

LORD RANDOLPH CHURCHILL AND TORY DEMOCRACY, 1880–1885

R. E. QUINAULT
Magdalen College, Oxford

The Tory democracy is a democracy which has embraced the principles of the Tory party. Lord Randolph Churchill: November 1885¹

My only desire is to see the game properly and scientifically played and the Conservative Party fairly strong in the next Parliament, and I do not care a rap who carries off the laurels and the credits. Churchill to Salisbury: April 1885²

‘Lord Randolph Churchill and Tory democracy’ is a cliché topic of late-Victorian historiography. All the monographs on Lord Randolph emphasise his enthusiasm for tory democracy.³ This enthusiasm has been explained by recent historians of Victorian Conservatism in terms of personal ambition rather than commitment to specific policies.⁴ But both these schools of interpretation are based on mistaken assumptions and insufficient or misleading evidence. I believe that neither the ‘orthodox’ nor the ‘revisionist’ explanations of Churchill’s involvement with tory democracy fit the facts of the case in most of their aspects. The following inquiry examines the various ways in which Churchill actually *was*, or has been alleged to have been, involved with that ambiguous concept, tory democracy. This necessitates an examination of the usage and meaning which Churchill gave to the phrase and of the extent to which he associated it with progressive social policies. It is also instructive to compare Churchill’s outlook with that of Gorst, his Fourth Party colleague, who was also identified with tory democracy. In order to assess the role which ambition played in determining Churchill’s support for tory democracy it is necessary to consider his relations with the official tory leaders and his own political expectations. Finally, it is relevant to

¹ *The Times*, 7 Nov. 1885 (Churchill’s speech at Manchester).

² Hatfield House (Salisbury papers): Churchill to Salisbury, 28 Apr. 1885.

³ *Speeches of the Rt. Hon. Lord Randolph Churchill 1880–1888*, ed. Louis J. Jennings (London, 1889), 1, xx–xxiv; T. H. S. Escott, *Randolph Spencer-Churchill as a portrait of his age, being a personal and political monograph* (London, 1895), p. 3; Lord Rosebery, *Lord Randolph Churchill* (London, 1906), pp. 149–54; Winston S. Churchill, *Lord Randolph Churchill* (London, 1907 edn), pp. 231–9; Robert Rhodes James, *Lord Randolph Churchill* (London, 1969), p. 121.

⁴ Paul Smith, *Disraelian Conservatism and social reform* (London, 1967), p. 323; Robert Blake, *The Conservative party from Peel to Churchill* (London, 1970), pp. 153–4.

examine his involvement in the activities of the National Union of Conservative Associations. On the one hand, it has been argued that his role in the National Union was indicative of his desire to launch progressive toryism on a recalcitrant party, while on the other, it has been viewed simply as part of his campaign to further his own position in the party.⁵

I

In a strictly literal sense, there is remarkably little evidence to connect Churchill directly with the phrase 'tory democracy'. Between 1880 and 1885, Churchill made very many speeches both in and out of parliament which were reported verbatim. Yet, as far as I am aware, Churchill used the phrase 'tory democracy' in only three speeches and in one article. Two of these allusions were merely passing references and only one attempted to define the phrase. Churchill first used the expression in the Commons in 1882, when he briefly referred to 'the great Tory democracy which Lord Beaconsfield partly constructed, that was formed in 1874'.⁶ Used in this context, the phrase meant little more than a majority Conservative government. Six months later, Churchill wrote in his article, 'Elijah's Mantle':

The expression 'Tory Democracy' has excited the wonder of some, the alarm of others, and great and bitter ridicule from the Radical party. It has, unfortunately, been subjected to some discredit by having been used by Mr Forwood, the Conservative candidate at the last Liverpool election, who used it without knowing what he was talking about. But the 'Tory Democracy' may yet exist...⁷

Churchill's reference to the Liverpool by-election of December 1882 was significant because it was on that occasion that the phrase 'Tory democracy' crept into the press and thus into national political parlance. It was immediately identified with an almost radical kind of progressive Conservatism. *The Times*, for example, portrayed Forwood as an advanced tory whose views were far too liberal for the Conservative leaders.⁸ Thus, it would seem that Churchill's use of the expression 'tory democracy' merely echoed the attention it had received in the press. Moreover, he dissociated himself from the one prominent Conservative popularly regarded as a tory democrat. Churchill had no contact with Forwood at this time and apparently did not appreciate the latter's real position. Forwood had been christened a tory democrat by his Liberal opponents and he only accepted the appellation after declaring that

⁵ For the former view see: Winston Churchill, p. 245; for the latter view see: R. T. Mackenzie, *British political parties* (London, 1955), pp. 25-6, 167.

⁶ *Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd series] 1882, CCLXXIV, 613.

⁷ *The Fortnightly Review*, CXCVII (1883), 621.

⁸ *The Times*, 9 Dec. 1882.

democratic toryism had an essentially conservative function.⁹ But the press was not interested in such niceties and its treatment of Forwood was a precedent for its subsequent treatment of Churchill.

The allusion in 'Elijah's Mantle' was not intended as an overture to a democratic tory oratorio by Churchill. For over two years, he never used the phrase 'tory democracy' in public again. But his apparent championing of progressive Conservatism in 1884 led Churchill to be widely regarded as the principal advocate of tory democracy.¹⁰ Once this belief had become current it rapidly took on a life of its own which had little connection with any specific statements by Churchill. When Wilfrid Blunt asked Churchill to define tory democracy in 1885, the latter confessed his ignorance, but thought it 'principally opportunism'.¹¹ Blunt's testimony is not always reliable, but his story has been taken as proof that Churchill merely regarded tory democracy as a vehicle for his own ambition.¹² But this interpretation is doubtful, in view of Churchill's reluctance directly to associate himself with tory democracy. There is no evidence that he regarded his personal motivation as synonymous with tory democracy. In October 1885, an admirer asked Churchill to take the first public opportunity to define 'what is now known as Tory democracy, of which you are the accredited chief and leader'. But significantly, the correspondent was unclear where Churchill stood on the matter:

Some say you desire to give the power in the State to the people and as such call you either a disguised Radical or renegade Conservative. But I have several times volunteered the suggestion that . . . the so called Tory Democrat . . . is a man who will preserve all that is old and good but who is ready to give the *control* of it to the people. . .¹³

Churchill responded to this request by devoting the last paragraph of a long speech at Manchester, in November 1885, to an attempt to define tory democracy. He agreed with his correspondent and with Forwood in that he saw tory democracy as little more than popular support for the traditional props of toryism: the monarchy, the house of lords and the Church of England. 'Under the protection of those great and ancient institutions' tory democracy would 'secure the path of administrative and social reform'.¹⁴ But he was no more specific on this point and *The Times* acidly commented:

On some other occasion we shall get a better explanation than this of the nature

⁹ Hampshire Record Office (Forwood papers): Forwood to the Liverpool Working Men's Conservative Association, 29 Jan. 1883. I am indebted to P. J. Waller, of Merton College, Oxford, for drawing my attention to this reference.

¹⁰ See, for example, *The Times*, 8 May 1884.

¹¹ W. S. Blunt, *Gordon at Khartoum* (London, 1911), p. 414.

¹² Robert Blake, *The Conservative party from Peel to Churchill* (London, 1970 edn.), p. 153.

¹³ Churchill College, Cambridge (Lord Randolph Churchill papers): RCHL 1/8/951: F. A. Adams to Churchill, 5 Oct. 1885.

¹⁴ *The Times*, 7 Nov. 1885.

of Tory democracy. If the exposition of it given last night at Manchester were correct, we should be tempted to regard it as a very flimsy political organisation, not likely to live long.¹⁵

But Churchill never did give a better explanation of tory democracy. Indeed, he never tried to define it in public again.

Since Churchill used the phrase tory democracy so occasionally and in an ambiguous or conservative sense why did he come to be regarded as the champion of progressive Conservatism? Part of the explanation is to be found in his association with the 'Fourth Party' – a tiny group of tory freelances below the gangway in the house of commons. The 'Fourth Party' was originally formed to further the cause of traditional toryism, not progressive Conservatism.¹⁶ But the militant attitude of the group and its apparent independence from the official tory leadership led it to become a symbol of a new kind of popular toryism.¹⁷ Moreover, Gorst, one of the members of the Fourth Party, had long wished to modernize and popularize the organization of the Conservative party. He wrote to Churchill in September 1882:

The time seems ripe for the rise of the Democratic Tory party, which was always Disraeli's dream, at the head of which you might easily place yourself. I want to write an article on the feebleness of the Conservative party as a political organization; pointing out that it is led by and in the interest of a narrow oligarchic and land-owning class, and that the people in whom the real Conservatism of the nation resides have no voice in the matter.¹⁸

Precisely these arguments are contained in an article entitled 'The State of the Opposition', written by 'Two Conservatives', which appeared later that year.¹⁹ Almost certainly Gorst was one of the authors, but there is no evidence that Churchill was his co-author. Yet it has been claimed that this article was the democratic tory manifesto of Churchill and his Fourth Party friends.²⁰ But there is evidence that Churchill disagreed with Gorst's article in important respects.

In the spring of 1883, Churchill published, under his own name, two letters to *The Times* and his article 'Elijah's Mantle'. Most historians have relied on Winston Churchill's incomplete and misleading summary of his father's arguments in these works.²¹ But an examination of the originals shows that at this time Churchill's opinions were not synonymous with those of Gorst. The latter, in 'The State of the Opposition', blamed the 1880 tory electoral defeat on aristocratic control of the party. But

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ See: R. E. Quinault, 'The Fourth Party and the Conservative opposition to Bradlaugh 1880–88', *Eng. Hist. Rev.* xc1 (1976), 315–40.

¹⁷ *Vanity Fair*, xxiv (1880), 186.

¹⁸ RCHL 1/1/76: Gorst to Churchill, 10 Sept. 1882.

¹⁹ Two Conservatives, 'The state of the Opposition', *The Fortnightly Review*, cxc1 (1882).

²⁰ Escott, pp. 158–82. Rhodes James, p. 131.

²¹ Winston Churchill, pp. 195–203.

Churchill, though he attacked the party wire-pullers and appealed to the 'new Conservatives' in the country, did not attack the aristocratic nature of the party.²² Indeed, he declared that the nucleus of the tory party was the house of lords.²³ Whereas Gorst attacked the folly of the tory peers for opposing the Arrears Bill in 1882, Churchill defended their action in his second letter to *The Times* and in 'Elijah's Mantle' praised the Lords for their bold rejection of the Compensation for Disturbance Bill. But Gorst, on the other hand, denounced such action on behalf of the Irish landlords. There were other clear divergences of opinion. While Churchill criticised Northcote, Gorst referred to 'the ability and sagacity of Sir Stafford Northcote'. Gorst stressed the key importance of creating popular tory organizations in the large boroughs, whereas Churchill thought that the electoral problem was not in England, but in the Celtic fringe and believed something might be done in Ireland. One final difference concerned party tactics. While Gorst declared that a whig alliance would not avert the fall of exclusive toryism, Churchill thought the tories should ally with all dissident groups, including the whigs, in order to defeat the government. Thus, although Gorst and Churchill were sometimes close allies on certain questions, they were not Tweedledum and Tweedledee.

The growth of Churchill's political reputation owed less to his association with the Fourth Party than has been claimed.²⁴ His success, both in the Commons and in the country, was largely the product of his oratorical ability and his mastery of the main political question of the day—the Irish problem. Churchill's views on the latter were virtually uninfluenced by those of his Fourth Party colleagues. But on Ireland, as on other matters, Churchill was greatly influenced by the views of his parents, the duke and duchess of Marlborough.²⁵ They, moreover, ensured that Randolph did not directly commit his own political fortunes to the 'new' forces of urban Conservatism before 1884. Although invited to stand for Manchester in 1882, Churchill declined because of the opposition of his parents.²⁶ He therefore remained M.P. for Woodstock, his family's pocket, rural borough constituency, until after the death of his father in 1883. Even then, he did not agree to stand for Birmingham till January 1884, when the impending Reform Bill made the abolition of the Woodstock constituency a virtual certainty. Churchill remained M.P. for Woodstock till December 1885: winning another election there on his admission to the tory cabinet in June 1885.

²² *The Times*, 2, 9 April 1883.

²³ Lord Randolph Churchill, 'Elijah's mantle', *The Fortnightly Review*, cxcvii (1883), 619.

²⁴ H. E. Gorst, *The Fourth Party* (London, 1906), p. 318.

²⁵ See R. E. Quinault, 'Lord Randolph Churchill and Irish Home Rule', *Irish Historical Studies* (forthcoming).

²⁶ RCHL 1/1/84: Churchill to W. Houldsworth, 14 Nov. 1882.

II

Between 1880 and 1885 Churchill paid relatively little attention in his public speeches to progressive legislation and social reform. Throughout the period, he concentrated his oratorical efforts on both criticizing the record of the Liberal government and upholding the traditional tory view of the constitution. In 1883, for example, he opposed progressive reforms which undermined the position of the monarchy, the Church, the house of lords, the Irish Union and the rights of property.²⁷ Nevertheless, by the later 1880s Churchill had acquired a reputation, in certain tory circles, as an advanced social reformer. Thus Louis Jennings claimed that on 'innumerable social questions... Lord Randolph was... nearly a quarter of a century before his party'.²⁸ But there is little evidence to validate this claim before 1883. In 1875, Churchill did vote for Dilke's Cottagers Allotment Bill, but his support simply reflected electoral pressure, since a majority of his constituents were agricultural labourers.²⁹ Before 1880, in the main, he adopted an ultra tory line on domestic policy. In 1878, for example, he opposed the Women's Disabilities Removal Bill, the Capital Punishment Abolition Bill and the County Government Bill.³⁰ The latter, he complained, 'was based, like the rest of recent Tory legislation, upon principles which were purely democratic'.³¹ In 1880, the new Liberal government introduced an Employers Liability Bill. Winston Churchill claimed that the Fourth Party criticized the measure 'entirely in the interests of the working classes' and 'in accordance with the spirit of Lord Beaconsfield's progressive Toryism'.³² But Churchill personally attacked the Bill as much in the interests of the employers as of the employees. He favoured unlimited liability as 'less damaging to an employer than a limited liability'.³³ His amending clause was supported by traditional tories like Newdegate and opposed by all the leading Liberal radicals.³⁴ The Fourth Party did little collective campaigning on behalf of the working classes. In 1883, they did support, along with the radicals, a measure to prevent the employment of young girls in heavy industry, but this episode did not arouse public interest or controversy.³⁵

The first time Churchill considered the question of social reform in general, was in the last paragraph of his article, 'Elijah's Mantle'. He took as his keynote Beaconsfield's phrase of 1871 – 'Sanitas sanitatum, omnia sanitas' – which he thought 'ought to guide Tory leaders at the present

²⁷ Herbert Vivian, *Myself not least, being the personal reminiscences of 'X'* (London, 1925), p. 24.

²⁸ Jennings, I, xxiii.

²⁹ *House of commons divisions 1874–5*, p. 447: 14 July, 1875.

³⁰ *House of commons divisions 1878*: 19 June, 13 Mar.

³¹ P.D. 1878, CCXXXVIII, 907.

³² Winston Churchill, pp. 111–12.

³³ P.D. 1880, CCLV, 241–2.

³⁴ *House of commons divisions 1880*: 13 Aug.

³⁵ *House of commons divisions 1883*: 9 May & P.D. 1883, CCLXXIX, 351–2.

time'.³⁶ But he made no attempt to sketch out a full programme of social reform. He merely mentioned, approvingly, the particular welfare reforms suggested by two tory peers – Salisbury and Carnarvon – and three Liberals – Bryce, Lawson and Collings. Churchill emphasized that such social reforms should be inexpensive – 'Public and private thrift must animate the whole'.³⁷ His ideas about social reform had little in common with the objectives of advanced contemporary radicals, but were reminiscent of the policies adopted by Disraeli's government after 1874 or of mid-Victorian Liberal radical schemes. Even after 1883, Churchill had little to say on most social questions. In March 1884, he quietly advocated State provision of free elementary education, but he did not wish to make it a party question and did not refer to it in his major speeches.³⁸ When Blunt asked Churchill, in 1885, whether he had any special scheme for improving the condition of the poor, he replied, 'No, but Lord Salisbury has.'³⁹ Unlike Salisbury, Churchill did not sit on the Royal Commission on the housing of the working classes or write on that topic, although it was the most debated social question in 1883–4.⁴⁰

But there was one social reform which Churchill did champion and which involved him in considerable controversy in 1884 – urban leasehold enfranchisement. In 1883, the rising cost of renewing leases, especially in London, provoked ire amongst the lessees which led to the creation of the Leasehold Enfranchisement Society. The latter was founded by Henry Broadhurst, a radical Liberal M.P., who introduced a Leasehold Enfranchisement Bill into the Commons.⁴¹ This measure was not initially supported by the Fourth Party, but Churchill and Wolff, sensing popular feeling, decided to bring in their own Bill. Wolff advised Churchill to restrict the proposed draft to urban areas:

... for the town occupier you would obtain great support on our side whereas the case of farms would frighten them... from what I can learn, most of your secret admirers are among our country gentlemen and I should not if I were you cut into them by destroying what they like best in their landed property, the feeling of the 'signoria' and the rights of sport-they all labour under the nuisance of leases for their town houses.⁴²

Their Leasehold Enfranchisement Bill was therefore restricted to urban sanitary districts.⁴³ But it was a wider Bill introduced by Broadhurst which was debated by the Commons. In his speech Churchill attacked the

³⁶ 'Elijah's mantle', p. 621.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ RCHL 1/2/310: Churchill to ?, 10 Mar. 1884.

³⁹ Blunt, p. 465: 23 July 1885.

⁴⁰ Andrew Mearns, *The bitter cry of outcast London*, ed. A. S. Wohl (Leicester, 1970), pp. 9–35.

⁴¹ D. A. Reeder, 'The politics of urban leaseholds in late Victorian England', *Internat. Rev. Soc. Hist.* vi (1961), 415–19.

⁴² RCHL 1/2/207: Wolff to Churchill, 8 Nov. 1883.

⁴³ *Parl. papers 1884*, III, Public Bills no. 90 (8 Feb. 1884). No reference to Lord Randolph's support for leasehold enfranchisement in 1884 is made in Winston's biography.

behaviour of 'the great Whig dukes who covered London with their bloated estates'.⁴⁴ By contrast, his own ducal family, did not own any significant amount of real estate in urban districts. Wolff had previously made a similar complaint about whig landlords:

We are in London the vassals of Whig dukes who rule us through a lot of solicitors and surveyors. . . They interfere with the comforts of both rich and poor, render good building impossible and constantly destroy the livelihoods of small tradespeople.⁴⁵

Churchill's animosity towards the whig urban landlords was prompted by previous whig support for the Liberal government's legislation which eroded the rights of the agricultural landowners, especially those in Ireland.⁴⁶ As Giffard remarked later in the debate, Churchill was encouraging the rural landowners to revenge themselves on those urban landlords who had supported 'legislation in the direction of punishing agricultural landlords'.⁴⁷

The peroration which closed Churchill's speech in favour of leasehold enfranchisement in towns, hid the essential conservatism of his arguments. He dissociated himself from 'antediluvian Toryism' and declared that the Conservative party would only return to power if it dealt with great social questions.⁴⁸ This was calculated to provoke the wrath of several 'antediluvian' tories. Colonel Dawnay, for example, complained that 'the policy of the Tory Democratic Party was rank Socialism – a policy of plunder and confiscation'.⁴⁹ But Churchill had argued that the multiplication of freeholds was essentially conservative, whereas the existence of enormous estates acted as 'a powerful stimulus to Socialism and popular discontent'.⁵⁰ Moreover, several tory M.P.s, such as J. H. Puleston, D. MacIver and C. B. Stuart-Wortley, also favoured leasehold enfranchisement although they were neither tory democrats nor followers of Churchill.⁵¹ Churchill explained his attitude further in a letter he later wrote to a Birmingham friend. He pointed out that both tories and Liberals had previously interfered with freedom of contract. The tory-controlled house of lords was partly responsible, with the Liberal government, for passing the Agricultural Holdings Act and the Irish Land Acts. Randolph observed:

In comparison with legislation of that kind the compulsory conversion of long leaseholds into freeholds in towns, full and ample compensation being paid to the freeholders is. . . 'a trifling matter'.⁵²

He also noted that the principle of the measure had been advocated in the Conservative *Quarterly Review* in 1879. This was a reference to J. T.

⁴⁴ P.D. 1884, CCLXXXVI, 241–2.

⁴⁵ Salisbury papers: Wolff to Salisbury, 6 Nov. 1883.

⁴⁶ P.D. 1884, CCLXXXVI, 243.

⁴⁷ Ibid. 252.

⁴⁸ Ibid. 245–6.

⁴⁹ Ibid. 255.

⁵⁰ Ibid. 244.

⁵¹ *The Times*, 20 Mar. 1884.

⁵² RCHL 1/2/325a: Churchill to J. Moore Bayley, 24 March, 1884.

Emmett's article on 'The Ethics of Urban Leaseholds'. Emmett was an architect turned journalist, who led the attack on the Gothic revival.⁵³ Many of Emmett's arguments in favour of leasehold enfranchisement would have struck a personal note for Churchill, who leased his house at Connaught Place from the Church commissioners. Emmett argued that the leasehold system was specially obnoxious to the nobility and West End residents, circumstanced like Churchill:

To have lost the amplitude and individuality of a town house and to be numbered in a row of compo-fronted slips of leasehold work, to be the subject of a common building speculation, with its transient fashions and vulgarities, is not consistent with the notion of an ancient aristocracy. The change from Grosvenor Square to Grosvenor Place is like an abdication of nobility.⁵⁴

But for Churchill, the younger son of a poor duke, the change from Blenheim and St James's Square to Connaught Place must have been even more striking. Emmett argued that the leasehold system encouraged transient residence which bred indifference to sanitation and thus created fevers and typhoid.⁵⁵ In the autumn of 1882 the Randolph Churchills moved into Connaught Place. Shortly afterwards, Lady Randolph succumbed to typhoid. Her husband told her 'that accursed house in St James Place poisoned you'. He later wrote suggesting that defective drains in their new house might be responsible for her infection.⁵⁶ Thus Churchill had personal reasons for agreeing with Emmett's strictures on the leasehold system.

Churchill's conversion to the cause of leasehold enfranchisement was shortly followed by his conversion to the cause of parliamentary reform. But his change of heart bore all the hall-marks of a death-bed repentance. At Edinburgh, in December 1883, he had opposed parliamentary reform as a diversionary tactic by the Liberals.⁵⁷ Churchill voted with the Conservative opposition against the second reading of the Reform Bill in April 1884.⁵⁸ But the Bill was passed by a large majority and this effectively ended any hopes that the tories could effectively oppose the Bill in the Commons. Churchill had to acknowledge the logic of a situation which he had done his best to prevent. He was now, moreover, a tory candidate for Birmingham, where both parties favoured the extension of household suffrage to the counties.⁵⁹ In his first Birmingham speeches (made after the second reading of the Reform Bill) he grasped the bull by the horns and welcomed the increasing

⁵³ J. T. Emmett, *Six essays*, introd. by J. Mordaunt Crook (London, 1972), pp. v-xix.

⁵⁴ J. T. Emmett, *The ethics of urban leaseholds* (London, n.d.), reprinted from the *British Quarterly Review*, April 1879, pp. 18–19.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* pp. 16–17.

⁵⁶ Peregrine Churchill & Julian Mitchell, *Jennie, Lady Randolph Churchill* (London, 1976), pp. 111–18; Randolph to Jennie, 1, 5 Jan. 1883.

⁵⁷ *The Times*, 20 Dec. 1883.

⁵⁸ *House of commons divisions 1884*: 7 Apr.
⁵⁹ RCHL 1/3/405: Churchill to H. H. Wainwright, 9 June 1884 (publ. in Winston Churchill, appendix 3, pp. 845–8).

political role of what he termed 'the English democracy'.⁶⁰ He argued that the new electorate could not be wire-pulled like the old cliques, but had to be persuaded. The imminence of parliamentary reform – which would erode tory control of the rural county seats – combined with his own need to gain support in Birmingham, induced Churchill to identify himself, for the first time, specifically with the cause of urban toryism:

The Tory party of today is no longer identified with that small and narrow class which is connected with the ownership of land. . . its great strength can be found and must be developed, in our large towns as well as in our country districts.⁶¹

The radical implications of Churchill's Birmingham speeches were widely commented upon. The whig, Lord Derby, who was colonial secretary, wrote to Harcourt:

R. Churchill is improving and very clever: but I cannot imagine that the bulk of the Conservative party will accept him. He seems to me to be keeping open a door between himself and the Radical section to which, if he has any real opinions, he ought to belong.⁶²

But there were aristocratic tories who welcomed Churchill's counsel in the light of the new political situation and who were, perhaps, less convinced than Derby about Randolph's radicalism. Lord Castletown, for example, was glad that Churchill had taken up democratic Conservatism:

If the Conservative party are to exist at all it will be on that line and no other. The old Toryism of the landed gentry and the Carlton Club is in my opinion a thing of the past.

But the purpose of Castletown's letter was to elicit Churchill's support for a parliamentary amendment in favour of the Irish landowners.⁶³ There certainly was a conservative side to Churchill at this time, although few noticed it. Half his speech at Birmingham on 16 April 1884 was devoted to his familiar defence of the monarchy, the Lords and the Church.⁶⁴ His hostility to the new radicalism was revealed in his speech opposing a Metropolitan Water Bill sponsored by the corporation of London. This proposed that wealthier consumers should pay more for their water, allowing the poorer classes to use water more freely, with corresponding benefits to health. Churchill described this plan as 'the wildest Socialistic doctrine that . . . I have ever heard enunciated . . . what is proposed . . . is nothing more than a graduated water tax'.⁶⁵ Moreover, Churchill's later public speeches in 1884 and 1885 were no more sympathetic to the nostrums of advanced radicals. For example, he did not mention again his support for leasehold enfranchisement.

⁶⁰ *The Times*, 16 Apr. 1884.

⁶¹ *Ibid.* 17 Apr. 1884.

⁶² Bodleian Library, Oxford (Sir W. V. Harcourt papers): Derby to Harcourt 17 Apr. 1884.

⁶³ RCHL 1/3/364: Castletown to Churchill, 6 May 1884.

⁶⁴ *The Times*, 17 Apr. 1884.

⁶⁵ P.D. 1884, CGLXXXV, 1223.

Churchill's relations with the working classes illustrate the conservative character of his appeal. He never claimed any intimacy with the working classes, though he did display a fitful interest in their welfare. The popularity he enjoyed in some working class circles was largely a recognition of the skill and audacity with which he championed the cause of Conservatism generally, rather than the interests of the workers in particular. He did talk of adapting the tory party to the wants and wishes of the masses and of trusting the people but, in practice, it was much more a case of the masses trusting and adapting themselves to the wishes of the tory party. One of the reasons why Churchill became so popular was because significant sections of the working classes *were* prepared to support old-style toryism. In 1884, for example, some London printing workers wrote to Churchill applauding his opposition to atheists, faddists, caucus-mongers and 'the cuckoo-politician – the Infallible of Birmingham and his colleague the Screw-Sybarite' – in plain English: Bright and Chamberlain.⁶⁶ But Churchill offered progressively minded working men little, although he did favour working men standing as parliamentary candidates.⁶⁷ However, the cost of standing for parliament virtually excluded working men from the Commons unless they could obtain the support of the few large trade unions. But, at this time, Churchill apparently took the view that 'Politics are the ruin of trades unions'.⁶⁸

III

The popular theory that Churchill utilized the slogan 'tory democracy' simply in order to facilitate his rise to the Conservative leadership poses many problems which cast doubt on its veracity. If Churchill posed as a radical he was more likely to alienate rather than win over the senior members of the party whose support he would need in order to gain the leadership. Moreover, why should Churchill, if he was purely motivated by personal ambition, adopt such a risky policy when he had already gained a prominent position in the party by championing traditional tory causes with regard to Ireland and the Bradlaugh case. On the other hand, there clearly was a need for the Conservative party in general to adopt a more popular image. The lack of support for the tories in 1882–3 would have been particularly worrying for Churchill, since he thought Gladstone would go to the country on the reform question in the summer of 1884.⁶⁹ Churchill's interest in the Primrose League and the National Union at this time partly reflected his concern to improve tory organization before a general election. But the role of Churchill's

⁶⁶ RCHL 1/2/297: address dated 9 Feb. 1884.

⁶⁷ RCHL 1/5/616: J. Dumphreys to Churchill, 25 May 1885.

⁶⁸ *The Times*, 15 Oct. 1884: Churchill's speech at Birmingham.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* 17 Apr. 1884: Churchill's speech at Birmingham.

personal ambition in determining his behaviour can only be assessed by considering his relations with the tory leaders and his own expectations.

Virtually all the literature on Lord Randolph Churchill states, or clearly implies, that he decided, in 1883, to challenge Salisbury and Northcote for the party leadership.⁷⁰ I shall test the truth of this assertion by examining his relations first, with Salisbury and, secondly, with Northcote. By October 1880, Churchill had decided that, when Beaconsfield died, he would support the claims of Salisbury to become overall party leader. Significantly, Churchill feared that Northcote would prove not insufficiently progressive, but insufficiently conservative for his taste.⁷¹ Wolff and Bowyer also encouraged Churchill to champion Salisbury.⁷² When, in March 1883, it was decided that Northcote should unveil the statue of Beaconsfield, 'A Tory' publicly complained that this was another attempt by Northcote's partisans to ensure that Salisbury did not become the next Conservative premier.⁷³ A few days later, Churchill, in a letter to *The Times* boldly advocated the claims of Salisbury to be the head of the tory party.⁷⁴ This much is uncontroversial. A week later, *The Times* published a second letter from Churchill, which has been widely interpreted as advancing Churchill's own claims to the leadership.⁷⁵ Although *Punch* published cartoons which suggested that Churchill aspired to lead the party, his second letter attracted less serious attention than his first letter had.⁷⁶ A reading of the complete second letter shows that it simply developed the arguments, contained in the first letter, advocating Salisbury as sole leader of the party.⁷⁷ Nearly half the second letter dealt with the way in which the dual leadership had been responsible for the tory surrender over the Arrears Bill in 1882. Churchill believed that the surrender would not have occurred 'if Lord Salisbury at the time had been recognized as the supreme leader of the party'.⁷⁸

⁷⁰ See, for example: Escott, p. xv; Winston Churchill, p. 203; Harold Gorst, pp. 236–7; A. J. Balfour, *Chapters of autobiography* (London, 1930), pp. 155–6; E. J. Feuchtwanger, *Disraeli, democracy and the tory party* (Oxford, 1968), pp. 168–9; Andrew Jones, *The politics of reform, 1884* (Cambridge, 1972), p. 71.

⁷¹ The marchioness of Londonderry, *Henry Chaplin* (London, 1926), pp. 161–2: Churchill to Chaplin, 30 Oct. 1880.

⁷² Salisbury papers: Wolff to Salisbury, 18 Feb. 1880. RCHL 1/1/74; Bowyer to Churchill 4 July 1882.

⁷³ *The Times*, 29 Mar. 1883. The letter may have been written by Churchill.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* 2 Apr. 1883.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* 9 Apr. 1883.

⁷⁶ *Punch*, 14, 28 Apr. 1883 (Teniel's cartoons: 'The bumptious boy' & 'A dream of the future'). Churchill's first letter was commented on by a *Times* leader (2 April, 1883) and by Edward Hamilton in his diary (D. W. R. Bahlman, *The diary of Sir Edward Walter Hamilton 1880–1885* Oxford, 1972, II, 417). Neither *The Times* nor Hamilton commented on Churchill's second letter.

⁷⁷ *The Times*, 9 Apr. 1883.

⁷⁸ Salisbury thought that 'A golden opportunity for breaking Gladstone's dictatorship has been lost' when the tories surrendered over the Arrears Bill (B. L. Cross papers Add. MSS 51263: Salisbury to Cross, 10 Aug. 1882).

In his second letter Churchill wrote that the party should be led by a statesman ‘who knows how to sway immense masses of the working classes, and who, either by his genius or his eloquence, or by all the varied influences of an ancient name can move the hearts of households’. It has been claimed that Churchill selected deliberately ambiguous words so that he could advance his own claims to the leadership. But this interpretation is clearly invalid if this single sentence is placed in the full context of the two letters. The reference to a statesman who could sway the working classes referred back to Churchill’s first letter, where he noted the success of Salisbury’s provincial tours and his projection of a policy ‘eloquently expressing the principles of popular Toryism’. His assessment of Salisbury’s performance was endorsed by Edward Hamilton, Gladstone’s secretary.⁷⁹ Moreover, Churchill’s reference to a statesman popular with the working classes was written just after Salisbury’s speech at Birmingham on 29 March 1883 when he claimed that the tories were acting ‘in the interest of the working classes most of all’.⁸⁰ By contrast, Churchill had made no speech in a major urban centre for well over a year, nor tried particularly to woo the working classes. Further evidence that Churchill was still advocating Salisbury’s leadership is contained in his article, ‘Elijah’s Mantle’, published in May 1883. Despite its title, the article was a general survey of tory prospects and tactics rather than a re-working of Churchill’s views on the leadership. He made no explicit plea for Salisbury to become overall party leader, indeed, the latter was mildly criticized for his opinions on party tactics. But Churchill was much more critical of Northcote and annoyed that the latter should have taken precedence over Salisbury at the unveiling of Beaconsfield’s statue. Moreover, in an important section, Churchill argued that the tory leader should sit in the Lords – particularly when the party was in opposition. This suggestion excluded Churchill, as well as Northcote, from consideration as a possible party leader. Nothing in Churchill’s article favoured his own claim to the leadership.

But Churchill’s advocacy of Salisbury’s claim to be the sole leader of the party did not earn him the gratitude of the marquis. Though Salisbury had certainly had his differences with Northcote over the Arrears Bill in 1882, he remained loyal to the dual leadership arrangement.⁸¹ Indeed, the strength of support for Northcote in the Commons left Salisbury with no alternative but to acquiesce in the matter. Though Churchill discussed the merits of ‘Elijah’s Mantle’ with Balfour, Salisbury’s nephew, he had little direct contact with the marquis.⁸² But

⁷⁹ Hamilton’s *Diary*, II, 417.

⁸⁰ *The Times*, 30 March, 1883.

⁸¹ But Salisbury did not publicly defend Northcote after Churchill’s attack, believing that ‘All this fuss is so much grist to R.C.’s mill’ (British Library, Balfour papers Add. MSS 49688: Salisbury to Balfour, 3 Apr. 1883).

⁸² Mrs Cornwallis-West, *The reminiscences of Lady Randolph Churchill* (London, 1908), p. 103. British Library, Iddesleigh papers, Add. MSS 50020: Salisbury to Northcote, 11 Mar. 1883.

Salisbury's aloofness must have had a discouraging effect on Churchill. In August 1883 he was apparently critical of Salisbury's leadership in the Lords.⁸³ But if the two men were not intimate, nor were they hostile to each other. In January 1884, Salisbury congratulated Churchill's 'very gallant resolution' in standing for Birmingham, which he thought would 'do the party conspicuous and very real service'.⁸⁴ Churchill was greatly encouraged by Salisbury's approval.⁸⁵ But in the spring of 1884, the two men took up different positions on the question of the powers of the National Union of Conservative Associations. Contrary views on land reform added to the differences between them. Salisbury, as Chancellor of Oxford University and tory leader in the Lords, must have disliked Churchill's abortive Lands in Mortmain Bill.⁸⁶ Churchill and Wolff's support for urban leasehold enfranchisement was not endorsed by Salisbury, who was a considerable owner of urban property.⁸⁷ He wrote to Northcote in April 1884:

I see Randolph Churchill is doing his best to set the owners of property against him. He will hardly carry Birmingham on those terms.⁸⁸

But Churchill would have been aware that one of Birmingham's largest landowners – the fifth Baron Calthorpe – was a Liberal.⁸⁹ The difference of opinion between Churchill and Salisbury at this time was exaggerated by *The Times*. The latter asserted that even if Churchill's principles could be described as toryism, it was 'certainly not the Toryism which Lord Salisbury understands and represents'.⁹⁰ But after the reconciliation of the two men in July 1884, Churchill remained generally loyal to Salisbury. For example, when, in May 1885, Churchill drew up lists of possible future members of a tory government, he included Salisbury both as premier and as foreign secretary.⁹¹

Churchill's relations with Northcote were, of course, less cordial than his relations with Salisbury. But he did not seriously fall out with Northcote until March 1883.⁹² Even then, Northcote was partly responsible for the deterioration in relations. Angered by the independent stance of the Fourth Party, Northcote decided that it was 'necessary to bring our young friend to his bearings, otherwise the party will be quite disorganised'.⁹³ Churchill resented being, as he put it, 'charged with mutiny' and he defended his tory orthodoxy in his second letter to *The*

⁸³ RCHL 1/1/164: Wolff to Churchill, 28 Aug. 1883.

⁸⁴ RCHL 1/2/277: Salisbury to Churchill, 28 Jan. 1884.

⁸⁵ Salisbury papers: Churchill to Salisbury, 30 Jan. 1884.

⁸⁶ See, *The Times*, 6 May 1884.

⁸⁷ Salisbury papers: Wolff to Salisbury, 8 Dec. 1884.

⁸⁸ Add. MSS 50020: Salisbury to Northcote, 2 Apr. 1884.

⁸⁹ *Dod's parliamentary companion, 1884*; John Bateman, *The great landowners of Great Britain & Ireland* (London, 1883), p. 72.

⁹⁰ *The Times*, 8 May 1884.

⁹¹ RCHL 1/5/600.

⁹² See, R. E. Quinault, op. cit. pp. 331–2.

⁹³ Salisbury papers: Northcote to Salisbury, 9 Mar. 1883.

Times about the leadership.⁹⁴ Commenting on Churchill's first letter, *The Times* claimed that it proposed the removal of Northcote from the lead in the Commons and seemed to imply that Churchill wished to take over Northcote's job.⁹⁵ But in both his letters and his subsequent article, Churchill never called for anything more than the end of the dual leadership. *The Times* was not right in claiming that if Salisbury became overall leader then Northcote would have to give up the lead in the Commons. After all, Northcote had led the Commons as Beaconsfield's deputy between 1876 and 1881, therefore why should a reversion to such an arrangement, this time with Salisbury, be unacceptable? It should also be pointed out that Churchill's public writings on the leadership were not entirely hostile to Northcote. In his first letter he admitted that Northcote possessed 'great and peculiar qualifications' to be the leader of the tory party.⁹⁶ There is no evidence that, at this time, Churchill saw himself as a ready replacement for Northcote as leader of the Commons. When, in August 1883, there were rumours that Northcote would retire, Wolff wrote to Salisbury about a replacement, 'In the present no doubt Lord John Manners would be the best man. After him Beach or Billy Dyke.' He did not even mention Churchill as a possible contender, though he feared W. H. Smith was in the running.⁹⁷

Churchill's relations with Northcote improved soon after April 1883. The death of Churchill's father brought the two men closer. The duke of Marlborough had been a friend and admirer of Northcote.⁹⁸ At the end of July 1883 Northcote wrote to Churchill, telling him 'We can't afford to have you laid up'.⁹⁹ In October 1883 some Edinburgh students hesitated to vote for Northcote as their university rector because they doubted whether he adequately represented the Conservative party. Churchill wrote to their representative:

If Sir Stafford Northcote does not represent the Conservative party as adequately as it is possible for any human being to do, I am at a loss to know who is his superior in that respect. . .¹⁰⁰

Churchill and Northcote were still on cordial terms in December 1883.¹⁰¹ But Churchill's behaviour in the first half of 1884 appears to have misled Northcote into thinking that Churchill wanted to carry tory democracy to a radical extreme. He wrote to Salisbury in June:

Various indications lead me to think that Randolph is going in boldly and will ride 'Tory Democracy' pretty hard. If he does, we may come to a split. . .¹⁰²

⁹⁴ *The Times*, 9 Apr. 1883.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.* 2 Apr. 1883.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ Salisbury papers: Wolff to Churchill, 31 Aug. 1883.

⁹⁸ Add. MSS 50021: Churchill to Northcote, 6 July 1883.

⁹⁹ Blenheim Palace papers: Northcote to Churchill, 21 July 1883.

¹⁰⁰ *The Times*, 2 Nov. 1883; Churchill to W. R. Brodie, 31 Oct. 1883.

¹⁰¹ RCHL 1/2/231 Northcote to Churchill, 22 Dec. 1883 & 1/2/232: Churchill to Northcote, 25 Dec. 1883.

¹⁰² Salisbury papers: Northcote to Salisbury, 3 June 1884.

But he still sought Churchill's advice on party tactics in July, although the latter courteously refused it until the National Union controversy was settled.¹⁰³ But thereafter, co-operation was resumed. In October 1884 Northcote went to Birmingham to speak on behalf of Churchill's candidature. After the Aston riots, Northcote informed Salisbury 'we must have better organisation here if Randolph is to carry the seat'.¹⁰⁴ It was not until the Penjdeh crisis of April 1885, that Churchill told Salisbury that Northcote was no longer fit to lead the Commons. Even then, he realized that an 'open revolt against Sir S.N. would be fatal in every way'.¹⁰⁵ Churchill remained undecided as to what role Northcote should play, if any, in a future tory government. When he drew up lists of potential tory cabinet ministers, Churchill excluded Northcote from one list, but made him president of the council on another and even leader of the Commons on a third.¹⁰⁶ Therefore, Churchill's subsequent refusal to accept office unless Northcote forfeited the lead in the Commons, cannot have been decided upon long in advance.

Churchill's relations with the party leaders must also be seen in the context of his own political aspirations. Balfour, in his memoirs, admitted that Churchill had never explicitly declared his ambition to become leader of the party.¹⁰⁷ Whatever the extent of Churchill's ambition, it is difficult to believe that he imagined he could rise, in the course of one parliament, from being a back-bencher without experience of office to being the leader of his party. In the nineteenth century such a dramatic rise never occurred. Disraeli did become leader of the tories in the Commons without having held government office, but this resulted from the exceptional circumstances created by the Peelite secession. But there was also a more concrete restraint on Churchill's ambition. For most of the 1880 parliament he did not command wide support amongst the party in the Commons. In 1883, his attack on the dual leadership only resulted in nearly all tory M.P.s signing a testimonial expressing confidence in Northcote.¹⁰⁸ Even in 1884, Churchill was not always regarded as a leading politician. Sir Richard Temple later wrote:

I well remember men, late in 1884 and early in 1885, saying that a Conservative Government would have to find some secondary office for him. They said, for example, that the Parliamentary Secretaryship to the Admiralty would have a sobering effect.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰³ RCHL 1/3/441: Northcote to Churchill, 10 July 1884 & 1/3/442: Churchill to Northcote, 10 July 1884 (printed in Winston Churchill, pp. 286–7).

¹⁰⁴ Salisbury papers: Northcote to Salisbury, 14 Oct. 1884.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., Churchill to Salisbury, 28 Apr. 1885 (printed in Winston Churchill, pp. 310–13).

¹⁰⁶ RCHL 1/5/600.

¹⁰⁷ Balfour, p. 152.

¹⁰⁸ Sir John Mowbray Bt., M.P., *Seventy years at Westminster* (London, 1900), p. 295. See also: Add. MSS 50041: Winn to Northcote, 3 Apr. 1883.

¹⁰⁹ Sir Richard Temple Bt., M.P., *Letters & character sketches from the house of commons* (London, 1912), p. 193.

Churchill was hardly more sanguine about his political prospects. At Birmingham, in April 1884, he described himself 'as a humble member of the rank and file of the tory party' who was 'not the least bit in the confidence of the leaders' though he had laboured hard on their behalf.¹¹⁰ Soon afterwards, when described to an audience as a future minister, Churchill replied that he did not justify such flattery.¹¹¹ Perhaps public statements of this kind should not be taken at face value, but Churchill was certainly despondent about his political position at this time. In May 1884 he resigned from the chairmanship of the National Union and seriously considered withdrawing from his Birmingham candidature.¹¹² He does not appear to have taken these decisions merely as a clever ploy to strengthen his position. Indeed, he was so despondent at this time, that he contemplated giving up politics altogether.¹¹³ Even after his reconciliation with the party leaders, Churchill still had doubts about his future. In November 1884, for example, he told Chamberlain that the latter would rise far above himself in the political world.¹¹⁴ As late as February 1885 he apparently did not think he would be included in a future tory government.¹¹⁵ Two months later, when criticising Northcote's leadership in the Commons, Churchill wrote to Salisbury:

I pray you not to allow yourself to imagine that either then [1883] or now, was I or am I, actuated by much or indeed any personal ambition.¹¹⁶

Yet if Churchill was merely bent on self-advancement, he was stupidly inviting Salisbury to take him at his word when the tories came into office. Moreover, in his letter Churchill argued that the tory opposition in the Commons should rally, not round himself, but round Hicks Beach. Even admission to the cabinet did not augment Churchill's taste for office. In August 1885 he told Salisbury that he doubted whether his inclusion in the government had been advantageous to the party.¹¹⁷ Three months later, he informed the premier that he had no desire to remain in office.¹¹⁸

IV

Churchill's involvement in the affairs of the National Union of Conservative Associations during 1883–4 has been interpreted as a ploy by which he advanced his own claims to the party leadership.¹¹⁹ It seems clear that Churchill hoped that his action in this arena would strengthen his

¹¹⁰ *The Times*, 16 Apr. 1884.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 18 Apr. 1884.

¹¹² RCHL 1/9/1043: Churchill to Satchell Hopkins, resigning Birmingham candidature (unsent and undated draft c. 3 May 1884: published in Winston Churchill, Appendix II, pp. 840–3).

¹¹³ RCHL 1/3/360: Henry Lucy to Churchill, 4 May 1884.

¹¹⁴ Winston Churchill, pp. 300–1: Churchill to Chamberlain, 27 Nov. 1884.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.* pp. 855–6: Churchill to his mother, 17 Feb. 1885.

¹¹⁶ Salisbury papers: Churchill to Salisbury, 28 Apr. 1885.

¹¹⁷ Salisbury papers: Churchill to Salisbury, 15 Aug. 1885.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.* 29 Nov. 1885.

¹¹⁹ Jones, p. 71.

position in the party generally. But there is no evidence that he regarded the National Union simply as a stepping-stone to the party-leadership for himself. Indeed, Churchill's involvement with the National Union was largely a by-product of his campaign to make Salisbury the overall party leader. Churchill first became implicated with the National Union in April 1881, after the death of Beaconsfield. He attempted, with Wolff, to persuade the Council of the Union to accept Salisbury as the sole party leader.¹²⁰ Gorst, significantly, did not openly support this initiative in 1881.¹²¹ Even in 1883, though Gorst advised Churchill about the National Union, the two men disagreed on the leadership question. Gorst wrote to Churchill in August 1883:

I think you declared against Northcote prematurely in 'Elijah's Mantle' and that it is a mistake to run Salisbury against him.¹²²

But in 1883, as in 1881, Churchill encouraged the grass-roots tory organizations to back Salisbury as the overall party leader. He wrote in his first letter to *The Times*, in April 1883:

Conservative associations in the country and the various centres of provincial Conservative thought must speak out and bring pressure to bear upon the wire-pullers in London, who are occupied with designs for their own advancement.¹²³

In his second letter, Churchill declared that he had not expected his views to be supported by many M.P.s, but pinned his hopes on grass-roots tory support.¹²⁴

After the failure of Churchill and Wolff's scheme to get the National Union to accept Salisbury as sole leader in 1881, Churchill made a more serious attempt to gain influence in that quarter. In 1882, he was elected, despite considerable opposition, a member of the National Union Council. The latter lacked real power, but it was a suitable forum in which Churchill could carry on the grass-roots campaign announced in his letters to *The Times* in April 1883. By July he had decided to try to win over the National Union to his views. Though Churchill immediately elicited the help of Gorst, the latter did not originate the idea of winning over the National Union.¹²⁵ Churchill's underlying purpose in launching this campaign is unfortunately not on record. But there is evidence that, in part, his original intention was simply to continue his earlier efforts to make Salisbury the overall party leader. Churchill launched his campaign at the National Union conference in October 1883. On that occasion, he regarded 'the Goats' (Northcote's supporters) as his

¹²⁰ Add. MSS 50032: H. S. Northcote to his father, Stafford Northcote, 30 Apr. 1881 (printed in Feuchtwanger, pp. 167-8).

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² RCHL 1/1/157: Gorst to Churchill, 15 Aug. 1883.

¹²³ *The Times*, 2 Apr. 1883.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.* 9 Apr. 1883.

¹²⁵ RCHL 1/1/146: Gorst to Churchill, 2 Aug. 1883.

opponents.¹²⁶ Ashmead Bartlett, one of the leading ‘Goats’, thought that Churchill’s speech to the conference was ‘an almost verbatim’ re-hash of his article on ‘Elijah’s Mantle’.¹²⁷ This comment implies that Churchill’s speech was reminiscent of his earlier attack on the dual leadership. Bartlett believed the Fourth Party wanted to use the National Union to choose a leader, but he did not suggest that Churchill wanted the leadership himself.¹²⁸ Some members of the National Union initially believed that Churchill was campaigning on Salisbury’s behalf. For example, J. M. Maclean ‘assisted in getting Lord Randolph elected as Chairman of the Council and in passing some motions directed against the Stafford Northcote section of the party’ because he opposed the dual leadership and was ‘a firm believer in Lord Salisbury’.¹²⁹ Henry Howorth, a prominent Manchester tory, also opposed the dual leadership and believed that the constituencies wanted Salisbury to be the sole party leader.¹³⁰

At the 1883 National Union Conference Churchill had two immediate objectives: ‘to declare war against the Central Committee and advocate the placing of all power and finance in the hands of the Council of the National Union’.¹³¹ It is tempting to concentrate on the positive rather than the negative goal in assessing Churchill’s purpose. Yet, in the spring of 1884, it was the power of the Central Committee, rather than the power of the National Union, which was the principal stumbling block preventing an agreement between Churchill and the party leaders.¹³² Randolph’s hostility to the Central Committee was connected with his opposition to the dual leadership arrangement. The chairman of the Central Committee in 1883 was Edward Stanhope. It was the latter who drew up a testimonial expressing confidence in Northcote after Churchill had published his first letter attacking the dual leadership.¹³³ Churchill had previously been informed that Northcote was backing ‘a move to get E. Stanhope put to the front’.¹³⁴ At a meeting of the Central Committee, in April 1883, Stanhope made a thinly disguised attack on Churchill for criticizing the dual leadership and then praised Northcote.¹³⁵ The two men clearly disliked each other at this time. In January 1884, Stanhope wanted to defeat Churchill in the National Union, but Balfour warned Salisbury that Stanhope ‘always has been anxious to precipitate a public

¹²⁶ Winston Churchill, p. 252: Churchill to Wolff, 3 Oct. 1883.

¹²⁷ Add. MSS 50041: Ashmead Bartlett to Northcote, 2 Oct. 1883.

¹²⁸ Ibid. 20 Sept. 1883 (printed in Feuchtwanger, p. 174).

¹²⁹ J. M. Maclean, *Recollections of Westminster and India* (Manchester, 1902), pp. 68–9.

¹³⁰ *The Times*, 16, 18 February, 1884.

¹³¹ Winston Churchill, p. 249: Churchill to Wolff, 28 Sept. 1883.

¹³² See, for example: the report of the National Union Committee 18 Mar. 1884 (Salisbury papers).

¹³³ Rhodes James, p. 125.

¹³⁴ RCHL 1/1/101: Wolff to Churchill, 24 Jan. 1883.

¹³⁵ *The Times*, 19 Apr. 1883.

“explanation” with Randolph’.¹³⁶ In May 1884, Salisbury thought that the principal obstacle preventing a settlement of the National Union controversy was ‘R.C.’s hatred of Stanhope’.¹³⁷

Churchill’s actions during the winter of 1883–4 show that he was using the National Union to try to establish Salisbury’s claim to the overall leadership of the party. In December 1883, Churchill became chairman of an organization committee of the National Union intended to press for more involvement by the Union in party organization. Churchill was empowered to seek an interview with Salisbury to effect this.¹³⁸ Nothing was done to contact Northcote, though Salisbury, in his reply, pointed out that the matter also concerned the party leader in the Commons.¹³⁹ Although Northcote attended the subsequent interview between the Union committee and the leaders, Churchill only requested advice from Salisbury.¹⁴⁰ The latter, in his reply, was careful to write on behalf of Northcote as well as himself.¹⁴¹ But the organization committee, welcoming the reply ‘as the charter of the National Union’, alluded to it solely as ‘Lord Salisbury’s plan’ and spoke of the ‘duties now imposed upon them by the leader of the Party’.¹⁴² But Churchill’s attempt to champion the primacy of Salisbury through the National Union came up against two insuperable problems. Salisbury refused either to separate his position from that of Northcote or to tolerate the supplanting of the Central Committee by the National Union.¹⁴³ Yet Churchill did not encourage a breach between his committee and Salisbury. Even the inflammatory decision of the party leaders to force the National Union to quit the London premises it shared with the Central Committee did not lead Churchill immediately to abandon his efforts to reach a compromise acceptable to both parties.¹⁴⁴

In a letter to Salisbury, in April 1883, Churchill claimed that the delegates of the National Union wanted the party’s organization to be modelled on that of the Birmingham Caucus. He thought that the Caucus was ‘the only form of political organisation which can collect, guide and control for common objects large masses of electors’.¹⁴⁵ Since Salisbury had previously condemned the Birmingham Caucus system, it is tempting to assume that Churchill and Salisbury held fundamentally

¹³⁶ Salisbury papers: Balfour to Salisbury, 14 Jan. 1884.

¹³⁷ Add. MSS 49688: Salisbury to Balfour, 1 May 1884 (printed in Balfour, pp. 165–6).

¹³⁸ Salisbury papers: Churchill to Salisbury, 9 Dec. 1883.

¹³⁹ RCHL 1/2/222: Salisbury to Churchill, 11 Dec. 1883.

¹⁴⁰ Salisbury papers: memo. dated 9 Jan. 1884.

¹⁴¹ RCHL 1/2/304: Salisbury to Churchill, 29 Feb. 1884 (printed in Winston Churchill, pp. 254–5).

¹⁴² Salisbury papers: Report of Nat. Union Organization Committee, n.d.

¹⁴³ Ibid. Salisbury to Churchill (copy) 1 Mar. 1884.

¹⁴⁴ RCHL 1/3/338: undated memo. concerning the notice to quit. See also: Salisbury papers: Northcote to Salisbury, 18 Mar. 1884.

¹⁴⁵ Salisbury papers: Churchill to Salisbury, 3 Apr. 1884 (printed in Winston Churchill, pp. 836–7).

different views on the nature of party organization and its relation to party policy.¹⁴⁶ But Churchill's endorsement of the Caucus was only partial. He admired it inasmuch as it was an elected, representative and responsible body.¹⁴⁷ But he strongly opposed the Caucus when it sought to extend its power beyond the realm of organization and tried to dictate policy to party leaders.¹⁴⁸ Both in private (to the tory leaders) and in public (at Birmingham) Churchill disclaimed any desire to allow popular tory organizations to interfere in the formulation of party policy in general.¹⁴⁹ He also felt that the Birmingham Caucus bred corruption and restricted political freedom.¹⁵⁰

In other respects as well, it is difficult to see that in the National Union controversy Churchill was advocating a policy of tory democracy which was fundamentally unacceptable to the party leaders. Churchill wrote to Salisbury in March 1884:

With reference to the hope which you express that 'there is no chance of the paths of the Central Committee and the National Union crossing' I fear it may be disappointed. In a struggle between a popular body and a close corporation the latter I am happy to say in these days goes to the wall.¹⁵¹

But to what extent was the National Union a 'popular body' and the Central Committee a 'close corporation'? The National Union was not fully representative of local tory organizations.¹⁵² Nor was its constitution entirely democratic, for some Council members were co-opted: a point not overlooked by Churchill's critics.¹⁵³ On the other hand, the Central Committee, though controlled by the Westminster leadership, did much to foster contacts with grass-roots Conservatism.¹⁵⁴ In 1883, Salisbury told the annual dinner of the Central Committee that it was an agency by which the party leaders could learn of local party sentiment. His audience included representatives from 71 boroughs and 34 counties.¹⁵⁵

It is also simplistic to suggest that Churchill's National Union campaign was fought on behalf of the masses and the provincial middle class against an exclusive and reactionary aristocratic elite. In his key-note speech to the National Union conference in October 1883, Churchill made no attack on aristocratic toryism.¹⁵⁶ It was only when he came into conflict with Salisbury, as well as Northcote, that Churchill adopted a

¹⁴⁶ *The Times*, 30 Mar. 1883: Salisbury's speech at Birmingham.

¹⁴⁷ *Jackson's Oxford Journal*, 2 Feb. 1884: Churchill's speech at Woodstock.

¹⁴⁸ *The Times*, 17 Apr. 1884: Churchill's speech at Birmingham.

¹⁴⁹ Salisbury papers: report of Nat. Union Organization Committee, 18 Mar. 1884. *The Times*, 17 Apr. 1884.

¹⁵⁰ *The Times*, 1 Feb., 18 Apr. 1884.

¹⁵¹ Salisbury papers: Churchill to Salisbury, 6 Mar. 1884.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, Northcote to Salisbury, 24 Feb. 1884.

¹⁵³ *The Times*, 29 May 1884: Henry Howorth to the editor.

¹⁵⁴ See Feuchtwanger, pp. 160–1.

¹⁵⁵ *The Times*, 19 Apr. 1883.

¹⁵⁶ Winston Churchill, pp. 249–51.

mildly anti-aristocratic tone in the late spring of 1884.¹⁵⁷ Although he advocated the proper representation of tory working men, this question did not, in itself, become a bone of contention between Churchill and the party leaders. Salisbury was also alive to the need to capture the loyalty of the working classes at this time.¹⁵⁸ At no stage in the dispute did Churchill gain the unanimous support of urban middle class Tories – as Feuchtwanger has pointed out.¹⁵⁹ Even Churchill's provincial supporters, such as J. S. Hopkins of Birmingham and Arthur Forwood of Liverpool, gave him only conditional loyalty and were in no sense his stooges.¹⁶⁰ Though he advocated a National Union Council 'thoroughly representative of provincial opinion', Churchill's main practical desire was to exclude his 'active personal opponents'.¹⁶¹

The National Union controversy was ended by the sudden reconciliation of Churchill and Salisbury in July 1884. Blake has seen the settlement as virtually a defeat for Churchill since 'Salisbury gave away nothing that really mattered'.¹⁶² But his assessment is based on misconceptions and inaccuracies. Contrary to the later claims of his son, Gorst did not, at the time, regard the settlement as a surrender. He wrote to Churchill, immediately after the rapprochement with Salisbury:

Altogether we have gained very substantial successes: we have destroyed the central committee, we have revolutionized party management and defeated the leaders in their attempt at Sheffield to suppress us. I am quite content to rest for the present on our laurels. . .¹⁶³

The abolition of the central committee, even if foreshadowed by the intentions of the official leaders, achieved one of Churchill's two immediate objectives.¹⁶⁴ Although party management was not 'revolutionized' as Gorst claimed, the prestige of the National Union was enhanced. Moreover, since Churchill did not desire to create a Liberal style caucus, he would not have mourned the failure to establish one.¹⁶⁵ Churchill's main gain from the National Union controversy lay (as he had probably always intended) in the field of men, not measures. For the National Union settlement further enhanced the status of Salisbury in the party and weakened the position of Northcote and his principal supporters. It is significant that the settlement was effected by Churchill and Salisbury alone without consulting Northcote. 'An integral part of the plan' was that Salisbury should entertain the National Union Council

¹⁵⁷ RCHL 1/9/1043: Churchill to Hopkins c. 3 May 1884.

¹⁵⁸ *The Times*, 14 June 1883: Salisbury's speech at Kingston.

¹⁵⁹ Feuchtwanger, p. 171.

¹⁶⁰ Salisbury papers: Hopkins to Salisbury, 16 Mar. 1884; and RCHL 1/3/433: Forwood to Churchill, 6 July 1884.

¹⁶¹ RCHL 1/3/443: Churchill to Forwood, 10 July 1884.

¹⁶² Blake, p. 155.

¹⁶³ RCHL 1/4/455: Gorst to Churchill, 27 July 1884. For another favourable comment on Churchill's settlement see: RCHL 1/4/458: M. W. Mattinson to Churchill, 29 July 1884.

¹⁶⁴ Cf. Feuchtwanger, p. 187.

¹⁶⁵ Cf. Blake, p. 155.

to dinner at his house.¹⁶⁶ On this occasion, Churchill proposed Salisbury's health and vice-versa. Northcote, though invited, did not occupy the centre of the stage.¹⁶⁷ Churchill was delighted with the settlement and strongly appreciative of Salisbury's good offices.¹⁶⁸ The agreement ensured that the leading places in the National Union were all occupied by men who were not hostile to Churchill and not beholden to Northcote. Churchill's proposal that Balfour should become a vice-chairman showed that he did not oppose Salisbury's influence in the National Union.¹⁶⁹ But Forwood thought the settlement sounded the knell of Northcote's leadership.¹⁷⁰

Contrary to past and present orthodoxies, Lord Randolph Churchill did not favour tory democracy either as part of a crusade against aristocratic reaction or as a convenient cloak for his own ambition. Inasmuch, as he utilized the phrase 'tory democracy' at all, or inculcated its spirit, he did so largely in response to popular demand and in order to further the fortunes of the Conservative party. Between 1880 and 1885 he continually strove, using every means at his disposal, to defeat the Liberal government and to create the conditions for a tory victory at the polls like that of 1874. In 1880 and 1881, the Bradlaugh case and the Irish crisis allowed Churchill to attack the government from the standpoint of traditional toryism. But the latter, on its own, proved insufficient to overturn the Liberal majority. Moreover, Churchill was aware that the Liberals, by changing the rules of the political game, could extend and develop their hold on power. In 1883, Churchill claimed that since the radicals had moved the centre of political debate from parliament to the 'stump', the tories would, perforce, have to imitate their example.¹⁷¹ Similarly, in 1884, Churchill realized that a new reform act would change the electoral geography of Britain. His new stress on urban toryism was a practical response to the inevitable weakening of tory rural power and the increased representation of the big cities. But Churchill's tory democracy consisted of new means rather than new ends. He simply wished the new electorate to dance to the old tory tune: defending the established constitution. This explains why he was not a tory democrat before 1884 and why he did not offer clear social policies to the public. Churchill believed that social reforms should not undermine support for the monarchy, the Lords, the Church and the union of the empire – in other words the bastions of toryism. Even his support for leasehold enfranchisement was designed to strengthen, rather than weaken, the position of property owners.

¹⁶⁶ Add. MSS 50020: Salisbury to Northcote, 26 July 1884.

¹⁶⁷ *The Times*, 1 Aug. 1884.

¹⁶⁸ Salisbury papers: Churchill to Salisbury, 26 July 1884.

¹⁶⁹ Add. MSS 50020: Salisbury to Northcote, 26 July 1884.

¹⁷⁰ RCHL 1/4/457: Forwood to Churchill, 28 July 1884.

¹⁷¹ *The Times*, 9 Apr. 1883.

Although Churchill used the rhetoric of tory democracy to strengthen traditional toryism, he came to be widely regarded as a champion of progressivism *per se*. This resulted from a failure to distinguish between Churchill's methods and objectives. He believed that 'boldness in politics, as in war, never fails'.¹⁷² In particular, Churchill thought that the tories should ally with all dissident groups in order to defeat Gladstone's government.¹⁷³ He therefore allied with the Parnellites on Bradlaugh and Irish coercion and with the whigs, in 1886, on Home Rule. Such co-operation did not make Churchill either an Irish Nationalist or a whig. But when he occasionally allied with the radicals on, for example, leasehold enfranchisement, he was regarded as a radical by some tory M.P.s.¹⁷⁴ This impression was fostered by *The Times*, which had its own reasons for boosting Churchill's image as a tory democrat. Before 1886, *The Times* had a slight Liberal bias and it championed the cause of progressive Conservatism before Churchill was associated with such a policy.¹⁷⁵ Chenery, the editor of *The Times*, regarded Churchill as a future leader of a progressive tory party and encouraged his pretensions in that direction.¹⁷⁶ When Churchill spoke at Birmingham in April 1884, *The Times* welcomed his embrace of urban toryism and only regretted that he did not advance more concrete policies of his own.¹⁷⁷ A month later, *The Times* supported Churchill's stand in the National Union controversy, though it questioned his moral scruples.¹⁷⁸ A year later, *The Times* claimed that Churchill was second to none as a popular tory orator, though his views were inimical to 'the old-fashioned Toryism, now about to receive its coup de grace'.¹⁷⁹ When Churchill spoke at Manchester in November 1885, the paper thought his speech betrayed 'an ever-present sympathy with thorough-going Liberalism' which showed that 'naturally the Conservative Democrat is the ally of Mr Chamberlain'.¹⁸⁰ But in his speech, Churchill attacked such radical nostrums as disestablishment, three acres and a cow and inequitable taxation of capital, as well as Dilke's record at the Local Government Board.¹⁸¹ He later declared that 'the action of the modern Radical party was distinctly retrogressive'.¹⁸² However, such factual points, lost in the small print of the report of a long speech, did not have the influence of a *Times* leader.

Popular belief that Churchill *was* a tory democrat, though initially largely a myth, soon became a political force in its own right. Churchill's stand on the leadership and the National Union came to be regarded simply as advocacy of progressive toryism for its own sake. His original

¹⁷² 'Elijah's mantle', p. 620.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.* pp. 617–18.

¹⁷⁴ See above, p. 148.

¹⁷⁵ *The Times*, 9 Dec. 1882.

¹⁷⁶ RCHL 1/1/98: Wolff to Churchill, 14 Jan. 1883. See also: RCHL 1/1/87: Chenery to Churchill, 7 Dec. 1882; and *The Times* 14 Feb. 1884 (leader on tory leaders).

¹⁷⁷ *The Times*, 16, 17 Apr. 1884.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.* 8 May 1884.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.* 7 May 1885.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.* 7 Nov. 1885.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸² *Ibid.* 23 Nov. 1885: Churchill at Birmingham.

motivation and aboriginal toryism were largely forgotten. In June 1885 Forwood pressed Salisbury to include in his new government a representative of the 'party of action' who would champion urban toryism.¹⁸³ Salisbury assumed that Forwood was referring to Churchill.¹⁸⁴ Thus, on the threshold of office, Churchill was under pressure to act up to his new reputation, although it was only indirectly the product of his own actions. He was type-cast as a tory democrat and this label had an important influence on his subsequent career and posthumous reputation. His son Winston both emphasized and was influenced by his father's progressive image, while subsequent historians continued to confuse retrospective reputation with contemporary reality.

¹⁸³ Salisbury papers: Forwood to Salisbury, 9 June 1885.

¹⁸⁴ Forwood papers: Salisbury to Forwood, 10 June 1885.