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## A coming of age: how and why the UK became the first democracy to allow votes for 18-year-olds

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### ABSTRACT

In 1969, the UK became the first country to lower its age of franchise to 18. Most other democracies soon followed. This article provides the first detailed examination of the debates and processes which contributed to the UK's pioneering reform of the age of enfranchisement. It explores parliamentary and press debates during the 1960s, arguing that lowering the voting age to 18 was not in response to popular mobilisation by the public or pressure groups, nor the outcome of significant political contestation. Rather, voting age reform was a consequence of the desire of political leaders to align the voting age with what society increasingly perceived as the new age of adulthood, 18. Lowering the voting age was part of package of reforms which attempted to streamline the age at which young people were seen to become adults.

### KEYWORDS

Voting; franchise; representation; adulthood; rights

## Introduction

With the passing of the Representation of the People Act In 1969, the UK became the first democracy to lower the voting age from 21 to 18 for national, regional, and local elections. Beyond the UK at that time, the lowest voting age was 20, in Australia, Japan, Sweden and Switzerland. Most countries quickly followed the UK, to the extent that 18 became the standard international age of democratic enfranchisement (with notable outliers).<sup>1</sup> Despite the UK's pioneering role in voting age reform, the process that led to the Representation of the People (1969) Act has received surprisingly little attention in the historical and political literature on British constitutional change.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Act passed with little recognition from UK politicians, the media, or even contemporary voting age reform campaigners. This was curious, given that voting age reform is again a salient issue in contemporary UK politics, with 16 and 17 year-olds now franchised to vote in certain types of elections.

This article addresses the gap in the literature by offering a detailed assessment of how and why lowering the voting age to 18 came about. It begins by analysing historical approaches to voting age reform in the UK prior to the introduction of 'Votes-at-18' before

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going on to consider the campaign, government and parliamentary processes, and the engagement (or lack thereof) of the British media and public with the issue during the 1950s and 1960s. Our starting point is placement of the 1969 Act within the context of previous reforms of the age of enfranchisement since the Great Reform Act of 1832. It will show that, while previous age-related electoral reforms linked to expanding the franchise were reactive and defensive measures in response to public pressure, the UK state proved to be a proactive international pioneer when it lowered the voting age to 18. This owed much to voting age reform being largely driven by the motivations and actions of UK political actors, mainly within the Labour Party, in response to growing and widespread concerns regarding the shifting norms of 'adulthood' amid a period of significant social and cultural change. It also explains the absence of mass public demand or campaigning to lower the voting age to 18.

We present two contrasting perceptual frames in twentieth century views of young people.<sup>3</sup> In the first, young people were characterised in the elite political discourse of the time and in the press as exhibiting substantial personal maturity, considerable cultural influence and unprecedented consumer spending power. However, according to the second frame it was feared young people might have less commitment to the existing political system and established social norms. The UK government was keen to recognise that young people were reaching traditional markers of adulthood (full-time employment, independent living, marriage) at an earlier age during this period than in previous generations. At the same time, political discourse indicated parallel but contradictory concerns around levels and modes of youth political participation, and the concurrent rise of radicalism among certain groups of young people.

We analyse these contrasting developments by assessing the extent to which the enfranchisement of 18 year-olds represents a policy example that fits Arthur Marwick's 'measured response' theory. In his classic work, *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy and the US*, Marwick argued that the UK political establishment developed a uniquely liberal response to the transformations in youth culture during the 1960s.<sup>4</sup> He argued that this British exceptionalism primarily involved strategies of co-option and compromise in response to the growing political and cultural demands of young people. This was contrasted with the more aggressive strategies of elite resistance, coercion and repression employed by the political establishment in other Western democratic states during this period. Marwick argued that, in taking a more conciliatory approach, the UK establishment was able to stymie much of the rising social and political tension which convulsed some other liberal democracies in 1968. We conclude that reform of the electoral franchise by lowering the voting age to 18 fits with Marwick's interpretation of establishment co-option strategy. However, this top-down approach might not be sufficient in isolation to explain the motivations behind the reform and we therefore also consider the relative importance of other explanations such as partisan political advantage, changes in young people's political socialisation processes and the political incentivisation created by demographic pressure and attitudinal changes among young people.

## Materials and methods

There is little secondary literature dedicated to the lowering of the voting age to 18. Accounts of the 1960s Labour governments and of Harold Wilson as Prime Minister tend

to concentrate upon other concerns. As an indication of the lack of coverage, Ben Pimlott's (1992) otherwise exhaustive biography of Wilson does not mention his subject's reform of the franchise.<sup>5</sup> The same void applies to several longer-spanning histories of the Labour Party, whose focus upon the party's period in office in the 1960s is mainly upon the problems of industrial relations and the economy.<sup>6</sup> One account that does mention franchise reform in passing asserts that the Representation of the People Act (1969) 'lowered the voting age to 18 to bring Britain in line with many other countries in Europe'.<sup>7</sup> No other country held such a voting age.

Much of our research was drawn from primary sources, including use of the Hansard digitised archive, the British Newspaper Archive at the British Library in London, and the Labour History archive at the People's History Museum in Manchester. We focus primarily on the period 1959–1969, charting the development of debates on the voting age issue. We thus reviewed the existing academic literature on the Conservative and Labour governments of the late 1950s and 1960s and associated party election manifestos and policy documents. This allowed us to analyse the strategic direction of policy by assessing the extent of party-political support or opposition to franchise reform, and their wider engagement with youth politics. Using newspaper archives, we review the degree to which there was mobilisation among the public or printed press on the voting age issue.

The article also assesses the parliamentary debates of the period to examine the degree of partisanship and the extent to which there was a political consensus for change. We examine the key findings of the Latey Committee,<sup>8</sup> established to review the age at which young people should acquire rights, and the Speaker's Conference set up to review the voting age. In reviewing those debates in Hansard, we undertook a content analysis of the speeches to explore key themes. We examine Cabinet and Parliamentary Labour Party minutes to assess the breadth and depth of support for lowering the voting age, the basis of backing for reform of the franchise and the fears associated with change. In analysing the debates within the Cabinet, we also utilise the diaries of leading members such as Richard Crossman and Tony Benn. We also calculated levels of party support for change or continuity by checking the affiliation of each MP who voted on amendments to the voting franchise reform bill (only the constituency affiliations of speakers in those debates are recorded in Hansard).

## **Historical reform of the age of enfranchisement**

We begin with a short overview of previous reforms of the franchise, assessing the extent to which the voting age resonated. The lowering of the voting age in 1969 is often framed in progressive terms, drawing on a political narrative which lauds Westminster's vanguard role in providing a global model of democracy as the 'Mother of Parliaments'. It does not however form part of a historical narrative of age-related reform, as age was a peripheral element in the expansion of the British electoral franchise. From the 1832 Great Reform Act until 1969, the age of enfranchisement was 21. We identify three main stages which shape an age-related historical narrative of British electoral franchise reform prior to 1969; the formalisation of a standardised age in 1832, the asymmetric age-related expansion of the franchise after the First World War, and the equalisation of the voting age for all in 1928.

The formalisation of a standardised age of electoral enfranchisement occurred as part of the Great Reform Act of 1832, considered by many as the first significant step in the long journey towards the establishment of universal suffrage in Britain.<sup>9</sup> The 1832 Reform Act also had a highly significant role in standardising British electoral law and practice. Prior to 1832, electoral administration was irregular and localised with significant variation in the rules of enfranchisement between different constituencies. But while the parameters of the franchise were defined by highly restrictive property rules, these varied significantly between constituencies. As well as a limited expansion of the franchise, the 1832 Reform Act addressed these local and regional inconsistencies by providing the first set of regularised, nationally enforced, electoral rules. The reforms restricted the franchise to males only and created a minimum legal voting age of 21.<sup>10</sup> The level of property qualifications required for gaining voting rights remained the primary concern of the 1832 act for legislators. With the minimum age of property ownership 21, it was logical for this to be the minimum voting age. The 1832 Reform Act thus calibrated the voting age with the most significant marker of adulthood for early nineteenth century British ruling elites and legally established voting as a (male) 'adult' act.

The second stage of UK voting age reform was connected to the limited enfranchisement of women after the First World War, which also created age-related asymmetries in adult voting rights. While the electoral franchise continued to be extended in Britain during the nineteenth century, it sought only to increase the number of male voters through the progressive liberalisation of property restrictions on voting rights. The concerted campaign for the enfranchisement of women in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century also saw the voting age become a significant factor in UK electoral franchise reform. The 1918 Representation of the People Act granted women aged 30 or over the right to vote but with property stipulations which meant they (or their husband) had to occupy a dwelling-house, or land or premises of a yearly rental value of not less than £5. This meant women aged 30 or over living with their parents or family, or in domestic service, could not vote. These rules were not applied to enfranchised men aged 21 or over. Moreover, gender-based disparities were maintained for those women under the age of 30 who were not enfranchised.

As Takayanagi notes, this meant 'the number of women excluded from the vote in 1918 was approximately one-third of the adult female population; and about one-third of those women were aged over 30 years'.<sup>11</sup> The justifications for the establishment of gender-based asymmetry in voting rights were grounded in widespread concerns among the all-male political establishment about a potential electorate in which women would represent the majority of voters.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, many men believed women under the age of 30 lacked the maturity and responsibilities of marriage to be trusted to exercise rational democratic choice. This asymmetry was accepted by most leaders of the women's suffrage movement at the time as a necessary trade-off to ensure that most women would gain the right to vote.

The third stage of UK voting age reform occurred in 1928 and sought to address the increasingly controversial gender-based asymmetries in voting rights established by the 1918 Representation of the People Act. The equalisation of voting rights was not however driven by popular demand alone, and parliamentarians of all political hues (including for the first time a small number of female MPs) were sympathetic to further reform of the electoral franchise.<sup>13</sup> This noted, some in Westminster continued to question the maturity

of some young women—the so-called ‘flappers’—and argued that equalisation of the voting age should be at 25 years of age.<sup>14</sup> Such concerns were however a minority view and the Representation of the People (Equal Franchise) Act 1928 finally established universal suffrage in the UK by lowering the voting age for women to 21. This noted, debate around the issue at the time focused almost exclusively on the equality aspect rather than the voting age itself.

It was therefore not until the 1960s that the age of enfranchisement became a principal driver of democratic reform. The Representation of the People Act in 1969 was unprecedented in that it was the first franchise reform legislation in British constitutional history to have a primary focus on the voting age as an issue in its own right, in which the relationship between adulthood and electoral enfranchisement was key. Overall, the age of enfranchisement was clearly a second-order issue in terms of the reform of the UK electoral franchise prior to 1969. However, it is still notable that the cautious elite response to the voting age was characterised by a reactive, defensive and piecemeal approach to reform, features which we will now demonstrate were also characteristic of the change in 1969.

### **The road to ‘Votes-at-18’**

Voting age reform in the UK in 1969 triggered a wave of change elsewhere, as 18 became the established age of enfranchisement in most democratic states. Lowering the voting age below 21 was not however entirely unprecedented in the UK. Between 1918 and 1920, men aged 19 or above in the armed forces who had served in the First World War were briefly permitted to vote.<sup>15</sup> However, a Speaker’s Conference held in 1944 rejected the permanent lowering of the minimum voting age to 18 and the issue lay dormant for some years thereafter.

So, what prompted the UK to move in 1969? Unlike the contemporary debate over ‘Votes-at-16’, which has been accompanied by concerns over low voting rates among young people, there is no evidence that youth political apathy during the 1960s fuelled demands for reform. There was no significant difference in turnout between young and old voters at elections prior to the 1969 Representation of the People Act.<sup>16</sup> Turnout was seen primarily as contingent upon constituency variables of party control, urban rural differentiation and marginality.<sup>17</sup>

Large numbers of young people joined youth organisations linked with the main political parties and trade unions. In the late 1940s, the Young Conservatives—with a ‘very elastic’ definition of youth which reached 35 years of age on occasion<sup>18</sup>—boasted a membership of 160,000.<sup>19</sup> The organisation was, however, hardly a hotbed of political activism.<sup>20</sup> Membership had fallen to 54,000 by 1965 and a survey of members the following year showed a majority (53%) thought the Young Conservatives was a social club, although, perhaps paradoxically, almost as many (52%) felt they had some political influence within the Party.<sup>21</sup>

The extent of political commitment of young people involved in party youth organisations was difficult to discern, with little reference in the major national newspapers to youth politics or advocacy groups until the emergence of the radical student movement in the late 1960s. This noted, such radicalism was offered by only a modest section of the university community, amounting to a very small proportion of young people in the UK.

Political parties assigned little space to specifically addressing youth orientated issues in their election manifestos or wider discussions of policy. Furthermore, British political elites were not incentivised into voting age policy change through direct external pressure from young people. There were few youth political advocacy groups and the issue did not witness a sustained campaign from young people within the Labour Party or the trade unions.

This noted, one of the principal motivations for lowering the voting age to 18 originated in perceptions among political elites that a shift had occurred in youth attitudes to democracy, together with concerns about the changing nature of youth transitions to adulthood. The campaign for 'Votes-at-18' can be linked in part to growing concerns amongst the main political parties that youth social alienation could mutate into a widespread anti-democratic embrace of either far-left or nationalist causes.<sup>22</sup> Fielding notes that during its lengthy period in opposition, and particularly following from the 1955 general election defeat, the Labour Party became increasingly vexed about its failure to attract young people to replace older members.<sup>23</sup> Whilst politics during the 1950s might overall have been seen as stable, it witnessed a rise of activity beyond parties and parliament through the actions of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND). Moreover, the 1960s saw the advent of pressure group politics and the expansion of street protest, evident for example in demonstrations against the Vietnam War.

For Labour, the dilemma was how to harness protest within party politics. Although some on the Left may have endorsed activities outside the routine forms of political activity, Labour was also concerned about entryism, by which young, radicalised members could facilitate hostile takeovers of local party branches. Such concerns intensified during the 1960s, reinforced by fears that counter-cultural youth movements could mutate into revolutionary politics. Labour Party established a Youth Commission in 1959, which included celebrities such as the footballer, Jimmy Hill, whose resultant report saw the creation of a new youth wing, the Young Socialists (although youth extended until the age of 30 in terms of eligibility to join). The Youth Commission's final report, *The Younger Generation*,<sup>24</sup> proposed lowering the age of enfranchisement to 18, arguing that the imposition of a number of state-ordained obligations, particularly taxation and military service, should be complemented by the right to vote.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, enfranchisement would, it was argued, stimulate greater political participation and social activism amongst young people.<sup>26</sup> As Fielding contends, Labour's youth programme was largely a top-down process of instilling 'responsibility' in the young, derived from an overarching wariness of youth political activity.<sup>27</sup> The policy of lowering the voting age was adopted by the Labour leadership, concerned that the Conservatives' promotion of the 'affluent society', in which Britons had 'never had it so good,' was increasingly popular with younger voters.<sup>28</sup> Labour saw 'Votes-at-18' as a policy which could appeal to young people by recognising them as legitimate and responsible adult members of the electorate.

Yet while support for lowering the voting age might have appeared a bold and radical policy, within the Labour party itself the campaign for 'Votes-at-18' was led and promoted by the politically moderate faction within the Party's Young Socialists. This was a calculated move as part of their response to Trotskyist entryism among young Labour activists, with the promotion of voting age reform an attempt to appear equally in favour of transformational change as more radical left-wing activists. The Labour leadership tended



to fear the Young Socialists, doing little to encourage the organisation and reorganising it with fewer powers in 1965, with the number of youth branches halving between 1962 and 1969.<sup>29</sup> Rather than seeking to garner widespread support from young people and other potentially sympathetic and influential individuals and groups, the 'Votes for Youth' campaign that emerged from Labour's Youth Commission focused almost exclusively on convincing Labour MPs and the Party's National Executive Committee to support the policy. It was thus an elite-focused campaign strategy from a narrow segment of young Labour activists, with little evidence of broader coalition-building within the wider Labour movement or other potential supportive organisations. Indeed, there was almost no active public campaigning for 'Votes for Youth' during the late 1950s and for much of the 1960s. Student and other youth advocacy organisations did not mobilise on the issue. This, in part, is explained by the National Union of Students officially remaining an apolitical organisation due to the 'no politics' clause in its constitution (a platform which was adhered to until the election of Jack Straw as President in 1968). Trade unions also showed scant interest in the issue. This noted, the policy did not attract much internal or external opposition either.

Furthermore, there was little coverage of the issue in the media. With the exception of an isolated satirical reference to voting rights for 18-year olds in the youth pages of the *Daily Mirror* in November 1953,<sup>30</sup> the first instances of 'Votes-at-18' being reported by the media were related to the publication of Labour's 1959 Youth Commission Report. The rare flurry of press attention in youth politics this elicited was largely confined to newspapers supportive of the Labour party. In September 1959, the *Daily Mirror*<sup>31</sup> devoted a week of frontpage headlines campaigning for a reduction in the voting age, including a readers' survey showing 80% of young readers and 60% of those over-18 supported the change. At the end of that week, *The Guardian*<sup>32</sup> ran a supportive editorial, stating that arguments against 'Votes-at-18' were weak and illogical. The *Daily Telegraph*<sup>33</sup> also ran an editorial on the same day, acknowledging there was no reason why 21 was set in stone as the age of enfranchisement but rejecting 'Votes-at-18' on the grounds that young people were insufficiently mature.

The *Daily Mirror's* initial fulsome support for 'Votes for Youth' did not extend beyond that initial week of campaigning. This may—in part—have been due to Labour backtracking from its initial enthusiasm for the policy. The *Daily Mail*<sup>34</sup> observed that many Labour MPs believed the issues was contentious amongst the electorate. Labour was thus reluctant to make voting age reform a campaign issue ahead of the imminent October General Election and distanced themselves from the 'Votes for Youth' campaign which emerged from the party's Youth Commission. It was telling that, although the Labour Party publicly committed to lowering the voting age to 18, the policy was not included in their 1959 general election manifesto. Instead, a vague promise to consult with other parties on the matter was all that was offered (Labour Party 1959b).

Although the new Conservative government did not share Labour's interest in reforming youth electoral rights, it responded to Labour's move by widening its own appeal to young people. In the wake of the Conservative election victory in 1959, the Party launched its own consultation on the issue with the Young Conservatives—one of six youth consultations which formed the Young Conservatives' Policy Group Scheme.<sup>35</sup> This was overseen by the Party Chairman, Rab Butler, keen to modernise the party's image to retain and extend the support of younger voters. Engagement with the issue stimulated some



press coverage, particularly when Butler expressed interest in cross-party talks during a parliamentary debate on electoral laws.<sup>36</sup> The Young Conservatives were, however, reluctant to support what some saw as too radical a reform, and others did not feel was sufficiently radical. As Lamb notes, differences of opinion on the issue thus ranged from objections ranging from concerns about the maturity of young people to discontent that the age of candidacy was not also being considered.<sup>37</sup> However, most Conservatives— young and old—were agreed that voting age reform would likely disproportionately benefit Labour at the ballot box. The Conservative Party rejected the proposition of lowering the voting age at its 1961 party conference in Brighton and the issue failed to gain further internal party traction.

Mainstream media interest also diminished, particularly as voting age reform now had little chance of being introduced under the Conservative government. In the aftermath of the 1959 general election, the *Daily Mirror* proved the only major newspaper which maintained some interest in voting age reform. For example, the paper drew attention to a campaign set up by the National Council of Civil Liberties (NCCL) supporting lowering the voting age as part of the creation of a Teenager Rights Charter.<sup>38</sup> It also supported the Private Member's Bill submitted by backbench Labour MP, Emerys Hughes, which (unsuccessfully) sought to lower the voting age to 18.<sup>39</sup> It is noteworthy that this sporadic coverage expressed few value judgements concerning young people and youth culture and the issue was generally not connected to discussion of other ages of majority.

In the early 1960s, the only campaigning of note beyond inward-looking Labour Party youth circles was that undertaken by the NCCL, which continued to support voting age reform as part of a wider campaign to revise the legal framing of adulthood to 18. The NCCL's campaign did not, however, extend beyond the occasional letter appearing in broadsheet newspapers and a petition in 1963 which attracted support from some notable public figures, including Bertrand Russell, but only amassed a modest 1,500 signatures. There was also scant evidence of public appetite for voting age reform. A rare example of reputable opinion polling on the issue saw the *Daily Mail* report a 1963 National Opinion Poll survey which indicated that two-thirds of the electorate were against lowering the voting age to 18.<sup>40</sup>

The 'Votes for Youth' campaign did gain some traction the following year though, when a further petition organised by a young Labour councillor, John Horsfield, in conjunction with the NCCL, amassed 15,000 signatures and attracted some concerted press coverage.<sup>41</sup> Horsfield was associated with the moderate Right of the Young Socialists but saw 'Votes-at-18' as a unifying radical call which would unite and interest Labour Party members, and provide the political stimulation for young people which the Party had highlighted a need for in its report on young people and politics half-a-decade earlier. But although the *Daily Mirror*<sup>42</sup> reported the call of Labour MP John Stonehouse for 'Votes-at-18' to be included in the Party's 1964 general election manifesto, there no mention of voting age reform in that prospectus.<sup>43</sup>

Media coverage of voting age reform increased considerably in the wake of Labour's 1964 election victory, particularly once it became clear that the new government would seriously consider voting age reform with the announcement of a Speaker's Conference on the issue.<sup>44</sup> This was a significant development. There were only five such conferences, formal inquiries into an issue of electoral law, throughout the twentieth century. The *Daily Mirror*<sup>45</sup> recommitted its support for the 'Votes for Youth' campaign through its backing

for Labour MP Robert Maxwell's Private Member's Bill, noting that the aim was to get the Labour leadership to finally commit to introducing the measure. The *Daily Mirror*<sup>46</sup> also devoted a major feature to a discussion of the 'In-Betweens' which concentrated on the position of young adults in society more widely but with a major focus on the voting age. In the feature, young people were framed as mature adults who gained significant responsibilities at a much earlier age than previous generations. The piece highlighted inconsistencies by which young people owned houses and had children but could not vote or join a library without parental permission. Such positive coverage stimulated negative reactions in some sections of the right-leaning press to voting age reform. The *Daily Mail*<sup>47</sup> offered the strongest objections, disapprovingly noting the Young Socialists' adoption of the policy and linking this to the radical views expressed by its Trotskyist members as a reason to maintain the voting age at 21. However, a column by Anne Scott-James in the same edition expressed support for lowering the voting age, linking it to gender equality.

### Context and drivers for reform

Overall, voting age reform was not a subject to greatly excite the press, political elites, or the general public during the first half of the 1960s. What, therefore, were the specific drivers of reform? Andrew Thorpe's history of the Labour Party claims the lowering of the voting age was 'less a principled commitment to young people than a piece of gerrymandering based on the assumption that young people were more likely to vote Labour than Conservative'.<sup>48</sup> Yet if selfish motivation was at its heart, it was based upon an insubstantial assessment of the youth vote. The voting intentions of younger people were far from clear. In 1950, Labour's share of the vote among 21–24 years olds almost matched its national share, at 45% and 46% respectively. By 1959, the share among the same younger category had fallen to 36%, against an overall average of 44%. As Catherine Ellis notes, this did cause concern within the Labour Party and ensured that its internal Youth Commission report received a more attentive hearing than might have otherwise been the case.<sup>49</sup> By 1964, Labour's 21–24 year old vote share had recovered and exceeded that amongst all voters by 45% to 41%, but this gap had been halved two years later (51% to 49%).<sup>50</sup> Even if a sceptical view is offered of the Home Secretary James Callaghan's assertion to the Parliamentary Labour Party that 'the Government had never let consideration of political advantage sway its decision on this question',<sup>51</sup> it seems plausible that gains for Labour were at most a secondary driver. Partisan advantage for Labour appeared possible but uncertain and perhaps only modest at best.

Explanations for change lie elsewhere, in the perceived need of political elites to respond to apparent changes in youth culture which led to examination of the age of adulthood. Osgerby highlights the emergence of a growing visibility of youth in the 1960s, freed from the shackles of often unrewarding and mundane (male) National Service.<sup>52</sup> The new prominence of the teenager was marked by conspicuous consumption and acquired increasing societal importance because of its spending power.<sup>53</sup> This relative affluence strengthened the case for a lower age of adulthood. The occasionally confrontational nature of youth subculture, as musical and cultural tribes clashed (as in the mods versus rockers battles of the mid-1960s) was also a concern. Beyond those rivalries, a more general 'negative stereotyping' of a rebellious youth 'counter-culture' was

evident. Garland et al. argue that youth identities 'seemingly contained the power—not always intentionally—to challenge social and cultural convention'.<sup>54</sup> Whilst this was not initially viewed as problematic, social and generational tensions grew as youth cultures developed. Thus, the contribution of a distinctive youth culture opened a 'youth question' which political leaders felt needed to be addressed by enticing 'buy-in' to the existing order. The lowering of the voting age was offered as a minimum response, even if direct challenge to that order was minimal. In the directly political sphere, disdain for the existing politics among young people was most epitomised by student rebellions but these concerned matters other than the age of franchise.<sup>55</sup>

This new prominence of youth culture sparked some fears of a moral panic in a period which saw the rapid decline of one of the supposed societal 'glues' in the form of organised religion. As Callum Brown chronicles, there was a modest increase in religious association in the immediate post-World War II years but what followed was 'unprecedented rapidity in the fall of Christian religiosity amongst the British people'.<sup>56</sup> The demise of organised religion and the accompanying 'moral metamorphosis'<sup>57</sup> of social liberalism was most marked among young people. The movement away from religion formed part of a broader 'anti-deferential revolt in the 1960s'<sup>58</sup> but was characterised more by boredom and apathy towards its institutions, amid the growth of alternative pursuits, than dangerous and destabilising anti-establishment rebellion, or a demand for 'youth voice'. Moreover, decline was uneven, being most marked among students, who were increasingly agitated on political causes but not necessarily 'Votes-at-18'. Whilst it would be stretching a point to make a direct connection to the award of the vote to those young people, it was perhaps one method of encouraging participation within an established institutional framework which found itself increasingly challenged.

The potential challenges to societal order from very different youth groups, from apolitical musical sub-cultures to politicised student radicals, were at least tacitly acknowledged. There was recognition of young adulthood via an invitation to join the polity by the offer of a vote. The focus of the 1960s Labour government in terms of young people nonetheless lay more in reforming educational structures than in the political harnessing of 'youthdom'. Following the 1963 Robbins Report,<sup>59</sup> Labour focused upon expanding university education, which increased from a paltry 3.7% of school leavers in 1962 to 8.4% by 1970.<sup>60</sup> A section of radicalised attendees engaged in student politics and protests. 1965 saw Labour's introduction of comprehensive secondary education. The government also planned to raise the school leaving age to 16, although this was not enacted until the following decade. This different focus noted, the Labour Party was keen to ensure that young people complied with the existing rules of democratic party politics upon completion of their education. By permitting young adults a vote, the calculation was that there was a greater chance of them developing a loyalty to the political parties operating within that system rather than engage in pressure group politics or social movement activity which potentially challenged that order.

### **The Speaker's Conference on Electoral Law and the Latey Committee**

On coming to power in October 1964, Harold Wilson's government sought to address the voting age question in combination with another issue not identified in its election manifesto: growing concerns over young people's transitions to adulthood and potential

lowering of the age of majority. First, the Labour government announced the establishment of a Speaker's Conference on Electoral Law to review the voting age, together with a range of other issues including methods, conduct and expenses of elections, the use of broadcasting, and the cost of election petitions.<sup>61</sup> This comprised a committee, initially of 29 MPs, chaired by the Speaker of the House of Commons.<sup>62</sup> The Speaker's Conference was established in May 1965, and sat briefly in June of the same year. Its progress was stymied though, first by the death of the Speaker, Sir Harry Hylton-Foster, in the parliamentary summer recess in 1965 and then the general election in March 1966 which led to the Conference being dissolved and reconstituted.<sup>63</sup> As such, the Speaker's Conference only began its work in earnest in the autumn of 1966.

In July 1965, Labour also announced the establishment of a committee, chaired by Justice John Lately, to review the age of majority (which was at this time 21) and its relationship with various ages of responsibility, particularly 'the broad aspects of wardship and the contractual, proprietary and matrimonial powers of infants'.<sup>64</sup> The formation of the Lately Committee originated from growing concerns regarding changing social attitudes during the post-war period towards young people, acknowledging a wider transformation in how British society understood and realised the citizenship rights and responsibilities defining adulthood.<sup>65</sup>

Lately sought to break with parliamentary tradition and adopted radical approaches to the formation of his committee, with its 11 members selected to reflect diverse legal, civic, and political backgrounds and expertise with regards to young people. It was also experimental in the use of innovative tools of inquiry, such as opinion polls and college workshops, in attempting to engage with and understand the aspirations of young people. It heard evidence from a diverse range of bodies, including the Church of England Board for Social Responsibility, the Association of Municipal Councillors and the British Medical Association, whilst also considering representations from individuals. Downey noted the Lately Committee's approaches ensured a large amount of evidence was taken, and that the final report was 'lively', 'occasionally humorous' and 'highly controversial'.<sup>66</sup>

Crucially, that report, published in July 1967, recommended that the age of majority should be lowered to 18 and that young people aged 18 or over should have the power to enter consumer contracts and personal wills, as well as acquiring the rights to inherit and own property. The Committee also stated that young people should be able to marry without the consent of their parents, or of the courts. The Lately Report cited better education, earlier physical maturity, and growing affluence and autonomy of young people as the justification for its recommendations, noting 'we have had impressive evidence that the young are usually quite capable of conducting their own affairs with sense and honesty'.<sup>67</sup> The report was categorical in its conclusions, boldly stating that 'this Committee is convinced that we must ensure that the young go out into the world as fully prepared for their adult responsibilities as possible, and that in giving them adult status at 18 we are doing no more than recognising the simple facts'.<sup>68</sup>

The Lately Committee's radical approach was not without difficulties though and political tensions in establishing a new age of adulthood were apparent as it reported its findings and recommendations. Only nine of the eleven members of the committee agreed to the main recommendation regarding the lowering of the age of majority and unanimity was not reached on eight of the fifty-two recommendations. Two members,

including future Conservative Chancellor, Geoffrey Howe, publicly dissented and produced a minority report which proposed that the general age of majority should remain at 21 but that young people should be free to own and dispose of property at 18.<sup>69</sup> However, the issue of marriage without parental or state consent before the age of 21 was foremost in informing this minority position. Some Latey Committee recommendations appeared to contradict the desires of young people themselves, with evidence from National Opinion Polls suggesting that two out of three 16–20-year-olds concurred with a minimum age of 21 for credit purchases, home ownership and marriage without parental consent.<sup>70</sup>

The publication of the Latey Commission's final report, with its recommendation to lower the age of majority to 18, received comprehensive but mainly neutral coverage in the following day's newspapers (20 July 1967). The *Daily Express*<sup>71</sup> expressed tepid and reluctant support for Latey's recommendations, while noting that public perceptions of irresponsible teenagers clashed with the reality that most young people aged 18 to 21 were responsible adults. Both *The Times*<sup>72</sup> and the *Daily Mail*<sup>73</sup> gave the Latey Report considerably less attention but noted it had clearly strengthened the case for 'Votes-at-18'. In the same edition, *Daily Mail* columnist Ann Scott-James recanted her previous support for voting age reform due to the threat posed by the emergence of 'hippies'.

By agreement between the political parties, consideration of the age of enfranchisement did not form part of the Latey Committee's terms of reference. The Latey Committee were careful in their evidence-gathering to abide by these terms and the final report did not express any views on the voting age. The final report stated that, although the ages of majority and enfranchisement might both be revised, they need not necessarily be congruent. This noted, the decision to consider a review independently but at a similar juncture in the parliament meant the issues became intimately connected. Indeed, the impetus for reform of the voting age was enhanced by the recommendations of the Latey Committee, which one commentator at the time stated had political implications 'for arousing strong feelings among the middle-aged'.<sup>74</sup>

Labour's commitment to undertake the parallel reform of the age of enfranchisement and the age of majority was part of a wider review of the legal framing of adulthood, outlined in the Party's 1966 general election manifesto, which stated:

The Labour Party has proposed to the Speaker's Conference the introduction of Votes at Eighteen, to add a necessary political dimension to the increasingly important economic and social position of young people' (Labour Party, 1966: pt. 5, para 3.2).

The reconvened Speaker's Conference on Electoral Law was, however, far more reluctant to embrace such a radical reform, even though it had advance access to the findings of the Latey Report. As with all previous Speaker's Conferences, there was no publication of details of the extent or form of evidence-gathering and analysis. However, the extent to which there was division on the issue was revealed when the Speaker's Conference first reported its recommendations to Westminster in June 1967 on all those matters within its terms of reference except the voting age.<sup>75</sup>

The publication of the Final Report of the Speaker's Conference on Electoral Law<sup>76</sup> in February 1968 saw the Labour government accept 60 of 71 conclusions. However, on the issue of voting age reform, the Conference recommended a reduction of the age of enfranchisement to 20, not 18 as Prime Minister Wilson had hoped. The final report did

not explain its decision-making rationale but did provide details of the voting figures of the Conference members in making its decision, with the age of 20 agreed by 24 votes to 1. A separate proposal for 'Votes-at-18' was rejected by 22 votes to 3. In the wake of the final report, some Labour MPs suggested Conservative members of the Conference blocked 'Votes-at-18' for party political reasons, and that Labour MPs had agreed on the age of 20 only when it was evident that a further lowering was not possible.<sup>77</sup>

The press coverage of the Speaker's Conference highlighted tensions regarding the principle and nature of voting age reform. Following the Latey Report in July 1967, some right-leaning newspapers appeared to accept the inevitability of some form of voting age reform. As such, they consistently advocated that Speaker's Conference should seek a cross-party compromise whereby the voting age be lowered to 20. When the final Speaker's Conference report was published, the *Daily Express*<sup>78</sup> framed the issue in terms of a sensible compromise which would reduce the threat from (left-wing) youth radicalism. The *Daily Telegraph*<sup>79</sup> highlighted that lowering of the age by single year was likely to have negligible impact and was consistent with British traditions of gradual reform.

### **From Cabinet to Parliament: overruling the Speaker's Conference**

The convoluted pathway to lowering the voting age to 18 was a product of the overlapping approach instigated by Wilson's Labour governments from 1964 with regards to revising the age of majority and the age of enfranchisement. Two difficulties had emerged in reforming the voting age which were a product of its decision to disaggregate the two issues. First, the Latey Committee, which recommended that many adult rights be lowered from 21 to 18, had been advised by the government *not* to include the voting age in its considerations. Second, the Speaker's Conference, the vehicle by which Labour wanted to amend the voting age, recommended only a modest lowering to 20. How was this conundrum resolved?

The adoption of the recommendations of the Latey Commission on the age of majority allowed the Labour government to justify its intent to lower the voting age to 18. This noticeably increased the saliency and politicisation of the voting age issue but also led the Wilson government to the awkward position of overruling the Speaker's Conference it had established to recommend on the issue. The Labour Cabinet spotted the potential difficulties in the event of non-alignment between Latey and the Speaker's Conference. During the Cabinet's endorsement of the Latey Committee's recommendations in November 1967, the Foreign Secretary, Michael Stewart, observed that 'if the age of full legal capacity were reduced to 18, it would be difficult to resist the conclusion that the voting age should be similarly reduced'.<sup>80</sup> Aspiring for alignment to avoid possible trouble, the Cabinet agreed to a Commons debate on the Latey Report, making clear the Government's sympathy for 'Votes-at-18' whilst 'not prejudging the question of the appropriate age for the franchise' and taking the view that, notwithstanding their separate terms of reference, 'the Speaker's Conference would welcome an opportunity to consider the views of the House on the [Latey] Report'.<sup>81</sup> The Leader of the Commons, Richard Crossman, supported Stewart in his inevitability of 'Votes-at-18' thesis, believing 'it would be impossible not to support it now that we have announced our support for the



Latey Committee's recommendation for reducing the age of consent from twenty-one to eighteen'.<sup>82</sup>

Yet it was uncertain in Spring 1968 that such a view would prevail. The Parliamentary Labour Party approved 'Votes-at-18' on 9 May 1968 (a day of poor Labour local election results) but the first Cabinet meeting on the issue in the following week did not reach a firm conclusion. The Cabinet Committee examining the matter had 'unanimously' taken the view that the Speaker's Conference decision to reduce the voting age by only one year should be upheld.<sup>83</sup> This view was prompted less by measured debate over the alignment of ages of responsibility than the consideration that a modest reduction would 'make the danger of the young Scottish and Welsh nationalist vote less grave'.<sup>84</sup> The salience of the supposed risk in Scotland was added to by a memorandum from the Home Secretary to the Cabinet showing it was north of the border that 18–21 year olds would form the highest percentage of the electorate than in England.<sup>85</sup> Crossman was convinced that 'in Scotland and Wales the young people will vote nationalist'.<sup>86</sup> The Cabinet requested that the Cabinet Committee gather the limited information, such as opinion polls, on support for reform. This was a somewhat surprising request as polling evidence in favour had already been reported to Cabinet in Autumn 1967, when it was briefed that a Gallup Poll showed a majority (56%) of 18–20 year olds backed a lowering of the voting age, with 30% opposed.<sup>87</sup>

The three strongest opponents of 'Votes-at-18' in Cabinet were Richard Marsh, ironically its youngest member, who declared that ministers 'must have gone absolutely mad ... if they thought the working-class wanted students to be enfranchised', and the Scottish and Welsh secretaries, who feared that the new voters might support nationalist parties in those countries.<sup>88</sup> Cautious conservatism characterised the Scottish National Party and Plaid Cymru during that era as much as radical chic<sup>89</sup> but the modest stirrings of nationalism during the 1960s nonetheless prompted some fears within Labour that awarding youth a vote would increase the problem. Labour had attempted to head off the nationalist question by proposing a Constitutional Commission, the Home Secretary insisting to the Parliamentary Labour Party that 'the constitutional arrangements that have existed in the UK for centuries could not be lightly swept away'.<sup>90</sup> Some of the most fervent anti-nationalists were the strongest opponents of empowering young people in Scotland and Wales with a vote, as they viewed this as one way to endanger those constitutional arrangements.

Tony Benn strongly endorsed 'Votes-at-18' as part of a broader package of 'normal civil rights' accepted post-Latey.<sup>91</sup> Benn noted the 'great anxiety on the part of Willie Ross, the Scottish Secretary, and also George Thomas for reasons of nationalism' and feared that their opposition 'will bust us up'.<sup>92</sup> Thomas had only replaced the equally implacable opponent (for the same reasons) of 'Votes-at-18', Cledwyn Hughes, as Secretary of State for Wales, the previous month. The only other opposition voiced in Cabinet was that of Ray Gunter, Minister of Labour, who expressed concerns regarding the undue influence of teachers upon young people.<sup>93</sup> In the event, the initial caution of the Cabinet Committee was usurped by the impact of the Latey Committee's recommendations and on 30 May 1968 the Cabinet agreed to back 'Votes-at-18'. According to Crossman's account, the Committee was simply told by the Lord Chancellor, Gerald Gardiner that, given Latey's conclusions, it needed regardless of its previous view, to recommend to Cabinet the acceptance of 'Votes-at-18'. Age alignment was all.



Prime Minister Wilson requested individual votes of Cabinet members on the issue, indicative that he was uncertain where sentiment lay. Crossman reported there were four 'fanatical supporters' of lowering the voting age to 18 in Cabinet, three 'fanatical opponents' and the remainder, including himself, 'unenthusiastic supporters'.<sup>94</sup> The most fanatical backer was Tony Benn who 'made it clear he wouldn't stay a member of the Cabinet unless the eighteen year olds got justice'.<sup>95</sup> Michael Stewart argued at the initial May Cabinet meeting that young people 'aren't granted rights, they grow into them', hence his support for a Latey linkage to voting rights.<sup>96</sup> He reiterated these arguments at the 30 May Cabinet, telling Wilson: 'The young are insisting on their rights and you'd be mad to resist now. Of course you must give way'.<sup>97</sup> For Wilson, it was not a difficult decision. If he rejected 'Votes-at-18' he risked losing a Cabinet member and the debate would not disappear, whereas no such exit threat came from opponents of change. Latey provided cover for a change in Labour's position and so 'Votes-at-18' appeared a very low-cost choice.

Once the Cabinet had resolved the issue in favour of 'Votes-at-18', the Labour government moved quickly towards legislating for franchise change, publishing its White Paper in July 1968.<sup>98</sup> Yet parliamentary debates revealed some dissent was evident within the Party. As Bingham notes, 'it is revealing that neither the Latey Committee nor the Speaker's Conference reached a consensus'<sup>99</sup> and there was a minority within Labour's ranks uneasy over the extent of change. Protagonists on both sides of the 'Votes-at-18' argument frequently conflated or contested the relationship between the age of enfranchisement and issues of maturity and adulthood, not only in examining the Representation of the People Bill used to introduce change to the franchise but again in the Family Law Reform Bill which was also passed in 1969.

Latey was supposed to be arbiter of adulthood and the Speaker's Conference the determinant of the age of franchise. However, the Labour Government simply coupled what it had initially decoupled—thus Latey trumped the Speaker's Conference. As the Secretary for State for the Home Department, James Callaghan, noted in a debate on the Speaker's Conference final recommendations in July 1968:

The Final Report of your Conference contains seventy-one conclusions, of which the Government accept sixty. Of the remainder, four of the conclusions on which the Government differ relate to major issues. First your Conference recommended by a majority that the minimum age for voting should be reduced to twenty. On the other hand, the Government have already announced their acceptance of the recommendation of the Latey Committee that the age of majority should in future be 18 and the Government accordingly recommend in the White Paper that the minimum age for voting should also be reduced to eighteen years.<sup>100</sup>

Labour introduced the Representation of the People Bill, to lower the voting age to 18, in November 1968. With considerable chutzpah, Callaghan asserted that 'The Bill owes its existence to the recommendations of your Conference on Electoral Law, Mr Speaker'<sup>101</sup> knowing that what the Bill proposed was a very significant departure from the Conference's advice that the voting age should only be reduced by one year.

The idea of linking various new rights, including the voting age, to the revised age of adulthood which emerged from the Latey Report found some cross-party sympathy. For example, the Conservative MP, Sir Peter Rawlinson, argued for a single, comprehensive reform bill.<sup>102</sup> For the Liberals, Eric Lubbock insisted that 'if every other restriction on the

affairs of a young person between the ages of 20 and 21 is to be removed . . . would it not be totally unacceptable for the Government to introduce legislation without removing the restrictions on young people to take part in political activities?'<sup>103</sup> Some advocates urged the Labour government to also lower the minimum ages of jury service and consent for homosexual sex.<sup>104</sup>

As with some of the arguments related to further reform of the voting age to 16 today, parliamentary debates in the late 1960s often focused on what constituted the appropriate age of maturity and contained assertions over the extent to which young people were competent, sentient humans, capable of voting. The Labour MP, George Strauss, pointed out that the only body which had given evidence to the Latey Committee regarding the mental development of young people, the British Medical Association, had been 'non-committal' and 'no one suggested that they [young people] mature so much earlier that we are entitled to reduce the age from 21 to 18'.<sup>105</sup> Another Labour MP, Charles Pannell, noted that 'there is nothing sacred about the age of 18'.<sup>106</sup> In response, the Foreign Secretary, Michael Stewart, argued that young people had 'grown into' the legal rights conferred by Latey and it was therefore only logical they should be granted their political equivalent.<sup>107</sup> In the Lords, an opponent of 'Votes-at-18', Lord Brooke of Cumnor, lamented that Labour was now 'absolutely hypnotised by the Majority Report of the Latey Committee'.<sup>108</sup>

Other themes apparent in contemporary voting age discussions were also evident in the parliamentary debates of the late 1960s which preceded and accompanied reform. Some justified 'Votes-at-18' by drawing on the refrain of 'no taxation without representation'.<sup>109</sup> This, in part, reflected that the school leaving age in the 1960s was 15 and the low rate of university entrance during that era meant that a far higher percentage of 18 to 21-year-olds were in full-time taxed employment. The issue of military service and enfranchisement was also raised, with one peer supportive of change noting, 'young men of 18 command tanks costing £200,000. They are old enough to be killed, old enough to breed and I think they should be old enough to vote'.<sup>110</sup> It was also noted that if a 20-year-old just missed a general election, they could be aged 25 before entitled to vote.

Despite the UK being widely regarded at the time as a unitary state, the distinctive legal and political environment in Scotland was also cited as a reason for change in the late 1960s. For example, the Liberal Lord Henley, declared that he was supportive of 'Votes-at-18' as 18-year-olds had enjoyed 'more legal capacity for quite a long time' in Scotland without causing concerns.<sup>111</sup> The Scottish National Party's newly-elected first MP, Winnie Ewing, also expressed her party's support, noting 'is it not the case that when the voting age was 21 the average age at which votes were [first] cast was 23, and that when the age is reduced to 18, as I hope it will be, the average age at which votes will be [first] cast will be 20?'.<sup>112</sup> In her maiden speech to the House of Commons in November 1967, Ewing had argued that 'there are moral and intellectual reasons why it is good sense to make people responsible at the of 18 if not sooner—and I mean fully responsible in every sense of the word'.<sup>113</sup>

Few parliamentarians reflected on previous extensions of the franchise. In a rare such moment of contemplation, Lord Chancellor Gardiner, noted:

as regards the voting age, nobody has ever thought about it. Of course, until after the First World War, it had to be 21, because there was the property qualification . . . so it had to be 21,

because a person could not own property until 21. But the odd thing is that when Parliament abolished the property qualification they never said: 'Well is 21 the right age? Should it be 23? Ought it to be 19, or what?'<sup>114</sup>

Some advocates sought to highlight spurious arguments regarding female voter capacity made during the passage of the 1917 Representation of the People Bill to reject similar points raised in the late 1960s regarding young people. As one MP reflected, 'speaker after speaker talked about how women were hysterical and emotional and were given to running off at tangents'.<sup>115</sup> Whilst the lowering of the voting age was unquestionably 'an electoral leap in the dark', and one that lacked universal support, the parliamentary controversy it generated was modest, particularly given that the move made the UK distinct from every other democracy.<sup>116</sup>

Despite repeated requests from the Conservatives to host a free vote on the issue, the Labour government whipped its MPs. This betrayed nervousness in the senior ranks over the extent and depth of the commitment of Labour MPs to the cause. The Cabinet had asked the Chief Whip to gauge support. He believed that 'about two-thirds of the Government's supporters were in favour of reducing the voting age but, since there was no guarantee that Members sympathetic to the proposals would attend and vote, proposed that a two-line whip should be issued to Private Members and a three-line whip to Ministers'.<sup>117</sup> Cabinet agreed a 'firm two-line Whip' for MPs and ministers.<sup>118</sup> The Conservatives chose not to whip their parliamentary vote regardless, one of their opponents of lowering the voting age, Quintin Hogg, describing Labour's whipping as a 'parliamentary outrage'.<sup>119</sup>

The passage of the Representation of the People Bill was unremarkable and not prolonged, even though Callaghan declared his weariness over the 60 speeches made across the White Paper, Second Reading and Committee of the Whole House stages of the Bill in the Commons.<sup>120</sup> Disagreements over reducing the voting age crossed party lines. Supporters of change sought to bind the voting age issue to the Lately Committee's recommendations to lower the age at which other rights were realised. For example, Labour MP Ivor Richard argued that opponents of 'Votes-at-18':

cannot go on saying "No" to the Lately Report when one of the things which it establishes is that young people now mature earlier and that society ought therefore to fix the age of legal and social responsibility at 18. It is absolute and arrant nonsense to say at one and the same time that young people are to be entitled to marry at 18, to enter into contracts at 18, and to bind themselves by hire purchase agreements at 18, but that they are not entitled to vote in a General Election at 18 for a Parliament which will legislative over precisely those things for which they are now held to be responsible.<sup>121</sup>

However, many MPs on both sides of the House of Commons were irritated by what they regarded as a cavalier disregard of the Speaker's Conference deliberations on the matter. George Strauss moved an amendment to his own government's Bill, supported by some Labour and Conservative MPs, to change the proposed lowering of the age of franchise from 18 to 20. Noting how participating MPs had deliberated in the Speaker's inquiry in a non-partisan way, Strauss asserted that 'special importance should be attached to the recommendations of Mr Speaker's Conference when its decisions are unanimous, or nearly unanimous, as they were in this case'.<sup>122</sup> Strauss had already complained to the Parliamentary Labour Party that 'those who

had served on the Speaker's Conference would be placed in an invidious position if the Whips were put on' to support 'Votes-at-18'.<sup>123</sup>

Yet the extent of unanimity of the Speaker's Conference was contested. In line with convention, the Conference's deliberations remained private, with only its final recommendations and voting published. Whilst only one of its 25 members had ultimately voted in favour of lowering the vote to 18, this was, according to one of its members, Labour MP John Mendelson, because of a willingness to coalesce around a compromise, not necessarily an outright rejection of 18.<sup>124</sup>

Strauss went on to cite three other pieces of evidence against lowering the voting age to 18: the annual Hansard Society meetings of 2,600 sixth formers, which had overwhelmingly rejected the idea, the fact that the '18–21 club had polled 3,000 members and got a two-to-one response of "No"; and that a poll of 1,350 readers of the *Catholic Herald* had been similarly negative.<sup>125</sup> Strauss suggested few young people would bother voting. In response, the Liberal MP, Eric Lubbock, asked whether 'a whole section of the community should be deprived of the vote because two-thirds of that section does not wish to exercise it', given that local elections were only participated in by one-third of electors'.<sup>126</sup>

In November 1968, the Labour government enjoyed an overall majority of 67. Given that Labour MPs were whipped, the only way by which Conservative opponents might defeat the introduction of votes for 18 year-olds was to support the Strauss amendment to the government's Bill. That would at least diminish the scale of change, with a more modest reduction of the voting age to 20. In support of asymmetric ages of majority and enfranchisement, Strauss drew attention to what he saw as inconsistencies of the Labour government in terms of their differing response to the Latey Committee and Speaker's Conference:

The recommendation of Mr. Speaker's Conference was arrived at after a full review and consideration of the Report of the Latey Committee. The conference accepted the view of that Committee that the age of majority for civic and private purposes should not necessarily be the same. It is strange that that view was not accepted by the Government, who based their case on the recommendations of the Latey Committee but deliberately ignored that most relevant paragraph of its Report.<sup>127</sup>

Yet despite the reported resistance of Conservative members of the Speaker's Conference to a three-year reduction in the age of franchise, the issue was not one of great Conservative partisanship. The Strauss amendment was defeated in the Commons on 26 November 1968 by 275 votes to 121. Strauss could only find ten Labour colleagues to oppose 'Votes-at-18' in favour of his more modest proposal. Those Labour rebels were joined by 109 Conservative MPs (including past and future Prime Ministers in Alec Douglas-Home and Margaret Thatcher respectively) and two Ulster Unionists in opposing 'Votes-at-18'. This amounted to less than half of the 262-strong Conservative parliamentary party. Labour naturally provided the bulk of MPs, 225, of those rejecting the amendment to 'Votes-at-18' but they were joined by a sizeable number of Conservatives (38) in addition to eight Liberal MPs, plus one each from the Scottish National Party and Ulster Unionist Party. A sizeable chunk (44%) of Conservative MPs did not vote, perhaps a recognition of the parliamentary arithmetic which led them to conclude that the issue was a 'done deal' in an era where government defeats were exceptionally rare. However, it

may also have reflected their lack of interest in the issue. Although 78% of Labour MPs voted, this still left a significant minority absent.<sup>128</sup>

The last possible bastion of resistance to 'Votes-at-18' was the House of Lords. Here also, Conservative opposition was muted. The final debate in the Lords took place in February 1969. An amendment was tabled by the Labour peer, Lord Stonham, replicating that laid before the Commons by George Strauss, demanding 'Votes-at-20'. Speaking in favour of the Somers amendment, the Conservative peer, Lord Burnham, urged caution, insisting: 'It may be that 18 is the right age but if—and I believe there is a good case for saying so—we find that it is too immature an age, we can never take that vote away'.<sup>129</sup>

However, Somers did not pursue his case, ending the debate by declaring that 'in view of what appears to be the general opinion of the House, I shall not press this Amendment to a Division'.<sup>130</sup> Prior to this concession, Somers had offered a few parting shots, lamenting that 'an odd type of national madness seems to have swept over the country with regard to this question of youth . . . mental maturity can only come with experience'.<sup>131</sup> Somers also declared that 'as to national knowledge they [young people] are totally lacking'.<sup>132</sup> The Earl of Cromartie also denounced the 'utterly unnecessary legislation', declaring that those affected:

were just passing the teenage stage and none of them has the slightest interest in this . . . there has not been a single case in the country where a single banner has been carried saying 'For heaven's sake! Give us the vote at 18'.<sup>133</sup>

But this was the final exchange and highlighted that parliamentary debate was effectively over.

It is noteworthy that media coverage did not become any more partisan as political momentum built in Westminster around voting age reform. If anything, newspaper positions on the issue became increasingly ambiguous. In its coverage of the issue in late July 1968, the *Daily Mirror*<sup>134</sup> (25–26 July 1968), the only consistent media champion of lowering the voting age, appeared to cool on the idea as the probability of change loomed. It focused on the divisive nature of the proposal, the lack of consensus and the opposition the Labour Party faced from its own backbenchers on the issue. In contradiction to its prior support, it printed a column by Woodrow Wyatt that represented the strongest condemnation of the policy published in this period. Citing recent student sit-ins and demonstrations, Wyatt condemned the immature and anti-establishment nature of young people. The column presented results from a poll of 18–20 year-olds, showing that the Conservatives were outperforming Labour in this age group by 43% to 23%. Wyatt concluded that Labour was damaging its own electoral chances by lowering the voting age, as young people's contrary nature would lead them to always vote against the government of the day. This downbeat coverage of the issue continued when the bill was passed. The *Daily Mirror*<sup>135</sup> noted how several Labour MP's had rebelled against the government and there was unease at the rejection of the Speaker's Conference recommendation. Among right-leaning papers, a *Daily Telegraph* editorial,<sup>136</sup> prior to the parliamentary debate, reversed the paper's previous cautious opposition to 'Votes-at-18' to one of cautious support, linking the voting age with that of military service.

In July 1969, the Representation of the People Bill passed into law, in many ways an accidental product of the Latey Commission. During the same month, the Family Law Reform Act (1969) also passed, the outworking of the Latey's Report desire to change the

age of majority from 21 to 18 and confer various rights at the revised, younger, age of adulthood. The reduction in the age of franchise concluded a process in which the parliamentary debates relied, inevitably, on assertion rather than evidence, given the uncharted territory into which the franchise was being taken. There was an absence of deep thought or strategic planning within the Labour government's ranks over voting age reform, apathy on the opposition benches, no considered backing for 'Votes-at-18' from either the Lately or Speaker's Conference routes and scant serious research on where public opinion lay. Moreover, although the Westminster Parliament may have introduced a world-leading measure, it did not establish any formal mechanisms to evaluate its impact and effects. The parliamentary debates did not consider the difficulties of implementing the new age of franchise. The outcome was that although census data suggested 800,000 newly enfranchised 18–20 year olds should have joined the electoral register for the 1970 general election, only 464,000 were actually registered<sup>137</sup> and abstention among those youngsters on the electoral roll was offered as a contributory factor towards the lowest turnout (72%) at an election since 1935.<sup>138</sup>

### **Discussion: why did the UK lead the way on 'Votes-at-18'?**

There are consistent themes running through each section of our analysis. Firstly, the momentum towards voting age reform in the 1960s was almost exclusively associated with internal debates within the Labour Party. While there was a minor grassroots campaign for 'Votes-at-18' initiated by key figures within Labour Young Socialists, this was a relatively insignificant factor compared with the importance of national public campaigns to previous episodes of electoral franchise reform in Britain. The campaign was limited to a subset of young Labour advocates connected to the right of the party who wanted to 'own' the issue and offer their own radical policy item as a distinctive response to the emergence of a Trotskyist challenge within the Young Socialists. The 'Votes for Youth' campaign therefore had little ambition to become a wider national movement. It pressurised the Labour government by lobbying Labour MPs and the National Executive Committee. This dynamic characterised the elite-driven nature of the reform process. Media attention to voting age reform peaked during the periods where it had achieved increased saliency within the Labour Party with little evidence of any sustained external pressure from the media on the issue over the period.

Second, in contradiction to widely held assumptions regarding the contemporary politics of voting age reform,<sup>139</sup> there is little evidence of electoral partisanship being a substantial factor in the voting age reform process of the 1960s. Contrary to subsequent developments in UK electoral politics, the Labour Party of the 1960s could not be confident in gaining young people's support at the ballot box and there was little evidence of significant Conservative concern regarding the impact of lowering the voting age on the party's electoral prospects in either the parliamentary debates or the media. Voting age reform does not seem to have been regarded as an overtly partisan move at the time. Labour's initial interest in lowering the voting age stemmed from an assumption among its central figures that the Conservatives were the more popular party with young people during the 1950s, while there is no evidence of the Conservatives recognising their own 'youth problem' until decades later.

Third, voting age reform was an issue which waxed and waned in interest and policy momentum throughout the late 1950s and 1960s, but it did not capture the imagination of the media or the public. This in part can be attributed to the widely held perception amongst parliamentarians that it was an issue of relatively low political resonance or public interest. Overall, media attention on voting age reform in the 1960s can be categorised as sporadic, ambiguous and non-partisan. While there is evidence of the issue being linked to the rise of youth culture, perceived at various times as either a positive opportunity for national renewal or a negative threat, the voting age issue did not capture the media's imagination. It played no role in agenda setting, with the level of coverage rising and falling according to the attention given to it by the Labour Party.

However, the media coverage does clearly highlight the relatively non-partisan nature of the voting age debate throughout the 1960s. Crucially, right-wing newspapers did not perceive any partisan disadvantage in Labour's voting age reform and therefore raised little significant opposition to the measure. Indeed, one of the reasons for the relative lack of coverage could have been the absence of a clear-cut partisan component that might appeal to readers. Press attention thus only peaked at significant political moments related to the development of the political case for 'Votes-at-18'. These were focused almost exclusively on the politics within the Labour Party but there was little in the way of sustained coverage or strongly held opinion expounded in the media on the issue. This noted, there is some evidence of partisan divisions in newspaper coverage of the voting age campaign. In issue ownership terms, the media clearly perceived it as a Labour Party issue of little relevance to the Conservative Party or to right-leaning newspapers. This appears an accurate reflection of the political priorities of the voting age campaign and its role in the wider political debate.

Despite periods of increased interest in voting age reform, there was little akin to a sustained media campaign in left-leaning newspapers. Instead, the saliency of the issue and their stance mirrored the development of the debate within the Labour Party. The left-leaning media appeared to follow the Labour Party's agenda on the issue rather than attempting to influence or lead that debate. In contrast to the contemporary debate on voting age reform, at no point did right-leaning newspapers appear to perceive lowering the voting age as a threatening move for electoral advantage. The more common criticism of voting age reform in the right-wing press was related to the lack of strong argument in favour, the absence of clear public support for change and young people not being sufficiently mature.

Media reporting of the voting age issue also consistently highlights the previously identified contradictory frames through which the emergence of 1960s youth culture was perceived.<sup>140</sup> At varying points young people are represented in the media as a uniquely privileged and mature generation seeking greater autonomy over their lives and at others as an irresponsible and dangerous 'other'. For the media, it was considered at best a second order issue that could occasionally be used as emblematic in discussions of wider transformations in youth culture. Even during the parliamentary debates on the Representation of the People Act, the concerns of most MPs were related to issues of process and the wider context of the Latey Committee's proposed reforms, rather than the direct benefits that would be accrued from enfranchising 18-year-olds. There was also a striking absence of interest in elevating young people's voices in the debate from campaigners, politicians, or the media.



If electoral partisanship and grassroots, 'bottom-up' public pressure, the two most commonly cited factors in franchise reform processes, fail to provide satisfactory explanations, then it is necessary to consider alternative approaches to understanding the UK's role as an unlikely pioneer of 'Votes-at-18'. Voting age reform was elite-led and emerged, through internal debates within the Labour Party, as an alternative moderate response to the more radical challenges being proposed by young left-wing party activists. This appears consistent with Arthur Marwick's 'measured response' theory as we outlined in the introduction to this article.<sup>141</sup> Marwick argues there was an aspect of British exceptionalism in the response of elites to the radical challenge of youth culture.

Government responses were moderate, calm and conciliatory in the 1960s, as opposed to the reactionary and oppressive state resistance to the rising power of young people that occurred in other western democracies. Concern that Labour could lose young people to revolutionary movements and extra-parliamentary politics formed part of the political reasoning for supporting the lower voting age of 18 as a moderate alternative. In the media coverage of voting age reform, there also developed a consensus around the importance of ensuring that young people remained committed to the existing democratic system, a theme that appeared in both left- and right-leaning newspapers and lends further support for Marwick's perspective on political change.

Rejecting the Speaker's Conference recommendation for a voting age of 20 and proposing the UK become the first democratic country to lowering the voting age to 18 was however a significant political gamble by the Labour Government. In the absence of a clear partisan agenda, Marwick's 'measured response' theory provides a plausible explanation for that government's motivations in committing so much political capital to voting age reform, an issue that seemed of marginal interest to media and public opinion. This is also consistent with duality in elite perceptions of young people during the 1960s. There is a juxtaposition between the increasing importance and social influence of young people in the 1960s concurrent with the emerging perception of youth culture as a threat and potential source of subversion and political instability.

However, Marwick's 'measured response' theory cannot fully account for the rising saliency of voting age reform in the 1960s or the timing of the reform. A better fitting explanation lies in the relationship between theories of social capital and political incentivisation. While, as Marwick recognises, the impact of 1960s youth culture on generational political division did not peak until the early 1970s, our analysis demonstrates the shift in tone and perception of young people as an identifiable political grouping during this period. Media reports in the late 1950s largely frame young people's political involvement as constructive, conventional and unconflictual with political campaigns (such as the 'Votes-for-Youth' movement) contained within the recognised formal political institutions of the time, notably party youth wings.

This transforms over the period, as the political establishment and mainstream media perceive young people's political engagement as more problematic and more likely to be associated with system challenging ideas and movements. This is coupled to the growth of youth culture and the emergence of 'young people' and their interests as a distinctive (and essentialised) societal group. Political elites perceived young people as gaining unprecedented levels of social capital during this period, leading to a likely increased incentivisation to engage in political activity. This increase in young people's social capital was recognised in the implementation of the recommendations from the Latey Report

that significantly increased young people's official levels of autonomy by reducing the age of majority to 18. This ultimately forced the government to recognise the political incentives this autonomy implied. In meeting those political incentives through lowering the voting age to 18 the Labour government was primarily attempting to complete a new social contract between young people and the state, one which recognised the autonomy and consumer power of the younger strata and was prepared to acknowledge this explicitly via the award of new economic and political rights.

## Conclusion

This article has provided the first detailed analysis of the process and debate which led to the UK becoming the first country to lower the voting age to 18. Undertaking extensive archival research, we have examined the three most relevant components in the development of UK voting age reform in the 1960s; the evolution of the campaign around the issue; the content of Cabinet and parliamentary debates on reform, and media coverage of the subject of voting age reform between 1959 and 1969. The analysis demonstrates that, despite the UK taking the lead in what became a global reform of the voting age to 18, the issue was a low key, non-partisan and relatively uncontroversial example of franchise reform compared to earlier British reform and the contemporary debate on the voting age in the UK. A pioneering change emulated across much of the rest of the world was characterised by a lack of planning, little public pressure, little debate within the governing party from constituency to Cabinet level and supine parliamentary activity. 'Votes-at-18' was a largely niche issue with little traction even amongst many of the politically engaged, one that did not resonate much with those outside of the mainstream.

Lowering the voting age to 18 is one of the rare examples in the history of British electoral franchise where reform was undertaken without public pressure from below. Instead, this was an example of an elite-driven progressive reform process. The lack of strong partisan electoral motivations among advocates and opponents of reform was also a feature of 1960s voting age reform, even allowing that Labour concerns about its poor electoral performance among young people were significant in developing momentum for 'Votes-at-18'. Conversely, the Conservatives were not particularly exercised by the issue, this reflected in their decision to not whip MPs in the parliamentary vote. Indeed, some Conservatives backed 'Votes-at-18'. While Labour's proposals did not attract a bipartisan consensus of political elites, only a minority of Conservative MPs participated in the one serious attempt to derail its progress through parliament. It was more a case of a moderately determined government meeting only indifference as a barrier.

In the absence of conventional explanations of reform, we suggest that the Labour government was primarily motivated by perceptions of the broader shifts in youth culture during the 1960s, notably the growth in young people's levels of affluence and cultural influence. Despite using the cross-party Speaker's Conference to explicitly separate the voting age issue from the Latey Report and broader reform of age-related rights, the government was ultimately forced to acknowledge that the two could not be coherently separated. In doing so, they were, somewhat ironically, following in the long tradition of the UK voting age being linked to other more significant markers of adulthood, such as property ownership rights. The other, less overt, consideration of youth culture, was a

slight fear of its possible diversion into extra-parliamentary or alternative politics and the hope was that voting was a measured, minimal way of keeping youth within the existing system.

Parliamentary and academic analysis of the 1969 Representation of the People Act and the implementation of 'Votes-at-18' has been surprisingly limited, given its significance. There has been no attempt by Westminster to analyse its impact on youth political engagement and participation. The consistent, and later precipitous, decline in young people's turnout rates in UK General Elections that followed from the early 1970s onwards makes the act of lowering the voting age to 18 important in the context of possible outcomes from a further lowering of the voting age to 16. Moreover, the significance of age as a contemporary voting variable has ensured that debates about the age of franchise are unlikely to disappear. Indeed, the contemporary debate on 'Votes-at-16' contains similar arguments around the maturity, empowerment and social status of young people. Furthermore, consideration of reform of the age of enfranchisement by political elites reflects the growing power of youth culture in the 1960s to effect policy change.

This noted, voting age reform debates in the 1960s also differ from those which have emerged since the late 1990s. While the former was concerned primarily with symmetrical ages of adulthood, today's 'Votes-at-16' campaign is located within the sphere of youth rights and political agency. Moreover, current debates about 'Votes-at-16' have proven more politically divisive, both in terms of the two main political parties at Westminster and across the increasingly devolved multi-national UK state. Over the past decade, first Scotland and then Wales have lowered the voting age to 16 for local and sub-state national parliamentary elections. Unlike in 1969, there is no universal age of enfranchisement in the UK.

Overall, there appears little evidence that the Labour government's commitment to voting age reform in 1969 was driven by any form of sustained public campaigning or party-political competition. Advocacy by young activists in the Labour Party did appear to have some impact within the Parliamentary Labour Party in raising the salience of the issue and encouraged high-profile support from a small number of liberal public intellectuals. There was, however, no mass 'Votes-at-18' campaign involving young people or civil society groups. The road to lowering the voting age to 18 was ultimately elite-led by Harold Wilson's government, to fulfil an election pledge which had been motivated by their ambiguous and sometimes contradictory attitudes towards the transformations in 1960s youth culture.

## Notes

1. More than 90% of countries currently have the age of enfranchisement set at 18. See Eichhorn and Bergh (eds), *Lowering the Voting Age to 16*.
2. Notable exceptions include Bingham, "The Last Milestone."
3. Bingham, "The Last Milestone," paragraph 19.
4. Marwick, *The Sixties*, 56.
5. Pimlott, *Harold Wilson*.
6. See as examples, Harmer, *The Labour Party 1900–1998*; and Pelling, *A Short History of the Labour Party*.
7. Lee, *British Political History 1914–1995*, 215.

8. Latey, *Age of Majority*.
9. See, for example, Pearce, *Reform! The Fight for the 1832 Reform Act*.
10. There does appear to be some evidence that prior to 1832 men under the age of 21, and women who met the highly restrictive property qualification (which would have been a very rare occurrence), were entitled to vote in some constituencies. See, Richardson, *The Political Worlds of Women*, 24.
11. Takayanagi, *Women and the Vote*, 172.
12. Garrard, *Democratisation*, 80. There were exceptions—women who were university graduates or who met certain property qualifications were entitled to vote before the age of the 30.
13. Takayanagi, *Women and the Vote*, 182.
14. ‘Flappers’ in the 1920s were young women who were known for their energetic freedom, embracing a lifestyle viewed by many at the time as outrageous, immoral, or downright dangerous. For an excellent overview of the impact of female enfranchisement in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, see Thane, “What Difference did the Vote Make?” 268–85.
15. Blackburn, “Laying the Foundations of the Modern Voting System,” 37.
16. Dar, “Elections: Turnout,” 4.
17. Butler and King, “The British General Election of 1966,” 278–81.
18. Lamb, “Young Conservatives, Young Socialists and the Great Youth Abstention,” 18.
19. Bingham, “The Last Milestone,” para. 4.
20. Black, “Young Conservatism,” 992.
21. Layton-Henry, “The Young Conservatives 1945–70,” 152.
22. Labour Party, “1959 Manifesto,” 7.
23. Fielding, *The Labour Governments 1964–70*, 183.
24. Labour Party Youth Commission, *The Younger Generation*.
25. Post-war military conscription, determined by the National Service Act (1948), applied only to men between aged 17–21 for a period of 18 months. It was gradually ended from 1957, with the last national servicemen leaving in 1963.
26. Labour Party Youth Commission and Baron Gardiner; *Commission Report*, 3.
27. Fielding, *The Labour Government*, 165–90.
28. Ellis, “No Hammock,” 440.
29. Thorpe, *A History of the British Labour Party*, 176.
30. *Daily Mirror*, 10 November 1953.
31. *Daily Mirror*, 8–14 September 1959.
32. *The Guardian*, 14 September 1959.
33. *Daily Telegraph*, 14 September 1959.
34. *Daily Mail*, 15 September 1959.
35. *Ibid.*, 441.
36. *Daily Mirror*, 6 November 1959.
37. Black, “Young Conservatism,” 1017.
38. *Daily Mirror*, 11 December 1959.
39. The story was deemed newsworthy less for the substantive quality of the Bill, which was universally acknowledged to be unlikely to succeed, as for the fact that at 31 words it was one of the shortest ever recorded (*Daily Mirror*, 11 February 1960).
40. *Daily Mail*, 1 October 1963.
41. See as examples, *Daily Mirror*, 9 December 1964, *Guardian*, 14 December 1964, *Daily Mail*, 22 April 1965.
42. *Daily Mirror*, 18 August 1964.
43. Fielding, “Rethinking Labour’s 1964 Campaign,” 312.
44. See e.g. *Daily Mail*, 13 May 1965, *Daily Mirror*, 13 May 1965.
45. *Daily Mirror*, 13 May 1965.
46. *Daily Mirror*, 22 May 1965.
47. *Daily Mail*, 25 November 1965.
48. Thorpe, *A History of the British Labour Party*, 176.
49. Ellis, “The Younger Generation.”

50. *Ibid.*, 205.
51. Parliamentary Labour Party. Minutes of Meeting, 21 November 1968.
52. Vinen, *National Service*.
53. Osgerby, *Youth in Britain since 1945*.
54. Garland et al., "Youth Culture, Popular Music and the End of 'Consensus,'" 268.
55. *Ibid.*, 97–99.
56. Brown, "The Death of Christian Britain," 188.
57. *Ibid.*, 190.
58. Brown, *Religion and Society*, 238.
59. Committee on Higher Education, *Robbins Report*.
60. Robbins Report, 20. Education; Historical Statistics, 14.
61. White and Parker, "Speaker's Conferences," 8.
62. Prior to the creation of the Electoral Commission in 2001, Prime Ministers had, on several occasions during the twentieth century, asked the Speaker to establish and chair conferences to reach all-party agreement on reforms to electoral law. For a detailed overview of the Speaker's Conferences, see White and Parker, "Speaker's Conferences."
63. Bingham, "The Last Milestone," paragraph 7.
64. Downey, "Report on the Committee on the Age of Majority," 429.
65. Lately Committee, *Report of the Committee on the Age of Majority*.
66. See note 64 above.
67. Lately Committee, *Report of the Committee on the Age of Majority*, 9.
68. *Ibid.*
69. Howe noted in his 1994 autobiography that the minority Dissenting Report he co-wrote in response to the Lately Committee final report was based on a 'fundamental difference of approach' to his colleagues. See Howe, *Conflict of Loyalty*, 42.
70. Downey, "Report of the Committee on the Age of Majority," 433.
71. *Daily Express*, 20 July 1967.
72. *The Times*, 20 July 1967.
73. *Daily Mail*, 20 July 1967.
74. *Ibid.*, 435.
75. HC Deb, 22 June 1967, vol 748 cc.1942–3, <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1967/jun/22/mr-speakers-conference-on-electoral-law>.
76. Conference on Electoral Law, Final Report.
77. Bingham, "The Last Milestone," paragraph 10.
78. *Daily Express*, 28 February 1968.
79. *Daily Telegraph*, 28 February 1968.
80. CAB 128/42/63, 2 November 1967. See also Fielding, *The Labour Governments 1964–70*, p.184.
81. CAB 128/42/63, 2 November 1967.
82. Crossman, *The Diaries of a Cabinet Minister, Volume Three*, 37.
83. Howard, *The Crossman Diaries*, 447.
84. *Ibid.*, 447.
85. CAB 129/137/6 'Electoral Reform: Reduction in the Age of Voting to 18: Increase in Electorate'. Memorandum by the Secretary of State for the Home Department. The memorandum showed the percentage of 18–20 year olds in Scotland would form almost seven per cent of the electorate, nearly one per cent higher than the figure for England and Wales.
86. Crossman, *The Diaries of a Cabinet Minister*, 37.
87. CAB 134/2860, 2 November 1967.
88. Fielding, *The Labour Governments 1964–1970*, 184.
89. Lynch, *The History of the Scottish National Party*; and McAllister, *Plaid Cymru*.
90. Parliamentary Labour Party. Minutes of Meeting, 6 November 1968.
91. Benn, *Office Without Power. Diaries 1968–72*, 68.
92. *Ibid.*, 69.
93. Crossman, *The Diaries of a Cabinet Minister*, 65.

94. Howard, *The Crossman Diaries*, *Ibid.*, 447. The 'fanatical supporters' were Tony Benn, Peter Shore, Michael Stewart and Gerald Gardiner, suggesting the Left was most enthusiastic, although Crossman thought Barbara Castle, also of the Left, would have opposed had she been present.
95. Crossman, *The Diaries of a Cabinet Minister*, 65.
96. See note 93 above.
97. Crossman, *The Diaries of a Cabinet Minister*, 92.
98. HM Government, *Representation of the People Bill*, Cmnd 3717.
99. Bingham, "The Last Milestone," para. 11.
100. HC Deb 24 July 1968 vol. 769 cc.576–82.
101. HC Deb, 18 November 1968, c.913.
102. HC Deb, 10 April 1968, cc.1403–4.
103. HC Deb, 10 April 1968, c.1405.
104. See HL Deb, 23 January 1969, 1045–94.
105. HC Deb, 18 November 1968, c.948.
106. See note 103 above.
107. Fielding, *The Labour Governments 1964-70*, 184.
108. HL Deb, 23 January 1969, c.1050.
109. e.g. Alan Williams, HC Deb, 18 November 1968, c.1010).
110. Viscount Monckton, HL Deb, 6 February 1969, c.235.
111. HL Deb, 22 November 1967, 286, 1048–9.
112. HC Deb, 24 July 1968, cc. 576–82.
113. HC Deb, 20 November 1967, cc.956–1028.
114. HL Deb, 22 November 1967, 286, 1064–69.
115. Anthony Gardner, HC Deb, 18 November 1968, c.994.
116. Fielding, *The Labour Governments 1964-70*, 185.
117. CAB 128/43/44, 29 October 1968, 5.
118. *Ibid.*
119. HC Deb, 18 November 1968, c.1015.
120. HC Deb, 26 November 1968, 774, c.417.
121. HC Deb, 26 November 1968, 774, c.342.
122. HC Deb, 26 November 1968, c.309.
123. See note 51 above.
124. HC Deb, 26 November 1968, c.330.
125. HC Deb, 26 November 1968, c.313.
126. *Ibid.*
127. HC Deb, 26 November 1968, 774, c.310.
128. Four MPs acted at tellers (two for the Aye side and two for the no and are not included in the voting tallies. Three of the four were Labour MPs (including Strauss) and the other a Conservative. HC Deb, 26 November 1968, c.435.
129. HL Deb, 6 February 1969, 299, c.220.
130. HL Deb, 6 February 1969, 299, c.228.
131. Lord Somers, HL Deb, 6 February 1969, 299, cc. 214–16.
132. HL Deb, 6 February 1969, 299, c.228.
133. Earl of Cromartie, HL Deb, 6 February 1969, 299, c.215.
134. *Daily Mirror*, 25–26 July 1968.
135. *Daily Mirror*, 27 November 1968.
136. *Daily Telegraph*, 15 October 1968.
137. Butler and Pinto-Duschinsky, *The British General Election of 1970*, 263.
138. Denver and Garnett, *British General Elections since 1964*, 39.
139. See Loughran, Mycock, and Tonge, "Lessons from 1969," 32.
140. Bingham, "The Last Milestone," para. 17.
141. See Marwick, *The Sixties*, 1998.

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