For the study of Liberal, SDP and
Liberal Democrat history

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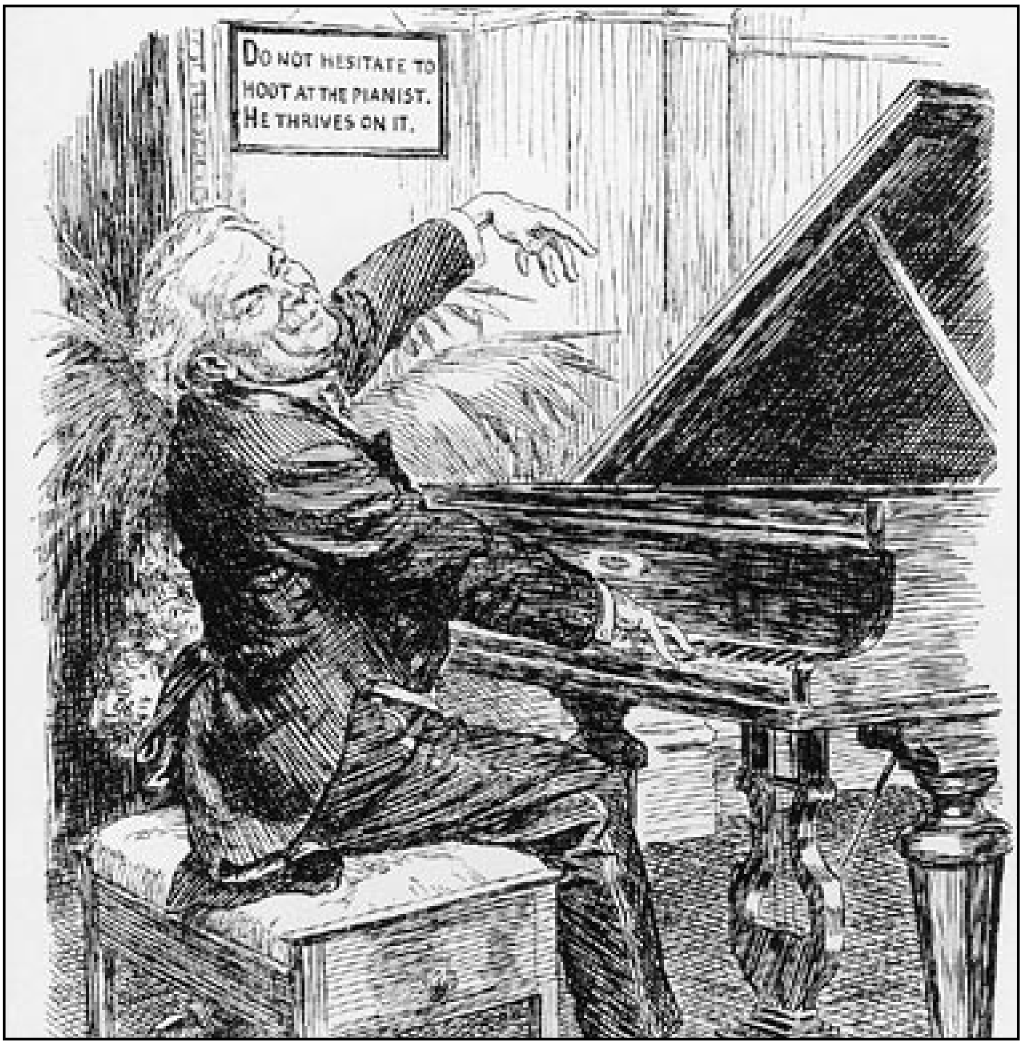
Journal of Liberal HISTORY


Do not hesitate to
hoot at the pianist.
He thrives on it.

The Fall of the Lloyd George Coalition

Meeting report
Margaret Macmillan, Andrew Thorpe, John Barnes, Stuart Ball

Andrew Hudson
The history of the Lib-Labs Labour interests within the Liberal Party

Jaime Reynolds and Robert Ingham
Archie Macdonald MP for Roxburgh and Selkirk, 1950–51: biography

Jürgen Frölich
The German Liberals Between third force and marginal force

Adrian Slade
'Hard man' with heart Interview with Bill Rodgers

Liberal Democrat History Group

HISTORY GROUP NEWS

Contribute to Liberal Democrat history

The Liberal Democrat History Group is aiming to establish an archive of personal recollections of party history.

We'd now like as many readers of the *Journal* as possible to send us your Liberal, SDP and Liberal Democrat anecdotes and recollections: every story is vital.

Whatever your experience, you are welcome to contribute. If you have or know of party records or other documentary material that might be of historical interest please give us details.

Large or small

Maybe your story is a brief anecdote, or maybe it's a lifetime memoir. Feel free to write your story whether it be 100 words or 10,000 words long.

What sort of information are we looking for?

We're looking for personal recollections and information from people who have been active (or whose forebears were active) in the Liberal, Social Democrat or Liberal Democrat parties.

What are our main areas of interest?

Our interest ranges across the whole history of the Liberal Democrats and its predecessors from the nineteenth century to the present day.

We would like to hear memories of party personalities, elections, local constituency history, triumphs and disappointments.

Be honest

This is the most important thing about any story on this site.We want it to be a accurate and authentic.

What will happen to your story?

Our main aim is to ensure that the party's 'folk memory' is preserved.
Your contributions will be archived and we aim to make them accessible for researchers through our website, the *Journal of Liberal History* and other publications.

Send contributions to:

Liberal Democrat History Group Liberal Archive project, at:

- biographies@liberalhistory.org.uk; *or*
- 10 Beltinge Road, Herne Bay, Kent CT6 6DB

Cover illustration

'The Great Improviser', from *Punch,* 9 June 1920 - Looyd George still in command of the Coalition (see meeting report, page 29).

Oral history

Another new, but related, History Group project is a new publication: an Oral History of twentieth century Liberalism – a thematic study of the Liberal Party and liberalism, drawing upon interviews with Liberal activists and politicians, as well as autobiographical sources.

Many of the necessary interviews have already been conducted, for other purposes (such as PhD theses), and we hope that the new Liberal Archive (see left) will also contribute valuable material.

We also, however, need to interview a number of key party figures – and for that we need help!

Interviewers needed

We would like to hear from anyone willing to volunteer some time to interview a small number of key Liberal (or SDP or Liberal Democrat) activists about their period in the party, and their experience in particular areas (campaigning, for example, or policy-making, or party organisation).

Guidance will be given with questions and interview techniques.

If you are able to help, please write to Robert Ingham, the *Journal's* Biographies Editor, who is coordinating the project, at:

- biographies@liberalhistory.org.uk; *or*
- 10 Beltinge Road, Herne Bay, Kent CT6 6DB

'The View from Knowsley'

A Conference at Knowsley Hall, Liverpool; 19–20 March 2004

'The View from Knowsley' will be an unparalleled opportunity to discuss the work of statesmen on both sides of British politics for the best part of a century.

For historians, the Earls of Derby are particularly interesting in party political terms, having both a Whig/Liberal and a Conservative inheritance.

Although the fourteenth Earl of Derby is known to history as a Conservative Prime Minister, he made his political reputation as a Whig, and in the 1830s served in the great reforming Cabinet of Earl Grey. Melbourne saw Stanley – as he was then known – as a future leader.

The fifteenth Earl, having long been on the 'liberal' wing of the Conservatives, eventually joined Gladstone's second government after spectacularly falling out with Disraeli. His diary is a rich source for the history of both parties.

In addition, the seventeenth Earl served in Lloyd George's government and acted on its behalf as ambassador in Paris.

The conference will include presentations about the fourteenth Earl's earlier career, the fifteenth Earl's work as a Liberal Colonial Secretary and the seventeenth Earl's role, as well as their Conservative contributions.

The author of the fourteenth earl's first modern biography and the editor of the fifteenth earl's diaries will both be presenting papers, along with a range of historians discussing a fascinating and long-neglected area of political history.

More details can be found at **www.viewfromknowsley.com**

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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.

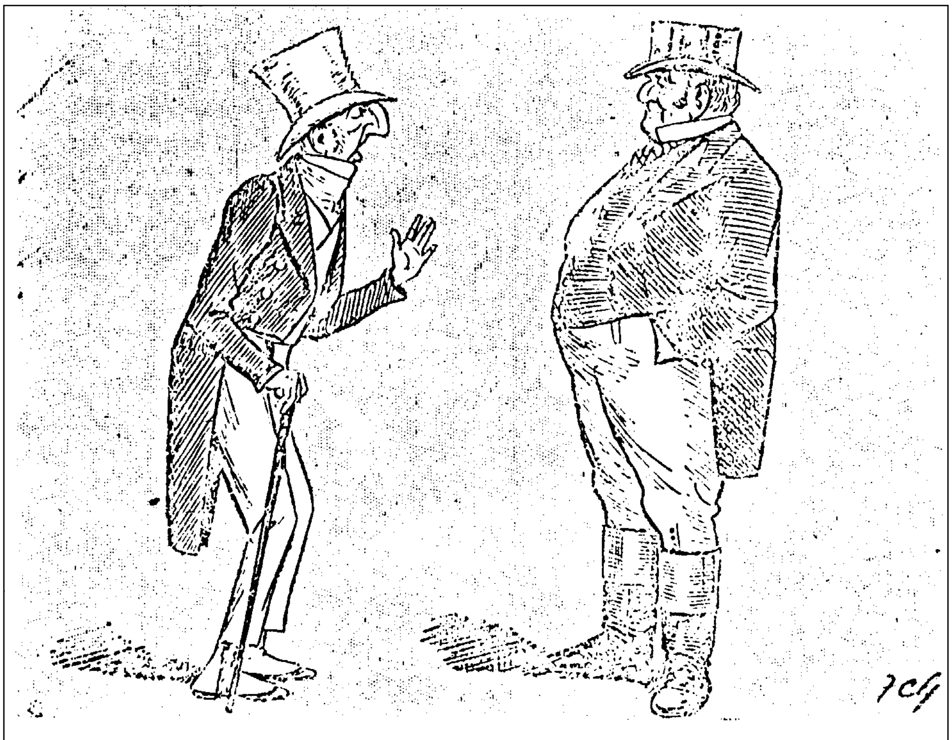
For more information, including details of publications, back issues of the *Journal,* tape records of meetings and archive and other research sources, see our web site at: **www.liberalhistory.org.uk**.

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

THE HISTORY O

Andrew Hudson considers the history of what became known as Lib-Labbery: the representation of labour interests in parliament through the Liberal Party.

Lib-Labs have been defined by F. A. S. Craig as 'Candidates who were in most cases nominees of the local Liberal and Radical Associations but who campaigned mainly on trade union and labour issues.'[1] According to Shepherd, the term 'Lib-Lab' probably originated as a term of abuse which was abbreviated from 'Liberal-Labour', a term which the MPs proudly referred to themselves by.[2]



The Old Fogy: *Oh, Mr Bull, isn't it dreadfully revolutionary to have all these representatives of Labour in the House of Commons?*
Mr Bull: *Not a bit of it. It* WOULD *be if they* WEREN'T *there.*

Labour MPs in the Commons: Francis Carrouthers Gould, *The Westminster Gazette*, 10 February 1906

Lib-Labbery in these situations was not an alliance with the Labour Party. Cooperation with the Labour Party coexisted with Lib-Labbery during the first decade of the last century but, by that time, Lib-Labbery was in the process of being superseded by the Labour Party.

Craig's definition excludes MPs such as Joseph Chamberlain and Charles Dilke who were sympathetic to labour interests but not involved in the trade union movement. It would also exclude Samuel Plimsoll, as he only became president of the Seamen's Union after his brief parliamentary career was over and was nominated for his record as a campaigner for maritime safety. It would also exclude honorary figureheads such as Batty Langley who was made the first president of the National Association of Railway Clerks, largely because they wanted an MP as a figurehead. Langley was an employer in Sheffield and his selection as a Liberal candidate for the Attercliffe division of Sheffield in 1894 caused considerable contention amongst local trade unionists and resulted in Ramsay Macdonald resigning from the Liberal Party and joining the Independent Labour Party.[3]

F THE LIB-LABS

One of the earliest figures in the history of Lib-Labbery was the radical campaigner Francis Place, who Cole describes as trying to instil reformism and the Liberal-labour alliance before its time,[4] although Wallas makes no reference to this in his biography of Place. Place had campaigned in support of the 1832 Reform Act but his greatest personal achievement was to get parliament to repeal the Combination Acts that suppressed combinations of working men. Wallas describes Francis Place as trying to coach middle-class radicals in the difficult art of acting with the working men of the day and as regarding the repeal of the Corn Laws as more practicable than parliamentary reform.[5] Another early figure was William Newton, who contested Tower Hamlets in 1852 without success. Together with George Howell and W. R. Cremer, he subsequently became one of the first trade union candidates in 1868, although he was again unsuccessful. Place had said that 'everyone who may expect general results in a short time will be disappointed.'[6] He was to be vindicated.

Lib-Labbery began to develop as a political force in the 1860s within the National Reform League which was founded to extend the franchise and whose secretary, George Howell, was a member of the London Trades Council and became the first parliamentary secretary of the Trades Union Congress. Direct working-class representation only became feasible with the passage of the 1867 Reform Act, which enfranchised male adult householders in urban areas. A Labour Representation League was formed in 1869 by the 'Junta', which was a dominant force within the London Trades Council. It was effectively a successor to the National Reform League.[7] It was largely a London movement that sought to return working-class men to parliament and to register working-class voters without reference to their opinion or party bias. In practice, it sought to have working-class candidates adopted as Liberals and to influence Liberals to support working-class aims in parliament.

The Labour Representation League had its first success in the 1874 general election with the return of two miners, Alexander Macdonald for Stafford and Thomas Burt for Morpeth, as Liberals. The introduction of the secret ballot had undoubtedly helped by preventing any opportunity for intimidation from employers. However, during the election part of the working-class vote had been cast for the Tories against the more reactionary of the Liberal candidates and there were allegations that they had helped to disorganise the Liberal vote.

The refusal of Gladstone's government to repeal the Criminal Law Amendment Act prevented any alliance with the Liberals, towards whom most of the union leaders were drawn because of their radical predilections and connections.[8] The repeal of this legislation in 1875 removed any serious differences that had separated union leaders, such as Will Allen of the Engineers Union, who was president of the Labour Representation League, from the Liberals.[9] The Lib-Lab era had begun. The League, however, made little progress – only increasing its parliamentary representation at the 1880 election by one member to include Henry Broadhurst who was secretary of the Parliamentary Committee of the TUC. The League expired the following year.

Wallas describes Francis Place as trying to coach middle-class radicals in the difficult art of acting with the working men of the day.

Lib-Labbery however, made some progress during the 1885 election despite a lack of enthusiasm on the part of the TUC, which had rejected a motion calling for a parliamentary fund in 1882. Eleven Lib-Lab MPs were elected. The 1884 Reform and Redistribution Act had reduced the number of multi-member urban seats in which Liberal Associations could adopt a Lib-Labber as one of their candidates, but this loss had been offset by the extension of the franchise within county constituencies that included mining areas where working-class voters were in the majority. Of the eleven Lib-Lab MPs returned in 1885, six were miners. Miners' MPs were to form the core of Lib-Labbery until the Miners Federation of Great Britain affiliated to the Labour Party in 1908. The newly elected Lib-Lab MPs met prior to the state opening of parliament at Henry Broadhurst's TUC office before marching to parliament as a group.[10]

The following year, the TUC created a special Labour Electoral

League Committee, which soon separated to become the Labour Electoral Association and sought to promote the return of working-class men to parliament and, in practice, to secure the adoption of its candidates by local Liberal and Radical Associations. It worked largely with local trades councils, which were in many cases still dominated by Liberal trade unionists. It opposed three-cornered fights and refused to support independent labour candidates against Liberals.[11] The League lasted until 1894.

The number of Lib-Lab MPs was slightly reduced by the loss of three sitting members. There were only two new entrants, one of whom, R. B. Cunninghame-Graham, sat as a Radical MP and subsequently joined the Independent Labour Party.

Lib-Labbery was by no means universally popular amongst trade unionists. Its supporters were largely members of the older craft unions that supported conciliation and arbitration with wages being determined according to a sliding scale based on the selling price of the relevant product. They also opposed state intervention and regulation and preferred trade union funds to be used for Friendly Society purposes rather than in support of industrial action. In contrast, the newer general trade unions had dispensed with the Friendly Society role and used their funds to support their members during strikes and lockouts; their leaders were sympathetic to socialism. In 1890, the 'New' Unionism had temporarily captured the Trade Union Congress and nearly all the socialist resolutions were carried. Henry Broadhurst resigned his position as secretary following the passage of a resolution in support of the eight-hour day.[12]

Lib-Labbery was by no means universally popular amongst trade unionists. Its supporters were largely members of the older craft unions.

In the 1892 general election, ten Lib-Lab MPs were elected showing that no progress had been made in increasing the number of sitting Lib-Lab MPs since the previous two elections. Three independent socialist MPs were also elected: John Burns, who was in the Engineers Union but had played a prominent role in organising the 1888 London dock strike; Joseph Havelock Wilson, the secretary of the Seamen's Union; and Keir Hardie. The first two subsequently became Lib-Labbers, but Keir Hardie remained an independent labour MP and the Independent Labour Party was formed at a conference held at Bradford the following year. Lib-Labbers also faced hostility in many local Liberal Associations whose caucuses were often hostile to both working-class candidates and interests. After the 1892 election, T. R. Threlfall, the secretary of the Labour Electoral League, himself a staunch Liberal, complained that:

> Of the thirteen Labour MPs in the present house, four ran in opposition to or without recognition of the caucus, five represented constituencies where organised miners absolutely dominated the position and where the shopkeepers and employing classes are so small in number to have comparatively little power and only four either captured or outgeneralled it.[13]

Joyce places some of the blame on the Liberal tradition that candidates were expected to pay their own electoral expenses and contribute towards the running of their constituency organisations – since working-class constituencies often had the poorest organisations and thus were most reliant on rich candidates.[14]

Mining constituencies were largely an exception to the lack of working-class candidates, since they were often so socially cohesive that the support of the miner's leaders could be essential in delivering the vote. According to Shepherd, Thomas Burt was able to use the strength of the union's influence to force the retirement of the sitting MP for Morpeth in 1874.[15] The Miners Federation was also prepared to finance candidates. Scotland proved to be particularly hostile to Lib-Labbery with only three Lib-Lab candidates being selected – of whom only one, R. B. Cunninghame-Graham, was ever elected. Keir Hardie had himself attempted to become adopted as a Liberal candidate in the Mid-Lanark by-election in 1888 without success.[16]

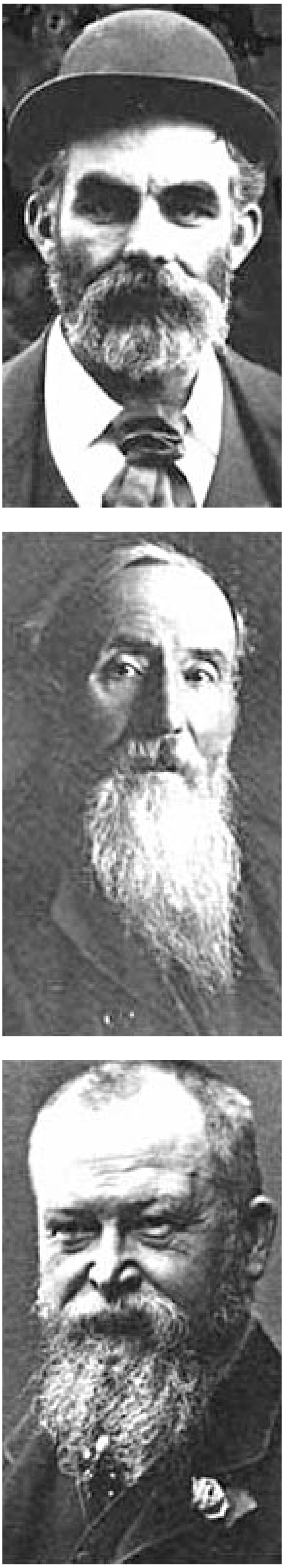
Although the victory of socialist ideas at the 1890 TUC was temporary, support for 'New' Unionism and socialist ideas grew amongst the trade union rank and file, particularly in the trades councils. In 1893, the TUC adopted a largely socialist programme and voted for a special fund to support working-class candidates, but only those who subscribed to 'collective ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange'.[17] However congress narrowly rejected a motion to establish an independent working-class party and the TUC leadership was still dominated by Lib-Labbers who fought back.

In 1895, new rules were brought in with the aim of curbing the influence of socialists. Trades councils, which had by that time come largely under socialist control, were excluded from representation at the TUC and being a delegate was restricted to either trade union officials or people working in the trade they represented. This rule had the effect of also excluding prominent Lib-Labbers such as Henry Broadhurst and John Burns.[18] The TUC also brought in a number of illiberal rules such as the card vote by which delegates ceased to make decisions as individuals.

The concern about the lack of enthusiasm for Lib-Labbery at constituency level was shared by some people in the Liberal hierarchy. The Chief Whip, Herbert Gladstone, and the national agent, Henry Schnadhorst, were concerned at the dearth of working-class Liberal candidates. A National Liberal Federation fund was made available to give some assistance to such candidates, although it was limited and little use was made of it. Sam Woods, the secretary of the parliamentary committee of the TUC, was supported by the party hierarchy to stand as a Liberal candidate for Walthamstow in a by-election in 1897 after losing his seat at Ince in the 1895 election.[19]

The socialists managed to prevail at the 1899 TUC conference, and the TUC passed a resolution calling for a conference of representatives of trade unions, cooperatives and other organisations with a view to devising ways of securing the return of an increased number of labour members to the next parliament. This conference was called in 1900.[20] The success of the resolution is thought not to have been solely due to the socialists. Seven major unions that voted for the resolution were under strong socialist influence, but they accounted for less than half of the total vote in favour of the resolution. The difference is thought to have been made up from the bulk of the smaller unions. It has been suggested the motion was passed because the establishment did not exert itself to oppose it.[21] The vote was 546,000 to 434,000 in favour, with the miners and cotton unions voting against it.

The conference of representatives voted to form the Labour Representation Committee (LRC), which managed to get two of its parliamentary candidates elected in the 1900 election. One of them, Richard Bell, the secretary of the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants, subsequently joined the Liberal Party. In contrast, eight Lib-Labbers were also returned in 1900.



Lib-Labs: John Burns, Thomas Burt, Henry Broadhurst

The LRC's fortunes improved with two by-election victories: David Shackleton at Clitheroe and Arthur Henderson at Barnard Castle. Both successful candidates had been Liberals and Shackleton could probably have been a Liberal candidate.[22] Henderson was supported by the local miners as the Liberal candidate was a local landowner.[23] The results worried Herbert Gladstone and resulted in his secret meeting with Ramsay Macdonald, the secretary of the LRC. The outcome was a confidential agreement under which certain seats would only be fought by one of the parties.[24] The agreement was unenforceable due to the autonomy of local Liberal Associations, but pressure could be brought on them such as ensuring that dissident associations received no outside support. Clarke suggests that the Liberal Party had difficulty contesting seats in the Khaki election of 1900 and that the party headquarters found it easier to discourage a local party from fighting than to dictate to a constituency which candidate should be chosen.[25] The Liberal Party gave up around thirty-five seats. Sitting Lib-Labbers were given a free run by the LRC.

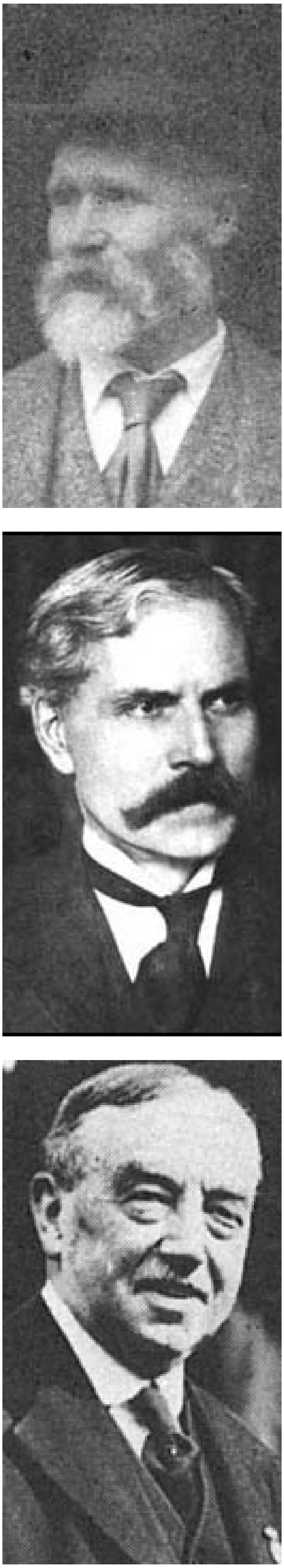
The highest number ever of Lib-Lab MPs were returned at the 1906 election. Twenty-three in all were elected, of whom fourteen were miners – but they were outnumbered by twenty-nine LRC MPs. Both groups cooperated on the passage of the 1906 Trades Disputes Bill, but the LRC MPs formed their own Labour Party with its own whips and officers. The Lib-Lab MPs formed their own parliamentary group, electing the miners' president, Enoch Edwards, as their chair and Richard Bell as secretary. The Lib-Lab group regarded themselves as a loose group of trade unionists supporting the Liberal Party rather than a party within a party. An uneasy truce prevailed with the secret electoral pact remaining in place.

There was some resentment at local level. Clarke describes some of the greatest bitterness against Lib-Labbers occurring amongst rank-and-file trade unionists. There had been opposition to the election of Sir Henry Vivian, who was a cooperator, at Birkenhead in 1903, and the trades council in Burnley had opposed the Lib-Lab candidate Fred Maddison and supported Henry Hyndman who was the Social Democratic Federation candidate at the 1906 election.[26]

Between the 1906 and 1910 elections, however, some mavericks broke ranks. An independent socialist, Victor Grayson, was returned in a by-election in the Colne Valley in 1907 despite opposition from the TUC. Walter Victor Osbourne, the secretary of the Walthamstow branch of the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants (ASRS) successfully challenged the legality of his union's political levy in the courts with the result that political funds were declared to be *ultra vires* by the House of Lords in 1909. It was, however, a Pyrrhic victory, as the funds were used mainly to pay MPs' salaries and one of the victims was Richard Bell whose position as secretary of the ASRS was becoming increasingly untenable owing to his support of the Liberal Party. Bell stood down at the 1910 election.

In 1908, the Miners Federation of Great Britain voted to affiliate to the Labour Party, despite the opposition of the miners' leaders. According to Craig, the miners' MPs were allowed to retain the Liberal whip until parliament was dissolved at the next general election if they wished.[27] Three miners' MPs declined to join the Labour Party. Enoch Edwards refused to let them stand as Miners Federation approved candidates, on the grounds that 'others had supported the bill'.[28] They were, however, allowed a free run at the election.

Only six Lib-Lab MPs were returned in the January 1910 election, including the three dissident miners who all represented seats in the North-East. The Labour Party increased its number of seats to forty, although this increase was largely accounted for by a change of allegiance on the part of miners' MPs – the bulk of whom stood as Labour candidates. The December 1910 election produced the same number of Lib-Labbers and an increase in the number of Labour MPs by two. There was a slight change amongst the individual Lib-Labbers, however. John Burns and the three dissident miners retained their seats but Sir Henry Vivian and Joseph Havelock Wilson lost theirs.



Labour: Keir Hardie, Ramsay MacDonald, Arthur Henderson

By-election results showed that there was still some residual support for Lib-Labbery at grass-roots level. Although, for example, Havelock Wilson failed to win Battersea in a by-election, there is evidence that in mining areas there was continued support for Lib-Labbery and that the miners' leaders' decision to affiliate to the Labour Party was unpopular. In a by-election at Hanley, held after the death of Enoch Edwards in 1912, the electorate rejected the Labour Party and returned a Tory in a three-cornered contest. In 1913, the Derbyshire miners supported their agent, Barnet Kenyon, who stood as a Lib-Lab candidate in a by-election for Chesterfield and who, as a result, became the last Lib-Lab MP elected to parliament. In a subsequent by-election in Derbyshire North-East, the miners fielded a candidate who secured official Labour endorsement, but the seat was lost to a Unionist in a three-cornered fight. Two miners' MPs were expelled from the Labour Party for leaning towards Liberalism.[29]

The last survivors continued to sit in parliament until the 1918 election when they either stood down, like John Burns and Thomas Burt, or they changed their label. Thomas Burt had been a Lib-Lab MP throughout the whole period of Lib-Lab representation and had become the Father of the House. John Ward, who represented the Navvies' Union, continued to represent Stoke on Trent until 1929 – describing himself as an Independent Labour candidate but being supported locally by both Liberals and Conservatives. Barnet Kenyon continued to represent Chesterfield as a Liberal until that same election in 1929. Joseph Havelock Wilson was returned to parliament as a National Liberal, representing Middlesbrough, until 1922.

Was Lib-Labbery doomed to failure, and the rise of the Labour Party inevitable? Dangerfield places the origins of the decline of Liberalism as far back as the 1906 election.[30] Pelling suggests that the decline was not due to any sordid intrigues between Lloyd George and a few Conservative leaders or the impact of the First World War but to the long-term social and economic changes that were simultaneously uniting Britain geographically but dividing the inhabitants in terms of class.[31] Splits had occurred in the Liberal ranks prior to the war; there was a major split over Irish Home Rule in the latter half of the 1880s. However the Liberal Party had retained the vote of the bulk of the working-class community eligible to vote.[31]

The failure of Lib-Labbery to make sufficient progress in the Liberal Party may, however, have been a crucial factor in the party's failure to adapt to social change. There are probably three key phases. First, there was the failure of the Lib-Labbers to make any significant progress in securing an increased number of MPs between the 1886 and 1892 elections. The second phase was the capture of the TUC policy-making process by socialist elements during the 1890s and the subsequent decision to field LRC candidates. The third element was the Lib-Lab pact in which the Liberal Party effectively encouraged labour representation outside its ranks. There is one more stage to the process – the decision of the Miners Federation of Great Britain to change its allegiance to the Labour Party – though by that time Labour Party MPs outnumbered Lib-Labbers in Parliament.

The first two phases were probably the most significant. Had the Lib-Labbers increased their representation in the 1892 election, they would have continued to have been seen as an effective means of working-class representation. The seeds of change were, however, probably sown after the election but prior to the formation of the Labour Representation Committee. It was during this period that the Lib-Labbers began to lose control of the TUC and socialist-instigated motions began increasingly to be passed. It was also during this period that the future leading elements of the Labour Party, including Ramsay Macdonald and Arthur Henderson, ceased to support the Liberal Party. Had the Liberal Party been able to field around fifty working-class candidates by the mid-1890s, history might well have followed a different path. Pelling suggests that during that period there was an even greater factor eroding the votes of the smaller unions: the lukewarm attitude of the Liberal leaders towards the payment of MPs – even though it was proposed in the Newcastle Programme supported by Gladstone.[32]

The failure of Lib-Labbery to make sufficient progress in the Liberal Party may have been a crucial factor in the party's failure to adapt to social change.

The unions themselves could have shown a more positive attitude and followed the example of the miners. A scheme was established for their union by Ben Pickard who was a Yorkshire miner and an MP from 1885 to 1904. Under the scheme each district of the miners' union paid into a central fund for financing candidates.[33] The support for miners' candidates in mining constituencies was not completely unconditional and owed much to the fact that the local miners' leaders were people who had built up respect in local communities over a period of time. The affiliation of the Miners Federation of Great Britain to the Labour Party was not universally welcomed, as shown by the by-election results in Staffordshire and Derbyshire between the December 1910 election and the outbreak of the First World War. They suggest that the re-election of the sitting MPs in the 1910 elections following their change of party allegiance may well have been a personal vote, whilst the decision of the rank-and-file miners in Chesterfield to support their agent Barnet Kenyon suggests that support for Liberalism was by no means dead. Fenwick, Burt and Wilson were not allowed to stand as miners' candidates in the 1910 election, but they were not opposed – suggesting that they had a high standing in their communities. There may have also been an innate conservatism of the non-partisan variety in the electorate of mining communities that manifested itself in continued support for Liberalism. This support appears to have been eventually transferred to the Labour Party, with coalfield areas such as Durham, Glamorgan and Northumberland becoming Labour strongholds.

The agreement with the LRC was arguably a panic measure to prevent the anti-conservative vote from being split as much as it was the result of any fear of being superseded by the Labour Party. Clarke suggests that the understanding was advantageous to both sides, rendering the bidding and counter-bidding for trade union support at constituency level irrelevant. However it also had the effect of ensuring that subsequent labour representation would be increasingly outside Liberal control.

Clarke acknowledges this and that the act was the death knoll of Lib-Labbery, stating: 'whereas Lib-Lab MPs were once a concession to labour, now that the Lib-Lab MPs were merely a rump, they were a provocation'.[34] He also suggests that the LRC made Lib-Labbery redundant. Although the Lib-Lab group reached its highest numbers following the 1906 election, it was by that time too little and too late.

The leadership of the TUC was still inclined towards Liberalism and there were few differences in policy between the Liberal and Labour Parties. A. H. Gill, the Labour MP elected to the multi-member constituency of Bolton in 1906, was described by the *Manchester Courier* as 'a worthy Liberal-Labour who would not offend the mildest Liberal in his loyalty to Lloyd George'.[35] The Labour Party was, however, independent and enshrined socialism in its constitution following the end of the First World War.

A counterfactual scenario could be constructed in which the Liberal Party adapted more quickly to working-class emancipation and the demands of working-class representation. The payment of MPs, the persuasion of local Liberal Associations that the adoption of working-class candidates was in their long-term interests, and greater financial support from the trade unions could have resulted in the TUC retaining its allegiance to the Liberals. It would also have removed any perceived need for a pact with the LRC by preventing it from being formed in the first place. A small socialist party would probably have gained a few seats in Parliament but it may not have presented a serious challenge. Under such a scenario, the 1910 election may well still have resulted in a hung parliament, as the electoral agreement with Labour prevented any large-scale splitting of the anti-conservative vote. There was also a large contingent of Irish Nationalist MPs who may have held the balance of power.

As the Lib-Labbers had a track record of supporting the party leadership – they were staunch supporters of Gladstone when the divisions over Irish Home Rule occurred[36] – they would probably have supported the leadership over entry into the First World War. John Burns, the first working-class cabinet minister, resigned as President of the Board of Trade over the declaration of war on Germany and was probably as representative of the Lib-Labbers as Ramsay Macdonald was of the Labour Party in his opposition to the war. Burns had initially been elected as an independent socialist. The Lib-Labbers would probably have supported the Asquith faction in the 1918 election had the split still been in existence. Joseph Havelock Wilson, who was elected as a National Liberal in 1918, was not a member of parliament when the split occurred and, like Burns, had been initially elected as an independent socialist. The anti-coalition Liberals would have remained the main left-of-centre party throughout the twenties, and the Liberal Party would have recovered from the split as it recovered from the divisions over Irish Home Rule in the 1880s.

The Lib-Labs contributed directly to the growth of the tradition of radical and democratic politics in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. They are also a part of Liberal history which should be acknowledged with pride.

As it was, Lib-Labbery was a failure. The Lib-Lab MPs were criticised by Joseph Chamberlain as 'the fielders and runners of the Gladstone Party'.[37] However they were the first working-class MPs. Johnny Clynes, who was a cabinet minister in the first Labour cabinet, described Thomas Burt and Alexander Macdonald as the 'forlorn hope of the mighty army of British workers flung upon the gates of St Stephens; and those gates have never been shut against us since'.[38] Shepherd claims that, in the mythology of Labour history, the Lib-Labbers are little remembered as labour pioneers and suggests that 'as former working men representing working-class interests for the first time, they contributed directly to the growth of the tradition of radical and democratic politics in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries'.[39] They are also a part of Liberal history which should be acknowledged with pride.

Andrew Hudson is a member of the executive of the Association of Liberal Democrat Trade Unionists.

1 F. W. S. Craig, *British Parliamentary Election Results 1885–1918* (1977), p. xiv.

2 John Shepherd, 'Labour and Parliament: The Lib-Labs as the First Working-Class MPs 1885–1906', in Eugenio Biagini and Alistair J. Reid, *Currents of Radicalism* (Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 187–211.

3 Malcolm Wallace, *Single or Return: The History of the Transport Salaried Staffs Association* (TSSA, 1996), p. 13.

4 G. D. H Cole, *Short History of the British Working-Class Movement 1789–1947* (Allen and Unwin, 1947), p. 139.

5 Graham Wallas, *The Life of Francis Place 1771–1854* (Allen and Unwin, 1925), p. 25 and pp. 390–91.

6 Ibid.

7 Cole, *Short History of the British Working-Class Movement,* p. 211.

8 H. A. Clegg, H. A. Fox and N. A. F. Thompson, *A History of British Trade Unions Since 1889* Vol 1 (Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 51.

9 Cole, *Short History of the British Working-Class Movement,* p. 74.

10 Shepherd, 'Labour and Parliament', pp. 187–211.

11 Cole, *Short History of the British Working-Class Movement,* p. 231.

12 Ibid., p. 247.

13 T. R. Threlfall, *The Political Future of Labour in the Nineteenth Century* (1894), pp. 213–14.

14 Peter Joyce, *The Realignment of the Left: A Short History of the Relationship between the Liberal Democrat and Labour Parties* (Macmillan, 1999) pp. 19–20.

15 Shepherd, 'Labour and Parliament', pp. 187–211.

16 Henry Pelling, *Origins of the Labour Party 1880–1900* (Macmillan, 1954), p. 65.

17 Cole, *Short History of the British Working-Class Movement,* p. 251.

18 Ibid., p. 253.

19 Shepherd, 'Labour and Parliament', pp. 187–211.

20 Cole, *Short History of the British Working-Class Movement,* p. 261–62.

21 Clegg et al., *A History of British Trade Unions Since 1889,* p. 303.

22 George Bernstein, *Liberalism and Liberal Polities in Edwardian England.*

23 Ibid.

24 Kenneth Morgan, *The Age of Lloyd George* (Allen and Unwin, 1971), p. 34.

25 P. F. Clarke, *Lancashire and the New Liberalism* (Cambridge University Press, 1971), p. 314.

26 Ibid., p. 332.

27 F. W. S. Craig, *British Parliamentary Election Results 1885–1918* (1977), p. xiv.

28 Clegg et al., *A History of British Trade Unions Since 1889,* p. 419.

29 Henry Pelling, *Popular Politics in Late Victorian Britain* (Macmillan, 1968), p. 116.

30 G. Dangerfield, *The Strange Death of Liberal England* (1936), p. vii.

31 Pelling, *Popular Politics in Late Victorian Britain,* p. 120.

32 Pelling, *Origins of the Labour Party 1880–1900,* p. 223.

33 Pelling, *Popular Politics in Late Victorian Britain,* p. 107.

34 Clarke, *Lancashire and the New Liberalism,* p. 336.

35 *Manchester Courier,* 8 December 1909.

36 Shepherd, 'Labour and Parliament', pp. 187–211.

37 Clegg et al., *A History of British Trade Unions Since 1889,* p. 279.

38 J. R. Clynes, *Memoirs 1869–1924,* p. 21.

39 Shepherd, 'Labour and Parliament', pp. 187–211.

Jaime Reynolds and **Robert Ingham** analyse the career of Archie Macdonald (1904–83), Liberal MP for Roxburgh and Selkirk for just eighteen months, between the 1950 and 1951 elections.

BIOGRAPHY: ARCHIE MACDONALD

Amidst the wreckage of the February 1950 general election, when the Liberal Party made its last effort at revival before the era of Jo Grimond, just three seats were wrested from the other parties: Grimond's Orkney and Shetland; Huddersfield West, where Donald Wade won, thanks to a local pact with the Conservatives; and Roxburgh and Selkirk in the Scottish Borders, where Archie Macdonald defeated the sitting Tory. Macdonald's victory was one of the very rare Liberal gains in three-cornered general election contests with the other two parties during the long years in the electoral wilderness from the end of the 1920s to the mid-1960s.[1]

Macdonald's triumph was short-lived. The Conservatives regained the seat at the next general election, in October 1951, and it was to remain in their hands until David Steel's victory in the enlarged Roxburgh, Selkirk and Peebles constituency at a by-election in 1965. Nevertheless Archie Macdonald's victory put him amongst the tiny handful of Liberal MPs during the nadir of the party's fortunes in the 1950s[2] – though perhaps the least remembered today.

Archibald James Florence Macdonald was born on 2 May 1904 in Uniondale, South Africa. His parents were Dr G. B. D. Macdonald, an eye surgeon originally from Aberdeen, and Beatrice Blanche Meeking. They travelled widely in Africa and Asia studying tropical eye diseases and finding cures for them. After spending a short time in South Africa, the family moved to Australia, where Macdonald was educated at Chatswood Grammar School, Sydney, and the Royal Australian Naval College. He was a highly successful wool buyer in Australia in the mid-1920s, and then in the early 1930s, after his arrival in Britain, he and his brother established their own firm importing decorative woods and tinned fruit and vegetables from Australia. From 1933 he worked for Rowntrees, and it was Seebohm Rowntree (one of the founders of Management Research Groups) who encouraged his successful application for the job of Joint Chief Executive of that association in 1937.

Macdonald volunteered for service on the outbreak of war but was refused on health grounds: he had had a serious thyroid operation in 1935. In 1940 he became Secretary of the Paint Industry Export Group, a position he held until 1949. He was also Director and Secretary of the Wartime Paint Manufacturers' Association from 1943 to 1945. He was a director of Robert Bowran and Co. Ltd, a paint manufacturing firm, from 1949 to 1953 and then of Joseph Freeman Sons and Co. Ltd (later Cementone) from 1956, serving as vice-chairman from 1962 to1966.[3]

He played little role in Liberal politics before the 1945 general election, when he stood as candidate for Roxburgh and Selkirk. Captain George Grey, MP for Berwick-on-Tweed until his death on active service in 1944, had heard Macdonald speak at a paint industry meeting and persuaded him to offer himself as a Liberal candidate. He was suggested as a suitable candidate for Roxburgh and Selkirk on account of his experience in the cloth trade.[4] Macdonald was interested in public service and of an independent non-partisan frame of mind and this may have attracted him to the Liberals.

His background in business and importing/exporting was not untypical for a Liberal activist in the party of the 1940s and 1950s.

The constituency was and remains one of the most prosperous parts of Scotland, with a substantial local agricultural industry based on sheep farming, stock raising and upland farms. It was also one of great textile and clothing areas of Britain, specialising in high-quality tweeds and knitwear in the mills of towns like Galashiels and Hawick. It is also 'a real land of the lairds'. When canvassing Macdonald often encountered the response: 'I'd like to vote for you, but if I did the laird would know and then where would I be?' The valleys abound with the castles and stately homes of noble Scottish families. Also many retired military people lived there.

In the early post-war years, politics in Roxburgh and Selkirk was still notably shaped by traditional aristocratic influence, above all that of the Tory Dukes of Buccleuch, the most powerful of the great landowners in the Borders. The constituency had been held by the Conservatives[5] from the early 1920s, first by the Earl of Dalkieth and then, on his succession to the title as Eighth Duke of Buccleuch and Queensbury in 1935, by his brother Lord William Scott. Liberalism had, however, always been strong in the constituency.[6] In 1935 the Liberal candidate had gathered a third of the votes, some 6,000 behind Scott. There was also a significant Labour vote in third place. It was a seat where the traditional political culture had arrested the sharp decline in Liberal support evident elsewhere in the country, but it was hardly a hot prospect for a Liberal win.

Macdonald was adopted as Liberal candidate for Roxburgh and Selkirk in summer 1944, after touring the constituency with Lady Glencoats, a prominent figure in the Scottish Liberals, and addressing meetings in each of the five main towns. However his candidature was not universally welcomed. An official of the Scottish Liberal Federation reported in July 1944 that 'he is a Right Wing Liberal and disinclined to fight Labour'. A later report was similarly negative.[7] Shortly afterwards he seems to have explored the possibility of transferring his candidacy to Aberdeen, but nothing came of this.[8] It is unclear what might have prompted these criticisms, but in any case the energy and commitment that Macdonald put into his campaign in 1945 and the friendships that he built with many local Liberal figures suggest that they were soon forgotten.

The Scottish Liberal hierarchy was also concerned about the dilapidated state of the party organisation in Roxburgh and Selkirk, and in almost every other Scottish constituency. Particularly seen in this context, Macdonald's result in 1945 far exceeded expectations. He held the Liberal vote steady while the Tory vote fell away, reducing Scott's majority to 1,628. The Labour vote jumped from 17 per cent to 29 per cent, but was not enough to push Macdonald into third place.[9]

One of the features of the 1945 general election was that in a few constituencies the Liberals managed to supplant Labour as the beneficiary of the large anti-Conservative swing. Local factors and the quality of candidate and campaign made a difference. In Roxburgh and Selkirk, Macdonald probably shared some of the anti-Tory swing, compensating for any Liberal votes that shifted to Labour. Personal factors may also have played a part. The right-wing Scott was vulnerable to the backlash against the 'Guilty Men' of the Conservative Party, blamed for the failure of the appeasement policy of the 1930s.[10] In his election address Macdonald made much of the broad, classless appeal of the Liberal Party – 'the only party that can unite the great bulk of the people, as it represents all shades of opinion from progressive Conservatives to moderate Labour' – promising at all times to put country before party and to establish a 'Constituency Council' including representatives of the Labour and Conservative parties. He stressed the importance of profit-sharing in industry, equal pay for women and home rule for Scotland.[11] Certainly Macdonald's performance was impressive, not least when contrasted with the defeat of Sir William Beveridge, founder of the welfare state and the incumbent Liberal MP for the neighbouring Berwick-upon-Tweed constituency, who lost by a slightly larger margin_than Macdonald.

Macdonald made much of the broad, classless appeal of the Liberal Party – 'the only party that can unite the great bulk of the people, as it represents all shades of opinion from progressive Conservatives to moderate Labour'.

Doubtless Macdonald benefited also from his connections with the local Craigmyle family. Shortly after the election on 12 September 1945, he married the Honourable Elspeth Ruth Shaw (b. 1921). Her father was the second Lord Craigmyle, a former Liberal MP, and her grandfather, the first Baron Craigmyle, had been a minister under Rosebery, Campbell-Bannerman and Asquith.[12] Her maternal grandfather was the Earl of Inchcape, a mighty shipping magnate, who had served in Lloyd George's government during the First World War. A fierce proponent of free trade and *laissez-faire*, he famously defected to the Conservative Party in 1926.[13]

After the 1945 election Macdonald was active in policy development within the Liberal Party. He chaired a party sub-committee studying co-partnership in industry[14] and was also a member of the Liberal Reconstruction Committee, established after the election to overhaul the party organisation, and the Liberal Party Council.[15]

As a result of the 1945 performance and Macdonald's nursing of the constituency, Roxburgh and Selkirk had become one of the Liberals' most winnable seats at the 1950 general election.[16] Macdonald was again selected as candidate to fight Scott. Helped by a much increased turnout (up by 8.5 per cent) and a fall in the Labour vote of 4.7 per cent, Macdonald was elected with a majority of 1,156.[17]

New Members of Parliament are often advised to wait for weeks or months before making their maiden speeches, in order to soak in the ambience of the House of Commons, and to choose uncontroversial subjects to raise. New Liberal Members in the middle of the twentieth century could not take advantage of this advice. In his maiden speech, in the debate on the King's Speech in March 1950, Macdonald spoke on self-government for Scotland and Wales. The speech was greeted with the usual courtesy, except by Bob Boothby, who fiercely attacked the ideas it contained. Jo Grimond also made his maiden speech on devolution shortly afterwards in support of Macdonald.[18]

Archie Macdonald and family

With his background in business, Macdonald was pressed straight away into action as an economic spokesman for the Liberal Party, calling for economy, deregulation, and on one occasion declaring his belief in 'substantial profits'. However, he was by no means an out-and-out *laissez-faire* free-trader, proposing in one debate that the United Nations should become the sole buyer of vital raw materials in order to avoid countries bidding up prices against each other. He also argued strongly for the Liberal policy of co-partnership in industry, a cause with which he was closely identified.[19] He was an active MP. In the eighteen months of the Parliament he made speeches in thirteen debates in the House, mostly on economic questions, and often spoke in Committee, as well as asking some fifty questions

In 1951 Macdonald faced a new Conservative candidate, Commander C. E. M. Donaldson.[20] The Liberals, divided and exposed by the intense Labour–Conservative struggle in the 1950–51 Parliament and ill-prepared for another general election so soon, were in trouble. It was no surprise that Macdonald lost his seat in a bruising campaign. In fact he did well to keep the margin of defeat down to 829 votes. Macdonald had worked hard as a constituency MP, writing over 2,000 letters to ministers on behalf of his constituents during his eighteen-month tenure.[21] The Liberal poll actually increased by some 250 votes, perhaps partly as a result of tactical voting by Labour supporters. However, on a very high turnout the Tory vote rose by over 2,000.[22] Donaldson was to hold the seat until his death in 1965, when, at the ensuing by-election, David Steel won Roxburgh, Selkirk and Peebles for the Liberals.

It is curious that, although Macdonald remained a committed Liberal for a further twenty years and seems to have retained some political ambitions, he did not stand again for parliament or – as one of the party's very few recent MPs – play a significant role in the Liberal revival of the later 1950s. He did not contest the expanded Roxburgh, Selkirk and Peebles constituency in 1955, despite invitations from local Liberals to return.[23]

He remained active in the party debates of the early 1950s, opposing the economic right which was vocal in the Liberal Party at the time. Macdonald was perhaps the most prominent of the signatories of the letter to the *Guardian* of 27 March 1953 announcing the establishment of the Radical Reform Group to oppose *laissez-faire* (though supporting free trade). The group aimed to promote 'the policy of social reform without Socialism which Liberals have developed from 1908 onwards'.[24]

His gradual withdrawal from front-line politics was partly a reaction to the exhausting experience of sitting in the 1950–51 Parliament, where the Conservative opposition was intent on wearing down the Labour Government, with its wafer-thin majority, by means of repeated all-night sittings. The strain on the nine-strong band of Liberal MPs was particularly intense. Macdonald had a young family and continued to work for Robert Bowran, where the Managing Director, despite being a 1950 Liberal candidate himself, was unsympathetic towards Macdonald's political commitments. By the end of the parliament Macdonald was utterly exhausted and had developed problems with a nerve in his face due to stress. The 1951 election in Roxburgh and Selkirk, during which he was subjected to sharp personal attacks by the Conservatives, left its mark.

According to his son, Macdonald was 'not a career politician with personal political ambitions. His interest in a political position … was the opportunity it gave to help individuals with difficulties and to serve his community … He had many interesting and creative political ideas but lacked the political instincts to trim them in order to "sell" them successfully … he was always an individual thinker and would never support a policy with which he disagreed simply because it was avowed by a party to which he belonged.'[25]

He found a more satisfying outlet in local government in

Hampstead, where he lived for most of his life. He served as a Hampstead borough councillor and Liberal group leader from 1962–65. His brief Liberal municipal career ended with the reorganisation of London politics in 1964. He stood as one of the Liberal candidates for Camden in the Greater London Council elections of that year, polling badly, and was also defeated in Hampstead Town Ward for membership of the new Camden Borough Council.[26]

He retained some connections with the Scottish Borders. According to David Steel in his memoirs, *Against Goliath*, Macdonald indicated a willingness to contest the 1965 by-election in Roxburgh, Selkirk and Peebles, suggesting that Steel might stand down as candidate in his favour and act as agent, although Macdonald's family consider this to be unlikely. In the event, Macdonald returned to support and speak for Steel in the by-election.[27]

Macdonald roundly condemned his Conservative opponents in Hampstead on his borough council defeat in 1965 and predicted that the Liberals had a bright future in the area.[28] Less than six years later, and after much agonising, he joined the Conservative Party and served as a Camden councillor until 1976. Macdonald was a public-spirited man – he was also for many years a magistrate and a member of the Board of Visitors of Wormwood Scrubs – and was no doubt attracted by the prospect of again being able to serve his local community and disappointed that, at the time, membership of the Liberals offered limited opportunities to hold public office. It is often now overlooked that the 1970 election was one of the Liberal Party's worst and one of its consequences was to strengthen the role played in the party by 'wild' Young Liberals such as Tony Greaves and Gordon Lishman with whom Macdonald – who had become more conservative in his views in later life – was particularly out of step. However, it seems that he was not converted by Conservative policies, profoundly disagreeing with many of them, as he openly told the Hampstead Tories.

He was not a politician and above all not a 'party man'. He was always his own man and so was very difficult for politicians to use. He should really have been an independent.

Macdonald's role in the Liberal Party, after its promising start, was unfulfilled, and clearly disappointing to himself. One can only agree with the view of his son Michael that 'he was not a politician and above all not a "party man". He was always his own man and so was very difficult for politicians to use. He should really have been an independent.'[29]

Archie Macdonald died on 20 April 1983, aged seventy-eight. He was survived by his wife and two sons, Michael and Ian.

Dr Jaime Reynolds studied politics at LSE, and has a long-standing interest in Liberal Democrat and electoral history. Dr Robert Ingham is a historical writer, and Biographies Editor of the Journal of Liberal History.

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[1] The others were Colne Valley, in somewhat unusual circumstances, in 1931, Orkney and Shetland in 1950, and North Devon in 1959. A few more were gained in the absence of a candidate from one or other of the main parties, and Torrington and Orpington at by-elections in 1958 and 1962 respectively.

[2] A total of twelve Liberal MPs sat in Parliament between the 1950 election and the end of the decade. Apart from Grimond, Macdonald was the only one who sat for a Scottish constituency.

[3] Information provided by Michael Macdonald .

[4] Ibid.

[5] The Conservatives ran under the label 'Unionist' in Scotland.

[6] The separate Roxburghshire and Peebles & Selkirk seats were Liberal from 1906 to 1923 and Hawick Burghs (Hawick, Galashiels and Selkirk) was a safe Liberal seat until its abolition in 1918.

[7] Esslemont Papers, Aberdeen University Library, MS3037/1/4/42 a–b.

[8] Ibid.

[9] The full result was: Scott 13,232 (37.9%), Macdonald 11,604 (33.2%), Thomas (Lab) 10,107 (28.9%). Electorate 47,492, turnout 73.6%.

[10] He had been a member of the 'January Club', established by Sir Oswald Mosley in 1934 to win support in Conservative and 'respectable' circles for the ideas of the British Union of Fascists. Nevertheless he served in the army during the Second World War as Field Marshal Alexander's military secretary. Scott was not alone in his right-wing views. His brother, the Duke of Buccleuch, was an admirer of Hitler and lobbied for a negotiated peace with Germany in 1940; see John Colville, *Fringes of Power,* p. 83. Scott's fellow Conservative MP for the neighbouring Peebles and Midlothian constituency, Captain 'Jock' Ramsey, was interned during the war for his pro-Nazi activities.

[11] *Election Address of A. J. F. Macdonald, Liberal Candidate* (1945).

[12] See Robert Shiels, 'Tommy Shaw: Lawyer, Politician and Judge', *Journal of Liberal History* 38, spring 2003, pp. 22–23.

[13] James Lyle Mackay, first Earl of Inchcape (1852–1932) shipowner – most prominent figure of his time in British shipping; 1917, Committee of Imperial Defence; 1921–22, 'hawkish' member of the Geddes Committee which recommended sweeping cuts in public expenditure. Liberal until 1926 when he joined the Conservative benches in Lords. Ardent and committed free trader and fierce opponent of state intervention. He contributed £50,000 to the Liberal election campaign in 1923.

[14] *The Times, House of Commons 1950.*

[15] *The Times, House of Commons 1951;* Alan Watkins, *The Liberal Dilemma* (1966), p. 43.

[16] The third most winnable after Caithness and Sutherland and Orkney and Shetland.

[17] The full result was: Macdonald 15,347 (39.4%), Scott 14,191 (36.4%), Thomas (Lab) 9,413 (24.2%). Electorate 47,430, turnout 82.1%. The constituency boundaries were unchanged from 1945.

[18] HC Deb, 10 Mar 1950, cc. 615–29.

[19] For example on the debate on the second King's Speech of the parliament, see HC Deb, 7 Nov 1950, cc. 774–84.

[20] According to David Steel, Commander Donaldson was not a strong candidate and his victory in 1951 was unexpected; David Steel, *Against Goliath* (1989) pp. 33–34.

[21] Information supplied by Michael Macdonald.

[22] The detailed result was Donaldson 16,438 (40.6%), Macdonald 15,609 (38.6%), White (Lab) 8,395 (20.8%). Electorate 47,614, turnout 84.9%.

23 Steel, *Against Goliath,* p. 37, says that after much toing and froing Macdonald declined the Liberal Association's invitation. However his son doubts whether Macdonald considered returning to fight the seat, although asked to do so by local Liberals. The Conservative majority increased to 15.6%, with the Liberal in second place on 32.1%.

24 Watkins, *The Liberal Dilemma,* p. 70. The letter was also signed by Desmond Banks, E. F. Allison, Norman Clark, Peter Grafton and Philip Skelsey.

25 Michael Macdonald note to the authors, 8 October 2002.

26 The Liberal candidates won 6% of the votes in the three-member constituency. Macdonald polled slightly better than the other two.

27 Steel, *Against Goliath,* p. 37, and information provided by Michael Macdonald.

28 *Hampstead and Highgate Express* and *Hampstead Garden Suburb and Golders Green News,* 15 May 1964.

29 Michael Macdonald note to the authors, 8 October 2002.

LETTERS

Peter Hatton

Having done a PhD on the Colonial Office under Lewis (Loulou) Harcourt over thirty years ago, I was delighted to see Patrick Jackson's biographical article about him in issue 40. He is most illuminating on his years as his father's secretary (and manager?) and his social and political background.

However, it seems to me perverse not to consider Harcourt's contribution in office to colonial / imperial policy. I would summarise the main heads there as:

1. Amalgamating the Nigerias (1912–14).
2. Further developing Dominion status – especially at the Colonial / Commonwealth conference of 1911, and through his close relations (via the first Governor-General, (Lord) Herbert Gladstone (son of W. E.)) with the new Union of South Africa.
3. Vigorously defending the policy of coastal concentration in British Somaliland when the Tories (amendment to King's Speech, February 1914) demanded aggressive action against Muhammad Abdille Rahman ('the mad mullah' to the British press).
4. Supporting peasant proprietor export development in colonial Africa (especially Ugandan cotton and Ghanaian cocoa); he even sacked a Governor of Kenya (then the British East African Protectorate) for sharp practice over an African land reserve.
5. As MP for Rossendale, in Lancashire (and with an ennobled ex-MP for Oldham as his number two) he was zealous in securing supplies of cotton, palm oil, rubber and chocolate for British (especially Lancashire) industries.
6. He kept a close eye on Liverpool shipping interests and when he thought Treasury actions over the silver coinage of British West Africa was threatening them he won a tussle with Lloyd George on this issue.

I could go on, but I hope that this is more than enough to suggest that Jackson's argument that Harcourt 'looked to the past and failed to come to grips with the industrial and social problems of the new century' is not the whole story.

The other section I would like to comment upon is Harcourt and foreign policy (in 1971 I published an article in *European Studies Review* entitled 'Harcourt and Solf: the Search for an Anglo-German Understanding through Africa, 1912–14'). Harcourt remained throughout the leading Cabinet advocate of détente with Germany; he organised the Cabinet majority that led to the Haldane mission to Berlin in1912. He was also totally dismissive of any obligations towards Russia, and challenged the phrase 'Triple Entente' whenever it appeared in Cabinet papers. As I stated in my letter in issue 30, more ministers considered resigning during the fraught Cabinet meetings of 30 July – 4 August 1914. Although Belgium was a useful pretext for backing down, I am sure the prime motive in Harcourt's case was to avoid splitting the party; once it was clear that Asquith, Grey and Churchill could not be moved, more resignations could only have led to a coalition or a minority Tory government.

Larry Iles

With reference to the special issue 39 of the *Journal of Liberal History,* it is a pity that Lord Rennard agrees so readily with Bill Rodgers' contemporary document indicting Tony Cook's SDP candidature for the Darlington by-election debacle in 1983. Both of them underestimate the impact of the media, and in particular the behaviour of Vincent Hanna, the avowedly pro-Labour, *Newsnight* interrogator. He went overboard in praising Labour's Ossie O'Brien in his reports, and gave Cook the kind of merciless battering at press conferences that even veteran candidates would have found difficult to withstand. Hanna later admitted that he had really gone for Cook, hammer and tongs.

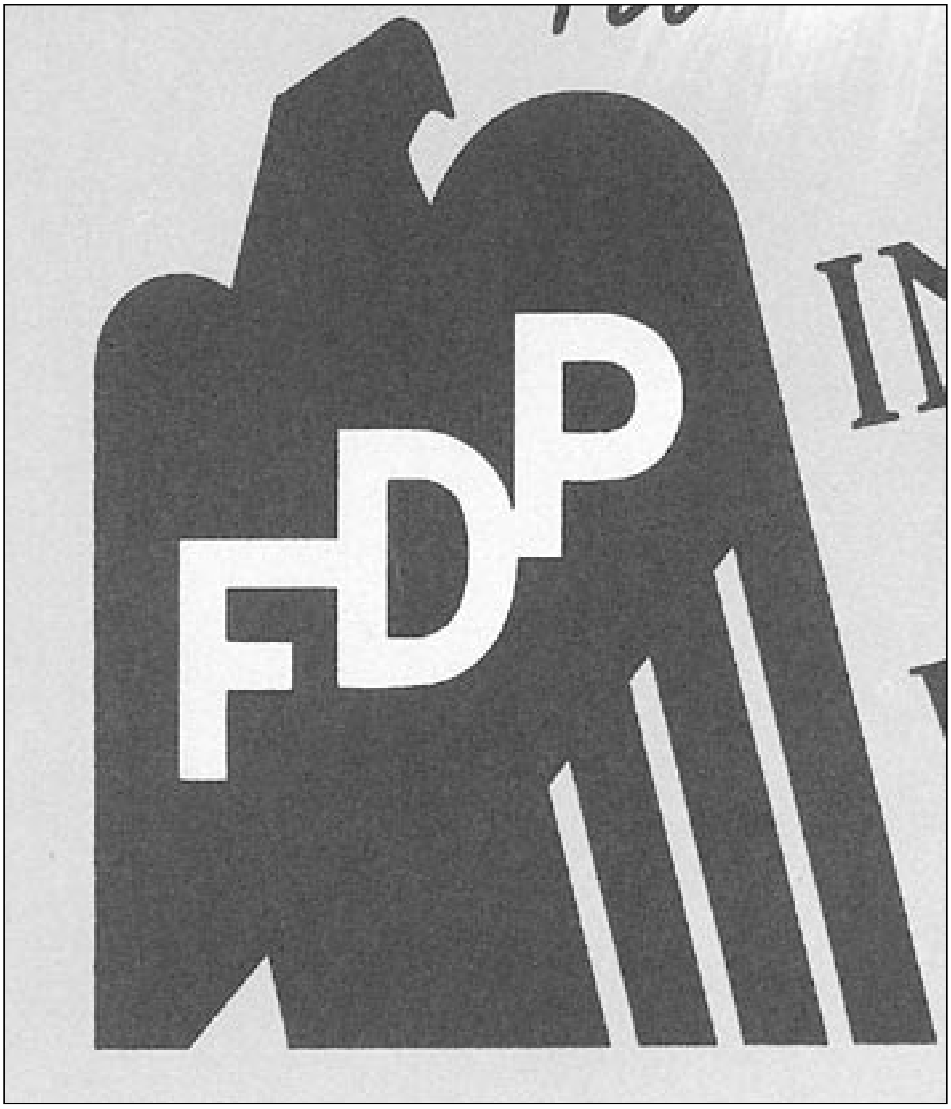
The argument that Cook was a lightweight TV reporter is also overdone; Tyne Tees always specialised in young and telegenic presenters. A much worse fault was that on policies Cook chose to be rigorously – and rather emptily – centrist, rather than take strong stands, as O'Brien and Fallon both did.

Dr Jürgen Frölich outlines the role of the Free Democratic Party in German Federal politics.

THE GERM

BETWEEN THIRD FO

No other established party in the Federal Republic of Germany has had as contentious an image as the Free Democratic Party (FDP). Its imminent death, in terms of political significance, has been predicted many times and it has been declared superfluous on the grounds that the Federal Republic is no longer in need of a Liberal party. On the other hand, even though it is currently the smallest party in the German Bundestag, elected with a 7.4% share of the vote in September 2002 – the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and the Social Democratic Party (SPD) both gained 38.5% and the Greens 8.8% – it can boast more than forty years of participation in the government.



Party logo from 1953

That makes it the longest-serving party in the federal government, as compared with the CDU's thirty-six years, the SPD's twenty-one years and the Green Party's five years. Furthermore, looking back on German contemporary history, it becomes evident that the decisive changes of 1948–49, 1955, 1969, 1982 and 1989–90 were brought

IAN LIBERALS

RCE AND MARGINAL FORCE

about only with the support of the FDP. But how can this not-unimportant role of the Liberals be explained in the face of the level of criticism of the party in both journalism and historiography?

Looking back at the German national electoral system and at the party political system as they crystallised in the first decade after 1949, one could gain the superficial impression that there were only two parties at work. In 1949 eight political parties entered the Federal Parliament, but with the introduction of the 'Five Percent Clause' in 1953, the ban on the Communist Party in 1956 and the rise of Chancellor Adenauer and the CDU as a leading political force, the number of parties represented in the Bundestag was reduced to three, with the CDU and SPD as the so-called 'big' or 'people's' parties. Only one of the smaller parties, the FDP, survived the first decade of the Federal Republic.

It managed this because the founders of the Republic had decided in favour of a system of proportional representation and against a majority vote system. Half of the parliamentary seats are filled by representatives directly elected by their constituents; however, the so-called 'Second Vote' is also decisive for the composition of Parliament since every political party that wins more than 5%, or at least three constituencies, gets a proportional share of the mandates. The FDP could always claim a share of the vote of between 5.8% and 12.8% (see table). Since no party, with the exception of the CDU in 1957, has ever managed to gain an absolute majority of mandates or votes, it was always necessary to form a coalition of two or more parties. Until the Green Party entered Parliament in 1983, the FDP therefore had the power to select one of the two major parties with whom to form a working coalition. The exception was from 1966 to 1969, when the CDU and SPD formed a 'Great Coalition'. Consequently, for many years the FDP played a crucial role in parliament, several times preventing a change in electoral system from proportional to majority voting, which was a particular goal of the CDU in the mid fifties and the late sixties.

Because the Liberals were known for 'tipping the balance', they were unable to establish firm public support, as the party in opposition would always try to isolate itself from the FDP, particularly in the case of the CDU after 1969 and of the SPD from 1982 to the present. Furthermore, because many journalists and contemporary historians have sympathised with one of the two major parties, and still do so, it is not surprising that the FDP has been given little credit for its political achievements. The change of coalition in 1982 – when a new grouping of CDU and FDP led to the replacing of the SPD Chancellor, Helmut Schmidt, with the leader of the CDU, Helmut Kohl – was an occasion that particularly produced much long-lasting anger and aggression against the FDP on the part of the left of German politics and public opinion, who forgot that the SPD had performed a similar manoeuvre in 1966 by joining the Great Coalition and sending the FDP into the ranks of the opposition.

Because the Liberals were known for 'tipping the balance', they were unable to establish firm public support, as the party in opposition would always try to isolate itself from the FDP.

But the blame for the controversial image of the FDP cannot solely be laid at the door of anti-Liberal political commentators and political scientists. There are – at first sight – some inconsistencies in the development of the party since its inception. So it is useful to outline a brief history of the FDP.

Even at its founding on 11 December 1948 in the South Hessian town of Heppenheim, it was not clear what the political aims of the party would be. The regional parties that formed the FDP, nine months before the Federal Republic was born, had varying ideas as to what the party would represent. Two main movements prevailed: on the one hand were the so-called 'Old Liberals' of Southern Germany and the Hanseatic cities, who strove to revive the left Liberal movement of the Weimar Republic and wanted to place the

Election	FDP	CDU/CSU	SPD	Greens	PDS	Others
	% / seats	% / seats	% / seats	% / seats	% / seats	% / seats
1949	11.9 / 52	31.0 / 139	29.2 / 131	–	–	27.9 / 76
1953	9.5 / 48	45.2 / 243	28.8 / 151	–	–	15.5 / 45
1957	7.7 / 41	50.2 / 270	31.8 / 161	–	–	10.3 / 17
1961	12.8 / 67	45.4 / 242	36.2 / 190	–	–	5.6 / –
1965	9.5 / 49	47.6 / 245	39.3 / 202	–	–	3.6 / –
1969	5.8 / 30	46.1 / 242	42.7 / 224	–	–	5.4 / –
1972	8.4 / 41	44.9 / 225	45.8 / 230	–	–	0.9 / –
1976	7.9 / 39	48.6 / 243	42.6 / 214	–	–	0.9 / –
1980	10.6 / 53	44.3 / 226	42.9 / 218	1.5 / –	–	0.4 / –
1983	7.0 / 34	48.8 / 244	38.2 / 193	5.6 / 27	–	0.4 / –
1987	9.1 / 46	44.3 / 223	37.0 / 186	8.3 / 42	–	1.3 / –
1990	11.0 / 79	43.8 / 319	33.5 / 239	5.0 / 8	2.4 / 17	4.3 / –
1994	6.9 / 47	41.5 / 294	36.4 / 252	7.3 / 49	4.4 / 30	3.5 / –
1998	6.2 / 43	35.1 / 245	40.9 / 298	6.9 / 47	5.1 / 36	5.8 / –
2002	7.4 / 47	38.5 / 248	38.5 / 251	8.8 / 55	4.0 / 2	2.8 / –

General elections 1949–2002 (up to 1987 Federal Republic; since 1990, United Germany)

FDP at the centre of the political spectrum with good relations with both sides; opposing them were the Free Democrats of North Rhine–Westphalia, Hesse and Lower Saxony, who identified themselves with the *national* Liberal tradition, and saw the FDP as a party for the bourgeoisie, reformed National Socialists and former soldiers from World War II. Both tendencies shared a disapproval of any economic *dirigisme* or political influence on the part of the churches, as well as the hope of a reunified Germany. Despite the presence of well-known 'Old Liberals' Theodor Heuss and Thomas Dehler, who were the leading figures in the Southern German parties, the 'national' side at first seemed the stronger force. It was soon suspected, though, that they condoned the infiltration of the FDP by former National Socialists, and as a result the 'Old Liberals' gained more and more influence until the middle of the 1950s.

This is not to imply that the early FDP was undiscriminating about who it was willing to form a coalition with. On the contrary, whilst representing a bourgeois body of voters, it was without doubt on the same side as the CDU, with whom it shared more in the way of economic policies than the SPD. The FDP formed a coalition with the CDU from 1949 to 1956, and then again from 1961 to 1966, under the chancellorship first of Konrad Adenauer and then, from 1963, of Ludwig Erhard. The latter, although a member of the CDU, was considered a genuine Liberal because of his economic policy convictions.

The main problem of the Adenauer era revolved around the question of national reunification. The Free Democrats suspected that, in supporting their goal of Western integration, Adenauer would neglect their other aim of reunification with East Germany and the Saar region. In 1956 the coalition fell apart, leaving the FDP as an opposition party for the first time. After the triumph of the 1961 elections under the slogan 'With the CDU, but without Adenauer' – who by that time was 85 years old – the FDP/CDU coalition returned, albeit with Adenauer still as chancellor. At least he was replaced within two years by the 'father of the economic miracle', Ludwig Erhard. But since differences remained surrounding the question of Ostpolitik, the coalition failed once again in 1966. Contributing to this failure were the increasing differences in opinion on the matter of fiscal policy. Yet again, the FDP found itself in opposition – a position that lasted three years. During that period it found itself threatened by the possibility of electoral reform, just as it had been in 1956.

New similarities with the SPD were found on the topic of Ostpolitik. The construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961 changed all consideration of the possibility of a reunified Germany. With reunification hopes pushed to the distant future, the FDP thought it more important to improve relationships with the Eastern block and between the two German nations. In 1969, Willy Brandt headed an SPD/FDP coalition for which Ostpolitik was the main basis. During this period the FDP changed its stance towards the centre-left and, particularly amongst the younger, more left-leaning party members, it was social-Liberal concepts that temporarily gained more influence. The highpoint of this trend was the so-called 'Freiburg Programme' of 1971, which placed greater emphasis on reforms in the areas of education, civil rights and social welfare. But, with the onset of the oil crisis and the changing economic framework of the mid 1970s, the FDP began to focus once again on its Liberal economic principles, which lead to increasing tensions within the SPD/FDP coalition. The coalition eventually failed because of further differences over NATO rearmament, which reflected the coalition partners' more general disagreements in the areas of security and foreign policy. In 1969 the FDP provided Walter Scheel as Foreign Minister, followed in 1974 by Hans-Dietrich Genscher, both of whom sought to bring the Western partners together and to create understanding with the East, forming a foreign policy that would become a trademark of the FDP.

In the autumn of 1982 the FDP effected a change in government, abandoning the coalition with the SPD in order to create a coalition with the CDU. This was reflected in the change of chancellors from Helmut Schmidt to Helmut Kohl and meant a fundamental alteration in both foreign and economic policy. Within this context, the Federal Republic was able to act upon the changes that Gorbachev was undertaking in the East, and this culminated in the extraordinary success of 1989–90. Although it is Kohl who is generally credited with this feat, it was only with the help of the Liberal Hans-Dietrich Genscher, who worked alongside him as Foreign Minister, that the unification process was accomplished. In the first elections of the reunified Germany in 1990, the FDP was able to win 11% of the vote and continue a coalition with the CDU, as many of the leading politicians of the Liberals were originally from the DDR and had long supported reunification.

Within the unified Germany, however, the FDP slowly began to lose electoral support as a result of problems deriving from the unification process itself. Furthermore, at the same time the FDP began to adopt the ideals of Anglo-American 'neo-liberalism'. This new orientation, which was in some regards a return to the FDP politics of the fifties and early sixties, was finally evident in the 'Guidelines to the Liberal Civic Society', which was passed as a resolution during the party conference in Wiesbaden in 1997 and in which a general reform of German economic and social policies was demanded. Nevertheless, in 1998 and 2002 the majority of the Germans placed their trust in more traditional German social policies – as exemplified, for instance, by the debate about the 'German Way' during the last election campaign – leaving the FDP, for the first time in its history, in opposition for two consecutive terms. However, the FDP is currently represented in five of the sixteen state governments.

The party's political changes meant changes in the nature of its supporters, which can only briefly be outlined here. In the beginning the FDP was mainly supported by the so-called 'old middle classes' ('Alter Mittelstand') of protestant master craftsmen, merchants and farmers and by former soldiers. During the period of the social-Liberal coalition the 'new middle classes' – employees and senior staff – became more important amongst the party organisation and membership, but since the split-up of the social-Liberal coalition the FDP has focused its efforts on the more self-supporting parts of the new middle classes to get support from independent retailers, the self-employed, doctors, lawyers and so on. Naturally these changes of pressure groups within the party have left some traces on the party's policies, but they have not changed its general attitude.

This brief historical sketch demonstrates that the FDP has had a much greater influence on Federal German history than the votes and the historiography would lead one to expect. It was the FDP that has facilitated all the important, fundamental decisions and changes of the last half century, because it was Federal German Liberalism that secured majority support for these changes in both Parliament and public life. The Liberals were the most determined advocates for a model of society that was based on private ownership and not socialist concepts. They passed laws on this basis, with the help of the larger CDU and even before

Party Leaders of the FDP

1948–49	Theodor Heuss (MP Reichstag 1924–32, Federal President 1949–59)
1949–54	Franz Blücher (Minister of the Marshall Plan and Vice Chancellor 1949–57)
1954–57	Thomas Dehler (Justice Minister 1949–53, Head of Parliamentary Party 1953–57)
1957–60	Reinhold Maier (Prime Minister of Baden-Württemberg 1945–53)
1960–68	Erich Mende (Head of Parliamentary Party 1957–63, Minister for Domestic German Relations and Vice Chancellor 1963–66)
1968–74	Walter Scheel (for Economic Cooperation 1961–66, Foreign Minister and Vice Chancellor 1969–74, Vice-president of Parliament, Federal President 1974–79)
1974–85	Hans-Dietrich Genscher (Minister of the Interior 1969–74, Foreign Minister and Vice Chancellor 1974–92)
1985–88	Martin Bangemann (General Secretary of FDP 1973–75, Economic Minister 1984–88, EU Commissioner 1989–99)
1988–93	Otto Graf Lambsdorff (Economic Minister 1977–84)
1993–95	Klaus Kinkel (Justice Minister 1991–92, Foreign Minister and Vice Chancellor 1992–1998)
1995–2001	Wolfgang Gerhardt (Hessian State Minister 1987–1991, Head of Parliamentary Party since 1998)
since 2001	Guido Westerwelle (General Secretary of FDP 1994–2001)

FDP

Die Liberalen

Party logo from 2002

the Federal Republic of Germany was founded, in the Economic Council and the Parliamentary Council, the predecessors of the Federal Parliament. They supported Adenauer and his policy of Western integration and entrance into NATO, both of which were strongly opposed by the SPD. They criticised from early on the unshakable attitude of the first chancellor over his policies towards the East and always created new approaches that finally led to a policy of détente, although this could only be made effective through a change in political camps by the FDP. Through the swap in coalition partners, as a result of which they made many enemies, the FDP secured a successful shift in economic policies during the 1980s. It was also the FDP who secured – together with the CDU – the majority in favour of unification, against strong counteracting forces amongst the Social Democrats and the Greens. Even Berlin would not have become German capital without the votes of the Liberals – together with the East German Greens and the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS) – because a majority of the two main parties supported the 'old' capital, Bonn.

In addition to serving as a catalyst for political change, the FDP has also served to steer politics away from either extreme. This was particularly apparent in the 1970s and 1980s, when it first blocked the left wing of the SPD from gaining too much influence over economic policy, and later blocked the anti-communist hardliners in the CDU who wanted to break off communication with the East. Throughout these political manoeuvrings, the strong man within the FDP was Hans-Dietrich Genscher, who was Minister of the Interior from 1969 to 1974, later Foreign Minister from 1974 to 1992, and also Vice Chancellor under both Helmut Schmidt and Helmut Kohl. Both change and continuity are therefore firmly linked with the FDP, as the two political camps to left and right could seldom hold a majority of their own before 1998.

The increasing paralysis within the domestic policy of the Federal Republic since the 1990s (the 'German Disease') might be explained by the decreasing strength of the FDP within Parliament, and the party's weak opposition to the extension of West Germany's welfare system to the East and the resulting transformation of that system, despite the fact that the party held the Federal Ministry for the Economy for many years. However, one should not overlook the fact that, since 1972, this ministry has had much less political weight and influence in comparison with the Ministry of Finance, which has always been filled by a member of one of the two 'big' parties.

In retrospect, the official retirement of Hans-Dietrich Genscher in 1992 has been as much a loss for the FDP as the crises of the 1950s, and changes of coalition in 1969 and 1982, as Genscher, even after his withdrawal as party leader in 1985, had been the 'strong man' of the party. Under Genscher's leadership, the party had always been able to recover from such critical events within a few years, but his exit from the political stage has led to a number of smaller crises that have evolved into a lasting crisis. This is evident in the sudden changes of party leader: Klaus Kinkel from 1993 to 1995, Wolfgang Gerhardt from 1995 to 2001 and, since 2001, Guido Westerwelle. Nevertheless, there has been a reassessment of its programme that has transformed the FDP in the eyes of the public into the 'most Western party in Germany'. However, this new programme and leader, supported mostly by young voters, were probably not the main reason for the outcome of the 2002 elections, in which the party gained far more votes than was generally expected. Nevertheless, the FDP remains in opposition.

In terms of the constants of Liberal politics over the history of the Federal Republic, two main points should be mentioned. First, economic and social policies have always followed a decisively Liberal bent, hostile to state intervention, but not excluding support for welfare state measures, especially during the social-Liberal coalition. However, for most of its history the FDP has had much less sympathies for the welfare state than – in my opinion – for example the Liberal Democrats in Britain.

Second, on the matter of the national question, the FDP has always supported the self-determination of Germans in both the West and the East. In the 1960s the national question, for the FDP, went hand in hand with a concept of foreign policy that was founded on détente and reliability without abandoning the aim of a peaceful reunification. While this was in harmony with the main elements of traditional nineteenth-century Liberalism, the third aim of that previous period – a constitutional state – is no longer reflected in Liberal programmes and policies. This is primarily due to the fact that the Federal Republic already corresponds to Liberal concepts of a constitutional state and that all the other important parties conform to this, with the possible exception of the successor to the SED, the PDS, which is represented in the Bundestag by only two MPs.

Since 1990 the 'National Question' has naturally lost any meaning. It has been replaced by issues like reliability in German foreign policy and the restructuring of the social system towards more freedom and responsibility for the individual. If one believes that the best thing to have happened to the German nation during its strange development over the last century is the so called 'Arrival in the West' of a unified Germany, it can only be hoped that the FDP will be able to continue its role as a 'Third Force' and to make an important, if not decisive, contribution to the Federal Republic of Germany. That the FDP as a 'Third Force' has contributed much is without question for the author. Germany needs a party with a clear orientation towards the Western world, including the whole North Atlantic area, both in respect of a common policy and common values. And maybe some day such a political entity can become the second or even first force, even if it does not look so at the moment or in the near future. However, the history of Liberal parties in other parts of the world, especially in Great Britain, teaches us that this is not impossible.

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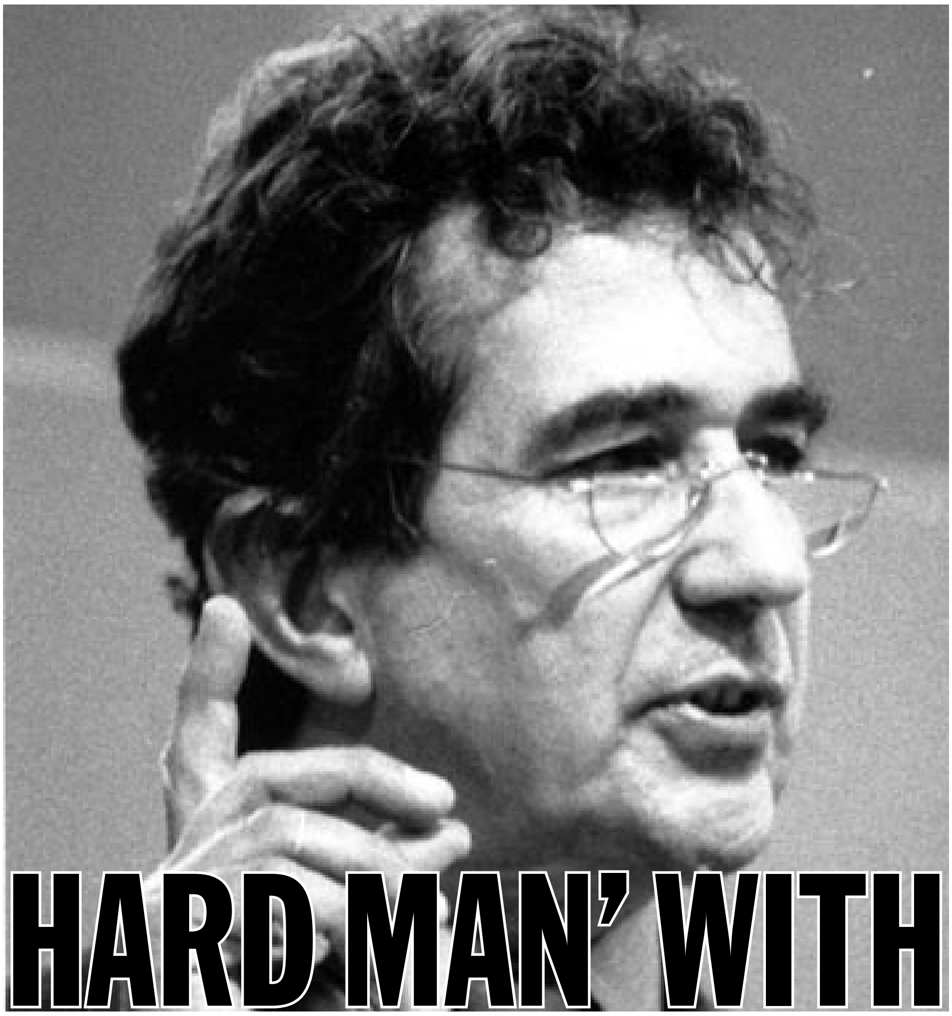
SDP CARTOONS

July at Gallery 33, near London Bridge, saw an extensive exhibition of cartoons from the *Social Democrat* newspaper, many of which were reproduced, with commentary, in *Journal of Liberal History* 39. Liberal Democrat History Group resources benefited from a donation made to the Group for each cartoon sold.

Not all the cartoons were sold, however, and Gallery 33 (33 Swan Street, London SE1) is still holding a stock of originals. Whenever they gather a dozen enquiries they invite people to come and browse. Anyone interested should contact Maria Linforth-Hall on 020 7407 8668 or marvasol@btconnect.com. A 25% donation to History Group funds will be made on sales from those who identify themselves as *Journal* readers.

Chris Radley (cartoonist), left; Maria Linforth-Hall, Gallery Administrator, bottom right, with a character from many of the cartoons!



Adrian Slade talks to Lord Bill Rodgers of Quarry Bank, Labour Cabinet Minister under Callaghan, member of the 'Gang of Four' founders of the SDP, and Leader of the Liberal Democrat in the House of Lords.

'HARD MAN' WITH HEART

Oxford friend of Shirley Williams and Dick Taverne; political contemporary of the then Liberals Robin Day and Jeremy Thorpe; Secretary of the Fabian Society in the '50s; victor of the Stockton-on-Tees by-election in '62; junior, senior or cabinet minister in the Labour governments of the '60s and '70s; member of the 'Gang of Four' that founded the SDP and, at least as far as Liberals were concerned, the 'hard man' of the Alliance seat negotiations; Director-General of the RIBA and then the ASA; leader of the Liberal Democrats in the House of Lords – Bill Rodgers is widely remembered for a lifetime of politics that effectively began when he was just eight years old.

'I was born in Liverpool' he says. 'My father was clerk to the Health Committee, which dealt with housing in those days. I used to travel around the city with him on the trams. When you are eight or nine you are easily impressed and I became very aware of the absolute poverty in the old tenement slums, compared to the comfort of the semi-detached in which we lived. I well remember seeing children outside the pubs without shoes. My father had a great sense of public service and, although he never revealed his political views to me until after he retired, he deliberately used to take me round to the housing and the hospitals. So my interest came from what I saw and my father's commitment to improving those conditions.'

In the 1945 election Bill Rodgers actually supported the Liberal candidate in Toxteth East because he thought he was the best man for the job. That may have been so but sadly Professor Lion Blease, as he was apparently named, only mustered 6,000 votes.

'It was a great lesson about the importance or not of candidates', he says. 'After the election I wrote to all the parties and then decided to join the Labour Party.'

Educated at Quarry Bank school, from which he takes the title of his peerage, he went to Oxford in the late '40s and began to be politically active, although he did not see himself as inevitably going into politics. 'I actually wanted to become a journalist,' he says, 'and when I'd finished at Oxford I badly needed a job. I applied for two, one with the *Liverpool Daily Post* as a trainee, the other with the Fabian Society. I really wanted the Liverpool job but they took so long to make up their minds I took the Fabian Society offer instead.' And he stayed there for the next nine years, a number of them as the

Society's youngest-ever General Secretary.

He was not very happy with the Labour Party of the '50s. 'It was in a mess. After the 1945–51 government had done its work it ran out of ideas. There was a serious split between the consolidators under Herbert Morrison and the traditional left under Aneurin Bevan. Although in some ways I preferred the left, I thought they were off the point, particularly about nationalisation. I did not think we should immediately be nationalising cement, sugar and so on. It was a nonsense. That view gradually became more and more developed within the party, although it really took from 1959 to Blair before it the change came in full. I think the Labour governments in between managed well and did some good things, particularly Roy Jenkins, but there was not really a coherent view of what we were about.'

Bill Rodgers was a founder member of the Campaign for Democratic Socialism and in the early '60s was a strong supporter of Labour leader Hugh Gaitskell in his attempts to rid the party of its anti-nuclear stance on defence and its 'Clause Four' commitment to nationalisation. 'I didn't agree with Hugh's opposition to Europe but I think he would have come round, and, had he lived, we might have seen a significant change in the party and a more convincing alternative to the Tories. He would have been an outstanding prime minister and more successful than Wilson', he believes.

'Wilson wasted those first eighteen months after '64,' he says. 'He was waiting for the moment to get a big majority, so we never dealt with the crisis that was coming. I don't think he was a good prime minister. He did not always tell the truth. His strength was that he was a good picker of people: Roy Jenkins instead of Antony Crosland for Home Secretary and then Chancellor, for example.'

For a moment Bill Rodgers philosophises about his approach to politics. 'The phrase used to be that "you can't have socialism without taxation". Forget the word "socialism" but my view then, and still is, that you don't get a fair and just society unless you are prepared to pay for it. So I remain one of those who still thinks that, if you want better public services, you have to be prepared to pay for them through taxation.'

Although in the '50s he had been lukewarm about the concept of Europe, he attributes his subsequent enthusiasm to what he sees as the final collapse of British independent influence after Suez, and Europe was part of his platform when he first stood unsuccessfully in a by-election in 1957.

His second by-election, which older Liberals remember better, was at Stockton-on-Tees in Orpington year, 1962. Rodgers eventually won with a majority of 7,000 over the Tories but only after Prime Minister Macmillan had paid his first ever visit to a by-election, to ward off the Liberal challenge. He just kept the Tories in second place. What did Bill Rodgers think of the Liberals of those days?

'A lot of them booed me at my by-election but I liked them', he says, 'even if I did not take them very seriously. But, when I came into the House, I developed a great respect for Jo Grimond and listened to his speeches very seriously. They were thoughtful, reflective and right, although they did not always seem to get to grips with the rough, tough brutality of questions. At least that was what I thought. I also had a lot of time for Eric Lubbock.'

Bill Rodgers makes it pretty clear that he was never a Harold Wilson man, and he obviously responded well to Wilson's rival George Brown, for whom he later worked as a junior minister.

His ministerial career covered all the major departments except education, and included being Secretary of State for Transport in the mid-70s. He claims that his first job, under George Brown at the Department for Economic Affairs, gave him the most satisfaction and, interestingly, that working with Roy Jenkins at the Treasury was the least rewarding. 'For all George's short-comings it was very exciting all the time. I got on with him and learned a huge amount, and when I moved with him to the Foreign Office, I learned a lot more', he says.

My view then, and still is, that you don't get a fair and just society unless you are prepared to pay for it. So I remain one of those who still thinks that, if you want better public services, you have to be prepared to pay for them through taxation.

'Roy Jenkins had given me my Fabian Society job and we always got on very well', he says. 'He was like an elder brother. I don't know whether we were of like mind. He was much more liberal and tolerant than I was, and fastidious. That's probably a strength. I am not sure what he meant when he referred in your last interview[1] to my Morrisonian tendencies, but I suppose that almost from the beginning he had been moving to a more liberal form of social democracy, whereas I was much more mainstream, rigid and probably more boring. But working for Roy at the Treasury was less exciting. His style was very different from what I was accustomed to and perhaps being a close friend did not make it easier.

In the 1974–79 parliament, Rodgers was a junior minister at Defence for two and a half years, joining the cabinet as Secretary of State for Transport in 1976. 'With the exception of Ernie Marples and Barbara Castle very few people have made much of an impact in that job. The timescales are too long and you need a particular sort of personality to get anywhere.' During this period, there was a very real threat that the government would lose its majority in a vote of confidence. This brought Bill Rodgers once again face to face with the Liberal Party.

'Oh yes, I remember that well. Peter Jenkins of the *Guardian* rang me and said that David Steel wanted to talk to Jim Callaghan, which I thought was interesting. So I spoke to David and then told Jim what he had in mind (a possible pact). Jim said he would be happy to talk. They did and the Pact, which I voted for, was the result. Over the period of the Pact I dealt with David Penhaligon on transport. He was quite different from me in style and approach but we did find a good deal of common ground. In fact I think Liberal influence was generally much greater during the Pact than most Liberals supposed.'

Rodgers and Steel did not renew their communications prior to the formation of the SDP. 'David tried but I didn't want to. I think he was hoping that I might join up with Roy in some fourth party. I did not want to discuss it. I wanted to keep my head clear to decide which way to go. I didn't want to compromise the possibility of bringing others with me into any new venture.'

When he and the rest of the 'Gang' formed the SDP, did he see the SDP as filling a gap in alliance with the Liberal Party or as standing on its own? 'I saw it as two parties in parallel until there was natural convergence. That's why I said at our launch that our two parties should divide the seats equally. That went down very badly with Social Democrats like David Owen and Mike Thomas, who wanted to fight all the seats, but equally badly with most of the Liberal Party. That's why I had no choice but to play the hard man in holding the line. I was very tough. In the SDP we knew what we were doing. We had worked it out carefully and we were startled to find that the Liberals hadn't done the same.'

Getting used to the Liberal way doing things obviously caused Bill Rodgers some problems, but his determination to see the negotiations through successfully apparently had the effect of convincing David Owen that he was a man more after his own heart than Roy Jenkins or Shirley Williams. Owen was to be proved dramatically wrong a few years later.

'Do you remember those difficult discussions between the parties about defence in 1985?' Bill Rodgers asks. 'I had had a lot of experience of defence issues and when we had that joint commission to decide the Alliance's approach to the replacement of Polaris by Trident (effectively an agreement that the life left in Polaris meant that no firm policy decision need yet be made), Owen became very angry with me. He regarded me as having let him down. He was angry with Shirley too but I had to be punished and he was ruthless about it. It was like a Star Chamber approach in a specially convened party committee, with Bob Maclennan throwing the first stone. After that I don't think David and I spoke to each other again for many years.'

Like Roy Jenkins, Bill Rodgers has welcomed the changes in the Labour Party and attributes them in great measure to the success of the Liberal Democrats.

All involved in the Alliance in the early '80s try to pinpoint why it did not quite break through. Apart from the frequently acknowledged political effect of the Falklands victory, Bill Rodgers also blames the Darlington by-election that followed Simon Hughes' win at Bermondsey. 'We should have won that too but we had a candidate who was not up to the spotlight of a by-election and the press took full advantage of it. If we had won, it might have made a huge difference. In general we also underestimated the strength of Labour voters' loyalty to their party.'

After the 1983 election Rodgers saw an eventual merger of the Liberals and the SDP as right and inevitable. 'On the night of the 1987 election I remember saying on late-night television that merger must now come as quickly as possible. In the event we took too long. We had a lot of problems in the SDP with our 60/40 split vote. We were not able to deliver to the Liberal Party as we should have done and that put things back initially for the merged party, but after that I think our joint party has been a remarkable achievement. A lot of credit goes to Paddy Ashdown for our climb back. I think few people around the world would have expected our result in '97, whereas now, wherever you go, we are totally recognised as a significant third party. We've even got PR after all those years of Liberal campaigning.'

Like Roy Jenkins, Bill Rodgers has welcomed the changes in the Labour Party and attributes them in great measure to the success of the Liberal Democrats. He also admits to an admiration for Tony Blair. 'I am not a wholly one-party man. I am capable of recognising worth in other parties. There is now a new Labour Party that is nothing to do with the old Labour Party. Tony Blair may have many faults but I am prepared to ask whether we could have a better Labour leader than he is now.'

So where are the Liberal Democrats in the political spectrum of today? 'It's a difficult question but to me the essential essence of what the Lib Dems are is a party that gives priority to the public services and the will to pay for them, is concerned about the elimination of poverty and greed – in fact is concerned about the liberal nature of our society and its quality. It's not really about left, right or centre. It's about what you believe in.'

We concluded with the issue of the day – Iraq. Bill Rodgers sees himself as more of a hawk than the party as a whole but, like most other people, is relieved to see a relatively quick and successful end to the hostilities. He does not see the unilateral action by Britain and the US as setting a precedent for future action. 'Each occasion has to be looked at carefully and separately', he says.

Having suffered a stroke a few years ago, after three and a half years as a firm and successful leader of the party in the Lords, he has had to withdraw from very active politics. Nevertheless he still attends the Lords, and the remarkable recovery he has made suggests that he still has plenty more to contribute to life in some capacity. He may have had to play the hard man occasionally but his heart is still firmly in the right place.

A shorter version of this interview was first published in Liberal Democrat News *in May 2003.*

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1 See *Journal of Liberal History* 38 (spring 2003), pp. 6–10.

REPORTS

The Liberal Party and general elections since 1945

Evening meeting report, February 2003, with David Butler and Neil Stockley

Report by **David Cloke**

February's meeting after the AGM, ably chaired by the Liberal Democrats' Director of Campaigns and Elections, Chris Rennard, provided two quite different perspectives on the Liberal Party's approach to campaigning in general elections. Taken together, they marked the gradual development of party organisation and campaigning during general elections and also highlighted common themes and problems. David Butler, through both his direct personal experience and also through interviews with most, if not all, the key players of the period, provided illuminating vignettes of the campaigns. He decided not to cover the Alliance years because of the large number of notes made and because it was 'a confused time'. Neil Stockley, a former Director of Policy charged with producing the party's 1997 manifesto, investigated the Liberal Party's manifestos and their effectiveness as campaigning tools.

David Butler, described by Lord Rennard as the foremost walking encyclopaedia of British politics, started by announcing that he went back to the last time but one when the Liberals brought down a government. In October 1924 his grandfather was the Liberal candidate for London University. However, as he was on a lecture tour in America when the general election was called, and was unable to get back, his daughter, Butler's mother, ran the campaign on behalf of her father in the months before Butler himself. Perhaps, as Butler himself mused, this explains his life-long interest in elections.

The first party conference Butler attended was the Liberal Assembly in Hastings in October 1949. At that period he had a sense of talking to people who had been brilliant young men in 1906, or who were the sons of those brilliant young men, and who were looking back fondly to that time. The 1950 general election was the first that he watched closely and, in his view, was a turning point in Liberal history. The party felt that it should make a big effort and so fielded 475 candidates, resulting in 350 lost deposits. The chant that the 'Liberal candidate lost his deposit' very much got through to the electorate. As indicated in Butler's useful handout, the party's total vote actually rose compared to 1945, though this was entirely due to the substantial increase in candidates, and the vote per candidate fell from 18.6 per cent to 11.6 per cent, the lowest figure in the post-war era. Perhaps not surprisingly, the number of candidates in the 1951 and 1955 general elections fell to 109 and 110 respectively. As Butler pointed out, with the party receiving barely over 2 per cent of the vote, the prevailing assumption was that it was the end of the road for the Liberals and that they should turn into a debating society.

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A new world

Then in 1959, according to Butler, the world changed fundamentally. It was the most important election in his lifetime in terms of changing the nature of elections through the use of opinion polls and press conferences and with the presence of competitive television due to the arrival of ITV. Until then the BBC had not ensured that it maintained its neutrality when it reported on campaigns. The year 1959 also marked a change in general election research. In 1959 Butler began his series of interviews with almost all the people at the centre of the political battle. His work now stretches to six yards of interview notes, including rather electric interviews with party leaders. Extracts from these notes were a key feature of the remainder of his talk, though he acknowledged that their 'off the record' status made it difficult to put all that was said into the public domain.

According to Butler, Herbert Harris (who ran the Liberals' 1959 campaign) regarded the 1959 election as a success. Its twin purposes had been to project Jo Grimond and the case for a stronger opposition than Labour was capable of. There had been a full canvass in half a dozen rural seats and the number of full-time agents had risen from eighteen in 1955 to thirty in 1959. However, the Torquay conference had been an absolute disaster and was seen as a shambles by the press. It was also a snag that Grimond sat for such a distant constituency. At this time the party was being run on £24,000 a year.

Butler then reported on a number of interviews with Jo Grimond. His strategy had been to persuade people of a liberal inclination that Liberal votes would be effective, if only for their impact on the other parties. Grimond felt that this was easier to do when it was clear which of the other parties was going to win. Another problem was that many in the party expected it to behave in every respect as if it were a major party – which took up a lot of time, energy and money, most of which was wasted. During the subsequent Orpington period, Butler stated that Grimond's aim had been to make the party more serious intellectually. He had argued, however, that there were not enough brains in the new recruits.

Speaking to Grimond in 1966 – when the party budget had risen to £106,000 a year – Butler learned that he was of the view that the Liberals had no option but to fight a two-handed fight, which was extremely difficult. This, Butler maintained, was to be a common theme through to the Chard speech in 1992.

The Thorpe leadership

In 1969 Butler spoke to Pratap Chitnis, the head of the Liberal Party Organisation. Chitnis reported that all the MPs were agreed that Jeremy Thorpe was a disaster and that there were suggestions that Byers should lead the party from outside, with only a chairman in the Commons. He had argued that the Liberals needed an intellectual as leader who could formulate ideas and rally people behind him. Chitnis felt that since 1966 the Liberals had been in the wrong position and with the wrong leader. Thorpe was seen as an 'organisation man', thinking about life peerages and the like and not about policy: Richard Wainwright would have been much better.

Butler's discussions with Lord Avebury in 1974 revealed that it was felt that the February 1974 election was very much Thorpe's own campaign. Thorpe had allocated campaign tasks to Avebury, Byers, Lloyd of Kilgerran and Beaumont, but after this very little had happened apart from the briefing of candidates: they did not meet formally during the course of the campaign. Thorpe decided the main campaign tactics on his own and managed the campaign very smoothly. Avebury did not believe that things could have been done better within the available budget. However, some in the campaign had wanted Thorpe to declare that a Liberal government was possible. It was felt that, by failing to do so, Thorpe allowed it to be inferred that the party was trying to achieve a balance of power situation, which was not, in fact, the case.

Speaking to Thorpe in April 1974 Butler learned that he had believed in the largest possible front and that fielding over 500 candidates was a major achievement (it was the largest number since 1950). He felt that there were advantages to fighting the campaign from Barnstaple, with much better television footage arising from walkabouts in his own constituency than Wilson could achieve in strange territory. Butler had noted at the time that Thorpe was a 'very complacent and secure man … very sure of his own role.'

Interviewing David Steel after the two 1974 general elections, Butler learned that Steel was of the view that the Liberals, as the begetter of the coalition idea, should have been publicised more and that Wilson should have been attacked for refusing to take part in a government of national unity. He also felt that hovercraft and helicopters had been used too much and that they had been seen as gimmicky, especially by the BBC, whose coverage was a cause of genuine grievance amongst party members. Steel felt that there had been a shortage of political direction during the second 1974 election. The expensive TV link to Thorpe's North Devon constituency had been of limited value this time, being largely devoted to his daily press conference.

In the middle of campaign for the October general election, Butler's colleague Dennis Kavanagh spoke to the former MP Arthur Holt, who had done much for the party after he left the Commons. He felt that Liberal plans were going much as expected despite the fact that he did not know what was going on. The party had failed to create situations and he didn't believe they could go much further on the basis of the style and appeals projected during the February campaign.

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John Pardoe shared Steel's view that journalists had seen the use of hovercraft as gimmicky and had failed to report on the substance of Thorpe's speeches. He was critical of Thorpe's leadership during the inter-election period: Thorpe was an organisation man, yet needed to be giving speeches on ideas. Pardoe had also believed in a full slate of candidates, which would enhance the national vote, although some candidates had not been aware of the consequences of fighting in central Glasgow and similar constituencies.

A 'backroom boy' speaking during the 1979 campaign reported that the committee at the centre certainly influenced day-to-day tactics but had not dealt with larger strategy matters. Steel did not have a press officer accompanying him and the central advisers could only contact him via Archy Kirkwood. At the centre the people who counted were Gryff Evans and Geoff Tordoff: they dealt with crises as they arose and with the last-minute increase in candidates. Elaborate plans drawn up in the preceding year had all more or less collapsed, but, despite two-thirds fewer staff than in 1974, most people had felt that the campaign was more efficient.

Speaking about the 1979 campaign, Richard Holme had said that Steel was to have been projected as the candidate for Liberalism: the leader was the candidate in virtually every constituency. Holme claimed that they had followed through on that strategy. Despite little movement in the polls early on, morale in the constituencies had remained high.

Ashdown's inheritance

Turning to the post-Alliance period, Butler reported that, at a seminar before the 1992 election, Paddy Ashdown had said that he was astonished when he took over the leadership quite how decayed the party was. He had acknowledged that this could not be remedied quickly and that the forthcoming election was not remotely winnable: instead, he had a long-term goal. The party had by then built up its finances and had a firm base of around 10 per cent amongst the electorate. It was impressive that it had not been more squeezed in by-elections. Ashdown had stressed the balancing act he had had to undertake, illustrating this with an opinion poll that had shown that 29 per cent of Liberal Democrat supporters had wanted the party to join a coalition with the Conservatives and the same number had wanted one with Labour. He had consistently stressed the importance of getting the Conservatives out and, in Butler's view, quite recklessly stated that he would be prepared to force a second general election if either of the parties refused to accept his conditions for a four-year deal.

Interviewed after the 1992 election, Ashdown said that the campaign had been technically the best he had seen or heard about. There had been some backbiting about him being on television too much, but this had been unavoidable as the press would not listen to any other spokesman. He felt, however, that the Liberal rallies had been over-hyped. Meanwhile, Des Wilson reported that he had been surprised that the interventionist Ashdown had stood back during the election and kept to his deal not to interfere. The party had shown great discipline and there had been no problems: the campaign had come through with clarity. Wilson had been very proud of his 'My Vote' slogan.

In 1997 Ashdown had reported that he knew that he was going to do very well the week before the election. Richard Holme, who, according to Ashdown, had been brilliant at running the campaign, had said that he had been afraid to tell him how well he was doing at that point. The messages they were trying to get through were doing so and undecided voters were coming over. He felt that it had been very important that he had managed to avoid questions on hung parliaments as a result of his Chard speech in 1992: the party could say its own thing and target its own voters, not be knocked off-message by Conservatives or Labour. They had done well because they had front-loaded their expenditure, investing in their key seats over eighteen months. Holme had said that they had stuck to their campaign war book and got good coverage. By 2001, the Liberal Democrats were so much more professional, according to Chris Rennard, that they did not need to import a full-time campaign manager. However, he noted that it was a limitation that Charles Kennedy was the only really big-hitter.

In summary, Butler declared that he would not have dreamed, except in the first flush of the Alliance, that he would live to see the Liberal Party with fifty MPs, almost as many as it had in 1929. The party aspirations mentioned to him down the years came true in 1997 and 2001, where the campaigns had made a quantum leap forward from the rather random operations noted earlier. In part this could not have been done without the new technologies, and all the parties had moved in this direction. However, most informed observers had rated the Liberal Democrats' central campaign the best in 2001 and this, Butler felt, was thanks to Chris Rennard.

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The role of the manifesto

Neil Stockley started by discussing the role that the manifestos played in British election campaigns. Few people, apart from party activists, interest groups and journalists in the elite media read them. But, for all parties, manifestos provide an accessible statement of their campaign themes and help answer the question 'Why vote for us?' If a campaign was a war, they might be seen as providing the ammunition. For the opposition party, the theme was essentially 'it's time for a change' and the manifesto sets out what changes it will make and why it will be better. The governing party's theme is always 'we deserve more time', with its manifesto promising 'more of the same'.

At no stage did the post-war Liberal Party have any real chance of becoming the government or even the opposition. But it still needed a way of appealing to the electorate. Like all third parties, its basic theme was 'the government has failed but you can't trust the others either' or 'a plague on both their houses'. In more positive terms, it sought greater political influence, either to act as a vehicle for change, or to act as a brake on the excesses of the major parties, or a combination of both. Therefore, Stockley suggested, the role of the manifesto was to show voters the difference that having more Liberal MPs would make. However, he argued that the experience of the years before 1945 showed that the party needed a clear strategy and a theme that the electorate could understand and relate to. This had to be backed by clear policies that were distinctive, popular and relevant to the campaign. He then backed this up with a number of case studies from 1945 to 1974.

The first was the 1945 manifesto, which, Stockley claimed, was essentially a socialist blueprint for Britain, with a bold tone and strong commitments to social security and full employment. It was a radical document, very much of its time and based h on the Beveridge Report. However, the party was not united on its strategy – to recruit dissident Conservatives who did not believe that Churchill and his colleagues could be trusted to implement the Beveridge proposals. Indeed, the leader, Sir Archibald Sinclair, fought the election on free trade and 'individualist' values. Not surprisingly the Liberal campaign failed, not least because, with so few candidates, the party's attempt to be the agent of change was not credible. Labour had now assumed that mantle.

in 1964 'The Times' credited the party with having the best policy programme.

The next example was 1955, when the party faced very similar problems but in a very different context. With just six MPs, the party could not claim to be a contender for government. So its campaign theme was very much 'a plague on both their houses': the Liberals promised to act as a c on the other parties, which, it argued, were too class-based to promote the national interest. But this was difficult to sustain in a more prosperous, tranquil time. The advent of 'Butskellism' – the broad political consensus about using demand management to keep employment levels up while gradually freeing up the economy – left the middle ground very crowded. To Stockley, the Liberal manifesto, *Crisis Unresolved,* was the worst document of its type he had came across: it was hard to define what it meant in practice, it had few original ideas and was scared to depart from the consensus. What the 1955 campaign showed, he argued, was that the protest vote strategy could only work if one or both of the major parties was very unpopular or perceived as 'extremist' or irrelevant.

Grimond – the policy impresario

The party's problems with strategies and messages seemed to be solved in the Grimond years. By 1964, Grimond, whom Stockley dubbed a 'policy impresario', wanted the Liberals to campaign as agents of change. He had a clear long-term strategy: to instigate a realignment of the left, with the Liberals at the heart of a new grouping that would embrace the progressive elements in Britain. In the interim it was to gain more influence for the Liberal Party.

Stockley showed how Britain in the early 1960s seemed a more conducive environment for a protest vote strategy. Its mood was very much that of a stagnant, more anxious society. The Liberals charged the major parties with ignoring the real problems that Britain faced because they were too bogged down in dogma. Labour was too complacent and too dominated by trade unions and the Tory Government too hidebound to modernise Britain.

The Liberals were convinced that disillusioned voters would support their policies and ran a very policy-based campaign aimed at 'new progressive' voters. Stockley recounted how their 1964 manifesto promised greater use of technology in industry, employee participation in company decisions, cuts in income tax, higher spending on education (a theme that continues today) and the pursuit of membership of the EEC. More than before, Liberal candidates picked up on the manifesto themes. (Stockley added that from today's perspective the document sounded very corporatist, with its talk of a 'national plan for economic growth' supported by an centralised incomes policy.)

Although the Liberals won 11.2 per cent of the vote and returned nine MPs in 1964, Stockley did not believe that the manifesto and the campaign that grew from it were a success, at least in the way that Grimond intended them to be. With Harold Wilson promising 'the white heat of technology' and the Conservatives trying to join the EEC, the Liberal message was not unique by the time the campaign started. The other parties – especially Labour – seemed to have captured the 'new progressives'. The Liberal Party was unclear exactly who (or where) these voters were and so any appeal to them was based on what the strategists *thought* they were interested in. Stockley showed that in general the electorate was more concerned with cost-of-living issues and any successes largely came about because of disenchantment with the Conservatives and, to a lesser extent, with Labour.

Did that mean producing a detailed manifesto was a waste of time? No. Stockley pointed out that the Liberal manifestos of the period usually attracted favourable media comment. (For example, in 1964 *The Times* credited the party with having the best policy programme.) This may have helped build the party's credibility and its 'classless' and 'moderate' image. Indeed, in 1964, the Liberals scored their best electoral swings in London, Kent, Surrey and Sussex and trebled their vote amongst the professional upper and upper middle classes and the white-collar occupational groups. And they picked up three seats in the Scottish Highlands and did very well in the English regions. One of the Party's main planks was a range of development policies for those parts of the country that were left out of post-war economic growth. In other words policy messages, if not the manifesto itself, may have helped the Liberals to win seats.

Liberal high point: 1974

February 1974 was the Liberal Party's most successful post-war campaign. The election was tailor-made for a third-party protest vote strategy. Having presided over a deteriorating economic and industrial situation, Edward Heath's Conservative Government was very unpopular. Locked in a bitter dispute with the miners over incomes policy, Heath called a snap election to win a fresh mandate. But a divided Labour Party had begun its first lurch to the left. For the Liberals, Jeremy Thorpe attacked the sectional stances of the major parties and called for national unity and an end to confrontation.

Stockley showed how the party's manifesto played a major role in reinforcing these themes. To keep inflation in check, it called for a statutory wages and prices policy and a special surcharge on employers. The manifesto also reprised familiar policies from the Grimond era, such as employee participation in companies, to help smooth over workplace disharmony. The elite media, such as the *Financial Times*, praised the Liberal programme. As well as having an appealing theme, Thorpe and his party were able to pick up and run with a credible alternative programme. During the course of the campaign Liberal support trebled, reaching over 20 per cent in some polls.

In addition to a certain amount of luck, the Liberal Party at last seemed to have its policy and its strategic houses in order. But Stockley concluded by pointing out two major ironies. When Wilson called a new election for October 1974, the Liberals largely re-used their February manifesto. With a strong showing in February and still achieving more than 20 per cent support in the polls, they were now much more relevant than at any time for a generation. Yet the Liberal manifesto still offered no answer to the most important question the party would face: with whom and on what terms would the party take part in a coalition? (Or, on what basis would it decide?)

Second, the Liberals had now succeeded in striking a popular chord. They had some distinctive policy ammunition with which to fight their campaign. But they were really promising to maintain the economic status quo and preserve the post-war consensus. Far from offering a radical departure, the Liberals were appealing to 'small-c conservatism' in an increasingly anxious electorate. And, he asked, could anyone say that the policies they offered to tackle inflation and right the economy, were really 'liberal'?

The meeting provided a lively and interesting canvass of the c challenges facing Liberal and Liberal Democrat campaigns. A great deal had changed with the advent of television and the internet. The constant difficulties were the need to overcome the fatal 'wasted vote' argument and the Liberals' sheer lack of resources compared to the funding, personnel and technology available to the Conservative and Labour parties. The importance of having a credible, effective communicator as leader cannot be overstated; neither can the need for a distinctive, relevant and clear campaign message. And it seems to have been only in very recent times that Lib Dem campaigns have assembled all the pieces of this multi-dimensional jigsaw and given the party its strongest voice.

Far from offering a radical departure, the Liberals were appealing to 'small-c conservatism' in an increasingly anxious electorate.

The Fall of the Lloyd George Coalition

Evening meeting (joint with the Conservative History Group), July 2003, with Margaret Macmillan, Andrew Thorpe, John Barnes and Stuart Ball

Report by **Graham Lippiatt**

It is always fascinating to hear historians talk about history. Introducing the meeting, the Conservative MP for Mid Norfolk, Keith Simpson, who is also Chairman of the Conservative History Group, reminded us that Arthur Balfour is reputed to have said that 'history does not repeat itself, historians repeat each other'. What we were about to hear, however, was four different interpretations of the reasons for the downfall of the last Liberal prime minister.

David Lloyd George became prime minister in December 1916. There had been a Liberal-Conservative coalition in office under Asquith since May 1915, but doubts over the prosecution of the First World War produced dissatisfaction on both Liberal and Unionist benches. As A. J. P. Taylor pointed out, 'Bonar Law could destroy the [Asquith] Coalition. What would be its successor?'[1] There was no longer enough support among the Tories to sustain an Asquith government but nor was there sufficient support among Liberal rebels to put in an administration led by Austen Chamberlain or Bonar Law. Lloyd George saw to it that he emerged as the only candidate who could keep the Coalition together, keep the increasingly influential Labour Party on board and convince the backbenchers that he was the man who could win the war.

If the influence of Andrew Bonar Law was crucial to the rise of Lloyd George, it was equally central to his fall from office six years later. In October 1922 the Conservatives met at the Carlton Club to decide whether the party should continue to support the Coalition. With Bonar Law's backing they voted to pull out of the government. Lloyd George resigned three hours after the vote, and, at the general election that followed soon after, the Conservatives won a majority of over 100 seats. Bonar Law became prime minister. Neither Lloyd George nor the Liberal Party were ever to return to office again.

As the chairman explained, it had been hoped to hold this joint meeting at the Carlton Club itself but they were unable to make a room available. In any event, it would not have been the actual building in which the famous meeting took place, so what better location for our seminar than the Lloyd George Room at the National Liberal Club?

Our first speaker was Margaret Macmillan, Professor of History at the University ofToronto and author of the prize-winning book about the Paris Peace Conference of 1919, *Peacemakers:The Paris Peace Conference of 1919 and Its Attempt to End War.* Professor Macmillan opened by making some remarks about the uses of history and its potential to act as a key to understanding the present and to raise interesting parallels and questions.The period at the end of the First World War, Professor Macmillan believed, was vital to understand if we are to make sense of the world today. Her intention was therefore to describe the international situation between the end of the war and October 1922 and so set the context for the fall of the Coalition.

From left: Andrew Thorpe, Margaret Macmillan, Keith Simpson MP, Stuart Ball, John Barnes (Photo: Martin Ball)

Why did the Coalition fall?

But first, in asking why the Coalition failed, the easy answer was that coalitions usually do.They have been put together by people in disparate groupings for their own purposes and at a certain point they run out of steam. Professor Macmillan identified the various factors that made the Coalition work in the first place and that then contributed to its failure.The first thing was the times themselves. It is difficult from the perspective of the present day to imagine what it must have been like to live in those days at the end of the Great War. It was a time when people in Europe, in Britain and to a lesser extent in North America felt that the very foundations of their world had been shaken.As Bolshevism spread from Russia and appeared to be taking root elsewhere, as empires fell and political, economic and social structures were turned upside down, there was a feeling that the world was in a process of being remade, cut adrift from its moorings, and no one was entirely certain what was going to happen next.This made for a very dangerous but also a very exciting period.There was also an optimism that the world could be turning into a better place and that the tremendous sacrifices of the First World War must mean something.

These pressures at first consolidated and sustained the Lloyd George Coalition.Just as Woodrow Wilson was acclaimed in Europe for trying to build a new type of international relations, domestically there was a feeling that perhaps a new type of politics could be emerging. This was based on more than a fear of Bolshevism or revolution; it was based on a feeling that the war had meant something and that 'something' included the fact that the old ways of doing things did not work. Lloyd George and some of those close to him in the Coalition sensed this themselves and there was some discussion about forming a new centre party. Indeed, there was talk of t both before the coupon election of 1918 and again in 1921. Professor Macmillan thought that this represented more than just cynicism or an effort by Lloyd George and friends to hold on to power. It was picking up on a more general attitude – one that cut through all sections of society and from right to left across the political spectrum – that new structures and institutions were needed to address the problems of the post-war world, economically, socially and in international affairs.

There was also a very strong feeling that David Lloyd George was the man who could do it. He was the man who had won the war, something that was recognised and appreciated across the whole of society. He was perceived as someone who had introduced new ways of doing things, new styles of administration – he ran a great deal out of his own office, including key areas of foreign policy – and people believed he was going to use this new approach to be the man to win the peace. It was both this belief in the stature and personality of Lloyd George, and the fit between his approach and style and the needs of the times, which w the Coalition the 1918 election and sustained it through the immediate aftermath of the war. In the longer run, however, the same factors would serve to pull the Coalition apart and cause it and Lloyd George to fall.

As the Paris Peace Conference failed to settle some of the major problems in Europe and within international relations, there set in a sense of disillusionment. The new ways of doing things were not working either. Professor Macmillan's view was that the Conference and the resulting Treaty of Versailles attempted to shape a world which at that time simply could not be shaped. The international situation did not lend itself to the construction of a lasting peace. There were too many unresolved issues. The new states emerging in central and eastern Europe, often in conflict with one another, were very difficult to accommodate in the European system. The new Soviet Union showed very little interest in participating in the normal system of states. Germany was highly resentful about the way in which it lost the war and could not come to terms with any peace settlement. In Professor Macmillan's opinion, the Treaty of Versailles was not as harsh as it has been painted – either later or as it was at the time by J. M. Keynes. But that was not reflected in contemporary feeling, and what people feel, and what they think as a result, is perhaps more important politically than the truth.

As the early 1920s wore on, there continued to be problems and Lloyd George did not seem to be able to deal with them. In a way he brought this on himself. He conducted a very personal sort of diplomacy. He loved going to conferences and his personal success and failure was identified very much with the success or failure of these international events. In particular, Lloyd George failed to settle the reparations issue, the question of how much Germany should pay in compensation for the war. Also unresolved was the question of Turkey and the Middle East. Lloyd George was widely seen as the man who had encouraged the Greek policy of seeking a presence in what became modern Turkey and when that went wrong, in particular over the Chanak crisis, he was blamed for it.

He tried to bring Germany and Soviet Russia back into the system of states, but his failure to make progress on this at the Genoa Conference of February 1922 was seen by many as evidence that the Coalition was not working. Lloyd George's personality was increasingly seen as autocratic rather than radical and he also seemed to be running out of steam, tired and unwilling to appear in the House of Commons. So, in conclusion, Professor Macmillan's view was that the factors that had helped Lloyd George in the first place – the idea that there was a new world order and he was the man to shape it – were by 1922 all seen as working against him, and caused the Coalition to fall apart.

Impact on the Liberals

The next speaker was Andrew Thorpe, senior lecturer in history at Exeter University and an authority on British politics between the wars. Thorpe's focus was on the impact of the fall of the Coalition on the Liberal Party and its development over the following years. The Coalition has been seen by many Liberals, both at the time and since, as a rather dark period in the history of British liberalism, unable to be forgotten or, for many, forgiven. The manner of the formation of the Coalition in December 1916, the decision to fight a general election in 1918 as a coalition, and the continuance of the Coalition through four years of peacetime, during which the split in the Liberal Party was intensified and consolidated – all of these factors created a situation in which Liberals felt deeply ill at ease and this discomfort took the form of disappointment with Lloyd George himself.

Many Liberals were delighted to see Lloyd George brought down in October 1922, yet paradoxically the fall of the Coalition presented the Liberal Party with a huge and ultimately insuperable problem.

Thorpe quoted from the book *Mr Lloyd George and Liberalism* by J. M. Robertson, an Asquithian Liberal, published in 1923: 'Liberal leaders are to be chosen for right sagacity, for right judgment, for self-control, for rectitude, for political science and these qualifications Mr George lacks. To lack them, when all is said, is to lack the character needed in a political leader. And in a comprehensive sense it may justly be said that there is an insurmountable objection to him as a leader, at least for Liberals. With Conservatives indeed, it is otherwise.'

Many Liberals were delighted to see Lloyd George brought down in October 1922, yet paradoxically the fall of the Coalition presented the Liberal Party with a huge and ultimately insuperable problem. What Thorpe then suggested was that, in many ways, it might have been better if fusion between the Coalition Liberals and the Conservative Party taken place, as some had hoped would happen in 1920. This would have left the remaining Liberals to plot their own course, independent of the taint both of Lloyd George and of coalitionism, which in reality followed it after 1922. Thorpe argued that the fall of the Coalition has been seen as bringing the Liberal Party real benefits. These included a strengthening of personnel, stronger party organisation, better policy and strategy. His own view, however, was that, on balance, the Liberal Party did not benefit from reunion post-1922.

As regards personnel, apart from Lloyd George himself, most of the Coalition Liberals who came back to the party were fairly undistinguished. The other prominent Coalition Liberal was, of course, Churchill, but he lost his seat in Dundee in 1922, was out of Parliament for two years and then returned as a Conservative, being made Chancellor of the Exchequer by Baldwin. Although he was a towering figure, Lloyd George himself was such a controversial character that, even after he became leader of the reunited Liberals in 1926, many leading personalities in the party like Grey and Maclean, mostly with an Asquithian background, hurried to support the Liberal Council with the aim of getting rid of him.

In terms of party organisation, the return of Lloyd George brought one huge benefit, the Lloyd George Fund. This is the bind that the Asquithians could not get out of. Asquith himself was desperate not to reunite with Lloyd George and many of his supporters were also determined to resist reunion, but the party was very short of funds and had no obvious way of raising extra money, so the Lloyd George Fund proved irresistible. However the use of the fund soon became problematic. Firstly, Lloyd George retained personal control of the money and was chary about dispensing funds. In addition, the existence of this vast treasure chest disinclined Liberals on the ground from doing the fundraising needed to develop the organisation and its electoral capacity. This was in contrast with the Labour and Conservative Parties at this time.

When looking at policy there is no doubt that Lloyd George brought dynamism to a party which desperately needed it, and one result was the various 'coloured books' of the mid and late 1920s. But at the same time there were other ideas around in the party which would have developed without reunion, and some of the policies which were introduced under Lloyd George's influence may not have been as appropriate for the times as were thought. The forward-looking policy on unemployment that formed the core of the Liberal platform in the 1929 election was an exciting, proto-Keynesian initiative, but whether it brought much benefit to the Liberals in terms of votes at that election, or the consolidation of Liberal support is, according to Thorpe, very much open to question. It certainly enabled Baldwin and the Tories to attack the Liberals as irresponsibly radical, making promises to reduce unemployment which could not be delivered.

Thorpe's analysis of the Liberal position in the 1920s is of a stance that was increasingly misconceived. The Liberal Party was, from 1924, the third party in British politics – but a third party which still very much possessed heartland areas. There is a case for saying that the strategy of the party should have been to consolidate those areas. Instead, it continued to believe itself to be a potential party of government – an outlook that may not have been the best way forward for it – and the return of Lloyd George contributed to that ministerial mentality.

The final problem the return of Lloyd George represented for the Liberals was one of image. Although, in Thorpe's view, too much may often be made about the importance of image in politics, it was evidently the case that by 1922 Lloyd George had an image problem. There was a clear sense that both the Lloyd George Coalition and the prime minister had become sleazy and were not to be trusted. Echoing Harold Wilson's quotation that the Labour Party was a moral crusade or it was nothing, Thorpe felt that Liberals in the 1920s looked on their party in the same way as a moral, uplifting movement. The reputation of Lloyd George was damaging to that portrayal, as he was unable to present himself as a credible leader of a party with a moral purpose.

In Thorpe's view, the collapse of the Coalition brought benefits to the Liberal Party in the very short term: reunification, more money, policy ferment and a more dynamic leadership. As a result there was some achievement over the next ten years. Twice the Liberals held the balance of power in Parliament, in 1924 and 1929–31. They adopted a daring and innovative economic policy at the end of the 1920s. They got electoral reform on to the legislative agenda in 1930–31 and there was a return to office as part of the National Government when it was first formed. But these achievements were, to Thorpe, ephemeral. The return of the Lloyd George Liberals in 1922–23 forced the Liberals to put off the day of reckoning and the need to come to terms with third-party status. T thinking did not occur until a generation later, in the 1950s, and from that point onward the party effectively repositioned i to create a new type of politics and a new way forward.

Thorpe ended by reminding us that the fall of the Coalition had not been the responsibility of the Liberal Party. It was the decision of the Conservatives to end it. Yet it was the Liberals who were at the mercy of the fall-out from it.

Echoing Harold Wilson's quotation that the Labour Party was a moral crusade or it was nothing, Thorpe felt that Liberals in the 1920s looked on their party in the same way as a moral, uplifting movement. The reputation of Lloyd George was damaging to that portrayal.

The Carlton Club meeting

It was then the turn of John Barnes, editor of the *Conservative History Journal* and co-author, with Keith Middlemas, of the 1969 biography of Stanley Baldwin. Barnes also started with a reference to historiography. According to Ambrose Bierce, God cannot change the past, which is why he connives at the existence of historians. Like Macmillan and Thorpe, Barnes sought to recreate a picture of what was happening in politics in the 1920s, as people thought about the massive changes that had happened in the world and tried to canalise them into the normal channels of party politics. It was important to remember that everything was thought to be up for grabs: the Liberal Party was still recruiting new Young Liberals; the party may have been declining in a relative way, but in absolute terms there were more Liberal voters in 1929 than there had been before the First World War, or in the early 1920s.

But it was right for the Conservatives and Liberals to be worried about the electoral role of the working class, as there were few seats where the middle class amounted to more than a fifth of the electorate. Barnes saw two answers to this problem for non-Labour politicians. On the one hand, there was the solution which Lloyd George had sought to cobble together in 1918: to unite the more progressive face of Toryism, the kind of people who made up the Unionist Social Reform Group before 1914, with his own (supposedly) progressive Liberals. In the early years of the Coalition, that recipe had certain attractions. But the first thing that went wrong was an onset of panic at the economic slump, which led to a move away from social reform and towards retrenchment, epitomised by the Geddes committee on national expenditure and the 'Geddes axe'. From that moment onward the progressive voices and tariff reformers in the Conservative Party began to suspect that the Coalition was no longer the answer to containing the rising tide of organised labour. It is no accident that Leo Amery was one of the chief conspirators in bringing down the Lloyd George Coalition: he was probably the most thoughtful of the younger tariff reformers, a man who hoped to enlist recruits from the trade unions behind a broadly social-reform, tariff-reforming caucus. However Barnes re-emphasised that in the early summer of 1922, the Coalition appeared very secure. Even after the failure at Genoa there was really very little sign of trouble. Austen Chamberlain had routed the diehards in two debates in April and yet within months his own leadership of the Conservative Party was in question.

Andrew Thorpe, Margaret Macmillan and Keith Simpson MP (Photo: Martin Ball)

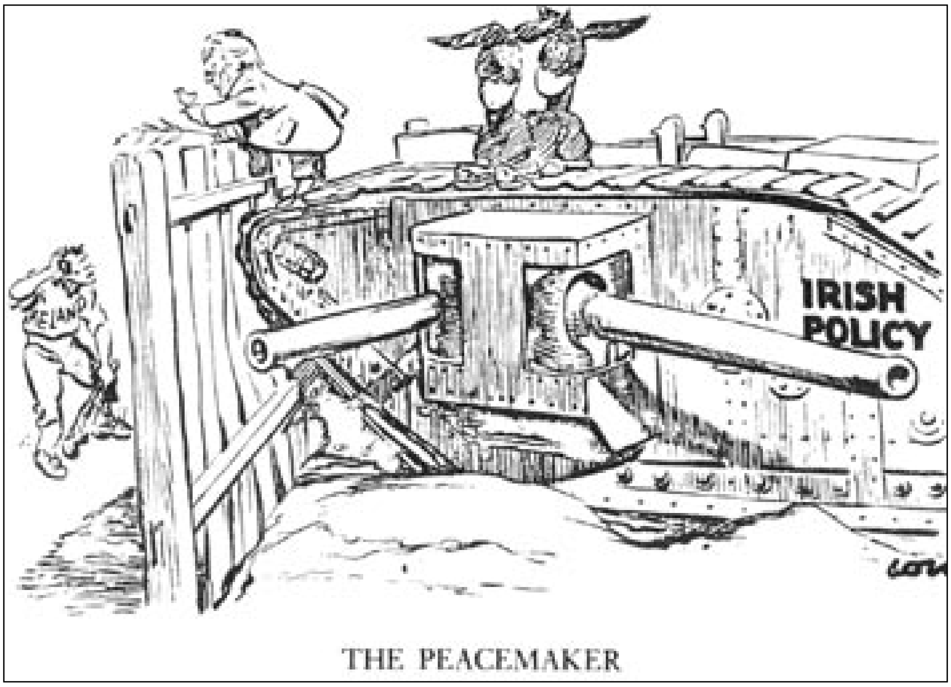
So what went wrong? Barnes identified four factors. By far the most important was the assassination of Sir Henry Wilson and the revival of violence and civil war in Ireland. It was in the aftermath of the debate on that issue in July 1922 that Baldwin and Amery (neighbours in Eaton Square) got together and decided to give the government some weeks to see if it could get its act together on Ireland, and build on Churchill's brilliant summing up in the debate during which he said that if the Irish could not settle their affairs then the British would help them to do so. Ireland is a very important theme in the history of the Coalition. Second, and following close afterwards, there was the honours scandal. Next, the diehards linked their fortunes to Lord Salisbury, probably the most prominent Unionist peer. Finally, there occurred a little-known event at the end of July, when most of the Coalition Liberals failed to vote in favour of a duty on fabric grants, the first great test of the Safeguarding of Industries Act, and the first test of the compromise that had been reached around the issue of tariff reform. But if the Coalition Liberals would not even vote for that measure, what did the protectionist Tories have to gain from remaining any longer in the Coalition?

These four events taken together were fatal to the survival of the Coalition. However, nothing happens by accident, and it must not be forgotten that the downfall of the government was engineered – and by the 'second eleven'. These were men with their political futures still ahead of them who desperately wanted to be rid of Lloyd George. They believed that they would go down to defeat at the next election, tarred by what was seen as an autocratic and sleazy government. They were fearful that Labour would make headway and they needed a progressive answer, a moral answer and a challenging answer to the onset of socialism, and they thought that Lloyd George had become a hobble around their ankles, rather than the great saviour that he had seemed in 1918. This permeated to Cabinet level and to the debate in the Tory party about whether there should be an immediate election. Curzon and Baldwin became more important, along with less well-remembered figures such as Boscawen and Peel. Curzon is reputed to have said, 'When you begin to hear the death watch beetle in the rafters, then the end of the house is nigh.' It was.

Barnes identified Stanley Baldwin as the key figure, as he was able to act as a link between the junior ministers and Cabinet colleagues. Baldwin's reaction was both moral and constitutional. He had his policy concerns over Ireland and was, Barnes maintained, a tariff reformer. He was looking for a constructive answer to socialism but he had a personal revulsion to the sleaze that was increasingly taking over the Coalition and he had worries about matters of constitutional principle, such as Lloyd George's presidential style and the way he appeared to be neglecting Parliament. After the Chanak crisis, Baldwin came back from holiday in France to a Cabinet meeting on 1 October and to a government that did not know whether war was about to break out or not. Baldwin gained the impression that he was entering an engineered international crisis, one that would allow the Coalition to go into a khaki election. At first, Baldwin thought that he might resign and walk away from it; but then the dissident ministers begin to meet, Baldwin was seized by a mood of resolution and the junior ministerial and Cabinet dissidents began to coalesce around him. Baldwin sat down with Sir Samuel Hoare and J. C. C. Davidson to go though Vachers Parliamentary companion, picking out the names of eighty Conservative MPs, chosen not for their views but for their reputations. Those MPs were then brought together. Sources conflict about how many actually met: one indicates thirty-five but Hoare himself (probably based on a diary) says seventy-four. But the upshot of the meeting was that they wanted to go to the country as an independent party and they wanted a Conservative as prime minister. They acknowledged that coalition might be inevitable but, if so, they wanted it on their terms.

It was at this stage that Austen Chamberlain badly misplayed his hand. He took things personally, felt it was a matter of honour to continue to support the government as he had pledged to do, talked about betrayal and failed to take a strategic view of the longer term interests of the Conservative Party. He took what the junior ministers and the backbenchers were saying very much as an ultimatum and felt that all their criticisms of the government and of Lloyd George were actually attacks on him. In that view he was egged on by his evil genius Birkenhead, who took the view that he knew the electorate better than the Tory dissenters and wanted them to do their worst, feeling that they could never form or lead a government.

Baldwin knew he could not bring down the Coalition, even backed by the body of opinion in the party, without there being an alternative prime minister. He also knew that he was not prominent enough to be seen as that leader and thus that, if Chamberlain and Birkenhead would not cooperate, another figure had to be identified. A crucial part of the strategy was therefore to encourage Bonar Law, who was hesitant to come back and show open disloyalty to the leadership, out of retirement. A succession of emissaries was despatched to try to tempt him and he finally allowed himself to be persuaded to come to the Carlton Club for the meeting. It is not clear whether he had made up his mind what to say, but for the rest the presence of an alternative leader was sufficient. In the end, Bonar Law made a rather confused speech. For the whole of the first part of it no one knew which way he was going to jump, but then he came down very firmly on Baldwin's side. Baldwin's own speech was described by Barnes as one of the most memorable eight minutes that have ever been delivered. As a hatchet job on Lloyd George it could not have been surpassed. But the work that Baldwin had done before the event was even more important. It was Bonar Law's presence and speech that swayed the day. In the view of the dissenters, if Bonar Law had not come to the Carlton Club and made his speech, they would have lost, the Coalition would have endured and Lloyd George would have remained prime minister.



'The Peacemaker' – David Low on the Coalition's Irish policy, *The Star,* 1922. Lloyd George holds out symbols of peace, but is backed up by the threat of armed force. Low always portrayed the Coalition as a two-headed ass (here sitting on top of the tank).

Role of the Conservative grassroots

The last speaker was Stuart Ball, Reader in History at Leicester University and writer and commentator on the Conservative Party. Ball began by describing the fall of the Lloyd George Coalition as, without doubt, one of the most decisive events of modern British political history. It is one of the most dramatic and one of the most humanly enthralling as well. Ball drew attention to the work of a number of historians who have looked at the downfall of the Coalition. In particular, he identified a pioneering study published in 1973 by Michael Kinnear called *The Fall of Lloyd George.* Yet despite this wealth of historical assessment, there are still neglected aspects of the fall of the Coalition and it was on one of these – in Ball's view the most important of the under-appreciated areas, the role of the Conservative grassroots – that he chose to focus in his talk. By grassroots Ball said he meant the rank and file members in the constituencies and the country – not the Parliamentary party, or the backbenchers. The other speakers had covered thoroughly the background issues to the fall of the government but the actual mechanism through which the Coalition was ended was revolt within the Conservative Party, a revolt which not only swept away Lloyd George but, in an extraordinarily unprecedented manner, swept away the Conservative leadership as well. It was almost as if the first intention of the dissenters was to remove Austen Chamberlain, and it was simply as a consequence of this that Lloyd George was also removed. Lloyd George, of course, was not present at the Carlton Club; it was Austen Chamberlain who called the meeting, Austen Chamberlain who handled it and Austen Chamberlain who lost it. All Lloyd George could do was sit and wait until a white-faced Sir Philip Sassoon rushed from the Carlton Club to Downing Street to break the news that it was all over.

Ball felt that it was essential to look beyond the actions of the more visible players – the elite players at Cabinet, junior ministerial or backbench level – and to examine the role of the Conservative rank and file and the immense influence he believed they had wielded both over the parliamentary party and over Central Office and the machinery of the Conservative Party in the country. It was the rank and file who realised that the days of the Coalition were numbered and it is they who worked to persuade the leadership to catch up with that opinion on the ground. The decline in support for the Coalition in many areas, particularly in safe seats in the Conservative heartlands in southern England and the Midlands, brought considerable pressure to bear on Conservative MPs and prospective parliamentary candidates to adjust their position. Under this pressure, they sought to distance themselves from the Coalition – a coalition that was failing and in increasing trouble.

Baldwin's own speech was one of the most memorable eight minutes that have ever been delivered. As a hatchet job on Lloyd George it could not have been surpassed. But the work that Baldwin had done before the event was even more important.

The clearest method for doing this was the promise, made sometimes privately to constituency executive committees and sometimes in public at constituency meetings, that when the election came the MP or candidate would stand as a Conservative pure and simple. This was a movement that built up momentum throughout 1922. J. C. C. Davidson (Bonar Law's former Parliamentary Private Secretary) was one example of this in his Hemel Hempstead seat. Like Bonar Law, Davidson was not an out-and-out opponent of the Coalition in the months leading up to October 1922. But he was already under pressure in his constituency by January 1922. The minute book of one of the Ladies' Organisations shows that he was asked if he was prepared to stand as an independent Unionist at the next election. At this stage Davidson hedged but, after being urged to answer definitively at several other meetings during the year, at a gathering in September he informed his membership that he would stand as an independent Conservative at the next election – an announcement that was received with great applause.

Davidson was just one of many under similar pressure and this is confirmed by Kinnear's analysis of the pronouncements of Conservative politicians in the press and by Stuart Ball's examination of constituency association minute books. Well before the calling of the Carlton Club meeting in October 1922, a large number (possibly a majority) of Conservative MPs had already publicly or privately committed themselves against the Coalition. The vote at the meeting can be anticipated as a foregone conclusion and the emphasis in some studies on the influence of the speeches may be exaggerated. MPs went into the meeting not just with their minds made up but with commitments already made to the people who mattered in their constituencies and to their chances of being re-elected. It was this pressure from the constituencies that opened up cracks at the very base of the edifice of the Coalition. The pressure was being applied even before the summer of 1922 and the cracks widened and travelled upwards, undermining the whole structure.

Ball then went on to talk about the causes of the hostility that the Conservative grassroots felt towards the Coalition and to examine what motivated the unusual degree of dissidence and rebellion among the normally docile and deferential Tory rank and file. The first element he identified was the importance of what he described as 'economy'. This was an issue linked to *the* economy and in particular to the collapse of the post-war boom in 1920: the combination of rising prices and heavy taxation that seriously squeezed two important groups for the Conservative Party: the middle classes, especially the professional classes in the towns and suburbs, and those who owned land in agricultural areas. But what the word 'economy' particularly meant in this period was the very high levels of taxation – both Imperial taxation to the national exchequer and local rates – which had risen massively as a result of the First World War and which were now affecting an increasingly large number of people. The 'economy' people were seeking was a cutback in government spending in order to reduce taxation in response to the depression that was hitting the country.

There was vocal criticism of the ballooning of central government and of bureaucracy, of controls and wartime red tape, of the massive increase in the size of the civil service and the greater responsibilities that had been handed out to local government.

This volatile mixture of economic hard times and complaints about government restrictiveness and interference was stirred up by Lord Rothermere, the owner of the *Daily Mail*. Rothermere mounted his own campaign, the Anti-Waste League, and stood candidates in by-elections, winning two Conservative seats. This sent a shiver through the Conservative Party from top to bottom. Combined with this was the depression that agriculture, especially arable farming ,went through in the 1920s. The Lloyd George Coalition had brought in a major measure, the 1920 Agriculture Act, that looked as if it would greatly benefit the farmers, but the government then found that it was too expensive and it became one of the victims of the Geddes axe. So the Conservatives got some of the 'economy' they were seeking but ironically at the expense of their own supporters, as subsidies for farmers were axed.

On top of this catalogue of discontent and of government failure was heaped the rise of Labour, as evidenced in by-elections and local government elections. The growth of Labour led the Conservative rank and file to demand two things that the Lloyd George government had promised but was manifestly refusing to deliver. The first was House of Lords reform: revisiting the 1911 Parliament Act, which had always been said to be only a temporary measure, and restoring some powers to the House of Lords. Conservatives wanted this desperately because they were frightened by the prospect of a Labour majority in the Commons with no constitutional check upon it. The second, and linked, issue for Tories was the reform of trade union law: the 1913 Act, the question of contracting in and contracting out, the political levy – all bound up with the issue of the political role of the trade unions. Again the government had promised to do something about this and again it had let the Conservatives down. There was also the question of Ireland, where the government had swung from 'taking murder by the throat to shaking murder by the hand' in the phrase used by Unionists in this period. However, in Ball's view, because the position of Ulster had been safeguarded, with its own parliament, the issue of Ireland had lost resonance for many rank and file Conservatives.

To sum up, Ball reiterated that, while the anti-coalition pressure from the rank and file upon MPs and candidates varied across the country, it was most pressing in the Tory heartlands in the South, the Midlands and the suburbs. It was strengthened by the emerging role of women Conservative members as women gained the vote and began to play an increasing part in constituency political activity. The other critical element in the fall of the Coalition was the role of the National Union centrally, the representative institution of the Conservative rank and file. It was the National Union, under the chairmanship of Sir George Younger, which prevented the Conservatives from pressing for a general election in January 1922 because the issue of House of Lords reform had not been settled. When Birkenhead attacked Younger as the cabin boy trying t steer the ship, he made Younger the hero of the rank and file and the loss of support for the leadership in the National Union was a critical factor in the eventual downfall of the Coalition.

In conclusion, Ball reminded us that it was well known that the Carlton Club meeting was called by Austen Chamberlain as an offensive move. He intended to ambush his critics, to isolate and expose them. It was a tactic used more effectively and more cleverly by Stanley Baldwin twice in 1930 in the two party meetings he called in June and October of that year. Chamberlain's over-confidence led to his own downfall and then to the fall of the Coalition. But Chamberlain also had a defensive reason for calling the meeting and for calling it when he did. In a few weeks' time, the Conservative Party (National Union) annual conference was due to meet. It was evident even to Chamberlain that the conference would either overwhelmingly and publicly reject the Coalition in a way that would make it impossible for him to carry on leading the party, or would shatter the party from top to bottom. The defensive reason Chamberlain had for calling the Carlton Club meeting was to pre-empt and bounce the National Union conference. Chamberlain wanted Conservative MPs to back the leadership, back the Coalition and agree to fight a quick general election as Coalition MPs, with the result that the National Union conference would have been postponed. This move proved that the Conservative grassroots did matter. If they had no influence, why would Chamberlain have needed to take the gamble of the Carlton Club meeting as a means to prevent the National Union conference from taking place?

The Conservative grassroots did matter. If they had no influence, why would Chamberlain have needed to take the gamble of the Carlton Club meeting as a means to prevent the National Union conference from taking place?

Overall, the meeting heard four different interpretations of the Carlton Club meeting, its impact and the reasons for the fall of the Lloyd George Coalition. In this joint event with the Conservative History Group the emphasis was upon the role of Conservatives, and an important element which was missing from the analysis and which should be addressed in a future meeting or *Journal* article was the role of Liberals in the fall of what turned out to be the last Liberal prime minister.

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1 'Politics in the First World War' (1959) reproduced in *From the Boer War to the Cold War, Essays on 20th Century Europe* (Penguin Books, 1996)

REVIEWS

Demise of the 'project'

Paddy Ashdown: *The Ashdown Diaries: Volume Two 1997–1999* (Allen Lane, 2001)

Reviewed by **Alan Leaman**

Every so often – roughly once in a generation – the sea of British electoral politics parts and we catch a glimpse of a better land. The Tories take a tumble. The progressives get their turn. Reformers celebrate. 1906. 1945. 1997. The dates have become a cliché. But we know them so well chiefly because the list is so short. The twentieth century was a Conservative century.

This second volume of the Ashdown diaries is devoted to the idea that the next century doesn't have to be like that – that progressives can alter the terms of trade of British politics and establish a position of dominance for themselves. It is a sustained argument in favour of the greater co-operation between Labour and the Liberal Democrats that is almost certainly necessary if this is ever to happen.

So here is the story of the political party that Ashdown led through his last two years as leader, and which consistently failed to rise to the significance of the occasion. Plus the best insight we have yet into the character and qualities of our Prime Minister – our charming, talented, elusive and somehow never-quite-settled Prime Minister. And, above all, the story of how two political leaders, presented with their once-in-a-generation opportunity, failed to deliver the goods.

Diaries are an exciting source of political history. I love them. Even though this volume takes around 500 pages to get through two years, it still makes for a cracking read. These are a politician's thoughts as they happened; they have that smack of realism – and sincerity – that is often missing from the carefully prepared memoir. They contain the titbits and pen portraits that enliven the political process – and are all the better for that. One of the interesting sub-plots here is Tony Blair's growing concern about the situation in Iraq, well before the second George Bush was even running for the White House. Another is the emerging race to succeed Ashdown to the Lib Dem leadership.

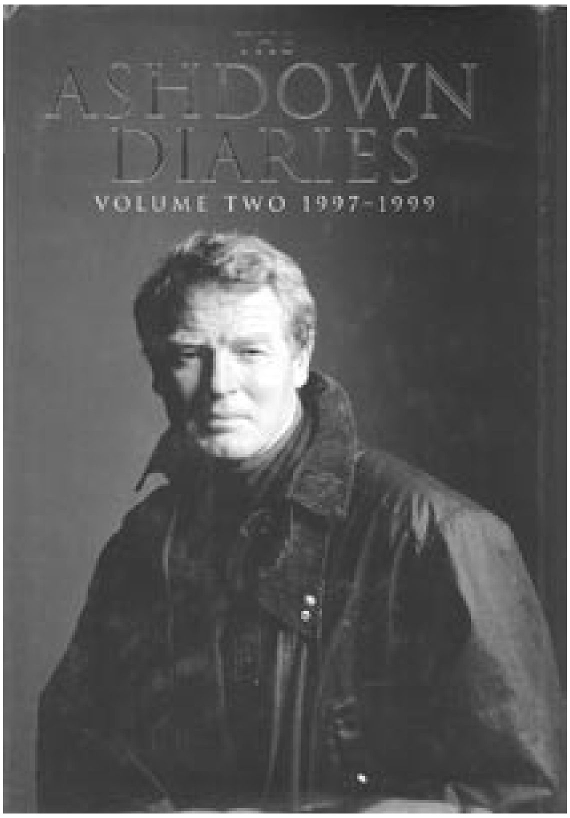
Of course diaries are flawed; that is part of the point. Ashdown had the rather endearing view that almost anyone he spoke with had agreed with him by the end of the conversation. So he can, as we now say, inadvertently mislead his readers. Like all humans, he can remember things differently from others who were with him at the time. So what? The important thing is to know what it felt like to be there, playing such a pivotal role at the top of politics.

Paddy dictated his diary entries on to tape almost every day during the eleven years of his leadership. While I was working for him, I was hardly conscious of this ritual, which usually took place, I understood, late at night – though sometimes more quickly after special events. Occasionally some of us were asked to read through extracts, most often detailed accounts of particularly important meetings. It was quite an efficient way of telling us what had happened, who had said what, even (though this was less interesting) what food and drink had been consumed.

So how reliable is Paddy's testimony? This will be an important question for future historians of the period, and his version may be challenged when we read the recollections of Blair, Brown, Campbell et al. Andrew Rawnsley's *Servants of the people* (2000) already provides a subtly different perspective on many of the same events.

Paddy's volume contains lengthy verbatim accounts of conversations between Ashdown and Blair. How accurate are they? My estimation is: very. No one has so far seriously challenged any of his account. But, again, the most important thing is what they tell us of how Paddy himself approached his task, and how he felt that others responded.

Looking back from the vantage point of 2003, of course, 1997 seems a big wide world away. It is already difficult to re-imagine the extraordinary excitement that Labour's victory generated. Or the effect of the leap in Liberal Democrat representation. The tantalising prospect of a thorough-going



modernisation of Britain's institutions, even of a new type of politics itself – not just changing the style, but the substance as well.

The atmosphere today could hardly be more different. For many, the story after six years is one of disappointment rather than opportunity. Did people really believe that a referendum on the euro was just around the corner? Or that PR for Westminster was a real prospect? And was there ever a serious chance of the two parties forming a coalition government, even after Labour won with such a large majority?

So it is natural for people to ask whether the attempt to bring the two parties closer together after 1997 was ever sensible. Should Ashdown have opted for a quieter life? And, if the Ashdown version of this story is accurate, was he was being led a merry dance by Blair or simply misreading the signals?

Rereading the story today, a number of themes emerge with greater clarity. First, there's no doubt from this account that Ashdown's party behaved pretty badly. Its gratitude to him for delivering unprecedented electoral success endured just about as long as it took for the new Parliamentary Party to assemble at Westminster. And party committees subsequently went into emotional spasms at the least provocation.

Three excuses have been offered for this behaviour, none of which is convincing. Many MPs and others say that Ashdown never told them what was going on, and therefore that they could not be held responsible for his strategy. Yet, according to the account in the diaries, Paddy was telling almost everyone he met. Not all the tactical details, certainly; but all the strategic objectives were laid out for everyone to see. If there was a fault, that was precisely it. By running his ambitions up the flagpole so often and so volubly, Ashdown risked frightening his colleagues before he could deliver the deal.

It also becomes fairly obvious that Tony Blair himself never really appreciated exactly what Ashdown was saying to him. This is where the bigger problems lay. It would be wrong to accuse the Prime Minister of bad faith; the real charge appears to be poor understanding.

Second, many allege that the Lib Dems were obliged to temper their convictions and to hold back on legitimate criticism of the new government during this period. There is precious little evidence for this either. Indeed, Ashdown recounts many examples where the opposite was the case – and where he defended the party resolutely against Blair's complaints. There are other instances where the Lib Dems simply didn't know what they were doing, so got themselves into a mess that was all their own fault.

And, third, there was always the nagging fear that a closer identification with Labour could do the Lib Dems electoral harm. Yet all the evidence points in the opposite direction; constructive opposition was good electoral politics. Ashdown tells of his pleasure when his party captured Sheffield City Council from Labour in 1999. Who runs Sheffield now?

But it also becomes fairly obvious from all the conversations recorded here that Tony Blair himself never really appreciated exactly what Ashdown was saying to him. This is where the bigger problems lay. It would be wrong to accuse the Prime Minister of bad faith; the real charge appears to be poor understanding.

Time and again decisions were allowed to drift. But mainly because Blair hadn't grasped the significance of what was said to him, or because he just came with a mindset that couldn't take it on board. It was Ashdown himself who generated all the momentum behind 'the project'. Once he left the leadership of the Lib Dems, and with nothing or no one to maintain the initiative, Blair quickly lost interest. For the Prime Minister, this was probably always an optional extra – a 'nice to have'. For Ashdown, it was a core objective.

If Paddy put himself in a weaker position, it may have been because he spent too much time and energy on the detail of his discussions with Blair, and not enough on winning the public argument for the new type of politics that he wanted. The behind-the-scenes stuff is obviously important. But it only works these days if supported by an out-in-the-open campaign to build wider consent. The 'project' was over-dependent on people at the top; there was a wider constituency of support for Lib-Labbery in both parties and beyond which was never properly mobilised.

But, even in this context, it is still worth marking the many dividends that this short period brought – both for the Lib Dems and their wider policy objectives. Scotland and Wales have their devolution settlements, and the fact of co-operation between the parties at Westminster helped pave the way for coalitions in Edinburgh and Cardiff. Thanks to Ashdown's insistence on PR, a dozen or so Liberal Democrats are members of the European Parliament who otherwise would not be there. Indeed, it is now widely accepted wisdom that all new political institutions should embrace a form of proportional voting. Above all, Ashdown was able to ensure that his party prospered, and that he could hand it over in August 1999 in robust health and with a better sense of its own identity than it had enjoyed for years. Who can honestly argue that an alternative strategy would have enabled him to do as well?

Some say, of course, that this book simply records the actions of an older man in a hurry. In two senses they are right; in the one they mean, they are wrong. Looking again through the diaries, it becomes utterly clear just how keen Ashdown was to leave his post. He mentions this first in May 1997, just days after the election. So this was no personal quest for position, the most usual accusation; all the evidence points in another direction. Rather, these were the actions of a leader who knew he didn't have much more time at the top, and who also knew that, the rhythms of politics being what they are, if this was ever going to happen, it would have to happen quickly. The window was always about to close and, after this brief period, it duly did.

Still, we can certainly see why – after eleven years of leading his party at Westminster – Ashdown was ideally prepared for the even more interesting job of presiding over the squabbling factions of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Alan Leaman was political adviser, speechwriter and spokesman for Paddy Ashdown from 1988–93. He was Liberal Democrat Director of Strategy and Planning in the run-up to the 1997 election, when he also was a Parliamentary candidate. He now works for a financial services trade association

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'The world is different because she lived'

Jane Jordan: *Josephine Butler* (John Murray, 2001)

Reviewed by **Paddy Beck**

Why did I previously know so little about this woman and her achievements? I asked myself as I read this book. The gaps in my knowledge have certainly been filled in by Dr Jane Jordan in this extremely interesting and informative biography of Josephine Butler – a woman described by Millicent Fawcett, founder of the Fawcett Society, as 'the most distinguished woman of the nineteenth century'.

Josephine Butler was born Josephine Grey, in Northumberland 1828, into a large family with strong Whig, Liberal and Methodist connections. Earl Grey (Prime Minister 1831–34) was her cousin. Her father, John Grey, was both a Liberal activist and a political confidant of Earl Grey until he had to abstain from active politics when appointed the manager of Greenwich Hospital Estates, Northumberland, in 1833. Jane Jordan recounts some delightful family anecdotes about the Grey family's continuing Liberal allegiance – her younger sister, Hatty, when asked her name used to add that she was 'a good fig' (a good Whig). Her mother came from a Methodist and Moravian Brethren background, and ensured that all her children received a good education incorporating a strong moral sense that recognised and abhorred injustice. The family were deeply religious and, although Josephine continued to attend an Anglican church, she considered herself a Wesleyan both by upbringing and by inclination. In 1847 Josephine visited Ireland. What she saw there was to haunt her for the rest of her life although she suppressed this publicly for another forty years.

In 1852 Josephine married George Butler, Public Examiner in the Schools at Oxford University. From the outset of their courtship George made clear his concept of marriage as 'a perfectly equal union, with absolute freedom on both sides for personal initiative in thought and action and for individual development' and this he maintained throughout the following thirty-seven years. From the start, he and Josephine studied together and continually discussed the issues of the day. Josephine's nascent 'feminism' is apparent from the birth of their first child at the end of 1852. She refused to have a physician present in part as a 'protest against wicked customs' that denied professional status to female midwives.

What courage it must have taken for a woman who initially felt unable even to voice the word prostitution to stand up in public to describe and denounce the degrading treatment enforced by the Contagious Diseases Acts.

Perhaps it was this background that is the clue to answering the fascinating question of what made Josephine – from the privileged upper middle class, deeply religious, modest in manner, delicate in health – take on the establishment of the day on behalf of 'fallen women'. What courage it must have taken for a woman who initially felt unable even to voice the word prostitution to stand up in public to describe and denounce the degrading treatment enforced by the Contagious Diseases Acts on working-class women who could not prove their virtue.

Josephine had been helping prostitutes, whom she called 'outcasts', and engaging with European women about the iniquities of the regulated prostitution system on the continent when the three Contagious Diseases Acts were passed between 1864 and 1869. These Acts covered eighteen British towns that had nearby army camps or naval ports. They were partly modelled on the European system of regulated prostitution and were designed to control the spread of sexually transmitted disease. Women believed to be prostitutes were not only forced to register as such but were subjected to fortnightly internal examination to ensure they were disease free. If women were found to be diseased, they were detained in 'lock' hospitals for up to nine months. The purpose of the Acts was in part – to quote Austin Bruce, Liberal Home Secretary in 1872 – to allow men to 'sin with impunity'.

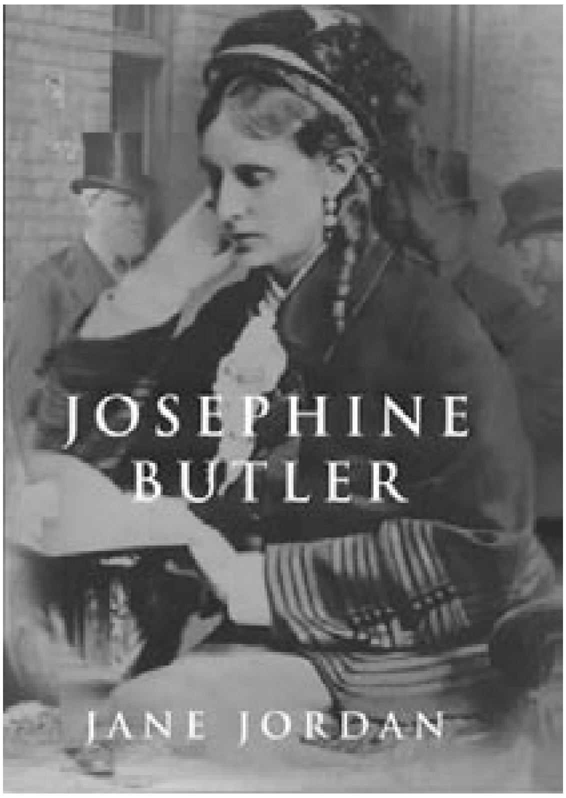
Perhaps the most harrowing part of this book is the description of what these Acts meant in practice. Women could be labelled prostitutes on the word of policemen or magistrates with no further proof required. They were forced to undergo examination even when pregnant or just after childbirth. If they refused examination they were imprisoned in conditions even worse than the dreaded 'lock' hospitals. Many of the women were illiterate – putting their cross on forms they did not understand and which had not been explained. Consequently Josephine campaigned more against the violation of individual rights than on the basis of any medical violation. First she published a book called *The Constitution Violated*. Then she concentrated on getting the Acts repealed: this meant tackling parliament.

From birth Josephine's natural allies were the Liberals. She continued to have close links with many Liberal families especially when the Ladies National Association for the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts (the LNA) was formed in 1869. The four Priestman sisters, Quakers, were among her closest allies. One, Elizabeth, was married to John Bright MP and their daughter Helen Bright Clark was to become a leading figure in the LNA. The Radical MP for Halifax, James Stansfield, was to sacrifice a promising political career through his unwavering support of Josephine and the LNA. However some of the contradictions within the Liberal Party and its ambivalence towards women's issues – particularly its attitude to women's suffrage – first became evident through the fight over the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts. A rival Liberal candidate and supporter of repeal, Dr Langley, was put up to oppose a Liberal arch-supporter of the Acts, Sir Henry Storks, at the Colchester by-election in 1870. Josephine and the ladies of the LNA campaigned vigorously against Storks. This split in Liberal ranks resulted in a Conservative victory. The tactic was to be used frequently during the fight over woman's suffrage.

Another issue that greatly disturbed Josephine was the low age of consent in Britain – twelve years old. This she regarded not only as abhorrent but as leading directly to the trafficking to mainland Europe of large numbers of girls we would now regard as children. Josephine was pan-European. Not only did she have extensive family links around the continent but she founded a European federation of societies dedicated to abolishing the state regulation of prostitution. Jane Jordan covers Josephine's travels and both the successes and tribulations she and her European federation encountered. But she does not mention that the federation still exists under the name 'International Abolitionist Federation' based in Copenhagen. This organisation continues to campaign for the abolition of the state regulation of prostitution – rather than the abolition of prostitution per se, as many think – and for equity of treatment to both sexes. Neither does she mention that there is still an active Josephine Butler Society that is a direct descendent of her campaigning groups, and which continues to fight for much the same causes.

Dr Jordan provides many insights into Josephine's character. Passionate, independent and very strong willed in public, Josephine's doubts, religious turmoil and often despair were not generally known outside her closest confidantes and her husband. Her ardent speeches, often to working men, were renowned. 'Two pence, gentlemen, is the price in England of a poor woman's honour. Under the Contagious Diseases Acts these girls are no longer women but only bits of numbered, inspected and ticketed human flesh flung by Government into the public market.'

That Josephine was fully supported by her husband George, an ordained clergyman and headmaster of Liverpool College, is perhaps as astonishing as Josephine's own career. Jane Jordan is careful to delineate George's ungrudging support and to insist that Josephine's writing clearly shows that she put her role as wife and mother above that of a political activist. However, on the evidence of this book, I am not sure that I agree this was always the case – particularly not in the last few years of George's life. Certainly their eldest son, also George, would have contested Jordan's view – as can be demonstrated by the arrangements he made for his mother's very small, private funeral and – later – for her memorial window in Liverpool Cathedral.



Nevertheless this remarkable woman should be remembered as someone who changed the course of events. As Prof. James Stuart said in a tribute after her death, 'The world is different because she lived'. But perhaps not yet different enough: many of the issues she campaigned on remain with us.

She fought against the trafficking of young girls for sexual purposes. She fought for equality of treatment between men and women in sexual matters and for the right of women to make their own decisions and own their own bodies. The whole terrible business of trafficking, especially within Europe, has resurfaced over the last few years to the extent that an Inspector in the Metropolitan Vice Squad recently said that it is fast becoming more profitable and less risky than drug trafficking. The dramatic recent growth of HIV/Aids as a gender issue in sub-Saharan Africa, where 60% of the people infected are women, is partly attributable to a cultural tradition where women cannot say no. As Peter Piot, head of UNAIDS, said at that organisation's annual conference: 'The face of Aids is becoming the face of young women'. The fight must go on.

Like all biographies there are some sections that are more interesting than others. Nonetheless I would strongly recommend this book as both an enjoyable read and a fascinating delve into the more murky and less well-known areas of Victorian Britain.

Paddy Beck has been a local councillor, agent and parliamentary candidate. She is a member of the Josephine Butler Society and of the Women Liberal Democrats' Executive. She represented the National Union of Women at the UN Conference Against Racism in Durban, 2001.

'Not So Much A Question of Greatness'

Sheila Gooddie: *Mary Gladstone: A Gentle Rebel* (John Wiley & Sons, 2003)

Reviewed by **Tony Little**

The dustjacket describes Mary Gladstone as 'a woman at the heart of politics nearly half a century before women had the vote', silently carrying the implication that, without the vote, Victorian women had no place in politics. This was never true but we are only gradually rediscovering what that place was, and it is good to see a commercial publisher finding space for a biography of a woman whose importance relates principally to her family's political position.

For some women, their place in Victorian politics was, as might be expected, merely decorative, the little bit of colour seated quietly among the black frock coats on the platform. For others, such as Josephine Butler, it was campaigning in the front line on unpopular women's issues. Among the aristocracy, it was often participation in the family business – the hostess who used entertainment as part of political man-management like Lady Palmerston – or the covert messenger such as Mrs O'Shea intriguing on behalf of her lover Charles Stewart Parnell. Political women were, naturally, faithful confidantes of their menfolk and a trusted few were left to manage local campaigns in the absence of their husband or brother who was down in Westminster. But were there other more operational roles open to the right woman?

The Gladstones were a recently rich family, but the money earned in trade by Mary Gladstone's grandfather, Sir John, was invested in political opportunities and a place for the family among the ruling elite. Sir John himself played a prominent part in the politics of Liverpool as a friend and supporter of Canning and Huskisson. Mary's paternal uncles stood for parliament, as did her brothers. Her father, W. E. Gladstone, forced to abandon his clerical vocation, was of course the 'People's William', the dominant Liberal politician of the Victorian era who, by the time Mary was born in 1847, had already achieved cabinet office. Like it or not, Mary was destined to a life surrounded by politics at the highest level.

Mary's father was an extraordinary mixture of political endeavour, literary tastes, religious controversy and a physical energy whose surplus expended itself in long walks and tree felling.

There were three main thoughts with which I approached this book. Naturally it would contain the history of the dutiful daughter in a privileged Victorian family. I also looked forward to the insight into female political activism promised on the dustjacket and hoped in addition for a few sidelights on the life and career of the Grand Old Man.

Sheila Gooddie gives the impression of being most comfortable with the family life. The introduction, setting the scene from the Great Exhibition onwards, and the first chapter with Mary listening devotedly to her father's Midlothian speeches, might be skipped by the impatient reader with some knowledge of the era, but when the book gets going we get full details of family life among the elite. I almost wrote 'typical family life' but, while Mary's upbringing was conventional, it would be hard to assert that the Gladstone family was typical. Mary's father was an extraordinary mixture of political endeavour, literary tastes, religious controversy and a physical energy whose surplus expended itself in long walks and tree felling. He had proposed to her mother Catherine Glynne in a letter containing a (just about grammatically correct) sentence of 141 words in eighteen clauses and sub-clauses.[1] Catherine was both very different from and well suited to her husband. Graceful but full of fun, forgetful, impulsive and unpunctual, she achieved an independent life with the charities she promoted and yet was fully her husband's confidante, supportive of his ambitions. They married in a joint ceremony with Catherine's younger sister Mary who married George, Lord Lyttelton. The Lyttletons had twelve children and the two families remained close, with the cousins regularly in each other's company and among Mary's closest friends. The Gladstones occupied a variety of houses in London to suit his career but stayed in Catherine's family home of Hawarden Castle to such an extent that, while they did not own it, Hawarden Castle became organised around them.

'Von Moltke'

Mary was the fifth of eight children. By the time she was three, she had already suffered the loss of an elder sister and the family worried about her health, particularly her eyesight. Both for her good and for the recuperation of her parents, it was decided that they would take a holiday in Italy. Perhaps this was Mary's biggest contribution to British politics, for it was on this holiday that Gladstone visited political prisoners in jail in Naples and his indignation, expressed in a public letter to his mentor Lord Aberdeen, helped pave the way for his eventual entry into the Liberal government of 1859.

In the shorter term, his period out of office in the mid-1850s allowed him to be an indulgent father to his family. In sharp contrast to, say, the Chamberlain family, the Gladstone children were both allowed to argue with and contradict their parents. Unlike her brothers, Mary did not go to school but was well read, drawing on the family library for works as varied as Shelley's poetry and Butler's *Analogy of Religion*, and showed a passionate interest in art and music. In 1865 she was presented at court but one gains an impression that she preferred the time she spent in the ladies' gallery of the House of Commons to the time spent at the balls and entertainments by which young women of the time met suitable marriage partners. While Mary appears to have made friends readily, few young men measured up to the standard set by her father and the one who did, Arthur Balfour professed himself in love with her cousin, May Lyttelton, who died in 1875. Others paid suit to Mary, including Tennyson's son Hallam, but she took a long time to recover from the shock of Balfour's rejection. By way of sublimation she built friendships with the much older and married Burne-Jones, Ruskin and Lord Acton.

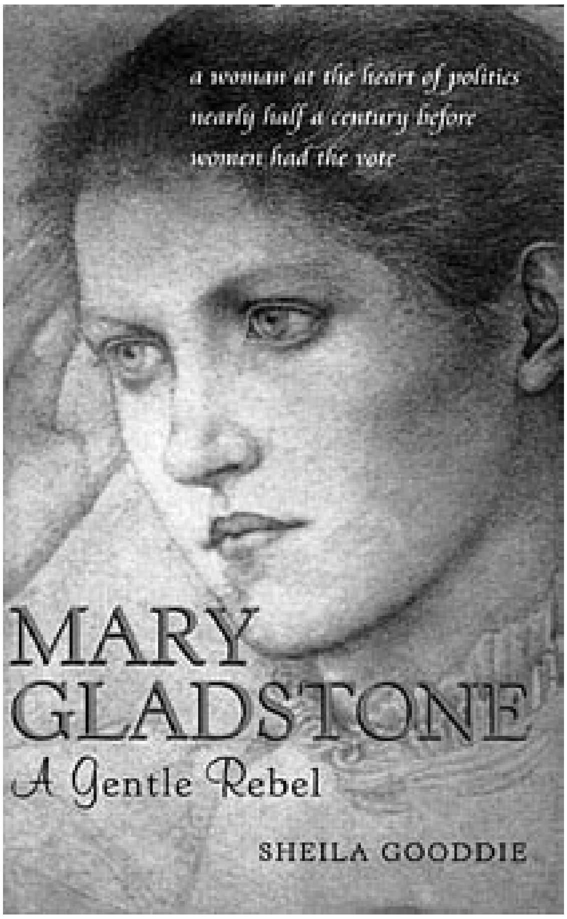
Whether it was the high standards set by their parents or whether it was parental selfishness which required the family to stay at home as unpaid secretaries, none of the Gladstone children married young. Helen, the youngest sister, did not marry at all but escaped the family home, with Mary's assistance in overcoming the strong objections of their mother, to become a pioneer female academic at Newnham College, Cambridge. Ordinarily, organisation of the household would have been Catherine Gladstone's duty but it was one to which she was ill-suited by either temperament or inclination and the role devolved gradually on to Mary. Mary's superior administrative skills earned her the nickname 'von Moltke', after the Prussian field marshal responsible for the German success in the Franco-Prussian War.

After his defeat in the 1874 election, Gladstone gave up the leadership of the Liberal Party but did not retire from politics, making a gradual comeback to the front line, particularly after the agitation over the Bulgarian atrocities of 1876. On his 'retirement', he decided not to employ a secretary and relied on his children to undertake the role. While this would have been seen as good training for sons destined to a life in politics, the involvement of the daughters and especially of Mary was much more unusual.

Her own office

In 1880, W. E. Gladstone was elected for both Leeds and Midlothian and ceded the Leeds seat in favour of his son Herbert. This created a vacancy in the official secretarial team that supported Gladstone when he assumed the premiership for the second time – a vacancy filled by Mary. Mary created her own office space in 10 Downing Street and worked as part of a team of five. Since she was the only woman on the team, this caused concern to Mrs Gladstone about the propriety of her unchaperoned meetings. Gooddie quotes Sir Henry Ponsonby as estimating that Gladstone and his secretaries wrote about 25,000 letters a year.

Here, where Gooddie could have located the heart of her book, we are hindered by her apparent inexperience in political history. Colleagues clearly saw Mary as having the ear of her father. She had the man-management skills her parents neglected in their focus on higher things, soothing bruised egos and placating irate ministers. She served as a channel to Gladstone for Rosebery and Acton in particular.


a woman at the heart of politics nearly half a century before women had the vote
MARY GLADSTONE
A Gentle Rebel
SHEILA GOODDIE

Principally, she acted for her father in ecclesiastical appointments – a subject in which he probably took more interest than any other premier and in which she was able to rely on the assistance of her friendship with Henry Scott Holland.

In many ways, Gladstone's government of 1880–85 was the most frustrating of his periods as Prime Minister – its achievements modest compared to the scale of its majority. Gladstone's colleagues regularly threatened to resign and Gladstone himself was apparently always on the verge of retirement. To what extent did Mary's diplomatic skills prevent matters deteriorating even further? Sheila Gooddie apparently does not ask herself what difference Mary made; for her the achievement of a female working at No. 10 is enough in itself, and we are left with little clear impression of Mary's impact 'at the heart of politics'. Rather she focuses on the passage of the well-known events of the second government and on the passing comments of Mary on these events or, more naturally, on the devastating impact on the family of the assassination of Lord Frederick Cavendish, the husband of her close friend Lucy Lyttelton.

In 1886, at the age of 39, Mary surprised the family by marrying a man nine years her junior, Harry Drew, the curate at the parish church of Hawarden. She married as she always intended: for love rather than position. The shock over the age difference and relative poverty of her husband appeared to horrify her cousins and her maid more than her parents, for whom a clergyman had much to recommend as a suitor. The wedding, in February 1886, was fitted in around the Home Rule crisis and, although initially she remained with the family, the chance of Harry running the parish of Buckley allowed the creation of a separate household, albeit one only a few miles from Hawarden. Unfortunately this was at the expense of Helen's career, as she left Cambridge to take over the care of her parents.

Despite her age and a number of miscarriages, Mary was blessed with a daughter. Harry Drew remained at Buckley until 1905 and then became rector of Hawarden where he died in 1910. Mary survived until New Year's Day in 1928 and in her last few years contributed articles to *Nineteenth Century* on her father's library, published her reminiscences of Acton and wrote a biography of her mother.

One is used to Victorian biographies, whoever their subject, being defined in relation to Gladstone, and it is pleasantly surprising to find that this one is not. With the Grand Old Man shooed off into his 'Temple of Peace' the rest of the family suddenly come to life. The glimpses thus granted are not always comfortable. The inconveniences portrayed range from the minor, such as the degree of organisation required for travel in Victorian Europe, to the always present risk of premature death, even among such well-cosseted families, in childhood and childbirth.

One gains an impression that she preferred the time she spent in the ladies' gallery of the House of Commons to the time spent at balls and entertainments.

Mary Gladstone wrote of her planned biography of her mother, 'it was not so much a question of greatness as of unusualness, distinctiveness' that were needed for a biography. As Sheila Gooddie concludes, this is as true of Mary as of Catherine. The Mary portrayed in this biography was obviously bright, perceptive and passionate in her politics. It would have been nice to have heard from her more directly than Sheila Gooddie allows.

Tony Little is Chair of the Liberal Democrat History Group.

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[1] P. Magnus, *Gladstone* (John Murray, 1954), p. 38. The letter is quoted in Magnus.

ARCHIVES

The David Owen Papers at Special Collections and Archives, University of Liverpool Library

by **Maureen Watry**

In July 1996 the Rt Hon the Lord Owen CH was installed as the Chancellor of the University of Liverpool. At that time his papers were transferred to the University Library.

Over a period of two years the papers were sorted and catalogued. They are stored in some 400 boxes and include correspondence, MS notes, memoranda and reports, committee papers, speech transcripts, news cuttings, publications, campaign material, photographs, cartoons, video and cassette recordings. These cover David Owen's political career from his early Labour Party membership until his resignation from the House of Commons in 1992. The main body of records date from c.1962–92, although the collection also contains some earlier material relating to David Owen's family life and education.

The papers are arranged in four groups, broadly reflecting

A Liberal Democrat History Group Evening Meeting

WINSTON CHURCHILL – LIBERAL POLITICIAN

It is often forgotten that Winston Churchill served in four different governments as a Liberal minister, between 1905 and 1922. Indeed, the year 2004 sees the centenary of his joining the Liberal Party, when he crossed the floor of the Commons in protest at the Conservatives' lurch away from free trade. This meeting will examine Churchill's Liberal legacy.

Speakers: **Keith Robbins** (former Vice Chancellor of the University of Wales at Lampeter and author of *Churchill*) and **Paul Addison** (Director of the Centre for Second World War Studies and author of *Churchill on the Home Front 1900–1945*).

7.00 p.m., Monday 2 February (following the History Group AGM, at 6.30 p.m.)
Lady Violet Room, National Liberal Club. 1 Whitehall Place, London SW1

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the chronological structure of David Owen's life and work:

Personal and Family Papers, **D 709/1**: a small section that includes: Correspondence; General papers; Photographs.

Labour Party Papers 1960–81, D 709/2: covers a wide range of material including correspondence, speech transcripts, articles, memoranda and reports, campaign material, news cuttings, and photographs: Early Labour Party membership: related papers (1962–66); Labour MP for Plymouth: constituency papers (1966–81); Papers as Minister for the Navy (1968–70); Papers as member of Opposition: Shadow Defence spokesman and defence issues (1970–73); Papers as member of Opposition: Children Bill (1974); Papers as Minister of Health (1974–76); Papers as Foreign Secretary (1977–79); Papers as member of Opposition: Shadow Energy spokesman (1979–81); Speeches: general; Articles: general; Day files; Diaries; David Owen's publications; Photographs and cartoons; Personal policy papers and general correspondence; News cuttings and publications; Papers on leaving the Labour Party.

SDP Papers 1981–92: **D 709/3:** Papers on the formation and launch of the SDP; Committee papers; Policy records; Council and Conference papers; Election and campaign material; Publicity and fund raising records; Regional organisation records; Associated groups and organisations; Parliamentary business papers; Personnel and general administration papers; Papers relating to the SDP/Liberal Alliance; Papers relating to the SDP and Liberal Party merger and the re-establishment of the SDP; SDP MP for Plymouth: constituency papers; General correspondence; Day files; Policy: private and reference papers; Speeches; Articles; David Owen publications; Diaries; Photographs and cartoons; Audio-visual material; SDP newspapers and publications; News cuttings collection; SDP: general and historical reference material; Papers on the winding down of the SDP.

Papers relating to independent organisations: D709/4: Independent Commission on Disarmament and Security Issues; World Security Trust; Independent Commission on International Humanitarian Issues.

The full finding aid for the David Owen Papers is available under the heading 'Access' at: http://sca.lib.liv.ac.uk/collections/Oweb/index.html.

The majority of materials in the David Owen papers are available for consultation by researchers, but some files are closed or only available with permission from the donor.

Researchers visiting Special Collections and Archives are able to take advantage of the Reading Room reference collection and the University Library's general collections which, taken together, provide a broad range of printed materials that complement subjects covered in the David Owen Papers.

Enquiries about access to the David Owen Papers should be directed to Dr Maureen Watry, Head of Special Collections and Archives, Sydney Jones Library, University of Liverpool, PO Box 123, Liverpool L69 3DA; tel: 0151 794 2696; fax: 0151 794 2681; email: mwatry@liverpool.ac.uk