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LIBERAL DEMOCRAT HISTORY GROUP

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Front page photo:
The founders of Liberal International at Wadham College, Oxford, April 1947.
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Editorial/Correspondence
Duncan Brack (Editor)
Flat 9, 6 Hopton Road,
London SW16 2EQ.
email: dbrack@dircon.co.uk.

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Liberals Unite

The Origins Of Liberal International

1997 marked the fiftieth anniversary of the foundation of Liberal International. *Dr Julie Smith* traces the events of 1947.

History is made by those who follow a political ideal. Sceptics merely look on.
Roger Motz, Opening Address at the Mondorf-les-Bains Congress, 19 August 1953.

In November 1997 liberals from around the world descended on Oxford to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Liberal International (World Liberal Union). Some of the participants were returning personally to the place where they had helped to found LI in April 1947.

Liberal International was established in the wake of the Second World War, but international liberal contact can be traced back much further.[1] In particular, European liberals met from 1910, and in 1924 the *Entente des Partis Libéraux et Démocratiques similaires* was formally established.[2] The *Entente* met regularly throughout the next decade, bringing together liberals from across Europe, including British Prime Minister David Lloyd George and French premier Edouard Herriot, but ceased to meet in 1934, when the international situation made cooperation too complex. International cooperation among young liberals took place within the Union of Radical and Democratic Youth, which was established in 1921. The Union in particular fostered liberal contacts which were later to be of use in setting up Liberal International.

In the aftermath of the Second World War, renewed ideas for liberal cooperation emerged from two sources, one Anglo-Norwegian and one Belgian. They were in part a response to increasing globalisation and a sense that the nation state was becoming outdated; in part a reaction to international insecurity and the authoritarianism of the left and of the right which had led to two world wars.

In 1945 John MacCallum Scott took up a position in the headquarters of the Allied Land Forces in Oslo. MacCallum Scott was keen to set up some sort of international liberal organisation and so, equipped with the names of some Norwegian liberals, he soon made contact with, *inter alia,* former members of the Norwegian resistance Halfdan Christophersen and Johan Andresen. MacCallum Scott explained his desire to initiate international cooperation and quickly won support from his Norwegian contacts, who offered to host a meeting with British liberals to discuss the matter further.

MacCallum Scott wrote to the British Liberal Party to announce the Norwegian offer, but the party was preoccupied by domestic politics in the aftermath of the disastrous results of the 1945 election. He also, however, wrote to 65 individual liberals and the response was far more positive. In particular, Sir Percy Harris, who had been Liberal Chief Whip until he lost his seat in 1945, offered a great deal of support. Sir Percy suggested resurrecting the *Entente*, but MacCallum Scott wanted the new organisation to have a much stronger administrative capacity than the *Entente* had had. Thus, the first stage in the project was the creation of the British Liberal International Council (BLIC) – subsequently renamed Liberal International (British Group) – with Sir Percy as its President.

The Belgian Liberal Party celebrated its centenary in 1946. Its leader, Senator Roger Motz, also supported the idea of international liberal cooperation. He therefore invited many liberals from across Europe to the centenary celebrations held in June 1946, when he took the opportunity to discuss closer cooperation. Representatives of the Belgian, British, Danish, Dutch, French, Italian, Swedish and Swiss liberal parties attended the lavish gathering in Brussels. Among those present were Spanish exile Salvador de Madariaga, Danish liberal Hermod Lannung and the Anglo-Italian Max Salvadori, all of whom were later to play a large part in Liberal International.

One difficulty which had emerged in Oslo – that there were usually as many different opinions as there were liberals present – also proved true in Brussels. Nevertheless, there was enough consensus for agreement to be reached on the Declaration of Brussels, which set out basic liberal principles. There was further progress towards cooperation when, at the end of the celebrations, British Liberal leader Clement Davies announced: 'And next year we shall all meet again to resume our labours. On behalf of my colleagues here and my party at home, I invite you all, and many, many more, to join us in Britain at a conference of Liberals of the World.' This was one of the few occasions when the British Liberal Party, as opposed to active and enthusiastic individual British liberals, helped set the agenda for LI. The offer was immediately accepted and led to the Oxford Congress of 10–14 April 1947.

The conference planned for August 1946 in Oslo became essentially a preparatory meeting for the Oxford Congress. It was a select group who met in Rasjøen, north of Oslo: five Norwegians, four Britons and Mrs J. Borden Harriman, the former US Ambassador to Norway, were present. As Halfdan Christophersen stated, the aims of the conference were: 'first of all to define liberalism, and secondly to consider the practical means by which the liberal outlook could be spread more widely throughout the world'. A British draft manifesto had been prepared in advance and this was discussed at Rasjøen, leading to the adoption of an Oslo draft manifesto, which provided a starting point for discussion in Oxford.

Although Clement Davies had issued the invitation for the 1947 Conference on behalf of the British Liberal Party, the actual organisation of the Conference fell to MacCallum Scott and the British Liberal International Council. Wadham College, Oxford, the *alma mater* of both MacCallum Scott and Halfdan Christopherson, was chosen as the venue, since it was hoped that the Oxford setting might mask the austerity measures still prevailing in Britain. Representatives from nineteen countries – Austria, Belgium, Canada, Cyprus, Czechoslovakia, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Great Britain, Hungary, Italy, Norway, Spain, South Africa, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey and the United States – attended the Conference.[3] Delegates included such eminent figures as Theodor Heuss, Roger Motz, René Pleven and Viscount Samuel.

> The manifesto appears uncontentious in the 1990s. However, in the 1940s its opposition to totalitarianism was extremely significant.

Among the main topics considered in Oxford was the organisation of the proposed international body and the drafting of a manifesto. The Congress considered the Oslo draft manifesto, which was partly based on the Declaration of Brussels, and also a Belgian draft, in turn based on the Oslo draft and the Declaration of Brussels. In terms of organisation there was a tension between those who favoured cooperation between liberal parties and those who thought such cooperation should be among individuals or groups. Roger Motz suggested the British example, where the British Liberal International Council worked with the Liberal Party. However, Sir Percy Harris pointed out that the BLIC was quite independent of the Liberal Party. The majority of the delegates supported Sir Percy's argument that the new organisation (the name Liberal International had not yet been adopted) should be independent of parties, with the councils or groups set up in other countries independent of parties and open to people who were not members of political parties. The Italian Professor Giovanni Cassandro rejected this view, saying that liberal principles in the form of a manifesto should be 'entrusted to political groups organised in the form of a party'. Dr Pavel Tigrid, a Czechoslovak delegate, pointed out that this would impede growth since while individuals living in totalitarian regimes might be able to form groups, there was little hope of liberal parties emerging and affiliating.

A sub-committee was set up to consider the question and a compromise solution was adopted to the effect that each country should determine the constitution of its own group, thus allowing group and party affiliation. This question prefigured a long-running tension within LI over the relative merits of individual versus party membership. Since many of those present in Oxford, including MacCallum Scott, had only loose ties with their national parties, there was strong support for the concept of an organisation based on group affiliation. However, over the years this position shifted. The last-ever individual member, the then Bulgarian President Zheliou Zhelev, joined in 1992; in 1994 he became a patron and hence, no longer technically an individual member. LI groups have continued, but over the years liberal parties have come to play a much larger part.

The Congress finally adopted the name Liberal International (World Liberal Union) and a Provisional Executive Committee was elected. Among those on the Executive were Sir Percy Harris, Don Salvador de Madariaga, Roger Motz and John MacCallum Scott. Willi Bretscher, the editor of the Swiss liberal newspaper *Neue Zürcher Zeitung,* joined the executive in January 1948 following the death of the Swiss representative Dietrich Schindler. De Madariaga became the first President of Liberal International, while Sir Percy Harris and Willi Bretscher both played a key role in the early years. Representatives of some of the larger liberal parties also pledged financial support.

A sub-committee was also appointed to produce a new draft manifesto taking the views expressed by the delegates into consideration. The results of their deliberations were adopted in the form of the Oxford Manifesto. Liberal International had been created.

The manifesto signed by the founders of Liberal International appears uncontentious in the 1990s. However, in the 1940s its opposition to totalitarianism was extremely significant. Changes in the international environment in the last fifty years have led LI to draw up other manifestos: the Oxford Declaration of 1967, the 1981 Rome Appeal, and a new manifesto drafted by Liberal Democrat peer Lord Wallace of Saltaire and widely discussed by all LI member parties, for adoption at the Fiftieth Anniversary Congress. Nevertheless, the basic principles espoused in the 1947 manifesto remain as valid in the 1990s as in the 1940s.

Among its most salient points were a commitment to freedom and the fundamental rights of citizens, with particular emphasis laid on the need for 'true democracy', which the manifesto asserts is: 'inseparable from political liberty and is based on the conscious, free and enlightened consent of the majority, expressed through a free and secret ballot, with due respect for the liberties and opinions of minorities'. Similarly, the manifesto stressed the importance of economic freedom, without which political freedom was rendered impossible. The signatories rejected excessive power, be it of states or business monopolies; nor was public welfare ignored. Thus the manifesto reflected aspects of social and economic liberalism. The importance of international cooperation as a way of averting war was also considered.

Liberal International was born in the aftermath of world war and grew up in the shadow of the Cold War. The aim was to bring together liberals from all parts of the globe, but in the early years its membership was primarily European and the main focus of its work was on European affairs. In the early years a great deal of time and effort were devoted to questions concerning European security and the dangers of communism and the majority of its members were (West) European. As its name suggests, however, LI was intended to be a world organisation and over the years it evolved substantially. Decolonisation and the emergence of new democracies across the world offered scope for expansion, and Liberal International made concerted efforts to attract liberal parties in Latin America, Africa and Asia. Moreover, with the collapse of communism in Europe in 1989 a large number of new liberal parties emerged, mainly of which sought membership of LI.

Liberal International has also become a more professional body during its first half century. Initially it was dominated by individuals with few party links. MacCallum Scott was a prime example, and Don Salvador de Madariaga, LI's first president, was a Spanish liberal exile with little political clout. De Madariaga's successor, Roger Motz, was very much an exception in the early period of LI as an active national party leader. The Italian liberal Giovanni Malagodi, who was LI president twice (1960–66 and 1982–89), attempted to integrate national parties more fully, and to improve LI's finances, with some success. Despite being involved in national political life, however, Malagodi was not a world figure, and LI's salience remained limited.

With the election to the presidency in 1989 of the then leader of the German Free Democrats, Dr Otto Graf Lamsdorff, LI finally had a leader of world standing – a factor which also helped former British Liberal leader Sir David (now Lord) Steel conduct a highly successful presidency from 1994 to 1996. Lambsdorff and the FDP viewed his presidency as part of his work as party leader, with mutual benefits; he thus benefited from support from his political advisers. Similarly, the current president and Dutch VVD leader, Frits Bolkestein, is supported by the party's International Officer. Such party involvement in the presidency inevitably gives it greater weight. Over the years, however, national parties have gradually become more aware of LI and its potential, which has helped expand the membership and also encouraged parties to play a more active part once inside LI. These changes have been enhanced by the work of Belgian liberal Annemie Neyts-Uyttebroeck, now Deputy President, but for several years Treasurer, who recognised the need to put the organisation of a sound footing, and by the mid-1990s had achieved her aim.

Now, in 1997, Liberal International is a truly worldwide organisation, with a sound operational and financial structure, able to help foster the forces of liberalism and democracy around the world – as its founders envisaged 50 years ago.

Inseparable from political liberty and based on the conscious, free and enlightened consent of the majority, expressed through a free and secret ballot, with due respect for the liberties and opinions of minorities.

Dr Julie Smith *is a Teaching Fellow at the Centre of International Studies, Cambridge, and Fellow of Robinson College, Cambridge.*

This article is based on the author's book, A Sense of Liberty: The History of the Liberal International 1947–1997, *published by Liberal International in November 1997.*

Concluded on page 20.

Scottish Devolution

The Grimond Years

After 300 years, Scotland is to have a Parliament again. *Dr Geoffrey Sell* examines the role of Jo Grimond in the story of Scottish devolution.

For the first time since the Act of Union of 1707, Scotland will soon have its own directly-elected Parliament. The part played by the Liberal Party in bringing this to fruition, and specifically that of Jo Grimond, its leader from 1956 to 1967, repays examination.

Devolution, or home rule, is a very old issue in Scottish politics. It dates back at least to the middle of the nineteenth century, and was adopted as a policy by the Liberal Party in Scotland in 1888. There has always been some dissatisfaction with the Union and with the way it worked. It was muted when government was minimal and when, in Sir Walter Scott's words, Scotland was left 'under the guardianship of her own institutions, to win her silent way to national wealth and consequence'. But Scott also protested against what he saw as a 'gradual and progressive system' of assuming that Scottish interests were always identical with English ones.

Contentment with the Union lasted until Gladstone's proposal to give Ireland home rule encouraged some to demand the same thing for Scotland. Between 1889 and 1914, Scottish home rule was debated 15 times in Parliament. A Liberal Bill for Scottish Home Rule reached and passed a second reading in 1913; the war, however, interrupted its further passage. In 1924 a federalist Scottish Home Rule Bill, supported by Scotland's Labour MPs, failed in the Commons. In 1927 a Government of Scotland Bill was talked out.


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'I think we have embarked on a journey and the end destination of that journey is independence'
Alex Salmond, SNP leader
'I'm delighted that such a decisive majority has grasped the

The Labour Party, initially favourable to Liberal ideas on devolution, lost interest in the 1920s. For years Labour was seen as the party of the centralist state; in 1956, Hugh Gaitskell finally confirmed what had been clear for years, and told the Scottish Labour Party that Labour was now unionist and against home rule for the Scots. It was against this failure that radical Liberalism organised – for some 50 years, up to 1974, the most consistently distinctive feature of its general election manifestos was the regular call for Scottish and Welsh devolution.

Under Grimond's leadership, the Liberal Party offered a critique of the British state that focused on the erosion of the constitutional checks and balances necessary to provide safeguards against executive dominance. Eccleshall suggests that the Liberals' common anti-statist position gave them a distinctive ideological role in post-war Britain.[1] Individuality required a centrifugal dispersal of power, involving electoral reform, devolution and a reform of local government, demonstrating a commitment to political pluralism. If socialism was about equality then liberalism, for Grimond, was about freedom and participation. Participation was the carat of modern Liberal politics, standing in contradistinction to the bureaucratic elitism of socialism and the social elitism of the major strands of conservatism. Grimond appreciated that the extent to which the state embodied trust, participation and inclusion was the extent to which those values were diffused through society at large.

Grimond's commitment to devolution was in evidence from the beginning of his political career. As Orkney and Shetland's prospective candidate in 1949, he detected a lack of enthusiasm in the country and a pessimism about the future. This was because people no longer felt responsible for their own destinies; their lives were subject to controls which seemed arbitrary and exasperating. 'It was not strong government we needed,' Grimond commented during the 1950 general election, 'but less government, better government and government nearer home.'[2]

That Grimond chose to devote his maiden speech to devolution is significant, for it distinguished him from most other Scottish MPs. Many people, he believed, felt that the government 'was a remote and even a fairly hostile affair which is not their concern.'[3] The solution was to bring government nearer to ordinary people. Opponents, he argued, 'can soft pedal the issue as much as they like, but the feeling for it is growing. These sentiments found favour with the Kilbrandon Report some 20 years later, which stated that it was widely felt that government was remote, insensitive to the feelings of the people, and had inadequate machinery for the expression of grievances.

Grimond claimed that devolution would never have been raised in the Debate on the Address in 1950 had it not been for him and A. J. F. Macdonald (Liberal MP for Roxburghshire and Selkirkshire). The Liberal Party, Grimond argued, not only thought of it first, but 'we alone have the plans for its practical application. We'll punch that home whenever we get the chance'. Although the Party pursued a rather lonely parliamentary furrow in its commitment to devolution, Grimond detected a groundswell of support in Scotland: in the late 1940s the Scottish Covenant movement had managed to secure over a million signatures in favour of a Scottish Parliament. The movement never penetrated national politics, however, and after 1951 even this small flame began to gutter. It was not until the early 1960s that the issue began to attract significant support.

Undeterred, Grimond repeated his pledge to campaign for a Scottish Parliament during the 1951 election campaign. It was necessary to ease the burden on the Westminster Parliament, and it was a step forward in freedom which would not weaken, but strengthen, the unity of the Kingdom. Grimond was not a nationalist; he had no desire to separate from England. Liberals did not believe that devolution was another word for nationalism; it was a logical response to the growing feeling of alienation in parts of the UK.

Grimond did not particularly like the word 'devolution', as it implied that power rested at Westminster, from 'which centre some may be graciously devolved'. Enoch Powell's aphorism, 'power devolved is power retained', sums up that side of the affair. Grimond would rather begin by assuming that power should rest with the people who entrusted it to their representatives to discharge the essential tasks of government. Once it was accepted that Scotland was a nation, then it had to be accorded a parliament with all the normal powers of government except for those delegated to the United Kingdom government or the EEC.[4]

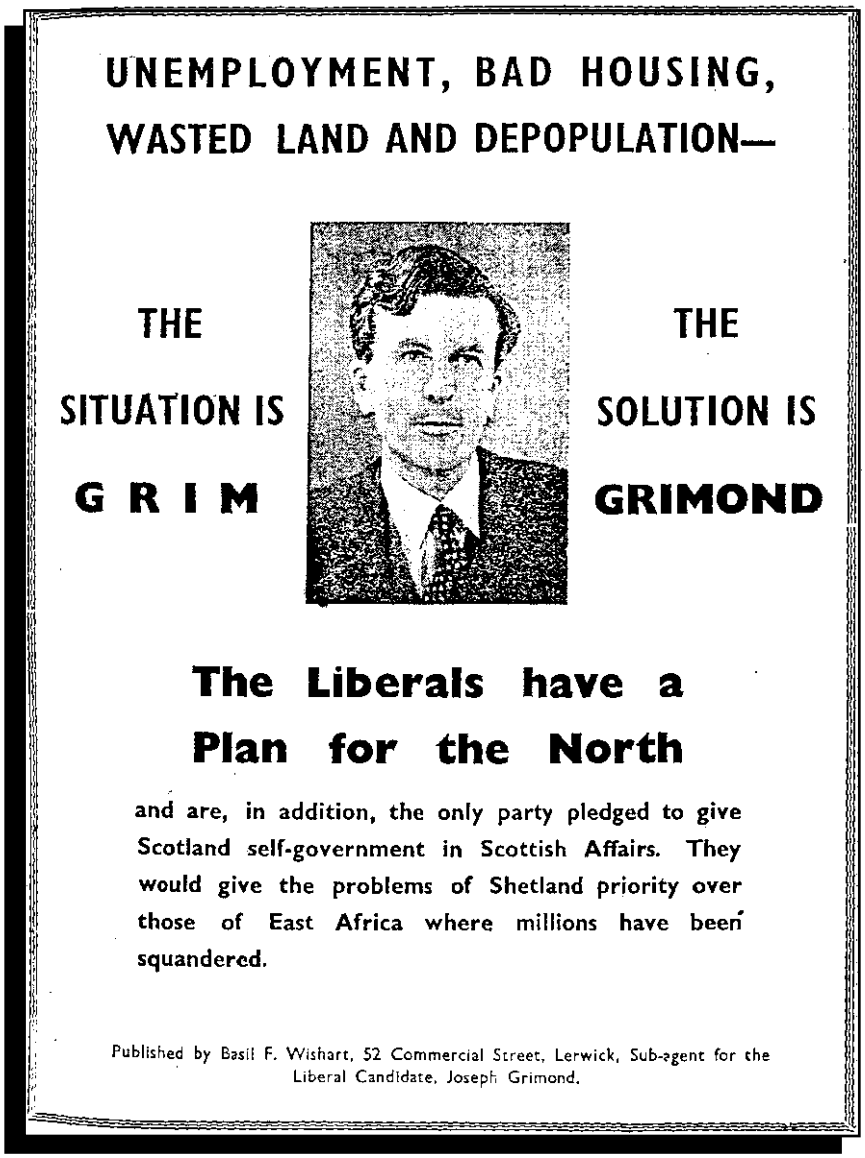
Grimond's commitment to devolution continued unabated after he assumed the Liberal leadership in 1956. Asked in 1960 if had a chance to bring one new Act of Parliament into being, what it would be, he replied unhesitatingly that it would be one calling for some measure of devolution. At the 1961 Edinburgh Assembly a motion urging the early establishment of a Scottish Parliament for Scottish affairs was passed. The motion provided for the maximum amount of fiscal power in a Scottish Parliament consistent with close co-operation in the UK and the Common Market, and a Scottish Treasury to levy taxation. (Significantly, despite Liberal protestations, the Callaghan government refused to entertain a Scottish Assembly having any independent powers of taxation in its Scotland Bill of November 1977.)

To what extent did the Liberal Party's espousal of devolution find a resonance amongst the Scottish electorate? During the 1964 general election campaign, Grimond was convinced that one of the big issues would be the debate between centralisation and decentralisation. This concern was reflected in the Liberal manifesto. It proposed a national plan, the keystone of which would be the decentralisation of power and wealth from London. It believed there were plenty of able men and women in Scotland who could make a bigger contribution to the running of their own affairs. Launching the Scottish Liberal Party's supplement to the manifesto, Grimond claimed that Scots were faced with the decision as to whether they were going to retain or lose their identity as a nation. More and more of the top level decisions were taken in London and the whole tradition of Scottish democracy was in danger of being swamped.

The Scottish Highlands were perceived as fertile Liberal territory,

It was not strong government we needed, but less government, better government and government nearer home.

If socialism was about equality then liberalism, for Grimond, was about freedom and participation.



and Liberal commitment to devolution was particularly stressed there. An election advertisement in the *Northern Times* pictured two young women school teachers. They believed that Scotland had to run her own affairs in order to achieve the prosperity of which she was capable. The Liberal Party, they added, 'in offering a measure of Home Rule, appeals to us, and therefore we want a Liberal in Sutherland this time.'[5]

That the Liberals were perceived as the most nationalist of the main parties was undoubtedly a factor behind their electoral success in 1964. Grimond was not slow to play the nationalist card. He told Sutherland Liberals that 'we are in an area not only far from London generally but also far from the thinking of people in London. If this was colonial territory I sometimes think we would be more generously treated.' In an eve-of-poll message to Highland electors he stated that 'if you feel patriotism in yozU own land and the North, you must vote Liberal tomorrow.' This reference to colonialism was repeated at the 1965 Assembly by leading Scottish Liberal John Bannerman. Occasionally, he remarked, 'we get visits from Tories who like to see the natives. They come on safari from London.'

With the Liberals acting as the pacesetter for devolution, why were they unable to prevent the rise of the Scottish National Party? Part of the problem, Budge & Urwin suggest, was a lack of communication with the electorate.[6] As was the case with other pioneering Liberal policies such as entry into the EEC, or the abolition of Britain's independent nuclear deterrent, many electors were confused about where the Party stood. An opinion poll taken in the Kelvingrove and Woodside areas of Glasgow at the 1964 election showed that only 22% of respondents thought that Liberals were in favour of giving Scotland home rule. 44% thought they were against and 34% didn't know. These figures were disappointing, but Glasgow was a traditionally weak area for Liberals.

During the latter part of the Grimond's leadership, the SNP began to make an electoral impact. It perhaps unconsciously positioned itself as a classic protest party, as natural a haven for those disillusioned with the two-party system, as was the Liberal Party. Its political philosophy, other than nationalism, was of a familiar 'plague on both your houses' sort. It evolved during the 1960s into a mixture of individualistic and anti-state leftism that mirrored the Liberal revival in England. The real SNP threat to Liberal hopes became apparent when William Wolfe, the party's chairman, polled nearly 10,000 votes in the 1962 West Lothian byelection, and the Liberal candidate lost his deposit. The Liberal result was a 'sharp reminder to the party of the fruits of years of neglect'[7] It was disturbing for it showed that the SNP had an ability to reach a section of the electorate – the industrial working class – where the Liberal Party was traditionally weak.

At the 1964 general election the SNP fielded 15 candidates and obtained 2.4% of the Scottish vote. This increased to 23 candidates and 5.0% of the vote in 1966. This had a traumatic effect on Scottish Liberals who had regarded the nationalists in the early days as slightly errant Liberals who tended to extremism on the home rule issue. The form of the relationship between the two parties bitterly divided Scottish Liberals. Just before the 1964 election there were attempts to reach an arrangement. Wolfe persuaded the Scottish Nationalists to offer the Liberals an electoral pact if they would give top priority to their declared policy of a federal Britain. The move foundered as the SNP set impossibly rigid con-

ditions and the Liberals denounced separation. In March 1964 the Scottish Liberal Party issued the following statement:

Nowhere is there a place in Liberal policy for any separatism of the extreme character advocated by the Scottish Nationalists. For that reason there is no possibility of a pact with the Nationalists unless they agree to travel the Liberal road of federal home rule for the United Kingdom.

James Davidson, Liberal candidate and subsequently MP for West Aberdeenshire, recalls that whereas Grimond and Bannerman were in favour of maximum cooperation, Russell Johnston and George Mackie took the diametrically opposite point of view.[8] John Mackay, Liberal candidate for Argyll in 1964 and 1966 comments that it was the 'ever-closer moving to the SNP in 1966 and 1967' that was the final straw in leading him to defect to the Conservatives.[9] Incidentally, it was not until the October 1974 general election that the SNP first fielded a candidate against Grimond.

Nevertheless, with his advocacy of devolution and the creation of a Highlands and Islands Development Board, Grimond was able to plant roots that have lasted until the present day. With the success in 1964 of Russell Johnston at Inverness, Alasdair Mackenzie in Ross and Cromarty and George Mackie in Caithness and Sutherland there was now a Highland bloc of Liberal MPs who would champion their region's interest at Westminster. The voice of the Highlands would be clearly and forcefully heard; the periphery had struck back. The Liberal flag was hoisted in triumph over 11,000 square miles of Highland territory. Mackie exulted that it was now Liberal country all the way from Muckle Flugga in the Shetlands to Ballachulish in Southern Invernesshire.

'Occasionally,' Bannerman remarked, 'we get visits from Tories who like to see the natives. They come on safari from London.'

Further electoral success took place against a background of policy work, in which the Party developed a regional strategy. The ideas contained in the pamphlets *Boost for the Borders* and *A Plan for the North East* played an important part in the dramatic byelection victory in Roxburgh, Selkirk and Peebles in 1965, and James Davidson's victory in West Aberdeenshire in the 1966 election, as had those in Russell Johnston's pamphlet *Highland Development* in 1964.

Ironically, Liberals MPs' enthusiasm for giving the Scottish people a greater say in their own affairs did not always find an echo with their own electorates. The referendum result of March 1979 showed that both the Borders and Orkney and Shetland voted against the Government's devolution plans. Fear of domination by a Labour-controlled central belt is still a powerful emotion.

Dr Geoffrey Sell *is a college lecturer and a member of the History Group's Committee. He recently completed his Ph.D thesis on 'Liberal revival: British Liberalism and Jo Grimond 1956–67.'*

Notes:

1 R. Eccleshall, *British Liberalism* (London: Longman, 1986) p. 51.
2 *The Orcadian* 2 March 1950.
3 Parl. Debs., vol. 472, col. 626, 10 March 1950.
4 Jo Grimond, *A Personal* Manifesto (Oxford: Martin Robertson, 1983), p. 54.
5 *Northern Times* 4 September 1964, p. 5.
6 I. Budge and D. Urwin, *Scottish Political Behaviour* (Longman, 1966)
7 *The Guardian* 10 June 1962.
8 Completed questionnaire (6 November 1991) received from J. Davidson, Liberal candidate for West Aberdeenshire 1964 and MP for the constituency 1966–70.
9 Completed questionnaire, (26 November 1991) from Lord Mackay of Ardbrecknish.

Research in Progress

This column aims to assist research projects in progress. If you can help any of the individuals listed below with sources, contacts, or any other helpful information – or if you know anyone who can – please pass on details to them. If you know of any other research project in progress for inclusion in this column, please send details to the Editor at the address on page 2.

The Liberal Party and foreign and defence policy, 1922–88. Book and articles; of particular interest is the 1920s and '30s; and also the possibility of interviewing anyone involved in formulating the foreign and defence policies of the Liberal Party. *Dr R. S. Grayson, 8 Millway Close, Oxford OX2 8BJ.*

The Liberal Party 1945–56. Contact with members (or opponents) of the Radical Reform Group during the 1950s, and anyone with recollections of the leadership of Clement Davies, sought. *Graham Lippiatt, 24 Balmoral Road, South Harrow, HA2 8TD.*

The grass roots organisation of the Liberal Party 1945–64; the role of local activists in the late 1950s revival of the Liberal Party. *Mark Egan, First Floor Flat, 16 Oldfields Circus, Northolt, Middlesex UB5 4RR.*

The political and electoral strategy of the Liberal Party 1970–79. Individual constituency papers from this period, and contact with individuals who were members of the Party's policy committees and/or the Party Council, particularly welcome. *Ruth Fox, 7 Mulberry Court, Bishop's Stortford, Herts CM23 3JW.*

Reports

Religion and the Liberal Party

Evening meeting, July 1997, with Alan Beith MP and Jonathan Parry

Report by *Nick South*

In *The Optimists*, his study of Victorian Liberalism, Ian Bradley begins his chapter on 'The Nonconformist Conscience' with Gladstone's comment in 1877 that 'nonconformity supplies the backbone of English liberalism' – and suggests that this view would have been shared by supporters and critics of Victorian nonconformity alike.

Some Liberals, however, believed that their political creed had been made too 'puritanical and provincial' by the nonconformists; some nonconformists believed their religion had been compromised and subordinated to the demands of politicians. Nonconformists and Liberals may have been bound together by a 'mutual need and a certain mutual respect', but the relationship, Bradley suggests, was not always an easy one.

This tension lay at the heart of the historian Jonathan Parry's analysis of the relationship between Liberals and dissenters when he spoke at the History Group AGM in July. But Parry's conclusion was more damning: that all through the nineteenth century, the Liberal Party had to appeal to more than just radical nonconformists, and that religion was a divisive force, hindering party unity and damaging its electoral prospects. Indeed, he argued, the Liberal Party's worst electoral experiences in the nineteenth century occurred when the middle classes were frightened away by radical dissent.

His analysis began in the 1830s. The broadening of the political class after the Great Reform Act made new coalition-building essential. As the two-party system firmed up in the 1830s, and Tories and Whigs divided on the key issues of the day, by far the most controversial of these issues were religious. By the end of the 1830s, the Whigs were identified with dissenters and Irish Catholics, and the Tories with diehard churchmen. As the influence of the middle classes grew after 1832, so did the influence of dissenters in the majority of large towns. They had real grievances – over church rates, their exclusion from Oxford and Cambridge, compulsory Anglican marriage rites, and the social stigma that flowed from this discrimination.

Whig leaders were most sympathetic to these dissenting concerns, at least in the abstract. The Whig mythology of the state as a sink of corruption – a self-sustaining belief through the years of opposition at the start of the nineteenth century – gave Whigs and dissenters a shared disdain for the power and social stranglehold of church and state, squire and parson. There was also a younger, more intellectual group of Whigs, who admired the rational and intellectual vigour of dissenters, especially on education. The most prominent of these was Lord John Russell, who led the attempts at religious and educational reform in the 1830s.

This, Parry argued, was the main reason for the Tory revival towards the end of the 1830s. But the die had been cast. While some lower middle-class dissenters, suspicious of the political establishment which included the Whigs, devoted their energies to voluntarism, for the next 20 years the broad body of dissenters found themselves allied to the Liberal Party.

If, pre-1867, political liberals and religious dissenters were brought together by the latter's practical grievances, post-1867, with most of these resolved, the bond between nonconformists and Gladstone's Liberal Party was increasingly built around the shared language of conscience, morality and the crusade. In some ways, the pattern of this second period was similar to that of the first. The broadening of the franchise in 1867 excited radicals, and dissenters sprang to life, particularly over the issue of disestablishment. Gladstone's commitment in 1868 to disestablishment of the Church of Ireland was seen by dissenters as a prelude to the disestablishment of the Church in England, Scotland and Wales.

But this did not happen, for two reasons. The first success, in England at least, was that the dissenters' increasing enthusiasm and activism on the issue frightened middle class Anglicans. Combined with the 1870 Education Act, this roused the Anglican community, revived the Conservatives, and led, in 1874, to the Conservatives' first clear-cut election victory since the 1840s.

The second reason for the failure of disestablishment, Parry argued, was that nonconformists themselves were unenthusiastic about legislation in general in the second half of the nineteenth century. In part, this was because so many dissenters were locked into an attitude that everything the state did was bad. In part, it was simply because, by the late nineteenth century, there were so few practical dissenting grievances left. Marriage, deaths, university entrance tests – all had been dealt with. Disestablishment was still there as an

issue, but it was an abstract one, not a practical one, and the most respected dissenters were not particularly committed.

Parry went on to argue that, in the absence of practical dissenting grievances, what is interesting about the second half of the nineteenth century is how often the established church and nonconformists seemed to find themselves on the same side – for example, in urban communities. Disestablishment, many felt, would actually weaken the ability of the Christian church as a whole to be a missionary force. So in England, at least, pressure for disestablishment weakened – though it endured in Scotland and Wales, where it was tied up with other issues.

In the 1870s, Parry argued, there was little that dissenters actually wanted from the Liberal Party – a good job, he suggested, since the party was led by then by Gladstone, a great churchman who was highly dubious about disestablishment. The rapport between Liberals and nonconformists by then was less to do with sharing the same grievances, and more to do with sharing the same language – not the language of dissent, but of the crusade. It was evangelical politics which lay at the heart of the Liberal Party's relationship with dissenters in this phase – most notably, of course, over the Bulgarian atrocities, but on a wide range of other issues as well. Gladstone's affinity with nonconformists, Parry suggested, was not because of the issues, but because he talked about them. His speeches were like nonconformist sermons – and he bonded with his nonconformist audience because he told them how virtuous they were!

But as the Liberal Party found, whenever it got too close to nonconformist concerns – such as temperance reform – this was usually at the expense of support from other quarters. In the final analysis, the only way Gladstone could keep the different groups of Liberal supporters together was by quashing the radical dissenter demands, and relying on moral tone and language to keep them on board.

Alan Beith then took up the story, concentrating on religion and the Liberal Party in the twentieth century. He began by emphasising the party's appeal, not just to nonconformists, but also to other religious denominations, and then focused on how the party's 'special relationship' with nonconformists had fared over the last 100 years.

> The bond between nonconformists and Gladstone's Liberal Party was increasingly built around the shared language of conscience, morality and the crusade.

The 1906 Liberal landslide resulted from many factors. But the party's nonconformist supporters, fired up by the education issue, put a lot of passion into the election, and saw the victory very much as theirs. Their enthusiasm after 1906 diminished somewhat, and they saw the loss of the Birrell reforms as a serious setback in the new government.

After World War One, the influence of nonconformists in the party diminished significantly. In part, of course, this was due to the post-1918 decline of the Liberal Party; in part due to the decline of nonconformity from its peak of support around 1910–12. Nonconformity provided an increasingly weak reference point in a period when the religious division that dominated politics was between Irish Protestants and Catholics.

As the numbers of nonconformists declined, so distinctly Liberal groups such as the Scottish Free Church and the United Methodist Church disappeared – and active nonconformists were increasingly preoccupied with running their own congregations in a declining denomination. Nonconformists whose backgrounds led them naturally into trade unionism had little affinity with the Liberal Party – and the drift of Methodists, in particular, into the Labour movement via the unions was increased by the attractions of the Christian Socialist movement.

For all these reasons, the influence of nonconformity in the Liberal Party diminished. And yet nonconformists remained extremely important in the survival and revival of the party. On one level, this was due to the basis for recruitment which the chapels provided, especially in the west country. Alan Beith recalled his decision to join the party, as a young teenager after the Torrington byelection. He looked up who to contact and discovered that it was the Sunday School supervisor. When he approached him and asked to join, the supervisor commented that 'no-one has done that for a while'! To build up branches, they went round the chapels which were known not to have links with the Labour Party.

There was an important affinity on another level, too, and that was through the Biblical idea of the 'righteous remnant' (Isaiah 9, Romans 11) – a natural attitude among post-war Liberals, and characteristic of nonconformists' view of their own religious status.

Finally, Beith argued that in policy and ideological terms, nonconformists in the party played an important role in asserting the distinctiveness of liberalism from socialism. While the main ideological influence on twentieth century liberalism may have been the 'social liberal' agenda, this was not an exclusive agenda. Those nonconformists who had not gone over to the Labour Party, and who remained with the Liberals, knew why they had done so. In socialism, they saw a statism to which they were deeply hostile, on religious as well as political grounds – and this hostility was rooted in the nineteenth cen-

tury and in beliefs which fostered such an affinity between nonconformists and the Gladstonian Liberal Party. It was probably not without coincidence, Beith concluded, that nonconformists in the party were still a strong force in emphasising the Liberal Democrats' distinctiveness from the Labour Party today.

From Beveridge to Blair

Fringe meeting, September 1997, with Frank Field MP and Nick Timmins

Report by *David Cloke*

At the autumn party conference, over 100 Liberal Democrats met in the rather bizarre surroundings of Eastbourne's Tennis Centre to consider the history of the welfare state and to peer into its future. They were welcomed by Archy Kirkwood MP, Chairman of the Commons Select Committee on Social Security – the first member of the party, or its predecessors, to hold such a post. The meeting was an historic occasion for another reason: it was the first Liberal Democrat fringe meeting ever to be addressed by a government minister.

It fell to Nick Timmins, the public policy editor of the *Financial Times* and author of a key work on the welfare state, *The Five Giants,* to outline the role of William Beveridge as midwife to the welfare state and to discuss what responsibility, if any, he had for the problems that have arisen in recent years. Whilst he said that he came to praise Beveridge and not to bury him, Timmins acknowledged that it was not an easy thing to do. Beveridge was not an easy man, he was vain and arrogant and could be cranky. His, often strongly held, views were not consistent throughout his life. Just four years prior to the publication of his Report he was calling for the 'whiplash of starvation' to force the unemployed back into work.

The Beveridge Report itself was an attempt to reconcile two irreconcilable values: individual freedom and compulsion. It was Nick Timmins' view that, for its time, the report managed to achieve the necessary balance to a remarkable degree. What the Report couldn't foresee was how wrong it would be for our time. Nonetheless, he argued that Beveridge was extremely concerned to preserve incentives to work and to save. Hence he did not want a system that preserved an individual's income at the level they were previously earning (a 'Santa Claus' system) but one based on national insurance, creating a national minimum below which an individual would not fall.

Whilst he recognised that Beveridge did get much right (not least the creation of a welfare system with massive popular support which served the country for nearly 30 years), Timmins focused most of his remarks on what, for our time, it is thought Beveridge got wrong. These included the creation of an annual bill for pensions of £40 billion, a traditional view of the role of women and of the structure of family life, the destruction of friendly and mutual societies and the granting of too many rights without the expectation of increased responsibilities. There was some evidence to suggest that some of the problems arose from the way the Labour government implemented the Report's proposals. For example, Beveridge proposed phasing in the pensions scheme and a flat rate for benefits to meet the costs of rent.

According to Timmins, Beveridge designed the welfare state to meet the needs of the norm: two-parent families with the husband at work and the woman in the home at a time of full employment. He assumed that, as had been the case after the First World War, women would give up their jobs and return to the home after the Second. As a result of the findings of the 1931 census, he was concerned about a declining population, not an ageing one. Furthermore, there were a whole range of changes to society that Beveridge could not have foresees that have had an impact on the effectiveness of the welfare state: the postwar baby boom, the rise in lone parents, the growing need for disability benefits and the return of high levels of unemployment.

In essence Nick Timmins appeared to be arguing that the norms of society had changed, but that the welfare state had not changed to meet them, and that therefore a redesign is necessary. However, he also argued that it was not all Beveridge's fault, as many of the changes could not have been foreseen when the Report was written.

Frank Field MP, Minister of State at the Department of Social Security, perhaps rather dashing some of the hopes of the audience by declaring that he was not able to give details of the government's new policies as yet, but would pose some questions to the meeting. For him, the purpose of looking back was not to apportion blame but to learn. He also informed the meeting that he drew an important lesson from Nick Timmins' book, that the development of the welfare state was a continuing journey.

Field's starting point on that journey was the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, spurred on by the enormous enthusiasm of the social reformers of the time, such as those

involved in the Poor Law Reform Commission. They had seen the success of many members of the skilled and semi-skilled working classes and attempted to understand the reasons. It was their, and his, view that it came from the spread of mutual aid. As mutuality became a way of life, it taught civic values. Frank Field argued that the franchise was conceded to these groups for this reason: it was a public recognition of the full citizenship they had already obtained.

With this background in mind, for Field Lloyd George should be viewed as a villain in the story of the welfare state. As a result of pressure from the commercial societies he let them compete on an equal basis with the mutual societies. From then on there was a state-organised attempt to drive out the mutuals, despite mutual and friendly societies having more members than trade unions.

Whilst Beveridge was not exactly a villain, according to Field he did try to have it both ways with regard to the mutuals. He wanted to establish state provision very quickly, but with mutual societies providing a 'top up'. However, as they were not made part of the delivery system mutuals were eased out and the role of private welfare was extended. In Field's view the extension of the role of the state and of the private sector had long-term damaging effects on society. In their anxiety to force the pace of change both Lloyd George and Beveridge lost sight of the key starting point for any welfare system: the establishment of mechanisms for secure social advance.

Frank Field's concern that the pace of change should be a measured one was perhaps reflected in his unwillingness to announce any government policies in this area, though he offered three key questions:

1 How can opportunities for change be built in to the welfare system?
2 As it is now recognised that welfare does affect people's behaviour, how do we build a welfare system that enhances civil society?
3 How should the government seek a new consensus in these issues and where should the balance lie between a top-down approach and developing support from the grassroots?

In some small way the search for consensus began as soon as Frank Field sat down, with a lively exchange of views between the representatives at the meeting and the minister. Discussion ranged from single mothers to the role of local government and on to how to tackle the 'hardening of hearts' that was one of the legacies of the Thatcher era. Perhaps uniquely for a meeting of the History Group, there was much looking to the future. Whilst this is to be welcomed, ultimately the meeting was somewhat unsatisfactory in that it failed to provide a uniquely Liberal view and critique of the welfare state. Although many Liberal Democrats are deeply committed to the principles of the welfare state, the Party should not forget the many concerns expressed by Liberals during its development and expansion during the late 1940s and 1950s.

Finally, I would like to draw attention to a piece by Nick Timmins in the *Financial Times* on 18 September 1997. In it he reports on the 'plethora of panaceas' to Britain's welfare problems being considered by the government. He quotes the research director of the Fabian Society, Ian Corfield, who states that 'Labour's problem is not a shortage of ideas. Rather it appears to have too many – and it doesn't know which ones to choose.' He adds that 'everyone is running around very energetically, but no one has a shared view of the role of the state in all this.' It would seem to me that the Liberal Democrats, including the History Group, should lead the discussion in determining the role of the state in the welfare system.

In this month ...

All extracts from the Liberal Magazine*, December 1947:*

It is fairly obvious now that the Direction and Control of Labour Bill would have been thrown out if the men and women in Parliament had been free. What a farce! The leaders of the Liberal Party have recently issued a long statement on this subject. The statement ends: 'The most urgent constitutional reform is to ensure that a minority in the constituencies shall no longer be able to obtain a majority in the legislature.'

George E. Buckland

'Only Liberals can prevent a Liberal Government next time', so we are told. We had three rehearsals for the General Election, and one has been wasted; three chances to build up our machine, and one has been wasted; three chances to inculcate the habit of voting Liberal, and one has been wasted. The nation was ready to turn to us, and we refused to give them leadership. Do we deserve to win? .... By not putting up candidates, or by putting up Independents, you cause your colleagues who do stand to lose. The only way to build up a political machine is to fight elections.

Harold T. Kay (on local elections)

It is obvious that there has been a complete division of opinion in the Government with regard to policy. The Minister for Economic Affairs, when he was President of the Board of Trade, was all the time warning the country but what has been happening? The speech he delivered yesterday was followed almost immediately by a speech from one of his colleagues flatly contradicting him! How can we possibly have confidence in His Majesty's Government when there is obviously a division of opinion on policy in the Government?

Clement Davies MP, in the Debate on the Address

Young Liberals

The 'Red Guard' Era

Peter Hellyer argues that foreign policy issues had a crucial role to play in the growth of the Young Liberals in the 1960s and '70s.

I was interested to read in Newsletter 14 (March 1997) the article by Ruth Fox on 'Young Liberal Influence and its Effects, 1970–74'. While I would not disagree with many of her conclusions, I do, however, query her starting point, and, in particular, her statement that: 'The Young Liberals were first catapulted on to the national stage in 1970 through their involvement in the "Stop The Seventy Tour" of the South African cricket team'.

The phenomenon of a radical and large Young Liberal Movement, including both the National League of Young Liberals and the Union of Liberal Students, which, incidentally, she fails to mention, began to emerge significantly earlier, as might be deduced from the printing with the paper of a *Guardian* cartoon from the 1966 Brighton Assembly, showing the 'Red Guards,' led by George Kiloh, then NLYL Chairman, assaulting a barricade defended by Grimond, Thorpe and others of the parliamentary party. By summer 1970, the YLs were already well in the public eye, partly because of the skills of Kiloh and others, such as Terry Lacey, Phil Kelly, and Louis Eaks, in attracting press attention. Good copy for the tabloid press could always be guaranteed.

There are also a number of factual errors. STST, for example, did not commence sabotage of cricket grounds in January 1970; that began in the summer. In the winter of 1969–70, when STST began, with YL support, it was the rugby grounds that attracted attention. The conflict between the YLs and the party leadership over the Israel/Palestine issue began not after the 1970 general election but in 1968, sparked off by a letter written to the journal *Free Palestine* by a YL officer.

Quite apart from the question of precisely when the YLs began 'to be catapulted on to the national stage' (and, as a participant, I would argue for 1966, rather than for 1970), I also believe that Ruth Fox underestimates the importance of foreign policy issues in the growth of the YLs.

When the 'Red Guards' first came to public attention at the 1966 Brighton Assembly, a key factor was YL sponsorship of an anti-NATO resolution. Over the next few years, a number of foreign policy issues came to the fore, not just inside the Liberal Party but also in the country at large, of which the most significant were the question of how to end the UDI by Ian Smith in Rhodesia, this issue linking up with the broader topic of opposition to apartheid, and growing American involvement in the Vietnam war.

On both these issues, the Wilson government adopted policies that were perceived as being either insufficiently radical, or pro-American, or both. Opposition to government policy on these issues was seen by many young people as a way of expressing their own dissatisfaction with government.

At the same time, the Labour Party Young Socialists, then controlled by the forerunners of Militant, and other groups such as the International Marxist Group and International Socialism were often perceived as being radical, but steeped in an unfamiliar – dare I say boring? – Marxist rhetoric. Perhaps, too, they often were simply not 'fun.'

The Young Liberals, on the other hand, not only offered radical policies, but 'fun' as well, being closer to the 'flower power' culture of the so-called hippies, and adopting a far less puritanical approach than the various Trotskyist groups to the 1960s sexual revolution and the widespread availability for the first time of cannabis. Those groups viewed the most popular of the YL lapel badges, 'Make Love Not War,' with distaste, but thousands were sold to non-YLs.

Although the YLs may have had an image that was lacking in 'seriousness,' that was by

no means unattractive. Still under the label of the Liberal Party, and therefore less susceptible to the smear of being called communist at a time when Cold War rhetoric still had a powerful hold, rebellious youth could be rebellious and still remain to some extent within conventional political norms, including campaigning in local and parliamentary elections.

The YLs (both NLYL and ULS) gained substantial experience in working with single-issue campaigns, such as those on Southern Africa and Vietnam. They were, for example, granted representation as an organisation on the National Council of the Anti-Apartheid Movement from around 1967, with individual YLs subsequently being elected for several years to the AAM Executive. YL officers were also on the organising committees for the major anti-Vietnam War demonstrations in London in March and October 1968, both of which were attended by many YLs.

In contrast, contrary to Ruth Fox's suggestion, the YLs played a relatively small part in the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, although opposed to nuclear weapons. One reason, in part at least, was the feeling that CND was too uncritical of the Soviet Union. During the summer of 1968, a number of YL Executive members and other leading activists had experienced Soviet bloc repression at first hand, first at a World Youth Festival in Bulgaria, and then in Czechoslovakia during the 21 August Soviet invasion – convincing evidence of the need to oppose the Soviet bloc as firmly as the United States, and a policy distinguishing them from the various Marxist groups, in particular the Young Communists.

By the late 1960s, the YLs were able to take a lead in starting 'Stop The Seventy Tour', a lead welcomed by Anti-Apartheid, more concerned with staying inside the law. Had the YLs not already achieved recognition in previous years as a campaigning force on Southern Africa and other foreign policy issues, the lead taken by Eaks and Hain (as well as others who were not YLs), on STST would have attracted neither media interest nor the support it so quickly gathered.

Young Liberals as the press saw them: the cover of the *Guardian* report on the Liberal Assembly, 1966.

While Kiloh, Lacey, Eaks, Phil Kelly (and, I would claim, myself) may have been particularly involved in foreign policy issues, there were other strands of YL thought that were more involved in developing the community politics approach. Among NLYL and ULS leaders in the late 1960s were people like Tony Greaves and Gordon Lishman (like Lacey and Kelly, both officers both of ULS and NLYL), David Penhaligon and Howard Legg, who developed the combination of a radical YL approach and involvement in community politics out of which many of the changes that so revolutionised the party in the later 1970s grew, and which Ruth Fox well describes.

Finally, while YL activism on foreign policy issues may have given the movement a major boost in the late 1960s, many of those most involved moved on either to join the Labour Party, as did Kiloh, Lacey, Kelly and later Hain, or to leave party politics altogether, as did Eaks. (I think I was something of an exception, although scarcely typical, since, apart from returning for every general election but one since 1970, I have been resident abroad for most of the last 25 years.)

Many of those who were more preoccupied with community politics, however, have stayed the course within the party, spreading that approach throughout the party. That is perhaps why Ruth Fox has overlooked the role of foreign policy issues in the growth of NLYL and ULS.

Peter Hellyer *is a journalist living in Abu Dhabi; he was International Vice Chairman of the NLYL from 1967 to 1969.*

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Would you like you to review articles submitted to the *Journal of Liberal Democrat History* for content and accuracy?

We are looking for reviewers with background knowledge of any of the various topics or periods covered by *Journal* articles. Comments made are relayed, anonymously, to the authors.

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Harry Willcock

The Forgotten Champion of Liberalism

Mark Egan remembers the Liberal who helped ensure that British citizens today are not compelled to carry identity cards.

A leader article in *Liberal Democrat News* last year (LDN 30 August 1996) argued that 'ID cards are insidious' and that 'sometimes conscience dictates a higher law than the latest bigoted intolerant missive from Westminster'. Clarence Harry Willcock would have wholeheartedly agreed. In 1951 Willcock took on the police and the government in a famous court case which paved the way for the abolition of identity cards the following year.

The case of Willcock v. Muckle is now largely forgotten, but the evidence and arguments presented in the case illustrate the issues which are bound to re-emerge if the government – following their postwar predecessors – takes up Michael Howard's pre-election intention to introduce a photocard driving licence.

ID cards were introduced in Britain by emergency legislation immediately on the outbreak of war in 1939. The cards remained in use after the war to facilitate the administration of food rationing. Aneurin Bevan described them as 'distasteful' and 'repugnant' but, he argued, the cards were necessary as long as an estimated 20,000 deserters were at large in the country. It was assumed that these deserters would be unable to acquire food without an ID card and that the cards could be abolished once the deserters were captured.

This justification for the continued use of ID cards was a fiction. ID cards were easily forged and the droves of starving deserters whom the government expected to surrender to the authorities never materialised. By 1950 Labour ministers argued that the cards should be retained for administrative purposes. Applications for medical treatment, for new passports, and even withdrawals from Post Office savings accounts all required the production of an ID card. The police also had powers to ask to see an ID card, although supposedly only when they had grounds to suspect the commission of a serious crime. In practice the police often demanded to see the ID card of anyone they dealt with, no matter how trivial the offence they had committed. In total 61 people were prosecuted for failing to produce an ID card within two days of the police demanding it, the last of whom was Harry Willcock.

In December 1950 Willcock was stopped by the police for speeding along Ballard's Lane, Finchley. He refused to show the police his ID card, stating: 'I am a Liberal, and I am against this sort of thing'. Willcock had twice stood for Parliament as a Liberal, at Barking in 1945 and in 1950. He was a Yorkshireman, and had served as a Liberal councillor and as a magistrate in Horsforth for many years before the war. In the magistrate's court he argued that the emergency legislation introducing ID cards was now redundant, because the 'emergency' was clearly at an end, and thus he had committed no offence. His counsel urged the magistrates to 'say with pleasure and with pride that we need not be governed by restrictive rules any longer.' The magistrates were impressed by Willcock's case and, although convicting him, gave him an absolute discharge. Willcock decided to test the law in the High Court.

Willcock assembled a team of prominent Liberal lawyers, comprising Basil (now Lord) Wigoder, Emrys Roberts MP, A. P. Marshall and Lucien Fior, to fight his case. The case was heard by seven senior judges, including the Lord Chief Justice. Willcock's appeal was dismissed on 26 June 1951 after the Attorney General, Sir Frank Soskice, successfully argued that in 1939 Parliament had legislated to deal not with one emergency but with several, undefined emergencies, and that consequently the legislation requiring the carrying of ID cards remained valid.

Despite ruling against Willcock the Lord Chief Justice was sharply critical of the government. He suggested that the definition of the 'emergency' was ambiguous and concluded that 'to use Acts of Parliament passed in war-time for particular purposes now that the war had

ceased tended to turn law-abiding subjects into law-breakers.' Within the week new guidelines were drawn up by the Metropolitan Police to ensure that police officers could only demand the production of ID cards in exceptional circumstances, and other police forces were encouraged to follow suit.

The government came under pressure in Parliament to abolish ID cards. A number of both Labour and Conservative MPs, particularly Sir William Darling, Lt-Col Lipton and Lt-Cmdr Hutchison, had regularly urged the government to scrap ID cards during the preceding six years. Following the Willcock case the Liberal MPs, particularly Clement Davies, also began to call for reform. The Liberal Party had not previously campaigned on the issue, although during the war Sir Archibald Sinclair had extracted a promise from the government that it would discontinue its emergency powers at the end of the war. In the House of Lords the Marquess of Reading proposed a motion, 'that the use of identity cards is unnecessary and oppressive, and should be discontinued without delay'. It was passed by 54 votes to 28.

A campaign was also commenced outside Parliament, headed by Willcock and supported by several Liberal MPs and candidates. The Freedom Defence Committee was launched by Willcock ceremonially destroying his own identity card in front of press photographers on the steps of the National Liberal Club. In August 1951 a well-attended public meeting was held in Hyde Park to launch a petition to Parliament calling for an end to 68 emergency measures which had continued despite the end of the war.

The campaign failed to generate any further momentum. The 1951 Liberal manifesto did not even mention ID cards, and in the heat of the election campaign in the autumn of that year the issue was all but forgotten. The incoming Tory government initially refused to commit itself to a policy on ID cards. However, on 21 February 1952 the Secretary of State for Health, H. Crookshank, finally announced that the public no longer needed to carry the cards. The decision was presented as a budgetary one, with the government saving £1 million as a result. Clement Davies asked whether the government would compensate Willcock's court costs but, predictably, no help was forthcoming. Willcock, the Liberal hero, was dead within the year.

Looking back, it is interesting to note that only individual Liberal members and candidates spoke out on grounds of principle against the use of ID cards. Labour MPs were amongst the most enthusiastic supporters of the cards because they represented the triumph of bureaucratic socialism over individual rights. Tory MPs generally opposed ID cards on the grounds of their inefficiency. Some Tories called for more sophisticated ID cards to be introduced so that everybody could have one number identifying them to the government from birth to death. Only Liberals objected to the cards because they infringed the fundamental liberties of the individual.

> He refused to show the police his ID card, stating: 'I am a Liberal, and I am against this sort of thing'.

It is also instructive to observe the ways in which ID cards were abused by state officials. Post Office staff had the right to demand the production of an ID card and this caused widespread resentment. Some police forces did arbitrarily demand to see ID cards. In 1946 it was reported in Parliament that the police regularly rounded up and questioned girls in the West End of London who could not prove their identity. Anyone without an identity card was immediately assumed to be an army deserter or a criminal and this left some groups, such as gypsies, especially vulnerable to harassment. Comically, there was also a case of a vicar refusing to baptise an infant until his parents procured an ID card for him.

In practice ID cards were easily forged, so criminals were barely affected by their existence. Ordinary citizens were affected, having to pay to replace lost cards and risking prosecution if they failed to do so. Without a written constitution or Bill of Rights to which to appeal, citizens had no redress from the abuse of the law by government officials and the police. Were ID cards to be reintroduced we would again face the injustices Harry Willcock stood up to and, ultimately, triumphed over.

***Mark Egan** is a clerk in the House of Commons, and a member of the History Group's committee.*

Reviews

Who Did It?

George Dangerfield: *The Strange Death of Liberal England* (Serif, 1997)

Reviewed by *Graham Lippiatt*

'Stands the Church clock at ten to three?
And is there honey still for tea?'

These are the famous concluding lines of Rupert Brooke's nostalgia-fest, the poem *The Old Vicarage, Grantchester*. Every generation believes the world was once a better, gentler place. We search for the lost golden age of long warm summers like those Brooke remembered in the same poem:

'…. when the day is young and sweet,
Gild gloriously the bare feet,
That run to bathe ….'

George Dangerfield's masterpiece *The Strange Death of Liberal England,* first published in 1935 in New York and now reissued in paperback by Serif, is one of the reasons why so many English people have located our mythical golden age in Edwardian times. This is a truly classic book. How many other commentaries or academic treatises on politics and society written 60 years ago would bear republishing today, or find their way on to undergraduate reading lists?

Dangerfield's primary interest was literature. He read English at Hertford College, Oxford, then went to the USA where he worked as a critic and became the literary editor of *Vanity Fair*. *The Strange Death of Liberal England* has an epilogue entitled 'The Lofty Shade', inspired by a quotation from A. E. Housman, dealing with the work of the so-called Georgian Poets who first met in 1912 and whose leading light was Rupert Brooke. Brooke's death seemed to Dangerfield a metaphor for the England he represented – that idealised golden age, its life so mysteriously cut short at the height of its powers.

When Dangerfield wrote, however, he wrote not poetry or novels but history. In 1953 he won the Pulitzer Prize for American History and published works on American nationalism and the Anglo-Irish question. His literary background and the era in which he studied gave him an approach to the writing of history which drew on the tradition of history as a branch of literature, in the footsteps of writers such as G. M. Trevelyan. As A. J. P. Taylor was fond of pointing out, the words for story and history are the same in a number of languages. Perhaps this is why *The Strange Death of Liberal England* has the feel of a political thriller – a kind of historical Agatha Christie. Just who did leave those stab wounds in the body of the Liberal Party found bleeding to death in 1915? Dangerfield lines up the leading suspects and invites us to a *Murder on the Orient Express*-like conclusion, that it was the work, not of a single perpetrator, but of four groups of conspirators.

Dangerfield's analysis is that Liberal England's consensus politics, a consensus based upon the Liberal virtues of rationality and tolerance, was cut down by the rise of political violence and protest against the state. He identified the main actors in this rebellion as the Tory peers, the suffragettes, the trade unions and the Ulster Unionists. He explores this thesis with great style and an immense readability. He sets out how the great election landslide of 1906 was something of an anomaly, 'built of showy but not very durable stuff'. Liberal England was doomed by an inherent inability to deal with – perhaps even to understand – the growth in the violence and disorder of industrial unrest, the methods and resistance of the women's movement and the threat of civil conflict in Protestant Ireland over Home Rule.

I found Dangerfield at his most readable in dealing with the Tory rebellion, the House of Lords' opposition to the Parliament Bill and Conservative support of Sir Edward Carson's organisation of volunteers to fight Home Rule. Here is a story within a story, with a beginning, a middle and an end – and fortunately all in that order. The starting points are Lloyd George's People's Budget of 1909 and the Home Rule Bill of 1912. The first, rejected by the Tory majority in the Lords, led to the proposal to take away the Lords' right to amend money bills and ended when the threat to flood the Upper House with Liberal Peers was accepted by the King. The second, the fruition of a long-held Liberal cause and a consequence of the dependence of the Liberals in Parliament on the votes of the Irish Nationalists after the two inconclusive general elections of 1910, ended when the outbreak of the First World War meant the Bill had to be put to one side. Subsequent events made sure that other routes to Irish independence and Ulster Protestant autonomy were taken. Dangerfield seems less assured on his

other areas of suffragette violence and industrial unrest, as though he knows there is a good tale to tell but gets a bit confused in the telling.

Dangerfield's analysis has of course been discredited by more recent historians. The period from 1906–14 has been recognised as a time of fundamental strength for the Liberal Party, with the emergence of the New Liberalism and the implementation of a reforming legislative programme after 1908. The Liberal vote remained strong in areas of traditional support, despite the growth of the Labour Party. Focus has shifted away from analysis of the prewar era to explain Liberal decline. The effects of the war itself, the internal Asquith/Lloyd George split and the emergence of mass democracy after 1918 have come to be seen as the competing elements in the demise of the Liberal Party.

And therein also lies one of the problems with Dangerfield's book. Is he just dealing with the electoral eclipse of the Liberal Party? Or, perhaps, just the failure of the Liberal government? He seems to be searching for something more, trying to chart a fundamental change in British politics and society, from a liberal society based upon reason, toleration and the primacy of the individual to something else – presumably one based upon the collective identity and ideology of class. Dangerfield conflates these wider social questions with the narrower electoral fate of one political party and its problems in government. Of course the issues are linked; the one illuminates the other, but they are not the same thing and Dangerfield keeps mixing them up. Here is Dangerfield on social change:

'In the streets of London the last horse-bus clattered towards extinction. The aeroplane …. called forth exclamations of rapture and alarm …. There was talk of wild young people …. of night clubs; of negroid dances. People gazed in horror at the paintings of Gauguin, and listened with delighted alarm to the barbaric measures of Stravinsky. The old order, the old bland world was dying fast …. and the Parliament Act was its not too premature obituary.' (pp 65–66).

It is prose like this, the literary legacy of history in Dangerfield's era, which makes this book so readable. The analysis may be flawed and the conclusions out of date, but like all good history it contains truths and insights which endure. This new edition provides a very welcome opportunity for Dangerfield's work to be revisited by all students of liberal history.

Building the Party

Don MacIver (ed), *The Liberal Democrats* (Prentice Hall, 1996)

Reviewed by *Tony Little*

The strained birth of the Liberal Democrats ensured that the infant party struggled over its first few years and it enjoyed little of the glow of the limelight which blessed the arrival of the SDP. In consequence, there seems to have been little study of how the new party was put together and how it has developed. Consequently, this collection of essays is very welcome and would serve as a sound introduction to any new member who wanted some background as to how the party ticks.

Strictly speaking this is a work of contemporary politics rather than of history but since the editor of this Journal is a contributor it would seem churlish not to mention it. But like every collection of essays, some parts are tastier than others. The introduction is a sound summary of the background to the party, the traditions it inherits and the dilemmas it faces. The book list at the end is comprehensive and would serve any new or old member as a solid programme for their leisure hours.

The two chapters by Jones and Steed on the thought and tradition of the party both lay out the roots of the party in New Liberal thinking, from the turn of the century, and something of the contribution made by social democrat thought. As someone from a Liberal background, I felt slightly disappointed at the limited attention both paid to the social democrat side. The threat from Dr Owen meant that the new party had to be tough and more practical in its policies than historically Liberal assemblies had been, but, philosophically, what did the social democrats bring to the party?

I was more seriously disappointed that neither of these two authors focused more on the Gladstonian traditions of the party. The political agenda in the 1980s and 1990s has been driven by a Thatcherite perversion of that tradition. Even the Labour government has adapted to it. So has Paddy Ashdown and the party's economic spokesmen, but it goes against the grain of a Liberal Democrat conference and activists who began their careers under Butskellism. Brack's piece on policy-making highlights some of the tensions this creates and has benefited from an ability to speak openly now that he does not bear official responsibility for policy creation.

The strength of the collection lies with those who have had practical experience of politics, and the weakness is with the purer academics. The Bennie, Curtice and Rudig survey of membership is fascinating in an 'I never knew that' sort of way and highlights the need to recruit across

a wider spectrum of ages and backgrounds if we are to break out of a middle class, middle age, public sector support system. To my mind, McKee's essay on factions and groups in the party has relied too heavily on official briefings, recognising but not fully understanding the tolerance extended by one part of the party for the others, underestimating the importance of ALDC and making too much of the noisy but ineffective Chard Group.

As always with a work on contemporary politics the publishing schedule has meant that some items are already stale, such as the Tower Hamlets case, and the emphasis placed on balanced councils rather than those where Lib Dems enjoy a majority. Even so, while the survey of balanced councils must reflect the accuracy of the answers given, I felt that Temple might have spent more time covering a smaller sample of councils in more depth, to convey some of the sweat of the committee room, the passion of the council chamber and the frustration of members and officers alike in managing a hung council.

A somewhat bigger omission is in the coverage of the parliamentary party. MacIver makes us acutely aware of the difficulties of formulating an effective electoral strategy for winning parliamentary seats, but the book needs a survey of the strategies open to the parliamentary party within Westminster and of the work of our parliamentarians. Currently they work well as press spokesmen for the party and, I am sure, as community politicians in their constituencies. They are effective cheerleaders for the membership but what do they do all day at Westminster and what good is it for the country or the party? This question is the more important now that we are more substantially represented in Parliament. I am sure there is scope for MPs to learn from the strategies of effective council groups which have grown and consolidated their electoral strength. If there is ever a hung parliament I hope they will draw on the extensive council experience available.

It is easy to criticise any book with such a wide range of contributors, but it would be churlish not to commend MacIver and his team for getting this book written and more importantly, published. Members should buy their own and order copies through their local library to help stimulate interest in the party.

Archive Sources

The Liberal Democrat History Group aims to develop and publish a guide to archive sources for students of the history of the Liberal Democrats and its predecessor parties.

We would like to hear from anyone knowing the whereabouts of any relevant archive material, including the records of local and regional parties and internal groups. Please write to Dr Geoffrey Sell at the address below.

Recently we have received information on two sources:

- Records deposited in the *Dorset County Record Office*: including minute books, year books, newsletters, election publications and *Focus* leaflets. Most of the material dates from the 1960s, '70s and '80s, but some goes as far back as 1906.
- Records deposited in the *Dundee City archives*; contains material dating back to Winston Churchill's period as MP for the city.

Any researcher needing more information should contact Dr Geoffrey Sell at 5 Spencer Close, Stansted, Essex CM24 8AS.

A Liberal Democrat History Group Fringe Meeting

The Struggle for Women's Rights

with
Johanna Alberti (Newcastle University)
and
Shirley Williams

8.00–9.30pm, Friday 13 March
Royal Clifton Hotel, Southport

Liberals Unite

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For further details contact Liberal International, 1 Whitehall Place, London SW1A 2HD; tel: +44 171 839 5905; fax: + 44 171 925 2685; email: worldlib@cix.co.uk.

Notes:

1 This research is based primarily on material in the LI archive held in the Archives of the Theodor Heuss Akademie in Gummersbach, but also draws on John H. MacCallum Scott, *Experiment in Internationalism – A Study in International Politics* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1967).

2 See Michael Steed, 'The Liberal Parties in Italy, France, Germany and the UK' in Roger Morgan and Stefano Silvestri, eds., *Moderates and Conservatives in Western Europe: Political Parties, the European Community and the Atlantic Alliance* (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1982).

3 Owing to their respective domestic situations, the representatives from Estonia, Hungary and Spain were all exiles.