

THE TIME OF POLITICS AND THE POLITICS OF TIME:
EXPLORING THE ROLE OF TEMPORALITY IN BRITISH CONSTITUTIONAL
DEVELOPMENT DURING THE LONG NINETEENTH CENTURY

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Abstract

“The Time of Politics and the Politics of Time: Exploring the Role of Temporality in British Constitutional Development during the Long Nineteenth Century,” studies the role of time in the development of Britain’s liberal democracy. Conceptually, it explores time both as a structure that the procedural framework of the British Parliament produced and as an historical perception that the technological culture of modernity constructed. In both cases, the study focuses on the constitutional significance of perceived fluctuations within the scarcity of political time as well as imagined changes in the pace and continuity of history. Methodologically, I use these conceptualizations of time in order to examine the intersection of four seemingly disparate political phenomena in Victorian and Edwardian Britain: namely, the perceived expansion of democracy, the instrumentalization of rationality in political culture, the devaluation of deliberative practices as forms of political action, and the rise of mass political dissatisfaction with the efficiency of Parliament.

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Introduction:
The Time of Politics and the Politics of Time: Exploring the Role of Temporality in British Constitutional Development during the Long Nineteenth Century

This dissertation studies the role of time in the nineteenth and early twentieth-century development of Britain's liberal democracy. Conceptually, it explores time both as a structure that the institutional and procedural framework of the British Parliament produced and as an historical perception that the instrumental (or means/ends rational) and technological culture of modernity constructed. In both cases, the study focuses on the constitutional significance of perceived fluctuations within the scarcity of political time as well as imagined changes in the pace and continuity of history. Methodologically, I use these conceptualizations of time in order to examine the intersection of four seemingly disparate political phenomena in Victorian and Edwardian Britain: namely, the perceived expansion of democracy, the instrumentalization of rationality in political culture (signified most explicitly by the imaginative transformation of Parliament from the "grand inquest of the nation" to the "legislative machine"), the devaluation of deliberative practices as forms of political action, and the rise of mass political dissatisfaction with the efficiency of Parliament.

The study has two main arguments regarding the above listed points of intersection. First it argues that the perceived expansion of democracy in Britain and a rising sense of the public gaze amongst parliamentarians increased the amount of work demanded of the House of Commons and thus enhanced the degree to which law-making was a time-sensitive endeavour. This process facilitated a re-prioritization of parliamentary business that conceptually divorced "work" from "talk" (legislative

production from legislative deliberation) and led to the recognition that the law-making practices of the House of Commons required acceleration. While initially motivated by a structural shift in time-scarcity, however, the adoption of acceleratory reforms proceeded at a pace that was largely determined by changing visions of continuity/discontinuity in historical time, which manifested themselves in the perceived extent of the connection/disconnection between experience and expectation. When these two categories became divorced at the end of the century, major procedural reforms took place which privileged the action-based executive at the expense of the deliberative privileges of the legislature. Put differently, the study's first argument suggests that the temporality of modernity circumscribed the potential for deliberative democracy in British constitutional development.

The second argument posed in this study concludes that the increasing cultural prevalence of a distinction between experience and expectation as well as the growth and persistence of an image of parliamentary inefficiency helped to create, by the Edwardian period, a new time-based issue for political movements to contest: namely, the appropriate speed of political and legislative action. This temporality, in concert with the Edwardian experience of relative economic and military decline, provided a discursive terrain conducive to the emergence of alarmist political rhetoric which extolled the virtue of efficient political action at the expense of open-ended public political debate. While an emphasis on the virtue of action over talk was a central feature of a number of extra-institutional political movements, such as was evident in the "Deeds not Words" slogan of the Women's Social and Political Union, the present study focuses its analysis on the

linguistic structure of the national efficiency movement and its eventual infusion of the rhetoric deployed by Joseph Chamberlain's movement for tariff reform and imperial union. As we will see, the discursive structure of these movements actively pursued the construction of a "national time" that was defined by scarcity and discontinuity. In these ways, the cultural restriction of deliberative practices in the Edwardian public sphere contained distinct lines of continuity with the procedural limitation of discussion in Parliament.¹

Taken together, the two arguments of this study suggest that a series of transformations within the "time of politics" (the perceived temporal dimension of politics) helped to produce a "politics of time" (the linguistic negotiation of temporality) which ultimately effected a fundamental shift in British political culture, one which significantly limited the potential for deliberative democracy. Yet, while these arguments point to the restriction of democratic practice as inherent to British constitutional development and the temporal logic of modernity, the study does not suggest that these processes completely nullified the potential for a deliberative politics. To the contrary, the final pages of this study offer a novel interpretation of the Edwardian new liberalism that focuses, not on the movement's blending of organic and liberal political philosophy, but rather on the rational and temporal structures that were equally constitutive of its political identity. Through this interpretative framework, I demonstrate the existence of an

¹ When the term "public sphere" is used in this study it is intended to refer solely to formal organizations of public political debate such as the press, party-based meetings, and discussion groups. While this is a more restrictive definition than has been offered in the recent historical literature it is intended to allow the present author to maintain a greater degree of precision in a short study such as this one.

alternative, slower political temporality that was rooted in a rationality based not on the concept of efficiency but rather on the openness of the procedures of inter-subjective communication.

II

Over the course of the past two decades, British political history has experienced both a process of retooling and a significant revival. In part, this development followed from major shifts in the British political climate during the 1980s and 1990s. The growing strength of the political right and the end of the cold war forced many academics to reconsider the socio-economic models of analysis that had previously dominated the study of politics. Consequently, political historians developed new methodological approaches that subjected previously accepted axioms to close scrutiny and revision.² This process resulted in heated debates over the place of power, knowledge and identity in the working of the British polity which caused historian James Vernon to observe that, “in these historic times politics are back in fashion.”³ While the intellectual value of these debates has been significant, the project of the “new political history” remains largely unfinished. Although some areas, such as class and empire, have been thoroughly

² Perhaps the most notable revisions have concerned the issues of class and democratic expansion. On the issue of class see, Patrick Joyce, Visions of the People: Industrial England and the Question of Class, 1840-1914, (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Dror Wahrman, Imagining the Middle Class: The Political Representation of Class in Britain, 1780-1840 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). On the issue of democratic expansion see, James Vernon, Politics and the People: A Study in English Political Culture, 1815-1867, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993)

³ James Vernon, Politics and the People, p. 1

revisited and revised, several other important topics have remained almost entirely uncultivated. Included among these subjects are the institution of Parliament during the Victorian and Edwardian periods and the political function of time.

It may seem strange to suggest that a historiographic lacuna surrounds the British Parliament in its nineteenth and early twentieth-century forms. It is important, perhaps, to clarify that by Parliament I mean the institution itself – its mode of working and its position in the cultural imagination. The work on this subject is not only limited in quantity but also out-of-date.⁴ For a short period in the mid-twentieth century political and administrative historians became aware of this problem in the historical literature. In his 1960 article, “The Growth of Ministerial Control in the Nineteenth-Century House of Commons,” Peter Fraser wrote that “while the reform of the parliamentary electoral system in the nineteenth century offers the historian a well-trodden highway of political controversy, the reform of the internal functioning and procedure of the House of Commons remains... largely trackless and unexplored.”⁵ In an effort to fix this imbalance a few useful articles began to appear. In addition to Fraser’s piece, for example, Lord Campion’s essay, “Parliamentary Procedure, Old and New”, and a few specialized inquiries into changes in parliamentary business such as Colin Leys’, “Petitioning in the

⁴ Indeed, two of the most authoritative works on the subject derive from the Edwardian period: Josef Redlich’s 1908 book, The Procedure of the House of Commons: A Study of its History and Present Form and Sir Courtenay Ilbert’s 1911 book, Parliament, Its History, Constitution and Practice. Josef Redlich, The Procedure of the House of Commons: A Study of its History and Present Form, (London: Constable, 1908); Courtenay Ilbert, Parliament, Its History, Constitution and Practice, (London: Williams and Norgate, 1911)

⁵ Peter Fraser, “The Growth of Ministerial Control in the Nineteenth-Century House of Commons,” English Historical Review, (75), 296, (July 1960), 444

Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries,” David Pring’s, “Standing Committees in the House of Commons”, and Patrick Howarth and Nona Bowring’s books on parliamentary Questions all subjected the institutional and procedural structure of Parliament to historical analysis.⁶ As a rule, however, the study of Parliament remained on the fringes of political historiography.

Things have not changed very much since then. Despite the efforts of the History of Parliament Group and scholars like T.A. Jenkins who believes that “...a third dimension to the political process is being left out”, historians have continued to pay only limited attention to Parliament itself.⁷ As Andrew Adonis observed in 1993:

For all the preoccupation of British historians and political scientists with government and parties, little study has hitherto been devoted to the operation of Parliament in general.... Scholars piecing together the jigsaw of modern political history have shown little interest in the minutiae of parliamentary procedure and the legislative process, while their counterparts concerned with popular politics take that to mean extra-parliamentary politics by definition. In the existing literature, Parliament is the place upon which parties, élites, and interests converge, but where no one congregates.⁸

Due to this historiographic anomaly there is a dearth of information on the legislative procedures and practices of Parliament in the years during which it established its current

⁶ Lord Campion, “Parliamentary Procedure, Old and New,” in Campion, et al., ed., Parliament: A Survey, (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1952); Colin Leys, “Petitioning in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries,” Political Studies, (3), 1, (1955), 45-64; David Pring, “Standing Committees in the House of Commons,” Parliamentary Affairs, (11), 3, (1957), 303-317; Patrick Howarth, Questions in the House: The History of a Unique British Institution, (London: Bodley Head, 1956); D.N. Chester and Nona Bowring, Questions in Parliament, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962)

⁷ T.A. Jenkins, Parliament, Party and Politics in Victorian Britain, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), 1; T.A. Jenkins, “The Whips in the Early Victorian House of Commons,” Parliamentary History, (19), 2, (2000), 259

⁸ Andrew Adonis, Making Aristocracy Work: The Peerage and the Political System in Britain, 1884-1914, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 7

constitutional position. While we have some sense of the course that British constitutional development took in the nineteenth century, we still know almost nothing about how the institutional centre of this developing polity functioned. Clearly, Parliament requires more treatment than it has thus far received.

Political time provides a promising way of analytically approaching the Victorian and Edwardian Parliament. Historians from a variety of sub-disciplinary backgrounds have accepted the premise that over the course of the Victorian and Edwardian periods the dominant modes of experiencing and perceiving time underwent significant change and that these changes affected modes of socialization and British intellectual culture.⁹ As Jerome Buckley has argued, “It was in the nineteenth century, especially in Victorian England that many modern attitudes toward the whole temporal process first emerged. The Victorians... were preoccupied almost obsessed with time.”¹⁰ If changes in the perceived structure of time affected British culture generally, there is certainly no reason

⁹ For a good overview, though with a literary focus, see Jerome Hamilton Buckley, The Triumph of Time: A Study of the Victorian Concepts of Time, History, Progress, and Decadence, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966). Beyond Buckley’s there are a number of academic works that examine time in the Victorian and Edwardian periods. See, for instance, Stephen Kern, The Culture of Time and Space, 1880-1918, (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1983); Wolfgang Schivelbusch, The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the Nineteenth Century, (New York: Urizen Books 1977); Paul Readman, “The Place of the Past in English Culture, 1890-1914,” Past and Present, No. 186, (February 2005), 147-200; P.B.M. Blaas, Continuity and Anachronism: Parliamentary and Constitutional Development in Whig Historiography and the Anti-Whig Reaction 1890-1930, (The Hague, 1978); Peter Mandler, “In the Olden Time: Romantic History and English National Identity, 1820-1850,” in Laurence Brockliss and David Eastwood (eds.) A Vision of Multiple Identities: The British Isles, (Manchester, 1997), 78-92; Peter Mandler, The Fall and Rise of the Stately Home, (New Haven, 1997); Billie Melman, The Culture of History: English Uses of the Past, 1800-1953, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006)

¹⁰ Jerome Hamilton Buckley, The Triumph of Time, pp. 1-2

to believe that the legislators who reformed Britain's Parliament would have been exempt. To be sure, as later chapters in this study will show, parliamentary language in the late nineteenth century contained industrial and technological metaphors, such as the railway or the principle of the division of labour, that were associated with an increasingly fast-paced society. As a category of analysis, then, time/temporality may have the potential to integrate Parliament into the "new political history," healing the traditional division between high and popular politics and providing a more expansive vision of the political. The available methodological and theoretical foundations for conducting a time-based history of British politics, however, present an immediate problem.

In the same way that historians have avoided Parliament, so too have they avoided political time. While British historians have commonly made statements about the structure of time in the Victorian and Edwardian periods, these statements usually amount to little more than rhetorical flourish, lacking the rigor of serious analysis.¹¹ Moreover, in the few instances where time has become a central component of historical analysis, its political significance has been treated as *either* a matter of hours and minutes *or* as a culturally constructed sense of historical continuity. In other words, modern British historiography does not contain a conceptual approach that would provide for a comprehensive understanding of the temporal/political relationship.

¹¹ See, for instance, George Dangerfield, The Strange Death of Liberal England, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 20-21; Jose Harris, Private Lives, Public Spirit: Britain 1870-1914, (London: Penguin 1993), 32-33

In the wider European historiography, things are not much different. While historians such as Reinhart Koselleck, Peter Fritzsche and Roger Griffin have suggested frameworks for grasping the political implications of perceptions of continuity and discontinuity in historical time, these frameworks exhibit some significant problems. Firstly, while all of these scholars convincingly demonstrate that their historical subjects exhibited changes in their perceptions of time, none of them provide an account of the epistemological basis for these shifts. Moreover, while these scholars often point to the political significance of shifting experiences of temporality, they never extend their analysis beyond time's influence as a component of culture.¹² Much like British historiography, then, the wider European field rarely addresses the issue of time in a way that sufficiently captures the complexity of the temporal/political relationship.

For the purpose of the present study it is clearly necessary to look beyond the disciplinary boundaries of history for conceptual guidance. Political science proves useful in this regard. Though as recently as the 1990s political scientists such as Donald Miller, Andreas Schedler and Javier Santiso could complain that "reflections on politics and time have remained unsystematic, implicit, and disperse," the recent work of Hartmut Rosa and William Scheuerman has shifted the intellectual terrain significantly, providing important conceptual devices, such as de-synchronization, which can prove useful for

¹² Reinhart Koselleck, Futures Past: On The Semantics of Historical Time, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004); Reinhart Koselleck, The Practice of Conceptual History: Timing History, Spacing Concepts, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002); Roger Griffin, Modernism and Fascism: The Sense of a Beginning under Mussolini and Hitler, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Peter Fritzsche "Nazi Modern," Modernism/Modernity, 3 (1996), 1-21; Peter Fritzsche, Stranded in the Present: Modern Time and the Melancholy of History, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004)

historians and political scientists alike.¹³ At the same time, however, this work has serious limitations that make the viability of applying it to the British context highly questionable.

The theories postulated by Scheuerman and Rosa convincingly demonstrate that processes of temporal acceleration produce anti-democratic effects by increasing the prerogative of the executive and decreasing the viability of popular political participation. This idea proceeds from the premise that liberal democracy requires a slow-moving temporality that is not in-sync with the demands of modern industrial societies.¹⁴ This point has some merit, for as political philosopher Sheldon Wolin has also argued, “political time, especially in societies with pretensions to democracy, requires... a leisurely pace. This is owing to the needs of political action to be preceded by

¹³ Donald F. Miller, “Political Time,” Time and Society, (2), 2, (1993), 180; Andreas Schedler and Javier Santiso, “Democracy and Time: An Invitation,” International Political Science Review, (19), 01, (1998), 5; Hartmut Rosa, “Social Acceleration: Ethical and Political Consequences of a Desynchronized High-Speed Society,” Constellations, (10), 1, (2003), 3-33; Hartmut Rosa, “The Speed of Global Flows and the Pace of Democratic Politics,” New Political Science, (27), 4, (December 2005), 445-459; William Scheuerman, “Busyness and Citizenship,” Social Research, (72) 2, (Summer, 2005), 447-470; William Scheuerman, “Liberal Democracy and the Empire of Speed,” Polity, (34), 1, (September 2001), 41-69; William Scheuerman, Liberal Democracy and the Social Acceleration of Time, (Maryland: The Johns Hopkins Press, 2004). For further analyses on the subject of acceleration’s impact on legislative procedures see Clinton Rossiter, Constitutional Dictatorship: Crisis Government in the Modern Democracies, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1948). For a sustained treatment of the applicability of these theories to British historical inquiry see Ryan Vieira, “Connecting the New Political History with Recent Theories of Temporal Acceleration: Speed, Politics, and the Cultural Imagination of Fin De Siècle Britain,” History and Theory, (50), 3, (2011), forthcoming

¹⁴ On this point also see Carl Schmitt, “The Crisis of Positive Statutory Legality: The Twentieth Century,” in Hartmut Rosa and William Scheuerman, High-Speed Society, pp. 65-73 and Robert Hassan, Empires of Speed: Time and the Acceleration of Politics and Society, (Boston: Leiden, 2009), 151-186

deliberation... [which] takes time because, typically, it occurs in a setting of competing or conflicting but legitimate considerations.”¹⁵ What Scheuerman and Rosa neglect, however, is that to be at all effective widely representative forms of government require faster legislative mechanisms than do systems that are less representative. It is, therefore, incorrect to assume that all forms of democracy at all stages of development share a monolithic slow-moving temporality. Indeed, the present study finds that the emergence of government based on a widely representative franchise in Britain required and initiated an acceleration of the law-making process that had anti-democratic implications.

Contrary to Scheuerman and Rosa’s somewhat un-historicized theories, the present study suggests that we need to pay much closer attention to the temporal presuppositions implicit within different representative systems, with different procedural logics, at different stages of constitutional development. Scheuerman and Rosa’s model appears to be based on the contemporary American-style Presidential system, which involves fixed terms, a formal separation of powers, and a legislative infrastructure designed to accommodate a democratic franchise. Under such a model political time has a significant degree of stability: the existence of the executive is more or less guaranteed for the duration of its term and the significant demands that a heterogeneous franchise put on the legislature do not threaten to overload the system. In fact, as Scheuerman and Rosa rightly suggest, the significant temporal problems that face the contemporary American legislature come primarily from processes of acceleration that occur outside of the system. In the nineteenth-century British parliamentary system, on the other hand, the

¹⁵ Sheldon Wolin, “What Time Is It?” *Theory and Event*, 1, (1997), 4

temporal problems that emerged were largely products of the system itself. Since the temporality that frames the structure of the contemporary American presidential system differs significantly from that which emerged from Britain's parliamentary system in the nineteenth century, the Scheuerman and Rosa model is not particularly suitable to a study of Victorian and Edwardian British politics.¹⁶

Another problem that precludes the application of Scheuerman and Rosa's model to British history is its lack of any epistemological analysis. While these two scholars provide a compelling account of structural change, neither explains how these changes have been subjectively interpreted or how their meaning has been inter-subjectively negotiated. In other words, they provide no account of the basic mechanisms that allow the structural change to become a matter of politics. In my view, two issues stand out here. These issues are the roles of language and rationality in the phenomenology of temporal experience and its relationship to politics.

¹⁶ This relates to a more general problem in the work of Rosa and Scheuerman: namely, the limited degree of autonomy and agency that they assign to the political. In Rosa's formulation, the political is positioned as posterior to the social, economic and cultural motors of acceleration. At no point in Rosa's model is the political actively engaging with or steering the temporal. While Scheuerman makes some effort to understand the active role of politics in the acceleration process, this begins and ends in his analysis with inter-state competition. Indeed, in most of Scheuerman's work political developments result from temporal alterations: the balance of the separation of powers is disfigured by acceleration as is the potential for democratic citizenship. The present study avoids this pitfall through its dialogue with the "new political history" which views politics as "a field irreducible to social determinants." This premise holds that politics creates and frames its own issues rather than simply reflecting the material interests of particular social constituencies. This idea is not meant to imply a complete divorce between the social and the political. Rather, the "new political history" aims to emancipate the latter from the former, to suggest that each operates within its own logic, and to demonstrate that the relationship between the two is more balanced and complex than has been generally supposed. James Epstein, "Introduction: New Directions in Political History," *Journal of British Studies*, 41, (2002), 255-258

It seems severely problematic that neither Rosa nor Scheuerman account for how linguistic representations affect the construction of time as a political issue. As political philosophers from Aristotle to Arendt have claimed, language is the most basic precondition for politics to occur.¹⁷ Only through language can phenomena become framed as experience, and only through language can individual experiences be communicated and translated into inter-subjective forms of meaning.¹⁸ Moreover, as philosophers such as Paul Ricoeur and David Carr have demonstrated, language not only makes the ontological political, it also makes experience temporal. Indeed, as both Carr and Ricoeur show, the phenomenology of time is empty without an appeal to the hermeneutic of narrative.¹⁹ In these

¹⁷ Aristotle, The Politics, 1253bl; Hannah Arendt, The Human Condition, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 3-4.

¹⁸ As one British historian recently observed, "...politics can only take place within the context of language." James Epstein, Radical Expression: Political Language, Ritual and Symbol in England, 1790-1850, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 28.

¹⁹ David Carr and Paul Ricoeur both argue that narrative is central to the construction of time, though they do so in different ways. Ricoeur argues that humans use devices to combine and make sense of different forms of time. While mechanisms such as calendars and clocks combine "cosmic time" and "lived time" thus creating "historical time", narrative is the device that endows "historical time" with meaning, thereby creating "human time." David Carr takes the argument further, suggesting that narratives are not imposed but rather are natural to the human experience of time. Thus, he suggests that "pre-thematic" narratives structure all human interactions with temporality and that the human experience of time is impossible except through narrative. A similar point is also made, but from the perspective of the historian, in Stephen Heathorn's recent book, For Home, Country and Race: Constructing Gender, Class, and Englishness in the Elementary School, 1880-1914. Here Heathorn illustrates how national historical narratives in English elementary school readers at the beginning of the twentieth century worked to configure a form of "national time" that became a central part of individual political identities. Paul Ricoeur, Time and Narrative, V.I-III, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984-1988); David Carr, Time, History and Narrative: An Essay in the Philosophy of History, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986); David Carr, "Narrative and the Real World: An Argument for Continuity," History and Theory, (25),

ways, Rosa and Scheuerman's failure to address the function of language makes their project of tying acceleration to politics incomplete, and it makes the application of their model to British constitutional history untenable.

In addition to language, Rosa and Scheuerman also leave the question of rationality (that is, the implicit or explicit calculus through which actions are deemed to be appropriate or well-reasoned) entirely unaddressed. Yet, as scholars within the Frankfurt tradition of critical theory, from Max Horkheimer to Jürgen Habermas have argued, the anti-democratic implications of efficiency (or acceleration in Rosa's vocabulary) are largely produced by the epistemological prevalence of an instrumental understanding of what constitutes rational action.²⁰ Such an understanding, these scholars suggest, privileges the conscious interests of the independent subject and tends to reduce all interactions to subject/object relationships which, in turn, erodes the rationality of inter-subjective discussion and devalues the time spent between the realization and actualization of desires. In short, instrumentality as epistemology makes fast paced political action seem more rational than the necessarily slow pace of deliberative engagement. In order to understand the relationship between time and politics then, it is necessary to go beyond Rosa and Scheuerman's strictly structural account and engage with the epistemological mechanisms that mediate the appeal of acceleration/deceleration.

2, (1986), 117-32; Stephen Heathorn, For Home, Country and Race: Constructing Gender, Class and Englishness in the Elementary School, 1880-1914, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 56-84

²⁰ Max Horkheimer, Eclipse of Reason, (New York: Continuum, 2004); Herbert Marcuse, One Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Societies, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970); Jürgen Habermas, Theory of Communicative Action, (New York: Polity Press, 1994)

A time-based analysis of British politics during the Victorian and Edwardian periods clearly requires a framework that will account for elements that have been left unexplained in the existing historiographic and theoretical work on the relationship between time and politics. We need to explain: first, the parliamentary forms and procedures which created the basis for a structural time-scarcity in the House of Commons; second, the linguistic and logical structures that allowed the acceleration of legislative movement to become a higher political virtue than the traditionally protected deliberative privileges of Private Members and minority groups in the House; and third the way in which this understanding of time affected political debate outside of Parliament. Only by developing an understanding of these three issues can we begin to grasp the shifting significance of time in the development of Britain's liberal democracy. In the remaining pages of this introduction I will provide a chapter by chapter summary of my argument that outlines how the above listed issues are addressed.

III

Chapter 1 explores how constitutional and customary changes in nineteenth-century British politics introduced into parliamentary life and practice two sets of competing time demands which created a large variance between the amount of time required for parliamentary work and the amount of time available to complete it. The first temporal tension examined by this chapter concerns the institutional and procedural structure of Parliament. Over the course of the century the quantity of Public Bills presented to Parliament each Session increased dramatically. Simultaneously, since

parliamentary reporting made the House of Commons increasingly visible to a wide public, the incentive for Members to seek publicity through their activity in the House also increased. As the amount of time required for legislative work rose, therefore, the verbosity of Members came to increasingly consume the House's time. The second time-based tension examined in the first chapter concerns the parliamentary life of the individual Member of Parliament. Just as the increasingly public nature of parliamentary debates compelled Members to spend more time in the House, the rising degree of constituency pressure that a widening franchise produced forced them to also allocate substantially more time to constituency work. While historians such as Frank O'Gorman have shown that a Member's constituency duties were arduous in the late Hanoverian period, the expansion of the franchise and the limitation of corrupt electoral practices in the nineteenth century meant that, in general, the Victorian Member had to spend more time knocking on doors during the canvass and drafting correspondence while in London.²¹ As such, the necessarily finite amount of time available to the Member became trapped within a tension that pulled in several separate directions.

Since these two sets of competing demands took place within a constitutional framework where time was finite, there emerged a severe aggravation of the time scarcity inherent to Britain's parliamentary system.²² This progressive limitation of parliamentary

²¹ Frank O'Gorman, "Campaign Rituals and Ceremonies: The Social Meaning of Elections in England 1780-1860," *Past and Present*. 135 (May 1992), 79-115

²² Before proceeding further into the argument it is necessary at this point to explain what exactly I mean by "the time-scarcity inherent to Britain's parliamentary system." Two constitutional forms put maximum limits on the quantity of time available to legislators. These forms were, first, the existence of a seven year maximum term limiting the life-span of each Parliament and, second, the practice that all Bills died that

time forced parliamentarians to re-evaluate the methods of parliamentary governance and, in particular, to question what constituted a rationally organized legislature. In this process, which forms the primary subject of chapters two and three, an instrumental rationality which conceptually divorced acts of deliberation, such as Questions or Motions, from perceptions of efficient legislative production progressively displaced a value-based rationality that privileged the maintenance of historical continuity.

Chapter 2 examines the changing ways in which parliamentarians made sense of the increasing scarcity of parliamentary time in the period between the procedural resolutions introduced by the Government of Spencer Perceval in 1811 and those introduced by the Beaconsfield Ministry in 1878. I argue that while parliamentarians clearly recognised the time problem posed by an increasing volume of parliamentary work, the way in which they rationalized this issue precluded the possibility of any systematic overhaul of the House's procedural code. This particular rationalization, I claim, proceeded from an understanding that saw parliamentary debate as reasonable insofar as it conformed to normatively accepted rules of debate. In this way, Parliament

had not received Royal Assent by the prorogation of the Session. Additionally, the time-consuming nature of the traditional procedures for legislative scrutiny ensured that law-making was necessarily slow-moving and that, as Reginald Palgrave observed in 1878, "the loss of national time is an evil inevitable to parliamentary government." In other words, the basic structure of the parliamentary system ensured that the time available to the legislature was necessarily scarce and thus any increase in the volume of work thrown upon the House would only work to exacerbate this inherent scarcity. Reginald Palgrave, The House of Commons, (London: McMillan, 1878), 31. The seven year maximum term was instituted in 1715 with the Septennial Act in order to limit popular political excitement and help secure the position of the new royal family. This maximum term persisted until 1911 when it was amended by a provision in the Parliament Act which established 5 years as the maximum term. Prior to 1715, the 1694 Meeting of Parliament Act had set the maximum parliamentary term at 3 years and before 1694 there had never been a statutory limit on parliamentary terms.

was understood to be rational so long as it operated within the historically established customary procedures of the House which were seen as the infrastructure by which the virtues of free speech and independence were transmitted from the past into the present. This rationalization, I argue, helped to create a three-part temporal discourse that made the reform of procedure according to principles of efficiency seem absurd. This discourse, I argue, persisted in a dominant position until the late 1870s.

In Chapter 3 I argue that by the early 1880s an instrumental rationality which was rooted in ideas of means/ends efficiency had clearly replaced the value-based rationality as the dominant mode of understanding the problem of parliamentary time. This new rationale saw the increasing volume of oratory in the House as a disease that impeded the proper function of the legislature. As this perception of an inefficient Commons became prevalent, parliamentarians began to seriously question the ability of the historically established procedures of the Commons to cope with contemporary parliamentary verbosity. These questions resulted in the growth of a perception of historical discontinuity. While descriptions of the constitution made during the earlier part of the nineteenth century tended to stress the ancient origins of British liberty, those made at the end of the century often stressed the “new”, “unique” and “unprecedented” character of the political present.²³ In short, an epistemological transformation in rationality helped to secure a connection between the actual scarcity of parliamentary time and culturally constructed perceptions of continuity in historical time.

The advance of instrumentality and the corollary sense of historical disconnect

²³ See, for example, William Rathbone, “Reform in Parliamentary Business,” Fortnightly Review, 29, (1881), 171

went hand in hand with three developments in British political culture and practice: these were, the mounting cultural fascination with speed, rates of change, and progress that grew out of the technological and industrial innovations of the nineteenth century; the succession of Charles Stewart Parnell to the leadership of the Irish Home Rule Party and the vast increase in parliamentary obstruction that he initiated; and the emergence of an imagined democracy, that followed from changes in Britain's constitutional structure after 1867. During the late Victorian period, these developments came together in Britain's national political culture and produced a new executive centred strand of constitutional discourse that could represent any attempt to exercise opposition to the sitting Ministry through the tactics of legislative delay as an anti-British clogging of the "legislative machine." Thus, by the end of the century, I claim that perceived transformations within the time of politics had produced a politicization of time that while veiled in a democratic language contained significant anti-democratic tendencies.

In the fourth and final chapter, I explain how, by the beginning of the twentieth century, a politicization of time outside of Parliament shared striking similarities with what emerged in the procedural debates of the 1880s. Though both Liberal and Conservative Ministries from 1879-1906 had secured executive control over the allocation of parliamentary time, Parliament itself never lost the image of inefficiency that had built up over the course of the nineteenth century. In fact, party splits and ministerial resignations, such as those that occurred in the Unionist Party over tariff reform, only worked to further that image. Moreover, the continuing belief in parliamentary inefficiency was accompanied in the Edwardian period, by a growing sense

of rapid change accentuated by political decline and crisis.²⁴ Consequently, oppositional political movements in the Edwardian period, most notably national efficiency and tariff reform, were provided with the opportunity to integrate into their rhetoric an imagery of temporal de-synchronization between Britain's state and its society. These movements imagined Parliament as lagging behind the needs of British domestic or foreign policy and deployed a rhetoric in the public sphere that stressed not only the need for a particular reform in public policy, but also emphasized the necessity of speed in legislating that reform. Politics in this language, just as in the late nineteenth-century procedural debates,

²⁴ The historiography that surrounds the Edwardian period largely depicts it as a period of crisis, confusion, and at times hysteria. The two most classic books in this sense are George Dangerfield's The Strange Death of Liberal England, which argues that Britain's democratic polity was on the verge of collapse in 1914, and Elie Halevy's The Rule of Democracy, 1905-1914, which claims that Britain was largely defined by domestic anarchy during the Edwardian period. Many historians now argue that the claims made by these books are greatly exaggerated. Nevertheless, the idea that the Edwardian period was one of panic and uncertainty is supported both in the primary and secondary literature. George Dangerfield, The Strange Death of Liberal England, (London: Constable and Co., 1935). Elie Halevy, The Rule of Democracy, 1905-1914, (London: Benn, 1952). For a detailed consideration of the claims made by Dangerfield and Halevy see, David Powell, The Edwardian Crisis: Britain, 1901-1914, (London: Macmillan Press, 1996). For considerations of the Edwardian period as uncertain, unstable, and riddled with crisis see, David Brooks The Age of Upheaval: Edwardian Politics, 1899-1914, (New York: Manchester University Press, 1995); G.R. Searle, The Quest for National Efficiency: A Study in British Politics and Political Thought, 1899-1914, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971). For depictions of the political divides within the major political parties see, H.C.G. Matthew, The Liberal Imperialists: The Ideas and Politics of a post-Gladstonian Elite, (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1973); E.H.H. Green, The Crisis of Conservatism: The Politics, Economics and Ideology of the British Conservative Party, 1880-1914, (London: Routledge, 1995) and Frans Coetzee, For Party or Country: Nationalism and the Dilemmas of Popular Conservatism in Edwardian England, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990). For a discussion of the international anxieties and their impact on British politics, both in terms of institutional politics and public discourse see, Paul Kennedy, The Rise of the Anglo-German Antagonism, 1860-1914, (London: Ashfield Press, 1980) and Paul Kennedy and Anthony Nicholls, eds., Nationalist and Racist Movements in Germany and Britain before 1914, (London : Macmillan, 1981)

was subject to a technological/instrumental reduction; it became a means, an instrument justified by its ability to achieve an end that was exterior to itself. Just as deliberative practices in Parliament had been circumscribed by perceived shifts in the “time of politics” during the Victorian period, so too did a similar series of shifts limit the potential for liberal practice outside of the House.

In the final section of Chapter 4 I argue that, in gaining a prominent place in the Edwardian public sphere, the national efficiency movement and tariff reform also helped facilitate a countervailing discourse that was rooted in a much different understanding of what constituted rational politics. Here I focus on new liberal thinkers who abhorred what J.A. Hobson termed “the reign of machinery” in the political imagination and sought a more open deliberative politics.²⁵ Whereas national efficiency and tariff reform attempted to accelerate the polity by rhetorically constructing an imagined scarcity of time and claiming that the purpose of politics was to act without delay in order to resolve the degeneracy that they claimed produced that scarcity, new liberalism depicted this emphasis on action-based efficiency as severely problematic. Instead they argued that free-wheeling public debate was a fundamental element of a rationally functioning politics. Moreover, I argue, by using Norman Angell as a case study, that the new liberal pursuit of a more communicative understanding of political rationality had the effect of contesting not only the dominant conception of rational politics but also its acceleratory temporality. While the patience for discussion necessary for the actualization of the new liberal political vision largely evaporated in August 1914, the widespread public currency

²⁵ J.A. Hobson, Problems of a New World, (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1921), 14-15

of some new liberal initiatives, such as Angell's Great Illusion campaign, nevertheless revealed the viability of a politics procedurally organized around non-instrumental principles.

In the concluding sections of the study, I bring the above points to bear on the recent procedural reform debates of the late 1990s and early 2000s, arguing that until the participants in these debates begin to consider the historical evolution of the temporal and rational structures which underpin contemporary visions of parliamentary "efficiency" and "effectiveness" they will remain trapped in a self-perpetuating system of procedural acceleration based on the marginalization of political deliberation.

Chapter 1:
The Problem of Time, the Claim to Represent, and the Desire to Modernise:
Understanding the Changing Temporal Structure of Parliament

British political historians have long known that the modernisation of Britain's constitution was significantly more uneven, multi-directional and complex than had been suspected in the early twentieth century by whig historians such as G.M. Trevelyan.¹ As early as the 1950s, revisionists such as Norman Gash and D.C. Moore convincingly demonstrated that the electoral practices and constituency map of the post-1832 period were neither more fair nor representative than they had been in Hanoverian England.² Moreover, as Gash and others have shown, the social composition of the House remained predominantly aristocratic until well into the nineteenth century and, as historians such as Michael Bentley, Richard Price, Keith McClelland and J.C.D. Clark claim, these aristocratic politicians neither desired nor sought the establishment of popular government and, in fact, often viewed franchise reform as an exclusionary constitutional device.³ Indeed, as James Vernon and Frank O'Gorman argue many of the reform efforts

¹ The writings of G.M. Trevelyan depict Britain's constitutional development as a fairly straightforward process that led to British democracy, beginning with the Great Reform Act of 1832 and continuing progressively through the century by way of electoral legislation. As he wrote, the 1832 Reform Act had established "the sovereignty of the people... in fact if not in law,... clear[ing] a smooth path for the inclusion of all in the sovereign political nation." George Macaulay Trevelyan, British History in the Nineteenth Century, 1782-1901, (London: Longmans, 1922), 242-243

² Norman Gash, Politics in the Age of Peel: A Study in the Technique of Parliamentary Representation, 1830-1850, (Toronto: Longmans Green, 1953); D.C. Moore, The Politics of Deference: A Study of the Mid-Nineteenth-Century English Political System, (New York: Harvester Press, 1976)

³ Norman Gash, Aristocracy and People in Britain, 1815-1865, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979); William Henry Whiteley, "The Social Composition of the House of Commons, 1868-1885," (Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Cornell University, 1960); Michael Bentley, Politics without Democracy, 1815-1914: Perception

commonly associated with nineteenth-century Britain's advancing democracy often did more to close down existing democratic structures: "At the founding moment of English liberty and democracy," writes Vernon, "it was the closure of democratic political forms, the stifling of a radical libertarian tradition that was most evident."⁴

This revisionist trend reveals the problems that necessarily result from any effort to structure historical analysis around large teleological narratives or broad and ill-defined concepts such as modernisation or democratisation. Recognizing this shortcoming, recent work in British political history has tended to study Britain's constitutional evolution by focussing less on the unfolding of an all-encompassing narrative and more on the often discreet operations of power. This transformation of analytical focus has expanded our vision of the political, bringing under its compass the linguistic construction of "imagined" subjectivities. But while it has proved fruitful in that regard, its creative potential has been limited by a tendency to reduce the concept of subjectivity to the rather narrow epistemological parameters of identity as well as its apparent unwillingness to incorporate the history of Parliament into its analytical framework. By examining the place of temporality and rationality in political subjectivity and by stressing the changing

and Preoccupation in British Government, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984); Richard Price, British Society, 1680-1880, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Keith McClelland, "England's Greatness, the Working Man," in Defining the Victorian Nation: Class, Race, Gender and the British Reform Act of 1867, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 71-118 ; J.C.D. Clark, English Society, 1688-1832 : Ideology, Social Structure, and Political Practice during the Ancien Regime, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985)

⁴ James Vernon, Politics and the People: A Study in English Political Culture, 1815-1867, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 7; Frank O'Gorman, Voters, Patrons, and Parties: The Unreformed Electoral System of Hanoverian England, 1734-1832, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989)

character of Parliament in the political imagination, the present study moves the “new political history” beyond its current conceptual limitations. This chapter begins the study by exploring how the changing relationship between the legislature and the constituencies produced a significant scarcity of time in the House of Commons and, in turn, forced parliamentarians and the public to reconsider what exactly constituted a rationally organized Parliament.

The chapter identifies two tensions in the time-structure of parliamentary life and practice that worked to turn parliamentary time (by which I mean the days, hours, and minutes available to both the House and its Members to complete their respective parliamentary duties) into an increasingly scarce commodity. The first tension was between simultaneous increases to the amount of public legislation that the House had to consider, the number of divisions it had to take, and the amount of extra-legislative duties (i.e. questions, motions, and speeches) it began to perform. The size and concomitance of these increases meant that while the House required more time for the production of legislation, the finite availability of time was being rapidly consumed by the House in divisions and extra-legislative activities. The second tension discussed in this chapter involved concurrent increases in the amount of constituency work that Members had to perform outside of the Chamber and the amount of publicity that they felt compelled to seek through their activity in the House. Here, the Member’s time was being pulled in two separate directions. The chapter argues that these two tensions were directly related to a series of changes in the Parliament/constituency relationship that brought the experience of the public gaze to bear more dramatically on the subjectivity of

parliamentarians, creating more active Members of Parliament, additional parliamentary work and an increased scarcity of time.

While each individual Member would obviously have experienced these temporal changes in his own idiosyncratic way, according to his own individual dedication to the completion of his parliamentary work, this chapter suggests that in general these two tensions introduced a structural shift in the availability/scarcity of parliamentary time. The important point here is that the chapter is not immediately concerned with specific individual experiences of temporality, but rather with a large-scale structural shift in Parliament's time regime that would have allowed parliamentarians to observe the need for a re-prioritization of parliamentary work and an acceleration of Parliament's legislative mechanisms. When this chapter refers to the "House" or to the "individual Member," it is referring not to actual Members of Parliament, but rather to an abstraction of a component of the structure of Parliament. The purpose of this methodology is to show that, throughout the century, the increasing scarcity of time was setting up a politicization of time: that condition where time ceases to be solely the temporal location of politics and becomes a subject of political negotiation itself. In short, that the "time of politics" was creating the potential for a "politics of time." In subsequent chapters we will examine, through a more discursive lens, how this new politics played out.

II

In the nineteenth century, a series of changes within the nation's political and social structure and its transportation and communication infrastructure transformed the

British polity. On the one hand, these changes proceeded by way of electoral legislation that ultimately increased the size and heterogeneity of the electorate and made election practices more fair and transparent. This legislation included the three Great Reform Acts of 1832, 1867, and 1884, the Ballot Act of 1872, and the Corrupt Practices Acts of 1854, 1883, and 1885.⁵ While the work of revisionist historians has significantly problematized the view of this body of legislation as democratic, it must nevertheless be conceded that these Acts helped to increase the imagined presence of democracy in the minds of the representatives at Westminster, who increasingly came to believe that their hold on the constituencies was becoming significantly more tenuous. While the actual rate of seat turnover in the House only increased minimally, Members nevertheless began to express a sense that they were under the thumb of their constituents.⁶ As Sir Courtney Ilbert (Clerk of the House 1902-1921) warned in 1903, “In the present day... the Member who

⁵ For statistics on the electoral expansions that followed the Reform Acts, see C. Cook and B. Keith, British Historical Facts, 1830-1900, (London, 1975). For a discussion of the provisions of the 1883 Corrupt Practices Prevention Act, see A.L. Lowell, The Government of England, pp. 222-224. On the impact of the Act, the key work is still Cornelius O’Leary, The Elimination of Corrupt Practices in British Elections, 1868-1911, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1962). This piece, however, has recently been challenged in, Kathryn Rix, “The Elimination of Corrupt Practices in British Elections? Reassessing the Impact of the 1883 Corrupt Practices Act,” English Historical Review, 2008, (500), 65-97.

⁶ The mean and median numbers of seats turned over in the nine elections between 1832 and 1868 were 37.9 and 40.1, the mean and median numbers of seats turned over between 1874 and 1900 had increased to 42.1 and 46.2. Thus the data only show a mean/median increase of 5-6 seats, out of more than 600, over a 60-year period. This is hardly the stuff of historical change. Michael Rush, The Role of the Member of Parliament Since 1868: From Gentlemen to Players, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 77

is slack in attendance or uncertain in his allegiance, is apt to be severely called to account by his constituents.”⁷

In addition to electoral legislation, a much more protracted process of change in the structures of popular political communication furthered the perception of greater democracy. This change was characterized by the emergence of discursive spaces such as voluntary societies and debating clubs, which provided the disenfranchised with opportunities to scrutinize and discuss political issues publicly.⁸ This “public sphere”, such as Jürgen Habermas has termed it, became more directly connected to Parliament in the nineteenth century as the communication infrastructure linking the legislature and the nation became more sophisticated.⁹ Though the House never formally repealed the 1641 and 1738 bans on parliamentary reporting, it increasingly disregarded them after 1771 when Parliament had shown itself incapable of effectively prosecuting offenders.¹⁰ By 1812, Hansard had been established and shortly thereafter the public reporting of

⁷ Courtney Ilbert, “Preface” in Josef Redlich, The Procedure of the House of Commons, Vol. 1, (London: Constable, 1903), xvi.

⁸ Jürgen Habermas, The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989); Kathleen Wilson, The Sense of the People: Politics, Culture and Imperialism in England, 1715-1785, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1998). For a critical discussion of the nature of the public sphere, and for a series of conceptual revisions of Habermas’ idea, see, Craig Calhoun, ed., Habermas and the Public Sphere, (Cambridge MIT Press, 1992); Nick Crossley and John Roberts, After Habermas: New Perspectives on the Public Sphere, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004).

⁹ John Garrard, “Democratization in Britain,” in John Garrard, ed., European Democratization since 1800, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 44-45

¹⁰ Peter Thomas, “The Beginning of Parliamentary Reporting in Newspapers, 1768-1774,” English Historical Review, (74), 293, (October 1959), 629-630

parliamentary deliberations became a staple of the London dailies.¹¹ By 1826 one author in the Edinburgh Review would note that the debates “are read by all who ever read anything” and, as the century wore on, parliamentary reporting would only become more widespread, efficient, and accurate.¹² At mid-century several factors facilitated the growing volume of parliamentary reporting. These factors included the introduction of a Reporter’s Gallery by Charles Barry in the rebuilt Chamber, which liberated the reporters from the cramped back bench of the Stranger’s Gallery and increased their potential number from approximately 24 to 60, and the elimination of the stamp duty in 1855, which helped reduce the cost of newspapers and facilitated their popular appeal.¹³ By 1860 one parliamentary historian would term parliamentary reporting “a sine qua non of modern life.”¹⁴ With the repeal of the paper duty in 1861, the favourable telegraph rates provided to newspapers through the 1868 Telegraph Act, and the introduction of telegraph and telephone facilities in the House of Commons, this piece of rhetorical

¹¹ Thomas Erskine May, The Constitutional History of England Since the Accession of George Third, 1760-1860, Vol. 1, (1863), 390-406

¹² Edinburgh Review, 88, (1926), 460, quoted in Peter Fraser, “The Conduct of Public Business in the House of Commons, 1812-1827,” (Unpublished Ph.D. University of London, 1957), 129

¹³ One article in Gentleman’s Magazine from 1868 claimed that at any given time there were “about a hundred” reporters at work “either in the gallery or the committee room writing out copy for their printers.” Charles Pebody, “The Gallery,” Gentleman’s Magazine, 225, (1868), 459; Charles Dod, “The House of Commons,” London Quarterly Review, (July 1854), 16. On the effect of repealing the Stamp Act and the growth of the popular newspaper press, see John Vincent, The Formation of the British Liberal Party, 1857-1868, (London: Pelican, 1972), 94-101

¹⁴ Charles Gratton, The Gallery: A Sketch of The History of Parliamentary Reporting and Reporters, (London: Pitman, Paternoster Row, 1860)

flourish would become ever closer to reality.¹⁵ To be sure, by 1878, parliamentary reporting in the provincial press had grown to such an extent that it had produced a problem of space in the Reporters Gallery which led a parliamentary committee to consider architectural plans for its expansion.¹⁶

As improvements in parliamentary reporting enhanced the ability of electors to observe their representatives, the opportunities for the electors to communicate with their representatives were also increasing. The expansion of the House of Commons Post Office in 1884 and the institution of the Telegraph Office in 1892 reflected not only the increasing volume of parliament/constituency relations, but also served to further enhance and make more constant the communicative relationship between the Member of Parliament and those he claimed to represent.¹⁷ Though the static nature of written

¹⁵ The 1868 Telegraph Act provided the legislative infrastructure through which the Postmaster General was able to buy up the nation's telegraph companies. Clause G of the Act stipulated that the Postmaster General could "make contracts, agreements, and arrangements with the proprietor or publisher of any public registered newspaper... for the transmission or delivery of telegraphic communications at rates not exceeding one shilling for every hundred words transmitted between the hours of six p.m. and nine a.m. and at rates not exceeding one shilling for every seventy-five words transmitted between the hours of nine a.m. and six p.m." An Act to enable Her Majesty's Postmaster General to Acquire, Work and Maintain Electric Telegraphs, c.110 31 and 32 Vict. For the sake of precision it is worth noting that while provincial papers began to cover parliamentary debates more regularly and efficiently, the transcription of those debates in the Gallery remained largely dominated by the London papers. Indeed as late as 1878 the Speaker was allocating all but four seats in the Gallery to London papers. Of the four seats that were set aside three were given to agencies that furnished reports for county papers and one was reserved for Mr. Hansard's reporters. Report of the Select Committee on Parliamentary Reporting, 1878-79, (203), iii

¹⁶ Report from the Select Committee on Parliamentary Reporting, 1878 (327), Appendix No. 7, Diaries of Speaker Brand, Parliamentary Archive

¹⁷ Michael Rush, The Role of the Member of Parliament Since 1868: From Gentlemen to Players, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 207-208; Factsheet G2O,

dialogue provided the constituent with only a limited potential for reshaping the message of his/her representative, the increasing sophistication of Britain's railway network and the availability of cheap railway travel facilitated an expansion in the much more open give and take of verbal contact. Consequently, there occurred an increase in the reception of deputations and large scale provincial speaking tours.¹⁸ These changes to parliament/constituency communications meant that each elector was provided with improved media for engaging with his/her representative about his conduct in the House.

Generally speaking then, we can see in nineteenth-century Britain the emergence of mechanisms through which the representatives at Westminster could be regularly observed and engaged by their electors. Moreover, as the imagined presence of democracy became more prevalent, this observation and engagement became framed by a sense of critical judgement. Conceptualized as such, this suggests the emergence of a new power dynamic in nineteenth-century British parliamentary politics: one which was based on the principle of surveillance. In the logistics of this new relationship the reporting of parliamentary debates served a unique and important function. Not only did the House become more visible to the nation, but each Member became more visible to his constituents. When Members spoke in the House, they no longer simply addressed their colleagues through the Speaker; they now also addressed their electors through the

The House of Commons Post Office, The House of Commons Information Office, March 2006

¹⁸ T.A. Jenkins, Parliament, Party and Politics in Victorian Britain, (New York: Manchester University Press), 23. Also see, Joseph Meisel, Public Speech and the Culture of Public Life in the Age of Gladstone, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 223-274; Henry Jephson, The Platform: Its Rise and Progress, (London: Thomas Nelson, 1892)

reporters.¹⁹ As Charles Gratton noted in his 1860 history of parliamentary reporting, “when a Member addresses the House, he does not address the House, but the public, through the reporters gallery.”²⁰ By introducing this new audience, parliamentary reporting significantly changed the practice and experience of parliamentary speaking.

It had long been a custom of the House that, in order to speak, a Member had to seek the attention of the Speaker by rising in his place and standing with his head uncovered.²¹ While this procedure may seem like a matter of little importance at first, it was implicated in the construction of a certain type of power that structured the relationship between the Member, the Speaker and the House. This practice necessarily separated parliamentary speakers from their audience and placed them under an individualizing gaze. Here it is important to remember that Members of the British House of Commons have always sat, not in individually differentiated and assigned seats, but rather on elongated benches that run the length of the chamber. Prior to rising, the Member existed amongst the almost undifferentiated mass of his party colleagues, but in rising he separated himself and consciously sought the gaze of the Speaker. Parliamentary journalism continued this practice by reporting speeches as the product of individuals. The press represented M.P.s not as anonymous members of a party or group, but rather by their names and/or titles. The introduction of a new and vast audience thereby greatly

¹⁹ For a good, though short, discussion of the impact of parliamentary reporting on the patterns of oratory in the House see Joseph Meisel, Public Speech and the Culture of Public Life in the Age of Gladstone, pp. 77-79

²⁰ Charles Gratton, “The Gallery,” pp. 108-9

²¹ Thomas Erskine May, A Treatise on the Law, Privileges, Proceedings, and Usage of Parliament, ninth edition, (London: Butterworth’s, 1883), 341

expanded the effect produced by the custom of a Member “rising in his place.” In the process a new power dynamic was formed.²²

Using the parliamentary vernacular of the day, Members and observers of Parliament often described this new dynamic through the metaphor of the theatre: the Order Paper became the “parliamentary playbill” and the House became the “Theatre Royal Westminster”, which performed for the satisfaction of John Bull.²³ Sir Richard Temple, Conservative Member of Parliament from 1885-1895, employed this trope in his short book on parliamentary life and practice, entitled, The House of Commons.²⁴ Temple claimed that while Parliament had in past ages been referred to as “the best club in London”, by the end of the nineteenth century it had become more apt to describe the House as a theatre, where Members were actors performing for the applause of their constituency audience:

The House is the national theatre; the Chamber is its stage; the precincts are its green rooms; the Members are the actors, hopeful not for applause from the immediate spectators, but for the approval of the vast body outside; the debates are the representatives with divers dramatic incidents; the footlights are the glare of public opinion beating upon them...²⁵

Though Temple’s representation of the House of Commons as a theatre speaks to the existence of the public gaze in Parliament, it does not adequately account for the

²² As historian Joseph Meisel recently observed, “...compared to the nineteenth century, the exclusion of reporters from debates and the limited extent of the press in the eighteenth century made MPs public figures on virtually an ex-officio basis. The new relationship between press and Parliament in the nineteenth century, and the massive growth in the number and size of newspapers, made MPs public figures in fact.” Joseph Meisel, Public Speech and the Culture of Public Life in the Age of Gladstone, p. 78

²³ Charles Dod, “The House of Commons,” London Quarterly Review, (July 1854), 6; “A New Piece,” Punch, (4 February 1882), 55

²⁴ Sir Richard Temple, The House of Commons, (London: John Long, 1899)

²⁵ Ibid, p. 48

anonymity and sense of constant observation that parliamentary reporting introduced into the Commons. When an actor walks onto the stage he/she knows that the audience's gaze has been initiated. In this sense, the theatre metaphor was better suited to explain the practice of parliamentary speaking in the era prior to mass reporting, when the Member's experience of observation was initiated by his standing in the House. Subsequent to the proliferation of parliamentary reporting, however, the Member could no longer be certain when the gaze of his observer was operative. Whether the Member was sitting or standing his constituents could be judging him: when standing they judged his statement, when sitting his value as a representative. Perhaps then, Jeremy Bentham's description of the panopticon presents a more fitting metaphor for the power dynamic that parliamentary reporting created.

Bentham's panopticon design was characterized by a circular building where the cells of those under inspection represented the circumference and where partitions differentiated each cell from all of the others and ensured that each subject was kept in isolation. The attention of every inmate was to be directed to the inspector's apartment which was located at the centre of the building. This apartment was circular and windows ran around its circumference. The windows were designed in such a way that they made it impossible for those in the surrounding cells to know when they were being observed. Bentham's plan thus intended to introduce a disciplinary form of power by not only creating an observatory situation, but by producing a sense in the mind of the observed that he/she was constantly visible to an unseen and anonymous inspector. This perceived

constancy and anonymity is what I wish to highlight by using panopticism as a mode of explaining the reformation of parliamentary speaking that reporting initiated.

While the panopticon has mostly been associated with designs for prisons, schools and hospitals, it is important to remember that Bentham noted it “will be found applicable... without exception to all establishments whatsoever, in which within a place not too large to be covered or commanded by buildings, a number of persons are meant to be kept under inspection.”²⁶ Certainly, the House of Commons fits these criteria. Of course, the panoptic dynamic that began to infuse the practice of parliamentary speaking during the nineteenth century was not precisely Benthamite. We can be sure that Barry did not have panopticism in mind when he designed the Chamber of St. Stephen’s. Indeed, panopticism in Parliament was, architecturally speaking, the inverse of Bentham’s model, placing, as it did, the centre under the gaze of the periphery. As such, the panopticism which concerns us is more akin to the general power relationship that Michel Foucault, Patrick Joyce and others, argue became increasingly prevalent from the nineteenth century onwards.²⁷ Even here, however, we must tread lightly, as the Foucauldian vision of panopticism is bound up with ideas of bourgeois discipline and inhibition. In this sense, my usage of panopticism is also the inverse of the Foucauldian model. Parliamentary panopticism did not inhibit action; it spurred it: M.P.s did not

²⁶ Jeremy Bentham, Panopticon: or, the Inspection-house. Containing the Idea of a New Principle of Construction Applicable to any Sort of Establishment, in which Persons are to be Kept and in Particular to Penitentiary-Houses, Prisons, Houses of Industry, Work-Houses, Poor-Houses, Manufactories, Mad-Houses, Hospitals and Schools, (Dublin: Thomas Byrne, 1787), 2

²⁷ Michel Foucault, Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison, (New York: Random House, 1977), 195-228; Patrick Joyce, The Rule of Freedom: Liberalism and the Modern City, (New York: Verso, 2003), 98-144

shrink from the surveillance; they embraced it. Parliament's panopticism contributed not to the formation but rather the wearing down of discipline.

Throughout the century parliamentarians commonly observed the erosion of discipline that this inverted panopticism imposed on Parliament. As early as 1848, Lord Stanley told the Lords that in the Commons, "Constituencies watched their representatives more narrowly" and that this gaze provided M.P.s with "greater inducements to recommend themselves to the notice of their constituents by much greater activity in speaking."²⁸ A year later, Thomas Erskine May made a similar link between the growth of prolix debate and the growing impact of the public gaze when he wrote: "The free election of Members by local communities, who are interested in the activity of their representatives and the publicity that is given to every Parliamentary proceeding, have combined to stimulate and encourage discussion."²⁹ While parliamentarians such as Stanley and Erskine May observed this phenomenon early in the century, it was more commonly described in the late-Victorian and Edwardian periods. This was especially the case in the late 1870s and 1880s, when the general cultural fascination with technological efficiency had reached unprecedented heights and the obstructive practices of the Irish Party under Parnell had brought questions of legislative movement to the forefront of political discussion.

²⁸ HL Deb., 14 April 1848, vol. 98 cc. 330

²⁹ Thomas Erskine May, "Remarks and Suggestions with a View to Facilitate the Dispatch of Public Business in Parliament," (London: James Ridgway, 1849), 7. For a scholarly account of the relationship between the growth of the press and the increasing quantity of oratory in Parliament, see, Joseph Meisel, Public Speech and Public Life in the Age of Gladstone, pp. 77-79

In 1882 Erskine May wrote in a confidential memorandum prepared for William Gladstone's Cabinet that Members had developed an "irresponsible eagerness" to "press forward... the interests of their constituents, on every practicable occasion."³⁰ In the press too, the increasing volume of oratory was regularly critiqued. As one author in Reynolds's Newspaper wrote, Parliament's "predominant idea is not work, but display. So many speeches have to be made in order to sustain the reputation of so many politicians."³¹ At the root of this idea, again, was the perception that constitutional and cultural changes in British politics had placed M.P.s at the mercy of their constituents. "The great majority of the House now consists of talking Members," wrote Sir Edward Webster in 1882, "men who all have something to say on some subject or another, and who consider that they are under an obligation to their constituents, to their country, to themselves, to say it, and resay it, and say it again, whenever they can make an opportunity of doing so."³² Likewise, Lord Grey observed in an 1884 article for the Nineteenth Century that, "Members seem now to feel more than formerly that in order to retain their seats it is necessary to keep themselves as much as possible in the minds of their constituents by their continual activity in the House of Commons."³³

Through the 1890s and into the Edwardian period this perception persisted. Historian William Lecky, for instance, observed in 1896 that "[t]he enormous and

³⁰ Edward Hughes, ed., "Sir Erskine May's on Parliamentary Procedure in 1882," Public Administration, 34, (1956), 419-420

³¹ "Talk, Talk, Talk," Reynolds's Newspaper, (12 February 1882), 4

³² Sir Edward Sullivan, Common Sense in Politics: Letters Written to the Morning Post, (London: Office of the Morning Post, 1883) British Library, 8139 DF 16 (4)

³³ Earl Grey, "The House of Commons," The Nineteenth Century, (15), (1884), 519

portentous development of parliamentary speaking” was largely owing to “the increasing power of the constituencies over their Members” and “the development of the provincial papers... [which] made it an easy and desirable thing for each Member to be reported at full in his own constituency as a prominent speaker.”³⁴ By the Edwardian period, the prominent Harvard constitutional historian A.L. Lowell wrote:

Every Member of Parliament today is seeking for the approbation of his constituents, and far from dreading publication of what he says in the House, his effort is rather to attract attention to himself by the reports in the local press of his remarks in Parliament.³⁵

Members wanted their electors to see them as active, Lowell claimed, since it was their activity in the House that justified their continued ability to sit as representatives: “The ordinary Member” Lowell wrote “is not satisfied to have the case argued well; he wants to take part in the argument himself. He wants the public, and especially his constituents, to see that he is active, capable and to some extent prominent.”³⁶ In other words, Lowell argued that Members became increasingly aware of their visibility to the nation and, in order to keep their seats, they became more active parliamentarians: they attended more divisions, they spoke in more debates, they asked more questions of Ministers, and they presented more Bills.

In the subsequent section of this chapter, I will use statistics from the House of Commons Journal Office to show that these contemporary perceptions were rooted in

³⁴ William Lecky, Democracy and Liberty, Volume 1, (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1981), 125-126

³⁵ A.L. Lowell, The Government of England, p. 244

³⁶ *Ibid*, p. 292

actual changes in the character of Parliament's work and that this increase had a significant impact on the amount of time available to the legislature.

III

Time-based structures bind all representative forms of political organization. The specific character of these structures, however, varies from one system to another. The creation of competing time demands in Parliament was significant because the custom that all Bills die at prorogation, and the absence of any codified regulation setting the length of parliamentary Sessions, ensured that Parliament's time was both finite and unpredictable. Records kept by the House of Commons Journal Office allow us to understand the finitude of parliamentary time by charting fluctuations in the average length of parliamentary Sessions during the nineteenth century. Using those records, Table 1.1 illustrates that between 1845 and 1905 the amount of time available per Session fluctuated periodically but followed no clear overall pattern of increase or decrease. The erosion of parliamentary discipline effected by parliamentary reporting and the public gaze therefore transformed the finitude of parliamentary time into a condition of severe time scarcity. The increasing burden of work that was at the root of this temporal problem can be measured quantitatively through the records of the Journal Office, supplemented as well by the records kept in the private papers of Erskine May. Through these statistical records it is possible to produce a general analysis of Parliament's increasing time scarcity and to begin reconstructing the way this evolving scarcity developed.

Table 1.1

Decennial Period	Avg. Days Sitting per Session
1845-1855	128.8
1855-1865	116.5
1865-1875	115
1875-1885	132.7
1885-1895	138.5
1895-1905	124.9

Source: House of Commons Journal Office, Parliamentary Archives, Records of the House of Commons: Journal Office, Book of Statistics. HC/CL/JO/23/1

Table 1.2 makes clear the increase in the amount of public legislation. Using mean averages over decennial periods, this data displays a substantial and unmistakably clear increase over the full course of the nineteenth century in the number of Public Bills presented by Members of the Commons. Between 1802-1811 and 1887-1896 the average number of Public Bills presented per Session by Members of the House of Commons increased by more than 134%, from 147.8 to 346.4. Within this general increase there are only two instances of decrease between decennial periods. In all other cases the pattern is one of increasing legislation, with a rate of change that is often above 20%. Moreover, the data demonstrate a significant acceleration and culmination in this pattern during the latter third of the century. Just as the amount of proposed legislation was clearly on the increase, so too was the amount of extra-legislative activity. Tables 1.3, 1.4, 1.5, and 1.6 show an overall increase of 303% in motions, 4,433% in questions, 112% in divisions, 1,672% in speeches and 154% in active parliamentary speakers. Moreover, as with Public legislation, these increases culminate in the latter third of the century.

Table 1.2

Decennial Period	Mean Number of Bills Presented by Members of the House of Commons per Year
1802-1811	147.8
1812-1821	183.1
1822-1831	116.2
1832-1841	160.7
1842-1851	166.3
1867-1876	229.6
1877-1886	240.8
1887-1896	346.4
1897-1906	306.6
1907-1914	336.75

Source: House of Commons Journal Office, Parliamentary Archives, Records of the House of Commons: Journal Office, Book of Statistics. HC/CL/JO/23/1

Table 1.3

Year	Average Number of Pages in the Order Book Occupied by Notices of Motion per Session
1845-54	1,226.20
1855-64	1,417.40
1865-74	2,149.50
1875-84	2,834.20
1885-94	3,390.50
1895-1904	2,891.20
1905-1914	4,953.10

Source: House of Commons Journal Office, Parliamentary Archives, Records of the House of Commons: Journal Office, Book of Statistics. HC/CL/JO/23/1

Table 1.4

Year(s)	Average Number of Questions to Ministers per Parliamentary Session
1847	129
1848	222
1850	212
1857	451
1860	699
1867	912
1870	1,203
1877	1,343
1880	1,546
1883-1887	3,589.00
1888-1892	4,132.80
1893-1897	4,652.40
1898-1902	5,679.60
1900-1904	5,848.20

Source: House of Commons Journal Office, Parliamentary Archives, Records of the House of Commons: Journal Office, Book of Statistics. HC/CL/JO/23/1

Table 1.5

Decennial Period	Mean Number of Divisions per Session
1857-67	162.64
1868-78	236.36
1884-94	298.82
1895-1905	345.45

Source: House of Commons Journal Office, Parliamentary Archives, Records of the House of Commons: Journal Office, Book of Statistics. HC/CL/JO/23/1

Table 1.6

Year	Total Number of Speeches	Number of Members who Spoke
1810	1194	179
1811	1572	177
1812	1973	206
1836	4521	351
1837	2790	295
1838	4514	343
1845	5176	339
1846	4061	367
1847	5332	319
1883	21,160	456

Sources: Papers of Sir Thomas Erskine May, Parliamentary Archives, Statistics on sittings, divisions, speeches etc, 1794, 1810-1812, 1836-1838 and 1845-1848, ERM/8/7; Joseph Meisel, Public Speech and the Culture of Public Life in the Age of Gladstone, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001): 75

In part, the increases in divisions and extra-legislative work can be seen as a corollary to the increase in public legislation. Certainly as the number of Bills increases it can be expected that the quantity of these other areas of work would increase at a roughly similar rate. The data, however, do not show this relationship. What is particularly striking about this data is that the areas of parliamentary work that are characterized by oratorical display (i.e. motions, questions, and speeches) increased at a rate that far exceeded the increase in areas of work that are largely silent (i.e. divisions and the introduction of Public Bills). This increase in speaking would cause Sir John Sinclair to complain as early as 1829 that: “the practice of making Speeches... has become much

more prevalent than formerly, and occupies a great deal of time.”³⁷ Given this significant variance it seems fair to suggest that these increases were not simply the result of an increased demand for legislation but must instead have proceeded from the emergence of a power dynamic that was believed to provide substantial rewards to acts of display.³⁸ One compelling way of explaining this power dynamic is through reference to the panoptic effects of an increased public gaze in Parliament.

Beyond the anecdotal evidence already presented and the fact that chronologically there is a correlation between Parliament’s increasing transparency and its growing burden of work, a telling quantitative indication of the operation of the public gaze in Parliament can be found in the data kept on Private Members’ legislation.³⁹ If a panoptic

³⁷ Sir John Sinclair, “Thoughts on the Means of Preventing the Public Mischiefs which Necessarily Arise from the Great Load of Public and Private Business with which the House of Commons is at Present Overwhelmed,” (London: Sherwood, Gilbert and Piper, 1830), 8. Indeed, even if we remove the period post 1883, which involved vast spikes in questions and speeches, the overall increases in questions and speeches remains substantially higher than the increase in Bills: for questions it is 1093% and for speeches it is 346%.

³⁸ There are, of course, several separate explanations that can partially account for specific rises within the general increase of parliamentary work. The 1801 Act of Union and the drive to agricultural enclosure, for instance, are two factors that would account for the substantial increase in parliamentary labour during the first 20 years of the century. These factors, however, are unable to account for the pattern as a whole. Peter Fraser, “The Conduct of Public Business in the House of Commons, 1812-1827,” (Unpublished Ph.D. University of London, 1957), 96-97; Michael Bentley, Politics without Democracy, 1815-1914, p. 7. Similarly, increases in the late 1840s and early 1850s could be tied, as Peter Mandler has suggested, to ideas of political responsibility that were prevalent within the ideology of Lord John Russell’s Whig administration. Peter Mandler, Aristocratic Government in the Age of Reform: Whigs and Liberals, 1830-1852, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990)

³⁹ The chronological connection is not suggested in all areas of parliamentary work. While Bills, motions, divisions and questions appear to demonstrate a correlative relationship, the annual quantity of petitions presented demonstrates the opposite. While 70,369 petitions were presented on average every session between 1841 and 1846, that

power dynamic was operational in nineteenth-century parliamentary culture, it would be reasonable to assume that Members would have been compelled to engage regularly in the presentation of non-government legislation, regardless of whether that legislation had any chance of passing into law. Thus, by the end of the century, when the government had secured control over House time, we could expect to see continually high levels of Private Members' legislation.

Table 1.7 demonstrates that during the late Victorian and Edwardian periods there was a continually high number of Private Members' Bills presented to the House despite the dismal probability of their passing. The data displayed here shows that, between 1896 and 1905, the average number of Private Members' Bills presented to the House every Session was 166.1, which accounted for 54.9% of all the Public Bills presented to Parliament by Members of the Commons. During this same period only an average of 21.1 reached Second Reading and only an average of 11.1 were passed into law. On average, then, Private Members had only a 6.6% chance of their Bills' receiving Royal Assent. Between 1906 and 1914 the numbers were no better. During this period, Private Members presented an average of 198.6 Bills every Session, which amounted to 58.8% of all Public Bills presented by Members of the Commons. Of these only an average of 23.1

number had decreased to 20,296 in 1868-1872 and to 14,050 in 1883-1887. The reason for this decrease was a reform in the procedure on petitions, which significantly reduced the number of times a Member could speak upon the presentation of petitions. Whereas Members had previously used the presentation of petitions in order to raise a debate, this practice became no longer possible. Interestingly, if the pre-1832 data on the number of petitions is compared with the data immediately following the First Reform Act, a significant rise is observable and a possible correlation exists between the increasing numbers of petitions after 1832 and the growth of democratization in the public imagination. For a discussion of these issues see, Colin Leys, "Petitioning in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries," Political Studies, (3), 1, (1955), 45-64

Table 1.7

Year	Pub. Bills Intro. By Private Members	PM Bill that get 2nd Reading	PM Bill that reach Report Stage (but not passed)	PM Bills passed into Law
1896	175	27	3	13
1897	191	27	3	14
1898	184	27	1	18
1899	158	16	3	10
1900	161	25	4	14
1901	152	11	2	3
1902	163	22	N/A	10
1903	166	21	3	12
1904	146	20	3	11
1905	165	15	3	6
1906	188	14	3	4
1907	168	27	8	13
1908	226	37	14	19
1909	205	28	10	15
1910	177	12	2	8
1911	223	19	2	14
1912	217	19	9	8
1913	185	21	3	16
1914	199	31	12	16

Source: House of Commons Journal Office, Parliamentary Archives, Records of the House of Commons: Journal Office, Book of Statistics. HC/CL/JO/23/1

received Second Reading and only an average of 12.5, or 6.3%, received Royal Assent. While data is unavailable for the 1870s and 1880s, it is unlikely that the potential for passing non-government legislation was much better in this earlier period. This being the case, it can be assumed that Private Members had reasons other than law-making for introducing their Bills and, given the improved means of communication between Parliament and the nation at large, it seems likely that one important reason for the continually high number of Private Members Bills was the increasing need for Members to be seen as active by their constituents. While it is true that the introduction of the Bill would have afforded the Member with only a very limited opportunity for display in the House, especially given the dismal prospects of reaching either second reading or committee stage, the presentation of the Bill would nevertheless have provided the Member with mention in the local paper or, failing that, something that could be mentioned in his constituency correspondence or the discourse deployed during his canvass.

Thus far I have shown that, despite the relatively static and finite character of the time available to Parliament, almost every area of Parliament's workload was increasing throughout the century. This variance, of course, meant that parliamentary time became progressively scarcer. The question we need to address now concerns the way in which this ontologically real shift in the time structure of the Commons affected contemporary perceptions of parliamentary governance. The key to answering this question resides in our understanding the extent to which the growing desire for in-House display competed with the increasing demand for public legislation. First, however, we need to understand

the shifting relationship between legislation and parliamentary time irrespective of extra-legislative increases.

Translating the data on Public Bills into hours and minutes presents significant difficulties. Obviously, the legislative process is a complex and multi-faceted one that cannot be measured in time-based terms simply on the basis of the number of Bills introduced each Session. The lack of more specific data makes it impossible to accurately say how many additional days, hours and minutes were required by the House to meet the increasing burden of Public Bills. Without knowing the annual variations within the proportion of Bills that made it to second reading and subsequently to the more lengthy debates that characterize the “clause by clause” considerations of committee stage, the ability to speak with precision about the relationship between increased quantities of legislation and the aggravation of Parliament’s time scarcity is limited. Moreover, since the duration of time consumed by legislation depends largely on idiosyncratic factors not directly connected with a Session’s quantity of legislation (i.e. the contentiousness of individual Bills, the degree of party polarization, the extent of obstructive practices, etc.) it would be exceptionally difficult, even with these additional data, to determine the duration of hours and minutes that was required by the House in order to meet the increases in proposed legislation. But, while that aim may be impossible to achieve, there are nevertheless two forms of measurement that can suggest something of the relationship between the House’s legislative burden and the fluctuating amount of time available. These measurements concern, first, the amount of time that divisions occupied and, second, the House’s ratio of Bills-to-time.

The procedures that governed the taking of divisions in the House during the nineteenth century made the practice of parliamentary decision making unduly time consuming. Prior to 1906, the taking of a division required a lapse of two minutes after the question was put before the doors to the Chamber were closed, after which the entire number of Members in the Chamber had to rise, walk through the appropriate lobby and be counted by the teller.⁴⁰ In this light, it is not surprising that even as early as 1833, during a debate on the advisability of building a new chamber for the House, one Member of the Commons argued that a new Chamber would save time in the taking of divisions: “If on divisions we could save half an hour it would be a matter of very considerable importance, pressed as we are with a variety of business.”⁴¹ Similarly it is not surprising to learn that more than one Speaker of the House between the 1840s and 1880s observed the necessity of shortening “the time now lost in taking divisions.”⁴² Table 1.8 puts the temporality of divisions into as precise terms as possible, demonstrating that, between 1860 and 1902, the amount of time occupied by this mode of voting increased by more than 100%, from 66 hours to 158 hours. Table 1.8 also shows that, during the 1890s and 1900s, divisions regularly occupied between 8 and 10% of the total time available to the House per Session. Since divisions represent the primary mode of decision making in parliamentary law-making this data clearly suggests that the time required for legislative consideration was on the increase throughout the century. Divisions, however, represent

⁴⁰ Standing Orders of the House of Commons, 1900, House of Commons Parliamentary Papers, (314), 9

⁴¹ HC Deb., 7 March 1833, vol. 16 cc. 372

⁴² Charles Shaw Lefevre to Thomas Erskine May, nd., Papers of Thomas Erskine May, PA, ERM 2/29-30.

only one aspect of the legislative process. This being the case, it is worthwhile to seek a separate indicator for the expanding amount of time required for law-making. This separate indicator can be achieved by creating a ratio of Bills-to-time.

By comparing the available data on the number of sitting days per Session with the number of Public Bills introduced, we can determine precisely how many Bills the House had to get through each week in order to entirely clear the Order Paper. While this formulation is only abstract, it nevertheless provides some sense of the relationship between an increased legislative burden and Parliament's time. Table 1.9 demonstrates that between 1845 and 1914 the increasing amount of Public Bills far outweighed the number of sitting days. While the House had to get through 6.9 Bills per week in 1845-1855, that number increased to 10.25 in 1865-1875, and 12.76 in 1885-1895. While the numerous *ad hoc* procedural reforms adopted between the 1840s and 1880s, such as the introduction of the rule of progress and the removal of debate from first reading, would have accelerated the legislative process, it seems highly unlikely that they would have offset the substantial increase in the variance of Bills-to-time. As one author in the Pall Mall Gazette noted in January 1882, it had become "simply impossible for the House to keep pace with the current demand for legislation."⁴³ Now, when we weigh against the already diminishing time available for legislation, the even more immense increases in parliamentary oratory, we can get some sense of the extent to which the time available to the House of Commons was being placed between *competing* demands.

⁴³ "The Coming Struggle," Pall Mall Gazette, (12 January 1882), 1-2

Table 1.8

Year	Divi- sions	Hours Occu- pied	% of Total Sitting Hours	Year	Divi- sions	Hours Occu- pied	% of Total Sitting Hours
1860	264	66	5.3	1882	400	100	6.97
1861	184	46	4.99	1883	287	71.75	6.17
1862	216	54	6.09	1884	204	51	4.62
1863	183	45.75	5.41	1885	279	69.75	6.78
1864	151	37.75	4.38	1886	134	33.5	3.59
1865	95	23.75	3.72	1887	465	116.25	8
1866	75	18.75	2.33	1888	349	87.25	6.29
1867	164	41	3.93	1889	351	87.75	8.08
1868	164	41	4.87	1890	245	61.25	5.63
1869	152	38	4.07	1891	400	100	8.45
1870	240	60	6.08	1892	183	45.75	6.39
1871	266	66.5	6.02	1893	441	110.25	5.76
1872	277	69.25	6.74	1894	236	59	6.2
1873	224	56	6.38	1895	128	32	3.5
1874	160	40	5.62	1896	394	98.5	8.79
1875	247	61.75	6.17	1897	355	88.75	8.59
1876	240	60	5.81	1898	288	72	7.22
1877	359	89.75	8.63	1899	352	88	8.99
1878	271	67.75	5.94	1900	272	68	7.16
1879	234	58.5	5.1	1901	451	112.75	10.51
1880	210	52.5	5.05	1902	632	158	9.85
1881	407	101.75	7.27				

Table 1.9

Period	Weeks per Session	Public Bills Presented	Bills per week for 100% Efficiency
1845-1855	25.89	177.45	6.91
1865-1875	23.11	235.64	10.25
1885-1895	27.31	333.73	12.77
1905-1914	29.26	334.90	11.94

A particularly good illustration of this competition for time can be found in the case of Questions to Ministers. Questions to Ministers were taken at the beginning of the Sitting, following Private Bills and public petitions and preceding Public Bills and Notices of Motion. Consequently, while Questions were an important part of parliamentary law-making, they always existed outside of and in tension with the time available for the consideration of Public Business. Table 1.10 demonstrates that, between 1847 and 1902, the amount of time occupied by Questions increased from approximately 6.45 hours (0.7% of the total sitting hours) to 119.46 hours (7.45% of the total sitting time of the House). Since increases in the number of questions had the tendency to delay legislative activity, these increases were often interpreted as being significantly problematic. Moreover, as parliamentary observers began to tie vast increases in oratory with Members' self-interested attempts to display themselves to their electors, the importance of Questions in the legislative process was undermined.⁴⁴ This was especially

⁴⁴ In an 1875 letter to Henry Brand, then Speaker of the House, the backbench Liberal Member for Bedfordshire, Samuel Whitbread III, wrote that the most effective method for reducing the growing number of parliamentary questions was simply to limit the number of questions that were reported on by the press: "As to shortening Questions I should not propose any further direct powers than those now exercised by the Speaker. But that which most encourages idle Questions seems to me to be the certainty of having a full report of Question and Answer in the newspapers. If the press would omit some of the absurd Questions from their report I think it would check the practice." Samuel

evident in the 1880s, when the number of questions asked of Ministers began to spike dramatically. As one author in the Nineteenth Century wrote in 1881: “[T]he questions are usually put by busybodies whose sole purpose is to shine in the local newspaper...” and as Erskine May complained in the same year “the growing abuses in putting Questions to Ministers need correction. Their number is inconveniently multiplied, and their length unduly extended. They are often trivial, and unworthy of the attention of Parliament.”⁴⁵ Like Erskine May, W.M. Torrens (parliamentary scholar and M.P.) complained in 1881 that “the time that has come to be spent in asking and answering questions... obviously curtails to a significant extent that which is needed for the transaction of national business.”⁴⁶ These complaints make it not particularly surprising that during the 1880s the House started to adopt acceleratory reforms to questions procedure.⁴⁷

Whitbread III to Henry Brand, 24 November 1875, Papers of Henry Bouverie William Brand, PA, BRA/1/3/8

⁴⁵ “The Deadlock in the House of Commons,” The Nineteenth Century, (September 1881), 337-338.; Thomas Erskine May, “Memorandum on the Rules of Procedure in the House of Commons,” 5 November 1881, ADD44154. The panoptic origin of the vast increases to the numbers of questions being asked was also noted by Ilbert who wrote: “Asking questions in the House is one of the easiest methods by which a member can notify to his constituents the attention which he devotes to public affairs and to their special interests. For this and other reasons, the right to ask questions is specially liable to abuse...” Sir Courtenay Ilbert, Parliament: Its History, Constitution and Practice, (London: William and Norgate, 1911), 113.

⁴⁶ W.M. Torrens, Reform of Procedure in Parliament to Clear the Block of Public Business, (London: WMH Allen, 1881), 26

⁴⁷ On this point see, D.N. Chester and Nona Bowring, Questions in Parliament, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1962), 18-19; James William Lowther, A Speaker’s Commentaries, (London: Edward Arnold, 1925), ii, 299-300; Kenneth Bradshaw, “Parliamentary Questions: A Historical Note,” Parliamentary Affairs, (7), 3, (1953), 320

Prior to 1880 it had been at the discretion of Members to give notice of their question verbally in the House, rather than providing a solely written notice. This often led to the question being asked twice: first when the Member gave notice that on such and such a date he intended to ask such and such a question, and second when the Member formally asked his question.⁴⁸ Gradually after 1880 the House adopted a practice, codified into a Standing Order in 1888, which pushed Members towards providing their notice in writing.⁴⁹ While this reduced the amount of parliamentary time that was consumed by questions, it would be incorrect to assume that it solved the problem. As Speaker Brand wrote in his diary on 22 July 1881,

There are no less than 47 questions on the Order Book for this day. The like has never been known before. The House has of its own Motion pressed Members giving notice of questions to desist from reading them at full length. Thus time is saved, but after all, the answers consume the more time; and I wish that we could contrive some means of shortening answers.⁵⁰

As Table 1.10 shows, despite the procedural acceleration of questions, they continued to occupy conservatively between 6 and 10% of the House's total sitting hours between 1889 and 1902. Moreover, since the data available through the Journal Office only applies to questions that appeared on the Notice Paper and therefore does not account for subsidiary questions or other questions for which notice had not been given, Table 1.10

⁴⁸ Report from the Select Committee on the Business of the House, 1871, (137), p. 26, 287-288

⁴⁹ The rule stipulated: "That Notices of questions be given by Members in writing to the Clerk at the Table, without reading them viva voce in the House, unless the consent of the Speaker to any particular question has been previously obtained." Standing Orders of the House of Commons, House of Commons Parliamentary Papers, 1900, (314), 7

⁵⁰ Diaries of Speaker Brand, 1880, Papers of Henry Bouverie William Brand, PA, BRA/3/4

Table 1.10

Date	Questions to Ministers	Hours Occupied	% of Total Sitting Hours
1847	129	6.45	0.70
1848	222	11.1	0.79
1850	212	10.6	0.96
1860	699	34.95	2.81
1870	1,203	60.15	6.10
1880	1,546	77.3	7.43
1883	3,185	159.25	13.69
1884	3,555	177.75	16.12
1885	3,354	167.7	16.31
1886	2,821	141.05	15.10
1887	5,030	251.5	17.30
1888	5,549	277.45	20.01
1889	4,049	67.48	6.22
1890	4,407	73.45	6.75
1891	3,770	62.83	5.31
1892	2,889	48.15	6.73
1893	6,534	108.9	5.69
1894	3,567	59.45	6.25
1895	3,873	64.55	7.06
1896	4,464	74.4	6.64
1897	4,824	80.4	7.78
1898	5,155	85.91	8.62
1899	4,521	75.35	7.69
1900	5,106	85.1	8.96
1901	6,448	107.46	10.02
1902	7,168	119.46	7.45

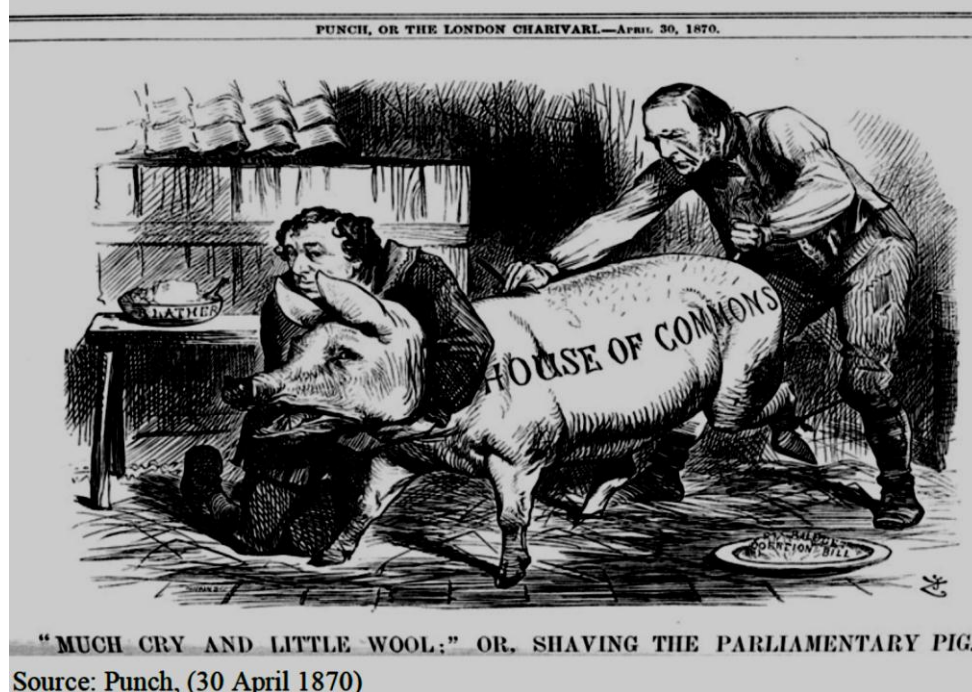
does not fully capture the time demands that questions continued to exert on the House.⁵¹ Indeed, the significant demands that questions continued to put on the House's time were the primary motivation behind Prime Minister Arthur Balfour's significant reforms to questions procedure in 1902, which included the introduction of a statutory maximum duration for questions per sitting as well as "starring" (the formal differentiation on the notice paper of questions that required a verbal answer from those which required a written one).⁵²

The case of questions brings into relief not only the structure of the competition for House time but also how that competition would be interpreted: namely, by conceptually dividing the work of Parliament between "talk" and "action." It is for this reason that, throughout the century, complaints about, what William Gladstone termed in 1856, "the declining efficiency of Parliament" were commonly framed according to this binary with the House's "wanton indulgence in fatuous, empty and mischievous talk",

⁵¹ For example, using the Journal Office data Table 1.10 demonstrates that in 1901 6,448 questions were asked which occupied a total of 107.46 hours, but Balfour's parliamentary speech on questions procedure on 30 January 1902 shows that when subsidiary questions are included, the total number of questions increases to 7,180 and the total time occupied increases to 119 hours. HC Deb., 30 January 1902, vol. 101 cc. 1353

⁵² HC Deb., 30 January 1902, vol. 101 cc. 1369-1371. The procedures that were adopted stipulated that on days when the House had two sittings questions would begin at 2:00pm and none would be taken, with a few exceptions, no later than 2:55pm. It also stipulated that Members who desired an oral answer could distinguish it by marking an asterisk beside it. If a "starred" question was not reached by 2:55pm would receive a written answer from the Minister to whom it was addressed and that answer would be printed and circulated with the votes. Alternatively, the Standing Order also provided that the Member could postpone his question if he still desired a verbal answer. Standing Orders of the House of Commons, 9 (1-5) 1905

Figure 1.1



leading directly to its inability "to get through its business in the time at its disposal."⁵³ That, "the national interests are sacrificed in order that a couple of hundred individuals may advertise themselves by talk"; that "works not words are required from the English Parliament"; that the House needed to "do more and talk less"; that "speech accumulates" while "Bills decay"; that "the pace of legislation is not equal to the bulk of words"; that "the tongue of Parliament has grown too long and too large", and that Parliament

⁵³ "The Session," *London Illustrated News*, (10 August 1861), 121; Lord Grey to Samuel Whitbread, III 1875, Bedford Local Archives. Also see, "Close of the Session," *London Illustrated News*, (9 September 1848), 145; "The Abandoned Bills," *London Illustrated News*, (10 July 1847), 17; HC Deb., 30 August 1848, vol. 101, cc. 669-672; HC Deb., 24 November 1837, vol. 39 cc. 193-200; "Notes on Parliament: The Paralyzed Assembly," *Reynolds' Newspaper*, (19 March 1882), 3; "The Predicament of Cloture and Coercion," *Reynolds' Newspaper*, (26 March 1882), 1

produces “much cry and little wool” as pictured in Punch (Fig. 1.1).⁵⁴ At the root of all of these representations was the tension that the increase in parliamentary labour put on the finite time of the House. For both parliamentarians and the public this perceived separation would provoke debates over the priority of different aspects of parliamentary governance and the necessity of accelerating the law-making process.

V

While an increased sense of the public gaze caused a large number of Members to more actively engage in parliamentary business, large demands were simultaneously being made on their time outside of the House as well. Constituency pressure became more constant and severe in the nineteenth century. Even if, as recent historiography has shown, constituents in the eighteenth century possessed a great deal of power in electoral politics, the pressure they exerted on their Members could never be constant because the

⁵⁴ “Talkee Talkee,” Reynolds’s Newspaper, (4 April 1886), 4; Gracchus, “The Premier and his Promises,” Reynolds’ Newspaper, (19 November 1882), 2; HC Deb., 8 November 1882, vol. 274, cc. 1080 ; William Gladstone, “The Declining Efficiency of Parliament,” Quarterly Review, 99, (October 1856), ; “The Silent Member,” London Illustrated News, (5 February 1881), 131; “Toryism or the Majority,” Reynolds’s Newspaper, (12 November 1882), 1; Gladstone, “The Declining Efficiency of Parliament,” p. 293; “A Parliamentary Cold Water Cure,” Punch, v. 15, (1848), 16 “Much Cry and Little Wool, or Shaving the Parliamentary Pig,” Punch, (30 April 1870). The phrase, “much cry and little wool” was commonly used in the political vernacular from the 1850s on in order to indicate the increasing propensity of Members to talk and the consequently decreasing ability of the House to legislate. For examples, see, “The Business of the Session,” Manchester Guardian, (6 September 1848), 4; Untitled Leading Article, London Illustrated News, (18 August 1877), 146; Untitled Leading Article, London Illustrated News, (16 August 1879), 142; HC Deb., 22 April 1850, vol. 110 cc. 668; HC Deb., 27 August 1880, vol. 256 cc. 373; HC Deb., 10 July 1884 vol. 290 cc. 741; HC Deb., 18 July 1890, vol. 347 cc, 302

individual Member could easily escape his constituents when in London.⁵⁵ In the Victorian and Edwardian periods, however, the expansion of parliamentary representation and the enhanced speed of communication and transportation that resulted from the proliferation of railway and telegraph technology, made the walls of St. Stephen's increasingly transparent. London, thus, ceased to be an escape from electoral pressure.⁵⁶ By 1911, Ilbert could write that the Member's "relations to his constituents, whether they have voted for him at the poll or not, are constant and close, and require unremitting attention both in and out of session and both at Westminster and elsewhere."⁵⁷ It is for this reason that we find nineteenth-century parliamentarians expressing more and more concern over both the quantity of work demanded of them and the amount of time needed to complete it.⁵⁸ Three areas of constituency work stand out in this regard: campaign canvassing, the reception of deputations, and constituency correspondence.

⁵⁵ John Mackintosh, "Parliament and the Public: The Effects of the Media," in John Mackintosh, ed., People and Parliament, (London: Saxon House, 1979), 4

⁵⁶ Ibid, p. 5. Contrary to my argument, social scientists such as Donald Searing have suggested that the constituency role of the British MP was insignificant until the advent of the welfare state in the mid-twentieth century. This suggestion seems to suffer from a retrospective bias. That is to say, it judges the past not according to its own standards but by those of the present. While it is certainly true that the constituency duties of parliamentarians *increased* as the welfare state blurred the divisions between the social and political, the suggestion that nineteenth-century parliamentarians ignored their constituents during the regular parliamentary Session ignores the quantitative and qualitative evidence presented in this chapter. Donald Searing, Westminster's World: Understanding Political Roles, (London: Harvard University Press, 1994), 122-123. Also see, Sir Charles Ponsonby, Ponsonby Remembers, (Oxford: Alden Press, 1965), 11; Julian Critchley, "Returning to the House," in Dick Leonard, ed., The Backbencher in Parliament, (London: Macmillan, 1972), 242

⁵⁷ Sir Courtenay Ilbert, Parliament, p. 167

⁵⁸ Thus, Edward Webster's complaint, expressed in his 1868 pamphlet, that a parliamentary representative should not be compelled "to any greater sacrifice of his time, than is absolutely necessary for his constituents' interests." Edward Webster, "The Public

Campaign canvassing was one constituency-based activity that had, since the late eighteenth century, exacted a significant toll on the patience of the Member.⁵⁹ The canvass, as O’Gorman has shown, inverted the social hierarchy and could be a trying experience for the Member who “had to go out of his way to court and to flatter the voters and their families.”⁶⁰ During the canvass the candidate could expect to be met with complaints, demands and insults from his social inferiors. While this could be trying for electoral candidates in the pre-reform era, it exacted an even more significant toll as the century progressed.⁶¹ While the importance of canvassing probably did not increase, it certainly did not diminish either. As late as 1883 the Member for Londonderry claimed that his electors informed him, “That which is not worth asking for is not worth having,

and Private Business of the House of Commons Considered in Relation to the Economization of the Time of the House and of its Members,” (London: William Ridgway, 1868), 15

⁵⁹ Several scholars have demonstrated that canvassing at the beginning of nineteenth-century indicates how important and exhausting the practice was even in the unreformed system. For example, see Robert Worthington Smith, “Organisation and Canvassing : Yorkshire Elections before the Reform Bill,” American Historical Review, 74 (1969), 1538-1560; D.R. McAdams, “Electioneering Techniques in Populous Constituencies, 1784-96,” Studies in Burke & His Time, (1972), 23-53; Frank O’Gorman, Voters, Patrons, and Parties, pp. 91-105

⁶⁰ As O’Gorman argues: “Free of the normal social restraint, voters were able to treat their superior with scant respect; to interrupt, heckle and insult them. As one commentator remarked, ‘rudeness to the candidate is exercised as a privileged right.’” Frank O’Gorman, “Campaign Rituals and Ceremonies: The Social Meaning of Elections in England 1780-1860,” Past and Present, 135 (May 1992), 84-85

⁶¹ For a discussion of the practice of canvassing in the Victorian period see, Moisei Ostrogorski, Democracy and the Organization of Political Parties, (New York: MacMillan, 1902), 153-156, 454-459

and if you don't take the trouble to come to my door I shall not take the trouble to go to the poll.”⁶²

Though the importance of canvassing cannot be said to have altered much, what did change was the amount of time the practice consumed. A larger electorate and a more sophisticated registration system meant that the candidate had more votes to solicit. Moreover, the statutory elimination of paid canvassing after 1883 meant that the candidate had not only more votes to solicit but less potential to defray the time spent soliciting votes by employing canvassers. As Moisei Ostrogorski wrote in his classic study of the impact of democracy on political organization in Britain:

Having lost none of its importance from the standpoint of the political parties, the operation of the canvass has become far more complicated. The extension of the suffrage effected during the last thirty years has increased the number of voters, that is to say the number of persons who have to be hunted up.... Besides, the parties have not at their disposal the old body of canvassers, which included, along with the friends of the candidate, paid agents.⁶³

For this reason, Members in the mid-to-late-Victorian period commonly described canvassing as “a great labour” of “toilsome, and often disheartening”, “slow and laborious work,” that “took an unconscionably long time.”⁶⁴

⁶² HC Deb., 2 July 1883, vol. 281 cc. 98. On the continued importance of canvassing also see, Ramsay MacDonald, “How to Lose and How to Win an Election,” (London: Fabian Society, 1895); Norman Gash, Politics in the Age of Peel, p. 117; Jon Lawrence, Speaking for the People: Party, Language and Popular Politics, 1867-1914, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 178, 251; Moisei Ostrogorski, Democracy and the Organization of Political Parties, pp. 454-459

⁶³ Moisei Ostrogorski, Democracy and the Organization of Political Parties, p. 454

⁶⁴ William Lockney Harle, A Career in the Commons: or Letters to a Young Member of Parliament on the Conduct and Principles Necessary to Constitute him an Enlightened and Efficient Representative, (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1850), 8; James William Lowther, A Speaker's Commentaries, (London: Edward Arnold, 1925), 172-175, 231, 258

The amount of time consumed by canvassing varied from one Member to the next depending on a variety of factors, including the hold the Member had on his constituency, the size and geography of the constituency, and the availability of modern transportation logistics. In large constituencies and counties the expansion of the franchise made the time demands posed by a door-to-door canvass virtually impossible to fulfil, which was what led to the mid-century growth in the practice of hiring paid canvassers.⁶⁵ Thus, the provision of the 1883 Corrupt Practices Prevention Bill that eliminated the hiring of paid canvassers created some significant problems for Members like Henry Broadhurst, who told the Commons that “[i]n the larger constituencies it has become impossible for a man who sought a seat in Parliament to canvass the whole of the voters.”⁶⁶ While large constituencies posed a significant time problem for electoral candidates, Members who represented small boroughs were not exempt from the increasingly time-consuming nature of the door-to-door canvass. Indeed, as Lord Randolph Churchill told the Commons on 2 July 1883, the door-to-door canvass posed a significant time demand for Members representing the smaller boroughs because “The electors knew that it was in the power of the candidate to call upon them, and they expected him to do so.”⁶⁷ Moreover, as Churchill explained, since the electors knew that a representative for a small borough had fewer doors to knock on they would often engage their candidate in “long arguments” and thus, while the representative of a smaller borough had fewer votes to solicit he had

⁶⁵ For a discussion of the growth of paid canvassing see, HC Deb., 22 July 1868, vol. 193 cc. 1640-1644

⁶⁶ HC Deb., 2 July 1883, vol. 281 cc. 96

⁶⁷ HC Deb., 2 July 1883, vol. 281 cc. 94

to spend more time soliciting each vote.⁶⁸ In sum, Members representing large and small constituencies were equally susceptible, though in different ways, to the increasing time-burden that canvassing posed.

The geography and transportation logistics of a constituency played a significant part the volume of time consumed in canvassing. For Members like James William Lowther, M.P. for Penrith 1886-1918, who represented a diffuse constituency made up of several villages, where the availability of railway transport was limited, the experience of door-to-door canvassing was a formidable challenge.⁶⁹ In the autobiography of his political life, Lowther complained of the excessively “long time” that it took to travel “by road from one village to another.”⁷⁰ That said, however, it would be incorrect to assume that Members representing constituencies that did not present these logistical problems were immune to the time demands of the canvass. Given the increasing accountability of the electoral system that followed the Corrupt Practices Acts, the possibility of a strong rival in the constituency was heightened which meant that electoral candidates had to canvass both more regularly and vigorously.⁷¹

As the communicative link between Parliament and constituency became more constant, the reception of deputations was another job that began to occupy the Member’s time more regularly. The growing speed of transportation had facilitated an increase in

⁶⁸ Ibid

⁶⁹ See Lowther’s discussion of his first canvass in Penrith. James William Lowther, A Speaker’s Commentaries, pp. 172-175.

⁷⁰ Ibid. p. 172

⁷¹ W. McCullagh Torrens, Twenty Years in Parliament, (London: Richard Bentley and Son, 1893), 18. Also see Lowther’s discussion of his 1892 canvass in which his opponent “had been at work in the constituency for some years, making a house to house canvass of the villages...” James William Lowther, A Speaker’s Commentaries, p. 231

the number and importance of deputations that Members received and, although deputations most commonly solicited Ministers, the unofficial Member could expect to receive several every Session.⁷² Moreover, while Ministers often received deputations only with reluctance, their reception by a private Member was a practice essential to maintaining close and constant intercourse with the constituency. As one backbencher advised his colleagues in 1850: “if you, the Member, play your part well, [the deputation] will, when they return to the town from whence they came, praise loudly their representative; speak of your courtesy and intelligence...”⁷³ While there is no quantifiable evidence available to indicate the exact extent to which the practice of receiving deputations fluctuated throughout the century, some indication of the increase can be ascertained by an interesting assertion made in the memoirs Sir Richard Temple, M.P. from 1886-1892. In his memoirs, Temple complained that the conference rooms in the rebuilt Palace of Westminster, where M.P.s met their constituents and received deputations had become “utterly insufficient.”⁷⁴ Thus, if Temple’s statement can be taken as at all representative, it would seem that by the 1880s the practice of receiving deputations had grown to exceed the capacity of the architecture that had been designed for them less than 50 years earlier.

Another area of the parliament/constituency dialogue that seems to have increasingly occupied the time of the Member was the escalating quantity of constituency

⁷² Sir Courtenay Ilbert, Parliament, p. 168

⁷³ William Lockey Harle, A Career in the Commons, p. 18

⁷⁴ Sir Richard Temple, Life in Parliament: Being the Experience of a Member in the House of Commons from 1886 to 1892 Inclusive, (London: John Murray, 1893), 19-20

correspondence that came before him. As early as the 1830s Edward Baines, Member of Parliament for the Borough of Leeds, could spend several hours every day drafting written correspondence for his constituents.⁷⁵ This was not an uncommon experience among MPs. In November 1830, in a parliamentary debate over the state of the Public Business, Sir Robert Peel claimed that starting the sittings at an earlier hour would negatively affect Members' ability to fulfil their parliamentary duties as it would limit their "means of communicating with their constituents."⁷⁶ Since the Post Office did not deliver its letters until 9:30 am, Peel claimed that Members required at least the hour and a half between 9:30 am and 11:00 am to "satisfactorily answer the various applications which they received from their constituents"⁷⁷ Thus, as Peel suggests, it was common amongst MPs in the 1830s to spend, on a daily basis, approximately two hours drafting constituency correspondence.⁷⁸ As the century wore on, this experience became even more widespread.

By 1840-41 the backbench Conservative Member for East Constituency, Henry Broadley, was writing numerous constituency letters daily and expressed surprise,

⁷⁵ Edward Baines [jnr.], The Life of Edward Baines Late M.P. for the Borough of Leeds, (London: Longman, 1851), 194-195

⁷⁶ HC Deb., 03 November 1830, vol. 1 cc. 132

⁷⁷ Ibid

⁷⁸ Very little statistical data exists on the quantity of mail delivered to the Commons in this period. That said, we do know that in 1837 there were 3,084,000 franked letters transmitted which, when divided by the number of sitting M.P.s (658), suggests that on average each Member wrote 4,687 letters that year. Given the corrupt nature of the franking system during this period, however, it is very difficult to say with any certainty how many letters M.P.s were writing. House of Commons Information Office, "Fact Sheet, G20: House of Commons Post Office," (March: 2006), 5

confusion and relief on those few days that he was undisturbed by correspondence.⁷⁹ By 1846 Richard Cobden found that his constituents would not leave him alone and that “every post brought twenty or thirty letters.”⁸⁰ In 1875, John Locke, M.P. for Southwark 1857-1880, told the Commons, “I receive a great many letters from my constituents on all kinds of subjects; some of them I would rather not see, others I am always glad to receive.”⁸¹ By the 1880s this phenomenon seems to have grown further. By 1889, the weight of mail carried for the House of Commons Post Office was 237,782 oz., the equivalent of approximately 713,346 letters, which amounts to an average of 1,065 letters per M.P.⁸² In this context, it is not surprising to find M.P.s like Alfred Pease and Richard Temple writing that they often drafted 40 letters to constituents a day, and spent roughly three hours every morning attending to their correspondence.⁸³

While the statements of Baines, Cobden, Locke, Pease, and Temple suggest that the available time of the Member was progressively consumed by a growing burden of constituency correspondence, it could be suggested that these were particularly dedicated

⁷⁹ John Markham, ed., The Diary of an Honourable Member: The Journal of Henry Broadley, M.P. 1 January, 1840 to 17 March, 1842, (Hull: Humberside Leisure Services, 1987), 10, 24, 69

⁸⁰ John Morley, The Life of Richard Cobden, (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1881), 275

⁸¹ HC Deb., 15 July 1875, vol 225 cc. 1517

⁸² In 1890 it was 205,443 oz. For the data on the weight of correspondence carried for the House, see “Thirty-fifth report of the Postmaster General on the Post Office,” House of Commons Parliamentary Papers, 1889, (C.5850), Appendix M, p. 55; “Thirty-sixth report of the Postmaster General on the Post Office,” House of Commons Parliamentary Papers, 1890, (C.6171), Appendix M, p. 62. For the average weight of a letter, see Author Unknown, “The Justice and Profit of a Uniform Penny Postage,” The British and Foreign Review, (8), 16, (1839), 467

⁸³ Sir Alfred Pease, Elections and Recollections, (London: John Murray, 1932), 257; Sir Richard Temple, The House of Commons, p. 76

Members who were not representative of the majority of M.P.s. Indeed, as Michael Rush has recently shown, there was no shortage of Victorian Members who took almost no notice of their constituencies and operated in Parliament through the Burkean notion that as representatives they were entitled to act according to their own judgement regardless of the expressed views of their electors.⁸⁴ That being said, there is much qualitative evidence to support the argument that, by the closing decades of the century, a large proportion of the House's Members spent a great deal of time writing letters.

In the latter half of the nineteenth century M.P.s commonly complained about the limited facilities provided for them by Parliament for the drafting and dispatch of their constituency correspondence.⁸⁵ In 1876, for example, Sir Henry Peek complained to the House that since "a large proportion of Members' correspondence is on the public service in connection with their constituencies" the extra penny payable on letters deposited to the Commons Post Office after 7:00pm should be discontinued.⁸⁶ In 1881, Robert Lyons suggested that since "the great bulk of the correspondence of Members arises in the discharge of their duties to their constituents" a system of franking (free postage for Members) should be instituted on all outward mail.⁸⁷ Similarly, in 1896 Robert Ashcroft suggested that Members should be entitled to free postage because of "the great number of letters and telegrams" that they were "called upon to forward to their constituents on

⁸⁴ See Michael Rush, *The Role of the Member of Parliament Since 1868*, p.215

⁸⁵ In addition to the references cited in the text above also see HC Deb., 17 March 1887, vol. 312 cc. 508; HC Deb., 7 April 1876, vol. 228 cc. 1408; HC Deb., 5 March 1877, vol. 232 cc. 1358

⁸⁶ HC Deb., 13 July 1876 vol. 230 cc. 1395

⁸⁷ HC Deb., 03 February 1881 vol. 258 cc. 58

Parliamentary business.”⁸⁸ The regularity of this complaint, that constituency correspondence was exacting a financial burden on the Member’s purse, suggests that M.P.s were drafting significant quantities of constituency correspondence in the latter part of the nineteenth century.

In addition to a financial burden, increased constituency correspondence was also posing a significant tax on the Member’s time. This can be seen by the fact that Members, by the end of the century, were often forced to work on their constituency correspondence in Parliament. As early as 1871 Robert Macfie, M.P. for Leith 1868-74, asked the First Commissioner of Works whether he would “be good enough to set apart some convenient place in the Palace of Westminster” where Members could work on “letters on business concerning the constituencies.”⁸⁹ Though Macfie’s request was never formally granted, the memoirs of Richard Temple illustrate that an informal accommodation was subsequently made. By the end of the century, Temple writes, a custom had developed whereby Members kept all discussion on the lower corridor surrounding the outside of the Chamber so that, as a courtesy to those Members who needed to draft letters, the upper corridor was kept silent.⁹⁰ The emergence of this custom was tied to a growing necessity for Members to draft their correspondence in the House, which suggests that

⁸⁸ HC Deb., 14 February 1896 vol. 37 cc. 344

⁸⁹ HC Deb., 25 May 1871, vol. 206 c. 1255

⁹⁰ Sir Richard Temple, Life in Parliament, p. 19; Also see Courtney Ilbert, Parliament, p. 174

correspondence had grown to such an extent that completing it consumed more time than Members possessed outside of their in-House duties.⁹¹

The growing quantity and importance of continual constituency correspondence was noted by observers of Parliament. In his 1911 treatise on parliamentary history, Ilbert discussed how constituency correspondence had come to occupy a significant portion of the Member's time. He wrote:

Mere correspondence will impose a severe tax on his time. The days when Andrew Marvell could discharge his obligation by writing a weekly letter to his 'worthy friends', the mayor and the alderman of Hull, are long past. Modern constituencies are great multitudes, who use their pens freely, and expect replies. The modern member has to spend his mornings in dictating letters, and his afternoons and evenings in writing them in the library and lobbies of the House of Commons.⁹²

While Ilbert's statement did not come until the end of the Edwardian period, similar observations were made by William Lockey Harle in his 1850 book, A Career in the Commons: or Letters to a Young Member of Parliament on the Conduct and Principles Necessary to Constitute him an Enlightened and Efficient Representative. Here, Harle advised new Members of Parliament that their constituents "will assuredly require at your hands the utmost respect and attention to their wants and wishes." He wrote that Members of Parliament received "letters unnumbered" from their constituents and that if they wished to be re-elected "[t]hese communications must be promptly and sensibly

⁹¹ A. L. Lowell also observed the growth of Member's drafting their correspondence in the House. See, A.L. Lowell, The Government of England, p. 249

⁹² Sir Courtenay Ilbert, Parliament, p. 167

answered.” “Precision and promptitude in your correspondence” he advised “will afford gratification unbounded.”⁹³

The increasing quantity of constituency correspondence involved the Member in a myriad of additional time-consuming duties beyond simply drafting more letters. An examination of the types of questions and demands that Members received in their constituency correspondence makes this clear. By far the subjects most commonly discussed in a Member’s correspondence with his constituents were patronage and charity.⁹⁴ While providing funds for local institutions would have exacted a toll on the Member’s purse, fulfilling requests for patronage would have also put a heavy burden on the Member’s time. Since, as T.A. Jenkins has demonstrated, the distribution of patronage was primarily done through party Whips, a Member’s ability to obtain patronage positions for his constituents required him to be punctual in arriving for the Session and in attending divisions and debates when asked.⁹⁵ In other words, his ability to acquire patronage was largely contingent on his maintaining a cordial relationship with the Whip, which implicated him in an economy that required time-based sacrifices and an increase in time-discipline.

Beyond the almost overwhelming number of requests for patronage and charitable subscriptions, Members also received letters from both individual constituents and

⁹³ William Lockney Harle, A Career in the Commons, p. 16

⁹⁴ Norman Gash, Politics in the Age of Peel, pp. 342-372; Michael Rush, From Gentlemen to Players, p. 68; Michael MacDonagh, The Book of Parliament, pp. 56-60

⁹⁵ For a discussion of the role of party whips in the distribution of patronage positions in the nineteenth-century civil service see, T.A. Jenkins, “The Whips in the Early Victorian House of Commons,” Parliamentary History, 19, (2000), 259-286; T.A. Jenkins, Parliament, Party and Politics in Victorian Britain, p. 64

organizations regarding Bills that were before the House. These letters kept electoral pressure on the Member during the Session by stressing the interests of his supporters in the passing or failing of particular pieces of legislation.⁹⁶ Here too, the time consumed in constituency correspondence involved a myriad of tasks beyond the drafting of letters. The Member had to keep informed about the provisions of Bills that might affect the interests of his constituency, he had to attend and speak in the debates on those Bills so that he could demonstrate to his constituents that he was representing their interests, he had to badger Ministers for information, and he had to acquire, annotate and forward copies of Bills to interested groups in his constituency. Observing the proliferation of these practices in the late nineteenth century, Ilbert noted that “the modern Member... is expected to ask questions in the House about matters of local interest, and to communicate by post the ministerial reply, with such comments as occur to him.”⁹⁷ Despite Ilbert’s claim that these practices were exclusive to the “modern Member”, it would be a mistake to assume that they were not engaged in by M.P.s in the earlier nineteenth century. For example, the correspondence of Henry Tancred, M.P. for Banbury 1832-1859, contain several letters addressed to his constituency agent, John Munton, on legislative matters that concerned groups in his constituency. Members were also often compelled to follow the way their comments in the House were reported by local

⁹⁶ See, for example, the correspondence of B.S. Trinder, ed., A Victorian M.P. and his Constituents: The Correspondence of H.W. Tancred, (Banbury Historical Society), 54, 59, 95

⁹⁷ Sir Courtney Ilbert, Parliament, p. 167

newspapers and Hansard.⁹⁸ Indeed, it is for this reason that, by 1876, 400 Members of Parliament were subscribing to Hansard.⁹⁹ Given all of these additional duties, it is not surprising that correspondence involved the Member in much more time-consuming work than a simple increase in the volume of letters that he had to draft.

Collectively, the growth in canvassing, deputations, and correspondence consumed a significant portion of the Member's available time. Moreover, when growth in these areas is considered alongside the increased need for Members to appear in the House, it emerges that throughout the century Members of Parliament were faced with a progressively more significant set of competing time demands. Thus, Arthur Symonds would observe as early as 1832 that, regardless of the intelligence and physical endurance of MPs, the increasing scarcity of parliamentary time would eventually render their efforts futile:

Whatever may be the powers of an individual Member, some time must be given to sleep and relaxation, and the remnant that is left be allotted, to correspondence, to interviews with his constituents, [and] - to attendance at the house; how little then remains for reading and preparing for its deliberations? In truth, the Members have not time to do all these things.¹⁰⁰

Though Symonds claim was made in the early 1830s, its meaning would increasingly

⁹⁸ In 1847 Punch produced a cartoon illustrating the compulsion that Member's felt to see how they were represented in the local press. The text accompanying the image read: "He has ordered all the morning papers that he may have the pleasure of comparing all the reports, and judging of the impartiality or accuracy of each." Similarly, a Punch article from 1848 commented that backbench M.P.s were expected to follow reports of their activities in the House and forward those reports to their constituents. "The New Member," Punch, 13, (1847), 242; "The Model M.P.," Punch, 14, (1848), 118

⁹⁹ Stafford Northcote to Henry Brand, 13 Nov 1877, Papers of Henry Bouverie William Brand, PA, BRA1/3/33

¹⁰⁰ Arthur Symonds, "Practical Suggestions for the Internal Reform of the House of Commons," (London: F.C. Westley, Strand, 1832), 6-7

come to represent the experience of M.P.s as the century progressed. As the political commentator Michael MacDonagh observed in his 1897 book on parliamentary life, the multiple duties of a M.P. leave him with “very little time for anything else.”¹⁰¹

The diaries of Speaker Brand evince the above point well. Between the early 1870s and the mid-1880s Brand’s diary contains numerous references to the time-consuming nature of his position and the extent to which it tested his physical capacity. As early as 1872, for instance, he wrote that, “The prolonged sittings, fixed to one seat sometimes for upwards of 10 hours, in a heated atmosphere with a prosy debate are a sore trial for the body.”¹⁰² These early references, however, were limited in quantity. By 1878-1880 Brand started to regularly deploy a time-based vocabulary in his complaints about Parliament. Brand often described, in dissatisfaction, Parliament’s “slow progress” of business; he referred also to “precious time” and the “pressure of time.”¹⁰³ Tied to these perceptions were more regular and vivid complaints about the overly time-consuming, and thus physically draining, nature of his duties as Speaker. In 1878 he complained that the prolonged sittings were beyond his ability to keep awake and that he “must hereafter

¹⁰¹ Michael MacDonagh, The Book of Parliament, (London: Isbister and Company, 1897), 69

¹⁰² Diaries of Speaker Brand, 1872, Papers of Henry Bouverie William Brand, PA, BRA/3/1

¹⁰³ For mentions of slow progress see Brand’s diary entries for: 27 April 1876, 17 July 1876, 15 May 1879, 8 July 1879, 14 February 1881, 23 May 1881, 4 July 1881, 12 July 1881, 13 July 1881, 19 August 1881, 2 June 1882, 7 June 1882, 9 June 1882, 12 June 1882, 17 July 1882, 21 May 1883, 14 June 1883, 19 June 1883. For mentions of “precious time” see Brand’s diary entries for: 10 March 1876, 2 March 1882, 12 March 1883. For mentions of the “rapid” transaction of business see Brand’s diary entries for: 9 May 1876, 11 April 1877, 26 May 1880. For mention of the “pressure of time” see Brand’s diary entry on: 31 July 1876

take coffee or use some other means to keep off drowsiness.”¹⁰⁴ In 1879 he wrote of being “tired and sleepy in the Chair” and that his “strength is sorely tried.”¹⁰⁵ Brand also complained of being unable, due to a scarcity of time, to keep up his parliamentary correspondence and that in consequence he had to draft letters while he sat in the Chair.¹⁰⁶ Additionally, Brand lamented how the limited time available to him made it impossible to maintain a regular family life. On 9 August 1879, for instance, he described “a singular domestic incident” in which he had to meet his future daughter-in-law during “the only time at my command was the short quarter of an hour when I take lunch.” This, he wrote, served as “an illustration of the way in which our time is absorbed this Session.”¹⁰⁷

While Brand’s diary represents the experience of a parliamentarian, the physically draining tensions in parliamentary time were not lost on the press. This was nicely represented by the prominent political cartoonist Henry Furniss in his sketch, “Who Would be an MP? A Warning to Aspiring Legislators.” Here, Furniss’ sketch shows a Member of Parliament caught between multiple and simultaneously made demands “In Parliament” and “At Home.” “At Home” the Member is being hounded for subscriptions, his pocket is being emptied by a group of electors, his address is being scrutinized by a constituent, he is engaged by another constituent on the subject of legislation,

¹⁰⁴ Diaries of Speaker Brand, 1878, Papers of Henry Bouverie William Brand, PA, BRA/3/3

¹⁰⁵ Diaries of Speaker Brand, 1879, Papers of Henry Bouverie William Brand, PA, BRA/3/3

¹⁰⁶ Diaries of Speaker Brand, 1878, Papers of Henry Bouverie William Brand, PA, BRA/3/3

¹⁰⁷ Diaries of Speaker Brand, 1879, Papers of Henry Bouverie William Brand, PA, BRA/3/3

Figure 1.2



Source: Papers of Henry Furniss, Parliamentary Archives, Sketches by Harry Furniss (1854-1925), HC/LB/1/112

and, in the far right of the frame, he is being physically pulled to the constituency by a number of constituents. “In Parliament” the Member is shown at a desk drafting a piece of correspondence, sitting in the Chamber, sitting in Committee, and hurriedly walking to the House. In the middle of the sketch an enlarged image of the Member is shown exhausted, slouching back and grasping his head in frustration. In these ways, Furniss’ illustration visually sums up the multiple, simultaneous and spatially distinct time demands that Britain’s increasingly democratic and over-burdened legislature put on the individual Member of Parliament.

VI

This chapter has shown how the changing relationship of the representative to those he claimed to represent resulted in the growth of two sets of competing time demands in parliamentary life and practice. The first of these involved a concomitant growth in the House's legislative burden and in its Member's desire for rhetorical display. The second involved a concomitant growth in the Members' desire for publicity in the House and his increasing duties outside of the House in the M.P./constituency dialogue. In both cases, the availability of parliamentary time was made progressively more limited. As we will see in subsequent chapters, these changes in the ontologically real time-structure of parliamentary politics led numerous parliamentarians, throughout the century, to consider means by which they could accelerate the House's legislative mechanisms in order to alleviate its growing scarcity of time. Speeding up the procedures of law-making, however, always involved restricting the existing privileges of the non-government Member and, for this reason, debates over procedural reform often became implicated in questions of constitutional virtue and the political importance of maintaining its historical transmission: thus, Robert Inglis' appeal to the 1848 Committee on Public Business that "some considerations are more important than the saving of time."¹⁰⁸ In this way, the House was forced to prioritize parliamentary action and, as a corollary to this, to define what the function of the House of Commons was in the broader context of the constitution. Was the House primarily a Chamber for inquiry and the raising of grievance

¹⁰⁸ Report from the Select Committee on Public Business; together with the Minutes of Evidence, and Appendix, 1848, House of Commons Parliamentary Papers, (644), 10

or was it a site for the production of legislation? In this way, the shifting “time of politics” helped to compel into being a “politics of time.”

In subsequent chapters we will examine how this new politics played itself out in nineteenth-century British political culture. Certainly, as historians Josef Redlich, Peter Fraser and Miles Taylor have already pointed out, the nineteenth-century evolution of Parliament entailed the rise of Ministerial control over the allocation of House time.¹⁰⁹ This historical narrative, while not inaccurate, does not exhaust the “politics of time.” Instead of charting the subjugation of the Private Member subsequent chapters will, therefore, focus on the cultural and epistemological transformations that allowed for the rising power of the executive in the legislature. In particular what we will focus on is the increasing separation of “talk” from “action” and the rising power of efficiency in perceptions of rational parliamentary law-making and public political discussion.

¹⁰⁹ Josef Redlich, The Procedure of the House of Commons: A Study of its History and Present Form, Vol. I, (trans. A. Ernest Steinthal), (London: Constable, 1908); Peter Fraser, “The Growth of Ministerial Control in the Nineteenth-Century House of Commons,” English Historical Review, (75), 296, (July 1960), 444-463; Miles Taylor, The Decline of British Radicalism, 1847-1860, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995)

**Chapter 2:
Temporality and Rationality in Early-to-Mid-Victorian Parliamentary Culture:
Procedural Debates in the House of Commons, 1811-1878**

To contemporaries of the late Victorian period, a paradox defined procedural reform in the first three quarters of the nineteenth century. While many parliamentarians knew of the legislative time scarcity and, between 1811 and 1878, often engaged in procedural reform debates, the reforms that were adopted were always conceived of as solutions to specific individual impediments to the accomplishment of the House's legislative burden and not as the rationalization of an inefficient and anachronistic procedural code. From approximately 1880, parliamentarians looking reflectively on the reforms of this period described them as irrational and ineffective. Erskine May observed in 1881 that the attempts to reform procedure in this earlier period were all ill-fated because "the removal of one abuse has generally aggravated another" and a different late-Victorian Liberal claimed that because, "changes have been made with too timid and tentative a hand" the reforms always proved ineffective.¹

For the later Victorians, the aim of procedure was to achieve, first and foremost, a means/ends efficient legislative system and thus, any attempt to reform the procedural code which did not rigorously pursue this end was wrongheaded. These later historical actors did not recognise that, in the earlier part of the century, the predominant rationalization of procedural reform was based on a highly idealized understanding of

¹ Thomas Erskine May, "Sir Erskine May's Views on Procedure in 1882," Edward Hughes, ed., Public Administration, 34, (1956), 423; E.R. Wodehouse, "Reform of Procedure in the House of Commons: A Lecture delivered to the Bath Young Men's Liberal Association, December 8th, 1881", (Bath: William Lewis and Son, 1881), 12

constitutional practice and its relationship to historical time. Procedural reform in the earlier part of the century was not irrational but differently rational.²

Historical investigations of early-to-mid-nineteenth-century procedural reform have largely replicated the idea that procedure and parliamentary time are issues that are necessarily given to a means/ends rational formula.³ On this basis, parliamentary historians have attempted to explain either why the reforms of the earlier period were not as efficient as, or in the case of Peter Fraser why they were more efficient than, the reforms adopted between 1882 and 1902. In this way, historians have entirely avoided the more positive question: “why were the reforms of this period structured and proposed in the way that they were?” This previous teleological focus has also generally led to causal explanations that only point to negative and structural factors that were extraneous to the period, such as the lack of party-based obstruction, the lack of a fully developed party-system, or the absence of a democratic franchise. In order to provide an account that analyses the historical actors of this period on their own terms, this chapter pays close attention to the language that surrounded the issues of parliamentary time and procedural reform between 1811 and 1878. Through this focus it attempts to reconstruct the rational

² My conceptualization of differently rational rather than irrational is largely based on the sociology of Max Weber whose work points to a plurality of rationalities. As he put it in The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, “what is rational from one point of view may well be irrational from another.” Max Weber, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, (New York: Routledge, 1999), 26. For a typology of Weber’s forms of rationality, see, Stephen Kalberg, “Max Weber’s Types of Rationality: Cornerstones for the Analysis of Rationalization Processes in History,” The American Journal of Sociology, (85), 5, (March, 1980), 1145-1179

³ See, for instance, Josef Redlich, The Procedure of the House of Commons: A Study of its History and Present Form, Vol. I, (trans. A. Ernest Steinthal), (London: Constable, 1908); Peter Fraser, “The Growth of Ministerial Control in the Nineteenth-Century House of Commons,” English Historical Review, (75), 296, (July 1960), 444-463

structures that parliamentarians used to make sense of these issues and to thereby explain why the House pursued reform in the way that it did. By framing the chapter in this way, I remove procedure from its insulated and highly underdeveloped historiographic position and integrate it into the wider study of British political culture.

The debates over procedure during this period were overwhelmingly characterized by the sense that, in terms of constitutional development and practice, the political past was continuous with the political present and that the maintenance of this continuity provided for the historical transmission of constitutional virtues, such as free speech and independence.⁴ Through its regular presence in procedural debates, this constitutional/historical imagery worked to structure the way parliamentarians made sense of the increasing scarcity of actual parliamentary time, strengthening the belief that Parliament's time problem was temporary rather than structural and that the maintenance of the existing procedural code was in the best interest of the constitution. In this way, the particular pace of reform in the first three quarters of the nineteenth century can be seen as the result of a specific ordering of the interaction between two forms of time. As the actual hours and minutes became increasingly scarce and forced the issue of reform on

⁴ Free speech and independence were perceived as highly significant and intrinsically English political virtues from at least the eighteenth-century. They were central to numerous ideological frameworks including "country ideology", "popular radicalism", and "classical liberalism", not to mention their linguistic articulation in codes of masculinity and general understandings of constitutional development. On these points see, Kathleen Wilson, The Sense of the People: Politics, Culture, and Imperialism in England, 1715-1785, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); John Brewer, The Sinews of Power: War, Money, and the English State, 1688-1783, (New York : Alfred A. Knopf, 1989); H.T. Dickinson, Liberty and Property: Political Ideology in Eighteenth Century Britain, (London: Methuen, 1977), 163-269

the agenda, a culturally constructed vision of historical time worked to mitigate the issue and structure the debate.

The language of constitutional/historical continuity was, of course, not the only vocabulary through which Parliament's time scarcity could be interpreted. Yet, as we will see, alternative vocabularies, such as the one proposed by William Wickens, had only a limited impact on the procedural debates that occurred on the floor of the House or in the numerous Select Committees established between 1837 and 1878 on the efficiency of the Public Business. In fact, parliamentarians and organs of the press who were committed to the language of constitutional/historical continuity were often able to co-opt and incorporate these alternative representations. This ability to disarm alternative modes of representation was largely based on the symbiotic relationship that the continuity discourse shared with a separate discourse of historical discontinuity. This latter expression of historical time applied to the parliamentary activities of individual Members of Parliament as well as parliamentary groups such as the Cabinet. Since the language of continuity depicted the constitution as immune to temporal change it seemed irrational to blame the scarcity of hours and minutes on anachronisms in the procedural code of the House. Nevertheless, the scarcity of time was obvious and demanded some explanation. Members of the House and the press were thus often drawn to the argument that inconsiderate Members perverted the rules and, through their bad etiquette, turned the virtues of independence and free speech into new forms of political vice. This, in turn, allowed the problem of parliamentary time to be viably represented as a temporary rather than a structural problem and ad hoc procedural amendments that did not fundamentally

alter parliamentary practice could be chosen as the proper recourse. The interaction between real time and historical time, in this way, created a three part temporal dynamic: while the actual time available to legislators was decreasing and the need for procedural reform was apparent, the scope and extent of the reforms adopted was limited by a constitutional discourse of historical continuity that was rooted in a value-based rationality and strengthened by a separate discourse of historical discontinuity.

The political force of this dynamic was most clearly present in the years following 1847 and the establishment of Lord John Russell's first ministry. During this period, particularly in the parliamentary Session of 1847-1848, the scarcity of time in Parliament reached new heights and developed an increased urgency in public discussion. This was accentuated by a heightened cultural fascination with speed and rates of social/political change, which, in turn, led to the emergence of a new political critique that disparaged the sitting Parliament for being too slow, un-modern and out-of-sync with "modern" Britain. This de-synchronization critique was expressive of a means/end vision of political rationality that saw politics as analogous to purposive physical movement and capitalist economic activity and which viewed the allocation of time to activities unrelated to legislative production as "waste." Despite the growth of this new critique, as well as the formation of a Select Committee and numerous calls for reform both in and out-of-doors, the pace of reform during this period remained defined by ad hoc solutions to temporary and non-systemic problems.⁵ The reason the reform of House of Commons procedure

⁵ For example, while the House, upon the recommendation of the 1848 Committee, adopted the rule of progress in regards to Bills previously considered in Committee, it neither adopted nor discussed Speaker Charles Shaw-Lefevre's plan for

proceeded at the pace that it did during these years is to be found in the rational coherence of the temporal dynamic identified earlier. By explaining Parliament's time problem as a function of an historical shift in parliamentary manners, parliamentarians and members of the press provided the discourse of historical discontinuity with increased legitimacy and allowed it to act as a bulwark for the discourse of constitutional/historical continuity.⁶

Though a three part temporal dynamic explains the persistence of the discourse of constitutional/historical continuity in procedural debates, it does not account for the initial association between procedure and historical continuity. In order to explain this association it is necessary to point to a wider series of parent discourses in early-to-mid-Victorian English culture. As historian Boyd Hilton has argued, "a static-cum-cyclical conception of time... [was] a hallmark of early nineteenth-century attitudes generally."⁷ It was not until the 1850s, Hilton argues, that advances in geology and medical science began to erode this cyclical time and replace it with a linear and progressive historical vision. Yet, despite this general temporal change, an image of historical continuity

eliminating debate on motions for adjournment. Nor did the House discuss the very encouraging evidence provided to the Committee by witnesses in favour of a closure resolution.

⁶ This reasoning was, of course, also given added legitimacy by the prominent contemporary view, which historians have subsequently exposed as a myth, that the reforms of 1832 had increased the presence of the middle class in the Commons, thereby fundamentally altering the social composition of the House. On the existence of the myth and its impact on public perceptions of Parliament see Joseph Meisel, Public Speech and the Culture of Public Life in the Age of Gladstone, pp. 60-64. On the point that this nineteenth-century belief was thoroughly inaccurate see S.F. Wooley, "The Personnel of the Parliament of 1833," English Historical Review, (53), 210, (1938), 240-268; William Henry Whiteley, "The Social Composition of the House of Commons, 1868-1885," (Unpublished Ph.D Dissertation, Cornell University, 1960)

⁷ Boyd Hilton, The Age of Atonement: The Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought, 1795-1865, (New York : Oxford University Press, 1988), 33

remained a central trope in mid-Victorian culture. Indeed, Hilton argues that this shift to a linear vision of historical time not only helped maintain ideas of historical stability, it also contributed to “a rapid spread of the idea of continuity.”⁸ Recent work by political historians committed to the linguistic turn has shown that ideas of continuity were equally pervasive in extra-parliamentary constitutional discourse, wherein the “ancient constitution” was commonly represented as immune to temporal change. This “constitutional idiom” has been discussed at length by historians such as Richard Price, James Epstein, Patrick Joyce and James Vernon.⁹ Yet, this historiography has primarily referred to politics out-of-doors, largely ignoring the place of Parliament within this constitutional vocabulary. Given the fact that the Houses of Parliament represent the most obvious physical manifestation of the unwritten constitution, however, their place in this idiom would clearly have been important. With the aim of providing a rationale for the connection between procedure and images of historical continuity, the final section of this chapter is given the task of discussing, in general terms, the place of Parliament within this broad constitutional discourse.

⁸ Ibid, p. 301. A similar point has been made by Peter Mandler, who has argued that emerging discourses on the English national character after 1848 provided a temporal/historical vision of continuity in, especially Liberal, political discussion. Peter Mandler, “The Consciousness of Modernity? Liberalism and the English National Character, 1870-1940,” M. Dauntton & B. Rieger eds., Meanings of Modernity: Britain from the Late-Victorian Era to World War II, (London: Berg, 2001), 119-144

⁹ Richard Price, British Society, 1680-1880, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); James Epstein, Radical Expression: Political Language, Ritual, and Symbol in England, 1790-1850, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994); Patrick Joyce, “The Narrative Structure of Victorian Politics,” in James Vernon, ed., Re-Reading the Constitution: New Narratives in the Political History of England’s Long Nineteenth-Century, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); James Vernon, Politics and the People: A Study in English Political Culture, 1815-1867, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993)

II

Parliamentarians early in the nineteenth century witnessed a substantial increase in the amount of parliamentary work expected of the House of Commons. In order to address the time problems that these increases posed, the Commons adopted numerous procedural reforms which aimed at maximizing the time of the House by introducing more strict regulations to govern its timetable and hasten the way that it conducted its business. Beyond accelerating the Public Business, these reforms also undercut the traditional privileges of non-government Members. This process began in 1811 with the decision to divide the House calendar between Order and Notice days. In 1833 the decision was made to create a special sitting for the presentation of petitions, and in 1835 a short sitting on Wednesdays for the consideration of Orders proposed by Private Members was added. This differentiation of House business not only lessened the opportunities for non-government Members to regularly capture the time of the House, it also allowed Ministers and other Members to avoid hearing the concerns of their colleagues, which, in turn, led to a regularly low attendance and frequent “count-outs” during the sittings that had been allocated to the presentation of petitions and Private Members business.¹⁰

¹⁰ The significance of removing petitions from the regular sitting of the House should not be understated. As late as 1882 Thomas Erskine May, then Clerk of the House, would regard it as “the boldest change of procedure ever yet introduced affecting not only the accustomed privileges of Members, but the rights of the people, as petitioners.” It is then not surprising that this procedural reform raised a large amount of outrage. For instance, Fergus O’Connor, M.P. for Cork, complained to the House on 17 May 1833 that, “the absence of Ministers from the House of Commons during the presentation of Petitions, at the morning sittings, is an insult to the House of Commons, and an injustice to the people of England.” The reason for this outrage was that petitions were among the

While early reforms such as these aimed to maximize parliamentary time by significantly reducing the rights of non-government Members, the slow pace at which they were adopted and the ad hoc character in which they were proposed suggests that the problem of parliamentary time was believed to be linked to novel predicaments that were non-systemic and temporary in nature. At the root of this belief was a historical mindedness that saw parliamentary procedure as both “the fruit of long experience” and the means by which the virtues of the “ancient constitution” were transmitted into the present. This understanding of the relationship between historical time and procedural development created among Members of the Commons a suspicion of what were seen as novel reforms.

One of the earliest procedural debates in the nineteenth century took place in the period between 1811 and 1813. From 1810 to 1811 the number of Public Bills presented by Members of the Commons had increased by 7.58%, and between 1811 and 1812 it had increased by another 40.85%. At the same time the urgency of political action was increasing as the effects of Napoleon’s blockade were being widely felt and fears of Jacobinism, Luddite agitation and economic dislocation spread through the nation.¹¹ In

Private Members most effective means of means of raising debate on matters disconnected from those listed on the Order Paper. Indeed, Alderman Waithman complained to the House on 03 November 1830, that despite the fact that he represented 13,000 to 14,000 constituents he “could never get an opportunity of speaking, except upon the presentation of petitions.” Edward Hughes, ed., “Sir Erskine May’s Views on Procedure in 1882,” *Public Administration*, 34, (1956), 420; House of Commons Debates, 17 May 1833, vol. 17, cc. 1344; HC Deb., 03 November 1830, vol. 1, cc. 140. Also see Peter Fraser, “The Growth of Ministerial Control,” pp. 450, 452-453

¹¹ For a discussion of the chaotic conditions surrounding Perceval’s Ministry see Boyd Hilton, *A Mad, Bad, and Dangerous People? England 1783-1846*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), 219-222

order to hasten the action of what was increasingly seen as a weak government, then, Spencer Perceval told the Commons, on the afternoon of 27 February 1811, that it was necessary to “find out some means of expediting the necessary business of the Session.”¹² To this end, he suggested the resolution, “that in this present Session of Parliament all Orders of the Day set down in the Order Book for Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, shall be disposed of before the House will proceed upon any Motions of which notices shall be entered in the Order Book.”¹³ In other words, that legislation already slated for deliberation would have, for the duration of that Session, priority on three days of the week.

Perceval’s resolution was largely framed through a means/ends rationality the primary concern of which was the amount of time consumed in the law-making process. In response to this resolution, Perceval faced numerous objections. In one case, the objection operated through the same rationale, as Lord Folkestone suggested that Perceval’s proposal would only further limit the time available to legislators, which was already “too much limited.”¹⁴ The most common objection that Perceval faced, however, was framed in an entirely different way. This argument operated through the basic assumption that past political experience, not novel reforms, was the best means of organizing parliamentary practice. Charles Yorke, M.P. for St. Germans, told the Commons that amendments to procedure were unnecessary as “the ancient orders of the

¹² HC Deb., 27 February 1811, vol. 19 cc. 106-107

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ HC Deb., 27 February 1811, vol. 19 cc. 107

House were all intended for the furtherance of public business.”¹⁵ Samuel Whitbread, the well-known radical M.P. for Bedford, said that he could not approve “of rashly breaking in upon the old established usages of parliament... [which] were the entrenchments of minorities.”¹⁶ Such a course would, according to Whitbread, “deprive the House of its vitality.”¹⁷ George Ponsonby, M.P. for Cork, responded to Perceval’s call for reform by stating that the Commons needed to be extremely cautious in any alteration to the traditional rules and usages of the House, which had been proven by experience: “The existing rules of practice have been adopted after long experience and they should not be hastily altered without full and urgent proof of the superiority of the plan proposed to be substituted.”¹⁸ While each of these Members provided a different reason for his hesitancy towards Perceval’s plan, they all implicitly agreed that the political experience of the past was the most able guide for the parliamentary practice of the present. Parliament’s time problem, while recognized, was therefore not linked to a constitutional or structural deficiency. Instead, the root of Parliament’s time problem was located in temporary issues such as the unusual “press of business” or, more significantly, the tendency of some Members to consult “their own convenience in preference to the national interest.”¹⁹

A similar rhetorical/temporal structure is evident on the re-introduction of Perceval’s resolution in the Sessions of 1812 and 1812-13. On both occasions, Whitbread objected by stating that some considerations were significantly more important than

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ HC Deb., 27 February 1811, vol. 19 cc. 108

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ HC Deb., 27 February 1811, vol. 19 cc. 107

¹⁹ HC Deb., 5 March 1811, vol. 19 cc. 244, 246

accelerating the legislative process. He claimed that while the proposed resolution might speed up the work of the Government, it would also greatly injure freedom of discussion which, in his view, was an essential part of English constitutional practice.²⁰ He stated that the time problem under which the House was operating was only temporary and the continual introduction of Perceval's resolution was therefore unnecessary. Instead of adopting "novel measure[s]" Whitbread hoped that Members would continue to insist on the rights they had enjoyed in "the good old times."²¹ Concurring with Whitbread, Mr. Abercromby told the House that it would be an error to impose a "real and permanent evil in order to get rid of a supposed and temporary inconvenience."²² For both Whitbread and Abercromby, then, the historically developed practice of the House appeared better suited to the politics of the present and future than was Perceval's proposed resolution. This same point was made by Mr. Ponsonby, who told the House that it should pause before adopting Perceval's resolution, as he had "never witnessed any attempt to break in upon the old established usages of Parliament that was not attended with great inconvenience."²³

Following the procedural debates between 1811 and 1813, the next debate on Parliament's time problem occurred late in 1830. Here, too, the debate took place in a period of crisis that helped to accentuate the need for political action. In a year filled with rioting rural workers and parliamentary reform agitation, the House's legislative burden had increased by more than 54% since the previous Session. It was in this context that, on

²⁰ HC Deb., 9 January 1812, vol. 21 cc. 111

²¹ HC Deb., 1 December 1812, vol. 24 cc119-120

²² HC Deb., 9 January 1812, vol. 21 cc. 112

²³ Ibid

3 November 1830, Sir Robert Peel told the Commons that Parliament's "great difficulty" was "to find time for the adequate performance of its several duties."²⁴ On the suggestion of the Speaker, Charles Manners-Sutton, Peel proposed that the House should meet an hour earlier, at 3:00 pm instead of 4:00 pm. Peel stated that he was "exceedingly unwilling" to propose any more significant change in the hour of meeting as he felt that would infringe on the committee work and constituency correspondence with which many Member's occupied their mornings.²⁵

Whereas the 1811-1813 debates exhibited an extreme reluctance to alter the procedures of the House, Peel's speech met with the enthusiasm for reform that characterised much public political debate in the early 1830s. Radical M.P.s like Daniel O'Connell, Joseph Hume, and Henry Brougham only objected that Peel's proposed reform would not go far enough. Yet, despite this enthusiasm for reform, an ambivalence about novelty in House procedure continued to temper Peel's thinking about parliamentary time. By the end of the debate, Peel's position had hardened that Parliament's time problem could not be resolved through a systematic reform of House procedure, but only through a minor alteration to the hours of sitting and by hoping that "hon. Members would use their individual discretion." As he stated:

Any Gentleman might, if he pleased, detain the House for four or five hours.... [A]lmost everything must depend upon the individual discretion of hon. Members, who could do much more than any regulation could effect towards the attainment of the desired end, if they would address themselves fairly and seriously to the subject under debate, laying aside all extraneous matter, and not indulging in surplus eloquence which never carried conviction

²⁴ HC Deb., 3 November 1830, vol. 1 cc. 130

²⁵ HC Deb., 03 November 1830, vol. 1 cc. 131

with it, and which often tended rather to obscure than to throw light upon the subject before the House.²⁶

Thus, while Peel's initial claim that House practice required reform was based on his recognition that Parliament was operating under a scarcity of time, his attempt to locate the origin of that problem led him to the manners of individual Members rather than defects in procedure. Consequently he continued to view the House's procedural code as relevant.

The functioning of this temporal dynamic can again be seen in the much larger procedural deliberations of 1837. The continuing significance of Parliament's time scarcity was made manifest when, on 5 June 1837, Lord Brougham complained to the House of Lords that the growing inefficiency of the Commons was resulting in measures not reaching the Second Chamber until "so late a period that it was almost impossible to pay attention to them."²⁷ As such, Brougham complained that the House of Lords was not provided with a sufficient quantity of time to "fairly" do its work and, as a result, the quality of the legislation produced by Parliament suffered.²⁸ Brougham thus concluded that it was "not only advisable, but the imperative duty of the House" to find and apply a remedy to Parliament's time problem "as speedily as possible."²⁹ Subsequently Select Committees were appointed in both the Lords and the Commons. While the Lords Committee, once constituted, decided to limit its deliberations to the conduct of Private

²⁶ HC Deb., 03 November 1830, vol. 1 cc. 141-142

²⁷ HL Deb., 5 June 1837, vol. 38 cc. 1170

²⁸ Brougham complained that: "In three or four weeks, when the month of July had come, the whole of the business would be thrown upon [the Lords]... which, to be fairly done and deliberately considered... ought to be spread over the whole of the seven months." Ibid.

²⁹ HL Deb., 5 June 1837, vol. 38 cc. 1184

Business, the Commons Committee was more successful in attending to Brougham's complaint regarding the efficiency of the Public Business.³⁰

The Commons Committee, which had been ordered to "consider the best means of conducting Public Business with improved regularity and despatch", reported its findings to the House in November. The report claimed that the Commons was unable to efficiently accomplish its legislative burden because the existing procedures could be perverted by Members in order to reallocate House time.³¹ In fact the Committee claimed that the quantity of time assigned to government Orders in the House's calendar had been "interfered with" by a proportion of more than one-third.³² The central problem according to the Committee was the right of individual Members to move amendments that were beyond the scope of the business being discussed. While it had long been "the privilege of any Member of the House to interpose any amendment that he may think fit, even without notice, upon any occasion whatever", the Committee observed that the increasingly common usage of this privilege to divert the attention of the House away from the Orders of the Day was a novelty.³³ In order to curb this new but increasing problem the Committee recommended limiting the scope of potential amendments to the reading of Orders so as to reduce deviations from the Order Paper and better control the allocation of

³⁰ HL Deb., 15 July 1837, vol. 38 cc. 1914

³¹ Report of the Select Committee on the Public and Private Business of the House p. ii; 1837 (517); HC Deb., 24 November 1837, vol. 39 cc. 193-200

³² Report of the Select Committee on the Public and Private Business of the House p. 4; 1837 (517)

³³ As the Committee stated: "In adverting to... the frequent interruption of the Rules of the House, which appropriate Mondays and Fridays to Orders of the Day, your Committee must remark, that the practice appears to be a novel one.... [T]his privilege, conferred for purposes of public utility, was clearly only intended to be practically taken advantage of in cases of extreme importance." Ibid., p.4

parliamentary time.³⁴ By this course the Committee suggested that parliamentary time would become more stable and regular and that, in consequence, the House would become more efficient.

In Brougham's complaint and the Select Committee's recommendations, there is a clear connection between a decreasing quantity of actual parliamentary time and the recognition that the procedures of the House required reform. This relationship between time and calls for reform is also linked to a sense of historical discontinuity that is most clearly present in the recognition of novel parliamentary practices. Yet, as in earlier instances, the Report from the Select Committee on Public Business exhibited a clear reluctance to significantly reform the procedures of parliamentary law-making. The reform suggested by the Committee was non-systemic in nature, striking at one perversion of the House's rules and not the rules themselves. This, the Committee explained, was owing to the fact that "the evils which are known to exist" were the result of the "non-observance" of the rules "more than from any defect in the Rules themselves."³⁵ The purpose of reform according to this reasoning was to limit opportunities for manipulation and to thereby maintain historical continuity in constitutional practice

Despite the limited character of the proposed reform, the Committee felt it necessary to explain that it had "most careful[ly] considered every other course" and that

³⁴ In the language of the Committee: "...that upon the question being put from the Chair, that any Order of the Day be read, except in the case of a Committee of Supply or Ways and Means, no amendment should be proposed except that the other Orders of the Day, or that any particular Order, be now read." Ibid., p. 4

³⁵ Ibid., p. 3

it had not come to its conclusion “without having sought in vain” for alternatives.³⁶ The Committee also explained in its report that its extensive search for alternative reforms was driven by its members’ belief that such a search was required before it would be right to suggest any amendments to “Orders which have the sanction of long experience.”³⁷ While the report of the 1837 Committee does not include a verbatim account of its deliberations, the non-systemic nature of the reform proposed and the Committee’s expressed reasoning for why this particular reform was required both suggest a scepticism driven by a historical perception that viewed the House’s procedure as immune to temporal change. A similar finding suggests itself in the Commons debate on the Committee Report.

On 24 November 1837, Lord John Russell presented the report to the Commons. While Russell recommended the reform that had been suggested by the Committee, he was convinced that the introduction of additional rules would not solve Parliament’s time problem. Russell claimed that, more than the reform proposed by the Committee, the House required a reformation in the manners of its Members. As he stated,

Even this regulation will not be of much use unless Members themselves are fully impressed with the great evil which results from the irregularity of their proceedings, and are determined to bring into effect the regulations suggested, and to make it their custom and constant practice to carry on the business of the House regularly.³⁸

Beyond claiming that Parliament’s time problem was not linked to a defect in the parliamentary system, Russell also exhibited a reluctance to significantly alter the

³⁶ Ibid., p. 5

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ HC Deb., 24 November 1837, vol. 39 cc. 195

House's existing procedural code. He claimed not simply that the plans proposed were only "experiments to make the proceedings of the House more regular", but that they were intended to do so "without altering much its ancient rules and practice."³⁹ He insisted that, as a member of the Committee, he had "striven to keep as much as possible within the old regulations."⁴⁰ Russell's esteem for the House's "ancient rules" was shared by Thomas Wakley, M.P. for Finsbury, and Charles Hindley, M.P. for Ashton-Under-Lyne, both of whom expressed concern over the "hasty adoption" of amendments to "the old constitutional system."⁴¹

The procedural debates of 1837 exhibit a rhetorical structure that fits the pattern of the earlier debates. Here again we find perceptions of ontological and historical time discursively intersecting and producing a recognition that, while reform was required, its scope should be limited. The same discursive/temporal pattern sometimes also appeared in the small amount of press comment that procedural reform received during this period. For example, an author in the Edinburgh Review observed in 1819 that meaningful legislative debate had suffered in the House of Commons due to "the great increase in all branches of parliamentary business."⁴² While the author initially suggested that this required significant and acceleratory reforms in Britain's legislative process, he concluded that since "our Parliamentary forms are... the gradual result of long and varied

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ HC Deb., 24 November 1837, vol. 39 cc. 200

⁴² "Chambre des Pairs de France – Session de 181 – Seance du Samedi, 8 Mai 1819," Edinburgh Review, 63, (July 1819), 193. Also quoted in Peter Fraser, "The Conduct of Public Business in the House of Commons, 1812-1827," (Unpublished Ph.D. University of London, 1957), 108

experience... the utmost caution ought to be used even in hinting at any change or addition for the purpose of improving them.”⁴³ While the author did not provide much elaboration on this point, the idea that an increase in the demands on parliamentary time detrimentally affected the legislative process and therefore created a need for procedural reform would receive more sustained treatment in three pamphlets and books published during the late 1820s and 1830s. Unlike the Edinburgh Review article, however, this literature demonstrates the existence of an alternative language through which the problem of parliamentary time and procedural reform could be understood.

The first of these tracts was William Wickens’ 1829 piece, An Argument for More of the Division of Labour in the Civil Life in this Country, Part 1 in which the Argument is Applied to Parliament.⁴⁴ Here, Wickens argued that “the Infinity of Matters that are now submitted to Parliament” created a temporal condition whereby the parliamentary Session became “but a continued legislative race” and that, as such, potential legislation was often hastily and insufficiently considered by Parliament.⁴⁵ According to Wickens, this race was part of a self-perpetuating cycle, as legislation drafted and passed in haste was often “of the most deplorably defective quality” and required amendment in later Sessions of Parliament.⁴⁶ As he wrote, “not only does the particular Act often prove to be badly drawn up – but some wrong is inflicted – some oversight committed – some case left unprovided for – which causes the Measure at once to work ill, and which speedily

⁴³ Ibid, pp. 93-94

⁴⁴ William Wickens, An Argument for More of the Division of Labour in this Country, Part 1 in which the Argument is Applied to Parliament, (London: Saunders and Otley, 1829)

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 16

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 141

requires re-interference, and fresh legislation.”⁴⁷ Wickens suggested as a remedy the introduction of a system of devolution whereby the work currently done on the floor of the Commons would be delegated to local and parliamentary committees. He claimed that by adopting this course Parliament would be relieved of approximately one-half of its annual duties.⁴⁸

Following Wickens, Sir John Sinclair, in his short 1830 pamphlet entitled, “Thoughts on the Means of Preventing the Public Mischiefs which necessarily arise from the Great Load of Public and Private Business with which the House of Commons is at Present Overwhelmed”, lamented the existence of parliamentary practices that facilitated “a great waste of valuable time.”⁴⁹ According to Sinclair this waste of time was owing to the extensive growth in all branches of parliamentary work which ensured that, “the time of the House is occupied with such an endless variety of matters, and [that]... a single day can hardly be procured to bring forward questions of the greatest domestic importance.”⁵⁰ These facts led Sinclair to the conclusion that “there is an *absolute necessity* to devise some means of remedying a state of things so injurious to the Members of the House and to the national interests.”⁵¹ Like Wickens, Sinclair suggested the adoption of a division of labour. Specifically, he called for a system of devolution whereby much of the work that was then transacted on the floor of the House would be relocated to a newly formed

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 134

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 142

⁴⁹ Sir John Sinclair, “Thoughts on the Means of Preventing the Public Mischiefs which Necessarily Arise from the Great Load of Public and Private Business with which the House of Commons is at Present Overwhelmed,” p. 8

⁵⁰ Ibid., p.7

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 9 [emphasis in original]

second chamber of the Commons.⁵² Though Sinclair did not suggest exactly how much time could be saved by the adoption of his proposal, he did claim that through a system of simultaneous labour, “the character of the House would be raised” and Ministers would be ensured “*more time* to attend to the Ardua Regni.”⁵³

In 1832 the idea of applying the principles of the division of labour to Parliament was once again forwarded, this time by Arthur Symonds. With agitation for a reform of the parliamentary franchise at its height, Symonds argued in his book, Practical Suggestions for the Internal Reform of the House of Commons that significant procedural reform was now required more than ever.⁵⁴ Without such reform, Symonds claimed, the nation would likely see neutralized “many of the benefits which may be expected to flow from the proposed [franchise] reform of Parliament.”⁵⁵ Like both Wickens and Sinclair, Symonds observed that the House suffered from a severe time scarcity:

It is utterly impossible for the House to accomplish its duties under its present arrangements and as a consequence, individual Members, though their physical and mental endowments be superhuman, must fail in their duty, unless the period of a day be multiplied six-fold.⁵⁶

⁵² Similar suggestions were recently made by the Select Committee on the Modernisation of the House of Commons. In its 1998, this Committee suggested the formation of a “parallel chamber” or “main committee” in order to alleviate the multiple pressures of business that then fell upon the Commons. See, “Modernisation of the House of Commons - First Report,” <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm199899/cmselect/cmmodern/60/6002.htm>, (accessed 15 December 2010)

⁵³ Ibid., p. 14. Ardua Regni: Latin for “the difficult affairs of the kingdom.” [my emphasis]

⁵⁴ Arthur Symonds, “Practical Suggestions for the Internal Reform of the House of Commons,” (London: F.C. Westley, Strand, 1832)

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 6

⁵⁶ Ibid.

According to Symonds, this scarcity of parliamentary time produced a condition where the legislature was “hurried and inefficient, and therefore productive of ill.”⁵⁷ If the House continued to operate through its existing procedure, Symonds argued that “hurry and confusion will follow insufficient arrangements, and the old proverb ‘the more haste the worst speed,’ will be exemplified as surely in this instance as in all human affairs.”⁵⁸ As a remedy, Symonds suggested that the House would maximize the time at its disposal by dividing the Commons into concurrently sitting Committees. Moreover, Symonds claimed that such a course would allow the House to get directly to its real legislative work, without the obstruction of formalities. Symonds’ suggestion involved the creation of ten committees, each assigned to a particular branch of legislation and each consisting of approximately fifty Members. Through the adoption of this plan, Symonds suggested that the efficiency of the House would increase by five-and-a-half times, thereby offsetting the increasing scarcity of parliamentary time.

As the above discussion suggests, the frameworks for reform proposed by Wickens, Sinclair and Symonds were fairly extensive in detail. Not only did they suggest that House duties be divided and devolved, they also discussed the necessity of this action, the appropriate mode of proceeding, and the expected benefits. In addition to their attention to detail, these authors were strategic in how they structured their appeals. Wickens, Sinclair, and Symonds all employed an aesthetic framing that provided an alternative language to the discourse of historical continuity. This was done through the use of a mode of emplotment that best resembles the narrative structure of romance. Their

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 7

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 9

claims were structured around a storyline that was characterized by “the hero’s transcendence of the world of experience, his victory over it, and his final liberation from it.”⁵⁹ For all three authors the conditions of present political experience worked to oppress and trap the House of Commons. “The House of Commons is oppressed with business of all descriptions,” wrote Sinclair, and “the legislature is perfectly oppressed,” wrote Wickens.⁶⁰ This state of oppression in which the House operated was represented as making it “utterly impossible” for the Commons to accomplish its duties.⁶¹ It was argued by these authors, however, that the House could transcend this reality by applying the principles of the division of labour, which, as Symonds pointed out, have “worked wonders in all but the House of Commons.”⁶²

In pointing to the effects of the division of labour on areas of British society outside of Parliament these authors were able to invoke a romantic image of national progress. This imagery was perhaps most apparent in Wickens, who placed the notion of progress at the centre of his appeal, arguing that his plan for devolving the work of Parliament was intended to achieve “some advance or forward movement” in the organization of English civil life.⁶³ Citing Adam Smith’s Wealth of Nations, Wickens suggested that Parliament’s progress was behind that of the rest of the nation:

⁵⁹ Hayden White, Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 8

⁶⁰ John Sinclair, “Thoughts on the Means of Preventing the Public Mischiefs,” p. 5; William Wickens, An Argument for More of the Division of Labour, p.141

⁶¹ Arthur Symonds, “Practical Suggestions for the Internal Reform of the House of Commons,” p. 6

⁶² Ibid, p. 7

⁶³ William Wickens, An Argument for More of the Division of Labour, p. 2

The author of the 'Wealth of Nations', tells us, there is a period in the progress of states, when the artificer in any given material is the Workman upon all occasions on which that material happens to be concerned.... If by any possibility this statement could be regarded in the light of an allegory, we should say that it depicts, with no ordinary fidelity, the present actual position or predicament of our legislature.... The entire context being to the effect that 'as society advances in numbers and in improvement, the manifold avocations of the artificer come to be parcelled out among separate sets of hands, and to constitute in reality, totally distinct branches of industry.'⁶⁴

Wickens' claim that the division of labour was a necessary and inevitable agent of historical progress and that, consequently, it needed to be applied to the organization of the legislature added the motif of improvement to his narrative. This motif was clearly evident in the work of all three authors. Thus, Symonds would suggest that through the division of labour, the legislature could contribute more effectively to "the progress of national improvement."⁶⁵

By framing their work in a "romance of improvement", these three authors situated their appeals within the linear vision of historical time that was gaining strength within English culture during the 1830s. Moreover, by framing their arguments in a linear rather than cyclical temporal vision, these authors were able to give procedural reform a greater significance. As the author in the Westminster Review commented on Symonds' piece: "however rapidly a nation advances in the march of improvement, it is only step by step that it can proceed surely.... We have gained the first step – the recognition of our right to chuse [sic] our representatives.... The object now is to select the tools for our workmen."⁶⁶ This "romance of improvement" has been identified by historian Patrick

⁶⁴ Ibid., pp. 3-4

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 9

⁶⁶ Westminster Review, 17, (1832), 451

Joyce as one of the most pervasive and powerful narratives in early to mid-nineteenth-century English political discourse, drawing much of its force from the growth of industrial and technological modernity and its ostensible ability to allow humans to transcend their natural limitations.⁶⁷

Given the presence of this politically powerful aesthetic in the procedural discourse presented by Wickens, Sinclair and Symonds, it is striking that none of the schemes proposed by these three authors had any effect whatsoever on the Commons procedural debates of the 1830s. Indeed, this anomaly would cause one author in the Edinburgh Review to claim that Wickens' book, in particular, "has not attracted the notice which it merits."⁶⁸ While striking, however, the limited impact of Wickens et al. accords with the power of a continuity discourse in parliamentary discussions of the allocation of time. Wickens anticipated that the House would exhibit this reluctance towards reform and, for this reason, he wrote towards the end of his piece that the Commons must avoid, "that blindness of some people that is all but physical, to the necessity that exists... of adapting from time to time to the growth of progress – the institutions of society."⁶⁹

If the publications of Wickens, Sinclair, and Symonds did not greatly impact the reform debates of the 1830s, they did nevertheless foreshadow a major discursive trend that would become apparent in later parliamentary debates on procedure. More specifically, these publications anticipated the emergence of two alternative languages for

⁶⁷ Patrick Joyce, Democratic Subjects, 161-176

⁶⁸ Edinburgh Review, v. 66, p. 214

⁶⁹ William Wickens, An Argument for More of the Division of Labour, pp. 144-45

the rendering of Parliament's time problem, both of which signalled the strengthening of a means/ends rational political vision and its growing ability to make sense of political action outside of a value-based rubric.

The first of these was the imaginative transformation of time into a commodity, which, like capital, could be valued, possessed, traded, multiplied, spent or wasted. In debates during the 1840s representations began to emerge which increasingly rendered parliamentary time in this way.⁷⁰ Thus, by 6 June 1840, George Sinclair, M.P. for Caithness, would complain of "the slow and slovenly manner in which the business of the country was carried on", by stating that Members "seemed disposed to deal with the public time as a spendthrift does with a large fortune."⁷¹ That is:

they at first consumed many days... on protracted debates..., on motions designed to lead to nothing, and on bills intended to be withdrawn, and when the season of prorogation was near at hand, they could scarcely command as much time, or collect as many Members, as were necessary for expediting indispensable business.⁷²

Sinclair's complaint not only reflects the continuing significance of Parliament's time problem, it also suggests the growth of a potentially subversive rhetoric of temporal commoditisation which privileged the reduction of delay in the realization of legislative demands over the maintenance of historically transmitted constitutional virtues. Sinclair's

⁷⁰ Interestingly, Steven Marcus has identified a similar discursive formation during the 1850s in the literature on sexuality and in English pornography. Here, Marcus observed that "to spend" was the common colloquial expression to describe an orgasm, that discussions of sexuality were often framed by the idea of scarcity, and that the central appeal of pornography was its image as a world of plenty where "that universal fluid currency could be spent without loss." Steven Marcus, The Other Victorians: A Study of Sexuality and Pornography in Mid-Nineteenth-Century England, (New York: Basic Books, 1966), 22

⁷¹ HC Deb., 06 June 1840, vol. 54 cc. 963

⁷² Ibid

statement, however, also reflects the way in which the language of temporal commoditisation could be incorporated into the imagery of constitutional/historical continuity through the three part temporal dynamic. Note that for Sinclair, the problem of parliamentary time was not the product of a defect in the House's ancient rules but rather resulted from the manners and character of the Members. The problem was not that the House's procedural code was out-of-date but that the Members of the House acted like spendthrifts.

In addition to anticipating the notion of a commoditised time, the writings of Wickens, Symonds and Sinclair also foreshadowed the increasingly pronounced sense of historical discontinuity that would reveal itself in the procedural reform debates of the 1840s and after. This image of discontinuity would be rooted in a language that used tropes of physical movement through space in order to depict the legislature lagging behind the nation. Even more significantly than commoditisation this de-synchronization critique and its tropology of movement had subversive potential: not only did this idea run entirely contrary to the ideas of stability associated with historical continuity, but the tropology of movement also privileged the problems of ontological time over those of historical time. But, while these representations of de-synchronization had the potential to disrupt the constitutional/historical continuity discourse, they would also be incorporated into the logic of the three part temporal dynamic and thereby disarmed. Indeed, unlike Wickens et al. this imagery would not emphasize the anachronisms of the parliamentary system, rather it would point to a significant historical change in the conduct of M.P.s. Thus, while contemporary understandings of Parliament's time problem underwent a

significant shift in the 1840s, the dominant vision of procedure as immune to history was able to persist. The key period in this transition came with the establishment of Lord John Russell's first Ministry in 1847.

III

Following the resignation of Sir Robert Peel over the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846, and the consequent fall of his Conservative Ministry, Russell's Liberal Party succeeded to power under conditions of significant instability. While Russell had proposed a vast program of social legislation his chances of pushing that program through Parliament appeared unlikely. Russell's first Ministry was not rooted in widespread support, it was instead, as historian Norman Gash has termed it, "a government by default."⁷³ Indeed, Russell did not command a disciplined Party with a vast majority, but rather was the head of a fractured Cabinet that was in government on the basis of a small majority of seats in the House and the lack of a united opposition.⁷⁴ Moreover, external and domestic crises, such as the continuing problems of the Irish famine, the development of a commercial panic in the autumn of 1847, growing Chartist agitation, and political revolutions on the continent, only worked to further restrain the legislative prospects of Russell's Government. In this context it is not at all surprising to find the prominent

⁷³ Norman Gash, Aristocracy and People: Britain, 1815-1865, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), 242

⁷⁴ Charles Greville, The Greville Memoirs: A Journal of the Reigns of King George IV., King William IV., and Queen Victoria, Henry Reeve, ed., (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1896) vol. 6, pp. 132-133; Michael Bentley, Politics Without Democracy, 1815-1914: Perception and Preoccupation in British Government, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 84-89; Paul Scherer, Lord John Russell: A Biography, (London: Associated University Presses, 1999), 177-188; Norman Gash, Aristocracy and People, pp. 242-248

Peelite Sir James Graham writing to the fourth Earl of Aberdeen that “no minister had a more unpromising or disagreeable task than that which Lord John has now to encounter.”⁷⁵

Despite the dismal prospects facing Russell’s Liberal Government, the Prime Minister proved himself a clever enough parliamentary tactician to eventually achieve much of his “Condition of England” legislative program. By the end of its term, Russell’s Ministry had passed a Ten Hours Act, a Public Health Act and an Interments Act; it had expanded the state’s power over teacher training and it had established a Poor Law Board to supersede the Poor Law Commission.⁷⁶ During the first two Sessions of his Ministry, however, the ambitious program that he had put forward was often contrasted against the perceived dearth of important statutes that had received the Royal Assent. In Punch Russell’s achievements were represented as a “farce” and the equivalent to a “harvest of one sheaf.”⁷⁷ In his diary, Charles Greville, Privy Councillor and political satirist, complained at the end of Russell’s first Session that “Bill after Bill has been thrown over” and that “the Session will come to an end with hardly anything been done.”⁷⁸ The central problem was that, while Russell’s program was initially described by one Peelite as

⁷⁵ Quoted in Paul Scherer, Lord John Russell, p. 177

⁷⁶ These legislative accomplishments have been cited by historian Peter Mandler in his attempt to rescue the Whig Government of Russell from the harsh historiographic treatment it has tended to receive at the hands of historians like Gash. For a discussion of Russell’s accomplishments, see Peter Mandler, Aristocratic Government in the Age of Reform: Whigs and Liberals, 1830-1852, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 236-274

⁷⁷ “The Farce of the Session,” Punch, 15, (1848), 89; “The Parliamentary Harvest of One Sheaf,” Punch, 15, (1848), 81

⁷⁸ Charles Greville, The Greville Memoirs, vol. 6, p. 97

reform at “the speed of an Express Train”, the actual pace of his legislative achievements was significantly less efficient.⁷⁹

The divide between the expected and actual pace of Russell’s program worked to create a space for the deployment of a commoditised temporal language that was rooted in the implicitly valuated notion of “waste.” Greville noted that the outstanding feature of Russell’s first year was the “great deal of time [that had been] entirely wasted.”⁸⁰ Similarly one author in the Manchester Guardian wrote that in Parliament “there has been a rather greater waste of time than usual” and another author in the Times complained of Parliament’s “wilful waste of time.”⁸¹ This emphasis on the “waste” of parliamentary time contained a particular set of temporal and rational presuppositions. Most notably, its emphasis on purposive doing was linked to a perception that a lengthy period of time between articulation and actualization was a significant political problem to be avoided. In this way, it raised speed in law-making to the position of a political virtue and thus had an obvious potential to disrupt the power of the continuity discourse and to move procedural reform debates toward a more systemic focus. Indeed, discussions of the “waste” of parliamentary time were seen by Lord Brougham as “injurious... to the character of the constitution” and the London Illustrated News argued that the 1847 Session had demonstrated one “simple fact” about the House of Commons, “that the business of Parliament has so increased, that, with the utmost strain on its powers, the

⁷⁹ Quoted in Peter Mandler, Aristocratic Government in the Age of Reform, p. 249

⁸⁰ Ibid

⁸¹ Untitled Article, Manchester Guardian, (10 July 1847), 5; Untitled Article, Times (London), (26 November 1847), 4; Untitled Article, Times (London), (25 March 1848), 4

Legislature is not up to its task.”⁸² While the 1847 Session drew some public attention to the problem of parliamentary time, it would be quickly superseded by the extremely protracted Session of 1847-48.

The 1847-48 Session was referred to by Punch as “the monster Session” and by both the Speaker and the Queen, in their respective speeches at the prorogation, as “a protracted and laborious Session.”⁸³ Between the opening of Parliament on 18 November and the prorogation on 5 September, the House considered 200 Public Bills, it divided on 255 occasions, its Ministers were asked 222 questions, it considered 18,450 petitions, and Hansard recorded that 3,402,004 words were spoken.⁸⁴ To put these figures in terms relative to 1847, the number of Public Bills had increased by 22%, the number of divisions had increased by 50%, the number of Questions had increased by 42%, the number of spoken words recorded in Hansard had increased by 20% and the mean

⁸² HL Deb., 20 July 1847, vol. 94 cc. 584; “The Abandoned Bills”, London Illustrated News, (10 July 1847), 17

⁸³ “The Monster Session,” Punch, Vol. 15, (1848), 76; “House of Commons”, Times (London), (5 September 1848), 3; HL Deb., 5 September 1848, vol. 101, cc. 791, 792

⁸⁴ Sir Thomas Erskine May, “Remarks and Suggestions with a View to Facilitate the Dispatch of Public Business in Parliament,” Papers of Thomas Erskine May, Parliamentary Archives, ERM/18/36/1; Report from the Select Committee on Public Business, (1848), iii; “The Public Business of the House of Commons,” Times (London), (6 September 1848), 4; Hansard author’s own count. In addition to the considerable quantity of business transacted on the floor of the House, the amount of Committee business that Members were faced with was also substantial. In the 1847-48 Session there were 44 Public Committees each with an average of 15 Members, 28 Election Committees, 14 Committees on Railway Bills, and 129 Committees on Private Bills. Since Committee business was transacted in the morning before the sitting of the House, such a large number of Committees meant that the time the Members had outside of the House was made increasingly scarce. It was in this sense that one author in the Times observed, these Committees make a “heavy demand... on the time of Members.” “The Public Business of the House of Commons,” Times (London), (6 September 1848), 4

number of words spoken per debate had increased by 21%.⁸⁵ Moreover, the number of petitions presented in the 1847-48 Session represented an increase of 11% from the mean average between 1842 and 1847, and 24% from the mean average between 1837 and 1842.⁸⁶

In order to grapple with the vast increase in work Parliament attempted to expand the time at its disposal. In the Lords, an abortive attempt was made at removing the custom that unfinished legislation died with prorogation when Lord Stanley introduced the Parliamentary Proceedings Adjournment Bill.⁸⁷ Though Stanley's Bill never passed, Parliament attempted to combat its increasing time scarcity by sitting longer and later than it had in any Session within recent memory. To put this in precise units of time, in 1847-48, the House sat on 170 occasions, which represented a 29% increase from the previous Session; each sitting of the House lasted for an average of 8.25 hours. The House sat for a total of 1407.5 hours, of which 136.25 hours were after midnight.⁸⁸ These sitting hours represented, respectively, a 9%, 35%, and 48% increase from the previous

⁸⁵ Return of the Number of Days on which the House Of Commons Sat in the Session of 1847, 1847, (746); A List of the Public Bills which have been Introduced into the House Of Commons during the Session 1847, Stating by whom Introduced, or which have been brought from the Lords, and the Date of their Several Stages in the House, and Distinguishing those which have since become Law, 1847, (756); Return on the Number of Divisions in the 1847 Session, 1847, (746)

⁸⁶ Report from the Select Committee on Public Business, (1848), iii

⁸⁷ The Bill passed its committee stage in the Lords and was reported to the Commons where it eventually died on the Order Paper. HL Deb., 14 April 1848, vol. 98 cc. 329-340; HL Deb., 15 May 1848, vol. 98 cc. 981-987; HL Deb., 23 May 1848, vol. 98 cc. 1255-1259; HC Deb 5 July 1848 vol. 100 cc. 131-137

⁸⁸ Records of the House of Commons Journal Office, Parliamentary Archives,

Session as well as a 6%, 24%, and 30% deviation from the mean averages between 1845 and 1848 (inclusive).⁸⁹

Such a busy and extended Session reignited the criticism that Parliament was not properly spending the time at its disposal. In his widely read 1848 pamphlet, “Remarks and Suggestions”, the then examiner of petitions for Private Bills and noted procedural expert, Thomas Erskine May, observed that Parliament had only been able to attain “the great objects of a Legislature” after a significant “waste of time, energy and health.”⁹⁰ Similarly, the Times complained on 25 March 1848 of “the present waste of legislative time.”⁹¹ This revival of the language of “waste” caused one author in the London Illustrated News to claim that the Session would be “chiefly memorable” not only for “its large promises and mean performances”, but also for “its unusual duration... its prolixity of speed [and] its slowness to pass measures.”⁹² In other words, as the Conservative Member, Benjamin Disraeli put it, that “its efficacy has not been commensurate with the period of its existence.”⁹³ Here, again, the language of a commoditised and valuated time is clearly present and its ability to render the parliamentary time scarcity as an urgent problem is obvious. This language, however, was not alone in this. In Disraeli’s emphasis on the speed/slowness of parliamentary action, we can begin to see that a separate, but complimentary, discourse of de-synchronization was also emerging, one which played

⁸⁹ Return of the Number of Days on which the House of Commons Sat in the Session of 1847, 1847, (746); Return of the Number of Days on which the House Sat in the Session of 1846, 1846, (723-II); Return of Number of Days on which the House of Commons Sat in Session of 1845, 1845, (659)

⁹⁰ Thomas Erskine May, “Remarks and Suggestions,” p. 6

⁹¹ Untitled Editorial, Times (London), (25 March 1848), 4

⁹² “Close of the Session,” London Illustrated News, (9 September 1848), 145

⁹³ HC Deb., 30 August 1848, vol. 101 cc. 669

equally on an instrumentally rational vision of politics that privileged the enactment of legislation over its scrutiny.

Largely because of its ostensible inability to manage economically the time of the Session, the first two years of Russell's Ministry were imagined by their contemporaries as being too slow and antiquated for a rapidly changing and modern Britain. The mid-to-late 1840s were characterized by a "railway mania" accompanied by a fascination with speed and its romantic promise of transcendence over the natural limitations of space and time.⁹⁴ The legislature thus was perceived to have fallen out of synch with the technological speed of modernity. This concern was also intensified by contemporary perceptions, especially present during and after the 1840s, of an acceleratory rate of social and political transformation. Perceptions of hastening social change were commonly articulated through the language of "the rising generation" or "the coming man."⁹⁵ Here, the idea of change became personified in the perceived or at least anticipated emergence of what appeared to be new people, largely unanchored in historical time and dangerous

⁹⁴ On the romantic promise of speed see Dionysius Lardner, Railway Economy: A Treatise on the New Art of Transport, Its Management Prospects and Relations, Commercial, Financial and Social, (London: Taylor, Walton, Maberly, 1850), esp. pp. 8-15. H.G. Lewin, The Railway Mania and its Aftermath, 1845-1852, (New York: A.M. Kelley, 1968); Wolfgang Schivelbusch, The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the 19th Century, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 31-34; C.E.R. Sherrington, A Hundred Years of Inland Transport, 1830-1933, (Andover: Chapel River Press, 1934), 96

⁹⁵ See, Charles Reade, The Coming Man: Letters Contributed to Harper's Weekly, (New York: Harper Brothers, 1978); Justin M'Carthy, "Coming Men in England," The North American Review, 150, (Mar., 1890), 310-320. Of all the 258 references to "the rising generation" in Hansard during the nineteenth-century, 51 (20%) were made during the 1840s.

Figure 2.1



Source: Punch, 12, (1847)

to tradition.⁹⁶ Indeed, one cartoon from 1847, entitled “The Rising Generation - in Parliament”, shows just how this language of social change intersected with pre-existing concerns about the efficacy of the British legislature. Here, an older Peel stands over a juvenile Disraeli. Illustrating the rebellious nature of “the rising generation,” the caption reads, “Peel: ‘Well, my little man, what are you going to do this Session, eh?’ Disraeli (the Juvenile), ‘Why aw – aw – I’ve made arrangements – aw – to smash – aw – everybody.’”⁹⁷ This language of an accelerating society worked to enhance the pre-

⁹⁶ Thus, during a debate in Committee of Supply in 1845, Viscount Mahon suggested procuring a collection of portraits of eminent men distinguished in British history. Such a collection, he argued, might exercise a most beneficial influence upon “the rising generation.” HC Deb., 27 June 1845, vol. 81 cc. 1334-41

⁹⁷ “The Rising Generation – In Parliament,” Punch, 12, (1847), 47

existing but growing concern with the inefficiency of the legislature and a sense of discontinuity between the political past and present.

Perceptions of acceleration, though, were not just limited to social change. It is, of course, important to remember that Russell's second Session in Parliament took place amidst revolutions in France and Germany as well as Chartist agitation at home. All of these occurrences led to increasing concerns with the pace of political change and the ability of the current British legislature to keep up. Whereas social change was often articulated through a language that personified time; political change was commonly articulated through a representational analogy between politics and physical movement through space. Such an analogy provided commentators with the ability to temporalize politics by representing it as a phenomenon subject to acceleration or deceleration. In Punch, for instance, visual representations of the European revolutions and the reformist agenda of Cobden used this analogy in order to capture a hastening in the rate of political change. In "The New Continental Coach, Revolution" European monarchs and statesmen were depicted as trapped within a fast-moving coach that was driven by a woman wearing a "cap of liberty" and racing by a paralyzed John Bull.⁹⁸ Similarly, the use of spatial motion in order to comment on the speed of politics can be seen in "The Hour and The Man." The contrast here, however, is drawn between a fast moving British nation and a slow moving legislature. Russell is depicted sitting in a train station, in front of him is an image of Richard Cobden dressed in the garb of a conductor, and behind Cobden is a train, operated by John Bull and labelled "reform." The caption below the image reads:

⁹⁸ "The New Continental Coach, Revolution," Punch, 14, (1848), 162

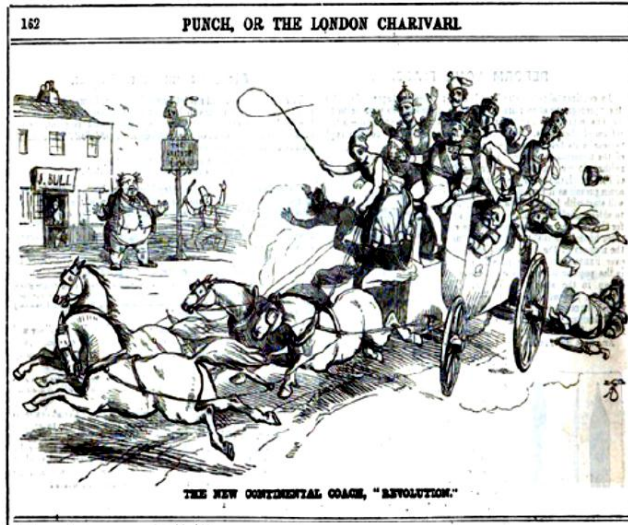
“Cobden: Now, sir, are you going by us? Russell: No, thank you, *you’re too fast for me*; I shall go by the Parliamentary Train.”⁹⁹ Here, the trope of physical movement functions as a means of critiquing the slowness of both Russell’s Government and the British legislature’s production of legislation. As we saw in the language of “waste”, the rationality of political action is here constructed through a means/ends instrumental vision.

The critique of de-synchronization was often accentuated through imagery of a “sleeping” government and an “awake” nation. For example in both “The British Lion’s Feeding Time” and “The Sluggard”, Russell is represented as being unhappily awakened by representatives of the nation. In the former cartoon, the nation is represented by both a hungry lion and a disappointed Mr. Punch. Approached by Mr. Punch, who is shown to be carrying a basket full of legislation, Russell is shown yawning and confused about the time. The caption reads, “J. Russell: ‘Hollo, I’ve been asleep! Why, what’s O’clock is it?’ Punch: ‘Oh, I’ll let you know what’s O’clock! It’s high time he was fed; and these are the things to give him.’”¹⁰⁰ In “The Sluggard”, Russell is again shown sleeping. Here images of an angry John Bull and Mr. Punch stand around him as he is awoken. The contrast between a sleeping and unproductive Prime Minister and an awake, expectant and unhappy nation should be seen as an extension of the motion/stillness binary through which an instrumentally rational critique of de-synchronization was applied to the sitting Parliament.

⁹⁹ “The Hour and the Man,” Punch, 14, (1848), 211

¹⁰⁰ “The British Lion’s Feeding Time,” Punch, 14, (1848), 189; “The Sluggard,” Punch, 14, (1848), 241. Also see, “Used Up,” Punch, 15, (1848), 79; “We’re All A-Nodding,” Punch, 14, (1848), 239

Figure 2.2



Source: Punch, 14, (1848): 162, 211

Figure 2.3

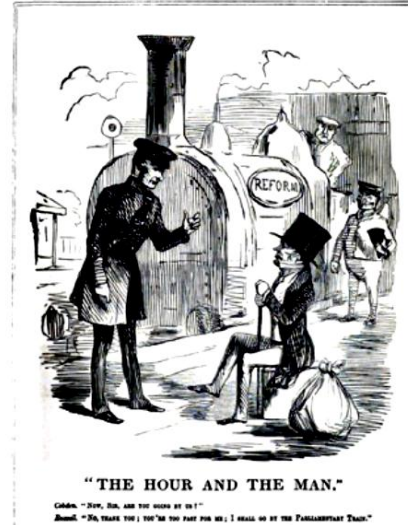


Figure 2.4



Source: Source: Punch, 14, (1848): 189, 241

Figure 2.5



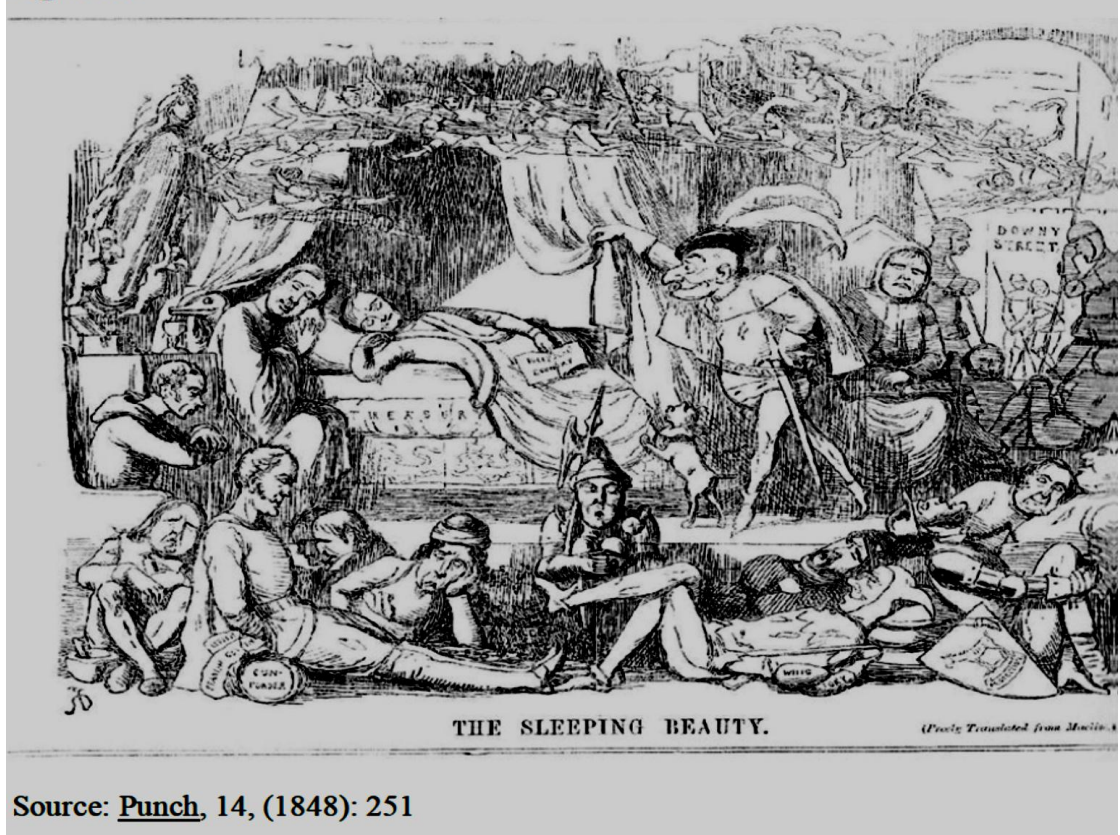
Perhaps the most striking instance of this critique found in Punch during the 1848 Session is “The Sleeping Beauty of St. Stephen’s.” Here, a number of M.P.s (drawn from both the Government and the Opposition) are shown in a deep sleep. Disraeli, for instance, is shown in the bottom left asleep on his hand. The centrepiece of the image, however, is Russell who is represented as sleeping on a bed marked “Treasury” with a series of fairies carrying torches and representing national “anarchy” swirling above him.¹⁰¹ Arguably the most striking aspect of the image is the contrast between the pace of movement associated with the images of the legislature and the nation. While Russell and Disraeli lay still, the speed at which the fairies move is accentuated by the elongated trails of smoke that follow from their torches and the series of horizontal lines that extend backwards from each image.

This image of the legislature being out of synch with the nation was made even more obvious in the poem attached to the image. Here, “trains” and “coaches” are used metaphorically to render the nation/legislature in terms of acceleration/deceleration while the language of “the coming man” is used to introduce a corollary modern/antiquated antinomy:

Oh Whigs, and Whiglings, let me speak:
Chance after chance has passed away,
And we’ve been waiting many a week,
For all you said you’d do some day.
And much amaze has crossed my mind

¹⁰¹ The Treasury Bench is also represented as a bed in: “Russell Warming Peel’s Bed,” Punch, 15, (1848), 37

Figure 2.6



Source: Punch, 14, (1848): 251

To see you on your present doze
On Treasury benches and behind
....
In politics 'tis well to know,
Those who would win must learn to wait;

Trains Parliamentary are slow,
And precious things come precious late.
He travels by a faster coach,
A novel flag he hath unfurled!
The Coming Man! Of whose approach
Disraeli hath warned the world.¹⁰²

When will this reign of Nod expire,
And Act and Work be born again?
When will the sleeping House require
New measures, fitting for new men?¹⁰³

¹⁰² "The Sleeping Beauty of St. Stephen's," Punch, 14, (1848), 250-1

As should be evident by now, the political and satirical press had clearly adopted this imagery as an instrumentally rational, time-based language for the critique of Russell's Government.

This temporal/political language was vividly employed by two political cartoons published in Punch during 1847. These cartoons take Lord John Russell as their protagonist and they represent him both as overburdened and exhausted by his parliamentary labours. In "The Boy-Of-All-Work", Russell is represented as a servant boy surrounded by dirty boots.¹⁰⁴ Each boot has a different legislative issue inscribed on its sole, representing a potential piece of legislation. The fact that the boots are dirty is meant to convey the message that the legislation is either poorly drafted or too contentious to pass quickly through the House. The image, however, does not simply comment on the time problem posed by the quality of the legislation, but also that posed by the quantity. The boots in the image are so numerous that they overflow from the shelves of the room onto the floor. Thus the image conveys the message that Russell's Government is faced with problems both in terms of the quantity and quality of legislation before the Commons.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ "The Boy-Of-All-Work," Punch, 12, (1847), 37

Figure 2.7



Figure 2.8

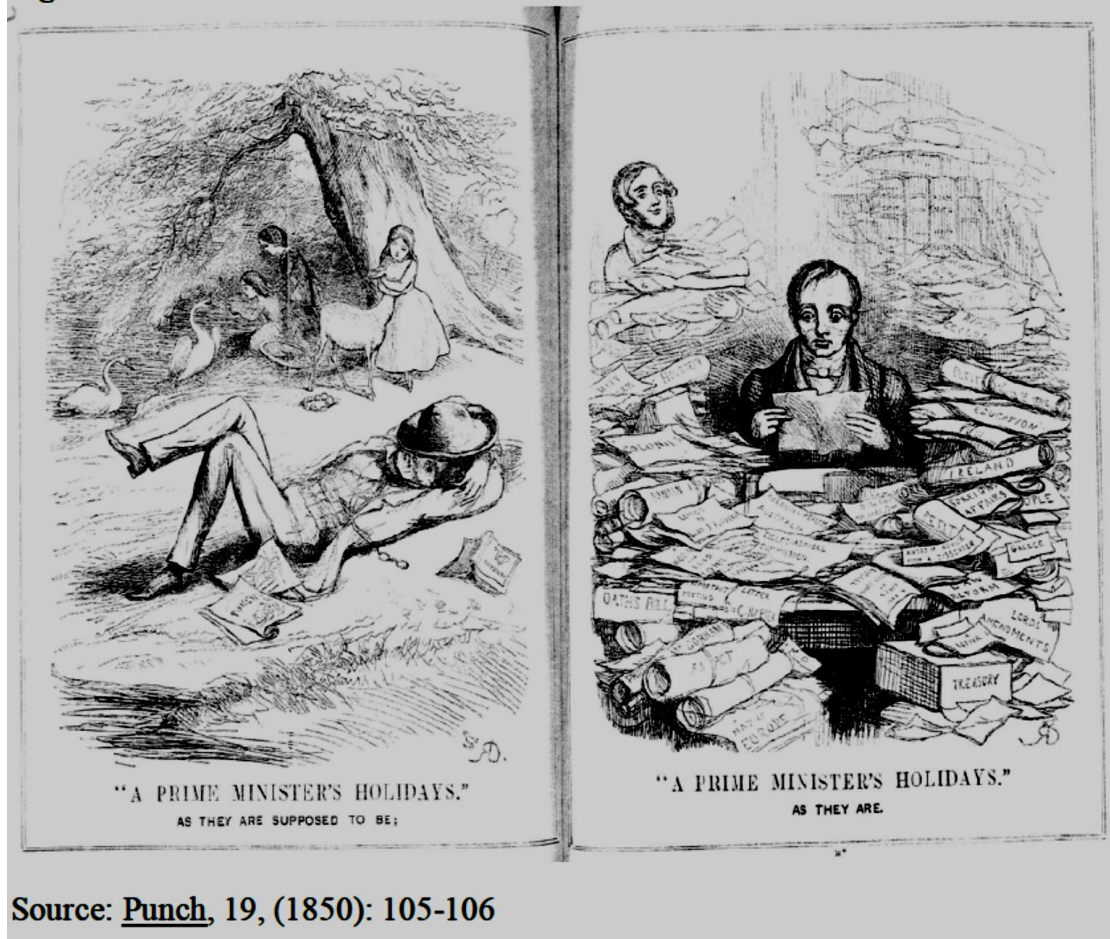


with the ability to scrutinize fully those Bills that have been proposed. As such, it is evident that the ideas of productivity and efficiency in politics are conceptually divorced from acts of deliberation and that, as such, actions that fall under the latter category are understood as temporally wasteful. Second, both images imply not only that the Government's work would be time-consuming but that it is excessive beyond the duration of time available to complete it. In other words, that Russell's Cabinet is not fast enough to clear out its legislative arrears. It is for this reason that Russell is represented as overwhelmed and inactive in both images. Third, both images suggest that the increasing volume of parliamentary work is a novelty and that it represents a discontinuity between the political past and present. It is for this reason that the image of Russell in "Boy-Of-All-Work" despondently states: "Here's a precious lot of dirty boots I've got to clean! I *never* was in such a House."

In 1850 Punch published a political cartoon entitled "A Prime Minister's Holidays" which, like the cartoons of 1847 and 1848, contains a commentary both on the Government's increasing legislative burden and the temporal implications of that burden.¹⁰⁶ The cartoon divides into two images that contrast the Prime Minister's holidays "as they are supposed to be" and "as they are." The first image is idyllic and calm. Russell is represented in a rural landscape, resting beneath a tree. On one side of him are two opened periodicals and on the other are three children playing with two swans and a fawn. The second image offers a stark contrast to the first. In this image, Russell is represented as sitting at his desk surrounded by Bills, letters, petitions, and

¹⁰⁶ "A Prime Minister's Holidays as they are supposed to be; A Prime Minister's Holidays as they are," Punch, 19, (1850)

Figure 2.9



reports concerning not only Britain's domestic concerns but its growing foreign and imperial interests as well. The representations of work that surround Russell not only fill his desk but are also stacked around him from the floor to his shoulders. Behind Russell, Lord Stanley, then Leader of the Opposition, is shown smiling as he brings more work to Russell's desk. At the back of the image, stacked across a shelf and almost entirely covered with parliamentary work, are a series of treatises on liberal political economy. In this way the image identifies not only the volume and diversity of work with which

Parliament was faced, but the way in which this work appeared to overwhelm the ideological framework of classical liberalism, which held deliberative political action in high regard.

The temporal subtext of these cartoons was also present in other forms of critique. In July 1847, one author in the London Illustrated News noted that “The duties of the ruler are becoming more arduous every year.”¹⁰⁷ Comparing the parliamentary labours of “modern Premiers” with those of Robert Walpole (Prime Minister 1721-1742) the author suggests that:

the age of Walpole was mere play in comparison... The wigged and ruffled members of the Parliaments of the first George would stand aghast at the work exacted from their successors of the reign of Victoria, and declare it degrading to a gentleman. To sit from eleven in the morning in a close crowded room, deafened by counsel talking against time... until the cry of the Speaker at prayers! summons him at four o’clock to the House, there to abide till the day sinks into night, and the night brightens into day again; and this not, as of old, on one or two occasions during a session, but every day almost as regularly as it comes.¹⁰⁸

By juxtaposing the image of the gentleman legislator against the modern statesman, the author suggests a distinct historical discontinuity between past parliamentary experience and present parliamentary expectations. Thus, the author does not simply write that parliamentary life is becoming more arduous, but that one period in parliamentary history has ended and a new one has begun. As he puts it, “The easy time of legislators is gone.”¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ “The Abandoned Bills,” London Illustrated News, (10 July 1847), 18

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

In 1850, a similar observation was made by William Lockey Harle. Writing advisedly to new Members of the Commons, Harle distinguishes sharply between the easy parliamentary life of the gentleman legislator and the hard, time-consuming parliamentary life of contemporary M.P.s. He writes:

A seat in the Commons is truly the reverse of a bed of roses. A few years ago a gentleman might amuse himself all day, go down to the House in the evening, hear a speech, record his vote, and go home to his family a gratified and unwearied man. Legislation was an amusement... and serving your party on great and stirring occasions, an agreeable excitement. Drudgery, and a seat in parliament, at the period to which I allude, was never named in the same breath. A Member was an important person, who had the privilege of franking letters, and strolled down to the House when the stroll was tempting. Matters, however, in this respect, are most materially altered.¹¹⁰

As in the London Illustrated News, Harle's image points to temporal discontinuity through its use of a time-based language. More precisely, Harle refers to a "period" which extended even to "a few years ago" but which no longer exists.

These expressions contain a clear emphasis on discontinuity and instrumentality that is much more vivid than in earlier debates on parliamentary time and House procedure. The political present is constantly represented as entirely distinct from the political past and, often, the distinction is apprehended by the observer as related to the declining potential for political action (understood as legislative production). Moreover, whereas the earlier debates had been largely limited to the House, the very public nature of this new language made the issue of parliamentary time a popular concern. This being the case, it is reasonable to assume that this language had the potential to disrupt the constitutional/historical continuity discourse that had previously been insulated by the

¹¹⁰ William Lockney Harle, A Career in the Commons, p. 15

walls of St. Stephen's and which had exerted a tremendous force in framing earlier procedural reform debates. It is nevertheless clear, however, that the discontinuity being observed was linked more to the changing manners of M.P.s than to some essential defect or anachronism in House procedure. In the four Punch cartoons, the message was personified in images of the Prime Minister and other Members of the Commons. Similarly, the written texts provided by Harle and the author from the London Illustrated News, focussed not on an anachronistic procedural code but instead on the experiences and actions of M.P.s. The central point here is that the problem of parliamentary time was not usually imagined as a structural failing. This point is made more clearly by an examination of the attempts in 1847-48 to assign blame for the "waste" of House time.

The Sessions of 1847 and 1847-48 not only increased the public discussion of parliament's time problem, as well as the sense of temporal de-synchronization and historical discontinuity associated with it, they also helped to politicize the issue of parliamentary time. That is to say, the heightened recognition and discussion of Parliament's time problem led to a discursive contest in both the House and the press over who, or what, was to blame for the "waste" of parliamentary time. In this contest, the past-oriented constitutional discourse identified in the earlier discussions of parliamentary time was continually present. This was evident in the fact that Parliament's time problem was almost never described as the result of a defect in the constitution or the procedural code of the House. Instead the blame was assigned either to the ineptitude of the Ministry, the inconsiderate practices of some private Members, and/or a perversion of the "ancient" rules of the House.

On 24 August 1848, during the debate on the Diplomatic Relations with Rome Bill, Sir John Tyrell blamed the Session's "continued protraction" squarely on the Prime Minister and his recent purchase of a villa in Richmond.¹¹¹ During the same debate, Thomas Anstey similarly blamed Russell by suggesting that the Prime Minister was obstructing the Bill's progress through unnecessary opposition, "oppos[ing] the Bill at every stage, and divid[ing] the House on every point."¹¹² Six days later, on August 30, Disraeli followed suit and blamed the Session's "unexampled duration" on Russell and his Ministry's poor handling of the Budget and estimates.¹¹³ This, Disraeli claimed, had "deferred the consideration of the estimates, in Committee of Supply, three months beyond the usual period."¹¹⁴ While the Government was sometimes blamed for misusing House time, more often the blame was placed on the shoulders of unofficial Members.

This emphasis on the practices of unofficial Members could serve the interests of the sitting Ministry. Russell, for instance, told the House on two occasions that the increased length of the Session was a product of the immense growth in "protracted debates" that came before the House: "although so large a number of important measures have been carried, the debates on every subject are more protracted than they used to be, and therefore the difficulty of carrying many measures in a single Session of Parliament is proportionally increased."¹¹⁵ Placing the blame on non-government Members, however, was not exclusive to the Government. In Punch the perceived slowness of the 1847 and

¹¹¹ HC Deb., 24 August 1848 vol. 101 cc. 490

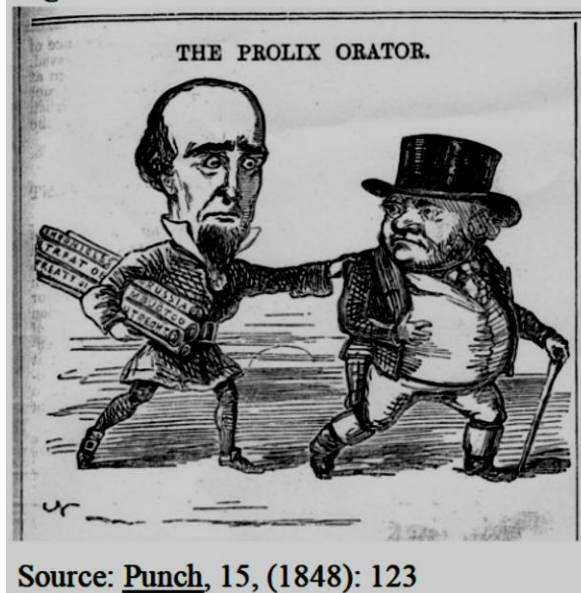
¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ HC Deb., 30 August 1848, vol. 101, cc. 669

¹¹⁴ HC Deb., 30 August 1848, vol. 101, cc. 685

¹¹⁵ HC Deb., 20 June 1848, vol. 99, cc. 927

Figure 2.10



Source: Punch, 15, (1848): 123

1847-48 Sessions was commonly blamed on the unnecessarily lengthy discussion and deliberation that occurred in the House. This rhetoric usually centred on the previously quoted and notoriously long-winded M.P., Thomas Chisholm Anstey. Playing on the analogy between physical movement and politics, one author in Punch observed that Anstey's numerous motions in the House created a misnomer, "for how can we attach the idea of motion to an affair that brings itself and everything else to a dead standstill."¹¹⁶ In Punch, Anstey's speeches in the Commons were depicted as "the story without an end," and he became the archetype for the "prolix orator" who frustrates John Bull, stops his movement and wastes "weeks of public time."¹¹⁷ According to one author in Punch, prolix orators such as Anstey were responsible for an "intolerable quantity of words" that

¹¹⁶ "The Monster Motion", Punch, vol. 14, (1848), 82

¹¹⁷ "The Story Without an End," Punch, 14, (1848), 72; "The Prolix Orator," Punch, 15, (1848), 123

was out of proportion to the House's "halfpennyworth of work."¹¹⁸ The author then mused that "Members who have nothing to say... take up so much time saying it."¹¹⁹ In assigning the blame to Members, these articles refused to accept the possibility that the rules of the House were out-of-date or defective. Indeed, as one author claimed, the fact that Parliament had not crumbled under the weight "of work - that is talk," was "a gratifying proof of the stability of our Institutions."¹²⁰

This unwillingness to blame defects in the House's procedural code for the "waste of time" associated with the 1847 and 1847-48 parliamentary Sessions implies that the "ancient" rules were still largely seen as relevant. On this point, Erskine May was more explicit in his previously quoted pamphlet, "Remarks and Suggestions." Here he wrote that while "the rules of parliamentary procedure are, for the most part, of ancient origin" they had the merit of having "been tested by the practical experience of many generations." He argued that this test of experience had shown that "the greater part of them are admirably adapted, in principal (sic) as well as in practice, to the deliberations of a popular assembly." On this basis he then claimed that while "some of them may require partial amendment... all who have experienced their efficacy are agreed that their principles should rarely be departed from and that amendments, even in practice, should be made with the utmost caution."¹²¹

The persistence of this commitment to maintaining the "ancient rules" in the face of an obvious parliamentary time problem can also be found in the reports and

¹¹⁸ "Our Prorogation Speech," Punch, 15, (1848), 85

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Thomas Erskine May, "Remarks and Suggestions," p. 8

deliberations of the Select Committees on Public Business established between 1848 and 1861. For example, while the Committee of 1848 considered the adoption of significantly contentious reforms, such as the closure, and while it suggested to the House a number of reforms, its report also claimed that the central problem facing Parliament was not a defect in its rules. Rather, the problem lay, first, in the Government's ineptitude in preparing its measures and allocating the House's time and, second, in the inconsideration of non-government Members. As the report suggested:

Your Committee... ventures to express the opinion that... by the careful preparation of measures, their early introduction, the judicious distribution of business between the two Houses, and the order and method with which measures are conducted, the Government can contribute in an essential degree to the easy and convenient conduct of business. They trust the efforts of the Government would be seconded by those of independent Members, and that a general determination would prevail to carry on the Public Business with regularity and dispatch.¹²²

The Committee therefore concluded that in order to ensure "the prompt and efficient dispatch of business" the House should rely "not so much on any new rules, especially restrictive rules" but rather "on the good feeling of the House, and on the forbearance of its Members."¹²³

The Committee's conclusion was based largely on the evidence provided by Charles Shaw-Lefevre, then Speaker of the House. In his testimony, Shaw-Lefevre assigned the blame for "the slow progress of measures through the House" not on any defects within the House's procedural code but rather on "the unusual number of Members who speak in debate,... the accumulation of Bills [and] the virtual abuse and

¹²² Report from the Select Committee on Public Business, 1848, (644); viii

¹²³ Ibid

evasion of the rules of the House.”¹²⁴ He claimed that the House did not require the adoption of wholly new rules, but rather only a series of amendments to existing procedure. Indeed, the proposals that he provided to the Committee suggest, not a major revision of the House’s procedure, but rather a series of generally unconnected reforms that aimed to limit debate in specific areas of the legislative process. In this regard, his evidence greatly contrasted the testimonies provided by the three other witnesses examined by the Committee, all of whom were representatives in either American or French legislatures. Contrary to Shaw-Lefevre, these other witnesses all provided evidence that recommended the adoption of a procedure by which the closure of debate could be effected in any area of legislative deliberation. These recommendations, however, were seen as foreign, un-English, and representing too radical a departure from the established procedure of the House. Some Members worried that adopting new rules such as the closure could lead to abuses of power by the Cabinet, and that too radical a departure from the established procedure would result in the “excision of any of the remaining opportunities which Members possess of offering observations to the House by which they are enabled to oppose any measure.”¹²⁵ As Robert Inglis, Member for Oxford University, reminded the Committee, “some considerations are even more important than the saving of time.”¹²⁶

In the years subsequent to 1848, the idea continued to persist that the House’s time problem lay in individual Member’s behaviour rather than an imperfection in the

¹²⁴ Ibid

¹²⁵ Ibid., pp. 24, 10

¹²⁶ Ibid., p. 11

system and that caution and hesitancy should govern efforts towards procedural reform and the acceleration of the legislature. In reporting its findings to the Commons, the 1854 Select Committee on Public Business claimed it had “no doubt of the great and increasing amount of the business of The House” and that it was of the “opinion that it is desirable that the forms of The House should from time to time be reconsidered, in order to remove any needless obstructions to the despatch of business.” Nevertheless, the Committee wrote of the “necessity of great caution in effecting changes in a system sanctioned by long experience and national respect.” Thus, the Committee stated that its members,

concur entirely in the opinion of the Committee on Public Business in 1848, as expressed in the following extract from their Report: ‘It is not so much to any rules, especially restrictive rules, that Your Committee would desire to rely for the prompt and efficient despatch of business by The House.’¹²⁷

A similar rhetoric was present seven years later, in 1861, when the next Select Committee on Public Business was established. In moving for the appointment of the Committee, Viscount Palmerston, then Prime Minister, told the House that while reform was necessary in order to “accelerate Public Business”, the House “ought to be very cautious in changes of this description.”¹²⁸ Edward Horsman, Liberal M.P. for Stroud, responded that, while he agreed that the Public Business was transacted too slowly, it was important that “the House should consider whether there were not other causes besides defects in the ‘forms and proceedings,’ to which the evil might be attributed.”¹²⁹ Like Horsman, Benjamin Disraeli, then Conservative Leader in the Commons, similarly claimed: “I am

¹²⁷ Report from the Select Committee on the Business of the House, 1854, (212), p. iv

¹²⁸ HC Deb., 7 February 1861, vol. 161 cc. 154

¹²⁹ HC Deb., 7 February 1861, vol. 161 cc. 157

ready to admit that occasional criticism on our proceedings and forms may be advantageous rather than otherwise.... I should, however, for my own part, be sorry to see any change introduced into the forms of the House which would tend largely to alter the mode in which our business is now transacted.”¹³⁰ The Committee report closely mimicked these sentiments, stating that it had “proceeded with the utmost caution... [and] respect [for] the written and the unwritten law of Parliament, which for ages has secured a good system of legislation, perfect freedom of debate, and a due regard for the rights of minorities.” “This respect for tradition and this caution in making changes” the report explained “have proceeded on the principle, that no change is justifiable which experience has not proved to be necessary, and that the maintenance of the old rules is preferable to new, but speculative amendments”:

Your Committee, like preceding Committees on the same subject, have passed in review many suggested alterations, but like them have come to the conclusion that the old rules and orders, when carefully considered and narrowly investigated, are found to be the safeguard of freedom of debate, and a sure defence against the oppression of overpowering majorities. Extreme caution, therefore, in recommending or introducing changes is dictated by prudence. These rules and orders are the fruit of long experience: a day may break down the prescription of centuries. It is easy to destroy; it is difficult to reconstruct... it is the first duty of the House to maintain these rules inviolate, and to resist every attempt to encroach upon them.¹³¹

In these Committee and House deliberations upon procedure a few things are clearly evident. First, we can see that the relationship between historical continuity and discontinuity existed in a symbiotic discursive relationship that clearly produced hesitancy amongst M.P.s to significantly reform procedure. This skepticism and the

¹³⁰ HC Deb., 7 February 1861, vol. 161 cc. 162

¹³¹ Report from the Select Committee on the Business of the House, 1861, (173), iii, xi

temporality that produced it were epistemologically grounded in ambiguities over what constituted rational political action. While the discourse of discontinuity was driven forward by an instrumental vision of rational political action, in which deliberation was subordinate to production, the continuing strength of the continuity discourse was insured by a value based rationality that placed the historically developed virtues of free speech and independence above the efficient production of laws.

IV

That a language of temporal continuity in the discourse surrounding procedural reform was able to persist with vigour throughout much of the nineteenth century is clear. Even as late as 1882, Prime Minister William Gladstone, while introducing his procedural reform scheme to the House, prefaced his comments with a series of statements that anticipated and aimed to disarm this continuity discourse. He stated that his Government had “endeavoured to maintain... a spirit of studious moderation, and in no point to go beyond the necessity of the case, rather trusting to the wisdom of the House upon future occasions than attempting now to go beyond that necessity by making a certain and full provision for all possible emergencies that may arise.”¹³² Moreover, it is equally clear that this language was often expressive of a rationalization of procedure that saw in it, as a connection between past and present, one means of transmitting historically established constitutional virtues. Though the bulk of the present chapter has aimed to explain the mechanics of *how* this discourse was able to endure for so long, the question of *why*

¹³² HC Deb., 20 February 1882, vol. 266 cc. 1125

procedural issues were so often given moral meaning and associated with temporal continuity remains unexplained. To this end, this concluding section suggests that the connection between images of historical continuity, a value-based substantive rationality, and questions of procedure was the result of a wider constitutional discourse in early-to mid-nineteenth-century British political culture.

That perceptions of historical continuity and political virtue played a major role in early-to-mid-nineteenth-century discussions of Britain's constitutional structure has been widely acknowledged by British political historians. In his thorough examination of contestations over the nature and structure of the unwritten constitution during this period, historian James Vernon acknowledged that while different social and political groups "imagined the constitution's history in different ways, all stressed continuity between past and present struggles, and their implications for the future."¹³³ The strength and prevalence of this constitutional language in this period's political culture was so vast that it has been referred to by several historians as the "master fiction" in which political debate took place, "the nearest thing to the political master-narrative of its day."¹³⁴ Indeed, this recent literature has demonstrated that this political idiom, rooted as it was in tropes of historical continuity, was present not only in Whig and Tory rhetoric but also that of Radicals. In other words, political actors who were otherwise committed to Painite

¹³³ James Vernon, *Politics and the People*, p. 298. For a similar interpretation of late eighteenth century popular political discourse see, Kathleen Wilson, "Inventing Revolution: 1688 and Eighteenth-Century Popular Politics," *Journal of British Studies*, (28), 4, (October 1989), 349-386

¹³⁴ James Epstein, *Radical Expression: Political Language, Ritual, and Symbol in England, 1790-1850*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), vii, 76; Patrick Joyce, "The Constitution and the Narrative Structure of Victorian Politics," p. 188

notions of natural rather than historical rights were often compelled to frame their appeals in a historicized constitutional rhetoric.¹³⁵

While this new historical literature has demonstrated the importance of historical continuity in constitutional discourse, the arguments have generally been made with reference to politics out of doors and, as such, the impact of a value-rational and past-oriented constitutional discourse on the structure and function of Parliament or the House of Commons has rarely been studied. Yet, as historians such as Roland Quinault and, more recently, David Cannadine have argued, Parliament represented a physical manifestation of the British constitution and, consequently, discussions of its reform often became situated within this past-oriented image of the constitution.¹³⁶ The reluctance to fundamentally or systematically reform House procedure gained much of its power from the existence of a more extensive parent discourse that was prevalent in the nation's political culture surrounding the "ancient constitution" and the important place of Parliament within it.

The presence of this broader discourse can be easily identified in the debates over the erection of a new Chamber for the Commons. St. Stephens' Chapel in the Palace of

¹³⁵ James Epstein, Radical Expression, pp. 29-69; Idem, The Lion of Freedom: Feargus O'Connor and the Chartist Movement, 1832-1840, (London: Croom Helm, 1982), esp. chapters 3-4; John Belchem, Orator Hunt: Henry Hunt and English Working Class Radicalism, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 107-110; Idem, "Republicanism, Popular Constitutionalism, and the Radical Platform in Early Nineteenth-Century England," Journal of Social History, (6), 1, (January 1981), 1-32, esp. pp. 6-12; Richard Price, British Society, p. 258

¹³⁶ David Cannadine, "The Palace of Westminster as Palace of Varieties," in Christine Constituency and Jacqueline Constituency, eds., The Houses of Parliament: History, Art, Architecture, (London: Merrell, 2000); Roland Quinault, "Westminster and the Victorian Constitution," Transactions of the Royal Historical Society, Sixth Series, VII.2 (1992), 79-104

Westminster, where the Commons had held its deliberations before the fire of 1834, was notoriously inadequate. Indeed, the old Chamber could only hold slightly more than half of the Commons' 658 Members. Yet, despite the clear incapacity of the existing chamber to meet the demands of the legislature, proposals to build a wholly new Chamber were rejected by the House. In these debates, which were occurring as early as 1832 but which took on a new urgency after the 1834 fire, proposals in favour of erecting a new building were commonly rejected through a language that deployed an imagery of historical continuity and the need to maintain the institutional structure which had largely defined England's greatness in a past golden age.

On 7 March 1833, Joseph Hume, radical M.P. for Middlesex, proposed that the House should consider building a new Chamber. As he put it, "[the present Chamber] did not afford sufficient accommodation for the Members who were called on to assemble, and that, in consequence, they could not discharge their duties comfortably."¹³⁷ Citing the report of a Select Committee that had been established in the previous Session, he argued that "neither as regarded space, ventilation, and other conveniences, was it possible to make such alterations in the existing House as would meet the object proposed."¹³⁸ Moreover, he drew the attention of the House to evidence presented to the Committee which demonstrated that while the present Chamber could be elongated by fifteen feet, there was no possibility of extending its width and that, as such, it would be impossible to renovate the existing Chamber to accommodate an appropriate number of Members.¹³⁹

¹³⁷ HC Deb., 7 March 1833, vol. 16 cc. 371

¹³⁸ Ibid

¹³⁹ Ibid

But Hume's suggestions, framed in a language of practicality and instrumentality, were shouted down.

The language used by Hume's opponents was characterized primarily by a sentimental and nostalgic attachment to the past. Hume's idea was rejected by Members who "objected to pulling down that building hallowed by its recollections."¹⁴⁰ Members such as Philip Howard and Robert Inglis claimed that the current chamber "was endeared to the sons of freedom, not less by the triumphs it had witnessed than by the struggles it had seen" and that, in moving to a new building, "the representatives of the empire... would leave behind them the inspiration thrown over them by the glorious recollections of the great men who had rendered this pile illustrious by the splendour of their eloquence."¹⁴¹ In short, Hume's suggestion was seen as offensive to a prevalent sense that Parliament represented a valuable link to England's political past; a link that maintained continuity in history and the invigoration of a present politics with the glories of a past golden age.

This attachment to the past was also evident when, after the 1834 fire, Charles Barry was commissioned to rebuild Parliament. Barry's design evinced a clear attempt to maintain temporal continuities between the political past and present. As historian Andrea Frederickson has recently argued, Barry's design "was guided by 'the invention of tradition', or the desire to imply... a continuity with a suitable past perceived as the

¹⁴⁰ HC Deb., 7 March 1833, vol. 16 cc. 378

¹⁴¹ HC Deb., 7 March 1833, vol. 16 cc. 377

nation's Golden Age."¹⁴² Similarly, David Cannadine has written that the rebuilt parliament was a building "proclaiming continuity rather than change: a display of 'national history' and 'national historicism.'"¹⁴³ Indeed, Barry's new parliament contained two hundred statues of past monarchs, a massive royal entrance, ornate robing rooms for the monarch, but a Commons chamber with seating that could accommodate less than half of the number of Members, and virtually no space was allocated to Government Ministers or Party Caucuses.¹⁴⁴ All of this resulted in an architectural representation of the constitution that was past rather than future oriented. Moreover, the new Parliament was built on the site of the old one, despite the numerous suggestions for a location that was more central and accessible. This too was an indication of a desire to maintain temporal continuity. Indeed, when Hume suggested moving Parliament to St. James' Park he was met with Thomas Attwood's retort that "the historical associations of six hundred years ought not to be disregarded in the choice of a situation for the new Houses of Parliament."¹⁴⁵ Clearly, as Quinault has argued, "the New Houses of Parliament were not designed to house a new constitution."¹⁴⁶

This emphasis on historical continuity in the debates over the architecture of the Houses of Parliament can be seen as one part of the constitutional discourse identified in extra-parliamentary politics by Vernon, Joyce, Price and Epstein. Continuities in time

¹⁴² Andrea Fredericksen "Parliament's Genius Loci: The Politics of Place after the 1834 Fire," in Christine Constituency and Jacqueline Constituency, eds., The Houses of Parliament: History, Art, Architecture, (London: Merrell, 2000), 99

¹⁴³ David Cannadine, "The Palace of Westminster as Palace of Varieties," p. 15

¹⁴⁴ Roland Quinault, "Westminster and the Victorian Constitution," pp. 91-92

¹⁴⁵ HC Deb., 9 February 1836, vol. 31 cc. 242

¹⁴⁶ Roland Quinault, "Westminster and the Victorian Constitution," p. 103

were central to the development of the constitution and in these debates it was argued that, as the physical or architectural embodiment of the constitution, the Houses of Parliament needed to illustrate this. If the architectural structure of parliament was the physical embodiment of the constitution, then the procedure of the Commons was its practical functioning and it is thus not surprising to find a similar set of associations in the debates surrounding procedural reform. More precisely, the established procedural code was seen not only as “ancient” but also as the embodiment and protector of English liberty, which was associated with the right to speak of minorities in the House. This was perhaps made most explicitly clear in the Select Committee Reports from 1848 to 1861 which claimed that the “old rules and orders...” were the “safeguard of freedom of debate, and a sure defence against the oppression of overpowering majorities.”¹⁴⁷ It was, however, also present in earlier debates and was certainly central to Samuel Whitbread’s claim in 1811 that “the old established usages of parliament... were the entrenchments of minorities” and that by altering them the House would be deprived of its “vitality.”¹⁴⁸

V

While a value-rational and past-oriented understanding of the constitution was effective in protecting the House from procedural reform for much of the nineteenth century it had begun to show significant cracks by the late 1860s and 1870s, as the

¹⁴⁷ Report from the Select Committee on the Business of the House, 1861, (173),

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¹⁴⁸ HC Deb., 27 February 1811, vol. 19 cc. 108

critique of de-synchronization started to develop a more subversive character.¹⁴⁹ Indeed, by 1868 Edward Webster would reject the dominant rationality of his contemporaries and argue in more instrumental terms, in his pamphlet, “The Public and Private Business of the House of Commons Considered in Relation to the Economization of the Time of the House and of its Members”, that “the plea of antiquity in a matter of this character can hardly stand against that of utility.” Procedure, he maintained was “a matter of business and not of sentiment”:

At the time these stages were contrived, the amount of business devolving on Parliament was much smaller than at present, the means of diffusing information of its acts slow and tedious, and the difficulty to Members of travelling to London for the purpose of voting against any measure required time; under these circumstances it was only just that the stages should be numerous and dilatory; now however, the introduction of any measure has usually been anticipated by public discussion, and when everybody knows in the course of one day what the House proposes to do, and when most Members can reach the House in eight and forty hours afterwards, if within the United Kingdom, the reasons for retaining so many stages seem to disappear.¹⁵⁰

Similarly, by 1872, Robert Lowe, then Chancellor of the Exchequer, would tell the Commons that the traditional aversion to procedural reform was framed in “the language of a past age” which applied not to the parliamentary life of contemporary Members but rather “to a state of things that no longer existed.”¹⁵¹ While it may have been necessary in the past for non-government Members to have multiple

¹⁴⁹ It is worth noting here that the 1870s were also the period that hours and minutes became increasingly politicized as the presence of clocks on public buildings became an increasingly regular phenomenon. See James Vernon, *Politics and the People*, p. 62

¹⁵⁰ Edward Webster, “The Public and Private Business of the House of Commons Considered in Relation to the Economization of the Time of the House and of its Members,” (London: William Ridgway, 1868), 24

¹⁵¹ HC Deb., 26 February 1872, vol. 209 cc. 1093

opportunities to raise debate and interrogate “corrupt Ministers”, the House had now to reform itself to “modern standards” and provide the Government with the time to “pass the laws which public opinion and the exigencies of the present times imperatively demand.”¹⁵²

The claims of Webster and Lowe should largely be seen as a result of the post-1847 debates over parliamentary procedure. The function of procedure is represented and evaluated here in terms of instrumentally rational rather than value rational action and the historical presuppositions of the language exhibit a much more present/future than past/present orientation. Though the procedural debates of mid-century did not result in a significant overhaul in the Standing Orders, they did nevertheless make the issue of parliamentary time more contested, urgently discussed and in so doing they provided the petri dish for the development of a new political language. In this way, they set the stage for a later discursive shift which would ultimately result in the virtual remaking of the House’s procedural code. Yet, while the beginnings of this change can be observed in the late 60s and 70s, the ability of ideas of historical continuity to protect the “ancient rules” would persist at least until 1882. Indeed, in 1878, when Stafford Northcote called for the establishment of a Select Committee on Public Business he would tell the House that:

Nobody could be more reluctant than I am... to interfere with old-established rules... for the sake of introducing new ones that might at first sight look better.... I think it is most essential that, even if we have occasionally to suffer inconvenience, we should observe, and observe very strictly, those great

¹⁵² Ibid

principles which have been handed down to us by our forefathers in this House for so many generations.¹⁵³

The next chapter will explore the late century demise of the past's power, the shift towards a practical rationality, the growth of new discursive tools and strategies, and the massive reform schemes that were introduced by William Gladstone and later Arthur Balfour.

¹⁵³ HC Deb., 24 January 1878, vol. 237 cc. 380

Chapter 3:
From the Grand Inquest of the Nation to the Legislative Machine: The Growth of
Instrumentally Rational Readings of Parliamentary Time and Procedural Reform,
1878-1902

On 2 February 1882, William Ewart Gladstone, then head of the Government, introduced a series of procedural resolutions that generated significant debate both in and out-of-doors. Contemporaries of the period and historians alike have described these reforms as “the real watershed between the ancient and modern practice”, marking “a great change in our politics”, “completely alter[ing]... the historic course of parliamentary business” and initiating “an entirely new departure... in the history of the British Parliament.”¹ They included provisions for the closure of debate, the limitation of dilatory motions for the adjournment, the calling of attention to repetition or irrelevancy in debate, the removal of debate on the question of introducing a Bill at report stage, the application of the rule of progress to the Committee of Supply, and the limitation of Committee of the Whole in Committee stage deliberations and the transfer of those deliberations to two newly created Standing Committees. In short, the reforms were aimed at systematically and fundamentally altering the way the House conducted its business in order to accelerate legislative production, transforming the House from the “grand inquest of the nation” to the “legislative machine.” These rules, however, were not only different in kind from those discussed in the previous chapter, but were also accompanied by a distinct temporal/constitutional discourse.

¹ Edward Hughes, “Sir Erskine May’s on Parliamentary Procedure in 1882.” Public Administration. 34, (1956), 289; Author Unknown, “New Rule at Last” Pall Mall Gazette, (11 November 1882), 1; “The Speaker’s New Rules,” Pall Mall Gazette, (10 February 1881), 5; Joseph Redlich, The Procedure of the House of Commons, (London: Constable, 1908), 176

Gladstone justified his proposed reforms by claiming that the Commons was temporally out of step with the nation it governed. Nineteenth-century parliamentary history was, Gladstone argued, defined by “two great features”: the first was “the constantly increasing labours of the House” and the second was “its constantly decreasing power” to fulfil its duties.² The House’s inability to meet the demand for legislation was, according to Gladstone, a result of the 1832 Reform Act, which in the eyes of contemporary reformers had placed Britain on the path to popular government. “Before the Reform Act,” Gladstone argued “the position of a Member of this House was one of perfect ease and convenience... and the time placed at the disposal of an active and intelligent man,” was sufficient for the completion of his parliamentary duties.³ Immediately following 1832, however, a “fundamental change... occurred” and “the pressure and calls upon the House were felt to be painful and almost intolerable.”⁴ Gladstone then suggested that the future would continue to distance itself from the past and the legislative burden would continue to increase beyond the House’s capabilities for work: “what we have to anticipate, as matters stand, is undoubtedly that we shall not overtake our arrears unless we take measures for the purpose, and that our arrears will continue to grow upon us and add to our labour, embarrassment, and discredit.”⁵ Gladstone’s language betrays the emergence of a new way of understanding parliamentary time.

² House of Commons Debates, 20 February 1882, vol. 266 cc. 1128

³ HC Deb., 20 February 1882, vol. 266 cc. 1129

⁴ Ibid

⁵ HC Deb., 20 February 1882, vol. 266 cc. 1131

Whereas the previous chapter argued that the structure and pace of procedural change during the first three quarters of the nineteenth century was largely determined by a value-based rationality and its creation of a discursively deployed three-part temporal dynamic, the present chapter explores the way in which this three-part dynamic was overcome and how the ad-hoc pace of procedural reform gave way to the broad and systematic reform schemes introduced in the 1880s and beyond. It argues, first, that this movement towards more systematic reforms was facilitated by a series of simultaneously occurring shifts in Government and Party leadership that occurred in 1880. These shifts involved the ascendance of Charles Stewart Parnell to the leadership of the Irish Home Rule Party, the replacement of Lord Hartington by William Gladstone as leader of the Liberal Party, and the establishment of a Liberal Government after the landslide electoral defeat of Lord Beaconsfield's Conservative Ministry. While the first of these changes increased the urgency with which parliamentary time was discussed, the latter two placed at the head of the Government a Minister committed to the practical rationalization of the House's procedural code. But, while these party-based shifts can help to explain how the reforms of 1881-1882 were able to be introduced, they provide little rationale for why they passed. Though Gladstone was the head of a significant majority in the Commons, his 1881 urgency resolution and the reforms that he proposed in 1882 were highly contentious. In order to explain how these reforms passed, it is therefore necessary to explore the procedural debates of 1881-1882 and the temporal and political culture in which they occurred.

The chapter argues that the discursive framework through which procedural reform was debated had, by the late 1870s, begun to shift in a dramatic way. Whereas a discourse of constitutional/historical continuity had dominated procedural debates for much of the century, in the late Victorian period it began to crumble. This, of course, is not to say that it disappeared. As I alluded to at the end of the previous chapter, it remained pervasive in the 1877-79 debates on Stafford Northcote's procedural resolutions. In these debates, however, a rationality that emphasized purposive action and the means/ends logic of efficiency had clearly begun to assume a dominant position. This rationality became tied to the representational analogy of politics and physical movement and it became manifest in the late 1870s through the language of "excessive speed" and the general imaginative blend of railway travel and parliamentary activity. These shifts, in turn, facilitated the growth of the de-synchronization discourse which started to increasingly play upon the themes of technological and democratic progress, redefining the House of Commons as the "legislative machine" and providing the basic logic for a gendered reading of Irish Obstruction. By 1882, this chapter argues, the symbolism of this discourse, and the rationality upon which it was based, had moved to an ascendant position in procedural debates, structuring the rhetoric of both advocates and opponents of reform and constituting a "shared linguistic code" that carried on at least into the Edwardian period.

II

The movement towards the party-based and discursive shifts of the early 1880s began with the 1875 introduction of the half-past twelve rule. This rule was introduced by the Beaconsfield Conservatives in an effort to curb the excessive number of controversial and time-consuming non-government Bills that were introduced by Isaac Butt's Home Rule Party. It stipulated that no opposed business could be entered upon in any Sitting after 12:30 a.m., thereby making useless Butt's strategy of cluttering the Order Paper. But, while it may have served its intended purpose, it ultimately proved to be counter-productive. By setting a daily time-limit on the discussion of opposed legislation, the Beaconsfield Government had unwittingly given up Ministerial control of House time. Indeed, the half-past twelve rule provided the procedural infrastructure whereby the progress of Public Business could be dictated by a small opposition group committed to prolonging the discussion of legislation listed early on the Order Paper and entering notices of opposition to Bills slated for discussion later in the Sitting. Thus, while the rule made Butt's strategy ineffective, it opened the door to a new form of oppositional legislative delay that was based on intentionally increasing the volume of oratory in the House.

By the late 1870s, a small minority in the Irish Party, led by Joseph Biggar and Charles Stewart Parnell, started to recognize the futility of Butt's strategy.⁶ These Members began to practice a more direct policy of obstruction, which aimed to acquire

⁶ This set included: Parnell, John Power (M.P. for Mayo), Frank O'Donnell (M.P. for Dungarvan), Biggar, Mahon O'Gorman (M.P. for Clare), John Nolan (M.P. for Galway), George Whalley (M.P. for Peterborough)

power not by cluttering the Order Paper with Bills but rather by systematically delaying Government business through dilatory motions. The tactics here involved: filibustering the House with prolonged speeches, calling the attention of the House to the presence of strangers, continually moving motions for adjournment, and calling for multiple divisions.⁷ Whereas Butt's tactics were significantly hindered by the half-past twelve rule, Parnell and Biggar used that rule to their own advantage. By regularly giving notice of opposition to Government legislation and by continually delaying business that had been brought before the House earlier in the Sitting, Parnell and his supporters could effectively "talk out" the Government's legislative program. Throughout 1877 Parnell and his followers regularly delayed and dragged discussions of the Estimates, the South Africa Bill, the Valuation Bill, and the Marine Mutiny Bill, while at the same time regularly entering their names in opposition to English legislation.⁸ Parliament thus faced a greater time-scarcity than previously and the conceptual separation of work from talk became ever more apparent. Having recognised how to control parliamentary time and kill the Government's program through its own procedural mechanism, Parnell and Biggar had acquired a tool of immense political power.

⁷ During the debate on the Irish Coercion Bill in 1875 Biggar spoke for four hours, a year later on 6 March 1876 Parnell divided the House seventeen consecutive times, and on 2 July 1877 Parnell, by the same tactic was able to keep the House sitting through the night until seven the next morning. Indeed the use of divisions was one of Parnell's favourite mechanisms for occupying the time of the House. Between 1876 and 1878 there were 177 divisions that involved a minority of less than twenty-one and 100 that involved a minority of less than 11 and in these divisions Parnell was almost invariably present in the minority.

⁸ For instance, in February 1877 Parnell and Biggar had their names entered in notice of opposition to every piece of English legislation.

Though Parnell's followers in the late 1870s never exceeded seven, the perceived contemporary significance of Parnellite Obstruction would, by June 1877, lead two of the House's most recognized constitutional and procedural experts, the Speaker of the House Henry Brand and the Clerk of the House Thomas Erskine May, to discuss the "expediency, if not absolute necessity of altering our rules to meet the present circumstances."⁹ Within a month, Brand and Erskine May had drafted five resolutions that aimed to stomp out the obstructive tactics of Parnell and, on July 4, Brand presented the scheme to Lord Hartington, then Leader of the Liberal opposition. Hartington's enthusiasm for reform was limited. Though he told Brand that he would be willing to second the motion for the introduction of the rules, he stated also that he would much prefer to wait for the next Session and appoint a Select Committee to consider the best means of expediting the Public Business.¹⁰ Persistent, Brand held two subsequent meetings on July 26 and 27, this time both with Hartington and Stafford Northcote, Beaconsfield's lieutenant in the Commons. Though Brand was unable to secure approval for all of his rules, his meeting with Northcote did lead to the immediate introduction of two procedural resolutions.

On 27 July 1877 Northcote stood in the House and proposed the introduction of two new Standing Orders that limited opportunities for obstruction in both the House and Committee. The first rule stipulated that when a Member had been twice declared out of order, by either the Speaker or the Chairman of Committees, the debate would be

⁹ Diaries of Speaker Brand, 1876-77, Papers of Henry Bouverie William Brand, PA, BRA /3/2

¹⁰ Ibid

suspended and, on a motion made in the House, that Member could be precluded from speaking again for the remainder of the debate.¹¹ The second rule stipulated that, in Committee of the Whole, no individual Member could “move more than once during the debate on the same question that the Chairman do report progress or that the Chairman do leave the chair nor to speak more than once to such motion.”¹² Additionally the rule stipulated that “no Member who has made one of those motions have power to make the other on the same question.”¹³ Since the number of Irish Members engaging in obstructive tactics was relatively small during this period, these rules were seen as a viable means of limiting the ability of Parnell and his supporters to control the time of the House, without altering much of the customary rules of procedure. In the eyes of Brand and Erskine May, however, Northcote’s two rules were seen as utterly insufficient. These sentiments were bolstered when, four days after the introduction of Northcote’s resolutions, the House was kept sitting for twenty-six consecutive hours on the South Africa Bill. By November, Brand had prepared a memorandum for Northcote that outlined a number of reforms which he believed to be necessary. These included, the devolution of committee stage deliberations from Committee of the Whole to Standing Committees, the removal of the half-past twelve rule, the confining of the scope of debate on a motion to the subject of that motion, and the removal of debate from the question of the Speaker leaving the Chair and the House resolving itself into Committee of Supply.¹⁴

¹¹ HC Deb., 27 July 1877, vol. 236 cc. 25

¹² Ibid

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ Henry Brand to Stafford Northcote, Papers of Henry Bouverie William Brand, PA, BRA 1/3/26

Convinced of the need for additional reform but not willing to concede to the necessity of Brand's plan, Northcote rose in the Commons on 24 January 1878 and moved that a Select Committee "be appointed to consider the best means of promoting the despatch of Public Business in this House."¹⁵ Over the course of four months, between 5 March 1878 and 5 July 1878, this Committee met on sixteen occasions and took evidence from six witnesses, including Erskine May and Brand. The evidence provided by Erskine May and Brand included recommendations for significant and wide-ranging reforms such as, the establishment of Standing Committees, the imposition of a maximum number of Private Member's Bills per Session, and the introduction of a provision for the suspension of Members found in contempt of the House.¹⁶ When the Committee reported to the House, it recommended nine separate reforms which, if adopted, would have significantly reduced the opportunities for legislative obstruction and greatly accelerated the way in which the House conducted its business.¹⁷ The recommended reforms included provisions for the suspension of Members found in contempt of the House, the settling of motions for adjournment without taking divisions, the re-ordering of non-government Bills on the Order Paper so as to ensure that the most mature Bills receive precedence, the introduction of fixed time-limits for the various stages of individual Bills, and the limitation of dilatory motions in Committee of the

¹⁵ HC Deb., 24 January 1878, vol. 237 cc. 379

¹⁶ Report from the Select Committee on Public Business, 1878, (268), 1-82

¹⁷ When the Committee finally reported to the House on 8 July 1878 it exhibited, what Redlich has termed, an "energetic desire for reform." Joseph Redlich, The Procedure of the House of Commons, p. 149

Whole.¹⁸ These recommended reforms, however, did not get far in the House. In the subsequent Session, Northcote proposed to the House six of the Committee's nine recommended reforms. Of these six, only one was adopted. Further, the reform that was adopted was limited in scope, resulting simply in the application of the rule of progress to the Estimates in Committee of Supply. By the end of 1879 then, the House had incorporated only three new rules into its procedural code.

The limited movement achieved in procedural reform between 1877 and 1879 represents a bit of a puzzle. Certainly the public's awareness had been heightened by the activities of the Parnellites, the acceleration of the legislature had been advocated by the two most recognised authorities on procedure, and a Select Committee had concluded that significant reform was imperatively needed. Moreover, Northcote's private correspondence with both Brand and Lord Beaconsfield indicates that, as early as 1877, the leader of the Government in the Commons was keen to introduce a number of reforms.¹⁹ In this context, the limited movement towards reform appeared anomalous. To Brand the limited gains were seen as the result of Northcote's weakness as a leader. Brand described him as "a head that is wagged by its tail", a leader whose "feeble good

¹⁸ Report from the Select Committee on Public Business, 1878, pp. iii-v

¹⁹ Stafford Northcote to Benjamin Disraeli, 4 September 1877, Stafford Northcote Papers, British Library Manuscript Collection (hereafter referred to as BLMC), ADD50018; Stafford Northcote to Benjamin Disraeli, 20 January 1881, Stafford Northcote Papers, BLMC, ADD50018; Stafford Northcote to Benjamin Disraeli, 25 January 1881, Stafford Northcote Papers, BLMC, ADD50018; Stafford Northcote to Henry Brand, 4 January 1881, Papers of Henry Bouverie William Brand, PA, BRA1/4/32; Stafford Northcote to Henry Brand, 13 March 1878, Papers of Henry Bouverie William Brand, PA, BRA1/3/39

nature” would ensure that “the stronger will of Parnell” prevailed.²⁰ While Brand’s analysis is clearly too narrow for our purposes, it is certainly true that Northcote’s inability to push procedural reform through the House between 1877 and 1879 was partially the result of two very important practical considerations. First, while Northcote was the leader of the Conservatives in the Commons, it was Beaconsfield who was the head of the Government. Northcote therefore lacked the authority to dictate the direction of Government policy, regardless of whether he supported reform or not. Secondly, the Beaconsfield Cabinet was not at all keen on introducing a procedural reform scheme. Despite Northcote’s advocacy of the issue in Cabinet, he was unable to marshal much official support and was forced to write to Brand on 13 November 1877, that “the inclination of my colleagues is to do as little as possible.”²¹ Thus, even if Northcote had been at the head of the Government, his ability to put forward significant reform would have been hampered by divisions in the Cabinet. These practical considerations, however, were not the only things holding back the introduction of significant reform.

The 1877 and 1879 debates over procedural reform were permeated by the past oriented constitutional discourse that had structured discussions of parliamentary time for much of the century. While Members of the Liberal Opposition, like Peter Rylands, George Anderson, and Sir William Vernon Harcourt rehearsed the traditional arguments that the reforms were “not sanctioned by experience”, that they would wrongly make a

²⁰ Henry Brand to George Grey, 7 February 1881, Papers of Henry Bouverie William Brand, PA, BRA1/4/49b; Diaries of Speaker Brand, 1878, Papers of Henry Bouverie William Brand, PA, BRA/3/3

²¹ Stafford Northcote to Henry Brand, 13 Nov 1877, Papers of Henry Bouverie William Brand, PA, BRA 1/3/33

“permanent change to remedy a temporary evil”, and that parting with “Constitutional principles in order to get rid of small inconveniences... was like a man burning his house down to warm his hands”, Northcote and other Members of the Government used a similar past-oriented rhetoric to justify their reforms. Northcote, upon introducing his 1877 resolution, stated that he was not attempting to revise procedure but rather was re-affirming an “established rule” so as to maintain “the history and... past glories of this Assembly” and thereby preserve “unimpaired the reputation that has been handed down to us.”²² Rationalizing reform through a language of constitutional/historical continuity served a pragmatic purpose for Northcote in that it framed reform in a way that could appeal to his hesitant Cabinet colleagues. This continuity discourse, then, was arguably a natural and essential rhetoric for the Conservative leader in the Commons.

The language of continuity, however, was not as powerful or uncontested as it had once been. Though Northcote framed his 1877 speech around the theme of continuity, by 1879 this language was almost entirely absent from the Government’s justificatory rhetoric and had become the exclusive property of the Opposition. Moreover, even within the Opposition there was an explicit dissent from continuity with Members like Edward Knatchbull-Hugessen defaming the House’s desire to maintain rules that “had no other considerable merit than antiquity” and which, while being “well suited to the old times in which they were drawn”, now “if not absolutely obsolete, were inapplicable to an Assembly in which so many more Members took part in the debates than was formerly

²² HC Deb., 27 July 1877, vol. 236 cc. 34

the case.”²³ Hugessen’s statement represents the beginnings of a more general shift in the rationalization of parliamentary time, which was characterized by the rise of an instrumental rationality that was chiefly concerned with reducing the delay between the articulation and realization of legislative demands in order to master an unpredictable future. While this new rationality would, in the 1880s, facilitate the erosion of hesitancy in reform, its initial articulation in the 1877 and 1879 debates was discursively framed in such a way that it strengthened the House’s resolve against rapid procedural change. This discursive framing grew out of the culturally prevalent concern with the dangers of “excessive speed.” Though this concern had been present as early as the late 1820s, as we saw in the pamphlet literature of Wickens et al., it was in the 1860s and 1870s that it became associated with railway accidents and took on more powerful connotations.

Between the 1840s and the 1870s the development of Britain’s railway network had led to a growing public fascination with railway accidents.²⁴ From the late 1850s to the late 1870s these accidents gained a regular place in the newspaper press and parliamentary debates and led to the formation of two Select Committees and a Royal Commission.²⁵ Pervading these inquiries, representations and debates was a sense that the increasing number of accidents was largely the result of what came to be termed

²³ HC Deb., 17 February 1879, vol. 243 cc. 1358-9

²⁴ Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey*, pp. 129-149

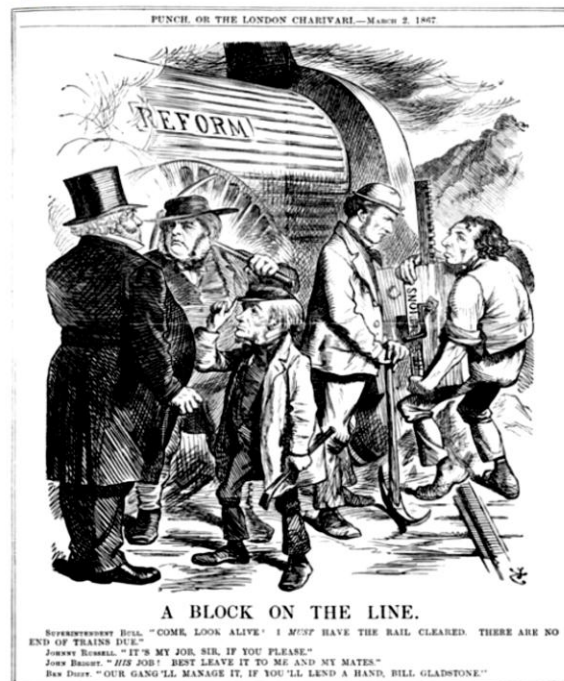
²⁵ For a discussion of the pervasiveness of railway accidents in the press and the nation’s cultural imagination see Ralph Harrington, “Railway Safety and Railway Slaughter: Accidents, Government and Public in Victorian Britain,” *Journal of Victorian Culture*, (8), 2, (2003), 187-207. On the prevalence of accidents generally in the late Victorian cultural imagination see Roger Cooter, “The Moment of the Accident: Culture, Militarism and Modernity in Late Victorian Britain,” in Roger Cooter and Bill Luckin eds., *Accidents in History: Injuries, Fatalities and Social Relations*, (Atlanta: Rodopi, 1997), 107-157

“excessive speed.” The problem, especially as it was conceptualized in the Commissions and Committees, was that the imprecise regulation of movement led to temporary decelerations which, in turn, led to subsequent intense accelerations, as train operators attempted to make up the time they had lost. As the 1857 Committee Report stated, “such excessive speed has arisen... from the want of *strict* punctuality in the time of the departure and arrival of trains from each station, which leads to an *excess* of speed for the purpose of endeavouring to make up time lost.”²⁶ It was in this period of abnormal haste that the origins of the accident were believed to be located.

This line of thinking came to inform discussions of obstruction, procedural reform and parliamentary time more generally in 1877 and 1879. In a political culture where objects of movement had become regularly used as metaphors to represent and critique political action, the synthesis of the problems of parliamentary and railway time made sense. Moreover, during the 1860s the railway had come to occupy a regular place in discussions of parliamentary time. This is particularly evident in the critiques that were made against Russell’s, and later Disraeli’s, efficiency in dealing with the issue of franchise reform. In the 2 March 1867 Punch cartoon “A Block in the Line”, for instance, the Reform Bill is represented as a train which has been halted by Radicals, Whigs and Tories who insist on amending its machinery and obstructing all other trains (Bills) on the line. This imaginative rendering of Parliament as a railway was also present in the emerging linguistic use of railway slang in the parliamentary vernacular. This was

²⁶ Report from the Select Committee on Accidents on Railways, 1857-58, (362),
iii

Figure 3.1



Source: Punch, (2 March 1867): 87

especially the case with the verb to “shunt” (meaning to move one train aside to allow another to pass) which became commonly deployed by parliamentarians, especially from the 1860s, in order to describe and critique the ordering of Public Business and the allocation of parliamentary time.²⁷ On 11 May 1860, when Vincent Scully, the MP for Cork, questioned the Government’s handling of the franchise reform issue, he stated that while they had promised an “express train” and had on that basis “shunted” all of “the more useful trains,” the Reform Bill had “turned out to be a mere Parliamentary train, going at the slowest possible pace” and obstructing “all the other traffic.”²⁸ This

²⁷ For example, see, April 25 1856, HC Deb. Vol. 141 cc 1553; February 17 1860, HC Deb. 17 Vol. 156 cc 1307; February 20 1866, HC Deb. Vol. 181 cc 843; April 26 1866, HC Deb. vol. 182 cc 2127; June 10 1869, HC Deb. Vol. 196 cc 1522

²⁸ May 11 1860, HC Deb. Vol. 158 cc 1120

Figure 3.2



Figure 3.3



Source: Punch, (18 August 1877): 62; Punch, (14 July 1877): 7

linguistic usage became even more prevalent in the early-to-mid 1870s.²⁹ In this context, it is not particularly surprising to find a synthesis of railway and parliamentary time infusing the late 1870s debates over procedural reform.

In the 14 July 1877 Punch cartoon “Pigheaded Obstruction” and in the image attached to Punch’s 18 August 1877 “Essence of Parliament” the imagery of the railway and the logic of “excessive speed” are clearly present as modes of expressing the problems posed by Irish Obstruction. In the first image, published before the introduction of Northcote’s procedural resolutions, the Parnellites are represented as pigs blocking the

²⁹ For example, see, April 29 1870, HC Deb. Vol. 200 cc 2094; June 20 1870, HC Deb. Vol. 202 cc 552; HC Deb 21 June 1870 vol. 202 cc 636; HC Deb. 13 July 1870 vol. 203 cc. 188; HC Deb 28 July 1870 vol. 203 cc. 1131; HC Deb 1 March 1871 vol. 204 cc. 1116; HC Deb 2 March 1871 vol. 204 cc. 1203; HC Deb 9 March 1871 vol. 204 cc. 1680; HC Deb 20 March 1871 vol. 205 cc. 304; HC Deb 5 March 1872 vol. 209 cc. 1453; HC Deb 30 May 1872 vol. 211 cc. 819; HC Deb 3 June 1872 vol. 211 cc. 1053; HC Deb 20 March 1873 vol. 214 cc. 1938; HC Deb 2 May 1873 vol. 215 cc. 1421-22; HL Deb 1 July 1873 vol. 216 cc. 1612-13; HC Deb 17 April 1874 vol. 218 cc. 733; HC Deb 11 June 1874 vol. 219 cc. 1414; HC Deb 31 May 1875 vol. 224 cc. 1150

line and thus decelerating a train marked “Parliament.” In response, the Speaker, represented as the “Parliamentary Engine-Driver”, exclaims that while he “won’t drive over ‘em this time” he will be forced “to clear the line” if they persist.³⁰ The second image, published at the end of the Session, subsequent to the introduction of Northcote’s resolutions and the late Session legislative rush, shows a train, stylized as the Palace of Westminster, running over a racialized depiction of the Parnellites. In these images, however, it is not simply the Irish, murdered by the parliamentary train, who suffer the consequences of “excessive speed.” It is significant that the image of Beaconsfield, being carried from the train, is represented as thoroughly exhausted. This image of Beaconsfield represents one of the central arguments deployed in support of reform during the 1877 and 1879 debates.

Advocates for reform in 1877 and 1879 regularly argued that amendments to procedure were needed in order to limit opportunities for obstruction and ensure that the Commons did not have to race through legislation at the end of the Session. Upon introducing his 1879 resolution for applying the rule of progress to the Estimates, Northcote argued that, for several Sessions, the discussion of the Estimates had been continually delayed by Members exercising their privilege of raising grievances before the consideration of Supply. This delay created a high degree of “uncertainty” as to when the Estimates would be considered, usually pushing them back “until it was impossible to discuss them properly.”³¹ The Estimates being as important as they are, Northcote argued, it was in the interests of all Members to ensure that there existed some “plan” for bringing

³⁰ “The Parliamentary Engine Driver,” Punch, (14 July 1877), 7

³¹ HC Deb., 17 February 1879, vol. 243 cc. 1338

them forward that would, as he put it, “provide something like certainty as to the time.”³² Northcote’s reasoning here mimics the concerns surrounding railway accidents. He wants to ensure “certainty” and punctuality so as to avoid the subsequent necessity of “excessive speed” later in the Session. Similarly, in the 1877 debate over Northcote’s two resolutions, George Osborne Morgan, a member of the Liberal Opposition, argued in support of an amended version of Northcote’s reforms by claiming that the existing rules ensured that legislative deliberation was too often delayed early in the Sitting and rushed before the adjournment. As he put it, “the time which used formerly to be devoted to discussing and amending the details of a measure was now wasted in declamations about the wrongs of Ireland” the result being that legislative consideration “was carried on at hours when half the House was in bed, and the other half ought to be.” “It could scarcely be matter for wonder in these circumstances”, he concluded, “that the legislation of the country had become day by day more and more unsatisfactory.”³³

Just as the rhetoric of “excessive speed” provided reformers with a justificatory language outside of the continuity discourse, it also provided opponents to reform with the means to argue that the Government was acting in a fashion that was “too hasty.” The M.P. for Glasgow, George Anderson, for instance, claimed that Northcote’s resolutions were framed “under feelings of irritation” against the obstructionists and that it would be inexpedient to deal with the question of reform “in so hasty a way.”³⁴ Similarly, Charles O’Connor, Member for Roscommon, claimed that because the resolutions “had been very

³² Ibid

³³ HC Deb., 27 July 1877, vol. 236 cc. 34

³⁴ HC Deb., 27 July 1877, vol. 236 cc. 40

hastily framed” it was likely that they “would not accomplish the object for which they were intended.”³⁵ In addition to claiming that the resolutions had been too rapidly constructed, opposition Members also claimed that there was an inherent danger involved in making the legislature move faster. Here the opposition co-opted and inverted Northcote’s argument. The House of Commons was more than a machine involved in the production of legislation, they argued, it was the “grand inquest of the nation” and its deliberations, if they were to be at all meaningful, had to be conducted at a slow tempo.³⁶ As Peter Rylands, the Member for Burnley, told the Commons in the 1879 debate, the House is “the mouthpiece of the nation”:

the organ by which all opinions, all complaints, all notions of grievances, all hopes and expectations, all wishes and suggestions, which may arise among the people at large may be brought to an expression here, may be discussed, examined, answered, rejected, or redressed.³⁷

Rylands claimed that Northcote’s attempt to procedurally circumscribe parliamentary deliberations so as to expedite the production of legislation would “materially abridge” this function. Similarly, George Bentinck, the Conservative Member for Norfolk, told the

³⁵ HC Deb., 27 July 1877, vol. 236 cc. 38

³⁶ This argument was part of a larger conservative discourse which can be found, for instance, in Earl Grey’s 1858 book, Parliamentary Government Considered with Reference to a Reform of Parliament: An Essay. Here, Grey wrote: “A few years, though much in the life of an individual, are little in the life of a Nation; and some delay in passing useful measures may well be submitted to, as cheaply purchasing the advantages we obtain in return for it.... Though the progress of legislative improvement in this country may seem too slow to men of eager and impatient tempers, if we consider fairly what has been done since the meeting of the first reformed Parliament, we shall find no just grounds for complaining of the rate of our advance, when we remember how safely and surely that progress has been made.” Earl Grey, Parliamentary Government Considered with Reference to a Reform of Parliament: An Essay, (London: Richard Bentley, 1858), 74-76

³⁷ HC Deb., 17 February 1879, vol. 243 cc. 1347

Commons that accelerating legislative deliberations would lead to bad legislation, “the less they hurried, and the more they dealt with details,” he stated “the better for the progress of Public Business.”³⁸ Thus, while the concept of “excessive speed” provided the reform cause with a language to express the need for an instrumentalization of procedure, that language could easily be contested by opponents arguing that the proposals were drawn up too quickly or that they would not check but ensure the presence of “excessive speed” in law making.

The continued ad-hoc pace of reform between 1877 and 1879 should be understood as the consequence of practical political considerations, the persistence of the constitutional/historical continuity discourse, and the cultural concern with the dangers of “excessive speed.” Yet, while the pace of reform suggests continuity with the earlier procedural debates, highly significant elements of change are evident in the rational and linguistic frameworks through which parliamentary time was understood. The rationality that underpinned the concept of “excessive speed” was significantly different than that which had previously been expressed through the continuity discourse. This signalled a break in the discursive structure of the debates on parliamentary time, which would become increasingly evident in the 1880s. Whereas in the early-to-mid-Victorian debates the appropriate temporality of Parliament was represented as subsumed by the interests of the constitution, in the 1880s the temporality of Parliament would come to be determined in pragmatic terms by its relationship to the nation.

³⁸ HC Deb., 17 February 1879, vol. 243 cc. 1349

III

On 24 March 1880 the seventh Session of Beaconsfield's second Parliament was prorogued and later that day it was dissolved. In the election that followed, Gladstone's famous Midlothian campaign and public denunciation of "Beaconsfieldism", helped to ensure that the Conservatives suffered significant losses. When Parliament re-opened, on 29 April 1880, a new Liberal Government was formed under the leadership of the "People's William." This greatly increased the potential for significant amendments to House procedure. The Minister at the head of the Government was now a Member of the Commons and therefore was more available to the Speaker for the discussion of procedure. Moreover, whereas Brand had always felt estranged from Beaconsfield, and despite the constitutional maxim that the Speaker was to be strictly non-partisan, Brand was deeply imbedded in the Liberal Party and had for decades maintained an association with Gladstone. Brand had been the Liberals' chief whip under Lord Palmerston between 1855 and 1858 and had succeeded to the Speakership in 1872 during the period of Gladstone's first Ministry. With Gladstone now at the head of the Government, the Speaker had a more sympathetic and powerful ear available to hear his case for reform. This link between the Speaker and the Prime Minister, however, was not the only party-based shift in 1880 that improved the likelihood of systematic procedural reform. Simultaneously the relationship between the Irish Party and the new Government was shifting as well.

The first Session of Gladstone's new Parliament was both short and efficient. Between the Throne Speech on April 29 and the prorogation on September 7, the House

sat on only 87 occasions and yet it was able to pass 96 Public Bills into law.³⁹ The general success of the Session was largely owing to its relative tranquillity and the absence of significant obstruction. Though Parnell had become leader of the Irish Party in April, following Butt's death, the limited emphasis that Gladstone had placed on Irish issues during his electoral campaign, especially compared to the emphasis on the need for repressive measures stressed by the outgoing Beaconsfield, helped to ensure that the practice of obstruction by the Parnellites would be limited throughout the Session. Yet, while on the surface the impetus to reform seemed minimal, the private papers of Gladstone, Brand and Northcote reveal an extensive correspondence regarding the need for amendments to procedure.

By the close of Gladstone's first Session, the mounting land agitation in Ireland, which had largely grown out of the poor harvests in 1877 and 1878 as well as the plummeting prices on cattle and grain, and which by 1880 had become characterized by the withholding of rents and the growth of violent or threatening actions against landlords, had convinced the Cabinet of the need to seek coercive legislation. Thus, just as the Speaker was being brought into closer contact with the Prime Minister, the Cabinet was being positioned in a posture that was directly antagonistic to a Party which was now headed by the leader of its obstructive faction. It is not surprising then that, anticipating the obstructive response of Parnell to the introduction of the planned Coercion Bill, Gladstone began discussing the possibility of procedural reform immediately following the close of his first Session.

³⁹ Return of the Number of Days on which the House Sat in the Sessions of 1880, 1880, (0.144)

On October 23 Gladstone prepared a confidential memorandum for his Cabinet on the need for reform in the upcoming Session. This memorandum indicates Gladstone's early commitment to procedural reform as well as the particular way in which he rationalized reform. Gladstone argued for a system of legislative devolution based on standing Grand Committees. This he suggested would "neutralize or reduce within more moderate bounds the scandalous evil of obstruction."⁴⁰ Significantly, though, Gladstone was not concerned with obstruction as a problem independent of the time scarcity that had been growing in the House over the past century. "Even without taking obstruction into account" he wrote, "while legislation has fallen into great arrear, the labours of Parliament have become unduly and almost intolerably severe."⁴¹ This trend was, Gladstone wrote, "the secret of the strength of the obstructor proper... which makes it pay him so well to pursue his vocation at all costs."⁴² "Were the time at the disposal of the House equal to the calls upon it," Gladstone argued, "it would be in respect to him, a fund virtually unlimited, and it would no longer be so well worth his while to draw upon it."⁴³ Gladstone's strategy of devolution was thus aimed at attacking the deficiency in procedure that was the source of obstruction. By adopting a system of committees, he argued, the House would "at once economise its time, reduce its arrears, and bring down to a minimum the inducement to obstruct."⁴⁴

⁴⁰ William Gladstone, "Obstruction and Devolution," 23 October 1880, in H.C.G. Matthews, ed., The Diaries of William Gladstone, (Charlottesville: InteLex Corporation, 2002)

⁴¹ Ibid

⁴² Ibid

⁴³ Ibid

⁴⁴ Ibid

Gladstone's memorandum lacks the overriding justificatory ideal presented in the rhetoric of earlier advocates of procedural reform. Instead Gladstone rationalized reform in purely mechanical terms. The advantage of devolution over the introduction of repressive measures, Gladstone argued, was not that the latter would be contrary to "free speech" or "the spirit of the constitution" but rather that it would solve the parliamentary time-scarcity with less resistance and was therefore more efficient. Moreover, introducing devolution would not exhaust the possibility of repressive measures in the future. Gladstone's memorandum, therefore, suggests two significant points. First, it is clear that the Prime Minister was considering significant procedural reform months before the Parnellites actually launched the campaign of obstruction against the Protection of Person and Property Bill and, second, that Gladstone's consideration of procedural reform was conceptualized in systemic and justified in instrumental terms.

Despite Gladstone's desire to fix the systemic problems in procedure, he was aware that such reform would require much time consuming debate and that, as such, it would not assist in the quick passing of his Coercion Bill. In December 1880, Gladstone thus sought the advice of the Speaker on the best means of reforming House procedure in the interim. On December 15, he wrote to Brand that, since his Government intended to introduce, upon the opening of the Session, a Bill that would effect "repressive measures" in Ireland, it was necessary to "weigh thoroughly, especially in view of the recently developed art of obstruction, the question of what will be the best means of expediting

business.”⁴⁵ He therefore asked Brand whether “principle and precedent warrant or recommend any modification either formal or practiced of our ordinary modes of proceeding?”⁴⁶ In response, Brand assured Gladstone that, given the “existing crisis”, the House “would be thoroughly warranted in passing a resolution, setting aside our ordinary modes of proceeding, for the purpose of passing a Bill or Bills essential to the public safety.”⁴⁷

Brand’s idea of suspending the ordinary rules of the House seems to have given Gladstone the idea of drafting his urgency resolution which stipulated that, upon the majority of the House voting that the public business was in a state of urgency, the Speaker would be provided with the ability to frame new rules to temporarily govern business.⁴⁸ In Gladstone’s reasoning this mode of proceeding had much to recommend it. Since the resolution would only require the House to determine whether the state of Public Business was temporarily urgent, it would not create an overly time consuming

⁴⁵ William Gladstone to Henry Brand, 15 December 1880, Papers of Henry Bouverie William Brand, PA, BRA/1/4/23

⁴⁶ Ibid

⁴⁷ Henry Brand to William Gladstone, 18 December 1880, Papers of William Gladstone, BLMC, ADD44194

⁴⁸ The rule read as follows: “That, if upon Notice given a Motion be made by a Minister of the Crown that the state of Public Business is urgent, and if on the call of the Speaker 40 Members shall support it by rising in their places, the Speaker shall forthwith put the Question, no Debate, Amendment, or Adjournment being allowed; and if, on the voices being given he shall without doubt perceive that the Noes have it, his decision shall not be challenged, but, if otherwise, a Division may be forthwith taken, and if the Question be resolved in the affirmative by a majority of not less than three to one, the powers of the House for the Regulation of its Business upon the several stages of Bills, and upon Motions and all other matters, shall he and remain with the Speaker, until the Speaker shall declare that the state of Public Business is no longer urgent, or until the House shall so determine upon a Motion, which after Notice given may be made by any Member, put without Amendment, Adjournment, or Debate, and decided by a majority.” HC Deb., 3 February 1881, vol. 258 cc. 103

debate and, secondly, once passed it would allow the speedy reform of procedure through decree rather than division. Despite these advantages, however, Brand was initially opposed to urgency as he thought it would open the Speaker to charges of being partial. He wrote to Gladstone that such a course should not be adopted until “all other means have been exhausted.”⁴⁹

Instead of urgency, Brand insisted that the House needed “a well-considered resolution for closing the debate.”⁵⁰ Given Gladstone’s previously expressed scepticism about the efficiency of introducing “repressive measures”, it was clear that to avoid protracted debate any such measure would require the support of the Opposition. For this reason, Brand spent December 1880 and January 1881 attempting to convince both Gladstone and Northcote of the necessity of applying a closure resolution to the procedure of the House. Like Gladstone, Northcote initially rejected the idea on practical grounds, writing that he “seriously doubt[ed] the acceptance of anything like the Clôture.”⁵¹ Brand responded to this in a language of necessity, claiming that the tactics of the Parnellites “paralyzed” the House and would eventually “bring Parliamentary Government into contempt.”⁵² The best way of avoiding this, he argued, was by adopting a closure procedure but one which was “subject to certain conditions for the protection of

⁴⁹ Henry Brand to William Gladstone, 22 January 1881, Papers of Henry Bouverie William Brand, PA, BRA/1/4/39b

⁵⁰ Ibid

⁵¹ Stafford Northcote to Henry Brand, 4 January 1881, Papers of Henry Bouverie William Brand, PA, BRA/1/4/32

⁵² Ibid

minorities.”⁵³ For Northcote’s review, Brand enclosed a proposed resolution which would vest discretion for the procedure in the Speaker.⁵⁴

With the opening of Gladstone’s second Session, on 6 January 1881, the Government announced its intention introduce “a Bill for the better protection of person and property in Ireland”, which in effect would suspend Habeas Corpus.⁵⁵ As had been expected, Parnell and his supporters mounted a campaign of obstruction that prolonged the debate on the Address and exhausted the patience of the Government. By January 17 Gladstone’s private secretary, Edward Hamilton, wrote in his diary, “The debate on the Address is still proceeding.... The patience of all right-minded men is becoming rapidly exhausted.”⁵⁶ Three days later he wrote, “[T]he debate founded on the various

⁵³ Ibid

⁵⁴ The draft resolution read: “That on a motion being made, during any Debate in the House or in any Committee of the whole House “That this Debate be now closed,” the Speaker or the Chairman may if he thinks fit, desire any Members who support such motion to rise in their places; and if not less than forty Members so rise, he shall thereupon put the Question, no debate, adjournment or amendment being allowed; and if such Question be resolved in the affirmative, the original Question shall be forthwith put from the Chair.” Papers of Henry Bouverie William Brand, PA, BRA/1/4/34b

⁵⁵ The first provision of the Act ensured the suspension of Habeas Corpus for the duration of the period in which the Act was in force. It stipulated: “Any person who is declared by warrant of the Lord Lieutenant to be reasonably suspected of having either before or after the passing of this Act been guilty as principal or accessory of high treason, treason-felony, or treasonable practices, wherever committed, or of any crime punishable by law committed in a prescribed district, being an act of violence or intimidation, or the inciting to an act of violence or intimidation, and tending to interfere with or disturb the maintenance of law and order, may be arrested in any part of Ireland and legally detained during the continuance of this Act in such prison in Ireland as may from time to time be directed by the Lord Lieutenant, without bail or mainprize; and shall not be discharged or tried by any court without the direction of the Lord Lieutenant.” Protection of Person and Property (Ireland). A Bill for the Better Protection of Person and Property in Ireland. 1881 (79) v.17

⁵⁶ Edward Hamilton, Diaries of Edward Hamilton, 17 January 1881, BLMC, ADD 48630

amendments to the address is still dragging its weary way and the House is slowly but surely moving towards the point at which some stringent measures for dealing with obstruction will be necessary.”⁵⁷ This context appears to have helped sway the Cabinet towards accepting the idea of introducing a closure resolution, as the January 20 and 22 entries in Hamilton’s diary indicate that both the Prime Minister and the Cabinet had agreed that some form of closure was required “if obstruction showed itself next week at all virulently.”⁵⁸ Given the contentiousness of the closure, however, Gladstone was still committed to ensuring that his Government would have the support of the Opposition if it proceeded with the introduction of such a resolution. Thus, Gladstone wrote to Brand that he was willing to discuss the matter further with Northcote in order to establish “a clear case and a decisive measure.”⁵⁹

Significant obstacles impeded Northcote’s ability to support the introduction of a closure resolution. After 1880, his position as the Conservative Leader in the Commons had become more tenuous as a result of the recent emergence of a small Conservative splinter group, led by Randolph Churchill and known as the Fourth Party. Churchill’s group had shown itself to be open to the regular use of oppositional legislative obstruction and it was unlikely that they would support any resolution that would provide the majority with the ability to close a debate. Acknowledging this, Brand wrote in his diary on January 19, that while he did not doubt that “Northcote will consider with reason and

⁵⁷ Edward Hamilton, Diaries of Edward Hamilton, 20 January 1881, BLMC, ADD 48630

⁵⁸ Edward Hamilton, Diaries of Edward Hamilton, 22 January 1881, BLMC, ADD 48630

⁵⁹ William Gladstone to Henry Brand, 20 January 1881, in H.C.G. Matthew, The Diaries of William Gladstone.

fairness any proposal made,” he was concerned that Northcote would be “too much swayed by stronger and unreasoning minds with whom he is associated.”⁶⁰ Brand’s concerns were well grounded. In an earlier correspondence between Northcote and Lord Beaconsfield, Northcote had expressed that it would be almost impossible to secure the support of the Fourth Party for the adoption of a closure resolution.⁶¹ In spite of this, however, Northcote’s response to Brand’s draft resolution signalled that he was willing to at least discuss the idea further. He wrote that while he was at first glance against some of the specifics of Brand’s idea for a closure resolution, particularly the vesting of the initiative with the Speaker, he would “think the matter over more carefully.”⁶²

Between January 20 and 24, while the debate on the address was still dragging in the House, Brand, Gladstone and Northcote discussed the details both of Gladstone’s proposed urgency resolution and Brand’s possible closure rule. By January 24 it seemed that Northcote would support both Gladstone and Brand’s resolutions but only with significant amendments. Regarding the closure, Northcote suggested that it should only be applicable through a motion being made by a Minister and carried by a three-quarter majority. For Gladstone’s urgency resolution, Northcote demanded that a motion for urgency should not be carried unless the majority in favour consisted of more than half of the full number of sitting Members and that the power of ending urgency lay not with the

⁶⁰ Diaries of Speaker Brand, 1881, Papers of Henry Bouverie William Brand, PA, BRA/3/4

⁶¹ Stafford Northcote to Benjamin Disraeli, 18 Dec. 1880, Stafford Northcote Papers, BLMC, ADD 50018

⁶² Stafford Northcote to Henry Brand, 19 January 1881, Papers of Henry Bouverie William Brand, PA, BRA/1/4/33; Also see Stafford Northcote to Benjamin Disraeli, 19 Jan. 1881, Stafford Northcote Papers, BLMC, ADD 50018

Speaker but with either the completion of the Bill for which urgency had been declared or by a vote of a majority of the House. Brand was not pleased. In his diary he wrote that the closure would be “much weakened” by Northcote’s amendments but that “being at his mercy, we must agree.”⁶³ By January 24, then, it seemed that the Gladstone Government would be able to proceed with the support of the Opposition. This appearance, however, was deceiving.

In his deliberations with the Speaker and the Prime Minister, Northcote had been pledging his party’s support without Beaconsfield’s consent. When Northcote appraised Beaconsfield of the situation, the Leader replied that “the business is too rash and grave to settle in this off-hand manner” and that the reforms seemed overly “hasty and crude.” He thus told Northcote that he ought to “sleep on it” and that reflection would induce him to relinquish his approval.⁶⁴ Having received this discouraging response, Northcote, on January 25, withdrew his support from the proposed closure resolution but stated his party would still back the urgency rule.⁶⁵ This withdrawal of support did not sit well with either Gladstone or Brand, who referred to Northcote as “flabby and shabby.”⁶⁶ The potential for a bi-partisan initiative clearly exhausted, the Speaker and the Prime Minister were left with three options. They could introduce urgency without closure, they could abandon reform altogether, or they could move for the appointment of yet another Select

⁶³ Diaries of Speaker Brand, 24 January 1881, Papers of Henry Bouverie William Brand, PA, BRA/3/4

⁶⁴ Benjamin Disraeli to Stafford Northcote, (undated), Stafford Northcote Papers, BLMC, ADD 50040

⁶⁵ Stafford Northcote to Benjamin Disraeli, 25 Jan. 1881, Stafford Northcote Papers, BLMC, ADD 50040

⁶⁶ Diaries of Edward Hamilton, 30 Jan. 1881, Edward Hamilton Papers, BLMC, ADD 48630

Committee. None of these options were appealing. Both the Speaker and the Prime Minister were convinced of the need for reform, Brand was unwilling to accept urgency without closure, and Gladstone was unwilling to proceed without the support of the Opposition. The drive towards reform had hit a wall.

On the same day that Northcote withdrew his support for the closure, however, a chain of events began on the floor of the House that would ultimately lead to the introduction of both the urgency and closure resolutions. On January 25, after Parnell had kept the House sitting for twenty-two consecutive hours, Gladstone secured the House's approval on a motion that the Protection of Person and Property Bill be given precedence over all other business. Once introduced the Bill was met with a concerted campaign of obstruction which, by January 31, had convinced Gladstone that the Bill would only pass by resorting to a sitting in which the Government outlasted the Parnellites. To this end, the House sat continuously from 4:00 p.m. on January 31 to 9:00 a.m. on February 2, or more than forty-one consecutive hours. The sitting was only brought to a close by the Speaker, who, operating outside of the established procedure, immediately closed the debate and put the main question to the House. On the following day Gladstone rose in his place and moved his urgency resolution which, after the suspension and forced removal of several Parnellites, passed unanimously.⁶⁷

Following the Speaker's closure and the subsequent introduction of Gladstone's urgency resolution, the regular procedures of the House were suspended and, as the resolution indicated, "the powers of the House for the regulation of its business" were

⁶⁷ "Parliamentary Intelligence," Times (London), (4 February 1881), 6-8

vested solely in the Speaker.⁶⁸ On February 9, Brand decreed nine new rules for the temporary management of House business. These rules were broad in scope providing for the virtual elimination of motions for adjournment and investing in the Speaker the ability to close debate, to quickly resolve any challenge to his rulings and to order a Member to immediately discontinue his speech.⁶⁹ On February 17 the Speaker introduced two additional rules which applied, what has since become known as the “parliamentary

⁶⁸ HC Deb., 3 February 1881, v. 258, cc. 103

⁶⁹ The rules read:

1. That no Motion for the adjournment of the House shall be made, except by leave of the House, before the Orders of the Day or Notices of Motions have been entered upon. [Communicated to the House 4th February, 1881.]
2. That when a Motion is made for the adjournment of a Debate, or of the House, during any Debate, the Debate thereupon shall be strictly confined to the matter of such Motion.
3. That, if during any Debate, a Motion be made for the adjournment of the Debate, or of the House, Mr. Speaker may decline to put the Question thereupon, if, in his judgment, such Motion is made for the purpose of obstruction: or, if he think fit to put such Question, he may put it from the Chair forthwith.
4. That no Member, having spoken to a Motion for the adjournment of a Debate, or of the House, during any Debate, shall be entitled to move, or to speak to any similar Motion, during the same Debate.
5. That Mr. Speaker may call the attention of the House to continued irrelevance or tedious repetition on the part of a Member; and may direct the Member to discontinue his speech.
6. That when it shall appear to Mr. Speaker, during any Debate, to be the general sense of the House, that the Question be now put, he may so inform the House; and on a Motion being made "That the Question be now put," Mr. Speaker shall forthwith put such Question; and if the same be decided in the affirmative, by a majority of three to one, the Question previously under Debate shall be forthwith put from the Chair.
7. That when the Order of the Day for the Committee on any Bill, or other matter declared urgent is read, Mr. Speaker shall forthwith leave the Chair, without putting any Question; and the House shall thereupon resolve itself into such Committee.
8. That, on reading the Order of the Day for the consideration of a Bill (declared urgent), as amended, the House do proceed to consider the same, with out Question put.
9. That when, before a Division, Mr. Speaker's decision that the "Ayes," or "Noes," have it is challenged, Mr. Speaker may call upon the Members challenging it, to rise in their places; and if they do not exceed twenty, he may forthwith declare the determination of the House." HC Deb., 9 February 1881, vol. 258 cc. 435-436

guillotine” (an allocation of time motion intended to ensure that certain stages of a Bill are completed by a certain date), to Bills both in Committee and in the House.⁷⁰ On February 28, the Protection of Person and Property Act having passed, the Speaker declared that the state of Public Business was no longer urgent and the regular rules were put back in force. The period of urgency was thus short but its effects were significant.

The events of January 31 to February 28 created a precedent for the comprehensive revision of the traditional procedural code. Moreover, they demonstrated that such a revision could intensely accelerate the legislative process and greatly compensate for the parliamentary time scarcity. It is little wonder then that Gladstone would become further bolstered in his commitment, initially expressed in his 1880 Cabinet memorandum, to eliminate Parliament’s time problem through systemic reforms. To this end, Gladstone would, in the next Session, introduce a major reform scheme based largely on the Speaker’s urgency rules and the devolutionary principles outlined in his earlier memorandum. But, while the urgency rules set a precedent for the acceleration of Parliament through fundamental procedural alterations, the conditions under which Gladstone operated in 1882 were significantly different than those that faced Brand in

⁷⁰ The rules read:

“1. That on a Motion being made, after Notice, that the Chairman of a Committee upon any Bill, declared urgent, do report the same to the House, on or before a certain day and hour; or that the Consideration of any such Bill, as amended, be concluded, on or before a certain day and hour; the Question thereupon shall be forthwith put from 1071 the Chair, but shall not be decided in the affirmative, unless voted by a majority of three to one.
2. That when the House has ordered that the consideration of a Bill, as amended, be concluded, on or before a certain day and hour, the several new Clauses and Amendments shall be put forthwith, after the Member who has moved any new Clause or Amendment, and a Member in charge of the Bill has been once heard: or if a Member in charge of the Bill has himself moved a new Clause or Amendment, after one other Member has been once heard thereupon.” HC Deb., 17 February 1881, vol. 258 cc.1070

1881. Whereas the urgency rules were temporary expedients to solve a short term crisis, Gladstone's 1882 rules represented a permanent alteration of House procedure. Moreover, while Brand, once Gladstone's urgency resolution had passed, was able to introduce new rules without a division being taken, Gladstone could only reform procedure through the consent of the House. This, of course, posed a problem for the Liberal leader who expected resistance not only from the Opposition parties but from within the ranks of his own party as well.⁷¹

On 2 February 1882, Gladstone announced his Government's intention to move a series of procedural resolutions. Once introduced, his reform plan faced significant opposition not only from Northcote and the Conservatives but also from radicals within his own party, such as Joseph Cowen and Sir William Marriot. The debates on Gladstone's new rules were therefore greatly protracted. The first of the resolutions (the closure) was by far the most contentious and hotly debated. Opposition Members argued vehemently against it, claiming that it represented "the tomb of English pride", the clapping of "the French gag... upon English lips", and that it was "repugnant to the political instincts and traditional feeling of Englishmen."⁷² Introduced on 20 February 1882, its debate continued beyond the Easter Recess until August when the House adjourned until the fall. When Parliament re-opened, on October 24, Gladstone secured approval on a motion that the new rules of procedure have precedence over all Orders and Motions on every sitting day, and, even after that the debate on the first resolution

⁷¹ William Gladstone to Henry Brand, 1 April 1882, William Gladstone Papers, BLMC, MS 44545

⁷² "Epitome of Opinion," Pall Mall Gazette, (10 February 1882), 12

continued until November 10. The remaining resolutions, which, among other things provided for the devolution of legislative work, continued until December 1. Gladstone's resolutions not only received substantial attention in the House, they were also heavily reported and commented upon by newspapers of every political stripe: from the Times and the Standard, to the Pall Mall Gazette and the Manchester Guardian. For the first time since 1848, the problem of parliamentary time was brought continually before the public eye.

These resolutions received such significant attention largely because they were antithetical to earlier reforms. They were not designed to fix the temporary abuse of an otherwise relevant rule but rather to amend, as comprehensively as possible, a procedural code that had become anachronistic. Underpinning this perception of anachronism was a political vision that was deeply plugged in to an increasingly prevalent sense of historical discontinuity and acceleration. This sense of a new temporality in political culture was largely based on perceptions of democratic progress and technological mechanization. As historian Richard Price has recently shown, by the late 1870s the unintended mass male enfranchisement that followed the 1867 Reform Act had thrown the past-oriented and exclusionary character of constitutional discourse into a state of disorder and ensured that "the language of democracy could now be spoken as a foreseeable reality."⁷³ Moreover, as numerous historians have pointed out, there was a clear fascination with the increasing rates of technological change that characterized European and English culture in the *fin de siècle* and which seemed to be turning Britain into, what one Punch cartoonist referred

⁷³ Richard Price, British Society, p. 290

Figure 3.4



Source: Punch, (9 December 1878): 317

to as, a “museum of modern antiques.”⁷⁴ As the constitutional historian Walter Bagehot noted in 1872, the “peculiarity” of his contemporary age was that “by it everything is made into an antiquity.”⁷⁵

In this ostensibly new historical age, the procedures of Parliament that had been

⁷⁴ “Museum of Modern Antiques,” Punch, (9 December 1878), 317. That the period surrounding the end of nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century was characterized by a profound sense of change has been acknowledged by numerous historians. Perhaps most notably, Stephen Kern observed, in his now classic book, The Culture of Time and Space, that “sweeping changes in technology and culture created distinctive new modes of thinking about time and space” which produced a sense of acceleration and “set the world rushing.” Stephen Kern, The Culture of Time and Space, 1880-1918, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 1, 130

⁷⁵ Walter Bagehot, Physics and Politics, or Some Thoughts on the Application of the Principles of 'Natural Selection' and 'Inheritance' to Political Society, (London: Henry S. King and Co., 1872), 5

inherited from the past increasingly came to be seen as obsolete formalities unsuitable to the present. As one author in Reynolds's Newspaper observed in 1882:

[I]t is necessary to revise the antiquated rules of the House of Commons, which are about as suitable to English life today as the coach and six of our great grandfathers before the genius of Macadam had invented the process of road making, or like the oil lamps of the early days of George IV, before Windsor lighted up Pall Mall with gas. Now that we travel from York to Chester by the light of a winter's day, and have our great thoroughfares lighted by electricity, it is impossible to put up with the Fabian rust of old rules in Parliament.⁷⁶

Certainly it is not hard to imagine how law-making practices that gave each Bill three readings and five stages of debate would be seen as out-dated in an age when "the hours follow each other so rapidly" and the perceived rate of social and cultural change might reduce the duration of relevancy or applicability for particular Bills.⁷⁷ By the time that Gladstone was introducing his new rules, then, external conditions were creating an ideal political environment for the deployment of a new language of reform, which claimed, as one author in the Pall Mall Gazette wrote, that it was irrational to "make a fetish of forms from which the reality has long passed away."⁷⁸

⁷⁶ "Liberty of Speech in Danger," Reynolds's Newspaper, (26 February 1882), 1

⁷⁷ "Parliamentary Review," Pall Mall Gazette, (2 February 1881), 1; Joseph Cowen made this point in his 1882 pamphlet on the possibility of the House of Commons adopting the closure: "In recent years the position of public affairs has greatly altered. Information that was once the exclusive possession of a favoured few is now the common property of all. News of events that transpire at the other side of the globe and in their most distant dependencies is flashed here in a few hours.... This rapidity of communication, and this multiplication of the means of publicity, have quickened public life and intensified discussion. Opinion as a consequence ripens more rapidly. The sentiments prevailing this year may not be entertained next." Joseph Cowen, "The Right of Free Speech: Speech by Mr. Joseph Cowen, M.P., made in the House of Commons," (Newcastle on Tyne: Andrew Reid, 1882), 12

⁷⁸ "Considerations on Procedure," Pall Mall Gazette, (10 January 1882), 1

We can begin to observe this new language in the 1880-1881 procedural writings of two parliamentarians who were read and consulted by Gladstone.⁷⁹ These men were, William McCullagh Torrens, the Liberal Member for Finsbury, and Thomas Erskine May. Torrens' major work on the subject of procedure was his 1880 treatise, Reform of Procedure in Parliament to Clear the Block of Public Business in which he advocated procedural reform in a language that stressed changing political conditions and the irrelevance of contemporary parliamentary practice. He wrote that in Parliaments before the nineteenth century, "prolixity, tautology, and other vices of modern civilization were unknown."⁸⁰ In "modern" Parliaments, however, Torrens argued that things had changed and yet Members continued to "bow down" to "obsolete forms" as if they were still relevant: to, as he put it, "treat the mummy as if it were a living thing."⁸¹ According to Torrens, procedure required not a minor revision but full and systematic reform. Torrens wrote that M.P.s needed to "look facts in the face" and "remodel the standing rules of business to suit the imperative needs of the time."⁸² In this way, Torrens' rhetoric contains an explicit rejection of the language of constitutional/historical continuity found in earlier debates. "The oldest and best constitutional contrivances for the security of order and freedom" he wrote, had "by overstrain been broken down beyond repair."⁸³

⁷⁹ Stafford Northcote to Henry Brand, 4 January 1881, Papers of Henry Bouverie William Brand, PA, BRA1/4/32 ; William Gladstone to Thomas Erskine May, 11 January 1882, Papers of Thomas Erskine May, PA, ERM 1/36-37

⁸⁰ W.M. Torrens, M.P., Reform of Procedure in Parliament To Clear the Block of Public Business, (London: WMH Allen, 1881), 53

⁸¹ Ibid. p. 33

⁸² Ibid. p. 33

⁸³ Ibid. p. 3

A similar rejection of the language of constitutional/historical continuity can be found in the memorandum drafted by Erskine May for Gladstone's Cabinet on 5 November 1881. In this memorandum, Erskine May argued for reform by pointing to anachronisms in procedure. He outlined a number of "public evils" that, as he put it, arose chiefly from "imperfections in the Parliamentary system."⁸⁴ Erskine May claimed that while reforms had been adopted throughout the century they had only occurred through the "indifference, jealousy or reluctance" of Members who "irrespective of party, have hitherto proved themselves strongly conservative in matters affecting the procedure of the House."⁸⁵ Erskine May depicted these previous efforts as irrational, claiming that these Members had refused to see the need for significant procedural reform and had "even clung to old forms and traditions which have ceased to be applicable to their present time."⁸⁶ In the past few years, however, Erskine May claimed that "the majority of the House" had been "awakened" to the need for reform and that it was now an opportune time to pursue amending the House's procedural code.⁸⁷

As in Torrens, the sense of historical discontinuity is explicit in Erskine May's memorandum. Moreover, like Torrens, Erskine May's separation from the value-based rationality of earlier debates is suggested by his inability, or at least unwillingness, to see

⁸⁴ Gladstone thanked May for his paper, writing that he had "read with great interest your able paper on procedure; which will be a great help to us in approaching a difficult question." William Gladstone to Thomas Erskine May, 7 November 1881, Papers of Thomas Erskine May, PA, ERM 1/31-33; Thomas Erskine May, "Memorandum on the Rules of Procedure in the House of Commons", 5 November 1881, BLMC, ADD44154 79-85

⁸⁵ Ibid

⁸⁶ Ibid

⁸⁷ Ibid

previous reforms as anything but mistaken. These assertions are particularly striking in Erskine May's work, since he had been writing on the subject for close to four decades, and his earlier work, particularly the 1848 pamphlet "Remarks and Suggestions", had been defined by the imagery of constitutional/historical continuity. As we saw in the previous chapter, Erskine May had claimed in this earlier piece that because the rules of the House had "been tested by the practical experience of many generations" amendments should only be made with "the utmost caution."⁸⁸ In his 1881 memorandum, however, this stress on caution is entirely absent. The traditional procedures are not represented as immune to the change of history but rather as out-of-date. Even areas of procedure that had been hallowed within the constitution such as the raising of grievances before supply were demystified by Erskine May's language and presented as un-modern: "the inconvenient and objectionable practice of moving Amendments on going into Committee of Supply, by which the order of business is continually disturbed... is no more than *a modern abuse of an old constitutional doctrine*."⁸⁹

Torrens and Erskine May were implicated not only in the subversion of the continuity discourse but also in the construction, or at least the circulation, of a new language of reform. Both authors appeal, not to an overriding ideal but rather to the instrumentality of means to ends in their assessment of procedure as out-of-date. For both authors, the primary purpose of procedure is to ensure the efficient consideration of proposed legislation, which means ensuring its steady and uninterrupted movement. This

⁸⁸ Thomas Erskine May, "Remarks and Suggestions" p. 8

⁸⁹ Thomas Erskine May, "Memorandum on the Rules of Procedure in the House of Commons"

does not mean that either Erskine May or Torrens were indifferent to procedure's function of protecting the historical transmission of constitutional liberties but rather that these idealised concerns were generally subordinated to the central issue of legislative efficiency.

In addition to offering a new way of thinking about procedure, both authors also offer a new tropology through which parliamentary procedure and its significance can be understood. In Erskine May this is based on a rhetorical link between democracy and progress. He claims that while the constitutional structure of the nation has advanced, the procedural code of the House has remained unchanged. The traditional procedures of the House are represented in this argument as standing in the way of further political progress. Erskine May asks his reader: "Of what avail, indeed, is improved representation if the action of the Legislature be paralyzed by shortcomings and abuses in its own procedure?"⁹⁰ Torrens' work, while containing little on the progress of popular representation, constantly uses an imagery of technological mechanization. He writes that Parliament "has broken down"; he refers to Parliament's imperial concerns as the "imperial train" which requires "punctual dispatch and timely arrival at its destination"; he refers disparagingly to contemporary procedural reformers in the House as "experimentalists in improved gas light"; he terms the proposals for legislative devolution to be "wheels" of a "new mechanism"; and he calls St. Stephen's both a "legislative mill" and a "co-operative mill" that operates a "legislative loom" run on "the whole steam

⁹⁰ Ibid

power of Parliament.”⁹¹ But, while Torrens and Erskine May employ separate tropes, the intended meaning is the same: the House of Commons is not historically in step with the nation.

By 1881, the use of these forms of imagery in order to establish the contention that Parliament was operating in a new time was pervasive not only in the writing of parliamentarians but in pamphlet literature and the press as well. In “Obstruction and the Reform of Procedure”, issued by the National Reform Union, a similar tropology can be observed. Here, the author uses the metaphor of the machine as his principal mode of representing the House of Commons. He refers to the Commons as “the driving wheel of the whole Empire” and claims that poor organization and obstruction have “so clog[ged] the wheels of the machine that it will do next to nothing....” He argues further that if bold reforms are not introduced “the water” will continue to gain fast “on the pumps.”⁹² It was through these machine-based metaphors that the author established his contention.

This historical temporalization of Parliament is made more explicit in the author’s concomitant use of an imagery of democratic progress. “In former days”, the pamphlet reads “the House of Commons was more like what the House of Lords is still. Its members belonged for the most part to the same aristocratic class, and they did not stand in awe of their constituents.” In the contemporary period, however, things had changed. “The present is a democratic age”, the author wrote, where seats in the Commons are no longer “secure possessions” and where most Members have “a thirst for work or

⁹¹ W.M. Torrens, M.P., Reform of Procedure in Parliament, pp. 3, 6, 8 123, 93-94

⁹² E.R. Woodehouse, “Obstruction and the Reform of Procedure,” (Bath: William Lewis and Sons, 1881), 6

distinction.”⁹³ Having established that significant constitutional change had occurred in England’s representative system, the author then argued that reform was needed in the House’s procedural code. “The mere antiquity of the rules of the House should not be suffered to invest them with the sanctity of a superstition,” he told his reader. While they had “been excellent rules in their day”, it was clear that, “like other institutions and ordinances, they must yield to the dissolving touch of time and change.” This, the author maintained, was the only conclusion that could be reasonably reached:

Is it consonant with sense and reason that rules which are the birth of a period when the House was preoccupied with the defence of its privileges against encroachment by the Crown, should be equally effective in a period when the enemies whom it has most reason to fear are within its own walls? It would hardly be more effective to wear a suit of ancient armour as a defence against paralysis.⁹⁴

This rhetoric follows the same logic and employs the same imagery as Erskine May’s memorandum: the political present is distinct from the past by virtue of its democratization but, while the political nation has changed with time, the procedure of the House has remained unaffected and is now unable to complete its work.

By 1882 the development of this new language of reform provided reformers with the means and to make irrational, what one author in Reynolds’s Newspaper called, Parliament’s “reverence for all that is old and vested and, above all, traditional.”⁹⁵ This was done not simply through the rendering of the present as a new time, distinct from the past, but also through a series of separate connotations that were carried in the language’s tropology.

⁹³ Ibid, p. 10

⁹⁴ Ibid, p. 12

⁹⁵ Reynolds’ Newspaper, (23 Jan. 1881), 1

The imagery of democratic advance made possible a significant revision of the traditional association between the independence of the Private Member and the right of free speech. If the present was a democratic age, then the Government, based as it was on the majority of elected Members of Parliament, could embody “the people” and, as such, the agenda of the Government could be imagined as the interests of the nation.⁹⁶ This is what Brand meant when, in 1877, he told Northcote that objections against limiting the privileges of Private Members lost their force in “these days when the relations of the Crown and its Ministers on the one hand and the House on the other, are firmly established upon a popular basis.”⁹⁷ Whereas “independence” and “free speech” had been traditionally understood as a bulwark against the “tyranny of the majority”, the imagery of democratic progress meant now that free speech protected the whole from the “tyranny of the minority.”⁹⁸ Such a rhetorical possibility became significant in 1882 when the opposition built much of its case upon the themes of independence, free speech, and their credentials as intrinsically English virtues.

⁹⁶ GHL Le May, The Victorian Constitution: Conventions, Usages and Contingencies, (London: Duckworth, 1979)17-8

⁹⁷ Memorandum on Procedural Reform Prepared by Brand, 1877, Papers of Henry Bouverie William Brand, PA, BRA/1/3/26

⁹⁸ See especially Lord Hartington’s speech in response to the claim that the government’s proposals would create a tyranny of the majority, HC Deb., 20 March 1882, vol. 267 cc. 1329. The concept “tyranny of the minority” was by no means a creation of the procedural debates but instead seems to have developed in parliamentary discourse as a result of the Second Reform Act. Indeed, it seems to have first appeared in parliamentary discourse in the period immediately following the Second Reform Act of 1867. This fact accords with the recent work of Peter Mandler which points to a synthesis between democracy and free speech in late century writings on the English national character and its relationship to the consciousness of modernity. See, Peter Mandler, “The Consciousness of Modernity? Liberalism and the English National Character, 1870-1940”, M. Daunt and B. Rieger eds., Meanings of Modernity: Britain from the Late-Victorian Era to World War II, (London: Berg, 2001), 119-144

Whereas the House of Commons had long been imagined as the “grand inquest of the nation”, the “best club in London”, or the “national theatre”, the use of technological imagery provided for the imaginative transformation of the House into the “parliamentary machine.” This imaginative transformation carried with it important temporal presuppositions about parliamentary business which worked to further the emerging rationality of the late Victorian procedural debates. As one author in the Pall Mall Gazette wrote, “The day when politics were merely a noble game are now over. The English Parliament is expected to work. Upon the efficiency of its work its title to the respect of the people will henceforth depend.”⁹⁹ As a corollary to this, the duration between the introduction of a Bill and its completion, what might be termed the “time of the Bill”, became a less meaningful time than the time associated with either the rejection of that Bill or its Royal Assent, what might be termed the “time of the Act.”¹⁰⁰ As Edward Reynolds, under the penname of Gracchus, wrote in Reynolds’ Newspaper, “Heaven knows we have endured long enough a flood of useless verbiage, and that now we want, expect, and *will* have an immediate, direct, and rapid flow of useful legislation.”¹⁰¹ The problem with the current organization of Parliament, reformers argued, was that it was unable to efficiently complete its work: that it prolonged the “time of the Bill” and

⁹⁹ “The Importance of the Session” Pall Mall Gazette, (23 October 1882), 1

¹⁰⁰ For a more general and philosophical commentary on technological modernity, practical rationality and the meaning that these things attach to the time between beginnings and ends, see Martin Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology,” in William Lovitt, ed., The Question Concerning Technology and other Essays, (New York: Harper, 1977), 3-35; Lorenzo Simpson, Technology, Time and the Conversations of Modernity, (London: Routledge, 1995); Espen Hammer, “Temporality and the Culture of Modernity,” (forthcoming)

¹⁰¹ “The Premier and his Promises,” Reynolds’ Newspaper, (19 November 1882),

delayed the “time of the Act.” “The House of Commons is now like a machine of scant power, choked with work which it cannot turn out” Brand wrote.¹⁰²

According to this new language, then, procedurally limiting practices of open discussion became a rational act because, in this new era reform would provide for the more efficient creation of legislation that would actualize the demands of “the people”. This meant, as Punch cartoonists observed in “The Old Horse” and “The National Merry-Go-Round”, that in 1882 Gladstone was not simply providing the Government with an apparatus for the circumvention of a temporary obstruction, he was creating the procedural infrastructure to allow for the legislative movement demanded by John Bull.¹⁰³ As another Punch cartoonist noted, Gladstone was a “modern magician” who, in an age when “our old rules are all sixes and sevens”, was taking a “hint” from “science” and providing “new lights for old.”¹⁰⁴ In all of these cartoons, the concomitant imagery of historical discontinuity, democratic advance and technological mechanization suggest that procedures which favoured the efficient production of government legislation were both in the interests of “the people” and essential in their new historical era. Though at times certain elements of the language were less explicit than others, they were all present upon closer examination. For instance, in “New Lights for Old”, while the imagery of discontinuity and technology is explicit, the imagery of democratic advance is implied through the use of the possessive adjective “our.” Similarly, in “The Old Horse”, while the democratic and discontinuity imagery is explicit, the imagery of technological

¹⁰² Henry Brand to Samuel Whitbread III, Papers of Henry Bouverie William Brand, PA, BRA 1/3/7

¹⁰³ “The Old Horse,” Punch, (19 November 1881), 235

¹⁰⁴ “New Lights for Old,” Punch, (1 April 1882), 151

Figure 3.5

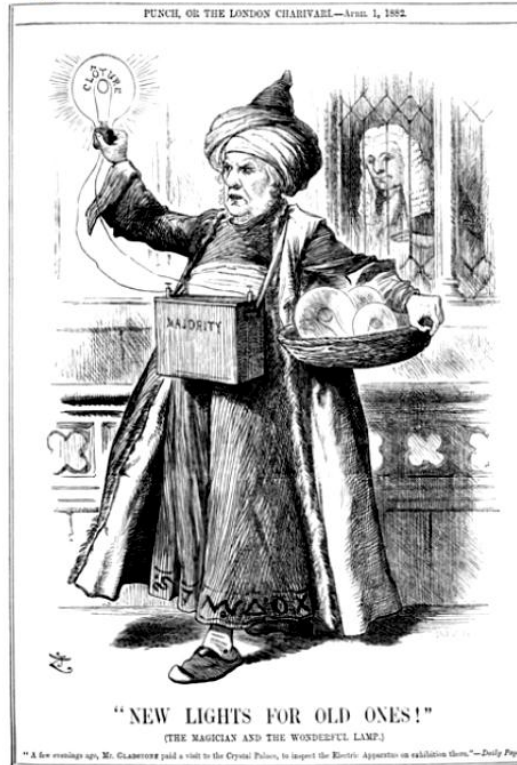


Figure 3.6



Source: Punch, (1 April 1882): 151; Punch, (25 March 1882): 139

Figure 3.7



Source: Punch, (19 November 1881): 235

mechanization is implied through the image of Gladstone's younger horse, named "energy."¹⁰⁵

The above series of connotations and denotations lent a particular meaning to the relationship between obstruction and the reform scheme provided by Gladstone. The Parnellites posed a problem, not because they temporarily impeded the will of the Government, but rather because they delayed the realization of the will of "the people." The actions of the Parnellites were seen to be, as one author in the Pall Mall Gazette noted, "reducing to impotence", not the executive branch, but "the representative assembly of the English people."¹⁰⁶ In the Punch cartoon, "Boycotted", the Parnellites were shown trapping John Bull behind a boulder, not Gladstone. Instead, Gladstone shows up as a policeman promising Mr. Bull that he has his eye on the situation. In this sense, obstruction ceased to be a temporary problem and instead came to represent more generally a structural problem in the new era of the democratically propelled parliamentary machine. The Parnellites were, as the Yorkshire Post observed, an indication that "the machinery for the discipline of the House of Commons has broken

¹⁰⁵ While the imagery of "The Old Horse" the explicitly mechanical imagery of "The National Merry-Go-Round" the cartoons juxtaposition of an old exhausted horse with a young energetic one can be taken to represent the general calculus of the technological imagery. That is, the association inherent to the imagery of modern (or new) movement with speed and unbounded energy. Indeed, the new horse that Gladstone provides John Bull with is even named "energy." Moreover, as the German historian Reinhart Koselleck has observed, the use of animal imagery was characteristic of nineteenth-century attempts to visually render the acceleration inherent to technological modernity. See, Reinhart Koselleck, "Is There an Acceleration of History?" in Hartmut Rosa and William Scheuerman, eds., High-Speed Society: Social Acceleration, Power and Modernity, (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2009), 113-134, esp. pp. 114-116

¹⁰⁶ "Considerations on Procedure," Pall Mall Gazette, (10 January 1882), 1

Figure 3.8



Source: Punch, (29 January 1881): 42

down” and procedural reform was necessary to ensure that, as another author in the Standard put it, “the whole parliamentary machine is not brought to a deadlock.”¹⁰⁷ It was, as an author in the Pall Mall Gazette noted, “a plain fact that we have fallen upon a new time” and it was necessary to “put the parliamentary machine in gear again.”¹⁰⁸ Attempting to put the machine back into working order leant to Gladstone the image of a defender of “the people” against an insurrectionary group.

¹⁰⁷ Quoted in “Latest Morning Telegrams: The Obstructionists,” Yorkshire Post, (2 February 1881), 8

¹⁰⁸ “New Rule at Last,” Pall Mall Gazette, (11 November 1882), 1

The image of Gladstone as defending the interests of the nation allowed the new language of reform to run parallel with the gendered language of dutiful masculinity. This is noticeable from 1881 on, when visual renderings of the relationship between Gladstone and the Parnellites, procedural reform and Irish obstruction, became regularly framed as a physical battle between good and evil. In these images, obstruction became commonly represented as a monster, such as was the case in Punch's 5 February 1881 "Essence of Parliament," where it was shown as a winged dragon under the control of the Home Rulers.¹⁰⁹ Similarly, in both "The Irish Devil Fish" and "Strangling the Monster" bestial representations of Irish Home Rulers are shown being slain by a muscle-bound Gladstone.¹¹⁰ The same message was also conveyed without the direct presence of a Home Ruler. This, for instance, was the case in "On His Way" and the "Parliamentary Armoured Train."¹¹¹ In the former cartoon, Gladstone is represented as an armoured knight with his lance out moving towards a darkened wood labelled "obstruction." In the latter image, Gladstone is shown, manning a cannon, at the head of an armoured train labelled "clôture." In both representations the central theme is the masculinity of Gladstone, which is established by virtue of his soldierly engagement with the obstructionists. In this way, the new language of reform developed a separate gendered tropology that played on, what historian John Tosh has shown to be, increasingly potent

¹⁰⁹ "Essence of Parliament," Punch, (5 February 1881), 51

¹¹⁰ "The Irish Devil Fish," Punch, (18 June 1881), 282; "Strangling the Monster," Punch, (5 February 1881), 55

¹¹¹ "On His Way," Punch, (15 January 1881), 18-19; "The Parliamentary Armoured Train," Punch, (24 October 1882), 198-199

Figure 3.9



Source: Punch, (05 February 1881): 51

Figure 3.10



Source: Punch, (05 February 1881): 55

Figure 3.11



Source: Punch, (18 June 1881): 282

Figure 3.12



Source: Punch, (15 January 1881): 18-19

Figure 3.13



Source: Punch, (24 October 1882): 198-199

notions of masculinity in the late-Victorian and Edwardian periods of perceived imperial instability.¹¹²

By 1882 then, the reform cause had before it a thoroughly developed and rhetorically powerful language of justification, which had circulated not only through cabinet memoranda but also through the much more public media of the press. This language, of course, was not uncontested. In both the House and the press, opponents to Gladstone's resolutions, both inside and outside of his own party, continually contested the virtuousness of Gladstone's battle against obstruction, arguing that the Government's understanding of obstruction was too broad, that it vilified legitimate opposition and that Gladstone's proposals would extinguish all freedom of speech in the House. It was important, they argued, not to "confound obstruction with what is not obstruction" as this imposes "an injustice to much legitimate opposition..."¹¹³ In this sense, there was very little that was either virtuous or manly in Gladstone's actions. To the contrary, his resolutions were framed as cowardly and deceptive: "The new rules are not directed against Irish Obstruction, but against English liberty", one author in the Morning Post wrote. "It is evident" the author continued "that the would be dictator of England is using the cry of Irish Obstruction as a pretence under cover of which he seeks to trample upon the most essential rights of Parliament and the most indispensable privileges of the

¹¹² John Tosh, "Manliness, Masculinities and the New Imperialism," in Manliness and Masculinities in Nineteenth-Century Britain: Essays on Gender, Family and Empire, (London: Pearson, 2005), 192-214

¹¹³ Author Unknown, "The Clôture and the Recent Debate: A Criticism and a Review," (London: Kerby and Endean, 1882)

constitutional opposition.”¹¹⁴ Since, in this reasoning, Gladstone became the opposite of English masculinity, it was argued that, by opposing the resolutions, it was the Conservatives who were the true and manly guardians of the nation: “the country now looks to the Conservative Party”, wrote one author in the Yorkshire Post, “to battle manfully and determinedly with the forces of doctrinaire Radicalism.”¹¹⁵

In contesting the language of reform through these arguments the opposition was rooting itself in the old, past-oriented vocabulary. Indeed, opponents to reform often deployed this vocabulary in articulating their hostility to procedural change. They argued that Gladstone’s resolutions would “curtail and degrade freedom of speech”, that they would turn the House of Commons into “a very different body than that which has hitherto been the glory of English history”, and that the Government was committing “high treason against the constitutional liberties of the English people” by proposing reforms that, if enacted, “will have terminated the parliamentary history of Britain.”¹¹⁶ But, while it is true that the traditional, past-oriented arguments persisted, it is equally true that these arguments became significantly weakened in the 1880s. This point was not lost on the opposition, which was increasingly aware of the growing rhetorical power of the new language and its present/future orientation. Indeed, the Marquis of Salisbury was forced to admit during a public speech in January 1882 that, “the country which desires to have its business done thoroughly, carefully, and effectually, is disposed to regard the

¹¹⁴ Quoted in “Epitome of Opinion,” Pall Mall Gazette, (1 February 1882), 11

¹¹⁵ Quoted in, “Epitome of Opinion,” Pall Mall Gazette, (25 October 1882), 12

¹¹⁶ “Speech of the Rt. Hon. Stafford Northcote at Liverpool, April 13 1882,” LSE Selected Pamphlets; “Speech of the Marquis of Salisbury, at Liverpool, April 13 1882,” National Union of Conservative and Constitutional Associations

fondness with which parliamentarians cling to ancient forms as something not far removed from Dryasdust.”¹¹⁷

Given the growing realization that the past-orientated discourse was fast becoming spent, opponents to reform began attempting to structure their arguments through, and thus co-opt, the tropology of the new language. This was done in a variety of ways. Some attempted simply to graft the new imagery onto the old arguments. The Conservative electoral candidate in Bedfordshire, James DeRicci, for instance, claimed that “valuable time – the time of our political representatives, the time of this country, has been frittered away” not because of imperfections in the procedure but rather because of the Government’s “sheer irritable incapacity to make the parliamentary machine work.”¹¹⁸ While acknowledging the metaphor of the “parliamentary machine”, and its logic of efficiency, DeRicci’s argument represents little more than a minor semantic alteration to the non-systemic arguments that were common between 1811 and 1878.

Others were more radical in their attempts to capture the discursive space opened up by the new language. Accepting the discontinuity thesis, they nevertheless contested the Government’s reading. A number of pamphleteers, for instance, claimed that there was nothing modern or future-oriented about Gladstone’s proposals at all. “The modern watchword is ‘searching’” these authors argued, and Gladstone’s rules would not only limit debate in the present, they would destroy “much of the Parliamentary wheat on

¹¹⁷ “Reform of Parliamentary Procedure” Publications of the National Union, No. 62, National Union of Conservative and Constitutional Associations, St. Stephen’s Chambers, Westminster, January 1882

¹¹⁸ James DeRicci, “The Bubble of Obstruction,” (London: Chapman and Hall, 1882), 9

which the future of our Constitutional breadstuffs must depend.”¹¹⁹ Similarly, the radical dissident Liberal, Joseph Cowen, claimed that while he recognised the necessity of “rubbing off the rust and adapting our forms to the ever-shifting conditions of the country and the times,” the Government’s proposals would only make the machine more inefficient. The Conservative Member for Lincolnshire, Edward Stanhope, also argued that while he and others on his side of the floor acknowledged that “the Rules governing the Procedure of the House—many of which were antiquated, and others unnecessary—required to be completely overhauled,” it was clear that “the evils felt to exist in the working of the parliamentary machine were not touched by the Government proposal at all.”¹²⁰ But, while the opposition attempted to capture the discursive space created by the new language, their efforts were self-defeating.

The problem that the opposition faced was that, in attempting to integrate the future-oriented discourse of the new language into their appeals, they were trying in vain to blend a rhetoric based on purposive doing with a wholly negative critique of the Government’s proposals. They acknowledged the problems of de-synchronization and the need to find a remedy but provided no viable alternative to the resolutions proposed by

¹¹⁹ Author Unknown, “The Clôture and the Recent Debate: A Criticism and a Review,” (London: Kerby and Endean, 1882), 8; “Reform of Parliamentary Procedure” Publications of the National Union, No. 62, National Union of Conservative and Constitutional Associations, St. Stephen’s Chambers, Westminster, January 1882; James Herman DeRicci, “Liberal Despotism,” (London: Edward Stanford, 1882), 13

¹²⁰ Joseph Cowen, “The Right of Free Speech: Speech by Mr. Joseph Cowen, M.P., made in the House of Commons,” (Newcastle on Tyne: Andrew Reid, 1882), 2; HC Deb., 20 February 1882, vol. 266 cc. 1187

Gladstone.¹²¹ The result was that while opposition's attempts to integrate the tropology of the new language legitimized that language's status, making it a "shared linguistic code", their purely negative critique left them open to attack for inaction. By the fall of 1882 the Conservative Party's opposition to reform could be viably represented as un-progressive and the tropology of the new language could be easily deployed against it. As Henry Labouchere told his Northampton constituents, "Government by the people and for the people is my creed. We live in an age of railroads and electricity, and they really must decline to drive along forever in the slow old donkey-cart which the Conservatives regard as the only vehicle fit and proper for the nation to be passengers in."¹²² Or, as one author in the Liverpool Post wrote: "The Liberal Party are resolved upon radical reforms, which the Conservatives are equally resolved to delay to the last possible moment. The policy of the one, therefore, is to make the House of Commons an efficient instrument of legislation; of the other, to lock its wheels, detach its gears, to make a hole in its boiler."¹²³

IV

The last vote on Gladstone's procedural resolutions was taken on December 1, and the 1882 parliamentary Session was prorogued the next day. By the end of the

¹²¹ Certainly it is true that alternatives were proposed in the pamphlet literature, but there was very little unity to these. Moreover, much of the alternatives suggested were overly vague calling for the delegation of legislative duties rather than the restriction of opportunities for debate but offering up no detailed scheme of delegation.

¹²² "The Premier and his Promises," Reynolds' Newspaper, (19 November 1882),

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¹²³ Quoted in "Epitome of Opinion," Pall Mall Gazette, (6 October 1882), 12

Session, the Standing Orders of the House of Commons had been radically altered. The Speaker now possessed the power to close a debate and to stop speeches that were deemed tedious, irrelevant or repetitive. Debates over questions of adjournment or the transition to and from Committee became regulated by rules that confined both their potential scope as well as the number of times each Member could speak. The rule of progress was applied to Supply and, finally, the “clause by clause” consideration of Bills relating to law and trade were partially removed from the floor of the House and committed to two Standing Committees. These resolutions reduced the opportunities for debate, they restricted the potential scope of debate, and they provided the majority with a means to silence minority groups in the House. In short, they provided for the acceleration of law-making by limiting the privileges of non-government Members and turning procedure into the means to facilitate instrumentally rational, means/ends efficient, legislative action.

In 1882 this appeared to mark a rapid transition in parliamentary history, signalling the triumph of Ministerial control. Within the course of a few years, however, it would become increasingly evident that the bark of 1882 was much worse than its bite. The Standing Committees then established were rarely resorted to and when used they quickly proved inefficient. The bulk of Committee Stage deliberations thus remained on the floor of the House and the Committees even lapsed entirely between 1883 and 1888.¹²⁴ Similarly ineffective was the Government’s closure resolution. Despite all the

¹²⁴ C.J. Hughes, “The Early History of Standing Committees,” Parliamentary Affairs, p. 378; David Pring, “Standing Committees in the House of Commons,” Parliamentary Affairs, (11), 3, (1957), 303-304

concern that it would sound the death knell of constitutional liberty, between 1883 and 1887 the procedure was only twice resorted to.¹²⁵ As Peter Rylands observed in 1886, the controversial procedures enacted four years prior were “practically inoperative.”¹²⁶ Throughout the late Victorian years and into the parliaments of Edward VII, the complaint was commonly heard that “chatter” not “work” characterised the House and in 1887, 1902 and 1906 major schemes of procedural reform were introduced by the Governments of Salisbury, Balfour and Campbell-Bannerman. But, if 1882 cannot be said to have marked the final defeat of the non-government Member, it can nonetheless be seen to mark the triumph of the “practical” rationalisation of procedure, the emergence of a new type of reform based on that rationality, the strengthening of a future-orientation in the temporal presuppositions of Parliament, and the forging of a new linguistic code which encapsulated all of these things and provided for their discursive articulation and circulation. If the 1882 Session did not mark the death of constitutional liberty, it certainly did mark the transition away from the past-oriented constitutionalism of the earlier period.¹²⁷

Throughout the remainder of the Victorian and into the Edwardian period, the tropology of the new language of reform was continually present. Parliament was often

¹²⁵ Joseph Redlich, The Procedure of the House of Commons, 177

¹²⁶ HC Deb., 22 February 1886, vol. 302 cc. 931

¹²⁷ In his short treatment of the 1882 procedural crisis, in his wider study on Whig historiography, P.B.M. Blaas observed this, arguing that “because of this crisis the much vaunted value of the old parliamentary traditions came to be doubted. The usefulness of the past was questioned at last, for traditional political arguments and all the historical precedents on which they were based were at last subjected to some critical scepticism.” P.B.M. Blaas, Continuity and Anachronism: Parliamentary and Constitutional Development in Whig Historiography and in the Anti-Whig Reaction between 1890 and 1930, (London: Martinus Nijhoff, 1978), 197-206

represented operating in an historical period that was distinct from the past. It was also often represented either as a piece of machinery or a piece of infrastructure that was to be repaired and constructed by political actors. The existing “parliamentary machine” was represented as a miserably deficient implement that needed to be reformed to suit Britain’s emerging modern democracy and save time. In one pamphlet from 1896, which argued in favour of repealing the closure resolution, the author deployed a mechanical language, structured through a railway vocabulary, arguing that:

Parliamentary debate has been shunted into a siding to avoid an obstruction on the line. There is nothing to be done but to put the train back on the line – the principle of representation – clear away the obstruction, and resume the running.¹²⁸

But while the author argued against the closure he accepted the premise that democratization had substantially altered the polity and that, as such, the House required “some new and appropriate machinery.”¹²⁹ The discontinuity thesis and its mechanistic

¹²⁸ Author Unknown, “The Ruined Procedure of the House of Commons,” (Oxford: Williams and Norgate, 1896), 6

¹²⁹ Ibid p. 3. The metaphor of the “parliamentary machine” was prevalent not only in this pamphlet literature but in the House debates as well. While advocates of reform claimed that their “intention was to free the wheels of the parliamentary machine, to increase the expedition of public business, and add to the happiness of hon. Members” opponents equal employed the mechanistic language. Some opponents to reform, like John Dillon, accused the Government of trying “to drive the Parliamentary machine beyond all limits of human endurance” while others, like Albert Rollit, claimed that the Government’s proposals left “the parliamentary machine, constructed in the Middle Ages, in a condition which fails to adapt it to modern requirements.” Moreover, these claims often employed the imagery of democratization in order to establish the theme of historical discontinuity. Farquharson, for instance, argued that “the palmy days of Peel and Palmerston, when there were many silent members, were over. Things had quite changed now..... They were all desirous of speaking occasionally in order to lay before the House the wants and wishes of their constituencies.” HC Deb., 1 May 1902, vol. 107 cc. 534; HC Deb 7 February 1902 vol. 102 cc. 734; HC Deb., 6 February 1902, vol. 102 cc. 614

and democratic tropology, however, were not the only linguistic elements of 1882 that were extended into the later period. The reform of procedure as a protective, virtuous and masculine act was also present in later debates. In some cases, the masculinity of reformers was representatively enhanced by the feminization of Parliament, perhaps most obviously present in Henry Furniss' creation of "Parliamentina." As a feminine subject Parliament became something that required instruction and protection. The protection that was required, however, was not a defence from reform but rather a security against the unbridled hyper-masculinity of unruly men in the House. Security was not required from reform, it was acquired through reform. This was a clear extension of the virtuous and dutiful masculinity first associated with the procedural reform cause in the 1882 representations of Gladstone v. Obstruction.

The meaning of all this for our purposes is that the creation and extension of this new language, from 1880 until the Edwardian period, signalled a radical transformation in the "politics of time", which saw the making of speed into a political virtue and delay into a political vice and which looked to the mastery of an open future rather than the maintenance of continuity as a central purpose in political action. This shift in the "politics of time" had significant implications for governance. Most notably, because delay became something to be avoided, the potential for open ended political debate was pushed into a position of constant retreat. While the bulk of the study so far has concentrated on the issues of parliamentary time, the next chapter will show that the effects of political acceleration had ramifications in extra-parliamentary political discourse as well.

Chapter 4:
The Politics of Time in the Edwardian Public Sphere: Liberty, Efficiency and the
Presupposition of Discontinuity

At the 1901 mayoral banquet in Wolverhampton Sir Henry Fowler, M.P. for Wolverhampton East, publicly complained of the “antiquated procedure” of the Commons. According to his speech, these procedures ensured that the act of law making in Britain was akin to pouring the wine of the twentieth century into the bottles of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Illustrating his point, Fowler deployed a series of technological tropes, claiming that the existing procedural code ensured that the business of the country was being carried on by “old-fashioned wagons and canal-boats” and arguing that it was time for the House to learn from “railway directors” who “do not waste their time in entering into discussions on paltry little details.”¹ In Fowler’s speech many of the basic rhetorical devices we observed in the late nineteenth-century procedural debates are clearly present. Discontinuity in historical time, temporal de-synchronization, the reduction of the legislature to a piece of machinery, the belittling of deliberative practices and the idea that the House should be judged according to the efficiency of its legislative production are all clearly present.

A few months after Fowler’s speech, on 30 January 1902, Prime Minister Arthur Balfour rose in the House of Commons to explain the procedural reform plan that his Government intended to introduce. As with Fowler, Balfour’s plan and the language which framed it indicated lines of continuity with the late nineteenth century. Though Balfour explained to his critics that his reforms would “leave this House what it always

¹ “Procedure Reform in the House of Commons,” Times (London), (3 January 1902), 5

has been... not merely a machine for passing legislation, but a free arena” it was nevertheless apparent that he intended to transform the House into a stable, predictable and executive-driven legislative engine.² The plan included twenty-four separate provisions that ranged from codifying the hours of sitting, to making more severe the provisions for suspending Members from the House, to empowering the Speaker to terminate a sitting without the question being put and to refuse the taking of a division. Balfour’s scheme also aimed to remove the necessity for a debate at the Second or Third Reading of a Bill, postpone automatically all Private Business not disposed of by 2:25pm on every day except Friday, limit oral questions to Ministers in the House, and transfer the short sitting from Wednesday to Friday. Like the reforms of 1882, the provisions of Balfour’s scheme were explicitly present/future oriented and visibly privileged legislative production over legislative deliberation. The content of the two reform plans, however, does not exhaust the continuity between 1882 and 1902. The discourse Balfour used to frame his resolutions also shared striking similarities with the rhetoric of the 1880s.

Balfour’s speech in the Commons upon introducing his procedural reforms was most strikingly characterized by an expressed concern with an open and fast approaching future. He claimed that contemporary England was in an age of “change” and that the House needed to amend its procedure if it wished to keep up: “for an assembly like the present, in an age as changing as the present, itself to remain unchanged would show that we are not fitted to adapt ourselves to the necessities of the country.”³ In establishing this point, Balfour employed an imagery of democratic progress, arguing that hindrances to

² HC Deb., 30 January 1902 vol. 101 cc. 1373

³ HC Deb., 30 January 1902, vol. 101 cc. 1351

executive authority had ceased to be as important as they once were. In these new historical conditions, the past-oriented aversion to procedural change was, in Balfour's view, irrelevant and unproductive:

I hope... that no man will meet us by saying that we are abandoning the old traditions of this House and throwing away safeguards which were once found necessary in our constitution. After all, Charles I. is not knocking at our door now, and our business now is not to fight with the Crown. The dangers that we have to fear are not the dangers which our ancestors had to fear.⁴

Clearly, the structure of Balfour's reforms and the discourse in which they were justified both shared striking similarities with the Gladstonian reforms of 1882. It would be a mistake, however, to assume that the type of political thinking evident here was exclusive either to Balfour or to discussions of parliamentary procedure.

What Balfour represented in 1902 was the apogee of a much more general shift in the time-based presuppositions of British politics. This was a shift characterized primarily by a declining contentment with the stability of the past and the development of a sense of political insecurity with the future; a shift which ultimately linked legitimacy with the ability to manage contingency, synchronize with and direct history, and put time back in its place. The purpose of the present chapter is to show how this new political thinking was manifest in political discussion outside of Parliament during the Edwardian period.

II

In the preceding three chapters we observed how the politicization of time in the nineteenth century produced a new and technologically driven vision of Parliament which

⁴ HC Deb., 30 January 1902, vol. 101 cc. 1373

took efficiency as its overriding ideal. The problem with the story up until now is that it has been largely confined to Parliament. Yet, as numerous historians including Stephen Kern and Modris Eksteins have argued, the rising value of efficiency represents one of the most important tendencies unifying the historical development of politics and culture in late nineteenth and twentieth century Western Europe.⁵ Likewise, philosophers from Martin Heidegger to George Grant have suggested that the technological mode of being and knowing has become prevalent in the modern west and has facilitated the rising value of efficiency in political practice.⁶ As the work of these scholars suggests, our subject has a much wider scope than has been captured thus far in the present study. For that reason, this chapter examines the way in which politics and time were fused together in political debate out-of-doors during the Edwardian period.

This chapter focuses on the continuing temporally driven tension between political discussion and political action, particularly as it was reflected in the ideological contest between national efficiency and new liberalism. As we will see, the idea of historical discontinuity, which had become the dominant historical and ontological idea underpinning debates over parliamentary time, also represented the primary temporal presupposition around which the ideological contest between these two movements was organized. Indeed, historical discontinuity was a constitutive element of both the national efficiency and new liberal identities. Yet, while the spokesmen for both movements could

⁵ Stephen Kern, The Culture of Time and Space, 1880-1918, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983); Modris Eksteins, Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age, (Toronto: Key Porter Books, 1989).

⁶ Martin Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology" in William Lovitt, ed., The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays, (New York: Harper Perennial, 1977), 3-35; George Grant, English-Speaking Justice, (Toronto: Anansi, 1985)

agree that they were standing at the threshold of a temporally new world, they disagreed sharply over what this meant for political practice. Like Balfour and the procedural reformers before him, the advocates for national efficiency stressed the need for accelerating the potential speed of British political action and, in the process, they adopted an instrumental understanding of political communication that demeaned deliberative practice as something that tended to “waste” time. The new liberals responded to this position by stressing the irrationality of the Edwardian obsession with efficiency and the importance of maintaining the necessarily slow-moving character of free-wheeling and open-ended political debate.

This division between the national efficiency advocates and the new liberals was underpinned by their respective attachments to two separate structures of political rationality. While the national efficiency advocates clearly espoused a goal-oriented vision of rational action, the new liberals saw rational political action as determined by the enactment of consensus-building discursive activity. The temporal politics contained in this national efficiency/new liberal divide, however, were not simply limited to an intellectual divergence regarding perceptions of the appropriate pace of political action. Since these groups interpreted the pace of politics to be an important logistical consideration for the functioning of the polity it should come as little surprise that their rhetorical strategies were actively oriented towards the acceleration or deceleration of politics. Just as nineteenth-century parliamentarians sought to alter the speed of the polity by either “obstructing” Parliament or procedurally circumscribing debate, the spokesmen

for these political movements aimed to alter the pace of politics by modifying the conditions and procedures of political communication outside of Parliament.

Advocates for national efficiency attempted to accelerate the polity by creating an imagined scarcity of “national time.” This imagined scarcity was created through the construction and rhetorical deployment of decline-oriented narratives that actively opposed the optimistic and progressive “liberal master narrative” of the nineteenth century.⁷ National efficiency then constructed its claim to authority on the basis of its declared ability, in a world divorced from experience, to foresee danger and manage contingency.⁸ New liberals viewed national efficiency rhetoric and the cultural fascination with speed as panic-inducing and politically problematic. Since the maintenance of a reason-based public sphere represented what historian Christopher Mauriello has called a centrally important “mobilizing fiction” to the new liberal political identity, this group of political actors actively contested the temporality of national efficiency. Locating rationality in the practice of public speech itself, they claimed that irrationality was not manifest in the delay of actions but rather in the limitation of debate. For this reason, they stressed the importance of the public intellectual and the preservation of open-ended and critical public discussion.⁹ As we will see in the case of

⁷ Stephen Heathorn, For Home, Country and Race, pp. 56-84

⁸ A similar argument has been made regarding the temporal underpinnings of the construction of Nazi authority. See, Peter Fritzsche, “Nazi Modern,” Modernism/Modernity, (3), 1, (1996), 1-22; Roger Griffin, Modernism and Fascism: The Sense of a Beginning Under Mussolini and Hitler, (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007)

⁹ Christopher Mauriello, “The Public Sphere and the Liberal Imagination: Public Intellectuals, New liberals and the Transformations of Culture, 1880-1914, (Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Brown University, 1995). See also, Christopher Mauriello, “The

Norman Angell, new liberals attempted to slow the accelerating temporality of public political debate by creating forums for discussion that were guided by procedures that facilitated not instrumentally efficient action but slow-moving, carefully reasoned, consensus building practices of deliberation.

If the procedural debates of the nineteenth century reflect the growth of “discontinuity” and “de-synchronization” as the temporal presuppositions of parliamentary culture, and efficiency as the overriding ideal of parliamentary activity, with instrumentality as the epistemological foundation for political rationality, then the ideological confrontation between national efficiency and new liberalism reflects not only the existence of these ontological and epistemological understandings beyond the walls of St. Stephen’s but also the emergence of new pockets of resistance against an efficient, action driven state. As we will see in our examination of Norman Angellism, this resistance was in fact based on large groupings of public support which feared the growth of, what our nineteenth-century parliamentarians referred to as, “excessive speed” in political decision making. Of course, the hot days of August 1914 evaporated much of the patience upon which this fight against speed was based and shifted the terms of the contest from liberty/efficiency to cranks/patriots. Nevertheless, for however short a time, the Edwardian period did exhibit a viable resistance to the growing force of instrumentally efficient politics.

Strange Death of the Public Intellectual: Liberal Intellectual Identity and the ‘Field of Cultural Production’ in England, 1880-1920,” Journal of Victorian Culture, (6), 1, (2001), 1-26

III

The Edwardian period was, in large measure, defined by a sense of acceleration and historical change. As one contemporary remembered, it was a period when “the *tempo* of life quickened” and as another wrote, it was a period defined by “a ‘speeding up of living’” which took place “in all classes in so marked a fashion within a generation.”¹⁰ The growth of this cultural fascination with speed and rates of change has not been lost on historians. From George Dangerfield in 1936 to Jose Harris in 1993 the assertion has commonly been made that the Edwardians were a people who felt they were experiencing “a quantum leap into a new era of human existence” characterized by “great contingency... [and] fast-moving change” and who, consequently, wanted “to run very fast and in any direction.”¹¹ Of course, as we have seen in earlier chapters, perceptions of acceleration were not exclusive to the early twentieth century but had been regularly articulated from at least the late 1840s. What was unique to the Edwardian period, however, was the prevalence of these attitudes.

The increase in perceptions of acceleration was tied to a number of factors, including the rapid growth of mechanical travel and the heightened volume and velocity of traffic that it produced; Britain’s declining international position amongst the great powers; rising concerns over Britain’s military efficiency and racial stock; and the

¹⁰ G.P. Gooch, “Edwardian England, 1901-1914,” in F.J.C. Hearnshaw, Edwardian England, A.D. 1901-1910: A Series of Lectures Delivered at King's College, University of London, During the Session 1932-3, (Freeport: Books for Libraries Press, 1968), 28 [original emphasis]; Charles Masterman, The Condition of England, (London: Methuen, 1909), 21

¹¹ Jose Harris, Private Lives, Public Spirit: A Social History of Britain, 1870-1914, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 33; George Dangerfield, The Strange Death of Liberal England, (London: Constable, 1936), 8

apparent breakdown of the social order signalled primarily by class and gender transgressions.¹² These increasing rates of social, cultural, and political change worked to expand the perception that the present was disconnected from the past: “We stand upon

¹² In London, for instance, the number of passengers annually carried by railways, tramways and omnibuses increased from 269,662,649 in 1881, to 847,212,335 in 1901 and to approximately 1,164,000,000 in 1904, and, during the Edwardian period, the number of licensed motor vehicles in the metropolis increased from 5,023 in 1904 to 25,067 in 1908, while the number of motorcars in use in Britain increased from 8,500 in March 1904 to more than 32,000 in 1908. In 1896 the national maximum speed was raised to 12 mph, replacing the existing rules which set the maximum speed by the pace of a person walking ahead of the vehicle with a red flag. Even with this increase, however, the speed limit was seen by motorists as tyrannical and became commonly disregarded. As one representative of the “automobile club” wrote in the *Times* newspaper, the increasing sophistication of the contemporary motorcar with its “powerful brakes” and “perfect control” ensured that “the existing law which provides that even on a clear, straight road, devoid of traffic, a light motor vehicle must not be driven at a speed greater than 12 miles an hour does not command and cannot command respect or observance.” In 1903, Parliament passed the Motor Car Act which raised the limit to 20 mph. Nevertheless, the regulation of speed remained heavily contested and between 1904 and 1905 proceedings were initiated against 983 motorists for breaking the speed-limit, while, over the same period, 1,500 motorists were charged with driving recklessly under the provisions set out in Section 1 of the Act. Report of the Royal Commission Appointed to Inquire into and Report upon the Means of Locomotion and Transport in London, 1905, House of Commons Parliamentary Papers, (cd. 2597), 6; George Swinton, “The Chaos of London Traffic,” *Nineteenth-Century and After*, 64, (1908), 624; William Plowden, *The Motor Car and Politics, 1896-1970*, (London: The Bodley Head, 1971), 60, 63. “Motor Vehicle Regulations”, *Times*, (London), (6 March 1902), 12; Peter Cain, “Political Economy in Edwardian England: The Tariff Reform Controversy,” *The Edwardian Age*, (London: MacMillan 1979), 36. On the culture and politics produced more generally by the experience of relative decline see, Aaron Friedberg, *The Weary Titan: Britain and the Experience of Relative Decline, 1885-1905*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988); G.R. Searle, *The Quest for National Efficiency: A Study in British Politics and Political Thought, 1899-1914*, (London: Ashfield Press, 1990); Frans Coetzee, *For Party or Country: Nationalism and the Dilemma of Popular Conservatism in Edwardian England*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990). On the cultural impact of 1880s breakdown of “separate spheres” see Judith Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight*. On the cultural impact of the WSPU as a dramatic example of the “separate spheres” breakdown see Erika Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure: Women in the Making of London’s West End*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000). On the rise of class antagonism see G.R. Searle, *A New England: Peace and War, 1886-1918*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), 441-455

the threshold... of a new era in political and social life” wrote one author in the Nineteenth Century.¹³ To many Edwardian intellectuals it appeared the gulf between experience and expectation was greatly widening.¹⁴ As we have already seen, the perception of a collapse in the connection between the political apparatus of the past and the conditions of the present was abundantly evident in the language of procedural reformers since Gladstone. Yet, as I suggested earlier, this political thinking was in no way limited to discussions of procedure. To be sure it was also evident in expressions that pointed to the obsolescence of existing political ideologies and parties. As historian Frans Coetzee has demonstrated, *fin de siècle* Britain witnessed the emergence of a legion of political organizations united by their conviction that “the prevailing set of assumptions”

¹³ Quoted in G.R. Searle, The Quest for National Efficiency, p.52

¹⁴ This sense was expressed by H.G. Wells in 1902 when he wrote that “from the very dawn of history” Europeans had existed within a static and circular historical time but that now “almost suddenly the circling has ceased, and we find ourselves breaking away.” This idea, of course, is not meant to suggest that the past ceased to occupy a position in Edwardian culture. Indeed, as historians such as Paul Readman, David Cannadine and Stephen Heathorn have shown, the deployment of a tropology based on the English past was central to attempts to construct an English identity through public festivals and elementary school education. The important point, however, is that this “invention of tradition” was often related to the experience of change and temporal instability. For Cannadine it represented an attempt to present “a unifying symbol of permanence” in a period of “change, crisis, and dislocation”, for Heathorn it was part of the “scare” over Britain’s relative decline, and for Readman it represented a “widely felt desire to sustain a sense of continuity at a time of change.” In other words, for all of these scholars, the presence of an imagery based on the past in the Edwardian period was part of a desire to stabilize temporal experience in a period when perceptions of acceleration and historical discontinuity were prevalent. H.G. Wells, Anticipations, p. 32; David Cannadine, “The Context, Performance, and Meaning of Ritual: The British Monarchy and the Invention of Tradition, 1920-1977,” in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., The Invention of Tradition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 101-164, esp. 122; Stephen Heathorn, For Home, Country and Race, p. 27; Paul Readman, “The Place of the Past in English Culture, 1890-1914,” Past and Present, 186, (February 2005), 147-201, esp. 150

upon which Britain was governed had become obsolete and that contemporary circumstances “required a new faith.”¹⁵ While the subjects of Coetzee’s study were entirely from the political right, those on the left and centre often showed signs of a similar belief. Indeed, a wide historiography exists on the numerous efforts to revitalize the centre-left of British politics, either through imperialism or social reform.¹⁶ Certainly, it was this context of perceived partisan anachronism that caused H.G. Wells to write in his 1914 book, Mankind in the Making, that the existing parties derived “from that past when the new view of life had yet to establish itself... they express no creative purpose now... they point towards no constructive ideals.” That “the old party fabrics are no more than dead rotting things, upon which a horrible rubbish thicket maintains a saprophytic vitality.”¹⁷

¹⁵ Frans Coetzee, For Party or Country: Nationalism and the Dilemmas of Popular Conservatism in Edwardian England, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 97. Also see, E.H.H. Green, The Crisis of Conservatism: The Politics, Economics, and Ideology of the British Conservative Party, 1880-1914, (London: Routledge, 1995)

¹⁶ See, for example, the historiography surrounding the new liberalism. Michael Freedman, The New Liberalism: An Ideology of Social Reform, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 21; Peter Clarke, Lancashire and the New liberalism, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971). While scholars such as Duncan Tanner and Michael Bentley are more sceptical about the extent and impact of the new liberalism, there is no question that the Liberal Party went through a period of substantial reconfiguration during these years. Thus, Bentley writes of a crisis in party doctrine following Gladstone’s conversion to Irish Home Rule and continuing until after 1906. Michael Bentley, The Climax of Liberal Politics: British Liberalism in Theory and Practice, 1868-1918, (Baltimore: E. Arnold, 1984); Duncan Tanner, Political Change and the Labour Party, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1990)

¹⁷ H.G. Wells, Mankind in the Making, (London: Chapman & Hall, 1914), 18. Similar to Webb and Wells an author in Reynolds Newspaper claimed in 1895 that the conventional ideas of the Liberal Party “no longer move us, and we are waiting for the new thought which will mould a new party – and carry it to new victories.” Quoted in Jon Lawrence, Speaking for the People: Party, Language and Popular Politics in England, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 203

The perceived historical anachronism of the existing political parties was part of a more general dissatisfaction with the efficiency of political action. In the first five years of the twentieth century, the Government of Lord Salisbury and, later, Arthur Balfour was often critiqued for its poor management of parliamentary time and its general legislative inefficiency. Despite the significant procedural reforms of 1882-1902, this sense of inefficiency was given added legitimacy as the problems of the Boer War and subsequently the tariff reform controversy brought Arthur Balfour's Government to what appeared to be indecisive standstill. Moreover, after the decisive Liberal electoral victory in 1906, the growing tension with the Conservative dominated Lords stymied the legislative production of the Commons ultimately pushing Parliament into a constitutional crisis and a returned state of apparent inertia. This renewed emphasis on the "waste of valuable time" by the Commons helped to legitimate an instrumental vision of politics that, in turn, helped push demands for national efficiency to the forefront of public discussion.¹⁸

As the work of historian G.R. Searle has convincingly demonstrated, national efficiency represented the "political catch-cry" of the Edwardian age: that "phrase or slogan which sums up the hopes and fears of the hour, though in a maddeningly imprecise way."¹⁹ Searle's assertion that national efficiency was "maddeningly imprecise" has to do with the term's elasticity. The idea of national efficiency drew in people of all political stripes, from Fabian Socialists like Sidney Webb to arch Conservatives like Leo Amery

¹⁸ See, for example, "The 'marking time' of the House of Commons", Times, (12 July 1902), 11; "The House of Commons", Times, (1 September 1902), 9; HC Deb., 1 February 1900, vol. 78 cc. 396; HC Deb., 6 February 1900, vol. 78 cc. 756, 758, 767

¹⁹ G.R. Searle, The Quest for National Efficiency, p.1

and played an active role in a number of, what at first appear to be disparate, political initiatives. From attempts to form a coalition government in 1910 to discussions of eugenics and international trade, national efficiency was a term that was given central importance. It is, therefore, little wonder that the only attempt to create a unified program and a “brains trust” for the movement, the self-styled “co-efficients”, lasted less than a year before significant partisan and ideological cleavages broke it apart.²⁰ What did provide some unity to national efficiency though was the temporal character of the rhetoric that its proponents publicly deployed. In this rhetoric three characteristics stand out as elements of commonality. First, national efficiency advocates deployed a language that was more strategic than communicative. That is to say, their language aimed to effect an action rather than build an understanding.²¹ Second, national efficiency’s rhetorical strategy clearly played upon the wide recognition that time had become both discontinuous and acceleratory. National efficiency advocates used this perception to their advantage by representing the open un-mastered future as something that was

²⁰ As one member of the club put it, “The Co-Efficients, as a brains trust with a definite political object, petered out almost as soon as it began.” L.S. Amery, My Political Life, (London: Hutchinson, 1955) 224. For a discussion of the formation, aims, and ultimate dissolution of the club see, G.R. Searle, The Quest for National Efficiency, pp. 150-152; Bernard Semmel, Imperialism and Social Reform: English Social Imperial Thought, 1895-1914, (New York: Anchor Books, 1968), 62-73. The primary source accounts of H.G. Wells and Bertrand Russell indicate that the central point of contention which ultimately lead to the breakup of the club was the tension between liberty and efficiency. See, H.G. Wells Experiment in Autobiography: Discoveries and Conclusions of a Very Ordinary Brain, (New York: Gollancz, 1934), 761-762; Bertrand Russell, The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell, (London: Allen, 1969), 77

²¹ The theoretical basis for this distinction is rooted in Habermas’s contribution to the Frankfurt philosophical discourse on rationality in his Theory of Communicative Action. Jürgen Habermas, Theory of Communicative Action: Reason and the Rationalization of Society, pp. 284-288

threatening. Third, national efficiency's rhetorical strategy aimed to speed up the mechanisms of the British state.

To illustrate the above listed points, I will consider the writings of four national efficiency advocates from very different political backgrounds: Sidney Webb (Fabian socialist and founder of the coefficients), Ernest E. Williams (author and advocate of tariff reform), Arnold White (polemical journalist and advocate of naval expansion), and Archibald Philip Primrose, the fifth earl of Rosebery (former Prime Minister and Liberal Party leader). These individuals had no official connection in terms of their political or ideological affiliation and it is precisely for this reason that they have been chosen as examples here. Despite their diffuseness, their public expressions contained important elements of commonality not only with each other but also with the procedural debates we examined in the previous chapter. In this way, the public rhetoric of these individuals demonstrates the pervasiveness not only of national efficiency but also the basic temporal and rational structures (i.e. ideas of scarcity, discontinuity and instrumentality) that we saw develop in late nineteenth century procedural debates.

The prominent Fabian socialist Sidney Webb wrote two essays on national efficiency: his September 1901 article in the Nineteenth Century and After, entitled "Lord Rosebery's Escape from Houndsditch" and his November 1901 Fabian tract, entitled, "Twentieth Century Politics: A Policy of National Efficiency."²² In both pieces the central argument deals with the necessity of a new party of the left to act as a true

²² Sidney Webb, "Lord Rosebery's Escape from Houndsditch." Nineteenth Century and After, (September 1901), 366-386; Sidney Webb, "Twentieth Century Politics: A Policy of National Efficiency," (London: The Fabian Society, 1901)

opposition to the Conservative Government.²³ The Liberal opposition, according to Webb, was dead and its reform would represent nothing more than the “patching up [of] old clothes” which, given “the expanding conditions of contemporary politics” could provide nothing but “wretched wearing material.”²⁴ The reason the Liberal Party had become obsolete, Webb argued, was because the nation had simply advanced beyond it. “During the last twenty or thirty years, we have become a new people” he wrote.²⁵ But, it is important to note that “the rising generation”, to use Webb’s phrasing, did not create itself but was instead the result of a shift in historical time. As he put it:

Early Victorian England now lies, in effect, centuries behind us. Such things do happen. The processes which make one generation differ from another operate sometimes slowly and imperceptibly, sometimes quickly and even suddenly. At one period centuries may pass without any discoverable difference in the mind or character of the nation. At another, new ideas are precipitated and new parties crystallised almost before the old parliamentary hands have time to prove their visionariness.²⁶

In Webb’s rationale then, history had developed an agency that was beyond the control of the nation. This is one of the central rhetorical and imaginative tendencies of the national efficiency movement: the idea that agency had been relinquished by the historical actor and given to time, the belief that in acquiring agency time had accelerated, and the conviction that the nation needed to respond quickly to the conditions of the new age. Like Balfour’s speech in support of procedural reform, Webb’s rhetoric stressed the existence of contingency and the necessity for fast and decisive action.

²³ At this point, with the exception of Gladstone’s brief Ministry from 1892-1894, the Conservatives had been consistently in power since 1886.

²⁴ Sidney Webb, “Lord Rosebery’s Escape from Houndsditch,” p. 366

²⁵ Sidney Webb, “Lord Rosebery’s Escape from Houndsditch,” p. 368; Sidney Webb, “Twentieth Century Politics,” p. 3

²⁶ Ibid.

National efficiency rhetoric narrated British history in an international context. Britain was represented as the previous master of the world who, largely because of its own hubris, had been dethroned and was now threatened by younger nations with their own interests. The common image of Britain propagated by this movement was a nation “corrupted with ease” and displaying “increasing symptoms of slowing down” while the nations surrounding it, and antagonistic towards it, were represented as rapidly progressing into the future.²⁷ The extent to which these other, more fast-paced nations posed a threat to English interests was often conveyed through a tropology of national death or imminent disaster. When one author in the Spectator described the “universal outcry for efficiency” as “the most notable social fact of this age”, for example, he noted that everywhere “the same cry is heard: Give us Efficiency, or we die.”²⁸ It was argued, however, that Britain could save itself by waking up to the dangers facing it and by becoming the master of its own future. This, however, required action not talk and speed not delay.

Arguably one of the most significant pieces of national efficiency rhetoric was Ernest E. Williams’ popular 1896 book, Made in Germany, which not only received comment in the Times, the Pall Mall Gazette, the Saturday Review, and the public speeches of former Prime Minister Lord Rosebery, but also occasioned a book length response from the political author and free trade advocate George Webb Medley.²⁹ Here,

²⁷ Author Unknown, “England after the War,” Fortnightly Review, (1 July 1902), 3

²⁸ Quoted in G.R. Searle, The Quest for National Efficiency, p. 1

²⁹ George Webb Medley, The German Bogey: A Reply to Made in Germany, (London: Cassell, 1896)

Williams emphasized the significance of Germany's commercial penetration of traditionally British held markets: "It is but too clear" he wrote "that on all hands England's industrial supremacy is tottering to its fall, and this is largely German work."³⁰ For Williams, this transformation was not simply an economic shift but a great sea change in history. Britain's historical progress had slowed and Germany's had hastened. "England's marvellous progress is an event of past, not current, history" wrote Williams. "In all our industries you find a steady slowing-down: it is Germany that is in for the 'marvellous progress' now."³¹ According to Williams, then, history had placed Britain in a state of relative decline, a point that he emphasized through the use of metaphors of mortality: England and Germany were engaged in a "deadly rivalry," and England was fast approaching the "extinction" of its commercial supremacy.³² Significantly, Williams was not just concerned with British decline but with the rapidity at which that decline seemed to occur: "The industrial supremacy of Great Britain has long been an axiomatic commonplace; and it is fast turning into a myth."³³ The existence and rapidity of decline, however, was only half of Williams' argument.

³⁰ Ernest E. Williams, Made in Germany, (London: Heinemann, 1896), 44. For an historiographic consideration of German infiltration of traditional British markets, see Zara Steiner and Keith Neilson, Britain and the Origins of the First World War, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 60-61; James Joll, The Origins of the First World War, (New York: Longman, 1984), 164. For a consideration of British suspicions surrounding the growth of the German economy, see Ross J.S. Hoffman, Great Britain and the German Trade Rivalry, 1875-1914, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1933), 224-272

³¹ Ernest E. Williams, Made in Germany, p. 5

³² Ibid. p. 8

³³ Ibid. p. 1

While Williams' book provided a decline-oriented narrative, it always held out the possibility of national resurgence. Williams stated that he "declined to believe that England's industrial character ha[d] so deteriorated" that it was beyond redemption.³⁴ He suggested that despite the recent progress of Germany, it did not yet have the power to entirely marginalize England:

Germany is yet in her industrial infancy; and the healthiest infant can do poor battle against a grown man. England, with her enormous capital, and the sway she has wielded for a century over the world-market, is as that strong man... yet if a strong man, as the years advance on him, neglects himself and abuses his strength, he may fall before an energetic stripling.

According to Williams, Englishmen simply needed to stop allowing their own hubris to blind them of the economic and political dangers which they faced. Once this was accomplished, Williams suggested, a series of reforms could be introduced, including fair trade and greater technical education, which could lead to England's "salvation" and restore some of its "departed glory."³⁵ But, as Williams' metaphor of the aging man suggested, delay in reform would be perilous.

A similar narrative of national history is present in Arnold White's 1901 book, Efficiency and Empire. A polemical journalist, White ardently supported naval expansion in the face of a rising German threat. Indeed, he originally achieved public notoriety earlier in 1901 when he sent the Daily Mail a piece of Admiral Charles Beresford's private correspondence which outlined the deficiencies of Britain's Mediterranean fleet.³⁶ In Efficiency and Empire, White argued that the future that his contemporaries faced was

³⁴ Ibid. p. 175

³⁵ Ibid. pp. 164-175

³⁶ "Arnold White and Lord Charles Beresford," Times, (5 May 1902), 12

significantly different than the future that was anticipated by Britons in the Victorian period. This was so for two reasons. The first reason was that international politics were increasingly becoming defined by the fact that Britain was “almost universally disliked” and the second reason was that Britain’s domestic political and social structures had degraded to the point that they could no longer keep pace with the progress of younger nations such as Germany and the United States.³⁷ Like Williams, then, White rhetorically resituated the historical position of Britain by placing it on a trajectory of decline approaching an imminent end. The reason Britain was declining, he argued, was because its population had become overly confident and comfortable, unaware of the dangers posed by its enemies and willing to be ruled by politicians who were “artists in words” rather than “men who can think and do.”³⁸ To use White’s vocabulary, Britain had become “inefficient” much like “a prosperous man in advanced middle age, who eats and drinks to repletion, takes no exercise, and is content to enjoy life while he may.”³⁹

Much like Williams, White argued that this decline trajectory was not inevitably permanent. While “the practical directing ability of the kingdom has deteriorated” he wrote “the nation is essentially sound at heart, and neither incapacity in high places nor the inefficiency of the bureaucracy are irremediable.”⁴⁰ In fact, he claimed that “most of our public evils are remediable with little trouble, provided the public awakes to the fact that a remedy is wanted.”⁴¹ What was required, according to White, was a break with the

³⁷ Arnold White, Efficiency and Empire, (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1973), 16-17

³⁸ Ibid. p. 15-16

³⁹ Ibid. p. 24

⁴⁰ Ibid. p. 25

⁴¹ Ibid

political traditions of the past. While “the Anglo-Saxon passion for individualism, patience under adverse circumstances, inherent love of law and order, and continuity of purpose” may have strengthened Britain in the nineteenth century, White argued that the “Victorian era of comfort and progress already belong[ed] to the irrevocable past.”⁴² Now Britons lived under “the reign of machinery” and Britain’s “administrative machine” needed to be “re-engined” so that it could be elevated from its current state of “breakdown.”⁴³ The nation needed to replace the “tired pessimists or pococurante philosophers” who currently dominated the public service with “business men” who could make the machine work by updating it to the constantly changing needs of the time.⁴⁴ Reforms of this nature would allow the nation to master its uncertain future. To be effective, however, the reforms needed to be introduced immediately.⁴⁵ White predicted that Britain “cannot continue in existence for twenty years if we pursue the course we now follow.”⁴⁶ As with Williams, the nation is here again situated within a decline-oriented narrative and the rapidity of that decline is emphasized by the time-line provided by the suggestion of an imminent end. At the same time, though, the potential for national resurgence is suggested by the possibility of changing the nation’s political direction.

A similar rhetorical and narrative tendency can also be found in the speeches and writings of Lord Rosebery, arguably the Liberal Party’s most prominent national efficiency advocate. Whereas Webb, Williams and White had all achieved public

⁴² Ibid. pp. 29, 309

⁴³ Ibid. pp. 25, 28, 31, 33, 315, 39, 245

⁴⁴ Ibid. p. 29

⁴⁵ Ibid. p. 31-32

⁴⁶ Ibid. p. 312

currency through the press, Rosebery was known primarily as a parliamentarian. Following William Gladstone's retirement in 1894, Rosebery succeeded as the Liberal leader and sat as the head of the Government until the general election of 1895. From 1898, Rosebery became the acknowledged head of the Liberal Imperialists and from 1900, developed an increasing role in the press as an advocate for, as he put it, "restor[ing] efficiency to our Parliament, our administration and our people."⁴⁷ For an indication of the character of Rosebery's public discourse, consider his introduction to Alfred Stead's book, Great Japan: A Study of National Efficiency. Here, Rosebery wrote that while England had been a successful nation in the past, its successes had been achieved in a period prior to the modern growth of efficiency. In the modern world, England had to learn efficiency or face its peril. As he put it:

You ask me to write a few words to precede your study of national efficiency in connection with Japan. Japan is indeed the object-lesson of national efficiency, and happy is the country that learns it. Not a hundred books or a thousand prefaces will bring this lesson home to our own nation. *We have been so successful in the world without efficiency that in the ordinary course of events we shall be one of the last to strive for it without some external pressure. We won our empire and our liberties by genius and daring in an inefficient world. Now that one or more nations are keenly striving after efficiency it will not be easy to maintain our heritage; for the inefficient nation must sooner or later go to the wall* [my emphasis].⁴⁸

Further emphasizing the themes of decline and temporal end, Rosebery wrote that the nation could only be moved towards efficiency by three things: "obvious decline, sudden

⁴⁷ Lord Rosebery, "National Policy: A Speech Delivered at Chesterfield, December 16, 1901," (London: Arthur L. Humphreys, 1902), 16

⁴⁸ Lord Rosebery, "Foreword," in Alfred Stead, Great Japan: A Study of National Efficiency, (London: The Bodley Head, 1906), pages of foreword unnumbered

catastrophe, or some stimulating example.”⁴⁹ The possibility of learning from the example of others represents, in this case, the imagery of non-hopeless decline and the possibility of resurgence. The theme of potential resurgence is, in fact, often emphasized by Rosebery in this piece. For instance, he argues that, contrary to the belief that “we are too old a nation for new departures; that our garment is too old for new patches”, Japan, which is “historically speaking, a much older nation than ours”, is an example that a fundamental national remaking around the ideal of efficiency is possible; that England can start “a fresh career” and is not doomed to inefficiency and decline. Indeed, Rosebery goes on to write that the possibility of such a resurgence becomes even more obvious when one considers that England has not only “all the raw materials” that it requires but also “courage and brains and strength.”⁵⁰

In the style of the procedural reform discourse that stretches from the 1870s to Balfour, Rosebery argued that resurgence required that the legislature be transformed from a site for deliberation to a place of action. “The problem” as Rosebery put it “is that Parliament... is talk rather than action oriented.”⁵¹

Do we ever stop to reflect what is the outcome of it all: the net result of millions of words, words, words; of great debates and incessant divisions and spirited autumn campaigns? In truth, exceedingly little. “The hungry sheep look up and are not fed.” But Brown has made a fine speech, and Jones has surpassed himself, and Robinson has done less well than usual, and so we turn complacently from the long newspaper reports to the ordinary bread and cheese of life. And the old State machine creaks on.⁵²

⁴⁹ Ibid

⁵⁰ Ibid

⁵¹ Ibid

⁵² Ibid

In this way, we see in the Liberal Rosebery all of the rhetorical tendencies we identified in the Conservatives Williams and White as well as the Fabian Webb. Moreover, the technological imagery with which Rosebery concludes and the instrumentality that frames his thinking suggests clear lines of continuity with the procedural debates we examined in the previous chapter. This, however, does not exhaust the links between national efficiency and House of Commons procedural reform.

Much like procedural reformers from Perceval to Gladstone to Balfour, advocates for national efficiency built their case for reform on the existence of a perceived scarcity of time. By positioning the nation in a fatal and decline-oriented narrative, national efficiency increased the temporal proximity of a perceived end. This was not necessarily the end of the nation per se but the end of one of its narratives – particularly, the rise and fall of its international hegemony. This, of course, clashed hard with nineteenth-century conceptions of “national time” which, as Heathorn has shown, were often conceived in terms of “progress without end.”⁵³ At the same time, by holding out the possibility of redemption, the need for action was endowed with great urgency. Thus, the perceived time scarcity was furthered by every moment that passed without the prescribed action being taken. The language of national efficiency, therefore, not only turned time into a scarce resource, it also set in motion a process through which the scarcity of that resource was constantly increased. Much like the procedural reformers of the late nineteenth century, the rhetorical strategy of national efficiency was implicated in the creation of an image of time that was defined by contingency and scarcity and a claim to authority on

⁵³ Stephen Heathorn, For Home, Country and Race, p. 51

the stated ability to master that contingency and alleviate the scarcity. The example of national efficiency does not exhaust the extension of the temporal logic and rhetorical tendencies of procedural acceleration. This can be seen in the public speeches of tariff reform's most important spokesperson, the Birmingham M.P., Joseph Chamberlain. While Chamberlain's language in support of tariff reform initially lacked the emphasis on national decline, the existence of external enemies, and the imminence of a potentially avoidable temporal end, these devices were quickly integrated into his later speeches and eventually became central to his political appeal.

Consider the ways in which Chamberlain's speech on 15 May 1903, delivered to the Unionists of West Birmingham, differed from his 6 October 1903 speech delivered at St. Andrew's Hall in Glasgow. In the first speech, Chamberlain emphasized the theme of temporal break and the importance of turning history into a place for wilful mastery. More specifically, he claimed that with the Boer War, Britain had entered upon a new age and that in this new age the nation had to become the author of its own destiny. To use his specific vocabulary, Britain was standing at "the beginning of a new era" and, as it was opening "a new chapter" in its historical existence, it was important to recognize that the present was "a creative time" when the nation could "decide its future destinies."⁵⁴ "I want you to look forward," he told his audience "I want you to consider the infinite importance of this, not only to yourselves but to your descendants. Now is the time when

⁵⁴ Joseph Chamberlain, "A Demand for an Inquiry," in Imperial Union and Tariff Reform: Speeches Delivered from May 15 to November 4, 1903 by the Right Honourable Joseph Chamberlain, M.P., (London: Grant Richards, 1903), 5-6

you can exert influence.”⁵⁵ Chamberlain, however, also claimed that no action should be taken before a thorough debate: “I desire that a discussion on this subject should be opened. The time has not yet come to settle it.”⁵⁶ Thus, while Chamberlain’s rhetoric exhibits some important similarities with the language of national efficiency it lacks the trope of scarcity and the need for immediate action. In fact, Chamberlain’s stress on inquiry rather than action was more akin to the new liberal reaction against efficiency than a replication of national efficiency rhetoric. Within five months, however, by the time that Chamberlain delivered his speech in Glasgow, the continuity with procedural reform and national efficiency is more clearly present.

In Glasgow, Chamberlain told his audience that “Britain has played a great part in the past in the history of the world.” He believed it could continue to do so in the future.⁵⁷ Yet, he exclaimed, he could see in Britain “the signs of decay... [the] cracks in the walls of the great structure” and that because of this he knew “that the foundations upon which it has been raised are not broad enough or deep enough to sustain it.”⁵⁸ Chamberlain then inserted an external enemy into the story and claimed that Britain was fighting a “modern” battle with out-of-date weaponry: “I want to prepare you now, *while there is time*, for a struggle greater than that to which I have referred [i.e. the Boer War] – *a struggle which we are asked to meet with antiquated weapons and with old-fashioned*

⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 7

⁵⁶ Ibid, p. 17

⁵⁷ Joseph Chamberlain “The Case for Tariff Reform,” in Imperial Union and Tariff Reform: Speeches Delivered from May 15 to November 4, 1903 by the Right Honourable Joseph Chamberlain, M.P., (London: Grant Richards, 1903), 22

⁵⁸ Ibid, p. 23-24

tactics [my emphasis].”⁵⁹ Here we see Chamberlain introducing not only an unnamed external enemy but also the image of history moving beyond the nation’s grasp, both sets of imagery functioning to make the availability of time seem increasingly scarce. This sets the basis for his next claim, that Britons must adopt a change in their existing fiscal policy if they wish to survive: “I have said that if Imperial trade declines we decline. My second point is this. It will decline inevitably unless *while there is still time* we take the necessary steps to preserve it [my emphasis].”⁶⁰ “We might have done it with greater effect ten years ago. Whether we can do it with any effect or at all twenty years hence I am very doubtful. We can intervene now.”⁶¹ Here Chamberlain deploys a time-limit in order to turn the existing scarcity of time into a constantly increasing scarcity requiring immediate action. Chamberlain then legitimates the authority of his claim by implying that while other “English politicians cannot see the future,” he can.⁶² In all its essentials, then, Chamberlain’s speech at Glasgow contains the narrative structure, rational basis and claim to authority we observed in discourses of national efficiency.

The speech at Glasgow was more representative than exceptional. In his 28 October 1903 address at Liverpool he concluded by reminding his audience of their nation’s past glory: “I can never read our past history without a thrill of emotion... What grand things we have done by the courage, the tenacity and the determination of our

⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 24

⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 27

⁶¹ Ibid, p. 29

⁶² Ibid, p. 36

race!”⁶³ He then implied that, without reform, the nation’s progress would end, telling his audience that he “does not believe that all that is meant to go for nothing”, that the “duty” of modern politics was “too heavy for her [Britain’s] shoulders” and that as things stood Britain “cannot rival the empire’s springing up around her.”⁶⁴ Chamberlain told his audience, “we cannot look to a future equal to our past.”⁶⁵ But, through the introduction of tariff reforms based on imperial preference, Britain could strengthen its imperial ties and enter upon a new era of progress: “yes, we are old, but the Empire of which we are a part is new (great cheers), and in that Empire we may find with our kinsmen and our children a future – a joint future – which we shall share with them, which will be greater than anything to which we can look back (cheers).”⁶⁶ Here, at Liverpool, we see again the same rhetorical strategy: Britain is situated on the path of historical decline, this decline comes after a period of substantial progress and it is accentuated and made more perilous by the suggestion of external enemies, but the decline is neither inevitable nor irreversible.

Chamberlain’s use of this rhetorical/narrative pattern helped to heighten perceptions of historical discontinuity and acceleration as well as perceptions of de-synchronization. After 1903, public discussions of tariff reform were often framed in a language that made Chamberlain the representative of “the future” and Prime Minister

⁶³ Joseph Chamberlain, “A Reply to Lord Goschen,” in Imperial Union and Tariff Reform: Speeches Delivered from May 15 to November 4, 1903 by the Right Honourable Joseph Chamberlain, M.P., (London: Grant Richards, 1903), 174

⁶⁴ Ibid, p. 174-175

⁶⁵ Ibid, p. 175

⁶⁶ Ibid.

Figure 4.1



Source: Punch, (16 December 1903): 425

Balfour “a reed shaken in the wind.”⁶⁷ For instance, the 16 December 1903 Punch cartoon entitled, “History Reverses Itself; or, Papa Joseph taking Master Arthur on a Protection Walk”, shows Joseph Chamberlain as a grown man hastily walking in the direction of “Protection” while a childlike Balfour, whose hand he is holding, stumbles behind.⁶⁸ Chamberlain’s ability to move with greater force and speed than Balfour is meant to convey the inability of the sitting Government to operate at a pace commensurate with the temporal conditions of the historical present, hence the caption: “Papa Joseph: ‘Come

⁶⁷ “Pinchbeck Protectionism,” Nation, 4 June 1903, pp. 450-451

⁶⁸ “History Reverses Itself; or, Papa Joseph taking Master Arthur a Protection Walk,” Punch, (16 December 1903), 425

along, Master Arthur. Do step out.’ Master Arthur: ‘That’s all very well but you know I cannot go as fast as you.’⁶⁹ As in the late Victorian and Edwardian procedural debates, railway imagery is used here to suggest the modernity and speed of Chamberlain’s movement. Note in particular the puff of smoke that trails behind him in the fashion of a coal powered locomotive. The image, in this way, suggests that the rhetorical/narrative acceleration of time implicit in the language publicly deployed by the national efficiency and tariff reform movements was not lost on the press.

The Cambridge philosopher, Bertrand Russell also observed how this rhetorical rendering of time was paying political dividends for the tariff reform movement. In a 1904 letter to the French historian of British politics, Elie Halévy, Russell wrote: “protectionists here spend almost all their time proving, what is obvious, that we are losing our industrial supremacy. Thus, they get people in a fright, ready for any remedy that may be proposed.”⁷⁰ Unlike the Punch cartoon, however, Russell’s expression contained a particular distaste for tariff reform rhetoric. It was to this effect that Russell wrote to Halévy that in politics, as in other spheres of life, “excitement leads to follies” and that the public language of tariff reform was politically irresponsible. The point, according to Russell, was that in their expressions of fast-paced historical change, tariff reformers were creating panic, circumscribing the public use of reason and, in these ways,

⁶⁹ Ibid. The depiction of the state slowing down in relation to Chamberlain and Tariff Reform is both apt in its interpretation of recent political developments and prophetic when one considers future developments. Between September and October 1903, tariff reform was responsible for three significant ministerial resignations, and by 1905 it was largely responsible for Balfour’s own resignation as Prime Minister, which initiated a general election in 1906.

⁷⁰ Bertrand Russell to Elie Halévy, 2 February 1904, WRAC, (Bertrand Russell Collection), Box 5.20

doing a great disservice to British politics. Russell was not alone in his criticism of the political virtues of speed, rather the belief that speed posed problems for political practice represented one of the central, though historiographically unrecognised, temporal underpinnings of the Edwardian period's new liberalism.

III

The Edwardian liberal revival has been described by scholars in a number of ways. While some historians, including Peter Clarke and Michael Bentley, treat it as either a successful or unsuccessful party-based political movement, others, such as Michael Freeden, analyse it as an ideology led by a number of writers who were committed to integrating individualism and collectivism in liberal political theory.⁷¹ Given the discursive and cultural focus of the present study, the new liberalism is here interrogated from the latter perspective; as an intellectual movement spearheaded by thinkers and propagandists such as Leonard Trelawny Hobhouse, Charles Prestwich Scott, Charles Frederick Gurney Masterman, John Atkinson Hobson and Norman Angell. But while most ideologically focussed studies of the new liberalism have centered on its blending of an "organic" collectivist understanding of the polity into liberal thought, the present treatment focuses on the movement's temporal and rational foundations, viewing

⁷¹ Peter Clarke, Lancashire and the New liberalism, (Cambridge: University Press, 1971); Peter Clarke, Liberals and Social Democrats, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1978); Michael Bentley, The Climax of Liberal Politics: British Liberalism in Theory and Practice, 1868-1918, (London: Arnold, 1987); Michael Freeden, The New liberalism: An Ideology of Social Reform, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978). For a concise, though thorough, discussion of the various lines of interpretation of the Edwardian new liberalism see Andrew Vincent, "New Liberalism in Britain, 1880-1914," Australian Journal of Politics and History, (36), 3, (December 1990), 388-405

it as intellectually linked to other movements by the presupposition of discontinuity but at the same time engaged in a deep scepticism over the political virtues of efficiency. In this way, I offer a new interpretation of the new liberals which suggests that the origins of their political identity are not located solely in the desire to blend organicism with liberalism, but also in the Edwardian period's time-culture. Just as national efficiency and tariff reform were treated as extensions of the temporal logic we identified in late nineteenth-century procedural debates, new liberalism is treated here as one particular extension of the concern over "excessive speed." The new liberals were, therefore, unique not solely because they attempted to reconcile liberty and community but also because they tried to integrate talk into rational political action.

The new liberalism was deeply concerned with, what Hobson described as, the fate of liberalism in "the new economic and moral world opening out before us."⁷² The new liberals imagined themselves as operating at a liminal stage of historical existence where, as Charles Masterman wrote in 1905, "expectancy and surprise" were the "notes of the age."⁷³ This was because the Edwardians, according to Masterman, existed "uneasily between two great periods of change" where they could see "a past still showing faint survivals of vitality" and "a future but hardly coming to birth."⁷⁴ They stood before "the coming time" and could see "the darkness lightened by the coming of the dawn"; were privy to "that moment" where "a world has perished, a world been born" and, if they listened carefully, they would "be deafened by the noise of the crash... of

⁷² JA Hobson, Crisis of Liberalism: New Issues of Democracy, (London: P.S. King and Son, 1909), xiv [my emphasis]

⁷³ C.F.G. Masterman, In Peril of Change, p. xii

⁷⁴ Ibid.

growing and of dying worlds.” In short, the new liberals saw the Edwardian age as “an alien time” divorced from all previous history: “The new world of the future we confront with as little knowledge of its possibilities as was possessed by any prophet of the past.”⁷⁵ In this liminal period, the new liberals sought to confront “the violence of an unknown future” and reconstruct their political creed to suit the new world that they faced.⁷⁶

One of the central problems that this time of change was believed to pose for liberal political practice was the way in which its culture of speed and efficiency was disabling the potential for meaningful political participation. As L.T. Hobhouse observed in his 1904 book entitled, Democracy and Reaction, it seemed as though “the doctrine of democratic rights has been replaced by the demand for efficiency.”⁷⁷ Everywhere, Hobhouse argued, life seemed to be speeding up and consequently the “average Briton” was being left with insufficient time to participate meaningfully in political action. “The slow going John Bull of old days” was gone, he wrote:

‘the-man-in-the-street’, or ‘the-man-on-the-top-of-a-bus’ is now the typical representative of public opinion, and the man-in-the-street means the man who is hurrying from his home to his office, or to a place of amusement. He has just got the last news-sheet from his neighbour; he has not waited to test or sift it; he may have heard three contradictory reports, or seen two lying posters on his way up the street, but he has an expression of opinion ready on his lips, which is none the less confident, because all the grounds on which it is founded may be swept away by the next report he hears. The man-in-the-street is the man in a hurry; the man who has not time to think.⁷⁸

Note that Hobhouse uses the adjective “old” and the adverb “now” to establish two separate temporal spaces. He then claims that this historical discontinuity is observable

⁷⁵ Ibid, pp. 305, 36, xi, 306, 301, 330

⁷⁶ Ibid, p. 306

⁷⁷ L.T. Hobhouse, Democracy and Reaction, (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1904), 60

⁷⁸ Ibid, p. 69

through the juxtaposition of the “slow” John Bull of the past with the “hurrying” man-in-the-street of the present. Thus the historical fracture which Hobhouse suggests is based on the relative speeds of existence in the present and the past. Hobhouse, however, is not simply making a point about temporality. Rather, the temporal shift he observes is significant insofar as it affects the potential for rational political action. According to Hobhouse, speed begot thoughtlessness in politics and it was thereby depriving Britain’s emerging democracy of reasoned and critical discourse in politics. In direct contrast to procedural modernization and national efficiency then, Hobhouse conceived of acceleration as antithetical to a rationally functioning democracy. This perception was not limited to Hobhouse but rather was regularly present in the writings of other new liberals.

In the heavily new liberal weekly The Nation, one author observed that it was in “the power of swift and easy communication..., the salient characteristic of modern civilization,” that Britain would find the “gravest peril” to its emerging democracy.⁷⁹ Like Hobhouse, this article maintained that the rapid transmission of information facilitated the creation of confident, impassioned, yet poorly informed, political opinions and hatreds. Similarly, Hobson observed in his, Psychology of Jingoism, that, while a war-spirit had been manifest in earlier civilizations, the irrationality of jingoism was indelibly linked to modernity’s acceleratory character. Jingoism was described by Hobson as “quick” and “rapid” and foremost among its causes, he argued, were: “the mechanical facilities for the cheap quick carriage of persons, goods, and news.”⁸⁰ Driven by speed, political irrationality was seen to desire further speed in the form of efficient political action and it

⁷⁹ “The Mob Mind,” The Nation, (1 August 1908), 631

⁸⁰ J.A. Hobson, The Psychology of Jingoism, p. 6

was therefore argued that the increasingly acceleratory character of Edwardian society worked to dismantle the more open-ended forms of political communication. Calling the attention of his readers to Parliament, Hobson argued in his Crisis of Liberalism, that the fast moving public opinion of the *fin de siècle* was directly linked to the procedural acceleration of the legislature and the growth of executive control in the Commons, and in this sense, argued that speed had resulted in “a diminution of representative government and a failure of democracy.”⁸¹

In contesting the virtues of speed in politics, the new liberals saw the need for new discursive spaces that were temporally at odds with the fast-paced and action-oriented discourse of national efficiency and which were more conducive to the necessarily slow-moving character of freewheeling public debate. New liberals therefore often wrote of the need for more “public intellectuals.” As Christopher Mauriello has shown, new liberals understood the “public intellectual” not in terms of “an ideal oligarchy or a select class” but rather as a particular “type” of person exercising “a certain kind of intellectual authority.”⁸² More specifically, the new liberals looked back to early-and-mid-nineteenth-century thinkers such as John Stuart Mill and John Ruskin, or sometimes to even earlier thinkers such as the German Johann Goethe, for their inspiration. What the new liberals drew from these earlier thinkers was the universality of their intellectual pursuits, something which they believed was lost in their contemporary age of specialization. Moreover, new liberals pointed to the commitment of these thinkers to “mixing with

⁸¹ J.A. Hobson, Crisis of Liberalism, pp. 9-10

⁸² Christopher Mauriello, “The Public Sphere and the Liberal Imagination” p. 116

mankind... guiding their counsels, undertaking their service, and getting something accomplished for the obvious good of the world or the village.”⁸³

In the new liberal view, these earlier thinkers had employed the vast breadth of their knowledge to guide the societies in which they existed successfully through periods of economic, social and political change. The new liberals believed that this type of thinker would provide the conditions of salvation for liberal practice in the “modern” age. As Hobhouse wrote in an article for the Manchester Guardian, hope for the future of liberalism “must largely depend upon the efforts of thinkers – not thinkers of study, but thinkers in close contact with the necessities of national life – to restate the fundamental principles of Liberalism in the form which modern conditions require.”⁸⁴ In other words, the role of the intellectual was conceptualized as a shepherd who could lead the population through the present state of rapid change by introducing to it a coherent set of liberal principles. As Hobhouse wrote in The Nation, “the thinker is no recluse but a man with a living and practical function... to constantly restate political principles in terms of the living needs of each generation.”⁸⁵

As the above quotations suggest, the intellectual in new liberal thought was someone who could heal the break in history and restore some degree of continuity. The activities of the intellectual would, in Hobhouse’s vocabulary, “link the hopes and efforts

⁸³ “Dearth of Genius,” The Nation, (20 June 1908), 410; “Life and the Poet,” The Nation, (30 May 1908), 303

⁸⁴ Quoted in Christopher Mauriello, “The Strange Death of the Public Intellectual” p. 17

⁸⁵ L.T. Hobhouse, “The Re-statement of Liberalism,” The Nation, (8 January 1910), 614

of the present with the great emancipating movements of the past.”⁸⁶ The intellectual, however, could not be characterized by the “Fabian fallacy” of a technocratic master leading a passive *demos*, as this would represent a condition obstructive to the progress of democracy and rationalism in politics.⁸⁷ For new liberals, rational knowledge was constituted not by the monological workings of a single mind but rather through open dialogue conducted between multiple subjects. Thus, Hobhouse described Mill as “greater than all the thinkers of his century” precisely because “he had taken to heart the message of the oracle to Socrates.... [H]e had early learnt that, since truth is not a system that emerges complete from the workshop of one mind... the most useful work is not that which counterfeits finality, but that which furthers the collective effort.”⁸⁸ The job of the intellectual, then, was understood to be oriented towards the development of a critically rational faculty amongst the general population. It was only through this growth of critical reason that liberalism could keep pace with, and maintain vibrancy in, the modern age.

The temporality implicit to the new liberal emphasis on the creation and maintenance of critical inquiry starkly contrasts the temporality implicit to the language publicly deployed by national efficiency. Whereas advocates for efficiency had built their political appeal upon the creation of an imagined scarcity of “national time” and the claim that fast moving political action was needed, the new liberals constructed an image of politics in which concerns over time scarcity were actively marginalized and the

⁸⁶ Ibid

⁸⁷ Ibid

⁸⁸ Quoted in James Kloppenberg, Uncertain Victory: Social Democracy and Progressivism in European and American Thought, 1870-1920, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 320

necessarily slow-moving character of freewheeling debate was given prominence. Given the emphasis that new liberalism placed on the importance of public intellectuals in this political vision, it should be expected that many new liberal writers saw themselves as the moderators and facilitators of popular rationalism. As Mauriello has recently argued, this idea “created a self-fulfilling role for new liberal intellectuals.”⁸⁹ What Mauriello neglects, however, is the fact that, in their attempts to structure public political debate, these intellectuals were actively engaged in a struggle to define the temporality of Edwardian politics. New liberalism, then, should not simply be understood as constructing an image of a slower politics but also as engaged in practices that would bring that image into reality. As the case of Norman Angell shows, the new liberal vision of a more deliberative politics was in some ways actualized during the period immediately before the Great War.

IV

Historians have typically viewed Angell as a failed pacifist and neglected his deep investment in the Edwardian period’s new liberalism.⁹⁰ While he was not among the group of intellectuals who published in The Nation, he viewed the prominent new liberal John M. Robertson as one of his intellectual heroes and he maintained a correspondence during the Edwardian period not only with British new liberals such as Hobson but also

⁸⁹ Christopher Mauriello, “The Public Sphere and the Liberal Imagination,” p. 123

⁹⁰ Ryan Vieira, “New Liberalism and the Edwardian Public Sphere: Norman Angell and Angellism Reconsidered,” Journal of Liberal History, forthcoming, winter 2011

American new liberals such as Herbert Croly, Walter Weyl and Walter Lippman.⁹¹ Moreover, his most well-known book, The Great Illusion: A Study of the Relation of Military Power in Nations to their Economic and Social Advantage was heavily infused with the central ideas of the new liberalism. In The Great Illusion, Angell argued that a war between Germany and Britain would be economically counter-productive because rapid means of communication and the international extension of credit had made these two countries financially interdependent.⁹² Like most new liberal political arguments, Angell's contention rested on an organic conception of politics in which "the organism as a whole becomes quickly conscious of any damage to a part."⁹³ To Angell, the emergence of this interdependence was uniquely modern and represented a significant historical break in the state of international politics. Because this interdependence was so new, however, Angell argued that its reality was generally unrecognized and its potential for quelling the possibility for European conflict was moot.⁹⁴ Moreover, much like other new liberals, Angell also believed that the accelerated and irrational character of contemporary political debate stood in the way of the rational appreciation of modern political

⁹¹ See, for instance, his correspondence with J.M. Robertson and Charles B. Forcey, the Columbia University professor of history who consulted Angell for his book on American new liberalism. WRAC (Norman Angell Collection), Box 1

⁹² Norman Angell, The Great Illusion: A Study of the Relation of Military Power in Nations to their Economic and Social Advantages, (Toronto: McClelland and Goodchild, 1910). This paper will not detail all of the arguments of The Great Illusion as these are available in a great deal of the existing literature. Here I will allude to Angell's arguments only when necessary and only insofar as they apply to the general argument of the present paper. For a detailed summary of Angell's arguments see, Paul David Hines, "Norman Angell Peace Movement, 1911-1915," (Unpublished Ph.D dissertation, Ball State University, Muncie, Indiana, 1964), Chapter 1

⁹³ Angell, The Great Illusion, p. 157

⁹⁴ Ibid. p. xiii

conditions.⁹⁵ What was needed, then, was for someone or some group to effect an alteration in the patterns of public speech which could produce a greater degree of, what he called, “rationalism” in politics.

As with Hobhouse, Angell’s understanding of the role of the intellectual was framed by the idea of creating a popular critical faculty. Like the new liberals discussed earlier, Angell looked back to the mid Victorian era for his archetype of the public intellectual, placing particular emphasis on John Stuart Mill. As Angell expressed in his autobiography, “If there is any one book which explains a man’s intellectual life the fact that at twelve I read and was entranced and entered a new world as a result of reading Mill’s On Liberty explains most of my subsequent intellectual life.”⁹⁶ Mill upheld openness of debate and individual judgement as the fountain of rationality in politics and Angell’s political thinking became dominated by the view that the foundation of liberal democracy was robust debate in an open public sphere: “There can be no sound democracy without sound individual judgment.... That skill cannot possibly be developed save by the habit of free tolerant discussion”.⁹⁷ Just as for Hobson and Hobhouse, the way in which citizens communicated with each other about political questions was a fundamental concern for Angell:

[t]he question is not whether we discuss public policy – we do it in any case endlessly, noisily, raucously, passionately. The question is whether we are to

⁹⁵ This point is perhaps best illustrated in Angell’s description of his initial encounter with the circle of pundits that surrounded Lord Northcliffe and their attachment to outdated political ideas. Angell, After All, p. 138

⁹⁶ Norman Angell, Reminiscences of Sir Norman Angell, Columbia University Oral History Collection, part 1, No. 8, p. 11

⁹⁷ Ball State University (hereafter BSU) (Norman Angell Collection), Box 46, “Power”

carry on the discussion with some regard to evidence, some sense of responsibility to truth and sound judgment; or with disregard of those things in favor of indulgence in atavistic emotion.⁹⁸

If public political discussion maintained always “the temper of reasonableness, toleration of contrary opinion, the attitude of enquiry and the open mind” Angell believed that political communities could avoid the “senseless panics which so often in politics lead us into disastrous courses.”⁹⁹ In direct contrast to national efficiency and the logic of procedural modernization, Angell believed that rational political action was characterized by its “making human intercourse not less but more worthwhile.”¹⁰⁰

Between 1910 and 1914, Angell’s Great Illusion became a publishing sensation. Selling more than two million copies, it was eventually translated into twenty-five languages, and by 1912 it had inspired the formation of between 30 and 40 discussion groups in Britain alone.¹⁰¹ Indeed, The Great Illusion had become, what one historian has since termed, “the coffee table book of its time.”¹⁰² In the Edwardian press, reviews and articles about Angell’s book appeared in periodicals and newspapers of all political stripes. While some reviewers praised it as “one of the most damaging indictments that

⁹⁸ Norman Angell, After All: The Autobiography of Sir Norman Angell, (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1951), 145

⁹⁹ Norman Angell, “War as the Failure of Reason,” in J.M. Robertson, ed., Essays Towards Peace, (London: Watts, 1913), 69; BSU (Norman Angell Collection), Box 47, Norman Angell, “Democracy and the Main Street Mind”

¹⁰⁰ Norman Angell, “Man v. the Statesman,” Vol. 1, No. 1 (1914), 17

¹⁰¹ The sales figures are taken from: Howard Weinroth, “Norman Angell and the Great Illusion: An Episode of Pre-1914 Pacifism”, The Historical Journal, Vol. 17, no. 3, (1974), 551. Involved in the discussion groups were some of Britain’s most influential minds: Bertrand Russell, C.P. Scott, and J.A. Hobson, to name only a few.

¹⁰² Hugh Peter Gaitskell McNeal, “Making War Expensive and Peace Cheap: The Emergence of New liberal Internationalism in Anglo-American Thinking, 1897-1914,” (Unpublished Ph.D Dissertation, Harvard University, 2000), 150

have yet appeared of the principles governing the relation of civilized nations to one another,” others criticized his thesis as one-sided and naive.¹⁰³ Though Angell’s contemporaries may have disagreed over the merits of his ideas, all agreed that The Great Illusion was, as an author in Toronto’s Globe put it, “a book whose influence it seems impossible to exaggerate” and as another Canadian observer noted: “[w]hether men agree with him or not, they have had their views on war and peace shaken to the foundations.”¹⁰⁴ As an unnamed reviewer in the Pall Mall Magazine wrote in January 1913: “The Great Illusion ha[d] taken its place among the few books that have stirred the minds of men and the obscure author of the modest pamphlet ha[d] become the leader of a new school of thought.”¹⁰⁵

As with other elements of the drive towards a new liberalism, Norman Angellism was concerned with the fast-pace of modernity. In The Great Illusion he wrote that his contemporary period saw “more change... in ten years than originally in ten thousand” and, borrowing a term from Henry Adams, he argued that political actors “must not ignore the Law of Acceleration” which was the defining characteristic of this “new world.”¹⁰⁶ Moreover, as with other new liberals, acceleration was deemed by Angell and his followers to have potentially significant anti-liberal tendencies. Given our discussion

¹⁰³ Author Unknown, “The New Pacifism,” Quarterly Review, 12, (1912), pp. 202, 203; A.T. Mahan, “The Great Illusion,” North American Review, 195, (June 1912)

¹⁰⁴ “Norman Angell and the Emperor,” The Globe, (14 September 1912), 6; Main Johnson, “Norman Angell: Apostle of Peace,” Canadian Magazine, Toronto: The Ontario Publishing Co., (March 1914), 534

¹⁰⁵ The William Ready Division of Archives and Special Collections, McMaster University (hereafter WRAC), (Norman Angell Collection), Box 5 Clippings File, “The Great Illusion,” Pall Mall Magazine, January 1913

¹⁰⁶ Norman Angell, The Great Illusion, p. 199

earlier, it is perhaps not surprising that one of the most significant problems that Angellism associated with the increasing tempo of modern life was its propensity to close down forums devoted to open-ended critical discourse. As one Angell supporter told his audience in 1914: “[i]n this hurrying world of ours there is always a danger lest the superficial be taken for the real, the shadow for the substance, misrepresentation for truth.”¹⁰⁷

For Angell himself the problem of acceleration in politics was most obviously present in the rhetoric of national efficiency. In his now largely forgotten 1903 book, Patriotism Under Three Flags: A Plea for Rationalism in Politics, he wrote:

There has grown up in England recently a party which professes... that [liberal] principles need not be regarded so long as there be ‘efficiency.’ We are told there is no danger in giving the government irresponsible power, if only it be a ‘business government.’¹⁰⁸

But while Angell saw in national efficiency an archetypal example of the problems of speed in politics, he certainly did not limit his critique to that. For instance, like Hobson, Angell also saw the problems posed by speed in the growth of executive power in England and the “lopping off one by one of parliamentary prerogatives.”¹⁰⁹ More generally, Angell linked the acceleration characteristic of the Edwardian period with a growing “impatience of discussion” and a general shift in the mood of the public:

[w]hile it is true that the Victorian era, as much in England as in America, reflects on the whole a contrary spirit – the predominance of a reasoned effort towards well-being, rather than a satisfaction – the recent events analyzed

¹⁰⁷ Lieutenant B.S. Townroe, “Fundamental Points of Agreement between the aims of the Garton Foundation and of the National Service League,” in Hilton ed., Report of Certain Discussions, p. 169

¹⁰⁸ Norman Angell, Patriotism Under Three Flags, p. 64

¹⁰⁹ Angell, Patriotism Under Three Flags, p. 63

here would show that these forces of rationalism have spent themselves, and that sentiment is once more coming to occupy the first place in public policy.¹¹⁰

Thus, Angell claimed that just when sound political thinking was most necessary, demands that British politics “keep up” with the constantly changing present were ensuring that “[o]rdinary independence of thought or political action was yelled down as treason.”¹¹¹ In order to re-introduce an independence of thought into discussions of international politics, Angell mounted his Great Illusion campaign.

In 1909 Angell self-published “Europe’s Optical Illusion” – the pamphlet upon which The Great Illusion was based – and once published he used his contacts in the press to secure favourable reviews.¹¹² Angell’s most fruitful press contact was Percy Parker, then owner of Public Opinion, who believed that “Europe’s Optical Illusion” would become “the book which had the greatest effect on the thought of man and on his ultimate social well-being.”¹¹³ Parker devoted a great deal of time and energy to helping Angell promote his ideas. Through reviews in Public Opinion, Angell’s thesis was introduced to a large and politically important audience. One of Angell’s letters to Parker lists the distribution of 2034 copies of Public Opinion, which contained a review of Angell’s work. Of these 175 were sent to English newspapers, 94 to American newspapers, 667 to the British

¹¹⁰ Angell, Patriotism Under Three Flags, pp. 3, 14

¹¹¹ BSU, (Norman Angell Collection), Clippings File Box 62, Norman Angell, Untitled Article, Daily Messenger, n.d.

¹¹² For instance, Angell’s association with H.W. Massingham led to H.N. Brailsford’s enthusiastic review in the Nation, H.N. Brailsford, “The Motive Force of War.” Nation, 6, No. 12, 18 December 1909, pp. 490-492

¹¹³ Percy Parker, “An Unchallenged Book: The Book of the Day – A Worthy Candidate for the Nobel Literature and Peace Prizes,” Public Opinion, 27 January 1911, (99), 2570

House of Commons, 611 to the House of Lords, and 487 to American Congressmen.¹¹⁴ Similarly, a separate letter indicates that Parker had distributed favourable reviews to approximately 30,000 business men.¹¹⁵ With the help of media contacts such as Parker, Angell's political pamphlet developed a wide public currency and it was also not long before Angell was being approached by "half the publishers in London" to expand his pamphlet into a book.¹¹⁶ He accepted the offer of the William Heinemann's publishing firm and late in 1910 The Great Illusion appeared.

In many ways, historian Albert Marrin was correct when he wrote: "The Great Illusion was the right book in the right place at the right time."¹¹⁷ With a deteriorating international situation Angell's arguments were deeply plugged-in to the concerns and anxieties of the Edwardians. It is therefore not surprising that The Great Illusion attracted the attention, praise and scorn, of some of Europe and North America's most important public men. Among these was Angell's then boss, the newspaper baron Alfred Harmsworth (later Lord Northcliffe), who had originally, "pooh-poohed the idea that" Angell's thesis "could hold water or... affect politics practically," but by the end of 1910 had become convinced that "in a cheap edition [The Great Illusion] could run into a

¹¹⁴ WRAC (Norman Angell Collection), Box 1, Percy Parker to Norman Angell, 26 January 1911.

¹¹⁵ WRAC (Norman Angell Collection), Box 1, Percy Parker to Norman Angell, 2 March 1911.

¹¹⁶ In May 1910 Angell wrote to Parker that he was receiving letters "from every imaginable sort and condition of person: financiers, politicians, journalists, writers, soldiers, university professors, etc." BSU (Norman Angell Collection), Box 20, Norman Angell to Percy Parker, 18 May 1910; Angell, Reminiscences, p. 105

¹¹⁷ Marrin, Sir Norman Angell, p. 118

million.”¹¹⁸ Northcliffe threw himself into the Great Illusion campaign, providing Angell with funding and giving him space in the Daily Mail to engage the critics of his book and to “push home its thesis.”¹¹⁹

Late in 1911, the Daily Mail provided Angell with an important point of entry to the Edwardian public sphere. Northcliffe’s decision to give Angell space in the Mail proved timely. Following the Franco-German dispute in Morocco, the question of the financial impact of international conflict became increasingly topical and the debate over Angell’s thesis gained further momentum.¹²⁰ Using the columns of the Daily Mail, Angell engaged what he saw as the panicked “collective mind” in critically rational public debate. Here he expressed and elaborated on his ideas, while also listening and responding to his critics.¹²¹ By the close of 1911, Norman Angell’s public scrutiny of commonly held ideas regarding war and peace had brought him a large and sympathetic audience that, collectively,

¹¹⁸ BSU (Norman Angell Collection), Box 27, Angell to F.W. Wile, 3 November 1910, BSU (Norman Angell Collection), Box 29, Norman Angell to Kennedy Jones, 1911.

¹¹⁹ Ibid. Supina’s dissertation provides evidence that Northcliffe was also in some way funding Angell’s peace work. Supina points to the fact that when Angell left the Daily Mail in 1912 his propaganda expenses instantly increased to three times their previous size. Supina, “Norman Angell and the Years of Illusion.” p. 103

¹²⁰ See “The Kaiser’s Answer: Effect in Germany, Severe Financial Depression, Comments of Berlin Press,” Daily Mail, 9 September 1911, p. 5

¹²¹ For an example of Angell “pushing home” his thesis see Norman Angell, “The Lesson of the Bourse Panics”, Daily Mail (London), 15 September 1911, p. 4c-d. For an example of Angell engaging his critics see Norman Angell, “The Great Illusion and the War: A Reply to my Critics”, Daily Mail (London), 5 October 1911, p. 4d-e. For an example of Angell’s ideas being discussed in editorial columns see “The Risk to Germany”, Daily Mail (London), 8 September 1911, p. 4b. For an example of Angell being criticized: “War and the Money Markets: A Real Test for Norman Angell”, Daily Mail (London), 4 October 1911, p. 4f.

represented the boundaries of an emerging discursive space. In early 1912 Angell left the Northcliffe organization to pursue his Great Illusion campaign full-time.

After 1911, Angell concentrated his efforts on creating discussion groups and periodicals through which he could further scrutinize the outdated political language that he believed formed the foundation for contemporary discussions of war and peace. In these efforts he received invaluable help from Reginald, Viscount Esher.¹²² Esher was what Angell called the *eminence grise* behind the British throne: he was a good friend of the royal family who had made it his business to get to know all the political leaders, public men, and writers so that he could advise the King of their qualities.¹²³ Moreover, Esher had close ties to Britain's military elite and therefore, like Harmsworth, he was an unlikely convert to the Great Illusion campaign.¹²⁴ Nevertheless, Esher had been one of the first public men to whom Angell mailed copies of "Europe's Optical Illusion", and Esher was thoroughly impressed with the pamphlet.¹²⁵ Esher would become even more

¹²² Lord Esher was a man of tremendous political influence during this period. Not only was he a good friend of King Edward, but he was also the overseer of Queen Victoria's private papers. In 1902, he served on the Elgin Commission on the South African War. In 1903, he was invited by Arthur Balfour to become War Secretary. In 1905, he became a permanent member on the Committee of Imperial Defence. For a more detailed biography see Peter Fraser, Lord Esher: A Political Biography, (London: Hart-Davis MacGibbon, 1973).

¹²³ Angell, Reminiscences p. 106

¹²⁴ See McNeal "Making War Expensive and Peace Cheap," pp. 153-157

¹²⁵ In January 1910, he wrote a supportive and encouraging letter to Angell: "I hate flattery, but I am not flattering when I urge you to push home your main thesis. Your book could be as epoch making as Seeley's *Expansion of England*, or Mahan's *Sea Power*. It is sent forth at the right psychological moment and wants to be followed up if you have time and drive." BSU (Norman Angell Collection), Box 7, Reginald Esher to Norman Angell, 11 January 1910. This letter greatly impacted Angell who later said it was largely Esher's support of "Europe's Optical Illusion" which was responsible for the pamphlet's expansion into a book. As he wrote to Esher: "I think, in a sense, you are

supportive of Angell's work when he witnessed discussions of Angell's thesis in Desart's sub-committee for the Committee of Imperial Defense.¹²⁶ In fact, Esher became so intrigued by Angell's work that he was able to convince the philosophically minded former Conservative Prime Minister Arthur Balfour and the wealthy industrialist Richard Garton to join Angell and himself in forming the Garton Foundation for Promoting the Study of International Polity.

The Garton Foundation was arguably the most important organization in the growth of Norman Angellism. Its aim, according to the Memorandum of Association, was "[t]o promote and develop the science of International Polity and economics as indicated in the published writings of Mr. Norman Angell, and for the purpose aforesaid to organize and federate those who may become interested in the said science..."¹²⁷ In other words, the Garton Foundation hoped to "bring before the mind of the European public the

responsible for the book, because if it had not been for your kind encouragement given to the pamphlet on which it is based I am not sure that it would have been written." For his support Angell dedicated his 1914 book The Foundations of International Polity to Esher. BSU (Norman Angell Collection), Box 7, Norman Angell to Reginald Esher, 30 October 1910.

¹²⁶ In a speech at Cambridge University Esher commented on witnessing these talks: "I have had the opportunity of listening to very confidential inquiries into, and discussions of, the economic effects upon our trade, commerce and finance on the outbreak of a European war in which we ourselves might be engaged. This inquiry extended over many months, and many of the wealthiest and most influential men of business from the cities of the United Kingdom were called to give evidence before those whose duty it was to conclude the report. I am sure that very few, if any, of those eminent witnesses had read his book, but by some mysterious process the virus of Norman Angell was working in their minds, for one after the other, these magnates of commerce and of finance, corroborated by their fears and anticipations, the doctrine of The Great Illusion." BSU (Norman Angell Collection), Box 29, "Viscount Esher's Speech at Cambridge University"

¹²⁷ WRAC (Norman Angell Collection), Box 7, "Memorandum of Association," Garton Foundation Members Agreement, clause 3, article 1

significance of a few simple, ascertainable, tangible facts... and to encourage their discussion.”¹²⁸ More important for our purposes, however, was the methodology through which this aim was pursued. The Foundation used existing spaces for debate within the public sphere to publicize Angell’s work. During 1912 Angell lectured at prestigious institutions throughout Britain.¹²⁹ In addition to this the Garton Foundation also created new spaces for debate, such as the monthly periodical War and Peace: A Norman Angell Monthly and the many discussion groups that were formed across Britain. In both venues Norman Angell and the Garton Foundation showed themselves welcoming of criticism and concerned primarily with the open-ended analysis of political questions. As B.N. Langdon-Davies told an audience at the Leeds Norman Angell League on 17 April 1914:

[t]he dangers to avoid in the conduct of a movement such as ours are many. I propose to run briefly through a few which have occurred to me. Petulance, the attitude of impatience towards those who are obsessed with the old views, is most disadvantageous. So also is pedantry, the irritating way of seeming to regard ourselves as alone possessing the true doctrines and the dangerous habit of asserting dogmatically as facts many things which are really only tendencies.¹³⁰

The Garton Foundation was strictly non-partisan and attached to Angell’s principle that “The Right of Free Speech is an empty thing unless it is accompanied with a sense of the

¹²⁸ Norman Angell, “The International Polity Movement,” The Foundations of International Polity, (London: W. Heinemann, 1914), 218

¹²⁹ A few British organizations that Angell spoke at under the auspices of the Garton Foundation included: The British Chamber of Commerce (Paris), The Chatham Club (London), The South Place Institute (London), The Pioneer Club (London), The Midland Institute (Birmingham), The National Liberal Club (London), The Glasgow Liberal Club, The Leeds Chamber of Commerce, the Liberal Colonial Club, and the United Service Institution. Hilton, “Report for 1912”; “Overseas Dominions: Mr. Norman Angell on their Impregnability,” Times (London), 1 November 1913, p. 5g; “Mr. Norman Angell and the Use of Armies,” Times (London), 9 October 1913, p. 5g

¹³⁰ BSU (Norman Angell Collection), Box 29, B. Langdon Davies, “Dangers to be Avoided,” in “Leeds Norman Angell League Conference”.

obligation to listen to the other fellow.”¹³¹ By 1914, Angell could write: “the educative policy of the Garton Foundation is one which can equally be supported and approved by the soldier, the Navy League man, the Universal Service man, or the naval economist and the Quaker.”¹³²

The admission of fallibility on the part of Angell and his Garton colleagues became a cornerstone of their political identity. As Angell wrote to a reader in 1911, “so far from declining to listen to my opponents, they are just the people whom I listen to most carefully.”¹³³ Forty years later he reiterated this in his autobiography:

[i]n the case of any person whose judgment is really deserving of confidence, how has it become so? Because he has kept his mind open to criticism of his opinions and conduct.... The steady habit of correcting and completing his own opinion by collating it with those of others, so far from causing doubt and hesitation in carrying it into practice, is the only stable foundation for a just reliance on it.¹³⁴

As one reviewer in Everybody's Magazine noted: “Mr. Angell has a mind like an edged blade, but he uses it like a scientist, and not like a crusader. He is not a propagandist, he is an elucidator.”¹³⁵

Angell pushed for a reciprocal dialogue to become the dominant characteristic of the new discursive spaces that were founded in the wake of The Great Illusion. Upon the founding of the Manchester University War and Peace Society, Angell wrote in an open

¹³¹ BSU Norman Angell Collection, Box 45, “Free Speech”

¹³² Angell, “The International Polity Movement,” p. 211

¹³³ WRAC (Norman Angell Collection), Box 1, Norman Angell to R. Walton, 28 April 1911

¹³⁴ Angell, After All, p. 173

¹³⁵ Everybody's Magazine, May 1911, reproduced in reproduced in, WRAC (Norman Angell Collection), Box 6, The Work of Norman Angell by his Contemporaries: A Selection of Reviews and Articles Reproduced and Bound up, Issued Privately for Personal Friends and Some Students, p. 8

letter to its members, “[s]uch a club should include men of as diverse opinions as possible – quite as much those interested in the machinery of warfare, as those interested mainly in the bearing of these matters on social progress.”¹³⁶ Angell believed that such an ideologically diverse membership would only increase the quality of debate that occurred within the Society:

[i]f the circle includes a certain number generally hostile to pacific conceptions, so much the better. They will, by their points of interrogation act as a stimulus to the investigation of the rest, while on their side they will certainly benefit by a better understanding of factors, which even from the purely military point of view can no longer be neglected.¹³⁷

This attitude was also evident in the Garton Foundation’s monthly periodical, War and Peace. As the lead writer put it in the inaugural number, “That failure of understanding which we call war... is a natural and necessary outcome of certain beliefs and misconceptions which can only be corrected by those intellectual processes that have marked all advance in understanding – contact and discussion.” Therefore the purpose of the journal was “[t]o impress the significance of just those facts which are the most relevant and essential in this problem, to do what we can to keep them before public attention and to encourage their discussion.”¹³⁸ For this reason, War and Peace aimed to remain “strictly non-partisan” and published pieces both by Angell’s supporters and his critics.¹³⁹ The result was that War and Peace

¹³⁶ BSU (Norman Angell Collecton), JX1963A52, Norman Angell, “An Open Letter to the Manchester University War and Peace Society”

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ “About Ourselves”, War and Peace, 1, No. 1, October 1913, p. 1

¹³⁹ Supporters: Bertrand Russell, “Why Nations Love War”, War and Peace, 2, no. 14, November 1914, p. pp.20-21; H.N. Brailsford, “On Preventing Wars”, War and Peace, 2, no. 17, February 1914, pp. 71-72; J.A. Hobson, “The Limitations of

became a sphere of critical discussion based on an open-ended, mutual give and take. The genuine debate which framed this branch of *Norman Angellism* would become characteristic of all Angell's activities with the Garton Foundation prior to the First World War.

The tremendous growth of the free-wheeling discursive spaces that Angell created was not limited by Britain's shores. Angell created a sensation world-wide, by June 1913, The Great Illusion had sold 11,000 copies in Germany, 21,000 copies in France, and 15,000 copies in Italy.¹⁴⁰ Angell's work also developed a tremendous public currency in Canada, where his book went through six editions by 1914.¹⁴¹ The character of Norman Angellism in Canada can be seen through an examination of the University of Toronto International Polity Club, founded on 23 October 1913. Within one year this organization had 250 formal members, it attracted several high profile speakers, it held meetings with attendance figures over 300, and it caused Angell to refer to Toronto as "the intellectual centre of the Dominion."¹⁴² By 11 April 1914, Toronto's Star reported the club to be "...thoroughly alive."¹⁴³

Nationalism", War and Peace, 1, no. 6, March 1914, p. 155; E.D. Morel, "Foreign Policy and the People", War and Peace, 1, no. 3, February 1914, p. 129; Ramsay MacDonald, "The War and After", War and Peace, 2, no. 13, October 1914, p. 5; For an additional list of contributors see Angell, After All, p. 169. Critics: Frederic Harrison, "Mischievous and Immoral", War and Peace, 1, no. 3, December 1913, p. 65. A. Rifleman, "The Fallacy of Norman Angellism", War and Peace, 1, no. 4, January 1914, p. 103. A. Rifleman, "The Fallacy of Norman Angellism: Further Instances", War and Peace, 1, no. 5, February 1914, p. 167

¹⁴⁰ Supina "Norman Angell and the Years of Illusion," p. 132

¹⁴¹ Johnson, "Norman Angell: Apostle of Peace," p. 531

¹⁴² For membership figures see "Polity Club Serves Noteworthy Ends," Star (Toronto), 11 April 1914, p. 10c; Speakers to the club in its first year included, John Lewis (editor of the Toronto Star), G.E. Jackson (Cambridge Lecturer in Economics),

In the way of the clubs and societies in Britain, the University of Toronto International Polity Club firmly adhered to a language of inclusion and a spirit of inquiry. The formal objects of the Club were:

[t]o encourage the study of international relations; to discuss problems relating to armed aggression; to consider means of settling international disputes without war; to stimulate a sympathetic appreciation of the character, problems and intellectual currents of other nations; and to cooperate for the furthering of these aims with similar organizations in other universities.¹⁴⁴

The Club was not a peace organization per se, but rather was aimed at anyone interested in international issues.¹⁴⁵ According to its manifesto, the Club was based “first and foremost, on individual breadth of view” and was the product of no “clique, nor of any single college.”¹⁴⁶ This point was reiterated by the organization’s second president, C.R. Young, who in 1915 defined the Club as “...an association of eager enquirers, of searchers after truth...”¹⁴⁷ The hope of the Club was that “by its broad and open-minded

J.A. Macdonald (editor of the Toronto Globe), Sir John Willison (Canadian correspondent to the London Times), Alfred Noyes (English poet), and N.W. Rowell (leader of Ontario’s provincial Liberal Party). BSU (Norman Angell Collection), Box 29, “Memo for Norman Angell,” 15 February 1914. The club’s first meeting filled the newly built YMCA’s auditorium achieving an attendance of 300. “New University Club Hears Able Addresses,” Globe (Toronto), 5 December 1913. According to the Star extra tables had to be brought in to accommodate the inaugural meeting, , “Varsity People are Fond of Polity Club: Big Crowd, with Many Ladies, Hear Speakers at International Dinner,” Star (Toronto), 5 December 1913. University of Toronto Archives and Records Management (hereafter UTARMS), Office of the Registrar, A1973-0051/239

¹⁴³ “Polity Club Serves Noteworthy Ends,” Star (Toronto), 11 April 1914, p. 10c

¹⁴⁴ UTARMS, Office of the Registrar, A1973-0051/239, “International Polity Club Report for 1915”

¹⁴⁵ “There is assuredly nothing in these objects that commits the Club, as a club, to the advocacy of either peace or war. On the contrary there is much that will appeal to all students of World problems.” “International Polity Club Report for 1915”.

¹⁴⁶ UTARMS, Office of the Registrar, A1973-0051/239, “International Polity Club Report for 1914”.

¹⁴⁷ “International Polity Club Report for 1915”.

interest in every phase of internationalism...” it could “form student opinion and send forth from the University men and women trained to think clearly and without prejudice.”¹⁴⁸ In membership, the Club was highly diverse. In terms of gender, fully half of the 300 who attended the inaugural meeting were female, nearly half of its 250 members in 1914 were female undergraduates, and from 1915-1916, women made up more than half of its executive. Additionally, membership in the club was not just limited to students, but open to the general public, and the club actively encouraged membership from people of different cultures and political points of view.¹⁴⁹ According to its manifesto the single requirement for membership was, “sincerity of conviction or honesty of doubt.”¹⁵⁰ As Gilbert Jackson, Vice President of the Club, told a Toronto Star reporter, “[w]e exist for the purpose of thought and discussion.... We think that the subject of war and peace is one that interests most people, and we try to study it from all points of view, getting opinions of men of all types of mind.... We number among our members Imperialists, Liberals, and Conservatives, Socialists and Individualists.”¹⁵¹

Angell was the public intellectual in action. Although The Great Illusion did not stop what became the First World War, it did undoubtedly raise both the quantity and quality of public political discussion, drawing into its ranks a politically and socially

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ A shining example of the cosmopolitan nature of the club is the fact that on 8 December 1914 it held a “cosmopolitan night” where representatives of various cultures could express, “in speech or in music, the infinite variety of the peoples of the earth as well as something of their common possessions.” UTARMS, Office of the Registrar, A1973-0051/239, “Cosmopolitan Night,” Star, 8 December 1914.

¹⁵⁰ “International Polity Club Report for 1914”.

¹⁵¹ UTARMS, Office of the Registrar, A1973-0051/239, “Polity Club Serves Noteworthy Ends,” Star (Toronto)

diverse body of political actors. As one author in the Canadian Magazine wrote, “Napoleon made the world tremble; Norman Angell has done even more, he has made the world think.”¹⁵² Considering the growth of *Norman Angellism* between 1910 and 1914 and its attachment to critical reflection and open-ended dialogue, and given that the consideration of criticism is a time consuming process, it seems logical to conclude that *Norman Angellism* promoted a slower temporality that provided an alternative political vision and experience to that which was offered by the prevalent action-based culture of efficiency. As one element of the new liberalism, Angell thus shows the extent to which resistance and concerns over excessive speed existed in the “politics of time” in the Edwardian period.

V

The events of August 1914 reduced to almost impotence this attempt to enhance deliberative politics, altering the terms of the contest from efficiency/liberty, or action/discussion, to patriot/crank. While it is true that organizations such as the Union of Democratic Control attempted to maintain open political discussion, the explosion of nationalist sentiment and the passing of the Defence of the Realm Act provided both the cultural and legal basis for the suppression of dissenting opinion. Moreover, after Britain’s entry to the war, the development of an environment of intense nationalist sentiment occurred so quickly that the characteristically slow-moving new liberalism had little opportunity to hold its ground. Commenting on the events of July and August 1914,

¹⁵² Johnson, “Norman Angell: Apostle of Peace,” p. 534

Angell attributed his inability to affect policy to “the paralyzing rapidity” with which events developed.¹⁵³ He wrote, “Our failure to produce a greater effect must be attributed mainly to the speed with which the situation developed.”¹⁵⁴ The beginning of the Great War brought the politics of time, more or less, to its conclusion. Speed and action had won, while scrutiny and slow-moving deliberation had lost. This, however, should not obscure the significance of the new liberal resistance to the Edwardian culture of efficiency. In creating new discursive spaces that were defined largely by their contestation of the imagined scarcity of time which characterized the rhetoric of procedural reform, national efficiency and tariff reform, new liberalism provided a space outside of the hectic tempo of political life where individuals were given time to reflect. Though this temporal aspect of the movement was ultimately marginalized in 1914, in the immediacy of the Edwardian age it allowed for meaningful political engagement outside of the action-oriented mood of the pre-war period.

¹⁵³ BSU (Norman Angell Collection), Box 66, Norman Angell, “Report,” n.d.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

Conclusion

This dissertation has aimed to show how politics and time became fused together in British constitutional development and practice over the course of the long nineteenth century. Epistemologically, it has pursued its topic through the lens of rationality, showing in the process that differing conceptions of rational political action mediated and were mediated by shifting perceptions of time's passing. In the end, the study has attempted to demonstrate that nineteenth-century constitutional development was, in part, characterized by the ascendance of an historically fractured, temporally accelerated and rationally instrumentalized understanding of politics that significantly marginalized other perspectives. Politics, in this way, became subject to a technological reduction: the institutions of the state and the discursive exchanges which constitute the public sphere lost their autonomous justificatory logic and became mere techniques in the service of ends external to themselves. Parliament ceased to be the "Grand Inquest of the Nation" and instead was imagined as a "legislative machine" and the public sphere became a site for strategic perlocutionary speech acts rather than illocutionary communicative action oriented to the inter-subjective construction of mutual understanding.

The early twentieth century seemingly marked the final triumph of this instrumentalized politics, as the perception of historical discontinuity became reified into an almost universally accepted ontological presupposition and the call for efficiency became the political catch cry of the day. Yet, while the Edwardian age ostensibly represented the climax of this peculiarly "modern" politics, it also exhibited pockets of resistance that were defined by an alternative temporality, rationality and set of deliberative procedures. Just as instrumentality, discontinuity and de-

synchronization provided the antithesis to the dominant value-rational continuity discourse of the early-to-mid nineteenth century, the necessarily slow-moving communicative rationality expressed by the proponents of the new liberalism provided one bulwark to the full actualization of an accelerated and instrumentalized politics in early twentieth-century Britain.

The interpretation put forward in this study is meant to operate on three levels. At its most explicit and sustained argumentative form, this dissertation has attempted to contribute to debates in British constitutional historiography, particularly with respect to the recent revisionist arguments regarding democratization and constitutional development. In the way of scholars such as James Vernon, Frank O’Gorman and Richard Price, I have attempted to illustrate how elements of Britain’s constitutional development that are commonly seen as emancipatory, such as the extension of the franchise or the development of a communicative link between Parliament and the constituencies, often had consequences that were confining or repressive. That, in short, the emergence of British democracy was characterised less by the expansion of freedom than by a complex transformation of the relationships from which power is produced and around which it is organised. By introducing the procedural and cultural framework of Parliament and the emergence of a “politics of time” I have presented subjects that have been almost wholly neglected by scholars such as Vernon, and by suggesting some of the multiple ways in which politically rational action was constructed by Victorian and Edwardian historical actors I have widened the epistemological borders which have governed constitutional revisionism. At its most explicit level then, this study can be seen as a significant expansion of revisionist constitutional historiography.

On a more implicit and sub-textual level, the arguments put forward in this study have been meant as a contribution to the social science scholarship on temporality and politics. As I argued in the introduction, the numerous scholars who have addressed the nature and function of temporality in modernity have insufficiently addressed the epistemological aspects of the question. In order to address this deficiency, I have built upon the recent insights of philosopher Espen Hammer and throughout this study have integrated into my discussion of the political functions of modern temporality a concept that has preoccupied critical theorists from Horkheimer to Marcuse to Habermas: namely, the reductive and oppressive potentiality contained in the modern idea of reason. In this way, I have suggested that by marrying the academic discourse on the political function of temporality with the Frankfurt tradition of critical theory we can better understand, what Rosa has termed, the self-perpetuating character of modern acceleration. Thus, the subtext of this study can be seen as the attempt by an historian to contribute to a scholarly dialogue occurring well beyond his discipline. While this may have led to a simplification of the claims made by scholars in other disciplines, an eventuality that is perhaps inevitable to interdisciplinary dialogue, I can only hope that the conceptual and historical contributions of this study outweigh its deficiencies.

While in its explicit historical arguments and its implicit conceptual suggestions this study addresses issues that may appear to be wholly divorced from the reality of contemporary political practice, this dissertation has also been intended to have a practical purpose. Since 1997, the idea of modernising the political and law making process has received continued attention at Westminster and in the periodical and newspaper press. These discussions, however, have been characterized by a

shallow historical perspective that has unquestionably accepted the temporal and rational horizons of modernity. By providing a deeper historical narrative for these recent discussions of the necessity to modernise procedurally the British legislature, the present study has sought to unmask the often anti-democratic character of the temporal and rational structures which drive the project of political “modernisation.” It is on this third interpretative level that I now wish to conclude the study.

II

During the 1997 UK general election the idea of “modernisation” was brought to the centre of political debate. For at least a year the Labour Party had maintained that the rules of parliamentary law making and debate required updating if British democracy was to be revitalized. As Ann Taylor, the future leader of the Commons, told a Charter 88 meeting in May 1996, the previous reform efforts of the Conservatives contained “nothing at all to make MPs more effective in holding the executive to account.”¹ This “conventional reformist” agenda, she maintained, neglected the “main project of reengaging the gears of the political process in a fundamental way so that ordinary voters feel genuinely connected with the people that represent them.”² This, Taylor told her audience, would “be Labour’s true project for Parliament.”³ Five months later, in October 1996, Tony Blair’s Labour Party collaborated with Paddy Ashdown’s Liberal Democrats on a Joint Consultative Committee on Constitutional Reform which expressed the need to revise

¹ Ann Taylor, “New Politics, New Parliament,” Quoted in Lucinda Maer, “Modernisation of the House of Commons, 1997-2005,” p. 7

² Ann Taylor, “New Politics, New Parliament,” Quoted in Alex Brazier, Matthew Flinders and Declan McHugh, *New Politics, New Parliament?: A Review of Parliamentary Modernisation since 1997* (London: Hansard Society, 2005), 6

³ Quoted in Lucinda Maer, “Modernisation of the House of Commons, 1997-2005,” p. 7

parliamentary practice in order to “secure a government that is democratic” and to limit the ability “of those in power to reduce their accountability to the people.” In order to achieve this, the Committee argued that the mechanisms of Parliamentary scrutiny needed to be made more effective. Such reforms would revitalize British democratic practice and, the Committee’s report argued, “there is today, a pressing need to renew democracy in Britain.”⁴ In 1997, when the general election was called, both the Labour and Liberal Democrat parties made manifesto pledges to “modernise the House of Commons” along the lines set out by their Joint Consultative Committee. When, following the election, Blair’s Labour Party formed its Government the updating of parliamentary procedure to strengthen democratic practice was, therefore, part of its mandate.

Within a few weeks of taking power Blair’s Government held a Commons debate on the subject of parliamentary modernisation and less than a month later, on 4 June 1997, it established the first Select Committee on the Modernisation of the House of Commons.⁵ The House reappointed the Committee in every Session between 1997 and 2008, over which time it produced more than forty reports and memoranda on subjects ranging from legislative programming to improving the communicative link between Parliament and the constituencies. Yet, despite Labour’s claim to novelty, the modernisation of procedure was in no way an innovation of Blair’s New Labour. The idea has been continuously present in political and constitutional discourse since the early nineteenth century; it was neither a Labour, nor a Tory, nor even a twentieth century innovation. Even the idea of modernisation for the sake of democratic

⁴ Report of the Joint Consultative Committee on Constitutional Reform, 1997

⁵ Lucinda Maer, “Modernisation of the House of Commons, 1997-2005,” Research Paper prepared for the Library of Parliament, (14 June 2005), 8

improvement was present at least since the 1880s. Further, the relationship between democratic practice and procedural modernisation is much more uneasy than Blair and his supporters seem to think.

The discontinuous, accelerated and technological character of modernity's temporal and rational horizons are largely at odds with the slow-moving nature of law-making practices that proceed by debate and amendment. Indeed, as we have seen throughout this study, the desire to thoroughly routinize political action so as to make it predictable, quantifiable, manageable and, therefore, mechanically efficient, has tended to exist in an inverse relationship with the ability to maintain the open deliberative practices that have historically served as the justification for parliamentary government and which are presently demanded by theorists of deliberative democracy such as Jürgen Habermas.⁶ This being the case, it would seem that at the root of Labour's 1997 claim to modernise parliamentary procedure in order to improve the infrastructure of British democracy there is a basic contradiction, one which has a long historical lineage that the present study has attempted to elucidate. While Parliament may indeed need to be modernised in order to be democratic, its modernisation has historically tended to make it less parliamentary (that is, less deliberative), and as parliament becomes less parliamentary its potential for democratic politics has consequently been reduced.

As the writings of a number of scholars and parliamentary onlookers seem to indicate, the above tension has been apparent in the work of the House of Commons

⁶ Jürgen Habermas, Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998); Jürgen Habermas, "Popular Sovereignty as Procedure," in James Bohman and William Rehg, eds., Deliberative Democracy: Essays on Reason and Politics, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997), 35-66

Modernisation Committee. Reflecting on the Committee's work over the previous seven years, Tony Wright, the Labour MP for Cannock Chase, wrote in a 2004 article for Parliamentary Affairs that there has been "an inherent ambiguity about the term modernisation, certainly as applied to Parliament." He wrote that two ideas of modernisation had been continually present in the Committee's efforts. In the first place, he wrote, there had been an "executive-minded" conception, "the kind of modernisation favoured by governments... the kind that wants to process business more efficiently and predictably." While, at the same time, there persisted in procedural reform discourse a separate and contradictory idea of modernisation: "the kind of modernisation that wants to shift the existing balance between executive and legislature in significant respects, notably by strengthening Parliament's scrutiny function."⁷ In this way, Wright suggests that the work of the Modernisation Committee could be understood as the working out of a tension between "modernisation-as-efficiency" and "modernisation-as-scrutiny."⁸ In a similar vein, Alexandra Kelso has argued that the work of the Modernisation Committee has been characterised by a tension between "efficiency reforms" and "effectiveness reforms."⁹ Efficiency reforms "involve maximising the outputs of the House of Commons" by either streamlining the legislative process entirely or by ensuring that government business progresses as expeditiously as possible through the stages of debate; effectiveness reforms "alter the institutional context" of the Commons so as to more

⁷ Tony Wright, "Prospects for Parliamentary Reform," Parliamentary Affairs, (57), 4, (2004), 869-870

⁸ Ibid. p. 870

⁹ Kelso's terms are derived from the vocabulary through which the Committee has defined itself. In one of its reports from the 1997-1998 parliamentary Session, the Committee stated that its intended purpose was to enable "the House and its Members to work more effectively and efficiently." Quoted in Alexandra Kelso, "The House of Commons Modernisation Committee," p. 145

equitably balance the powers of the executive and legislative branches of the constitution.¹⁰

Having pointed this tension out, Wright and Kelso then illustrate how Blair's Labour quickly turned its back on "effectiveness reforms" and pursued instead a reform program that favoured the operations of the executive. Not only has the Committee been continually chaired by the Leader of the House but the vast majority of the reports produced by the Committee focussed on matters of efficiency. As Kelso shows, of the 21 reports issued by the Modernisation Committee only 4 were primarily concerned with improving "effectiveness" while the other 17 were clearly oriented to increasing the efficiency of the executive.¹¹ Moreover, Kelso points out that while the Committee actively and vigorously pursued efficiency reforms such as legislative programming, it only approached reforms oriented to improving the mechanisms of legislative scrutiny reluctantly and under external pressure, as was the case in its examination of the Select Committee system.¹² It is clear then that, as Wright concludes, "modernisation-as-efficiency has had more success than modernisation-as-scrutiny," or, as Kelso writes, that the Modernisation Committee has been preoccupied with ensuring "the smooth operation of the Commons as a *legislative machine*."¹³

Given the extent to which efficiency issues have outweighed questions of effectiveness in the work of the Modernisation Committee most parliamentary observers and scholars such as Kelso and Wright have concluded that the Committee

¹⁰ Ibid. p. 145

¹¹ Alexandra Kelso, "The House of Commons Modernisation Committee," p. 147. For a similar analysis also see Phil Cowley, "The Commons: Mr. Blair's Lapdog," *Parliamentary Affairs*, (54), 4, (2001), 817

¹² Ibid. pp. 151-152

¹³ Ibid. p. 146 [my emphasis]

has been simply a means by which Blair's Labour Government could circumscribe the potential for scrutiny and expedite its legislative program. Indeed, the Committee's penchant for executive-driven efficiency led one scholar to claim that Blair was transforming the Commons into his "lapdog." Similarly, Kelso concludes that the Modernisation Committee "has been primarily concerned with securing an efficient House of Commons, which is as streamlined as possible, and which facilitates the expeditious dispatch of government business" and that "in the final analysis, the government needs the Modernisation Committee far more than does the House of Commons."¹⁴ In attributing Labour's switch from an initial rhetoric of effectiveness to a reform program of efficiency to the Party's movement from the opposition to the government, Kelso's interpretation is too narrow. While it is undoubtedly true that the desire to push through a legislative agenda was at work in Labour's push for efficiency reforms, beneath this desire something more fundamental was at work. By this I am referring to the temporal and rational assumptions upon which the push for modernisation is based and through which it is justified.

What all of this goes to show is that the particular fusing of politics and time that developed in the late nineteenth century, and which made efficiency and means/ends instrumentality into key political virtues, still dominates political thinking in our own time. Moreover, it will continue to subtly direct our political thinking so long as parliamentarians and political onlookers unquestionably accept the temporal and rational structures that have become so pervasive in modernity. What is required to move beyond this "iron cage" is not the further instrumentalization of political thought, discussion, and action, nor the synchronization of the legislature with the

¹⁴ Ibid. pp. 154-155

accelerated contours of modern society, but rather a reassessment of what constitutes rationality in politics. Here, it seems to me that our present political existence, despite its constant orientation to the future, has much to learn from the past. Particularly, it seems, from the alternative rational and temporal frameworks provided by the Edwardian new liberalism and its sub-group *Norman Angellism*, both of which favoured a vision of “rationalism” in politics that was constituted not by the relation of means to ends but rather by the discursive relationship between political subjects.

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