Managing Domestic Dissent in First World War Britain

Brock Millman

MANAGING DOMESTIC DISSENT IN FIRST WORLD WAR BRITAIN

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Managing Domestic Dissent in First World War Britain

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Series Editor's Preface

The deluge of the First World War swept away not only millions of lives, but thrones and empires. As the conflict settled into a war of attrition without obvious end, states found themselves forced into an ever-more intense management of both the war and domestic fronts. Societies were tested to destruction by the demands placed by the war upon their economies, manpower reserves and social fabric. By the war's end all the major combatants were experiencing dissent either in the armed forces or domestically, or both.

Brock Millman's excellent and innovative work examines how the state coped with the rising tide of dissent unleashed by the supreme social stresses of the First World War through a meticulous case study of how one major combatant, Britain, dealt with these problems. Placing dissent centre-stage as a problem to be managed in the conduct of war gives a very different perspective from that of traditional military history. Not only that, it also helps to illuminate some aspects of war policy that can otherwise seem obscure, such as the retention of troops in Britain for which Lloyd George was to be censured in the Maurice debate in 1918. The perspective Millman provides makes it clear that there were two wars going on, one in the trenches and one for retention of control at home to ensure that the other could still be supplied. In the process, he skilfully interweaves these two conflicts, making clear the extent to which they impacted upon each other.

This was more than a matter of the passage of the Defence of the Realm Act (DORA) 1914, and its various manifestations. Millman makes it clear that dealing with dissent involved far more than DORA, or the elaboration of the necessary machinery in the Home Office or other departments of state. By clarifying the often informal structures, not dissimilar to the Crown and Anchor Clubs and other such bodies of the Napoleonic era, through which a patriotic alliance was forged, he provides a much more textured account of social conflict and its management during the First World War. At the same time, he illuminates the way in which the war and its consequences gradually provided the

occasion for an alignment between mainly middle-class opponents of the conflict and working-class opposition to the degree of coercion it seemed to entail, into a broad-based, cross-class dissenting movement

The significance of this account, accordingly, lies not only in its contribution to military history. Nor is it confined to the light it undoubtedly sheds upon the way in which Whitehall and Westminster sought to manage social conflict during the First World War. In laying bare the changing nature and articulation of this social conflict it also helps to demonstrate that propaganda, whether patriotic or dissenting, is not just a matter of public meetings, films or newspapers addressed at an undifferentiated audience, but something that had to work with and helped to structure patriotic and dissenting alliances. Furthermore, in the process Millman explicates that realignment at the level of low politics wrought by the war, a realignment that was to consign Liberal England to the history books and forge an electoral alliance that was to ensure the Conservative dominance of the inter-war years.

Peter Catterall
Series Editor

Abbreviations

AEU	Amalgamated Engineering Union
AG	Adjutant General
AJAG	Assistant Judge Advocate General
ASE	Amalgamated Society of Engineers
BL	British Library
BLIO	British Library India Office
BLO	Bodleian Library, Oxford
BSP	British Socialist Party
BWNL	British Workers' National League
CCC	Churchill College, Cambridge
CID	Criminal Investigation Department
CIGS	Chief of the Imperial General Staff
CMA	Competent Military Authority
CO	Conscientious Objector
DE	Dalmeny Estate
DMI	Director of Military Intelligence
DORA	Defence of the Realm Act
DPP	Director of Public Prosecutions
DRR	Defence of the Realm Regulations
DWRGWU	Dockers, Wharf, Riverside and General Workers' Union
ELFS	East London Federation of Suffragettes
FO	Foreign Office
FOR	Fellowship of Reconciliation
GFTU	General Federation of Trade Unions
HLRO	House of Lords Records Office
HMG	His Majesty's Government
HO	Home Office
ILIREE	Industrial League for the Improvement of Relations between Employers and Employees
ILP	Independent Labour Party
IWM	Imperial War Museum
IWW	International Workers of the World

JAG	Judge Advocate General
JP	Justice of the Peace
KCL	King's College, London
LBU	London Busworkers' Union
LSE	London School of Economics
MEPO	Metropolitan Police
MFGB	Miners' Federation of Great Britain
MI7	Military Intelligence, Bureau Seven
MIN	Ministry of Information
MP	Member of Parliament
MUH	McMaster University, Hamilton
MUN	Ministry of Munitions
NAC	National Council Against Conscription
NAEE	National Association of Employers and Employees
NAM	National Army Museum
NASFU	National Amalgamated Seamen's and Firemen's Union
NAUL	National Amalgamated Union of Labour
NCCL	National Council for Civil Liberties
NCF	No-Conscription Fellowship
NSL	National Service League
NSP	National Socialist Party
NUDL	National Union of Dock Labourers
NUM	National Union of Miners
NUPPO	National Union of Police and Prison Officers
NUR	Nation Union of Railwaymen
NUWSS	National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies
NWAC	National War Aims Committee
PLP	Parliamentary Labour Party
PRO	Public Record Office
RAF	Royal Air Force
RN	Royal Navy
SDF	Social Democratic Federation
SDP	Social Democratic Party
SNDC	Socialist National Defence Committee
SRO	Scottish Record Office
SWC	The British Stop the War Committee
SWMF	South Wales Miners' Federation
TA	Territorial Army
TF	Territorial Force
TGWU	Transport and General Workers Union
TUC	Trades Union Congress
TUC WEC	Trades Union Congress, War Emergency Committee

UB	University of Birmingham
UDC	Union of Democratic Control
VF	Volunteer Force
WAC	War Aims Committee
WC	War Cabinet
WEC	War Emergency Committee
WIL	Women's International League for Peace and Freedom
WO	War Office
WPC	Women's Peace Crusade
WSF	Women's Suffrage Federation
WSPU	Women's Social and Political Union

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Introduction

IT IS a commonplace that modern warfare is not a conflict of armies so much as a contest of societies. Defeat can come as much from the collapse of the home front as from military failure. The maintenance of a nation's will to fight is as important as its physical ability to continue the struggle. Total war, as it emerged during the twentieth century, broadens the scope of the conflict and links aspects of the contest in an organic manner, to the point where weakness anywhere can become weakness everywhere. Lack of military success can easily give rise to dissent on the home front, which, taking the form of industrial unrest, may deprive the army of those things it requires to prevent new and greater defeats. Failure on the home front is therefore as likely to produce total disaster as is defeat at the battle front.

Never was this more the case than during the First World War, when the victorious allies triumphed over Germany largely because the latter's will to carry on the fight had collapsed with its power to do so. The allies did not fight better; with the exception of Russia, they fought longer. Even Russia was never comprehensively defeated in the field, however; it dissolved from within, and this necessarily produced a collapse at the front. By 1917, similarly faced with political and national discontent they did not have the power to contain, Germany's allies were finished. Italy was a noneffective ally by the end of 1917 not simply because of what was happening on the Isonzo, but because of what was transpiring at home. Indeed, defeats at the front derived in part from social–political dislocation. The Italian army was not simply weak in itself, but feeble because Italy was failing. Germany itself might have continued the war through 1919 (as it was expected that it would) except that disappointments at the front combined with war weariness to produce social–political disarray. Dissent was clumsily handled, and national cohesion was lost. In the end, Germany had to end the war or risk comprehensive failure. France and Britain, on the other hand, survived the challenge of total war, if only narrowly, and crossed the finish line first not because they were fastest but in large measure

because other competitors had collapsed along the way. Perhaps more appropriately Britain dragged its failing ally, France, across the line on 11 November 1918.

An understanding of the techniques by which each combatant mobilized and sustained civilian effort and morale, therefore, is crucial to accounting for the course and verdict of the war. An understanding of the reasons for Britain's exceptional endurance is especially critical. By the autumn of 1918, of the original combatants Britain alone continued to field an effective force while preserving national cohesion. The Russian, Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires were dead. Italy was practically comatose. France was failing. Germany was plainly dying. Britain's fortitude was, at least in part, a function of the fact that Britain of all the combatants was most effective in dealing with dissent on the home front. It follows that to understand why this was so is to take one of several necessary steps toward comprehending why the war ended as it did.

The subject of what follows is the ways in which order was maintained on the British home front (with the exception of Ireland) through to victory in 1918.[1] Important work has been done here on what might be termed the 'positive' means by which civilian morale was sustained and the fruits of civilian endeavour maximized.[2] What remains a blank spot, however, is consideration of the negative efforts by which the government buttressed the home front by limiting, or directing into harmless channels, the expression of dissent. The spotlight has been on the ways in which participation in the war was encouraged and the effectiveness of the national effort maximized, rather than the methods by which opposition was discouraged and the disruption occasioned to the war effort by dissent minimized. It is with this second category that this book is principally concerned.

While specific studies do not exist, some notion of government activity can be glimpsed in works on wartime protest movements of which there are plenty; in a few of the better of these some notion is given of government actions. Here, of course, the government is the enemy, and mention is made of its activities only to provide a background against which the development of dissent can be highlighted. Some, however, are valuable sources. Honourable mention, in this regard, must surely go to Marvin Swartz, who, in *The Union of Democratic Control in British Politics during the First World War*[3] gives what is probably the best existing description of British policy as it developed through the war. This, however, is not his primary focus.

Specific studies which reverse Swartz's priorities are almost totally lacking. About the best that can be found are some monographs dealing with government strike-breaking.[4] These, unfortunately, consider the

government's reaction to only one type of dissent. Only one of them devotes any space to the First World War period.[5] Another explicitly indicates that this was a time during which the government was not much worried about industrial action.[6] Another suggests the same.[7] None has used existing wartime material very adventurously. Richard Thurlow's *The Secret State* and Gerard De Groot's *Blighty* are sound, but, once again, their focus is broad and their primary interest elsewhere.[8] Aside from these, a novel, Pat Barker's *The Eye in the Door*, is the best account there is.

This is a major lacuna in the history of the First World War. After all, if a workman can be bought or convinced, he can equally well be confused, intimidated, or deprived of the leadership which alone can make his disaffection in the mass a challenge to the war effort. Ultimately co-operation can be compelled, and it is a mistake to think that no democratic, no *British*, government would consider such a step. The costs of uncontained dissent are simply too high. If dissent reaches major proportions and cannot be silenced then defeat must follow.

Why does this lacuna exist? Perhaps part of the reason that measures to combat dissent have not received much attention is because crucial records have not been available. Consider the British case. Many of the most important files in the most important collections were to be closed for one hundred years. Much of this material has only recently been opened; and even at this late date it is obvious that many files are incomplete. Police correspondence and reports, 'black lists', Criminal Investigation Department (CID) surveillance records and domestic threat assessments may simply have been as embarrassing for the compilers after the war as for those then surveyed, or indeed, for those caught up in waging the war against internal enemies. Documents like these may have been purged; they may simply remain closed. Some important collections appear to have been almost completely sanitized. Correspondence between the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police (MEPO) and the Home Office (HO), for instance, is almost entirely absent for the war and the immediately postwar period. This correspondence may never have existed. Letters between the Commissioner and the Home Secretary were pasted into exercise books. Between 1914 and 1922, there are almost no letters. Pages were not excised. There were no pages.[9] Along the same lines, we know that Admiralty Intelligence was very active in combating dissent, but such activities have left almost no trace in Admiralty files.

The government, of course, was not the only actor with a selective memory and a bad conscience. Most of those personally engaged on the government side left little record of their activities against dissent.

Assistant Commissioner Basil Thomson, with responsibility for directing the police response to dissent, is a partial exception. Those parts of his memoirs which deal with his activities against dissent, however, are few, obviously sanitized, and included, it seems probable, for curiosity value.[10] Nor do many wartime dissenters have very good postwar memories. This was probably by choice. In his memoirs, Philip Snowden confessed that he had deliberately omitted the long passage he had initially planned concerning the wartime utterances and activities of his opponents. Why? They were too terrible and shaming for those implicated, he thought, to be recalled.[11] Equally shaming may have been remembrance of his own wartime statements (some of which were certainly seditious) once the passions produced by the war had abated and he had taken high office in His Majesty's Government (HMG).[12] It is unlikely that Snowden was the only person who practised this type of self-censorship. About the only memoir writers prepared to tell all were Clydeside Reds – John McGovern and William (Red) Gallacher for instance. Unfortunately, while useful and entertaining, their recollections are of doubtful general utility.[13]

The result? Many questions which cannot be definitively answered and much information lacking detail. Here are a few examples. We can, for instance, establish from the surviving correspondence that there were lists of those to be pre-emptively arrested in certain eventualities without being able to know who was on them because the lists themselves, in all probability, no longer exist. Similarly, we can know that there was infiltration of suspect organizations – trade unions, and suspicious political and peace organizations for instance – without being able to establish the scale or effectiveness of such penetration. We know there were informers. Who they were and how they were recruited and selected remains a mystery. We know that, by 1917, information concerning the activities of dissenting organizations was being passed to civilian organizations for their pre-emption, without being able to establish the scale or global effectiveness of such co-ordination. We know that Lloyd George and other leading members of his administration were associated with the war against dissent, both officially and unofficially, but it is difficult to ascertain how complete was their personal responsibility for much that occurred. We can, finally, sketch out a system of repression functioning effectively by 1917, but it is difficult to know just how much this system was the product of chance or forethought. These are only a few of the more provoking questions. Tentative answers will be suggested for some of them in what follows.

What exists teases and invites speculation without permitting the construction of a comprehensive narrative. Nonetheless, while the

complete story cannot be told, enough documentation remains and is now open to give some, provisional, idea of method. What follows is a brief discussion of the highly effective negative methods by which British dissent was marginalized, those persons and organizations which might have mobilized it were rendered impotent, and the type of internal dissension which drove Russia from the war and brought about the collapse of Germany was prevented. It was not that Britain was peculiarly without dissenters, just that the British government dealt with them particularly effectively. Such methods grew from very humble beginnings to the point where, by the end of 1917, a highly effective if not always consistent system of repression had emerged, capable of silencing the dissent which existed, while a more thoroughgoing structure was already being prepared against the eventuality that dissent might develop in more dangerous directions still. And, while the British government never assembled the formal powers of the autocracies – or even of Clemenceau's administration in Republican France – its policies were, perhaps, more effective for that fact. A covert practice of repression ensured that few ever knew how extensive were the activities inspired, if not always carried out, by the government. Nor were repressive practices ever implemented in such a fashion as was obviously inconsistent with civilian, peacetime practice. Civilian governments, characterized by liberal intentions if not always by liberal practice, remained in control throughout the war. This ensured that all repressive measures were carried through only so far as astute judges of the matter considered that a critical mass of British society was willing to follow, indeed, was disposed to lead. What this meant was that while the government came to operate comprehensively against dissent, repression remained a solution without becoming unnecessarily, disproportionately provocative.

If, therefore, as Ludendorff saw it, the British army might be conceived of as being the instrument of victory, this must be construed not only as an acknowledgement of the fighting prowess of British and dominion troops, but at least in part, as a tribute to the efficiency with which Britain's home front was policed and the private disaffection of many prevented from bringing about national collapse.

NOTES

1. Ireland is excluded not because it is of no interest, but owing to constraints of time and space. Ireland, properly considered, would require a whole volume to itself.
2. For the propaganda war, for instance, see G. Bruntz, *Allied Propaganda and the Collapse of the German Empire in 1918* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1972);

P. Buitenhuis, *The Great War of Words* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1987); A. Ponsonby, *Falsehood in Wartime: This Containing an Assortment of Lies Circulated Throughout the Nations During the Great War* (New York: E. D. Dutton, 1929); J. Read, *Atrocity Propaganda 1914–1918* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1941); N. Reeves, *Official British Film Propaganda During the First World War* (London: Dover, 1986); C. Roetter, *Psychological Warfare* (London: Batsford, 1974); M. Saunders and P. Taylor, *British Propaganda During the First World War* (London: Macmillan, 1982); J. Squires, *British Propaganda at Home and in the United States 1914–1917* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986).

3. M. Swartz, *The Union of Democratic Control in British Politics During the First World War* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971).
4. R. Desmarais, 'Lloyd George and the Development of the British Government's Strike Breaking Organization', *International Journal of Social History*, 20 (1975), pp. 1–15; R. Geary, *Policing Industrial Disputes. 1893–1985* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); K. Jeffery, *States of Emergency: British Governments and Strike Breaking since 1919* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983); J. Morgan, *Conflict and Order: The Police and Labour Disputes in England and Wales 1900–1939* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987); S. Peak, *Troops in Strikes: Military Intervention in Industrial Disputes* (London: Cobden Trust, 1984).
5. Morgan, *Conflict and Order*, pp. 65–71.
6. Geary, *Policing Industrial Disputes*, p. 48.
7. Keith Jeffery begins his discussion of the government strikebreaking apparatus by indicating that it was a product of the period immediately following the war, Jeffery, *States of Emergency*, p. 1. In fact, it is more appropriate to see the mechanism surviving into peacetime as the much reduced quantification of wartime practice.
8. R. Thurlow, *The Secret State: British Internal Security in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), pp. 47–63, especially pp. 60–3; G. De Groot, *Blighty: British Society in the Era of the Great War* (London: Longman, 1996), pp. 140–60. Thurlow, most importantly, avoids Jeffery's error. For him, the First World War was a seminal period, during which roles were assumed, never to be renounced, and inhibitions lost, never to be regained. De Groot is good, but tends to understate the potential of dissent. For him, the dissenters were 'leaders without followers ... fringe ideologues who maintained a lonely and futile opposition to the government' (p. 143). This confuses social–political reality with the effect of government policy.
9. See PRO, MEPO 1/68, and MEPO 1/69. Virtually nothing remains from the period 1914–22 aside from a few letters dealing with spies, and alterations to the police force – the enrolment of special constables, and the retention of retired men, for example.
10. B. Thomson, *The Scene Changes* (London: Doubleday, 1937); idem, *The Story of Scotland Yard* (London: Grayson & Grayson, 1935).
11. Lord Snowden, *Autobiography* (London: Ivor Nicolson & Watson, 1934), p. 416.
12. Snowden was a dynamic platform speaker who, if many of his wartime speeches are taken at face value, was also a revolutionary firebrand and a strong admirer of the Bolsheviks – advocating, through the later war years, that their solution for Russia be applied to Britain. By 1920, his tune had changed considerably (see, for example, in addition to sources indicated below, B. Russell, *The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1968; London: George Allen & Unwin, 1968), Vol. II, p. 102, etc.). He had become a convinced anti-Bolshevik, and the memory of his wartime utterances must have caused him considerable mortification.
13. W. Gallacher, *Revolt on the Clyde* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1949); J. McGovern, *Neither Fear Nor Favour* (London: Bloomfield Press, 1960).

—1—

War and Dissent, 1914–1915

IN AUGUST 1914 Britain declared war on Germany. In Britain, as in all combatant countries, such few voices as were raised in dissent were overwhelmed by a chorus supportive of the decision to resort to arms. It would have been strange had it been otherwise. While its entry to the war had been controversial, attended by the resignation of several members of the Asquith government, Britain entered the war to defend well-defined and long-established interests. It was widely believed that the war would be over quickly and that victory would not require any fundamental change to peacetime ways of doing things.

This is not to say that there were no dissenters. From the beginning, there were prominent men who associated themselves in opposition to the war. During its first year, however, they were without a coherent body of followers, agreed programme, or effective organization. While these things existed in embryo, dissent had not yet developed to the point where it could be a threat to the war effort. Such would remain the case until an increasingly total war, requiring greater levels of sacrifice and necessitating wartime departures such as conscription, began to produce mass disaffection associated, ultimately, with elite dissent. It is, however, important that we understand the basic nature of British anti-war dissent because, while dissent grew in scope and significance, it grew from particularly British roots and its nature did not change. Repression can only be effective if it is constructed to account for the particular characteristics of a given dissent.

Ramsay MacDonald and the faction of the Independent Labour Party (ILP) opposing Britain's entry to the war must surely have pride of place in any discussion of anti-war dissent in Britain. From the time of the first ILP peace meeting in Trafalgar Square, even before the declaration of war, much of the party leadership never looked back.[1] Many of them – Keir Hardie, Ramsay MacDonald and others such as Philip Snowden, Fenner Brockway and Clifford Allen – were either pacifists or convinced, at least, that war between nations did not serve the interests of the working class.

Brockway was a good example of a socialist dissenter and a pacifist. The son of missionary parents, he had graduated from liberalism to advanced socialism by 1907. Throughout he was an uncompromising pacifist. No Marxist, he considered that only pacifism was reconcilable with socialist principles. The only exception he was ever willing to make to this general rule was in the case of colonial peoples struggling for independence. Even this exception was still some decades away in development, and hardly covered Britain's case in 1914.[2] As well, for socialists like Brockway, many of them perhaps less convinced pacifists than he was, the conflict between nations was of less relevance than the struggle for the rights of labour. The secret of the bayonet – need it be said? – was that there was a worker on either end. 'We are told that international Socialism is dead', began the ILP Christmas card for 1914,

> that all our hopes and ideals are wrecked by the fire and pestilence of European war. It is not true. Out of the darkness and depth we hail our working class comrades of every land. Across the roar of guns, we send sympathy and greetings to the German Socialists.
>
> In forcing this appalling crime upon the nations, it is the rulers, the diplomats, the militarists who have sealed their doom. In tears of blood and bitterness, the greater Democracy will be born.
>
> With steadfast faith we greet the future; our cause is holy and imperishable, and the labour of our hands has not been in vain.
>
> Long Live Freedom and Fraternity!
> Long Live International Socialism![3]

While these sentiments were certainly those of a minority, they were, nevertheless deeply held.

For his part, Ramsay MacDonald, in 1914 the leader of the ILP, the umbrella Labour Party and the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP),[4] represented a greater constituency within British politics: the perplexed – those who combined socialism with religious motives and who, if internationalist by creed, were patriots by instinct. While certainly considered 'pacifists' at the time, adherents of this persuasion would be more correctly labelled today, following Martin Ceadel, 'pacific-ists': anti-war, but not in all cases, convinced that sometimes recourse to war might be a regrettable necessity.[5] This was certainly not a very well defined, nor comfortable position. One of his biographers, Bernard Sacks, is probably most correct in describing MacDonald as a 'practical pacifist'.[6] That is, while not a pure pacifist like Brockway, he was so

opposed to war in principle that he could scarcely identify a single case which would justify it. 'I do not think', he wrote to another of the perplexed, in May 1916,

> that [in the event of war] a socialist would be inconsistent if he performed work of national importance such as teaching and farming. I am quite sure that if a Socialist Government were in power conditions might arise when it would have to defend itself, but it would do so on a philosophy of individual conscience and not of State tyranny over the individual. That is where the difference comes in between us and the militarists. ... If, in addition to being a Socialist, one is a member of the Society of Friends or a Tolstoyan, then of course, one's Socialist principles must be mixed up with the others, only do not say that the combination of principles which results is pure socialism because it is not.[7]

One, perhaps, could fight if a citizen of a socialist country under attack, if one was a volunteer, and provided that there were no conflicting religious principles. Britain was not a socialist country in 1914. MacDonald was not sure that it had been attacked. With MacDonald there *were* religious scruples. Moreover, like many dissenters MacDonald believed that conscription must inevitably follow from involvement in a European war. Conscription, as Keir Hardie put it, was 'the badge of the slave'.[8] MacDonald, quite plainly, was not likely to provide very effective support for Britain's war effort.

On the other hand, like many of the perplexed, MacDonald was well able to distinguish between combatants. If the war had to be fought, then he certainly hoped that Britain would win it. Britain's participation was a crime; yet a German victory would be a disaster. Overcoming his loathing for the idea of war, in August 1914 MacDonald even offered to work for the national interest provided that his fundamental objections were understood. He was made to understand by Lloyd George, however, that this was simply not good enough.[9] Going further, in October MacDonald took up a challenge to put his principles into practice by volunteering to work for a field ambulance unit. He crossed over into France to see what he could do. He was not at the front for very long, however, before he was arrested by the military authorities and deported back to Britain.[10] He withdrew thereafter into an opposition more extreme than it need have been. Confused MacDonald may have been: he was also already peripheralized and identified as a leader of dissent.

In August 1914 MacDonald withdrew from leadership of the Labour

Party when it became clear that the dissenters would be in the minority. To prevent permanent disunion, Arthur Henderson, his successor, allowed him to remain as treasurer.[11] MacDonald had already found an alternative forum for political activity. With other, like-minded dissenters, he became a prominent, founding member of the Union of Democratic Control (UDC).[12] MacDonald's primary objection, always, was less with the war (which he hated) than with the way in which Britain had entered the war, and the prewar diplomacy which had brought it about (which he absolutely abhorred). The only rational policy, he considered, was to fight until a tolerable peace could be made, and then to work to ensure that there was never a repetition.[13] Moreover, as a socialist, MacDonald was not slow to indict social inequalities as the root of the political evil which had led to the war. If the war had to be fought, he considered, then the rich should be made to finance it out of their own pockets, thus reducing their liking for conflict, avoiding placing a burden on future generations, and accomplishing wealth redistribution.[14] MacDonald, needless to say, very quickly became rather unpopular with very many people.

Both the convinced socialists and the perplexed, combined against the war, were a minority within the Labour Party, labour movement and working class. If all had answered the cry found, for instance, in the ILP Christmas card, dissent might have been vigorous and effective from the beginning of the war. Within Labour ranks, however, a split had already developed in August 1914. When MacDonald proposed that Labour MPs vote against war credits, he had found himself opposed by a solid block of ILP Trades Union Congress (TUC) members led by John Hodge. Patriotism rather than socialist or pacifist principle was the guiding light of this faction. Hodge insisted that the question was an easy one: 'either we are for our country or we are against it'.[15] Even where full-blooded, bellicose patriotism was not in evidence, the majority Labour view was that it would be a political mistake, both strategic and tactical, to compromise the allied war effort. Disagreement within the Labour Party reflected division within the working class. About the only place where Labour unity was preserved through the war was in London. Here, Herbert Morrison – Labour's coming man – managed to preserve a fragile unity by deliberately avoiding the question of the war altogether.[16]

Elsewhere, division was the rule, and the patriots in the ascendance. Throughout the war, the Webbs tell us, five-sixths of the PLP and nine-tenths of the aggregate membership of the Labour Party supported the government's war policy.[17] 'From the beginning of the war to the end', they affirm,

> the Labour Party, alike in all its corporate acts, and by the individual efforts of its leading members ... stuck at nothing in its determination to help the Government win the war.[18]

The Webbs were certainly over-stating the case, but not much.[19] Even in the ILP – both as a party, and the Labour grouping most accepting of dissent – dissenters were a minority in 1914 and remained so until the Leeds conference of 1917 at least. Marwick provides a useful illustration. In 1918 (with dissent at its high point), in Bradford (a town notorious for its militancy), and in the local ILP (that organization most opposed to the war), absent membership 'was accounted for as follows – 429 in His Majesty's Forces, nineteen in His Majesty's Prisons, with, in addition, twenty-nine conscientious objectors on Alternative Service'.[20] In a place, a time and an organization in which we would expect dissenters to be disproportionately over-represented within a general working-class membership, serving soldiers outnumbered objectors of all types, by 9 to 1, and absolutists by almost 23 to 1.

There were exceptions to the general rule that patriotism overruled dissent in the early years of the war, places where the outbreak of war did not lead to immediate social consolidation. Clydeside was one. The reasons, however, were particular to the region. In Glasgow, for instance, a class divide of the most dangerous kind existed which was not at all lessened by the clumsy policies adopted by the Scottish Office in 1914–15.[21] There was, in addition, a substantial immigrant Irish population in Glasgow, and wherever they were found, the Irish were fodder for dissent during the First World War period.[22] On the Clyde, moreover, the local dissenting leadership almost immediately attempted to turn wartime grievances and fears of approaching conscription to political purposes. Dissent's national leadership did not learn this trick until the later months of 1915. The local Labour leadership tended, finally, to be far more radical than was usual. John MacLean, for instance, the most prominent local Marxist, was not only very popular, but almost unique among British Marxists in being against the war from the beginning. Here only were the most radical voices in British political life against the war; here only did these voices find a ready-made mass audience; here only were the tactics of dissent effective from the start of the war.[23]

The result? In a departure from more permissive policies elsewhere, far left journals were simply suppressed (*Forward* and *Worker* in January 1915) and the most intransigent leaders – John Muir, John MacLean, William Gallacher and Tom Bell – imprisoned. Muir and Bell (the printer) were sentenced for association with *Worker*, which carried an article in January 1915, entitled 'Should Workers Arm?', judged to be

blatantly seditious. MacLean got three years, Gallacher six months, and Bell, Muir and Maxton one year each.[24] At the end of the year, Gallacher and Emanuel Shinwell conspired to humiliate Lloyd George during a trip north.[25] First of all, they convinced most prominent Labour leaders to boycott the powerful Minister of Munitions. Ultimately, David Kirkwood was the only local Labour leader prepared to meet him. Later, a packed meeting booed Lloyd George off the stage, and ended by singing the Red Flag. Three days later, nine prominent, radical Labour leaders were arrested and deported.[26] In 1916, Maxton and MacLean were imprisoned, yet again, for speaking against conscription.[27] Thereafter, to a certain extent, Glasgow quietened down under the patient handling of David Kirkwood, who, despite his growing radicalism, was determined to use the war in the interests of the working class. While recalcitrant, and always violent, Glasgow ceased to be so much of an exception.

Somewhere between the Labour dissenters, and the TUC patriots such as Hodge stood Arthur Henderson – the perfect leader for a split party. An officer of the British Section of the Second International, he had assisted Keir Hardie's efforts to stop the war. With Ramsay MacDonald, he had joined the UDC. While he was later to resign from the executive, Henderson never fully repudiated his association with the UDC and returned to it by the end of the war.[28] On the other hand, Henderson did not believe that British diplomacy had been responsible for the war. He believed that Britain's cause was just, and that Germany was evil.[29] He went further and promised to support even conscription and government workplace restructuring if the emergency required it.[30] To do anything else, he considered, would make him a traitor to Britain's soldiers – three of whom were his own sons.[31] Ultimately, Henderson took office in the government: first as PLP whip in the Asquith coalition government, and later as a member of the Lloyd George War Cabinet. He was also an energetic participant in wartime recruiting campaigns.[32] 'If being secretary of the Labour Party', he answered an opponent, 'is in any way to preclude me from doing my duty to my country in this crisis, then I want my hon[ourable] friend and others to know that I chose my country before my party.'[33] When Henderson resigned as leader of the ILP, he was replaced by Fred Jowett, a man of similar convictions – inclined to oppose war, but likewise inclined to support this one. While a dissenter of pacifist tendencies, and pro-UDC, Jowett was also convinced that Britain needed to fight this war to win.[34]

Labour dissenters were by no means alone. Many Liberals hated war, power politics and most of all conscription, so far were these out of keeping with the Gladstonian inheritance. Liberals were, however, like

Labour, divided on the issue of when policies designed to win the war became simply unacceptable. They were, moreover, as vulnerable to patriotic considerations. Nor did the fact that a Liberal government was in power make the situation any easier. A few Liberal-Imperialists of the Rosebery school, such as Winston Churchill, then First Lord of the Admiralty, were exultant and were vigorous supporters of the war effort. A few others – Sir Edward Grey, the Foreign Minister, Haldane, the War Minister and Lloyd George, the Chancellor of the Exchequer – accepted what could not be avoided. Asquith, the Prime Minister, needed to be convinced. In the end, he was brought to throw his weight on the side of his friends, and principal political allies, Grey and Haldane.[35] Most other Liberals were appalled by what had happened. Lord John Morley, Charles Trevelyan and John Burns withdrew from the government at the prospect of war, so much did they disapprove of the 'secret diplomacy' which they believed had brought it about. They could not countenance participation in a war which, they considered, had been caused by unprincipled diplomacy, and was being conducted by immoral means towards ignoble ends. Few, however, moved to overt opposition. That would be, if nothing else, party treason. It would also surrender the party to Grey, Haldane, Lloyd George and Churchill.

Charles Trevelyan, alone among the principal men of the Liberal Party, broke not only with the government but with his party, and became a notable dissenter. It would have been strange had he not. A Gladstonian, he was, in 1904, the founder of the National Peace Council, and a constant critic of the foreign policy of Sir Edward Grey. With war imminent, he became a founder and financial backer of the British Neutrality Committee, and with the declaration of war, a founding father of the UDC.[36] In the early months of the war, he bent his best efforts to the construction of a united anti-war front in Parliament, drawn both from the Liberal and Labour parties.[37] His opinion of the existing Liberal leadership was already highly unfavourable, and steadily declined. As early as 1915 his disapproval was near total. '[W]hen you have reached the depth of dishonesty of Asquith and Grey over the French alliance', he wrote to Sir Arthur Ponsonby in the early months of 1915, 'you are capable of any immorality.'[38] Trevelyan was not only worried about how the war began, but horrified at the crimes which, he was certain, must follow. He believed, for one thing, that the war would certainly be long and hard. It would necessarily involve conscription. But what to do? The best policy, he considered, would be to wait things out, dissociating at least a remnant of the Liberal and Labour parties from the war's conduct, and prepare this rump to organize the inevitable revulsion which would develop.[39]

Certain leading Liberals who remained in the government agreed with much of Trevelyan's assessment. They were not willing, however, to go so far, so openly. It was a sign of the dilemma presented for Liberalism by the war that even leading Liberals and allies of Asquith such as Reginald McKenna, the Home Secretary in 1914, his successor in 1915 (Attorney General in 1914), Sir John Simon and the Chairman of the Board of Trade, Walter Runciman, had their qualms.

Simon was widely expected to leave the government on the outbreak of war, and only stayed after Lloyd George convinced him that the Germans had sought war.[40] Even then, it took a personal appeal from Asquith to ensure Simon's continued loyalty. He would stay, he promised, 'though with a heavy heart'.[41] By 1916, Simon had had enough and, on the issue of conscription, followed those who had left the government at the outset – taking with him 'about three dozen' other Liberal members of the House of Commons 'into opposition to attack the measure'.[42]

McKenna and Runciman disapproved of the way in which Britain had entered the war, and of conscription. However, like many others, they were confused by events for which there was no recent precedent. McKenna, for instance, considered that the army would have to grow if Britain were not to default on its obligations to its allies, but also believed that the growth of the army would imperil Britain's ability to remain in the war by undermining other aspects of national strength.[43] He was, therefore, only too keenly aware of the central dilemma of British domestic war management without having any insight as to how it was to be solved. After the spring of 1915, McKenna and Runciman were only maintained in the government with the most explicit assurances from Asquith that the Unionists,[44] then entering the national government, did so with an open mind on divisive issues such as Ireland, conscription, free trade and taxation.[45] Of course, the Unionists had only accepted Asquith's equivocations (particularly on conscription) because they considered them the best that could be obtained at the moment, and certain to be expanded in the future.[46]

Having made their personal opposition known, most dissenting Liberals remained silent thereafter so as not to harm the party. McKenna, for instance, promised that despite his disagreement with government policy, he would never go into opposition or split the party – even on the issue of conscription.[47] A divided party would fall to the Unionist wolves. Asquith would be isolated within the party and the Liberal 'militarists' would have a clear field.[48] 'What will the country say', Mrs Asquith pleaded at a time when McKenna appears to have been contemplating a real break, 'when it hears that you, Runciman &

Simon – all *real* Liberals – all heart & soul in agreement with Henry have left him?'[49] What the country would say, however, was probably less important for McKenna than what the country would do: turn to Bonar Law or Lloyd George, operating without any effective check.

When Asquith began to renege on his promises, McKenna remained in the government, serving in a succession of posts, increasingly marginalized, unhappy and without influence in the formation of a war policy the defining features of which he could never accept. Runciman resigned.[50] Both remained silent. McKenna was silent, as well, to cries that if Liberalism failed to provide a lead to dissent it would fail, and the Liberal Party would lose leadership of the 'progressive forces' in the nation.[51] In the end, silence seemed like complicity. Apparent acquiescence in a policy dominated by the Unionist agenda was the major reason why dissent, in the end, came to flow through Labour rather than Liberal channels.

Simon was an exception to the rule. Unlike most other Liberal dissenters, he did formalize his break with the party. His dissent, however, remained strictly parliamentary, and therefore, ineffective. Like McKenna and Runciman, he refused to provoke division, however divisive the issue. 'Sir John desires to assure your Majesty', his letter of resignation went,

> that no effort on his part will be wanting to promote a renewal of the national unity which this proposal has jeopardised. He has done, and will do, everything in his power to confine the opposition to this Bill to protests, on grounds of conviction and policy, against its enactment; and has already made it clear, as Mr Balfour admitted in Thursday's debate, that this unhappy difference does not and must not imply any division as to the supreme national purpose for which your Majesty's subjects, one and all, have entered the war.[52]

Having moved into opposition, like McKenna, he refused dissenting appeals to lead the cause against the war,[53] while he himself saw service with the staff of the Royal Flying Corps (RFC) in France.

Another prominent Liberal who, like Trevelyan, not only left the party but moved into overt opposition, was Sir Arthur Ponsonby. While not a party figure of the stature of Trevelyan, Ponsonby was a long-time critic of British foreign policy. As chairman of the Liberal foreign affairs group, he had been a gadfly afflicting whichever government happened to be in power. Even before the war, scenting danger, he had authored a number of books highly critical of what he perceived to be the new, and, as he saw it, unconstitutional way of forming foreign policy.[54]

Like Trevelyan, Ponsonby did not simply oppose the government for the way in which it had entered into the war. He opposed the war itself. Like Trevelyan, he considered the war an unmitigated disaster. 'The matter we are dealing with', he told his Stirling constituents on 25 March 1915,

> is not just a party question, a passing dispute or a matter of small concern which can be left in abeyance. It is a shattering catastrophe the consequences of which will last our life times. The result of which will be felt for generations to come.[55]

And why had this happened? Largely because of the prewar arms race. This was Ponsonby's bugbear, just as conscription was Trevelyan's. Both, of course, were carried over into the UDC critique. 'When nations devote', Ponsonby wrote,

> all their enterprise, their inventive genius, their labour & wealth and the best of their manhood to the manufacture & perfecting of engines of war it is inevitable that an opportunity will sooner or later be made to test their efficiency ... *I feel very strongly about this and think it must be fully dealt with.*[56]

The war could have been avoided. Nothing could possibly be gained sufficient to justify even the effort already made. Who could possibly gain anything from a continuation of the conflict? Only the sinister armament interests. They, Ponsonby charged, had created the environment which had produced the war, and stood ready to rake in the blood money. Ponsonby less broke with the Liberal party than formalized an existing breach when he came together with like-minded men to build the UDC.[57]

Other intellectual Liberals, outside parliament – J. A. Hobson, Norman Angell, Bertrand Russell,[58] Philip Morrell, F. W. Hirst – followed Ponsonby and Trevelyan into active opposition. From the beginning of the war, these men (Angell, Russell and Morrell especially) had been meeting with Liberal and Labour parliamentary dissenters in an attempt to orchestrate a campaign against the war.[59] From this seed grew the UDC. The intellectuals, quite simply, agreed that the war was a crime and a danger on which Britain had embarked due to bumbling, manipulation and its overly enthusiastic participation in a flawed and morally bankrupt international system. They agreed, moreover, that conscription was inevitable and a crime, and that armament interests had both helped cause, and would solely benefit from, a conflict which

was otherwise a universal catastrophe. We should not wonder at such concurrence. These men had erected much of the intellectual framework employed by the dissenters. In moving into dissent they were simply associating themselves with the wartime political expression of their own prewar ideas.

A minority faction of the suffragette movement, drawn on by the wider radicalism of which their feminism was a feature, accompanied the socialists and Liberals into dissent. F. W. Pethick Lawrence (later honorary treasurer of the UDC) and Sylvia Pankhurst, leader of the East London Federation of Suffragettes (ELFS), were leaders of this tendency which had begun to split, for tactical reasons, from the mainline Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) in the months immediately before the war.[60] Kindred movements supported them: the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WIL) and Margaret Haley's Women's Peace Crusade (WPC), for instance. The WIL and the WPC were direct responses to the war formed following the suspension of general WSPU activity.[61] Catherine Marshall of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) had also, even before the war, been drawn towards a social, rather than a strictly gender critique of contemporary Britain. Like these others, she quickly became a prominent leader of dissent.[62]

The dissenting suffragettes believed that the struggle of women for political rights was simply part of a greater conflict pitting the disadvantaged against the powers that were. For women, the vote was a beginning. There were other issues of interest to women, they believed, which were more amenable to class or political than gender analysis.[63] Moreover was it not bad tactics to fail to support anti-war dissent? Against the status quo, dissenters of all kinds would have to form a common front or risk being defeated in detail. Support for anti-war dissent, in part, would simply reciprocate backing already received in the struggle for the vote. The ILP had been the only prewar party which had supported, consistently and whole-heartedly, the demand for a female suffrage. Asquith, Grey and the rest (with the exception of Lloyd George and Churchill) were not just Britain's war leadership, but the prewar leaders of the anti-suffrage movement. How would helping to keep them in power further any feminist platform, however modest?

While a suffragette anti-war movement certainly existed from the beginning, for our purposes it does not require separate treatment. From 1914, the dissenting suffragettes were ILP fellow-travellers and, by the end of the war, this faction of the movement had practically disappeared into the Labour Party. The ELFS, for instance, became in March 1916 the Women's Suffrage Federation, devolved into the

Workers' Socialist Federation in 1918 – its male component larger at each stage, its suffragist message more subordinate to socialist content.[64] Despite this fact, however, and even though they were small in numbers, the dissenting suffragettes represented a considerable accretion of strength for dissent. The WIL, in particular, developed a considerable propaganda apparatus. The WPC was remarkably persistent in attempting to arrange anti-war meetings.[65] As male dissenters, by 1916, began to disappear into prisons and guardhouses, very often it was their female collaborators who kept the colours flying.

Such were the major political sources from which anti-war dissent developed. In all of the greater movements from which it derived, dissent remained a minority tendency. Given these disparate origins, it might be considered that dissent would remain an amorphous, divided and impotent force. From the beginning of 1915, however, dissent was beginning to gain coherence, to solidify into an effective force. Why was this?

One factor which certainly contributed enormously to the consolidation of dissent, and which is far too often forgotten in studies of the subject, was the religious provenance of British pacifism. Whatever political form anti-war dissent might take, whether Liberal or Labour (or suffragette for that matter), all were rooted in the traditional abhorrence of large portions of British nonconformity for war of any kind and whatever the cause, and distrust of the state both as foreign policy actor, domestic oppressor and in and for itself.[66] With the exception of the few anti-war British Marxists (John MacLean and Tom Bell for example), doctrinaire non-Christian socialists of other varieties (Clifford Allen and Fenner Brockway for instance), and intellectual humanists (such as Bertrand Russell and Norman Angell), it was a fact that most prominent dissenters were religious. In significant ways, their dissent was as much a product of their religiosity as a response to the circumstances of the day. MacDonald, for instance, was a radical because religious, and became a Christian socialist because a radical. The integrating factor throughout was the nature of his piety.

It is not surprising, of course, that British anti-war dissent should spring from this source. Both the Liberal and Labour parties had begun, in large measure, as conventions of reform-minded nonconformists, albeit of differing social strata, with different sects predominating, and at different times. Emmeline Pankhurst's autobiography is a monument to nonconformist faith become liberal convictions transformed into gender critique when confronted with particular problems. All, in large measure, were simply manifestations of nineteenth-century religious enthusiasm become political radicalism when applied to the resolution

of real grievances. In this respect, the dissenting doctrine, rather than simply representing a political challenge, was as well, a religious challenge to the state church represented politically by the Conservative Party – the established church in politics. When Liberalism combined with Labour and the suffragettes in dissent it was as much a fusion of Fox, Wesley and Hannah Moore as it was an association of Mill, Marx and Mary Wollstonecraft.

Among dissenters whose formal religious belief had atrophied, it was generally replaced by a secular humanism which, in most of its particulars, was virtually indistinguishable from the nonconformist Christian social ethic. Consider, for instance, the Allen, Brockway and Russell examples. Allen had studied for a career in the Church before his conversion to socialism. By his later admission, he came to socialism exactly because he considered it to be the only way to carry through the ethical reform of international and political life.[67] The type of reform he had in mind was virtually identical to that envisioned, for instance, by Ramsay MacDonald. What made him different was that his socialism superseded his Christianity rather than proceeded from it – as it did, for instance, with MacDonald, Hardie and Lansbury. Similarly, Brockway's missionary socialism carried much of the same content as the missionary religion he had learned as a child. Likewise, Russell's pacifism is difficult to justify except by reference to principles whose religious origin Russell formally repudiated. Even the Clyde Communists were no different. It was to Catholicism, for instance, that John McGovern and Red Gallacher first looked for an answer. When it proved insufficient to satisfy them, they rejected revealed religion in favour of another faith (Marxism: revealed politics) suggestively like, in many respects, that discarded.

As with the leaders, so with the followers. Christianity, rather than socialism, provided the surest and most reliable link to the working class, itself still in the final throes of nineteenth-century enthusiasm. The best, most popular and most effective propaganda produced by the dissenters was directed primarily, particularly in the early years, at a Christian, nonconforming audience. The religious polarity of dissent did not truly begin to shift until 1917, when the socialist element began to receive equal prominence. A unifying basic belief system, whatever their politics, must certainly be counted as a factor of tremendous importance, linking dissenters of all kinds.

Religion was not the only factor lending coherence to dissent. There was, as well, the fact that both the Labour and Liberal leadership shared an intellectual critique of the prevailing practice of foreign affairs in particular, in which dislike of secret diplomacy, armaments and

conscription occupied pride of place. To some extent, concurrence of analysis had been formalized in organization even before the war. The ultimate unifying mechanism, the UDC, was less a striking departure than a natural and inevitable response to the war. Finally, whatever the agenda and membership, it seems to be the case that almost all dissenting organizations, before and during the war, appear to have shared common sources of funding.

Let us consider the extra-political organizations consolidating dissent. Before the war, many who would become dissenters were already associated with various 'Norman Angell' organizations – study groups convened to discuss the ideas of Norman Angell, author of the *Great Illusion*, published in 1910. Ponsonby, E. D. Morel and Ramsay MacDonald had all contributed before the war, for instance, to *War and Peace*, a 'Norman Angell monthly'. Angell himself, of course, was to be a principal founder of the UDC, who, by the summer of 1915, had left off writing general critiques and had begun to pen specific condemnations of Britain's war policy.[68] Similarly, E. D. Morel had been secretary-general of the Congo Reform Association in the years immediately before the war. Among those inclined to dislike British foreign and imperial policy, he was already a notable figure, and the membership of this organization, in large measure, carried over into anti-war dissent.[69]

Another factor which served to consolidate dissent was membership of the UDC, which grew naturally from the foundations established by Angell and Morel. From the beginning, the UDC was envisioned by its political leadership – MacDonald, Ponsonby, Trevelyan – as an organization capable of linking Labour and Liberal opponents of the war. It would become, they hoped, something like a non-partisan, super 'Norman Angell' pressure group, pursuing an agenda already established by the prewar foreign policy critics.[70] E. D. Morel was identified as a probable secretary, also from the beginning. He was a good catch for the UDC. While he agreed with the general purpose of the leaders, Morel had some ideas of his own. He refused to be 'a mere automaton'.[71] In time, he became an almost predominant influence in the formation of UDC policy. While this dominance did not always sit well with other leaders, Morel possessed organizational ability of the first order and ultimately his vision of the UDC prevailed.[72]

In Morel's view, the UDC should never seek to become a simple, monolithic, single cause organization. Rather, it would assume a similar role in dissent to that of the Labour Party on the British left. It would be the general staff of anti-war dissent, organizing the membership of other agencies as its shock troops. Morel, as secretary, would be chief of dissenting general staff. The first step was for the UDC to find friends.