5 *The United Kingdom: safeguarding the Reform Acts with SMP*

Throughout the nineteenth century, the United Kingdom was home to one of the strongest movements for minority representation, offering both intellectual guidance and organizational leadership to its counterparts in Europe and throughout the democratic world (Carstairs 1980; Hart 1992). The movement drew on strong support from the two major parties, as both Liberal and Conservative MPs saw a need for some electoral safeguards to accompany suffrage expansion. Efforts to establish PR, however, were consistently thwarted by party leaders who saw more pitfalls than opportunities in the system. Finally in 1884, the United Kingdom would become the first European country to formally adopt a system of uniform single-member plurality. Paradoxically, when the system of SMP was introduced, it was presented as a form of PR, one that would act as a better guarantee of minority representation than any that had previously been proposed. To understand how SMP came to be seen as a functional equivalent for PR and the preferred means of safeguarding the position of right parties, one needs to examine the dynamics of electoral system choice in the UK in the previous decades as the country inched closer to manhood suffrage.

Democratization and working-class mobilization

The correspondence of voting system reform activity to suffrage expansion is most direct in the case of the United Kingdom. By far the most intense waves of reform activity emerged in response to the major Reform Acts of 1867 and 1884, each of which significantly expanded the franchise. On both occasions, electoral system choice emerged as a central point of contention, resulting in rifts between party leaders and the rank and file, as well as within party leadership. Throughout these debates, preferences for electoral systems turned on actors' calculations

of whether workers would organize independently or join one of the established parties and rely on it to represent their interests.

In the initial stages of suffrage expansion, many were confident that the tradition of deference would be sufficient to prevent independent working-class mobilization. This view was most forcefully expressed by Walter Bagehot, a scholar of the English constitution, who in his classical work, published on the eve of franchise reform in 1867, reassured his countrymen that the vitality of the English political system had long rested on the deference of electors to their betters. He argued that the practice of deference continued to have a strong hold on the people of England. This practice rested on the recognition by the masses of their social superiors, through what he called the "theatre of society":

> They defer to what we may call the *theatrical show* of society. A certain state passes before them; a certain pomp of great men; a certain spectacle of beautiful women; a wonderful scene of wealth and enjoyment is displayed, and they are coerced by it. Their imagination is bowed down; they feel they are not equal to the life which is revealed to them . . .The higher world, as it looks from without, is a stage on which the actors walk their parts much better than the spectators can. (Bagehot 1867, 198–199).

So confident was he in this social hierarchy that he thought it would make the masses resistant to the appeals of any who fell outside it. "If a political agitator were to lecture to the peasants of Dorsetshire, and try to excite political dissatisfactions, it is much more likely that he would be pelted than that he would succeed"[1] (Bagehot 1867, 200).

Though Bagehot's position toward this practice was somewhat ambiguous, seeing in it potential dangers as well as benefits, other advocates of democratic expansion took it as a reassurance that granting suffrage to the working classes would not significantly challenge their hold on power. In fact, support for suffrage expansion was often predicated on the expectation that the practice of deference would lead workers to align themselves with exiting political forces rather than challenge the status quo through independent mobilization.

These social norms were greatly aided by aggressive strategies of containment employed by right parties in the decades before suffrage expansion. Throughout the nineteenth century, Liberals as well as

[1] It is noteworthy that in a second edition published in 1873, Bagehot tempers these claims, explaining that it was still too early to know what the effect of the Reform Act of 1867 would be.

Conservatives had pursued a combination of repressive and accommodationist measures in an effort to preempt potential moves toward independent working-class mobilization. Among the exclusionary measures developed to serve this end was a system of plural voting or "fancy franchises," whereby university graduates, landowners, and certain ratepayers would be awarded multiple votes. This feature was adopted in the Reform Act of 1832 and persisted in different forms until 1948 (Carstairs 1980, 197). This only applied to approximately 7 percent of the electorate but had a substantial impact on electoral outcomes because there was no cap on the number of votes an individual was entitled to. Thus a landowner with property in 20 different constituencies could cast 20 votes (Goldstein 1983, 11). Right parties also put in place various laws that limited workers' organizational capacity throughout this period. This included the Combination Acts as well as the Master and Servant Acts which criminalized such things as picketing and public meetings and strictly regulated the finances of trade unions.

Combined with these exclusionary measures were concerted efforts at accommodation by the Liberal and Conservative parties, both hoping to gain the allegiance of workers. This included sponsoring cooperatives, benefited associations, labor clubs, and "friendly societies" that aimed to provide basic social services. Right parties also frequently reached out to trade unions on policies affecting labor. Franchise reform was also a large component of accommodationist strategies and each party actively maneuvered to beat the other to the punch. The Liberals were especially aggressive in their efforts and were actively involved in the push for working-class incorporation. Among the ranks of Liberal MPs were many self-identified Radicals who, though not from the working classes themselves, championed workers' causes. Liberals went so far as to set up a reform association, the Northern Reform League, that in many ways competed with working-class organizations over leadership of the suffrage reform movement (Cole 1941, 25).

William Gladstone, the Liberal leader and one of the dominant political figures of the Victorian era, led a failed effort for franchise reform in 1866. Gladstone proposed a moderate reform bill which was defeated largely by members of his own party, a group referred to as the "Cave of Adullam."[2] It was a coalition of Adullamites and Conservatives that

[2] This is a biblical reference. The cave of Adullam was a place where the discontented would meet to discuss their grievances.

ultimately brought down the Liberal government that same year. With the Conservative victory in the next election, Benjamin Disraeli, head of the Conservative Party, set out to destroy the "old Whig monopoly of Liberalism" by introducing his own Reform Bill with even broader suffrage expansion than that proposed by Gladstone (Himmelfarb 1966, 102; Collier 1999, 64). The Conservatives had languished in the minority for nearly two decades and he saw in franchise reform the opportunity to gain a stronger position by appealing to workers.

The Reform Act of 1867 would be the first real test of working-class mobilization. At the time of the Reform Act, there existed no workers' party, though working-class organizations were sending mixed signals about their political ambitions. The London Working Men's Association (LWMA) was established in 1866, in anticipation of the Second Reform Act. It was, from its inception, a political as well as an economic organization, its primary objective being "to procure the political enfranchisement of workers and promote the social and general interests of the industrial classes" (Cole 1941, 39). With the first element of this agenda in sight as suffrage expansion was being favorably discussed in the House of Commons, the LWMA shifted its focus to the latter. In order to promote the interests of workers, the Association deemed it necessary to present for election independent working-class candidates. One of its first resolutions urged that "as legislative action on the subject of Trade Unions, and upon questions affecting labour and capital generally, will, in all probability, be undertaken by the first Reformed Parliament ... this Association strongly recommends to their fellow workingmen throughout the country the desirability of a united effort being made to procure a direct representation of labour interests by the return of working men to Parliament" (Cole 1941, 40).

The LWMA went further to call for the establishment of a Workingmen's Parliamentary Election Fund to aid suitable working-class candidates. This did not at the time, nor would it in the first several decades of the labor movement, mean the formation of an independent workers' party, but rather the support of individual working-class candidates who would identify primarily as Liberal MPs. The LWMA, which was considered one of the more radical labor organizations at the time, was still very wary of appearing to advocate "class representation" inimical to the general welfare. Their platform made it clear that their vision was one of independent

working-class representation harmonizing with other class interests, blending almost imperceptibly in the Commons:

> Providing a careful selection of working-class candidates be made, there is no reason why they should stand isolated as a class in Parliament any more than the special representatives of other interests now sitting there ... We believe that, after the first novelty of their appearance in the House has worn off, they will, insensibly and imperceptibly, blend with other members in the performance of the usual duties expected from members of the Legislature ... We presume that the working-class candidate, in addressing a constituency, would do as all other candidates do – appeal to the electors generally, and not to those of a particular interest. (Cole 1941, 44)

Thus the demand for labor representation was tempered by the inclusive character of the rhetoric. Still it is significant that as they began discussions of suffrage expansion, Conservatives and Liberals could see the initial stages of independent working-class political mobilization. The call for united and independent political representation for the working classes threatened to undermine the practice of deference on which advocacy of suffrage expansion had been based. And it was in this context that right parties began to seek electoral safeguards against the effects of democratic expansion.

PR and the Reform Act of 1867

The Reform Act of 1867 was the first major step toward working-class incorporation in the United Kingdom. Though the Reform Act would enfranchise only a small portion of the adult male population, given the small size of the franchise at the time, this would mean an 88 percent increase in the size of the electorate, drawn mostly from the urban working classes (Carstairs 1980, 190). With this dramatic change to the size and the composition of the electorate, many Liberal and Conservative MPs, fearing that they would become an electoral minority, increasingly argued for the necessity of introducing some sort of electoral safeguard to protect their position. The existing electoral system was a combination of single- and two-member districts elected under plurality rule. This was the result of the prevalent *ad hoc* method of reapportionment. Rather than redrawing district boundaries to maintain single member districts of equal size, new members were added to districts with burgeoning

populations. By the time of the Reform Act of 1867, only in certain rural areas of Scotland and Wales was the population small enough to warrant only one member. Thus the system consisted mostly of multi-membered districts. Under the proposed Reform Act, several urban districts were to get an additional member to make up for increases in population size. These urban districts in particular were of concern because they tended to have larger working-class populations. Moreover, the multi-member plurality system, under which representatives would be elected at large greatly exaggerated majorities and could potentially pose a threat to right parties if there were significant working-class mobilization.

Through the course of debate over the Reform Act, a movement emerged for electoral safeguards to be established along with franchise reform. An unlikely alliance of Liberals and Conservatives led the movement from its inception. Their goal was to establish minority representation for the House of Commons as a means of counteracting the anticipated democratic influx. The issue of "minority representation" had received a great deal of attention in the years leading up to the Reform Act. Of course the minority in question was upper-class electors who would become a numerical minority with the advent of suffrage expansion. There were various proposals discussed at the time, the most popular of which was a plan by Thomas Hare, a barrister, who in 1859 had published *A Treatise on the Election of Representatives: Parliamentary and Municipal.* In it he warned against "the dangers of that absolutism which would result from committing the destinies of the country to the uncontrolled government of the numerical majority" (Hare 1859, 4). To remedy these dangers, he proposed a system of "personal representation" in which electors would choose candidates from the country at large, ranking them in order of preference. Once a candidate had fulfilled his quota, his votes would be transferred to the electors' next choice. Hare claimed that this system would give the elector greater choice, reduce wasted votes, and guarantee that minority interests would be directly represented in Parliament. Hare's work would have a great impact on debate over voting system reform throughout Europe as well as the United States and Australia. It immediately caught the attention of many prominent public figures, most notably John Stuart Mill, who saw in it the ideal check on mass democracy.

Mill's role in the movement for minority representation in many ways epitomizes the ambivalence of elites with regard to democratization.

Despite Mill's status as one of the preeminent liberals of his time, his vehement support for extending the franchise to sections of the working classes and women, and his unwavering support for representative government, a decided anxiety about democratic governance marked much of his thought. His skepticism with regard to the intellectual and moral capacities of the "average man" can be found throughout his writings. According to Mill, working-class participation was necessary for the cultivation of civic virtues in the individual and the progress of society as a whole. However, as he explained in *On Representative Government*, he considered it to be "highly mischievous" to admit them "in their present state of morals and intelligence, to the full exercise of suffrage" (Mill 1861, 360). Until the working classes had received a satisfactory civic education, their participation had to be mediated through electoral safeguards. To this end, a system of minority representation provided the ideal remedy for Mill. Hare's scheme in particular he placed "among the very greatest improvements yet made in the theory and practice of government" (Mill 1861, 310). It insured the direct and independent representation of the "superior intellects" who he assumed would always be in the minority (Mill 1861, 313). And in so doing, it allowed for a much greater expansion of the franchise.

Mill's strong endorsement greatly helped to promote the cause of minority representation in the United Kingdom. In fact it was Mill (an MP at the time) who first introduced minority representation as an amendment to the franchise bill of 1867 (United Kingdom 1867, 1343). A number of proposals for minority representation were made through the course of debates, the most popular of which was a measure for the cumulative vote. The cumulative vote was proposed as a moderate form of minority representation that would allow electors in multi-member districts to weight their preferences for candidates. Under the multi-member plurality system in place, each elector in these constituencies had as many votes as there were seats to be filled, but could only vote for a given candidate once, which would effectively produce a plurality outcome. The cumulative vote, on the other hand, would allow the elector to dispense the votes as he saw fit, either "plumping" them on one candidate, or distributing them among a few candidates. With some coordination, electors supporting a minority candidate could potentially secure his election by concentrating their votes and thus weighting their preference.

The proposal for the cumulative vote in three-cornered constituencies was not seen as an ideal remedy. Advocates of stronger safeguards would have liked to see multi-member constituencies established nationally with some mechanism of proportional representation as the standard. However, the measure for the cumulative vote was seen as an important stepping stone, providing a precedent for future reformers to build on. But it was not simply a tactical move. In applying the cumulative vote to the existing multi-member districts, reformers hoped to secure minority representation in the industrial urban centers where they thought suffrage expansion posed the greatest danger.

Discussions of the cumulative vote reveal the extent to which party discipline broke down on the issue of electoral system choice, as various intra-party factions developed preferences for different strategies. The proposal for the cumulative vote was sponsored by Robert Lowe, a Liberal MP, who despite having a strained relationship with his own party, was considered one of its most influential leaders. Lowe was one of the members of the Cave of Adullam, which helped to bring down the Liberal government in 1866. Despite his position of leadership within the party, Lowe, like many of the Adullamites, acted on many occasions against the wishes of party leaders. His proposal for the cumulative vote was one such instance.

In introducing the proposal, Lowe made clear that the measure was meant to act as a safeguard against the impact of suffrage expansion. He argued that the cumulative vote was "the last opportunity for giving variety to the franchise." He warned that if it was not successful, "there will be nothing left but one simple uniform franchise to be entrusted to, and left in, the hands of the lowest class in society" (United Kingdom 1867, 1037). Lowe was voicing a common concern at the time that the Reform Bill signaled the surrender of governance to an unrestrained democratic form. Other Liberals similarly argued that along with suffrage expansion, some mechanism would be necessary to defend the instructed minority from the power of the numerical majority (United Kingdom 1867, 1100).

These concerns were echoed across the aisle by Conservative MPs who also saw the need to safeguard the position of the minority. Robert Cecil (Viscount Cranborne) explained, "We want a principle which will be strong enough to counteract the overwhelming weight you have given in contradiction to all the old traditions of the community to one particular class in it" (United Kingdom 1867, 1098). J. E. Gorst,

another Conservative MP, warned that without some electoral safeguard, the Commons would "represent only one class, and that, generally, the lowest; so that the opinions of the richer voters would be of no value when weighed in the same scale with a more numerous section" (United Kingdom 1867, 1074). Charles Newdegate similarly warned, with regard to urban centers, that "the minorities in the large constituencies were too important to be overlooked" (United Kingdom 1867, 1090).

This may seem like a rather extraordinary overreaction to a measure which was to enfranchise only a small percentage of the adult male population, but the anxiety was widespread and it was shared by many of the supporters of minority representation. It should also be noted that although the bill would extend suffrage to only a small portion of the population, given the small size of the franchise at the time, this would almost double the size of the electorate. Moreover, the new electors would be drawn mostly from the urban working classes, whose allegiance to established parties was expected, but not guaranteed. Thus the cumulative vote was presented and defended as a means of safeguarding the position of right parties from the effects of democratic expansion.

Paradoxically, among those supporting the proposal were outspoken champions of democratic expansion. The value of electoral safeguards was defended my J. S. Mill who insisted on the importance of protecting "those who are in danger of being outnumbered and subjected to the tyranny of a majority" (United Kingdom 1867, 1107). Walter Morrison, another Liberal Radical who was one of the strongest supporters of franchise reform, similarly maintained the necessity of electoral safeguards, arguing that "the minority would generally be better disciplined and actuated by higher motives than the majority, for a large number of persons always went with the winning side; whereas the greatest reforms ever achieved were always initiated by a small but noble band, who were at first in conflict with the majority" (United Kingdom 1867, 1076–1077).

Enthusiasm for PR, however, was not matched by party leaders. Both Disraeli and Gladstone opposed the implementation of electoral safeguards, defending the virtues of the soon to be enfranchised electors. Disraeli stated his opposition to the measure in an impassioned speech, "And who are these people to whom you are offering the franchise ... They are Englishmen, who have been born and bred under the influence of the laws, the manners and customs and traditions of the country"

(United Kingdom 1867, 1114). Gladstone too came to the defense of the new electors, maintaining "as regards the majority, you, who on public grounds will disenfranchise nobody ... are about to inflict a certain disenfranchisement, or, at all events, a diminution of electoral power, upon men against whom you bring no charge for the use they have made of it" (United Kingdom 1867, 1170).

Both Disraeli and Gladstone saw in franchise reform an opportunity to attract workers to their parties, and feared that the implementation of electoral safeguards would ultimately backfire, alienating workers and pushing them further down the road of independent mobilization. This point was forcefully made by Gladstone, who rejected demands by a large faction of his own party to adopt PR as shortsighted. "I believe the proposed change would be in favor of the party to which I belong," he argued. "That, however, does not alter the question, and does not in the slightest degree recommend it to me" (United Kingdom 1867, 1163). He feared that the emphasis on the representation of individuals would ultimately backfire, giving labor the very strength that advocates of minority representation were trying to check. "If you determine to give representation to minorities" he warned, "you recognize ... the principle of numbers; and, if so, you must be prepared in the long term to make that recognition consistent" (United Kingdom 1867, 1171). Gladstone, one of the original architects of British Lib-Labism, feared that the adoption of PR would undermine efforts of accommodation and the alliance which had been forged between the Liberal party and labor organizations.

At the time, workers identified strongly with the Liberals. According to Luebbert, "[t]he allegiance of workers, and more particularly the trade unions, to the Liberals was such that until the end of the century, advocates of a separate working class party fought an almost futile battle" (Luebbert 1991, 16). Representatives of labor stood for office, sometimes successfully, but this was always done either directly through the Liberal Party or in close association with it. PR would have provided some protection to right parties, but it would have likely aided independent labor mobilization. The existing system of multi-member plurality served as a deterrent to such mobilization because of the relatively high threshold for entry. PR would have significantly lowered this threshold, potentially emboldening labor, whose leaders at the time seemed content to work through the Liberals. Gladstone had greater faith in accommodation as a means of containing labor than he did

in PR, confident as he was that workers would continue to align themselves with the Liberals.

Others shared this opinion, arguing that PR would corrode the system of tutelage and deference which existed between the classes. G. J. Shaw-Lefevre, a Liberal MP, objected to the proposal on the basis that it was "based upon a theory of classes which was as yet unknown to our Constitution" (United Kingdom 1867, 1072). In particular, he argued that, in giving recognition to class antagonisms, the measure could backfire.

> Why . . . should the upper classes be the only minority thus to band together for its special purpose? Should we not have other minorities doing the same, and returning Members, not for the general good, but for their own special advantage? . . . [the working classes] on their part, relieved from the influence of the wealthy and the intellectual, would themselves return more violent partisans, persons having in view only class interests. (United Kingdom 1867, 1072)

He maintained that it was of the greatest importance that the "wealthy and the intellectual should be compelled to descend from their eminence and to mix with the common people." Without such "mixing" he warned, the important functions of "directing, advising, and moderating the masses" would be jeopardized (United Kingdom 1867, 1073). Charles Adderley, another prominent Liberal MP, similarly warned of the danger of allowing this "stereotyped antagonism" between the classes to be institutionalized. He appealed to a sense of responsibility, claiming that "[the poor] formed no opinions on most political questions, but generally followed leaders" (United Kingdom 1867, 1084). Though most supported the need for electoral safeguards in principle, it was feared that the implementation of PR would ultimately undermine the broader goal of containment, distancing workers and undermining efforts to bring them into the fold of the existing political system.

In the end, the proposal for the cumulative vote was defeated by a decisive majority. However, when the Reform Bill was sent to the Lords, there was great opposition to passing the bill without some electoral safeguard. They returned it with an amendment for the limited vote in the newly formed three-member constituencies. Under the limited vote, electors got fewer votes than there were seats to be filled. Thus in the three-membered constituencies, electors would get only two votes. As

with the cumulative vote, this system would also have the effect of weighting the preferences of the minority if they were to coordinate around a single candidate. These multi-member constituencies were specifically targeted because it was within them that working-class mobilization posed the greatest threat.

When the amendment for the limited vote was sent to the Commons, there was a sense of genuine uncertainty over who would benefit from the measure. A large faction of the Liberal Party supported it, though Gladstone continued to vehemently oppose any measure for minority representation. Disraeli on the other hand reiterated the government's opposition to any scheme of minority representation but asked the House to approve it in "the spirit of compromise and conciliation" (United Kingdom 1867, 1110–1111). One member candidly confessed his confusion stating, "Some hon. Members who held extreme Liberal opinions were in favour of the amendment, and strangely enough it was supported by Conservatives too" (United Kingdom 1867, 1159). The confusion reflected the fact that the provision for the limited vote served interests that did not always fall neatly along partisan lines. The amendment returned by the Lords would apply the limited vote only to the new multi-membered constituencies created by the redistribution scheme in the Reform Act. This was supported by advocates of minority representation because it would provide some sort of electoral safeguard in urban centers where working-class mobilization was most threatening. It gained the support of some Conservatives, because it would likely result in the election of more Conservative candidates in these districts.

This point was made by John Bright, a Liberal MP, representing Birmingham, one of the cities that stood to gain a representative under the Reform Bill. Bright argued that the provision of the limited vote would negate the effect of the additional member. The case of Birmingham provides a useful illustration of this. Birmingham at the time had two Liberal members. The addition of one member using plurality voting would most likely result in the election of three Liberal members. However, with the limited vote it was quite likely that the Conservatives would be able to elect one of the three members. This, according to Bright, would result, if party discipline held, in the Conservative member canceling out one of the votes of the Liberal members, which would render Liberals in Birmingham weaker than they were before the addition of a new member. Bright concluded with the statement that his constituency "would prefer that the Member you

are about to give it had been given to Keighley, St. Helens, Barnsley, or Luton, as first proposed, than that it should be given under such conditions as you now wish to impose" (United Kingdom 1867, 1135).

Bright was correct that the effect of the limited vote would be to neutralize those in the majority. This is precisely what many advocates of minority representation were hoping for. In the event that there was a serious electoral challenge from working-class organization, the limited vote would help to contain the gains made by Labour candidates. However, in the absence of a Labour threat, the effect of the limited vote applied in urban districts would likely strengthen the Conservatives in these districts. This was a sacrifice advocates of minority representation were willing to make. It mattered little to them that the additional seat would go to a rival party, so long as it did not go to someone from outside the established right parties. For proportionalists, the prospect of aiding a rival party was a small price that they were more than prepared to pay to protect against the impact of working-class mobilization. Ultimately, the amendment was passed with the support of both Conservatives and Liberals many of whom were committed proportionalists, along with a faction of Conservatives who no doubt were hoping to benefit electorally from its operation. Supporters of PR did not consider this to be a permanent solution, but rather a first step toward broader electoral safeguards. And in the meantime, it would provide for some protection where right parties expected to be the most vulnerable.

The Reform Act of 1884 and the adoption of SMP

By the time of the Reform Act of 1884, the political situation had changed significantly. More labor organizations had embraced the idea of direct political action through parliamentary representation. Most importantly, the Trade Union Congress, which had been established in 1868 as a national umbrella organization for regional trade unions, adopted an electoral strategy in addition to its lobbying efforts. At the time of its establishment, the TUC, like its predecessors, had rejected direct political participation, gearing its efforts mostly toward registering voters and lobbying MPs (Webb and Webb 1898, 257).

Though initially established as a means of coordination between trade unions, the TUC quickly turned its attention to electoral mobilization. The main reason for the change of heart was the TUC's inability to successfully lobby for reform of the laws governing collective

action. Realizing the weakness of lobbying strategies alone, the TUC sought direct representation. In 1869 the TUC established a Parliamentary Representation Committee and began working to bring "qualified workmen" to Parliament (Cole 1941, 50). Despite this show of independence, the TUC worked very closely with the Liberal Party and went to great lengths to make clear its allegiance to the Liberals, claiming that in voting for working-class candidates its electors were simply expressing their support for qualified individuals (Cole 1941, 71–73). The TUC did not seek to establish an independent labor party and in fact actively blocked the efforts of others who wished to do so (Hunt 1981, 273).

Moreover, the TUC made a concerted effort to promote cross-class cooperation. A Labour Representation League established in close association with the TUC made clear that its mission was:

> to secure the return of qualified working men ... and ... where deemed necessary, recommend and support as candidates from among the other classes such persons as have studied the great Labour problems and have proven themselves friendly to an equitable settlement of the many difficult points which it involves. (Roberts 1958, 59)

Such efforts were welcomed by the Liberal Party, which reciprocated with the support of a handful of labor candidates. The TUC's Parliamentary Committee regularly coordinated with the Liberal Electoral Committee and it was often the case that if Liberals stood for election in certain districts, labor candidates would step down (Cole 1941; Winstanley 1990). In the general election of 1874, the TUC succeeded in electing the first two labor candidates to Parliament, Alexander MacDonald from Stafford and Thomas Burt from Morpeth, both miners and both prominent TUC members. They were put forward along with 11 others who failed and several others who withdrew to clear the way for Liberal candidates (Webb and Webb 1898, 273–274; Cole 1941, 67–68). From this point on, labor achieved sustained representation in Parliament, but its electoral strategy continued to be dominated by the Liberals well into the twentieth century. Moreover, in Parliament Lib-Lab members acted very much as a part of the Liberal Party, so the independence of labor representation was still greatly limited (Hunt 1981, 271).

These Lib-Lab candidates were critical in the Liberal Party's efforts to gain the allegiance of workers. And, though identifying as Liberals, they

also received a great deal of attention from the Conservative Party whose leaders went out of their way to show their appreciation of the presence of "qualified" working men. The Conservative government that came to power in 1874 courted these representatives with cabinet appointments and they were regularly consulted on matters related to labor.

The TUC and its Lib-Lab members also played a critical role throughout this period in fighting more radical socialist forces, such as the Social Democratic Federation (SDF) established in 1881. The SDF adopted an explicitly Marxian platform and rejected cross-class cooperation in favor of revolutionary social transformation (Cole 1941, 86). It was especially critical of Lib-Labism, which was regarded as a debasement of the labor movement. The TUC fought the SDF's efforts aggressively, denouncing its revolutionary tone and putting pressure on TUC members to reject its appeals. When the SDF sought to run its own candidates, the TUC campaigned against them and, with the aid of the Liberals, prevented the election of a single SDF candidate.

TUC leaders were not entirely devoid of Marxian influence. Many had participated in the First International and saw themselves as part of the transnational movement for workers' rights; however, they rejected the full-scale adoption of socialist platforms. They were committed to a program of social transformation, but one that would be achieved through the existing political structure. This moderate approach had greater appeal among trade unionists whose political resources were often embedded in cross-class cooperation. Despite a brief period of radicalization, by the mid-1880s the TUC had successfully reasserted its power within the leading unions and working-class mobilization returned to the old practices of accommodation with the Liberal Party.

Lib-Lab cooperation was also carefully cultivated throughout this period by Gladstone, and it was largely thanks to his efforts that the Liberals regained the majority in 1880 (Collier 1999, 66). Gladstone's rhetoric, if not his actions in office, appealed to labor leaders who saw him as a champion of workers' issues (Howell 1983). Gladstone painted a picture of workers as "capable citizens" whose devotion to their nation was beyond doubt. Such nationalist appeals helped to draw workers closer to the Liberals and distance them from the universalist narratives of class solidarity. Though his actions in office were not always favorable to labor, his inclusionary rhetoric often gained him the allegiance of labor organization and the votes of their members.

Going into discussions of the Reform Act of 1884, Gladstone had every confidence that the new electors would join the ranks of the Liberal Party.

Gladstone's faith in strategies of accommodation, however, was not shared by others who sought more immediate safeguards against suffrage expansion. In anticipation of the Reform Act of 1884, proportionalists launched their second major campaign. The provision for the limited vote in the Reform Act of 1867 had always been considered a first step in the process of implementing proportional representation throughout the country. Emboldened by this practically marginal but symbolically significant success, reformers set out to establish a national organization. The movement for voting system reform enjoyed its greatest popularity at this time. According to reformers, the need for PR was greater that ever. Fredrick Seebohm, an economic historian and prominent public figure wrote in 1883, "A Parliament representing only local majorities, shifted from side to side by the oscillation of the least stable and the least intelligent class of fluctuating voters, is no fair representation of the nation – it may, at certain crises in national history, become government by the mob" (Seebohm 1883, 915).

In 1884, the Proportional Representation Society formed and immediately launched an impressive nation-wide campaign, opening up chapters in several cities. Activists toured the country extolling the virtues of proportional representation. The PRS's publicity efforts were considerable and included, in addition to the usual publications, several mock elections conducted through widely circulated newspapers, all aimed at demonstrating the effect of different voting systems and familiarizing the readers with their proposals for voting system reform (Hart 1992, 102).

The PRS identified the single transferable vote as their preferred system of proportional representation. This form of STV was different from Hare's scheme in that it would establish several multi-member districts throughout the country, rather than taking the entire country as one district. Advocates of proportional representation in the United Kingdom had always preferred electoral systems which allowed for some geographic divisions and preserved, to a certain extent, existing communities. There was a general distaste for the list systems that were popular throughout continental Europe because they were thought to increase the influence of political parties (Catterall 2000, 162).

The composition of the PRS reflected the continuing ambivalence of the parties with respect to voting system reform. The PRS's membership was generally split, including approximately 93 Liberal and 91 Conservative MPs in 1884 (Hart 1992, 102). The PRS had several able champions in the Commons at the time, the most active of whom were John Lubbock, Albert Grey, and Leonard Courtney. This group of reformers tried to distinguish themselves from Hare and earlier schemes of proportional representation. What was most important to them was that they distance themselves from the image of the "idealistic," "theoretical," or even "scientific" schemes of earlier reformers. Theirs was to be a sober, pragmatic, parliamentary movement (Jones 1972, 101–102).

When in February, 1884, the government announced its plan to bring a bill to expand the franchise, the PRS responded immediately. The leaders wrote to Gladstone, urging him to include some measure of proportional representation in larger constituencies. Gladstone insisted that the issue would get a fair hearing, but made no moves to achieve this. Gladstone remained hostile to PR, fearing that it would jeopardize his efforts to bring workers into the ranks of the Liberal Party. As things stood, though labor organizations put forth independent candidates, they were heavily dependent on the support of the Liberals (Cole 1941, 110). This dependence was critical in maintaining labor's allegiance to the Liberals and preventing the rise of an independent labor party. Though PR would offer some protection against labor's projected strength as an electoral majority, it would effectively undo the ties that bound labor to the Liberals, undermining the broader goal of containment. In an effort to appease the large faction of his party sympathetic to PR, however, Gladstone continually reassured its advocates that action would be taken to establish electoral safeguards, writing to Courtney and Lubbock on several occasions asking them to be patient (Gladstone 1884, 246; Hart 1992, 104).

However, when the Reform Act was presented to the Commons, there was no mention of PR. The Act consisted of a number of different bills aimed at bringing the county franchise in line with the borough franchise established in 1867. The result would be a 67 percent overall increase in the electorate (Carstairs 1980, 190). In effect, it would do for the rural population what the Reform Act of 1867 did for the urban population. Just as Disraeli had hoped to advance the Conservative Party by expanding the working-class franchise in the boroughs, so

too did Gladstone hope to gain favor for the Liberal Party by incorporating the working classes of the counties.

The need for electoral safeguards to accompany such broad suffrage expansion was acknowledged, but what was introduced instead of PR was a novel approach to minority representation, described by some as "a very queer solution" (Jones 1972, 196). The Reform Act proposed establishing a uniform system of single-member constituencies with plurality voting, along the lines of that which had been established in the United States several decades earlier. What is remarkable is that this was in fact introduced as a functional alternative to PR – one which would secure the representation of the minority, and thereby right parties, more effectively than any that had been previously proposed. It was argued that single-member districts with plurality voting would in fact provide a more effective safeguard than multi-member districts with proportional voting. The logic behind this was explained by Charles Dilke, a Liberal MP and one of the architects of the bill:

> The belief of the Government was that, by the single-seat system generally adopted in the Bill, the representation of minorities would be secure in the most practical form in which it could be secured by parliamentary measures ... the result of the Bill would be to give a large and varied representation in that House to minorities. (United Kingdom 1885, 1816)

Gladstone himself argued that, though it may not have gone as far as some would have wanted, it did go "a long way towards what is termed the representation of minorities" (quoted in Hart 1992, 114).

Several MPs resigned in protest, including Lord Courtney, head of the PRS. Personal correspondence between Courtney and Gladstone reveals a divergence in strategy, though not in desired ends. Gladstone urged Courtney to reconsider his resignation, maintaining that the measure for PR, "even if at the last unavoidable, is as I think premature" and asking Courtney to give serious consideration to the new proposal which would achieve some of the same goals (Gladstone 1884, 253–254). This could be dismissed as an empty gesture; however, the details of the plan support the claim that SMP was seen as a means of securing the representation of right parties. In fact it was Robert Cecil (now Lord Salisbury), the leader of the Conservative Party and longtime supporter of PR, who initially proposed SMP as an alternative (Salisbury 1884, 145). Although it would not guarantee proportional representation, he argued, it could be an effective safeguard. The

mechanism is different, but if properly arranged, the outcome could be quite similar to that under PR.

To understand how Gladstone and Salisbury hoped to use SMP as an electoral safeguard, one needs to look at the instructions given to the Boundary Commission which was to draw up the new electoral districts. In a secret memorandum, the Commission was instructed that "in the arrangement of the divisions special regard shall be had to the pursuits of the populations." The memorandum went on to indicate that "in all cases where there are populous localities of an urban character to include them in one and the same division" (Gladstone 1884, 251; Rossiter 1999, 40). This was not simply the usual concern for balancing the interests of urban and rural constituencies. They were just as concerned about the distinctions within the urban/rural divide and this was made clear in the instructions to the Commission. They referred to the districts as miners' districts, educational districts, industrial districts, commercial districts, and Poor Law districts (Hare 1885; Lubbock 1885). Their hope was that single-member districts would make it "easier to separate different types of voters because, being smaller in area, they were more likely to be homogeneous in character" (quoted in Chadwick 1976, 675). They were in effect gerrymandering to create minority-majority districts where right parties could easily gain representation.

Though this is not the first time SMP had been discussed as an electoral safeguard, this was the first time it was explicitly equated with PR. The use of SMP paradoxically was seen as the ideal electoral safeguard. Through carefully constructed districts, it would provide increased protection for right parties in the short term, while allowing strategies of accommodation to proceed, potentially undermining the rise of an independent labor party in the long term.

Post-1884: SMP retained

Advocacy for PR did not stop with the decision of 1884. The emergence of an independent Labour Party in 1900 revived calls for stronger electoral safeguards to protect right parties against working-class mobilization. Between 1900 and 1922, there were several proposals to establish PR both at the local and national level. Each was extensively debated but ultimately failed to garner sufficient support. Despite an increase in popularity of the issue in public circles and growing support

among MPs, advocates of PR faced difficulty in making a compelling case about the labor threat. First, the electoral threat presented by labor was relatively weak at the time. In the two decades following its formation, the Labour Party polled no more than 7 percent of the overall vote, and even those meager gains were achieved with the help of the Liberals. This led many to speculate that the "Labour experiment" may be short-lived.

Second, the Labour Party that was established was ideologically moderate and espoused none of the revolutionary ideas of its European counterparts. To be sure, the existence of an independent Labour Party in itself represents a certain degree of radicalization. It grew out of a period of increased radicalism among trade unions in the 1890s. Critics espousing a more Marxian brand of socialism saw the practice of Lib-Labism as undermining labor's aspirations and subjugating the interest of the working classes to those of the bourgeoisie. However, the emergence of the Labour Party was ultimately a compromise between more radical "new unionist" and the moderate old guard of the TUC. And the new Labour Party espoused a moderate platform of class harmony and gradual social transformation through cross-class cooperation.

This moderate ideological platform was reflected in Labour's electoral strategy as well. Even with formal parliamentary independence the Labour Party maintained strong ties to the Liberals. In fact historians have suggested that the early Labour Party leaders may not have intended for the party to become completely independent of the Liberals (Hobsbawm 1964; McKibbon 1970). In 1903, the long tradition of Lib-Lab cooperation was further institutionalized through a formal agreement between Herbert Gladstone, head of the Liberals, and Ramsay MacDonald, leader of the Labour Party. The pact was intended to allow the two parties to make common cause against the Conservatives by coordinating their candidacies to prevent splitting the working-class vote. In practice it greatly benefited the Liberals as it was almost always Labour candidates who withdrew when the two parties competed (Hart 1992, 164). Though such pacts existed elsewhere throughout Europe, nowhere were they so heavily dominated by the right party.

For these reasons, advocates of PR faced great difficulty in convincing party leaders of the need for stronger electoral safeguards. While their counterparts on the Continent were confronted by increasingly volatile

socialist parties threatening radical social transformation, they were dealing with a center-left Labour Party that sought progressive reform through cross-class cooperation. Though PR had widespread support among the party rank and file, decisive opposition from the leadership of both right parties thwarted successive attempts at electoral reform (Hart 1992).

For their part, Labour leaders also rejected PR. Despite appeals from more radical factions within organized Labour, calling for PR to put an end to Labour's dependency on the Liberals, Labour leaders opposed PR on the grounds that it would detract from its potential as an electoral majority. In a speech to the Labour Party, Ramsay MacDonald argued that such "unnatural" technical manipulations were not necessary and could potentially be dangerous, "The organic evolution of political parties was secure" he argued, and once the evolution of electoral competition ran its course, Labour would come to dominate the Liberals (Hart 1992,165). At that point, PR would only hinder its progress. In a matter of a few years, MacDonald's perspective would be vindicated. In the election of 1922, Labour unexpectedly surpassed a divided Liberal Party to become the main party of opposition.

The sudden rise of Labour would effectively close the window of opportunity for advocates of PR, both because it secured the position of a parliamentary majority opposed to PR and because it reinforced the hegemony of ideological moderation within the labor movement, obviating the need for stronger electoral safeguard. While the rise of an electorally viable labor party represented a partial defeat of containment strategies, the ideological moderation of this party represented an important victory for the right. And although in this game of electoral chicken it would seem that the Liberals were defeated, they were able, with the help of their working-class allies, to defeat more radical elements within the labor movement. This meant that the Labour Party in the United Kingdom never really represented a socialist threat. And in the absence of such a threat, right parties could not be moved to embrace PR. It is noteworthy that even once Labour eclipsed the Liberals as the main party of opposition and formed its first minority government, Liberal Party leaders continued to reject appeals for PR arguing that "whatever party was in office, it was the Liberal party who really controlled the situation" (Asquith quoted in Hart 1992, 220). In later years the Liberal Party would come to embrace PR as a means of regaining their electoral standing. However, as Labour became an

increasingly non-threatening part of the electoral landscape, these appeals would fall on deaf ears.

Conclusions

Ultimately, the battle between supporters of PR and SMP in the United Kingdom was a battle of competing strategies. Both camps were motivated by the common goal of establishing electoral safeguards to protect right parties. The ultimate decision to adopt SMP turned on right parties' broader strategies of containment and the need for an electoral system to support such strategies. The choice of SMP in the United Kingdom may, in retrospect, seem sub-optimal. Today we know that ultimately, an independent Labour Party would displace the Liberals as the main party of opposition. But in 1884, Gladstone and others had every reason to believe that their strategy could work, not only dissuading labor from organizing independently, but potentially strengthening the Liberal Party as well. And in the following years, even as an independent Labour Party began to assert itself in the electoral arena, it was in close connection with, and highly dependent on, the Liberals. Containment still seemed to be within reach, undermining several efforts to establish PR (Hart 1992). The sudden rise of Labour in 1922 would make it impossible for the Liberals to recover from their miscalculation. The decisions made in 1884 were in a sense "locked in." Thus, while the outcome may seem sub-optimal, it is one that makes sense given actors' understanding of their situation and the path-dependent nature of decision-making.