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# AN ATYPICAL NORTHERN TOWN: WHY WAS THE KEIGHLEY INDEPENDENT LABOUR PARTY (ILP) UNABLE TO GAIN AN MP UNTIL 1922?

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A thesis submitted to the University of  
Huddersfield in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements for the Degree of MA by  
Research.

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## **Abbreviations**

DORA: Defence of the Realm Act

ILP: Independent Labour Party

LRC: Labour Representation Committee

MP: Member of Parliament

SDF: Social Democratic Federation

TUC: Trades Union Congress

UK: United Kingdom

## **Abstract**

Whilst Keighley was not a particularly remarkable town in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it was amongst a small group of towns that played first-hand witness to one of the most significant events in modern British political history- the rise of Labour and the decline of the Liberals. In contrast to other similar areas, however, Keighley- an old West Yorkshire mill town- saw a much more gradual Labour growth and Liberal slide. So why was this? Well, despite the occurrence of some inciting incidents, which may have alienated some Liberal supporters in the late nineteenth century, the Party retained a solid infrastructure across the town that would take years to degrade, including: a supportive local newspaper, a large amount of name recognition and a supportive class of influential industrialists. The Keighley ILP, on the other hand, began with little more than its enthusiasm and members in the 1890s. Whilst Keighley would ultimately prove to be rather fertile grounds for an ILP, it would take the organisation a number of decades to build the necessary recognition and campaigning infrastructure that it required to attain sustainable success. All the while, the Party contended with a series of internal and external pressures. The victim of Liberal attacks throughout the 1890s, 1900s and 1910s, the Keighley ILP seemed to be on course for some success prior to First World War. The unprecedented speed and scale at which this success would come, however, could not have been foreseen, but for the initial collapse of the Liberal Party as a result of the conflict. This was a collapse which was compounded, but not confirmed, by the extension of the franchise and emergence of a new political philosophy.

## Introduction

The success of political parties is usually judged by their ability to attain power. It is therefore unsurprising that historians, journalists and politicians alike all seek to dissect the reasons behind a successful or unsuccessful election campaign in the aftermath of any given poll. The elections of the early twentieth century (September 1900, January 1906, January 1910, December 1910, December 1918 and November 1922), in particular, have been the focus of much historical analysis as a result of their monumental impact upon life in Britain. One of the key narratives that emerged from these elections is the stumble that the Liberal Party suffered as a direct result of the rise of the Labour Party as a viable opposition in some crucial Liberal seats. Such narratives, however, have a tendency to make sweeping generalisations and as such oversimplify the complex political situations of individual areas. The true strength and relevance of these debates can therefore only be verified through the localised studies of towns such as Keighley, where a Labour Member of Parliament (MP) was not elected until 1922 despite the fact that the seat appeared to be a prime candidate for a Labour victory during the preceding decades, with prominent Labour figures such as Tom Mackley believing that as of 1907 ‘the “National I.L.P. [could not] afford to throw away such a good constituency as Keighley”’.<sup>1</sup> This view was almost certainly developed with the knowledge of Keighley’s high level of deprivation; a level of deprivation that was so prominent that it even led the Liberal *Keighley News* to remark that ‘Keighley was notorious, not famous, for low wages’.<sup>2</sup> This was an observation which makes the fact that Keighley’s

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<sup>1</sup> Laybourn, K. & Reynolds, J. (1984). *Liberalism and the Rise of Labour 1890-1918*. New York: St. Martin's Press. p 165; ILP Archive, Francis Johnson Collection, 1907/144 In Laybourn, K. & Reynolds, J. *Liberalism and the Rise of Labour 1890-1918*. p 165.

<sup>2</sup> *Keighley News*, 7 September 1889. Housed in Keighley Library.



parliamentary seat was able to allude the Labour Party for as long as it did a conundrum. As such, it highlights the complexity and fragmented nature of the Labour Party's development in the United Kingdom (UK) in the early twentieth century. Thus emphasising the need for studies such as this, to establish a clearer picture of the early formation and development of the Labour Party.

### **National Context**

In order to fully explore the conflict that occurred between the Liberal Party and the Labour Party during the early twentieth century, it is vital to understand the background against which the struggle occurred. This section will therefore layout the context to the origins of the Liberal-Labour conflict at both a national and local level.

As noted by Henry Pelling, the origins of the Labour Party can be traced back to the formation of the Labour Representation Committee (LRC) 'at a conference in London in February 1900'.<sup>3</sup> Prior to that, during the late nineteenth century, several left-wing organisations such as the Social Democratic Federation (SDF), the Fabian Society and the Independent Labour Party (ILP) had laid the foundations for the formation of the LRC (and future success of the Labour Party) - each promoting various socialist philosophies amongst key areas of the electorate, before then attaching themselves to the new Labour movement as affiliates for varying lengths of time.<sup>4</sup> Of these three organisations, the ILP, 'which was formed at Bradford in January 1893', was the only group to have any real impact in industrialised northern areas like West Yorkshire as a result of its 'more overtly working class and trade union' structure; consequently, the ILP will feature more significantly in this

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<sup>3</sup> Pelling, H. (1982). *A Short History of the Labour Party* (7th ed.). United Kingdom: MacMillan Press Ltd. p 1.

<sup>4</sup> Laybourn, K. (2000). *A Century of Labour*. Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing. pp 1-2.

work than either the SDF or Fabians.<sup>5</sup> Although left-wing politics became increasingly popular in Britain during the late nineteenth century, the various left-wing movements failed to achieve any real electoral success as they remained divided until the formation of the LRC in 1900; at which point, Keith Laybourn has suggested, 'there was no obvious sign that it would be any more successful than previous efforts to form parties of the working classes or socialist organisations' as the LRC had a severe lack of resources and presence.<sup>6</sup> For example, the group initially operated from Ramsay MacDonald's residence in London and 'spent only £33 in supporting fifteen candidates at the 1900 general election' just two of which were elected.<sup>7</sup>

Despite its meagre origins in early 1900, the LRC was able to do what no other socialist party had done in Britain and cement itself as a key fixture within British politics from 1906 onwards by securing the election of 29 MPs at the 1906 general election.<sup>8</sup> The success of the LRC at the 1906 poll was ultimately underpinned by a mixture of luck, happenstance and savvy political strategy, with the LRC's success very much reliant upon factors such as the outrage caused by the Taff Vale Decision of 1901 and the Lib-Lab electoral pact of 1903. The Taff Vale Decision was a major legal judgement made by the House of Lords in 1901, 'which ruled that a trade union could be sued and compelled to pay for damages inflicted by its officials.'<sup>9</sup> The Lib-Lab pact, meanwhile, was an informal agreement that was reached

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<sup>5</sup> Laybourn, K. *A Century of Labour*. p 2.

<sup>6</sup> Laybourn, K. *A Century of Labour*. p ix.

<sup>7</sup> Laybourn, K. *A Century of Labour*. p ix.

<sup>8</sup> Packer, I. (2006). The great Liberal landslide: The 1906 general election in perspective. *Historian*, (89), 8-16 from <https://search-proquest-com.libaccess.hud.ac.uk/docview/275042752?accountid=11526>. p 15.

<sup>9</sup> Trade Union Congress. (2001). *The Taff Vale decision*. Retrieved from <https://www.tuc.org.uk/research-analysis/reports/section-taff-vale-decision>.

between the LRC and the Liberal Party in 1903 in order to consolidate the anti-Conservative vote.<sup>10</sup> Having secured the election of 29 MPs at the 1906 general election, the LRC gained a major foothold within Parliament to the point that Paul Adelman identified 1906 as 'the most successful year for Labour in the history of the Liberal administration' due to Labour's ability to influence the Liberal Party to pass more radical bills such as 'the Trades Disputes Act 1906'.<sup>11</sup> Labour's significant gains at the 1906 general election continued in the two 1910 general elections to the point that Labour held 42 parliamentary seats by the close of the year, this growth coinciding with a major surge in trade union support as union membership grew 'from about two million in 1906 to four million in 1914'.<sup>12</sup> As noted by David Powell, however, the 'increase [in Labour's total number of MPs] was accounted for mainly by the decision of the formerly Lib-Lab Miners' Federation of Great Britain to affiliate to the Labour party in 1909 and the consequent redesignation of their parliamentary contingent.'<sup>13</sup> Despite Labour's growth, a feeling began to emerge from 1910 onwards that the Party failed to have any influence, with many Labour Party supporters believing:

it was their party and not the Liberals' that appeared to be 'strangely dying' during these years [late 1900s and early 1910s]. For if in terms of policy, the Labour Party acted only as a radical tail to the Liberal Party, electorally too it appeared to be making little headway.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Packer, I. *The great Liberal landslide: The 1906 general election in perspective*. p 15.

<sup>11</sup> Adelman, P. (1996). *The Rise of the Labour Party 1880-1945* (3rd ed.). Harlow: Pearson Education Limited. pp 38-39.

<sup>12</sup> Adelman, P. *The Rise of the Labour Party 1880-1945* (3rd ed.). pp 42 & 45.

<sup>13</sup> Powell, D. (2004). *British Politics, 1910-35: The crisis of the party system*. Taylor & Francis Group. p 35.

<sup>14</sup> Adelman, P. *The Rise of the Labour Party 1880-1945* (3rd ed.). pp 39 & 41-42.

Nonetheless, the Labour Party continued to attract new members and develop its infrastructure in the years prior to the First World War, with the Party doubling its local membership as well as establishing affiliate links with unions that represented over two million workers from the years 1906 to 1914.<sup>15</sup> Due to the undeniable link between Labour's early growth and its increase in trade union support, historians such as Laybourn have explored Labour's relationship with unions throughout much of their work and suggested that whilst unions were integral to the Party's early growth, their support came at a cost.<sup>16</sup> For it was union pressure that ultimately forced the Labour Party to adopt the highly controversial Clause Four within its constitution in 1918, pledging the Party to 'the Common Ownership of the Means of Production'.<sup>17</sup> Despite this, it was also trade union support that both secured and moulded Labour's position in the 1910s, with Manchester's *Daily Citizen* noting that Labour was 'financed out of trade union funds, and officered and run mainly by trade union leaders' during this period.<sup>18</sup>

Although the foundations for the success and longevity of the Labour Party were laid ahead of the First World War, it is beyond doubt that the First World War and the events that unfolded as a result of the conflict were of huge importance to the rise of the Labour Party from 1918 onwards. For example, Laybourn noted that it was the First World War that 'divided the Liberal Party, as Asquith came into conflict with David Lloyd George over the conduct of the War.'<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, Laybourn noted that 'the War also saw the Labour

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<sup>15</sup> Adelman, P. *The Rise of the Labour Party 1880-1945* (3rd ed.). pp 44-45.

<sup>16</sup> Laybourn, K. *A Century of Labour*. pp xiv-xv.

<sup>17</sup> Laybourn, K. *A Century of Labour*. p xii.

<sup>18</sup> *Daily Citizen (Manchester)*, 3 September 1913. p 4.

<sup>19</sup> Laybourn, K. (1988). *The Labour Party 1881-1951*. Great Britain: Alan Sutton. p 72.

Party join with the Coalition government, thus enhancing its claims to the status of a potential party of government.<sup>20</sup> This position was bolstered by the fact that the Coalition government, under the leadership of Lloyd George, adopted several policy suggestions made by the Labour Party during the War years 'such as food rationing, state control of mines, shipping, etc.'<sup>21</sup> Although the First World War provided the Labour Party with a series of opportunities to establish itself as a major entity within British politics, it must also be noted that it did present the Labour Party with a series of challenges. The most prominent of these was the splitting of the Party's membership along the lines of pro-war and anti-war.<sup>22</sup> Labour was able to ultimately overcome these challenges and capitalise upon the disarray of the Liberal Party in order to assert itself as the major progressive challenger to the Conservative Party in the aftermath of the War. According to Adelman, one of the primary reasons that the Labour Party was able to conquer the internal divisions that it suffered as a result of the War was because of the strength of its wartime leader, Arthur Henderson, who was renowned for both his 'tact and patience' and as such was able to navigate and nullify the irreconcilable differences of the various interest groups within the Labour Party such as the pro-war Fabians, Social Democrats and anti-war ILP.<sup>23</sup> Following the conclusion of the First World War in November 1918, the Labour Party fought a modestly successful campaign at the December 1918 general election- amassing an increased total of 57 MPs.<sup>24</sup> More important, however, was the Labour Party's increase in its

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<sup>20</sup> Laybourn, K. *The Labour Party 1881-1951*. p 72.

<sup>21</sup> Adelman, P. *The Rise of the Labour Party 1880-1945* (3rd ed.). p 48.

<sup>22</sup> Laybourn, K. *The Labour Party 1881-1951*. p 72.

<sup>23</sup> Adelman, P. *The Rise of the Labour Party 1880-1945* (3rd ed.). p 46.

<sup>24</sup> Audickas, L., Cracknell, R., & Loft, P. (2020). *UK Election Statistics: 1918-2019: A Century of Elections* (CBP7529). Retrieved from <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-7529/>. p 13.

percentage of the vote share from 6.4 in December 1910 to 20.8 in 1918, which was the second largest in the country and thus established the Labour Party as a major contender within British politics.<sup>25</sup> Nonetheless, the Party's first major post-war success was to come at the 1922 general election when the Labour Party was able to amass 142 MPs and become the second largest party in the country and as such the official party of Opposition.<sup>26</sup>

### **Local Context**

A typical northern town, Keighley had many indicators that pointed towards the potential for Labour growth in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Key amongst these indicators were an expanding population and a local economy (as of 1861) based upon manual trades such as textiles and agriculture.<sup>27</sup>

It was therefore only a matter of time until the Labour movement began in the town, with the Keighley Labour Union eventually founded in October 1892.<sup>28</sup> The Union was formed in response to a number of events including the Keighley engineering strike of 1889 and the Manningham Mills strike of 1890 and 1891. The engineering strike was a small industrial walkout that occurred in Keighley during 1889 when the town's engineers went on strike in protest of their low rate of pay and harsh working environment.<sup>29</sup> The strike was ultimately

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<sup>25</sup> Craig, F. W. S. (1976). *British Electoral Facts 1885 - 1975* (3rd ed.). London: The MacMillan Press Ltd. pp 8-10.

<sup>26</sup> Audickas, L., Cracknell, R., & Loft, P. *UK Election Statistics: 1918-2019: A Century of Elections* (CBP7529). p 13.

<sup>27</sup> GB Historical GIS / University of Portsmouth. (2009 - 2017). *Keighley PLU/RegD through time | Population Statistics | Population Change*. A Vision of Britain through Time. Retrieved from [http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10139338/cube/POP\\_CHANGE](http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10139338/cube/POP_CHANGE); GB Historical GIS / University of Portsmouth. (2009 - 2017). *Keighley PLU/RegD through time | Industry Statistics | Persons aged 20 and over by Sex and 1861 Occupational Order*. A Vision of Britain through Time. Retrieved from [http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10139338/cube/OCC\\_ORD1861\\_OVER20](http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10139338/cube/OCC_ORD1861_OVER20). Contributor: David Allan Gatley.

<sup>28</sup> Laybourn, K. & Reynolds, J. *Liberalism and the Rise of Labour 1890-1918*. p 43.

<sup>29</sup> James, D. (1995). *Class and Politics in a Northern Industrial Town: Keighley 1880-1914*. Cornwall: Ryburn Publishing. p 75.

the long-term consequence of a sense of distrust and growing resentment between the town's engineers and their manufacturing bosses and as such was 'the first engineering [strike] in Keighley for seventeen years and at [its] peak attracted 3,500 workers from a total of 28 companies despite the fact that the local trade union only numbered around 300 people'.<sup>30</sup> The strike was so significant in Keighley that it received a great deal of coverage from the local press in which it was reported that:

The demands made by the men engaged in the iron trade in Keighley have brought about a suspension more or less complete in the local industry. These demands, it is hardly necessary to repeat, comprised an advance of 10 per cent on the present rate of wages, and extra pay for overtime.<sup>31</sup>

Delving deeper into the strike, the *Keighley News* also came to realise that the explanation as to why the workers were so desperate for a pay increase was because they were amongst some of the worst paid in the country.<sup>32</sup> The argument that the masters used in defence of their low wages, however, was:

That the maintenance of fairly regular employment in the town [was] due to the acceptance of contracts below the market figure- at rates which will not bear the granting of a 10 per cent increase in wages. Those who have had experience of the fluctuations in some other trade centres will admit that regularity is worth a great

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<sup>30</sup> James, D. *Class and Politics in a Northern Industrial Town: Keighley 1880-1914*. p 75; Clarkson, J. (2019). *The Battle for Keighley: The conflict between the Liberal Party and the Independent Labour Party in Keighley between 1893 and 1906*. (Degree dissertation). University of Huddersfield, N/A. p 6.

<sup>31</sup> *Keighley News*, 31 August 1889. Housed in Keighley Library.

<sup>32</sup> *Keighley News*, 31 August 1889. Housed in Keighley Library.

deal to the workman, for, unfortunately, prosperity in spurts tends to breed extravagance, rendering short commons doubly hard to bear when they come.<sup>33</sup>

The Manningham Mills strike, meanwhile, was a major industrial dispute that occurred in Bradford in 1890 and 1891 as a response to efforts from the Mills' owners to decrease pay for a number of their labourers because of the impending impact of the McKinley tariffs in the United States of America from 1890 onwards.<sup>34</sup> Whilst the Manningham Mills strike did not directly impact upon life in Keighley, the strike did showcase how the nearby Manningham area of Bradford- which, like Keighley, was largely reliant upon the textiles industry as its largest sector of employment- was the subject of an attempt of exploitation by unscrupulous employers.<sup>35</sup>

Following the creation of the Keighley Labour Union in the latter part of 1892, the Labour movement became entrenched as a key part of political life within Keighley.<sup>36</sup> The ILP, specifically, was of huge importance to the town as unions throughout Yorkshire were notoriously weak and organisations like the ILP were therefore relied upon in areas like Keighley to fight for the interests of workers.<sup>37</sup> Commenting upon the state of textile

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<sup>33</sup> *Keighley News*, 31 August 1889. Housed in Keighley Library.

<sup>34</sup> Laybourn, K. (1988). *The Rise of Labour*. London: Edward Arnold. pp 19-20; Blewett, M. (2006). Diversities of Class and Gender Experience and the Shaping of Labor politics: Yorkshire's Manningham Mills Strike, 1890-91 and the Independent Labour Party. *Labor History*, 47(4), 511-535. Doi: 10.1080/00236560600899040. pp 519-520.

<sup>35</sup> GB Historical GIS / University of Portsmouth. (2009 - 2017). *Manningham SubD through time | Industry Statistics | Occupation data classified into the 24 1881 'Orders', plus sex*. A Vision of Britain through Time. Retrieved from [https://visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10554615/cube/OCC\\_ORDER1881](https://visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10554615/cube/OCC_ORDER1881); GB Historical GIS / University of Portsmouth. (2009 - 2017). *Keighley PLU/RegD through time | Industry Statistics | Persons aged 20 and over by Sex and 1861 Occupational Order*. A Vision of Britain through Time. Retrieved from [http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10139338/cube/OCC\\_ORD1861\\_OVER20](http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10139338/cube/OCC_ORD1861_OVER20). Contributor: David Allan Gatley.

<sup>36</sup> Laybourn, K. & Reynolds, J. *Liberalism and the Rise of Labour 1890-1918*. p 43.

<sup>37</sup> Worley, M. (2005). Introduction: Labour's Grass Roots. In M. Worley (Ed.) *Labour's Grass Roots: Essays on the Activities of Local Labour Parties and Members, 1918-45*. (pp. 1-6). Burlington: Ashgate. p 3.



unionisation within West Yorkshire in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Tony Jowitt noted that, in contrast to the Lancashire Cotton Unions, West Yorkshire's General Union of Textile Workers had only a fraction of the membership, with 4,150 members versus 278,758 members in 1908.<sup>38</sup> Explaining the disparity in membership, Jowitt noted that one reason was that various aspects of the West Yorkshire textile trade splintered into different unions.<sup>39</sup> Other difficulties that Jowitt highlighted with regards to the effective development of textile unionisation within West Yorkshire were the fact that: 'mills were small and often internally specialised; there were large numbers of female and juvenile workers, and each mill paid different rates.'<sup>40</sup> Given the pre-eminence of the textile trade within areas like Keighley, it was incredibly difficult for trade unionism to establish a foothold in the town without penetrating the sector; nonetheless, trade unionism was able to establish something of a presence within the town through the engineering sector, which, as noted by Laybourn, 'was well unionised in Leeds, Halifax and Keighley.'<sup>41</sup> The overall impact of the unionisation of this sector was limited, however, on account of its relative small size.

In order to fight for the interests of workers, the Keighley ILP became a platform for a slew of well-known activists such as Philip Snowden, who would later become an MP and Labour's first Chancellor of the Exchequer, and the Horner brothers (Herbert and Edward),

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<sup>38</sup> Jowitt, J. A. (1991). *Textiles and Society in Bradford and Lawrence, USA, 1880-1920*. Retrieved from <http://www.bradfordhistorical.org.uk/textiles.html#ref1>.

<sup>39</sup> Jowitt, J. A. *Textiles and Society in Bradford and Lawrence, USA, 1880-1920*.

<sup>40</sup> Jowitt, J. A. *Textiles and Society in Bradford and Lawrence, USA, 1880-1920*.

<sup>41</sup> Laybourn, K. & Reynolds, J. *Liberalism and the Rise of Labour 1890-1918*. p 25.

who would later become larger than life figures within the local Party.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, the Keighley ILP also created its own newspaper called the *Keighley Labour Journal*, which printed regularly from 1894 to 1902 and attacked the opponents of the ILP; encouraged the organisation's philosophy; and espoused the organisation's successes, like the fact that it 'contested sixteen elections- thirteen Municipal, two Guardians, and one School Board and ... won seven' in its first six years of existence.<sup>43</sup> Curated and produced by ILP activists on an almost weekly basis throughout parts of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the *Keighley Labour Journal* served as little more than propaganda for the local ILP- consisting primarily of opinionated articles and selective reporting on both the local and national political matters of the day. As such, the *Keighley Labour Journal* will be able to provide this research with a great deal of information about the way in which the Keighley ILP saw itself and its rivals during its early years; however, in doing so the research will consider all of the problems that utilising such a source entails, including the manipulative way in which the newspaper was compiled and presented. Other local publications such as the *Keighley News* will, similarly, inform large parts of this research, and as such be viewed with the same level of scrutiny. In contrast to the *Keighley Labour Journal*, the *Keighley News'* Liberal ownership and overt Liberal support will be highlighted.

Having attained some success at a local level, the Keighley ILP finally contested its first general election in 1906 during which the Party achieved a highly respectable third place

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<sup>42</sup> James, D. (1987). "*Our Philip*": *The Early Career of Philip Snowden*. Retrieved from <http://www.bradfordhistorical.org.uk/snowden.html>; James, D. *Class and Politics in a Northern Industrial Town: Keighley 1880-1914*. pp 94-95.

<sup>43</sup> James, D. *Class and Politics in a Northern Industrial Town: Keighley 1880-1914*. pp 20 & 92; *Keighley Labour Journal*, 28 January 1899.

finish with a 26.6 percentage vote share.<sup>44</sup> The 1906 general election would ultimately see the electorally impervious John Brigg, a highly respected local businessman, returned yet again as the Liberal MP for Keighley.<sup>45</sup> Subsequently, the Labour Party would not contest another parliamentary election in Keighley up until after Brigg's death in 1911, which triggered the first of three contested parliamentary by-elections in Keighley during the 1910s (1911, 1913 and 1918).<sup>46</sup> Referring to the Keighley by-elections of 1911 and 1913, specifically, Roy Douglas noted that although the strength of the local ILP was not enough to win the seat, it was sufficient to come a strong third only behind '1,215 votes in 1911, and 1,084 in 1913'.<sup>47</sup> Both results were a substantial improvement upon the 2,220 votes by which the Labour Party finished behind in 1906.<sup>48</sup> A further parliamentary by-election took place in Keighley during 1918 and saw a Liberal candidate successfully stand on behalf of the Coalition government against a rogue Labour candidate.<sup>49</sup> More significant, however, was the general election of 1918, which occurred directly after the First World War at a time of great social and economic change, and ultimately saw Keighley elect its first Conservative MP in a sign of things to come for the Liberal Party.<sup>50</sup> With the election combining both previous patterns of the three major political parties closely contesting the seat of Keighley

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<sup>44</sup> James, D. *Class and Politics in a Northern Industrial Town: Keighley 1880-1914*. p 93; *Clarion*, 2 February 1906. p 6.

<sup>45</sup> Laybourn, K. & Reynolds, J. *Liberalism and the Rise of Labour 1890-1918*. p 165; *The Manchester Guardian*, 2 October 1911. p 9.

<sup>46</sup> Laybourn, K. & Reynolds, J. *Liberalism and the Rise of Labour 1890-1918*. p 165; *The Times*, 28 October 1911. p 9; *The Manchester Guardian*, 10 November 1913. p 6; *The Manchester Guardian*, 29 April 1918. p 4.

<sup>47</sup> Douglas, R. (1974). Labour in Decline 1910-1914. In K. D. Brown (Ed.) *Essays in Anti-Labour History*. (pp. 105-125). London: Macmillan. p 119.

<sup>48</sup> *The Manchester Guardian*, 28 October 1911. p 9.

<sup>49</sup> *The Manchester Guardian*, 29 April 1918. p 4.

<sup>50</sup> Craig, F. W. S. *British Electoral Facts 1885 - 1975* (3rd ed.). pp 116 & 132.

alongside the newer national trend of the Liberal Party losing ground to Labour and the Conservatives. This was a trend that paved the way for the Labour Party to win the seat of Keighley for the first time in its history in 1922.<sup>51</sup> This heralded a new period in the history of Keighley as a parliamentary seat in which it would be almost exclusively swapped between Labour and the Conservatives.

### **National Historiography**

Due to the fact that the Labour Party replaced the Liberal Party as one half of the duopoly that dictated British politics (alongside the Conservative Party) from 1924 onwards, there is a significant body of literature relating to the rise of the Labour Party and the decline of the Liberal Party during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>52</sup> With much historiographical debate as to why the Labour Party was able to rise at the expense of the Liberal Party during this period.

One prominent historical view is that the First World War was either responsible for, or helped to rapidly accelerate, the growth of the Labour Party from a fringe political movement in the early 1900s to a party of government in the early 1920s. Despite persisting to this day, the popularity of this opinion seems to have peaked during the 1970s. In 1974's edited book, *Essays in Anti-Labour History*, for example, Liberal historian Roy Douglas conducted an analysis of all the parliamentary elections between the years 1910 and 1914 in order to determine if Labour's rise in 1918 was the result of gradual growth over many years or a rapid expansion because of the First World War.<sup>53</sup> Douglas' work ultimately

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<sup>51</sup> Craig, F. W. S. *British Electoral Facts 1885 - 1975* (3rd ed.). pp 116 & 132.

<sup>52</sup> Clarke, P.F. (1971). *Lancashire and the New Liberalism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Laybourn, K. *The Rise of Labour*; Laybourn, K. & Reynolds, J. *Liberalism and the Rise of Labour 1890-1918*.

<sup>53</sup> Douglas, R. Labour in Decline 1910-1914. In K. D. Brown (Ed.) *Essays in Anti-Labour History*. p 105.

concluded that whilst the Labour Party was not an obvious threat to the Liberal Party prior to the First World War, 'it had a certain "nuisance value" towards the liberals' between 1910 and 1914 'because it was believed that in most places the intervention of a labour candidate would take more votes from the liberal than from the unionist.'<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, Douglas also insisted that Labour had little strength during this period and that 'no shred of evidence existed anywhere which might suggest that within ten years the Labour Party would be forming the government of the country.'<sup>55</sup> Ian Packer, similarly, investigated the results of parliamentary by-elections across the UK between the years 1911 and 1914 in order to determine the extent to which the pre-war period hinted at the future trajectory of Britain's major political parties.<sup>56</sup> Packer's work ultimately concluded 'that the 1915 [scheduled general] election result was still in the balance [between the Liberals and Conservatives] in August 1914' and thus inferred that it was the First World War that began Labour's ascent.<sup>57</sup> On a more general level, John Shepherd also acknowledged that the First World War and the Liberal Party's poor handling of the conflict were key components in Labour's rise and Liberalism's decline during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>58</sup> Shepherd, specifically, highlighted the various ways in which the conflict caused the Liberal Party to split and noted that foremost amongst those reasons were: the struggle for leadership that it caused at the top of the Party as well as the way in which it prompted

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<sup>54</sup> Douglas, R. Labour in Decline 1910-1914. In K. D. Brown (Ed.) *Essays in Anti-Labour History*. p 125.

<sup>55</sup> Douglas, R. Labour in Decline 1910-1914. In K. D. Brown (Ed.) *Essays in Anti-Labour History*. p 125.

<sup>56</sup> Packer, I. (2011). Contested Ground: Trends in British By-Elections, 1911-1914. *Contemporary British History: Politics, Power and Diplomacy in the Twentieth Century: Essays in Honour of Professor David Dutton*, 25(1), 157-173. Doi: 10.1080/13619462.2011.546134. p 157.

<sup>57</sup> Packer, I. Contested Ground: Trends in British By-Elections, 1911-1914. p 170.

<sup>58</sup> Shepherd, J. (2010). The Flight from the Liberal Party: Liberals who joined Labour, 1914-31. *Journal of Liberal History* (67). 24-34. p 26.

the Liberals to enact restrictive illiberal policies- which ultimately alienated many Party members.<sup>59</sup> In his 1993 book, *A Short History of the Liberal Party 1900-92*, Chris Cook provided a brief account of the various trials and tribulations that faced the Liberal Party across the duration of the twentieth century for which he used the work of individuals like Douglas as the basis.<sup>60</sup> In contrast to the likes of Douglas, however, Cook did not see the parliamentary by-elections between 1910 and 1914 as anything but negative for the Liberal Party as, whilst these results did not necessarily symbolise good fortunes for Labour, they did showcase a Liberal Party that was losing control of large parts of its northern heartlands and facing the prospect of electoral annihilation without a pact ahead of the 1915 general election.<sup>61</sup> Nonetheless, Cook also insisted that 'in 1914 the Liberal Party was certainly not dead, nor indeed dying, despite the arguments propounded by George Dangerfield' and that it was the First World War that ultimately signalled the beginning of the end for Liberal Party dominance within the UK; 'for the First World War was to put to the ultimate test not only the conscience of Liberalism but also the leadership of Asquith'.<sup>62</sup>

As the argument that the rise of the Labour Party and the decline of the Liberal Party were both intrinsically linked with the occurrence of the First World War began to gain some real traction amongst Liberal historians during the late twentieth century, a new wave of Labour historians began to engage with and challenge this notion. Initially, these historians did so by tracking Labour's progress at a national level. In his 1966 book, *The Downfall of the*

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<sup>59</sup> Shepherd, J. *The Flight from the Liberal Party: Liberals who joined Labour, 1914-31*. p 26.

<sup>60</sup> Cook, C. (1993). *A Short History of the Liberal Party 1900-92* (4th ed.). Basingstoke: THE MACMILLAN PRESS LTD. p vii.

<sup>61</sup> Cook, C. *A Short History of the Liberal Party 1900-92* (4th ed.). pp 61-62.

<sup>62</sup> Cook, C. *A Short History of the Liberal Party 1900-92* (4th ed.). p 62.

*Liberal Party 1914 – 1935*, for example, Trevor Wilson argued that ‘the Liberal party was clearly disintegrating’ between 1914 and 1935.<sup>63</sup> More specifically, Wilson suggested that the Liberal Party’s protracted final collapse occurred after the Party had suffered two difficult patches between the years of 1885 to 1905 and 1911 to 1914.<sup>64</sup> The latter period of which was typified by issues such as ‘the situation in Ireland’, Labour’s threat to withdraw from its electoral pact with the Liberals and ‘industrial unrest’.<sup>65</sup> Despite this, Wilson concluded that ‘the revolution may have begun before 1914. But only the war, and the action during it of certain Liberals best equipped to deflect the revolution, ensured that it would triumph.’<sup>66</sup> In his 1988 books, *The Labour Party 1881-1951* and *The Rise of Labour*, Keith Laybourn also suggested that it was, simply, more than the First World War that led to the rise of Labour and the decline of the Liberals in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>67</sup> In the former, Laybourn suggested that the Liberal leadership dispute between David Lloyd George and Henry Hebert Asquith was one of the key reasons behind the rise of the Labour Party.<sup>68</sup> In the latter, meanwhile, Laybourn acknowledged the argument that Labour was quite weak prior to 1914 and, furthermore, acknowledged the view that had:

the four million or so, largely working-class, men who did not have the vote in 1914  
been enfranchised as they were under the 1918 Franchise Act then the Labour party

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<sup>63</sup> Wilson, T. (1966). *The Downfall of the Liberal Party 1914 – 1935*. London: Collins. p 16.

<sup>64</sup> Wilson, T. *The Downfall of the Liberal Party 1914 – 1935*. pp 15-16.

<sup>65</sup> Wilson, T. *The Downfall of the Liberal Party 1914 – 1935*. p 16.

<sup>66</sup> Wilson, T. *The Downfall of the Liberal Party 1914 – 1935*. p 390.

<sup>67</sup> Laybourn, K. *The Labour Party 1881-1951*; Laybourn, K. *The Rise of Labour*.

<sup>68</sup> Laybourn, K. *The Labour Party 1881-1951*. p 72.

would have presented a more serious political challenge to Liberalism than was apparent in its pre-war parliamentary representation.<sup>69</sup>

In his 1990 book, *The Ideologies of Class*, Ross McKibbin also focused upon the social composition of the UK and the way in which it favoured Labour growth, arguing that 'Britain was unquestionably a working-class nation.'<sup>70</sup> In their 2000 book, *Labour's First Century*, Duncan Tanner, Pat Thane and Nick Tiratsoo outlined the difficulties faced by Labour as the Party attempted to transition itself 'from being a fringe party of opposition to a party of government'.<sup>71</sup> The trio, in particular, focused upon the difficulty faced by Labour as it tried to navigate a series of global crises, including the First World War, which according to the trio was pivotal in the demise of the Liberal Party.<sup>72</sup> With the First World War's monumental impact upon early twentieth century British politics brought back into focus by the likes of Tanner, Thane and Tiratsoo, Matthew Worley touched briefly upon the subject in his 2005 book, *Labour Inside the Gate: A History of the British Labour Party Between the Wars*.<sup>73</sup> In the book, Worley remarked of a sharp improvement in the level and state of Labour's membership and organisational infrastructure from 1914 to 1918.<sup>74</sup> And, furthermore, noted a flaw in the argument that Labour's rise was through the awakening of Britain's lower classes, concluding that there was no evidence 'that a working-class constituency

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<sup>69</sup> Laybourn, K. *The Rise of Labour*. pp 11-12.

<sup>70</sup> McKibbin, R. (1990). *The Ideologies of Class*. Oxford: Clarendon Press. p 2.

<sup>71</sup> Tanner, D., Thane, P., & Tiratsoo, N. (2000). *Labour's First Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>72</sup> Tanner, D., Thane, P., & Tiratsoo, N. (2000). Introduction. In D. Tanner, P. Thane, & N. Tiratsoo (Eds.) *Labour's First Century*. (pp. 1-7). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. pp 2-3.

<sup>73</sup> Worley, M. (2005). *Labour Inside the Gate: A History of the British Labour Party Between the Wars*. London: I.B. Tauris.

<sup>74</sup> Worley, M. *Labour Inside the Gate: A History of the British Labour Party Between the Wars*. p 4.



would lead inevitably to Labour Party support'.<sup>75</sup> In 2018, Stuart Ball expanded upon the ideas introduced by the likes of McKibbin and Worley- arguing that the Representation of the People Act 1918, secondary to the War, was one of the most important reasons as to why the Labour Party rose at the expense of the Liberal Party in the early twentieth century- stating that the act caused 'the only substantial and long-term change that has [ever] taken place in the British party system.'<sup>76</sup> This was a sentiment which Chris Wrigley expanded upon in his 2018 article, *The Labour Party and the Impact of the 1918 Reform Act*, in which he argued that the Representation of the People Act 1918 was closely tied to the rise of Labour for a number of reasons.<sup>77</sup> His primary conclusion was that the act 'ensured that the Labour Party had greatly to improve its organisation for an enlarged electorate.'<sup>78</sup> And- alongside 'the economic, social and political impact of the war'- it was the act that was key in defining both Labour and British politics for years to come.<sup>79</sup> Wrigley, however, also took care to note the importance of the financial implications of the act, which ensured that the Labour Party's election campaigns were more financially viable and competitive when contrasted to the Party's wealthier rivals- capping the total spend of each individual candidate on any given campaign.<sup>80</sup>

On the back of the wave of scholarly analysis that began to occur on the history of the Labour Party following on from the Party's centenary in 2000, Martin Pugh, in 2011, chose

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<sup>75</sup> Worley, M. *Labour Inside the Gate: A History of the British Labour Party Between the Wars*. pp 5-6.

<sup>76</sup> Ball, S. (2018). The Conservative Party and the Impact of the 1918 Reform Act. *Parliamentary History*, 37(1), 23-46. Doi: 10.1111/1750-0206.12336. p 23.

<sup>77</sup> Wrigley, C. (2018). The Labour Party and the Impact of the 1918 Reform Act. *Parliamentary History*, 37(1), 64-80. Doi: 10.1111/1750-0206.12338.

<sup>78</sup> Wrigley, C. The Labour Party and the Impact of the 1918 Reform Act. p 79.

<sup>79</sup> Wrigley, C. The Labour Party and the Impact of the 1918 Reform Act. pp 79-80.

<sup>80</sup> Wrigley, C. The Labour Party and the Impact of the 1918 Reform Act. p 72.

to take an alternative approach in his analysis of the early rise of the Labour Party by viewing it in the full context of the Party's then century of history. As such, Pugh's prevailing viewpoint was that the Labour Party attained much of its success not as a result of its radical ideas or one single event, but by adapting to and embracing the existing institutions of the UK.<sup>81</sup> For example, the Labour Party embraced 'the British constitution', 'electoral system' and 'monarchy' amongst many other things.<sup>82</sup> According to Pugh, it was Labour's involvement with traditional British institutions that largely helped to develop the Party into a diverse and sophisticated organisation that became thoroughly embedded within the British political system, rather than a simple flash in the pan.<sup>83</sup>

To summarise, a substantial number of historians have explored the rise of Labour and the subsequent decline of the Liberal Party in Britain during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, offering a range of explanations as to why these changes occurred with one of the most common suggestions being that it was a consequence of the First World War. It is notable, however, that a strong tradition began to emerge amongst Labour historians from the 1960s onwards, suggesting that the Party's rise was inevitable through class composition alone and events such as the First World War simply accelerated a near certain process. To prove this point, many emerging Labour historians began to transition their work from national studies to regional studies in the latter part of the twentieth century to show how organic Labour growth occurred prior to the First World War; examples of these will be discussed in the next section.

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<sup>81</sup> Pugh, M. (2011). *Speak For Britain! A New History of the Labour Party*. London: Vintage. p 2.

<sup>82</sup> Pugh, M. *Speak For Britain! A New History of the Labour Party*. p 2.

<sup>83</sup> Pugh, M. *Speak For Britain! A New History of the Labour Party*. pp 2-3.

### Local Historiography

From the 1970s and 1980s onwards, a whole new generation of Labour historians began to debate the reasons for the growth of the Labour Party during the early twentieth century.

The most effective of these historians were those that used localised studies to demonstrate their point. This is very much due to the fact that, as identified by Adelman, the Labour Party during its infancy 'was really a federal organisation' that derived much of its strength from its various local ILP branches; many of which operated with a great deal of autonomy- meaning that the organisation had a greatly varied level of support across the country.<sup>84</sup>

This varied level of support nationwide meant that a whole variety of reasons contributed towards Labour's popularity or lack thereof, a level of nuance difficult to capture in a generalised national study. This section of research will therefore focus upon the historiography of Labour's rise at a local level, with a key emphasis upon its performance in the North of England, West Yorkshire and Keighley above all else.

Peter Clarke's 1971 book, *Lancashire and the New Liberalism*, was one of the first regional studies to be released upon the subject of the rise of Labour and the decline of Liberalism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>85</sup> In contrast to most of the other works that will be discussed in this section, however, Clarke's work was from a Liberal perspective and as such continued the theme of exploration around the First World War and the question of whether it was the conflict that ended the Liberal Party.<sup>86</sup> Clarke's lasting perspective on the debate was that the Liberals had undergone a huge renaissance in

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<sup>84</sup> Adelman, P. *The Rise of the Labour Party 1880-1945* (3rd ed.). p 50.

<sup>85</sup> Clarke, P.F. *Lancashire and the New Liberalism*.

<sup>86</sup> Clarke, P.F. *Lancashire and the New Liberalism*.

Lancashire prior to 1914 and as such it must have been the War that led to the Party's demise.<sup>87</sup> Although Clarke's work was based upon a study of Lancashire as opposed to West Yorkshire, the economic and social similarities between the two areas meant that Clarke drew some attention from historians focusing upon both regions. In particular, Clarke drew the attention of Keith Laybourn and Jack Reynolds, who in their 1984 book, *Liberalism and the Rise of Labour 1890-1918*, were amongst the first historians to discuss the state of politics within West Yorkshire during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Amongst their key arguments was the idea that the 'decline of the Liberal Party was a continuous process from the late nineteenth century onwards and that this reflected the fundamental change in the structure and organisation of society.'<sup>88</sup> Laybourn and Reynold's basis for such views was the monumental shift that occurred in the electoral fortunes of both Labour and the Liberals throughout the early twentieth century.<sup>89</sup> Something which the pair attributed to factors such as Labour's consolidation of union support throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as opposed to the First World War.<sup>90</sup> Furthermore, Laybourn and Reynolds also noted that whilst Labour expanded in the textile districts of West Yorkshire from 1900 to 1906, 'the once promising Keighley constituency saw a regression in Labour support after 1900.'<sup>91</sup> Perhaps, this was a result of the town's relatively weak unions. In his 1983 book, *British Workers and the Independent Labour Party 1888-1906*, David Howell challenged the certainty with which the rise of the ILP was

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<sup>87</sup> Clarke, P.F. *Lancashire and the New Liberalism*.

<sup>88</sup> Laybourn, K. & Reynolds, J. *Liberalism and the Rise of Labour 1890-1918*. pp 1-2.

<sup>89</sup> Laybourn, K. & Reynolds, J. *Liberalism and the Rise of Labour 1890-1918*. p 1.

<sup>90</sup> Laybourn, K. & Reynolds, J. *Liberalism and the Rise of Labour 1890-1918*. Preface.

<sup>91</sup> Laybourn, K. & Reynolds, J. *Liberalism and the Rise of Labour 1890-1918*. p 130.

inevitable, specifically, noting how it was at risk of Liberal assimilation should the Liberal Party have modernised at the start of the twentieth century.<sup>92</sup> Whilst Howell suggested that the ILP's rise in Britain in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was not inevitable, he did acknowledge that its development proved to be a necessary bridge towards the growth of progressive politics.<sup>93</sup> And, that it 'must be seen as a product of political skills exercised within unforgiving limits.'<sup>94</sup> According to Howell, 'such creativity was not the monopoly of national leaders but was exemplified in a variety of local situations.'<sup>95</sup> An example of which saw 'Lanarkshire miners and Yorkshire woollen workers [attempt] to come to terms with the challenges of trade union weakness and Liberal inflexibility.'<sup>96</sup> Although Duncan Tanner did not, specifically, discuss Keighley within his 1990 book, *Political change and the Labour Party 1900-1918*, he made a very pertinent point about how small industrial towns like Keighley struggled to attain any major ILP growth during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as, in contrast to larger cities such as Bradford, they were generally reliant upon a single mill for employment and as such their populations were in a more vulnerable position.<sup>97</sup> In his 1995 book, *Class and Politics in a Northern Industrial Town: Keighley 1880-1914*, David James provided the only comprehensive account of the political history of Keighley in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>98</sup> Of

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<sup>92</sup> Howell, D. (1983). *British Workers and the Independent Labour Party 1888-1906*. Manchester: Manchester University Press. pp 394-395.

<sup>93</sup> Howell, D. *British Workers and the Independent Labour Party 1888-1906*. p 396.

<sup>94</sup> Howell, D. *British Workers and the Independent Labour Party 1888-1906*. p 396.

<sup>95</sup> Howell, D. *British Workers and the Independent Labour Party 1888-1906*. p 396.

<sup>96</sup> Howell, D. *British Workers and the Independent Labour Party 1888-1906*. p 396.

<sup>97</sup> Tanner, D. (1990). *Political change and the Labour Party 1900-1918*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p 250.

<sup>98</sup> James, D. *Class and Politics in a Northern Industrial Town: Keighley 1880-1914*.

the many key points that James made within his work, the most pertinent to this research was his suggestion that the Keighley ILP's inability to retain the support of its most senior and active supporters in the face of severe challenges such as better career prospects elsewhere and personal issues was a key reason behind its stagnation during the 1900s.<sup>99</sup> In his 2005 book, *Labour's Grass Roots: Essays on the Activities and Experiences of Local Labour Parties and Members, 1918-45*, Worley collated a series of localised studies about the history of Labour as it began to transition itself from a fringe movement to a party of government.<sup>100</sup> During his work, Worley noted that the ILP was of huge importance to towns like Keighley (until as late as the 1920s) as unions throughout Yorkshire were notoriously weak.<sup>101</sup> Furthermore, Worley also stressed the importance of local activists.<sup>102</sup>

In conclusion, from the limited material that exists on the rise of Labour in Keighley during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a consensus seems to exist amongst historians that Keighley's ILP stumbled in the period between 1900 and 1906; subsequently, suffering a setback in its growth that meant that it failed to win the once promising seat until 1922. This was a situation which was made all the more difficult by the lack of union strength in Yorkshire as a whole throughout the same period.

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<sup>99</sup> James, D. *Class and Politics in a Northern Industrial Town: Keighley 1880-1914*. p 94.

<sup>100</sup> Worley, M. (2005). *Labour's Grass Roots: Essays on the Activities of Local Labour Parties and Members, 1918-45*. Burlington: Ashgate.

<sup>101</sup> Worley, M. Introduction: *Labour's Grass Roots*. In M. Worley (Ed.) *Labour's Grass Roots: Essays on the Activities of Local Labour Parties and Members, 1918-45*. p 3.

<sup>102</sup> Worley, M. Introduction: *Labour's Grass Roots*. In M. Worley (Ed.) *Labour's Grass Roots: Essays on the Activities of Local Labour Parties and Members, 1918-45*. p 1.

### Concluding Thoughts

In contrast to a number of other industrialised areas in the north, where Labour's rise was a smooth ascent, the Party's rise in Keighley was a complex and tricky affair. A study such as this therefore adds a fresh perspective to an already crowded historiographical discussion concerning the rise of Labour and the decline of Liberalism- offering a more detailed and nuanced understanding of how Labour's rise at the expense of the Liberals came to pass. For, it was only through winning parliamentary seats in towns like Keighley that Labour was able to become a permanent fixture within British politics; and, it was only through protracted struggles, tying together both local and national issues, that Labour was able to win these very seats.

Furthermore, in Keighley, specifically, there remains a wide variety of largely untouched sources from which arguments can be formulated and evidenced about the rise of Labour and the failure of Liberalism, which include: local ILP meeting minutes and financial accounts; local Liberal Party meeting minutes; and local newspaper archives. These sources provide not only fascinating insights into both the political goings on of Keighley between the years 1892 and 1922, but also the mind-set of those either implementing or opposing these changes; with newspapers and meeting minutes, in particular, offering extensive details beyond factual headlines or meeting resolutions in the form of opinion pieces, manufactured political propaganda and points of debate over the various contentious issues of the day. Despite all of the advantages offered by these types of sources, they do still present a number of issues. For example, even though newspapers, like the *Keighley News*, are produced with the aim of informing the general public, this aim is very much secondary to its primary objective of fulfilling its owner's interests, which may range from selling lots of newspapers to promoting an ideology. Meeting minutes, on the other hand, are a far less

problematic source as they are created with the specific intention of serving as a factual account of decisions made during meetings and are generally agreed upon by all of the participants afterwards; nonetheless, they do still present some problems as they are not exempt from human error or manipulation and fail to showcase the debate leading to decisions. The most notable weakness of meeting minutes as a source, however, is their tendency to wildly vary in both their presentation and detail as a result of the many different individuals involved within their composition over the years, which means that an individual's ideas, target audience or personality clashes can be either easily missed or mistaken.

In order to provide a fully comprehensive account of the rise of the Keighley ILP, this research will look to explore the history of Keighley politics throughout both the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries using three distinct periods to do so: 1892 to 1900 (the formation and early development of the Keighley ILP), 1900 to 1914 (the stagnation of the Keighley ILP) and 1914 to 1922 (the First World War, the resurgence of the Keighley ILP and the collapse of the Liberal Party). It is these three periods that will then form the basis of the research's five chapters in which different elements of the rise of the Labour Party and the decline of the Liberal Party in Keighley during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries will be discussed. Each chapter, in particular, will be centred upon a series of relevant themes or issues and discuss how those specific topics not only manifested themselves in the outlined period of the chapter, but also how they then feed into the overall narrative of the rise of the Labour Party and the decline of the Liberal Party both locally and nationally in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Specific issues for exploration will include: the impact of the Liberal Party's continuous neglect of its working class supporters in the formation and early development of the Keighley ILP; the



impact of internal difficulties on the Keighley ILP's reduction in growth after an initial surge;  
and the impact of the First World War on redefining the political discourse on more  
favourable terms for Labour.

## **Chapter 1: A Stacked Deck: All the Reasons the Early Labour Movement Should Have Failed (1892-1910)**

If we are to understand how it took the ILP, one of the most influential and economically progressive political parties of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, almost thirty years to win a parliamentary election in the town of Keighley, then we must understand the difficult trials and tribulations that both it, and the wider Labour movement as a whole, faced during their formative years between 1893 and 1910. For on paper, it would almost seem to be a foregone conclusion that a fresh new party, such as the ILP, with a radical set of policies, a recently reconfigured electorate and plenty of union support could thrive in a town as unsettled and turbulent as late nineteenth and early twentieth century Keighley. As such, this chapter will take an analytical look at the development of the Labour movement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in order to surmise why it had difficulty in establishing itself at both a local and national level early on.

One of the key factors behind the Labour movement's electoral appeal in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was the radical policy platform upon which its advocates stood. The broad principles of this platform were governed by a strong desire for social justice and equality; for example, the ILP, which served as the major political precursor to the Labour Party in Britain, was formed with 'the collective ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange' all strictly in mind as objectives.<sup>103</sup> Other early ILP policy goals included: the 'abolition of child labour, provision for the sick and

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<sup>103</sup> Adelman, P. *The Rise of the Labour Party 1880-1945* (3rd ed.). p 22.

disabled [as well as] work for the unemployed'.<sup>104</sup> Despite the inherent appeal of a number of the proposals championed by Labour candidates, very few of them were ultimately able to secure election; a number of reasons as to why this was the case have been discussed over the years, with various explanations offered.

One of the most common explanations used for the failure of early Labour candidates was that they were insurgent candidates and as such were thought to have little chance of winning without additional support; for example, 28 ILP candidates had previously failed in their attempts to secure election during the 1895 general election campaign, whilst the success of Labour Party candidates in both the 1906 and 1910 general elections were thought to be largely dependent upon the support they received from the Liberal Party.<sup>105</sup> In Keighley, this seemed to be the case, with the ILP candidate at the 1906 general election, W.T. Newlove, dismissed in local news outlets as 'Keighley ha[d] no need to make experiments with the Mr. Brigg in the field and [it was believed that] the rising tide of Liberalism should make his return secure.'<sup>106</sup>

Another explanation for the failure of early Labour candidates was that the Liberal Party adopted an adequate number of radical policies in order to retain the support of its electoral coalition; for example, following the disastrous Liberal association with the Taff Vale Decision of 1901, many Liberal Party MPs, like their Labour counterparts, were resolved to reverse the effects of the Decision as a part of their 1906 general election campaigns.<sup>107</sup> Furthermore, the 1906 Liberal government also introduced a slew of legislation that focused

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<sup>104</sup> Adelman, P. *The Rise of the Labour Party 1880-1945* (3rd ed.). p 22.

<sup>105</sup> Adelman, P. *The Rise of the Labour Party 1880-1945* (3rd ed.). pp 23 & 42.

<sup>106</sup> *Bradford Daily Telegraph*, 16 January 1906. p 5.

<sup>107</sup> Trade Union Congress. *The Taff Vale decision*.

upon welfare reform and whilst the Labour Party may have feared that a good deal of it did not go far enough, there is little doubt that it was substantially more comprehensive than anything that had been implemented before.<sup>108</sup> In fact, the perceived similarities between both the Liberals and Labour were such that in some cases they were referred to almost interchangeably, with the *Leeds Mercury*, for example, making a point to refer to the timetabling and legislative challenges faced by 'the Labour and Liberal reformers' in its 23 April 1906 edition.<sup>109</sup>

A third explanation offered to demonstrate the failure of early Labour candidates was that Labour's radical policies, whilst attractive, were ultimately unable to maximise support for their candidates until the enfranchisement of the wider population occurred with the Representation of the People Act 1918.<sup>110</sup> Although the Representation of the People Act 1884 expanded the electorate to include approximately two thirds of all adult men from the one third that had previously been enfranchised by the Representation of the People Act 1867, the change in the configuration of the electorate, by itself, was simply not enough to topple the Conservative and Liberal duopoly over British politics.<sup>111</sup> Furthermore, in response to the Act, the Liberal Party changed the way in which it conducted politics- hoping to meet the needs of its new electorate- by adopting the Newcastle Programme in 1891. The Newcastle Programme was a wide ranging policy commitment that was accepted by the Gladstonian elements of the Liberal Party during the 1891 National Liberal Federation

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<sup>108</sup> Adelman, P. *The Rise of the Labour Party 1880-1945* (3rd ed.). p 39.

<sup>109</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 23 April 1906. p 4.

<sup>110</sup> Pilkington, C. (1999). *The Politics Today Companion to the British Constitution*. Manchester: Manchester University Press. p 134.

<sup>111</sup> Pilkington, C. *The Politics Today Companion to the British Constitution*. p 134.

meeting in Newcastle in order to reassert the Party's support for Irish Home Rule as a key electoral issue, whilst simultaneously pledging to embrace a transformative domestic agenda should the Party be elected.<sup>112</sup>

In addition to the aforementioned political factors, a number of practical factors ensured that the Labour Party was in no position to challenge the Liberals following the two general elections of 1910, with the Osborne Judgement of 1909- which prohibited trade unions from supporting political parties economically- leaving them in great financial difficulty.<sup>113</sup> In Keighley, specifically, the local Labour Party failed to contest either of the two general elections of 1910 and as such did not suffer a perilous financial situation; nonetheless, the branch was far from financially stable and had contended with a number of financial difficulties in the past.<sup>114</sup> As showcased in the Keighley ILP accounts between 1897 and 1907, for example, the branch was frequently strapped for cash as its limited income from membership charges and other oddities was unable to consistently fund the cost of its electoral expenses, promotional materials and social events.<sup>115</sup> It may even be argued that it was these pre-existing financial difficulties that ultimately deterred the Keighley ILP from standing a candidate at either of the 1910 general elections. Overall, the difficulty endured by the Keighley ILP, as one of the nation's stronger ILP branches, only serves to highlight the difficulties that the Labour movement faced throughout its formative years during the late

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<sup>112</sup> Matthew, H. (2015). *Newcastle Programme*. The Oxford Companion to British History. Retrieved from <https://www-oxfordreference-com.libaccess.hud.ac.uk/view/10.1093/acref/9780199677832.001.0001/acref-9780199677832-e-3040>.

<sup>113</sup> Adelman, P. *The Rise of the Labour Party 1880-1945* (3rd ed.). p 41.

<sup>114</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 22 January 1910. p 6; *Leeds Mercury*, 8 December 1910. p 6.

<sup>115</sup> Keighley Independent Labour Party Accounts 1897 – 1907.

nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as its message struggled to meaningfully cut through and its resources were scarce.

Despite both a need and desire for a change in the configuration of Britain's major political parties during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the ILP, in spite of both its radical new agenda and firm convictions, found itself facing a rude awakening. For it struggled to contend with the difficulties of the first-past-the-post voting system as well as the legislative flexibility and financial might of both the Liberal and Conservative Parties. In the first instance, this meant that the ILP struggled to survive, let alone thrive, with the little influence that it did have largely been by virtue of a Liberal gift.

## **Chapter 2: Off to a Flyer: The Rise of the Keighley ILP**

### **(1892-1900)**

Following its initial origins in 1892, the Keighley ILP fast became a prevalent force within the town.<sup>116</sup> The aim of this chapter is therefore to discuss how such a feat occurred, with a view to later highlighting how the undoing of the very same factors that led to the success of the ILP also caused its stagnation.

In order to fully explore the themes of this chapter, it is necessary to understand the various socio-economic factors affecting Keighley during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. According to the statistics of its poor law union, Keighley was a growing town from 1810 to 1910 and, furthermore, according to the statistics of its Municipal borough, continued its growth, albeit at a much lesser rate, until 1915- at which point it began to suffer a slight population decline (until at least 1931).<sup>117</sup> Keighley's main area of employment (as recorded in 1861) was in the textiles industry, with other large areas of employment including agriculture and engineering.<sup>118</sup> In addition to its rapid growth in the late nineteenth century, Keighley's population density also increased by slightly more than one person per acre from 1850 to 1900 and, furthermore, was more than double that of the

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<sup>116</sup> James, D. "Our Philip": *The Early Career of Philip Snowden*.

<sup>117</sup> GB Historical GIS / University of Portsmouth. (2009 - 2017). *Keighley PLU/RegD through time | Population Statistics | Population Change*. A Vision of Britain through Time. Retrieved from [http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10139338/cube/POP\\_CHANGE](http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10139338/cube/POP_CHANGE); GB Historical GIS / University of Portsmouth. (2009 - 2017). *Keighley MB through time | Population Statistics | Population Change*. A Vision of Britain through Time. Retrieved from [http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10002540/cube/POP\\_CHANGE](http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10002540/cube/POP_CHANGE).

<sup>118</sup> GB Historical GIS / University of Portsmouth. (2009 - 2017). *Keighley PLU/RegD through time | Industry Statistics | Persons aged 20 and over by Sex and 1861 Occupational Order*. A Vision of Britain through Time. Retrieved from [http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10139338/cube/OCC\\_ORD1861\\_OVER20](http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10139338/cube/OCC_ORD1861_OVER20). Contributor: David Allan Gatley.

national average from 1890 onwards.<sup>119</sup> It was during this period that Keighley also garnered its reputation of being ‘notorious, not famous, for low wages’.<sup>120</sup> Keighley’s rapid expansion in size and productivity throughout the duration of the nineteenth century, at rates above those of the national average, ultimately led to its development as an industrialised urban town in which many of its workers were subjected to subpar conditions. Consequently, Keighley began to show indicators for potential Labour growth, with its rapidly expanding working class population and a compression in wages for said population chief amongst the reasons as to why. Furthermore, towns such as Keighley, which had a large mechanised industry, could be thought to be prime territory for Labour growth in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as ‘trade unionism was naturally more effective amongst the crafts and in the male-dominated industries’ like some of those found within Keighley.<sup>121</sup> Other areas with a similar union and industrial presence were Leeds and Halifax.<sup>122</sup> These areas, like others across Yorkshire, experienced a marked upturn in their Labour performance from 1900 onwards.<sup>123</sup> As noted by Laybourn and Reynolds, however, this was very much in contrast to the fortunes of the Keighley ILP, which stumbled from 1900 to 1906 for a variety of reasons that will be discussed throughout this research.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> GB Historical GIS / University of Portsmouth. (2009 - 2017). *Keighley PLU/RegD through time | Historical Statistics on Population for the Poor Law Union/Reg. District | Rate: Population Density (Persons per Acre)*. A Vision of Britain through Time. Retrieved from [https://visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10139338/rate/POP\\_DENS\\_A](https://visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10139338/rate/POP_DENS_A).

<sup>120</sup> *Keighley News*, 7 September 1889. Housed in Keighley Library.

<sup>121</sup> Laybourn, K. & Reynolds, J. *Liberalism and the Rise of Labour 1890-1918*. p 25.

<sup>122</sup> Laybourn, K. & Reynolds, J. *Liberalism and the Rise of Labour 1890-1918*. p 25.

<sup>123</sup> Laybourn, K. & Reynolds, J. *Liberalism and the Rise of Labour 1890-1918*. p 130.

<sup>124</sup> Laybourn, K. & Reynolds, J. *Liberalism and the Rise of Labour 1890-1918*. p 130.



Keighley first became a centre for industrial action during parts of the mid and late nineteenth century, with all of this activity ultimately culminating in the Keighley engineering strike of 1889 and the subsequent formation of what would become the Keighley ILP in 1892.<sup>125</sup> During the months of August and September 1889, specifically, the Keighley engineering strike was very much the talk of the town with updates on the situation regularly dominating the local news.<sup>126</sup> In the 31 August 1889 edition of the *Keighley News*, for example, the origins of the strike and the demands of its participants were the subject of much detailed coverage and analysis, with it reported that:

The demands made by the men engaged in the iron trade in Keighley have brought about a suspension more or less complete in the local industry. These demands, it is hardly necessary to repeat, comprised an advance of 10 per cent on the present rate of wages, and extra pay for overtime. The first-named demand forms the crux of the agitation, though the masters would have been well advised if they had not ignored the overtime question in their reply. The men, it is certain, would not consent to resume work with this particular question – which was thought to have been settled long ago – in suspense for another three months. If the masters have decided to honour the undertaking of 1872, as some of them appear to be willing to do, why not say so, and remove one cause of bitterness?<sup>127</sup>

Furthermore, in the 7 September 1889 edition of the *Keighley News* it was reported that:

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<sup>125</sup> James, D. *Class and Politics in a Northern Industrial Town: Keighley 1880-1914*. p 54.

<sup>126</sup> *Keighley News*, 7 September 1889. Housed in Keighley Library.

<sup>127</sup> *Keighley News*, 31 August 1889. Housed in Keighley Library.

The Keighley strike is not at an end, but there is a substantial change in the situation since last week. In one important branch of the local iron trade- the wringing and washing machine industry- a better feeling has manifested itself, and in most, if not all, cases, the men have resumed work on conditions which appear to give general satisfaction. The masters, as became those with whom the initiative naturally lies, made it understood that they were prepared to meet their workpeople in amicable conference.<sup>128</sup>

The very fact that a town such as Keighley was able to initiate strike action of any major significance, like the Keighley engineering strike of 1889, can be considered an achievement on behalf of its local Labour movement; for it was principally in cities, like Bradford, that Labour movements were able to thrive, presumably, on account of the fact that the population in such areas were both more receptive to new ideas and dispersed across several employers- meaning they were not vulnerable to the retaliation of one individual should they strike.<sup>129</sup> As such, the scale and impact of the Keighley engineering strike can be considered all the more impressive; particularly, when it is further considered that 'Keighley was well known for the weakness of its trade-unionism [throughout the duration of the nineteenth century].'<sup>130</sup> It is therefore unsurprising that the circumstances surrounding the Keighley engineering strike of 1889, by far the most significant strike action to have occurred in Keighley during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, were very much a onetime occurrence from which the Keighley Labour movement could only benefit for a limited time. Thus, as the momentum behind the intense localised strike action in both

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<sup>128</sup> *Keighley News*, 7 September 1889. Housed in Keighley Library.

<sup>129</sup> Tanner, D. *Political change and the Labour Party 1900-1918*. p 250.

<sup>130</sup> James, D. *Class and Politics in a Northern Industrial Town: Keighley 1880-1914*. p 54.

Keighley and West Yorkshire began to subside in the late nineteenth century, the Keighley ILP lost a key avenue through which it was able to attract new members and inspire new support, making its later development throughout the early twentieth century that bit more difficult.

As noted by James, however, ‘one immediate result of the success of the strike was an increase in trade-union activity, leading to the formation of a [Keighley] Trades Council in February 1890.’<sup>131</sup> Additionally, James also noted that ‘a number of new trade-union branches were established, while old ones expanded’ throughout Keighley in the aftermath of the strike.<sup>132</sup> It is almost certain that at first these organisations were overwhelmingly Liberal in their affiliation; however, migrated to the likes of the ILP over time. For example, Herbert Horner, the founder of the Teachers’ Union in Keighley, abandoned the local Liberal Party to help found the Keighley ILP.<sup>133</sup> Furthermore, Horner’s union were so committed to the cause of Labour that it later pledged to financially support his campaign should he stand against Sir John Brigg for election as Keighley’s MP during 1910.<sup>134</sup> Despite all of this activity, motivated as a direct consequence of the engineering strike of 1889, James suggested that one of the major, and most immediate, legacies of the event and its aftermath was a ‘mistrust of the Liberals’ throughout Keighley.<sup>135</sup> Early signs of which were exhibited by Herbert Horner in the 23 February 1895 edition of the *Keighley News* in which it was noted that:

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<sup>131</sup> James, D. *Class and Politics in a Northern Industrial Town: Keighley 1880-1914*. p 77.

<sup>132</sup> James, D. *Class and Politics in a Northern Industrial Town: Keighley 1880-1914*. p 77.

<sup>133</sup> James, D. *Class and Politics in a Northern Industrial Town: Keighley 1880-1914*. pp 77 & 90.

<sup>134</sup> Laybourn, K. & Reynolds, J. *Liberalism and the Rise of Labour 1890-1918*. p 165.

<sup>135</sup> James, D. *Class and Politics in a Northern Industrial Town: Keighley 1880-1914*. pp 78-80.

The CHAIRMAN [Horner], in the course of a few opening remarks, said he supposed that when the Liberals selected their candidate in a few weeks' time they would bring forward some prosy old capitalist who would indulge in speeches about the necessity of long hours in order to meet foreign competition, and would re-state the rest of the stale doctrines that men were becoming wearied of.<sup>136</sup>

Whilst the engineering strike laid the groundwork for an increase in trade unionism and political activity across Keighley during the 1890s, little more could be achieved without the work of the Keighley ILP and, more specifically, certain individuals within the organisation. For it was the impetus of members such as Philip Snowden, Mary Jane Dixon and W.F Hardy that enabled the ILP to flourish from nothing in 1892 to a pillar of Keighley's political landscape in 1900.

A member of both Keighley Town Council and the Keighley School Board, Philip Snowden was one of the Keighley ILP's foremost figures in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and became well-renowned throughout the town for both his skills as a public speaker and his tenure as the *Keighley Labour Journal's* editor.<sup>137</sup> Snowden's involvement with the local media throughout Keighley was, particularly, pivotal in the development of the town's ILP as it helped to both highlight the insecurity of the local Liberal Party position and bring some attention to the ILP's bold new message.

Snowden's reputation as a political figure within Keighley was such that a Conservative Party member was even quoted in 15 June 1895 edition of the *Keighley News* as remarking that:

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<sup>136</sup> *Keighley News*, 23 February 1895. p 6.

<sup>137</sup> James, D. "*Our Philip*": *The Early Career of Philip Snowden*.

“Mr. Philip Snowden is a sharp thorn in the side of the Liberals. They have felt the weight of his withering scorn, and they writhe under it. As a leader against social evils Mr. Snowden is a giant, and his crusade is bound to carry in its wake some amelioration of the existing evils.”<sup>138</sup>

In response to this quote, the Liberal *Keighley News* labelled Snowden as little more than a Conservative puppet, questioning:

What does all this mean? It means that Mr. Snowden is a whip to beat the Liberal Party with, that his services will be thankfully accepted, but that no payment is promised him. They love him for his hatred to Liberals, but they do not accept his principles. For we are told that his grounds are not safe. Now, if Mr. Philip Snowden is a safe guide, let us follow him. But if he is an unsafe guide, let us beware of him, and even though we may respect the man, refuse to acknowledge that any good results are likely to follow “in the wake” of his unsafe leadership.<sup>139</sup>

The response of the *Keighley News* to the Conservative’s quote ultimately shows that the newspaper, alongside the wider Keighley Liberal movement, remained acutely aware of the threat that Snowden posed to their interests, with his respectability, personality and acumen all of key concern. Consequently, the Liberals pursued the tactic of denouncing Snowden as not only a crazed socialist, but as an uncivilised bully. In the 4 May 1895 edition of the *Keighley News*, for example, it was reported that:

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<sup>138</sup> *Keighley News*, 15 June 1895. p 4.

<sup>139</sup> *Keighley News*, 15 June 1895. p 4.

We have no desire to judge Mr. Snowden as he judges others. It is better every way, and more charitable too, to suppose that he means nothing of what he says. It is his manner of speaking. It is the sad fate of a demagogue that the louder he screams the louder he will have to scream. Personal vituperation is a stimulant of which ever-increasing doses must be taken to produce any visible effect. Mr. Philip Snowden began his mission in a manner which inspired respect even amongst antagonists. He has now reached a point in the descending scale at which the most charitable can only hope that he is acting a part which his evil star compels him to play.<sup>140</sup>

The 23 February 1895 edition of the *Keighley News* also described ‘Snowden dealing out ribaldry and indiscriminate abuse as if he were heading a street mob.’<sup>141</sup> Despite this, the *Keighley News* could not help but to acknowledge some of Snowden’s brilliance within its publication. One such example was in the 23 February 1895 edition of the *Keighley News* in which it was noted that:

The rapid development of Mr. Philip Snowden as a teacher, orator, and demagogue is very instructive. Apparently with little practise, though probably after much preparation and meditation, he comes forth from his retirement to display powers which would do no disgrace to a veteran of many years’ standing. We claim to have been among the first to pay generous homage to his abilities, sincerity and honesty of purpose. But we are compelled to say that, with even greater rapidity, Mr. Snowden has developed along other and less satisfactory lines. ... Here at last was a

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<sup>140</sup> *Keighley News*, 4 May 1895. p 4.

<sup>141</sup> *Keighley News*, 23 February 1895. p 4.

man who could expound the Socialist case with dignity and yet with fervour, with moderation and yet with vigour.<sup>142</sup>

The Liberal-Labour press war in the broadsheets of Keighley in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries did much to cement Snowden's status as a major figure within Keighley politics. His fiery personality and cunning wit helping to both capture the hearts and minds of the population and successfully bait the Liberal *Keighley News* into giving both him and his principles lots of coverage in the press. Whilst much of this coverage was mixed, it did help to establish Snowden as a credible individual within Keighley and, furthermore, as a voice of bold new ideas. For Liberal attacks on Snowden were always prefaced with a sign of respect, and it became apparent that the Keighley ILP was known to stand for 'the pooling of all the property and resources of society in one common fund, to be dispensed for the common good.'<sup>143</sup> Snowden's largest impact, however, was arguably made in the *Keighley Labour Journal* in which he frequently called out the Liberal Party on its poor policy and poor behaviour.<sup>144</sup> As the work of the *Keighley Labour Journal* formulates key areas of future chapters, it will not be discussed here with any great level detail.

Other influential members in the early ILP included Mary Jane Dixon and W.F. Hardy. Like Snowden, Dixon was a 'Labour member of the School Board' in addition to being 'well known as a Primitive Methodist local preacher [and] regular speaker at the Keighley Labour Church.'<sup>145</sup> Whilst Dixon helped to establish the ILP as a formidable political force, serving as

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<sup>142</sup> *Keighley News*, 23 February 1895. p 4.

<sup>143</sup> *Keighley News*, 15 June 1895. p 4; *Keighley News*, 4 May 1895. p 4.

<sup>144</sup> James, D. *Class and Politics in a Northern Industrial Town: Keighley 1880-1914*. pp 91-92; *Keighley Labour Journal*, 8 March 1896.

<sup>145</sup> James, D. "Our Philip": *The Early Career of Philip Snowden*.

an elected representative on behalf of the organisation, she also helped to develop the ILP as much more. Her role as an ILP executive member and 'regular speaker at the Keighley Labour Church', for example, meant that she was able to provide the institution with both vital supervision and engagement during its formative years.<sup>146</sup> Established in 1891, the Labour Church was founded upon the principles 'that the emancipation of the working classes from capitalism was a religious movement' and 'the improvement of social conditions was as important as the development of personal character.'<sup>147</sup> Although the Labour Church was a short lived experiment, lasting little more than two decades, it burned both bright and fast within Keighley, serving as an additional way in which the ILP could engage with the community and develop its local reputation.<sup>148</sup> According to Laybourn and Reynolds, much of the ILP's early development throughout West Yorkshire during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was underpinned by 'the growth of Labour's cultural and social institutions'.<sup>149</sup> In Keighley, for example, the Labour Church was one of the key avenues through which the local ILP helped to engage women with its ideas, with a contributor to the 23 November 1895 edition of the *Clarion* noting that:

It is cheering to know that at the Keighley Labour Church meetings about one-third of the attendants are women, and that half the members of your Vocal Union also

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<sup>146</sup> James, D. *Class and Politics in a Northern Industrial Town: Keighley 1880-1914*. pp 90 & 127; James, D. "Our Philip": *The Early Career of Philip Snowden*.

<sup>147</sup> Pierson, S. (1960). John Trevor and the Labor Church Movement in England, 1891-1900. *Church History*, 29(4), 463-478. Doi: 10.2307/3161930. p 463.

<sup>148</sup> Johnson, N. (2018). *The Labour Church: The Movement & Its Message*. New York: Routledge. p 1897.

<sup>149</sup> Laybourn, K. & Reynolds, J. *Liberalism and the Rise of Labour 1890-1918*. p 117.



belong to our sex. So many write to me that no women attend the meetings that I should be interested to know how you manage to “draw” them.<sup>150</sup>

Meanwhile, individuals such as W.F Hardy, ‘president of the [Keighley] Trades Council and an ILP borough councillor’, provided the ILP with a mixture of the various advantages stated above.<sup>151</sup> Being able to both act as a link between the local ILP and Trades Council- helping to improve relations between the two- and serve as an active member of the ILP- injecting it with extra enthusiasm. The latter of which was most notably shown when in the 19 October 1895 edition of the *Keighley News*, it was reported that:

Mr. Hardy said he thought they would bear in mind what Mr. Horner told them at the beginning about their opponents having already tried to apply the boycott. It was evident that they had not to do just as they liked up there, and he had no doubt that when the polling-day came there would be an attempt to carry the boycott further, to prevent the working people from going to the polling-booth.<sup>152</sup>

And again in the 28 January 1899 edition of the *Keighley Labour Journal*, when it was reported that:

Councillor Hardy followed, and mentioned that his brief experience on the Council had already shown him the need for a large increase in the Labour group, so as to fight the forces of monopoly which are now so powerful there.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> *Clarion*, 23 November 1895. p 8.

<sup>151</sup> James, D. *Class and Politics in a Northern Industrial Town: Keighley 1880-1914*. p 99.

<sup>152</sup> *Keighley News*, 19 October 1895. p 6.

<sup>153</sup> *Keighley Labour Journal*, 28 January 1899.

The culmination of all of the hard work of these individuals came in 1900 when the Keighley ILP had 'four of their members ... on the Town Council and three on the School Board'.<sup>154</sup> By this time, the ILP had also expanded into the community and established a Keighley Labour Church, Keighley Labour Woman's Group and a local newspaper in the form of the *Keighley Labour Journal*, whilst also providing some limited tuition on essential subjects.<sup>155</sup> This all meant that the ILP had become embedded within the town of Keighley in far more meaningful way than simply that of a political party.

In conclusion, the ILP developed at a relatively impressive rate in Keighley during the late nineteenth century and did so on the back of a number of factors. The first and most important of which was the fallout of the Keighley engineering strike of 1889, which saw a new wave of radical political activity sweep across the town, creating fertile grounds upon which an ILP could thrive. The second less important reason was the individuals that ran the local ILP as, whilst the likes of Snowden were able to perform wonders with building the ILP and its reputation, their work was still very much dependant on this initial breakthrough and ultimately limited in its final results to a unspectacular but respectable four Town Councillors and three School Board members.<sup>156</sup> Furthermore, it could, and will later, be argued that the work of these individuals only served to mask the ILP's internal divisions and electoral deficiencies and as such stunted the organisation's future growth; possibly, tarnishing their original efforts.

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<sup>154</sup> James, D. "Our Philip": *The Early Career of Philip Snowden*.

<sup>155</sup> James, D. "Our Philip": *The Early Career of Philip Snowden*; *Keighley Labour Journal*, 7 January 1894.

<sup>156</sup> James, D. "Our Philip": *The Early Career of Philip Snowden*.

## **Chapter 3: The Local Failings of the ILP: A Lack of Experience, Intelligence and Diplomacy (1895-1903)**

Another reason as to why the Keighley Labour movement struggled to grow between the years 1900 and 1922 was because of the organisation's inability to establish a firm base of support within the town. Despite some promising signs about the growth of Labour in Keighley during the late 1890s, which saw a total of five ILPers elected to the Council from 1896 to 1900, following the turn of the century these promising signs began to diminish as 'electoral successes were fewer' for the ILP.<sup>157</sup> Whilst the reasons for the Keighley ILP's stagnation during the early twentieth century will be discussed in great detail throughout this research, this section will, specifically, focus upon the Keighley Municipal elections of 1901 and the various reasons as to why the Keighley ILP failed to consolidate its support during these elections. Furthermore, this section will also review how these factors affected the performance of the Labour Party more generally at both a national and local level throughout large parts of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Why the Keighley Municipal elections of 1901? Because it was these elections that were the first to occur in the period commonly identified as the start of the Keighley ILP's downturn in performance.

In the lead up to the 1901 Municipal elections in Keighley, it was very much the issue of excessive town expenditure that dominated the political discourse, with the Liberals, ILP and 'the newly formed Keighley Ratepayers' Association' all focusing extensively upon the

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<sup>157</sup> James, D. *Class and Politics in a Northern Industrial Town: Keighley 1880-1914*. p 93.

issue throughout the campaign.<sup>158</sup> The public's demand for a reduction in the Council's rates was such that, somewhat, of an expectation developed that the new Council would curtail some of its superfluous spending.<sup>159</sup> This presented the Keighley ILP with a unique series of challenges as it wished to both defend the records of Labour Councillors and uphold commitments to higher public spending, whilst simultaneously attacking its Liberal opponents.<sup>160</sup> Consequently, the organisation elected to '[blame] the Liberal majority for inefficiency while at the same time it defended the services that the rates provided.'<sup>161</sup> As such, remarks were published in the *Keighley Labour Journal* reminding that the ILP had foretold of such a 'result if the town's business continued to be managed as it has been in the past.'<sup>162</sup> Whilst Snowden promoted the need for 'parks, police, free education, public health departments, well-lit streets and drains' across the town.<sup>163</sup> Although these were pledges that Liberals or Conservatives might usually be able to get behind, the focus of the 1901 Keighley Municipal elections was very much on the reduction of rates, meaning that these issues were largely ignored. With Liberal candidates such as Joseph Waterhouse, standing in the North-West Ward, instead, pledging 'to check the extravagant expenditure of recent years' and 'resist the policy of lavish expenditure on unnecessary schemes, and also on projects which can be deferred until the financial condition of the town warrants them.'<sup>164</sup> And John Pickles, the candidate endorsed to stand in the East Ward by the

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<sup>158</sup> *Keighley News*, 19 October 1901. Housed in Keighley Library; *Keighley Labour Journal*, 28 October 1901.

<sup>159</sup> James, D. *Class and Politics in a Northern Industrial Town: Keighley 1880-1914*. p 100.

<sup>160</sup> James, D. *Class and Politics in a Northern Industrial Town: Keighley 1880-1914*. p 100.

<sup>161</sup> James, D. *Class and Politics in a Northern Industrial Town: Keighley 1880-1914*. p 100.

<sup>162</sup> *Keighley Labour Journal*, 28 October 1901.

<sup>163</sup> James, D. *Class and Politics in a Northern Industrial Town: Keighley 1880-1914*. p 100.

<sup>164</sup> *Keighley News*, 19 October 1901. Housed in Keighley Library.

Keighley Ratepayers' Association, promising to reform the rates levied by the Council and promote 'the delaying of costly enterprises, such as that of a further extension of our Tramway System, Electric Lighting, the Widening of Roads, also the Buying of Property.'<sup>165</sup> Although the ILP could purport to have been in opposition to the changes made by the Liberals, which ultimately led to Keighley's high rates, the ILP could neither purport to have the relevant experience to undo such damage, or the most hard-line stance on the means of reduction of debt. It was candidates like the Liberal Waterhouse, for example, that '[had] the advantage of some experience in Local Government and Municipal affairs, having served on the Borough Council during the first six years of its existence.'<sup>166</sup> Whilst it was the Ratepayers' Association's John Pickles, who advocated that 'any overstaffing, very high salaries, waste caused by incompetence, ought at once to be inquired into.'<sup>167</sup> This ultimately left the ILP outflanked on two major fronts that could both differentiate the Party from its rivals and win votes. Thus it was the Keighley ILP's lack of political experience and idealistic outlook in a pessimistic society that ultimately saw the organisation expose itself to its rivals in 1901.

Whilst not referring to Keighley, in particular, Adelman noted that the Labour Party's lack of political experience proved to be problematic in its attempts to grow in the early twentieth century.<sup>168</sup> Specifically, Adelman noted that many of Labour's early parliamentarians were 'often ill-at-ease and inarticulate in Parliament and ignorant of, or uninterested in, the wider

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<sup>165</sup> *Keighley News*, 19 October 1901. Housed in Keighley Library.

<sup>166</sup> *Keighley News*, 19 October 1901. Housed in Keighley Library.

<sup>167</sup> *Keighley News*, 19 October 1901. Housed in Keighley Library.

<sup>168</sup> Adelman, P. *The Rise of the Labour Party 1880-1945* (3rd ed.). pp 39-40.

questions of debate'.<sup>169</sup> Furthermore, he also noted that the Party's parliamentary influence was not only diminished by this, but also by both the persistent absences of many of its MPs and the unruliness of those that were present.<sup>170</sup> In Keighley, specifically, the local Liberal Party viewed the Keighley ILP in a way very similar to that of its national counterpart. Clarkson, for example, referencing the work of James, noted that:

the Keighley Liberal Party had three responses to the rise of the ILP in 1895: to consider them as radicals that should return to the Party, as it was the Liberals who could introduce actual change; to consider them as 'impractical idealists'; and to consider them as 'troublemakers' that formed the ILP to attack the Liberals out of bitterness.<sup>171</sup>

None of these responses helped to build a particularly strong relationship between the Liberals and the ILP, with the latter two responses, especially, developing a lot of animosity between the two parties. This situation was not improved by the fact that the Keighley ILP used various means such as the *Keighley Labour Journal* and the speeches of its most prominent members to attack the Liberal Party on account of its politics, personalities and corruption. In the 8 March 1896 edition of the *Keighley Labour Journal*, for example, the ILP attacked a number of individuals within the Liberal Party on account of their dishonesty and exploitation:

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<sup>169</sup> Adelman, P. *The Rise of the Labour Party 1880-1945* (3rd ed.). p 40.

<sup>170</sup> Adelman, P. *The Rise of the Labour Party 1880-1945* (3rd ed.). p 40.

<sup>171</sup> Clarkson, J. *The Battle for Keighley: The conflict between the Liberal Party and the Independent Labour Party in Keighley between 1893 and 1906*. p 18; James, D. *Class and Politics in a Northern Industrial Town: Keighley 1880-1914*. pp 104-106.

We know it is fashionable to call ourselves free- we know also that there are some of our local employers of labour who are gentlemen enough not to interfere with their employees, when the latter, out of working hours, have dared to take up an opposite position to themselves. All honour to them, say we, but we know, also, that there are others who will stoop to any depth of meanness, and use any device to remove such men from their path. We are not referring to men far away in other towns, cases have been found here, for even in Keighley, it is not so long since a prominent Liberal told a defeated Labour candidate "it was a good job for him he had not won the election, as if he had, his whole future career would have been blasted."<sup>172</sup>

Furthermore, an excerpt from one of Snowden's speeches featured in the 13 July 1895 edition of *Keighley News* also served to showcase the ILP's displeasure with the Liberal Party's policies and inefficiency as Snowden remarked that:

[he] envied the simple faith of those who believed they were likely to get payment of members from the Liberal Party. They had been in office for three years, pledged to this reform, there had been no obstacle to prevent them giving payment of members, they had simply refused it, and now they came before the people and asked them to return them to power to give payment to members.<sup>173</sup>

Commenting upon the tension between Labour and the Liberals in the late nineteenth century, the 9 February 1895 edition of the *Keighley News* remarked that:

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<sup>172</sup> *Keighley Labour Journal*, 8 March 1896.

<sup>173</sup> *Keighley News*, 13 July 1895. In James, D. *Class and Politics in a Northern Industrial Town: Keighley 1880-1914*. p 110.

Among those who are roughly classed together as “Labour men” there are still wider differences. Some of them hold opinions no more advanced than those of Radicals. The only difference between them is that the former refuse to accept anything at the hands of the Liberals, or to entrust them with the task of passing it. Indeed, if it were passed they would regard it as tainted at its source, and the coveted reform would cease to be a reform.<sup>174</sup>

By branding Labourites as little more than a motley crew of petty and bitter men, the *Keighley News* only served to further stoke divisions between the Liberals and Labour. Another example of which can be found in the 2 March 1895 edition of the *Keighley News*, where it was reported that:

Mr. Tuckwell recognises at least that all which has come to the nation in the way of progress has come to it through the Liberal party. He stands upon a Liberal platform, and appeals to the great party which has done so much before to proceed along the lines which he indicates; he exhorts them to make terms with the Labour party, and if possible to adopt their programme. This at least shows no hostile animus towards Liberals. His mission is reconciliation, not hostility. Whilst we doubt extremely his success, we appreciate his spirit, and cannot avoid contrasting it with that of the Labour leaders, who as good as tell us that even if we would adopt their programme entire they would have nothing to do with us, because we are liars and hypocrites, and that they, therefore, intend to vote for Toryism and the House of Lords.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> *Keighley News*, 9 February 1895. p 4.

<sup>175</sup> *Keighley News*, 2 March 1895. p 4.



The ultimate way in which the Liberal-Labour war of words impacted Keighley in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was through the lack of a Lib-Lab pact in the town due to the bad local relations between the two parties.<sup>176</sup> Consequently, political groups like the Conservative Party, which may have otherwise been wiped from the town had the Liberals and Labour allied, were able to continue fighting elections with decent results.

Although the *Keighley Labour Journal* was initially released on 7 January 1894 on the basis that it could provide both 'useful information in connection with the Labour Movement' and 'some permanent record of the addresses delivered during the Session', the *Keighley Labour Journal* soon came to take on life as much more.<sup>177</sup> James, for example, suggested that Snowden transformed the *Keighley Labour Journal* into a 'propaganda sheet' and 'muck-raking journal'.<sup>178</sup> The precise reasons behind the transition are not fully known, however, one of the major reasons was almost certainly the poor treatment that ILPers could expect to receive in the local newspapers. The 14 September 1901 edition of the *Keighley News*, for example, contained a letter entitled 'THE ATTACK ON THE I.L.P. CANDIDATE' in which George Town, an ILP candidate at a recent Municipal election, refuted remarks made against him 'in the last issue of the "News"'.<sup>179</sup> The remarks suggested that Town was chosen from within the ranks of the Conservative Party to stand 'because the Conservatives [were] about sick of the Independent Labour candidates, and [had to] be propitiated with

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<sup>176</sup> James, D. *Class and Politics in a Northern Industrial Town: Keighley 1880-1914*. p 112.

<sup>177</sup> *Keighley Labour Journal*, 7 January 1894.

<sup>178</sup> James, D. *Class and Politics in a Northern Industrial Town: Keighley 1880-1914*. p 92.

<sup>179</sup> *Keighley News*, 14 September 1901. Housed in Keighley Library.

one of their own, as the price of their continued support.<sup>180</sup> The bulk of Town's response was:

Allow me, sir, to say that these charges or insinuations are positively untrue; but the attack you made on me has had the desired effect, and no doubt you have, ere this, been heartily thanked by the Liberal wirepullers for the adroit way in which you played into their hands.<sup>181</sup>

Whilst the very fact that the *Keighley News* published Town's criticisms of its own paper suggest that the organisation tried to develop some sort of relationship with the local ILP, Town's remarks indicate that the ILP held a very pessimistic view of the paper and its intent; something which could not be overturned very quickly.

The conflict between the Keighley ILP and the *Keighley News* during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was ultimately emblematic of the wider Labour movement's conflict with the mainstream press. Snowden's development of the *Keighley Labour Journal* in the late 1890s, for example, was only a small part of a wider national trend of radical journalism, which saw the development of newspapers such as the *Clarion*. Established in 1891, the *Clarion* was 'a weekly [socialist] paper that sold 40,000 copies at one penny each.'<sup>182</sup> In its first edition, released on 12 December 1891, the *Clarion* outlined a number of key objectives:

it will be the duty of the blowers of the *Clarion* to accomplish that "first strong necessity," or bust themselves in the attempt. So gents, if you could oblige me by

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<sup>180</sup> *Keighley News*, 14 September 1901. Housed in Keighley Library.

<sup>181</sup> *Keighley News*, 14 September 1901. Housed in Keighley Library.

<sup>182</sup> Pugh, M. *Speak For Britain! A New History of the Labour Party*. pp 26-27.

waking up to the fact that “put not your trust in parties” is the first step to take, you will save my bellows from premature disruption.<sup>183</sup>

The necessity to which the paper referred was:

... to rouse the people up, to keep them stirring and vigilant, to carry the war dead into the tent of such a creature as this Lord Palmerston, and ring into his soul (or what stands for it) that the time for dandy insolence is gone for ever.<sup>184</sup>

Besides politics, the *Clarion* also offered coverage on a variety of other areas ranging from sport to theatre- meaning that, as noted by Pugh, the success of the *Clarion* was derived from its structure as ‘a normal newspaper in which the politics was leavened with entertainment and titillation.’<sup>185</sup> Although the *Keighley Labour Journal* shared similarities with the *Clarion*- both papers aiming to spread socialist philosophies and break old party allegiances- factors such as the differing sizes and readerships of the two papers ensured they had dramatically different impacts. With the *Clarion* spreading its message more subtly across a wider section of society, and the *Keighley Labour Journal* stirring up controversy in Keighley.

In conclusion, the ILP served as a type of firebrand within Keighley politics during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Whilst its disruptive status won it some admirers, the Keighley ILP’s adversarial nature ensured that the organisation would be unable to make a major breakthrough in Keighley until 1922- when society had undergone a major upheaval. For its lack of experience in elected office; radical ideas; and combative

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<sup>183</sup> *Clarion*, 12 December 1891. p 1.

<sup>184</sup> *Clarion*, 12 December 1891. p 1.

<sup>185</sup> Pugh, M. *Speak For Britain! A New History of the Labour Party*. p 27.

relationship with both the Liberal Party and press, all combined to ensure that the Party would remain on the fringes of political life in the town.

## **Chapter 4: The Implosion of Keighley Labour (1900-1914)**

Following the initial success of the Keighley ILP in the late nineteenth century, the organisation began to suffer from a period of stagnation during the early twentieth century; consequently, this section of my research will attempt to explain the reasons as to why this was the case, and in doing so will address how all the reasons that saw the ILP grow throughout the 1890s ultimately unfolded to see it stagger through both the 1900s and 1910s. Furthermore, this section will also begin to explain how these setbacks meant that the ILP was unable to gain an MP in Keighley until 1922, whilst other Labour movements in similar areas such as Halifax were able to elect parliamentary representatives all the way throughout both the 1900s and 1910s.

The Keighley ILP's loss of key individuals such as Snowden, Dixon and Hardy to challenges such as better prospects elsewhere, a disinterest in public life and personal issues at the turn of the twentieth century can be seen as one of the key reasons as to why the Keighley ILP began to falter after the year 1900.<sup>186</sup> For the skill, enthusiasm and experience of these members was key in developing the Keighley ILP in the face of severe challenges such as a lack of resources, organisational infrastructure and an established voter base. It was in 1902, for example, following the ILP's loss of individuals such as Snowden that the *Keighley Labour Journal* was eventually discontinued.<sup>187</sup> Presumably, this was a result of a lack of interest from within the Party's ranks in continuing the newsletter. The discontinuation of

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<sup>186</sup> James, D. *Class and Politics in a Northern Industrial Town: Keighley 1880-1914*. p 94.

<sup>187</sup> James, D. *Class and Politics in a Northern Industrial Town: Keighley 1880-1914*. p 20.

the *Keighley Labour Journal* served to limit the Keighley ILP's means of promotion and, furthermore, acted as a precursor to the substantive decline of the ILP's other wider community work through institutions such as the Labour Church.

Although the Keighley ILP would eventually be able to replace all of the individuals that it lost after 1900, their sudden departures left significant gaps within the ILP's expertise and eagerness from which it would take years to recover. The Keighley ILP's gradual process of recovery would take longer than expected, however, as from 1909 to 1913 the Keighley ILP found itself hindered by a series of internal divisions over who should stand for election as the town's MP.<sup>188</sup> The most significant of these disputes, in 1913, pitted Herbert Horner, one of the Keighley ILP's controversial founding members, against a group of newer members led by William Bland, who was 'a local ILPer and trade-unionist'.<sup>189</sup> Horner had previously wished to stand for the town's vacant parliamentary seat on two occasions and declined in support of no candidate in 1910 and a rival candidate in 1911.<sup>190</sup> The selection of a candidate in 1913, once more, would have proven to be the cause of little more than a minor dispute had it not been the case that:

Horner threatened to form a second ILP branch in opposition to the Keighley ILP, annoyed at the fact that Bland, and the "Blandite" section of the Keighley ILP were excluding him from an active part in Keighley Labour politics.<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> Laybourn, K. & Reynolds, J. *Liberalism and the Rise of Labour 1890-1918*. pp 165-166.

<sup>189</sup> Laybourn, K. & Reynolds, J. *Liberalism and the Rise of Labour 1890-1918*. p 165; James, D. "Our Philip": *The Early Career of Philip Snowden*; James, D. *Class and Politics in a Northern Industrial Town: Keighley 1880-1914*. p 93.

<sup>190</sup> Laybourn, K. & Reynolds, J. *Liberalism and the Rise of Labour 1890-1918*. pp 165-166.

<sup>191</sup> Laybourn, K. & Reynolds, J. *Liberalism and the Rise of Labour 1890-1918*. pp 165-166.

James suggested this conflict, amongst other things, was emblematic of a wider clash between 'the ethical socialists and trade-unionists' in Keighley during the early twentieth century, with trade-unionists like Bland 'chiefly interested in improving the lot of the workers', whilst ethical socialists like Horner were primarily interested in changing the perception of society.<sup>192</sup> Whilst Horner would ultimately decide against forming a rival ILP to that of the Keighley ILP, there is little doubt that the institution still suffered a substantial setback as a result of the conflict. With such incidents, perhaps, one of the reasons that Packer commented that, as of 1913, 'the National Executive Committee were unimpressed by the local Labour organisation in Keighley'.<sup>193</sup> The situation in Keighley in 1913, however, was not entirely new to the ILP, with other similar events having previously occurred. In Halifax, for example, 1894 saw three principal members of the town's early ILP clash over the contention of seats at that year's Municipal Elections as well as various other issues, with much of the controversy covered in the press.<sup>194</sup> The controversy first began to boil over in the 27 October 1894 edition of the *Halifax Guardian*, in which a letter from John Lister was published stating:

I really cannot consent to stand again, and I only entered two years ago to serve as a stop gap until a real Labour man was ready to step in. ... I cannot submit to have my opinions, even on matters of detail and policy, cut and dried for me. I do not wish to put either myself or the Labour Union in a false position.<sup>195</sup>

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<sup>192</sup> James, D. *Class and Politics in a Northern Industrial Town: Keighley 1880-1914*. p 95.

<sup>193</sup> Packer, I. *Contested Ground: Trends in British By-Elections, 1911-1914*. p 160.

<sup>194</sup> Laybourn, K. & Reynolds, J. *Liberalism and the Rise of Labour 1890-1918*. pp 89-91.

<sup>195</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 27 October 1894. p 5.

It was then intensified when, in the very same edition of the paper, it was reported that:

This letter, received so near to the day for sending in nominations, naturally caused some confusion - confusion made worse confounded on Wednesday by the nomination of Mr. Beever for both Central and Southowram Ward, and Mr. Lister for North.<sup>196</sup>

It soon transpired that Beever, in Central Ward, and Lister, in North Ward, had been nominated by the Liberals.<sup>197</sup> As a result, Beever 'was pressed to repudiate the [Liberal] nomination if it was without his approval; but he declined to do so.'<sup>198</sup> And Lister was informed of the disapproval of the Labour Executive to which he replied 'I shall stand unless Tories withdraw in Central or Southowram.'<sup>199</sup> The issue was finally resolved on Election Day when all 'Labour candidates, including Beever were defeated' and, subsequently, 'Beever was expelled from the Halifax Labour Union for "insubordination" and Lister was forced to make his apologies to the Council of the Halifax Labour Union.'<sup>200</sup> The fallout of the incident continued to unfold into the early part of next year and the conflict it developed between various interest groups within both the local and national ILPs was a source of significant weakness and embarrassment for the Labour movement as a whole throughout the year of 1895.<sup>201</sup> Although the conflict within the Halifax ILP in 1894 was a much more divisive and public affair than that of the Keighley ILP in 1913, the relatively swift and decisive way in

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<sup>196</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 27 October 1894. p 5.

<sup>197</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 27 October 1894. p 5.

<sup>198</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 27 October 1894. p 5.

<sup>199</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 27 October 1894. p 5.

<sup>200</sup> Laybourn, K. & Reynolds, J. *Liberalism and the Rise of Labour 1890-1918*. p 91.

<sup>201</sup> Laybourn, K. & Reynolds, J. *Liberalism and the Rise of Labour 1890-1918*. pp 90-94.



which the incident was resolved meant that the Halifax ILP, in contrast to that of Keighley, was able to move beyond a perpetual state of stagnation and rebuild itself into a newer more successful organisation.

Specifically reflecting on the Keighley ILP's lack of growth in the early twentieth century, Herbert Horner focused on other reasons as to why the town's ILP began to struggle after 1900. Horner's main belief was that '[the ILP's] success came too soon' as the organisation had not had the necessary time in order to develop a solid reputation or strong base of support in Keighley prior to its initial successes in which 'many voted for [ILP] candidates simply to spite and defeat the candidates of the opposite orthodox party.'<sup>202</sup> This viewpoint was never better supported than when the Liberal *Keighley News* accused the ILP of being little more than a Conservative Party tool in the paper's 15 June 1895 edition, with it being inferred that the Conservatives promoted both left-wing policies and utilised ILP members as a means to discredit and detract votes away from the Liberals.<sup>203</sup> More specifically, the *Keighley News* remarked that:

When, for example, a Conservative contemporary says that "the question of the unemployed is a very serious one; the Labour party are justified in keeping it to the front," we need not have been in doubt as to its true meaning, even if the writer had not appended his own moral: "The Unionists are the true friends of the working classes, and the solution will come from that party."<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>202</sup> *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 27 March 1908. In James, D. *Class and Politics in a Northern Industrial Town: Keighley 1880-1914*. p 94.

<sup>203</sup> *Keighley News*, 15 June 1895. p 4.

<sup>204</sup> *Keighley News*, 15 June 1895. p 4.

The *Keighley News*' remarks clearly indicate the importance with which the paper's editor and the quoted Conservative Party member both viewed the strength of the local ILP in the context of their party's own political fortunes, and as such suggests that Horner's view that the ILP was often supported throughout the 1890s as the party of opposition may well be correct. For the determination of both the Conservatives and the Liberals to win or, at the very least, deny positions of elected office to each other was such that the ILP was frequently used as a means to siphon votes away from each other. As suggested by the article above, for example, this trend was particularly prominent amongst the ranks of the Conservatives Party given that the prevailing opinion of political activists throughout both the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was that the Conservative Party, as opposed to the Liberal Party, benefitted from the presence of Labour on the ballot.<sup>205</sup> Most likely on account of the fact that the Labour Party competed with the Liberal Party, rather than the Conservatives, over the progressive vote. One example of this train of thought can be seen in the 19 January 1906 edition of the *Leeds Mercury* in which an article was published on the 1906 general election contest in Keighley entitled 'DOUBLE ATTACK ON THE LIBERAL FORTRESS. | IS THE TORY TO SLIP THROUGH?'<sup>206</sup> In the article, it was remarked that 'hope now runs high in the Tory breast. The Labour party are in the field and their interests are intrusted to Mr. W. T. Newlove'.<sup>207</sup>

Reviewing the Keighley by-election of 1913, as a part of his 2011 study, Packer posited a drab assessment of the Keighley ILP's electoral performances during the early twentieth century. In particular, Packer noted that some Labour supporters saw Keighley as a prime

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<sup>205</sup> Douglas, R. Labour in Decline 1910-1914. In K. D. Brown (Ed.) *Essays in Anti-Labour History*. p 125.

<sup>206</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 19 January 1906. p 6.

<sup>207</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 19 January 1906. p 6.

target after the ILP's strong performance at the poll during the Keighley by-election of 1911, with factors such as a partial localised Liberal-Conservative electoral alliance alongside a series of local strikes- thought to potentially bolster key areas of Labour support ahead of 1913.<sup>208</sup> This notion, however, proved to be wrong.<sup>209</sup> The impact of these factors, perhaps, overestimated.

Details of strike action were publicised in the 1 September 1913 edition of Manchester's *Daily Citizen* in which a notice was published: 'Wanted all MOULDERS and MACHINE MOULDERS to KEEP AWAY FROM KEIGHLEY. Strike proceeding.'<sup>210</sup> And in response to the strike, the reconciliatory actions of the town's Liberal leadership and business owners were noted in the 6 September 1913 edition of the *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*.<sup>211</sup> More specifically, the paper noted that:

A meeting in private, convened by the Mayor of Keighley (Mr. W. A. Brigg), between Messrs. Hall and Stells and the representatives of the moulders now on strike, was held in the Mayor's Parlour yesterday afternoon, and after a long conference the meeting was adjourned. It was stated that the prospects of a settlement were hopeful.<sup>212</sup>

The local news' portrayal of the Liberal Brigg to be a reasonable man of action played into the Keighley Liberal Party's ongoing narrative that the town's local Labour element were chaotic and thus implied that it was only the Liberals that could run Keighley effectively.

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<sup>208</sup> Packer, I. *Contested Ground: Trends in British By-Elections, 1911-1914*. p 160.

<sup>209</sup> Packer, I. *Contested Ground: Trends in British By-Elections, 1911-1914*. p 160.

<sup>210</sup> *Daily Citizen (Manchester)*, 1 September 1913. p 8.

<sup>211</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 6 September 1913. p 10.

<sup>212</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 6 September 1913. p 10.

Ultimately, mitigating any electoral advantages Labour may have thought it had in Keighley in 1913.

Alone, the Keighley ILP's loss of key members, excessive internal divisions or premature success as a party of opposition would have been enough to simply delay the Party's growth during the early twentieth century by just a few years. Combined, however, these factors along with a number of others meant that the Party's growth was postponed for a substantial period of time. Consequently, it was not until 1922 when: a new generation of Labour activists came to the fore, the two other major political parties were struggling with internal wrangling and Labour had established itself as both a radical and experienced political party that the Keighley Labour movement finally overcame the obstacles to its growth and rose to political pre-eminence inside of the town.

Given the growth that the Labour Party experienced in areas such as Halifax, Bradford and Leeds during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, however, the question still remains as to why Labour, specifically, enjoyed success in these areas as opposed to Keighley during the early twentieth century; for Labour was able to secure the election of MPs in both Halifax and Bradford West in 1906.<sup>213</sup> Although Halifax is not the perfect point of comparison for Keighley as Halifax, in its poor law union, had around two and half times the population by 1900, it did have a similar rate of growth across the nineteenth century.<sup>214</sup> Furthermore, Halifax (in 1861) had employment in very similar areas to Keighley,

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<sup>213</sup> Craig, F. W. S. *British Electoral Facts 1885 - 1975* (3rd ed.). p 110.

<sup>214</sup> GB Historical GIS / University of Portsmouth. (2009 - 2017). *Halifax PLU/RegD through time | Population Statistics | Total Population*. A Vision of Britain through Time. Retrieved from [https://visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10102560/cube/TOT\\_POP](https://visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10102560/cube/TOT_POP); GB Historical GIS / University of Portsmouth. (2009 - 2017). *Keighley PLU/RegD through time | Population Statistics | Total Population*. A Vision of Britain through Time. Retrieved from [https://visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10139338/cube/TOT\\_POP](https://visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10139338/cube/TOT_POP).

with textiles, agriculture and engineering making up three of its four largest sectors of employment.<sup>215</sup>

So how precisely did Labour growth fair in Halifax as opposed to Keighley? Like the Keighley ILP, the early Labour movement in Halifax was quite dependent upon the personalities of a few well-known figures in the 1890s and, subsequently, stumbled when they clashed over the contention of seats in the same decade.<sup>216</sup> Nonetheless, Halifax was able to recover from this and, subsequently, continue its Labour growth throughout the 1890s to the point that, in 1898, it had the nation's largest ILP branch, whilst Keighley, around the same time, sat within the top twelve.<sup>217</sup> Unlike Keighley, however, the development of the Halifax Labour movement continued through the 1900s when Halifax, taking advantage of its dual MPs, was able to return a Labour representative.<sup>218</sup> Besides the dual MP system that was contested in Halifax, which proved to be a key factor in Labour's breakthrough, another substantial difference between the two towns was the class of the individuals that constituted their respective ILPs, with the Halifax ILP having a key middle-class supporter to bolster its ranks and finances.<sup>219</sup> Although Keighley and Halifax shared a number of similarities with regards to their rate of growth, geographical location, core areas of

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<sup>215</sup> GB Historical GIS / University of Portsmouth. (2009 - 2017). *Halifax PLU/RegD through time | Industry Statistics | Persons aged 20 and over by Sex and 1861 Occupational Order*. A Vision of Britain through Time. Retrieved from [https://visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10102560/cube/OCC\\_ORD1861\\_OVER20](https://visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10102560/cube/OCC_ORD1861_OVER20). Contributor: David Allan Gatley; GB Historical GIS / University of Portsmouth. (2009 - 2017). *Keighley PLU/RegD through time | Industry Statistics | Persons aged 20 and over by Sex and 1861 Occupational Order*. A Vision of Britain through Time. Retrieved from [http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10139338/cube/OCC\\_ORD1861\\_OVER20](http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10139338/cube/OCC_ORD1861_OVER20). Contributor: David Allan Gatley.

<sup>216</sup> Laybourn, K. & Reynolds, J. *Liberalism and the Rise of Labour 1890-1918*. pp 89- 91.

<sup>217</sup> James, D. *Class and Politics in a Northern Industrial Town: Keighley 1880-1914*. pp 13-14.

<sup>218</sup> Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer, 31 January 1906. p 8.

<sup>219</sup> James, D. *Class and Politics in a Northern Industrial Town: Keighley 1880-1914*. p 88.

employment and early Labour development throughout both the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the individual fortunes of their two ILPs were quite different, with Halifax securing its first Labour MP in 1906 and Keighley securing its first Labour MP in 1922.<sup>220</sup> There are a number of reasons as to why this was the case such as Halifax's two MP system, stronger ILP and greater appetite for change. All of which the Halifax Labour movement was ultimately able to capitalise upon in order to secure its success much earlier than its Keighley counterpart.

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<sup>220</sup> Craig, F. W. S. *British Electoral Facts 1885 - 1975* (3rd ed.). pp 110, 116 & 132.

## Chapter 5: The Long Decline of the Keighley Liberal Party and the Relevance of the First World War (1885-1922)

Having already discussed a number of reasons as to why the Keighley ILP's growth began to falter during the early twentieth century, following on from its initial surge in popularity during the late nineteenth century, this section of my research will analyse the reasons as to why the growth of the Keighley ILP began to, once again, pick up in the years immediately prior to 1922. The most obvious reason as to why the Keighley ILP, and the Labour Party in general, began to rise in popularity in the years immediately prior to 1922 was because of the First World War and the way in which the conflict transformed British politics. For it was the First World War that led to both the formal split of the Liberal Party and the introduction of universal male suffrage in Britain in 1918.

If, as suggested by historians such as Clarke, it was the First World War which led to the inevitable division and failure of the Liberal Party, then why was this?<sup>221</sup> Reflecting on a similar question, Cook made the point that the First World War challenged 'not only the conscience of Liberalism but also the leadership of Asquith.'<sup>222</sup> By the time of the First World War, however, ideological splits and poor leadership had long plagued the Liberal Party in one form or another. In Keighley, for example, the local Liberal Party had been rather outspoken in its disapproval of the Boer War in 1900.<sup>223</sup> Furthermore, in 1901, a man by the

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<sup>221</sup> Clarke, P.F. *Lancashire and the New Liberalism*.

<sup>222</sup> Cook, C. *A Short History of the Liberal Party 1900-92* (4th ed.). p 62.

<sup>223</sup> Keighley Liberal Association Minute Book Jan 1896 - Apr 1931.

name of Mr. T. R. Williams gave a speech to ‘the opening meeting of the session of the Liberal Club Debating Society’ on the topic of “Why I Left the Liberal Party” in which:

he was mainly occupied in denouncing Imperialism and the South African war and the connection of Liberalism therewith. He spoke vigorously on the subject, his argument being that the Liberal party could not identify itself with Imperialism and still maintain its true principles. Lord Rosebery, he said, was ploughing his solitary furrow, and if he continued it it would lead him to perdition. He strongly condemned Sir William Harcourt and Sir H. Campbell-Bannerman, contending that the former had betrayed his trust at the inquiry into the Jameson Raid, and that the latter had done nothing but “shift and trim” on the war question.<sup>224</sup>

On a national level, Henry Campbell-Bannerman’s leadership of the Liberal Party between 1899 and 1908 was blighted by a series of issues, some of which Mr Williams addressed above, including: internal divisions over the Boer crisis, poor electoral performances at the 1900 general election and Campbell-Bannerman’s inability to command an effective government.<sup>225</sup> Consequently, it may be argued that some key elements of the Liberal Party’s decline were protracted over many years and the First World War, simply, served as a means through which to re-ignite these issues and finally break the Liberal Party coalition. The question remains, however, as to why it was the First World War, specifically, that seemingly acted as the major conduit behind the resurgent growth of Labour and the rapid decline of Liberalism before 1922 across the UK. This is because other events and

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<sup>224</sup> *Keighley News*, 19 October 1901. Housed in Keighley Library.

<sup>225</sup> Cannon, J., & Crowcroft, R. (2015). Campbell-Bannerman, Sir Henry. In *A Dictionary of British History*. Retrieved from <https://www-oxfordreference-com.libaccess.hud.ac.uk/view/10.1093/acref/9780191758027.001.0001/acref-9780191758027-e-630>; Cook, C. *A Short History of the Liberal Party 1900-92* (4th ed.). pp 31, 33 & 43.



movements such as the Suffragette campaign, question of Irish Home Rule and the Great Labour Unrest all had equal potential throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to institute a level of change similar to that enacted by the First World War.

**Part 1: A Sign of Things to Come: The Issues that Had Long Plagued the Liberal Party Prior to the First World War**

Established in 1903, the Women's Social and Political Union (eventually the Suffragettes) brought so much attention to their campaign to attain the right to vote for women in the early twentieth century that legislation for universal suffrage was on the radar of several major political parties before the outbreak of the First World War; however, it never seemed to fully materialise as a result of the indifference (and sometimes opposition) that organisations such as the Liberal Party had to the legislation.<sup>226</sup> Irish Home Rule (instituting a devolved Irish government), meanwhile, seemingly had the potential to split the Liberal Party throughout both the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as it had previously resulted in a substantial number of Liberal figures and MPs defecting to the newly founded Liberal Unionist Party- which aligned with the Conservative Party- in 1886.<sup>227</sup> The Liberal Party, nonetheless, survived the incident- in part thanks to the strong and innovative leadership of William Ewart Gladstone- and continued to pursue it as key policy until the advent of the Republic of Ireland in 1922.<sup>228</sup> The Great Labour Unrest, furthermore, created ideal conditions for both a fracture in the Liberal Party and a resurgence in the Labour Party to occur prior to 1918. The Great Labour Unrest was a series of loosely connected strikes

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<sup>226</sup> Rosen, A. (2012). *Rise up, Women! : The Militant Campaign of the Women's Social and Political Union, 1903-1914*. Taylor & Francis Group. pp 30, 36-9 & 67.

<sup>227</sup> Cook, C. *A Short History of the Liberal Party 1900-92* (4th ed.). pp 22-24. Cannon, J., & Crowcroft, R. (2015). Irish Home Rule. In *A Dictionary of British History*. Retrieved from <https://www-oxfordreference-com.libaccess.hud.ac.uk/view/10.1093/acref/9780191758027.001.0001/acref-9780191758027-e-1838>.

<sup>228</sup> Adelman, P. *The Rise of the Labour Party 1880-1945* (3rd ed.). pp 41 & 98.

that took place across the UK between the years of 1911 and 1914 and saw a variety of professions, from docking to mining, strike for a total of nearly fifty million working days in its first two years alone.<sup>229</sup> Despite its prevalence, the only real strike action to occur in Keighley during this period was in the summer of 1914 when the town's engineers staged a walkout.<sup>230</sup> Starting in early May, the strike continued until at least late August when a sizeable section of the town's striking workforce finally began to return to work.<sup>231</sup> As a result of the strike, it was reported in the 4 August 1914 edition of the *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer* that:

One large employer states that nine-tenths of his orders have been cancelled, and that it would make less difference to shut down till Christmas than to keep the doors open, in spite of the fixed charges which every big establishment has to meet.<sup>232</sup>

Any traction that the strike may have had, however, ultimately seemed to dissipate as a direct result of the First World War, meaning that the Great Labour Unrest in Keighley had little area to exploit (with engineering one of the few industries within the town that had solid unionisation) or time to take effect.

Overall, the major events listed above, alongside many others, had the potential to both redefine the way in which British politics was conducted and the very people that conducted it. These events repeatedly failed, however, to affect anything more than minimal change;

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<sup>229</sup> Béliard, Y. (2014). Introduction: Revisiting the Great Labour Unrest, 1911-1914. *Labour History Review*, 79(1), 1-17. Doi: 10.3828/lhr.2014.1. p 1.

<sup>230</sup> *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 5 May 1914. p 7.

<sup>231</sup> *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 5 May 1914. p 7; *Shipley Times and Express*, 21 August 1914. p 2.

<sup>232</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 4 August 1914. p 13.

largely in part due to the strength of the Liberal Party and its ability to avoid the need to make meaningful changes to either itself or the system within which it operated.

In Keighley, specifically, the Liberal Party appeared to be largely immune to the impact of significant political events, both local and national, for much of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as the Party was continuously able to return MPs in the town from 1885 to 1918.<sup>233</sup> This meant that whilst events such as the Keighley engineering strike of 1889 may have been key to the emergence of Labour within the town, such events ultimately did little to disturb the Liberal Party's solid grip on power in Keighley. There are a number of reasons as to why this was the case, one of which was the inability of the Labour Party, as the Liberal Party's primary opposition in the area, to regularly contest all of the elections. The financial situation of the Keighley Labour Party was probably one of the primary reasons as to why this was the case. The Keighley ILP accounts between 1897 and 1907, for example, painting a fairly pitiful picture of the ILP's finances, with the branch constantly struggling to balance its income and expenditure.<sup>234</sup> A situation which was only worsened by the enactment of the Osborne Judgement of 1909, which made it 'illegal for a trade union to contribute financially to a political party', and not aided by the fact that the Labour Party, in contrast to its rivals, was a grass roots volunteer led organisation.<sup>235</sup> The Keighley Liberal Party, on the other hand, was very much an oligarchy that, like many other Liberal and Conservative associations during the late nineteenth century, was almost certainly reliant

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<sup>233</sup> Craig, F. W. S. *British Electoral Facts 1885 - 1975* (3rd ed.). pp 116 & 132.

<sup>234</sup> Keighley Independent Labour Party Accounts 1897 – 1907.

<sup>235</sup> Adelman, P. *The Rise of the Labour Party 1880-1945* (3rd ed.). p 41; Worley, M. Introduction: Labour's Grass Roots. In M. Worley (Ed.) *Labour's Grass Roots: Essays on the Activities of Local Labour Parties and Members, 1918-45*. p 1.

upon self-funding and a small group of volunteers.<sup>236</sup> In fact, according to Party records, the Keighley Liberal Association only had 69 subscribed members as of 1898.<sup>237</sup> Furthermore, point twelve of the local Party's constitution (adopted 1896) stated that: 'in all Local Elections, unless otherwise decided by special resolution of the General Committee, each candidate will be responsible for his own expenses.'<sup>238</sup> Nonetheless, an apparatus did exist within the Liberal Party that afforded the institution the ability to retain an agent in the town of Keighley from as early as 1889 to as late as 1918 in order to promote the Party and its philosophies.<sup>239</sup> At an annual cost of around £200 (in 1889), the Keighley Liberal Party could only afford to cover around a third of the agent's salary with its individual subscriptions and local committee contributions, meaning it was probably reliant upon wealthy donors to fund the shortfall of the endeavour in future years.<sup>240</sup> The Keighley Liberal Party's ability to rely upon a class of wealthy donors to either fund its various projects or election campaigns gave the organisation a definitive advantage over its ILP rivals. Likewise, the position of many Liberal Party members as prominent local employers and community activists provided the Liberals with a further advantage over their Labour counterparts. Part of the popularity of John Brigg, for example, Keighley's long serving

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<sup>236</sup> Tanner, D. *Political change and the Labour Party 1900-1918*. p 251; Ball, S., Thorpe, A., & Worley, M. (2005). Elections, Leaflets and Whist Drives: Constituency Party Members in Britain between the Wars. In M. Worley (Ed.) *Labour's Grass Roots: Essays on the Activities of Local Labour Parties and Members, 1918-45*. (pp. 7-32). Burlington: Ashgate. p 8.

<sup>237</sup> Keighley Liberal Association Minute Book Jan 1896 - Apr 1931.

<sup>238</sup> Keighley Liberal Association Minute Book Jan 1896 - Apr 1931.

<sup>239</sup> Keighley County Liberal Association Minute Book Apr 1885 – Dec 1924; *Keighley News*, 16 March 1918. Housed in Keighley Library.

<sup>240</sup> Keighley County Liberal Association Minute Book Apr 1885 – Dec 1924.

Liberal MP, was born of the fact that he was a well-known and highly respected individual within the town.<sup>241</sup> Besides his position as MP within Keighley, Brigg also served as:

an *ex officio* member of the Board of Guardians, a magistrate, a county councillor, as well as being connected with the running of the Mechanics Institute, two schools, two hospitals and the St John's Ambulance, local charities, the Scientific and Literary Society and the football club, not to mention the Chamber of Commerce and Textile Society.<sup>242</sup>

Furthermore, other members of the Brigg family such as John's son, Benjamin Septimus, also played a similarly prominent role within the town's public life, creating a certain feeling of awe and dynasty around the family.<sup>243</sup> As argued by James, the fact that employers were able to and did, in fact, occupy positions on several decision-making bodies at once ensured these men had a great deal of power and thus ensured that town's like Keighley became a sort of political monopoly under their control.<sup>244</sup> For their position as employers provided them with both a good deal of economic and social power, as they were able to simultaneously finance their own campaigns and dissuade opposition through simple threats. Furthermore, their role as public figures provided them with notoriety and name recognition that could otherwise be seldom earned. Whilst many Keighley employers avoided interfering with the political activities of their employees outside of work, a few did

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<sup>241</sup> Laybourn, K. & Reynolds, J. *Liberalism and the Rise of Labour 1890-1918*. p 165; James, D. *Class and Politics in a Northern Industrial Town: Keighley 1880-1914*. p 32.

<sup>242</sup> James, D. *Class and Politics in a Northern Industrial Town: Keighley 1880-1914*. p 32.

<sup>243</sup> James, D. *Class and Politics in a Northern Industrial Town: Keighley 1880-1914*. p 32.

<sup>244</sup> James, D. *Class and Politics in a Northern Industrial Town: Keighley 1880-1914*. pp 32-33.

and as such attracted stinging rebukes from the local ILP.<sup>245</sup> In the 8 March 1896 edition of the *Keighley Labour Journal*, for example, a series of aggressive remarks were made against a number of local Liberals within the town stating that:

a prominent Liberal told a defeated Labour candidate “it was a good job for him he had not won the election, as if he had, his whole future career would have been blasted.” Nor is it very long since a son of one of our so-called Liberal employers told another, with respect to a Labour candidate, that “they would not have such a man about the place,” and this not on account of working capacity, but simply because of his political opinions.<sup>246</sup>

Despite the strength of the accusations that the Keighley ILP was able to level against the town’s Liberal Party during the late nineteenth century, it was ultimately unable to further its cause. Even at its early electoral peak in 1900, for example, the Keighley ILP were only able to secure a respectable, if not spectacular, ‘[four seats] on the Town Council and three on the School Board’.<sup>247</sup> Furthermore, the impact of these victories were tainted by the fact that the majority of them, on a Council level at least, were won in the same area of Keighley, East Ward, and as a result displayed that the electoral appeal of the Keighley ILP was limited.<sup>248</sup> Overall, the town of Keighley showed some strong indications of possible Labour growth in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Whilst some of this growth was realised with the election of Labour representatives to local decision-making bodies and the establishment of a relatively healthy Keighley ILP branch, the story of Keighley Labour

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<sup>245</sup> *Keighley Labour Journal*, 8 March 1896.

<sup>246</sup> *Keighley Labour Journal*, 8 March 1896.

<sup>247</sup> James, D. “Our Philip”: *The Early Career of Philip Snowden*.

<sup>248</sup> James, D. *Class and Politics in a Northern Industrial Town: Keighley 1880-1914*. p 93.

throughout much of the late nineteenth century, in particular, was the story of unrealised potential. For, regardless of what choices the movement made, it was ultimately unable to dent the Liberal Party's solid grip on Keighley in any meaningful way as the Party merely coasted on its reputation alone.

## **Part 2: A Changing of the Guard: Why the Liberal Party no Longer Dominated Keighley from 1918 Onwards**

Despite all of the resilience that was displayed by the Liberal Party at both a local and national level throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the 1918 general election proved to be the beginning of the end for the Party as a major player in British politics. For the Liberals went from controlling 272 parliamentary seats, and forming the government at the close of 1910, to controlling a joint total of 163 parliamentary seats between their two rival factions, the Coalition Liberals (127 MPs) and the Liberals (36 MPs), in 1918.<sup>249</sup> Although David Lloyd George and his Coalition Liberals were able to remain in government as junior partners to the Conservative Party, having orchestrated a right-wing electoral pact, the election ultimately saw the start of a lasting split occur within the Liberal Party and as such unearthed major flaws within both branches electoral platforms.<sup>250</sup> For example, 'the Coalition Liberals were dependent on Conservative votes [in order to secure a number of their parliamentary seats in areas such as the north of England]', where they were particularly vulnerable to Labour surges on account of the industrialised makeup of

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<sup>249</sup> Summers, A. (2015, May 7). Election fails to produce clear winner: ANOTHER TIME: Poll 105 years ago inconclusive - a familiar situation to us with the result of today's general election looking to be one of the closest ever, the result 105 years ago makes for interesting reading. Essex author Andrew Summers shares an extract of his book, *A Hung Parliament: Three Week Election 1910*. *Essex Chronicle*. Retrieved from <https://search-proquest-com.libaccess.hud.ac.uk/docview/1679013522?pq-origsite=summon>; Cook, C. *A Short History of the Liberal Party 1900-92* (4th ed.). p 75.

<sup>250</sup> Cook, C. *A Short History of the Liberal Party 1900-92* (4th ed.). pp 75-77.

the constituencies.<sup>251</sup> Alternatively, many of the returning Liberal MPs survived the 1918 general election on account of luck.<sup>252</sup> Although many Liberal Party members tried to dismiss their 1918 electoral defeat as an anomaly, the Liberal Party went on to endure another major defeat at the local elections of 1919- losing former strongholds like Bradford.<sup>253</sup> In Keighley, specifically, the 1918 general election saw the Liberal Party lose the town for the first time in its history.<sup>254</sup> In a somewhat surprising turn of events, however, it was the Conservative Party that won the seat from the Liberals as opposed to Labour.<sup>255</sup> This, however, can be attributed to a number of factors such as low voter turnout, post-war patriotism and the fragmentation of the left wing vote. In Keighley, the issue of low voter turnout was of particular importance, with the *Keighley News* frequently noting its concern over the speed at which the 1918 general election was being pushed ahead and, more specifically, how this meant that some newly enfranchised voters such as those within the armed forces would be unable to vote.<sup>256</sup> One example of this can be found in the 30 November 1918 edition of the *Keighley News* in which it was noted that the Conservative candidate:

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<sup>251</sup> Cook, C. *A Short History of the Liberal Party 1900-92* (4th ed.). p 76.

<sup>252</sup> Cook, C. *A Short History of the Liberal Party 1900-92* (4th ed.). p 76.

<sup>253</sup> Cook, C. *A Short History of the Liberal Party 1900-92* (4th ed.). pp 80-81.

<sup>254</sup> Craig, F. W. S. *British Electoral Facts 1885 - 1975* (3rd ed.). pp 116 & 132.

<sup>255</sup> Loft, P., Uberoi, E., & Watson, C. (House of Commons Library). (2020). *1918-2019 Election Results by GE*. Retrieved from <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-8647/>.

<sup>256</sup> *Keighley News*, 30 November 1918. Housed in Keighley Library.



Mr. Clough professes a great regard for the soldiers and sailors. He would show it better by condemning an election carried through in their absence, an election in which they can have no voice, and many of them even no vote.<sup>257</sup>

In 1922, under more regular circumstances, Labour would finally take the seat for the first time in its history- thus cementing the growing irrelevance of the Liberal Party in Keighley.<sup>258</sup>

To conclude, the 1918 general election signalled a major downturn for the Liberal Party as a leading political entity across Britain, with the Party suffering major blows to both its electability and viability as a force for political change. The difficulty facing the Liberal Party at this point was then further perpetuated by the Party's increasing lack of appeal in key areas such as Keighley due to the existence of both a viable Labour alternative and a growing sentiment of anti-Liberalism. The latter of which was cultivated by the First World War and the Liberal Party split.

The post-war development of anti-Liberalism can, in large part, be attributed to the growing incompetence amongst the highest ranks of the various Liberal administrations that operated throughout the UK between 1914 and 1918. Asquith, in particular, was the target of much criticism, with his choice to dissolve the longstanding Liberal administration in favour of a coalition government in 1915, marking 'a major event in the Liberal retreat' and seeing his leadership privately attract much disdain from senior Liberals.<sup>259</sup> Prior to this, his Liberal government would also attract public disdain as a result of their lack of preparedness for and poor management of the War's initial stages.<sup>260</sup> Asquith's government, nonetheless,

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<sup>257</sup> *Keighley News*, 30 November 1918. Housed in Keighley Library.

<sup>258</sup> Craig, F. W. S. *British Electoral Facts 1885 - 1975* (3rd ed.). pp 116 & 132.

<sup>259</sup> Wilson, T. *The Downfall of the Liberal Party 1914 – 1935*. pp 49-50.

<sup>260</sup> Wilson, T. *The Downfall of the Liberal Party 1914 – 1935*. p 50.

were able to remain popular with some of their contemporaries, who viewed the incoming Lloyd George government with suspicion. In the 9 December 1916 edition of the *Keighley News*, for example, the paper led with an article remarking:

Whether we are passing through the most critical period of the war or not, we are passing through a period of grave changes at home, and those primarily responsible for these changes will have much to answer for if the results on the war should be otherwise than for good. Their own expectations on this point are certainly not shared by the generality of the nation. The developments of the last few days are not the outcome of any popular demand for a change of Government. They are the outcome of political intrigue and of a Metropolitan press propaganda marked by a virulence of denunciation scarcely ever paralleled in this country.<sup>261</sup>

Articles such as this one from the *Keighley News*, whilst not necessarily representative of the entire population's views, showcase that the public were desperate for the resolution of the First World War and, perhaps, not only became disaffected with the Liberal Party's poor governance during the early stages of the conflict, but also the political melodrama within which the Party engulfed itself. For the leadership disputes between Lloyd George and Asquith only served to make the machinery of government more difficult to operate and as such only served to extend the War. Reflecting on the state of the Liberal Party in the immediate aftermath of the transition from Asquith's Coalition to that of Lloyd George, the *Keighley News*, specifically, noted that 'the situation is fraught with danger to the welfare of the Liberal Party' and that 'during the past two years and a-quarter [Liberal Party division]

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<sup>261</sup> *Keighley News*, 9 December 1916. Housed in Keighley Library.

has not really been dead but only sleeping.<sup>262</sup> Furthermore, the paper also noted that with this latest development that Parliament had experienced ‘a marked change in spirit’, alluding to a possibility of the renewal of bitterness between Asquith and Lloyd George down the line.<sup>263</sup>

In a rather telling moment for the future of the Liberal Party, the major issue of the 1918 general election campaign proved to be the melodrama over the dispensation of David Lloyd George’s coupons.<sup>264</sup> As defined by Cook, a coupon ‘was the nickname given to the letter jointly signed by Bonar Law and Lloyd George stating that the holder was the officially recognised Government candidate.’<sup>265</sup> The controversial and disadvantageous way in which these coupons were dispersed throughout the Liberal Party as opposed to the Conservative Party led to contemporary commentators and historians alike questioning the motives behind Lloyd George’s actions, with the charges levelled against him ranging from personal benefit to stupidity.<sup>266</sup> In Keighley, the coupon was provided to Robert Clough as opposed to the ‘Asquithian Liberal’, William Somervell.<sup>267</sup> First elected at a by-election in April 1918, Somervell entered the race as Keighley’s incumbent MP and his rejection at the hands of Lloyd George’s Coalition was to dominate the local coverage of the election.<sup>268</sup> With the 7

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<sup>262</sup> *Keighley News*, 16 December 1916. Housed in Keighley Library.

<sup>263</sup> *Keighley News*, 16 December 1916. Housed in Keighley Library.

<sup>264</sup> Wilson, T. *The Downfall of the Liberal Party 1914 – 1935*. pp 140-141.

<sup>265</sup> Cook, C. *A Short History of the Liberal Party 1900-92* (4th ed.). p 74.

<sup>266</sup> Cook, C. *A Short History of the Liberal Party 1900-92* (4th ed.). pp 74 & 73; Wilson, T. *The Downfall of the Liberal Party 1914 – 1935*. pp 140-141 & 149.

<sup>267</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 2 December 1918. p 6.

<sup>268</sup> *The Manchester Guardian*, 29 April 1918. p 4.

December 1918 edition of the *Leeds Mercury* reporting on a 'LIVELY UNIONIST MEETING AT KEIGHLEY' in which:

Mr. J. Ellison Haggas criticised Mr. Somervell's position as a supporter of Mr. Asquith rather than Mr. Lloyd George. Mr Somervell he said, was not a supporter of Mr. Lloyd George as he pretended to be in April, or he would not have been opposed now.<sup>269</sup>

The situation finally came to its natural conclusion on Election Day, with the Conservative Clough narrowly defeating the Liberal Somervell and Labour Bland.<sup>270</sup> Speaking on the result of the election, Clough 'acknowledged that his supporters had included patriotic Labour men and Liberals, who approved of the Coalition policy, and trusted that they would never have cause to regret their choice.'<sup>271</sup> The Liberals- through Sir John Clough- blamed their first loss in Keighley upon 'the treacherous conduct of Mr. Lloyd George.'<sup>272</sup> And 'Mr. Bland complained of having been slandered and maligned during the contest.'<sup>273</sup>

Overall, the civil war that engulfed the Liberal Party in 1918, as a result of the First World War and the power vacuum that it created at the highest level of British politics, almost caused irreparable damage to the Party and its reputation. For not only did the dispute allow the Conservative Party to secure the reins of government, but it also allowed the

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<sup>269</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 7 December 1918. p 8.

<sup>270</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 30 December 1918. p 4.

<sup>271</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 30 December 1918. p 4.

<sup>272</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 30 December 1918. p 4.

<sup>273</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 30 December 1918. p 4.

Labour Party to usurp the Liberal Party's niche of supporters and validity as the official Opposition.

Although factors, besides the Liberal split, like the Representation of the People Act 1918 were of huge importance to the growth of the Labour Party at the expense of the Liberal Party in the early twentieth century, it must be noted that the Labour Party- both during and prior to the First World War- had begun to establish itself as a clear and viable alternative to the Liberals. With the Liberal Party appearing to be slowly dying in some areas. In Keighley, for example, the Keighley County Liberal Association only recorded a total of four meetings between the War's start in 1914 and its near conclusion by the end of 1917.<sup>274</sup> Whilst the War, similarly, impacted the Keighley ILP, it did so to a much lesser extent, with the organisation still regularly meeting throughout the conflict in order to conduct business.<sup>275</sup> The only difference being that both the War and the issues arising from the conflict were now considered as a part of the Party's decisions. For example, one of the ILP's resolutions from 1917 stated that:

This meeting emphatically condemns any forcible deportation of aliens to their native countries for political motives, including military service, and it demands that the British Government should withdraw its decision of compelling aliens to enter the British Army under threat of compulsory repatriation, and should abandon its policy of deporting French, Italian, Serbian, etc., defaulters to their native countries.<sup>276</sup>

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<sup>274</sup> Keighley County Liberal Association Minute Book Apr 1885 – Dec 1924.

<sup>275</sup> Keighley Independent Labour Party Minute Book 1914 – 1917; Keighley Independent Labour Party Minute Book 1917 – 1920.

<sup>276</sup> Keighley Independent Labour Party Minute Book 1917 – 1920.

This contrast in the activity of both the Keighley Liberal Party and Keighley ILP throughout much of the wartime period serves as a means to exemplify the different directions in which the two Parties were heading in the early twentieth century. With the Keighley Liberal Party a dwindling organisation dependent upon the support of less than 70 members towards the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>277</sup> Support that appeared to almost dissipate entirely after the 1918 general election, with Cook noting that ‘many local Liberal Associations suffered an almost total collapse of organisation, membership and activities.’<sup>278</sup> Meanwhile, the Keighley ILP was a flourishing organisation with 120 members towards the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>279</sup> A number which was additionally enhanced by the growth of Labour organisations such as trade unions throughout the early twentieth century.<sup>280</sup> Although the Keighley ILP was an imperfect organisation, it was an organisation that experienced lots of growth in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and as such was an organisation in the ascendancy. In contrast, the Keighley Liberal Party was a persistent, albeit unstable, presence across the town during this time frame, with its low and aging membership (as evidenced by its 1898 membership total and the death of many of its key figures such as Sirs- Swire Smith and John Brigg- which will be discussed later) clear signs of decline.<sup>281</sup> As such, the organisation was reliant upon the strength of the national Liberal Party for its continued success and as a result of its decline, which was facilitated by the First World War and the internal Liberal Party conflict, the Keighley Liberal Party began to decline too. With

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<sup>277</sup> Keighley Liberal Association Minute Book Jan 1896 - Apr 1931.

<sup>278</sup> Cook, C. *A Short History of the Liberal Party 1900-92* (4th ed.). p 80.

<sup>279</sup> Laybourn, K. & Reynolds, J. *Liberalism and the Rise of Labour 1890-1918*. p 62.

<sup>280</sup> Adelman, P. *The Rise of the Labour Party 1880-1945* (3rd ed.). pp 44-45.

<sup>281</sup> Keighley Liberal Association Minute Book Jan 1896 - Apr 1931; *The Times*, 18 March 1918. p 5; *The Manchester Guardian*, 2 October 1911. p 9.

the only time that the Liberal Party could purport to have any real relevance within Keighley after 1922, being for a brief spell in 1923 when it won the town's parliamentary seat on account of the Conservative Party's absence at the poll.<sup>282</sup>

As many historians have noted over the years, the rise of Labour was closely connected to and largely dependent upon the support that the Party received from the unions. Whilst historians such as Adelman noted that a significant part of this relationship was developed in the pre-war period from 1906 to 1914, there is no doubt that the War and the way in which the conflict was conducted helped to further strengthen this relationship.<sup>283</sup> In Keighley, for example, the town experienced some strike activity, both potential and realised, throughout the duration of the First World War- despite little history of industrial action beforehand. In contrast to other areas, where strike action was more prevalent, unions in Keighley were, seemingly, more apprehensive about pursuing such action. In the 16 December 1916 edition of the *Keighley News*, for example, 'the president of the Keighley branch of the Amalgamated Society of Toolmakers' was eager for the paper to clarify that his sector was constructively engaging with the Government; having previously published a press notice from the Minister of Munitions, on 25 November, in relation to the recruitment of engineers 'which stated that endeavours were made by representatives of the Government to obtain a conference with representatives of the other skilled engineering unions concerned, but it was not found possible to collect them in time.'<sup>284</sup> Subsequently, the paper published the Minister's updated remarks that '[he] should like to express [the Government's] appreciation of the very prompt response made to the invitation by the

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<sup>282</sup> Loft, P., Uberoi, E., & Watson, C. (House of Commons Library). *1918-2019 Election Results by GE*.

<sup>283</sup> Adelman, P. *The Rise of the Labour Party 1880-1945* (3rd ed.). pp 44-45.

<sup>284</sup> *Keighley News*, 16 December 1916. Housed in Keighley Library.

[union] executives at very short notice.<sup>285</sup> The eagerness of individuals such as the aforementioned union leader to avoid being seen in an unfavourable light was almost certainly an exercise in both public relations and caution. For the Government's passage, and subsequent amendment, of laws such as the Defence of the Realm Act 1914 (DORA) 'allowed the Government to seize factories and land to produce the huge amount of munitions and weapons that were needed to win the war' and, simultaneously, subject the workers, as with all citizens, 'to the rule of military courts.'<sup>286</sup> Consequently, the ramifications for carrying out strike action could be extremely severe for a union both legally and publically. Furthermore, as noted by Laybourn, unions were put in an additionally compromising position by the fact that the TUC 'declar[ed] an industrial truce and accept[ed] the Munitions Act, which outlawed strikes in connection with war work, in 1915.'<sup>287</sup> It was the Government's enactment of extremely stringent and divisive controls such as these that led historians, like Shepherd, to suggest that the Liberal Party's crisis in the early twentieth century was in part related to the restrictive illiberal policies it enacted.<sup>288</sup> For the choice of the Liberal led government to sacrifice both its ideals and society's core freedoms to enhance its chances of winning the War meant that the Party had to undergo a fundamental rethink of its core principles, whilst also suffering from the inevitable public fallout garnered by its choices.

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<sup>285</sup> *Keighley News*, 16 December 1916. Housed in Keighley Library.

<sup>286</sup> UK Parliament. (2021). *Defence of the Realm Act 1914*. Retrieved from <https://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/parliament-and-the-first-world-war/legislation-and-acts-of-war/defence-of-the-realm-act-1914/>.

<sup>287</sup> Laybourn, K. *A Century of Labour*. p 24.

<sup>288</sup> Shepherd, J. *The Flight from the Liberal Party: Liberals who joined Labour, 1914-31*. p 26.



Despite the deterrents against striking, as previously mentioned, some strike action did take place in Keighley throughout the duration of the First World War. One such incident was a strike of tramway workers reported in 19 May 1917 edition of the *Keighley News* in which it was noted that:

On behalf of the strikers- who number about sixty- it is stated that some time ago the men were offered an extra halfpenny per hour to the exclusion of the women, but the offer was refused on the ground that a promise had been made when women were first engaged that they should be put on the same footing as the men as regarded wages and conditions. A special committee of the Corporation charged with the task of dealing with all bonus questions offered a 3s. war bonus, but again the women were excluded. The outcome was a fresh demand on behalf of the men and women, the terms to include the Bradford scale, except that a war bonus of 6s. would be accepted in place of Bradford's 8s.<sup>289</sup>

The basis for the strike action outlined above was a combination of a low rate of pay and males supporting their female colleagues, which according to the national archives were amongst the most common reasons for industrial action during the First World War.<sup>290</sup> In contrast to the public talks between the engineering unions and the Government that dominated the 16 December 1916 edition of the *Keighley News*, however, the dispute outlined above was in a sector not directly associated with the war effort and as such should have been able to strike. Nonetheless, engaging in strike activity proved to be difficult for

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<sup>289</sup> *Keighley News*, 19 May 1917. p 4. Retrieved from <https://hardenvillagecouncil.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Kly-News-19-May-1917-Bertie-Graham-p-3-and-5b.pdf>.

<sup>290</sup> The National Archives. *Strike action*. Great Wharton. Retrieved from <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/first-world-war/home-front-stories/strike-action/>.

the tramway workers, with one employee claiming that ‘months ago we were ready to cease work, [but the] head office of our union said we could not [as] we were under the Munition Act.’<sup>291</sup> Furthermore, the same individual noted that in order to resolve this situation- the workers were required to receive external arbitration.<sup>292</sup> Ultimately, the way in which legislation such as DORA and the Munition Act restricted certain union activity and could be weaponised against others meant that the Liberal Party, as leaders of the Government, lost any remaining credibility that it may have had regarding union activity; particularly, when the individuals that stood to benefit from such acts were the business owning classes that typically supported the Liberal Party.

Whilst the First World War, in a great many ways, correlated with an increase in anti-Liberalism and Liberal Party decline at both a local and national level, this was not the end for the Liberal Party in Keighley. Despite the inevitability of its decline, similar to the early Keighley ILP, the Liberal Party had a string of talented individuals that ensured the organisation punched above its weight throughout the 1910s. Subsequently, the Liberals may have continued to be a strong presence in the town until, at least, the 1920s if it had retained these individuals. Unfortunately, however, the Keighley Liberal Party was unable to do so, with a significant number of the aforementioned individuals dying due to advanced years. Sir Swire Smith, for example, Keighley’s Liberal MP between the years 1915 and 1918 was one such case.<sup>293</sup> Elected unopposed in 1915, shortly after the formation of the

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<sup>291</sup> *Keighley News*, 19 May 1917. p 4. Retrieved from <https://hardenvillagecouncil.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Kly-News-19-May-1917-Bertie-Graham-p-3-and-5b.pdf>.

<sup>292</sup> *Keighley News*, 19 May 1917. p 4. Retrieved from <https://hardenvillagecouncil.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Kly-News-19-May-1917-Bertie-Graham-p-3-and-5b.pdf>.

<sup>293</sup> Keighley & District Local History Society. (N/A). *Digital Archives- Sir Swire Smith*. Retrieved from <https://www.flickr.com/photos/keighleyhistory/19586580781/in/album-72157655709316125/>.

Coalition government, Smith was a highly valued figure within Keighley.<sup>294</sup> He had garnered a strong local reputation through his involvement in several organisations and, more specifically, his 'friendship with Andrew Carnegie [which] brought England's first Carnegie library to Keighley'.<sup>295</sup> Carnegie had agreed 'to provide, at a cost of £10,000, a free library for the borough of Keighley' before late 1899 and did so as during his earlier visit to the town:

The lack of a free library appears to have struck the visitor most of all, and on learning how many other calls there had been on the philanthropy and the revenues of the community- for a new hospital, for street improvements, water supply, and other undertakings in hand or immediate prospect- he signified to Sir Swire his wish to place the inhabitants of Keighley in possession of a library accessible to all.<sup>296</sup>

This meant that Smith, like Brigg before him, was well-respected as both a community leader and philanthropist within the confines of Keighley, and as such was an electorally tricky proposition for any rival party. This does not mean that Smith was without opposition, however, as whilst Labour may have joined Asquith's Coalition and then later Lloyd George's Coalition in 1915 and 1916 respectively, significant parts of the Party still had severe reservations about the First World War and opposed the conflict.<sup>297</sup> In Keighley that meant that upon the death of Sir Swire Smith in March 1918, his Liberal successor, William

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<sup>294</sup> Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer, 30 June 1915. p 11; Laybourn, K. *A Century of Labour*. p 24; Keighley & District Local History Society. *Digital Archives- Sir Swire Smith*.

<sup>295</sup> Keighley & District Local History Society. *Digital Archives- Sir Swire Smith; The Observer*, 17 March 1918. p 8.

<sup>296</sup> *Sunderland Daily Echo and Shipping Gazette*, 9 August 1899. p. 2.

<sup>297</sup> Laybourn, K. *A Century of Labour*. p 24.

Somervell, faced significant Independent Labour opposition during his by-election campaign.<sup>298</sup> Of the campaign, Somervell remarked that:

the issues between Mr. Bland and himself appeared to be narrowing. Both wanted peace, but with a difference. Mr. Bland, who seemed to have copied points from his earlier-issued address, asked us to negotiate for peace and to trust Germany.<sup>299</sup>

Somervell's tactic of smearing Bland as a German sympathiser ultimately proved to pay dividends, with Somervell elected by 4,873 votes to Bland's 2,349.<sup>300</sup> Nonetheless, 'Mr. Bland expressed satisfaction that 32 per cent of the voters had supported the "peace by negotiation" policy.'<sup>301</sup>

Having been elected on a weakened mandate and with little time to establish himself as the town's MP, Somervell then went on to contest Keighley at the 1918 general election and, seemingly, lost his seat as a victim of the national trend of anti-Liberalism.<sup>302</sup> Ahead of the election, the fact that Somervell was from Kendall, and not a local man, was highlighted by his Conservative opponents.<sup>303</sup> Had an individual such as Sir Swire Smith or Sir John Brigg therefore contested that 1918 general election, a strong case could be made that the Liberals may have retained the seat of Keighley for at least another four years given the esteem with which both men were held in the town. It is difficult to see any individual doing much more, however, as the speed at which politics was changing, particularly at a national

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<sup>298</sup> *The Observer*, 17 March 1918. p 8; *The Manchester Guardian*, 29 April 1918. p 4.

<sup>299</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 24 April 1918. p 4.

<sup>300</sup> *The Manchester Guardian*, 29 April 1918. p 4.

<sup>301</sup> *The Manchester Guardian*, 29 April 1918. p 4.

<sup>302</sup> *The Manchester Guardian*, 29 April 1918. p 4; *Leeds Mercury*, 30 December 1918. p 4.

<sup>303</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 7 December 1918. p 8.

level, from 1918 onwards meant that local MPs were increasingly vulnerable to radical swings in the mood of the electorate as a result of national issues.

### **Part 3: A Long Awaited Coronation: How the ILP Won in Keighley in 1922**

In 1922, under more regular circumstances, Labour was able to finally win the seat of Keighley- beating the Conservatives and the Liberals in a three horse race. Unlike the previous election campaigns in Keighley, 1922 was different in the fact that it had very few external factors affecting the outcome of the race. The campaign, nonetheless, was far from straight forward, with a number of complex dynamics at play. Robert Clough, the well-respected incumbent Tory MP, was standing down; the son of Sir John Brigg, one of Keighley's beloved former Liberal MPs, was trying to resurrect the local Party's hopes; and a large percentage of Keighley's population would be exercising their right to vote for the first time having been absent in 1918.<sup>304</sup> So how did Labour emerge from this chaos as victors?

The primary reason as to why Labour was able to finally win in 1922 was because of vote splitting. This can be seen as in 1923 in a two horse race between a Labour and Liberal candidate, the Liberal won- suggesting that whilst Labour held a plurality of the vote, an anti-Labour element, if organised, could and did hold a majority.<sup>305</sup> Ahead of the 1922 election, the Labour candidate, Hastings Lees-Smith, even touched upon the topic of vote splitting as he wrote of the contest ahead that:

We have now a clean fight in Keighley between Labour and the two pre-war parties of Conservatives and Asquithian Liberals. Keighley has never yet returned a

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<sup>304</sup> *Keighley News*, 28 October 1922. Housed in Keighley Library; *Keighley News*, 30 November 1918. Housed in Keighley Library.

<sup>305</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 8 December 1923. p 20.

Conservative by means of Conservative votes and will certainly not do so after the experience of the last Parliament with its Conservative majority. Mr. Asquith and the Liberal Party are extinct volcanoes, and have no programme or solution for the unemployment, reductions in wages and privations which the people are suffering to-day.<sup>306</sup>

Whilst the Keighley Liberal Party had a candidate of strong local pedigree ahead of the 1922 general election in William Brigg, it struggled with an identity crisis and as a result ultimately failed to acknowledge the true cause of its defeat in 1918, meaning it was unable to fully rebound ahead of 1922. The Liberal *Keighley News* exemplified this having stated that a large reason for Somervell's loss in 1918 was because 'he was an outsider, with two local opponents in the field against him.'<sup>307</sup> As such it becomes evident that the local Liberal Party failed to acknowledge the true impact of other factors such as the War, the Party's long term decline or 1918 split in the process of its decline. The latter of which proved to be a, particularly, major issue again in 1922, with rumours circulating in the press:

that at a meeting of Liberal leaders a fortnight ago he [Asquith] had put forward proposals for Liberal reunion which had been turned down by his colleagues, and, in deference to their views, abandoned by him.<sup>308</sup>

In response, Asquith denied the rumours and stated that 'we are all anxious for Liberal reunion.'<sup>309</sup> By this point, however, the damage had already been done, with the Liberal

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<sup>306</sup> *Keighley News*, 28 October 1922. Housed in Keighley Library.

<sup>307</sup> *Keighley News*, 28 October 1922. Housed in Keighley Library.

<sup>308</sup> *Keighley News*, 11 November 1922. Housed in Keighley Library.

<sup>309</sup> *Keighley News*, 11 November 1922. Housed in Keighley Library.

Party earmarked in the eyes of some as a party of indecision and animosity; a viewpoint which the Party failed to effectively combat in either 1922 or the years preceding. On 29 March 1920- shortly after Asquith's return to Parliament- for example, a resolution was passed on behalf of the President of the National Liberal Federation, which 'decline[d] the invitation extended to Liberals by the Prime Minister to enter into "closer co-operation" with the Conservative Party' as no wartime alliance was necessary, to do so would sacrifice party principles and abandon a core of Liberal Party supporters.<sup>310</sup>

Another reason for Labour's belated success in Keighley in 1922 was the quality of the Party's candidate at the election in Hastings Lees-Smith. Whilst William Crawford Anderson and William Bland, the Labour candidates of the preceding decade, had strong local records, both men rarely enjoyed the full support of the Party in their various election bids and had to contend with other external factors such as the wartime fallout.<sup>311</sup> Lees-Smith, on the other hand, had no such issues in his 1922 campaign and had the advantage of boasting an impressive reputation as an Oxford educated former Liberal MP for Northampton (1910-1918), who served during the First World War.<sup>312</sup> The latter of which could be considered key in his election as one of William Bland's major difficulties in his two 1918 campaigns was his position as a pacifist, with individuals such as the Liberal Somervell campaigning on a slogan of 'VOTE FOR SOMERVELL | Down with the Pacifist, and make the Germans Pay.'<sup>313</sup>

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<sup>310</sup> Keighley County Liberal Association Minute Book Apr 1885 – Dec 1924.

<sup>311</sup> Laybourn, K. & Reynolds, J. *Liberalism and the Rise of Labour 1890-1918*. p 165; *The Manchester Guardian*, 29 April 1918. p 4; *Leeds Mercury*, 30 December 1918. p 4.

<sup>312</sup> *Keighley News*, 28 October 1922. Housed in Keighley Library.

<sup>313</sup> *Keighley News*, 14 December 1918. Housed in Keighley Library.

Finally, the choice of Keighley's incumbent Conservative MP, Robert Clough, to step down ahead of the 1922 general election ensured that the Conservative Party was unable to build upon its successful electoral performance in Keighley in 1918 and cement itself as the dominant political force within the town.<sup>314</sup> Of the new Conservative candidate, the Liberal *Keighley News* remarked that 'while, Mr. Foulds has some excellent qualities, he lacks nearly all of those which tended to make Sir Robert Clough so popular a personality'.<sup>315</sup>

Furthermore, the paper also emphasised the ability of 'Sir Robert to appeal so effectually at the last election to the unattached and uncertain voter.'<sup>316</sup> Having secured election with Clough in 1918, under more favourable circumstances, the odds were beginning to mount against the Conservatives in Keighley in 1922, with the Liberal turmoil and poor voter turnout of 1918 no longer major issues. As such, the Party's loss of a figure as significant as Clough was yet another key factor in why the Conservatives lost the seat to the gain of Labour in 1922. Overall, Labour's success in Keighley began to look increasingly imminent from 1918 onwards, with 1922 simply the year in which the breakthrough occurred on account of a variety of factors from the ongoing disarray of rival parties to the strength of Labour's candidate and platform- things which had never quite aligned until this point.

In conclusion, there were several events throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that had the potential to transform the Labour Party from an insurgent electoral force in Keighley to an electoral juggernaut. Yet, it was not until after the occurrence of the First World War in 1922 that the Party was able to finally secure the election of its first MP within the town. Whilst factors such as the First World War's transformative effect on

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<sup>314</sup> *Keighley News*, 28 October 1922. Housed in Keighley Library.

<sup>315</sup> *Keighley News*, 28 October 1922. Housed in Keighley Library.

<sup>316</sup> *Keighley News*, 28 October 1922. Housed in Keighley Library.



popular British political opinion and electoral makeup undoubtedly had an impact upon the Party's fortunes, it seems to be that the most influential factor involved in the rise of Labour from challenger to victor in Keighley after 1918 was the faltering of the Liberal Party at both a local and national level. For it was the Liberals that dominated the seat throughout much of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a level of control which only really began to subside after 1918 when the Party was in the process of a national implosion and the Labour Party became distinguished as the only viable party of the left.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the rise of the Labour Party and the decline of the Liberal Party in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, both locally and nationally, were two very closely interconnected and complex events that unfolded over a prolonged period of time for a number of reasons. For ILPs, like Keighley, underwent three distinct and protracted stages of development in order to ensure that the Labour Party became a party of both local and national significance; a position that was then consolidated by the catastrophic failure of the Liberal Party. Firstly, towns established a local ILP; secondly, towns provided the men and women to both vote for and nurture a local ILP; and finally, towns abandoned their support of the Liberal Party in favour of a local ILP. Whilst it is simple enough to trace how these events unfolded, it must be noted that in order for these events to conspire in the way in which they did that a whole variety of different factors had to play out. Chief amongst these factors was the Liberal Party's continuous neglect of its working class supporters and its assuredness of their continued support, which not only allowed ILPs to form across the country in areas like Keighley, but in some cases thrive with the support of Liberals; for many Liberals simply saw the ILP as a mere extension of their own Party. This enabled ILPs, such as Keighley's, to carve out a meaningful base of support from both apathetic voters and disillusioned Liberals; many of whom would then be influential in establishing the infrastructure that the Keighley ILP would need to first survive and then thrive. Whilst many ILPs would endure a period of stagnation following on from their initial successes in the period between 1900 and 1914, as they no longer had fresh appeal or outsider status, Keighley's ILP, in particular, suffered a difficult period of regression in this time as it lost a whole generation of ILPers to external factors and then preceded to waste another on a

series of internal disputes. This ensured that the many problematic features of the Keighley Liberal Party, and the governance of the Liberal Party as whole, went either largely unopposed or largely unnoticed in the town, with rival parties such as the ILP being too preoccupied to properly hold the Liberal Party to account let alone fulfil its position of power. The outbreak of the First World War, however, would change all of this forever, with the conflict not only having the unique ability to unite Labour and divide Liberals across the country, but also awaken the general population to both movements for social and economic change which had, otherwise, been failing to truly penetrate the sphere of political discourse for decades. This was despite the impact of events and campaigns like the Taff Vale Decision, the Suffragette movement and the Great Labour Unrest in raising awareness for the advantages of certain types of social and economic change. It was the undeniable link between the occurrence of the First World War and the breakthrough of the Labour Party to the detriment of the Liberal Party, which led many Liberal historians to, specifically, identify the War as the major reason behind the turn in fortunes of both the Liberal and the Labour Parties post-1918. Whilst the First World War and the way in which the conflict dramatically overhauled British society was undoubtedly a key element in both the Labour Party's ascent and the Liberal Party's decline at both a local and national level in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the emphasis often placed on the event by Liberal historians seems to be exaggerated. With many historians using the event as an excuse for the Liberal Party's poor management before and after the period between 1914 and 1918. For the Liberal Party had slowly been haemorrhaging its power away, particularly in the north, since as early as 1885, with the Party, seemingly, more interested in warring with itself over a whole plethora of issues rather than undertaking the fundamental rebuild that it needed.

Although the Liberal Party had been showing signs of weakness for decades and was, particularly, vulnerable to a Labour surge in an area such as Keighley, Labour was ultimately unable to win the town's parliamentary seat until as late as 1922. This was despite the fact that some Labour movements were able to secure success in areas similar to Keighley up to sixteen years earlier. So then, why did it take Keighley so long to secure the election of a Labour MP? Well, despite some radical tendencies, Keighley was not quite the same hotbed for left wing politics as other northern or urbanised areas were. Furthermore, the town had a strong, but ultimately failing, Liberal Party apparatus, which was more than enough to delay the advance of an ILP in its tumultuous early stages of development. Finally, the local ILP required the lasting social change that was brought about by the First World War to catapult it from a significant minority to a convincing plurality of the vote share. For it was changes to the composition of the electorate and their overall mind-set that led to both the rise of a emboldened leftist Labour Party and the decline of a floundering centrist Liberal Party. Thus validating the popular historiographical argument that Labour's rise was a near certain process simply accelerated by the First World War.

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