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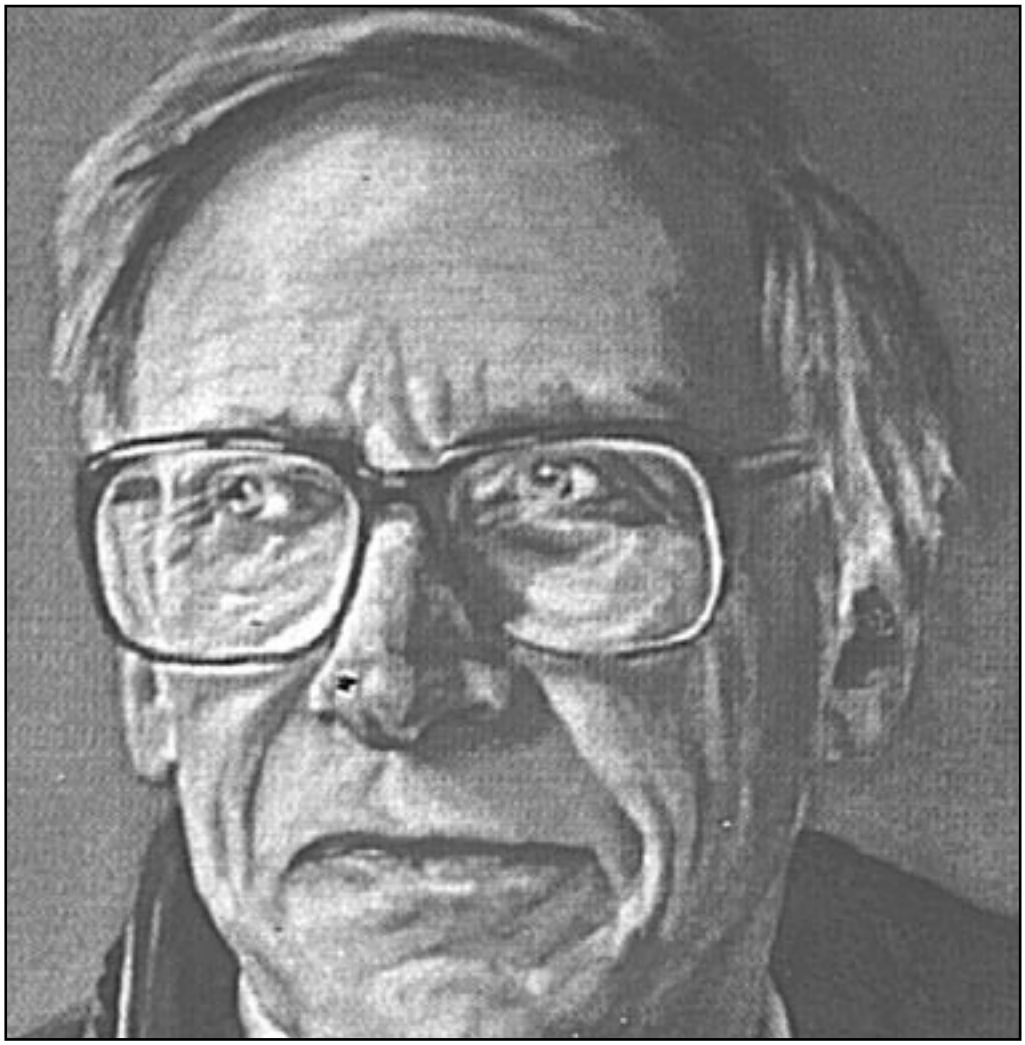
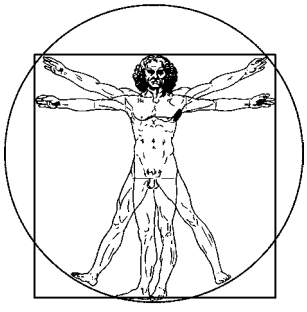


Heir to the New Liberals?



Liberal Democrat History Group

TEN YEARS OF LIBERAL HISTORY

This issue of the *Journal of Liberal History,* number 40, marks the tenth anniversary of the publication originally known as the *Liberal Democrat History Group Newsletter,* then the *Journal of Liberal Democrat History,* and operating under its current title since the beginning of 2003.

I think it is true to say that those of us involved in launching the Liberal Democrat History Group in 1988 – inspired by the Liberal History Group in the pre-merger Liberal Party – had no idea that we would end up where we are now.

Our original intention was simply to organise fringe meetings at the main Liberal Democrat Federal conferences. Perhaps slightly to our surprise, many of them turned out to be extremely popular, and we gradually accumulated a list of people willing to help out with other tasks. So, in 1994, we started to organise meetings both at the spring party conferences, and also in London, for the benefit of non-conference attendees.

And in September 1993, we produced the first issue of the Group's Newsletter, designed simply to publicise our activities and to publish reports of our meetings, and a few book reviews of interests to students of Liberal history.

We managed to stick to a (more or less) regular quarterly publication, and ten years on we can look back at forty issues, including eight special 'themed' issues, three books (published with the help of our friends at Politico's), a rapidly developing website, and an expanding range of contributors and helpers. (Which is not to say that we don't need more contributions and help!) Perhaps most pleasingly, both Labour and Conservatives have finally got round to emulating us, with two History Groups founded in the last year.

Our underlying aim has never really changed, though – to promote the study and research of Liberal history, whether relating to the Liberal Party, SDP, Liberal Democrats or, more broadly, British (and sometimes foreign) Liberalism. We wanted both to remind party members of their party's history, and to promote its study and research – generally a neglected topic – amongst all those interested, whether academics or not.

We hope you find the *Journal of Liberal History* helps you in one or both of these aims, and manages to be an enjoyable and interesting read at the same time.

I cannot thank enough all those who have made the *Journal* possible over the last ten years. Here's to the next decade!

Duncan Brack (Editor)

How they used to look: Newsletter number 1, Newsletter 10 – our first special, on 'Liberals and the First World War' – and the first *Journal of Liberal Democrat History,* nunber 17.

New subscription rates for the Journal

Subscription rates for the *Journal* will be increasing from the new subscription year, starting in September 2003. This is the first rise for four years; it is necessitated by the increasing costs of producing what is on average a much larger publication than hitherto.

An annual subscription to the *Journal of Liberal History* now costs £15.00 (£7.50 unwaged rate) for individuals and £25.00 for institutions. This includes membership of the History Group unless you inform us otherwise.

Rates for overseas subscribers are £20.00 for individuals and £30.00 for institutions; special three-year rates are available for £55.00 (individuals) and £85.00 (institutions) total.

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Liberal Democrat History Group

The Liberal Democrat History Group promotes the discussion and research of historical topics relating to the histories of the Liberal Democrats, Liberal Party, and SDP, and of Liberalism. The Group organises discussion meetings and produces the *Journal* and other occasional publications.

For more information, including details of publications, back issues of the *Journal,* tape records of meetings and archive and other research sources, see our web site at: **www.liberalhistory.org.uk**.

Hon President: **Earl Russell** Chair: **Tony Little**

HEIR TO THE

Ed Randall

describes and assesses the contribution of the American philosopher John Rawls to political philosophy and Liberal thought and suggests that Rawls is a true heir to the New Liberalism of T. H. Green and L. T. Hobhouse.

Liberal political thought and philosophy have invigorated and inspired modern politics and helped to shape European political systems since the end of the seventeenth century. To the diverse and extraordinarily creative family of liberal thinkers, including John Locke, Voltaire, Montesquieu, Thomas Paine, Marquis de Condorcet, Benjamin Constant, Adam Smith, Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill, we must add the name of the greatest political thinker of the twentieth century, John Rawls.

John Rawls died on 24 November 2002 having made what was indisputably the greatest contribution of any twentieth-century political philosopher to the canon of liberal thought and one of the most remarkable contributions to political philosophy of any time. Rawls was, as one of his most able, articulate and knowledgeable admirers has put it: '[aware of the] prodigies of cruelty and destruction for which [human beings] are prepared to offer justifications'.[1] But, as Thomas Nagel went on to argue, Rawls's deep understanding of and commitment to liberal civilisation meant he was determined not to let 'the great evils of the past and present undermine hope for the future of a Society of liberal and decent Peoples around the world'.[2]

Rawls – a biography

When Rawls died, in November last year, the obituary writers were only able to draw upon a very limited amount of information about the personal life of a modest and very private man.[3,4] There can be no doubt that John Rawls, never a seeker after publicity, wanted it that way. Nevertheless, what is known about Rawls's social background and intellectual development is helpful in understanding him as a philosopher and as a liberal political thinker.

John Rawls was born in 1921 and grew up in Baltimore in the American state of Maryland. Significantly, Maryland had been a slaveholding state before 1865. Although it did not become part of the Confederacy, it had strong ties to the slaveholding Southern

NEW LIBERALS?

states that fought together in the American Civil War. Rawls's philosophical arguments, based upon deeply held beliefs about the importance of reciprocity and mutual respect in social and political life, reflected an abiding abhorrence of slavery, and most especially the slavery which the South had defended and depended upon; a slavery that had persisted despite the existence of an American covenant committing American citizens to building a society based on respect for individual rights and the maintenance of democratic government.

Rawls was educated at an exclusive independent school, affiliated to the Episcopal Church, in Kent, Connecticut. This was an educational choice that reflected his parents' religious beliefs and the social and economic advantages of being born into a wealthy and established Baltimore family. He was the second of five brothers – two of whom died as a result of childhood infections that John believed they had contracted from him. Indeed Rawls attributed the development of his severe stutter to the shock of his brothers' deaths.[5] His liberalism and his ideas about social justice were powerfully shaped by this childhood tragedy and by his recognition of the part that luck could play in the course of an individual's life. Rawls's liberalism pays particularly close attention to the numerous unmerited advantages that come with good fortune, and the part that misfortune, equally unmerited, can play in the course of a life. John Rawls was also strongly influenced by his parents' active involvement in Democrat politics and by a very particular admiration for Abraham Lincoln. This American President, who had been a firm opponent of slavery despite having been born in a slaveholding state, was, in Rawls's own words: 'selfless in [his] judgements of … society's interests'.[6]

Rawls entered the US army in 1943, having graduated from an elite American educational institution – Princeton University, in New Jersey. Although he is known to have described his army career as 'singularly undistinguished'[7] it is clear that his service as an infantryman in New Guinea, the Philippines, and Japan had a profound impact on his moral and political outlook. He was still serving in the US army in August 1945 when the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. He believed that the decision to drop the bomb had violated the principles by which liberal democracies should govern their conduct of war, and later on he said so. Quite unusually, for an academic renowned for the use of highly abstract language and careful phraseology, he chose to castigate what he regarded as a grievous 'failure of statesmanship'.[8] According to his best-informed and most sympathetic obituarist, his personal knowledge of the terrors and horrors of war, 'overshadowed everything he did as a student, [stimulated] his interest in politics … and [in] the principles of international justice …'.[9]

Rawls's deep understanding of and commitment to liberal civilisation meant he was determined not to let 'the great evils of the past and present undermine hope for the future of a Society of liberal and decent Peoples around the world'.

Rawls returned to Princeton when the war was over and there he enrolled as a doctoral student. He completed his doctorate on ethics and ethical decision-making in 1950 and, in the process, deepened his interest in both political and moral philosophy. By some accounts he was already committed to the production of his masterwork, *A Theory of Justice*, although it was not published until 1971. Despite having spent almost ten years at Princeton, as both a postgraduate and undergraduate and then as an instructor, this 'northernmost outpost of … southern gentlemen'[10] did not provide a long-term intellectual home or an academic berth for John Rawls.

He travelled to England, to Oxford University, in 1952 and spent the academic year 1952/53 in Oxford with the aid of a Fulbright fellowship. He worked with and took inspiration from many of Britain's leading philosophers and political thinkers, including Isaiah Berlin, Stuart Hampshire and Herbert Hart.[11, 12] His interest in their work, and their interest in his, continued throughout their lengthy careers as political thinkers and philosophers. John Rawls had become part of an international community of political thinkers and philosophers committed to the assiduous and academic pursuit of political truths. He was becoming known as a quiet, gifted and exceptionally thoughtful American and well on his way

to becoming an extraordinarily influential American. But it was a protracted process, mostly hidden from public, if not from academic, view.

On his return to the United States from Oxford, he joined the staff of Cornell University in Ithaca, New York. Although he is thought to have completed much of the work on *A Theory of Justice* at Cornell before 1960, he had in fact still published very little. Just three articles are listed in his *Collected Works* as having been published before 1963.[13] His approach to political philosophy was epitomised by the lengthy gestation of his political and philosophical writing. He believed in a thorough, if not to say exhaustive, and highly academic examination and evaluation of his own ideas. The process of arriving at a 'reflective equilibrium' – Rawls's term, for 'a process of mutual adjustment of principles and considered judgements'[14] – was one to which he was fully committed. 'Reflective equilibrium' was represented as having been a cornerstone of *A Theory of Justice* when it eventually appeared in print, and it describes his general approach to political philosophy.

Despite his modest published output, Rawls was made a full professor at Cornell in 1962, having previously obtained a tenured academic position at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He then moved on to Harvard University, where he settled in the early 1960s, and where he subsequently became the Conant University Professor in 1979, an honour conferred after his international academic reputation had been well and truly made by *A Theory of Justice*.

A worldwide audience for Rawls's ideas

A Theory of Justice has attracted a vast and truly international readership. It has been translated into twenty-seven languages and has sold hundreds of thousands of copies as well as motivating, according to Alan Ryan, some 5,000 serious academic replies or 'ripostes' since its publication in 1971.[15, 16] Responses to Rawls's liberal thought have probably filled more academic library shelves than the work of any other liberal political thinker, ancient or modern; indeed his political thought spawned a publishing industry of its own in the final quarter of the twentieth century. Rawls was surprised by the runaway success of his book and the attention it received – not just in academic circles but well beyond. There can be little doubt about why it was and remains so popular and is so widely praised and admired, even by those who strongly disagree with Rawls's arguments and conclusions.

A Theory of Justice has attracted a vast and truly international readership. It has been translated into twenty-seven languages and has sold hundreds of thousands of copies.

A Theory of Justice served as midwife for the rebirth of philosophical argument about the greatest, the most profound, social and political questions. Philosophy had become very dull and technical in the years immediately before and after the Second World War, and most philosophers seemed uninterested in debates about human rights and wrongs, about social justice and about the ways in which human societies should be governed and organised. Rawls took on the big political questions, he made them interesting and, above all else, he provided a way to discuss them. Those questions included: What is the point of political argument? What, if any, obligations do individuals, as members of a society, have to one another? Is it possible to weigh liberty and equality against each other when we try to fashion and reform our social and political institutions?

To a considerable degree, *A Theory of Justice* took over Rawls's academic career and his work as a philosopher. Most of what he wrote and published after 1971 was offered as justification, refinement, development or correction to his particular and avowedly liberal conception of social justice. His ideas about political liberalism, public reason and toleration all stemmed from his liberal conception of social justice. And Rawls grew increasingly interested in relating his conception of social justice, and of the political liberalism upon which he vigorously argued it rested, to the formulation of the just principles that he hoped and believed could serve as the foundation for a fair and tolerant world order. The titles of his principal works published since 1971 help to illustrate the core issues and themes that he, as a convinced and confidently egalitarian liberal, believed were central to political philosophy: *Political Liberalism; The Law of Peoples (with 'The Idea of Public Reason Revisited');* and *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement*.

The personal good fortune that Rawls recognised had had a great impact on his life – he had lived when two of his brothers had died, he had survived the war in the Pacific when many of his peers had been killed, and he had been born into a wealthy society and a prosperous family at a time and in circumstances that enabled him to pursue his deep interest in political philosophy – did not last for the whole of his life. In 1995 Rawls suffered the first of a series of strokes. They were not allowed to prevent him from completing *The Law of Peoples* in 1998 in which, as Thomas Nagel puts it, we can find 'some of his strongest expressions of feeling'.[17]

Rawls: the ideas and the works – *A Theory of Justice and Political Liberalism*

A theory of justice

Rawls is responsible for a number of substantial additions to the language employed in political philosophy and refinements of the concepts used by political thinkers; the term 'reflective equilibrium' has already been mentioned. In his writings on social justice, Rawls introduced the idea of a 'veil of ignorance', the notion of an 'original position' and the concept of a 'maximin decision rule' or 'difference principle'. These are all part of his

presentation and recasting of the so-called *contractarian* tradition in political philosophy: a tradition of political thought intended to help provide a persuasive account of social and political institutions and practices; an account that reasonable people might be expected to subscribe to, if they were free to do so and prepared to adopt and apply the same principles in the governance of society to everyman.

The *contractarian* tradition is typically presented as congruent with liberal principles and practices and held to rest upon a reasoned and consensual approach to deciding what is right and fair – not just for ourselves but for all those to whom we wish to accord the same respect we seek and expect for ourselves. Rawls himself explained what he was trying to do in *A Theory of Justice*. His aim was to: 'generalise and carry to a higher order of abstraction the traditional theory of the social contract as represented by Locke, Rousseau, and Kant …'[18]

John Borden RAWLS

1921	(Feb 21) – Born in Baltimore, son of Anna Abell RAWLS (née STUMP) and William Lee RAWLS
1939	Graduates from Kent School in Connecticut and goes on to Princeton University
1943	Completes his undergraduate degree at Princeton and joins the US army, going on to serve as an infantryman in the Pacific theatre
1946	Despite an opportunity to become an officer, leaves the army and returns to study at Princeton where he pursues research for a doctorate
1949	Marries Margaret Fox (a painter) with whom he subsequently has five children
1950/51	Is awarded a doctorate at Princeton for his thesis: *A Study in the Grounds of Ethical Knowledge: Considered with Reference to Judgements on the Moral Worth of Character.* His thesis serves as the basis for his first academic publication *Outline of a Decision Procedure for Ethics.*
1950–52	Employed as an instructor at Princeton
1952–53	Holds a Fulbright Fellowship that enables him to go to Oxford University where he meets several of Britain's most eminent political philosophers including the leading liberal thinker Isaiah Berlin
1953–59	Works as an assistant/associate professor at Cornell University
1960–62	Professor of Philosophy at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, Massachusetts
1962–79	Professor of Philosophy at Harvard University
1970–72	President of the American Association of Political and Social Philosophers
1971	*A Theory of Justice* is published and widely acclaimed
1979–91	Holds the James Bryant Conant University Professorship at Harvard (the most esteemed Harvard Chair, previously held by the economist Kenneth Arrow)
1993	His second major book is published, entitled *Political Liberalism*
1995	Has the first of a series of strokes
1999	*The Law of Peoples* is published
1999	Rawls is awarded the National Humanities Medal by President Clinton
2001	*Justice as Fairness: A Restatement* is published
2002	(November 24) – Dies of heart failure

In search of justice

Although we do not choose the time, the place or the circumstances of our entry into the world, Rawls invited his readers to think about the choices that they might make – if they were able to do so – about the different possible societies they might join. He argued that it was open to all of us to think deeply and productively, with honesty and detachment, about the ways in which societies were organised and the ways in which they might be reorganised.

While we do not have the option of joining a great human congress prior to taking up our membership of society, we can use our intellects to grapple with the issues that such a hypothetical assembly – in some imaginary ante-chamber to life – might enable potential new citizens to deliberate. Rawls offered a means, for all who wanted to use it, to grapple with such matters as the choice of principles by which society should be governed and the lines along which human societies should be organised.

In *A Theory of Justice*, Rawls invites his readers to undertake a thought experiment: to imagine themselves in a situation (which he called 'the original position') in which individuals are able to make and share judgements about the arrangements that they would choose, from all possible arrangements, to order and organise society.

Rawls's invitation is to join him on a journey to a place where no one has specific knowledge of personal interests and characteristics. Participants in Rawls's original position can be aided in their deliberations by certain kinds of information. They can be told everything that there is to know about human societies. They are allowed, for example, unrestricted access to the work of social researchers, psychologists, philosophers and historians. This is permitted, even encouraged, so that their discussion of social and political principles is as well informed as it can be. Though it must be conceded – in the face of criticisms directed at the work of social scientists and other observers of the human condition – that it is far from certain how useful such 'information' and 'knowledge' would turn out to be. The social sciences have enjoyed rather modest success in providing undisputed insights into human behaviour.

The original position is only open to those who undertake the journey there by way of a veil of ignorance; participants are deprived of personal knowledge but not of their humanity in the course of a journey past the veil. (Or should it be through a Bunyanesque vale of ignorance?) Because they undergo a thorough – but highly selective – amnesia, which is not meant to rob them of their human nature, participants in Rawls's extraordinary hypothetical congress, his 'original position', lack all certainty about how any agreement they enter into – the principles chosen to govern society – will apply to them personally.

Rawls was convinced that the fairness that he believed was an integral part of his extraordinary thought experiment would powerfully shape any conceivable agreement made by even the most self-regarding of human beings who found their way to the original position. He set out to devise a procedure that was as fair as possible, but it is clear that he also believed that a human capacity for reason and for fairness was fundamental to the pursuit of social justice and to political liberalism. In this he followed Immanuel Kant's belief in the existence of a defining characteristic of human beings: a capacity for moral personality. And Rawls was convinced that reasonable readers would agree that the imaginary participants in his great congress would emerge united in their support for two principles of social justice that would form the foundation blocks for a just and liberal society.

Rawls believed that participants in the original position would insist, before all else, on entrenching equal respect for every person. Agreement on making respect for individual liberty the first – the prior – principle of social justice would reflect the individual's determination, under all conceivable circumstances, to ensure that they would be able to enjoy *the most extensive set of basic liberties consistent with the same liberties for all others*. It was, Rawls argued, a truly basic and fundamental human desire to be treated and regarded as the end rather than the means in any social scheme or plan – a notion found at the core of the liberal political tradition and exemplified in the works of John Locke and J. S. Mill.

Inequalities, according to this second principle of justice, were only justified if they worked to the advantage of the worst off. This component of the second principle of justice has been labelled the 'difference principle'.

Rawls believed that the second principle of social justice would reflect the awareness of all those participating in the original position that they were quite uniquely vulnerable; it would reflect an understanding of the part that chance, purest chance, plays in all our lives. Participants would be aware of the possibility that it could be their lot, their personal misfortune, on travelling back past the veil of ignorance, to discover that they now occupied the worst position in society. *Inequalities, according to this second principle of justice, were only justified if they worked to the advantage of the worst off.*[19] This second component of the second principle of justice has been labelled the 'difference principle'. It can be characterised as the ultimate insurance policy for those in the original position: they know that they could be amongst life's biggest losers and that it is only the design of a fair society that can cap their suffering and their disadvantages. Only fair social and political principles can offer them protection against the unmediated consequences of being worst off.

A keen appreciation of the central importance to liberalism of interdependence, mutuality and fraternity are hallmarks of the New Liberalism of T. H. Green, L. T. Hobhouse and John Hobson. They are an equally important part of Rawls's political philosophy. Just as the New Liberals challenged the works and political doctrines of the greatest exponents of liberal classical economic thought and the liberalism of the utilitarians, above all of the great liberal thinker Jeremy Bentham, John Rawls's work represented a great challenge to the unbalanced and market-obsessed liberalism of Friedrich Hayek. As Duncan Forrester has put it – and put it rather well: 'Issues of justice for [Rawls] cannot simply be swept aside in the pursuit of efficiency and economic prosperity. Justice is what holds a decent society together'.[20]

At the heart of liberalism

Rawls's most basic proposition, the core of his political liberalism, was that social and political institutions should give expression to the belief that respect for another person's right to self-determination ought to take priority over other political goals. Whilst respect for another person's entitlement to decide for themselves what is right and what is good is not unqualified – it requires, for example, a mutuality of respect – a liberal's conception of justice cannot accommodate the belief that 'the loss of freedom for some can be made right by a greater good shared by others'.[21] This sharply distinguishes Rawlsian political thought from utilitarianism, itself an important and powerful strand in the rich tapestry of liberal political argument.

In reacting against utilitarianism, Rawls shared a good deal in common with John Stuart Mill, who grew away from his father James's utilitarianism as his liberal political thought developed and matured. Rawls shares even more with the New Liberals, T. H. Green and L. T. Hobhouse who 'disparaged Bentham [and] found much in [John Stuart] Mill's improved', heavily qualified, 'utilitarianism highly appealing'.[22] Indeed it may be fair to argue that Rawls, along with many other contemporary liberal political thinkers, has failed to acknowledge the extent of the intellectual debt owed by twentieth-century liberals to the New Liberal thinkers of the final quarter of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth. However, there should be no doubt about the importance of the New Liberal heritage found – albeit barely acknowledged

– throughout Rawls's industrious and unceasing reworking of the great New Liberal themes: support for thriving individuality, for the promotion of liberal community and above all, for social justice.[23,24]

Life's lottery

Rawls was keenly aware of life's lottery. He was aware of the extent to which almost everything in life depends on chance events, on contingencies over which individuals have little or no control. A liberal theory of social justice could not, he argued, overlook or evade the fact that: 'the natural distribution of abilities and talent … are decided by the outcome of a natural lottery; and [that] this outcome is arbitrary from a moral point of view.'[25]

Reasonable people, he believed, would recognise the existence and the all-pervasive influence of good and ill fortune on the course of human lives and support social institutions and public policies that challenged rather than entrenched the inequalities that had arisen from what he referred to as the 'natural lottery'. Rawls rejected the view that acceptable justifications for an unequal distribution of income and wealth in a just society should rest on differences that were arbitrary from a moral standpoint.

An unequal distribution of wealth and income could be justified, but the justification would have to depend upon the extent to which social and economic inequalities were of benefit to the unluckiest and the most disadvantaged members of society. This is a philosophical position that appears to bless communion between New Liberals and Democratic Socialists in the past and their numerous progeny on the centre left of European politics in the present. Indeed, European Liberals and Social Democrats have relied on Rawls in fashioning the case for the reform of social welfare systems in capitalist, liberal and democratic societies. Labour's Social Justice Commission, set up on the initiative of John Smith, and the Liberal Democrats' Commission on Wealth Creation and Social Cohesion in a Free Society, set up on the initiative of Paddy Ashdown, both owed a philosophical debt to the renewal of interest in ideas about the compatibility, in market societies, between economic goals one the one hand and social cohesion and social justice on the other; an interest strongly stimulated by Rawls's *Theory of Justice*. No doubt this is what motivated Will Hutton to make the claim that, in Europe (though not in America), it was Rawls, more than any other philosopher, who had: '[justified] … universal education, health and income support and [the] redistributive taxation to pay for it'.[26]

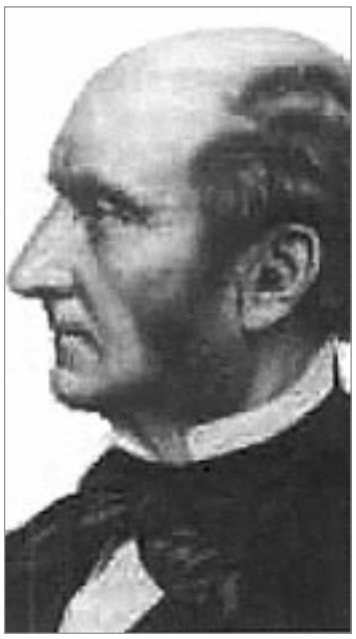
Hutton's estimate of the critical importance of Rawls's conception of social justice to the formulation of contemporary plans for social reform is shared by others including Duncan Forrester. Forrester describes the Labour Party's Commission on Social Justice as 'largely Rawlsian in its inspiration', referring to the four principles of social justice that the Commission espoused as 'distinctly Rawlsian in tone'.[27]

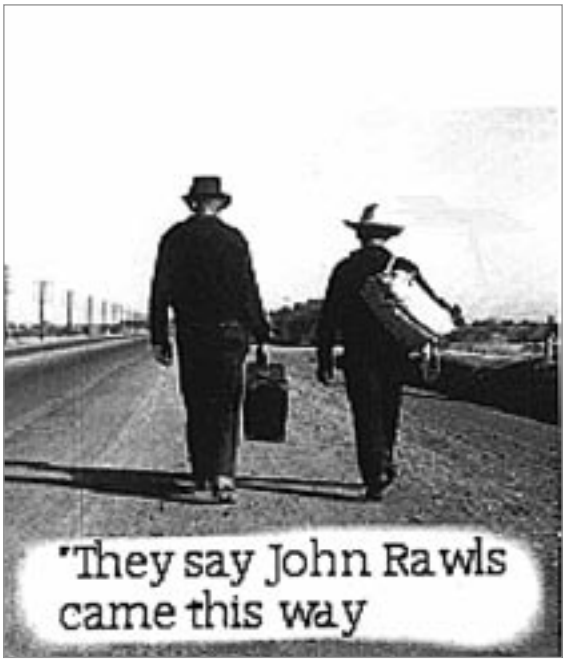
There can be little doubt that Rawls's approach to distributive justice is both radical and egalitarian. However, while it appeared to provide powerful support to liberals wishing to make the case for progressive taxation and for redistributive public policies, Rawls left it to others to champion detailed public policy prescriptions and manifestos based on his philosophical methods and conclusions.

Broadening the appeal of *A Theory of Justice*

In his *Political Liberalism* Rawls set out to develop his conception of justice as a form of liberalism that would have the broadest possible appeal. He believed it was possible to formulate his most important ideas about justice as

Liberal philosophers: John Stuart Mill, T. H. Green, and L. T. Hobhouse





fairness in a way that would be attractive to many different members of diverse and open societies and to reasonable people in very different societies right around the globe – people who were likely to have distinctly different ideas about what constituted the good life.

In some ways Rawls narrowed his philosophical ambition and in other respects he embraced a greatly extended philosophical task. Once again, in so doing, he added to the language of political philosophy. *Political Liberalism* included references to the 'fact of reasonable pluralism', 'an overlapping consensus', 'the criterion of reciprocity' and 'political justification through public reason'. Let us briefly consider each of these, because they are the concepts that came to dominate his philosophical and political writing in the years following the publication of *A Theory of Justice* and right up to the end of his life.

Rawls grew dissatisfied with *A Theory of Justice*. He came to the conclusion that it had a major shortcoming. While those who already shared his liberal outlook were likely to accept its method and general conclusions, other reasonable people might not be so accepting – because *A Theory of Justice* appeared to be founded upon beliefs that were accepted as self-evident by liberals but not necessarily by other reasonable people. And liberals should firmly endorse, as a key part of the liberal outlook, the view that there are many people with different, but reasonable, conceptions of how human beings should behave and of what is good.

What Rawls came to refer to as political liberalism needed to be built upon as wide a base as possible. That base, he believed, was present in societies with a public culture that was essentially democratic. Rawls's aim was to present his ideas about justice as fairness in such a way that they would be acceptable to people who understood and accepted that any stable social order in any social system was dependent upon co-operation and mutual respect. Indeed political liberalism refers to 'everyday conceptions' of individuals as free and equal beings who have the capacity and will to co-operate with one another.[28]

John Rawls believed that one of the greatest challenges facing any modern political philosopher was the fact that democratic societies fostered diversity. Democratic societies encouraged the expression of distinct and apparently incompatible beliefs among their citizens. Such pluralism, if it was to be consistent with peaceful and fruitful coexistence, required the common acceptance of political ideas that were themselves capable of attracting and retaining the support of people with very different cultural, religious and moral beliefs. He noted that, even though we encounter people with whom we have quite fundamental disagreements, people who strive for very different ends, we nevertheless accept that they are sincere about what they believe and no less intelligent or fair-minded than ourselves.

It was an article of liberal faith for Rawls that people who disagree, even quite fundamentally, can – despite their disagreements – be convinced of each other's reasonableness, if they share an essentially democratic outlook. What made this quite critical, from the perspective of liberal democracy, in Rawls's opinion, was that *the fact of reasonable pluralism* was not a temporary matter, a passing phase in the life and times of liberal democratic society, but an enduring and (most certainly to liberals) welcome characteristic of modern liberal societies. Therefore a key task confronting liberal thinkers was to construct a convincing account of democratic and tolerant societies that appealed to as many people as possible and appealed as the 'work of human reason', thereby supporting and sustaining 'enduring free institutions'.[29]

One important contemporary facet of debate about social justice and its relationship to laws and institutions in liberal democracies concerns the status of human rights. It is not unreasonable to suggest, as Francesca Klug has, that Rawls has played an important part in stimulating and shaping the philosophical and political arguments that now influence how we interpret such documents as the European Charter of Human Rights and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, although Klug is far from convinced that Rawls and liberals in general have been on the side of the angels.[30]

Rawls's desire to accommodate the greatest possible diversity of distinctive world views, when formulating and giving expression to his conception of justice as fairness, meant that he favoured a state that maintained its neutrality, so far as practicable, between different ideas about how we should live and order our lives. However, Rawls was far from being an advocate of uncritical pragmatism in public policy. Mutual respect and toleration in human societies may be grudging – based on fear rather than on philosophical reasoning or generosity. Toleration may be pragmatic and based on the recognition that no one is sufficiently powerful to have things all their own way. It may reflect an acceptance of the inevitability, rather than the desirability, of compromise. But

Rawls, in his *Political Liberalism*, sought something more reliable and less fleeting: he wanted to articulate something that could serve as the bedrock for political liberalism. For a liberal society to exist and continue to exist, it was necessary, in his view, that there was a broad and reasoned agreement about social and political fundamentals. Liberal political community required a method as well as a social and political covenant that acknowledged and entrenched respect for human diversity.

An overlapping consensus about the essentials of a liberal political community would only be possible, in Rawls's opinion, if agreement rested upon something that could be found from within the beliefs of each group of citizens and from within each distinctive world view represented in society. Reasonable people, reasonable citizens, wishing to co-operate with each other, wanting to live together as well as to enhance and honour their own traditions and notions of the good life, needed to be persuaded that doing so was entirely congruent with the mutual respect that was fundamental to liberal political community. What Rawls refers to as the *criterion of reciprocity* would enable citizens, with distinct world views, to accept one another's motives and actions as expressing genuine beliefs about what would be accepted by others as reasonable.

The search for common ground and the elaboration of the criterion of reciprocity are important requirements if what Rawls refers to as *public reason* is to play its full part in enabling citizens to settle differences about the ways in which their society should be governed and the ways in which all the members of a just political community should be involved in government.[31]

Assessing and criticising Rawls

Liberals value liberty but do not believe that liberty is a licence simply to do as you please. And liberals can take great inspiration from John Rawls's efforts to plot the domain of liberty in a just society. For Rawls, liberalism necessitated a search for, identification of and defence of the principles needed to create an enduring liberal and democratic political community. Liberal societies depend upon consent, and reasonable people are assumed to be most persuadable about the virtues of any political community if they perceive as just not only its political institutions but its social and economic ones as well.

The purpose of Rawls's most famous work, *A Theory of Justice*, can be expressed very straightforwardly. It was an invitation to consider what kind of society we would choose to live in if we did not know, or could not be sure, how things would turn out for us personally if we went to live there. And, to begin with, Rawls was convinced that the only sensible choice for human beings who wanted to live with other human beings would be a liberal society in which liberal values permeated every aspect of life. Later he rejected this view. Nevertheless he remained committed to the central role of liberal ideas and values. In place of what had been, to use his terminology, a comprehensive liberal doctrine, he argued for what he called political liberalism. Political liberalism was, he came to believe, the best expression of our most widely shared ideas about what is needed for people to live together in a society that is able to endure and, at the same time, offer all its members the best possible prospects for realising their very different goals and capabilities.

Despite his enthusiasm for building broad agreements and identifying commonalities, Rawls's political liberalism and his ideas about social justice have attracted as much criticism as they have support. His liberal outlook appears to many of his fellow Americans to be rather un-American. One of his fiercest philosophical opponents, Robert Nozick, a liberal of a very different kind who also died last year, attacked the very heart of Rawls's liberal project. Nozick insisted that at the heart of liberalism were individual rights that should not be violated, under any circumstances – even if violations were thought to be necessary in order to bring about the good or at least the fair society.[32] Building an entire edifice of government, for example, to advance the interests of the worst-off would mean, in Nozick's view, trampling endlessly on the rights of the better-off. Why should those who were more talented and who worked harder simply accept that the product of their hard work and greater talent should be commanded – commandeered – by the state and be treated as if it did not belong to them but to others who were less fortunate? If liberalism stood for anything, in Nozick's view, it stood for a world in which individuals could not be enslaved by some great social purpose imposed on them in the name of the population at large.

For Rawls, liberalism necessitated a search for, identification of and defence of the principles needed to create an enduring liberal and democratic political community.

Rawls attracted fierce criticism of a very different kind from political thinkers, such as Michael Sandel, Charles Taylor and Michael Walzer, who believed that liberalism and liberal ideas, including Rawls's liberalism and liberal ideas, served – however unintentionally – to undermine or sideline *community*. Ties of the intellect are, from this point of view, weak and unsatisfying. If people are to *belong* and to *respect* one another they must feel a part of something that is deeply rooted in their lives. Liberal choices, however cleverly constructed, that are detached from the values we have been raised to hold, the historical communities of which we are a part and the bonds of family, are no substitute for the commitment and sense of belonging that are largely inherited and imbibed as we grow up in the communities with which we most naturally come to identify. But the so-called communitarian attack on

Rawls's work often caricatures his views and claims to have discovered incompatibilities where few if any exist.[33] Rawls never denied the importance or the value of community. He was – as he often made plain – concerned to work out a basis for liberal political community that could help to obstruct the passage and the tyranny of any world view that would not or could not accept a place in society for the reasonable beliefs and practices of others.

Rawls's philosophical writings have often been introduced as a rationalisation or justification for the welfare state.[34] And one particularly strong and growing line of criticism of his liberal conception of social justice is that it has failed to stiffen the resolve of Liberals and Social Democrats to strengthen welfare systems that have singularly failed, in the course of the last twenty years, to stem a rapid rise in economic and social inequality, particularly in the United States and Britain – precisely those English-speaking countries where Anglo-American political philosophy might have been expected to have had the greatest impact on practical politics.

It is known that Rawls himself was disappointed with the impact that public welfare systems had had on economic and social inequalities. Ben Rogers even describes Rawls as coming to 'despair of the capitalist welfare state, which acquiesced in a dramatic rise in social inequality in the 1980s and '90s'.[35] No doubt we need to be bolder and build upon Rawls's ideas about designing a basic structure for our social and economic institutions that embodies the difference principle in a more appealing and effective form than is found in the welfare states of the early twenty-first century.

It is surely right, as Will Kymlicka argues, that 'the main focus for the politics of liberal egalitarianism should be [remedying] (the growing) inequality in people's circumstances'.[36] Rawls is dead but his ideas live on. Those who follow him and find his egalitarian liberalism attractive need to show less timidity and much greater determination, as well as ingenuity, in reconnecting liberalism with long-standing liberal ambitions for a freer *and* a fairer society.

Rawls's political philosophy is, above all else, about fashioning the intellectual resources needed to understand and build stronger liberal political communities in which we can form and sustain institutions and beliefs that help us to trust and to respect one another despite our many differences.

John Rawls's contribution to political philosophy was a distinctively and strongly liberal one. In common with other liberals, Rawls identified the most important and politically significant human characteristic as the capacity for personal decision: a capacity that, following Kant, Rawls believed was not simply self-regarding. Liberals value self-determination but also champion respect for each individual's capacity to make decisions about the kind of life that they want to lead.

Rawls's political philosophy is, amongst other things, a determined attempt to integrate a commitment to tackling inequality into the core of liberal thought. He asserted, in *A Theory of Justice*, that a liberal conception of society should be firmly rooted in fairness. If the liberal conviction that we are entitled to equal respect is to be taken seriously and actively pursued in the organisation of society, then the pursuit of social justice must go hand in hand with the pursuit of liberty. Liberalism seeks a winning recipe that reconciles Isaiah Berlin's negative and positive notions of human liberty. It may be that this is a goal as elusive as the Holy Grail, but that does not mean that liberals should abandon it. The value and importance of human goals does not depend simply on whether they are, in some ultimate sense, achievable. If we thought that, we would surely abandon scientific enquiry tomorrow.

Liberalism, Rawls's liberalism at least, is not only concerned with securing basic freedoms; it is strikingly egalitarian. Freedom and justice depend on mutual respect, reciprocity *and* support for individual autonomy. An honest recognition and celebration of human interdependence need not mean giving up on the defence of individual liberty. But having complex, many-sided, political ambitions, of the kind that characterised the work of John Rawls and the New Liberals (in whose intellectual footsteps I believe he often trod), does make it important to understand why those liberals who have managed to avoid a fixation with the 'magic of markets' also believe that any insistence that liberals must choose between justice and liberty is fundamentally misconceived and illiberal. Rawls, as will be clear to anyone who has read *A Theory of Justice*, was fascinated by neo-classical economic theory; but he, like the New Liberals, never accepted that market mechanisms were a substitute for political argument or for the creation of political institutions able to formulate and implement a wide range of public policies.

Acknowledging the importance of pursuing social justice in a liberal society, and recognising that interdependence is an inescapable part of the human condition, we should also be able to accept that the plea on Martin Englebrodde's tombstone[37] captures a key ingredient in Rawls's egalitarian liberalism and the liberalism of the New Liberals, with whom I have suggested Rawls had much in common:

> Here lies Martin Elginbrodde,
> Ha'e mercy on my soul, Lord God;
> As I would do, were I Lord God,
> And Thou were Martin Elginbrodde

Rawls's liberal political philosophy was very deliberately designed to encourage and foster a political outlook that was *other regarding*. Martin Englebrodde's plea for mercy and his promise of reciprocity, should his own and his creator's roles be reversed, encapsulates a liberal view of the world. It is a world in which we know we cannot stand alone, in which we want and need the benefits of living and working together and still wish to pursue our own course in life. Martin proposes a contract with his maker that

is, despite their unequal power, intended to appeal to his all-powerful creator, because it is quintessentially decent and fair; exactly what Martin assumes his maker to be. Given their inequality his plea can have little appeal to his creator other than its sincere promise of reciprocity based upon fairness. Its appeal is essentially moral and intellectual – but that is enough if it is known to be genuine. Martin trusts in the fairness of his maker and believes that his maker will know that he is genuine. Members of human societies are rarely able to express quite the same trust in each other or have the same confidence in each other's ability to estimate sincerity.

Human society has something in common with Martin's divine authority when it comes to the power that its most important office holders can exercise. We would all like to be able to trust in the basic fairness of the institutions that help to define our political community. Rawls's political philosophy is, above all else, about fashioning the intellectual resources needed to understand and build stronger liberal political communities in which we can form and sustain institutions and beliefs that help us to trust and to respect one another despite our many differences.

Conclusion

Most of Rawls's writing is, it has to be acknowledged, highly abstract. It is important not to be put off by his exceptionally scholarly approach to political philosophy. Isaiah Berlin, when praising Bertrand Russell, endorsed what he described as Russell's 'highly perceptive but unexpected insight' that 'the central visions of great philosophers are essentially simple'.[38] Rawls's place in the pantheon of political philosophy is secure; he authored two very long and very weighty academic tomes of political philosophy. But he was also the most thoughtful and skilful twentieth-century exponent of the view that liberalism calls on us to show an equal respect and concern for all of our fellow humans.

Rawls certainly showed great brilliance and ingenuity and an extraordinary mastery of technical and philosophical language in his published work. But, as Isaiah Berlin also observed, the use of highly abstract and technical language by philosophers is a bit like putting on heavy armour to fend off real or imagined adversaries. We should not allow Rawls's armour to deter us from making the effort to grasp the ideas and insights contained in his work: the work of the greatest twentieth-century political thinker.

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Patrick Jackson
analyses the life and career of Lewis 'Loulou' Harcourt (1863–1922), son of and secretary to William Harcourt, Liberal MP and cabinet minister under Asquith.

BIOGRAPHY: LEWIS HARCOURT

Lewis Vernon Harcourt was born in Pont Street, London, on 31 January 1863, the son of William (later Sir William) Vernon Harcourt and his wife Marie Therese Lister, who died soon after the birth. Reflecting his inherited place in the political establishment, the child was christened Lewis (with Lord Clarendon acting as godfather) in memory of Marie Therese's stepfather George Cornewall Lewis who had recently died and had been a Liberal Chancellor of the Exchequer and Home Secretary. However, Lewis Harcourt was known throughout his life as Loulou.

For many years William Harcourt feared that his delicate and precocious boy would not survive, and the anxiety resulted in an extraordinarily close and protective relationship: Harcourt told Loulou on his twelfth birthday that he had been left 'as both a trust and a consoler'.[1] Even his father's second marriage in 1876 did little to affect the relationship. The thirteen year old acted as best man at the ceremony in Westminster Abbey and accompanied his father and young American stepmother on the Paris holiday that followed their honeymoon.

When Loulou left Eton in 1881 he became private secretary to his father, now Home Secretary in Gladstone's second government, and he continued to perform this confidential task until shortly before William Harcourt's death in 1904. Loulou taught himself shorthand and typing and was willing to undertake the humblest secretarial duties. His father was wealthy and well connected, and Loulou grew up with ready access to all the drawing rooms of London society and to the country-house parties where political alliances were made. Despite his over-indulgent upbringing Loulou was generally well liked and a welcome guest: older women such as Mrs Gladstone mothered him and confided in him, and the childless John Morley contrasted his charm with his father's abrasive tactlessness.

Lewis Harcourt loved gossip and he was a good listener: politics were always the main preoccupation, but he also enjoyed photography, theatre going, and grouse shooting. The seventy-four volumes of Loulou's journal, now in the Bodleian Library, provide a lively account of political and social life in upper-middle-class London at the end of the nineteenth century and the narrative is spiced by racy anecdotes. These include the embarrassing expiry of a circuit judge in a brothel, the death-bed confession of a clergyman who said that he had married Queen Victoria to John Brown, and the story of an archdeacon charged with sexual impropriety who, according to Loulou, had to pay a high price for girls because he insisted that they must be not only young but High Church.

The political partnership between Lewis Harcourt and his

father grew even closer over the years and, despite the emotional intensity of the relationship, there were no quarrels or estrangements. This was remarkable because William Harcourt never managed to curb an exuberant and fiery temper and succeeded in exasperating and alienating most of his colleagues. In contrast, Loulou (tall and thin alongside his Falstaffian father) was self-controlled and quietly determined. When A. G. Gardiner included Lewis Harcourt in the 1908 collection of biographical essays *Prophets, Priests and Kings*, he described the inscrutable smile of a 'dominating, masterful figure' whose thoughts were 'known only to Mr Lewis Harcourt and his maker'.

Loulou became a shrewd judge of his father's political speeches and actions, and his influence behind the scenes was considerable. At the time of the Home Rule split in 1886, he was less sceptical than William Harcourt abut the feasibility of Gladstone's proposals and he helped to ensure that his father remained at the old man's side, effectively as his deputy, rather than leaving the Liberal Party with Lord Hartington and Joseph Chamberlain, the two colleagues with whom he had previously worked most closely. From time to time Lewis Harcourt was tempted to embark on an independent political career. Several constituencies sounded him out about standing as a parliamentary candidate, and in 1892 he was offered the post of junior whip in Gladstone's fourth and last government, but he knew that he was indispensable to his father. However he served the party by acting as secretary of the Home Counties Liberal Federation from its foundation in 1887 and by organising election campaigns and supervising fundraising activities in the south east of England. He was also a founder member of the National Liberal Club.

In 1894 Lewis Harcourt played a controversial part in the intrigues that followed Gladstone's retirement. His father had acted as deputy leader in the House of Commons and would have been the preferred successor for most Liberal backbenchers, who relished his pugnacious leadership. However the Queen chose Lord Rosebery, whose imperial policies approximated to those of Lord Salisbury. Rosebery expressed strong reservations (fully justified in the event) about his suitability for the premiership, and he would probably have abandoned the attempt to form a government if there had been any serious resistance by cabinet colleagues. Loulou fought a tenacious rearguard action in support of his father's claims, or rather, in Loulou's view, his entitlement after all the hard work they had both contributed during the bleak years of opposition. He encouraged a protest by backbenchers against the imposition of Rosebery and he used all his influence with the Liberal leaders to whom he was closest. He pressed Spencer to reduce the high naval estimates that were the proximate cause of Gladstone's departure and dangled before John Morley the tempting prospect of becoming either Chancellor of the Exchequer or Foreign Secretary in a Harcourt government. This strenuous manoeuvring was fruitless. Harcourt's high-handed treatment of colleagues during his period at the Treasury left many of them unprepared to serve under him, and he was too proud to play any part in his son's intrigues. The only outcome was to make Harcourt's humiliation more obvious, and permanently to sour relations with Rosebery who never forgave Loulou for the part he had played.

Loulou became a shrewd judge of his father's political speeches and actions, and his influence behind the scenes was considerable.

In the Rosebery government Loulou helped with the 1894 budget, his father's greatest achievement, encouraging the radicalism that underlay the introduction of steeply graduated death duties applied to both landed and personal property. He also urged the inclusion in the budget of a graduated income tax, but Harcourt was persuaded by officials that this would overload the fiscal machinery.

During the years in opposition after the 1895 election defeat Loulou supported his father against the carping criticisms of the Liberal imperialists (Grey, Haldane and, more ambivalently, Asquith) who looked forward to Rosebery's return from political exile. At the end of 1898 Harcourt resigned the Commons leadership, in a manoeuvre coordinated by Loulou and Morley that was designed to force into the open the intrigues of Rosebery's supporters. Campbell-Bannerman and most of the other Liberal leaders condemned the move, but when Campbell-Bannerman took over the leadership he was subjected to similar treatment by the Liberal Imperialists and he welcomed Harcourt's loyal support, particularly during the Boer War when there were bitter divisions of opinion in the party.

In 1904, shortly before his father's death, the forty-one-year-old Loulou was elected to Parliament as the member for Lord Hartington's old Lancashire constituency of Rossendale. Harcourt escorted him into the House of Commons and reported that 'the dearest wish of my life was fulfilled. The House was crowded on both sides and … cheered the rising and the setting sun'.[2] After a partnership of twenty-five years with his father, Lewis Harcourt's own political career lasted only half as long, but for nearly all that time the Liberal Party was in power and Loulou was in office. This suited him very well: he was not by temperament a back-bencher, nor an inspiring public speaker like his father, but a political organiser who enjoyed operating in the inner corridors of power.

He waited two years before making his maiden speech as First Commissioner of Works in Campbell-Bannerman's government; in March 1907 he was promoted to the cabinet in the same

Sir William Harcourt in the House of Commons, by F. C. Gould

post, having declined a transfer to the Department of Education because he enjoyed his responsibilities for the royal parks and palaces, including the Houses of Parliament. In 1910 Asquith promoted Loulou to succeed Lord Crewe as Colonial Secretary, and during his period of office new railway links were established in Nigeria (where Port Harcourt was named after him) and in East Africa. He was also responsible for steering through the House of Commons several measures unconnected with his departmental responsibilities: in 1906 a bill, rejected by the House of Lords, abolishing the entitlement to plural voting for electors with property in several constituencies; in 1907 a Small Holdings and Allotments Bill; and in 1909 a London Elections Bill.

In many respects Lewis Harcourt's liberalism reflected traditional nineteenth-century principles, especially those inculcated by his father. Asquith admired his caution and administrative competence, and the two men got on well together despite Asquith's former association with Rosebery and the Liberal Imperialists. Loulou regularly sat next to the Prime Minister in cabinet and favoured quiet asides rather than attempts to dominate the discussion in his father's style. Not all his colleagues appreciated this approach: Charles Hobhouse described him as 'subtle, secretive, adroit, and not very reliable or *au fond* courageous'.[3]

Loulou had married the wealthy daughter of an American banker and he entertained lavishly at his town house in Brook Street, Mayfair (later the Savile Club) and at the Harcourt family seat at Nuneham Courtenay, Oxfordshire, where the Asquiths were regular guests. Like Asquith (and William Harcourt) Loulou strongly opposed the granting of the parliamentary franchise to women and he played a prominent part in the anti-suffrage campaign. He voted against the Parliamentary Franchise (Women) Bill in March 1912 and against the Representation of the People (Women) Bill in May 1913, and his outspoken views made him a target for the militant suffragettes. In 1912 an attempt was made to set fire to the children's quarters at Nuneham Courtenay.

Opposition to women's suffrage was not the only question on which Loulou seemed to look back to his father's political views. Although the 1894 Budget had been seen as radical, William Harcourt was firmly committed to Gladstonian principles of retrenchment, and Loulou regarded Lloyd George's financial policy as reckless and electorally damaging. Lloyd George described him as the most resolute of the cabinet critics of the 1909 People's Budget. However Loulou strongly supported the campaign to restrict the veto powers of the House of Lords which culminated in the 1911 Parliament Act and, during the Home Rule crisis of 1913, he warned George V of the potentially serious consequences if the decisions of the House of Commons were not allowed to prevail.

Lewis Harcourt remained powerfully influenced by his father's views on foreign policy, particularly the need to avoid continental commitments. William Harcourt had braved unpopularity by his opposition to the Boer War and, as Chancellor of the Exchequer, he had struggled to resist the inexorable pressure for increased naval and military expenditure. In 1908 and 1909 Loulou took a similarly strong, but ultimately unsuccessful, line against Fisher's naval estimates. Like most of his colleagues, Loulou only became aware towards the end of 1911 of the Anglo-French staff talks that had been taking place in secret for nearly six years. When the cabinet debated the subject on 1 November 1911, Asquith claimed that the government was not committed to military intervention in the event of war with Germany, and Loulou continued to reject the view that war was inevitable, seeking to negotiate the peaceful settlement of outstanding colonial disputes. At the end of July 1914 he initially argued the case for neutrality, but finally allowed himself to be persuaded that the invasion of Belgium made British involvement inescapable. Apart from John Morley and John Burns, who both resigned, all the cabinet ministers who had expressed strong reservations in November 1911 supported the decision to go to war.

Like many other Liberals, Loulou was opposed to conscription and was regarded by critics of the government as one of the ministers who failed to appreciate the need for more radical measures to win the war. When a coalition government was formed in May 1915, Asquith moved him back to the Office of Works, to be succeeded as Colonial Secretary by the Conservative leader Bonar Law whose brusqueness came as a shock after his predecessor's suavity. Lord Esher said that in any other country Loulou would be the Tory and Bonar Law the democrat.[4]

Although he was only 53 in 1916, Lewis Harcourt was exhausted and in poor health after

over ten years in ministerial office and he was content to resign with Asquith in December of that year and to go to the House of Lords in January 1917 when the King agreed to revive the family viscountcy which had been held by a Lord Chancellor in the reign of Queen Anne.

He was an infrequent participant in the business of the Upper House, although in January 1918 he took part in the debates on the Representation of the People Bill. He now accepted the inevitability of women's suffrage, but continued to share his father's scepticism about proportional representation.

Loulou retained his interest in the electoral organisation of the Liberal Party and he had a wide range of prestigious non-political activities, as befitted a life-long member of the charmed circle of the great and the good. He helped to found the London Museum in 1911, was a member of the advisory committee of the Victoria and Albert Museum and of the council of the British School at Rome, and was also a trustee of the Wallace Collection, the National Portrait Gallery, and (like his father) the British Museum.

On 24 February 1922, at the age of 59, Lewis Harcourt was found dead at his Brook Street town house (not Nuneham, as suggested in the *Dictionary of National Biography*), and was succeeded as the second viscount by his son. He had taken an overdose of a sleeping draught and there were rumours of suicide, but the coroner returned a verdict of misadventure.

On the following day Loulou had intended to meet A. G. Gardiner to discuss progress on the biography of his father in which he had been closely involved. He would have been ready to accept that nothing in his own political career matched the vital contribution he had made to the career of his father.

In 1908 Gardiner singled out Loulou as 'one of the three men in the Liberal Party to whom all things seem possible',[5] but despite his organisational skills he never fulfilled this potential. He lacked his father's passionate involvement, and with hindsight one can see Lewis Harcourt as an example of the way in which some of the Liberal leaders, after the great electoral victory of 1906, looked to the past and failed to come to grips with the industrial and social problems of the new century. When he was deprived of his father's guidance in 1904 Loulou confided to Spencer that he felt 'very rudderless in details, but firmly anchored in principles'.[6] The principles remained valid, but his father had always recognised the need to adapt them flexibly to circumstances.

Sources

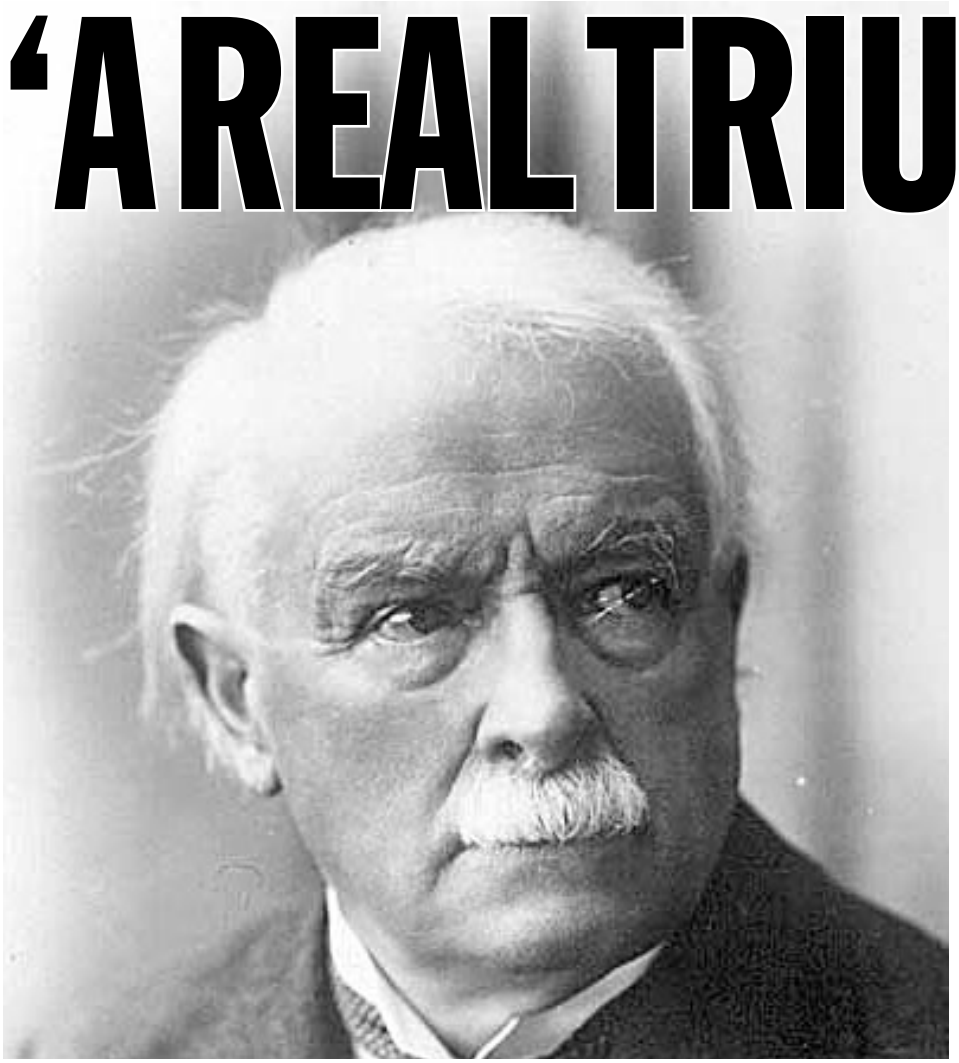
The main primary source is Lewis Harcourt's unpublished journal, now in the Bodleian Library, Oxford. Among the secondary authorities, A. G. Gardiner's *Prophets, Priests and Kings* (1908) contains a perceptive portrait of Lewis Harcourt, and Gardiner's *Life of Sir William Harcourt* (1923), written with Lewis Harcourt's close co-operation, contains a definitive account of his career as secretary and companion to his father. The *Dictionary of National Biography* article on Lewis Harcourt by Lord Onslow (1937) is flawed by inaccuracy on several points of detail.

*Since he retired from the civil service in 1989 Patrick Jackson has devoted himself to the study of Victorian Liberal politics. He has published biographies of Lord Hartington (*The Last of the Whigs, *1994) and W. E. Forster (*Education Act Forster, *1997) and has recently completed the first full-scale biography of Sir William Harcourt for eighty years. He has written the article on Lewis Harcourt for the new* Dictionary of National Biography, *and also the entries for George Otto Trevelyan, Henry James (Lord James of Hereford) and J. K. Cross.*

Lewis Harcourt, by Harry Furniss

1 Harcourt Papers, DEP 649, f1.
2 Harcourt to his sister, 18 March 1904, Alfred Gardiner, *The Life of Sir William Harcourt* (Constable, 1923), vol. 2, p567.
3 Edward David (ed.), *Inside Asquith's Cabinet: From the Diaries of Charles Hobhouse* (John Murray, 1977), p229.
4 Maurice V. Brett (ed.), *Journals and Letters of Reginald, Viscount Esher* (Nicholson & Watson, 1934–38), vol. 3, p137.
5 A. G. Gardiner, *Prophets, Priests and Kings* (Alston Rivers, 1908), p122.
6 Spencer Papers, KS 218, 21 December 1904.

'A REAL TRIUMPH FO



Dr J. Graham Jones examines a bizarre episode in January 1931 when an editorial columnist on the staff of *The Times* took at face value an imaginary 'interview' with Liberal Party leader David Lloyd George published in the column of the mythical 'Junior Member for Treorchy' in the *Western Mail*, and assesses the reaction to it.

Perhaps the best-kept secret in the history of twentieth-century Welsh journalism is the precise identity of the celebrated mythical *Western Mail* columnist 'The Junior Member for Treorchy'. His lively pen graced the Welsh national daily newspaper from 1910 until the beginning of the Second World War and then resurfaced in 1959 for a further distinguished five-year stint. The Junior Member's speciality was the imaginary interview, generally with prominent politicians and public figures. These included party leaders like Stanley Baldwin and James Ramsay MacDonald, as well as many other ministers of the crown and Welsh backbench MPs. A reference in one of his columns, favourable or condemnatory, soon came to be regarded as a notable claim to fame. He wrote with unfailing wit, candour, irony and penetration, with a meticulous knowledge of public events and their potential significance, and of the thoughts and motives of public figures, most of whom accepted his barbed comments with good grace. The Junior Member possessed an uncanny knack of making his 'interviewees' speak in a totally authentic and credible way.

Western Mail readers, with whom these columns were a particular favourite, all realised that the exchanges were totally imaginary. One of the Junior Member's most consistent victims was David Lloyd George, who relished every word of the lively columns. A lengthy 'interview' with the Liberal leader entitled 'Mr Lloyd George and his Future', and subtitled 'May go to the Right – and he may go to the Left', was published in the *Western Mail* to mark his 68th birthday on 23 January 1931. It quoted telling remarks on the state of the Liberal Party.

Astonishingly, a journalist of the staff of *The Times* rather naïvely took the 'interview' at face value and referred to it in a leading article published the following day. As the paper had taken a consistently hostile attitude towards the Liberal leader over many months, it relished the opportunity to discredit his reputation still further and to perpetuate renewed rifts within an already feud-racked Liberal

OR MY OLD FRIEND'

Party. The episode immediately caused a minor sensation in the journalistic and political world. All the major national newspapers ran columns referring to the blatant misinterpretation, *The Times* felt compelled to publish a (somewhat half-hearted) apology to its mystified readership, and Lloyd George himself issued a press statement clarifying his personal position and congratulating 'his old friend the Member for Treorchy' on his 'real triumph'. Even in the proceedings of the House of Commons there were several pointed references to the Junior Member during the debates of the ensuing two weeks. The episode stubbornly refused to lie down, inevitably then causing intense embarrassment for the editorial team of *The Times*.

These events took place at an agonisingly difficult time both for the strife-ridden, notoriously quarrelsome Liberal Party and for Lloyd George personally who was at the time compelled to steer a perilously arduous political course.[1] In the general election of 30 May 1929, the Labour Party had captured 288 constituencies, the Conservatives 260 and the Liberals only 59. As Labour Premier James Ramsay MacDonald formed his second minority administration, the Liberals held the balance of power in the House of Commons. The agreement was that, in return for Liberal support, the Government would introduce legislation to reform the electoral system so that the Liberals would enjoy fairer representation in the Commons more in line with their level of popular support in the country. Nationally it was a notably inauspicious period: the breakdown of the traditional staple industries in the 1920s had led to ever-spiralling unemployment levels, nearing a total of almost three million, a steady fall in wage and price levels and resultant social and community difficulties. All three mainstream political parties experienced bitter divisions, most notably the Liberals who were visibly falling apart, many of their MPs growing increasingly restive about keeping the Labour Government in power. There was a mounting challenge in their ranks to the most sacred of the party's traditional doctrines – free trade. There were repeated threats to break away and join forces with the Conservatives as National Liberals (as indeed was eventually to happen in the summer of 1931).

The relationship between the Liberals and the Government was a particular bone of contention during the late autumn and winter of 1930. Lloyd George, always the ultimate pragmatist, strove to shore up the Government (and thus avoid yet another general election likely to prove calamitous for the Liberals) without entering into a complex, full-scale coalition between the Liberal and Labour Parties. He retained a deep-rooted attachment to his party, not least because it provided him with a working organisation, a reservoir of traditional allegiance and a parliamentary following. He had no intention of going it alone in a political wilderness and believed that a strong Liberal Party might well be the vehicle to herald his return to high ministerial office.

A lengthy 'interview' with the Liberal leader entitled 'Mr Lloyd George and his Future', and subtitled 'May go to the Right – and he may go to the Left', was published in the *Western Mail* on 23 January 1931.

The Labour Government lost no time in introducing simultaneously its Trade Disputes Bill and an Electoral Reform Bill containing provision for the alternative vote, on the understanding that the latter would buy Liberal acquiescence in the former. There was probably no firm 'pact', but many Liberals grew restive that Lloyd George was seeking closer relations with the Government than some of them wished. Further difficulties stemmed from the introduction by the Government in December 1930 of a highly divisive Coal Mines Bill which sought to bring together the Miners' Federation and the obdurate coalowners, but which contained many clauses wholly unacceptable to the Liberals.

In his 'interview' with the Junior Member for Treorchy the following diatribe was attributed to Lloyd George:

> I am expected to accomplish the impossible with the Liberal Party. It has lost its *heart* as well as its tail. Between ourselves, I sometimes feel that its *stomach* has also gone, and yet I am being held responsible for its emaciated and truncated appearance.
>
> Although I am the official leader of the party, men like

> [Edward] Grey, [Walter] Runciman, John Simon, and Donald Maclean, who in past days used to urge loyalty to the skipper as the first duty of every member of the party, are deliberately and even sullenly holding aloof from me and publicly flouting my authority. In the circumstances, I should be fully justified in emulating the example of Gladstone by throwing up the responsibility of the leadership in order to find leisure for contemplating the glories of the world to come.

Pressed by Treorchy to elaborate, he reconsidered: 'I live for what these eyes can see: this old earth is quite enough for me. And so in spite of the ruptures and cleavages with which the party is riven I mean to stick to its leadership.' At the close of the 'interview', Treorchy asked intently, 'But what about *your* future?', and received from LG a rather guarded reply:

> I can only say in reply to your question that I am not prepared to commit myself *just yet* in regard to my future destiny. I may go the Right or I may drift to the Left. My decision will be determined by circumstances. In the meantime I must wait until I can discern *where the land lies*.[2]

As with many previous 'interviews' with both Lloyd George and other prominent politicians, the column published in the *Western Mail* on 23 January 1931 was widely read and aroused considerable interest. But everyone realised that it was imaginary. On the very same day was held the first day's debate on the Trade Disputes Bill which placed the Liberal MPs in an extremely difficult position, some of their number asserting that the measure would legalise the general strike. The next day in a lengthy editorial on the bill entitled 'The Liberal dilemma', *The Times* columnist concluded by referring to the 'remarkable interview which Mr Lloyd George accorded on his birthday to the representative of a local newspaper'. It quoted the Liberal leader's closing remarks as he answered Treorchy's questions, 'his countenance corrugated with his quizzical smile'. The column concluded, 'That no doubt correctly represents the present attitude of the Liberal Party, but circumstances seem to be conspiring to render it less comfortable than it sounds. In the interests of self-preservation it may even be wiser to take a doubtful course than to abstain from taking any course at all.'[3]

The *News Chronicle* described the course of events as 'the most entertaining newspaper and political comedy for years … It is not given to many of us to hoax so completely the stately *Times*.'

Reaction was predictably swift and highly amused. The *Sunday Times* the next day described the bizarre episode as 'one of the most entertaining political comedies of recent years'. Britain's premier daily newspaper had commented 'solemnly and with moral indignation' on a totally imaginary, fictitious interview. The paper, which had made no secret of its antipathy to Lloyd George, had indeed suffered 'a strange lapse'.[4] The 'lapse' was all the more incredible as it was well known that the Junior Member had conducted 'imaginary humorous interviews with public personalities for many years in the *Western Mail*'.

It was also the *Sunday Times* that drew Lloyd George's attention to the editorial column in *The Times*. The Liberal leader considered the course of events hilarious. The interview had been a 'gorgeous piece of imagination. How *The Times* came to allow itself to be so deluded into the position it has created for itself is almost beyond credence.' But there was also, he insisted, 'a serious side to the joke. The suggestion embodied in the comment, "I am waiting until I can discern where the land lies" I strongly resent. It is inaccurate, without foundation, and misleading.'[5]

In a lengthy statement published in *The Observer* on the same day, Lloyd George spelled out his reaction:

> The *Western Mail,* the leading Conservative Welsh journal, has, for over twenty years, published a series of imaginary and humorous interviews by a writer calling himself 'the Member for Treorchy', with public men, including Mr Baldwin, Mr Ramsay MacDonald and all the political personalities of the day.
>
> As a Welsh MP, I am supposed to have been very frequently 'interviewed'. These articles afford considerable amusement to the Welsh public of all parties. No sane person would ever be taken in by them, and, to be quite fair, the *Western Mail* does not intend that they should. But the editor of *The Times* has such a morbid obsession against me that he is hardly responsible when he comes to judge any tale to my detriment. So he solemnly quotes in a leading article a passage from one of the entertaining skits which appeared on Friday, and draws important inferences therefrom as to 'the attitude of the Liberal party'.
>
> 'COMPLETELY HOAXED'
>
> The Editor of The Times has allowed himself to be completely hoaxed. It is a real triumph for my old friend, 'the Member for Treorchy', and I congratulate him. Tomorrow Welshmen of all parties will be holding their sides with laughter over the episode. Men with a sense of humour outside Wales will join in. The merriment will, however, be tempered with a sense of regret that a paper which still affects to be our leading journal should be thus befooled and debased by personal spite.[6]

The next day the Liberal newspaper the *News Chronicle* described the course of events as 'the most entertaining newspaper and political comedy for years … It is not given to many of us to hoax so completely the stately *Times*.' How *The Times'* editorial columnist could have interpreted at face value the imaginary interview it considered 'incomprehensible'. But, it went on, 'the *Times* has really been hoaxing itself for a long

time by its odd practice of printing the real leaders of Liberalism on a back page, while according the largest type to exponents of "Liberalism", of whom most Liberals have never heard'.[7]

These claims did not lack justification. Certainly *The Times* had adopted an unfailingly hostile attitude towards Lloyd George. After the Liberal leader had addressed party candidates at the National Liberal Club a year earlier, *The Times* had slightingly dismissed his words as 'a very skilful display of skating over thin ice', and it took advantage of the opportunity to launch a vehement attack upon the continued existence and means of control of the infamous Lloyd George political fund: 'Mr Lloyd George could have converted frowns into smiles at any time by divesting himself of the fund, the whole fund, and, of course, nothing but the fund.'[8] His speech to the Liberal Party conference in October was 'so discreet that it lacked even a peroration'. Its tone revealed him as 'only too anxious to continue co-operation with the present Government'.[9] A further speech to Liberal election candidates six weeks later had 'broadened the fence with self-righteousness until it looked quite comfortable to sit upon'. *The Times'* columnist went on:

> Is the fence, however, really any broader? Is not the whole of Mr Lloyd George's case that the circumstances are unpropitious for a General Election, and is not the only deduction from his speech the fact that that there will not be an early election if he can help it? In spite of all his heroics, he has brought down to the materialistic plane of party tactics the problem whether the Liberal Party should keep the Government in office or not. The fact is not disguised by the argument that the Liberal attitude will be less misunderstood if the Government is a little less rude to the Liberals and the Liberals a little more rude to the Government.[10]

Small wonder, therefore, that the paper had relished the 'interview' published in the *Western Mail* on 23 January 1931 and had rushed with intemperate haste to pass comment upon it. On Monday 26 January, it had no alternative but to publish an apology. Even now, however, it trivially dismissed its Saturday column as no more than 'a light-hearted reference' to Lloyd George. Although it denied any 'personal spite' in its words, it regretted that it had interpreted the original 'interview' as 'emanating from himself and not from the writer of a skit'.[11] The *Western Mail* was unimpressed. Far from being 'a light-hearted reference', *The Times'* column had been 'solemn and severe' in its censure upon Lloyd George and the Liberal Party, while the Liberal leader himself had interpreted its words as 'further evidence of a morbid obsession against himself cherished for some reason or other in Printing House Square'.

Over the weekend the *Western Mail* had found itself bombarded with insistent appeals to reveal the true identity of the Junior Member for Treorchy. Predictably, it refused to budge.[12] There were also repeated repercussions in the proceedings of the House of Commons. On Monday 26 January, following a question on the advertising of the British Industries Fair, Ernest Brown, Liberal MP for Leith, asked in a supplementary question to the minister responsible, 'Whether he is arranging as a means of advertising this fair, for another spurious article to be written by the hon. member for Treorchy in the *Western Mail* and the *Times*'.[13] During the same day, the Junior Member was also mentioned by Winston Churchill, the former Conservative Chancellor of the Exchequer, during a lengthy speech on India. In the course of the ensuing debate the Junior Member was mentioned on no fewer than four occasions and attracted chanting choruses of 'Treorchy' as successive speakers found their perorations interrupted by excited MPs.[14] Two days later, during the debate on the Trade Disputes Bill, Churchill relentlessly taunted Ramsay MacDonald, the Labour Prime Minister, continuing:

> I was not invited myself to the conference which took place last week in Downing-street between the Prime Minister and the leader of the Liberal party, but my hon. friend the Member for Treorchy – (laughter) – gave me a true account of the incidents between the two party leaders. After the usual compliments the Prime Minister said, 'We have never been colleagues. We have never been friends, at least what we call holiday friends. But we have both been Prime Minister, and dog doesn't eat dog (Laughter). Just look at the Bill the Trade Unions and the wild fellows have foisted upon me. Do me a service and I will never forget it. Take it upstairs and cut its dirty throat'. (Uproarious laughter and cheers).[15]

Some of those present even accused Churchill of being the true Junior Member for Treorchy – to his great amusement.

The laughter in the Commons chamber continued for several minutes as Churchill continued his account of the imaginary Downing Street interview, but his words failed to bring a smile to the face of the Prime Minister who 'sat with folded arms and immobile features' on the Government benches while his Cabinet colleagues, J. H. Thomas and Vernon Hartshorn, MP for Ogmore, laughed loudly. Both the Commons and the Peers' Gallery were packed as Churchill spoke. Some of those present even accused him of being the true Junior Member for Treorchy – to his great amusement.[16]

The following week, during the debate in the Commons on the Electoral Reform Bill, Gordon Lang, Labour MP for Oldham and a native of Chepstow, spoke on the proposal to abolish double-member constituencies, concluding his speech, 'Finally, all I hope is that with the abolition of senior and junior members for

the same constituency, we shall not get rid of that representative who adds so much to the gaiety of nations and, lately, has so generously hoodwinked so many of us – "the Junior Member for Treorchy"', a comment which provoked a sonorous 'Hear, hear' from Lloyd George which reverberated around the Commons chamber. The Junior Member, clearly, would not lie down.[17]

Dr J. Graham Jones is Senior Archivist and Head of the Welsh Political Archive at the National Library of Wales.

1 On Lloyd George's role at this specific juncture, see John Campbell, *Lloyd George: the Goat in the Wilderness, 1922–1931* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1978), pp. 278–80; Colin Cross (ed.), *Life with Lloyd George: the Diary of A. J. Sylvester, 1931–45* (London: Macmillan, 1975), p. 23; Peter Rowland, *Lloyd George* (London: Barrie and Jenkins, 1975), pp. 665–66.
2 *Western Mail*, 23 January 1931.
3 *The Times*, 24 January 1931, p. 13, col. c.
4 *Sunday Times*, 25 January 1931.
5 Ibid.
6 *The Observer*, 25 January 1931.
7 *News Chronicle*, 26 January 1931.
8 *The Times*, 21 January 1930, p. 15, col. d.
9 Ibid., 18 October 1930, p. 13, col. b.
10 Ibid., 6 December 1930, p. 13, col. b.
11 Ibid., 26 January 1931, p. 11, col. d.
12 *Western Mail*, 26 January 1931.
13 *House of Commons Debates, 5th series,* Vol. 247 (26 January 1931), cc. 595–96.
14 Ibid., cc. 661 ff.
15 Ibid., c. 1022 (28 January 1931).
16 *Western Mail*, 29 January 1931.
17 *House of Commons Debates, 5th series,* Vol. 247 (2 February 1931), c. 1511; *Western Mail*, 4 February 1931.

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 3) for inclusion here.

Cornish Methodism and Cornish political identity, 1918–1960s. Researching the relationship through oral history. *Kayleigh Milden, Institute of Cornish Studies, Hayne Corfe Centre, Sunningdale, Truro TR1 3ND; KMSMilden@aol.com.*

History of the Liberal Party. Roy Douglas (author of *The History of the Liberal Party 1895–1970* and a dozen or so other historical books) is working on a new book about the Liberal Party and its history. This will trace events from the rather indeterminate 19th century date when the party came into existence to a point as close as possible to the present. He believes that the story requires attention to be given not only to the glamorous deeds of major politicians but also to such mundane matters as party organisation and finance. ideas, please! *Roy Douglas, 26 Downs Road, Coulsdon, Surrey CR5 1AA; 01737 552 888.*

Hon H. G. Beaumont (MP for Eastbourne 1906–10). Any information welcome – especially from anyone having access to material about the history of Liberalism in Eastbourne – particularly on his political views (he stood as a Radical). *Tim Beaumont, 40 Elms Road, London SW4 9EX.*

Letters of Richard Cobden (1804–65). Knowledge of the whereabouts of any letters written by Cobden in private hands, autograph collections, and obscure locations in the UK and abroad for a complete edition of his letters. *Dr A. Howe, Department of International History, London School of Economics, Houghton Street, London WC2A 2AE; a.howe@lse.ac.uk.* (For further details of the Cobden Letters Project, see www.lse.ac.uk/collections/cobdenLetters/).

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

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.*

Liberal policy towards Austria-Hungary, 1905–16. *Andrew Gardner, 17 Upper Ramsey Walk, Canonbury, London N1 2RP; agardner@ssees.ac.uk.*

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

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.*

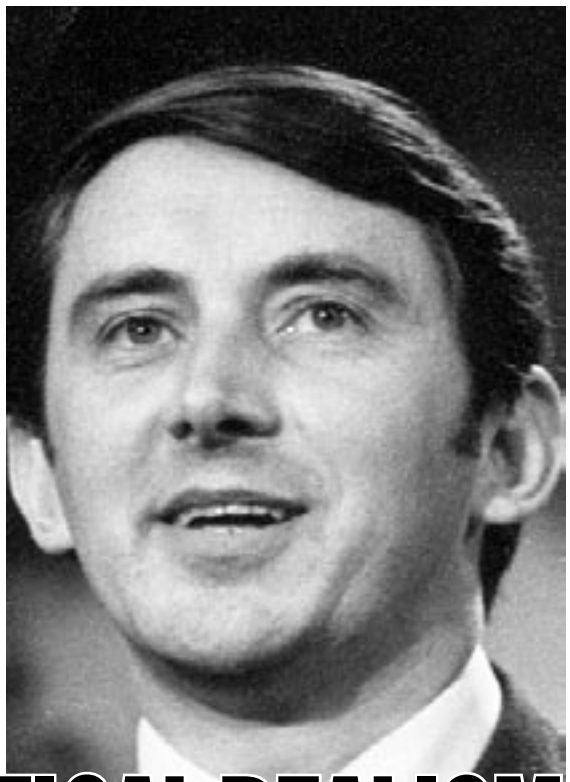
Recruitment of Liberals into the Conservative Party, 1906–1935. Aims to suggest reasons for defections of individuals and develop an understanding of changes in electoral alignment. Sources include personal papers and newspapers; suggestions about how to get hold of the papers of more obscure Liberal defectors welcome. *Cllr Nick Cott, 1a Henry Street, Gosforth, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, NE3 1DQ; N.M.Cott@ncl.ac.uk.*

SDP in Central Essex. Contact with anyone who had dealings with the area, and in particular as many former SDP members of the area as possible, with a view to asking them to take part in a short questionnaire. Official documents from merger onwards regarding the demise of the local SDP branches and integration with the Liberals would also be appreciated. *Elizabeth Wood, The Seasons, Park Wood, Doddinghurst, Brentwood, Essex CM15 0SN; Lizawsea@aol.com.*

Student radicalism at Warwick University. Particulary the files affair in 1970. Interested in talking to anybody who has information about Liberal Students at Warwick in the period 1965-70 and their role in campus politics. *Ian Bradshaw, History Department, University of Warwick, CV4 7AL; I.Bradshaw@warwick.ac.uk*

Welsh Liberal Tradition – A History of the Liberal Party in Wales 1868–2003. Research spans thirteen decades of Liberal history in Wales but concentrates on the post-1966 formation of the Welsh Federal Party. Any memories and information concerning the post-1966 era or even before welcomed. The research is to be published in book form by Welsh Academic Press. *Dr Russell Deacon, Centre for Humanities, University of Wales Institute Cardiff, Cyncoed Campus, Cardiff CF23 6XD; rdeacon@uwic.ac.uk.*

Adrian Slade talks to former Liberal leader David Steel (Lord Steel of Aikwood) about his career in politics, from his election in 1965, through his period as leader of the Liberal Party from 1976 to 1988 to his recent role as Presiding Officer of the Scottish Parliament.



ARCHITECT OF POLITICAL REALISM

For all the high hopes of Jo Grimond's 'Liberal Revival', only three by-elections were actually won by the Liberal Party of the 1960s. The most significant for the future was Roxburgh, Selkirk & Peebles, where, in 1965, 26-year-old David Steel, 'Boy David' as he quickly became known, won the seat with a 4,500 majority over the Tory. Unlike the other by-election victors, Eric Lubbock and Wallace Lawler, Steel's majority just survived the party's debacle at the 1970 election and he went on to become one of the Liberal Party's longest serving leaders.

Four years ago the creation of a Scottish Parliament drew him back from near-retirement politically. He stood for election as an MSP and then became the parliament's first speaker. Having recently stepped down, he once again feels free to talk on wider issues.

From the moment he entered politics, David Steel has never been afraid to take risks and court controversy. His introduction of the 1967 Abortion Bill; his creation of the 1976 Lib–Lab Pact; his encouragement of the formation of the SDP; his proposed alliance with the new party; his ultimate strong advocacy of Liberal–SDP merger: all have made him enemies, even if those enemies are heavily outnumbered by his supporters. But, on each occasion, events have tended to vindicate him, and his place in history as the Liberal Party's architect of political realism and co-operation is firmly assured.

Steel's Liberalism is deeply rooted in colonial Africa, where his father was a minister of the Church of Scotland and where he was educated until coming to boarding school in Scotland in his teens. 'Right up to independence, education in colonial Africa was as segregated as it was in South Africa,' he says. 'Even at fifteen, that seemed all wrong to me. Then my time at university coincided with the Sharpeville massacre, which had a deep effect on me, and I joined the Anti-Apartheid Movement that was formed as a result. Also, much influenced by Jo Grimond, who was rector of the university and actually introduced me to my future wife, Judy, I joined the Liberals.'

John Pardoe and Roy Jenkins had at different times suggested that David Steel was always more of Social Democrat than a Liberal. How true was that? 'Oh, Jo jokingly suggested it too, at the time of the Alliance,' he says. 'If being a bit of an interventionist Liberal also means being a Social Democrat then perhaps there is an element of truth in it. But, despite some early efforts by Labour MP John Mackintosh to persuade me, I never wanted to join the Labour Party. No doubt, if I had, I would later have helped to form the SDP! I'm a Keynesian Liberal. Was he a Social Democrat?'

In 1962, when Steel was in his last year and president of his university's Liberals, uncrowned Scottish Liberal king George

Mackie offered him his first job – Assistant Secretary of the Scottish Liberal Party. This was part of a successful Mackie plot to put him into Roxburgh, Selkirk & Peebles, one of Scotland's few seats in which Liberals were in second place. He went on to make huge inroads into the Tory vote in the 1964 election and to win the by-election that soon followed. 'We fought it very much on local issues,' he says. 'The local hospital, the threatened Beeching railway closure, the revitalisation of the Borders, which had been suffering badly from depopulation by the young.'

When he first entered Parliament, these were the sorts of constituency issues that Steel concentrated on. But he also developed his African interests. 'I remember slipping into Rhodesia with Archy Kirkwood during the Smith UDI regime,' he says. 'We were arrested on the way out.' At this point he proudly produces his 'Prohibited Immigrant' certificate, which he was forced to accept by the Rhodesian authorities. Shortly after this visit he took over from David Ennals as President of the Anti-Apartheid Movement. 'They needed someone who wasn't going to be made a minister,' he says.

But, after the 1966 election, he drew third place in the private members' bill ballot and shot immediately to the attention of the public at large when he decided to introduce a bill to legalise abortion in certain circumstances. Until then abortion had been illegal, was often self-induced, and was also the province of back-street operators and private clinics covering their work under other names.

'I had supported change openly in my by-election and here was a chance to do something about it,' says Steel. 'Six or seven previous attempts had all failed for lack of time, but the most recent, Lord Silkin's, had already gone through the Lords and I decided to pick up his draft. Silkin's son, John, was the then Labour Chief Whip and he and Roy Jenkins, by now Home Secretary, were very keen that I should it take it on. So for all these reasons I decided to try.'

It was a brave advocacy that made him very unpopular with some people. 'I still get letters to this day, calling me Hitler, baby murderer and so on,' he says. 'But there was wide cross-party support for change, particularly amongst Labour ministers. It took up many hours of consultation listening to doctors, the churches and pro and anti groups, but, crucially, Roy found us the parliamentary time to get the bill through.'

The new bill legalised abortion under certain conditions, putting the decision in the hands of any two doctors who agreed to the abortion in good faith. 'It was not a woman's right to choose, so you still get campaigning on that issue, but at the time it was a pioneering reform compared to most other countries,' he says.

His constituents were less unhappy with his Abortion Bill than his association with the anti-apartheid opposition to the 1969/70 South African rugby tour. 'Menzies Campbell and I did a meeting in my rugby-loving constituency. It was very badly attended and didn't make me popular. At the election the next year my majority went down to 500.'

He was not alone in suffering at that election. All but six of the twelve Liberal MPs lost their seats. 'And the combined majorities of Jeremy, John Pardoe and myself, half the parliamentary party, totalled just 1500,' he adds with a laugh, although he found it far from amusing at the time.

In 1968 Wallace Lawler had won a by-election seat from Labour in Birmingham Ladywood (now part of Clare Short's territory). This apart, why had the party made so little impact between 1966 and 1970? 'The Wilson government was very much in the ascendancy,' he says. 'And, unlike today, there was a strong Tory party. We were also very thin on the ground in those days, particularly in local government. We suffered the classic squeeze. I don't think there was much we could have done.'

'The next four years were quite different because we benefited from the by-election effect. Ladywood had not been a major by-election win but Rochdale and Sutton were and they were followed by three other wins. People always tend to support winners and that was what we were. In the same way late, at a much more difficult time, we were undoubtedly helped by David Alton's win at Edge Hill a month or two before the1979 election.'

Steel was soon to take over as party leader. In party terms what had he learned from his first ten years? 'To concentrate on our strengths, such as we had, and not to dissipate – to target seats and not spread resources too thinly. Of course we became much better at that a few years later.'

Not surprisingly he had found the period following Jeremy Thorpe's departure as leader 'very depressing and long drawn out' but he refutes any suggestion that the leadership election he fought with John Pardoe had been bad-tempered. 'John and I always got on extremely well, and I hand it to him that, within a day of my being elected, he came to my office to give me his full support. I was devastated when he lost his seat in 1979. Although he never was deputy leader, everyone thought he was and his economic expertise was of huge value, particularly to me because I had none. He was a great loss to the party.'

When Steel became leader and he used his first Assembly speech to call on his party to be prepared to share power at some stage. He sees the Lib–Lab Pact as a logical sequel to that speech. 'It had always seemed to me quite unrealistic to expect us to move straight into majority government so I was always looking for a pathway to get us back into influence and power. When Labour faced a vote of confidence in the

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House I saw this as an opportunity, not to avoid an election – we were not in particularly good shape but there was no reason to suppose that we would be any better later – but to do something positive in co-operation.

In retrospect had the Pact achieved much? 'Yes, I think it did – not so much in policy terms but politically, in forcing the party to think about possible coalition and relations with other parties and that was particularly important later when the SDP was formed. There were some policy gains, for example for small businesses and a free vote on Europe, but of course we lost that. In retrospect perhaps we should have stuck out for PR in the European elections but, as Jo said at the time, to bring down a government on an issue that almost nobody except Liberals cared about might not have been worth it!'

Steel had many meetings with Prime Minister Jim Callaghan during the Pact and retains a high regard for him as a patriot and manager. 'Where he let us down was after the Pact ended. He failed to go for an election in the autumn of 1978 because he was persuaded that he would have a better chance of an overall majority later. If he had not listened to that advice, everyone might have benefited from a subsequent coalition rather than a Thatcher Government.' Nevertheless the 1979 result was better than Steel expected at the time – 'We came up again and we survived'.

Not many months later he was having his informal chats in Brussels with Roy Jenkins about Roy's growing disenchantment with Labour and the fallout within the Labour Party at home. They explored ways in which they might work together. 'Yes, later on, we did discuss whether Roy should join the Liberal Party. His view was that first he should try something new and that only if that failed should he join, and then not as a campaigner. So I encouraged him to pursue something more fundamental. It has become clear that, even at that time, there was a difference of view between Roy and David Owen, who thought a new party should go it alone rather than work with in alliance with the Liberals.'

Was that view shared by Bill Rodgers and Shirley Williams? 'To begin with, yes it was, but Roy's courageous decision to stand in a difficult seat like Warrington and seek the support of Liberals helped him to persuade them to change their minds and support the idea of an alliance, although David Owen was never really persuaded.'

Steel too had been courageous, some thought foolhardy, in offering up the Liberal Party to an alliance with a new party that, for a few months, looked as if it might overwhelm it electorally. 'Yes it was a risk, but I have always taken risks and I thought all along that the two parties were complementary. They had the leadership and we had the people on the ground and in local government. It didn't take long for Bill and Shirley, and most of the Liberal Party, to come round to that view.'

Nevertheless leadership, or rather joint leadership, was never easy and Steel had his problems with both Jenkins and Owen. He looks back with some regret at his meeting with Jenkins at Ettrick Bridge during the 1983 election that was meant to clarify leadership confusion.

'The problem was the electorate's perception of the two of us. Unfortunately David Marquand had invented the title for Roy of "prime-minister-designate", which neither of us had ever used, but which was picked up by the media. It was confusing because we had agreed that I would lead the campaign and Roy would become PM if we got elected. The attempt at clarification didn't really work and, sadly, for a short time it slightly soured my relationship with Roy. It may even have been a factor in Roy's resignation as SDP leader after the election.'

Nevertheless, at the election the Alliance all but pushed Labour into third place, the Alliance continued, and David Owen took over from Roy Jenkins. 'I actually got on well with David – those photos of us in woolly jumpers looking over farm gates were perfectly genuine,' Steel says. 'I didn't have as much social contact with him as I did with Roy, but at times he was very supportive, particularly after the defence debate at Eastbourne. We had our own heated debates about policy and tactics but they were good tempered, even if he did get an obsession over defence.'

Steel believes strongly that his legacy as leader was to get his party to face the realities of politics.

'But, if you ask me whether joint leadership could ever have worked, the answer is no, and that is why by 1987 I strongly favoured either a split or a merger of the two parties. My one regret is that we then took so long, and it wasn't just David Owen's fault, as Liberals like to think. We were at fault, too, in the way we chose to structure our negotiating team.'

Steel hadn't expected David Owen to opt out of the process and had thought he would stand for leader of the merged party. He also admits that the difficulties encountered in the protracted negotiations convinced him that, after twelve years of Liberal leadership, he did not want to stand himself. 'It all could have been much neater and easier,' he says. 'But that it was done was essential, and the proof of the pudding is in the eating. We got one party with one leader and now, instead of having a handful of MPs between us, we have more than 50.'

Steel believes strongly that his legacy as leader was to get his party to face the realities of politics, and in today's climate there is nowhere has it had to do so more than in Scotland where for the last four years devolved government has been in the hands of a Labour–Lib Dem coalition, and seems likely to remain so. Perhaps the latest proof of the Steel pudding?

A shorter version of this interview was first published in Liberal Democrat News.

HILAIRE BELLOC AND

David Boyle argues that there is a liberal tradition in Britain that has usually run independent of, yet parallel to, the Liberals or Liberal Democrats. It is recognisably Liberal in its commitment to individual freedom and local self-determination, but it has included Radicals (Cobbett), Tories (Ruskin, or so he said), Socialists (Morris) and Greens (Schumacher). And though both traditions have influenced each other in every generation, they have rarely come together in Parliament. The exception – and it was a brief exception – was in the political career of the writer, poet and historian Hilaire Belloc, Liberal MP for South Salford, 1906 to 1910.

'I think we can explain how to make a small shop or a small farm a common feature of our society better than Matthew Arnold explained how to make the State the organ of Our Best Self.'

G. K. Chesterton, *The Outline of Sanity*

'And never a ploughman under the sun.
Never a ploughman. Never a one.'

Hilaire Belloc, 'Ha'nacker Mill'

Belloc has inspired at least two major biographies in the last twenty years, but – considering the influence he cast in his lifetime – he is little remembered today, except perhaps for the occasional 'Cautionary Tale about Matilda' or 'Lord Lundy's tears'. A century ago, it was very different.

Belloc had a French father, an English mother and an American wife. His grandfather was a friend of John Stuart Mill and his mother moved in Liberal Party literary circles. He was born in 1870, served briefly in the French

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artillery and took Oxford by storm as an eloquent conversationalist, speaker and debater in the generation of Liberals like John Simon and J. L. Hammond. He joined these two as a contributor to the 1897 book *Essays in Liberalism* – Belloc's contribution concentrated on land reform and singled out Cobbett rather than Cobden as the great Liberal pioneer. One reviewer claimed that the ideas of none of the six contributors 'correspond to those of any recognised section of the Liberal Party'.[1] This was prophetic: Belloc's strident Catholicism and drinking habits made him rather stand out in a party of determined nonconformists and temperance reformers.

He managed the temperance problem by siding with the reformers against the big brewers, arguing that 'the vast majority of publicans throughout England are the servants, and probably the debtors also, of a small and very wealthy clique whose power it is our business to destroy.'[2] The Catholic aspect was more difficult. He lost the Liberal nomination for Dover in 1903 when the local Catholic priest leapt forward at his adoption selection meeting and embraced him – or so he attributed his failure. But in South Salford in 1904 he was unanimously adopted, and he moved the vote of confidence in the party that year at their conference in Manchester, predicting victory at the next election so that 'the ancient soul of Britain, a thing in some peril, would thereby be delivered'.[3]

South Salford was a marginal seat and the Conservatives adopted the unsophisticated slogan 'Don't vote for a Frenchman and a Catholic'. Belloc ignored the advice of his constituency campaigners in the 1905/06 election campaign and confronted the religion issue head-on at a packed public meeting. 'Gentlemen, I am a Catholic,' he told them, taking his rosary out of his pocket. 'As far as possible, I go to Mass every day. This is a rosary: as far as possible, I kneel down and tell these beads every day. If you reject me on account of my religion, I shall thank God that he has spared me the indignity of being your representative.'[4] There was silence for a few moments, then thunderous applause. He took the seat by 852 votes.

He was never taken entirely seriously in Parliament and, from the start, he was a thorn in the side of his own government. His campaign against importing cheap Chinese labourers into South Africa – a form of slavery, he said – thoroughly embarrassed Campbell-Bannerman, who had promised to stop it. His campaign for pure beer offended the nonconformists. 'There are very few nights when I do not go to bed after drinking a pint or two of beer,' he told the Commons, admitting that his speech had offended the teetotallers in his constituency – adding offensively 'there are eight of them'.[5]

His campaign to have all secret party funds audited – even his own – infuriated Liberal Party managers. His satirical novels *Mr Clutterbuck's Election* (1908) and *A Change in the Cabinet* (1909) – both dictated at great speed during Holy Week – offended his own side as well as the others. He also became increasingly disillusioned with Parliament: 'I can see little object in the House of Commons,' he said less than a year after the election. 'It does not govern; it does not even discuss. It is completely futile.'[6] His opposition to female suffrage stemmed from his sense of the superiority of women over parliamentary politics. It wasn't an argument that cut much ice with either side.

The heart of Distributism was the redistribution of land and property so that everyone had some – on the ground that small enterprises, smallholdings and small units were the only basis for dignity, independence and liberty.

Still, he exhausted himself getting re-elected in 1910 (this time by just 314 votes), but was then enraged that Asquith did not push his battle with the Lords far enough to depose them entirely. When a second election loomed at the end of the year, he decided that he could not remain an official Liberal. He never stood for Parliament again. 'I think everyone will agree with me that even the most modest pen in the humblest newspaper,' he said in his final Commons speech, 'is as good as a vote in what has ceased to be a free deliberative assembly.'[7]

His collaboration with G. K. Chesterton after that – together they made up the unusual creature dubbed by Bernard Shaw as the 'Chesterbelloc' – was certainly political. Their horror at deals between the two front benches after the 1910 election was simply naïve, but he finally torpedoed any links with the

party during the so-called Marconi scandal.

This was not, by any stretch, a high point in Liberal history, and concerned a handful of cabinet ministers – including Lloyd George – who appeared to have been involved in the insider trading of Marconi shares. It was Belloc's weekly *Eye-Witness* – selling 100,000 copies a week – which did most to bring the scandal to the public's attention, unfortunately focusing on the fact that two of the central figures were Jewish. Belloc had stood down from the editorship by then and had unwisely handed it over to Chesterton's younger brother Cecil, a swaggering anti-semite. But he stood by Chesterton when he was prosecuted for criminal libel by the brother of the attorney-general, Rufus Isaacs. (Cecil was found guilty but only fined £100, which the Chestertons claimed as a moral victory.)

And that was that for Belloc's relationship with the party – but in another more subtle respect it was just the beginning. His book *The Servile State* (1912) was an influential diatribe against big business and Fabian collectivist policies – a book now rather inappropriately kept in print by obscure American libertarians, which wouldn't have pleased him. The book formed the basis of the political movement known as Distributism that flourished in the 1920s and 1930s.

Distributism knitted together the old Catholic social doctrine of Pope Leo XIII and Cardinal Manning, which was so close to Belloc's heart. It mixed a generous dollop of land-reforming Liberalism with unworldly Gandhian simplicity, borrowing the old slogan of Joseph Chamberlain and Jesse Collings from the 1880s, 'three acres and a cow'. Its heart was the redistribution of land and property so that everyone had some – on the ground that small enterprises, smallholdings and small units were the only basis for dignity, independence and liberty.

Belloc in 1932, by Daphne Pollen. Belloc said of it: 'You have made me look like Blake, seeing a vision'.

Belloc, Chesterton (G. K., that is) and the Distributists were equally hostile to socialism and capitalism, and set out to prove they were the same thing: 'Collectivist experiment is thoroughly suited (in appearance) to capitalist society,' wrote Belloc. 'It works within the existing machinery of capitalism, appealing to just those appetites which capitalism has aroused, and ridicules as fantastic and unheard-of just those things in society the memory of which capitalism has killed among men wherever the blight of it has spread.'[8]

Distributism was anti-industrial, anti-finance, anti-corporation, anti-bureaucrat, and most of all anti-giantism, in the form of either big bureaucracy or big business – the 'Big Rot' according to Belloc. Capitalism is unable to satisfy human needs for stability, sufficiency and security, said Belloc, and is therefore only a phase. What Distributism was actually *for* was a little hazier, but it included Jeffersonian solutions of workers' co-operatives, smallholdings and land redistribution, and savings boosted by the state. One of the Distributists' earliest campaigns was in support of the small London bus companies that were being driven out by the monopolistic London General Omnibus Company. In response, they bought a series of Distributist buses, painted them red, green and blue and called them things like 'William Morris' – and took on the big company buses.[9]

Distributism fizzled out after the Second World War. There have been Distributist gestures since then (Mrs Thatcher's sale of council houses, for example), but little more. Its proponents were disappointed that those who had taken it to heart most were not the urban poor, but craftsmen like Eric Gill or journalists like Beachcomber. Yet *The Servile State* had been enough to cast a disabling doubt over the minds of radical New Liberals as they leant towards the Fabians.[10]

Between the wars, there were set-piece debates between Belloc's Distributism and Shaw's Fabianism, and between Belloc's Distibutism and Wells's Modernism – and from the perspective of two generations later, Belloc seems to have won both debates. The two great Liberal ideologues of the period, Keynes and Beveridge, were not necessarily well known as Liberals.

Belloc's politics thereafter drifted in directions no Liberal would follow. He flirted with French monarchism, with Mussolini and Franco. His views about Europe's Jewish heritage were complicated enough for him to be accused of anti-semitism – and, like T. S. Eliot, his reputation has been tarred with that ever since – though he recognised Hitler for what he was from the start. In fact, he consistently warned against Europe's peril and Hitler's threat to the Jews. He died in 1953, and his reputation continues to suffer from his association with *Eye-Witness* under Cecil Chesterton, with its proto-fascist undertones. But that obscures some of the ways in which his liberal legacy remains, especially in the modern Liberal Democrats.

By the 1930s, a new generation of Liberals was having to respond to the collectivism of the dictators, especially as the Webbs were embracing Stalin on behalf of the Fabians. And these were influenced by Belloc, his passionate sense of Europe and his idea of a different kind of common ownership – by people, rather than by The People.

The party's policy, *Ownership for All*, agreed at the Liberal assembly in Bath in 1938, set out the very Distributist notion that 'the widespread ownership of property is the firmest guarantee against dictatorship' – including policies to reform inheritance laws, tackle monopolies, tax land and share profits.[11] The purpose of free trade is to undermine monopoly, it said – not to make the world safe for monopoly. The chair of the *Ownership for All* panel was a former editor of the *Huddersfield Examiner*, Elliott Dodds, who would be Liberal Party president in 1948–49 and was one of the key figures behind the party's intellectual revival under Jo Grimond.

The influence of Belloc on Grimond's Liberalism was almost unacknowledged – though Grimond later described the Belloc tradition as one 'to be studied and fostered'.[12] Yet the Distributist themes were very prominent in the Liberal revival years: industrial common ownership, resistance to bureaucracy and the whole idea of a non-socialist radical alternative. Dodds was among the ginger group formed in 1953, calling itself the Unservile State Group, that remade the party's ideology along these lines – its title a tacit acceptance of the *Servile State* critique. 'Tribute must be paid to the work of Hilaire Belloc and G. K. Chesterton who, though they fell foul of the Liberal Party, were such doughty fighters for Liberal values, and whose "Distributist" crusade inspired so many (including the present writer) with the ideal of ownership for all,' wrote Dodds that year.'[13]

Generally speaking, the alternative Liberal tradition of Cobbett, Ruskin, Morris and Belloc – if it exists as such – has held back from the party. It was recognisably agrarian where the party was more industrial. It was recognisably high Anglican or Catholic where the party was more nonconformist. It was deeply melancholic where the party – as anybody who delivers *Focus* will confirm – was hopelessly optimistic. It was interested in the economic roots of liberty when the party was interested in the political roots. And its interest in free trade was always more flexible, and sometimes unrecognisable.

But there have been vital moments of cross-over. It's there in Keynes's call to national self-sufficiency,[14] or in Beveridge's conviction that Liberals would have a further aim beyond socialists – 'not material progress but spiritual liberty'.[15] And although the Roman Catholic political doctrines that so influenced Belloc seem pretty dusty in the UK these days, it was Pope Leo XIII who first coined the concept of 'subsidiarity' in his encyclical *Rerum Novarum* in 1896. It was this idea that was taken up by Belloc, turned into a political creed in Distributism, rescued from obscurity by Schumacher – only to pop up again as the central tenet of Euro-ideology, and the one that knits Liberal Democrat European policy with its enthusiasm for decentralisation.

But for Belloc, subsidiarity always meant more than just administration. He applied it just as much to our relations with employers, with business, and with money. He would probably advise Liberal Democrats these days that applying subsidiarity to other areas of life is the best way towards a new radical Liberal critique, capable of uniting people behind the cause. And – if I might be allowed a contemporary comment in a history journal – I believe he would be right.

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1 Joseph Pearce, *Old Thunder: A life of Hilaire Belloc* (London: HarperCollins, 2002).
2 Ibid.
3 Ibid.
4 A. N. Wilson, *Hilaire Belloc* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1984).
5 Pearce, *Old Thunder.*
6 Ibid.
7 Ibid.
8 Hilaire Belloc, *The Servile State* (London: T. N. Foulis, 1912).
9 A. N. Wilson, *Hilaire Belloc*.
10 Victor Feske, *From Belloc to Churchill: Private scholars, public culture and the crisis of British Liberalism 1900–1939* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).
11 Elliott Dodds, *Ownership for All: The Liberal Party committee's report on the distribution of property* (London: Liberal Party Organisation, 1938).
12 Jo Grimond, *introduction to Cobbett's Tour in Scotland,* ed. Daniel Green (Aberdeen University Press, 1984).
13 Elliott Dodds, *Ownership for All* (London: Radical Programme Series/Liberal Publication Department, 1953).
14 See for example J. M. Keynes, 'National Self-Sufficiency' in *Collected Works,* ed. Moggridge (London: Macmillan, 1982), vol 21.
15 Quoted in Ian Bradley, *The Strange Rebirth of Liberal Britain* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1985).

Ian Crowe examines the career and political thought of Edmund Burke (1730–97) – normally thought of as a Conservative philosopher, but a political thinker whose writing has much of relevance to Liberals.

BIOGRAPHY: EDMUND BURKE

Edmund Burke was born in Ireland in 1730, the second surviving son of Richard Burke, an attorney, and his wife, Mary. After graduating from Trinity College, Dublin, Burke travelled to London to train for the Bar at the Middle Temple; but by the mid 1750s his lukewarm interest in the legal profession had given way to an uncertain career in academic writing and journalism. His prospects brightened with the publication of two books of significance, *A Vindication of Natural Society* (1756) and *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), and his publisher, Robert Dodsley, commissioned him to edit a new venture, a periodical of current events, political and cultural reviews and essays entitled the *Annual Register*, which first appeared in 1759. By the time he was elected to parliament, in 1765, Burke had gained a secure reputation in literary and academic circles: he was, for example, a well-respected member of Dr Johnson's circle and one of the founding members of 'The Club'.

Burke's political career began when he was appointed private secretary to William Hamilton, a wealthy and promising politician, some time around 1760. Hamilton became Chief Secretary to the Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland, the Earl of Halifax, in 1761, and Burke followed him to Dublin. Four years later, after an acrimonious break with his employer, Burke was appointed private secretary to the great Whig landowner Charles Watson-Wentworth, Marquis of Rockingham, and that December was provided with the 'pocket' parliamentary seat of Wendover through the favour of Lord Verney, a friend of his close friend, Will Burke (no family link has ever been proved).

Although he made an immediate impact on the House as a speaker, and consolidated his position among the Rockingham Whigs with his *Thoughts on the Cause of the Present Discontents* (1770) – a defence of political party as a counter to supposed 'hidden influences' working close to the person of the monarch, George III – Burke really rose to prominence as a parliamentarian after he was elected to represent Bristol, then England's second port, in 1774. This was the occasion of his famous statement upon the duty of a member of parliament to his constituents: 'Your representative owes you, not his industry only, but his judgment; and he betrays, instead of serving you, if he sacrifices it to your opinion.' The statement, in hindsight, was highly unfortunate, for Burke's six years as the member for Bristol were neither entirely happy nor successful. His sympathetic judgment of the American colonists in their quarrel with parliament, his promotion of the relaxation of Irish trade restrictions, his support for Catholic Relief, and his absorption in the broader political struggles

at Westminster, produced tensions and enmities among his constituents that resulted in his withdrawal from the poll in 1780. For the remainder of his parliamentary career, until 1794, he sat for the Yorkshire seat of Malton.

Burke remained loyal to Rockingham up to, and well beyond, the latter's death in 1782, and his campaigns during this period were particularly directed at perceived encroachments of royal power upon the prerogatives of parliament. This impeccably Whiggish stand – liberal in its sensitivity to the preservation of constitutional liberty in Britain – was extended to a defence of the 'chartered rights' of the American colonists, criticism of the penal laws imposed upon Irish Catholics under the 'Protestant Ascendancy', opposition to the institution of slavery in the British Empire, and, from the early 1780s to 1794, an exhaustive attack on what he perceived as the arbitrary and tyrannical rule of East India Company officials over Britain's Indian subjects. One personal source of this commitment to justice within the nation's Imperial responsibility may be found in Burke's own upbringing in Ireland, the son of a Protestant father and Roman Catholic mother.

Burke held office (as Paymaster-General) for about twelve months in all: in 1782, during Rockingham's brief second administration, and for several months under the ill-fated Fox–North coalition, in 1783. After the collapse of the coalition in December 1783 and its replacement by Pitt the Younger's first administration, Burke was never to be in power again. He remained close to Charles J. Fox during the early years of the impeachment of Warren Hastings, Governor-General of Bengal, and through the first regency crisis of 1788–89, but broke with the Foxites in 1791 over their sympathetic reception of the French Revolution, ending his parliamentary life in the company of the less radical Portland Whigs.

Nowadays, Burke's anti-ideological stand is particularly appealing to many conservatives, but it should be equally relevant to liberals.

Burke's most famous work, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, appeared late in his career, in 1790. Its penetrating attacks upon the French revolutionary philosophy of the 'rights of man' seemed to many of his contemporaries, and to some of his closest political friends, an inexplicable abandonment of his earlier commitment to liberty; but Burke set out to show in succeeding works – particularly in *An Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs* (1791) and his *Letters on a Regicide Peace* (1795–97) – that he had consistently propounded an understanding of the rights and duties of man in society that was based not on abstract propositions but upon universal principles necessarily mediated through circumstances, history, cultural forms of social behaviour and inherited institutions.

The last years of Burke's life were filled with personal and professional disappointment. The impeachment of Warren Hastings failed, the revolutionary spirit appeared to pose increasing threats to Britain's heritage of chartered liberties and rights, and Burke's only surviving son, Richard, died weeks after being elected as the new member for Malton. Burke's grief was only relieved by the consolations of his extremely successful and happy marriage to Jane Nugent.

In many ways, Burke's legacy, and with it his significance for modern-day liberalism, has been distorted by the extraordinary success of the *Reflections*. For example, Burke's critique of the French Revolution has been taken as an assault on the Enlightenment, or 'Modernity', and a defence of monarchy, aristocracy, and feudalism. But his criticisms of British policy in Ireland, America, and India, his observations on slavery and economical reform, and his close parliamentary association with the Rockingham Whigs and their successors, all suggest a mind that thought radically about social injustice and, in its balance of reason and passion, was well within the broad and varied traditions of eighteenth-century Enlightenment thought.

Burke's later assault on 'Jacobinism' was, in fact, a defence of the intellectual currents of his time against an emerging heresy that placed a potentially disastrous reliance upon abstract and rationalist thought to the exclusion of other vital facets of human nature and social intercourse. In particular, Burke feared the consequences of its atheistic assumptions when applied to politics, and this helps to explain his hardening attitude, towards the end of his life, as regards the toleration of dissenters in Britain (although he maintained his earlier latitudinarian position to his death and remained a strong promoter of relief for Roman Catholics).

During the nineteenth century, admirers of Burke included figures as diverse as Coleridge and Gladstone, Croker, Macaulay, and Morley: Disraeli's early writings clearly owe much to the spirit of Burke, and Matthew Arnold found in him a vital source of wisdom. Yet, inasmuch as the contours of Victorian Britain were defined by confidence in material progress and imperial power, and by the growth of industrialisation and parliamentary democracy, Burke was an awkward paradigm for both Conservatives and Liberals. Between Burke the romantic reactionary and Burke the proto-Utilitarian, there appeared to be little space in which to embrace the sheer breadth and complexity of his genius.

Nowadays, Burke's anti-ideological stand is particularly appealing to many conservatives, but it should be equally relevant to liberals; his faith in the naturalness and benefits of integration and coexistence among diverse cultures, and his insistence that there is more to the political and social animal than mere rational formulae, can help us to appreciate more fully the enduring human impulse for liberty, while also understanding the vital importance of community life,

civic duty and a respect for the wisdom of tradition in the preservation of that liberty. These are all facets of the human condition that have, in the past, been central to the liberal heart, and they may still convey a sense of the inherent dignity of the human individual far surpassing that to be found in the writings of the many 'scientific' humanitarian planners who have emerged since Burke's death.

In large part, recent developments in Burke scholarship have stemmed from the disintegration of the ideological context within which Burke's thought had come to be analysed in the decades after the Second World War – i.e., the Cold-War world – when Burke's significance as a thinker was often debated in a way that identified Communism as a twentieth-century form of Jacobinism. Conor Cruise O'Brien's Introduction to his famous biography of Burke, *The Great Melody* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1992), offers, perhaps, the final serious contribution to this debate. Since the end of the Cold War, attention has turned increasingly to the recovery of aspects of Burke's thought that transcend the anti-Jacobin stance of his later years. These include his campaigns against British corruption in India, his understanding of the social and moral significance of custom, tradition, and culture in relation to a 'science' of human nature, and the origins and political context of his religious beliefs.

Several recent, outstanding, scholarly publications have helped to chart these new paths in Burke studies, opening up fresh perspectives on his life and the relevance of his thought: F. P. Lock's biographical study, *Edmund Burke, Volume One: 1730–1784* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998); David Bromwich's anthology of Burke's writings, *On Empire, Liberty, and Reform: Speeches and Letters* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000); and, most recently, J. C. D. Clark's new edition of Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (Stanford University Press, 2001). The appearance of the *Viking Portable Edmund Burke*, edited by Isaac Kramnick (Harmondsworth, 1999), and of *Edmund Burke: His Life and Legacy* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1997), a collection of essays by scholars, politicians and journalists published to commemorate the bicentenary of Burke's death, also illustrate the continuing vibrancy of interest in Burke's thought.

A really sound introduction to Burke and his thought remains to be written, but Peter Stanlis's introduction to *Edmund Burke: Select Writings and Speeches* (Washington, D.C., 1963) covers the ground very effectively, and Russell Kirk's *Edmund Burke: A Genius Reconsidered* (Arlington House, 1967, revised and updated by the Intercollegiate Studies Institute, Wilmington, 1997) provides an accessible and often penetrating study for the interested reader. Also helpful is the commentary of Nicholas Robinson in his collection of contemporary prints and cartoons *Edmund Burke: A Life in Caricature* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996). More difficult, but highly rewarding of perseverance, is Gerald Chapman's *Edmund Burke: The Practical Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967). A recent publication of interest is *Edmund Burke of Beaconsfield* by Elizabeth Lambert (University of Delaware Press, 2003) which is an absorbing study of Burke's domestic life, focusing particularly on his relationship with his wife, Jane. Readers would find it highly instructive not only about aspects of Burke's personality but about the wider context of the life of the landed gentry in late-eighteenth-century England.

For those interested in reading Burke's original writings, there are a number of options. Besides the anthologies mentioned above, there are very good, affordable selections available from Liberty Fund, Inc., Indianapolis, USA, (including a new imprint of E. J. Payne's three-volume *Select Works of Edmund Burke*, which first appeared in the 1870s). The Oxford University Press edition of the *Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke* (general editor Paul Langford) is largely excellent, particularly those volumes edited by P. J. Marshall and containing Burke's Indian writings. In selecting original works of Burke, readers should seek out, in particular, the 'Speech on Fox's East India Bill' (1783), the 'Speech on Conciliation with the [American] Colonies' (1775), the 'Letter to the Sheriffs of Bristol' (1777), the posthumously published 'Tracts on the Popery Laws in Ireland', and Burke's opening speech at the impeachment trial of Warren Hastings (1788).

For discussions of Burke's thought in the contemporary context, see Jim McCue's trenchant and well-wrought *Edmund Burke and Our Present Discontents* (London, 1997) and Terry Eagleton's short but stimulating article 'Saving Burke from the Tories,' which appeared in the *New Statesman*, 4 July 1997.

Ian Crowe is director of the Edmund Burke Society of America. Educated at St. Catherine's College, Oxford, and the University of Bristol, he is now pursuing research at the University of North Carolina. In 1997 he edited Edmund Burke: His Life and Legacy, *a collection of essays marking the bicentenary of the death of Edmund Burke, which was published by Four Courts Press, Dublin.*

REVIEWS

A Leader without a party

John Grigg: *Lloyd George: War Leader* (Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, 2002)
Reviewed by **Ian Hunter**

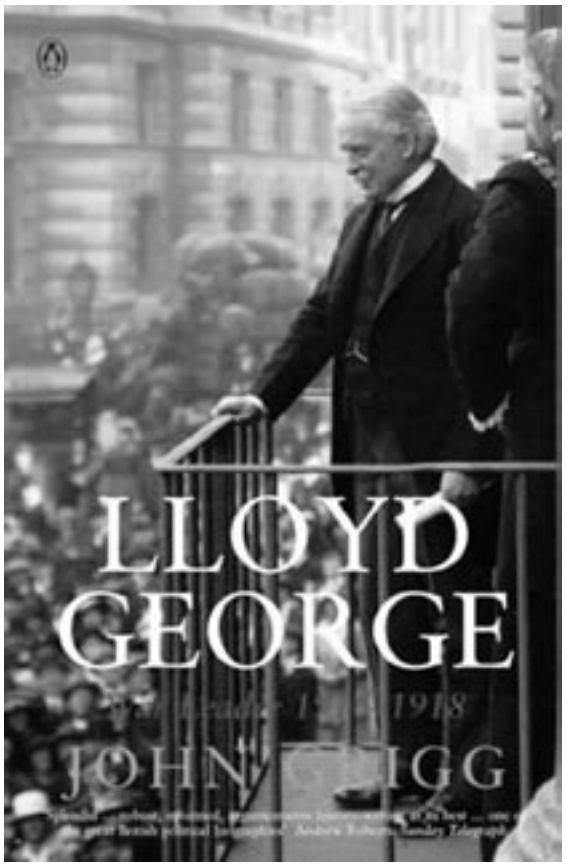
The first three volumes of John Grigg's outstanding biography were published between 1973 and 1985. Seventeen years later the volume covering Lloyd George's first two years as premier has been published. It is the most impressive of the set. Sadly, Grigg did not live to finish the book, which is completed by an epilogue from Margaret Macmillan, Lloyd George's great-granddaughter. Interestingly there are reports that Grigg has left sufficient notes and partial drafts for a skilled and sympathetic writer to complete, at least to some extent, the planned fifth volume on the post-war premiership and the final twenty-three years of Lloyd George's life.

Overall, Grigg's biography has done much to restore some balance to the portrait of Lloyd George and to offset the criticism that writers biased towards the Tories and Asquith have dispensed over previous decades. Grigg provides a convincing and generally sympathetic picture of Lloyd George. The vast intellectual colour and political talents of the man are apparent but there is no attempt to ignore the less attractive egotism, selfishness, sexual philandering and occasional lack of principle that were also part of one known as 'the goat' by his enemies, particularly Baldwin. Grigg pulls few punches when analysing Lloyd George's relationship with his secretary, mistress and eventual second wife, Frances Stephenson. In particular, the little-reported fact that he had entered into a joint suicide pact with her is discussed with barely disguised contempt for Lloyd George's self-centeredness.

Grigg can hardly write a dull paragraph. This book dazzles with deep insight and understanding. Indeed it is almost two books in one – providing both a comprehensive summary of the key events and personalities during the period from 1916–18 as well as a sophisticated and controversial comparison of the war premierships of Churchill and Lloyd George. One of Grigg's main contentions is that the situation that Lloyd George faced in 1916 was even more desperate and critical than that faced by Churchill in 1940. One does not necessarily have to agree with Grigg to enjoy the challenge and freshness of his argument. Throughout the book Grigg sets out to judge Lloyd George's record in the First World War against the now better-remembered achievement of Churchill in the Second. The comparison does not find Lloyd George wanting.

One of the most attractive aspects of the book is that Grigg consistently maintains a sense of balance. In the chapter that covers Arthur Henderson and Neville Chamberlain (both individuals who fell foul of Lloyd George, and left his government) the writing is a master class in presenting both sides of the case without falling foul of accusations of sitting on the fence. Grigg is also excellent in his treatment of the difficult relationship that Lloyd George had with the military establishment. Although he managed to remove the ineffective and inflexible Robertson as Chief of the General Staff, he had to tolerate Sir Douglas Haig as Commander-in-Chief of the British Army in France until the end of the war, in spite of having severe doubts about Haig's strategic judgment. Lloyd George had much less freedom of action than Churchill managed to achieve during his premiership. He was the Liberal leader of a government dominated by the Tory party and was dependent on them for his political survival. He became a leader without a party and this was at the heart of his downfall in 1922. It was not a mistake that Churchill would make in 1940 when, on the resignation of Chamberlain, he was offered and accepted the leadership of the Tory party.

Irrespective of the political weakness of his position Lloyd George achieved an immense amount by force of personality. He restructured the support apparatus around the cabinet with the creation of an informal 10 Downing Street secretariat separate from the official civil service machine. He appointed highly experienced men from



outside politics as directors of manpower, shipping, food distribution, agriculture and other areas of the war effort. This was almost unheard of at the time but usually proved to be highly successful. The personal relationship that Lloyd George forged with leading Conservatives such as Bonar Law and Lord Derby partly compensated for his political weaknesses. It enabled him to dismiss Sir John Jellicoe from the Admiralty on Christmas Eve 1917 and to force the adoption of the convoy system on the Navy – a key factor in the defeat of the growing German submarine menace, which threatened to starve Britain into submission. His hold on the Tory high command psyche also helped him to restore Churchill from his Dardanelles-induced banishment to office at the Ministry of Munitions in spite of Tory front- and back-bench opposition.

Grigg's final volume provides a fresh store of ammunition for anyone energised to argue that Lloyd George was one of the twentieth century's most remarkable British prime ministers, along with Winston Churchill, H. H. Asquith and, possibly, Margaret Thatcher. All were exceptional in that they had the capacity to make things happen that would not have happened otherwise. Grigg's work provides the case material for the advocate who would argue that Lloyd George was the greatest prime minister of his century.

Ian Hunter is completing a part-time doctorate on the Liberal Party and the Churchill Coalition.

What difference did he make?

Michael McManus: *Jo Grimond: Towards the Sound of Gunfire* (Edinburgh: Birlinn Ltd., 2001)
Reviewed by **Michael Steed**

This is an overdue and comprehensive biography, but one that I found rather oddly focused. I had enjoyed reading the book, been impressed by the research behind it, irritated by the easily avoidable errors (as was David Steel in his laudatory review *Grimond: The Great Gadfly*),[1] but had wondered why it failed to tackle some obvious historical questions, all before I was asked to review it for this *Journal*. So I read several other reviews before composing this one.

Generally Michael McManus is seen to have served a useful purpose. Reviewers of my generation have welcomed the much-needed, thorough account of Jo Grimond's life, and have remembered how inspired they were by him – recalling a radical iconoclast and a man of ideas. Generally, too, they have echoed McManus's view that the Liberal Party which Jo took over was a party nearly defunct, desperately close to annihilation in the House of Commons, and one which he duly rescued from oblivion. A similar consensus about Jo Grimond was evident at the Liberal Democrat History Group meeting in Brighton in September 2002.[2]

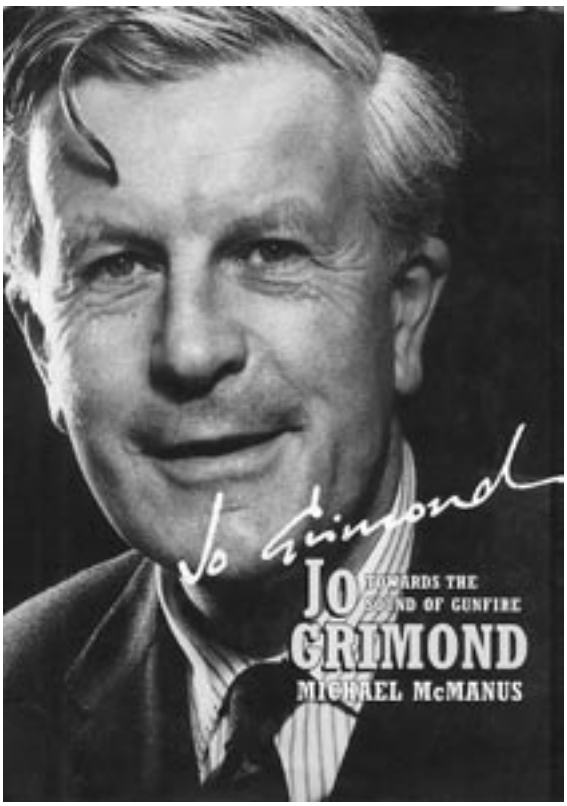
But let us apply the sharp edge of Grimond's own renowned iconoclasm to the significance of Grimond's career. Do the facts and figures support the view that Grimond averted what Steel called the 'near complete extinction' of the Liberal Party? They certainly do not. McManus himself acknowledges – but only briefly towards the end of the book (p. 375) – a 'modest recovery as early as 1954' in Liberal fortunes. The revival was more than that. By the local elections of May 1956, many more Liberal candidates were standing and the party's vote was moving sharply upwards. In the four by-elections during the twelve months before Grimond became leader in November 1956, Liberal candidates took nearly a quarter of the vote and even in the no-hoper of West Walthamstow they took 14.7%. What legacy did he leave that was so different? In the nine by-elections in the year following his resignation in January 1967, the Liberal vote averaged just 13.6%.

Many of those who rose in the Liberal Party in the decades following Grimond's leadership, and who did so much to improve its fortunes, were his bequest to British politics.

His impact on Liberal parliamentary success was just as limited. In 1955 there were six Liberal MPs, three of them dependent on local Conservative support, and an average general election vote of 15%. In 1970, the election following his departure, again just six Liberal MPs were elected (three with tiny majorities, all fewer than 700) and the average vote was 13.5%.

Obviously this reflected both the increasing number of candidates in weaker areas and three years of Jeremy Thorpe's leadership. Yet it is difficult to conclude that Jo's leadership itself produced an electoral revival or left the party stronger in popular support. The interesting pattern of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s is that there were three distinct revivals, one starting under Clement Davies (continuing under early Grimond), one under Jo Grimond, and one under Jeremy Thorpe. But as each revival ebbed it left the party a little stronger than before. Leadership seems almost irrelevant.

And if the party was certainly stronger organisationally when Jo Grimond left than when he took over, this could only be indirectly due to his leadership. The great gadfly was not an organisation man. The improvement in party organisation in fact owed most to a man who could have so



easily have become leader. If, in the February 1950 election, just 0.2% of voters nationwide had voted against the Conservatives instead of for them, the Liberals would have won the North Dorset seat where Frank Byers lost by a mere 97 votes, creating the Chief Whip vacancy that Grimond stepped into. And Atlee would have won a comfortable working majority – larger than the actual majority Churchill was to win in 1951. Byers, the obvious successor to Clement Davies, would probably then have taken over as leader during this likely full-term Parliament.

One way of posing the question of what difference Grimond's leadership made to the Liberal Party is to ask what would have happened if the 1950 election outcome had been only slightly different and Frank Byers had led the party into a 1954/55 general election. When I started canvassing in the early Grimond years, I found Byers still better known among Liberal-inclined voters than Grimond. He was a star on the (then) BBC Home Service, especially *Any Questions* in the days when that mattered. Grimond was never as good either in the House of Commons or on radio.[3]

But I cannot conceive that Colonel Byers, as he was then significantly often called, would have matched Grimond on the emerging televisual platform. This is where Grimond's warmth, self-deprecating wit and willingness to engage in real debate came over so well, just as it did in person on a traditional election platform, or – for me as a student – chatting around a dining table. There is no one like that among the trained politicians who appear on television today. McManus is not unaware of Jo's personal qualities but he does not convey his engaging personality and oratorical skills anything like so well as Tony Greaves at Brighton in 2002.[4] Greaves was right to emphasise Jo's charisma: he was more prophet than politician. But his combination of the skills of a nineteenth-century radical orator with those of a late-twentieth-century television performer made him a remarkable politician nonetheless.

McManus is more interested in Jo Grimond the political thinker and writer. He devotes much more space to Grimond the journalist-MP and roving elder statesman (1967–83) than to his formative years as a rising star of the party (1950–56). He concludes the book with two lengthy appendices on Grimond's attitudes to European and constitutional questions and on his philosophy. He finishes claiming Grimond for 'One Nation' values (p. 422), or – in other words – for McManus's own Disraelian Tory tradition. Hence the focus of this biography is on a writer and his place in the history of political ideas. It is not about a party leader – about the 'Life and Times' of someone who sought to change political history.

Maybe this rescues Jo from the failure of his political strategy. Certainly the strategy of realignment of the left, for all that it appealed to me immensely over forty years ago, got nowhere. But I still agree with William Wallace in stressing the 'huge difference' that Jo made to the party.[5] Because he had the ideas, personality and skills that he did, and because the party was reviving electorally, he drew a whole generation of new, young people into Liberal activism. Many of them might well have voted Liberal without him, but on the other hand many of those would never have given so much of their time and energy to politics without him.

Jo Grimond did not save the Liberal Party. It would have survived and probably prospered without him. But I believe that he did have a profound effect on its character. McManus records (p. 373) that, towards the end of his life, Grimond felt that his political career had ended in failure. I think that Jo judged his own achievements harshly. Many of those who rose in the Liberal Party in the decades following his leadership, and who did so much to improve its fortunes, were his bequest to British politics.

Michael Steed now lives in retirement in Canterbury where he is an honorary lecturer in politics and international relations at the University of Kent. He was President of the Liberal Party, 1978–79.

1 *The Scotsman* (2 November 2001). McManus's mistakes are typically confusion of names (e.g. Peter Jay for Douglas Jay, p. 257) or electoral details (e.g. p. 86 – the Conservatives did fight Clement Davies in Montgomery in 1950).
2 *Journal of Liberal History*, 38, Spring 2003, pp. 32–36.
3 Frank Byers, incidentally, makes too few appearances in this book. But there is a poignant photograph, weirdly entitled *Much Ado about Nothing* (the meeting of 3 March 1974) which sums up the party's succession of leadership over time, showing Byers, Grimond, Thorpe and Steel standing together.
4 *Journal of Liberal History*, 38, Spring 2003, p. 35.
5 Ibid., pp. 33–34.

'A despot in the making'

Mark Bonham Carter and Mark Pottle (eds.), *Lantern Slides: The Diaries and Letters of Violet Bonham Carter 1904–1914* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1996)

Reviewed by **Robert Ingham**

Although now fading fast from the public's consciousness, Lady Violet Bonham Carter was a Liberal colossus who bestrode the middle of the twentieth century. Strong-willed, opinionated, domineering, somewhat autocratic, she could sometimes give the impression that she had carried the Liberal Party on her back through the dark days of the 1940s and 1950s. The reality wasn't too far from that perception. Her broadcasting appearances, indefatigable service on committees of all kinds, influence in high places, and championing of the Liberal cause rallied morale and stiffened backbones during years of continual decline. She kept the Liberal flame of her father's generation burning, if faintly at times, until it could safely be passed to her son-in-law, Jo Grimond.

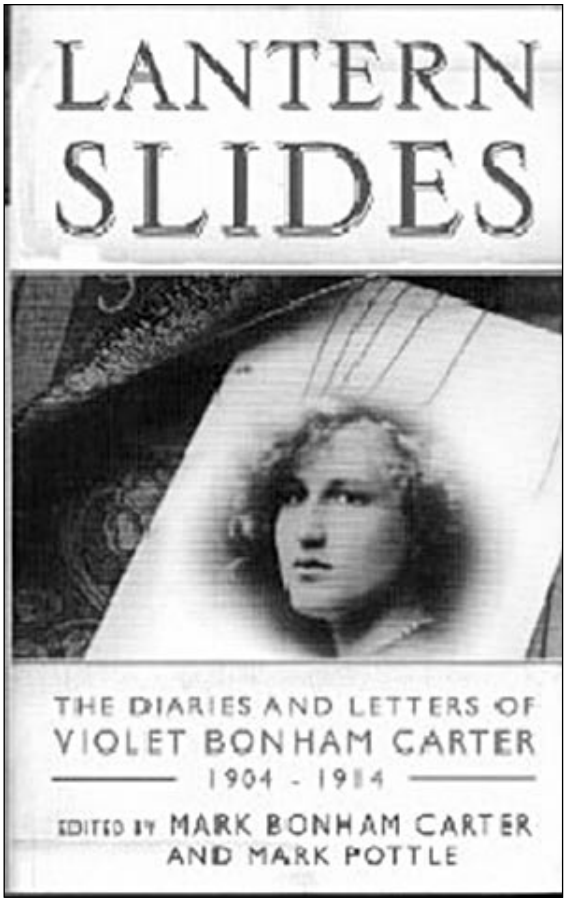
Anyone who has heard stories about 'Lady Vi' during the bleak period immediately post-war, or read of her in the histories and memoirs of the time, would be hard pushed to imagine her as a lovestruck teenager, whirling from ball to opera to European holiday during the dying years of aristocratic ascendancy. The triumph of *Lantern Slides*, the first volume of Violet Asquith's (as she then was) diaries, covering the period from 1904 to 1914, lies in the way Violet and her contemporaries vividly come to life, with barely a hint of editorial intervention.

Violet Asquith had a seat at the top table of British politics from a very young age. In June 1905, at the age of eighteen, for example, she dined with A. J. Balfour, the Prime Minister, who only a few months later was to resign, allowing the Liberals in. Balfour's statement over lunch that Churchill 'with his name, chances and capacity ought to have gone further by now' was perhaps premature. A few weeks later she was arguing with Hilaire Belloc and Sir John Dickson-Poynder, a Conservative MP, about the propriety of maintaining close personal relations with people of the opposite political persuasion. Labour politicians did not often feature on the guest lists of the events Violet attended at this time, although in July 1905 she formed an unlikely threesome with John Burns and Edwin Montagu. Burns, the first working-class member of the Cabinet, jocularly characterised her as a 'despot in the making'.

It would be misleading to describe *Lantern Slides* as a political commentary, however. The political references are quite modest at first, although they come to dominate the later stages. Instead, the book is a personal account of an unusual young woman coming of age in the heart of the Edwardian establishment. Denied the opportunity to follow her brothers to Balliol by the conventions of the time, the diaries open with seventeen-year-old Violet and her older brother Arthur packed off with a maid to Paris for six months, so that he could learn French for a career in the City. In Paris, Violet led a carefree existence, seemingly unfettered by parental restrictions. Although lacking the formal education from which her brothers benefited, she could already hold her own when the conversation turned to Japanese art, Turkish politics or German literature.

On returning to England, Violet came out into society. Attracting a dutiful crowd of potential suitors, who she mostly kept at arms length, Violet lived the popular image of the period: balls till late when up in London, and a succession of weekends in country houses. Violet was not so taken up by the high life as to neglect political affairs, and there is a marvellous account of the formation of the 1905 Liberal government, including the effort required to persuade Grey and Haldane to join. Failure to include them could have helped the Conservatives rally and reduced the scale of the Liberal triumph in 1906. Violet was appalled that she happened to be abroad, recovering from an infection, when her father was appointed Prime Minister, although she managed to capture from afar the absurdity of H. H. Asquith hurrying to Biarritz, to be sworn in by a holidaying monarch.

In her personal life, 1909 was a crucial year. One of Violet's wooers, Archie Gordon, was fatally wounded in a car accident. Rushing to his bedside,



Violet asked to marry him hours before he died. From then on, for some four years, Violet's diary was written as a letter to her late fiancé. In memory of Archie Gordon, she set up a boys' club in Hoxton, which she ran successfully for several years. She was helped by Mark Bonham Carter (known as Bongie), her father's Private Secretary, who throughout the period played the role of dependable friend of last resort. Violet and her friend Venetia Stanley joked that Bongie resembled Gabriel Oak from Hardy's *Far From the Madding Crowd*. By 1914, Bongie's warm letters addressed Violet in the same way as she addressed her diary to Archie Gordon. Their marriage, after a brief courtship, is covered in the second volume of diaries.

Of Violet's uneasy relationship with her stepmother, Margot, there is precious little. Her father is the subject of several uncritical appreciations. Their relationship was very close and warm, although not sufficiently close for Violet to detect that H. H. Asquith was a close confidante of Venetia Stanley at this time. There is not a sniff of this scandal, although it shocked Violet to the core when it was finally revealed in the 1960s. Relations with Lloyd George were not, at this time, particularly strained, although Violet records that she 'heaved' over one of his populist speeches on Lords reform in 1910.

After 1909, with Violet 'out' in society and mourning Archie Gordon, politics featured more prominently in her life. She gave vivid accounts of the 1909 Budget, the 1910 elections and the Marconi affair. Her robust views on the suffragettes and their cause are given vent on several occasions: had she been sympathetic to them, might she have persuaded her father to change his mind? It is interesting to note, too, how rowdy was the House of Commons at that time, with uproar far worse than anything experienced in recent times. Interestingly, in a conversation about the prospect of a 1915 general election, H. H. Asquith threatens that similar tactics would be employed by the Liberals against the Conservatives over Irish Home Rule, should the Liberals be defeated. 'Imagine, Winston and Lloyd George unmuzzled,' ponders the Liberal leader.

Her robust views on the suffragettes and their cause are given vent on several occasions: had she been sympathetic to them, might she have persuaded her father to change his mind?

Violet herself was more than just a commentator at this time. She was active in the Liberal Social Council, visiting 'distant' Palmers Green and Harlesden to speak for the cause. She spoke regularly in public in support of the government and found she enjoyed it. There were also opportunities for foreign travel. With her father, she took a cruise with the Churchills on the Admiralty yacht *Enchantress*. While he was away, the Prime Minister missed some serious industrial action by the dockworkers and the resignation of the Lord Chancellor, Lord Loreburn. Even the normally calm Bongie was reduced to sending fevered telegrams reminding the Prime Minister of the dangers of leaving the government rudderless at such a sensitive time. Violet also visited her brother Arthur in the Sudan, where she rejected the advances of Bongie's older brother Edgar, and travelled to the United States and Canada, where she dined with Theodore Roosevelt amongst others.

This first volume of the diaries ends with some correspondence with a vivacious Rupert Brooke, a sign of the horrors to come. The second volume of Violet's diaries are more fragmented, although the first sections chronicle the downfall of the society into which Violet was born. In the third volume, Violet is captured as an ageing member of the great and the good, on an endless treadmill of committee meetings, and a giant amongst pygmies in her own party. *Lantern Slides* is the best of the lot, and unmissable for students of the Edwardian era and its politics.

A word should be said for the editing. Violet's son Mark initiated the project but died shortly before publication. Mark Pottle assisted with *Lantern Slides* and then edited the other two volumes outright. They did a splendid job, not just in terms of allowing Violet to speak out, in her own words, and at her own sometimes breathless pace, but in providing detailed, helpful footnotes and appendices on the people and places mentioned.

Robert Ingham is a historical writer, and Biographies Editor of the Journal of Liberal History.

REPORT

Liberal Heroines

Fringe meeting report, March 2003, with Baroness (Liz) Barker and Diana Wallis MEP
Report by **Justine McGuinness**

Once again the History Group provided the most lively and simulating fringe event at Conference. The reason was simple: an interesting subject and very passionate

speakers, who succeeded, where others so often fail, in 'firing up' their audience. Indeed, so enthused were the audience that the meeting did not really end. Rather we had to be thrown out of the room and the discussion continued in the corridors and bar of the Grand Hotel.

First up was Liz Barker, with a formidable and inspiring selection of women. Baroness Barker first focused on Harriet Taylor (née Hardy), otherwise known as Mrs John Stuart Mill. Then, to the surprise and enjoyment of the audience, she turned to Anna Eleanor Roosevelt (from the introduction everyone thought it was going to be Hilary Rodham Clinton) and finished with possibly the strongest candidate, Rosa Parks.

Through her work and her relationship with Mill, Harriet Taylor was an impressive agent for change, and it is this, together with her passion for equality, that clearly qualifies her to be a 'liberal heroine'. Harriet Taylor and John Stuart Mill met each other in 1830 at a dinner party, while she was still married to John Taylor, a wealthy businessman who helped found the Reform Club and London University. Their relationship developed but, as Liz commented, speculation about that is 'irrelevant because what is evidenced in his writing and in hers is that they were two people who adored each other as equals.'

During the 1840s, Taylor and Mill withdrew from London society and worked together on *Principles of Political Economy*. Two years after the death of John Taylor in 1849, Mill and Taylor did marry but only after a declaration by Mill recognising Harriet's freedom and property rights, rights not recognised by British society at that time. So low key was the wedding that even Mill's brother did not know about it for some time.

They were a happy couple who shared everything, especially his work. Together they formulated some of the most important ideas on discrimination and equality, ideas that have changed the lives of women ever since. Liz Barker highlighted the 'Enfranchisement of Women', published in the *Westminster Review* in 1851, as the work that best sets out the collaboration between Mill's analytical powers and Taylor's more emotional approach to philosophy. However, as Barker pointed out, surviving essays show that Harriet held more radical views than her second husband and was more attracted to the socialist views expressed by people such as Robert Owen.

All three women had a passionate hatred of injustice, which was rooted in the experience of people around them. Each challenged the codes of the society in which she lived. Each started without a platform and created one and, in so doing, brought about change for others.

Liz's second heroine, Anna Eleanor Roosevelt, was the wife of one of the world's most famous men, her cousin Franklin Delano Roosevelt. They married in 1905 and at the time Eleanor had no objectives other than to be a supportive wife and mother. However, her aspirations changed over time. As her husband's political career progressed, she expanded her circle of women friends, from the progressive, liberal reformers she and Franklin knew to women in organised labour organisations. Eleanor's lifelong interests such as education and economic justice began to take practical shape. By the end of World War One she had joined the board of the NY State League of Women Voters and become an active campaigner for the civil rights agenda of the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People.

As a teacher, campaigner and writer, Eleanor pursued her own course without ever undermining FDR's position, even when they disagreed. Throughout the Depression she worked tirelessly on behalf of working women and people trapped in ghettos and unsanitary housing. Some of her words from that period still resonate today. In 1932, for example, she said that there was a need for 'something more than the temporary alleviation of suffering through emergency aid or charity. It is nice to hand out milk or bread. It gives you a comfortable feeling inside. We need new and bold solutions.'

Liz told the meeting that Eleanor Roosevelt showed her ability to bring about bold solutions when she directed the construction of a model community in West Virginia during the New Deal era. Indeed, throughout that time she was Franklin's eyes and ears, travelling the country to see the New Deal in practice.

During their time in the White House, she published six books, wrote countless articles, started women-only press briefings with women reporters and courted controversy over what we would call human rights issues. Even after her husband's death in 1945 she remained a formidable power broker within the Democratic Party. As Liz put it: 'A fine lady who influenced a fine man'. What a tribute!

Liz Barker concluded with a woman who did not make speeches or write articles, but rather was known for one thing only. After a hard day's work in December 1955, Rosa Parks sat on a bus in Montgomery, Alabama and refused to move to the back to make way for a white person. Liz described this as a 'quiet act of dignified defiance against prejudice'. An act that surely elevates her to 'heroine', and clearly a liberal one at that – and one from which modern liberal democrats can take inspiration.

All three women had a passionate hatred of injustice, which was rooted in the experience of people around them. Each challenged the codes of the society in which she lived. Each started without a platform and created one and, in so doing, brought about change for others. Liz ended with a timely reminder that, at this particular time when the actions of the current American administration make any liberal 'despair', the USA has

nevertheless been a place where 'great and inspiring things have happened for women and for liberty'.

Diana Wallis MEP stood in at the last minute and delivered an excellent speech. Her first nomination for heroine status was Anne Carter, a woman often in trouble, who lived in Essex in the 1620s. While her motives may be questioned, Anne led a group of men in a raid on a ship following the introduction of a grain tax. One could argue that it was an example of direct action by a group of desperate, hungry people fighting for the good of the local community against central government. Unfortunately, the powers of the day did not see it like that. Anne was captured and hanged for her part in the civil unrest.

Ms Wallis also nominated (though she is still alive) Mary Robinson, a woman who, in Diana Wallis's words, 'rocked the system' and had a tremendous impact on Irish society. Robinson was the first woman President of Ireland and used her presidency for the good of all people in Eire, not just the ones who had voted for her. Diana argued with force that Mary Robinson's impressive record on human rights means she is a liberal heroine, whatever her party label.

Members of the audience then offered nominations for liberal heroine status. Harriet Smith suggested Enid Lakeman for her work on electoral reform, while Sue Vincent offered Caroline Norton (granddaughter of Richard Brinsley Sheridan) who lived in a era where women's voices counted for nothing, yet campaigned for property rights for women. Elizabeth Garrett Anderson was offered as a heroine for her groundbreaking work on women's health. Others suggested included Marie Stopes, Josephine Butler, Emily Hobhouse, Octavia Hill and Helen Suzman.

Diana Wallis argued with force that Mary Robinson's impressive record on human rights means she is a liberal heroine, whatever her party label.

As the meeting closed, despite there being no end to the discussion, a clear call came from the audience that the History Group should look at running a special *Journal* issue focused on heroines. Judging from the questions at this fringe, there is much debate to be had about what a liberal heroine is and how to define heroism. Does she have to be dead? Or could she be alive and still working for political change, such as Shirley Williams? And clearly there is a considerable amount of material to consider.

Several members of the audience spoke with warmth and affection about Baroness (Nancy) Seear. William Wallace reminded us of her support for the party through the bad as well as the good years. Liz Baker, in replying, said that Nancy had once offered advice to Sally Hamwee about attending political meetings: 'Always go if there is food'. There was no food at this meeting, but I feel sure that Nancy would have come for the intellectual feast. I look forward to seeing what the History Group serves up at the next conference!

ARCHIVES

Liberalism in Dundee

by **Iain Flett**

Although not a source immediately apparent as pertaining to Liberalism, the sixteenth century wooden-boarded register of burgesses or freemen of Dundee, known as The *Lockit Buik* (Locked Book) contains entries of interest to Liberal historians. George, later Baron, Armitstead, was made a burgess in 1854 not in his own right, but by right of his wife Jane, who was daughter of Edward Baxter of Kincaldrum. He was one of the very few who was later entered again in his own right as an honorary burgess in 1904 'in recognition of his long commercial connection with Dundee and his generous liberality to the Charitable and Benevolent Institutions of the City'.

There are also entries for the following figureheads:

Rt Hon Sir George Otto Trevelyan, Bart., HM Sec of State for Scotland, in connection with his support for Dundee's constitution as a County of City, 1894.

Sir John Leng, printer, publisher and MP for Dundee, 1902.

Rt Hon Herbert Henry Asquith, Prime Minister and First Lord of the Treasury, 1912.

Rt Hon David Lloyd George MP, Prime Minister 'especially to his services in connection with the Great World War now raging', 1917.

Sir Garnet Wilson 'in recognition of his long, distinguished and useful career as a member of the Town Council of Dundee …', 1971.

In addition to this, there is an amusing and unusual cartoon of Dingle McIntosh Foot on the Friends of Dundee City Archives website index to their Poor

A Liberal Democrat History Group Fringe Meeting

CLEMENT DAVIES – LIBERAL PARTY SAVIOUR?

Clement Davies led the Liberal Party from 1945 to 1956. During that time, the party came very close to dying out – but it survived. He turned down Churchill's offer of a government position and in so doing preserved the party's integrity. His tenure was as long as that of Jo Grimond, the hero of modern Liberalism. And yet today Davies' leadership is hardly remembered at all.

Did Clement Davies save the Liberal Party from extinction? Or was he part of the problem?

Clement Davies' contribution to British politics will be assessed by **Alan Wyburn Powell**, author of the new biography, *Clement Davies: Liberal Leader,* and **Dr David Roberts** of the University of Wales at Bangor.

8.00 p.m., Sunday 21 September
Lancaster Room, Hilton Brighton Metropole Hotel, Brighton

database at www.fdca.org.uk/poor_index.htm. It portrays the night that he dressed incognito in 1932 to gain access to the East Poorhouse to test complaints about the accommodation and food.

However, there are two principal collections in Dundee City Archives of interest to Liberal historians. The first is of GD/DLA, Dundee Liberal Association, covering the years 1884 to 1981. Minutes range from those of the Executive Committee, covering the period 1929–58, which include a pamphlet and letter from the Dundee Spanish Medical Aid Committee, 17 May 1937, down to nine ward minute books for the first quarter of the twentieth century. The ward minute books have been found fascinating as a case study by those researching 'grassroots' activity.

As in all archives, titles can be misleading; the Dundee League of Young Liberals account book for 1925–38, more importantly, contains 9 loose items, including 4 photographs of Jeremy Thorpe MP, with Sir Garnet Wilson and Nathaniel Gordon, with shoppers in Dundee in February 1972.

The fine tradition, now a faint memory, of keeping pasted newscuttings books has left this collection with a rich insight into the Association's work and interests. With this series starting in 1882, the second volume contains a Programme for a Grand Evening Concert in 1895, and a 'Warning to Electors' poster in 1896, and of course there would have to be at least one volume relating to Churchill's election campaign of 1909–10, together with that of Dingle Foot of 1935–45.

There is detailed correspondence in 1947–48 concerning candidates for the Dundee parliamentary seats including Dingle Foot, John Junor and Sir Garnet Wilson, Lord Provost [Scots for mayor] of Dundee, and this neatly leads us to the other collection of interest to Liberal historians, that of Sir Garnet Wilson. Sir Garnet's family has left Dundee City Archives with its only extensive collection of correspondence created by a Lord Provost, and this collection is an excellent reflection of his views, his contacts, his politics, his own family business of a large department store, and particularly the running of the Home Front in Dundee during World War Two.

Starting with Sir Garnet's legal apprenticeship indenture of 1900, there are his speeches from the 1930s on topics as diverse as 'Style and Vocabulary' and 'The Educational Service and the Employer'. His correspondence, which is still being catalogued, includes exchanges in 1940 with his friend and fellow Liberal MP Dingle Foot, in the Ministry of Economic Warfare, and with D. C. Thomson, the Dundee press magnate and arch-critic of Churchill.

These records are available for consultation at Dundee City Archives by prior appointment. Address: 21 City Square, Dundee DD1 3BY; Tel: +44 (0)1382 434494; Fax: 434666. Our website is http://www.dundeecity.gov.uk/archives.