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HISTORY



Liberals and Nationalists

Graham Watson

Scottish Liberals, Scottish Nationalists and Dreams of a Common Front

Russell Deacon

'The Steady Tapping Breaks the Rock'

Liberalism in Wales

Peter Lynch

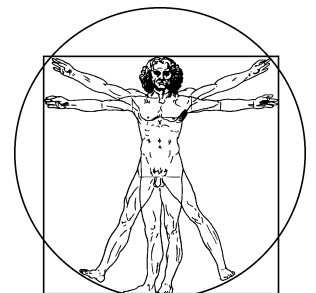
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February 1999

Scottish Liberals, Scottish Nationalists and Dreams of a Common Front

Sometimes allies, sometimes enemies: *Graham Watson MEP* analyses the history of relations between Scottish Liberals and Scottish Nationalists.

From the passing of the Great Reform Act in 1832 to the end of Victoria's reign, the Liberals won every general election in Scotland. While there was often a Tory majority, in Scotland the Liberals' nadir (in 1841) was a majority of nine seats over the Tories; in November 1868 the Liberal Party won no fewer than fifty-three of the sixty Scottish constituencies. Every Liberal government of the period relied on Scottish Liberals.

Scottish Liberals demanded and achieved recompense in the devolution of government, with major pieces of reforming legislation including the creation, in 1885, of the post of Secretary for Scotland, and the establishment ten years later of the Scottish Grand Committee. The concern of many Liberals, that Scotland had been betrayed in the Union of the parliaments, was assuaged as definite steps were taken towards Scottish self-government within the Union.

To add impetus to the process the Scottish Home Rule Association was formed in 1886, and the break-away of the Liberal Unionists over Irish home rule shortly thereafter left the field clear for the Liberal home rulers. With the new century they founded the Young Scots Society, whose principal aim was to work towards self-government. In June 1910, some twenty Liberal MPs established the Scottish Nationalist Committee and historians have argued that, had it not been for the outbreak of the first world war, logic would have forced the Liberal government to follow Irish home rule with similar provisions for Scotland.¹

As so often in history, however, the need did not call forth its own fulfilment; the Liberal Party went into decline and those opposed to London rule were divided on issues ranging from pacifism to social reform, many of which seemed more pressing after the Great War than the mechanics of governing Scotland.

In the 1930s the Liberal Party split, and although Herbert Samuel reiterated the commitment of mainstream Liberals to Scottish self-government, the party was by now powerless to put its policies into effect. The cause of home rule was destined, between the wars, to rely on the energies of a few outstanding individuals – John McCormick, Eric Linklater, Roland Muirhead, Sir Alexander MacEwen and others – as Unionist coherence triumphed over Liberal disorder.

After the second world war, home rule was briefly back on the agenda. In April 1945, Dr Robert McIntyre won an important byelection victory in Motherwell in a straight fight against Labour, becoming the first modern 'Scottish National' MP. In February 1948 John McCormick stood as a 'National' candidate in a byelection in Paisley, again in a straight fight with Labour, and was a close runner-up. In 1949, two million Scots put their signatures to the Covenant organised by the Scottish Convention. Despite these events, however, self-government was hardly an issue at the general elections of 1950 and 1951. Social reform and the welfare state were the orders of the day. Liberal energies were committed to seeing through the Beveridge reforms, which were being implemented badly by the Labour government, and to ensuring the survival of a Liberal Party whose decline seemed terminal.

Jo Grimond and cooperative politics

It was not until the surprising Liberal revival of the early 1960s that home rule began once more to fire the imagination of the political class. Many Liberals saw in Jo Grimond, whose maiden speech in 1950 had majored on self-government for Scotland, and who assumed the leadership of the Liberal Party in 1957, a Westminster leader willing to champion Scotland's interests. They believed that however wide the difference between the home rule advocated by the Liberals and the complete independence of the emerging SNP, it was narrower than the gulf between two large unionist parties on the one hand and two small self-government parties on the other. Elected as Rector of Edinburgh University in 1961, Grimond inspired in a generation of younger politicians the idea that cross-party cooperation was the key to achieving their aims.

Little has yet been written about the way Grimond's proposals for a Liberal-SNP pact were continually to resurface in non-unionist politics until the 1970s. Now, with the advent of a Scottish parliament and the likelihood of Grimond's successors in the Scottish Liberal Democrats being coalition partners of either Labour or the SNP in the first Scottish government for 300 years, it seems appropriate to look back at the history of attempts by Liberals

to forge pacts with other parties to advance the cause of home rule

Grimond's thesis was that although the Liberal Party had lost much of its former glory, Liberals could expand their influence through seeking cooperation wherever possible with those of like mind. This could mean working together with different parties on different issues. At Westminster he sought a realignment of the left to put an end to thirteen years of Tory misrule. In Scotland, his supporters argued, he sought cooperation between all those in favour of self-government to complete the process of devolution begun by Gladstone and Rosebery.

The 1959 general election restored some Liberal confidence after the disappointment of the three general elections since 1945. The Liberal vote had started to creep back up and a byelection in North Edinburgh the following year showed a gratifying 15% support for the party. But it was the Paisley byelection in April 1961, before Orpington was even heard of, which set the Liberal heather alight. Paisley had traditionally been a Liberal stronghold² and John Bannerman, the Scottish rugby international, canvassed on a home rule platform 'like a thing possessed'.³ He polled 41% of the vote, rocking (like John McCormick in the previous Paisley byelection in 1947) the foundations of a complacent Labour establishment.

In Paisley there had been no Scottish National candidate, a fact which had undoubtedly helped rally

the wider non-unionist vote to the Liberal cause. Seven months later, at a byelection in the Bridgeton division of Glasgow caused by the resignation of the sitting Labour MP, the absence of a Liberal candidate helped Scottish National candidate Ian Macdonald poll 18% of the vote

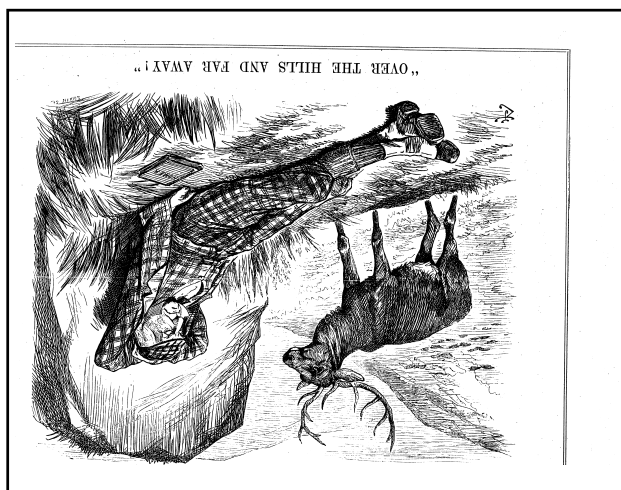
and almost topple the Unionist candidate from second into third place.

Derek Michael Henderson Starforth-Jones, a tertiary education adviser of colourful hue who travelled according to whim under different combinations of his name, was despatched as one of the Liberal representatives to the cross-party Scottish National Congress.⁴ Though the SNP did not formally join the Congress, some of its members attended; and Starforth began talking with them about the idea of a possible Liberal-Nationalist pact. The byelections in Paisley and Woodside had shown each party's potential; if they had competed on the same ground such a strong showing would have eluded them. Did this not militate in favour of a formal agreement? That idea was subsequently to remain prominent on both parties' agendas for more than a decade.

The death of John Taylor MP caused a byelection in West Lothian in June 1962. An Edinburgh University law graduate and promising young Liberal called David Steel (soon to become Assistant General Secretary of the Scottish Liberal Party) called a meeting at St. Michael's manse in Linlithgow which decided to invite William Wolfe, a local chartered accountant and outspoken home ruler, to stand as the Liberal candidate. Mr Wolfe declined; he was to stand for election, but as the SNP's candidate. The Scottish Liberals, unaware that Wolfe had joined the SNP three years earlier, were not a little embarrassed. For the first time since 1929 they fielded a candidate of their own in West Lothian despite having only a skeleton constituency organisation. Unsurprisingly, and like many Liberals before and since (including the author), he failed even to save his deposit.

Starforth pursued the idea of electoral cooperation with a draft pamphlet entitled 'A Scottish Government and Parliament', advocating openly a pact between Liberals and the SNP. His enthusiasm was not shared by all his fellow Liberals, however. At a meeting in their Atholl Place, Edinburgh headquarters on 30

Gladstone's governments relied on Scottish Liberal MPs.



June the Scottish Liberals' executive committee refused to publish it.⁵ But they agreed simultaneously not to adopt parliamentary candidates for the coming general election in North Aberdeen, Stirling or either of the Perthshire constituencies. The non-unionist opposition should not be split.

On 1 December the Liberals' executive gave 'sanction, but not approval', for talks between their Chair-

for contesting a byelection in the Labour-Liberal National marginal constituency of Dundee West, a contest in Kinross & West Perthshire with the chance of defeating or at least embarrassing the Prime Minister of the day⁷ was a prospect neither could resist.

Alasdair Duncan-Miller, the son of a former member for East Fife, had previously spoken in favour of the SNP candidate Arthur Donaldson.

December he moved that the two parties' office-bearers should meet to negotiate a pact, though he was out-voted. But on 8 February 1964, at an extraordinary meeting of the SNP council, Wolfe moved successfully to gain a commitment that the matter would feature on the agenda of the party's next regular council meeting on 7 March.⁸

The SNP resolved in March 1964 to ask the Scottish Liberals whether they would put self-government at the head of their programme and require all general election candidates to pledge themselves to it and to forcing self government if the two parties between them held a majority of Scottish constituencies. Starforth responded warmly, but John Bannerman, quizzed by the press, replied that the issue ranked alongside other key priorities and that the Scottish Liberals, as part of a wider UK party, could not contemplate unilateral action. Bannerman would not allow the SNP to dictate the terms of cooperation.

The Scottish Liberals resolved in April to establish a study group to investigate measures that could hasten the achievement of self-government, 'not precluding discussion with outside bodies'.⁹ That month the Liberals fielded their largest-ever slate of candidates for the local elections and prepared for what was by Liberal standards a major onslaught at the general election in October.

Alec Douglas-Home's return to the Commons had done little to revive Tory fortunes. A byelection in May in the Lanarkshire seat of Rutherglen, a Tory-Labour marginal, was to prove unappetising to both Liberals and Nationalists. The Conservatives entrusted Iain Sproat to maintain their narrow majority in a straight run against Labour. Not for the last time, he was to disappoint them.¹⁰

The Scottish Liberals entered the 1964 election on a platform of federalist fervour. They gained three new MPs – Russell Johnston in Inverness, Alasdair Mackenzie in Ross & Cromarty and George Mackie in Caithness & Sutherland – and took

Grimond's thesis was that although the Liberal Party had lost much of its former glory, Liberals could expand their influence through seeking cooperation wherever possible with those of like mind.

man, John Bannerman and the SNP President Dr Robert McIntyre. Meeting a fortnight later at the North British hotel, the Liberal Party council added the rider that 'there should be no appeasement'.⁶ But in the light of the byelection in Glasgow Woodside the previous month, where the Liberals and the SNP between them had polled almost as many votes as the Labour victor, Bannerman was convinced that talks aiming at a non-aggression pact could prove fruitful. The meeting with McIntyre in March 1963 identified good will on both sides. The two men agreed to consider the respective strength of each party when deciding which seats to contest. Though both recognised that without the party discipline which the prospect of government can offer, the decision about whether to field a candidate would rest ultimately with the local constituency organisations, they nonetheless shared the view that the cause of home rule could best be advanced by maximising the third-party devolutionist vote.

Discord

The balmy days of spring were not to last, however, and the autumn brought renewed discord. While neither party showed much enthusiasm

for contesting a byelection in the Labour-Liberal National marginal constituency of Dundee West, a contest in Kinross & West Perthshire with the chance of defeating or at least embarrassing the Prime Minister of the day⁷ was a prospect neither could resist.

But Duncan-Miller himself was perceived by the Liberals and by some Nationalists as the candidate more likely to dent Tory prestige. Approaches were made to the SNP to allow Duncan-Miller a free run, but in vain. And though the Liberal bandwagon made much noise and achieved second place for their candidate, ('a gratifying result in difficult circumstances', as John Bannerman described it), the Tories romped home to victory with more votes than all the other parties combined.

The government decided that the time was opportune to elevate Niall Macpherson to the peerage, provoking a byelection in Dumfries the following month. The Scottish Liberals and the SNP again both fielded candidates; both lost their deposits, though their intervention almost cost the Conservatives the seat. John Bannerman noted that the SNP had now lost four deposits in succession, but with little satisfaction; he deplored the fact that the lack of agreement between the two parties meant 'the Scottish vote' remained ineffective. For the SNP, William Wolfe became similarly convinced that a pact was the way forward. In a letter to the *Scots Independent* in November 1963 he laid out his stall. At the SNP's national council on 7

Roxburgh, Selkirk & Peebles at a byelection less than a year later. Though these gains owed something to the successful appeal of Liberal plans for rural regeneration, presented in the Liberal pamphlet 'A better deal for the Highlands', their plans for Scottish self-government had featured prominently in their campaign.¹¹ Even the *Daily Record*, not known for its attention to Liberal politics, was moved to report on the Liberals' plans in a series of articles on the Liberal revival.

In the following general election eighteen months later, Scottish Liberals held most of their gains of 1964 and added to them West Aberdeen, though they lost Caithness to Labour (by just sixty-four votes). In none of the five constituencies they now held had there been a Nationalist challenger. The value of this was clear to Liberals, and a resolution from Ross & Cromarty Liberal Association to their national council in June 1966, calling again for a formal Liberal-SNP pact, was debated at length.¹² By September, Scottish Liberal Chairman George Mackie had received a letter from his SNP counterpart asking for a formal approach from the Liberals. There was division in the Liberal camp on the ripeness of the time, but renewed discussions on an informal basis were agreed 'to see what common basis there was for a joint effort to promote Scottish interests'.¹³

Clouds were gathering from the south, however. A joint meeting that summer between the office-bearers of the Scottish and English Liberal Parties and Liberal parliamentarians had reached no agreement on whether a pact would serve Liberal interests; whilst the Liberal Party in parliament relied on Scotland for almost half its MPs, the vanity induced by its victories across Britain had fuelled belief in a nation-wide revival and had drawn some of the fluid from the Scottish self-government boil.

The following month the SNP issued press statements to the effect that it would contest all seventy-one Scottish constituencies. In January the Liberals' executive saw no basis for

cooperation with the SNP, though one or two members dissented.

1967: Nationalist strength grows

If Liberal doubts about a pact had grown in the latter half of 1966, the following year was to produce two events which were to strengthen the hand of those SNP members opposed to a Nationalist-Liberal agreement. Parliamentary byelections in Pollok (March 1967) and Hamilton (November) were to change radically the SNP's perception of their chances of going it alone.

In Pollok a prominent Nationalist candidate in the shape of George Leslie, a local folk singer, polled more than 10,000 votes to the Liberals' 735. The SNP executive met three days later and decided to take no action on electoral pacts; instead they urged all who wanted a Scottish parliament to join the SNP.

A special meeting was called of the Scottish Liberals' executive to discuss the Pollok result and the SNP's move. Once again, Liberals favouring an agreement with the SNP pushed their case: James Davidson MP announced that he would try another approach to the SNP; Grimond, who had resigned the Westminster leadership of the Liberals, supported him. Broadcaster and prominent Liberal Ludovic Kennedy and his comrade-at-arms Michael Starforth handed round the text of a resolution to go to the SLP's annual conference in May, formally seeking links with the SNP.

The Liberal executive resolved to express its opposition to a pact, however, defeating the Kennedy-Starforth proposal by sixteen votes to two and resolving to release the figures to the press. The hard-liners, led by George Mackie and Russell Johnston, appeared to be in the ascendant, reasserting their distinctive Liberal identity. But it was clear the issue would dominate the Liberals' conference agenda.

The Scottish Liberal Party conference in Perth (18-20 May) was a

fissiparous affair. Party Vice Chairman Russell Johnston MP used a speech to a session chaired by Donald Wade to accuse Grimond for incoherence and lack of self-discipline, criticising especially Grimond's visit to the SNP headquarters in Ardmillan Terrace. The stage was set for a battle. In what the *Scotsman* described as 'the most lively and hackle-raising debate in the steaming political cauldron of the Salutation Hotel',¹⁴ Kennedy and Starforth called for the drawing up of an electoral pact with the SNP 'to avoid splitting the self-government vote and to join in achieving a Scottish parliament before Britain's entry into the Common Market'. In a stormy session, with a number of close votes, the conference narrowly accepted a compromise amendment put by two of the Scottish Liberal MPs, Jim Davidson and David Steel, rejecting a Liberal approach to the SNP but inviting them to take the initiative 'if they recognised the need to place the national interests of Scotland before short-term party interests'. The SNP reaction was a statement from their Chairman, Arthur Donaldson, that any approaches for cooperation must come from the Liberals. Partisan pride had the upper hand: both sides were playing hard to get.

With Jo Grimond on the backbenches and John Bannerman in the House of Lords, Mackie and Johnston put out a statement the following month to all Liberal constituency organisations outlining the SLP's opposition to cooperation with the Nationalists. For the Liberals, it seemed that the matter was firmly closed. There were to be no dealings with a party which a young Liberal spokesman had derided in Perth as 'a motley collection of fanatics, ragamuffins and comic singers'. In the SNP, too, the advocates of a pact were losing ground. The cause of nationalism in the UK had been given a boost by a stunning victory for Welsh nationalist Gwynfor Evans in Carmarthen in July. The SNP themselves came tantalisingly close to winning a local

council seat in the Ruchill ward of Glasgow in a massive swing against Labour; they stormed to victory in a Stirling county council byelection in October. Their optimism about their own success grew.¹⁵

In the second of the two decisive events of 1967, the Hamilton byelection in November, the SNP polled 46% of the vote, returning Winnie Ewing to parliament in a spectacular victory and putting self-government back in the headlines. The absence of a Liberal candidate had been due not to any agreement between the two parties but to the absence of an active Liberal Association in the constituency. Ludovic Kennedy went to speak on Winnie Ewing's behalf but to do so he resigned from the Liberal Party, thus denting any hopes of a joint campaign.

Nationalist sentiment in Scotland seemed to be on the up, and on 2 December Jo Grimond broke silence. If hitherto some had doubted the amount of energy Grimond was prepared to invest in the cause of home rule, there doubts were now dissipated. Grimond calculated that despite the rise of the SNP and the development of a Nationalist theology, there had been no decline in the Liberal vote; indeed, the SNP was taking votes mainly from Labour. In a speech in Kirkwall, well-reported

impression that we are hostile to self-government itself'.

To grassroots Liberals in Scotland it was clear that the extent of the SNP's enthusiasm for complete secession from the UK had risen in direct proportion to their prominence. The SNP's substantial gains in the local elections in May 1967 had given many enthusiastic but inexperienced Nationalists a platform from which Liberals were frequently attacked. SLP Chairman George Mackie, on the brink of resignation, demanded that the MPs listen to the voices from the constituencies. He persuaded the Scottish Liberal Party's executive to state their unanimous agreement that 'the gulf between the separatist policy of the SNP and the federalist system of self-government proposed by the SLP shows no prospect of being bridged. The response from the SNP has been completely negative.'

By the summer of the following year, however, while blacks in America and students in Paris were caught up in a whirlwind of new ideas about how individuals could take power over their own lives, the mechanisms of self-empowerment in Scotland through a home rule pact were to erupt once again on the Liberal and Nationalist agendas. At a press briefing during a joint conference of Scottish and English Liber-

Johnston nor George Mackie had been consulted, and Lord Bannerman's attack on the Tories earlier that day for sending Ted Heath up to pronounce on Scottish problems looked mighty hollow. 'It is riot for Mr Thorpe to say what kind of government we should have,' stormed SNP president Robert McIntyre in an impeccably targeted reply, 'it is for the Scottish people'.

Scottish Liberal leaders convened a swift emergency meeting with their UK leader and a statement was issued saying: 'Mr Thorpe offered no pact, which he would not do without the approval of the Scottish Liberal Party ...' But Jo Grimond seized the opportunity, and two days later used the conference debate on federalism to appeal to the people of Scotland to unite in a quest for a Scottish democracy, 'ready to collaborate in equal partnership with the other nations of Great Britain'. Appealing to Nationalists and Liberals over the heads of their leaders, he seemed almost to propose a Scottish Party with the sole aim of self-government and to offer himself as its leader. Russell Johnston took the floor to launch a stinging attack on Grimond, and by thirty votes the Grimond plan was voted down. The joint conference backed a comprehensive plan for devolution, but wanted nothing of a Liberal-SNP 'dream ticket'.

Following Ludo Kennedy's lead at Hamilton, Starforth resigned from the Scottish Liberal Party and joined the SNP, and though scattered individuals in both parties made occasional rumblings, talk of a pact again receded.

In preparation for the general election of 1970 the SNP adopted candidates in eight of the most promising Liberal territories. As Chris Baur reported in *The Scotsman* in November 1969, 'The Scottish Liberals and the Nationalists have become so entrenched in their official attitudes towards cooperation with each other that a pact between the two parties to preserve and enhance the Home Rule vote is an almost hopeless proposition'.

There were to be no dealings with a party which a young Liberal spokesman had derided in Perth as 'a motley collection of fanatics, ragamuffins and comic singers'.

in the national press, he raised once again the banner of common cause between Liberals and the SNP. Hard on the heels of his speech came a letter to the Scottish Liberal headquarters from four of the five Scottish Liberal MPs arguing that the party 'should cease passing resolutions or making statements hostile to the Nationalists since it is impossible to do this without giving the

als in September in Edinburgh, Jeremy Thorpe chose as his subject the advocacy of a common front between the Liberals and Nationalists on limited home rule 'which could sweep Scotland and Wales at the next general election and bring about national parliaments within three or four years'.

Scottish Liberals were more than a little surprised. Neither Russell



At the election the intervention of an SNP candidate in Ross & Cromarty almost certainly caused the defeat of the sitting Liberal member, and in Caithness prevented George Mackie from recapturing the seat from Labour's Robert MacIennan. The Scottish Liberals refrained from contesting the SNP's best prospect seats, but to little avail: the Nationalists gained only one surprise victory, in the Western Isles, and lost their byelection gain in Hamilton. In two other seats, Banff and East Aberdeenshire, the combined vote for the Liberal and SNP candidates was greater than the number cast for the winner.

The 1970s

Disillusion within both parties at their poor election performances sparked calls for a fresh look at the idea of a pact. The election to the SNP leadership some months before of William Wolfe, an admirer of Grimond's and an advocate of co-operation, and the insistence on the Liberal side of Grimond disciple David Steel, led to an exchange of correspondence between the parties' presidents and a meeting to discuss the matter in July. But if the matter caused dispute privately among the Scottish Liberals, Wolfe could not contain his dissenters. The Nationalists were publicly divided on the issue and it was an infinitely cautious team of Liberal leaders who confronted their SNP counterparts in Edinburgh. 'The SNP have asked for these talks', read a terse statement

from the Scottish Liberal HQ, 'and as a matter of courtesy the SLP executive will hear what they have to say. But in the light of recent press statements from the SNP the Liberal executive have not seen any great change in their attitude.' The Liberal delegation was led by Russell Johnston, who had already put on record his opposition to exchanging his Liberal birthright for a mess of unsalted secessionist porridge.

Wolfe and Steel saw two ways of bending the post-election circumstances to the purpose of their common cause. The first was to use the election results to persuade their respective parties to agree on a fist of constituencies where one party would stand down, easing the task of the holder or the best-placed challenger to the major parties; the second would be to seek common candidatures in seats where the combined vote of the two parties was substantial. Such agreements would rely heavily, however, on the good will of both parties' local constituency associations; as Steel was to discover in different circumstances a decade later, such good will would prove difficult to foster.

Despite William Wolfe's insistence at the three-hour meeting that

cooperation developed.

By the time the 1974 election approached, excitement in both camps had all but died. The cinders were to flicker briefly in January 1973, after ten SNP members and four Liberals met in Perth, at the initiative of SNP Angus candidate Malcolm Slessor and the Liberals' John Russell of Kingussie, reviving the proposal for a limited non-aggression pact. But the plan was thrown out by the SNP's conference in May and met a similar fate at the Scottish Liberal conference later the same month.

Why had the two parties failed, over the course of thirty years, to advance the cause of self-government, reborn in 1945? The failure of the non-unionist parties to agree a common front certainly prevented the issue from achieving the sustained prominence it would have required to elicit a government response. Prior to the 1960s, neither party had many candidates and there were few, if any, constituencies where both had a local organisation worthy of the name. While many in the Liberal Party were seized with the idea in the late 1960s, enthusiasm for pluralism within the SNP did not come to a head until after the 1970 general election. But by then the

While both parties were unhappy with the Union, one advocated home rule, the other – increasingly – independence. The former cause held an intellectual attraction, the latter a more populist appeal.

the two parties' views on self-government were less far apart than was thought, Johnston and his team politely showed the door to the SNP. A joint statement issued after the meeting reported that: 'The objections to making electoral pacts were recognised and the subject was not pursued'; and though scope was foreseen for cooperation at Westminster on Scottish issues, there is precious little evidence that such

idea had been soured for Liberals by the SNP's costly intervention in their best constituencies. Moreover, while the SNP could attract votes from the Scottish Liberals in rural constituencies, it was by no means clear that the Liberals appealed to the voters in urban west central Scotland among whom the SNP had found fertile ground.

In the 1960s, an electoral pact would have been a logical arrange-

ment between the third and fourth parties in an essentially two-party system. But did they share enough common ground? While both were unhappy with the Union, one advocated home rule, the other – increasingly – independence. The former cause held an intellectual attraction, the latter a more populist appeal. Both parties were divided about the wisdom of working together.

1974–79: An end to the debate?

The two 1974 general elections changed the fortunes of both parties in a way which silenced the debate. Though Scottish Liberal numbers remained constant, across Britain the Liberals more than doubled their number of MPs, vastly increased their share of the popular vote and looked on the verge of a breakthrough. Talk of coalition, first with Heath's Conservative Government and then with Wilson's Labour, hit the headlines. Liberal coalitionist energies were thus absorbed elsewhere. The SNP meanwhile gained six seats in the February election and a further four in October, taking their numbers from one MP to eleven within as many months. They were now substantially more important than the Liberals in Scotland. While the Liberals' David Steel, ever a dogged campaigner, clung to his mentor Grimond's idea of common fronts, the 1974–79 parliament was to deliver to him the prize of British Liberal leadership and the opportunity for a pact with the Callaghan

Government on a programme for national recovery.

Shortly after the October 1974 election, a split in the Labour Party in Scotland¹⁶ put the issue of devolution back on the government's agenda. But the breakdown of talks between those in favour of self government meant that when the referendum finally came, at the fag end of a tired parliamentary term, the pro-devolution forces were divided into separate camps and unable to mount a campaign to inspire the electorate with the half-baked fare on offer from Labour in March 1979. Even the governing party could not unite its supporters in favour of its devolution proposals; Tam Dalyell's 'West Lothian' question was simply the most striking feature of its division into 'Labour says Yes' and 'Labour No' campaigns. Nor could pro-devolutionists rally four-square behind the plans. Scottish Liberal MP Russell Johnston and Conservative MP Alick Buchanan-Smith ran their own distinctive brand of 'Yes' campaign.

Although 52% voted in favour of devolution in the March 1979 referendum, a wrecking amendment inserted in the legislation by Islington Labour MP George Cunningham (requiring the support of at least 40% of those eligible to vote before the measure could proceed) saw the defeat of the plan for devolution worked out during the Lib-Lab agreement. The opportunity to unite those in favour of self-government and to drive forward a convincing agenda had been lost once again by its advocates.

The democratic deficit

Much to the dismay of those who had believed Alec Douglas-Home's last minute promise, on the eve of the referendum, that the Conservatives would come up with a better plan for self-government, the Conservative victory in the 1979 general election under Margaret Thatcher ushered in nearly two decades of Westminster hostility to devolution. The SNP, reduced from eleven MPs to just two, was relegated to the side-

lines along with the issue of home rule. Though the Scottish Liberals entered the 1980s with the same three MPs as a decade earlier, their emerging pact with the SDP was to swell their ranks in Scotland before the 1983 general election, and the Liberal-SDP Alliance's performance was to take them into double figures.

Liberal leader David Steel became the country's second most popular politician. His campaign for merger between the Liberal Party and the SDP for the best part of the 1980s diverted Liberal attention from common fronts with other parties. But with the SDP led by Dr David Owen, the Alliance was doomed to failure. The new party which arose from its ashes saw public support fall to just three per cent in opinion polls in Scotland in 1988; yet despite this the Liberal Democrats retained in the 1992 general election the nine Scottish seats they had won in 1987.

The Scottish Liberal Democrats were born into a changed political climate. The economic recession which followed the Scottish oil-financed boom years of the mid eighties hit Scotland hard. While in the early years of her premiership Mrs Thatcher had allowed the Scottish Office to continue Keynesian economic policies, the re-election of the Conservatives in 1983 signalled the arrival of a new, harsher approach. It did not go down well with Scotland's voters. In 1987 the Scottish Conservatives suffered their worst defeat since 1910, returning only ten MPs out of seventy-two. A decade later they were to be eliminated totally.

Unrepentant, Mrs Thatcher addressed the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in 1988 and restated her opposition to devolution. She believed in the primacy of the individual over the collectivity. To some observers at the General Assembly, the forum which most closely approximated to a Scottish Parliament, the Prime Minister showed a lack of understanding and an incapacity for generosity. To one cleric, her speech was 'a disgraceful



travesty of the gospel.¹⁷

Scotland's 'nanny state' was increasingly under attack from London. Yet many took pride in the standard of social welfare provision. With government ministers such as Chancellor Nigel Lawson openly scolding the Scots for their 'dependency culture' and Scots being used as guinea pigs for measures such as the hated poll tax,¹⁸ dissent grew. It found expression on a wider canvass too. While it had been in Scotland's interest to help the English run the British Empire, did not the gradual retreat from Empire and the imminent loss of Hong Kong, in which Scots had played a significant role, mean the English were fast outliving their usefulness? Moreover, the Single European Act of 1986, paving the way for a closer European Union, threw into sharp relief the measure of self-government enjoyed on the continent from Bavaria to Barcelona.

More and more Scots began to question the Conservative Government's legitimacy north of the border. The Scottish Grand Committee, composed of Westminster MPs rep-

and the Scottish Liberal Democrats. The election of John Smith as leader of the Labour Party in 1987 allowed the self-government question free expression in Scottish Labour circles. Suddenly, all opposition parties were advocating a change to the Union, backed by stronger voices in the churches, the trades unions and in local government.

The Constitutional Convention

A century after the creation of the post of Scottish Secretary under a Liberal government, Home Rule was fully back in the spotlight of mainstream politics. The Campaign for a Scottish Assembly, erected from the debris of the 1979 referendum campaign, decided to repeat some of the tactics of the Covenant of 1949. It launched a Scottish 'Claim of Right' in July 1988 to demonstrate the breadth of support for reform. On 30 March 1989 the emerging Scottish Constitutional Convention, set up under the joint chairmanship of Sir David Steel and Lord Ewing

alist fundamentalists over the moderates who were genuinely in favour of a cross-party approach. In opposition to the Tories, many SNP members believed the key to success lay in differentiating themselves from Labour – thus independence rather than home rule.

The withdrawal of the SNP before the Convention began talks¹⁹ worried the Scottish Liberal Democrats. Fearful of a Convention dominated by the much larger Labour Party, they had hoped the SNP's presence would allow Liberals to occupy the middle ground between minimalist and maximalist approaches to devolution. In fact they found allies in the smaller parties and the churches and discovered that the SNP's withdrawal actually increased Labour's reliance on the Liberal Democrats to give the Convention cross-party legitimacy. Moreover, Labour proved to be less monolithic than some Liberal Democrats had feared, with groups such as the STUC and the Scottish Labour Women's Caucus siding with the Liberal Democrats in favour of a proportional election system and tax-raising powers for the Scottish Parliament.

By 1992, however, prominent Scottish Liberal Democrats were losing enthusiasm for cooperation with Labour. As they had feared, they suffered by being perceived as too close to the larger party. They blamed the drop in their party's share of the vote at the 1992 general election on their involvement with Labour in the Convention. Liberal Democrat leader and Gordon MP Malcolm Bruce, who had seen his own parliamentary majority sharply reduced and a byelection gain in neighbouring Kincardine blown away like snow off a dyke, led the change of tack; but the new course was not to be long held, for concern for his own re-election led to Bruce handing over the leadership in 1993 to Orkney & Shetland member Jim Wallace, whose constituents' concerns about government from Edinburgh, which he understood, were balanced by the strong personal commitment to

A 'democratic deficit' was becoming apparent. If Scotland voted consistently for left-of-centre government, why should it put up with right-wing governments foisted on it by the English?

resenting Scottish constituencies, had seen its powers progressively reduced under the Conservative Governments since 1979; in 1987, having lost most of their Scottish seats, the Tories decided to boycott the committee, thus effectively killing it off. For Scotland this added insult to injury.

A 'democratic deficit' was becoming apparent. If Scotland voted consistently for left-of-centre government, why should it put up with right-wing governments foisted on it by the English? Opposition to the Union now found expression beyond the narrow ranks of the SNP

to draw up a practical blueprint for a Scottish Assembly, endorsed the Claim of Right.

The Scottish Constitutional Convention enjoyed the support of all opposition parties plus the churches and the trade unions. The SNP were concerned, however, that it would deprive them of identity and electoral advantage. In November 1988 they had overturned a Labour majority to win 48% of the vote in a byelection in Glasgow's Govan constituency. Their 1992 general election slogan, 'Free by '93', represented the triumph of Nation-

Scottish self-government bred in the scions of the Scottish establishment.²⁰

Many felt that the SNP's refusal to join forces with other parties in the Constitutional Convention had delayed the project for home rule and played into the hands of the unionists. Frustrated by the surprising re-election of a unionist government in 1992 and the slow progress of the Convention following John Smith's untimely death, Scottish Liberal Democrats and leading Scottish Labour figures began to pool ideas about how to ensure that an incoming Labour government would deliver the devolved government which seemed to many axiomatic of the trend within the ever-more prominent European Union.

In December 1992 the forces in favour of home rule staged the largest political rally ever held in Scotland. The leaders of the Scottish Labour, Scottish Liberal and Scottish National parties led over 100,000 in a demonstration, at the Meadows in Edinburgh, against the democratic deficit. This was followed by a twenty-four hour vigil outside the old Royal High School on Calton Hill (the site of the proposed Scottish parliament) which was maintained until the passing of the Scotland Bill under the Labour government nearly five years later.

The Liberal Democrats' cooperation with Labour proceeded, but not without hiccup. The death of Labour leader John Smith in 1994 deprived the home rule movement of a powerful ally. In 1996, Labour leader Tony Blair declared a shift in his party's position on devolution. A Labour government, he said, would hold a referendum before proceeding to legislate. It would not support the terms of the 'electoral contract' agreed between Scottish Liberals and Scottish Labour under which the Scottish Parliament would be comprised of almost equal numbers of members elected under a constituency system plus proportional representation top-up lists. He also questioned the proposed Scottish Parliament's powers, causing widespread dismay by appearing to sug-

gest at one point that they would not exceed those enjoyed by parish councils south of the border. Any tax-raising powers were to require a separate endorsement in the referendum. The Scottish National Party seized the opportunity to accuse Labour of insincerity; even Scottish Liberals felt obliged to condemn Labour's new policy as 'a gross breach of trust'. To some, dreams of a common front seemed once again dashed.

A nation again

The determination of a small group of prominent Scots politicians, however, brought together by institutions such as the John Wheatley centre, was undiminished. Under Labour front-bencher Robin Cook and Liberal Democrat President Robert Maclennan, a series of talks on constitutional reform narrowed down the options for a Scottish Parliament, building on the measure of agreement that cooperation in the Constitutional Convention had spawned. A new agreement on a voting system was drawn up allowing for the election of a reduced but nonetheless substantial number of Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs) under proportional representation top-up lists. Professor Bernard Crick, for Labour, and the Liberal Democrats' David Millar of Edinburgh University's Europa Institute even prepared draft standing orders for the parliament. Liberal Democrat leader Paddy Ashdown used his growing relationship with Labour leader Tony Blair to coax him into viewing Scottish and Welsh self-government in domestic matters as necessary parts of the modernisation of Britain.

The Scottish Liberal Democrats were to approach the 1997 general election determined not to repeat their mistakes of five years earlier. They campaigned on the theme: 'one vote for the Liberal Democrats is the



one vote needed for a Scottish parliament', needing to differentiate themselves sharply from a Labour Party which they argued could not be trusted on home rule, and an SNP which now sought outright independence. In an important shift from previous election campaigns, however, they sought to concentrate their campaigning not on the constitutional issue but on issues of greater concern to the electorate such as health, crime and education.²¹

On the morning of 2 May 1997, Scotland woke up to a changed political landscape. Westminster had a Labour government with a landslide majority; just as importantly, there was not a single Conservative MP left in Scotland. The unionists had been routed. The Liberal Democrats themselves had more than doubled their Westminster representation to a total of forty-six MPs, ten of whom were from Scotland. Though halved as a percentage of their party's Westminster contingent, the Scottish Liberal Democrats were now without doubt the official opposition in Scotland. Despite significant tactical voting to oust the Conservatives, public demand for devolution had not swept the SNP to great prominence; their numbers had increased from three MPs to six, but the general election result was viewed by some in the SNP as a disappointment.

The new government moved quickly to introduce a bill on Scottish devolution and to set a date for a referendum. For Scottish Liberal Democrats, the referendum required

a 'double yes', since there were to be two questions, one on the principle of devolution and one on whether the new parliament should have revenue-raising powers. Could the three non-unionist parties decide to put aside their differences and to campaign together for a 'yes, yes' vote?

Prospects for cooperation between Labour and the Liberal Democrats were good: they had worked together in the Constitutional Convention and both had included a commitment to a Scottish parliament in their 1997 election manifestos. Se-

command a majority of votes in the parliament. Liberal Democrats officially remain neutral on their preference for a coalition partner, but many believe inevitably that the choice will be Labour. Labour and the Liberal Democrats both believe in devolution within the Union and worked together in the Scottish Constitutional Convention. The seats held by the Liberal Democrats are unlikely to be won by Labour, and vice versa. The SNP, by contrast, remained aloof from the Convention and see devolution as a stepping stone to independence;

Scottish Liberals their strongest negotiating position.

Whatever the outcome of the elections in May 1999, Scotland's parliament is likely to have a government in which parties are obliged to find common ground. It seems almost certain that Liberal Democrats will follow the advice of the now deceased Jo Grimond to 'expand their influence through seeking cooperation wherever possible with those of like mind'.

Graham Watson was Chair of Paisley Liberal Association, and a member of the SLP executive, from 1981–83. He contested byelections in Glasgow Central in June 1980 and Glasgow Queen's Park in December 1982. From 1983–87 he was head of the private office of Liberal leader David Steel. In 1994 he became the first Scottish and British Liberal ever to be elected to the European Parliament – for a constituency south of the border!

The system of proportional representation for the election of MSPs is only the most evident of the results of the common front with other parties which Jo Grimond and David Steel had advocated.

curing the support of the SNP was more problematic; they opposed home rule, seeing independence as the only solution for Scotland. Eventually their leader Alex Salmond MP, under pressure from the other parties, decided to support the campaign since his party's constitution required it to 'further Scotland's interests'; home rule would be presented as a step down the road to independence. A cross-party umbrella group, 'Scotland FORward', was established to promote the new parliament, but the lacklustre nature of the opposition 'Think twice' campaign provided little competition. The Tories were in some disarray after their election disaster.

Scotland voted unequivocally in favour of a Scottish parliament with tax-varying powers. Through cooperation in the Constitutional Convention, the Liberal Democrats had achieved their aim of home rule for Scotland. The system of proportional representation for the election of MSPs is only the most evident of the results of the common front with other parties which Jo Grimond and David Steel had advocated.

The voting system, however, will mean that no one party is likely to

indeed they have pledged themselves to a referendum on independence if they gain office.

Liberal Democrat collaboration with Labour at Westminster adds to the likelihood of cooperation in the Scottish Parliament, though some argue that the Liberals have rarely gained from pacts with Labour, citing the 1920s and the 1970s,²² and the prospect of a new Liberal Democrat leader may throw the party's cooperation strategy into question.

Many Scottish Liberal Democrats favour an agreement with the SNP and would support a referendum on independence within the lifetime of the first Scottish parliament. Donald Gorrie MP and party treasurer Dennis Robertson Sullivan are among the most prominent advocates of this position, which has also been discussed between MPs representing the two parties at Westminster.²³ A further option, favoured by some, would be to allow a minority government to operate, with Liberal Democrats lending support on an agreed programme. Most recognise that keeping their options open until after the votes have been counted and the MSPs are known gives the

Notes:

- 1 G. S. Pryde, *Scotland from 1603 to the Present Day*, p. 223.
- 2 H. H. Asquith was MP for Paisley 1920–24, and it had been solidly Liberal before then; the Liberals held the seat again from 1931–45.
- 3 John McCormick, 'Flag in the Wind'.
- 4 The other Scottish Liberal representative was John J. Mackay, who fought Argyll as a Liberal in 1964 and 1966 before contesting the seat as a Conservative in 1974 and winning it for the Tories in 1979.
- 5 The pamphlet was subsequently published in October 1962 as 'Having been agreed by a panel of Scottish Liberals'.
- 6 Scottish Liberal Party Council and Executive Committee minutes, Edinburgh University Library.
- 7 The Earl of Home had assumed the premiership on 18 October and had resigned his peerage to seek election to the Commons.
- 8 The SNP's special council meeting had been convened to discuss a reorganisation plan drawn up by Gordon Wilson, later to lead his party. Towards the end of the meeting Tom Gibson, a prominent Nationalist, editor of the *Scots Independent* and an opponent of a pact, had to leave. Wolfe saw his chance to get his issue on to the party's agenda and seized it.
- 9 SLP executive committee minutes.
- 10 Despite the prestige of ministerial office, Iain Sproat was to fail in his bid to secure re-election to Parliament in Roxburgh & Berwickshire in 1983. In

one of the most delicious ironies in twentieth-century Scottish politics, he had abandoned his Aberdeen South constituency for fear that he would lose it. A young candidate named Gerry Malone was ousted from the new constituency of Roxburgh & Berwickshire to make way for the minister, who subsequently failed to win the seat. The only seat left for Gerry Malone was the aforementioned Aberdeen South, which he proceeded to hold for the Tories.

- 11 Budge and Urwin, in *Scottish Political Behaviour*, pp. 97–98, suggest on the contrary that voters perceived the Scottish Liberals as being opposed to home rule; if so the voters paid remarkably little attention to either the party's literature or the media reports of its campaigning.
- 12 The motion was finally referred back for further discussion.
- 13 Christopher Harvie, in *No Gods and Precious Few Heroes*, pp. 146–47, contends that 'after 1964 the Liberals kept their distance from the SNP'. He is mistaken.
- 14 *The Scotsman*, 20 May 1967.
- 15 William Wolfe, *Scotland Lives*, p. 38.
- 16 Two Labour MPs and a host of their supporters left Labour to form the Scottish

Labour Party in January 1976. For an account of this short-lived venture, see H. M. Drucker, *Break-away: the Scottish Labour Party*.

- 17 Her speech of 21 May 1988, reported in *The Scotsman* two days later ('Sermon on the Mound', 23 May 1988) included the monstrous proposition that the good Samaritan's greatest asset was his bulging wallet. It was probably the most insensitive address to a General Assembly of the Kirk since Cromwell's 'bowels of Christ' letter of 3 August 1650.
- 18 Andrew Marr, *The Battle for Scotland*, 1992.
- 19 The SNP claimed they were 'grossly under-represented' at the Convention. They had been offered 8% of the seats, a calculation based on the party's number of MPs and local councillors after the 1987 general election, but claimed that their recent success in opinion polls and byelections entitled them to greater representation.
- 20 Wallace was always more comfortable with cooperation with Labour than the SNP. In a speech to the Liberal Democrat conference in Inverness in 1992, he launched a stinging attack on the SNP, suggesting that the party's acronym stood

1895 election

R. W. Wilson, the victorious Liberal MP for Mid-Norfolk in 1895, presented a framed certificate to his helpers. It is in colour with a photograph of the MP and a thank-you letter to the recipient. One was found in an antique shop in Norfolk by subscriber Tony Luckhurst. If anyone would like to acquire a colour copy, please contact him at tonyluck@cix.co.uk.

for 'Slogans, Not Policies'.

- 21 Scottish Liberal Democrat executive committee minutes, 8 September 1996.
- 22 Allan Massie, *Sunday Times*, 20 December 1998.
- 23 SNP Deputy Leader John Swinney and Scottish Liberal Democrat campaign coordinator Michael Moore discussed potential cooperation over lunch at Westminster.

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 party agent and English electoral culture, c.1880 – c.1906. The development of political agency as a profession, the role of the election agent in managing election campaigns during this period, and the changing nature of elections, as increased use was made of the press and the platform. *Kathryn Rix, Christ's College, Cambridge, CB2 2BU; awr@bcs.org.uk.*

Defections of north-east Liberals to the Conservatives, c.1906–1914. Aims to suggest reasons for defections of individuals and develop an understanding of changes in electoral alignment. Sources include personal papers and newspapers; suggestions about how to get hold of the papers of more obscure Liberal defectors welcome. *Nick Cott, 1a Henry Street, Gosforth, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, NE3 1DQ; N.M.Cott@newcastle.ac.uk.*

The Hon H. G. Beaumont (MP for Eastbourne 1906–10). Any information welcome, particularly on his political views (he stood as a Radical). *Tim Beaumont, 40 Elms Road, London SW4 9EX.*

Liberals and the local government of London 1919–39. *Chris Fox, 173 Worplesdon Road, Guildford GU2 6XD; christopher.fox7@virgin.net.*

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 party. *Dr R. S. Grayson, 8 Cheltenham Avenue, Twickenham TW1 3HD.*

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 grassroots 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 Unservile State Group, 1953–1970s. *Dr Peter Barberis, 24 Lime Avenue, Flixton, Manchester M41 5DE.*

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.*

'The Steady Tapping Breaks the Rock'

Russell Deacon traces the history of the post-war Welsh Liberal tradition.

There is a Welsh proverb which states that it is the 'steady tapping that breaks the rock'. Over the last forty years, Welsh Liberals have undergone a process of consolidation rather than experienced any significant expansion. After Plaid Cymru's political breakthrough in the 1970s the Welsh Liberals and then the Welsh Liberal Democrats remained the fourth political party in Wales. Recent Conservative misfortunes have brought the Welsh Liberal Democrats back to the position of third largest political party in Wales. This article explores the history of the Welsh Liberal Party since its establishment in 1966 and more latterly the Welsh Liberal Democrats, formed in 1988.¹

'Our spirit is such that if the Liberal Party died elsewhere it would always go on in Wales'

Major Parry Brown (Chairman of the Liberal Party in Wales), 19 December 1949

Major Parry Brown's confidence in the Welsh Liberals reflected a strong Liberal tradition in Wales which reached its peak in 1906 when, for the first time this century, Wales became a Tory-free zone. The Liberal and Lib-Lab candidates took thirty-three of Wales' thirty-five seats, with the Labour Party taking the other two. Liberalism in Wales had reached its zenith. For the whole of the twentieth century Liberalism has held on in Wales – though sometimes, such as during the periods between 1979–83 and 1992–97, by only one seat. There has, however, never been a period in the twentieth century when Liberalism has not been represented in Wales, in contrast to Welsh nationalism, in the shape of Plaid Cymru, or Conservatism. For parts of the twentieth century Wales almost acted as a refuge for Liberalism within the United Kingdom – half of the parliamentary party after the 1951 election repre-

sented Welsh constituencies, for instance. MPs from Wales have played a prominent role in the United Kingdom party as well. The national party was twice led by Welsh Liberal MPs: David Lloyd George (1926–31) and Clement Davies (1945–56).

The origins of a distinct Welsh Liberal Party go back to the closing decade of the last century. In the late nineteenth century the Liberals in Wales were split into two Federations of North and South Wales. The North Wales Liberal Federation supported the idea of a Welsh Liberal Party that was distinct from that in England. Anglicised Liberals in the South, however, strongly resisted 'Welsh domination'. The present day Welsh Party emerged when Lloyd George formed the Welsh Liberal Council in 1897. The lack of trust between the northern and southern elements of the party, however, ensured that the Council was only an organisational shell.² Power remained with the Federations.

Between 1916 and 1951, the Asquith/Lloyd George split and the three-way division caused by the formation of the National Government in 1931 caused divisions within Wales which ensured that the Council's role remained irrelevant. The key post of Welsh Liberal Agent and Secretary was not even filled between 1936 and 1946, and often the Northern and Southern Federations passed conflicting resolutions.³ The party lacked a Welsh identity in everything but name and developed few distinctively Welsh policies beyond support for political and administrative devolution.

In 1945, the Liberal Party contested eighteen seats in Wales, winning eight; Liberals in Welsh seats made up more than half of the parliamentary party.⁴ Between 1945–59 the number of Welsh Liberal MPs was reduced from eight to two; in the latter year, the Welsh component of the Parliamentary Liberal Party was reduced to a third. The number of Welsh seats contested by Liberals had also fallen, to eight. Liberals were represented in local gov-

ernment only where they were prepared to stand as independents.⁵

Strong measures were felt to be needed in order to save the party; in 1959 the secretary of the party in Wales, G. Madoc-Jones, declared that: 'a constructive and positive remedy would be for the Liberal Party of Wales to declare itself an autonomous and quite independent organisation.'⁶ Clement Davies had concentrated on the survival of the national party and therefore had done little to encourage Welsh party devolution. This notion was taken up by Emlyn Hooson upon his election for Clement Davies' seat of Montgomeryshire following Davies' death in 1962. Over the next few years Hooson, together with other prominent Welsh Liberals such as Lord Ogmores, Martin Thomas, G.W. Madoc-Jones and Geraint Howells, determined to pursue a far greater degree of Welsh devolution within the Liberal Party. They were also concerned that Plaid Cymru was increasingly stealing their clothes on the issue of devolution, and building up a healthy support in many traditional Liberal areas of North Wales.⁷

Graham Jones, the Welsh historian, saw the Liberals in the period up until 1966 as a party which: 'emerged as increasingly the political home of the elderly, ever more detached from the mainstream of Welsh political life, many of its younger radicals defecting to Labour, the Welsh patriots embracing Plaid Cymru, and some former Liberals finding a congenial home in the Conservative Party. The Liberal appeal and commitment to traditional values and memories were no longer sufficient to win the party mass electoral support in Wales.'⁸

In March 1966 Roderic Bowen was defeated by 523 votes in the traditional Liberal seat of Cardiganshire. With the Liberals reduced to just one seat (Emlyn Hooson's Montgomeryshire) and with a fearful eye being trained upon the rising fortunes of Plaid Cymru, the momentum for change began to build up. On 10 September 1966, two hun-

dred delegates at the Welsh Liberal Conference at Llanidloes decided, upon Hooson's advice, to set up a separate party, based on the Scottish Liberal Party model, with federated links to the Liberal Party Organisation in London.⁹ This move was unpopular in south Wales but a federal structure has been retained ever since.

Policy in the new Welsh party continued to be focused on political devolution. The standard and depth of debate on this issue within the party meant that, at its second annual conference, at Llandrindod Wells in June 1968, Hooson was able to declare that his party had become 'the thinking party in Wales ... the think-tank of Welsh politics'.¹⁰ Welsh Liberals championed devolution at Westminster. Hooson introduced the Government of Wales Bill, which advocated a Welsh Parliament, on St. David's Day 1967, though this was soundly defeated. Over the next ten years, the Liberals fought hard to distinguish themselves in their enthusiasm for devolution from Plaid Cymru.

The fact that the Welsh Liberals had further embraced devolution made little difference to their electability in the 1970 general election, where the party only contested around a third of the seats (Table 1). But they did gain Cardiganshire in February 1974, and by the general election of October 1974 the party was able to contest all of the Welsh seats for the first time since 1906. Over the next twenty-three years, however, despite achieving, at most, in 1983, almost a quarter of the Welsh popular vote, the party never won more than three MPs in Wales (Table 1).

The 1974 Liberal victory in Cardiganshire brought on to the political stage the Ponterwyd hill-farmer Geraint Howells. Howells, like Hooson, was an ardent devolutionist.¹¹ On some issues, such as Welsh education, he sometimes appeared closer to the Plaid Cymru agenda than to that of his own

Table 1
Liberal Party/Alliance/Liberal Democrat share of votes and seats in Wales 1970-97

Year	% of vote	MPs
1970	6.8	1
1974 Feb	16.0	2
1974 Oct	15.5	2
1979	10.6	1
1983	23.2	2
1987	17.9	3
1992	12.4	1
1997	12.0	2

party.¹² Owing to Howells and Hooson, the Liberals' commitment to devolution, including the proposals of the Callaghan government, was reinforced. Beyond devolution, however, both MPs paid only limited attention to policy creation or the general stewardship of the Welsh Liberal Party. The party failed to make any real gains in the local government elections of 1976 and 1979, which saw major Labour setbacks. The practical role of holding the Welsh party together was left to Martin Thomas QC, Vice Chair of the Welsh Party between 1967-69, Chair between 1969-74 and President between 1977-79. Thomas, a successful barrister based in North Wales and London, played a crucial role in running the Welsh party and encouraging policy creation across a broad range of issues until the 1997 general election.

Howells' support for devolution may have been popular in the Welsh-speaking heartland of Cardiganshire, but was less so in Montgomeryshire. Hooson's support for devolution alienated him from the increasing number of English immigrants into the area.¹³ In the 1979 general election, as the Liberals prepared to celebrate a 'Liberal century' in Montgomeryshire, Hooson lost his seat. Welsh Liberal fortunes were once again at a low ebb.

The limited popularity of devolution forced Howells and the Welsh party to concentrate on other areas of policy, including local government reform. This made little difference to

the fortunes of the Welsh Liberal Party and not even the advent of the Alliance with the Social Democratic Party (SDP) boosted significantly Liberal representation in Wales. Montgomery was regained in 1983, by Alex Carlile, but this was a meagre reward for an Alliance poll of 23.2%. Carlile was much more of a national politician than Howells, who directed his attention towards his own special interests of home affairs and agriculture.¹⁴

Richard Livsey's byelection victory in 1985, as Liberal/Alliance, did little to revitalise the Welsh party. At the 1986 conference so few delegates arrived that the conference came close to being abandoned.¹⁵ It was unsurprising, therefore, that at the 1987 general election the party's vote fell back to 17.9% and no new seats were won, although the three existing seats were held.

In March 1988 a joint conference of both the Welsh Liberal Party and SDP, although attended by only eight members, saw both parties merged. The SDP had never succeeded in winning a Parliamentary seat in Wales and, unlike in England or Scotland, no prominent SDP MPs or peers were able to stamp their mark on the new Welsh party. Only a few of the key Welsh SDP figures such as Gwynoro Jones (former Labour MP for Carmarthen) and Tom Ellis (former Labour MP for Wrexham) and a few SDP councillors in Neath and Taff-Ely district councils remained much involved at the time of the merger, and none became prominent in the new party. Cardiff Liberal councillor Jenny Randerson, for instance, beat Gwynoro Jones in the contest for the chairmanship of the new party. By 1992 the Welsh Party Executive of

thirty-four included only four who had previously belonged to the SDP. This implied that the core of the Welsh Liberal Democrats remained strongly Liberal in background; the party's three MPs – Carlile, Howells and Livsey – were all former Liberal Party members. As a result, it was traditional Welsh Liberal ideals, rather than those of the SDP, which shaped the Welsh party's policy agenda. This encouraged weak central control of Liberal Democrats in Wales, especially because the SDP bequeathed little in the way of money or administrative resources to the new party.

The Alliance's inheritance did include some benefits. The creation of the SDP, and its alliance with the Liberals, breathed new life into Liberals at local government level. Although few SDP councillors were elected, for the first time in decades Liberal councillors appeared on urban councils, including Cardiff and Swansea. The Alliance also tended to contest more seats than either the Conservatives or Plaid Cymru. As a consequence, whereas the Liberals had held 2.6% of district council seats in 1979, the Alliance held 6.1% in 1987; there was a similar rise in the number of county council seats held, from 1.9% in 1977 to 6.5% in 1985.¹⁶ Although this did not include the control of any councils, it did give the Alliance a presence for the first time on many.

Whilst the 1980s had proved to be a period of expansion for the Alliance, the 1989 European elections and the 1992 general election were severe disappointments for the Welsh Liberal Democrats. In the latter election, Geraint Howells lost his seat to Plaid Cymru and Richard Livsey lost his to the Conservatives. The party fell behind Plaid Cymru in terms of

parliamentary representation, retaining only one seat, Alex Carlile's Montgomeryshire. As a result of this poor election performance, the party's 1992 Swansea conference decided to take a number of measures to avoid the Liberal Democrats' total elimination in Wales. Prominent amongst these was the upgrading of the party's Welsh HQ, which for the previous two decades had been run by part-time staff, to a full-time office. It also allowed for the employment of a full-time party manager, Judi Lewis, who had previously been secretary to Geraint Howells MP. A distinct Welsh policy agenda was also to be encouraged.

Alex Carlile attempted to fulfil the role of Welsh Leader and federal party spokesman on issues ranging from health to the Home Office for the next five years. While Howells and Hooson had also adopted this role in the past, the demands made on Carlile's time by the media, as well as by Welsh question time, the Welsh Grand Committee, the Welsh Affairs Select Committee and other parliamentary activities requiring a Welsh Liberal input, were considerable. To help Carlile, Martin Thomas was elevated to the peerage in 1996. He was the first Welsh Liberal Democrat or Welsh Liberal who had not been an MP to join the House of Lords since the party's formation in 1966.

By the time of the 1997 general election the Welsh party had publicly targeted the seats of Brecon & Radnorshire, Ceredigion, Conwy and Montgomeryshire for election victories. All needed swings of 3.1% or less; Brecon & Radnorshire was one of the most marginal seats in the whole of the United Kingdom. In Ceredigion and Conwy the Liberal Democrats put forward two traditional Welsh-speaking Liberal candidates, Dai Davies and Roger Roberts. In the event, however, the party quietly abandoned Ceredigion. A traditionally Welsh-speaking and politically independent area, the mainly English-speaking Welsh Executive felt that an uncharismatic candidate had been selected and that

Table 2 Welsh Liberal Party fortunes 1970 and 1997

Election	Seats contested	Position (%)					Lost deposits (no.)
		1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	
1970	17 out of 36	6	7	53	29	6	2
1997	40 out of 40	5	18	55	23	0	2

(Sums do not total 100% due to rounding)

the seat was now irretrievably nationalist. Plaid increased its majority from less than two thousand votes to over ten thousand. Ceredigion was replaced by Cardiff Central as the party's fourth most winnable Welsh seat.

Conwy's fate, however, was different. A Conservative/Liberal marginal throughout the 1980s, Labour, who had become the strongest party on the local council in 1995, came from third to win in 1997. Richard Livsey did, however, regain Brecon & Radnorshire in a more anglicised part of Wales. Montgomeryshire was won by Lembit Öpik, a Newcastle councillor from Northern Ireland born of Estonian parents, with no previous Welsh background. Thus Welsh Liberal Parliamentary representation remained restricted to the English border county of Powys, and neither MP spoke Welsh. The failure of the Conservatives to win any seats in Wales in 1997 meant that the Liberal Democrats at Westminster, as well as at local government level, could truly claim to be the third party in Wales for the first time since the early 1970s. It was also significant that the total Liberal Democrat vote in Wales remained the same as in 1992, at 12.4%, despite the party languishing at between 6–7% in Welsh opinion polls between 1992–97.

In its first general election as a federal party, 1970, the Welsh Liberal Party contested 47% of the seats and came first in just one (Table 2). In its most recent election, 1997, the Welsh Liberal Democrats contested all of the seats and came first in two. Its overall electoral position remained better than in 1970 but it never managed to break out of the counties of Ceredigion or Powys at a Parliamentary level during the intervening period. As in 1970, however, the party remained in the position of the third most popular in the majority of the seats it contested. Perhaps a fitting judgement on a political party that has always thought to provide a third way in Welsh politics. When the first proportional elections are held for the Welsh Assembly, in May 1999, the

third party in Wales may well be represented throughout Wales for the first time since 1906. It will be case of the 'steady tapping of the Welsh Liberal Democrats' finally breaking the rock of its widespread political exclusion.

Russell Deacon is a senior lecturer in government and politics at the University of Wales Institute, Cardiff (UWIC) Business School. He was Director of Policy for Liberal Democrats Wales in the 1997 general election, and the Welsh party's principal author of its proposals for a Welsh Parliament: 'A Senedd for Wales: beyond a talking shop'.

Notes:

- 1 The Welsh Liberal Democrats' official title is Liberal Democrats Wales, chosen by the former leader Alex Carlile because it translates more closely the Welsh name of *Democratiaid Rhyddfrydol Cymru*. For grammatical reasons they are referred to as the Welsh Liberal Democrats throughout this article.
- 2 K. O. Morgan, *Rebirth of a Nation* (Oxford University Press, 1981), p.44.
- 3 D. Roberts, 'The Strange Death of Liberal Wales' in J. Osmond (ed), *The Na-*

tional Question Again: Welsh Political Identity in the 1980s (Gomer Press, 1985), p. 81.

- 4 Clive Betts, *The Political Conundrum* (Gomer Press, 1993), p. 17.
- 5 J. Graham Jones, 'The Liberal Party and Wales 1945–79', *The Welsh History Review* 16:3 (June 1993), p. 355.
- 6 Roberts, 'The Strange Death of Liberal Wales', p. 90.
- 7 Graham Jones, 'The Liberal Party and Wales 1945–79', p. 347.
- 8 Graham Jones, 'The Liberal Party and Wales 1945–79', p. 355.
- 9 Roberts, 'The Strange Death of Liberal Wales' p.90
- 10 Graham Jones, 'The Liberal Party and Wales 1945–79', p. 349.
- 11 Duncan Brack et al (eds), *Dictionary of Liberal Biography* (Politico's Publishing, 1998), p. 190.
- 12 Betts, *The Political Conundrum*, p. 18.
- 13 K. O. Morgan 'Montgomeryshire's Liberal Century: Rendel to Hooson, 1880–1979', *The Welsh History Review* 16:1 (June 1992), p. 108.
- 14 Brack, *Dictionary of Liberal Biography*, p. 72.
- 15 Betts, *The Political Conundrum*, p. 23.
- 16 M. Rallings and M. Thrasher, Local Government Election Results, *Local Government Chronicle* 1993, p.xix.

A Liberal Democrat History Group Evening Meeting

Did the Yellow Book spell the end of Asquithian Liberalism?

Britain's Industrial Future, the report of the Liberal Industrial Inquiry established by Lloyd George, was far in advance of any comparable contribution to political debate when it appeared in February 1928.

The 'Yellow Book's' advocacy of government planning to reduce unemployment formed the basis of the Liberal election campaign of 1929. What difference did it really make to British politics? Did it change the direction of the Liberal Party?

Discuss the issues with leading historians of the period
John Grigg and **Richard Grayson**.

(The meeting will follow the History Group AGM, at 6.30pm).

7.00pm, Monday 12 April

National Liberal Club, 1 Whitehall Place, London SW1

In From The Fringes?

The Scottish Liberal Democrats

Peter Lynch examines the development of the Scottish Liberal Democrats and assesses whether the party can emerge from the fringes of Scottish politics to become an important player in the Scottish Parliament.

It is not only the Federal Liberal Democrats who celebrate their tenth birthday this year, but also the Scottish Liberal Democrats, created by the merger of the Scottish Liberal Party and the Scottish SDP in 1988. Scotland has always been important to the Liberal Democrats and the Liberal tradition in general, both historically and in recent times.

After all, it was Scotland which provided Jo Grimond and David Steel, in addition to around a half to one third of the party's MPs at Westminster, many of them in prominent front-bench positions, such as Malcolm Bruce and Menzies Campbell, or holding important positions within the federal party organisation, such as Charles Kennedy and Bob Maclennan. Clearly, without their Scottish MPs, the Alliance would have been a much weakened force from 1983–97. In addition, since 1997, given the new intake of MPs, the Scottish contingent provides the party with some of its most experienced parliamentarians.

It can also be argued that it is the Scottish Liberal Democrats (SLD) that make the Liberal Democrats (and the Liberals before them) a genuinely federal party. This may sound an exaggerated claim given the existence of the Welsh and English parties, but can be appreciated given the size, political impact and autonomy enjoyed by the Scottish party within the federal structure both before and after the 1988 merger. The Scottish party has a clear identity, distinctive policies and an entirely separate organisation and membership structure – and a greater level of autonomy – than its counterparts in Wales and England. In part, this is a result of Scotland's political and governmental distinctiveness within the UK, with different education and legal systems and distinctive government arrangements through the Scottish Office. However, it is also a result of the lengthy development of the Lib-

eral Democrats as a determinedly Scottish party committed to home rule historical roots in Scottish culture and politics. Undoubtedly, the party's role in the future Scottish Parliament will serve to make it even more distinctive from the federal organisation.

The Liberal Tradition

It would be no exaggeration to say that Liberalism was *the* political movement of nineteenth-century Scotland. The Liberal Party dominated elections from 1832 until the 1880s, when the splits within the party over Irish home rule created the break-away Liberal Unionists to divide the Liberal vote. However, even then, support for the Liberals never dipped below 50% in Scotland from 1832–1918, with the result that the Liberals were almost always able to harvest a substantial majority of Scottish seats until the end of the First World War. After 1918, however, the party went into what seemed like a permanent decline, fuelled by the UK-wide divisions of the 1920s and 1930s, only briefly reviving in the 1960s before experiencing a much more substantial renaissance in the 1980s.

Ironically, the Liberal tradition lived on after 1918 in the shape of the Scottish Unionist Party, with some of its inheritance reflecting previous divisions over Irish home rule and the merger of the Liberal Unionists with the Conservatives in 1912. This brought a radical, liberal element into the Unionist Party in addition to a working-class electorate opposed to Irish home rule and Irish migration into Scotland. Whilst the Liberals survived as a minor party after the 1930s, reconstituted as the Scottish Liberal Federation in 1945, a broader liberalism successfully operated through Unionism and the experience of the National coalition of the 1930s. Significantly, National Liberal candidates were still standing for the Unionists in the 1950s (indeed, eight of them were elected in Scotland at the 1955 gen-

eral election), reflecting the extent to which liberalism remained a viable political force in Scotland, though not one which actually helped the Scottish Liberal Party itself. The Unionists were also careful to maintain good relations and tacit electoral alliances with local Liberal parties in a number of Scottish constituencies, in order to avoid splitting the anti-Labour vote.¹ Thus, as the Liberal Party withered away across the UK from the 1920s, it was the Scottish Unionists who were able to appear as a replacement party and the natural home for disaffected and disenfranchised Liberals as Liberal organisation declined – though Labour was also able to benefit from an ability to attract former Liberal voters.

The Unionists' success mirrored the Scottish Liberal Party's failures in the period from the 1920s to the 1960s. Party-political liberalism declined across Scotland, and the party confined itself to contesting a limited number of seats at general elections due to its organisational weaknesses. For example, in 1951, the Scottish Liberals only contested nine of the seventy-one seats, followed by only five in 1955. Of course, such targeting yielded reasonable results in these seats. It helped to maintain local organisations and support bases in some rural areas which would provide the grounds for future success – as in Gordon, which the Liberals contested at every post-war election (except 1959), Russell Johnston's Inverness seat, which the party fought at every election from 1945 onwards (except 1951) and David Steel's seat in the Borders, which the party contested at every election from 1945.²

However, the inability to fight the majority of seats in Scotland between 1951 and 1974 meant that Liberal popular support fell away across large parts of the country, despite efforts to revive support by the party's grassroots. Significantly, it was only in 1983, with the advent of the Alliance, that the Liberals (together with the SDP) were able to contest all of Scotland's Westminster constituencies.

The party's weaknesses in organisation and membership provide part of the reason for the limited success of the party in later years – and why those successes only occurred in certain parts of Scotland – but the rise of the Scottish National Party is also an important factor. Unlike the Liberals in England, the Scottish party faced an important competitor for the third-party vote as Scotland developed into a four-party system in the 1970s and 1980s. For example, the Liberal revival in 1974 saw the party's support in England rising to 21.3% in February and 20.2% in October. In Scotland, the party was pegged back to only 7.9% and 8.3% at the two elections, whilst the Nationalists emerged to take 22.1% and 30.4% and become Scotland's second party.³ The Liberals gradually coped with the Nationalist threat in their own heartlands, but the SNP has remained a long-term obstacle to the Scottish Liberal Democrats and has often appeared more capable of upsetting the two-party balance in Scotland than its older Liberal rival – often in dramatic style.

Electoral prospects

Although in the past the Scottish Liberal Democrats can clearly be seen as the victims of an unfair voting system, over the last decade they have become experts at playing the first-past-the-post system. Indeed, the Scottish Liberal Democrats have not been disadvantaged by the FPTP system, through the party's ability to concentrate its support in a small number of constituencies. In the 1980s and 1990s, the success of the party's targeting was evident from its ability to win and retain seats in general elections, even while its support was declining in Scotland after 1983, and remained static at 13% between 1992 and 1997.

There are two problems with the party's electoral performance in Scotland. First, too much of it has come at the expense of one party, the Conservatives. Clearly, there have been special factors at work here in relation to the anti-Scottish image

of the Tories, but the SLD does remain vulnerable to a Conservative revival.

Second, there is the fact that the SLD's support is often non-existent outside its heartlands in the Borders, Highlands and Northeast. Besides Edinburgh West, the party has no urban seats and is a marginal force in the central belt, which contains the bulk of Scotland's population and seats. This reality makes the SLD appear as something of a 'regional' party in Scotland, represented in the rural areas and small towns, in competition with the Conservatives, but unable to challenge Labour or the SNP. Devolution and the use of the additional member system for elections to the Scottish Parliament is one route out of this electoral ghetto, as the SLD can expect to pick up votes and seats through the regional party lists in urban central Scotland, giving it a level of representation that has so far eluded it.

The SLD's opinion poll rating for elections to the Scottish parliament on 6 May 1999 have shown nothing of the volatility of support for the SNP and Labour, but they have demonstrated an opportunity to perform well. The fact that the election involves a two-vote system has demonstrated the party's ability to win support on the second ballot for regional party lists. For example, polling for the *Herald* in July 1998 suggested that the SLD would gain 8% of first votes and 12% of second votes, which would deliver fifteen seats, whilst by December 1998 this had risen to 12% on the first vote and 16% on the second, delivering nineteen seats.

Either result would put the party in a position to play a role in a coalition government. Also, such polls have been taken well in advance of the campaign itself. The SLD are formidable constituency campaigners, and can also be expected to gain from the new system through fighting a distinctive second-vote campaign as the balancing party, capable, through coalition, of radicalising Labour or, alternately, moderating the SNP.

From constructive opposition to equidistance to government?

The Scottish Parliament seem likely to deliver a governing role for the Scottish Liberal Democrats. The combined effects of the electoral system and the balance of electoral support for the four parties in Scotland is likely to produce a coalition government after the first elections in May 1999. Given that the Conservatives remain *persona non grata*, and the fractious relations between Labour and the SNP, it is the Liberal Democrats who could emerge as the king-makers. The party's involvement in a coalition in Edinburgh has been generally assumed to involve Labour, in a reconstruction of the coalition within the Scottish Constitutional Convention from 1989–95. However, the emergence of the SNP as a more credible force, and evident dissatisfaction with Labour in office (especially in Scotland) has presented a considerable opportunity for the Liberal Democrats, as the party now

has two potential suitors rather than one. In 1998 the SLD had private discussions with the Nationalists as potential coalition partners.

Of course, the different political situations in Scotland and the rest of Britain requires a careful balance to be struck between the party's strategy in Scotland and at Westminster. The SLD's strategy has become one of equidistance between the SNP and Labour, rather than of constructive opposition to Labour.⁴ Indeed, constructive opposition at Westminster could start to unravel if the SLD enters government with the SNP at Holyrood, and could also be undermined if the SLD aligns with Labour in Scotland and drags the party too far into government with Labour.

However, Liberal Democrats in Scotland and in London have been adept at managing these types of problems before, and the autonomy of the Scottish Liberal Democrats, and its experience in local government in particular, should provide it with a range of high-calibre Scottish parliamentary candidates capable of holding their own as either government or opposition in Edinburgh. Devolution therefore offers the Scottish

party a bright new future and a potential power-sharing role in government, with more than an echo of David Steel's 1981 rallying cry to the party assembly at Llandudno, to go back to their constituencies and prepare for government.

Dr Peter Lynch is a lecturer in politics at the University of Stirling and author of 'Third-party politics in a four-party system: the Liberal Democrats in Scotland', Scottish Affairs 22 (Winter 1998).

Notes:

- 1 I. Hutchinson, 'Scottish Unionism between the two world wars', in Catriona MacDonald (ed), *Unionist Scotland 1800–1997* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1998).
- 2 Richard Parry, *Scottish Political Facts* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988).
- 3 Peter Lynch, 'Third-party politics in a four-party system: the Liberal Democrats in Scotland', *Scottish Affairs* 22 (Winter 1998), p.19.
- 4 Before 1997, equidistance could not have worked in Scotland. The SLD could never have argued it was equidistant between Labour and the Tories, as it was involved in a tacit coalition with Labour in the Scottish Constitutional Convention. In addition, the Tories were *persona non grata* in Scotland and all the opposition parties combined against them.

No Docking of Horses' Tails

The fight for an independent Cumberland

By Mark Egan

Cornwall is not the only English county for which independence has been claimed by parliamentary candidates. In the 1950s, William Brownrigg twice contested Penrith & the Border on the platform of 'Home Rule for Cumberland'.

Born in 1897, Brownrigg was a well-known, rather eccentric, farmer at The Flatts, Kirkbampton, Cumberland. Prominent within the local farming community, Brownrigg put himself forward as an In-

dependent candidate at the 1951 general election, securing just 158 votes. Aside from his call for home rule, he argued for the legalisation of 'cock-fighting [during December], sweepstakes, card-playing and

gambling', as well as 'no docking of horses' tails'. Other distinctive policies included increased salaries for mole-catchers and the return of land confiscated from Jacobites to their descendants.

Undaunted by his disappointing result, Brownrigg emerged again in 1955, challenging William Whitelaw as an Independent Conservative. His poll improved to 368 votes but he again lost his deposit. This was of little concern to Brownrigg, who covered his election expenses on this occasion by means of wagers with fellow farmers that he would again stand. Sadly, Brownrigg did not pursue his political career further and was unable to capitalise on the increasing popularity of nationalism in the 1960s.

Devolution for the Duchy

The Liberal Party and the Nationalist Movement in Cornwall

Garry Tregidga examines the historical links between Liberalism and nationalists in Cornwall.

There is a tendency for Cornish nationalism to be either ignored or ridiculed in studies of ethno-regionalism. The absence of a major nationalist party on the lines of Scotland or Wales, combined with the conventional view that Cornwall is just part of a vague and artificial region of the south-west, centred on Bristol, ensures that this attitude is not really surprising.

Yet the Duchy has not been immune to developments elsewhere in the Celtic fringe. Although Mebyon Kernow (MK), the principal nationalist party, is effectively marginalised by the current electoral system, regional discontent has been the catalyst for political developments in Cornwall throughout this century. Moreover, the Liberal Party has been the main beneficiary of this process. This article will therefore focus on the historical links between Liberalism and the Celtic-Cornish movement, noting the impact of nationalist ideas on the Liberals and discussing the electoral failure of MK since 1970, before concluding with a brief look at the current relationship between MK and the Liberal Democrats.

The formative years

The history of modern Cornish nationalism can be traced back to the end of the nineteenth century. Following the Liberal split of 1886 over the question of home rule for Ireland, Gladstone and his supporters decided to make the issue appear more relevant to mainland Britain by ad-

vocating a federal system of government: 'home rule all round'. Although Coweth as Kelto-Kernuak (the Celtic-Cornish Society) operated on a non-political basis, the Cornish Liberals used the cultural themes raised by this organisation for political purposes. Thus, the cause of Irish home rule was defended on pan-Celtic grounds, while some Liberal activists echoed their counterparts in Wales by calling for the disestablishment of the Anglican Church in Cornwall. When Winston Churchill proposed the creation of regional legislatures for England in 1912, the editor of a local Liberal newspaper called for domestic self-government:

'There is another Home Rule movement on the horizon. Self-government for Cornwall will be the next move ... The Metropolis is coming to mean everything, and all the provinces approximate towards the fashion of the centre ... We think this is much to be deplored, and we do not see why Cornwall should not join in the 'Regionalist' movement which is striving in various parts of Western Europe to revive local patriotism.'¹

Yet the outbreak of the First World War removed those conditions which had allowed these ideas to flourish. This was crucial since the debate over devolution had not developed sufficiently to make a lasting impact on party politics. Nevertheless, the experience of the inter-war period was to ensure that the potential for regionalist discontent was to remain. While Labour's electoral breakthrough led to the creation of a class-based political system, the Liberals remained entrenched as the main alternative to the Conservatives in Cornwall.

Radical politics was still based on the traditional agenda of religious non-conformity, while Liberalism was presented as the anti-metropolitan alternative to the new Labour-Conservative alignment at Westminster. This left the Liberals well placed to take advantage of the emergence of political nationalism after the Second World War.

Mebyon Kernow: pressure group to political party

The formation of Mebyon Kernow (Sons of Cornwall) in May 1952 marked an official change of direction for the Cornish movement, since this was the first organisation publicly to support devolution. Its initial strategy was to operate as a pressure group, working with other organisations to protect the interests of the region, and producing policy documents on subjects ranging from local government reform to the need for a university in Cornwall. Membership remained relatively low until the 1960s, when public concern over a series of issues, from rural depopulation to the threat of territorial expansion from Plymouth, led to a dramatic rise in support. By 1970, when MK contested its first parliamentary election, the movement had a total membership of over 3,000.²

Although MK attracted support across the political spectrum, the

Liberal Party was its main ally. This was demonstrated only a few months after the creation of the group, when senior Liberal figures like John Foot supported home rule on the grounds that Cornwall was a 'separate nation', while it was only the Liberal Party which supported devolution in the 1959 election.³ The revival of Cornish Liberalism in the late 1950s reflected widespread concern over the weak state of the local economy, and the activities of MK reinforced the party's claims that Cornwall was being ignored by central government. But the Liberals also accepted the constitutional objectives of the Cornish movement. Peter Bessell and John Pardoe, the MPs for Bodmin and North Cornwall, were members of MK, and in 1967 they declared that the 'Cornish people have the same right to control their country, its economy and its political future, as the other Celtic peoples of Scotland and Wales'.⁴

Cornish nationalism since 1970: failure and potential

Yet this Liberal/MK nexus was undermined by the decision of the nationalists to enter the electoral arena. The byelection successes of Plaid Cymru and the SNP in the late 1960s, combined with growing support for MK in local government elections, encouraged the group to

embrace a new role as a political party. In 1970 MK contested the parliamentary constituency of Falmouth & Camborne, though the party attracted less than a thousand votes. By 1979, however, there were indications that this new strategy was starting to succeed. In the election of that year MK secured a total vote of 4,155 from the three constituencies that it contested, while a month later the party's chairman, Richard Jenkin, polled 10,205 votes (5.9% or nearly 10% of the total Cornish vote) in the European parliamentary constituency of Cornwall & Plymouth.

But MK failed to build on these results. The party's vote in West Cornwall slumped in 1983 (see Table 1) as anti-Conservative voters switched to the new SDP/Liberal Alliance. The shock of this defeat, combined with a lack of funds and a failure to develop a coherent strategy, meant that the nationalists did not even contest the 1987 and 1992 elections. In 1997 MK fielded four candidates on the platform of self-government within the European Community, but the party struggled to obtain an average vote of just one per cent.

The electoral failure of the nationalist movement reflects a number of basic problems. In the first place the increasing significance of tactical voting ensures that a small party like MK is going to be at a serious disadvantage in Westminster elections, while the creation of the Cor-

Table 1 Cornish nationalist vote at general elections *

Election	St Ives		Fal-Cam		Bodmin **		Truro		North Cornwall	
	Vote	%	Vote	%	Vote	%	Vote	%	Vote	%
1970	-	-	960	2.0	-	-	-	-	-	-
1974 Feb	-	-	-	-	-	-	85	1.5	-	-
1974 Oct	-	-	-	-	-	-	384	0.7	-	-
1979	1662	4.0	1637	3.0	865	1.7	227	0.4	-	-
1983	569	1.2	582	1.2	-	-	-	-	364	0.7
1987	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
1992	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
1997	-	-	238	0.4	573	1.0	450	0.8	645	1.1

* Mainly Mebyon Kernow candidates, but includes Cornish Nationalist Party (CNP) at Truro in 1979 and North Cornwall in 1983.

** South-East Cornwall constituency since 1983.

Table 2 Cornish nationalist vote at European elections (Cornwall & Plymouth constituency)

Election	Vote	%	Party
1979	10205	5.9	MK
1984	1892	1.0	CNP
1989	4224	1.9	MK
1994	3315	1.5	MK

nish Nationalist Party, a breakaway group formed in 1975, also points to the tendency for fragmentation with any marginalised organisation. The nationalists also failed to develop a long-term election strategy. Although MK can expect to poll a higher share of the vote in district and county council elections, local victories were not used as a springboard for future success. This was demonstrated in the early 1970s. In the previous decade MK had won a number of seats on local councils, but just as this strategy was starting to succeed the party effectively withdrew from local elections until the late 1970s! In recent years nationalist candidates can still expect to poll a median vote of over 10%, while the party retains a small presence in local government, with one seat on the county council and three seats at the district level. In retrospect the party's failure to concentrate its efforts at the local level was therefore a serious mistake.

However, the underlying problem for the nationalists lies with the central role of the Liberals in Cornish politics. Although Plaid Cymru and the SNP could rely on a continuous tradition of political activity stretching back to the inter-war period, MK was a latecomer to the world of party politics. By the late 1960s the Cornish electorate had already been mobilised on the anti-metropolitan issue by the Liberal Party. The crucial point about the long-term development of ethno-regionalism in Cornwall was that until 1970 this process was mainly associated with the Liberals. That party's local role as the centre-left and anti-metropolitan alternative to the Conservatives was

further strengthened after 1974 by the popular appeal of David Penhaligon (MP for Truro), and it was only to be expected that a separate electoral challenge by the nationalists would fail at the Westminster level.

Future prospects

If we are to consider the prospects for MK we must therefore start with the Liberal Democrats. The relationship between MK and its old ally has become increasingly complex in recent years. In one sense the legacy of the days of Bessell and Pardoe still continues since the county's Liberal Democrat MPs, particularly Andrew George (MP for St Ives), tend to be sympathetic to MK ideas like a Cornish Assembly and a separate Regional Development Agency. But the Liberal Democrats are also now the 'establishment' party in local government. MK activists are suspicious of many leading Liberal Democrat councillors in Cornwall, and believe that the failure to press for a separate RDA will ultimately lead to political rule from Bristol if devolution is extended to the English regions.

These factors are currently shaping the electoral strategy of the na-

tionalists. Many issues still need to be resolved, but under the moderate and practical leadership of Richard Cole the party is currently attracting younger members and developing a more professional approach to electioneering. MK's immediate objective is to build a base in local government, and the first major test of this new strategy will come with this year's district council elections when the party will be fielding a record number of candidates.⁵ If this challenge achieves results MK might finally start to establish itself as a serious electoral force in Cornish politics.

Dr Garry Tregidga is Assistant Director of the Institute of Cornish Studies.

Notes:

1. For a more detailed discussion of this subject see G. Tregidga, 'The Politics of the Celto-Cornish Revival 1886-1939' in P. Payton (ed.), *Cornish Studies* 5 (1997).
2. For further information on the history of MK see P. Payton, *The Making of Modern Cornwall* (Redruth, 1992), pp. 194-204 and B. Deacon, 'The Electoral Impact of Cornish Nationalism', in C. O'Luin (ed.), *For a Celtic Future* (Dublin, 1983).
3. *Cornish Guardian*, 8 May 1952; *New Cornwall* 7:6 (October 1959).
4. Quoted in Payton, *The Making of Modern Cornwall*, p. 228.
5. See *Cornish Nation* 11 (Autumn 1998) and 12 (Winter 1998-99).

Membership Services

The following listings are available to History Group members:

Mediawatch: a bibliography of major articles on the Liberal Democrats appearing in the broadsheet papers, major magazines and academic journals from 1988; plus articles of historical interest appearing in the major Liberal Democrat journals from 1995.

Thesiswatch: all higher degree theses listed in the Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research under the titles 'Liberal Party' or 'liberalism' (none yet under SDP or Liberal Democrats).

Any subscriber is entitled to receive a copy of either listing free; send an A4 SSAE to the address on page 2. Up to date versions can also be found on our web site (www.dbrack.dircon.co.uk/ldhg).

Help needed: we need a volunteer to keep these listings up to date: anyone with access to the *British Humanities Index* (Bowker Saur) and the journal *Theses Completed* (both should be available in university libraries). Anyone willing to help should contact the Editor at the address on page 2.

From Liberalism to Nationalism: The political career of David Murray

Mark Egan examines the career of one politician who epitomised the relationship between Liberals and Nationalists in Scotland.

The links between the Liberal Party and Scottish nationalism have been detailed elsewhere in this *Journal*, particularly by Graham Watson. The career of David Murray, who stood four times for Parliament in the 1950s, illustrates the close relationship between Liberals and Nationalists at that time. Murray began his political career in the Scottish Convention movement in support of home rule, serving alongside several prominent Liberals, but within twenty years was active in opposition to David Steel in the Roxburgh, Selkirk & Peebles constituency.

David Murray was an engineer and journalist who had travelled extensively prior to the second world war, before standing for Parliament for the Western Isles in 1950 at the age of fifty. Murray appears to have chosen the Western Isles, where he challenged Labour MP Malcolm Macmillan, because there was ‘very little Tory feeling in the Isles’, but the Labour vote was not solidly based on trade unionism, as in the Scottish lowlands. Murray stood as ‘an independent on a home rule platform’, having been prominent in the launching of the Covenant for a Scottish Parliament, and in January 1950 approached Lady Glen-Coats for formal backing from the Scottish Liberal Party (SLP). Glen-Coats served with Murray as an officer of the National Covenant Committee, which agitated for Home Rule.

Glen-Coats’ reply was doubly disappointing; she argued that home rule was ‘not a big issue in the Isles, as they are as suspicious of Edinburgh as of London’, and that the SLP would not back Murray against Wing-Commander Huntly Sinclair, the independent Liberal candidate. Murray’s protest that Sinclair was a right-winger, adopted by the local Liberal Association only because he could pay his own election expenses, fell on deaf ears, so he claimed to have the support of Glen-Coats and the SLP anyway. Glen-Coats telegraphed the SLP’s support of Sinclair at the last moment, even though the latter had indicated his unwillingness to accept the Liberal whip if elected, leading to an acrimonious exchange of correspondence between Murray and the SLP.

Murray polled just 425 votes in 1950, with Macmillan defeating Sinclair by a majority of 1,437. In October, Murray again contacted Glen-Coats to warn her that the Liberal Association was considering an alliance with the local Tories, but that some senior local Liberals would back his candidature at the next election. This spurred Glen-Coats into action and her letter to the Liberal Association persuaded them to accept Murray as their prospective candidate.

Murray, back home in Cambuslang, did not take his chance. Over the summer, Donald Stewart, a Liberal-minded councillor with whom Murray had corresponded, chaired SNP meetings in Stornaway, and branches of the party were formed in Lewis and Uist. The Western Isles Liberal Association responded by back-

ing John Mitchell as Conservative and National Liberal candidate. Murray arrived in Stornaway three weeks before polling day without any local support, literature, committee rooms or an agent. The understanding he had felt had been achieved with the SNP had evaporated. Glen-Coats was cautious of providing official backing for a candidate in such a weak position, but the Liberal Party was especially keen to challenge any candidates standing under a Conservative/Liberal banner, and a cheque for £250 was dispatched. Murray optimistically reported to Edinburgh that the renegade Liberal Association was in its 'death throes', that the SNP's intervention was 'more pique and personality than anything else', and that Labour support was slipping. But, despite describing himself in his election address as 'of the seed of the Scottish Highlands and Islands', Murray scraped the worst Liberal poll in the election – just 916 votes, less than a hundred ahead of the SNP candidate.

Murray initially presented his result as a triumph, which showed that: 'the Liberal Party emerges as the only one with great hidden reserves' in the constituency. He particularly discounted the growth of the SNP, seeing no fundamental differences of policy or principle between them and the Liberal Party at the time. This approach irritated the SLP, as did Murray's request for a further £250 to invest in a local lobster scheme, to boost the party's profile. Murray argued that, if Cambuslang SNP could raise money to spend wherever was most appropriate in Scotland, he should receive the backing of rich Liberal Associations from throughout Scotland. This attitude was contrary to that which underpinned the Liberal Party's constitution and also illustrated Murray's connections with the SNP in his home town.

Murray continued until 1958 to claim that he was Liberal candidate for the Western Isles, although he lacked the backing of a Liberal Association or of the SLP and did not

contest the 1955 election. He was offered the chance to become Liberal candidate for Glasgow Woodside in 1957, but refused, only to stand for the Kelvingrove seat at a byelection in 1958. The West of Scotland Liberal Federation had declined to contest this seat, provoking Murray to appear as a Liberal Home-Rule candidate. He was backed by neither the SLP nor the SNP; his agent, Ian Howard, was expelled from the latter for backing Murray and later formed the 'Scottish Alliance' including other rebel nationalists, illustrating the SNP's growing political consciousness. Murray was privately backed by several SNP branch officials and polled his best ever vote – 1,622 – though a long way short of the two main parties. Eighteen months later, Murray again polled over 1,000 votes as an Independent at Motherwell. He stood on local issues, with little mention of Liberalism or home rule in his literature, although he continued to claim membership of the Liberal Party.

Murray's political career culminated in support for Anthony Kerr, independent nationalist candidate at the Roxburgh, Selkirk & Peebles byelection in 1965, at which David Steel was elected for the Liberal Party. Kerr did not believe that the Liberals were sincere in their support for home rule, or that their proposals were sufficiently far-reaching. The SNP refused to back Kerr and abstained from the election, indicating their disagreement with Kerr's assessment and the weakness of their organisation on the ground. Murray spoke for Kerr, perhaps still bitter about what he perceived as shabby treatment by the SLP when he was candidate for the Western Isles, but the nationalist polled badly.

David Murray's papers can be found in the National Library of Scotland, from which all quotations have been taken.

Mark Egan is a clerk in the House of Commons, and a regular contributor to the Journal.

Liberal Democrat History Group Publications

Following the success of the *Dictionary of Liberal Biography* (see review on pp. 31–32), the History Group will be publishing more books in association with Politico's – and readers of the *Journal of Liberal Democrat History* are invited to help.

The Dictionary of Liberal Quotations is scheduled for autumn 1999, part of a set of three political quotations books. Quotations from, or about, any famous (or obscure) Liberal, Social Democrat or Liberal Democrat are very welcome; please include full details of the source.

Great Liberal Speeches, intended for publication during 2000. This book will include the full texts of around thirty famous speeches by Liberal politicians, with commentaries.

Oral History of Twentieth Century Liberalism. A thematic study of the Liberal Party and liberalism, drawing upon interviews with Liberal activists and politicians, as well as autobiographical sources.

Dictionary of Liberal Biography, 2nd edition, provisionally scheduled for 2002 or 2003 – but we would like to hear ideas now for the inclusion of major figures omitted from the first edition. Please also tell us about any mistakes you spot in the current edition; errata will be included in the History Group's web site, and corrections made in the second edition.

Please write with ideas to Duncan Brack, Flat 9, 6 Hopton Road, London SW16 2EQ; ldhg@dbrack.dircon.co.uk.

In This Month ...

The 1950 general election took place on 23 February. The result of the election shattered hopes of a Liberal revival. 319 of the 475 Liberal candidates lost their deposit; only twenty-four candidates polled over 25% of the total vote and only nine of those were actually elected.

The records of various Liberal organisations shows how bitter the blow of the election debacle was to Liberals, especially in financial terms.

From the minutes of the General Council of Altrincham Liberal Association, 17 April 1950

Mr Bayley, the defeated Liberal candidate, told the meeting that the Liberals were only existing at the present time. He described the situation as very awkward. 'Until the country had a moral stature behind it, it would do no good'.

From the minutes of the executive committee of Harborough Liberal Association, 25 March 1950

Agreed to ask the Liberal Party's headquarters if the Association could be exempted from paying to them an annual £50 bond.

From the minutes of the executive committee of the Harwich Liberal Association, 17 March 1950

Mr Train, the defeated Liberal candidate, stated the amount he had put down for the recent election campaign and indicated that no more money would be available from him in future.

From the minutes of the executive committee of West Walthamstow Liberal Association, 2 March 1950

Mr Pim, the defeated Liberal candidate, was not willing to continue as candidate without greater financial backing because of the costs he had incurred during the last campaign.

Some Liberal organisations, despite the set-back, began to plan for the future.

From the minutes of the executive committee of the London Liberal Party, 16 March 1950

Every seat in London was fought, without the approval of either the President or Chairman of the London Liberal Party. G. B. Patterson and Norman Stewart ensured that candidates were found for every seat, with Stewart acting as agent for eight candidates in south-east London. Due to lack of finance Stewart was given his notice immediately after polling day. The Secretary of the Party (Gendall Hawkins) was worried that candidates had over-spent, leading to the possibility of writs being issued. Some sixty-one or sixty-two Liberal Associations were now in operation in London as a result of the fight. Mr Hawkins stated that there was a lot of 'clearance work' to be done, removing those Association officers who were willing to cling to office without producing results. A special meeting of four delegates per Association was being called to form a steering committee to plan for the next election.

From the minutes of a meeting of Liberals in Sittingbourne, 28 February 1950

Motion to form a Liberal Association, in the light of the election result, was passed unanimously. Miss Beth Graham suggested a plan of action – decided to form a committee in Sittingbourne and West Swale before trying to organise in the other parts of Faversham constituency. The sole purpose of the Association would be to fight elections.

Some (but too few) Liberal Associations considered their stance in the 1950 local elections.

From the minutes of the executive committee of Hampstead Liberal Association, 13 April 1950

Pre-election publicity had used all of the Association's funds. The Treasurer had loaned the Association £100 and paid £77 12s 3d to complete the purchase of the lease on 130, Finchley Road. Two other committee members had subbed the Association £150. Even so, only £57 was left in the bank to pay liabilities of £78, without accounting for future salaries and expenses. A plan was formulated to contest all local election seats in the

constituency. One aspect of the plan was a proposal to form a committee to study local affairs and to present proposals to the Borough Council.

From the minutes of the executive committee of South Leeds Liberal Association, 20 March 1950

Leeds Liberal Federation suggested that, in the forthcoming local elections, Liberals should fight wherever Communist candidates stood, as a protest at the agreement between the Conservative and Labour Parties for all sitting councillors to be returned unopposed this year.

Some sought guidance from the Liberal Party's Headquarters about its policy for the next election, which was expected within months.

From the minutes of the action committee of Southport Liberal Association, 28 February 1950

The Action Committee is not in a position to indicate to the Special General Meeting any policies for contesting the next general election until it is known what will be the policy of the Liberal Headquarters.

At the top, plans were afoot.

Letter from Viscount Samuel to Sir Gilbert Murray, 23 March 1950

There is a correspondence now proceeding between Clement Davies and Clement Attlee on the general question of electoral reform, arising out of Churchill's statement in the House of Commons Until we have a definite declaration from the two parties – if one can be obtained – it would be inexpedient to arrive at a decision as to our own future course Whatever its nature, it might cause open disagreement in the Liberal Party.

But they came to nothing.

Letter from P. P. Bloy to B. Ashmore, 18 November 1950

The Liberal Party today lacks leadership, especially since the election; the Parliamentary Party is disunited; and it lacks interest in the South African colour bar and recent immigration restrictions.

Letters to the Editor

Liberals in the balance

Tony Little

John Howe is right to remind us that Dangerfield does not represent history but rather great polemical writing ('Liberal history and the balance of power, *Journal of Liberal Democrat History* 21). He is also right to remind us that there is a dynamic in hung parliaments which predisposes certain outcomes, but not, I believe, right to argue that the third and fourth parties have no choice, and by implication no influence, on the outcome.

The cases involving the Irish Nationalists have proved consistently controversial, with an academic industry which would be sadly disappointed if all the peculiarities were ever resolved. This is because there was a range of possible outcomes and complex but ambiguous manoeuvring rather than an inevitable dénouement. To understand these dynamics it is necessary to go back before 1886 and follow the process through rather than look at 1886, 1892 and 1910 in isolation.

The rise of the Home Rule party in Ireland had largely been at the expense of the Irish Whigs/Liberals. After Parnell seized the leadership of the party, it perfected obstructionism, contributing to the frustration and low achievement of the 1880–85 Liberal government. Following Gladstone's resignation in 1885, the Conservative minority government depended on Irish support. Parnell had a secret meeting with Lord Carnarvon, the Tory Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, in which Carnarvon, it appears, exceeded his brief, showing more support for an Irish legisla-

ture than the Premier Lord Salisbury would have wished (shades of recent dealings by his descendant Lord Cranborne). This gave Parnell the apparent prospect of a deal with the Tories, and he urged the Irish living in England to vote Tory at the election of December 1885, in the hope of precipitating a hung parliament.

Technically he achieved this but the arithmetic (the number of Liberal MPs elected at the 1885 election approximately equalled the Conservatives plus the Home Rule Irish) was too finely balanced. The Irish could deny government to the Liberals but could not hope to sustain the Conservatives in office for any length of time against Liberal opposition. Nevertheless, at first, Gladstone hoped that the Tories would stay in office to resolve the Irish difficulties. But once Herbert Gladstone had flown the Hawarden Kite, revealing his father's conversion to home rule, it was clear that the Liberal bid for Irish support was higher than Salisbury could ever contemplate. Since it was also immediately clear that the Liberals were split on home rule, Salisbury could stand back and watch his enemies fight among themselves. Parnell had no choice but to support the Liberals, but only because Gladstone, much to the surprise and dismay of his own party, had adopted the Irish agenda.

In the period 1886–92, as John Howe argues, neither the Liberals nor Tories had a majority. But once again it was a period in which the

parties manoeuvred to secure an advantage. However, the only way the Liberals could have formed a government would have been to reconvert the Unionist Liberals and retain the support of the Irish. Even for such an expert sophist as Gladstone this was a Herculean task. It did not make a Tory-Unionist alliance the only possible outcome. Previous Liberal rebellions had always been resolved inside the party. Efforts were made to reunite the Liberals, especially during the 1887 Round Table talks. Some Liberal Unionists did drift back to the Gladstonian fold over the lifetime of the parliament and while personalities and events prevented a healing of the rupture, hope was not abandoned until the mid 1890s.

Parnell's career was destroyed by his divorce scandal but while he led the Nationalist party, he remained alert to the practical possibilities of gaining concessions from the Conservatives. Salisbury operated the traditional British policy of coercion against disturbances and providing timely relief for practical Irish grievances, hoping to 'kill home rule by kindness' but keeping alive the possibility of Irish support for Conservative policy. This remained the Unionist strategy between 1895 and 1906, for most of which they had the additional advantage of a split in the Home Rule party.

The bitter futility of trying to achieve home rule against the Lords' veto in 1892 influenced the younger generation of Liberals who formulated government policy between 1906 and 1910. They were determined to give domestic issues the priority over Irish concerns that Gladstone had denied. The People's Budget and the reform of the Lords opened up new possibilities. The Liberal losses sustained in the elections necessary to bring in Lords' reform created a hung parliament, while the removal of the Lords' veto made home rule a practical proposition. Home rule was a price paid reluctantly, rather than enthusiastically, by Asquith. The Irish went along with budget policy because

that was the bargain they struck to get home rule.

Unlike the Labour Party, the Irish could afford to hold out for a high price. They were unlikely to lose votes by playing their hand too hard. Despite their numerical superiority, the Liberals were the weaker partner unwillingly prepared to make concessions.

The position of the Liberals in 1923–24 was very different and might be more appropriately compared to that of the Peelites in the 1850s, when weak party allegiances were linked to hung parliaments. Hindsight tells us that the Whigs, Radicals and Peelites inevitably coalesced, but it did not look obvious to the participants who needed several attempts before arriving at this answer. Like the Liberals in 1923, the Peelites knew what they did not want – protection – but, unlike the Irish in 1886, had no very clear and obtainable positive policy.

Perhaps if Liberals had had a Yellow Book manifesto earlier the outcome would have been different. As it was, personal differences among the leadership remained unresolved while

their limited advance had been against the Tories who had anyway rejected Lloyd George in 1922. As John Howe indicates, the Labour government did not last because it did no deal. There was no clear choice for the Liberals as the balancing party, and they certainly did not discover the right way out of their dilemma. It is not obvious that they would have gained from sustaining Labour in power for longer, or from backing the Tories. However, that is not the same as saying that the Liberals had no power. They had the power to bring down the government which they, unwisely, exercised.

Unlike the participants at the time, we can now see that the Liberals were destroyed as a party of government in the inter-war years. Labour's decision to go it alone ultimately strengthened the Tory hand as much as its own. Surely it is reflection on this period which has led Mr Blair to hanker after a rebuilding of the forces which backed Asquith and Lloyd George in their great reforming government. For Liberal Democrats, the lesson is to be well-prepared in advance of a hung parliament.

the previous year). The party published on that occasion six or eight (I think the latter) pamphlets of new policy, all of it interesting, most of it good. But the new factor (compared with previous years) was that each one of them was the work of an academic of standing or of a committee headed by one. Alec Peterson, Bruce Patterson, Brian Keith-Lucas and the rest were all people highly respected in their fields.

How he attracted these people is not obvious. Part of it was pure personal charm; part of it was that he was at heart a maverick intellectual and they recognised the fact he was bored by the obvious and adored upsetting conventional thinking; and the third part was the fact that he was by education and family at home and at ease in the liberal establishment of the day, which meant that he had immediate access to the circles in which he would meet and could influence rising academics.

Jo found a Commons party of six and left it the same number; he never as far as I know gave a 'great' parliamentary performance; he would have been an unreliable cabinet minister and probably a bad premier. He was hell to work for. But he found an intellectually run-down party and (with the help of Mark Bonham Carter) lit an intellectual flame in it which continues to this day, and which perpetually surprises those who were only prepared to judge the party by more conventional standards. In my book that amounts to greatness.

Help Needed!

The Liberal Democrat History Group will be having an exhibition stand at the Liberal Democrat conference in Edinburgh (5–7 March), in order to increase membership, raise our profile and make new contacts. We would like to hear from any member who would be able to spare an hour or two looking after the stand; please contact the Editor (see page 2).

Was Grimond a 'great man'?

Lord Beaumont of Whitley

1. A bouquet for publishing the brilliant article on 'Liberal history and the balance of power' (John Howe, *Journal of Liberal Democrat History* 21).

2. A brickbat for allowing through Graham Watson's howler stating that Chesterton was an MP ('Six characters in search of an author', *Journal* 21). He would have fallen off the bench! Graham was presumably mixing him up with Belloc.

3. And most importantly, Bill Rodgers ('Of obituaries and great men', *Journal* 21) denies Jo Grimond a place in his pantheon of Liberal great men on the grounds that 'he in the end achieved very little'. He bases this explicitly on his failure to

achieve greater parliamentary representation while he was leader and implicitly on the observation, which no-one would challenge, that he was not a great success in the Commons chamber (the touchstone which most parliamentarians would use).

What Bill ignores was Jo's influence on the intellectual standing of the party. Under Sinclair and Davies the sparkle of ideas which Keynes and others had brought to the party had slipped away, and William Beveridge was not closely enough identified with the Liberals to bring it back.

But Jo did! The first assembly I attended was in 1962 at Llandudno (although I had been elected a Party Treasurer in my absence at Edinburgh

Reviews

'There are Things Stronger Than Parliamentary Majorities' (Andrew Bonar Law, 1912)

Alan O'Day:
Irish Home Rule 1867–1921
(Manchester University Press, 1998)
Reviewed by Tony Little

Devolution has been the policy of the Liberal and Liberal Democrat parties for more than a century, and is so ingrained in the party that its origins and strange history are often forgotten. An argument can be made that in the form of home rule for Ireland it was a policy that almost destroyed the Liberal Party and that it was an accident of parliamentary circumstances rather than a natural outcome of Liberal philosophy.

Ireland was the last nation formally to join the United Kingdom, and union with Britain never appears to have sat comfortably with the majority of the population. Union was a reaction to the rebellion of 1798 and, at intervals thereafter idealistic but inept revolutionaries unsuccessfully attempted to cut the chains. While sometimes led by high-minded and even upper-class Protestants, these uprisings drew whatever strength they had from the dissatisfaction, poverty and desperation of the Catholic peasants.

Strangely it was the failure of the Fenian outrages in 1867 which acted as the catalyst for change. A campaign to secure clemency for Fenians suffering long prison terms overlapped with a reaction among respectable Catholics towards a non-violent constructive constitutional form of nationalism. Meeting them part-way, in 1868, a new Liberal government under Gladstone, with a self-proclaimed

mission 'to pacify Ireland', adopted a policy initially of disestablishment of the Anglican Church of Ireland, and later of land reform.

From the conjunction of the forces in Ireland emerged the Home Rule party under Isaac Butt. While it made progress in winning seats in Ireland, its impact at Westminster was limited until Joseph Biggar and Charles Stewart Parnell developed obstructionism. They exploited the then easy-going rules of the Commons to slow down the pace of English business and highlight the needs of Ireland. Parnell replaced Butt as the leader of the party and in 1885 the party won (just) the balance of power in the Commons. The Home Rule party won the vast majority of seats in Ireland, including a majority in Ulster, and one in Liverpool.

In the ensuing crisis, Gladstone both adopted home rule as Liberal policy and defined its structure. Until Gladstone sat down with his cabi-

net to draft the first Home Rule Bill, it had been an aspiration for the Irish but untested in England, and had no need for a concrete form. The process of definition crystallised all the difficulties, which have ever since bedevilled the Irish peace process and the introduction of devolution anywhere in Britain. What powers should be devolved? What reserved for the imperial parliament? Should there be representation at Westminster? Should it be more closely related to the size of the electorate? Should the representatives of the devolved countries have the right to speak and vote on the affairs of the other countries at Westminster? How should the rights of minorities within the community be protected?

While not accepting Gladstone's proposals as fixing 'the boundary to the march of a nation', Parnell supported the bill. For the majority of Liberals such devolution chimed in with trusting the people. However, about one third of Liberal MPs on the radical left and Whig right of the party not only harboured prejudices about obstructive and rebellious Irish, but saw the bill as heralding the break-up of an Empire then nearing its peak. At times it is hard to see the distinction drawn, especially by Radical Unionists, between schemes of local government reform which they would have accepted and the proposals Gladstone made, but it should not be forgotten that in 1886, there was no county council system as we know it today. Irish local government was provided by a series of grand juries dominated by an elite of Protestant landowners.

The break with the Liberal Unionists was fatal to the bill. Continued advocacy of home rule gave Gladstone and the remainder of the party a sense of purpose over the following years, but guaranteed that there would be no reunion. This put paid to the prospect of Liberals governing for the best part of twenty years.

Alan O'Day argues that there were two kinds of home ruler – the moral and the material. For the moral home rulers, the appeal was

primarily to achieve a form of nationhood for Ireland to which she was entitled. For many, this emotional and spiritual ambition was secondary to the reforms required to give the Irish people the day-to-day government which reflected their own needs and agenda. The party leadership worked on both ambitions and it is this which differentiates the party from any Irish predecessors. Even short of achieving a parliament for Ireland, the party could always put proposals forward and sometimes achieve successes which met the needs of the electorate for land reform, better education, economic aid and local government.

This service function sustained the Home Rule party through the crisis of the fall of Parnell, the frustration of the 1892 Gladstone government and the growing disengagement of the Liberals from home rule that followed. Nationalists were able to exploit the alliance of the Conservatives and Liberal Unionists to secure and improve the lot of the Irish tenants. Despite splits within its ranks and the growth of Sinn Fein, with its more militant philosophy of boycotting Westminster, the Home Rule party was ready and able to exploit the hung parliament which followed the elections of 1910 and the removal of the Lords' veto.

O'Day provides another useful analytical tool by enumerating the eight groups each of whom was vital to the legitimacy of self-government. These included, naturally, the Catholic population of Ireland, and the adoption of the plan by one of the major British parties, support of the press and the consent of the British public. The plan needed to pass both the Houses of Parliament. 'Southern Irish Unionist opposition had to be moderated; and, finally, Ulster Unionist interests needed to be satisfied.' Catholic support was sustained, but the first two attempts in 1886 and 1892 failed the parliamentary and English public support hurdles.

Strangely, the position of the Ulster Protestants was not recognised by Gladstone in 1886, though Lord Randolph Churchill saw the poten-

tial for exploiting their fears, and Gladstone was prepared to give some protection to the religious minority overall. By 1892, the Ulster Unionists were better prepared, and in 1912 the support given to their intransigence by the Conservatives brought the greatest crisis for parliamentary government since the civil war. The even greater European crisis of 1914 put the Irish debate on hold, though with home rule on the statute book but not implemented.

The Great War changed many things, not least the landscape of Irish politics. The 1916 rebellion resurrected the military strategy. The introduction of conscription for Ireland in 1918 delivered the election into the hands of Sinn Fein. Those of its members not in prison met in Dublin rather than Westminster. But, perversely, their boycott allowed the British parties at Westminster to re-

solve the Ulster problem and grant dominion status to the rest of Ireland in 1922. It was a messy solution with few friends for which we are still paying a price, but for most practical purposes Ireland had ceased to be of contention in Britain.

O'Day's book provides a full coverage of each stage in the development of home rule. Written in the form of a textbook, it also comes with a clear chronology, potted biographies of each of the main characters and an assortment of relevant brief documents for students to use as evidence. However, the general reader should not be dissuaded by this structure. It is a clear and enjoyable read, written from the perspective of the Irish but not in any partisan way. This difference in viewpoint provides a valuable counterpoint to the traditional English Liberal historiography.

Three Acres and a Cow

David Stemp:

Three Acres and a Cow: The life and works of Eli Hamshire

Reviewed by John James

When I saw this title on the bookshelf I guessed it would contain at least some kind of reference to land reform and poverty; I reached for my wallet; and I've not been disappointed. The book, written by the subject's great-great-grandson, is an ideal purchase for anyone interested in mid-to late nineteenth century history.

The book begins with some of the Hamshire family background and genealogy and is itself full of interesting anecdotes such as: 'had to pay sixpence for the redemption of English captives taken by the Turkish pirates'. It's Eli and his works, however, that really interested me. Eli Hamshire was born on Christmas Day 1834, at Ewhurst in Surrey, into a family of yeoman farmers down on their luck. He was largely self-

educated and became, amongst other things, a carrier. He was a thrifty chap: he was renting a field at the age of fourteen, and if he came upon a toll bridge he would unhitch the horse, lead it over and then pull the cart across himself to save a penny. At the age of twenty-nine he married Rebecca, who brought a modest fortune with her; it was not squandered. He also brewed his own beer, after falling out with the local

publican, eventually teaching his daughter to brew it before she left for school in the morning.

Hamshire was acutely aware of the disparity of wealth and the problems it caused, his greatest criticism being reserved for the clergy, who, he thought, cared for the shepherd (themselves) more than the flock. There is no mention of any books that may have guided his thinking except for the Bible. Perhaps the Bible was all he needed.

In his late forties he wrote *The Source of England's Greatness and the Source of England's Poverty* under the pen name of 'a Carrier's Boy'. The book was intended as an autobiography but is more a collection of his thoughts, events in his life, anecdotes, articles and correspondence. He sent copies to leading figures and eventually met his hero, Gladstone. He was a Radical and a Liberal and also claimed title to the idea and phrase, 'three acres and a cow', often attributed to Jesse Collings MP. He complained greatly of underused and vacant farmland and he detested the system of the workhouse and poor relief. He even stated that if the government held land in trust, the rental income would permit reduced taxation. He was also quite aware that taxing land would make sure it was put to use. He offered opinions on all sorts of matters: you can read his thoughts on poverty, inhumanity, hunting, the clergy, magistrates, pollution and even the price of fish!

His next book, *The Three Great Locusts*, is almost a continuation of the first. The locusts' are the Tories, the Church and lawyers. There are more stories of empty stomachs and shoeless feet in a community that misused land. His proposal to celebrate the jubilee of Queen Victoria must be mentioned. He starts by quoting Leviticus XXV, demands restoration of half the common lands for the poor and suggests most humbly that the Queen give a million to provide the cottages the poor would need. Also included are his views on war, an international army and court of law. You can read about the meetings he attended and can learn the legend of 'Dog Smith'.

If Hamshire lived today I think he would have been active in local, if not national, politics. He lived in a time of great social, economic and industrial change, a period of reform, in which he represented the common man's growing awareness of his rights as a citizen who could help mould his own and others lives. He was a son of the soil and thus more aware than most are today of man's need of

access to land and the connection between land use and poverty. It is not all politics and poverty, though – read his thoughts on manure, the fashion of women pinching their waists and his warnings against smoking.

The book is well produced and is as entertaining as it is interesting. It can be obtained from David Stemp, 27, Netley Close, Surrey, SM3 8DN.

Plugging the Gaps

Duncan Brack et al (eds):

Dictionary of Liberal Biography
(Politico's Publishing, 1998)

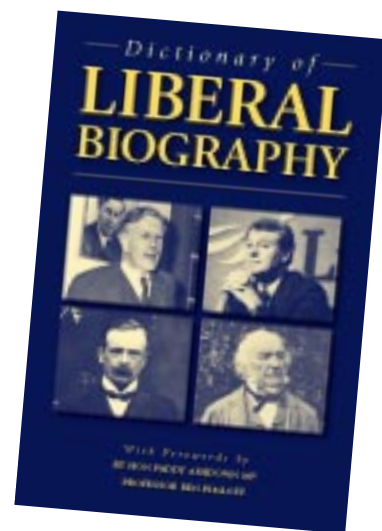
Reviewed by Chris Cook

All those interested in the history of the Liberal Party, whether they be historians or party activists, have suffered worse than their counterparts interested in the history of the Conservative or Labour Parties.

The origins and early rise of the Labour Party and its subsequent varying fortunes in the twentieth century have attracted enormous interest. Of the writing of books on Labour history, there seems no end. Similarly, the once-neglected Conservative Party has recently seen a spate of major historical studies, not only the completion of the multi-volume *Longman History of the Conservative Party* but also important individual one-volume studies by Alan Clark and John Ramsden. By comparison, the Liberals have been neglected. While the emergence of Victorian Liberalism and the triumphs of Gladstone, as well as the later achievements of Asquith and Lloyd George, are well covered, much of later twentieth-century Liberal history remains neglected. There are few studies of the 1930s, the dark days of the 1950s, or even such aspects as the post-war Liberal local government revival. Even worse has been the dearth of reference books devoted to Liberal history. Thus there

has been no single-volume guide to the key facts and figures of Liberal Party history or of the more general area of thought and action known as Liberalism.

The new *Dictionary of Liberal Biography* at least sets out to plug one very important gap. It brings together over 200 biographies of a variety of figures active in Liberal politics – not just in parliament, but in the higher echelons of party organi-



sation, as well as in the important area of local government, the scene of so much Liberal activism in the post-1960 era. Inevitably, there are always problems in drawing up such a volume. Who should be included? Who excluded? And what criteria for inclusion, especially amongst the living? These difficulties show up in one or two oddities: given the paucity of Liberal MPs since 1945, one might expect every Liberal in this period to be included, but Clement Freud is a notable absentee. He does, however, get a mention in one of the many valuable appendices, where his byelection victory at the Isle of Ely in July 1973 is recorded. This is where the wheels can begin to fall off carts of this kind: of the clutch of byelection victors in the period between the 1970 and first 1974 elections – namely Cyril Smith, Graham Tope, David Austick, Alan Beith and Freud himself – three are in and two not (Freud and Austick).

But there is much here to celebrate and enjoy. Julian Glover's entry on Jeremy Thorpe is a model not only of good sense and tact, but also achieves the difficult feat of writing exactly the kind of 'day before yesterday' history which is so hard to do well. So do many others. As Professor Ben Pimlott points out in his foreword, this volume reflects the invaluable nature of biography as a vital contribution to history and political thought. The bringing together of so many of the strands of activism and thought that have made up British liberalism since the eight-

A Liberal Democrat History Group Fringe Meeting

Liberalism and Nationalism: Allies or Enemies?

Liberals and Nationalists have sometimes shared common aims. But how close are they? Are their basic philosophies compatible with each other? How has cooperation worked in practice? Why did nineteenth-century Liberals support nationalist movements while their twentieth-century counterparts have tended to oppose them?

In this year of elections to the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly, discuss the issues with **Donald Gorrie MP** and **Gordon Lishman**. Chair: **Ray Michie MP**.

8.00pm, Friday 5 March
Chandos Room, George Inter-Continental Hotel
George Street, Edinburgh

eenth century in a single volume can only stimulate further investigation.

Not the least of the achievements of the editor and his team of coadjutors was to do something that would have taxed the mind of almost any compiler of political dictionaries or encyclopaedias, namely to bring the multi-faceted and almost inchoate world of nineteenth- and twentieth-century liberalism into a viable and coherent volume. A volume in which the great Liberal thinkers of the past, Cobden, Bright, Hobhouse and the rest, share the platform – so to speak – with figures such as Trevor Jones ('Jones the Vote'), who re-established Liberal


credibility as an electable force in local politics, and Tony Greaves, who helped to mastermind Liberal 'community politics', is of immense value and richness without obvious incongruity. The group from the *Journal of Liberal Democrat History* who were responsible for the original idea and for seeing a book with more than 120 contributors to a successful completion are to be congratulated, not least for prompting the question ever-present in this area, of whether a Liberal 'tradition' really is a viable organising category over more than two centuries. They make a very good case that it is.

As a book it is that increasingly rare thing, a pleasure to use and one which will repay much browsing, not least in the excellent appendices which could so easily have been stinted. How ironic and typical of the world of politics it is that the ever-changing political scene has thrown up so soon after the book's publication the announcement of Ashdown's departure as Liberal Democrat leader. Still, all the more need now for a well-deserved second edition.

Dr C. P. Cook is author of A Short History of the Liberal Party 1900–97 (Macmillan, 1998).

The Dictionary of Liberal Biography

is available for £20.00 (plus £2.50 postage and packing for postal or telephone orders) from:



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