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## *Introduction and outline*

Modern British government is government by party leaders in Cabinet. It is still the "Crown in Parliament" which formally takes or authorizes every legislative or administrative action, but of the three major components of this composite entity – the Commons, the Lords, and the Sovereign – the first is now virtually unchecked. The House of Lords can only minimally delay acts of the elected assembly, and both the Lords and the Monarch have long since lost their ability to veto (much less initiate) legislation. Since the Cabinet controls the agenda of the House of Commons and generally consists solely of the leaders of the party with a majority of seats in the Commons, and since the influence of party on voting in Parliament is extremely strong, the Commons itself has in essence retained only a veto and, to a lesser extent, an amendment power over the legislative proposals of the majority party's leaders who sit in the Cabinet. As a recent essay on legislation in Britain notes, today's conventional wisdom is that "parliament has relinquished any capacity for legislative initiative it may once have possessed to the executive in its midst" (Walkland and Ryle 1981: 91).<sup>1</sup>

Corresponding to this widely accepted view of a party-dominated legislative process is a conception of parliamentary elections as essentially methods of choosing which party shall rule. Electoral organization is dominated by the parties rather than by individual candidates, and it is for parties rather than individuals that British voters are generally thought to vote. Representation in modern Britain is conceived of as almost exclusively "national" and party-based. What might be called "local" representation, where each MP acts as a delegate or trustee of his constituents' specific policy concerns, is scarcely mentioned at all.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>This conventional wisdom is perhaps best suited to the mid-twentieth century, and it has recently been attacked as regards the 1970s – see Schwarz (1980), for example.

<sup>2</sup>Here again, the 1970s have given something of a shock to these views. See Butler and Kavanagh (1980: 407–10) and Cain, Ferejohn, and Fiorina (1984).

The topic of this work, broadly construed, is the historical development of the system of representative democracy just sketched. Obviously, this is a vast topic, and a number of limitations have been observed. Geographically, as the title suggests, we deal only with England; Scotland, Wales, and Ireland are left untouched. Temporally, we confine the enquiry mostly to the years between the first (1832) and third (1884) Reform Acts. Substantively, we focus on certain aspects of the development of English political parties. In order to indicate just what those aspects are, it will be useful to recall the conventional division of political parties into extra-parliamentary electoral organizations (the party organization), intra-parliamentary groupings (the party-in-government), and followers or adherents in the voting public (the party-in-the-electorate).<sup>3</sup>

Much of what has been written in political science concerning the development of parties (English or otherwise) in the nineteenth century focuses on the first of these aspects — party organization. In Duverger's influential comparative analysis, western parties in general are seen as having developed in three characteristic stages: first the creation of parliamentary groups, then the organization of electoral committees to channel the votes of an expanding electorate, and finally the permanent linkage of these two elements (Duverger 1955: xxiii-xxxvii). LaPalombara and Weiner (1966) also use the establishment of permanent local party associations (in regular communication with national units) as a defining characteristic of modern parties.

Here, in contrast, party organization will be only a secondary concern. While important, it is by no means the only part of the developmental story; changes within the party-in-government and party-in-the-electorate were just as striking, and it is with these that we shall be primarily concerned. In particular, we seek to explain the evolution of two crucial behavioral aspects of the modern English polity: the marked regularity with which MPs vote with their parties, and the strong tendency of voters to vote for parties rather than individuals. Put another way, this book seeks to show when and explain why party became the dominant influence on voting behavior in England — both in the legislature and in the electorate.

The first of these topics is relatively well trodden ground. Owing to Lowell's pioneering quantitative research at the turn of the century, it has long been known that intra-party cohesion in the House of Commons increased markedly, from levels in the 1850s comparable to those found in American legislatures to levels in the 1890s comparable to the high standards set by mid-twentieth century Parliaments (Lowell 1902).

<sup>3</sup>The use of these terms was popularized by Key (1964).

There have been few studies of party voting in the electorate, however, and those that exist yield conflicting pictures. It will be demonstrated here that the development of party voting in the electorate followed a pattern remarkably similar to that found in the legislature.

This of course suggests that the two developments were causally related, and a further aim of the book is to unravel and clarify this relationship. This involves several steps, including the detailed exposition of the actual pattern of evidence on voting behavior in the electorate and in the legislature; investigation of the interaction between MPs and their constituents; examination of the possible impact of party organization; and, most important, identification of the myriad effects of two major institutional changes, which act as our chief independent variables: the extension of the suffrage and the centralization of legislative authority in the Cabinet.

The extension of the suffrage is of course a familiar theme in studies of the development of parties. As a general rule, large alterations in the size of the voting population, whether increases or decreases, intended or unintended, have had profound and multifarious effects on political parties — whether one speaks of late seventeenth and eighteenth century England (Plumb 1967), late eighteenth century America (Charles 1956), the post-Civil War American South (Kousser 1974), or any of a number of other instances. More specifically, the major comparative studies of party development (Weber 1946; Duverger 1955; LaPalombara and Weiner 1966) have strongly linked extension of the suffrage to the evolution of party organization. Here the connection between size and party organization will be examined quantitatively, using cross-sectional evidence available from a census of party organizations conducted by the Conservative Central Office in 1874. More important, we shall also examine the impact of the growth of the electorate on MPs' campaign strategies and on their behavior in Parliament. The exigencies of electoral politics in the newly expanded constituencies, we shall argue, were intimately related to the increasing legislative power of the Cabinet.

The Cabinet had had imposing executive powers since its inception in the late seventeenth century, but it was only in the nineteenth century, and largely after the passage of the first Reform Act in 1832, that it achieved a virtual monopoly of legislative initiative as well. The "nearly complete fusion of the executive and legislative powers" in the Cabinet was what Walter Bagehot proclaimed in 1865 to be the "efficient secret" of English government (Bagehot 1865), and the development of this efficient secret — of a Cabinet with both executive and legislative preeminence — has been a central concern of English constitutional historians ever since.

Nonetheless, a major theme in the study of the efficient secret – the interaction of the Cabinet and the electorate – has received little in the way of sustained investigation. This book seeks to fill that gap.

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The remaining chapter of Part I and the first three chapters of Part II set the stage for the main analysis that begins in Chapter 6. Chapter 2 provides a brief and selective overview of nineteenth century political and economic events. Chapter 3 documents the dramatic increase in party cohesion in Parliament, and Chapters 4 and 5 dispense with some possible explanations for this increase that are suggested in the literature.

Chapter 6 then turns to the origin of the efficient secret, seeking to explain how and why the fusion of executive and legislative powers in the Cabinet was achieved in the generation after the first Reform Act. While to some degree accepting the traditional explanations offered for this development (Redlich 1908; Fraser 1960; Cromwell 1968), which focus on the expansion of the economy, Chapter 6 also attempts to go beyond previous research – both as regards the description of what the actual pattern of institutional change was and as regards the reasons underlying it. In particular, we emphasize the important effects that the requirements of electoral politics in the expanded constituencies had on the operation and procedure of the House of Commons.

The remainder of the book after Chapter 6 is largely concerned with the consequences that the rise of the Cabinet had for voting behavior in Parliament (Chapters 7 and 8) and in the constituencies (Part III). Chapter 7 begins with the observation that the Cabinet's increasing importance made positions there, and in the ministry as a whole, more desirable. Since the Prime Minister held the key to these positions, he had an increasingly attractive reward with which to induce discipline. Although more attention has been paid to ministerial ambition as a cause of party loyalty later in the twentieth century, its development in the late nineteenth century may plausibly be viewed as contributing to the evolution of cohesive parties, and Chapter 7 investigates this possibility.

Two other developments intimately connected with the increasing legislative power of the Cabinet were the government's duty or right to either resign or dissolve Parliament when defeated on crucial legislation (it had had such a duty in regard to administration since the seventeenth century). The "duty" to resign was often the "right" to threaten resignation; on matters of importance, the Cabinet might pressure its adherents by threatening to resign unless supported, thus changing the vote from one concerning the merits of the bill to one concerning the overall merit of the government. The ministry might in a similar fashion threaten

dissolution, although the effects of this threat were somewhat more complicated. Both these "rights" of the ministry – to threaten resignation and to threaten dissolution – have often been identified as important factors explaining the discipline of late nineteenth and twentieth century British parties; and the development of these rights has been suggested as a cause of the increasing trend in party cohesion. Chapter 8 investigates the viability of these assertions.

Chapters 9 and 10 deal with voting behavior in the English electorate from 1818 to 1918. Down to the passage of the Ballot Act of 1872, English electors voted publicly and *via voce*, and most students of nineteenth century elections have focused on the fascinating social, political, and economic consequences of this electoral publicity. Thus, for example, a major theme of Victorian electoral studies concerns the bribery of electors. When voting was public, one could verify that one's bribe had had the intended effect, and bribery was a common feature of Victorian elections. More generally, political historians have emphasized that public voting allowed the transference of any kind of socio-economic creditorship into electoral currency; thus, landlords could often influence the votes of their tenants, customers the votes of the shopkeepers they patronized, and so forth.

The contrast between the researches of historical psephologists and modern studies of elections held under the secret ballot is striking. The dominant themes in the study of twentieth century British electoral behavior are (1) the marked degree to which voters in parliamentary elections view their choice as one between national parties rather than as one between two or more local candidates, and (2) the marked degree to which this choice between parties is determined by the voter's social class. Nowhere does one find much discussion of the kind of electoral influence which occupies students of the Victorian era. And, on the other hand, it has only been recently that twentieth century interests have crept back into Victorian studies. The work of Cornford (1964) and of Wald (1983) has explored in great detail the development of class-based voting in the later nineteenth century – the second of the themes listed above.

This book, and in particular Chapter 9, explores the first theme – the development of a party-oriented electorate. In so doing, it takes advantage of some distinctively English documentary sources. Before the massive redistricting of 1885, most English constituencies returned two members to Parliament. Moreover, election results in these constituencies were often reported in documents sufficiently detailed so that the number and percentage of voters who split their (two) votes between the parties are readily available. Using these invaluable electoral documents, we have computed nation-wide trends in split voting from 1818 to 1918. The statistics on split voting allow a fairly clear answer to the question of

when English elections began to turn chiefly on partisan as opposed to personal factors.

In order to clarify *why* party voting increased when it did, Chapter 10 examines the linkage between the centralization of legislative authority in the Cabinet and voting in the electorate. A standard argument as to why twentieth century Britons tend to vote for parties rather than individuals runs as follows: British voters can register an opinion on the executive only through their vote for MP; the Cabinet is the effective focus of power, and the individual MP typically has an insignificant impact on the direction of policy; hence voters tend to base their vote decisions chiefly on their preferences for the executive. Chapter 10 relates this idea of parliamentary elections as choices of the executive to the evidence on increased party voting in the electorate. The effect of the expansion of the electorate is also investigated.

Chapters 11 and 12 explore the linkage between voting behavior in the electorate and in the legislature. Essentially this linkage deals with the relationship of represented to representative, and in particular with the influence of constituents over their MPs. We argue that the development of party discipline in Parliament went hand in hand with – indeed, was to a considerable extent caused by – a significant alteration in the relationship of MPs and their constituents. In particular, Chapter 11 shows that the development of party voting in the electorate ought in theory to have led to a reduction in constituency-inspired dissidence, and Chapter 12 provides evidence that such dissidence did in fact decline in the 1870s and 1880s.

## *The historical setting*

It would be difficult to overstate the magnitude of change in nineteenth century Britain. In a country which preened itself on the smoothness of its political adaptation and on its avoidance of the violent revolutions that rocked the Continent, political change was nonetheless massive, and no major institution of the polity escaped the century without fundamental alteration. In a country whose best economists at the beginning of the century believed that large increases in population, given a fixed supply of other factors of production (in particular, land), could only lead to famine, the population nonetheless quadrupled at the same time that the real product per capita also quadrupled (Deane and Cole 1967: 282). In this chapter we sketch the broad outline of political and economic events. The purpose is chiefly to provide some of the general historical background that readers who are not Victorian historians may require. The discussion in the second section also covers some topics – in particular, the expansion of the press and the alteration of the rules of procedure of both private and public legislation – that are important in later chapters.

### THE COURSE OF POLITICS

The best-known landmarks of nineteenth century British political history remain the three Reform Acts, which, in the Whig interpretation, punctuated the march from an aristocratic and factional politics, prevalent in the early years of the century, to a democratic and party-based politics at the end of the century. The greatest watershed was perhaps the first Reform Act, passed in 1832. Before 1832, the electoral system had been based on the enfranchisement of particular communities: the counties and the parliamentary boroughs; each such constituency typically returning two members to Parliament. Within the boundaries of the geographically defined constituencies, local customs and special enactments determined

which men were actually allowed to vote, with the result that the franchise approximated universal manhood suffrage in a few places, was confined to a small corporation in others, and dwindled to a single elector in the rotten boroughs of Old Sarum and Gatton. The first Reform Act did away with some of the worst anomalies of this system by, first, wholly or partly disfranchising eighty-six of the smallest boroughs; second, distributing the seats thus freed to newly created county divisions and to some of the larger cities – e.g., Birmingham, Manchester, and Leeds – that had previously been unrepresented in Parliament; third, taking a step toward uniformity in the franchise by granting the vote in all boroughs to those occupying a house worth ten pounds a year (thereby, with other provisions, allowing a 50–80% increase in the national electorate); and fourth, providing for the creation of registers of voters. Notwithstanding the apparent importance of these changes, historians have emphasized that most of the features of the unreformed system survived the Act. Although the utterly rotten boroughs were gone, 39% of English boroughs still had registered electorates of fewer than 500; although the manufacturing interest now had a sizable voice in Parliament, the northern industrial counties and London were still greatly underrepresented (in terms of both population and wealth); although many constituencies now had competitive elections, proprietary or pocket boroughs, the seats of which were essentially in the gift of certain powerful noblemen and commoners, persisted; and electoral influence, corruption, and violence remained, in the view of many historians, the chief determinants of election results.

The second Reform Act, passed in 1867, was to some extent intended to get rid of the more glaring abuses that remained after 1832. The smallest boroughs, those deemed most susceptible to influence, were wholly or partly disfranchised, new boroughs and county divisions being given seats. The franchise in the counties was enlarged and that in the boroughs extended to all householders, with the practical result that the registered electorate in England nearly doubled between 1865, the last pre-reform election, and 1868, the first post-reform election. Once again, the representative system was brought more in line (but by no means completely in line) with demographic and economic conditions.

After the report of the Hartington Committee in 1870 revealed the extent to which corrupt practices and “undue” influence had survived the reform, Parliament adopted vote by secret ballot in 1872 (the Ballot Act). Corruption does seem to have changed in form after passage of the Ballot Act (Hanham 1969: 291–93), but the election of 1880 was considered particularly corrupt by contemporaries, and as a result the first rigorous regulation of campaign expenditures and corrupt practices was enacted in 1883. The Corrupt and Illegal Practices Act of that year did

away with the old system of paid canvassers and imposed stringent expenditure limits. For the first time it became necessary to recruit *volunteer* campaign workers on a large scale, and this “provided a very important stimulant to the development of the mass party in [England]” (McKenzie 1963: 164).

The last nineteenth century expansion of the electorate came a year later with the passage of the third Reform Act. The English and Welsh electorate was increased by about 76%, and topped the four million mark. The redistricting of 1885 completely disfranchised 79 and partially disfranchised 36 of the smaller constituencies in the process of a comprehensive restructuring of the electoral system: before 1885, 57% (and before 1867, 70%) of the English and Welsh districts returned two members, whereas after 1885 only 8% did so. For the first time, almost all districts were single-member. Also for the first time, London and the northern industrial counties had a fair share of the representation on the basis of population.

Concomitant with the important legal changes in the electoral system – the expansion of the electorate, the introduction of the secret ballot, the regulation of campaign expenditures, the switch from multiple- to single-member districts – were myriad other changes in the political and economic systems. Some of these are the main subjects of later chapters – as for example the organizational growth of the parties, the development of party voting both in Parliament and in the electorate, and the evolution of Cabinet government. What we shall turn to next is a brief sketch of economic and demographic changes and some of their immediate political effects.

#### THE ECONOMY AND POPULATION

Britain during the nineteenth century was an expanding society. Between 1780 and 1860 the population almost tripled. At the same time, the center of population moved toward the towns and the north. The portion of the English and Welsh population living in urban areas (those with 2,500 or more inhabitants) nearly doubled between 1801 and 1871, from 33.8% to 65.2% (Bedarida 1979: 17); and the four most industrial counties (all in the north and Midlands – the West Riding of Yorkshire, Staffordshire, Warwickshire, and Lancashire) increased from 17% of the population in 1781 to 26% in 1861 (Floud and McCloskey 1981: 106). Moreover, the fastest rate of growth was in the largest towns: for every English and Welsh person living in a city of 100,000 or more in 1801, there were three in 1871 – at which point nearly a third of the total population resided in such cities.

All previous experience would have led to the conclusion that real

income per worker should have declined as a consequence of the increase in population. The doubling of the English population in the sixteenth century, for example, had cut income per worker in half. Moreover, the best current economic reasoning also predicted a decline in per capita income: for – so argued Ricardo and Malthus – if some factors of production are held constant, then a trebled population will be unable to treble output. The law of diminishing returns presaged a dismal future for an expanding society.

“What was extraordinary about the industrial revolution,” as McCloskey puts it, “is that better land, better machines and better people so decisively overcame diminishing returns” (Floud and McCloskey 1981: 108). Malthus and Ricardo were not just wrong, they were spectacularly wrong. This was in part because increased capital investment increased the number of tools and machines per worker. But, more important, the quality of tools and machines, and the knowledge of men, also increased. Thus, for example, innovations in preparing, spinning, and weaving cotton reduced the cost of resources needed to produce a piece of cotton cloth eight-fold over the eighty years from 1780 to 1860. A similar story played out for wool: the resource cost of worsteds fell about 1.8% per year, that of woollens about .9% per year. Indeed, textiles, together with just a few other sectors – iron, canals and railways, and coastal and foreign shipping – accounted for nearly half the total productivity growth in the economy. These were the bellwether sectors setting the pace for modern economic growth. Other sectors, however – e.g., machinery and implements, chemicals, pottery, glass, gasworks, tanning – also experienced technical change and a growth in productivity. Inventiveness was on the rise, as is suggested by the sheer number of English patents sealed in each decade: 22 in 1700–09, 477 in 1780–89, 4,581 in 1840–49.

In addition to a growth of productivity within sectors, the economy underwent massive structural change. The occupational distribution of the labor force is perhaps the clearest index. Roughly, two main periods can be discerned, during which change in the distribution of the labor force took characteristically different shapes. First, during the opening three decades of the century, agriculture and manufacturing industry traded places in relative importance, with agriculture’s percentage of the labor force falling about 11 points, from 36% to 25%, and industry’s percentage increasing about 11 points, from 30% to 41%. Second, during the remainder of the century, agriculture’s share continued to fall rapidly, but industry no longer picked up all the released labor. Instead, the fastest-growing sector was trade and transport. The percentage of the labor force employed in trade and transport rose from 12.4% in 1831 (just before

Table 2.1. *Expansion of the press, 1824–86*

Year	Number of newspapers in the United Kingdom	Number of newspapers in provincial England
1824	266	135
1856	795	375
1871	1,450	851
1886	2,093	1,225

Source: Vincent (1966: 65)

the railway boom of the 1830s) to 22.6% in 1891 (Deane and Cole 1967: 142).

A larger population, greater productivity in each sector, and a structural shift toward manufacturing industry and transport all contributed to economic growth. The result of this growth was that Britain was far and away the dominant economy of the nineteenth century. By one estimate, England controlled in 1850 over 40% of the world’s trade in manufactured goods. By another estimate, her capacity in the modern industrial sectors amounted in 1860 to 40–45% of world capacity. Yet another estimate holds that as late as 1870 she produced nearly one-third of all the articles manufactured in the world (Crouzet 1982: 4–5).

The importance of Britain’s economic growth for the political system in general is beyond the scope of this work. But two particular instances of economic growth – the expansion of the newspaper industry and the development of the railroad – are both illustrative of general trends and relevant to arguments made in later chapters.

### *Expansion of the press*

The political press grew amazingly rapidly: where there were 135 English provincial newspapers in 1824, there were 1,225 sixty years later (see Table 2.1). And it was not just the number of newspapers that changed: their size and circulation increased enormously as well.

The causes of this great expansion of the press were many. In part, the press grew because of a tremendous growth in the potential demand for newspapers. The population was growing rapidly, and education was expanding literacy. At the same time, economic development was swelling the demand for advertising.

The press grew also because of the relaxation and ultimate removal of the “taxes on knowledge.” In 1833 the advertisement duty was lowered, and in 1836 the newspaper stamp duty and paper duty were cut.

In 1853 the advertisement duty was abolished, followed in 1855 by the stamp duty and in 1861 by the paper duty. Musson (1958: 411) noted: Each of these fiscal relaxations resulted in newspaper expansions. The *Manchester Guardian*, for example, was thereby enabled to lower its price from sevenpence in 1821 to fourpence in 1836, twopence in 1855, and a penny in 1857; to change from a weekly publication in 1821 to a bi-weekly in 1836 and a daily in 1855; to expand in size from a mere four-page folio in 1821 to sixteen or more considerably bigger pages by the early years of this century; and to increase its circulation from about 3,000 a week in 1828 to ... over 40,000 daily by the late 1880s.

Notwithstanding the growth in demand for newspapers and the removal of legal obstacles, newspaper growth of such magnitude would not have been possible without revolutionary technical improvements. Railways, by improving postal service and allowing journalists to travel faster and farther, began to transform methods of collecting news. The invention of the electric telegraph had an even greater impact on news gathering techniques beginning in the late 1840s. For the first time, provincial newspapers could report news from London, Europe, and America in a timely fashion. Sometimes this was with the help of the new telegraphic agencies, such as Reuter's (founded in 1851). But the larger newspapers established their own telegraphic capability.

As a consequence of the telegraph, elections were quickened and broadened; *The Times* noted in 1859 that whereas elections used to drag on for months,

we now live in an age of steam, and the phases of the contest succeed each other with startling rapidity .... Not only have the leading statesmen of all parties addressed their constituents, but every electoral body has had an opportunity of scrutinizing the appeals addressed to every other .... Electors are no longer confined to the communications of their own candidates. They can peruse, contrast, and criticise a dozen addresses at a time, ... and deduce perhaps rather a broader moral than any particular candidate intended to convey.<sup>1</sup>

None of these remarkable changes would have had the impact they did if methods of printing had not been revolutionized. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, printing had changed comparatively little since Caxton. Type was still produced by hand with simple equipment in small foundries, and set by hand using the composing stick. Printing was still done on the handpress, with a typical rate of output of about 200–250 impressions per hour. Improvements were rapid in the new century. Friedrich Koenig invented a practical steam-driven printing machine in 1811 capable of over 1,000 impressions per hour. This was improved on by others so that by 1827 there were machines capable of 5,000–

<sup>1</sup>*The Times*, London, 11 April 1859, p. 8.

6,000 sheets per hour. Further speed waited on the development of rotary printing. Augustus Applegarth first overcame the practical difficulties in 1846, and 10,000–12,000 sheets per hour was possible (Musson 1958).

In the second half of the 1850s, after the further development of rotary printing and the removal of the stamp duty, the price of newspapers fell generally to a penny. This new affordability, together with the timely flow of telegraphic news from London and abroad, assured that the newspaper would assume a more important role in local politics and also that provincial opinion could begin to affect the House of Commons on almost a day-to-day basis. Some of the specific effects of the emergence of the penny press are discussed in Chapter 10.

### *The railroad and the steam locomotive*

The tonic of steam power was, of course, not limited to the newspaper industry. A working steam carriage had been devised as early as 1801. For a few decades steam was used chiefly in collieries, but the opening of the Stockton and Darlington line in 1825 heralded the age of the passenger locomotive. Railway building booms swept Britain in 1836 and again in the 1840s, so that by 1847 five thousand miles of main line track – or about one-third of what was ultimately attained in the 1880s – had been laid.

The economic impact of the railroad was of course profound. The railroad also had a number of direct implications for politics. In particular, its development illustrates how an increasingly complex economy vastly increased the volume of legislative activity in Parliament and thereby forced procedural change.

This is clearest as regards private rather than public legislation. The distinction between private and public bills was not always exact, but generally “every bill for the particular interest or benefit of any person or persons” (including local governments) was regarded as private. Such bills had first been widely used in promoting turnpike roads, canals, and the enclosure of commons in the second half of the eighteenth century. In the nineteenth century, they were used also to authorize construction of railroads, to regulate local police and sanitation, and to grant private or municipal bodies the authority to undertake the provision of water, gas, tramway services, and so forth.

Due primarily to the flood of railway bills that Parliament had to process in the 1830s and 1840s, the procedure on private bills underwent a complete transformation, especially as regards the role played by locally interested MPs. In the eighteenth century, the presumption was that locally interested members would take the lead. Thus, for example, a bill to enclose commons in Lincolnshire would typically be introduced by an



MP for Lincolnshire, who would then steer the bill through Parliament. The crucial stage was generally in committee, and in the appointment of this committee the eighteenth century solicitude for the locally interested MP was particularly clear: as a general rule, all MPs whose constituencies were in, or adjacent to, the area affected by the bill were put on the committee. Often, only those MPs who were locally concerned would attend committee meetings, and the result was an informal decentralization of decision-making power (Williams 1948, vol. 1).

This informal decentralization can be illustrated in the case of enclosures. There was a general understanding that a petition for enclosure had a chance to pass only if the local landowners in favor of it held between them a three-quarters or four-fifths majority of the land *in value*. If this condition was met, the enclosure usually passed, unless the opposition included some large landowner with influence in Parliament. The proponents of the bill secured the assistance of a local MP, and usually only local MPs paid any attention to the bill as it passed through the House (Tate 1967: 96–100).

Although the old private bill procedure could be an effective way to decentralize decisions when there was no controversy at the local level, it was an entirely different matter when there was disagreement. If both sides to a controversy had effective parliamentary representation, the eighteenth century procedure could be exceedingly cumbersome and costly. The cost came chiefly in committee, where the proceedings were patterned after a court of law, both sides being represented by counsel. As an eighteenth century manual on private bill procedure warned, litigation in committee “may probably be very tedious, especially if the parties have money enough to throw away in feeing counsel” (Williams 1948, vol. 1: 33).

As the nineteenth century progressed, more and more money was thrown away enriching counsel. The chief reason for this was the increase in the number of private bills dealing with controversial matters. Bills to naturalize a wealthy foreigner or to remove entail from an estate were rarely contested. Bills to give right of way to a new railway were often contested. After a variety of partial remedies had been applied, the railway boom of the 1840s destroyed the old procedure. In 1844, 45% of all petitions for private bills pertained to railways; and in the same year the Commons decided to staff their railway bill committees exclusively with impartial members. This practice was extended to all other private bills in 1855. Each member chosen for committee service thereafter was required to sign a declaration that his constituents had no local interest, and that he had no personal interest in the bill to be considered (Williams 1948, vol. 1: 529).

Although by far the greater part of the legislative activity stimulated

by the growth of the railroad was private, not all was. During the 1840s, Parliament passed several public acts that directly regulated the conduct of railway companies. Obviously these acts would not even have appeared on the parliamentary agenda, much less been passed, had railroads not been invented. The same might be said regarding factory acts and the invention of factories, acts protecting power looms from vandalism and the invention of power looms, and so forth. In general, invention, structural change in the economy, and the explosion and redistribution of population all generated new problems that eventually worked their way into the legislative process. As a consequence, the public business of Parliament expanded: where the *Parliamentary Debates* took 4,638 pages in 1820, they took 6,944 in 1840, and 10,786 in 1860. As in the arena of private legislation, this increased volume of activity forced changes in the traditional rules of procedure. Of this we shall have more to say in Chapter 6.

In addition to illustrating the growing activity of Parliament, railroad legislation in the 1840s also shows the expanding involvement of business firms in the political process. Gladstone's bill in 1844 can be taken as an example. As originally proposed, the bill specified conditions under which new railroad companies might, after a period of fifteen years, be purchased by the state. The railway companies viewed the possibility of nationalization with great hostility, and in July of 1844 a deputation with representatives from twenty-nine of the largest railway companies met with Peel, Gladstone, and Lord Granville Somerset to urge their views. After the government refused to postpone the measure, the railroads took the battle into the press and also intensively lobbied individual MPs. Eventually, Gladstone was forced to compromise: of the original bill's forty-eight clauses, half were abandoned, and the clauses touching on state purchase were made considerably more favorable to the companies (Alderman 1973: 16–17).

Although not all industries had as potent an influence in Parliament as did the railroads, the attempt to affect the political process seems to have been increasingly common. Consider, for example, the growth of local Chambers of Commerce. The first British Chambers of Commerce were established in New York and Jersey in 1768. In the British isles, early Chambers were established at Glasgow and Belfast (1783), at Edinburgh (1785), and at Manchester (1794) (Alderman 1984: 7). For the most part, according to Read (1964), these early Chambers of Commerce had limited success: provincial businessmen in general seemed more disposed to join ad hoc groups that lobbied for specific laws than to support the more permanent and general lobbying efforts offered by the Chambers. From about mid-century, however, more and more Chambers were founded or refounded: at Liverpool (1850), Bradford (1851), Leeds



(1851), Birmingham (1855), Sheffield (1857), Nottingham (1860), and in many other places. In 1860 many of the Chambers joined together to found the Association of British Chambers of Commerce. The Association opened a London office and retained an agent who was, among other things, charged with obtaining early notice of all parliamentary bills affecting commerce and with arranging interviews with MPs (Read 1964: 210–11).

In addition to business associations, the nineteenth century also saw the growth of specialized organizations dedicated to specific political objectives. Of these we shall have more to say in Chapter 7; for present purposes it is sufficient to note that such groups were rare until the first Reform Act made the achievement of legislative goals through an electoral strategy more workable, and the success of the Anti-Corn Law League in implementing such a strategy in the 1840s sparked widespread imitation.

## *The development of disciplined parliamentary parties*

### *The measurement and theory of party cohesion*

Historians have referred to the period between the first and second Reform Acts as the "golden age of the private MP." Although this phrase would certainly be a misleading guide to the private member's procedural status, which declined significantly in this period (see Chapter 6), it does convey some idea of the prestige which the private member enjoyed. This prestige was based in part on a conception of the member of Parliament as an independent and significant agent in the "grand inquest of the nation." Parliamentary independence was in vogue, especially after the Peelites broke off from the Conservatives in 1846: "If there was one attitude that the Peelites popularized and made fashionable, it was that even the most mute backbencher, when it came to a division, had a duty to vote his conscience and his sense of honor" (Jones and Erickson 1972: 222-23). In keeping with this attitude, many MPs emphasized in their election addresses that they would take an "independent" stance in the Commons, or give "independent support to Liberal (or Conservative) principles." And, in Parliament, party discipline reached its lowest measured levels in the twenty years after the repeal of the Corn Laws.

It is the marked increase in levels of discipline after this mid-century nadir that has attracted the attention of journalists and scholars since the 1870s. Precise measurement of the increase in discipline has lagged behind recognition, however, and is still very incomplete for the period before 1885. Since we shall often be dealing with questions of timing, and attempting to delimit the periods to which various explanations of the increase in discipline can feasibly apply, we need to take a close look at what quantitative knowledge there is of trends in party discipline in the nineteenth century.

#### THE MEASUREMENT OF COHESION

The earliest published figures on aggregate party discipline are due to A. L. Lowell's pioneering work at the turn of the century (Lowell 1902). In

this work, Lowell defined the now-familiar concept of a "party vote" — one in which 90% or more of the members of one major party oppose 90% or more of the other major party — and used it to document the upsurge in discipline by calculating the percentage of all divisions which were party votes in seven selected years: 1836, 1850, 1860, 1871, 1881, 1894, and 1899. Since Lowell's work, only two comparable contributions to our quantitative knowledge of party cohesion in Victorian Parliaments have been made.<sup>1</sup> Hugh Berrington has calculated the percentage of divisions which were party votes in 1883, 1890, and 1903 (Berrington 1967-68), and John D. Fair has recently calculated alternative statistics of cohesion for every year from 1885 to 1918 (Fair 1983). Data compiled for this book allow estimation of the levels of discipline in 1869 and 1875.

Before presenting any of these figures, we should first note that the significance of intra-party unity on a set of divisions depends on the context in which those divisions are conducted: whether there is salient inter-party conflict, whether the division is whipped, whether the division is well-attended. The premises here are as follows: (1) High levels of unity on questions that provoke little inter-party conflict do not testify to the strength of party as a determinant of the vote as much as would the same levels of unity on conflictual issues. (2) Intra-party unity on unwhipped divisions indicates less about the efficacy of leadership pressure on the membership than does the same level of unity on whipped votes. (3) Simple averages may mislead: The procedure of previous scholars (not just in the British field) has been to calculate simple averages, adding up the cohesion scores on each division and dividing this sum by the number of divisions. By this procedure, a division in which only 10 members of the party participated, 3 dissenting, counts equally as a division in which 300 participated, 90 dissenting. Ninety instances of dissidence in the latter division contribute no more to the final statistic than do the 3 dissents of the first division. If most dissidence occurs at unimportant and sparsely attended divisions, then we may understate the real influence of party by reporting averages of cohesion coefficients, without weighting divisions by their attendance.<sup>2</sup>

In order for us to take account of these three factors — inter-party conflict, whippings, and attendance — Tables 3.1-3.5 provide a broad

<sup>1</sup>Other significant contributions have been made by a number of scholars. W. O. Aydelotte, John R. Bylsma, and James C. Hamilton use scalogram techniques on large samples of divisions. See Aydelotte (1962-63), Bylsma (1977), and Hamilton (1968). Beales (1967), Mitchell (1967), and others have intensively examined much smaller samples. Stephens and Brady (1976) look at cohesion in large divisions. Beer (1966) gives original figures for Edwardian Parliaments.

<sup>2</sup>The discussion in this paragraph is influenced by Cooper, Brady, and Hurley (1977).

Table 3.1. *Intra-party unity: cohesion, simple averages*

Year	Conservatives				Liberals		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	IU*	(1)	(2)	(3)
	All	Whip	IU*		All	Whip	IU
1836	.739	.795	.762		.619	.659	.706
1850a	.566	.582	.567		.601	.594	.691
1850b	.652	.679	.686		.639	.646	.724
1860	.572	.580	.547		.597	.587	.673
1869	.589	.532	.553		.659	.612	.829
1871	.762	.767	.792		.717	.741	.793
1875	.931	.957	.971		.652	.657	.725
1881	.829	.879			.820	.832	

Note: In Tables 3.1-3.5, the figures for 1836, 1850, 1860, and 1871 are the author's calculations, using the data published by Lowell (1902). The first line for 1850 (labeled 1850a) defines a Conservative as a Protectionist or Peelite, a Liberal as a Liberal, Radical, or Repealer; the second line (labeled 1850b) defines the parties as Lowell did. When there is only one line for 1850, it defines the parties in the more inclusive fashion (i.e., as the lines labeled 1850a do). The figures for 1869 and 1875 are based on 10% random samples drawn by the author from the House of Commons Division Lists. The figures for the 1874-80 Parliament are based on the sample drawn by Hamilton (1968). The figures for 1881 are calculations by Samuel Beer based on Lowell's published data for that year (Beer 1966: 257). All figures exclude divisions in which nine-tenths or more of both parties (defined as the members of the party voting in the division) were on the same side, except for Table 3.5, where we have been unable to find anything but the total figures in 1881, 1894, and 1889.

\*IU = index of unity, i.e., cohesion calculated on the basis of divisions in which 50% or more of one party opposed 50% or more of the other.

Table 3.2. *Intra-party unity: cohesion, weighted averages\**

Year	Conservatives				Liberals		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	IU	(1)	(2)	(3)
	All	Whip	IU		All	Whip	IU
1836	.770	.823	.796		.602	.642	.692
1850	.588	.602	.589		.620	.627	.704
1860	.608	.599	.614		.622	.618	.704
1869	.712	.716	.715		.749	.699	.851
1871	.817	.828	.840		.744	.771	.816
1875	.941	.965	.977		.676	.687	.742

\* See footnotes to Table 3.1.

Table 3.3. *Intra-party unity: cohesion on unwhipped votes<sup>a</sup>*

Year	Conservatives		Liberals	
	(1) Simple average	(2) Weighted average	(3) Simple average	(4) Weighted average
1836	.687	.712	.582	.554
1850	.531	.559	.617	.600
1860	.557	.627	.617	.633
1871	.738	.767	.614	.601
1881	.236		.678	
1894	.591		.602	
1899	.673		.982	

<sup>a</sup> See footnotes to Table 3.1.Table 3.4. *Inter-party differences: index of likeness, simple averages<sup>a</sup>*

Year	(1) All	(2) Whip	(3) Unwhipped
1836	.447	.378	.513
1850	.566	.564	.572
1860	.606	.620	.577
1869	.465	.515	
1871	.352	.342	.395
1875	.352	.339	

<sup>a</sup> See footnotes to Table 3.1.Table 3.5. *Numbers and percentages of whipped divisions<sup>a</sup>*

Year	Whip		Governing party	
	All			
1836	181	88 (48.6%)	Liberals	
1850	318	216 (67.9%)	Liberals	
1860	257	173 (67.3%)	Liberals	
1869	16	11 (68.8%)	Liberals	
1871	256	209 (81.6%)	Liberals	
1875	26	24 (92.3%)	Conservatives	
1881	411	379 (92.2%)	Liberals	
1894	246	222 (90.2%)	Liberals	
1899	357	316 (88.5%)	Conservatives	

<sup>a</sup> See footnotes to Table 3.1.

array of measures. First, to maintain some comparability with previous studies, we present unweighted average Rice coefficients of cohesion for all and for whipped divisions (Table 3.1). A frequently used statistic in studies of the American Congress combines some elements of the intra-party unity and inter-party conflict dimensions by computing cohesion based only on divisions which saw 50% or more of one party opposed to 50% or more of the other; we present this so-called index of unity in Table 3.1 also. Second, weighted averages are calculated for the various classes of divisions – all, whipped, and those in which majorities of the two parties were opposed (Table 3.2). Third, cohesion on unwhipped votes is described (Table 3.3). Finally, to complement these figures on intra-party unity, information is presented on inter-party conflict (Table 3.4) and on the percentages of divisions which were whipped (Table 3.5). We will make no attempt to digest the mass of figures in these tables all at once. A few general observations can be made, however. First, as the internal cohesion of the parties increased, their similarity to each other (measured by Rice's index of likeness) declined. We have calculated the index of likeness only through the 1870s, but even for this subset of years a broad negative covariance with cohesion is visible.

Second, cohesion increased markedly within the category of whipped votes, starting in the late 1860s and 1870s. Thus, although it is true (see Table 3.5) that the percentage of votes that were whipped increased in the 1870s, this does not in itself explain the trends in cohesion.

Third, there is no trend observable in the unwhipped figures (Table 3.3) for either party over the century as a whole. Indeed, the figures appear quite erratic, especially for the Conservatives. This is no doubt due in part to the fact that only 10–20% of the divisions were unwhipped by the 1870s, and only 10% thereafter. With a small sample of bills introduced by a motley crew of backbenchers (bills introduced by the government were whipped), it is not surprising to find widely varying figures. This observation warns one against the procedure, which might at first have appeared attractive, of simply comparing whipped to unwhipped cohesion in order to gauge the power of the whip. Even in the earlier years, when a significant number of divisions were unwhipped, there is still the question of why. The government had a decision to make – to whip or not – and little is known about how they decided. On some unwhipped votes, the government may have had a known preference but decided (because they anticipated defiance of the whip? because they had not introduced the bill?) not to whip. In these cases there may still have been pressures on members to support their leaders, and to compare whipped to unwhipped votes in hopes of controlling for these pressures may be misleading. We shall follow the usual procedure in the literature and concentrate for the most part on whipped votes.

A fourth point to note is that the weighted averages are generally higher than the simple averages, showing that dissidence was less frequent in the larger divisions, as the work of Beales (1967), Stephens and Brady (1976), and Bylsma (1977) would indicate. Nonetheless, roughly the same pattern appears in both the weighted and unweighted numbers.

This pattern can be described as follows (using the weighted figures when available; see Table 3.2): For the Conservatives, there is a sharp decline from .823 in 1836 to .602 in 1850; a plateau in the 1850s; and a sharp recovery to .716, .828, and .965 in 1869, 1871, and 1875, respectively. A larger sample of divisions drawn from the entire Parliament of 1874-80 indicates that the Conservatives compiled a party voting record in this Parliament comparable to the most disciplined in the century.<sup>3</sup> Although cohesion dipped in the early 1880s, the work of Fair (1983) shows that after 1885 Conservative cohesion was almost invariably in the .90s. For the Liberals, there is a much smaller decline, from .642 in 1836 to .618 in 1860, followed by an erratic increase to .699, .771, .687, and .832 in 1869, 1871, 1875, and 1881, respectively. Although Liberal discipline seems to have been incredibly low in 1886, in the later 1880s and 1890s it was generally in the .80s, falling into the .70s only four times. After the turn of the century (and before the Great War) Liberal cohesion was almost invariably in the .90s.

There are a number of questions about the development of party discipline that one might ask. Here we shall focus on explaining the earliest observable increases in cohesion – in the period 1860-81. The contrast between the 1850s and 1870s – especially marked for the Conservative

<sup>3</sup>The total sample from the 1874-80 Parliament numbers 74, roughly 5% of the divisions in that Parliament. Of these, 26 were a random sample drawn by the author from 1875. Since this subsample was random, we can construct 95% confidence intervals for the 1875 figures. The results are quite reassuring. For example, the 95% confidence interval for the simple average Conservative cohesion score on all sample divisions is (.923, .939). That is, the probability that the true average Conservative cohesion in 1875 was between .923 and .939 is .95. Thus we are confident that the figures for the Conservatives in 1875 do not significantly overstate the level of Conservative discipline in that year. The reliability of the figures for the whole Parliament cannot technically be justified in the same manner, since the full sample is not random. However, further evidence that the levels of discipline in this Parliament were quite high can be culled from the figures on (1) the number of amendments carried against the Government and (2) the number of times the Government whips were defeated. The average number of amendments per year carried against the second Disraeli ministry was .17, lower than the corresponding figure for any other ministry between 1853 and 1905 (these being the cutoff years for the data series on which we base this assertion; see Lowell 1912, vol. II, 317). Similarly, the average number of defeats on whipped divisions per session of the Disraeli ministry was 1.1, a record bettered by only one other ministry (Salisbury's, 1895-1900) from 1857 to 1900. Other indications of the importance of party in this Parliament are given in Hamilton (1968).

party but visible for the Liberals as well – reflects, we shall argue, some fundamental changes in the Victorian polity.

#### THE DETERMINANTS OF PARTY DISCIPLINE

Before discussing its determinants, we should first clarify the meaning of "party discipline" as used here. There is a distinction between "party discipline" construed as the actual disciplinary actions taken by the leadership, and "party discipline" construed as how united a party was in the division lobbies. When interest centers on disciplinary action, it is natural to concentrate on the rewards and punishments available to leaders and their effectiveness in using them. When the explanandum is a particular statistic measuring the frequency with which members of a party voted together, however, any factor that influenced MPs' voting decisions becomes relevant. We shall use "party discipline" (and "party cohesion," "party voting unity," etc.) in the latter sense: to refer to specific statistics measuring the tendency of members of a party to vote together.

With the advent of the computer, the study of such statistics, and other statistics relating to roll call voting, has become a major sub-field of political science and, at least in the United States, of political history.<sup>4</sup> A variety of approaches to interpreting these statistics – relating them to the underlying political reality which generated them – have been developed. Here we shall discuss two general classes of theories: perfect information models and cue-taking models.

Perfect information models focus on the public nature of legislative voting and attempt to identify those agents in a representative's environment – e.g., pressure groups, parties, constituents, colleagues – that have the most impact on the legislator's decisions. As the name suggests, these models tend not to focus on imperfections in the representative's knowledge, but rather on a variety of straightforward or subtle pressures put on him: the party leadership will not advance his career if he does not support their programme, a pressure group will contribute to his campaign if he votes in such and such a way, his prospective opponent at the next election will advertise his vote on a particular issue among his constituents, and so on. Cue taking models, in contrast, focus on the vast number and complexity of decisions that modern legislators must make and on the way in which the informational requirements thereby imposed on them are lessened. While these models are not incompatible with the main aspects of the perfect information models, their central insight is rather different.

<sup>4</sup>For the political science literature, see, for example, Fiorina (1974) and Kingdon (1977). For a survey of recent work in political history, see Silbey (1981).

Both the perfect information and the cue-taking approaches are applicable to the nineteenth century English case. We shall first consider the perfect information approach.

As he cast his vote, the nineteenth century MP could not simply weigh the questions of public policy *in vacuo*. He had also, perhaps, to deal with explicit communications and requests from active and articulate interest groups, to anticipate the responses of less articulate constituent groups, to gauge the interpersonal consequences of his action in a collegial and partisan body. He was subject, in other words, to a variety of pressures. Pressure, as we shall use the term, refers to the perception by an MP that some person's or group's future behavior was to some degree contingent upon his vote, and that this behavior would affect his well-being. Some kinds of pressure were rather like an explicit barter concluded between the MP and the various groups which populated his environment: the MP would vote so as to further the group's goals if the group would further, or refrain from hindering, the MP's goals (over some of which it presumably had some control). Thus, for example, Lowell (1912: 467-68) notes that socially conscious Conservative backbenchers were aware that they might forfeit invitations to events at the Foreign Office if they did not consistently support the party in the division lobbies. Mid-Victorian pressure groups, as discussed in Chapter 7, were firmly wedded to a strategy of electoral pressure, seeking to convince MPs that they faced electoral defeat if they supported "the drunkard's drink," business on Sundays, or any of a number of other pernicious practices.

The meaning of "pressure" as we use it here is broader than the colloquial or "barter" meaning, however. In common parlance one generally speaks of a legislator being pressured only when he faces a clear threat from some group. As used here, pressure can exist without such threats. For example, an MP had sometimes to be sensitive to the desires of his constituents, even if these were in no way expressed at the time of a particular division, for he knew that his vote might be raised and scrutinized at the next election.

Given this broad notion of pressure, we can consider two basic ways in which party discipline can increase. For specificity, we shall focus on individual party support scores, which report the frequency with which a given MP voted with a majority of his party, relative to the total number of times he voted.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup>Note that we use frequency of agreement with the majority position of the party membership, rather than frequency of agreement with the position of the party leadership, as the numerator. Conceptually, the latter is perhaps preferable. However, practically speaking, the position of the party leadership (given by the whips) and the majority position of the voting membership were almost always the same, even in the earlier part of the century.

First, it is clear that the relative frequency with which an MP voted with his party should, other things equal, have increased as the party leadership was more able to affect the goals of MPs. Indeed, this idea drives most thinking about party discipline. In explaining the decline of discipline after the Conservative split over the Corn Laws, the loss of credibility of the leadership as a source both of patronage and of sanctions has been cited as important (Chapter 4). For Ostrogorski, the key to the increase in discipline after the second Reform Act was electoral pressure exerted by the new local party associations (Chapter 5). The high levels of cohesion in the twentieth century House of Commons have often been attributed in part to the control which the Premier has over the career advancement of MPs (Chapter 7), and to the government's ability to use the threat of resignation or dissolution to keep its partisan and election-shy supporters in hand (Chapter 8). One of the major behavioral developments in the nineteenth century, the focusing of electoral attention on the Cabinet rather than on the individual candidates for MP (Chapter 9), meant that electoral pressure from the constituencies was largely redirected from the individual MP to his party leaders, so that party pressures bulked relatively larger in the decisions of many MPs (Chapter 11).

Second, the frequency with which an MP supported his party should, other things equal, have increased as the party's position was less often repugnant to other groups and to the MP himself. This effect is independent of the "strength" of party; even if the party had virtually no ability to affect any of the MP's goals, if it happened usually to agree with the forces which determined the MP's decisions, then of course the MP would be observed usually to support his party. A number of hypotheses are suggested by this observation. First, any process or occurrence (perhaps a redistricting, an extension of the franchise, a propaganda campaign) that increased the frequency of agreement of a party with the constituencies of its members should have promoted cohesion. This idea is common in the American literature, where the strength of constituent groups makes it particularly appealing, but has received only limited attention in the British literature.<sup>6</sup> Second, any process (e.g., the regularization of nomination procedures, an ideological polarization in the country coincident with party lines) which increased the probability that a party's membership would agree personally with the party program should have fostered voting unity. Third, if we consider the decisions which MPs would have made in the absence of any party pressure (but reflecting all other pressures), any process bringing these decisions more into accord with the party position should have increased cohesion. An

<sup>6</sup>In the American literature, see, for example, Cooper, Brady, and Hurley (1977). For a constituency-based look at the British parties, see Stephens and Brady (1976).

example of such a process has been suggested by Berrington (1967-68). According to Berrington, the inability of the party leadership to rely on support from the opposite benches after the early 1880s necessitated the negotiation of greater intra-party unity; this process of intra-party negotiation ensured that actually proposed legislation was more likely to be palatable to concerned members of the party. If anything, Berrington seems to argue that the party leadership became weaker, yet was able to secure a higher level of specifically partisan support because of an increased probability of agreement with their followers.<sup>7</sup> In Chapter 11, we discuss the regularization of nomination procedures and the increasing willingness of party members to negotiate their differences, rather than carry them into the division lobbies, in greater detail.

An implicit assumption of the simplest perfect information models is that legislators know the preferences of relevant groups, and their own preferences, regarding any particular bill. Modern legislators, however, vote on a great variety of motions dealing with matters sometimes arcane and often complex, and recent scholarship has emphasized the degree to which legislators, especially in the American Congress, remain ignorant of the details and even the main outlines of many motions on which they vote, relying on cues or recommendations given by colleagues and leaders in deciding how to vote.<sup>8</sup> According to one school of thought, this represents an economizing response of legislators in the face of the vast amount of information they would have to process were they to become "fully informed."<sup>9</sup> If cues are appropriately chosen, decisions can be made as the legislator would have made them were he to bear the costs of becoming fully informed, but these costs are avoided.

There are conditions under which cue-taking is more likely, and others under which it is less likely, however, as the seminal work of Anthony Downs (1957) makes clear. Downs's work actually focuses on voting behavior in the mass electorate, but since his analysis can be applied to legislative voting as well, a brief summary is in order. A fundamental distinction that Downs makes is between political information which is essentially free and that which is not. Free information is that for which no cost is borne that could be transferred to another person - as nearly

<sup>7</sup>Since the dissatisfaction that a party member expressed in the "negotiation period" may have reflected not just his personal preferences but also pressure from constituent and other groups, Berrington's hypothesis in a sense combines the first two hypotheses. For another work emphasizing the importance of intra-party bargaining and accommodation, see Jackson (1968).

<sup>8</sup>On cue-taking, see Matthews and Stimson (1970; 1975).

<sup>9</sup>Actually the notion of a rationally selected cue, while evident to some extent in the work of Matthews and Stimson (1970; 1975), appears more obviously in related work on the notion of party identification. For a recent review and assessment of the rationality of party cues in the electorate, see Franklin (1984).

as possible only the irreducible cost of cognizing or assimilating the information is borne by the individual. Thus, for example, a broadsheet handed to a voter free of charge as he walks down the street may represent free information in Downs's sense: the only cost is that of reading and understanding the proffered essay. Of course, if the voter is illiterate or the essay poorly written, then some of the costs of the information could in principle be transferred to another - one who would read the broadsheet and provide a clear verbal summary. Probably the most significant sources of free political information in nineteenth century English society were conversations, cartoons, posters, songs, broadsheets, and newspapers. The question Downs asks is when rational voters (of the species *Homo economicus*) will invest in costly political information, and when they will rely on the flow of free information available in their society. At the most abstract level, the answer is simple. Rational voters are more likely to rely on essentially free information when (1) it is more costly to become informed and (2) the expected benefits of becoming informed are less.

Applying this general perspective to the nineteenth century Parliament, the following specific hypotheses are suggested: (1) Since the cost of becoming informed increases with the complexity and frequency of votes, nineteenth century MPs should have been more likely to rely on free information - a chief element of which was the recommendations of their party leaders - as motions pushed to a division became more complex and frequent. In Chapter 6 these ideas are examined further when it is shown that both the number and complexity of divisions, and the attendance rates of MPs, increased over time. (2) Since the benefit to acquiring information depends on the chances that the information will actually change the vote decision, any process whereby nineteenth century MPs became more confident that their party's line would be acceptable to them were they to investigate the matter thoroughly should have increased party voting. This logic leads again to the hypothesis, discussed earlier, that party cohesion should have increased when the probability of agreement between the party and other relevant groups (or the MP) increased. These ideas will be examined further in Chapters 10 and 11.



## *The Peelites and the disruption of the party system*

The preceding chapter has shown quite clearly that party discipline in the House of Commons increased from the 1850s to the 1870s. This chapter asks if an explanation for this increase can be found by examining the prior decline in discipline, from 1836 to the 1850s. This decline is generally attributed to the controversy over the Corn Laws and the resulting break-up of the Conservative party.<sup>1</sup> If this explanation is correct, one might expect that when the split in Conservative ranks had been resolved, discipline would recover. Hence, some portion of the post-1850 increase might be accounted for by a simple recovery or rebound theory. Because Liberal cohesion was almost constant over the 1836-60 period, falling only slightly, notions of recovery are not attractive as an explanation for the increase in Liberal discipline over the 1860-81 period, which appears to be a first-time phenomenon. But trends in Conservative discipline (Tables 3.1-3.2) show a considerable dip from 1836 to 1850 and 1860, and "recovery" may be an apt explanation of the trend from 1860 to 1871. In order to assess this idea, we must first briefly examine what the effects of the split in Conservative ranks were, and when these effects began and ended.

The schism in the Conservative party came in the Parliament of 1841-47 when Sir Robert Peel, then Conservative leader, introduced and passed a bill repealing the Corn Laws (with the aid of the Whigs). After the decisive vote in 1846 the bulk of the Conservative party, referred to as Protectionists, acquired new leaders (among them, Disraeli), and refused to follow Peel further; a somewhat smaller band, referred to as Peelites or Liberal-Conservatives and including many prominent men (among them, Gladstone), continued allegiance to Peel. Although the break was acrimonious and sharp, the possibilities for reconciliation between at

<sup>1</sup>This is the position taken in Lowell (1902). See also Jones and Erickson (1972).

least the majority of Protectionists and Peelites remained. The prestige of the Peelite leadership was such that the possibility also existed that they would forge a new party, drawing additional support from both the Protectionists and the Liberals. And, finally, union with the Liberals could not be discounted.<sup>2</sup>

This uncertain status of the Peelite section, with the possibility that they might pivot to either party or form a new party, acted to erode the foundations of party discipline. First, the Peelite leadership contained a number of Cabinet-level talents, and any Premier - Protectionist or Liberal - bidding for their support had naturally to allocate several ministerial positions to them. But this meant that those who conducted the day-to-day party battle for the Protectionists and Liberals "found themselves (with good reason) wondering whether ... their services would be rewarded once the prize of office had been attained" (Jones and Erickson 1972: 222) or whether the position that might have been theirs would go to a Peelite. Thus, the Peelite position exerted a demoralizing influence on the leadership in both major parties. Second, as an alternative set of leaders, the Peelites represented an alternative source of patronage. Disappointed Liberal or Protectionist office-seekers, who might not be able to see their way over to the other major party, could appeal to the ideologically more palatable Peelites (Jones and Erickson 1972: 35). Third, ambitious backbenchers in both of the major parties may have had in mind the possibility that the Peelite leaders might appear in their own party in a leadership capacity. This possibility undermined the authority of the regular party leaders, since backbenchers might look to future Peelite leaders for guidance when they disagreed with their nominal leaders. Thus, for example, disobeying Disraeli was not so dangerous if the chance existed that he would be displaced from the Conservative leadership in the Commons by Gladstone.

The state of limbo or potential in which the Peelites stood lasted for approximately a decade. Sir Robert Peel, who died in 1850, made no attempt to resolve the uncertainty. He did not reward his followers and move toward the establishment of a new party; nor did he make overtures either to the Protectionists or to the Liberals. Rather, he allowed his example of disregard for party to stand and emphasized the independence and dignity of the individual MP. After Peel's death, the Peelite leaders similarly made no decisive move. Throughout the 1850s, however, the Peelite section shrank, its members drifting back into the major parties or retiring, with not enough new recruits to make up the losses. Recent

<sup>2</sup>Much of this chapter is based on Jones and Erickson (1972) and, to a lesser extent, on Conacher (1972).

scholars have suggested 1856 or 1857 as the point at which a meaningful section no longer existed (Jones and Erickson 1972; Conacher 1972).

This date may be a bit early as marking the end of the effects mentioned before. Presumably, the prestige that the Peelite example gave to parliamentary independence did not disappear suddenly. And individual Peelites remained to a later date. In particular, Gladstone did not clearly enter the Liberal party and sever all ties with the Conservatives until he accepted office under Palmerston in 1859 and resigned from the Carlton Club in 1860. Nonetheless, one might expect that the major parties in 1860, well after the supposed end of the Peelite section in 1856–57, should have been less directly influenced by the Peelite episode. A comparison of the levels of cohesion in 1850 with those in 1860 might then provide a very rough means by which to assess the importance of the Peelites' effect on discipline. The expectation is that discipline, if measured comparably in both years, would have been lower in 1850, when the Peelites were much in evidence, than in 1860, after they had passed from the scene as a separate group.

Table 3.1 dispels this expectation. The reader will note that there are two sets of entries for 1850. One set (labeled 1850b in the table) corresponds to Lowell's assumption that the Protectionists and Peelites were properly viewed as separate parties at that time, as were the Liberals and Repealers. Lowell classified all MPs in 1860 as either Conservative or Liberal, and he noted (1902: 327) that the apparent decline in discipline in his figures from 1850, when Protectionists and "true" Liberals are compared, to 1860, when expanded notions of Conservative and Liberal are used, is presumably due to this difference in classification. He opines that the nadir of party voting occurred somewhat earlier than 1860. Yet, if one recalculates cohesion scores in 1850 after grouping Protectionists and Peelites under the Conservative banner and subsuming the Repealers under the Liberal banner – essentially what Lowell does for 1860 – one finds that the new 1850 figures (labeled 1850a in the table) are remarkably similar to the 1860 figures.

This finding may indicate a problem with the rebound theory, if we believe that the disruptive effects of the Peelites on discipline should have been significantly mitigated by 1860. The other alternative is to emphasize the slowness with which the scars of the Peelite schism healed. If we take this latter route, then the timing of the rebound would appear to be about right – the 1860s.

However, there are other factors to consider before accepting the rebound theory as applied to the 1860s. Although it has some appeal, the theory is more complicated than it appears. In order for it to be straightforwardly operative, party discipline must be shown to have been reestablished in the 1860s and 1870s on the same basis as in the 1830s; that

is, the elements contributing to discipline in the 1830s must somehow have been depressed by the split in Conservative ranks and then re-emerged as this split was resolved. But at least one factor that still played at least a supporting role in maintaining party cohesion in 1836 – namely, political patronage – had changed considerably by the 1870s. The following excerpt of a letter written in 1843 by Thomas Fremantle, Patronage Secretary of the Treasury, to a youthful William Ewart Gladstone, then a member of Peel's Conservative ministry, is indicative of the state of affairs earlier in the century:

I hear that your application in favor of young Mr. Walker is not founded on strong political claims. It is more a case of kindness and charity – such as I should more readily consider than any others if I were at liberty to do so – but at the Treasury we must look first to the claims of our political supporters and our patronage is, as you know, quite inadequate to meet the applications of members of the House of Commons in favor of their constituents who naturally consider all our patronage as theirs.

The son of a good voter at Newark would stand a better chance under your recommendation than the son of a poor clergyman who probably made it a point of duty not to interfere with politics.

If, however, I have misunderstood the case, let me know and I will note the name and pray excuse me for my frankness in explaining to you how these things are viewed within the corrupt walls of a Secretary of the Treasury's room.

(Hanham 1969: 321)<sup>3</sup>

By the 1870s, the importance of patronage was considerably reduced and clearly on the decline. In 1853, the Northcote-Trevelyan Report on the Civil Service, advocating open competitive examination as the means for admission to the Civil Service and a number of other reforms, became the programme for reformers for the rest of the century. In 1855 a preliminary examination designed to exclude the unfit from further consideration was wrung from a reluctant Derby ministry, although it appears to have had limited effect. A more important step was taken in Gladstone's first ministry by an Order in Council of June 1870 which established open competition as the method of entry into the Civil Service. Gladstone's friend and Patronage Secretary, George Glyn, complained of the reform: "I lose, without notice, and at once, the great advantage of the daily correspondence and communication with members of the party which the ordinary dispensing of the Treasury patronage gave me, to say nothing of the power which it placed in my hands" (Hanham 1969: 315). It would seem, then, that a pillar in the edifice of discipline in 1836 had been seriously damaged by 1870, and for reasons not usually linked with the split in Conservative ranks over the Corn Laws. Thus, one may question whether the rebound theory in its simplest form holds water.

<sup>3</sup>On the importance of patronage generally, see Gash (1977: 345, 356–57, 365).

The difficulty in giving an accurate account of the timing of the Peelites' effects and the conceptual problem just discussed make the rebound theory less attractive. It seems plausible that there were some phenomena one might wish to group under the rubric of "recovery," but to talk of a return to the status quo ante is misleading. Indeed, the argument of later chapters is that the increase in discipline – among both Conservatives and Liberals – was based upon fundamentally new features of English politics. Finally, it should be noted that even if one accepted some notions of recovery for the Conservatives, these would not account for the levels of discipline in 1875, and in the 1874–80 Parliament generally, which were considerably higher than those in 1836.

## 5

### *The caucus*

The establishment of local party associations in most constituencies soon after the second Reform Act nearly doubled the electorate, the affiliation of these associations with national umbrella organizations, and the role of these new organizations played in disciplining MPs became the subjects of a series of polemical contemporary examinations.<sup>1</sup> W. E. Forster's well-publicized altercation with the Bradford Liberal Association in the 1870s was painted as an intemperate attack by rabid non-conformists on a moderate statesman. The fancied resemblance of the Birmingham plan of organization to American big-city machines, the vigorous activity of the National Liberal Federation in the 1880s, Randolph Churchill's attempt to use the National Union of Conservative and Constitutional Associations as a vehicle for his ambitions – all these made lively topics in the periodical literature and, later, in books. The culmination of this literature was Mosci Ostrogorski's forceful attack at the end of the century on the new forms of British party organization, which put forth a view of this organization – emphasizing its importance in disciplining MPs – that is still widely influential, especially among political scientists.

This chapter examines Ostrogorski's views. The first section reviews the history of extra-parliamentary party organization from an Ostrogorskian perspective, then turns to more recent and rather different assessments. The second section focuses specifically on what effect, if any, local party associations had on the party loyalty of MPs.

#### EXTRA-PARLIAMENTARY PARTY ORGANIZATION

Election campaigns before the second Reform Act were still organized in an ad hoc fashion. The candidate hired someone, generally a solicitor, to act as his manager; and electoral machinery – to get voters to the poll,

<sup>1</sup>References to this literature can be found in Ostrogorski (1902).

organize treating, and so on – was constructed at the candidate's expense or, less often, at that of his friends and benefactors. This handling of election campaigns was feasible because the constituencies were still small (85% had electorates smaller than 2,000) and because there was something of a natural electoral organization in the hierarchical structure of society. It was well known, for example, that landlords greatly influenced the votes of their tenants, and a similar relationship held between employers and their men, between important customers and the shopkeepers to whom they gave their custom, and so on (Gash 1977: ch. 8). This meant that lining up the support of influential men – which required little organization – could do much for a candidate's chances. If a candidate was successful in courting influential support, he needed even less in the way of a "machine."

This state of affairs was altered fundamentally, according to Ostrogorski, by the second Reform Act. The electorate was almost doubled by this Act, and the traditional conduct of elections – by solicitors, influence, and money – became inadequate. Encouraged by the parliamentary leadership on the Conservative side and by the example of the "Birmingham Caucus" on the Liberal, permanent local party associations with dues, officers, regular meetings, "mass" membership, and continual activity sprang up. These were organized at the national level by the National Union of Conservative and Constitutional Associations (the NU, founded in 1867) and the National Liberal Federation (the NLF, founded in 1877). Those MPs who sought reelection found that they were now dependent on the new party associations. Ostrogorski argued that because the local and national associations were loyal to the parliamentary leadership, the leadership acquired an effective electoral threat with which to discipline their members:

Now under the Caucus [i.e., the new organizational regime], and thanks to it, in both parties refractory Members are called upon by their respective Associations to fall in behind the leader and they must comply if they want to be reelected. Thus in the intimate relations between the parliamentary chief and his followers, there has been imported from outside a regular intimidation agency, which makes the Members, for the nonce, simple puppets on the parliamentary stage.

(Ostrogorski 1902: 609)

The evidence that Ostrogorski gives for this view is anecdotal and pertains largely to the Liberal experience. Much attention is paid to the Birmingham Caucus, an elaborate machinery created to organize the Liberal forces of Birmingham so as to thwart the so-called minority representation clause of the second Reform Act. This clause directed that electors in those few large boroughs returning three members should have only two votes. The caucus arranged a system of ward-by-ward voting so as to split the total Liberal strength equally amongst the three

Liberal candidates, ensuring the victory of all three over the greatly outnumbered Conservatives, who might otherwise have sneaked in. The Birmingham Caucus appeared at the first general election (1868) after the second Reform Act, and the rapidity and radical nature of this innovation set the tone for much of Ostrogorski's discussion.

The actual content of the other evidence which Ostrogorski advances is indicative of a much less sharp and radical organizational break, however. The following passage from G. Lowes Dickinson, who slightly earlier had come to many of the same conclusions as Ostrogorski, is representative of the other evidence upon which Ostrogorski relies:

To organize simultaneous protests, addressed, at critical points, to members who show signs of a dangerous independence, is one of the recognized functions of the National Liberal Federation. "If the caucus had existed in 1866," says Mr. Schnadhorst in a burst of confidence, "the Cave of Adullam would have been almost untenanted"; and later examples show that the boast was justified. In 1881, for instance, there were signs of wavering in the Liberal ranks on the question of the Irish policy of the government. Instantly, a circular was issued by four officials of the Federation, calling upon the Liberal associations to put pressure on their representatives. "The time has come," they announced, "for Liberal constituencies to declare that proceedings which involve such danger to the nation, and to the Liberal government, cannot be tolerated." "The circular," we are told, "produced the effect which the committee had hoped to secure," and the Liberal government was saved, to save the nation. Similar tactics were adopted with equal success in 1883.

(Dickinson 1893: 82–83)

What is noteworthy about this passage is that the examples cited of the Liberal Caucus in action are both from the 1880s. This is characteristic of Ostrogorski's evidence regarding the NLF, also. And this is not surprising, since the NLF was not established until 1877. The point is that one should not look to the caucus's sway to explain the general increase in Liberal discipline from the 1850s to 1869, 1871, and 1875, which is seen most clearly in the weighted averages (Table 3.2). The discipline of members from Birmingham and other constituencies where the organizational change was abrupt may have been affected by such changes,<sup>2</sup> but most Liberal members do not seem to have faced a vigorous association in the early 1870s. Hanham has noted that, even in the big towns, "almost everywhere the 1868 election was fought on an ad hoc basis by an organization specially formed or adapted for the purpose by the old party leaders" (Hanham 1978: 93) and that, further, "the overwhelming success of the Liberals at the 1868 election encouraged them to rest content with their existing organization" (Hanham 1978: 114). James Bryce observed that "as late as the general elections of 1868 and 1874, nearly all candidates offered themselves [directly] to the constitu-

<sup>2</sup> Joseph Chamberlain's defection does not fit well with such a supposition, however.

uency," rather than as the nominees of a local association, as became customary later (Bryce 1913, vol. II: 81). It appears that, on the Liberal side of the House, increased discipline due to the spread of local associations under the NLF could not possibly have been significant until the later 1870s at the earliest.

Moreover, later scholarship indicates that the establishment of a local association did not necessarily mean added pressure on the MP to toe the party line. First, the local association may have been impotent. Consider, for example, the North Northamptonshire Liberal Association's "decidedly subordinate" role in the 1880 election: "The Association remained the client of the Whig landowners because, as its President acknowledged, there was no possibility of their gaining a success unless they obtained a candidate from one of the aristocratic families in the county." The decision that Robert Spencer should contest the North division [in 1880] was made quite independently by Lord Spencer, and the Association was not informed of it until after the dissolution" (Howarth 1969: 88-89). Second, the local party may have been independently minded. In East Northamptonshire, the Liberal MP found himself drawn away from the mainstream of his party by the radical activity in his local association (Howarth 1969: 114-15). Berrington (1967-68: 363) has asserted that this was common, and that "the Liberal Caucus, at least in the early stages, made for more, not less indiscipline."

The effect of Liberal associations established after the second Reform Act on Liberal discipline in Parliament has not yet been addressed statistically. Those who stress the importance of these associations, such as Ostrogorski and Dickinson, cite instances of successful pressuring by the NLF of potentially dissident MPs. Later scholars cite examples showing that local associations sometimes fostered rather than inhibited dissidence. What is needed to advance this dispute is constituency-by-constituency knowledge of the status of Liberal organization together with information on the tendency to dissent of each Liberal MP. One could then see whether MPs with well organized districts were more or less supportive of party positions than MPs with poorly organized districts. Also, the increase in discipline in those districts acquiring the new organizational could be compared to the increase in districts with no organizational improvement. While this programme of research is not feasible for the Liberals, it is for the Conservatives, and is attempted in the next section.

#### PARTY ORGANIZATION AND PARTY DISCIPLINE: THE CONSERVATIVES

The development of local Conservative associations and the influence of this development on Conservative discipline received, as noted above,

less attention from Ostrogorski and other critics of party organization. partly, this seems to be because the NU did not pressure MPs in the open fashion of the NLF. One early observer noted that "the local Conservative committees were jealous of outside control, and would not surrender their independence; the NU has consequently become more than anything else a centre for distributing pamphlets, cartoons and other electioneering literature" (Hanham 1978: 115). Although the NU did not overtly suppress dissidence, it should be noted that the Conservatives, the losers in 1868, made a determined effort to improve their organization. An aggressive new party agent, who set about to prod local Conservatives into achieving a basic level of organization, was appointed in 1870, and by 1874 59% of all English and Welsh constituencies had self-styled "Conservative" or "Conservative Workingmen's" associations. Possibly, this fairly rapid development of local associations made for an increase in discipline on the Conservative side of the House. If we do not entertain this supposition, which essentially extends Ostrogorski's explanation to a time and party which he did not originally emphasize, then there is certainly a need to explain the markedly higher levels of Conservative discipline in the 1870s on some other grounds than extra-parliamentary organization.

In order to probe the connection between Conservative organization and discipline, use is made of a document compiled in 1874 by the Conservative Central Office describing the state of local Conservative organization in each of the 293 constituencies of England and Wales in that year.<sup>1</sup> In addition to noting the existence of clubs, registration associations, Conservative or Conservative Workingmen's associations, and variants on these forms, the document gives the names and addresses of relevant officers and agents. As mentioned in the preceding paragraph, 59% of the English and Welsh constituencies were identified as having some kind of a Conservative association. Another 9% had either a registration association or a club as the most significant organization, while 29% had only a local party agent and 3% had no organization whatsoever. The relatively fine organizational categorization appearing in the source document is collapsed in Table 5.1, which compares, in counties and in boroughs, the average party support score of Conservative MPs from districts with a Conservative or Conservative Workingmen's association to the average score of MPs from districts that had no organization or only an agent.<sup>2</sup> As can be seen, there is no support in this

<sup>1</sup>This document, titled "Conservative Agents and Associations in the Counties and Boroughs of England and Wales," was first used by Hanham (1978). Professor Hanham was kind enough to provide me with a reproduction of his own hand copy of the document after efforts to secure a copy from England failed.

<sup>2</sup>In this and the succeeding analysis, party support is defined as the percentage of

Table 5.1. *Conservative discipline as a function of Conservative organization*

Party support	Organizational status	
	Low	High
<i>The boroughs</i>		
Average party support score	.941	.943
Number of observations	46	74
<i>t</i> test	$t = .12$	
<i>The counties</i>		
Average party support score	.976	.965
Number of observations	88	50
<i>t</i> test	$t = 1.47$	

Note: The party support score is defined as the proportion of times a Conservative MP supported his government when they put on the whips.  
Source: See footnote 4.

table for the idea that Conservative organization affected Conservative discipline. In the boroughs, there was virtually no difference in average loyalty of MPs between well-organized and poorly organized districts, while in the counties, those from the poorly organized districts actually gave higher levels of support than those from organized places (although the difference is not significant).

Although there is no support for the Ostrogorskian hypothesis in these data, the approach might be criticized as not testing the theory in its own terms. What is relevant to Ostrogorski's theory is not, directly, the average levels of party support found in organized and unorganized places, but rather the change in discipline found in those places which acquired a new party organization as contrasted with those places which clung to the older forms. This comparison is more difficult but is attempted in Table 5.2. Using a sample of divisions from 1869-70, we have computed party support scores for all those Conservative MPs who attended at least one division in the sample. The levels of discipline in 1869-70 should be less affected by the Conservative organizational push, which, as mentioned above, really got under way with the appointment of a new na-

Table 5.2. *Changes in Conservative discipline and organization*

	Organizational status in 1874	
	Low	High
Average change in party support	.063 (89)	.056 (65)

Note: Party support scores in 1869-70 were calculated based on a sample of 30 divisions: 16 randomly sampled from 1869 by the author, 14 coded by Davis and Huttenback (1986). Support scores in 1874-75 were calculated based on the sample of 43 divisions described in footnote 4.

tional party agent in 1870. Hence, a comparison of the change in discipline from 1869-70 to 1874-75 in those constituencies with and without a new Conservative association in 1874 should be, for the most part, a comparison of constituencies which underwent organizational change with those which did not.<sup>3</sup>

The results of such a comparison (Table 5.2) are no more supportive of an Ostrogorskian perspective than the previous analysis presented in Table 5.1. Of 154 Conservative MPs from England and Wales who sat (and voted) both in 1869-70 and in 1874-75, 65 had Conservative or Conservative Workingmen's associations in their constituencies by 1874. On average, the party support scores of these 65 MPs increased 5.6 percentage points from 1869-70 to 1874-75. This compares with an average increase in party support of 6.3 percentage points for the 89 MPs whose constituencies had not acquired some type of association by 1874.

If a finer categorization of organizational status is adopted, it becomes evident that MPs whose constituencies had clubs or registration associ-

<sup>3</sup>The number of associations affiliated with the NU by year was as follows: 1871, 289; 1872, 348; 1873, 407; 1874, 447; 1875, 472 (plus 228 branch associations). Unfortunately, it is not known precisely how many associations there were before 1871, nor is it known how many associations per constituency there were. Perhaps as many as 50-100 associations were original members in 1867. In 1874 there were 167 constituencies with associations, for an average of 2.68 associations per constituency. If we assume there were 150 associations in 1869, this would indicate 56 constituencies if we assume that the association-per-constituency ratio was constant. Hence, if we had a full sample we would be comparing 56 constituencies with high and constant organization, plus 111 which changed from low to high levels of organization, to 94 which remained at a low level. We do not have a full sample, of course, because not all constituencies returned Conservatives. If we are willing to assume that the sample of observations we do have - which requires a Conservative MP sitting in 1869 and 1874 - is random with respect to the possession of organization, then about  $111/(111 + 56) = 66\%$  of those districts having associations in 1874 should have acquired them in the period 1869-74. See McKenzie (1963: 150, 159-60).

ations as the most advanced form of organization had the greatest average increase (.095) in discipline, while MPs whose constituencies had at most a party agent had the smallest average increase (.046). But the differences between organizational classifications are never statistically significant (even at the .1 level).

There is certainly considerable room for improving the analysis attempted here, which is based on fewer divisions than one would like and does not attempt to control for other possibly relevant variables. But the analysis as it stands lends very little if any support to Ostrogorski's thesis, and is consonant with the tenor of recent historical scholarship, which has discounted the importance of party organization (Vincent 1966; Bertrington 1967-68; Feuchtwanger 1968; Hanham 1978). Local party associations may eventually have become important in the enforcement of party discipline in Parliament. But one cannot explain the earliest upward trends in party discipline, in the 1860s and 1870s, on the basis of organizational advance.

In the next three chapters, we investigate alternative explanations of the growth in party cohesion that hinge not on extra-parliamentary organization but rather on the centralization of legislative authority within Parliament. Change internal to Parliament – in particular the rise of the Cabinet – predated the full development of party organization in the constituencies and offers a rather different perspective on party cohesion.

## *The origin of the efficient secret*

To my thinking at least, the gradual growth and final establishment of the Cabinet system has been of greater importance than anything in our constitutional history since the Revolution settlement.  
(the Earl of Balfour, 1927)

Over the course of the nineteenth century, the procedure of the House of Commons was radically transformed. The basic rules and conventions of public legislation, which dealt chiefly with matters of general or national concern, and of private legislation, which dealt with matters of personal or local concern under a different procedure, were entirely rewritten. In this chapter, the major developments in public legislation are reviewed. The central theme is the origin of the efficient secret (i.e., a Cabinet with not only executive but also legislative predominance) in the decline of the private member. The next section describes the Cabinet's increasing authority over public legislation in the period before 1867, and the corresponding diminishment of the private member – even in the midst of the so-called golden age of the private MP. The second section attempts to explain these changes, and the third looks to their consequences.

### THE CENTRALIZATION OF LEGISLATIVE INITIATIVE

In the eighteenth century, the Cabinet was almost purely an executive body. Ministers were responsible primarily for the administration of royal government, and the conception of their legislative duties extended only to the passage of measures (chiefly financial) necessary to the ordinary conduct of government. General measures of public policy, it was thought, "were properly the concern of Parliament as a whole, and should normally be introduced not by the government but by private members" (MacDonagh 1977: 5).

"Bagehot (1936: xii).



In keeping with these notions, the rules of procedure governing public legislation gave very little preference to ministers. Only ministers could recommend new taxes or charges upon the public revenue, but there was little distinction made in the legislative agenda between the government's business and that of private members, and all members enjoyed a number of formidable parliamentary rights by the exercise of which they might ensure a hearing for their grievances or ideas. Any member, for example, could raise a debate upon the presentation of a petition (such presentation having precedence over ordinary business) or could repeat as often as he wished the privileged motion that "the House do now adjourn," thus obstructing business indefinitely. Since there were no formal limits on debate, any member could filibuster proceedings of which he disapproved. And members still cherished the right to make motions "on the sudden," without any previous notice. Whatever else may be said, the eighteenth century procedure was certainly not designed to facilitate the passage of a legislative programme by the government.

The rules and conventions of procedure began to change in the new century, at first slowly and then more rapidly in the 1830s. Two examples can serve to indicate the nature of procedural reform: the increasing distinction made between the government's business and private members' business, and the erosion of individual parliamentary rights.

The introduction of Order Days in 1811 laid the foundations for both developments. Owing to the addition of a hundred Irish members after 1800 and to an augmentation of parliamentary business, the time available for government business became inadequate. Since the "notices of motion" put down in the House's schedule – the "Order Book" – were more numerous, and since these had to be dealt with before the House could proceed to the "Orders of the Day," this latter business, which was also listed in the Order Book and included items such as committee of supply and the stages of bills, was often not reached until after midnight. Members complained that the ministers were sneaking through controversial legislation at late hours, and the government responded with a proposal that the Orders of the Day should be given precedence on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. This proposal was vigorously contested, but the choice was continued after-midnight sittings or some expedient, and the House accepted the ministerial proposal limited to Mondays and Fridays. From that point, it became customary to pass a resolution at the beginning of each session stating "That in the present session of Parliament, all Orders of the Day, set down in the Order Book for Mondays and Fridays, shall be disposed of before the House will proceed upon any motions of which Notices shall be entered in the Order Book."

This resolution was certainly to the advantage of the government, since

most of its business came up in the form of Orders of the Day; but it also potentially benefited private members who intended to introduce bills.<sup>2</sup> This was because the stages of bills also were considered as Orders of the Day and because no formal distinction had been made between the Orders of the Day of the government and those of private members. Thus, members who anticipated introducing bills might have favored the establishment of Monday and Friday Order Days, since their bills were more likely to pass.

In practice, however, it seems that the government dominated Order Days from the start. In the very next session (1812), a private member complained that "Ministers had assumed the right of calling for particular Orders, on the plea of expediting the public business," and moved that the resolution establishing Monday and Friday as Order Days be amended to indicate that the Orders of the Day should be taken "in exact rotation, as they stand in the Order Book."<sup>3</sup> This amendment was negatived on division, 15–58, and did not appear again until 1829.<sup>4</sup> Then, it was merely suggested, and not pushed to a division.

In the next session (1830), two new suggestions appeared (made by backbenchers) which reveal the extent to which government precedence on Order Days had become customary. One MP suggested that the precedence of the government be recognized, but that *private members' Orders* be taken as they stood in the Order Book. Another wished to give the government precedence on two days, but to create a third Order Day (Wednesday) on which Orders would be taken in "regular rotation."<sup>5</sup>

This latter suggestion was put into force in the next session, although only on an "experimental" basis. On 13 July 1831, the House agreed to a motion by another backbencher that Wednesday be made an Order Day. The Chancellor of the Exchequer, speaking for the government, remarked that

"In 1833, Lord Althorp was careful to point out that if the special morning sittings he was proposing were limited to the Orders of the Day, then "not only might the public business proceed more rapidly, but such Gentlemen as had Bills in charge might be enabled to prosecute their completion." *Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd series, xix, 115. In 1834, when the government attempted to secure the precedence of Orders over notices for the remainder of the session, Secretary Rice argued that "As to the imputation, that this motion was made to favour the Government, other Members had as much interest in the Orders of the Day being admitted to precedence as the Government." *Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd series, xxiv, 1290.

<sup>2</sup>*Parliamentary Debates*, 1st series, xxi, 111–12, and *Commons Journal*, 9 January 1812.

<sup>3</sup>*Mirror of Parliament*, 21 May 1829, p. 1799.

<sup>4</sup>*Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd series, i, 130–42. As regards Mr. Robert Cutlar Ferguson's comments, I have relied on the version given in *Mirror of Parliament*, 3 November 1830, p. 53, which differs from that given in *Parliamentary Debates*.

Undoubtedly, if the Right Honourable Baronet wishes that government shall have precedence on Wednesdays, as on the other Order Days, then the advantage contemplated by the Honourable Mover of this resolution will be small to those Gentlemen who have Bills pending; but I understand him to mean that Orders of the Day on Wednesdays shall have precedence according to the order in which they stand, without any preference to government . . . it would be dangerous to make this a permanent regulation; but I have no objection to treat it as an experiment.<sup>6</sup>

Exactly one week later, the Chancellor tested the flexibility of this experiment by moving a government Order ahead of others.<sup>7</sup> The history of Wednesday Order Days thenceforth was one of continual government encroachment and backbench complaints.<sup>8</sup> After 1835, the Commons invariably designated Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays as Order Days at the beginning of each session, and the government seems increasingly to have established precedence (Fraser 1960).

What had started in 1811 as a division of the House's business into Order Days, on which Orders of the Day would have precedence, and Notice Days, on which notices of motion would have precedence, had become by the 1830s, if not sooner, a division between "government days" and "private members' days."

This segregation of official and unofficial business became an important factor in the erosion of the parliamentary rights of individual members, which began in earnest in the 1830s. Consider, for example, the right to amend a motion that a particular Order of the Day be taken next. Before the 1830s, such amendments were rare, and always germane – that is, they sought simply to substitute another Order of the Day for the one originally suggested. Beginning in the 1830s, however, members began to use such amendments in order to raid the government's time and raise debates on extraneous subjects.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>6</sup>*Mirror of Parliament*, 13 July 1831, p. 533. Note that Fraser's (1960: 453) assertion that 1835 marked the "first time a distinction was created between the business of the Government, and that of private members" is incorrect. Albeit "experimental," such a distinction was clearly entailed in the motion of 13 July 1831.

<sup>7</sup>*Mirror of Parliament*, 20 July 1831, p. 703.

<sup>8</sup>For government attempts to secure precedence on Wednesdays, see *Mirror of Parliament*, 14 May 1834, p. 1707; 21 May 1834, p. 1799; 13 June 1834, p. 2201; 1 July 1835, p. 1677; 12 August 1835, p. 2451; 22 June 1836, pp. 720–21. For backbench complaints concerning government precedence on Wednesdays, see *Mirror of Parliament*, 12 August 1835, p. 2451; 22 June 1836, pp. 721–24; 8 July 1836, p. 2293; 8 March 1837, p. 515; 21 March 1837, p. 783; 24 November 1837, pp. 193–203. During the busy 1830s, one finds a tendency toward the end of the session to pass resolutions making all days Order Days. Such a motion was first made on 27 August 1831, by a backbencher, and was first passed in 1833, four days before the end of the session. In the next session, a similar motion was carried 24 days before the session's end. In the next sessions, it was 34 days and then 50 days before the end of the session.

<sup>9</sup>This and the next two paragraphs are based on Fraser (1960).

The basic problem was that the time reserved to private members became "polluted," especially after Wednesdays were made Order Days. Tuesdays and Thursdays, on which days it was proper for private members to raise general debates, fell into disrepute, for a variety of reasons. First, because of a greatly increased number of notices, the Order Book was filled for weeks in advance, and a lottery for precedence was instituted. This meant that the House had to face the luck of the draw. Since, as Lord Stanley told the House, "most of the notices were a mass of trash and rubbish to which no-one thought it worthwhile to attend, except for the member who gave the notice,"<sup>10</sup> the luck of the draw was not apt to be edifying. Consequently, attendance on Tuesdays and Thursdays was poor – both by MPs and, in all probability, by reporters. Second, the government did not acknowledge any responsibility to make a House on Tuesdays and Thursdays. This did nothing to alleviate the problem of attendance. Third, ministers did not usually show up on Tuesdays and Thursdays. The result of all this was that those MPs who sought the attention of a full House, or the attention of the government, or the attention of the press – and through them, of the public out of doors – were motivated to raid the government's days by moving amendments to the routine motions of the Orders of the Day.<sup>11</sup> By 1837, the government found that a third of their days were being seized in this way by private members, and after a select committee reviewed the matter, amendments to particular Orders were forbidden by Standing Order. A number of other methods remained to secure the same effect, and after these had been discovered and their use became intolerable, all but one were abolished by resolutions passed in 1848 and 1849.

The segregation of government business from private members' business also had a deleterious effect on the ability of unofficial members to legislate. It was easy for a member to introduce a bill, have it read a first time, and then printed at state expense; but after that, progress was very uncertain. In part perhaps because of the attractiveness and ease of having a bill printed, the number of bills introduced by private members increased. The resulting lottery for time eventually made it virtually impossible for a private member to pass a bill which was controversial, since anyone opposed to it could talk it out on the night it came up, and the chances of securing more time later in the session were slim.<sup>12</sup> Thus,

<sup>10</sup>*Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd series, xxxiv, 199, quoted in Fraser (1960: 453).

<sup>11</sup>It might also be noted that the rules of the House were such that it was unusual for one notice to have precedence over another. Thus, a member wishing to bring up some matter in a timely fashion, even if he was perfectly willing to bring it up on a Tuesday or Thursday, probably found this considerably more difficult than raiding one of the Order Days.

<sup>12</sup>The difficulty of passing bills by private effort was heightened because combining with like-minded colleagues in order to shorten the odds was frowned upon. On 19

increasingly, private members' bills could be passed only with the help of ministers, or if they were unopposed and lucky. Between 1846 and 1868 only eight private members' bills that ministers had opposed at any stage passed into law (Gurowich 1984: 630).<sup>15</sup>

Attitudes toward legislation reflected the clearly altered balance of power. As late as 1836 Melbourne proclaimed the older view that "the duty of a government is not to pass legislation but to rule" (MacDonagh 1977: 5); as late as 1844 Sir Robert Peel defended the right of independent members to legislate (Todd 1869, vol. ii: 63); but these notions were changing, under the stress of events, as early as the 1830s. It is difficult to know precisely when the newer conceptions – viz., that the government was responsible for legislation as well as administration, that all important measures should and would emanate from the ministry, that few if any measures should or could pass against the ministry's wishes – became dominant. But it seems safe to say that by 1848 they were at least well on their way to being so. Three events in that year can be taken as illustrations of the trend. First, one finds Lord John Russell chafing under the "supposed duty of the Members of a government to introduce (and carry) a great number of measures... a duty which is new to the government of this country."<sup>16</sup> Second, a select committee on procedure recommends, and the House enforces, the abolition of various parliamentary maneuvers which private members had been using to force their concerns upon the attention of the House. Third, the committee report clearly acknowledges the primary importance of the ministry in legislation, concluding "that the satisfactory conduct and progress of the busi-

ness June 1876 the Speaker noted that "If two or more Members of the House holding the same opinion on some specific motion combine together to ballot for precedence... such a practice is an evasion of the rules of the House" (Howarth 1956: 188).

<sup>15</sup>In the early 1870s, out of 120 bills introduced by unofficial members in the average session, only 25 to 30 were passed into law (*Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd series, ccxxi, 581–82) and generally only 10 to 15 per annum reached the statute books by the end of the century (Lowell 1912, vol. i: 314). These figures can be compared with those Lord Russell gave in a speech in 1848 defending his government against charges of ineptitude and lack of vigor: "I find that out of 125 Bills introduced by the Government during the present Session, 705 Bills have been already passed, or have received so much of the sanction of the House as to make it probable that they will receive the assent of the Crown during the present Session" (*Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd series, ci, 710). My own count (from *Commons Papers* 1847–48, vol. ii, p. 13) indicates that the government passed 96 of 124 bills in the 1847–48 session, or 77%. This is about the same percentage one finds in the early 1870s (*Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd series, ccxxi, 581–82). Another indication of the increasing power of the Cabinet, suggested by Beatrice (1970: 80), is the degree to which "appeals to party discipline" were replacing the use of the House of Lords to resist Private Members' Bills which the government opposed."

<sup>16</sup>*Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd Series, ci, 709–10.

ness of the House must mainly depend upon her Majesty's government, holding as they do the chief control over its management."<sup>17</sup>

By 1855, Sir Charles Wood could review his career in Parliament in the following terms:

When I was first in Parliament [in 1825],... the functions of the government were chiefly executive. Changes in our laws were proposed by independent members, and carried, not as party questions, by their combined action on both sides. Now, when an independent member brings forward a subject it is not to propose a measure himself, but to call to it the attention of the government. (Ilbert 1914: 52)

In 1861 the *Illustrated London News* noted that "All legislation is passing into the hands of the government," and Gladstone eight years later "thought he put it moderately when he said that nine tenths of the legislation of the house, looking to numbers and importance, passed through the hands of the government."<sup>18</sup>

#### THE CAUSES OF PROCEDURAL CHANGE

All told, the evidence regarding the centralization of legislative authority in the Cabinet is quite clear. While there is no particular watershed date to point to, the executive's dominance over public legislation was widely recognized by the 1860s, thanks largely to the work of such authors as Alpheus Todd and, above all, Walter Bagehot. Bagehot's famous assertion (first made in 1865 in the *Fortnightly Review*) that the "efficient secret of the English Constitution may be described as the close union, the nearly complete fusion, of the executive and legislative powers" was so effective and celebrated a statement because he was the first to recognize and interpret for a wide audience a new, increasingly obvious, and important feature of English government.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup>*Commons Papers*, 1847–48, vol. xvi, p. 146.

<sup>18</sup>Gurowich (1984: 630); *Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd series, ccxvii, 1188.

<sup>19</sup>Beyond the *Illustrated London News* comment in 1861 quoted earlier, one might note the following observations made in a scholarly text first published in 1866: "The rule that all great and important measures should emanate from the executive has of late years obtained increasing acceptance. The remarkable examples to the contrary, which are found in parliamentary history antecedent to the first Reform Acts, could not now occur, without betokening a weakness on the part of ministers of the crown which is inconsistent with their true relation towards the House of Commons.... Sir Robert Peel, in 1844, insisted that individual members of Parliament had a perfect right to introduce such measures as they thought fit, without the sanction of the government.... But of late years the great increase of debates, and the annual accumulation of arrears of public business, have combined to render it practically impossible for Bills introduced by private members to become law, unless by the active assistance of the government" (Todd 1869, vol. II: 63–64). Contemporaries did not

Less clear than the fact of the Cabinet's growing control of the legislative agenda, however, was its cause. One might ask two questions. First, why did the parliamentary rights of private members decline? Second, why was the Cabinet the apparent beneficiary of this decline? As regards the first of these questions, recent scholarship emphasizes the growth in volume and complexity of parliamentary business (Fraser 1960; Cromwell 1968; Ramm 1984). Between 1760 and 1808 the items of business increased four-fold, and the pace thereafter does not seem to have slackened (Fraser 1960: 446, n. 1). Moreover, legislation tended to become more and more technical and complex as the century wore on: "At last it became obvious that the amount of business far exceeded the limited time available.... To get the parliamentary machine going some restraint was inevitable" (Cromwell 1968: 15-16).

This emphasis on the limited time available to conduct a rising tide of business is essentially correct as an explanation of the proximal or immediate causes of procedural change. Time was limited, and business, and hence the demand for time, did increase. Some species of limitation on debate, essentially the rationing of an extremely scarce resource among legally equal members, was to be expected, as were efforts to streamline procedure. But the time pressure model has its shortcomings. First, it is rarely clear why the particular new rules chosen to economize time, rather than others, were in fact chosen. Second, the model leaves one wondering why and how the demand for legislative time increased.

The conventional answer to the latter query is that the rapid expansion of the British economy and population raised new interests in society and new problems to be solved.<sup>18</sup> At a general level, this is undoubtedly true. But it may help to focus more narrowly on the *demand by MPs for legislative time* (where "legislative time" is defined as time on the floor of the House and in Committee of the Whole). Virtually all items of business took up legislative time and required the intercession at some stage of an MP. Thus, another way of saying that business increased is to say that MPs became more active, and a study of the participation of MPs in debate, in divisions, and in the proceedings of the House generally may offer an illuminating alternative perspective on the growth of business.

have to read scholarly texts to find similar estimates of the Cabinet's importance. Walter Bagshot's series of articles in the *Fortnightly Review* in the mid-1860s (which later were collected in the *English Constitution*) popularized the distinction between the "dignified" and "efficient" parts of the constitution and made it clear that the "efficient secret," the controlling power of the English government, lay in the Cabinet. Gladstone, in a speech made in 1882, attributed the growth of business to three main causes: the enlargement of the Empire, the expansion of trade relations, and the enlargement of the conception of the function of government. See Redlich (1908: xix).

Table 6.1. *Speaking in Parliament, 1820-96*

Session	(1) MPs listed in sessional index	(2) Duration of session (months)	(3) Column (1) as percentage of all MPs
1820	201	7	30.5
1822	235	6	35.7
1825	241	5	36.6
1828	241	6	36.6
1833	395	7	60.0
1835	378 <sup>a</sup>	6	57.4
1852-53	385	6	58.5
1863	418	6	63.5
1874	444	5	67.5
1883	458	6	69.6
1896	578	6	86.3

Note: Hansard's was the standard record of the parliamentary debates, and it generally ran to several volumes in a session. An MP was included in the index if he spoke in debate, asked a question, made a motion, or otherwise addressed the chair. Column (1) gives the number of MPs listed in the cumulative sessional index for years in which such an index existed. For sessions in which there was no cumulative index, the indexes to each volume in the session were used - with, of course, due attention given to double counting. All MPs, not just English MPs, were counted.

<sup>a</sup>In this year, the index to the last volume of the year did not distinguish between peers and MPs, so the next-to-last volume was used instead. In that volume, 360 MPs were listed, and a 5% addition was made to this figure to give 378; 5% was chosen after examination of the increases from volume to volume in that year, and of the first-to-last-volume increases in other years.

Source: Author's compilation from Hansard's, for all years except 1833 and 1883, which are from Mackintosh (1962: 181).

It should first be noted that more and more MPs did participate in the proceedings of the House as the century wore on, as can be seen in Table 6.1. Column (1) in the table gives the number of MPs listed in the index to the *Parliamentary Debates* in selected sessions. These MPs were those who had spoken in debate, asked questions, made motions, or otherwise participated in the business of the House in such a fashion as to merit entry in the text, hence the index (simply voting did not get one an entry in either the text proper or the index). The figures in column (1) give an idea of the number of active members of Parliament in each of various sessions in the nineteenth century. Evidently, the active complement of MPs increased throughout the century. Whereas in the 1820s about 35% of the Commons were active enough to merit inclusion in Hansard's index, by 1855 57%, by 1874 two-thirds, and by 1896 nearly seven-eighths of all MPs were included.

Table 6.2. Voting participation in Parliament, 1836-99

Year	Total number of divisions	Percentage of divisions participated in by average MP	Number of divisions participated in by average MP
1836	187	22.8	43
1850	329	26.8	88
1860	265	25.3	67
1871	270	34.1	92
1881	411	36.6	150
1894	246	42.1	104
1899	363	38.6	140

Source: Participation rates were computed from the data given in Lowell (1902). All MPs, not just English MPs, are included in this analysis.

MPs also participated in divisions more often as the century progressed (Table 6.2). In the three sessions of 1836, 1850, and 1860, the typical MP voted in only about a quarter of all divisions; after the second Reform Act, participation rates increased to about 35%; and by the 1890s, MPs typically voted in about 40% of all divisions.<sup>19</sup>

The question is, Why did more and more MPs take an active role in the affairs of the House? Why, to take a specific example (Table 6.1), was there such a striking increase in speaking from the 1820s to the post-reform period?

One answer might rely on the expansion of the press. As early as 1833, C. W. Wynn complained in the Commons that the length of debates was increasing and attributed this to the reportage of debates:

In consequence of the publication of the debates, Members were anxious that their constituents should see that they took part in the discussion; and the consequence was, that hon. Gentlemen delivered arguments that had been urged by former speakers, not regarding what had been previously stated, provided they had the opportunity of delivering their sentiments.<sup>20</sup>

The importance of a favorable reception in the press was increasingly evident, and after the fire of 1834 the Commons moved to new quarters which, for the first time, had a gallery reserved for reporters. A common argument in favor of motions that the House not proceed with new business after midnight was that the press could not report debates at

<sup>19</sup>Fair, in his study of party voting behavior, calculates attendance rates for every year from 1886 to 1918. He finds that average attendance increased from 35.12% in 1887-92 to 40.94% in 1893-1904 to 48.46% in 1905-14 (Fair 1983: 7).

<sup>20</sup>*Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd series, xv, 1013.

such a late hour.<sup>21</sup> By the end of the century, an article on parliamentary reporting had this to say about the treatment of reporters by MPs:

Their [the MPs'] courtship is assiduous; none more eager than they to send upstairs, unsolicited, the notes of their speeches, occasionally the speech itself in extenso; nay, they will often track the reporter to his lair and plead with him to do justice to their eloquence. There are no members who are never reported; even the most insignificant is reported in his local paper. (Nicholson 1905)

The achievement of universal press coverage of Parliament, so that even the most insignificant member might be reported, followed the explosive expansion of the press in the middle of the century. The number of English provincial newspapers had increased nine-fold between 1824 and 1886, with the increase in the United Kingdom as a whole being comparable.<sup>22</sup>

Doubtless the expansion of the press played a role in spurring members to rhetorical heights. But the implicit assumptions in this argument should be noted. Only if constituents reacted to the behavior of their MPs in Parliament and MPs cared about reelection would increased press coverage have stimulated legislative prolixity.<sup>23</sup> Hence, the nature and independence of the constituencies underpinned the importance of press coverage.

Indeed, a factor more obviously important in the increased activity of the reformed Parliament than the growth of newspapers was simply the first Reform Act's disfranchisement (in whole or in part) of the smallest and rottenest boroughs, with the seats thus freed given to the counties and to previously unrepresented boroughs (including such large northern cities as Birmingham, Leeds, Manchester, and Sheffield).<sup>24</sup> The MPs who sat for the boroughs newly enfranchised under schedules III and IV of the Reform Act were more than twice as likely to participate in debate than had been MPs sitting for boroughs disfranchised by that Act, and redistricting alone thus goes some way toward explaining the increase in participation.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>21</sup>*Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd series, xxvi, 853; *Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd series, ccxviii, 271, 273-74.

<sup>22</sup>The growth of the English press can be seen in Table 2.1.

<sup>23</sup>Both these assumptions seem quite tenable — see Chapters 7 and 12.

<sup>24</sup>Some of the largest northern cities had already secured indirect representation in Parliament by purchasing boroughs elsewhere, but most of the cities enfranchised by the Reform Act had not previously had any representation. See Wooley (1938: 240).

<sup>25</sup>In February 1830, only 29 of the 162 MPs sitting for boroughs disfranchised under schedule I or II spoke in debate. In February 1833, 25 of the 64 MPs sitting for boroughs enfranchised under schedule III or IV spoke in debate. Thus, redistricting partially replaced a group of MPs only 18% of whom participated in a given month with a group over 39% of whom participated. The overall participation rates in both months were comparable, so that the difference in participation presumably lies with the differing political expectations faced by MPs for large places and for small places, as indicated in the text.

The reason for the lesser reliance on bribery and influence in the larger boroughs seems to be that these electoral strategies were simply less effective there – at least relative to the strategy of taking stands on matters of national policy. Certainly a fixed amount of money would buy a smaller proportion of the total votes in larger towns if the average price of votes was not less. Even if the price of votes was less (in proportion to the greater number of voters) one would presume that the costs of arranging to bribe many more electors, not to mention the increased risk of being caught, made bribery a less attractive electoral option. Similarly, a fixed amount of patronage must have been less useful – i.e., must have secured a smaller proportion of the total vote. Even if the implicit price of a vote in jobs was less in larger towns, the increased transactions costs (as in the case of bribery) probably diminished the electoral return. Finally, a fixed amount of influence could affect a smaller proportion of the vote as well in a larger constituency.

In contrast, a given policy promise – to disestablish the Irish church, for example – would almost certainly appeal to a larger number of voters in larger towns and may have appealed to a larger proportion. One suspects, therefore, that candidates in the larger and more independent boroughs engaged in the politics of opinion more thoroughly than their colleagues in the smaller towns because it made electoral sense to do so.<sup>27</sup>

If it is correct that the requirements of popular or mass politicking led candidates to stress policy as an important element in their campaigns, and if larger towns did generate more economic business for their MPs to take care of, then one ought to find that MPs from the larger constituencies generally participated in the business of the House of Commons more frequently than did MPs from the smaller boroughs. This is indeed what one finds. Consider, for example, participation in debate (Table 6.3). From 19 February to 19 March 1835, only 23.5% of those backbench MPs sitting for English boroughs with fewer than 2,000 electors spoke in debate. In contrast, 51.5% of MPs sitting for large English boroughs caught the Speaker's eye. Similarly, among English county MPs, those sitting for the larger constituencies were almost twice as likely to participate in debate.<sup>28</sup> In June and July of 1859, 42.2% of private mem-

<sup>27</sup>The same line of reasoning would indicate that the expansion of the electorate after 1832 ought to have made policy a more necessary component of elections in many constituencies. In this regard, it is interesting to recall that after 1832 it became generally customary for a candidate to issue addresses in the newspapers to his prospective constituents, informing them of his candidacy and of the general lines of policy he would support. See Bulmer-Thomas (1965: 81). See also the comments on the necessity of public speaking in larger constituencies in Lowell (1912, vol. I: 445).

<sup>28</sup>The relationship between speechifying and size of constituency was mild in a correlational sense. The correlation between the number of registered electors in an MP's constituency and whether or not he spoke in debate was .20 for borough MPs

More generally, the increase in participation can be traced to the greater size of the constituencies after 1832. A recent study suggests an 80% increase overall in the electorate after the passage of the first Reform Act (Cannon 1973). Mitchell (1967: 46) has noted the lax attendance of members from pocket boroughs in 1818–20, and in general one suspects that MPs sitting for smaller boroughs had less electoral incentive to participate in the proceedings of the House than did MPs sitting for larger boroughs and counties. There are two related lines of reasoning to suggest this conclusion. The first is basically economic. It had long been an accepted part of the MP's job to promote and protect the local economic interests of his constituents. This duty lay heavier on MPs representing areas with more important or numerous interests – i.e., the larger towns and industrialized county districts – both in the sense that there was more to do and in the sense that it was more essential to do it if one was to stay in office. Thus, MPs from large districts ought in general to have been busier than MPs from small districts because of the necessity of managing local economic interests.

Another line of reasoning is more political but is similar in that it focuses on a change in the relative effectiveness of the various strategies available to MPs. Briefly, the argument runs as follows: First, the smaller boroughs could be controlled by influence, bribery, and the judicious distribution of patronage more easily than could the larger boroughs and counties, where it was often essential also to engage in the politics of opinion; and second, influence, bribery, and patronage did not require any activity on the floor of the House or in Committee of the Whole, whereas enacting policy did. Thus, MPs who had engaged in the politics of opinion in their constituencies were motivated to participate in Parliament, and these MPs were generally from the larger constituencies.

The second part of the foregoing argument – that influence, bribery, and patronage did not require floor action – is fairly obvious; but the first part requires further examination. The most thorough recent study of the major boroughs notes that "the larger electorates . . . could never be managed simply through the influence of an elite personally rewarded by seats on the bench and so an MP had to give a lead to local opinion" (Fraser 1976: 182). Bribery is generally thought to have been a controlling electoral factor only in the small towns. This message comes out clearly in Hanham's magisterial survey (Hanham 1978), and contemporaries evidently believed it as well: When Parliament sought to deal with bribery that had become too extensive, their method was often simply to expand the offending borough's boundaries so as to include more electors.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>29</sup>For typical contemporary assertions of the unworkability of bribery in large constituencies, see the *Report from the Select Committee on Bribery at Elections*, vol. 1 (Shannon: Irish University Press, 1968), pp. 42, 49, 93.

Table 6.3. Size of constituency and speaking in Parliament

Constituency type and number of electors	Percentage of MPs speaking
<i>Panel I: 19 February 1835 to 19 March 1835</i>	
Boroughs ( $\leq 2,000$ electors)	23.5
Boroughs ( $> 2,000$ electors)	51.5
Counties ( $\leq 5,000$ electors)	16.4
Counties ( $> 5,000$ electors)	28.6
<i>Panel II: 31 May 1859 to 13 August 1859</i>	
Boroughs ( $\leq 2,000$ electors)	42.2
Boroughs ( $> 2,000$ electors)	66.2
Counties ( $\leq 5,000$ electors)	36.0
Counties ( $> 5,000$ electors)	43.2

*Note:* All English backbenchers not from universities were included in this analysis.  
*Source:* *Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd series, xxvi, clv, index.

Table 6.4. Size of constituency and voting participation in Parliament, 1841-47

Constituency type and number of electors	Average participation rate	N
Boroughs ( $\leq 2,000$ electors)	44.8	210
Boroughs ( $> 2,000$ electors)	50.7	59
Counties ( $\leq 5,000$ electors)	41.9	54
Counties ( $> 5,000$ electors)	50.3	70

*Note:* Because Professor Aydelotte chose his sample to include well-attended divisions, the participation rates here are higher than those in Table 6.2, where the figures are based on all divisions. All English MPs not sitting for universities who were both elected in 1841 and still members of Parliament at the dissolution in 1847 were included in the analysis.  
*Source:* Aydelotte (n.d.).

bers sitting for small boroughs spoke, versus 66.2% of those sitting for large boroughs.

MPs with large constituencies were also more likely to vote in divisions, as can be seen in Tables 6.4 and 6.5. Both in the Parliament of 1841-47 and in that of 1852-57 the voting participation rates of MPs serving large constituencies were 6 to 9 percentage points higher than the corresponding rates for MPs serving small constituencies.

and .22 for county MPs (both correlations significant at the .05 level). The correlation with total population was .15 for urban MPs and .39 for rural MPs.

Table 6.5. Size of constituency and voting participation in Parliament, 1852-57

Constituency type and number of electors	Average participation rate	N
Boroughs ( $\leq 2,000$ electors)	40.9	304
Boroughs ( $> 2,000$ electors)	47.4	99
Counties ( $\leq 5,000$ electors)	36.3	53
Counties ( $> 5,000$ electors)	45.0	108

*Note:* Because Professor Bylsma chose his sample to include well-attended divisions, the participation rates here are higher than those in Table 6.2, where the figures are based on all divisions. All English MPs not sitting for universities were included in the analysis.  
*Source:* Bylsma (1968).

What is suggested, then, is that the politics of large places required both a different kind of campaigning and greater activity in Parliament. The increased demand for legislative time was not due solely to industrialization and the creation of new problems that had to be dealt with legislatively. Were this the full story, one would expect parliamentary business to have ebbed and flowed with the gross national product. Yet the striking thing about both the figures on participation in debate (Table 6.1) and those on attendance at divisions (Table 6.2) is the contrast between the periods demarcated by the Reform Acts. Before 1832, the figures on participation range over only a 6% interval, between 30.5% and 36.6%; between 1832 and 1867 the figures again cluster within 6% of one another, but this time at almost double the level; between the second and third Reform Acts, the two figures are within 2% of each other, and higher than any previous figures. The similar clustering of attendance rates and the burst of procedural reforms in the 1830s strongly suggest that the increased demand by MPs for legislative time was an electoral phenomenon, driven chiefly by the growth of the constituencies.

Ironically, when the desire of private members to participate in the legislative process increased, when, as Sir Robert Peel put it, "there was a great appetite for legislation, and a strong desire among hon. Members to be distinguished as the introducers of new laws,"<sup>29</sup> the rights of private members began to fall away. As seen in the previous section, by the 1860s a number of parliamentary maneuvers traditionally available to members

<sup>29</sup>*Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd series, xxxix, 197.



had been outlawed, the number and importance of Acts carried by private members were considerably diminished, and it was generally agreed and expected that major legislation should and would emanate from the ministry. Thus, an apparent increase in the desire of members to participate was followed by a diminution of their ability to do so meaningfully.

The logic of this ironical outcome is fairly clear. There were only so many hours the House could sit in a year, and the point of great inconvenience would of course be reached long before the absolute limit. When more and more MPs became active in parliamentary affairs, thus increasing the aggregate demand for legislative time, the amount of time the average member could dispose of in the ordinary course of business had necessarily to decline.<sup>30</sup> But if members had the unrestrained extraordinary power to seize the attention of the House at virtually any time, they would use this power, and business would become chaotic. The Commons, in other words, faced the "tragedy of the commons."<sup>31</sup> Each MP wished to exercise the extraordinary parliamentary rights available to him in order to ventilate his, or his constituents', grievances and opinions; but when too many did exercise their rights, the cumulative effect was distressing to all MPs: at any sitting some solon might insist on bringing his nostrum to the floor more or less forcibly, hence hot air could not be anticipated and avoided, the House might have to sit late, even past midnight, in order to finish the public business, and the session might be extended into the dog days of August, when two kinds of hot

<sup>30</sup>To some extent, more time could be manufactured by sitting longer hours, streamlining procedure, and allowing the simultaneous use of time. The first of these was always available as a short-term, easily implemented and adjusted response to increased demand. But working longer hours was not a solution which MPs were eager to accept as permanent. The easiest permanent improvement, which the House eventually exploited fully, was in the direction of efficiency: dropping superfluous stages of business (e.g., in 1849 the procedure of bills was shortened by the abolition of the formal question and division as to engrossing the bill); and ensuring that no stage took more time than was necessary (e.g., in 1848 it was decided that when leave had been given to bring in a bill, the questions of the first reading and printing would be decided without debate or amendment moved). A somewhat different method of economizing time was to allow its simultaneous use by more than one member or piece of business. Thus, non-controversial bills could be passed through various of their stages en masse, a single debate was deemed sufficient to deal with a number of related petitions, a single answer would be given to a number of related (or even unrelated) questions.

<sup>31</sup>The "tragedy of the commons" refers, in its original and most specific usage, to the overgrazing of common grasslands. See Hardin (1968). The underlying logic has been generalized to include a vast array of social phenomena, from the dumping of sewage in a common waterway, to the extraction of oil from a common pool, to the littering of public parks, to the tendency of cocktail parties to become shouting matches. The "commons" has become "a paradigm for situations in which people so impinge on each other in pursuing their own interests that collectively they each might be better off if they (all) could be restrained, but no one gains individually by self-restraint" (Schelling 1978: 111). For a review of related issues, see Hardin (1982).

air generally proved very unpopular. In order to extricate themselves from the dilemma in which they were entangled, the Commons repeatedly took the most obvious way out and abolished the rights that were being abused.

The more or less unwitting beneficiary of this series of procedural crises was the ministry. As the rights of unofficial members declined, control of the legislative agenda passed increasingly into the hands of the government – and thus came about the efficient secret: the "nearly complete fusion of the executive and legislative powers" in the Cabinet.

This did not happen without a fight. Backbenchers complained about their loss of ability and about the usurpation of power by ministers even before 1832, and continued to complain throughout the century.<sup>32</sup> As early as 1836, a private member lamented that "from the manner in which the business before us has lately been gone through, it would appear as if none but members of the government can bring forward any measure. I have been, night after night, endeavouring to bring in a measure in which many of my constituents are deeply interested... but all in vain."<sup>33</sup> This kind of feeling among backbenchers was exploited by the Conservatives in 1838 to defeat Lord John Russell's motion that Orders of the Day be given precedence on Thursdays. In making his motion, Russell had been careful to note that, besides the government bills, "there were several bills brought in by individual Members" which would be advantaged by his motion.<sup>34</sup> But the real reason for the government's interest in creating more Order Days was that the House of Lords, dominated by the Conservatives, had been rejecting important government measures, using the excuse that the measures came up too late in the session for proper consideration. With enough Order Days, the ministry hoped to remove this excuse. The Conservatives accordingly took the offensive. Goulburn (Chancellor of the Exchequer in 1828–30 and 1841–46) led off by accusing the government of attempting to procure "a larger portion of precedence than any other government had ever enjoyed," and he emphasized that "the motion of the noble Lord had a direct tendency to prevent any Gentleman who might have to call the attention of the House to any grievance, or any matter of interest to his constituents... from bringing [his motion] forward in due time."<sup>35</sup> Graham (Secretary of State for the Home Department under Peel in 1841–46) then scored

<sup>32</sup>See *Parliamentary Debates*, 1st series, xxi, 111–12; *Mirror of Parliament*, 20 July 1831, p. 703; 27 August 1831, p. 1705; *Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd series, ix, 126, 150; *Mirror of Parliament*, 21 May 1829, p. 1799; 16 June 1834, p. 2227; 12 August 1835, p. 2451; 8 July 1836, p. 2293; 11 March 1837, p. 598; 21 March 1837, p. 783; *Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd series, xlii, 598–99.

<sup>33</sup>*Mirror of Parliament*, 8 July 1836, p. 2293.

<sup>34</sup>*Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd series, xlii, 598.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*

the "attempt on the part of the government, at engrossing to themselves those opportunities which independent Members had hitherto enjoyed of bringing forward questions of importance... he would not wish to look at this question with reference to his own side of the House merely [the Conservatives were in a minority], but he would appeal to... all hon. Members on the other side, who were unconnected with the government, whether this was a fitting, proper, or even convenient course?"<sup>16</sup> Peel himself then spoke, remarking that he "could not avoid perceiving that there was a growing tendency to discourage the bringing forward of measures by independent Members."<sup>17</sup> Apparently, the Conservatives were successful in arousing the Liberal backbenchers, for Russell withdrew his motion. The rights of backbench members were not given up easily.

Another point that should be emphasized is that even though backbench rights did dwindle, unofficial members did not immediately or obviously become legislative nonentities. What was lost in the 1830s and 1840s was the power of *independent initiative*: private MPs could no longer expect to initiate and carry major bills. They still retained, however, even into the 1870s and beyond, some power of indirect initiative. First, especially in the period 1846-68, the House of Commons was quite active in choosing and deposing ministries. Governments typically resigned rather than dissolve Parliament when defeated (see Chapter 8), and the usual pattern was for ministries to fall on specific substantive issues. Second, independent members could still introduce bills in order to publicize issues out of doors, and to pressure the Cabinet into action. Third, and perhaps most important, the legislative initiative of individual members was diverted into the question period.

Although asked as early as 1721, questions in their modern usage were largely a development of the period after the first Reform Act. By 1835 questions had become frequent enough so that the practice began of giving formal notice of the questions to be asked, by printing them on the Notice Paper. The growth in the number of questions placed on the Notice Paper was considerable after mid-century: where there were 212 in 1850, there were 699 in 1860, 1,203 in 1870, and 1,546 in 1880 (Chester and Bowring 1962: 316). Disraeli referred to questions in 1868 as one of the most important prerogatives of MPs (Howarth 1956: 190). After 1869, questions were placed in a special part of the Notice Paper, and a fixed portion of time was allotted to them in the hour before the commencement of the public business. The familiar question period, in other words, had arrived.

<sup>16</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd series, xlii, 599.

<sup>17</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd series, xlii, 603.

Questions were more frequently used because they could be made to serve some of the purposes which had led members to abuse their other rights. If MPs could no longer easily secure the time necessary to impress their constituents with their prowess in debate, they could show themselves vigilant in the defense of local interests by asking pointed questions.<sup>18</sup> Thus, one finds MPs inquiring about local appointments, local postal service, local construction, and so forth.<sup>19</sup> Questions could also be used to publicize a cause or grievance, and after the reforms of 1848 had done away with most of the devices whereby MPs had broken irregularly into debate, increasing use was made of them as vehicles to prod the ministry into legislative action. Howarth notes that "there was between 1848 and 1867 a steady growth in the efficacy of questions as a means of bringing about desirable reforms.... Questions which led governments to reconsider their policy, and in some cases to make important changes in the law, were asked on subjects ranging from Cleopatra's Needle to assaults on females, from vaccination to communication between railway passengers and guards" (Howarth 1956: 149). The growing use of questions to influence the government's course of action was yet another implicit recognition of the centralization of legislative authority in the Cabinet, and indeed it reinforced and accelerated this process by pressuring ministers to legislate on matters that they might otherwise not have pursued.

In addition to the continuing ability to prod the government into action (or inaction), backbenchers could also significantly amend government legislation once it was introduced. Table 6.6 gives the number of amendments to government bills (not including the estimates) carried against the government whips acting as tellers in each "Parliament" from 1853-56 to 1901-05. Anywhere from three to six amendments per year were carried against the government until the Parliament of 1874-79. Moreover, the number of ministerial measures altered by the House was of course greater than the number of amendments carried against the government whips. And even individual members could have an impact. In a debate in 1874 on the motion that no new business be taken after half past midnight, one member objected on the ground that the rule had led to "lobby legislation" in the last Parliament:

The government were at all times anxious to get their Bills through the House before the end of July, and on account of this Rule had to compromise with private Members who had Amendments on them. They had to go into the lobby

<sup>18</sup> Lowell and Bagehot both noted the desire to please constituents as a common motivation for asking questions. See Lowell (1912, vol. I: 332) and Bagehot (1936: 160).

<sup>19</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd series, clxxxiv, 116, 711; *Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd series, ccxviii, 269, 409; *Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd series, clvii, 103.

Table 6.6. *Amendments carried against the government whips*

Parliament	Number of amendments	Years	Average number per year
1853-56	25	4	6.25
1857-58	6	2	3.00
1859-65	27	7	3.86
1866-68	17	3	5.67
1869-73	20	5	4.00
1874-79	1	6	0.17
1880-85	11	6	1.83
1886	2	1	2.00
1887-92	3	6	0.50
1893-95	1	3	0.33
1896-1900	1	5	0.20
1901-05	4	5	0.80

Note: The source for these figures gives the number of amendments to government bills (not including estimates) carried against the government whips acting as tellers in each year since 1850. I have grouped the years into Parliaments. Because not all years lay wholly within a given Parliament, I sometimes have had to be arbitrary. Source: Lowell (1912, vol. 1: 317, n. 2).

and square up with those private Members, and clauses were thus passed which were objectionable, and would not have been passed had they been discussed in the House.<sup>46</sup>

Their continued power to amend and indirectly to initiate notwithstanding, one may wonder why private members did not push for some other solution to the procedural difficulties facing the House, one which would protect their rights better. After all, eventually their power of amendment decreased too, and their influence as individuals became quite negligible. Why, for example, did the House not develop a committee system in the 1830s along American or French lines? It is difficult to deal with such a question, but the important considerations seem to be these: First, the Cabinet already existed. Second, those members expert in procedural matters, and those most likely to be looked to for guidance in reforming the procedure, were for the most part ministers and former ministers. The most prominent members of all ten of the major select committees on procedure appointed during the century were men who had sat or were sitting in the Cabinet. These men had a considerable stake in the system as it stood, and were unlikely to recommend any diminution in the power of the Cabinet. Third, there was no natural organization to protect backbench rights against frontbench encroach-

<sup>46</sup>*Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd series, ccxviii, 278.

ment. Putting aside the large number of inactive MPs, whose grasp of procedure was probably quite limited, even those with some expertise, who could foresee the ultimate consequences of the cumulation of incremental changes, were unlikely to have the resources or possibly even the desire to organize a cross-party backbench coalition. Fourth, many of the procedural changes were both incremental and caught up in specific substantive issues. The government asked for slightly more precedence so that some particular important bill could pass. Even if an MP disliked the precedent being established, which marginally damaged his future abilities, he might still prefer to acquiesce in the government's encroachment for the sake of the immediate issue.

### THE CONSEQUENCES OF PROCEDURAL CHANGE

The consequences of the centralization of legislative authority in the Cabinet were myriad, and of fundamental importance to the further development of the English party system. We have already seen in the preceding chapter that what is still perhaps the best known explanation of the increase in party discipline in Parliament cannot explain the earliest increases in cohesion, those from 1860 to 1880. The rise of the Cabinet entailed several consequences which may account for this unexplained increase. As the ministry became more important, more men wished to belong to it, and Premiers could use the carrot of advancement and the stick of non-advancement to enforce discipline (Chapter 7); the threat of resignation or dissolution on the part of ministers carried more authority since resignation or dissolution might affect not just the administration of Her Majesty's government but also the whole course of legislation (Chapter 8); the attitude of the electorate changed, and electors began using their votes to determine control of the ministry rather than to determine the individual identity of the MP or MPs who represented them (see Part III).

Before we move on to deal with these consequences of the Cabinet's rise, one other point relating to the increased participation of MPs should be dealt with here. We have argued that the increased participation of MPs in the affairs of Parliament embroiled the Commons in a series of procedural dilemmas, and that to break out of these dilemmas the ancient procedural rights of private members were discarded. Another consequence of increased participation, adumbrated in Chapter 2, was that MPs more often found themselves voting on matters about which they had relatively little information. It has already been noted that attendance rates at divisions increased from about 25% in the 1830s to 40% in the 1890s. The total number of divisions held in an average session also

increased, from 229 in the 1830s to 323 in the 1890s. The consequence of these changes was that the typical MP found himself voting in about 57 divisions in the 1830s, versus 129 at the end of the century (Table 6.2 gives figures for a few specific years). Moreover, there are other reasons to believe that MPs in the 1890s probably knew less about the motions on which they voted than had MPs earlier in the century. First, legislation generally became more technical and complex as the century progressed (Fraser 1960; Cromwell 1968). Second, in the 1830s, relatively few divisions were whipped, and the typical MP's attendance was largely self-determined. An MP often turned out to vote because he chose to, and he presumably chose to when he or his constituents cared about the matter under consideration – hence, when he or they knew something about it. In contrast, in the 1890s the whip organization was fully developed, and MPs less often chose the divisions in which they would participate on their own initiative.

The overall consequence of voting in more divisions, on more complex matters, and on matters not necessarily of personal or local interest was ignorance. MPs more often needed some quick way to make decisions, and the party cue was always available on whipped divisions. Indeed, unwhipped votes seem even to have become unpopular:

... when the division bell rings he hurries to the House, and is told by his whip whether he is an "aye" or a "no." Sometimes he is told that party tellers have not been put on, and that he can vote as he pleases. But open questions are not popular; they compel a member to think for himself, which is always troublesome. Not that a member is a mere pawn in the game, but the number of questions which even a member of Parliament has leisure and capacity to think out for himself is necessarily limited.  
(Redlich 1908, vol. I: xvii)

An efficient whip organization pestering MPs to attend, the belief by MPs that their constituents would not appreciate lax attendance [<sup>1</sup>Simon was condemned on the grounds that he had voted in only forty of the last two-hundred and twenty divisions .... Some had condemned [Oldroyd] for only voting in 72 out of a possible 190 divisions" (James 1970: 83, 112)], and, indeed, any factor pushing MPs to attend and vote, even when they had little grasp of the issues at stake, might have contributed to party cohesion simply by increasing the number of MPs voting in ignorance and thus willing to accept the party whip.

Given our current patchy knowledge of cohesion in Parliament, however, it is difficult to say how important increased attendance was to the growth of party cohesion. From what we do know, it appears that there was cross-sectional correlation as well as longitudinal correlation between attendance and cohesion: in any given year, the best-attended divisions were those on which the party lines were drawn most clearly,

and over time both attendance and cohesion increased.<sup>41</sup> But the cross-sectional correlation was moderate and may have arisen simply because important party issues were whipped vigorously, and our assessment of the longitudinal correlation (between the average attendance and cohesion in a session) is based on only seven years. Even if there were more data on which to base a conclusion, it is not clear exactly how to measure the importance to discipline of the increased number of decisions that MPs had to make. Since the typical MP in the 1870s voted in only thirty more divisions than had his predecessors in the 1830s, however, the assumption here will be that the informational problems faced by MPs do not explain the bulk of the increase in party discipline before the 1880s.

<sup>41</sup>The cross-sectional correlations between attendance and cohesion in the seven years documented by Lowell – 1836, 1850, 1860, 1871, 1881, 1894, and 1899 – were respectively .04, .11, .15, .33, .39, .36, and .02. The attendance figures used were simply the total number of MPs participating in each division. The cohesion figures used were the averages of the Conservative and Liberal coefficients of cohesion in each division. The correlations for 1871, 1881, and 1894 are significant at the .05 level. The longitudinal correlation, between the mean attendance figure in a session and the mean cohesion figure in a session, was .91.

## *The electoral connection and ministerial ambition*

Why did men in the nineteenth century seek to enter Parliament? How many wished to stay once they had entered the "best club in London," and how many aimed higher, eyeing a position in the ministry? In studying an age before surveys or polls, the answers to these questions must be largely indirect. But the answers are important. If members covered admittance to the ministry, the Premier, who held the power of appointment, could establish a strong inducement to loyalty by making it clear that those who too frequently dissented would generally not receive office. Since members who sought ministerial positions usually had to acquire a certain amount of parliamentary experience — especially if they aspired to the Cabinet — they must have become at least instrumentally concerned with reelection, and a natural preliminary question concerns the number of members who sought to (and the number who did) stay in Parliament long enough to have a realistic shot at the ministry and especially the Cabinet.

Interest in reelection could stem from sources other than ministerial ambition, however, and the question of how many members were willing to put up with increasingly frequent election contests and the rigors of serving ever-larger popular constituencies is of interest in its own right. In the next section of this chapter, the desire of members to stay in office is reconnoitered. The second section turns to the question of specifically ministerial ambition and its significance for party discipline.

### THE ELECTORAL CONNECTION

I expect, therefore, always that the man who holds the seat of power and profit, and wherever emolument or honour may tie him to it, will cling to it, and in proportion as he clings to it he will be ready to concede something to those who may wish to shift him.  
(the Reverend Charles Stovel, May 1871)<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Quoted in Hamer (1977: 33).

Men sought seats in the House of Commons for a great variety of reasons. Barristers-at-law who entered Parliament were commonly believed to benefit in their practice and to have better chances of securing a place on the judicial bench. These considerations were likely to be imputed as reasons for entering Parliament to the numerous barristers in or at the door of the Commons, and Sir Henry Hawkins took care in his autobiography to avoid this imputation, stating that he "had no eye on Parliament merely as a stepping stone to a judgeship" (Harris 1905: 177). The Commons was also an excellent position from which to secure a baronetcy or other honor. F. B. Smith (1966: 90) speaks of one MP as "trying to auction his vote in return for a baronetcy, the sole object of his entering the House" (as it turned out, he realized his ambition by "opportunistically surrendering his seat to the Tory Lord Advocate"). Besides these more or less tangible reasons for entering Parliament, contemporaries and scholars have cited a number of others. A seat in the Commons conferred prestige and was also a gateway to high society; Robert Lowe spoke of "gentlemen wishing to get into society under the stimulus of their wives and daughters" as a familiar species of "non-political" members.<sup>2</sup> For the more political members there was the attraction of the Cabinet, and even if this pinnacle was not attained, members might still (at least earlier in the century) have a significant impact on policy. On a lesser plane, members enjoyed certain legal immunities, and one author has even noted the seat in St. Margaret's Church and the reader's ticker at the library of the British Museum — to both of which MPs had a right (MacDonagh 1897: 72–77).

For whatever reason men went to Parliament, if they wished to remain, or, as one contemporary put it, "long[ed] with the deepest longing to get back again," then they had to concern themselves with reelection (MacDonagh 1897: 67). Even the so-called non-political members had to pay attention to electoral politics if they planned to continue in the House.

This necessity became increasingly pressing as the number of uncontested seats declined and the number of candidates increased. Nearly half of the seats in the United Kingdom were typically uncontested at general elections from 1832 through 1865; but only a quarter of all seats were uncontested in the three elections held between the second and third Reform Acts, and only a fifth were uncontested in the period 1885–1910. Correspondingly, the number of candidates increased: before 1867, only one election — that of 1832 — saw more than a thousand candidates in the field; after 1867, no election saw fewer than this number.

Faced with the increasing probability of electoral competition, were

<sup>2</sup>*Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd series, clxxxii, 159.

MPs sensitive to those who had electoral power? The presumption of modern political science would be affirmative, and Victorians shared this presumption: they stated it in general terms, as did the Reverend Mr. Stovel, whose remarks to a Liberation Society conference began this section; and they were willing to act on it.

The tactics of pressure groups illustrate this willingness to act on a conception of the MP as a seeker of reelection. D. A. Hamer's illuminating study *The Politics of Electoral Pressure* shows that the typical repertoire of tactics employed by mid-Victorian pressure groups was increasingly centered on the electoral connection. Petitions, which earlier in the century were generally addressed to Parliament as a whole, came to include clauses affirming a resolve on the part of the signatories to use their votes in a particular way if MPs did not support the object of their prayer (Hamer 1977: 9). During elections, pressure groups attempted to secure pledges from the voters — both "positive" pledges, which bound the elector to vote for any candidate who committed himself to a particular policy, and the more constraining "negative" pledges, which bound the elector to vote for, and only for, candidates who had made the required commitment (Hamer 1977: 28). With sufficient discipline, a bloc of voters tied by common pledges could be dangled before the candidates. Hamer (1977: 29) writes that "some electoral strategists in the pressure groups, especially in the temperance movement, had a vision of a great bloc vote, completely detached from all other parties and issues.... Very strenuous efforts were made to segregate and coop up a 'temperance vote' through pledges and Electoral Associations.... An entire temperance electoral way of life developed: canvassing, pledges, meetings."

Although not all pressure groups had such a grand vision of the bloc vote, most sought to organize and utilize a body of opinion in the electorate as the basis of their influence over MPs. *The Times*, in 1874, noted the great variety of groups which pushed particular issues on the attention of the electors:

A remarkable fact connected with the present general election is the numerous advertisements appearing in the newspapers from political and social organizations of every conceivable description, all appealing to the electors to vote only for those candidates, irrespective of party, who will pledge themselves to support the opinions or crotchets represented by the respective societies, and to make those opinions a test question at the election.... Among the leading organizations thus appealing to the electors may be enumerated the United Kingdom Alliance, for suppressing the liquor traffic; the Sunday Rest Association, for stopping all... traffic on Sundays; the Contagious Diseases Act Repeal Association, the Female Suffrage Association, the Sunday League, the Liberation Society, the Church Defence Society, the Peace Association, the Land Tenure Reform Society, the Free and Open Church Association, the Open Spaces' Preservation Society, the

Anti-Vaccination Society, the Licensed Victuallers' Protection Society, the Labour Representation League, the Protestant Electoral Union, &c. &c.<sup>1</sup>

In their endeavor to secure influence, pressure groups sent a variety of straightforward messages to candidates. First, candidates might be informed that they could secure a certain number of votes by adopting a particular policy (when the pledges were mostly positive). Second, candidates could be threatened with the abstention of voters who, presumably, would otherwise vote for them (when pledges were negative). Third, independent candidatures might be bruited (Hamer 1977).

Although pressure groups after the Anti-Corn Law League appear to have been firmly committed to a strategy of electoral pressure, most of them were not conspicuously successful in getting their nostrums into the statute books, and one may wonder whether their failure stemmed from any inadequacy in their assumptions about how to pressure MPs. Did most MPs wish to be reelected?

One straightforward way to answer this question is to look at the percentage of MPs actually seeking reelection. Of course, it should be kept in mind that this percentage is an imperfect indicator of the percentage who would have been willing to face some standard cost and probability of defeat. First, some incumbents faced no competition and others only token competition, and their willingness to go to the poll against more formidable opponents must remain conjectural. Second, some of those not seeking reelection had died — obviously we do not know anything about their desire to be reelected. Third, others did not seek reelection because of elevations to the peerage or acceptance of some remunerative position in the colonies, the judiciary, or the Civil Service. For these men, all we know is that they did not so wish to remain in the (unsalaried) Commons that they were willing to forgo appealing opportunities elsewhere. Since generally only four or five days elapsed between the dissolution and the date at which the earliest constituency went to the poll, the importance of these last two points is greatly limited by our definition of an incumbent as an MP sitting at the dissolution. Still, the election typically dragged on for several weeks or a month (most constituencies did not begin polling until the middle or end of this period); and a dissolution was the logical time for new opportunities to be seized and, to a certain extent, for them to be offered.

A fourth point is more important: those MPs who anticipated too high a probability of defeat may have opted reluctantly not to seek reelection. In the days of open voting and small electorates, candidates could get a pretty good idea of their chances. Sir John Aubrey, a prospective can-

<sup>1</sup> *The Times*, London, 2 February 1874, p. 7.

didate for Buckinghamshire in 1789, addressed a letter asking for support to every freeholder of the county, later announcing that he had "not met with such an extensive Encouragement as will justify a Perseverance in offering himself" (Davis 1972: 39). The electorates, at least in many of the boroughs, remained small enough down to 1867 and even 1884 so that similarly comprehensive information gathering was feasible.

Finally, it should be noted that the figures we are about to present concern only the percentage of incumbents seeking reelection in the same constituencies for which they sat at the dissolution. Since some men went off to contest other places, however, the figures clearly understate the total percentage of MPs seeking reelection. This understatement would appear to range from about 1 to 5 percentage points.<sup>4</sup>

With these caveats in mind, we can turn to Table 7.1. Considering all MPs sitting for English provincial boroughs at each dissolution from 1835 to 1900, the table shows that only twice did fewer than 70% of these MPs seek reelection. In 1847, the first general election after the Conservative split over the Corn Laws, only 67.2% of the members wished to face their constituents, while in 1868, after the second Reform Act had nearly doubled the national electorate, only 69% of English provincial MPs sought reelection. On average, the percentage of MPs seeking reelection was somewhat higher than 70%, and this average increased over the century: it was 76.8% in 1835-65, 78.0% in 1868-80, and 86.0% in 1885-1900. This increasing tendency to seek reelection occurred despite a decreasing probability of success. Whereas on average 83.5% of incumbents seeking reelection were successful in 1835-65, this figure fell nearly 10 percentage points for the elections between the second and third Reform Acts, and recovered only to 79.0% in the post-1885 period. These figures reflect to a considerable degree trends in the number of uncontested constituencies.<sup>5</sup>

The same basic patterns appear if one looks only at incumbents who faced a contest for their seats. As might be expected on the assumption that MPs anticipated electoral competition and shunned too-high probabilities of defeat, fewer incumbents sought reelection in districts which saw an actual contest. But the percentage of MPs seeking reelection in contested districts also shows a definite upward trend: 75.6% in 1835-65, 77.8% in 1868-80, and 84.8% in 1885-1900. The success rates of

<sup>4</sup>The justification for this assertion comes from simply counting the number of incumbent MPs in each general election year who left their constituencies to contest another (whether at the general election or at a by-election in the same year). We have done this for elections from 1865 to 1900, and the percentages range from 1.2% in 1874 and 1886 to 4.9% in 1868, with an average of 2.5%.

<sup>5</sup>The average percentages of seats uncontested at general elections in the United Kingdom in the periods 1832-65, 1868-80, and 1885-1900 were 45%, 26%, and 21%, respectively.

Table 7.1. Incumbents in English provincial boroughs, 1835-1900

Year	Incumbents in all boroughs			Incumbents in contested boroughs		
	(1) <sup>a</sup>	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
1835	.809	.841	.68	.807	.783	.63
1837	.792	.826	.65	.790	.777	.61
1841	.749	.846	.63	.741	.765	.57
1847	.672	.852	.57	.630	.741	.47
1852	.720	.815	.59	.689	.728	.50
1857	.759	.819	.62	.769	.707	.54
1859	.853	.883	.75	.848	.808	.69
1865	.791	.799	.63	.774	.708	.55
Avg.	.768	.835	.64	.756	.752	.57
1868	.690	.796	.55	.704	.769	.54
1874	.811	.719	.58	.799	.684	.55
1880	.840	.693	.58	.833	.676	.56
Avg.	.780	.736	.57	.778	.710	.55
1885	.813	.689	.56	.810	.682	.55
1886	.928	.825	.77	.915	.792	.72
1892	.843	.814	.69	.833	.800	.67
1895	.859	.750	.64	.843	.703	.59
1900	.855	.873	.75	.839	.818	.69
Avg.	.860	.790	.68	.848	.759	.64

Note: Incumbents are defined as the members sitting at the dissolution. The number of incumbents in provincial boroughs by this definition was essentially equal to the number of seats - only rarely was a vacancy created so late in the Parliament that it was not filled at a by-election. There were roughly 304 provincial seats in the period 1832-68, 263 in 1868-85, and 166 in 1885-1918. The first figure represents 46% of all the seats in Parliament at the time; the last, about a quarter.

<sup>a</sup>Column (1), proportion seeking reelection; column (2), success rate; column (3), survival rate [column (1) × column (2)]; column (4), proportion seeking reelection; column (5), success rate; column (6), survival rate [column (4) × column (5)]. Source: Author's compilation from the data of Craig (1974; 1977).

incumbents facing a contest were of course lower, and varied somewhat differently over time than the overall figures. They still indicate, however, that the increasing tendency to seek reelection did not come about simply because of an electoral climate more favorable for incumbents.

Indeed, the electoral weather appears to have been particularly harsh in the four consecutive general elections of 1868, 1874, 1880, and 1885. Whereas the average survival rate of incumbents (i.e., the proportion who actually continued to sit in Parliament for the same borough) was



Table 7.2. *Incumbents in English counties, 1835-80*

Year	Incumbents in all counties			Incumbents in contested counties		
	(1) <sup>a</sup>	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
1835	.87	.90	.78	.85	.68	.57
1837	.79	.96	.76	.78	.77	.60
1841	.80	.94	.76	.79	.79	.62
1847	.77	.98	.76	.62	.88	.54
1852	.90	.92	.82	.85	.79	.67
1857	.78	.96	.76	.67	.91	.61
1859	.85	.97	.83	.73	.79	.58
1865	.82	.94	.77	.72	.82	.58
Avg.	.82	.95	.78	.75	.80	.60
1868	.73	.86	.63	.63	.76	.48
1874	.89	.92	.82	.83	.79	.66
1880	.87	.84	.73	.83	.76	.63
Avg.	.83	.87	.73	.76	.77	.59

<sup>a</sup>Column (1), proportion seeking reelection; column (2), success rate; column (3), survival rate [column (1)  $\times$  column (2)]; column (4), proportion seeking reelection; column (5), success rate; column (6), survival rate [column (4)  $\times$  column (5)].

Source: Author's compilation from the data of Craig (1974: 1977).

.64 in 1835-65, only 57% on average of English provincial incumbents survived into the next Parliament at the elections of 1868-85. Only in the first of these elections, 1868, is the low survival rate attributable to a low proportion seeking reelection. In the last three the explanation lies in the low success rates: .719 in 1874, .693 in 1880, and .689 in 1885, these being the three lowest figures in Victoria's reign. Yet, despite these low success rates, the percentage of borough incumbents seeking reelection in these three years averaged 82.1%, more than 5 percentage points higher than the 1835-65 average.

The picture is generally similar for English county members (see Table 7.2). County MPs were on the whole more likely than their urban counterparts to seek reelection (although not when faced with a contest) and were also more likely to win reelection. But the same trends in candidate behavior visible in the boroughs are also visible in the counties: the two years in which the fewest county MPs sought reelection were 1847 and 1868. There was a one-point increase in the average percentage of rural MPs seeking reelection, from 82% in 1832-65 to 83% in 1868-80, and this increase came despite an eight-point drop in success rates, from 95%

to 87%. Indeed, the two worst years for county incumbents were 1868 and 1880, when only 86% and 84%, respectively, won reelection.

Although there is room for doubt about timing, it seems relatively clear that there was a firm electoral connection in English politics by the middle of the century and that this connection, if anything, became stronger toward the end of the century. Beginning with the Anti-Corn Law League in 1841, a series of pressure groups explicitly adopted a strategy of electoral pressure. More incumbents sought reelection, and this was true even at elections which in the event proved their chances to have been relatively unfavorable, and even before election costs were curbed. Finally, as seen in Chapter 6, more MPs were willing to engage in the activities, such as speaking in Parliament to provide copy for the organs of the press, which a more popular politics demanded.

#### MINISTERIAL AMBITION AND PARTY DISCIPLINE

... a seat in the Cabinet has become the ambition of all the prominent men in Parliament.

(A. L. Lowell, 1906)<sup>a</sup>

If most MPs did wish to remain in the Commons, why was this so? Since by the end of the century the backbencher had been reduced to relative impotence, and almost all positions of any consequence were in the ministry, the inference seems inescapable that politically ambitious men must increasingly have sought positions in the ministry. As these positions were at the disposal of the Prime Minister, he had a valuable resource with which to reward loyalty. There are two crucial questions: Was there a substantial (possibly growing) number of "political" members sensitive to the Premier's criteria in allocating ministerial posts? And was it understood that these posts went, generally, to those who were solid party men supportive of the leadership? The answer to each question, as regards the end of the century, appears to be yes, but the evidence is less clear for earlier in the century.

As was the case regarding the number of MPs who desired reelection, there is no survey evidence on the number of members aspiring to the ministry. An indirect handle on things may be attained by focusing on the Cabinet. How many members acquired the parliamentary experience which Cabinet ministers usually had? If only a few members acquired such experience, then perhaps a relatively well defined set of "political" members will be suggested by tenure considerations alone. Table 7.3 presents the mean tenure and the 50th, 75th, and 90th deciles of the tenure distribution for three sets of MPs defined by period of first entry into Parliament. Thus, for example, there were 329 MPs who entered

<sup>a</sup>Lowell (1912, vol. 1: 58-59).

Table 7.3. *Tenure in the House of Commons by period of entry*

Period of entry	Number entering	Mean tenure	Decile of tenure distribution			
			50th	75th	90th	
1860-67	329	11.8	9	17.5	25.5	
1868-84	879	11.7	9.5	15.5	29.5	
1885-1910	1,786	11.6	10.5	16.0	27.0	

Source: Compiled from Stenton (1976). I am grateful to Lance E. Davis and Robert A. Huttenback for allowing me to use their computerized data set of biographical information on MPs (Davis and Huttenback 1986).

Parliament for the first time in the years 1860 through 1867 (this figure includes MPs entering at by-elections in all years 1860-67, and those entering at the general election of 1865; it does not include those re-entering Parliament after an absence). The average and median tenures of these 329 MPs were 11.8 and 9 years, respectively. Fully a quarter of these MPs went on to accumulate 17.5 or more years of service in the Commons. Since the average prior experience in Parliament of Cabinet ministers in 1868-1916 was between 13 and 14 years (Willson 1959: 227), it is evident that quite a few members entering in 1860-67 could not be discounted for office on the count of inexperience.

Later cohorts of entering MPs appear roughly comparable to the 1860-67 cohort. Evidently, experience in Parliament puts very little limit on the number of MPs who might have aspired to the Cabinet. The 9-10.5 years which the median member served are too many for a conclusion that he could not realistically have aimed for high office because of inexperience.

A more important limiting factor was simply the number of posts in the Cabinet. From Grey's reform ministry in 1830 to Salisbury's second ministry in 1886, the number of men in the Cabinet varied without much trend between 12 and 18. Since about half of the posts were normally filled by peers, the number of MPs in the Cabinet ranged usually between six and nine. Clearly, not many MPs could realistically hope for an appointment in the Cabinet in these years. The situation improved when the Cabinet increased in size, which it began to do in the 1890s, reaching 20 in 1902 and 1908, and usually exceeding this figure after the Great War (Alt 1975). Lowell attributed this enlargement to the increasing range of affairs with which the government dealt and to "the fact that a seat in the Cabinet has become the ambition of all the prominent men

in Parliament," so that "there is constant pressure to increase [its] size" (Lowell 1912, vol. 1: 58-59).

Although the Cabinet increased in size in the last decade of the century, the number of MPs in the ministry as a whole did not increase until the first decade of the next century. Whereas 34 MPs served in Peel's short-lived 1835 ministry, only 28 served under Derby (1859), and only 33 under Disraeli (1874) and under Salisbury (1895).<sup>7</sup> Typically, less than 10% of a nineteenth century Premier's followers found office under him. The real increase in the number of MPs serving in the ministry came in the opening decades of the twentieth century. The figure reached 43 by 1910 and 60 by 1917, after which it dipped into the 50s before surging again after mid-century (Butler and Freeman 1968).

There are two inferences to be made from the increasing number of Cabinet and ministerial posts in the 1890s and early 1900s. First, one might argue, with Lowell, that the increase reflected a greater ministerial ambition among members. Second, one might infer that the larger number of positions attracted a larger crop of applicants. If either inference is valid, the value to the Prime Minister of his power of appointment would potentially have increased.

For the purposes of this work, however, the timing of this end-of-the-century appreciation in the value of the appointment power excludes it from purview. The focus here falls on the earliest observed increases in discipline - in the 1860s and 1870s - and in these decades there was no increasing trend in the size of Cabinets (Disraeli's second was the smallest Victorian Cabinet) or ministries. Yet, although there was no multiplication of places, the power of the Cabinet was increasingly recognized in the 1860s, and the attraction of the stable supply of Cabinet posts may have become stronger or more widespread even in this earlier period. Regardless of whether the attractiveness of Cabinet and ministerial positions was increasing, the static connection between the Premier's disposal of these seats and discipline is of interest in its own right.

Whether the power of appointment translated into increased discipline depended upon how offices were allocated, and the strategies which MPs employed to obtain them. Lowell describes two basic techniques for those seeking a ministerial post (Lowell 1912, vol. 1: 58-59; Heasman 1963). An MP might adopt a safe course, voting with the party whips consistently, speaking in support of his leaders, patiently awaiting his just reward; or he might adopt a riskier course, criticizing and even attacking the leadership, cultivating a personal following among the backbenchers, and hoping to be bought off by a position in the government. To be

<sup>7</sup>MPs in the ministry were identified from the *Parliamentary Debates*.

Table 7.4. Party support of those who later received ministerial posts

	Average party support score	N
<i>Panel I: Liberals in 1874-80</i>		
Those receiving office in 1880-85	.916	34
Those not receiving office in 1880-85	.858	193
	( $t = 2.1$ )	
<i>Panel II: Conservatives in 1869-73</i>		
Those receiving office in 1874-80	.875	37
Those not receiving office in 1874-80	.873	275
	( $t = .09$ )	

Note: The party support score is defined as the proportion of all divisions whipped by the government on which the MP supported his party. The identification of ministers was made from the first volume of Hansard's.

Source: For panel I, the party support scores are based on a sample of 74 divisions described in Table 12.1. For panel II, the support scores are based on a random sample of 16 drawn by the author, plus 25 more from the period 1869-73 (Davis and Huttenback 1986).

successful, the latter strategy required an independent power base which most private members neither had nor could realistically hope to acquire. It is plausible, therefore, that most MPs adopted a strategy closer to the former.

One simple way to test this idea is to examine opposition MPs, comparing the party support scores of those who received a ministerial appointment the next time their party was in office to the support scores of those who received no such appointment. Table 7.4 shows that the 34 MPs who both sat in the Parliament of 1874-80 and held office sometime during Gladstone's second ministry (1880-85) supported their party in 1874-80 on 91.6% of the divisions whipped by the government, as compared to a figure of 85.8% for those Liberal MPs who did not go on to receive an office under Gladstone. However, a comparable analysis for Conservatives in 1869-73 reveals little difference between those who went on to hold office under Disraeli in 1874-80 and those who did not. The average party support score of ministry-bound Conservatives in 1869-73 was 87.5 as compared to 87.3 for their backbencher colleagues.<sup>a</sup>

The sample of divisions on which these analyses are based could of course be larger. For now, however, the best information available on the connection between future ministerial appointment and discipline in

<sup>a</sup>These results hold up in a multivariate analysis controlling for the type of constituency (borough or county), whether the MP survived into the next Parliament, and various other factors.

the 1870s is mixed. For this reason, and since the numbers of MPs actually securing ministerial posts were so small, the idea that increasing party cohesion can be attributed to a greater number of MPs seeking ministerial posts is best applied to a later time - the 1890s and early 1900s.

### *The Cabinet's strength: threats of resignation and dissolution*

During the nineteenth century, a government had two choices when it no longer enjoyed the confidence of the House of Commons. It could resign, handing the administration over to whomever the Queen designated (her choice being restricted to at most a few major figures in the opposition), or it could ask the Queen to dissolve Parliament and issue writs for a general election. The first of these options has not been much used in the twentieth century, but the Victorian House of Commons could and did replace ministries in which it had lost confidence without suffering a dissolution. Indeed, during the early Victorian period, a government was considered to be responsible to Parliament, and if defeated early in the life of a Parliament, it was usually expected to resign and permit the formation of another Cabinet (Mackintosh 1962: 93–96). In the thirty-five years from 1832 to 1867, governments resigned as a consequence of sustaining defeats in the House of Commons on eight occasions (not counting the two resignations, in 1841 and 1859, which were direct results of general elections). Later in the century, however, the normal option for a defeated ministry shifted somewhat from resignation toward dissolution. In the fifty years after 1868, only three ministries that had lost the confidence of the House chose to resign (not counting the Gladstone ministry's attempt to resign in 1873); all the rest chose to dissolve.

Whether or not a government enjoyed the confidence of the House could be decided in a variety of ways: by a formal vote of no confidence, by a vote on a major piece of legislation, or by a series of votes of secondary importance. Each division in a session might be classified by the likely effect on the ministry and Parliament which a defeat for the government on that division would entail. For example, a particular division may have been such that a defeat for the government was certain to lead to an immediate dissolution; another may have been fairly likely

to lead to resignation within a few weeks; a third may have had no bearing on either dissolution or resignation; and so on.

Such considerations of dissolution and resignation have long figured in explanations of the discipline of British parties. Bagehot, writing in 1867, opined that

though the leaders of party no longer have the vast patronage of the last century with which to bribe, they can coerce by a threat far more potent than any allurements — they can dissolve. This is the secret which keeps parties together ... a solid mass of steady votes ... are maintained by fear of [the leaders] — by fear that if you vote against them, you may yourself soon not have a vote at all. (Bagehot 1936: 125–26)

Lowell, writing forty years later, noted that “when men recognize that the defeat of a government measure means a change of Ministry, the pressure is strong to sacrifice personal opinions on the measure in question to the more important general principles for which the party stands” (Lowell 1912, vol. 1: 457). The point as regards both change of ministry (with all that that implied in terms of patronage, policy, and ministerial place) and dissolution (with all that that implied in terms of expense and risk of defeat) is that the merits of particular questions could be swamped by larger issues, and backbenchers had to take heed of this. The party leadership had also to recognize its precarious tenure of office: “Since the Cabinet may be overturned at any moment ... it must try to keep its followers constantly in hand; and since every defeat, however trivial, even if not fatal, is damaging, it must try to prevent any hostile votes. ... Thus from the side both of the private member and the responsible Minister there is a pressure in the parliamentary system towards more strict party voting” (Lowell 1912, vol. 1: 84).

How important was the fear of dissolution and resignation to the development of party discipline in the nineteenth century? The dissolution of Parliament had always been possible, and ministries had been resigning en masse since the eighteenth century. The new factor was the linkage of dissolution and resignation to legislation. Prior to 1830, no ministry had ever resigned on a question of legislation (Woodward 1939: 23). When the legislative power of the Cabinet grew, however, governments began to fall on legislative questions too. Indeed, the expectation that all major pieces of legislation would emanate from the Cabinet, the development of which was traced in Chapter 6, went hand in hand with the expectation that the government would resign or dissolve upon sustaining an important legislative defeat. Even in the early part of the century, ministers had let it be known that they would resign, or possibly seek a dissolution, if defeated on certain important motions. These threats — so they were interpreted and called by contemporaries — were both un-

popular and rare for some time after 1832. In 1847, "men complained of the unreasonable conduct of the Ministers because they had twice in six months made a major question a matter of confidence" (Mackintosh 1962: 85). And the leaders seemed disposed to make – or at least advocate – sparing use of such threats. Peel noted that "menaces of resignation if the House of Commons do not adopt certain measures are very unpalatable, and I think they should be reserved for very rare and very important occasions" (Jennings 1951: 442). By the 1860s, the use of threats of resignation and dissolution had apparently picked up. The fates of both the Liberal Reform Bill in 1866 and of Disraeli's Reform Bill in 1867 seem to have been significantly affected by the fear of dissolution among Liberal backbenchers (Smith 1966: 88, 116–17, 167, 181); and Gladstone's use of threats of confidence in the Parliament of 1868–74 startled one contemporary, who asserted that "if the number of times Mr. Gladstone declared that he should regard the current proceedings as a vote of want of confidence in Her Majesty's Ministers could be ascertained and summed up the result would be astounding" (Lucy n.d.: 50). Unfortunately, there is no easy or precise way to ascertain and sum up even explicit threats of resignation, so the precise trends are still unknown. Nonetheless, the general tendency was clearly toward an increasing recognition on the part of MPs that a fairly wide range of issues might affect the ministry's decision whether or not to stay in office. By 1886, Lord Salisbury considered *limiting* his government's sphere of responsibility: "We will be responsible for the guidance of Parliament only on the questions which we ourselves submit to it" (Jennings 1951: 459). Although Salisbury was not suggesting that every bill introduced by his government would be by itself a stand-or-fall issue, the extension and recognition of responsibility is clear. MacDonald was more precise in 1924 as to what the questions of confidence would be: "The Labour government will go out if it is defeated upon substantial issues, issues of principle, issues which really matter" (Jennings 1951: 459). In general, twentieth-century governments have tended to treat most important questions as questions of confidence.

The trends in the nineteenth century as regards matters of confidence can thus be summed up as follows: more and more questions were treated as questions of confidence, and the expected consequence of a loss of confidence was, increasingly, a dissolution. What impact did these trends have on the development of party discipline?

The most obvious approach to studying the impact of threats of confidence is to identify motions which the government had clearly identified as vital to its continuance in office and see if cohesion was higher than on otherwise similar motions which the government had not decided to take a stand on. The work of Bylsma (1977) and of Beales (1967) shows

that discipline was indeed very high on major matters of confidence during the 1850s. Unfortunately, however, comparable studies do not exist for other periods. And there is no easy and systematic way in which to identify all motions on which the government had staked its reputation in any given session. The only entirely explicit and "guaranteed" threat of dissolution was Derby's in 1858, when he obtained royal permission beforehand to announce that if the motion of censure over Ellenborough's despatch were carried, he would go to the country. F. B. Smith speaks of Gladstone on one occasion as "intimating" that the government "might not accept an adverse vote" (Smith 1966: 110). And that differences of opinion could arise as to whether or not a threat had been made is shown by the following exchange in the House of Commons:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer had threatened the House with a dissolution. ["No, no!" from the Treasury Bench.] Well, what was the meaning of the passage about cutting away the bridges and burning the boats? He had understood that – and he ventured to think it had been so understood by the public – as a threat of dissolution. ["No!" from the Treasury Bench.] He was glad to hear it was not so – he was glad to have been the humble instrument of clearing up the mystery.

Obviously, not all threats of confidence were crystal clear.

An alternative method of assessing the importance of threats of confidence can be devised which does not require the identification of which divisions were, and by how much, under the gun. It will help first to note that the effects of a threatened resignation and of a threatened dissolution were somewhat different. This was recognized by the Liberal chief whip, Brand, when he advised Gladstone to treat Grosvenor's amendment as a matter of confidence, but emphasized that the threat should be one of resignation rather than dissolution (Smith 1966: 88).

How an MP evaluated a possible resignation depended chiefly on the relative attractiveness of having his, rather than the other party's, leaders in office. This, in turn, depended on such considerations as how powerful the Cabinet was as an institution, whether the MP held or hoped for ministerial position, and how greatly he preferred the likely policy of his own leaders to the likely policy of the other party's leaders.

How an MP evaluated a possible dissolution, on the other hand, might have been rather different. A dissolution, of course, since it entailed a general election, might so alter the House of Commons that the ministry which had called for the election could not continue in office. Dissolutions thus entailed the possibility of resignation, and the reaction of MPs to possible dissolutions should have been affected by the same factors listed in the previous paragraph. But dissolutions also, and more immediately, entailed electoral expense and the risk of defeat. This gave the threat or

possibility of a dissolution added zest. And indeed, although Victorian MPs did sometimes vote to oust ministries, they were probably more reluctant to vote for a dissolution; Richard Cobden declared that he had never been able to discover what was the proper moment, according to members of Parliament, for a dissolution. He had heard them say they were ready to vote for everything else, but he had never heard them say they were ready to vote for that. (Bagshot 1936: 126)

Since the usual procedure was increasingly for defeated governments to request a dissolution rather than to resign, we shall focus on dissolutions in the remainder of this chapter. The question is whether or not an increasing fear of dissolution was the key to the increasing discipline of the mid-Victorian parties.

Before accepting any such view, one should note that the impact of dissolution on discipline has not gone unchallenged – even when the argument is applied only to the twentieth century Parliament. The most frequent objection is that threats of dissolution cannot explain the cohesion of the opposition. Jackson, for example, asserts that “since only the government can dissolve Parliament, opposition leaders cannot use this threat with their backbenchers. Therefore, nearly half the MPs cannot be controlled by the threat of dissolution of Parliament” (Jackson 1968: 10). Other criticisms are that even the government, which can threaten dissolution, has neither the incentive (because ministers stand to lose more by a dissolution than backbenchers) nor the “follow-through” (because governments rarely use elections to purge their ranks of dissidents) to make dissolution an effective tool (Epstein 1956: 364; Andrews 1960; Jackson 1968: 11). These criticisms clearly view dissolution as an explicit threat made by the ministry. Although we shall continue to speak of “threats,” we shall understand by this more than explicit admonitions. Whenever an MP perceived that the defeat of the government on a motion had some probability of producing or hastening a dissolution, this threat should have affected his decision, whether or not ministers had explicitly menaced the House. It is common knowledge in the twentieth century that substantial amendments to Her Majesty’s Most Gracious Speech are tantamount to votes of no confidence, and no reminder of impending dissolution need be made by the government. Indeed, no overt threat of dissolution has occurred since 1922, yet the occurrence of votes with the potential for causing dissolution has been frequent (Mackintosh 1962: 498). It would appear much more fruitful, therefore, to focus on the response of MPs to the pressure of a perceived dissolution, rather than to confine analysis to dissolution as an explicit threat.

A dissolution meant a general election, and whether and how much an MP wished to avoid this presumably depended on the time remaining

to the natural end of Parliament and on his expectations of electoral victory and cost. The cost of an election was undoubtedly something that MPs always wished to avoid, and the earlier in a Parliament that a dissolution was threatened, the greater the value in deferred cost that might be secured by ensuring that the threat was not carried out. Thus, one would expect threats of dissolution to be decreasingly effective as a Parliament toiled toward its statutory end. Since the only way an MP could, by private action, decrease the probability of a dissolution was to vote for the government (or to abstain, if a member of the opposition), one would also expect that the opposition’s discipline and attendance might be lower than the government’s, since opposition members were exposed to a pressure favoring the government.

However, there were two other consequences of dissolutions which may alter these relationships: dissolutions involved risks of both personal defeat and party defeat. When MPs felt that an immediate general election would give them or their party a poor chance of reelection, they naturally wished to avoid a dissolution on this count as well as on the count of cost. The Liberal whips in 1867 reported that their backbenchers were afraid to oppose the second reading of Disraeli’s Reform Bill (as Gladstone wished to do), since the government would dissolve if beaten, and they dared not face their constituents after having defeated an extension of the suffrage (Smith 1966: 167). T. D. Acland wrote to his wife explaining that Gladstone was hampered by the Radicals, the Whigs, and “a large body who care for nothing except to avoid a dissolution” (Smith 1966: 181). On the other hand, when MPs felt that an immediate dissolution would give them or their party a good chance at reelection, they might actually seek it, even if they were currently in office and Parliament had some years to go. For example, in 1878, after Lord Beaconsfield’s triumphant return from Berlin, the Conservative government considered a dissolution even though they had suffered no setback and the Parliament had over two years remaining (Mackintosh 1962: 178–79). Again, in 1900, Conservatives were generally happy to fight an election on the Boer War, even though this meant a dissolution two years earlier than legally necessary. Thus, when electoral conditions were favorable enough, the value of deferred costs could be outweighed by the high probability of reelection, and MPs might, on balance, actually favor a dissolution.

In general, however, it seems safe to make the following assumptions. Every MP wished to postpone dissolutions insofar as doing so deferred the costs of election and the risk of personal defeat. Government MPs wished to avoid dissolutions also because of the risk of party defeat, while opposition MPs viewed elections positively to the extent that they might produce a new ministry. If the entire set of whipped divisions taken in a given Parliament is considered, therefore, and if the very strong

assumption is made that no other factor affecting discipline covaried with time, then one would expect two specific patterns of behavior if dissolution was of preeminent importance to the government in keeping its troops in line. First, majority party cohesion should decrease with time, since the potency of the (implicit or explicit) threat of dissolution decreases with time. Second, for the same reason, minority cohesion should increase with time.

In order to give a fair test to these predictions, divisions from several Parliaments would need to be examined. Unfortunately, for the period of interest (*viz.*, the 1860s and after), the necessary data rarely exist in a form suitable for analysis. The only Parliament for which we have a reasonable number of machine-readable divisions for several sessions is that of 1874-80, which may have been unusual because of the Berlin Conference. In this Parliament, the correlations of time with majority cohesion and minority cohesion were both small and insignificant, the latter being of the wrong sign. If one looks at the correlation between time *within a session* (for those sessions studied by Lowell) and the cohesion of the government and opposition parties, one finds that the relationship is more often than not of the wrong sign.<sup>2</sup>

Possibly these negative results simply reflect a violation of the very stringent assumption that no other factor affecting discipline changed over time. Party leaders, for example, may have brought their most controversial measures forward in the early or middle years of a Parliament; indeed, if they believed that threats of dissolution were more efficacious earlier in a Parliament, they may have had an incentive to do so. Nonetheless, one might doubt whether a better test of the disciplinary impact of dissolution would reveal as strong a result as, say, Bagehot or Jennings (1939) would have it. For an MP faced with a threat of dissolution — even an explicit and guaranteed threat such as Lord Derby's in 1858 — should not have acted as if his vote was certain to make the difference between a dissolution and a continuation of Parliament — which seems to be the implicit assumption of Bagehot and Jennings. In the case where the government would dissolve if and only if defeated, a single MP's vote would be decisive only if the division was decided by exactly one vote (or was tied); in all other situations, the MP's vote would not matter in the sense that he could vote either way and the Parliament would still dissolve, or not, as the case might be. Thus, the threat or possibility of a dissolution should have been discounted by MPs. Dissolution was a

<sup>2</sup>The correlation of time within a session with majority cohesion and with minority cohesion was, in 1836, .13 and -.06; in 1850, -.22 and .08; in 1860, -.19 and .11; in 1871, .06 and -.14; in 1881, .16 and -.16; in 1894, -.25 and .08; and in 1899, .07 and -.14. Cohesion and attendance were calculated for whipped divisions only. Time was proxied by the sequence number of the division in the given session.

collective threat, not an individual threat, and the usual incentives to "free ride" should have existed. For example, if an MP's constituents wanted him to vote against the government, and he believed that he would incur some increased risk of defeat at the next election if he did not, then he should have been tempted to vote his constituency, hoping that *others* would support the government in sufficient numbers to prevent a dissolution.

It is difficult at this point to draw any confident conclusions about the importance of dissolution to the development of party discipline. There is certainly case-study evidence that dissolution played an important role at least some of the time; chiefly on important matters that were closely fought. There is also evidence that the number of issues that the government treated as matters of confidence increased during and after the 1860s. Moreover, Schwarz has recently argued that the recurrence of indiscipline in the House of Commons in the 1970s followed, at least in the Labour party, a weakening of the "parliamentary rule," i.e., "the understanding that, following a defeat of the government on the floor on an important issue, the government may well resign" (Schwarz 1980: 33). Indeed, Schwarz notes that the number of defeats sustained by governments in the 1974-78 period (39) was not far short of the four-year average for the period 1851-67 (44) (Schwarz 1980: 27).

Yet, although it is highly suggestive that the parliamentary rule should have gained and lost prominence when it did, it is hard to accept variations in the strength of this convention as a full explanation of the trends in parliamentary discipline. Threats of dissolution, in addition to being collective rather than personal in nature, are clearly endogenous. If one asks why the Labour government in the 1970s decided to relax the parliamentary rule, the answer seems to be that it could no longer count on the solid support of its followers: for if it could, why relax the rule? Factors other than dissolution must have already begun to undermine party unity, and the public loosening of the parliamentary rule may well have been as much a response to as a cause of declining cohesiveness. The question then becomes, Precisely what other things might have changed in order to undermine discipline? And, in the nineteenth century, the question is, What other things might have changed to bolster discipline? The answers to these questions may lie in the electoral arena.