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*Discourses of Labour: The Cases of William Abraham
and Gerhard Stötzel, 1890–1914*

by Leighton S. James, PhD

The supporters of the Herr Stötzel's candidature say we must send a worker to the Centre fraction so that their interests will be represented and therefore we should vote for Herr Stötzel¹

They were labouring men - where could they pick, from one end of the land to the other, a man more worthily representative of the labouring classes than was Mabon? They were miners - where could they find a man anywhere who had done the real work which Mabon had done in Parliament and on Commissions on behalf of the miners of that country?²

In 1903 the Unionist Government seemed on the verge of collapse. Local party associations began to gear up for the upcoming campaign. In south Wales, a political struggle between former allies seemed to be brewing. In July and August the *Rhondda Leader* reported on events in the South Glamorganshire parliamentary seat. The Tories had selected Colonel W. H. Wyndham-Quin to contest the seat, but the representatives of the Liberal party and the labour movement seemed unable to reach an agreement on a candidate. The Liberal 500 had decided to appoint Lief Jones, a temperance campaigner, while the local miners' lodges had selected William Brace, the Vice-President of the South Wales Miners' Federation. William Abraham, the President of the Federation, was reported to be 'sadly disappointed' by this turn of events and claimed that the miners had not been consulted by the Liberal 500 regarding the candidature. The *Leader*, however, placed the blame squarely on the shoulders of the lodges, which had not informed the local Liberal party of their intention to put forward a candidate. The Liberals agreed to defer the appointment of Lief Jones until the lodges could ascertain his attitudes toward labour issues and to this end a joint committee of twenty-eight was formed.³ In the short term, however, the result was for the moment unimportant as the Government did not fall and survived until 1906.

I would like to thank David Howell for reading an earlier draft of this article.

¹ *Essener Volkszeitung*, 10 January 1877.

² Sir Edward J Read, Liberal activist from Cardiff, speaking in favour of Williams Abraham's candidate in 1892, *Glamorgan Free Press*, 9 July 1892.

³ *Rhondda Leader*, 25 July and 1 August 1903.



The striking thing in this episode was the attitude of William Abraham (1842-1922), better known by his bardic name, Mabon. Although he claimed to be disappointed by the situation, he faced accusations from some members of the local labour movement that he had been in contact with the Liberal 500 all along. It was further claimed that the Liberals had been under the impression that they had Mabon's backing for Lief Jones. Mabon refuted these claims at a speech at Tonyrefail on 1 August. Yet he simultaneously emphasised his Liberal credentials. 'I am pledged to vote for Labour reform, whatever Government brings in the Bill, but as an individual in politics I am a Liberal'.⁴ The *Rhondda Leader*, however, saw the controversy as symptomatic of a wider shift in political currents. It claimed that the term Lab-Lib had replaced Lib-Lab and that Labour was now in the ascendancy. It made an appeal to keep the traditions of Liberalism alive, arguing that men like Keir Hardie had spurned it in a show of ungratefulness. Indeed, Mabon himself claimed at the annual demonstration of District No. 1 miners on 12 September that he wanted the Lib-Labs to become Lab-Libs. He invited Liberal representatives in Wales to become representatives of Labour first. 'If they did that, their Liberalism would always be clean and healthy, for a man who accepted the Labour programme had nothing to fear from the Liberal programme'.⁵

For Mabon then the ideals of Liberalism and Labour were intricately intertwined. Yet the tensions evident in South Glamorganshire were by no means an isolated case. There were similar struggles over candidature in other seats and in local elections.⁶ The disputes over candidates in the 1900s were undoubtedly linked to two factors. First, the expansion of mining in the region since the mid-nineteenth had transformed the local labour market and made miners the dominant occupational group. Second, the formation and growing strength of the South Wales Miners' Federation (SWMF) provided Labour candidates with the resources they needed to stand for election. However, the precocious nature of the SWMF cannot explain the struggle between Labour and Liberalism alone. Indeed, the two movements had a tempestuous relationship that predated the establishment of the SWMF. Despite his Liberal convictions, Mabon's own election to Parliament in 1885 had involved just such a struggle and, following the affiliation of the Mineworkers' Federation of Great Britain to the Labour Party in 1909, he was to become a Labour MP proper. In this light the fears of the *Rhondda Leader's* editor over the shift in political currents seem prescient.

⁴ Ibid, 8 August 1903.

⁵ Ibid, 19 September 1903.

⁶ See Christopher Howard, 'Reactionary Radicalism: The Mid-Glamorgan Bye-Election, March 1910', *Glamorgan Historian*, 9, 1973, 29-41; David Cleaver, 'Labour and Liberals in the Gower constituency, 1885-1910', *Welsh History Review*, 12, 3, 1985, 388-410.

This article seeks to explore some aspects of this transition from Liberal to Labour. Admittedly, many historians have examined the 'decline of liberalism – rise of labour' debate, both within the context of south Wales and Britain as a whole. Space precludes detailed analysis of all the contributions to this debate, but explanations have included socio-economic change, the impact of the First World War, the rise of class, the effect of electoral reform, the emergence of modern party politics, and ideological schism within the Liberal party. As Keith Laybourn has pointed out, it is very difficult to find a single cause for the rise of Labour and decline of Liberalism.⁷ All these factors undoubtedly had some role to play. Moreover, it can be persuasively argued that the importance of specific factors varied between regions and locales.

The article does not seek to deny their salience, but rather attempts to provide a new angle through which to examine the specific case of Labour and Liberalism in south Wales. It seeks to do this in two ways. First, it focuses specifically on the political languages used by the candidates. The debate provoked by the publication of Gareth Stedman Jones seminal essay on Chartism has often strayed into polemics. Yet, it has also had positive outcomes. Historians have become more alert to and interested in the important constitutive role of language and discourse. Andy Croll has argued that Welsh history has been largely sheltered from the currents of debate in England, although it should be pointed out that as early as 1980 Peter Stead was writing about the language of Edwardian politics in Wales.⁸ Writing in the 1990s Chris Williams employed the notion of political languages in his *Democratic Rhondda*.⁹ The incident briefly outlined above illustrates that changes in political language were not simply so much semantics, but were linked to perceived shifts in the balance of political power.

Secondly, the article seeks to place the events in south Wales into a comparative context. Several works have already compared south Wales with other coalfields. Martin J. Daunton, for example, has compared work processes and housing in the south Wales, Northumberland and Durham coalfields.¹⁰ More wide-ranging studies have dealt with the transition from

⁷ For a summary of the debate see Keith Laybourn, 'The rise of Labour and the decline of Liberalism: the state of the debate', *History*, 80, 1995, 207-26. For an overview of the theories behind many interpretations of the rise of labour and fall of liberalism see Jon Lawrence, *Speaking for the People: Party, Language and Popular Politics in England, 1867-1914*, Cambridge, 1998.

⁸ See Andy Croll, "'People's Remembrancers' in a post-modern age: contemplating the non-crisis of Welsh Labour History", *Llafur*, 8, 1, 2000, 5-17; Peter Stead, 'The Language of Edwardian Politics' in David Smith (ed.), *A People and a Proletariat: Essays in the History of Wales, 1780-1980*, London, 1980, 148-65.

⁹ Chris Williams, *Democratic Rhondda: Politics and Society, 1885-1951*, Cardiff, 1996, 7-9.

¹⁰ See Martin J. Daunton, 'Miners' houses: South Wales and the Great Northern Coalfield, 1880-1914', *International Review of Social History*, 25, 1980, 143-75 and 'Down the Pit: Work in the Great Northern and South Wales Coalfields, 1870-1914', *Economic History Review*, 34, 4, 1981, 578-97.

Liberalism to Labour, although none have explicitly addressed the issue of language. David Gilbert, for example, argued in his microstudy of Ynysybwl and Hucknall that the 'catastrophically sudden strange death' of Liberalism in south Wales was located in the 'minutiae of social change in the townships and villages'.¹¹ Gilbert focuses on the close relationship between the community and the local miners lodge in Ynysybwl as the explanation for political change.¹²

Other historians have gone further a field. In his comparison of the south Wales and West Virginia coalfields, Roger Fagge has argued that the transfer from Liberal to Labour hegemony was based on a combination of advances in independent labour organisation and the stress placed on the Liberal consensus by industrial unrest and the Great War. By contrast the West Virginian miners were unable to construct an independent political movement.¹³ Werner Berg, on the other hand, has tried to explain differences between the south Wales and Ruhr coalfields in terms of patterns of industrialisation and proletarianisation. The pit village of south Wales created a 'purer' type of working class that was able to exercise greater control over their politics than the fragmented working-class milieu in the Ruhr.¹⁴ More recently, Stefan Berger has examined the same two regions. However, while Berg's work owes much to the theories of organised capitalism popular in Germany in the 1970s and early 1980s, Berger deploys Jürgen Habermas's concept of the lifeworld. He argues that the more synchronous lifeworld of the Welsh miners helped contribute to a more unified political expression than was the case for their colleagues in the Ruhr.¹⁵

More broadly John Breuilly has sought to explain why the British working class remained wedded to Liberalism, while the German working class turned quickly to social democracy in the mid-nineteenth century. After examining a range of explanations, he persuasively argues that a confluence of factors meant that British Liberalism was more successful than the German variant in binding the workers to its political colours. Key among these factors were the divisive effect of German unification on the

¹¹ David Gilbert, *Class, Community and Collective Action: Social Change in Two British Coalfields, 1850-1926*, Oxford, 1992, 108-9.

¹² *Ibid.*, see chapter 4.

¹³ Roger Fagge, *Power, culture and conflict in the coalfields: West Virginia and south Wales, 1900-1922*, Manchester and New York, 1996, 248-9.

¹⁴ Werner Berg, 'Zwei Typen industriegesellschaftlicher Modernisierung: Die Bergarbeiter im Ruhrgebiet und in Südwales im 19. Jahrhundert und frühen 20. Jahrhundert' in Gustav Schmidt (ed.), *Bergbau in Großbritannien und im Ruhrgebiet. Studies zur vergleichenden Geschichte des Bergbaus 1850-1930*, Bochum, 1985, 218.

¹⁵ Stefan Berger, 'Working-class Culture and the Labour Movement in the South-Wales and the Ruhr Coalfields: A Comparison', *Llafur*, 8, no. 2, 2001, 5-40.

liberal movement, the introduction of universal male suffrage for the *Reich* and the unifying tradition of radicalism for workers and the middle classes in Britain.¹⁶

However, although Breuilly notes that the working class in both countries were divided by ethnicity and religion,¹⁷ he does not examine working class support for political traditions other than liberalism or social democracy. This article takes a different approach by comparing the transition from Liberal to Labour in south Wales, not with other British coalfield constituencies or with German Social Democracy, but with the Catholic Centre party in the Ruhr. Superficially the comparison may seem counterintuitive, but arguably there were some broad similarities between the two parties.¹⁸ Both had strong links to religion. Admittedly, the institutional links between the Centre party and the Catholic Church and the Liberals and Nonconformity differed. Yet, during election campaigns Nonconformist preachers in south Wales and Catholic priests in the Ruhr were ubiquitous figures at the hustings.¹⁹ Moreover both parties had a strong working-class element and, as we shall see, relations between working-class and middle-class activists were often strained. Yet despite these similarities the experiences of the Liberal and Centre parties in the coalfields differed from the 1900s. While the labour wing of the Liberal party increasingly asserted its independence and eventually broke the Liberal hold on the mining constituencies after the Great War, in the Ruhr the Centre vote remained largely stable, despite the existence of several radical Christian-Socialist splinter parties during the Weimar Republic.²⁰ In light of this, the guiding theme of the article is why the Liberals were less successful than the Centre in binding organised labour to the party.

¹⁶ John Breuilly, *Labour and liberalism in nineteenth-century Europe: Essays in comparative history*, Manchester and New York, 1992, 119-53.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 116.

¹⁸ In fact one historian has argued that the Centre party represented a liberal force in Wilhelmine politics. See Margaret Lavinia Anderson, *Windthorst: A Political Biography*, New York, 1981, 8.

¹⁹ See Matthew Cragoe, 'Conscience or Coercion? Clerical Influence at the General Election of 1868 in Wales', *Past and Present*, 149, 1995, 140-69 and Margaret Lavinia Anderson, 'Voter, Junker, Landrat and Priest: The Old Authorities and the New Franchise in Imperial Germany', *American Historical Review*, 98, 5, 1993, 1448-1474.

²⁰ In 1871 the Centre received 23.9% of the vote in the core constituencies of the Ruhr. As late as 1920 it still received 23.3% of the vote. Thereafter its share declined somewhat and hovered between the 18 to 21% mark until the fall of the Republic. Wolfgang Jäger, *Bergarbeitermilieus und Parteien im Ruhrgebiet. Zum Wahlverhalten des katholischen Bergarbeitermilieus bis 1933*, München, 1996, 20 and 30.

The Election of Gerhard Stötzel and Mabon

The initial elections of Gerhard Stötzel (1834-1905) in Essen (1877) and Mabon in the Rhondda (1885) are illustrative of the strained relationships between labour and middle-class activists. Both were from working-class backgrounds and stood in competition with middle-class candidates from their own parties. Stötzel, born near Siegen in 1834, had worked as a metal turner at the Krupp owned factory in Essen and later served in the Franco-Prussian war. An autodidact, Stötzel later became editor of the *Volksfreund* newspaper, the only Christian-Socialist workers' newspaper in the Ruhr at the time. He was active in the Catholic Pius Association and also played a leading role in attempts to organise the workers. He was heavily involved with the Christian-Socialist Workers' Association, a forerunner of later Catholic workers' associations. The Association had been formed in 1870 and by the beginning of 1871 the membership of the main branch alone numbered 2,200. Part of the organisation's success was due to the existence of several radical clerics, who advocated a brand of social Catholicism derived from the teachings of Bishop of Mainz, Wilhelm von Ketteler, in 1860s.²¹ They were willing to champion workers' demands and one such cleric, Johannes Laaf, had taken over leadership of the Association in 1872.²²

Mabon, born in 1842 at Cwmavon, began his working life at the age of ten as a doorboy. He later worked in the spelter works before leaving for Chile to work in the copper mines in 1864. He returned in 1865 and worked in the tinsplate industry before returning to mining in 1875. He became involved in the Amalgamated Association of Miners in the early 1870s and was dismissed from his job because of repeated absences to attend conferences. Thereafter, he rose to become agent for the Loughour District. The AAM collapsed in 1875 following a disastrous strike action. In 1877 Mabon moved to the Rhondda, established the Cambrian Miners' Association and became champion of the Sliding Scale method of regulating industrial relations, which he believed was the best method for ensuring harmony between employer and employee. In fact, Mabon, a lay preacher, was famed for his ability to quell rowdy miners' meetings through singing hymns.²³

²¹ Bishop von Ketteler published a pamphlet in 1864 entitled *The Worker Question and Christianity* in which he advocated the formation of workers' organisations on the basis of Catholic theology. See August Erdmann, *Die Christlichen Arbeiterbewegung in Deutschland*, Stuttgart, 1908, 16 and Otto Müller, *Die christliche Gewerkschaftsbewegung Deutschlands mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der Bergarbeiter- und Textilarbeiter-Organisationen*, Karlsruhe, 1905, 7-12.

²² Heiner Budde, *Christlich-Sozial an der Ruhr: Eine Volksbewegung im Zentrum der Industrie*, Essen, 119; Hermann Schröter, 'Gerhard Stötzel, Reichstagsabgeordneter für den Wahlkreis Essen, Stadt und Land, von 187 bis 1905', in *Das Münster am Hellweg*, 6/9, 31, June 1978, 67-76. Jäger, *Bergarbeitermilieus*, 65-66.

²³ E. W. Evans, *Mabon: William Abraham 1842-1922: A Study in Trade Union Leadership*, Cardiff, 1959, 1-21.

Although Mabon and Stötzel were both from working-class backgrounds, the constituencies they eventually represented had some important differences. Essen was a heavily urbanised seat and had greater occupational diversity than the Rhondda. The Krupp firm dominated the city, providing jobs for thousands of workers in its factories and mines. In comparison, mining was the dominant occupation in the Rhondda. The seat also encompassed a number of distinct settlements straddling along the valley sides and floor. Both areas were in a state of flux as the industrial base expanded and immigrants, attracted by the prospect of higher wages, moved into the area. In south Wales, the greatest number of these immigrants came from just across the English border. Essen, on the other, was more ethnically diverse and by the 1890s especially the Polish community there became quite sizeable.²⁴

Mabon and Stötzel were then well-known figures within their constituencies, and both were successful in building an organisational base for themselves, although trade unionism was generally weak in both areas. There were small unions in south Wales, but they were geographically divided and some, like the Cambrian Miners' Association, lacked many of the functions associated with full trade unions. In the Ruhr, on the other hand, the first large-scale strike in the coal industry occurred in 1872 and was followed by an ultimately unsuccessful attempt to establish a union. Six years later there was a second attempt to form a trade union, this time under the leadership of Anton Rosenkranz. This second unsuccessful attempt at unionisation provided a backdrop for Stötzel's initial election in 1877.²⁵ Yet despite the embryonic nature of trade unionism the two would-be politicians had the backing of other workers' organisations. This organisational support was crucial for their election campaigns. It provided the necessary social and economic capital to challenge the middle-class activists, not least because parliamentarians were not paid in either Germany or Britain at the time.²⁶

²⁴ For a general comparison of the development of south Wales and the Ruhr see Werner Berg, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft in Deutschland und Großbritannien im Übergang zum 'Organisierten Kapitalismus'. Unternehmer, Angestellte, Arbeiter und Staat im Steinkohlenbergbau des Ruhrgebietes und von Südwales, 1850-1914*, Berlin, 1984. On south Wales specifically see E. D. Lewis, *The Rhondda Valleys*, 1958 and Brinley Thomas, 'The Migration of Labour into the Glamorganshire Coalfield 1861-1911' in W. E. Minchinton (ed.) *Industrial South Wales 1750-1914: Essays in Welsh Economic History*, London, 1969, 37-56. On Essen generally see Ulrich Borsdorf, *Essen - Geschichte einer Stadt Essen*, Essen, 2002. On the Krupp factories see, Paul Johann, *Alfred Krupp und die Arbeiterbewegung*, Düsseldorf, Schwam, 1987.

²⁵ See E. W. Evans, *The Miners of South Wales*, Cardiff, 1961, 133-8; See Tenfelde, *Sozialgeschichte der Bergarbeiterschaft an der Ruhr im 19. Jahrhundert*, Bonn, 1981, 470-86 and 514-521; Heinrich Imbusch, *Arbeitsverhältnis und Arbeiterorganisationen im deutschen Bergbau: Eine geschichtliche Darstellung*, Berlin, 1980.

²⁶ On the necessity of this capital see Jon Lawrence, *Speaking for the People: Party, Language and Popular Politics in England, 1867-1914*, Cambridge, 1998, 64.

Stötzel was the first to stand for election. In the run up to the elections tensions between the Christian-Socialist and the more traditional members of the local Centre party were growing. The Christian-Socialist wing of the party refused to accept the re-nomination of the incumbent Christoph Ernst von Forcade de Biaix, a jurist from Berlin. A decisive intervention came from the miners' leader Anton Rosenkranz at an electoral meeting on 24 December 1876. He argued that Forcade had little sympathy with the concerns of the workers, or even the people generally.²⁷

Stötzel prevaricated. This did not, however, prevent his supporters from trumpeting his working-class credentials and placing them in direct juxtaposition to the privileged Forcade. The *Essener Volkszeitung* reported on a meeting held in support of Stötzel's candidature in Essen on 2 January 1877. At the crowded hall visitors had a leaflet pressed into their hands entitled 'Call to the members of the Christian-Socialist Workers' Party'. The pamphlet claimed that the Christian-Socialists had achieved much for the workers. The organisations' membership had increased and press organs had been created for the movement. Yet, it freely admitted, that in comparison little gain had been found in the political sphere. It went on to claim that this was due to the composition of the *Reichstag*, whose deputies, including those of the Centre party, had 'done little to further our demands'. It rhetorically asked whether their members had ever heard of a Centre deputy who had introduced a bill for:

a normal working day or at least a minimum wage which the employers could not force down. Had a member of the Centre party ever made this demand a subject of propositions or interpellations in the national assembly? No-one had ever heard of that! And why? Because until now the Centre party has consisted of people, who in reality either do not understand the circumstances and needs of the workers, or do not want to understand, or are not allowed to understand since their own interests or the interests of their voters are in opposition to those of the workers. Workers! We cannot be blind any longer to the fact that in the Centre party we have the same bourgeoisie as workers in other parties have. That an employer is Catholic, Protestant or Jewish is inconsequential for us, because they are all cut from the same cloth... Workers! If we want our demands to be finally placed before the national assembly, let us elect an able and proven man, one of us... He will be of more use to us than Herr Forcade or any other similar Herr. And if Stötzel should refuse, then good, let us seek in his stead another worker. Workers! To your posts! Give your vote only to our candidate, the worthy Stötzel. If he refuses, then unite quickly behind another workers' candidate. God bless this work!

²⁷ Jäger, *Bergarbeitermilieus*, 68.

The meeting itself was a stormy affair. The workers and the middle-class (*Bürgerlich*) parties were represented respectively by Laaf and Matthais Weise, the owner of a textile factory and member of the Centre party's provincial committee. Weise denied the accusations that the Centre party had done nothing for the workers and claimed that Forcade was a 'warm friend of the workers'. However, his speech seemed to make little impact on the audience and was greeted with heckling and cries to 'Get down'. Instead, Laaf offered an olive branch. He proposed that several members of the Association meet with the middle-class fraction to secure their guarantee that a workers' candidate would be selected for the next election. This was accepted, although some declared that Stötzel should stand in the run-off election regardless.²⁸

While the middle-class fraction was prepared to support the social and economic demands of the Christian-Socialists, it rejected any limitations on its rights to select future candidates.²⁹ This rejection destroyed any possibility of consensus. Instead, the middle-class fraction attempted to undermine Stötzel by claiming the Christian-Socialist movement was close to Social Democracy.³⁰ However, neither this nor the personal recommendation of the Centre party leader, Windthorst, or even the support of most of the priests was enough to ensure victory for Forcade.³¹ In the first round of elections Forcade received 32.3% of the vote, Stötzel 27.6%, Gützloe, the National Liberal candidate, 27.4% and Hasselmann, the Social Democrat, 12.6%. In the run-off election the Social Democrats called upon their supporters to vote for Stötzel as the only way for the Christian-Socialist to throw off the influence of the priests. The National Liberals also supported him as the lesser of two evils.³² In the next election (*Stichwahl*) Stötzel received 60.3% compared to 39.7% for Forcade, largely due to the transfer of social-democratic votes.³³

Unlike the Essen constituency in 1877 the Rhondda seat contested by Mabon was newly created. The formation of this new seat provided the space for the Rhondda Steam Coal Miners' Association (RSCMA) to put forward a candidate in the figure of Mabon. The actual events surrounding the election of Mabon bear some striking similarities to earlier events in Essen. The RSCMA had begun to consider nominating a candidate as early as 1883. By January 1885 Mabon had been selected and a Parliamentary Executive Committee chosen to organise the campaign. Unlike Stötzel, Mabon did have

²⁸ *Essener Zeitung*, 2 and 3 January 1877.

²⁹ *Tremonia*, 4 January 1877.

³⁰ *Essener Volkszeitung* 23 January 1877.

³¹ Paul, *Alfred Krupp*, p. 214; Claudia Hiepel, *Arbeiterkatholizismus an der Ruhr: August Brust und der Gewerkverein christlicher Bergarbeiter*, Stuttgart, 1999, 33. For Windthorst recommendation of Forcade 'high worth' see *Tremonia*, 5 January 1877.

³² *Essener Zeitung*, 20 January 1877.

³³ Jäger, *Bergarbeitermilieus*, 68.

the support of several other parliamentarians, such as the Liberal Henry Hussey Vivian and the Lib-Lab Henry Broadhurst. However, the Liberal Three Hundred selected as its candidate the coalowner and president of the Pontypridd and Rhondda Liberal Association, Lewis Davis. At a meeting of the Three Hundred four candidates for nomination eventually presented themselves. Davis beat Mabon in the final round of voting by 143 votes to 51. However, the miners' association complained that the Liberals had deliberately organised affairs to the disadvantage of their candidate. They accused the Three Hundred of including a disproportionate number of colliery officials and of holding their ballot at an inopportune time for most miners to attend. At a second ballot Davis won again, but Mabon stated he was going to stand in any event.

The actual campaign was marked by violence and personal attacks by both sides. Like Stötzel and the Christian-Socialists, Mabon and his supporters emphasised his working-class credentials. At a meeting at Tynewydd a speaker asked 'What does Mr F. L. Davis know of the workmen's needs? He has no experience of the life of a working man... It is said that Mr Davies has a number of letters after his name. Well, I don't know whether they are B.A., M.A. or LL.P.D.; but I am going to ask your permission to attach four initials to the name of Mabon to-night. They are C.F., P.B. - What do they mean? 'Collier's Friend' and 'Perfect Brick'. In conclusion, the speaker said Mabon was not only a Welshman but a Welsh speaker - not only a Cymro but a Cymreigydd. 'He was one of the people - and one brought up, like them, in the School of adversity'. Mabon himself claimed that he didn't want 'class legislation, but they wanted class representation'. By contrast Davies's claim that 'he was a young man whose sympathies were as wide as the needs of the working classes' and questioned whether it was 'absolutely necessary that a representative of the working classes should be himself a working man' seemed lacklustre.³⁴ On the day Mabon was the clear victor, taking 56.3% of the vote, compared to Davies's 43.7%.³⁵

The similarities between Stötzel and Mabon extended beyond the language used during the election. Following their entry into the national legislatures both politicians were quickly reconciled with their erstwhile opponents, in Stötzel's case much to the disappointment of the Social Democrats. The Catholic *Tremonia* paper, which had supported Forcade, congratulated the former metal worker as a 'noble victor' and 'tipped its hat' to the Christian-Socialists, while Weise became a firm supporter of Stötzel in subsequent elections.³⁶ In fact, he had to fight another campaign the following year. This

³⁴ *Pontypridd Chronicle*, 6 November 1885.

³⁵ For the full story of Mabon's election see Williams, *Democratic Rhondda*, 31-7.

³⁶ *Tremonia*, 25 January 1877

time Stötzel was the sole Centre candidate and was standing against his former employer, Alfred Krupp. By nominating Krupp the National Liberals hoped to exploit the split between the middle- and working-class Centre voters. Krupp had an advantage in that many of his workers lived in company housing. This allowed them to be exposed to intensive canvassing, while restricting the campaign of the Centre. Krupp had also placed pressure upon the Catholic workers' association by threatening to sack members. Yet despite these pressures Stötzel won an absolute majority in the first round.³⁷

In the Rhondda, Mabon and his supporters formed the Rhondda Labour and Liberal Association (RLLA), which absorbed the Rhondda Liberal Association. Mabon also faced the prospect of having to fight another election less than a year after his initial victory. However, this time Davis made it clear that he did not intend to stand. Mabon was returned unchallenged. By playing upon his working-class credentials and maintaining his links with the Liberal party and beyond that to the Nonconformist chapels, Mabon was able to ensure dominance of his seat. He was unchallenged at every election between 1886 and 1910, except for 1900 and 1910.³⁸ On those occasions the seat was contested by a Conservative candidate. Faced by these challenges Mabon and his followers were again to employ the language of class by emphasising that he represented the workers. For example, in 1900 Tom Richards, Secretary of the SWMF, linked Mabon to the fortunes of the new established trade union. He claimed:

the objects of our organisation were briefly those - they had taught managers of collieries that the collier had a backbone, and intended having what he had bargained for. The collier felt that he honestly did his part of the bargain and that he could force the manager to do his. ... That organisation could be used to advantage to further their usefulness as voters. The organisation would send Mabon to oppose the members whose only intention was the hoarding up of wealth. No men should be sent to Parliament but men who knew what labour was, and they had such a man in Mabon.³⁹

Stötzel was not quite as fortunate as Mabon. Unlike the Rhondda, Essen was contested at every election and he did lose it once to Krupp in 1893 before recapturing the seat in 1898. Moreover, he was unable to monopolise the discourses of labour. Following the lapse of the Anti-Socialist Law in 1890 the Social Democratic Party reappeared on the electoral scene and was able, despite over a decade of persecution and harassment, to contest the Essen

³⁷ Paul, *Krupp*, 253-68.

³⁸ Williams, *Democratic Rhondda*, 38-7.

³⁹ *Rhondda Leader*, 2 June 1900.

constituency in the same year. This renewed left-wing challenge, in the form of miners' leader Ludwig Schröder, did not cause Stötzel to retreat from his earlier rhetoric. Instead his working-class background were continually emphasised at rallies. Weise presented him as:

a man, who came from workers' circles, who knows the circumstances of the workers like hardly anyone else. If Herr Stötzel does not now work by hand, he has however not stopped working with head and heart. Herr Stötzel knows the circumstances of the workers as well as the best miner. In Bochum they have selected a miners' candidate, but there are also other interests to be represented in the Reichstag. We have also iron and steelworkers, who could also use the same right and name a candidate from their midst. We would be making a great mistake if we separate ourselves from Herr Stötzel and are not loyal to him, because he is a strong-minded man respected by all parties.⁴⁰

In response to accusations that he was not a working-class candidate Stötzel revived his 1877 victory over a middle-class Centre candidate. He differentiated himself from the SPD candidate through his rejection of republicanism and atheism, arguing that social reform could only be achieved on the basis of Christian thought.⁴¹ Stötzel and his supporters were then propagating a general working-class identity aimed at appealing to the numerous factory workers of Essen as well as the miners. On the other hand, Schröder was portrayed as representing only a particular group among the workers. Furthermore, by indicating that he had been selected in Bochum for the Essen seat, Schröder's credibility as a representative of the locale was undermined.

Stötzel also faced a simultaneous challenge from an obscure miner called Pohlmann. Nominated by the Protestant Workers' Association, Pohlmann played on feelings of loyalty to the monarchy and nationalism.⁴² Weise ridiculed claims that the Centre was somehow not nationalist. 'The Centre voters, to which the workers belong, could for once ask whether they are considered not national but un-German workers.' Furthermore, the Kaiser's social reforms were seen as already part of the Centre's own platform.⁴³ Therefore, by constructing an identity that played on the workers' sense of occupation identity, nationalism and religiosity Stötzel was able to effectively occupy the ground that any of his opponents, be they SPD, National Liberal or Conservative, may have sought to use. This coupled with his existing

⁴⁰ *Essener Volkszeitung* 3 February 1890.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 4 February 1890.

⁴² *Rheinische-Westfälische Zeitung*, 20 February 1890.

⁴³ *Essener Volkszeitung*, 18 February 1890.

prominence and the overwhelmingly Catholic structure of the district, with its network of organisations, ensured that he was comfortably returned for the constituency for the sixth consecutive time.

A similar mix of labourism, nationalism and religion was evident in the Mabon's political language. In 1892 Mabon faced the prospect of campaigning against a Liberal Unionist. One supporter deplored the fact that Mabon was being challenged and his language mixed both the Welsh nationalist and labour sentiments that became characteristic of Lib-Labism in south Wales.

He had come to ask, in the name of Mr Gladstone and the Liberal party of Cardiff, and the Labour party of Cardiff, and in the name of common sense, what was meant by opposition in such a constituency as that with a man such as they had to represent them? They were Welshmen, he presumed. Where were they going to get a Welshman who could stand up more nobly for Wales than that candidate had done? They were labouring men – where could they pick, from one end of the land to the other, a man more worthily representative of the labouring classes than was Mabon? They were miners – where could they find a man anywhere who had done the real work which Mabon had done in Parliament and on Commissions on behalf of the miners of that country?⁴⁴

Both Mabon and Stötzel deployed a political discourse composed of a potent mix of nationalism, concern for the workers and religiosity. Chris Williams has commented that Mabon, as Welshman and worker, represented a compound of class identity with the other political ideals of Liberalism.⁴⁵ Much the same could be said of Stötzel in relation to labour, political Catholicism and Germany. Indeed, these links were strengthened and made more feasibly by Pope Leo XIII succession. His abandonment of his predecessors anti-modernist stance and the publication of his *Rerum Novarum*, 'On the Rights and Duties of Capital and Labour', acted as a stimulus to further organization among working-class German Catholics.⁴⁶

The discourses employed by both Mabon and Stötzel proved remarkable resilient for decades, seeing off both internal and external challengers. Yet, if these discourses were so compelling how was it that the bond between Labour and Liberal fractured, while that between Christian-Social and Centre endured?

⁴⁴ *Glamorgan Free Press*, 9 July 1895.

⁴⁵ Chris Williams, 'Democracy and Nationalism in Wales: The Lib-Lab Enigma', in Robert Stradling, Scott Newton and David Bates (eds.), *Conflict and Coexistence. Nationalism and Democracy in Modern Europe. Essays in honour of Harry Hearder*, Cardiff, 1997, 111.

⁴⁶ Ellen Lovell Evans, *The German Center Party, 1870-1933: A Study in Political Catholicism*, Carbondale and Edwardsville, 1981, 178-80.

Languages of Labour, Languages of Class

As already noted many reasons have been posited for why the Progressive alliance between Labour and Liberalism frayed and ultimately unravelled. We will not rehash them here, nor engage in a detailed analysis of the structural differences between south Wales and the Ruhr, but rather focus on what explanations emerge from the context of the comparison. This section focuses on four overlapping explanations – the existence/non-existence of specific milieux, the potential binding effect of religion, the role played by other parties, and finally shifts in political language.

First, in Germany the relationship between Catholics of all classes had been strengthened by the effects of the *Kulturkampf* of the 1870s. This consisted of a number of discriminatory laws directed towards the Catholic Church. The policy was a failure, for rather than encouraging Catholics to identify with the newly created *Reich* it consolidated the community and created a distinct Catholic milieu of which the Centre party was just one, albeit very significant, expression.⁴⁷ Even after the laws had been abolished the memory of the *Kulturkampf* was an important element of Centre discourse. For example during the 1884 election Stötzel supporters claimed that a vote for his National Liberal opponent, Huffmann, represented a vote for the *Kulturkampf*.⁴⁸

In south Wales there was not really a comparable event, at least not in living memory. The theoretical literature on milieu creation sees state sanctioned discrimination as a prerequisite for milieu creation, but such top-down action is lacking in late nineteenth-century Wales. True, Liberals did refer to the disabilities their Nonconformist forebears had had to suffer, but these lacked the immediacy of the *Kulturkampf*. Disestablishment, of course, remained a core Liberal demand in south Wales. Yet, unlike the German laws, the Church in Wales was not seen as a direct attack on Nonconformity, but more of an obstacle to be removed. Therefore, although Nonconformity could act as a strong bonding agent, it is perhaps unwise to identify a cohesive Nonconformist milieu. This is not to suggest that the chapels had no influence upon electorate. Matthew Cragoe has likened the role of Welsh Nonconformist preachers during the 1868 elections to Catholic priests in Germany.⁴⁹ However,

⁴⁷ On the creation of milieux in Germany see William Claggett, Jeffrey Loesch, W. Phillips Shively, Ronald Snell, 'Political Leadership and the Development of Political Cleavages: Imperial Germany, 1871-1912', *American Journal of Political Science*, 26, 1982, 643-64. On the German Centre Party on the *Kulturkampf* see Evans, *Center Party*, 36-78. Finally, on the Catholic milieu in the Ruhr specifically see Michael Schäfer, 'Das Milieu der katholischen Arbeiter im Ruhrgebiet (1890-1914)', Dagmar Kift (ed.), *Kirmes-Kneipe-Kino. Arbeiterkultur im Ruhrgebiet zwischen Kommerz und Kontrolle (1850-1914)*, Paderborn, 196-225.

⁴⁸ *Essener Volkszeitung*, 18 and 20 October 1884

⁴⁹ Cragoe, 'Conscience or Coercion?', 141.

by the end of the nineteenth century Nonconformist influence had weakened. More importantly its attitude toward the labour movement was divided. While some supported the labour movement, others feared it would come under the influence of socialism.⁵⁰ Indeed, by the 1900s such was the sense among some in the Rhondda that religious concerns were being left behind that the Rhondda Nonconformist League was reformed, not to compete with the RLLA, but to convince the leaders to represent not only labour but also the old issues like Disestablishment.⁵¹ By contrast in Germany the Centre was concerned over the prospect of a renewed *Kulturkampf*.⁵²

The issue of religion is related to a second possible reason. We could speculate on the respective 'binding' effects of Catholicism and Protestantism. Nonconformity was largely concerned with individual salvation, while Catholicism has a more collective ethos.⁵³ If we accept this then it is perhaps possible to argue that Catholicism acted as a greater cohesive agent than Nonconformity. This is a tentative argument and more work needs to be done on the precise relation between religion and the labour movement. Undoubtedly, Catholicism alone cannot explain the Centre party's success in retaining its electorate. This was also partly due to the unchanging constituency boundaries and the opportunism of the leadership.⁵⁴ The Centre party could more easily absorb collectivist demands than Liberalism and combine the concerns of labour and religion. This combination was facilitated by the predominantly Protestant character of the heavy industrialists. Catholicism in the Ruhr was also subject to the same process of secularisation as religion in other regions. It is also worth noting that the SPD was far more successful in recruiting members and voters in the more Protestant parts of the Ruhr than the predominantly Catholic communities like Essen.⁵⁵

Mention of the SPD brings us to a third reason. Unlike, the Centre the Lib-Lab movement and later the Labour party in south Wales did not face a serious challenge from the Left. The Independent Labour Party made some inroads into Wales in the 1890s and succeeded in returning Keir Hardie as one MP for Merthyr in 1900. Hardie's election, however, owed much to the ill feeling between the two Liberal candidates for the seat and ILP support remained

⁵⁰ Cyril E. Gwyther, 'Sidelights on Religion and Politics in the Rhondda Valley, 1906-26', *Llafur*, 3, 1, 30-43; Robert Pope, 'Facing the dawn: Socialists, Nonconformists and Llais Llafur, 1906-1914', *Llafur*, 7, 3 & 4 1998/99, 87.

⁵¹ *The Rhondda Leader*, 8 June 1907.

⁵² Evans, *Center Party*, 151-164.

⁵³ W. R. Lambert, 'Some working-class attitudes towards organised religion in the nineteenth-century', *Llafur*, 2, 1, 1976, 9-12.

⁵⁴ David Blackburn, 'Catholics and Politics in Imperial Germany: The Center party and its constituency' in idem (ed.), *Populists and Patricians: Essays in Modern German History*, London, 1987, 208.

⁵⁵ Jäger, *Bergarbeitermilieus*, 21-6.

small and patchy in the Principality.⁵⁶ Other socialist groups such as the Social Democratic Federation and Socialist League proselytized in the region but had limited impact.⁵⁷ Mabon had his critics on the Left, but they remained largely isolated voices. In 1910 some vague attempt was made to by the Mid-Rhondda Socialist Propaganda Committee to mount a candidate in opposition to Mabon. The plan failed through lack of support and funds.⁵⁸

The Centre party, on the other hand, were challenged by the Social Democrats. Unlike the Christian-Socialists within the Centre Party, the SPD employed a political discourse based explicitly on Marxism. The SPD was a self-consciously working-class party. Although non-Marxist, Lassalleian ideas remained an undercurrent within the party, the essential conflict between labour and capital at the root of Marxist ideology seemed to correlate better to the discrimination the Social Democrats experienced under Bismarck.⁵⁹ The experience of state repression was therefore instrumental in allowing a whole generation of Social Democrats to endorse a Marxist discourse, even if in practice they were reformist.⁶⁰ The Centre responded to this challenge in several ways. First, it contrasted its religiosity and national loyalty to the alleged atheism and internationalism of the SPD. Second, it declared it was a *Volkspartei* (people's party). However, at the same time Stötzel still used the language of labour. During the 1903 election, for example, Stötzel alternately portrayed the party as the guardian of Christianity, the workers and as a *Volkspartei*.⁶¹ That there were sometimes tensions between these visions of the party has already been shown, but the existence of a credible threat in the form of the SPD generally allowed points of fracture to be papered over and unity ensured. Indeed, the Centre and other Catholic organisations conceived of themselves as a bulwark against Social Democracy. Stötzel claimed at a celebration thrown to mark the thirtieth anniversary of his first electoral victory that 'I have seen it as my task to struggle against Social Democracy. As early as the 1860s I formed a front with Herr Weise against them at a public meeting in Werden. In order to protect the worker against the social-democratic flood, I have always striven to found and maintain associations on a Christian-Socialist basis'.⁶²

⁵⁶ See David Howell, *British Workers and the Independent Labour Party, 1888-1906*, Manchester, 1983, 253.

⁵⁷ Deian Hopkin, 'Labour's Roots in Wales, 1880-1900', in *The Labour Party in Wales 1900-2000*, Duncan Tanner, Chris Williams and Deian Hopkin (eds.), Cardiff, 2000, 42-57.

⁵⁸ *The Rhondda Leader*, 10 December 1910. Williams, *Rhondda*, 42.

⁵⁹ For the Lassalleian and Marxist trends with the early social-democratic movement see Thomas Welskopp, *Das Banner der Brüderlichkeit. Die deutsche Sozialdemokratie vom Vormärz bis zum Sozialistengesetz*, Bonn, 2000, 668-705.

⁶⁰ W. L. Guttsman, *The German Social Democratic Party, 1875-1933: From Ghetto to Government*, London, 1984, 228.

⁶¹ *Essener Volkszeitung*, 12, 15 and 19 June 1903.

⁶² *Ibid*, 12 October 1903.

In comparison to the sharp dichotomy in the Ruhr, the division between socialist and non-socialist labour was more permeable in south Wales. There seemed a great degree of ambiguity over the Lib-Lab MPs relation to socialism. For example, at an RLLA meeting in 1907 one of Mabon supporters deplored the socialist habit on holding meetings on a Sunday, but also claimed that Mabon 'was not a socialist of that class. He belonged to the evolutionary school of socialism.' Interestingly, Mabon did not feel it necessary to disown the statement.⁶³ Therefore, the absence of credible left-wing party and the marginalisation of Marxism, meant socialist and more independently orientated labourite discourses were able to develop within the parameters of Lib-Labism and had certain continuities with Liberalism. As the *Rhondda Leader* noted in the 1900s the balance seemed to be shifting from Lib-Lab to Lab-Lib.

This brings us full circle to the issue of language. The language of the Centre party remained largely constant throughout the period before the First World War. Religion, labour and nationalism were recurrent themes. This was in part due to the reasons given above, but the party was also insulated from change to some degree by an electorate system in which parties did not form governments. This and the run-off system of elections encouraged the parties to cling tightly to their own distinctive identities. By maintaining these identities, manifested through their political language, parties could hope to deny other parties an absolute majority and reach a deal with them before the subsequent run-offs.⁶⁴ It was therefore in the interests of the Centre party to maintain the integrity of its political discourse so as to clearly differentiate it from its opponents.

In south Wales, on the other hand, it is possible to detect a slight but significant shift of emphasis in the discourse of politicians such as Mabon. Within Liberal rhetoric the term 'class' was often used in a pejorative manner; it was used to symbolise sectional and particularistic interests detrimental to the community and was most often applied to the landlords. Instead the Liberals claimed to represent 'the masses' or 'the people'. The people were imagined as the *gwerin*, 'a term of cultural nationalism and not of class conflict or class struggle'. The *gwerin* were supposed to be a classless, educated, temperate, Welsh, Nonconformist, respectable people.⁶⁵ Orientated toward the community the term encompassed not only workers, but also professionals and industrialists. Viewed in this manner the *gwerin* seem roughly analogous to the German term *Volk*.

⁶³ *Rhondda Leader*, 7 December 1907.

⁶⁴ Margaret Lavinia Anderson, *Practicing Democracy: Elections and Political Culture in Imperial Germany*, Princeton, 2000, 226.

⁶⁵ Prys Morgan, 'The Gwerin of Wales: Myth and Reality', in *The Welsh and their Country*, I. Hume and W. T. R. Pryce (eds.), Llandysul, 1986, 135-39.

Mabon had begun to introduce a new element to the language of the people used by the Liberals; one which recognised the dignity of labour. Yet by the 1890s there were tensions within Mabon's Lib-Labism. At a meeting of the Cambrian Miners' Association in 1892 he supported the issue of a parliamentary fund, arguing it was better not to be dependent on outside aid. He complained 'I tell you where I have been bound a little. Not by Tories - they would not ask me, but by Liberals [who by] contributing think that on that account they have a claim on me. They may send £10 or £5, but they expect a meeting for every pound sent.'⁶⁶ This desire for some degree of independence extended to policy. Mabon, for example, had little to do with *Cymru Fydd*, believing it an unwelcome distraction from the labour cause.⁶⁷

We should be wary of exaggerating the fracture between Labour and Liberalism before the 1914. After all Labour candidates still presented themselves as progressives. Hardie used the language of Liberalism on issues like Disestablishment and the Liberal 'masses vs. classes' discourse was strongly evident in the 'Peers vs. the People' slogans deployed during the 1910 elections. There was certainly no neat, linear progression from mass to class, and older understandings were still visible in the 1920s. However, it was during the 1890s and 1900s the term 'class' began to lose its pejorative connotations. This change paralleled the increasing organisation of the miners following the 1898 strike. The formation of the SWMF and the revitalisation of the Trades and Labour Councils increased the resources available for those that advocated more independent working-class representation. For much of the pre-war era Liberal discourse did exhibit a remarkable degree of elasticity in accommodating this change, but as the example that began this article reveals, the reluctance of the Liberals to accept working-class candidates merely strengthened demands for independent representation and made the workers' organisations more precocious. Like Mabon before them the younger generation of Lab-Libs and Labour MPs utilised the language of class. Moreover, the mounting industrial unrest in the coalfield meant that class took on a new salience. The largely rural *gwerin* imagery seemed increasingly untenable against the background of the strikes of 1898, 1910/11 and 1912 and did not provide a language through which to criticise the employers. Class, on the other hand, did. Gradually, almost imperceptibly, the notion of class undermined that of the *gwerin* and ultimately replaced it in the post-war years. In effect, the Welsh working class became 'the people' in Labour discourse, while the employers, who were seen as part of the community in the Liberal political language, were excluded.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ *Glamorgan Free Press*, 2 July 1892.

⁶⁷ See Williams, 'Democracy', 118-25; *ibid*, *Rhondda*, 45.

⁶⁸ Gwyn A. Williams, *When Was Wales? A History of the Welsh*, Harmondsworth, 1985, 238.

In contrast to the Liberals, the term 'class' was never such a divisive issue for the Centre party. In fact, it was not often deployed. This was so even during the tumultuous 1877 election. Stötzel was indeed seen to be a representative of the workers, but not necessarily the working class. Indeed, for many Centre activists the notion of 'classes' was tainted with the spectre of social democracy and class conflict. Instead, Stötzel and others claimed to represent a *Stand* (estate), a term with implications of shared rights and obligations and common values. A persistent criticism of the SPD was that 'the patented "workers' party", wants to follow a "pure workers'" politics', they show no interest for the remaining estates (*Stände*).'⁶⁹ Within this view the miners, metalworkers, artisans and white-collar workers were all seen as occupationally distinct, but interdependent groups. It proved a more flexible and resilient notion than that of the *gwerin* in that it provided the workers with a vocabulary through which to criticise the industrialists. Wage cuts, dismissals and lockouts could all be regarded as the employers' failure to live up to their obligations to the workforce. It could also be used to legitimise demands for recognition of Christian trade unions, who unlike the social-democratic trade unions, only wished to work together with employers. The Centre party political discourse was therefore able to endure periods of industrial unrest and the social tensions that arose out of the Great War far better than that of Liberalism or Lib-Labism.

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This article has suggested a new way of examining the 'rise of labour - fall of liberalism' debate. It is not intended as a definitive answer or meant to supplant other explanations. Clearly social change, the effect of the war, the franchise and the rise of party politics all played some role in Liberalism eventual replacement by Labour in the mining valleys of south Wales.

Instead, by means of the comparison, the article does offer some insight into what is distinctive about events in south Wales or Britain. It illustrates the important role that political discourses had to play, while at the same time being aware of the interaction between structure and language. Both Mabon and Stötzel utilised a language that was heavily dependent upon the notion of the dignity of labour. Both used this language within the wider discourses of Welsh Liberalism and German political Catholicism. However, the Centre party language proved the more resilient. Admittedly, it was influenced by external factors such as the *Kulturkampf*, the strength of Catholicism in the region, the peculiarities of the German electorate system and the threat posed Social Democracy. But this article does not deny the significance of those

⁶⁹ *Tremonia*, 2 January 1907.

structural factors. Rather it suggests that political languages were influenced by, but also reinforced those factors. The focus upon the *Stand* rather than class, for example, was flexible enough to provide a vehicle to legitimise workers' organisation and criticise employers without breaking links to middle-class Catholics.

In south Wales, on the other hand, the language of Liberalism encapsulated within the concept of the *gwerin* lacked the flexibility to encompass the rise of organised labour or to explain the industrial unrest of the 1900s. The communitarian ethos in which employee and employer existed in harmony could only stretch so far and the notion of the *gwerin* was a poor paradigm through which to deal with adversarial industrial relations. Moreover, Mabon's use of 'class' had freed it from the negative connotations that it held with Liberal language. As more working-class men, backed by the increased capital available to them through organisations, presented themselves for nomination, only to be rejected by Liberals, so the salience of the term 'class' grew until Liberal discourse could not house it. Indeed, the Liberal associations by rejecting working-class nominees were undermining their own classless imagery and feeding ideas of class. Yet class did not completely triumph over Liberal discourse. Instead, the Labour party incorporated many aspects and elided notions of 'the working class' and 'the people'. It occupied the discursive space previously inhabited by the Liberals and turned the south Wales coalfield into a Labour stronghold for the rest of the century.