The Conservative party in north-east Wales, 1906-1924

Abstract
Between 1906 and 1924 the Conservative party only won three parliamentary elections in North-east Wales - the Denbigh Boroughs division twice in 1910 and the county seat in Flintshire in 1924. Conversely the Liberal party won all the other elections throughout the period, with the exception of Wrexham which fell to Labour in 1922 and 1923. This, however, says more about the vagaries of the British 'first past the post' electoral system than it does about the true strength of the political parties in the region. Indeed, between 1906 and 1924 the Conservative party never averaged below 39 per cent of the electorate in the constituencies it contested. Given this impressive but unrecognised electoral position, what this study set out to do was to analyse the strength of Conservatism in a region where failure was the norm. The period was chosen because it saw the last Liberal administration in this country, and marked the start of the Conservative dominance of government for much of the twentieth century. It also saw one of the biggest cultural and social upheavals in British history with the advent of the First World War, and witnessed the enfranchisement of women for the first time. The general election of 1906 returned no Conservatives for Wales. In North Wales a conference was called to examine the situation and evaluate future prospects. This led to a review of party organisation in the region, the intention being not only to attract more working class people and women, but also to lessen the autocratic domination by the landed classes. In 1910 the Conservatives won the Denbigh Boroughs constituency with a large swing against the Liberals, and came very close to winning the Flint Boroughs by-election of 1913. The period of War, 1914-1918, saw all political parties moth-balled until the end of hostilities, but during the period of Coalition Government from 1918 to 1922 in which Liberal representation went almost unchallenged in North-east Wales, the Conservatives reorganised their Constituency Associations. By 1924 the landed domination of the party had diminished significantly, and in Flintshire the Conservatives won their first seat in an industrial working class area. Underpinning this success was a long-standing popular support, which after 1906 was better organised and mobilised for the Conservative cause through a variety of loosely attached organisations, societies and clubs. The Primrose League, an organisation that had been founded in 1883 to rally Conservative support, had a very high membership in the region compared to the rest of Wales. For example, the Denbigh Primrose League had over 800 members in 1912. A network of Conservative clubs existed in the region and as early as 1905 a thriving Workingmen's Association had been founded in Wrexham. The Conservative party was also well represented in local government; in Flintshire between 1907 and 1913 it had more county councillors than the Liberal party. In addition, the upheaval of War and the attraction of socialism to the newly enfranchised masses meant that the Conservative party had to widen its appeal to those people who had acquired the vote in 1918. By recruiting women and working class members the Conservative party was able to lay the foundations for a number of parliamentary successes in North-east Wales that lasted until the 1990s. It is therefore the contention of this thesis that the Conservative party not only survived a very difficult period, but that it emerged a strengthened and invigorated force.
The Conservative and Liberal Parties are the oldest and until the end of the 19th century they were the only parties elected to the House of Commons. The main British political groupings are the Conservative and Labour Parties and the Party of Liberal Democrats. Because of the electoral method in use, only two major parties obtain seats in the House of Commons. People belonging to smaller political parties join one of the larger parties and work from within to if make their influence felt. The exception to this are members of the Scottish National and Welsh Nationalist Parties, who, because their influence votes are concentrated in specific geographical areas, can manage to win seats although their total support is relatively small. The Conservative Party.