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Leaders and leadership

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Front cover photos:
Jeremy Thorpe arrives at Downing Street for talks with Edward Heath, 2 March 1974
Liberal poster, February 1974 election
Jeremy Thorpe at Liberal Assembly

Journal of Liberal Democrat History

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Interview

Duncan Brack and **Mark Pack** interview Jeremy Thorpe, leader of the Liberal Party 1967–76.

Leaders and Leadership

Jeremy Thorpe was elected as leader of the Liberal Party in January 1967. When he took over from Jo Grimond, the party's support seemed stuck at no more than 10%, as the country swung away from Labour towards Ted Heath's Conservatives; in the 1970 election, the Liberals polled just 7.5% and lost half their seats. Yet in the following four years, Thorpe took the party into its second great post-war revival, winning five by-elections and seeing the Liberal vote rise, in February 1974, to more than six million, over 19% of the total vote.

In the light of growing allegations about his personal life, Jeremy Thorpe stood down as leader in May 1976, and lost his seat in the 1979 general election. Soon after the election he was tried at the High Court for conspiracy to murder, but was found innocent of all charges. He now lives in retirement in London and North Devon.

Duncan Brack *and* Mark Pack *interviewed him for the* Journal of Liberal Democrat History *on the lessons that can be drawn from his period as party leader.*

We started by asking him what advice he had, as a former leader to a current one, for Charles Kennedy. Party organisation is an important area. The leader, Thorpe suggested, had the right to enquire – tactfully – of various departments and committees what they are up to and what they are not; as, at the end of the day, 'he bears the rap'.

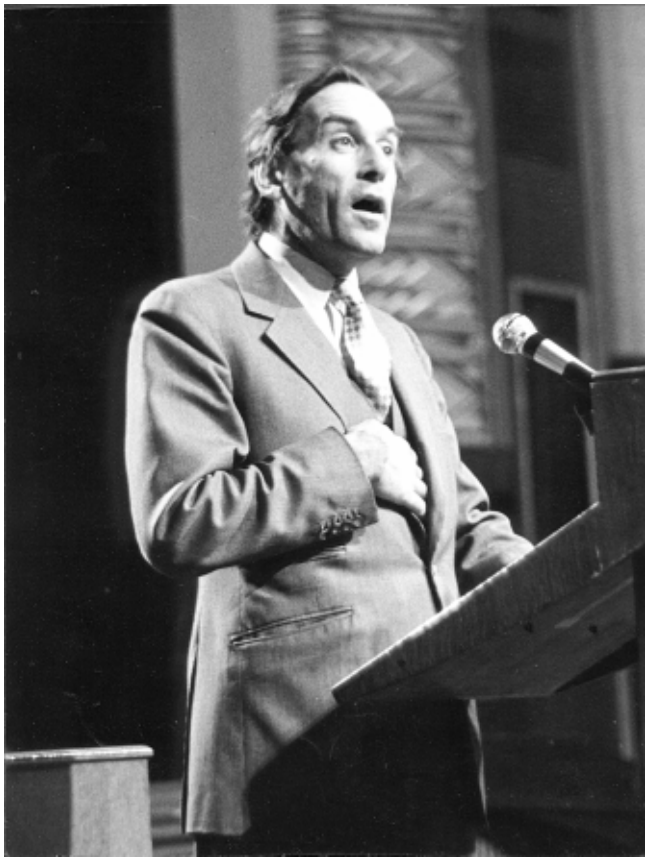
Some things never change – when he was elected as Party Treasurer in 1965, he discovered that the party had enough money only for six months, so fund-raising became an urgent priority. Several years beforehand he had created and raised finance for targeted 'winnable seats'. However, the shortness of time and money meant that as leader there was no immediate prospect of raising funds. As it was, money started to come in to help the headquarters overdraft, but there was inadequate time to deal adequately with the winable seats.

The result was the disaster of the 1970 general election, where the Liberals only narrowly avoided losing three of the six seats they in the end won – had 800 Liberal voters voted Tory in the wrong seats, John Pardoe, David Steel and Thorpe himself would have been defeated, leaving a parliamentary party of only three MPs, two Scottish and one Welsh. Fortunately, Charles Kennedy appears unlikely to have to face this kind of challenge – but if he does, he needs the 'courage and determination that Paddy displayed in 1989' in the face of the devastating Euro election results, where, Thorpe believed, if the Greens had been able to capitalise on the result, 'they could have broken us'.

But there could be too much concentration on internal matters. 'If he finds in the organisation a standing committee charged with constitutional issues – abolish it'. There have been clear differences in leadership styles here. Jo Grimond, for example, had 'no idea what was going on in organisation. On policy, yes – he liked writing articles, and the more difficult they were to understand, the more brilliant people thought they were.' Thorpe himself was not particularly involved in day-to-day party matters, but he certainly knew what was going on. The disaster of 1970 was due in large part to a failure of party organisation, and as a result, he believed he concentrated more than any other leader on this area. But policy was still important – he was criticised, for example, for spending too much time on Rhodesia, though this was a subject he knew and cared about.

It was a struggle to maintain a public profile for the party. The television companies told him one year that they would only come to the Liberal Assembly to cover his speech, on the last day. 'Oh', said Thorpe, taking a decision instantly, 'I'm making my speech on the first day … and a second speech on the last day.' So he did, and the cameras stayed there for the whole time – but this was a further proof of the weakness of the party's position in the run-up to the 1970 fiasco.

One innovation in February 1974 was spending £10,000 on national advertising – a step which had never been taken before, by any party, at least during general election campaigns. There was some doubt over the legal position, but the Liberals justified it by dividing the total costs between all the constituency campaign expenses. In retrospect, did Thorpe regret opening this Pandora's Box, where



the other parties could heavily outspend the Lib Dems? Not at all – it would have happened at some point in any case, and pound for pound he believed the party benefited much more from its national advertising.

One Liberal party political broadcast involved Lester Pearson, the Canadian Liberal leader. Pearson was initially reluctant to take part in an overtly political activity, but Thorpe promised not to ask him anything about politics in Britain, but only about the benefits of Liberal government in Canada. '"Mr Pearson, you are the Liberal Prime Minister of Canada. How is it the Liberal Party has consistently defeated the Labour and Tory parties in debate and organisation? What is so great about your party?" It was marvellous broadcast.'

Did Jeremy Thorpe think it was true that leaders inevitably grew more distant from the grassroots of their parties? 'I don't think so. I was never very close to the committee-, constitutional-amendment sort of people. But I used to get right in there, getting round and seeing people.' His impression was that he was good at staying in touch with the different parts of the country – Scotland, with Johnnie Bannerman and George Mackie, mid-Wales, with Roderic Bowen and Emlyn Hooson, the Home Counties, and so on. 'I went to all the by-elections. I was at the counts in Orpington, Roxburgh & Selkirk and Montgomeryshire.' It was important that the 'leader must always be accessible to party members. Bearing in mind that the person with the cause at heart is probably a volunteer worker, and has nothing to gain except the satisfaction of seeing the party do well.' In particular, Thorpe ensured that he established regular monthly or weekly meetings with the Young Liberals – then in their 'Red Guard' phase – to ensure proper liaison with the national party.

Looking towards the election

What policy challenges will Charles Kennedy face? Europe is undoubtedly the greatest, as it was in Thorpe's years as leader (in 1972 his small group of MPs saved the legislation taking Britain into the Community from defeat). Many Tories had always displayed 'a gut reaction against foreigners. If Harold Macmillan had had a free vote in the House of Commons when he decided to apply for Community membership [in 1961], he would have had a massive vote against.' He believed that the issue of Europe would eventually drive the Conservatives apart, as had the repeal of the Corn Laws a century and a half ago.

Whether this would result in a major split, into two distinct groupings, or simply a steady stream of defectors to other, more pro-European, parties was 'too early to say' – but could well happen after the next election. Part of this depended on William Hague, who, Thorpe believed, 'would be for the chop' after losing the next election – as was Home, Heath, and, in a similar manner, Thatcher, when Conservative MPs became convinced that her continued leadership would cost them victory. It was likely, however, that he would be replaced not by someone even more right-wing, but by 'a healer' who would try to bring both sides together'.

On Liberal Democrat positioning, argued Thorpe, 'to remain radicals', the party must oppose the government when they fall short on social issues such as education and health care. 'There are certain things they are trying to achieve which we should back, and have done, like devolution … on those sort of issues of course we should back them. On certain social issues, they've done something. But I think we have to keep them up to their own standards which they had when they were in opposition.' In particular, Thorpe was not

David Steel with Jeremy Thorpe and portrait at the National Liberal Club

impressed by Jack Straw, who seemed to be trying to go one better than his Tory predecessor Michael Howard.

Is there a likelihood of electoral reform for Westminster? 'It depends upon how much the Labour Party needs the tactical Liberal vote at the next election'. They have not entirely ruled out anything. In fact, the *Tories* should really now be keen proponents of reform, given the way in which their representation had been eliminated in many of the big cities. 'My heart bleeds for them', said Thorpe.

Thorpe himself has argued – to the Jenkins commission – for a dual system, using the single transferable vote, with multi-membered constituencies, for the bigger towns and cities, and the alternative vote, with single-member constituencies, for rural areas; in fact, this was the system recommended by the Speaker's Conference on electoral reform in 1917. Thorpe himself had served on a Royal Commission, established by Gwilym Lloyd George in 1955, to consider electoral systems for the new constitutions for the colonies, arguing for PR on the grounds that ethnic minorities had to be represented. Of all the problems in Northern Ireland, the electoral system (PR for local government and the Northern Irish Parliament) had not attracted any criticism; it was seen as part of the healing process.

How different was politics in the 1990s compared with his period as an MP? 'There's a lot more money around.' MPs, and the leader, had far fewer staff – now, with greater research assistance, they are certainly better informed. State funding for political parties would undoubtedly be desirable, and would help to avoid the undue influence exerted by rich individuals, such as Michael Ashcroft – a situation which Thorpe saw as 'outrageous'.

What was likely to happen at the next election? Thorpe believed the situation would be similar to that in 1964, when he had expected that the Liberals would win either ten seats or ninety; nothing in between (in the end the party won nine). 'In the same way, the Liberal Democrats will be down to twenty, or up to sixty.' But the party had to avoid the 1923–24 situation, where the Liberals won 159 seats in 1923, but then crashed to forty in 1924, as they were seen to be propping up a minority Labour government with no clear programme of their own. This need not happen. Party organisation was vital; and the government had to be opposed where necessary.

Thorpe on the hovercraft campaign tour in August 1974

Amnesty International

Rarely mentioned these days is Jeremy Thorpe's involvement with the human rights organisation Amnesty International. The photographs of African leaders on the wall of his study were a continuing reminder of his interest in the affairs of that continent. Both as a politician and as a journalist, he frequently visited Africa, and took a close interest in the human rights situation.

Support for Amnesty was therefore a natural step. He provided the organisation with information on the state of political prisoners in Ghana, and also became a trustee of the 'prisoners of conscience' fund, which provided aid to recently released political prisoners.

Shortly after his acquittal, in 1979, he was offered the post of Director-General of the British section of Amnesty International. The application caused great controversy amongst the active members of Amnesty in Britain, perhaps not surprisingly given the timing of the offer. In addition, Amnesty was then having to work hard to show its political independence, and the appointment of someone who had until very recently been a leader of a political party may not have helped. However, given his record of involvement, Thorpe recalls that he felt that the appointment should not have been controversial.

Nonetheless, the divisions within the British Section resulted in a crowded emergency general meeting in central London, at which the ruling Council was voted out (though many of its members were shortly afterwards re-elected). As a result, the appointment fell through. For Thorpe himself, it was, in his words, a 'sad business', though not one that has left any bitterness. For many of those who attended the emergency meeting, it is even now the most exciting Amnesty general meeting they can recall.

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Jeremy Thorpe's reminiscences, *In My Own Time,* were published by Politico's Publishing in 1999.

Clement Davies

J. Graham Jones examines the offer of a Cabinet position to the Liberal leader Clement Davies in October 1951.

Churchill, Clement Davies and the Ministry of Education

Edward Clement Davies (1884–1962), leader of the Liberal Party from 1945 until 1956, has been variously described as 'an underestimated Welshman and politician',[1] and as 'one of the unknown great men of modern times'.[2] Davies, it is true, remains one of the most enigmatic and puzzling of twentieth-century front-line British politicians.

Born at Llanfyllin in mid-Wales in February 1884, Davies achieved brilliant academic success as an undergraduate in law at Trinity College, Cambridge, and was called to the Bar by Lincoln's Inn in 1909. Soon afterwards, he established a highly successful and lucrative legal practice at London. He held a number of prestigious official positions after the outbreak of the First World War, and took silk at a relatively young age in 1926. Although Davies had taken a passionate interest in political life ever since boyhood, and had indeed been approached to stand as a Liberal parliamentary candidate as early as 1910, he did not stand for parliament until the 'We Can Conquer Unemployment' general election of 30 May 1929 when he was elected MP for his native Montgomeryshire. Thereafter he was to hold the seat continuously until his death in March 1962.

Initially Clement Davies was a warm supporter of David Lloyd George and his ambitious, radical policies for tackling unemployment and the array of social and economic ills facing a troubled nation in the late 1920s – bold Keynesian initiatives which were crystallised in the famous 'Yellow Book' *Britain's Industrial Future* published in 1928. Soon afterwards, however, the Liberal leader's dramatic *volte face* over the second Labour Government's Coal Mines Bill in 1930 heralded the parting of the ways.[3] Only fifteen short months after he had somewhat reluctantly abandoned a promising, well remunerated career as a top ranking barrister in order to become a backbench politician, Davies was already beginning to rue his decision: 'Losing briefs and wasting my time here [in the House of Commons] – it is really appalling. Sometimes I wish I had stuck to my proper job, but ambition is a terrible thing'.[4] Small wonder, therefore, that in his ever increasing disillusionment with political life and with pressing financial problems, Davies decided to accept a prestigious, well remunerated position as legal director of Lever Brothers, at the enormous annual salary of £10,000.[5] It was widely assumed at the time that this new departure would lead to his retirement from active politics, but a last minute change of heart by his new employers allowed Davies to stand for re-election to parliament in October 1931, when he was returned unopposed as a National Liberal follower of Sir John Simon, as again happened in November 1935.

Throughout the 1930s, however, Clement Davies, a National Liberal, rarely participated in Commons' debates, displayed but scant enthusiasm for the cut-and-thrust of political life, and devoted much of his time and energy to his duties for Lever Brothers. He has rightly been described as, in that period, 'almost the archetypal semi-detached politician',[6] one who did not occupy the centre-ground of political life until 1938–39 when he became chairman of the 'Vigilantes Group', a cross-party group of MPs who urged the abandonment of Neville Chamberlain's appeasement policies in the face of the ever more menacing threat of the dictators Hitler and Mussolini. The Vigilante Group's influence increased rapidly after the outbreak of war in September 1939,

with Davies himself emerging as one of the most vocal and effective critics of the ailing National Government. Clement Davies eventually resigned from the Government in December, and played an important role in the removal from office of prime minister Neville Chamberlain in May 1940 and his replacement by Churchill.[7] It would seem that Davies shared some rapport with Churchill who may have offered him minor governmental office and a viscountcy during 1940. In March 1941 he resigned as a director of Unilever, re-entered political life energetically, now veering sharply leftwards in the political spectrum as he joined the 'Radical Action' group within his party and zealously endorsed the left-wing proposals of the famous Beveridge Report published in 1943.

The policies which Clement Davies now advocated in his political speeches were increasingly socialistic, including even partial nationalisation of the land. The Beveridge initiative was, he insisted, a development of traditional Lloyd George policies to reduce unemployment and improve living standards.[8] At a pre-election meeting convened within his Montgomeryshire constituency in June 1945, his position was unequivocal:

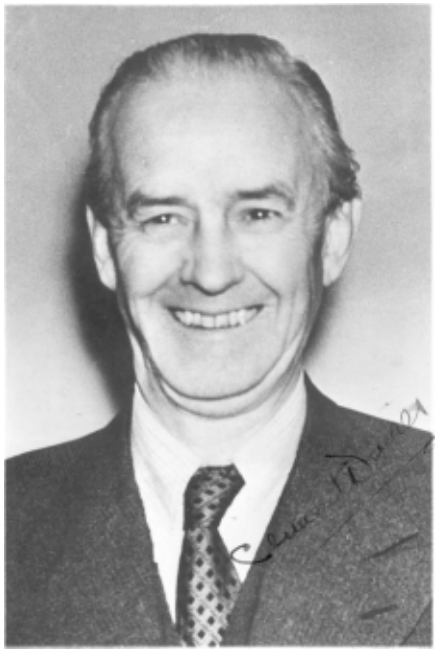
> I stand on the side of the progressive. If two parties such as Labour and Conservative were equally balanced then I would vote Labour. Members of the Labour Party and myself can walk side by side for a long way. There are many things on which we agree.[9]

He consequently faced only a Conservative opponent in Montgomeryshire in July 1945, and was even endorsed by the local Transport and General Workers' Union, as 'the only progressive candidate' standing in the division.[10] In the event, Davies was re-elected with a majority of more than 3,000 votes as Attlee's Labour Party swept to power with a huge landslide majority at the polls. He remained true to the line which he had taken during the election campaign:

> I pledge myself – as long as the Labour Government works for a permanent peace throughout the world, and works for the ordinary common man, I pledge myself to work alongside that Government.[11]

Only days later, Clement Davies had, perhaps unexpectedly, been chosen 'chairman' (if not leader) of the twelve Liberal MPs who had survived their party's near decimation at the polls in 1945.[12] They had selected their new 'chairman' by the bizarre expedient of requesting each Liberal MP to leave the room in turn while the rest discussed his leadership potential.[13] Davies faced an agonisingly difficult political and personal challenge. Already 61 years of age (and thus the oldest Liberal leader since Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman in 1899), he was totally unprepared and untrained for the experience of leadership, now thrust upon him by the shock defeat of his predecessor as leader, Sir Archibald Sinclair, at Caithness and Sutherland. His eleven followers were indeed 'a motley group', most of them re-elected by only a hair's breadth in remote rural constituencies in the Celtic fringe (Wales, Scotland and the west country) and totally lacking cohesion and a common political philosophy. Three of them – Professor W. J. Gruffydd (the University of Wales), Major Gwilym Lloyd-George (Pembrokeshire) and T. L. Horabin (North Cornwall) – were already displaying signs of potential disloyalty, although the last named still became the party's chief whip in the difficult political circumstances of 1945. Clement Davies' loyalty to the Simonite Liberal camp throughout the 1930s, and some of the idiosyncratic sentiments which he had expressed during the war years, led to tension and unease, even dissension, among his colleagues. It had been thought likely that he would resign his seat in order to pursue his professional and business interests full-time, and it was widely known that psychological problems had already compelled him to spend short periods in a nursing home.

In his first speech to the House of Commons as Liberal Party 'Chairman', Davies remained positive: 'We can all rejoice at the end of the Tory regime, at the end of reaction and chaos… We wish this Government well'.[14] While he himself seemed to stand firmly on the left, prepared to support the new Labour Government, Churchill and his fellow Tory leaders, shocked at the scale of their defeat at the polls, looked to the



Edward Clement Davies: signed photo

Liberals as the route to their political recovery and salvation. Some floated the notion of an anti-Socialist centre party (potently reminiscent of the 1918–22 Coalition Government) as the means of excluding Labour from office. Churchill was himself an avid proponent of Liberal-Conservative collaboration, and had displayed heartfelt regret at the departure of his Liberal colleagues from the Coalition Government in the spring of 1945 (Gwilym Lloyd-George alone had remained). During the election campaign he had broadcast to the nation:

> Between us and the orthodox Socialists there is a great doctrinal gulf which yawns and gapes … There is no such gulf between the Conservative and National Government I have formed and the Liberals. There is scarcely a Liberal sentiment which animated the great Liberal leaders of the past which we do not inherit and defend.[15]

Some younger, progressive, more radical Conservative MPs such as Harold Macmillan and Quintin Hogg, members of a group of 'Tory Reformers', went further, the latter asserting that there was 'no striking difference' on domestic policies between themselves and the Liberals. He issued an invitation to the Liberal MPs: 'If Liberals would only come over into Macedonia and help us (or come over somewhere and help somebody) the policy we both believe in might get somewhere. There is no doubt that we would, together, capture

the Conservative Party'.[16] No Liberal MP responded to Hogg's initiative, and Clement Davies was adamant that no formal pact or informal collaboration with either of the other parties could be countenanced.

Davies's strength of character and inner resources were stretched to the limit as the Attlee Governments ran their course. Many of his parliamentary colleagues were potentially disloyal, displaying highly inconsistent, even bizarre, voting records in the lobbies of the House of Commons. There was general Liberal support for the enactments of the Attlee Government from 1945 to 1947, as the early nationalisation programmes, the establishment of the National Health Service and the granting of Indian and Burman independence were warmly applauded. Davies portrayed the setting up of the NHS and the introduction of social insurance as the implementation of fundamental Liberal policies, asserting, 'It would be ignoble to hinder that work merely because it happens to be in the hands of other people to promote'.[17] He insisted that many of the enactments of the Attlee Government were simply 'cashing in on the hard work of the Liberal Party over forty years'.[18] In response to rumbles from his constituency that he might reach some kind of understanding with local Conservatives, he was unrelenting: 'So long as I am their representative in Parliament and the leader of the Liberal Party, there will be no union with the Conservatives in Montgomeryshire. I intend to re-organise the Liberals in Montgomeryshire soon'.[19]

By 1947 it did indeed appear as if Davies's unequivocal stand and tireless assiduity were yielding positive dividends. The Liberal Party seemed to be emerging from the political doldrums and re-asserting itself as a major party of state. Davies voiced his determination to the Council of the Party Organisation that the Liberals should put up at least 500 candidates at the next general election: 'If we are an independent Party, we will have no truck with anybody, we will stand on our own two feet. We will fight in 600 constituencies. Turn these words into action, or acknowledge defeat here and now'.[20]

By this time his attitude to the Attlee Government (whose honeymoon period had manifestly come to an end) had hardened considerably. The exceptionally hard winter of 1946–47 had led to a severe economic crisis which, Davies was convinced, had been exacerbated by governmental failure to devise an effective overall strategy to balance the national economy. He spelled out his conviction to a Liberal Party rally at the Royal Albert Hall in November: 'Worst of all politically, we are today in the hands of political bankrupts dodging from one subterfuge to another… There is a complete lack of true statesmanship'.[21] Davies's spirited stand against the Conservatives was buttressed by the unwavering support of the party's elder statesman Lord Samuel, a former party leader, who shared a harmonious relationship with his successor, and who proclaimed that the Conservative party had been strengthened in each successive generation by absorbing into its ranks Liberal defectors: 'For my part I will have no share in leading a third swift glide down the slippery slope to extinction'.[22]

At the end of November the Liberal Party issued a statement declaring that it was the duty of all true Liberals to 'stand firm against the Conservative overtures'.[23] Not all prominent Liberals concurred. Lady Violet Bonham Carter, Asquith's daughter, firmly lodged on the party's right wing and a close personal friend of Winston Churchill's, wrote to Lady Megan Lloyd George to express her alarm, 'One must face the *possibility* of Parliamentary extinction – *Or do you think this an exaggerated fear*? … What can a party of 10 *do*? Containing at most 4 "effectives"?? (& even these not always agreed on major issues?)'. She tended to advocate an electoral pact with the Tories as the route to achieving the desperately needed electoral reform which alone would guarantee Liberal survival.[24] Undeterred, Lady Megan publicly depicted the manifold difficulties facing the Labour Government as a welcome opportunity for a Liberal breakthrough: 'Must this country … be condemned to the choice of two evils?'.[25]

As the general election approached, Clement Davies studiously distanced himself from both the major political parties. His tentative support for the Attlee Government was long gone. Before the end of 1947 he had criticised the Labour Party to his constituents:

> Everything is being organised from the centre and the centre is a small oligarchy. Freedom is threatened by conscription for the Army in peacetime and now by the direction of labour in industry. Hitler and Mussolini began their appeal to the people as Socialists. Is this free country passing into national socialism on the road to a police state, and are the spiritual rights of man to be sacrificed on the altar of materialism erected to false and foreign gods?[26]

During the long run-up to the 1950 general election he spared no effort to pinpoint the position of the Liberals:

> Do not run away with the idea that Liberalism provides the middle way between the other two. Still less that it is a compromise between them. Liberalism is a distinct creed – a distinct philosophy: distinct from Socialism, from Communism, and from Conservatism.[27]

Although he battled valiantly to portray the Liberal creed as a positive philosophy, quite distinct from both Socialism and Conservatism, the omni-present danger was that he might alienate both the right and left wings of his tiny party. 'No one knows better than you what a hard struggle it is,' Davies had written despairingly to his predecessor Sir Archibald Sinclair in February 1949. He was heartened somewhat by the response at party rallies and the substantial financial contributions which came to hand, but still felt, 'I have no end of trouble here as you can well understand.'[28] The party was still wracked by deep rooted differ-

ences of opinion over possible co-operation with the Conservatives, and over the advice on voting which should be given to Liberal sympathisers in constituencies where there was no Liberal candidate.[29] As the election finally loomed in the early days of 1950, Davies was privately most pessimistic about his own prospects and those of his fellow Liberal MPs from Wales.[30]

Early in January Attlee announced that Parliament would be dissolved on 3 February, and that polling day would follow on the 23rd. On the day following the Prime Minister's statement, Liberal headquarters issued an unequivocal statement to quell the rumours which persisted in political circles: 'In spite of statements to the contrary, it is still being suggested that the Liberal Party in some parts of the country is allying itself with the Conservative party. This is not so. The Liberal Party emphasises that it is fighting the coming election as an entirely independent force with at least 400 candidates in the field.'[31]

A long and protracted wrangle ensued between the Liberals and Conservatives over the use of the title 'United Liberal and Conservative Association' by at least four local Conservative associations. 'Is it so much to ask', wrote Clement Davies to Churchill, 'that the Conservative Party should fight under its own name, or at least under a name which does not clash with that of another Party which is recognised throughout the world?' Since the Conservative leader had personally approved the use of the term 'Liberal-Conservative', Davies expressed his intention of publishing forthwith his letter of protest in the national press.[32] Churchill at one drafted a debating reply which was masterly in its combination of cool insolence and persiflage:

> I thank you for your kindness in writing to me amid your many cares. As you were yourself for eleven years a National Liberal and in that capacity supported the Governments of Mr Baldwin and Mr Neville Chamberlain, I should not presume to correct your knowledge of the moral, intellectual and legal aspects of adding a prefix or a suffix to the honoured name of Liberal. It has certainly often been done before by honourable and distinguished men.[33]

In his further reply Davies dismissed Churchill's lengthy epistle as 'facetious and evasive', deploring the fact that the Tory leader was prepared to support 'what we Liberals rightly regard as an unworthy subterfuge'.[34] Churchill in turn wrote on Davies's letter, 'No further answer'.[35]

When he was adopted at Woodford on 28 January, however, Churchill returned to the subject of:

> … the very small and select group of Liberal leaders who conceived themselves the sole heirs of the principles and traditions of Liberalism, and believed themselves to have the exclusive copyright of the word 'Liberal'. This super select attitude finds an example in the exclusion of Lady Violet Bonham Carter and, I may say, of Sir Archibald Sinclair from the four broadcasts the Liberals are making between now and the Poll. In Lady Violet Bonham Carter we have not only a Liberal of unimpeachable loyalty to the party, but one of the finest speakers in the country. Her speech against Socialism, which was so widely read two months ago, recalled the style of old and famous days. But her voice must not be heard on the air on this occasion.[36]

Four days later he returned to the same theme in response to Liberal charges that the Conservatives had attempted to reduce their share of election broadcasts:

> When I saw how the Liberal group had distributed their broadcasts, I offered, with the full consent of my colleagues, one of the Conservative twenty-minute broadcasts to Lady Violet Bonham Carter. This offer was made, of course, without any conditions whatever. Lady Violet was perfectly free to say whatever she pleased. She was dissuaded from accepting this not ungenerous offer by the Clement Davies group. The public will not, therefore, hear on the broadcast any clear exposition of the view held by the majority of Liberals, who, while remaining loyal to the Liberal Party, are strongly opposed to Socialism.[37]

In spite of these spirited exchanges at leadership level between Davies and Churchill, it is evident that at provincial centres such as Sheffield and Bristol informal arrangements were made between the local Liberal and Conservative parties in relation to both municipal and parliamentary elections. Most spectacularly of all, a quasi-formal pact was struck at Huddersfield where Liberal Donald Wade was able to capture the West division in the absence of a Conservative contender, while the Liberals ran no candidate at Huddersfield West. At Dundee, too, a near-formal merger of the local Liberal and Conservative Parties was foiled only when Liberal Party Headquarters at London put up their own candidate independently of the Dundee Liberal Association.

Generally the outcome of the 1950 election was again disappointing for the Liberals. Although Clement Davies was re-elected comfortably in Montgomeryshire with a majority of 6,780 votes, and four other Liberal MPs from Wales held on – Roderic Bowen (Cardiganshire), Lady Megan Lloyd George (Anglesey), Sir Rhys Hopkin Morris (Carmarthenshire) and Emrys O. Roberts (Merionethshire) – the party polled only 2.6 million votes nationally, lost 319 deposits out of 475, and returned only nine MPs. Davies wrote despairingly to Sinclair, 'The position is far and away more difficult than it has been since the '29 Parliament'.[38] Within weeks his health, never robust, had broken down yet again, and he was compelled to retire from public life for several weeks.[39] Persistent rumours ensued that he was likely to accept a position outside politics or else to retire to the House of Lords, conjecture which was emphatically repudiated.

Davies soldiered on to face an array of political difficulties. The re-elected Attlee Government declared its unwillingness to consider a measure of electoral reform, and a number of influential Liberal peers voiced their intention of joining the

Conservatives. By the spring, Sir Archibald Sinclair, Lord Samuel and the elderly Liberal academic Gilbert Murray (a distinguished Oxford classicist) had all reluctantly concluded that the only viable route ahead lay in an agreement with the Conservatives.[40] Sinclair argued that only an 'arrangement with the Conservative party – an arrangement on the Huddersfield lines limited to the general election' offered hope of securing electoral reform and thus political survival.[41] Davies, however, demurred, still sanguine that a distinctive, positive Liberal creed might yet be salvaged.[42] The party generally had grown increasingly despondent ever since the outcome of the February poll. In May Clement Davies spelled out the nub of his dilemma to Gilbert Murray:

> If you attended our Liberal Party Committees, or the meetings of the Parliamentary Party, or saw the correspondence that I receive, I believe that you would come to the conclusion that there is no Party today, but a number of individuals who, because of their adherence to the Party, come together only to express completely divergent views.

At times he tended to despair of keeping intact an increasingly fractious party which seemed intent on tearing itself apart:

> 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. We have suffered so much in the past from these quarrels… Any further division now would, I fear, just give the final death blow.[43]

There was ample justification for his heartfelt fears. The left-wing, radical group of MPs within the Parliamentary Liberal Party, which had already lost from its ranks stalwarts like Frank Byers (agonisingly defeated by just ninety-seven votes at North Dorset in February 1950), Wilfrid Roberts and Tom Horabin, had good reason to fear the final victory of the Tories. In the spring two Welsh Liberal MPs – Lady Megan Lloyd George and Emrys O. Roberts – supported by Dingle Foot and Philip Hopkins, who represented divisions in the west country, began a rearguard action against what they regarded as Clement Davies's inclination 'to veer towards the Tories'.

'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.'

The concern of the left wing was understandable. There were indications that Davies may have at least engaged in discussions with Conservative representatives. He had certainly met and corresponded with Lord Beaverbrook in the early months of 1949,[44] following which the newspaper magnate had expressed the hope that they might again 'have some conversation on politics'.[45]

The narrowness of the Conservative defeat in February 1950 – Attlee now had an overall majority of only six seats – increased the pressure on them to seek some kind of alliance with the Liberals. In his response to the King's speech, Churchill quoted *The Times* editorial which had attacked the Liberals for 'a national disservice by the irresponsible spattering of the electoral map with hundreds of candidatures'.[46] Now, in the wake of his narrow defeat and of Lady Violet Bonham Carter's refusal of his offer of one of the Conservative election radio broadcast slots, Churchill dangled a more positive olive branch in the form of a promise of an inquiry into the need for electoral reform by a future Conservative government. Both Churchill and Lord Woolton had approached Davies to discuss the possible allocation of constituencies, while prominent Tory backbencher Cyril Osborne had written to *The Times* in early May insisting that 'all liberal minded Liberals can co-operate with the modern Conservative Party, which holds the same faith'.[47]

Davies kept detailed notes of the arguments which he had used in his discussions with Churchill. He asserted that Liberal Party headquarters could not intervene in the choice of candidates (although, as events transpired, it did so to abort a pact at Dundee). An alliance between the Liberals and Conservatives, he went on, 'would never be permitted by the rank-and-file of the Liberal Party… There is throughout the country a body of Liberal voters, of all ages, who will not vote Conservative'. He was not prepared even to countenance any alliance which called into question the independence of the Liberal Party so that 'there can be, therefore, no overall or central agreement made between Party leaders, or Party Headquarters, for the allocation of constituencies'.[48]

So widespread was the concern and anxiety that permeated the ranks of the Liberal Party by the spring of 1950 that Clement Davies felt obliged to issue a public statement that he had 'no intention of compromising the independence of the Liberal Party'.[49] The same unwavering standpoint was repeated in his speech to the annual meeting of the Liberal Party of Wales at the end of the same month: 'The Liberal Party will not jeopardise its independence or restrict its freedom of action for any price, however great'.[50] To the Liberal faithful he underlined the same point in print: 'The Liberal leaders have no knowledge of Conservative intentions or of Conservative proposals and no negotiations are taking place'.[51] Yet his brave rhetoric was somewhat undermined as a steady stream of major party figure joined the ranks of both the Conservatives and Labour.[52] In particular, the Liberal Party was rocked by repeated conjecture that Lady Megan Lloyd George (whom Davies had appointed deputy party leader in January 1949 in a desperate, last ditch attempt to keep her within the Liberal fold) was about to defect to Labour.[53] At the party's annual assembly convened at Scarborough in September Davies stuck to his guns:

> We refuse to get out. We refuse to die. We are determined to live and fight on. There is an undoubted danger in the division of the country between two parties using two mighty, powerful, wealthy machines. Danger lies in the possibility that the two machines will become all powerful, controlling the local associations, controlling candidates, and members of the House.[54]

But there was uproar as soon as the party's right wing sensed a more radical

spirit at the assembly. Acting as its spokesman, Lady Violet Bonham Carter wrote to tell Clement Davies that she felt 'aghast when I read the proceedings of the [1950] Assembly… The lunatic fringe seems to have complete command'.[55] Only weeks later it was the turn of the left wing, led by Lady Megan, to rebel spectacularly, threatening to join Labour at once, and pushing Davies to the brink of resignation as party leader. 'The truth of the matter as it seems to me is this,' he wrote. 'They are not concerned really about the Party or the country. They are concerned about themselves only and think that their best chance lies in help from the Socialists.'[56] 'Don't speak or even think of laying down the leadership. This is the moment to stand fast and fight,' responded Lady Violet, who was clearly horrified at the prospect of Megan succeeding Clement Davies as party leader. 'Neither Megan nor Emrys Roberts have the slightest desire to leave the Party. They know *how* small a part they would play in the Labour Party.'[57] In the event, Clement Davies refused to yield, and the rebel MPs eventually backed down, but their very real threat was the most harrowing manifestation yet of the fundamental dilemma facing the Liberals.[58]

Not only did rumours of clandestine negotiations between Clement Davies and Conservative leaders cause deep dissension in Liberal Party ranks, they also undermined the internal morale of the Tories.[59] By the autumn of 1950 the influential 1922 Committee had grown highly uneasy, and some Tory backbenchers were beginning to criticise Churchill for his apparent wooing of the Liberals.[60] Lady Violet Bonham Carter had, it was rumoured, been entrusted to negotiate with leading Conservatives concerning an allocation of constituencies.

As 1951 began it was very much apparent that the 'frustrating and frustrated Parliament'[61] elected the previous February could not continue in office for very much longer. In Montgomeryshire the local Conservative Association resolved to withdraw their candidate in order to allow Clement Davies a straight fight against a sole Labour opponent. Davies was unimpressed:

> The Liberal Party will remain independent. I cannot make a bargain with anybody. I have nothing to bargain with except my principles. I am sufficient of a democrat to say that any man should have the right to vote for the candidate who is most likely to represent his voice in Parliament, and the more candidates that come forward the better.[62]

Although there was no question of a national alliance between the Liberals and Conservatives, local 'arrangements' were very firmly on the political agenda. At the Labour-held seat of Colne Valley in Yorkshire the local Conservative Association again withdrew its candidate in favour of Lady Violet Bonham Carter, partly because of her close friendship with Winston Churchill. At the beginning of the year she had been warned by Clement Davies, 'The one matter that worried me was the question whether you, or I, or any of us, should give beforehand a pledge as to our support of either of the other two Parties in the House of Commons after the Election. I myself refuse to give such a pledge'.[63] She herself attempted to justify the situation by ould make every effort to broaden the basis of his Government and include some men of real ability drawn from outside the Party fold'.[64]

As the October election approached, the 'Huddersfield pact' made in 1950 remained operational, while a similar agreement enabled Arthur Holt to capture Bolton West for the Liberals against a sole Labour opponent, in the event the only Liberal gain of the election. No Liberal candidate stood in Bolton East. Clement Davies, Roderic Bowen and Sir Rhys Hopkin Morris all enjoyed straight fights against Labour men. Some senior Liberal Party officials spared no effort to persuade Davies that in such agreements lay the route to future party survival.

In the run-up to polling day the National Liberal Lord Teviot suggested to Clement Davies that the emphasis of the Conservative and Liberal election broadcasts demonstrated how close the two parties had now become, so that Liberal sympathisers in constituencies with no candidate of their own should be urged to vote Conservative.[65] Davies at once dismissed the suggestion, on the advice of both Philip Fothergill[66] and Lord Samuel, who proposed that the Liberal leader should reply stating 'that the Liberals do not wish to be reduced to the same political futility as the Liberal Nationals (but not necessarily in those words!)'.[67] Smarting at the tart rebuff, Teviot published his letter in the national press with the intention of embarrassing Davies.[68]

It would appear that the notably restrained and moderate campaign which the Conservatives waged in October 1951 was a studiously conscious bid for Liberal votes. Churchill even offered support for Lady Violet at Colne Valley, and he himself travelled northwards to address one of her election meetings. Rumours intensified that a Tory victory at the polls would lead to the offer of a Cabinet position to Clement Davies. When the Liberal leader had broadcast to the nation on 28 September, the nub of his message was an assault on the record and policies of the Socialists.[69] As the young political analyst David Butler, then beginning to make a name for himself, wrote in response, 'Mr Davies' broadcast, it was widely noted, attacked only the Labour Party and, on points of policy, said little that would have caused surprise if it had come from a Conservative… In an election in which a large number of Liberals had no candidate of their own, this emphasis was regarded by many as particularly significant'.[70]

When he was adopted as the Liberal candidate for Montgomeryshire at Newtown on 6 October, Clement Davies again made his point: 'There are candidates of various descriptions, but there is only one Liberal Party. Don't you have a second thought that we are anything but an absolutely independent party, with no allegiance or obligation to any of the other two great parties'.[71] Simultaneously Liberal Party headquarters issued the following statement:

> The attention of the Liberal Party headquarters has been drawn to a suggestion appearing in a morning paper that Liberal leaders might be offered positions in a Conservative Government if the Conservatives were successful at the polls. The Liberal Party repeats what has been many times affirmed, that it is fighting the election as a completely independent party without any understanding, pact or arrangement with any other party. It has no knowledge of the intentions either of the Prime Minister or of

Clement Davies with Lord Samuel, Liberal leader 1931–35

> the Leader of the Opposition in the event of either of them being called upon to form the next Government. If either a Labour or a Conservative Prime Minister wished to broaden the base of his administrations the Parliamentary Liberal Party would at that time decide its course of action in the normal constitutional way.[72]

Although Davies was himself re-elected with a record majority of 9,221 votes, a total of only six Liberal MPs were returned, while four radicals (including Lady Megan Lloyd George and Emrys O. Roberts) lost their seats. Arthur Holt at Bolton West was the only new Liberal MP. Even party sympathisers feared that this was indeed the point of no return for their party. The staunchly loyal *Manchester Guardian* almost gave up hope:

> It is hard to see in this depressing picture much ground for building up a country-wide political party on the old model. Unless there is some change in the Conservative Party or some break-up in the Labour Party, the Liberal Party can look forward only to further attrition and further losses to the two major parties.[73]

Although Labour had again polled slightly more votes than the Conservatives, an unusually high percentage of floating voters in some marginal constituencies chose to vote Tory, which changed established voting patterns enough to give the Tories 321 seats to Labour's 295. It was, in a sense, a freak win. Winston Churchill became Prime Minister with an absolute majority. Speculation again intensified that Clement Davies would be offered ministerial office, perhaps the new position of minister for Welsh affairs.[74] In the event it is almost certain that on 28 October Churchill offered the Liberal leader the ministry of education (possibly within the Conservative Cabinet) in a move which one historian has described as 'the deadliest shaft of all'.[75] There is no doubt that Davies's immediate personal reaction was to accept. He had administrative flair, and was still not lacking in political ambition. Moreover, he was now sixty-seven years of age, and must have realised that this offer was indeed his very last opportunity to participate in government.

At Churchill's London home and for a full two hours over lunch at Chartwell the following day the two men were closeted together as the Prime Minister used his persuasive skills on Davies. Churchill was 'politely gloomy' as the conversation turned to the past:

> Clement Davies: Do you remember speaking at Bradford in 1909?
> Churchill: No.
> Mrs Churchill: Yes dear, you must.
> Churchill: Ah, yes. That was when I was a young Liberal. I must have made a very *truculent* speech.[76]

Davies realised, however, that it was a team decision, and stated that he must discuss the offer with his senior party colleagues, among them Jo Grimond, Frank Byers, Lady Violet Bonham Carter, Lady Megan Lloyd George and Lord Samuel. Of these Lady Violet alone urged him to accept. Five years later, following Davies's retirement as Liberal leader, she recalled her advice in the face of Churchill's offer:

> You may remember that when Winston wanted you & two Liberal Under-Secretaries to join him in 1951 I wanted you to go in. My reasons were that the economic crisis was *far* greater than in 1931 – when Samuel, Archie [Sinclair] & Donald Maclean joined the national coalition (without any consultation or 'by-your-leave' from the party!) & I thought that the Liberals shld. – through you – make their contribution, & in spite of their small numbers could wield real *power*… I did not feel that a Coalition is holy if it is made up of 3 parties, & unholy if it only consists of two! Moreover I thought that responsibility & administrative experience wld. benefit our party which had had none since 1918. One must construct as well as criticise. Whatever you may have thought or felt you refused office then – a great personal sacrifice – because you felt that in so doing you were interpreting the people's will. Looking back I feel that you may well have been right. Your action – however disinterested & patriotic – might well have split the remnant we had left. (I must add that *only* Winston's leadership made me think it possible. I cld never have contemplated it under Eden! Winston was never a Tory – as the Tories know.) But whether right or wrong it was a great & selfless sacrifice – which few would have made – & one that will always be remembered – with reverence & admiration.[77]

All the others were adamant that acceptance would spell the death knell of the Liberals as an independent political party. They knew full well that the tiny group of six Liberal MPs could easily become submerged into the Conservative Party as had the former Simonite Liberals. If he wished to preserve his party intact, Davies really had no choice. On the evening of 28 October, Liberal Party headquarters issued a statement:

> Mr Clement Davies has received an offer of office in Mr Churchill's Government. He has felt unable to accept it. At the same time, the Liberal Party is deeply concerned at the possible effect of the narrow majority in the House of Commons resulting from the General Election upon the successful conduct of British policy both in domestic and international affairs. In these circumstances it will, both in Parliament and in the

> country, give to the Government support for measures clearly conceived in the interests of the country as a whole.[78]

Davies's decision was depicted as a sharp 'rebuff' to Churchill's declared objective of forming a 'broad-based Government which will be as widely representative as possible'.[79] But it was reported that the Prime Minister had voiced his intention of assisting the ailing Liberal Party by considering the introduction of proportional representation in Parliament and the possible restoration of the university seats which had been abolished by Attlee's Government in 1948.[80] Harold Macmillan preserved in his diary a graphic account of the process of Cabinet making at the end of October 1951:

> Meanwhile Clem Davies has come and gone. Will he be Minister of Education? He would love this, but what about the Liberal party? He will try to persuade them, but Megan L. George, and Lord Samuel will resist. He leaves for the meeting. (We hear later – on the wireless – that the Liberals will not play).[81]

It was widely felt in political circles that Davies might have enjoyed a notable success as minister of education. He had already given much attention to the problems of educational provision in rural areas. Had he accepted, junior ministerial office would also have been conferred on two of his Liberal colleagues.[82] He was widely considered to be 'the ablest MP who had never held ministerial office', and one who, by 1951, had inevitably 'had a bellyful of dissension within his own party', but he had put loyalty to the Liberal Party first.[83] His refusal was, as Lady Violet later put it, 'a renunciation rare in politics today'.[84] 'We refuse to be stamped out' was Clement Davies's proud call to his 1951 party assembly, 'In spite of all temptations, we still prefer our own doctrine and we are determined to maintain our independence'.[85]

There is no doubt that Churchill's offer and Davies's response had marked a major turning point in the history of the Liberal Party. As Labour MP Philip Noel-Baker wrote from the re-assembled House of Commons to his mistress the defeated Lady Megan Lloyd George, 'I'm so immensely happy that you are *not* here, & faced with the hopeless conflict you would have had in your party'.[86] Gilbert Murray reflected to Lord Samuel, who, together with Sir Archibald Sinclair, had attended the Liberal Party meeting convened to discuss Churchill's offer to Davies:

> Well, we have had another resounding defeat, and yet I am sure that there is a strong Liberal feeling in the country. For example, the O[xford] U[niversity] Liberal Club has now, I believe, a record number of over 1,100, and is much larger than either of its rivals – someone told me about twice as big. *I was glad that Winston offered a post to Clement Davies, but I think that CD's answer was exactly right.*[87]

On reflection, Davies claimed to be satisfied with his decision – 'I am glad you agree that we did absolutely right in refusing Winston's offer' – and with the encouraging measure of support for the Liberal Party from university undergraduates.[88] But as maverick Socialist Desmond Donnelly, narrowly re-elected in Pembrokeshire, wrote to Caradog Jones, Davies's Labour opponent in Montgomeryshire in October 1951, 'Old Clem was swilling gin in the smokeroom in mid-afternoon to forget the job old Samuel made him refuse. However if he throws in his hand with the Tories any more he will be finished.'[89]

Dr Chris Cook has generously described Churchill's offer as 'presumably one of genuine goodwill to the Liberals',[90] and it may well be that an element of sentimentality surrounded the olive branch. On the other hand the Tory leader was well aware that his party had won through in 1951 on a freak minority vote, and he was thus desperately anxious to neutralise the Liberal threat for the future.

There are indications that he regarded the ministry of education as of minimal interest and significance. It was widely known that, when he had offered the same position to R. A. Butler back in 1940, he had apologised for having nothing better available. The position was filled almost as an afterthought in early November 1951 – nearly the last ministerial position to be filled – and was offered to Miss Florence Horsbrugh, the little known MP for Manchester Moss Side, who had only just returned to the Commons following defeats in the general elections of 1945 and 1950.[91] She apparently was approached only because Walter Elliot was not at home when the prime minister had telephoned him to offer him the vacant position. Elliot, it is said, was devastated at the rebuff, and was consequently made a Companion of Honour as a consolation prize in 1952.[92] At the end of the day, the ministry of education was not even accorded Cabinet status in the new Conservative administration.

Winston Churchill

Following his discussions with Churchill back in 1950, Clem Davies had noted, 'The only way in which the Liberals could maintain their independence and be distinct from Liberal Unionists and National Liberals, would be for them to enter into a binding self-denying [*sic*] that they would not take any office in a Conservative government'.[93] At the end of the following year he had remained true to his own prescient edict. Goaded in the Commons by Anthony Wedgwood-Benn (Labour, Bristol South-East) on 8 November to explain his apparent refusal to '[give] some stability to the present Government', Davies replied, 'For the simple reason that he and his party remained absolutely independent.' '(Loud Opposition laughter).'[94] At a luncheon held in Davies's honour at the National Liberal Club two weeks later, Lord Samuel was effusive in his praise for the decision which he had taken. Davies responded, 'However small be 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'.[95]

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Notes

1 The phrase is the title of Lord (Emlyn) Hooson's lecture to the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion on 19 June 1996, published in *The Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion*, 1997 (New Series, Vol. 4, 1998), 168–86, and reprinted in the *Journal of Liberal Democrat History* 24 (Autumn 1999), 3–13.
2 Roy Douglas, *The History of the Liberal Party, 1895–1970* (London, 1971), caption to plate opposite p. 248.
3 See the *Montgomeryshire Express*, 2 September 1930.
4 *Ibid.*
5 *Ibid.*, 10 August 1930; Hooson, 'Clement Davies', pp. 172–73.
6 Hooson, 'Clement Davies', p. 173.
7 David M. Roberts, 'Clement Davies and the fall of Neville Chamberlain', *Welsh History Review* 8 (1976–77), 188–215.
8 *Montgomeryshire Express*, 12 May 1945.
9 *Ibid.*, 9 June 1945.
10 NLW, Clement Davies Papers C3/12, circular letter from Huw T. Edwards, area secretary of the TGWU, 2 July 1945. I am most grateful to Mr Stanley Clement-Davies, London, for permission to consult and make use of his father's papers.
11 *Montgomeryshire Express*, 28 July 1945.
12 *The Times*, 3 August 1945, p. 4.
13 Douglas, *op. cit.*, pp. 249–50.
14 *House of Commons Debates, 5th series*, Vol. 413, cc. 117–18 (16 August 1945).
15 Cited in C. Cooke, *Sir Winston Churchill: a self portrait* (London, 1954), p. 199.
16 *The Spectator*, 21 September 1945, p. 267.
17 *Liberal Magazine*, July 1946, p. 309.
18 *Montgomeryshire Express*, 10 August 1946.
19 *Ibid.*
20 *Liberal News*, 19 September 1947.
21 NLW, Clement Davies Papers K1/41, draft speech notes, 17 November 1947.
22 *Liberal News*, 21 November 1947.
23 *The Times*, 27 November 1947.
24 NLW MS 20475C, no. 3168, Lady Violet Bonham Carter to Lady Megan Lloyd George, 17 November 1947 ('Private').
25 NLW MS 20491E, no. 3429, unlabelled press cutting dated 18 November 1947.
26 *Montgomeryshire Express*, 11 October 1947.
27 NLW, Clement Davies Papers K1/48, draft speech notes, 10 May 1949.
28 *Ibid.* J3/3, Davies to Sinclair, 16 February 1949 (copy).
29 See *ibid.* J3/9, Sinclair to Davies, 2 January 1950.
30 *Ibid.* J3/10, Davies to Sinclair, 6 January 1949 [*recte* 1950] (copy); J3/11i, Sinclair to Davies, 9 January 1950; J3/12, Davies to Sinclair, 12 January 1950 (copy).
31 *The Times*, 12 January 1950.
32 Churchill Archives Centre, University of Cambridge, Churchill Papers 2/64, Davies to Churchill, 23 January 1950: 'My dear Churchill …'.
33 *Ibid.*, Churchill to Davies, 25 January 1950 (copy): 'My dear Davies …'.
34 *Ibid.*, Davies to Churchill, 26 January 1950: 'My dear Churchill …'.
35 *Ibid.*, note initialled 'WSC', 26 January 1950.
36 Quoted in H. G. Nicholas, *The British General Election of 1950* (London, 1951), pp. 86–87.
37 *The Times*, 2 February 1950.
38 NLW, Clement Davies Papers J3/14, Davies to Sinclair, 22 March 1950 (copy).
39 *Ibid.* J3/15, Sinclair to Davies, 28 March 1950; J3/16, Davies to Sinclair, 17 April 1950 (copy).
40 *Ibid.* J3/23, Sinclair to Davies, 3 May 1950; J3/25, Murray to Davies, 10 May 1950; House of Lords Record Office, Samuel Papers A/130(9c), notes of conversation by Lady Violet Bonham Carter, 4 May 1950.
41 NLW, Clement Davies Papers J3/23, Sinclair to Davies, 3 May 1950.
42 *Ibid.* J3/22, Davies to Sinclair, 28 April 1950 (copy).
43 *Ibid.* J3/26, Davies to Murray, 11 May 1950 (copy).
44 *Ibid.* J1/75–78.
45 *Ibid.* J1/78, Beaverbrook to Davies, 19 January 1949.
46 *The Times*, 27 February 1950.
47 *Ibid.*, 12 May 1950.
48 NLW, Clement Davies Papers C1/54, notes by CD entitled 'Liberal position as put to me by Mr. Winston Churchill and Lord Woolton, 1950'.
49 *The Times*, 3 May 1950.
50 *Liberal News*, 26 May 1950: 'The Liberal Party is not for sale'.
51 *Ibid.*
52 See Kenneth O. Morgan, *Labour in Power, 1945–51* (London, 1984), pp. 292–93.
53 See *The Observer*, 4 June 1950.
54 *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 30 September 1950.
55 NLW, Clement Davies Papers J3/42, Lady Violet Bonham Carter to Davies, 6 October 1950.
56 *Ibid.* J3/45, Davies to Lady Violet Bonham Carter, 15 November 1950 (copy).
57 *Ibid.* J3/46, Lady Violet Bonham Carter to Davies, 18 November 1950.
58 See the *Daily Telegraph*, 18 November 1950.
59 See Malcolm Baines, 'The survival of the British Liberal Party, 1933–59' in Anthony Gorst, Lewis Johnman and W. Scott Lucas (eds.), *Contemporary British History, 1931–1961: Politics and the Limits of Policy* (London and New York, 1991), p. 26.
60 Bodleian Library, Oxford, Conservative Party Archives CC01/8/541, memorandum by J.P.L. Thomas, 'Negotiations with the Liberals', sent to Woolton, Piersenné and Maxse, 15 September 1950.
61 The phrase is that used by Harold Macmillan in his *Tides of Fortune* (London, 1969), p. 352.
62 *Montgomeryshire Express*, 14 October 1950.
63 NLW, Clement Davies Papers J3/53, Davies to Lady Violet Bonham Carter, 11 January 1951 (copy).
64 House of Lords Record Office, Samuel Papers A/155 (xiii) 42, Lady Violet Bonham Carter to Samuel, 28 February 1951.
65 NLW, Clement Davies Papers J3/58, Teviot to Davies, 4 October 1951.
66 *Ibid.* J3/60, 'Suggested reply to Lord Teviot's letter of 4.10.51'.
67 *Ibid.* J3/59, M. J. O'Donovan, private secretary to Lord Samuel, to Davies, 5 October 1951.
68 *Ibid.* J3/62, telegram from Teviot to Davies, 6 October 1951.
69 Published *in extenso* in *The Listener*, 4 October 1951.
70 D. E. Butler, *The British General Election of 1951* (London, 1952), p. 65.
71 *The Times*, 8 October 1951.
72 *Ibid.*
73 *Manchester Guardian*, 27 October 1951.
74 See the *Western Mail*, 27 October 1951.
75 Douglas, *op. cit.*, p. 265.
76 Martin Gilbert, *Never Despair: Winston S. Churchill, 1945–1965* (Minerva paperback edition, 1990), p. 655.
77 NLW, Clement Davies Papers J3/83, Lady Violet Bonham Carter to Davies, 2 October 1956.
78 *The Times*, 29 October 1951.
79 *Ibid.*
80 *Western Mail*, 29 October 1951; *Manchester Guardian*, 29 October 1951.
81 Cited in Macmillan, *Tides of Fortune*, p. 365.
82 *Western Mail*, 30 October 1951; *Manchester Guardian*, 30 October 1951.
83 Hooson, 'Clement Davies', p. 181.
84 *Manchester Guardian*, 1 October 1956.
85 Cited in Alan Watkins, *The Liberal Dilemma* (London, 1966), p. 65.
86 NLW, Lady Megan Lloyd George Papers, PNB to MLG, 12 November 1951.
87 NLW, Clement Davies Papers J3/63, Murray to Samuel, 29 October 1951 (copy) (my emphasis).
88 *Ibid.* J3/65, Davies to Murray, 9 November 1951 (copy).
89 NLW, D. Caradog Jones Papers, file 2, Donnelly to Jones, 5 November 1951.
90 Chris Cook, *A Short History of the Liberal Party, 1900–1984* (London, 1984), p. 134.
91 *Western Mail*, 2 November 1951.
92 Gilbert, *op. cit.*, p. 656.
93 NLW, Clement Davies Papers C1/54.
94 *The Times*, 9 November 1951.
95 *Ibid.*, 22 November 1951.

D. J. Taylor tells the story of Thackeray's spirited performance on the Oxford hustings in 1857.

The Newcomer

The most famous Oxford by-election of all took place in 1938 when the Master of Balliol, A. D. Lindsay, standing on a Popular Front, anti-Munich ticket, managed to halve the majority of his Tory opponent, Quintin Hogg. Running it a close second, perhaps, was a contest fought out more than eighty years before, featuring a celebrated novelist and a campaign whose excesses confirmed a reputation for corruption and electoral sharp practice that dogged the city for most of the Victorian era.

Modern critics have tended to belittle Thackeray's attempt on the constituency of Oxford in July 1857. Catherine Peters, for example, calls it 'a faintly ludicrous episode, even for the middle of the nineteenth century'. This kind of mild disparagement is understandable – twenty-five years after the Great Reform Act the amateur politician was fast becoming an endangered species – but it ignores Thackeray's abiding interest in current affairs, rekindled by recent mismanagement of the Crimean War, and the range of contacts he had built up in the decade since *Vanity Fair* (1847–48) had made him famous. This, after all, was a man who knew leading Liberal magnates such as Palmerston and Lord John Russell, and dined at the Whig salon of Holland House – not bad attributes for anyone who fancied setting up as parliamentary candidate in the 1850s.

At the same time, it is sometimes easy to forget the enthusiasm with which Victorian literary men embroiled themselves in practical politics. Dickens had been a parliamentary reporter; Trollope stood at Beverley in 1868 (a jaundiced account of this experience turns up in his novel *Ralph The Heir*). John Morley ended up – in another century, admittedly – as Secretary for India. Certainly the Whig faction that began the episode by inviting Thackeray to stand at Edinburgh in 1856 would have seen nothing ridiculous in the idea of having a novelist as their candidate.

As it turned out, Thackeray declined this offer. It was never repeated – largely because the sarcasm of his recent lecture series on *The Four Georges* had offended some of the senior aristocratic Liberals in whose gift many parliamentary seats still lay – but he was undeterred. He thought that the success of his recent lecture tour around the provinces had made him better known, to the point where he would have a better chance of entering parliament as an independent than as a Whig nominee. In any case, his annoyance with the current Liberal administration, and what he saw as Palmerston's cynicism in repopulating his cabinet from the same small group of grandees favoured by his failed predecessor, Lord Aberdeen, was one of his main reasons for standing. The general election of March 1857, at which Palmerston's premiership was confirmed, went by without anything suitable offering itself, but by midsummer there was news of a vacancy at Oxford. Thackeray decided to stand.

For an aspiring parliamentarian from London, the Oxford constituency mixed advantages and drawbacks in about equal parts. It returned two members (James Langston, the senior MP, had sat since 1841) and was broadly Liberal in sympathy, although a Tory, Donald Maclean, had retained one of the seats from 1835 to 1847. The electorate was small, barely extended by the Reform Act of 1832, and by the mid-1850s standing at fewer than 3,000 voters. It was also horribly corrupt: Langston alone was thought to spend £200–£300 per election in procuring support.

Corruption, in fact, had created the vacancy which Thackeray now proposed to occupy. In the March general election – a fight between four Liberals – Langston had romped home, but suspicions of latent Conservatism had led to the defeat of Edward Cardwell, the other sitting member, by Thackeray's friend Charles Neate, fellow of Oriel. Shortly afterwards, however, Neate was removed on a charge of 'Colourable Employment' – providing temporary and mostly spurious jobs for one's supporters during an election – and a contest to fill the single vacant seat was set for 21 July. No Conservative presented himself, and it looked as though Thackeray would have a clear run against the Whig nominee, a somewhat languid Irish peer named Viscount Monck.

Arriving in Oxford early in the month, Thackeray established himself at the Mitre Inn and renewed his longstanding connection with St John's, where his old Charterhouse friend W. R. Stoddart had been a fellow

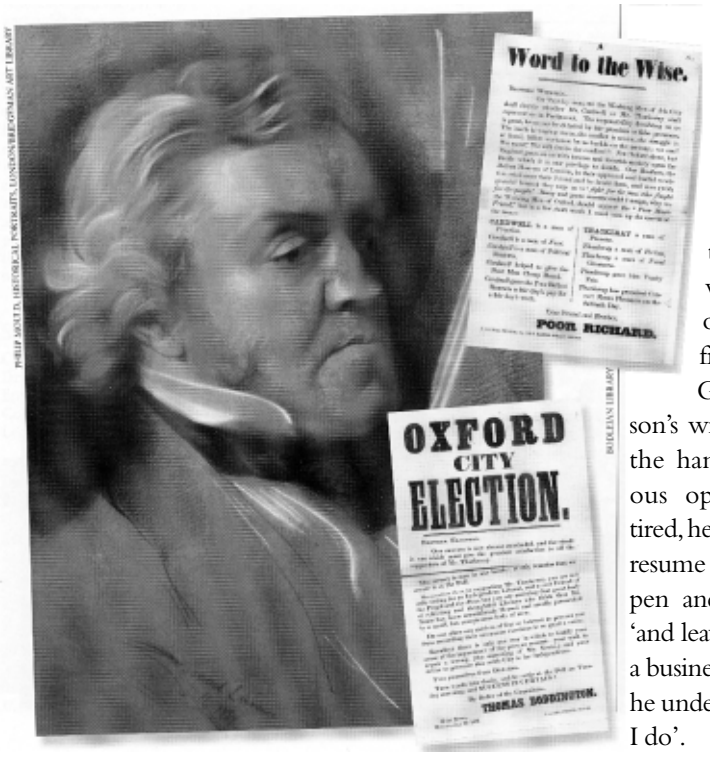
until his death the year before. The first statement of his political beliefs, issued to an electorate that would have had considerable trouble in decoding them from his published works, stressed his radical credentials. In a 'Broadside' to the voters of 9 July he promised, if elected, to use his best endeavours to widen the constitution and 'popularise' the government of the country. 'With no feeling but that of good will towards those leading aristocratic families who are administering the chief offices of the state, I believe that it could be benefited by the skills and talents of persons less aristocratic …'

All this sat comfortably with the moderate radicalism that had distinguished Thackeray's early career as a journalist, survived the excesses of Chartism, and persisted even through his acceptance into smart upper-class society in the wake of *Vanity Fair.* Biographers have never had any difficulty in establishing that Thackeray loved a lord, but he undoubtedly saw it as his task to build bridges between a remote, paternalist Whiggery and what he realised were the genuine grievances of the lower classes. An address given on 10 July at the Town Hall took up this theme. 'The popular influence must be brought to bear on the present government of the country', he declared; 'If they flinch remind them that the people is outside and wants more and more.'

Meanwhile there were the face-to-face practicalities of electioneering to be got through. Thackeray claimed that he found the experience of calling on potential supporters humiliating, and discovered only two people who knew who he was. He paid a particularly disillusioning call at a house where the maid enquired: 'Are you Mr Neate's friend? Master's h'out, but he said I was to say he would vote for yeow.' All the same, as polling day loomed, his prospects looked sufficiently promising for the Whigs to take serious fright, sack Viscount Monck and re-draft Cardwell. They also determined to fix on Sunday Observance as the topic most likely to undermine Thackeray's campaign. The novelist's advocacy of Sunday opening of museums and similar places had annoyed extreme Sabbatarians, and on 18 July, three days before the poll, he was forced to issue a pamphlet restating his support for public access to picture galleries and gardens, but denying that he ever 'spoke of opening theatres on Sunday'.

Assuming he would lose against a highly competent opponent – Cardwell ended his career as Secretary for War – with whose opinions he rather sympathised (he told his daughter Annie that he was secretly a Cardwellite), Thackeray nonetheless went down by a surprisingly narrow margin – a mere 65 votes out of the 2,075 cast. He made a well-received valedictory speech, invoking the memory of the prize-fighters Gully and Gregson, and Gregson's willingness to shake the hand of his victorious opponent, and retired, he told the crowd, to resume his place with the pen and ink at his desk 'and leave to Mr Cardwell a business which I am sure he understands better than I do'.

Portrait of William Makepeace Thackeray, 1867, by Samuel Laurence (1812–84)



The parallels with the quixotic Colonel Newcome's parliamentary ambitions in *The Newcomes,* completed two years before, should not perhaps be overdrawn. Thackeray knew what he was doing, and the kind of behaviour he would find. His own motives, too, were far from disinterested. For one thing, a parliamentary seat offered the route to a public appointment and a safe salary which would absolve him from the need to write. If anything disappointed him it was how few of the enfranchised college servants – except at St John's – had taken his side. His election expenses came as a further blow. 'I can't tell you how disappointed we were he didn't get in', Annie told Mrs Stoddart. 'We minded it a great deal more than he did, but I think the bills affected him a great deal more than us.' In the end the election cost £895, which Thackeray, perpetually harassed by money worries, could ill afford.

As well as signalling the end of Thackeray's parliamentary ambitions – though he expressed vague notions of wanting to stand again for a year or more – the contest also had a direct effect on the constituency itself. Once again the whiff of corruption hung over the campaign – Thackeray himself admitted that even had he been elected he would have suffered Neate's fate on account of the activities of his agents, and the historian J. R. Green, who canvassed on his behalf, was openly asked for money by an Oxford bargemaster supposed to control many votes. Hearing this and other evidence, the Royal Commission of 1881 concluded that a sixth of the city's electorate might be affected by illegal inducements, temporarily disenfranchised 141 people, and reduced the number of seats to one. Oxford moved on towards the age of parliamentary democracy proper, but the contest of 1857, and Thackeray's involvement in it, remains as one of the liveliest episodes in its volatile electoral history.

This article originally appeared in Oxford Today *(Trinity 1999), and is reprinted here by kind permission of the Editor, Christina Hardyment, and the author. It is taken from* Thackeray, *by David Taylor (Chatto & Windus, 1999).*

David Dutton examines the career of the Liberal leader in the Lords in the 1950s and 60s.

Lord Rea

Philip Russell Rea was born into a family of strong Liberal traditions. His grandfather, Russell Rea, was Liberal MP for Gloucester (1900–10) and for South Shields (1910–16). He became President of the Free Trade Union and was among the leaders of the campaign which resulted in the establishment of the eight-hour working day for miners. His father, Walter Russell Rea, ennobled as Baron Rea in 1937, was Liberal MP for Scarborough (1906–18), for Bradford North (1923–4) and for Dewsbury (1931–5). He held junior office during the First World War and again in the early stages of the National Government. Many Liberal progeny of Philip Rea's generation made their way into other political parties, usually out of the belief that Labour offered a more practical vehicle for the realisation of their radical aspirations in a period when the Liberal party itself appeared to be in a state of irreversible decline. But Rea remained loyal to the Liberal faith. Though, unlike his father and grandfather, he was not himself elected to the House of Commons, he played a not inconsiderable part in keeping the Liberal torch alight during some of the party's darkest days - that period when, as Bernard Wasserstein has written, the party 'displayed a stubborn capacity to survive and to make a fruitful contribution to British public life that belied the Liberals' shrivelled parliamentary state'.[1]

Born on 7 February 1900, Rea was educated at Westminster School, Christ Church, Oxford and the University of Grenoble. He served in the Grenadier Guards in the last stages of the first World War before joining the family firm of merchant bankers. Entering Liberal politics, he was active in his father's election campaigns in the 1920s and 1930s before being adopted himself in 1938 as Liberal candidate for Darwen, the seat held until 1935 by Herbert Samuel.

The coming of a second world war inevitably delayed Rea's political ambitions and in fact he never stood for election to the Commons. He became a Lieutenant-Colonel in the King's Royal Rifle Corps, attached to the Special Forces. In later years, as his *Guardian* obituary noted, Rea 'said little' about his wartime activities.[2] In fact he was an important figure in fostering resistance movements inside enemy-occupied Europe. He joined SOE in August 1941 as an acting Captain and was appointed to SOE headquarters where he was engaged as a Conducting Officer in briefing and equipping agents who were about to depart for the field. His duties often involved his taking those agents to their airfields of departure, and he sometimes went with them in their aircraft as a despatcher. He was also responsible for pinpointing the dropping grounds which agents reported to London by wireless, clearing them with the RAF and arranging clandestine air operations. In these duties his fluent French, learnt at Grenoble, proved invaluable.

In December 1942 Rea became a Major in SOE's AM Section where he was responsible for work connected with the so-called Massingham Mission in Algeria. Then in August 1943 he became a personal staff officer to Brigadier Colin Gubbins, the head of SOE. The following March he transferred to be head of the AD section, dealing with honours and awards.

Rea left SOE on 5 August 1945, but continued to work for the organisation in a civilian capacity until SOE itself was wound up in January 1946. For his

Lord Rea in 1979

wartime services he was awarded the OBE, made an officer of the Order of the Crown of Belgium, created a Chevalier of the Legion of Honour and awarded the Croix de Guerre with Palm. Rea served in the Foreign Office until 1950, but the death of his father in 1948 and his succession to the latter's hereditary peerage opened up the possibility of restarting his political career. Just twelve Liberal MPs had been elected to parliament in 1945; at the General Election of 1951 this figure dropped to six. But sixty-three peers took the Liberal whip in 1945. Rea became the party's Chief Whip in the upper house in 1950, a post he held for five years, earning the respect of his colleagues. In the same period he was Deputy Lord Chairman of Committees.

In June 1955 Lord Samuel, who had held the position for eleven years but who was then eighty-five years of age, was obliged to resign the leadership of the Liberal peers. Viscount Thurso, who as Archibald Sinclair had led the party in the Commons from 1935 to 1945, considered taking his place, but had never fully recovered from the stroke he had suffered in 1951 and his doctor vetoed the idea. In these circumstances it was anticipated that Lord Layton, who had for some time served as Samuel's deputy, would now be elected leader. But Layton felt unable to accept because of the pressure of his business commitments. It was in this way that Rea was unanimously elected to the leadership. He was to hold this position for nearly twelve years and thus to pass through the nadir of Liberal fortunes and witness the first stirrings of the party's revival. His elevation soon necessitated his resignation as President of the Liberal Party, to which office he had been elected earlier in the year.

Rea proved a popular figure on the Liberal front bench. It was some indication of his parliamentary standing that he became a member of the Political Honours Scrutiny Committee in 1962. In this capacity he called for a reform of the whole scrutiny system following the publication of Harold Wilson's controversial 'lavender list' in 1976.

Rea's wit and lightness of touch were well suited to the debates of the upper chamber. He disliked pomposity and was particularly irritated by vague or euphemistic language. In March 1963 he objected to the use of the phrase 'sanitary convenience' in a parliamentary bill. 'A sanitary convenience,' he complained, 'did not, presumably, mean either a handkerchief or the driver of a dust cart.' 'Above all,' he told their Lordships, 'he wished to protest against "powder room" which seemed to indicate in transatlantic ladies a touching and remarkable belief in the relieving powers of pulverised talcum.'[3]

As Liberal leader in the Lords Rea found himself obliged to speak on a wide range of issues. But, with the Cold War at its height, he was especially concerned with reducing the risk of nuclear war and for Britain to abandon her pretensions to great power status. The country 'seemed to find it difficult to realise that her nineteenth-century position in the world was not in abeyance but actually gone. Britain must adapt her ideas to the modern world.'[4] Such thinking made him particularly contemptuous of the notion that Britain remained an independent nuclear power. 'Why should we attract an onslaught on this undefended island by the provocative possession of a virtually useless contribution to American nuclear arms? That would be the very reverse of a deterrent.'[5]

'Why should we attract an onslaught on this undefended island by the provocative possession of a virtually useless contribution to American nuclear arms? That would be the very reverse of a deterrent.'

Traditional Liberal issues and values were close to Rea's heart. He campaigned tirelessly for electoral reform; he presented a bill for the better preservation of the liberty of the individual; he voted at the party's annual conference to lower the voting age to eighteen; and he never tired of reminding the Conservative government and its Labour successor that the commitment to reform of the House of Lords, contained in the Parliament Act of 1911, remained unfulfilled:

> For half a century the Conservatives had failed to tackle realistically the problem of Lords reform because [they] liked the Lords; Labour had failed to tackle it because it did not like the Lords. The Liberals liked a second chamber but saw much room for improvement.[6]

Rea suffered a heart attack in the autumn of 1966 and felt obliged to resign the leadership in the following March. His tenure of office thus coincided almost exactly with that of Jo Grimond in the Commons, and the latter's resignation in January 1967 may have helped to prompt his own. At all events he had stayed at the helm long enough to know that the Liberal Party's fortunes had at last turned the corner. He remained active in the Lords and was a Deputy Speaker until 1977.

Outside politics Rea had a wide range of interests. His family base was in Cumberland and he identified himself with a variety of organisations which promoted the enjoyment of the fells. From 1957 to 1962 he was a member of the BBC General Advisory Council. He was a gifted musician, composed pieces for choir and piano and was an enthusiastic member of the parliamentary Catch Club which met to sing madrigals and other works for a male voice choir. He married the novelist Lorna Smith in 1922. She died in 1978. A son of this marriage pre-deceased Rea and the title passed on his own death in April 1981 to his nephew, Dr J. Nicolas Rea.

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Notes

1. B. Wasserstein, *Herbert Samuel: A Political Life* (London, 1992), p.371.
2. *The Guardian*, 23 April 1981.
3. *The Times*, 19 March 1963.
4. *Ibid.*, 7 February 1963.
5. *Ibid.*, 12 February 1959.
6. *Ibid.*, 30 April 1965.

Reports

Dancing the Charleston Again

Evening meeting, November 1999 with Ben Pimlott and David Dutton

Report by **Robert Ingham**

A theme running throughout the politics of the twentieth century, and still of relevance today, is the relationship between the Labour Party and the Liberal Party and its successors. Much academic attention has focussed on the inter-war years, when the Liberal Party was replaced as one of the two major parties of government by the Labour Party it once fostered. On 22 November 1999 Professor Ben Pimlott, biographer of Hugh Dalton, Harold Wilson and the Queen, and Dr David Dutton, biographer of Sir John Simon, addressed an evening meeting of the History Group on the subject of Liberal/Labour relations during the 1918–31 period, under the title of 'Dancing the Charleston Again'. It proved to be a fascinating evening.

The 1920s was a decade of political flux. Labour formed an administration for the first time, governing in 1924 and then again from 1929. The last shred of Liberal government ended in 1922; the party reunited, split, and again combined; and the results of the 1929 election confirmed that it could no longer claim a place at the top table of British politics. The Conservative Party sat back and, advocating 'safety first', took advantage of the confusion on the left of British politics to dominate the inter-war era. It is for this reason that the relationship between the Liberal and Labour Parties at this time, particularly during the 1923 Parliament, has been so closely scrutinised, to see whether the politicians involved could not have stopped the years of Tory hegemony that followed by acting differently.

Dr Dutton dissected the performance of the Liberal leaders during the 1923 Parliament to show how the party was left in political and financial disarray by the time of the disastrous 1924 election. The 1923 election resulted in a 'hung' parliament in which the Conservatives were the largest party but in which a combination of Liberal and Labour formed a majority. Both parties had campaigned on the free trade platform, but there was little prior consideration within the Liberal Party of what that might imply in terms of cooperation with Labour in Parliament after the results were declared. Simon saw a chance for the Liberals to govern alone; Asquith seemed content for Labour to govern with general Liberal support, perhaps in the hope of Labour failing to succeed; and Lloyd George sought a more positive left-wing alliance. Unable to decide how to operate as a third party in a two-party system, and acquiescing in Labour's mishaps without in any way influencing the direction of the Government's policy, the Liberal Party was reduced to a rump after the 1924 election.

Analysis of the Liberal/Labour relationship at this time, however, should not preclude consideration of how the Conservative Party took advantage of three-party politics. Dr Dutton described the Liberal/Conservative relationship as the key axis of the 1920s. Some Conservatives in the early 1920s wished to foster cooperation with the Liberal Party in order to combat effectively the socialist menace. While the rhetoric of this group survived, experience of the 1923 Parliament persuaded Tories such as Austen Chamberlain that the Liberal Party needed to be destroyed, not propped up, in order to defeat Labour. This hardening of the Conservative attitude to the Liberals influenced British politics until at least the 1950s, and, in local government politics, for even longer. Increasingly, the Liberal Party, and liberalism, was made to look irrelevant in the great struggle between Tory freedom and enterprise on the one hand and socialist bureaucracy and austerity on the other. The reaction of Liberals to the development of Conservative thought and argument was fully revealed during the 1929 Parliament, when the party split three ways on its attitude to the Labour Government and quickly fell into decades of political oblivion.

Professor Pimlott stepped back from the party battle to question whether British politics was fundamentally changed during the 1920s. Describing the Labour Party of the inter-war years as the Liberal Party in practice, he argued that there was a clear thread of continuity running from the Liberal Government of 1906 to the Labour Government of 1924 and beyond. Several former Liberals filled government posts in the 1924 and 1929–31 administrations, and, as the Liberal Party declined, many people who would have previously been likely to join the Liberals were instead swept into the Labour Party. If the Liberal Party had emerged from the First World War as the principal opponent of the Conservative Party then it would have incorporated many of the policies and supporters of the Labour Party and, except perhaps in relation to its attitude to trade union questions, would not have looked dissimilar to the Labour Party of the 1920s and 1930s. This contention provoked a lively debate between the speakers.

Perhaps the most striking aspect of the party politics of the 1920s was the extent to which the possibility of coalitions and pacts were not discussed by the parties. In recent years, the question of how parties would behave in a 'hung' parliament has been an important theme of general election

campaigns, even when the prospect of such an outcome was distant. During the 1920s, however, the Liberal Party seemed to over-emphasise the power and influence it might wield if it held the balance of power in parliament and completely failed to appreciate the extent to which offering general support to a government of which it was not part would impact adversely on its credibility. The leaders of the other two parties during this period come across as far less naïve. The Tories took full advantage of the electoral conditions of the 1920s to establish their hegemony, and the Labour Party single-mindedly set out to govern untrammelled by arrangements and understandings of the sort hankered after by the Liberal Party. Perhaps this contrast reflected the declining powers of Asquith, the deep divisions within the Liberal leadership, and the extent to which the Liberal elite failed to grasp that the arguments and attitudes of the nineteenth century did not impress the expanded electorate of the post-First World War era.

Leaders Good and Bad

Evening meeting, February 2000 with Robert Maclennan MP and Professor Peter Clarke

Report by **David Cloke**

The History Group meeting in February was, in the words of one speaker, something of a party game. Each of the two main speakers, Professor Peter Clarke and Robert Maclennan MP, was asked to review the Liberal, Liberal Democrat and SDP leaders of the twentieth century with a view to determining the two key figures amongst them. Those attending the meeting also had the opportunity to participate in a ballot for the best and worst leader. The meeting was ably presided over by Lord Hooson, who wondered airily at the beginning of the meeting if he had been chosen because he had known, or at least met, every Liberal leader since David Lloyd George.

The two keynote speakers chose quite different methods for arriving at their chosen two. Professor Clarke assessed each leader against two key criteria: their success in terms of the agenda they set for themselves and the party, and their success in achieving it. The latter was judged according to the leader's ability to mobilise support within the party, parliament and the country. In Professor Clarke's view the greatest leaders were those with a clear agenda who were successful in mobilising support behind it. Robert Maclennan began more instinctively. He had chosen his two key figures almost from the start. He then proceeded to analyse the claims of those that remained to replace them. However, for reasons of self-preservation, he excluded from consideration the five surviving leaders.

Peter Clarke began by considering Gladstone, effectively the first leader of the party (though strictly speaking outside the scope of this meeting!). In Clarke's view he had created the first truly mass party in British politics. Gladstone both commanded the Treasury bench and was a national figure in the country. He had a distinctive agenda that appealed to the moral conscience of the nation. He was not only the first but possibly the greatest Liberal leader.

Rosebery was a disappointment in comparison but then, perhaps, who wouldn't have been? Clarke argued that he had been chosen because he seemed to possess 'a certain sort of charisma'. However, it failed to come off and Rosebery 'flickered out'. Hence, for Clarke, the next effective leader was Campbell-Bannerman. According to Clarke, C-B had succeeded simply because Asquith could not afford to take the job on at the time. His leadership of the party at the time of the 1906 general election had invested his time with a 'warm romantic glow' which perhaps was not entirely justified by events. His short premiership did not leave behind a compelling record, his agenda having largely been aborted: an effort had been made to settle education and he had tried to introduce a compromise measure in Ireland. He was very genial and agreeable and fondly remembered but not really compelling otherwise.

Robert Maclennan, however, chose C-B as one of his two key leaders of the century. He led the party when it enjoyed the 'plenitude of political power' but more than that, in Maclennan's view, to Campbell-Bannerman belongs the credit for creating a great reforming movement. Maclennan recalled that at the age of fourteen, whilst walking with his grandfather in Stirling, he passed a statue of C-B outside the library. He had been MP for Stirling Burghs when Maclennan's grandfather had returned with the army from the Boer War. In June 1900, Campbell-Bannerman had asked and answered his own question: 'When is a war not a war? When it is carried on by methods of barbarism in South Africa.' Fifty years later the power of that indictment continued to rankle with Maclennan's Tory grandfather. Fifty years on again, that memory dispelled for Maclennan the image of C-B as a buffer.

For this speech was not an aberration. Despite his appearance of bluff amiability C-B had conceived a powerful hostility to the Unionists, one derived from moral repugnance. Indeed, we are not alone in underestimating C-B, argued Maclennan; so too did Asquith, Grey and Haldane. The Unionists, however, did not make the same mistake. To reinforce his argument, Robert Maclennan quoted from the *Manchester Guardian* on C-B's impact in the House of Commons as leader of the opposition.

> Those who heard Sir Henry's first speech as leader of the opposition are

Jo Grimond: the best leader …

never likely to forget the sensation it caused – the look of pained resentment that came to the faces of Mr Balfour and Mr Chamberlain as they realised that the new man was actually attacking them, even holding them up to derision.

This image of him was reinforced by his successor, Asquith, who, in his tribute to C-B in the House of Commons, declared that: 'we have not seen in our time a man of greater courage'. C-B was also a 'great picker of men' and presided over a brilliant cabinet. In Maclennan's view, it is to C-B, rather than to Asquith, that the credit lies for fashioning the great reforming government which followed the 1906 landslide.

In turning to Asquith, Clarke noted that the esteem in which he was held had declined in the latter part of the twentieth century. In his view Asquith was one of the most effective prime ministers of the century and he was well overdue for revival. In terms of mobilisation, Clarke argued that he successfully presided over a form of coalition politics, with Labour acting more like a pressure group than a political party. He managed to keep the Irish Nationalists on board despite never delivering Home Rule. Asquith energised politics and dominated his cabinet. At least up to the First World War, Clarke argued that he was an effective leader and his authority was never challenged. He also had a clear agenda of social reform, encapsulated in the establishment of old age pensions and the National Insurance Act, which laid the foundations of the welfare state.

Maclennan was less convinced that Asquith's failings as a wartime leader should be so overlooked. Revisionist historians were increasingly calling him to account for the 'massive blunder of the First World War'. In his published letters of the time, Maclennan noted, there were details of the minutiae of the Irish Question but little on the events in continental Europe. Maclennan also questioned whether Asquith did enough with his huge majority in the House of Commons. He did acknowledge, however, that, unlike Tony Blair, he faced a powerful House of Lords – 'a lion blocking the road way'. That Asquith faced it down and drew its teeth, Maclennan agreed, was highly creditable; nonetheless, the debit side of his peacetime leadership should not be overlooked. The massive parliamentary majority he inherited melted away in two years. His consequent reliance on the Irish Nationalists and the increasingly intractable nature of the Irish question drew ever more of Asquith's attention across St George's Channel when, in Maclennan's view, he should have been concentrating on events across the English Channel. In summary, Maclennan argued that on the simple test of whether or not he left the party stronger than he had found it, Asquith must be deemed a failure.

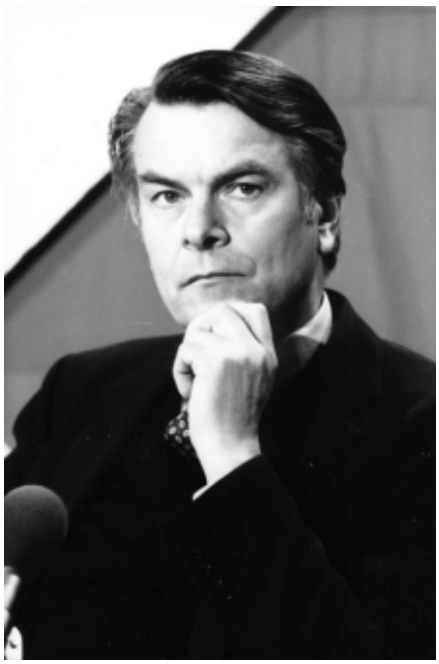
Asquith's eventual successor as leader was Lloyd George. Clarke felt that his contribution was hard to access. It was difficult for him decide whether to take into account Lloyd George's undoubted skills as a war leader and his success in the immediate post-war period in mobilising the centre ground, both of which predated his succession to the leadership of the party. As party leader, Clarke argued that Lloyd George developed a distinctive agenda, building on the ideas he had expressed in Asquith's Government and as Prime Minister after the war. Clarke also noted that in the 1920s, with *We Can Conquer Unemployment,* he established a macroeconomic agenda for the first time in Britain – although he was never given the chance to implement it.

For Maclennan, Lloyd George could only be assessed from the time of his assumption of the party leadership in 1926 – by which time his best efforts were behind him. His recognition of the policy vacuum in the party was obviously important; indeed there is something noteworthy in producing policy pamphlets that are still worth reading seventy years on. Nonetheless, Maclennan believed that, despite his success as a wartime leader, he lacked the 'finer arts of peace-time politics'.

Lloyd George's successor, Sir Herbert Samuel, was in Clarke's opinion a largely passive figure. He was clever, even wise, and a great conciliator (which one would have thought was a rather useful asset in the party at the time). But the ability to mobilise support seemed to be too much for him. This may not have been so surprising given the state of disintegration that the Party then faced. Maclennan passed over Samuel even more quickly. Whilst he acknowledged Samuel's intellectual contribution to turn-of-the-century Liberalism, Maclennan felt that he lacked the qualities needed 'to handle the fissile elements which constituted the inter-war party'.

Maclennan, however, was more sympathetic to Samuel's successor and his own predecessor as MP for Caithness and Sutherland, Sir Archibald Sinclair. He took over a divided party, lacking in direction, which appeared

… and David Owen: the worst?



almost irrelevant to the rest of politics. Despite this, Sinclair took an honourable stand against appeasement and worked with self-punishing commitment in the wartime coalition government, narrowly losing his seat in the 1945 election in consequence. Maclennan noted that when he was first elected in 1966, Sinclair's former constituents told him that he had forgotten about them. Maclennan believed this to be almost certainly untrue; Sinclair had simply assumed that the people of Caithness and Sutherland would see winning the war as the all-encompassing duty of their MP.

Clarke also commended Sinclair's leadership of the party. In terms of the mobilisation of support he did keep the party going and provided a strategy for survival – which could be regarded as no mean feat at the time. It was less clear to Clarke whether Sinclair provided a distinctive agenda for the party. Nonetheless, he enabled it to act within Churchill's wartime coalition and to assist in the development of the post war consensus.

The one-time Liberal National MP, Clement Davies, succeeded Sinclair as leader in 1945. For Clarke, Davies did one important thing: preserve Liberal independence. If he had taken up Churchill's offer of a cabinet post, the history of the party might have ended there. (*See Graham Jones' article in this issue.*) Maclennan agreed that his one important service was the refusal of the cabinet post. Clarke noted that whilst he succeeded, to the limited extent possible, in mobilising the party, Davies was quite unable to provide it with any clear agenda. Even amongst his MPs there were wide differences of view.

In terms of mobilisation of support, it was obvious to Clarke that Davies' successor, Jo Grimond, energised the party in a way not seen since the time of Lloyd George. He provided the party with serious hope of revival. He also had a clear agenda, in his call for the realignment of the left. Whilst he did not achieve either of these objectives he set the party on an upward trajectory that meant it had clearly turned a corner. For Maclennan, Grimond stood alongside Campbell-Bannerman as one of the two great Liberal leaders of the century. Like C-B, courage was a distinguishing feature. As with C-B, Maclennan first drew on a personal anecdote in his assessment of Grimond. In the autumn of 1956 he had been dining with his father and Lord Weir, a fellow Conservative and chairman of a successful engineering company manufacturing marine pumps. Grimond had written to him asking him what he thought about the future of the industry in the West of Scotland, to which he replied: 'Dear Jo, do your own homework!' According to Maclennan, this was typical of the many rebuffs that Jo was to receive 'in his unending quest for fresh and relevant policy proposals'. In re-reading *The Liberal Challenge*, Maclennan had been struck by the sharpness of Grimond's observations. He spoke directly, faced the blemishes in society with frankness and understood the heterogeneous nature of the UK. It may have seemed that his project was unattainable after the 1966 general election. However, his vision inspired those who created the Alliance fifteen years later. For Maclennan, Grimond's freshness and openness to new ideas would make him a leader for any age.

Not being limited by the need for political self-preservation, Clarke continued his survey with Grimond's various successors. Jeremy Thorpe, he argued, had a great deal of charisma and was a man of wit and charm. However, there was little sign of a distinctive agenda and consequently he came over as unconvincing and inconsistent. David Steel was successful in putting the party back together after the fall of Thorpe, and was also successful in reaching out beyond the party. Clarke argued that, paradoxically, his agenda was that of a good social democrat, which may explain the importance he attached to the alliance with other social democrats. Roy Jenkins, meanwhile, had a more consistent vision of what could be created with the SDP and appealed to the 'radical centre'. In Europe he also had a clear and distinctive agenda.

Clarke suggested that Jenkins' successor, David Owen, was perhaps New Labour before his time. He was clearly more committed to Labour rather than to Liberal traditions, and this represented a fracture line with others in the SDP. Rather than mobilising support, Owen seemed to leave many people behind him in his wake. Clarke was also unclear as to what Owen's self-professed agenda of the 'social market' actually meant. Finally, Clarke turned to Paddy Ashdown. Like many before him he received a dismal inheritance. Clarke argued that he very effectively established a strategy for recovery, though it was less clear what this was *for:* the recreation of Grimondite ideas of the realignment of the left, perhaps?

This meeting perhaps posed as many questions as it answered. Both the speakers gave very personal views of the leaders and many of the members of the audience responded in similar way during the discussion at the end. Perhaps the most enlightening aspect of the meeting was, as Robert Maclennan stated at the beginning of his address, what the choices may have revealed about those that made them. What, I wonder is revealed by the audience's overwhelming choice of Jo Grimond as the best leader and of David Owen as the worst? Is it illuminating, for example, to see that Lloyd George continues to divide the party with almost as many members of the audience voting him the best leader as

Best and worst leaders

The result of the ballot held at the meeting was as follows:

	Best	Worst
Campbell-Bannerman	5	–
Asquith	5	1
Lloyd George	5	6
Samuel	–	8
Sinclair	–	–
Davies	–	2
Grimond	15	–
Thorpe	–	1
Steel	–	1
Ashdown	4	–
Jenkins	1	–
Owen	–	15
Maclennan	–	–
Gladstone (write-in)	1	–

Reviews

A Liberal life

Daniel Waley: *A Liberal Life: Sydney, Earl Buxton, 1853–1934* (Newtimber, 1999)
Reviewed by **Malcolm Baines**

Daniel Waley has written a solid overview of the political career of this middle-ranking pre-First World War Liberal statesman, with several interesting insights into more general political issues of the time. He has added to its value to anyone interested in looking at the period in more detail by providing copious footnotes and a list of the Buxton papers. As a result, this book is well worth reading for those particularly interested in late Victorian or Edwardian politics, or in the history of South Africa, where Buxton was Governor-General from 1914 to 1920.

Buxton was born into one of those industrial dynasties of the late eighteenth century, including, for example, the Cadburys, which were to provide the financial basis of a number of Victorian and Edwardian political careers. In Buxton's case, the industry was brewing, and the income generated sufficient that Buxton could devote his life to political service despite suffering from a serious bone disease.

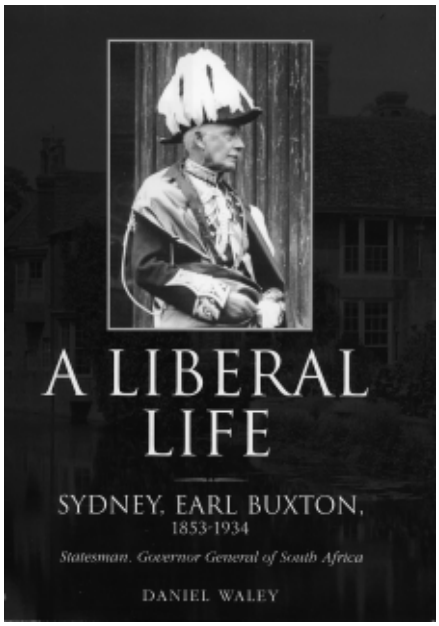
Waley sketches well the beginnings of Buxton's political career: his election to the London School Board in 1876, at the age of twenty-three, where he gradually established a reputation as a radical on social issues. As a rising Liberal politician with private means, Buxton had a typical start in parliamentary life. He had some impact as a political thinker, publishing several mediocre political works including a *Handbook to Political Questions of the Day.* Buxton stood unsuccessfully in Boston, Lincolnshire, in 1880, and had a short period as MP for Peterborough from 1883 to 1885, before becoming member for Poplar in the East End in 1886 until his resignation in 1914.

In parliament, Buxton spoke frequently on a number of issues and cemented his radical reputation by taking a leading and sympathetic role in the 1889 dock strike. He also argued in favour of free education and against judging schools purely on their examination results. Buxton was, however, opposed to allowing widespread Jewish immigration from Eastern Europe into London, arguing that charity begins at home.

Waley portrays Buxton as a rising Liberal politician who never quite reached the top of the greasy pole. He joined with Asquith, Haldane and Grey in forming a group to press for a wider programme of social reform in the 1890s. However, unlike the others, who substantially advanced their careers in Gladstone's 1892–94 government, Buxton was disappointed only to be offered the Colonial Under-Secretaryship. This post did, however, begin his interest in Southern African affairs. Waley, in one of the most interesting chapters of the biography, gives a fascinating insight into the Poplar Liberal Association in this period and how fundamental Buxton and his wife were to its organisation, providing a focus for constituency activity during the year.

After the defeat of Rosebery's Government in June 1895, Buxton returned to opposition. Waley has little to say about Buxton's contribution to Liberal thinking in this period. Given his former ministerial post, it is perhaps natural that he should have been preoccupied with the Boer War, but it was also the time of his second marriage. Nonetheless, he still hoped for high office following Campbell-Bannerman's formation of a government in December 1905, even thinking it possible he might become Chancellor of the Exchequer. Campbell-Bannerman, however, had a low opinion of Buxton, confiding to his secretary that he felt a place had to be found for him even though it was not deserved through merit. In the event, he served until 1910 as Postmaster-General and then under Asquith as President of the Board of Trade.

Buxton was no match for the political skills of Lloyd George, who, for example, unscrupulously persuaded Asquith that he should be the one to introduce the Government's measures to bring in unemployment insurance. As a result, Buxton was very much on the margins of the 1906–14 Liberal administrations, although it is not clear from Waley's account that he ever had the ability to play a more prominent role. Increasingly fed up with dealing with industrial unrest, Buxton took the opportunity to replace Herbert Gladstone as Governor-General of



South Africa, a post in which he seems to have been a much greater success.

Waley gives an interesting resumé of Buxton's career as Governor-General and in many ways this is the best part of the book. In particular, he focuses on Buxton's relations with the defeated Boer leaders Smuts and Botha, now running the South African government, the pressures on him to support South African annexation of Swaziland and Rhodesia, and how he travelled the region to support the war effort.

Buxton returned to the family home in Sussex in 1920, where he spent his remaining years, until his death in 1934, in writing a biography of Botha and continuing his interest in African affairs. Although in the Asquithian camp, Buxton played no real role in the Liberal squabbles of that period.

This is the first biography of Buxton, a man who struggled against illness and family tragedy in the premature deaths of his first wife and four of his six children, but never seemed from Waley's account to have had the necessary political skills to make a success of his periods in government. Waley certainly concludes that his conciliatory role as Governor-General was Buxton's main achievement and probably that part of his public career he enjoyed most. Overall, an interesting insight into a lesser known figure but not one that changes fundamentally our understanding of the pre-First World War Liberal Party.

Copies of A Liberal Life *can be obtained from Newtimber Publications, Newtimber Place, Newtimber, Hassocks, West Sussex BN6 9BU; tel: 01273 833298; web: www.newtimber.co.uk.*

Liberals and Labour

Peter Joyce: *Realignment of the Left? A history of the relationship between the Liberal Democrat and Labour Parties* (Macmillan, 1999)

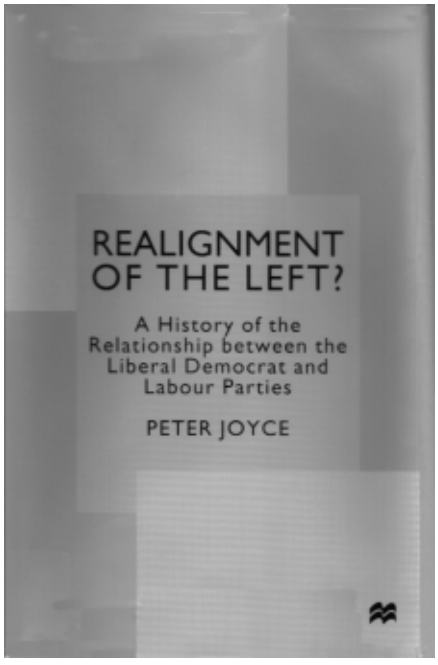
Reviewed by **Robert Ingham**

The relationship between the Liberal Democrats and its predecessors and the Labour Party has been a source of political interest for much of the last century. Historians have long considered the question of how the Labour Party came to replace the Liberal Party as one of the two major parties in the British electoral system, as well as why the Liberal Party survived once it slipped to the political periphery. The creation of 'New' Labour and the election of the Blair Government in 1997 has encouraged fresh consideration of the relationship between the parties, particularly with the advent of joint policy negotiations on a range of key issues.

Peter Joyce has made an early attempt to assess the relationship between the parties during the twentieth century, but plenty of opportunities remain for other historians in this fertile area. Joyce's study is a patchy mix of new research – particularly on the period during which Jo Grimond was Liberal leader – and a review of existing literature. Students arriving at this area of political history fresh will find Joyce's work useful, but more expert readers are likely to find the book a little disappointing.

Joyce's consideration of the relationship between the Liberal and Labour Parties before the Second World War is competent but does not add a great deal to existing work in this area. There is a good discussion of the reasons for the Liberal Party's eclipse by Labour, for which Joyce eventually pins responsibility on internal feuds within the Liberal Party and the failure of the Lloyd George government to deliver a land 'fit for heroes'. He is relatively kind on Asquith's stance during the period of Labour government in 1924, and looks in some detail at the Popular Front initiatives of the 1930s. Interestingly, he finds an early example of the Liberal Party deciding to target its efforts on a handful of promising parliamentary constituencies, in 1938.

Joyce devotes 200 pages to the post-war era, compared to only half that number on the years prior to 1945. The main criticism of the book is that he allows too much space to a discussion of the Grimond era, including a section of doubtful relevance on Grimond's views after he retired as Liberal leader, at the expense of other aspects of the Liberal/Labour relationship. Joyce makes no mention of the talks which took place during the 1950 Parliament between Liberal MPs and a representative of the Labour Party on the possibility of the Liberals backing a Labour programme during a period when Labour's parliamentary majority was small. The relationship between the two parties at local government level is not considered, although there were examples of local pacts and arrangements, for example at Southport. His treatment of the Lib-Lab Pact is surprisingly short and Christopher Mayhew, the only sitting



Labour MP ever to defect to the Liberal Party, does not rate a single reference.

Joyce's book is not the 'authoritative account of the history of the British left and centre' which it claims to be, and nor is it an entirely convincing analysis of the relationship between the Liberal and Labour Parties. Such an analysis would surely have compared in detail the ideological underpinnings, and the background and views of the activists, of the two parties. Instead, Joyce has written a history of the Liberal Party from the point of view of its relationship with the Labour Party. Such an exercise is not without value, and the book makes for an interesting, if ultimately unsatisfying, read.

Intelligent Liberalism

Conrad Russell: *An Intelligent Person's Guide to Liberalism* (Duckworth, 1999)
Reviewed by **Duncan Brack**

This book, part of Duckworth's 'Intelligent Guide to …' series, provides an excellent outline of modern Liberal philosophy. It deserves a review here because, as one would expect from an author who is a professional historian as well as a politician (and Honorary President of the Liberal Democrat History Group, no less), it is firmly rooted in the history of British Liberalism.

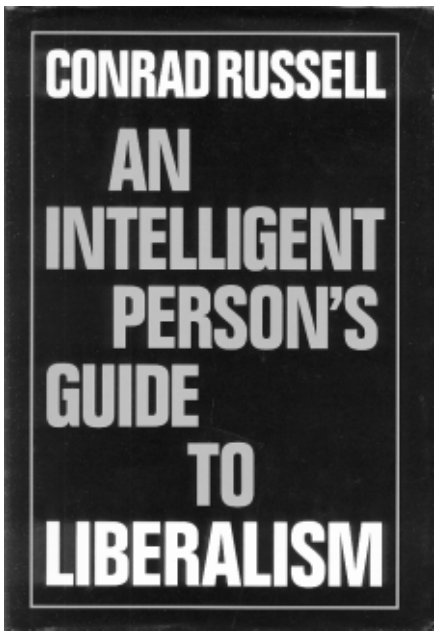
Russell writes clearly from the point of view of Liberalism as a distinct philosophy, deriving originally from events and thinking in the seventeenth century – while observing that an alternative vision, at times held by many Liberals, sees the party as one part of the progressive 'centre-left', closely related to Labour. As he does throughout the book, he provides plenty of quotations to support both views.

From the first position, modern Liberalism is the inheritor of a long and continuous tradition, though one that is, Russell argues, often misunderstood because of 'the distinctive twentieth-century failing of trying to analyse earlier centuries' politics in terms of economics', rather than, for example, religion. It was not disputes over religious *principles,* however, that motivated the early Liberals, but conflicts over church *power* – and it is the concern over the use of power that lies at the heart of Liberalism:

> That is why they provide a grounding in how to apply the Human Rights Act in the twenty-first century. Principles designed to protect Nonconformist aldermen in the reign of Queen Anne had been translated into principles of racial non-discrimination before the end of the American Civil War. Their application to gender and sexual orientation has taken us a little longer, but in those fields too, we find principles taken from the religious politics of the seventeenth century can be applied to the sexual politics of the twentieth. This approach has given Liberalism a philosophical continuity almost unique in British, and possibly in world, politics.

Russell traces the development and meaning of a series of Liberal themes. The most basic, and the oldest, deriving from Whig opposition to Stuart absolutism and to the exercise of hereditary power in the absence of consent, is the control of executive power. The Glorious Revolution of 1688 committed the Whigs to the 'ascending theory' of power, in which power came up from the people, who conferred it – or not, as the case may be – on government. Another way to express it, as Russell does in quoting one of his former pupils, is as a belief in 'equality of birthright'. Liberal achievements in curbing executive power and patronage stem from this basic approach: the steady widening of the franchise throughout the nineteenth century, the opening of the civil service to competitive entry, the abolition of purchase of army commissions, to cite but a few. The Gladstonian commitment to retrenchment, superficially so different to the following century's New Liberals' belief in public spending for social ends, in practice derived from the desire to limit expenditure on the armed forces, police and the diplomatic service, then the main areas of state spending, which primarily benefited the upper classes; it was another means of constraining executive power.

Along with the control of power goes its dispersal, which Russell links with the promotion of diversity, religious, social, geographical and cultural, to form pluralism, his second theme. Again there are strong historical roots: the Whig rejection of the Tory view of church and state as coterminous, Gladstone's acceptance of the United Kingdom as a country of several nations, the long-held belief in the autonomy of local government – a strong contrast with other, more centralised states such as France, where, as John Stuart Mill noted, 'everything was done *for* the people, and nothing *by* the people'.



The Liberal commitment to equality, Russell argues, derives from this belief in a diverse and tolerant society. Such a society cannot exist where individuals are treated differently by the law and by government institutions because of their nature. 'Equality before the law' was one of the great rallying cries of Liberalism from the earliest days of the Whigs; 'equal justice', 'non-discrimination' and 'concern for the underdog' are just as valid ways of expressing it. Lloyd George launched his career in the Llanfrothen burial case of 1888, where he successfully acted for a family of a nonconformist quarryman who had been denied burial in the local churchyard. This, of course, is a very different commitment to equality than is Labour's, and perhaps helps explain many of the fundamental differences in approach between the two philosophies.

The remaining chapters of the book deal with economics, internationalism, civil liberties and the green agenda. Once again, Liberal principles are explained in terms of their historic development. Since Liberalism has such deep roots, going back before the state could exert any significant control over the levers of economic activity, the party, argues Russell, 'does not have an economic philosophy'. Economics is important principally in that it affects the distribution of power in society and can thereby enlarge, or diminish, the life-chances of individuals. In general, Liberals have tended to support the operation of the free market, mainly because this has appeared to be the system which has the greatest potential to deliver the greatest benefits to the greatest number with the smallest need for government interference. Many Victorian Liberals saw the free market, and in particular free trade, as desirable because it provided a means of protecting the poor against the rich, who possessed the power (then, and to a certain extent now) to fix prices, rig the market and restrict choice. Liberals opposed concentrations of economic power as much as they did of political power, and for the same reasons.

The principle of the control of power applies just as well in the international arena. Historically, Liberals have supported the underdogs, nations struggling to be free of empires, minorities oppressed by majorities – though without automatically assuming that independence, which often bears overtones of exclusivist nationalism, is necessarily the best option; various forms of federalism are valid alternatives. Equally, Liberals have argued for the creation of a strong framework of international law, wherein every country, no matter how small and weak, may enjoy the same rights to equal treatment – say, in a border dispute, or an argument about trade discrimination – as its larger and more powerful neighbours. The creation of effective international and supranational institutions – the European Union, the United Nations and its agencies – is a natural development of this belief, and explains why Liberals have always argued the pro-European and pro-internationalist case throughout the twentieth century.

This approach has given Liberalism a philosophical continuity almost unique in British, and possibly in world, politics.

In the civil liberties chapter, Russell looks at how Locke's concern with restricting government interference was developed by Mill into the belief that the preservation of civil interests does not require a common system of morality. Moral principles are something individuals choose for themselves: 'human nature is not a machine to be built after a model, and set to exactly the work prescribed for it, but a tree, which requires to grow and develop itself on all sides, according to the tendency of the inward forces which make it a living thing'. As Russell observes, 'this is now somewhere near the heart of what Liberals believe', and he uses it to explain the problems the party has experienced with the more authoritarian, nanny-state tendencies of New Labour.

Green Liberalism, obviously, has less deep historic roots, but Russell does a better job than anyone else I have read of analysing how environmentalism fits in with the rest of Liberal philosophy, again tracing the Liberal approach back to the concern with the distribution of power, but this time with its distribution *between* generations. It relates to the idea of the exercise of power as a trust, passed to the government by the consent of the people, exercised in their name and for their benefit, and on behalf not just of the current population but of future generations too.

Probably the least successful chapter is the penultimate, which looks forward to the future development of Liberalism, seeing the phenomenon of globalisation, with its economic, environmental and security policy dimensions, as being the next major challenge the party and its philosophy will have to face. The text largely just states the problems, without attempting any prescriptions. An epilogue underlines the distinctiveness of the Liberal philosophy by comparing it with the other parties' – an easy task for Conservatism, but a more difficult one for Labour, the competition rather than the opposition.

There are some minor criticisms one can make of *An Intelligent Person's Guide to Liberalism*. Russell is occasionally too prone to write in soundbites, going for the nicely turned phrase rather than the compelling explanation. And on occasion he simply ducks out of difficult arguments. But these flaws are few and far between in a book that not only links philosophy with history, but does so in a concise and beautifully written way. What more could one want?

Snippets

The uses of bicycles

A corps of cyclists, formed from those who ride and who display no eagerness for house-to-house canvassing, should be constituted for the important duty of checking and tracing voters who have removed, and also for the circulation of special issues of literature. *[p. 2]*

Is Organ Playing forbidden?

Is Organ Playing forbidden? A somewhat perplexing question is occasionally raised by the promoters of election meetings: whether payment may be made for the use of an organ in the building, and for the services of an organist – if the fact of the organ being used makes no difference in the cost of the hall, in other words, where the existence of the organ, whether used or not, would not affect the fee charged for the hall – in that case, if no payment is made by the candidate or his agent to an organist to play, there would appear, so far as the election is concerned, to be no objection to the organ being used. *[pp. 192–3]*

Extracts taken from H. F. Oldman and J. Manus: The Conduct And Management Of Parliamentary Elections: A Practical Manual *by William Woodings (9th ed., Liberal Publication Department, London, 1933).*

Research in Progress

If you can help any of the individuals listed below with sources, contacts, or any other information — or if you know anyone who can — please pass on details to them. Details of other research projects in progress should be sent to the Editor (see page 2) for inclusion here.

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.*

Edmund Lamb (Liberal MP for Leominster 1906–10). Any information on his election and period as MP; wanted for biography of his daughter, Winfred Lamb. *Dr David Gill, d.gill@appleonline.net.*

The political life and times of Josiah Wedgwood MP. Study of the political life of this radical MP, hoping to shed light on the question of why the Labour Party replaced the Liberals as the primary popular representatives of radicalism in the 1920s. *Paul Mulvey, 112 Richmond Avenue, London N1 0LS; paulmulvey@yahoo.com.*

Recruitment of Liberals into the Conservative Party, 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. *Cllr Nick Cott, 1a Henry Street, Gosforth, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, NE3 1DQ; N.M.Cott@ncl.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 have been Chairmen. *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.*

Liberal foreign policy in the 1930s. Focussing particularly on Liberal anti-appeasers. *Michael Kelly, 12 Collinbridge Road, Whitewell, Newtownabbey, Co. Antrim BT36 7SN*

The Liberal Party and the wartime coalition 1940–45. Sources, particularly on Sinclair as Air Minister, and on Harcourt Johnstone, Dingle Foot, Lord Sherwood and Sir Geoffrey Maunder (Sinclair's PPS) particularly welcome. *Ian Hunter, 9 Defoe Avenue, Kew, Richmond TW9 4DL; ian.hunter@curtishunter.co.uk.*

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.*

A Liberal Democrat History Group Evening Meeting

'Methods of Barbarism' – Liberalism and the Boer War

'When is a war not a war?' asked the Liberal leader Campbell-Bannerman. 'When it is carried on by methods of barbarism in South Africa.'

One hundred years after the Boer War began, **Professor Denis Judd** (University of North London), author of *The Boer War and Empire,* will review the response of Liberalism to the War. **Dr Jacqueline Beaumont,** Research Fellow at Oxford Brookes University, will discuss the attitudes of the Liberal press. Chair: **Menzies Campbell MP.**

6.30pm, Monday 3 July

National Liberal Club, 1 Whitehall Place, London SW1

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We are looking for readers and historians to help us produce the *Journal of Liberal Democrat History* in the following ways:

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- Review articles submitted for publication – providing comments (anonymously) to their authors on their content and accuracy. (Let us know in which period you have expertise.)
- Provide graphics – photos, cartoons, etc – to help illustrate articles in the *Journal.*

If you can help with any of these, we would like to hear from you – please contact the Editor (contact details on page 2).

History Group publications

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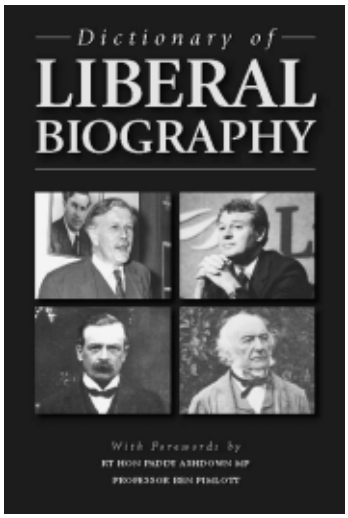
Contributors include leading academics, MPs and peers; with forewords by Rt Hon Paddy Ashdown MP and Professor Ben Pimlott.



Also included as appendices are detals of all party leaders and chief whips in the Houses of Commons and Lords, and party presidents and chairs of executives; cabinet ministers since 1859; and by-election winners since 1918.

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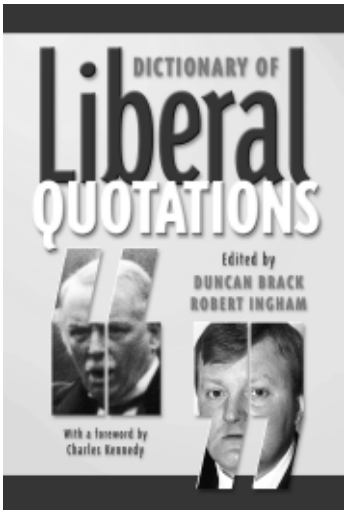
Dictionary of Liberal Quotations

The essential guide to who said what about Liberals and Liberalism

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

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



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.
George Worman

Including over two thousand quotations by and about Liberal Democrats, Liberals and Social Democrats, from over six hundred prominent politicians, writers and journalists.