"It Is Necessary to Make A Complete Breach With the Past": How The Failures of the Second Boer War Shaped British Policy, Politics, and Society in the Edwardian Era

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Abstract
This thesis examines the impact of the Second Boer War on the United Kingdom. Focusing mostly on policy and parliamentary inquiry, the piece explores how British military shortcomings during the war led to a major reorganization of the military and a dramatic expansion of the social safety net. Additionally, the thesis touches upon how the war caused the government to begin more systematically collecting data and led to private-sector efforts to improve the physical condition of the British public.

Keywords
history, Europe, United Kingdom, Boer War, Edwardian Era, military reform, social reform, People's Budget

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“IT IS NECESSARY TO MAKE A COMPLETE BREACH WITH THE PAST”: HOW THE FAILURES OF THE SECOND BOER WAR SHAPED BRITISH POLICY, POLITICS, AND SOCIETY IN THE EDWARDIAN ERA

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Introduction

In 1899, at the height of its power, the British Empire went to war with a small group of Afrikaner farmers in South Africa. It expected a quick and easy win in a minor colonial war, of the sort that Britain had fought dozens of times in the Victorian period. Instead, it got bogged down into a three-year quagmire necessitating the biggest British military deployment in a century and the biggest outside Europe to date. This shocked the British leadership and public. A general sentiment of nearly avoided disaster swept the nation. What if it were not the tiny Afrikaner republics, but Germany or Russia?

Government leaders reluctantly responded to the frenzied panic with a series of public inquiries from 1902 to 1904. These committees, largely set up to calm the public, ended up issuing damning reports of British weakness and recommended radical change. To hear the committee members tell it, nearly every facet of British military organization needed to be uprooted and modernized in order to be able to compete with a rising Germany. Furthermore, the public was no longer fit for military service and multiple commissioners called for compulsory military education “as the only practical alternative to conscription.”¹ Social conditions were producing wastrel and medically unfit adolescents who would be useless in a national emergency. Normally prosaic matters like physical education and school meals became the subject of national attention as the

public and the press increasingly demanded change to shore up British national power and stem perceived imperial decline.

This thesis studies the British response to the Second Boer War -- the investigations into problems and possible solutions, wholesale military reorganization, and major social reform -- as a distinct period of British history separate from both the Victorian age and World War I. The period between the Second Boer War (1899-1902) and World War I (1914-1918), largely overlapping with the reign of King Edward VII (r. 1901-1910), is rarely considered on its own terms. Depending on the context, it is either considered the prelude to World War I or the end to the Victorian era. As such, the immediate impact of the Boer War on the momentous changes that occurred during the Edwardian Era has been overlooked in favor of longer narratives. Military historians have considered how the reforms impacted British military capability effectiveness in World War I, while social historians have focused on how the broadening of the franchise, rise of trade unionism, spread of socialist ideology and the decline of the landed aristocracy led to the period’s social welfare reforms. Political historians have considered how the reforms and subsequent constitutional crisis contributed to the permanent decline of the Liberal Party after World War I and its replacement by the Labour Party. What I have done is combined all these fields to consider how the Second Boer War led to change in the Edwardian Era. As such, I have both taken the scholarship out of silos and considered the Edwardian Era not as the epilogue or prologue to something else, but a period worth studying in its own right.

The Second Boer War of 1899-1902 was a long time coming. The original colonial power in the region was the Dutch, not the British. Originally established as a
trading post for the Dutch East India Company (VOC), the colony rapidly became a hub of Dutch settler colonialism. Against the wishes of Dutch colonial authorities, many white settlers trekked inland and set up farms outside of the direct reach of authorities. After the British occupied the colony during the Napoleonic Wars and permanently gained control under the Anglo-Dutch Treaty of 1814, the migration of Dutch settlers, now called Afrikaners or Boers, continued. The migration reached further inland and is known as the “Great Trek” from 1836 onwards as the Boers continued migrating further inland to escape the expanding reach of the British colonial rulers and the 1834 prohibition of slavery.

These migratory Boers set up two states: the South African Republic, usually called the Transvaal Republic, and the Orange Free State. These states were recognized as independent by the British in 1852 and 1854, respectively. Particularly once diamonds were found in the Boer territories, the Transvaal Republic and Orange Free State were destined for conflict with the expansionist British, a simmering conflict that would break out into the First Boer War in 1880-1. This war, a relatively minor conflict, resulted in Boer victory and the British were forced to reverse their 1877 annexation of the Transvaal Republic and accept its independence.


3 Having covered over 100 years of colonial history in two paragraphs, this obviously omits certain major events and intermediate diplomatic actions. One such was an attempt in 1875 to combine the British colonies with the Boer Republics in a federation modeled off the 1867 federation of Canada.
Southern Africa on the eve of the Second Boer War, 1899.

Why the First Boer War, a conflict that resulted in clear British defeat, did not provoke the same soul-searching and rapid change as the Second Boer War, is a question that, to fully answer, would require a far longer work than the short space I have devoted to it. However, there are a few key differences to draw out. The First Boer War was fought on a much smaller scale than the second. The entire war was three months and fewer than five hundred people died in total. The government, led by William Gladstone (PM 1868-74, 1880-5, 1886, 1892-94) actively decided against escalating the war further, calculating the costs of such an escalation to greatly exceed the benefits. This was a consistent policy that was applied again during the Mahdist War in Sudan (1881-99).

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where only consistent public outrage caused Gladstone to order an expedition to relieve the 1884 Siege of Khartoum. The relief force, dispatched extremely reluctantly and with great delay, arrived too late and the city had fallen and its British commander, popular hero General Gordon, killed. There are clues that Gladstone himself was not enamored of expansionism; he had declared about the Sudanese rebellion, for example, “yes, these people are struggling to be free, and they are rightly struggling to be free.” As someone who also sought to shrink the state, it makes sense that he took chances to exit potentially costly expansionist conflicts, like that in Sudan in the mid 1880s and in the Transvaal in 1880-81.

There were also significant social and situational differences between the two Boer wars that made failure in the second far more significant. Firstly, war correspondents in the second provided the British public with a far more complete and far more frequent view of the failures. For example, during the several-month-long Siege of Mafeking, several correspondents trapped in Mafeking provided their newspapers with frequent updates on matters as small as daily life of the inhabitants. These firsthand reports captivated the British public.

Secondly, the political and social landscape had changed. Specifically, the working class had a far greater say in politics and policy. In the interim two decades, working class males had gained the right to vote and trade unions had expanded rapidly to include not just skilled workers, as had been traditional, but also unskilled workers like miners. So-called “Lib-Lab” MPs rose in numbers and power within the Liberal Party.

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6 William Ewart Gladstone, “Vote Of Censure” (1884), [http://localhost:54806/Commons/1884-05-12/debates/2b4f1e3a-2a07-478f-9b38-804be469f989/VoteOfCensurehighlight=yes+these+people+struggling+free+they+rightly+struggling+free](http://localhost:54806/Commons/1884-05-12/debates/2b4f1e3a-2a07-478f-9b38-804be469f989/VoteOfCensurehighlight=yes+these+people+struggling+free+they+rightly+struggling+free).
and Parliament overall. A crisis of masculinity was also brewing, one that was not specific to Britain. A similar crisis of masculinity was playing out in the United States over the closing of the frontier, one that got its outlet largely in the expansionism and jingoism of the Spanish-American War, a reaffirmation of American manhood.

Thirdly, the international situation of the British had changed significantly in the last two decades of the nineteenth century. In 1880, the British were without peer in almost all measurable realms. British industry was far larger than any other nation, the world’s trade was carried on British ships and British financiers financed the world economy. Britain’s navy was far larger than any other and Britain’s traditional military rival, France, had been decisively defeated by the nascent German Empire in 1870-1.

By 1899, Britain’s advantage in all these realms was slipping. In absolute terms, the British economy was considerably larger than any other, but the US and Germany were catching up. In 1880, the volume of British trade was 2.3 times that of German or American trade. By 1900, that advantage had fallen to about 1.5 times German trade and 1.8 times American trade. This is just one point of comparison, but others -- railroad length, steel manufacturing, coal mining, population size -- all point to the same trend: Germany was poised to catch up to Britain. Britain’s military advantage was declining as well. German military buildup was closing the gap and the British public knew it,

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7 See John Tosh and Michael Roper’s book *Manful Assertions: Masculinities in Britain Since 1800* for a discussion of how masculinity was changing and how it was influenced by new organizations like the Salvation Army as well as the Empire.
9 Ibid.
10 Ibid.
particularly as the Germans embarked on a major shipbuilding program to combat the Royal Navy’s advantage.

Diplomatically, Britain had fallen behind as well. In 1882, the Triple Alliance of Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy was formed. In 1892, the French and the Russians formed an alliance, one deeply threatening to Britain. Russia imperiled Britain’s hold on India while France menaced both the British Isles and other colonial holdings, including the Suez Canal. This vulnerability became clear when Britain nearly went to war with France during the Fashoda Incident of 1898. Britain was left out in the diplomatic cold with no major allies and facing two potentially hostile alliances. Suffice to say, Britain was primed by 1899 both to truly commit to winning the colonial war and to panic at the difficulty of doing so.

The Second Boer War was precipitated by the refusal of the Boer Republics to permit “Uitlanders” -- British white citizens who had migrated to the Boer Republics, largely for economic reasons -- to vote. The British had the Boers in a vise: if they permitted the Uitlanders to vote, the Uitlanders, already economically dominant, likely would have outnumbered the Boers at the polls within a decade or two and voted to annex themselves to the Empire. The Boer voting citizen population was quite low: in the 1893 Transvaal presidential election, a total of 14,965 votes were cast.\textsuperscript{11} This low total was itself considered unreasonably high and there were reports that more votes were cast than there were names on the electoral register.\textsuperscript{12}

\textsuperscript{11} The Annual Register; A Review of Public Events (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1894), 442.
\textsuperscript{12} The Volksraad (Parliament) appointed a committee to investigate this claim and ultimately rejected it, but the electoral register is no longer extant (to my knowledge). In 1911, Encyclopedia Britannica wrote that they believed that the electoral roll was manipulated and that concerns were ignored by the Boer Volksraad because the runner up candidate (Petrus Jacobus Joubert) favored easing restrictions on
presidential election, 8,244 votes were cast.\textsuperscript{13} The estimates of the British were that the two Republics contained no more than 40,000 Boer male citizens of fighting age.

As such, the power balance was immensely asymmetrical. Britain would be able to beat the Boers; everyone knew so. Even the Boer leaders knew this and begged other European powers to intervene.\textsuperscript{14} Nonetheless, the Boers resisted far above their numbers and expected capabilities. Ultimately, subjugating them required three years, £217 million (twelve percent of 1900’s gross national product), 450,000 British soldiers, and a scorched earth policy of concentration and internment camps.\textsuperscript{15} The stage was set for the national panic and reform that this thesis explores.

The existing scholarly works on the United Kingdom between the Second Boer War and the beginning of World War I is extremely disjointed. There is scholarly work on Social Darwinism, social and military reform, taxes, tariffs, and the Boy Scouts. What has been lacking is a comprehensive study bringing all of this together, which is the niche I have sought to fill.

Ideas of Social Darwinism, which applied the concepts of natural selection and survival of the fittest to societies, positing that weaker societies, ethnic groups of races would be taken over by stronger ones, first arose in the 1870s and began to gain wide acceptance. The field studying Social Darwinism and its effects is extremely vast and some scholars, such as Robert Bannister, dispute the idea that there even was such a

\textsuperscript{13} “M.T. Steyn Is Sworn in as President of the Orange Free State | South African History Online,” n.d., \url{https://www.sahistory.org.za/dated-event/mt-steyn-sworn-president-orange-free-state}.

\textsuperscript{14} For an excellent explanation of what each power (other than Britain) thought about the Second Boer War and why none intervened, see \textit{The International Impact of the Boer War}, edited by Keith Wilson.

concept.\textsuperscript{16} It should also be noted that the concept of Social Darwinism was largely discredited because of its strong association with racist, colonialist, and Nazi ideology and that scholars studying it have often done so with an eye towards the terrible things justified through the use of Social Darwinist philosophy.

Nonetheless, at the turn of the twentieth century Social Darwinism was adopted by people across the political spectrum. Christopher Shaw, for instance, has identified strong Social Darwinist themes in the writings of members of the Fabian Society, an extremely influential democratic socialist organization instrumental in establishing and growing the Labour Party.\textsuperscript{17} The turn of the century has been identified by many scholars, including Jeffrey O’Connell and Michael Ruse, as a highwater mark for the ideology.\textsuperscript{18} O’Connell and Ruse even go so far as to refer to the period as “Social Darwinism triumphant.”\textsuperscript{19} This dominant ideology, usually viewed in light of the conflagration of World War I, led to increased stakes for both the British and the Germans. Many Brits considered themselves in an existential rivalry with the Germans, one that they were increasingly likely to lose.

One German general framed the issue as follows in a book provocatively titled \textit{Britain as Germany’s Vassal}: competition among nations “eliminates the weak and used-up nations, and allows strong nations possessed of a sturdy civilisation to maintain themselves to obtain a position of predominant power until they too have fulfilled their


\textsuperscript{17} Christopher Shaw, “Eliminating The Yahoo Eugenics, Social Darwinism and Five Fabians,” \textit{History of Political Thought} 8, no. 3 (1987): 521–44.


\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.
civilising task and have to go down before young and rising nations.”

The influence of Social Darwinist ideology on the road to war is well documented but less investigated is the clear influence of the ideology on the series of investigatory committees set up in the wake of the Boer War. One of the few scholars to do so, Bentley B. Gilbert, focused solely on the 1904 Inter-Departmental Report on Physical Deterioration and only briefly discussed the strong influence of Social Darwinist fear on the report.

This scholarship is related to, but often separated from, scholarship on perceptions of British imperial decline. A major work in this field is Aaron Friedberg, *The Weary Titan: Britain and the Experience of Relative Decline*, whose title makes reference to a 1902 reference by a British politician to Britain as a “Weary Titan [which] staggers.” Friedberg focuses on domestic British political discourse, arguing that the Second Boer War produced a new round of finger pointing among the British elite as they struggled to accept relative decline. He also examines specific policy points and the debates surrounding them in three areas: the economy, the empire and the military, broadly the same three areas that I have divided my work into. However, he focuses on different issue-areas within those three extremely broad ones than I have, with a far stronger focus on imperial defense.

Historians have thoroughly studied the Liberal reforms of 1906-12, together with the tax reform and “People’s Budget” of 1909-10. Often considered a precursor to the

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welfare state set up after World War II, the reforms have been catalogued in many books. They have also been studied in a political context, as they were enacted by the last majority Parliament to date to have a Liberal majority and led to constitutional change by neutering the House of Lords. Much has been written about this as well. A major work on them is Peter Rowlands’ seminal two-part book series *The Last Liberal Governments*, published in 1969 and 1971, which charted the policy initiatives and political pitfalls of the Liberal administration. More recently, scholars like John Cooper, have undertaken more narrow inspections like *The British Welfare Revolution, 1906-14*, focusing on the reforms themselves and their policy implications.

Studies have proliferated on the changes in the British military between the Second Boer War and First World War. This is compounded by the fact that the British military was unique among major powers both before and after reform: it did not conscript and it had a professional army. Civilians also retained ultimate command of the British military. Scholars including John Gooch have studied the top-down changes in the command structure and decision-making apparatus, with a particular focus on the creation of a general staff and the reworked War Office. The result of these changes was a superior and more flexible military, one that performed far better in World War I than the old system had in the Second Boer War.

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Other scholars have studied the changes to recruitment and the daily life of the soldiers. Two of these are Timothy Bowman and Mark Connelly who, in their 2012 book *The Edwardian Army: Recruiting, Training, and Deploying the British Army, 1902-1914*, treat the 1902-14 epoch as worthy of examination in its own right, similar to my approach. They also discuss the impact the Boer Wars had on the reform efforts, although they group them together with the Russo-Japanese War in spurring reform. In their work, they eschew the top-down approach taken by Gooch and focus on the reformed regimental experience and social history of the soldiery.

Several books have been written about the early Boy Scouts and their fetishization of the empire and the frontier. These books often discuss the US as well, where the Boy Scouts movement was taking off at roughly the same time for many of the same reasons. Indeed, the group of people who were instrumental in starting the Scouting movement in the US even fought with Baden-Powell in the Second Boer War.

One excellent example of the broad set of works on the early Boy Scouts and its relationship to the frontier ideology is *Sons of the Empire: The Frontier and the Boy Scout Movement, 1890-1918* by Robert MacDonald. MacDonald and others have linked the Boy Scouts to the idea of physical decline and rescuing the young male. It is also abundantly clear that the prominence given Baden-Powell and South Africa at the turn of the century spurred the movement. However, to date, no author I have found has related the Boy Scouts to the broader set of reforms and sustaining British imperial power, nor to

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the prominent idea of using tariff reform to draw the empire closer together and promote white settlement of the vast colonial lands.

The Mahdist War is an interesting contemporary comparison to the Boer Wars. The British were driven out of Khartoum in 1884, just three years after being driven out of the Transvaal. In 1898, the British under Lord Kitchener returned to defeat the Mahdist state. In 1899, merely one year later, Lord Kitchener led the British back into the Transvaal to reconquer it with great determination. The difference is that, at Omdurman in Sudan, Kitchener killed, wounded, or took prisoner approximately 30,000 Mahdist soldiers while losing only 429 British killed or wounded. Omdurman decisively demonstrated the havoc that late 19th/early 20th century weaponry could wreak on less technologically advanced forces. In the Transvaal, Kitchener struggled for three years to win against a force that was highly organized, well-armed and waging a determined guerilla campaign, an indicator of the way to beat superior forces armed with new weaponry. Many lessons could have been drawn from the two wars and the original fall of Khartoum caused far more consternation than the British retreat from the Transvaal.

Despite the victory in the Mahdist War, the British public, primed for signs of imperial decline and danger, focused on the British struggle to win the Boer War and subsequently began to panic. In my first chapter, I explore the investigatory efforts taken, often reluctantly, by the British government. These were taken, depending on one’s interpretation, to quell the panic or as a serious effort to diagnose the ills afflicting Britain and possible remedies. In my second chapter, I discuss the general election of 1906 and

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the social and military reform efforts that result from the Liberal victory. In my third chapter, I shift focus to efforts centered on the empire and taxation, discussing the use of and fight over tax hikes in the “People’s Budget” to fund the new programs, the movement for an imperial preference tariff to promote imperial self-sufficiency and power, and the rise of the Boy Scouts as a response to the Boer War.

The Edwardian period, between the Victorian age and the world wars, is a pivotal time in British, European and world history. Too often, studies of this period have focused on one aspect of history. Additionally, foreign policy and international geopolitics have been the focus of study on the lead up to World War I. I have deemphasized foreign policy in an effort to break from that tradition and to prevent the reader from reading everything solely in the context of international diplomacy. Without a thorough understanding of the domestic politics and society of one of the key players in the international order, the United Kingdom, was anchored in their last war, the Second Boer War, that study is at best incomplete. I hope that by illuminating that link I have provided readers with new tools with which to view the Edwardian period, the United Kingdom and the critical lead up to World War I.
Problem Solving by Committee: Efforts to Identify Problems with British Warmaking and Recruitment Capabilities, 1902-04

[The outbreak of war] produced the most perilous international situation in which the Empire has found itself since the days of Napoleon. Only an extraordinary combination of fortunate circumstances, external and internal, saved the Empire during the early months of 1900, and there is no reason to expect a repetition of such fortune if, as appears probable, the next national emergency finds us still discussing our preparations.²⁹

Sir George Taubman-Goldie, 1903

On May 31, 1902, the Treaty of Vereeniging was signed and the Second Boer War was officially over. What had begun as a small, provincial war and turned into the biggest British military deployment in a century had ended. As the troops began shipping home, the British began to focus on why the war was so difficult to win. Amidst a Social Darwinist atmosphere, chief among the questions asked was, “if we cannot even beat a bunch of farmers, how can we expect to defend ourselves?” The government had to respond and set up three committees. The first was officially called the “Royal Commission to inquire into the military preparations for the war in South Africa, and into the supply of men, ammunition, equipment, and transport by sea and land in connection with the campaign, and into the military operations up to the occupation of Pretoria.” Commonly called the Elgin Commission (after Lord Elgin, the chair of the Commission),

²⁹ Sir George Taubman-Goldie, Notes of Commissioners Appended to the Report of His Majesty’s Commissioners Appointed to Inquire into the Military Preparations and Other Matters Connected with the War in South Africa, 149.
it looked into the failures of the war.\textsuperscript{30} The second, officially called the “Royal Commission on Physical Training (Scotland)” was charged with researching exactly that: the state of physical training and education in Scotland. Why Scotland was chosen is never explicitly mentioned. The third, officially called the “Inter-Departmental Committee on Physical Deterioration,” was set up to investigate the physical state of the British people. It was particularly interested in young, military-age men, but they also examined the state of affairs with regard to young women.

Of these three, the only one that has received any substantial inclusion in the historiography to date is the Elgin Commission. The Elgin Commission is usually seen by military historians such as John Gooch as not terribly influential itself, as its report mostly refrained from making recommendations but merely highlighted faults. Additionally, Gooch and others claim reform was obstructed at the time by entrenched interests, including the Admiralty, and that it was only with the publication of the 1904 Esher Report (to be discussed in the next chapter) that the pressure for reform could no longer be ignored.\textsuperscript{31} The other two reports receive almost no mention in secondary literature. Historians of social reform have tended to focus on the Edwardian Era and the new policies designed to bolster the role of the state and improve the general welfare as the culmination of decades of agitation and reform. The Second Boer War itself is not generally considered, even though, as I will argue, it served as a catalyst both for formal

\textsuperscript{30} The Lord Elgin who chaired this commission was not the same one who is associated with the removal of the Elgin Marbles from the Parthenon nor the one who is associated with the destruction of the Summer Palace in Beijing. This Lord Elgin is their grandson and son, respectively.

\textsuperscript{31} John Gooch, \textit{The Plans of War: The General Staff and British Military Strategy, c. 1900-1916}. 
investigation into the problems of poverty and by linking the issues to concerns of national power and national defense.

Among other innovations, these committees are notable for their collection and heavy use of data as well as for a broadening of scope beyond the elite and officer class. The Elgin Commission was one of the first to hear evidence from ordinary soldiers, and the members of the Commission were extremely thorough, collecting evidence for fifty-five days, hearing from 114 witnesses and collectively asking 22,200 questions. The minutes of evidence occupy over 1,000 pages. Indicating the complexity of the problems and their importance, the commissioners did not believe this was enough and protested in the preface to their final report that they were asked to report too early.

The Elgin Commission wrote an extensive report. They did not opine on strategy or tactics, viewing such questions as outside of their remit. The commission was also composed entirely of civilians, limiting the quality of any advice they could give on strategic or tactical matters. What they focused on instead were questions of military administration, a focus that would remain for the remainder of the Edwardian period. What institutional failures constrained valid strategic or tactical choices was the focus of the commission’s inquiries, a concern that reflects an understanding that the British military apparatus was woefully deficient for the requirements of war.

Despite the potentially damning nature of their report on powerful people, the Commission did not pull punches. On the contrary, some very powerful people,

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33 Ibid, 1-4.
34 Ibid.
particularly the Commander-in-Chief, Lord Wolseley, came off looking rather incompetent. This willingness to look, in detail and truthfully, at the failures of the administration of the war marked a major step in creating the conditions for true, root-and-branch, successful reform of the country’s military administration.

Chief among the concerns was the worry that the British nation had become soft and no longer able to defend itself. Britain had a unique system of military recruitment, with a small and professional army. All the other major European powers--France, Germany, Austria-Hungary and Russia--relied on a system of conscription in which most males served in the military for two or three years, depending on the state.\textsuperscript{35} Those states had large standing armies and it was relatively easy to expand them, as older males had already been through military training once and could be called upon again in times of crisis.

By contrast, Britain relied entirely on volunteers turning up at recruiting stations in large enough numbers. The British generally viewed mandatory military service as a tool of autocracy and historically believed that a large standing army would threaten the free, democratic nature of Britain by giving whoever controlled the army the ability to threaten and coerce compliance. Britain’s unique political situation and isolated geography enabled them to maintain this posture for centuries. While France, Germany and Russia all experienced multiple major invasions during the nineteenth century and France and Germany suffered revolution, France several times, the United Kingdom

\textsuperscript{35} Russia was an exception as the huge military-age population and relative lack of industrialization meant the Russian state could not afford to conscript all those eligible. Nonetheless, a far bigger proportion of the Russian male population entered the military than the English. The United States also did not conscript at the time.
(with the exception of Ireland) remained both safe and stable. The country prided itself on its political situation and not having a militarized or intrusive bureaucracy and several British accounts of travel from the continent note the visible presence of the military around the country, in sharp contrast to the British reality. As a consequence, when the country was forced to face its military failings in the Second Boer War, they could neither mimic the continent fully nor afford to keep the status quo. They were forced to develop a new military model.

The standing army, known as the “Regular Army,” was backed up by an Army Reserve, a Volunteer Force (even though all British soldiers were volunteers, “Volunteer” in this context refers to a specific portion of the armed forces), the Yeomanry and the militia. On the eve of war in 1899, there were ostensibly 249,466 soldiers in the Regular Army and about 500,000 in the assorted other outfits.36

At first glance, nearly 750,000 soldiers does not seem like a small army, but that number obscures considerable weakness. In the first place, the reported total of around 750,000 was not actually 750,000 men.37 The Regular Army was at full strength, but the other units were in practice considerably under the reported numbers. Additionally, most of the Regular Army, who were the soldiers immediately available for dispatch to South Africa, were required for other purposes. India, which was both the weakest point of the British Empire, close as it was to the Russian Empire, and essential for imperial defense, was protected by 73,157. Another 51,204 were on duty in the colonies or Egypt, which was a British protectorate at the time. The government had only limited ability to move

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36 Lord Elgin et al., “Report of His Majesty’s Commissioners Appointed to Inquire into the Military Preparations and Other Matters Connected with the War in South Africa,” 31-37
37 Ibid.
them to South Africa for fear of leaving key places such as the Suez Canal undefended and extremely vulnerable. The recent Fashoda Crisis, in which war had been only narrowly avoided with France in the Sudan, made clear that threats existed. While no other power ultimately intervened in the war, the British feared that another power, particularly Germany or Russia, would exploit the situation to their own advantage.

The remaining Regular Army included a Field Army of 84,000 that was prepared for deployment abroad if necessary. This Field Army was composed of two Army Corps of nearly 40,000 men each as well as a cavalry division. While they were both prepared for overseas deployment, the expectation was that both would only be necessary in the event of a major Continental war and that one would be more than sufficient for a colonial dispute. To that end, these Corps were also incorporated into the overall Home Defense plan for the British Isles in the event that an enemy landed troops in the UK.38

Additionally, the military had no contingency plan to easily scale up deployment abroad after these immediate deployments. They also had no plan to rapidly expand the size of the Regular Army at all once the 80,000 strong Army Reserve was activated, as happened within one year of war. As the total deployment to South Africa of soldiers of all kinds ended up being 448,435, the pre-war plans were clearly inadequate. Of those, some 250,000 were officially considered part of the “Field Army” that had originally been designated for overseas deployment. Since at no point during the war did the British resort to compulsory conscription, this increase was entirely due to voluntary enlistments.

38 Ibid.
As the Elgin Commission noted in their report, the result was that the entire South African force was “hastily improvised.” Setting aside for the moment the problems of administering, officering, providing medical care for, and transporting a force five times larger than planned, the problem that transfixed attention was that of finding enough able-bodied men of military-eligible age to fill out the ranks. One officer wrote in July 1901 that “all are agreed that the provision of the men is the first difficulty that must be dealt with.” Recruitment was quite difficult throughout the war, and many of those who did turn up were rejected for various physical reasons.

At one point, officials considered the cause of the shortage of soldiers to be low pay relative to private sector work, particularly in the strong economy that then existed. In 1901, several people proposed raising the military pay to enable the nation to raise a bigger army. Sir Frederick Maurice, an obscure Major-General, believed instead the problem was not that Britain lacked willing men for the army, but that those men were not physically fit enough to actually join and serve in the army. In July, 1901 he wrote that the result of raising military pay would be to “bring into the world [a] vast army of cripples.” He argued, instead that “if we spend our money in raising the pay, we extract out of the population, no doubt, a better class of men; but we leave the deterioration of the national staple behind the army, on which the army ultimately depends, untouched, perhaps aggravated.” Aside from the obvious implications for the army of being unable

39 Ibid.
41 Ibid, 114.
42 Ibid.
to find recruits, this statement intimately connects the army, national defense and the bodies of civilians.

Sir Frederick Maurice became nationally famous and won converts to his point of view in January, 1902 when he wrote an article in the *Contemporary Review* entitled “Where to Get Men.” In it he argued that the War Office was a mere “convenient whipping-boy” for the recruitment failures. Instead, it was “the nation that must take the question up.” This article was widely read, although it was originally published anonymously, once Maurice admitted to being the author, he began speaking widely on the subject. He followed up in January, 1903 with a longer article, also in *Contemporary Review*, called “National Health: A Soldier’s Study.” By Maurice’s reckoning, only forty percent of those wanting to serve were actually still capable of service after two years in uniform. He found many people receptive to his point of view including, crucially, the Prime Minister, the War Secretary and the Director-General of the Army Medical Service, who was a particularly zealous proponent of this theory.

The combination of concern over physical health (and thus citizens’ bodies) and national warmaking capabilities was not new to Europe or the broader Western world. On the Continent, where militaries were large and tensions were high, statistics were more broadly available and governments took more action to address social ills. Additionally,

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44 Ibid, 84.
45 Ibid.
46 Sir Frederick Maurice, *Sir Frederick Maurice; a Record of His Work and Opinions, with Eight Essays on Discipline and National Efficiency*, 114.
48 Sir Frederick Maurice, *Sir Frederick Maurice; a Record of His Work and Opinions, with Eight Essays on Discipline and National Efficiency*, 114.
Social Darwinist ideology was particularly prominent in Germany.⁴⁹ The British government had not traditionally engaged in the same sort of analysis, however, until after the Second Boer War.

To look into the physical condition of potential recruits, two other committees were set up, the “Committee on Physical Training (Scotland)” and the “Inter-Departmental Committee on Physical Deterioration.” They focused mostly on young adults and children, especially men, but also considered women. Both committees also focused on recommendations for change; something generally avoided by the Elgin Commission. This was especially true for the Committee on Physical Training (Scotland), whose terms of reference are here:

“To enquire into the opportunities for physical training now available in the State-aided schools and other educational institutions of Scotland; and to suggest means by which such training may be made to conduce to the welfare of the pupils; and further, how such opportunities may be increased by Continuation Classes and otherwise, so as to develop, in their practical application to the requirements of life, the faculties of those who have left the day schools, and thus to contribute towards the sources of national strength.”⁵⁰

The terms of reference clearly reflect some Social Darwinist concern over the future of the nation in a time of perceived weakness. Rectifying that issue would “contribute towards the sources of national strength” and, as such, the Committee was charged with making proposals on how to improve the physical training regimens available in Scottish schools. Why Scotland was specifically chosen is unmentioned, either in the terms of reference or otherwise, but it can be surmised based upon some of the findings of the report and other indicators of the time. Urbanization was linked to

⁴⁹ Jeffrey O’Connell and Michael Ruse, “Social Darwinism,”
some of the maladies afflicting those rejected for military service and Scotland was more urbanized than the relatively agrarian Ireland. While England was yet more urbanized, England was also considerably wealthier. The maladies were also associated with poverty, particularly poor housing and nutrition, rates of which were considerably higher in Scotland than in England. Lastly, Sir Frederick Maurice had called conditions in Glasgow the worst in Britain.51 Among many other problems of data collection, the number of those who were rejected by the recruiting officer was uncollected.

Another possible reason for the selection of Scotland as the Committee’s focus was that there was some data for England. The British Medical Association had collected English data twenty years prior but had not done so to the standards of the early twentieth century, an issue that was addressed by the Committee on Physical Deterioration rather than the Committee on Physical Training. Some progressive social reformers, most notably Charles Booth and Seebohm Rowntree, had done some work in urban areas in England (Booth in London and Rowntree in York) to determine what they called the rate of poverty more recently. Booth’s study lasted from 1886 to 1903 and examined London; Rowntree’s study was in 1899 and in York.52 Their work was also evaluated and generally rejected by the Inter-Departmental Committee, but its existence may be another reason why Scotland was selected as the focus of the Committee on Physical Training.

In the UK at the time, education was officially compulsory until the age of fourteen (as of 1901, prior to that it had been compulsory up until the age of ten). After

51 John Stewart, “‘This Injurious Measure’: Scotland and the 1906 Education (Provision of Meals) Act,” The Scottish Historical Review 78, no. 205 (April 1999), 79.
the age of fourteen, children had the option to continue in free public schools called “Continuation Classes” up until the age of eighteen.\textsuperscript{53} Courts were permitted to detain children younger than fourteen in so-called “Truant Schools” should they routinely fail to attend school. Criminalized children were sent to so-called “Industrial” or “Reformatory” schools. The Committee considered these schools separately from other schools and otherwise divided schools into “elementary,” “training colleges” for teachers, “higher class schools”, and universities and evaluated each group separately.\textsuperscript{54}

In general, physical education in Britain and other European countries consisted of some semi-militarized activities and some recreational ones. In terms of the drills that emulated some aspect of military life, military drill was the most common, although it should be viewed as an attempt to improve the physical condition of those who partook, rather than a legitimate preparation for military service. Cadet corps, on the other hand, were often present, especially in universities. These corps were often associated with the local Volunteer forces and boasted a high rate of enrollment in the Volunteer forces among cadets.\textsuperscript{55} Despite their shared name, these cadets have more in common with modern ROTC than modern cadets at places like the United States Military Academy (West Point). Being a cadet was additive to their study, rather than the main focus.

Other activities with military roots being practiced in schools included rifle shooting.\textsuperscript{56} The inclusion of rifle shooting is an excellent example of the melding of physical education with militarism and national security. Rifle shooting involves only

\textsuperscript{53} Lord Mansfield et al., “Report of the Royal Commission on Physical Training (Scotland).”
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid.
very limited physical activity, but trains young children in the use of guns, a vital skill for national defense. It also aided the development of hand-eye coordination and improved eyesight, two concerns the Elgin Commission had about British soldiers during the Second Boer War.\textsuperscript{57} Rifle practice was not limited to older children, either: the Committee recommended that children under fourteen be given only dummy guns, thus implying that in at least some places they were being given live rifles previously.

The most common non-militarized activity in Britain was gymnastics.\textsuperscript{58} Gymnastics has strong nationalist overtones on the continent, particularly in Germany, where a major gymnastic association, the \textit{turnverein}, was founded with the explicit aim of improving the physical health of Germans so as to protect against invasion.\textsuperscript{59} The same thought was not explicitly expressed in Britain, but the link was implicitly present.

Gymnastics then was not the same as what we consider gymnastics. For the British of the early 20th century, gymnastics meant exercises in a gymnasium, not necessarily the agile movements we tend to associate with the sport. This meant, for example, that “gymnastics” included weightlifting. Other non-militarized physical activities included swimming, boxing, fencing and running as well as organized sports. It should also be noted that the type of activity differed heavily depending on the type of school. For example, residential schools had more rifle shooting than non-residential ones and cadet corps existed in universities but not elementary schools.\textsuperscript{60}

\textsuperscript{57} Lord Elgin et al., “Report of His Majesty’s Commissioners Appointed to Inquire into the Military Preparations and Other Matters Connected with the War in South Africa.”
\textsuperscript{58} Lord Mansfield et al., Report of the Royal Commission on Physical Training (Scotland).
\textsuperscript{60} Lord Mansfield et al., Report of the Royal Commission on Physical Training (Scotland).
The Committee members also reached some sweeping conclusions that generally applied to schools regardless of type. The vast majority were failing to provide adequate physical instruction, a threshold the Committee somewhat arbitrarily set at 2 hours per week. Many schools, particularly those in urban areas, lacked any sort of infrastructure for physical activity, even something as simple as a “covered shed” or an “open pitch” (yard). Compounding the issue, schools often did not have any dedicated physical education teacher. Additionally, teachers of all sorts suffered from a general lack of understanding of basic health and physiology, something that the Committee members believed to worsen the problems of physical condition.  

Neither schools nor other authorities conducted routine physical examinations of students that might identify easily rectifiable problems or contribute to a better understanding of how widespread medical and physical problems were among schoolchildren.

One of the surprising findings of the Committee was that Reformatory and Industrial Schools provided far better physical education than did any other type of school. This was partially due to the fact that the Committee had identified a correlation between more exercise and fewer disciplinary violations. The Committee members also found a correlation between the Industrial/Reformatory Schools providing more physical education and students’ outcomes in traditional non-physical education. The Committee singled out the Boys’ Industrial School at Mossbank, right outside of Glasgow, which housed juvenile delinquents from Glasgow. The school had a comprehensive system of physical training and therefore, despite the fact that the boys who enter are “waifs and

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61 Ibid.
63 Ibid, 10.
strays” and “very backward in education,” ninety to ninety-five percent leave as “good and useful citizens.” The Committee also stated in its report that their findings about Industrial and Reformatory Schools “clearly shows that physical training is quite as important in fitting for civil life as it is for boys intended for the Army or Navy.” This language is also yet another example of the tight mental connection the Edwardians had between physical strength/proficiency, honest work, being a good citizen and national power/capability.

There are other indicators that the commission was not solely concerned with military capabilities, but also with the creation of good citizens. One such indicator is that, although the vast majority of time and ink was spent discussing the education of able-bodied males, the Committee did address female education as well as the education of the “feeble-minded and cripples.” Their inclusion at all suggests a broader concern with national welfare than mere military potential, although they were linked in the public mind. The report also explicitly states that there should be no “unduly military character” to physical training. However, there are clear limits to what the Committee defines as “unduly military;” it still recommended rifle practice with dummy guns for male children under fourteen and outright stated that there are advantages to aspects of military training and discipline.

Additionally, with regard to Continuation Classes (ages fourteen to eighteen), the Committee expressed a great respect for the military. One of the main concerns,
according to the Committee, was that this age breeds loafers and lifelong vagrants.\textsuperscript{68}

Students left school at the age of 14 and experienced no structure during the very formative teen years. To that end, the Committee recommended both making Continuation Classes compulsory and increasing the number of cadet corps present at Continuation Classes. It found that formal physical activity in school decreased as students got older, but it also thought military drill and other semi-militarized activities were more suitable for older children then younger ones.

According to the Committee, the cadet corps available both channeled the natural energy of that age into something productive and also would help aid military recruitment.\textsuperscript{69} To that end, it proposed reforms to the cadet corps to both increase their number and ease recruitment into the military. The Committee proposed that some of the requirements (e.g. that everyone have uniforms) be relaxed to ease the creation of new cadet corps. It also recommended that the formation and regulation of cadet corps be moved from the War Office to the Education Department. However, conversely, it recommended that military experts assume sole responsibility for designing the cadet corps and connecting the corps to Volunteer brigades so as to easily facilitate military recruitment.\textsuperscript{70} The Committee considered this connection mutually beneficial and it is yet another example of the relationship held to exist between eligibility for military service and being a good citizen. The Committee members also suggested making recruitment easier by allowing recruits from cadet corps or Boys’ Brigades (another quasi-militarized extracurricular activity generally formed in connection with a local church and religious

\textsuperscript{68} Ibid, 19-21.
\textsuperscript{69} Ibid, 35-36.
\textsuperscript{70} Ibid.
teachings) to undergo an expedited training program upon Volunteer enlistment. This would be permissible because, according to the Committee, a great number of potential recruits had already learned basic drill and therefore found the Volunteer training boring and repetitive.

The Committee evaluated examples of physical training regimens abroad, noted the benefits and faults of the Swedish, American, French, German and other systems of physical education and generally failed to draw firm conclusions as to what the English should do. What it did instead was recommend the creation of a panel of experts to create a British physical education program. However, regarding cadet corps, the Committee explicitly mentioned two details that have a bearing on their recommendations. In France, the country had moved away from cadet corps because the boys undergoing such programs were picking up the foul language of their drill sergeants rather than becoming more moral and upstanding. In Australia, by contrast, the boys in cadet corps tended to keep in touch with their cadet corps leaders long after officially aging out of the group and those leaders acted as a moral and stabilizing influence. Thus, it proposed encouraging (and training) regular teachers to be leaders of cadet corps and, to a lesser extent, Boys’ Brigades, something which would tightly bind education and military drill. This was also a cost-saving measure as it cut down on the need for extra personnel.

The Inter-Departmental Committee on Physical Deterioration followed the Committee on Physical Training (Scotland) and drew lessons from its report. In the

71 Ibid, 31-33.
original terms of reference for the Committee, the preceding committee was directly referenced:

“To make a preliminary enquiry into the allegations concerning the deterioration of certain classes of the population as shown by the large percentage of rejections for physical causes of recruits for the Army and by other evidence, especially the Report of the Royal Commission on Physical Training (Scotland), and to consider in what manner the medical profession can best be consulted on the subject with a view to the appoint of a Royal Commission, and the terms of reference to such a Commission, if appointed.”

Quickly, it was realized that there simply did not exist enough data or other evidence on the physical state of the British population in 1903. The terms of reference were thus added to, with a new mandate that the Committee both indicate what data would need to be collected and how it might be collected. This was a problem that had plagued both of its predecessor committees. The Elgin Commission had sidestepped this problem by relying largely on anecdotal evidence regarding the difficulty of recruitment and the causes thereof. The Committee on Physical Training authorized its own data collection on maladies afflicting schoolchildren in Aberdeen and Edinburgh. These two places were selected as representative of rural Scotland and urban Scotland, respectively.

All three committees considered the Recruiting Returns, with their totals of men presented to medical officers for inspection and those admitted, to be highly unreliable sources of information. While they did not question the veracity of the data, what was at issue was their use. A Professor Cunningham, a witness for the Inter-Departmental

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Committee, summed up the major problem with the use of the Recruiting Returns as follows:

“When trade is good and employment plentiful it is only from the lowest stratum of the people that the Army receives its supply of men: when, on the other hand, trade is bad, a better class of recruit is available. Consequently the records of the recruiting department of the Army do not deal with a homogeneous sample of the people taken from one distinct class.”

The Recruiting Returns listed the education level and occupation of the potential recruit. The education level varied heavily from year to year, supporting Professor Cunningham’s assertion. The occupation category was not useful as one category, “Labourers,” was overly broad and included many people in highly disparate circumstances. While this was the biggest problem with the use of the Recruiting Returns, it certainly was not the only one. In 1897, recruiting officers were authorized to turn away people who would obviously fail the medical examination. This change decreased the value of the returns in evaluating the health of people who present themselves for recruitment because those turned away by the recruiting officers themselves were not included in the Returns. Additionally, the medical requirements for the army changed over time, with a particular emphasis on oral health leading to an increase in rejections just prior to the outbreak of the Second Boer War.

The Committee reached out to the premier medical bodies in Britain at the time: the Royal College of Surgeons and the Royal College of Physicians. Both had also been contacted by the War Office to try to determine the existence of and cause of physical deterioration. This was precisely the same question later asked of the Inter-Departmental

73 Ibid, 4.
74 Ibid.
Committee. Both responded that they did not have enough data to make a determination but that the figures with which had been presented did not suggest that.\textsuperscript{75} The Royal College of Physicians also, accurately pointed out that the War Office and public had already jumped to the conclusion that there had been decline rather than actually evaluating the data as then existed. Instead, the Royal College of Physicians suggested that an inquiry be set up “into the present extent and causes of the alleged physical disability for military service” rather than one on deterioration.\textsuperscript{76} The governing coalition wanted to bury the issue and set up the Committee to try to postpone and prevent new legislation on the subject. Nonetheless, as evidenced by the terms of reference for the Inter-Departmental Committee, this admonition was largely ignored, evidence that the public had been convinced there was physical deterioration and feared the consequences.

Although the Inspector-General of Recruiting insisted there had been general physical deterioration amongst recruits, the Director-General of the Army Medical Service and a former Inspector-General of Recruiting admitted that the problem was that the Army had failed to attract high-quality recruits.\textsuperscript{77} In testimony before the Committee, General Borrett stated that he believed that a great many would-be recruits had been unable to secure work as manual laborers and presented themselves to the army in a last-ditch attempt to secure steady work.\textsuperscript{78} Indeed, some evidence presented supported the theory that the factory working class was healthier than those presenting themselves for

\textsuperscript{75} Royal College of Physicians and Royal College of Surgeons, “Reports to the Home Office by the Royal Colleges of Physicians and Surgeons” (Printed for H.M. Stationery Off., by Wyman & Sons, Limited, 1903), \url{https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/009794859}.

\textsuperscript{76} Royal College of Physicians, “Memorandum on Physical Deterioration of Army Recruits” (Printed for H.M. Stationery Off., by Wyman & Sons, Limited, 1903), \url{https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/009794859}.


\textsuperscript{78} Ibid.
recruitment. Of ninety Glasgow factory workers who presented themselves for army medical evaluation, eighty-five passed and were accepted into service. Nationally, however, in 1902-3 only 76.9% of those who presented themselves for army medical evaluation were accepted into service. In Germany, at the time, eighty-four percent of those liable for conscription were deemed physically fit for service. As referenced earlier, that Britain could be attracting better recruits was originally recognized in 1900-01, but the issue of raising pay and taking other steps to attract better recruits had largely been sidelined in the focus on alleged physical unsuitability for military service. Here, once again, concern over the physical health of the citizenry fused with concern about the military and national defense.

The major caveat this comes with, however, is the same as was noted earlier with regards to the Committee on Physical Training: because the percentage of people rejected out of hand by British army recruiters was not collected, it was not possible to say with certainty that these two figures reflect equal dismissal rates by the recruiting officer. Perhaps the Glasgow officers evaluating the volunteers from the factory were simply more stringent and passed fewer potential recruits on to the medical examiners. One witness summed up the dominant opinion of army recruits as follows:

“[The Army] are landed with the failures, and the lack of self-improvement which they have exhibited is largely bound up with their physical condition. At seventeen they become street loafers -- practically the only available source of recruiting for the army.”

79 Ibid.
80 Ibid, 5.
With its enlarged mandate to develop and propose a means of routinely surveying the health of the population, the Committee relied very heavily on Professor Cunningham of the British Association for the Advancement of Science. The Association was already, when the Committee convened, carrying out an “Anthropometric Investigation” into the health of British children and the Committee thought that fit nicely with their mission.\textsuperscript{81} Professor Cunningham proposed that a standardized scheme be set up, with surveyors employed to go, gradually and continuously, from school to school, taking the same measures, recorded on the same forms, with the same instruments. He suggested that these surveyors obtain the following information: biographical, height, chest, girth, weight, head length, breadth and height, shoulder breadth, hip breadth, vision, degree of pigment.\textsuperscript{82} When consulted, the College of Surgeons said it believed the scheme was “greatly to be desired” and wrote that it would also collect the measurement from the “lower extremities” to the “crest of the ilium” (the upper part of the pelvis).\textsuperscript{83} The College of Physicians supported the plan and said its “value...cannot be over-estimated,” but suggested also measuring the circumference of the children’s heads.\textsuperscript{84}

The Committee itself expressed some reservations about the plan as proposed by Professor Cunningham. Its biggest complaint was the expense of employing such a large staff of dedicated surveyors, a complaint that would come up again and again during the period.\textsuperscript{85} It proposed an alternative: that teachers generally make these measurements of

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{81} Ibid, 8.
\bibitem{82} Ibid, 10-12.
\bibitem{83} Royal College of Physicians and Royal College of Surgeons, “Replies from the Royal Colleges of Physicians and Surgeons” (Printed for H.M. Stationery Off., by Wyman & Sons, Limited, 1903), \url{https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/009794859}.
\bibitem{84} Ibid.
\end{thebibliography}
their children at two standard ages. Additionally, the Committee members noted that, when children seek to enter factory work, they are inspected by the “Certifying Factory Surgeons” who ensure that they are physically fit to work in a factory.\textsuperscript{86} The Committee notes that these examinations were generally not centrally recorded, but that it would be a simple matter to add other measurements to the exam and to keep records of each exam, not simply whether or not the child passed. As the Certifying Factory Surgeons inspected 375,000 British children annually, this would have been valuable information.\textsuperscript{87}

The Committee also noted other organizations already in possession of some of the pertinent data for adults. In particular, it noted that health insurance companies held vast quantities of physical data on British adults that, should they be enticed or mandated to share, would be of great value. Additionally, those on government healthcare, administered by local authorities through the Poor Law, were already required to submit forms to Poor Law Medical Officers when they get sick and that it would have been a relatively simple matter to change the contents of the forms to request additional information about the person’s ailment and general physical condition.\textsuperscript{88} Since the Committee was predominantly concerned with the groups from which military recruitment was drawn, it noted that they disproportionately get their healthcare from the Poor Law.

The enlarged mandate also authorized the Inter-Departmental Committee to both try to identify the cause of the problem and to make recommendations to ameliorate it. This edit massively expanded the remit of the Committee and meant that it made an

\textsuperscript{86} Ibid, 11.
\textsuperscript{87} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{88} Ibid, 10-13.
inquiry into the living conditions and other living standards of the working class, particularly in urban areas. That the working class lived in poor conditions was not a new idea: social reformers and segments of the press had been raising the alarm about this for decades and much progress had been made in the nineteenth century. However, the governing coalition at the time was dominated by conservative interests who opposed additional regulation and government intervention. The choice to expand the remit of the Committee was probably a way for the government, which did not want to take action, to appear to take action on an issue of importance to the public while delaying any actual legislation.

The Committee came to the conclusion that the urban population had risen rapidly but that the death rate among urban dwellers was higher than among rural residents. At the time, in the UK, urban and rural areas were governed by different forms of local government. The Committee simply defined urban as those governed by the urban sort and rural as those not defined by the urban sort. This does not always map nicely onto population density and sometimes reflects an outdated reality. Despite the claim of physical deterioration, urban death rates in 1903 were lower than the rural death rate fifty years prior.

The British had a long tradition of calling for the self-improvement of the poor, dating back to the early nineteenth century and the punitive Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834, which greatly diminished the numbers of those eligible for government assistance and made said assistance dependent on confinement in a workhouse. The Victorian conception was summed up nicely in Samuel Smiles’ 1859 book “Self-Help,” which

\[\text{\textsuperscript{89}}\text{Ibid, 16-30.}\]
claimed that poverty was largely the result of irresponsible habits and a lack of desire for improvement.90 This attitude remained present in the report of the Inter-Departmental Committee, which reported the presence in some classes of “laziness, want of thrift, ignorance of household management, and particularly of the choice and preparation of food, filth, indifference to parental obligations, drunkenness.”91 Alcoholism was a particular vice mentioned many times in the report as worsening poverty and, in fact, the Committee’s members are so transfixed by it that they reported that, rather than an amelioration in physical condition, a raise in pay frequently led to deterioration of physique as more money is spent on drink.

Despite many sentences like the one in the previous paragraph, the Committee displayed an awareness that poverty and associated maladies, such as those that might disqualify one for military service, were heavily associated with environment and circumstance. Consequently, it reported that there was “every reason to anticipate RAPID amelioration of physique as soon as improvement occurs in external conditions.”92 It displayed a particular awareness of this reality when it comes to children, who did not have a say in their own circumstances.

Parental alcoholism was a subject in which the Committee members expressed considerable sympathy for the children but the single subject with which they had the most sympathy for children was school meals. At the time, the serving of school meals was not standard and, when it was done, it was done by a private organization in partnership with the school. The Committee emphasized that parental responsibility for

90 Samuel Smiles, Self Help; with Illustrations of Characters and Conduct (London: John Murray, 1859).
92 Ibid, 14.
their children must be fostered and that children are best off when well taken care of by their parents. That said, the “evils arising from underfeeding” were so pressing that “some authoritative intervention is called for at the earliest possible moment.”

Dr. Eichholz, an Inspector of Schools, reported to the committee that he estimated that sixteen percent of the London elementary school population (totaling 122,000 students) were underfed and that bad physique amongst students was mostly due to lack of proper nutrition. Eichholz’s estimate was contested by the London School Board (LSB), who estimated only 10,000 were based on the LSB’s experience with the charities serving free school meals to the poor in their schools. The LSB’s estimate, however, was faulty in that it assumed all underfed children were taking a meal every day and in that it only included schools run by the LSB. In contrast, Dr. Eichholz’s estimate was supported by reports from other urban centers in the UK. One example of these reports was the one from the Medical Officer of Health for Manchester, who estimated that fifteen percent of Manchester children were underfed.

As a result, “with scarcely an exception, there was a general consensus of opinion that the time has come when the State should realize the necessity of ensuring adequate nourishment to children in attendance at school.” One such exception, Dr. Kelly, Catholic Bishop of Ross (in Ireland), thought that such a system would weaken parental responsibility and undermine the family. However, the Committee recommended the use

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93 Ibid, 66.
94 Ibid.
95 Ibid.
96 Ibid, 67.
97 Ibid, 69.
of joint public-private partnerships, with funds taken from the Poor Law administration to pay for it.\textsuperscript{98}

The Committee also looked into many other questions regarding the question of physical deterioration. I have focused on the issue of data collection, alcoholism and nutrition because of a lack of space and time to discuss all other factors and these are themes raised widely and that contributed to later legislation. However, this report also discussed physical training in schools and cadet corps (much to the same conclusion as the Committee on Physical Training), rural housing, urban overcrowding, coal miners’ health, the health of new mothers, preventing adulteration of food, reforming of Irish elementary schools, instruction of girls in cooking and hygiene, smoke pollution and other factors. The report was extremely comprehensive and proposed changes to each of the topics listed above and more.

These are merely some pertinent selections of the findings of the three committees. Most important is the fact that these questions surrounding the well-being of the country’s working class and the impact of that well-being on national power and the military were being asked at all. These questions had all been raised before the Second Boer War, but never with the same sense of urgency and never with the consideration of the military. Citizens’ bodies, the military, and national strength were all inextricably linked together after the Second Boer War. Additionally, the questions surrounding the conditions of the working class gained more prominence and more salience with the Second Boer War and the piercing of the British sense of security.

\textsuperscript{98} Ibid, 69-71.
How Much to Reform: Unionist and Liberal Policy Responses to Perceived Weakness While in Government

The sudden Fall of our great Western Ally ten years ago, unanticipated as it was by the thoughtless mass of mankind, should have come as no surprise to those few persons who study the rise and fall of Empires, and are acquainted with the causes which, in every case, have brought about their dissolution. No writer who possesses a heart can however afford to look at the fall of England merely with the eye of the moralist or the calm historian…and even had we saved the British from disaster our assistance would only have afforded a brief and intellectual respite. The sources of their weakness were too deeply rooted to be removed in a day. They had become too effete and nerve-ridden to guide the destinies of the world.99

Elliott Evans Mills, *The Decline and Fall of the British Empire*, 1905.100

In 1904, the British government began mounting a policy response to the ills identified in the investigations of the previous two years. At first, the changes were relatively minimal and focused mostly on military reform. The Conservative/Unionist government actively avoided social reform and sought to minimize the issue. However, in 1906, Britain held a general election in which the Conservative/Unionist government that had held power for a decade was decisively defeated, losing a total of 246 seats, including that held by the prime minister until the month prior to the election, Arthur Balfour of Manchester East.101 The biggest beneficiary of the Unionist electoral collapse, and the party that would form the next government, was the Liberals, who won 397 seats,

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100 *The Decline and Fall of the British Empire* was a popular fictional Social Darwinist book that purported to be a Japanese textbook analyzing the causes of England’s fall. Mills intended it as a warning about the path the nation was on.

101 The Unionist government resigned on December 5, 1905 and was replaced by a Liberal administration which immediately called an election which began on January 12, 1906 and concluded on February 8, 1906.
214 up from the election of 1900. The Liberals’ electoral ally, the Labour Representation Committee, picked up twenty-seven seats for a total of twenty-nine, giving the two parties a total of 426 seats.\(^{102}\) The new Liberal administration quickly responded to the concerns in the 1902-04 post-Boer committee reports. Rapidly picking up the pace of change in both the social sphere and the military sphere, the Liberals instituted policies in response to the committee reports launching the programs now known as the “Liberal reforms” (social sphere) and “Haldane reforms” (military sphere). The standard of living for the British working class and the issue of national strength had become intertwined and the Liberals sought to respond to both.

Prior to the election of 1906, the nation was governed by a coalition government of the Conservative Party, led by the prime minister and Liberal Unionists, who generally gathered under the banner of Colonial Secretary Joseph Chamberlain. The coalition is generally referred to as “Unionist” as the two constituent parties supported the maintenance of the Irish status quo while the two major opposition parties (the Liberals and the Irish Parliamentary Party) advocated for Irish Home Rule. The Unionist coalition was generally opposed to offering additional government programs to aid the poor and drew a high level of support from the educated, Anglican populace.

The coalition had reluctantly implemented the committees in the previous chapter, particularly the Committee on Physical Deterioration, partially to appear as if they were responding to the popular outrage but without committing to any new programs.\(^{103}\) The hope was that the committee would calm down public opinion and that the public would

\(^{102}\) The House of Commons had a total of 670 seats in 1906.

shift to a new worry, one that was hopefully more palatable to the government. This was not what happened. Before the report was published, the cabinet had resolved to permit no new expenditure on social welfare by local authorities. Balfour told William Anson, the Secretary for Education and a reformer, that the findings of the committee could be “as sympathetic as he liked, but that there would be no increase in rates.”

The report, far more thorough and alarmist than had been anticipated by the government’s ministers, threw that pledge in doubt.

One minister, the president of the Board of Education, Marquis of Londonderry encapsulates the knee-jerk government response to the Committee’s findings. He urged the appointment of a second committee to investigate the first committee’s findings in order to buy more time and allow them the chance to shape the policy implications. Londonderry explicitly stated that the new committee’s terms of reference must make clear that it was not “at liberty to make any far-reaching proposal that the Unionist party would be unwilling to support.” He ended up doing just that on March 14, 1905, appointing the “Interdepartmental Committee on Medical Inspection and Feeding of Children Attending Public Elementary Schools.” The committee’s terms of reference ordered it to figure out what could be done better with regard to school feeding “without any charge upon public funds” (emphasis mine).

Ultimately, Parliament passed a non-

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binding resolution urging the government to permit use of local funds for school feeding. As the Unionist coalition was removed from office the following year, this was the full extent of their action on the issue.

While it was staunchly opposed to new social programs and internally divided over the issue of tariff reform (to be discussed in the next chapter), the government was far more successful in implementing military reforms. As is the general trend in democratic and bureaucratic governments, and clearly with this particular administration, the government set up another committee to propose recommendations on how to “reconstitute” the War Office. The War Office (Reconstitution) Committee (known colloquially as the “Esher Committee” after the Committee’s chairman, who had also been a member of the Elgin Commission), unlike the education committee formed by Lord Londonderry, was expected to produce real results that the government could actually act on to improve military efficiency.108

The Committee reported in three parts in February and March 1904 (with the collective whole known as the “Esher Report”), each responding to the reforms enacted in response to the previous report. One of the major failures identified in the Elgin Commission’s report was the lack of a centralized clearing house for British strategic decision making. The country’s outdated decision-making apparatus centered around the Commander-in-Chief. The war revealed that the Commander-in-Chief was dangerously isolated from the rest of the British military administration and lacked the intelligence

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apparatus necessary to make coherent military plans. The Commander-in-Chief also got boggled down in details of administration and, being outside the Cabinet, was often ignored when it came time to actually make funding and appropriations decisions.\textsuperscript{109}

The failure of the Army’s decentralized decision-making is well documented. Among the failures were the increased encroachment of the Treasury into military decision making and a lack of information sharing among different elements of the military administration. John Gooch, one of the preeminent historians of the interwar military reforms, argues that the British had previously neglected the land forces in favor of the Royal Navy.\textsuperscript{110} This was partially by necessity: Victorian Britain sought to minimize its government expenditure and the navy could provide a measure of security that the army could not. The army could not prevent Britain from starving for lack of food imports, for example.

The Second Boer War drew attention to the Army and its outdated nature. The Esher Report declared that the “recent war has disclosed” some “grave evils” in the nation’s military administration. The committee members were “strongly impressed by the gravity of the danger thus incurred, which would, in circumstances easily imagined, lead to national disaster.”\textsuperscript{111} In the first place, the Esher Report sought to harmonize Army and Navy strategy. To that end, a “Defence Committee” was set up which consisted of representatives from the navy, army, Indian corps, and the self-governing colonies. These appointees were to be rotated no less than every two years to prevent

\textsuperscript{109} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{110} John Gooch, \textit{The Plans of War: The General Staff and British Military Strategy, c. 1900-1916}.
each service from marginalizing the Defence Committee. This Committee was also to be directly responsible to the Prime Minister and to plan in both war and peace for strategic defense.

The Admiralty was considerably better designed and run than the War Office. The Admiralty, which maintained the Royal Navy in a constant state of readiness, had a far more flexible and capable administration. Even though the Admiralty was not directly involved in fighting in South Africa, the Navy was responsible for conveying troops and supplies to South Africa. It did this without a hitch and, of all the institutions in the British military apparatus, the Admiralty was the only one that coped well with the sudden influx of troops during the Second Boer War.\textsuperscript{112}

The Esher Report recommended the creation of an Army Council along the same lines as the Board of the Admiralty. The Council would divide explicit and “scientific” grouping of duties among four military and three civil members. One of the civil members would be the Secretary of State for War and all other members were to have specific areas of concern, something the Report found lacking in the current set up. The other major change was to delegate far more responsibility to new regional administrative districts, something designed to remove strategic policymakers from the day-to-day responsibilities of administration and make it easier to keep accurate records. The entire arrangement was designed to both reduce administrative responsibilities, especially of strategic officers, and to cope with wartime deployment and a massive influx of new soldiers.

\textsuperscript{112} Lord Elgin, “Report of His Majesty’s Commissioners Appointed to Inquire into the Military Preparations and Other Matters Connected with the War in South Africa.”
The influence of the Second Boer War’s failures is immediately apparent. From the alarm in the opening pages of the report, the Esher Report was intimately concerned with potential catastrophe. The Esher Report also noted that it was not the first committee to examine these issues, nor the first one to recommend the changes it did. In fact, it stated that “no public department has been so frequently examined or so scathingly criticized by Commissions and Committees as the War Office.”¹¹³ Why did these constant committees lead to minimal actual change?

Until the Boer War, British politicians did not see the necessity. Entrenched interests helped prevent change and, in the absence of a national crisis, there was not enough impetus to overcome that. Gooch also writes that a major source of opposition to War Office reform was actually the Admiralty, which feared that a strengthened, more capable War Office would compete more effectively for public funds and attention.¹¹⁴ The Esher Report finally led to change and a number of orders in council were issued in 1904 implementing the recommendations of the Report.

In the wake of the Second Boer War, the Balfour administration also took the first steps towards ending Britain’s traditional policy of “splendid isolation.” During most of the Victorian era, the British sought to avoid permanent alliances with anyone. They sought instead to remain at peace through a combination of isolationism and a strong fleet. By maintaining a “two power standard,” in which the Royal Navy was to be at minimum the size of the second largest and third largest navies combined, British policy during both Conservative and Liberal administrations was to make it near-impossible for...

any enemy alliance to successfully overpower the Royal Navy and invade Britain. Another major concern was keeping Britain fed, as most of Britain’s food was imported from abroad.

The Second Boer War exposed both the benefits and drawbacks of such an approach and persuaded the British government that it could no longer sit on the sidelines. Despite generally pro-Boer attitudes among the continental powers, particularly Germany and Russia, none intervened.115 As a longer-term concern, both the German Empire and the United States were rapidly gaining in economic strength and embarking on major shipbuilding programs.116 Additionally, the fundamental weakness of the British land forces was on display and threatened Britain’s control of vital shipping lanes around the Cape and through the Mediterranean. Weakness also potentially threatened British control of India, as Russia could potentially invade India by land. Indeed, because of this risk, the Indian forces and command structure were considerably ahead of the British forces, which adopted many of their practices.

The Russian threat pushed the United Kingdom into its 1902 alliance with Japan, another power that felt threatened by Russia. The most practical implication of the alliance was that it enabled Britain to withdraw naval squadrons from East Asia to meet a potential German threat. In 1904, merely two years later, Britain signed the “Entente Cordiale” with France. While not a formal alliance, the Entente Cordiale both significantly reduced the likelihood of war by resolving major colonial disputes and set

116 The German shipbuilding program, although tangential to the story of British reform, was also partially driven by the Boer War. Despite massively pro-Boer sentiments among the public and the administration and a genuine desire to weaken British power in the Cape, German policymakers concluded that the massively superior Royal Navy would be an immovable obstacle to effectively intervening to support the Boers.
the stage for both alliance with the French and resolution of disputes with the Russians (a major French ally). Given the quick succession with which foreign alliances were signed, it is clear that the end of “splendid isolation” was significantly hastened by the danger felt after the Second Boer War.

The Unionist government, tremendously unpopular among the public and internally divided over the issue of tariff reform, collapsed in December 1905. It was replaced by a Liberal administration that immediately called an election for January-February 1906.\textsuperscript{117} In that election, a profoundly more pro-reform Liberal administration led by Prime Minister Henry Campbell-Bannerman was elected in a landslide. Whereas the election of 1900 resulted in 411 seats for the Unionists and 177 for the Liberals, the 1906 election resulted in the Liberals holding 397 seats and the Unionists only 156.\textsuperscript{118} Even Prime Minister Balfour lost his seat.

Traditionally, the election has been viewed as a referendum on the unpopular Unionists. For example, one Boston periodical wrote on Jan 20, 1906 that Prime Minister “Balfour has lost his seat in Manchester, being defeated by a weak candidate, so strong is the reaction against him and Mr. Chamberlain.”\textsuperscript{119} Imperial preference, a proposed policy by which imports from British colonies were given preferential tariff rates, was tremendously unpopular, as was the administration’s conduct of the war itself. The electorate was also apt to punish an administration that had prematurely claimed victory.

\textsuperscript{117} The first British general election to be held on a single day was 1918.
\textsuperscript{119} “British Parliamentary Elections,” Congregationalist and Christian World, Jan 20, 1906, https://www.proquest.com/docview/124157077?accountid=14707&parentSessionId=CxJeI7ZFLsp378cA0sm0hUWH4QM%2Fktlzlh22G%2FMjMc%3D&parentSessionId=Fgw7EDKBTNZ4jGGUX1147U%2BW4YUxJT4DnJgMahtf5Gs%3D&pq-origsite=summon.
in the Second Boer War during the campaign for the 1900 election (the preceding election), only for it to turn into a national embarrassment. Historians have largely focused on the Liberal campaign and the backlash against Unionist protectionist policies. The only exhaustive examination of the campaign is in Anthony Howe’s *Free Trade and Liberal England 1846-1946*, but he focuses mostly on free trade and the Liberals’ championing of it in their campaign.\(^\text{120}\) Other analyses, like that done by Huw Clayton, focuses not on the campaign at all but on the mid-campaign internecine fighting within the Unionist Party over the issue of free trade.\(^\text{121}\) I concur with the assessment that the government’s unpopularity dragged it down, but I believe that the policy field considered by the voting public was far larger than historians have usually considered. Although imperial preference was heavily referenced, particularly by the Liberals, the election was fought around a plethora of social policies promoted and proposed in the wake of the Boer War.


Imperial preference does figure quite heavily in this poster. It can be seen in the list of “what Toryism means” on the bottom right (“dear food for everybody” and “taxes for the working man”), the top right (where the Tory Chancellor is seen taking everything possible from a worker’s home) and the middle left (where “Protection” and “Retaliation” are “united against free trade”). There were also several posters dedicated exclusively to the issue of free trade. The South African military failure was also present through “faulty rifles for our soldiers,” a reference to the Elgin Commission’s finding that more than 200,000 of the rifles issued during the Boer War had defective sights. 

123 Lord Elgin, “Report of His Majesty’s Commissioners Appointed to Inquire into the Military Preparations and Other Matters Connected with the War in South Africa.”
However, there are other policies under discussion in this poster. The top left shows Mrs. Chamberlain scoffing at old age pensions and leaving the issue at the doorstep of “Oddfellows & Friendly Societies,” which were mutual aid societies formed by workers at the time. Considering the Unionist campaign helps illustrate the presence of social issues in the election. The Unionist campaign largely ignored the issue of tariff reform, presumably recognizing its wide unpopularity among the middle class, and instead focused on painting the Liberals as radicals who would be unable to revitalize the Empire and would instead ruin it.

A 1905/6 Unionist campaign poster depicting Campbell-Bannerman leading John Bull, a fictitious national personification, to ruin, 1905/6.

A 1905/6 Unionist campaign poster depicting Campbell-Bannerman as an old woman in front of a shoe overstuffed with “liberal promises”.

Historians have failed to consider whether the Unionist campaign, in widely disseminating the idea of Liberals as in favor of social reform, licensing reform and education reform, actually increased Liberal voter support. Given a lack of public opinion polling in the early 20th century, the impact of each campaign can only be speculated at, but, even if it was not necessarily enthusiastic about reform, the electorate had clearly been introduced to it and accepted it as a possibility. The clear electoral mandate won by the Liberals also indicates support for their policies.

Regardless of how it came to power, the new Liberal administration was far more pro-reform. On both the military and social side of reform, the administration sought to advance new policies. Lord Haldane, the new Secretary of State for War, began what are

now known as the “Haldane Reforms.” Several other prominent liberals including David Lloyd George, the new Chancellor, advocated for significant social reform.

Lord Haldane sent one of the earliest and strongest signals the Liberal administration was committed to act on the recommendations in the 1902-04 committees in a speech he gave to Parliament on March 8, 1906:

Our army is wanted for purposes abroad and overseas. It is necessarily a professional army; we could not get such an army by conscription...we have to protect the distant shores of the Empire from the attack of the invader. We want, therefore, an army which is very mobile and capable of rapid transport...it ought to be on a strictly limited scale and perfect rather in quality than expanded in quantity.126

He followed it up with a comprehensive memorandum in July on specifics.127 These two documents combined give a comprehensive picture of the military reforms that Haldane was seeking to implement and are far more sweeping than the steps to reform the Unionists had taken in the immediate wake of the Esher Report. His reforms, which have been extensively studied, completely reconstituted the organization of the army.

Haldane sought to economize while enhancing the capabilities of the British military. The combined military budget (army and navy) actually did fall by about 15% in the first two years after the Liberals took power, but then began to rise again.128 It is also notable that the military spending in 1905 (the last year of the Unionist government)

was £73,200,000 compared to £44,250,000 in 1899, the year the Boer War broke out.\textsuperscript{129}

The savings thus still left the military budget at a far higher level than had existed pre-War. The increase was also in both the naval budget and the army budget.\textsuperscript{130}

The evidence suggests that Haldane was serious about economizing and he references it frequently. However, Haldane may have conceptualized economizing as getting a more effective military for relatively less money rather than spending less overall. While he frequently mentions his desire for economy, and some MPs in his party were uneasy about dramatically higher expenditure, he fiercely defended the military budget when other figures in the Cabinet (particularly Lloyd George and Churchill) tried to reduce them to pay for old age pensions in 1908. One account has him literally storming into Prime Minister Asquith’s office and issuing an ultimatum over the following year’s Army Estimates (Army budget).\textsuperscript{131}

Haldane’s reforms modernized the British military. He created an expeditionary force for overseas deployment, something that had not previously existed. This expeditionary force would consist of 150,000 men in total, of whom 50,000 would be permanent, regular soldiers.\textsuperscript{132} In keeping with the tension between economy and strength, this was an expansion of the total force available for deployment, but a decrease

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\textsuperscript{129} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{130} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{131} Peter Rowland, \textit{The Last Liberal Governments}, 195-7. It is an amusing aside that Haldane had an extremely low opinion of most of his colleagues in the Cabinet. On Prime Minister Asquith: “not a man of imagination.” On Chancellor Lloyd George, “an illiterate with an unbalanced mind.” On Winston Churchill, then the President of the Board of Trade, “as long winded as he was persistent.” (\textit{The Last Liberal Governments}, 39). All was not harmonious in the Liberal administration.
\textsuperscript{132} Peter Rowland, \textit{The Last Liberal Governments}, 187-90.
in the number of permanent regulars. In the same theme, Haldane pulled British forces back from the colonies and told them they needed to help fend for themselves.\textsuperscript{133}

Additionally, Haldane reformed the home defense forces. Previously there had been three separate forces: the Militia, the Yeomanry and the Volunteers. Under Haldane’s 1908 plan, the Militia retained its separate nature, but became a “special reserve.” The Yeomanry and Volunteers were amalgamated into a new “Territorial Army” that was to be administered by local county organizations.\textsuperscript{134} In doing this, he both followed the decentralization trend of devolving military administration from the War Office to localities and showed a keen awareness of the recruitment difficulties.

The plan to reorganize the home defense forces drew massive pushback, but, with the wind of national crisis and an indomitable personality, Haldane was able to push the plans through Parliament. To begin, the services themselves were highly resistant to change. The Militia refused to support any plan that saw them amalgamated with the Volunteers or that could result in being deployed overseas. The Volunteer rank-and-file were lackluster about the new Territorial Army and, when the Volunteers were dissolved and the rank-and-file asked to re-enroll in the new Territorial Army, only half did.\textsuperscript{135} MPs were concerned about the potential added expenditure. One, the Liberal George McCrae, wrote in a British weekly called \textit{The Nation}, “the spirit of expenditure, abnormal, insatiable, grows and fattens in times of war. Its unhealthy appetite remains and craves for more long after the cessation of active hostilities.”\textsuperscript{136} Ultimately, Haldane had to cave

\textsuperscript{133} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{134} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{135} Ibid.
to the Militia and promise MPs that the new Territorial and Reserve Forces would not use any more money that had previously been spent on the home defense forces. With this concession, Haldane was able to push the plans through Parliament.

Haldane thought that administering the new Territorial Army locally, and embedding it more firmly in society, would help imbue a more militaristic spirit into the British. Under his leadership, the military did considerably more outreach in local schools and universities than it previously had. Haldane was delivering on his vision of a “nation in arms.”

He was aware that the continental nations had a far more martial spirit than Britain did, a result of their conscription. To combat that, he sought to create an “Officer Training Corps” embedded within local public schools and universities to help with recruitment and increase the visibility of the military.

They replaced and absorbed many, but not all, of the pre-existing “cadet corps” which had cropped up on an ad hoc basis across the country.

Lastly, Haldane implemented a set of reforms in 1907-9 designed to draw the Empire closer together and improve its collective defense. He created an “Imperial General Staff” which was to have representatives from all of the Dominions and the British Army. Additionally, he sought to standardize military doctrine and education across the Dominions through this new Imperial General Staff. The Imperial General Staff did not have the authority to mandate changes to the Dominions’ defense forces, but

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139 “Imperial Conference Correspondence Relating to the Proposed Formation of an Imperial General Staff” (Printed for H.M. Stationery Off., by Darling & Son, Limited, February 1909).
140 Ibid.
it rather recommended a common imperial defense plan, a uniform military structure, and standardized training and doctrine.\textsuperscript{141} Haldane did not have the authority to mandate this, but the colonies accepted it in theory in 1907 and approved a specific plan in 1909, with the explicit caveat that the new system not limit the autonomy of the Dominions. Broadly speaking, the recommendations were adopted by the Dominions and the IGS heavily contributed to the effectiveness of the combined British-colonial army in World War I.

In the interests of not belaboring the point, many of Haldane’s reforms have been excluded from this discussion. Additionally, all of these reforms built on or directly implemented pre-existing recommendations that had not been acted upon because of a lack of necessity and spirit of reform. Historians have largely agreed that Haldane’s reforms dramatically improved the fighting and administrative capabilities of the British Army. One only has to compare the chaotic and ad hoc nature of the deployment to South Africa in 1899 to the far faster and simpler deployment to the continent in 1914 to see the Haldane Reforms in effect. Additionally, the British military had failed to adequately fight the Boers in 1899 but was able to hold its own against the more powerful German army in 1914. Sir John French, a British Field Marshal in World War I, stated that “without the assistance which the Territorials afforded…it would have been impossible to hold the line in France and Belgium.”\textsuperscript{142}

To turn attention to social reform, the Liberal administration launched a program as radical as the Unionists had claimed they would. This program directly addressed numerous concerns raised in the 1902-04 post-Boer reports. Despite that, there were

\textsuperscript{141} Ibid.
some policies that were included that bore no relation to British fighting capability or the health of military-age males. For example, the flagship program was a new system of old age pensions, something that no one thought would help Britain’s fighting capabilities or ensure a greater supply of fit recruits for the army. As previously mentioned, Lloyd George, a major advocate of old age pensions and opponent of tax raises, even tried to fund the pensions with money taken from the military budget. This showcases the fact that, by the late 1900s, the fervor over national efficiency and strength had merged with broader concern over poverty and living standards to create an atmosphere ripe for reform of all stripes. Even as far back as the committees themselves, which were set up directly in response to the Second Boer War, some concerns were raised that have no immediate bearing on fighting capabilities. One example of this is the section on the disabled. Winston Churchill, in multiple 1908 opinion pieces in *The Nation*, described the comprehensive program as creating a “minimum standard” of living for every Englishman.\(^{143}\)

A prime example of the reforms that can be directly tied to post-Boer concerns over the health of the nation’s youth is the Education (Provision of Meals) Act 1906, which enabled (but did not mandate) local authorities to use taxpayer money to provide free school meals. Local authorities could also receive grants from the Treasury to fund up to half of the cost.\(^ {144}\) While relatively non-controversial in 1906, it had been tremendously controversial only a few years earlier. This was one instance in which the


change of government directly resulted in a change in policy. Whereas the Unionist
government had sought to bury the issue and Prime Minister Balfour did not put
legislation to a vote, the Liberal government passed it within a year of taking office. It is
also an excellent example of how, although both the Unionists and Liberals agreed on the
need for some change, specific policies and issue areas remained under fierce debate.

The Liberal government passed two other laws that directly legislated upon
children's health in 1907 and 1908. The Education (Administrative Provisions) Act of
1907 meant that school children received three medical inspections.\textsuperscript{145} Additionally,
parents were made responsible for the condition of the children they sent to school and
school boards were given the authority to act against parents of children who showed up
in poor condition. Aside from simply ensuring regular data collection, which the 1902-04
committees did not have yet desperately wanted, the act responded to concerns raised by
the committees’ members of emphasizing both the well-being of children and importance
of parental responsibility.

The Children Act (commonly known as the “Children’s Charter”) of 1908 was the
last watershed legislation for children aimed at improving the physical stature of the
young. It banned children from begging, placed a minimum age for the sale of tobacco,
abolished the death sentence for children and set up juvenile courts separate from normal
criminal courts.\textsuperscript{146} All three of these acts clearly respond to conditions and evils raised in
the 1904 Physical Deterioration Report. The Administrative Provisions Act also enabled

\textsuperscript{145} “Education (Administrative Provisions) Act 1907” (1907),
https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/001885144.
considerably better data collection on children than had previously been available, a reflection of the committees having had a nearly impossible time finding reliable data.

The Liberals also legislated to reduce alcohol consumption, an issue raised by the Physical Deterioration Report as a major evil. The new temperance regime proposed by the Licensing Act of 1908 significantly limited the number of liquor licenses that could be issued in any given jurisdiction.¹⁴⁷ This new licensing regime would have also permitted more liquor licenses per capita the less densely populated the jurisdiction was, meaning that urban areas had their licenses particularly limited. One reason for this is almost certainly that the military drew most of its recruits from the cities. A second is likely because the Physical Deterioration Report found that many urban children were suffering because their parents were alcoholic. The law also permitted localities to prohibit the sale of alcohol entirely and strengthened enforcement for sale to underage children (under fourteen).¹⁴⁸ As might be imagined, the liquor industry mobilized and lobbied extremely heavily against the bill but ultimately failed to prevent its passage in the House of Commons. They did, however, succeed in persuading the Unionist majority in the House of Lords to veto it. The Liberals, determined to reduce alcohol consumption, instead significantly raised excise duties on alcohol in their 1909/10 budget, which did become law.¹⁴⁹

There were many other social reform acts aimed at ameliorating the situation of the British worker and addressing social ills. A major example is the government's introduction of compulsory health insurance for workers earning less than £160 annually

and the introduction of unemployment aid and sick pay.\textsuperscript{150} In 1910, the government passed a new Census Bill designed to increase the amount of information available to the government when crafting new social policy.\textsuperscript{151} Despite the spate of legislation, the outbreak of World War I interrupted implementation of many of the new programs and made it difficult to ascertain the impact of those that were implemented.

Some of this legislation was also directly influenced by external factors. The rise of the Labour Party, although often overstated, caused the Liberal government to act more aggressively than it might otherwise have. One bill that, although it helped workers and fits into the broader reform scheme, was clearly influenced by both the defection of trade unions to Labour in the 1906 election and a court decision (\textit{Taff Vale Railway Co. v Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants}, 1901) was the Trade Disputes Act of 1906. The judges in the \textit{Taff Vale Railway Co.} case held that trade unions that walked out on strike could be sued by employers for damages.\textsuperscript{152} This act, controversial even within the Liberal Cabinet, effectively overturned the \textit{Taff Vale} decision and it is highly unlikely that, without the \textit{Taff Vale} case, the act would have been thought necessary. Nonetheless, the Unionist government in power in 1901 saw no need to pass such an act and only in 1906, under considerable pressure, did the new Liberal government pass such an act. Although not directly linked to the response to the Boer War and heavily influenced by other factors, the Trade Disputes Act showcases how other progressive policies also got included within the post-Boer program to strengthen the nation’s defense capabilities.

\textsuperscript{150} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{151} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{152} \textit{Taff Vale Railway Co v Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants}, No. [1901] UKHL 1 (United Kingdom House of Lords July 22, 1901).
The Unionist and Liberal administrations in power in the first decade of the twentieth century approached the issues raised by the Second Boer War and the resulting investigations very differently. The Unionist government eschewed new social programs in favor of a protectionist program that was wildly unpopular and never implemented. The Liberal government, by contrast, introduced a slew of new social programs. In the next chapter, I will address, among other things, the consequences when the administration sought to impose new taxes to pay for these programs, something unimaginable for a Liberal administration for much of the nineteenth century and rabidly opposed by some of the party’s MPs in the early twentieth. The Unionist government also made major changes to foreign policy, abandoning Britain’s decades-old “splendid isolation” policy and began implementing army reforms in line with those recommended by the Esher Report. The Liberal Secretary of State for War, Lord Haldane, would later rapidly speed up the pace and nature of the military reform.
Improving British Bodies and Safeguarding Britain’s Empire: Tariff Reform, the People’s Budget, and the Boy Scouts

[The Roman Empire] fell at last, chiefly because the young Romans gave up soldiering and manliness altogether…they had no patriotism or love for their grand old country, and they went under with a run when a stronger nation attacked them. Well, we have got to see that the same fate does not fall upon our Empire. And it will largely depend upon you, the younger generation of Britons that are now growing up to be the men of the Empire. Don’t be disgraced like the young Romans.\textsuperscript{153}

Robert Baden-Powell, \textit{Scouting for Boys}, 1908

In this third and final chapter, I have turned to three other efforts driven by the Second Boer War to improve the stock and collective strength of the British citizen body: one Unionist, one Liberal and one non-governmental. The Unionist effort focused on tariff reform as a means of promoting the settlement of vast colonial territories. This was intended to improve British self-sufficiency by increasing colonial food production and decreasing British dependency on foreign imports. It was also an effort to better the citizenry as the white colonial was viewed as an ideal and thus exporting citizens to the colonies would improve their value to the Empire. The Liberal program centered not on exporting citizens to the colonies but using taxes to decrease inequality and to pay for the extensive social and military programs described in the preceding chapter, ultimately resulting in a clash between the House of Lords and the House of Commons that permanently dismantled the Lords’ power.

The non-governmental program, Boy Scouts, became wildly popular after the Second Boer War and sought to bring the best of the colonies to Britain, remind young citizens of their responsibilities to the Empire and prepare them for its defense. The

Scouts program incorporated imperial ideology and taught youngsters skills, like tracking, widely practiced in the colonies but generally absent in Britain’s urban centers. Although these are disparate efforts spanning both the political spectrum and the entire Edwardian Era, they are united by a post-Boer impulse to preserve the Empire by strengthening the citizenry, particularly the young male citizens who form the backbone of the military. The two political programs also come from vastly different ideological backgrounds and were bitterly opposed by the other. Despite the British being united by a need to improve imperial defense, the means of doing so was hotly contested.

The colonial minister in the Unionist administration, in power during the war and until 1906, was Joseph Chamberlain. Chamberlain was the second most prominent figure within the Unionist coalition, after Prime Minister Arthur Balfour. In the immediate aftermath of the war, Chamberlain proposed an “imperial preference tariff” to increase the empire’s autarky and promote the settlement of the colonies. In doing so, he plunged the Unionist coalition into internecine fighting. He resigned from the cabinet in 1903 due to his split with other ministers on the issue and instead began a tour of the UK promoting tariff reform. He first introduced the policy in Birmingham after he made a trip to South Africa to draw attention to colonial and imperial issues. When introducing the policy, he claimed that “upon what you do in the next few years, depends that tremendous issue whether this great Empire of ours is to stand together, one free nation, if necessary against all the world, or whether it is to fall apart into separate States, each selfishly seeking its own interest...and losing also the advantages which union can
give.”

He sought to promote settler colonialism with a positive vision of empire. At the center of Chamberlain’s effort was the belief that the UK was losing ground to other nations, such as the US, because “the United States of America have offered a greater attraction to British immigration” than the British colonies have, with the result that the United States has managed to bring a great deal more land under cultivation.

The imperial preference policy would have privileged imports from British colonies by applying a lower tariff to colonial goods than external goods. The pre-existing policy applied low tariffs on all imports and did not discriminate between colonial and foreign imports. The policy, as proposed, would have both lowered internal imperial tariffs and raised tariffs against external countries, thus preferencing goods from British colonies. In 1903, leading protectionists formed a “Tariff Reform League.” According to historian Bruce Murray, the League was also considerably more open to large-scale expenditure than the hardliners in the Unionist coalition, even embracing old age pensions.

The proponents of reform claimed that tariff reform would result in an increase of available funds for defense and administration but without raising domestic taxes. Chamberlain urged adoption of the reforms with maximum urgency, arguing that the times demanded the policy be implemented “before it is too late.”


Permeating Chamberlain’s speeches and desires was the Second Boer War. From his trip to South Africa to raise awareness to his repeated references to the failures of the war and the lessons learned, the impact of the Second Boer War was felt throughout his push for tariff reform. He was also keenly aware of how emigration acted as a stress-reliever on the British population, social system and economy in the preceding decades and sought to refocus that emigration to the British colonies. In turn, he thought that would allow Britain and its Empire to become more self-sufficient and more powerful. Thus, tariff reform was his preferred policy solution to the failures identified with the Second Boer War.

Immensely controversial, the policy was only apathetically supported by Prime Minister Balfour. Andrew Thompson, a historian studying the Tariff Reform League, argued that Balfour’s attitude toward the policy amounted to trying to water down the policy as much as he could without further dividing his party.158 Amid unabated Unionist infighting, in 1910, Balfour promised to put the issue to a national vote before implementing it.159 Thompson also documents the Tariff Reform League’s heavy suspicion and dislike of Balfour. Some prominent figures, including a group of MPs, even left the coalition government and joined with the Liberals.160 Ultimately, amidst united Liberal opposition and with weak support from the Prime Minister and some other Unionist grandees, tariff reform remained a theoretical way of strengthening the Empire and was never implemented.

159 Ibid.
160 Ibid.
Several years later, under a Liberal administration, the tariff issue was not as prominent. While the Unionist coalition continued to advocate for tariff reform, the Liberal administration had other revenue-raising plans. In 1909, Chancellor David Lloyd George proposed a wide-ranging set of new taxes collectively known as the “People’s Budget.” The nineteenth century saw a slow and gradual decline of public expenditure relative to GDP. Tax collections as a percentage of GDP fell during the century from around 10% of GDP in 1800 to 7% in 1899 after peaking at over 15% of GDP circa 1810 (largely to fund the cost of war with Napoleonic France). It should be noted that neither figure includes some collections by local authorities, which generally rose over the century due to new levies for things like public health. However, this spending was on a much smaller scale than the national taxation and the overall trend of public expenditure was down. These local taxes were primarily levied on property value.

Immediately after the Second Boer War, the only major new levy on the table were tariff hikes. Even those were not primarily being proposed for revenue-raising reasons, but rather for reasons of imperial cohesion and development as well as competition against rising rivals, particularly Germany and the United States. The Labour Representative Committee, the forerunner of the Labour Party, entered Parliament in 1900 and, even then, held two seats out of a total of 670. Although the Labour Representative Committee won twenty-nine seats at the 1906 polls in a loose electoral alliance with the Liberals, the point remains that there was not a great political will for

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the major use of taxation to reduce inequality.\footnote{“Past Elections: 1906,” \url{https://www.theguardian.com/politics/electionspast/page/0.,1451427.00.html}.} Additionally, as the Liberals held a majority on their own and were not reliant on the support of the Labour MPs, the influence of socialist ideas was even further diluted. It should also be noted that MPs were not paid a salary until 1911, thus anyone in the Parliament in the aftermath of the Boer War was wealthy enough to support themselves, putting the office out of reach of the vast majority of the populace.

The Liberal Cabinet pledged fealty to the idea of economy in government, but as I pointed out in chapter two, that term does not inherently mean small government but could be taken to mean efficient government. However, it was clear that many Liberal MPs were highly opposed to greater taxation on the grounds that it would both distort the economy and hold it back. The Liberal-leaning press, such as the \textit{Economist} or the \textit{Financial Times}, which had historically backed liberal policies and liberal candidates, was also quite opposed to tax increases.

However, in the wake of the Second Boer War and the concerns over national power and efficiency, the government budget was increasing on all sides. Military expenditures, both army and navy, rose to pay for Haldane’s reforms and the new naval building program. The passage of new social programs meant that civil expenses were also rising, or at least scheduled to rise in the following years as the programs were phased in. Additionally, deficit spending was not something that was thought viable for the government to engage in over the long term.

At first, the funds shortage pitted members of the Cabinet against each other. The Cabinet was a collection of ideologically diverse individuals and should not be viewed as
a cohesive whole, but rather as representative of the factions vying for power in the Liberal Party. Additionally, although all ministers generally thought that some program of reform was necessary to address the national weakness brought to light by the Second Boer War, different ministers had different priorities. The most pertinent fault line lay between David Lloyd George, the Chancellor, and Lord Haldane, the Secretary of State for War. In fact, Haldane thought Lloyd George downright incompetent, even once referring to him as “an illiterate with an unbalanced mind.”\textsuperscript{163} It is unclear whether Lloyd George held personal animus for Haldane in the same way and, in his defense, Haldane held extremely low opinions of several of his fellow cabinet members.

In 1907, Lloyd George tried to take funding from the military for his social reforms. Haldane stopped him by threatening to resign and generally making a scene.\textsuperscript{164} With neither the social reformers nor the military ones willing to give up their post-Boer reform programs, the last resort left was to pay for them with tax increases. In this, however, the Cabinet ran smack into fierce resistance from both the Unionists and many members of their own party, like the MP George McCrae.\textsuperscript{165} McCrae was not opposed to some change, in fact he had been a commissioner on the Commission on Physical Training (Scotland). He merely opposed tax raises and costly programs, focusing instead on relatively cheap ones (like physical education).

Tax increases were also attractive to Lloyd George because of their ability to reduce inequality independent of spending. Traditionally, most of the taxes levied in the UK (and elsewhere) were what we would consider to be “regressive” taxes. Taxes on

\textsuperscript{163} Peter Rowland, \textit{The Last Liberal Governments; the Promised Land, 1905-1910}, 39.
\textsuperscript{164} Ibid, 195-7.
\textsuperscript{165} George McCrae, “The Spirit of Expenditure.”
consumption and imports generally fall into this category as they hit poor people disproportionately hard. Lloyd George decided to go another way and, in doing so, ignited a constitutional crisis.

On April 29, 1908, Lloyd George presented his 1909/10 budget: the “People’s Budget.” One scholar, Gwyneth McGregor, said that “no budget has ever caused such a furor, or played such a momentous part in history.”166 With it, she claims, “a new era dawned.”167 It is hard to overstate the importance of this budget in British history. It represented the first attempt to reduce inequality through taxation and a shift away from regressive import taxes towards income and property taxes. It was also an acknowledgement that taxation shaped society and could be used as a social tool rather than a mere revenue-raising instrument. This was also something recognized, albeit in a different way, by the Unionists proposing tariff reform.

What was in this momentous legislation? By twenty-first century standards, rock-low tax rates and new taxes of the sort that are commonly applied in the twenty-first century. To the British in 1909, however, this legislation represented a major break from the past. It proposed raising the income tax rate on wealthy individuals while holding it steady for the working and middle classes. Those earning less than £2,000 annually, which included the vast majority of the populace, would have been taxed at 3.75%, the already-existing rate.168 A higher rate of 5% was to be charged on incomes over £2,000 with an additional surcharge charged past £3,000. Additionally, estate tax, which had

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167 Ibid.
been introduced in 1894, would have been raised, as would land and transfer taxes.\footnote{Ibid.} Overall, the new income, death, stamp and property levies would have had a relatively small impact on the actual revenue of the state, raising £7,500,000 annually out of total revenue of £162,590,000.\footnote{David Lloyd George, “The People’s Budget,” in \textit{Better Times: Speeches by the Right Hon. D. Lloyd George, Chancellor Of the Exchequer, M.P.} (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1910), 142.} Increased alcohol and tobacco duties yielded another £6,100,000 of new revenue and served the additional purpose of discouraging alcohol and tobacco consumption.\footnote{Ibid, 141.}

The links between the tax program and the post-Boer reform program are abundantly clear. Apart from the obvious fact that tax revenues would have paid for the programs, Lloyd George framed the question as one of war against poverty, saying in his presentation on April 29th “this is a War budget.”\footnote{Ibid, 143.} His presentation included claims that the money would be used to banish “poverty and squalidness,” much the same language used by both the Committees in 1902-4 and by policymakers in the Liberal government.\footnote{Ibid.} Raising taxes on alcohol and tobacco use also follows up on the committee reports, which complained about the substances’ overuse.

These taxes targeted the wealthy, particularly landowners. This was in contrast to the Unionist tariff proposals which would not only have hit the poor harder than the landowners but would have also increased landowner wealth by making British agricultural products more competitive then would be otherwise possible.\footnote{During the 1906 campaign, the Liberals called their program “big loaf” in contrast to the Unionist’s “little loaf,” implying that the Unionist proposals would have raised food costs dramatically. Lloyd}
George portrayed the Lords and other opponents of the tax program as standing in the way of national security, stating in October 1909 that a “fully-equipped duke costs as much to keep us as two Dreadnoughts; and dukes are just as great a terror and they last longer.”

Haldane also supported the new legislation as a means to increase national security, writing on August 9th that “we should boldly take our stand on the facts and proclaim a policy of taking, mainly by direct taxation, such toll from the increase and growth of this [national] wealth as will enable us to provide for 1) the increasing cost of social reform: 2) national defense; and also 3) to have a margin in aid of the Sinking Fund.”

By the letter of the law, the Lords retained veto power over all legislation in the British Parliament. In practice, at the time, finance was considered by customary law to be the sole prerogative of the House of Commons. Regardless, the Lords rejected the People’s Budget for the first time since the Glorious Revolution (1688). In part, they justified doing so by saying that, if the Liberals could show a clear economic mandate for the budget, the Lords would pass it. In response, the Liberals called a general election.

This election, fought almost solely on the issue of the budget, resulted in a hung Parliament, with a minority Liberal government retaining power with the support of the Irish Parliamentary Party. The Lords accepted this as evidence that the Liberals had an electoral mandate to pass the People’s Budget and passed it. The dispute had moved

176 Peter Rowland, *The Last Liberal Governments; the Promised Land, 1905-1910*, 168.
177 Andrew Marr, *The Making of Modern Britain*.
178 “100 Years Ago: Constitutional Crisis and the Parliament Act of 1911,” Bodleian Library, 2011,
http://blogs.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/archivesandmanuscripts/tag/1910-general-election/.
beyond the immediate budget, however, and the Liberals sought to establish Commons’ ultimate superiority over Lords. This was not directly related to failures of the Boer War but was intimately tied to the Lords’ attempt to reject the People’s Budget, a post-Boer reform and, as such, merits discussion. The Liberals’ decision to take on the Lords also indicates that they intended to continue passing progressive legislation of the sort that the Lords might object to.

A second election was held in 1910, on the issue of the Lords’ power. The results were virtually identical to the results of the earlier election over the budget. The Liberals responded by threatening to swamp the Lords by getting the king to create hundreds of new, Liberal voting peers, thereby forcing the Lords to either accept their own demise or accept the dilution of their power. The Tories in the House of Lords were highly divided, with one faction, the “ditchers,” arguing that they should call the Liberals’ bluff and force them to either back down or follow through on the creation of new peers. Ultimately, the ditchers lost and the Parliament Act 1911 passed the House of Lords, stripping them of their veto over financial matters entirely and limiting their power over non-financial bills.

Some scholars, like McGregor, have argued that the budget was deliberately provocative and designed to create a showdown between the Liberal Commons majority and the Tory Lords majority. In making that judgment, those scholars point to the Lords’ rejection of Liberal policies between 1906 and 1909. They also point out that the

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180 Ibid.
181 Ibid.
182 Ibid
183 Gwyneth MacGregor, “The People’s Budget.”
Liberals knew the Lords would object to the taxes, Lloyd George said the budget would “terrify” them.\textsuperscript{184} They mention that the Liberals decided to neuter the Lords despite getting their budget approved. In doing this, they minimize the extent to which the tax program was an integral part of a broad post-Boer effort to increase British national power and efficiency through major policy changes. They also ignore the reality that just over half of the new revenues were raised through the controversial levies; increases in excise tax also yielded new revenue.

Although the language of Liberal policy makers, particularly Lloyd George, was anti-aristocratic when originally promoting the People’s Budget, there is no indication that they always intended to permanently reduce the Lords’ power. Additionally, Lloyd George and the rest of the Cabinet originally sought the cooperation of the propertied classes, when it was not forthcoming, they turned to new taxes.\textsuperscript{185} My interpretation is that, once the Lords blocked the People’s Budget and King Edward was replaced by the more sympathetic King George, the Liberals saw a chance to make it permanently easier for them to pass legislation in the face of an implacably hostile House of Lords dominated by Unionists.

While post-Boer War initiatives over tariffs and taxes were governmental efforts to respond to the military failure of the Boer War, there were also numerous non-governmental efforts to do so. Numerous groups and movements formed to improve the safety of Britain and its empire. Some of these, like the Tariff Reform League or the National Service League, lobbied for changes in governmental policy (in the National

\textsuperscript{184} Peter Rowland, \textit{The Last Liberal Governments; the Promised Land, 1905-1910}, 168.
\textsuperscript{185} Andrew Marr, \textit{The Making of Modern Britain}. 75
Service League’s case, compulsory military education). Others, like the Legion of Frontiersmen, were primarily paramilitary efforts to train members in the event of an invasion. The Legion of Frontiersmen, in particular, was heavily focused on the Empire and only permitted those who had frontier/colonial experience to enlist. Still others, like a fund sponsored by Arthur Pearson, sought to address the social ills, in his case by sending urban boys on vacations to the countryside to improve their health.

I have focused on one movement, the Boy Scouts. The Boy Scouts combined efforts to train the young in military drill with fetishization of the Empire and improving the physical stature of the young. The movement’s popularity and ethos were heavily grounded in the Boer War and the movement spread incredibly rapidly, becoming by far the biggest and most recognizable of these movements. In 1909, merely one year after the publication of the manual *Scouting for Boys*, there were an estimated 107,000 Boy Scouts in Britain. Originally spreading organically, the movement and its troops were organized into the Scouts Association in 1910.

The British and American Scout movements grew at roughly the same time and were founded by people who knew each other: Robert Baden-Powell in the UK and Ernest Thompson Seton (among others) in the US. Most of the founders had served together in the Boer War and the reason for their popularity on both sides of the Atlantic

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188 Ibid.
189 Ibid, 21.
were similar: Anglo-American masculinity was thought to be in peril, with Scouting a potential antidote. The closing of the American frontier played heavily into this. There are some major differences, however. While the British Scouts adapted primarily African imagery and clothing, the American Scouts had a Native American motif. Additionally, the American Scout movement stressed independence and play while the British version placed emphasis on duty and obedience; a reflection of the movement’s more militarized character.\(^1\) In short, while ignoring the parallel American movement would be remiss, the two were not the same, nor are either the same as the 21st century movement. From this point on, unless otherwise specified, reference to the Boy Scouts should be taken to mean the British movement.

The Scouting movement in its entirety was inseparable from Robert Baden-Powell and his experiences during the Second Boer War. During the Siege of Mafeking (Oct 1899-May 1900), Robert Baden-Powell, the founder of the Boy Scouts, gained national fandom for his steadfast defense of the city in the face of a Boer siege for nine months. He was fortunate enough to be trapped in the city with a number of war correspondents, whose firsthand accounts of Baden-Powell (B-P) and the city’s residents made him a national hero. With the city’s relief, he became the Hero of Mafeking at a time when the only other news coming from South Africa was of defeat. Sales of his 1899 book, *Aids to Scouting*, were very high.\(^2\) The *Graphic* reported that there was “a dash of Nelson’s blood in his veins,” a reference to national hero Admiral Nelson who had defeated the French fleet at Trafalgar and thus ended the threat of Napoleonic

\(^1\) Robert H. MacDonald, *Sons of the Empire: The Frontier and the Boy Scout Movement, 1890-1918*, 179.
invasion. At the Theatre Royal, Portsmouth, the lead singer delivered the recitation “B-P, who kept the old flag flying.” In even the leading newspapers in the land, Baden-Powell’s virtues were extolled:

Perhaps no person whose name has become more prominent in this war is more admired and trusted than Colonel Baden-Powell. No man has done so much with such slender means. No man has done so much with such slender means. None has shown a more unquenchable cheerfulness in the presence of crushing dangers and cruel trials. None has displayed a greater fertility of resource in devising expediants and in turning to the best account the gradually dwindling powers of a half-starved population.

Apart from elevating the founder of the Scout movement to mythologized national hero status, Mafeking had direct other implications on the Scout movement. During the Siege of Mafeking, the defense effort was aided by a group of young white boys, the Mafeking Cadet Corp, who served as messengers, orderlies, postmen and in other non-combat roles. They were essential for internal communication and freed up the vastly outnumbered British combat soldiers. Baden-Powell would later claim that the Mafeking Cadet Corps was the inspiration for Scouting for Boys and the Scout movement although whether this is true or an attempt to further link the Scout movement to Mafeking and his Boer fame is unclear.

In the day-to-day life and practices of the Scouts, imperial motifs were omnipresent. The early uniform itself contained colonial and native references from head to toe. The hat worn was highly similar to the one worn by the South African

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194 *The Times of London*, May 19, 1900 in Robert H. MacDonald, *Sons of the Empire: The Frontier and the Boy Scout Movement, 1890-1918*, 95. A great irony of this lauding of Baden-Powell is that, after Mafeking, he proved to be an extremely poor military commander. He excelled at organization and logistics but was an extremely poor tactician; he was removed from combat command in August, 1900.
Constabulary and the Canadian Mounties. The design of the staff the Scouts carried was Ashanti (a people native to Ghana against whom Baden-Powell had fought in the 1890s).\textsuperscript{196} Scouts sported colonial-style shorts with bare knees and a “Mafeking native” bootlace.\textsuperscript{197} Even the omnipresent Scout badge carries imperial importance: it most likely imitates the wooden beads of the Zulu king Dinuzulu’s ceremonial necklace.\textsuperscript{198}

Scouts’ daily activities also contained colonial motifs. In the scouting handbook \textit{Scouting for Boys} (at one point the most popular book in the Anglosphere other than the Bible), Baden-Powell used stories of himself on campaign to explain the importance of tracking and other scout skills.\textsuperscript{199} Most of the stories and plays the boys are supposed to act out are set in the Empire. One, for example, is a highly fictionalized version of the story of John Smith and Pocahontas that proclaims English superiority.\textsuperscript{200} Despite these stories being set in the Empire, not all of them are explicitly imperial. Another, set in South Africa, is about the proper treatment of thieves and negligent soldiers; there is no imperial dimension beyond the involvement of the military.\textsuperscript{201}

Native and imperial traditions Baden-Powell personally witnessed were repurposed for use by urban British boys. One example was native tracking skills, which Baden-Powell witnessed when he commanded native British allies in West Africa. Another example of appropriation is the Ingonyama song, a Zulu song from the Boer

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\textsuperscript{197} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{198} Ibid; Baden-Powell is thought to have acquired a copy of the necklace while on campaign in Natal in 1888.
\textsuperscript{199} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{201} Ibid, 124-126.
War, that the Scouts are supposed to sing as a “War Song.” Throughout Scout practices and *Scouting for Boys* is a clear fetishization of the empire and the frontier as having produced the best British men, in contrast to the soft cities of Britain proper. Indeed, this was explicitly stated. “Give me the man who has been raised among the great things of Nature; he cultivates truth, independence, and self-reliance; he has generous impulses; he is true to his friends, and true to the flag of his country,” Baden-Powell claims to quote from an earlier book. “I find that those men who come from the furthest frontiers of the Empire...are among the most generous and chivalrous of their race.”

Beneath the heavy layer of imperial reference and frontier fetishization was a clear sense that Scouting will help prevent the fall of the British Empire. The Boy Scout was to “BE PREPARED to help in defending his country,” should the need arise. Baden-Powell recommended such military texts as *The Boys’ Book of Battles*, the *Manual of Military Engineering*, and the *Active Service Pocket Book*.

Evidence exists that the nation viewed them as pseudo-soldiers or at least a part of the infrastructure attempting to ready Britain for the next threat. As early as 1909, the Boy Scouts were depicted in the national press and the eye of the public as a part of British defense and the future of the country. In *Punch*, a satirical magazine popular among the middle class, who were precisely the people most likely to enroll their

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203 Ibid, 212. Baden-Powell was notorious for plagiarism from other sources. In this case, he purports to quote from W.T. Hamilton’s *My Sixty Years on the Plains, Trapping, Trading, and Indian Fighting* (1905). I found the original quote -- Baden-Powell does not get it quite right, although he captures the essence of it. See page 96 of Hamilton’s work for the original.
204 Robert Baden-Powell, *Scouting For Boys: A Handbook for Instruction in Good Citizenship*, 283; BE PREPARED is capitalized as it shares initials with Baden-Powell and the phrase was often identified with him.
children in Scout troops, a 1909 cartoon depicted a young Scout leading the elderly Mrs. Britannia to safety.

“Our Youngest Line of Defence,” *Punch*, September 1, 1909.\(^{206}\)

The connection between the Scouts and national defense and power did not disappear after 1909. One hundred fifty Scouts participated prominently in the military parade during King George V’s 1911 coronation.\(^{207}\) In 1912, a scout troop died in a tragic accident at sea covered in the national press as the “Sheppey disaster.”\(^{208}\) Despite not being members of the military or any other governmental organization, their coffins, draped in Union Jacks, were escorted by a military guard through the streets of London to


\(^{208}\) Ibid, 176-77.
great fanfare. Among many other prominent people, the King sponsored the Scouts, as did the Prince of Wales and The Telegraph. One significant caveat to this is that the War Office, when asked, officially declared the Scouts a separate organization with “Service connections,” in practice, the Scout administration was separate.

In addition to the strong imperial motif and the direct connection between the Scouts and ideas of war and defense, the Scouts were supposed to make good citizens. Scouting and the entire lot of imperial-related activities were intended to make the supposedly soft British urban youth as hard and useful as the people of the frontier. This was clear from the very start of the Scout movement: the subtitle of Scouting for Boys is A Handbook for Instruction in Good Citizenship.

Scouting was supposed to be a defense against wastefulness, loitering, alcoholism, and, in short, all the behavior identified as dangerous and negative in the 1902-04 reports. Baden-Powell, in Scouting for Boys, related the current situation of Britain to the circumstances identified by Edward Gibbon’s famous book as the causes of the fall of the Roman Empire, namely, the Romans’ loss of civic virtue and adoption of vices. Baden-Powell was not the first to make the comparison between the fall of Rome and the perceived imminent fall of Britain, the idea was commonly floated in the press and a 1905 anonymously published book entitled The Decline and Fall of the British Empire expressly invoked Gibbon’s work.

Scouting and related activities were to guard against that, giving British young men not only practical skills with which they could get jobs and defend the British

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209 Ibid.
210 Ibid, 196.
Empire, but something productive to occupy their time with. In many ways, this reflects the same concern as the Commissioners who, in 1904, had recommended that compulsory education be extended to age 18 to prevent British youth from adopting wastrel habits in their late teen years.\textsuperscript{211} In short, Scouts were supposed to be an idealized version of frontiersmen, good soldiers, and good citizens.

The years following the Boer War saw a new understanding of the Empire and the frontier. Fear that the imperial center had grown soft and unmanly drove panic about the future of Britain and its empire, a fear that was often existential. Policies, like the imperial preference tariff, were proposed to draw the Empire closer together and promote settlement of the vast colonial farmlands. Lionization of the frontiersman and the colonial also resulted in a vast expansion of social programs and a reorganization of the military which, in turn, led to new taxes never seen before in the UK. Those taxes were also used as a social tool to try to make the citizenry more valuable and useful to Britain and the Empire. Lastly, the Boy Scouts incorporated military training, colonial motifs and physical exertion in an extremely popular non-governmental effort to improve Britain’s youth without conscripting them or moving them to the colonies.

\textsuperscript{211} Lord Esher et al., “Notes of Commissioners Appended to the Report of His Majesty’s Commissioners Appointed to Inquire into the Military Preparations and Other Matters Connected with the War in South Africa”
Conclusion

The British embarked on two invasions in 1898 and 1899. The first, the conclusion to the Mahdist War, was a resounding victory for the Brits. Sustaining minimal casualties, they managed to crush the Mahdist state and retake Sudan, which they had lost fifteen years prior. The second, the Second Boer War (1899-1902), was a three year quagmire that consumed a tremendous percentage of British financial resources and required essentially the full complement (and more) of trained soldiers in the British Isles to defeat two small republics of Dutch farmers in South Africa. Often overlooked, this war was a transformational moment in British history. It set Britain up to be able to actually fight effectively during World War I as well as creating a template for a welfare state later followed by Clement Attlee.

The war shocked a nation accustomed to power and security. With the nation having just lost its longtime monarch, Queen Victoria (r. 1837-1901), facing a rapidly rising Germany and in fear for its empire’s security, the weakness on display during the Boer War set off widespread panic. Concern spread that not only was Britain’s military administration inadequate for the task of twentieth century warfare across continents but that the nation’s citizens themselves were not medically fit for military service. In the press and in the government, people claimed that three in five British men of military age were unfit for war. What would this mean in the event of a German invasion? Fueled by Social Darwinist ideology, the British considered it an existential crisis, to the point that popular books imagined German invasions and the fall of England. This fear consumed both the Unionist administration in power until 1906 and the Liberal administration that
took power afterwards and led, both directly and indirectly, to sweeping changes in British government and society.

The government originally set up a series of committees to investigate the failures of the war and the physical condition of the British youth. In part of an increasing trend towards government collecting data and statistics, these committees embarked on major data gathering efforts. They rejected pre-existing data as insufficiently scientifically rigorous, ideologically slanted or misleading. The Elgin Commission heard not just from senior officers, but from the rank-and-file. The other two committees sent people out to inspect British youth and report back and centralized and standardized already existing modes of data collection. The prominence of these committees and their methodology points towards not just the importance of the topic to the British public, but a new form of policymaking: one increasingly based on statistics and verifiable knowledge and one in which the entire nation was involved.

The Unionist government made relatively few reforms. Instead, they stalled for time and never called legislation to a vote. Their biggest policy, tariff reform, was only weakly supported or actively opposed by certain segments of the party, including the Prime Minister. They were punished for inaction during the 1906 general election, where they lost hundreds of seats.

The new Liberal administration immediately got to work instituting reforms. On the military side, Lord Haldane nearly transformed the military infrastructure. Britain gained a general staff, new methods of administering regiments, an Expeditionary Force and Officer Training Corps. Britain lost the outdated Commander-in-Chief position and the Treasury was shorn of its undue influence over military policy. Britain’s new military
was clearly different from its old, but it was also not a copy of the continental militaries. Haldane did not implement national conscription and Britain continued to rely on a smaller, professionalized army than its continental counterparts. While Britain gained a General Staff, it had far less influence than the continental ones. Firstly, it was ultimately subject to civilian oversight. Additionally, because of the autonomy of the Dominions, the new Imperial General Staff was not given authority to mandate changes to colonial defense plans. On the same theme, the British Empire had several different militaries (the British one, the Indian one, the Australian one, etc.) that worked together rather than a singular institution.

Major social reforms were also implemented. A “Children’s Charter” sought to protect children and give them better upbringing, paid for by the state. Reforms such as the introduction of school meals were intended to improve the physical condition of British adolescents and thus contribute to the development of a population capable of national defense. Other policies got caught up in the reformist ethos of the era and were implemented due to purely social concerns. One example of this would be old age pensions.

Britain also saw a resurgence of interest in and glamourization of the empire and the frontier. Joseph Chamberlain, a prominent Unionist, proposed tariff reform both to increase Britain’s self-sufficiency, particularly with regard to food, and promote settlement of the colonies. As he thought colonials were better citizens and soldiers than residents of Britain proper, this would have, in his eyes, improved the security of the Empire. The Liberals, forced to choose between military and social policies, ultimately opted to raise taxes instead. Their tax changes both paid for transformational changes and
also were, themselves, a tool to increase the living standards of the working class in Britain proper. Lastly, many non-governmental organizations sprang up with the aim of securing the Empire. One of these, the Boy Scouts, directly targeted adolescents and combined militarism, concern over the physicality of adolescents, and lionization of the colonial man.

Studying these changes and the society and military the response to the Boer War ended up creating is indispensable for the study of World War I. I have sought to provide a unified study of this, condensing numerous studies of pieces of the change and adding new information. Without the changes, Britain would have been incapable of fighting effectively. The changes also produced a society far more resilient and tolerant of war than the one that entered the Second Boer War. I have largely opted to ignore the international context in my thesis. I did not want the reader to lose sight of how the changes were a reaction to a previous war and instead get trapped in viewing the post-Boer changes in the light of World War I. The British did not know when WWI was coming, nor did they know what form it would take, how long it would last or anything else that a modern reader knows. Despite that, there is an irresistible temptation for the reader to, if presented with the detailed geopolitical context, view each change as a step on the road to war. I hope that, by largely excluding the serious international crises and foreign policy maneuvers during the Edwardian Era, I have kept the reader’s mind focused on British domestic and imperial policy and context.

In my limited time and space, I have focused on the Edwardian Era and the post-Boer changes. That said, there are several other related avenues that could use exploration. I briefly touched upon two of them in my introduction. They are both side-
by-side comparisons, one of the Second Boer War with the First Boer War (1880-81) and the other of the Second Boer War with the Mahdist War (1881-99). The First Boer War ended in British defeat, but did not provoke public outcry nor substantial reform. I have briefly explained my thinking on the subject in the introduction, but the context and conduct of these two wars merits side-by-side examination.

The Mahdist War is another interesting comparison. The Mahdist War spanned a far longer time and can be broadly broken into three phases: British defeat, stalemate, British victory. When the British were first defeated and driven out of Khartoum, the public was outraged. However, this outrage was largely directed at the reluctance of Gladstone’s government to relieve the siege of Khartoum, which was led by popular hero General Gordon. The defeat and fall of Khartoum -- and the rest of Sudan -- did not provoke much change in Britain. When they returned in 1898, they easily defeated the Mahdists at the Battle of Omdurman in an incredibly lopsided victory. Omdurman is merely one year before the beginning of the Second Boer War, but the British focused so heavily on the Boer War and not on the Mahdist War. Why this is merits examination, although I have offered my thoughts in the introduction.

One other possible avenue of exploration is into the parts of the reform effort that do not relate directly to the question of military capability or physical strength. The earliest example of this is directly after the war, with the Committee on Physical Training (Scotland) report, which mentions both girls and the disabled, groups that were not going to serve in the armed forces under any circumstances. A minority of policies do not relate directly to children or adolescents, with the most prominent being old age pensions. I have sought to incorporate some discussion of how general socialist and progressive
policy fused with concern over national strength to produce a reform program containing
both elements, but the mechanics of this and the debate over exactly which policies
should be implemented and why is one that merits further study.

Ultimately, I believe that I have made an important contribution to the field of
Edwardian history. My work situates itself in the Edwardian Era, with an emphasis on
dealing with that period rather than a longer story dating to either the Victorian Era or the
World Wars. Using mostly evidence from the government and from the press, its strength
is also as a combined work of political, military, diplomatic and social history and cannot
be easily categorized into one or the other.
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