

Long, Walter Hume

by Patrick Maume

Long, Walter Hume (1854–1924), 1st Viscount Long, politician, was born 13 July 1854 at Bath, Somerset. He was the eldest of five sons and five daughters of Richard Penruddocke Long (1825–75), Wiltshire landowner and conservative MP, and his wife Charlotte Anna (née Hume; d. 1899) who came from a family of Wicklow landowners. In his memoirs Long claimed to be ‘a citizen of the United Kingdom in the fullest sense of the words’ since his paternal grandmother was a Scot, his mother was Irish, and he spent the first twelve years of his life on a Welsh estate owned by his family. While he was growing up Long often visited the estate of his Wicklow relatives at Humewood; his maternal grandfather, William Wentworth Fitzwilliam Hume (afterwards Dick), was MP for Wicklow, 1852–80. For much of his life he was a regular visitor to Ireland for fox hunting and other social purposes, and he had a wide network of Irish contacts. He was occasionally accused of ‘Hibernian impetuosity’, though in 1907 Lloyd George famously mocked him as ‘an amiable Wiltshire Orangeman’ (Kendle, 206, 209), suggesting that he was an outsider exploiting Ulster fanaticism for political gain. His links with Ireland were reinforced when he married Lady Dorothy Blanche Boyle (1858–1938), daughter of the ninth earl of Cork and Orrery, on 1 August 1878; the Corks were strongly associated with Wiltshire as well as Ireland, and Long's mother-in-law was a daughter of the first marquess of Clanricarde. Long and his wife had two sons and three daughters.

Long was educated by a private tutor, at a small preparatory school (which he compared to Dickens's Dotheboys Hall), at Harrow, and at Christ Church, Oxford, which he left in 1877 without taking a degree. His father's early death in 1875 meant that Long had to take responsibility for the family estate when barely twenty-one, and his failure to restrict the extravagance of his mother and a younger brother led to financial liabilities which caused the sale of most of the estate shortly before the first world war. He served as conservative MP for North Wiltshire in 1880–85, then moved to the East Wiltshire constituency because of boundary changes. From 1886 to 1892 he was parliamentary secretary to the local government board, with particular responsibility for the poor law system; he helped to draft the 1888 Local Government Act and earned a reputation as a capable administrator.

Long lost his seat at the 1892 general election but was returned for Liverpool West Derby at the beginning of 1893. In 1900 he was deselected because of Liverpool Orange hostility to the alleged sympathy of the conservative government for religious ritualism and its supposed appeasement of the Church of Rome; he then moved to Bristol South. Long served as opposition front bench spokesman on local government (1893–5), as president of the board of agriculture (1895–1900), and as president of the local government board (1900–05). During this period he built up an extensive network of contacts among backbenchers and the unionist grass

roots; although handicapped by a choleric temper (which caused him to make biting statements without sufficient thought) he developed a reputation as an honest and straight forward politician.

In March 1905 Long was appointed chief secretary for Ireland after the resignation of George Wyndham (qv). The choice of Long was intended to reassure hardline Irish unionists who had helped to precipitate Wyndham's downfall. Although Long retained Sir Antony MacDonnell (qv), a catholic with nationalist leanings, as under-secretary, his term in office was marked by undisguised favouritism towards unionists in appointments to public office, which had the useful effect of silencing hardline critics who hoped for promotion. He rigorously enforced the laws against nationalist protestors: for example, cart drivers who displayed their names in Irish on their vehicles were prosecuted on the grounds that such inscriptions were 'illegible'. He cracked down on cattle-driving protests directed against graziers in the west and midlands and influenced the administration of land purchase in a manner favourable to the landlords. And he embarked on an RIC recruitment drive to reverse a decline in police numbers, which had been allowed after the passage of the Wyndham Land Act on the assumption that land agitation would decrease and make savings possible.

Long's actions were immensely popular among Irish unionists; although he lost his Bristol seat at the 1906 general election which returned a liberal government, he was returned as unionist MP for Dublin South County. After the death of Edward Saunderson (qv) in October 1906 Long succeeded him as leader of the Irish unionist MPs and of the Irish Unionist Alliance (IUA); in January 1907 he was elected chairman of the Ulster Unionist Council (UUC), and he subsequently established the Joint Committee of Unionist Associations of Ireland, which tried to coordinate the activities of the IUA and UUC. In January 1907 Long oversaw the formation of the Union Defence League (UDL), becoming its president. This was initially intended to oppose the devolutionary Irish Council Bill. After the collapse of that bill the UDL coordinated Irish unionists' links with their British allies, collected material for unionist propaganda, and organised the participation of Irish activists in British elections. In 1914 the UDL launched the 'British covenant' in support of Ulster, and the organisation remained the principal port of call in London for Irish unionist activists until the treaty. Long was also president of the Budget Protest League (1909–10), formed to oppose Lloyd George's budget of 1909.

In 1908 Long secured the conservative candidacy for the Strand division of Middlesex. After his election there in January 1910 (leaving Bryan Cooper (qv) to succeed him in Dublin South) he resigned the Irish unionist leadership, in which his place was taken by Edward Carson (qv). During the passage of the 1911 Parliament Act, Long publicly supported the 'Hedger' position (that the lords should acquiesce in the limitation of their veto) rather than the 'Ditcher' view (that they should resist to the last), since he feared that a mass creation of liberal peers would leave the government in complete control. After the resignation of Arthur

Balfour (qv) Long was a prominent candidate for the conservative leadership. While describing himself as 'a moderate tariff reformer' he had resisted attempts by 'Whole Hogger' protectionist supporters of Austen Chamberlain to purge the remaining unionist free-traders; he was seen as the favoured candidate of the traditionalist tory backbenches as against Chamberlain's business and liberal unionist backers. Since neither group was likely to accept the victory of the other, Long and Chamberlain stood down in favour of a compromise candidate Andrew Bonar Law. In Long's case this decision was partly necessitated by his health: from early in the century he had suffered from chronic sciatica and neuritis, which were exacerbated by overwork and hunting accidents, and he was to suffer periods of severe ill health for the rest of his life.

During the ensuing Ulster crisis, in addition to his English and Irish campaigns on behalf of the unionists (during which he publicly predicted that if home rule were conceded it would be necessary to reconquer Ireland within twenty years), Long participated indirectly in gun-running activities through his private secretary, Sir Philip Bull, and appears to have known in advance of the landing at Larne of a cargo of rifles for the UVF in 1914. While denouncing any suggestion of adopting a federalist compromise, Long maintained tenuous contacts with the 'conciliationist' William O'Brien (qv) through Moreton Frewen (qv) – he had made a donation of £2,500 to O'Brien in 1910. The chronically optimistic O'Brien later called Long 'as romantic a lover of Ireland as his mother's Irish blood could make him' (O'Brien, 74). In 1915 O'Brien privately made the bizarre suggestion that Long could solve the Irish problem if he were made lord lieutenant with cabinet rank. As late as 1918 Long tried to recruit O'Brien – by then in fact a supporter of Sinn Féin – into a federalist 'moderate party'.

While publicly threatening civil war (on the assumption that this was the best way to get the Asquith government to back down) Long privately showed some willingness to accept Ulster exclusion from the provisions of the home rule act if this became necessary. In the coalition cabinet of 1915 Long became president of the local government board, and drew on his network of southern unionist contacts to provide him with data on the Irish situation. After the Easter rising he joined Lord Lansdowne (qv) and Lord Robert Cecil in resisting proposals to grant immediate home rule in return for temporary partition, while encouraging the (abortive) attempt of Somerset Saunderson to stir up an Irish unionist revolt against Carson's willingness to accept six-county (rather than nine-county) partition. His actions appear to have been motivated partly by concern for the southern unionists and belief that a home rule Ireland would rapidly become an uncontrollable wartime security threat, partly by anger at accusations of betrayal (from such hardline figures as the *Morning Post* editor H. A. Gwynne), and partly by sheer love of intrigue. In order to avoid the dissident ministers' resignation, the government watered down these proposals to such an extent that they were rejected by the Irish Parliamentary Party. Long then turned down an offer of the chief secretaryship (he refused the post again in 1918) on the grounds that his strong identification with unionism would hinder a settlement.

On the formation of the Lloyd George government in December 1916 Long was moved to the colonial office, where he remained until the end of the war. From early 1917 he emerged as the principal cabinet advocate of an Irish settlement based on the creation of a 'federal' (in fact devolutionary) system of government throughout the UK; this was based on an acceptance that a return to the pre-war situation was impracticable, and on the increasingly tenuous hope of saving something for the southern unionists from the wreckage. He supported the abortive 1917–18 Irish Convention. In 1918 he chaired a cabinet committee delegated to draw up a home rule bill for Ireland, whose provisions were to be implemented simultaneously with conscription; at the same time he advocated 'firm government' in Ireland. He was a leading advocate of conscription for Ireland and a principal mover in the arrest in 1918 of Sinn Féin leaders on the basis of a supposed 'German plot'.

In the December 1918 general election Long was elected for the St George's division, Westminster, and was subsequently appointed first lord of the admiralty. In October–December 1919 he chaired the committee that drew up the Government of Ireland Bill; he helped to shepherd it through the house of commons, giving the Ulster unionists a pledge (for which he claimed cabinet approval) that if they gave their full support to the bill they would be given complete control of the six-county area and its boundaries would not be tampered with. At the same time Long was one of the strongest cabinet advocates of a hardline security policy, and he gained added influence from mid-1920 by his service on the cabinet committee on Ireland; he declared that if southern Ireland failed to accept the terms of the Government of Ireland Act it should be subjected to direct rule as a crown colony.

Long's health had been in decline since the beginning of the first world war, and was further affected by the loss of two of his children: his eldest son was killed in action in January 1917 and the Longs attributed the death of a daughter in 1920 to exhaustion brought on by wartime nursing. He increasingly delegated ministerial duties to his junior minister, James Craig (qv), and was bedridden for long periods with spinal arthritis. Late in 1920 Long suffered a stroke; he resigned from the cabinet on 12 February 1921 and was elevated to the peerage on 4 June as Viscount Long of Wraxall. His withdrawal, together with that of Bonar Law, who resigned on grounds of ill health, played a significant role in creating the conditions for the Anglo-Irish truce. But Long regarded the conceding of a boundary commission in the 1921 treaty as a breach of his pledge to the Ulster unionists; he reiterated this view in correspondence with former colleagues, and arranged for it to be made public after his death. He died 26 September 1924 at his home, Rood Ashton, Trowbridge, Wiltshire.

Long has often been dismissed as a diehard backwoodsman. More recently his abilities as an administrator and political operator have been reassessed, and his influence on shaping the Anglo-Irish settlement of 1914–21 recognised. It remains the case, however, that he was a man of limited vision who underestimated the strength of Irish nationalism and played a considerable role in blocking attempts

at a compromise settlement before coming to advocate one himself. As Carson complained during the 1916 negotiations, 'The worst of Walter Long is that he never knows what he wants but is always intriguing to get it' (Jackson, 193). Long's papers are in the Wiltshire Record Office, Trowbridge, and the British Library.

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W. Long, *Memories* (1923); William O'Brien, *The Irish revolution and how it came about* (1923); Eunan O' Halpin, *The decline of the union: British government in Ireland, 1892–1920* (1987); J. A. Kendle, *Walter Long, Ireland, and the union, 1905–1920* (1992); Patrick Maume, *The long gestation: Irish nationalist political life, 1891–1918* (1999); Alvin Jackson, *Home rule* (2003); Patrick Maume and Cornelius O'Leary, *Controversial issues in Anglo–Irish relations, 1910–1921* (2004); ODNB