In the years between 1880 and 1890, a term emerged on the British electoral platforms — a term whose existence was almost inseparable from the career of one man. The term was Tory Democracy, the man Lord Randolph Churchill.

Today Tory democracy is a commonplace of fact, but in 1880 it was a paradox which inspired the ridicule not only of the Radicals but of the Tories themselves. After all, the Tories were the Conservative party, the party of reaction, and although they had been responsible for the household franchise Reform Act of 1867, they knew that their reasons for this move were self-protective. Much as Disraeli may have sympathised with the working classes, every Conservative knew that the Reform Act was the result of a Liberal majority in the House of Commons, a majority which pressurised the Government into passing this radical bill. For the Tories it was an act of necessity and not of principle. The elections of 1880 seemed to show that this fact had been recognised by the voters, and the Liberals were returned with an enormous majority. The stage was set for an age of Liberal government.

However, the serene confidence of the Liberals (led by Gladstone, the Grand Old Man himself) and the quiescence of the Conservatives (with their leader Disraeli hibernating in the House of Lords as Lord Beaconsfield and Sir Stafford Northcote in the Commons "no more a match for Mr. Gladstone than a wooden three-decker would be for a Dreadnought") was soon to be violently disturbed by the activities of the champion of the new creed of Tory Democracy. What exactly was this ideal? Was it an ideal? Or was it rather a useful and deceptive fiction? The answer lies in the career of Lord Randolph Churchill whose extraordinary rise in the Tory ranks was due partly to the popularity he acquired as a man of the people — as a Tory Democrat or, more correctly, the Tory Democrat.

Churchill's position begins to emerge in two statements made early in his career which were expressions of the politics he saw himself following. The first describes his view of Conservative "principles":

To let things alone as much as we can; to accustom ourselves to look always at the brightest side; to legislate rather for the moment than for the dim and distant future, gratefully leaving that job to posterity, and thus making all classes comfortable—these are, as I understand them, the maxims of what we know as Conservative politics.  

Alongside this he placed the second — a definition of Tory Democracy seen as a creed which ... supports the Tory party because it has been taught by experience and by knowledge to believe in the excellence and the soundness of Tory principles. But Tory Democracy involves also another idea of equal importance. It involves the idea of a Government who in all branches of their policy and in all features of their administration are animated by lofty and by Liberal ideas.

Put them together and what do you get? A perfect paradox which is carefully prevented from achieving the force of a metaphysical poem by the studied vagueness of its terms.
Under these circumstances, what was the point of creating Tory Democracy? Was Randolph Churchill using it to further the interests of the Conservative party? Did he endeavour to promote the well-being of the lower classes by increasing their political powers? Or did he endeavour to promote the well-being of Randolph Churchill?

Winston Churchill, in his biography of his father and Ostrogorski and Harold Gorst in their works, were convinced that Lord Randolph abandoned his aristocratic equals (at least for a large part of his career) to fight for the rights of the people. Certainly this was the impression that Lord Randolph laboured to promote, and for a long time he was successful. Nevertheless, another aspect of his career also began to make an impression and this presented itself in terms neither vague nor paradoxical. It was the expression of a belief in a system of politics guided by a practical and mercenary approach. This approach is reflected on one occasion in Lord Randolph's scornful condemnation of the idealistic Liberals and Radicals who

whenever they attempt to move in the ordinary paths of Government [are unsuccessful because] one of these so-called principles immediately rises up, paralyses their action and makes them an object either of mockery or of passion.?

It is further reflected, even more emphatically, in this statement which Churchill gave as his guiding rule:

Discriminations between wholesome and unwholesome victories are idle and impracticable. Obtain the victory, know how to follow it up and leave the wholesomeness or unwholesomeness to critics.

Could a man who professed a dislike of principles and a belief in obtaining victory at all costs, propound and act in accordance with a legitimate ideal or was the ideal to suffer at the hands of its complex maker?

Having thus found the starting-points on which to base our questioning, we may now begin our investigation of the problem as it developed within the Conservative party, in the House of Commons and in the country at large.

Randolph Churchill made his first great impact in the House of Commons in the course of the Bradlaugh debates which began when the initiative of refusing to allow Bradlaugh take his seat in the House was taken by Sir Henry Wolff. Bradlaugh, the “Iconoclast,” had, in a moment of self-advertising calculation, planned a dramatic scene in which he was to refuse to take the Parliamentary oath. The scene would also have, as a side-effect, the merit of being a highly-effective source of embarrassment to the institution-preserving principles of the Conservatives. Wolff, however, with a shrewd sense of the possibilities of the case, very neatly turned the tables and began what one might call a “deeply removing” campaign in which he called upon Church, Queen and Country in ready succession to condemn the unconstitutional and atheistic professions of Mr. Bradlaugh. Wolff’s attack, although invoking all the elements of British respectability, was merely a tactical move whose primary motive was to inflict a crushing defeat on the Liberal Government. Gladstone received the verbal blows rained upon Bradlaugh firstly because Bradlaugh was a Liberal member and secondly because Liberal principles decreed that Gladstone and his Government defend Bradlaugh’s right to be a “conscientious objector”.

Shortly after the beginning of the “battle,” Wolff was joined by John Gorst, Randolph Churchill and Arthur Balfour. It is significant that because of his ability in swaying his audience, Lord Randolph soon replaced Wolff in the attentions of the House. His first speech against Bradlaugh ended in the beautifully melodramatic gesture of his stamping upon that unfortunate work of Brad-
laugh's entitled “The Impeachment of the House of Brunswick”. To use Winston Churchill’s own words:

Henceforward, upon the Bradlaugh question, he took his natural place as a leader and before two years had passed he was credited by the public with having begun the whole controversy.

Thus Lord Randolph Churchill had, as a matter of course, seized upon the situation to bring himself to the attention of the public — the first part of a practical politician’s programme. But the activities of Lord Randolph and of the “Fourth Party” (as this group, which was the accidental result of this attack upon the Government, came to be known) did not cease here. Having played one game successfully and collected quite a sizeable following in the effort, this group of four ambitious, intelligent and adventurous men, goaded on by a sporting instinct which meant that their “tactics were often conceived amid scenes of levity”, set out on a two-fold scheme. With as much amusement for themselves as possible, they were to try to defeat the Government as often as possible, and also to resurrect the Conservative Opposition. The latter involved an attack upon the “old goat”, Sir Stafford Northcote, and his advisers who galled the small group below the gangway because of their refusal to oppose the Government with enough vigour. It was this part of their role which gave the party much of its popular support. After all, in times of misfortune, an attack upon any “establishment” is bound to be popular, especially if, as in this case, it was based on obvious fact.

Apart from the popular appeal of this branch of their activities, it also seems that their roles appealed to the four men because each one was provided with a means of fulfilling some of his ambitions. For instance, Sir Henry Wolff was able to indulge in a little witty invective on the one hand and a little diplomatic tight-rope walking on the other; John Gorst was enabled to enjoy a little revenge against the leaders of the Conservative party whom he held responsible for the lack of recognition he had received for his past work for the party organisation; Arthur Balfour, by engaging in the attack upon Sir Stafford Northcote, was promoting the chances of his uncle, Lord Salisbury, to succeed to the position of Lord Beaconsfield as the leader of the Tories. As for Lord Randolph, the Fourth Party’s pursuits, either by accident or by design, were soon to become a series of stepping-stones on the road to establishing himself as the shaper of Conservative policy.

The purpose of this rather lengthy digression has been to illustrate another of the aspects of Tory Democracy. Among others, Harold Gorst, the historian of the Fourth Party, particularly emphasised the Tory Democratic nature of the Party. Consequently, it was necessary to examine the formation, aims and actions of the Party. So far, although there is much evidence of popular support, particularly for its foremost member, Randolph Churchill, there is little if any evidence of Tory Democracy. The main claims to this ideal, however, have not yet been examined. The first of these I propose to investigate now, while an evaluation of the second should emerge in the process of my examination of the National Union issue. To begin, then, with the debate over the Employers’ Liability Bill. The Bill was introduced for the working classes by the Liberals, but Lord Randolph and the Fourth Party enhanced their reputations for Tory Democracy by vehemently opposing the Bill on the grounds that it was not liberal enough. So far, so good. But the implication of their opposition was that the Bill was defeated and the working-classes, whether they recognised it or not, were forced by their “champions” to relinquish even the little advantage they would have obtained had the Bill been carried. Clearly the Fourth Party
had again managed to use the working class argument to put the Liberals in a ridiculous position. In this they were simply following their previous policy and Tory Democracy does not seem to have really come into their line of action at all.

Meanwhile, though Lord Randolph was riding the Tory Democratic wave, his efforts to "obtain the victory" continued unflagging. But the victory was not necessarily the victory of Tory Democracy. This becomes particularly evident in three other events in which Lord Randolph played the leading part. The first of these was the Liberal Reform Bill of 1885.

Here we find Lord Randolph apparently trying to play around with party and public opinion and actually coming into conflict with his colleague, Arthur Balfour. The event took place in Edinburgh where both men were on the Conservative platform. Churchill, presumably in the hope of winning the support of borough electors who stood to lose influence by the proposed Reform Bill, spoke against the extension of the franchise. It is likely that, as Lord Randolph later claimed, his speech was calculated to discover whether the Liberals could be opposed on this ground. Whatever his intentions, it is clear that he was working anti-democratically by trying to prevent the extension of the franchise. Nor was this a momentary lapse, as later events were to prove. When the Bill was actually introduced in the House, Lord Randolph again tried to thwart both the Government and the reform by agitating for the Bill's postponement; but, after having found that there was no support forthcoming, he made a complete reversal and henceforth became the chief protagonist of the reform. In this light, Churchill's efforts to explain his conversion as the result of Balfour's convincing speech at Edinburgh do not quite seem to fit the facts. Once more everything suggests that Churchill was trying to learn which way to act in a politically expedient manner.

So much for his democracy, and as for what he called the "lofty" and "Liberal" sentiments of Tory Democracy, perhaps the best source of information is his attitude towards Ireland and Home Rule. To begin with, his reaction to Coercion measures seems to have been primarily geared to the work of consistent opposition. When the Liberals sought to abandon Coercion, Lord Randolph was firmly against the move; when the Liberals found themselves in a position where they had to restore Coercion, Lord Randolph changed his stand and opposed this move. Churchill argued that the ending of coercive measures would bring an increase of violence in Ireland, while the later restoration after a period of freedom would have exactly the same result. The occurrences in Ireland appear to have borne him out in this, but the sad fact is that the obstructionist methods of men such as Churchill were one of the principal causes for the situation developing in Ireland as it did. Whenever the Liberals introduced a Bill to relieve the Irish of some irritation the obstructionists immediately went into action to prevent its passage.

Returning once more to Lord Randolph, his position appears in true perspective when, as a member of the Conservative Government, he followed an absolutely coercionist course. In other words, it is very likely that, in his earlier actions, his efforts were directed against the Liberal Government, with very small, if any, consideration for the plight of Ireland. For further evidence of his mercenary intentions, there is his attempted one-year Amendment to the Coercion Bill, in which even his friends of the Fourth Party refused to support him. Nevertheless, it was only through the persuasion of his father that he was induced to give up the plan. The risk of civil war in Ireland did not concern him as long as the Liberals could be defeated in the House.
This attitude repeatedly reappears in all his dealings with the Irish question. Certainly he, too, was an exponent of the Tory policy of “killing Home Rule by kindness” and there are several speeches that can be quoted in which he urges the Conservatives to adopt a generous policy towards Ireland (this is especially true in the early phase of his career), but off the platform (and later in his career) the true tenor of his generosity is revealed. For example, his own “generous” work for Irish education:

It is the Bishops entirely to whom I look in the future to turn, to mitigate or to postpone the Home Rule onslaught. Let us only be occupied a year with the Education Question. By that time, I am certain, Parnell’s party will have become seriously disintegrated. Personal jealousies, Government influences, Davitt and Fenian intrigues will all be at work on the devoted band of eighty: and the Bishops who, in their hearts hate Parnell and don’t care a scrap for Home Rule, having safely acquired control of Irish education, will, according to my calculation, complete the rout.24

This from the same man who, Lord Rosebery says, quoting Lord Randolph’s own words, made a deal with Parnell promising “no Coercion” if he deserted the Liberals to support the Conservatives.25 And it was still the same man who, in anticipation of the Ulster problem (which he played a large part in creating), coined the battle-cry of the Unionists — “Ulster will fight and Ulster will be right”,26 and who declared that

even if the Government went out and Gladstone introduced the Home Rule Bill, I should not hesitate, if the other circumstances were favorable, to agitate Ulster even to resistance beyond constitutional limits... Lancashire would follow Ulster, and would lead England...27

His shrewd awareness of the forces at work enabled him to promote “amorally,” one would have to say, the fight to “obtain the victory,” without any thought for principles — humane, constitutional, democratic or otherwise.

So far, Tory Democracy, considered as a part of Randolph Churchill’s career, both as an independent and a member of the Fourth Party, has not made a particularly favourable impression. However, the great battleground of Tory Democracy has not yet been considered. The controversy took place this time not within the House of Commons but within the Conservative party itself. It began in 1883 with a series of letters28 written to the Times pointing out the decline of the Conservative party and criticising the dual leadership. The letters were connected with the unveiling of the statue of Lord Beaconsfield — the first letter denounced the selection of Sir Stafford Northcote to unveil the statue; the second declared that:

Lord Salisbury, Lord Cairns and Sir Stafford Northcote all possess great and peculiar qualifications. If the electors are in a negative state of mind they may accept Sir Stafford Northcote; if they are in a cautious frame of mind they may shelter themselves under Lord Cairns; if they are in an English frame of mind they will rally around Lord Salisbury.29

It continued in a slightly Tory Democratic vein with the added appeal of sarcasm:

Many of the party in the country are determined that their efforts and their industry shall not result merely in the short-lived triumph and speedy disgrace of bourgeois placemen, “honorable” Tadpoles, hungry Tapers, Irish lawyers. The Conservative party was formed for better ends than these...30

The final letter was still more radical, not because of its appeal to Tory Democracy but because of the extraordinary claims that it implied. Neither Sir Stafford Northcote nor Lord Salisbury were considered by this stage for the Tory leadership. What the party needed was to be represented by, and identified with, a statesman who knows how to sway immense masses of the working classes, and who, either by his genius or his eloquence, or by all the varied influences of an ancient name, can move the hearts of households.31
There was one man who fitted this description better than all others and that was Lord Randolph Churchill himself. The challenge was made and so began the intricate manoeuvrings to obtain control of the National Union of Conservative Associations and, at the same time, to “secure substantial authority and financial independence” for that body.\(^\text{32}\)

It is vital to realise that the second of these aims, that of securing authority and independence for the Union, is the one that is lauded as having been inspired by Tory Democratic ideals. The reason for this is that the National Union was the representative body of the Conservative Associations which were that part of the party machinery which catered for and consisted of the popular elements of the Conservative party. That is to say that if the National Union’s authority in the party increased, the supposedly oligarchical rule of the Conservative organisation would be replaced by a democratic system. Randolph Churchill was not one to avoid emphasising this aspect of his plans particularly as at Birmingham when he was speaking to a working class audience:

> Now some of our friends in the party have a lesson to learn which they do not seem disposed to learn. The Conservative party will never exercise power until it has gained the confidence of the working classes; and the working classes are quite determined to govern themselves, and will not be either driven or hoodwinked by any class or class interests. Our interests are perfectly safe if we trust them fully, frankly and freely; but if we oppose them and endeavour to drive them and hoodwink them, our interests, our Constitution and all we love and revere will go down. If you want to gain the confidence of the working classes, let them have a share and a large share — a real share and not a sham share — in your party Councils and in your party government . . .\(^\text{33}\)

Making this sort of speech, condemning the old men of the party, and having the support of Wolff and Gorst on the Council of the Union, Churchill’s influence grew rapidly until he was finally elected chairman of the Council by a vote of 17 to 15 over Lord Percy, the candidate of the party leaders.

The struggle with the “oligarchy”, which now came to a head, was nominally directed against the Central Committee; but, since the Committee’s executive consisted of the party leaders, it was really a battle with Lord Salisbury and Sir Stafford Northcote for the finances of the Tory party. The ultimate prize for the victor was the control of the Conservative party.

After a series of upsets and recoveries, including a resignation from the chairmanship and then a temporary reconciliation with Lord Salisbury, Randolph Churchill and his supporters gained a small but working majority in the Union Council. This was the long-awaited hour of Tory Democracy. Lord Randolph was in a position to bargain with the Tory leaders for recognition of the popular element’s right to take part in shaping Conservative policy. The collapse came with a vengeance. Declaring that with the possibility of a Liberal dissolution in the near future it was necessary for the Conservatives to present a united front, Churchill abandoned the claims of the Union. And, after a token settlement (including a dinner for the Council . . . a sort of meal for the condemned men arrangement . . .), the party “laid the National Union peacefully to rest.”\(^\text{34}\)

This desertion of Tory Democracy coincided with the complete collapse of the Fourth Party. When Churchill began his offensive against Lord Salisbury, he inevitably lost the support of Balfour, and now that he ended the bid for power in the party machine, he, even more inevitably, lost the support as well as the friendship of Gorst, who naturally felt himself much-deceived. Although his assistance had been used from the beginning, he was not consulted over the fatal decision, and this decision was to put an end to his career as a member of Parliament.
Why, then, had Churchill, with this one act, eradicated the two main sources of his power — Tory Democracy and the Fourth Party? One reason appears to be that, because of his increasing influence in the House and now through the influence in the Union which he was ready to relinquish, Lord Randolph had reached such a prominent position that the leadership of the House of Commons was within his reach. In this case it would serve his own interests to allow the control of the party's finances to stay with the leaders. Furthermore, it is likely that his continued precarious position and small majority had convinced him that democracy was too fickle a mistress. Since the National Union was not entirely in his grasp, it would not serve his purposes to give it too much power. In other words, obtaining the victory did not mean a victory for Tory Democracy but for Randolph Churchill. Tory Democracy of the kind proclaimed at Birmingham had served its purpose to be replaced once more by the democracy of the social welfare scheme outlined in Churchill's previous "Elijah's Mantle" article. It was

a scheme of social progress and reform, of dimensions so large and widespread that many volumes would not suffice to explain its details... A social revolution which, passing by and diverting attention from wild longings for organic change, commences with the little peddling Boards of Health... the amelioration of the dwellings of the poor... [the] ideal of compulsory national insurance, includes... temperance propaganda, preserves and reclaims commons and open spaces... constructs people's parks, collects and opens to the masses museums, libraries, art galleries, does not disdain the public wash-houses... [In this way] the "Tory Democracy" may yet exist...

This was a democracy which, to be quite blunt, was no democracy at all. Like that brain-child of Wolff and Churchill, the Primrose League, with its "knights" and "dames" and its "Grand Habitation," it was part of a lovely fairy-tale told to put the children to sleep.

Lord Randolph did eventually succeed in 1886 to the position of leader of the House of Commons with the added role of Chancellor of the Exchequer. But unfortunately for him, his temperament and ambition were still not appeased, and he continued stubbornly to refuse to accept anyone else's orders. His conflicts with Lord Salisbury did not cease until finally even that man's patience wore thin and was forced to give him the ultimatum to do as he was told or else... Lord Randolph, hoping to rally support with his usual tactics, resigned. However, this time people were tired of him — too many critics had been concerned with the "unwholesomeness" of his victories, and this time he was forced to face defeat. From this time onward, Lord Randolph Churchill existed as a political force no longer.

In summary, then, and with an attempt at a wider vision, we may see Tory Democracy as part of a larger political scheme. It was one man's answer to the Birmingham Caucus of the Liberal-Radical coalition. It recognised the people so that it could use them. The reason for the success of Churchill's gestures, even if they were empty, is that he at least conceded to the presence of the people, which was more than many of the Tory members did. Nevertheless, Tory Democracy was still an empty gesture. Fittingly, it became the rallying-cry of the Primrose League which, like the Caucus, was a well-organised system of bribing the voter. Through the agency of "dinners," "teas" and "entertainments," with occasional speeches from M.P.'s, he was persuaded to vote for the right party.

Thus, clearly, quite apart from the insincerity of the claims made for Tory Democracy by Lord Randolph, there were other factors which prevented this creed from becoming a reality. For one thing, Tory Democracy could not
properly exist until the democratic element became a reactionary element supporting the country's institutions. When the interests of the ultra-Tory and the democrat began to coincide, then Tory Democracy would become a reality. This union was partly brought about by the Irish problem in which the Home Rule issue brought 20 years of Conservative Government. As well as this, the right of the masses to shape policy, the policy of any party, could not become a fact until the people themselves were aroused to a pitch where they themselves really set out to gain this power and would not be taken in by fairy-tales. To a certain extent this stage was reached in the course of the Irish question. To a certain extent this stage has been reached today.

NOTES

4. Ibid.
8. Ibid., vol. 1, p.233.
11. Gorst, op. cit., p.191. I emphasise this because, no doubt, this was a vital factor in the existence of the Party: the men simply enjoyed each other's company.
12. See H. Gorst, op. cit., ch. 1.
13. It is worthwhile noting that Sir Henry Wolff was the only member of the Party to retain the friendship of all the members as well as of all their opponents.
14. H. Gorst, op. cit., p.84.
15. A. Balfour, op. cit., p.49.
16. See H. Gorst, op. cit., ch. v.
18. Ibid., vol. 1, Appendix III.
19. Ibid., vol. 1, Appendix III.
20. Ibid., vol. 1, P.181.
22. H. Gorst, op. cit., p.156.
25. Lord Rosebery, Lord Randolph Churchill, London, 1906 — the actual passage runs: "Randolph's own statement was that 'there was no compact or bargain of any kind: but I told Parnell when he sat on that sofa that if the Tories took office and I was a member of their Government, I could not consent to renew the Crimes Act. Parnell replied, 'In that case, you will have the Irish vote at the elections.'" 
28. The first letter was anonymous, signed by "A Tory," while the other two were signed by Churchill. The dates of the letters were March 29th, April 2nd, and April 19th.
30. Ibid., vol. 1, p.240.
31. Ibid., vol. 1, p.183.
34. Ibid., vol. 1, p.359.
35. This is the suggestion made by Balfour, op. cit., pp.170-172.
37. A very good picture of the situation is presented from Lord Salisbury's point of view in Lady G. Cecil, Life of Robert, Marquis of Salisbury, vol. 3.
38. Ostrogorski, op. cit., esp. chs. vi and viii.