The Sea Change of Democracy: from Anxiety to Legitimacy

A critical conceptual history of 'democracy' in British parliamentary debate (1866-1886)

J.W.P. van der Weele
S1067109
Oude Vest 137 A
2312 XW Leiden
06-53684406

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Prof. dr. H. te Velde
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Full fathom five thy father lies;
Of his bones are coral made;
Those are pearls that were his eyes;
Nothing of him that doth fade,
But doth suffer a sea-change
Into something rich and strange.
Sea-nymphs hourly ring his knell:
Ding-dong.
Hark! now I hear them — Ding-dong, bell.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Sea Change

In 'The Tempest' – Shakespeare's last play – the Duke of Milan, Antonio, and his son, Ferdinand, sail the sea. But suddenly, they land in a storm. Their ship is wrecked, and both men strand on the same remote island, though separate from each other. Thereafter, the Duke's son is led to believe that his father has drowned, by a spirit named Ariel, who sings the song of 'Full Fatham Five'.[1] The spirit tries to comfort Ferdinand: though his father is dead, he would now become part of the sea: his body would turn into coral, and his eyes into pearls. Thus, the sea would change him into something better, 'rich and strange'.

The transformation of the Duke's body was thus made *by* the sea; and therefore Shakespeare named it a 'sea-change'. It meant an unanticipated turnover, a sudden start of a gradual process over time. In this metamorphosis, the body's form was retained, but the substance was replaced. In the end, though, the body would change 'beyond recognition'. It would take on a resemblance to the new surroundings; the body would become part of the sea.[2] Hence, a new word was invented.

In the centuries after, 'the sea-change' term stopped being a direct quotation and turned into an idiom; a neologism that could be used in different texts and contexts. It occurred again in the literature of the nineteenth century, but has nowadays become part of common English. It is used in news and business discourse alike.[3] In the twentieth century, 'sea change' lost its necessary connection to the sea: nowadays it refers to any profound transformation, caused by any agency. Yet, the word maintained its core meaning: a complete, unexpected, but positive transformation.[4]

1.2 Democracy: Then and Now

The stand of this thesis is that the concept of 'democracy' underwent exactly such a tempestuous transformation, in the British parliament of the late nineteenth century. In the House of Commons of the 1860s and 1870s, at least, 'democracy' was despised by the MP's: the word carried a strong negative connotation. No one wanted to have a democracy, and no

[1] The full play can be read on 'The Tempest', *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare,* http://shakespeare.mit.edu/tempest/full.html (accessed on November 14, 2012).
[2] W. Shakespeare, *The Tempest* (London 1999).
[3] B. Watson, 'Buzzword of the Week: Sea Change', *Daily Finance,* http://www.dailyfinance.com/2010/12/09/buzzword-of-the-week-sea-change (published on September 12, 2010; accessed on November 14, 2012).
[4] M. Quinion, 'Sea Change', *World Wide Words*, http://www.worldwidewords.org/qa/qa-sea1.htm (published on March 25, 2000; accessed on November 14, 2012).

one wanted to be a democrat. Gradual franchise extensions (1867, 1884) transformed this valuation. Yet it took the British parliament decades of debates, and three parliamentary reform acts, before the concept of 'democracy' was judged positively by most members of the House of Commons. It was only *after* the Third Reform Act, during the Irish Home Rule debates of 1886, that a new consensus was reached: that Great-Britain *was* a democracy, essentially ruled by 'the people'. Twenty years before, during the Second Reform Act debates in 1866, such an utterance was unimaginable; it was perhaps desired by a few Radicals, but condemned by a broad majority. Hence, from 1866 to 1886, the meaning and value of the concept of 'democracy' underwent a complete, unexpected, but positive change. Therefore, it was a 'sea change'.

How can we explain this conceptual turnover, from an essentially negative to a predominantly positive valuation? And how did democracy's meaning shift? Those are the two main questions that this thesis tries to answer. By doing this, we can considerably improve our contemporary understanding, and analyse our current appreciation, of democracy. Anno 2012, the slogan of democracy has become the most valid legitimization of all politics; there is hardly an alternative. The Arab spring countries are expected to become 'democracies', Western newspapers assert,[5] and the EU itself suffers from its democratic deficit.[6] Time and again, democracy is the solution. In the late nineteenth century, however, it was a key problem. What were the arguments then, in favour and against? Why have we become a democracy? For an important part, we share and copy the meaning and value of 'democracy' that originated in the late nineteenth century. If we study the start of this process, we can better understand how the present dogma of 'democracy's' superiority originated, and learn why we think what we think, and say what we say.

1.3 The British Lacuna

The interest in this topic was first actuated by Professor in Dutch History, Henk te Velde of Leiden University, who in 2010 gave a class on populism in the Netherlands, and supervised a paper on 'the dangers of democracy', as perceived by Dutch parliamentarians in the early 1890s.[7] What did 'democracy' mean in the Netherlands' political debate? After assisting in an

[5] C. Coughlin, 'The Arab Spring was no prelude to democracy', *The Telegraph,* http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/syria/9302719/The-Arab-Spring-was-no-prelude-to-democracy.html (published on May 31, 2012; accessed on November 14, 2012).
[6] Author unknown, 'An ever-deeper democratic deficit', *The Economist,* http://www.economist.com/node/21555927 (accessed on November 14, 2012).
[7] J.W.P. van der Weele, 'De dreiging van de democratie. Conservatief-liberale ideeën over 'democratie' tijdens de strijd om de Kieswet-Tak in het weekblad De Liberaal in 1894' (Unpublished; Leiden 2011).

MA course on this very question, in which the class intensively studied the conceptual change of 'democracy' in Dutch political debate (19th-21th century), we asked ourselves how distinctive the Dutch developments were. To answer this question, the perspective was shifted to another country, across the North Sea: to Great-Britain.

Great-Britain proved interesting, above all, because – different from the neighbouring countries of Germany and France – it has no tradition of 'conceptual history' at all. Never was a diachronic, British history of the word 'democracy' written. This is deplorable, for the concept is so salient in the twenty-first century world, with English' status as a world language. Only one entry by Dr Robert Saunders (Oxford University) comes close. He analysed the concept's meaning during the Second Reform Bill debates, yet stopped at the year 1867.[8] His perspective was thus synchronic. As Saunders admits, 'we still lack an intellectual history of the very word 'democracy''.[9] This thesis hopes to contribute to this peculiar knowledge lacuna in European, conceptual history.

This thesis thus focuses solely on Great-Britain. Although a comparison with a different country, such as the Netherlands, has been considered for its interesting potential, it proved impossible for the scope of this thesis. Not only would it result in a thesis twice as thick, and twice as late, it would also impair the depth of the analysis and the scope for political context and internal explanations. By choosing for a thorough, synchronic analysis of individual speech acts, a shallow and nugatory comparison was prevented. Thus, this thesis can be perceived as a stand-alone case study, within European history. It may be read, though, beside Te Velde's recent work on 'democracy' in the Netherlands, to obtain a comparative overview.[10]

1.4 Source material

The thesis' main aim remains to better understand the history of democracy in Great-Britain itself. To be more specific: the history of the concept in the parliamentary discourse of the House of Commons between 1866 and 1886. Due to a major digitisation programme, which finished in 2008,[11] it has been possible to compose a corpus, consisting of all the

[8] R. Saunders, *Democracy and the Vote in British Politics. 1848-1867: The Making of the Second Reform Act* (Oxford 2011) 9-13.
[9] R. Saunders, 'Rethinking British Democracy' on *Wikidot, http://robertsaunders.wikidot.com/democracy-project* (published on January 18, 2011; accessed on November 14, 2012).
[10] H. te Velde, 'De domesticatie van democratie in Nederland. Democratie als strijdbegrip van de negentiende eeuw tot 1945', *BMGN. Low Countries Historical Review* Vol 127 No 2 (2012) 3-27.
[11] C. Adams, 'The Hansard Digitisation Project' in *New Statesman,* http://www.newstatesman.com/blogs/new-media-awards/2008/06/government-hansard-project-web (published on June 9, 2008; accessed on November 14, 2012).

parliamentary speeches in which the word 'democracy' occurred at least once. Indeed, the primary source material is limited to the parliamentary debates of the Lower House, for this was the determinant arena in which the reform question was contested. At Westminster, the actual decisions were made. Although very important discussions on reform and democracy started, indeed, *outside* parliament – particularly by philosophical radicals in the 1860s – it was the national parliament that held the key to constitutional change. For this reason, it is worth assessing the changing language *within* this one demarcated domain: the House of Commons.

We must, however, keep in mind that this House, as a stage of debate, was not 'radical' at all. It was a 'rear-guard', rather than an 'avant-garde' of ideas. Positive values of 'democracy', for example, were not first introduced into politics, and then into public opinion, but exactly the other way around. Radical pamphlets and brochures preceded the parliamentary records in the innovation of political legitimization. Hence, the discourse of the national parliament was not representative at all of the language living in society. And similarly, the thoughts of parliamentary debate were not innovative at all. At the most, parliamentary language formed a 'middle range' discourse; continuously lagging behind the innovative challenges uttered in the press.[12] However, for both pragmatic and eclectic reasons, no extra-parliamentary sources, such as newspapers and brochures, were included in this study. Though these are often sources for conceptual histories,[13] it would impair the uniformity and the impartiality of the corpus.

Subsequently, the source material fully consists of the digitised Hansard records. Hundreds of speech acts have been analysed and arranged thoroughly. To be able to (re-)arrange the many speech acts conveniently, each utterance was labelled, according to the speaker, date, subject, line of reasoning, related concepts, and finally the definition and valuation of 'democracy'. In this way, not only what the concept meant, is portrayed, but also *how it was used*. This question is the most interesting, for it does not only ask about the concept's definition, but also about the values it contained, the feelings it brought about and the emotional force it yielded. 'Democracy' was a slogan often used as a weapon, and its rhetorical value thus cannot be ignored. Much attention is therefore paid to actual quotes, to illustrate its real use. Moreover, by explaining *what* it meant, we will touch upon the

[12] This argument was made by Emeritus Professor of Politics Michael Freeden, in a private interview on the research plans of this thesis (Oxford, March 13, 2012).
[13] M. Richter, *The History of Political and Social Concepts. A Critical Introduction* (Oxford 1995) 39.

arguments and metaphors, so that we learn much as well about the *how* and *why:* the parliamentarian's strategies.

Despite the efficient organization of the sources, beforehand, no particular distinction was made between different parties or groups within the House. This choice was made on purpose, as the principal aim was to see how the concept was used 'in parliament', and to judge how individual actors responded to each other's language. In the parliamentary discourse of the nineteenth century, the political landscape consisted not simply of Liberals versus Conservatives, or Whigs versus Radicals. Instead, the Lower House was generally comprised of individual men, with their own individual behaviour, values, and strategies. Every speech act was therefore viewed upon itself, in relation to the others in the debate, for after all; individual men of each party met each other in the debating chamber. Conceptual change did not stop at party boundaries. Their language use, thus, should not be oversimplified, by stressing party lines.

Of course, some background information on every politician has been added to the narrative, such as professions and party affiliations, yet this data formed not the start of the research. This information has been added between brackets, every time a new MP is introduced. All the displayed names are the original first and family names, and not the noble names and titles, as often displayed in the Hansard Records. This was done on purpose, because often noble titles changed over time: Lord Robert Cecil, for example, was first referred to as Viscount Cranborne and later as the Marquis of Salisbury.[14] To prevent confusion only their original names are mentioned. For further information on specific politicians, one can look up their biographies in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*: the exact links are given in the footnotes. And for a quick check on a member's party affiliation, an alphabetical factsheet of quoted MP's is added to the appendix.

Besides the parliamentary primary sources and the biographical dictionary, frequent use was made of secondary literature; both to portray how the issue of parliamentary reform figured on the political agenda, and to explain the political innovations occurring in this period. Two handbooks in particular should be named; the introductory works written by the historians Ian Machin (Professor at Dundee) and Martin Pugh (Professor at Newcastle). Although their respective books on 'the rise of democracy' and 'the making of modern British politics' are no exhaustive nor ground-breaking publications, they offer pleasant overviews of factual information; as they summarize the non-disputed developments, as depicted in several

[14] Paul Smith, 'Robert Cecil', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2048/view/article/32339 (accessed on December 3, 2012).

recent monographs. For a quick reference, these two books proved very useful. However, for more in-depth information on specific themes, the reader is advised to read further, for example in the additional literature that is suggested in the footnotes.

1.5 Three meanings, three parts

Furthermore, much secondary literature was read for the second chapter of this thesis, named the 'Theoretical framework'. This chapter first outlines the historiography of 'conceptual histories', before it explains the choice to associate to one of the three 'schools'. The rest is of the thesis is ordered chronologically, in three parts. The first part covers the Second Reform Act debates, which took place from 1866 to 1867: in these two years, a clear consensus existed on democracy's meaning and negative value. The next ten years, from 1868 to 1878, are depicted in part two. In this period, the concept became highly polarized: a second meaning emerged, and for the first time democracy's meaning was challenged by various members, who conferred a positive valuation. After the Third Reform Act debates, which went on from 1878 to 1885, the positive valuation won the strife, so that after 1886 – during the Irish Home Rule debates – a new consensus could emerge. The first meaning, that of a 'distant form of government' was now replaced by a third one: Great-Britain had *become* a democracy. In each of the three parts, ample space is devoted to changes in the political agenda, political relations, and political culture, to portray the context and to explain the causes of conceptual change.

Despite all these dynamics, the term 'democracy' was continuously used with one aim: to *convince* the audience of a certain viewpoint. After all, that is what parliamentary debate is ultimately about. At least from 1866 to 1886, the concept was constantly part of a certain 'mode of persuasion'. Nevertheless, 'democracy's' exact aim and function differed in each of the three parts: it was first used to incite emotion, then to state the facts, and finally to legitimize positions. How these 'persuasion modes' functioned precisely is explained in each of the three separate conclusions, with the names of 'Pathos', 'Logos' and 'Ethos'. Indeed, these concepts are derived from Ancient Greek, and were first described in Aristotle's work on rhetorical advice. The narrative is built up rhetorically – according to an old Greek threefold.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: CONCEPTUAL HISTORY

The study of the history of concepts has an interesting history itself: quite separate from each other scholars in two different countries developed their own research tradition in this field.

From the 1970s, historians in Germany developed their *Begriffsgeschichte*, as British academic worked on their history of 'political discourse'. These two schools proceeded along 'parallel tracks': they came close to each other, but they never intersected.[15] They differed in origin, methodology and outcomes. In the two first paragraphs of this chapter, the main characteristics of the German and British schools will be discussed, while the third paragraph displays an interesting development occurring in the 1990s; a group of Anglo-American scholars presented a convergence of the best of both schools into a new discipline named 'critical conceptual history'. A close reflection on the theoretical premises of the three models offers methodological insights for use in this study.

2.1 German 'Begriffsgeschichte'

The *Begriffsgeschichte* school was the result of an immense research mission; the life work of a generation of German historians. They first developed their own theoretical justification and a clear methodology, and then built up a practical research project. This project started in 1972 and finished only twenty-five years (!) later, in 1997, and was named the '*Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe. Historisches Lexicon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland'*.[16] The enormously ambitious plan resulted in a monumental collection: seven volumes with – in sum – more than 9000 pages. It was a lexicon that analysed the 'fundamental concepts' in history, with a focus specifically on social-political words in the German language: 122 *Begriffe* were discussed accordingly.[17]

The central belief that the editors and authors of the *GG* shared, was the insistence on the connection of conceptual history (*Begriffsgeschichte*) with social history (*Sozialgeschichte*).[18] In post-war West-Germany, social history was a relatively new and upcoming discipline, professed by younger scholars who challenged the 'traditional' forms of political and intellectual history and sought to synthesise the social sciences with historical research. History was viewed by them more as a framework of structures, than as a set of events. Social processes were the key subject to research, to understand how human action

[15] T. Ball, 'Conceptual History and the History of Political Thought', in: *History of Concepts. Comparative Perspectives* (Amsterdam 1998) 78.
[16] M. Richter, *The History of Political and Social Concepts. A Critical Introduction* (Oxford 1995) 27.
In the rest of this thesis the Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe will be abbreviated as GG.
[17] I. Hampsher Monk, K. Tilmans and F. Van Vree, 'A Comparative Perspective on Conceptual History – An Introduction', in: *History of Concepts. Comparative Perspectives* (Amsterdam 1998) 1.
[18] R. Koselleck, 'Begriffsgeschichte and Social History' in: *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time, transl. Keith Tribe* (New York 2004) 76.

was conditioned; the former focus on intentions and purposes of historical actors had been too narrow.[19] The new 'social historians' thus focused on long-term structural transformations.

The best example of the impact of this logic is the overarching hypothesis that the editors of the *GG* envisaged: the *Sattelzeit* hypothesis. The central idea behind the project was a postulate about the German road to modernity, which was thought to be distinct from the rest of Europe. Four long-term social processes formed the German modernisation: *Verzeitlichung, Demokratisierung, Ideologisierbarkeit* and *Politisierung*.[20] The name of the hypothesis was chosen for its metaphor of the *Sattel*, literally a saddle, meaning the pass across a mountain range linking two valleys.[21] It was the period between approximately 1750 and 1850 that was seen as such a *Sattel*: a watershed, constituting the historical transition to modernity. This was the time in which the concepts, central to the political and social language of German-speaking Europe, changed the most: a linguistic process which intensely reflected and affected social transformations to modernity.[22]

The German conceptual historians explained their methodological assumptions with the use of a few concepts derived from linguistics. The first is the distinction between semasiology and onomasiology. Semasiology means the study of all the different meanings of a term or concept, it is the first basic question a conceptual historian asks: 'What did concept X mean?'. But asking only this question can never be enough, the German editors postulated: some historical phenomena may have been designated by several different concepts, or by a combination of concepts. If so, semasiologically following only one concept cannot give us satisfactory answers.[23]

Therefore, the *GG* sought a combination with the onomasiological approach. Onomasiology stands for the opposite approach of semasiology: it means the study of all names or terms in a language for the same thing or concept.[24] This second approach entails looking for related concepts and synonyms: which different words were being used to refer to the same one thing in reality, in a language at a specific time? Which other concepts correlated or overlapped with the specific concept under study? Another part of this linguistic strategy was the search for opposite or contrary concepts: what were the antonyms of a particular concept? By reflecting on all these related concepts, the historian could expose the

[19] Richter, The History of Political and Social Concepts, 28.
[20] Hampsher Monk, 'A Comparative Perspective on Conceptual History', 2.
[21] Hampsher Monk, 'A Comparative Perspective on Conceptual History', 2.
[22] Richter, The History of Political and Social Concepts, 36.
[23] Richter, The History of Political and Social Concepts, 47.
[24] Ibidem, 39.

'semantic field' of a given time.[25] By creating a web of related concepts, a better understanding of concepts and conceptual change could be gained.

The second pair of methodological concepts, borrowed from the study of linguistics, was the distinction between the diachronic and synchronic aspects of a language. This dichotomy was based on the acknowledgement that languages change across time (diachrony), and yet have a definite structure at any point in time (synchrony).[26] Synchrony thus meant the portrayal of the meaning of a concept, and the sketching of the semantic field, at a certain point in time. Diachrony meant the focus on linguistic change in the long run: tracing the changing meaning of concepts over time, and moreover, the addition of new concepts and the disappearance of older ones. The editors of the *GG* wanted to write a lexicon stressing the changing of meanings over time: therefore they alternated the synchronic with a diachronic perspective. Besides explaining what a concept meant in a certain time, the questions 'when', 'where' and 'how' this changed, were central parts of each entry in the *GG*.[27]

Influenced by the approach of the *Sozialgeschichte*, the authors of the *GG* decided that for writing their 'histories of concepts' they should analyse a great variety of materials. Different from the traditional 'histories of ideas', not only texts by 'major thinkers' and philosophers should be included, but also material written by less known authors, for example documents originating from everyday life. A question of great importance to the authors of the German project was the degree of representativeness of the sources, and therefore much emphasis was placed on the need of critically weighing the evidence.[28] The *GG* was to be more about the meaning of concepts in common language than about developments in intellectual thought: only this way conceptual change could be connected to social transformations.[29]

Therefore, the authors aimed at a range of sources 'unusually broad in range, discrepant in origin and appeal, and extending to as many social formations as the sources permit'.[30] Besides utilizing the work of famous thinkers, information was to be gathered from newspapers, journals, pamphlets, reports and speeches in assemblies; in documents originating in governmental, administrative, and legal bureaucracies, and in memoires,

[25] Ibidem, 48.
[26] Hampsher Monk, 'A Comparative Perspective on Conceptual History', 2.
[27] Richter, The History of Political and Social Concepts, 46.
[28] Koselleck, 'Begriffsgeschichte and Social History', 81.
[29] Ibidem, 83.
[30] Richter, The History of Political and Social Concepts, 39.

correspondence, and diaries. Other praised sources included dictionaries, encyclopaedias, handbooks and thesauri.[31]

2.2 British 'Political Discourse'

At the same time as the German scholars worked on their Begriffsgeschichte project, their colleagues in Great-Britain occupied themselves with a somewhat related but different type of research. From the 1970s on they developed further on the traditional discipline of the history of ideas – the study of political thought and classical political writings – to create the history of '*Political Discourse'*.[32] Different from their continental counterparts, they did not proceed encyclopaedic and instead worked quite selectively, and, for the most part, individually. The University of Cambridge formed the centre of this new discipline, where the three historians John Dunn, John Pocock and Quentin Skinner came to be known as the 'Cambridge school'.[33]

These scholars stressed the need to study the 'political discourse' that historians encounter while studying historical texts: the 'languages' that historical actors used to express their political ideas. With 'language' they did not mean the natural languages such modern English, but instead a specific sub-language which comprised 'shared conceptions of the world, shared manners and values, shared resources and expectations and procedures for speech and thought' through which 'communities are in fact defined and constituted'.[34] It meant the language spoken in a particular discipline, domain, sphere or sub-community.[35] These 'sub-languages' were often referred to as 'discourses'.

When can something be named a discourse; when is it not simply a political style? Pocock argued we need to search for modes of speech 'stable enough to be available for the use of more than one discussant and to present the character of games defined by a structure of rules for more than one player'.[36] From this explanation we can conclude that the sub community of a parliament is a good example of a possible research subject within this discipline. The relatively closed environment of a parliament, as an arena with its own 'game rules' and 'language customs' makes a good fit. It seems Pocock thought the same thing, as he himself wrote elaborately on the history of 'Whig political discourse'.[37]

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[31] Ibidem.
[32] J.G.A. Pocock, 'Introduction: The State of the Art' in: Virtue, Commerce, and History: Essays on Political Thought and History, Chiefly in the Eighteenth Century (Cambridge 1985) 2.
[33] M. van Gelderen, 'Between Cambridge and Heidelberg. Concepts, Languages and Images in Intellectual History', in: History of Concepts. Comparative Perspectives (Amsterdam 1998) 230.
[34] Ball, 'Conceptual History and the History of Political Thought', 79
[35] Ibidem.
[36] Pocock, Introduction: The State of the Art', 7.
[37] Pocock, Introduction: The State of the Art', 32.

In studying 'discourses', the historical dimension is very important: all language-use has taken time to form, and is a reflection of the recognized values or ways of thinking of a certain period. But norms and values change over time, and therefore a constant struggle dominates political speech: historical actors continuously explore the tension between established linguistic usages and the practical 'need' to use words in new ways. The language one uses is thus first constrained by the 'context': the norms and values present in a certain time, the political environment and the society at large. It is the historians' task to connect changes in these areas with changes in the use of the language in political discourse, for in the context one can find the causes for linguistic innovation. Each conceptual study thus goes in two directions: first towards the 'political context' and then towards individual, strategic *speech acts.*

The former is studied because, as Pocock stressed, 'to attain any knowledge of the linguistic innovation the researcher needs to have knowledge of the political context.[38] When the structures of society, the rules of politics or certain norms and values change, the actors live through 'new experiences', as Pocock calls them, to which they have to react, in deeds and in words. The historian will therefore 'look for indications that words were being used in new ways as the result of new experiences';[39] and in doing this he will have to work towards what he sees as new elements in their experience.[40] The 'political context' thus yielded new experiences, and so influenced the arguments and words the politicians of the past deployed in their debates. What political change triggered them to use innovative language?[41]

From here Pocock moves to a second level, that of identifiable, individual historical actors, and the strategic 'moves' they made in saying what they said. This is also where Skinner's repeated focus on 'intentions' springs up: we need to know what a political actor 'was doing' when he said or wrote something, and when he expressed himself in a political debate. What case did he desire to argue? What action or desire did he want to legitimate or delegitimize?[42] What practical situation was he in? This practical situation will include pressures, constraints, and encouragements the actor was under or perceived himself as being under; the historian thus has to consider both personal characteristics as political informal rules and relations.

[38] Ibidem, 12.
[39] Ibidem, 13.
[40] Ibidem, 30.
[41] Ibidem, 4.
[42] Ibidem, 14.

Why does anyone say what they say? Pocock explains that each actor will 'present information selectively as relevant to the conduct and character of politics, and […] will encourage the definition of political problems and values in certain ways and not in others'.[43] Politicians will generally choose their words as to fit the common language rules that are accepted in a certain discourse, but also try to frame their own values and arguments as effective as possible. Obviously, this leads to the simultaneous employment of speech acts favouring the utterance of contrary propositions. Actors manoeuvre strategically and use language for their own benefit, and this consequently leads to disagreement about the meaning of certain concepts. Here Pocock arrives at Walter Gallie's renowned term of the 'essentially contested concepts', and concludes that political language is by its nature ambivalent.[44]

Thus, historical actors often disagree about the language that they use. As we saw, when conceptual change takes place, others step up and comment critically on the chosen words, and reflect on it. These types of discussions, labelled as 'second-order languages', are very useful for the historian, for they are the moments that explicate the diverse opinions on conceptual change. According to Pocock, the historian should look 'for ways in which [a speech act] may have rearranged, or sought to rearrange, the possibilities open to the author and his co-users of language'. Stumbling upon 'second order languages' can help in pursuing this aim, because exactly these moments can shed a light on how individual speech acts affected other users of the language. Hence, they show how speech acts influenced the discourse.[45]

To discover precisely why actors said something new is not an easy task, but Pocock emphasized the possibility to at least construct certain hypotheses. He described the sources and the procedure: 'From the texts they wrote, from our knowledge of the language they used, the communities of debate to which they belonged, the programs of action that were put into effect, and the history of the period at large, it is often possible to formulate hypotheses concerning the necessities they were under and the strategies they desired to carry out […].'
The historian who wants to explain conceptual change has to reflect on the linguistic strategies of individuals, and perceive these as 'necessary' reactions to changes in the societal or political context. The British scholars thus did not neglect the social context, but started their research from the identifiable individual actor.

[43] Ibidem , 8.
[44] Ibidem, 8.
[45] Ibidem, 11.

2.3 'Critical Conceptual History'

As we saw, the German and British schools of thought, while both trying to connect the history of language with the history of politics, differed quite strongly from each other. German historians had a background in social history, and thus looked for explanations in long-term social structures, while the British advanced on their interest in the history of ideas, and sought to explain linguistic change by pointing towards identifiable historical actors. Not a diachronic but a synchronic narrative was their focal point. And as the Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe yielded a conceptual lexicon, to prove the practical outcomes of its methodology, the Cambridge scholars questioned the relevance of this approach. For Pocock, language was about the interaction of multiple concepts in a certain delineated context, and to him the German narratives of isolated concepts over a few centuries made it look as if these words had a life of their own. By criticizing its theoretical premises, the British denied the utility of such a 'history of concepts' and instead proposed a ´history of discourse´. The two schools never integrated or converged.[46]

Instead, the Anglo-Saxon scholars produced a number of theoretical articles, which seem very useful as well for any historian trying to write a (synchronic!) history of a concept. Especially Pocock's article on 'political discourse' presented a clear methodology, as he practically discussed what the historian's task should be. The explanations he suggested for finding the causes of linguistic change are just as applicable to conceptual change. It can be argued that a history of a *concept* in a certain delineated time is in fact an essential part of a history of *discourse*, as any discourse simply consists of numerous words and (key) concepts. It appears that the distance between the German and British schools of thought might be less unbridgeable than the Bielefeld and Cambridge scholars thought themselves, and although vast differences remain, it seems that the development of an 'Anglo-Saxon conceptual history' might be possible after all.

This conclusion was, at least, drawn, at the end of the 1980s, by numerous historians active in the Anglo-Saxon world. Led by the American editors James Farr and Terence Ball, a group of British and American scholars started an initiative to explore the possibilities of an Anglo-Saxon conceptual history. As they advanced on the 'political discourse' tradition, the academics now acknowledged the relevance of 'conceptual history'. Until then, English conceptual histories had been a rarity; the volume *Political Innovation and Conceptual*

[46] P. Francois, 'De convergentie tussen de Angelsaksische ideeëngeschiedenis en de Duitse/continentale begripsgeschiedenis – een status quaestionis' in: *Revue belge de philology et d'histoire* Vol 83 (2005) 1175-1203; 1196.

Change was the first in its kind. Sixteen entries were written about the use of various key concepts in the English language, of which two came from John Dunn and Quentin Skinner.[47] Pocock, however, resisted any such rapprochement to Begriffsgeschichte.[48]

The American academic Terence Ball proved to be the main advocate of this discipline, which he named 'critical conceptual history', as he defended it in various publications.[49] He repeatedly stressed the similarities between the German and the British schools of thought. 'Both are interested in the linguistic limitations and political possibilities inherent in historically situated vocabularies. Both are, accordingly, concerned with the linguistic dimensions of political conflict'.[50] Nevertheless, it soon becomes clear, that he leans more towards the Anglophone school.

He proceeds, for example, from the starting point of the 'political discourse'. Concepts are the defining features, the building blocks, of any discourse, and the task of the historian should be to track how words and languages changed in the past.[51] The ways in which any actor can use and change language is not unlimited, it is constrained by a 'particular tradition', a discourse of – for example – 'republicanism' or 'Liberalism'. The common values and rules in such a sub-language set the borders within which conceptual change can occur. The critical conceptual historian must therefore always use the framework of a certain political discourse: the language that is used within a particular community.

The aim in this discipline should be to chart the contestation and innovation of the concepts used by politicians in the past. According to Ball there is a causal link between these two processes: when political agents take issue with their opponents' and/or audience's understanding of a concept, they challenge its meaning.[52] This way a conceptual change is brought forward; innovation follows upon contestation. The historian should wonder how and why these changes came about: who did this; for what reasons, and with what rhetorical strategies? Any conceptual change must be traced to the problems perceived by particular historical agents in particular political situations.[53] It thus becomes clear that Ball focuses on the language-use of identifiable actors.

[47] Q. Skinner, 'Language and political change' and J. Dunn, 'Revolution' in: T. Ball, J. Farr and R.L. Hanson, Political Innovation and Conceptual Change (Cambridge 1989) 6, 333.
[48] Francois, 'De convergentie tussen de Angelsaksische ideeëngeschiedenis en de Duitse/continentale begripsgeschiedenis', 1202.
[49] Ball, Conceptual History and the History of Political Thought, 75-87.
[50] Ibidem, 78.
[51] Ibidem, 81.
[52] Ibidem, 81.
[53] Ibidem, 81.

Such 'language traditions' are, as Ball explains, challenged in political conflicts: concepts are 'weapons of war, tools of persuasion and legitimation, badges of identity and solidarity'.[54] Political actions, including those that alter of extend the meaning of political concepts, are intentional; they attempt to do something, to bring something about.[55] The use of concepts is thus strategic, and to understand *how* they are used, the researcher should direct his attention to the political contests and arguments in which the concept under study appears. Hence, the historian should dive into political debates, to see in what ways the linguistic innovation occurred. How were political problems framed, with what arguments and with which metaphors or analogies?[56] Key words are used in debates to perform particular kinds of action, and it is the historian's task to reconstruct these strategies.

It is necessary to remember that conceptual change, as well as political innovation, often occurs 'piecemeal and by way of a rather ragged process'. It comes about through debate, dispute, conceptual contestation and partisan bickering.[57] In choosing their words, actors always try to present themselves as positive as possible while reflecting negatively on their political opponents. In this process, however, the politicians of the past were also constrained by the tastes and standards of the audience at which they aimed. How far can you go? In political debates, Ball emphasized, the audience is the referee who judges whether an action is still intelligible and legitimate.[58] The critical conceptual historian should thus focus on both the rhetorical strategies of the individual innovator as well as on the practical possibilities offered by the language conventions and the boundaries set by the audience.

2.4 Valuable elements

A few central ideas from both the German and British schools of thought offer practical value for this thesis. The German starting point of asking what a certain concept meant in the past overlaps with the aim of this study. Moreover, its alternation of semasiology and onomasiology, and its attention to creating 'semantic webs' to explain a concepts meaning, present practical possibilities, as well as its use of both diachrony and synchrony. However, the German focus on the representativeness of sources and its background in social history do not seem to fit well with the limited sources chosen for this thesis and its emphasis on the

[54] Ibidem, 82.
[55] Ibidem, 84.
[56] Ibidem, 86.
[57] Ibidem, 85.
[58] Ibidem, 85.

development of political thought among political elites. Not social structures but political conflicts should be in the centre of this study.

In this respect, the British discipline of 'political discourse' forms a better point of departure. The Cambridge scholars' emphasis on identifiable individuals, concrete rhetorical strategies and personal intentions legitimizes the value of closely reading parliamentary debates: here one can find why and how concepts were actually used in political arguments. The notion of 'essentially contested concepts' helps to understand conceptual change, while the notion of 'second order languages' helps us to locate this process. More importantly, Pocock's suggestion that historians should explain linguistic change from the political context, and the individual experiences of politicians in the past, will prove very useful.

The most beneficial and promising starting point for this thesis however, must be Ball's convergence, as offered in his method of 'critical conceptual history'. The Anglo-Saxon focus on identifiable actors yields the possibility to reason from the sources, and of explaining conceptual change by closely reading parliamentary debates. Not vague and large hypotheses of long-term social processes but tangible and demonstrable speech acts are designated to account for the changing uses of language. The view of language as the result of rhetorical strategies has convincingly been stated by the British and American scholars: words are used as weapons and the historian should wonder what strategies the politicians of the past possessed. Ball makes credible that it is in the actual contestation of concepts in debates, occurring within a certain discourse, that linguistic innovation takes place. His methodological insights offer a feasible research map, as they correspond directly to the aim and sources of this thesis.

PART I: THE SECOND REFORM ACT DEBATES (1866-1867)

3. THE CORE MEANING: DISTANT FORM OF GOVERNMENT

3.1 Reform on the agenda (1832-1867)

3.1.1 After the First Reform Act (1830s-1840s)

Histories of parliamentary reform usually start in the year 1832. This was the year of the Great Reform Act: the first widespread reconstruction of parliamentary representation since

several centuries.[59] Small, 'rotten' boroughs were disfranchised, new larger town received parliamentary seats, and the vote was extended to parts of the middle classes. The effects, however, were still very limited: the vote rested firmly on property and privilege. This was in accordance with the initiator's desideratum. The aim was not to change the constitution, nor to democratize the country. The Reform Bill instead intended to reinforce the existing political system of deference towards the aristocracy. They reformed to maintain.[60]

While in 1832, by most politicians, the Reform Act was judged as a 'final settlement', in the following two decades an increasing number of MP's perceived a need for further reform.[61] Throughout the 1830s and 1840s Radicals made repeated, but futile, efforts in the House, to extend the franchise, to introduce the secret ballot, and to stop electoral bribery. All such proposals were defeated, for a majority opposition existed of many Liberal MP's and almost all Conservative ones. Many sitting MP's were themselves involved in electoral bribery and were hostile to broader popular influence.[62] They rather maintained the status quo. While inside parliament plans for further electoral reform were thwarted, outside parliament they gained support. The Chartist movement, a strong, middle class pressure group, campaigned for reform from the late 1830s until the late 1840s. Their demands, however, were ignored by the government and had only few supporters in parliament; their 'Six Points of the People's Charter' was for most politicians too extreme.[63]

3.1.2 Failed governmental proposals (1850s)

From the 1850s, however, after the Chartist movement had faded away, parliamentary interest in electoral reform was slowly resuscitated. A few Liberal and Conservative politicians now opened their eyes for electoral change. Upcoming politicians such as John Russell and Benjamin Disraeli started to realise the potential benefits for their own party: appealing to a broader public might win them votes and could also strengthen the divided parties. Both parties were rather weak in the Commons: the Liberals in cohesion (landed Whigs on the one hand and urban Radicals on the other) and the Conservatives in seats. Perhaps a moderate reform carried out by them could increase their electoral support.[64] Their interest was thus largely party-political.

[59] I. Machin, *The Rise of Democracy in Britain. 1830-1918* (Basingstoke 2001) 20.
[60] Machin, *The Rise of Democracy*, 23.
[61] J. Garrard, *European Democratization since 1800* (Basingstoke 2000) 34.
[62] Machin, *The Rise of Democracy*, 48.
[63] Ibidem, 34.
[64] Ibidem, 38.

But instead of strengthening each party, reform divided both. The two parties were dominated by aristocrats, who opposed reform, fearing it would reduce the power of the landed interest. Party leaders were divided as well: while Russell enthusiastically defended parliamentary reform, his fellow Liberal Palmerston strongly opposed it. And while Disraeli continuously tried to persuade Derby that the Conservatives should press for Reform, as means to an electoral boost, the latter was not so confident.[65] Throughout the 1850s, several members of both parties introduced moderate franchise extension and redistribution plans, but all failed because of internal disagreement. For many MP's reform seemed either too extreme, or unnecessary: why change what was good?

The idea that reform was unnecessary was concluded from the lack of public agitation. Strikingly, while the House started debating reform, outside parliament interest in electoral changes had declined. Therefore Russell complained that 'the apathy of the country was undeniable', after his reform proposal of 1860 was defeated.[66] He blamed the lack of public agitation: without the help of the public it was impossible to pass reform. Thus, while in the 1830s and 1840s the public desired reform, but parliament did not; in the 1850s and 1860s the situation was fully reversed. Now parliamentarians sought to reform, but could not convince a majority, without a cry from the people.

3.1.3 Towards the Second Reform Act (1860s)

This stalemate situation ended in the middle of the 1860s. In 1864 the Reform Union was founded, a mainly middle-class organization, led by the Radical politician John Bright, that campaigned for household suffrage and the secret ballot. One year later, the working classes organized themselves as well, in an association named the Reform League. Their demands were even higher: they called for general manhood suffrage.[67] When one Radical MP, Edward Baines, introduced a measure in the Commons this year, to lower the qualification for the vote, the Liberal Chancellor of the Exchequer, William Gladstone (Liberal leader)[68], was recorded saying: 'every man who is not presumably incapacitated by some consideration of personal unfitness or of moral danger, is morally entitled to come within the pale of the Constitution'.[69] This statement caused quite a stir: following this rule would open the way to manhood suffrage.

[65] Ibidem, 51-53.
[66] Ibidem, 55
[67] Ibidem, 56.
[68] R. Pearce and R. Stearn, *Government and Reform in Britain. 1815-1918* (London 2000) 56.
[69] Machin, *The Rise of Democracy*, 57.

Manhood suffrage was, however, not what Gladstone wanted to introduce at all. His main aim was to demonstrate his faith in the respectability of the working classes; a limited reform measure might therefore be enough. Working class men such as artisans, shopkeepers, and factory workers now asked for the vote, in order to secure recognition as independent and respectable citizens, and Gladstone had felt the need to respond.[70] The Liberal party, traditionally tied closely to urban community life, could no longer ignore such cries. As British historian Parry described the Liberal dilemma: 'their political reluctance to be seen *resisting* Reform proposals should not be mistaken for a general *enthusiasm* for Reform'.[71] To please the working men, a moderate gesture was necessary.

Therefore, in 1866, Gladstone himself introduced a reform bill; albeit a fairly moderate one. The measure would not bring manhood suffrage, but would limit the enfranchisement to about 400,000 new voters: a group of skilled, 'respectable' working class men.[72] For a majority of MP's this measure went too far. Most Conservatives opposed it and the Liberals were divided: a combination of Whig aristocrats and Liberal middle class MP's opposed the reform bill. They were led by Robert Lowe, a middle class intellectual who genuinely feared the measure: under his leadership they formed the 'Cave of Adullam': a gathering of dissidents, named by the Radical MP John Bright after one of the biblical stories in the Old Testament. [73] Subsequently these MP's were named Adullamites.

Together with the Conservatives these Adullamites soon destroyed the bill in the Commons: in Mid-June 1866, the Liberal ministry had to resign. It was replaced by a minority Conservative government.[74] The bill was lost, but the Radicals showed their determination not to lose the current chance of reform. They redoubled their agitation in the country. With the help of the working-class Reform League the public pressure was built up, to keep the question afloat. With mass meetings, demonstrations and riots in London, the working classes made their desire for further reform heard, in a way comparable to the Chartist movement of twenty years before. This incited the new Conservative government to contemplate the question of reform.[75]

Obviously, the Conservatives were aware of their minority position in the House. If the Liberal Party was able to reunite, the Conservatives would lose their position in the

[70] Jonathan Parry, *The Rise and Fall of Liberal Government in Victorian Britain* (New Haven & London 1993) 209.
[71] Parry, *The Rise and Fall of Liberal Government*, 210.
[72] Machin, *The Rise of Democracy*, 58.
[73] Machin, *The Rise of Democracy*, 59.
[74] Ibidem, 59.
[75] Ibidem, 66.

government. Therefore, they needed to try and enhance their strength, while maintaining the divisions amongst Liberals. Proposing their own reform bill could help them: it might win them new votes, while conserving the Liberal rupture. Furthermore, it might transform popular agitation into popular support for Conservatism. To stay in power, they had to bring in their own bill.[76] Soon Derby presented his broad proposal: male household suffrage in the boroughs. This measure considerably exceeded the bill of 1866, and would enfranchise a much larger group of working class men. This seemed to be no problem: only a handful of Conservatives protested and resigned.[77]

Hence, the positions in the Commons had shifted completely within one year. While in 1866 the Bill was defended by Liberals and Radicals, and opposed by Conservatives and Adullamites, only a year later the Liberals and Conservatives had switched places. In 1867, the Adullamites grumblingly joined Gladstone (against reform), while the Radicals joined the Conservative cause (for reform).[78] This latter group was able to pass some amendments, which broadened the franchise even further. In this new situation the Conservative party triumphed. Despite severe criticism, the bill was accepted by a majority in the House in Mid-July 1867.[79]

The effect of this measure was the doubling of the electorate, to nearly two and a half million men.[80] Most of these new household voters lived in large urban constituencies, though not typical Conservative strongholds! How could this measure then benefit the Conservative party? The large enfranchisement in the boroughs was neutralized by a limited redistribution of seats: the larger towns only received a few additional seats while many small boroughs remained in place. And for the counties – traditional Conservative constituencies – not much changed at all.[81] The British district system made the 1867 reform bill, the 'Second Reform Act' a safe bet: admitting majorities of working men in a few large boroughs would not translate into a majority of working men in the House.

[76] Parry, *The Rise and Fall of Liberal Government*, 214.
[77] Machin, *The Rise of Democracy*, 63.
[78] Ibidem, 63.
[79] Ibidem, 65.
[80] Ibidem, 65.
[81] Ibidem, 65.

3.2 One slogan, diverse definitions

3.2.1 Frequency and facts

In the parliamentary reform debates of these last two years, 1866-7, which led up to the Second Reform Act, the word 'democracy' was very frequently mentioned in the House of Commons. Reform and democracy were inextricably linked: in most cases, when parliamentary reform was discussed, MP's spoke of 'democracy'. And thus, in 1866-7, the word was noted more than 300 times in the Hansard records. It was *the* determining slogan of the reform debates, *the* slogan used to discuss parliamentary reform. The statistics support this assertion, for in the year 1868, *after* reform had been accomplished, the word 'democracy' immediately left the House, with only seven appearances in the entire year. The exact frequency of our period can be found in the appendix, in table 1 and graph 3.

After analysing these debates thoroughly, it becomes clear that there was in fact one narrative being told, over and over again, by dozens of different parliamentarians. This story consisted of three parts: the explanation of democracy's meaning, its direct electoral results, and its consequences in the long run. By explaining the negative prospects of democracy the MP's had one aim: to denounce the proposed parliamentary reform. Its meaning was clearly negative: democracy was a word of warning. The concept was repeatedly designated as the – direct or indirect – consequence of accepting the bill, and for that reason, the MP's frequently elaborated on the precise meaning of this threat. The MP's tried to prove that the bill was democratic, and that democracy was a dangerous thing. This you should not try nor risk.

3.2.2 Reform leads to democracy

In the debates of both 1866 and 1867 the importance of the reform bills was repeatedly stressed: the meaning and consequences of reform was regularly inflated to great heights. Now was a decisive moment: the acceptance or rejection of reform would form a breaking point in British history. Everything could change. By this logic, MP Christopher Griffith[82] attested in 1867: 'The House found itself on the top of an inclined plane which led directly to the pit of democracy'.[83] If reform was passed, then a process was started that could not be stopped: then Great-Britain would ultimately transform into a democracy. This argument of the 'slippery slope', essentially a sophism, was repeated frequently by several members. A

[82] No biographical data his been found in the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, nor in online sources. The only information found on Christopher Griffith is in the Hansard Records: http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/people/mr-christopher-griffith (accessed on November 14, 2012).
[83] Christopher Griffith, *Hansard* , April 11, 1867.

clever metaphor was invented by Alexander Beresford Hope (author and independent MP)[84], who said that even a limited measure would open the 'floodgates to democracy'.[85]

Several similar metaphors were invented to propagate the notion of such a democratic pitfall. One of the words used to describe it was 'progress'. Robert Cecil (Viscount Cranborne, Conservative)[86], for example, worried about the forthcoming reform and said that this could never be a permanent settlement of the suffrage question, as the government had promised. The First Reform Act of 1832 was enacted with the same idea of 'finality' in mind, Cecil said, but that turned out to be false as well. 'No sooner was it passed than politicians were found who urged a further extension of the franchise and a more rapid *progress* towards democracy.'[87] Cecil looked at the past and predicted the future: 'The same process will take place, be it through a period of few years or many, as has taken place between 1832 and the present time; and, if you accept that instance as your guide, it is certain that at a complete democracy you must arrive at last, and that, perhaps, within no very distant period.[88] Reform would only lead to more reform, and to democracy in the end.

Although the word 'progress' may sound as a positive valuation, this was clearly not the case. Most MP's, including Cecil, chose neutral terms, such as 'steps towards democracy'. As Cecil argued, the introduction of 'yet another reduction of the franchise' would only 'make another step towards complete democracy'.[89] And John Maguire (Irish newspaper proprietor and Liberal MP)[90], for example, made his negative feelings clear, by arguing that 'to make a step in the direction of democracy' appeared to be 'the strangest and wildest proposition that was ever broached by man'.[91] Others chose negative frames such as 'the inroads'[92], 'the onward march'[93] or 'the downward career'[94] towards democracy. And Charles Newdegate even said that democracy was an 'evil influence' that 'operated in an evil direction in a constitutional country.'[95] Whatever words the parliamentarians chose, the message was the

[84] J. Mordaunt Crook, 'Alexander Beresford Hope', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography,* http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2048/view/article/13713 (accessed on November 14, 2012).
[85] As referred to by Thomas Hughes, *Hansard,* April 19, 1866.
[86] Paul Smith, 'Robert Cecil', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography,* http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2048/view/article/32339 (accessed on November 14, 2012).
[87] Robert Cecil, *Hansard,* March 13, 1866.
[88] Robert Cecil, *Hansard,* March 13, 1866.
[89] Robert Cecil, *Hansard,* March 13, 1866.
[90] David Steele, 'John Maguire', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography,* http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2048/view/article/17792 (accessed on November 14, 2012).
[91] John Maguire, *Hansard* , April 16, 1866.
[92] Robert Lowe, *Hansard,* April 8, 1867.
[93] Alexander Beresford-Hope, *Hansard,* July 15, 1867.
[94] Frederick Leveson Gower, *Hansard,* April 20, 1866.
[95] Charles Newdegate, *Hansard,* June 17, 1867.

same: if reform was accepted, the road towards democracy was opened. And once this process was started, no one knew whether it could still be stopped.

3.2.3 Universal suffrage

But what did democracy mean, exactly? An important element one should realise, is that it was viewed as a system: a form of government with particular characteristics. This meaning comes forward already in the first utterance of democracy from this period: a statement made in March 1866 by Matthew Marsh (Liberal Whig, backbencher)[96]. Marsh pointed towards Australia as an example of the failures of democracy, and said that 'he hoped and trusted that England would not adopt a *system* which at the other side of the world had had such deplorable results'.[97] Other parliamentarians made similar remarks and mentioned the United States of America and France as other examples of 'democracies'.[98]

So what kind of system was this, exactly? Many parliamentarians connected it to the suffrage system, as did Marsh, who mentioned that in Australia there had been a 'large extension of the suffrage, combined with local self-government.'[99] Democracy thus meant that a large part of the population had a direct say in politics, by either self-government or by the right to vote. The notion of self-government was however an exception; conventionally it was portrayed as a form of government based on the idea of representation of the people by delegates in a parliament. Thus, the only difference with the contemporary British system was the number of people allowed to vote. In a democracy the suffrage was wider than it currently was.

In many cases, democracy was explained as universal suffrage. A speech given by Gladstone outside parliament, to a crowd in Liverpool, might have contributed to this meaning. As James Stanhope (Conservative)[100] echoed, Gladstone had said that 'if by democracy he meant *liberty*—if by democracy he meant the *extension to each man* in his own sphere of every privilege and of every franchise that he can exercise with advantage to himself and safety to the country, then I must say I do not see much to alarm me in the word 'democracy.''[101] Stanhope was so appalled by this definition, that he described it as 'the most

[96] E.W. Dunlop, 'Matthew Marsh', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/marsh-matthew-henry-4156 (accessed on November 14, 2012).
[97] Matthew Marsh, *Hansard* , February 9,1866.
[98] Robert Lowe, *Hansard*, April 26, 1886.
[99] Matthew Marsh, *Hansard* , March 12,1866.
[100] Reference found to James Banks Stanhope in H.C.G. Matthew, 'Edward Stanhope', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2048/view/article/26245 (accessed on November 14, 2012).
[101] James Stanhope, *Hansard,*, April 12, 1866.

dangerous sentence he ever read', 'for the word "if" led either to no franchise at all or universal suffrage.'[102] Gladstone's prophecy of a system under which 'each man' could exercise the suffrage alarmed Stanhope, who concluded this 'must lead to universal suffrage': a dreadful prospect.

Stanhope repeated this statement, for it reminded him of a similar statement made two years earlier, in the House of Commons, which had caused quite a stir. In 1864, Gladstone had said that 'every person not presumably incapacitated by some consideration of personal unfitness or political danger was morally entitled to come within the pale of the Constitution.'[103] This promise of suffrage extension, given by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, had seemingly shocked many among the upper classes, and the new speech given at Liverpool was perceived by Stanhope as a 'mere repetition'.[104] The only difference was the fact that now, this extension of the suffrage to 'every person' was explained by Gladstone as the essence of democracy.

During 1866-7, this perception of 'democracy' as a form of government with a universal suffrage, was reiterated numerous times. Often universal suffrage and democracy were named in one breath, as Henry Selwin (Conservative)[105] did, who said that he would 'like to know how many steps there were thence to universal suffrage and democracy'.[106] Such remarks suggest the two concepts to be strongly connected. Sometimes this link was articulated even more explicitly, for example by George Bowyer (jurist and Liberal yet independent-minded MP)[107], who believed 'that no Member of that House would wish to see democracy, based on universal suffrage, triumphing'.[108] Hence, universal suffrage was a substantial element of 'democracy'.

3.2.4 Extended suffrage

Nevertheless, many other speeches make clear that in this period, universal suffrage was not a *necessary* element of the concept of democracy. Often, it was enough to talk about any extension of the suffrage – any deviation from the current system – to bring the term

[102] James Stanhope, *Hansard* , April 12, 1866.
[103] James Stanhope, *Hansard* , April 12, 1866.
[104] James Stanhope, *Hansard* , April 12, 1866.
[105] W.B. Duffield, 'Henry Selwin-Ibbetson' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2048/view/article/36014 (accessed on November 14, 2012).
[106] Henry Selwin, *Hansard* , April 13, 1866.
[107] M. Lobban, 'George Bowyer', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2048/view/article/3090 (accessed on November 14, 2012).
[108] George Bowyer, *Hansard,* July 20, 1866.

'democracy' into the debate. Edward Bulwer (writer and Conservative politician)[109], for example, opposed the Reform Bill of 1866, and said he did so because it promoted the democratic principle that 'every working man [had] a right to a vote'.[110] He rejected the idea of allowing working men to vote: accepting this principle would inevitably lead to democracy, for him a gruesome perspective. Charles Neate (scholar and Conservative Liberal MP)[111] agreed with him, when during the 1867 debates, he stated that 'he was not prepared for this measure of extensive democracy and household suffrage […] ; it would, in his opinion, be a very great mistake'.[112] The bill, which indeed approximated household suffrage, at least in the boroughs, was thus rhetorically dismissed as a measure of 'extensive democracy'.

Hence, many MP's portrayed 'working men suffrage', 'household suffrage', or 'manhood suffrage', as 'democratic', to be able to criticize the reform bill. They loaded the concept with a meaning that was useful in the debates: a meaning that approximated the imminent reform measures. Therefore, 'democracy' was given several different meanings. There was no set definition for how wide the suffrage had to be, to be named 'democratic'; the politicians flexibly changed their stance as they saw fit. Therefore, in the 1866-7 debates, the concept of democracy certainly did not necessarily mean a system with universal suffrage: an aspect we might today judge as a decisive element. Democracy primarily referred to the abandonment of the contemporary constitution, and the replacement of it by s*ome sort* of popular government. But what kind of rule a 'democracy' would be, exactly, no one was very sure. Although its general meaning was not very contested, reaching a consensus on its precise definition would be a difficult task.

3.3 Alternative? An eye on the past

3.3.1 A 'mixed' constitution

The last paragraphs made very clear that 'democracy' as a form of government was conventionally perceived as a threat. It was something that the MP's could imagine existing somewhere else, but not in the Great-Britain of that time. 'Democracy' was primarily very distant: it belonged to different countries, such as the United States and France, or to different

[109] A. Brown, 'Edward Bulwer-Lytton', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2048/view/article/17314 (accessed on November 14, 2012).
[110] Edward Bulwer, *Hansard* , April 13, 1866
[111] A.C. Howe 'Charles Neate', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2048/view/article/19835 (accessed on November 14, 2012).
[112] Charles Neate, *Hansard*, May 27, 1867.

times, such as Greek Antiquity. Hence, the core meaning of 'democracy' was a distant form of government. But if this rapprochement of 'democracy' was the imminent threat, what alternative was offered? How should the British political system look like in the future? This latter question was, however, not answered directly: for the political system of the future, they only looked towards their own past: the 'ancient' British Constitution should be maintained. If there was to be any reform, many MP's agreed, it should affirm the existing political system, and not change it. In this discourse, an important role was taken up by the British constitution, or more specifically: the idea of it as essentially a 'mixed' system.

It was asserted that, over a period of centuries, Great Britain had developed a unique type of governance, which was both safe and stable, exactly because the monarchy, aristocracy and democracy ruled together and divided power in three parts. Logically, in this mix, the queen was the monarch, the House of Lords represented the aristocracy, and the House of Commons meant the democracy. It should be noted, though, that in this mix 'democracy' only meant the representation of the *interests* of 'the people', and not the direct *representation* of all individuals, as we may read into it nowadays.[113]

An *unmixed* democratic system, on the other hand, not restrained by the power of a monarch nor by the House of Lords, sounded perilous to almost all MP's. To underline this doctrine, John Coleridge (baron, judge and Liberal MP)[114] emphasized that 'he was not, and never had been, the advocate of *unmixed* democracy' although he admitted that 'in all free Governments there must be a large mixture of the democratic element'.[115] A bit of democracy was all right, but there should not be too much, was the broad consensus in 1866-7 discourse. The proposed reform bills were seen, or at least rhetorically framed, by many opponents, as a threat to the mixed constitution: it was argued that the old, trusted system was now swapped for a new, questionable form of government. Why give up on the proven success of the 'ancient constitution'?[116]

Yet, as part of the mixed constitution, democracy was not a fearful thing, but simply a fair and just element of the constitution. As long as it was contained, or 'clamped' between the monarchical and aristocratic powers, there was no need to worry. In 1866-7, however, reform was imminent, and the 'influence of democracy' was increasing. If they 'were not

[113] M. Pugh, *The Making of Modern British Politics. 1867-1945* (Oxford 2002) 5.
[114] D. Pugsley, 'John Coleridge', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2048/view/article/5886 (accessed on November 14, 2012).
[115] John Coleridge, *Hansard*, June 4, 1866.
[116] Robert Cecil, *Hansard*, May 30, 1866.

wise in time', democracy would sweep away 'the institutions of this country'.[117] Reform would admit 'a large infusion of the democratic element into the electoral system of this country'[118], Charles Russell (former army officer, Conservative MP)[119] said. And according to the Liberal John Maguire, suffrage extension meant a 'terrible influx of the democratic element'.[120] This notion of an existing 'democratic element', as one of the valid powers in the British constitution, was well-established in parliamentary discourse. But now, from 1866 on, the mixed system was threatened by the growth of the democratic part.

Robert Cecil shared in this fear, and slowly saw the mixed constitution crumble: 'Our Constitution was monarchical; it was aristocratic; it had, also, a large tinge of democracy; but speaking practically, the monarchical principle has died. The aristocratic principle you are now sentencing to death; the democratic principle you propose to leave alone, unchecked by the elements which existed before […]'.[121] In the previous century, the power of the monarch had, indeed, already declined, and Cecil feared that now the aristocracy was next. The Reform Bill of 1867 would leave them with the 'democratic principle'; an irresponsible and unpredictable decision, he thought. Charles Adderley (baron and Conservative MP)[122], joined in his fears, and concluded his concerns with a known expression: 'Putting new wine into old bottles, would only result in the bursting of the bottles.'[123] Obviously, democracy was the new wine, and the constitution the old bottle, which was about to burst. With a sense of emotion, the beloved constitution was placed against the criticized democracy.

3.3.2 The idea of balance

The central idea underlying this idea of a mixed constitution was a focus on 'balance'. This concept, part of the *political* order, had a counterpart in the perception of the existing *social* dividing lines: a view of Great-Britain as essentially a class society. At least in late 1860's parliamentary discourse, social-economic factors were frequently designated as the cause of *the* determining cleavages in society. In this view, the British country was divided into an upper, middle and lower class. Many parliamentarians showed a strong awareness of the

[117] John Maguire, *Hansard*, April 16, 1866.
[118] Charles Russell, *Hansard*, August 8, 1867.
[119] E.M. Lloyd, 'Charles Russell', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2048/view/article/24300 (accessed on November 14, 2012).
[120] John Maguire, *Hansard*, April 16, 1866.
[121] Robert Cecil, *Hansard*, July 5, 1867.
[122] J.E.G. de Montmorency, 'Charles Bowyer Adderley', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2048/view/article/30341 (accessed on November 14, 2012).
[123] Charles Adderley, *Hansard*, March 20, 1866.

class-divided structure, and made clear they did not want anything to change. They mainly wanted to maintain the 'balance': in both politics and in society.

In this balanced system, the lower classes were almost fully excluded from any direct political power. In 1866, for example, only 18 per cent of all adults had the right to vote.[124] In the logic of the mixed constitution, though, this formed no problem. A limited franchise was not incompatible with the current tenet of representation of 'the people'. In fact, parliamentary representation was not about *individual's* rights at all, but about the representation of *communities*.[125] Every MP acted for his borough or county, it was said, and looked after all of the interests in this area. Therefore, there was no need at all for everyone to vote, it was argued: the interests of non-electors would be represented adequately by their leaders anyway. Indirectly, thus, all 'the people' were already represented in parliament.[126] Although it was not a rule *by* the people, it certainly was a rule *for* the people, one could say.

In the 1866-7 debates, this balanced situation was perceived to be under threat. If the reform bills of 1866-7 would extend the suffrage to large parts of the working classes, the perfect political balance would be dismantled. As Robert Cecil described it in 1867: 'Last year I contended earnestly against allowing such an increase of the franchise as would, I thought, disturb the *balance* of classes'.[127] The strict suffrage rules kept the necessary divisions of political power in its place; any change was thought to be hazardous. 'Balance' was the main concept with which both the mixed constitution and limited suffrage were defended.

3.4 The rule of whom?

3.4.1 Transfer of power

So what did these parliamentarians actually fear for: what would happen if democracy was introduced? Or as Robert Cecil asked aloud: 'What is it that we dread in democracy?'[128] For him, the real problem of reform was not to take, *in ordinary times*, 'our countrymen into our councils, or to see their feelings and wishes represented in this House. On one-half or three-fourths of the questions that come before us, we know it is as desirable that their opinions

[124] Cook, *The Routledge Companion, 61.*
[125] Pugh, *The Making of Modern British Politics,* 5.
[126] Matthew Marsh, *Hansard,* March 12, 1866.
[127] Robert Cecil, *Hansard,* April 11, 1867.
[128] Robert Cecil *Hansard,* April 11, 1867.

should be represented as those of any class in the community'. This sounded almost as the argumentation of an MP *in favour of* suffrage extension.

But then Cecil showed his true face: 'What we have to fear is that on particular subjects upon which classes are pitted against each other the balance of classes should be disturbed by the *overwhelming power of the lower portion of the community*, and that then you would have legislation of a kind which no wise man would approve.'.[129] According to Cecil, in about one-fourth to one-half of the parliamentary issues, it would be 'dangerous' to include the lower classes into the Commons, for with their 'overwhelming power' they would 'disturb the balance'.[130]

The imminent reform bill would thus not only be a widening of the suffrage, a *sharing* of political power with the working classes, but instead the effect would be the '*handing over'* of all control. Edward Horsman (moderate Liberal)[131] summed up the many questions, that the opponents of reform had asked in parliament over the last weeks: 'What are the real principles, what are the aims, what are the claims to our confidence and support on the part of *this new ruler* whom Lord Russell seems determined to set over us? Do we adopt his principles? Do we endorse his ends?[132] Parliamentary reform would bring a democracy: a transfer of political power to a 'new ruler'. As Horsman explained it, no one knew what this would bring.

3.4.2 Rule of 'the people'

So did these parliamentarians, then, know exactly who this 'new ruler' would be? Over the two years of 1866-7, the meaning of 'democracy' was explained as the rule of several different matters. To start with, in many speeches it meant the 'rule of the people'. A good example was given by the Conservative Charles Newdegate, who touched upon the subject of democracy and eloquently alternated the word with 'the government of the people'. He said: 'My view of this country does not prove to me that, even under the most favourable circumstances, and they exist here, the *Government of the people* is a desirable event.'[133] This definition, however, still leaves a great uncertainty: what did 'the people' mean? Did it literally mean all the individuals present in a certain country, only the middle classes, or perhaps only the working class people?

[129] Robert Cecil, *Hansard,* April 11, 1867.
[130] Robert Cecil, *Hansard,* April 11, 1867.
[131] G.C. Boase, 'Edward Horsman', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography,* http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2048/view/article/13822 (accessed on November 14, 2012).
[132] Edward Horsman, *Hansard,* March 12, 1866.
[133] Charles Newdegate, *Hansard,* July 5, 1867.

The latter explanation seems quite probable, at least in James Stanhope's speech, from June 1866: 'The Opposition side of the House might have to go farther than they would wish towards democracy. He, for one, warned the Government against *introducing* large bodies of *the people*'.[134] Clearly, in this speech 'the people' stood for the working classes, who were yet to be introduced to the suffrage. Robert Lowe's (Liberal, Adullamite leader)[135] made a similar remark, when he talked about 'the people' as an uneducated group, of which he himself was certainly no part: 'When you have once taught the people to entertain the notion of the individual rights of every citizen to share in the Government, and the doctrine of popular supremacy, you impose on yourselves the task of re-modelling the whole of your institutions, in reference to the principles that you have set up.'[136] Thus, when democracy was explained as the 'rule of the people', this served to bolster the concept's negative connotations.

3.4.2 Tyranny of the majority

This view of democracy as essentially the rule of the working classes was sometimes explicated more clearly in parliamentary discourse. Often it was preceded by an intermediate step, used by anti-reformers to construct their argument: the idea of democracy as 'the representation of the majority'.[137] This was one of the essential fears uttered in the 1866-7 debates, often explained with the argument that if democracy was majority rule, every minority would easily be suppressed. And in contemporary British politics, much value was attached to minority rights. In a more practical sense, it was feared that an extended suffrage would soon place a majority of working class representatives in the Commons, simply because this class was the most numerous group in society. Democracy would thus end up soon in working class rule.

Charles Newdegate explained his fears: 'When the predominance of one party in a democracy has once been fairly established, there is no safety for those who differ with it by ever so slight a shade. The majority being overwhelming, all opposition is stifled. No man dares breathe a whisper against the prevailing sentiments, for the popular voice will bear no contradiction. Hence the suppression of wholesome advice, the concealment of useful truths.'[138] If Britain became a democracy, the upper- and middle class could only form a minority in parliament, and would thus be easily suppressed by the lower-class majority.

[134] James Stanhope, *Hansard*, June 14, 1866.
[135] J. Parry, 'Robert Lowe', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2048/view/article/17088 (accessed on November 14, 2012).
[136] Robert Lowe, *Hansard*, July 15, 1867.
[137] Robert Lowe, *Hansard*, April 26, 1866.
[138] Charles Newdegate, *Hansard*, July 17, 1867.

Although they possessed the education, the intelligence and the political experience, they would no longer be listened to. The majority would simply enforce the popular wishes of the masses, and, as Newdegate suggested, might even silence deviating thoughts! Due to these fears, even Ralph Bernal (Advanced Liberal/Radical)[139] described the 'tyranny of the majority' as the 'greatest evil' of a pure democracy'[140]. This became a popular slogan during the 1866-7 debates.

Some other rhetorical slogans were connected to 'democracy' as well: it was either explained as the rule of 'numbers', 'the masses', or 'the mob'.[141] It was defined so regularly in these ways that William Baxter (author and Liberal MP)[142], a member in favour of the 1866 reform bill, became frustrated about 'such expressions as 'the "dominion of mere numbers"—"the rule of the uneducated masses "—"the swamping of property and the transfer of power entirely to the lower orders"'. Baxter said 'they had been made use of with a consistency and a levity which was most astonishing, considering the small foundation which they had in fact.'[143] Such utterances were indeed made regularly in the 1866-7 debates, and it is clear that with the 'masses' these parliamentarians referred to the lower, working classes. Democracy would be their prospective rule.

3.4.3 Suppression of minorities

Democracy was thus the rule of the majority, in which minorities were suppressed. And in the parliamentarian's class based discourse, the minority they were thinking of, was made up of themselves: the middle- and upper classes. They would be suppressed. It was for this reason that Alexander Beresford Hope attested that 'Democracy is not literally the best form of government unless this weak side of it can be strengthened, unless it can he so organized that no class, not even the most numerous— (And they all knew that the working men formed the most numerous class in this country)— Shall be able to reduce all but itself to political insignificance, and direct the course of legislation and administration by its exclusive class interests'.[144] Beresford Hope explained his objections against democracy clearly: the 'weak side' was that the numerous working classes could seize all political power, reduce every

[139] D. Beales, 'Ralph Bernal Osborne', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2048/view/article/2234 (accessed on November 14, 2012).
[140] Ralph Bernal, *Hansard*, July 12, 1867.
[141] Alexander Beresford Hope, *Hansard*, April 12, 1867
[142] E.I. Carlyle, 'William Baxter', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2048/view/article/1741 (accessed on November 14, 2012).
[143] William Baxter, *Hansard*, April 13, 1866.
[144] Alexander Beresford Hope, *Hansard*, April 19, 1866.

other class to 'political insignificance' and then exclusively serve its own interests. Minorities would be 'crushed'.[145]

But not only would the minorities suffer, according to Robert Montagu (Conservative)[146] giving the majorities 'unchecked domination' would lead to stagnation, and ultimately the 'detriment of all'. 'If any class obtained supreme power, not only would that class suffer because of the stagnation it induced, but *every other class also would suffer* indirectly; because the interests of each of these would be disregarded. Especially would that be the case if the class that had the supreme power was *the lowest and the least educated* of all.'[147] If only one class ruled, and only looked after their own cause, in the end, every class would suffer. No one would benefit from such a system of rule, it would 'ruin the country'.[148]

3.4.4 Rule of the uneducated

So why were the working classes deemed to be so incapable of ruling the country? Samuel Laing (author, railway executive, and Liberal MP)[149] gave two reasons. He worried in 1866 that, if there was to be any parliamentary reform, then 'it should not be made in a manner which involved the inevitable preponderance of numbers over *property* and *intelligence*, and paved the way to a system of democracy.'[150] It were exactly these two qualities: property and intelligence, that the 'masses' lacked, and that were thought of as decisive requirements for safe and sound government rule. Until then, Great-Britain had been governed by the 'wealth and intellect': elements now threatened by the democratic 'principle of numbers'.[151] Democracy was thus explained as the blunt force of the many, and placed opposite of the qualities of the few.

Repeatedly it was stated that the working classes were 'uneducated' and 'ignorant', and therefore incapable of wisely using their right to vote. Edward Bulwer was one of the sceptics. He sought to show that England of 1866 was not ready for a democracy, because of the lack of education among the working classes: the country did not offer 'that universal and generous system of education without which it would be madness to make the working class

[145] Alexander Beresford Hope, *Hansard*, April 12, 1867.
[146] G. Le G. Norgate, 'Robert Montagu', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2048/view/article/35075 (accessed on November 14, 2012).
[147] Robert Montagu, *Hansard*, June 4, 1866.
[148] Robert Lowe, *Hansard*, May 20, 1867.
[149] T. Seccombe, 'Samuel Laing', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2048/view/article/15892 (accessed on November 14, 2012).
[150] Samuel Laing, *Hansard*, April 13, 1866.
[151] Robert Lowe, *Hansard*, July 15, 1867.

the sovereign constituency of a Legislative Assembly.'[152] First introduce education, and then suffrage extension; was his argument. Proceeding the other way around would be 'a ruinous experiment'.[153]

Then, the working class representatives would soon monopolize power in the House of Commons, displace the current, experienced elite and do whatever they pleased. For this reason, William Baxter warned against 'handing over the monopoly of political power' to them, 'the mere multitudes and uneducated masses', as it would be a 'great danger'.[154] The idea of such a transfer of power recurred frequently in the debates. Michael Hicks-Beach (Conservative)[155] followed the same line of reasoning and even stated that he did not think 'the intelligence and education of the nation should be subjected to the dominion of an inferior order of civilization'.[156] The lower classes were inferior to the middle- and upper classes, so why should the intelligent and educated be subjected to them?

Most of the lower classes had indeed only followed a limited amount of education, and this would perceived as a grave risk for both future politics and society. How could the uneducated ever make a good decision on Election Day? They had neither the experience nor the knowledge about politics. It alarmed many politicians that the important task of selecting the members of the House, a task with a great responsibility, would be given to the uneducated majority of the population. Charles Adderley was one of them, who, after discussing the 'effects of democracy', was convinced 'every day more and more that the best government is not that in which all have a share, but that which is directed by the class of the highest moral principle and intellectual cultivation'.[157]

3.4.5 Rule of the dispossessed

Besides lacking education and intelligence, the lower classes did not have any, or at least much, property themselves. They were workers, whose only assets were their own sets of hands. In several speeches the argument can be found that it was unwise to hand over power to the dispossessed, for the jealousy of the working classes would damage the other classes. Robert Lowe emphasized the earnestness of this topic, by directly addressing the House: 'You must look these matters in the face, for it is useless to suppose that, founding your institutions

[152] Edward Bulwer, *Hansard,* April 13, 1866.
[153] Edward Bulwer, *Hansard,* April 13, 1866.
[154] William Baxter, *Hansard,* April 13, 1866.
[155] M. Pugh, 'Michael Hicks Beach', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography,* http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2048/view/article/33859 (accessed on November 14, 2012).
[156] Michael Hicks Beach, *Hansard,* April 27, 1866.
[157] Charles Adderley, *Hansard,* July 5, 1867.

on democracy, you can go on legislating with a deference to established privileges and the rights of property'.[158] It was naïve to think that, under a democratic form of government, contemporary property rights would be maintained. In another speech, he affirmed democracy had an 'envious spirit'.[159]

If Britain became a democracy, and the workers' majority gained political power, would the wealthy minority still be safe? How could it be assured that they would not distribute their wealth and lands for their own benefit? As Alexander Beresford-Hope warned, the accumulation of property might be 'corrected' by politics, after a 'democratic cry for equal distribution'.[160] Democracy was, after all, the 'system' of 'mere numbers and the cravings of those who wanted'.[161] Hence, if the 1867 Bill passed, 'in its broadest and most dangerous form', the wealthy and landowning upper class should fear democracy's rise.

Especially Robert Lowe enthusiastically exhibited his rhetoric: 'Does not the right hon. Gentleman know what democracy is? Whatever we learnt at Oxford, we learnt that democracy was a form of Government in which the poor, being many, governed the whole country, including the rich, who were few, and for the benefit of the poor. The question is—is not that the form of Government which the right hon. Gentleman is seeking to introduce?[162] Democracy meant 'the government of the rich by the poor'. Obviously this sounded as a warning to the upper classes of British society, to which most MP's belonged.

3.4.6 Synonym of 'the people'

As we saw in the two previous paragraphs, the conventional meaning of democracy was a particular form of government, often explained in more detail as the rule of the working classes. This was the conventional (not contested) meaning of the concept. But in these two years, in a few speeches, the word 'democracy' was used in a quite different way: not to refer to a system of rule but instead directly to 'the people' or 'the working classes' themselves. For this reason, the noun 'democracy' was always preceded by the article 'the', as this quote shows: 'The question for the House to decide was whether they were prepared for the governing power of the country to be thrown into the hands of the democracy.'[163] Thus, in certain cases, '*the* democracy' became to mean 'the people'.

[158] Robert Lowe, *Hansard*, July 15, 1867.
[159] Robert Lowe, *Hansard*, July 15, 1867.
[160] Alexander Beresford Hope, *Hansard*, June 6, 1866,
[161] Alexander Beresford Hope, *Hansard*, March 18, 1867.
[162] Robert Lowe, *Hansard*, April 26, 1866.
[163] Charles York, *Hansard*, April 26, 1866,

This sentence was spoken by Charles York (Viscount Royston, landowner and corrupt dandy, Conservative MP)[164], who must have meant 'the people' or a certain group of people, because 'the democracy' he mentioned, was able to exercise 'governing power'. He certainly did not talk about democracy as a system. Interestingly enough, on the exact same day, two others MP's directly used the word in the same way, and applied it in their own speeches. One of them, Michael Hicks-Beach, reflected on the past debates and attested that 'The questions likely to arise under this Bill were not those between Whigs and Tories but between the rich and the poor. It was the beginning of a contest between the aristocracy and the democracy of the country.[165] The known antithesis between aristocracy and democracy was explicated as the contrast between the rich and the poor. Thus, here, '*the* democracy' did not only mean the *rule* of the poor, it meant 'the poor' themselves.

3.5 Negative consequences; or related concepts

Now we have reconstructed democracy's meaning in the 1866-7 debates, and the electoral expectations in the short run, it is time to analyse the perceived consequences of democracy in the long term. What negative consequences did these parliamentarians foresee for the future? In this respect, it is insightful to show with which other concepts 'democracy' was connected in a semantic web. Democracy was frequently explained with related negative concepts such as 'revolution', 'equality' and 'despotism', and contrasted with positive values such as 'freedom', 'progress' and 'Britishness'. How did these related concepts contribute to the contemporary meaning of 'democracy'?

3.5.1 Revolution and agitation

The negative perception of 'democracy' was regularly invigorated by either combining or equating 'democracy' with 'revolution'. Walter Meller[166], for example, used it in one of his speeches against the 1866 reform bill: 'this he considered a most democratic and revolutionary measure.'[167] In this context, of course, the two concepts did not necessarily have the same meaning, but still, the two were presented as equivalent characteristics of the same reform measure. A similar remark was made by Baillie Cochrane (author and Liberal-

[164] F.M.L. Thompson, 'Charles Philip Yorke', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2048/view/article/61075 (accessed on November 14, 2012).
[165] Michael Hicks Beach, *Hansard*, April 27, 1866.
[166] No biographical data his been found in the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, nor in online sources. The only information found on Walter Meller is in the Hansard Records: http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/people/mr-walter-meller (accessed on November 14, 2012).
[167] Walter Meller, *Hansard*, March 13, 1866

Conservative MP)[168], who cited an article in which it was stated that 'this Reform Bill is revolution and democracy; and henceforth the democratic element will prevail in the country'.[169] Numerous times revolution was connected to democracy in these ways; they were two contiguous concepts in the same semantic web.

Robert Montagu made use of 'revolution' in a similar way as Meller and Baillie Cochrane, but he explicated the connection more clearly. The relationship was causal: 'What, then, did the right hon. Gentleman do in introducing the present Bill? He spent his oratory in describing the great scope and range of Parliamentary Reform, and left the country under the impression that he was initiating a vast scheme of revolution; he let out that he was commencing a democracy in detail, and that the change which he proposed would be not only great but reiterated; and that the agitation, always injurious, would be indefinitely prolonged.' Hence, revolution was the scheme: the road, the course of action; of which democracy was the result: the system, the form of government. Both terms were explained as causing a 'great, reiterated change', of which 'prolonged agitation' was an integral part.

This concept of 'agitation' was one of the negative words brought in connection to both revolution and democracy. It was for example uttered by William Gladstone (Liberal leader)[170], who in 1867 stressed the need to defend the 'securities of the Constitution', as 'guarantees against democracy'. They were 'the firm, solid, well-built walls, which are to stem the tide of agitation!'[171] Here, the constitution was stated as the opposite of democracy. But, furthermore, the constitution was also equated with the metaphor of 'walls', and democracy as the 'tide of agitation'. Agitation meant public unrest, turmoil or commotion: things that frightened the calm and civilized members of parliament.

These were effective words to utter in the House of Commons, because most MP's were proud of Great-Britain's stability over the centuries. Revolution, agitation and chaos were perceived as atrocities, usually only extant on the European mainland. As James Whiteside (judge and Conservative MP)[172] said it: 'If we look abroad and compare the state of the Continent of Europe with our own country, we find that whilst abroad they have been

[168] M.G. Wiebe, 'Alexander Baillie Cochrane', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography,* http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2048/view/article/5760 (accessed on November 14, 2012).
[169] Baillie Cochrane, *Hansard,* June 1, 1866.
[170] H.C.G. Matthew, 'William Gladstone', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography,* http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2048/view/article/10787 (accessed on November 14, 2012).
[171] William Gladstone, *Hansard,* April 11, 1867.
[172] N. Wells, 'James Whiteside', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography,* http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2048/view/article/29302 (accessed on November 14, 2012).

disturbed by convulsions and torn by revolutions, we have been happy in the enjoyment of a system of government which has managed to combine liberty with order and stability.'[173]
With this argument, Whiteside must have had the French Revolution in mind. In 1866-7 parliamentary discourse, the French violence, terror and chaos were frequently mentioned, as warnings against reform. Politics should be debate in parliament, not agitation on the streets.

During the French Revolution, according to Marsh, at least, it had been the 'inherent excellence of our mixed Constitution' that had saved Great-Britain from such disorder.[174] Therefore, if now, the question was 'how to prevent democracy from gaining ground', the answer must, again, be found by 'looking at the constitution'.[175] The past had proven the successes of the British political system: why change what is good? If now reform was passed, Marsh suggested, then they would 'necessarily become to all intents and purposes a democracy'.[176] The logic was clear: reform would lead to revolution. It would end the chain of centuries of stability and peace, and would transform Britain into a democracy.

3.5.2 Despotism and demagogy

As we discussed before, such a democratic constitution meant the rule of the 'urban working classes'. In some speeches, the MP's were more precise: it would be the rule of their political leaders! Robert Lowe, the front man of the Adullamite movement, for example, often repeated the prophesy that a widened suffrage would soon lead to the rule of 'trade union leaders'. In his own words: he wanted 'to call the attention of the House in a few words to the condition of the trade unions, because we are all anxious to discover, if we can, the future of that democracy which, I believe, this Bill will be the first means of establishing.'[177] The Reform Bill would thus establish a democracy, in which the House of Commons would soon be dominated by the trade unions.

But these unions were in a hazardous condition; these organizations would easily lead away the masses; in particular its 'self-constituted leaders'.[178] What kind of new leaders could they expect? Lowe pointed to America to designate the type of men elected under democracies: 'We see in America, where the people have undisputed power, that they do not send honest, hardworking men to represent them in Congress, but *traffickers* in office, *bankrupts*, men who have *lost their character* and been driven from every respectable way of

[173] James Whiteside, *Hansard,* March 13, 1866.
[174] Matthew Marsh, *Hansard,* March 12, 1866.
[175] Matthew Marsh, *Hansard,* March 12, 1866.
[176] James Whiteside, *Hansard,* March 13, 1866.
[177] Robert Lowe, *Hansard,* April 26, 1866.
[178] Charles Newdegate, *Hansard,* May 31, 1867.

life, and who take up politics as a last resource.' Democracy could only lower the quality of politicians.

Often this type of government was portrayed with a feel for emotion; it was regularly framed as the rule of 'despotism'. This latter concept instilled the same type of fear as democracy did: it was the prospect of un-free, un-representative, and authoritarian rule. The step from democracy to despotism was only a small one, MP's emphasized: the matter of reform should therefore be treated with the utmost caution. Sometimes the suggested link was even closer, then the connection was not causal but synonymous. Robert Lowe, for example, almost equated the two concepts, by saying that 'it is an old observation that every democracy is in some respect *similar* to despotism'.[179]

Even 'worse than despots themselves', Lowe attested, was the possible election of 'those who flatter and dawn upon the people', in other words: representation by 'courtiers and flatterers'. With this, he implied something we might nowadays call 'populist', but was in that time referred to with the word of 'demagogy'. As Robert Cecil predicted the 'flattery' after reform: 'No sooner have we done that than the hon. Member for Birmingham, or, perhaps, some *demagogue* keener than he who may supplant him, will *urge the further claims of the people*.'[180] In this speech, Cecil attacked the Radical MP Bright, and expressed his fear for popular (or populist) policies. The new leaders would not do what was best for the country, but instead hand out empty promises, to please their voters. As Robert Montagu explained the risks: 'Any demagogue, by *seducing the working men* with his oratory, and putting himself at their head, could rule the House with irresistible power, and carry his democracy to any issue he might desire'.[181] Reform would thus place the power into the wrong hands: a dangerous process.

3.5.3 The rule of passion

Robert Lowe advanced on his conception of democracy further, by emphasizing how impressionable the working classes were: 'It is not the educated and reflective who are influenced by ideas, but the half educated and the *unreflective*; and if you show to the ignorant and poor and half educated wrong, injustice, and wickedness anywhere, their *generous instincts* rise within them, and nothing is easier than to get up a cry for the redress of those

[179] Robert Lowe, *Hansard*, April 26, 1866.
[180] Robert Cecil, *Hansard* , March 13, 1866.
[181] Robert Montagu, *Hansard* , April 13, 1866.

grievances.[182] The uneducated parts of the population had no experience with reflecting on political issues, and would have to rely on their instincts. Therefore, in elections, they could be easily influenced or persuaded to still these primitive desires. If the people saw injustice anywhere, they would want to fix it. This, however, led not to the most prudent politics, Lowe suggested.

Democracy thus was a form of rule, not of reason, but of passion.[183] These 'democratic passions' would have disastrous results for foreign policy, he explained: they would quickly end up in war. Lowe gave examples, and pointed towards the Australian colonies of Victoria and New South Wales, who were 'both governed by universal suffrage' and whose rivalry was therefore likely to escalate into war. And what to think of America? 'A section of the American democracy revolted and broke up the Union, the rest fought to preserve it; the war was fought out to the bitter end'.[184] The American Civil War had only just ended, in the 1866 debates, and Lowe sought a causal connection between this conflict and the democratic form of government. 'Democracy was a terrible warlike power',[185] Lowe concluded.

Samuel Laing also spread the idea that democratic rule was 'enthusiastic and impassioned', and he, too, identified this as a dangerous feature of people rule. He explained his thought: 'In this country, the centre of a vast colonial empire, and depending on a vast system of commerce ramifying over the whole world, the necessity must be taken into consideration of a prudent and consistent policy, not swayed by the enthusiastic and impassioned influence of democracy'.[186] The passion of democracy was opposed to prudent and consistent policy: two important pillars for the rule of the British empire. It was feared that under democratic rule, only 'the variety and passions of the moment' would be listened to: the short-term interests of the classes. The longer term vision on the nation, ' the permanent interests of the country', would be forsaken.[187]

3.5.4 Equality and uniformity

One year later Robert Lowe elaborated on his understanding of democracy, when he expanded on one principle on which the 1867 Bill was supposedly based: the maxim of equality. Equality was an essential component of democracy: 'It regards all citizens, however

[182] Robert Lowe, *Hansard* , April 26, 1866.
[183] Samuel Laing, *Hansard* , April 13, 1866.
[184] Robert Lowe, *Hansard* , April 26, 1866.
[185] Robert Lowe, *Hansard* , April 26, 1866.
[186] Samuel Laing, *Hansard* , April 13, 1866.
[187] James Stanhope, *Hansard* , June 14, 1866.

different they may be in other respects, as in the main alike, and founds upon that view the future constituency of this country in direct opposition to the old constituency which it replaces.'[188] This conception of equal, individual rights was heavily criticized by Robert Lowe: no man was equal and therefore it was fatuous to base the constitution on it. Some proponents of reform indeed assumed this principle, of a 'right existing in the individual', and thus perceived the suffrage as a natural right of every man. Lowe, obviously, denied the existence of such a natural right. According to him, this principle stood opposite of the old principle of constituency representation, and the aim of 'general expediency'.[189].

This democratic principle, 'that one man is as good as another' was also articulated by James Whiteside, who concluded: 'Now, that is democracy'.[190] And as Lowe, he was critical of equality, and said that it was 'impossible to contend that one man was as good as another'[191]. Different from the proponents of natural right thinking, these politicians did not approach 'equality' in a normative way: as equal values, that everyone naturally possessed. Instead they perceived the concept in a descriptive way: British society simply was not built on equality: as we saw, the idea of class-based dividing lines was engraved deeply in parliamentarian thinking.

A few times, the connection between 'democracy' and 'equality' was made the other way around: then, democracy was not perceived as the *result* but as the *cause* of equality. Robert Lowe was one of the first MP's to make this argument, when he attested that democracy had 'yet another tendency, which it is worthwhile to study at the present moment'. 'It is singularly prone to the concentration of power. Under it individual men are small, and the Government is great. That must be the character of a Government which represents the majority, and which absolutely *tramples down* and *equalizes* everything except itself.'[192] In a democracy, the state would increase its size and powers, and use this control to 'equalize everything': to dissolve all differences in society.

With poetic wordings Lowe made it seem as if democracy was a constant threat, as if the present constitution was a fragile valuable, that should be treated with the utmost care. 'Democracy you may have at any time. Night and day the gate is open that leads to that *bare and level plain*, where every ant's nest is a mountain and every thistle a forest tree.'[193] Under the rule of the people, 'everything' would be equalized. With this, Lowe, again, pointed at the

[188] Robert Lowe, *Hansard*, July 15, 1867.
[189] Robert Lowe, *Hansard* , July 15, 1867.
[190] James Whiteside, *Hansard* , May 30, 1866.
[191] James Whiteside, *Hansard* , May 30, 1866.
[192] Robert Lowe, *Hansard* , April 26, 1866.
[193] Robert Lowe, *Hansard* , May 31, 1866.

levelling effects of handing over majority rule to the lowest classes: in a democracy, the wealth and lands of the minority were likely to be distributed among the poor.

When one closely reads the arguments and the metaphors, the feeling springs to mind that it was not only *material* equality that Lowe referred to. In a democracy, even the treatment of political matters would be done in a 'level matter', 'characteristic of democracy', Lowe said. He praised concepts such as 'variety' and 'difference', and opposed them to 'uniformity' and the 'dead level of democracies'.[194] In his own words: 'It would be "refreshing," as people say in novels, to have a little difference'.[195] It is probable that the Adullamite leader was thinking of the future of parliamentary debate: if the working class masses sent a majority to the House, how much actual discussion would remain? If all MP's were equal, would not all the differences of opinion disappear? Lowe feared the demise of rational debate.

3.5.5 Protection, not progress

In some speeches, also the practical outcomes for future policy, under a British democracy, were illustrated. Especially these debates point out that the foremost antonym of 'democracy' was 'freedom'. Under a democracy, 'freedom' would be counteracted in at least three ways: in 'its operation on commercial progress, civil progress, or religious freedom. 'They would find that it [democracy] had been the opponent, and not the friend of, measures for the advancement of freedom under those heads'.[196] In this speech of Matthew Marsh, and in a number of speeches of other MP's, it was 'denied that democracy had been favourable to human freedom or progress'. [197] Freedom nor progress were part of democratic rule.

The first of Marsh's points, democracy's operation on 'commercial progress', was explained regularly in connection with free trade policy, or, to be more precise, the lack of it under democratic rule. The laissez-faire economic policy was seen as the anchor of British success in the economic development and the industrial take-off, and its maintenance was deemed very important: 'If we have a precious jewel in the world it is our free trade policy. It has been everything to us.' Several MP's looked abroad to see what democracy would mean for free trade: let's 'take the facts', Gathorne Hardey (Conservative)[198] said. 'Canada has raised her duties enormously, and justified them upon protectionist principles'. Marsh

[194] Robert Lowe, *Hansard*, July 4, 1867.
[195] Robert Lowe, *Hansard*, July 4, 1867.
[196] Matthew Marsh, *Hansard*, March 12, 1866.
[197] Matthew Marsh, *Hansard*, March 12, 1866.
[198] J. Parry, 'Gathorne Gathorne-Hardy', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2048/view/article/33356 (accessed on November 14, 2012).

endorsed this argument, and claimed that, in like manner, in the democracies of France and America, 'they found high protective tariffs in connection with democracy'.[199] 'Protection was indeed the child of democracy'.[200]

The second negative effect of democracy on freedom referred to its effect on civil progress, or 'social and civil freedom'. As Marsh explained, for this, 'it was only necessary to refer to what had been done at the time of the French Revolution, and to the state of things in France under universal suffrage at the present moment, to see how far democracy promoted civil freedom. The press was completely gagged, and this year there had been twenty-one warnings, six condemnations, four suppressions, and two interdictions'.[201] Hence, democracy would not encourage freedom of the press, nor would it benefit the judicial system. The third downside of democracy was its supposed effect on religious freedom: Marsh doubted that, under majority rule, minority religions would be as free as they were now. He cleverly selected examples and mentioned there had been 'religious democracies in Spain, Naples, and France, but they had not promoted religious freedom'.[202]

3.5.6 Not for Britain

Besides democracy's contrast to freedom and progress, Robert Cecil added a third antonym: democracy was essentially un-British. The system was simply not appropriate for Great-Britain. As he argued in the Commons: 'I doubt very much whether a democracy is a Government that would suit this country'.[203] In other countries, on the other hand, such as the United states, its effects might be quite advantageous. The decisive differences between the US and Great-Britain were determined by both the constitution and society. As Edward Horsman said it: 'In America, such an infusion [of democracy] was perfectly safe, because it harmonized with the principles of their Constitution'.[204] But if they introduced it into British institutions, 'the result was to make the Executive the absolute tool of the popular branch of the Legislature'. This argument was echoed in the House of Commons many times.

About one month later, Edward Bulwer expanded it, and sought to explain how different British society was from American society, to prove that democracy 'surely in a country like England', would 'be a ruinous experiment'.[205] To him, democracy was

[199] Matthew Marsh, *Hansard,* March 12, 1866.
[200] Matthew Marsh, *Hansard,* March 12, 1866.
[201] Matthew Marsh, *Hansard,* March 12, 1866.
[202] Matthew Marsh, *Hansard,* March 12, 1866.
[203] Robert Cecil, *Hansard,* July 15, 1867.
[204] Charles Adderley, *Hansard,* March 20, 1866.
[205] Edward Bulwer, *Hansard,* April 13, 1866.

essentially the government that belonged to 'societies in their youth, and in which the habits of men […] produce a certain equality of manners and education'.[206] British society was old, and consisted out of traditional class divisions. American society, quite the opposite, was relatively young, and built on the democratic principles of equality.

Bulwer gave the example of the 'very limited area of soil compared to the pressure of its population' in England[207]: while in the US, there was so much land available, and no established landowning class; in much smaller Britain, the wealthy landowners would certainly suffer from working class rule, with its jealous, equalizing nature. Allowing the pressure of the population to run its course via political influence, could have grave consequences for the distribution of land. Therefore, John Pakington (Conservative)[208] concluded that 'in the United States you may without danger extend the elective franchise to classes, to which it would be highly imprudent to do so in a Reform Bill adapted to this country.'[209] Britain and democracy could, thus, not go hand in hand.

3.6 Response: Denial of democracy

It is an important fact that the word 'democracy' was first brought into the parliamentary reform debates by the opposition: Conservatives en Adullamites. Not the government, who proposed reform, nor the Radicals, who supported it, were the ones who chose 'democracy' as their slogan. The word bore a negative connotation, for most, and was used as the weapon of the opposition. Anyone seeking to discredit the imminent bill, could apply the concept as a negative frame. The government, on the other hand, did not adopt the word as their slogan at all, and most of them, including William Gladstone, Chancellor of the Exchequer in 1866, seemed to ignore the term. A search through the debates highlights this fact: in 1866, the word 'democracy' was uttered by Gladstone only once, when he quoted an attack made by Lowe.[210]

3.6.1 We will never be a democracy

His successor, Benjamin Disraeli (Conservative leader)[211], took a different attitude towards the slogan and already on March 18, 1867, when he was about to introduce *his* new version of reform, reflected on the theme. In that night, before the actual debates took place, he

[206] Edward Bulwer, *Hansard,* April 13, 1866.
[207] Edward Bulwer, *Hansard,* April 13, 1866.
[208] P. Chilcott, 'John Pakington', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography,* http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2048/view/article/21149 (accessed on November 14, 2012).
[209] John Pakington, *Hansard,* May 31, 1866.
[210] William Gladstone, *Hansard,* June 1, 1866.
[211] J. Parry, 'Benjamin Disraeli', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography,* http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2048/view/article/7689 (accessed on November 14, 2012).

explained that his reform would not tend to democracy: 'We do not, however, live—and I trust it will never be the fate of this country to live—under a democracy. The proposition which I am going to make to-night certainly have no tendency in that direction'.[212] Obviously, he had closely witnessed the debates of 1866, and tried to prevent his reform bill from undergoing the same accusations. His remark that his proposal would not be democratic was thus made in advance, in expectation of future criticism. Disraeli tried to stop democracy as a slogan.

Disraeli not only made an effort to erase the connection of 'democracy' with his 1867 reform bill, but also sought to replace it with a new frame. He made a new distinction, of which he said it 'ought to be borne in mind by the House in dealing with the provisions of the Bill which I am about to ask leave to introduce.' According to the new Chancellor, reform was not about acknowledging '*democratic rights'*, but instead about handing out '*popular privileges'*. This sounded less threatening. Furthermore, a 'privilege' made it look like a favour, given to the working classes; opposed to a 'right': something they inherently deserved. This perception of the suffrage as a 'natural right' was highly controversial at the time; as the debates indicate. Disraeli came up with an alternative. The vote was a reward, not a right.

As Disraeli explained the distinction between the two concepts, popular privileges were 'consistent with a state of society in which there is great inequality of condition. Democratic rights, on the contrary, demand that there should be *equality of condition* as the fundamental basis of the society which they regulate.' This was a clever explanation, for as we saw earlier, the fact that Great-Britain knew great inequality, had been an argument in 1866. By making this reform bill about popular privileges instead, Disraeli sought to gain support. Unfortunately for Disraeli, though, the term 'popular privileges' never replaced democracy's role as *the* slogan to counter parliamentary reform.

Over the year 1867, Disraeli's reform bill was attacked for the same reasons and with the same words as Gladstone's proposal a year before: this proposal went too far and would open the way to a democracy. However, different from Gladstone, Disraeli did defend his bill by reflecting directly on the word democracy. Several times he commented on the word and tried to distance himself from it: 'That word "democracy" is an awful word. I despair of getting a definition of it even from hon. Gentlemen opposite'.[213] Disraeli's despair underlines the notion that no clear consensus existed on democracy's definition. At one time, Disraeli

[212] Benjamin Disraeli, *Hansard*, March 18, 1867.
[213] Benjamin Disraeli, *Hansard*, June 17, 1867.

assumed that it meant 'that the *populace* is to be the ruler of all things'. And in that case, the Chancellor concluded, 'the borough qualification we propose' is '*far from* being a democratic qualification'. His reform would not be democratic at all, he maintained, and with him, both property and institutions were safe.[214]

But Disraeli's protests were without use: over the next few weeks of debate, the accusations of 'democracy' persisted. At one point, he decided to respond, again: to challenge its connection to reform and to ask about its meaning. 'Now that this measure is brought forward', Disraeli said, 'we are told that "democracy is triumphant," and we are about to change the Constitution of England and all those principles on which our predecessors have exercised the noble franchises which have been bestowed by Parliament. I think that a most extraordinary statement to be made with reference to the present situation of affairs.'[215] Clearly, the connection of reform with democracy provoked Disraeli, who thought the allegation was improper and, moreover, exaggerated.

Repeatedly, Disraeli asked about the concept's meaning: 'I wish, that some of these great lights would condescend to tell us what they mean by this terrible word democracy which they now introduce with such facility into our debates'.[216] He did not want his bill to be linked to 'this terrible word', and demanded a clear definition: only then could be verified if this bill would be democratic. Disraeli asked: 'Is it household suffrage? I suppose it is household suffrage. That is democracy. Well, there are 4,500,000 inhabited houses in England. […] Not more than a moiety of these, even if this Bill passes, will be inhabited by persons qualified to exercise the franchise. Then, if household suffrage be democracy, what is this all about?' His measure was so limited, and would only increase the constituency with 'about 300,000' respectable Englishmen.[217] Hence, all the drama was overstated.

3.6.2 Condemning the catchphrase

Nearly all expressions of 'democracy', given by the government and reformist parliamentarians, followed upon allegations made by the opposition. Thus, they only spoke of 'democracy' as a response: when quoting the opposition, and when reflecting critically upon their assertions. In their speeches, they sought to deny the allegations of promoting 'democracy', because, for them, too, the word carried a negative connotation. They wanted to

[214] Benjamin Disraeli, *Hansard*, June 17, 1867.
[215] Benjamin Disraeli, *Hansard*, July 5, 1867.
[216] Benjamin Disraeli, *Hansard*, July 5, 1867.
[217] Benjamin Disraeli, *Hansard*, July 5, 1867.

prove that this reform would *not* be an 'advance towards democracy'. Because of these accusations, many MP's reflected numerous times on the meaning of the concept.

The fact that the pro-reformist MP's only used 'democracy' as a response, can be underlined by the way they introduced the word into their own speeches. As William Baxter unfolded, after the first month of debate, in April 1866: 'They had heard a great deal lately of the dangers which were impending from what was called unbridled democracy'.[218] 'Democracy' had entered into the debates through the opposition, and always served to show the risks of reform. Baxter responded to this slogan, and stated that the expectation of such democratic consequences was 'outrageous'.[219] The measure at hand was a moderate proposal to enfranchise 400,000 respectable men, and it 'quite passed his comprehension', how anyone could believe this would lead to a democracy. Baxter even doubted the sincerity of the oppositions fear: 'if any hon. Gentlemen in that House *really believed* in the dangers which these Gentlemen stated threatened the landed interest of this country, the House of Lords, and the throne of their beloved Queen herself, he did not think they could have slept in their beds.'[220]

Numerous other MP's in favour of reform followed Baxter's line of reasoning and critically assessed the opposition's rhetoric: John Coleridge, for one, asked why 'this horror of democracy [had] been kept over their heads, when the question was simply one of lowering the franchise and the redistribution of seats'.[221] The issue at hand was not about parliamentary reform, but about giving 'the working classes increased power'.[222] This was nothing threatening or revolutionary; it was not about democracy at all. Charles Villiers (Liberal Tory)[223], too, explained reform as a 'moderate measure', instead of a democratic act. He condemned 'all this cry and alarm at the consequence of democracy', and uncovered the opposition's discourse as 'speculative fears', 'sought to alarm us'.[224] Fear was the instrument to convince parliament to vote against reform, and 'democracy' was its slogan. Reformist MP's sought to elucidate these tactics.

[218] William Baxter, *Hansard,* April 13, 1866.
[219] William Baxter, *Hansard,* April 13, 1866.
[220] William Baxter, *Hansard,* April 13, 1866.
[221] John Coleridge, *Hansard,* June 4, 1866
[222] Thomas de Grey, *Hansard,* February 5, 1867.
[223] A.C. Howe, 'Charles Villiers', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography,* http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2048/view/article/28286 (accessed on November 14, 2012).
[224] Charles Villiers, *Hansard,* March 13, 1866.

Both John Coleridge and Austen Layard (archaeologist and Liberal MP)[225] went even further than elucidating: in 1866 they directly combatted the rhetorical tricks from the opposition side. According to Coleridge, the opposition's talk of democracy had delivered 'able discourses, so carefully composed, so skilfully delivered, and so delightful to listen to', but these were only hollow phrases. This rhetoric might sound impressive, but for the topic under discussion, 'they had really no force, and no relevancy whatever'. [226] Coleridge sought to imply that although (or even, because) the style was exiting, the content was weak. 'Democracy' was a powerful but empty catchphrase.

The denunciation of the measure as 'democratic' might, then, only remain interesting as an 'exercise of clever men', Austen Layard stated.[227] He did not value the slogan that high, and argued that 'Democracy may be a very good and safe subject for young politicians to try their maiden speeches upon.' He made a comparison between democracy and stuffed animals, used by primitive young warriors and huntsman to practice their swords and spears, to prepare themselves for encounters with a real animal. 'Much in the same way the more aged and experienced of the hon. Gentlemen opposite use my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham. He is made to represent this *formidable monster*—democracy; and upon him younger Members of the Conservative party are invited to try their courage and their strength'.[228] Attacking the reform bill with 'democracy' was here seen as an 'easy' tactic, mainly suited for inexperienced debaters. In this way, Austen Layard condemned the use of democracy as a valid and worthy phrase for veteran MP's.

3.6.3 Copying the slogan

Only a few reformist MP's went further than criticizing the use of the word 'democracy'. They turned around the opposition's argument and stated that it was not *reform* that would lead to democracy, but instead, the *refusal of reform*. Several times it was suggested that it would be dangerous to vote against the reform bill, that this was a necessary measure, and that no one knew what would happen if it was rejected. William Baxter framed the reform proposal in this way, as a prudent decision*:* 'Gradual changes made in time, wise concessions gracefully given, did not tend to bring about revolutions. It was that policy of determined *resistance to all changes*, and the persistent refusal to grant reasonable popular demands,

[225] J. Parry, 'Austen Layard', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, lhttp://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2048/view/article/16218 (accessed on November 14, 2012).
[226] John Coleridge, *Hansard*, June 4, 1866.
[227] John Coleridge, *Hansard*, June 4, 1866.
[228] Austen Layard, *Hansard*, April 16, 1866.

which in the end endangered the constitution'[229] Reform was placed against revolution: if now the suffrage was denied, the people might stand up, start a revolution, and endanger the constitution.

Baxter, however, did not speak of the consequences in the terms of 'democracy', but only mentioned the impending 'revolution'. Francis Crossley (carpet manufacturer, philanthropist and Liberal MP)[230], however, spoke of both. He suggested that now was the time for reform, and framed the bill as a direct and necessary successor to the widely renowned First Reform Bill of 1832. 'If in 1832 a step had not been taken we should have had a revolution. This 1866 bill was another step in the same direction, and in like manner he believed it would preserve the peace and prosperity of the country for many years. If they 'wanted to *destroy the evils of democracy* they should admit those who were outside within the pale of the Constitution, and thus give them an interest in maintaining its action and existence'.[231] Reform should thus be chosen by all who wanted to 'destroy the evils of democracy'. Now the proposition used the slogan for their own cause.

3.7 Few positive remarks

Until now, this chapter has emphasized the conventional negative connotation of the concept of 'democracy' in the 1866 -7 debates. However, there were a few – in fact only a handful – of MP's who spoke of the word in clearly *positive* terms. Their utterances formed a major exception to the norms of contemporary parliamentary discourse. Carefully these MP's brought up the idea that democracy could show some flaws, but that these did not outweigh its merits. The most well-known MP who belonged to this group was perhaps John Stuart Mill (philosopher, economist, and Liberal MP), who sat in the Commons from 1865 until 1868.[232]

Mill concluded in the year 1866 that many 'reasonable things' could be said both 'pro and con about democracy'.[233] He was joined a year later by Edward Knatchbull-Hugessen (baron and Liberal MP)[234], a major proponent of reform, who attested that, while extending electoral rights to the un-enfranchised, they should, 'at the same time', 'seek to provide that whilst we reap the full *advantages*—we shall avoid or at least mitigate the *evils*—of

[229] William Baxter, *Hansard,* April 13, 1866.
[230] G.C. Boase, 'Francis Crossley', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography,* http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2048/view/article/6807 (accessed on November 14, 2012).
[231] Francis Crossley, *Hansard,* March 12, 1866.
[232] J. Harris, 'John Stuart Mill', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography,* http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2048/view/article/18711 (accessed on November 14, 2012).
[233] John Stuart Mill, *Hansard,* April 13, 1866.
[234] W.F. Rae, 'Edward Knatchbull-Hugessen', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography,* http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2048/view/article/15704 (accessed on November 14, 2012).

democracy.'[235] The system could, thus, entail evils, as the critics of reform had emphasized, but could *also* offer advantages. In their reform effort, they should reap these democratic benefits. Democracy was thus not all danger and evil.

These two MP's agreed in their aim of reform and their appreciation of democracy. However, more than Knatchbull-Hugessen did Mill feel the need to set the two concepts apart: according to him, 'democracy' was *not* the issue right now: 'This is not a democratic measure'.[236] He believed it 'neither deserve[d] that *praise,* nor, if hon. Members will have it so, that *reproach'*.[237] This quote confirms the notions that Mill, himself, thought of democracy as something praiseworthy, but understood that this idea was unconventional in the Commons. While for most MP's, the bill was democratic, because it went too far, for Mill, it was *not* democratic, because it went not far enough.

In a few remarks, though, both MP's sought to defend 'democracy' and to demonstrate its advantages. They looked for arguments and examples in the same places as the opponents of reform had done: both in the past and abroad. Edward Knatchbull-Hugessen boasted his knowledge of history, and exclaimed: 'From all that I have ever read and gathered from the pages of history, I have always believed this to be the *great merit* of a pure democracy—that every man, feeling and knowing himself to be part and parcel of the State—assisting in framing those laws which he had to obey, threw, as it were, his own individual strength and vigour into the constitution, and so the State, resting upon the concentrated vigour and strength of the whole body of the people, became possessed of a certain inherent power and vitality which could never be obtained by a country resting upon a less extended basis.'[238] Democracy could thus only strengthen the British state.

John Stuart Mill made an argument in favour of democracy too; not by looking at the past but by looking abroad. To be more precise, by pointing at the United States. This country had often been presented to prove the failures of democracy, and Mill admitted that the 'various American Legislatures [were] perpetually making mistakes'. However, he continued his speech by saying that 'they [were] perpetually *correcting* them too'. In fact, the evil of democracy was 'far outweighed by the *salutary effects* of the general tendency of their legislation, which is maintained, in a degree unknown elsewhere, in the direction of the *interest of the people*. Not that vague abstraction, the good of the country, but the actual

[235] Edward Knatchbull-Hugessen, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography,* August 8, 1867.
[236] John Stuart Mill, *Hansard,* April 13, 1866.
[237] John Stuart Mill, *Hansard,* April 13, 1866.
[238] Edward Knatchbull-Hugessen, *Hansard,* August 8, 1867.

positive well-being of the living human creatures who compose the population'.[239]. It was for this object of politics that the utilitarian Mill deemed the American democracy superior to the British mixed system.

The essential difference between these two systems was the very aim of politics: what was the parliaments guiding line? Should it be the 'good of the country', as many parliamentarians maintained, or the 'well-being' of all individuals, as Mill had taught? And what did 'the representation of the people' mean? Who were exactly represented: communities, classes or individuals? These were the crucial questions underlying the 1866-7 debates. The few MP's who spoke out in favour of democracy settled for the latter answer. As Knatchbull-Hugessen affirmed, he wished 'to see *men* in communities, and not communities only represented in this House'. 'He longed to see that House, as far as possible, the mirror and image of the political opinions of the country'.[240] This was how a democratic parliament worked.

Such a conception of politics differed tremendously from the current parliamentary discourse, and therefore such statements caused quite some unrest in the House. Many parliamentarians of both parties jumped up to utter their aversion. To say one was in favour of democracy, or to speak of democracy's merits, was to make a bold, Radical statement. Thus, when an MP held such opinions, he had to be strong and confident to dare and utter them in the Commons. A remark made by John Coleridge, an MP who himself 'was not the advocate of unmixed democracy' is interesting in this respect. He said that 'even were he a strong advocate of democracy, he should not think for one moment of forcing his opinions upon a *society of Gentlemen to whom he knew them to be repulsive'*.[241] This sentence confirms the conventional view of democracy, and clarifies why so few positive remarks about democracy were made. Even those who saw some merits in democracy, were discouraged to say it, because of the social pressure in the House. The concept was clearly highly controversial.

Less controversial was the notion that Great-Britain was *set on a path* into the direction of democracy. Yet the consensus was that they still had a choice: the Commons stood at the crossroads. While the many opponents of reform had used this image to instil fear into their audience, to show the need to make a halt on this path, the few proponents of democracy emphasized the need to proceed along with time. As John Stuart Mill said it, there was 'an obvious tendency in this country towards democracy': this was one of the 'signs of

[239] John Stuart Mill, *Hansard,* April 13, 1866.
[240] Edward Knatchbull-Hugessen, *Hansard,* August 8, 1867.
[241] John Coleridge, *Hansard,* June 4, 1866.

the times'.[242] It was the government's duty to follow this. William Forster (Liberal)[243] supported this argument, and emphasized that they should not oppose 'the growth of the people and the progress of civilization', for this was not safe. This MP, who mentioned that he himself was called an 'advocate of democracy', summed up his feelings in an astute chiasmus. Could you stop democracy? 'I believe you could not if you would, and I trust you would not if you could'. With this figure of speech Forster pointed out that stopping democracy was both impossible and undesirable.

Another reformer, Henry Fawcett (economist and Liberal MP)[244], concurred with Mill and Forster. He looked into the future, and predicted that 'they were coming to a democracy'. Once the 'great' democratic principle had been tried, it would step by step take hold, and in 'twenty or perhaps fifty years hence', it would settle a 'pure democracy'.[245] This sounded exactly as the argument the opponents of reform had made to denounce the reform bill, but different from them, obviously, Fawcett *approved* of democracy and judged this imminent process in a positive way. This he defined as a system of government rule, 'in which everyone ha[s] an *equal opportunity* of exercising political influence and political power'.[246] All should be included. Defiantly he stated that 'he was a friend of democracy'.[247]

3.8 Mode of persuasion: Pathos

Despite the efforts of these five MP's, who tried to attach a positive value to the concept of democracy, a negative evaluation dominated parliamentary discourse. For almost all parliamentarians during the 1866- 7 debates, 'democracy' carried a negative value. It was a form of government that a broad majority of the Commons did not want: a group roughly 60 MP's repeatedly warned for it, in an effort to stop two parliamentary reform bills. Democracy became a slogan, strongly connected to reform, that stood for severe risks in the future and a threat to the status quo. The aim of this keyword was clear: to yield an emotional response to the matter of reform, and to instil fear into dubitable members of the House. The hazardous effects were not worth the risk, the opposition proclaimed.

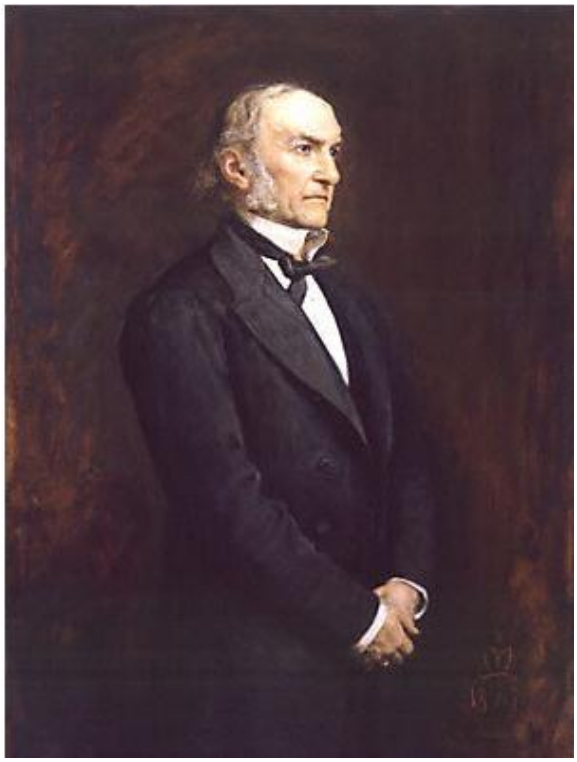
The aim and methods of the use of 'democracy' can plainly be related to one of the 'modes of persuasion' that Aristotle had described more than 2000 years earlier: 'pathos'.

[242] John Maguire, *Hansard,* April 16, 1866.
[243] A. Warren, 'William Forster', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography,* http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2048/view/article/9926 (accessed on November 14, 2012).
[244] L. Goldman, 'Henry Fawcett', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography,* http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2048/view/article/9218 (accessed on November 14, 2012).
[245] Henry Fawcett, *Hansard*, July 5, 1867
[246] Henry Fawcett, *Hansard*, July 5, 1867
[247] Henry Fawcett, *Hansard*, July 5, 1867

This rhetoric device meant as much as 'emotion': if a speaker appealed to the feeling of the public, he was using this style.[248] According to Aristotle, to create emotion, one should first stress the importance of the matter. Therefore, a central element in persuading with pathos, is the message that it is the *own interest* of the audience which is at stake. They must feel fear, anxiety, despair or mistrust.[249] Other advised emotions were outrage, aversion and anger.[250] If the speaker succeeded in evoking such feelings, decisions would be highly influenced by emotions. Hence, these exact same aims and methods were (deliberate or not) applied in 1866-7, in the application of the word 'democracy'.

[248] A. Braet, *Retorische Kritiek. Overtuigingskracht van Cicero tot Balkenende* (Den Haag 2009) 52.
[249] Braet, *Retorische Kritiek*, 55.
[250] Ibidem, 53.

3.9 Four key actors (1866-1867)



William Gladstone
(Chancellor of the Exchequer 1859-1866)

Benjamin Disraeli
(Chancellor of the Exchequer 1866-1868)

Robert Lowe
(Liberal MP 1852-1880)

Robert Cecil
(Conservative MP 1853-1868)

PART II: LOOKING BACK AND BEYOND (1868-1878)

4. THE FIRST MEANING MAINTAINED: DISTANT FORM OF GOVERNMENT

4.1 Had they become a democracy? (1868-1871)

4.1.1 Reform off the agenda

Now that the Second Reform Act was a fact, the basic qualification for the vote in the boroughs practically became the 'male household suffrage'. Any male householder who paid rates, or any lodger that paid a rental of at least ten pounds, and lived in the same house for at least one year, could now register to vote.[251] As British historian Jonathan Parry described it, this was indeed a 'revolutionary change', because now –for the first time – a large group of working men throughout the country received a say in the composition of national politics. Between 1866 and 1871 the English borough electorate rose from 500,000 to 1.25 million.[252] An overview in percentages can be found in graph 1 of the appendix.

As we discussed in the third chapter, such an extensive change had not been the aim at the start in 1866: neither Gladstone nor Disraeli were 'democrats'. The combination of party political considerations and the many amendments delivered by Radical MP's had broadened the new suffrage rules considerably: restrictive measures such as additional property qualifications or 'fancy franchises' (extra votes for the intelligent and wealthy) had been struck out.[253] Therefore, at the time, the measure was perceived as a 'leap in the dark': what would it bring?[254] Historian Parry went even further and judged the 1867 Reform Act as an 'accident'. It was the 'most unintentional revolution in the history of British politics'.[255] The eventual outcome was far wider than anyone had wanted beforehand.

Therefore, both Liberal and Conservative observers were apprehensive about the behaviour of the newly enfranchised masses. What would the new voters do?[256] In the short run, though, not much did change. In the first elections, held in 1868 and based on the new electoral rules, the public did not reward Disraeli's Conservative Party for the effort he had put in. It was the Liberal party that won a majority in the Commons, and subsequently formed

[251] C. Cook, *The Routledge Companion to Britain in the Nineteenth Century* (London 2005) 60.
[252] Parry, *The Rise and Fall of Liberal Government,* 217
[253] Ibidem, 216.
[254] J.B. Conacher, *The Emergence of British Parliamentary Democracy in the 19th Century. The Passing of the 1832, 1867, and 1884-1885 Reform Acts* (New York 1971) 175.
[255] Parry, *The Rise and Fall of Liberal Government,* 207, 216.
[256] Ibidem, 217

a government, presided by Gladstone.[257] Parliamentary reform was now removed off the political agenda. After decades of repeated debates and futile proposals, now a final settlement had been found.

For this reason, it shall not come as a surprise to anyone that in the period 1868-1871 the word 'democracy' was barely used in the Commons. Quickly after the Act was accepted, the concept sneaked off parliamentary stage. While in 1867 it had been mentioned 120 times, one year later, only seven parliamentarians used it in their speeches. Now a solution was found for parliamentary reform, there was clearly not much need to reflect on the concept again. The few times that 'democracy' *was* mentioned in the House, it functioned to look back on the Act that had been passed in 1867. Had this reform indeed changed Great-Britain? Had they become a democracy?

4.1.2 Step into a democratic direction

John Stuart Mill was the first to answer this question. He concluded that 'a great change has taken place in the situation of this country as respects its institutions. […] Our Constitution has been materially altered in a *democratic direction*.' A step had thus been taken, but for him, the form of government had not yet changed into a democracy. This was, however, still his expectation or, perhaps, his hope for the future. This we can conclude from a quote in which he addressed one of the challenges of democracy. For him, the, the 'great political problem of the future […] [was] to obtain the combination of democratic institutions with skilled administration'[258]. The institutions of the future were to be democratic.

Nathaniel Lambert (mine-owner and Liberal MP)[259] joined Mill's line of reasoning in 1870, and argued that 'as the suffrage has been extended we have been *gradually becoming* more democratic'. In his view, democracy as meant form of government in which 'the right of making laws resides in the people at large'. This he judged a fairly positive future prospect for Great-Britain: America, 'the most democratic of nations' had proven that a democracy was able to pay off its debt. Furthermore, 'popular assemblies generally mean to do the thing that is *right and just*, and have always a degree of *patriotism and public spirit'*.[260] A transfer of the legislative task to the 'people at large' would thus be beneficial for policy and governance. Both Mill and Lambert thought Great-Britain had taken an important step towards democracy.

[257] Cook, *The Routledge Companion,* 68.
[258] John Stuart Mill, *Hansard*, June 17, 1868.
[259] Author unknown, 'Nathaniel Lambert', http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nathaniel_Lambert (accessed on November 14, 2012).
[260] Nathaniel Lambert, *Hansard*, July 5, 1870.

4.1.3 Yes, a democratic suffrage

One year later, in 1871, Henry Fawcett reflected on the Reform Act too. He reminded the House again of the debates a few years before, and portrayed the 1868 Bill as a 'Trojan Horse', over which the House had fought nightly. Should they let it in? Some had said that 'inside it there was a great democracy, which, if once let loose, would issue forth and sway the Government', while others had not seen the dangers and wanted to let it in anyway. Fawcett, who mentioned that 'he had never concealed from the House that he held extreme democratic opinions', was in favour of reform, but was aware as well of the democratic dangers, that needed to be checked.[261]

'Extravagance' was one of the disadvantages of democratic institutions: 'if not properly checked, they sometimes tended to make government expensive'. This was exactly what was happening now, he argued: only three years after the Act, the government issued a 'large expenditure of 3,000,000 pound'.[262] Fawcett criticized this policy and maintained that 'it was the duty of that House, *now that they had a democratic suffrage*, to relax not a single check which might tend to prevent extravagance'. The suffrage was now thus evaluated as 'democratic'![263] However, whether or not the current *form of government* was democratic too, he did not yet say.

4.1.4 No democracy, no alarm

Prime Minister Disraeli also reflected on the topic in 1871, when he reminisced the 'last Reform Bill'. He remarked he wanted to respond to the 'vague but terrific pictures of the democracy under which we are now suffering'.[264] It is certain, however, he meant this ironically, and did not truly think Great-Britain was a 'democracy' at all. To make this clear to all, he quickly added that 'the constituency of England at this moment consists of exactly one-third of the adult males. Hon. Gentlemen will, therefore, see at once that that is *not quite the form* which an overpowering democracy assumes'. With such a limited franchise, surely Great-Britain could not be named a democracy.

Furthermore, he argued, the results of the latest General Election, held after the Second Reform Act, showed that 'at least a moiety of the new constituency voted for Conservative candidates'.[265] So why would anyone still be alarmed by parliamentary reform?

[261] Henry Fawcett, *Hansard*, April 27, 1871.
[262] Henry Fawcett, *Hansard*, April 27, 1871.
[263] Henry Fawcett, *Hansard*, April 27, 1871.
[264] Benjamin Disraeli, *Hansard*, July 24, 1871
[265] Benjamin Disraeli, *Hansard*, July 24, 1871

The elections had proven that the last supposedly 'democratic' measure was safe. Therefore, Disraeli stated, again ironically, that they should not 'be so frightened by the awful democracy which has been created'. The form of government had not changed. Nor had the form of representation changed: Disraeli dispelled the notion that 'we are now, and are for ever to be, the slaves of an overwhelming democracy'.[266] Democracy had not impaired the British institutions.

Seeing as this quite differs from the notions of Mill and Fawcett, we can safely conclude that the value of 'democracy' was quite contested in the Commons of 1868-1871. This assumption is supported by Disraeli himself, who remarked that 'it is not expedient that hon. Gentlemen on either side of the House, with a view of arriving at very different conclusions, on *one side of exultation, and on the other of alarm*, should express opinions which have no foundation whatever in fact'.[267] Some MP's attested 'in exultation' that Britain was very close to being a democracy, while others were still 'alarmed' of its rise. While Mill was excited of the democratic direction, Fawcett still feared the people's extravagance. According to Disraeli, both were wrong. Great-Britain was not a democracy, nor should anyone be alarmed.

4.2 New reform proposals (1871-1877)

4.2.1 Next on the agenda

The first three years after the Second Reform Act had proven the fierce opponents of 1866 and -7 wrong. Great-Britain had not become that awful democracy of which they were so afraid; warnings of tyranny, violence, or demagogy did not come true. Not yet, in any case. The second warning that these opponents upheld was the idea of a 'slippery slope': if this reform was passed, then soon Great-Britain would slide away into a democracy.[268] In this view, the Reform Bill of 1867 meant the opening of the floodgates: if this step was taken, then further reforms would soon follow. Did the 1870s show such a chain of events?

Yes, in a way this warning proved more prophetic. As British historian Machin summarized it, the measure of 1867 had indeed 'whet the appetites of reformers for further change'.[269] A minority of progressive MP's had wider demands for reform, and although it took a few years, from 1871 on they sounded their cries for new electoral reform. These

[266] Benjamin Disraeli, *Hansard*, July 24, 1871
[267] Benjamin Disraeli, *Hansard*, July 24, 1871
[268] M. Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory. A Conceptual Approach* (Oxford 1996) 154.
[269] Machin, *The Rise of Democracy in Britain,* 66.

sounds came mainly from Radical and Liberal MP's, who saw possibilities for further electoral improvement. In 1871, they first called for the secret ballot, and in the next few years, for the extension of the franchise in the counties, and the vote for women.[270]

As we shall see, all three debates correlated directly with the occurrence of the slogan of 'democracy'. If reform was discussed, the familiar slogan was brought to the fore: the conventional narrative of 1866-7, in which democracy was a word of warning, was simply repeated. It was again explained that 'democracy' was a popular and dangerous form of government, and that the British constitution was moving into a democratic direction. Throughout the 1870s, 'democracy' remained a word with clear negative connotations.

Only the first of these three measures was accepted, eventually, and no major reform schedule was passed nor contemplated in the 1870s. This might be explained by the lack of popular organization and agitation for reform.[271] The middle-class Reform Union soon declined, after the Second Reform Act was accepted, and the working-class Reform League underwent a similar fate. This association was dissolved as soon as 1869. With no popular agitation in the country, the governments felt no pressure at all to touch upon the highly controversial topic. Therefore, neither the Liberal ministry of Gladstone (1868-1874) nor the Conservative cabinet of Disraeli (1874-1880) proposed a Third Reform Bill just yet. [272]

4.2.2 The Secret Ballot

The first ministry of Gladstone (1868-1874) was, indeed, more concerned with Irish matters, educational, and other social reforms, than with electoral change. A major exception was made in 1871, when the government proposed the introduction of the secret ballot.[273] The events of the first general elections of 1868 had changed the Liberal stance; gradually Gladstone's government came to appreciate the benefits of secret voting. The large enfranchisement of 1867 boosted fears for bribery and corruption: poorer voters could easily be tempted to sell their vote, or to submit to the pressure of landlords or employers.[274] The secret ballot would take this problem away at once.[275] Political patronage would end, and the

[270] Ibidem, 74, 84.
[271] Ibidem, 71.
[272] Ibidem.
[273] Ibidem, 75.
[274] Ibidem, 82
[275] For more information on the ballot issue, read B.L. Kinzer, *The Ballot Question in 19th Century British Politics* (New York 1982).

House of Commons would become a 'more complete representation of the opinions and wishes of the electoral body', as the Radical John Bright acclaimed.[276]

Some Liberals and many Conservatives, however, opposed the measure, for traditionally the vote was perceived as an asset, that belonged to the community: it was not an individual right. The choice one made affected the entire nation, and therefore it should be open for all to see. The possibility to hide one's personal opinion would remove any sense of individual responsibility.[277] The secret ballot was therefore judged as 'un-English' and 'unmanly'.[278] Secrecy was cowardly, opponents implied. Furthermore, the correlation with the occurrence of the word 'democracy' is striking. After a frequency of eight in 1870, in 1871 the concept occurred 47 times. 'Democracy' returned as *the* slogan to oppose electoral reform.

This connection between the ballot and democracy was first made by John Ball (judge and Irish Conservative MP)[279], who brought up the writings of Montesquieu. The famous French philosopher, an authority on political thinking, had supposedly said that 'it is a fundamental law of democracy that voting shall be open'. If Great-Britain was to be a democracy – Dr Ball made clear he expected this for the future – then the voting system should be set up accordingly, and the secret ballot should thus be opposed.[280] Charles Newdegate brought up another French thinker for this same cause: Tocqueville. Tocqueville had supposedly written about the changes that now took place in the British electoral system, and had judged them as 'dangerous', on one ground: 'that they might lead to the establishment of the most irremediable of all forms of Government, that democracy which always forbades, if it does not constitute a despotism'.[281] The risks of reform were again repeated.

For Newdegate, secret voting was just another step in the hazardous direction of democracy. 'Secrecy of voting does seem logically to entail manhood suffrage', he attested. If the people could vote anonymously, they would vote soon, indirectly, for even more suffrage extension, he suggested. And if manhood suffrage was reached, 'as the consequence of the secrecy of voting by Ballot', they would 'encounter and entail upon the country the evils of

[276] Ibidem, 76.
[277] Ibidem.
[278] Ibidem.
[279] G.H. Davis, 'John Ball', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2048/view/article/1217 (accessed on November 14, 2012).
[280] John Ball, *Hansard*, June 26, 1871.
[281] Charles Newdegate, *Hansard*, July 10, 1871.

democracy'.[282] If now electors could conceal their votes, 'they would no longer be able to arrest the further progress in the descent towards democracy'.[283] Democracy would be the ballot's inevitable result.[284]

One year later, in 1872, when the secret ballot proposal arrived at its second reading, Newdegate again opposed the measure. By using the word 'democracy' as a word of warning, he sought to oppose the ballot; in a way that many MP's had done five years before. The change in the ballot was presented, as in 1866-7, as a 'fundamental change in the Constitution of the country'. And again, it was attested that the freedom of the constitution was threatened by the rise of the 'unchecked democracy'. And again, this would ultimately tend to despotism. As Newdegate said it himself: 'I watch this tendency to unchecked Democracy with jealousy, and for this reason – that all modern history proves that Democracy always tends to despotism, if it be not itself despotic'.[285]

4.2.3 County Household Suffrage

In the end, however, the frightening narrative of democracy's dangers could not prevent the passing of the secret ballot. In 1872 the measure was accepted and in 1874, for the first time, elections were held secretly.[286] Directly one year after, in 1873, another subject related to electoral reform arrived on the political agenda: the extension of the franchise in the counties. Six year earlier the Second Reform Act had given household suffrage to the boroughs, but the counties were left unchanged. This imparity was deemed unfair by an increasing number of MP's. As Gladstone stated in 1872, 'the present condition of the county franchise' could not 'very long continue'.[287] Something should change: the disparity between boroughs and counties was sought to resolve.

Throughout the early 1870s various Radical proposals were discussed in the Commons. But although the question aroused some support in the country, and most of the leading Liberals showed signs of yielding to the measure, all contemplated measures were defeated in the end. The opposition, consisting of most Conservatives and the former Adullamite Liberals, were able to stop the controversial expansion. They disliked the idea of such an extensive reform, so shortly after the previous one. When one of these proposals was discussed, in 1873, the slogan of 'democracy' was applied frequently. Even the argument

[282] Charles Newdegate, *Hansard* , July 6, 1871.
[283] Charles Newdegate, *Hansard* , July 10, 1871.
[284] Charles Newdegate, *Hansard* , July 23, 1873.
[285] Charles Newdegate, *Hansard* , July 12, 1872.
[286] Cook, *The Routledge Companion*, 60.
[287] Machin, *The Rise of Democracy*, 84.

reminds us of 1866 and -7: that passing such a measure would open the way to 'universal suffrage', the 'undermining of the constitution', and the rule of a 'democracy'.[288] Further suffrage extension would inevitably lead to a democracy.

Again, it was Charles Newdegate who, quite solemnly, stuck to the rhetoric of the Second Reform Act. In 1873, in fact, he was the only one to make bitter remarks on democracy. Only one Member of Parliament chose to respond to his fierce attitude against reform: William Forster. He attested that 'The hon. Member has spent rather a long time in this House in prophesying all sorts of evil results as likely to follow from projected legislation in a Liberal direction, and then when the anticipated results have accrued, in pointing out how no very great evil had followed after all.'[289] Before each reform measure Newdegate warned that this would be *the* decisive step towards the evils of democracy, only to conclude afterwards that the outcomes were not that disastrous. Why should the House still listen to him? If Newdegate now 'contended that the extension of the franchise to household suffrage to occupiers in counties [would] tend towards the bourne of absolute democracy', his arguments possessed no force, Forster claimed.[290]

With this second-order language, Forster made clear he started to doubt the argument that electoral reform would undeniably result in a democratic form of government. Now for the third time in seven years, the same argument was made, that *this* reform measure would be *the* decisive step. Now Forster stopped and looked back: had this same story not been told a few times before? Indeed. And had all the horrors of democracy factually become true? They had not. Great-Britain's politics were still stable, secure and safe.

The fact that now *only* Newdegate made the argument of 'democracy' against the bill, and the additional fact that Forster spoke up against it, points in the direction that the 'reform = democracy' narrative was losing support in the House. Less MP's felt it applicable or relevant to apply it as a slogan against this franchise extension. In the current political situation, the concept's emotional force was simply less strong than in 1866-7. Of course, many politicians still had the warnings of that time in the back of their minds. But from the negligible political consequences, they could conclude two things. Either democracy had *not* come in 1867; if so, why should the House believe the warnings now, with the very moderate measure of the county franchise? Or democracy had *indeed* come, but if so, if this was democracy, then it clearly was not the horrifying thing the opposition parliamentarians had

[288] Charles Newdegate, *Hansard*, July 23, 1873.
[289] William Forster, *Hansard*, July 23, 1873.
[290] William Forster, *Hansard*, July 23, 1873.

prophesied. Then, democracy was not the revolutionary, equalizing, or despotic system at all. The argument thus began to lose its credibility, causing the slogan of 'democracy' to lose its validity.

4.2.4 Female franchise

Quite similarly did another reform topic recur on the political agenda: the extension of the franchise to women, on the same limited requirements as men. With this aim, throughout the 1870s, eight separate bills were introduced in the Commons, but all were defeated in the end.[291] For a broad majority of Liberals and Conservatives giving women the vote was out of the question: it was almost unimaginable. The vote was the task of respectable men, and after household suffrage was brought to the boroughs, the principle was accepted that the man of the house voted for his entire household: including his wife.[292] Only a small minority of Radicals thought otherwise, and felt that respectable women should be included. In 1876, one of them introduced a proposal that would do so. Curiously, only in this year was the plan opposed with the concept of 'democracy'.

And in fact, it was only Charles Newdegate who did so; who used the word 'democracy' as a weapon against the women's vote. His argument is well-known by now: adopting this measure would inevitably lead to the establishment of a democracy. If even a few women were given the franchise, for the assumption they had a natural 'right', how could any men be kept out? 'If you once accept the principle that the franchise is a right, you cannot, without inflicting injustice, refuse to adopt manhood suffrage, or even the universal suffrage of both sexes'. If women were admitted to the vote, there was no principle left that could stop manhood suffrage. Universal suffrage of both sexes would soon follow. From this logic, Newdegate concluded that extending the franchise to women, was 'the most democratic measure [...] that could be devised'.[293]

It is interesting that Newdegate was the *only* MP who repeated the statements on the negative consequences of democracy. No one responded to him, at least not in the Commons, with the use of the word 'democracy'. In addition, it is notable that over the years, Newdegate's exact word use changed as well. In 1876, he not only said that the measure was democratic, and that therefore it was a bad thing. This had been the core of the argument in 1866-7. Now, Newdegate argued that the Bill was an '*extreme* measure', with an '*ultra-*

[291] Machin, *The Rise of Democracy*, 84.
[292] Pugh, *The Making of Modern British Politics* 5.
[293] Charles Newdegate, *Hansard*, April 26, 1876.

democratic' tendency, based on an '*ultra-democratic* principle'.[294] The addition of 'ultra' must have been aimed at attracting some extra attention. Saying 'democracy' alone was no longer bold enough.

The repeated use of the term throughout the 1870s, in a stable political environment, had stimulated inflation: 'democracy' alone was not the terrifying word of warning it used to be. Now all the exaggerated warnings of democratic evils had not come true, 'democracy' was no very frightening prospect any more. This may explain why most MP's abandoned the concept as a slogan in 1876, when women's suffrage was contemplated. And it explains too, that when Newdegate applied it, he sought to strengthen its force by adding suffixes such as 'ultra'. Perhaps this former effect even re-enforced the latter one: Newdegate was so isolated in the use of this word, 'democracy', that he Radicalized his language use even further: to maintain the attention that he desired.

As Newdegate's word use changed, his arguments altered too. Repeatedly we have seen the argument that democracy was essentially 'despotic', or, in any case, would lead to 'despotism'. Now, Newdegate said the same thing, but went one step further. He came up with a – for Anglican Britain – quite far-fetched argument: 'If the majority of a constituency in any country were composed of women, and if the Roman Catholic Church, for example, were to become the dominant power in this country […] we should not only have a despotism, but probably a despotism, following upon a Democracy, either governed, or overturned as in France in 1852 by the internal though extraneous force of the Papal despotism'.[295] If women were allowed to vote, Great-Britain could thus end up in the tyranny of the Vatican. Apparently, to Newdegate, female voters were more susceptible to religious persuasion than their male counterparts.

5. POLITICAL INNOVATION: TWO DECISIVE DEVELOPMENTS

5.1 National party organization and professionalization (1868-1880)

5.1.1 Bottom-up developments

The 1870s might seem an uneventful decade, for most of the reform proposals were quickly defeated. Only the secret ballot was passed. The significance of this period, however, lies less in the *events* than in the longer-term *developments*. In fact, one innovation in particular

[294] Charles Newdegate, *Hansard,* April 26, 1876.
[295] Charles Newdegate, *Hansard,* April 26, 1876.

gradually transformed the form, rules and legitimization of politics: national party organization. Already before the Second Reform Act two 'parties' existed, the Liberals and the Conservatives, but both were merely parliamentary groupings, with a very loose internal structure, and with no fixed, national organization connecting them formally to electors in the country.[296] Both two aspects were about to change. The cause of this was ultimately the admittance of urban working men to the suffrage: new voters had to be persuaded to vote for their party.[297] They had to be included into politics: national party organization proved an effective manner. This severely changed the practice of both electioneering and politics.[298]

The process started from the ground up:[299] local associations formed the foundations of later national party organizations. In particular working men's clubs played an important part: since decades, working men came together in their own organizations, and after 1867 political parties sought to sponsor these. As British historian Pugh described it: 'Politicians felt so apprehensive of losing touch with the urban electors that they threw considerable resources into extending the network'.[300] Both parties started to sponsor working men clubs and friendly societies, to spread their values and ideas among its members. And perhaps most importantly: their party name. Through these local clubs, they fostered a habitual loyalty. By moving beyond strictly political activity, the political parties permeated the daily lives of their members.[301]

At the same time, local parties emerged throughout the country. In several (predominantly urban) districts, formal constituency associations were founded based upon individual membership. Hundreds or thousands electors could now, for the first time, formalize their political loyalty by becoming a member.[302] And if they wanted, and had the time, they could become an active volunteer. These local partisan activists were vital in spreading the message and harnessing the voters. In fact, according to Pugh, they formed the central element in the political transition of the late nineteenth century: much of the canvassing and propaganda work, previously paid for on an ad hoc basis, was now done by volunteers out of free will.[303] They did it out of sheer identification with the party.

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[296] Pugh, *The Making of Modern British Politics,* 22.
[297] Belchem, *Class, Party and the Political System,* 7.
[298] Vernon, *Politics and the People,* 181.
[299] For more extensive information on bottom-up developments and the role of civil society on the democratization of politics, read Garrard, *European Democratization since 1800,* 44-46.
[300] Pugh, *The Making of Modern British Politics,* 16.
[301] Ibidem, 17.
[302] Ibidem.
[303] Ibidem, 4.

5.1.2 National organization: Conservatives

These associations had their origin in local initiatives; they were not caused by strategic plans made at the top. It was a matter of time, however, before the separate organizations united into national organisations: the local clubs became branches of one national party. The Conservatives came first, with the founding of the National Union of Conservative and Constitutional Associations (NUCCA) in 1867.[304] Although this organization was founded without co-operation of the parliamentary top, Disraeli soon gave his blessing. National party organization thus started from the rank and file, before they were embraced by party leaders. [305]

From the start, the NUCCA functioned mostly as a propaganda machine.[306] It printed and spread pamphlets nationally, to appeal to the working men's vote. In these pamphlets, it was stressed how badly the Liberals fell down on their promises and how beneficial Conservative measures had been.[307] Furthermore, the National Union emphasized the Conservative appeal to traditional values: defences of 'the Church establishment, religious education, private property, the Empire, the monarchy, and the union with Ireland' were appreciated by working men too.[308] The aim of the National Union was thus clearly one-way. Or as John Gorst, honorary secretary, stated in 1867: the Union should be 'not a meeting for the discussion of Conservative principles on which we are all agreed, it is only a meeting to consider by what particular organization we may make these Conservative principles effective among the masses'.[309]

Disraeli clearly saw the necessity of connecting to the new voters, and understood the utility of party organization.[310] Therefore, three years later, he founded the Conservative Central office: an organization more closely affiliated to the parliamentary Conservatives. This agency was designed to stimulate new local associations, maintain contact with them and compile lists of candidates.[311] By 1872 both the Union and the Office were closely linked to each other; through a common headquarters and one leading party agent: John Gorst. Via Gorst, perhaps Britain's first spin doctor, the parliamentary Conservative party became

[304] Cunningham, *The Challenge of Democracy,* 121.
[305] Pugh, *The Making of Modern British Politics,* 17.
[306] E.J. Feuchtwanger, *Disraeli, Democracy and the Tory Party. Conservative leadership and Organization After the Second Reform Bill* (Oxford 1968) 111.
[307] Pugh, *The Making of Modern British Politics,* 80.
[308] Ibidem, 51.
[309] Ibidem, 48.
[310] M. Pearce and G. Stewart, *British Political History 1867-1990* (London 1992) 77.
[311] E.J. Feuchtwanger, *Disraeli, Democracy and the Tory Party. Conservative leadership and Organization After the Second Reform Bill* (Oxford 1968) 128.

connected to the masses of new voters. Gradually the outlines of a modern, national party organization could be distinguished. Its success came soon: the victory in the general elections of 1874 encouraged the new organization to continue on the chosen path.[312] [313]

This may sound as if the Conservatives adapted very quickly to the conditions of a mass electorate. It should, however, not be forgotten that many (mostly rural) constituency associations remained small and /, and that not all Conservative MP's were as dynamic as Disraeli was.[314] Much of the parliamentary party was either indifferent, or even hostile, to the increased participation of popular movements. Particularly in the rural areas, local notables were highly sceptical about the swift changes.[315] The Conservative case should never be based upon programmes of legislation for the working class, they believed. The danger they feared was the prospect of the Conservative parliamentary party ridding traditional values, in exchange for working men's votes.[316] If the collective influence would increase, their individual dominion would diminish.[317]

5.3.3 National organization: Liberals

Liberal parliamentarians were similarly divided. The local, urban associations were primarily Radical in character: they were the broad bases of various working men, increasingly interested in a promise named politics. Via their local associations, named 'caucuses', they wished to make their voices heard.[318] This, obviously, threatened the position of local notables and parliamentary Whigs, who had controlled political power for over centuries. They distanced themselves from the development. Thus, when in 1877, the local associations united under a national umbrella, named the National Liberal Federation (NLF), the existing differences between Whigs and Radicals were intensified.[319]

The Liberal's overarching leader, William Gladstone, was brought in a difficult position. At first he was sceptic as well, of programme politics in general and the caucuses' pretensions in particular. Nevertheless, he chose to speak on the NLF's inaugural meeting.

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[312] Ibidem, 48.
[313] Quite interestingly, historian John Belchem has labelled this process of 'canvassing the support of workers as 'old-style populism'. In the 1870s itself, however, this 'populism' was named 'democratic', as shall be pointed out in the next chapter. For more information, read J. Belchem, *Class, Party and the Political System in Britain* (Cambridge 1990) 18-20.
[314] Pugh, *The Making of Modern British Politics,* 51
[315] Vernon, *Politics and the People,* 181.
[316] Ibidem, 48.
[317] For more extensive information on Conservative party organization, read E.J. Feuchtwanger, *Disraeli, Democracy and the Tory Party. Conservative leadership and Organization After the Second Reform Bill* (Oxford 1968) 105-221.
[318] Pugh, *The Making of Modern British Politics,* 17.
[319] Ibidem.

Speaking at such popular events convinced Gladstone of the possibilities: this was an excellent way to reach great masses of supporters and to spread his message. Therefore, throughout the 1870s, Gladstone found ever more reasons to make a performance in public.[320]

In fact, he was one of the first national leaders to pursue this course; to take the trouble to come to the people; to meet them and to speak with them. Over the years Gladstone visited industrial centres, spoke on franchise reform, and repeatedly found a willing crowd. Best remembered is his famous 'Midlothian Campaign', a series of speeches on foreign policy in 1880. For the general election of that year Gladstone successfully toured a several cities: an event cited as the first modern political campaign.[321] With his long, passionate talks, he reached many of the new electors, and, additionally, won himself the name of 'the people's William'.[322]

The subsequent 1880 elections were won by the Liberal party. This outcome surprised Conservative activists, who volunteered for the Conservative NUCCA. They blamed the supposed lack of party organization for the disappointing results: the Conservatives methods did not advance enough to win the new working men's vote. With the prospect of further franchise extension in the counties, something should change. To improve matters in the future, the National Union brought out an advice. They demanded an increase in the budget, a further professionalization, and in particular more speeches from their parliamentary leaders in the country.[323] Gladstone had set an example. After the 1870s, it had become clear that the rules of the electoral battle had changed. Party organization became part of the competition.[324]

5.3.4 From listening to participating

The outdoor speeches in the country, given by the – now famous – politicians, were attended by crowds of thousands. In this setting, of course, not all of the people could hear the speaker. Fortunately, every word was written down by journalists, who reprinted the speeches in the provincial and national newspapers, and often added their own lively commentary.[325] These articles were highly popular. The spread was stimulated by the removal of stamp duties on newspapers in 1855: after this year, the number of published newspapers grew quickly, from

[320] Ibidem, 27.
[321] Ibidem, 4.
[322] Pearce and Stearn, *Government and Reform,* 56.
[323] Ibidem, 49
[324] For more extensive information on Liberal party organization, read E.F. Biagini, *Liberty, Retrenchment and Reform. Popular Liberalism in the Age of Gladstone. 1860-1880* (Cambridge 1992).
[325] H. te Velde, *Het theater van de politiek* (Amsterdam 2003) 16 and H.C.G. Matthew, 'Gladstone, rhetoric and politics' in: P.J. Jagger ed., *Gladstone* (London 1998) 213-214.

795 in 1856 to 2093 in 1886.[326] Newsprint extended to larger sections of the population, and consequently political news and discussion became very popular and fashionable.[327] Throughout the 1870s, political debate spread to the people. Speeches were no longer limited to Westminster, but sounded throughout the country. For the first time, politicians were heard by a broad audience.[328]

Yet, not everyone was content with mere *listening* to political speeches: throughout the 1870s, more middle- and working class men wanted to *participate* themselves.[329] A first opportunity to do this was offered by local debating societies. Independent institutions, not affiliated to any of the parliamentary parties, sprang up throughout the country. With names as 'Parliament' or 'House of Commons', these local associations copied the Westminster parliament in miniature: with a 'Government' and an 'Opposition', motions and bills, these debating chambers ran on the same lines as the national one. Their popularity grew quickly: by 1883, over a hundred of towns had them and their total membership reached 35,000.[330] It aided political education, and furthermore, transformed politics into a popular activity. [331]

However, in these debating societies, politics remained a mere game: no real influence could be exerted on national decisions. Therefore, the local constituency associations came to be used. Although the party organizations such as the NUCCA and the NLF were founded with a different aim – one-way propaganda – very soon its members wanted something in return. They felt party organization could and should be used for something more; they hoped it could obtain a representative function as well.[332] Throughout the 1870s, the Liberal caucuses as well as the Conservative clubs developed into centres of discussion. Local members debated political issues and came up with their own solutions. Party organization, stimulated by the parliamentary leadership, thus soon elicited representative demands from the rank and file.

Eventually the annual, national conferences, too, became the scenes of lively debates. No longer was the agenda restricted to organizational strategies, but increasingly substantive

[326] Machin, *The Rise of Democracy in Britain,* 73.
[327] A.W. Robertson, *The Language of Democracy: Political Rhetoric in the US and Britain. 1790-1900* (Ithaca 1995) 130.
[328] Ibidem, 135.
[329] Cunningham, *The Challenge of Democracy*, 129.
[330] Machin, *The Rise of Democracy in Britain,* 74.
[331] For more information on these debating societies, and a comparative view with the Netherlands read J.J. van Rijn, *De eeuw van het debat: de ontwikkeling van het publieke debat in Nederland en Engeland, 1800-1920* (Amsterdam 2010).
[332] Pugh, *The Making of Modern British Politics,* 33.

political issues were discussed. The NLF and NUCCA meetings started to suggest national measures, prepare party programmes, and indicate priorities to the parliamentary leaders.[333] This had not been Disraeli's nor Gladstone's objective at the start, but it proved a process that could hardly be stopped or countered. Via the national organizations, the local party activists sought a way to control their representatives in parliament. Caucuses and clubs claimed their place: party organization offered them a platform, to influence national politics outside election times. Party membership thus offered increasing leverage to the people.[334]

The Second Reform Act thus changed not only the electoral system. It started a long-term process of party organization, which formalized and centralized parliamentary politics. Furthermore, it changed the relationship between the voters and the parliament; or the people and the government.[335] By the end of the 1870s, British political debate was no longer a closed elite affair. It became instead an open national conversation, in which the common people – working men included – could have their say. Party activists became increasingly numerous, whilst political associations rapidly spread and multiplied. All these members were trying, to some degree, to channel their desires into party policy and, ultimately, into government legislation.[336] Although it remains a matter of contention, to which extent they succeeded, it cannot be denied that the place of the people in the balance of political power was shifting. Though working class men had not taken over parliamentary power, their influence had certainly increased.[337]

5.3.5 Professionalization in parliament

At the same time, parliamentary politics underwent a shift towards professionalization. In a relatively short time, electoral rules transformed so much, that historian Pugh dares to say that 'the general election of 1880 may, with some justification, be regarded as the first modern election'. In this year, he argues, only few parliamentary candidates stood without the benefit of a professional party agent and a permanent party organization. This professionalization applied not only to electoral procedures, but also to parliamentary conventions. It affected political culture in general: while politics used to be a part-time activity before 1867, now it became more a full-time career. Under Gladstone, the parliamentary year grew longer, and governments made growing demands upon MP's. Lengthier debates and more complex

[333] Ibidem, 33, 49.
[334] Ibidem, 33.
[335] H. Cunningham, *The Challenge of Democracy: Britain 1832-1918* (Essex 2001) 125.
[336] Pugh, *The Making of Modern British Politics*, 73
[337] Belchem, *Class, Party and the Political System*, 8.

legislation demanded more time and effort from the individual members: the function of backbenchers changed radically.

The most important innovation was perhaps the rise of tighter party discipline. Although parliamentary members officially remained their individual vote, pressure was exerted on them to vote as one block. The Conservative party was most cohesive: from the 1860s to the 1880s, they voted more often as one, than the Liberals, both in office and in opposition. To many contemporaries, these developments seemed to undermine the status of the individual MP. Both Conservative and Liberal commentators and parliamentary members criticized the innovation: the party collective encroached more and more upon their individual time and freedom.[338] This should be reversed.

Even within the House of Commons, some Liberals criticized the party-internal transformations. They attacked the influence of local caucuses on other MP's, and argued that extra-parliamentary elements subjected politicians to their dictates. According to historian Pugh, however, this conclusion was not very accurate. In practice, 'the NLF invariably lent encouragement to MPs in rebellion against the leadership'.[339] Nevertheless, these utterances are highly relevant, for they portray the perception of parliamentarians themselves towards political innovation. How did MP's reflect on the narrowed gap between parliament and the people? Interestingly, they did so with the use of the concept of 'democracy'. How this connection was made, will be highlighted in the next chapter.

5.2 Social composition in the Commons (1868-1874-1880)

5.2.1 Less aristocrats, more businessmen

We have now dealt with both the changes in the *electorate*, and changes in the *relationship* between the electorate and parliament, but we have left the changes within *parliament* aside. Can the demise of democracy as a negative slogan not simply be explained by the changed composition of parliament? Did perhaps the extension of the franchise change the configuration of the Commons so much, that the anti-democratic speakers were voted out? Thus, can we relate the development of democracy's meaning and value to the changing composition of parliament?

To answer this question, let us start with an extensive perspective, and analyse the changing configuration from a social-economic viewpoint. What was the background and

[338] Pugh, *The Making of Modern British Politics,* 20.
[339] Pugh, *The Making of Modern British Politics,* 19.

profession of British parliamentarians, and how did this develop in our period? An article written by historian William Whiteley helps us out: he studied the composition of the Commons and distinguished between six categories of professions: 'Who were the men elected to parliament between the Second and Third Reform Bills?', was his main question.[340] From counting the numbers of each category, present in the Commons, Whiteley concluded that in the period between 1866 and 1885, significant alterations took place in the social structure of the House.[341]

The first change was the limited decline of the landed aristocracy, who had occupied the majority of seats in the House before 1868. As table one shows, within fifteen years, the number of aristocrats declined from 437 in 1865 to 325 in 1880. This process was initiated by the Second Reform Act: the extension of the franchise to urban workingmen and the accompanying redistribution of seats displaced tens of old members. Furthermore, the introduction of the secret vote in 1872 reduced corruption and intimidation, which had previously favoured the election of aristocratic landlords.[342] The second transformation Whiteley pointed out was the increase of men of new wealth: dozens of businessmen, lawyers and other professional men replaced the departing landed aristocrats. The combination of industrialization and electoral reform boosted their chances: after the towns had grown, their boroughs or counties had received improved parliamentary representation.[343]

The third development was, of course, the enfranchisement of the urban working men. What did this mean for the social composition of the House? As we portrayed earlier, the often repeated warnings (of working men obtaining majorities of seats) turned out to be false: in reality, the new voters kept the upper- and middle classes in power. This can be explained, first, by the changed relationship between parliamentarians and the people. MP's could no longer look down on the working classes; they had become a real influence on which their rule depended.[344] Consequently, parliamentarians were much more sensitive to working class demands than before. The innovation of party organisation did its work: the new voters were appeased by pamphlets and popular rhetoric.

Secondly, few working men stood for election themselves, due to the high costs involved in getting and keeping a parliamentary seat. Until 1911, parliamentarians received no financial support from the state. Nevertheless, in 1874, for the first time, two working men

[340] William H. Whiteley, 'The Social Composition of the British House of Commons, 1865-1885' in: *Historical papers / Communications historiques* Vol 5 No 1 (1970) 171-185; 171.
[341] Whiteley, 'The Social Composition', 171.
[342] Ibidem, 173.
[343] Ibidem, 175
[344] Ibidem, 176

(ex-miners) stood for election and were able to enter the Lower House, representing the Liberal party. Their position was made possible by the support of their coal-mining constituency: first at the poll booth, and then via a voluntary remittance of a yearly salary.[345] In the House, these men joined two sitting tenant farmers, who had represented their district from the year 1868.[346] All these shifts in composition can be found in table 3 (appendix).

These three changes in the social composition of the House of Commons must, however, not be exaggerated. Even in 1880, a majority of seats was still taken up by landed aristocrats. In this year, 325 of the 652 representatives belonged to the landed upper class. Hence, the decline was gradual, but steady. Different from the pessimistic predictions, it was more an evolution than a revolution. Nevertheless, a significant transformation was put in motion. There were now entering, for the first time, propertyless members of the middle and working classes: for both Conservative and Liberal parties. Hence, the social composition was becoming more and more varied, regardless of the party in power. Perhaps most important is the fact that the House of Commons was no longer essentially a chamber of landowners. The overwhelming aristocratic majority was gone, and their strength and numbers were declining. As the American historian Seymour rightly concluded as early as 1915: 'the Act of 1867 […] broke down aristocratic control in many constituencies'.[347]

From this fact, an interesting analogy may be made with the concept of 'democracy': before the Second Reform Act the Lower House was unambiguous on democracy's meaning and value, but after 1868, the clear negative consensus was broken. The cautious decline of the landed aristocracy coincided with the decline of democracy's negative evaluation. And while new MP's entered the House – with each election in 1868, 1874 and 1880 – almost simultaneously new meanings arose, with first neutral and then positive connotations. These men had real effects on the language of political debate. As Whiteley stated: 'The newer members made significant contributions on a broad range of subjects.' As an example, he mentioned the 'intellectual Radicals', who led the fight for 'further electoral reform'. Although a causal link is always difficult to prove, a notable correlation cannot be denied.

5.2.2 The demise of democracy's critics

Perhaps we can test this hypothesis by switching to an intensive viewpoint: by analysing the composition of the Commons not by looking at classes, but at individual men. Let us therefore

[345] Ibidem, 184
[346] Ibidem, 172
[347] C. Seymour, *Electoral Reform in England and Wales. The Development and Operation of the Parliamentary Franchise. 1832-1885* (London 1915) 521.

focus on the political careers of the particular MP's, who used the word 'democracy' in the parliamentary debates. Can we relate the change in democracy's evaluation to the shifts within parliament? To assess the gradual demise of democracy as a negative slogan, which started during the 1870s, the main question we need to answer is the following: when did the MP's parliamentary career end? An analysis of the careers of the foremost opponents of parliamentary reform – those enthusiast operators of the negative slogan of 'democracy', often quoted in chapter three – might lead to a tentative indication.

During the 1866-7 parliamentary reform debates, a group of about twenty-four members of the opposition side actively and repeatedly used the concept of 'democracy' in a negative way. Although these twenty-four were not the only ones criticizing reform and 'democracy', they were indeed the forefront: the most active and original users, who shaped the political discourse which others merely copied and quoted. For their leading role, most of the narrative of the first part is based on the quotes of these selected twenty-four. Did this group of MP's survive the first general election of 1868? And the subsequent elections in the years after?

Already six of them quit parliamentary politics before 1869: Edward Bulwer, Christopher Griffith, Matthew Marsh, James Stanhope, and James Whiteside were either not re-elected or voluntarily left the Commons in 1868. Robert Cecil left the parliament as well in that year, but did not abandon politics completely: he was still at the start of a long and successful political career.[348] In the next elections, of 1874, four additional members were displaced: John Coleridge, Walter Meller, John Pakington and Charles York did not return in the House. And six more sat in the House until 1880: Charles Adderley, George Bowyer, Alexander Baillie-Cochraine, Gathorne Hardy, Edward Horsman, Robert Lowe, and Robert Montagu. Charles Russell quit in 1882. Thus, in the three elections after the Second Reform Act, sixteen active opponents had left the House: they had either quit voluntarily, were not re-elected, or had died.[349]

Hence, when the Third Reform Act was discussed in 1884, 16 out of 24 – two-third – of the most active critics of 'democracy' had disappeared from the House of Commons. Eight were re-elected continuously: they sat long enough to witness both the Second and the Third Reform Act debates: William Baxter, Samuel Laing and Charles Newdegate remained their seats until 1885, after the passing of the Third Reform Act. Alexander Beresford Hope sat

[348] Robert Cecil, contemporarily known as Viscount Cranborne, was later known as the Marquess of Salisbury and became Prime Minister three times. (1885-1886, 1886-1892 and 1895-1902)
[349] An elaborate overview of the exact years of entry and exit of all the quoted MP's of this thesis can be found in table 2 of the appendix.

until 1887, Henry Selwin until 1892 and Michael Hicks-Beach even until 1906. Of these men, Charles Newdegate was the fiercest opponent of 'democracy', who continued to press against further parliamentary reform for many years. In fact, he was the only one to do so; he upheld his rhetoric of democracy's dangers until his death in 1887.

Only one MP had switched sides: Samuel Laing. While in 1866 he had still worried about democracy's effects, ten years later he openly appreciated the democratic outcomes of the Second Reform Act. The other men simply kept silent about the concept. William Baxter, Alexander Beresford-Hope, and Henry Selwin did not mention 'democracy' at all after 1867, although they sat in the House for years after. The same holds for William Gladstone: in the 1870s and 1880s he rarely used the word in the Commons. Perhaps these men realised, as Laing had, that all the negative consequences – founded in the word 'democracy' – had not come true, but different from him, did not want to explicate their error in the House. Or, if they had retained their negative evaluation, felt that the slogan had lost its emotional force. It had been used too often, without success in stopping parliamentary reform.

From these facts, we can conclude that the use of democracy as a negative slogan faded, at the same time as its previous representatives disappeared from the House. But was there also a *causal* link between these two developments? This position is hard to defend. Sixteen out of the twenty-four members had left the Commons in 1880, but still, of the remaining eight, seven members abandoned the slogan anyway. Only Charles Newdegate maintained his agitation. Therefore, it seems more plausible that the slogan itself was getting worn out. Over the 1870s, it lost its force and applicability.

Nevertheless, the displacement of MP's may have *amplified* this process: the less the slogan was repeated in the 1870s, the less new parliamentarians could connect to it. New MP's, elected in 1868, 1874, and 1880, were unfamiliar with the debates of the Second Reform Act, and rarely heard the word 'democracy' in its negative sense. Furthermore, these new politicians brought new values into the House. An increasing number of them, of course, was elected by the working men's vote, and could surely not be against it. As we shall see, consequently, the evaluation of 'democracy' in the Lower House gradually improved.

6. A SECOND MEANING EMERGED: SYNONYM OF 'THE PEOPLE'

6.1 'The democracy': no slogan but a fact (1868-1871)

6.1.1 The people, or a part of it

During the 1870s, a pivotal development took place in the concept's meaning, which has not yet been fully discussed. From 1868 on, an additional meaning of 'democracy' was added in the Common's parliamentary debates. No longer was 'democracy' only a form of government; instead, it *also* became a synonym for 'the people' themselves: 'the population', or at least a part of it. With this meaning, 'democracy' was always said in combination with the article 'the'. Thus, 'the democracy' meant 'the people'. A glimpse of this we already witnessed in paragraph 3.4.6, in a few of the 1866 speeches, but now, its usage grew quickly. Thus, while in 1866-7 'democracy' was conventionally said to refer to a distant or *future* form of government, in the following years 'the democracy' was increasingly said to designate something in the *present*: the people. Exact numbers can be found in graph 3 and 4 of the appendix.

In the period 1868-1871 the word was often applied in this new way. It should therefore not surprise anyone that 'democracy' no longer solely appeared in debates on parliamentary reform or franchise extension, but can be found in speeches on various topics. In a debate on the Church in Ireland, for example, William Johnston (Orangeman, Radical Irish MP)[350] mentioned that he 'was not afraid to face the Protestant democracy of the country'.[351] In this sentence, the word democracy could easily be replaced with 'part of the population', without changing its meaning. Two months later, William Charley (lawyer and Conservative MP)[352] talked about 'the Conservative democracy of the country', and said he was their 'representative'.[353] He claimed that this democracy would support the passing of a certain bill. Thus, 'the democracy', now meant as much as a 'part of the population'. However, it remains unclear whether it meant the Protestant and Conservative *common* people, or *all* the Protestant and Conservative people. Or did it only mean the voters? We cannot be sure.

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[350] A. Jackson, 'William Johnston', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2048/view/article/34214 (accessed on November 14, 2012).
[351] William Johnston, *Hansard*, May 31, 1869.
[352] J.B. Atlay, 'William Charley', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2048/view/article/32372 (accessed on November 14, 2012).
[353] William Charley, *Hansard*, July 16, 1869.

In many cases, 'the democracy' was mentioned without the addition of an adjective as 'Conservative' or 'Protestant'. In 1870, for example, in a debate on education laws, George Dixon (educational reformer and MP)[354] sought to describe the current state of politics, and touched upon the concept as well. He attested that 'they had one of the strongest governments that had existed for many years', and added that 'they were supported by a democracy whose power had not yet been fully developed'.[355] From this we can conclude with confidence that 'a democracy' must have meant 'the people' or at least a part of it. The addition that its 'power had not yet been fully developed' suggests that Dixon referred to the working classes, who three years earlier had received the vote.

6.1.2 The working classes

This interpretation of 'the democracy', as essentially 'the working classes', was explicated more clearly in a speech held by Edward Craufurd (Scottish Radical MP)[356], who expressed himself in a debate on the taxation of rifles. He claimed that the Chancellor of the Exchequer now introduced a taxation measure, because he 'had no confidence in the democracy'.[357] What did 'the democracy mean here? The whole nation or just a part of it? Craufurd must have thought chiefly of the lower classes, as he directly added that the imminent measure 'would take away the power of reaction from the *lower orders'*.[358]

This definition of the lower or the working classes, was taken up as well by Frederick Corrance (Conservative)[359]; an MP who in 1871 stated that the main differences in the House were based on differences between 'local and class interests'. Boroughs stood against counties, upper classes against working classes. He wondered what would be the consequence, 'whenever interests clashed'. If the boroughs won this stride, 'they would find themselves in the hands of an irresponsible democracy of the large cities', he said. [360] The 'politics of an urban democracy' would then rule: the lower classes, which lived in British towns. Their 'democratic' rule would be chaotic.

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[354] V.E. Chancellor, 'George Dixon', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography,* http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2048/view/article/7697 (accessed on November 14, 2012).
[355] George Dixon, *Hansard,* June 23, 1870.
[356] Author unknown, 'Edward Craufurd', http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edward_Henry_John_Craufurd (accessed on November 14, 2012).
[357] Edward Craufurd, *Hansard,* July 22, 1870.
[358] Edward Craufurd, *Hansard,* July 22, 1870.
[359] Author unknown, 'Frederick Corrance', http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frederick_Snowdon_Corrance (accessed on November 14, 2012).
[360] Frederick Corrance, *Hansard,* July 24, 1871.

No parliamentarian reflected on this shift in meaning in second-order language; not in the House of Commons itself, at least. The MP's added a meaning to a word without mentioning it, almost as if it was a completely different word at all. Of course it was not: the only difference was the use of an article or not. However, its meaning was separated from the start. Whereas 'democracy' had been a political slogan, which succeeded in 1866-7 in yielding emotional responses, 'the democracy' was no slogan at all. No longer was the noun restricted to the topic of parliamentary reform; it was applied in various subjects. Interestingly, it seemed to show no added value, compared to the already existing concept of 'the people': its meaning was just as vague and broad. And similarly to this synonym, it carried neither inherent positive nor negative values. It was essentially a neutral fact, used by both Conservatives, Liberals and Radicals, to either acclaim the support of 'the people' or to condemn it.

6.2 Criticizing its influence (1871-1877)

6.2.1 Obeying the democracy

In the next few years, however, from 1871 to 1877, the concept of 'the democracy' was less used to designate 'the people' in a positive way, and increasingly to assign the *negative* effects of the Second Reform Act. Most utterances of 'the democracy' in this period were made by parliamentarians, who looked back on the changes of the Second Reform Act and critically assessed the way the 'rules' of politics had changed since. In particular, they criticized the way that 'the democracy' had increased their influence on political affairs. While in the period 1868-1871, 'the democracy' had a fairly neutral meaning, in the following years it was associated most often with negative values. How this meaning developed in the 1870s, is explained in this paragraph.

It all started in 1871, when the House of Commons debated on the 'abolition of purchase' (of military ranks) in the British Army. John Pakington opposed this measure, for he thought it was a 'costly, party, crotchety project'. The plan at hand would not contribute to 'the national defences of the country', would only cost money, and was only chosen from a desire to adopt a 'democratic system', he stated. Most important: Pakington said it was a 'sop to democracy'.[361] By saying this he suggested that the bill was not introduced for its rational

[361] John Pakington, *Hansard*, March 13, 1871.

necessity, but only proposed to please some parts of the population. The measure was a mere bribe, used to obtain the favour of the people.

This was no valid motive for legislation, Pakington implied. According to him, the government acted 'in the vain hope of satisfying the appetite of that insatiable monster'.[362] With this, he meant 'the people', 'the voters', or perhaps 'the working classes'. About this exact meaning, we cannot be too sure. The democracy meant, here, the people, or at least a part of it. Their influence on politics had clearly increased: a development Pakington seemed to regret. Now the government only sought the democracy's approval, they neglected their true task, he feared. The form of representation was changing, now the gap between the government and 'the democracy' had shrunk.

A similar argument was made one year later, by Henry Fawcett, who also argued that the influence of 'the democracy' was growing. According to him, this was a dangerous process, for it might lead to the rise of 'socialism'. Socialism was summed up by him as the policy of ample state intervention: the State was to provide 'land for the people at a low price', 'houses at a cheap rate', and, most dangerous of all: 'free education'. In fact, free education was 'the first plank in the programme of the International'.[363] This 'socialism' might come upon them 'at any time', Fawcett maintained, as now even Disraeli, while 'striving for place and power', 'would not object to make Socialist bids *for the support of the Democracy*'.[364] In one of Disraeli's speeches, half a year before, he had apparently made 'Socialistic' promises to the British voters, to gain their support. The increased influence of the people now threatened the independent position of politicians.

This shift in representative behaviour caused the 'great danger of Democracy', Fawcett suggested. If politicians merely *echoed* the people, they would soon make 'repeated and increasing demands' upon the state budget, and nourish irresponsible policies such as free education. This was completely out of line with the laws of current economic thought. 'The people', however, lacked any such knowledge; Fawcett worried: the 'popular notion as to the Consolidated fund [the government's bank account] was that it was a perennial source of wealth, kept full by the bounty of nature, and that in the general scramble for it the more any constituency could get the better'.[365] The people did not understand that the government's

[362] John Pakington, *Hansard*, May 11, 1871.
[363] Henry Fawcett, *Hansard*, March 5, 1872.
[364] In this quote, 'Socialism' took over the role that 'democracy' had played in the past ten years: the concept of a system which enclosed the fears for the future. The baton was passed here from 'democracy' to 'socialism'. This confirms that 'democracy' was indeed losing its negative force, and was being surpassed in frightfulness by the relatively new concept of 'socialism'.
[365] Henry Fawcett, *Hansard*, March 14, 1872.

money came out of the pockets of the ratepayers: the voters themselves! State extravagance would harm them and the economy. Any obedience from parliament to 'the democracy' or 'popular feeling' was therefore unintelligent.[366]

6.2.2 Two meanings separated

Hence, a few years after the passing of the Second Reform Act, it gradually dawned upon several MP's that the conventions of politics were changing. While 'democracy' was used less as a *warning* for the *future*, it was increasingly applied to assess the *reality* of the *present*. The key innovation was the changing relationship between parliamentarians and voters. Now even Disraeli made direct promises to his voters about future policy; an indication that the gap between parliament and the people had shrunk. Whereas parliamentarians used to listen to public opinion, then weigh and assess it with their own critical minds, now some politicians directly listened to the people, and tried to please them where they could. The critical assessment and reflection by the educated, intelligent, better part of the population was thus taken away from the process. 'Representation' came to mean more a *reflection* of popular wishes than the vague *inspiration* of popular opinion.

This idea that the influence of 'the democracy' in politics had been growing was broadly acknowledged: it was perceived as a fact. But from this, neither Pakington nor Fawcett concluded that the innovation in representation had also changed the *form of government*. No critic said that now they *had* an influential democracy, they had also *become* a 'democracy'. They clearly distinguished the two meanings of the word in their discourse. This total separation of two narratives – based around the same noun – might seem rather odd, as if *having* a democracy and *being* a democracy was completely unrelated to each other.

However, we can detect some logic in the full separation. Perhaps, in the 1870s, the 'negative' narrative of the Second Reform Act – the story of democracy as a warning, a distant but frightful form of government – was too jaded, too worn out, to be repeated again. Instead of warning for the future, most critics of the people's influence chose to attack the real and visible changes occurring before their eyes. For them, it made more sense to talk about 'the democracy', to pinpoint exactly where the problem lay (the influence of 'the people', or 'the working classes'), than to fall back on the vague warnings against a political system. The problem now was simply not a future form of government, but the *current* changes in the

[366] Henry Fawcett, *Hansard*, March 14, 1872.

form of representation. These innovations should be reversed. The two narratives were therefore not connected.

6.3 Mode of persuasion: Logos

This interpretation of democracy's second meaning, as a mere 'fact', can be related to the second of Aristotle's modes of persuasion: Logos. Logos can be translated as 'argumentation' and meant as much as the 'content' of a speech. [367]In the view of the old Greek thinker, this was the core of any plea: it is the combination of standpoints and effective arguments. As Emeritus Professor in the History of rhetoric Antoine Braet stresses, these standpoints need to have a basis in reality, to be able to convince someone.[368] Therefore, every speaker makes assertions about *states of affairs* in reality: facts of existence that can be checked by others; or value-based assumptions, that he shares with his audience. Subsequently, he builds up his arguments based on these facts and values. If he succeeds in doing so, he has taken the first and important step towards persuasion.[369]

As we saw in this chapter, the concept of 'the democracy' came to be part of the 'standpoints' in speeches. It was not aimed to trigger emotion, nor was it part of any particular type of argument. Instead, it was a building block of several different arguments, used to refer to actual facts present in reality. To say 'the democracy' was to mention a group of people outside parliament: it referred to the current state of affairs. It was neither controversial nor disputed: it was a fact upon which every MP agreed. The 'logos' was clear: Great-Britain in the 1870s *had* a 'democracy' (a people), it was there, and could be mentioned in several subjects of debate, by any Member of the House.

[367] Braet, *Retorische Kritiek*, 12.
[368] Ibidem.
[369] Ibidem, 25.

6.4 Four key actors (1868-1878)

William Forster
(Liberal MP 1861-1886)

Charles Newdegate
(Conservative MP 1843-1885)

Henry Fawcett
(Liberal MP 1865-1884)

John Pakington
(Conservative MP 1837-1874)

PART III: THE THIRD REFORM ACT DEBATES (1878-1885)

7. THE FIRST MEANING REVALUATED: DISTANT FORM OF GOVERNMENT

7.1 Reform on the agenda, again (1874-1880)

Despite the changes in political organization and social composition, further parliamentary reform remained the wish of a minority of MP's, throughout the 1870s. This minority consisted mostly out of Liberal Members, including the Radicals. They were in favour of further enfranchisement, with as their main aim the extension of household suffrage to the counties.[370] For a broad majority in the House, though, such a measure went too far. The cabinets too opposed it: for the Liberal ministry of Gladstone (1868-1874), the time was not right for yet another reform, and after the elections of 1874 the reform-sceptic Conservatives won a majority in the Commons. Therefore, from 1874 on, the county reform was lost out of sight. Disraeli was able to form his second ministry, which would sit on the government benches until 1880.[371]

No one expected the Conservatives to reform the counties.[372] Their previous reform of 1867 was passed mostly because of party political considerations, but now the conditions were very different. Now they had a sound majority in the Commons, and no electoral benefit of reform. Extending the vote in the counties, their traditional home base, was risky, and furthermore, a popular organization pressing for change was again absent. Hence, the only effect of introducing such a controversial measure could be to split their party. Therefore, Conservatives did not propose any franchise extension, nor any redistribution of seats. When the topic was discussed, it was because Liberal MP's made proposals in the Commons. They maintained it on the political agenda, until Disraeli's cabinet was through.[373]

The national elections of 1880 seemed to end the stalemate. After six years of Conservative rule the Liberal Party won a large majority in the Commons, allowing Gladstone to form his second cabinet. The Liberals, who had for years discussed parliamentary reform, but could not achieve anything, now had the matter in their own hands again. They were expected to finally settle the county household suffrage. However, old divisions remained to exist: Whig aristocrats, still suspicious of reform measures, had not lost their influence.

[370] Machin, *The Rise of Democracy in Britain,* 84.
[371] Cook, *The Routledge Companion,* 60.
[372] Machin, *The Rise of Democracy in Britain,* 85.
[373] Ibidem, 88

Gladstone even appointed some in his new cabinet.[374] The broad Liberals party was split between its two wings: progressive Radicals on the one hand, and Conservative Whigs on the other. This division delayed a decision on reform.

It was for this reason that the matter of the household franchise in the counties was not easily settled.[375] As we saw before, a Liberal majority in the Commons did not mean a majority in favour of reform. Years of debates circled around the same theme. The issue of the county franchise remained on the political agenda throughout the early 1880s – until a majority was found in favour. It was increasingly debated, especially since 1878: the year in which the Commons remembered the passing of the Second Reform Act, now ten years before. This induced its members to reflect on the current state of politics. What had been the results of the previous reform measure, and how should a next one look like? How had representation changed, and what could be improved? While answering these questions, the House reflected regularly on the meaning of the word 'democracy'.

In these parliamentary debates, the dichotomy between the two meanings of 'democracy' was maintained. While in some speeches 'democracy' was still a distant form of government, a warning for the future, in others, 'the democracy' meant 'the people', a present entity which had already obtained political influence. These two narratives were reiterated from 1878 on. This continuation, however, does not imply that nothing changed. Quite the opposite is true: because 'democracy' was now so highly debated, it becomes clear that certain elements were profoundly disputed. Although the Members of Parliament not always confronted each other with their different notions; from several speeches we learn that they had very different thoughts on democracy. Within each of the two narratives, there was no agreement on the exact value or the meaning of the concept. Therefore, all the contested elements will be discussed, in this chapter and the next. This will portray how contested 'democracy' was, from 1878 to 1885.

7.2 Contested meaning and value (1878-1882)

7.2.1 The rule of one class

Among the parliamentarians who spoke of 'democracy' as a future form of government, there was an important disagreement on the concept's exact meaning. Who would rule in a democratic system? For Robert Lowe, the main opponent of suffrage extension and

[374] Ibidem, 89.
[375] Ibidem, 90.

democracy in 1867, 'democracy' still meant the class rule of the lower classes. But, perhaps surprisingly, he rarely used his old slogan of 'democracy'. In 1878, he only repeated his old argument once: when he said he objected 'to any class, high or low, having the whole political power of the State.' Be it a plutocracy or a democracy, the objection is the same. No *one class* is fit to govern by itself'.[376] In 1879, again, Lowe brought up the concept of 'democracy' only once. He seemed reluctant to do so, as he stated first that he was 'not going to say anything against democracy'. Yet, he then started repeating all his known arguments against this form of government. It was not 'durable', it would disturb the balance, and it would put the institutions in peril. He still maintained a democracy would land them into 'difficulties from which there will be no retreat'.[377]

Although his arguments were the same as in 1866-7, Lowe's style had changed. He no longer held lengthy speeches on every negative aspect of democracy. After repeating his known statements, Lowe quickly apologized to the House, 'for having detained it so long'.[378] What did he mean by this; where were the fierce speeches? We cannot be sure. It sounds almost as if Lowe did not want to interfere with the matter too much. He only mentioned 'democracy' to stress that 'this question is not so easy a matter' as [hon. Members] think it is'.[379] For Lowe, in any case, the concept still meant the rule of *one class*, the lower or working classes. 'Democracy' was still part of the same argument as in 1866-7, in which any suffrage extension, and any step towards democracy, was rejected.

In 1883, Arthur Arnold (writer and Radical MP)[380] applied the concept of democracy in a similar way, although he took the very opposite position: in favour of it. Arnold first quoted the Conservative Robert Cecil, who 'was afraid of the class "the largest in numbers", and had said that 'democracy like death, gives back nothing'.[381] In this view, democracy thus was the rule of the most numerous class. This was the working class, Arnold explained: working men would rule Great-Britain of the future. In his own words: Robert Cecil 'should despair of the future of the country if he did not see that the increase in the power of *the working class* was inseparable from that future'.[382] Arnold therefore suggested that 'his right hon. Friend might become better acquainted with the *most numerous class*'. Class rule was coming: whether he liked it or not.

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[376] Robert Lowe, *Hansard*, February 22, 1878.
[377] Robert Lowe, *Hansard*, March 4, 1879.
[378] Robert Lowe, *Hansard*, March 4, 1879.
[379] Robert Lowe, *Hansard*, March 4, 1879.
[380] G.S. Woods, 'Arthur Arnold', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography,* http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2048/view/article/30454 (accessed on November 14, 2012).
[381] Arthur Arnold, *Hansard*, March 30, 1883.
[382] Arthur Arnold, *Hansard*, March 30, 1883.

7.2.2 Or government by the whole people?

This quote already indicates that the authority of Robert Lowe and Robert Cecil – on this subject – was not as undisputed as it had been ten years before. Now a Radical repeated Cecil's words: not to criticize its definition, but to *appreciate* the outcome that was meant to *frighten*. Nevertheless, this explanation of democracy's meaning as the rule of only one class was not shared by *all* reformist politicians. Quite the contrary: in the late 1870s, several parliamentarians stepped up to promote their own interpretation. Arthur Kavanagh (Conservative)[383] was one of them. He elaborated on the topic and explained that, to him, the 'equal representation of *all classes*' was the key element of democracies.[384] This was the exact opposite of Lowe's and Cecil's explanations: whereas they had always maintained that democracy was the rule of *one* class, Kavanagh stressed democracy meant the rule of *all* classes.

This contrast can logically be explained by the different value they attached to this system: while Lowe still opposed democracy, Kavanagh claimed in fact that 'the true principle of a safe and sound democracy' was the 'safest, broadest basis upon which a Constitution could rest'.[385] He argued that Great-Britain's development towards 'democracy' was a good thing. For this exact reason, to make democracy an acceptable concept, he provided the word with a positive definition. If democracy was not the rule of one class, but instead, the 'equal representation of all classes', it became acceptable at once. If democracy was the inclusion of all, and not the tyranny of one class, the chief argument against it was removed right away. In this view, democracy was a system that not yet existed, but that they should aspire for the future.

Two days later, Rowland Blennerhassett (journalist and Liberal MP)[386] repeated the words chosen by Kavanagh. He also claimed that 'the true principle of democracy is the government of the people *by the whole people* equally represented, not the government of the people by a majority of the people exclusively represented.'[387] The old principle that democracy was the 'tyranny of a majority' was now literally denied. While in 1867 most proponents of suffrage extension had opposed 'democracy', eleven years later, the proponents

[383] J.M. Rigg, 'Arthur Kavanagh', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography,* http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2048/view/article/15189 (accessed on November 14, 2012).
[384] Arthur Kavanagh, *Hansard*, March 6, 1878.
[385] Arthur Kavanagh, *Hansard*, March 6, 1878.
[386] D.C. Lathbury, 'Rowland Blennerhassett', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography,* http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2048/view/article/31926 (accessed on November 14, 2012).
[387] Rowland Blennerhassett, *Hansard*, March 8, 1878.

of further extension used 'democracy' in a clear positive way. The previous meanings of 'majority' or 'one class rule' therefore had to be replaced.

Four years later, Blennerhassett explained his thoughts on 'democracy' even further. According to him, the question was now 'to reconcile the rapid advance of democracy, consequent on the extension of the franchise, with the rights and liberties of every section of the people—how, in a Reform Bill, to unite generosity and intelligence.'[388] Thus, if the franchise was extended, they advanced towards democracy: this was a good thing. The only danger they should evade was that, somehow, the 'now unenfranchised' would get the 'whole power in their hands'. Then, the 'rights and liberties' of minorities would not be safe, he suggested. This was exactly what Lowe had argued, and had presented as the definition of 'democracy'. Blennerhassett opposed this interpretation; and argued that such a majority rule, the dominance of one class, had nothing to do with 'democracy' at all. 'To that the true principles of democracy itself were opposed', he maintained: 'those principles required the just presentation of *the whole people*, and of *every class* in the people'.[389] Democracy thus now carried a positive value: it meant the representation of every class.

7.2.3 No power can prevent it

Although it was contested who would rule in a democracy, it is clear that for all these parliamentarians, 'democracy' meant a certain, distant form of government, and potentially *the* system of Great-Britain in the future. But how would they become it? Did they still have a choice? Or was the rise of democracy unstoppable, and perhaps even, inevitable? The expectations in this respect were highly diverse. Before we elaborate further on one of these perspectives, let us remember the water metaphor that had been used frequently in the debates of the Second Reform Bill: the act was a floodgate which unleashed a devastating wave of democracy. A similar figure of speech was now used with the opposite aim, by the proponents of democracy and reform.

George Morgan (lawyer and Liberal MP)[390], for example, brought up the metaphor again in 1879, and explained its meaning most clearly. Indeed, they were in the middle of a 'wave of democracy', he said, and argued that 'they had as *little chance of resisting* the wave of democracy by opposing this proposal as the Danish King had of resisting the rising of the

[388] Rowland Blennerhassett, *Hansard*, March 21, 1882.
[389] Rowland Blennerhassett, *Hansard*, March 21, 1882.
[390] M. Cragoe, 'George Morgan', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2048/view/article/19221 (accessed on November 14, 2012).

tide.'[391] This was a reference to a legend about Cnut the Great, a mediaeval King, who had arrogantly commanded the tide of the sea to halt, but had failed to do so. He could not stop nature. In the legend, Cnut had then admitted there was no King but God, and hung his gold crown on a crucifix.[392] With this comparison, Morgan emphasized that 'democracy' was an uncontrollable force, such as the sea, that could not be resisted, even if they tried.

Blennerhassett thought too that 'democracy' could no longer be stopped, but left the metaphors behind. Already in 1878, he argued avowedly that 'the democratic extension of the franchise must go on; there is *no power* in the country that *can stop it* now'.[393] This explanation, too, made it sound almost as if the democratic extension was a force of nature; as if the Commons did not have the decision in its own hands. Blennerhasset's view on this does point in this direction, as he argued that 'active and permanent forces in the life of the nation are constantly at work, which erelong will bear us onwards more rapidly than ever towards the ultimate triumph of democratic principles'.[394] They had started a process of democratization that could now not be stopped.

Clearly, Blennerhasset was in favour of this democratization process: now the 'petty shopkeepers, the tradesmen, and the artisans' were admitted in the boroughs, how could 'the large mass of precisely similar population which happens to reside beyond the existing borough boundaries' be kept out? The boundaries between boroughs and counties were rather artificial, Blennerhasset suggested, and therefore made no valid motive to exclude thousands of miners and farmers.[395] Furthermore, the agricultural population, 'described a few years [earlier] as that mute and helpless multitude who [had] never made their voices heard in the din of politics, or their presence felt in any social movement', were now 'clamouring to be let in'.[396] Perhaps it was this social pressure from below which, in Blennerhassett's view, made democracy an unstoppable force.

Blennerhassett thus agreed that democracy was now 'inevitable'. In 1879, he added that the imminent change would also be 'irrevocable'. The next Reform Bill, which was now contemplated, would extend the suffrage in the counties, so that 'a wide democratic franchise all over the country' was established. Such a step was not far away, Blennerhassett prophesied, 'within no distant date' it could become 'an accomplished fact'. Then Great-

[391] George Morgan, *Hansard,* March 4, 1879.
[392] Henry of Huntingdon, *The Chronicle of Henry of Huntingdon, comprising The History of England, From the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the accession of Henry II.* (1853) 199.
[393] Rowland Blennerhassett, *Hansard,* March 8, 1878.
[394] Rowland Blennerhassett, *Hansard,* March 8, 1878.
[395] Rowland Blennerhassett, *Hansard,* March 8, 1878.
[396] Rowland Blennerhassett, *Hansard,* March 8, 1878.

Britain would become a true democracy. They were not yet there, but very, very close. Blennerhassett made these remarks to emphasize the need to set up safeguards in time, so that 'the rights and liberties of every section of the community' were ensured. The 'supremacy of numbers' had potential dangerous effects, that needed to be checked, he claimed.[397] Democracy was on its way and they should better be prepared.

7.2.4 Or could it be stopped?

Of these two MP's, Morgan was fully in favour of the imminent and inevitable democracy, while Blennerhassett also admitted some dangers that should be checked. Many other MP's shared this anxiety, but, different from Blennerhassett, felt they could still prevent 'democracy'. According to them, it was a force that could still be stopped. George Bowyer for example, admitted in 1880 that 'the tendency of the present time was in the direction of democracy, not only abroad, but in this country'. Again, it was 'the tide which was setting in that direction', but according to Bowyer, this tide could still be 'stemmed'.[398] Therefore, he opposed a motion in which the House considered the shortening of the duration of Parliaments. Taking such a measure might stimulate the democratic tide: this he did not want.

The main subject in which 'democracy' figured, though, was clearly the potential next reform bill, that would extend the suffrage in the counties. Claud Hamilton (Conservative)[399] fiercely opposed any such measure. He argued that if a new Reform Bill was passed, and 'every householder' in the country, in both borough and county, was given the vote, there was no principle left to stop there. 'Why should not every man have an equal right?', he asked ironically. Every 'poor fellow' should then be admitted to the vote as well. 'What harm would it do?', he asked, as if it was a very light or easy question. Household suffrage in the counties would soon lead to 'manhood suffrage': 'and there they would be, with universal suffrage, and equal electoral districts – pure, unrestricted, sublime democracy'[400]. For Hamilton, democracy's meaning was clear: a system based on universal suffrage.

This idea that extending the suffrage in the counties would lead towards a democracy was shared as well by George Goschen (financier and moderate Liberal MP)[401][402]. In 1878,

[397] Rowland Blennerhasset, *Hansard*, March 4, 1879.
[398] George Bowyer, *Hansard*, February 24, 1880.
[399] Author unknown, 'Lord Claud Hamilton', http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lord_Claud_Hamilton_(1843-1925) ((accessed on November 14, 2012).
[400] Claud Hamilton, *Hansard*, March 4, 1879.
[401] T.J. Spinner, 'George Goschen', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2048/view/article/33478 (accessed on November 14, 2012).

when the topic was explored, he raised an expressive question: was it 'safe for the House or the country at this time of day to cast its sword into the scale of democracy?' He himself answered first: 'He did not think it was'.[403] According to both Hamilton and Goschen, whether or not the British government was to be democratic, was still a choice. If now a new Reform Act was passed, this might turn out to be the definite step towards a democratic form of rule. Any further change in the franchise was therefore a delicate matter. Hence, 'democracy' was still a controversial concept with distinct negative connotations.

Such rhetoric reminds us of the arguments made earlier, most often in the 1866-7 debates. It implied that the House still had the choice whether or not to proceed towards a democracy: passing a next reform bill would open the way, but rejecting it would halt the process. Democracy was thus not an inevitable force, and could still be stopped. But different from 1866-7, between 1878 and 1882 more MP's had the idea that they had proceeded further, and were closer to a democracy than before. That is why Charles Warton (barrister and Conservative MP)[404] said in 1881 that now was 'a time when they were trembling on the brink of a democracy.'[405] With other words, they were very close to becoming a democracy. He perceived it as a frightening prospective: they were 'trembling'. Only one small push was enough to fall off the brink, and into the hands of the democracy. A new Reform Act could exactly be such a decisive push.

This idea that 'democracy' was something of the imminent future was shared by Frederick Inderwick (lawyer and Liberal MP)[406]. In 1883, he responded to a distinct argument that some MP's had made to defend female suffrage. Lord Beaconsfield, for one, had said that 'female suffrage is the best, if not the only, effectual barrier to an ever-increasing Democracy'.[407] This argument was founded on a fallacy, Inderwick contended. The tendency of the franchise was only downwards – 'it cannot be raised' – and eventually it would get so low that 'men of bad and revolutionary passions' would obtain the vote. Admitting women to the suffrage, though based on the same conditions, would not change anything, Inderwick argued: this would only add 'the bad passions of a low class of women'.[408] The best thing

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[402] George Goschen already sat in the House of Commons since 1863, but had not before said the word 'democracy' at all. Although he had voted in favour of the Second Reform Bill in 1867, he became a fierce opponent of further parliamentary reform after 1878, and frequently applied the slogan of 'democracy'.
[403] George Goschen, *Hansard,* February 22, 1878.
[404] Author unknown, 'Charles Warton', http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Warton (accessed on November 14, 2012).
[405] Charles Warton, *Hansard,* March 30, 1881.
[406] J.B. Atlay, 'Frederick Inderwick', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography,* http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2048/view/article/34097 (accessed on November 14, 2012).
[407] Found in a reference by Frederick Inderwick, *Hansard,* July 6, 1883.
[408] Frederick Inderwick, *Hansard,* July 6, 1883.

they could do, thus, to halt the 'ever-increasing democracy', was to stop any lowering of the franchise. No further extensions to men, or to women, he suggested. Democracy was a process that should now be stopped.

7.3 The Third Reform Act Debates (1884-1885)

7.3.1 Reforms of Gladstone (1883-1885)

When Gladstone led his second cabinet (1880-1885), he had two leading reform priorities: dealing with electoral corruption and settling household franchise in the counties. The former aim was settled in 1883, when the government succeeded in passing its Corrupt and Illegal Practices Bill.[409] Despite the introduction of the secret ballot, eleven years before, electoral malpractices continued to exist. Additional measures were therefore taken. By criminalizing attempts to bribe or intimidate voters, and standardizing the amounts that could be spent on election expenses, Gladstone's cabinet hoped to stop corruption. Candidates should now publish their campaign expenses and could only employ one paid election official. Consequently, campaigns came to depend more on volunteers, and voting increasingly became an individual act of choice and conscience.[410]

The second important step towards reform taken by this cabinet followed in the next year: 1884. In this year a major Third Reform Act was proposed. The reason that Gladstone took four years to come up with this, was the silent agreement that, after a Reform Act, a parliamentary dissolution and a general election should soon follow. [411] Had they proposed their reform as soon as 1880, then Gladstone's second ministry would only have lasted shortly. Therefore the cabinet chose to wait. But when in the autumn of 1883 Radicals throughout the country organized large meetings, to demand the county suffrage, and the trade unions urged Gladstone for the same thing, his cabinet undertook action.

After more than a decade of repeated debates on reform, finally the government itself proposed a bill that would establish household suffrage in the counties. This measure was, peculiarly – very different from all the previous parliamentary reform measures – not the result of a politicized debate, nor the outcome of party political considerations. The settlement was instead the result of inter-party negotiations, between the leaders of both the Conservative and the Liberal party. They came together to agree on compromise changes with mutual

[409] Machin, *The Rise of Democracy in Britain,* 90.
[410] Ibidem, 93.
[411] Ibidem.

advantage in mind. Neither the masses nor the parliament brought about reform this time: agreement was reached behind the closed doors of statesmen's houses.

Both the outlines and the details of the Third Reform Act had been discussed between the party leaders before they introduced it to parliament. Consequently, under increasing party discipline, the opposition to reform in the Commons had declined to a minimum. Although some parliamentary quarrels on *details* continued to exist, the *principle* of reform was trusted by a broad majority in the House. Different from the First and Second, this Third Reform Act was primarily based on consensus.

7.3.2 Two opponents left

When the measure was discussed in the Commons, the frequency of the word 'democracy' in the Hansard records rose again. With 59 times in one year, it topped any previous year since 1867. However, the use of democracy as a negative slogan, applied *against* reform, had almost completely disappeared. The narrative had lost most of its supporters; only the handful of MP's that still opposed the *principle* of further enfranchisement maintained the frame of 'democracy' as a word of warning. In fact, in 1884, only two Members of the House protested against the imminent reform bill for the reason it would establish a democratic form of government. With the concept of 'democracy' they solely tried to prevent the threat named democracy. Those two members were Charles Newdegate and Robert Peel.

Charles Newdegate, the persistent anti-reformist Conservative, still sat in the House and was still principally opposed to any further step towards 'democracy'. He assailed the Prime Minister, William Gladstone, because his speech about reform 'was based upon Democratic principles': doctrines that Newdegate strongly disputed.[412] With these 'democratic principles' he mainly referred to Gladstone's portrayal of the suffrage as a 'natural right'. This was a false dogma, in Newdegate's view: the vote was not a right at all; instead it was a 'trust', which should only be given to respectable and capable men, who were certainly fit to exercise it. In the past twenty years, this idea of the 'right to vote' had pervaded the Commons, and the wise and just words of the late Lord Palmerston[413] were forgotten.[414]

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[412] Charles Newdegate, *Hansard*, May 1, 1884.

[413] Lord Palmerston was a late statesmen, who as a Prime Minister in the 1860s had blocked parliamentary reform. He had passed away in 1865, opening the way to the Second Reform Act. For more information read: D. Steele, 'Henry John Temple', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*,http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2048/view/article/27112 (accessed on November 14, 2012).

[414] Charles Newdegate, *Hansard*, May 1, 1884.

Quite interestingly: this charge of 'democratic' principles was repeatedly alternated in the rest of Newdegate's speech with attacks on the principle of 'equality'.[415] They took turns as if they meant the same. We can conclude, thus, that the two concepts had a similar meaning and value to him. Apparently, 'democracy' and 'equality' had a close connection in a semantic web: they were quite interchangeable. Hence, the concept of 'equality' had a negative meaning to him as well: it implied 'uniformity' and would bring 'a dead level to the country.[416] Perhaps Newdegate reasoned that if the charge of 'democracy' had lost its frightening effects, maybe 'equality' had not. He used both words as weapons to refute Gladstone's plans.

These remarks on 'democratic' and 'equality' principles were followed by a small meta-discussion, when Newdegate stated defiantly that 'if such a change of the principle of equality was to be observed, it would involve a *revolution*.' Gladstone stood up, and responded by shouting 'No, no!'. He objected to the use of the term 'revolution'. The Hansard recorded Gladstone saying: 'Perhaps, when he [Newdegate] next addressed the House, he might coin some new word to convey his meaning.'[417] In 1884, it was all very well to be named 'democratic', or to be charged with having 'principles of equality', but to suggest a 'revolution' would follow, was one step too far. This is where Gladstone drew the line. Newdegate then rephrased his words and said: 'The system that would then exist would approach very nearly to that of equal electoral districts, and would be another step in the direction of Democracy.'

Both the parliamentary mastodons, Gladstone and Newdegate, had sat in the House for many years; respectively from 1832 and 1843. The latter used this experience against the former. In 1884, Newdegate looked back on previous decades and argued that 'he remembered the Prime Minister when he was a very different politician.' In previous years, Gladstone had 'eulogized the character and conduct of the House of Commons as it existed between 1832, when the first Reform Bill was passed, and 1852'. Gladstone had even written that 'after 1852', there had been 'a deterioration'. Newdegate then asked Gladstone whether 'any improvement had taken place since 1867?'.[418] He himself thought not. If the 'character and conduct' of the Commons had been optimal between 1832 and 1852, and 1867 had not been an improvement, why enfranchise even more people now? Why keep changing the composition of the House, if it had only been for the worse?

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[415] Charles Newdegate, *Hansard*, May 1, 1884.
[416] The remark of a 'dead level' was made by Charles Warton, June 19, 1884
[417] Charles Newdegate, *Hansard*, May 1, 1884.
[418] Charles Newdegate, *Hansard*, May 1, 1884.

The second principal opponent to reform and democracy was Robert Peel (baronet, son of former Prime Minister Peel (1788-1850), and Liberal Conservative MP)[419]. Different from Newdegate, he had voted in favour of reform in 1867. The measure now proposed, however, went too far for him. In his own words: 'I believe the measure of the Government will subvert the existing order of things, and therefore it cannot add to the welfare, the happiness, or the prosperity of our country.' As many opponents of reform had done in 1867, now seventeen years later, Peel came up with the argument of the Constitution. The British constitution was very complicated, he argued, it was 'perhaps, the most complicated [piece of machinery] the world has ever seen'.[420] Therefore it should not be impaired in any way.

One of the greatest writers – he said not whom he meant – supported this statement, Peel argued. This author had supposedly proven that 'Happy and well-governed are those States where the middle part is strong and the extremes weak'. This was exactly the case in the current constitution: Great-Britain had a mixed system with a fair balance. The equilibrium was threatened, however, by the Third Reform Bill of 1884. As Peel explained: 'If you unduly strengthen the *extremes*, whether in the direction of an Aristocracy or a Democracy, you will, in my opinion, weaken the leading merits of our Constitution'.[421] Democracy was thus an extreme direction, to which reform would lead.

7.3.3 Balanced, wise, and just

The exact opposite argument was made by Blennerhasset, who defended the reform bill with the use of the same slogan. He emphasized that the future form of British government should include *all the classes*, and that no majority should suppress any minority in the House. According to him, that was the 'widest principle of democracy'.[422] Democracy was the rule of all the people, and not the domination of one class. This Reform Bill was a step in the right direction, Blennerhassett suggested. It was, in his own words, 'the grandest measure of Reform that was ever submitted to Parliament'. He defended it fiercely: this reform was truly 'democratic', for it would *maintain the balance* in society.[423] Therefore, they should vote in favour. Democracy was again used as a slogan, but now with a clear positive value: in favour of reform.

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[419] G.C. Boase, 'Robert Peel', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2048/view/article/21765 (accessed on November 14, 2012).
[420] Robert Peel, *Hansard*, March 31, 1884.
[421] Robert Peel, *Hansard*, March 31, 1884.
[422] Rowland Blennerhassett, *Hansard*, March 3, 1884.
[423] Rowland Blennerhassett, *Hansard*, March 3, 1884.

In 1885, when the county franchise extension was passed, and the Commons discussed the expected redistribution of parliamentary seats, John Lubbock (banker, scientific writer and Liberal MP)[424] emphasized the benefits of democracy as well: it seemed that 'government of *the people, for the people, and by the people*, was so obviously *wise and just* that it must almost of necessity work well in any intelligent community'. Nevertheless, he still worried about the possible failure of democracy: the form of government they were now approaching, or had perhaps already approached. He did not explicate his views on this matter very clearly. He concluded from his history books that democracy had 'often failed in the past': 'Why in State after State had power so often swung from one extreme to the other—from the tyrant to the demagogue, and back again from the demagogue to the tyrant?'[425] The past proved democracy's flaws: what would it bring to modern Britain?

The true reason for the failures of democracy in the past was, Lubbock held, 'the faulty manner in which the principle had been applied'. In fact, he argued, 'there had never yet been true representation on a large scale'. Thus, to function properly, the democratic principle should yield a 'true representation' of the people, yet no modern country had ever achieved this. Thus, nothing was wrong with the *principle* of democracy; only with its *practical* implementation. Great-Britain should now do better, he suggested. A solution for this problem, however, he did not give.

Lubbock only mentioned that the democratic systems that had been tried had given 'undue power to extreme men'. They left 'those of *moderate* views, who generally constituted the great *majority*, almost unrepresented and practically powerless.'[426] This statement forms an interesting deviation of the previous argument, which held that exactly *because* democracy was essentially 'majority rule', demagogues or tyrants were elected. The majority chose them. Democracy used to be the 'tyranny of the majority'. But now, Lubbock attested that 'the great majority' held 'moderate views'. This part of the population would even be 'almost unrepresented and practically powerless'. This is an interesting line of reasoning: as if only the 'system' and not the 'majority' was to blame for the election of tyrants. It seems as if Lubbock, above all, tried to criticize previous democratic systems, without disparaging the people.

[424] T.L. Alborn, 'John Lubbock', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2048/view/article/34618 (accessed on November 14, 2012).
[425] John Lubbock, *Hansard*, March 2, 1885.
[426] John Lubbock, *Hansard*, March 2, 1885.

8. THE SECOND MEANING MAINTAINED: SYNONYM OF 'THE PEOPLE' (1878-1885)

8.1 Contested meaning and value (1878-1883)

Besides the declining use of 'democracy' as a distant form of government, the narrative of 'the democracy', as the synonym of 'the people' continued to exist, before and during the Third Reform Act debates. In many speeches, though, this concept was applied in a similar *negative* way: to state that 'the democracy' would obtain – or had already obtained – an important amount of political influence. As in the 1870s, which was analysed in chapter 6.2, there was disagreement on the desirability of this development: was democracy good for legislation? Was the changed relationship between politics and the people an improvement? Very different from the early 1870s though, from 1878 on, critique was alternated with acceptance, and sometimes even with praise. The political innovations were increasingly accredited. In the next two paragraphs it is explicated how the new role of 'the democracy' was discussed, before and during the Third Reform Act debates.

8.1.1 Reform will change representation

In the years 1878 to 1883 the concept of 'democracy' occurred most often in debates in which a next reform bill was contemplated. Now it was not only said that further parliamentary reform would lead to a 'democracy', and that this would be undesirable, but instead a thorough argument was given to deprecate the imminent changes to the character of politics. More specifically: it was maintained that further reform would change the relationship between parliament and the people.

Charles Legard (baron and Conservative MP)[427] was one of the important actors, who in 1879 summed up his objections. His main argument was based on the relationship between the Member of Parliament and the voter: 'I conclude what the Radical Reformer really desires eventually to effect is a direct effectual Representative of the people; representing them not as a delegate commissioned to take care of their interests, but as a deputy appointed to speak their will.'[428] For Legard, the parliamentarian should have the task to represent the people indirectly, and to take care of their interests. But increasingly, the gap was shrinking, and he

[427] Author unknown, 'Scarborough', http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scarborough_%28UK_Parliament_constituency%29 (accessed on November 14, 2012).
[428] Charles Legard, *Hansard,* March 4, 1879.

feared that politicians would act as 'deputies', who mirrored the people's voice directly. This new development threatened the traditional view on representation.

Legard's view of the contemporary form of government was quite traditional. It had long not been said[429], but he brought it to the fore again: Great-Britain's constitution was a 'mixed Government' and this should stay this way. They had for centuries had a 'limited Monarchy', with which Legard was satisfied. But now, the 'Radical Reformers' wished to constitute a 'pure democracy'. These two powers were inconsistent with each other. 'A complete and democratic representation, such as the Reformers aim at, cannot exist as part of a mixed Government', he argued.[430] If the Household suffrage would be extended to the counties, this would mean a decisive change in the Constitution. Taking this step would establish a complete democracy: a dangerous, difficult and unprofitable operation.

Two MP's responded to Legard's speech, though not in terms of 'democracy'. Robert Lowe came in to approve the arguments that were brought in, which proved 'that there ought to be no lowering of the franchise',[431] and George Morgan stepped up, to oppose this reasoning. Contrary to Legard and Lowe, Morgan thought that democracy could not be stopped, even if they wanted it. He stated, perhaps ironically or annoyed, that Charles Legard had made a 'very amusing speech'. This may point out that Morgan did not take his arguments very seriously. He then explained why, in his view, Legard's arguments were false. Morgan reminded the House that now 'they had had 10 years' experience under household suffrage, and if a mistake had been made in 1867, they ought to have found it out before this.' [432] If Household Suffrage worked in the boroughs, why not introduce it in the counties? Yet, in this response, Morgan ignored the maxim of 'mixed government', as brought up by Legard.

Three years later, Legard's arguments were echoed again, now by George Goschen. This Liberal MP gave an interesting speech in which he, too, summed up the contemporary fears for political innovation. He said: 'The alarms of hon. Members opposite, he thought, touched both the present and the future. They were afraid for the immediate present that certain dark designs were to be carried out, and they were also afraid for the future. To put those fears into words, their case was this—they seemed to feel that there had been an increased volume of *Democratic movement*. They seemed to fear that the Parliament of the future—the immediate future, one would almost think—would be different from the present House of Commons; that it would abandon the traditions of the past, and that—why he was at

[429] At least not in connection to the concept of 'democracy'.
[430] Charles Legard, *Hansard,* March 4, 1879.
[431] Robert Lowe, *Hansard,* March 4, 1879.
[432] George Morgan, *Hansard,* March 4, 1879.

a loss to conceive, but for some reason or other—there was going to be a kind of *fierce Party spirit*, which was going to *suppress the minority* on every possible occasion.'[433]

To sum it up in 21st century language: according to Goschen, several parliamentarians were afraid for the changes in political culture. They had the idea that the rules of parliament were transforming: traditions were diminishing and party commitment was growing. The main cause of this was the 'democratic movement' which, over the years, had increased rapidly. It was the democracy, the increased influence of the people into parliament, which caused various political innovations. The fear was, thus, not for the unknown, as it had been in 1867, but exactly for the changes that were now coming into effect. New innovations were judged with suspicion. What would be the consequences in the long run? An insecure, negative outlook dominated their perspective.

8.1.2 Or had change already come?

Goschen thus clearly pointed out that most of the political innovations, which Legard still feared for the future, had in fact already taken place. The increased involvement of 'the democracy' into politics had changed the character of representation: it was now no longer a prospect for the future. Several members in the House made similar remarks. Stanley Leighton (antiquary and Conservative MP)[434], for example, stated in 1882 too that 'they approached to democracy'. And he, too, did not expect very positive effects: 'did any one suppose that our political conscience would be purer, our political methods less violent, our political partizanship less extreme?'[435] British politics were changing, he felt: the traditional methods and individual conscience were already undermined. This change was again connected with the constitutional changes of 1867 and the rise of 'the democracy'.

To explain how this change actually functioned, Leonard Courtney (baron, journalist and Liberal MP)[436] cited a self-proclaimed 'democratic representative', who had said, 'as an illustration of the way in which the influences of the people outside were growing', that 'the strongest Members in that House altered or suppressed their opinion, on the ground that the masses of the people were against them.'[437] In recent years the people, outside of parliament, had interfered increasingly with parliament's decisions. Now 'the masses' engaged in political

[433] George Goschen, *Hansard,* November 1, 1882.
[434] F.G. Kenyon, 'Stanley Leighton', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography,* http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2048/view/article/34484 (accessed on November 14, 2012).
[435] Stanley Leighton, *Hansard,* May 1, 1882.
[436] H.C.G. Matthew, 'Leonard Courtney', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography,* http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2048/view/article/32589 (accessed on November 14, 2012).
[437] Leonard Courtney, *Hansard,* March 4, 1879.

debate, helped shape public opinion, and forced their opinions on the Members of the House. It was this latter point that frightened Courtney mostly: 'the dependence of hon. Members upon the feelings of the people was growing rapidly, and was undermining their independence of thought'.[438] It was out of fear for the masses that MP's changed their behaviour in the House. This was the political innovation that the democracy had brought.

The Liberal Courtney himself regretted this development, and criticized the Conservative party for assenting to this change. He stated polemically that 'the policy of the Tory party' formed 'the triumph of unchecked Democracy', for they reflected directly 'the prejudices and the passions as well as the moderation and reason of the nation'. According to Courtney, the Conservative party, who at the time had a majority in the House, was guilty of democratic policies. The Tories were no longer the independent representatives of the people but had changed into the dumb spokesmen of the masses. Their role was degraded to the voice, not the mind, of the public. Democracy thus maintained its negative meaning. It stood for the acceptance of the new relationship between parliament and people.

The idea that the relationship between parliament and the people had indeed changed, was shared by Charles Warton. In an 1882 debate, he mentioned that 'the right hon. Gentleman must feel that if he did not comply with the wishes of the Democracy, he would be devoured, like Antæus, by his own dogs.'[439] In other words, he said that it was logical if Members felt they should listen to the 'wishes of the Democracy' – the desires of the people – for if they did not, they would be 'devoured' by public opinion.[440] This statement tells us most, probably, of Warton's own conscience. The influence of extra-parliamentary opinions had risen to unacceptable levels, he implied.

8.1.3 Democracy furthers legislation

One parliamentarian spoke up against these critiques: George Russell (writer and Radical Liberal MP)[441]. He saw in fact an important role for 'the democracy' in the House of Commons. In a speech in 1882, he stated that 'the House of Commons was doomed to a decrepit and inglorious old age if for one moment it lost touch with the *democracy or constituencies or people* of the United Kingdom.'[442] The connection between parliament and the people was thus very important, he emphasized: the link was necessary and should be

[438] Leonard Courtney, *Hansard,* March 4, 1879.
[439] Charles Warton, *Hansard,* November 6, 1882.
[440] Charles Warton, *Hansard,* November 6, 1882.
[441] G.H.L. Le May, 'George Russell', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography,* http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2048/view/article/37925 (accessed on November 14, 2012).
[442] George Russell, *Hansard,* November 9, 1882

strong. The people in the constituencies should be able to trust the British institutions: its 'dignity' and its 'efficiency'.[443] 'The democracy should be in full sympathy and harmony with its Representatives in the House', he said. Only then could the government rule with success. Only then could the House do its work 'as in the past'. It was for this very reason that 'the democracy' was so important to Russell'.[444]

In 1883, Jesse Collings (Radical)[445] gave a speech in which he too praised the role of 'the democracy', with one particular aim: to criticize the government's expenditure. He suggested they should listen better to what 'the modern democracy' wanted. What did the people desire? An 'audience of the working classes' would not get excited of spending on Royal Parks and Palaces, nor of a 'gunpowder and glory' policy. Fewer expenses should therefore be made in the Navy, the Army and the Civil Service. Instead, this money should be spent on 'the people' themselves: the state could help make their lives 'richer and fuller'. The modern democracy insisted namely 'upon a certain amount of rest and enjoyment, and […] the State should help them in that matter'.[446] More expenditure to social improvement was legitimate, Collings argued, for the simple reason that this was what 'the modern democracy' desired.

Directly opposite to Collings stood Donald Currie (shipowner and Liberal MP)[447]. Although he uttered them more than a year later, his arguments clearly contrast with the speech mentioned above. According to Currie the country needed not cuts but, instead, a large increased expenditure on the Navy. Only then could the British colonies be defended. Colling's argument that 'the Democracy' did not want this, or the idea that the people were 'indifferent', was invalid. Currie had reasons to believe otherwise. He argued that now 'the Democracy' was 'awakening to the glorious inheritance' they had in the colonies.[448] The people thus in fact desired extra expenditure themselves! He tried to prove this point by reading out a letter he had received from a 'working man', who supported extra expenditure on the Navy.

The interesting thing occurring here, is the fact that both politicians, both Collings and Currie, looked towards 'the democracy' (whatever its exact meaning: in any case large parts of the population) as a way to *legitimate* their proposals. If the people wanted it, they should

[443] George Russell, *Hansard,* November 9, 1882.
[444] George Russell, *Hansard,* November 9, 1882.
[445] A.W. Ashby, 'Jesse Collings', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography,* http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2048/view/article/32500 (accessed on November 14, 2012).
[446] Jesse Collings, *Hansard,* April 6, 1883.
[447] A. Porter, 'Donald Currie', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography,* http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2048/view/article/32671 (accessed on November 14, 2012).
[448] Donald Currie, *Hansard,* December 2, 1884

do it. This was a new way of approaching politics. The new conflict of opinion was not based on difference in principles, but on different views on the people's desires. Both politicians now argued that *they* knew best what 'the democracy' wanted. Nevertheless, the question does remain whether Collings or Currie truly believed they knew what the democracy desired, or whether it was just a clever strategic argument in political debate. Nevertheless, the fact *that* it came to be used says a lot about the changed value of the concept of 'democracy'.

Hence, from about 1878, more Liberal parliamentarians came to acknowledge the fact that 'the democracy' had received a distinctive say in politics. Now the suffrage had been extended, 'the people' were a power to deal with. And whether they liked it or not, the form of representation had changed. Acknowledgement not yet meant acceptance, but certainly the former cleared the way for the latter. This acknowledgement, however, led first to another discussion: whether the political innovations, which had already taken place, had made an improvement or not. If 'the democracy' now ruled Great-Britain, what did this mean for legislation?

Samuel Laing undoubtedly thought the effects had been positive. Ten years after 1867 he used 'democracy' – quite suddenly – in a very positive way: to portray the advantages of a widened suffrage. Or at least, to point out that the often repeated dangers and disadvantages of democracy had no basis in reality. Laing, for example, praised the United States as an example: this democracy, with its universal suffrage, had kept the peace, disbanded its army and kept up the national credit. The extended suffrage had added much value, he argued. It had changed Americans into 'an eminently law-abiding people', while in France, it had 'sobered and improved the French character'.[449] Interestingly, Laing first discussed 'democracy' as something occurring in other countries, before touching upon the developments in Britain.

After that, Laing argued that 'we must look at home to try and predict what would be the effect of that great extension of the suffrage which so alarmed the right hon. Gentlemen [Robert Lowe], but which, after all had, to a great extent, *already taken place*'. The first major suffrage extension had indeed already passed in 1867. While Lowe had said, back then, that this would yield 'all sorts of horrible things', according to Laing it had been a great success. Ten years after 1867, he responded to Lowe, and said that he wished to know 'where were the political, social, and financial atrocities' for which they had been warned. [450]

[449] Samuel Laing, *Hansard*, February 22, 1878.
[450] Samuel Laing, *Hansard*, February 22, 1878.

Robert Lowe's visions of the rule of the 'ignorant democracy' had, admittedly, made a 'plausible theory' at the time, but the practice of the last ten years had proven him wrong. The widening of the suffrage had not transformed the government into the unstable rule of 'popular passion or delusion', but instead, as Laing said, had 'greatly aided legislation'.[451] According to him, the predictions of democracy's effects 'might have been true of ancient Rome or mediaeval Venice', but in contemporary Britain, suffrage extension proved a safe measure. The people were ready for it, and even in foreign policy, 'the wisdom of the many' saved them 'from the folly of the few'.[452]

Although Laing admitted that the electoral changes had been 'democratic', he did not conclude literally this had changed the current form of government into a 'democracy'. Although the shift had 'to a great extent' already taken place, there were still some additional changes to be made. A next reform bill could make the final adjustments, he suggested: then they could follow the great democratic examples of France and America. This interpretation, that a major transformation had already taken place, was shared by Peter Rylands (steel manufacturer and independent Radical MP)[453], who stated that 1867 had indeed transformed the 'Constitution of this Kingdom'. 'The change […] had taken place'. [454]

On the other hand, though, Rylands emphasized that the actual effects on the government had been minor. Although the constitution had changed, the people in government had not. But he was sure 'the time would come when […] they would have a very strong *element of democracy* represented upon the Government Bench.'[455] Thus, in 1879, this MP felt that the influence of democracy had not yet reached its potential limits. The Second Reform Act, however, had made this possible. As the influence of the people, 'the democracy', was growing, their participation in government was only a matter of time. The conditions for a democratic government were already there.

8.1.4 Or did the tyranny rule?

George Goschen was not convinced of the advantages of the latest suffrage extension that Laing and Rylands defended, but was willing to admit that not 'any of the legislation of the last 10 years had been of a terrible character'.[456] This was, however, only due to the fact no

[451] Samuel Laing, *Hansard*, February 22, 1878.
[452] Samuel Laing, *Hansard*, February 22, 1878.
[453] W.F. Rae, 'Peter Rylands', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2048/view/article/24417 (accessed on November 14, 2012).
[454] Peter Rylands, *Hansard*, February 20, 1879.
[455] Peter Rylands, *Hansard*, February 20, 1879.
[456] George Goschen, *Hansard*, February 22, 1878.

democratic demands had been made. Not yet, in any case, for Goschen thought it still was too early to draw any conclusions. He had seen 'no proof yet, that [the House] would be able to resist and that it was not *already under the strong influence* of numbers'. For this reason, it was too early to pass a next reform bill: the extension of the franchise to the counties had to wait. 'We travelled fast in these days', Goschen argued, 'but 10 years was a short time to allow to elapse between one great Reform Bill and another'.[457]

Furthermore, Goschen was not satisfied with the political effects of the previous Bill. It was said the Act of 1867 was safe, for 'even that democratic measure resulted in increasing the power of the Conservative Party', but Goschen perceived things differently: the newly elected Conservatives were 'no longer Conservatives in the old sense'. 'They no longer performed the function which they used to perform – they had not the power of resistance. They showed it in their attitude on great questions, upon which they came more under democratic influence'.[458] The people had thus not become Conservative, Goschen suggested, but instead, the Conservatives had become democratic.

He criticized this development, for if the influence of the people grew, the individual responsibility of parliamentarians was bound to decline. Therefore, he wondered if 'statesmen still [held] their own – against all the gusts of popular opinion and passion?' Goschen felt that the Conservative party not always had the power to 'resist' the voice of the people; a development he deeply regretted. This 'weakening of individual responsibility and of the responsibility of statesmen' was, he claimed, a 'well-known characteristic of democracy'. This democratic element was, he suggested, 'clearly becoming a characteristic of the present time'.[459] Although Goschen did not conclude that Great-Britain was becoming a democracy, he vaguely attested that its essential elements were indeed introduced.

This idea was explicated even more clearly by Leonard Courtney, who concluded from this that they were in 'the middle of a democratic process'. This MP, who opposed any further suffrage extension, reminded the House of previous reform debates, in which 'they were often told that the tide of democracy would erelong come upon them'. But according to him '*it had already come*, and they were floundering in the middle of it'.[460] 'The democracy', Courtney argued, had already taken an undue influence on politics.

The increasing influence of the people on politics had caused severe results for actual policy, he stated. 'What had been the history of legislation and of public opinion during the

[457] George Goschen, *Hansard,* February 22, 1878.
[458] George Goschen, *Hansard,* February 22, 1878.
[459] George Goschen, *Hansard,* February 22, 1878.
[460] Leonard Courtney, *Hansard,* March 8, 1878.

last few years but the history of *government by impulsive, varying, unsteady opinion*? Ever since this Parliament had been called together they had had, time after time, exhibitions of currents of opinion running now in one direction, now in another; not in consequence of the dictates of prudence and reason, but because some *sentiment, feeling, or passion* had for the moment taken possession of the public mind.'[461] Hence, in Courtney's view, the country was already flooded by the tide of democracy; the Commons was ruled by the changing passions of the public mind.

In 1882, when the House considered to close down, by national law, the public houses on Sundays, Charles Warton, too, opposed the bill for its 'democratic' tendencies. According to him, it was tyrannical. He explained his logic, and took Cornwall as an example. He claimed that 'the chances were 999,999 to one against a Cornishman being arrested on Sunday for drunkenness, and this Bill was directed against the one.'[462] With such odds, why should they close *all* the public houses, and take away the free choice of *all* men to visit such a house? The only motive for passing such a measure was that some people wanted others to 'conform to their ideas', he attested critically. The measure would impair individual liberty, and was a typical example of the 'tyranny of people' and 'a gross instance of the tyranny of democracy'.[463] Democracy's rise had caused tyrannical legislation.

8.2 The Third Reform Act Debates (1884-1885)

8.2.1 Already enough democratic influence

In a majority of the speeches of 1884-5, 'democracy' meant not a 'form of government' but was, instead, a synonym for 'the people'[464]. With this definition, it could be used with *both* a negative value, to oppose parliamentary reform, *and* with a positive value, to defend it. This was similar to the meaning in chapter 6.1 (1868-1871). Yet, the way these two groups defined the concept now differed considerably, as we shall see. The few MP's that still opposed the principles of franchise extension defined the concept of 'the democracy' primarily as one class. More specifically: the working class, the urban population, or the industrialized workers. They spoke of 'the democracy' to clarify two things: first that 'the democracy' already had enough influence, and secondly, that the Third Reform Act would be an unfair and unwise decision.

[461] Leonard Courtney, *Hansard*, March 8, 1878.
[462] Charles Warton, *Hansard*, August 12, 1882.
[463] Charles Warton, *Hansard*, August 12, 1882.
[464] See graph 4 in the appendix for an exact overview.

Especially George Goschen's name should be noted. In an effort to oppose the imminent parliamentary reform, he started by assessing the contemporary state of politics, to prove that 'the democracy' already had enough influence. For this purpose, Goschen gave an interesting impression of the way parliament had changed in the last two decades. He responded to Gladstone, who had earlier given *his* thoughts on the parliamentary developments since 1867. The PM had praised the innovations and had argued that 'Parliament had greatly improved, and that there was now more comprehension of *the wants of the people* than there had ever been before.' If this was the case, many Members of the House argued, 'Why not then go further, and enfranchise 2,000,000 more?'[465]

Goschen, on the other hand, concluded that the political innovations had been enough, and should not go further. He also stressed that many results had not been beneficial. In particular, he criticized the shifts in political opinion: 'If Parliament has improved in some senses, are there not *totally different views* prevailing on political questions, some of which might be dangerous to the State? In this House do we not take a totally different view on many questions from that which we took 10 years ago?' [466] Now the 'wants of the people' sounded more clearly in the House, Goschen complained that this was not the best for the general interest. Not all the opinions of 'the people' belonged in parliament: 'dangerous' views should be kept out.

The main problem that Goschen assessed was the increased influence of the people: the rule of 'the democracy'. He criticized the status quo more directly by asking: 'Do we not see that Democracy at every turn is clutching the arm of the Executive power? Do we not see that it is influencing our actions in our Indian Empire, and testing our hold on subject races?' [467] In the last twenty years, the public opinion had increased its grip on the government. Although no working men sat in the government themselves, and only two sat in the Commons, their influence was immense: their voting power resulted in real political leverage.

The political innovations of party organization and professionalization had indeed changed the relationship between politicians and their voters. But Goschen was alone in his criticism. The Hansard recorded him saying: 'We see it in the relation of Members to their constituents. [Cheers] Those cheers come from hon. Gentlemen below the Gangway; they are Democrats, and they know that the measure the House is going to pass is calculated to

[465] George Goschen, *Hansard,* April 7, 1884.
[466] George Goschen, *Hansard,* April 7, 1884.
[467] George Goschen, *Hansard,* April 7, 1884.

strengthen the hands of the Democrats.'[468] These cheers denote how controversial the topic was: while Goschen detested the shrunken gap, other Members literally cheered it. And while for Goschen, 'Democrat' still bore negative connotations, for other Members, it became a proud party name. These Radical politicians, who sat 'below the gangway', felt they represented the 'democracy'.[469] For them, to be called a 'democrat' was no longer an insult.

Besides mentioning the Radicals, Goschen in particular attacked the Conservative party, for it was becoming more and more democratic. The change had started in 1867, when the Second Reform Act was passed. That act was 'the work of a Conservative government', Goschen explained, and what followed was the birth of something new: 'the Conservative working man'. Although 'he votes for Conservative men', 'he coerces Conservative Members in a democratic direction', Goschen maintained. Conservatism had thus become democratic; by a process they had started themselves. 'The whole attitude of the Conservative Party has been entirely changed, as it was certain to be, by the Act of 1867'.[470]

The result of this was that the Conservative MP's felt 'much more' the contact of democracy, Goschen claimed. And the same could be said of the Liberal Party. Members of both sides had 'lost the power of resistance to principles', and now only rivalled with each other in the competition for votes. Goschen described contemporary political debate in this way: 'They rather present the attitude of a body of rival practitioners, who are prepared to *carry out the will of the people* in competition with politicians on this side who advocate precisely the same principles.'[471] Politicians only battled to carry out the will of the people. No clear distinctions on principle were left. The main cause of this political innovation was 'democracy'. 'Since the Reform Bill of 1867 democracy has been making tremendous strides on both sides of the House', Goschen said. With this conclusion, he certainly had a point. But his resistance was outdated, and caught up by reality. Therefore, he stood alone: it made him a voice crying in the wilderness.

8.2.2 Goschen's last efforts

After having explained why the 'democracy' already had enough influence on national politics, Goschen reflected on the probable effects of the imminent franchise extension. In his speeches, he regularly mentioned 'the democracy', which it would enfranchise: or more specifically, the '*urban democracy*'. This he explained as the '*industrial workers'*: they would

[468] George Goschen, *Hansard,* April 7, 1884.
[469] George Goschen, *Hansard,* April 7, 1884.
[470] George Goschen, *Hansard,* March 3, 1884.
[471]George Goschen, *Hansard,* April 7, 1884.

benefit most from the suffrage extension in the counties: not the agricultural labourers. According to Goschen, the bill would cause an 'entire transfer of political power from an agricultural and farm class to the *urban class*'.[472] The cause of this was the urbanization and industrialization of the counties: if household suffrage was attained here, then the 'agricultural constituents' would be entirely outvoted, Goschen claimed. The bill would remove the balance between rural and urban areas, causing industrial workers to rule the country. All other interests would then be ignored.

Further in the speech, Goschen repeated this statement, but was met with a response from fellow MP's, which was noted in the Hansard Records. He said: 'An election on the new franchise, as I can conclusively prove, will immensely add to the strength of the urban democracy—[Cheers]— […]'[473] While he himself tried to *criticize* the 'new franchise' with the argument it would 'add to the strength of the urban democracy', some other MP's in the House *praised* such an outcome. They cheered. The point that essentially divided these two camps was a difference of opinion on the value of democracy. For Goschen, the concept meant, above all, 'majority rule'. He feared that, if 'the democracy' was strengthened even further, the 'principle of protecting minorities' would be lost.[474] Minorities would then be trampled upon. For the cheering members, on the other hand, the inclusion of 'the democracy' seemed only fair: it would not transfer power but establish a true mirror of public opinion in the country.

The different interpretation of this essential concept was once explained by Goschen himself, in second-order language. He remarked: 'We are perfectly agreed as to its effect; but there is this great difference between us—that what is their hope is my fear.' While Radical MP's wanted even more influence of 'the people', he himself thought they had already more than enough. While they hoped for further franchise extensions, he feared it. The reason for this stance was not – if we believe his own words – that he distrusted the people ('That is not so'). He, in fact, remarked that he 'would gladly see the enfranchisement of large additional numbers'. The main reason for opposing this reform bill was the fear that then 'these hon. Members', these 'democrats', would obtain a 'vast majority in the House'. Then the 'preponderating power' would be given to one particular class.[475] And this was not how Goschen wanted the House to look like: above all, he wanted to maintain the class balance.

[472] George Goschen, *Hansard,* April 7, 1884.
[473] George Goschen, *Hansard,* April 7, 1884.
[474] George Goschen, *Hansard,* April 7, 1884.
[475] George Goschen, *Hansard,* April 7, 1884.

If we compare this line of reasoning with the speeches opposing reform of 1866-7, we can conclude that the argument (suffrage extension = democracy = one class rule) had remained the same. But in the seventeen years that had passed, an important element had changed. Now, in 1884, Goschen did not attest that the measure would create a democratic *form of government*: he spoke not of 'democracy' as an imminent political system. Instead, he only named 'the democracy' to *designate* the working classes. Apparently, the concept of 'democracy' as a fearsome *system* had lost much of its applicability; in a time when reformist politicians proudly stated they were 'democrats'. For them, the word 'the democracy' carried a positive value: increasingly, MP's stated they represented 'the democracy'. Hence, the conventional meaning of the concept was no longer solely negative. This process diminished the pejorative force it once carried.

8.2.3 A safe, fair, and wise reform

The fact that only a few MP's opposed the bill on principal grounds and with the use of the word *'democracy'* was also noted in the Commons. John O'Connor Power (barrister and Irish Parliamentary Party MP)[476], for example, portrayed the state of affairs quite comically, by recollecting a familiar metaphor. He said: '[Goschen] had warned them against moral cowardice and swimming with the stream; but he did not think that on this occasion the right hon. Gentleman showed so much courage in not swimming with the stream. To use another metaphor, it seemed to him that the right hon. Gentleman had taken the *desperate resolve* of jumping overboard, hoping that he could buffet the waves of Democracy *by himself alone*.'[477] The old metaphor of the 'democratic tide' or the 'democratic wave' was now ridiculed: it had definitely lost its force.

Power seemed to enjoy these maritime metaphors, for he continued his speech by stating that he 'looked upon every proposal of this kind as an effort made by a wise and far-seeing statesman to guide the ship of State over the turbid waters, and to allow it to pass along on its course into a harbour of refuge. […] He would sympathize with the right hon. Gentleman thoroughly in not going with the stream when it was going in the wrong direction; but he regretted that the right hon. Gentleman occupied the *peculiar and unique position* of being directly and emphatically opposed to the principle of the Bill. *If there was danger to the State* by this increase of political power being placed in the hands of the people, that argument

[476] Author unknown, 'John O'Connor Power', http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_O%27Connor_Power (accessed on November 14, 2012).
[477] John O'Connor Power, *Hansard,* April 7, 1884.

would more properly have come from the Leader of the Opposition.'[478] From this quote we learn both that Power himself saw no danger in the increased power of 'the people', and, perhaps more interestingly: that Goschen now occupied a 'peculiar and unique position'. A large majority of parliamentarians accepted the democratic principles; but Goschen stood alone.

That now in 1884, the fear for the democracy had faded, was confirmed by William Willis (barrister, judge and Liberal MP)[479]. In November of that year he argued that 'there was no fear now of the democracy being led by demagogues.' From this he concluded that the next important reform question, the redistribution of seats in the Commons, 'might with perfect safety be left to settle itself after the 2,000,000 had been enfranchised'.[480] First the suffrage should be extended in the counties, and after that the new House could decide on an eventual redistribution. This was a safe procedure, and no one should be worried of 'the democracy'. The fact that Willis still emphasized this aloud in the House, however, does indicate that this was not a view shared by everyone. It was more a reassurance than a doctrine.

In a similar way, Henry James, also in favour of the reform measure, tried to take away eventual worries about democracy's rise. James also made clear that 'democracy' should not frighten anyone now. He gave one reason: democracy was not something of the rural, but instead, of the urban areas. And now that the counties would receive the household suffrage, the rural element, and not the (democratic) urban part, would be strengthened. While Goschen had denied this distinction, James kept it up. 'This Democracy', he argued, 'is far more strongly developed among the urban than among the rural populations'.[481] Here, apparently, 'democracy' meant neither a form of government, nor the population itself, but something that could 'develop among' the people. Perhaps it referred to the 'industrialization' or to 'political Radicalism': elements particularly present in urban areas. Of James' exact meaning, though, we cannot be too sure.

Perhaps a contribution made by James Picton (author and Liberal MP)[482] might help us to refine our understanding of the contemporary meaning. Picton made an interesting distinction in the meaning of 'the democracy' in 1885, when he argued that 'the democracy'

[478] John O'Connor Power, *Hansard*, April 7, 1884.
[479] J.B. Atlay, 'William Willis', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2048/view/article/36936 (accessed on November 14, 2012).
[480] William Willis, *Hansard*, November 7, 1884.
[481] Henry James, *Hansard*, April 7, 1884.
[482] S.C. Orchard, 'James Picton', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2048/view/article/35527 (accessed on November 14, 2012).

were not in favour of war. It was 'foolish to suppose' this, he stated, and said that: 'it might be true that the idlers at the shop windows, who gazed at a senseless picture of a military square fighting against Arabs, were in favour of war, or that the loungers in the music halls, echoing sanguinary choruses, were eager for war; but *the ordinary democracy*—the democracy of *organized industry*—were impatient of war, and disgusted also.'[483] Thus, a distinction was made between 'the ordinary democracy', people who worked in 'organized industry', and others: 'idlers' and 'loungers': people who did not work. The activity of labour was thus an essential factor in the meaning of 'the democracy'.

As the quotes in this paragraph demonstrate, the parliamentarians in favour of reform used the concept of 'the democracy' primarily as a *response* to its critics. They tried to explain that 'the democracy' was fit to receive to vote, and that no dangers would follow from enfranchising them. In a few speeches, though, reformist MP's took an active – instead of a reactive – stance: Stephen-Williamson (owner shipping company and Liberal MP)[484], for example, tried to emphasize the need and the benefits of the measure, by using the word 'democracy'. According to him, 'the Democracy of this country' needed 'strengthening and invigorating'. A 'more resolute Democracy' was necessary, for one particular reason: 'to demand from this House a more adequate and business-like concern for the many social questions that demanded attention.'[485] If 'the democracy' became stronger in the House, the many social questions in the country could finally be properly addressed.

9. A THIRD MEANING EMERGED: CURRENT FORM OF GOVERNMENT (1885-1886)

9.1 After the Third Reform Act

In December 1884 the Third Reform Act was accepted by a majority in the House of Commons. It added over two million men to the electorate: now all male householders in both counties and boroughs could register to vote – at least if they met the residence requirement of one year. Within less than twenty years, the ratio of adult male voters had developed from 1 in 3 (1869) to 2 in 3 (1885).[486] Electoral bribery had been tackled, electoral districts had been equalized, and – perhaps most importantly – the default power of the landed political class,

[483] James Picton, *Hansard,* February 23, 1885.
[484] Author unknown, 'Stephen Williamson', http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stephen_Williamson (accessed on November 14, 2012).
[485] Stephen Williamson, *Hansard,* April 7, 1884.
[486] Cook, *The Routledge Companion*, 60.

via a vast number of seats in the Commons, had now finally been broken.[487] An enormous step towards democracy was made; as historians now agree.

But how was this step perceived in that time, in the House of Commons itself? What was the meaning and the value of 'democracy' *after* the Third Reform Act? To find out, let us look closer at the debates of the year 1886. This year is particularly interesting because of the high frequency of 'democracy': in 1886 it occurred 156 times. One year before, it had only been said 26 times. In the entire period under study, only the year 1866 could top that number. How can we explain this sudden increase? The answer lies in a new reform measure, which however, had nothing to do with extension of the franchise. The subject that excited so much talk of 'democracy' was the proposal for Irish Home Rule.[488]

Besides parliamentary reform in Britain, the issue of Home Rule in Ireland was the second important issue in the nineteenth century. [489] Irish political parties fiercely campaigned for it in the 1870s and 1880s: first the Home Rule League and later the Irish Parliamentary Party. Under growing nationalism, they demanded their own Irish parliament, to exist within the existing British Empire.[490] For long, though, had their demands been futile: within the House of Commons, they could convince no majority in favour of such an extensive constitutional change. However, from 1885, matters were about to change, when the Irish Parliamentary Party won more than fifty additional seats in the Commons.[491]

William Gladstone, Prime Minister in 1886, was persuaded that the Irish 'people' had now definitely pronounced in favour of self-government. The more he read about the subject, the more he convinced himself that the Irish people shared their own national identity, and that this will of 'the people' should not be denied. Home Rule would be a mere natural development of the principle of popular, responsible self-government, an idea so often proclaimed during the parliamentary reform debates.[492] The contemporary policy of coercion seemed immoral, and should therefore be ended. Furthermore, the measure would bring pragmatic benefits: the obstructive Irish Nationalist MP's would be removed from Westminster, and set an example for the success of strong, local bodies, all maintained in the

[487] Machin, *The Rise of Democracy*, 101.
[488] The case that the 'Irish cause' came to be strongly identified with 'democracy' was also made by Eugenio Biagini. For more information read E.F. Biagini, *British Democracy and Irish Nationalism. 1876-1906* (Cambridge 2007).
[489] What follows is a summary of the proposal, the motives, and the counterarguments raised in the debates of 1886, as described by British historian Jonathan Parry. For more information on the principles and arguments read J. Parry, *The Rise and Fall of Liberal Government in Victorian Britain* (London 1993).
[490] Parry, *The Rise and Fall of Liberal Government*, 292.
[491] Ibidem, 295.
[492] Ibidem, 296.

unity of the Empire.[493] A personal motive might have urged Gladstone to swift action: this could be his last service to Great-Britain, before retirement. Most of the proposal, nowadays known as the First Home Rule Bill, he wrote himself. [494]

The measure, again, divided the Liberal Party. Although it appeared in line with some Liberal ideals, it directly contravened other principles: primarily those of national and imperial integration. Besides *principal* issues, the opposition stated that disastrous *practical* consequences would follow. How could a local parliament ensure the liberties of all groups present in the Irish society? Instead, it was the rule of British law that best secured the social harmony in that divided nation.[495] This coercion was certainly not repression, they maintained.

Furthermore, the opposition argued that this could never be a final settlement: it would only encourage Irish Nationalists to agitate for complete separation. And perhaps it would even set a bad example for the subjects in the rest of the Empire: what would it mean to the colonies?[496] In the end, these arguments won the vote. After two months of debate, a majority in the Commons – including 94 Liberal MP's – defeated the bill.

9.2 The Irish Home Rule debates (1886)

9.2.1 Legitimizing positions for and against

During these 1886 Home Rule debates, the concept of 'democracy' was applied very often. Again, it carried two meanings: it was both a synonym for 'the people' and a form of government. But now, in nearly all of the utterances made with this former definition, it had a very clear positive value: 'the democracy' was again a slogan, now to *legitimize* a stance towards Home Rule. Quite interestingly, it was both used to oppose and to defend the proposal: both members against and members in favour said they did so because of the interests and the desires of 'the democracy'. Various politicians of all the parties, Conservative, Liberal, or Irish, accredited their particular position to their close relationship to 'the people'. Legitimization was the key aim.

[493] Ibidem, 297.
[494] Ibidem, 295.
[495] Ibidem, 299.
[496] Ibidem, 300.

A good example of an *opponent's* argument was given in May 1866, by Robert Hanbury (Conservative)[497]. He countered the measure for the reason that 'the democracy of England had now come into power', and that therefore, they should listen to the wishes of the people. According to him, '*what the democracy wanted* was that Ireland should be bound to England and Scotland by equal laws. Let the facts be put before the democracy of England, and he had no fear of the result.'[498] The House of Commons should thus base their decisions on the wishes of public opinion, he suggested: parliament should implement the desires of the people, now that it was admitted that 'the democracy' had come into power. 'The democracy' was now clearly said to legitimate his position in the debate.

Arthur Winterbotham (cloth manufacturer and Liberal MP)[499] followed Hanbury's logic. In an effort to stop the Bill, he argued: 'Why did not the Irish Members give the democracy of England one chance? To the *first Parliament* elected by the democracy they had given no chance. How had they given it a chance? They were going to cut themselves adrift from this Parliament. ["No, no!"] They were going to set up a Parliament in Dublin, and they claimed the right to make laws for Ireland in Dublin.'[500] The second sentence of this quote is intriguing: Winterbotham now explicated that this parliament, in which they sat now, was the first which was elected by 'the democracy'. If now, at this stage, the Irish Members cut themselves loose, to set up their own parliament, they would not even give this new form of government a real chance.

Several other Members of the House followed the same line of reasoning as Hanbury, however, to *defend* the Irish Home Rule Bill. James O'Brien (Irish Parliamentary Party)[501], for example, argued that any hon. Gentlemen who opposed the Bill, did not 'fairly represent English and Scotch opinion'. They did not 'represent the opinion […] of the ruling power in these countries – the enfranchised democracy of Great-Britain and Ireland'.[502] The democracy, thus, ruled in Great-Britain, and its opinion should therefore be translated properly in decisions of the House. Charles Fenwick (trade union leader and Liberal MP)[503] joined in, and claimed that the Bill had 'the sympathy of […] the great and growing

[497] E. Clarke, 'Robert Hanbury', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2048/view/article/33678 (accessed on November 14, 2012).
[498] Robert Hanbury, *Hansard*, May 18, 1886.
[499] Author unknown, 'Arthur Winterbotham', http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arthur_Winterbotham (accessed on November 14, 2012).
[500] Arthur Winterbotham, *Hansard*, June 3, 1886.
[501] Author unknown, 'J.F.X. O'Brien', http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/J._F._X._O%27Brien (accessed on November 14, 2012).
[502] James O'Brien, *Hansard*, May 21, 1886.
[503] N. McCord, 'Charles Fenwick', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2048/view/article/47351 (accessed on November 14, 2012).

democracy of this country'.[504] And Thomas O'Connor (journalist and Irish Nationalist MP)[505] predicted hopefully that, in the second reading of the Bill, the House would 'obey the mandate of the democracy of England, speaking through Representatives with a *unanimous* voice'.[506] Now, the function of parliament was explained as a mirror of the people, which supposedly possessed one opinion on this issue: in favour of reform.

This latter Member, Thomas O'Connor, mentioned later that 'the British democracy', had given 'to the people of Ireland a message from the masses of the English people of peace and reconciliation between the two nations.'[507] This quote shows beautifully how the concept of 'democracy' was easily alternated with the English 'people' and 'nation'. Increasingly, 'the democracy' was applied to mean not only the working classes, but essentially *all* the English people. A remark made by Edward Macnaghten (judge and Conservative MP)[508] confirms this observation. He stated first that he trusted 'the people of England' and then said: 'I trust the democracy of England. Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people'. Democracy, people and nation had suddenly become interchangeable concepts with an equal meaning.

9.2.2 Acceptance by Goschen

How did George Goschen, the persistent opponent of democracy, deal with all these statements of the 'now established democracy'? Interestingly, he did not deny it at all. In April 1886, he even stated himself, similarly, that they had now enfranchised 'the democracy'. This he explained as 'the new recruits', 'the new voters', who now had to take up 'new duties'. And although he presumably still did not accept it, he said that, 'with regard to the future', they were not to be an 'autocracy' but a 'democracy'.[509] Thus, he still did not say they had become a democracy yet, but displayed his expectations for the future. His emotional style and rhetoric was diminished. Now, for the first time, Goschen did not use the concept to agitate, but to state a fact. The negative value of 'democracy' had now fully disappeared.

During the debates about Irish Home Rule, Goschen mentioned the concept too, when he stated the following in June 1886: 'The democracy of this country is now *enthroned* for the *first time*, so to speak, in office; and it has to face in its first days this tremendous

[504] Charles Fenwick, *Hansard*, May 25, 1886.
[505] M. Macdonagh, 'Thomas Power O'Connor', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2048/view/article/35286 (accessed on November 14, 2012)
[506] Thomas O'Connor, *Hansard*, May 28, 1886.
[507] Thomas O'Connor, *Hansard*, May 28, 1886.
[508] J.A. Hamilton, 'Edward Macnaghten', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2048/view/article/34803 (accessed on November 14, 2012).
[509] George Goschen, *Hansard*, April 13, 1866.

responsibility.' Now he explicated fully that now, *for the first time*, 'the democracy' was enthroned: now, in 1886, 'the democracy' sat 'in office'.[510] They had handed over power to the people, or the working men, he concluded. But now, already, they had to debate such an important issue as Home Rule. This indicates that Goschen did not trust the democratic Commons could prudently deal with it.

In fact, Goschen was as opposed to Home Rule as he was opposed to suffrage extension, and feared for the outcome. He summarized his concerns: 'I say, do not let it be hustled into a fatal and irrevocable step. This step is *irrevocable*. Do not let the *first chapter* in this new volume of our history open with a breach in the Constitution and a sapping of the foundations which bear the weight of this colossal Empire.'[511] The enthronement of democracy was thus acknowledged as a new chapter in history: ancient traditions had come to an end. Goschen was defeated: though he had long fought against it, he had lost the battle against 'the democracy'. Consequently, not the democracy, but Home Rule was the imminent change he sought to stop. Not the people itself, but the choice it would make, now endangered the Constitution. In 1886, the rule of 'the democracy' itself was, perhaps not accepted, but certainly acknowledged, even by its former foremost opponent.

9.3 Assessing the changes

9.3.1 We are now a democracy

The essential meaning of the concept of 'democracy' was, from the start of our period in 1866, a *distant* form of government: it was a system of the distant past or of different countries. Back then it was a slogan used to warn against parliamentary reform: almost no one wanted a democratic system in the future. After the passing of the Third Reform Act, though, something very important had changed. 'Democracy' was still said frequently, and still meant a particular form of government, but no longer was it a distant form of government. It was no longer something of the distant or imminent future. When the concept was used in 1886, it was instead applied to mention the *current* form of government. It was repeatedly stated, by members of all parties, that now Great-Britain had *become a democracy*. Within twenty years, the concept's value had turned completely: from negative to positive.

Perhaps this definite shift in *this* meaning (form of government) can be explained *from* the change in the second meaning: that of 'the democracy' (synonym of 'the people'). After in

[510] George Goschen, *Hansard,* June 7, 1866.
[511] George Goschen, *Hansard,* June 7, 1866.

1886 it was regularly confirmed by both reform's friend and enemy – both Radicals, Liberals and Conservatives – that 'the democracy' now ruled, and that the people were entrusted with all political power, it also became possible to defend that the *form of government* had become democratic. If 'the democracy' ruled, why would they not *be* a 'democracy'? In the last few years, the two definitions of democracy had conceivably converged: 'the democracy' and 'a democracy' were not so different any more, as they had been in the 1870s. Soon this conclusion became undeniable: and in 1886 it was regularly stated in the House of Commons that they *were* a democracy.

The first parliamentary speech in which this claim was made came from Edward Leatham (scholar and Liberal MP)[512] as early as March 1885. 'We have arrived at the vigour of Democracy', he said. Leatham looked back in time, and described 'the history of the triumph of Democracy in this country'.[513] It was a triumph: democracy proved to be a success. The government functioned as it should. Without any shock or brute force, they had smoothly changed their form of government, he suggested. How had they got there? According to Leatham, the triumph was the main result of the working classes, who had 'shown a rare discretion'.[514] He praised the prudent choice these 'new' enfranchised voters had made during the last elections.

The outcomes of these first 'democratic' elections had seemingly surprised Leatham, for he said in 1885: 'With the power, if they had wished it, of deluging this House with mechanics and working men, they have deliberately preferred to be represented by men many points above them, it may be, in the social scale, yet sympathizing with those of their demands which are just, and able to clothe those demands in language and to sustain them by arguments which must command the respect, and possibly the acquiescence, of statesmen.'[515] The new votes of the working men had thus gone to men, not of their own class, but of 'many points above them'. The lower classes had placed their confidence in 'us', Leatham claimed: the upper classes. And now, in return, they knew they could trust the working men. Democracy thus turned out to be no class *struggle*, but instead, class *cooperation*.

Leatham was quite contented with this outcome. If this was a democracy, he was not worried. If the lower orders simply voted for higher classes, not much would change, he figured. Therefore, he strongly opposed the interpretation of 'democracy' as a form of

[512] Author unknown, 'Edward Leatham', http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edward_Aldam_Leatham (accessed on November 14, 2012).
[513] Edward Leatham, *Hansard*, March 2, 1885.
[514] Edward Leatham, *Hansard*, March 2, 1885.
[515] Edward Leatham, *Hansard*, March 2, 1885.

government in which parliament was a 'mere photograph'. This idea had been brought in earlier, by another Member of the House. If it was up to Leatham, the Lower House would not become an 'abject epitome of the thoughts, good, bad, and indifferent, of the nation.' Instead, it should reflect its highest thoughts, its noblest aspirations, its broadest sympathies.' 'This is the very meaning of election', he argued: 'We elect, not the random elements, which in their infinite variety are to be found scattered everywhere upon the surface, but what is best and soundest; and it is only on this grand hypothesis that this House is honourable, or that it is any honour to sit in it.'[516] For him, 'democracy' thus meant more 'the election of the best' than the 'representation of all'.

One year later, Henry Labouchere (journalist and Radical MP)[517] reflected on the past changes as well. He looked back upon the Reform Act of 1885, the act which had redistributed the seats in the House of Commons, and introduced a system of equally populated constituencies. This Act of 1885 had been the definite step towards a democratic form of government, Labouchere argued self-assured: 'After the Reform Bill of last year they were *landed in a Democracy*.'[518] This grammatical use of the concept points out that he did not mean a group of persons or a class but specifically a form of government: a system. Great-Britain had become a 'democracy' in 1885. What did this mean in practice? Labouchere concluded that, as a result, 'the decisions of the House of Commons were now, to all intents and purposes, the decisions of the whole country.' The opinion of the 'country' should thus lead the way.

Labouchere sought to elevate this principle as a new maxim in British politics: now they had become a democracy, they should act like one. From this, he concluded that that other part of Parliament, the House of Lords, had become obsolete. In his own words: 'The country was now becoming democratic, and hereditary legislators were an anachronism in a democracy.'[519] The Upper House should thus be changed or abolished. This particular quote is all the more intriguing, for Labouchere now not only said that the form of government had become democratic, but that, in fact, the entire 'country' was becoming a democracy. The form of the state and the form of the country were thus equated. However, still an important grammatical difference was made: while the first quote ('they were landed in a Democracy')

[516] Edward Leatham, *Hansard*, March 2, 1885.
[517] H. Sidebotham, 'Henry Du Pré Labouchere', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2048/view/article/34367 (accessed on November 14, 2012).
[518] Henry Labouchere, *Hansard*, March 5, 1886.
[519] Henry Labouchere, *Hansard*, March 5, 1886.

suggests completion, the second quote ('the country was becoming democratic') implies an on-going process.

In the rest of his speech, Labouchere elaborated on his understanding of the concept. By doing this, he sought to reason why the (supposedly contemporary) democracy could not co-exist with a hereditary legislature. 'Democracy recognized no class distinctions, no hereditary legislators; and Democrats regarded a Hereditary Legislature as an insult, an absurdity, and an abomination—they regarded such an Assembly, claiming to overrule the decision of the Representatives of the people, as a baneful and pernicious institution'.[520] In a democracy, 'the people' ruled indirectly, so why uphold an institution that would only neutralize or deny this legitimate power? The House of Lords, in its current form, should thus be abrogated.

The quote mentioned above contains a second interesting aspect. It can be found in the first words: 'Democracy recognized no class distinctions'.[521] Apparently, for Labouchere in 1886, the concept meant the rule of the 'whole country', of all the people, and not the rule of one particular class. If we compare this with the utterances made in 1866-7, we can conclude that a shift of 180 degrees had taken place. Back then, 'democracy' meant the rule of the 'working classes', but now, twenty years later, it was stated that in this form of government, 'no class distinctions' at all were made. Democracy now meant the inclusion of all classes into politics. More than before did it mean the rule of 'all the people': similar to 'the nation'.

In one of the debates on Irish Home Rule, an extraordinarily elucidating speech was given by James Bryce (Irish jurist, historian, and Radical MP).[522] Bryce's main argument was that, on this issue, and in any other, they should do 'what the British people wish', for the very reason that now they were a democracy. Under this form of government, this should be the very aim of politics: doing what 'the people' want. It formed the legitimization of his standpoint: he knew what the public wanted and therefore the House should listen to him. In his speech, he further explained his conception of 'the new-born democracy of England'. Democracy was new-born: hence, it was a new situation. Bryce explained his understanding of it by addressing several aspects:

'If our Government were a despotism, or such an oligarchy as ruled before the Reform Act of 1832, I could understand my right hon. Friend the Member for East Edinburgh (. Goschen) or

[520] Henry Labouchere, *Hansard*, March 5, 1886.
[521] Henry Labouchere, *Hansard*, March 5, 1886.
[522] C. Harvie, 'James Bryce', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2048/view/article/32141 (accessed on November 14, 2012).

the Marquess of Salisbury making this proposition. But what are we? We are a democracy, — a modern democracy.' […]

'A democracy has a short memory; and although it might, in a moment of exasperation, pass severe laws, it would soon forget the occasion of those laws and repeal them.'

'A democracy loves equality, and it could not bear to think, as it would be apt to think, that in ruling by stern laws it was oppressing the masses of the people in the interest of a landlord class.'

'A democracy has a tender conscience, and a dislike—perhaps too strong a dislike—of severe methods; it would be pained by the fear that it was doing in justice and sanctioning harshness.'

'A democracy loves freedom, and it would refuse to put into the hands of a Government such as the Marquess of Salisbury contemplates that suspension of the Irish representation, that subjection of Ireland to arbitrary rule, which would be necessary for his purpose.'[523]

From these five points, we learn that, at least for Bryce, 'democracy' meant a form of government, which was very different from 'despotism', but that came forth out of an 'oligarchy'. It knew both advantages (love for freedom, a tender conscience), and disadvantages (a short memory and a too strong dislike of severe methods). Whether its love for 'equality' was meant as a positive aspect remained unclear: for 'the masses' it was good, but the interests of the 'landlord class' were dismissed.

Was this speech, then, meant to praise or to denounce the new, modern, British democracy? Bryce said this was not the point: 'I am not arguing now whether in all this democracy may be right or wrong, or whether we have done foolishly or wisely in m*aking our Government a democracy*. With such questions I am not concerned, for what I ask the House is to realize the present facts and their consequences. I say that *we are a democracy*, and that we must, therefore, *govern on democratic principles*.'[524] Presenting the 'facts' was thus his only aim, Bryce maintained. Nevertheless, this speech had an obvious political aim: defending Irish Home Rule. Great-Britain had become a democracy, so they should govern on

[523] James Bryce, *Hansard*, May 17, 1886.
[524] James Bryce, *Hansard*, May 17, 1886.

democratic principles: principles that disproved the further suppression of Ireland. Democracy had thus become both the argument and the word applied to justify political legitimacy.

In the same debate, Alexander Hall (Conservative)[525] responded to Bryce's speech: not to oppose him but to support his argument. Hall added one more element to his summary of democracy's meaning: order. 'Democracy loves equality; but democracy loves order.' He pointed towards America as the typical example of a democratic country, an example they should follow. 'And what is the consequence in America?', he asked. 'Why, that in that country everyone feels safe, and the people grow all the richer for it.'[526] His evaluation of 'democracy' as a form of government was very positive: it was orderly, safe, and good for the economy.

9.3.2 What would come of the future?

Nevertheless, the disadvantages of democracy, admitted by James Bryce, were soon taken over by the opposition to Home Rule: to debunk this current form of government. Edmund Wodehouse (Liberal)[527], for one, quoted Bryce in a clever way, when he repeated the point that 'democracy can pass *severe laws* in a moment of exasperation, but soon *forgets the occasion* of them, and repeals them'. This he explained 'in other words': 'democracy 'can fly into a passion and kick somebody, but is incapable of patient, uniform, and consistent rule'.[528] This did not sound as a prudent form of government, he suggested. What would come of it in the future?

As Wodehouse said himself: 'If that be a true description, democracy will, I fear, *prove unfit* to be lord and master of a vast Dominion embracing divers races and nationalities in different stages of civilization and political development; and an Empire which a people has made under the guidance of a great aristocracy will slide from its grasp in anarchy, bloodshed, and ruin.'[529] Now democracy had become established, its negative effects would damage the country, he feared. The Empire, which was built up by the aristocracy, was now replaced by a democracy, which would ultimately slide into anarchy. Democracy would 'prove' to be unfit, he said: no word was devoted to ways to stop it. It was now a *fait accompli;* a done deal. Only time could prove him right.

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[525] Author unknown, 'Alexander Hall', http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander_William_Hall (accessed on November 14, 2012).
[526] Alexander Hall, *Hansard,* May 17, 1886.
[527] Author unknown, 'Edmund Wodehouse', http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edmond_Wodehouse (accessed on November 14, 2012).
[528] Edmund Wodehouse, *Hansard,* June 3, 1886.
[529] Edmund Wodehouse, *Hansard,* June 3, 1886.

Wodehouse's speech, in turn, produced its own response. It was directly after his talk that John Nolan (landowner, army officer, and Irish Parliamentary Party MP)[530] stood up. He reacted: 'the hon. Member who had just sat down [. Wodehouse] told them that he would not make a philosophical speech; but, in his [Colonel Nolan's] opinion, that speech was full of the hon. Gentleman's *peculiar philosophy,* for he told them all that democracy would do, and all that democracy would not do, and various other things.'[531] This response attests an interesting point: that Wodehouse's perspective on democracy had now become quite singular. The idea of 'democracy' as unfit and dangerous was now characterized as a 'peculiar philosophy': it was not shared by most Members of the House. While in 1866 this view had been conventional, now, in 1886, it had become exceptional. The value of the concept had turned drastically within twenty years.

9.4 Mode of Persuasion: Ethos

The foremost aim of the concept of 'democracy' in the 1886 debates was the legitimization of political representation. Members of each party defended their position in the Irish Home Rule debate, for example, with the reason that *they* truly represented 'the people's' opinion. They stated that they knew what the public wanted, and that *therefore* their position on this topic – either for or against – was the only correct one. Hence, in the past two decades, the mission of the Lower House had changed decisively: no longer did the individual MP make up his own mind, based on what he deemed best for the nation and his constituency, but instead, he followed the opinion of the people, guided increasingly by the professional institutions of his party organization. Via both these national parties and the extended vote, 'the democracy' had been able to increase its grip on politics: compelling the MP's to divert their focus more on the needs and desires of 'the people'. This process changed the legitimization of parliament and ultimately the value of the concept of 'democracy'.

This emphasis on the aim of 'democracy' as essentially a way to *legitimize* politics can be connected to the third mode of persuasion that Aristotle named 'Ethos'. Ethos meant as much as 'Character' and stood for the impression that a speaker makes on his audience. This element is especially important in political speeches: politicians need to be *credible*. They must be *trusted* by their audience. As Braet emphasized it: when defending a certain measure, to obtain trust is more vital than to supply specific arguments. When we believe adopt a

[530] Author unknown, 'John Nolan', http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Philip_Nolan (accessed on November 14, 2012).
[531] John Nolan, *Hansard,* June 3, 1886.

viewpoint on the basis of 'ethos', we do so not because of a particular argument, but instead, because of the authority of the speaker.[532]

Therefore, the mode of 'ethos' can be compared to 'authority argumentation': the speaker emphasizes he should be trusted for the reason he is an authority on the subject. He knows what is best.[533] The 'Ethos' element is, however, always something an audience attributes to a speaker; it is not something one inherently possesses. It is always an opinion. According to Aristotle, three aspects are continuously checked: whether the politician is competent, honest, and well-disposed.[534] However, to make such an impression, the speaker can exercise particular manoeuvres. Especially the latter point seems most applicable to this study: politicians need to make clear that they are well-disposed towards the audience. They must trust that he, at least, shares their preferences.

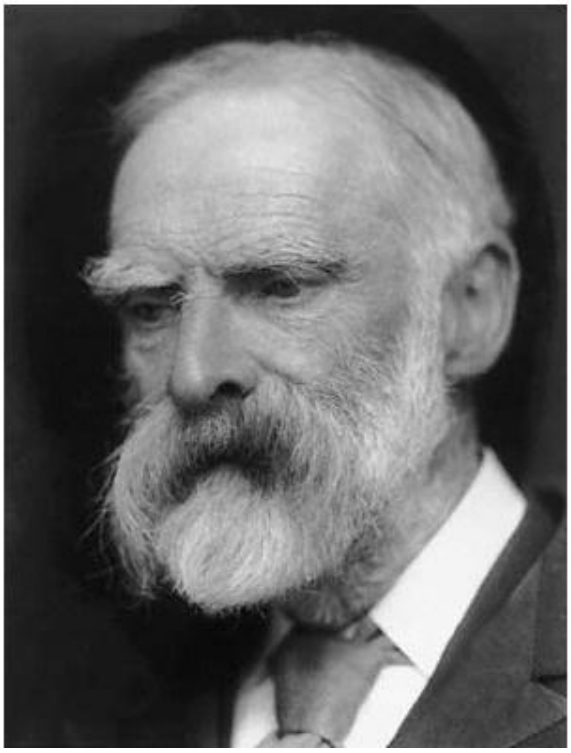
He can obtain this trust by emphasizing their commonalities, their mutual interests: either their material needs or certain common ideals. But most effective is, as Braet explains literally, to refer directly to the audience, or to explain what connects the speaker to this audience.[535] This advice of 'ethos', as articulated first by Aristotle, was exactly implemented by many parliamentarians in the Irish Home Rule debates of 1886. They, too, emphasized their link with their supporters in the country and 'the democracy' at large. By building up their 'ethos', with the use of the concept of 'democracy', they legitimized their standpoint, granted themselves authority to speak, and made a credible impression on the audience outside the House.

[532] Braet, *Retorische Kritiek*, 50.
[533] Ibidem, 50.
[534] Ibidem, 51.
[535] Ibidem, 52.

9.5 Four key actors (1878-1886)

Samuel Laing
(Liberal MP 1852-1885)

George Goschen
(Liberal MP 1863-1900)



James Bryce
(Irish Radical MP 1880-1907)

Robert Peel
(Conservative MP 1850-1886)

10. CONCLUSION

The question this thesis tried to answer is why and how the concept of 'democracy' transformed from an essentially negative to a predominantly positive slogan, within the discourse of the House of Commons between 1866 and 1886. By analysing the changing aim and use of the concept in hundreds of parliamentary speeches, and by connecting these linguistic changes to the actual political innovations of that time, it has been possible to formulate a set of convincing explanations. Due to both political and linguistic processes, set in motion after the Second Reform Act, the aim and value of the concept changed gradually but significantly within two decades. Nevertheless, in this time period, 'democracy' always remained a word aimed at persuasion: therefore it is categorized in the three 'modes of persuasion', as first described by Aristotle, more than two millennia before.

10.1 Pathos: Evoking emotions (1866-7)

The first 'mode of persuasion' that can be related to the studied speeches was 'pathos': the incitement of emotion. During the parliamentary reform debates of 1866 and 1867, this was the key aim of 'democracy'. It was a word of warning, clearly meant to arouse fear among the audience. Therefore, 'democracy' was regularly connected to related concepts, such as revolution, agitation, despotism and equality; and frequently opposed to British values such as freedom, progress, balance, and the constitution. Democracy's exact definition, though, remained uncertain: it was a quite flexible concept, which meant some form of popular government, with either 'wide' or 'universal' suffrage. And similarly, it could mean the rule of the majority, the rule of the uneducated, or the rule of the unpropertied. Quite often, such descriptions were combined.

There was no need to specify its definition: opposition MP's adapted its meaning as they saw fit. As long as it served its aim: to prevent parliamentary reform. Therefore, the message was unambiguous: if this reform was accepted, then sooner or later, Great-Britain would end up in a democracy. This frame repeatedly caused excitement in the House, because for most parliamentarians, such a prospect seemed gruesome. A broad majority of the House of Commons believed that democracy was dangerous and undesirable. Members deemed it not compatible with the ancient, 'mixed' constitution, the class balance in society and the political aims of rational debate and constituency representation. This negative value, as well as its meaning of a distant form of government, was part of a clear consensus on the concept: no one, except for a few Radicals, wanted to be named a 'democrat'.

10.2 Logos: Stating the facts (1868-1877)

In the ten years after the Second Reform Act, the concept of 'democracy' was applied much less frequently: less than ten times a year, except for the year 1871, when the House of Commons discussed the Secret Ballot. Again, this reform was opposed with the same slogan of 'democracy': since 1867, its meaning and value had not changed. But again, the slogan could not succeed in preventing reform, for this bill was passed as well. Partly because of these repeated 'failures', the concept was losing its emotional force during the 1870s. Another reason was the fact that MP's started to realise that all the warnings of 1866-7 had not come true: either they had not become a democracy, or it was not as horrific as foretold. Consequently, fewer parliamentarians made use of the slogan, and the few that still did needed to add extra suffixes such as 'ultra' and 'extreme', to still attract some attention to their words. Piece by piece, the slogan of 'Democracy' lost its validity.

This linguistic process was stimulated by a metamorphosis of political reality. In particular two political innovations should be noted: organization in national parties and a changing composition in the Lower House. Both processes were set in motion by the Second Reform Act: it had broadened the electorate significantly, and added hundreds of thousands of new working men to the vote. This forced all the (borough) politicians to change their tactics: both Liberals and Conservatives now had to convince the lower classes to vote for them. No longer could they hate abhor democracy and criticize the working men; they should include them. No longer could they rely on nepotism: party organization came in its place. If they did not organize themselves, and did not change their discourse, they would be easily displaced at the next election.

This displacement, however, occurred anyway, though gradually. The social composition of the House of Commons was changed considerably by the elections of 1868, 1874, and 1880. They broke the parliamentary dominance of the landed aristocracy, which had lasted for centuries: upper-class nobility was replaced by the upcoming middle-class, and even a few working men were able to obtain a seat. In this process, the opposition MP's of 1866-7, who had so fiercely opposed parliamentary reform, democracy, and the working men's vote, were gradually displaced by more progressive members. And although a number of these anti-democrats still sat in the Commons in the 1880s, they rarely used the slogan in the Chamber of Westminster. Democracy's emotional force had faded, and perhaps more importantly, its value had become too contested. The consensus on democracy's negative value was now definitely broken.

In the 1870s, not only the value, but also the exact meaning of the concept was challenged. Besides the definition of a 'distant form of government', an additional meaning emerged. Increasingly, the word was said with the prefix of the article 'the', to be used as a synonym of 'the people'. With this definition, it could either refer to the entire nation, a particular part of the population, or the lower classes – dependent on the MP and the situation of his utterance. Although its exact meaning was flexible, one thing was certain: no longer was democracy a slogan, but increasingly a fact. That there existed a 'democracy' in the country was questioned by no one. It was simply a noun like any other, used to make assertions about states of affairs in reality. Therefore, it could be applied in debates on various topics, by members of each party. As part of the argumentation in speeches, it has been connected to Aristotle's 'Logos'.

Although 'the democracy' could now be mentioned with neutral or positive objectives, in most of the 1870s, the negative value still dominated. The noun was particularly said by MP's who assessed the present reality of politics, and were dissatisfied with the current influence of 'the people' on politics. Indeed, the relationship between parliament and the people was changing, in a time of party organization and professionalization: the gap was shrinking, now more working class men desired to participate in political debate. Politicians, in turn, maintained closer contact to their voters, by visiting working men's clubs, local party meetings and national conferences. Furthermore, party organizations increased their grip on individual MP's, gradually leading to tighter parliamentary discipline than before. A number of MP's criticized these strategic innovations; and blamed 'the democracy' for the change.

10.3 Ethos: Legitimizing positions (1878-1886)

When after 1878 the House of Commons seriously contemplated the successor to the Second Reform Act, it became clear how essentially contested the concept of 'democracy' had become. Not only did it mean both a 'distant form of government' and a 'synonym of the people', but similarly, it carried both negative and positive valuations. The former meaning, for example, was explained first very negatively, as the rule of 'one class', which would ensue if the suffrage was extended further. This was the same narrative as in 1866-7. Now, however, this definition was strongly challenged by MP's who portrayed the imminent 'democracy' very positively: for them, it meant government by the whole people. And for them, it was the result of a process that could not be stopped. Democracy had become inevitable.

At the same time, the second meaning of the concept – a synonym of 'the people' – continued to exist, and was assessed, very similarly, in both negative and positive ways.

While some opponents of further reform stated that a Third Reform Act would only change parliamentary representation, others realised that the change had already come. 'The democracy' had already obtained a considerable amount of political influence. But was this a good thing? Again the concept of democracy formed the centre of the discussion: while proponents of further reform argued that the influence of the people had aided legislation, the opponents condemned the changes and rather saw them reversed. They stated rhetorically that now the 'tyranny of the majority' ruled the Commons.

This negative valuation of 'democracy', though, was scarcely uttered in the final parliamentary debates of 1884-5, which directly led to the Third Reform Act. In these two years, the concept was again applied with its two meanings, but quite suddenly, its negative charge had almost completely disappeared. Only a few veteran parliamentarians, who had also witnessed the previous Reform Act, opposed the bill for the reason it led to a democratic form of government. For most MP's, now, 'democracy' was said to praise reform. For them, it was a balanced, wise and just system; essentially the fair representation of *all* the people. After inventing this new definition, 'democracy' could be applied as a positive slogan as well, to defend reform.

The sudden, near consensus on its positive value can be attributed to the way the Third Reform Act came about: the measure itself was the result of consensus politics. Liberal and Conservative leaders had designed the plan together, before introducing it to parliament. Therefore, under increased parliamentary discipline, the opposition was declined to a minimum. A broad majority in the Commons did not utter principal objections to the bill in the House, and spoke rarely of 'democracy' at all. Consequently, the negative slogan of 'democracy' was now applied by only a few dissidents and independent MP's. In 1884-5, it had lost both its impact and its supporters.

It was only after the passing of the Third Reform Act, though, that the concept of 'democracy' was truly accepted. This became clear in the parliamentary debates on Irish Home Rule, another important reform measure which had dominated the political agenda for years. In 1886, this bill was both defended *and* opposed with a reference to 'the democracy'. Now, however, it came to mean not 'the working classes', but instead 'all the people', or the entire nation. Members of each party – of the Conservative, the Liberal, and the Irish Parliamentary Party, now stated that they represented 'the democracy', that they knew what the nation wanted, and that therefore they should vote in favour, or against. With the use of this concept, every party legitimized their position in the debate. Because of this aim –

making a credible impression – its use in 1886 has been connected to the mode of persuasion of 'Ethos'.

These Home Rule debates were dominated by the second definition of democracy – that included the article 'the', and now meant as much as 'all the people'. For the first time, in fact, it was broadly acknowledged, even by its previous and latest critics, that now 'the democracy' ruled Great-Britain. When even George Goschen accepted the changed political conditions, and stated that now 'the democracy' ruled, as if it was a fact, the battle was over. Furthermore, the first definition, that of a 'distant form of government' had vanished. It was replaced by a new meaning: that of the *current* form of government! After all, if indeed 'the democracy' ruled, why would they not *be* a democracy? When some members said that now they had become a democracy, and no one stepped up to challenge it, the old negative value had decisively ended. Hence, in 1886, a new consensus ended the many years of conceptual polarization.

10.4 The Sea Change of Democracy

If we overlook the entire period, we learn that 'democracy' made a complete volte-face within only twenty years, both in meaning and in value. While in 1866 the concept essentially meant a distant form of government; the popular rule of *one* class; in 1886 it was mostly used as 'the democracy', referring to *all* 'the people', or sometimes the 'nation'. This change reflected an underlying shift in meaning; whereas first 'democracy' essentially meant *majority rule*, in the end, it primarily meant the expression of the *will of the people*. While the former was valued negatively in 1866, the latter was cheered in 1886. At the same time as this concept changed, the meaning of the adjacent concept of 'the people' shifted too, from the 'working classes' to 'the nation'. Hence, after parliamentary reforms broadened the electorate, the meaning of 'the people' was broadened as well.

Furthermore, at the end of our period, it was regularly stated that 'democracy' was the name of the *current* form of government, instead of something of the distant or imminent future. Now 'the democracy' ruled they had become a 'democracy'. This latter shift in meaning was made possible by a prior shift in valuation: while in 1866 'democracy' was looked at with contempt, and desired by no one; during the 1870s, the new influence of the people on politics was (though criticized) increasingly acknowledged. And after the Third Reform Act consolidated the innovation, the inclusion of the people was fully accepted. Therefore, in 1886, the triumph of 'democracy' could be proudly proclaimed.

The essential change occurring in these twenty years should thus be located in the increased influence of 'the people' on politics. This process was started, as is often explained, 'by accident', when the Second Reform Act was passed in 1867. It set three processes in motion: the electorate was widened, the composition of parliament changed, and their interrelationship was redefined. These innovations changed the 'rules' of politics: middle- and lower classes were for the first time included into politics, which forced parliamentarians to adapt their discourse: the words they chose. Or, rather, the value and meaning they attached to those words. In the post-1867 reality, most MP's could no longer abhor democracy and ignore the working men. Instead, both old and new parliamentarians embraced 'the democracy'. They invented a new definition, gave democracy a positive value, and changed the aim and legitimization of politics.

The process towards becoming a democracy thus started in 1867, after the 'accidentally' broad extension of the Second Reform Act, exactly as the critics had foretold. The House of Commons moved into a democratic direction, but only because parliament's own definition of it changed. Interestingly, this idea of a 'democratic direction', so often proclaimed in these twenty years, was connected to one foremost metaphor: the image of the sea. To be more specific: the metaphor of a democratic 'wave' or 'tide', which would hit Britain after the 'floodgates' were to be opened in 1867. This and related metaphors were repeatedly uttered in the twenty years of parliamentary reform debates, as we have seen.

The parliamentarians' metaphor bears a striking correlation to the image of the 'sea-change', as noted by Shakespeare in 'The Tempest'. As in the story, the Duke, Antonio, was surprised by a storm, and had supposedly drowned, quite similarly was Great-Britain hit by the 'democracy' in 1867: no one had wanted it: it would supposedly end the ancient constitution. The turnover was unanticipated. Thereafter, a gradual process of broad change was started. While the Duke's body underwent a full transformation – from bones into coral, and eyes into pearls – quite similarly did Britain's political institutions evolve: the relationship between parliamentarians and the people was revised. It was a full metamorphosis: but while the *substance* (democratic values, composition of MP's) was replaced, the body's (constitutional) *form* was retained.

The Duke in 'The Tempest' did not want his death at sea, and similarly, the parliamentarians did not want democracy at first. Interestingly, Robert Cecil had literally made the same comparison himself, when he said that 'democracy like death, gives back nothing'. But in the end – as Ariel, the spirit said – this was for the best. The song was meant to comfort the Duke. Over time, Antonio's body would change 'beyond recognition': it would

become more beautiful, and would take on a resemblance to the new surroundings. A similar process occurred in post-1867 British politics: after the democratic innovations of suffrage extension, the parliament indeed came to resemble its surroundings – British society – better. Due to national party organization and professionalization, and a changing social composition in the House, the supposedly 'first' democratic parliament of 1885 better represented 'the people' than before. 'Democracy' was now valuated as an improved form of rule. Hence, the foundation of British democracy was truly a 'sea-change'.

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Hansard People
http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/people
(This database can be accessed freely)

Oxford Dictionary of National Biography
http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2048
(This online dictionary is utilized for biographical information of the historical actors and the pictures of the twelve 'key actors'. The dictionary can be accessed after logging in on the proxy of Leiden University, or via any other university subscription)

Wikipedia – The Free Encyclopaedia
http://en.wikipedia.org
(This open source encyclopaedia is often deemed too unreliable for academic purposes. It is, however, only utilized to retrieve the party affiliation of a few MP's, who had no entry at all in any other biographical database)

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APPENDIX

Table 1: Frequency of 'democracy'

Year	Debates in which 'democracy' occurred	Total frequency of 'democracy'	Meaning A: Form of government	Meaning B: Synonym of 'the people'	Percentage Meaning B
1866	66	195	184	11	5,6
1867	51	120	116	4	3,3
1868	7	7	6	1	14,3
1869	7	9	3	6	66,7
1870	8	8	4	4	50,0
1871	17	42	31	11	26,2
1872	7	9	5	4	44,4
1873	2	2	2	0	0,0
1874	6	7	5	2	28,6
1875	7	8	4	4	50,0
1876	5	6	5	1	16,7
1877	2	2	2	0	0,0
1878	20	29	20	9	31,0
1879	13	19	16	3	15,8
1880	5	5	4	1	20,0
1881	7	11	3	8	72,7
1882	26	34	14	20	58,8
1883	19	24	17	7	29,2
1884	33	58	25	33	56,9
1885	18	26	10	16	61,5
1886	79	155	22	133	85,8

Source: Hansard Records 1803-2005 (http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/)

Table 2: Factsheet of quoted Members of Parliament

Name	Party	Birth	Death	In Commons	Out Commons
Alexander Baillie Cochrane	Liberal-Conservative	1816	1890	1841	1880
Alexander Beresford Hope	Independent	1820	1887	1841	1887
Alexander Hall	Conservative	1838	1919	1874	1892
Arthur Arnold	Radical	1833	1902	1880	1885
Arthur Kavanagh	Conservative	1831	1889	1866	1880
Arthur Winterbotham	Liberal	1838	1892	1885	1892
Austen Layard	Liberal	1817	1894	1852	1870
Benjamin Disraeli	Conservative	1804	1881	1837	1876
Charles Adderley	Conservative	1814	1905	1841	1878
Charles Fenwick	Liberal	1850	1918	1885	1918
Charles Legard	Conservative	1846	1901	1874	1880
Charles Neate	Conservative Liberal	1806	1879	1857	1868
Charles Newdegate	Conservative	1816	1887	1843	1885
Charles York	Conservative	1799	1873	1865	1873
Charles Russell	Conservative	1826	1883	1865	1882
Charles Villiers	Liberal Tory	1802	1898	1835	1898
Charles Warton	Conservative	1832	1900	1880	1885
Christopher Griffith	Unknown	1804	1876	1857	1868
Claud Hamilton	Conservative	1843	1925	1865	1918
Donald Currie	Liberal	1925	1909	1880	1900
Edmond Wodehouse	Liberal	1835	1914	1880	1906
Edward Bulwer	Conservative	1805	1873	1832	1866
Edward Craufurd	Radical Irish	1816	1887	1852	1874
Edward Horsman	Moderate Liberal	1807	1876	1836	1876
Edward Knatchbull-Hugessen	Liberal	1829	1874	1857	1880
Edward Leatham	Liberal	1828	1900	1859	1886
Edward Macnaghten	Conservative	1830	1913	1880	1887
Francis Crossley	Liberal	1817	1872	1852	1872
Frederick Corrance	Conservative	1822	1906	1867	1874
Frederick Inderwick	Liberal	1836	1904	1880	1885
Gathorne Hardy	Conservative	1814	1906	1856	1878
George Bowyer	Liberal but	1811	1883	1852	1880

	independent-minded				
George Dixon	Liberal	1820	1898	1867	1898
George Goschen	Liberal	1831	1907	1863	1900
George Morgan	Liberal	1826	1897	1868	1897
George Russell	Liberal / Radical	1853	1918	1880	1895
Henry Fawcett	Liberal	1833	1884	1865	1884
Henry Labouchere	Radical	1831	1912	1865	1906
Henry Selwin	Conservative	1826	1902	1865	1892
James Stanhope	Conservative	1821	1904	1852	1868
James Bryce	Liberal / Radical	1838	1922	1880	1907
James O'Brien	Irish Parliamentary Party	1828	1905	1885	1905
James Picton	Liberal / Radical	1832	1910	1884	1894
James Whiteside	Conservative	1804	1876	1851	1866
Jesse Collings	Radical	1831	1920	1880	1918
John Ball	Conservative	1815	1898	1868	1875
John Coleridge	Liberal	1820	1894	1865	1873
John Lubbock	Liberal	1834	1913	1870	1900
John Maguire	Liberal	1815	1872	1852	1872
John Nolan	Irish Parliamentary Party	1838	1912	1872	1906
John O'Connor Power	Irish Parliamentary Party	1846	1919	1874	1885
John Pakington	Conservative	1799	1880	1837	1874
John Stuart Mill	Liberal	1806	1873	1865	1868
Leonard Courtney	Radical	1832	1918	1876	1900
Matthew Marsh	Liberal Whig	1810	1881	1857	1868
Michael Hicks-Beach	Conservative	1837	1916	1864	1906
Nathaniel Lambert	Liberal	1811	1882	1868	1880
Peter Rylands	Radical (independent)	1820	1887	1868	1887
Ralph Bernal Osborne	Advanced Liberal / Radical	1811	1882	1841	1874
Robert Cecil	Conservative	1830	1903	1853	1868
Robert Hanbury	Conservative	1845	1903	1878	1903
Robert Lowe	Liberal	1811	1892	1852	1880
Robert Montagu	Conservative	1825	1902	1859	1880
Robert Peel	Liberal Conservative	1822	1895	1850	1886

Rowland Blennerhassett	Liberal	1839	1909	1865	1885
Samuel Laing	Liberal	1812	1897	1852	1885
Stanley Leighton	Conservative	1837	1901	1876	1901
Stephen Williamson	Liberal	1827	1903	1880	1895
Thomas O'Connor	Irish Nationalist	1848	1929	1880	1929
Walter Meller	Unknown	1819	1886	1865	1869
William Baxter	Liberal	1825	1890	1855	1885
William Charley	Conservative	1833	1904	1868	1880
William Forster	Liberal	1818	1886	1861	1886
William Gladstone	Liberal	1809	1898	1832	1886
William Johnston	Radical Irish	1829	1902	1868	1902
William Willis	Liberal	1835	1911	1880	1885

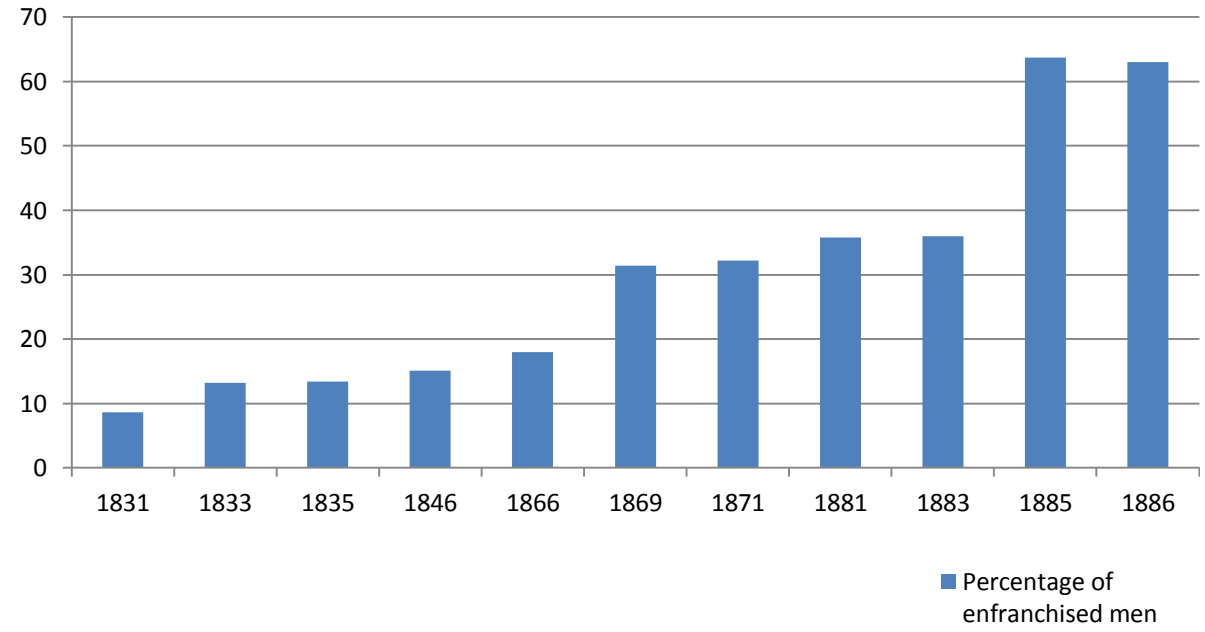
Sources: Hansard People (http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/people) and Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2048)

Table 3: Social composition of the House of Commons (1865-1885)

Background / Profession	**1865**	**1868**	**1874**	**1880**
Aristocrats primarily concerned with land	437	410	382	325
Businessmen	144	162	171	194
Lawyers	56	57	69	83
Other professionals	20	27	24	44
Tenant farmers	1	2	4	3
Workingmen	0	0	2	3
Totals	658	658	652	652

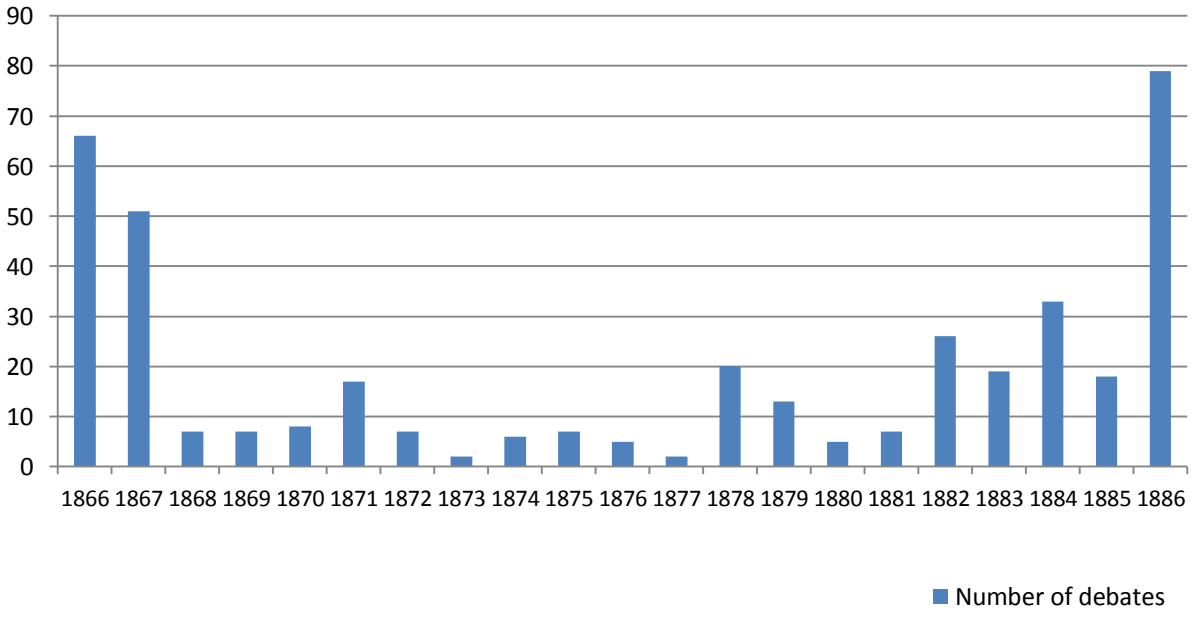
Source: W.H. Whiteley, 'The Social Composition of the British House of Commons, 1865-1885' in: Historical papers / Communications historiques Vol 5 No 1 (1970) 172.

Graph 1: Percentage of enfranchised men in Great-Britain (1831-1886)

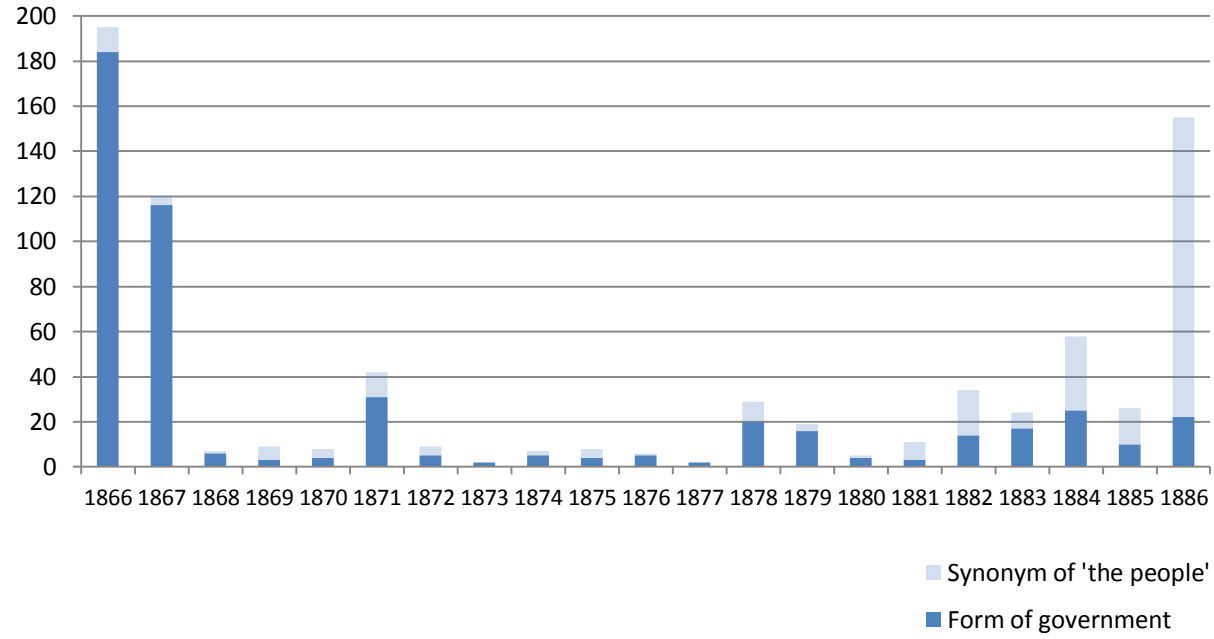


Source: C. Cook, The Routledge Companion to Britain in the Nineteenth Century (London 2005) 61.

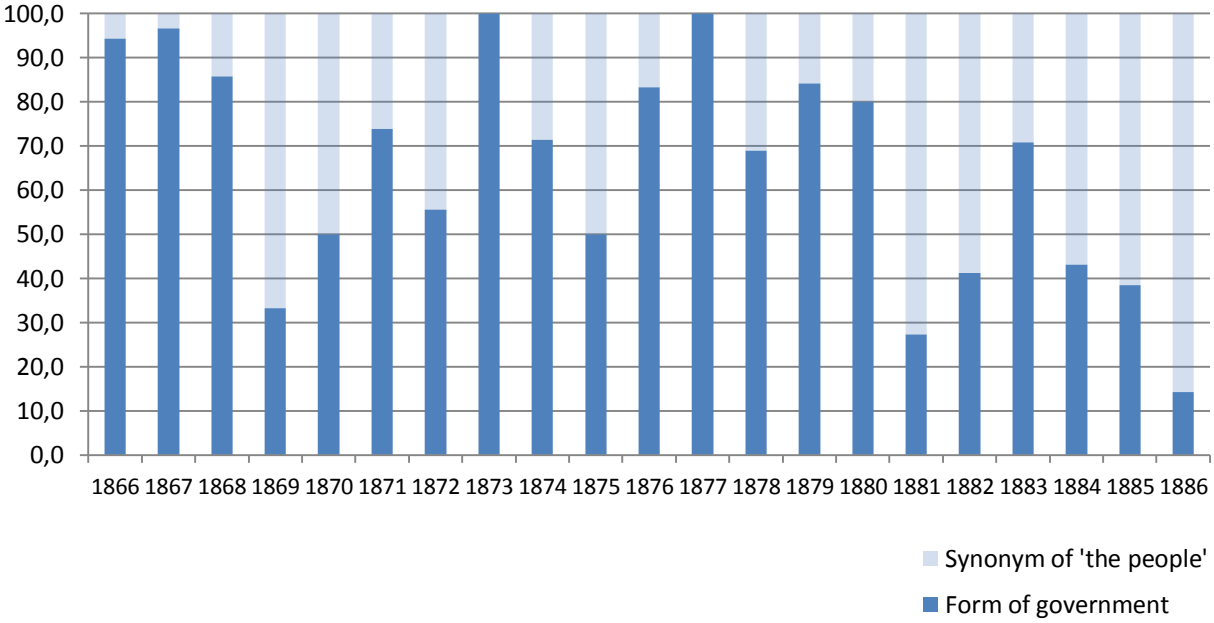
Graph 2: Number of debates in which 'democracy' occurred in the House of Commons (1866-1886)



Graph 3: Total frequency of 'democracy' in the House of Commons (1866-1886)



Graph 4: Percentages of the two meanings of 'democracy' in the House of Commons (1866-1886)



Source: Hansard Records 1803-2005 (http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/)