

## Introduction

### Majority Rule and Its Problems

This book is about politicians who have changed the number of political dimensions in British politics. And it is about politicians who play veto games. So, what is a political dimension? And how many of them are there usually? And what *is* a veto game?

A dimension is a way of organizing opinions. There is an infinity of possible policy platforms. Both politicians and voters need some way to evaluate them. A simple measuring rod is money. If I like health care to be publicly funded, then, other things being equal, the more money politicians promise to spend on public health care, the better.

But of course, other things are not equal. Politicians have to decide not only how much to spend, but how much to tax. And when they spend, they have to decide not only how much to spend on health, but how much on defence, education, roads, police, statues of famous men, and all the other things that governments spend taxpayers' money on.

The commonest way to make sense of this is to arrange possible policies along some line from the most extreme in one direction to the most extreme in the other. Politicians are well used to the terms 'left' and 'right' to label the ends of this line. Voters are less well used to the terms, but a wealth of evidence from surveys in many countries shows that they are comfortable with the line, or dimension, and that they are able to locate themselves, and the political parties, on such a line. (For contemporary evidence from Britain see the successive reports from the British Election Survey: Heath *et al.* 1985, 1991, 1994). A left-wing policy is one that gives priority to high spending, and a right-wing policy is one that gives priority to low taxation.

Politicians and voters alike make more subtle distinction. Within spending priorities there are 'left-wing' and 'right-wing' shades. People and politicians of the left give priority to health, social services, and overseas aid. People and politicians on the right give priority to defence and security. On both sides, people are aware that there is more to politics than taxing and spending, and they bundle their moral and ethical views into their evaluation of left

and right, in ways that may seem to fit together less well than views on taxing and spending. For instance, opposition to restrictions on business is viewed as a 'right-wing' stance; but so is support for state enforcement of community morals. What about businesses that are believed to undermine community morals? Maximizing freedom to take, and trade in, drugs is viewed as a left-wing policy, but maximizing freedom to drive, and trade in, expensive cars is viewed as a right-wing policy.

This matters to political philosophers. It need not matter to political scientists, or to historians. What matters is whether bundles of policies, which may have no objective coherence, have subjective coherence to politicians, or to voters, or both. It is hard to judge how voters view bundles of policies. Only since the 1930s is there any survey evidence on how voters perceive policies and politicians; only since the 1960s have the surveys been sophisticated enough to give reliable information. For the rest of the period covered by this book, we have to guess. At least we know how politicians appealed to voters, which appeals seem to have succeeded, and which seem to have failed.

For politicians, the problem is a little more tractable. It can be tackled using both statistical and literary tools. The main statistical tool is roll-call analysis. This book uses it for the chapter on the 1840s, and in the background of the chapter on the 1880s, but not for the later chapters, because it has not been done on British data since then. Roll-call analysis examines the votes cast in a legislature—in our case, the House of Commons. How MPs vote on divisions is recorded, and this may open a route into understanding the ideologies of the dead. It can be shown that some votes are correlated, and others are not. For instance, how MPs in the Parliament of 1841–7 voted on the Corn Laws is correlated with how they voted on Ireland. It is not correlated with how they voted on factory reform. Those who wanted to keep the Corn Laws usually wanted to repress Irish unrest with force. Those who wanted to repeal the Corn Laws tended to be (slightly) more open to Irish dissent. But knowing where an MP stood on either of these sets of issues does not help us predict whether he favoured or opposed greater regulation of factories. The first set of issues stood on the main dimension of politics at the time. Factory reform did not.

Roll-call analysis is very big in American political science. It is almost invisible in Britain (and, as it happens, what there is has mostly been done by Americans). This may be partly because it is hard to do, and until recently required heavyweight computing power and familiarity with unfriendly programs—neither of these being resources that many British historians had at their fingertips. But it is due more to party discipline. Since the 1880s, most Commons division lists tell us nothing except which Members belonged to which party. Party discipline on the floor of the house has meant that any dissension is not expressed there. Ideologies are constrained by party, and roll-call analysis tells us nothing.

Where roll-calls are uninformative, we have to look at what politicians actually did and said. In this book, I rely both on what they said to the public,

and on what they said to one another. Usually, the latter is more important. Of course, politicians, like anybody else, sometimes lie. So we need to ask ourselves all the time *To whom is he saying this? How likely is it to be true?* Most of the arguments of this book are built on what politicians privately said to one another, and to their friends rather than their enemies. I have assumed that politicians lie to their friends less often than to their enemies. Perhaps the most reliable evidence of all is what they say to their mistresses. But only two of the politicians at the heart of this book have had mistresses.

Is British politics since 1846, then, one-dimensional or multidimensional? The evidence is that normal politics is more or less unidimensional. Parties and politicians align themselves on the main salient issues of the day, so that those who are 'left' on one are 'left' on others, and those who are 'right' on one are 'right' on others. Although voters do not closely follow these ideologies, they follow them closely enough to be able to identify with one or another party, and to know how 'close' they are to each party. Note that I am not claiming that most people can identify how left-wing or right-wing they are. That is false, and unnecessary for my argument. *Left* and *right* have no objective meaning; they are defined purely in relation to the issues of the day. Thus, for example, support of income tax is a 'right' position in the 1840s, because it can be shown to align with support for the landed interest and indifference to Irish reform.

If politics is unidimensional, we can always draw a graph such as Fig. 1.1. In Fig. 1.1, the possible policies lie along the horizontal,  $x$ -axis, from the most 'left' to the most 'right'. The vertical,  $y$ -axis measures the number of people who like each policy the best. Thus the higher the line AB at any opinion point, the more people hold that opinion. In presentations of this theory, figures such as Fig. 1.1 are often drawn with a bell-shaped curve with a few people at each extreme and many at the middle. This may often be true, but it has caused a lot of confusion because it tends to mislead readers new to the theory as to what the 'median voter theorem' means. Therefore I have deliberately drawn Fig. 1.1 with an asymmetrical, non-bell-shaped, distribution of opinion.

Given the way in which Fig. 1.1 has been defined, we may take the area under any part of the curve AB to represent the number of people whose favourite position lies in the range between the points vertically below the ends of the curve. A very special position is defined by the vertical line MM'. This line cuts the area under the curve into two areas of exactly equal size. Any voter whose ideal position is M' is a, or the, *median voter*. The median voter has exactly as many other voters to her 'left' as to her 'right'.

Now let us suppose that there are two parties trying to win power by means of a national election. Suppose, further, that each of them regards ideology as only a means to an end. Both parties care not what policies they put forward, but wish only for the spoils of office. Then each of them will put forward an identical platform, which will coincide with what the median voter wants. Why? Because if the first to move, say party *J*, goes to any other

**Fig. 1.1.** The median voter theorem for one-dimensional issues.

issue position, then the other party  $K$ , need only nestle up to  $J$ , but just fractionally on the majority side of it. In that event,  $K$  will get the majority of the vote, and win the election. This is illustrated by the lines  $JJ'$  and  $KK'$  in Fig. 1.1. As all of this is common knowledge (or, if it is not, the parties soon find it out), the parties both move to, or try to occupy, the median voter's position.

It is time for a reality check. How far have conditions in Britain since 1846 corresponded to the simplicities of Fig. 1.1? First, it is obvious that there have been parties that do not seek nationwide power. By far the most important of these have been the Irish Party and its successors. Already when our story opens, most people in Ireland were hostile to the Union of 1800, which had incorporated the whole of Ireland into the United Kingdom. Some of the Irish MPs in 1846 described themselves as Repealers, interested only in Irish affairs. The Repealers weakened (in Parliament, though not out of it) in the 1850s and 1860s. But, starting in 1874, the Irish MPs became a cohesive nationalist bloc. By 1886, all the seats in Catholic Ireland were held by the Irish Party, which sought concessions for Ireland from a British Government of either party. It was not interested in governing a United Kingdom of which it did not approve.

By the time of Lloyd George, the united Irish Party had fragmented, but it was still true that Catholic Ireland elected politicians who were not interested in ruling the UK; the Treaty of 1921 marked their final withdrawal. However, parties that do not wish to form the government of the UK have remained. The Ulster Unionists have been such a party (or parties) ever since 1921. They have now been joined by the Northern Ireland nationalists, by the Scottish National Party (SNP), and *Plaid Cymru* ('Party of Wales'). Although Lloyd George seemed to solve the Irish Question by taking it out of British

politics in 1921, it returned to haunt Britain again when violence restarted in 1968.

In a seminal work of comparative political science, Lipset and Rokkan (1967: ch. 1, quoted at p. 34) argue that European patterns of party competition are determined by the 'National Revolution' and 'the Industrial Revolution'. The Industrial Revolution is familiar. They argue that it generated class politics along the familiar left–right dimension. The National Revolution, they argue, set nation-building elites in the centre against those who resisted them in the periphery. Religion could in principle provide yet another dimension, although they argued that in many cases it aligned with the centre–periphery cleavage—the central elites belonged to one religion, and the resistant periphery to another. Furthermore, they argue, there is a lag between the development of cleavages (dimensions, in our terminology), and the development of party systems. Once a party system comes into existence along some dimension, there is a tendency for it to freeze up. The existing parties would rather adapt themselves to politics in the new dimension than allow new parties to come in and imperil their access to power. Therefore, old parties of centre and periphery may be more powerful, and new parties of class less powerful, than the issues of contemporary politics may lead one to expect.

Lipset and Rokkan's book appeared in 1967, at a time when all British political scientists accepted Peter Pulzer's (1975: 102—first published in 1967) axiom that 'Class is the basis of British party politics; all else is embellishment and detail'. Their idea that the centre–periphery dimension, although overlain by the left–right dimension, was still there started to gain acceptance with the relative decline of the Labour and Conservative parties and rise of peripheral parties in the 1970s. But it has never been as fully accepted as it should have been. Political scientists and historians are so used to looking at the British past through a retrospectoscope that they have tended to see things that were not there and missed things that were. They greatly exaggerated the importance of class in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century British politics at the expense of religion and centre–periphery politics.

The Lipset and Rokkan model fits British politics in most of our period. The centre wanted to extend British power all over the Empire. That meant, first, securing it in Scotland, Wales, Ireland, and even the north of England, which expressed varying degrees of discontent with London rule. Religious divisions strengthened the centre–periphery dimension and weakened the left–right dimension. The established churches—the Church of England and the Church of Scotland—were the churches of the centre. All the other churches were churches of the periphery. Most of Ireland was defiantly Catholic. Catholicism had been a badge of Irish identity ever since the seventeenth century. Wales was defiantly Nonconformist; Nonconformity was also stronger in northern than in southern England. Scotland had its own religious divisions, little understood by English politicians. The Church of Scotland split in 1843 on the lines of centre versus periphery within

Scotland, with the Free Church representing the spatial and socio-economic periphery and the established church the centre. The Free Church was strongest in the Highlands, and strongest of all where Highlanders had been evicted ('cleared') from their land. When Scots went overseas, as hundreds of thousands of them did to Ulster (many then going on to form a dominant religious group in the first century of the independent United States), they ceased to belong to an established church and became by definition Nonconformists. Struggles over church disestablishment and recognition—in Scotland in 1843, in Ireland from 1800 to 1869, and in Wales from 1910 to 1920—were as much centre–periphery politics as religious politics. In another seminal study by a non-Briton, Kenneth Wald (1983) showed that as late as 1910 religion was a better predictor than class of vote in Britain.

In normal times, the politics of centre and periphery could be bundled with the politics of left and right. As stated above, MPs in the 1840s had attitudes to Ireland (a centre–periphery issue) that lined up with their attitudes to the Corn Laws (a rural–urban issue generated by the Industrial Revolution). But the potential for disruptive changes of alignment was always there. At one level, the very presence of the Irish Party and its successors ensured that. The Irish Party did not seek power in the UK. But it held the balance in the House of Commons from 1885 to 1886, from 1892 to 1895, and from 1910 to 1918. Its successors as parties of the periphery (the Liberals, Scottish, Welsh, and Northern Irish Nationalists, and the Ulster Unionists) between them held the balance of power in 1974, from 1977 to 1979, and from 1996 to 1997. The presence of a potential second dimension enabled politicians such as Peel and Lloyd George to make the imaginative leaps discussed in the chapters that follow.

However, since 1900, or at the latest since 1914, there have been three parties in Parliament which *have* wanted to share in the government of the UK. The Labour Party won its first seats, as the Labour Representation Committee, in 1900. At first it was not clearly distinguished from the Liberals, and the two parties signed an electoral pact in 1903 which ensured that they did not run against one another in England. After the two General Elections of 1910, the Labour Party seemed to be in retreat, but the first wartime coalition of 1915 brought it into government. Since then, there has never been any doubt but that it sought to govern, even if in 1932 and again in 1980 that prospect seemed extremely remote.

The struggle between the Liberal and Labour Parties to form the opposition to the Conservatives lasted from 1918 to 1929; the Labour Party won, and the Liberals were driven back to the periphery, where they have continued to win most of their seats. In the early 1950s they almost died out altogether, appearing to confirm the truth of *Duverger's Law*:

*[T]he simple-majority single-ballot system favours the two-party system. Of all the hypotheses that have been defined in this book, this approaches the most nearly perhaps to a true sociological law. (Duverger 1959: 217; stress in original)*

The British electoral system would be more accurately described as a simple-*plurality* single-ballot system. In the Anglo-Saxon world it is also called 'First Past the Post'. This is another unsatisfactory name, because there is no fixed post for the first to pass. The electoral rule is that the candidate with the highest vote is elected, regardless of whether that candidate has won a majority of the vote. To distinguish 'the highest single vote, which may or may not be a majority of the votes cast' from 'the majority of votes', the former is called 'the plurality', and the British electoral system called the 'plurality system', throughout this book.

It is well known that the plurality system squeezes any candidate who is commonly believed to have little chance of winning locally. For such a candidate, being a perfect model of the opinions of the median voter is not sufficient; Duverger's Law puts a ruthless squeeze on her. Since the 1920s, this position has mostly been held by the Liberals, although in a few times and places it has been the Labour Party's turn to suffer, and in an even smaller number the Conservative Party's. These odd local situations account for the survival of the Liberals in the Commons from 1931 to 1964.

Nevertheless, unless the centre-periphery dimension is prised apart from the left-right dimension, they may collapse on one another. In that case, politics is unidimensional, and that is how British politics has appeared for most of the time since 1846. In unidimensional politics, it follows from the median voter theorem that parties will normally try to align themselves with the median voter. To do anything else is to risk catastrophic defeat. Some of the catastrophic defeats in British party politics during the period arise from parties being driven by their internal preoccupations to positions remote from the median voter, and/or from the electorate having sharply different views of the competence of the different parties. In 1931 Labour lost whatever reputation for competence at managing the economy it had had, as did the Conservatives in 1992. These factors account for the landslides of 1931 and 1983 (for the Conservatives) and 1997 (for Labour). These cases involved manoeuvres around (towards, away from) the median voter rather than heresthetic moves into new dimensions.

But chaos is always possible. Here, 'chaos' has a precise definition. Whereas unidimensional politics is strongly stable around the position of the median voter, multidimensional politics is intrinsically unstable. Since 1785 it has been known (although often forgotten) that, whenever there are at least three voters and at least three options, option A may beat B by a majority, which beats C by a (different) majority, which likewise beats A. This is called a *majority-rule cycle*. If opinions can be arranged in one issue dimension so that nobody ranks the 'middle' option worst, then majority-rule cycles cannot exist. If not, then there is no median and majority-rule cycles are likely to be pervasive.

This situation is shown diagrammatically in Fig. 1.2. Here the dimension 'left-right' is crosscut by the dimension 'slave-free'. Fig. 1.2 is intended to represent national politics in the USA from around 1800 to 1861. US national

**Fig. 1.2.** Issue space in two dimensions: the non-existence of an equilibrium.

politics from 1800 to 1861 exhibited a broad ‘left–right’ division. These terms may be used only with the repeated health warning that they have no objective meaning. But there was a ‘left’ politics which appealed to the small farmer on the frontier, and a ‘right’ politics which appealed to the city non-farmer. The former was represented by the Republican-Democratic, later Democratic Party founded by Thomas Jefferson in 1800, and refounded by the frontiersman President Andrew Jackson in 1828. The latter was represented by a succession of relatively unsuccessful parties—Federalists and Whigs.

There is an important difference of notation between Fig. 1.1 and Fig. 1.2. The  $x$ -axis is the same. But in Fig. 1.2, the  $y$ -axis now measures, not the number of people on each position, but positions on a second issue dimension. As the two dimensions are, statistically, ‘orthogonal’—which means no more than ‘at right angles’—a politician may be in any of the four quadrants of Fig. 1.2. A politician is assumed to have a favourite point—such as the positions  $A$ ,  $B$ ,  $C$  in Fig. 1.2. Spreading out from each agent’s favourite point are a set of *indifference contours*. One is shown around each of the points  $A$ ,  $B$ , and  $C$  in Fig. 1.2. An indifference contour links all the points in two-dimensional space among which the agent is indifferent. Supposing that I am agent  $A$ , say, the further a set of policies is from my optimum point  $A$ , the less I like it. Policies can depart from my ideal point in any direction—more favourable to slavery, more hostile to it, more ‘left-wing’, more ‘right-

wing'. Assuming that I can rank any set of policies against any other, I can then draw an indifference contour to link any collection of policy positions that I like, or dislike, equally. An infinite number of indifference contours can be drawn: the further away they are from my ideal point, the less I like the policies they represent. The assumptions embodied in this paragraph are often summarized by the expression 'Euclidean space'. The space I have just defined has the properties first defined by the ancient Greek geometer Euclid (with notation from the seventeenth-century French philosopher and mathematician René Descartes).

Fig. 1.2 may be used to show why chaos is almost always possible in two dimensions. Consider the three politicians whose ideal positions are point A, B, and C in Fig. 1.2. If points A, B, and C were in a straight line, the situation could be reduced to that of Fig. 1.1. From that we would know that voter B, whose optimum was B, was the median voter, and that position B was unbeatable. It might seem intuitively obvious that there is a similar stability if the three points are not in line. There is not.

To illustrate this, look again at the three indifference contours drawn on to Fig. 1.2, and in particular at the three hatched areas  $QP$ ,  $QR$ , and  $QS$ . The point Q where all three intersect, is the status quo: the current platform comprising a policy on slavery and a policy on welfare. From the definition just given, the area  $QP$  contains all the points which voters A and B prefer to the status quo Q. As A and B are a majority of the population, Q would lose to any point in this 'petal' (as these areas are called, for obvious reasons). Similarly, Q would lose to any point in the petal  $QR$ , by a 2–1 vote with A and C in the majority, or to any point in the petal  $QS$ , by a 2–1 vote with B and C in the majority. Suppose, without loss of generality, that Q is put to the vote against  $Q'$ . Compared to Q,  $Q'$  is inside the indifference curve of two out of the three voters. Therefore a majority of the electorate prefer it, therefore it is chosen. But, in an obvious sense,  $Q'$  is 'further away' from the electorate than the starting point.

But now the status quo point is  $Q'$ . A diagram similar to Fig. 1.2 could be drawn again, with three indifference curves coinciding at the new status quo  $Q'$ . I will not draw it, but leave it to the reader's imagination. Obviously, each of the petals is now larger. Therefore, the majority choice may wander yet further away from the original starting place. There is no bound to this process. Therefore, a sequence of majority decisions could take society arbitrarily far from its starting point.

This is not a formal proof of the now-notorious 'chaos theorems' that have been proved by Black and Newing (1951, in McLean, McMillan, and Monroe 1998); Plott (1967), Kramer (1973), McKelvey (1976, 1979), and Schofield (1983), among others. Nor is this book the place to prove or expound them—for that, see any intermediate or advanced social choice text such as Mueller 1989 or Saari 1995. The purpose of this little excursion into the geometry of social choice is to try to convince the reader that chaos is a real possibility whenever politics goes into two or more dimensions.

This may seem odd, since cycles are rarely observed. But politics is normally structured so as to hide them. Sometimes, however, it is in politicians' interest to bring them to the surface. In William Riker's (1982) canonical example, the Republican Party, created in 1856, deliberately revived the issue of slavery in US national politics in order to split the hegemonic Democratic Party into its northern and southern wings. In that, he claims, they completely succeeded, although at a heavy price. Once the issue of slavery cross-cut the 'left-right' alignment of the time, there was no stable outcome. In the Presidential election of 1860, there were four candidates. Under most plausible electoral systems, the northern Democrat Stephen A. Douglas would have won. But the system actually used—plurality vote filtered through the Electoral College—gave Abraham Lincoln a huge majority in the Electoral College, and successfully concealed, according to Riker, the underlying disequilibrium.

Riker built a great deal on this case—something for which he has been frequently criticized (see especially Green and Shapiro 1994, Mackie 2000). I am willing to concede a lot to the critics without conceding Riker's central point. In particular, I no longer accept Riker's claim that popular preferences were probably in a cycle among three of the four candidates (Lincoln, Douglas, and John Bell). As Mackie (2000) shows, this influential claim of Riker's depends on the assumption that most north-eastern Lincoln voters preferred Bell to Douglas (Riker 1982, Display 9–2, rows 1 and 2). Actually, most of them probably preferred Douglas to Bell, and with that switch Riker's cycle disappears. The chaos theorems are not quite as wide-ranging as they were believed to be when Riker (1982, 1986) wrote, and conditions for stability are a little more generous than he believed them to be. But his central insight remains valid. On critical occasions—however rare they may be—politics goes seriously multidimensional. When that happens, outcomes are extremely unpredictable. Given one set of rules, Lincoln won the 1860 election. Given most other sets of rules, Douglas would have won. The American Civil War might have had a very different course, or a different outcome, or perhaps not happened at all. The fate of slaves in the southern states might have been very different. We return to Riker's story in section 1.3, but first must introduce his distinction between heresthetic and rhetoric.

## Rhetoric and Heresthetic

Rhetoric is the art of verbal persuasion. Heresthetic is the art and science of political manipulation. All politicians use rhetoric; some use heresthetic. In order to make this book manageable, I am concentrating on some specialized sorts of political rhetoric.

All politicians use rhetoric to praise their own side (and its policies) and to denounce the other (and its policies). This sort of rhetoric calls for no special

comment, except when one politician exercises it much more skilfully than any other, thus giving his side an advantage. For instance, in the years leading up to the 1906 General Election campaign, discussed below, the Conservatives made a powerful rhetorical link between imperialism and xenophobia:

**LET 'EM ALL COME**

**Is the Radical Cry**

The Radicals, by their obstruction to the Aliens Bill, are evidently glad to see all foreigners who are criminals; who suffer from loathsome diseases; who are turned out in disgrace by their fellow countrymen; who are paupers; who fill our streets with profligacy and disorder.

*The Radical Welcomes Them All*

The Unionist Government wants to keep these creatures out of Great Britain. They don't want to see the honest Britisher turned out by these scourings of European slums. They brought in a Bill to check this evil flow of aliens.

But the Radicals said, No! we don't want to stop the foreign criminal and diseased outcast from coming into this country.

By obstruction, the radicals caused the postponement of the Government bill, which safeguarded British Workers.

Next Session, the Government will bring in the Bill again. Show your disgust of Radical tactics, and

**SUPPORT THE UNIONIST GOVERNMENT**

**In the Policy of Fair Play**

**For your Countrymen**

(National Union of Conservative and Unionist Associations, leaflet no. 325, 1904. Quoted in McKenzie and Silver 1968: 60)

But this was neutralized by the Liberal campaign in 1906, which managed to convince the electorate that Free Trade meant the Big Loaf and Protection meant the Little Loaf. (Liberal election agents even turned xenophobia to their advantage by putting a warm, freshly baked British Big Loaf next to a stale Continental rye-bread Little Loaf in committee room windows). Furthermore, the Liberals somehow conveyed the impression that the Conservatives would unleash a flood of Chinese labourers on Britain to take jobs from the British working man. Taking the period from 1895 to 1906 as a whole, therefore, neither side clearly gained the battle of xenophobic rhetoric.

There are, though, some cases in our period when one side gained a rhetorical advantage. The most clear-cut was during the battle between the Peers and the People—as one side called it—from 1909 to 1911. Nobody in our period could match Lloyd George at his peak:

The question will be asked 'Should 500 men, ordinary men chosen accidentally from among the unemployed, override the judgment—the deliberate judgment—of millions of people who are engaged in the industry which makes the wealth of the country?' That is one question. Another will be, who ordained that a few should have the land of Britain as a perquisite; who made 10,000 people owners of the soil, and the rest of us trespassers in the land of our birth . . . ? (Speech at Newcastle upon Tyne 10 October 1909, as quoted by *The Times* 11.10.09)

Lloyd George's purpose was a little bit heresthetical as well as rhetorical. He wished to infuriate the Tory peers so much that they would reject his budget. They did, playing into his hands.

At a deeper level, rhetoric consists of persuading everybody that the world is the way you say it is. It is usually quite easy to persuade your own side of this. Persuading the other side takes more skill. Sometimes you can cloak your argument in religion. There is no truth so final as religious truth. Unfortunately for rhetoricians, there has been no agreed religious truth in Britain during our period: as already discussed, religious alignments concurred with centre-periphery alignments. Religion could be a powerful weapon to rally your side, but not to persuade the other side to see the world as you saw it. Economics is more promising. Especially if Keynes's famous saying is true:

Practical men, who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual influences, are usually the slaves of some defunct economist. Madmen in authority, who hear voices in the air, are distilling their frenzy from some academic scribbler of a few years back. (Keynes 1936: 383)

The defunct economist in Keynes's sights was perhaps Adam Smith, but more likely David Ricardo or Alfred Marshall: the founder and refounder of the classical economics which Keynes sought to undermine. Classical economics was contested ground in the 1840s. Although Ricardo and his contemporaries argued passionately against the Corn Laws, it was not their voices that Peel (who was not mad) heard in the air. But by the 1860s, classical economics held an intellectual hegemony among British politicians that was not seriously dented until Keynes. That is not to say that all British politicians agreed with the classical prescriptions of free trade, cheap money, and low taxes. It is to say that those who disagreed were on the defensive. They started at a rhetorical disadvantage.

In this sense, the best rhetorician of our period is neither Peel nor Gladstone nor Disraeli nor Lloyd George, but Margaret Thatcher. During her Prime Ministership she evolved a novel economic policy that marked a radical break with the Keynesianism that had dominated British policy-making since 1945. She did not only say that the previous policies had failed. She said that *There is no alternative* to the policies she put in their place, and dumbfounded the critics within and without (Young 1990: 204–5). She said it so often that for a while her enemies nicknamed her Tina.

## Riker's Narrative and Its Critics

The US Presidential Election of 1860, which was won by Abraham Lincoln for the new Republican Party, was beyond dispute the most important outcome in the history of presidential elections. Of the four candidates, Lincoln was the most firmly associated with maintaining the Union at all costs. He was opposed to the extension of slavery (although not, in 1860, to the institution of slavery itself). Militant abolitionists who did want to extirpate slavery from the South backed him. Lincoln's election led directly to the South's secession, led by South Carolina, and to the Civil War—by far the most destructive war in the history of the United States, in which many more Americans died than in either World War, Korea, or Vietnam. It also led to the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments of the Constitution, which wrote the abolition of slavery and civil and voting rights into it.

Lincoln won with the lowest share of the popular vote<sup>1</sup> achieved by any winner in US presidential history—just under 40 per cent. That was enough to give him a comfortable victory in the Electoral College. The Electoral College, according to the US Constitution, is the body that actually elects the President. Each state has as many Electors as it has representatives in Congress. As every state has two Senators, this rule means that it has two Electors more than the number of its seats in the House of Representatives. Almost all states operated (and still do) a 'winner takes all rule' for their Electors: whichever candidate wins the most support in a state wins all of that state's Electors.

Lincoln and the Republicans had driven a wedge into the previously dominant Democrats, helping them to split into their northern and southern wings. Lincoln posed the following killer question to Douglas in 1858:

Can the people of the [should be 'a'] United States Territory in any lawful way, against the wishes of any citizen of the United States, exclude slavery from its limits prior to the formation of a state constitution? (At Freeport, Illinois, 27 August 1858. Holzer 1994: 96)

As Riker (1986: 2), says, 'To modern readers the question probably seems legalistic in sense and turgid in expression, and probably some are astonished by my description of it as a work of genius. However, it was not just the words themselves, but the setting, that honed this question stiletto-sharp.' Lincoln's question had the same effect as *Have you stopped beating your wife?* But it was harder to evade. Douglas was damned if he said *Yes* and damned if he said *No*. He said *Yes*, and then qualified his answer:

<sup>1</sup> Excluding the special case of 1824, another four-way fight, in which nobody won a majority of the Electoral College. Therefore the choice was made by the House of Representatives under the default procedure in the Constitution, for the second and last time in US history (the first was in 1800).

I answer emphatically, as Mr Lincoln has heard me answer a hundred times, on every stump in Illinois, that in my opinion the people of a Territory can by lawful means exclude slavery before it comes in as a State. . . . The people of a Territory have the lawful means to admit it or exclude it as they please, for the reason that slavery cannot exist a day or an hour anywhere unless supported by local police regulations. (Holzer 1994: 106)

As the white population spread across the continent beyond the original thirteen states of 1787, the newly settled areas were organized as Territories with a local legislature but not full statehood. Then, when they were judged to have a large enough population, Congress could vote to admit them as states. The original thirteen states were finely balanced between slave and free, and the Constitution reflects the messy compromises that were needed to get both classes of state to ratify it. The slave states had almost half of the population, and almost half of the seats in both houses of Congress. One of the messy compromises is that, at the demand of the southern states, slaves counted as three-fifths of a person each for the apportionment of congressional seats to the states, although of course they had neither votes nor any other rights. Despite this, it soon became clear that population was growing faster in the non-slave than in the slave parts of the country. So, in due course, the balance of seats in the House of Representatives, which are apportioned by population, would gradually swing to the disadvantage of the slave states. In the Senate, however, with two Senators per state regardless of population, the slave states could retain their block for longer (Weingast 1998).

Between 1791 and 1819, nine Territories were awarded statehood. Five of them were slaveholding (Alabama, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Tennessee). Four were not (Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, and Vermont). In 1819 a bill to admit Missouri was offered. A Representative from New York moved an amendment to prohibit slavery in Missouri. Both sides recognized the issue as momentous. The 77-year-old Thomas Jefferson wrote:

I had for a long time ceased to read newspapers or pay any attention to public affairs, confident they were in good hands, and content to be a passenger in our bark to the shore from which I am not distant. But this momentous question, like a fire bell in the night, awakened and filled me with terror. I considered it at once as the knell of the Union. It is hushed indeed for the moment. But this is a reprieve only, not a final sentence. (Thomas Jefferson Papers Series 1. General Correspondence. 1651–1827, Thomas Jefferson to John Holmes, April 22, 1820, read in facsimile on Library of Congress, Thomas Jefferson Papers website at <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/mtjhhtml/mtjhome.html>, 16.05.00. The printed version in Peterson 1975: 567–8, has minor punctuation errors.)

The knell was hushed by the Missouri Compromise, according to which Missouri was then admitted as a slave state, but balanced by Maine as a free state. Thereafter, states were admitted in pairs, one slave and one free (Arkansas with Michigan in 1836–7; Florida and Texas with Iowa and Wisconsin in

1845–8). As each state had two Senators, this meant that the balance of free and slave votes in the Senate remained undisturbed. The free states' share of US population, and hence of seats in the House of Representatives, had been growing rapidly through immigration. But a resolution to abolish slavery would have to pass both houses. It could not pass the Senate while the Missouri Compromise reigned.

From 1820 to 1850 the Missouri Compromise ensured the stability of the Union. In 1850 it broke down. California was admitted alone as a free state, and the South could foresee the end of its blocking vote in the Senate. The Wilmot Proviso (1846–8) had already threatened it. The Wilmot Proviso attempted to add a rider to resolutions voting money for war with Mexico, to stipulate that any territory gained as a result of that war should not permit slavery. Wilmot, like the promoter of the Missouri amendment in 1819, was a Representative from a northern district hundreds of miles from the nearest slave. He was moved by the concerns of his own district—to protect working-class whites from increased competition from blacks for jobs. However, to southerners, the whole point of war with Mexico was to gain territory in which slavery would be permitted, and therefore potentially more pro-slavery votes in the Senate. So the Wilmot Proviso was lethal for them. But the proviso itself could never have passed in the Senate. The admission of a free state without a balancing slave state was much more dangerous to southern interests. The war with Mexico led to a huge swathe of territory—modern New Mexico, Arizona, and California joining Texas, which had already declared its independence from Mexico—falling under United States control.

That unreliable guide hindsight sees the slide to war as inevitable from the breakdown of the Missouri Compromise. The Democrats, led by Douglas, tried to push the issue 'back into the localities so that it could not be agitated nationally' (Riker 1986: 4). They hoped to give the South a credible commitment to balancing California by admitting Kansas as a slave state. Their Kansas–Nebraska Act of 1854 ruled that those territories, which were rapidly gaining enough settlers to qualify as states, should decide for themselves whether to permit slavery. This led to a miniature civil war between slave and free forces in Kansas. Meanwhile, the southern-dominated Supreme Court destabilized the situation from the other side. In *Scott v. Sandford* (1857; 60 US 393), a slave, Dred Scott, had been brought to a state where slavery was illegal and then returned to Missouri, where it was legal. Scott sued, claiming that residence in a free state had freed him. The Court held that, according to the Constitution, blacks were not and could not be citizens of the United States, and federal law could not override the Constitution and make them so. This threatened to prevent any future federal attempts to outlaw slavery in Territories that were not yet states. Nevertheless, the Congressional Democrats came very close to securing a vote in both houses, in 1858, to admit Kansas as a slave state.

In 1858, when he posed the killer question,<sup>2</sup> Lincoln was fighting Douglas for a Senate seat in Illinois, a free state in which anti-slavery sentiment was growing. Those who know their *Huckleberry Finn* will recall that the plot turns on Huck and Jim missing Cairo, Illinois in a fog as they run away on a raft drifting down the Mississippi, so that they are carried deeper and deeper into the slave South. The constituency in which Douglas was running expected him to answer *Yes*; as the author of the Kansas–Nebraska Act he would be doubly embarrassed if he did not. But the 1858 campaign for the Senate mattered to Douglas not only for itself but also for his intended campaign for the Democratic nomination for the Presidency in 1860. To satisfy the nationwide constituency of Democrats with a voice in choosing their presidential nominee, Douglas would have to answer *No*. He could not credibly evade the killer question. He answered *Yes* and won the Senate seat. When he ran for the Democratic nomination for the Presidency in 1860, his campaign was so divisive that the party split down the middle. The Democrats had a rule that their presidential nominee must gain two-thirds of the vote at their nominating convention. This was designed to ensure (or at least had the effect of ensuring) that every Democratic presidential nominee had the support of both northern and southern Democrats. In the circumstances of 1860, it had no chance of securing unity. No Democrat, northern or southern, would be able to get two-thirds of the votes at the convention. The southern Democrats nominated John C. Breckinridge. The fourth candidate, John Bell, represented the southern wing of the old Whig party whose northern successors were the Republicans. According to the county election returns analysed by Lipset (1960: 348), Bell's strength in the South was in high-slave counties and Breckinridge's in low-slave counties. Lipset interprets this to mean that higher-status voters in the South continued to support the candidate whose former party had had most upper-class support.

Lincoln and Breckinridge were the extreme candidates. So it is safe to guess that almost everybody who voted for one of them ranked the other last. They were also strongly regional candidates—Lincoln of the Midwest (but with a strong following in New England and the Mid-Atlantic region as well), and Breckinridge of the South. Supporters of the two non-extreme candidates, Douglas and Bell, had regional, class, and slavery interests that pulled them in cross-cutting directions.

<sup>2</sup> The latest editor of the *Lincoln–Douglas Debates* disputes the long-held view that it was a killer question—a view which dates back at least to a 1901 novel cited by Riker (1986: 6–7). Holzer (1994: 89) points to Douglas's ready and fluent answer. It is true that Douglas's answer is ingenious. Good politicians must be good rhetoricians, and both Lincoln and Douglas, in their set-piece debates, were good rhetoricians. Douglas gets around the objection that *Dred Scott* forbade such action by saying that the legislature of a Territory could simply fail to police the fugitive slave laws if it wished to outlaw slavery in practice. But his unqualified first sentence gave Lincoln the weapon the Republicans needed to ensure that the Democrats would split at their 1860 nominating convention. Holzer does not mention the Democratic nominating convention's two-thirds rule (cf. Weingast 1998), which is probably crucial. Lincoln and the Republicans needed only to ensure that Douglas could not command two-thirds of the votes at the 1860 convention. Nobody could.

One of the extreme candidates—Lincoln—won. Because he beat Douglas narrowly all over the North, while winning no votes at all in the Deep South, he was able to convert under 40 per cent of the popular vote into an absolute majority of the Electoral College. It is not uncommon for extreme candidates, loathed by some and loved by others, to win multi-candidate elections in electoral systems like those in Britain and the USA. But the 1860 case is extreme. Mackie (2000: ch. 11) points out that we have to ask why there were four candidates, when it was common knowledge that the plurality electoral system usually punishes all but the first two. Why did Duverger's Law not operate? There are several reasons, but one important one is that the US presidential election system is more complicated than we have admitted so far. If no candidate wins more than half of the votes in the Electoral College, the election is thrown into the House of Representatives, where each state casts one vote. The ultimate default if even that fails was, in 1860, the Senate, because under the Twelfth Amendment (1804) the Senate chose the Vice-President if the electors failed to elect one. This procedure was changed again by the Twentieth Amendment (1933). Therefore, the centrist groups, especially John Bell and his backers, had an incentive to run. If the election went to the House or the Senate, the border states, where Bell was most strongly backed, could broker an outcome. Something like this had happened in the last election which went to the House, that of 1824. But, with the two extremist candidates available, the centre collapsed and Lincoln won in the Electoral College.

## Veto Games and Credible Commitments

I have spent time on the Riker–Weingast–Mackie story of the origins of the American Civil War, although it has nothing directly to do with the British crises that occupy the narrative chapters of this book. This is not just because it is a good story, but also because of the models and methods that it points to.

The noted evolutionary biologist Stephen Jay Gould calls stories he does not like 'Just So Stories'. Rudyard Kipling's original *Just So Stories* tell How the Elephant Got His Trunk, How the Leopard Got His Spots, and so on in a series of rather unlikely ways. Gould's criticism is aimed at those biologists who tell a story that (unlike Kipling's) might be true, but which he thinks is too neat. Things could have happened that way, but they could also have happened in lots of other ways. The same criticism is often levelled against Riker and other tellers of analytic narratives.

One acid test of an analytic narrative is: does it explain what happened better than rival accounts? In my view, the Riker–Weingast account passes that test. It explains all the facts about the origins of the Civil War that the standard political or economic accounts do, but also some facts that they do not. It explains why critics of the Democrats had an incentive to raise the issue of slavery from time to time, in the hope of breaking up the hegemonic

Democratic coalition. It also explains why Democrats from Jefferson onwards reacted with such fear and alarm at the attempts. It explains why so much of federal politics was concentrated on the apparently trivial issue of slavery in the Territories. Most of the Territories were very infertile ground for a slave economy, and nobody including slaveholders had any serious intention of introducing slaves to such places as Arizona or New Mexico. But if Territories were slaveholding, then future states would be slaveholding, and if future states were slaveholding, the balance rule for the Senate, introduced as the Missouri Compromise, could continue. And, given the rules for the passage of legislation through the bicameral Congress, the southern block on the Senate was absolutely central to preserving the peculiar institution in its heartland of the Old South.

In a word, the analytic narrative constantly recurs to the importance of institutions. Riker's version of it also lays great stress on heresthetic. Abraham Lincoln is celebrated as the greatest rhetorician in American political history. (Historians and literary critics remain fascinated by how he could craft the lapidary phrases of the Gettysburg Address while regarding it, and himself, as rhetorical failures). But Riker makes a plausible case for him as a heresthetician as well. He and others forced the dimension of slavery back into federal politics against the Democrats' increasingly desperate attempts to suppress it. And he blighted Douglas's future with his killer question at Freeport. It is now clear that Riker's attempt to portray each of the crises that led to the Civil War (especially the Wilmot Proviso and the 1860 election result) as an instance of cycling is unsuccessful. But his basic point remains sound.

Where there is equilibrium, it is (in the ungainly phrase) 'structure-induced equilibrium'. The underlying cycles that would lead outcomes to be unstable are suppressed because legislatures and constitutions are written in a certain way. The US Senate has a veto over all legislation not exclusively reserved to the House, and over all constitutional amendments. The two-Senators-per-state rule was therefore utterly crucial in the course of events leading to the Civil War. It distorted the slavery issue into an issue about the Territories. Other institutions that turn out to have been vital include the Democratic Party's two-thirds rule in its nominating convention; the practice (not a constitutional requirement) that most states give all their Electors to the party which wins a plurality of the electoral vote in the state; and the Twelfth Amendment's rules for dealing with the case where no presidential candidate gets a majority of the Electors' votes. All the games that politicians played in knowledge of these rules may be characterised as 'veto games'. We need to understand *veto players*, *extensive-form games*, *backward induction*, and *credible commitments*.

A veto player is simply one who has the right to make a move that cannot be overridden. The doctrine of parliamentary sovereignty, as taught to generations of students in or of Britain, states that Parliament can do anything except bind its successor. On the face of it, this turns the UK Parliament into a veto player in relation to the courts and the existing law (including laws

made by previous Parliaments). It can, and sometimes does, reverse the effects of court judgements by enacting laws that overturn them. Then, it is a veto player in a sense that, for instance, the United States Congress is not. But the UK Parliament is not a unitary actor. UK Acts of Parliament begin with the formula:

BE IT ENACTED by the Queen's most Excellent Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Lords Spiritual and Temporal, and Commons, in this present Parliament assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows

Parliament, thus, has three parts: *the Queen's most Excellent Majesty* (the Crown), the *Lords Spiritual and Temporal*, and the *Commons*. Most studies of parliamentary manoeuvres, including this one, concentrate on the last. But we must consider the others as serious potential veto players.

Many readers will be familiar with so-called 'normal-form games'. In a normal-form game, the payoffs to each actor from each outcome are summarized as a single number in a matrix. However, game theorists have always known that the normal-form omits the sequence of play. To model the fact that players move in sequence, and that they either know or can guess one another's preferences, we need to represent the game of decision-making in a multi-chamber legislature by a *game tree*, also known as an *extensive-form game*. Fig. 1.3 is a simplified extensive-form game of British parliamentary procedure. There are three actors, Commons, Lords, and King, and they move in a sequence determined by the rules of parliamentary procedure. In the stylized example of Fig. 1.3, the Commons moves first. (A bill may be introduced in either house, but all important bills in our period were introduced first in the Commons). Having gone through its internal procedures (First Reading, Second Reading, Committee Stage, Report), it either produces a Commons bill *c* or votes it down. If a bill is defeated at this or any other stage, the status quo (*sq*) continues. If the Commons produces a bill, it goes to the Lords. The Lords consider the Commons bill through their internal procedures. At the end of those they either accept the Commons version *c* or substitute their version *l*. If they do the latter, the bill returns to the Commons, who either accept the Lords' amendments or reject them. If they accept some and reject others, they produce a modified bill *c'*. There is provision in the rules of Parliament for a conference of both houses to resolve disputes. Unlike other bicameral assemblies, however, the British Parliament had allowed these formal procedures to go out of use before 1846. In principle, then, a bill may shuttle between the two houses until it runs out of time.<sup>3</sup>

The final actor in the parliamentary game is the monarch, here labelled King. The monarch retains the power to reject bills, although this last hap-

<sup>3</sup> A further series of branches should be added to the tree in Fig. 1.3 to show these iterations, with the outcomes in which the bill runs out of time labelled *SQ*. This is important in the practical cases in later chapters, but omitted here for clarity.

**Fig. 1.3.** An extensive-form game. The legislative process in a tricameral parliament.

**Fig. 1.4.** Ideal points of the actors in Fig. 1.3.

pened in the early eighteenth century. However, this monarchical power needs to be left in Fig. 1.3 so long as there is the remotest possibility that a monarch might consider using it or—importantly—that one of the other actors thinks he might. King George V toyed with the idea in 1910–14.

A device often used in studies of the US Congress, the European Union, and other multi-player legislatures is to map each actor's favourite position in relation to the status quo. Fig. 1.4 is a stylized example for the data in Fig. 1.3.

Where the actors stand is an empirical matter. I have drawn Fig. 1.4 so that everybody prefers some change to the status quo. In theory, the preferences of the monarch can be inferred directly from what he says or does. The preferences of the two houses are a slightly trickier matter. At this point game theorists appeal to the *median voter theorem* described above. According to the median voter theorem, the preferences of the median member of each chamber may stand for the preferences of that chamber. The reasoning is that any position other than the median voter's favourite—that is, the 'median

optimum' for that chamber—will lose a binary vote to the median optimum. Therefore, the chamber's favourite position is its median optimum.

The player whose turn ends the game has different preferences to those of earlier players and has the options of accepting or vetoing the options presented to her. Let us assume for the time being that these preferences are common knowledge. Then, some options that earlier players might otherwise take become much less attractive to them because they know that the last player may veto them. Another way of saying the same thing is to refer to *the rule of anticipated reactions*.

If the political game really were as simple as that portrayed in Figs 1.3 and 1.4, the outcome would be clear-cut. The King is the veto player, and will veto any option that is further from his optimum  $K$  in Fig. 1.4 than from the status quo point  $sq$ . I have drawn Fig. 1.4 to represent a situation in which the Commons' median optimum is the furthest from the status quo and the King's is the closest. However, the King prefers the Lords' median optimum to the status quo. If the preferences were as shown, and the King were an unconditional veto player, then the outcome of the game in Fig. 1.3 is predetermined. We read it by going backwards along each branch of the tree from each outcome. It is common knowledge that the King prefers  $l$  to  $sq$  and prefers  $sq$  to  $c$ . Therefore, in the branches that end with the King making a choice between  $c$  and  $sq$ , he will choose  $sq$ : that is, veto the bill. In the branches that end with the King making a choice between  $l$  and  $sq$ , he will choose  $l$ —that is, accept the bill, as amended by the Lords. Now let us move back up the tree. If the Lords amend the bill, the Commons are the second-last actor. Do they reinstate their bill, which would enact  $c$ , or do they accept the Lords' amendments? They know that if they reinstate  $c$ , the King will veto the bill; if they accept  $l$ , he will accept it. They would rather have  $l$  than  $sq$ . Therefore, if the Lords amend the bill, the Commons will accept their amendments. Back up one stage to the Lords' decision. If they amend the bill, they can work out that it will be carried as amended. As that is their best possible outcome, that is what they will do. Back up finally to the first decision: do the Commons propose the bill at all, or do they abandon it? Well, they would rather have  $l$  than  $sq$ , so it is worth their while to propose a bill. Unless they want to make a point (which they probably do), they would save a lot of time by offering the Lords' median optimum  $l$  and not their own,  $c$ , nor any intermediate position  $c'$ . If the Lords have a veto, they would veto any compromise position such as  $c'$ . The Commons would then have fully anticipated the reactions of the other two players in the game.

This form of reasoning is called backward induction. It enables us to solve extensive-form games. Most real extensive-form games are much more complicated than Fig. 1.3. They are complicated, first, because the favourite positions of each player are not always common knowledge; second, because if underlying opinion is not single-dimensional, heresthetic politicians will try to regroup the issues so as to win on them. Third, and relatedly, it is arbitrary to say when a game ends. Persistent losers, as Riker says, always have an incen-

tive to repackage the issues so that they come together in a way that turns the tables. How that works depends on the number of veto players.

The essential relationship between veto players and the dimensionality of the game is as follows. Veto players add stability, but at the expense of majority rule. A reorientation of national US politics around the new slavery agenda was held up, even though a majority of voters wanted it, because the Senate was a veto player. Up to 1911, many policies which could win a Commons majority, and a number which actually did, were vetoed in the Lords. Even in single-dimensional politics, that could mean the substitution of the median peer's optimum for the median MP's. In multidimensional politics, it meant that some points that could have been reached in a simple majority game were inaccessible. But it also meant that a politician who could restructure issues in order to win an unexpected Lords majority (Peel and Disraeli) or who could get rid of the veto itself (Lloyd George, with a little help from his friends), could achieve more than any other.

We need to look a bit more closely at the veto players in the British parliamentary game in our period.

## The Crown

For most of our period, the monarch was a Tory. Queen Victoria started her reign under the wing of her first, Whig, Prime Minister, Lord Melbourne. In the 1830s, she disliked Peel, and prevented him from coming to power in 1839. However, under Prince Albert's influence, she changed her mind and approved of Peel's 1841–6 administration. From Disraeli's premiership onwards, she was firmly partisan, approving her Conservative administrations, and loathing her Liberal ones. In 1892, she wrote as follows to one of the leaders of the Unionist Party, which had just lost a General Election, about W. E. Gladstone, who had just won it:

The danger to the country . . . which is involved in having all these great interests entrusted to the shaking hand of an old, wild, and incomprehensible man of 82½, is very great! It is a terrible trial, but, thank God, the country is sound, and it cannot last. (Victoria to Lord Lansdowne 12.08.92 in Newton 1929: 100. This letter was not included in the official edition of *The Letters of Queen Victoria*.)

Matthew (1995: 260–1) summarizes Queen Victoria's attitude to her Liberal governments in 1880–6 thus:

Victoria saw herself as an integral part of policy making, with the right to instruct, to abuse, and to hector. She corresponded about Liberal government policy and the content of the Queen's Speech with Conservative opposition leaders (but not *vice versa*); she continued to exclude certain Liberal MPs from Cabinet, and to object to lower-level appointment on grounds of policy; she expected revenge for Majuba; she opposed the Cabinet's withdrawal or reduction of British troops from Afghanistan and Egypt; she abused her ministers privately and, in the notorious case of the '*en clair* telegram' [discussed in Chapter 3] publicly over their handling of Sudanese policy; she objected to

Cabinet ministers' speeches; she offered to help Salisbury dissolve at the most propitious moment in 1885; she opposed Home Rule; and she did all these in her official capacity as Queen and Empress.

Edward VII was less partisan, although he did refuse to create enough peers to enact the 1909 Budget. George V, before becoming King, called Asquith 'not quite a gentleman' and Lloyd George 'that damned fellow' (both quoted by Bogdanor 1995: 67).

Was the monarch, then, a veto player in any of the games this book considers? Not in Peel's games: the queen supported him, but could not prevent him from resigning in June 1846. Not, effectively, in the games of Gladstone and Salisbury. Queen Victoria not only did as Matthew lists, but also tried to conspire with Gladstone's opponents in 1886 to form an anti-Home-Rule coalition (see e.g. her letters to George Goschen and his replies, in Buckle 1928, 2nd ser. iii. 712–13; 3rd ser. i. 22–7.) But they were quite capable of doing that on their own account. Gladstone's Home Rule Bills never got far enough for any question of a royal veto to be considered.

However, Edward VII and George V were more serious veto players, precisely because they were less extreme and somewhat wiser. Both were perturbed by some of the Asquith and Lloyd George administrations' policies: the 1909 Budget, reform of the House of Lords, and above all Home Rule. In 1914 George V seriously considered either refusing the Royal Assent to the Home Rule Act or dismissing the Liberal Government. He took advice from constitutional specialists, who happened to be Unionists. They confirmed him in his opinion that imposing Home Rule on Ulster was such a radical step that it warranted an equally radical reaction (Bogdanor 1995: 128–34). Fortunately, the First World War intervened.

Thus the game in Fig. 1.3 is not truly realistic. But it draws attention to something that is easy to forget if we do not think formally. George V could have refused assent to the Home Rule Bill or dismissed his government. We consider below the Australian crisis of 1975, where the Governor-General, that is, the representative of the Queen in Australia, did dismiss his government. But such actions by George V, like the real actions of Sir John Kerr, would not end the political game. Apart from anything else, they would call into question the legitimacy of the King himself. I consider this below in the section on the people as veto player.

## The House of Lords

From the start of our period until 1909, all political actors assumed that the House of Lords was an unconditional veto player in every respect save one: that it could not reject a money bill. The almost silent passage of the Repeal of the Corn Laws in the Lords in 1846 is one of the most remarkable features of that remarkable episode, and one almost unnoticed by most of the modern commentators.

The House of Lords was an active veto player from 1846 to 1911. The Lords had an inbuilt Tory majority. By definition, it comprised the eldest sons (or other closest male relations) of previous peers, plus those newly created as peers. Almost all peers were extensive landowners at the time of their creation; those who were not almost all became landowners, or their heirs did. A ruthless non-Tory Prime Minister could try to change the partisan make-up by creating peers with rival vested interests—capitalists or labourers, for example. The only ruthless non-Tory Prime Minister to have done so in our period was Lloyd George (see Chapter 6). Neither Gladstone nor any Labour Prime Minister until Tony Blair did; whereas both Salisbury and Thatcher, the two most determined Conservative Prime Ministers of our period, freely created peers from their own side. According to a table drawn up for Gladstone in 1892, he had created eighty-four new peers since 1868; Disraeli and Salisbury, who between them had been Prime Ministers for the same length of time as he had, had created 101. Furthermore, Gladstone stayed with the traditional criteria of selection, so that most of his eighty-four peers were landed. Accordingly, many of them or their successors deserted the Liberals in 1886 of the thirty-three peers created by Gladstone between 1880 and 1885, 'at most eight were active Liberals after 1886' (Matthew 1995: 265). Thus the vested interest of the Lords was the landed interest. Throughout our period the Tory Party has been closer to the landed interest than have the other parties.

It was common knowledge between the parties in 1884 that the Third Reform Bill, which widened the franchise by bringing the county franchise in line with that in borough constituencies, would be rejected in the Lords. Salisbury therefore offered Gladstone a deal: if the Liberals would agree to a Redistribution Bill and a bipartisan commission would agree on the constituency boundaries under it, the Tory-dominated Lords would pass the Reform and Redistribution Bills together (see Chapter 3). Salisbury thus used the Lords' veto power to force redistribution on the Gladstone administration. The Lords rejected Irish Home Rule in 1893; they would have rejected it in 1886 if it had reached them, but it was defeated in the Commons before being sent to the Lords.

The events of 1909–11 both illustrated and checked the Lords' veto power. Like much of the rest of the British constitution, the doctrine that the Lords could not reject a money bill was not written down in any constitutional text. Therefore, on 30 November 1909, the House of Lords rejected Lloyd George's budget by 350 votes to 75. Roy Jenkins comments:

As is so often the case when the House of Lords is engaged in reaching a peculiarly silly decision, there were many comments on the high level of the debate and on the enhancement it gave to the deliberative quality of the chamber. (Jenkins 1968: 101)

The Lords had refused to vote supply. Therefore there was no money to pay the wages of public employees. So the Liberal government dissolved Parliament immediately. In the ensuing election, probably the most dramatic in twentieth-century Britain, the Liberals campaigned on the theme of 'the Peers

against the People'. They succeeded in reversing the adverse trend of by-election results. Although their lead over the Conservatives was sharply cut from the huge lead they had had in 1906, so that the Irish Party held the balance, the parties hostile to the Lords (Liberals, Irish, and Labour) won a comfortable majority. The Liberals then introduced a bill to replace the absolute veto power of the Lords by a 'suspensory veto': that is, a provision that the Lords could reject a Commons bill twice, but if it was presented for a third time it would become law without Lords' approval.

This Parliament Bill then became the scene of another constitutional conflict which replayed that of the previous year. Forced by the breakdown of interparty talks (discussed in Chapter 6) to call another election, Asquith asked George V for a guarantee that, should the Liberals be returned again, he would be prepared to create enough Liberal peers to enact the Parliament Bill. This the King did very reluctantly: one of his private secretaries urged him not to; but the other clinched the issue by telling him (incorrectly) that if he refused to give the guarantees and Asquith resigned, the Tory leader Balfour would not form an administration—in which case the king would have been back with Asquith again.

Parliament was dissolved and a second election fought with exactly the same result, in aggregate, as the previous one. Though many seats changed hands, the changes cancelled one another out. The Parliament Bill was therefore enacted, finally passing the Lords on 10 August 1911 by 131 votes to 114. No creation of peers was needed.

The Parliament Acts of 1911 and 1949 (which reduced the suspensory veto from two sessions to one) changed the backward induction game. They divided it into two games, which may be called the post-election game and the pre-election game. In the post-election game, when a government has been newly returned, the Lords veto has no effect except delay. In the pre-election game, when a General Election is due before the bill in question had been back and forth the necessary number of times, the veto remains in effect absolute, as it was before 1911.

The structure-induced equilibrium in British politics is therefore complex. In the last two years before a General Election, the median peer remains a veto player. Early in the life of a Parliament, there is no veto player outside the Commons, with the uncertain exception of the people. Radical non-Tory governments can be radical early in their terms. The Lords did not obstruct the welfare and nationalization measures of the Attlee Labour government (1945–50), probably because they had learnt the lesson of 1911. But, as the model predicts, that government ran into increasing trouble from 1948 onwards, despite the 1949 Parliament Act. The Blair government elected in 1997 also got its radicalism in early. By 2000, even after the removal of the hereditary peers, it was sustaining frequent defeats in the Lords, some on civil libertarian issues, others on issues of traditional morality. The radicalism of Margaret Thatcher was unchecked by the Lords because she was a Tory radical.

## The People: An Uncertain Veto Player

Up to now, we have been discussing the monarch and the Lords as unconditional veto players: that is, as players whose decision ends the game. The truth is more complicated. In all the crises discussed in this book, the possibility has always existed of an appeal to the people. If a General Election returns the party that controlled the Commons at the time of the previous veto game, the other players probably have to give way. Peel rejected the idea of a dissolution and General Election in 1846 because he worried about the effect on social order of an election held at such a heightened mood of public opinion. For the two decades that Salisbury controlled the House of Lords, he saw it as a bulwark against 'disintegration', by which he meant an attack on (especially landed) property of which he accused the Liberals. Under his leadership, however, the Lords defended property where it was safe to do so and gave in where it was unsafe. It was safe to do so in places out of the public eye, as for example in private bill committees, or in defence of legal monopolies who extracted economic rent—solicitors, parliamentary agents, and so on (Adonis 1993: chs. 4–5; on landed professions and rent extraction see Offer 1981). It was unsafe to reject anything politically popular. Salisbury's own colleagues thought he was playing a dangerous game of brinkmanship in this way over the franchise reform bill of 1884, but he was saved by Gladstone's unexpected capitulation to him (Chapter 3).

*Après Cecil, le deluge.* Salisbury's successors as Tory leaders in the Lords lacked both his foresight and his control. The Liberals fought the election of January 1910 on the platform of 'the Peers against the People' and won more seats than they probably would otherwise have done. Although Lloyd George did not initially produce his budget as a deliberate provocation of the Lords, their subsequent behaviour gave him an ideal platform for the anti-Lords rhetoric that enlivened the autumn of 1909. The Liberal and allies' victory forced the House of Lords to pass the 1909 Budget. In the summer of 1911, the Conservative Lords divided between 'hedgers' and 'ditchers'. The 'ditchers' were prepared to die in the last ditch in defence of their own powers, even if it meant forcing the king to create enough peers to pass the Parliament Bill. The 'hedgers' argued that that would change the character of the Lords even more radically than would submission. As recorded above, the 'ditchers' gave way.

King George V did not actually do either of the things that would have brought him into constitutional confrontation with Lloyd George and his ministerial colleagues. In 1910 he agreed with great reluctance to create peers if required after another election confirmed the Liberals in control of the Commons (Jenkins 1968: 173–83; Bogdanor 1995: 117). And he did not either refuse Royal Assent to the Home Rule Act or dismiss the Liberal government in 1914. Had he done any of these things, a new and highly unpredictable game would have begun. How it would have ended is unknowable. But it was common knowledge among the players that the stakes were

high. Kings and peers who exercised their veto power once might lose it a second time.

The nearest parallel to the actions that George V contemplated is the dismissal of the Labor (Whitlam) government in Australia by the Governor-General, Sir John Kerr, in 1975. The parallel is not exact, and too much must not be read into it. But it gives some hints about the game that might follow a royal or upper-chamber veto. The constitutional conflict began, as in Britain in 1909, when the upper house refused supply. The Australian Senate, unlike the British Lords, is an elected house. Sir John Kerr, after taking advice from the Chief Justice of Australia (a former minister from the opposition Liberal party), acted swiftly and secretly, improving the soundproofing of his office before his coup (Whitlam 1979: xi–xii). He summoned Gough Whitlam and the Opposition leader Malcolm Fraser to his office. Fraser, embarrassingly, arrived first and his driver was instructed to hide his car round the back so that Whitlam would not see that he was there (Whitlam 1979: 108). Kerr then dismissed Whitlam, and appointed Fraser Prime Minister. When the Speaker of the House of Representatives asked for an appointment to protest that Whitlam still had the confidence of the House, Kerr delayed seeing him until he had dissolved Parliament. He then told him ‘that I had already dissolved both Houses of Parliament and that there would be an election for both on 13 December. There being nothing else of relevance to say the meeting ended’ (Kerr 1979: 374). The Speaker protested to the Queen, saying that Kerr’s actions ‘will damage the standing of your representative in Australia and even yourself’. Her office told him that under the Australian Constitution the Queen had no power to intervene (see the letters quoted in Whitlam 1979: 175–7).

Fraser had foreknowledge of Kerr’s veto play. In the short run it was successful for Fraser and his party: they won the ensuing General Election, in both houses, comfortably. In the long run, it has affected the two veto players quite differently. The legitimacy of the Senate has grown; that of the monarchy has shrunk. The final provocative chapter of Whitlam’s (1979) provoked and provocative book is entitled ‘Towards the Republic’. In fact, the Australians rejected a republic in their referendum of November 1999. But that is because the single alternative on the ballot was a head of state elected by both chambers of parliament, which the voters construed as a ‘politicians’ president’. A large majority of Australian public opinion was republican. Some royal advisers in Britain, but not all, have foreseen that controversial royal vetoes could similarly damage the legitimacy of the monarchy. This may have contributed to the failure of George V to exercise vetoes in 1910 and 1914.

In the days before opinion polls—that is, for all of our crises except the most recent—the People’s move was unknown before it occurred. We cannot tell what the People would have done when a General Election was contemplated but rejected, for instance in 1846 or 1866. When a crisis led to a decisive General Election, as in 1886, 1906, and 1922, we have to ask whether

the losing side anticipated the result. If it did, why did it allow the election to happen? If it did not, why not?

### Leading from the Wrong Side

One common heresthetic move is 'leading from the wrong side'. This book will deal with two notable cases:

- Peel and Repeal of the Corn Laws
- Disraeli and the Second Reform Act

Peel led the agricultural party, which abolished agricultural protection. Disraeli led the rural party, which enfranchised the towns. Many upsets in democratic politics share this feature. General de Gaulle came to power in France with the support of those who wanted to keep Algeria French; he promptly gave Algeria its independence. It was the hawkish Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin, not his doveish predecessors, who was induced to come to Camp David and sign the first Arab–Israeli peace agreement. The Peronist Prime Minister of Argentina, Carlos Menem, demolished the protective institutions which had nurtured Peronism and which Peronism had nurtured.

Part of the explanation may be simply surprise. Disraeli never originally intended to widen the franchise by as much as he did. The previous Whig-Liberal government had failed to reform the franchise because of a split in its ranks—Disraeli moved swiftly and surprisingly. But this explanation does not fit more long-drawn-out stories such as Repeal of the Corn Laws. However, where politics is two-dimensional, leading from the wrong side is easier than when it is not. Peel and his allies put together a coalition that mustered enough support, first in the Cabinet, and then in each house of Parliament, on the second dimension to overcome its unpopularity on the main economic dimension of politics.

A politician who sits in the centre has less far to go than one who tries to lead from the wrong side. That does not necessarily mean that the centre is a good place to be. We shall argue in Chapter 6 that Lloyd George foresaw the marginalization of the Liberals. While politics is one-dimensional, a centre party may indeed espouse the median voter's favourite policies. But it may still be severely squeezed by the plurality electoral system. This was what Lloyd George feared. His fears were well grounded. At least, from his position in the centre, he was able to try out leaps in all directions without any one of them seeming quite as dramatic as Peel's or Disraeli's leaps into the dark.

### What Is not in this Analytic Narrative and Why

Not all cataclysms are heresthetic. Since 1846, Britain has acquired and lost an empire and fought two world wars. Social and economic conditions have

changed out of recognition. People are vastly richer and healthier than in 1846, but they have not grown richer or healthier as fast as those of some other countries. Even if we restrict ourselves narrowly to high politics, there have been cataclysms on which this book has nothing to say outside this brief section. Define a *landslide election* as a General Election in which the party which went on to form the government won 60 per cent or more of the seats. There were landslide elections in 1832, 1895, 1900, 1918, 1924, 1931, 1935, 1945, 1983, and 1997. (If the threshold for a landslide is set higher, at two-thirds of the seats, the cases are 1832, 1918, 1924, 1931 and 1935). Table 1.1 ranks General Elections since 1832 according to the proportion of seats won by the party which went on to form a government.

The first thing to notice about Table 1.1 is that it does not correspond to many people's perceptions. The General Election of 1906 was not a Liberal landslide (the Liberals won 59.7 per cent of the seats with 49.0 per cent of

**Table 1.1.** British General Elections 1832–1997, in descending order of winner's share of seats

Election	Seats to winner	Total seats	Winner's seat share	Election	Seats to winner	Total seats	Winner's seat share
1931	554	615	0.901	1955	344	630	0.546
1935	432	615	0.702	1859	357	654	0.546
1924	419	615	0.681	1880	352	652	0.540
1918	478	707	0.676	1874	350	652	0.537
1832	441	658	0.670	1979	339	635	0.534
1997	419	659	0.636	1970	330	630	0.524
1945	393	640	0.614	1837	344	658	0.523
1895	411	670	0.613	1992	336	651	0.516
1983	397	650	0.611	1951	321	625	0.514
1900	402	670	0.600	1950	315	625	0.504
1906	400	670	0.597	1964	317	630	0.503
1868	387	658	0.588	1974O	319	635	0.502
1886	393	670	0.587	1885	319	670	0.476
1835	385	658	0.585	1974F	301	635	0.474
1959	365	630	0.579	1929	288	615	0.468
1987	376	650	0.578	1847	293	658	0.445
1857	377	654	0.576	1910J	275	670	0.410
1966	363	630	0.576	1892	272	670	0.406
1865	370	658	0.562	1910D	272	670	0.406
1922	345	615	0.561	1923	159	615	0.259
1841	367	658	0.558				

*Note to Tables 1.1 and 1.2:* Omitting 1852, where the link between election result and government formation is too tenuous for data to be usable.

*Source for Tables 1.1 and 1.2:* 1832–95, Craig 1981: Table 1; 1900–92, Butler and Butler 1994: 213–19 (transposing final 2 columns for 1987 and 1992); 1997, Butler and Kavanagh 1997: Table A1–1.

the votes cast). Nor was that of 1979 a Conservative landslide (the Conservatives won 53.4 per cent of the seats with 43.9 per cent of the vote). On the other hand, the elections of 1924 and 1935, which are rarely analysed in detail, were both Conservative landslides.

In any case, the seats won by a party in a General Election are the product of two things: the votes cast for it, and the operation of the electoral system which maps votes cast into seats won. The British electoral system usually gives the winner an advantage: the winning party's share of votes maps on to a higher share of seats. Moreover, the winner's advantage itself varies from election to election. So perhaps the right way to characterize landslides is by votes cast. Although statistics for share of the national vote go back to 1832, they are highly misleading for elections before 1880 because of unopposed returns. Even from 1880 to 1918, they are distorted by unopposed returns in Ireland. But Table 1.2 can be interpreted with that caution in mind.

Define a *vote landslide* as a General Election in which the winning side won more than half of the vote. There have been vote landslides only in 1880, 1886, 1900, 1931, and 1935, and unopposed returns in Ireland cloud the interpretation of the first three. To connect vote landslides and seat landslides, we need a third concept, which I shall call a *power landslide*. A power landslide is the difference between the winning party's vote share and its seat share. It may be measured absolutely as (seat share – vote share), or relatively as ((seat share – vote share)/vote share). The relative measure is a better measure of the extra power delivered by the electoral system. In seven elections since 1880 the winner's seat share has exceeded its vote share by over one-third; in descending order these are 1997 (47.2 per cent bonus), 1922, 1983, 1918, 1924, and 1987.

Contemporary British historians still seem (despite some recent corrections) much more interested in the parties of the left than in the hegemonic Conservative Party, and therefore have failed to analyse such cases as 1924 or 1935. This is one reason for the disparity between the elections that are thought of as landslides and those that are actually landslides. Another is that people confuse landslide election outcomes with landslide consequences. This book is about consequences, not election results, and therefore the seat and power measures are more relevant than the vote measure. A landslide election may be important for giving the elected government leeway it would not have if it had been elected more narrowly, and thus more opportunity to change direction radically. At the time of writing, the 1997 Labour Government seems to come into this category. But the evidence is not all one way. Peel's large majority was a hindrance, not a help, to his radical change. Lloyd George's heresthetic was built on a small proportion of Commons seats.

Nevertheless, we must say *something* about the election landslides which did not lead to any change of direction. Disregarding 1832 (a landslide in every sense, but outside our time frame), there was only one nineteenth-century case, namely 1895. The 1895 election marked the clear rejection of the Liberal minority administration of 1892. But the Unionists who came to

**Table 1.2.** British General Elections 1832–1997, in descending order of winner's share of votes, showing bonus calculations

Election	Seats to winner	Total seats	Winner's vote share	Winner's absolute bonus	Winner's relative bonus
1931	554	615	0.670	0.231	0.344
1832	441	658	0.667	0.003	0.005
1859	357	654	0.657	-0.111	-0.169
1857	377	654	0.651	-0.075	-0.115
1868	387	658	0.615	-0.027	-0.044
1865	370	658	0.602	-0.040	-0.066
1835	385	658	0.574	0.011	0.019
1880	352	652	0.554	-0.014	-0.025
1847	293	658	0.539	-0.094	-0.174
1935	432	615	0.537	0.165	0.308
1837	344	658	0.517	0.006	0.011
1886	393	670	0.514	0.073	0.141
1900	402	670	0.511	0.089	0.174
1841	367	658	0.509	0.049	0.096
1955	344	630	0.497	0.049	0.099
1959	365	630	0.494	0.085	0.173
1895	411	670	0.491	0.122	0.249
1906	400	670	0.490	0.107	0.218
1924	419	615	0.483	0.198	0.411
1951	321	625	0.480	0.034	0.070
1966	363	630	0.479	0.097	0.203
1945	393	640	0.478	0.136	0.285
1918	478	707	0.476	0.200	0.420
1885	319	670	0.474	0.002	0.004
1970	330	630	0.464	0.060	0.129
1950	315	625	0.461	0.043	0.093
1892	272	670	0.451	-0.045	-0.100
1964	317	630	0.441	0.062	0.141
1874	350	652	0.439	0.098	0.223
1979	339	635	0.439	0.095	0.216
1910D	272	670	0.439	-0.033	-0.075
1997	419	659	0.432	0.204	0.472
1910J	275	670	0.432	-0.022	-0.050
1983	397	650	0.424	0.187	0.440
1987	376	650	0.423	0.155	0.368
1992	336	651	0.419	0.097	0.232
1974O	319	635	0.392	0.110	0.282
1922	345	615	0.382	0.179	0.469
1974F	301	635	0.371	0.103	0.278
1929	288	615	0.371	0.097	0.262
1923	159	615	0.305	-0.046	-0.152

power merely picked up their programme, and most of their personnel, from the 1886–92 government.

Following the fall of Lloyd George in 1922, there were three General Elections at annual intervals, in the autumns of 1922, 1923, and 1924. Lloyd George's failure left the Conservatives in a dominant position, as we shall see in detail in Chapter 6. But there were two opposition parties of roughly equal standing. British politics in the 1920s were in what Cox (1997) has labelled a 'non-Duvergerian equilibrium'. In many constituencies it was unclear which opposition party—Labour or Liberal—was best placed to beat the Conservatives. In addition, the Liberals were split between their Asquith and Lloyd George wings in 1922. These facts account for the Conservative power landslides of 1922 and 1924.

In 1931 the Labour government fell over a (partly self-imposed) financial crisis. Some of its leaders joined Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald in forming a National Government with the other parties; most rejected him, and he was expelled from the party. Not surprisingly, the divided Labour Party scored one of its worst results in the ensuing General Election, in which the National Government parties' 2:1 vote lead was as usual exaggerated into an even greater lead in seats. Labour had by no means recovered in 1935, so once again there was a seat and power landslide for the National Government (that is, to all intents and purposes, for the Conservatives). These are unidimensional moves around the position of the median voter, which is why they get no further attention in this book.

For the same reason, this book has almost nothing to say about the man who, in a widely reported poll of historians at the start of 2000, was regarded as Britain's greatest twentieth-century Prime Minister. I agree with the poll's rankings (Lloyd George came second). But nothing that Winston Churchill did as Prime Minister from 1940 to 1945 was multidimensional, nor heresetic. Rhetorical it certainly was, and Churchill gets more space in the dictionaries of quotations than do any of the subjects of this book. But Churchill's political rhetoric was for a different purpose to Lloyd George's or Thatcher's. It was rhetoric designed to unify the nation, not to win political advantage. Churchill's greatness is a different sort of greatness to that of Peel and Lloyd George.