

# PROGRESSIVE PIONEERS: MANCHESTER LIBERALISM, THE INDEPENDENT LABOUR PARTY, AND LOCAL POLITICS IN THE 1890s

JAMES ROBERT MOORE

*University of Manchester*

**ABSTRACT.** *The Manchester Progressive Municipal Programme of 1894 has been viewed as indicative of a new Liberal approach to labour and social questions, heralding the New Liberalism of the Edwardian era and marking a gradual transition to class-based politics. Rather than focus on the role of senior individuals, such as Manchester Guardian editor C. P. Scott, in fostering the change, this article explores the practical problems of grass-roots party co-operation and the problems that Progressive approaches brought to Liberals. Progressive ideas had already permeated much Liberal thinking before 1890 and the Progressive Programme was less of a departure than might be imagined. Progressive policies may have helped consolidate Liberal working-class support but they did little to encourage co-operation with the Independent Labour Party (ILP). Where senior Liberals attempted to forge alliances they were invariably rebuffed. When Liberal candidates stepped down in deference to the ILP, Irish and working-class Liberal trade unionists revolted and split the party. The 1895 general election demonstrated the dangers of being too closely associated with the ILP and the limitations of Progressivism as a political strategy.*

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## I

Progressivism has become central to our understanding of late Victorian and Edwardian politics. It has been used to describe the process of cross-party co-operation between Liberals and Labour, the policies and ideologies that allowed this co-operation, and the spirit behind New Liberal welfare reform.<sup>1</sup> This article will analyse the complex nature of Progressivism and party competition in late nineteenth-century Manchester – a city that represented the symbolic home of both Victorian Liberalism and modern Labour politics.

<sup>1</sup> Major contributions include D. Tanner, *Political change and the Labour Party, 1900–1918* (Cambridge, 1990); M. Freedon, *The New Liberalism: an ideology of social reform* (Oxford, 1978); G. Bernstein, *Liberalism and Liberal politics in Edwardian England* (London 1986); D. Powell, 'The New Liberalism and the rise of Labour, 1886–1906', *Historical Journal*, 29 (1986), pp. 369–93; M. Pettey, 'The Progressive alliance', *History*, 58 (1973), pp. 45–59. For regional perspectives see P. F. Clarke, *Lancashire and the New Liberalism* (Cambridge, 1971); P. F. Clarke, 'The end of laissez faire and the politics of cotton', *Historical Journal*, 15 (1972), pp. 493–512; G. Bernstein, 'Liberalism and the Progressive alliance in the constituencies, 1900–1914: three case studies', *Historical Journal*, 26 (1983), pp. 617–40; A. W. Roberts, 'Leeds Liberalism and late Victorian politics', *Northern History*, 5 (1970), pp. 131–56.

It will seek to assess the viability of Progressivism as both a political platform and a basis for co-operation between the parties of the left. Unlike previous accounts it will concentrate on exploring the practical experience of Liberal–Labour relations rather than the role of senior individuals, such as C. P. Scott, in educating the Liberal Party towards Progressive ideas.<sup>2</sup> The early 1890s was a key period of electoral realignment with the emergence of the small, but vocal, Independent Labour Party (ILP) challenging Liberal influence in working-class constituencies. While Pelling and Howell have demonstrated the significance of this period in the development of the British Labour movement, less attention has been given to the growth of the Liberal–Labour co-operation and the influence of Progressivism.<sup>3</sup> This is partly due to the fact that the decade after 1886 is often regarded as simply a period of Liberal decline following the party split over Irish Home Rule. Yet the defection of right-wing Liberals at the time of the Home Rule crisis was, in some respects, a necessary prerequisite for the emergence of a new Progressive agenda.<sup>4</sup> The events of the early 1890s illustrate how new Liberal attitudes to cross-party co-operation were formed – revealing both the tactical possibilities associated with an anti-Conservative alliance and the limitations of such an approach.

Following the formation of the ILP the possibilities for a Progressive alliance became a central feature of political discussion amongst those on the left of the Liberal Party. Indeed there can be little doubt that the propagandist efforts of Liberal Progressives in the 1890s, such as C. P. Scott, did much to prepare grass-roots Liberal opinion for the Gladstone–MacDonald pact of 1903 which formalized an alliance between the Liberal Party and the newly emergent Labour Representation Committee.<sup>5</sup> However, if the experiences of the 1890s revealed new tactical possibilities to Liberal politicians, they also revealed the limitations of traditional Liberal attitudes towards organized labour. The experience of attempts at local co-operation forced Liberals to re-evaluate naïve assumptions that the ILP could be treated merely as the unofficial left wing of the Liberal Party or that trade unions would uncritically remain in the Liberal coalition. Liberals soon discovered that only by surrendering large working-class constituencies to the Labour movement could the demands of labour leaders to be satisfied. This article will argue that while Progressive policies may have brought electoral benefits, many Liberals failed to appreciate fully the tactical problems associated with an electoral alliance with a working-class party. Consequently, electoral territory surrendered in the 1890s became the new Labour heartland in the Edwardian period, undermining the Liberal Party's own working-class base. This naturally had major implications for the long-term health of Manchester Liberalism.

<sup>2</sup> Clarke, *Lancashire*, pp. 153–97.

<sup>3</sup> H. Pelling, *The origins of the Labour Party* (Oxford, 1965); D. Howell, *British workers and the Independent Labour Party, 1888–1906* (Manchester, 1983).

<sup>4</sup> E. Green, *The crisis of Conservatism* (London, 1995), p. 14.

<sup>5</sup> For a brief evaluation of the pact see G. R. Searle, *The Liberal Party* (London, 1992), pp. 71–6.

Although the Manchester party became a pioneer of Progressivism, it is important to recognize that the origins of Progressivism are complex. At one level it became closely associated with the band of Oxford intellectuals, such as T. H. Green, D. G. Ritchie, Graham Wallas, and L. T. Hobhouse, who provided intellectual rationale for the emerging social Liberalism of the 1880s.<sup>6</sup> The term entered popular usage through the London County Council (LCC) elections of 1889, where Fabian Socialists and Liberal radicals co-operated to provide, under a Progressive banner, a dramatically successful campaign to win control of the newly formed authority.<sup>7</sup> Progressivism was used to describe policies of social reforming municipal collectivism – especially in housing, transport, and labour relations.<sup>8</sup> Such was the success of the LCC's Progressive Programme that it established the LCC's leader, Lord Rosebery, as one of the foremost Liberal politicians of the day and assisted greatly in his rise to the premiership.<sup>9</sup>

Progressivism was, however, not primarily a programme but more an approach designed to provide cross-class electoral appeals, unifying the 'productive classes'<sup>10</sup> at a time of increasing class tension. By the mid-1890s it had become a generic label for those, mainly in the Liberal Party, who sought to find a common electoral platform that would unite Liberals and the Independent Labour Party under a common electoral banner. At national level it was a vision only realized when Liberal chief whip Herbert Gladstone concluded an electoral agreement with Ramsay MacDonald in 1903 to share out seats with the new trade union sponsored Labour Party.<sup>11</sup> In Manchester, however, Progressivism and Progressive alliances entered political debate more than a decade before with *Manchester Guardian* editor, C. P. Scott, and his cadre of 'advanced' Liberals famously pioneering the Manchester Progressive Municipal Programme and attempting to forge links with Independent Labour activists.<sup>12</sup>

Peter Clarke's *Lancashire and the New Liberalism* stands out as the classic study of Liberal Party revival through the agency of Progressivism, marking the emergence of New Liberalism in the former Conservative heartland of Lancashire. Yet there is a suggestion that the Liberal move to the left in the

<sup>6</sup> I. Bradley, *The optimists* (London, 1980), pp. 216–21; P. F. Clarke, *Liberals and Social Democrats* (Cambridge, 1978), pp. 9–27.

<sup>7</sup> Pelling, *Origins*, pp. 73–4.

<sup>8</sup> K. O. Morgan, *The age of Lloyd George* (New York, 1971), p. 23; F. Bealey and H. Pelling, *Labour and politics, 1900–1906* (London, 1958), pp. 6–7.

<sup>9</sup> R. R. James, *Rosebery* (London, 1995), p. 199.

<sup>10</sup> K. O. Morgan, 'The New Liberalism and the challenge of Labour: the Welsh experience, 1885–1929', in K. D. Brown, ed., *Essays in anti-Labour history* (London, 1974), pp. 159–82.

<sup>11</sup> D. Tanner, *Political change and the Labour Party, 1900–1918* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 21–3; F. Bealey, 'Negotiations between the Liberal Party and the Labour Representation Committee before the general election of 1906', *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, 29 (1956), pp. 261–74.

<sup>12</sup> Clarke, *Lancashire*, p. 162; J. Hill, 'Manchester and Salford politics and the early development of the Independent Labour Party,' *International Review of Social History*, 26 (1981), pp. 171–201.

early 1890s was more the product of electoral competition from the ILP than a principled conversion.<sup>13</sup> Other work has explored the limitations of Progressivism in the Liberal revival. Bernstein's study of Norwich, Leicester, and Leeds demonstrates the difficulties the Liberal Party had in trying to retain Labour within the Liberal Progressive coalition.<sup>14</sup> Thompson's work on London suggests that for all the Progressive language, London Liberalism suffered badly from the rise of 'class politics' between 1895 and 1914.<sup>15</sup> Some have cast doubt on the idea that Progressivism had any real influence over party elites at all beyond a small number in government – Bentley points out that there is virtually no sign of a discussion of Progressivism in private Liberal accounts.<sup>16</sup> Similarly Laybourne has argued that there is little sign of Progressivism in local or regional political activity.<sup>17</sup> A more recent large-scale study of regional politics by Tanner, however, paints a more complex picture – one where Progressivism, as a hazily defined set of ideas, influenced both Liberal and Labour parties.<sup>18</sup>

## II

Manchester played a key role in the development of British Liberalism and the British Labour movement. It was the home of classical Liberalism and the 'Manchester School' of economic and social theory – the symbol of middle-class triumph and of industrial capitalism.<sup>19</sup> Yet it also has a good claim to be the birthplace of the modern British Labour movement. It provided the location for the first Trades Union Congress, played a large part in the formation of the Independent Labour Party, and was home to the Labour Church Movement. It is important, however, not to be misled by historical milestones or popular images. Manchester industrialists of the first half of the nineteenth century were neither exclusively Liberal nor nonconformist, with groups like the John Shaw's Club testimony to a continuing 'Church and King' Tory tradition.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, the Liberalism of the Manchester School was not always as progressive or 'advanced' as other cities. Palmerston's 'gunboat' foreign policy was popular in Manchester, and led to the rejection of the city's radical MPs, including, remarkably, John Bright, the government's

<sup>13</sup> Clarke, *Lancashire*; Hill, 'Manchester.'

<sup>14</sup> G. Bernstein, 'Liberalism and the Progressive alliance in the constituencies, 1900–1914: three case studies', *Historical Journal*, 26 (1983), pp. 617–40.

<sup>15</sup> P. Thompson, *Socialists, Liberals and Labour: the struggle for London, 1885–1914* (London, 1967). In contrast to Clarke, Thompson identifies a sharp decline in the fortunes of the party after 1892 and views them as the product of a rise in class-based voting patterns.

<sup>16</sup> M. Bentley, *The climax of Liberal politics* (London, 1987), pp. 138–45.

<sup>17</sup> K. Laybourne, *The rise of Labour* (London, 1988), pp. 26–30. This approach is also reflected to some degree in K. Laybourne and D. Jones, eds., 'The rising sun of Socialism': the Independent Labour Party in the textile district of the West Riding of Yorkshire between 1890 and 1914 (Bradford, 1991).

<sup>18</sup> Tanner, *Political change*, pp. 19–43.

<sup>19</sup> A. Kidd, *Manchester* (2nd edn, Keele, 1996), pp. 69–70.

<sup>20</sup> F. S. Stancliffe, *John Shaw's, 1738–1938* (Manchester, 1938).

leading critic and an icon of the free trade movement.<sup>21</sup> Manchester Liberalism also benefited little from the ‘democratic’ electoral reforms of 1867–8, with the 1868 general election seeing the return of the city’s first Conservative MP.<sup>22</sup> The problems of the Liberal Party in mid-century are important in placing debates about the late nineteenth-century Liberal Party in perspective. By exaggerating the party’s mid-century unity and strength, it is easy carelessly to assume that the late nineteenth century was simply a period of decline following a ‘golden age’. Manchester Liberalism may have had great influence on the national political stage, but it rarely exercised complete dominance over its own city.

Similarly, pioneering Manchester socialists often struggled to make an impact. Indeed the major cotton trade unions of the north-west became synonymous with opposition to independent labour politics after famously opposing the formation of the Labour Representation Committee at the 1899 Trades Union Congress.<sup>23</sup> In his seminal work on the ILP, Howell spent little time analysing the Manchester party, regarding the limited progress it did make as largely an outgrowth of existing labour and trade union loyalties, rather than a result of its socialist programme.<sup>24</sup> Part of the reason for the difficulties in establishing an independent Labour movement in Manchester was the economic and cultural fragmentation of the working class. By the late nineteenth century the depiction of Manchester as ‘Cottonopolis’ was only partly accurate. The large cotton warehouses springing up around the major railway stations paid testimony to the emergence of Manchester as a leading distribution centre, but by the end of the century most of the cotton spinning and production had moved to towns on the periphery of the city.<sup>25</sup> In 1891 it was estimated that only 266 spinners were left working in the North-East parliamentary division – once an area dominated by cotton production.<sup>26</sup>

The diversification of Manchester’s industrial base brought new challenges to those concerned with organizing the working class. Major infrastructure projects such as railway improvements and the Manchester Ship Canal brought waves of unskilled labourers into the city. The old small trades in the workshops of Ancoats and the tailors’ shops of Strangeways continued to exist alongside the new railway and engineering works of Gorton and the chemical plants along the city’s waterfronts.<sup>27</sup> Ethnic and racial divisions further fragmented the labour market. Manchester’s substantial Jewish and Irish communities are well known, but the city also became home to a thriving

<sup>21</sup> Kidd, *Manchester*, p. 72.

<sup>22</sup> P. Whitaker, ‘The growth of Liberal organisation in Manchester from the eighteen sixties to 1903’ (PhD thesis, Manchester, 1956), pp. 64–5.

<sup>23</sup> J. Hill, ‘Working class politics in Lancashire, 1885–1906, a regional study in the origins of the Labour Party’ (PhD thesis, Keele, 1969), p. 4. <sup>24</sup> Howell, *British workers*, pp. 221–5.

<sup>25</sup> Kidd, *Manchester*, pp. 106–11.

<sup>26</sup> Letter, ‘Cotton operative’, *Manchester Guardian (MG)*, 5 Oct. 1891.

<sup>27</sup> J. Hill, ‘Manchester and Salford politics and the early development of the Independent Labour Party,’ *International Review of Social History*, 26 (1981), pp. 171–201.

Italian community and various nationalities from eastern Europe. These ethnic loyalties and differences were used by both major parties to rally electoral support. Stephen Chesters Thompson successfully built up a strong Conservative East Manchester constituency with populist appeals to the 'loyalist' and Unionist sympathies of the indigenous population and in opposition to the alleged dangers of Irish Home Rule. The Liberals, in contrast, derived much support from the Jewish traders of North Manchester and from the Irish of North and North-East Manchester – with North Manchester quickly becoming the safest Liberal seat in the city.<sup>28</sup>

The roots of the Progressive Municipal Programme can be found in the changes that overtook the Manchester Liberal Party in the mid-1880s. The 1885 general election saw the defeat of John Slagg, the city's most right-wing Liberal MP, and within a year Manchester had three Liberal MPs, Jacob Bright, Charles Schwann, and Sir Henry Roscoe, all from the centre-left of the party.<sup>29</sup> A similar change could be observed in municipal politics. By the mid-1880s the Liberal majority on the city council was under pressure from an increasingly partisan Conservative opposition. Matters were made much worse when a financial scandal rocked the Liberal administration, prompting the retirement of one of the most prominent whig Liberal aldermen.<sup>30</sup> This encouraged the Liberal Party to look to policy innovation in order to restore lost prestige. Alderman Thomas Wright led the corporation's unhealthy dwellings committee in a campaign to improve the city's housing conditions and pioneered local authority housing in Manchester.<sup>31</sup> Well before the formation of the ILP, experience had demonstrated that Progressive, interventionist social policies could attract electoral dividends. In 1890 Alexander McDougall used a strong social reform manifesto to help overturn a large Conservative majority in All Saints Ward.<sup>32</sup> In the only other contested election of that year, in Longsight, Dr Russell made the pulling down of unsanitary property his electoral platform, and was elected second of six candidates – only being out-pollled by the well-known former chairman of the Longsight Local Board.<sup>33</sup> The new Liberal agenda was also popular in middle-class areas. Two years later the Liberals inflicted a crushing defeat on sitting Conservative councillor for leafy Rusholme, Samuel Royle, winning by 708 votes to 478. By 1892 socialists had to contend with a Liberal Party with policies already much influenced by Progressive ideas.

As in that other pioneering Labour town, Bradford, the growth of the Independent Labour Party in Manchester was associated with the increas-

<sup>28</sup> See F. W. S. Craig, ed., *British parliamentary election results, 1885–1918* (2nd edn, Aldershot, 1989), p. 149.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 150. Slagg later served as MP for Burnley 1887–9 after the death of Peter Rylands.

<sup>30</sup> J. Moore, 'The transformation of urban Liberalism: Liberal politics in Leicester and Manchester, 1885–1895' (PhD thesis, Manchester, 1999), pp. 162–79.

<sup>31</sup> *Manchester Courier (MC)*, 5 Feb. 1885; Manchester City Council, council resolution, 4 Feb. 1885, special committee letter book 1, p. 2, MCL, M9/77/1. <sup>32</sup> *MG*, 3 Nov. 1890.

<sup>33</sup> *MG*, 3 Nov. 1890.

ing appetite of local trade unions for direct labour representation.<sup>34</sup> The development of New Trades Unions, in forging new trade associations in formerly unorganised trades, provided not only a potential source of support for an independent party, free from the party political guidance of older unions, but also acted as important training grounds for a new generation of political organisers. Leonard Hall, responsible for much of the ILP's early organisation in Lancashire, gained considerable political experience from his work in organising the navvies union and before the age of thirty had worked in the Labour movement for nine years.<sup>35</sup> Some of the New Trades Unions were the product of special efforts by established unions, whilst others emerged almost spontaneously as a result of industrial disputes – for example a dispute over alleged employee fraud persuaded the Manchester tramway guards to form a union.<sup>36</sup>

Much of the enthusiasm for establishing New Unions, however, diminished after the collapse of a bitter strike in the municipal gas department. Many Liberals viewed the strike as an example of the damaging effects of socialist agitation.<sup>37</sup> Even William Bailie, the secretary of the local Socialist League, felt that the identification of the socialist movement with the strike damaged the union's cause in the eyes of the public. Bailie attempted to distance the League from the New Unions, even claiming that when socialists joined trade unions, 'they abandoned socialist agitation, because they knew that socialism was entirely distinct from these, and its advocacy might retard the success of the union movement'.<sup>38</sup> There was also a strong feeling amongst many Liberals that the New Unions were being misled and mismanaged by 'extremist' groups. Consequently, the Liberal Party made attempts to recruit influential New Union leaders into their own party. John Kelly, the leader of the Lurrymen and Carters Union was asked by his local Liberal Association to oppose Alf Settle, a Salford Social Democratic Federation (SDF) councillor, in a municipal by-election.<sup>39</sup> Kelly initially spurned these advances and gave Settle his support.<sup>40</sup> Yet three months later, much to the disgust of local Socialists, Kelly re-appeared as a Liberal candidate in Ordsall Ward, Salford. Kelly's defection seems to have been as much on personal as political grounds, but the move strengthened ties between the Liberal Party and one of the most powerful New Unions. Many local Liberals also became closely associated with attempts to organize trade unions for women and white-collar workers. Local MPs H. J. Roby and William Mather chaired meetings of the National Union of Shop Assistants and became prominent supporters of measures to limit the hours of retail workers by statute.<sup>41</sup> Meanwhile, C. P. Scott became president of the Manchester Corporation Workmen's General Union.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>34</sup> J. Reynolds and K. Laybourn, 'The emergence of the Independent Labour Party in Bradford', *International Review of Social History*, 20 (1975), pp. 313–46.

<sup>35</sup> *Labour Prophet*, Feb. 1894, III/26.

<sup>36</sup> *Commonweal*, 3 Aug. 1889.

<sup>37</sup> *MG*, 5 Dec. 1889.

<sup>38</sup> Letter, W. Bailie, *MG*, 17 Dec. 1889.

<sup>39</sup> Settle later joined the ILP.

<sup>40</sup> *Workman's Times (WT)*, 17 July 1891.

<sup>41</sup> *Clarion*, 23 Apr. 1892.

<sup>42</sup> Clarke, *Lancashire*, p. 161.

Between the Liberal Party and the independent socialist groups stood the Fabian Society. The Manchester branch was formed in 1890 and two years later had a membership of 124. The organization represented an eclectic group of socialists who widely disagreed as to socialist strategy. Some, such as J. W. Scott of North-East Manchester, were active members of local Liberal Associations. Indeed, J. W. Scott's branch in North-East Manchester supplied Fabian activists to C. P. Scott in the 1891 parliamentary by-election in the division.<sup>43</sup> Others, such as former Liberal Richard Pankhurst, maintained close links with Liberal leaders while supporting the formation of an independent labour party. Other Fabians were much less compromising, with figures such as William Johnson, secretary of the Shop Assistants Union, campaigning for the removal of all Liberal Party officials from local Fabian membership.<sup>44</sup> These tactical differences over 'permeation' were not, of course, unique to Manchester, but rather reflected a national debate as to how Fabians could best achieve their political goals.<sup>45</sup> What is remarkable is that the Manchester Fabian Society abandoned the notion of Liberal permeation very early. By the spring of 1892 they were already supporting the creation of an independent labour electoral association and prohibiting Liberals who held official party positions from being members of the local society.<sup>46</sup> Thus in an important sense the Manchester Fabians were not so much an adjunct of the early ILP but rather its forerunner.

The New Trades Unions and socialist societies provided only a limited base of support for a fledgling ILP, and it was the Manchester and Salford trades council that did the most to stimulate wider public discussion of direct labour representation. It did, after all, represent by far the largest single group of organized trade unions in the city. Its role in nominating candidates for public office in alliance with the Liberals made it the inevitable focus of working-class grievance over labour representation. The trades council had long been allowed by the Liberal Association to nominate a working man representative for the local school board, but had become increasingly frustrated at being given such a small share of the representatives on a body of crucial importance for working class education and self-improvement. Before each school board election the Liberal Party organized a conference in which all sympathetic religious organizations were invited – the nonconformist churches and the Roman Catholics – together with trades council representatives. The conference then elected a committee with the difficult and controversial task of selecting candidates.<sup>47</sup> The curious cumulative vote system used in school board elections gave minority groups the opportunity to break out of caucus control – but also placed a premium on effective party organization. In order

<sup>43</sup> Letter, J. W. Scott to C. P. Scott, 28 Sept. 1891, John Rylands University Library of Manchester (JRULM), C. P. Scott collection (CPSC) 119/78. <sup>44</sup> *WT*, 16 Jan. 1892.

<sup>45</sup> M. Bevir, 'Fabianism, permeation and Independent Labour', *Historical Journal*, 39 (1996), pp. 179–96. <sup>46</sup> *WT*, 19 Mar. 1892; *WT*, 30 Apr. 1892.

<sup>47</sup> Letter, S. Woodcock to C. P. Scott, 24 July 1891, JRULM, CPSC 119/69.



to avoid chaos, the various nonconformist denominations generally preferred to co-operate, but all wanted their own representative on the school board. However, if the Liberal and nonconformist coalition fielded too many candidates this would only result in their votes being spread too thinly with a consequent loss of seats. The determination of the nonconformist denominations to maintain their own positions made it impossible for the Liberal Party to accommodate many more trade unionists. Thus although the party was keen to negotiate with the trades council, party organizers such as J. A. Beith steadfastly refused to increase the number of candidates the party were set to field for fear of courting electoral disaster.<sup>48</sup>

In 1891 the trades council offered four names to the Liberal committee for consideration, but only one, George Kelley, was accepted. Kelley complained, but the Liberal election committee declined to discuss the issue. The trades council felt snubbed and withdrew further co-operation. The Liberals, clearly having misjudged just how much offence they had caused, sought to reopen negotiations, but this time the trades council refused. Conflicting ideologies played no part in the disagreement: both major trades council representatives nominated for the school board, Kelley and Slatter, were committed Liberals.<sup>49</sup> The key significance of this dispute, however, was that it prompted a major representative body with significant resources to work toward the creation of independent labour electoral machinery in the city. Such was the snub given by the Liberals that in the first six months of a new Labour Electoral Association (LEA), sixteen trade societies chose to affiliate.<sup>50</sup>

The Liberal school board election committee adopted a programme that the trades council would have found easy to support. The abolition of school fees for every elementary school became central to the Liberal platform. Only differences over representation kept the sides apart. Officials on both sides were blamed for the breakdown in relations between the two parties and the Liberal Association secretary Benjamin Green came in for particular criticism.<sup>51</sup> The subsequent election demonstrated that although the trades council could present a significant challenge to the Liberal Party, it would struggle to get its candidates elected. C. P. Scott's wife polled more votes than the three independent labour candidates combined.<sup>52</sup> Improvements in Liberal Party organization helped ensure that all their 'Free Board School' candidates were elected and further emphasized the importance of effective party machinery in cumulative vote contests.<sup>53</sup> The trades council's defeat, however, only seemed to spur it on to yet more energetic activity and within months the number of trade societies which had affiliated to the LEA had increased to thirty, with very few refusing to join outright.<sup>54</sup> Relations with the Liberal Party further

<sup>48</sup> Letter, J. A. Beith to C. P. Scott, 28 July 1891, JRULM, CPSC 119/70.

<sup>49</sup> *WT*, 28 Aug. 1891. <sup>50</sup> *WT*, 9 Oct. 1891. <sup>51</sup> *Spy*, 21 Nov. 1891, p. 33.

<sup>52</sup> *WT*, 21 Nov. 1891.

<sup>53</sup> Manchester Liberal Union (MLU), annual meeting secretaries' report, 7 Sept. 1892, Manchester Central Library (MCL), M283/1/1/2. <sup>54</sup> *WT*, 30 Jan. 1892.

deteriorated when the city council refused to allow the trades council rooms in the town hall for their regular meetings. This refusal had great symbolic significance for union leaders who saw themselves as being deliberately excluded from the official public life of the city, at a time when middle-class philanthropic organizations were freely allowed to use municipal buildings.<sup>55</sup> The gradual breakdown in relations between the trades council and the Liberal Party made many trade unionists increasingly receptive to the idea of an independent labour party and new socialist ideas.

Advocates of independent labour representation were fortunate in having three outstanding public supporters who helped shape the nature of the early ILP in the city. Leonard Hall of the Navvies Union provided the practical organizational expertise. Robert Blatchford, or Nunquam of the *Clarion* newspaper, was the popular and flamboyant public face of local socialism. Already well known for his work at *Bell's Life* and the *Sunday Chronicle*, Blatchford made his *Clarion* into one of the most lively popular journals of the day.<sup>56</sup> John Trevor, the founder and de facto leader of the Labour Church Movement, helped provide Manchester socialism with a strong ethical and religious dimension. Trained as a Unitarian minister, Trevor became disillusioned with the attitudes of existing churches towards working-class participation in religious activities and founded a movement that exercised an important influence over many northern towns.<sup>57</sup> By the spring of 1892 the plethora of independent labour and socialist groups demanded some level of co-ordination. In some areas independent labour electoral associations had been set up in competition with those of the trades council, and some, such as the North Manchester group, refused to affiliate to the trade council's LEA despite lengthy negotiations.<sup>58</sup> In order to try to bring these groups together Trevor persuaded Blatchford to call a meeting with the aim of establishing one body to co-ordinate the campaign for independent labour representation. Blatchford's position as a flamboyant socialist personality clearly contributed to the success of the initiative. Around 1,000 people attended the first meeting with about 700 supporters allegedly offering their names as potential party members.<sup>59</sup>

The presence of figures like Hall, Trevor, and Blatchford in Manchester brought significant benefits to the local movement for independent labour representation. However, all three tended to give a greater priority to the national movement than to the detail of party management and organizational development in Manchester itself. Trevor spent much time and money on his *Labour Prophet*, attempting to use it as a vehicle for creating a genuinely national movement. The *Labour Prophet* lost money almost continuously and it had to be heavily subsidised by Trevor's own private wealth. Trevor was particularly

<sup>55</sup> *WT*, 30 Apr. 1892.

<sup>56</sup> *Spy*, 24 Apr. 1891, p. 3.

<sup>57</sup> L. Smith, 'John Trevor and the Labour Church Movement' (MA thesis, Huddersfield Polytechnic, 1985), pp. 2–3, 40.

<sup>58</sup> *WT*, 13 Feb. 1892; *WT*, 5 Mar. 1892.

<sup>59</sup> *WT*, 28 May 1892.

keen to spread his message in the capital and in 1895 decided to move south for a time to promote the movement in London.<sup>60</sup> By the general election of that year Trevor was becoming increasingly frustrated with the ILP which, he felt, did little to support Labour Church work. As the ILP fell short of Trevor's ideas of building an ethical socialist commonwealth, he became far more interested in promoting the Labour Church Movement as a national organization and far less interested in the day-to-day operations of the ILP in Manchester.<sup>61</sup>

Manchester's other major ILP leaders took up prominent roles in the national party. Local ILP organizer Alfred Settle took the chair of the first National Administrative Committee (NAC) meeting, which was held in Manchester.<sup>62</sup> The 1894 NAC elections saw both of Manchester's best-known local activists, Leonard Hall and Fred Brocklehurst, gain election.<sup>63</sup> Although this did not take Manchester's ILP leaders out of local politics entirely, it did provide them with a heavy burden of political work – particularly the work involved in trying to secure sufficient finance to support the work of the NAC. The leaders of the Manchester ILP were effectively trying to help establish a national party before they had had the opportunity to consolidate their own electoral position in the difficult territory of an economically and ethnically divided city. At this stage the Manchester and Salford ILP depended almost exclusively on voluntary workers as none of the local party organizers were paid employees of the party. Leonard Hall worked as the general secretary of the Lancashire and Adjacent Counties Labour Amalgamation – a federation of mainly New Unions and trade societies.<sup>64</sup> Fred Brocklehurst took up the general secretaryship of the Labour Church Movement and his duties frequently took him away from the city.<sup>65</sup> Robert Blatchford was much in demand as a national political figure and commentator, in addition to being editor of the weekly *Clarion*. Having nationally important figures running the local ILP was clearly not an unmixed blessing, with local party leaders only being able to devote limited time to the Manchester party.

The determination of local ILP leaders to launch outright attacks on Liberal heartlands in Manchester and refuse any talk of Progressive electoral accommodations had significant implications for the relationship between the two parties. To a large extent the network of socialist and LEA groups that had existed before 1892 determined ILP strategy. In several areas the local ILP already had a basic party organization, such as Harpurhey where activity focused around the Fabian Institute in Rochdale Road.<sup>66</sup> The scale of the Independent Labour vote in those wards that the party fought was sufficient to suggest that a breakthrough in some areas of the city was a realistic possibility. The 1892 election saw the fledgling party do poorly in St George's,

<sup>60</sup> *Labour Prophet*, May 1895, iv/41.

<sup>61</sup> *Labour Prophet*, July 1895, iv/43.

<sup>62</sup> Independent Labour Party (ILP), National Administrative Committee (NAC), 15 Mar. 1893, pp. 3–5, Independent Labour Party collection (ILPC), British Library of Political and Economic Science (BLPES), ILP1/1/1–M890/1/1.

<sup>63</sup> ILP, NAC, Feb., p. 13.

<sup>64</sup> *Clarion*, 14 Oct. 1893.

<sup>65</sup> *Labour Prophet*, Jan. 1893, ii/13.

<sup>66</sup> *Clarion*, 22 Oct. 1892.

a radical Liberal stronghold in South-West Manchester, but in the other two wards it fought, New Cross and Harpurhey in North-East Manchester, each ILP candidate took over 1,000 votes.<sup>67</sup>

### III

The ILP had emerged on the local political scene at a critical time in the city council's history. Following the general election the Liberal Party could no longer depend on the Liberal Unionists in the city council to maintain a nominal majority. Before the municipal election of that year the Liberals had forty-nine members to the Conservatives forty-seven but the eight Liberal Unionists effectively deprived the Liberals of a majority for the first time since the city's incorporation. The city Liberal leadership was alarmed at the new situation and had called for all local associations to fight all seats where there was 'a reasonable prospect of success'.<sup>68</sup> The ILP's intervention in the election forced the Liberal Party to fight a rearguard action in seats they regarded as safe and would probably otherwise have been uncontested. This, of course, meant the diversion of Liberal resources away from marginal wards. Rather than gain seats the 1 November elections actually saw one net gain to the Conservatives. This loss was recovered in a by-election later that month, but the new Conservative and Unionist majority gradually began to assert its authority and replaced two Liberal aldermen with Unionist nominees.<sup>69</sup> Although party discipline on the council was not rigorously enforced, the Liberals found themselves in a clear minority for the first time ever and under strong pressure from a new political force in one of their key constituencies – that of North-East Manchester.

North-East Manchester, with its large Irish population, was widely regarded as the most marginal seat in the city. The Liberal Party long recognized the need to field a candidate with broad appeal to the substantial working-class constituency, as well as Irish nationalist supporters. The vocal social reformer Charles Rowley would have been a popular local choice but 'top end wirepullers' were all too aware of his somewhat crotchety reputation and blocked his candidature.<sup>70</sup> William Holland, the head of the local party organization and a leading local employer, was reluctant to look beyond right winger Alex Forrest, but radicals approached C. P. Scott.<sup>71</sup> Scott's triumph in securing the nomination marked a significant victory for the 'advanced' portion of the party. Scott was, of course, well known for his strong Home Rule sympathies. He was also a powerful advocate and patron of New Unions, such as William Johnson's National Union of Shop Assistants, whose North-East

<sup>67</sup> *The official handbook of Manchester and Salford 1893* (Manchester, 1893), pp. 358–60.

<sup>68</sup> MLU, Union committee, 3 Oct. 1892, MCL, M283/1/1/2.

<sup>69</sup> MLU, Union committee, 24 Nov. 1892, MCL, M283/1/1/3.

<sup>70</sup> Letter, C. Rowley to C. P. Scott, 6 Dec. 1889, JRULM, CPSC 118/134.

<sup>71</sup> Letter, W. Johnson to C. P. Scott, 21 July 1891, JRULM, CPSC 119/20.

Manchester branch had close Liberal Party ties and was actually based in the local Gladstone Club in Rochdale Road.<sup>72</sup> When a government re-shuffle brought about a by-election in North-East Manchester during October 1891, the Liberal Party naturally anticipated victory in this highly marginal division. C. P. Scott's narrow defeat represented a major blow to Liberal prestige. The failure of the party to capture North-East Manchester was particularly galling to Scott who placed so much importance on winning Irish and working-class support.<sup>73</sup> Many Liberals were wholly bemused and frustrated at the failure of working-class electors to support 'their party'.<sup>74</sup> More experienced politicians such as Schnadhorst and Holland viewed the defeat philosophically and felt it would be reversed at the general election.<sup>75</sup> Yet within twelve months Scott had again gone down to defeat, despite his advocacy of popular labour measures such as a national pensions scheme and statutory regulation of hours in the retail trade.<sup>76</sup> The frustrating serial defeats of the Liberal Party in North-East Manchester damaged Liberal electoral credibility and led some to look to a possible independent labour candidate as a way of breaking the narrow Conservative hold on the seat.

Following promising municipal election results in North-East Manchester, the ILP began to concentrate its efforts in this area of the city. In September 1893 the party launched a separate constituency branch association in the division which quickly proved a great asset to the city party.<sup>77</sup> Branch officials succeeded in attracting city-wide attention when they were arrested for making an allegedly illegal street collection for locked-out miners. Somewhat inadvisably the city council's watch committee decided to go ahead and prosecute the ILP officials, but then were forced into an embarrassing climbdown after a Liberal rebellion at the following meeting of the full council. ILP commentators rejoiced in the victory, believing that the propaganda generated was certain to improve ILP prospects in the coming municipal elections.<sup>78</sup>

The decision of the ILP to fight North-East Manchester was a disaster for C. P. Scott's own ambitions in the constituency. Once Leonard Hall had conditionally accepted the offer of the candidature, the prospects for the Liberal Party in a three-cornered contest seemed bleak.<sup>79</sup> Initially Scott made conciliatory moves towards the ILP, advising his party colleagues that the new party should simply be seen as the unofficial left wing of the Liberal Party, but predictably Hall, who wanted no compromise, ridiculed these comments.<sup>80</sup> Scott then encouraged the Liberal Party in North-East Manchester to support the ILP candidate. Richard Pankhurst, the former radical Liberal and now a staunch ILPer, paid tribute to Scott as 'a high-minded, public spirited man'

<sup>72</sup> Letter, W. Johnson to C. P. Scott, 1 Oct. 1891, JRULM, CPSC 119/83; 6 Oct. 1891, JRULM, CPSC 119/84.

<sup>73</sup> *MG*, 9 Oct. 1891.

<sup>74</sup> Letter, U. M. Bright to C. P. Scott, 9 Oct. 1891, JRULM, CPSC 119/94.

<sup>75</sup> Letter, F. Schnadhorst to C. P. Scott, 9 Oct. 1891, JRULM, CPSC 119/96; letter, W. Holland to C. P. Scott, 13 Oct. 1891, JRULM, CPSC 119/100.

<sup>76</sup> *Manchester City News (MCN)*, 2 July 1892.

<sup>77</sup> *WT*, 9 Sept. 1893.

<sup>78</sup> *WT*, 16 Sept. 1893.

<sup>79</sup> *Clarion*, 9 Dec. 1893.

<sup>80</sup> *WT*, 6 Jan. 1894.

offering ‘a rare and precious precedent of disinterested devotion to the public service’.<sup>81</sup> However, the ungenerous response of many members of the ILP to Scott’s decision did little to persuade Liberals that the ILP was a potentially friendly ally. Hall’s accusation that Scott’s true reason for withdrawing was simply the belief that he could not win the seat seemed genuinely to hurt the *Manchester Guardian* editor.<sup>82</sup> Hall, in turn, was offended by Scott’s apparent suggestion that the ILP was less committed to Irish Home Rule than the Liberal Party. Although Scott tried to smooth relations between the two parties, it was clear that his hopes of conciliating the ILP were failing.<sup>83</sup>

Unfortunately C. P. Scott’s withdrawal from North-East Manchester was interpreted by many as a sign of Liberal weakness. The local Liberal Association was left with no candidate and yet was being expected to support a party that seemed increasingly hostile to it. Many radicals were clearly confused at the reaction of the ILP to their accommodating overtures. Others felt that if the ILP was indeed to be regarded as simply an ‘advanced’ section of the Liberal Party, then perhaps they should be a member of it rather than the official Liberal Party. The loss of senior radicals such as L. D. Prince, the president of the Hulme Radical Association, to the ILP only served to highlight the atmosphere of confusion and impending crisis.<sup>84</sup> The response of the ILP toward Liberal offers of co-operation was typified by events surrounding the selection of school board candidates in 1894. Liberals attempted to forge co-operation while the ILP was determined that it would only co-operate if Liberals surrendered completely to its demands. The Progressive Liberal committee responsible for managing the elections invited representatives of all local labour organizations to attend its deliberations, including the ILP, the Labour Church Movement and the SDF. Controversy arose, however, on the issue of religious education. The nonconformist groups present defeated a socialist resolution for secular education in schools and when a socialist proposal for free school meals was ruled out of order on the grounds that the issue was outside the board’s control, the socialists walked out.<sup>85</sup>

Local Liberal activists were divided on just how to respond to socialist tactics. Harpurhey ward officials continued to insist on the importance of avoiding conflict between Liberal and ILP candidates. Many branches, however, felt that any attempts to conciliate the ILP were doomed to failure. ILP opposition to Liberal candidates in some areas of the city was deemed to be motivated mainly by personal dislike – such as that against James Southern in South Manchester. Radicals in South-West Manchester made numerous attempts to come to some form of electoral agreement with the ILP, but after continual snubs they came to the conclusion that further effort was not

<sup>81</sup> Letter, R. Pankhurst to C. P. Scott, 24 Mar. 1894, JRULM, CPSC 120/15.

<sup>82</sup> Letter, C. P. Scott to R. Pankhurst, 3 Apr. 1894 [copy], JRULM, CPSC 120/21; *Clarion*, 31 Mar. 1894.

<sup>83</sup> Letter, C. P. Scott to R. Blatchford, n.d. [copy], JRULM, CPSC 120/23.

<sup>84</sup> *Clarion*, 13 Jan. 1894.

<sup>85</sup> *Labour Leader (LL)*, 21 Apr. 1894.

worthwhile. With apparently no possibility of the Liberal Party reaching an understanding with the ILP at municipal level, the only alternative was for Liberals to take a more confrontational approach and fight the ILP on their own ground. Ardwick Liberals had already experimented with stealing the ILP's thunder by 'including [in the Liberal manifesto] as many parts as could be of the Labour Party's programme'.<sup>86</sup> Consequently a committee was appointed to consider the adoption of 'an advanced Municipal Programme for Manchester', although the Union declined to direct the traditionally semi-autonomous ward associations to adopt labour representatives at future elections.<sup>87</sup>

Following C. P. Scott's dramatic withdrawal from North-East Manchester, a degree of panic began to spread through Liberal ranks. The 1893 municipal elections saw eight ILP candidates come forward in Manchester, with the socialists doing particularly well in New Cross and helping defeat one of the two Liberal candidates.<sup>88</sup> Events left Liberals in North-East Manchester particularly divided. Some not only supported the new ILP candidate, as Scott had advised, but also subscribed to ILP funds. This support allowed the socialists to issue 15,000 election pamphlets in the spring of 1894.<sup>89</sup> Others saw the danger that the ILP could pose to the Liberal Party if Liberals encouraged it through well-meaning sympathy for increased labour representation. Edwin Guthrie led moves in Manchester to persuade Liberals to face up to the dangers the ILP posed to the integrity of the party. He urged the Manchester Liberal Union to consult the national party leadership and the Labour Electoral Association in order to secure more labour candidates for the Liberal Party at the general elections.<sup>90</sup> In the absence of Gladstone as a figure who could command the loyalties of all Liberals there was a real fear that the trickle of ILP defections could develop into a flood. However, despite a warning from Guthrie that 'the Liberal Party will suffer disintegration unless steps are taken to forestall and undermine the action of the ILP' consultations with Schnadhorst proved largely unproductive.<sup>91</sup> A Manchester deputation to the National Liberal Federation obtained little other than a promise to consider the suggestion that local associations should be consulted on the issue.<sup>92</sup> It was clear that Manchester Liberals would have to find their own local solutions to the ILP problem.

Part of the solution proved to be the adoption of the Progressive Municipal Programme, although by the time it was used in a municipal campaign the ILP already had a foothold on the city council. The Liberal Party's adoption of the Progressive Municipal Programme marked a move away from local politics in

<sup>86</sup> MLU, Union committee, 17 Nov. 1893, MCL, M283/1/1/3.

<sup>87</sup> MLU, Union committee, 17 Nov. 1893, MCL, M283/1/1/3.

<sup>88</sup> *The official handbook of Manchester and Salford 1894* (Manchester, 1894), p. 337.

<sup>89</sup> *Clarion*, 5 May 1894.

<sup>90</sup> MLU, Union committee, 16 July 1894, MCL, M283/1/1/3.

<sup>91</sup> MLU, Union committee, 26 July 1894, MCL, M283/1/1/4.

<sup>92</sup> MLU, Union committee, 19 Dec. 1894, MCL, M283/1/1/4.

which individuals with party labels fought elections to a system in which parties with specific programmes contested battles over policy differences. Although the Progressive Municipal Programme was not binding on all candidates, it did offer a benchmark against which the opinions of potential Liberal candidates could be tested. The programme was ambitious. It called for an eight-hour day for corporation workmen ‘where practicable’, a large increase of working men on public bodies, greater municipal control of corporation tramways, ground value taxation, and widespread demolition of slum property.<sup>93</sup> Although less collectivist than that of the ILP, the Liberal proposals contrasted sharply with the type of politics the party had pursued in municipal government in the 1880s – a time when the council had obtained a reputation for corruption and mismanagement.<sup>94</sup> Indeed in one sense the Liberals were fortunate in that they had lost their council majority. Had they been in control a large number of the more conservative Liberal aldermen – James Harwood for example – would probably have opposed many of the programme proposals. However, as the party was now effectively in opposition Liberal Party divisions were less obvious. Those Liberals who disagreed with the programme could simply ignore it.

The ILP was, of course, all too aware of the differences that existed between more conservative Liberal representatives and the Progressives, personified by Edwin Guthrie and C. P. Scott. The ILP did all it could to try to associate current Liberal representatives with those involved in the scandals of the 1880s. Housing and building control was a particular focus for criticism. The council’s failure to promote widespread housing and sanitary improvement was blamed on the fact that the council’s buildings by-law committee was largely composed of Liberal and Conservatives who had a financial interest in the construction trade.<sup>95</sup> The council also continued to come into conflict with the ILP and trade unions on the use of streets and public parks for demonstrations, particularly on Labour Day.<sup>96</sup> However, despite populist campaigns against local municipal leaders, the ILP’s electoral progress was much more limited than the panicky Liberal reaction may have suggested. As with ILP branches elsewhere, the party faced the key difficulty of how to finance its political activities, particularly as it was attempting to fight as many municipal seats as possible. Various fundraising schemes were tried, including an unsuccessful co-operative trading society.<sup>97</sup> It soon became clear that the ILP was making only limited progress in the key North-East Manchester constituency where Scott had allowed it a free run. In New Cross Ward, with its large Irish electorate, Irish politicians continued to look to the Liberal Party as their main political allies. A summer by-election in New Cross Ward saw a largely unknown Irishman, standing on a Liberal-Progressive platform taking almost double the number of votes as the ILP candidate, with Irish electors reportedly voting

<sup>93</sup> MLU, Progressive Municipal Programme, 16 July 1894, MCL, M283/1/1/4.

<sup>94</sup> See Moore, ‘The transformation of urban Liberalism’, ch. 5. <sup>95</sup> *LL*, 31 Mar. 1894.

<sup>96</sup> *Clarion*, 12 May 1894.

<sup>97</sup> *LL*, 16 June 1894.



solidly for their countryman.<sup>98</sup> The suggestion often made by Liberals that the ILP was not wholly committed to Home Rule clearly did significant damage to the socialists in Irish neighbourhoods. There were also significant tensions in the trade union movement between the largely Irish, Liberal-supporting, trade unions and those unions that were increasingly coming under the influence of the ILP. When leading Liberal Irishman Daniel McCabe turned up to a Sunday trade union demonstration with members of his Gasworkers and General Labourers Union, his political opponents tried to force him to march at the back. The largely Irish union naturally felt slighted, rolled up its banner, and left. Suggestions in the national labour press that the Irish action simply reflected the Irishman's 'national gift of perversity' were hardly calculated to improve relations with the Irish community.<sup>99</sup> Indeed, it may have been the Irish community in North-East Manchester who were behind Liberal Party moves to reject C. P. Scott's advice and bring out an alternative Liberal candidate to run against the ILP. One group was even reportedly audacious enough to try to persuade Richard Pankhurst to come out as a Liberal candidate against Leonard Hall.<sup>100</sup>

When the ILP finally made a significant municipal breakthrough on the city council it was mainly at the expense of the Conservatives rather than the Liberals. In 1894 the ILP took two Conservative seats by adopting popular local miners' union representatives as candidates. One of the seats won, Openshaw, was actually located in the Lancashire Gorton parliamentary division, outside the Progressive guidance of the Manchester Liberal Union. Liberals in Gorton had been divided ever since the adoption of a rather conservative railway magnate as Liberal parliamentary candidate in 1885; by the 1890s the local mining unions had proved rich recruiting grounds for the ILP.<sup>101</sup> The other ward in which the ILP was victorious was Bradford, another area where miners were influential, helping to elect the colliery check-weightman J. E. Sutton to the city council and breaking longstanding Tory domination of the ward. In neither case did the Liberal Party field a candidate. In the seven cases where Liberal and Labour candidates came into direct conflict, the Liberal candidates polled more votes in all but one. Overall, two Liberal losses were counterbalanced by two Liberal gains – a remarkably creditable performance in a year where municipal elections across the country saw the Conservative Party heavily in the ascendancy.<sup>102</sup>

Older unions, like that of the miners, played a more significant role in securing independent labour representatives on public bodies than the celebrated New Trades Unions. The trades council became a particular focus of ILP political attention with socialists gradually trying to persuade the council not only to support independent labour representatives, but also to take a more active role in the general political life of the city – by organizing the annual Labour Day demonstration at the beginning of May, for example. The

<sup>98</sup> *Clarion*, 30 June 1894.

<sup>99</sup> *LL*, 19 May 1894.

<sup>100</sup> *LL*, 16 June 1894.

<sup>101</sup> See Moore, 'The transformation of urban Liberalism', ch. 1.

<sup>102</sup> *MG*, 2 Nov. 1894.

Liberal leaders of the trades council increasingly felt under pressure, with G. D. Kelley threatening to resign after accusing the ILP of trying to ‘nobble the Council’.<sup>103</sup> By 1895 the council’s executive committee probably had as many committed ILP partisans in its ranks as Liberals. Liberals largely resisted moves for the council to get involved in May Day demonstrations, but by 1895 they only defeated moves for the council to organize the demonstration by forty-two votes to forty-one.<sup>104</sup> Liberal trade unionists that remained, however, made it impossible for the council ever to become a completely compliant ally of the ILP. The chairman, Liberal Matthew Arrandale, appealed to trade union loyalties to prevent the council splitting on partisan lines, but there were signs that many unions were very unhappy with the growing ILP influence within the body.<sup>105</sup> After the 1895 general election there were a large number of trade union secessions from the council, reversing the generally upward trend in membership since the early 1880s.<sup>106</sup> Hostility to political partisanship within the council meant that the ILP was never able to capture fully its key offices, with trade union loyalties and records of service being more important for promotion within the council than party political views. Kelley, despite his distaste for ILP influence, continued to serve as secretary and in 1897–8 the trade unionists of Manchester even elected a Conservative as their chairman.<sup>107</sup>

The Manchester and Salford ILP was not, in any case, without its own internal divisions. In order to maintain democratic control over its elected representatives, the ILP’s executive committee adopted rigorous regulations as to the responsibilities of its chosen candidates. Representatives were required to provide regular reports on their activities, submit their election address to the party’s executive committee for approval, and even leave a signed resignation letter in the hands of party officials in case the party decided to withdraw their support for the candidate.<sup>108</sup> To a large extent these conventions reflected trade union traditions of delegate democracy, but these types of rules were wholly alien to those who had joined the ILP from the radical wing of the Liberal Party. Radicals traditionally valued local ward autonomy over central control and had fought long battles against the centralizing authority of the old Liberal Association and Reform Club. Yet when the St George’s Ward branch refused to co-operate with the new rules on just these grounds the ILP executive committee seemed genuinely surprised. St George’s, although only one of sixteen branches, was potentially a strong working-class ward for the ILP and even after the branch was suspended from the party its candidate still managed to take over 600 votes in the municipal election of that year.<sup>109</sup> Indeed, the conflict was regarded as so significant that Tom Mann intervened in the dispute on the side of the executive committee.<sup>110</sup> St George’s refused to accept

<sup>103</sup> *MG*, 22 Mar. 1893.

<sup>104</sup> E. and R. Frow, *To make that future now! A history of the Manchester and Salford trades council* (Manchester, 1976), pp. 35–6.

<sup>105</sup> *MG*, 28 Mar. 1893

<sup>106</sup> *Manchester and Salford trades council annual report*, January 1896, MCL, 331–88 M30 LHN.

<sup>107</sup> Frow and Frow, *To make that future now!*, pp. 35–42.

<sup>108</sup> *LL*, 20 Oct. 1894.

<sup>109</sup> *MG*, 2 Nov. 1894.

<sup>110</sup> *Clarion*, 27 Oct. 1894.

Mann's direction and the NAC effectively expelled the branch.<sup>111</sup> Revelations about the apparent illiberality of ILP internal procedures and the centralized control of the party by an executive committee did little to make the ILP attractive to Liberals dissatisfied with their own party. Just when the party was beginning to enjoy a limited amount of electoral success, its leading local figures appeared to be at daggers drawn.<sup>112</sup>

Leonard Hall, by now president of both the Manchester and Salford and Lancashire and Cheshire ILP, became the focus of criticism. This criticism was aimed not only at his powerful role in the party, but also at his behaviour as a Navvies Union organizer. A leading ILP organizer from Levenshulme, A. F. Winks, wrote to a NAC sub-committee making unspecified allegations about Hall's activities.<sup>113</sup> At the same time Robert Blatchford began using his newspaper to air vocal opposition to the structure of the Manchester and Salford executive, and, in particular, to the powerful position of president, which Hall occupied. In December the *Clarion* launched a stinging attack on the party's lack of internal democracy accusing the executive committee of being 'too small, and its connection with the party ... too distant and too slight'.<sup>114</sup> Nunquam's attacks were the spur for Hall to resign his presidency of the Manchester party.<sup>115</sup> A little over a month later Hall was persuaded to return to his position at the party's annual general meeting, but problems continued. Keir Hardie complained of 'unscrupulous gangs of schemers and plotters in Manchester working with might and main to disrupt the ILP movement there'.<sup>116</sup> Liberals were blamed for trying to foster the divisions that had become all too apparent – a curious statement, given that many of the dissidents were desperately trying to regain their membership of the ILP after their branch had been expelled.

Complaints against Hall did not go away. Following further allegations and a party investigation, Hall was cleared by the NAC of serious misappropriation of union funds.<sup>117</sup> However, his controversial past, and his at times abrasive character, had done much damage to his candidature – as he himself admitted he made 'enemies faster than friends'.<sup>118</sup> Yet to a very large extent the Manchester ILP had placed their future in the hands of Leonard Hall. He was their parliamentary candidate in a key constituency and took personal responsibility for much of the organizational work of the Manchester party. The allegations against Hall had been highly damaging and rumours began circulating that Hall would not contest the general election. In May the *Manchester City News* reported that Richard Pankhurst was to take over Hall's candidature in North-East Manchester.<sup>119</sup> Again there were suggestions that

<sup>111</sup> ILP, NAC, 4 Dec. 1894, pp. 70–1. <sup>112</sup> *LL*, 27 Oct. 1894; *LL*, 3 Nov. 1894.

<sup>113</sup> ILP, NAC, Elections and constitution sub committee, 17 Nov. 1894, pp. 48–51.

<sup>114</sup> *Clarion*, 8 Dec. 1894. <sup>115</sup> *LL*, 1 Dec. 1894. <sup>116</sup> *LL*, 19 Jan. 1895.

<sup>117</sup> Although he was forced to repay a small sum. ILP, NAC, sub committee, 14–15 Dec. 1894, pp. 78–84.

<sup>118</sup> Letter, L. Hall to K. Hardie, 23 Nov. 1894, BLPES, Francis Johnson Collection (FJC) 94/207. <sup>119</sup> *Clarion*, 18 May 1895.

Hall was at odds with several members of the Manchester party over new party rules and the constitution.<sup>120</sup> Finally, at the end of June, Hall did what many of his opponents had expected him to do and resigned his candidature – ostensibly because he felt there were insufficient funds to fight the election.<sup>121</sup> It was clear, however, that this was not the only reason for his resignation. Local ILP activists had been told by the Conservatives that they had information about Hall's union record that they would release during the election campaign if he were to go to the polls.<sup>122</sup> Hall's withdrawal so shortly before the election left the ILP in an impossible situation, with the local party facing a complete loss of credibility.<sup>123</sup> The ILP had been handed a golden opportunity to take a seat in Manchester by Scott's Progressives, yet just weeks before the poll were left with no candidate.

The electoral situation in Manchester was complicated by the decision of Richard Pankhurst, the former Liberal, to contest nearby Lancashire Gorton as an ILP candidate. Gorton had been shown to be promising ILP territory with municipal victories for the party in Openshaw. Hall's resignation in North-East Manchester seemed to offer the opportunity of an accommodation between the ILP and the Liberal Party. Some Liberals hoped that in return for the Liberals withdrawing from Gorton, the ILP would lift their threat of fielding a candidate in North or North-East Manchester where they, in any case, no longer had a candidate.<sup>124</sup> Richard Pankhurst, never a doctrinaire politician, was open minded about the situation, hinting to Keir Hardie that the party should consider negotiating to secure the withdrawal of the Liberal candidate from Gorton providing this could 'be done consistently with the principles and dignity of the party'.<sup>125</sup> Grass-roots opinion on both sides, however, precluded any such arrangement. The executive committee of the Gorton Liberal Association was strongly in favour of bringing forward a Liberal candidate, agreeing unanimously to field a candidate.<sup>126</sup> The ILP in North-East Manchester was also in no mood to compromise after for so long expecting to challenge the sitting Conservative MP.<sup>127</sup>

Astutely, Richard Pankhurst realized that his only real prospect of success was by stressing his radical Liberal rather than socialist credentials during the course of the election campaign. Although he was unable to persuade the Liberal executive committee not to field a candidate against him, he caused a sensation by persuading the official Liberal candidate, James Brierly, to withdraw.<sup>128</sup> Just like C. P. Scott two years before, Brierly saw little point in opposing an ILP candidate if this meant allowing a Conservative in, especially when the ILP candidate in question had such remarkably similar views to the 'advanced' section of the Liberal Party. Having pulled off this major coup

<sup>120</sup> *LL*, 4 May 1895.

<sup>121</sup> *Clarion*, 29 June 1895.

<sup>122</sup> Letter, G. Beresford to K. Hardie, u.d., BLPES, FJC 95/149. <sup>123</sup> *LL*, 6 July 1895.

<sup>124</sup> *Manchester Evening Mail (MEM)*, 10 July 1895.

<sup>125</sup> Letter, R. Pankhurst to K. Hardie, 9 July 1895, BLPES, Letter, FJC 95/116.

<sup>126</sup> *MG*, 4 July 1895.

<sup>127</sup> *MG*, 16 July 1895.

<sup>128</sup> *Gorton Reporter (GR)*, 13 July 1895.

Pankhurst did all he could to display his loyalty to Liberalism in order to attract Liberal votes. At a meeting in Longsight he declared himself to be ‘the strongest Liberal candidate in the north of England’, and challenged his remaining Liberal opponents to demonstrate how his programme differed from ‘the Liberal progressive programme’ officially endorsed by the Manchester Liberal Union.<sup>129</sup> Pankhurst was simply stressing the notion that the ILP was merely an ‘advanced’ Liberal Party – something that many Liberal Progressives believed. Indeed, this was an argument Liberals had often previously used in unsuccessful attempts to negotiate electoral pacts with the ILP. As the campaign progressed it became increasingly clear that the local Liberal Party executive had been completely out-manoeuvred. When Pankhurst eventually persuaded the sitting MP, William Mather, to subscribe to his candidature, the humiliation of the local Liberal Party executive was complete.<sup>130</sup>

#### IV

Scott, Mather, and Brierly all genuinely supported an increased number of working men in Westminster and were not afraid to endorse socialist candidates if electoral logic suggested that by fielding a Liberal candidate the Conservatives would be successful. However, the 1895 election demonstrated the problems of this type of electoral generosity toward the ILP. Hall’s fall from grace left a vacuum in the leadership of the Manchester ILP. Pankhurst provided much of the resources for the Gorton ILP, but his appeal was as much to Liberal as socialist sympathies, and because the Gorton ILP lacked any real party organization the branch was heavily dependent on him.<sup>131</sup> In North-East Manchester the Liberal Party were once again defeated, but the ILP was humiliated taking little over 6 per cent of the vote in a seat it had once boasted of winning. Pankhurst did much better in Gorton and clearly inherited many Liberal supporters, but still went down to the Conservatives by some 1,600 votes.<sup>132</sup> If nothing else, the election demonstrated the inadequacy of Liberals simply leaving the field open for the ILP to tackle the Conservatives. Even when the Liberals were in close political agreement with the ILP candidate on major issues and their former local MP and candidate endorsed the ILP candidate, they could not persuade sufficient Liberals to support a socialist. Moreover, Gorton demonstrated that many Liberal Party officials were not prepared to support ILP candidates at any price and would split the party rather than accept the advice of figures like Mather and Brierly. Liberals were seen placarding local walls calling for their fellow party members to abstain from voting for Pankhurst and some even declared their support for the Conservatives.<sup>133</sup> The election had destroyed any immediate hopes of a future electoral agreement between the parties. Hardie reminded his party supporters that official Liberalism viewed the ILP ‘with demonic hatred’ while local

<sup>129</sup> *MG*, 16 July 1895.

<sup>130</sup> *GR*, 13 July 1895.

<sup>131</sup> *Clarion*, 17 Aug. 1895.

<sup>132</sup> Craig, *British parliamentary election results*, pp. 150, 317.

<sup>133</sup> *Clarion*, 27 July 1895.

leaders blamed the Liberal Party for the re-emergence of a Conservative parliamentary majority in Manchester.<sup>134</sup>

The Manchester Liberal Party's loss of two of its three seats in the city had little directly to do with ILP intervention in the election. The party's Manchester South seat was won by a Liberal Unionist in a straight fight, but the Unionist majority was only seventy-eight votes in what was by then a marginal constituency. The loss of South-West Manchester probably had much to do with the retirement of popular radical MP Jacob Bright, and in any case the ILP was very weak in this constituency after closing down the powerful St George's branch which made up such a large part of the division. The ILP's only degree of success had come in a constituency, Gorton, where the Liberal Party had been historically divided and where sympathetic miners' unions could give the party at least some organizational focus. The labour press could do little to hide the fact that the election had proved a great disappointment to the rank and file of the ILP.<sup>135</sup> The lack of effective constituency organization was the party's main handicap. In Gorton, despite recruiting over 100 new members during the course of the campaign, the ILP found it difficult to match the effectiveness of the established parties. Workers, of course, found it disproportionately difficult to be placed and stay on electoral registers and without effective registration committees, it was unlikely the ILP would be able to make much progress against well-financed and professional party machines.<sup>136</sup>

There were also other problems in establishing a party based on the form of 'democratic centralism' of the ILP. Figures like Richard Pankhurst and L. D. Prince who had moved from radical Liberalism to ILP socialism did not fit in easily with the culture of the new party. Whereas radicalism traditionally favoured decentralization, pluralism, and constructive dissent within the party, ILP socialism stressed the need for collective discipline in accepting centrally agreed policies and rules. Thus it was not surprising that after the 1895 general election more internal troubles broke, just as they had done twelve months before. The dispute focused on L. D. Prince, who as one of Manchester's citizens' auditors, was perhaps the most important ILP elected representative in the city. Over a decade before Joseph Scott had demonstrated the power of the office of citizens' auditor by exposing a series of scandals and mismanagement in the city council that brought fundamental changes to the operation of the authority. Prince was seen as a potentially dangerous adversary by senior council leaders, who, knowing that the ILP's reputation had already been besmirched by Hall, accused Prince of using fees from council work to swell ILP coffers.<sup>137</sup> A detailed ILP investigation found that Prince had no charges to answer, but criticized him for 'not loyally obeying the orders of the executive committee' in certain matters.<sup>138</sup> Prince, clearly angered by the failure of his party to give him unqualified support after the charges had been

<sup>134</sup> *LL*, 27 July 1895. The Conservatives won five of the six parliamentary seats in the city.

<sup>135</sup> *LL*, 27 July 1895.

<sup>136</sup> *Clarion*, 17 Aug. 1895.

<sup>137</sup> *Clarion*, 14 Dec. 1895.

<sup>138</sup> *LL*, 7 Dec. 1895.

found to be groundless, responded by resigning his position as citizens' auditor without consulting the ILP executive committee. In a party where elected representatives were regarded as elected delegates, directly responsible to the party leadership, this move was regarded as the ultimate sin. At the party's annual general meeting the following month Prince was expelled from the party.<sup>139</sup> A figure who could have been a major thorn in the side of the Liberal municipal establishment was thus permanently lost to the ILP.

For the ILP loyalty to the labour brotherhood was all, but taken to extremes the culture it engendered could be counterproductive. It meant that many of those from the Liberal radical tradition were permanently marginalized, with dissenters from collectively agreed positions having little role to play. What Liberal Progressives misunderstood was that Manchester's ILP leaders were committed to constructing a new type of national party based on class interest, not a left-wing labour electoral association. This necessarily meant that thoughts of co-operation with those of other parties, like C. P. Scott, could not be entertained. Labour demands antagonized many Progressive Liberals, like Edwin Guthrie, who turned from being moderately sympathetic to the broad goals that the ILP represented to believing that the ILP must be fought and defeated if the Liberal Party was to survive. Institutional difficulties made it difficult to turn Liberal sympathy for labour representation into practical effect. Liberals valued decentralized party decision-making and it was unthinkable that the central party – the Manchester Liberal Union – could ever instruct local associations to adopt working-class candidates. Similarly in school board elections it was inconceivable that the Liberal Party would antagonize nonconformist leaders by rejecting them in favour of labour representatives selected by a trade council.

The case of Manchester illustrates the problems inherent in attempting to construct a 'Progressive alliance' and raises questions as to whether it was in the Liberal Party's interest to do so. Working-class Liberals and ILP socialists were bitter enemies in the Manchester trades council and there is little evidence that working-class Liberals ever sought to foster co-operation between the parties. Similarly, the leadership of the Independent Labour Party was irreconcilably hostile to talk of compromise with Liberals. School board elections demonstrated that the ILP would only entertain thoughts of co-operation if Liberals surrendered completely to their political demands. Even when Liberals were prepared unconditionally to stand down for the ILP this only served to help the Conservatives and undermine Liberal unity and support in working-class constituencies. In North-East Manchester local Liberals and Irish Nationalist leaders simply could not be persuaded to support the controversial local ILP candidate – a decision that seemed justified given his sudden resignation before the 1895 election. In Gorton the decision of the sitting Liberal MP to try to bounce the local party into accepting an ILP

<sup>139</sup> *Clarion*, 25 Jan. 1896.

successor ended in disaster. The local Liberal Party split, with many Liberals supporting the Conservative candidate rather than following the guidance of their local MP. Moreover, it was clear that ILP support was simply not strong enough to defeat the Conservatives – even in constituencies like Gorton, where the ILP had a significant trade union base. Liberalism still had a significant hold over working-class voters – Gorton’s ILP candidate knew that only by depicting himself as a Liberal would he have any chance of success.

Progressive policies and programmes helped Liberals both reinforce the party’s working-class base and consolidate its position in the existing, more middle-class suburban strongholds. For a short period in the late 1890s, the Liberals even regained a numerical majority on the city council. However, efforts to forge a Progressive alliance saw the Liberal Party retreat into its middle-class strongholds – especially after the Gladstone–MacDonald national electoral pact. The Liberal Party continued to be strong in those constituencies with a significant middle-class electorate – namely the constituencies of North and South Manchester<sup>140</sup> – but the logic of Progressivism, as encouraged by C. P. Scott since 1892, meant they had to surrender what were once safe working-class Liberal constituencies, such as South-West Manchester and Gorton. Many Liberals continued to see Labour as a working-class branch of their own party. Yet the 1890s had illustrated that far from fostering class harmony between the ‘productive’ classes, attempts to foster a Progressive alliance only served to institutionalize class divisions. By abandoning working-class constituencies to the ILP, the Liberals only undermined their claim to be a cross-class party. Working-class Liberals in areas such as Gorton were forsaken by their own party and local Liberal Associations split. Moreover, the division of the electoral map into Liberal and Labour constituencies could only encourage future ideological divergence.<sup>141</sup>

While Clarke and Tanner have illustrated how Progressivism enhanced the Liberal Party’s electoral appeal,<sup>142</sup> the fundamental strategic difficulties associated with electoral alliances must not be neglected. The electoral arrangements of the 1903 Gladstone–MacDonald pact reflected the existing political landscape and the new Labour Party invariably laid claim to those working-class districts formerly fought by the ILP. Consequently, Manchester Liberalism was forced back yet further into its middle-class electoral heartlands by the logic of the Progressive alliance. One should be cautious about accepting Tanner’s view that Labour drew its strength largely from those areas where the Liberal Party was historically weak.<sup>143</sup> The two constituencies where the ILP was strongest were also important centres of working-class Liberal support. Gorton was previously a safe Liberal seat and North-East Manchester was a

<sup>140</sup> See B. Jones, ‘Manchester Liberalism, 1918–1929: the electoral, ideological and organisational experience of the Liberal Party in Manchester, with particular reference to the career of Ernest Simon’ (PhD thesis, Manchester, 1997), pp. 32–3, 310–11.

<sup>141</sup> Powell, ‘The New Liberalism’, p. 392.

<sup>142</sup> Clarke, *Lancashire*, pp. 162–3; Tanner, *Political change*, pp. 134–5.

<sup>143</sup> Tanner, *Political change*, pp. 156–7.



Conservative/Liberal marginal until 1895. Following the policy adopted by the Progressives in the 1890s, both were ceded to the Labour Party by the terms of the 1903 accord and both were won by the Labour Party at the general election three years later.<sup>144</sup> Thereafter Liberal organization in these working-class constituencies deteriorated sharply and by 1918 it was practically dead.<sup>145</sup> By becoming a pioneer of Progressivism, Manchester had re-established itself as the symbolic capital of British Liberalism, especially after the loss of Birmingham and the decline of Leeds.<sup>146</sup> Progressive ideas helped stimulate Edwardian radicalism and the Progressive alliance helped deliver a major general election triumph. Yet Manchester's Progressive leaders seemed not to appreciate the problems cross-party co-operation would bring. Progressivism required the Liberal Party to abandon many working-class constituencies and, by implication, many of its working-class supporters. Manchester Progressivism provided a viable electoral platform but it did not present a credible long-term political strategy.

<sup>144</sup> H. Pelling, *Social geography of British elections, 1885–1910* (London, 1967), pp. 244–6.

<sup>145</sup> Two recent writers also regard the Liberals as having abandoned many working-class areas of Manchester to Labour after 1906. See Jones, 'Manchester Liberalism, 1918–1929', pp. 33, 310–11, and S. McGhie, 'Liberal politics in Manchester, Oldham and Stoke-on-Trent, 1906–1922' (PhD thesis, Manchester Metropolitan, forthcoming). For a short assessment of the national implications of the Gladstone–MacDonald pact see T. Lloyd, 'Lib-Labs and "unforgivable electoral generosity"', *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, 48 (1975), pp. 255–9.

<sup>146</sup> Roberts, 'Leeds Liberalism', pp. 154–6.