Liberal Democrat History Group

Newsletter 16   September 1997   £2.50

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Newsletter 16: September 1997

INTO THE LIMELIGHT.

Labour replaced the Liberals as the main opposition party in the
1920s. Two articles in this issue examine the relationship between
Labour and Liberal votes – in the 1950s (Peter Joyce, page 6)
and the 1990s (John Curtice, page 2).

A Liberal Democrat History Group Fringe Meeting

From Beveridge to Blair: Reform of the Welfare State

with Frank Field MP (Minister of State, DSS) and Nick Timmins. Chair: Archy Kirkwood MP.
6.15pm, Monday 22 September (Eastbourne); for full details see back page.

So How Well Did We Do?

A critical look at the Liberal Democrat performance in the 1997 election;

*by **John Curtice**.*

Taken by surprise at the scale of 'New Labour's' election victory, few media commentators have paid much attention to the Liberal Democrats' achievements in the 1997 general election. Yet with 46 seats, the party emerged from the election with its largest Westminster army since 1929. It was little short of the kind of outcome of which the SDP/Liberal Alliance had dreamed in the heady days of the early 1980s. So just what should we make of the Liberal Democrat performance in 1997? And where might the party go from here?

There is certainly much for the Liberal Democrats to cheer about in the election result. Some key elements in the party's election strategy were clearly successful. It benefited from tactical voting, aided and abetted by the strategy of targeting. Local election success helped to contribute to parliamentary success. And in apparently finally breaking the seemingly impregnable barrier posed by the single-member plurality electoral system, the party has helped to raise new questions about the value of a system which it has long wanted to change.

It is important to be aware just how much the party's haul of seats was far greater than could have been anticipated. If the movement of votes had been the same in every constituency, the Liberal Democrats would have won 28 seats, not 46. But the movement of votes was anything but uniform. Rather, voters tended to opt for whichever opposition party they reckoned could best defeat the local Tory.

The pattern is quite clear from Table 1. Here we look at what happened in those seats where the Tories started off with at least a third of the vote, and divide these seats up according to their tactical situation. (Seats where the Tories started off with less than a third of the vote experienced a systematically lower swing against the government which has nothing to do with tactical voting.) It is easy, however, to miss the evidence of tactical voting. After all, Labour's vote rose by more than the Liberal Democrats' did in every kind of seat. But what matters is that Labour's vote rose on average by 2–3 points less in those seats where the Liberal Democrats started off in second place and not more than 30% behind Labour, while the Liberal Democrat performance was 2–3 points better. This clearly suggests that some voters in these seats who would otherwise have voted Labour opted instead to back the Liberal Democrats in order to defeat the Conservatives.

Not that tactical voting happened everywhere where the Liberal Democrats started off in second place. In those seats where the Conservatives had more than a 30 point lead, voters appear to have decided that the Liberal Democrats had little chance of winning. In seats too where Labour started off not far behind the Conservatives, such as Aberdeen South and Bristol West, voters often appear to have decided that Labour rather than the Liberal Democrats had the best chance of winning locally. Even amongst those seats where the Conservative lead was less than 30 points, tactical voting was by no means universal. It was evident in most seats where the Liberal Democrats started off less than 15% behind, but thereafter it was to be found in some places and not in others.

Where Labour started off second, in contrast, tactical switching from the Liberal Democrats to Labour occurred almost everywhere, irrespective of how far behind the Labour party started. Evidently voters took account of the position of the two opposition parties in the polls and came to the conclusion that Labour were worth backing almost anywhere. But they generally needed more convincing about the effectiveness of voting Liberal Democrat. There is a clear lesson here; tactical voting is more difficult to stimulate if you are down in the national polls.

But what helped to convince voters that the party was indeed strong enough locally to defeat the incumbent Tory? Here two strategies, one traditional in the party, the other rather less so, both appear to have played their role. Tactical voting was notably more prevalent in those constituencies which had been targeted for up to four years beforehand by providing national support for the local campaign. In those

Table 1: Tactical Voting

Tactical Situation	Change in % voting			No. seats
	Con	Lab	LD	
Lab seats; Con >33.3%	−12.6	+9.6	−0.3	107
Con/Lab seats	−12.6	+13.0	−3.0	181
LD seats; Con >33.3%	−10.6	+9.6	+1.6	8
Con/LD; Con lead <30%	−11.8	+6.5	+1.9	80
Con/LD; Con lead >30%	−13.5	+10.0	−0.8	60
Three-way marginals	−11.6	+10.9	−2.3	18

(Three-way marginals: Con 1st, LD 2nd in 1992, but Lab within 6% of LDs)

seats where the party started off less than 30% behind the Conservatives, its vote rose by 4.0% on average in those seats it targeted, but fell by 2.3% elsewhere. Targeted constituencies were strongly encouraged to emphasise in their literature that the party was ahead of Labour locally, and it is notable that it was Labour rather than the Conservatives who under-performed in these seats.

Good local election performances also seem to have advanced the party's credibility as an effective challenger. For example, in the South of England, the party's local election record in the last parliament was generally far better south and west of a line from Bristol to Oxford to Brighton than immediately to the north and east of it. That pattern was also evident in the general election. In those seats in the south-western corner where the party started off between 15% and 30%, its vote rose on average by 0.4%; to the north and east it fell by 1.9%. Beyond the south of England, some of the party's most spectacular gains, such as Harrogate and Sheffield Hallam, followed upon significant local election achievements.

But if voters' willingness to vote tactically was influenced by the party's position in the national polls, then the party's success in raising its support during the campaign from just 11–12% at the beginning to 16% by the end (and 17% on polling day) also played an important role in the result. True, Liberal Democrat support often rises during an election campaign, but there is no inviolate rule that says this is always so. In 1987, for example, an ill-directed campaign stymied by the differences between Steel and Owen saw support fall. But in emulating the 1992 campaign with a pledge to increase taxes and spend more on education, the Liberal Democrats again cast doubt on the popular contention that voters will not vote for tax increases. Labour's pledge not to raise income tax rates failed to stop a significant slide in its support during the campaign.

Of course, one reason why in the past Liberal Democrat votes have not been translated into seats is that the party's vote was geographically evenly spread. Tactical voting and targeting have helped to counteract that tendency. Liberal Democrat support now varies more from one constituency to another than at any time since the Liberal Party first fought elections on a nation-wide basis in 1974. Meanwhile, the Conservatives' support has become more evenly spread, as its vote fell most in 1997 where it was previously strongest. Conservative support is now only a little less evenly spread than Liberal Democrat support.

These changes are helping to undermine one of the traditional defences of Britain's first-past-the-post electoral system. That system is meant to enable voters to choose between alternative governments. That implies that it should treat the two main parties, at least, in an even-handed fashion. But in 1997 the electoral system exhibited a strong bias against the Conservatives and in favour of Labour. This is shown in Table 2, which shows what the outcome in seats would be at the next election if there was a uniform swing from Labour to the Conservatives across the whole country. On this basis the Conservatives would secure an overall majority only if they were ten points ahead of Labour. Labour, in contrast, could still win an election while more than 1% behind the Conservatives. Such figures will raise new questions about the single-member plurality electoral system at a time when the government is committed to holding a referendum on its future.

Table 2 does. though. also indicate one reason for caution amongst Liberal Democrats about their 1997 performance. If it had been the Conservatives who had won 44% of the vote, and Labour were only on 31%, then even with votes geographically distributed as they actually were in 1997, the Liberal Democrats would have won just 24 seats. The party is still heavily dependent for its success on it being the Conservatives rather than Labour who are unpopular. Labour/Liberal Democrat contests barely exist. There are just seven seats where the Liberal Democrats came second and were within 30% of Labour in first place.

Moreover, while local election success may have had some beneficial impact on the party's ability to win parliamentary votes, it is also clear that voters are still happier to vote Liberal Democrat in local elections than in parliamentary elections. In much of England and Wales county council elections were also held on May 1st. The party may have lost 200 seats, but it still did better in the local elections than in the parliamentary contest. In a dozen constituencies where the results were collected by *The*

Table 2: The Relationship between Seats and Votes						
	% Votes			Seats		
Swing to Con	Con	Lab	Con	Lab	LD	Other
0%	31.5	44.4	165	419	46	29
2%	33.5	42.4	187	403	41	28
4%	35.5	40.4	220	374	37	28
6%	37.5	38.4	252	345	33	29
6.5%	38.0	37.9	259	338	33	29
7.2%	38.7	37.2	270	329	32	28
8%	39.5	36.4	280	320	31	28
9.8%	41.3	34.6	301	300	29	29
10%	41.5	34.4	306	295	29	29
11.5%	43.0	32.9	330	272	27	30
12%	43.5	32.4	341	263	26	29
13%	44.5	31.4	352	254	24	29

(Others include 18 seats elected in Northern Ireland.)

Front page of *Liberal Democrat News* — masthead "Liberal Democrats", No. 459/460, 65p, 9th May 1997. Contents listed: History: have we been here before? 4; Ashdown: the challenge ahead 8; How we got the message across 9; Nicholson: who made the difference. Headline: "LIBERAL DEMOCRAT NEWS — 46 MPs — more than any time since Lloyd George — BREAK THROUGH". "Thank you for helping make the difference by Richard Holme". "Watching the results at the Pizza on the Park election-night party (picture: David Boyle)". "All 46 MPs: see pages 3–9". "Bank: a welcome first Lib Dem step". Photo caption quote: "If, for lack of personal commitment, courage or competence, the two parties fail in this project, then this will be just another new government, with another new programme. We will become just another opposition, opposing them. And the Conservatives, armed with a right-wing agenda and under a right wing leader, will probably — sooner rather than later — sweep back by the very system that has just swept them away. If, between us, we lose this moment, it"

Economist, and where the local elections could be compared unambiguously with the parliamentary outcome, the Liberal Democrats on average won no less than 10% more of the vote in the local than in the parliamentary elections.

But there are other, tougher, questions to be asked about the Liberal Democrat performance in 1997 too. The party may have turned an inauspicious poll rating at the beginning of the campaign into a record haul of seats by the end, but that begs the question of why the party started off in such a weak position in the first place. After all, the party had achieved significant electoral progress when the Conservatives were removed from office in both 1964 and 1974. Why could it not repeat that performance when fighting the most unpopular Conservative government in electoral history? Why did the party instead see its national vote fall for the third election in a row, ending up with its second lowest share of the vote since 1974?

It is worth bearing in mind that the Liberal Democrats' prospects did not always look so bleak during the last parliament. After all, the party won both the Newbury and the Christchurch byelections in 1993. Those victories saw the party's national poll rating rise to well above 20%. But then along came Tony Blair, and the Liberal Democrats' poll rating fell. Indeed, it was the Liberal Democrats, not the Conservatives, who suffered from the advent of 'New Labour'.

Why was this so? It is worth remembering how the party reacted to Tony Blair's accession to the Labour

leadership. It largely welcomed it. It then got mired in incessant press questioning about whether the party was going to end its policy of 'equidistance' between Conservative and Labour – and took 12 months to find the answer. Little wonder the press declared the party both indecisive and irrelevant.

The contrast between the party's tactics then, when its support fell, and its stance during the election, when its support rose, could not have been more dramatic. Whatever the degree of agreement between the two parties on constitutional reform, the Liberal Democrats did not hesitate to attack Labour's reluctance to tax or spend. And despite the conventional wisdom that voters will not vote for higher taxation, Labour's support fell as that for the Liberal Democrats rose.

We should not, of course, jump to conclusions. But the contrasting experiences of 1994 and 1997 certainly raise some important questions. Was attacking 'New Labour' a more effective strategy for winning Liberal Democrat votes than embracing it? Might the party's share of the vote in the 1997 election been significantly higher if the former strategy had been adopted earlier? True, perhaps the closer relationship with Labour made it easier for Labour voters to switch to the Liberal Democrats. But it could also have been true that it was the Liberal Democrats' attacks on Labour for being too soft on tax and spend that made it easier for Labour partisans to switch to the Liberal Democrats and live with their conscience. As yet, answers to these vital questions awaits analysis of survey data from the British Election Study, which is only now becoming available.

It was the Liberal Democrats, not the Conservatives, who suffered from the advent of 'New Labour'.

Of course we cannot ignore the wider picture either. Closer relations with Labour have inaugurated a process that could yet lead to the introduction of proportional representation for Westminster elections. The omens are certainly more promising than many believed possible, with proportional representation promised by the Labour government for European elections and seats at the Cabinet Committee table for Liberal Democrats. Even if it proved an ineffective electoral tool, closer relations may yet prove an important strategic lever. But the onus will be on the party leadership during the course of this parliament to deliver this benefit. Otherwise, attacking looks like good sense.

John Curtice is senior lecturer in politics at the University of Strathclyde and is co-author of How Britain Votes, Understanding Political Change *and* Labour's Last Chance.

Why Didn't the Liberal Party Die?

Duncan Brack reports on the Liberal Democrat History Group fringe meeting at the Liberal Democrat conference in March 1997; with William Wallace.

Ably chaired by Sir Russell Johnston MP, whose own election dated from the end of this period, William Wallace (Lord Wallace of Saltaire) examined the near death and survival of the Liberal Party in the 1950s and '60s .

The 1951 election saw the nadir of the Party's fortunes. Only 109 seats were contested and only six were won (and five of them had been given a clear run by the Conservatives). After 40 years of almost constant decline, it was simply not clear what Liberalism was *for*, particularly when set against the liberal conservatism of Churchill and the Liberal Nationals. Assemblies of 4–500 delegates were badly organised and marked by infighting between the classical economic liberals and the progressives of the Radical Reform Group.

Yet the Liberal Party survived, kept alive by a rump of mostly elderly 'awkward nonconformists' dedicated to their vision of Liberalism. And from the mid 1950s a slow revival set in, given a major boost by the 1956 Suez crisis and the reactionary colonialism of British foreign policy, as Conservatives proved that they were *not* Liberals in disguise. By the end of the decade, party organisation had improved and the progressives had won their fight with the economic liberals, who departed, some to found the Institute of Economic Affairs. New high-profile recruits such as Mark Bonham Carter and Ludovic Kennedy joined the party and helped to give its byelection campaigns wider press coverage.

By 1959 the worst was over; survival had been assured, though success far from guaranteed. The following three years, however, saw the first great Liberal revival, with membership tripling to 300,000, byelection success in Orpington and local election victories too. Lord Wallace identified three main reasons: Labour's third successive election defeat left it with an aura of permanent failure; Jo Grimond proved a very attractive and charismatic leader; and the party's ability to fight byelections properly made it look like an increasingly viable alternative. The incomers to the party can be seen as modernisers, with strong similarities to the new recruits brought into politics by the SDP (though with an interesting correlation to religious (nonconformist, of course) belief – not of the members, but of their parents).

Yet after 1963 the revival faded away. The failure of Macmillan's attempt to join the EEC marked the end of Conservative dominance and a new Labour revival – reinforced by the appearance of the new and radical Labour leader Wilson after Gaitskell's unexpected death. The 1964 election saw a small Labour majority, and opened the gates to a still-unexplored episode in Liberal history, Grimond's attempt to cooperate with Wilson in Parliament. Wilson played Grimond along until the opinion polls turned in Labour's favour in the autumn of 1965; his conference speech destroyed Liberal hopes and marked the beginning of the end for the Liberal leader. Although the party gained 12 seats in the 1966 election, it had no obvious role to play against the background of Labour's large majority.

What was the legacy of the first Liberal revival? Although most of the new members departed when circumstances shifted for the worse, what was left was a more coherent and better-organised party. Those who stayed maintained the party through the grim period of the late '60s, produced the Red Guards of the Young Liberals, and community politics, and provided the backbone of the Liberal revival of the early '70s. And crucially, they knew that politics could be difficult – unlike the new recruits of the '60s (and, 20 years later, the new Social Democrats) who thought everything would be easy.

The discussion after William Wallace's talk benefited from many who had become active during the period. It was generally agreed that the European issue was crucial to revival, helping to lend coherence and forward-thinking to the Liberal platform, building on the internationalism which had helped keep Liberalism alive. Grimond's capacity to take an issue and project it was important, even if he had to be convinced (by Arthur Holt) that Europe was the right one; and his ability to come over well on television helped. Suez was important in attracting Liberal support, but it was symptomatic of a wider reaction against Conservatism, and a desire for change, particularly amongst young people.

The question of why the Liberal Party came so close to extinction was also considered. The Asquith–Lloyd George split had divided the party right down to the postwar period, contributing to a backward-looking image of irrelevancy. But past memories can also be allies. Sir Russell believed he had first been elected partly on distant recollections of Gladstone's egalitarianism of the 1880s; as he said, Liberalism survived not just on nonconformity but also on romance. Clement Davies' decision to keep the party out of coalition with Churchill – and hence, alive – in 1951 was perhaps his greatest service to Liberalism. Leading Liberals such as Holt, Wade, Byers and, later, Mark Bonham Carter ('the party's 'lost leader', according to one contributor) helped keep the organisation together so that it was able to benefit from the growing disenchantment of the progressive middle classes with Conservative reaction and Labour class and union obsession. Perhaps above all else, Liberals never – quite – stopped believing in themselves and their cause.

The Labour Party and the Pursuit of the Liberal Vote, 1945-1959

*Labour made a determined effort to absorb the Liberal vote when the party seemed to be in terminal decline after 1945. **Peter Joyce** tells the story.*

The relationship between the Liberal Democrats and the Labour Party has been a subject of political significance in recent years. This brief article plots a relatively neglected area of British postwar political history and examines attempts made by the Labour Party to make inroads into the electoral support of the Liberal Party. The period chosen for this study, c. 1945–59, was a time when the Liberal Party was a declining political force, prompting Labour to seek the absorption of Liberal support into their party by arguing the case for progressives to ally themselves under one political banner. The 1959 general election evidenced a revival of Liberal fortunes. This situation not only caused some within the Labour Party to rethink their attitude towards the Liberal Party but also made it possible for Liberals to go on the offensive and seek, through Grimond's strategy of the realignment of the left, to offer progressives the possibility of securing joint action within a newly-constructed political vehicle.

This article seeks to examine the arguments which were presented by the Labour Party to secure progressive unity, the rationale for pursuing such an objective and the implications which it posed for the subsequent development of both political parties.

Progressive Unity

The 'Popular Front'

The project of a 'popular front' originated in the 1930s and sought to unite all parties on the left of the political spectrum in opposition to the Conservative Party and the National Government. Its pivot was 'an understanding between the two largest parties – Liberal and Labour'.[1] Although this form of joint action attracted support from members of the Labour and Liberal Parties (Lady Megan Lloyd George being active in discussions to promote such an objective[2]), it failed to secure official endorsement by either. The leaders of both parties were signatories to a manifesto which was issued following a meeting at the Albert Hall in December 1936, but were unable to agree on any further progress which was compatible with the concept of a popular front. Against a background of unhappiness with the treatment they had received from Labour when they put this party into office in 1924 and supported the government between 1929 and 1931, Liberals put forward two basic objections to a popular front in the 1930s.

First, they opposed Labour's socialist programme, as this entailed abolishing private enterprise. Liberals supported the latter but wished to diffuse ownership. It was further perceived that the nationalisation of all the means of production, distribution and exchange would involve the suppression of liberty which Liberals sought to promote.[3] Second, Liberals were sceptical about the effectiveness of the electoral arrangements in the constituencies which would be required unless a change first occurred to the electoral system. They believed that local associations of both parties would disregard any arrangement concluded by their national organisations and, more importantly, voters who were denied the possibility of voting for a candidate of their own party would not necessarily support one put forward by another participant to the popular front. In particular Liberals feared that voters who had the choice of voting Conservative or socialist would support the former and thus the popular front would ironically become a mechanism 'to perpetuate the dominance of the 'National' government'.[4]

The subject of a popular front was again raised towards the end of the war and was debated at the 1944 Labour Party conference when the report of the Conference Arrangements Committee was discussed. Although the Liberal Party was not universally viewed as a potential participant in 'a coalition of the left for the purpose of bringing socialism in our time',[5] some speakers expressed their desire to include the Liberal Party in any arrangements which might be constructed to bring about 'the unity of left forces'.[6] The following year an attempt was made to refer back a section of the report of the Conference Arrangements Committee because the conference agenda contained no specific resolution concerning the conclusion of arrangements with other progressive parties at the forthcoming general election. This motion was defeated on a card vote by the narrow margin of 1,314,000 to 1,219,000.

Labour's Quest for Progressive Unity at the 1945 General Election

The Labour leadership was sceptical of the value of working with other political parties and instead sought to secure a fusion of progressive forces under what Arthur Greenwood described as the 'umbrella' of the Labour Party. This involved

Labour making a direct appeal to progressives to support Labour. Accordingly its 1945 manifesto urged progressive voters to vote for the Labour Party. It was argued that the Liberal Party would not be able to form a government as the consequence of its involvement in that contest and that if Liberals supported their own party the result could be instability, confusion and the possible return of a Conservative administration. Thus progressive voters were urged to ensure that the next government was a Labour government which would act in accordance with the principles of policy set out in its manifesto.[7]

The sentiments contained in this declaration were reinforced by the activities of the Labour Party research department. A document was prepared for the use of its candidates which emphasised that the two parties were in agreement in many policy areas, including the desire to nationalise certain industries, to control monopolies, to direct investment and to increase public spending. Progressive Liberal voters were thus informed that no radical difference separated the programmes of the two parties and they were warned that the intention of the Liberal Party to contest the election independently of Labour 'might split the progressive vote and therefore wipe out the possibility of anything akin to the Liberal election programme being put into operation'.[8]

Thus the Labour Party sought to secure progressive unity by securing the support of Liberal voters rather than through cooperation with the official Liberal hierarchy. Their main arguments for securing this objective focused on a perceived joint desire to defeat Conservatism and similarities in certain policies. The socialist ideology of the Labour Party was specifically downplayed in order to capture Liberal votes.

Progressive Unity 1945–1950

Labour propaganda continued to seek Liberal support following its 1945 election victory. The Liberal performance in 1945, and more especially in subsequent byelections, encouraged the Labour Party to pursue its attempt to secure the alliance of progressive forces. The spectre of Liberal decline was emphasised in order to urge this course of action. The publication *Talking Points* on 14 January 1950 urged Liberals to consider how the radical tradition could continue to make a contribution to British politics. Particular use was made of prominent Liberal defectors to the Labour Party to advance such an argument.

In 1950 Sir Geoffrey Mander (the Liberal Member for East Wolverhampton, 1929–45, who had served as Archibald Sinclair's PPS when the Liberal Leader was Secretary for State for Air in Churchill's coalition government) published a pamphlet which was designed to secure Liberal support for the Labour Party. He argued that both parties shared a similar outlook and that the Labour Party had taken over the mantle of the radical tradition by embarking upon a constructive programme built upon the 'radical foundations

of freedom and democratic rights' that had been originally constructed by the Liberal Party.[9] In a separate publication he argued that Labour's welfare state was built on the policy which Asquith's government had implemented between 1906 and 1914, and he cautioned Liberals against supporting the Conservative Party. He stated that no matter how progressive individual Conservatives might be, the vested interests which that party represented constituted a reactionary force which Liberals had opposed throughout its history. He contrasted the attitude adopted by the Liberal Party to Labour's nationalisation programme with the doctrinaire opposition mounted by the Conservative Party.[10] Other Labour publications of this period emphasised the support given by the Liberal Party to other items of the government's domestic programme such as house building.[11]

The Strategic Importance of the Liberal Vote Following the 1950 Election

Labour's interest in the Liberal vote heightened following the 1950 general election. The Liberal Party's poor performance in that contest (which suggested that a reduced number of Liberal candidates would contest future general elections) and Labour's narrow victory emphasised the importance of Labour securing new sources of electoral support in order to retain power. It was estimated that a net Labour gain over the Conservative Party of 10% of the vote obtained by the Liberals in 1950 would have given the government an additional 11 seats and an overall majority of 28 in the new House of Commons. A 20% net gain of the Liberal vote would have increased the government's majority to 44 while a 30% net gain would have secured Labour a majority of 68.[12] Although such figures ignored the vital question as to whether such a net gain was realisable, the Labour Party was warned that if the Conservatives managed to secure a large proportion of the Liberal vote at the next election, 'we are almost certainly beaten'.[13]

Opinion polls did not provide Labour with much comfort concerning their ability to eat into the Liberal Party's support in future general elections. A Gallup poll suggested

the Conservative Party stood to gain a larger share of the Liberal vote in the absence of a Liberal candidate[14] and the party's National Agent repeated this view in his report to the National Executive Committee.[15] However, research which suggested that one quarter of Liberal supporters in 1950 had voted Labour in 1945 and that 27% of Liberal voters derived from a working class background[16] induced Labour to make its appeal to Liberal voters more specific than had previously been the case. It was conceded that Labour could make no appeal to the 'Tory sort of Liberal' and, instead, an appeal to support and vote for the Labour Party was addressed to 'the progressive Liberal, who stands for ideas and not for labels and outworn dogma'.[17] It was thus perceived that while 'Liberal Tories' would never vote Labour, other Liberals were by instinct anti-Conservative. The party was thus informed it was its 'duty and .... job' to convert such support.[18]

A number of arguments were put forward in Labour propaganda to achieve this objective. Following the 1950 general election, progressive opinion within the Liberal Party continued to be wooed by assertions that the actions of the aims of the radical wing of the Liberal Party were compatible with the actions of the Labour government. In May 1950 a number of former Liberals were joint signatories to a letter in the *Times* which urged radicals to concentrate on reconciling political democracy and personal freedom with the planning of social justice and economic fair shares. It was argued that the Labour Party was the best vehicle to achieve such an objective and radicals were urged to join this party.[19] It was alleged that Labour offered the best opportunity for the implementation of Liberal policies such as the advancement of freedom, social reform and peace[20] and such a theme was actively put forward during the 1951

general election. It was asserted that Labour was 'clearly the heir of the radical tradition. The government have been doing thoroughly radical things during the last six years'. Policies such as the welfare state, fair shares and full employment were stated to have been built on Liberal foundations and the nationalisation of industries on their merits was stated to be the Liberal approach.[21] The attempt by Labour to discover a solution to the problem of poverty was referred to as one which would have 'warmed the cockles of David Lloyd George's heart'.[22]

In an attempt to retain some control over the actions of Liberal supporters in constituencies which the party would not contest in 1951, the Liberal Party Organisation drew up a questionnaire which local parties could address to candidates of the other parties. On the basis of the replies received, advice could be given to Liberal voters concerning how to vote locally. The Labour Party was aware of the potential which this mechanism provided for the capture of progressive Liberal support. One Minister recalled the manner in which the League of Nations Union questionnaire had been used in the 1929 general election to secure support from Liberal voters in places where there was no Liberal candidate. He concluded that 'we must bear in mind that the Liberal vote (I think it is not much less than four million) may not only decide this election but two or three elections more'. He warned that once Liberals had voted Conservative 'they may do so much more easily another time'.[23]

Labour's research department prepared a covering letter which their local parties could send with their replies to the Liberal questionnaire. This argued that Labour had 'taken up the banner which William Gladstone and David Lloyd George bore so well'. Local Labour parties were further advised to

refer to 'the very large measure of agreement that exists between our parties'. It suggested that such a level of agreement was not surprising given the origins of the Labour Party, 'whose early members had more often than not learnt their politics in the Liberal Working Men's Clubs in the last century'.[24] It was argued that if all the government's past achievements and proposals for the future with which Liberals agreed were put on one side of a scale and all the actions and policies which Liberals disapproved of were put on the other, 'the balance will come down strongly in Labour's favour'. Assertions of the compatibility of radical liberalism with the Labour government were coupled with allegations that the Conservative and Liberal Parties were 'traditional enemies';[25] it was argued that 'the traditions of Liberalism – freedom and social justice – meet in the Conservative Party their historic enemy' whereas the Labour Party was the 'champion and friend' of such Liberal ideals'.[26]

Aftermath of the 1951 General Election

Labour's analysis of the 1951 general election suggested that the party had failed in its quest to capture a significant share of the Liberal vote. It was believed that the presence of Liberal candidates in 1951 made little difference to the outcome of the election[27] but that the withdrawal of Liberal candidates resulted in a disproportionate share of their 1950 vote being taken by the Conservative Party. Seventeen of the 22 seats lost by Labour in 1951 were affected by the withdrawal of a Liberal candidate and it was estimated that in these constituencies the Liberal vote transferred to the Conservative party in preference to Labour in the ratio of three votes to one.[28]

The Labour Party thus put forward a different argument to benefit from Liberal abstentionism in future contests. Progressive Liberals were now courted by the accusation that the Liberal Party had moved to the right of the political spectrum and was no longer deserving of the support of radicals. This view had been articulated before the 1951 general election, when it had been alleged that the Liberal leadership might be manoeuvred into concluding an agreement with the Conservative Party despite the feelings of its rank-and-file supporters,[29] but was voiced more prominently following this contest. In October 1953 the Labour journal *Forward* reported that Dingle Foot had resigned as a prospective Liberal Parliamentary candidate as he was disturbed by the party's 'right wing' policy. He was later quoted as having said that whereas in 1945 the Liberal Party had been an alternative to the Labour Party, by 1950 it had become an alternative to the Conservatives.[30] Similar sentiments were voiced by the former Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Liberal Party, Lady Megan Lloyd George. In 1955 she defected to the Labour Party, alleging that 'the official Liberal Party of 1955 seems to have lost faith with the radical tradition which inspired it'.[31] She later claimed that she had not left the Liberal Party but that the latter had

deserted her. She thus urged Liberal supporters to vote Labour in the 1955 general election.[32]

Labour propaganda issued during the 1951 contest pointed out that of the six successful Liberal candidates, only Grimond had faced Conservative opposition in 1951 and that these two parties had concluded local agreements which in Colne Valley resulted in the 'amazing spectacle' of the leader of the Conservative Party supporting the candidature of Lady Violet Bonham Carter. After 1951 it was alleged that Liberal Members of Parliament overwhelmingly supported the Conservative Party in the division lobbies.[33] Liberal leaders were thus accused of pursuing actions which had transformed their party into 'a mere appendage of the Tories'.[34]

The attack on the alleged right-wing drift of the Liberal Party was coupled with the more traditional assertion that Labour's policies were compatible with radical ideals. It was argued that much of the work of the Labour Party had been to extend and amplify the measures initiated by radicals, and it was alleged that the introduction of the National Health Service completed the work initiated by Lloyd George. Labour's educational reforms were similarly alleged to have been built on foundations laid by the Liberal Party.[35] It was thus concluded that 'Labour ideals are those which any good Liberal can support'. They were said to 'spring from a fundamental belief in the brotherhood of man and a determination that all people all over the world deserve a fair start in life'.[36]

A Revision of Labour Actions Towards the Liberal Party

The tactics pursued by the Labour Party towards the Liberal Party between 1945 and 1955 sought to capture the support of progressive Liberal supporters and thereby further the decline of the Liberal Party. However, Labour's examination of the 1955 general election suggested that Labour's best interests were not necessarily served by the demise of the Liberal Party. The belief that Liberal voters without a candidate tended to overwhelmingly support the Conservative Party[37] implied that Liberal intervention would harm the Conservatives and that such loss of support could be of vital significance in marginal constituencies. The journal *Labour Organiser* in October 1957 assumed that Labour's victory in the Gloucester byelection in 1957 was aided by the decision of the Liberal Party to field a candidate. However, the extent to which Liberal intervention would aid the Labour Party was not universally accepted within Labour circles. It was argued that Liberal intervention would not automatically win back that party's former support since voting Liberal 'is sometimes a half-way house to voting Tory, and once the elector has taken the plunge he may continue to vote for the Tory'.[38] The publication *Talking Points* expressed concern in 1958 that the Conservative support attracted to the Liberal Party in byelections would not necessarily be retained at a general election.

Accordingly, the Labour Party also continued with its former tactic of seeking to convert the radical Liberal vote using the same arguments as had been presented previously concerning Labour's radical actions and the right-wing posture of the contemporary Liberal Party.

In 1956 a further group of Liberal defectors joined the Labour Party, alleging that 'there is a great deal of common ground between radicals and the Labour Party and that the difference between them now largely belongs to the past'.[39] Labour literature described Lady Megan Lloyd George as 'a bonny defender of those radical values which she and other direct inheritors of the true Liberal tradition .... realise can only be fought for effectively within the Labour Party'.[40] The Labour leader also sought to identify the two traditions by arguing that the greatest achievement of the Liberal Party in its history was the social reform programme enacted by the 1906 government: 'in many ways what the Labour Party has done .... is to carry on and carry much further what they started then'.[41]

Arguments alleging that the Liberal Party had moved in a right-wing political direction were also put forward as the 1959 general election approached. References were made to cooperation between the two parties both in constituencies[42] and in the House of Commons, where it was alleged that Liberal MPs had given the government what amounted to 'general support'.[43] It was asserted that the party's 'right wing' leadership was out on line with the radically-minded rank-and-file,[44] and reference was made to Grimond's remark that if the Liberal Party held the balance

of power after the election it would support the major party with most seats in the new House of Commons. Radical Liberals were informed that should the Conservative Party achieve a narrow election victory, Grimond would lead his Parliamentary supporters behind 'the men of Suez, and Cyprus, Hola and Nyasaland'.[45]

Liberal Responses

A number of leading Liberals were opposed to progressive unity, as they believed that the Labour Party's socialist ideology would become the dominant political philosophy underlying the actions of a postwar union of progressive forces.[46] This view was substantiated by some Labour propaganda of that period which espoused the merits of socialism. One publication argued that a key problem faced by the Liberal Party was that, like Labour, it was committed to reform but did not possess economic policies with which such could be paid for. Thus while Liberalism 'stands for the sincere will to reform, without recognition of the means' to achieve it, Labour's commitment to socialism made it possible to transform society and ensure that reforms in areas such as social services and slum clearance would be permanent.[47]

Other Labour propaganda issued between 1945 and 1959 did, however, seek to play down the party's socialist ideology. Liberals countered this by asserting their belief that even if the party put forward a moderate image at election times, socialist 'extremists' would come to the fore when the contest was over. Thus during the 1951 general election campaign, the Liberal leader argued that if Labour secured a majority in the new House of Commons the subsequent government would be taken over by the socialists. The spectre was raised of Bevan and Wilson securing positions of dominance, with Attlee being relegated to the position of Minister of Health and Gaitskell being dismissed.[48]

However, although the constitution of the Labour Party committed it to socialism, it was possible to argue that the entry into this organisation of a number of radical Liberals would have ideological consequences. Following his defeat in 1945, Beveridge informed Lady Violet Bonham Carter that he did not view Labour as a natural enemy and that he had discussed the possibility of his joining Labour with Herbert Morrison. He stated that 'if I were young enough I should go into the Labour Party in the hope of liberalising it from within'.[49] Other Liberals such as Jo Grimond also considered such an option,[50] although generally they arrived at the view that the most appropriate course of action was to remain independent of Labour. One reason for this was that the radical influence, as a minority position within the Labour Party, would be sidelined.[51]

The 'Radical Liberals'

Some Liberals did, however, accept the validity of Labour's call for progressive unity. This position was forcibly put

forward by Lady Megan Lloyd George, Emrys Roberts and Edgar Granville during the 1950–51 Parliament. Collectively these three MPs were termed the 'radical Liberals'. Their arguments concerning progressive unity brought them into opposition with their own Parliamentary party.

The three 'radicals' were initially concerned with the manner in which the Conservative Party used the tactic of pressing constant divisions in the House of Commons as a tactic to wear the government down. They believed that this had the effect of turning the lobby into an instrument of Conservative politics. In pursuit of this view, they supported the government in the division on the King's Speech on 6 November 1950, whereas the remainder of the Parliamentary party voted with the opposition. The following day this group voted against their own party's amendment related to the cost of living (which had Conservative support) and supported the Government concerning controls and nationalisation, contrary to the action of the other Liberal members. The *Times* on 11 November 1950 stated that such actions implied these MPs opposed all cooperation with the Conservative Party and were unlikely to join with the opposition in any division that threatened to bring the government down. These MPs put forward diverse reasons to explain their actions. Lady Megan contended that the Liberal Party had drifted to the right and away from the old radical tradition.[52] Another suggested that the Liberal Parliamentary party should support the government and assure it of a stable position in Parliament so that it could effectively face the challenge posed by communism.[53] Latterly Lady Megan Lloyd George, sought to link the ideologies of liberalism and socialism by arguing that the fundamental aims of radicals and socialists were essentially the same and that 'the radicals of yesterday are the socialists of today'.[54]

Proposals for Liberal cooperation with the Labour government emanated from other quarters. In 1951 a conference of the Welsh Liberal Party discussed the relationship between the two parties and proposed that the Liberal Party should announce its support for measures adopted by the Labour government to safeguard full employment and the welfare state. It was further suggested that the Parliamentary party should issue a statement that it would not vote to bring down the government unless a vital principle was at stake on which the Liberal Party was prepared to fight an ensuing general election. It was further proposed that in Wales the Liberal Party should not oppose sitting Labour MPs who supported the 'Parliament for Wales' campaign, in return for which the Labour Party would withdraw its candidates from constituencies in which a Liberal candidate stood a better chance of victory than a Labour one.[55] The *Economist* on 23 April 1955 referred to unsuccessful attempts having been made to negotiate a number of straight fights against Conservative candidates at that election.

The Liberal hierarchy did not, however, accept the wisdom of progressive unity. With the exception of Thomas Horabin, many of the leading Liberal advocates of progressive unity who followed the logic of their beliefs and joined the Labour Party (such as Sir Geoffrey Mander, Wilfrid Roberts, Lady Megan Lloyd George and Edgar Granville) did so following their defeat as Liberal candidates. This opened them to the accusation of political opportunism by their former political allies. In 1956 Geoffrey Acland publicly rejected Dingle Foot's proposition that they should both apply for Labour Party membership. He argued that there would always be some Liberals 'who will seek to align themselves with one or other of the best alternatives, in order to more speedily fulfil their political ambitions'.[56]

Implications of Labour's Pursuit of Progressive Unity

The suggestion of inter-party cooperation (discussed at the 1944 and 1945 Labour conferences) had an influence on subsequent political arrangements which were advocated or which actually took place. The main difficulty of the popular front was that progressive opinion was united on the importance of achieving an essentially negative objective, that of defeating Conservatism, but (because of the ideological differences separating socialists and liberals) in disagreement concerning how the defects of contemporary society could be best remedied. However, discussions in the 1930s and 1940s did succeed in placing the theme of inter-party cooperation onto the political agenda and the idea was acted upon in the 1970s with the Lib–Lab Pact. However, its main impact (that of preserving the Labour government) seemed to many not to be a noble objective.[57] This did pave the way, however, for inter-party cooperation in the form of the Liberal–SDP Alliance which involved agreements of key policy issues. Ultimately a merger of the two parties occurred, based on an ideological meeting of minds.

With the exception of inter-party cooperation discussed at Labour conferences in 1944 and 1945, Labour's pursuit of the objective of progressive unity was at the expense of the continued existence of the Liberal Party. Figures produced after the 1950 general election could have been used as the basis to justify Labour abstention in constituencies in which the Liberal Party posed the most serious threat to the Conservative candidate. Labour had stood aside in a number of such areas in 1945, but had formally abandoned this position for the 1950 general election. However, rather than seeking to offset potential Conservative gains derived at the expense of Liberal abstentionism with Liberal gains secured by Labour withdrawal in selected constituencies, Labour instead sought to secure long term advantage from the Liberal Party's decline by courting the support of the progressive Liberal voter. This heightened Liberal fears that one of Labour's key aims was to smash their party and in particular to secure the defeat of Liberal Members of Parliament. This contrasted with the Conservative attempt

to secure Liberal support which included offering straight fights against Labour opponents in selected constituencies. Although such a course of action had implications for Liberal political freedom of action, it did hold out to the party the hope of survival which Labour tactics did not.

The Liberal antagonistic response to Labour's attempt to secure progressive unity had further political implications. Hostility towards Labour's strategy intensified opposition to that party's actions and gave substance to a view that under Clement Davies' leadership the party had 'swung to the right'. This view is not a totally accurate one. Liberal opposition to the actions of the postwar Labour governments was based on a variety of factors. These included a genuine distaste for actions which were deemed socialist. Leading Liberals argued that Labour's nationalisation programme was far more doctrinaire than 'technical' and that the government's concentration on 'matters which first appeared in their programme 50 years ago' was a major cause of the recurrent economic problems after 1945.[58] Socialism was viewed as the negation of freedom which in practice was associated with 'controls, dictatorships, direction from Whitehall, direction of labour, conscription in peace time, monopolies, restrictions and the doctrine of government by Order in Council'. It was thus concluded that 'no government in the history of Britain has done so much as this government to destroy liberty'.[59] Additionally, Liberal enthusiasm for postwar Conservatism was based on a genuinely held belief by leading Liberals (including Davies and Lady Violet Bonham Carter) that Churchill remained a Liberal and was trying his best to aid the Liberal cause via the Conservative Party.

The extent to which Liberal support was absorbed into the Labour Party (either permanently or as a tactical vote in the absence of Liberal candidates) after 1945 cannot be precisely determined. However, both parties were aware of the importance of this factor. The non-socialist support which the Labour Party wished to secure was one factor which prompted the party to review its ideology during the 1950s, questioning the continued relevance and electoral appeal of fundamentalist socialism. The support given to Labour by non-socialists after 1945 also served to legitimise Jo Grimond's attempts to seek a realignment of the left. Labour's pursuit of progressive unity served to justify an attempt to pursue this process and place all progressives under one political roof.

Peter Joyce is a lecturer in the Social Science Department of Manchester Metropolitan University. His pamphlet The Liberal Party and the 1945 General Election *was published by the History Group in 1995.*

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8. Labour Party Research Department, *Notes on the Liberal Party* (unpublished election material, 1945), p. 1.
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12. Morgan Phillips, *General Election Report – Personal Observations by the General Secretary* (unpublished report, 1950), p. 5.
13. Herbert Morrison, *The Last General Election and the Next* (unpublished memorandum for a joint meeting of the National Executive Committee of the Labour Party and Labour Ministers, London, 19–21 May 1950), p. 2.
14. Morgan Phillips (1950), *op cit.*, p. 3.
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16. Labour Party Research Department, *Notes on the Findings of Opinion Polls, General Election 1950* (unpublished report, April 1950), p. 10.
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18. Morgan Phillips, speech at the Labour Party Conference, Scarborough, 1 October 1951.
19. Richard Acland, Leslie Hale, Thomas Horabin and Sir Geoffrey Mander, letter in *Times*, 11 May 1950.

In this month ...

September 1952 (*Liberal News*)
'The first prize of a £20 travel voucher for the best essay by "under-eighteens" was won by 17 year-old David Marquand, London, who wrote on "why I support European unity".'

September 1962 (*Liberal News*)
'We have now reached the state where all normal activity in the city and country is being throttled by road congestion .... unless the government acts now to coordinate town and country planning and transport policies, Britain will be reduced to standstill in another decade.'

September 1972 (*Liberal News*)
'One of Britain's leading authorities on the House of Commons has come out forcefully in support of the Liberals' proposals for a register of MPs' business interests.'

September 1977 (*Liberal News*)
'Peter Hain, former chairman of the Young Liberals, and Simon Hebditch .... have announced their resignation from the Liberal Party. They are to join the Labour Party .... They said they believed the position of radicals in the Liberal Party had become untenable.'

Liberal/Tory Pacts: Partnership of Principle or Struggle for Survival?

Malcolm Baines reports on the Liberal Democrat History Group discussion meeting in March 1997; with Michael Kandiah.

Despite all the interest over the last few years in Liberal/Labour relations, still topical following the invitation to Paddy Ashdown and other senior Liberal Democrats to join a Cabinet sub-committee in July, it is salutary to remember that Liberals have generally been much closer to forming alliances with the Conservatives than they have with their Labour rivals.

Dr Michael Kandiah, Senior Fellow at the Institute of Contemporary British History, focused in some detail on Liberal/Conservative negotiations during the 1945–51 Parliaments at a Liberal Democrat History Group meeting just before the last general election. The chair of the meeting was Peter Thurnham MP, himself a recent defector from the Tories to the Liberal Democrats and MP for Bolton, scene of one of the two constituency level pacts between the two parties in the 1950s.

Dr Kandiah began by explaining that his own background was as a historian of the Conservative Party and in particular of the Conservative elite. He would look at the Tory strategy during the 1945–51 period in order to resolve why nothing more concrete happened with the Liberals despite the pressure to maximise the anti-socialist vote. This pressure commenced with the beginning of the Cold War and the first wave of nationalisations leading to the pamphlet 'Design for Freedom', produced by individuals working together in both parties. Labour proposals to reform the House of Lords also drew the parties closer as many Liberal peers were anxious to preserve one of the party's few remaining areas of influence.

Less helpful, however, were the steps taken by the Conservative party machine in May 1947 to formalise relations with the Liberal National Party, the successors to Sir John Simon's breakaway group in 1931. The Woolton/Teviot pact between the Liberal Nationals and the Tories was seen by the Liberals as confusing voters, and Churchill himself was deeply antipathetic to the Liberal Nationals because of their prewar support for appeasement. Woolton himself, originally from a business rather than a party background, saw the Conservatives as beyond politics and had little personal interest in promoting deals other than with specific individuals and constituencies. As a result, although the seeds for an agreement between Liberals and Conservatives were there, the 1950 election only saw scattered local cooperation, most notably in Huddersfield, where Donald Wade was elected as a Liberal MP.

The 1950 election was significant because while it brought major Conservative electoral progress, it led Central Office to conclude that they could not win without Liberal support. Churchill then proceeded to take unilateral action. He set up a committee under Rab Butler which began negotiations on policy with the Liberals. The committee, however, began with the premise that a strategic arrangement would not be accepted by the public. Violet Bonham-Carter, however, was only interested in the strategic benefits an arrangement would bring: seats, a role in government and electoral reform. Woolton thought the Liberals would wither away if the Conservatives did not throw them a lifeline, whilst most local associations had nothing but contempt for them. Proportional representation was therefore an insuperable problem and the negotiations made little progress. Unhappy with this, Churchill attempted to pressure the Conservatives into making concessions but local constituency resistance proved too strong.

As a result, the 1951 election was fought by the Conservatives on the basis that whilst they were in broad agreement with liberalism they would ignore the Liberal Party itself. The only local pact was in Bolton, leading to the election of Arthur Holt as the Liberal MP for Bolton West. When that election won the Conservatives a small overall majority the concerns about needing a close relationship with the Liberals to beat Labour fell away, although negotiations continued in a desultory fashion until the mid 1960s when Grimond repositioned the party on the left of the political spectrum.

Dr Kandiah's conclusion was that throughout the 1950s the two parties broadly agreed on policy, with the exception of proportional representation. The Conservatives did win the Liberal vote, and as a result the 1951 election, almost by default, but the Liberals were able to benefit and probably ensure their own survival as a result of the few deals that were agreed at constituency level.

The discussion that followed broadened out into the negotiations with Labour that some Liberal MPs were carrying out at the same time, how genuine Winston Churchill was about a formal Liberal/Tory pact, relations in Wales and the influence of the National Liberals though their magazine 'New Horizon' on the ideological development of the Tory party. All in all, an interesting review of an important period in the party's history.

Liberal Party Archives at the BLPES

*An overview of the Liberal Party archive deposited in the Archives Division of the British Library of Political and Economic Science, and related Liberal Party material among the main library holdings; by **Sue Donnelly.***

When the National Liberal Club decided to convert a storage room into an office during the 1987 general election campaign it was time for the Liberal Party's archive to find a new home. After a visit from the Angela Raspin, Archivist at the British Library of Political and Economic Science, the Liberal Party's archive was moved to the Archives Division at BLPES on an indefinite loan. Over the next few years it was sorted, catalogued and made available to researchers.

The archive as it was transferred provides core material for the study of the party from the 1950s to the 1980s, and has been augmented by further accessions from party headquarters in Cowley Street and donations by individual party members. Most of the material covers the period after World War II, although earlier material survives in the form of copies of the constitution from 1936, annual reports from 1934 and 1936, scattered agendas and programmes for the Liberal Assembly from 1912, press cuttings from 1924–36, Liberal Candidates' Handbooks and Parliamentary Party speakers' notes for 1929 and 1931 and some policy summary files which date from the inter-war period. However, this material is very sparse and researchers interested in the period before 1945 will find more extensive information in the National Liberal Club archives at the University of Bristol.

The core of the papers is concerned with the administration and organisation of the Liberal Party. These include the National Executive Committee minutes, 1954–85, Liberal Party Organisation minutes, 1958–79, Party Council working papers, 1972–86 and the Standing Committee (later the Policy Committee) minutes 1960–86 along with the minutes and papers of other central committees such as the Candidates Committee and Constitutional Review Committee. Liberal Party Assemblies are full represented from 1967–87, with programmes and lists of resolutions surviving from some earlier assemblies.

A significant proportion of the archive is occupied with election campaigning including files on general and byelection campaigns, transcripts of party political broadcasts from the 1980s and a collection of Speakers and Candidates' Handbooks. Papers relating to Regional Organisations also contain material regarding local election campaigns.

Researchers tracing the development of Liberal policy will find a long series of policy summary files which trace changes in a wide range of subject areas from agriculture to women's rights, some of which date from the inter-war period. There are also interesting but small numbers of files on the Lib-Lab Pact and the Social Democratic Party along with a larger section on the Liberal/SDP Alliance.

In addition to this central material the Archives Division has received a number of related deposits including the archives of the Union of Liberal Students and of the Young Liberals. This collection is currently uncatalogued, but limited access can be provided by arrangement with the archivist. A small amount of material has been transferred from the Liberal Whip's Office and a collection of Liberal Democrat working group files document the policy discussions which followed the formation of the party in 1988.

A number of closely related archive collections provide a broader picture of the Liberal Party's development in recent years. Papers have been deposited from Sir David Steel's House of Commons office documenting his leadership of the party, the SDP/Liberal Alliance and negotiations towards the merger of the two parties. Paddy Ashdown has transferred papers which relate mainly to his role as an MP prior to assuming the leadership of the party. The Liberal Movement (1988–93) has deposited some material but this is not yet available to researchers.

The majority of the papers deposited in the Archives Division are open and available to researchers. However more recent files in the Liberal Party archive and the papers of Sir David Steel and Paddy Ashdown have a 20-year closure period. The catalogues of more recent material are available and applications to the donors can be made through the archives for access to specified files.

Those researching the role and influence of the Liberal Party throughout the 20th century will find a number of useful collections amongst the Archive Division's wider holdings. These include the papers of William Beveridge (1879–1963), Leonard Courtney (1832–1918), Liberal MP for Liskeard (1876–85) and Bodmin (1885–1900) and his wife Catherine Courtney (1847–1929), Frances L. Josephy, chairman of the Federal Union and a Liberal Candidate in the 1950s, Jean Henderson (b 1900), a barrister who stood as a Liberal candidate in 1945, 1950 and 1955 and Lady Juliet Rhys-Williams (1908–64), who was a Liberal candidate and Honorary Secretary of the Women's Liberal Federation

The Unknown Prime Minister

Book Review: Ferdinand Mount, Umbrella *(Heinemann, 1994).*

Reviewed by **Tony Little**

Mount is a thoughtful conservative whose works have included *The British Constitution Now.* This novella tells the story of Lord Aberdeen in a series of vignettes of key episodes in his life.

Aberdeen would almost certainly win the prize for Victoria's Unknown Prime Minister, and yet he was a crucial figure in the history of the Liberal Party. A cousin to Byron, he made his early mark in meetings with Napoleon and was marked in return by the dismal sights of a Napoleonic battlefield. He took his place in government as a colleague of Peel, and went with Peel into the wilderness on the break-up of the Conservative Party in 1846. As the alternative Foreign Secretary to Palmerston, he always adopted the more conciliatory tone. Yet he was fated to be PM on the outbreak of the Crimean War, and it finished his career. Palmerston's advocates would argue that his more aggressive approach to the rest of the world was a greater deterrent to war than Aberdeen's apparently more pacific and reasonable stance.

Mount's work captures well the melancholy in Aberdeen's private life (he lost two wives to early graves) and the impact that it had on his public life. He turns the professional rivalry with Palmerston into a personal feud, but misses the role he played in the formation of the Liberal Party. Gladstone always saw himself as a disciple of Peel, but after Peel's death looked up to Aberdeen as more than just a leader of the remaining Peelites. On the fall of Aberdeen's government, Gladstone went angrily out of government and struggled to find his way back over the next four years. He was repeatedly tempted back to the Conservatives and could never bring himself to fully appreciate Palmerston. But at each temptation, Aberdeen helped keep Gladstone from sin until, in 1859, the right circumstances allowed Gladstone finally to reconcile himself to Palmerston and participate in the formation of the Liberal Party as we know it.

This book serves as an easy introduction to a needlessly neglected Premier.

Liberal Party Archives at the BLPES (continued)

in 1943. Amongst the archives' political posters and ephemera are posters produced by the Liberal Party, 1892–1910 (Coll Misc 519) and a large number of election addresses from Liberal candidates standing throughout the United Kingdom in all general elections since 1945. It must be noted that this is far from being a complete list of all our Liberal Party related holdings and that the Archives Division is regularly acquiring new material.

All these archive collections and further related material can be traced through the archive division's automated catalogue. This is currently only available to researchers visiting the Archive Reading Room but plans are in hand to make the main archive catalogue available online through the archive web pages located at http://www.lse.ac.uk/blpes/archives/. These pages give details of opening hours, new accessions, a general guide to holdings, details of services for readers and links to related sources. There is also provision for readers to make requests for searches to be undertaken by archives staff on the automated catalogue.

The archive collections and their users benefit from their location in a library which has always placed a high priority on collecting primary material. The printed book and journal holdings include Liberal Party and related material from the nineteenth century to the present day. The large pamphlet collection includes Liberal Party publications on many topics which can be traced through the main card catalogue and its subject index, the London Bibliography of the Social Sciences. In addition there are runs of Liberal journals ranging from the Women's Liberal Magazine 1919–20 to *New Outlook* 1963–84, which can be located through the main BLPES book catalogue which is available via BLPES's web pages.

Individuals wishing to make use of any of the archives mentioned in this article should contact the Archives Division, 10 Portugal Street, London, WC2A 2HD

Tel: **0171 405 7223**
Email: **Document@lse.ac.uk**
Web Page: **http://www.lse.ac.uk/blpes/archives/**

The Archives Division experimental on-line catalogue can be found at: **http://decomate.lse.ac.uk/eosindex.htm.** Logon as **lsearchives** with password **beatrice.**

Opening hours are:
Term and Easter vacation
    Monday–Thursday: 10am–7.30pm
    Friday: 10am–5.30pm (5pm in vacation)
    Saturday: 11am–5.30pm

Christmas and Summer vacation:
    Monday–Thursday: 10am–7.30pm
    Friday: 10am–5pm

From Beveridge to Blair – Reform of the Welfare State

with
Frank Field MP and *Nick Timmins*
Chair: Archy Kirkwood MP

'Social Insurance and Allied Services – report by Sir William Beveridge' provided the blueprint for the postwar welfare state which Labour governments implemented, and Conservative governments retained, for almost forty years. But as the century nears its end, is Beveridge's framework - modified and distorted by the Thatcher administrations - still relevant? What will New Labour do? Discuss the issue with *Frank Field MP*, Minister of State for Social Security and *Nick Timmins*, public policy editor, *Financial Times.* Chair: *Archy Kirkwood MP*, chair of the Commons Social Security Select Committee.

Tennis Centre, Eastbourne

6.15pm, Monday 22 September

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40.   Francis Williams, *Forward*, Volume 50, Number 50, 14 December 1956, p. 4.

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42.   A. Gardiner, *Labour Organiser*, Volume 36, Number 416, January 1957, p. 14.

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47.   Licinius, *Vote Labour? Why?* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1945), pp. 20–21.

48.   Clement Davies, speech at the Kingsway Hall, London, 2 October 1951. Quoted in *Times*, 3 October 1951.

49.   Sir William Beveridge, letter to Lady Violet Bonham Carter, 31 August 1945. Contained in the *Beveridge Papers*, section 6, item 18 (ii).

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55.   Welsh Liberal Conference, *Statement of Principles*, (unpublished paper, 28 July 1951).

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59.   Clement Davies, speech at Kingsway Hall, London, 28 January 1950.

Unpublished Labour Party election material is housed in the Labour Party Library. The Beveridge Papers are housed in the British Library of Political and Economic Science, London School of Economics.

The Labour Party and the Pursuit of the Liberal Vote (continued)

20.   Emmanuel Shinwell, speech to the Labour Party Conference, Scarborough, 1 October 1951.

21.   Sir Geoffrey Mander, *Draft Copy of a Letter from Sir Geoffrey Mander to Labour Candidates*, outlined in a letter from Sir Geoffrey Mander to Morgan Phillips, 12 October 1951.

22.   *A Word to the Impartial Voter* (London: The Labour Party, 1951, leaflet).

23.   Philip Noel Baker, unpublished letter to Morgan Phillips, 8 October 1951.

24.   Labour Party Research Department, *Specimen Replies to Liberal Questionnaire – A Specimen Covering Letter* (unpublished election material, 1951), p. 1.

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26.   *Tory Government or Radical Tradition ?* (London: The Labour Party, 1951, leaflet).

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28.   A. L. Williams, *Labour Organiser*, Volume 37, Number 432, May 1958, pp. 90–91.

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