

The Parliament Act of 1911

John Bercow

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It is a great pleasure to deliver the first in this series of lectures to mark the Parliament Act of 1911. The main advantage of being the first to speak is that it is impossible for any more learned figure to have outlined my preferred line of argument before I have had the opportunity to express it. The disadvantage, alas, is that I have to set the tone for a number of other speeches when I have absolutely no idea what those delivering them might say.

I should start by congratulating whomsoever had the excellent idea of a series of lectures such as this, and I think the whole House of Commons would agree with me. It would, however, be entirely understandable if sections of the House of Lords did not feel quite the same level of enthusiasm for the Parliament Act 1911 that I intend to articulate tonight. This lecture series should not, though, be the only means by which the coming centenary of this landmark legislation is commemorated, indeed celebrated, and I believe I will be in a position shortly to announce what I as Speaker will be initiating on behalf of the House itself.

This is an essentially academic audience with an admirable passion for history and I speak with this very much in mind. This is not, as Tony Blair memorably observed when arriving to chair what would become the Good Friday agreement peace talks in Belfast in 1998, “a moment for sound bites”, although admittedly the ex-Prime Minister did immediately follow that noble declaration of rhetorical self-restraint with the words “but I feel the hand of history upon our shoulders”. There really will be no sound bites tonight and in the case of the 1911 Act the hand of history has surely already been felt (and of course in many ways it continues to be felt).

I intend to divide my thoughts this evening into three distinct sections. The first of these will focus on how British politics, especially our parliamentary politics, had developed in the decades immediately before the epic struggle which would result in the 1911 Parliament Act. My intention here will be to demonstrate how many of the features of what in modern times are described, indeed frequently derided, as the

“professionalisation of politics” were already evident some one hundred years ago. The second part will be an examination of the politics of the Parliament Act 1911 itself. I will assert that it should be seen not as a two year battle between David Lloyd George’s famous People’s Budget of 1909 and the enactment of the Parliament Act two years later but as a five year contest which stretched from the moment of the election in 1906 of a Liberal Government with a vast majority in the House of Commons. Finally, and by its nature more thematically, I will attempt to step back from this history and ask what lessons the events of those times might have for British democratic politics today.

So let me start with an assessment of how politics had evolved in the decades immediately before the titanic battle of wills between a selectively elected House of Commons (for that is what it was) and an almost exclusively hereditary House of Lords (for that is what it was).

POLITICS BEFORE THE PARLIAMENT ACT STRUGGLE

Politics in late Victorian and Edwardian Britain might be described as semi-democratic. The impact of the expansion of the franchise in 1867 and 1884 had been to increase substantially the numbers of parliamentary voters on the electoral rolls. The best estimate for the total size of this electorate in 1866 is 1.36 million. This had risen to just under 2.5 million by 1869, to a shade over 3.15 million in 1883, to more than 5.7 million by 1885 and a much larger 7.9 million by 1911 itself. There was, as a consequence, a real link between what might be called the “popular will” and the composition of the House of Commons. It was democracy of a sort.

The crucial words in that sentence, nonetheless, are “of a sort”. It was a deeply flawed democracy in multiple respects. The most obvious element of this was the franchise itself. Much of the working class male population was excluded and all female adults were disqualified. Not only did a clear majority of adults not enjoy a vote but some of those who did had multiple ballots. A man could participate in elections in any place where he met the legal property qualification. Joseph Chamberlain, for example, is believed to have been on the electoral register and entitled to exercise his voting rights in six separate places. He was not unique.

The size of parliamentary constituencies was also staggeringly uneven. That unevenness makes the heated arguments about present inequalities look positively tame by comparison. In the election of 1910 the largest electorate was that of Romford

(more than 60,000 on the roll) while smaller boroughs such as Durham, Salisbury and Windsor had barely one-twentieth of that electorate. The average size of a constituency in England (around 13,000 people) was twice the tally of that of Ireland (about 6,500 people), a disparity of real political importance. The irony of this situation was that the party most disadvantaged by it – the Conservatives (and their Liberal Unionist allies) – was the one most determined to maintain the Union. The curiosity of numerical disparity was reinforced by the restrictive polling hours of election days in this era (normally 8am to 8pm) which were plainly inconvenient to working class electors.

This does not seem to have prevented semi-democracy being something of a spectacle. As the historian Martin Pugh has noted: “Victorian elections were expected as a matter of course to be punctuated by excessive drinking, mob actions ranging from exuberance to intimidation, an exchange of cash and a judicious application of the “screw” [the implicit influence over voters by rich candidates].”

In county areas this meant that the local squire would expect, nay demand, the backing of his workforce. In urban locations, bribery was the order of the day. One argument made against the adoption of the secret ballot in 1872 was that it would enable voters to take money from both sides but deliver to only one of them. There is evidence that this occurred, because only a decade later the Corrupt and Illegal Practices Prevention Act in 1883 entered the statute book. Much like speed limits on a motorway, unfortunately, legislation served only to limit excessive behaviour not abolish it outright. As Pugh again contends convincingly:

“In ancient parliamentary boroughs bribery amounted to a tradition rather than a venal sin: as late as 1911, for example, when Worcester was investigated by a Royal Commission, no less than 500 electors emerged guilty; by this period bribery had settled at an unspectacular level of 2s 6d or 5s plus a few drinks a vote, and the Worcesters had ceased to be typical.”

Although the spirit of the 1883 Act aspired to control constituency spending, it was consistently undermined. Sharp practices abounded, such as spending sizable amounts of money outside of the official election campaign period. Another trick was to allow others to spend money in the interests of certain candidates, even if that candidate publicly denied encouraging such activity. It is, I should stress, unimaginable that such shenanigans would succeed in the modern age.

For all its imperfections, the rise of semi-democracy in the late Victorian era did lead to seismic changes in the way that politics was conducted. These had seminal implications for Members of Parliament and hence the House of Commons itself. Four features mattered.

The first was the rise of the professional party agent as a key electoral actor. Paradoxically perhaps the 1883 Act encouraged this development because it required compliance (or the appearance of compliance) which only a specialist could provide. The main activities of the agent were ensuring that probable party supporters were placed on the electoral register while employing every trick in the book to remove likely partisan foes from the electoral roll.

The second was the emergence of formal constituency associations based on individual membership. This meant that for the first time candidates and MPs had to consider the opinions of the activists on whom they relied as a political machine at election time rather than simply rest assured of their own wisdom.

The third, allied to the second, was the arrival of the local party-sponsored club. These were usually social in nature involving inexpensive alcohol but could be more varied than that. In urban areas it could include brass bands and football teams which MPs were expected to subsidise. In other parts of the country it was entirely normal to see the political parties involved in friendly societies, building societies and even sick and burial societies. This would, again, have been close to an affront to MPs on all sides a few decades previously.

Finally, there was, in embryonic form at least, the invention of political manifestos. These started with Gladstone's "Midlothian campaigns" in the late 1870s, Joseph Chamberlain's "Unauthorised Programme" in the 1880s and the "Newcastle Programme" of the early 1890s. Policy was beginning to be formed outside Parliament and not by MPs or Peers exclusively.

All of which had, on the eve of the battle that would culminate in the Parliament Act of 1911, an extraordinary impact on the House of Commons itself. The conduct of parliamentary politics would be little short of revolutionised. This can be seen in several dimensions.

The first was in the pattern of sittings. Before this time, service in the House was seen as a civic obligation for those who could afford to undertake it, not a full-time endeavour.

As a matter of course, Parliament would rise for the shooting season in August and return in February, The new politics of semi-democratic Britain made this timetable an impractical luxury. This took a bit of getting used to: in October 1908 *Country Life* said “Next week Parliament will reassemble. The politicians who are at the head of the Government may think it necessary that this should be done; but the country gentleman as a rule looks upon an autumn session as an unmitigated nuisance. It takes him up to Town at a time when both sport and duty call for his presence at home; for when he is the owner of a great estate it is the pleasant days between now and Christmas that he has the chance of walking over his land and finding how his tenants have been treating it and what improvements may be necessary. Furthermore, the duties of the autumn session are only such as a man performs for the sake of his conscience.” But the times were surely changing.

The second dimension was that when Parliament sat it began to do so on the Government's terms. Persistent obstructionism by the Irish Nationalists led to Speaker Brand by executive decision introducing the closure of debate (although Gladstone would not have been sorry that he did). Although in the early days of the closure it had to be approved by a three to one majority (an interesting feature whose possible application to modern times I might speak about on another occasion) it was not long before the closure could be approved by a simple majority vote, to the great comfort and advantage of the Government of the day. The business of Ministers started to take precedence over that of humble backbenchers; the overall level of scrutiny undoubtedly fell.

The third was far tighter and tougher party discipline. The notion of an MP being associated with his conscience first and his party colours thereafter looked increasingly anachronistic. Whereas Governments, even those with hearty majorities, would regularly lose 10 to 15 votes in the House every year in the 1850s, this had become an average of one per session in the immediate period before the Parliament Act was adopted. By 1911 about nine in ten divisions saw a majority of Liberals cast votes differently from a majority of Conservatives.

It was surely the rancour over Home Rule which accelerated this trend. As one scholar of this time concludes: “After 1886 governments ceased to be able to rely upon support from oppositions which now criticised everything but without the prospect of defeating anything”. All of this, unsurprisingly, had a transformative effect on the people who

became MPs. Between 1868 and 1910 it is estimated that landowners fell from almost half of Conservative Members of Parliament to little more than a quarter of them. In the same timeframe, the percentage of Liberal MPs who were landowners tumbled from 26 per cent to 7 per cent. Those whose background was in industry, by contrast, increased from just under a third to over a half among Conservatives and from half to two-thirds within the Liberal caucus. The legal profession, in particular, saw a striking increase in its parliamentary representation. The rise of the professional politician was accompanied by the rise of the professional party political donor to fund their often quite expensive campaign activities. Contemporaries bemoaned the fact that the rate of creation of peerages in the 1880s and the 1890s was twice that of the 1830s and 1840s. Lesser honours such as knighthoods proliferated as well.

Much of this might strike us today as the march of modernisation and meritocracy. It was not only reactionaries, though, who expressed concern and disapproval at that time. This change occurred at a moment when Britain's industrial supremacy was being challenged by rivals and there were plenty of perfectly intelligent commentators who were willing to link the two developments. The esteemed M. Ostrogowski's epic treatise *Democracy and the Organisation of Political Parties* (1902) highlighted the damage which he believed that the new politics was inflicting upon the House of Commons. A few years later, the respected American academic A.L. Lowell used his *The Government of England* (1908) to regret the centralisation of power in the Cabinet and the related decline in the status and standing of the House of Commons.

Those who believed in the "National Efficiency" movement to combat the rise of Germany and the United States were even more forceful in their assessment of the new political arrangements. I want to close this section with a lengthy quotation from Martin Pugh and I invite you to close your eyes and consider how much of this might still be argued: "Critics argued that popular democracy had warped parliamentary politics by rendering it vulnerable to sectional pressures. Governments were run increasingly by amateurs adept at party warfare but incompetent in administration and the development of policy. They were obliged to indulge in sham conflicts on irrelevant issues that turned Parliament into an entertainment for a few partisans. 'Party is an evil', declared Rosebery, 'its operation blights efficiency'. One striking consequence of this was held to be that too much authority had lapsed to the Treasury whose narrow retrenchment philosophy killed both military innovation and social reconstruction; it also tended to eliminate the contribution of the expert and businessman to administration. This

debilitating process was evident too at a local level where specialists like doctors and engineers were losing out to the generalist or bureaucrat.”

Not everyone in the first decade of the last century, I should stress, agreed with this assessment. Yet there were plenty of influential individuals who had some sympathy for at least a section of this analysis. We should bear this in mind when reflecting on the fierce contest between the House of Commons and House of Lords that led to the 1911 showdown.

THE POLITICS OF THE PARLIAMENT ACT 1911.

The road to the Parliament Act is one which is often portrayed as a by-product of Lloyd George's People's Budget two years earlier. I want to assert this evening that it was a longer and more complicated path than that. It was instead the direct result of the 1906 General Election outcome which produced a massive Liberal majority in the House of Commons. It was, in my view, the political and institutional response to this which would lead to crisis.

Between the severe Conservative split over the Corn Laws in 1846 and the almost as traumatic Liberal divide on Home Rule four decades later, Liberal majority administrations were the norm in the United Kingdom. Only once during this forty year stretch, when Disraeli was Prime Minister between 1874 and 1880, did the Conservative Party control the House of Commons on its own terms. After the Home Rule battle, however, the situation was reversed. Conservative or Conservative/Liberal Unionist administration became the norm with but one minority Liberal Government dependent entirely on Irish Nationalist support occurring between 1892 and 1895. The astonishing events of 1905-1906 in which a sitting Conservative Government abandoned office, an initially minority Liberal administration obtained power and immediately sought a dissolution, winning a massive majority, were thus completely out of kilter with what had been standard political assumptions for 20 years. The net effect was to produce a House of Commons with a huge Liberal majority alongside a House of Lords where the Conservatives were no less dominant. In the previous few decades conventions had emerged in which the Upper House had ceded some of its authority to the more democratically elected Lower House but none of this was codified on the statute book. It was a matter of political calculation by each side how far to press its relative advantage.

It soon became clear that the Conservatives in both Chambers accepted that the Liberals had a mandate to maintain free trade rather than embark upon Tariff Reform but not much else. The two Houses clashed almost immediately. The first victim was a landmark Education Bill in 1906 which sailed through the House of Commons but was crushed in the Lords. A similar fate awaited the Plural Voting Bill shortly afterwards. In the next session a much more modest Education Bill was also blocked along with an Irish Devolution Bill and a Licensing Bill (causes especially close to Liberal hearts). The Government tabled a motion in the House of Commons insisting on the supremacy of the Commons over the Lords. It triggered a heated three-day debate but nothing changed as a consequence. Not only was this deadlock sapping for Liberal morale but it undermined the standing of the Government. In the course of 1908 the Liberals lost no fewer than eight by-elections. When Winston Churchill sought re-election in his North-West Manchester seat after his elevation to the Cabinet (it was the convention that this should occur in those days) he was defeated too (but was almost immediately elected for Dundee instead; they knew how to fix things then). The Liberal landslide of 1906 had become an institutional mudslide by the outset of 1909. As Roy Jenkins in his famous account *Mr Balfour's Poodle* published in 1954 would later put it: "For three years the smallest Opposition within living memory had effectively decided what could, and could not, be passed through Parliament. In the language of the day, the cup was full, and the sands were exhaustively ploughed."

In 1908 Herbert Asquith became Prime Minister and David Lloyd George his Chancellor of the Exchequer. They swiftly appreciated that their only hope of enacting major social reform was to incorporate these measures into Finance Bills which, by convention, the Lords would not seek to scupper. Much the same was, incidentally, true of the Obama White House's approach to health care in the United States last year where only the employment of a legislative device concerning the Budget could overcome a filibuster in the Senate. So in framing his 1909 Budget Lloyd George quite deliberately introduced within it provisions that in ordinary times would have been the subject of separate legislation. A further factor which the Welsh Wizard had to take into account was that after a successful campaign by the Admiralty, cheered on by the popular press ("We want eight, and we won't wait"), the Government had found itself almost bounced into purchasing four extra battleships with four more to come in the not too distant future.

The Chancellor's response to all this was a Budget which raised the then staggering sum of £16 million in additional revenues to pay for both the new Old Age Pensions

scheme that the Liberals favoured and the naval hardware that most of their Conservative foes craved. To square the financial circle, Lloyd George introduced a Super-Tax on the highest incomes, Death Duties on estates over £5,000 – the equivalent of £285,300 today – and, most radically of all, a system of Land Taxes not dissimilar to the Capital Gains Tax regime of our own times. He topped this up with traditional Liberal crowd-pleasers such as additional duties on alcohol, tobacco and liquor licences (these were sufficiently harsh to induce the Irish Nationalists to oppose his package).

This was a bold but incredibly divisive enterprise. A Budget Protest League was formed almost instantly with a Budget League emerging to make the case for the Chancellor. In the House of Commons, it is worth noting, there were relatively few fireworks to begin with. The Budget speech had been very long (two hours 47 minutes, a break to restore his voice with beef tea and then another hour and 47 minutes) and unusually dull by Lloyd George's standards. In the early months of the Budget debate in the House of Commons he was restrained in his rhetoric. In truth, the measures he had proposed were controversial enough within his own party ranks without stirring up the Opposition. Besides which, few observers at this stage seriously believed that the House of Lords would take the incendiary step of voting a Budget down.

As it became clear that they might, Parliamentary language hardened. The House of Commons passed the Budget at the outset of November and awaited the reaction of their Lordships. Constitutional authorities debated what the accepted rules of behaviour were and a tentative conclusion was reached that the Lords could not amend a Budget but could reject it in its entirety. Amid extraordinary scenes, the Lords decided on November 10th to throw out the Finance Bill. On December 2nd, Asquith moved a resolution in the House of Commons which declared that the Lords had exceeded their rights and that a general election would follow in January 1910.

The outcome of the election was in one sense inconclusive but in another quite decisive. The Liberals and Conservatives won almost identical numbers of seats and neither had a majority. Both of the minor parties – Labour and the Irish Nationalists – were, however, albeit for different reasons, resolutely in support of Lloyd George's proposals. The 1909 Budget was now safe (the Lords allowed it through in April without a division). The issue was whether it should be followed by legislation to ensure that nothing like this clash could take place again.

This was not as straightforward a matter as it might seem for the Cabinet. A Parliament Act would also remove any remaining excuse for not proceeding with Home Rule, as the Irish Nationalists who now held the balance of power in the House of Commons demanded, but Home Rule had proved as toxic for the Liberal Party as Tariff Reform was for the Tories. All sides accepted that it was a sensational constitutional step. Yet it was decided to take it.

The Parliament Act started with three resolutions adopted by the House of Commons. The drafting of both of these and of the subsequent Bill owed much to the Clerk of the House of the day, the splendidly named Sir Courtney Peregrine Ilbert. The resolutions were (1) that the Lords could not in future amend or reject a Money Bill (the Speaker being the person charged with ruling as to what was a Money Bill), (2) that if a Bill were rejected by the Lords it would become law provided that not less than two years elapsed between the introduction in the Commons and its third reading there and (3) that the maximum tenure of Parliaments should be reduced from seven years (where it had been set since 1716) to five.

At this stage it looked as if the Lords might respond relatively meekly. It was understood that a rejection of the Parliament Bill would trigger a further general election which if won by the Liberal-Labour-Irish Nationalist coalition would surely trigger either surrender by the Lords or, horror of horrors, the mass creation of peers by Edward VII to resolve the situation. Fate intervened with the sudden death of the monarch and the succession of George V, some of whose advisers were willing to entertain resisting the will of an elected administration.

A six month constitutional convention then took place behind closed doors in an attempt to secure a deal which would relieve George V of his unwanted situation. A lot of progress was made, so much so that Lloyd George and Winston Churchill became sympathetic to the idea of a Liberal-Conservative coalition to deal with other thorny matters such as Ireland. The sticking point, ultimately, was that the Opposition insisted that all constitutional measures, if dismissed twice by the Lords, would be automatically determined by a national referendum. This was a none-too-subtle attempt to ensure that Home Rule could always be prevented.

Matters were now stuck. A further general election was called for December 1910 although what George V would do if the Liberals remained in office was far from unambiguous. A private pledge to create the necessary number of peers to pass the

Parliament Act was extracted but the electorate was not let in on the secret. In the event, the result of this ballot was almost exactly the same as the one held at the beginning of the year. Asquith remained Prime Minister and the Parliament Act returned to the House of Commons. In March it was adopted on a vote of 368 to 273 on second reading and by late June it was with the Lords.

As incredible as it might seem today, there remained many in the Lords who favoured throwing the Parliament Bill out again. Some suggested a reform in the composition of the second chamber as an alternative to constraining its authority, others just urged resistance either believing that the threat to place several hundred more Liberals in ermine was a bluff or that the King would not deliver on it. When Asquith announced in the House of Commons in July that he had the word of George V he was howled down in a manner that has probably never been seen before or since in the Chamber. The politically explosive character of the situation was caused not merely by the Bill itself but the widespread expectation that its passage would be the dry run for Home Rule in Ireland and civil war there as a consequence.

The Lords were, however, cornered. They were split between the “hedgers”, those who viewed the Bill as less odious than hundreds of new Liberal colleagues who would provide no check and balance to the House of Commons, and the “ditchers” who were ready to die in the last ditch in defence of traditional arrangements. The intense political temperature was not assisted by the actual heat – the summer of 1911 was one of the hottest on record and the Palace of Westminster has never been strong on air conditioning. As the heat outside the Palace soared to almost 100 degrees (and that inside must have been more appalling), the House of Lords accepted the Parliament Bill by a majority of 131 votes to 114 votes.

THE LESSONS OF THE PARLIAMENT ACT STRUGGLE

There are five aspects to the extraordinary historical story that I have told that I would like to highlight. They reflect the fact that the 1911 Act was an even more dramatic constitutional innovation than it seems and that in many ways it still shapes the politics with which we live.

The first concerns the background to the titanic contest between the Commons and the Lords. It is absolutely stunning to me how much of what we regard as extremely modern features of politics – professionalisation, the dominance of the executive over the

legislature and the party machine over the individual MP – were actually a matter of intense discussion a century ago. That Lloyd George twisted the knife in 1911 by proposing the payment of MPs to entrench the rise of the professional politician was perhaps logical. This would seem to suggest, at one level, that these features – professionalism and the command of political party over parliamentary chamber – are the almost automatic by-products of the coming of democracy, which is a rather depressing conclusion. Yet if democracy means anything it must be about balancing power not awarding it exclusively to the executive or the legislature. It seems to me that the challenge of how to revive the best, even if idealised, spirit of independence of the pre-democratic House of Commons in a thoroughly democratic era such as our own remains the principal one for reformers of all stripes today.

In recent decades, the balance between the Government and Parliament has swung too sharply in favour of the former and against the latter. This is recognised today on all sides. It is worth stressing that a reassertion of Parliament cannot be achieved, and should not be attempted, by a nostalgic reversion to the practice of packing Parliament with aristocrats or plutocrats. Rather, empowering backbenchers individually, collectively, and institutionally is the way forward. The proposals set out by the Wright Committee earlier this year and adopted on an all-party basis at the behest of backbenchers in something akin to a Peasants' Revolt are an important first step towards achieving the balance that our forefathers in the first decade of the 20th century would have considered desirable. They are not, however, the final word.

The second aspect of this saga that I find intriguing is the role of strategy and tactics in the relationship between the two Chambers. The People's Budget was the logical consequence of the previous willingness of the House of Lords to strike down a series of substantial domestic legislative initiatives by the Liberal Government which had that government looking as if it was in office but not in power. Once the Lords had taken the nuclear option of dismissing a Budget wholesale it was all but impossible for Asquith to avoid bringing forward a Parliament Bill even though he had limited enthusiasm for the controversy it would ignite and the way in which it would fuse the issue of parliamentary reform with that of Home Rule for Ireland.

It was not inevitable that the House of Lords had to adopt such a posture. It could have been more respectful of the emerging democratic world and accepted or offered constructive amendments to the likes of the Education Bill. It could have stepped back

from demolishing the People's Budget. Indeed, the institutional genius of the House of Lords since 1911 is that it has, as a rule, played its hand much more subtly in the period since then than it did in the five years which led up to what many peers then deemed their parliamentary emasculation. When confronted with similar partisan splits to those of Edwardian Britain but under Clement Attlee, Harold Wilson and Tony Blair, the Lords were, perfectly properly, content to jab at the majority in the House of Commons when they felt the majority there was in the wrong place, but they have rarely sought to land a knockout blow. It was in the early 1960s that the legendary Muhammad Ali coined the motto "float like a butterfly, sting like a bee" but the sentiment had already been serving their Lordships well in the aftermath of their 1911 debacle. After all, the consequence for a bee of stinging its opponent is, as we know, its own destruction.

The third, perhaps less obvious assertion involves the impact which the Parliament Bill had on the relationship between the House of Commons and the monarchy. The sensationally tense political atmosphere of 1910-1912 was perhaps the last moment when it was argued seriously that a king might in effect dismiss a Prime Minister who had the confidence of a majority in the House of Commons and send for the Leader of the Opposition in his place. One of the King's Private Secretaries is thought to have favoured such a confrontation. The other, mercifully, did not, and if Robert Rhodes James's account of what happened is right that person was willing to tell the young king a bare-faced lie – that Balfour would not take office and lead a minority Conservative administration in these circumstances – in order to avoid such a situation. It would have been absolutely fatal for the monarchy if it had taken sides in this political sandstorm. Its very survival as an institution would have been under threat. We have the constitutional monarchy we enjoy today because the right call was made then.

The fourth feature that I find fascinating is that even though this was a semi-democratic age the will of the people was considered decisive in the battle over the Budget of 1909 and the Parliament Act of 1911. When the Lords rashly threw out the Budget in November 1909 it was the election of January 1910 which settled the question. When the Lords made it plain in the course of 1910 that they would not accept Asquith's version of the Parliament Bill it was the election of December 1910 which forced George V to promise a mass creation if needed. In the debates about the future balance of power between the House of Commons and Lords it was the notion of referendums which was put forward as the tie-breaker. Indeed, it was at this time that the Conservatives sought to extricate themselves from their dilemma that their activists

loved Tariff Reform while most of the electorate loathed it by pledging that no such change would be introduced without a referendum or a subsequent general election. All of which amounts to the observation that Britain achieved the notion of popular sovereignty before it had witnessed universal male adult suffrage, never mind votes for women.

The final section of this episode that I would like to note is a somewhat personal one. The impact that it had on the office of Speaker of the House of Commons. Before the 1911 Act the Speaker was the arbiter of what went on within the Chamber but not much beyond it. The provisions of the Parliament Act 1911 assigned to him, uniquely, the task of deciding on behalf of the House of Commons what legislation was the unique preserve of the Commons, an obligation that I still exercise. In the wider political debates of 1910-1911 a further extension of the authority of the Speaker was contemplated. When the convention of 1910 discussed what to do with constitutional measures where the House of Commons and House of Lords were in dispute it was again suggested that the Speaker should be the individual to decide what was and was not a constitutional proposal, a situation which would not have been a comfortable one when it came to the administration of Ireland. The requirement to determine what is a Money Bill has not politicised my office. A sweeping obligation to decide what is and is not a constitutional piece of legislation would be a much hotter potato.

It has been a privilege to discuss the events of the first decade or so of the last century with such an audience. I thank you for your patience this evening. It seems to me, in defence of myself, that the period under discussion is so fascinating and its consequences so profound that it is well worth an extended examination. I expect that the remainder of this lecture series will be at least as stimulating as the territory we have covered this evening. I would now welcome your questions whether on 1910-11 or 2010-11. Thank you very much indeed.