

British Radical M. P. 'S, 1874-1895: New Evidence From Discriminant Analysis*

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The late-Victorian Liberal party may be regarded as divided into Whigs, moderates, and Radicals, going from right to left in the political spectrum. The problem in this paper is to separate out the parliamentary Radicals. This is a difficult task because conventional sources often are inconsistent, ambiguous or completely lacking in their assignment of labels to members of factions. However, the votes in the House of Commons can be used to identify the members of a faction — in this case the Radicals — through the technique of multiple discriminant analysis.

The first step in the procedure was to find from conventional sources the M.P.'s clearly known to their contemporaries as "Radicals" and as other-than-Radicals. This step left a large unclassified group of Liberals in each of the parliaments under consideration. Then, through multiple discriminant analysis, the Liberal M.P.'s whose voting pattern most resembled that of the known Radicals were found. In addition, the very assumption that such factions existed in the Liberal party was tested by the discriminant analysis procedure. After it was affirmed that this assumption was valid, and the M.P.'s who behaved as Radicals were designated, the choices were tested further in conventional sources and final selection of Radical M.P.'s was made.

Multiple discriminant analysis is a statistical procedure by which quantifiable characteristics of something, such as a country, a corporation, or a number of individuals, can be employed to distinguish between two or more groups. The technique in this case finds the division which shows the greatest differentiation between the "known" groups of M.P.'s (provided that a statistical differentiation between the groups can in fact be proved). Next other divisions are added to the equation in the order that they contribute to statistical differentiation of the groups, until no more divisions can be found that do so. With the selected divisions, a discriminant function is derived, which defines the position of each M.P. along a one-dimensional continuum. The

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unclassified M.P.'s whose position along the continuum is near that of the known Radicals are designated as functional Radicals.

The results for the years from 1874 to 1895 can be summarized in the following table:

Radical M.P.'s, 1874-1895					
	1874-80	1880-5	1886	1886-92	1892-5
No. of Radical M.P.'s	94	176	158	161	191
% of the Lib. parl. party	32.8 %	47.3 %	46.6 %	66.0 %	65.9 %

These results lead to several significant conclusions. First, down to 1892, there were demonstrable differences between Radicals and the more moderate members of the parliamentary party. Second, the Radical segment of the parliamentary party increased after 1874, though leveling off after 1886. Third, the percentage of Liberal parliamentary seats held by Radicals increased sharply as a result of the Home Rule split. And fourth, there was an increasing identity of Liberal with Radical, so that after 1892, the terms, as formerly defined, became largely meaningless. Together, these conclusions suggest that a new look should be taken at the history of the late-Victorian Liberal party, especially to the interpretation which holds that the attachment of the party to Home Rule dampened the fires of Radicalism and consequently prevented the party from retaining working-class support.