

Journal of

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# Liberal Democrat

# HISTORY



## Clement Davies as Leader

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Emlyn Hooson

**Clement Davies**

*An Underestimated Welshman and Politician*

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Geoffrey Sell

**'A Sad Business' — The Resignation of Clement Davies**

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Harriet Smith

**The 1988 Leadership Campaign**

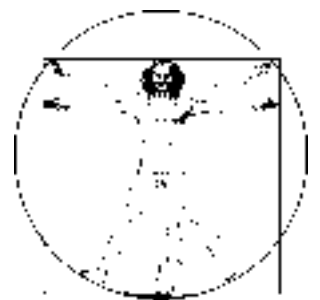
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Duncan Brack and Robert Ingham

**The Dictionary of Liberal Quotations**

*New History Group publication*

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Liberal Democrat History Group

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# Clement Davies

## An Underestimated Welshman and Politician

Clement Davies led the Liberal Party from 1945 to 1956. *Emlyn Hooson* reviews his life and career.

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As I am not an historian, I cannot claim to have investigated the life of the subject-matter of my talk this evening with that thoroughness which is the hallmark of the true historian's skill. However, speaking as a politician, lawyer and businessman from a rural Welsh background who was to follow Clement Davies as the Member of Parliament for Montgomeryshire, and, as someone who happened to know him reasonably well from my early twenties until the time of his death in 1962, I feel able to contribute to the process of reassessing the life and career of this underestimated Welshman. I have also had the advantage of knowing many of his old friends, both supporters and critics. Indeed, he and my late father-in-law, Sir George Hamer, despite some disagreements, were close friends. I was also privy to some of the praises and criticisms of him by some of his contemporaries and some of his closest political associates.

### The need for a reappraisal

For me to embark upon a new venture of this kind required some provocation. The first occurred in a lecture delivered to this very Society by our distinguished member, Professor Kenneth O. Morgan. During a lecture on a century of Montgomeryshire Liberalism, he described Clement Davies as 'an erratic Member of Parliament'. He added: 'Yet, it is a paradox that someone who was for so long a political maverick became so powerfully identified with the harmonies and historic continuities of Montgomeryshire Liberalism.' I believed then, and do so even more powerfully now, that this

view certainly needs modification. In my view, he had *always* been powerfully identified with those 'harmonies and historic continuities'. Also, whilst it is hard to think of any worthwhile MP who has not, occasionally, appeared to be erratic, I hope to be able to provide some insight into why Clement Davies appeared to be so at times.

The second catalyst came from Lady Byers, the widow of the late Lord Byers, who as Frank Byers had been the Liberal Chief Whip from 1945 to 1950. She wrote to me to say that she was totally incensed by a sentence in the *Daily Telegraph* obituary to the late Lord Bonham Carter (Mark Bonham Carter). It read: 'Grimond took over the leadership from the *ineffectual* Clement Davies'.<sup>2</sup> She was rightly incensed, for, without Clement Davies, I am convinced that the Liberal Party would not have survived the latter part of this century.<sup>3</sup>

In the course of my lecture, I hope to show that Clement Davies was anything but ineffectual and to point to certain signposts, which I believe will lead to his being seen in a different perspective as his life and work are further reviewed in the future. Much light has already been shed on his career by, in particular, the research work of Mr J. Graham Jones of the National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth,<sup>4</sup> where the Clement Davies Papers are kept,<sup>5</sup> and of Mr D. M. Roberts of the University of Wales, Bangor.<sup>6</sup> However, a full and considered biography of this very remarkable man is long overdue. There is quite a story to tell. I am not the man to tell it, but I hope to provide the *apéritif*.

### His career in outline

Let me begin by briefly summarising his career, aspects of which I shall consider in greater detail later. He was born on 19 February 1884



stant and constructive critic of the war effort. He is particularly famed for his part in the replacement as Prime Minister of Chamberlain by Winston Churchill. From 1942 onwards, he was a Liberal without suffix or prefix after he officially rejoined the Liberal Party. I thought I would never quote with approval any saying of the late Sir Henry Morris-Jones, the Liberal National Conservative. However, when Clem had rejoined the Liberal Party, he said ‘Clem decided to rejoin his old love, which of course he had in principle never deserted.’<sup>15</sup> I believe that to be true and that during his so-called maverick period, he was much less of a political maverick in reality than at first appears. At heart, Clement Davies was always a radical Welsh Liberal and he admired Lloyd George enormously as the most effective of radical politicians. In 1945 he was elected leader of the Liberal Party and remained so until 1956, when Jo Grimond succeeded him.

On the Welsh front, he is particularly remembered for a devastating report, which he produced just before the war, on the incidence of tuberculosis in Wales and its causes.<sup>16</sup> He was also very active in the international sphere<sup>17</sup> — in particular, in the movement for world government — for which work he was nominated and warmly recommended for the Nobel Peace Prize in 1955.<sup>18</sup>

## The Bar

Historians should, I think, look more closely at his work at the Bar. Its standard was such that he had the reputation of having had the highest paid junior brief ever known for his day. It came when, in the 1920s, without a leader,<sup>19</sup> he was instructed to appear for Lever Brothers<sup>20</sup> for 3,000 guineas against Brunner/Mond, now known as ICI. The case was eventually settled for £1,000,000. The scale of this settlement in its day was so great that ICI had to pay the damages over four years at the annual rate of £250,000!

Immediately after the First World War, Clement Davies was succes-

and died on 23 March 1962 at the age of seventy-eight. He came from the Llanfyllin area of Montgomeryshire, where his father, Alderman Moses Davies, was a small farmer, agricultural seedsman, valuer, and local auctioneer. Clement was one of the first pupils at the then new local County School.<sup>7</sup> From there, he won an open exhibition to Trinity Hall, Cambridge where he shone as a law student, taking firsts in everything<sup>8</sup> and he became the top student of his year. He was pressed to take a fellowship — an invitation he declined after he had definitely chosen a practising career at the Bar, rather than an academic one. Through other scholarships and exhibitions he joined Lincoln’s Inn. In his Bar Finals in 1910, he took a first in every subject and was awarded the Certificate of Honour for being the highest achiever of his year.

In the meantime, from 1908–09 he had been a lecturer in law at Aberystwyth. During this time, he wrote his first books.<sup>9</sup> The main subjects of his writing were the law relating to land and farm valuations and land duties. These were subjects on which his father had probably advised him that there was a market!

His pupil-master at the Bar was a man called Greer, who afterwards

became Lord Justice Greer before being elevated as Lord Fairfield, one of the Law Lords. Clem, as we all knew him, briefly joined the North Wales and Chester Circuit before transferring to the Northern Circuit. However, the area in which he enjoyed a meteoric rise was in his commercial law and admiralty law work in London. This was interrupted only when he was drafted into the Civil Service for strategic work on shipping during the war.

Clement Davies became a KC in 1926, but, in 1930, he left the Bar and joined the Board of Lever Brothers<sup>10</sup> as an Executive Director.<sup>11</sup> He remained in that capacity until his resignation in 1941 when he was appointed as a legal advisor to Unilever in a non-executive capacity.

In the meantime, in 1929, he had been elected as the Liberal MP for Montgomeryshire. During the 1929–31 period, he was a Lloyd George supporter. But from 1931 to 1940, he was a National Liberal, supporting the successive National Governments of Ramsay Macdonald,<sup>12</sup> Stanley Baldwin<sup>13</sup> and Neville Chamberlain.<sup>14</sup> In 1940 he changed his political course. From then until 1942, he sat in the House of Commons as an independent Liberal. During this period, he was a con-

sively appointed Secretary to the President of the Probate, Divorce and Admiralty Division of the High Court,<sup>21</sup> Secretary to the Master of the Rolls and, in 1922, as Junior Treasury Counsel. The two secretarial jobs were sinecures. They provided him with additional income and were clear pointers of the estimate of the legal establishment of him. This was, to all appearances, a man on the fast route to the Bench. He was not to pursue that course. In 1926 he was persuaded by the Lord Chancellor to apply for Silk and became a King's Counsel in that year. His earlier acceptance of the post of Treasury Counsel, which he had resigned early in 1925, indicated that the first option had been clearly open to him. However, there may have been an intervening cause, which had blocked this path to the Bench, to which I shall turn later.

Clement Davies had a substantial amount of work as a Silk. In the law reports of 1926 to 1930, his name frequently appears in large commercial and shipping cases. His decision in 1930 to accept a position on the board of Lever Brothers, rather than continue at the Bar is, on the face of it, a mystery. His starting salary at Lever Brothers was £10,000 a year<sup>22</sup> — double the salary then of the Prime Minister, a High Court Judge or the Lord Chancellor. But, the reasoning and motivation behind the move may be related to the cause of a nervous breakdown he endured in 1924 — a matter which does not seem to have been disclosed hitherto.

## Politics

He had been involved in political activity as a youngster in Montgomeryshire. In the 1909–10 period he was certainly addressing meetings in Oswestry and in his home area in support of the Lloyd George budget.<sup>23</sup> In 1910 he rejected the blandishments of Lloyd George that he should stand as a 'true Liberal' for Montgomery Boroughs after the incumbent, D.J. Rees, had quailed over the budget. Clement Davies was

solely tempted, but he saw that he had a living to earn at the Bar<sup>24</sup> and his father's advice settled matters: 'I don't know much about the Bar, but I think if I were employing Counsel, I should like him to give me all his attention and not part of his attention.'<sup>25</sup>

By 1927, he had agreed with the Montgomeryshire Liberal Association that, if they could not find another candidate, he would stand. Despite opposition from his predecessor, David Davies, subsequently Lord Davies of Llandinam,<sup>26</sup> he was adopted as its candidate in 1929. In the election of that year, he parried a very spirited attack from the Conservative candidate, a Mr Naylor. After that, he was never to face an opponent for the seat until the 1945 election, when Mr Philip Owen opposed him for the Tories.

The 1929 election was fought under the leadership of Lloyd George with, as far as the Liberals were concerned, the wholehearted support of Clement Davies. The campaign was founded on the famous Yellow Book,<sup>27</sup> the Green Book,<sup>28</sup> and the Brown Book, which rather upset his predecessor David Davies. These had largely been put together by Lord Keynes<sup>29</sup> with a wealth of other distinguished academics and business people contributing. They formed a truly radical policy. Funded by his dubious election fund, Lloyd George mounted a vigorous campaign but achieved only modest success. It is probably one of the great tragedies of this country that Lloyd George's ideas were not effected here, but there is no doubt that Roosevelt's 'New Deal' in the USA in the thirties was largely founded on them.

After a vigorous start to his Parliamentary career, by 1930, Clement Davies was disillusioned with Parliament. He said to a reporter from the *Montgomeryshire Express* in autumn 1930: 'Losing my briefs, wasting my time [in the House of Commons], it really is appalling. Sometimes I wished I had stuck to my proper job, but ambition is a terrible thing'.<sup>30</sup> This comment reflected

mounting frustration at Lloyd George's leadership and the *volte face* over the Coal Mines Bill. Clement Davies had cancelled many very important constituency engagements in January and February 1930 to draft amendments to the Bill. The Liberals could have brought down the government. In the event, Lloyd George backed the government. It is instructive to compare Clem's performance and his activities in Parliament before the Coal Mines Bill fiasco with the following ten years. From 1931 to 1939, speeches from Clement Davies were a rarity. Those that he did make were almost entirely devoted to the socioeconomic and administrative difficulties of rural Wales; the problems of his constituents were often used as examples. I would go as far as to say that, in this period, he was almost the archetypal semi-detached politician. He was not trying to further a political career in any way. My suspicion is that he largely devoted his active mind to other matters, not least his absorbing duties as an executive director of Lever Brothers.

After the 1931 election, Lloyd George's followers had virtually been reduced to a rump, largely comprising members of his own family and one or two close friends. Clement Davies espoused Simon's National Liberals. His adherence to the Simonites was due to his friendship with Sir John Simon. They both had Welsh associations: Simon was the son of a nonconformist minister in Pembrokeshire. They had also been closely associated at the Bar; Simon often led Clement Davies. At a time of uncertainty in Clem's mind, incisive advice from Simon coupled with, I suspect, his wife's preference for that course were decisive.

Simon was a very careful politician, always interested in preserving opportunities for himself. Lloyd George devastated him once by stating in the House of Commons: 'The Right Honourable Gentleman has sat on the fence for so long that the iron has entered his soul'. Nevertheless, I have no doubt that Simon was to greatly influence Clem

on Munich and the prosecution of the war.

In 1939 there was a sudden and dramatic change in the political activity and posture of Clement Davies. He returned to the United Kingdom having conducted a four-month inquiry, as Chairman of a commission consisting of businessmen and a considerable number of MPs, into the affairs of East Africa. Upon his return, there was a very different political atmosphere in this country. There was widespread pessimism about the intentions of Hitler and Mussolini. It was a chance meeting, under the auspices of Levers, that led to Clem meeting an important member of the Nazi Party masquerading as a trade official. This meeting caused him, virtually overnight, to change his view and to regard war as inevitable. Herr Wohltat, one of Goering's economic advisors, was later reputed to have occupied a very high position in the Nazi hierarchy. Evidently he had been sent over to the United Kingdom to probe businesspeople to see whether there was a possibility of avoiding war with Britain if Germany invaded the Soviet Union.

Wohltat met some very distinguished people over here. There is no doubt that his visit effected a transfiguration in Clem's appreciation of where the policy of the Chamberlain government had led.<sup>31</sup> He was galvanized into action and politics became central, as opposed to being marginal, in his life. Jano (his wife) loyally supported him although, I believe, she later came to regret it. Gone now was his rather thoughtless support for the Munich agreement. Soon afterwards, Clement Davies was elected Chairman of an all-party group of MPs<sup>32</sup> which was more concerned about the imminent threat of war. It began as a small nucleus with Leo Amery as Vice-Chairman and Robert Boothby as its Secretary. The group grew in size and was particularly discomfited by Neville Chamberlain's apparently ineffectual leadership in the early days of the war. In his address at Clement Davies's memorial

service, and in his autobiography, Lord Boothby tells of Clem's organisation of the campaign to remove Chamberlain and replace him with Churchill. Boothby wrote: 'He was one of the architects, some may judge the principal architect, of the government which first saved us from destruction and then led us to victory'. It was a small group which orchestrated the anti-Chamberlain vote in the no-confidence debate and foiled subsequent Tory party lobbying for Chamberlain to become deputy prime minister. Clement Davies, Robert Boothby, Leo Amery, Arthur Greenwood and others were all determined that Attlee should be deputy prime minister to make it a truly national government.

Boothby, Amery and other Conservatives in the group were invited to be ministers in Churchill's new wartime coalition, as were prominent Labour members and the Liberal leader, Archie Sinclair, and his chief whip. We know that Boothby has underlined the importance of Clem's friendships with Attlee, Greenwood and Lloyd George in particular. We also know that Churchill himself had a soft spot for Clem, yet, on the face of it, nothing was offered to him. When I asked Stanley Clement-Davies about this, he said that Churchill had offered a viscountcy to his father. It was explained to him, apparently, that Churchill had to accommodate all parties within the government and, of course, Clement Davies was not, then, a member of any party.

The family was consulted about this offer of a viscountcy.<sup>33</sup> They decided to support Clem's refusal, although, I suspect, his wife, Jano, had been tempted. Stanley has also told me that in the diary of his late sister, Mary, there is an entry of the date and of the fact of the offer. The offer of a viscountcy explains, in part at least, a reference in one of the letters stored in the National Library of Wales. In 1947, when Clement Davies was made a Privy Councillor, Lord Beaverbrook, that great confidant of Churchill's, wrote to him a letter dated 15 January. It con-

tained these words: 'You had other honours offered you, as I well know. The Privy Councillor is the right honour for your work and high character.'<sup>34</sup>

I can only speculate as to what other honours were offered. Given his intimacy with Churchill, Beaverbrook would certainly have known of the offer of the viscountcy; that must be one of the honours to which he referred. However, it should be noted that this was well before the offer of a place in Churchill's Cabinet, which was made in 1951.

## Family background

In assessing his career, it is very important to have regard to his family background. His father's family came from the Llanfyllin area. They had been great Whig supporters, certainly from the time of the 1832 Reform Act. Some of the family had lost the tenancy of their farms as a result of their Liberal votes and Clem never forgot it. His mother's family came from the Banw Valley and were traditional Tories. His maternal grandfather, a cattle dealer, apparently had had a thriving cattle trade with Ireland. Clem's father and mother lived on a relatively small farm where all the children helped with the farm work. The father, as I have mentioned earlier also ran a successful small-town auctioneering and land valuation business.<sup>35</sup> The parents were, in divergent but complementary ways, very considerable personalities and the family was a close-knit unit.

The whole family was academically talented.<sup>36</sup> Also, in the traditional Welsh way, they each helped each other financially with their respective careers. In a letter he wrote to his parents, soon after he was called to the Bar, Clem said that he would have to know all the solicitors he can, given the 'tremendous amount of money I have cost you all.' He added: 'Dear old Dav<sup>37</sup> is one in ten million and is more of an angel than an ordinary brother.' Out of his 'small income he has paid

£200 for me. In fact I have bled him of all he has, and still he is as cheerful and pleasant over it as if it had been only two shillings.<sup>38</sup>

In 1913 Clem married Jano Elizabeth Davies, who had a distinguished teaching career before marriage. At the age of twenty-nine, she was one of the youngest headmistresses of Latymer School, a well-known coeducational school in London. She was the adopted daughter of Mr Morgan Davies, a consultant surgeon who practised in London, but originated from Cardiganshire. She was also Welsh speaking. Jano had graduated from University College of Wales, Aberystwyth, in classics and modern languages. I imagine that this is where she met Clem during his period as a lecturer from 1908–09. They had four children, of whom the only survivor is Mr Stanley Clement-Davies. I am greatly indebted to him for information which he has given to me and for his permission to disclose, into the public domain, some matters which may explain some of the apparently strange decisions taken during Clem's life.

Few families have suffered as many tragic misfortunes as those that befell Clement Davies and his family. Two of the sons and the only daughter died in tragic and unforeseen circumstances, each at the age of twenty-four.<sup>39</sup> I remember Mr Stanley Clement-Davies telling me, many years ago, of the sigh of relief he breathed when he achieved the age of twenty-five. The family bore these tragedies with great fortitude, as far as the outside world was concerned, but the internal anguish must have been great. It will not surprise any of you I think, to learn that Jano herself had two serious nervous breakdowns — one before she was married<sup>40</sup> and another in 1949. In all Clem's political activities she was, to all appearances, a fervent and indeed adoring supporter of her husband.<sup>41</sup> On the very first occasion on which I spoke publicly with Clem at a packed meeting in Llanidloes, I was amazed to see that Jano was not only beaming throughout, but also, that

she was the one leading the applause! However, I gather from my conversations with Stanley that Jano did not really enjoy politics or the company of politicians. As a matter of taste, she much preferred the legal fraternity.

Jano was an impressive person of impeccable manners with a good deal of poise and style. Her instinct, I suspect, had always been to persuade Clem to adhere to an entirely legal career. These factors should all be remembered in seeking to decipher the change of direction in Clem's career between 1920 and his election to Parliament in 1929. I will come back to that and another important facet later.

## Clement Davies as a leader

Contrary to commonly expressed belief, Clement Davies was not an ineffectual leader.<sup>42</sup> To regard him as ineffectual fails to take account of his undoubted leadership qualities as evidenced by his work in three different capacities: first, in the tuberculosis inquiry; second, as chairman of an all-party group of MPs which brought Churchill's wartime coalition into being; and third, as leader of the Liberal Party.

### *The Tuberculosis Inquiry*

During his Chairmanship of the Government Commission in 1937–39 into the incidence of tuberculosis in Wales and its causes,<sup>43</sup> Clement Davies showed considerable leadership qualities, both in his thorough gathering of evidence, and in the incisiveness of the report's recommendations. Support for this assertion can be gleaned from, in particular, the contribution of Mr George Griffiths MP to the debate on the report. He thanked Clement Davies for being 'so definite', and added: 'I was very pleased to see, as he went

from town to town, that he took no whitewash with him. He put blunt questions to all who came in front of him.'<sup>44</sup> Upon publication, the report, with its condemnation of the dreadful housing conditions in urban and rural areas and its biting criticism of private landlords and local authorities, including some in his own constituency, had an immense and sensational impact. Throughout his time in Parliament, as the Rt Hon. James Griffiths pointed out, Clement Davies had drawn attention to these matters. He took full opportunity, when given the chance to do so, to shake people out of their lethargy and acceptance of such conditions as then existed in parts of Wales.

Apparently, this report was the best seller to emerge from the Public Print Office until the Beveridge Report. This reflected not only its importance for Wales but also its significance for the whole of the United Kingdom. It undoubtedly influenced the whole thinking of political parties on social, housing and economic matters in the pre-Beveridge years. Its effect was reflected in the post-war policies of the Labour Government and indeed in Macmillan's approach to these matters.





#### *Chairmanship of the All-Party Group<sup>45</sup>*

The All-Party Group of which Clement Davies was chairman mobilised to achieve a much tougher prosecution of the war effort than was apparent under Chamberlain. It is clear that Clement Davies showed great leadership skills. He was wholly determined to get rid of Chamberlain and was indefatigable in organising the matter. In the course of doing so, Clem succeeded in persuading Lloyd George, who had sulked over something, to return to the Chamber to make what Sir Winston Churchill subsequently described as his last decisive intervention in the House of Commons — a devastating attack on Chamberlain, ending with a peroration to the effect that all had to make sacrifices in war but that the greatest sacrifice Chamberlain could make was to surrender his seals of office.

In the Clement Davies Papers, there are two handwritten letters to Clem from that well-known self-seeker, Sir William Jowitt.<sup>46</sup> At about this time, naturally seeking help and guidance on his own possible preferment, it is interesting that one letter<sup>47</sup> begins 'Dear Warwick the Kingmaker' — eloquent testimony from an outsider for the view that Clement Davies was regarded by insiders as the principal architect of the replacement of Chamberlain by Churchill. Here, Jowitt was seeking

the use of the architect for his own furtherance.

#### *Leadership of the Liberal Party*

When he became Liberal Leader in 1945, one can well understand the ambivalent attitude of some of the other Liberal MPs. After all, until the early 1940s, Clem had not been a member of the party since 1931, although in Montgomeryshire he was always regarded as a proper radical Liberal. That he was first made Chairman of the Parliamentary Party, rather than its leader, illustrates the suspicion of his colleagues, despite the high reputation he had obtained during the war as a constructive critic of the National Government.

In 1945 the press tended to dismiss the Liberals as having been relegated entirely to the Celtic fringe. Indeed, of the twelve Liberals returned in 1945, six were from Wales, two were from Scotland and one each from Cumberland, East Anglia, Dorset and Cornwall. There were also deep policy divisions. Megan Lloyd George, Dingle Foot, Tom Horobin, Emrys Roberts and Edgar Granville certainly wanted more blanket support for the Labour Government than the other six were prepared to give. Unquestionably, it looked as though the Liberal Party might disintegrate.

On social policy, such as education, housing, the health service, na-

tional insurance reform, the party was united in support of much of what Labour was trying to achieve. But, over Labour's nationalisation plans, there was deep dissension. It led to the Liberals in the Commons voting in different ways. In retrospect, it does appear to me, although I was a considerable critic of Clem's at the time, that his refusal to give blanket support was fully justified in the light of subsequent events. He was right in his appraisal that, on economic matters, Labour's ideologically driven approach tended to lead towards disaster. Ironically, most of those who wanted greater support for Labour were themselves defeated and replaced by Labour members. For instance, in Anglesey, Megan Lloyd George was replaced by Cledwyn Hughes.

Lady Megan Lloyd George and Lady Violet Bonham Carter epitomised the polarisation in the party. In 1948, a few months after I had been adopted as the prospective Liberal candidate for Caernarfon Boroughs, I came to London to read for my Bar Finals. I recall that Clement Davies then invited me to be a member of a strange body called the Liberal Party Committee — apparently, entirely nominated by the leader. This body effectively decided and controlled the policy of the party. Some of the debates were, to put it mildly, vitriolic. In retrospect, as I look around that table in my mind's eye, I cannot think of anybody else who could possibly have kept them together. I would normally sit between the two captivating mistresses of the generally acerbic, but always charming comment, Lady Violet Bonham Carter and Lady Megan Lloyd George. They always chose to sit at the end of the table directly facing Clem. Each of them was very critical of him but from entirely different directions.<sup>48</sup> There was a third chair between them at the table and there I would sit. A particularly difficult session ended one day with a very mundane matter at the end of the agenda. Cornwall required a recommendation for the colour the party should



use in elections. Lady Violet wittingly suggested it was obviously 'a subject for you, Megan dear, to advise upon'. Upon which Megan rejoined: 'Oh well, dear, I don't really mind what colour they have, provided, of course, it's not violet'. To give an idea of the problems the Liberals then faced, Churchill engineered matters so that there was no Conservative opponent to Lady Violet in the Colne Valley in the 1950 election. Nevertheless, she still lost.

Although the Liberals were reduced to only six by 1951, it has to be remembered that they were the remnants of a party historically used to being treated in the House of Commons as a major party. It had its own Whip's room, a leader's room and its leader was invited to take part in all state occasions. Clement Davies insisted that this continued. His close personal ties with Labour and Conservative leaders enabled him to preserve all the essential framework for a national party. Any new centre or centre-left party would have taken an age to acquire such a framework on its own.

During this period he was greatly criticised both by the left wing and the right wing within his party. When I was a Bar student, I would intermittently do some research for a highly independent Liberal MP, of whom I was dearly fond, Rhys Hopkin Morris, KC. I remember that he used to tell me that Clem was liable to put over a viewpoint at the Liberal committee which the last person he had talked to in the lavatory had put into his head! This was a gross simplification, because Clem was indulging in a very careful balancing act. Given the difficulties, I think it astonishing that any leader managed to keep the Liberal Party together, but Clement Davies did so. A letter from him to Professor Gilbert Murray shows that he was acutely aware of the precariousness of the situation: 'My own position is one of almost supine weakness for if I give full expression to a definite course of action, that at once leads to trouble and a definite split. It is that split that I am so anxious to avoid.'<sup>49</sup>

He appreciated that disaster for the party was but a hair's-breadth away; any open split during the 1945–55 period would have brought about the end of the Liberal Party as such. Clem's sustained wisdom, determination and sheer devotion kept them together at that time, and this achievement has been grossly underestimated.<sup>50</sup>

It is against this perilous background that one must understand Clement Davies' refusal of a place in Churchill's cabinet following the 1951 election. Churchill's government was returned in October of that year with a small, but perfectly workable, overall majority. Churchill immediately offered Clement Davies a place in his Cabinet as the Secretary of State for Education. This must have been an enormous personal temptation for Clem; he had been widely described as the ablest MP who had never held ministerial office and he must, by then, have 'had a bellyful' of dissension within his own party, in the words of a modern prime minister.<sup>51</sup> He was also deeply interested in education, as was his wife.<sup>52</sup> Churchill spent a long time trying to persuade him, at Downing Street and over lunch at Chartwell, to accept. After consulting widely, Clem refused the post in order to preserve the Liberal Party.<sup>53</sup>

The *News Chronicle* of 1 October 1956 refers to Clement Davies' resignation from the leadership of the Liberal Party. It emphasises that it was his refusal of the post in the Churchill's Cabinet that was the foundation for the ability of the Liberals to reemerge as an independent fighting force, appealing particularly to youth, under Grimond.<sup>54</sup>

## Clement Davies the man

Clement Davies was a tallish, distinguished-looking man of a reserved, but very friendly disposition. I first heard him when I was a schoolboy on a market day in Denbigh appealing for funds to buy aeroplanes in the 'Wings for Victory'

campaign. He was a tremendous mob-orator, but had none of the subtleties that I had heard, a couple of years earlier, from Lloyd George. Nevertheless, he made a great impression on me. Later, when I came to know him well, I always found him most friendly and amiable. He had an amazing rapport with his constituents who loved his partly declamatory and partly narrative style. To illustrate his individual style he would frequently speak like this: 'I said to Winston on this problem ... and Winston said such and such. However, when we got into the chamber, things were different.' In an age when there was no television and when reports on political matters were very matter-of-fact, it is no wonder that his style went down well. It evoked a scene of an Old Testament prophet addressing his adoring followers.

I now turn to a personal matter which must be put on the scales, especially in assessing some of the ostensibly strange twists and bumps that characterised parts of Clem's career. In his article on Clement Davies in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, the late Francis Boyd, a famous and charming political correspondent for *The Guardian*, who was a considerable admirer of Clem, mentioned publicly for the first time that Clem had lived with another problem. Francis wrote in this way: 'He had an appalling political task, and he was working under a severe personal strain of which the public knew nothing — the effects of excessive indulgence in alcohol.'<sup>55</sup> I discussed that statement and explored it further with Mr Stanley Clement-Davies. What I say now is said entirely with his agreement and approval.

No-one that I had met in Montgomeryshire or elsewhere ever remembers seeing Clement Davies under the influence of drink. He certainly had a tremor in his hand and in my innocence as a young man I attached no importance to that, but nobody else seemed to do so either. He certainly did not appear to suffer from alcoholism as such. How-

ever, he had a very severe drink problem, which may have manifested itself in sessions of private drinking.

I know a distinguished Silk who, these days, after the strain of a heavy case, will go off on a great binge lasting days at times. Whether it was that kind of manifestation with Clem, I do not know, but the problem that beset the family was a real one. From the early 1920s, he definitely had this serious problem. It was apparent within the family by 1922. The nervous breakdown which Clem sustained in 1924 was related to drink. You will recall that he resigned as a Junior Treasury Counsel in 1925, which was an indication that the smooth path to the Bench, to which I referred earlier, which appears to have been his first, preference, was being abandoned. Intimates at the Bar and on the Bench must have had a severe jolt if they learnt of the fact of his drink problem in the early '20s. Does it account for his change of direction between 1920 and 1930? Was the smooth path to the Bench removed from him? Was this background problem a major factor behind his decision to join the board of Lever Brothers? Did that position raise the possibility, not only of greater security, but also of a more structured and less stressful life than that which exists at the Bar? I myself have had at least four occupations, some simultaneously, but the practising Bar is easily the most stressful if you cannot relax.

I find it astonishing that Clem and his wife and family lived with this problem for forty years and that it was known only to a few. It must have been an inhibiting, as well as a deciding factor behind a number of decisions taken in their lives. Tremendous discipline must have been necessary repeatedly to present a confident and reassuring public face. It seems that his problem was different in kind and in degree from Churchill's.

Perhaps you will now permit me to indulge in a few reflections on the way I see Clement Davies in retrospect. I believe that, for all his ability, discipline and achievements, he was

quite insecure and lacking in confidence. Like Jano, he never gave me the impression of being able to relax.<sup>56</sup> What his leisure pursuits were, if any, I do not know. It is very interesting to discover among the Clement Davies papers in Aberystwyth, a very touching letter, dating from his student days, from a close friend, whose signature is indecipherable, giving Clem some reassurance after an uncharacteristic failure to win a prize at University.<sup>57</sup> It reads: 'Of your success in life there must not be the slightest misgivings, a man with your incomparable energy and engaging personality must, sooner or later, come to the fore at the Bar. I know that you rather lack confidence in yourself and are of a retiring disposition (a quality to be rather admired than otherwise) but [*an indecipherable name*] tells me that father was the same and even to this day is quite shy, so let his career be an example to you.'<sup>58</sup> Who was the author of that letter? It shows an insight into Clem's personality and character, which, perhaps, only a very close friend and contemporary would have had. Was this basic insecurity linked to his later drink problem?

## Wales

Clement Davies' concern for Wales and its people runs like a golden thread through his career. I have already mentioned his report on tuberculosis and that even in his 'semi-detached' period, the concerns of his constituents<sup>59</sup> and the interests of Wales were never forgotten. This illustrates my belief that he was throughout 'powerfully identified with the harmonies and historic continuities of Montgomeryshire Liberalism'. He was also a consistent advocate of the appointment of a Secretary of State for Wales.<sup>60</sup> Among his papers are letters to prime ministers Chamberlain, Churchill and Attlee on the subject.<sup>61</sup> It is interesting to note that the most promising replies came from Churchill<sup>62</sup> and Attlee and it is probably quite significant that he had a fairly close personal relationship with

both of them.<sup>63</sup> Another interesting letter, which is among his papers, sets out clearly his belief that in order to achieve a sensible and satisfactory answer to the socioeconomic and administrative problems of Wales, it was necessary for Wales to have its own Parliament where the Welsh language would have the same standing as the English language.<sup>64</sup>

## Clement Davies as a lawyer in politics

Before I conclude, I wish to make some observation on how I would class Clement Davies among other lawyers in politics. In my view, lawyer/politicians fall into one of two categories. In the first, I would put those whose first priorities are their political beliefs and allegiances. The law is a secondary matter. Lloyd George and Asquith were two obvious examples of such men. In his biography of Benjamin Disraeli, André Maurois says that the great prime minister was once asked: 'Why, as you were called to the Bar, didn't you practice and become a great lawyer?' Disraeli is said to have answered cryptically: 'I gave up the chance of being a great lawyer to preserve the chance of being a great man'. There was speaking a man who was truly of the first category.

In the second category are those who are lawyers first and politicians second. Events may pull them into politics and they often bring highly focused minds to the pursuit of their responsibilities in political life without being creative or innovative politicians. In such a category, I would put Lord Shawcross<sup>65</sup> and Lord Gardiner.<sup>66</sup>

To reflect on the nature of legal training as a basis for political life, first, it is necessary to consider the nature of life at the Bar.<sup>67</sup> A barrister is trained to behave like a racehorse. He is taught to be wholly oriented on his objective, which is fixed for him at the outset of a case by, among other things, the side he is on and the rules of the profession. As for the racehorse, there are rails

on either side of the course and his training will have taught him to accept a blinkered approach. Whatever his own private view of the merits of the case, he must present his client's case in the best possible light to seek to achieve his objective. The aim may be an acquittal, a conviction, or an award of damages. By contrast, in politics, there are no rails at all. One can have a life in politics without any focus. Some accept the focus imposed upon them by party discipline. But the lack of rails and blinkers offers much greater scope for individual expression and eventually achievement. I think that this is what Disraeli had in mind. I have often said that I found the average standards of behaviour and of achievement to be higher at the Bar than in Parliament. However there were individuals from all parties in Parliament who had a bigger and broader vision, and who, in some cases, were capable of becoming great men.

I have reflected on this because of a view of Clem expressed to me by a man whose judgement I held in high regard: 'when Clement Davies is focused, he has, in my opinion, about the best mind I have

ever come across.' The words were said to me by the late Mr Cyril Jones of Wrexham, then the doyen of Labour solicitors in North Wales and a very remarkable man. I was driving him as my Instructing Solicitor to a planning appeal for one of his clients at Montgomeryshire Quarter Sessions, over which Clement Davies presided.<sup>68</sup> Legally, we had in our favour a difficult, but unanswerable point. Otherwise our case had no planning merit! It related to an enforcement notice in a case concerning a car dump. During the journey, I expressed the fear that Clem might take a sentimental view of the desecration of his beloved Montgomeryshire countryside by old car bodies and that he would lose sight of the legal point as the magistrates, against whom we were appealing, had done. Cyril dismissed my fear immediately: 'Mr. Hooson,' he said, 'you will see a different Clem today. As you know, I don't share his political views, but there isn't a better mind than his when it is focused, and when at the Bar it is always focused.' He was quite right. Clem saw the force of our argument immediately.

On balance, I would place Clement Davies in the second category of lawyer/politicians. He was at his best when his objective was set for him rather than as a self-generating politician. The three examples I have given of effective leadership from Clement Davies illustrate this. In his famous report on tuberculosis, his intention was set on shaking the country out of its supine acceptance of bad housing and drainage, and poverty. He achieved it. When he organised Chamberlain's downfall, he was ruthless and determined in pursuing his objective. Again, he achieved it. He saw his leadership of the Liberal Party as an exercise to preserve the independence of the party for a younger generation to take over with all the basic machinery for a national party maintained. Again, he achieved it.

## Conclusion

There is certainly a fascinating story yet to be fully explored. Among the biographical notes made by one of his sisters, Dr Laura Maule-Horne, who was a distinguished doctor, there is a quotation from the late Lord Atkin of Aberdovey, probably

the greatest judge of the twentieth century. At a meeting in Montgomeryshire or to the London Welsh he said of Clement Davies: 'There was no high office in the land which was not his for the acceptance, when he was kidnapped by commerce and became one of the head directors of Unilever, the biggest combine in the world.' In the light of what I have said earlier, it may be that 'kidnapped by commerce' may prove not to be quite correct. I hope that future

Clement Davies with Lord Samuel, Liberal leader 1931-35



historians will be allowed to see papers from the Lord Chancellor's Department and the archives of Unilever.<sup>69</sup> The latter will show, I believe, that he was a tremendously effective and incisive administrator who was much travelled. He must have made many more international contacts than were available to most MPs of his era. He was a man of broad knowledge and deep insight, but was not in my view a political philosopher, although he knew perfectly well what his core beliefs were. At heart, he was a traditional, radical Welsh Liberal who remains at the present time, for all the reasons I have given, a very underestimated Welshman and politician.

*This paper is based on a lecture given to the Honourable Society at the British Academy on 19 June 1996, with Lord Cledwyn of Penrhos, CH, in the chair. I am grateful to my former researcher, William Williams, Esq., Barrister at Law, for collating references to the sources as given in the footnotes, and to my secretary, Mrs Calan McGreevy, for typing the various drafts and the final version.*

*Emlyn Hooson, QC, LLB, was MP for Montgomeryshire from May 1962 (winning the seat in the by-election caused by Clement Davies' death) until 1979. Now, as Lord Hooson of Montgomery, he speaks for the Liberal Democrats in the Lords on Welsh affairs, legal affairs, agriculture and European affairs. He was President of the Welsh Liberal Party 1983–86.*

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#### Notes:

- 1 My emphasis.
- 2 *Daily Telegraph*, 6 September 1994.
- 3 See e.g. Geoffrey Sell, 'Clement Davies — the Forgotten Leader', *Radical Quarterly*, 36–51, where Clement Davies' role is described as one of considerable significance: 'Had he accepted [Churchill's offer of a post in Cabinet in 1951], the Liberal Party could have suffered the same fate of other coalition partners of the Conservatives — the Liberal Unionists and the Liberal Nationals. Neither is

in existence today. Speaking at the Liberal Party Assembly in 1976, David Steel summed up why Davies' leadership was important. He said, 'Had it not been for those who have more recently gone before us to preserve and maintain the Liberal Party when many doubted the need, then the condition of the country would demand that men and women come together to conspire to invent it.'

- 4 See 'The Reminiscences of Clement Davies', *National Library of Wales Journal* 28 no 4, Winter 1994, 405–416; 'Montgomeryshire Politics: Clement Davies and the National Government', *Montgomeryshire Collections* 73 (1985), 96–115; 'The Clement Davies Papers: A Review', *The National Library of Wales Journal* 23 (1983–84), 406–421.
- 5 Henceforth 'CDP'.
- 6 See: 'Clement Davies and the fall of Neville Chamberlain, 1939–40', *Welsh History Review* 8 (1976–77), 188–215; 'Clement Davies: The Liberal Party 1929–56' MA Thesis (unpublished).
- 7 His headmaster at Llanfyllin County School, Ifor H. Lewis, was never to forget Clement Davies' brilliance. Upon Clement Davies becoming a Privy Councillor, he wrote to him saying that he had won his way 'to the highest peak at the Bar and Parliament by sheer brilliance and scholarship', CDP B/212: letter dated 14 January 1947.
- 8 1905: top of the Inter-Collegiate in Law; Foundation Scholar (£30); 1906: first for both parts of the Law Tripos; made senior scholar at Trinity Hall; Latham prizeman; 1907: awarded prize for first class honours.
- 9 There are ten references to Clement Davies' works, be it as author, co-author, or contributor, at the British Library: e.g. *Land Valuation Under the Finance (1909–10) Act 1910*, *Reports of Land Valuation Appeals in Referee's Courts, HC, and HL*. Revised by Clement Edward Davies, 3 vol. Estates Gazette & Sweet & Maxwell, London, 1913 (Cat No 6128.c.2); Clement Davies and Ernest Evans, *An Epitome of Agricultural Law*, pp xxii, 378. Estates Gazette, London, 1911 (Cat No 6306.aa11); *Abridgment on Particular Subjects, Agriculture, Laws & Statutes*, IV (Cat. No. 6306.e.35); *The Agricultural Holdings Act 1908*, Laws & Statutes VIII Chronological Series Ed.VIII [1901–1910] (Cat. No 8226.r.20).
- 10 Now known as Unilever.
- 11 Not as legal advisor as has elsewhere been suggested. According to some biographical notes written by R. J. Maule-Horne, Clement Davies' sister, he was the Head of Transport, Chairman of the Internal Board of Commerce (CDP B/9/6).
- 12 24 August 1931 to 7 June 1935.
- 13 7 June 1935 to 28 May 1937. Baldwin was quite friendly with Clement Davies.

14 28 May 1937 to 10 May 1940.

15 CDP T/5/32.

16 *Report of the Committee of Inquiry into the Anti-Tuberculosis Service in Wales and Monmouthshire*, published March 1939.

17 His visions for an united Europe, *inter alia*, are summarised in his noteworthy letter to Walden Moore, the Director of the Declaration for Atlantic Unity. In particular, he is scathing about the missed opportunity for Britain represented by the failure to join the Common Market. He said that as France could not get a stable government, and as Germany and Italy were 'down and out', all looked to the UK for leadership and 'Britain threw the opportunity away and threw it away again in 1951'. CDP F4/95; dated 17 January 1962.

18 CDP B/8/30–34. B/8/30 is a letter from Gilbert McAllister, Secretary General of the World Association of Parliamentarians, of which Clement Davies was president, and contains a draft press notice headed 'Life Devoted to the Rule of Law'. It lists all the main nominees which included politicians from around the world. The prize was, however, not awarded that year; he was also nominated for the 'Légion d'Honneur' for services to France, see letter from R. B. Vielleville, President of the *Comité d'Etudes du Groupe Parlementaire Français pour un Gouvernement Mondial*, 9 May 1956, CDP B8/41.

19 Sir John Simon, KC, had rejected the invitation of Lever Brothers to appear, apparently for political reasons.

20 Later known as Unilever.

21 Now known as the Family Division.

22 £235,000 in today's money.

23 Among his papers are posters for meetings at which he spoke at this time: CDP, A9/71; A9/78.

24 It must also be remembered that MPs were unpaid until 1912.

25 See interview with Clement Davies on twenty-five years as an MP, *Liberal News*, 28 May 1954, CDP B3/21.

26 For an insight into the relationship between the two men and into the dramatic nature of the change in Clem's views in 1939 on how the war ought to be prosecuted, see CDP Class I: in particular I1/3, letter from David Davies to Clem and I1/5, letter from Clement Davies to his wife, Jano.

27 *We Can Conquer Unemployment*, campaign based on the book, *Britain's Industrial Future*.

28 Dealing with the national control of land and related issues.

29 John Maynard Keynes, the author of the most influential work on economics of the twentieth century: *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money*, published in 1936.

30 *Montgomeryshire Express* 2 September 1939. For an authoritative account of this

- period, see J. Graham Jones, 'Montgomeryshire Politics: Clement Davies and the National Government', *The Montgomeryshire Collections* 73 (1985), 96 *et seq.*
- 31 See J. Graham Jones, 'The Reminiscences of Clement Davies MP', *National Library of Wales Journal* XXVII no. 4, Winter 1994, 405–17, at 415 in which Clement Davies' record of what Herr Wohltat said to a meeting is: 'Europe is in a chaotic condition. Let us take control over Europe. You have the rest of the World.'
- 32 Sometimes called the 'Vigilantes Group'.
- 33 His son, Geraint, was seething when he had heard that his father had been offered a minor post in the Government: 'What does the PM think you are — an office boy to run and fetch for Arthur Greenwood?', CDP R. 13/14 letter from son to father, November 1940, quoted by J. Graham Jones, *op. cit.*, at 415.
- 34 CDP, B2/3.
- 35 For further details on his father's life and Clement Davies' family background, see the obituary of Alderman Moses Davies, CDP A9/88.
- 36 E.g., his sister, Dr Laura Maule-Horne, took medical degrees at London, Edinburgh and Paris, CDP A8, and she appears to have been a highly regarded member of her profession (see a reference written for her at A8/2); his brother, David Thomas Davies, qualified as a surveyor and became the Superintending Valuer for Wales, CDP A4.
- 37 His brother, David Thomas Davies.
- 38 CDP A9.
- 39 David Morgan Clement-Davies, then articled to a London solicitor, died of a heart attack, Sep 1939; Mair Eluned died whilst serving in the ATS, Nov. 1941 — a verdict of suicide was recorded; Geraint died in a road accident in Wiltshire whilst on active service, Feb. 1943.
- 40 Attributed to the pressure of her demanding job.
- 41 Jano was also a campaigner in her own right, working for women's rights, and she was a powerful public speaker. See, e.g. J. Graham Jones, *op. cit.* at 415–16
- 42 See, e.g., J. Graham Jones, *op. cit.*, at 416: 'All too often, Davies is portrayed as leader of the party at a time when its electoral fortunes were at their nadir. But, as *The Times* commented when Davies resigned the leadership in October 1956, "No leader could have prevented [the] numerical decline [of the Liberal MPs]; a less devoted leader than Mr Clement Davies might have failed to prevent it turning into a rout".'
- 43 Clem was a workaholic and, it was said, he had written the entire report himself save for the medical contribution.
- 44 See Hansard 22 March 1939 col. 1330–1421, 1421.
- 45 According to his sister's biographical note *supra*, they called, *inter alia*, for a Ministry for Production. Churchill refused, but, 'twelve months later, we had one'.
- 46 Later Lord Jowitt, Labour's Lord Chancellor from 1945.
- 47 W. Jowitt to Clement Davies 13 May 1940 (CDP).
- 48 See Alan Watkins, *The Liberal Dilemma* 60–82 at 61–62. After the 1951 election, neither was an MP: 'It is arguable, of course, that the Liberal Party in Parliament was more harmonious for the absence of these two from its ranks; Lady Megan was moving rapidly to the Left, Lady Violet just as rapidly to the Right. But despite their predilection for quarrelling — partly, perhaps, because of it — they were undoubtedly the best-publicised members of the Liberal Party.'
- 49 CDP, J3/16, letter from Clement Davies to Gilbert Murray, 11 May 1950 (copy); he also said that 'there is no party today, but a number of individuals whom because of their adherence to the party come together to express completely divergent views.' For further insight into the difficulties Clem faced see Class J generally.
- 50 See, e.g., *The Times* on Davies' honour on being made a Privy Councillor on 29 January 1947: 'The distinction justly recognises the tactical ability with which Mr Clement Davies has led the small, but vigorous, Liberal section of the opposition.' See also Lord Boothby, *My Yesterdays, Your Tomorrow*, 1962, in which he says that few would deny 'that he led [the Liberal Party] with dauntless courage, and no small measure of success.'
- 51 i.e. John Major.
- 52 Latymer School.
- 53 See Alan Watkins, *op. cit.*, at 65: 'some tribute should perhaps be paid to those Liberals who, in the dark days of 1951 and 1952, kept the faith: Philip Fothergill, Clement Davies, Frank Byers and others. It would have been easy for any of these to find a satisfactory, perhaps a glorious, future with one of the other parties. Davies, as we have seen, could have had a post in the Churchill Cabinet. Yet he stood firm ... "We refuse to be stamped out" he said to the Liberal Assembly. "In spite of all temptations we still prefer our own doctrine and we are determined to maintain our independence".'
- 54 Announcing his resignation to the Folkestone Assembly, Clement Davies, using a nautical metaphor, said: 'It is time that the tiller was placed in the hands of a younger man and that a new voice should be calling on the ship's company, rallying them to the great cause, which we all have so much at heart. Fortunately, I can step down knowing that there is a worthy successor waiting — one who has fully earned his master's certificate.' Quoted by Alan Watkins, *op. cit.*
- 55 See also, *Y Bywgraffiadur Cymreig* 1951–1970 (London, 1997).
- 56 This appears to be the impression he gave to G. B. Shriver, his tutor at Trinity Hall, as well as that of being a workaholic. In a letter of 2 December 1907, he implores Clem not to worry about the 'Whewell' and to enjoy his vacation: 'Vacations are not so frequent as all that. Say you live sixty more years, with three vacations per annum; the 'diminution' total is only 180', CDP A9/47 (i).
- 57 The 'Whewell'.
- 58 CDP A/9/53.
- 59 'James Griffiths, who entered parliament in 1936 as the Labour member for Llanelli, was immediately impressed by Davies' pleas in the Commons on behalf of his constituents: "He always used to talk about "my people, my county".' David M. Roberts, 'Clement Davies and the Fall of Neville Chamberlain', 1939–40, *Welsh History Review* 8, 188–215, 189; for corroboration of this view of Clement Davies as an ardent constituency MP, see Jo Grimond, *Memoirs* (London 1979), 148.
- 60 'Davies was closely involved in the formulation of this plank in the Liberal platform in 1929, was associated with the approach to Chamberlain in 1938, and continued to fight for this appointment throughout his career', J. Graham Jones, 'The Clement Davies Papers: A Review', *The National Library of Wales Journal* XIII, 406–21, 408.
- 61 CDP, D1.
- 62 Churchill wrote to Arthur Evans on 30 October 1943, saying that it was 'no doubt a very fit and proper matter for discussion in a transition period or when peace is restored', CDP D1/19.
- 63 Something which, tragically, was achieved not long after his death in 1964, when James Griffiths became the first Secretary of State for Wales.
- 64 *Ibid.*, D1/4: letter from Clement Jones to W. J. Jones, July 1960 (copy).
- 65 Hartley Shawcross, famed for his role in the Nuremberg trials.
- 66 Gerald Gardiner, who as Labour's Lord Chancellor, immortalised himself for students and practitioners of law for liberating the House of Lords from its own precedents, *Practice Statement* (1966) 3 All ER 77.
- 67 I confine myself to this branch of the profession as it is the one I know well.
- 68 He had become its Chairman in 1935 and remained in that position until his death. In 1959 in recognition of his work on the Bench, he was awarded with a Gregynog Presentation Book, which remains in his collection, CDP, E1/7.
- 69 Papers from the Unilever archives were, I believe, offered to Clement Davies' sister when she was making biographical notes.

# 'A Sad Business'

## The Resignation of Clement Davies

*Geoffrey Sell* examines the end of Clement Davies' leadership in 1956.

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For much of Clement Davies' leadership the Liberal Party was battling for survival. It was his fate to be party leader at the lowest moment in its history. The party that had once seemed a natural vehicle of government was close to extinction, commanding the support of little more than two per cent of the electorate and securing the return of only three MPs to Westminster without the benefit of local pacts.

Unlike 1945 or 1950, the Liberal Party adopted a narrow-front strategy for the elections of 1951 and 1955. Just 109 and 110 candidates respectively were fielded, and this helps to account, in part, for the low Liberal poll. In only fifteen constituencies in Great Britain at the 1955 general election did Labour and Conservative candidates not occupy the first two positions in the poll. The pattern of party competition was that of a stable and balanced duopoly. In local government the party was equally weak. Only 1.5% of councillors elected in 1955 were Liberal. Moreover, the party was adrift on policy. Its progressive clothes had been stolen by Labour in the post-war years, and those who rejected socialism found an attractive option in a Tory party influenced by Liberal ideas and led by moderates like Eden and Macmillan.

Surrender, however, was not countenanced. After his successful election victory in 1951, Churchill offered Davies the Ministry of Education. The offer was refused, but to many observers it looked like a brave gesture from a politically dying man. Davies believed that however 'small are our numbers we have a task to perform, and that cannot be performed if we sink our independence and see the party gradually welded into the structure of another party.'<sup>1</sup> At the 1953 Assembly, the Party President described Davies 'as the leader of a party, which after fighting three political Dunkirks, refuses to lie down.'<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, his leadership had been a controversial one. His political career was chequered, for although elected as Liberal MP for Montgomeryshire in 1929, he

chose to follow the Simonites and join the National Liberals in 1931. It was not until 1942 that he rejoined the Liberal Party.

Both Attlee and Churchill retired from the leadership of their parties in 1955. Would Davies, aged seventy-two and leader of the Liberal Party since 1945, follow suit? Certainly amongst many leading activists there was a strong belief that there was need for change. It 'was plain that the Young Turks and their friends among the Old Guard had lost faith in Clement Davies, whose oratory had become even more emotional and rambling. Grimond, became clearly the best chance of change.'<sup>3</sup>

### Grimond

Jo Grimond had been Chief Whip since 1950, and had married into the Liberal establishment, to Asquith's granddaughter, giving him his passport into Liberal politics. His mother-in-law, Lady Violet Bonham Carter, was 'the formidable high priestess of Liberalism.'<sup>4</sup> She took a proprietorial interest in the Liberal Party and the political hopes that she had once entertained for herself were transferred to Grimond. He was assisted by the lack of a credible alternative candidate. Of the six-man parliamentary party, two — Arthur Holt and Donald Wade — were clearly in Parliament only as result of tacit Liberal/Conservative pacts in Bolton and Huddersfield respectively. Roderic Bowen of Cardigan was not particularly energetic, and Sir Rhys Hopkin Morris was the Deputy Speaker.

The comments made at the January 1956 meeting of the National Executive can be seen as a criticism of Davies' leadership. Edwin Malindine claimed that 'in the space of the last twenty or thirty years, the Liberal Party had had setback after setback. Despite this, bands of Liberals were still working hard in the face of all defeats ... above all, Liberal workers need inspiration.'<sup>5</sup> H. Graham White, a former Liberal MP, felt that: 'more leadership of almost a spiritual kind, with a new

and vigorous statement of policy, was required.<sup>6</sup>

Although his Welsh oratory inspired the rank and file at rallies and at the annual Liberal Assembly, Clement Davies relied on generalities about Liberal philosophy, and could be rather woolly about current issues. For some Liberals, however, such as former Oxford University student David Penwarden, Davies displayed considerable passion. He was good on issues such as Africa and Europe. Penwarden recalls that Davies would: 'cry and break into tears when delivering a speech. He had a great rapport with students.'<sup>7</sup> Former Young Liberal Betty Corn was also an admirer. Davies' 'integrity shone through, one felt very loyal to him.'<sup>8</sup> During the latter part of his leadership, there was a resurgence of support for the Liberal Party at both Oxford and Cambridge universities, each of which had Liberal Clubs with memberships of over a thousand.

Davies did not pretend to be a party manager and was not very good at devising a positive programme for the party. He was rightly described as 'a radical evangelist' by temperament rather than a party boss, disliking rigid party organisation and conventions. Davies was thought intellectually flabby by the party hierarchy, including Lady Violet Bonham Carter and Philip Fothergill; Lady Violet's daughter, Laura Grimond, thought that Davies was faintly ridiculous.<sup>9</sup> David Steel commented that during Davies' leadership, 'all the Liberal Party was the left-over of a once great party. It didn't seem to have any relevance to modern political thought.'<sup>10</sup>

## Revival

Despite these criticisms, the final year of Davies' leadership saw the beginnings of a Liberal revival which was to blossom under his successor. This had little to do with Davies, who was suffering from ill health. He had been forced to miss the 1955 Assembly and convalesce in Majorca. In a

small number of rural and seaside constituencies, the party was benefiting from electoral disenchantment with the Eden government. This found expression at the Torquay by-election in December 1955, when the Liberal share of the vote increased from 14% to 23%. North West Liberals were told that this was 'a clear indication of political upturn ... The Liberal Party is on the march again, the old crusading spirit is being recaptured.'<sup>11</sup> At Hereford two months later, Labour was pushed into third place and the Liberal candidate secured 36% of the vote.

There was also evidence from the 1955 General Election that the Liberals were beginning to attract a 'floating' or protest vote, those wavering in support or those wishing to protest against the existing government without switching their allegiance to the other major party. Thus in Bristol North-East two-thirds of a sample of Liberal voters at this election had not voted Liberal before.<sup>12</sup> The 1955 election marked a turning point in the Liberal Party's history. It was the first election since 1929 in which the party improved on its previous performance. The tide had been stemmed. There were few real setbacks and many minor successes. The Liberal share of the vote per candidate rose slightly from 14.7% to

15.1%. Six MPs were returned, allowing a degree of credibility that would have been impossible to retain had their numbers been reduced to only two or three. Above all, the Liberal Party had survived.

The perception that Liberal fortunes were on the increase put heart into its officers. Geoffrey Acland wrote to Sir Andrew McFadyean in March 1956 that: 'the result of the 1955 election had surprised him far more than even those of 1945 and 1950. Everything indicated to me that we could do nothing more than say we went down and deep down fighting. Although the need had always been there, now he felt for the first time for many years we may succeed.'<sup>13</sup>

In some constituencies there were distinct signs of improvement. Blackpool Liberals were informed at their Annual General Meeting that: 'Membership was on the upgrade and the financial position healthier than for many years. Wards never better organised. Nationally the party is gaining ground especially among the younger folk.'<sup>14</sup>

## Pressure for change

Nevertheless, despite these indications that the party had begun to emerge from the electoral abyss, it was clear that some prominent Lib-

Clement Davies with the President of the Liberal Party, Sir Arthur Comyns Carr, in 1959.



erals wanted a leadership change. These included Major-General Grey, the Party Treasurer, and Philip Fothergill, Party Vice-President, who concluded that the election results of 1951 and 1955 had been more disastrous than those of 1945 and 1950.<sup>15</sup> This was because only a small number of constituencies, where the Liberals appeared to have a reasonable chance of victory, were contested. A younger man could provide the drive necessary to improve the party organisation.

It was Grey, a man known for his bluntness and not giving a damn for anyone, who finally approached Davies and urged him to relinquish the position of leader. It 'was time to go ... the party will accept Jo.'<sup>16</sup> This action was taken around June or July in 1956. Feelings of contrition sent the General straight away to Lady Violet. She asked him on whose authority he had told Davies to resign. He replied Fothergill. In times of crisis, Fothergill was the most respectable name one could think of. After all, he was head of the Temperance Association and Bands of Hope.

Grimond's engagement diary records that he met General Grey five times between the beginning of the year and July 1956. It also reveals that on 5 July he had lunch with Jeremy Thorpe, who, Dominic Le Foe, a publicity consultant to the party, claimed, was the mouthpiece of the campaign for Davies to go.<sup>17</sup> Thorpe was a member of the Party Council and candidate for North Devon, where he had increased the party's share of the vote from 19% to 32% in 1955. Granville Slack, Chairman of the Executive, recalls meeting Thorpe shortly before Davies resigned, when he was asked: 'can't we get rid of Clement Davies?' Slack replied to the effect that Thorpe should let things lie. He knew that Davies had not accepted any speaking engagements for the autumn, so consequently he expected him to resign.<sup>18</sup>

The parliamentary party was aware of the pressure for a change in the leadership. Arthur Holt,

Grimond's closest colleague, recalled being rung up and written to during the final months of Davies's leadership by party activists. Richard Moore, then a leader writer on the *News Chronicle*, told Holt that unless Davies went there would be a demonstration at the Assembly by the Young Liberals.<sup>19</sup> The parliamentary party were, however, reluctant to act, as they did not want to create a bad atmosphere. Davies was regarded as a nice, warm-hearted, man who did not really have much idea where the party should go.<sup>20</sup>

## The final stage

It seems unlikely that Grimond was unaware of what was going on. Upon arriving at the Assembly he 'vaguely discovered that there was a feeling that the existing leader, Clem Davies, should go.'<sup>21</sup> This was somewhat of an understatement, for the conference opened to newspaper headlines such as 'Davies: the big query'<sup>22</sup> and 'new leader for the Liberals.'<sup>23</sup>

Amid this intense leadership speculation, Grimond moved a resolution on automation. After a glowing introduction by the Assembly chair, he modestly stated that he appeared 'not as the white hope of the Liberal Party, but as the white hope of Kingston, Malden and Coombe Liberal Association' (the constituency association on whose behalf he was moving the resolution). His self-deprecatory, offhand, unforcedly humorous manner endeared him to the delegates. They made it unmistakably clear that he was their candidate for the position of leader-elect of the Liberal Party. He 'appeared before the Assembly as a delegate ... he left it as Crown Prince.'<sup>24</sup>

Grimond was absent when Davies announced his decision to step down. This was not made until he arrived at the Assembly, for he had told his agent in Montgomeryshire that he had no intention of resigning. Press Officer Phyllis Preston recalled that he was hoping that people would persuade him to carry on. She found him in an emotional state,

declaring: 'it's getting too much for me.'<sup>25</sup> When she learned that he intended to make an announcement the next day, she rang Grimond to tell him. He replied that: 'Clem hasn't said a word to me.'

In a moving speech, Davies took his leave and was warmly and lengthily cheered. This may have been because 'gratitude for past services and relief at his decision to step down were mixed in about equal proportions.'<sup>26</sup> However, Roy Douglas believes that Davies' announcement was met with real sorrow by many delegates. For some Liberals there was a strong element of hypocrisy in the air. The platform party were 'weeping like taps when Davies made his farewell address. Ugh. Disgusting, and they all really wanted him gone.'<sup>27</sup> Other Liberals were also unhappy. Peter Billenness, a member of the Party Council, felt that Davies should have been allowed to go in his own time.<sup>28</sup>

The *Observer* thought that several delegates, despite applauding Davies' speech, were privately contrasting his rather nebulous and sentimental reaffirmation of basic Liberal principles with the sharp, concrete and practical view on industrial progress expressed by Grimond.<sup>29</sup>

The *Economist*, in similar vein, commented that: 'Pensioning off an old servant is a sad business, but when the Liberals have paid their tributes to Clement Davies, they are bound to feel relieved that their leadership, like that of the two main parties, has now moved into the next generation.'<sup>30</sup>

Most Liberals accepted that a change of leadership was overdue, to someone who could provide energy and a clear vision of the way the Liberal Party should develop. The only man who could do this was Grimond. Stephen Cawley, Chairman of the Steering Committee for the 1956 Assembly, recalled his emotions: 'Of course, we rejoiced; a young man had taken over from a tired, old one with a rather chequered career of political allegiance.'<sup>31</sup>



## Was there an alternative?

Although necessary, it was nevertheless a painful transition for Davies. His friends stated that he was hurt by the manner of his going, for he had not gone of his own volition. Was there an alternative? In a party where there was no formal mechanism for removing a leader, it was bound to be a problem. Grimond recognised this: 'As there is no statutory limit on the time anyone can lead a party, and seldom any moment which all those involved see as the right moment to resign, a great deal depends on the character, judgement and goodwill of the leader ... It does him [Davies] credit, however, that he accepted with such good grace the suggestion that it was time for a change.'<sup>32</sup> Grimond subsequently wrote to Davies deploring the events (press articles, and so on) which led up to his decision to resign. He stated that: 'I do not believe it necessary for one moment that you should resign now.'<sup>33</sup>

Nevertheless, an increasingly ineffective elderly leader was removed from office against his will. Yet the impression was that 'Grimond would not play ball to push the old man out. Others had to wield the knife on his behalf.'<sup>34</sup> Party Council member Manuela Sykes believed that Grimond did not know the methods being used on his behalf.<sup>35</sup>

Clement Davies had all the tears and few of the joys of leadership. He held the pass during the most treacherous years in the party's history, and in doing so, helped to lay the foundations for the revival that took place under his successor. His legacy was that he passed on a separate independent national party further from extinction or engulfment by either of the major parties than when he took up the task. As the *News Chronicle* commented, 'Liberals are indebted to this man who refused to bow the knee and who recognised that the endless obituaries of the party were premature.'<sup>36</sup>

For the victories of the future, we must thank the guardians of the past. However, like many other political leaders before and since, his manner of departure was inglorious. He failed to realise that the curtain had come down and it was time to leave the stage and make way for another.

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### Notes:

- 1 *The Times* 22 November 1951.
- 2 *Liberal News* 22 May 1953, p. 1.
- 3 Letter from the late Dr T. Joyce, a former member of the Party National Executive, to author, 10 July 1989.
- 4 A. Sampson, *Anatomy of Britain Today* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1963) p. 120.
- 5 National Executive Committee Minutes, 14 January 1956; Liberal Party Archives, British Library of Political and Economic Science.
- 6 *Ibid.*
- 7 Interview with David Penwarden, 7 August 1989.
- 8 Interview with Miss B. Corn, 23 August 1989.
- 9 Interview with late Lady Grimond, 22 October 1988.
- 10 *Marxism Today*, October 1986.
- 11 Newsletter of the Lancashire, Cheshire and North West Liberal Federation, 1 February 1956; Federation Archives, Manchester Central Library.
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- 13 Letter from Geoffrey Acland (Chairman of the National Executive) dated 21 March 1956 to Sir A. McFadyean; McFadyean Papers, British Library of Political and Economic Science.
- 14 Annual General Meeting of the Blackpool Liberal Association 28 March 1956; Federation Archives, Lancashire Record Office.
- 15 D. M. Roberts, *Clement Davies and the Liberal Party*, MA Thesis, University of Wales, 1975.
- 16 Letter from the late Dr. T. Joyce to author, *op.cit.*
- 17 Interview with D. le Foe, 3 November 1988.
- 18 Interview with G. Slack, 5 April 1989.
- 19 Interview with Richard Moore, 13 July 1996.
- 20 Interview with the late A. Holt, 22 April 1989.
- 21 *The Listener*, 13 September 1984, p. 17.
- 22 *News Chronicle*, 27 September 1956.
- 23 *Manchester Guardian*, 27 September 1956, p. 5.
- 24 *Ibid.*
- 25 Interview with the late Miss P. Preston, 5 November 1988.
- 26 A. Watkins, *The Liberal Dilemma* (Plymouth: MacGibbon and Kee, 1966), p. 82.
- 27 Letter from the late Dr. T. Joyce, *op. cit.*
- 28 Interview with Peter Billenness, 28 July 1998.
- 29 *The Observer*, 30 September 1956, p. 9.
- 30 *The Economist*, 6 October 1956.
- 31 Letter dated 21 June 1993 from the Hon. S. Cawley to author.
- 32 M. Burton, *The Making of Liberal Party Policy 1945–80*, PhD thesis, University of Reading, 1983, p. 150.
- 33 Undated letter from Jo Grimond to Clement Davies; Clement Davies papers, National Library of Wales.
- 34 Based on an unpublished paper dated 30 September 1956 by Douglas Brown, former *News Chronicle* journalist; interview 29 July 1994.
- 35 Interview with Manuela Sykes, 23 August 1988.
- 36 *News Chronicle*, 1 October 1956.



# The 1988 Leadership Campaign

Following this year's leadership election for the Liberal Democrats, *Harriet Smith* looks back to the party's first such election.

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At 3.45pm on Thursday 28 July 1988, Paddy Ashdown MP was declared as first leader of the newly-merged Social & Liberal Democrats. He won 71.9% of the votes cast in the ballot, while his only opponent, Alan Beith MP, polled 28.1%. Turnout was 72% of a total membership of 80,104.<sup>1</sup>

The results of the election for the first President of the party were also announced on the same day. The winner was Ian Wrigglesworth, a senior figure in the former SDP, who beat Des Wilson and Gwynoro Jones, both Liberals. Although this result was closer than the leadership, there was an inevitability to it — eleven years ago, there was a strong feeling that the two most senior figures in the party should represent both old parties, although this feeling was not always shared, particularly among some ex-Liberals.

## Merger and after

The build-up to the leadership campaign began as soon as the party was formally merged in March 1988 — David Steel had made it clear that he did not want to continue as leader after the struggles of the Alliance days, and David Owen had gone off into his own wilderness. At that stage in the party's development, there were still serious divisions between former Liberals and former SDP members.<sup>2</sup>

Potential candidates for the leadership were identified almost immediately. Paddy Ashdown was already well-known in the party before he became an MP in 1983, mainly as a result of the Youth Charter he formulated as a result of his experience of working with unemployed youngsters. His unusual background (for a Liberal) as a soldier and diplomat also attracted attention. Once elected, he quickly made a name for himself as someone who was not

scared to say what he thought, frequently got into trouble as a result of indiscreet conversations with the press, and displayed boundless, indefatigable energy. He was widely recognised within and outwith the party as someone to keep a (wary) eye on.

Alan Beith was a complete contrast — a quiet Methodist lay-preacher, he embodied traditional Liberal values and beliefs and was seen as someone who would guard the Liberals' political integrity. He was also a very strong Parliamentary performer. Other potential candidates talked about within the party and mentioned by the press and media were Russell Johnston, Malcolm Bruce and Robert MacLennan, briefly leader of the SDP at the time of merger. In the end, however, they all decided not to stand and Bruce became Chair of Ashdown's campaign. David Steel, as outgoing Liberal leader, and Jim Wallace, as Chief Whip, stayed strictly neutral throughout the campaign.

The election was an all-member ballot using the alternative vote system. This was a unique method for electing a leader among the major political parties in the UK. In both the Labour and Conservative parties, leaders were (and still are) elected by MPs and other sections of the party using electoral colleges, and in the case of the Conservatives, a complicated series of ballots. The one-member-one-vote system of election used in the Liberal Democrats' 1988 leadership election attracted considerable attention from the press because of this.

As with the 1999 election, there was an artificial 'cold war' period before the serious election period started, but as there was no moratorium on campaigning before the official campaign, the period was used for intensive behind-the-scenes negotiations with potential supporters. Because of the recent merger, it was seen as essential for leadership candidates to

have support from ex-SDP members as well as ex-Liberals. Both teams also spent their time planning their press and media strategies, the timetable for keynote speeches and hustings, and general publicity.

Just before the real contest started, Alan Beith's campaign got off to an unfortunate start when one of his supporters — reputedly Alex Carlile — released a list of fifteen reasons why Ashdown was not fit to be elected. Beith eventually condemned the letter after intervention from David Steel and other senior party members, but the move had introduced a sour note.

## The campaign begins

By the time nominations closed on 24 June 1988, both candidates had attracted a strong list of supporters. Ashdown's key lieutenants were Malcolm Bruce MP, Archy Kirkwood MP, Tim Clement-Jones, Des Wilson (*deus ex machina*) and Alan Leaman. Other MPs who supported Ashdown included Matthew Taylor, Richard Livsey, Ronnie Fearn and Menzies Campbell. Tom McNally, Lindsay Granshaw, Anne Sofer, Denis Sullivan and David Marquand were his high-profile SDP backers, later joined by Roy Jenkins and Shirley Williams.<sup>3</sup>

Beith's team was chaired by Geraint Howells MP; supporters included Cyril Smith, Alex Carlile MP, David Alton MP, Lord (George) Mackie, Richard Wainwright, Annette Penhaligon, Andrew Gifford and Rev. Roger Roberts.<sup>4</sup> The contrast between a radical, cross-party approach to the development of the new Social & Liberal Democrats, and the more traditional approach to perpetuating old-style Liberalism in the new party could not have been more marked.

Ashdown launched his campaign in his constituency, Yeovil, on 1 June. Beith followed the next day, launching his effort from the cottage in Cheshire where he was born. The election process was similar to this year's,

but with a few differences. In 1988, hustings did not begin until after nominations closed, and every member of the party received notification of the date of the hustings. Each hustings — there were seven — had a specific policy area as a theme to which each candidate spoke, followed by general questions. The subjects were:

- Local government/environment
- Constitutional reform
- Health
- Economy and industry
- Education
- Home Affairs
- Foreign Affairs and Defence

This enabled Ashdown and Beith to articulate clearly their policies on these areas, plan press releases and maximise publicity for their policy positions and their views of the party's future. It was an effective way of enabling the candidates to set out their vision for policy development, then giving members a chance to ask questions about their more general concerns.<sup>5</sup>

In addition to the official hustings, other groups in the party held their own. There were Green and Women's hustings (on the same day), and Association of Liberal Councillors', Young Social & Liberal Democrats' and Parliamentary Candidates' conferences. Ashdown

**CAMPAIGN FOCUS**

**PADDY ASHDOWN**  
The Ability to Run — the Willingness to Lead...

**“WE MUST WIN THE BATTLE OF IDEAS”**  
PADDY ASHDOWN MP

Paddy Ashdown launched his campaign in Yeovil on June 1st by giving his enthusiastic supporters a clear message: "Our party can become the party of new ideas and it can change the course of British politics".

As pledges of support flooded into Paddy's campaign headquarters, he was quick to point to the importance of uniting the Party and preparing it for the tasks ahead. "The next general election campaign starts now," he said. "We must push aside the tired and old-fashioned Labour Party. It has failed the cause of reform and must be replaced. And we must go on to become the alternative to the Tories that people will be looking for in the 1990s".

Our ideas of community, liberty, and internationalism will become even more relevant," he said, "as Britain struggles with the legacy of Mrs Thatcher. We must bring the 'green' perspective into the centre of policy thinking. We must create a political ground for Liberalism and Social Democracy and confront the new agenda".

**A Winner . . .**

Paddy outlined his strategy for power in his very first speech of the campaign.

"The balance of power can never be an end in itself. Our real objective is, step by step, to become the Government of Britain. Of course we want to share power but we want to share it with the people, not with the old parties".

Looking to the future, he called for the Party to give a higher priority to building up its membership and to the concerns of young people. He argued that it should be more effective in serving its members, and that MPs should work more closely with the rest of the Party on its campaigns and policy development.

Matthew Taylor, the youngest MP in the Commons, stressed Paddy's qualities for the job. "Our Party needs a winner," he said. "Someone who can give it coherence and take it into power. Paddy is certainly a winner. Look what he's achieved in Yeovil as a constituency MP and in Parliament where he is known in all parties as an energetic and effective speaker. He outshone both Labour and Tory front benches on the Education Bill. Now we must give him an overwhelming mandate to lead our Party."

**... With Vision**

He was backed by Richard Livsey MP, the leader of the Welsh Social and Liberal Democrats. "We need a leader who is excited by political ideas, and not afraid to give a lead; someone who has a vision of the sort of Britain Social and Liberal Democrats are working for, and who can communicate it to the electorate; someone who will be sensitive to feelings and views within our Party and who will be open to new ideas. Paddy Ashdown is such a man. He knows that Britain needs a new direction and a new kind of leadership."

During the campaign, at meetings and events throughout the country, Paddy will meet thousands of members of the Social and Liberal Democrats. It is not just a campaign for the leadership of the party. It is the beginning of the campaign to put our values and policies where they belong — in Government and into action.

**“WHY I'M BACKING PADDY”**

I am delighted to give my wholehearted backing to Paddy Ashdown's campaign to become the new Leader of the Social and Liberal Democrats. By sheer energy and hard work, he built up a highly motivated local team to win Yeovil where he has since consolidated his base.

I know Paddy wants to lead an effective team in and out of Parliament uniting MPs, Candidates, Councillors and the Party organisation into an effective national political unit.

He is increasingly effective in Parliament, leading the opposition to the Education Reform Bill.

There come to know him as a man of high ideas and enormous energy to promote and develop them. Under his leadership I believe our Party will become a force of new and radical ideas aimed at challenging the outdated right and persuading the electorate that we represent the credible alternative to the Tories.

Paddy has the talent, energy and ideas to be an effective and successful leader of our Party.

MALCOLM BRUCE MP

Paddy has combined one of his leadership qualities by the way he has handled the education portfolio — consultative, purposeful, innovative, hard-working and high profile: just what we need!

ANNIE SOFFER

and Beith used these opportunities to make speeches on the future of the party and on policies relevant to the audience. A never-to-be-forgotten hustings was the Liberal Movement's<sup>6</sup> in Wolverhampton, where a large number of radical Liberals (including members of Ashdown's team) got together to make very clear their hostile views about the former SDP. Ashdown was given a hard time whereas Beith was welcomed openly.

In addition to formal and informal hustings, both candidates used invitations from local associations as opportunities to put across their views on various concerns. There was also — as in 1999, and in good

ALDC tradition — leaflet distribution, telephone canvassing and, for the first time in a leadership election, extensive use of the press and media.

## Political differences

A year before the election, Ashdown had already begun to articulate the political creed which he espoused throughout his leadership, and which eventually led to the development of the Joint Cabinet Committee with New Labour in 1997. He began an article in 1987 with the words: 'The realignment of the Left in Britain has always been seen in terms of realign-

ment of political forces. This is a pity, since what we need is a fresh assembly of new ideas.'

He argued throughout the campaign that a united, democratic, *new* party should not be afraid to re-think policies where necessary in order to 'make the message forward looking' (Ashdown's phrase). His underlying theme throughout was that choice and individual freedoms were the entitlement of every citizen, but that with that entitlement must come rights and responsibilities. New thinking should include looking at the social security/benefits/welfare system, putting green politics at the top of the agenda, and using the market wherever possible to promote prosperity. In 1988, these were new, challenging ideas, and were a conscious effort to move forward from the ideas and policies of the Grimond era. This did not mean that the Grimond legacy was rejected; the opposite was true. Grimond's clarity of thinking, new ways of looking at politics in his day, and his determination to succeed were crucial to the development of Ashdown's political philosophy. He felt, however, that the new party was the ideal, and possibly only, opportunity to expand and redirect those ideas in keeping with a different political age. Eleven years ago, those ideas challenged conventional political wisdom; eleven years on, they have become common currency.

Beith's message was based on more traditional Liberal thinking. By nature a less radical figure than Ashdown, he appealed to members who felt threatened by the centrist, professional, non-inclusive approach of the former SDP. Although both candidates shared a fundamental belief in Liberal values, Beith harked back to the former Liberal Party as his vision for the future. Unlike Ashdown, he rejected the idea of overtaking Labour, saying, 'The Leader should set the party the challenge of developing policies for the next general election based on those values and on our traditional belief in achieving a free and fair society, creating a safer planet and sustain-

**FOCUS**

**SOCIAL & LIBERAL DEMOCRATS**

**More & more People are Saying:**

**ALAN BEITH DESERVES TO WIN**

**In Parliament**  
Nancy Seear, Geraint Howells and Sir Cyril Smith are three of Britain's best loved and most respected Parliamentarians. They say Alan Beith deserves your support as a strong voice for the Party in the Commons.  
Sir Cyril says: I consider Alan Beith to be a grafter, a man of the highest integrity.  
Geraint Howells says: Alan Beith listens to people and we can trust him to develop our Party along democratic lines.

**In the Party**  
Alan Beith brings experience and skill to the Leadership race, having taken on many of the most challenging jobs in the Liberals, Alliance and now the Social and Liberal Democrats. People who want a Leader in touch with the membership are supporting Alan Beith. He has already led calls for reform of the Party's membership system following widespread dissatisfaction from old and new members alike.  
Gwyn Griffiths, a Chairman of the MLP, says: During the merger negotiations we saw in Alan someone who listens to ordinary members and reflects their concerns, while others kept safely on the sidelines.  
People from all sides of the Party are backing Alan, including Chris Wainman, Zerbano Gifford, Rachael Pitchford, Julie Horton, Joyce Rose & David Alton.

**In the Regions and Nations**  
Alan Beith's unrivalled commitment to strong nations and regions has won him the support of people like Lord Mackie and Elaine Morris, Gwyn Griffiths, Joan Smith & Neville Phillips, Richard Wainwright and Chris Foote-Wood.

**In the Council Chambers**  
As a Parish and District Councillor, Alan Beith learnt the skills and qualities that will make him a Leader who values consultation and accessibility above all else. He chose local government as the theme of his first hustings speech, in Birmingham, and will make sure our Councillors get the support and prominence they deserve.  
People who want a Leader who understands local government, because he actually served in it, say Alan Beith deserves to win. People like Chris Willmore, John Shipley, David Shutt, Rev. Roger Roberts and Annette Penhaligon are backing Alan.

**With YOUR Support he will Win**

able future and decentralising and devolving power.’

## Relations with Labour

Ashdown wanted to lead a party that, at that time, he genuinely believed could become a natural alternative government to a Labour Party then in a state of chaos. Neil Kinnock was being battered on all sides by opposing forces within the Labour movement, and their credibility had reached an all-time low. In October 1987, Ashdown wrote: ‘... Labour was determined to conduct a major rethink. It was also evident that they intend to move back to the centre ground as fast as their little legs and left-wing will allow. If they succeed, they will at last arrive at where we were twenty years ago. The Labour Party is about to learn again, and painfully, that Thatcherism will not be defeated by defending the past.’

He believed then that as long as Labour was vulnerable, there was a chance that a strong Liberal Democrat party could overtake them at the polls. The key to achieving that was to build what he described as an efficient, modern party of teamwork that could develop and promote radical policies, and not be afraid to take on the new challenges posed by new technology, globalisation and the communication revolution. He wanted to create an effective, coherent party which was capable of achieving real power.

Beith took a different view of how the party could achieve electoral success. At the launch of his campaign, he said: ‘I am not prepared to see the next general election handed on a plate to Mrs Thatcher or her successor while we conduct a battle for second place with the Labour Party ...’ His style was to do things through the party in the traditional Liberal way; he contrasted his experience as Deputy Liberal Leader and former Chief Whip with Ashdown’s political inexperience and impetuous approach. The implication of this was that Ashdown was the risky choice, someone who was likely to take decisions without consulting first.

## Differences in temperaments

This difference in approach and character was picked up by the media. Ashdown was accused of running a slick American-style campaign. One example of this was his campaign Focus, which was distributed to all party members, and contained his formal manifesto. It was a mixture of the traditional and the new, using colour, clear pictures, a specially designed letterhead and eye-catching graphics. Beith’s was a more traditional black-and-white presentation that stressed his political experience and his long history of commitment to the Liberal Party.

Ashdown was also accused of running ahead of the rest of his team, taking decisions and then informing them of what he had decided, and of impromptu unscripted media briefings which left his supporters wondering what was coming next. Beith ran a less flamboyant, more controlled campaign which took few risks and emphasised continuity.

The candidates’ widely differing campaign styles and their basic points of disagreement were epitomised by the debate over the party name. It was an important and potentially divisive issue in the new party, unimaginable though it is today. The long title was the cumbersome Social & Liberal Democrats, which inevitably became ‘the Salads’. Ashdown was happy to adopt the short title ‘Democrats’, not a very popular view among his campaign team, let alone among the party as a whole. Beith — with foresight — preferred Liberal Democrats. This issue was to become one of Ashdown’s biggest problems at his first conference, and continued to haunt him until the party finally (in 1989) became the Liberal Democrats.

A Leader in the *Times* commented: ‘Mr Beith stands very much for the apostolic succession of the old Liberal tradition. His expressed regret at the adoption of the short trade description “Democrats”, and his wish to rescue the word Liberal

for the party’s short title symbolises his attitude ... Mr Ashdown, on the other hand, does not conceal his dislike of harking back and is quite happy with “Democrats” ... He is the risk-takers’ choice, and not much is achieved in politics without risk.’

A less contentious point of difference between the candidates was their handwriting! In an effort to discredit Ashdown, Andrew Gifford (one of Beith’s lieutenants) had examples of their handwriting analysed in the hope that the result would prove that Ashdown was completely unsuited to be leader. Unfortunately for the Beith campaign, it backfired. The graphologist interpreted Ashdown’s writing as being that of a natural leader; Beith’s was that of a cautious, careful person who did not like taking risks and did not have strong leadership potential. Somehow or other this information found its way into various broadsheet diaries and tabloid gossip columns ...

It was ultimately Ashdown’s desire to take risks with the future that ensured his success. His approach was more acceptable to the ex-SDP element (which at that time made up less than one-third of party members) and to those ex-Liberals who feared that a traditional Liberal-style leader would restrict the new party’s appeal to potential new members and voters. The press also played a role in promoting the vision of a radical new party at a time when British politics was in a state of turmoil, with Thatcher increasingly being seen as a threat to the country’s future, the Labour Party at odds with itself, and the nationalists and Greens beginning to attract attention.

## 1988 and 1999 compared

The 1988 campaign was very different from the recent one. People then were looking for something new and exciting, a leader who could drag the new party out of the doldrums created by the Alliance. Ashdown came along at exactly the right moment. In 1999, after eleven years of his lead-

ership, most members were at a loss to know what they wanted. He had succeeded in leading the party to greater heights than for nearly seventy years, had embraced a new style of politics in his relationship with Labour and was without doubt one of the most dynamic politicians in Britain. The new leader would be someone very different to him, and someone who had a very hard act to follow.

The 1999 electoral mechanism was less agile than in 1988: the hustings process was more laborious and began before nominations closed, went on for much longer, and the way it was organised meant that candidates had less opportunity to talk in any detail about where they wanted to take the Lib Dems. This was compounded by having five candidates, only two of whom, Kennedy and Hughes, were serious contenders. Inevitably there was less time for contenders to articulate their visions, and the system whereby each had to answer the same question in turn made it almost impossible for anyone to stand out, or to express radically different views from the others. The debate about the party's future and direction went round in circles, with all the candidates basically agreeing about general policies with few specifics mentioned.

It was also more difficult to engage the media, who assumed it would be a Kennedy walk-over until near the end when Hughes began to gain ground. The media's main concern, unlike in 1988 when they scented a genuine battle between differing philosophies, was on the Liberal Democrat relationship with Labour. The only candidate who might have stimulated a real debate about 'the project' (as the Joint Cabinet Committee became known), was Don Foster who openly espoused closer links with Labour, but he withdrew his candidacy before nominations closed.

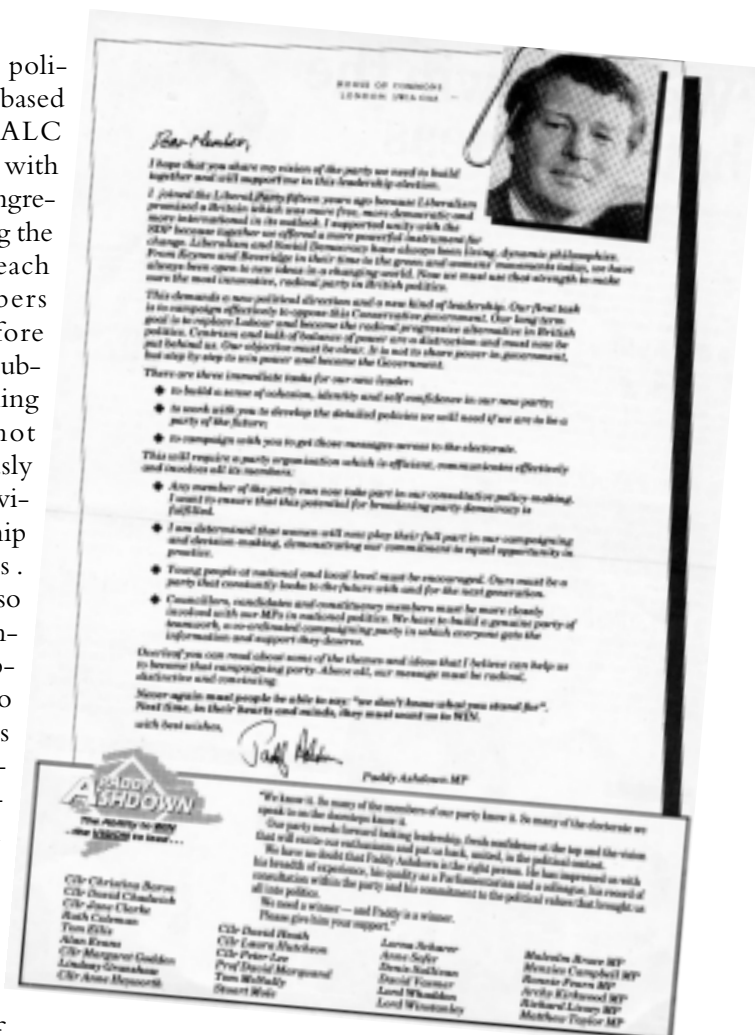
In 1988, Ashdown and his team took the opportunity in his campaign to exploit the Liberal ability to win hearts and minds through

community politics. It was based on classic ALC techniques, with the added ingredient of using the media to reach the members (and therefore the general public), something that had not been seriously tried in previous leadership elections. Ashdown also used the contest as an opportunity to articulate his political vision on issues which were unwilling to tackle — for example reform of the social security system. The campaign was sometimes controversial, and frequently exhausting, but it was an exciting time, as were the sometimes fraught but interesting and ultimately successful years that followed. Where next?

*Harriet Smith was Paddy Ashdown's Press Officer during and after the 1988 leadership election.*

**Notes:**

- 1 The turnout in the 1999 leadership election was 61.6% of a membership of over 85,000. There will be many explanations for this, but the most likely one is that in 1988, members were voting for the new leader of a new party, and the contest was based on principles, ideas and the future of a party that was still reeling from the wreckage of the Alliance. By 1999, the party was established and successful, and the leadership election more of a quasi-presidential contest than a battle about new ideas.
- 2 At the general election the previous year, the Alliance had polled 22.6% of the votes, and had 22 MPs. The campaign had been characterised by difficult exchanges between Owen and Steel, and



- a year later feelings still ran high.
- 3 Tim Clement-Jones was past Chair of the Liberal Party; Des Wilson was an outstanding campaigner for social justice issues; Alan Leaman was co-author of the Youth Charter and an active Young Liberal. Tom McNally (formerly Jim Callaghan's speechwriter), Lindsay Granshaw, Anne Sofer, Denis Robertson Sullivan and David Marquand were leading lights in the SDP.
  - 4 Richard Wainwright was a former Liberal MP, Annette Penhaligon was David Penhaligon MP's widow and an influential figure in the Liberal Party in her own right, Andrew Gifford was previously David Steel's Head of Office, and Rev. Roger Roberts was an eloquent, influential, Welsh Liberal.
  - 5 In the 1999 hustings, each candidate was given five minutes to explain in general terms why they would be the best leader, and then another five minutes to answer questions. After a short break, three or four pre-prepared questions were asked of all the candidates in turn.
  - 6 The Liberal Movement was established after merger to campaign for Liberalism within the SLD. It lasted for about four years as an effective voice in the new party.

# Lessons for Leaders

*Robert Ingham* considers the options open to Charles Kennedy and draws some lessons from the historical record.

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Now that Charles Kennedy has eased his feet comfortably into Paddy Ashdown's shoes, he has time to reflect on how best to lead the Liberal Democrats into the next general election and beyond. The experiences of his predecessors may offer some guidance about the dos and don'ts of the job, the route he should seek to take and the pitfalls he might encounter.

Firstly, Mr Kennedy will not need telling that, for the Liberal Democrats as much as for its predecessor parties, relationships with other parties matter more than almost anything else. Relations with Labour have long been a thorny subject. At first, Liberal leaders were able to delegate the task of dealing with the developing Labour movement. Before 1900 the key issue for Liberals was how to square collectivist ideas with mid-Victorian laissez-faire Liberalism. Joseph Chamberlain tackled this agenda head on and, after he left the Liberal Party over Irish Home Rule, a number of young Liberal thinkers and politicians — including Green, Ritchie, Hobhouse and David Lloyd George — were able to devise and articulate a 'New Liberalism' of social reform and economic freedom. After 1900, Herbert Gladstone, Liberal Chief Whip, offered the new Labour Party the famous pact which helped reduce Tory strength in many areas previously impervious to Liberal advances, and which allied a considerable section of the Parliamentary Labour Party to the Liberal Government.

Since the First World War, however, the relationship between the Labour and Liberal Parties has been of first importance to Liberal leaders. During the 1923 Parliament, Asquith gave the minority Labour Government unenthusiastic support but in the 1924 election appeared to describe the Labour Party as the 'common enemy' of both the Liberal and Conservative Parties. Trapped between the two millstones of capital and labour, right and left, the Liberals were crushed in 1924. Jo Grimond faced the prospect of offering Liberal support to a minority Labour administration during the 1964

Parliament, hoping that Liberal teeth would again sink into the real meat of power. Grimond raised the prospect of a realignment of the left in British politics to form a non-socialist alternative to the Tories, built on the Liberal Party but incorporating the right wing of the Labour Party and, for good measure, left-wing Tories. Grimond was perhaps the first Liberal leader to acknowledge that the Liberal and Labour Parties had emerged from broadly similar stock and were on the same side, that of progress and reform, in opposition to the Tories. But realignment was a vision, not a practical call to arms, and Labour's hundred-seat majority in the 1966 election put paid to Grimond's ambitions.

In many ways, the realignment Grimond sought has come and gone. The SDP, from which Mr Kennedy has sprung, was the vehicle by which some members of the right wing of the Labour Party joined forces with the Liberal Party. Tony Blair's Labour Party perhaps resembles the non-socialist progressive party which Grimond called for, especially in Scotland where the Labour and Liberal Democrat parties govern in coalition together. Paddy Ashdown succeeded in ensuring that the rise of Blair did not spell the end of the Liberal Democrats without clearly defining how Labour and the Liberal Democrats should now relate to each other. In considering the way ahead, Mr Kennedy must be mindful not only

David Lloyd George





Jo Grimond

of Asquith's experience in 1923–24, but also of David Steel's experiment — the Lib-Lab Pact. Although successful in terms of stabilising the political and economic situation in 1977–78, too few specifically Liberal achievements arose from the Pact either to convince Liberal activists to continue with it or to persuade the electorate to return more Liberal MPs to Parliament.

Although relations with the Labour Party are important, the Liberal Party's position with respect to other parties must not be overlooked. For thirty years from the mid 1920s to the mid 1950s the Liberal Party seemed closer in terms of its outlook, policies and leadership to the Conservative Party than to Labour. This was particularly true of the immediate post-war period, when Lord Woolton encouraged the creation of joint

Jeremy Thorpe



Conservative-Liberal constituency associations to counter the socialist menace and when pacts were offered and accepted in Bolton, Huddersfield, Colne Valley and elsewhere. Clement Davies' greatest achievement as Liberal leader was to refuse a cabinet post in Churchill's 1951 government. Had he accepted, it is difficult to see how the Liberal Party could have survived. This is a precedent Mr Kennedy will need to examine carefully. Other Liberal leaders have considered coalitions with the Conservative Party at national level, not least Jeremy Thorpe in 1974. The new Liberal Democrat leader might find it difficult to find points of agreement with the present Conservative leadership and periods of Liberal/Conservative government, particularly under Lloyd George after 1918, are scarcely propitious. The new leader will be mindful that, even while pursuing an agenda of cooperation with the Labour Party, Liberal Democrat MPs and candidates need the votes of Conservative supporters in many constituencies. Mr Kennedy will soon realise, if he has not done so already, that the Liberal Democrats continue to operate between the Tory and Labour millstones.

Now that devolution is a reality, Mr Kennedy, and his Welsh and Scottish counterparts, will need to look carefully at the relationship between the Liberal Democrats and the nationalist parties. The rise of Welsh nationalism has sapped Liberal strength in much of north and west Wales and now the nationalists are making inroads in the valleys of the south. Can the Liberal Democrats challenge the rise of the nationalists in Wales, or is the party doomed to sit on the margins of Welsh politics? And in Scotland, can the Liberal Democrats break out of their areas of traditional strength, including winning support from the SNP? The Liberal Party's attitude to the SNP was for many years ambivalent, with Jo Grimond in particular seeing opportunities for Liberal/SNP collaboration. Mr Kennedy is well placed to define a Liberal Democrat approach to nationalism in Scotland

and, by extension, to Wales and England as well.

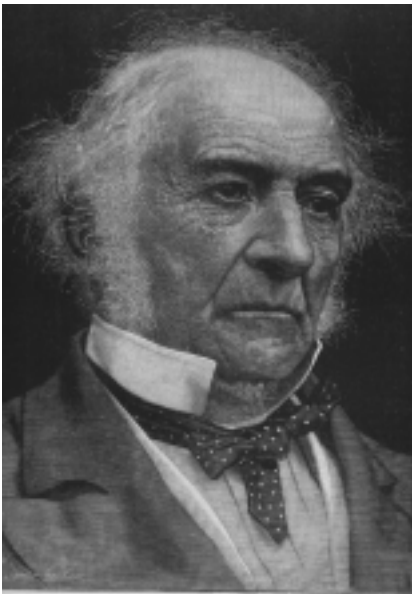
It is perhaps the tragedy of Liberal politics since 1920 that strategy has often seemed to matter more than policy. The most attractive Liberal policies down the years have often been pinched by the two larger parties, and commentators have concentrated not on the arguments advanced by Liberal leaders, but on how the Liberals might react to a hung parliament. Mr Kennedy will surely need no lessons about this, having contested the 1983 and 1987 elections when the hung parliament question bedevilled the Alliance campaigns.

Some Liberal leaders have tended to distance themselves from policy formation. The battles within the Liberal Party about the implementation of the policy of industrial co-ownership and the extent to which the state should support agricultural markets went on during the 1950s virtually unchecked by Clement Davies, for instance. Jo Grimond, however, recruited prominent academics and others to comprehensively rewrite Liberal policy in the early 1960s and personally devised Liberal policy on the nuclear deterrent. Paddy Ashdown stated at the outset of his leadership that he wished to move on from the policies of the Grimond era and succeeded, in particular, in making prominent the Liberal Democrats' pledge to increase income tax to improve the education system.

David Steel







William Ewart Gladstone

Electors do, sometimes, care about policies, but activists care more. Like David Steel before him, Mr Kennedy is the members', not the activists', choice as leader and he must appreciate the importance of keeping the party's activists on his side. The reception given to Jo Grimond at the Liberal Assembly in 1956 helped persuade Clement Davies to retire in favour of his younger colleague. Grimond was popular with Liberal members for

Paddy Ashdown



his charisma, oratory and intellectual approach to politics but was criticised by some activists for being out of touch with the grassroots, particularly local councillors. Several Liberal leaders have been criticised for appearing to jeopardise the independence of the Party — Ashdown, Steel, Sinclair and Lloyd George in particular. SDP leaders, mostly keen to work with the Liberal Party and suspicious of the power of activists in the Labour Party, tended to emphasise their responsibilities to the party's members, rather than to its activists. These influences from Mr Kennedy's SDP background may be the source of conflict with some Liberal Democrat activists in the years ahead.

Every Liberal leader since 1935 has spent about a decade in the job. One — Archibald Sinclair — lost the leadership as a result of losing his parliamentary seat, something Mr Kennedy obviously needs to avoid doing. Most of the rest have retired at times of their own choosing, although Jeremy Thorpe was forced to resign by revelations about his private life and resulting pressure from parliamentary colleagues. SDP leaders changed more quickly. Roy Jenkins' resignation was assisted by the presence of a younger, more dynamic colleague with Cabinet experience on the SDP benches — David Owen. Mr Kennedy need not fear that any of his fellow Liberal Democrat parliamentarians will challenge his position. He saw off four in the recent leadership contest and some of his most able colleagues — Ashdown, Beith, Campbell — are now approaching retirement. Indeed, one of Mr Kennedy's greatest challenges will be to successfully avoid the perception that the Liberal Democrats are a one-man band, something which his predecessors generally failed to achieve. The new leader might benefit from studying the circumstances of Jeremy Thorpe's resignation closely, however. Criticisms about Thorpe's management of the party and strategic thinking influenced those senior colleagues who chose not to stand by him when the Scott affair broke. Al-



Roy Jenkins

though Mr Kennedy will, in all likelihood, avoid damaging factional fighting within his party, Liberal politicians are no more inclined to tolerate failure or mismanagement than their Conservative and Labour counterparts.

Finally, Liberal leaders have long championed unfashionable causes. Gladstone championed the Afghans, Bulgarians and Armenians. Campbell-Bannerman stood up to the jingoists during the Boer War. Samuel and Sinclair lent support to the League of Nations and advocated rearmament rather than appeasement. Davies campaigned for Seretse Khama, Thorpe fought (almost literally at one stage) for minorities in Africa and Ashdown backed giving full British passports to the Hong Kong Chinese. That is not to say that Liberal leaders have ever shown much interest in the single-issue advocates often attracted to the Liberal Party — the land taxers, temperance reformers and Cornish nationalists. The main task of Liberal leaders was often to persuade electors that the Liberal Party was a credible, national force, with something relevant to say about the most significant contemporary problems facing the UK, rather than a small party, invisible or insignificant in much of the country, and obsessed with issues of marginal importance. This will remain a key task for Mr Kennedy in the years ahead.

*Robert Ingham is a historical writer and a regular contributor to the Journal.*

# The *Dictionary of Liberal Quotations*

Duncan Brack and Robert Ingham introduce the Liberal Democrat History Group's latest publication.

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Who said that 'Liberals are to be the oxen to drag the Labour wain over the rough roads of Parliament ... and ... when there is no further use for them, they are to be slaughtered. That is the Labour idea of cooperation'? Simon Hughes, campaigning to become leader of the Liberal Democrats? John Prescott, welcoming Charles Kennedy's election? In fact, this was David Lloyd George's description of the role of the Liberal Party during the 1923 Parliament, when Asquith's Liberals helped prop up the minority Labour administration. This is just one example of how the key themes of British politics recur from one generation to the next, drawn from the pages of a new publication — the *Dictionary of Liberal Quotations*.

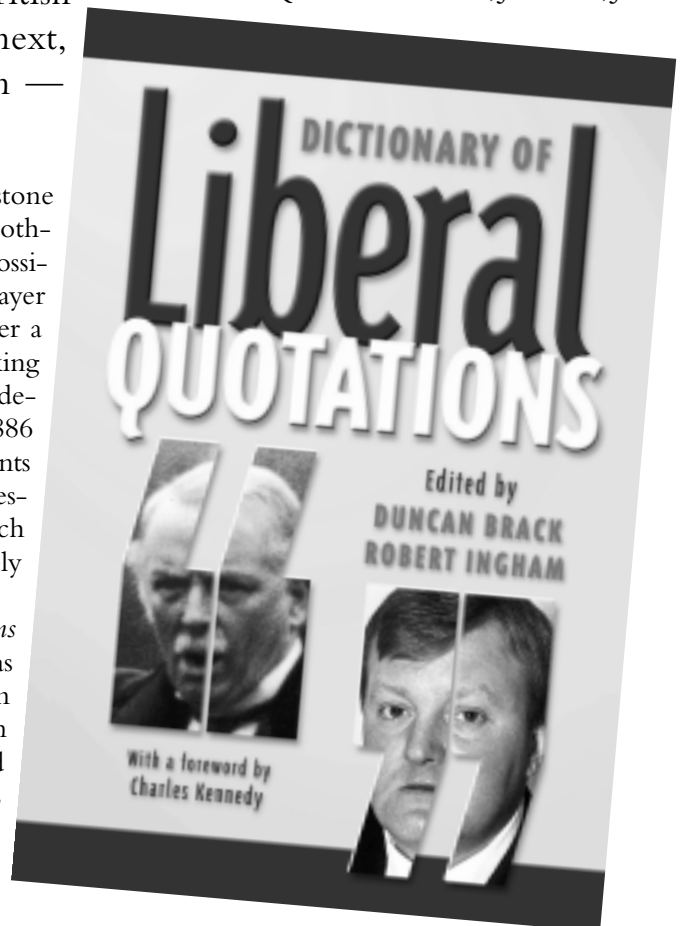
To give another example, when Gladstone wrote in 1887: 'one prayer absorbs all others: Ireland, Ireland, Ireland,' could he possibly have envisaged that the same prayer would be on the lips of politicians over a century later? How right he was, looking back, to declare when winding up the debate on the Home Rule Bill in June 1886 that this was 'one of those golden moments in our history' to resolve the Irish question, 'one of those opportunities which may come and may go, but which rarely returns'.

The *Dictionary of Liberal Quotations* also illustrates how political debate has changed over the years. William Harcourt, leader of the Liberal Party in the closing years of the last century, said in response to the increased emphasis being placed on social policy: 'we are all socialists now', words on which many members of the present govern-

ment might choke. And surely Charles Kennedy will not echo the appeal for recruits launched by a predecessor, Clement Davies: 'I have nothing to offer materially, no position, no career, and certainly not safety. I can only offer faith, and with that faith I demand a sacrifice'.

As well as including the most memorable quotes from Liberal Democrat, Liberal, Social Democrat and Whig politicians, from Charles Kennedy to Charles James Fox, William Gladstone to Shirley Williams, the *Dictionary of Liberal Quotations* will be an important source of reference on the development of liberal and social democratic thought.

Quotes from Paine, Jefferson, J. S.



I am for peace,  
retrenchment and  
reform, the watchword  
of the great Liberal  
Party thirty years ago.  
*John Bright*

You know what they  
say: if God had been  
a Liberal, we wouldn't  
have had the ten  
commandments. We'd  
have had the ten  
suggestions.  
*Christopher Bigsby  
and Malcolm  
Bradbury*

All the world over, I  
will back the masses  
against the classes.  
*W. E. Gladstone*

Faith, hope and  
canvassing — and  
the greatest of these  
is canvassing.  
*Frank Worman*

In 1929 the wise, far-  
seeing electors of my  
native Hereford sent  
me to Westminster  
and, two years later,  
the lousy bastards  
kicked me out.  
*Frank Owen*

Mill, Hobhouse, Keynes, Beveridge, Locke, Green, Tawney and Dahrendorf feature extensively. Many quotations from opponents of the Liberal Democrats and its predecessor parties have been included. While the writings of Lishman and Greaves and Hain explain the theoretical underpinnings of community politics, quotations from Peter Tatchell and Alan Clark show what opponents of the Liberal Democrats think of the strategy in practice. Everyone knows that the SDP aimed to 'break the mould' of British politics: the *Dictionary of Liberal Quotations* explains the origin of the phrase, and includes Margaret Thatcher's uncharacteristically witty response.

Over 200 pages of quotations from over 600 politicians, thinkers, academics, writers and others are included in the *Dictionary of Liberal Quotations*, which has been put together by members of the Liberal Democrat History Group. Charles Kennedy and Robert Maclennan have written forewords and, like last year's *Dictionary of Liberal Biography*, the *Dictionary of Liberal Quotations* is published in hardback by Politico's Publications and will be available from September, priced £18 plus £2.60 postage and packing. Subscribers to the *Journal* benefit from a special offer price of £14.40; an order form is enclosed with this issue.

The two companion volumes, the *Dictionary of Labour Quotations* and the *Dictionary of Conservative Quotations*, will be published at the same time, and will also be available for £18 each (£45 for all three bought together). *Journal* readers will of course be pleased to hear that the *Dictionary of Liberal Quotations* contains the largest number of quotes! This important source of reference is sure to be popular with Liberal Democrats, and also with those with a general interest in the history of the party, its predecessors and with liberal and social democrat thought, for many years to come.

*Duncan Brack and Robert Ingham are the editors of the Dictionary of Liberal Quotations.*

Go back to your  
constituencies and  
prepare for  
government!  
*David Steel*

The only part of the  
conduct of anyone for  
which he is amenable  
to society is that which  
concerns others. In the  
part which merely  
concerns himself, his  
independence is, of  
right, absolute. Over  
himself, over his own  
body and mind, the  
individual is sovereign.  
*John Stuart Mill*

As usual the Liberals  
offer a mixture of  
sound and original  
ideas. Unfortunately  
none of the sound  
ideas is original and  
none of the original  
ideas is sound.  
*Harold Macmillan*

Some men see things  
as they are and ask  
themselves: 'why?' I  
dream of things that  
never have been and  
ask myself: 'why not?'  
*Aeschylus*

# Collecting Political Cigarette Cards

*Graem Peters describes an unusual form of political activism.*

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Almost all political cigarette cards were produced between 1900 and 1930; after 1930, very little exists of any interest. Virtually every single cigarette card printed is known and its existence recorded in catalogues. They usually formed part of a particular named set; there are only a few sets of politicians, but the better known politicians frequently appeared in 'general interest' sets.

Of the political sets, the first and perhaps the best to appear was issued by Ogden's under their 'Guinea Gold' brand in 1900. These are relatively small for cigarette cards. They have a black and white glossy photograph of the politician on the front, with nothing on the back; the name is typed at the foot of the photo, noting his constituency, if an MP. There are sixty politicians in this set, known in the catalogue as 'Politicians Base D'. About twenty Liberals feature, including Campbell-Bannerman, Asquith, Rosebery, Herbert Gladstone, Burns, Grey, Fowler, Broadhurst, Sir William Harcourt, Tweedmouth, Kimberley and Labouchere. Many of the cards are quite common, but a number are hard to come across. At £60, the set is remarkably good value; individual cards may be picked up for around £1. Ogden's also produced a number of similar cards as part of general interest sets.

Murray's Cigarettes issued a set of fifty 'Prominent Politicians' in 1906. About half are Liberals, including Campbell-Bannerman, Lloyd George, Asquith, Herbert Gladstone, Lewis Harcourt, Middlebrook, Macnamara, Birrell, Burns, Grey, Haldane, Churchill, Russell, Fowler and Buxton. These are black and white matt photographs of slightly larger than average card size. It is virtually impossible to come across a complete set nowadays, and each card will probably cost about £18. The set was reprinted in 1909 with a slight amendment to the backs of the cards; since six of the original MPs had left the House, six new subjects were

added to replace them. The second set is collectable, though harder to come across than the Ogden's set and thus more expensive, at £120 for the set, with individual cards available at around £2.50.

Carreras issued an attractive set of fifty 'Notable MPs' in 1929. These were full-length coloured caricatures of leading politicians prior to the 1929 general election. Lloyd George, Simon, Runciman, Beauchamp and Macpherson were included, together with several prominent former Liberals such as Wedgwood Benn, Hilton Young, Wedgwood and Churchill. The backs of the cards contain a potted biography. Two different sizes of card exist, standard and extra wide. Both sets are fairly common and reasonably priced, at about £40 for the set and around £1 for each card.

R. & J. Hill produced a set of thirty cards entitled 'Our Empire' in 1930. This set featured a handful of royals, members of the Labour Cabinet, and the premiers from the leading Empire countries. The backs of the cards contain a potted biography on each. As with the Carreras 'Notable MPs', the cards came in two sizes. Pictorially, the set is not particularly attractive; the sepia matt photographs have been over-edited, and do not look very natural. The set, at £10, is very cheap and relatively common.

A better set of Labour politicians was produced by Godfrey Phillips, entitled 'The

Lloyd George in 1906





Balfour in 1900

members of the first Labour Government. The backs of the cards contain a potted biography. These are quite rare and, at £50 for the set, a bit pricey.

1924 Cabinet'. This is a set of twenty-five black and white photographs of the

Finally, Carreras produced a set of twenty-seven British Prime Ministers in 1928. This is a set of glossy black and white portraits of the more significant PMs since Walpole, up to Ramsay Macdonald. The backs of the cards contain a potted biography — a visually attractive set which is reasonably priced at £40, though hard to come across.

There are other sets which contain politicians in reasonable numbers: Ardath, 'Empire Personalities'; Ardath, 'Famous Scots'; Adkin 'Notabilities'; Hignett, 'Modern Statesmen'; Wills, 'Vanity Fair Series'; Imperial Tobacco Company of Canada, 'Notabilities 1917'; Ogden's, 'Gen-

eral Interest 1900'; and John Player, 'Straight Line Caricatures'.

Often antiques fairs will include a dealer in cigarette cards. Better still are collectors' fairs at which a number of cigarette card dealers will be present alongside dealers in stamps, postcards etc. Cigarette card collectors' clubs will occasionally organise cigarette card fairs. Collections can be held in special loose-leaf albums; some collectors will chose to have their sets specially framed, and hang them on the wall. Their value will increase over time.

*Graem Peters is a member of the Liberal Democrat History Group.*

## 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.*

**Liberal policy towards Austria-Hungary, 1905–16.** *Andrew Gardner, 22 Birdbrook House, Popham Road, Islington, London N1 8TA; agardner@ssees.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.*

**Defections of north-east Liberals to the Conservatives, c.1906–1935.** 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.*

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

**Crouch End or Hornsey Liberal Association or Young Liberals in the 1920s and 1930s;** especially any details of James Gleeson or Patrick Moir, who are believed to be Chairman. *Tony Marriott, Flat A, 13 Coleridge Road, Crouch End, London N8 8EH.*

**The Liberal Party and foreign and defence policy, 1922–88;** of particular interest is the 1920s and '30s, and the possibility of interviewing anyone involved in formulating party foreign and defence policies. *Dr R. S. Grayson, 8 Cheltenham Avenue, Twickenham TW1 3HD.*

**Archibald Sinclair and the Liberal Party 1935–45.** Sources, particularly for Sinclair's Air Ministry period (1940–45), the reorganisation of the party in 1936 and the 1945 election, needed. *Ian Hunter, 9 Defoe Avenue, Kew, London TW9 4DL; Ian\_Hunter@ATKEARNEY.com.*

**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, 42 Richmond Road, Gillingham, Kent ME7 1LN.*

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

**The Young Liberal Movement 1959–1985;** including in particular relations with the leadership, and between NLYL and ULS. *Carrie Park, 89 Coombe Lane, Bristol BS9 2AR; clp25@hermes.cam.ac.uk.*

**The political and electoral strategy of the Liberal Party 1970–79.** Individual constituency papers, and contact with 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.*

# Biographies

## Thomas Edward Ellis (1859–1899)

J. Graham Jones

Thomas Edward Ellis was born on 16 February 1859 at Cynlas, Cefnnddwysarn, near Bala, Merionethshire. He was educated at the Llandderfel British School and at the Bala Grammar School where his contemporaries included D. R. Daniel (who became a lifelong friend), O. M. Edwards and J. Puleston Jones.

He received a remarkable higher education for a Welsh nonconformist of the late nineteenth century. He spent the years 1875–79 at the young University College of Wales, Aberystwyth, and matriculated at New College, Oxford, in 1880, where he was active in the Essay Society, and was active in a wide range of social and political activities. He graduated in the Oxford honours school of modern history in 1884.

Ellis refused an academic post at the UCW, Aberystwyth, and became fully absorbed in his journalistic activities, contributing regular columns to the *South Wales Daily News* under the *nom de plume* 'Cuneglas'. Articles penned by him also appeared regularly in a number of North Wales newspapers. At the same time he spent a year as a tutor to the family of John Cory of St Mellons before in 1885 securing appointment as personal secretary to Sir John Brunner, a Swiss and the founder of the chemical company Brunner-Mond in the north of England. In December of the same year Brunner was elected the Liberal MP for the Northwich division of Cheshire.

In July 1886 Ellis was himself elected the Liberal MP for his native Merionethshire. He soon became an astute parliamentarian and a conscientious MP. From the out-

set of his political career he took an abiding interest in Welsh affairs, and was instrumental in securing the passage of the Welsh Intermediate Education Act of 1889. The following winter, when visiting Egypt, he was stricken with typhoid fever, and was given a national testimonial by the people of Wales on his return in 1890. Thereafter Ellis never fully regained his health, and his weakness was aggravated by a tendency to exert himself overmuch. He played a part in the activities of the *Cymru Fydd* movement, and was an admirer of the continental nationalism of Mazzini and Kossuth. His appeals for a legislative assembly for Wales fell largely on deaf ears, both at Westminster and within the Principality.

When the Liberals under Gladstone returned to power in 1892, the government's majority was only forty, thus rendering vital the loyalty of the thirty-one Liberal MPs from Wales. The Prime Minister offered Ellis the position of Junior Whip. After a great deal of perplexed heart searching, and in the face of intense opposition on the part of some of his Welsh colleagues, he resolved to accept the position. Although he was thereafter to some extent hamstrung by his acceptance of this official position within the Liberal Party, Ellis played an impor-

tant role in helping to secure the appointment of a Royal Commission (as opposed to a mere Select Committee) on Welsh Land, and in promoting bills for the Disestablishment of the Church of England in Wales. He himself proved to be one of the most effective witnesses before the Land Commission.

In 1894 a new Liberal Prime Minister, Lord Rosebery, against all expectations promoted Ellis to be the party's Chief Whip. In his new position he faced the 'Revolt of the Four' Welsh MPs against the conspicuous failure of the government to give priority to Disestablishment in its legislative programme. He played a part in the framing and passage of the 1894 Parish Councils Act. In the general election of 1895 the feuding Liberal Party was decimated at the polls, and in the autumn of 1896 Ellis' confidant Lord Rosebery resigned as the leader.

For the brief period of his life which remained, T. E. Ellis was to be free from the cares of office. His Welsh interests had increasingly recaptured his imagination during these years. He was especially interested in Welsh education, and was active in the affairs of the University of Wales, the Central Welsh Board, the Old Students' Association of the UCW, Aberystwyth, and the Guild of Graduates of the University. An erudite, cultured, attractive personality, Ellis edited the first volume of *Gweithiau*



*Morgan Llwyd o Wynedd* (London, 1899), a task which was later furthered by his brother-in-law J. H. Davies, Cwrt-mawr.

On 1 June 1898 Ellis married Annie J. Davies, the daughter of R. J. Davies of Cwrt-mawr, Llangeitho. The occasion was a major society event in Wales.

After suffering years of intermittent severe ill-health, Ellis died at Cannes on 5 April 1899, at the age of forty. His son, Thomas Iorwerth Ellis (1899–1970), was born eight months after his death. His widow, Mrs Annie J. Hughes-Griffiths, survived him un-

til 1944. Ellis was buried at Cefnddwyssarn, and a memorial column, the result of public subscription, was unveiled by fellow Liberal politician John Morley in the High Street at Bala in October 1903. Another adorns the quadrangle of the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth. A volume of his *Speeches and Addresses* saw the light of day in 1912.

T. I. Ellis published a two-volume biography of his father in Welsh in 1944 and 1948, while an English biography by Mr Neville Masterman, *The Forerunner: the Dilemmas of Tom Ellis* became available in 1972.

thinking for the post-Great War era. The school's leading figures included the historian and passionate Liberal activist Ramsay Muir and the Manchester businessman and city councillor Ernest Simon.

The second stream was the growing ascendancy within the Liberal Party of David Lloyd George, who succeeded Asquith as leader in October 1926. He had already organised some important policy studies, paid for by his infamous 'funds'. These included *Coal and Power* (1924), which promoted a 'middle way' between private ownership and nationalisation of the coal industry; *The Land and the Nation* (1925), on agriculture; and *The Towns and the Land* (1925) on the better use of urban land. Interestingly, Richard Grayson pointed out that this ascendancy happened largely by default. Asquith had lost his Paisley seat in November 1924, suffered a stroke in 1926 and died in 1928. There was an Asquithian faction, the Liberal Council, but it was largely ineffective.

The Liberal Industrial Inquiry was established in July 1926. Substantial contributors included the Liberal Summer School stalwarts Muir and Ernest Simon, the economist Hubert Henderson, Lloyd George's former private secretary Philip Carr, Charles Masterman and the Asquithians Herbert Samuel and John Simon. The editor of *The Economist*, Walter Layton, chaired the Inquiry. But the two most influential authors were Lloyd George himself and the former Treasury official, John Maynard Keynes. Keynes wanted to develop 'new wisdom for a new age' and strongly believed that tackling unemployment would require more than reliance on market forces. He and Lloyd George were at one in opposing the Gold Standard and, unlike the Asquithians, criticising the actions of the Baldwin government in the run-up to the General Strike. The product of their endeavours, more than 500 pages in length, was written in a dense style that makes for difficult reading; indeed, Keynes himself was highly critical of the pa-

# Reports

## Did the Yellow Book spell the end of Asquithian Liberalism?

Evening Meeting, 12 April,  
with John Grigg and Richard Grayson  
*Report by Neil Stockley*

In February 1928, the Report of the Liberal Industrial Inquiry — *Britain's Industrial Future*, generally known as the 'Yellow Book' — was published. 'By common consent,' Roy Douglas has written, 'it represented the most thoroughgoing set of proposals on the field of industry and employment which was advanced by any organisation whatever in the post-war period.'<sup>1</sup> Robert Skidelsky has called it: 'an exhaustive and far-penetrating survey of the British post-war economy, with far-reaching proposals for government planning, well in advance of anything in existence at the time.'<sup>2</sup> On 12 April, Dr John Grigg, the biographer of Lloyd George, and Dr Richard Grayson, Director of the Centre for Reform, led a stimulating discussion on the Yellow Book's implications for Asquithian Liberalism.

John Grigg began by outlining the genesis of the Yellow Book. It was the product of two confluent streams

of 1920s' Liberal activity. The first was the Liberal Summer Schools, which sought to promote new Liberal

per's wordiness and its tendency to excessively blow the Liberal trumpet.<sup>3</sup>

Richard Grayson summarised the Yellow Book's analysis of the problems of British industry. These were: high unemployment ('the gravest of our social maladies'), low wages, a depression in staple industries, inefficiency, immobility in the labour force (caused by such factors as a housing shortage) and an excess of UK investments abroad. The Yellow Book proposed public boards as a new way of running public concerns and new controls over monopolies. It sought to expand the domestic economy, with a programme of government-led investment in home markets, the establishment of an Economic General Staff and coordinated investment by public concerns. (Still, as John Grigg made clear, apart from supporting the nationalisation of coal royalties, it did not propose a significant expansion of public ownership.) The report also contained policies to improve the lot of trade unions and employees. These included a commission to review trade union law and a special council to review pay, conditions and relevant legislation in each industry.

The Yellow Book set out new policies to tackle poverty and unemployment. Minimum wages would be set, on an industry, rather than a national, basis. Responsibility for poor relief would be moved from the state to local authorities, in part to take the financial burdens off industry. Crucially, the report linked policies for national development with the attack on unemployment and poverty. It proposed a programme of investment in roads, housing, electricity, waterways and docks and a new emphasis on training young people working in industry.

As John Grigg said, however, that for all the document's innovation, there is much evidence of 'compromise and fudge' on vital points. This is no more evident than in its explanation of how the bold proposals would be paid for. Whilst it was clear that any economies required should come from cuts in defence spending, the Yellow Book took no posi-

tion on the desirable level of taxation. Grigg cited a clumsily written passage that warned of the negative consequences for productivity of using higher taxation to finance an improved social infrastructure while at the same time advocating policies to promote a more equal distribution of wealth, in order to build a truly democratic society and reduce class tensions!

Richard Grayson argued that although the Yellow Book represented 'a radical advance in the journey of Liberalism', this did not involve a total break with the ideas and methods which Asquith and his colleagues had adopted whilst they were in government. He explained this by defining the three phases of Asquithian Liberalism.

The first was Asquith's political roots, in which a strong commitment to free trade loomed large. This brought him to the forefront of Liberal politics during Joseph Chamberlain's tariff reform campaign in 1903. By producing budget surpluses in a free-trade economy when he was Chancellor, Asquith did as much as anyone else to defeat the arguments for tariffs.

The second phase was the Liberalism he put into practice as Prime Minister from 1908. This period included the People's Budget, which featured graduated taxes as a redistributive measure, and the 1911 National Insurance Act, a major plank in the embryonic welfare state. In the wake of the Great War, such ideas became outmoded as conscription became the litmus issue of Liberal politics and, later, the rival claims to leadership of Asquith and Lloyd George fatally split the party. The Liberal Party then organised itself around Gladstonian ideas of free trade and financial retrenchment — paying off debts and reducing taxes. In some senses this third phase of Asquithian Liberalism revived the first. Therefore, according to Dr Grayson, by the early 1920s the Yellow Book could be compared against two versions of Asquithian Liberalism — what it had been in its prime, and what it had become.

He contended that the Yellow Book can be seen as a continuation from the second, pre-Great War version of Asquithian Liberalism. Both were firmly based on the New Liberalism, which essentially argued that liberty was threatened not merely by the lack of political freedom but also by poverty and dire inequalities in society — which created a lack of freedom. They charged government with the responsibility for tackling this problem. The New Liberalism represented a move from a party that believed in negative liberty (government could do best by doing less) towards positive liberty (government needed to be more active to promote liberty).

Dr Grayson argued convincingly that the Yellow Book was a radical development of Asquithian Liberalism, in that it represented a view of society in which interests could be balanced in corporatist structures. Whereas Liberals had traditionally thought of people as individuals, groups loomed much larger in the schemes put forward by the Yellow Book. Further, Liberals came to be motivated as never before by anger about unemployment. In doing so, they spoke of the 'defects of the industrial system', positioning themselves as anti-market. The Yellow Book was more conscious of the belief in positive liberty than Asquithians had been. However, Dr Grayson may have gone a doctrine too far with his claim that the Yellow Book placed the Liberal Party 'firmly on social democratic territory'. It made no firm commitment to redistributive taxation and, understandably for a document that was supposed to be about industry and employment, contained no detailed proposals to reform social services or, indeed, to establish a welfare state.

As for the consequences of the Yellow Book, it did not help the electoral fortunes of the Liberal Party. The proposals on national development were developed and set out in a shorter pamphlet, *We Can Conquer Unemployment*. This became the basis of the Liberal Party's 1929 general election campaign. John



Grigg showed how poorly the Liberals fared in that election. The Liberal vote rose by two million from 1924 but the enfranchisement of women under thirty had added six million new voters to the electoral register. Further, the Liberals put up many more candidates than in 1924. The party's average share of the vote in the seats it contested fell from 31% to 28%.

In any case, to quote John Grigg, the Yellow Book 'cut little ice with the general public'. People were more concerned with the party's overall 'image' and its credibility as a prospective government. These were based mainly on the deep divisions the party had suffered over recent years and the dubious reputation of Lloyd George.<sup>4</sup> Skidelsky believes that, although the Liberals had the radical programme and the Conservatives and Labour both offered 'safety first', voters saw the election 'as a fight between the 'capitalist' parties on the one hand and the 'Labour and Socialist Party' on the other'.<sup>5</sup> Still, the Yellow Book may have helped the Liberal Party to survive as a political force. Richard Grayson suggested that there was still considerable public interest in the party during the 1920s — the report provided both a focus for that latent support and evidence of the Liberals' continuing vitality and relevance. It also served an internal purpose, providing a source of motivation for candidates and activists.

According to John Grigg, the publication of the Yellow Book brought a 'bemused, bored' reaction from the political class. Nevertheless, many of its contents would be central to British politics for more than fifty years. Their significance went beyond the usual confines of the 'right' and 'left'. The report's influence can be clearly seen in Oswald Mosley's famous 'Memorandum' to the Cabinet of May 1930, calling on his Labour colleagues to tackle unemployment by setting up a state finance corporation and mounting a central public works programme.<sup>6</sup> It can also be seen in *The Middle Way*, 'a comprehensive statement of the

case for a managed economy'<sup>7</sup> published in 1938 by the dissident Conservative MP Harold Macmillan.

John Grigg argued that the Yellow Book prefigured 'Butskellism', the partly mythical post-1945 consensus between the Labour and Conservative parties on running the mixed economy. He demonstrated the connection between the Inquiry's recommendations for state investment in industry and the 'Little Neddies', government investment boards that included employer and union representatives, set up in the early 1960s. Indeed, the assumption that the state should take responsibility for the country's economic well-being was not seriously disputed until the late 1970s.

This longer term significance of the Yellow Book has a powerful irony. Just as they gained more currency with the other parties, the findings of the Liberal Industrial Inquiry became less relevant to Liberal policies and campaigns. As Duncan Brack reminded the meeting, after Lloyd George no Liberal leader until Jo Grimond showed any interest in its proposals. And it finds few echoes in the contemporary

economic policies of the Liberal Democrats, or, indeed, those of any major political party.

The Yellow Book may have built on the version of Asquithian Liberalism that accepted the need for a more active role for the state and carried it forward into new forms of industrial interventionism and, indeed, corporatism. But the decisive break for twentieth-century Liberalism was made very early on, when the New Liberals moved away from the Gladstonian, minimalist vision of the state's role. For the Liberal Party at least, the Yellow Book was, in John Grigg's words, something of a blind alley.

#### Notes:

- 1 Roy Douglas, *The History of the Liberal Party 1895–1970*, (Sidgwick & Jackson, 1971), p. 201.
- 2 Robert Skidelsky, *Politicians and the Slump* (Macmillan, 1994), p. 52.
- 3 Robert Skidelsky, *John Maynard Keynes: The Economist as Saviour* (Macmillan, 1992), p. 264.
- 4 Douglas, *The History of the Liberal Party*, pp. 206–7.
- 5 Skidelsky, *Politicians and the Slump*, p. 51.
- 6 See Robert Skidelsky, *Oswald Mosley* (Macmillan, 1990), Chapter 10.
- 7 Paul Addison, *The Road to 1945* (Pimlico, 1994), p. 43.

# Reviews

## Virtues and Flaws

Richard Shannon: *Gladstone: Heroic Minister 1865–1898* (Penguin Press, 1999)

Reviewed by Tony Little

Gladstone undoubtedly ranks as the greatest leader of British Liberalism and would be a challenger for the country's greatest Prime Minister, holding office four times. A front-bencher in the 1830s, he did not retire from office until 1894.

In 1982, Richard Shannon published the first half of his biography of Gladstone, now re-issued by Penguin in paperback as *Peel's Inheritor 1809–*

*1865*. This covered Gladstone's journey from Peelite Tory to Peelite Liberal. His reputation was made at the Exchequer in the 1850s but, in the

first volume, Shannon left him facing his first true test of leadership after the death of Palmerston. We have had to wait seventeen years for the second half of the story, now available in hardback. Taken together, the two volumes have a good claim to be considered the standard modern biography of Gladstone. What light do they throw on the man and the leader?

When Morley completed his classic biography in 1903, it was intended as an act of homage, putting Gladstone, the heroic statue, on its pedestal. Since then we have discovered more of the feet of clay. Gladstone's diaries, in particular, have revealed the fallibility of the man, but in the process have enhanced the scale of his achievement even if one sometimes wishes to join Roy Jenkins in expressions of headmasterly exasperation. To the modern man in the street the fallibility which is remembered is the rescuing of fallen women but, to his contemporaries even in a more religious age, Gladstone's direct link to the divinity must have been a greater trial. As Labouchere put it: 'I do not object to the old man always having a card up his sleeve, but I do object to his insinuating that the Almighty placed it there'. To Gladstone himself the feeling that what he was doing served the divine purpose was a source of immense strength, recognised more clearly by Shannon than by other modern biographers.

## A first-rate man of business

What then marked Gladstone out as the leader to succeed Palmerston? Firstly, he was a first-rate 'man of business' — a government minister completely in control of his brief. Secondly, he was a compulsive if sometimes convoluted communicator. His budget speeches could last for three hours but throughout he would hold the attention of the House and command coverage in the newspapers. More importantly he aroused a natural empathy with

the public, particularly the striving lower middle and working classes, at a period when these were becoming electors — through the second and third Reform Acts — and when popular appeal was first used to support a government and a positive programme. Until the 1860s, it was more critical to command the support of the elite, though fear of mob rule could occasionally drive reforms for which the elite had no real enthusiasm. Once Gladstone had demonstrated the value of appealing to the electorate over the heads of parliamentarians, mass public meetings became a necessary component of every general election until the advent of television.

Part of Gladstone's mass appeal was the firm moral drive with which he endowed policy and the importance he vested in his chosen policies. A feature of his speeches was the way in which he talked up rather than down to vast audiences, seeming to involve them in deciding the great issues of state. And while speeches could cover a compendium of issues, each election campaign had a clear single issue on which to focus. Gladstone was reluctant to adopt the omnibus manifesto strongly advocated by Joe Chamberlain.

Gladstone failed that first test of leadership in 1866–67 — outmanoeuvred by the flexibility of Disraeli on the Reform Bill and unwilling to compromise with the rebels in his own party. But he bounced back to win the 1868 election with his plan to disestablish the Church of Ireland. With the defeat of his government in 1874 he retired, hurt and perplexed, only to recover with the campaign against Bulgarian atrocities of 1876 and the 1879 Midlothian onslaught on the cynical foreign policy of Disraeli. The great final crusade for Irish Home Rule started in 1886 demonstrates his technique and its importance in all its flawed magnificence. Gladstone's chosen policies so became the party's that as Harcourt argued to Gladstone in 1885: 'Pray do not entertain the notion that you can say anything *personally* which does

not commit and bind the party. *You are the party* and your acts are its acts.' (Shannon p. 253)

## The flaws of his virtues

But like all great leaders, Gladstone had the flaws of his virtues. These Shannon makes abundantly clear, almost as if determined to offset some of the more flattering accounts. The strong drive for achievement of great ends led him to use the party as an 'instrument' for their accomplishment. The Liberal Party was not something to be nurtured or cherished and developed in its own right but was just available to be employed as required. While personally sociable, he did not make sufficient effort to mollify his colleagues or flatter his back-benchers and increasingly, as he aged, looked to the support of a close family group — the same flaws which helped to destroy Peel.

In consequence, while the party 'out of doors' continued to identify itself entirely with the Grand Old Man, in each of his governments he drove the parliamentary party to destruction. Internal revolt and exhaustion brought down the first three governments. The final government ended with Gladstone's resignation in a quarrel with his ministers, but the party failed to revive under his successor. More importantly, his sense of mission, or perhaps his ego, as we would now describe it, prevented him from recognising the right moment to retire or from developing a worthy successor. Shannon is particularly scathing about the failure of Gladstone either to retire after 1882 or to put forward a substantive programme for the 1880–85 government. This government was marked by uncontrolled quarrelling inside the cabinet. Gladstone's comeback after 1876 destroyed Hartington's chance of leadership and his underestimation of Chamberlain wrecked another strong candidacy. Rosebery, who inherited by default, was not up to the job and talked himself out of it even before Gladstone's death.

Shannon has clearly used the missing seventeen years to immerse himself in the Gladstone papers, and is always ready with the apposite reference. Indeed, there are times when his own prose style takes on something of a Gladstonian hue. However, this is a work for those who have some familiarity with the period, as he does not spare time in painting the background to the issues. This is a pity because Shannon

does not provide any concluding passages that might balance the justified criticisms against the great reforms we owe to Gladstone. When writing on Joe Chamberlain, Enoch Powell pointed out the inevitability of political failure in any extended political career. Gladstone's was extended well beyond anything we are likely to experience today. Its failures were significant but its achievements great.

Waugh's grandfather. Add to all this his success as a journalist, and you have the full C. B. Fry legend.

Even in cricket, though, the cracks soon appear. Fry's bowling action was illegal and he was rarely able to reproduce his best batting form in tests. Then there are his bouts of mental illness. He suffered a first breakdown at university, and a more serious attack in 1929 which kept him out of public life for several years.

Nor can you ignore Fry's strange private life. In 1898 he married Beatrice Holme Sumner, ten years his senior. She had long been involved with Charles Hoare, a married banker, and the relationship had resulted in a scandalous society divorce. Her marriage to Fry has been seen by some as a business arrangement: Fry made an honest woman of her in return for Hoare financing his cricket career. Wilton rejects this theory, yet his revelation that the first child of the marriage was probably fathered by Hoare seems to support it.

Hoare had established the *Mercury*, a training establishment for boys wishing to go to sea. On Hoare's death in 1908 Fry became its nominal head, but the real power was Beatrice. Her rule became increasingly brutal, and the rigours of life under it proved fatal to one young inmate. That reliable arbiter of morals, *The Cricket Statistician*, has gone so far as to describe both Fry and his wife as psychopaths. Yet she remained in charge until her death in 1946. Fry followed her ten years later.

Ultimately this is a sad book — sadder than Wilton admits. Yet it contains many incidental pleasures. Try the accomplished poem on Indian independence which Fry wrote for *The Times* or the photograph of Boris Karloff keeping wicket. Above all, the fact that Fry opened for England with W. G. Grace and lived to be surprised by Eamonn Andrews for *This is Your Life* makes him one of the great men of this century.

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## Cricket, Albania and Liberals

Iain Wilton: *C. B. Fry: An English Hero*

(Richard Cohen Books, 1999)

*Reviewed by Jonathan Calder*

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As English cricket disappeared beneath the waves last month, many spectators found themselves remembering the heroes of happier seasons. But there is only one England captain who also fought three seats for the Liberals, served as a diplomat at the League of Nations and was offered the throne of Albania. In short, there is only one C. B. Fry.

Iain Wilton's new biography reveals some heavy feet of clay, but first it is important to appreciate just how compelling a figure Fry was in his prime. Born in 1872, his fame came originally from his extraordinary ability as a sportsman. He equalled the world long jump record while a student at Oxford, was reserve for an England rugby trial, won an England soccer cap and played for Southampton in the FA Cup final. Contemporaries likened him to a Greek god in appearance.

As a cricketer Fry was one of the giants of the golden years before the First World War. Batting for Sussex with Rankinsinhji, the silk-shirted Indian whose wristy stroke play ravished Edwardian crowds, he turned himself into the most remorselessly effective batsman in the country.

In 1907 Ranji acceded to the throne of Nawangar, an autonomous state under the Raj. When the League of Nations was formed in 1920, he became one of India's rep-

resentatives. He invited Fry to assist him and, aided by their cricketing fame and Ranji's lavish entertaining, they exerted considerable influence.

As a Liberal candidate Fry was defeated at Brighton in 1922, at Banbury in 1924 and at a by-election in Oxford later the same year. He was an unorthodox campaigner — he liked to address voters from the back of a white horse — but at Banbury he came within 224 votes of victory. Though his politics were idiosyncratic, his support for the League of Nations, which he called 'Liberalism internationalised', places him in the mainstream of party thinking.

The most famous story about Fry is that he was offered the throne of Albania. In later life Fry liked to embroider his tales, but Wilton concludes that this one is probably true. Certainly, the Albanians were seeking 'an English country gentleman with £10,000 a year', and one of the men they approached was Auberon

# Liberal Democrat History Group Meetings

*A Liberal Democrat History Group Fringe Meeting*

## 1974 Remembered

The two elections of 1974 formed the peak of the second post-war Liberal revival, giving the party six million votes but no more than fourteen MPs. Participants in the campaigns – including Tim Beaumont, Viv Bingham, Adrian Slade, Sir Cyril Smith, Paul Tyler MP and Richard Wainwright – share their recollections of the elections of twenty-five years ago.

**8.00pm,  
Sunday 19 September**

*Committee Room, Majestic Hotel, Harrogate*

*A Liberal Democrat History Group Evening Meeting*

## Dancing the Charleston Again

### **Liberal/Labour relations 1918–31**

Professor Ben Pimlott (Warden of Goldsmith's College and biographer of Hugh Dalton) and Dr David Dutton (biographer of Sir John Simon) will review relations between Liberals and Labour during the key period when Labour established itself as the main opposition party to the Conservatives.

**6.30pm,  
Monday 22 November**

*National Liberal Club, London SW1*

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