 4-5.

¹⁴ Bennett, *Charlie B*, p. 147; William C. Brooks to Charles Beresford, 28 Jan. 1888, BL, Add. MS 63117.

¹⁵ Edward A. Arnold to Charles Beresford, 21 Jan. 1888, BL, Add. MS 63117.

¹⁶ Note by Beresford in BL, Add. MS 63117. The three articles were 'The Admiralty Confusion and its Cure'; 'A Workable Admiralty' and 'The British Fleet and the State of Europe', *Nineteenth Century* (Jan. 1889), pp. 1-11.

¹⁷ Hobbs, 'Deleterious Dominance of *The Times*'. Mullins problematically characterises *The Times* as 'the most widely circulated and influential journal in Britain'. *Transformation*, p. 122.

¹⁸ See the representative leader in the *Nottingham Evening Post*, 27 Jan. 1888, p. 2.

and expected to see him back in office in due course.¹⁹ Liberal papers were often openly hostile, the *Daily News* running an editorial in support of civilian authority under the provocative heading ‘Lord Charles Boulanger’.²⁰ Admitting the, at this stage low-key, support of Admiral Hornby and others, Beresford remained isolated politically.²¹ The East Marylebone Conservative association did not attend Beresford’s resignation speech, something which the Captain himself described as a ‘slap in the face’, and he does not appear to have received the support of any prominent political organisations.²² The initial feeling within the government appears to have been relief that he was gone tinged with irritation at his ‘unmanageableness’.²³ This was reflected in the confident and relaxed speeches of Hamilton in January and February, in which the First Lord emphasised the strength and efficiency of the Navy.²⁴

An important reason for the lukewarm reception given to Beresford’s resignation was the public perception of his position as a junior officer and minister, against which he struggled to establish himself as an authority of comparative stature to, for example, Wolseley. The high regard in which he was held by the *Telegraph* proved to be a minority view. The *Morning Post*, while sympathetic to Beresford’s complaints and never doubting his patriotism, wrote him off as an ‘impetuous’ and inexperienced officer, ignorant of the organisation he sought to criticise – a heavy blow from such an important Conservative daily.²⁵ Just as damagingly, Beresford’s resignation speech received immediate and scathing attacks from former First Lord Northbrook and the retired Admirals Sir Robert Spencer Robinson and Sir George Henry Richards, all of whom had extensive experience of the Admiralty’s internal workings and outranked him in terms of professional and intellectual authority.²⁶ All three repudiated Beresford’s characterisation of the Admiralty’s lack of organisation for war and expressed hope that his

¹⁹ *Manchester Courier*, 27 Jan. 1888, p. 7.

²⁰ *Daily News*, 27 Jan. 1888, p. 5.

²¹ Hamilton, *Parliamentary Reminiscences*, pp. 92-93.

²² *The Times*, 27 Jan. 1888, p. 7. According to Bennett, ‘many of his friends and constituents begged him not to resign’, *Charlie B*, p. 147.

²³ Nancy E. Johnson (ed.), *The Diary of Gathorne Hardy, later Lord Cranbrook, 1866-1892: Political Selections* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 690; Mullins, *Transformation*, pp. 99, 103, 122; see also comments of Prince of Wales quoted in Bennett, *Charlie B*, p. 148.

²⁴ *The Times*, 12 Jan. 1888, p. 7; 19 Jan., p. 5; 4 Feb., p. 12. Mullins, *Transformation*, p. 126.

²⁵ *Morning Post*, 27 Jan. 1888, p. 4.

²⁶ *The Times*, 28 Jan. 1888, p. 10; 31 Jan., p. 8.

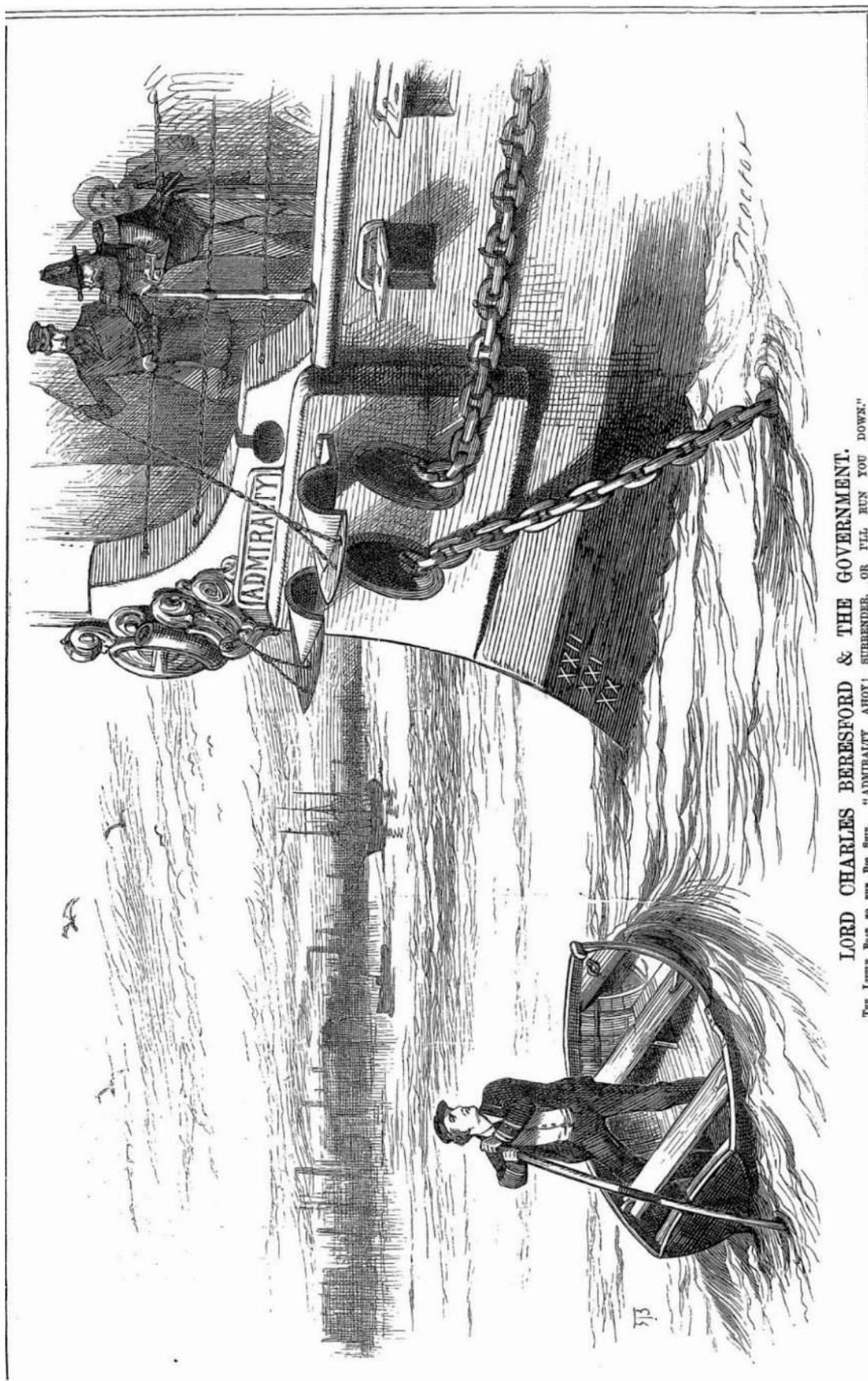
allegations would be put to rest by the government; as far as Richards was concerned, Beresford had strayed out of his ‘proper element’. In a strong editorial, *The Standard* succinctly explained why the view of the Captain – and, by extension, any serviceman – must necessarily be outranked by that of a Cabinet Minister:

Lord Charles’s opinion, on any professional topic, is entitled to weight, and we have no doubt that the greatest deference has been paid to his representations. But it is only one opinion out of many, and it is a strictly professional opinion. Lord George Hamilton, as First Lord, in council with his colleagues of Cabinet rank, has to take into account an infinite number of considerations which the Sea Lord [Beresford] is quite entitled to overlook.²⁷

Arthur Forwood, the Admiralty’s Parliamentary and Financial Secretary, provided a similar though more forthright argument in a speech at the beginning of February. In a direct rebuttal to claims that defence policy was best directed by ‘expert’ serving officers, Forwood contrasted the speed and excellence of British shipbuilding with the inefficiency of France’s naval administration, which until recently had been headed by an Admiral.²⁸ The extent to which this criticism succeeded in painting Beresford as well-meaning but relatively insubstantial government critic, lacking in serious public support, was captured by a February *Moonshine* cartoon, in which Beresford, piloting a tiny wooden dinghy, is shown attempting to ram the enormous ironclad *Admiralty*, captained by a serene Lord Salisbury [Figure 21].

²⁷ *The Standard*, 20 Jan. 1888, p. 5.

²⁸ *The Times*, 4 Feb. 1888, p. 12.



LORD CHARLES BERESFORD & THE GOVERNMENT.
THE LITTLE BOAT TO THE BIG SHIP. "ADMIRALTY AHOY! SURRENDER, OR I'LL RUN YOU DOWN."

Figure 21: 'Lord Charles Beresford & the Government.'

'The little boat to the big ship: "Admiralty Ahoy! Surrender or I'll run you down!"'
Moonshine, 4 Feb. 1888, p. 52.

The Navalist Propaganda Campaign

By the beginning of February, then, it appeared that Beresford's attempt to shake the naval establishment had failed. 'Public opinion' had largely dismissed or ignored his concerns, and continued to do so during March.²⁹ Nor had the support of Hornby had any serious effect. Although he was apparently one of the most highly respected officers in the Royal Navy, his presence at Beresford's resignation speech went unremarked in the subsequent newspaper coverage.³⁰ However, Beresford and a growing band of retired naval officers persisted in their criticisms, maintaining a steady irregular warfare across the letter columns of *The Times*, and in public and parliamentary speeches.³¹ Throughout most of 1888 Beresford largely confined himself to attacking 'scares and panic and the most wicked and scandalous waste', and as late as 11 May he was reported to have insisted that the present estimates would be enough if only the Navy were given a more efficient administration.³² Indeed it is clear that, on the issue of 'civilian' control of the Admiralty, he was having some effect, securing a better hearing from the press and, most notably, a Commons Select Committee in March.³³ Although somewhat uncomfortable for George Hamilton, this argument over the administrative structure of the Admiralty remained divorced from any serious discussion about the strength of the Navy itself, and was not obviously leading to an increase in the estimates, something which flies in the face of most historical accounts of the agitation. It was not until the heavyweight authorities of Colomb and Hornby became directly involved that the discourse changed from one of reform to that of expansion.³⁴ Between them these two men succeeded in exploiting the results of a 'strategic paradigm shift', which had been emerging in British naval thought over the previous

²⁹ See for example *Morning Post*, 13 Mar. 1888, p. 4.

³⁰ For a discussion of Hornby's reputation see Lambert, *Admirals*, pp. 282-283.

³¹ Mullins, *Transformation*, pp. 138-140. See in particular Captain C.C. Penrose Fitzgerald's remarkable letter to *The Times*, 30 Mar. 1888, p. 4.

³² Beresford, Parl. Deb., 12 Mar. 1888, col. 938; *Morning Post*, 11 May 1888, p. 3. This was quoted approvingly by Randolph Churchill in a speech on 'public economy', *Morning Post*, 17 May 1888, p. 2. See also Beresford's speech and Hamilton's reply in Parl. Deb., 4 June 1888, cols. 1057-1064.

³³ See the summary of press opinions in *St. James' Gazette*, 13 March 1888, p. 14.

³⁴ Smith, 'Public Opinion', p. 37. For an excellent example of the careful presentation of this 'heavyweight' expert naval authority see the essays by Admiral Sir Thomas Symonds, G. Phipps Hornby and Lord Alcester on 'What Our Navy Should Be', *Fortnightly Review* (Nov. 1888), pp. 557-580.

decade, to make the public case for a massive spending increase.³⁵ Although the nature of this shift has been extensively analysed, a large amount has been left unsaid on the precise details of the navalist tactics of distortion, deception and hyperbole. In particular, the sheer unreality of the navalist characterisation of the Royal Navy, especially in their public statements, is still often underplayed by historians. The following deconstruction of the 1888-1889 naval propaganda is therefore necessary not only to contextualise the subsequent public and official responses, but also to clearly restate the extent to which Beresford and his supporters sought mislead the nation into acquiescing in further armament spending.

The full navalist barrage was not released until May 1888. The first step was to deconstruct the ‘bricks and mortar’ school, a task which Colomb skilfully set about in a famous paper on ‘The Naval Defences of the United Kingdom’ at the Royal United Services Institute on 18 May.³⁶ In a direct attack on the fortification school of defence, and drawing heavily on Britain’s historical experience, he made a rare attempt to define what the phrase ‘naval supremacy’ meant in reality. The result was a strategy based on a blockade of French ports, combined with a strong reserve fleet and coastal defence ships.³⁷ While certainly comprehensive, such a scheme necessitated an enormous number of warships to cover the French coast and relied on bottling up the enemy rather than on defeating them on the high seas, a potentially wasteful and ineffective method, especially in the age of steam. Ultimately, it was a strategy which demanded an enormous expansion of the Royal Navy; although Colomb himself did not attempt to estimate the number of new warships needed, he concluded by observing that in a war with France alone, Britain would not have the ships to spare to defend its own commerce.³⁸ Tellingly, he supported this assertion not with an analysis of the contemporary naval situation, but instead with a table showing the size of the Royal Navy in 1805.

³⁵ Parkinson, *Late Victorian Navy*, p. 89; Mullins, *Transformation*, pp. 159-160.

³⁶ P.H. Colomb, ‘The Naval Defences of the United Kingdom’, *Journal of the Royal United Services Institute* (May 1888), pp. 565-601. For its importance see Schurman, *Education of a Navy*, pp. 46-48; Moon, ‘Invasion of the United Kingdom’, pp. 34-44; Parkinson, *Late Victorian Navy*, p. 99; Mullins, *Transformation*, pp. 145-148.

³⁷ For the Navy and blockade at this time see Marder, *Anatomy*, 110-113; Parkinson, *Late Victorian Navy*, pp. 84-88; Mullins, *Transformation*, pp. 84-85.

³⁸ Colomb, ‘Naval Defences’, p. 582.

‘Public opinion’ was now ripe for exploitation, a blow administered ten days later by Admiral Hornby at the ‘City Defence Meeting’. Building on Colomb’s arguments, and in keeping with wider naval opinion, Hornby rejected the convoy system of trade defence.³⁹ Instead, he advocated deploying ships at fixed points across the globe, a comparatively inefficient system which demanded fast modern cruisers to have much chance of success. By combining this theory with historical comparisons drawn, once again, from Britain’s Nelsonian navy, Hornby arrived at the view that under his scheme Britain required a minimum of 186 cruisers of at least sixteen knots. At that time, he said, the Royal Navy possessed ‘only’ forty-two; it was therefore deficient by 144 ships.⁴⁰ British vulnerability was thus ‘proven’, without reference to the strength of the French Navy itself. In this way, Hornby built an apparently compelling case for serious naval expansion, rooted firmly in ‘practical’ theory.

In hindsight, the flaws in Colomb and Hornby’s strategies are readily apparent, something which, as we shall see, a number of contemporaries pointed out. They had set the Royal Navy an unnecessarily difficult task – that of defending all points of the Empire, the home islands and blockading the French coast, while protecting Britain’s massive merchant fleet in an inefficient manner – with little reference to diplomatic likelihoods, geo-strategic realities, or the actual strength of the French fleet.⁴¹ Little wonder, then, that the Navy failed the test they had set it. This appearance of vulnerability was reinforced through repeated appeals to history, especially the benchmark of the massive Nelsonian fleet, with little acknowledgement of subsequent technological changes. These problems are, of course, easy to condemn in retrospect, and the initial reaction is to adopt an attitude of incomprehension that this approach was so successful. However, once one understands the wider context of the defence debate in Britain over the preceding decades the strength of these arguments for contemporaries, and their own apparent gullibility, is more easily appreciated. As we have seen, up until 1884 national defence, when

³⁹ Bryan Ranft, ‘The Protection of British Seaborne Trade and the Development of Systematic Planning for War, 1860-1906’ in Bryan Ranft (ed.), *Technical Change and British Naval Policy 1860-1939* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1977), pp. 1-22.

⁴⁰ *The Times*, 29 May 1888, pp. 11-12.

⁴¹ See also Mullins, *Transformation*, pp. 132-133.

publicly discussed at all, had largely focused on land defences, the principal subject of the mid-century invasion scares. While soldiers had been active in advocating fortifications and the effectiveness of the Volunteers had come in for much scrutiny, the Navy had been, in terms of press and political attention, relatively neglected. Although the true state of strategic awareness and war planning in official circles is disputed by historians the fact was that the subject had been largely absent from public discourse, a situation which Beresford rightly railed against and which gave his other complaints a degree of plausibility. Compared with the pessimism of Dunsany's 1880 'Silver Streak' essay, or the Army's inconsistent invasion anxieties, Colomb and Hornby's clear strategic vision shone like a ray of light: finally, a rational, detailed and thoroughly 'business-like' scheme of defence appeared to have been worked out. In the theoretical vacuum of the late 1880s, with little practical experience of naval warfare but for the occasional fleet manoeuvre, flawed ideas could easily take on a convincing validity, especially if they were endorsed by the majority of the relevant 'experts'.

Deceptive naval theory was important, but it was clear that if Beresford and his supporters were to secure some genuine increase to the Navy they would need to show that, even under the most favourable conditions, the fleet was not up to the task. This they did through a second tactic, parallel with the development of the new strategic visions and no less powerful. While not in themselves an obvious dishonesty, Colomb and Hornby's views provided the materials with which other navalists were able to construct a deeply pessimistic and objectively erroneous picture of the Royal Navy in relation to its French counterpart. The most prominent deception was constructed by Beresford himself. After first suggesting that Britain had a deficit in warships in March, Beresford put solid figures to this weakness in a *Nineteenth Century* article of January 1889 [Figure 22].⁴² He projected that by 1890 Britain would have a total of 36 first and second class battleships in Europe, and France thirty, while his ratio for cruisers stood at a similarly alarming 101 to seventy-five. These figures, he informed his readers, 'absolutely prove that we have no reasonable argument to adduce for considering that we could defend our coasts

⁴² Charles Beresford, 'The British Fleet and the State of Europe', *Nineteenth Century* (Jan. 1889), pp. 1-11.

against France alone.’ Yet, compared with both contemporary NID evaluations and Oscar Parkes’ later work, Beresford’s figures are seriously questionable.⁴³ He omitted a number of British battleships and six coastal defence ships, while including all six French coastal ironclads. By comparison with Beresford, the NID estimated that by 1890 Britain would have forty ocean-going battleships to twenty-four French, a figure with which Parkes’ figures – though, confusingly, not his analysis – broadly agree. Beresford further reinforced the image of British weakness by listing Royal Navy battleships by name and annotating a number with apparent inferiorities, while for the French he simply provided aggregate totals, neglecting to mention that the great majority of France’s second class battleships and a similar proportion of its cruisers were wooden-hulled ironclads, and therefore markedly inferior to their British counterparts.⁴⁴ He also included French warships that would not actually be launched in 1890, surely a fatal error when calculating that country’s naval strength. Beresford’s cruiser figures were equally problematic. Although his headline figures appeared worrying, his actual focus was on ships capable of fifteen knots and over: in comparing these, the less concerning figures of sixty-eight British and thirteen French are arrived at, while the NID figures show this itself to be an exaggeration. If one were inclined to be charitable, the problems in Beresford’s numbers might be put down to ignorance. Indeed, in his 1888 constituency speech he had admitted that despite ‘hours and hours’ of study, he had failed to understand the naval estimates.⁴⁵ Ship design does not necessarily require budgetary acumen, however, and even allowing for this personal mathematical deficiency it is difficult to describe Beresford’s picture of the Royal Navy as anything other than a conscious attempt at deceiving the public, using methods which were an exact repetition of the 1884 *Pall Mall Gazette* campaign.

In December 1888, Beresford used these figures to introduce his own twenty million pound compromise scheme, demanding 74 new vessels including fourteen battleships, the first time he

⁴³ The NID figures are republished in Parkinson, *Late Victorian Navy*, pp. 107-108; Parkes’ comparison can be found in *British Battleships*, pp. 352-353.

⁴⁴ Parkes, *British Battleships*, p. 353; Beeler, *British Naval Policy*, pp. 205-208.

⁴⁵ *The Times*, 27 Jan. 1888, p. 7.

had unambiguously called for naval increases.⁴⁶ Perhaps stung by previous attacks on his expertise, he heavily emphasised the thoroughness of his proposals, using, for example, the term ‘plan of campaign’ no fewer than fifteen times in his speech. Within the space of a year, Beresford and Hornby had gone from calling for a simple reorganisation of the Admiralty, to demanding a massive increase in the Navy, built on apparently solid statistics and theory. Crucially, all references to the reality of the Franco-Russian threat had been kept to an absolute minimum. It was in this way that naval officers during and after the passage of the Act felt able to describe the two-power standard as the ‘minimum’ necessary.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Beresford, Parl. Deb., 13 Dec. 1888, cols. 124-146.

⁴⁷ Marder, *Anatomy*, p. 106.

Assumed Distribution of British and French Navies in 1890-91.

MEDITERRANEAN.	HOME WATERS.	CHANNEL.	ON FOREIGN STATIONS.
At Toulon, <i>French</i> have 15 battle-ships built and building.	At Cherbourg, <i>French</i> have 9 (5 battle-ships, 4 coast defence), and 4 gunboats.	At Brest, <i>French</i> have 6 (4 battle-ships, 2 coast defence), and 4 gunboats.	<i>France</i> has 1 battle-ship.
<i>British.</i> Agamemnon Alexandra Benbow Camperdown Colossus Conqueror Dreadnought Edinburgh Hero Howe Inflexible Rodney Superb Nile Victoria British Total: 15 battle-ships	<i>British.</i> Ajax Anson Belleisle * Collingwood Devastation Hercules Hotspur * Invincible * Neptune Thunderer Triumph * Rupert * British Total: 12 battle-ships	<i>British.</i> Agincourt Black Prince Iron Duke * Monarch Northumberland Sanspareil Sultan Temeraire Trafalgar British Total: 9 battle-ships	<i>British.</i> Audacious Bellerophon Orion Penelope Swiftsure British Total: 5 battle-ships
BRITISH. 36 in European waters. 5 abroad. Grand Total : 41 armourclads.		FRENCH. 30 in Europe. 1 abroad. Grand Total : 31 and 8 gunboats.	

* Inferior to French coast defence both in speed, armour, and armament.

Figure 22: Beresford's 'Assumed Distribution of British and French Navies in 1890-91'.

The British ships are individually criticised, while equally out of date French warships remain anonymous. *Nineteenth Century* (Jan. 1889), p. 2.

The final aspect of the deception, and one which is particularly underemphasised in the secondary literature, was ‘navalist hyperbole’, the pessimistic rhetoric which was both justified by, and helped to conceal the weaknesses in, the arguments of Colomb, Hornby and Beresford.⁴⁸ The chief aim of this language was to give the impression that Britain was not merely on an equal footing with France, but actually in a position of naval inferiority. One unsigned article, for example, informed the public that ‘France has an actual superiority over us at the present moment in modern armoured battleships.’ Any other interpretation was merely the product of officials desperate to defend themselves from the ‘indignation of the country’.⁴⁹ Retired Rear-Admiral and Conservative MP Richard Mayne similarly declared that Britain was unable to equal France in battle ‘even if we were to send out all our lame ducks and obsolete ships.’⁵⁰ The Earl of Carnarvon spoke of the Navy’s ‘total inadequacy’, accusing the government of living in a ‘fool’s paradise of fancied security’.⁵¹ Sir Charles Dilke weighed in with an article which condemned the state of the Navy and soberly observed that France was in a position to launch an immediate invasion if Britain were to lose command of the Channel for a single day.⁵² Fitzgerald assured readers of *The Times* that nine out of every ten Royal Navy officers agreed that the Navy was inadequate.⁵³ Perhaps the closest thing to a navalist manifesto appeared on 10 May, in the form of the notice announcing the ‘strictly non-political’ ‘City National Defence Meeting’. This asked the reader to consider the following statements:

The Naval and coast defences are quite inadequate to the absolute requirements of the nation.

The country is to-day unprepared for war, and would risk a serious reverse were such to occur.

Our commerce would be at the mercy of an enemy in the present weak state of the Navy.⁵⁴

⁴⁸ Beeler, *British Naval Policy*, p. 276.

⁴⁹ Fitzgerald, ‘The Navy and the Country’, pp. 280-281.

⁵⁰ *The Times*, 26 May 1888, p. 11.

⁵¹ *The Times*, 29 May 1888, p. 12.

⁵² Dilke, ‘Europe and the Position of England’.

⁵³ *The Times*, 30 Mar., 1888, p. 4.

⁵⁴ *The Times*, 10 May 1888, p. 12.

After demanding an inquiry into the Navy, the notice called upon ‘Englishmen of all classes and politics’ to ‘take immediate action in this matter, and to learn the whole truth about our naval deficiency and unpreparedness for war’ from the ‘leading and most able officers’.

Key to this alarmist language was the assumption that future wars would come suddenly and without warning. The notice of 10 May concluded with the declaration: ‘a great war may at any moment burst upon us, in which we may have to fight for our very existence.’ Unlike in the Channel Tunnel scare of 1882, however, this was not the cause of any significant dissent or argument, a testament to the influence that the outlook embodied in Frederick Maurice’s *Hostilities without Declaration of War* now held in the military and political elites. As Captain Fitzgerald told the meeting of 5 June, ‘the highest authorities told us that wars in the present day would be short, sharp, and decisive, and that they would break out suddenly and with little warning.’⁵⁵ Importantly, it is clear that Lord Salisbury himself was entirely convinced of this outlook, which was also commonly held within the ranks of Tory MPs; in this respect, at least, the navalists were pushing at an open door.

Understanding the nature of this rhetoric is important if one wishes to appreciate how the navalists managed to rapidly seize control of the defence discourse, distracting from the reality of comparative naval statistics and successfully recasting the agenda in terms of British weakness and foreign strength. The resulting confusion, and ultimate success of the navalists’ approach, is well illustrated by a comparison of the two most influential London newspapers. In May 1888 the *Daily News* published tables comparing Britain’s war fleet with other major European powers, showing a large superiority, notably 45 British ironclads to 33 French. ‘We might, with advantage, have more ships;’ the paper concluded, ‘but to say that we are in danger because of the smallness of our fleet is surely to talk nonsense’.⁵⁶ A month and a half later *The Times* provided its own evaluation: 29 British battleships to 26 French, a latter number which it admitted it had only reached by including even the most inferior warships and all of France’s

⁵⁵ *The Times*, 6 June 1888, p. 6.

⁵⁶ *Daily News*, 26 May 1888, p. 6.

coastal defence ships.⁵⁷ This discrepancy was symptomatic of the problems which bedevilled any attempt to produce a like-for-like comparison of naval strength during the later nineteenth century. With navies of the period exhibiting little uniformity in the type of warships they possessed, and a rapid rate of technological obsolescence, there was no widely accepted yardstick available for analysts, amateur or otherwise, to use. In such a serious, complex and emotionally charged subject as national defence, uncertainty could only benefit those who wished to emphasise the country's weaknesses.

'Public Opinion' and the Navalist Campaign

The prevailing view of the navalist campaign, originating with Marder, argues that Beresford and his supporters were carried by a wave of popular support and 'panic' to press naval increases upon a reluctant government.⁵⁸ This view is repeated by both Jon Sumida and especially Mullins, who argues that Beresford's campaign 'rallied public opinion' in support of strategic awareness.⁵⁹ This interpretation is also supported in the wider historiography on the British Army and civil-military relations, which has attached to 1888 the ambiguous label of 'invasion scare'.⁶⁰ However, in an examination of the public meetings of April and May 1888, Steven Smith suggests that the naval agitation was 'essentially the work of the London Chamber of Commerce' and a few naval officers, in the face of 'very limited support' from the public.⁶¹ It is therefore necessary, if one wishes to appreciate the true nature of the Naval Defence Act, to consider in more detail the actual state of 'public opinion' during this period. This allows us to better judge not only the pressures on Salisbury's government, but also the state of the country as a whole in its attitude towards defence matters.

The view of 1888 as a victory for the people appears to have originated during the 1890s with Beresford himself, who was keen to emphasise the decisive role of the public sphere. Speaking to a Birmingham crowd in March 1896, he gave a brief narrative of the 1888 campaign:

⁵⁷ *The Times*, 10 July 1888, p. 9.

⁵⁸ Marder, *Anatomy*, p. 143, n. 48.

⁵⁹ Sumida, *Naval Supremacy*, p. 13; Mullins, *Transformation*, pp. 148, 160.

⁶⁰ Moon, 'Invasion of the United Kingdom', ch. 1; Spiers, *Late Victorian Army*, p. 60.

⁶¹ Smith, 'Public Opinion', pp. 36, 42.

For years the country had been in a state of panic, and millions of money had been spent after those in authority had stated that the fleet was adequate. It was not the Government that had increased the fleet, but the Press and public opinion. (A Voice: "That's you.") No; he merely put the fuse into the haystack and the people blew it up.⁶²

What is interesting about this account is that, as the heckler makes clear, even to a crowd of loyal Unionists Beresford was struggling to maintain the argument that the 'press and public opinion' were ultimately to be credited with the spending increases. This should not be surprising, for this story of public support was in fact an invention, only adopted by Beresford in 1889, when the spending increases seemed assured. Nor did such language appear in the press until retrospectives on the Naval Defence Act were produced during the 1890s.⁶³ At no point during 1888 did Beresford himself openly claim the support of 'public opinion', let alone that of the country as a whole; as we have already seen, nothing that had occurred during January-May 1888 suggested that he possessed such support. This is reflected in the words of the agitators themselves, who were constantly unsure as to their position *vis-à-vis* public opinion. Were they seeking to awaken it, or satisfy its demands? Although the City meetings referred vaguely to great concern in 'the country' it is difficult to ignore the fact that these gatherings consisted largely of armed forces officers and London capitalists. Beresford's Chamber of Commerce meeting on 28 May was a case in point. Although Carnarvon took great pleasure in declaring that the country was 'unanimously anxious, without distinction of party or political creed', Beresford himself had opened the meeting by admitting that 'what we really want is that the British public, who are somewhat drowsy on this great question, should be roused from their lethargy', a view echoed by the President of the Institution of Mechanical Engineers.⁶⁴ The meeting itself passed a resolution which admitted that it was representative only of the commercial and shipping interests of the City of London. Although the mood was slightly more confident at the following meeting on 5 June, Captain Fitzgerald nevertheless took the opportunity to lament the fact that the estimates remained at the mercy of a public which, in

⁶² *Daily News*, 20 Mar. 1896, p. 3.

⁶³ *Chambers Journal*, 23 May 1896, p. 326.

⁶⁴ *The Times*, 29 May 1888, pp. 11-12.

its ignorance and ‘indifference’, still preferred an economical ‘popular budget’ to a larger navy.⁶⁵ Among the resolutions passed at this meeting was one which claimed that any scheme put forward by the government ‘may be assured of the hearty co-operation of all classes’, surely a statement which necessarily assumed the support of people the navalists could not possibly have consulted.

As soon as one begins to search for the usual signs of wider public support, any illusions quickly collapse. Unlike the earlier Channel Tunnel debate, Beresford’s campaign produced no petitions for or against his proposals. Beyond London, no Chamber of Commerce appears to have thought the matter worthy of discussion, and only Birmingham and Grimsby were listed as having sent representatives to the City Meeting of 28 May.⁶⁶ Indeed it appears that the notice announcing the meeting was itself only sent to *The Times* and *Daily Telegraph*, despite the organiser’s claimed intention to appeal to a national audience.⁶⁷ Likewise no working class organisations or trade unions felt moved to come out for or against the agitation, despite the proliferation of navalist propaganda emphasising the threat to Britain’s food supplies and the obvious boon the spending would bring to shipyards. Aside from a number of London-based shipowners, bankers and organisations with an obvious and direct interest in the design and construction of warships – the Institution of Mechanical Engineers, for example – no groups from the wider commercial or industrial communities were represented at the public meetings.

This attitude of widespread public and political indifference was reflected in the results of two contemporary by-elections with strong links to Beresford’s agitation. The first came in May 1888 when the sitting Tory MP for Southampton, naval officer Sir John Edmund Commerell, resigned his seat to take up an appointment as commander-in-chief at Portsmouth. Commerell had long been an advocate of naval increases and it would not have been unreasonable to expect this vote, in an important port constituency on 23 May at the height of the navalist agitation, to

⁶⁵ *The Times*, 6 June 1888, p. 6.

⁶⁶ Smith, ‘Public Opinion’, p. 36.

⁶⁷ The notice was reprinted elsewhere, but not at the request of the organisers.

have been strongly influenced by talk of naval policy.⁶⁸ The result was certainly a ‘bitter disappointment’ for the Conservatives, who saw their majority of 741 collapse into one of 885 for the Radical ‘Gladstonian Liberal’ and shipping magnate Francis Evans, himself a strong navalist.⁶⁹ One should not be misled by Evans’ navalism, however, for when reports of political meetings and canvassing are examined the dominant issue in the strongly nonconformist constituency is revealed to have been the licencing clauses of the Local Government Bill, while the subsequent consensus among the local and London press was that the election had revealed a remarkable lack of interest in issues beyond the temperance debate.⁷⁰

Even more disappointing for Beresford’s cause was the Govan by-election eight months later, fought following the death of the sitting member and owner of the Fairfield shipyards, Conservative Sir William Pearce.⁷¹ On 12 January Beresford himself gave a strong navalist speech at the Fairfield Works in favour of the Liberal Unionist candidate, no less a figure than Sir John Pender.⁷² While Pender busied himself with pledges to ‘do all he could’ to increase the Navy, his Liberal opponent John Wilson – a staunch Radical and IAL member – produced the usual attacks on Admiralty inefficiency, condemned those who encouraged ‘suspicions’ of France, and urged the working class electors of Govan to reject ‘jingo hoodwinking’ and vote in the ‘interests of reform and retrenchment of our public expenditure’.⁷³ This they emphatically did, returning Wilson with a majority of 1071. If Southampton illustrated how irrelevant national defence and the preservation of the Union could be in the face of local politics, Govan demonstrated how ineffective navalist propaganda could be when it was deployed. Indeed, as T.G. Otte observes, foreign policy and defence issues had little influence in by-elections throughout this period, a possible consequence of the lack of foreign wars at the end of the

⁶⁸ J.K. Laughton, *rev.* Andrew Lambert, ‘Commerell, Sir John Edmund’, *ODNB*. This entry misdates his resignation to July.

⁶⁹ *Hampshire Advertiser*, 26 May 1888, pp. 6-7. For Evans on naval increases see his speech on the Naval Estimates, *Parl. Deb.*, 13 Dec. 1888, cols. 192-194.

⁷⁰ *Hampshire Advertiser*, 23 May 1888, p. 3; for the London press reaction see *Hampshire Telegraph*, 26 May, p. 6; 30 May, p. 3. The *Morning Chronicle* alone put the result down to naval policy. For the wider temperance context of the by-election see Gardiner, *Harcourt*, vol. II, pp. 103-106.

⁷¹ Henry Pelling, *Social Geography of British Elections, 1885-1910* (London: Macmillan, 1967), pp. 407-408; Otte, ‘Swing of the Pendulum’ pp. 138-140.

⁷² *The Times*, 14 Jan. 1889, p. 10; *Scots Observer*, 19 Jan 1889, pp. 232-233.

⁷³ *Glasgow Herald*, 15 Jan. 1889, p. 5.

1880s.⁷⁴ This perception was further reinforced when the Tories lost the Kennington by-election of March 1889, despite running on a high-profile navalist platform during the opening of the Naval Defence Bill's parliamentary debates.⁷⁵ As devoted members of the Radical parliamentary bloc, Evans and Wilson went on to vote repeatedly against the Naval Defence Bill, a clear indication that the holding of a seat with strong links to the Navy did not necessarily mean that an MP felt the need to support the service come what might.

To a large extent, the press reaction to the 28 May 'City Defence Meeting' confirmed this sense of popular scepticism and apathy. Certainly, across the Unionist press, Colomb and Hornby's mix of strategy and history was welcomed. 'Admiral Colomb's plan will be popular', observed the *Birmingham Daily Post*. 'It is in the grand style of the English spirit. It well beseems the proud mistress of the seas. It recalls the great deeds of an heroic past.'⁷⁶ For the *Morning Post*, Hornby's address, 'coming, as it does, from one whose experience and capacity are beyond cavil, ought to do more to arouse public attention than any number of purely official reports.'⁷⁷ Sober demands for inquiries into naval administration and the national defences were a strong theme during the following week.⁷⁸ 'We are not counselling a resort to panic,' concluded the *York Herald*, 'but the adoption of such measures as will prevent panic from arising.'⁷⁹

Such demands, however, came with qualifications. The Tory papers hoped that the agitation would strengthen the government's hand in its current and future policy of reform, rather than leading to a large naval expansion. It is clear that few were contemplating a programme on the scale of what would become the Naval Defence Act. Indeed, when the *Morning Post* returned to the subject in early June, it was to note with satisfaction a statement from Hamilton that Britain possessed double the French number of modern cruisers, and to point out the impossibility of the taxpayer meeting Hornby's demands for hundreds more.⁸⁰ On the other hand the Liberal

⁷⁴ Otte, 'Swing of the Pendulum', pp. 139-140.

⁷⁵ Otte, 'Swing of the Pendulum', p. 140.

⁷⁶ *Birmingham Daily Post*, 21 May 1888, p. 4.

⁷⁷ *Morning Post*, 29 May 1888, p. 4.

⁷⁸ *Lancashire Evening Post*, 30 May 1888, p. 2; *Western Daily Press*, 30 May 1888, p. 5.

⁷⁹ *York Herald*, 29 May 1888, p. 4.

⁸⁰ *Morning Post*, 5 June 1888, p. 4.

press, while always keen to support any attempt to introduce efficiencies into what was widely regarded as a wasteful and corrupt department of state, was deeply sceptical, at times derisive, of the navalist cause. The *Saturday Review* opened with a strong leader on the 26th, accusing the ‘Chronic Alarmists’ of misusing history, ignoring facts and peddling ‘craven and dangerous nonsense’.⁸¹ Nor was it alone in suspecting that the Navalists had knowingly ignored the real state of the fleet, as *Punch* made clear [Figure 23]. More moderate Liberal commentators repeatedly pointed out that Hornby’s use of the Nelsonian Navy as a yardstick against which to measure the current fleet was neither proportionate nor practical, and would, if indulged, only encourage the ongoing European arms race. Hornby was attacked for assuming ‘that all the world is likely to combine against us’, ‘that we should have no allies’ and that ‘all the disadvantages would tell against ourselves alone’.⁸² ‘We have spent money enough on our army and navy to make both services twice as strong as they need be for our purposes’, concluded *The Scotsman*, in a vehement condemnation of the ‘faddist’ alarmists, whom it characterised as peddling mere ‘professional demands’ for ‘enormous expenditure’ while lacking a coherent plan for defending the nation.⁸³ In short, the City meeting had revealed much appetite for inquiry and reform, but also a genuine suspicion of the cry of ‘England in danger’. It is little wonder that Beresford later wrote to Hornby warning that demands for hundreds of new cruisers would result in the country ignoring their proposals.⁸⁴

⁸¹ *Saturday Review*, 26 May 1888, pp. 611-612.

⁸² *Daily News*, 29 May 1888, p. 4; *North-Eastern Gazette*, 1 June 1888, p. 2.

⁸³ *The Scotsman*, 29 May 1888, p. 4.

⁸⁴ Mullins, *Transformation*, p. 154.



Figure 23: 'England's Invisible Armada'.

Beresford knowingly ignores the strength of the fleet. *Punch*, 26 May 1888, p. 243.

However, it is at this point important to stress the limited and top-down nature of nineteenth century ‘public opinion’. Beresford and his allies may have failed to carry with them either ‘the country’ or much of the press, but in regard to the organs that wielded the most influence over government policy – *The Times*, the ‘clubland’ papers and the literary magazines – the agitators were overwhelmingly successful. *The Times* used the opportunity to establish the hearty Blue-Water outlook which it held for the rest of the century.⁸⁵ The *Pall Mall Gazette* lamented the ‘refusal of officialism (sic) to take the public into its confidence’, and the *St. James’ Gazette* dedicated one editorial to a strong defence of the ‘Chronic Alarmist’ pilloried by the *Saturday Review*.⁸⁶ The *Daily Telegraph*, which enthusiastically adopted Colomb and Hornby’s ‘Nelsonian’ vision of naval defence, condemned the government for failing to ‘welcome and utilise the awakened anxiety of the public mind’.⁸⁷ In an excitable display of self-congratulation, the paper continued:

We made ourselves the channel of a deep and widespread national misgiving, to which we gave articulate expression and the reinforcement of hard facts. The British people are now beginning to comprehend the prodigious danger into which we have drifted, and they will not be put off from seeing that adequate measures are taken, and quickly taken, to avert that danger.⁸⁸

The impression of widespread concern among ‘society’ was further enhanced by the publication of June’s literary magazines, featuring a wide selection of pieces condemning the state of the nation, predominantly from Army officers fearing invasion. The effect of these was, according to the *Globe*, all the greater for the fact that the rest of that month’s crop of essays made for ‘rather dull reading’.⁸⁹ The contemporaneous invasion ‘scare’ stoked by Wolseley and endorsed by a wide array of ‘journals of opinion’ also added to the overall effect.⁹⁰ Most important of all was the attendance at the meetings of 28 May and 5 June, which although reported as ‘large and influential’ and ‘thoroughly representative’, in fact reflected the overwhelmingly Conservative

⁸⁵ Moon, ‘Invasion of the United Kingdom’, p. 45.

⁸⁶ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 29 May 1888, p. 4; *St. James’ Gazette*, 29 May 1888, p. 3.

⁸⁷ *Daily Telegraph*, 29 May 1888, p. 7.

⁸⁸ *Daily Telegraph*, 30 May 1888, p. 5.

⁸⁹ *The Globe*, 2 June 1888, p. 6.

⁹⁰ Moon, ‘Invasion of the United Kingdom’, pp. 29-30.

shade of City politics at this time. Of the thirty-three MPs publicly involved in Beresford's campaign thirty were Conservatives, the majority retired or serving military and naval officers.⁹¹ Especially prominent was the former Lord Mayor and current MP for the City of London, the Tory Sir Robert Fowler, who had publicly supported Beresford from the outset.⁹² Lord Salisbury was thus faced with the twin powers of London 'Society' and his own backbenchers. As we shall see in the following chapter, it was a combination he found difficult to ignore.

Conclusion

Looking back from 1889, Beresford prided himself that he had ran a campaign built on 'facts, figures and practical proposals.'⁹³ As this chapter has shown, this was far from an accurate depiction of the navalist arguments of 1888. Indeed, it is particularly clear that, left to his own devices, Beresford would never have achieved any substantial success. At no point during 1888 did he manage to establish himself as an authoritative 'expert', or even produce a consistent set of criticisms and demands. Only following the interventions by Hornby, Colomb and the London Chamber of Commerce did his cause gain any obvious momentum. Even then, this momentum was of a limited, exclusionary nature, reliant on his fellow officers, Tory MPs and the commercial classes of the City of London. The British press did not experience a 'panic' during May 1888 comparable to that which had occurred the Channel Tunnel in 1882, or even over the Navy in 1884. Nor, were 'the people', 'the country' or many in the press obviously convinced by the myth of naval weakness, a conclusion which complements Jan Rüger's recent suggestion that generalisations about popular navalism in the age of imperialism have often been overstated.⁹⁴ Nevertheless, despite these shallow foundations, in retrospect the events of

⁹¹ Listed in *The Times*, 10 May 1888, p. 12; 29 May, p. 11; 6 June 1888, p. 6. The Tories were: Lord Charles Beresford; Frederick FitzWygram; George Bethell; Sir Albert Rollit; Richard Mayne; Henry Blundell; Edward Field; Sir James Corry; Sir John Colomb; Sir Robert Fowler; George Price; Sir John Puleston; Richard Donkin; Edward Norris; John Gilliat; Charles Murdoch; Frederick Hankey; Edward Hoare; Henry Reed; Henry King; Robert Penrose-Fitzgerald; Edward Cotton; Lord Henry Brudenell-Bruce; Edward Hill; Sir Henry Tyler; William Sidebottom; John Henniker Heaton; Joseph Sidebotham; Thomas Sidebottom; Henry Trotter. The remaining three MPs were the Liberal Unionists Sir William Crossman and Thomas Sutherland and the Liberal Sir Edward Reed.

⁹² Fowler had been present on the platform at Beresford's speech to his constituents on 26 January and had been closely involved in the events of 1885. See Smith, 'Public Opinion', p. 33.

⁹³ *The Times*, 9 Mar. 1889, p. 10.

⁹⁴ Rüger, *Great Naval Game*, p. 124.

May 1888 clearly marked the beginning of the end for serious government resistance to the navalist demands. Beresford's campaign had been limited, but by May 1888 it had succeeded in acquiring just the support needed to gain the ear of the Prime Minister; just as importantly, it was operating in a political environment distracted by Irish issues and lacking the necessary presence of mind needed to face down the navalist agitation.

Chapter Eight

The Political Response

Hurrah! Hurrah! John Bull's awake,
And you may take your Davy
That, spite of Rads and nincompoops,¹
At last we'll have a navy.

In vain our wooden walls of yore
Did foemen spend their fire on;
Our iron walls as vainly they
Henceforth will spend their ire on.

The mettle of our metal fleet
Who tries will surely rue it;
Britannia now may rule the waves,
She's got the ships to do it.

'A Navy at Last', *Judy*, 21 November 1888, p. 245.

¹ Rads: Radicals.

The ‘well-considered plan’ of Conservative historiography notwithstanding, the Naval Defence Act has long been recognised by naval historians as something forced upon a reluctant Ministry.² Nevertheless, the reasoning behind Salisbury’s decision to embark on a major project of naval expansion in 1888 is poorly understood. The following chapter considers the reception of and response to the navalist campaign by both Conservative and Liberal politicians during 1888, hitherto overlooked by historians. It argues that, while the Conservative ministry possessed the capability to refute the navalist rhetoric, ‘public opinion’ eventually told on Lord Salisbury, who, ever the consummate politician, came to embrace the naval expansion as a political necessity. Shifting focus onto the Liberal Opposition, the chapter then argues that internationalist and anti-armament opinion remained subdued throughout the year despite given an excellent opportunity to launch a counter-crusade in favour of the existing defence settlement. Distracted by the Home Rule question, Liberals had little interest in devoting time to defence matters. The result was a substantial defeat for the principle of a civilian-led defence policy.

Political Context

Seen in hindsight, the political establishment should have been prepared for the events of 1888. W.T. Stead’s 1884 campaign produced a number of political lessons which Liberals in particular would have done well to heed. Stead had fully exploited the navy ‘weakness’ in the Liberal platform, making good use of navalist statements from both Cobden and Gladstone.³ The resulting combination of liberal principals, patriotism, and ‘scandal-mongering alarmism’ proved a potent mix, brushing aside scattered protests from the ‘Friends of Peace’ and successfully masking the underlying weakness of the overall argument.⁴ As such, 1884 revealed the febleness of contemporary Liberal anti-armament sentiment and ideology, the ineffectiveness of the likes of the Arbitration League or the Peace Society, and, ultimately, the ease with which the party itself might roll over and accept naval increases demanded from

² Marder, *Anatomy*, p. 143.

³ Blumenthal, ‘Navy Campaign of 1884’, pp. 68-70.

⁴ Beeler, ‘In the Shadow of Briggs’; Laity, *British Peace Movement*, p. 108. See for example ‘Two Views about the Navy’, *Pall Mall Gazette*, 8 Oct. 1884, pp. 1-2.

outside. Although Gladstone successfully managed to keep the more extreme Admiralty demands at bay, he did not publicly attack the underlying myth of naval weakness.⁵ The expense itself was accepted by a diverse number of Liberals including Lord Northbrook and Campbell-Bannerman at the Admiralty, justified as simply an extension of the party's policy of developing command of the sea 'steadily year by year', in Campbell-Bannerman's words.⁶ As a result, the political lessons of 'the Truth about the Navy' went largely unlearned, and when in 1888 this principal of moderate spending was more directly challenged, politicians in both major parties found themselves without the experience, organisation or conceptual tools to repel the threat.⁷

Naval critics were kept busy over the intervening years. The Navy's tardy response to the 1885 Panjdeh crisis with Russia came in for much criticism, for example, while elements within the press continued to push the apparent demands of public opinion.⁸ For most politicians, however, naval matters were rarely top of the agenda, and, along with so many other issues, were pushed even further down by Gladstone's 1885 conversion to Home Rule, an issue which had lost little of its potency by the later 1880s. Throughout 1888 and 1889 Irish affairs and the the Pigott forgeries case dominated both the Commons and the press, a subject to which the Naval Defence Bill, perhaps to the government's relief, was forced to play a poor second fiddle.⁹ Even the most fervent defence advocates recognised that the 'preservation of the Union' came before all other issues.¹⁰ On the other hand, many commentators were wont to regard the growing defence agitation as an entertaining distraction from Ireland. 'The new movement is by no means unwelcome to politicians generally' observed *The Manchester Courier's* London correspondent in May 1888, 'for the Home Rule question, which has held the field for so long,

⁵ Parry, *Politics of Patriotism*, p. 357.

⁶ J.A. Spender, *The Life of the Right Hon. Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman*, vol. I (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1923), pp. 52-56.

⁷ This was in spite of the fact that the myth of naval weakness was picked apart by the influential naval historian and theorist John Knox Laughton in an 1885 essay. Mullins, *Transformation*, p. 163.

⁸ Mullins, *Transformation*, p. 97; Beeler, *British Naval Policy*, p. 276; Hamilton, *Parliamentary Reminiscences*, p. 83.

⁹ S. Maccoby, *English Radicalism 1886-1914* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1953), p. 70.

¹⁰ Anon., 'National Defence', p. 437.

has grown stale of late.’¹¹ The most important effect of the Irish problem, however, was its influence over Gladstone, whose speeches during this period rarely referred to anything else.¹² In seeking to understand why the Liberal party in particular made such a poor showing in opposing spending increases, and therefore why the Naval Defence Act has made such little mark on political histories of the period, the all-pervasive nature of the ‘Irish Question’ must be appreciated.

The Government Response, 1888

In early 1888 the calm which reigned in the Admiralty was reflected across the Cabinet. Salisbury, famously dismissive of ‘expert’ opinions had little interest in spending a large sum on the Navy, while his Chancellor George Goschen had, according to Beresford, said that any proposal to increase the Navy was both preposterous and unwanted.¹³ At the Admiralty, George Hamilton was a decent administrator with two years of experience dealing with the Admirals by 1888. Certainly Hamilton was no passionate economiser, having opposed Randolph Churchill’s demands for reductions in the estimates, but neither was he a man likely to roll over and accept a large increase in them.¹⁴ Importantly, he was ably assisted by the Liverpool MP Arthur Forwood, the first shipowner ever to become an Admiralty minister, who took a tough, confrontational approach towards dealings with the officers on the Admiralty Board.¹⁵ As Paul Smith has shown, Forwood was fully cognisant of all aspects of naval administration, and his expertise and competence earned him a grudging respect from even the most anti-civilian naval officers.¹⁶ During January-April 1888, Hamilton and Forwood appeared repeatedly on platforms up and down the country, defending themselves, to some praise, against the various claims of Beresford and his supporters. During this time, they effectively contained the Navalist campaign.

¹¹ *Manchester Courier*, 12 May 1888, p. 5.

¹² See for example *The Times*, 29 May 1888, p. 12, when a short speech by the Liberal leader reaffirming his exclusive commitment to Home Rule contrasted markedly with the paper’s account of the ‘City National Defence Meeting’, printed immediately adjacent.

¹³ Mullins, *Transformation*, pp. 48, 63-65; Beresford, *Memoirs*, vol. II, p. 359.

¹⁴ Foster, *Lord Randolph Churchill*, pp. 304-307; Mullins, *Transformation*, pp. 65-66

¹⁵ Philip Waller, ‘Forwood, Sir Arthur Bower, first baronet (1836–1898)’, *ODNB*; Mullins, *Transformation*, pp. 66-67.

¹⁶ Smith, ‘Ruling the Waves’, pp. 27-39.

May opened with the government position as apparently determined as it had ever been. On 4 May the Leader of the Commons W.H. Smith, who had already privately appealed to the agitators to cease their campaign, informed the House that ‘the government are by no means willing to admit the dangerous weakness of the Army and Navy, nor the inefficiency of either of those Services’, and ruled out an inquiry into the state of the national defences.¹⁷ On 11 and 14 May, in his only substantial interventions into the controversy, Lord Salisbury quoted recent naval spending to support the contention that ‘there is no ground whatever for the implied reproach of parsimony and that we are neglecting the defences of the country.’¹⁸ ‘I deprecate the idea that it is possible for any government to lay down an absolute standard of safety’, he argued on the 14th. ‘You must know what your enemy is likely to be before you know whether your preparations are likely to be sufficient’.¹⁹ Salisbury clearly understood that British naval strength could not be dealt with in a vacuum, but must be evaluated with reference to the resources of its potential rivals and the government’s diplomatic policy. In light of Salisbury’s later defence of the Naval Defence Bill these statements of May 1888 make for remarkable reading.

However well founded, the result of Salisbury’s attitude was a perception among the navalists that the government was ignoring their concerns. A shrewd government might, at this stage, have instituted some high-profile Admiralty reforms, and perhaps commissioned a modest increase in cruiser strength. An excellent opportunity was soon to present itself in the form of the final report of the Commons Select Committee into the naval estimates, chaired by Henry Campbell-Bannerman. Published in August, this produced a qualified victory for civilian authority, recommending that the Sea Lords be given a greater advisory role in the creation of the estimates, without actually submitting to any substantial increase in naval spending.²⁰ Instead the government stuck to its position: the public meetings of that month can be seen as a direct consequence of this official refusal to act.

¹⁷ Mullins, *Transformation*, p. 151; Parl. Deb., 4 May 1888, cols. 1370-1373.

¹⁸ Salisbury, Parl. Deb., 11 May 1888, cols. 5-7.

¹⁹ Salisbury, Parl. Deb., 14 May 1888, cols. 106-107.

²⁰ Mullins, *Transformation*, pp. 133-137.

Subtle evidence of a split within the government emerged during May, when a speech by the arch-imperialist and ‘big-navy’ Civil Lord of the Admiralty Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett appeared to give some credence to the agitators’ demands.²¹ Indeed, the navalists were not without at least one ally within the Cabinet, as the Queen’s journal for early May shows that W.H. Smith, who had proven his pessimistic credentials through prominent involvement in the 1884 agitation, ‘felt anxious as to the state of our Army and Navy, and said some decided steps must be taken.’²² According to Victoria, Smith, who at this time was still publicly following the government line, did not think that either Stanhope at the War Office or Hamilton were ‘strong enough’, always declaring ‘*all is right, which we know it is not.*’²³ It is likely that Smith was closely involved in the decision-making process which led to the Naval Defence Bill, something which historians have missed.²⁴

Ashmead-Bartlett and Smith do not appear to have been representative of the rest of the government, however. Further research demonstrates that both Hamilton and Forwood maintained their position against the navalists throughout May, and that they easily had the measure of their opponents. On the 28th itself, the First Lord gave a speech at a gathering of Conservative Associations at Derby in which he laboured at some length to show that Britain far outclassed France in shipbuilding terms. Defiantly attacking ‘a certain number of naval officers’ for creating a ‘panic exactly at the moment when we were stronger than we had been for the last ten years’, he concluded with the declaration that the government would not have their policy dictated by outside influences.²⁵ A week later, during the Commons debate on the government’s proposed programme of fortifications for coaling stations, he returned to the subject after being directly challenged by Beresford over his Derby remarks. The result was an incisive and concise speech which tore up much of the navalist propaganda.²⁶ Beresford and his supporters, Hamilton charged, were sensational because that was the only hope they had of success. He accused

²¹ Mullins, *Transformation*, p. 155.

²² George Buckle (ed.), *The Letters of Queen Victoria* 3rd ser., 1886–1890 (London: Longmans, 1930), p. 410; Smith, ‘Public Opinion’, pp. 31–33.

²³ Buckle, *Letters of Queen Victoria*, 1886–1890, p. 413.

²⁴ Buckle, *Letters of Queen Victoria*, 1886–1890, pp. 415, 456.

²⁵ *The Times*, 29 May 1888, p. 10.

²⁶ Parl. Deb., 4 June 1888, cols. 1063–1071.

Beresford of misleading the public by exaggerating the amount which might be saved through reform, and Hornby of demanding 186 sixteen-knot cruisers when France in 1888 possessed only five. Indeed, he made much of the fact that in France at that moment, naval officers were demanding increased expenditure on the basis that Britain far outclassed the French fleet in cruiser strength. Rejecting a policy of mass shipbuilding – in part, ironically, because Hornby’s proposed scheme would come to twenty-one million pounds – Hamilton appeared to reaffirm the established policy of maintaining a naval programme ‘well within our financial compass’. He concluded with a warning against the ‘unreliability of public opinion’. The strength of his speech was reflected in the tribute paid to him by Shaw Lefevre, who pledged himself in complete agreement with the ‘firm stand’ Hamilton had made.²⁷ At first glance, Hamilton’s speech appeared to mark the end of the affair. The London correspondent of the *Dundee Courier* reflected:

Lord George Hamilton has been very generally complimented upon the speech in which he replied to the panicmongers last night. It was an admirable survey of our naval position, and completely disposed of the alarms of Sir Geoffrey Hornby and the jeremiads of Lord Charles Beresford. The panic is now an end, and in a few days it will have been forgotten by all but its discomfited authors.²⁸

There was, however, a problem with this interpretation. At the conclusion of his speech, Hamilton had said: ‘we agree that the Navy at the present moment has not arrived at the standard of strength which we hope it will attain, and when attained will be kept.’ While vague, this was clearly a significant change of tune. ‘What is all this but to confess that we are weak to-day?’ demanded the *Standard*. ‘There are too many indications’, it continued, ‘that the programmes of the Admiralty and War Office have been shaped, not by a conscientious recognition of our requirements, but by financial rule of thumb.’²⁹ In hindsight, Hamilton’s speech was not the death-kneel of the agitation but a preparing of the ground for a new direction

²⁷ Parl. Deb., 4 June 1888, col. 1071.

²⁸ *Dundee Courier*, 6 June 1888, p. 3.

²⁹ *The Standard*, 5 June 1888, p. 5.

in British naval policy, something which was recognised by the attendees at the second City meeting of 5 June.³⁰

Hamilton's criticisms were reiterated and expanded upon by Forwood at the Liverpool Chamber of Commerce on 9 July. Speaking in his capacity 'as a merchant and shipowner', Forwood launched into a scathing attack on Beresford, Hornby and Colomb.³¹ Calling for a moderate increase in the size of the fleet through the estimates, he pointed out that the British fleet remained 'far in advance of other nations' and proceeded to annihilate Hornby's 144 cruiser proposal with a comparative evaluation of the British and French fleets, demonstrating an awareness of realities such as France's inferior wooden hulled ships and coaling station deficiencies which outmatched that of the professional 'experts'. Importantly, he also followed Hamilton's criticisms of public opinion, 'those popular agitations which are often so prejudicial to good administration':

Unfortunately, the spirit of the age tempts people to exaggerate: unless a statement is sensational it receives but little attention at the hands of the public. Hence we have over-coloured speeches and newspaper articles, which do more harm than good, for their very extravagance deters sober-minded men from paying proper regard to the modicum of facts on which they may be based.³²

His audience clearly agreed, passing a supportive resolution – seconded by William Gladstone's brother, Robertson – and expressing confidence in the government to root out any existing inefficiencies in naval administration. The *Liverpool Mercury* also endorsed Forwood's words, which it saw as an example of 'self-possession and calm confidence' in contrast to the 'alarmist panic' and 'downright folly' of Admiral Hornby.³³ The *Daily News* confidently described the speech as the 'last nail in the coffin of the panic', but there was little evidence that his words had been absorbed by the political establishment, and he received no obvious support from either the government or Opposition.³⁴ The *St. James' Gazette* – a noted Beresford ally – ran an

³⁰ Smith, 'Public Opinion', p. 39.

³¹ *Liverpool Mercury* 10 July 1888, p. 8.

³² *Liverpool Mercury* 10 July 1888, p. 8.

³³ *Liverpool Mercury* 10 July 1888, p. 5.

³⁴ *Daily News*, 10 July 1888, p. 5.

editorial critical of Forwood, while most papers simply printed his words without comment.³⁵

The Times completely ignored it: instead it busied itself with a discussion of the preparations for the following month's naval manoeuvres, in a report which repeated the naval weakness myth as fact.³⁶ To an extent, Forwood's characterisation of the 'spirit of the age' had been proven correct: his calm, clear-headed analysis of the situation had failed to match the alarmist hyperbole of the authoritative, patriotic and 'non-political' naval officers.

The above narrative of Ministerial attitudes towards the naval agitation, when placed in the context of the relatively lacklustre nature of that same agitation, serves to emphasise the suddenness of the government's decision to adopt the Naval Defence Bill.³⁷ During June, Salisbury conducted a Cabinet-level defence review. On 1 July Lord Cranbrook, Salisbury's Lord President of the Council, recorded in his diary: 'Our Cabinet yesterday much occupied by G. Hamilton & responsibility. Large estimates loom before him.'³⁸ That same day Arthur Hood, the First Sea Lord, submitted what would become the basis for the Naval Defence Act to Cabinet, and the main body of the programme took shape during November, taking into account the lessons of the August naval manoeuvres.³⁹ A meeting of the responsible Ministers provisionally agreed the expenditure of twenty million pounds on the Navy on 11 December, although the Bill itself was not finalised until March 1889.⁴⁰ The decision to substantially expand the Navy was therefore taken by Salisbury at some point during June, and no more than a month following the meeting of 28 May.⁴¹ Once he had decided to expand the Navy, Salisbury remained reluctant to admit that he had been forced to do so by Beresford and his supporters. On 12 June, for example, he wrote to the Queen, assuring her that 'the efforts of the country

³⁵ *St. James' Gazette*, 10 July 1888, p. 3; Mullins, *Transformation*, p. 122.

³⁶ *The Times*, 10 July 1888, p. 9.

³⁷ Much of the following chronology is taken from Mullins, *Transformation*, pp. 68-70, 155-158.

³⁸ Johnson, *Diary of Gathorne Hardy*, p. 710. 'Responsibility' presumably refers to the question as to whether civilians or sailors should be held to account for the state of the fleet.

³⁹ Mullins, *Transformation*, pp. 156, 158.

⁴⁰ Buckle, *Letters of Queen Victoria, 1886-1890*, p. 456; Salisbury to Balfour, 10 Jan. 1889, Williams *Salisbury-Balfour Correspondence*, p. 274. Correspondence relating to the creation of the Naval Defence Bill from the perspective of Reginald Welby, Permanent Secretary to the Treasury, can be found in BL, Egerton MS 3291 B.

⁴¹ Mullins, *Transformation*, pp. 70-71; Hamilton, *Parliamentary Reminiscences*, pp. 106-107.

should be concentrated on a well-considered plan, and not be frittered away by the divergent counsels of various Admirals and Generals'.⁴²

It seems likely that Salisbury was pressured into his decision by trinity of elite public opinion, his own backbenchers and the Sea Lords. Yet the logical reasoning behind the government's change of policy remains elusive. The intention to embark upon a new naval programme was confirmed publicly on 9 November 1888, at the Lord Mayor's day Guildhall banquet.⁴³

Traditionally a time for Ministers to reflect on the year past, the state of the Navy was the foremost subject of interest. Introducing Hamilton as the first speaker, the new Lord Mayor, the Liberal James Whitehead, referred to the 'grave doubts...expressed in well-informed quarters' about the naval defences, and argued that 'all classes of the people' would support the government in any measures it may deem necessary, a marked departure from the attitudes of his predecessor. Hamilton's speech was short and to the point. With Northbrook's 1885 programme now complete and the government equipped with the experience and lessons of the recent manoeuvres, 'I hope that during the next 12 months', he said, 'we may be able to make a new and bolder start and a more sustained effort towards bringing up the strength of Her Majesty's Navy to that standard at which, in the opinion of Her Majesty's Government, it ought to be permanently maintained.' This policy shift was echoed by Salisbury. After reflecting on the ongoing European arms race – stressing how the result of any great war must necessarily be the 'national annihilation' of the defeated – the Prime Minister addressed the state of public opinion in Britain:

I do not say that this should diminish our confidence in peace, but I feel that there is a general impression pervading the community – one of those wide public impressions affecting every mind and every class which carries by its universality the warrant of its truth – which tells us that in the midst of so much preparation we must not remain unprepared.⁴⁴

⁴² Buckle, *Letters of Queen Victoria*, 1886–1890, p. 415.

⁴³ *The Times*, 10 Nov. 1888, p. 10; Marder, *Anatomy*, p. 143

⁴⁴ *The Times*, 10 Nov. 1888, p. 10.

As far as his interpretation of public opinion goes, this passage is a typically Salisburian political calculation. It is impossible not to compare it to Gladstone's condemnation of 'speculative panics' in the Channel Tunnel debate earlier the same year. What the Liberal leader regarded as the trumped-up concerns of a moneyed minority, Salisbury interpreted as the reflected view of the entire nation.⁴⁵ The navalists attempt to use the limited nineteenth century understanding of public opinion to appropriate the voice of the nation appeared to have succeeded spectacularly.

In actual substance, neither Hamilton nor Salisbury's speech explicitly detailed a large naval expansion. Salisbury was determined that no details of the programme should be leaked until the First Lord introduced it to Parliament.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, the implication of Salisbury's words were clear, discussed not only in the British press, but across Europe. 'Lord Salisbury has simply at last opened his eyes to the permanent facts, and acts accordingly', opined the *Pall Mall Gazette*, which looked forward to Hamilton's 'unanswerable case' for more ironclads when next he presented the estimates to Parliament.⁴⁷ One member of the Guildhall banquet audience was especially happy. 'After last night's speeches of Salisbury and Hamilton I am delighted', wrote Beresford to his friend Colonel John Ardagh on 10 November. 'The Government have completely given in to my demands and my resignation has borne good fruit.'⁴⁸

Yet as a justification for the Naval Defence Act Salisbury's speech rang extraordinarily hollow, especially in light of his professions of British naval strength made only a few months earlier. The Royal Navy is weak, he appears to argue, because the people believe it to be so. This was particularly peculiar in the context of the rest of the speech, in which he argued that the only danger the peace of Europe must fear was a 'burst of uninformed feeling among the masses of

⁴⁵ See Thompson's discussion of Salisbury in *British Political Culture*, p. 151.

⁴⁶ Salisbury to Balfour, 10 Jan. 1889 in Williams, *Salisbury-Balfour Correspondence*, p. 274.

⁴⁷ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 12 Nov. 1888, p. 1.

⁴⁸ Charles Beresford to John Ardagh, 10 Nov. 1888, TNA, PRO/30/40/10.

the people, who in every country can, if they will, control the action of their rulers'.⁴⁹ In one breath he was praising the rationality of the people's fears and in the next condemning their power. It was a strangely illogical line of reasoning for a Prime Minister who so prided himself on his firm and sensible governance.

It seems fair to say that the Naval Defence Act was an opportunistic move, designed to appease what Salisbury may have genuinely regarded as a national sentiment, whether or not he really believed that sentiment was rational. On the current evidence, it is difficult to say whether he ever seriously agreed that the Royal Navy needed strengthening. As the next chapter shows, that he and his government continued to shy away from explaining the reasoning behind their programme suggests that he was all too aware of his policy's dubious foundations. In light of this conclusion, attention must be turned to the position of the Liberal opposition. If the government's position was so weak and its support base vague, why did the Liberals not jump at the chance to exploit these problems in what rapidly became one of the defining policies of the Salisbury government?

The Lord Mayor and the Liberals

For the most part, Beresford and his fellow agitators limited their ire to past and present governments and the political system itself. Only on one or two occasions during the City Defence Meetings did they depart from this line to attack the Radical 'peace hallucination', while the Liberal party itself was mentioned only within condemnations of wider 'party exigencies'.⁵⁰ Certainly, this focus on the government was intentional – it was, after all, alleged flaws in current naval policy against which they were protesting. This was not to say, however, that they were consciously ignoring the Radicals. Rather the lack of attention paid to what in previous scares had represented the predominant ideological opposition to increased estimates was due in large part to the total failure of the Liberal party in general and Radicals and peace campaigners in particular to offer any sort of meaningful commentary on, let alone criticism of,

⁴⁹ He had made an almost identical statement at the previous year's banquet. *The Times*, 10 Nov. 1887, p. 6.

⁵⁰ Fitzgerald, *The Times*, 6 June 1888, p. 6.

the agitation. Other than the usual editorial comment, one searches the pages of the press between January and May 1888 in vain for serious criticisms of the agitation from prominent Liberals, Radicals or peace campaigners. It was not until mid-May that any such rebuke was offered to Beresford's campaign, and this only appeared as a result of direct provocation. Beyond this incident, Liberal critiques were few and far between, lacking in both coordination and, in many cases, intellectual force.

On 14 May, at the suggestion of Rear-Admiral Mayne, the organisers of the 'City National Defence Meeting' resolved to approach the Lord Mayor of London to request the use of the Guildhall, at which it was planned to put a resolution expressing 'grave anxiety' in the state of the national defence. It was also unanimously agreed that the Mayor himself should be asked to preside over the meeting, presumably in order to give the proceedings an air of officialdom and to reinforce the image of citywide concern.⁵¹

Unfortunately for Mayne, the office of Lord Mayor was held in 1888 by a man diametrically opposed to the pessimist outlook. Born in Belgium and brought up in London, the owner of the largest hotel in the city and a man prominently involved in the promotion of Anglo-Belgian relations, Polydor de Keyser was London's first Catholic Mayor since the Reformation.⁵²

Variouly described as a man of 'liberal and tolerant views' and an 'enthusiastic Liberal Unionist', De Keyser's outlook was reflected in his forceful reply to Mayne's request, circulated in the press on 18 May.⁵³ Not only did he deny any knowledge of widespread public support for Beresford, De Keyser went further and challenged the meeting's claim to represent popular opinion. 'I believe there is a strong feeling among them [the public]', he wrote, 'that the discreditable panic which has recently been created in the manner of the national defences has gone too far already.' Arguing that the concerns of the meeting should be raised through

⁵¹ *The Times*, 15 May 1888, p. 10; *Daily News*, 15 May 1888, p. 5.

⁵² Anita McConnell, 'Keyser, Sir Polydor de (1832–1898)', *ODNB*.

⁵³ *The Times*, 18 May 1888, p. 10. Characterisations of De Keyser come from *Daily News*, 30 Sept. 1887, p. 3; *Pall Mall Gazette*, 8 Nov. 1887, p. 9. Mullins suggests that De Keyser's letter was inspired by his support for Lord Salisbury, to whom he 'owed his appointment as Lord Mayor'. Unfortunately he provides no reference for this: as the Lord Mayor is not appointed but rather elected by the Liverymen of the City of London, it is unlikely that de Keyser had any such debt to the Prime Minister. Mullins, *Transformation*, p. 151.

Parliament and the ballot box in the ‘constitutional and proper ways’, De Keyser concluded his remarkable broadside with a refusal to be party to ‘fomenting an unpatriotic agitation which is unworthy of this great nation.’ The Lord Mayor’s letter attacked the very foundations of nineteenth century defence agitation, directly questioning its popular, legal and patriotic legitimacy. For De Keyser, Beresford and his ilk were little more than anti-democratic panicmongers, intent on using extra-constitutional pressure to force the elected government into a change of policy. It was within this context of support for representative democracy that he charged the agitators with a lack of patriotism; for him, any attempt to whip up a panic was an unpatriotic act in of itself, regardless of the motives which lay behind it.

The response to this letter revealed both how polarised the national defence debate had become and how thick-skinned one had to be in order to enter it. The *Morning Post* led the way the following day with an editorial which declared the affair a ‘black mark’ against De Keyser’s Mayoralty; the Mayor, argued the paper, had shown a ‘grotesque misapprehension of his functions’ and had proved himself ‘entirely out of touch with the vast mass of public opinion.’⁵⁴ This view was echoed by a number of prominent letters in *The Times*, most notably one by Admiral Algernon De Horsey, who wrote to articulate the ‘indignation’ which he was sure ‘all loyal citizens of London’ must have felt in reaction to De Keyser’s refusal of the Guildhall.⁵⁵ ‘What movement could be more patriotic’ he asked, ‘than a strictly non-political endeavour’ to encourage the public to ‘support’ the government in improving the national defences? De Horsey was also quick to point out the Mayor’s foreign nationality in a veiled reference to De Keyser’s own questionable loyalties. While some were thus ready to condemn the Mayor for a lack of patriotism, the *Pall Mall Gazette* considered that he had on the contrary been ‘too effusively patriotic’, displaying confidence in the government which the paper did not consider to be justified— an excellent illustration of how confused concepts of patriotism could become within the national defence context.⁵⁶ Beresford himself quickly moved to seize the moral high

⁵⁴ *Morning Post*, 19 May 1888, p. 4.

⁵⁵ *The Times*, 23 May 1888, p. 11.

⁵⁶ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 18 May 1888, p. 4.

ground, lamenting the Mayor's language, which he portrayed as the misguided statements of a man who was 'only desirous of saying what was right', while declaring that he himself was 'perfectly willing to be tried by court-martial if he had said anything which was not true or which was discreditable'.⁵⁷

De Keyser's letter was forthright, confident, and widely reported. For some in the Liberal press, it seemed for a time to mark the end of the 'scare'.⁵⁸ The Mayor's letter was loudly cheered at the annual general meeting of the Peace Society on 22 May, and the meeting unanimously passed a resolution condemning the defence scare as 'utterly groundless and discreditable'.⁵⁹ Addressing the meeting, the Radical MP Halley Stewart sought, as De Keyser had, to wrestle the right to speak for the 'people' from the navalists, declaring the public 'quite as competent to judge the defences of the nation as was the Duke [of Cambridge]'. If 'newspaper editors who created war panics' had an obligation to fight, he continued, 'they would be less disposed to invent these scares'. This apparent backlash was crowned six days later by Hamilton's speech of the 28th. However, these individual examples of support should not be regarded as indicative of a wider trend. The fact was that, in the mocking words of Lord Carnarvon, De Keyser's letter remained a 'singular literary curiosity'.⁶⁰ No prominent Liberal figure came out to support him. Distracted by Irish issues and unwilling to wade into the rhetorical quagmire which the debate had become, the Opposition, like much of the government, remained silent. Most significantly, many clearly felt that, given its lack of evident support, Beresford's campaign was dying a death on its own: in August, Campbell-Bannerman confidently declared that the attempt to encourage a scare had failed.⁶¹

Far from showing the weakness of the navalists, however, August actually secured their final victory. That month saw much anticipated naval manoeuvres testing strategies of blockade, with the papers full of accounts of 'the enemy' bombarding northern English and Scottish coastal

⁵⁷ *The Times*, 24 May, 1888, p. 7.

⁵⁸ *Lloyds Weekly Newspaper*, 20 May 1888, p. 1.

⁵⁹ The best account of this meeting is to be found in *The Standard*, 23 May 1888, p. 3.

⁶⁰ *The Times*, 29 May 1888, p. 12.

⁶¹ *The Times*, 14 Aug. 1888, p. 10.

towns in accordance, the Admiralty claimed, with French *Jeune Ecole* tactics.⁶² In truth, the manoeuvres were purposefully designed so as to present a ‘worst-case scenario’, exaggerating French strengths and British weaknesses.⁶³ Nevertheless, that the Navy had been powerless to stop the carnage was presented in the subsequent Admiralty report as the most powerful argument present thus far in favour of expansion. Cementing the victory which the navalists had already won within the government, the report demanded a minimum of a 5:3 ratio in British: French battleships, and 2:1 in cruisers – despite the fact that the Royal Navy was already in this position.⁶⁴

Too late, the Liberals realised the political significance of these wargames. In a lengthy letter to the *Times* Campbell-Bannerman, who had previously protested in the Commons that the manoeuvres had interrupted Sunday services in Greenock, not only expressed incredulity that a ‘civilized power’ would ever stoop so low as to attack defenceless civilians, but outright accused the Admiralty of conspiring to rig the manoeuvres in order to ‘frighten the British public’ and so boost the ‘political movement’ for more warships, an evaluation which seems correct in its essentials.⁶⁵ Replying in defence of the Navy, retired Admiral George Elliot poured scorn upon Campbell-Bannerman’s ‘optimist opinions’ and faith in the ‘sanctity of civilized warfare’. As far as he was concerned, the politician’s anger was merely a ‘measure of his dread of the British public becoming enlightened’ to the true state of the naval defences.⁶⁶ Campbell-Bannerman’s protests, supported in the Commons by Lawson’s description of the manoeuvres as ‘absurdities’, marked a nadir in public relations between the Liberal party and the Royal Navy. Few incidents so clearly highlighted how out of touch and naive Cobdenite appeals to civilisation, and the general Liberal approach to the armed forces, could appear in contrast to the ‘realist’ perspective of the new imperialism, obscuring the otherwise perceptive criticism of the manoeuvres which Campbell-Bannerman’s letter had exhibited.

⁶² Marder, *Anatomy*, pp. 107-111.

⁶³ Morgan-Owen, *Fear of Invasion*, pp. 25-26.

⁶⁴ Marder, *Anatomy*, pp. 107-111; Parkinson, *Late Victorian Navy*, pp. 111-112; Mullins, *Transformation*, 158.

⁶⁵ Parl. Deb. 7 Aug. 1888, cols. 1839-1842; *The Times*, 14 Aug. 1888, p. 10.

⁶⁶ *The Times*, 16 Aug. 1888, p. 6.

Similarly counterproductive was the attitude of many in the Radical press, led by *Reynolds's Newspaper*. While ridiculing the navalists' 'stupid and discreditable' motives was nothing out of the ordinary, by June the paper had adopted a decidedly antagonistic tone towards the gullibility of the British people:

All this outcry is raised for the benefit of those who have hitherto, and will again, profit by the panic they help to create – personal, not patriotic, motives governing their conduct. Unfortunately millions are led away by the specious language and arguments of knowing knaves, who prey upon the multitude of asses that Providence, for some mysterious reasons, has introduced in the scheme of creation.⁶⁷

However fine the prose, hurling abuse and insults at the electorate while grossly exaggerating the size of Beresford's popular support was hardly a sensible method by which to rally support against him. Yet this attitude was symptomatic of the shallow nature of Radical opposition to spending increases, concerned more with pursuing the ideological attack against capital, aristocracy and Admiralty 'corruption' than with contradicting the pessimists' 'facts'. Although a minority view within the press, the paper's fulminations were a foretaste of what was to come in the Commons, and a symptom of the wider malaise affecting Radical anti-armament politics.

In an article for the *Contemporary Review*, the editor of the *Manchester Examiner*, Henry Dunckley, accurately summarised the scattered and ineffective nature of the Radical response to the navalist propaganda surge of May. 'If the Radical party are to carry with them the sympathies of their countrymen,' he wrote, 'they are bound to have a policy which admits of being defined and vindicated. It will not do to deal in mere negations, nor to fire off shots at random, nor to hint at solutions which nineteen men in twenty will reject as absurd.'⁶⁸ As far as Dunckley was concerned, the lack of serious opposition to the claims of the armed forces had contributed not to panic, but rather a widespread sense of ignorance, helplessness and indignation. As civilians and taxpayers, the majority naturally wished to side with the politicians. Yet they had been provided with neither the information nor the leadership to have the courage

⁶⁷ *Reynolds's Newspaper*, 3 June 1888, p. 4.

⁶⁸ Henry Dunckley, 'National Defence', *Contemporary Review* (June 1888), pp. 885-901 (p. 896).

to disagree with the experts. ‘At present’, he concluded, ‘we are in a muddle... We pay thirty millions a year [on the Army and Navy combined], and all we get for it is that knowing men shake their heads, and tell us that we are all but utterly defenceless. Our soldiers say one thing, our sailors say another, and there is no competent man or body of men to decide between them.’⁶⁹

The *Leeds Times*, a Saturday paper with a strong editorial line on working class issues, provided an equally perceptive analysis of the navalist victory.⁷⁰ Although it had spent 1888 mocking the invasion idea as ‘as wild an improbability as an invasion of Greenland by the Zulus’ and accusing the Tories of stirring up a scare in order to distract from their own ‘sins’, by early 1889 the success of the agitation had encouraged the paper to look beyond the absurdities of its opponents and into the failure of its own cause, producing a thoughtful and introspective leader on the subject on 9 February.⁷¹ Why, it asked, were there so few habitually vocal opponents of increased estimates in Parliament? It could list only five by name.⁷² If reduced spending really was in the public interest then there ought to be ‘scores’: that there were not indicated a ‘great apathy on the part of the public.’ What the scare of 1888 had revealed was that the navalists were far more sophisticated than their opponents in propaganda and organisation. ‘When those persons chiefly interested in raising panics, and in reaping their fruit, are most ostentatiously prominent, both in and out Parliament, the Government is not unreasonably warranted in drawing the inference that “The Alarmists have it.”’

Having diagnosed the problem facing opponents of increased expenditure, the *Leeds Times* set about understanding how it might be rectified. The alarmists’ strength lay in their ability to produce vocal and well-organised support from across the press, armed forces and prominent sections of the business and political communities, exploiting the apathy of the electorate to dominate public discourse. Working on the principle that ‘Parliament never manifests alacrity to

⁶⁹ Dunckley, ‘National Defence’, p. 901.

⁷⁰ Brown, *Victorian News*, p. 73.

⁷¹ *Leeds Times*, 9 June 1888, p. 4; 9 Feb. 1889, p. 4.

⁷² The five were Lord Randolph Churchill, Joseph Pease, Sir Wilfrid Lawson, Alfred Illingworth and Charles Bradlaugh.

take vigorous action, except under outside pressure', the paper argued that the counter lay in coordinated, collective and popular action:

This is emphatically a taxpayers' question—a matter for the people of every town and district and county to move for themselves. Protests from merely several localities are utterly insufficient. Neither can the central representatives of any body, whether the Peace Society, or any other, effect much. It is a question which demands widespread individual and local action throughout the kingdom, in the form of persevering pressure upon members of Parliament separately, and upon the Government.⁷³

The paper was right to dismiss individual pressure groups such as the Peace Society or the new and growing IAL, for neither possessed anything like the presence at either constituency or parliamentary level which was required for a mass protest of the type envisioned.⁷⁴ The only successful counterfoil to the naval agitators' claims on 'public opinion' was the mobilisation of that self-same opinion against them.

Unfortunately for its own political allegiance, the analysis of the *Leeds Times* was all too correct. Not only were the lobbying strengths of the navalists and the apathy of the public all too clear, but also in its implied criticism of Liberal weaknesses. Indeed, it was becoming obvious that the naval weakness myth had succeeded even within the upper reaches of the Opposition. On 10 January 1889 Edward Walter Hamilton, former private secretary to Gladstone and now head of the Treasury's Finance Division, spent the evening talking with Lord Rosebery and John Morley, the latter perhaps the staunchest of Cobden's later generation of disciples. Hamilton recorded in his diary:

We had a good deal of talk about the Naval question and the probable demands for more money to be spent on our Naval Defences. J. Morley was not opposed to a considerable outlay, provided that there was some guarantee against a waste of money, that a real case for strengthening our Navy was made out by the Government and that the expenditure was made out of income. I expect this feeling will be widely shared by

⁷³ *Leeds Times*, 9 Feb. 1889, p. 4.

⁷⁴ Laity, *British Peace Movement*, pp. 111-115.

the Liberal party; though I doubt if Mr. G[ladstone] will be able to face any really big sum.⁷⁵

Naval expansion was, of course, not necessarily incompatible with Cobdenism. Furthermore as a Member for the shipbuilding centre of Newcastle, Morley may have had other, more prosaic reasons for supporting such a policy. Nevertheless, his willingness to give the pessimistic outlook a hearing was significant, and, as Hamilton guessed, representative of a substantial body of feeling within the party, although not, importantly, of its leader. Already in early 1889 it was clear that Liberals, lacking the organisation and unity to directly challenge the assertions of the naval officers were preparing to avoid the issue altogether. Indicative of this was Campbell-Bannerman's speech to his Stirling constituents on 24 January 1889. Retreating from his earlier attacks on the Admiralty, he instead that, as the government was in possession of 'the very highest and technical advice', it was to them alone that the question of military and naval strength should be left. 'He awaited their decision before expressing any strong opinion of his own.'⁷⁶

Conclusion

Salisbury, Hamilton and Forwood would all later claim, with memories as selective as that of Beresford, that they took the initiative during 1888 and were responsible for the decision to replace a financial with an Admiralty-led naval policy.⁷⁷ The first half of this chapter confirms the view of naval historians that these statements are misrepresentations. However, building on the conclusions of the previous chapter, it also brings a new perspective to bear on the reaction to the navalist campaign of January-May 1888. Remaining strong in the face of the agitators up to June and July, Hamilton and Forwood's efforts were undermined by their Prime Minister's sudden change of heart.

Why Salisbury decided to introduce such a wide-ranging naval expansion when he did remains a burning question. As we have seen, in Campbell-Bannerman's select committee report he had

⁷⁵ Dudley W.R. Bahlman, *The Diary of Edward Walter Hamilton 1885-1906* (Hull: University of Hull Press, 1993), p. 87.

⁷⁶ *Dundee Courier*, 24 Jan. 1889, p. 3.

⁷⁷ Mullins, *Transformation*, p. 63; Smith, 'Ruling the Waves', p. 36.

an excellent opportunity to make significant reforms to Admiralty administration, reforms which would have found support from the Liberals and probably would have allowed him to avoid any substantive increase to the size of the fleet. It is possible that the attention he was forced to direct onto the matter of Home Defence during mid-1888 led him to rapidly change the views on Home Defence, a subject he had hitherto happily avoided. Surrounded by Generals and Admirals – as well as his close ally W.H. Smith – demanding a quick resolution to an apparent defence ‘crisis’, he may have felt forced to ‘pick a side’ in the ongoing debate between the Army and Navy over Home Defence.⁷⁸ A naturally pessimistic man, Salisbury probably felt much affinity with the geopolitical vision articulated by the navalists. The apparent strength of support the naval lobby had within the press, the public and especially among his own backbenchers certainly helped him along the road to the Naval Defence Act; the lack of any organised Liberal resistance further encouraged this policy shift.

Indeed, as demonstrated in the chapter’s second half, the failure of Liberal and Radical opinion to mobilise against Beresford and his supporters was a crucial factor in the genesis of the Naval Defence Act. Attempts to dispute the navalist theories, figures and rhetoric had been scattered and ineffective, sparking little more than rueful reflection among Liberal commentators who were all too aware of the weaknesses of their cause. The result was that Beresford and his supporters were able to assail the government without distraction, encouraging the idea that they spoke for the majority. The last chance for the Liberals to redeem themselves and offer a united front against the proposed naval increases was therefore in its passage through parliament. This, as the next chapter shows, this they completely failed to do.

⁷⁸ Moon, ‘Invasion of the United Kingdom’, pp. 55-62.

Chapter Nine

The Parliamentary Passage of the Naval Defence Bill

There are surely few people who haven't heard tell
About Sindbad the Sailor, and all that befell
That adventurous wight in earth, water, and air –
More especially, p'r'aps, his performances rare
With the horrid Old Man of the Sea.

And, respecting the Naval Defence of our shore,
Poor John Bull seems to suffer like Sinbad of yore,
For he's squeezed very hard till his money drops out,
And he's made to keep painfully trotting about
By a wily Young Man of the Sea.¹

Now, the *Old Man* was finally ousted, I think,
By the sailor's supplying him freely with drink;
And if Number Two Sinbad would 'scape from the weight
On his back, he'll – but, no! don't let's hint at the fate
Of the artful Young Man of the Sea.

'The Young Man of the Sea', *Fun*, 3 Apr. 1889, p. 150.²

¹ 'Young Man': Lord George Hamilton.

² See figure 25.

The Naval Defence Bill marked an important stage in British Conservatism's embracing of the anti-internationalist, imperialist school of international relations. As this chapter demonstrates, in its scale, method and justification, the Bill offended almost every tenet of nineteenth century Liberalism. It was a clear and direct attack on the principles of small government expenditure, democratic accountability and the foundations of liberal internationalism itself. Meanwhile, for students of late nineteenth century British Liberalism, the parliamentary debates which culminated in the passage of the Naval Defence Act provide a fascinating snapshot of the state of both the party and the wider ideology at one of its most fractious and trying times. Particular attention is paid to the actions of leading Radicals William Randal Cremer and Henry Labouchere, the latter of whom was practically leading an open rebellion against the Liberal leadership during this period. The debates revealed a profound divide between the 'Gladstonians' and the Radicals, who between them failed to organise their opposition to what was a remarkably weak and vulnerable government policy. While the Gladstonians produced some excellent and analytical, if largely uncoordinated, criticisms, the Radicals deployed their entire internationalist armoury in a barrage which took the pages of *Hansard* from the incisive to the absurd. This process showed just how far the Radicals, still largely reliant on Cobdenite optimism, had to go to match the pessimistic imperialist world-view of their opponents. It also demonstrated, above all else, how contentious and painful the subjects of national defence and navalism remained within the wider Liberal world view. In the final consideration, this chapter shows that the Act's passage was far from the mere rubber-stamp confirmation of the Two-Power Standard historians have characterised it. Instead, it was a vehement and protracted parliamentary clash between internationalism and imperialism.

The Votes

The Naval Defence Bill passed through the Commons in two stages. A resolution proposing that £21,500,000 be spent on seventy warships over five years was first tabled by George Hamilton on 7 March. Due to government secrecy, this was the first sight that the Commons and the country had of the details of the programme, including its provision for handing money directly

to the Admiralty separate from the annual estimates. The resolution passed its first reading, after a destructive amendment proposed by Cremer, the founder of the IAL, was defeated by 256 votes to 85 on 1 April. The government's greatest hurdle was passed on 4 April, when an amendment to the proposed financial mechanisms, tabled by Hugh Childers on behalf of the Liberal leadership, was defeated by 159 to 125. Hamilton's resolution was confirmed and the Bill itself introduced on 8 April, passing its second reading on 7 May and, following a relatively smooth passage through the committee stage on 13 May, finally passed out of the Commons on 20 May. Strong Unionist whipping made sure the result of the second and third readings were never in doubt. The third reading comfortably defeated the die-hard Cremer's final attempt to block it by eighty-two votes. The Bill sailed through the Lords without a division on 27 May, passing into law on the 31st. Discussed in Parliament on ten separate occasions totalling almost 190,000 spoken words, the passage of the Bill was therefore hardly the seamless Unionist victory parade hitherto described by historians. Generally speaking, the 'moderate' Gladstonian opposition largely confined itself to the initial resolution stage, with the exception of the large turnout of 7 May. The debates on the bill itself, as shown below, were dominated by the Radicals.

Far from demonstrating 'almost unanimous' cross-bench support, a breakdown of the Naval Defence Bill votes [Tables 7-12] in fact demonstrates a highly partisan split between Unionists on one side and the Liberals and Irish Nationalists on the other. The Liberals began poorly and in a state of obvious disagreement on 1 April, when thirty-two percent of the party voted in favour of Cremer's motion and nine percent against. This was replaced on 4 April and 7 May with respectable Liberal turnouts against the Bill, although the opposition remained focused on the Radical core, who massively outnumbered 'moderates' in every division. Tellingly, Gladstone himself only voted once, against the Bill on 7 May. The lacklustre Irish vote, turnout for which only rose above forty percent on Childers' amendment, probably reflected an overall lack of interest in the issue from a party still digesting its recent vindication in the Pigott case.

Parnell himself never voted and no Irishman spoke during the debates, so it is difficult to know if the party had any developed attitude towards the bill at all.

Compared with the Opposition, the Unionists generally performed strongly in the division lobbies, with the notable exception of Childers' amendment on 4 April which, as discussed below, tackled the most controversial aspect of the proposals. In a testament to the strength of the Unionist alliance, the Liberal Unionist turnout on 7 May constituted seventy-five percent of the party's MPs. As with the Irish Nationalists, the precise attitude of the Liberal Unionist party towards the Bill can only be guessed at for not a single Liberal Unionist spoke during the Commons debates, although Northbrook, who sat for the party in the Lords, later expressed approval of the Bill in its entirety.³ Chamberlain himself had avoided making any public reference to naval policy in the months preceding the introduction of the Bill, merely commenting in January that he was in favour of 'some considerable extension' of 'our resources for defence'.⁴ Nevertheless it is significant that, considering the illiberal nature of the programme, only one Liberal Unionist briefly broke ranks to vote against it.

The identity of the few MPs who voted against the bulk of their respective parties serves as an interesting indication as to wider trends. The largest such 'rebellion' occurred on 1 April, when eighteen Liberals, among them Campbell-Bannerman, Childers, Morley, Edward Marjoribanks the Liberal Chief Whip and a number of prominent Liberal Imperialists such as Henry Fowler, Ronald Munro-Ferguson and Edward Grey, voted against Cremer's amendment and in support of the resolution's first reading. Some of these men were 'diehard' Liberal navalists, although not all. Campbell-Bannerman and Childers, for example, seem likely to have acted more out of a genuine reluctance to attack the proposal on its first reading, especially as they planned to amend it at a later stage.

1 April also saw the only defections from the Liberal Unionist and Irish parties. The former was Lewis Fry, a Quaker and a Radical, MP for Bristol North. He went on to vote against the

³ Northbrook, Parl. Deb., 27 May 1889, cols. 1073-1074.

⁴ *The Times*, 24 Jan. 1889, p. 9.

resolution's first reading, and then abstained on all subsequent votes. Meanwhile the Irishman, retired Army Colonel John Philip Nolan, MP for Galway North and one of the only Irish MPs with a background in the British armed forces, voted only against Cremer's amendment before returning to the fold, voting against the government on 4 April and 20 May.⁵ By their actions, these two men show how far these votes were a partisan affair, and how ideologically distinct from the party norm an MP had to be in order to publicly oppose the measure.

The final rebellion took place on 7 May, during the Bill's second reading, when four Liberals defied the bulk of their party to vote with the government. These men were Frederick Lambert, Earl of Cavan, a retired Royal Navy Officer and MP for South Somerset; Charles Milnes-Gaskell, a magistrate who sat for Morley in West Riding; Sir Charles Mark Palmer, industrialist and shipbuilder, the member for Jarrow; and Sir William Plowden, a retired Indian Civil Servant and MP for Wolverhampton West. Both Milnes-Gaskell and Plowden had voted against the government in previous Naval Defence votes, while Cavan had abstained. Only Palmer, who somewhat paradoxically had built warships for the Royal Navy and was also a member of the IAL, repeatedly voted in favour of the Bill.

⁵ Nolan had a history of championing military matters. See O'Day, *Irish Nationalism*, p. 165.

Tables 7-13: Parliamentary Divisions on the Naval Defence Bill, April – May 1889

[Appendix 4].⁶

Table 7: Cremer's Amendment, 1 April		
Party	Aye	No
Liberal	18	65
Conservative	197	0
Liberal Unionist	40	1
Parnellite	1	19
Total	256	85

Table 8: Hamilton's Resolution, First Reading, 1 April		
Party	Aye	No
Liberal	16	59
Conservative	194	0
Liberal Unionist	40	1
Parnellite	0	15
Total	250	75

Table 9: Childers' Amendment, 4 April		
Party	Aye	No
Liberal	0	87
Conservative	133	0
Liberal Unionist	25	0
Parnellite	0	38
Total	158	125

Table 10: Hamilton's Resolution, Second Reading, 4 April		
Party	Aye	No
Liberal	0	99
Conservative	184	0
Liberal Unionist	31	0
Parnellite	0	29
Total	215	128

Table 11: Naval Defence Bill, Second Reading, 7 May		
Party	Aye	No
Liberal	4	117
Conservative	222	0
Liberal Unionist	51	0
Parnellite	0	19
Total	277	136

Table 12: Naval Defence Bill, Third Reading, 20 May		
Party	Aye	No
Liberal	0	71
Conservative	148	0
Parnellite	35	0
Nationalist	0	30
Total	183	101

⁶ As per parliamentary procedure, the votes on the two amendments [Tables 7, 9] were votes to retain the original wording of the motion: in these two cases, a vote for 'No' was a vote in favour of the amendment.

Table 13: Majorities and Turnout		
Vote	Majority	Turnout
First	171	50.9%
Second	175	48.5%
Third	33	42.2%
Fourth	87	51.2%
Fifth	141	61.6%
Sixth	82	42.4%

The Government Justification for the Naval Defence Bill

In introducing his resolution, Hamilton acknowledged the ‘very great assistance which we have received from our naval advisors’, and his speech, which stressed defence of expanding trade and the importance of battleships over other vessels, was clearly drawn up based on the assumption of weakness presented by the Admiralty and the naval agitators. Yet, despite indulging the House with a speech of over 10,000 words, he did not once produce any comparative data, refer to foreign shipbuilding figures or point to any alarming differences in Anglo-French naval spending. He made only a brief reference to the ‘unceasing’ expenditure of European powers, hardly a novel revelation.⁷ In fact, Hamilton’s defence of the programme rested solely and dubiously on the ‘apprehension of what might occur’: in short, upon the ‘realist’, pessimistic and suspicious approach to foreign politics despised by so many Liberals. Although declaring ‘that our relations are friendly and cordial with all nations’, Hamilton nevertheless observed:

it requires no very deep student of history to know that there are certain sections of opinion and of influence in foreign countries which are unfriendly to this country, owing to jealousy of our prosperity and envy of our great colonial expansion, with our immunity from conscription and all its attendant evils and the like; and if any one of these influences, these cycles of opinion, happen temporarily to become predominant,

⁷ Hamilton, Parl. Deb., 7 Mar. 1889, col. 1169.

we cannot ignore the fact that increased naval armaments may be available for our annoyance and injury.⁸

This was undoubtedly a cautious and heavily qualified statement, but the tone should not distract from the fact that the largest expenditure in the history of nineteenth century British defence policy was justified not by any specific threat, but with an appeal to foreign ‘jealousy’. This statement is particularly interesting in light of Mullins’ conclusions as to the lack of a genuine Franco-Russian threat at this time. Hamilton knew that any attempt to point directly at a dangerous international situation would place his programme on shaky foundations. The *Pall Mall Gazette*, which was otherwise cautiously supportive of the proposed expansion, nevertheless gave voice to this problem in an editorial a few days later. ‘It is a great misfortune for the Government’, it observed, ‘that no one can pretend at the present moment that there is any urgent fear of attack from any of our neighbours’.⁹

Undeterred, the theme of future uncertainties was subsequently developed in different directions by two other members of the government, the arch-imperialist Civil Lord of the Admiralty Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett, and the Chancellor of the Exchequer and former Liberal First Lord of the Admiralty, George Goschen. For his part Ashmead-Bartlett revelled in the confrontational nature of the Bill and directly attacked the Radicals on the benches opposite. Declaring that Europe was living in ‘the days of sudden and fatal blows’, he argued that the proposed spending was required to ‘guarantee our Imperial power’.¹⁰ On the other hand, Goschen attempted to appeal to Liberal sensibilities by emphasising how the Bill would strengthen the Royal Navy’s traditional role of deterrence at home and maintaining peace and liberty abroad. ‘Nothing can produce a more powerful influence in favour of peace than the knowledge that Great Britain is strong’, he argued. ‘I agree that if it could be done it would be a work worthy of any Government to bring nations into conference and induce them to disarm, but I am afraid that in these days it would be a Utopian attempt.’¹¹ The implication was clear: internationalism, whether moral or institutional,

⁸ Hamilton, Parl. Deb., 7 Mar. 1889, cols. 1170-1171.

⁹ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 12 Mar. 1889, p. 1.

¹⁰ Ashmead-Bartlett, Parl. Deb., 6 May 1889, cols. 1322-1328.

¹¹ Goschen, Parl. Deb., 25 Mar. 1889, cols. 787-783.

was unrealistic. In the new Europe defined by struggle and competition, the sharpened trident of the Pax Britannica was the only proven guarantor of a liberal peace. Yet despite these arguments the government remained on thin ice. The case for the Naval Defence Bill was built on little more than an unfocused rejection of liberal internationalism, and stood vulnerable to any serious attempt to interrogate the true state of the Navy, or even the state of international affairs: Goschen himself pleaded with the House to trust the government and ‘not press us too much on the diplomatic side of the question.’¹² It was, therefore, from the very start, a highly ideological programme, and a direct challenge to Gladstonian Liberalism.

Conservative Critics

The Parliamentary reception of the government’s proposed programme of naval increases was, contrary to Marder’s description, anything but ‘unanimous’. Indeed, a study of *Hansard* reveals hardly a single MP other than government Ministers willing to praise the scheme in its entirety, and this included Conservatives. The first to speak following Hamilton’s introduction of the resolution was Randolph Churchill, at this stage still a weighty and authoritative figure in the Commons, especially on matters of finance.¹³ He closely interrogated the proposals, which he feared would ‘startle the public mind’ and ‘alarm’ foreign powers, and questioned whether a Bill committing future parliaments to the spending was not ‘practically beyond our power’.¹⁴ Already more Radical than Conservative on defence spending, this speech earned the approval of Radical anti-armament opinion [Figure 24].¹⁵ Churchill remained interested and involved over the three months of debates, asking regular questions, but he voted with the government only on 1 April, abstaining even on 7 May when he was present in the House. Although Churchill accepted the need for some form of naval expansion he obviously regarded

¹² Goschen, Parl. Deb., 25 Mar. 1889, col. 791. See Mullins’ commentary in *Transformation*, p. 48.

¹³ Foster, *Lord Randolph Churchill*, p. 350.

¹⁴ Churchill, Parl. Deb., 7 Mar. 1889, cols. 1192-1195.

¹⁵ Foster, *Lord Randolph Churchill*, p. 359.

Hamilton's programme with suspicion and remained extremely critical of the 'condemned and unreformed Admiralty to which the money was to be entrusted.'¹⁶

Another regular attendee was Charles Beresford, who voted with the government four times and claimed in his *Memoirs* that Hamilton's scheme was identical to that which he had presented to the House in December 1888.¹⁷ If he thought this in 1889, however, he concealed it well. On 7 March he accused the government of presenting a 'phantom addition' to the fleet, which lacked proper strategic vision and had more than a whiff of panic about it. 'I would honestly prefer to wait another year and do the thing in a proper, business-like manner,' he concluded, 'and let the people understand how the defences stand, than to proceed in a haphazard way, without any definite reason being given to the public why these proposals are made.'¹⁸ Fundamentally he did not think that the Admiralty's proposals adequately reflected the terrible state into which he believed the Royal Navy had fallen – although, as we have seen, his own views on that score were neither clear nor consistent.

It was this pessimistic broadside which moved the second Conservative criticism, this time from the Member for Oldham James Maclean, a strongly independent man who had sat on Campbell-Bannerman's Select Committee and voted against the navalists in that capacity.¹⁹ Maclean was determined to reassert 'the confidence which belongs to a truly Imperial people', alone if necessary, against what he saw as little more than a panic whipped up by a 'Syndicate of Admirals' who were undermining British maritime and imperial pride, not to mention the principle of government by civilians.²⁰ In words which would have matched the party line only a few months previously, but now virtually constituted an attack on the government, he declared that the Empire was 'never more strongly, or better defended, than at the present moment'.²¹

For this sentiment he received the unlikely praise of Sir Wilfrid Lawson, who described it as a

¹⁶ Churchill, letter to *The Times*, 9 Mar. 1889, p. 10. See also the exchange between Hamilton, Churchill and Illingworth, Parl. Deb., 7 May 1889, cols. 1403-1404.

¹⁷ Beresford, *Memoirs*, vol. II, p. 361.

¹⁸ Beresford, Parl. Deb., 7 Mar. 1889, cols. 1202-1203.

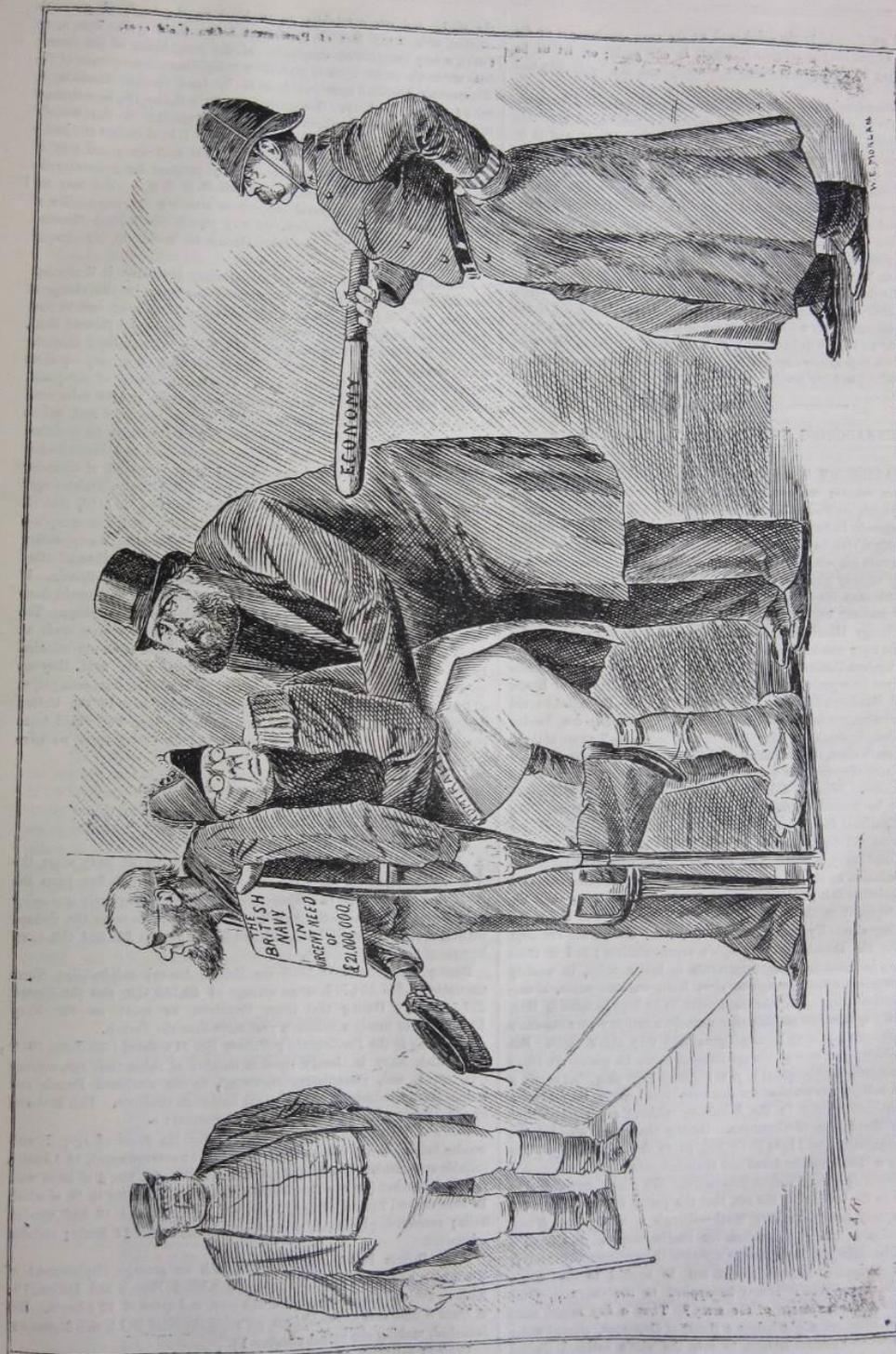
¹⁹ Mullins, *Transformation*, p. 134. For Maclean's character see Gerard Charmley, 'The Costly Luxury of Protesting': The Deselection of J.M. Maclean, MP', *Parliamentary History*, 31 (2012), pp. 378-395.

²⁰ Mullins quotes extensively from Maclean's speech in *Transformation*, pp. 161-166.

²¹ Maclean, Parl. Deb., 1 Apr. 1889, cols. 1310-1317.

‘rattling Radical speech’.²² Throughout the debates, there were few moments more indicative of the extent to which optimistic confidence in Britain’s national defences had come to be regarded, by the Conservatives at least, as a misguided, minority and ideologically suspect position, than this. Indeed, as the voting patterns show, Conservative MPs were solidly behind the government’s programme, even if relatively few of them *spoke* in the debates. Setting aside the views of Mavericks like Churchill and Maclean, the great bulk of the party, led by the substantial group of naval pessimists who had been involved in the agitation of 1888, had swallowed the myth of naval weakness whole.

²² Lawson, Parl. Deb., 1 Apr. 1889, col. 1317.



ANOTHER PUT-UP JOB.

P.C. RANDOLPH: "It's all up, you fellows! I see your little game, and I'll expose it——if you don't 'square' me!"

Figure 24: 'Another Put-Up Job.'

'P.C. Randolph: "It's all up, you fellows! I see your little game and I'll expose it – if you don't 'square' me!"'

Randolph Churchill, dressed as a police officer, confronts Lord Salisbury and the 'Admiralty' (possibly Arthur Hood), as they attempt to fool John Bull into giving the Navy £21,000,000.

Liberal and Radical, 16 Mar. 1889, p. 169.

The Press

One important factor which eased the path for the government during the debates was the relatively subdued response from the press. That this was the case was due to a multitude of reasons, all of which worked in the government's favour. Most obviously there was the crowded news environment. The Special Commission on the *Times* Parnell forgeries continued to claim the lion's share of political reportage: Richard Pigott's suicide had occurred only a week before Hamilton introduced his programme to the Commons. Indeed, one northern Liberal paper accused the government of using the naval programme to distract from the collapse of the case against Parnell.²³

More directly, by early 1889 most of the Conservative and Unionist press had committed itself to supporting any programme Salisbury would announce. The myriad differing estimates of British naval strength which had been printed over the preceding year only further served to reinforce this support for the government. 'Until the moment when Lord George Hamilton placed the House in possession the actual figures many guesses had been made as the probable amount of the credit that would be asked', reflected the *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*. 'The guesses had varied from ten millions to one hundred millions sterling. The Ministerial proposal hits the happy mean.'²⁴ The *St James' Gazette* hailed it as 'an honest endeavour to show that democracy is not altogether inconsistent with warlike effectiveness', and there was much admiration expressed for Hamilton's 'copious, lucid and cogent' speech.²⁵ His justification for the programme was 'moderate and dignified', concluded the *Morning Post*, 'and his elucidation of the details of the proposed scheme of ship-building was clear and exhaustive.'²⁶ Certainly there was regret from some Tory quarters – most notably the *Daily Telegraph* – that the programme did not go further and use the opportunity to establish British naval power 'beyond dispute or cavail', but this was relatively subdued.²⁷ Such support for the government was further

²³ *Shields Daily Gazette*, 11 Mar. 1889, p. 3.

²⁴ *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 8 Mar. 1889, p. 4; see also *Birmingham Daily Post*, 8 Mar. 1889, p. 4.

²⁵ *St. James's Gazette*, 8 Mar. 1889, p. 3; *The Times*, 8 Mar. 1889, p. 9.

²⁶ *Morning Post*, 8 Mar. 1889, p. 4.

²⁷ *Daily Telegraph*, 8 Mar. 1889, p. 4.

entrenched by the criticism which Hamilton immediately received from both navalists and Radicals in and out of the press. For the likes of the *The Scotsman* and the *Saturday Review*, both of which had previously attacked Beresford's alarmism in strident tones, the 'mutually destructive' criticisms Hamilton encountered proved that he had set a sensible course.²⁸

Unsurprisingly, many in the Liberal press viewed Hamilton's proposals with a sceptical and hostile eye. It was quickly observed that Hamilton had 'studiously avoided' an explanation or justification for his programme, and there was some concern that it would lead immediately to a new European arms race.²⁹ Even Liberal papers that accepted the need for some form of fleet expansion, were extremely concerned that the money was to be handed over to an unreformed Admiralty which they regarded as a swamp of corruption and inefficiency.³⁰ The overall Liberal view was summarised by the *Shields Daily Gazette*:

The new policy, to put the case briefly, is brought forward at the wrong time, is intended to further party objects, is not justified by anything which the Government is able to say in its behalf, is coupled with limitation the power of the House of Commons and an extension of the power of the House of Lords, and is to be administered by an Admiralty which the nation believes to be extravagant and incapable.³¹

Yet, considering the size and scale of the Naval Defence Bill, the Liberal response was surprisingly subdued. Such had been the demands of the alarmists that some papers appeared almost relieved that the programme was not larger.³² Even *Reynolds's Newspaper* initially responded to the announcement with only the most limited and stereotyped protests, while, surprisingly, *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper* even expressed support for the scheme, perhaps out of embarrassment towards the Radical position in parliament.³³ The Liberal uncertainty on how to respond to the proposals was obvious and, for their opponents, quite amusing.³⁴ There were two principal reasons for this reaction. In the first place, such had been the secrecy surrounding the

²⁸ *The Scotsman*, 9 Mar. 1889, p. 8; *Saturday Review*, 9 Mar. 1889, p. 273.

²⁹ *Derby Daily Telegraph*, 8 Mar. 1889, p. 2; *Daily News*, 8 Mar. 1889, p. 4; *Liverpool Echo*, 8 Mar. 1889, p. 3.

³⁰ *Manchester Guardian*, 8 Mar. 1889, p. 5.

³¹ *Shields Daily Gazette*, 11 Mar. 1889, p. 3.

³² See for example *Daily News*, 8 Mar. 1889, p. 4.

³³ *Reynolds's Newspaper*, 17 Mar. 1889, p. 4; *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper*, 10 Mar. 1889, p. 1.

³⁴ *The Observer*, 10 Mar. 1889, p. 4.

proposals that it took a while for many in both press and parliament to recognise their full import, and it took a long time for many to realise the Hamilton had no intention of ever fully justifying them. More importantly, however, was the marked lack of leadership emanating from Gladstone and his front bench.³⁵ Many Liberal papers were clearly waiting for mobilisation orders which never came. The *Daily News*, for example, did not begin to seriously critique the government's position until the debates were substantially over. It was in this way, then, that the Naval Defence Bill became accepted by the British press. Journalists did not support the government on the back of any overwhelmingly convincing arguments, but through revulsion against the navalist and Radical extremes, and a lack of leadership from the Gladstonian front bench.

The Liberal Party in 1889

Quite aside from the sheer scale of spending it authorised, the Naval Defence Bill was unprecedented in two ways. Firstly it represented an official endorsement of the 'two-power' naval standard in modern warships, placing the emphasis firmly on hardware rather than monies spent, as had hitherto been the case.³⁶ Secondly, once the Bill was made law, £10,000,000 of it was to be issued directly from the Consolidated Fund without being subjected to the 'ordinary routines of Treasury and parliamentary control of expenditure' as were the annual estimates.³⁷ Although this method of funding did not result in any immediate increases in taxation or borrowing it nevertheless represented a significant loss of democratic accountability to the Admiralty, a body deeply distrusted by Liberals.³⁸ Indeed, the reason such a mechanism was adopted was to make sure that any future Radical-dominated administration would be 'locked' into the programme.³⁹ This marked a 'decisive and irreversible shift' from a defence policy based on financial expedience to one defined by 'defence needs' as perceived by the Admiralty, a change which seemed to give free reign to the pessimistic and, in the eyes of Cobdenites,

³⁵ *Northern Echo*, 9 Mar. 1889, p. 3.

³⁶ Sumida, *Naval Supremacy*, p. 14. See also E.L. Woodward, *Great Britain and the German Navy* (London: Frank Cass, 1964), pp. 455-457.

³⁷ Sumida, *Naval Supremacy*, pp. 13-14; Smith, 'Ruling the Waves', pp. 36-39.

³⁸ Smith, 'Ruling the Waves', pp. 37-39.

³⁹ Smith, 'Ruling the Waves', p. 39; Parkinson, *Late Victorian Navy*, p. 117.

paranoid outlook of senior officers.⁴⁰ In addition to the Bill itself, the government's defence of it could easily be perceived as a slight towards the traditional Liberal naval policy emphasising defence and deterrence.⁴¹ There was therefore plenty for the Liberal party to sink its teeth into immediately as Hamilton had sat down on 7 March.

Yet despite the many aspects of the Bill that should have unified the Liberals, it was introduced to Parliament at an unfortunate time for the parliamentary party. Already heavily outnumbered by the Unionists, by March 1889 the party was adrift, its leadership lacking co-ordination or even satisfactory communication.⁴² Gladstone was exhausted and his mind concerned with little else other than the 'Irish obstruction', while family illness and bereavement in May placed him in no position to pursue a vigorous opposition.⁴³ The Grand Old Man's health reflected the position of his leadership team as a whole, whose inaction on recent Unionist policies had led to a collapse in relations with many of the party's backbenchers.⁴⁴ In January 1889 Gladstone wrote to Henry Labouchere, the most prominent of the 'extreme' Radicals, who appears to have suggested that Gladstone table a motion against the annual Naval Estimates.⁴⁵ Citing Unionist numerical strength, Gladstone merely replied that he was unconvinced 'the time has come for an active policy on our part', while he was concerned that a motion on the Navy vote would be seen as a vote of confidence in the government on which the Opposition would be pointlessly defeated. All the Liberal Leader could offer by way of a strategy was a waiting for the 'right time' to introduce a new Home Rule Bill, hardly the sort of approach which appealed to Radical firebrands such as Labouchere. This letter is vital for understanding the Naval Defence debates, for the disorganisation and disunity which characterised the Liberal response to the Naval Defence Bill can be seen as a direct result of this clash in attitudes, and, ultimately, Gladstone's own failings as leader during this time.

⁴⁰ Smith, 'Ruling the Waves', p. 39.

⁴¹ Beeler, *British Naval Policy*, p. 154

⁴² Hamer, *Liberal Politics*, pp. 140-144.

⁴³ Shannon, *Gladstone*, p. 480-482.

⁴⁴ Michael Barker, *Gladstone and Radicalism: The Reconstruction of Liberal Policy in Britain 1885-94* (Sussex: Harvester, 1975), pp. 169-170.

⁴⁵ Gladstone to Labouchere, 14 Jan. 1889, BL, Add. MS 44506; Hamer, *Liberal Politics*, p. 149; Barker, *Gladstone and Radicalism*, p. 171.

Gladstone's attitude would have been problematic at the best of times, but in the context of the party's fractious state in 1889 it had the potential to seriously undermine his leadership. This was due to the strong and confident position of the Radical interest in the Commons in early 1889, which by any measure constituted the majority of Liberal MPs.⁴⁶ Indeed, it might be more apt to speak of two separate Liberal parliamentary parties during this period, the 'moderate' and the Radical. In May, Labouchere, no doubt inspired in part by Gladstone's January letter, launched a semi-official 'Fourth party', replete with whips and mustering approximately seventy of the more 'malcontent' Radical MPs.⁴⁷ The express aim of this movement, which was nicknamed the 'Jacobyns' after one of its whips, was to force a dissolution through obstructionist 'guerrilla warfare', bringing divisions wherever possible.⁴⁸ The result, in the absence of Gladstone's unifying influence, was a general failure of coordinated action.

It was in this context that the Liberal party attempted to formulate a response to the Naval Defence Bill. On 29 March, former Liberal Cabinet Minister Lord Kimberly recorded in his diary:

Last week a meeting at Granville's to discuss course to be taken on Naval Estimates. Gladstone not there.⁴⁹ Agreed to press for reasons of Govt. for increased expenditures &c. &c. but not as a party to oppose, except as to proceeding by bill instead of the ordinary manner. The Radicals will vote against all increase, but many of our party would not go so far, and rightly. [Sir William] Harcourt harangued us in his finest vein of peace at any price rhodomontade (sic), after which J. Morley quietly asked, is not the question whether one naval force is sufficient or not?⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Hamer, *Liberal Politics*, p. 149; Maccoby, *English Radicalism 1886-1914*, pp. 71-80. For an evaluation of Radical strength in the 1886 Parliament see Heyck, 'Home Rule, Radicalism, and the Liberal party', pp. 70-71.

⁴⁷ Barker, *Gladstone and Radicalism*, pp. 170-171; R.J. Hind, *Henry Labouchere and the Empire 1880-1905* (London: Athlone, 1972), p. 7.

⁴⁸ See the exchange between Goschen and Labouchere, *Parl. Deb.*, 19 Mar. 1889, cols. 175-178; W.H. Smith quoted in Buckle, *Letters of Queen Victoria*, 1886-1890, pp. 479-480. For a summary history of the 'Jacobyns' see Barker, *Gladstone and Radicalism*, pp. 170-175. Essentially destructive in its aims with little in the way of organised policies, the movement broke apart in 1892.

⁴⁹ Although Gladstone was in London during the week of 18-24 March, the death of his brother, Thomas, on 20 March occupied him until his return from the funeral on 28 March. H.C.G. Matthew (ed.), *The Gladstone Diaries*, vol. XII (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 191-192.

⁵⁰ Hawkins and Powell *The Journal of John Wodehouse First Early of Kimberly*, p. 385.

This account is consistent with both Hamilton's diary for January quoted in the previous chapter, and the course of the debates themselves. Not only were many reluctant to take any serious action for or against the Bill, but it is also clear that a substantial number of Liberals, including Morley and Kimberly, were inclined to agree with the necessity of the programme – and, perhaps just as importantly, vehemently objected to Labouchere's tactics.⁵¹ The only point on which the party agreed was on its opposition to separating the spending from the annual estimates. These divisions in the party affected the entire hierarchy, contrary to historians' claims. Gladstone himself admitted in April that his frontbench had not come to a 'collective resolution' on the issue, and the meeting at Granville's appears to have been the only time the Liberal leadership met as a group to discuss it.⁵²

The Position of the Liberal Leadership

The central importance of the Naval Defence Act to British historiography revolves around its defining legacy, the 'formalisation' of the two-power standard, with the result that the Bill itself has been characterised by historians as a simple vote on this measure. As such, when they have paid any attention at all to the debates, historians have been searching for confirmation that the Liberal party supported the standard, and this, to their own satisfaction, they have found. Both Marder and Semmel, for example, alight on the speech of Campbell-Bannerman, who did indeed accept the standard, and both have cited this as reflective of wider Liberal policy.⁵³ This it emphatically was not; as has been explained, the Liberal party did not have an established policy towards the Naval Defence Bill. In fact, of the five ex-Cabinet Liberals to speak – Campbell-Bannerman, Childers, Gladstone, George John Shaw Lefevre and Sir William Harcourt respectively – only Campbell-Bannerman explicitly accepted the standard, and he admitted that he was only speaking for himself.⁵⁴ On the other hand, the Radical Shaw Lefevre, a man more in tune with Gladstone on naval issues than any of his colleagues, appeared to go some way towards dismissing the standard entirely instead arguing that the Royal Navy should

⁵¹ Heyck, 'Home Rule, Radicalism, and the Liberal party', p. 76.

⁵² Gladstone, Parl. Deb., 4 Apr. 1889, col. 162.

⁵³ Marder, *Anatomy*, p. 106; Semmel, *Liberalism and Naval Strategy*, p. 125.

⁵⁴ Campbell-Bannerman, Parl. Deb., 1 Apr. 1889, col. 1272.

maintain what he considered to be the widely accepted principle of a three-to-two superiority over France.⁵⁵ Meanwhile neither Childers, Gladstone nor Harcourt made any mention of the standard, or any other relative measurement of naval strength, in their respective speeches.

Indeed, even a cursory reading of the Naval Defence debates shows that the two-power standard was not regarded by front- or backbench Liberals as an important aspect of the Bill, while the leadership, although hardly united in its criticisms, was overtly hostile towards the proposed programme. In particular, the speeches of Shaw Lefevre, Harcourt and Campbell-Bannerman contained all the necessary ingredients for a concerted and comprehensive repudiation of the naval pessimism of Beresford and Hamilton. Between them, these three men held a wealth of experience in dealing with comparative naval spending, statistics and analysis. Campbell-Bannerman and Shaw Lefevre had both served in the Admiralty under Childers and Northbrook during the early 1880s, while Harcourt was a keen student of naval history and strategy whose antagonistic attitude to armed forces spending had earned him not a little hostility from military and naval circles in the past.⁵⁶ Stung into action on 17 May, Harcourt outright refused to accept the country's naval defences were wanting, using the Admiralty's own figures to show that the government had been driven from the confident position it had held only a year earlier by 'an entirely artificial scare', led by the 'sweet little cherub that sits up aloft', a reference to Beresford's position on the backbenches.⁵⁷

Harcourt's contribution contained much force, but the real work of methodically destroying the government's case was left to the able duo of Campbell-Bannerman and Shaw Lefevre. Both provided comparative analyses of British and French shipbuilding figures, showing that Britain far outstripped France in spending by at least a third, if not half.⁵⁸ They also demonstrated that, by Hamilton's own admission, Britain was on course to exceed the two-power standard by 1890

⁵⁵ Shaw Lefevre, Parl. Deb., 20 May 1889, col. 545.

⁵⁶ For Shaw Lefevre and Campbell-Bannerman's experience in the Admiralty see Beeler, 'In the Shadow of Briggs'; for Harcourt's attitude towards the armed forces see Smith, 'Ruling the Waves', pp. 40-41; A. Michael Matin, 'Scrutinizing the *Battle of Dorking*: The Royal United Service Institution and the Mid-Victorian Invasion Controversy', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 39 (2011), pp. 385-407.

⁵⁷ Harcourt, Parl. Deb., 17 May 1889, cols. 425-429.

⁵⁸ Campbell-Bannerman Parl. Deb., 1 Apr. 1889, cols. 1273-1274; Shaw Lefevre, Parl. Deb., 20 May 1889, cols. 544-546.

without the proposed programme – Campbell-Bannerman correctly observed that the standard was, in fact, already an established reality.⁵⁹ In a detailed discussion of the French Navy, he pointed out that French politicians were equally convinced of the weakness of their own fleet, and that so many of France’s wooden vessels were ‘fast passing into that picturesque category which the French style, “Sans valeur sérieux.”[without serious value]’⁶⁰ ‘On the mere comparison with other nations taken by itself’, he declared, ‘I can find no justification for any large extension of our naval strength.’⁶¹ ‘I challenge the Secretary to the Navy to get up and say that he believes this expenditure is really necessary’, said Shaw Lefevre, after quoting Forwood’s July Liverpool speech. ‘I am perfectly certain he cannot and will not do so.’⁶² Arguing that the construction of seventy warships at once would only provoke foreign navies to respond in kind, quickly making the British ships obsolete, the two men concluded with strong defences of the gradual, ‘prudent’ policy of naval expansion.⁶³

The analyses of Shaw Lefevre and Campbell-Bannerman were the most complete, but they were only two of many Liberal MPs who showed that the government’s proposals did not stand up to even a cursory analysis. Labouchere, for instance, also observed that the Royal Navy currently met the two-power standard, while Francis Evans and Sir George Otto Trevelyan attacked the ‘suicidal policy’ of building seventy ships concurrently, when, as Trevelyan pointed out, the Admiralty’s own estimates showed the life expectancy of a cruiser to be not much more than a decade.⁶⁴ Practically every Liberal to speak made a point of contrasting Hamilton’s many confident statements of 1887-1888 with both his own newfound pessimism, and the hyperbolic proposals of Admiral Hornby and the navalists. In short, the Liberal party showed itself to be replete with men fully capable of revealing the unstable foundations of the government’s proposed programme, displaying a competency with comparative naval spending and figures

⁵⁹ Campbell-Bannerman, Parl. Deb., 1 Apr. 1889, col. 1274.

⁶⁰ Campbell-Bannerman, Parl. Deb., 1 Apr. 1889, Col. 1272-1274.

⁶¹ Campbell-Bannerman, 1 Apr. 1889, col. 1272.

⁶² Shaw Lefevre, Parl. Deb., 20 May 1889, col. 544.

⁶³ Campbell-Bannerman, Parl. Deb., 1 Apr. 1889, col. 1279; Shaw Lefevre, Parl. Deb., 20 May 1889, col. 545. See also Beeler, *British Naval Policy*, pp. 277-278.

⁶⁴ Labouchere, Parl. Deb., 6 May 1889, col. 1302; Evans, Parl. Deb., 4 Apr. 1889, col. 1654; Trevelyan, Parl. Deb., 17 May 1889, cols. 416-422.

which Hamilton's defence of the scheme was conspicuously lacking. As Campbell-Bannerman observed, the government provided 'no data whatever' to justify its proposals: nor, indeed, did Hamilton or his Secretaries ever dispute the facts and figures cited by the Opposition.⁶⁵

Unfortunately for the Liberals, however, their attacks on the Bill were compromised by the disorganised and disunited manner of the party at this time. Each Liberal speech constituted a separate criticism of the government, resulting in a piecemeal approach which revealed the lack of official Liberal policy towards the Bill. Despite his confident deployment of facts and figures, for example, Campbell-Bannerman's speech contained so many technical qualifications and attempts to distinguish his own personal views from that of his party that Forwood felt moved to observe that 'in the end, the Right Honourable Gentleman appeared to be somewhat in doubt as to which side of the fence he should come down on'.⁶⁶ As discussed below, these efforts were further obstructed by the veritable typhoon of ideological rhetoric produced by the Radicals.

At the root of the Liberal party's problems was a lack of leadership from Gladstone himself. On 4 April – the only time he spoke at any length on the proposals and a month after Hamilton had first introduced his resolution – the Liberal leader attempted to explain his own position:

For my own part, I must own that I am not aware of a sufficient justification for this large expenditure. At the same time, I am aware that Her Majesty's Government have means of information and judgment on this subject such as I do not possess, and I do not think proper to take upon myself the responsibility of refusing on a question of confidence, as this necessarily is, a demand made by the responsible advisers of the Crown. I speak only for myself; it is the view I take.⁶⁷

An echo of his January letter to Labouchere, this statement was essentially an abdication of responsibility on Gladstone's part, an impression he solidified by his failure to vote in either of the day's divisions. For a man whose career and reputation was founded on the low-spending and anti-militaristic policies of Peel and Cobden, Gladstone's position on the Naval Defence Bill was more than merely 'curious', as Shannon described it: it almost defies explanation.

⁶⁵ Campbell-Bannerman, *Parl. Deb.*, 1 Apr. 1889, col. 1275.

⁶⁶ Forwood, *Parl. Deb.*, 1 Apr. 1889, col. 1279.

⁶⁷ Gladstone, *Parl. Deb.*, 4 Apr. 1889, col. 1623.

Indeed, by admitting the possibility that the government might possess information to justify its programme, Gladstone had come dangerously close to admitting that Salisbury's pessimistic view of international relations contained some merit. As Gladstone's frontbench colleagues had made clear, there was no real justification for the government's programme. His timidity explains the subsequent assumption that the Liberals acquiesced in and supported the passage of the Naval Defence Act. More importantly, by refusing to oppose the Naval Defence Bill Gladstone allowed the initiative in naval policymaking to pass to the Conservatives, who were now completely wedded to the myth of naval weakness. This shift had profound repercussions, both for British naval policy over the following two decades and for Gladstone's own career. As the conclusion of this thesis will argue, through his failure of leadership during March-May 1889 Gladstone laid the foundations for his own exit from politics in March 1894.

Financial Objections

Despite these failings, the Opposition did come close to seriously damaging the Bill on one occasion. On 4 April Hugh Childers, who avoided any references to naval strength or policy in his speech, introduced an amendment calling for the expenditure to be made 'in accordance with the constitutional practice hitherto observed'.⁶⁸ In this attempt to force the government to adhere to the annual Navy vote he was supported strongly by Gladstone, who argued that the Bill planted 'seeds of future evil'. There was 'scarcely any conceivable abuse in the finance of a country which may not be covered and justified' by the precedent set by the proposals, argued the Liberal leader.⁶⁹ The spectre of handing over ten million pounds to the Admiralty with minimal oversight proved too much for even the staunchest Liberal navalists. Former Director of Naval Construction Sir Edward Reed, for example, felt forced to abstain because he deeply disapproved of the 'unconstitutional' method of funding, despite having been involved in Beresford's 1888 campaign.⁷⁰ As Henry Fowler later observed, 'the Admiralty is hardly the

⁶⁸ Childers, Parl. Deb., 4 Apr. 1889, cols. 1602-1613.

⁶⁹ Gladstone, Parl. Deb., 4 Apr. 1889, col. 1631.

⁷⁰ Reed, Parl. Deb., 25 Mar. 1889, col. 802.

department to be trusted with the largest amount of uncontrolled expenditure'.⁷¹ The Radical Handel Cossham was more forthright: 'those who administer the Admiralty', he declared, 'are the most incompetent and the most wasteful portion of the community.'⁷² Liberal repugnance for the financial precedent set by the Bill was widespread and genuine, and there was little obvious basis for Tory MP General Edward Hamley's accusation that the Liberals were posing as 'defenders of the Constitution' in order to conceal their opposition to the two-power standard.⁷³

In terms of Commons arithmetic Childers' amendment was the most interesting of the divisions, defeated by only thirty-three votes. At only forty-two percent the Unionist turnout was low, especially when compared to the fifty-seven percent of Unionist MPs who voted in favour of the second reading of Hamilton's resolution later that same day. This level of abstention was indicative of the unpopularity with which the Bill's financial innovations were regarded on both sides of the House – and by many outside of it [Figure 25]. The voting pattern of the Radical Liberal Unionists was particularly telling. Of the twenty in Parliament, fourteen including Chamberlain voted repeatedly with the government in every division except Childers' amendment. In the latter case only one, Sir Julian Goldsmid, supported the Tories: the rest abstained. Yet, once again, the Liberals' attempts were rendered futile by their own lack of unity, organisation and leadership. Only forty-three percent of Liberal party MPs followed Childers through the division lobby, squandering a relatively strong showing by the Irish Nationalists. Notable abstentions included Labouchere, Shaw Lefevre and Gladstone himself, despite his speech in its favour. Equally as curiously, Cremer and James Jacoby – the latter the member after whom the 'Jacobyns' had been named – were also absent, although both voted in the second division of 4 April. Had they been better organised the Liberals might have dealt the government a serious blow on this occasion. Instead, the opportunity slipped through their fingers, never to return.

⁷¹ Fowler, Parl. Deb., 6 May 1889, col. 1331.

⁷² Cossham, Parl. Deb., 4 Apr. 1889, col. 1649.

⁷³ Hamley, Parl. Deb., 20 May 1889, col. 547.



“THE YOUNG MAN OF THE SEA.”

LORD GEORGE SQUEEZING A FEW MILLIONS OUT OF JOHN BULL.

—*Latest Edition of "Sinbad the Sailor."*

[See *Cartoon Verses*, p. 150.]

Figure 25: ‘Lord George squeezing a few millions out of John Bull.’

Hamilton’s flag reads: ‘England in Danger/ National Defence’. A perturbed John Bull is shown dropping coins from a bag marked ‘£21,500,000’. *Fun*, 3 Apr. 1889, p. 144.

The Radicals

Gladstone's failure of leadership was noted with disgust by the Radicals. As early as 7 March, prominent Liberal backbenchers had threatened independent action against the Bill if their leadership was not prepared to do so.⁷⁴ On 25 March, immediately following the introduction of Hamilton's resolution, Cremer proposed an amendment which declared the expenditure unnecessary on the basis that 'Her Majesty's relations with Foreign Powers...were of the most peaceful character'. However, Cremer began his speech with an attack, not on the government, but on the leaders of his own party:

Some of us had a right to expect that this very important proposal of Her Majesty's Government would have been met by sturdy opposition from above the Gangway on this side of the House. I cannot help expressing my deep regret that the Leaders of the Opposition have, as I conceive, neglected their duty towards the people of this country.⁷⁵

Despairing of their own party, the Radicals determined to meet the Tories head on, matching ideology with ideology and hyperbole with hyperbole, turning the debates into a clash between the internationalist and imperialist world views. In this they succeeded spectacularly, but in so doing they obstructed the more level-headed and analytical attacks of Shaw Lefevre, Campbell-Bannerman and others. Other than the occasional attempt by Labouchere and Caleb Wright, Radical backbenchers made no serious attempt to engage with spending figures or comparative naval analysis. Lawson, for example, despite giving five full speeches during the debates, made no real attempt to exploit any of the many routes which the data opened out to him. Instead, the Naval Defence debates provide a case-study in optimistic internationalism, from the mouths of its most fervent advocates.

Radical objections were built on the twin foundations of belief in the essential goodness of human nature, and the strength of international law. Put simply, the Radicals believed that, at

⁷⁴ See Picton, Lawson and Cremer, *Parl. Deb.*, 7 Mar. 1889, cols. 1210-1212.

⁷⁵ Cremer, *Parl. Deb.*, 25 Mar. 1889, cols. 773-774.

that moment, Britain existed in ‘absolute security’.⁷⁶ As Cremer pointed out, Lord Salisbury had repeatedly claimed that Britain was at peace with all its neighbours. If this was indeed the case, he not unnaturally wanted to know ‘where the foe is to be found who is desirous of invading our shores?’⁷⁷ As far as he and his parliamentary allies were concerned, the government’s justifications amounted to little more than ‘innuendos’ and arrogance directed against Britain’s neighbours.⁷⁸ James Picton, one of the most able Radical rhetoricians, summarised their outlook with his usual passion:

Are we living in a world of pirates? Are foreign countries nothing but dens of robbers? (Ministerial laughter.) Hon. Gentlemen who laugh at our simplicity in this respect imagine that they are living in the middle ages, when every man’s hand was against his fellows. They forget altogether the advance of the world... Yes, that is the spirit in which foreign nations are dealt with. We are not to have peace, not quietness, nor friendliness, nor neighbourliness, but supremacy.⁷⁹

In these criticisms, the Radicals were largely correct: the government had not identified a specific threat, and had repeatedly cast aspersions on Britain’s neighbours. However, in their eagerness to turn the debates into a struggle for the *zeitgeist*, they were rejecting the more measured and analytical tone of the ‘Gladstonian’ leadership, and instead reducing themselves to the level of the government’s argument, enabling the Conservatives to paint the entire Opposition as unpatriotic, unrealistic and utopian. This was a struggle in which the radical right was more than willing to play its part. Rising to these objections, the Conservative MP and former Royal Navy Captain George Price provided a worthy match to Picton’s optimism: the threat, he said, emanated from no single foreign nation but rather ‘the warlike spirit of the age...Europe armed to the teeth’. The Bill, he continued, was not ‘a temptation to aggression’ [by Britain] as many of its opponents argued, but instead represented a policy of ‘defence, not of defiance’, the motto of the Rifle Volunteers.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Labouchere, Parl. Deb., 6 May 1889, col. 1309.

⁷⁷ Cremer, Parl. Deb., 25 Mar. 1889, col. 784.

⁷⁸ Rowlands, Parl. Deb., 20 May 1889, col. 565.

⁷⁹ Picton, Parl. Deb., 17 May 1889, cols. 406-407.

⁸⁰ Price, Parl. Deb., 7 May 1889, col. 1413.

This latter comment was produced to contradict the second major Radical objection: that the Bill, was a fundamentally aggressive proposal. Radicals did not object to the characterisation of Europe as an ‘armed camp’. What they disputed was that this camp was necessarily a threat to Britain. Following in the teachings of Cobden, their watchword was non-intervention. ‘There is only one course open to us,’ observed Alfred Illingworth, ‘and that is to keep ourselves entirely aloof from the fray’.⁸¹ Britain’s Navy was strong enough: therefore, any dramatic increases could only be an attempt to increase the Empire’s offensive capabilities. As Picton had it, ‘those who are going to vote for an increased expenditure on the fleet are going to vote for a meddling foreign policy.’⁸² This point was driven home most forcefully by Labouchere, who characterised Britain’s past history as one of ‘meddling’, ‘annexation’, ‘folly’ and ‘wickedness’ and directly accused the Prime Minister of attempting to organise a ‘crusade’ against Russia.⁸³ Lawson agreed, going so far as to argue, in a remarkable passage which showed how easily non-interventionism could veer into outright pacifism, that a stronger Navy would discharge the Army from home defence and allow it ‘to go about committing raids, annexations and robberies in every quarter of the globe.’⁸⁴ Even if the Opposition did not unanimously believe that the explicit aim of the Bill was aggressive, there was widespread Radical agreement that it would be a destabilising force, the start of a new European arms race. Salisbury was accused of initiating a ‘policy of unlimited brag’, ‘a game of poker with all Europe, ships of war being the stakes’.⁸⁵ ‘When is this mad race in expenditure to cease?’ asked the Quaker businessman and President of the Peace Society Sir Joseph Pease. Pease was quick to apply Cobdenite economic theory to the situation: the more money spent on armaments, the less there was for the ‘industries of peace’.⁸⁶ These were not statements calculated to remove the derogatory label of ‘peace party’ from the Radical interest.

⁸¹ Illingworth, Parl. Deb., 4 Apr. 1889, col. 1662.

⁸² Picton, Parl. Deb., 17 May 1889, col. 405.

⁸³ Labouchere, Parl. Deb., 6 May 1889, cols. 1297-1298.

⁸⁴ Lawson, Parl. Deb., 4 Apr. 1889, col. 1656.

⁸⁵ Lawson, Parl. Deb., 20 May 1889, col. 578; Labouchere, Parl. Deb., 6 May 1889, col. 1299.

⁸⁶ Pease, Parl. Deb., 4 Apr. 1889, cols. 1644-1645.

The Radicals completely denied that the Navy secured peace. Only a reduction in armament spending could do that. Instead, it was the language of arbitration, to which they turned in search of an alternative to naval power. Cremer led the way, arguing that an international conference on armament reduction would bring ‘everlasting glory’ to a government which initiated it. His was an outlook made of the very stuff of Cobdenite optimism. Parliament, he opined, was behind the times: it had failed to recognise that the ‘old order of things’ had passed away, that democracy now ruled, and that democracy was fundamentally peaceful.⁸⁷ Once again, the pessimists provided the counter-argument by referencing the immovable militarism of the Continent. Responding to a particularly furious denunciation of the programme by Picton, Admiral Edward Field drily suggested that he be sent ‘as a special peace Commissioner’ to Bismarck.⁸⁸ Far from winning converts to their cause, the debates had merely served to reinforce the image of arbitrationists as ‘unpractical and even mischievous dreamers’.⁸⁹ In all, forty four members of the IAL went into the lobby in support of Cremer’s wrecking amendment, although in a sign of the gulf which now existed between the two Liberal parties, five Liberal Unionist IAL members voted against. In total twelve Unionist IAL members, including Sir Edward Watkin, voted with the government at least once over the six principal divisions. Just as defence advocates complained bitterly about party politics trumping the national interest, so too was the peace movement at the mercy of partisan concerns.⁹⁰

Radical pleas for an arbitrated arms reduction treaty were closely linked to the other great internationalist hope of maritime law. Throughout the debate Radicals made repeated references to the 1856 Declaration of Paris, with the aim of countering the government’s claim that the programme was needed for trade defence. The Treaty secured the right of neutral vessels to continue to trade with belligerents and abolished privateering. If this was indeed the case, argued the Radicals, then why should Britain spend enormous sums defending its trade routes? This argument was taken up with especial interest by Labouchere, who set about to show that

⁸⁷ Cremer, Parl. Deb., 25 March 1889, col. 786.

⁸⁸ Field, Parl. Deb., 17 May 1889, col. 409.

⁸⁹ Hamley, Parl. Deb., 20 May 1889, col. 550.

⁹⁰ Laity, *British Peace Movement*, p. 112.

Britain, France and Russia would all have to abide by the Declaration or else risk the ire of neutrals, particularly the economic if not naval power of the United States.⁹¹ Under the Declaration, he argued, Britain's ships could simply transfer to neutral flags; indeed, they would be forced to, owing to the enormous increase in insurance which British ships would immediately suffer on declaration of war. Therefore, he concluded, with the legalistic flourish for which he was famed, in wartime Britain would not need to worry about trade defence at all, for it would 'have no commerce to defend'.⁹² The argument was as straightforward as it was naïve. Such advocacies of arbitration and maritime law, far from reinforcing their case, were in fact largely irrelevant as regarded the Bill before them, and instead simply strengthened Conservative resolve while obscuring the more legitimate criticisms made by so many Liberals.

The initial interest thrown up by Hamilton's resolution quickly waned. By the time the Bill itself was introduced Westminster's traditional indifference towards the electorally unimportant area of defence policy had reasserted itself. Despite the significant financial and political interests at stake the Commons chamber was 'lamentably empty' as the Bill moved through its second and third readings, with most members content to leave the discussion to the experts, obsessives and cranks. In the derisive words of the *Graphic*, MPs were reluctant to spend their time listening to 'orators of the stamp of Captain Price and Colonel Gourley'.⁹³ Of the ten Tory MPs who defended the second and third readings six held military or naval rank.⁹⁴ Conversely, virtually all of the eighteen Liberals who spoke over the same period were in some way identified with Radicalism, Trade Unionism or pacifist causes. Other than Harcourt, who rose only to say a few words in reply to a perceived slight from Hamilton, the only Liberal ex-Cabinet member to give a full speech was the Radical Shaw Lefevre. The centre ground had vacated the chamber and the extremes held the floor. [Figure 26]. Unsurprisingly, such speakers

⁹¹ In answer to the observation that the Americans were 3,000 miles away and thus, presumably, unlikely to become involved in a European war, Labouchere unhelpfully observed that 'this country has voted money to protect the coasts of Australia, which are farther away than those of the United States'. Parl. Deb., 6 May 1889, col. 1315.

⁹² Labouchere, Parl. Deb., 6 May 1889, col. 1305-1309.

⁹³ *The Graphic*, 11 May 1889, p. 12.

⁹⁴ This number included all four Conservative naval officers in the House. Lord Randolph Churchill and W.H. Smith also intervened, but only said a few words each.

enthused the press as much as their fellow parliamentarians; when Labouchere or Ashmead-Bartlett constituted the main event, the government could be assured of minimal media scrutiny.⁹⁵

This attendance was reflected in the language of the debates, the Radical contributions to which bordered at times on the unparliamentary. The Bill was declared an ‘evil in itself, vicious in principle, and calculated to precipitate an appeal to war’, by George Howell, while Picton, a Congregationalist Minister, described it as ‘unpatriotic’, ‘wasteful’, ‘retrograde’ and ‘heathenish’.⁹⁶ Not to be outdone, the fiercely independent member for Sunderland Richard Storey described the Bill’s financial mechanism as nothing short of an act of ‘treason’ against the Commons and a direct attack on the ‘people’s liberties’.⁹⁷ ‘I shall offer’, concluded Lawson in his speech of 6 May, ‘a most determined opposition to this mad and monstrous proposal for augmenting the burdens of the people by fostering that military spirit, which has been the bane of civilization, of Christianity, and of progress.’⁹⁸ Rising to this barrage, General Hamley declared that the objections of his opponents ‘bore the same relation to the business of this House as a burlesque at the Strand does to the legitimate drama’ while the speeches of other military and naval MPs showed similar levels of irritation with, not to say hatred of, the Radical members opposite.⁹⁹ Needless to say, this was not an environment naturally conducive to reasoned and measured debate. Nor did it achieve anything other than reinforce the perception of the Radicals as uncompromising and out-of-touch, uninterested convincing their opponents. The sheer uselessness of the Radical diatribes was neatly depicted by an exchange between Hamilton and Lawson on 1 April. Following a particularly furious invocation of Cobdenite optimism from the backbencher, Hamilton wearily observed that ‘the effect of the hon.

⁹⁵ See for example the widely syndicated London Letter in *Sheffield Independent*, 7 May 1889, p. 3

⁹⁶ Howell, Parl. Deb., 17 May 1889, col. 398; Picton, Parl. Deb., 17 May 1889, cols. 408-409.

⁹⁷ Storey, Parl. Deb., 20 May 1889, col. 554.

⁹⁸ Lawson, Parl. Deb., 6 May 1889, col. 1320.

⁹⁹ Hamley, Parl. Deb., 20 May 1889, col. 548.

Baronet's speech was a little marred by the fact that we have often heard it before', to which Lawson defiantly replied that he would 'hear it again.'¹⁰⁰

Not only did the Radicals dominate the debates, they were also the driving organisational force behind the divisions, which were conducted in 'guerrilla' style. Working with the peace movement stalwarts Edward Pickersgill, Sir Joseph Pease and George Howell, Cremer acted as a teller for the noes in every single division except Childers' amendment on 4 April and the Bill's second reading on 7 May. Of the latter two, only 4 April was organised by the official Liberal whip. Moved by Labouchere the 7 May vote appears to have been the first division organised by the 'Jacobyns', with Labouchere's whips counting much of the Liberal frontbench, including Gladstone, through the division lobby, an example of the Radicals successfully 'leading the leaders'.¹⁰¹ During the Bill's later stages only Harcourt and Henry Fowler rose to represent the 'responsible Opposition', as *The Times* would have it.¹⁰² Outside of parliament much sympathy was in evidence for Fowler, whose speech on 6 May was widely recognised as one of the best of the debates, representing as it did the only serious attempt to present a balanced criticism of the Bill's financial mechanisms while also offering a forthright defence of the Liberal party's traditional support for navalism.¹⁰³ The *Morning Post* echoed the views of many when it observed that the Liberal party to whose navalist traditions Fowler appealed was 'no longer represented by himself', but had been hijacked by a group which 'neither respects its traditions nor submits to the control of the leaders.'¹⁰⁴ The Radical domination of the Liberal Parliamentary party, and the resultant disarray, was clear for all to see.

¹⁰⁰ Hamilton and Lawson, Parl. Deb., 1 Apr. 1889, col. 1323.

¹⁰¹ Hamer, *Liberal Politics*, p. 149. The first organised Jacobyn action was a motion of adjournment immediately preceding the opening of Naval Defence Bill's second reading, which rapidly descended into a shouting match. Labouchere made his debut speech as the leader of the Jacobyns during the Naval Defence Bill's second reading. See Barker, *Gladstone and Radicalism*, p. 171; Parl. Deb., 6 May 1889, cols. 1252-1297.

¹⁰² *The Times*, 7 May 1889, p. 9.

¹⁰³ Fowler, Parl. Deb., 6 May 1889, cols. 1328-1337.

¹⁰⁴ *Morning Post*, 7 May 1889, p. 5.



Figure 26: 'Naval Prodigy'.

'Naval Prodigy' sits crying while 'nurse Beresford' (left) and 'nurse Cremer' (right) quarrel over its 'supply'. *Fun*, 10 April, 1889, p. 154.

Contested Claims (i): Cobden

For some on the radical right, the debates were little more than a clash between the ‘patriotic’ idea of naval supremacy and the ‘exaggerated descendants of the old “Manchester School”, who, as far as Ashmead-Bartlett was concerned, simply wished to wait ‘until we see other powers ready to attack us before we do anything to protect ourselves.’¹⁰⁵ This, of course, was a gross oversimplification. In fact, far from showing his irrelevance, the Naval Defence Bill reaffirmed the central importance of Cobden’s ideas to the British national defence debate. ‘The bulk of the Liberal party’, reflected the *Manchester Guardian*, ‘hold the [navalist] views to which Mr. Cobden in his day gave such emphatic expression’.¹⁰⁶ For Liberals of a moderate hue, Cobden’s speeches and writings on the Navy provided a solid base of navalist ideology from which to launch their strategic, constitutional or financial attacks on the Bill. Both Francis Evans and Henry Fowler assured the House that their own views coincided with ‘Cobden’s doctrine that the Navy is our first, second, and third line of defence’, before using this as cover for their attacks on Admiralty waste and inefficiency.¹⁰⁷ The Radicals took a similar line, keen to avoid the ‘peace at any price’ label which had been attached to Cobden himself during the Crimean War before he had openly embraced navalism.¹⁰⁸ For them, Cobden’s caveat – that he would vote a hundred million pounds for the Navy only ‘if necessary’ – was key to their internationalist outlook, allowing them to express their support for the Navy while still opposing the increases of 1889. Indeed, it was on the back of Cobden’s analysis of British and French naval spending during the mid-century that Shaw Lefevre built his own criticisms of the bill, his advocacy of a three-to-two standard a self-conscious echo of Cobden’s own arguments in *The Three Panics*.¹⁰⁹

Cobden’s famous hundred million pound promise was contingent on the perception of external threats. As a ‘doctrine’, therefore, it was ripe for appropriation. Such was the aim of Rear-

¹⁰⁵ Ashmead-Bartlett, Parl. Deb., 6 May 1889, cols. 1322-1323.

¹⁰⁶ *Manchester Guardian*, 8 May 1889, p. 5.

¹⁰⁷ Evans, Parl. Deb., 4 Apr. 1889, col. 1652; Fowler, Parl. Deb., 6 May 1889, col. 1329.

¹⁰⁸ Lawson, Parl. Deb., 6 May 1889, col. 1316.

¹⁰⁹ Shaw Lefevre, Parl. Deb., 7 May 1889, col. 1381.

Admiral Mayne, who, provoked by Shaw Lefevre, was determined to claim Cobden's posthumous support for the Bill with the simple application of his own pessimistic understanding of the state of the Navy:

The right hon. Gentleman quoted Mr. Cobden as having said that our Navy should be to the navy of France as three to two; but why did he not add that Mr. Cobden said that if France attempted to alter that proportion he would be the first to vote: 100,000,000, if necessary, to maintain it. Why, Sir, France has already materially altered that ratio.¹¹⁰

Warming to his theme, on 20 May Mayne used an entire speech 'solely for the purpose of giving the House the exact words of Mr. Cobden', applying passages from one of Cobden's speeches to the present 'materially altered' circumstances and concluding, somewhat dubiously, that the 'revered statesman' was an advocate of a two power standard.¹¹¹ A provocative statement, it brought forth indignation from James Rowlands, Lib-Lab MP for East Finsbury, who pointed out the obvious truth that *The Three Panics* had been written to combat just such a proposal as the Naval Defence Bill. 'What', he asked, 'has become of the author of *The Three Panics*? I wonder whether the gallant Admiral has ever read "The Three Panics" carefully and assiduously?'¹¹² Rowlands protested not only the specific use of Cobden to advocate armament increases, but also lamented the manner in which his wider philosophy had been discarded in the struggle to claim his navalism:

I shall go into the Lobby in support of the Amendment of my Hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green [Cremer] as one of the legitimate heirs of Richard Cobden. (Cries of "Oh!") I should like to know how long hon. Gentlemen opposite have posed as the heirs of Richard Cobden, and have been proud of his deeds. I have yet to learn that they are admirers of his grand policy of Free Trade and non-intervention.¹¹³

These debates undeniably illustrated the importance of Cobden's memory for politicians of the later 1880s. But they also revealed the vulnerability and limitations of his non-interventionist principles, especially in the face of determined 'new imperialism'. Reduced to a mere statement

¹¹⁰ Mayne, Parl. Deb., 7 May 1889, col. 1389. See also the exchange between Field and Picton, Parl. Deb., 17 May 1889, col. 41.

¹¹¹ Mayne, Parl. Deb., 20 May 1889, cols. 541-542.

¹¹² Rowlands, Parl. Deb., 20 May 1889, col. 564.

¹¹³ Rowlands, Parl. Deb., 20 May 1889, cols. 564-567.

of navalism, Cobden's name had become a rod with which determined Tories like Mayne could use to beat his 'legitimate heirs'. In this way, it was symbolic of the deeper and more fundamental problems in Liberal anti-militarist thought. The Radicals were paying the price for their overreliance on the thinkers of the previous generation.

Contested Claims (ii): 'Public Opinion'

The other great contested issue was that of public opinion. Conscious, perhaps, of wider public indifference, MPs from both parties went out of their way to claim to be speaking for 'the people'. While the Radicals, invoking the 'toiling millions of the country', argued that the money ought instead to be spent on 'the mouths, the pockets, the homes of the people', the government was determined to bypass the 'flatterers and would-be leaders' on the benches opposite and instead appeal directly to the 'purer patriotism', as Ashmead-Bartlett described it, of the electorate itself.¹¹⁴ Meanwhile the service members eagerly adopted the mantle of representatives of the people which the navalists had worked so hard to create for them in 1888. They were, after all, elected just as were the Radicals: 'the democracy, whether in classes or in masses, always receive admirals in the same way', declared Mayne, 'and admirals are never afraid of going among them, or in any doubt of the reception they will get.'¹¹⁵ Beresford himself was determined to take his claim of public support and his claimed opposition to party politics to the extreme. Elaborating on his own preferred form of political 'responsibility', he expressed regret that the Bill did not put the First Lord of the Admiralty and the First Lord of the Treasury under a 'contract with the people, so that if these ships fail, or are not ready at the stipulated time, they should both be hanged.'¹¹⁶ As far as Mayne, Beresford and the other service members were concerned, it was the government's Bill, not the radical objections, which best represented the 'real interest' of the 'classes and masses'. Whether either side truly represented working class opinion is impossible to tell; certainly at no point did any MP cite any evidence for his

¹¹⁴ Cremer, Parl. Deb., 25 Mar. 1889, col. 776; Picton, Parl. Deb., 7 Mar. 1889, col. 1210; Ashmead-Bartlett, Parl. Deb. 6 May 1889, col. 1327.

¹¹⁵ Mayne, Parl. Deb., 7 May 1889, cols. 1390-1391.

¹¹⁶ Beresford, Parl. Deb., 13 May 1889, col. 1912.

claims about the nation's opinion, probably because by 1889 the nation, like so many of their fellow parliamentarians, was largely uninterested in fate of the Naval Defence Bill.

The subject of working class attitudes was also taken up in the Tory press, which eagerly seized the opportunity to set upon the Radicals for their failure to represent the perceived jingoism of the people.¹¹⁷ These attacks struck home. Responding in obvious frustration to one particular *Times* editorial, Sir Wilfrid Lawson aimed a barbed comment at the cheering Service members opposite, inadvertently accepting his opponents' claims to popularity and revealing his personal feelings of bewilderment towards an electorate which insisted on electing Tory soldiers and sailors who worked to waste its taxes on armaments.

The working classes may reject it [Radical opposition to the Bill] with indignant contempt, but I should be a coward and a traitor if, to win the applause of the working men, I were to betray their real interest. The working men have the power in their own hands, and I am disappointed with them, for they fill the House with generals, colonels, and admirals.¹¹⁸

James Picton concurred, warning the government that the people were not yet awake to their own interests and power; he predicted a day when the supporters of the Bill would be 'swept off the Benches of this House' by the popular will.¹¹⁹ These views were not all one-way, with Beresford at one point accepting that Cremer represented a 'large number of people in the country', working men included.¹²⁰ One event which serves to illustrate this problem of working class attitudes was the publication in May of a strongly-worded piece in the *Nineteenth Century* by Lord Armstrong, founder and owner of the Elswick gun foundries and shipyards.¹²¹ Praising the 'business-like' attitude of the government while damning the Liberal opposition for their appeals to the 'morality' of nations, Armstrong concluded by arguing that the main benefactors of the programme would actually be the working classes, 'chiefly at the expense of the

¹¹⁷ *The Times*, 1 Apr. 1889, p. 9.

¹¹⁸ Lawson, Parl. Deb., 1 Apr. 1889, cols. 1322-1323.

¹¹⁹ Picton, Parl. Deb., 17 May 1889, cols. 408-409.

¹²⁰ Beresford, Parl. Deb., 1 Apr. 1889, cols. 1256-1257.

¹²¹ Lord Armstrong, 'The New Naval Programme', *Nineteenth Century* (May 1889), pp. 629-640.

wealthy'.¹²² What Armstrong's article certainly indicated was that the government had strong support from the warship building industry. The Elswick works eventually received orders amounting to £426,279 as a result of the Act.¹²³

The last word on the bill was, with a certain inevitability, uttered by Lawson, in his fifth speech of the debates. On 4 April he had furiously denounced the scheme as 'one of the most odious which the classes have devised for the robbery of the masses.'¹²⁴ Returning to this theme on 20 May, he practically revelled in its 'odiousness' and even declared that he was not sorry that the measure had been passed, for it would 'teach the people of this country what the Tory Government is capable of. It will teach the country that the Tory Government considers that working men were born simply to maintain fighting men.' 'Mr. Speaker,' he concluded, 'it is because I am heart and soul for the shoemakers, and heart and soul against the nobles, that I give my most hearty support to the Motion of my Hon. Friend [Cremer].'¹²⁵ As true and pure as his motives may have been, Lawson's final speech was a quintessential example of the failings of Radical anti-militarism: although he began with a nod to existing naval strengths, this quickly disappeared in a sea of rhetoric. Regardless of whichever side actually represented popular or public opinion, it was imperialism which enjoyed the upper hand both ideologically and politically. Radicalism had little to offer beyond contempt and invocations of the Cobdenite millennium.

Repercussions

'Into the jaws of defeat walked the one hundred, - or, to be strictly accurate, the one hundred and one. They knew that to win was impossible, and to be beaten nothing less than disgraceful. But to their heroic souls, their labour was its own reward.'¹²⁶ So the *Spectator* reported the 'collapse' of the Liberal opposition on 20 May. The paper was certain as to the lessons which should be drawn from the three-month struggle: the Bill's passage was nothing short of a

¹²² Armstrong, 'The New Naval Programme', p. 640.

¹²³ Bastable, *Arms and the State*, p. 190.

¹²⁴ Lawson, Parl. Deb., 4 Apr. 1889, col. 1658.

¹²⁵ Lawson, Parl. Deb., 20 May 1889, col. 581.

¹²⁶ *The Spectator*, 25 May 1889, p. 705.

comprehensive defeat of the Radical ‘dream of insecurity’. ‘The time when defencelessness had charms for Englishmen is passing away,’ it concluded with satisfaction. ‘It may have altogether disappeared before Mr. Labouchere takes the first place at the Admiralty Board.’

In truth, the result had already been decided by the government victory on 7 May. The opposition to the third reading was an exercise in futility in every sense. The Liberals who turned out, ushered through the lobby by Cremer and Howell, represented the hard-core of Radical internationalists, the majority members of the IAL. Of the leadership, only Shaw Lefevre was present. ‘There can be no doubt that divided counsels on the Liberal side have taken all heart out of the opposition to the Government’s naval programme’, opined the *Pall Mall Gazette* following that vote. As far as the paper was concerned, the affair had provided a salutary lesson in the unpopularity of the Radical approach to naval policy:

Never was a Government more vulnerable than this one on its naval programme; but never will a Government escape the penalty of its faults so easily. We are not altogether sorry for the collapse of the Opposition in this matter; for it will at any rate serve to show how hopeless the Liberal position is when it lends any countenance whatever to the Little Navy school.¹²⁷

In general, Liberal attempts at comparative naval analysis had baffled the press, more used to the accessible rhetoric of the pessimists, while Radical fury simply gave the impression that much of the party was determined ‘to reduce the Commons to the condition of a large and well-filled and very resonant parrot-house’.¹²⁸ Such was the failure of the Liberal party’s Leadership to present a unified front on the Naval Defence Bill that by the end of May the *Times*, reflecting the opinion of a number of other papers, was wondering whether a ‘Gladstonian’ leadership in the Commons could be meaningfully said to exist at all.¹²⁹ *Punch* provided the best summary of the affair: in a cartoon published in early June, Hamilton was shown triumphantly leading a racehorse, ‘Naval Defence’, through a crowd of politicians. On the left sulk the Liberals, while

¹²⁷ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 7 May 1889, p. 2.

¹²⁸ *Saturday Review*, 25 May 1889, pp. 624-625; *Scots Observer*, 25 May 1889, p. 1.

¹²⁹ *The Times*, 7 May 1889, p. 9.

on the right, Mr. Punch offers his congratulations to Lord Salisbury: “‘Naval Defence’ was bound to win;- the opposition stable wasn’t in it!!” [Figure 27].

By failing to defeat the navalists, politicians had set a precedent which locked them into a spiral of confrontation with the Navy in which they were at a distinct disadvantage. The appetite of the sailors had been whetted, but they remained deeply unsatisfied, as Beresford’s behaviour during the debates demonstrated. Navalist grumblings emerged in the letters’ pages of the press even before the year was out, attacking the ‘gross illusions’ of ministers who dared to treat the Naval Defence Act as anything approaching a comprehensive solution to Britain’s defence problems.¹³⁰ For the Navy, now almost unanimously converted to the Hornby and Colomb school of naval thought, the two power standard was regarded as a woefully inadequate compromise, which failed to provide any serious measure of defence. But it also demonstrated that ‘party exigencies’ and ‘popular budgets’ could be beaten. With the Conservatives now won over to the pessimistic view of naval strength and Liberalism further damaged in its position on the Navy, there was little preventing the coming decades of British naval policy from being led by the professionals at the Admiralty. The real disaster of the Naval Defence Act, then, was not simply that it had failed to materially improve the British situation, but that in so doing it encouraged the Admiralty on to demanding further excesses, in the hope that each new programme would solve the problems of the last – in short, an arms race mentality.¹³¹

For the Conservatives, the Naval Defence Act can be seen as an important ingredient of the ‘crisis of Conservatism’, which the party suffered from the 1890s onwards.¹³² Having adopted the myth of naval weakness as fact, the party’s view of defence became increasingly dominated by patriotic pessimists. In this respect the Naval Defence Act became a self-fulfilling prophesy for the Tories, driving international tension which it had been supposed to prevent, thereby pushing the party further into the arms of the alarmists. Salisbury and Hamilton were frankly

¹³⁰ George Elliot, ‘The Navy and the New Year’, *Morning Post*, 25 Dec., p. 5.

¹³¹ Parkinson, *Late Victorian Navy*, pp. 201-203.

¹³² Green, *Crisis of Conservatism*, p. 12.

naïve if they believed that their policy shift would not encourage a Franco-Russian response.¹³³

As the *Daily News* observed following the final passage of the Bill through the Lords, ‘if Europe were indeed the powder magazine which our Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary makes it out to be, he ought to be heavily fined for smoking on the premises.’¹³⁴

For the Liberals, the new understanding of the passage of the Naval Defence Bill helps to clarify aspects of the party’s defence policy into the early twentieth century. During the 1900s the party struggled with the two-power standard, wishing to return naval spending to a policy based on existing diplomatic realities, rather than apocalyptic visions of a future great war against all of Europe. This struggle has been characterised by historians as an attempt to reject the ‘traditional’ two-power measure.¹³⁵ The truth is the opposite: in arguing for a redefined standard in 1906, Campbell-Bannerman was returning to the Liberal arguments of 1889, a reiteration of the Radical demands to know why and against whom Britain was supposed to be arming. More immediately, Gladstone’s resignation in 1894 over the naval estimates has always sat uneasily with his apparent support of the Naval Defence Act. As the conclusion of this thesis will explain, this new understanding of the Naval Defence Act allows us to better appreciate his actions during the final months of his fourth government.

¹³³ Marder, *Anatomy*, pp. 161-162.

¹³⁴ *Daily News*, 28 May 1889, p. 4.

¹³⁵ Williams, *Defending the Empire*, pp. 85, 88.

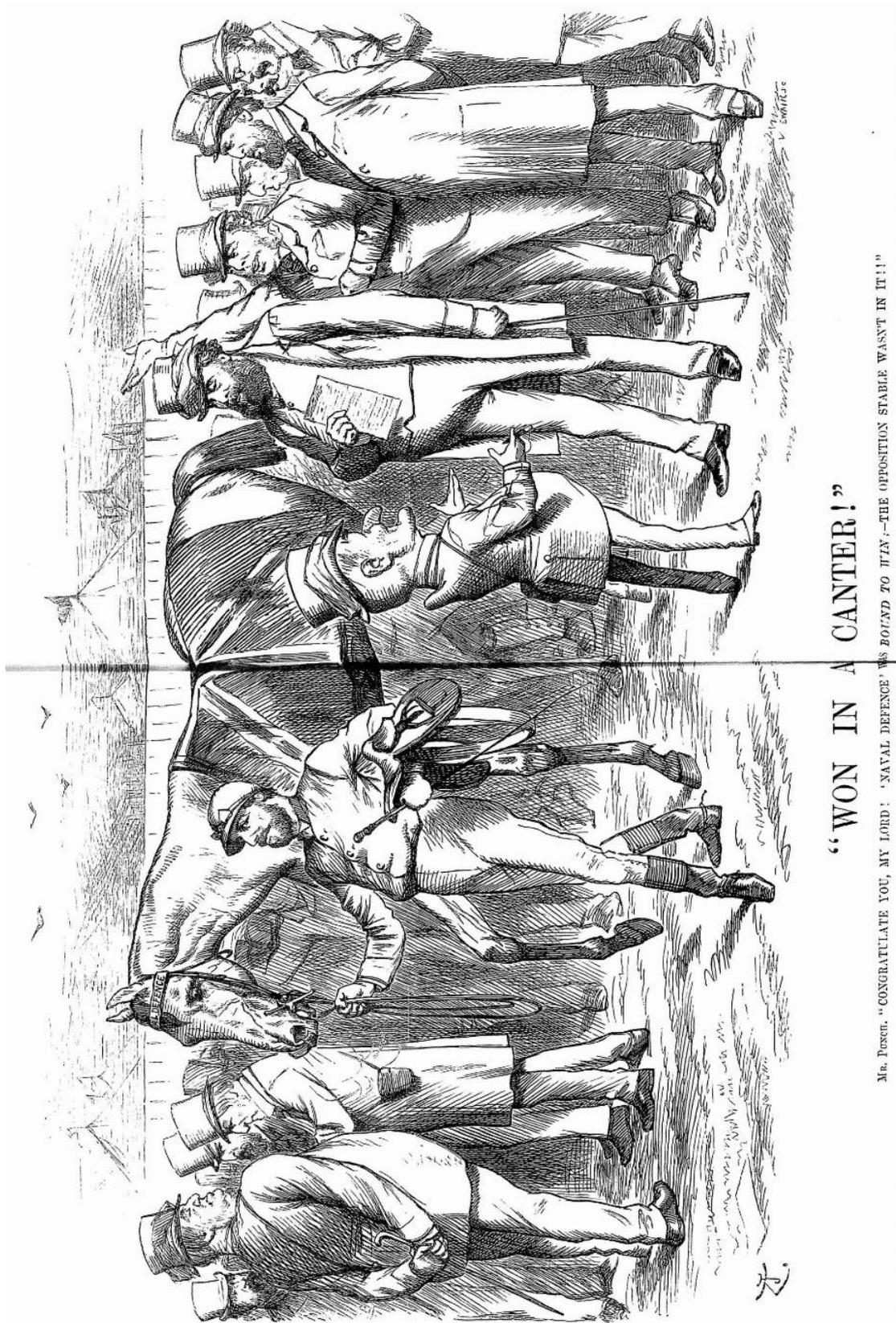


Figure 27: “Won in a Canter!”

‘Mr Punch: “Congratulate you, my Lord! ‘Naval Defence’ was *bound to win*;- the opposition stable wasn’t in it!!”’ *Punch*, 8 June 1889, p. 274.

Conclusion

Building on existing critiques of his work, this study has revealed Marder's characterisation of the public debate which resulted in the passage of the Naval Defence Act to have been seriously flawed. Already revealed by more recent historians to have been an unnecessary overreaction, this study has rejected the idea that the Act met with 'almost unanimous' public or political approval. Instead of a popular surge, it shows Beresford's navy campaign to have been somewhat of a damp squib, only making serious headway following the public meetings of May and June 1888. Indeed, rather than bowling the government over with unassailable facts and figures backed by popular approval, this thesis argues that the navalists ran a limited campaign which instead exploited the restricted nature of nineteenth century ideas of 'public opinion' to present itself as the voice of an otherwise apathetic public. That they were able to do this so successfully owed much to the failure of both the government and the Liberal Opposition to resist the navalist pessimism, despite clearly possessing the means to do so. This, to answer Beeler's implied question, is how the British 'bought' the navalist argument in 1888 and 1889: through a failure of political oversight. In this respect, both Salisbury and Gladstone must share the responsibility.

These conclusions are further supported by the study of the Parliamentary passage of the Naval Defence Bill. Tied to the pessimistic naval weakness myth, but lacking serious data to support their proposals, the government instead fell back on the anti-internationalist rhetoric of suspicion which characterised the 'realist' view of European relations. Although the Liberals opposed the Bill, their attempts to stop it were foiled by their own disunity and lack of leadership. From the very beginning of the debates, it was obvious that the Commons was hardly the place to begin a campaign of refutation based on comparative financial analysis; such a move should have begun in the press the previous year. The last-ditch Radical 'guerrilla' campaign succeeded only in earning its participants the derision of their opponents and the press alike. 'Imperialism', as Caroline Playne asserts, was triumphant.

Part IV

The 'Vortex of Militarism', 1890-1894

Chapter Ten

The Channel Tunnel and Naval Policy, 1890-1894

Now some time ago, as the Tories know,
When Salisbury held the sway,
How the Rads all curst if a boiler burst,
Or a shaft or crank gave way;
But old Gladstone's cure is both sound and sure,
Yes it hardly wants a think,
We can make no ships, or can sink no ships,
If we have no ships to sink.

So search all your life until you are bound
To the locker of good Old Davy oh!
You may search the ocean, the strait, or Sound,
But you'll never find Gladstone's Navy, oh!
With my ho! Heave oh!
You may whistle for Gladstone's Navy, oh!

We will not be slaves, and will rule the waves,
Though how is not clear to me;
But for trust we've grounds, a master of hounds,
Yes Lord Spencer guards the sea;
And though he no doubt knows nothing about
The ocean, no need to tell,
While his chief takes care that no ships are there,
He will rule the Navy well.

Though he works a ship as he hunts a hound,
you may swear in your affidavit oh!
While the Budget on Harcourt's back is found
You will never find Gladstone's Navy, oh!
With my ho! Heave oh!
You may whistle for Gladstone's Navy, oh!

'In Gladstone's Navy', *Sporting Times*, 6 Jan. 1894, p. 1.

The fourth Gladstone government, from August 1892 to March 1894, could have provided an opportunity for the Liberals to push back against the anti-internationalist advance. Regardless of any weaknesses, Gladstone remained the ‘world leader’ of a passionately cosmopolitan free trade movement, ‘still able to offer the world the best model of international harmony’.¹ As discussed in the introduction to this thesis, there is much evidence that the collection of ideas which constituted liberal internationalism were popular in the country. Although the margin in seats was small, the Liberal victory of 1892 nevertheless captured forty-five percent of the vote, only a few points short of the landslide of 1906. Any opportunity this moment offered was squandered, however. Rather than build an internationalist platform to face the defence pessimism of the Conservatives, the Liberals instead fought the election on Home Rule in the face of increasing public indifference.² Indeed, fewer than half of Liberal candidates’ election addresses mentioned foreign affairs at all.³ Ailing physically, Gladstone remained obsessed with Ireland. Meanwhile his Cabinet had little conception of a developed foreign policy, whereas Rosebery, the Foreign Secretary, possessed a strong Francophobia.⁴ Divided and embittered, even the staunchest cosmopolitans within the Liberal leadership were reluctant to support difficult policies they professed to believe in, their passion replaced with a pervasive sense of resignation.⁵ Consequently the administration put up limited resistance to the military and naval professionals who now dominated policymaking at the War Office and Admiralty. This chapter illustrates this fact through narratives of the fourth Gladstone government’s dealings with the Channel Tunnel and aftermath of the Naval Defence Act. In the former case it provides a narrative absent from any other study – in the latter, it offers a new perspective on the resignation crisis of 1893-1894. In both it stresses how a willingness to defend liberal internationalism against defence pessimism, the armed forces and ‘public opinion’ had had collapsed within the upper echelons of the Liberal party. With Gladstone’s resignation in March

¹ Matthew, *Gladstone: 1875-1898*, p. 318.

² Searle, *A New England?*, p. 161.

³ Taylor, *Trouble Makers*, p. 92.

⁴ Taylor, *Struggle for Mastery*, pp. 341-342. For Rosebery’s attitudes to France see McKinstrey, *Rosebery*, p. 78

⁵ Peter Stansky, *Ambitions and Strategies: The Struggle for the Leadership of the Liberal Party in the 1890s* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1964), p. xv.

1894 the ‘Peel-Cobden’ consensus which had dominated British politics since the mid-1860s suffered its greatest defeat, sending British liberal internationalism into a crisis from which it never truly recovered.

The End of Watkin’s Tunnel Dream

By 1888, Watkin’s ‘Channel Bore’ had become a staple of the satirical journals, often derided as an almost Sisyphean scheme.⁶ This impression was encouraged by his persistence in the Commons, where the Channel Tunnel Company applied to bring forward Bills in 1891, 1892, 1893 and 1894, although all were withdrawn before MPs were given a chance to vote.⁷

However, if the events of 1882-1890 have been given short shrift by historians, Watkin’s final four Bills have been entirely ignored.⁸ The 1891 and 1892 attempts, faced again with the determined opposition of the Conservative government and ‘military authorities’, had no chance of success.⁹ Gladstone’s resumption of power in 1892 offered new hope, however, and the Tunnel’s continued rejection did not appear to be a foregone conclusion, least of all to Watkin and Gladstone.

With a Prime Minister publicly pledged to the scheme, the Tunnel was potentially closer to gaining parliamentary endorsement in 1893 than it had been since 1884. Indeed, the two ministers with greatest responsibility for the Tunnel, A.J. Mundella at the Board of Trade and Henry Campbell-Bannerman at the War Office, had both voted in its favour in 1888 and 1890. As a fervent Gladstonian and IAL member, Mundella in particular was exactly the sort of man Watkin would have hoped to support his cause. Watkin also spent time building his relationship with Gladstone, inviting him to Paris in 1889 and to his Chalet in 1892.¹⁰ During 1892 the two men were in regular correspondence on the subject, and on 1 October the Prime Minister asked

⁶ *Funny Folks*, 7 July 1888, p. 210; *Fun*, 11 June 1890, p. 249.

⁷ Hodgkins, *Railway King*, pp. 627-628. For details see *London Gazette*, 25 Nov. 1890, pp. 6609-6610; 24 Nov. 1891, p. 6361; 22 Nov. 1892, pp. 6646-6647; 24 Nov. 1893, pp. 6854-6855. The application for the 1893 session was not for a Tunnel but rather a ‘Dover and Calais Submarine Tubular Railway’, presumably inspired by Sir Edward Reed’s proposal of 1891.

⁸ Hodgkins deals with them briefly, *Railway King*, pp. 627-628; Wilson’s *Tunnel Visions*, on the other hand, does not refer to these Bills at all.

⁹ See letter from War Office to Admiralty reaffirming Edward Stanhope’s opposition to the scheme in deference to the professionals, 6 Mar. 1891, TNA, ADM 116/1223.

¹⁰ Shannon, *Gladstone: Heroic Minister*, pp. 485, 527.

Watkin to send him proposals to submit to the Cabinet.¹¹ In another letter to Watkin later that month, Gladstone, ever aware of the importance of both public and ‘society’ opinion and conscious that this was a matter for collective Cabinet responsibility, explained the situation as he saw it:

I think the recent movement of public opinion has been favourable; but I am not able to say whether it has been of such an extent as to warrant the return of the Executive to the position which it assumed at the first inception of the question; and again viewing the curious cleavage of political society upon this question, I am not able as yet to estimate the balance of personal opinions among my colleagues.

I need not tell you which way my own wishes lean; but manifestly I have no title to press them beyond a certain point.¹²

Watkin, of course, wanted the government to fully commit to the scheme. Speaking in late 1892, he remained publicly confident that the government was ‘favourably inclined to the company’s enterprise’ and that the new Liberal majority in the Commons would support his Bill.¹³ But Gladstone could not offer this. On 23 November the Cabinet agreed that any further votes in the Commons would be an ‘open question’, something confirmed publicly by Mundella, Harcourt, Campbell-Bannerman and Gladstone when questioned by Conservative MPs in March 1893; on 14 March, a Liberal, Thomas Henry Bolton, gave notice that he would move the Bill’s rejection, to great cheers from the Tory benches.¹⁴

The government’s decision not to support the project was the result of important divisions within the Cabinet and the dominant position that the armed forces had established for themselves. Although a substantial number of ministers were on record as having voted for the Tunnel, the most influential Liberals after Gladstone, Lord Rosebery and William Harcourt, were opponents. The respective justifications offered by these two men mirrored their own

¹¹ Gladstone to Watkin, 26 Sept. 1892; Gladstone to Watkin, 1 Oct. 1892, both reprinted in Matthew Gladstone *Diaries*, vol. XIII, pp. 94, 98.

¹² Gladstone to Watkin, 26 Oct. 1892, reprinted in Matthew, *Gladstone Diaries*, vol. XIII, p. 120.

¹³ *The Times*, 30 Dec. 1892, p. 4.

¹⁴ Matthew, *Gladstone Diaries*, vol. XIII, pp. 149-150; Parl. Deb., 11 Mar. 1893, cols. 720-721; Parl. Deb., 13 Mar. 1893, cols. 1863-1864; Parl. Deb., 16 Mar. 1893, cols. 227-228; Parl. Deb., 20 Mar 1893, cols. 517-519; Bolton, Parl. Deb., 14 Mar. 1893, col. 34. Conservative opposition was very vocal during these exchanges: see accounts of Tory cheers and laughter in *The Times*, 14 Mar 1893, p. 6; 15 Mar. 1893, p. 6.

ideological differences, illustrating the range of problems that Liberals identified with the project. As the great hope of the ‘Liberal Imperialists’, Rosebery sympathised with the military protests. ‘I am anxious’, he had written to Gladstone in 1891, ‘to obtain the full advantage of the insular position with which providence has endowed us.’¹⁵ Meanwhile Harcourt articulated the more ‘Radical’ objection that the Tunnel might damage British liberties: ‘...I belong to the “old fogey” party on that question not from fear of invasion in time of *War* but of *Continentilisation* in time of *peace*’, he wrote in 1893.¹⁶ If these objections were not enough – and it is difficult to see, considering the stubborn natures of the two men, how they could have been surmounted – Gladstone had also accepted the right of the armed forces to continue to intervene.¹⁷ The fact that the alternative would at this stage had been practically unthinkable should not obscure the importance of this development for a man so disdainful of professional ‘interference’. The subsequent memorandums on the subject submitted to the Cabinet by the Adjutant-General Redvers Buller and the Inspector-General of Fortifications Robert Grant repeated most of Wolseley’s objections and emphasised the unanimity of military opinion on the issue.¹⁸ Watkin withdrew the Bill on 20 July 1893, unwilling to face the necessary parliamentary ‘tug of war’ and disappointed in his hope of government support.¹⁹

The 1894 Bill met an identical end, crushed during the last weeks of Gladstone’s premiership by the weight of professional opposition.²⁰ Remarkably, Campbell-Bannerman, that noted antagonist of the military and naval officer, was happy to oppose the scheme ‘on military grounds’, an indication of how the experience of government had changed the party’s

¹⁵ Rosebery to Gladstone, 16 July 1891, quoted in Matthew, *Liberal Imperialists*, p. 200. Rosebery publicly affirmed his opposition in a 1906 speech, declaring that a Tunnel would make Britain a ‘Continental Power’. *The Times*, 10 Dec. 1906, p. 3.

¹⁶ Harcourt to Gladstone, 17 Feb. 1893, quoted in Matthew, *Gladstone Diaries*, vol. XIII, p. 205, n. 1. Emphasis in original.

¹⁷ Gladstone to Harcourt, 18 Feb. 1893, reproduced in Matthew, *Gladstone Diaries*, vol. XIII, p. 205.

¹⁸ Redvers Buller and Robert Grant, ‘Memorandum on the Channel Tunnel’, 3 Mar. 1893, TNA, CAB 37/33/24.

¹⁹ *The Times*, 21 July 1893, p. 4; *Western Times*, 21 July 1893, p. 8; *Manchester Courier*, 21 July 1893, p. 5; *Dundee Advertiser*, 21 July 1893, p. 5.

²⁰ See memoranda by the Hydrographer of the Navy William Wharton and one other unidentified naval officer dated 20–26 Jan. 1894, in TNA, ADM 116/1223. Wharton praised Maurice’s ‘remarkable’ *Hostilities without Declaration of War*.

relationship with the armed forces.²¹ He rejected the scheme again when Prime Minister in 1907, officially in deference to the Admiralty and War Office, although in a letter to the King he insisted that, while he had ‘never thought much of the so-called military objections’, he believed that its construction would lead to panic, a decision which his successor Asquith endorsed.²² In this, Campbell-Bannerman serves as a fitting representative of the Liberal party’s tortuous relationship with the Channel Tunnel scheme: sympathetic to its ideals and unwilling to admit the truth of Wolseley’s objections, but also suspicious of the danger it represented to British society and forced, ultimately, to bow to the armed forces and ‘public opinion’.

The Channel Tunnel was not an irrelevant footnote to Gladstone’s final government. This was, after all, one of the most ambitious engineering projects of the century, with proven viability and the support of a significant lobby of businessmen, trade unions and politicians. Gladstone himself was obviously determined to do all he could for the scheme, pushing it in Cabinet and writing regularly to Watkin. His diary shows that he read Bradlaugh’s pro-Tunnel pamphlet in April 1893, presumably in anticipation of the planned Commons debate.²³ There is no doubt, as indicated by his conduct in 1888 and 1890, that he regarded the Tunnel as an important ideological issue and a potential weapon on the side of peace and free trade. In light of his intense feeling for the ideology of Cobden, he must have regarded the withdrawal of the last Tunnel Bills as a defeat for this outlook and an indication of the new direction of British politics. One acquaintance recorded – presumably in the immediate aftermath of the withdrawal of the 1893 Bill – that the Prime Minister was “‘suffused with shame” about the conduct of the English in regard to the Channel Tunnel’.²⁴

For Watkin, of course, the defeat was all the greater. With Gladstone’s replacement by Rosebery it was obvious that there was little hope of the British government supporting a Tunnel in the immediate future. Ailing physically, Watkin retired from public life shortly after

²¹ Wilson, *Tunnel Visions*, p. 49.

²² Wilson, *Tunnel Visions*, pp. 69, 88; John Wilson, *CB: A Life of Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman* (London: Constable, 1973), p. 593.

²³ Matthew, *Gladstone Diaries*, vol. XIII, p. 230.

²⁴ Lionel A. Tollemache, *Talks with Mr. Gladstone* (London: Edward Arnold, 1898), p. 88.

Gladstone himself. He had brought the idea of a fixed railway link between Paris and London nearer to reality than anyone else during the entire pre-1945 period. Britain would not have a pro-Tunnel Prime Minister until 1916 and David Lloyd George, who had voted in its favour in 1888 and 1890. However, although Lloyd George actively pushed the idea during the peace negotiations in 1919, like Gladstone before him he was unable to carry the Cabinet.²⁵ It was not until 1964 that the British government, in tandem with its attitude towards European unity, officially endorsed the making of a Tunnel, although actual work did not begin until 1974, and this was cancelled the following year.²⁶ Ironically it was a Conservative government that finally ratified the Anglo-French Tunnel treaty in 1987, with the Tunnel itself finally opened in 1994, exactly a century after Gladstone and Watkin retired. In her speech marking the former occasion, Margaret Thatcher described the project as ‘a demonstration of how to go about the practical making of Europe and demolishing its barriers’.²⁷ Cobden, Watkin and Gladstone, one assumes, would have heartily agreed.

The Navy and Resignation: A Reassessment

The Cabinet crisis which culminated in Gladstone’s final resignation in March 1894 has been chronicled a substantial number of times.²⁸ As is well known, at its root was Gladstone’s stubborn determination not to accept First Lord of the Admiralty Lord Spencer’s naval estimates, the highest the country had ever seen in peacetime, part of a £21,263,000 five-year programme that was only marginally smaller than the Naval Defence Act.²⁹ His ultimate capitulation in the face of his Cabinet colleagues – themselves facing an intractable Admiralty, an inflamed public opinion and an unsympathetic Conservative party – has long been regarded as the symbolic passing of the Peel-Cobden consensus which had dominated British defence

²⁵ Wilson, *Tunnel Visions*, chs. 5-7.

²⁶ Richard S. Grayson, ‘The British Government, the Channel Tunnel and European Unity, 1948-64’, in *European History Quarterly*, 26 (1996), pp. 415-436.

²⁷ Margaret Thatcher, ‘Speech at ratification of Channel Tunnel Treaty’, 29 July 1987, <<https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/106564>> [last accessed 4 July 2018].

²⁸ The standard account is Stansky, *Ambitions and Strategies*, ch. 2. See also Shannon, *Gladstone: Heroic Minister*, ch. 14; Matthew, *Gladstone: 1875-1898*; 348-355; Jenkins, *Gladstone*, pp. 608-618.

²⁹ Smith, ‘Ruling the Waves’, p. 48; Sumida, *Naval Supremacy*, pp. 16-17.

policy since the 1860s.³⁰ For naval historians the crisis reveals both the political success and the practical failure of the Naval Defence Act. Success, in that it tied the hands of the Liberals and forced them to continue building at a similar rate to Salisbury's government: failure, because the Spencer programme reflected the extent to which France and Russia, now formal allies, had managed to keep pace with the Royal Navy.³¹ It was clear that the Liberal and Radical criticisms of 1889 that argued the Act would promote and escalate a European naval arms race had proved correct.³² Administratively, Gladstone's retirement also marked the conclusive seizure of policymaking by the armed forces. This is the theme of the most comprehensive account of the resignation from the perspective of the Admiralty, Paul Smith's 1996 essay, which draws heavily from the letters of Lord Spencer and his Parliamentary Secretary, Sir Ughtred Kay-Shuttleworth.³³ After 1894, he argues, crossbench support for the two-power standard ensured that the Admiralty was a 'near-independent power within the government as a whole', free from close financial or political oversight.³⁴ As Marder puts it, 'the decks were now clear' for the full-scale acceptance of Admiralty demands.³⁵

In light of the naval historians' exposure of the myth of British naval weakness and the new understanding of the Liberal attitude to the Naval Defence Act established in Part III of this thesis, the Gladstonian resignation crisis is ripe for reassessment. Crucially, it follows that the events of 1893-1894 must be placed in the context of Gladstone and the Liberals' attitude to the Navy stretching back at least to 1888. Previous chroniclers of the resignation have tended to regard Gladstone's objections as a well-meaning but misjudged attempt to uphold financial consistency in the face of strategic reality. The truth, however, is more complex, for an awareness that the Naval Defence Act was an overreaction necessarily throws the Spencer programme into similar doubt. In this context, Gladstone appears less of a blind ideologue than historians have painted him. On the other hand, it also becomes evident that there is a direct link

³⁰ This is the theme of Daunton, 'Finance of Naval Expansion'. Other examples include, Kennedy, *British Naval Mastery*, p. 179; Howe, 'Gladstone and Cobden', p. 125.

³¹ Smith, 'Ruling the Waves', p. 40; Sumida, *Naval Supremacy*, p. 16.

³² See especially Parkinson, *Late Victorian Navy*, pp. 177-178.

³³ Smith, 'Ruling the Waves', pp. 39-52.

³⁴ Smith, 'Ruling the Waves', p. 51.

³⁵ Marder, *Anatomy*, p. 203.

between Gladstone's failure of leadership against the Naval Defence Act in 1889 and the position he found himself in in 1894. What follows is a critical retelling of the resignation crisis, framed and directed by this new understanding.

The technical and financial details of the Spencer Programme still await a full revisionist study. Unlike the events of 1888, however, the navalist agitation of 1893 has never been regarded uncritically by historians. In his account, Marder explains at some length how the navalists of 1893 ignored or downplayed Franco-Russian weaknesses, demonstrating a critical awareness which is missing from his study of the Naval Defence Act.³⁶ Importantly, Marder draws attention to the fact that British shipbuilders were able to produce a battleship in an average of twenty-one months faster than the French, for whom warship construction was also more expensive.³⁷ This picture has been reinforced by Parkinson, who identifies how the Royal Navy was made to look weak in 1893 by adding outdated French ships to comparative naval returns, just as in 1884 and 1888.³⁸ Indeed, by 1895 this policy appears to have been adopted openly by the Admiralty Board in its correspondence with Spencer.³⁹ Even under conservative estimates, in 1894 British first-class battleship tonnage equalled that of France, Russia and Germany combined, while the numbers of European warships under construction did not suggest that the two power standard was under imminent threat.⁴⁰ That year's *Brassey's Naval Annual* suggested that due to the withdrawal of obsolete warships, France's proposed building programme would actually leave the French navy no stronger in 1900 than it had been in 1894.⁴¹ As Shaw Lefevre argued in his essay of 1891 and as Harcourt later asserted in the Commons, British 'weakness' of the early 1890s was an immediate question of geographical distribution, rather than shipbuilding.⁴² On the other hand the Liberal government was also faced with a range of new

³⁶ Marder, *Anatomy*, pp. 184-188.

³⁷ Marder, *Anatomy*, p. 184.

³⁸ Parkinson, *Late Victorian Navy*, pp. 179-182.

³⁹ Parkinson, *Late Victorian Navy*, p. 180.

⁴⁰ Parkinson, *Late Victorian Navy*, p. 184; App. A.

⁴¹ Parkinson, *Late Victorian Navy*, p. 180.

⁴² Shaw Lefevre, 'Naval Policy of France', p. 620; Harcourt, Parl. Deb., 19 Dec. 1893, cols. 1880-1882. See also Gardiner, *Harcourt*, vol. II, p. 248. This fact was picked up by Gladstone, presumably after consultation with Harcourt. See for example Gladstone to Rosebery, 18 Dec. 1893 in Matthew, *Gladstone Diaries*, vol. XIII, p. 341.

factors which seriously undermined its ability to face down the Admiralty demands. Most significantly, the arms race initiated by the Naval Defence Act was now in full swing, necessitating some form of long-term increase in shipbuilding unless Britain was to achieve a thawing of relations with France.⁴³ A government united on a strong platform of internationalism and economic parsimony, buttressed by a proper appreciation of Britain's defence needs, could have done much to contain the spiralling naval estimates and mitigate the naval arms race spreading across Europe. This is not what happened. Instead, the Liberal government left office in 1895 having cemented the myth of naval weakness in place.

In the first place, an understanding of the Liberal failure to formulate a naval policy during 1888-1889 allows us to appreciate the position of the party as it took power in 1892. While Peter Stansky is right to point out that the Liberals attacked increasing military and naval spending in the run up to the 1892 election, this should not be mistaken for an established policy.⁴⁴ The 1891 Newcastle Programme did not set out a position on defence, while Gladstone and Harcourt produced only the most limited and vague of public attacks on Conservative spending increases, advocating no clear Liberal alternative.⁴⁵ There had thus been no concerted effort to challenge the myth of British weakness and anti-internationalist assumptions during the election campaign. The directionless state of Liberal naval policy was essentially unchanged from 1889. These problems were reflected in Gladstone's decision to appoint John Poyntz Spencer, Fifth Earl Spencer, as First Lord. Spencer's appointment has attracted little criticism from historians and has never been scrutinised in detail, despite the fact that he was clearly not a suitable man for the job, as Gladstone later admitted.⁴⁶ A 'moderate' man principally concerned with Home Rule and holding no previous experience of naval administration, Spencer appears

⁴³ Parkinson, *Late Victorian Navy*, p. 182.

⁴⁴ Stansky, *Ambitions and Strategies*, p. 21.

⁴⁵ The Newcastle resolutions are summarised in Maccoby, *Radicalism*, pp. 108-111. Gladstone at Newcastle, *Northern Echo*, 3 Oct. 1891, p. 3; Harcourt at Ringwood, *The Times*, 21 Apr. 1892, p. 10.

⁴⁶ Hamer, *Papers of Lord Rendel*, p. 117. For historians on Spencer's appointment see Marder, *Anatomy*, p. 169; Smith, 'Ruling the Waves', p. 40; Parkinson, *Late Victorian Navy*, p. 170. Peter Gordon's discussion of Spencer's time at the Admiralty in his introduction to the edited volume of Spencer's correspondence is a good example of how the myth of British naval weakness drives historians to cast Spencer in a kindly light. Peter Gordon (ed.), *The Red Earl: The Papers of the Fifth Earl Spencer*, vol. II: 1885-1910 (Northampton: Northampton Record Society, 1986), pp. 24-35.

to have been chosen as a result of Gladstone's curious determination to balance the number of Peers and Commoners in his Cabinet.⁴⁷ Within days of accepting the post, Spencer wrote to Gladstone to admit 'my own ignorance of the great subjects involved'.⁴⁸ Spencer immediately demonstrated that he had learnt none of the lessons of 1888-1889 by deciding to leave Hamilton's Admiralty Board in place, the first time the Sea Lords had not changed with a new administration.⁴⁹ Despite the fact that Gladstone, Harcourt and others in the government were aware of the need for strong civilian oversight of the 'professional oppressors', there does not appear to have been any attempt to challenge this decision.⁵⁰ This meant that the Cabinet, already left with little room for manoeuvre as a consequence of the actions of the Salisbury government, was stuck with a Board schooled in the outlook of Beresford, Hornby and Colomb, determined to uphold the myth of naval weakness and led by men at odds with the Gladstonian approach to defence.⁵¹ From this point onwards a decisive clash between Liberal parsimony and Admiralty pessimism became inevitable, with the Admiralty holding all the advantages.

The extent to which Spencer's appointment was an avoidable mistake is further emphasised by the fact that a number of more appropriate alternatives existed. That the Admiralty would go to Spencer was far from inevitable; Harcourt, for example, was staunchly opposed to Gladstone's decision to place 'one of the greatest spending departments' in the Lords.⁵² The three obvious alternative candidates were Henry Campbell-Bannerman, George Trevelyan and George Shaw Lefevre, all of whom were recognised by Spencer himself as 'conversant with naval affairs'.⁵³ All three, importantly, had proven themselves able to resist the myth of naval weakness during the debates on the Naval Defence Bill. In the event, however, Campbell-Bannerman was given the War Office while the other two fell victim, alongside a fourth candidate Henry Fowler, to

⁴⁷ Gardiner, *Harcourt*, vol. II, p. 226; Hamer, *Liberal Politics*, pp. 180-181; David Brooks, 'Gladstone's Fourth Administration, 1892-1894' in David Bebbington and Roger Swift (eds), *Gladstone Centenary Essays*, pp. 225-242 (p. 229).

⁴⁸ Spencer to Gladstone, 2 Sept. 1892 in Gordon, *The Red Earl*, p. 217.

⁴⁹ Parkinson, *Late Victorian Navy*, p. 170; Stansky, *Ambitions and Strategies*, p. 19.

⁵⁰ Smith, 'Ruling the Waves', pp. 40-42; Harcourt to Spencer, 4 Jan. 1893 in Gardiner, *Harcourt*, vol. II, p. 227; Spencer to Harcourt, 6 Jan. 1893, in Gordon *Red Earl*, vol. II, pp. 221-222.

⁵¹ Smith, 'Ruling the Waves', p. 40; Marder, *Anatomy* pp. 174-176.

⁵² Harcourt to Gladstone, 14 Aug. 1892 in Gardiner, *Harcourt*, vol. II, pp. 182-183; Hawkins and Powell, *Kimberley*, pp. 406-407.

⁵³ Spencer to Gladstone, 7 Feb. 1893, BL, Add. MS 44314.

Gladstonian snobbery.⁵⁴ Algernon West, Gladstone's Principal Private Secretary, thought that Fowler as First Lord would result in 'a mutiny at the Nore', while he dismissed without explanation the idea of Trevelyan or Shaw Lefevre – both now senior statesmen with extensive Admiralty experience – as 'ridiculous'.⁵⁵ Yet it seems unlikely that either of the latter two would have kept Hamilton's Board in place as Spencer had done, or have lent the navalists such a sympathetic ear; as we shall see, Shaw Lefevre kept up his opposition to the Spencer estimates for as long as Gladstone himself.

Spencer took enthusiastically to his work, determined to scrutinise the demands of the Admiralty Board and confident in his ability to keep down the estimates.⁵⁶ Immediately as he assumed office, however, the Admiralty began the work of revitalising the myth of naval weakness. That the Admiralty was conspiring to provide an erroneous picture of the Royal Navy during this time there can be little doubt, for as much was later admitted by Seymour Fortescue, then on the staff of the Naval Intelligence Department, in a remarkable passage in his memoirs hitherto unused by historians:

I remember being told to supply their Lordships with a statement of the combined strength of the Navies of France and Russia, against which had to be shown, ship by ship, our own Navy. I was given the hint that, the object being to wring more money for more ships out of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, I was to make out as formidable a list as I could of our then possible enemies. Naturally, I did as I was told, and no old lame duck was too obsolete to be trotted out for the occasion.⁵⁷

Fortescue was 'convinced that the device was too transparent to deceive a child' and remembered being secretly delighted when the document came back to him covered with Harcourt's own annotations. 'I felt', he continued, 'that with all the knowledge of those Fleets that I had at the moment, I could not have made a better selection of the obsolete and useless vessels than did the Chancellor with his blue pencil.' This or a similar occurrence was the

⁵⁴ For Gladstone on Fowler see Brooks, 'Gladstone's Fourth Administration', p. 228.

⁵⁵ Horace G. Hutchinson (ed.), *Private Diaries of the Rt. Hon. Sir Algernon West, G.C.B.* (London: John Murray, 1922), p. 197.

⁵⁶ Gordon, *Red Earl*, pp. 217-222.

⁵⁷ Sir Seymour Fortescue, *Looking Back* (London: Longmans, 1920), p. 194.

subject of a letter from Harcourt to Spencer in November 1892, in which the Chancellor declared that ‘the Admirals are up to their well-known “tricks and manners”’ – in this case including unbuilt French and Russian ships on a comparative return, which he had marked out, this time in red pencil.⁵⁸ Labouring under the pessimistic illusion, historians have not tended to pay much attention to the detail of Harcourt’s arguments during this period, regarding him as ‘intransigent’, an amateur naval enthusiast whose fierce and excitable outbursts were merely the usual protestations of a parsimonious Chancellor.⁵⁹ It is clear, however, that the opposite is the case. Behind his bullish and sarcastic assertions about the strength of the Royal Navy equalling that of the entire world, Harcourt possessed a masterful understanding of the true state of naval affairs.⁶⁰ Spencer, on the other hand, does not appear to have taken Harcourt seriously, describing him as ‘odd and extravagant’, possessing ‘every sort of theory’ and a ‘craze about ships’.⁶¹ Brushing off offers of support against his ‘professional oppressors’ in January 1893, Spencer wrote that he would be ‘extremely surprised if there is an excess of expenditure this year’, an observation which does not suggest the sharpest awareness of the recent political history of the Navy.⁶²

The political prelude to the Spencer programme was the Navy scare of 1893, the narrative of which is well understood.⁶³ It was driven by public alarm, spread especially energetically by *The Times*, regarding the British position in the Mediterranean, where the French maintained a strong fleet at Toulon. In August it became known that the Russian Navy was planning a visit to the base, sparking fears that the Royal Navy was dangerously outnumbered in the Sea. The subsequent agitation was of a smaller scale than that of 1888, but this was in large part because the battle was half won before it had even begun. The mechanisms of panic were now fully worked out. The usual papers were quickly rallied and a City meeting was held on 13

December, well-attended only by the ‘propertied and commercial classes’ as Edward Hamilton

⁵⁸ Harcourt to Spencer, 29 Nov. 1892 in Gardiner, *Harcourt*, vol. II, pp. 201-202.

⁵⁹ Stansky, *Ambitions and Strategies*, p. 21; Smith, ‘Ruling the Waves’, p. 40.

⁶⁰ Harcourt to Spencer, 19 Dec. 1892 in Gordon, *Red Earl*, pp. 220-221.

⁶¹ Spencer to Kimberley, 5 Dec. 1892 in Gordon, *Red Earl*, p. 219. See also Spencer to Harcourt, 5 Dec. 1892 in Gardiner, *Harcourt*, vol. II, p. 202.

⁶² Spencer to Harcourt, 6 Jan. 1893 in Gordon, *Red Earl*, p. 222.

⁶³ Marder, *Anatomy*, ch. 10; see also Parkinson, *Late Victorian Navy*, pp. 164-167.

bitterly remembered.⁶⁴ Freed from the moderating influence of government, the Conservative attitude to national defence was now dominated by the kind of pessimistic anti-internationalism espoused by Wolseley in the early 1880s. This was demonstrated by Lord Salisbury in Cardiff on 28 November, at a meeting connected to the annual conference of the National Union of Conservative and Constitutional Associations. Insisting that a single diplomatic blunder could lead to a sudden and calamitous war of aggression, he painted a picture of a Royal Navy which was well below the necessary strength and asked his audience to imagine an enemy fleet anchoring in Cardiff bay and demanding a ransom lest the town be ‘bombarded and burnt to the ground’.⁶⁵ In contrast to 1888, the meeting of 13 December occurred with the full support of the Conservative Lord Mayor of London. Gone was the uncertainty which marked the agitators’ attitude to the public in 1888, for the Naval Defence Act had put an end to any nagging doubts about whether or not the taxpayer would stomach such a programme. The meeting’s chairman, Albert Rollit MP, felt no embarrassment in describing the event as ‘the union of the nation and the Navy’, regardless of the fact that no evidence of wider national support had been forthcoming.⁶⁶ Even the Queen felt emboldened, taking the ‘constitutionally extraordinary step’ of demanding that Gladstone read the Cabinet a letter from her demanding an increase in both the Army and Navy.⁶⁷

The culmination of the agitation was the Commons debate on the evening of 19 December 1893, on a motion tabled by George Hamilton calling for a ‘considerable addition’ to the Navy.⁶⁸ British sea power, he declared, was ‘in jeopardy’, and he warned that the Navy must be prepared for a sudden, unexpected naval combination against it – such an attack, he argued, was the ‘one object’ of the ‘foreign nations’ he was sure were plotting against Britain.⁶⁹ In contrast to 1889 Gladstone was a man transformed, taking the fight directly to Hamilton’s statistics and his assumptions about the state of the world, which he attacked as ‘irrational and even absurd’,

⁶⁴ Bahlman, *Diary of Edward Hamilton, 1885-1906*, p. 257.

⁶⁵ *The Times*, 29 Nov. 1893, p. 11.

⁶⁶ *The Times*, 13 Dec. 1893, p. 12

⁶⁷ Matthew, *Gladstone: 1875-1898*, pp. 348-349; Matthew, *Gladstone Diaries*, vol. XIII, p. 338. See also Gardiner, *Harcourt*, vol. II, pp. 250-251.

⁶⁸ Hamilton, Parl. Deb., 19 Dec. 1893, cols. 1771-1788.

⁶⁹ Hamilton, Parl. Deb., 19 Dec. 1893, col. 1786.

noting, for example, the way in which wooden French ships had been added to the alarmist's figures.⁷⁰ This was the result of Harcourt's influence, who with his son had 'crammed' Gladstone on the strength of the Royal Navy the previous week.⁷¹ The debate also saw the extent to which the history of 1889 was already becoming confused in people's minds: the Liberals denied they had opposed the Naval Defence Act at all, while Forwood admitted that the two power standard had actually existed in 1889.⁷² The debate was concluded by Cremer, who sought to deconstruct the scare and the manner in which it had been 'manufactured'.⁷³ There was, he said, no evidence of any public alarm over the state of the Navy; no petitions had been presented to Parliament, nor had any 'bonâfide working class organisation' come out in support of the agitators, whose public appeal did not appear to extend beyond a few Unionist journals. Although the Strangers' Gallery was crowded the benches were not, and the debate was interrupted twice in order to ascertain that enough members were present for it to continue – hardly indicative of widespread political interest.⁷⁴ The Naval Defence Act had, Cremer concluded, brought about this 'mad race for rivalry in armaments', and he felt it his duty to raise a protest on behalf of the large section of the public opposed to such measures.

Gladstone undoubtedly agreed with Cremer's summing up. His amendment to Hamilton's resolution had been passed with a good majority, but it was a vote split on party lines and hardly a counted as victory against the navalists.⁷⁵ This he admitted that same day in a diary entry which reflected on the power 'society' and the 'professionals' now held over the nation, the latter he believed did not want substantial increases:

⁷⁰ Gladstone, Parl. Deb., 19 Dec. 1893, cols. 1789-1804.

⁷¹ Patrick Jackson (ed.), *Loulou: Selected Extracts from the Journals of Lewis Harcourt (1880-1895)* (Madison, New Jersey: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2006), p. 198.

⁷² Parl. Deb., 19 Dec. 1893, col. 1783; Forwood, Parl. Deb., 19 Dec. 1893, cols. 1845-1853.

⁷³ Cremer, Parl. Deb., 19 Dec. 1893, cols. 1885-1886.

⁷⁴ See the London letters in *Birmingham Daily Post*, 20 Dec. 1893, p. 4; *South Wales Daily News*, 20 Dec. 1893, p. 5.

⁷⁵ Jenkins, *Gladstone*, pp. 609-610.

Moved my Amendment. Majority 36. The situation almost hopeless when a large minority allows itself in panic and joining hands with the professional elements works on the susceptibilities of a portion of the people to alarm.⁷⁶

It did not take long for the ‘professional elements’ to make their power felt. Over the preceding weeks the Admiralty Board had been intimating to Spencer and Kay-Shuttleworth that it was preparing to ask for a new shipbuilding programme even larger than that of the Naval Defence Act.⁷⁷ As the government spokesman for naval policy in the Commons Kay-Shuttleworth was deeply worried that Gladstone or Harcourt would destroy the government by publicly espousing ‘optimist views’ to which the Admiralty Board would object.⁷⁸ This duly occurred when, during the 19 December debate, Harcourt cited ‘the responsible professional advisers’ in support of his claim that the present state of the Navy was satisfactory. This produced a protest from the Sea Lords, sent the following day to Spencer, in which they rejected Harcourt’s summary of their attitudes; the Chancellor was forced to make a clarification on 21 December.⁷⁹ That January, Harcourt had observed that the professionals at the Admiralty and War Office were ‘absolute masters of the situation’. He had now discovered to his cost how true this was.⁸⁰ A good indication of the Board’s thinking at this time was given in a letter from John Fisher to Austen Chamberlain on 22 December, in which the former described as ‘magnificent’ the profoundly pessimistic speech of Sir Charles Dilke, who had gone even further than the Conservatives and declared that ‘as matters stand there are all the elements of a national catastrophe’.⁸¹ Dilke himself had doubts as to whether Britain could hold its own against France alone: such was the nature of the alarmism with which Harcourt and Gladstone now found themselves faced.⁸²

⁷⁶ Matthew, *Gladstone Diaries*, vol. XIII, p. 342.

⁷⁷ Smith, ‘Ruling the Waves’, pp. 42-44.

⁷⁸ Kay-Shuttleworth to Spencer, 20 Nov. 1893, quoted in Smith, ‘Ruling the Waves’, p. 43.

⁷⁹ Sea Lords to Spencer, 20 Dec. 1893 in Gordon, *Red Earl*, pp. 231-232; Harcourt, Parl. Deb., 21 Dec 1893 col. 112. Smith gives an account in ‘Ruling the Waves’, pp. 44-45, although he misattributes part of the statement: the Sea Lords did not accuse Harcourt of ‘talking of experts’, but were quoting part of Harcourt’s speech. See also Gardiner, *Harcourt*, vol. II, pp. 250-251.

⁸⁰ Harcourt to Spencer, 4 Jan. 1893 in Gardiner, *Harcourt*, vol. II, p. 227.

⁸¹ Fisher to Austen Chamberlain, 22 Dec. 1893 in Arthur J. Marder (ed.), *Fear God and Dread Nought: The Correspondence of Admiral of the Fleet Lord Fisher of Kilverstone*, vol. I (London: Jonathan Cape, 1952), p. 119. For Dilke’s speech see Parl. Deb., 19 Dec. 1893, cols. 1813-1821.

⁸² Dilke to Spencer, 17 Nov. 1893 in Gordon, *Red Earl*, p. 229.

Spencer himself did not believe that Harcourt had been wrong in his statement that the Navy was weak in its present state.⁸³ Nevertheless, as early as May 1893 he had become convinced by the Sea Lords' argument that the Royal Navy would be outnumbered by France and Russia by 1896.⁸⁴ Thus although he worked hard to cut down the estimates for 1894, he was starting from an assumption of naval weakness which ensured that even the smallest programme would be practically the same size of the Naval Defence Act.⁸⁵ The correspondence which passed from Harcourt to Spencer during September-December 1893 makes for fascinating reading.⁸⁶ The Chancellor laid out, at great length, the naval superiority of Britain, arguing that this strength was confirmed even if the country did not build another ship for four years.⁸⁷ He attacked the 'lying statements of *The Times*' and the various other exaggerated examples of alarmism in the press, which were 'everywhere put forward and universally believed'.⁸⁸ The Sea Lords, he told any of his colleagues who would listen, were whipping up a panic by consciously misrepresenting the true state of the Navy to the public. He returned repeatedly to the tactic which the Admiralty and their supporters had developed for 'lumping together... ships which will not be finished for four years and treating them on a par with ships which will be finished in a month'.⁸⁹ He pointed out that France itself was undergoing a naval scare at that very moment.⁹⁰ According to Fisher, Harcourt combined with Campbell-Bannerman to take the fight directly to the Board of Admiralty themselves.⁹¹ As Harcourt had suspected all along, however, his struggles were in vain. His arguments were well founded, but he was hamstrung by having to operate in a political framework defined by the myth of naval weakness which the Liberals had left intact and unchallenged by their failure of opposition going back at least to 1888. Whatever his efforts, the Chancellor had little support or precedent for a unified front against demands for greater spending. In early January, Harcourt, still adamant he was in the right and

⁸³ Spencer to Rosebery, 20 Dec. 1893 in Gordon, *Red Earl*, p. 232

⁸⁴ Spencer to Rosebery, 26 May 1893 in Gordon, *Red Earl*, pp. 223-224.

⁸⁵ Smith, 'Ruling the Waves', p. 46.

⁸⁶ Gardiner, *Harcourt*, vol. II, pp. 244-251.

⁸⁷ Harcourt to Spencer, 28 Sept. 1893 in Gardiner, *Harcourt*, vol. II, p. 246.

⁸⁸ Harcourt to Spencer, 20 Nov.; 9 Dec. 1893 in Gardiner, *Harcourt*, vol. II, pp. 247, 249.

⁸⁹ Gardiner, *Harcourt*, vol. II, p. 250.

⁹⁰ Gardiner, *Harcourt*, vol. II, p. 250

⁹¹ Fisher, *Records*, pp. 51-53.

cursing the weakness of Spencer, but unwilling to cause the collapse of the government, submitted to the demands of the Admirals.⁹²

The adoption of Spencer's estimates by the Cabinet was now inevitable. The only question was whether or not Gladstone, who had remained aloof until the end of December, could be convinced to stomach them.⁹³ During January and February, the Prime Minister attempted to hold out against almost his entire Cabinet, fleeing at one point to Biarritz from where his colleagues continued to receive diatribes against the 'mad and drunk' proposals.⁹⁴ He should not, however, be regarded as irrational, senile or obstinate during this time. Rather, his notes reveal a sharp mind completely aware of the geopolitical and strategic implications of the proposals.⁹⁵ He pointed out how 'absurd' it was to ignore the three naval powers – Austria, Italy and Germany – who were 'probably adverse' to France and Russia when calculating the necessary British strength. He argued, not without good reason, that the programme would increase international tensions and jealousy of Britain, that it would stimulate Franco-Russian building and perhaps even push Britain towards the Triple Alliance. He believed it 'beyond expectation' of both the Liberal party and the public, and was ever aware of 'the changed relations with the professional element' which it implied. At the heart of his protests was a profound sense that the naval programme was a betrayal of the ideals which he argued – rightly or wrongly – he had spent most of his political life defending and to which he was now more closely bound than ever.⁹⁶ Crucially, he had now become aware, as he had not been hitherto, of what a mistake the Naval Defence Act had been. The Act, he told Edward Hamilton, was solely responsible for the arms race that he believed was now leading Europe towards 'catastrophe'.⁹⁷ Yet due to his failure to oppose that Act, Gladstone, like Harcourt before him, was unable to argue that the Spencer Programme clearly broke with party policy. 'The N.D. Act was foolish',

⁹² Stansky, *Ambitions and Strategies*, pp. 24-25; Hutchinson, *Private Diaries*, p. 232; Gardiner, *Harcourt*, vol. II, pp. 251-252; Bahlman, *Diary of Edward Hamilton, 1885-1906*, p. 241.

⁹³ Matthew, *Gladstone*, pp. 348-349.

⁹⁴ See especially Stansky, *Ambitions and Strategies*.

⁹⁵ See especially notes dated 9 Jan. 1894 in Matthew, *Gladstone Diaries*, vol. XIII, pp. 355-357.

⁹⁶ Howe, 'Gladstone and Cobden', pp. 125-126.

⁹⁷ Bahlman, *Diary of Edward Hamilton, 1885-1906*, p. 236.

he wrote. 'But is a thing done'.⁹⁸ He formerly resigned on 3 March 1894, completing a process of events which had been set in motion by his abdication of responsibility during the debates on the Naval Defence Bill on 4 April 1889.

As a final point, this reassessment of Gladstone's resignation sheds new light on the Prime Minister's one ally in the Cabinet. Shaw Lefevre, the First Commissioner for Works, is often ignored or belittled by historians, dismissed as 'an admirable man much concerned with the preservation of open spaces' who acted only out of his loyalty for Gladstone.⁹⁹ While widely recognised as an excellent and energetic administrator he was not popular inside or outside of the Commons, often considered dull, long-winded and difficult to get on with.¹⁰⁰ Yet in emphasising these factors it is easy to obscure his individualism, his passionate Cobdenism and his interest and expertise in naval affairs. His maiden Commons speech had been made, with Cobden's backing, on the *Alabama* incident and he served as a junior Admiralty Minister three times between 1866 and 1880.¹⁰¹ In the early 1870s he did not shy away from presenting Gladstone with the facts of the steadily increasing costs of modern warship design, while in 1880 he played an important role convincing the Prime Minister of the necessity of increasing the size of the fleet to compensate for recent French construction.¹⁰² As the first Liberal ex-Cabinet member to vote for the Channel Tunnel and the only to vote against the third reading of the Naval Defence Bill, Shaw Lefevre emerges from the present study as the most committed and determined of Cobden's front-rank parliamentary devotees. By 1892 he harboured hopes of becoming First Lord himself, hardly an unreasonable ambition in light of his experience.¹⁰³ His article of 1891 demonstrated a complete awareness of all the various alarmist tactics for misrepresenting the state of the Navy.¹⁰⁴ Far from a man with few interests beyond the development of public parks, Shaw Lefevre entered Gladstone's fourth government as one of

⁹⁸ Matthew, *Gladstone Diaries*, vol. XIII, p. 357.

⁹⁹ Jenkins, *Gladstone*, p. 612; Stansky, *Ambitions and Strategies*, p. 30; Marder, *Anatomy*, p. 201; Allen Warren, 'Lefevre, George John Shaw-' *ODNB*; F.M.G. Willson, *A Strong Supporting Cast: The Shaw Lefevres 1789-1936*, (London: Athlone Press, 1993), pp. 312-313.

¹⁰⁰ Willson, *The Shaw Lefevres*, pp. 254-256.

¹⁰¹ Willson, *The Shaw Lefevres*, p. 178.

¹⁰² Beeler, *British Naval Policy* pp. 142-143, 261-262; Beeler, 'In the Shadow of Briggs', pp. 4-5.

¹⁰³ Willson, *The Shaw Lefevres*, p. 312.

¹⁰⁴ Shaw Lefevre, 'Naval Policy of France', p. 626.

the most developed Liberal thinkers on naval administration and strategy. That he agreed with Gladstone on what he called the ‘iniquities of Spencer’s proposals’ is therefore hardly insignificant.¹⁰⁵ As he later explained to Gladstone, he regarded the plans ‘as calculated to lead the country into the vortex of militarism, which is the curse of Europe’.¹⁰⁶ He wanted to resign in protest alongside Gladstone, but refrained only because Gladstone did not make his views on the matter public.¹⁰⁷ Nevertheless Shaw Lefevre remained publicly unrepentant, declaring in a speech at the end of 1894 that taxes must rise because the Liberals ‘had to raise a large sum of money to increase the navy in deference to the view of alarmists, mainly belonging to the property classes’, an observation which could hardly have sat well with his fellow ministers.¹⁰⁸

Alone among his colleagues, Shaw Lefevre was utterly distraught about the implications the Spencer Programme had for his own reputation and that of Liberalism more generally, ‘saying that he cannot face his constituents at Bradford on our great Naval Expenditure after speeches he has made to them’.¹⁰⁹ That such sentiments were not more common in the correspondence and diaries of the Cabinet during 1893-1894 is reflective of the extent to which liberal internationalist and anti-armament sentiment was now a minority concern at the top of the Liberal Party. Only Gladstone, Harcourt and Shaw Lefevre appear to have seriously contemplated the consequences of the proposed estimates. Although they may have denied it, with the Spencer Programme the bulk of the Liberal Party finally accepted that the demands of the Admiralty must come before any ideological or financial objections.¹¹⁰ Despite the fact that it recognised the role of the Naval Defence Act in initiating the European naval arms race, the *Daily News* begrudgingly supported the Spencer Programme, praising the government for ‘doing its duty’ and warning other nations off attempting to challenge Britain’s ‘supremacy of

¹⁰⁵ Hutchinson, *Private Diaries*, p. 242. Shaw Lefevre was more willing to compromise than Gladstone, however. Hutchinson, *Private Diaries*, p. 277.

¹⁰⁶ Shaw Lefevre to Gladstone, 6 Mar. 1894, BL, Add. MS 44153.

¹⁰⁷ Willson, *The Shaw Lefevres*, p. 313.

¹⁰⁸ *Lincolnshire Echo*, 9 Oct. 1894, p. 4. During the early twentieth century Shaw Lefevre became a prominent campaigner against naval armaments and ‘militarism’, chairman of the Cobden club and one of the last and most vehement defenders of Cobden-Gladstone Liberalism. See Willson, *The Shaw Lefevres*, pp. 332-333.

¹⁰⁹ Lewis Harcourt, quoted in Willson, *The Shaw Lefevres*, p. 313. See also Hutchinson, *Private Diaries*, p. 242.

¹¹⁰ Smith, ‘Ruling the Waves’, p. 50.

the sea', a phrase which Gladstone himself abhorred.¹¹¹ The same desperate hope that Britain could halt the naval arms race through more shipbuilding was evident in the language used by the Rosebery government to justify its programme. 'We may hope', asserted Kay-Shuttleworth on presenting the plans to parliament, 'that it will be once for all understood that nothing which any other State can do will prevent our maintaining the security of our commerce, the defence of our possessions throughout the world, and the command of the seas.'¹¹² The most telling indication of the direction liberalism was now heading was Cobden's transformation into a navalist icon. At the same time as Gladstone was delivering 'Cobdenite sayings' to his Cabinet, he was being publicly berated for ignoring his idol's famous 'hundred millions' speech [Figure 28].¹¹³ In retirement, Gladstone's views remained entirely unchanged, having lost faith in his former colleagues' ability to resist Admiralty demands:¹¹⁴

What is now most uppermost in his mind is what he calls the spirit of Jingoism, under the name of Imperialism, which is now so prevalent. He could not, he said, denounce it in loud enough tones; but neither could he lay it all at the door of one side. It was Lord Spencer with his naval programme who had begun it. Since then things had gone from bad to worse. All sense of decency was gone. It was enough to make Peel and Cobden turn in their graves.¹¹⁵

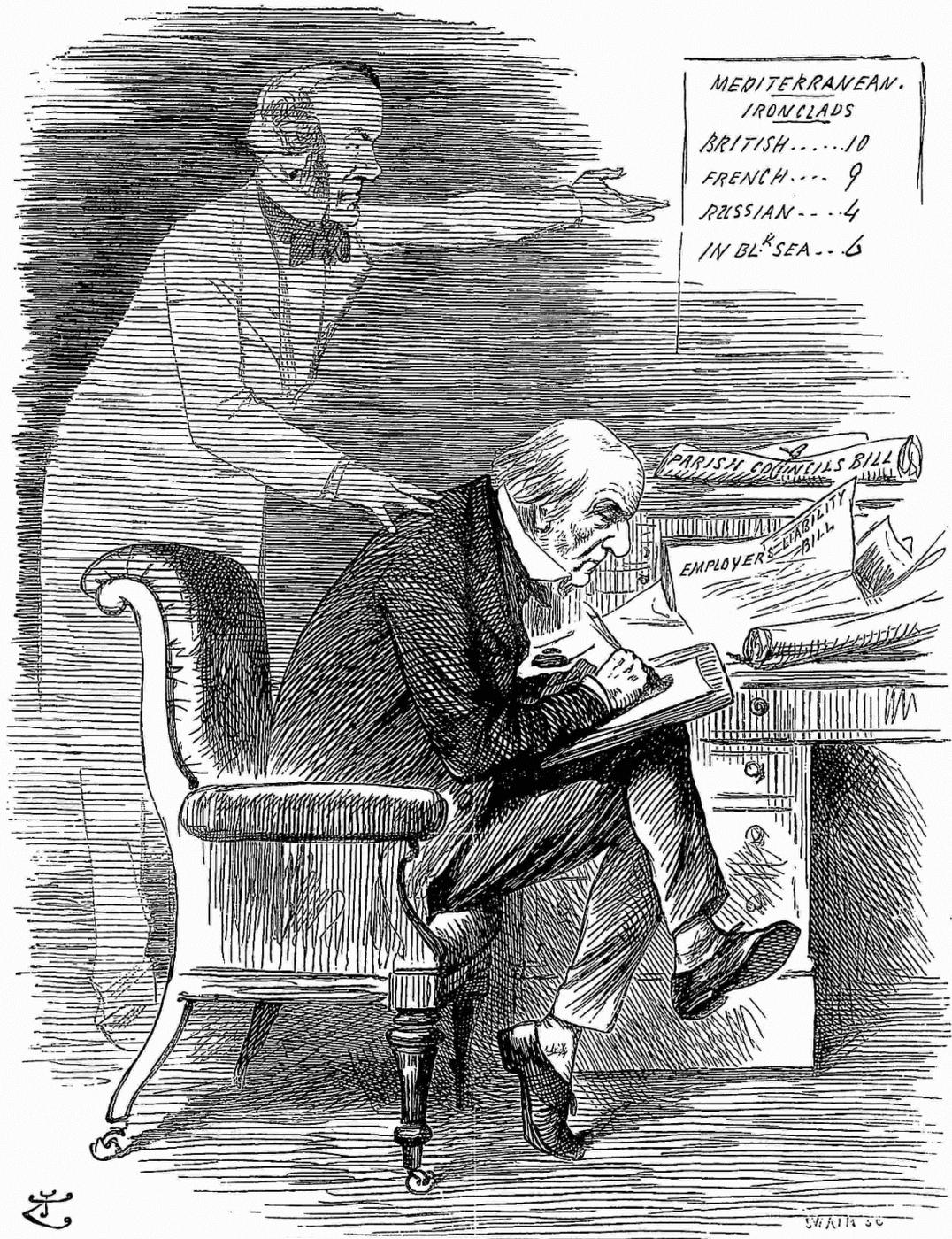
¹¹¹ *Daily News*, 16 Mar. 1894, p. 4. For the paper on the Naval Defence Act see 9 Jan. 1894, pp. 5. For Gladstone on naval 'supremacy' see Gordon, *Red Earl*, p. 267.

¹¹² Sir U. Kay-Shuttleworth, Parl. Deb., 20 Mar. 1894, col. 767.

¹¹³ Matthew, *Gladstone Diaries*, vol. XIII, p. 356. For one of many examples see Dilke, Parl. Deb., 19 Dec. 1893, col. 1819.

¹¹⁴ Hamer, *Papers of Lord Rendel*, p. 115.

¹¹⁵ Bahlman, *Diary of Edward Hamilton, 1885-1906*, p. 345.



“RULE, BRITANNIA!” (?)

SHADE OF COBDEN (quoting from his own speech at Rochdale, June 26, 1861). “I AM NOT ONE TO ADVOCATE THE REDUCING OF OUR NAVY IN ANY DEGREE BELOW THAT PROPORTION TO THE FRENCH NAVY WHICH THE EXIGENCIES OF OUR SERVICE REQUIRE. WE HAVE A LEGITIMATE PRETENSION TO HAVE A LARGER NAVY THAN FRANCE. . . . IF THE FRENCH GOVERNMENT SHOWED A SINISTER DESIGN TO INCREASE THEIR NAVY TO AN EQUALITY WITH OURS, I SHOULD VOTE A HUNDRED MILLIONS STERLING RATHER THAN ALLOW THAT NAVY TO BE INCREASED TO A LEVEL WITH OURS. . . . I HAVE SAID SO IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS, AND I REPEAT IT TO YOU.”

Figure 28: “Rule, Britannia!” (?)’.

Gladstone ignores the navalist ‘shade of Cobden’. *Punch*, 18 Nov. 1893, p. 235.

Conclusion

A Prehistoric Doctrine?

While everywhere the legions form,
While bristle camps, while arsenals swarm,
Think you alone to stem the storm
With “Peace, Retrenchment, and Reform”?

‘To John Bright, Radical Philanthropist’, *Sporting Times*, 3 Jan. 1880,
p. 3.



“It had been said that such ideas as he held were prehistoric doctrines. Well, he would rather have the doctrine of a prehistoric statesman than the ravings of an up-to-date Jingo. (*Laughter.*) What was the good of a man if he had to walk about in heavy armour all his life. (*Laughter.*)”—*Sir Wilfrid Lawson, March 6.*

Figure 29: The ‘prehistoric statesman’ and the ‘up-to-date jingo’.

Dressed in a bearskin tunic, Lawson faces the First Lord of the Admiralty George Goschen, who is encased in full plate armour with the prow of a warship protruding from his chest. *Punch*, 14 Mar. 1896, p. 131.

On 6 March 1896 Sir Wilfrid Lawson rose in the House of Commons and moved a nominal reduction to that year's naval estimates, at that date the largest ever submitted to parliament in peacetime.¹ He did so, he told the House, to condemn the 'stupendous' naval programme of the government and to raise a voice in support of 'the good old cause'.² At this remark many in the House began to laugh; they had heard a variation of Lawson's speech at almost every debate on the Army and Navy estimates for as long as most there could remember. 'Yes', he replied despairingly, 'the whole thing had become a joke now.' Not only in the Commons: he believed that MPs represented the views of their constituents when they laughed at peace, retrenchment and reform. Nevertheless, he persisted. The proposed spending, he insisted, represented a desperate attempt to make the country impregnable, inspired by an irrational paranoia about the intentions of Britain's neighbours. The only result would be the financial and moral ruination of the country: 'What was the good of a man', he asked, 'if he had to walk about in heavy armour all his life?' The previous day Sir Charles Dilke had directly attacked Lawson's invocation of Sir Robert Peel as a 'prehistoric doctrine'.³ 'Well,' replied Lawson, 'he would far rather have the doctrine of a prehistoric statesman than the ravings of an up-to-date jingo' [Figure 29].⁴ On 9 March his amendment was defeated by 45 votes to 262.

By the late 1890s 'retrenchment' was but a memory. In 1889 the annual naval estimates breached £15,000,000; by 1899 they had reached £26,000,000, and still the navalists argued that not enough was being spent.⁵ Lawson's characterisation of jingoism as 'up-to-date' in contrast with the old-fashioned and dying creed of Peel-Cobdenism therefore captured the political mood well.⁶ As outlined in Part I, defence pessimists had determinedly cultivated an image of themselves as riding the 'spirit of the age'. They had methodically deconstructed the 'civilised' view of relations between states, recasting conceptions of international relations in terms of competition and struggle and normalising the idea of Britain as a nation under challenge, weak

¹ Parl. Deb., 6 Mar. 1896, cols. 400-404; Marder, *Anatomy*, p. 263. This speech is also recounted in Marder, *Anatomy*, pp. 57-58.

² Parl. Deb., 6 Mar. 1896, col. 401.

³ Parl. Deb., 5 Mar. 1896, col. 250.

⁴ Parl. Deb., 6 Mar. 1896, col. 402.

⁵ Sumida, *Naval Supremacy*, p. 344.

⁶ Howe, *Free Trade*, pp. 191-192.

and in danger of a sudden foreign assault. By exploiting the authority of their professional expertise, armed forces officers presented themselves as men of the future, of 'science', whose views must be taken seriously and deferred to by 'amateur' civilians. This message they spread through sophisticated media techniques which exploited the limited nature of nineteenth century public opinion to present themselves as articulating the majority view of the nation. This proved especially effective in the aftermath of the 1884 Reform Act, which placed 'the people' at the forefront of political debate as never before. In contrast, internationalists like Lawson were unable or unwilling to adopt countermeasures which equalled those of their opponents. While retired admirals wrote to the papers and held meetings on the latest developments in naval theory, Lawson's language remained that of Cobdenite moralism, his diatribes confined almost exclusively to the House of Commons. Consequently, it proved easy for defence pessimists to paint their opponents as naïve Cobdenites, while simultaneously appropriating Cobden's memory for their own ends. In this respect the description of Lawson as 'prehistoric' seems apposite. He was the personification of all the problems liberal internationalism laboured under and seemed unable to escape.

While the peace movement struggled during the 1890s, their opponents lost no time in securing their victory.⁷ With the foundation of the Navy League in 1895 and the National Service League in 1902, defence pessimism became formerly institutionalised.⁸ Taking their inspiration from the agitations of the 1880s, these 'strictly non-political' organisations brought together professional expertise within organised propaganda machines. The personal link between these Leagues and the agitation of 1888 was particularly marked: Beresford became associated with both organisations, Phipps-Hornby was inaugural President of the Navy League and Wolseley, increasingly obsessed with the fear of invasion, joined the National Service League.⁹ Even though these organisations struggled to expand their membership beyond traditional Tory middle-class constituencies, they proved more than a match for the divided and disorganised

⁷ Ceadel, *Semi-Detached Idealists*, pp. 16-19.

⁸ Coetzee, *Party or Country*, pp. 15, 39.

⁹ Coetzee, *Party or Country*, pp. 17, 34-35, 41.

anti-armament movement, which never escaped its reliance on outdated Cobdenite mantra, making little headway even after the Liberal victory of 1906.¹⁰ Indeed, an important development of the period before 1914 was the extent to which defence pessimism became a cross-bench concern. A substantial number of Liberal MPs were involved in Navy League activities, for example.¹¹ As the Channel Tunnel case study demonstrates, liberal intellectuals were becoming increasingly uneasy with Gladstonian foreign policy.¹² The Liberal party itself was deeply split between the extremes of ‘Palmerstonian’ ‘Liberal Imperialists’ and Cobdenism, a problem that only began to be checked when Campbell-Bannerman assumed the leadership in 1899.¹³

The rise of the ‘Liberal Imps’, as Campbell-Bannerman derisively called them, reflected the culmination of the ‘imperial’ turn in British politics which had started back in the 1870s under Disraeli.¹⁴ This created much fertile ground for defence pessimists, for the greater the focus on imperial issues, the easier it became to emphasise how overstretched were the Empire’s forces. Ironically, an imperial crisis in 1898 over control of the Nile at Foshoda, in the Sudan, actually emphasised how little Britain had to fear from its continental neighbours. The respective fleets were mobilised, but instead of showing its weaknesses, the Royal Navy was immediately recognised to be more than a match for its French rival.¹⁵ Nevertheless, this display did little to challenge the myth of weakness. Two years later, pessimists used the excuse of the South African War to whip up a major French invasion scare which dominated headlines for weeks in the summer of 1900, on the premise that European nations were preparing for a ‘bolt from the blue’ invasion while the British Army was away in the veldt.¹⁶

¹⁰ Coetzee, *Party or Country*, pp. 29-32, 40-41, 115; Howard Weinroth, ‘Left-Wing Opposition to Naval Armaments in Britain before 1914’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 6 (1971), pp. 93-120.

¹¹ Matthew Johnson, ‘The Liberal Party and the Navy League in Britain before the Great War’, *Twentieth Century British History*, 22 (2011), pp. 137–163.

¹² Bradley, *Optimists*, p. 227.

¹³ Hamer, *Liberal Politics*, pp. 288-290; Wilson, *CB*, p. 282.

¹⁴ Wilson, *CB*, p. 301.

¹⁵ Marder, *Anatomy*, pp. 320-321.

¹⁶ Moon, ‘Invasion of the United Kingdom’, ch. 3.

In fact, it was not until Norman Angell published his *Great Illusion* in 1909 that internationalists finally obtained arguments which could equal the force and intellectual power of the pessimistic world-view. Reading his book, it is clear that the ‘illusion’ Angell attacked was essentially the image of ‘uncivilised’ warfare for economic gain that J.F. Maurice, Wolseley, Beresford and their supporters had constructed during the 1880s, and which Angell believed had become ‘universally accepted axioms of international politics’ by the twentieth century.¹⁷ Yet Angell’s book arrived too late to halt the anti-internationalist advance. In this it was only continuing the tradition of liberal internationalist failure to react effectively to attacks. In both the Channel Tunnel and Naval Defence Act, this thesis has shown how supporters of the one and opponents of the other started with many advantages, not least a public which was largely on their side. Yet while the anti-Tunnellers and navalists strenuously pushed their views in every available forum, their opponents limited themselves to parliamentary speeches, seemingly unaware that the battle was already lost. Distracted by internal party concerns – not least the Irish issue – and overawed by the pessimistic arguments, Liberals beat hasty retreats at almost every turn, leaving only the most persistent and in many respects least suitable, such as Wilfrid Lawson, to speak for them. No man was more culpable in aiding this retreat than Gladstone himself, who personified the problem of delayed reaction. Too late, he recognised the great threat which ‘militarism’ now posed to his ideals. By the time he came to devote his vast energies to the problem, his allies in the Cabinet had already succumbed. Within the political circles in which he moved, defence pessimism had been installed as the ‘spirit of the age’.

Conclusion

Between 1880 and 1894, British politics underwent a revolution in the way it approached matters affecting national defence. In 1880, civilian ministers set the policy objectives and financial limits with little concern for the likelihood of a sudden and unprovoked attack on the United Kingdom. Britain, it was assumed, would have ample time to prepare for conflict, while its navy was more than a match for any likely aggressor. Crucially, parliamentary control over

¹⁷ Norman Angell, *The Great Illusion: A Study of the Relation of Military Power in Nations to their Economic and Social Advantage* (London: Heinemann, 1910), pp. 12-23.

the defence policy and the budget was paramount; armed forces officers were involved only insofar as their advice was requested. Most front-rank British politicians, including Gladstone and Salisbury, adhered to this consensus.

Over the following fourteen years, however, a network of armed forces officers, ably assisted by a large circle of Conservative parliamentarians and members of the press, successfully overturned this status-quo. Exploiting their positions as ‘non-partisan’ defence experts, naval officers perpetually criticised the Royal Navy, while their army colleagues methodically constructed a scenario of future war ‘from the point of view of our finding the French army on our breakfast tables with *The Times* tomorrow morning.’¹⁸ Armed with a profoundly pessimistic understanding of international relations, they relentlessly attacked their opponents as fanatical economists or naïve cosmopolitans. At the same time, they steadily worked to chip away at the independence of parliamentary oversight, demanding that any major decisions that affected the defence of the realm must first be sanctioned by the relevant professionals. This was a key development, overthrowing decades of established practise; from this point onwards, defence policy was directed primarily by the war plans of the soldiers and sailors, not the diplomatic and financial priorities of the Foreign Office or Treasury. Importantly, the defence pessimists had succeeded in converting the Conservative party wholesale towards their point of view, using it to cement their victory. To this the Liberal party had little answer. With many high-ranking Liberals themselves convinced by the arguments of Wolseley and Beresford, the party became dangerously divided and unable to mount a serious counter-attack. With their failure to contest the Conservative decisions of 1889, the Liberals acquiesced in the transformation of defence policy which ultimately forced Gladstone out of office in 1894, after finding himself outmanoeuvred by his naval ‘advisors’. Far from doing ‘the work of peace and the work of goodwill among men’ that he had promised in 1880, by the 1890s Britain had rejected one high-profile attempt to draw closer to Europe, and instead precipitated a costly and futile naval arms race.

¹⁸ Fleetwood Wilson to John Ardagh, 15 Aug. 1889, quoted in Moon, ‘Invasion of the United Kingdom’, p. 85.

This thesis has detailed how this transformation came about. Drawing heavily from the contemporary writings of armed forces officers and their supporters, Chapter One shows how mid-century anxieties were revived and modified to construct a powerful myth of British vulnerability, ‘defence pessimism’, which comprehensively rejected the certainties upon which British security was founded. By deconstructing the reality of the French threat, the Chapter argues that there was little real threat from this quarter, a conclusion which seriously undermines assumptions about Britain’s geopolitical position held by both contemporaries and historians. Developing this theme in the context of literature on the rise of professionalism, Chapter Two explains how the armed forces officers exploited societal trends to position themselves as disinterested professional patriots, at odds with the selfish and ignorant political classes. This created a powerful rhetoric of expert authority which was used to spread defence pessimism, capturing the Conservative Party and outmanoeuvring the Liberals. Chapter Three demonstrates how these forces played out within the public sphere. Working with recent studies which emphasise the nuances of nineteenth century ‘public opinion’, the Chapter shows how, by using the largely apathetic position of the people towards defence to their advantage, pessimists deployed their strong links with the London media to create public opinion in their own image, overwhelming the disparate and disorganised Liberal attempts to resist them. The result was to stoke a fear of panic, especially within the government, which became a sort of self-fulfilling prophesy, each new ‘scare’ serving to convince politicians of the truth of the pessimistic case. Acting together, these three themes – pessimism, professionalism and public opinion – created a political environment which progressively constricted policymakers’ room for manoeuvre. By the 1890s, the sort of approach to defence common in 1880 had become politically untenable, at least from the perspective of those sitting around the Cabinet table.

The case studies in Parts II and III put this analysis into effect. For the Channel Tunnel, the hopeful Cobdenism of its supporters was swept aside by Wolseley’s uncompromising warnings about a ‘bolt from the blue’ invasion. Eight years later, the Naval Defence Act was passed by a Conservative government leaning heavily on anxiety and paranoia about foreign ‘jealousies’ to

justify what was a largely unnecessary programme of naval expansion. Closely dissecting press and ‘public’ opinion, both studies reveal how these forces were manipulated by the pessimists to give a false impression of the country’s mood which persists to this day – a wider implication of this thesis’ conclusions is that the British public were far from the enthusiastic imperialists or navalists they are often made to appear. Similarly, through analysis of the relevant Commons debates and divisions, the two studies have reversed our understanding of the position of the Tunnel and the Act within parliament. This is especially the case for the Liberal Party, which is shown to have opposed the Naval Defence Act and to have been much more in favour of the Channel Tunnel than hitherto assumed, illustrating, among other things, the extent to which Liberal MPs failed to act in a coordinated manner during these years. Finally, by closely reading the available documents, both studies show the situation within the leadership of the Conservative and Liberal Parties, and explain the difficulties which Gladstone and Salisbury had in reacting to developments. It seems safe to conclude that, in 1880, neither of these men wished to see the Channel Tunnel prevented or the naval estimates substantially increased. By the end of the decade, however, they had both been forced to come to terms with this new reality. After limited resistance, Salisbury accepted and embraced the growth of defence pessimism and the newfound power of the armed forces. Gladstone, meanwhile, saw his career destroyed in a futile attempt to prevent it.

By placing the myth of British weakness at the heart of its approach, this thesis has developed a much-neglected aspect of contemporary British politics. It has brought a fresh-perspective to the history of civil-military relations, demonstrating the surprising extent to which armed forces officers influenced culture and politics well beyond their formal roles. At the same time, it has seriously questioned the extent to which the British people bought in to the pessimism, building on an expanding historiographical trend problematising the idea of ‘public opinion’. It has also incorporated the Channel Tunnel and Naval Defence Act, for too long isolated within their own historiographical traditions, back into the narrative of the 1880s. Far from mere footnotes, these two controversies were key battles in the struggle over the direction of Britain’s foreign and

defence policies. In both cases it has demonstrated that unanimity was far from the rule and that the move towards a 'realist' conception of international affairs was by no means a smooth or uncontested process.

Reflecting on the historiography of the Great War, Margaret MacMillan warns that 'there is a danger in so concentrating on the factors pushing Europe towards war that we may neglect those pulling the other way, towards peace.'¹⁹ War in 1914, she argues, was not inevitable: in the same way, one implication to be drawn from this thesis is that the retreat of liberal internationalism during the 1880s was not preordained. There was a very real prospect of the Channel Tunnel being constructed, at least until late 1881. Likewise, even up to mid-1888 there was little obvious reason why Britain should kick-start a naval arms race in Europe. Had the former come to pass or the latter been prevented, the prospects for Anglo-French co-operation and European relations more generally might have been transformed, altering the course of twentieth century history.²⁰ While it is easy to dismiss such counterfactuals, an appreciation of them helps to understand the scale of the internationalist failure and anti-internationalist success during these years. That the hopes of 'peace, retrenchment and reform' were so dashed between 1880 and 1894 can justly be regarded as a tragedy, not merely for contemporary liberal internationalists, but for all Europe.

¹⁹ Margaret MacMillan, *The War that Ended Peace* (London: Profile Books, 2013), p. xxvii.

²⁰ See especially the conclusion to Parry, 'Crawling towards God', p. 35; Matthew, *Gladstone: 1875-1898*, pp. 318-319. Wilson reflects on the diplomatic, cultural and strategic consequences of a Channel Tunnel completed prior to 1900 in *Tunnel Visions*, p. xiv.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Local Debating Societies on the Channel Tunnel, 1882-1893
 [British Newspaper Archive: search conducted October – November 2017]

Society	Motion	Result	Source
Chatteris Debating Society (Ely)	The Channel Tunnel: Will it be for the benefit or otherwise of the nation?	A large majority was in favour of the Tunnel	<i>Cambridge Independent Press</i> , 28 Jan. 1882, p. 7.
Hendon Debating Society	That the advantages to be derived from the proposed Channel Tunnel do not warrant the execution of that scheme, having in view the increased facilities for invasion which would be afforded thereby	Carried by the casting vote of the chairman	<i>Hendon & Finchley Times</i> , 25 Mar. 1882, p. 5.
Ventnor Junior Debating Society (Isle of Wight)	A resolution expressing the belief that the Channel Tunnel would be successful, and the hope that it would be finished	‘Carried almost unanimously’	<i>Hampshire Telegraph</i> , 17 May 1882, p. 4.
Whitefield Debating Society	That the construction of the proposed Channel Tunnel would conduce to the best interests of the English nation	Carried by nine votes to seven	<i>Gloucester Citizen</i> , 24 Oct. 1882, p. 4.
Oakham Institute Debating Society	The Channel Tunnel would be of benefit to this country	‘rejected by an overwhelming majority’	<i>Grantham Journal</i> , 4 Nov. 1882, p. 2
Penzance Debating Society	That the Channel Tunnel is not desirable	Affirmed by a majority of seven	<i>The Cornish Telegraph</i> 30 Nov. 1882, p. 4.
Newland Literary and Debating Society (Lincoln)	That the Channel Tunnel be allowed to proceed	Resolution lost 17 to 12	<i>Lincolnshire Chronicle</i> , 8 Dec. 1882, p. 8.
Oakes Baptist Chapel Mutual Improvement Society (Lindley)	The Channel tunnel scheme; would it be beneficial to national Interests?	Carried in the negative by a large majority	<i>Huddersfield Chronicle</i> 16 Dec. 1882, p. 8.

Society	Motion	Result	Source
Wellingborough Debating Society	The proposed Channel Tunnel	Nine in favour of Tunnel, ten against (a number of non-voters)	<i>Northampton Mercury</i> , 23 Dec. 1882, p. 6.
The debating class, St. Leonards Mechanics' Institute.	Is the Construction of the Channel Tunnel Advisable?	Seven speakers, two in favour	<i>Hastings and St Leonards Observer</i> , 23 Dec. 1882, p. 3.
Colchester Parliamentary Debating Society	That, in the opinion of this House, the proposed construction of a submarine Channel Tunnel connecting us with the Continent, would be dangerous to the national safety and commercial interests of the Empire. Amendment: that...a Tunnel...will confer a great blessing on the Commerce and will tend to foster the friendship between the two nations	Amendment lost 35 to 39, original motion carried unanimously	<i>Essex Standard</i> , 13 Jan. 1883, p. 5.
Westgate (Baptist) Chapel, and the Horton-on-lane Mutual Improvement Societies	Would the Channel Tunnel endanger the interests of England?	Affirmative 22, negative 26	<i>Leeds Times</i> , 20 Jan. 1883, p.8
Berkhamsted Debating Society	That neither from a commercial or national point of view would the proposed Channel Tunnel be of benefit to England	Two for, five against	<i>Hertford Mercury and Reformer</i> , 17 Feb. 1883, p. 3.
Hackney Parliamentary Debating Society	That in the opinion of this House, a tunnel connecting England with the Continent would be fraught with danger to this country	'The "ayes" had it'	<i>Shoreditch Observer</i> , 17 Feb. 1883, p. 3.
Washford Debating Society	That this society regards with approval the proposed Channel Tunnel, and believes it would be conducive to the social and commercial well-being of the country	'lost by a majority of one only'	<i>West Somerset Free Press</i> , 27 Oct. 1883, p. 5; 10 Nov., p. 5.

Society	Motion	Result	Source
Bible Christian College Debating Society, (Shebbear, Devon)	A Channel Tunnel between England and France is both expedient and desirable.	Twenty for, seventeen against	<i>Western Times</i> , 27 Nov. 1883, p. 8.
Tunbridge Wells Debating Club	That the advantages of a submarine tunnel between England and France are more than counterbalanced by the disadvantages	The ayes have it	<i>Kent & Sussex Courier</i> , 14 Dec. 1883, p. 6.
Swindon Debating Society	Would the construction of the Channel Tunnel prove a benefit to the country?	Exactly split	<i>Swindon Advertiser</i> , 23 Feb. 1884, p. 3
Aylesbury Debating Society	The Proposed Channel Tunnel	Motion in favour carried eleven votes to two	<i>Bucks Herald</i> 12 April 1884, p. 5
Tonbridge Debating Society	The Channel Tunnel Scheme	'A favourable resolution was passed'	<i>Sevenoaks Chronicle and Kentish Advertiser</i> , 18 Nov. 1887, p. 5.
Sevenoaks Social and Debating Club	Debate on the Channel Tunnel	Five for, 12 against	<i>Kent & Sussex Courier</i> , 18 Nov. 1887, p. 8.
Bath Debating Society	That the proposed Channel Tunnel would be both unsafe and unnecessary	Carried by a majority of two	<i>Bath Chronicle</i> , 28 Nov. 1889, p. 3.
Icklesham Debating Society	A motion in favour of the Channel Tunnel	Lost by two votes	<i>Sussex Agricultural Express</i> , 5 Dec. 1891, p. 2.
Folkestone Debating Society	Would the Channel Tunnel be a source of danger to Britain?	large majority against Tunnel	<i>Folkestone Herald</i> , 12 Dec. 1891, p. 12.
St. Albans Debating Society	The desirability of constructing the Channel Tunnel	Eleven to two in favour of Tunnel	<i>Herts Advertiser</i> , 14 Jan. 1893, p. 5.

Commentary on Commons Divisions, Appendices 2-4.

The following data is taken from the official parliamentary division lists of the House of Commons, held in the library of the Institute of Historical Research.¹ These list the names of every MP who voted in the division and how they voted, either Aye (A) or No (N). The names in the tables below are reproduced as they appear in the division lists, except in the case of ‘Mc and ‘Mac’ prefixes, which are shortened with an apostrophe in the original. In cases where more than one MP had the same last name, the lists provide their constituency in abbreviated form, which is also retained in the tables below.

The original division lists do not include party affiliations. These have been added from a variety of sources, principally the relevant *Who's Who of British Members of Parliament*.² The classification of Irish Nationalist members in the 1880-1885 parliament is less straightforward, however, as there was little coherence in the group during this time. Consequently, only members listed as ‘Parnellites’ by Alan O’Day in his study of the party during this period have been categorised under the umbrella of the Irish Parliamentary Party; all other ‘nominal’ Home Rulers, with the exception of the Conservative A.H. Bellingham, have been classified as Liberals.³

Party abbreviations:

C – Conservative

IPP – Irish Parliamentary Party

L – Liberal

LU – Liberal Unionist

¹ Institute of Historical Research, BB.4016/Div.

² Michael Stenton (ed.), *Who's Who of British Members of Parliament*, vol. I, 1832-1885 (Hassocks, Sussex: Harvester Press, 1976); Michael Stenton and Stephen Lees (eds.), *Who's Who of British Members of Parliament*, vol. II, 1886-1918 (Hassocks, Sussex: Harvester Press, 1978). See Lubenow, *Parliamentary Politics*, App. 1, for a discussion of classifying party affiliations, including the classification of a number of the more independent MPs.

³ O’Day, *Irish Nationalism*, pp. 12-16.

Notes:

Radical: Liberal listed as a Radical MP in Thomas Heyck's *Dimensions of British Radicalism*.

Those marked with an asterisk 'denotes those referred to as Radicals in reliable contemporary sources', while those marked with a question mark 'possibly were Radical, but the evidence is ambiguous'.⁴

Post-1886 divisions only:

Radical Unionist: Liberal Unionist listed as a Radical in Heyck.⁵

IAL: Listed as a Vice President of the International Arbitration League in 1891.⁶

Limp: Liberal listed as a Liberal Imperialist in H.C.G. Matthew's *The Liberal Imperialists*.⁷

Channel Tunnel divisions only:

Knowles: Signed the *Nineteenth Century* 'protest' against the Channel Tunnel.

SCRC: Director or shareholder of the Submarine Continental Railway Company, 1881 or 1886.⁸

CTC: Shareholder of the Channel Tunnel Company, 1881.⁹

⁴ Heyck, *Dimensions of British Radicalism*, apps. B, C.

⁵ Heyck, *Dimensions of British Radicalism*, app. E.

⁶ *The Arbitrator*, July 1891, pp. 76-77.

⁷ Matthew, *Liberal Imperialists*, app. 1.

⁸ TNA, RAIL 779/9; RAIL 779/10.

⁹ TNA, RAIL 779/45.

Appendix 2: Divisions on Channel Tunnel Bills, 1884 and 1885

Name	Party	Notes	14 May 1884	12 May 1885
Ackers, Benjamin St. John	C			N
Acland, C.T. Dyke (Cornw. E.)	L		N	
Acland, Sir T. Dyke (Devon. N.)	L		N	
Agnew, William	L	Radical	A	
Ainsworth, David	L	Radical	A	
Allen, Henry Geo. (Pembroke)	L		N	
Allen, W.S. (Newc. Under Lyme)	L	Radical	N	
Allman, Richard Lane	L		N	
Allsopp, Charles	C		N	
Amherst, Wm. Amherst Tyssen	C		N	
Anderson, George	L	Radical*	A	
Archdale, William Humphreys	C		A	
Armitstead, George	L	Radical	N	N
Asher, Alexander	L		N	N
Ashley, Hon. Evelyn M.	L			N
Ashmead-Bartlett, Ellis	C		N	N
Bailey, Sir Joseph Russell	C			N
Baldwin, Enoch	L		N	N
Balfour, Arthur Jas. (Hertf. Bo.)	C	Knowles		N
Balfour, J. Spencer (Tamworth)	L		N	N
Balfour, Rt. Hn. J. Blair (Clackm.)	L		N	N
Balfour, Sir Geo (Kincardinesh.)	L		A	A
Barclay, James William	L	Radical*; Knowles		N
Barne, Fred. St. John Newdegate	C		N	N
Barnes, Alfred	L		N	N
Barran, John	L	Radical*	N	N
Barry, John	IPP			A
Barttelot, Sir Walter B.	C		N	N
Bass, Sir Arthur (Staffordsh. E.)	L	SCRC	N	
Bateson, Sir Thomas	C	Knowles		N
Baxter, Rt. Hon. William Edward	L	Radical*	A	A

Name	Party	Notes	14 May 1884	12 May 1885
Beach, W.W. Bramst. (Hants. N)	C		N	N
Bellingham, Alan Henry	C		N	N
Bentinck, Cavendish	C	SCRC	A, Teller	A
Beresford, G. De la Poer	C		N	N
Biddulph, Michael	L		N	N
Biggar, Joseph Gillis	IPP		A	A
Birkbeck, Edward	C		N	N
Blackburne, Col. John Ireland	C		N	N
Blake, John Aloysius	IPP		A	
Bolton, Joseph Cheney	L	Radical		N
Boord, Thomas William	C			N
Borlase, William Copeland	L	Radical	A	A
Brand, Hon. Henry Robert	L			N
Brassey, Henry A. (Sandwich)	L			N
Brassey, Sir Thomas (Hastings)	L	CTC	N	
Brett, Reginald Balliol	L			A
Briggs, William Edward	L	Radical*	N	
Bright, Jacob	L	Radical*		A
Brinton, John	L		N	
Broadhurst, Henry	L	Radical*	N	N
Broadley, William H. Harrison	C		N	N
Brodrick, Hon. St. John	C		N	N
Brooke, Lord	C			N
Brooks, Maurice (Dublin)	IPP		A	
Brooks, W. Cunliffe (Chesh. E.)	C		N	
Brown, Alexander Hargreaves	L	Radical*	N	N
Bruce, Hon. Thos. (Portsm'th)	C			N
Bruce, Rt. Hn. Lord Chas. (Marl.)	L			N
Bruce, Sir H. Hervey (Coleraine)	C		N	
Bryce, James	L	Radical*	A	A
Buchanan, Thomas Ryburn	L	Radical*	N	N
Bulwer, James Redfoord	C		N	
Burghley, Lord	C			N
Burrell, Sir Walter Wyndham	C			N
Burt, Thomas	L	Radical*; Knowles	N	N
Buszard, Marston Clarke	L	Knowles	N	N
Buxton, Francis Wm. (Andover)	L			A

Name	Party	Notes	14 May 1884	12 May 1885
Buxton, Sir Robt. J. (Norf. S.E.)	C		N	N
Buxton, Sydney C. (Peterboro)	L	Radical*	N	N
Caine, William Sproston	L	Radical*		N
Callan, Philip	IPP			A
Cambell, Richard F.F. (Ayr)	L		N	N
Cameron, Charles (Glasgow)	L	Radical	A	A
Cameron, Donald (Inverness)	C			N
Campbell, James A. (Glas. Univ.)	C		N	N
Campbell, Sir Geo. (Kirkcaldy)	L	Radical*		A
Campbell-Bannerman, Rt. Hn. H.	L	Radical*		N
Carbutt, Edward H.	L		A	A
Carden, Sir Robert Walter	C			N
Carington, Hon. Rupert	L			N
Cartwright, William C.	L			N
Cavendish, Lord Edward	L		N	N
Cecil, Lord Eustace H. B. G.	C	Knowles	N	N
Chamberlain, Rt. Hon. Joseph	L	Radical*	N	N
Chambers, Sir Thomas	L			A
Chaplin, Henry	C			N
Cheetham, John Frederick	L	Radical		N
Childers, Rt. Hon. Hugh C. E.	L		N	N
Christie, William Langham	C			A
Churchill, Lord Randolph	C	CTC		N
Clark, Stewart (Paisley)	L		N	N
Clifford, Charles Cavendish	L	Radical?	N	N
Clive, Col. Hon. G. Windsor	C		N	N
Close, Maxwell Charles	C		N	
Coddington, William	C		A	A
Cohen, Arthur (Southwark)	L	SCRC		N
Cole, Viscount	C			N
Colebrooke, Sir Thomas Edward	L		N	N
Collings, Jesse	L	Radical*	A	
Collins, Eugene	IPP			A
Collins, Thomas (Knaresboro')	C	Died Nov.1884	N	
Colman, Jeremiah James	L			N
Compton, Francis	C			N
Corbet, Wm. Joseph (Wicklow)	IPP		A	A
Corry, James Porter	C			N

Name	Party	Notes	14 May 1884	12 May 1885
Cotes, Charles Cecil	L		N	
Courtauld, George	L		A	N
Courtney, Leonard Henry	L	Radical*		A
Cowen, Joseph	L	Radical*		A
Cowper, Hon. Henry F.	L		N	N
Creyke, Ralph	L		N	N
Crichton, Viscount	C		N	
Cropper, James	L			N
Cross, John Kynaston (Bolton)	L	Radical*	N	N
Cross, Rt. Hn. Sir Rd. A. (Lanc.)	C	Knowles	N	N
Cubitt, Rt. Hon. George	C		N	
Cunliffe, Sir Robert Alfred	L			N
Currie, Sir Donald	L		N	
Curzon, Major Hon. Montagu	C		N	N
Dalrymple, Charles	C		N	
Davenport, H.T. (Staffords. N.)	C		N	N
Davenport, W.B. (Warwicks. N.)	C	Knowles	N	
Davey, Horace	L	Knowles	N	
Davies, David (Cardigan)	L	Radical*		N
Davies, Richard (Anglesey)	L	Radical		N
Davies, William (Pembrokesh.)	L	Radical?	A	A
Dawnay, Col. Hon. L.P. (Thirsk)	C		N	
Dawnay, Hn. G.C. (Yorksh. N. R.)	C		N	
Dawson, Charles	IPP		A	A
De Ferrieres, Baron	L			N
De Wormes, Baron Henry	C			N
Deasy, John	IPP		A	
Dickson, Thomas A. (Tyrone)	L			A
Digby J.K.D. Wingfield (Som.)	C			N
Digby, Col. Hon. E.	C		N	
Dilke, Rt. Hon. Sir Charles	L	Radical*	N	N
Dillwyn, Lewis Llewelyn	L	Radical*; Knowles	N	N
Dixon-Hartland, Fred. Dixon	C		N	N
Dodds, Joseph	L	CTC	N	N
Douglas, A. Akers-	C			N
Duckham, Thomas	L			N
Duff, Robert William	L		N	N, Teller

Name	Party	Notes	14 May 1884	12 May 1885
Dyke, Rt. Hon. Sir William Hart	C			N
Ebrington, Viscount	L		N	
Ecroyd, William Farrer	C			N
Edwards, Henry (Weymouth)	L		A	A
Egerton, Adm. Hn. F. (Derby, E.)	L		N	
Egerton, Hn. Alg. Fulke (Wigan)	C		N	
Egerton, Hon. Tatton (Cheshire)	C			N
Elcho, Lord	C		N	
Elliot, G.W. (Northallerton)	C			N
Elliot, Hn. Art. R.D. (Roxburgsh)	L	Radical?	N	N
Errington, George	IPP		N	
Estcourt, George Sotheron	C			N
Evans, Thomas William	L		N	
Ewart, William	C		N	N
Ewing, Archibald Orr	C		N	N
Fairbairn, Sir Andrew	L		N	N
Farquharson, Dr. Robert	L	Radical	A	A
Feilden, Lieut-General	C		N	N
Ferguson, R.C. Munro- (Ross)	L			N
Ferguson, Robert (Carlisle)	L	Radical	N	N
Ffolkes, Sir Wm. Hovell Browne	L		N	N
Finch, George H.	C		N	
Finch-Hatton, Hn. Murray E.G.	C			N
Findlater, William	L		N	
Fitzmaurice, Lord Edmond	L		N	N
Fitzwilliam, Hon. C.W. (Malton)	L		N	
Fletcher, Sir Henry	C		N	
Flower, Cyril	L	Knowles	N	N
Floyer, John	C			N
Foljambe, Cecil G. S. (Notts, N.)	L		N	
Foljambe, Fran. J.S. (Retford, E.)	L		N	N
Forster, Rt.Hn. W.E. (Bradford)	L			N
Forster, Sir Charles (Walsall)	L	Radical		N
Fort, Richard	L		N	N
Foster, Wm. Hen (Bridgnorth)	C			N
Fowler, William (Cambridge)	L	Radical	N	N

Name	Party	Notes	14 May 1884	12 May 1885
Fremantle, Hon. Thomas F.	C			N
Freshfield, Charles Kaye	C		N	N
Fry, Lewis (Bristol)	L	Radical		N
Fry, Theodore (Darlington)	L	Radical	N	N
Galway, Viscount	C		N	
Garnier, John Carpenter	C		N	
Gathorne-Hardy, Hon. John S.	C			N
Gibson, Rt. Hon. Edward	C		N	N
Giffard, Sir Hardinge Stanley	C		N	
Giles, Alfred	C		N	N
Gladstone, Herbert J. (Leeds)	L		N	
Gladstone, Rt. Hon. W. E.	L		N	N
Glyn, Hon. Sydney Carr	L		N	N
Goldney, Sir Gabriel	C		A	A
Gordon, Lord D. (Hunts.)	L			N
Gordon, Sir Alex. (Aberdeen, E.)	L		A	
Gorst, John Eldon	C		N	N
Gourley, Edward Temperley	L	Radical*	A	A
Gower, Hon. E.F. Leveson	L		A	
Grant, Andrew (Leith)	L	Radical	N	N
Grant, Daniel (Marylebone)	L		A	A
Grant. Sir G. Macpherson (Elgin)	L		N	N
Greene, Edward	C		N	N
Gregory, George B.	C		N	N
Grey, Albert H.G. (Northum.S)	L		A	
Grosvenor, Lord Richard	L	CTC	N, Teller	
Gunter, Colonel Robert	C			N
Gurdon, Robert, Thornhagh	L			N
Halsey, Thomas Frederick	C			N
Hamilton, Ion Trant (Dublin Co.)	C		N	N
Hamilton, J. Glen. C. (Lanark S.)	L			N
Hamilton, Lord Cl. John (L'pool)	C			N
Hamilton, Rt. Hn. Lord G. (Midx)	C		N	N
Harcourt, Edw. Wm. (Oxf. Co.)	C			N
Harcourt, Rt. Hn. Sir W. (Derby)	L		N	N
Hardcastle, Joseph Alfred	L	Knowles	N	N
Harrington, Timothy	IPP			A
Harris, Wiliam James	C		N	A

Name	Party	Notes	14 May 1884	12 May 1885
Hartington, Marquis of	L		N	N
Harvey, Sir Robert Bateson	C			N
Hastings, George Woodyatt	L		N	
Hay, Rt. Hn. Admiral Sir J. C. D.	C	Knowles	N	N
Hayter, Sir Arthur Divett	L		N	N
Healy, Timothy Michael	IPP		A	A
Henderson, Frank	L	Radical		A
Heneage, Edward	L			N
Henry, Mitchell	IPP			A
Hicks, Edward	C		N	N
Hildyard, T. Blackb. Thoroton	C			N
Hill, Alex. Staveley (Staff. W.)	C			N
Hill, Lord Arthur Wm. (Down)	C			N
Hill, Thos. Rowley (Worcester)	L	Radical	A	A
Holden, Isaac	L	Radical		A
Holland, Samuel (Merionethsh.)	L	Radical?	N	
Holland, Sir H.T. (Midhurst)	C	Knowles	N	N
Hollond, John Robt. (Brighton)	L	Radical		N
Holms, John	L	Radical*		N
Hope, Rt. Hon. Alex. Beresford	C	Knowles	N	N
Hopwood, Charles Henry	L	Radical*	A	A
Houldsworth, William Henry	C			N
Howard, E. Stafford (Cumb, E.)	L		N	
Howard, Geo. Jas. (Cumb E.)	L	Knowles	N	N
Howard, James (Bedfordshire)	L	Radical?	A	
Hubbard, Rt. Hon. John	C			N
Jackson, Wm. Lawies	C			N
James, Charles (Merthyr Tyvil)	L	Radical	N	N
James, Hn. Walter H. (Gatesh'd)	L	Radical		A
Jenkins, David James (Penryn)	L		A	A
Jenkins, Sir John J. (Carmar)	L	Radical	N	A
Johnson, Edward (Exeter)	L		A	A
Kennard, Coleridge J. (N. Sarum)	C			N
Kennard, Colonel (Lymington)	C			N

Name	Party	Notes	14 May 1884	12 May 1885
Kennaway, Sir John Henry	C	Knowles		N
Kenny, Matthew Joseph	IPP		A	A
Kensington, Lord	L		N, Teller	N, Teller
King Harman, Edward Robert	C		N	
Kingscote, Colonel	L		N	
Kinnear, John	L		A	
Knight, Frederick Winn	C			N
Knightley, Sir Rainald	C		N	N
Labouchere, Henry	L	Radical*	N	N
Lacon, Sir Edmund H.K.	C			N
Lalor, Richard	IPP			A
Lawrance, J. Compton (Linc. S.)	C			N
Lawrence, Sir J. Clarke (Lamb.)	L			N
Lawrence, Sir Trevor (Sur. M.)	C		N	
Lawrence, William (London)	L		N	N
Lawson, Sir Wilfrid	L	Radical*	A	
Lea, Thomas (Donegal)	L		N	N
Leahy, James	IPP		A	A
Leamy, Edmund	IPP		A	
Leatham, Edw. Aldam (Hudd.)	L	Radical*	N	N
Lee, Henry (Southampton)	L	Radical		A
Lefevre Rt. Hn. Geo. John Shaw	L	Radical	N	N
Leighton, Sir Baldwin (Salop, S.)	C			N
Lever, John Orrell	IPP		N	A
Levett, Theophilus John	C		N	N
Lewis, Charles Edward	C			N
Lewisham, Viscount	C			N
Lindsay, Sir Robert Loyd	C			N
Lloyd, Morgan (Beaumaris)	L	Radical*	N	N
Lloyd, Sampson S (War. Co.)	C			N
Loder, Robert	C			N
Long, Walter Hume	C	Knowles		N
Lopes, Sir Massey	C		N	N
Lowther, Hn. W. (Westmorel'd)	C		N	N
Lowther, James W. (Rutland)	C		N	N
Lowther, Rt. Hon. J. (Lincsh. N.)	C			N
Lubbock, Sir John	L	Knowles		N
Lusk, Sir Andrew	L		A	A

Name	Party	Notes	14 May 1884	12 May 1885
Lynch, Nicholas	IPP		A	A
Lyons, Robert Dyer	L		A	
Macartney, J.W. Ellison	C			N
Macfarlane, Donald Horne	IPP			N
MacIver, David	C		A	A
Mackie, Robert Bownas	L	Radical	N	
Mackintosh, Charles Fraser	L	Radical?	A	A
Macliver, Peter Stewart	L	Radical		N
Makins, Colonel	C		N	N
Mappin, Frederick Thorpe	L		N	N
March, Earl of	C			N
Marjoribanks, Edward	L			N
Marriott, William Thackeray	L		N	
Marum, Edw. Mulhallen	IPP			A
Mason, Hugh	L	Radical*		N
Master, Thos. William Chester	C			N
Maxwell, Sir H.E. (Wigtownsh)	C			N
Mayne, Thomas	IPP		A	A
McArthur, Alexander (Leic.)	L	Radical	A	A
McCarthy, Justin	IPP		N	
McCoan, James Carlile	IPP		N	N
McGarel-Hogg, Sir James	C		N	N
McIntyre, Aeneas John	L			N
McKenna, Sir Joseph Neal	IPP		A	A
McLagan, Peter	L		A	
McLaren, Charles B. B.	L	Radical*	A	
McMahon, Edward	IPP		A	A
Meagher, William	IPP			A
Meldon, Charles Henry	IPP		A	
Mellor, John William	L			A
Miles, Sir Philip J.W. (Som. E.)	C		N	N
Mills, Sir Charles Henry	C		N	N
Milner, Sir Frederick	C			A
Molloy, Bernard C.	IPP		A	
Monk, Charles James	L		A	A
Moore, Arthur	IPP		N	
Moreton, Lord	L		N	
Morgan, Hon. Fred. (Monm. Co.)	C		N	N
Morgan, Rt. Hn. G.O. (Denbigh.)	L	Radical*		N
Morley, Arnold (Nottingham)	L	Radical*	A	

Name	Party	Notes	14 May 1884	12 May 1885
Morley, John (Newcastle)	L	Radical*		A
Moss, Richard	C		N	N
Mowbray, Rt. Hon. Sir. John E.	C		N	N
Mulholland, John	C		N	
Muntz, Philip A. (WarwickCo.)	C			N
Muntz, Philip Henry	L	Radical	N	
Newdegate, Charles Newdigate	C		N	
Nicholson, W. Newzam (Newark)	C		N	N
Nicholson, Wm. (Petersfield)	L		N	N
Noel, Ernest	L			N
Nolan, Colonel	IPP		A	
Northcote, Henry S. (Exeter)	C			N
Northcote, Rt. Hn. Sir S. (Devon)	C			N
O'Beirne, Colonel	IPP			N
O'Brien, Sir Patrick (King's Co.)	IPP		N	N
O'Brien, William (Mallow)	IPP		A	A
O'Conner, John (Tipperary)	IPP			A
O'Connor, A. (Queen's Co.)	IPP		A	A
O'Connor, T.P. (Galway)	IPP			A
O'Donoghue, The	IPP		N	
Onslow, Denzil	C			A
O'Shea, William Henry	IPP			N
O'Sullivan, William Henry	IPP		A	A
Otway, Sir Arthur	L	Knowles	N	N
Paget, Rich. Horner (Som. M.)	C			N
Paget, Thos. Tertius (Leic. S.)	L			N
Palmer, Charles Mark (Dur. Co.)	L		A	A
Parker, Charles Stuart	L		N	
Patrick, Robert Wm. Cochran.	C		N	N
Pease, Arthur (Whitby)	L			N
Pease, Sir Joseph W. (Dur. S.)	L		A	
Peddie, John Dick	L	Radical*	A	A
Pell, Albert	C			N
Pemberton, Edward Leigh	C			N
Percy, Earl (Northumberl'd N.)	C		N	N
Percy, Lord Algernon (Wes'r)	C		N	N
Philips, R. Needham	L		A	A

Name	Party	Notes	14 May 1884	12 May 1885
Phipps, Chas. N.P. (Westbury)	C			N
Picton, James Allanson	L	Radical*		A
Playfair, Rt. Hon. Sir Lyon	L			A
Portman, Hon. W. Henry B	L		N	N
Potter, Thomas Bayley	L	Radical*	A	A
Powell, W. Rice H.	L	Radical*	N	N
Power, John O'Connor (Mayo)	IPP		A	A
Power, P.J. (Waterford Co.)	IPP			A
Power, Richard (Waterford)	IPP		A	A
Pugh, Lewis Pugh	L		N	
Puleston, John Henry	C		A	A
Raikes, Rt. Hon. Henry Cecil	C			N
Ramsden, Sir John	L			N
Rankin, James	C			N
Rathbone, William	L	Radical?		N
Read, Clare Sewell	C		N	
Redmond, John E (New Ross)	IPP			A
Redmond, W.H.K. (Wexford)	IPP		A	A
Reed, Sir Edw. James (Cardiff)	L		A	
Reid, Robt. Threshie (Hereford)	L			N
Rendel, Stuart	L	Radical*	N	
Repton, George William	C		N	N
Richard, Henry	L	Radical*	N	N
Richardson, Thos. (Hartlepool)	L			N
Ridley, Sir Matthew W.	C		N	N
Ritchie, Charles Thomson	C		N	
Roberts, John	L	Radical*		N
Robertson, Henry	L			A
Roe, Thomas	L	Radical	A	A
Rogers, J.E. Thorold (Southw'k)	L	Radical*		A
Rolls, John Allan	C		N	N
Ross, Alex. Henry (Maidstone)	C		N	N
Round, James	C		N	N
Roundell, Charles Savile	L		N	N
Russell, Geo. W.E. (Aylesbury)	L	Radical*	N	N
Russell, Lord Arthur (Tavistock)	L		N	N
Russell, Thomas (Glasgow)	L			A
Ruston, Joseph	L	Radical*		N

Name	Party	Notes	14 May 1884	12 May 1885
Rylands, Peter	L	Radical*	N	N
Salt, Thomas	C		N	N
Samuelson, Henry (Frome)	L	Radical	A	
Samuelson, Sir Bernhard (Banb.)	L			A
Sclater-Booth, Rt. Hon. George	C		N	
Scott, Montagu D. (Sussex, E.)	C		N	
Seely, Charles (Lincoln)	L	Radical?		N
Seely, Charles (Nottingham)	L			N
Sellar, Alexander Craig	L	Radical		N
Selwin-Ibbetson, Sir Henry J.	C		N	N
Severne, John Edmund	C		N	N
Sexton, Thomas	IPP		A	A
Shaw, Thomas (Halifax)	L	Radical*	A	A
Sheil, Edward	IPP		A	
Slagg, John	L	Radical		A, Teller
Small, John Francis	IPP		A	A
Smith, Abel (Herts)	C		N	N
Smith, Eustace (Tynmouth)	L			N
Smith, Samuel (Liverpool)	L		N	
Smithwick, John Francis	IPP			A
Smyth, Patrick Jas. (Tipperary)	IPP		N	
Spencer, Hon. Charles Robert	L		N	
St. Aubyn, Sir John (Corn. W.)	L		N	N
St. Aubyn, Walter M. (Helston)	C		N	
Stanhope, Hon. Edward	C	Knowles		N
Stanley, Edw. James (Som. W.)	C		N	
Stanley, Hn. E. Lyulph (Oldham)	L	Radical*	A	
Stanley, Rt. Hon. Col. (Lanc.N)	C			N
Stansfeld, Rt. Hon. James	L	Radical*		A
Stanton, Walter John	L		N	N
Stebble, Lieut.-Col. Richard Fell	L			A
Stevenson, James Cochran	L	Radical	N	N
Storer, George	C			N
Stuart, Hen. Villiers (Waterford)	L			N
Stuart, James (Hackney)	L	Radical*		N
Sullivan, T.D.	IPP		A	A

Name	Party	Notes	14 May 1884	12 May 1885
Summers, William	L	Radical	A	A
Sutherland, Thomas	L			N
Sykes, Christopher	C		N	
Talbot, John Gilbert (Oxf. Univ.)	C		N	N
Tavistock, Marquis of	L			N
Taylor, Peter Alfred	L	Radical*	N	
Thomasson, John Pennington	L	Radical		N
Thompson, Thos. C. (Durh. City)	L	Radical*	A	A
Thornhill, Arthur J. (Camb. Co.)	C			N
Thornhill, Thomas (Suffolk, W.)	C		N	N
Tillett, Jacob Henry	L	Radical	A	
Tollemache, H.J.	C			N
Tollemache, Hn. Wilbraham	C		N	N
Tottenham, Arthur Loftus	C		N	N
Tremayne, John	C			N
Trevelyan, Rt. Hon. George Otto	L	Radical*	N	N
Vivian, Arthur P. (Cornwall W.)	L		N	
Vivian, Sir Hen. Hussey (Glam.)	L		N	
Walker, Samuel	L		N	N
Wallace, Sir Richard	C	CTC		N
Walrond, Cal. William Hood	C		N	N
Walter, John	L		N	
Walter, John	L			N
Warton, Charles Nicholas	C		N	N
Watkin, Edward	L	SCRC	A, Teller	A, Teller
Watney, James	C			N
Waugh, Edward	L			A
Webster, Dr. John	L	Radical	N	N
West, Henry W.	L		N	N
Whitbread, Samuel	L			N
Whitley, Edward	C			N
Whitworth, Benjamin	IPP		A	A
Wiggin, Henry	L		N	N
Williams, S.C. Evans (Radnor)	L	Radical*	N	
Williamson, Stephen	L	Radical	A	A
Willis, William	L	Radical	A	A
Wills, William Henry	L			N
Willyams, E.W. Brydges (Truro)	L	Radical	N	

Name	Party	Notes	14 May 1884	12 May 1885
Wilmot, Sir Henry (Derbysh. S.)	C		N	N
Wilmot, Sir J. Eardley (Warw. S.)	C		N	N
Wilson, Chas. Hy. (Kings. on H.)	L	Radical	A	
Wilson, Isaac (Middlesborough)	L	Radical?	N	A
Wilson, Sir Matthew (Yk. W.R.)	L		N	N
Wodehouse, Edmond Robert	L		N	N
Woodall, William	L	Radical	A	A
Wortley, Charles Beilby Stuart-	C			N
Wroughton, Philip	C			N
Wyndham, Hon. Percy	C		N	
Yorke, John Reginald	C			N

Appendix 3: Divisions on Channel Tunnel Bills, 1887-1890

Name	Party	Notes	3 Aug. 1887	27 June 1888	5 June 1890
Abraham, William (Glamorgan)	L	IAL; Radical*		A	A
Abraham, William (Limerick)	IPP				A
Acland, A.H. Dyke (Yorks.)	L	Radical			N
Addison, John	C			N	
Agg-Gardner, James T.	C	IAL	N	N	
Ainslie, William George	C		A		A
Aird, John	C			N	
Akers-Douglas, Aretas	C		N, Teller	N, Teller	N, Teller
Allison, Robert Andrew	L	Radical	A	A	
Allsopp, Hon. Geo. (Worcester)	C			N	N
Allsopp, Hon. Percy (Taunton)	C			A	
Ambrose, William	C			N	N
Amherst, Wm. Amhurst Tyssen	C			N	N
Anderson, Charles Henry	L		A	A	
Anstruther, Col. Lloyd (Suffolk)	C		N	N	N
Anstruther, H.T. (St. Andrews)	LU		N	N	N
Asher, Alexander	L			A	
Ashmead-Bartlett, Ellis	C		N	N	N
Asquith, Herbert Henry	L	Limp; Radical*			A
Atherley-Jones, L.	L			N	N
Austin, John	L			A	A
Baden-Powell, Sir Geo. Smyth	C			N	N
Baily, Sir Joesph R.	C		N	N	N
Baird, John George Alexander	C		N		N
Balfour, Gerald William (Leeds)	C				N
Balfour, Rt. Hon. A.J. (Manch'r)	C	Knowles	N		
Balfour, Sir Geo (Kincardinesh.)	L		A	A	
Ballantine, W. Henry Walter	L	Radical*		N	N
Banes, Major George Edward	C		A	N	
Barclay, James William	LU	Radical Unionist; Knowles			N

Name	Party	Notes	3 Aug. 1887	27 June 1888	5 June 1890
Baring, Thos. Chas. (London)	C			N	
Barnes, Alfred	LU			N	N
Barran, John	L	IAL; Radical*		N	N
Barry, A.H. Smith (Hunts.)	C		N	N	N
Barry, Francis Tress (Windsor)	C				N
Bartley, George C. T.	C			N	N
Barttelot, Sir Walter B.	C		N	N	N
Bates, Sir Edward	C			N	
Baumann, Arthur Antony	C		N	N	N
Bazley-White, J.	C			N	N
Beach, Rt. Hn. Sir M. H. (Bristol)	C			N	N
Beach, W.W. Bramston (Hants.)	C		N	N	N
Beadel, William James	C		N	N	N
Beaumont, H.F. (Yorks. W.R.)	LU	IAL		N	
Beaumont, W.B. (Northumb.)	L				A
Beckett, Ernest W. (Yorks N.R.)	C			N	N
Beckett, William (Notts.)	C				N
Bective, Earl of	C			N	
Bentinck, Lord H.C. (Norfolk)	C			N	
Bentinck, Rt.Hn. G.C. (White'n)	C		A	A	A
Bentinck, Wm. G.C. (Penryn)	C		A	N	A
Beresford, Lord C.W. De la Poer	C		N	N	
Bethell, Commander	C		N	N	N
Bickford-Smith, William	LU				N
Biddulph, Michael	LU			N	N
Biggar, Joseph Gillis	IPP		A	A	
Bigwood, James	C		N	N	N
Birkbeck, Sir Edward	C			N	N
Blane, Alexander	IPP		A		A
Blundell, Col. Hen. Blundell H.	C		N	N	N
Bolitho, Thomas Bedford	LU			N	N
Bolton, Jos. Cheney (Stirlingsh.)	L	Radical		N	N
Bolton, T.D. (Derbyshire)	L	Radical			A
Bolton, Thomas H. (St.Pancras)	L				N

Name	Party	Notes	3 Aug. 1887	27 June 1888	5 June 1890
Bond, George Hawkesworth	C		N		N
Bonsor, Henry Cosmo Orme	C		N	N	
Boord, Thomas William	C			N	N
Borthwick, Sir Algernon	C		N	N	
Boulnois, Edmund	C				N
Bowles, Capt. Henry Ferryman	C				N
Bradlaugh, Charles	L	Radical*	A	A	A
Bridgeman, Col. Hon. Fran. C.	C		N	N	N
Bright, Jacob (Manchester)	L	IAL; Radical*		A	
Bristowe, Thomas Lynn	C			N	N
Broadhurst, Henry	L	Radical*	N		
Brodrick, Hon. St. John	C		N	N	N
Brookfield, A. Montagu	C		N	N	
Brooks, Sir William Cunliffe	C			N	
Brown, Alex. H. (Salop)	LU	IAL; Radical Unionist		N	N
Bruce, Gainsford (Finsbury)	C				N
Bruce, Lord Henry (Wiltshire)	C		N	N	N
Brunner, John Tomlinson	L	IAL; Radical		A	A
Bryce, James	L			A	A
Buchanan, Thomas Ryburn	L	Radical		A	
Burdett-Coutts, W.	C				N
Burghley, Lord	C		N	N	
Burt, Thomas	L	IAL; Radical*; Knowles	N	N	N
Buxton, Sydney Charles	L	IAL; Radical*	N	N	
Byrne, Garrett Michael	IPP			A	
Caine, William Sproston	LU	Radical Unionist		A	A
Caldwell, J.	LU		A		A
Cameron, Charles (Glasgow)	L	IAL; Radical*		A	A
Campbell, Henry (Fermanagh)	IPP		A		A
Campbell, James A (Glas. Univ.)	C		N	N	N
Campbell, Sir Arch. (Renfrewsh.)	C			N	
Campbell, Sir Geo. (Kirkcaldy)	L	IAL; Radical	A	A	A
Campbell-Bannerman, Rt. Hn. H	L	Radical*		A	A
Carew, James Laurence	IPP			A	A
Carmarthen, Marquess of	C		N	N	
Cavan, Earl of	L			A	A

Name	Party	Notes	3 Aug. 1887	27 June 1888	5 June 1890
Chamberlain, Rich. (Islington)	LU	Radical Unionist		N	N
Chamberlain, Rt. Hon. J. (Birm.)	LU	Radical Unionist			N
Chance, Patrick Alexander	IPP		A		
Channing, Francis Allston	L	IAL; Radical*	N	A	A
Chaplin, Rt. Hon. Henry	C		N	N	N
Charrington, Spencer	C		N	N	N
Childers, Rt. Hon. Hugh C.E.	L			A	A
Churchill, Rt.Hn. Lord Randolph	C	CTC		N	
Clancy, John Joseph	IPP			A	
Clark, Dr. G.B. (Caithness- sh.)	L	IAL; Radical*		A	
Clarke, Sir Edward (Plymouth)	C			N	N
Cobb, Henry Peyton	L	IAL; Radical*	A	A	A
Cochrane-Baillie, Hon. C.	C		N		
Coddington, William	C			A	
Coghill, Douglas Henry	LU		N	N	N
Coleridge, Hon. Bernard	L	IAL; Radical*			A
Collings Jesse	LU	Radical Unionist	A		
Colman, Jeremiah James	L			A	A
Colomb, Sir John Chas. Ready	C		N	N	
Commins, Andrew	IPP			A	
Compton, Francis (New Forest)	C		N	N	N
Condon, Thomas Joseph	IPP			A	A
Connolly, Laurence	IPP		A		
Conway, Michael	IPP		A	A	A
Conybeare, Chas. A. Vansittart	L	IAL; Radical*		A	A
Cooke, C. W. Radcliffe	C		N	N	N
Corbet, Wm. Joseph (Wicklow)	IPP		A		
Corbett, Archibald C. (Glasgow)	LU	Radical Unionist		N	
Cornwallis, F.S. Wykeham	C				N
Corry, Sir James Porter	C		N	N	
Cossham, Handel	L	Radical*	A		
Cotton, Col. Edw. Tho. D.	C		N	N	
Courtney, Leonard Henry	LU	Radical Unionist	A	A	A
Cox, Joseph Richard	IPP		A	A	A
Cozens-Hardy, Herbert Hardy	L			N	N

Name	Party	Notes	3 Aug. 1887	27 June 1888	5 June 1890
Cranborne, Viscount	C		N	N	N
Craven, Joseph	L	IAL; Radical		A	A
Crawford, Wm. (Durham, Mid.)	L	Radical*		A	
Cremer, William Randal	L	IAL; Radical*		A	A
Crilly, Daniel	IPP			A	A
Cross, Herb. Shepard (Bolton)	C		N	N	N
Cross, Hon. Wm. H. (Liverpool)	C				N
Crossley, Edward (Yorks. W.R.)	L			A	
Crossley, Sir Savile B. (Suffolk)	LU			N	
Crossman, General Sir William	LU	Radical Unionist	N		
Cubitt, Rt. Hon. George	C			N	N
Curzon, Viscount (Bucks.)	C			N	N
Dalrymple, Sir Charles	C		N	N	N
Darling, Charles John (Deptford)	C				N
Davenport, Harry T. (Staffsh.)	C			N	
Davenport, W. Bromley (Chesh.)	C	Knowles	N		
De Cobain, Edw. Samuel Wesley	C			N	
De Lisle, Edwin	C		N		N
De Worms, Rt. Hn. Baron Henry	C		N	N	N
Deasy, John	IPP		A	A	
Dickson, Thomas A. (Dublin)	L			A	
Dillwyn, Lewis Llewelyn	L	Radical*; Knowles		N	N
Dimsdale, Baron Robert	C		N	N	N
Dixon, George (Birmingh.)	LU	Radical Unionist		A	
Dixon-Hartland, Fred. Dixon	C		N	N	N
Donkin, Richard Sims	C			N	
Dorington, Sir John Edward	C		N	N	N
Duff, Robert William	L		N		
Dugdale, John Stratford	C				N
Duncan, Col. Francis	C		N	N	
Duncombe, Arthur	C			N	
Dyke, Rt. Hon. Sir William Hart	C		N	N	N
Ebrington, Viscount	LU		N		
Edwards-Moss, Tom C.	C			N	N

Name	Party	Notes	3 Aug. 1887	27 June 1888	5 June 1890
Egerton, Hon. Alf. J.F. (Lanc.)	C		N	N	
Egerton, Hon. Tatton (Cheshire)	C			N	N
Elcho, Lord	C			N	N
Elliot, Geo. Wm. (Yorks. N.R.)	C			N	N
Elliot, Hn. Art. R.D. (Roxburghs)	LU		N	N	
Elliot, Hn. Hugh F.H. (Ayrsh.)	LU			N	N
Ellis, James (Leicestersh.)	L	IAL	N	A	A
Ellis, John Edward (Notts.)	L	IAL; Radical*			N
Ellis, Thos. Edw. (Merionthsh.)	L	Radical*		A	
Elton, Charles Isaac	C			N	N
Esmonde, Sir Thomas	IPP		A	A	
Esslemont, Peter	L	IAL; Radical*	A	A	
Evans, Francis Henry	L	Radical			A
Evans, Samuel T. (Glamorgan)	L				A
Evelyn, William John	C		N		
Evershed, Sydney	L	IAL		N	N
Ewart, Sir William	C		N	N	
Ewing, Sir Archibald Orr	C			N	N
Eyre, Colonel Henry	C			N	N
Farquharson, Dr. R. (Aberd'sh)	L		A		A
Farquharson, H.R. (Dorsetsh.)	C			N	N
Feilden, Lieut.-Gen. (Lanc.N.)	C			N	N
Fellowes, Ailwyn Edward	C				N
Fenwick, Charles	L	IAL; Radical	A	A	A
Ferguson, R.C. Munro (Leith)	L	Limp	N	N	N
Fergusson, Rt. Hn. Sir J. (Manc'r)	C		N	N	N
Field, Admiral	C			N	
Fielden, Thomas (Lanc. S.E.)	C			N	
Finch, George H.	C		N	N	
Finlay, Robert	LU		N	N	
Finucane, John	IPP		A	A	A
Firth, Joseph Firth Bottomley	L	Radical*		A	
Fisher, William Hayes	C		N	N	N
Fitz Wygram, Sir Frederick	C			N	N

Name	Party	Notes	3 Aug. 1887	27 June 1888	5 June 1890
Fitzgerald, J. Gubbins (Longf'd)	IPP				A
FitzGerald, R. Uniacke Penrose	C		N	N	N
Fitzwilliam, Hn W.H.W. (Donc.)	LU			N	
Fitzwilliam, Hn W.J.W. (Peterb.)	LU			N	
Fletcher, Sir Henry	C		N	N	N
Flower, Cyril	L	Radical; Knowles		A	A
Flynn, James Christopher	IPP		A	A	A
Foley, Patrick James	IPP	IAL	A	A	
Foljambe, Cecil G.S.	L			N	N
Folkestone, Viscount	C			N	
Forster, Sir Charles (Walsall)	L			A	A
Forwood, Arthur Bower	C		N	N	N
Fowler, Sir Robert N. (London)	C		N		N
Fox, Dr. Joseph Francis	IPP		A	A	
Fraser, Gen. Charles Crauford	C		N	N	N
Fry, Theodore (Darlington)	L	Radical			N
Fulton, James Forrest	C			N	
Gardner, Richardson- (Windsor)	C			N	
Gaskell, Chas. Geo. Milnes-	L			N	N
Gathorne-Hardy, Hn. J.S. (Kent)	C		N	N	
Gedge, Sydney	C			N	N
Gent-Davis, Robert	C		N	N	
Gibson, John George	C		N		
Giles, Alfred	C			N	N
Gilhooly, James	IPP		A	A	
Gill, Thomas P.	IPP		A	A	A
Gilliat, John Saunders	C		N	N	N
Gladstone, Herbert J. (Leeds)	L				A
Gladstone, Rt. Hon. W.E.	L			A	A
Godson, Augustus Frederick	C				N
Goldsmid, Sir Julian	LU	Radical Unionist; SCRC		N	
Goldsworthy, Major-General	C		N	N	N
Gorst, Sir John Eldon	C		N	N	N
Goschen, Rt. Hon. Geo. Joachim	LU		N	N	N
Gourley, Edward Temperley	L	IAL; Radical*		A	A

Name	Party	Notes	3 Aug. 1887	27 June 1888	5 June 1890
Graham, Robert Cunninghame	L	Radical		A	A
Gray, Charles Wing (Essex)	C			N	N
Green, Sir Edward (Wakefield)	C			N	
Greenall, Sir Gilbert	C			A	
Greene, Edward (Suffolk)	C			N	N
Grey, Sir Edward (Northum.)	L	IAL; Limp; Radical		N	
Grimston, Viscount	C		N		N
Grotrian, Frederick Brent	C			N	N
Grove, Sir Thomas Fraser	L	IAL		N	
Gully, William Court	L	IAL; Radical			N
Gunter, Colonel	C			N	N
Gurdon, Robert Thornhagh	LU		N	N	N
Hall, Alexander Wm. (Oxford)	C			N	N
Hall, Charles (Cambridgeshire)	C		A	N	N
Halsey, Thomas Frederick	C		N	N	N
Hambro, Col. Charles J.T.	C		A		A
Hamilton, Col. Chas. E. (South'k)	C			A	A
Hamilton, Lord Cl.J. (Liv'pool)	C		N	N	
Hamilton, Lord Ernest (Tyrone)	C		A		
Hamilton, Rt. Hn. Lord G. (Midx.)	C			N	N
Hamley, Gen. Sir Edw. Bruce	C		N	N	N
Hanbury, Robert William	C		N	N	
Hanbury-Tracy, Hon. F.S.A.	L	IAL			A
Hankey, Frederick Alers	C			N	N
Hardcastle, Edward (Salford)	C			N	
Hardcastle, Frank (Lanc. S.E.)	C		N	N	
Harland, Sir Edward Alers	C				N
Harrington, E. (Kerry)	IPP		A	A	A
Harrington, Timothy (Dublin)	IPP		A	A	
Harris, Mathew	IPP		A	A	
Harrison, Harry	IPP				A
Hartington, Marquis of	LU		N		N
Hastings, George Woodyatt	LU			N	
Hayden, Luke Patrick	IPP		A	A	A

Name	Party	Notes	3 Aug. 1887	27 June 1888	5 June 1890
Hayne, Charles Seale-	L	IAL	N	N	N
Healy, Maurice (Cork)	IPP		A	A	A
Heath, Arthur Raymond	C			N	N
Heathcote, Captain Edwards-	C			N	
Heneage, Rt. Hon. Edward	LU		N	N	N
Herbert, Hon. Sidney	C		N	N	N
Hermon-Hodge, Robt. Trotter	C			N	
Hervey, Lord Francis	C		N	N	
Hill, Col. Edwd. Stock (Bristol)	C		N	N	
Hill, Lord Athur Wm. (Down)	C		N	N	N
Hingley, Benjamin	LU	Radical Unionist		N	N
Hoare, Edw. Brodie (Hampstead)	C			N	N
Hoare, Samuel (Norwich)	C		N	N	N
Hobhouse, Henry	LU			N	N
Holden, Isaac	L	IAL; Radical		A	A
Holland, Rt. Hn. Sir Thurstan	C		N		
Holloway, George	C			N	
Hooper, John	IPP		A	A	
Hornby, William Henry	C			N	
Houldsworth, Sir Wm. Henry	C			N	A
Howard, Joseph	C			N	N
Howell, George	L	Radical*		N	A
Howorth, Henry Hoyle	C		A		
Hozier, James Henry Cecil	C		N		N
Hubbard, Hon. Egerton	C			N	
Hughes, Colonel Edwin	C		A		A
Hulse, Edward Henry	C			N	
Hunt, Frederick Seager	C		N	N	
Hunter, Sir Guyer (Hackney)	C			N	N
Hunter, Wm. Alex. (Aberdeen)	L	IAL; Radical*			A
Illingworth, Alfred	L	IAL; Radical*		A	A
Isaacson, Frederick Wooton	C		N	N	N
Jackson, William Lawies	C		N	N	N
Jacoby, James Alfred	L	IAL; Radical*		N	N
James, Hn. Walter H. (Gatesh'd)	L	Radical		A	
James, Rt. Hon. Sir Henry (Bury)	LU			N	

Name	Party	Notes	3 Aug. 1887	27 June 1888	5 June 1890
Jardine, Sir Robert	LU			N	
Jarvis, Alexander Weston	C				N
Jeffreys, Arthur Frederick	C			N	N
Jennings, Louis John	C			N	N
Johnston, William	C			N	
Joicey, James	L	IAL; Radical*		A	
Jordan, Jeremiah	IPP	IAL	A		
Kay-Shuttleworth, Rt H. Sir U.	L			A	A
Kelly, John R.	C		N	N	N
Kennaway, Sir John Henry	C	Knowles	N	N	N
Kennedy, Edward Joseph	IPP		A		
Kenny, C.S. (Yorks. W.R.)	L			N	
Kenny, Joseph Edw. (Cork, S.)	IPP			A	
Kenny, Matthew J. (Tyrone)	IPP			A	
Kenrick, William	LU	IAL; Radical Unionist	A		N
Kenyon, Hon. George Thomas	C		A		A
Kenyon-Slaney, Col. William	C		N		
Kilbride, Denis	IPP			A	A
King, Henry Seymour (Hull)	C			N	
King-Harman, Col. E.R. (Kent)	C		N		
Kinloch, Sir John George Smyth	L	Radical*			A
Knatchbull-Hugessen, Herb. T. (Kent)	C			N	N
Knightley, Sir Rainald	C			N	N
Knowles, Lees	C		N	N	N
Labouchere, Henry	L	Radical*; CTC			A
Lafone, Alfred	C		N	N	N
Lambert, Cowley	C			N	
Lane, William John	IPP			A	
Lawrence, Sir Trevor (Surrey)	C			N	N
Lawrence, W.F. (Liverpool)	C				N
Lawson, H.L.W. (St. Pancras)	L	IAL; Radical*			A
Lawson, Sir Wilfrid (Cumb'land)	L	IAL; Radical*	A	A	A
Lea, Thomas (Londonderry)	LU			N	N
Leahy, James (Kildare)	IPP		A	A	A
Leake, Robert	L	Radical		A	A
Leamy, Edmund	IPP				A

Name	Party	Notes	3 Aug. 1887	27 June 1888	5 June 1890
Lechmere, Sir Edmund A.H.	C			N	
Lees, Elliott	C		N	N	N
Lefevre, Rt. Hon. George Shaw	L	IAL; Radical*	A	A	A
Leighton, Stanley	C			N	N
Leng, John	L				A
Lennox, Lord Walter C. Gordon	C			N	
Lethbridge, Sir Roper	C				N
Lewis, Sir Chas. Edw. (Antrim)	C			N	
Lewis, Thomas P. (Anglesey)	L	IAL		A	A
Lewisham, Viscount	C		N	N	N
Llewellyn, Evan Henry	C			N	
Lloyd-George, David	L				A
Lockwood, Frank	L	IAL		N	
Loder, Gerald Walter Erskine	C				N
Long, Walter Hume	C	Knowles	N	N	N
Lowther, Hn. Wm. (Westm'land)	C			N	N
Lubbock, Sir John	LU	Knowles		N	
Lyell, Leonard	L	IAL	N		
Lymington, Viscount	LU			N	N
Macartney, W.G. Ellison	C			N	
MacDonald, Dr. Roderick (Ross)	L	IAL; Radical*		A	A
Macdonald, Rt. Hn. J, (Edinb.U.)	C		N	N	
Macdonald, W.A.	IPP		A	A	
Macinnes, Miles	L	Radical			N
Mackintosh, Charles Fraser	LU			N	A
Maclean, F.W. (Oxfordsh.)	C			N	A
Maclean, J.M. (Oldham)	C			N	
Maclure, John William	C		A	A	A, Teller
MacNeill, John Gordon Swift	IPP			A	A
Madden, Dodgson Hamilton	C		N	N	N
Mahony, Pierce	IPP		A	A	
Maitland, William Fuller	L				A
Makins, Colonel	C			N	N
Malcolm, Col. John Wingfield	C				N
Mallock, Richard	C		N	N	N
Maple, John Blundell	C			N	N

Name	Party	Notes	3 Aug. 1887	27 June 1888	5 June 1890
Mappin, Sir Frederick Thorpe	L		N	N	
Marriott, Rt. Hn. W. Thackeray	C		N	N	N
Marum, Edward Mulhallen	IPP		A	A	A
Mason, Stephen	L		A		
Mather, William	L	IAL; Radical			A
Matthews, Rt. Hon. Henry	C		N	N	N
Mattinson, Miles Walker	C			N	
Maxwell, Sir Herbert E.	C		N	N	N
Mayne, Thomas (Tipperary)	IPP		A	A	
McArthur, Alexander (Leicester)	L	IAL		A	A
McArthur, William (Cornwall)	L			N	N
McDonald, Peter (Sligo)	IPP		A	A	
McEwan, William	L	IAL; Radical	N	N	N
McKenna, Sir Joseph Neal	IPP			A	
McLagan, Peter	L	IAL		A	A
McLaren, Walter S.B.	L	IAL; Radical*		A	
Menzies, R. Stewart	L			A	
Mildmay, Francis Bingham	LU	IAL		N	
Milvain, Thomas	C			N	
Molloy, Bernard Charles	IPP			A	
Montagu, Samuel	L	IAL; Radical*	A	A	
More, Robert Jasper	LU	IAL		N	
Morgan, H. Fred. (Monm'thsh.)	C			N	
Morgan, J. Lloyd (Carmarthen)	L				A
Morgan, Octavius V. (Battersea)	L	IAL; Radical	A	A	A
Morgan, Rt. Hn. G.O. (Denbighs)	L	IAL; Radical*			A
Morgan, W. Pritchard (Merthyr)	L				A
Morley, Arnold (Nottingham)	L	Radical*	A	A	A
Morley, Rt. Hon. J. (Newcastle)	L	Radical*	A	A	A
Morrison, Walter	LU		N		N
Morrogh, John	IPP				A
Morton, Alpheus Cleophas	L				A
Moss, Richard	C			N	N
Mount, William George	C		N		N
Mowbray, R.G.C. (Lanc. S.E.)	C		N	N	N

Name	Party	Notes	3 Aug. 1887	27 June 1888	5 June 1890
Mowbray, Rt. Hn. Sir J. (Oxf'd. U.)	C			N	
Mulholland, Henry Lyle	C			N	N
Muncaster, Lord	C			N	
Mundella, Rt. Hn. Anthony John	L	IAL; Radical*		A	A
Muntz, Philip A.	C			N	
Murphy, William Martin	IPP			A	
Neville, Ralph	L	IAL; Radical		N	
Newark, Viscount	C			N	N
Noble, Wilson	C			N	N
Nolan, Colonel (Galway, N.)	IPP		A	A	
Nolan, Joseph (Louth)	IPP		A	A	A
Norris, Edward Samuel	C			N	N
Northcote, Hon. Sir H. Stafford	C		N		N
Norton, Robert	C		N	N	N
O'Brien, James F.X. (Mayo)	IPP		A	A	A
O'Brien, P.J. (Tipperary)	IPP		A	A	A
O'Brien, Patrick (Monaghan)	IPP		A		
O'Brien, William (Cork, N.E.)	IPP			A	A
O'Connor, Arthur (Donegal)	IPP			A	
O'Connor, T.P. (Liverpool)	IPP		A	A	A
O'Doherty, James Edward	IPP		A	A	
O'Gorman Mahon, The	IPP			A	
O'Hanlon, Thomas	IPP		A		
O'Hea, Patrick	IPP		A	A	
O'Keefe, Francis A.	IPP			A	A
O'Kelly, James	IPP		A	A	A
O'Neill, Hon. Robert Torrens	C		N		N
Paget, Sir Richard Horner	C			N	
Palmer, Sir Charles Mark	L	IAL		A	
Parker, Hon. Francis (Oxf'dsh.)	C		N	N	N
Parnell, Charles Stewart	IPP			A	A
Paulton, James Mellor	L	IAL; Limp; Radical			N
Pearce, Sir William	C			N	
Pease, Alfred E. (York)	L				N
Pease, Henry Fell (Yorks. N.R.)	L	IAL		A	
Pelly, Sir Lewis	C		N		N
Penton, Capt. Frederick Thomas	C			N	N
Philipps, John Wynford	L				A

Name	Party	Notes	3 Aug. 1887	27 June 1888	5 June 1890
Pickard, Benjamin	L	IAL; Radical*	A	A	A
Pickersgill, Edward Hare	L	IAL; Radical*			A
Picton, James Allanson	L	IAL; Radical*	A	A	A
Pinkerton, John	IPP		A		
Pitt-Lewis, George	LU				A
Playfair, Rt. Hon. Sir Lyon	L	IAL		A	A
Plowden, Sir William Chichele	L	IAL; Radical		N	
Plunket, Rt. Hon. David R.	C		N	N	N
Plunkett, Hon.J.W. (Gloucester)	C		N		
Pomfret, William Pomfret	C			N	
Portman, Hon. Edwin B.	L			N	
Potter, Thomas Bayley	L		A	A	A
Powell, Francis Sharp (Wigan)	C		N	N	N
Powell, W.Rice H. (Carmar'sh)	L			A	
Power, Richd. (Waterford City)	IPP			A	A
Price, Captain (Devenport)	C			N	N
Price, Thomas P. (Monm'thsh.)	L	IAL; Radical*	A		
Priestley, Briggs	L	IAL; Radical		A	A
Pugh, David	L			A	
Puleston, Sir John Henry	C		A, Teller	A	A
Pyne, Jasper Douglas	IPP		A		
Quinn, Thomas	IPP		A	A	
Raikes, Rt. Hon. Henry Cecil	C		N	N	N
Randell, David	L	IAL; Radical*		A	A
Rankin, James	C		N	N	N
Redmond, John E. (Wexford)	IPP		A	A	
Redmond, W.H.K. (Ferman'gh)	IPP			A	
Reed, Henry Byron (Bradford)	C			N	N
Reed, Sir Edw. James (Cardiff)	L		A	A	A
Reid, Robt. Threshire (Dumfries)	L	Radical	N		
Reynolds, William James	IPP			A	
Richard, Henry	L			N	
Richardson, Thomas	LU			N	N
Ridley, Sir Matthew White	C			N	N

Name	Party	Notes	3 Aug. 1887	27 June 1888	5 June 1890
Ritchie, Rt. Hon. Chas. Thomson	C			N	N
Roberts, John (Flint Burghs)	L			A	A
Roberts, John Bryn (Eifon)	L	IAL; Radical*			A
Robertson, Edmund (Dundee)	L	IAL		N	N
Robertson, Rt. Hon J.P.B. (Bute)	C		N	N	N
Robertson, Sir Tindal (Brighton)	C		N	N	
Robinson, Brooke (Dudley)	C			N	N
Roe, Thomas	L	IAL; Radical	A	A	A
Rollit, Sir Albert Kaye	C			A	
Roscoe, Sir H. Enfield	L		A	A	
Ross, Alexander Henry	C		N	N	
Rothschild, Baron F. James de	LU			N	N
Round, James	C			N	N
Rowlands, James (Finsbury)	L	IAL; Radical*		A	A
Rowlands, W. Bowen (Card'sh.)	L	IAL		A	A
Rowntree, Joshua	L	IAL; Radical*	A		A
Russell, Sir Chas. (Hackney, S.)	L			A	A
Russell, Sir George (Berksh.)	C		A		
Russell, T.W. (Tyrone)	LU		A	N	
Salt, Thomas	C				N
Samuelson, G. Blundell (Gloucs.)	L		A	A	A
Samuelson, Sir B. (Oxford, N.)	L	IAL		A	A
Sandys, Lieut-Col. Thos. Myles	C		N		
Saunderson, Col. Edw. James	C			N	N
Schwann, Charles E.	L	IAL; Radical*	A	A	
Sellar, Alexander Craig	LU		N	N	
Seton-Karr, Henry	C			N	N
Sexton, Thomas	IPP			A	A
Shaw, Thomas (Halifax)	L	IAL; Radical*	A	A	A
Shaw-Stewart, M.H. (Renfrew)	C			N	N
Sheehan, Jeremiah Daniel	IPP		A	A	A
Sheehy, David	IPP			A	A
Sidebotham, J.W. (Cheshire)	C		N	N	N
Sidebottom, William (Derbysh.)	C		N	N	N

Name	Party	Notes	3 Aug. 1887	27 June 1888	5 June 1890
Simon, Sir John	L		A		
Sinclair, Wm. Pirrie (Falkirk)	LU	IAL	N	N	N
Slagg, John	L	Died 1889	A	A, Teller	
Smith, Abel (Herts)	C			N	N
Smith, Rt. Hn. Wm. H. (Strand)	C		N	N	
Smith, Samuel (Flint)	L	IAL; Radical		N	N
Somervell, James	C				N
Spencer, Ernest (W.Bromwich)	C		N	N	
Spencer, Hn. C.R. (Northampt'n)	L				A
Stack, John	IPP		A	A	
Stanhope, Philip	L	IAL; Radical*			A
Stanhope, Rt. Hn. E. (Lincolnsh.)	C	Knowles		N	N
Stanley, Edward James	C			N	N
Stansfeld, Rt. Hon. James	L	Radical*	A	A	
Stephens, Henry Charles	C		A		A
Stevenson, Francis S. (Suffolk)	L	IAL; Radical			A
Stevenson, Jas. C. (S. Shields)	L	IAL		N	
Stewart, Mark (Kirkcudb'tsh)	C			N	
Stokes, George Gabriel	C			N	
Storey, Samuel	L	IAL; Radical*		A	
Stuart, James (Shoreditch)	L	IAL; Radical*	A	A	A
Sullivan, Donal (Westmeath)	IPP		A	A	A
Summers, William	L	Radical		A, Teller	A, Teller
Sutherland, A. (Sutherlandsh.)	L	IAL; Radical*	A	A	A
Sutherland, Thomas (Greenock)	LU			N	
Swetenham, Edmund	C		A	N	
Swinburne, Sir John	L	IAL; Radical	A		A
Sykes, Christopher	C			N	N
Talbot, John Gilbert (Oxf. Univ.)	C			N	N
Tanner, Charles Kearns	IPP			A	A
Taylor, Francis	LU			N	
Temple, Sir Richard	C		N	N	N
Theobald, James	C		N	N	N

Name	Party	Notes	3 Aug. 1887	27 June 1888	5 June 1890
Thomas, Alfred (Glamorgan, E.)	L	IAL; Radical		A	A
Thomas, David Alfred (Merthyr.)	L	IAL; Radical*		N	N
Thorburn, Walter	LU			N	N
Tollemache, Henry James	C			N	
Tomlinson, Wm. Edw. Murray	C		N	N	N
Townsend, Frederick	C			N	N
Tuite, James	IPP		A	A	A
Tyler, Sir Henry Whatley	C			A	
Verney, Capt. Edmund H.	L				A
Vernon, Hon. Greville Richard	LU		N	N	
Villiers, Rt. Hon. C. Pelham	LU			N	
Vincent, Chas. Edw. Howard	C			N	
Vivian, Sir Henry Hussey	L	IAL		N	N
Wallace, Robert	L	Radical	A	A	A
Walrond, Col. Sir William	C		N, Teller	N, Teller	N, Teller
Walsh, Hn. Arthur Henry John	C			N	
Waring, Col. Thomas	C		N		N
Warmington, Cornelius M.	L	Radical		N	
Watkin, Sir Edward W.	LU	IAL	A, Teller	A	A
Watson, James	C			N	
Watt, Hugh	L				A
Wayman, Thomas	L	IAL; Radical		A	
Webb, Alfred	IPP				A
Webster, R.G. (St. Pancras)	C			N	N
Webster, Sir R.E. (Isle of Wight)	C			N	N
West, W. Cornwallis	LU				N
Weston, Sir Joseph Dodge	L				A
Weymouth, Viscount	C		N	N	N
Wharton, John Lloyd	C		N	N	
White, J. Bazley	C		N		
Whitley, Edward	C		N	N	N
Whitmore, Charles Algernon	C			N	N
Wiggin, Henry	LU			N	
Will, John Shiress	L			N	N
Williams, Arthur (Glamorgan)	L	IAL; Radical			A
Williams, Joseph Powell- (Birm.)	LU	IAL; Radical Unionist	A		

Name	Party	Notes	3 Aug. 1887	27 June 1888	5 June 1890
Williamson, J. (Lanc. N.)	L	IAL		A	A
Williamson, Steph. (Kilm'nock)	L	IAL; Radical		A	A
Wilson, Charles Henry (Hull)	L	Radical		A	
Wilson, Henry J. (York, W.R.)	L	IAL; Radical*	A		A
Wilson, Isaac (Middlesborough)	L			A	A
Wilson, Sir Samuel (Portsm'th)	C	IAL	N	N	N
Winn, Hon. Rowland	C			N	
Winterbotham, Arthur Brend	L		N		N
Wodehouse, Edmond Robert	LU		N	N	
Wood, Nicholas	C			N	
Woodall, William	L		A	A	A
Woodhead, Joseph	L	IAL; Radical	A	A	A
Wortley, Charles Beilby Stuart	C		N	N	N
Wright, Caleb (Lanc.)	L	IAL; Radical	A		A
Wright, H. Smith (Nottingham)	C		N	N	N
Wroughton, Philip	C			N	N
Wyndham, George	C				N
Yerburgh, Robert Armstrong	C		N	N	
Young, Charles Edward Baring	C			N	N

Appendix 4: Divisions on the Naval Defence Bill, April-May 1889

1 April (1): William Randal Cremer's Amendment

1 April (2): George Hamilton's Resolution, First Reading

4 April (1): High Childers' Amendment

4 April (2): George Hamilton's Resolution, Second Reading

7 May: Naval Defence Bill, Second Reading

20 May: Naval Defence Bill, Third Reading

Name	Party	Notes	1 Apr. (1)	1 Apr. (2)	4 Apr. (1)	4 Apr. (2)	7 May	20 May
Abraham, William (Glamorgan)	L	IAL; Radical*			N	N		
Abraham, William (Limerick)	IPP		N	N	N	N	N	
Acland, A.H. Dyke (Yorks.)	L	Radical			N	N	N	
Addison, John	C		A	A	A	A	A	
Agg-Gardner, James T.	C	IAL			A	A		
Ainslie, William George	C		A	A				A
Aird, John	C					A	A	A
Akers-Douglas, Aretas	C		A, Teller	A, Teller	A, Teller	A, Teller	A, Teller	A, Teller
Allison, Robert Andrew	L	Radical			N	N	N	
Allsopp, Hon. Geo. (Worcester)	C					A	A	A
Ambrose, William	C		A	A			A	
Amherst, Wm. Amhurst Tyssen	C		A	A	A	A	A	
Anstruther, Col. Lloyd (Suffolk)	C		A	A	A	A	A	A
Anstruther, H.T. (St. Andrews)	LU		A	A	A	A	A	A
Asher, Alexander	L		A	A			N	
Ashmead-Bartlett, Ellis	C		A	A	A	A	A	A
Asquith, Herbert Henry	L	Limp; Radical*			N		N	
Austin, John	L		N	N	N	N	N	N
Baden-Powell, Sir Geo. Smyth	C		A	A				
Baily, Sir Joesph R.	C		A	A		A		
Baird, John George Alexander	C		A	A	A		A	A
Balfour, Gerald William (Leeds)	C		A	A		A	A	
Balfour, J. Spencer (Burnley)	L	IAL; Radical*	N	N		N	N	

Name	Party	Notes	1 Apr. (1)	1 Apr. (2)	4 Apr. (1)	4 Apr. (2)	7 May	20 May
Balfour, Rt. Hn. J. Blair (Clackm.)	L	Radical	A	A	N		N	
Balfour, Rt. Hon. A.J. (Manch'r)	C				A		A	A
Ballantine, W. Henry Walter	L	Radical*					N	N
Banes, Major George Edward	C				A			A
Barbour, William Boyle	L					N	N	N
Barclay, James William	LU	Radical Unionist					A	
Baring, Viscount (Bedfordsh.)	LU		A	A	A			
Barnes, Alfred	LU		A	A			A	A
Barran, John	L	IAL; Radical*				N	N	
Barry, A.H. Smith (Hunts.)	C		A	A		A	A	A
Bartley, George C. T.	C		A	A	A	A	A	A
Barttelot, Sir Walter B.	C		A	A		A	A	A
Bass, Hamar	LU						A	
Bates, Sir Edward	C		A	A	A	A	A	
Baumann, Arthur Antony	C					A	A	
Bazley-White, J.	C		A	A	A	A		
Beach, Rt. Hn. Sir M. H. (Bristol)	C		A	A	A	A	A	A
Beach, W.W. Bramston (Hants.)	C		A	A				A
Beadel, William James	C		A	A		A		A
Beaufoy, Mark Hanbury	L	IAL	N	N		N		
Beaumont, H.F. (Yorks. W.R.)	LU	IAL	A	A				
Beckett, Ernest W. (Yorks N.R.)	C		A	A				A
Beckett, William (Notts.)	C		A	A				
Bentinck, Lord H.C. (Norfolk)	C		A	A	A	A		A
Bentinck, Rt.Hn. G.C. (White'n)	C		A					A
Bentinck, Wm. G.C. (Penryn)	C		A	A			A	A
Beresford, Lord C.W. De la Poer	C		A	A			A	A

Name	Party	Notes	1 Apr. (1)	1 Apr. (2)	4 Apr. (1)	4 Apr. (2)	7 May	20 May
Bethell, Commander	C		A	A	A	A	A	A
Bickford-Smith, William	LU		A	A				A
Biddulph, Michael	LU					A	A	A
Biggar, Joseph Gillis	IPP		N	N	N	N	N	N
Bigwood, James	C		A		A	A	A	A
Birkbeck, Sir Edward	C		A	A		A	A	
Blane, Alexander	IPP		N	N	N	N		N
Blundell, Col. Hen. Blundell H.	C		A	A	A	A	A	A
Bolitho, Thomas Bedford	LU		A	A	A	A	A	
Bolton, Jos. Cheney (Stirlingsh.)	L	Radical				N	N	N
Bolton, T.D. (Derbyshire)	L	Radical	N	N	N	N	N	N
Bond, George Hawkesworth	C		A	A	A	A	A	A
Bonsor, Henry Cosmo Orme	C		A	A		A	A	
Borthwick, Sir Algernon	C		A	A				A
Bowles, Capt. Henry Ferryman	C				A	A	A	A
Bradlaugh, Charles	L	Radical*	N	N		N	N	N
Bridgeman, Col. Hon. Fran. C.	C						A	A
Bright, Jacob (Manchester)	L	IAL; Radical*				N	N	
Bright, W.L. (Stoke upon Trent)	L	Radical*				N	N	
Bristowe, Thomas Lynn	C		A	A	A	A	A	
Broadhurst, Henry	L	Radical*			N		N	N
Brodrick, Hon. St. John	C		A	A	A	A	A	A
Brooke, Lord	C		A	A				
Brookfield, A. Montagu	C				A	A	A	
Brooks, Sir William Cunliffe	C					A	A	A
Brown, Alex. H. (Salop)	LU	IAL; Radical Unionist	A	A			A	A
Bruce, Gainsford (Finsbury)	C		A	A		A	A	A

Name	Party	Notes	1 Apr. (1)	1 Apr. (2)	4 Apr. (1)	4 Apr. (2)	7 May	20 May
Bruce, Lord Henry (Wiltshire)	C		A	A	A	A	A	
Brunner, John Tomlinson	L	IAL; Radical	N	N	N	N	N	N
Buchanan, Thomas Ryburn	L	Radical				N		N
Burdett-Coutts, W.	C						A	
Burghley, Lord	C		A	A	A	A	A	
Burt, Thomas	L	IAL; Radical*			N	N	N	N
Buxton, Sydney Charles	L	IAL; Radical*	A	A	N			
Byrne, Garrett Michael	IPP				N		N	N
Caine, William Sproston	LU	Radical Unionist	A	A			A	A
Caldwell, J.	LU		A	A	A	A	A	A
Cameron J. Macdonald (Wick)	L	IAL; Radical*						N
Cameron, Charles (Glasgow)	L	IAL; Radical*	N	N		N	N	N
Campbell, Henry (Fermanagh)	IPP					N	N	
Campbell, James A (Glas. Univ.)	C		A	A		A	A	
Campbell, Sir Arch. (Renfrewsh.)	C				A	A		A
Campbell, Sir Geo. (Kirkcaldy)	L	IAL; Radical	N	N			N	
Campbell- Bannerman, Rt. Hn. H	L	Radical*	A	A	N			
Carmarthen, Marquess of	C		A	A	A	A	A	A
Causton, Richard Knight	L	Radical*	N	N				N
Cavan, Earl of	L						A	
Cavandish, Lord Edward	LU						A	
Chamberlain, Rich. (Islington)	LU	Radical Unionist	A	A		A	A	A
Chamberlian, Rt. Hon. J. (Birm.)	LU	Radical Unionist	A	A		A	A	A
Channing, Francis Allston	L	IAL; Radical*	N	N	N	N	N	N
Chaplin, Rt. Hon. Henry	C						A	
Charrington, Spencer	C		A	A	A	A		A
Childers, Rt. Hon. Hugh C.E.	L		A	A	N			

Name	Party	Notes	1 Apr. (1)	1 Apr. (2)	4 Apr. (1)	4 Apr. (2)	7 May	20 May
Churchill, Rt.Hn. Lord Randolph	C		A	A				
Clancy, John Joseph	IPP		N		N	N		N
Clark, Dr. G.B. (Caithness-sh.)	L	IAL; Radical*	N	N			N	N
Clarke, Sir Edward (Plymouth)	C		A	A	A	A	A	A
Cobb, Henry Peyton	L	IAL; Radical*	N	N	N	N	N	N
Cochrane-Baillie, Hon. C.	C		A	A	A		A	
Coddington, William	C		A	A			A	A
Coghill, Douglas Henry	LU		A	A	A	A	A	A
Coleridge, Hon. Bernard	L	IAL; Radical*	N				N	N
Collings Jesse	LU	Radical Unionist				A	A	
Colomb, Sir John Chas. Ready	C		A	A	A	A		A
Compton, Earl (Barnsley)	L	IAL			N	N		
Compton, Francis (New Forest)	C		A	A			A	
Conway, Michael	IPP		N					
Conybeare, Chas. A. Vansittart	L	IAL; Radical*	N	N		N	N	N
Cooke, C. W. Radcliffe	C		A	A			A	
Corbet, Wm. Joseph (Wicklow)	IPP							N
Corbett, Archibald C. (Glasgow)	LU	Radical Unionist	A	A			A	A
Cornwallis, F.S. Wykeham	C		A	A	A		A	
Corry, Sir James Porter	C		A	A	A	A	A	
Cossham, Handel	L	Radical*	N	N	N	N	N	N
Cotton, Col. Edw. Tho. D.	C		A	A			A	A
Cozens-Hardy, Herbert Hardy	L		A	A		N	N	
Craig, James	L	Radical			N		N	
Cranborne, Viscount	C		A	A	A		A	A
Craven, Joseph	L	IAL; Radical	N	N		N		
Crawford, Donald (Lanark N.E.)	L	IAL; Radical			N			

Name	Party	Notes	1 Apr. (1)	1 Apr. (2)	4 Apr. (1)	4 Apr. (2)	7 May	20 May
Crawford, Wm. (Durham, Mid.)	L	Radical*			N			
Cremer, William Randal	L	IAL; Radical*	N, Teller	N, Teller		N, Teller		N, Teller
Crilly, Daniel	IPP		N	N	N	N	N	N
Cross, Herb. Shepard (Bolton)	C		A	A	A		A	A
Cross, Hon. Wm. H. (Liverpool)	C		A	A	A	A	A	
Crossley, Sir Savile B. (Suffolk)	LU		A	A			A	
Crossman, General Sir William	LU	Radical Unionist				A	A	A
Currie, Sir Donald	LU		A	A	A			A
Curzon, Hn. Geo. N. (Lanc.S.W.)	C				A		A	
Curzon, Viscount (Bucks.)	C		A	A				
Dalrymple, Sir Charles	C		A	A	A	A	A	A
Darling, Charles John (Deptford)	C		A	A			A	A
Darling, M.T. Stormonth (Edin.)	C		A	A	A	A	A	
Davenport, Harry T. (Staffsh.)	C				A	A	A	A
Davenport, W. Bromley (Chesh.)	C		A	A		A	A	
Davey, Sir Horace	L		A	A			N	
Dawnay, Col. Hon. L. P.	C						A	
De Cobain, Edw. Samuel Wesley	C		A	A	A	A	A	
De Lisle, Edwin	C		A	A	A	A	A	A
De Worms, Rt. Hn. Baron Henry	C		A	A	A	A	A	A
Dickson, Thomas A. (Dublin)	L				N	N		
Dillwyn, Lewis Llewelyn	L	Radical*	N	N		N	N	
Dimsdale, Baron Robert	C		A	A	A	A		
Dixon, George (Birmingh.)	LU	Radical Unionist	A	A		A	A	A
Dixon-Hartland, Fred. Dixon	C		A	A	A	A		
Donkin, Richard Sims	C						A	
Dorington, Sir John Edward	C				A	A	A	

Name	Party	Notes	1 Apr. (1)	1 Apr. (2)	4 Apr. (1)	4 Apr. (2)	7 May	20 May
Duff, Robert William	L		A	A	N			
Dugdale, John Stratford	C		A	A	A	A		A
Duncombe, Arthur	C		A	A		A	A	A
Dunsany, Lord	C							A
Dyke, Rt. Hon. Sir William Hart	C		A	A	A	A	A	A
Edwards-Moss, Tom C.	C		A	A		A		
Egerton, Hon. Tatton (Cheshire)	C		A	A				
Elcho, Lord	C		A	A			A	
Elliot, Geo. Wm. (Yorks. N.R.)	C						A	
Elliot, Hn. Art. R.D. (Roxburghs)	LU		A	A		A	A	A
Elliot, Sir George (Monmouth)	C				A		A	
Ellis, James (Leicestersh.)	L	IAL				N		
Ellis, John Edward (Notts.)	L	IAL; Radical*	N	N	N	N	N	N
Ellis, Sir J. Whittaker (Surrey)	C					A		
Ellis, Thos. Edw. (Merionthsh.)	L	Radical*	N	N	N	N	N	
Elton, Charles Isaac	C					A	A	A
Esslemont, Peter	L	IAL; Radical*	N	N	N	N	N	N
Evans, Francis Henry	L	Radical			N	N	N	N
Evershed, Sydney	L	IAL			N			
Ewart, Sir William	C						A	
Ewing, Sir Archibald Orr	C		A	A			A	A
Farquharson, Dr. R. (Aberd'sh)	L				N			N
Farquharson, H.R. (Dorsetsh.)	C						A	A
Feilden, Lieut.-Gen. (Lanc.N.)	C		A	A		A	A	A
Fellowes, Ailwyn Edward	C		A	A		A	A	A
Fenwick, Charles	L	IAL; Radical			N	N	N	N
Ferguson, R.C. Munro (Leith)	L	Limp	A	A	N			
Fergusson, Rt. Hn. Sir J. (Manc'r)	C		A	A	A	A	A	A

Name	Party	Notes	1 Apr. (1)	1 Apr. (2)	4 Apr. (1)	4 Apr. (2)	7 May	20 May
Field, Admiral	C		A	A	A	A	A	A
Fielden, Thomas (Lanc. S.E.)	C		A	A			A	A
Finch, George H.	C					A	A	A
Finlay, Robert	LU		A	A			A	A
Firth, Joseph Firth Bottomley	L	Radical*	N	N	N	N		N
Fisher, William Hayes	C		A	A			A	
Fitz Wygram, Sir Frederick	C		A	A		A	A	
Fitzgerald, J. Gubbins (Longf'd)	IPP					N		N
FitzGerald, R. Uniacke Penrose	C		A	A	A	A	A	A
Fitzwilliam, Hn W.H.W. (Donc.)	LU		A	A	A	A	A	
Fitzwilliam, Hn W.J.W. (Peterb.)	LU		A	A			A	
Fletcher, Sir Henry	C					A	A	
Flower, Cyril	L	Radical			N		N	
Flynn, James Christopher	IPP				N	N	N	
Foley, Patrick James	IPP	IAL	N	N	N	N		N
Foljambe, Cecil G.S.	L					N	N	N
Forwood, Arthur Bower	C		A	A	A	A	A	A
Foster, Sir Wlter (Derby Co.)	L	IAL; Radical	N	N			N	N
Fowler, Rt.Hn. H.H. (Wolver.)	L	Limp	A	A	N		N	
Fowler, Sir Robert N. (London)	C		A	A		A	A	A
Fox, Dr. Joseph Francis	IPP				N			
Fraser, Gen. Charles Crauford	C						A	
Fry, Lewis (Bristol)	LU	Radical Unionist	N	N				
Fry, Theodore (Darlington)	L	Radical				N		
Fuller, George Pargiter	L	Radical	N	N		N		N
Fulton, James Forrest	C					A	A	A
Gane, Lawrence	L	IAL; Radical				N		
Gardner, Herbert (Essex)	L	IAL	A	A				

Name	Party	Notes	1 Apr. (1)	1 Apr. (2)	4 Apr. (1)	4 Apr. (2)	7 May	20 May
Gaskell, Chas. Geo. Milnes-	L					N	A	
Gathorne-Hardy, Hn. A. (Sussex)	C		A	A		A	A	A
Gathorne-Hardy, Hn. J.S. (Kent)	C					A		A
Gedge, Sydney	C		A	A	A	A	A	
Giles, Alfred	C		A	A		A	A	
Gilhooly, James	IPP		N		N	N		
Gill, Thomas P.	IPP				N	N		N
Gilliat, John Saunders	C		A	A	A	A	A	A
Gladstone, Herbert J. (Leeds)	L						N	
Gladstone, Rt. Hon. W.E.	L						N	
Godson, Augustus Frederick	C					A		
Goldsmid, Sir Julian	LU	Radical Unionist	A	A	A	A	A	A
Goldsworthy, Major-General	C		A	A	A	A	A	A
Gorst, Sir John Eldon	C		A	A	A	A	A	A
Goschen, Rt. Hon. Geo. Joachim	LU		A	A	A	A	A	A
Gourley, Edward Temperley	L	IAL; Radical*					N	
Graham, Robert Cuningham	L	Radical	N	N	N	N	N	
Gray, Charles Wing (Essex)	C		A	A	A	A	A	A
Green, Sir Edward (Wakefield)	C		A	A		A	A	
Greene, Edward (Suffolk)	C				A	A	A	
Grey, Sir Edward (Northum.)	L	IAL; Limp; Radical	A	A		N	N	
Grimston, Viscount	C		A	A	A	A		A
Grotrian, Frederick Brent	C				A	A	A	
Grove, Sir Thomas Fraser	L	IAL				N		
Gully, William Court	L	IAL; Radical	N	N		N		N
Gunter, Colonel	C						A	A
Gurdon, Robert Thornhagh	LU		A	A		A	A	

Name	Party	Notes	1 Apr. (1)	1 Apr. (2)	4 Apr. (1)	4 Apr. (2)	7 May	20 May
Haldane, Richard Burdon	L	Limp; Radical*			N			N
Hall, Alexander Wm. (Oxford)	C		A	A				
Hall, Charles (Cambridgeshire)	C		A	A		A	A	
Halsey, Thomas Frederick	C				A	A	A	A
Hambro, Col. Charles J.T.	C					A	A	
Hamilton, Col. Chas. E. (South'k)	C				A	A	A	A
Hamilton, Lord Ernest (Tyrone)	C						A	
Hamilton, Rt. Hn. Lord G. (Midx.)	C		A	A	A	A	A	A
Hamley, Gen. Sir Edw. Bruce	C		A	A		A	A	A
Hanbury, Robert William	C		A	A	A			A
Hanbury-Tracy, Hon. F.S.A.	L	IAL			N			
Hankey, Frederick Alers	C		A	A			A	A
Harcourt, Rt. Hon. Sir William	L				N		N	
Hardcastle, Edward (Salford)	C				A	A	A	
Hardcastle, Frank (Lanc. S.E.)	C		A	A	A	A	A	
Harrington, Timothy (Dublin)	IPP				N		N	N
Harris, Mathew	IPP				N		N	
Hartington, Marquis of	LU		A	A	A	A	A	
Hastings, George Woodyatt	LU						A	
Havelock-Allan, Sir Henry	LU	Radical Unionist	A	A			A	A
Hayden, Luke Patrick	IPP		N	N	N	N	N	N
Hayne, Charles Seale-	L	IAL	N	N	N	N	N	
Healy, Maurice (Cork)	IPP						N	
Healy, Timothy M. (Longford)	IPP							N
Heath, Arthur Raymond	C		A	A		A		A
Heathcote, Captain Edwards-	C		A	A	A	A	A	A

Name	Party	Notes	1 Apr. (1)	1 Apr. (2)	4 Apr. (1)	4 Apr. (2)	7 May	20 May
Heaton, John Henniker	C		A	A	A	A	A	
Heneage, Rt. Hon. Edward	LU				A		A	
Herbert, Hon. Sidney	C		A, Teller	A, Teller	A	A	A	A
Hermon-Hodge, Robt. Trotter	C		A	A	A			
Hervey, Lord Francis	C				A	A	A	
Hill, Col. Edwd. Stock (Bristol)	C					A	A	A
Hill, Lord Athur Wm. (Down)	C		A	A			A	A
Hoare, Edw. Brodie (Hampstead)	C		A	A	A		A	A
Hoare, Samuel (Norwich)	C		A	A	A	A	A	A
Hobhouse, Henry	LU					A	A	A
Holden, Isaac	L	IAL; Radical	N		N	N		
Holloway, George	C				A	A	A	
Hornby, William Henry	C		A	A		A	A	
Houldsworth, Sir Wm. Henry	C		A	A		A	A	
Howard, Joseph	C				A	A	A	A
Howell, George	L	Radical*			N	N	N	N, Teller
Howorth, Henry Hoyle	C						A	
Hoyle, Isaac	L	IAL	N	N	N	N	N	
Hozier, James Henry Cecil	C		A	A		A	A	A
Hubbard, Hon. Egerton	C		A	A	A		A	A
Hughes, Colonel Edwin	C				A		A	
Hulse, Edward Henry	C						A	
Hunt, Frederick Seager	C		A	A	A	A	A	
Hunter, Sir Guyer (Hackney)	C		A	A		A	A	
Hunter, Wm. Alex. (Aberdeen)	L	IAL; Radical*			N		N	
Illingworth, Alfred	L	IAL; Radical*	N	N	N	N	N	N
Isaacs, Lewis Henry	C		A	A		A	A	

Name	Party	Notes	1 Apr. (1)	1 Apr. (2)	4 Apr. (1)	4 Apr. (2)	7 May	20 May
Isaacson, Frederick Wooton	C				A			A
Jackson, William Lawies	C		A	A	A	A	A	A
Jacoby, James Alfred	L	IAL; Radical*	N	N		N	N, Teller	
James, Hn. Walter H. (Gatesh'd)	L	Radical				N	N	N
James, Rt. Hon. Sir Henry (Bury)	LU		A	A	A	A	A	
Jardine, Sir Robert	LU		A	A		A		A
Jarvis, Alexander Weston	C		A	A			A	
Jeffreys, Arthur Frederick	C		A	A	A	A	A	
Jennings, Louis John	C		A	A			A	
Johnston, William	C		A	A	A	A	A	
Joicey, James	L	IAL; Radical*					N	N
Jordan, Jeremiah	IPP	IAL						N
Kay-Shuttleworth, Rt H. Sir U.	L					N	N	N
Kelly, John R.	C		A	A	A	A	A	A
Kennaway, Sir John Henry	C		A	A		A	A	
Kenny, Matthew J. (Tyrone)	IPP				N	N		N
Kenrick, William	LU	IAL; Radical Unionist					A	
Kenyon, Hon. George Thomas	C				A	A		A
Kenyon-Slaney, Col. William	C		A	A			A	
Kerans, Frederick Harold	C		A	A	A	A	A	A
Kimber, Henry	C					A	A	
King, Henry Seymour (Hull)	C				A	A	A	
Kinloch, Sir John George Smyth	L	Radical*				N		
Knatchbull- Hugessen, E. (Roch.)	L	IAL; elected 16 Apr. 1889					N	
Knatchbull- Hugessen, Herb. T. (Kent)	C				A		A	A
Knightley, Sir Rainald	C		A	A		A	A	

Name	Party	Notes	1 Apr. (1)	1 Apr. (2)	4 Apr. (1)	4 Apr. (2)	7 May	20 May
Knowles, Lees	C		A	A	A	A	A	A
Labouchere, Henry	L	Radical*	N				N	
Lafone, Alfred	C		A	A		A	A	A
Lalor, Richard	IPP				N		N	
Lambert, Cowley	C						A	
Laurie, Col. Robert Peter	C		A	A		A		A
Lawrence, J. Compton (Lincsh.)	C		A	A	A	A	A	A
Lawrence, Sir Trevor (Surrey)	C		A	A			A	
Lawrence, W.F. (Liverpool)	C		A	A		A	A	A
Lawson, H.L.W. (St. Pancras)	L	IAL; Radical*			N	N		
Lawson, Sir Wilfrid (Cumb'land)	L	IAL; Radical*	N	N	N	N	N	N
Lea, Thomas (Londonderry)	LU		A	A	A	A	A	
Leahy, James (Kildare)	IPP				N		N	N
Leake, Robert	L	Radical			N	N	N	
Lechmere, Sir Edmund A.H.	C		A	A		A	A	
Lees, Elliott	C		A	A	A	A		
Lefevre, Rt. Hon. George Shaw	L	IAL; Radical*					N	N
Legh, Thos. Wodehouse (Lanc.)	C						A	
Lennox, Lord Walter C. Gordon	C		A	A		A	A	
Lethbridge, Sir Roper	C						A	A
Lewis, Thomas P. (Anglesey)	L	IAL	N	N	N	N	N	
Lewisham, Viscount	C		A	A	A	A	A	A
Llewellyn, Evan Henry	C					A	A	
Lockwood, Frank	L	IAL				N	N	N
Long, Walter Hume	C		A	A	A	A	A	A
Lowther, Jas. W. (Cumberland)	C					A	A	A
Lowther, Rt. Hon. James (Kent)	C				A	A	A	
Lyell, Leonard	L	IAL				N	N	
Lymington, Viscount	LU				A		A	

Name	Party	Notes	1 Apr. (1)	1 Apr. (2)	4 Apr. (1)	4 Apr. (2)	7 May	20 May
Macartney, W.G. Ellison	C		A	A	A	A	A	
MacDonald, Dr. Roderick (Ross)	L	IAL; Radical*	N		N		N	N
Macdonald, W.A.	IPP		N	N		N	N	N
Macinnes, Miles	L	Radical				N	N	
Mackintosh, Charles Fraser	LU				A		A	
Maclean, F.W. (Oxfordsh.)	C		A				A	
Maclean, J.M. (Oldham)	C		A	A			A	A
Maclure, John William	C		A	A	A	A	A	
MacNeill, John Gordon Swift	IPP				N	N		
Madden, Dodgson Hamilton	C		A	A	A	A	A	A
Maitland, William Fuller	L				N			
Makins, Colonel	C		A	A			A	
Malcolm, Col. John Wingfield	C		A	A		A	A	A
Mallock, Richard	C		A	A	A	A		A
Maple, John Blundell	C		A	A			A	
Mappin, Sir Frederick Thorpe	L				N			
Marjoribanks, Rt. Hon. Henry	L		A	A	N, Teller	N		
Maskelyne, M. H. Story-	LU	IAL				A		A
Mather, William	L	IAL; Radical				N	N	N
Matthews, Rt. Hon. Henry	C		A	A	A	A	A	A
Mattinson, Miles Walker	C		A	A		A	A	
Maxwell, Sir Herbert E.	C		A	A	A	A	A	A
Mayne, Adm. R.C. (Pembroke)	LU		A	A	A	A	A	
Mayne, Thomas (Tipperary)	IPP				N			
McArthur, Alexander (Leicester)	L	IAL					N	
McCarthy, J. Huntly (Newry)	IPP				N			
McCarthy, Justin (Londonderry)	IPP				N	N		

Name	Party	Notes	1 Apr. (1)	1 Apr. (2)	4 Apr. (1)	4 Apr. (2)	7 May	20 May
McDonald, Peter (Sligo)	IPP						N	N
McEwan, William	L	IAL; Radical	N	N			N	N
McKenna, Sir Joseph Neal	IPP				N			
McLagan, Peter	L	IAL	A	A		N	N	
McLaren, Walter S.B.	L	IAL; Radical*					N	N
Mildmay, Francis Bingham	LU	IAL	A	A		A	A	
Milvain, Thomas	C		A	A	A	A	A	
Molloy, Bernard Charles	IPP		N	N	N	N		N
Montagu, Samuel	L	IAL; Radical*			N	N	N	
More, Robert Jasper	LU	IAL	A	A	A	A	A	A
Morgan, H. Fred. (Monm'thsh.)	C						A	
Morgan, Octavius V. (Battersea)	L	IAL; Radical	N					N
Morgan, Rt. Hn. G.O. (Den?)	L	IAL; Radical*				N		
Morley, Arnold (Nottingham)	L	Radical*			N, Teller	N	N	N
Morley, Rt. Hon. J. (Newcastle)	L	Radical*	A	A	N		N	
Morrison, Walter	LU		A	A				A
Moss, Richard	C						A	
Mount, William George	C		A	A		A	A	A
Mowbray, R.G.C. (Lanc. S.E.)	C		A	A		A	A	A
Mowbray, Rt. Hn. Sir J. (Oxford U.)	C						A	A
Mulholland, Henry Lyle	C		A	A	A	A		A
Muncaster, Lord	C					A		
Mundella, Rt. Hn. Anthony John	L	IAL; Radical*			N		N	
Muntz, Philip A.	C							A
Murdoch, Charles Townshend	C		A	A	A	A	A	A
Murphy, William Martin	IPP							N
Neville, Ralph	L	IAL; Radical			N		N	
Newark, Viscount	C		A	A		A		

Name	Party	Notes	1 Apr. (1)	1 Apr. (2)	4 Apr. (1)	4 Apr. (2)	7 May	20 May
Newnes, George	L	IAL; Radical	N	N	N			
Noble, Wilson	C		A	A		A	A	
Nolan, Colonel (Galway, N.)	IPP		A		N	N		N
Nolan, Joseph (Louth)	IPP		N	N	N	N	N	N
Norris, Edward Samuel	C					A		
Northcote, Hon. Sir H. Stafford	C		A	A	A	A	A	
Norton, Robert	C					A		
O'Brien, James F.X. (Mayo)	IPP		N		N	N		
O'Brien, P.J. (Tipperary)	IPP		N	N	N	N		
O'Connor, Arthur (Donegal)	IPP				N			N
O'Connor, John (Tipperary)	IPP		N	N	N	N		
O'Connor, T.P. (Liverpool)	IPP		N	N				
O'Hea, Patrick	IPP				N	N		
O'Keeffe, Francis A.	IPP							N
O'Kelly, James	IPP				N	N		
Oldroyd, Mark	L	IAL; Radical	N	N		N	N	
O'Neill, Hon. Robert Torrens	C		A	A	A	A	A	
Paget, Sir Richard Horner	C						A	
Palmer, Sir Charles Mark	L	IAL	A	A			A	
Parker, Charles Stuart (Pe?)	L				N			
Parker, Hon. Francis (Oxf'dsh.)	C		A	A		A	A	A
Paulton, James Mellor	L	IAL; Limp; Radical	A					
Pease, Alfred E. (York)	L				N		N	
Pease, Henry Fell (Yorks. N.R.)	L	IAL	N	N	N	N	N	
Pease, Sir Joseph W. (Durham)	L		N	N	N	N, Teller	N	N
Pelly, Sir Lewis	C		A	A		A	A	A
Penton, Capt. Frederick Thomas	C		A	A		A	A	A

Name	Party	Notes	1 Apr. (1)	1 Apr. (2)	4 Apr. (1)	4 Apr. (2)	7 May	20 May
Philipps, John Wynford	L		N	N	N	N		
Pickard, Benjamin	L	IAL; Radical*			N	N	N	
Pickersgill, Edward Hare	L	IAL; Radical*	N, Teller	N, Teller	N	N	N	N
Picton, James Allanson	L	IAL; Radical*	N	N	N		N	N
Pinkerton, John	IPP							N
Playfair, Rt. Hon. Sir Lyon	L	IAL			N		N	
Plowden, Sir William Chichele	L	IAL; Radical	A	N	N	N	A	
Plunket, Rt. Hon. David R.	C		A	A	A	A	A	A
Pomfret, William Pomfret	C		A	A			A	
Powell, Francis Sharp (Wigan)	C		A	A			A	A
Power, P.J. (Waterford, E.)	IPP		N	N	N	N	N	
Power, Richd. (Waterford City)	IPP				N	N	N	
Price, Captain (Devenport)	C		A	A	A	A	A	A
Price, Thomas P. (Monm'thsh.)	L	IAL; Radical*	N					
Priestley, Briggs	L	IAL; Radical	N	N		N	N	N
Provand, Andrew Dryburgh	L	IAL; Radical						N
Pugh, David	L		N	N	N	N		
Puleston, Sir John Henry	C		A	A	A	A	A	A
Quilter, William Cuthbert	LU	IAL						A
Quinn, Thomas	IPP					N		
Raikes, Rt. Hon. Henry Cecil	C		A	A		A	A	A
Randell, David	L	IAL; Radical*			N	N	N	
Rankin, James	C				A	A	A	
Rasch, Major Frederic Carne	C		A	A			A	A
Redmond, W.H.K. (Ferman'gh)	IPP							N
Reed, Henry Byron (Bradford)	C		A	A			A	
Reid, Robt. Threshire (Dumfries)	L	Radical			N			N

Name	Party	Notes	1 Apr. (1)	1 Apr. (2)	4 Apr. (1)	4 Apr. (2)	7 May	20 May
Richardson, Thomas	LU						A	A
Ridley, Sir Matthew White	C							A
Ritchie, Rt. Hon. Chas. Thomson	C		A	A	A	A	A	A
Roberts, John Bryn (Eifon)	L	IAL; Radical*					N	
Robertson, Edmund (Dundee)	L	IAL				N	N	
Robertson, Rt. Hon J.P.B. (Bute)	C		A	A	A	A	A	A
Robertson, Sir Tindal (Brighton)	C		A	A				
Robinson, Brooke (Dudley)	C		A	A			A	
Robinson, Thomas (Gloucester)	L	Radical			N		N	
Roe, Thomas	L	IAL; Radical					N	
Rollit, Sir Albert Kaye	C		A	A	A	A	A	
Rothschild, Baron F. James de	LU						A	
Round, James	C		A	A	A	A	A	A
Rowlands, James (Finsbury)	L	IAL; Radical*	N	N	N	N	N	N
Rowlands, W. Bowen (Card'sh.)	L	IAL	N	N	N		N	N
Rowntree, Joshua	L	IAL; Radical*	N	N	N	N	N	
Royden, Thomas Bland	C						A	
Russell, Sir Chas. (Hackney, S.)	L						N	N
Russell, Sir George (Berksh.)	C							A
Russell, T.W. (Tyrone)	LU		A	A	A	A	A	A
Salt, Thomas	C				A			
Samuelson, Sir B. (Oxford, N.)	L	IAL					N	
Sandys, Lieut-Col. Thos. Myles	C				A		A	
Schwann, Charles E.	L	IAL; Radical*	N	N			N	
Sellar, Alexander Craig	LU		A	A	A		A	A
Selwin-Ibbetson, Rt. Hn. Sir H.	C					A	A	
Seton-Karr, Henry	C		A	A		A	A	

Name	Party	Notes	1 Apr. (1)	1 Apr. (2)	4 Apr. (1)	4 Apr. (2)	7 May	20 May
Sexton, Thomas	IPP		N	N	N	N		N
Shaw, Thomas (Halifax)	L	IAL; Radical*					N	N
Shaw-Stewart, M.H. (Renfrew)	C		A	A			A	A
Sheil, Edward	IPP				N			
Sidebotham, J.W. (Cheshire)	C		A	A	A	A		A
Sidebottom, T. Harrop (Stalybr.)	C		A	A	A	A		
Sidebottom, William (Derbysh.)	C		A	A	A	A		
Sinclair, John (Ayr Burghs)	L		N	N		N	N	
Sinclair, Wm. Pirrie (Falkirk)	LU	IAL	A	A	A	A	A	A
Smith, Abel (Herts)	C		A	A		A	A	A
Smith, Rt. Hn. Wm. H. (Strand)	C		A	A	A	A	A	A
Smith, Samuel (Flint)	L	IAL Radical				N	N	
Stack, John	IPP							N
Stanhope, Philip	L	IAL; Radical*					N, Teller	
Stanhope, Rt. Hn. E. (Lincolnsh.)	C		A	A	A	A	A	A
Stanley, Edward James	C				A	A	A	A
Stansfeld, Rt. Hon. James	L	Radical*			N	N	N	N
Stephens, Henry Charles	C				A	A	A	
Stevenson, Francis S. (Suffolk)	L	IAL; Radical			N			N
Stevenson, Jas. C. (S. Shields)	L	IAL				N		
Stewart, Halley (Lincolnsh.)	L	IAL; Radical*	N	N	N	N	N	N
Stewart, Mark (Kirkcudb'tsh)	C		A	A		A	A	A
Stokes, George Gabriel	C		A	A	A			A
Storey, Samuel	L	IAL; Radical*					N	N
Stuart, James (Shoreditch)	L	IAL; Radical*	N	N			N	N
Sullivan, Donal (Westmeath)	IPP		N	N	N	N	N	N
Sullivan, T.D. (Dublin)	IPP							N
Summers, William	L	Radical	N	N	N	N	N	N

Name	Party	Notes	1 Apr. (1)	1 Apr. (2)	4 Apr. (1)	4 Apr. (2)	7 May	20 May
Sutherland, A. (Sutherlandsh.)	L	IAL; Radical*			N		N	
Sutherland, Thomas (Greenock)	LU				A	A		A
Swetenham, Edmund	C		A	A	A		A	
Swinburne, Sir John	L	IAL; Radical	N	N		N		N
Sykes, Christopher	C						A	
Talbot, John Gilbert (Oxf. Univ.)	C		A	A	A	A	A	A
Tanner, Charles Kearns	IPP				N			
Tapling, Thomas Keay	C		A	A	A	A		A
Taylor, Francis	LU		A	A	A	A	A	A
Temple, Sir Richard	C		A	A	A	A	A	A
Theobald, James	C		A	A	A	A	A	A
Thomas, Alfred (Glamorgan, E.)	L	IAL; Radical			N	N		
Thomas, David Alfred (Merthyr.)	L	IAL; Radical*	N	N		N	N	
Thorburn, Walter	LU		A	A	A	A		A
Tomlinson, Wm. Edw. Murray	C		A	A		A	A	A
Townsend, Frederick	C		A	A	A	A		
Trevelyan, Rt. Hn. Sir Geo Otto	L	Radical*					N	N
Tuite, James	IPP				N		N	N
Tyler, Sir Henry Whatley	C				A	A	A	A
Vernon, Hon. Greville Richard	LU		A	A	A	A	A	A
Vincent, Chas. Edw. Howard	C		A	A				
Vivian, Sir Henry Hussey	L	IAL			N			
Waddy, Samuel Danks	L					N	N	
Wallace, Robert	L	Radical	N	N	N		N	N
Walrond, Col. Sir William	C				A, Teller	A, Teller	A, Teller	A, Teller
Walsh, Hn. Arthur Henry John	C		A	A			A	
Wardle, Henry	L	IAL; Radical						N

Name	Party	Notes	1 Apr. (1)	1 Apr. (2)	4 Apr. (1)	4 Apr. (2)	7 May	20 May
Waring, Col. Thomas	C		A	A		A		A
Warmington, Cornelius M.	L	Radical	N	N	N	N	N	N
Watkin, Sir Edward W.	LU	IAL					A	
Watson, James	C				A	A		A
Wayman, Thomas	L	IAL; Radical	N	N		N	N	
Webster, R.G. (St. Pancras)	C		A	A				A
Webster, Sir R.E. (Isle of Wight)	C		A	A	A	A	A	A
West, W. Cornwallis	LU						A	
Weymouth, Viscount	C		A	A		A	A	
Wharton, John Lloyd	C							A
Whitley, Edward	C		A	A		A	A	A
Whitmore, Charles Algernon	C		A	A			A	A
Wiggin, Henry	LU						A	A
Will, John Shiress	L		N	N	N	N	N	N
Williams, Arthur (Glamorgan)	L	IAL; Radical	N	N		N	N	
Williams, Joseph Powell- (Birm.)	LU	IAL; Radical Unionist					A	
Williamson, J. (Lanc. N.)	L	IAL	N	N		N		
Williamson, Steph. (Kilm'nock)	L	IAL; Radical				N	N	
Wilson, Charles Henry (Hull)	L	Radical					N	N
Wilson, Henry J. (York, W.R.)	L	IAL; Radical*			N	N	N	N
Wilson, Isaac (Middlesborough)	L				N	N	N	
Wilson, John (Lanark.)	L	IAL; Radical*	N			N	N	N
Wilson, Sir Samuel (Portsm'th)	C	IAL			A		A	
Winn, Hon. Rowland	C						A	
Winterbotham, Arthur Brend	L		N	N		N		N
Wodehouse, Edmond Robert	LU		A	A	A		A	A
Wolmer, Viscount	LU		A	A		A	A	

Name	Party	Notes	1 Apr. (1)	1 Apr. (2)	4 Apr. (1)	4 Apr. (2)	7 May	20 May
Wood, Nicholas	C		A	A		A	A	
Woodall, William	L				N	N		
Woodhead, Joseph	L	IAL; Radical	N	N	N	N	N	N
Wortley, Charles Beilby Stuart	C		A	A	A	A	A	A
Wright, Caleb (Lanc.)	L	IAL; Radical	N	N	N	N	N	N
Wright, H. Smith (Nottingham)	C						A	
Wroughton, Philip	C						A	
Yerburgh, Robert Armstrong	C		A	A			A	
Young, Charles Edward Baring	C				A	A	A	A

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