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'AN UNCONVENTIONAL MP': NANCY ASTOR, PUBLIC WOMEN AND GENDERED POLITICAL CULTURE

Crossing the Border of Citizenship: Helen Taylor, the Independent Radical Democrat Candidate for Camberwell North, 1885

Janet Smith

National Coalition of Independent Scholars, UK
janet.smith2@btinternet.com

'Until 1918, in principle, and 1928 in practice, women's political activity in Britain was defined as beyond the frontier of formal citizenship' (Abrams and Hunt, 2000). This article explores the campaign of one such frontier woman, Helen Taylor, to become the first woman MP. Taylor accepted the nomination of Camberwell Radical Club to stand as the Independent Radical Democrat candidate for Camberwell North in the November 1885 election. The radicals of Camberwell were, thereby, directly challenging the 1832 Reform Act which had legally excluded women from full citizenship.

This article locates Taylor in the historiography of resistance to elite political culture, by radical clubs, in 1885. Links were made between Taylor's candidature and that of previous non-elite candidates, namely the attempt of Daniel O'Connell, David Salomon and Charles Bradlaugh to breach the frontier of full citizenship for Catholics, Jews and atheists in previous elections. The Liberal Party had become more centralised through the power of local Liberal Associations and committees based on the Birmingham caucus model (Lawrence, 1998; Parry, 1993). This led to some radical clubs challenging the Liberal establishment 'wire pullers' and standing their own candidates, creating triangular contests between the Liberal, Independent/Radical and Conservative candidates (Owen, 2008). This article further explores the anomaly of all three Camberwell North candidates openly supporting Home Rule, in an election where the contentious Irish question has been identified as being avoided by the majority of candidates (Biagini, 2007). In Camberwell North this saw two factions of Irish nationalism endorsing separate candidates.

The provenance of Taylor's feminism, socialism and anti-imperialism is also examined, which rescues the campaign from being the actions of a well-connected upper middle-class eccentric. The only previous detailed exploration of Taylor's candidature claimed it was the idiosyncratic whim of a political maverick whose manifesto would need explaining to the electorate (Pugh, 1978). On the contrary, Taylor's candidature and manifesto were located in contemporary socialist, radical and liberal politics and no such explanation would have been necessary. It was very much of its time.

Introduction

Following the centenary of the Parliament (Qualification of Women) Act 1918, which granted women over the age of 21 the right to stand for election as Members of Parliament, there has been great interest in the first women to do so. The most renowned are Constance Markiewicz, the first woman to be elected, and Nancy Astor (see Thane, 2020), the first woman to take her seat. However, over 30 years before these firsts, another, now forgotten, woman blazed a trail for women's equality. Her name was Helen Taylor and she made history when she accepted the nomination as the Independent Radical Democrat Candidate for Camberwell North in the general election of November 1885.

Few previous studies have focused on the campaign of the first woman parliamentary candidate. Evelyn Pugh (1978) reinstated this long-forgotten episode into the historiography, examining the events of Taylor's candidature in great detail. However, Pugh, whose research focus was John Stuart Mill, failed to acknowledge that both Taylor's actions and manifesto were firmly anchored in national and local liberal, socialist and radical politics of 1885. Pugh portrays Taylor as an individualistic political maverick rather than rooted in any political tradition. She ignores Taylor's influential position in radical and socialist circles in 1885 and the challenge that her candidature made both to the 1832 Reform Act (which had legally excluded women from full citizenship) and to elite Liberal politics. Thus, Pugh claims that Taylor's election manifesto was idiosyncratic when, in reality, it reflected the political ideology of the radical clubs, and advanced liberalism and the new socialism of the Social Democratic Federation. This would have been recognised by voters. For example, Pugh wrongly asserts that Taylor's election manifesto would have needed to be explained to the public. She cites Taylor's demands for free elementary education as an example. This ignores increasing support during the 1880s for free state primary education. Taylor had been an elected member of the London School Board for nine years where demands for the abolition of school fees, the school 'penny,' had been hotly debated. Taylor, herself, had put forward a number of motions in the school board chamber for their abolition. In 1885, her final motion had only been defeated on the casting vote of the Chairman (*School Board Chronicle*, 1881, 2 April).

Thomas Gautrey, a London teacher, claimed that Taylor's 'impassioned speech' in the school board debate of 1885 was a turning point in the campaign for free education. 'Free schools became from this time an election cry at both Board and Parliamentary Elections' (Gautrey, 1936: 86). The London electorate would have immediately understood where Taylor was politically located on seeing free education in her manifesto, as they would with her other demands. In not recognising that Taylor's political pledges stemmed from contemporary radical, socialist and liberal politics Pugh reduces the manifesto to that of an eccentric. Pugh's article does, nevertheless, stand as an important well-detailed study which reintroduced the episode into the historiography.

Taylor's candidature is also included in the entry on her by Philippa Levine in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Levine, 2004). Levine devotes a paragraph to the campaign and although she does not reference Pugh's previous study, she does acknowledge that Taylor's manifesto was rooted in radical politics and that she stood as a candidate against the official Liberal, in protest at the Liberal Association withdrawing support for W. A. Coote as their candidate and replacing him with Richard Strong. A third, short study (Smith, 2019), written for the *Women's Legal Firsts* project, concentrates solely on the legal challenge made by Taylor's candidature to the 1832 Reform Act. The campaign is put forward as an example of one of a number of challenges which were made to that Act, by supporters of women's suffrage, during the latter half of the nineteenth century.

The aim of this study is to examine in more detail the candidature of Taylor as a legal challenge to the 1832 Reform Act. Taylor is seen as one of countless women, throughout history, who crossed the boundaries of acceptable behaviour in their struggle to breach the frontier of full citizenship (Abrams and Hunt, 2000). It will also place Taylor in the history of resistance to the dominant political culture of previous non-elite candidates: O'Connell, Bradlaugh, and Salomon. These men attempted to breach the frontier of full citizenship for Catholics, atheists, and Jews in previous elections by challenging the hegemony of political power. It will illustrate that Taylor was one of a number of non-elite candidates, supported by the Radical clubs, who stood against the official Liberal candidates at this election. By 1885 the Liberal party

had become more centralised with the formation of local Liberal Associations and selection committees based on the Birmingham caucus model (Lawrence, 1998; Parry, 1993). These selection committees, organised by the official Liberal caucus, were made up of elected members from the local wards (Owen, 2008: 216). Resistance to the Liberal 'wire pullers' by local grassroot radicals in the clubs led to them standing their own candidates. This resulted in triangular contests between radical, liberal, and conservative candidates in a number of constituencies at the general election of 1885 (Owen, 2008). Finally, the provenance of Taylor's feminism, radicalism, socialism and anti-imperialism will be examined to show that her manifesto was grounded in the radical politics and utopian socialism of mid nineteenth century Britain and the new socialism of the 1880s. This rescues the candidature from the ahistorical claim that it was merely the actions of a well-connected upper middle-class eccentric. On the contrary, her manifesto, would have been understood by the electorate as an expression of contemporary progressive ideology.

Helen Taylor

Helen Taylor was born in London in 1831. Her mother was the feminist philosopher Harriet Taylor and her father John was a wholesale druggist. The Taylors attended meetings of the reforming Unitarian circle of William Fox where the intellectual Harriet met and fell in love with the economist and philosopher John Stuart Mill. John Taylor sanctioned an arrangement which saw his wife, Harriet, and Helen leaving the marital home in London and living in Walton, Surrey, with discreet visits from Mill. Mill and Harriet Taylor married in 1851, two years after John Taylor's death. Harriet had nursed her husband with great care over the final months of his life in 1849. Helen had maintained a good loving relationship with her father, after the separation of her parents, and made regular visits with her mother to stay with her father and two brothers in London (Robson, 2004). Harriet and Mill collaborated on political and social campaigns surrounding women's rights until her own death in 1859. After her mother died, Taylor worked with Mill in promoting women's suffrage. It has been recognised that she wrote many of his letters and that he owed much of his text *The Subjugation of Women* (1869) to both her mother's earlier published

work, *The Enfranchisement of Women* (1851) and to his step-daughter (Packe, 1954: 225). In his *Autobiography* (1873) Mill asserted that it was Taylor who had suggested this essay and that she had written parts of it (Packe, 1954: 224). 'Surely,' he wrote, referring to Helen coming to live and work with him, 'no one ever before was so fortunate after such a loss as mine, to draw another prize from the lottery of life' (Mill, 1873: 254). Mill and Helen Taylor were among the suffragists who set up the London National Society for Women's Suffrage in 1867 and who had organised a petition demanding votes for women. Mill had presented the petition to Parliament in 1866 when he was the MP for Westminster (1865–8). Taylor was grief stricken when Mill died unexpectedly in 1873. She began to carve out a campaigning and political life for herself beyond women's suffrage, determined to carry on the work of her mother and step-father. In August 1872, Helen wrote, 'I feel as though a torch has been left in my hands and I want to keep it alight till I can hand it on to someone younger than myself' (Helen Taylor, August 1872, Bertrand Russell Archives, box 0791294, no. 128499).¹

In 1876 Taylor was elected to the London School Board, on a Liberal ticket, as one of the members for Southwark, a borough with a poverty rate of 67.9 percent at this time (Booth, 1892). Elected School Boards were established to administer the system of state elementary schools, which were themselves established throughout Great Britain following the 1870 Forster Education Act. Women could both sit on the boards as elected members and vote in elections under the same rules as men. Taylor served three elected terms, being returned top of the poll in 1879 and 1882. She was popular among Southwark residents for her work on their behalf. She championed the rights of both working-class girls and boys to a decent education which, she believed, should be both free and secular. She also campaigned for educational endowments to be used for the schooling of the working-class for which they had been intended. She campaigned for equal access to education and equality in the curriculum for girls, equal pay for women teachers, and an end to physical punishment in schools. She

¹ H. Taylor to Lady Amberley, August 1872, McMaster University, Bertrand Russell Archives, box 0791294, no. 128499.

was a constant thorn in the side of the Liberal board members, refusing to follow the official party line in the chamber and voting for each motion on its merits. This led to her standing as an Independent Radical candidate in 1879 and 1882, during which campaigns the Liberals tried to unseat her (Hollis, 1989; Martin, 1999; Smith, 2018). Taylor was also in dispute with the Liberals in the 1880s for her involvement in the Irish Land War as a member of the Ladies' Land League. She supported the fight of the Irish tenants for fair, secure tenancies and opposed Gladstone's Coercion Acts in Ireland. She championed Irish Home Rule and was a well-known campaigner for land nationalisation as an executive member of both the Land Nationalisation Society and the English Land Restoration League (Smith, 2017). She was a founder and executive member with Henry Hyndman of the Democratic Federation, in 1881, which was renamed the Social Democratic Federation in 1884 after embracing Marxism. That same year she left the party, as did many other members, after a series of arguments with the autocratic Hyndman. She was so well-known by the late 1880s that the local press heralded her arrival in Preston to speak on land reform as a visit by one of 'the foremost women of her time (*The Lancashire Evening Post*, 1886, 19 October: 2).

Rumours of a female candidate, 1878

Taylor's candidature had a long gestation. In 1878 British newspapers reported that a woman had been chosen by Southwark Liberals as their prospective parliamentary candidate to contest the next general election. The local radical Liberals and the press linked Taylor's attempt to achieve full citizenship rights for women with David Salomon's campaign to become the first Jewish MP (*Pall Mall Gazette*, 1878, 9 August: 7). Salomons, a leading Jewish campaigner for Jewish emancipation, had been elected in 1851 as the Liberal MP for Greenwich, London. On swearing the oath of abjuration, required on entering Parliament, he omitted the Christian references and was ejected from the building. A few days later he again refused the full oath, took his seat and voted in two debates before being ejected by the serjeant-at-arms and permanently excluded and fined £500. A campaign resulted in the law requiring Christian affirmation being amended in 1858. This allowed Jewish MPs to take their seats (Hyamson, 1939). The *Pall Mall Gazette* expected that Taylor would

'make frequent attempts to take her seat, and although she would doubtless as often be removed by the serjeant-at-arms it would enable her to make a strong protest against the exclusion of women from parliament' (*Pall Mall Gazette*, 1878, 9 August: 7). *The Saturday Review* likened the possible candidature of Taylor to the election of Daniel O'Connell as MP for Clare, Ireland in 1828. A Roman Catholic, O'Connell refused to swear the Oath of Supremacy which required allegiance to the monarch as the Supreme Governor of the Church of England. The resulting barring of Parliament to O'Connell led to such political pressure for change that the Catholic Emancipation Act was passed in 1829. O'Connell took his seat on being re-elected later that year (MacDonagh, 1991). *The Saturday Review* was certain that although she could not 'take her seat if she were elected; she might at least be in the proud position of being able to knock at the door of Parliament. It was thus that O'Connell was returned for Clare and Alderman Salomon for Greenwich, and so great was the noise they made when knocking that the door was at last opened to them' (*The Saturday Review*, 1878, 17 August). For some reason, perhaps because she had only recently been elected to the London School Board, Taylor did not accept the candidature. Not until 1885 would she become the Independent Radical Democrat candidate for the newly formed constituency of Camberwell North.

Elite Liberalism in the 1885 Election

The Liberals had been in government since 1880 and had faced a series of challenges to their foreign policy in the East and in their dealings with Ireland from ultra-radical socialists like Taylor. There had been opposition and mass demonstrations against the Coercion Act 1881 which Gladstone had introduced in Ireland to deal with the agrarian unrest which had begun in 1879. Radicals, within the Democratic Federation and the clubs, had supported the Irish peasant in the fight against Anglo-Irish landlords for better tenant rights. They saw it as a fight for decency and they called for Irish Home Rule as the only ethical way forward to improve living conditions for the Irish people (Biagini, 2007: 58). Charles Stewart Parnell, the leader of the nationalist Irish Parliamentary Party in the House of Commons, and his fellow nationalist MPs were campaigning for Home Rule within and outside Parliament.

Parnell was exasperated with Gladstone's slowness to put Irish self-government on the parliamentary agenda. In the election of 1885 Parnell called upon Irish electors in Britain to only vote for those Liberal candidates who supported a Home Rule Bill. Biagini notes that Home Rule did not become a big issue during the campaigning for candidates but acknowledges that Helen Taylor, in Camberwell North, was one of the exceptions (Biagini, 66).

Liberal foreign policy in Egypt and Sudan was attacked by radicals and socialists. The invasion of Egypt in 1882 had been supported by the majority of Liberals; only 8 MPs had voted against the invasion, but radicals, including Taylor, opposed it. Gladstone saw military involvement in Egypt as necessary to promote English liberal democratic values in the region. Gladstone also believed that Britain needed to stop France dominating Egypt, otherwise France would increase its power and influence in the area (Parry, 2006: 346–9). The death of General Gordon, regarded by many in Britain as a Christian martyr, had caused a sharp decline in the Liberal government's popularity. He had died in January 1885, in Khartoum in the Sudan where he had been sent to evacuate British soldiers and civilians during a Sudanese revolt. He had been besieged almost a year despite public pressure at home for Gladstone to send troops to rescue him. He died before help arrived and Gladstone was blamed for his death. The Liberal government fell on 8th June 1885 after being defeated on an amendment to the Budget Bill and Lord Salisbury headed an interim Conservative government until the election in November (James, 1957; Parry, 2006).

Joseph Chamberlain's 'Unauthorised Programme' was of great influence on Liberal candidates and voters during the 1885 election. Chamberlain, the Radical Liberal MP for Birmingham, was the founder of the National Liberal Federation in 1877. This had united local Liberal Associations, strengthening central control of the party. The 'Unauthorised Programme,' far more radical than the existing policies of the Gladstone government, called for free education, land reform, dissolution of the Church of England, graduated taxation, death duties, male suffrage and elected county councils. His support for municipal socialism resounded with progressive voters in London who were campaigning for a unitary authority for the metropolis. (None of this was new. Taylor herself, had been involved in these campaigns for

a decade.) Chamberlain, however, boosted these causes and two thirds of Liberal candidates stood on his 'Unauthorised Programme' in 1885 (Blaxill, 2015). Where Chamberlain deviated greatly from Taylor's ideology was in his opposition to Home Rule for Ireland.

A non-elite Independent Radical Democrat Candidate for Camberwell North, 1885

Camberwell North was a new constituency created in 1885 following the Boundary Commission's decision to 'group together, as far as practicable, the inhabitants following similar pursuits' in the Southwark parliamentary divisions south of the Thames. Many inhabitants worked in the tanning industry or on the river as boatmen and lightermen (Pelling, 1967: 51). Radical clubs had emerged from the growth of radicalism within the London vestries after the 1832 Reform Act. This was a reaction to the increasing Whig centralised control of liberalism. Vestry radicalism was an alliance of middle-class liberals, the radical working-class and 'romantic elites' who resisted centralisation through localist politics. Working-class republican radicalism had been marginalised by liberalism from the days of the Palmerston administration (1855–1865) when the Liberals gained a reputation for good reforming government (Weinstein, 2011: 43 and 63).

The 1867 borough franchise resulted in an increased need for professional politics. Many constituencies had small majorities and, without organised party canvassers and a bureaucracy which could create a register of supporters and get out the vote on election day, seats could be lost on a small swing to the rival candidate (Parry, 1993: 221). By 1886, when the Liberals had 339 MPs, 110 were landowners, 164 from the middle-class professions and a mere 12 MPs were working-class (Parry, 1993: 19, 224). The centralised control exerted by The National Liberal Federation and the 'wire pullers' of the local Liberal Associations led to resistance to the caucus by grassroots radicals (Parry, 1993: 274). There were two radical clubs in the constituency: Camberwell Radical Club on Peckham Park Road, and North Camberwell Radical Club on Gloucester Road. Taylor was the President of the former which had been established in March 1885 (*South London Press*, 1885, 28 March: 4). Davis' study of London's radical clubs throws light on the political atmosphere in Camberwell

during the election of 1885. Radicals felt that the local Liberal Associations, with their candidate selection committees based on Chamberlain's Birmingham model, were undemocratic; resistance to the caucus was centred among the working-class artisans and their middle-class supporters in the local radical clubs. A total of 78 new radical clubs were formed between 1884–8 in London. From 1885, however, rather than continuing to be centres of advanced working-class republicanism, organising public lectures and mass protests for political reform, they were beginning the drift into places of entertainment and drinking, familiar to us as contemporary working-men's clubs. They did, however, before their political decline, successfully pull London liberalism to the left. As a result, Labour politics did not wield influence in the capital until 1918, unlike in other industrial areas of Great Britain. In 1885 opposition to official Liberal candidates by radical club members in London was due not to differences in ideology but from members' resentment towards the power of the local Liberal Associations, which allowed such associations to foist a Liberal candidate on the local community (Davis, 1989).

In May 1885, Charles Ammon, the secretary of Camberwell Radical Club, wrote formally to Taylor asking her to accept the nomination as the Independent Radical Democrat Candidate for North Camberwell:

...at the selection meeting for a suitable radical candidate to represent North Camberwell, it was carried unanimously amidst the greatest enthusiasm that our President Miss Taylor be invited to come forward and contest the division (Camberwell Radical Club, 22 May 1885, MTC 18: 5).²

Taylor accepted but declared that if a working-class man should present himself as a candidate she would step aside and support his campaign (*Englishwoman's Review*, 1885, June). Francis Soutter, a local radical activist and campaigner for Labour representation in parliament, was her political advisor during the campaign. He recorded that Taylor decided to accept the candidature because the local Liberal

² Camberwell Radical Club to Helen Taylor, 22 May 1885, London School of Economics (LSE), Mill Taylor Collection (MTC), file 18, no. 5.

Association had passed over their original choice of preferred candidate, a working-class compositor and Camberwell vestry member, William A. Coote (Soutter, 1923: 92). In the final ballot of the Liberal candidate selection committee, Coote had received 17 nominations and Richard Strong, a local magistrate, had received 73 (*South London Press*, 1885, 20 June: 4). Coote, an evangelical Christian, was a prominent social purity campaigner. Taylor was a member of the Moral Reform Union and both were active campaigners for the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts. These Acts had been introduced in the 1860s to control venereal disease amongst the armed forces. Women suspected of being prostitutes, who lived near certain garrisons and ports, could be forcibly detained and medically examined. Men, however, were not subject to this degrading treatment. The Acts had been suspended in Britain and Ireland in 1883 and would be repealed in 1886, although the campaign continued after that date for their repeal in parts of the British Empire including India and Hong Kong (see Walkowitz, 1980). The campaign against the Contagious Diseases Acts during the 1870s, led by Josephine Butler, and the successful winning of their suspension, led to sex no longer being a forbidden topic and emboldened campaigners to demand a change in men's sexual behaviour and a purification of society (Bland, 95: 97–101).

Josephine Butler and Bramwell Booth of the Salvation Army approached journalist W. T. Stead who agreed to conduct a six-week survey of prostitution in London. His study exposed child prostitution in the capital and shocked readers when it was published, in July 1885, in the *Pall Mall Gazette* under the title of *Maiden Tribute in Modern Babylon* (Bland: xiv). The National Vigilance Association (NVA) was formed, in August 1885, in response to Stead's journalism, and Coote became the Honourable Secretary. The sole aim of the NVA was the enforcement of the Criminal Law Amendment Act of July 1885 which had raised the age of consent from 13 to 16 (Attwood, 2015: 326).

Radicals in Camberwell, angry at the caucus for forcing Richard Strong upon them, looked for another candidate and chose to put up Taylor against the establishment's Liberal choice. Radical clubs throughout the country were using the same strategy, putting forward grassroots candidates to represent the working-class of the constituency against the choice of the local Liberal selection committees.

This resulted in triangular contests between the Radical/Independent, Liberal, and Conservative candidates, much to the horror of the Liberal party, who feared the split in the progressive vote would lead to a Conservative victory (Lawrence, 1998). Far from being the actions of a maverick, Taylor's candidature was one of a number of similar challenges being made by community activists to the Liberal hierarchy. Owen (2008: 220) identifies 18 triangular contests in the election of November 1885, but does not include the attempt of one in Camberwell North. All nine such progressive vote splitting contests in London produced a Conservative win (Owen: 216). In Nottingham West, Taylor's former Social Democratic Federation colleague, John Burns, stood as the radical club's 'anti-party candidate' and was attacked by Liberals for vote splitting. These independents were, however, often not anti-Liberal, they were anti-caucus as in Sheffield Central. Here Mervyn Hawkes stood as an anti-caucus independent candidate, supported by the radical clubs of the city, after having being rejected by the Liberal selection committee (Owen: 221–229).

The British press acknowledged Taylor's position as an anti-elite candidate, noting her popularity among the electorate where she was known for her work on behalf of the working-class on the London School Board:

That the great majority of the Radical working men will support her need hardly be doubted. On the other hand, there is a section of Liberal less advanced, and perhaps more fastidious, who may decline to sanction so startling an innovation, to say nothing of their dread of a politician of the most extreme type (*Liverpool Mercury*, 1885, 30 May: 5).

Many Liberals feared that Taylor would hand victory to the Tory candidate, Wilfrid Scawen Blunt. There were calls for the 'wilful woman' who would divide the Liberal vote to withdraw (*Leeds Mercury*, 1885, 11 November: 4). 'After all,' wrote one newspaper, alluding to Taylor's long-running battles with the Liberals over Ireland and within the School Board, 'the stoutest Liberal would probably prefer to see Mr Blunt rather than Miss Taylor in the House of Commons' (*Sheffield Independent*, 1885, 24 October: 9).

Taylor's candidature was also a direct challenge to the 1832 Reform Act by Camberwell Radical Club. Charles Ammon, quoted earlier, had indicated that it was a test of the legality of the Act. Her campaign, for full citizenship rights for women, places her in the tradition of other non-elite candidates challenging laws which barred them from being MPs; O'Connell, Salomons and Bradlaugh. The press made a direct link between Taylor and Bradlaugh. Bradlaugh, an atheist, had been first elected as a Liberal MP in 1880. He had been barred from Parliament for refusing to swear the Christian Oath of Supremacy. He would finally, after winning a number of by-elections and being disqualified on each occasion he refused the oath, be allowed to affirm allegiance to the Queen in 1886 as an atheist. One newspaper, on Taylor's campaign to enter parliament, sarcastically asked: 'Is it fair on Mr Bradlaugh to take the wind out of his sails in this fashion?' (*Huddersfield Chronicle*, 1885, 1 June: 4). Before 1832, women had not formally participated in elections as candidates or voters; this was merely through social custom, although they had campaigned for male candidates and sometimes had even cast a vote. Chalus' study (2005) of elite women of the eighteenth century identifies the influential role that women played in electoral politics as active supporters, organisers and canvassers for their husbands and male relatives. Women landowners, including Georgina, the Duchess of Devonshire in 1754 and Lady Susan Keek in 1784, had controlled seats through their patronage and influence over voters and, in effect, voted by proxy. Involvement in election politics had not been restricted to aristocratic and upper-class women. In 1868 working-class women attended the nomination procedure in Rothesay, Scotland, and put up their hands to vote for the Liberal candidate (Gleadle, 2001: 113). Women had also voted by clerical error. Once their names were erroneously on the electoral register they could not be turned away. In 1867, Lily Maxwell voted in the Manchester parliamentary election for the liberal candidate, Jacob Bright. Her name had been put on the register by mistake and she cast her vote as a rate paying shopkeeper. This error had been discovered by Bright and Lydia Becker, the secretary of the Manchester branch of the National Society for Women's Suffrage (Rendall, 1999). However, the 1832 Reform Act explicitly referred to those eligible to take

part in elections using male pronouns. John Stuart Mill had attempted to have these restrictive pronouns replaced by the word 'persons' during the parliamentary debates on The Representation of the People Act 1867 but had been defeated. Although used in the wording of the 1867 Act, 'persons' was used alongside male pronouns, which left its meaning open to the question: did this or did this not include women? Reformers campaigning for the same change at the time of the Representation of the People Act 1884 had also suffered defeat. Taylor and her supporters based their belief as to the legitimacy of her candidature on Section 4 of the Interpretation Act 1850, known more commonly as Lord Brougham's Act. This had decreed that, unless it was stated clearly that men only were being referred to, masculine pronouns legally included women. In 1867 many women suffragists had registered to vote citing the 1850 Act. A court case, *Chorlton v. Lings*, had followed which judged the suffragists' claim unlawful. Persons, it was decreed, did not include women. (The information on legal aspects of the challenge is taken from Smith, 2019). There had, however, been some advancement in women's rights during the last few decades. The Municipal Franchise Act 1869 had granted women ratepayers the vote in local elections. Women had been standing as candidates for the local School Boards since their creation in 1870 and they had been legally able to stand as Poor Law guardians for decades under the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act (Gleadle, 2009).

Taylor emphasised the importance of her candidature for the advancement of women's rights throughout the campaign. In an interview with a reporter from the *Pall Mall Gazette* she stated that it would be 'a great impetus to the general advancement of women' and that it would make women's suffrage seem moderate in comparison (*Pall Mall Gazette*, 1885, 21 November: 2). Taylor explained that her candidature was the only way to get the question of equal rights for women 'into the public domain...I feel I am acting as a pioneer and I expect at the next election there will be many women candidates for Parliament.' She claimed that there was strong support for her candidature among women, and insisted that there was no law against a woman candidate and that she expected her nomination to be accepted by the Returning Officer. When asked in which class there was most support for

women's rights, Taylor had replied that it was amongst 'respectable working men.' She believed that they valued women's work both inside and outside the home, because working-class women, their own wives, sisters and mothers, had always worked out of economic need (*Pall Mall Gazette*, 1885, 21 November: 2).

Taylor's Rival Candidates

Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, the Conservative candidate, was a 45-year-old retired diplomat. A writer and poet, he was interested in the Islamic world and was the author of a book entitled *The Future of Islam* (*The Times*, 1885, 25 November: 3). Blunt was fiercely anti-imperialist, having lived and worked extensively in the Middle East and India. In 1882 he had been banned from Egypt for four years for his support of Urabi Pasha, an Egyptian nationalist. He had opposed Gladstone's invasion of Egypt that year, as had Taylor. Blunt had also opposed the presence of British soldiers in the Sudan and was, like Taylor, a supporter of Irish Home Rule (Blunt, 1906). In 1888 he would serve a prison sentence in Ireland for chairing an anti-eviction meeting in Galway.

Blunt was standing as a Tory Democrat. Although Randolph Churchill is synonymous with the term 'tory democracy', he only referred to it in two public speeches and an article. He defined it as popular support for Tory progressive social reforms combined with support for the monarchy, House of Lords and Church of England. He saw it as a means of winning working-class support for the Tory party. It was the press who created the link between Churchill and tory democracy (Quinault, 1979: 143–163). Churchill, when asked by Blunt to define the term, said: 'To tell you the truth I don't know myself what tory democracy is, but I believe it is principally opportunism. Say you are a Tory Democrat and that will do' (Blunt, 1906: 407). The success of securing working-class support for the Conservatives in London was more down to popular grassroots conservatism, with local activists campaigning on local working-class issues, rather than nationally-promoted tory democracy (Windscheffel, 2007: 48). Blunt had been undecided as to which party to stand for, although he was, by birth and inclination, a Tory. He defined himself as a Tory Democrat, Tory Socialist and Tory Home Ruler. He called for 'fair trade not free trade' to protect

British workers from cheap foreign imports, thus promoting popularist conservatism amongst the workers of Camberwell (Blunt, 1906: 407). A supporter of the church, House of Lords, and the monarchy, he, a catholic, opposed secular state education (the School Board system which Taylor had devoted nine years to). He supported Indian self-government and the restoration of the Egyptian National Party and blamed Disraeli for the imperialism within the party (Blunt, 1906: 408). Blunt and Parnell had met earlier in the year to discuss the forthcoming election and Parnell had explained how he could not offer the Englishman a safe Irish seat because of the jealousy which would ensue among the Irish National Party. He had, nevertheless, promised that if Blunt stood as a Conservative in an English seat, he would endorse his candidature and secure the Irish vote for him, in recognition of his support for Irish tenant farmers (Longford, 1979: 216). Randolph Churchill was the President of the North Camberwell Working Men's Conservative Association (*Morning Post*, 1885, 22 September: 3). He supported Blunt's candidature and advised him to stay silent on his support for Home Rule until after the election. Blunt ignored the advice and stood as a Home Ruler on which Churchill blamed his defeat (Blunt, 1906: 413).

Richard Strong, the Liberal candidate, was the son of a City of London flour factor. He was 52-years old, a Justice of the Peace and a governor of Dulwich College (*Debretts Guide to the House of Commons*, 1886: 144). He was firmly of the Liberal establishment – embedded in the caucus so reviled by the radicals in the clubs – as chair of the Lambeth Liberal Association. A supporter of the 'Unauthorised Programme,' whilst at the same time vocally supporting Gladstone, he campaigned for the abolition of the House of Lords, free education and municipal reform. Unlike Taylor, he did not support secular education but supported Church Schools (*South London Press*, 1885, 21 November: 2). He, like Blunt and Taylor, also did not stay silent on Ireland. He declared, at his selection meeting, that he supported Irish Home Rule (*South London Press*, 1885, 25 July: 10). As the eventual winner, he would sit as an MP only until 1886 when the seat would be won by John Richards Kelly, the Conservative candidate. (This 1886 election followed the defeat of Gladstone's Home Rule Bill and disarray in the Liberal party as the anti-Home Rule Liberal Unionists

split from the party). In 1889 Strong would be elected to North Camberwell as a councillor on the newly created London County Council, on which he would serve five terms until 1904 (Jackson, 1965: 282).

Taylor's Campaign

In the autumn of 1885 Taylor announced that she was standing down from the London School Board, after nine years, 'to concentrate her energies upon her nomination as Parliamentary candidate for North Camberwell' (*School Board Chronicle*, 1885, 17 October). Taylor, aged 54, suffered from recurring ill-health. The hours needed to devote herself to school board duties were long. The weekly board meetings in 1882–3 had averaged four hours and thirty-seven minutes (*School Board Chronicle*, 1883, 6 October). On top of this were many hours devoted to constituency work and her public speaking as a member of the burgeoning land movement, women's suffrage and moral reform. Taylor issued a manifesto which was distributed as a handbill:

To the Electors of North Camberwell
 A fair day's wages for a fair day's work
 6 hour working day which will give work to men where now there is none
 Local government cooperation and workshops under elected managers
 Restoration of the land
 Direct taxation and graduated income tax, none under 300 and rising by
 degrees to 19 shillings in the pound
 No wars that are not voted for by the people
 Free justice
 Restoration of the endowments for free clothing, food and education
 Free education
 Home Rule and legislative independence for Ireland (Election Leaflet, MTC,
 box 7).³

³ *Cuttings and leaflets connected with the election of 1885*, LSE, MTC, box 7.

Far from being eccentric, the manifesto was a summary of Taylor's political beliefs and her radical heritage as the step-daughter of John Stuart Mill. It contained a mix of long held radical concerns (the misappropriation of educational endowments and land reform), utopian socialism (worker's cooperatives), the 'unauthorised programme' (free education, local government, and graduated income tax), and the socialism of the Social Democratic Federation (reduced working hours, land nationalisation, free justice, free education, and Home Rule). Like her rival candidates, and against the national trend, she openly supported Irish Home Rule. The press labelled Taylor a Radical Socialist (*North Eastern Daily Gazette*, 1885, 2 June: 4). Taylor saw herself as continuing the work of her step-father, who had laid down 'those principles of socialism which she hoped the people of England would soon be prepared to carry out' (*Pall Mall Gazette*, 1885, 21 November: 2). Taylor had arranged the posthumous publication of Mill's articles on socialism in *The Fortnightly Review* in 1849. She always insisted that he had been a socialist. Mill had moved to the left after the French Revolution of 1848 and the establishment of French worker cooperatives. Left-leaning Harriet Taylor had influenced his support for utopian socialism and the cooperative ideas of Owen, Fourier and Saint-Simon. Mill believed worker-controlled cooperatives should be tried, though he was against state control of the market and violent revolution (see Persky on Mill's move to the left: Persky, 2016: 141–151). Mill's socialist credentials have been dismissed as a phase, or merely utopian or market socialism, but this overlooks the radicalism of his support for the cooperative movement (McCabe, 2020: 5).

Taylor, therefore, straddled two worlds: that of earlier radical Chartism and utopian socialism, and the new socialism of Henry Hyndman's Social Democratic Federation. She had been a founder member of its precursor, the Democratic Federation, in 1881. The first members of the Democratic Federation were followers from the radical clubs of London, of the late chartist James Bronterre O'Brien. He had advocated that land nationalisation should be one of the first Acts of the new parliament after the hoped-for passing of the charter (Bevir, 1992). It was not until 1884, when the Democratic Federation embraced state ownership of the means of production and became the

Social Democratic Federation (SDF), that 'the O'Brienites attached aspects of vulgar Marxism to their earlier beliefs' (Bevir: 219). Shortly afterwards Taylor left the SDF, 'taking her working-class followers with her' (Wolfe, 1975: 106). She could not accept Hyndman's violent class-war rhetoric or his autocratic manner. Like her step-father, Taylor opposed violent revolution:

She was in favour of a republic but did not approve of anything other than peaceful means. She strongly disapproved of the use of rifles whether in the hands of monarchists or republicans (*Freeman's Journal*, 1882, 2 June: 3).

Before leaving the SDF she accused Hyndman of emulating the worst excesses of the capitalist press through his anonymous articles, attacking named individuals, in the party newspaper *Justice*.⁴ Disaffected revolutionaries, including William Morris and Eleanor Marx, also left and formed the Socialist League. Hyndman's opposition to women's suffrage would have been a further source of conflict between himself and Taylor. Karen Hunt's (1996) post-1886 study of the SDF examines the experiences of women in the organisation and its ambivalence to women's rights which hindered their involvement and agency in the movement. The woman question was left to individual conscience and not enshrined in policy.

Taylor was presented to the electorate as the local candidate. Voters were reminded in the election literature that she had been a Southwark Member of the London School Board in this part of London for almost a decade:

The People's Candidate
Vote for
Miss Taylor
The Tried Friend
Of
The People

⁴ H. Taylor to H. Hyndman, undated drafts, LSE, MTC, file 18, no. 27.

And

Their Children (election leaflet, MTC, box 7).⁵

Although many of her policies were also in the 'unauthorised programme', it was clear that Taylor's politics were to the left. The press reported that 'even Mr Chamberlain will not satisfy her' after she accused him of being 'hopelessly given over to Toryism' (*The Star Guernsey*, 1885, 23 July: 4). Taylor's electioneering met with much opposition and often resulted in rowdy, violent meetings as supporters of the Liberal candidate, Strong, tried to disrupt proceedings. On one occasion 'a chair came hurtling through the air' towards the platform (Soutter, 1923: 94). One press report described the 'utmost disorder' that erupted when she appeared on the platform accompanied by such 'loud cheers and groans' that she was unable to speak for five minutes: 'A free fight then ensued and the ladies had to beat a hasty retreat to the ante room' (*Lloyds Weekly Paper*, 1885, 1 November: 7). At one meeting, hearing that 'the platform was to be stormed,' Francis Soutter placed 40 volunteer stewards in front of the platform to protect Taylor and a further 40 around the room (Soutter, 1923: 94). Taylor had faced the same hostility from the Liberals during school board elections, which Soutter blamed on her independence in the board chamber where she voted on policies on their merits and 'her habit of calling a spade a spade utterly regardless as to whether the said spade's political bent was Tory or Liberal' (Soutter, 1924: 147). She had been a prominent anti-coercion campaigner, attacking Gladstone's policies in Ireland. She had been accused, during the Irish Land War, of having called Gladstone a 'dastardly recreant' who had forsaken the true policy of liberalism for 'personal ambition and jealousy' (*Birmingham Daily Post*, 1881, 17 October: 5). Taylor had denied the accuracy of the quote but did admit she had called him 'a dastard and a recreant...and believe that half of England would echo those words if polled' (Helen Taylor, undated, MTC, file 18, no. 27).⁶ A letter signed from 'a Liberal elector, Peckham' called Camberwell Radical Club a 'mischief- brewing clique'

⁵ *Cuttings and leaflets connected with the election of 1885*, LSE, MTC, box 7.

⁶ H. Taylor to G. T. Day, draft letter, no date, LSE, MTC, file 18, no. 17.

for 'the atrocity' of putting up Taylor as a rival candidate to Strong (*South London Press*, 1885, 29 August: 10, 11). She also faced the animosity of those opposed to women's suffrage. She was attacked as 'an unsexed female agitator' (*Yorkshire Gazette*, 1885, 29 October: 8). It is clear that Liberals feared Taylor's popularity with the voters in a triangular contest, and did not underestimate the number of votes that might be lost to her and the possibility of it resulting in a Conservative win. The working-class electorate, which the Reform Act of 1867 had increased, had grown further following Charles Dilke's Parliamentary and Municipal Registration Act 1878. This had enfranchised male residents dwelling in houses of multiple occupation. Such men were no longer classed as lodgers if they occupied a room and the landlord was not residing in the same house. The Franchise Act 1884, however, had had little effect on voting rights in boroughs like Camberwell; its impact had been seen in county seats (Davis and Tanner, 1996: 308, 314).

Taylor was endorsed by former SDF colleagues. W. B. Parker was standing as the SDF candidate in another triangular contest against the caucus 'wire pullers' in Central Hackney. He addressed one of her election meetings (*Reynolds Newspaper*, 1885, 15 November: 8). John Burns of the SDF, the grassroots candidate in the triangular contest in Nottingham, also endorsed her candidature and arranged for her to speak on his behalf in Nottingham. He believed that 'this will strengthen materially my candidature for the West Division' (John Burns, 9 October 1885, MTC, file 22, no. 34).⁷ Taylor was popular nationwide amongst the working-class for her work for the burgeoning land movement, which she had promoted at meetings up and down the country for the last five years.

Taylor's direct challenge to the 1832 Reform Act divided the women's suffrage movement. *The Englishwoman's Review*, though recognising that it showed growing support by men for full political participation for women, doubted that it would further the cause of women's suffrage. Rather it showed that 'men shall be allowed to appoint what candidate they choose whoever that candidate might be' (*Englishwoman's Review*, 1885, June). Taylor received a letter, signed 'AAW', which

⁷ J. Burns to H. Taylor, 9 October 1885, LSE, MTC, file 22, no. 34.

feared that the press coverage surrounding her candidature would 'do much to injure the prospects of the Women's Suffrage Bill' which was due its second reading in the House of Commons. It would have been far better to wait for the successful passing of the bill and then present herself as a candidate, for 'we feel anxious about any step that will endanger it' (A. A. W., 14 June 1885, MTC, file 13, no. 36).⁸ Sylvia Pankhurst recalled how her father, Dr Richard Pankhurst, had spoken at one of Taylor's hustings in support of 'that very drastic lady', despite the women suffrage societies keeping their distance, fearful of being implicated in a foolish attempt at challenging the law:

They considered it injurious to the suffrage cause. The fact that Helen Taylor cast off the trammels of skirts and wore trousers was an added and most egregious offence in their eyes. Even Mrs Pankhurst was distressed that her husband should be seen walking with a lady in this garb (Pankhurst, 1932: 27, 71).

It was most likely the divided skirt of the Rational Dress Society that Taylor was wearing, but she made more cautious women suffragists very nervous that their cause would be brought into disrepute by Taylor transgressing Victorian ideas of respectability.⁹

Taylor had been in conflict with the more conservative members of the women's suffrage movement since the formation of the London National Society for Women's Suffrage (LNSWS) in 1867. Historians have blamed Helen and Mill's uncompromising and autocratic leadership for ultimately splitting the movement (Holton, 1973; Worzala, 1974). It is true that her unwillingness to compromise was a destructive force which split the conservative London and more Liberal Manchester branches of the LNSWS, although Lydia Becker in Manchester also found her impossible to work with (Holton, 1995: 281). It must be acknowledged, however, that the animosity

⁸ A. A. W. to H. Taylor, 14 June 1885, LSE, MTC, file 13, no. 36. The signature is unclear and is most likely 'AHW,' the suffragist and School Board member, Alice Hare Westlake.

⁹ Ada S. Ballin in the *Science of Dress* (1885) observed that divided skirts might be made so artfully that an outsider would not know the difference between them and an ordinary skirt (Cunningham, 2002: 68). Taylor's were less successful.

of some suffragists to Taylor was political. Taylor's politics was too extreme for the more conservative suffragists. There were irreconcilable political divisions in the movement. Conservatives such as Emily Davies and Frances Power Cobbe wished to exclude married women from suffrage against the wishes of the Liberals, including Mill, Helen Taylor and Clementia Taylor (Caine, 1992).

Many British suffragists disapproved of Taylor's involvement in the Irish Land War as a member of the Irish Ladies' Land League (Smith, 2016). This had been formed, at Michael Davitt's instigation, to support the tenant farmers evicted for withholding their rent after the male Land League was proscribed by the British government and its leaders jailed. Taylor's friend, the suffragist Priscilla McLaren, wrote warning her that many in the women's rights movement feared she was bringing the cause into disrepute through her support for this Irish nationalist organisation. 'I hear now and then darker surmises of how much you and some others will retard our suffrage movement by signing yourselves up with the Land League question' (Priscilla McLaren, 15 March 1881, MTC, file 13, no. 234).¹⁰ Anna Parnell, sister of Charles Stewart Parnell, was the president of the Ladies' Land League and a friend of Taylor's. She was a fierce opponent of the British Empire and wrote scathing poetry mocking its supposed civilising effect (Smith, 1916). The Victorian women's suffrage movement has been dismissed as imperialist, basing its demands for equal citizenship in terms of rights within a civilised British Empire (Burton, 1994). This claim has been challenged by those who have identified that Victorian feminism was multi-faceted and included anti-imperialist feminism (Ware, 1992). Radical anti-imperialists, like Taylor, linked imperialism with a negation of true English values of liberty and English moral worth, views which they often combined with anti-militarism. Anti-imperialists opposed both the British occupation of Egypt in 1882 and the Coercion Acts in Ireland as immoral and a threat to democracy and, therefore, against true English liberal values (Matikkala, 2011). Taylor often spoke in such terms throughout her campaigning life, particularly at this time in regards to the invasion of Egypt and military involvement in the Sudan. During the Irish Land War,

¹⁰ P. McLaren to H. Taylor, 15 March 1881, LSE, MTC, file 13, no. 234.

she had linked the Irish struggle for land with that of past fights in Italy and France against tyranny, claiming that only Turkey had a more repressive government than Britain (*Freeman's Journal*, 1881, 3 November: 6). William Cobden's early nineteenth century anti-imperialism had greatly influenced Taylor's generation. Cobdenite anti-imperialism argued that taxation which could have improved society at home was wasted in foreign expansion, maintained by an expensive British army (Turner, 2008: 7). Taylor, like Cobden, was a lifelong pacifist and internationalist.

Ethel Leach, a fellow suffragist and Ladies' Land League member, and an elected member of the Great Yarmouth School Board, did support Taylor and became her election agent and appeared alongside her on election platforms (*Englishwoman's Review*, 1885, October). Taylor also received the support of the idiosyncratic campaigner and suffragist Jessie Craigen. Craigen and Taylor had been colleagues in both the Ladies' Land League and the Social Democratic Federation. At one time they had been very close but they had become estranged after an argument (Holton: 1996: 139).¹¹ Craigen established the 'Miss Taylor Election Independent Aid Committee', distributed a handbill and organised her own independent election meetings. Craigen's election literature clearly stated that her committee was 'not in communication with Miss Taylor herself or her committee in any way.'¹² Craigen referred back to pre-Reformation times when, she claimed, both Henry III and Edward III had summoned abbesses to Parliament. This, she claimed, validated Taylor's candidature in English law. No statute existed, she argued, that banned women from Parliament; neither was there anything in common law to forbid it. Craigen referenced Taylor's campaigning for the repeal of the Contagious Diseases

¹¹ Holton in her 1996 study, 'Silk dresses and lavender kid gloves', identified Craigen's relationship with Taylor as an example of Victorian romantic friendship between women. Holton believed that the argument resulted from Craigen criticising Parnell for ending the Irish land agitation and accepting Gladstone's Kilmainham Treaty. Far from being annoyed at Jessie's attack on Parnell, Taylor would have agreed that Parnell had betrayed the Irish Land League at a time when Ireland was ungovernable and self-rule arguably a possibility. The better tenancies which followed still left many Irish landless. Helen's political colleagues in both the land nationalisation and Irish nationalist organisations felt the same sense of having been betrayed by Parnell, including Michael Davitt, Anna Parnell and Henry George.

¹² *Cuttings and leaflets connected with the election of 1885*, LSE, MTC, box 7.

Acts as a reason to elect her to the House of Commons, a subtle reminder that Coote had been usurped as Liberal candidate by Strong:

In that House womanhood has been outraged by laws which, with cold brutality, made the daughters of the poor mere animal instruments to gratify the lusts of men. That degrading insult to us is still on the statute book. Send up a woman from North Camberwell to give utterance in the senate, for all womanhood in the land, to the hot shame and anger which every woman feels at it. Give womanhood a voice in the House of Commons to demand the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Act (Jessie Craigen, 1881, MTC, box 7).¹³

Henry George, the American political economist, endorsed Taylor. This increased the prestige of her campaign, for George was renowned throughout the English-speaking world for his advocacy of a single tax on land, which, he argued, should replace all other taxation. This would open up access to the land to a greater number of working people. Landlords would no longer be able to profiteer from tenants and their unearned profit from land ownership. Land, now idle, would be available for use, as it would be unprofitable to the landowner to keep it unused and incur taxation on it (George, 1881). Many of the increasingly literate working-class had read his influential book, *Progress and Poverty* (1881), printed in affordable cheap editions, or had attended the meetings of The English Land Restoration League which promoted his ideas. George himself had toured Great Britain to spread his philosophy, sharing speaking engagements with Taylor with whom he and his family had stayed upon first coming to Britain in 1881. Taylor was on the executive of the English Land Restoration League as well as the Land Nationalisation Society. Despite believing the single tax would never work and that land nationalisation was the only remedy, Taylor and many land campaigners were members of both organisations. They considered both the ELRL and the LNS to be working to the same end – the land

¹³ Ibid.

for the people. George wrote from New York that he believed that her election would further the cause of women's rights (Henry George, 25 September 1885, MTC, file 17, no. 23).¹⁴ One of the most famous men of the age, he had been converted to openly supporting women's rights by Taylor, noting: 'It is only of late years and largely since I first met you that I have come to realise the importance of women taking their part in politics' (Henry George, 17 September 1885, file 17, no. 88).¹⁵ George had considered Parnell ending the Land War as a betrayal of the land movement. He had written, in 1882, to Patrick Ford, the editor of the *Irish World*, that 'Parnell seems to me to have thrown away the greatest opportunity any Irishman ever had. It is the birth right for the mess of potage' (Henry George, jnr, 1900: 337). He would have been aware that Parnell was supporting the Conservative candidate and, by openly favouring Taylor, the most renowned of land reformers was sending a strong message about the Irish leader's land policy.

Taylor's Irish nationalist support came from those members of the Land League who had been side-lined by Parnell as too extreme after he accepted Gladstone's 1881 Land Act. This paved the way for peasant ownership of their farms and smallholdings and the end of the Land League. Both Davitt and Anna Parnell were revered amongst the Irish working-class in Britain as two of the leading Irish nationalists of the time. Davitt had spent seven years in Dartmoor prison for gun running to Ireland as a member of the revolutionary Irish Republican Brotherhood. He had set up the Land League to protect the peasants from being evicted from their homes, as they had been in the famine of 1845, when another famine in Ireland looked likely in 1879. He had been introduced to the British land movement by Taylor and was on the executive of the Land Nationalisation Society. They had worked closely together, since 1882, inciting land agitation throughout Great Britain (Smith, 2017). He had come to believe that the only way that Ireland would win her freedom was by, peaceably, obtaining the support of the British working-class. Davitt had been marginalised within the Irish nationalist organisations by Parnell for his advocacy and work for

¹⁴ H. George to H. Taylor, 25 September 1885, LSE, MTC, file 17, no. 23.

¹⁵ H. George to H. Taylor, 17 September 1885, LSE, file 17, no. 88.

nationalisation of the land over peasant proprietorship (King, 2016). Anna Parnell had worked closely with Taylor during the Land War as members of the Ladies' Land League. This organisation had run the Land War after the leading men, including Davitt and Parnell, were imprisoned by Gladstone. The Ladies had supported the evicted tenants at court hearings, attended the evictions, raised funds and organised and built the Land League huts to house those evicted by bailiffs during the 'no rent' campaign. Anna was so incensed by her brother's actions in calling off the campaign that it is reputed she never spoke to him again (McL. Côté, 1991; King, 2006; Moody, 1974; Moody, 1984). Michael Davitt and Anna Parnell believed that, in accepting the Treaty of Kilmainham in 1882, Parnell had missed an opportunity to achieve Irish independence. Ireland had been ungovernable during the land agitation, perhaps on the brink of an end to British rule. With Parnell supporting Blunt in Camberwell they were sending a signal to the elite constitutionalists of the Irish Nationalist Party. The press believed that Taylor's support for Home Rule would win her the Irish vote, 'which is by no means numerically insignificant in the division', as noted by the press (*Morning Post*, 1885, 1 October: 3). She had been a high-profile anti-coercion campaigner. Parnell was instructing the Irish in Britain to vote Conservative except in the case of a few named Radical and Liberal candidates who had not shared the Government's intransigence over Home Rule or its meddling in Irish education, and who had opposed the anti-democratic coercion laws.

In no case ought an Irish Nationalist to give a vote in our opinion to a member of that Liberal or Radical party, except in those cases which courageous fealty to the Irish cause in the last parliament has given a guarantee that the candidate will not belong to the servile and cowardly and unprincipled herd that would break every pledge and violate every principle in obedience to the call of the whip and the mandate of the caucus (*Buckingham Advertiser and Free Press*, 1885, 28 November: 6).

Davitt wrote a letter of support to Taylor, offering to take the chair at an election meeting if he could find the time to leave his work in Dublin. This was made into a

handbill for distribution amongst the Irish voters. It stated that he was 'satisfied that Ireland would not have a truer friend or a more staunch supporter in Westminster than you (Michael Davitt, 12 November 1885, MTC, file 13, no. 195).¹⁶ He, too, saw it as an important step in women crossing the frontier into full citizenship, stating that Taylor's candidature would further the cause of women's suffrage (Ibid).¹⁷

Anna Parnell had proved herself a capable leader when left to run the Land War in the absence of the male imprisoned leaders. A leading contemporary Irish nationalist, Andrew Kettle, regarded her as more able than her brother. He believed she was better able to understand the economics of landlordism and how Irish independence could be achieved, noting, 'Anna Parnell would have worked the Land League revolution to a much better conclusion than her great brother' (Kettle 1958: 48). Anna Parnell wrote to Taylor from Dublin, pledging her support, openly countering her brother's endorsement of Blunt. Taylor's campaign released the letter to the press. It urged the Irish community in Camberwell to remember the sacrifices that Taylor had made during the Land War on their behalf. It recalled the 'distressing drudgery' of her physical effort at evictions when she had opposed the bailiffs, risking imprisonment herself. It asserted that 'the most enthusiastic and self-sacrificing patriot could have done no more for Ireland than you did' (Anna Parnell, 5 November 1885, MTC, file 18, no. 98).¹⁸

Anna travelled over from Dublin to appear with Taylor at an open-air election meeting. The two women shared a platform in front of a crowd of working people, many of them Irish. Taylor called for the creation of an Irish Parliament, and was 'loudly cheered' for doing so and claimed that women were in the same position that Catholics had been in fifty years earlier, before O'Connell achieved Catholic emancipation. Anna appealed to the Irish electorate to vote for Taylor and again reminded them that she had made a significant contribution to the success of the Land League and had even physically erected Land League huts herself (*Freemans*

¹⁶ M. Davitt to H. Taylor, 12 November 1885, LSE, MTC, file 13, no. 195

¹⁷ M. Davitt to H. Taylor, 12 November 1885, LSE, MTC, file 13, no. 195 and handbill, *Cuttings and leaflets connected with the election of 1885*, LSE, MTC, box 7.

¹⁸ A. Parnell to H. Taylor, 5 November 1885, LSE, MTC, file 18, no. 98.

Journal, 1885, 24 November: 3). The Land League was an Irish nationalist organisation and support for it was support for the nationalist cause, as Anna was implicitly reminding those present. Katherine Tynan, the poet, recalled in her memoirs that that many joined the Land League only because they saw it as a means of achieving independence: 'The Land League in those days was the expression of the Nationalist spirit in Ireland. I think a good many of us felt the uninspiringness of it but there it was' (Tynan, 1913: 81). In Camberwell North, if not elsewhere at this election, three Home Rulers were openly fighting to secure the Irish vote.

Disappointingly, but predictably, all this campaigning and support were to be in vain. On the first day of the election, 24 November 1885, the Presiding Officer refused to accept Taylor's nomination papers as valid (Smith, 2019). She presented her papers in person and protested vehemently at the decision, declaring his actions were illegal. Wilfrid Blunt described the scene: 'Helen Taylor presented her papers... She was quickly demolished by Sandy Face who read out the Franchise Act' (Longford, 1979: 221). 'Sandy Face' referred to the complexion of the Presiding Officer. The official maintained that, under Section 4 of the Ballot Act, candidates were referred to as 'his' and 'him' and, therefore, women were excluded. The *English Woman's Review* supported Taylor's view that in many other Acts masculine pronouns did actually include women in the meaning and scope of the Act (*Englishwoman's Review*, 1885). The *Leeds Mercury*, however, had previously stated that it would be ridiculous to change constitutional law through 'the action of a knot of Radical socialists' (*Leeds Mercury*, 1885, 21 November: 6). *The Standard* declared that Taylor had shown a lack of knowledge of 'the elementary rules of grammar in the differentiation between masculine and feminine genders' (*The Standard*, 1885, 2 December: 3).

There were those who continued to maintain that Taylor had a legal right to stand for parliament. John Chapman, of the National Liberal Club, believed that the refusal of the Presiding Officer to accept her nomination was 'an abuse of his rightful authority' (John Chapman, 5 December 1885, MTC, file 4, no. 55).¹⁹ The *Law Journal* concluded that Taylor should have sought legal advice before submitting her papers.

¹⁹ J. Chapman to H. Taylor, 5 December 1885, LSE, MTC, file 4, no. 55.

The Returning Officer may have been legally obliged to accept them, despite her name being on them, if they had been submitted by a third party '...but she preferred boldly to avow her sex' (*The Times*, 1885, 27 November: 7). Here is seen Taylor's lack of ability to compromise. She argued with the Presiding Officer over her nomination papers rather than have someone present them on her behalf, because she felt she was morally right. With the triangular contest avoided, Richard Strong was returned as the Liberal member for Camberwell North, a victory for the caucus. Defeat for the Liberal party had been averted until the following year after Parliament's rejection of Gladstone's Home Rule bill which split the party.

Conclusion

This paper has focused on Taylor's campaign not as an historical curiosity, but as an example of the contemporary politics and issues surrounding the 1885 election in Camberwell North. It is an example of the triangular contests which occurred during that election as radical clubs kicked back against the 'wire pullers' of the Liberal party hierarchy. Taylor was presented to the electorate as a true grassroots candidate. This was a direct response to radicals in the constituency, having had the Liberal candidate, Strong, imposed on them. They had seen their first choice of candidate, W. A. Coote, unsuccessful in the candidate ballot of the official Liberal selection Committee. Taylor was President of the Camberwell Radical Club, a local campaigner and a well-known, popular school board member. She was indeed 'The People's Candidate,' despite her privileged position in society. Her grave in Torquay bears evidence of this with its inscription: 'She fought for the People.' The support for Taylor by the radical wing of Irish nationalism, Davitt and Anna Parnell, illustrates the power struggle taking place in the Irish nationalist movement. Both Davitt and Anna had opposed Parnell calling off the Land War and been side-lined by him. Parnell had closed down the Ladies' Land League and marginalised Davitt for his support for land nationalisation. Davitt and Anna publicly supported Taylor as their own non-elite candidate, in opposition to Parnell supporting Blunt, in a battle against the 'wire pullers' of their own movement. The candidature of Taylor was also a test of the 1832 Reform Act and a campaign against the legal barriers barring

women from full citizenship. This dismayed more cautious suffragists. Finally, analysing Taylor's manifesto, in the light of the provenance of contemporary radical and socialist thought, has shown that it would have been instantly recognisable to the electorate and not extraordinary or idiosyncratic in any way. After the campaign Taylor continued to work for land nationalisation and the Moral Reform Union. She made what peace she could with the Liberal Party by campaigning as a member of the Women's Liberal Federation, as one of the suffragists within it. During the 1890s she spent less and less time campaigning and more and more time at her house in Avignon, France, which she had shared all those years ago with John Stuart Mill. Her health declined during the decade and by the early years of the twentieth century she was a frail, confused old lady, shuffling among the leaves of her garden in the South of France (Diary of Mary Taylor, MTC, file 58, no. 4).²⁰ In 1905 her niece, Mary Taylor, persuaded her to return to England. She died in Torquay, aged 75, in 1907, eleven years before the election of the first woman MP, Constance Markiewicz. Taylor's campaign to enter the Houses of Parliament as the first woman MP faded from the historical record until Pugh's article in 1978. Her candidature, and her other political and social campaigning, passed swiftly from the record of the fight for women's citizen rights and the history of the struggle for workers' rights. Perhaps the main reason for the amnesia, other than the fact that she left little in the form of writing except a few lectures and political tracts, is that her campaigns, such as land reform and moral reform, died with her, as did the political ideology of her step-father which had informed them. Land as a politically important question faded with the First World War. The school boards were replaced by the county councils; the London School Board was dissolved in 1903 when the London County Council took over the running of the capital's state school system. Although she had been so active in such modern relevant campaigns such as equal pay for women, equality in the classroom for women teachers and girl pupils and an end to corporal punishment, the demise of the school boards led to a lack of continuity in the campaigns for these causes.

²⁰ Diary of M. Taylor, LSE, MTC, file 58, no. 4.

The Liberal Party itself, with which Taylor had such a strained relationship, had a final flourish in the early twentieth century, with the introduction of pensions for all, but declined as the working class attached its allegiance to the new Labour Party after the First World War. When she died the secretary of the Land Nationalisation Society, Joseph Hyder, wrote to Taylor's niece, Mary, that 'Her death snaps another link with the past'(Joseph Hyder, undated, MTC, file 29, no. 297).²¹ As her own generation passed away, the memory of how influential and active she had been in the last decades of the nineteenth century was forgotten. One person, however, did remember and recorded the importance of the part Taylor had played in the struggle for women's rights. The final word is, therefore, given to her erstwhile political advisor and friend, Frank Soutter. He included Taylor's parliamentary campaign in his 1923 memoirs and emphasised the importance of acknowledging those who had, in previous generations, played their part in the long struggle for women's suffrage and full citizen rights:

In this, the day of its almost complete success, we shall be the better for recollecting the labours of our predecessors. In the heyday of our prosperity it is well to remember that we often reap where others have sown; and of no movement is this more true than it is of that for the equality of sexes before the law (Soutter, 1923: 98).

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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²¹ J. Hyder to M. Taylor, undated, LSE, MTC, file 29, no. 297.

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