As with most other events, the advent of the General Strike exposed a further series of divisions in the Liberal ranks. Although there was much sympathy with the miners among many Liberals, the party recognised that the Strike was in effect directly challenging the Government. It was a challenge that few Liberals could support. The outstanding exception was Lloyd George.

The Liberal Shadow Cabinet made clear its position at the outset: all the resources of the Government should be used to achieve victory over the strike. As if to reinforce Liberal opinion that the strike must be crushed, Simon warned the trade union leaders that they stood liable at law to damages ‘to the uttermost farthing’ of their possessions – a highly dubious assertion. But whilst Simon was saying exactly the words that made music in Conservative ears, Lloyd George was adopting a more radical position.

He wrote to Sir Godfrey Collins (the Liberal Chief Whip) declining to attend the Liberal Shadow Cabinet meeting fixed for 10 May. Lloyd George declared that he would not join in denouncing the strike unless the Government’s handling of the situation and its refusal to negotiate were also denounced. Although Asquith seemed at first to react calmly, on 20 May he took issue with Lloyd George, denouncing him roundly to the delight of his followers.

The uneasy shadow war between the two antagonists was over: their last battle was under way. But it was a battle in which Asquith was to emerge the loser. A most acrimonious exchange of letters and views took place. On 1 June, 12 Shadow Cabinet Liberals wrote to Asquith, supporting his stand against Lloyd George. Its bitter language marked a new degree of acrimony in a struggle never lacking in vitriol.

Though Lloyd George had secured his position as Chairman by 26 votes to seven, it was unclear that he would win so easily if a vote of confidence was required. But, having assured his right-wing supporters
that he had no intention of allying with Labour, Lloyd George won by 20 votes to ten. At this moment, Asquith suffered a stroke on 12 June, keeping him out of politics for three months. Five days later, the annual meeting of the National Liberal Federation began at Weston-super-Mare. Though recriminations were kept out, and a virtually unanimous resolution of support for Asquith was carried, these events were only shadow politics. In October, Asquith resigned the Leadership. He died on 15 February 1928.

In the circumstances of October 1926, the Liberals had to look to Lloyd George. Without him, the party was both leaderless and penniless. Knowing the strength of his position, now Asquith was removed from politics, Lloyd George laid down his terms. His price was nothing less than full control of the party machine, together with the departure or retirement of those Asquithians he so disliked. Lloyd George’s offer of massive financial aid to the party meant the end for Phillipps, Gladstone and Hudson.1

Lloyd George was intent on a new broom. In place of the departed Asquithians, a new appointment of great importance for the future history of the party was made. The new head of the party organisation was Sir Herbert Samuel. It was an inspired choice, for Samuel was one of the few Liberals acceptable to all sections of the party, since during the bitter internal quarrels in the party he had been High Commissioner in Palestine.

The choice of Samuel to head the party machine was the first step towards revival. But Lloyd George’s greatest contribution was in the field of policy. During 1925, with Asquith still leader of the party, Lloyd George had poured money and resources into devising and producing new Liberal policies – even though few Liberals except Lloyd George and his associates took much part in their formulation.

The first of the new policies – the land scheme – had already been published in October 1925. It had been greeted with mixed feelings. The report of the ‘Land Inquiry Committee’, published in book form as *Land and the Nation*, but popularly known as the Green Book, aroused criticism, both of its contents and of the way in which it appeared.2 Further opposition, from candidates and Liberal Associations, flared when it was announced that Lloyd George had founded a new organisation, the Land and Nation League, to campaign for the implementation of the Green Book. Despite opposition to both his methods and his proposals, Lloyd George had carried on regardless. His next major contribution was in the field of unemployment, where a ‘Liberal Industrial Inquiry’ had been set up in 1925. A remarkable team of politicians and economists,