

This is only amplified by her unsuccessful struggle to keep the Liberal Party in the radical camp. The steady drift to the right after 1948 proved unavailing. Particularly interesting, is Megan's slow move into the Labour Party and her ultimate inability to be comfortable in it.

Overall, the book is a useful biography of a minor Liberal figure, whose main appeal is to those enamoured of the Lloyd George mystique. Copious information is provided of Megan's radical concerns, such as equal pay for women and a parliament for Wales, many still unrealised today. More interesting are details of life in the Lloyd George household and the relationships of the various parties within it, and that is why all those interested in Lloyd George will find it a worthwhile read.

Jonathan Parry: *The Rise and Fall of Liberal Government in Victorian Britain*  
(Yale University Press 1993; £30)

Reviewed by Tony Little

The Liberal Party was formed at a meeting in Willis' Tea Rooms in 1859. It reached a full flowering under the masterly leadership of Gladstone only to be broken by the traitorous desertion of the Whigs who revealed their true propertied interest in the 1886 Home Rule crisis. No? This is the straw man that Parry seeks to demolish in his book on parliamentary Liberalism up to 1886.

He argues, successfully, that the Liberals were a British party committed to the different national, economic and religious elements in the community rather than an English, Anglican and landed interest like the Tories. The Liberal leadership needed to respond to and manage social change rather than just resist or yield in the last ditch. Their skills were primarily administrative, despite their reforming legislative achievements, checking sectional lobbying and corruption in favour of firm economy. In spite, or perhaps because, of Palmerston's belligerence, Liberals really were the party of peace, retrenchment and reform.

Parry traces the roots of the party back to the 'country party' tradition of the eighteenth century Whigs enhanced by their digestion of the lessons of the post Napoleonic war period. Of particular importance was Canning's responsiveness to public opinion and his use of public opinion, rather than the monarchy, as the main support for policy. By the 1830s, the essential elements of Liberalism were in place. He plays down the strength and the ideological vanguard role of the Radicals and suggests that the 'advanced' elements of the party were unable to rouse the enthusiasm of the then restricted electorate for comprehensive radical legislative programmes. This failing damned the party to the wilderness for twenty years after 1886 and damned the Liberal revival under Asquith. The same lesson might also be applied to the radical governments of Attlee and Thatcher.

Since Parry equates Liberalism with what others would define as moderate progressive Whiggery, he is almost bound to

identify the 1885/6 Home Rule crisis as the end of his Liberalism because that is when many of the aristocratic Whigs deserted the party. It also leads him to denigrating Gladstone and the Peelite contribution to Liberalism while promoting the leadership qualities of Lord John Russell. Lord John's reputation was dealt a severe blow during the Crimean War and has never since fully recovered. Hartington was less laid back than he pretended but he failed to head off Gladstone in 1880 or carry the majority of the party with him in 1885/6. Gladstone's faults and failings were obvious even before his first premiership - his temper and messianic tendencies especially. They were outweighed by his virtues - his oratory, his vision, his drive and above all his administrative skills. While the immediate cause of the 1885/6 crisis was Gladstone's sudden and bungled conversion to Home Rule, the origins of Whig unease ran much deeper. The 1880-1885 government was an unhappy experience for its members, frustrated at home by Irish obstruction and almost broken up by foreign policy disputes. From the beginning some Whigs were worried that the government was not sufficiently responsive to property rights.

The real failing of the book is in its unwillingness to recognise the changing context in which the Liberal party operated. Parry has deliberately focused on parliamentary leadership but the leaders were responding to a changing electorate 'out of doors' and to real world problems. The post 1860s electorate had different social characteristics and posed new problems of party organisation and programmes. Churchill's Tory Democracy was as much a recognition of this as Chamberlain's radical programmes and Jingoism. Salisbury, for all his reactionary pessimism, catered to the new voters. If Gladstone and the Radicals failed in 1886 what alternative did Hartington offer that was not more readily available from the Tories?

In summary, Parry's work is well worth reading. He sets out his thesis clearly and argues his case cogently. He scores at least two out of three hits on the straw man.

## Membership Services

The History Group (with thanks to Richard Grayson for the work) is pleased to make the following listings available to its members.

*Mediawatch:* a bibliography of major articles on the Liberal Democrats appearing in the broadsheet papers and some magazines and journals (all those listed in the British Humanities Index, published by Bowker-Saur). Starting in 1988, this now extends to August 1993.

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

Any History Group member is entitled to receive a copy of either of these free of charge; send an A4 SSAE to Duncan Brack.