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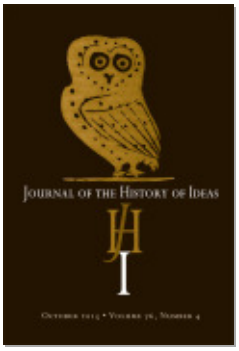

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Defining Progressive Politics: Municipal Socialism and Anti-Socialism in Contestation, 1889–1939

Emily Robinson

INTRODUCTION

Reinhart Koselleck halted his inquiry into the history of the term "progress" in the late nineteenth century, on the grounds that at this point it became ubiquitous; merely "a political catchword" used right across the political spectrum.[1] However, this is exactly the moment when a very specific form of "progressive" politics has been seen to emerge, based on a reformulation of liberalism and involving a new conception of the role of the state.[2] This has been described as an "ideological turn" which "changed

This article has been a long time in development and has incurred too many debts to list here. The principal ones are to the University of Nottingham for funding the research, to Steven Fielding, Philip Cowley and Michael Freeden for their support during that time, to Peter Mandler who read and commented on a draft, and to the anonymous reviewers, all of whom all engaged with the piece and pushed me to improve it. Previous versions of the paper were given at the Institute for Historical Research and at the European Social Science and History Conference; I benefited greatly from the comments and suggestions made by the audiences there.

[1] Reinhart Koselleck, *The Practice of Conceptual History: Timing History, Spacing Concepts,* tr. Todd Samuel Presner et al. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 230.

[2] See Peter Clarke, *Lancashire and the New Liberalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971); Michael Freeden, *The New Liberalism: An Ideology of Social Reform* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978); Michael Freeden, *Liberal Languages: Ideological Imag-*

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the nature of Western politics" and laid the intellectual groundwork for many of the achievements of the twentieth century, especially the foundation of the welfare state.[3] The purpose of this paper is to explore the way in which "progressive" was used as a political term at this time, and the implications this has for our understanding of the spreading and fracturing of Liberal attitudes to progress.

Previous studies of the British progressive movement have focused on the relationship between the established Liberal and fledgling Labour parties, asking how far it signaled genuine cooperation and why it ultimately failed.[4] Further analysis has explored the "theoretical eclecticism and organizational fluidity" of an intellectual "progressive tradition" and also traced its migration to the left of the Labour Party in the interwar years.[5] Although these authors have tended to take the meaning of the word "progressive" at face value, they have also raised questions about its history. Peter Clarke's seminal study of *Lancashire and the New Liberalism* was partly framed as an attempt to recover the term, which had been "forgotten" after the First World War and thereafter "neglected" by historians.[6] While Clarke acknowledged a pre-existing "generalized" usage of the term, he dated its emergence as a political term to the Progressive Party, which formed the first administration of the London County Council (LCC) in January 1889.[7] In James T. Kloppenberg's words, this new word "captured the novelty and amorphousness" of late Victorian collectivism because it was "free from the idea of a self-guiding market economy and the negative conception of liberty associated with variations on the theme of liberalism"—such as "new liberalism" or "social liberalism."[8]

For these authors, the meaning of the word "progressive" is intimately

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inations and Twentieth-Century Progressive Thought (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

[3] Freeden, *Liberal Languages*, 3–4.

[4] For example, Clarke, *Lancashire*; Peter Clarke, "The Progressive Movement in England," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 5 (1974): 159–81; Martin Petter, "The Progressive Alliance," *History* 58 (1973): 45–59; Jon Lawrence, "The Complexities of English Progressivism: Wolverhampton Politics in the Early Twentieth Century," *Midland History* 24 (1999): 147–66.

[5] David Blaazer, *The Popular Front and the Progressive Tradition: Socialists, Liberals and the Quest for Unity, 1884–1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 25. See also Peter Clarke, *Liberals and Social Democrats* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978).

[6] Clarke, *Lancashire*, 397–98.

[7] Clarke, "Progressive Movement," 160.

[8] James T. Kloppenberg, *Uncertain Victory: Social Democracy and Progressivism in European and American Thought, 1870–1920* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 299–300.

bound up with the history of the progressive movement and the political concept of "progressivism." This paper takes a different approach. Like Thomas Dixon's work on altruism, it does not work backwards to establish the roots of a familiar concept but instead begins with a particular word and "traces its development forwards and outwards," exploring the various concepts and ideas to which it became attached.[9] It therefore allows us to see the emergence of "progressive" as a party political label in late nineteenth-century London not as the declaration of a new alliance between Liberal and Labour politics but, instead, as an expression of existing Liberal concerns. Far from emerging with the London County Council, "progressive" was already well-established by 1889. And despite its later "connotations of social justice, state intervention and alliance with Labour,"[10] in 1889 it was most strongly associated with ideas about social evolution, civilization, and active governance and also with the very "idea of a self-guiding market economy" that the New Liberals went on to reject. The labeling of the "progressive movement" therefore begins to look more like an example of what Quentin Skinner calls "innovating ideologists . . . wresting an available moral language to their own ends," rather than the emergence of a new label to describe a new political concept.[11] Moreover, this did not succeed in completely reorienting the moral value of the term. In the interwar years, for instance, a number of Progressive parties emerged in municipalities throughout England and Scotland. They were coalitions of anti-socialist forces, including local business elites and Unionist politicians who vigorously opposed the "municipal socialism" of the London Progressives.

In 2005 Michael Freeden noted that the "central question" the history of ideas must address is: "what has to hold for this sentence, that paragraph, this narrative, to make sense to its author, and what has to hold for it to make sense to its consumers"?[12] This paper takes up Freeden's question and asks, what had to hold for the champions and opponents of municipal socialism both to call themselves "progressive" and to be understood as such by their electors? This inquiry takes us beyond party labels. It allows us to ask questions about what it meant to *be progressive* in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Britain. It is perhaps no surprise that at the

[9] Thomas Dixon, *The Invention of Altruism: Making Moral Meanings in Victorian Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press for the British Academy, 2008), 36–38.
[10] Clarke, *Lancashire*, 398.
[11] Quentin Skinner, *Visions of Politics, Vol. 1: Regarding Method* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 178.
[12] Freeden, *Liberal Languages*, 9.

very point when progress became a universal political value, a debate erupted about the kinds of policies which would further this end and so could be legitimately called "progressive."

MUNICIPAL BEGINNINGS

The progressive movement is now associated primarily with the United States, to the extent that some have suggested an American influence behind early Progressive municipal politics in Britain.[13] However, as Daniel T. Rodgers, the historian of the American progressive movement, acknowledges, this story begins in London. Not only the ideas of British Progressives but also the label itself "was English before it was American, born in the heated municipal politics of 1890s London."[14] It is therefore worth examining this moment of emergence in some depth. When the first administration of the London County Council called itself Progressive, what—at this particular historical moment—was that description intended and understood to convey?

First, it must be noted that although the politics of the London Progressives may have been novel, their use of the word "progressive" was not. The term was already well established in British political discourse, and strongly associated with Liberal politics in all its guises. While Whigs were widely seen to be "progressive reformers,"[15] the *Manchester Times* based its calls for a more radical liberalism on a program of "Free Trade, Cheap Government, Progressive Reform,"[16] and the *Manchester Guardian* described the Cobdenite "actively-minded gentlemen" of the Manchester Reform Association as a "progressive phalanx."[17] By 1845, Lord John Russell was able to use the term as a stand-alone label, declaring himself "a progressive in the cause of free trade."[18] To borrow J. W. Burrow's terms, this was a vocabulary which Liberals, Radicals, and Whigs were able to inhabit, rather than a doctrine to which they subscribed.[19] Its scope can

[13] See, for instance, Alex Windscheffel, *Popular Conservatism in Imperial London, 1868–1906* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2007), 141.
[14] Daniel T. Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998), 52.
[15] *Manchester Guardian* (hereafter *MG*), March 30, 1839, 2; *MG*, January 9, 1836, 2.
[16] *Manchester Times*, June 9, 1832, 2.
[17] *MG*, October 28, 1854, 6.
[18] *Manchester Times*, July 5, 1845, 4.
[19] J. W. Burrow, *Whigs and Liberals: Continuity and Change in English Political Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 5.

best be understood by considering its antonyms: conservative and stationary. The first of these denoted both a contemporary party position and a seemingly eternal cultural mindset, by which "The conservative and progressive elements were imbedded in the first principles of human society."[20] The second was rooted in the thought of the Scottish Enlightenment, with its desire to understand the historical development of commercial society. The progressive state, which manifested itself "while the society is advancing to the further acquisition . . . of riches," was "the cheerful and the hearty state," in contrast to the "hard" and "miserable" conditions in stationary or declining states, respectively.[21] As Burrow reminds us, such ideas were not swept away by the advent of utilitarianism, but continued to underpin Liberal thought throughout the nineteenth century.[22]

Given this background, then, it is perhaps unsurprising to find that the use of the label "Progressive" on the LCC was not heralded as a new departure in politics; rather controversy focused on the extent to which it signified the (unwelcome) application of existing Liberal politics to the metropolis. Municipal governance at this time was seen as a matter of administration rather than politics. Many candidates stressed that they were "purely non-political," they would be "the slave of no party, the mouthpiece of no clique" and stood at the request of "Citizens of all shades of Politics."[23] The Progressive Party was blamed for having introduced party politics to the contest on account of the London Liberal and Radical Union having resolved to support a slate of candidates "pledged to 'a Progressive Policy in all matters.' "[24] Perhaps for this reason, the term was not much used during the election itself. Just two election addresses referred to candidates as "Progressive" with a capital "P"[25] and only a further three candidates seem to have used the term at all—and one of these was from the other side of the political spectrum: a Moderate, who praised the Liberal

[20] Gladstone speaking in the House of Commons, March 22, 1850. Reported in *The Times*, March 23, 1850.

[21] Adam Smith *The Wealth of Nations* (London: Penguin, 1987), 184. See also Murray Milgate and Shannon C. Stimson, *After Adam Smith: A Century of Transformation in Politics and Political Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 186–216.

[22] Burrow, *Whigs and Liberals*.

[23] Election addresses of Horace Turner, W. Æneas Smith and Lord Rosebery. NLC Papers: DM688/2.

[24] John Davis, *Reforming London: The London Government Problem, 1855–1900* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 118. Quoting London Liberal and Radical Union, *Second Annual Report* (1888–89), 2.

[25] LCC 1889 election addresses, National Liberal Club Papers, University of Bristol Special Collections (hereafter NLC Papers): DM688/2. Addresses of B. F. C. Costelloe & James Woolen and George Cooper & Joseph Thornton.

Unionists for aiding the Conservative government in enacting its "progressive policy."[26] It was only *after* the election that the successful candidates divided into two distinct parties: Moderates and Progressives—although this was rather tentative.[27] Even the label Progressive was the subject of some confusion, being used interchangeably with Progressist until 1892, which led to complaints about inconsistency.[28]

A great deal of mythology has been attached to the London Progressive Party, particularly by Fabians, like Edward Pease, who described the way in which "the tramways of London were held as a trench in the world-wide conflict between Socialism and its enemies," attributing this to "Fabian advocacy."[29] This has inevitably colored later readings of the term "progressive" itself. However, as previous scholars have noted, there is a certain amount of self-congratulatory teleology to these accounts.[30] John Davis, in particular, cautions that "Too much can be made of the Progressives' ideological range . . . [and] coalition appearance." He notes that Labour members did not gain prominence within the Progressive Party, despite their effective work on the Council itself. Instead, the Progressive Party's "centre of gravity lay with the new Liberal and Radical Associations."[31] This is reinforced by an examination of the press coverage at the time. Even when the specific idea of "progressivism" appeared in 1892, it was initially a synonym for "radicalism." One of the earliest examples took Lord Rosebery's "faith in Progressivism" as justification for his desire that "men of business capacity" should be elected to the County Council.[32] Another identified them as "fanatical faddists," located in an established tradition of radicalism.[33]

It is also important to note that the Progressives strongly resisted the charge of party political influence. As late as 1901 they reassured electors that "a person may be a sound Conservative or Liberal Unionist and also a

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[26] Ibid., Theodore Lumley. See also Halford L. Mills in ibid.; and Margaret Sandhurst, *Women's Penny Paper*, December 29, 1888, 2.
[27] *Pall Mall Gazette "Extra,"* January 17, 1889, 86.
[28] Letter from "Quietus" to *Pall Mall Gazette*, February 20, 1892, 3.
[29] Edward R. Pease, *The History of the Fabian Society* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1916). Accessed as a Project Gutenberg e-book edited by Juliet Sutherland, Martin Pettit, and Paul Pettit, 2004, locations 1030–34.
[30] See, for instance John Davis, *Reforming London*, 119; Sir Gwilym Gibbon and Reginald W. Bell, *History of the London County Council, 1889–1939* (London: Macmillan, 1939), 83.
[31] Davis, *Reforming London*, 119.
[32] *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art*, February 13, 1892, 175.
[33] "London Awakening," *Isle of Wight Observer*, December 5, 1891, 4.

sound Progressive."[34] Indeed, the label seems to have been used precisely because it did *not* have an overtly ideological meaning. In an attempt to refute charges of politicizing the Council, Rosebery emphasized that "they turned their back on the word 'Liberal,' because they would not be identified in any way with the imperial [i.e. parliamentary] politics which that word represented." By this account, "progressive" was "a non-political name," indicating only a broad preference for reform over stasis.[35] The *Times* greeted the new Council with the hope that "all members of the London Council will turn out to be moderate in temper and progressive in policy, using the terms in their natural sense and not as party distinctions."[36] This was a key part of the Progressives' appeal. They emphasized the non-partisan nature of their brand of municipal modernity, arguing that most other cities (including those with Conservative administrations, like Liverpool and Sheffield) were progressive and London was being left behind.[37]

ACTIVE MUNICIPALISM

The distinguishing feature of progressive politics was its association with active citizenship. As Lord Hobhouse urged Londoners: "Shake off the sloth with which you are reproached in public matters, and which makes your friends despair of you, and your enemies despise you," by voting for "progress in town life" rather than "reaction."[38] As we will see below, right-leaning progressives in interwar Glasgow employed a similar rhetoric to galvanize their citizens *against* municipal socialism. Both were drawing on the language of civic republicanism, which we know from the work of J. G. A. Pocock.[39] As James Thompson has shown, these ideas continued to infuse mid- and late-Victorian conceptions of "good government," which valorized active and responsible local self-governance.[40] Sidney Webb made the connection explicit, with his call to awaken "That 'Municipal Patriotism' which once

[34] *To Conservatives . . . and Liberal Unionists*, leaflet No. 23 (London: Progressive Election Committee, 1901).
[35] *Daily News*, March 2, 1898, 3.
[36] *Times*, February 5, 1889, 9.
[37] *To Conservatives . . . and Liberal Unionists*.
[38] Hobhouse, "Londoners!!" (London: Eighty Club, undated [1891?]).
[39] J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975).
[40] James Thompson, "Good Government," in *Languages of Politics in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, ed. David Craig and James Thompson (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 21–43.

marked the free cities of Italy, and which is already to be found in our own provincial towns." He went on to explain that "We should 'municipalize' our metropolis, not only in order to improve its administration, but as the best means of developing the character of its citizens."[41]

Such ideals not only influenced the program of the Progressive Party, they also underpinned the creation of the LCC itself. The long struggle for metropolitan self-governance had been a cross-party issue until 1881 when the formation of the London Municipal Reform League politicized the issue, making it seem a predominantly Radical cause.[42] Not only was this electorally disastrous for the Moderates, who only won in 1907 under the new name of the Municipal Reform Party, it also helped to define active municipalism in London as exclusively left-wing, in a way that had not been true in other cities.[43] This association was cemented by the evangelical enthusiasm of the Progressive administration.[44] The Moderates' most frequent and consistent attack was that the Progressives were too active. They were perceived to have confused an administrative with a legislative role and to be directing their energies at extending their powers, rather than getting on with the effective (non-political) administration of the city's affairs.[45]

Despite their resistance to active municipal policies, however, the Moderates were unwilling to cede the term "progressive" to their opponents. As we have seen, one of the four election addresses to use this term at the 1889 election belonged to a Moderate. At the 1892 election there was a more deliberate attempt to undermine the Progressives' claim to the label. Of the thirty-three Moderate or Conservative election addresses that referred to the Progressive or Progressist party, policy or program, twenty-one—nearly two thirds—qualified this with the words "so-called," "self-styled" or by putting the words Progressive or Progressist in inverted commas. A few openly challenged the Progressives' use of these terms. John Bulmer, for instance, appealed for "the support of both Conservatives and moderate Liberals against the extreme party which has usurped the name of 'Progressive.'"[46] Similarly, Horace Farquhar emphasized the way in which the Moderates had carried out their municipal duties without "arrogating to

[41] Sidney Webb, *The London Programme* (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1891), v–vi.
[42] Windscheffel, *Popular Conservatism*, 132; Davis, *Reforming London*, 186.
[43] See Freeden, *New Liberalism*, 36–37; and Roger Ward, *City State and Nation: Birmingham's Political History, c. 1830–1940* (Chichester: Phillimore, 2005), 76.
[44] Susan D. Pennybacker, *A Vision for London, 1889–1914: Labour, Everyday Life and the LCC Experiment* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 3.
[45] See NLC Papers: DM688/2, 1892 election addresses. For example Lewis Edmunds & Frederick J. Reilly, Arthur Cawston & W. J. Dixon, M. H. Temple.
[46] John Bulmer, Election address, 1892. Available in NLC Papers, DM668/2.

ourselves the title of 'Progressists.' "[47] Several Moderates followed this line, presenting themselves as the party of true, sensible, steady progress, rather than the false or extreme progress represented by the Progressives. This was more than political point scoring; it shows the extent to which the Progressives had succeeded in laying claim not only to an attractive political label, but also to an important cultural and social value.

Many of the opponents of Progressive politics in this period were strongly committed to the idea of social, moral, and civilizational progress. They just did not believe it could be brought about by legislation—especially not at the municipal level. One particularly interesting case is that of Sir John Lubbock, the evolutionary biologist, archaeologist, and polymath. Although initially elected from the Progressive bench to be Vice Chairman of the LCC, Lubbock found himself increasingly at odds with the Progressive Party and shortly stepped aside. As Mark Patton has explained, this was something of a surprise: "Instinctively, he too was a progressive—he shared many of the aspirations of the new radicals—it was only their means that he doubted, convinced that these would, in all too many cases, have the opposite effect to that intended."[48] As Lubbock explained in a 1906 pamphlet, "Municipal trading is now urged in the name of progress, but it is entirely contrary to the old traditions of the Liberal party—to the teaching of Cobden and Bright, of Mill and of Fawcett." The result of such schemes would, he believed, "check the progress of scientific discovery, and stifle, if not destroy, that spirit of private enterprise to which in the past our commercial supremacy is mainly due."[49]

That Lubbock thought of himself as a progressive should not be surprising. The progressivism of the New Liberals was an adaptation of classical liberalism, not a departure from it.[50] The same was true of the Individualism developed particularly by Herbert Spencer.[51] Both were based on evolutionary and developmental conceptions of society; both saw man as a progressive being, continually developing and improving. But where Individualists imagined society naturally evolving towards a state of cooperation with no need for intervention, New Liberals saw this as "fatalism," and stressed instead the evolution of the mind and its role in "the attempt

[47] Horace Farquhar, Election address, 1892. Available in NLC Papers, DM668/2.
[48] Mark Patton, *Science, Politics and Business in the Work of Sir John Lubbock: A Man of Universal Mind* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 207.
[49] The Right Hon. Lord Avebury, P. C., *On Municipal and National Trading* (London: Macmillan, 1906), 4, 21.
[50] Freeden, *New Liberalism*, 5–22; Freeden, *Liberal Languages*, 21–28.
[51] M. W. Taylor, *Men Versus the State: Herbert Spencer and Late Victorian Individualism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 5.

to remodel society by a reasoned conception of social justice."[52] To Spencerians this was "a retrogressive rather than a progressive enterprise," which risked "undermining the very conditions of progress and re-creating the repressive type of society from which mankind had only recently emerged."[53] In the colorful language of the Earl of Wemyss, founder of the Liberty and Property Defence League, the policies of the London Progressives represented "progress backwards," which would "lead men in legislation back to the dark days of the Plantagenets, when prices were fixed by public authority; when the State was everything and the individual a slave."[54] This argument was explicitly rooted in eighteenth-century models of conjectural history. Men like Wemyss saw commercial society and freedom of contract as the means by which mankind had risen above feudalism; their opposition to municipal socialism was therefore pitched as an attempt to prevent Britain slipping back down the ladder of civilization.

It should also be noted that this was no longer just a debate within liberalism. Indeed, Freeden argues that by the 1890s extreme Individualist views were primarily held by Conservatives.[55] This is just one symptom of the way in which the distinction between Conservative and Liberal worldviews was starting to dissolve. In 1886 the Liberal Party had split over the issue of Home Rule for Ireland, and Liberal defenders of the Union entered into an alliance with the Conservatives. The seemingly natural and eternal division between the "progressive and conservative elements" of human society was no longer reflected in the political system. Both factions vigorously contested their right to inherit the mantle of the "Party of Progress."[56] It is worth noting that Unionism was often described as progressive in itself, on the grounds that it would foster a prosperous and progressive Ireland.[57] Again, we hear echoes of far older ideas about the progressive state being defined by its commercial activity.

A PROGRESSIVE NATION

This brings us to the wider context of what "progressive" meant to late nineteenth-century Britons—and indeed, what it did not. A sample of 767

[52] L. T. Hobhouse, *Democracy and Reaction*, ed., intro., and notes P. F. Clarke (Brighton: Harvester, 1972 [London, 1904]), 93; 118.
[53] Taylor, *Men Versus the State*, 167.
[54] Earl of Wemyss, *Modern Municipalism*, an address to the Paddington Ratepayers' Defence Association (London: Liberty and Property Defence League, 1893), 10.
[55] Freeden, *New Liberalism*, 11.
[56] See for example *MG*, March 3, 1888, 5; *GH*, October 31, 1888, 7.
[57] *Times*, June 5, 1888; October 10, 1888.

uses of the term in British newspapers and periodicals during 1888, the year leading up to the first LCC election, yielded just nine references—some of them tenuous—to the "progressive politics" identified at the start of this article, with its connotations of redistribution, collectivism, and state intervention. Indeed, just over one in seven refer to British politics at all—despite the likelihood that political subjects are over-represented by the use of newspaper data.[58] Two-fifths of the articles used "progressive" in a technical sense: either to mean sequential (as in music and language exercises "arranged in progressive order"[59]), or ongoing and increasing; for instance, many job advertisements specified that the salary would be "progressive."[60] The progressive nature of knowledge, especially in relation to the sciences and arts, appeared as often as British politics. The principal characteristic here was of the constant accumulation of knowledge and development of expertise.[61] For the most part, these sources referred to a steady, cumulative growth in knowledge, rather than radical or experimental innovation. As a piece in *The Musical Times* explained, "All true art is progressive, and the forms commonly used and accepted by musicians, which were the result of long and earnest endeavors to bring them to perfection, are yet in a transitive state."[62] Roughly one in nine of the articles referred to progressive nations and races—for example the formation of a Political Economy Society in Tokyo was taken to be a "remarkable illustration of the progressive and inquiring spirit of the Japanese."[63] Finally, around one in eleven used "progressive" as a synonym for prosperous or profitable, particularly in terms of business opportunities[64] and share values and dividends.[65]

While these figures cannot be anything more than indicative, they do allow us to build up a far more nuanced sense of the meanings which the electorate of January 1889 would have been likely to apply to the term

[58] Analysis of every use of the word "progressive" in the *Times*, *MG*, *GH*, and the ProQuest British Periodicals Digital Database Collections I and II, for the year 1888. Search undertaken in January and February 2012.

[59] See classified advert, *The Monthly Musical Record* 18 (January 1888): 9; and many similar adverts in, for instance, the *Athenaeum*, *Musical Herald*, *Musical Times*, *Musical Journal*, *Practical Teacher*, and *Saturday Review*.

[60] See *Times* classified adverts throughout the year, for example January 7, 1888, January 10, 1888, and January 23, 1888. Similar adverts are available in *MG*, for example February 8, 1888, March 22, 1888, and May 19, 1888.

[61] See *Edinburgh Review*, October 1888, 504; and *Portfolio* 19 (January 1888): 86.

[62] Anon., "Material of Music," *Musical Times*, August 1888, 464.

[63] *MG*, February 29, 1888, 5; See also, for example, *The Sunday at Home*, March 31, 1888, 208.

[64] For example, classified adverts, *Times*, January 31, 1888, June 14 and 19, 1888, 14.

[65] For example, *MG*, March 27, 1888, 5; *GH*, July 2, 1888, 6.

"progressive" than is possible from looking at its political uses in isolation. It gives a picture of dynamic forward-movement, of civilization realized through scientific discovery and commercial enterprise, and of an open-ended, yet ordered and sequential, sense of human development. There is a great deal here that would be familiar to the theorists of the Scottish Enlightenment, but little to suggest that at the time of the emergence of the London Progressive Party, the term was suggestive of new liberalism, social democracy, or an alliance between the two.

The example of Keir Hardie's candidature in the Mid-Lanark by-election in April 1888 is particularly instructive. Hardie attempted to stand as the Liberal candidate but was rejected and instead contested the seat as an independent miners' candidate. Given that Liberal support for working-class parliamentary candidates was the basis of the later Lib-Lab progressive alliance, this is one episode where we would certainly expect to see the word "progressive" used. Yet this is not the case. One article in the *Scottish Leader* commented that "A Labour candidate must have something more than horny hands to justify him in harassing the party of progress"—i.e. the Liberal Party.[66] The word "progressive" itself appears just twice.[67] The first was a proposal for "progressive death-duties" from the Liberal candidate.[68] The second came at a public meeting, when William Robert Bousfield, the Conservative candidate, called "for order and progressive reform." He was asked by a member of the audience whether "he was a Liberal or a progressive Tory," which was greeted with laughter from the crowd. To quote the *Glasgow Herald*:

> Mr Bousfield said he was not a Tory in any sense of the word. If he was asked if he was a progressive Conservative or a Liberal he should have difficulty in answering. . . . They were called Unionists now. But he did not care by what name he was called. He asked them to judge him by his principles.[69]

The primary contestation over the term "progressive" in the year before the founding of the LCC Progressive Party occurred between Gladstonian Liberals and Liberal Unionists, not between classical and "new" Liberals.

[66] *Scottish Leader*, April 20, 1888. Clipping in ILP Papers, British Library of Political and Economic Science (hereafter ILP Papers): 6/1/14.
[67] In addition to the digital databases already mentioned a folder of clippings has also been consulted: ILP Papers: 6/1/14.
[68] *GH*, April 25, 1888, 7.
[69] *GH*, April 24, 1888, 4.

Even if we turn to the editorials of the *Manchester Guardian*—the newspaper most closely aligned with the emergence of the progressive movement[70]—we do not see a sudden appearance of the term in the 1880s and '90s to describe this new type of politics. Instead we see a gradual evolution from progressive reform and improvement in the 1830s, through progressive policies and legislation in the 1840s and 1850s (including Manchester's "progressive phalanx"[71]), progressive opinions, governments, and candidates in the 1860s, to finally its application to labor politics in the 1890s.[72] Even then, the impression is of Labour candidates being welcomed into an existing fold of progressive Liberal politics, rather than the terms specifically referring to this new alliance. In November 1891, for instance, readers were reassured that "of course, we include the Labour party" when calculating the votes of "what may be called the Progressive party" on the Manchester School Board.[73] In June 1894, an editorial noted that the "progressive movement in the country" was "becoming more and more a distinctively Labour movement."[74]

LIBERALS AND SOCIALISTS

One of the groups most closely associated with creating the new Lib-Lab "progressive alliance" was the Rainbow Circle—a discussion group whose founding members included Ramsay MacDonald, J. A. Hobson, William Clarke, and Herbert Burrows.[75] In October 1896 (well into the Progressive Party's third term of office), its members launched a publication called the *Progressive Review*. Their use of this title was both hesitant and explicitly framed as an attempt to claim and redefine it in service of their emerging political program. Hobson, the assistant editor, explained its title interviewer in these terms:

> Progressive is a hard word to define. If I say that our review is to be an effective presentation of what we assume to be the forward

[70] See Clarke, *Lancashire*, 153.
[71] *MG*, January 28, 1854, 6.
[72] See for example *MG*, July 26, 1837, 2; July 24, 1847, 6; May 19, 1852, 4; June 18, 1864, 4; November 17, 1868, 4.
[73] *MG*, November 17, 1891, 5.
[74] *MG*, June 22, 1894, 5. See also *MG*, September 26, 1894, 5.
[75] Michael Freeden, *Minutes of the Rainbow Circle, 1894–1924* (London: Offices of the Royal Historical Society, 1989).

> movement in modern thought you will gain only an imperfect idea of our object.
>
> We feel that this great movement, which aims at social and political reform is wasting its energy in a confused inarticulate cry, to which the *Progressive Review*, we hope, will give a clear and rational expression.[76]

This was a self-reinforcing argument; it was in being defined as "progressive" that the ideas of the Rainbow Circle acquired the impression of forward movement, which in turn made them appear inherently progressive.

The purpose of the *Review* was to map out a new future for "the political party whose watchword has been Progress" in light of its current "disintegration and enfeeblement."[77] As the Liberal journal, the *Speaker*, put it, the new publication "aims to do for advanced Liberal thought what the *Edinburgh*, *Westminster*, and *Fortnightly* reviews respectively did for that thought at the times of their first appearance."[78] The major departure of the *Progressive Review* from these previous incarnations of liberalism lay in its "enlarged and enlightened conception of the functions of the State."[79] This was presented as a bold but necessary transformation, with the editors noting that "If such a departure from the historical lines of party action seem impossible, we can recognize no force in the claim of the Liberals to be regarded as the progressive party of the future."[80] Liberalism was defined by its openness to transformation; it was an evolutionary, adaptive creed, governed by the processes of history. As G. J. Shaw-Lefevre put it, liberalism "is necessarily progressive, for its aims advance as it succeeds in approaching them."[81] By defining their political project as progressive, the New Liberals—as Skinnerian "innovating ideologists"[82]—were attempting to harness these characteristics and to use them to drive the party in a particular direction. That direction was not itself intrinsically progressive.

The socialist press was disparaging of both the London Progressives and the entire project of Lib-Lab progressivism. While *Justice*, the newspaper of the Social Democratic Federation (SDF) welcomed the Progressives' electoral victories in 1889 and 1892 as evidence of the fact that "London

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[76] *Westminster Gazette*, September 18, 1896, 3.
[77] "Introductory," *Progressive Review* 1 (October 1896): 1–9, 4.
[78] *Speaker*, October 3, 1896, 342.
[79] "Introductory," *Progressive Review*, 4.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Andrew Reid, ed., *Why I am a Liberal, being Definitions and Personal Confessions of Faith by the Best Minds of the Liberal Party* (London: Cassell, 1885), 83.
[82] Skinner, *Visions of Politics*, 178.

has declared emphatically in favor of a policy of advance, of improvement, of the extension of municipal life," it also claimed credit for key aspects of the Progressive program, noting that "if not our men, our measures have been overwhelmingly victorious at this election."[83] By 1898 it was complaining that "They have taken—and spoilt—sufficient of the Socialist programme to get themselves dubbed Socialists by stupid or dishonest opponents."[84] Throughout the period, the SDF ran its own candidates against the Progressives in an attempt (in Paul Thompson's words) "to point out the genuine distinction between Social Democracy and Progressivism," and to highlight the paucity of the latter's achievements, particularly on housing and unemployment.[85] Such criticism was not limited to the SDF. An editorial in Keir Hardie's *Labour Leader* echoed the non-partisan language of the Progressives themselves. While welcoming the vast extension in public ownership, it noted that "these developments have been made by no one party. Our Conservative towns have them to as full an extent as our Liberal towns." Moreover, "many of them have been made from the narrowest ratepayer point of view. . . . They are, in fact, merely a form of extended joint-stock capitalism, with the ratepayers as capitalists."[86] This criticism was not unfounded. As John Davis explains, the London Progressives did see the municipality as "redistributor of wealth." The profits of their municipal enterprise were used to subsidize the rates, even though this "implied taxing the working-class consumer to support the householder."[87]

This approach has been seen as a weakness of the Progressive Party, the chink through which we can spot the middle-class Radicals beneath the municipal socialists. Yet, it is also possible that this is precisely what made them progressive according to established uses of the term. As we have noted, the progressive state was one of expansion, of industry, of innovation. This is the sense in which Adam Smith, Thomas Malthus, and John Stuart Mill all used the term. For Marxists, it was a necessary stage through which society must pass; but it was the stage of bourgeois accumulation,

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[83] Henry Quelch, "A Progressive Victory," *Justice*, March 12, 1892, 2. See also *Justice*, January 26, 1889, 1.

[84] "Poor Progressives!" *Justice*, February 26, 1898, 1.

[85] Paul Thompson, *Socialists, Liberals and Labour: The Struggle for London, 1885–1914* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul and Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967), 122–23.

[86] "Municipalisation: The Limit of Liberalism in Civic Spirit," *Labour Leader*, November 12, 1898, 372.

[87] John Davis, "The Progressive Council, 1889–1907," in *Politics and the People of London: The London County Council, 1889–1965*, ed. Andrew Saint (London: The Hambledon Press, 1989), 27–48 (33).

not of socialist transformation. As Ernest Belfort-Bax explained, modernity was characterized by the way in which it bound men, "like Ixion to the wheel of production and distribution." It was only once a "communistic organisation of society" had been established that "for the first time, will the economical interest definitely cease to be [the] determining power of Human progress."[88] Even Henry George, whose *Progress and Poverty* (available in Britain from 1880) was a foundational text for the transatlantic progressive movement, did not present his proposals as progressive in themselves; rather they were intended to mitigate the worst effects of "the progressive state of society," in which "all the causes that . . . operate to increase the productive power of labour tend, also, to advance rent, and not to advance wage or interest."[89]

COMMERCE AND ENTERPRISE

The idea that a progressive society would be necessarily prosperous and commercial did not die away with the emergence of progressive new liberalism. In 1906, the year the "progressive" Liberal government was elected, a book was published with the title, *The Business Blue Book: A Book for the Progressive Business Men and All Interested in Commercial Knowledge, which Includes Every Member of the Community.* Although it was primarily a handbook, "designed to assist the busy progressive business man" with his day-to-day affairs, the preface set out a wider vision of the role of commerce in Britain's historical development and in its future prospects. Following a "long sleep" when Britain had declined relative to its competitors, the author was now confident that the "dawn of a new era of commercial prosperity and greatness is breaking over this Empire."[90]

The Business Blue Book was published at the height of the popular fervor for Free Trade, which Frank Trentmann has identified. However, in the aftermath of the First World War such confidence dissolved and Trentmann tracks the way in which the former allies of Free Trade "migrate[d] to different ends of the political spectrum." Cooperatists, New Liberals,

[88] Ernest Belfort-Bax, "The Economic Basis of Social Evolution," *Justice*, December 1, 1888, 3, 5.

[89] Henry George, *Progress and Poverty: An Inquiry into the Cause of Industrial Depressions and of Increase of Want with Increase of Wealth, the Remedy* (Kindle version of Twenty-Fifth Anniversary Edition [1879]), 215–16.

[90] *The Business Blue Book: A Book for the Progressive Business Men and All Interested in Commercial Knowledge, which Includes Every Member of the Community* (London: Curtis Gardner, 1906), x.

and internationalists—David Blaazer's "progressive milieu"—joined the Labour Party, while middle-class business owners and ratepayers attempted to safeguard their positions by grouping around the Conservative Party.[91] With this in mind, we might expect to see a decline in "progressive" language by this latter group. But that was not the case. In the 1920s and '30s, defining and supplying the needs of the "progressive business man," and (less frequently) woman, became something of an industry in itself. In addition to handbooks, of the kind already mentioned,[92] business exhibitions were advertized on the basis that "No progressive man of affairs would willingly miss it."[93] As one of these put it, " 'More' and 'Better'—sums up the objective of every progressive business man and woman for 1929."[94] Advertisers targeted the "progressive business man" with everything from stationery to Dictaphones, and from new business journals to office space, always playing on his fear of missing out or being left behind.[95] This fits into a wider discourse, which presented business and retail as not only necessarily but perhaps also as uniquely progressive.

One of the key concerns of a truly progressive businessman was advertising. This was the means by which he could "make his business known, rather than . . . sitting down and waiting for popularity to come to him."[96] Moreover advertising was itself seen to be "evidence of progress, proof of good and profitable business."[97] Advertising was not limited to private enterprises however; municipalities were also keen to publicize their attractions. And it should come as no surprise that some chose to portray themselves as "progressive." This was particularly common among seaside resorts: Hastings and St Leonards advertised itself as "The Progressive Resort," Bournemouth as a "fashionable and progressive seaside resort," and Clacton-on-Sea as a "Well-equipped and progressive seaside resort."[98]

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[91] Frank Trentmann, *Free Trade Nation: Commerce, Consumption and Civil Society in Modern Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 18.

[92] *Business Blue Book*, ix. See also Max Rittenberg, *How to Compose Business Letters: A Book for Every Progressive Business Man* (London: Guilbert Pitman, 1909).

[93] Business and Advertising Exhibition at Olympia, October 13–22, 1910, advertised in *Times*, October 13, 1910, 9.

[94] Business Efficiency Exhibition, White City, January 23–February 2, 1929, advertised in *Times*, January 24, 1924, 8. See also Business Efficiency Exhibition, City Hall, Manchester, November 9–18, 1938, advertized in *MG*, November 9, 1938, 5.

[95] *MG*, November 2, 1920, 11; *MG*, September 19, 1929, 4; *Times,* March 2, 1926, 22; *Times*, November 20, 1924, 11.

[96] *Progressive Advertising*, November 1, 1901, 63.

[97] "What Advertising *Is* and What it *Does*," in ibid., 26–27.

[98] *Times*, December 11, 1931, 19; *Times*, October 9, 1931, 7; *Times*, October 24, 1924, 5; *Illustrated London News*, May 9, 1931, 2.

Municipal authorities were also described as "progressive" on account of their efforts to attract and entertain visitors. A promotional piece entitled "Winter Sunshine" in the *Manchester Guardian*, praised the way that Scarborough's "municipal authorities and other organisations strive to satisfy visitors and spare no expense in their efforts," noting that "The word progressive aptly describes their policy."[99] Similarly, a 1923 advert for Torquay, funded by Thomas Cook, listed the "progressive policy of the Corporation," along with its "climatic attractions" and "manifold entertainments" as the features which made the town "THE Premier winter resort."[100]

This should be located in a broader discourse about the nature of progressive municipal administration, which was often very far from the ideals of the London Progressives. The target audience of *The Bulletin: Dartford's Progressive Monthly News-Magazine*, for instance, can be identified by its promotion of the Rate-payers' Association, the Rotary Club, and the Association of Dartford Industries. An early issue expressed the hope that house-building would be taken over by "progressive builders" in private enterprise, "so that it will not be necessary for Local Authorities to burden themselves with Building Schemes."[101] Similarly, in 1936 the *Doncaster Gazette* produced a glossy advertising brochure revealing *Facts and Figures about this Progressive Town and the Intensively Industrial District*. The "progressive" nature of Doncaster was evidenced by its increasing population and its "modern" industry, housing, and shopping facilities. The brochure concluded that "Doncaster is a rapidly growing district—an area devoted to many business interests, with men of foresight and Progressive minds at their head." Gratifyingly for the *Gazette*, Doncaster was also felt to be "undoubtedly one of the most 'Advertising-minded' towns in the country."[102]

NEW ALLIANCES

This use of the term progressive to denote commercial values ran alongside the discourse with which we are more familiar. As Blaazer has shown, the

[99] *MG*, December 3, 1931, 4.
[100] *Times*, September 13, 1923, 15.
[101] "Facts for Ratepayers: What every Dartfordian ought to know," in *The Bulletin: Dartford's Progressive Monthly News-Magazine, incorporating Dartford Picturegoer's Gazette* 2 (January 1933): 5.
[102] *The County Borough of Doncaster: Revealing Facts and Figures about this Progressive Town and the Intensively Industrial District, in its relation to the Circulation Area of the "Doncaster Gazette"* (Doncaster: Doncaster Gazette, 1936), 3, 22, 21.

intellectual project of progressivism continued into the interwar years, shifting its center of gravity towards the Labour left.[103] This is the context in which the Federation of Progressive Societies and Individuals developed its left-liberal manifesto;[104] in which the Communist Party attempted to form a Popular Front of "the Labour and progressive forces in the country";[105] and in which the Progressive Book Society assured its readers that "the world is moving towards a classless collective society, the first stage of which will be the Socialist State."[106] The point of this paper is not to deny the importance of these left and center-left forms of progressive politics; it is simply to show that they did not have an exclusive claim to that label. Just as Communists tried to form anti-fascist alliances, Conservatives organized around the idea of anti-socialism—a trend which began in northern municipalities.[107] Many of these coalitions described themselves as "progressive."

In Sheffield, for instance, the business-dominated Citizens' Association prided itself on its "sane and progressive" attitude[108] and its candidates proclaimed their support for "a Sound, Progressive Municipal Policy with Fair Play For All."[109] In 1930 the Citizens' Association transformed itself into the Municipal Progressive Party.[110] This seems to have been an attempt to overcome partisan divisions between Unionists and Liberals. It was announced locally as "A New Party . . . formed of Anti-Socialists, absorbing the Citizen Party, called the *Progressive* Party."[111] A similar pattern can be seen in Glasgow, where the governing Moderate Party lost office to Labour in 1933. Following this shock, which was attributed "to the unfortunate division in the ranks of the Anti-Socialists," many arrangements

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[103] Blaazer, *Popular Front*.

[104] C. E. M. Joad, ed., *Manifesto, Being the Book of the Federation of Progressive Societies and Individuals* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1934).

[105] See, for instance, *Manifesto of the CPGB to the Labour Party Conference at Bournemouth* (London: CPGB, 1937), 3–4. Available in Communist Party of Great Britain Papers, Labour History Archive and Study Centre: CP/CENT/SUBT/02/02: 1926–40.

[106] "Towards Socialist Culture," *Forge: Journal of the Progressive Book Society, Ltd* 1 (October 1930): 1.

[107] E. H. H. Green, *Ideologies of Conservatism: Conservative Political Ideas in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 131.

[108] Councillor Turner, quoted in *Sheffield Telegraph*, 1922. Clipping available in Sheffield Citizens' Group & Progressive Party Minutes (hereafter SCGPP Minutes). Sheffield Archives (hereafter SA): LD2110.

[109] *Sheffield Citizen: Official Organ of the Sheffield Citizens' Association*, no. 30 (October 1927), available in Sheffield Labour Party Papers, SA: X263.

[110] Citizens' Group Minutes, August 5, 1930, SCGPP Minutes: LD2111.

[111] Agenda, June 16, 1930. City of Sheffield Conservative Women's Advisory Committee minute book in City of Sheffield Conservative and Unionist Association Papers, SA: LD2108, original emphasis.

were tried, culminating in the Progressive Party, formed in 1936.[112] Similarly in Edinburgh, Liberals and Unionists formed a Good Government League, followed by a Moderate Party in early 1929, which gradually became known as the Progressive Party. Again, the electoral advantages were clear, with the *Edinburgh Citizen and Portobello Advertiser* noting that, "The League has used its influence to prevent divisions in the anti-Socialist ranks at municipal elections, and it is significant that there has not been a triangular contest in Edinburgh since its formation."[113] In the 1930s such parties were bolstered by the addition of National Liberals.

In a historiography dominated by the politics of the Lib-Lab progressive movement, such uses of the term appear at best counter-intuitive and at worst disingenuous. Yet, these new Progressive parties made no secret of their opposition to municipal socialism. This was not an attempt to wear their opponents' clothes; nor was it an entirely new use of this language. Both the Sheffield Citizens' Association and the Glasgow Unionists had been speaking in terms of the need for "moderate and sanely progressive opinion" since the early 1920s.[114] In 1921, Glasgow was one of a number of Unionist Associations behind a motion to the Scottish Conservative and Unionist's annual conference on the need to work with other non-socialist organizations "to secure the return to Town and County Councils, Parish Councils, and Education Authorities of men and women of sound, progressive, and anti-Socialist opinions."[115] The connection between being "sound" or "sane" and "progressive" suggests an attempt to circumscribe the limits of acceptable political opinions, with socialism firmly on the outside.[116] "Progressive" here became a marker of "ordered progress," in contrast to what they presented as the "extreme revolutionary opinions" of their opponents.[117] The echoes of the London Moderate Party are clear.

However, there were also certain parallels with the rhetoric of the London Progressives. Like their predecessors, the interwar Progressives were

[112] Twenty-First Annual Report of the Glasgow Unionist Association, January 29, 1934, Scottish Conservative and Unionist Association Papers (hereafter SCUA Papers), National Library of Scotland: ACC 10424/26 (vii). See also Lewis Sheddon, memo (n.d.): Acc.10424/9 (xii).

[113] *Edinburgh Citizen and Portobello Advertiser*, February 8, 1929, 3.

[114] Glasgow Unionist Association, Maryhill Division, Annual Report, January 26, 1921. SCUA Papers: ACC 10424/26 (iii).

[115] Scottish Unionist Association Conference Programme, October 22, 1920. SCUA Papers: ACC 10424/26 (vii).

[116] For a broader exploration of anti-socialism in this period, see Laura Beers, *Your Britain: Media and the Making of the Labour Party* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010).

[117] Sixth Annual Report of the Glasgow Unionist Association, January 27, 1919. SCUA Papers: ACC 10424/26 (iii).

deeply concerned about apathy, which they saw not only as an electoral disadvantage to themselves, but also as a threat to a healthy civic sphere.[118] One election leaflet in Glasgow found it "deplorable" that 43 percent of citizens "should have shirked their responsibility and failed in their duty as citizens" by not voting. It asked its supporters to pledge that they would "not fail to go to the Poll and cast our votes for sound, economical and business-like administration of our Municipal affairs."[119] Another similarity was their use of Progressive as an avowedly "non-political" name, indicating an unspecified notion of "Good Government," analogous to that explored by James Thompson.[120] As with the LCC Progressives, this was contested.[121] The *Crewe Chronicle* complained, "We have lost faith in an organisation that professes to be non-political, but which has its headquarters at the Conservative Club and uses its political machinery."[122] As we saw with Lord Rosebery in 1892, this "non-political" appeal was coupled with an emphasis on "business-like" administration. One correspondent to the *Glasgow Herald* concluded his complaint that the Labour Party had introduced party politics into the Council with the words, "We do not want Labour, Liberals, Conservatives, I.L.P.s, or Communists in the Town Council. We want men who have business acumen, who would run the city successfully, as they would run a prosperous business."[123] This desire for "businesslike, and economical, conduct of the city's affairs" united all the anti-socialist Progressive Parties.[124] Their appeals often resonated with the language of nineteenth-century liberalism:

> The choice is between a continuance of Socialist rule marked by prodigal spending and a Progressive administration pledged to retrenchment and prudent, businesslike management and development of the city's resources.[125]

While such sentiments may seem very far from the politics of the progressive milieu which was by this point clustered on the Labour left, they were

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[118] See, for instance, *Crewe Chronicle*, October 25, 1930, 12; various memos by Lewis Sheddon, SCUA Papers: Acc.10424/9 (xii).
[119] Glasgow Unionist Association, Letter to Electors, November 1, 1934. SCUA Papers: Acc.10424/9 (xii).
[120] Thompson, "Good Government."
[121] See for instance letters in *GH*, October 26, 1937, 7; October 27, 1937, 11; November 1, 1937, 9.
[122] *Crewe Chronicle*, October 25, 1930, 12.
[123] *GH*, October 27, 1937, 11.
[124] *GH*, November 1, 1937, 10.
[125] *GH*, October 23, 1937, 10.

similarly rooted in the civic republican and radical liberal values, which—as we have seen—had long been seen as emblematic of progressive politics. The ideological divergence between New Liberals and Liberal Unionists did not preclude either side's continued use of this inherited language, even if it now carried very different implications for each.

CONCLUSION

One way of reconciling these alternate languages of progressive governance might be to see them as revolving around a contestation not over the meaning of the word "progressive" but about the sphere of activities to which it could legitimately be applied. Where Whigs and Radicals had discussed progressive nations, individuals, and bodies of knowledge, the London Progressives applied progressive attributes to government itself—making it active, expansive, and energetic. It is significant that this shift took place first at a local level, which enabled it to be presented as self-government in opposition to a large central state. Yet, it was resisted by those who saw any attempt to interfere in the free conduct of commercial relations as a threat to the historical processes that had made Britain into the epitome of a progressive society. Even when New Liberals succeeded in re-shaping political debate in the early twentieth century, this resistance continued.

This contestation over the term "progressive" could perhaps be dismissed as nothing more than the use of "progress" as an empty catchword, identified by Koselleck. However, this paper has tried to show that this was itself an ideological development, contingent on the splits within liberalism and their effects on the new alliances forged by Liberals with both social democrats and Conservatives. Liberalism had always been seen as the naturally progressive creed. It was rooted in models of historical development, first articulated by the thinkers of the Scottish Enlightenment and later adapted by evolutionary biologists and sociologists, often within the framework of philosophic radicalism. However, when liberalism splintered in the late nineteenth century (and again in the early twentieth), its influence spread across the political spectrum. It was no longer clear which faction was the truly progressive force. This was more than a dispute over positive and negative conceptions of liberty; it involved differing interpretations of history and the historical process. Whether commercial freedom was to remain the apotheosis of progressive civilization or whether it would be modified by the potential of government to improve citizens' lives—to

become itself a progressive force in society—was now in question. However, as J. W. Burrow noted a quarter of a century ago, this debate was not so sharply delineated at the time as it has often appeared in the works of historians.[126] It is therefore no surprise to find that those we crudely term individualists and collectivists, advocates of intervention and of *laissez-faire*, all thought of themselves as progressive people and that all laid claim to that political label.

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[126] Burrow, *Whigs and Liberals*.